Constructivism with a touch of the poet

By Dorothy Burkhart

THE immediately impressive things about Salvatore Pecoraro's work are its precision and craftsmanship. What is really important, though, is what we see overall, contradictions and conflicts and the artist's resolution of them.

Pecoraro works with styrene and Plexiglas — tough products of modern society, yet the visual effect he achieves is one of extreme delicacy.

I'm conscious of the materials, but my experience of the work is of shifting modulations of light, color and shadow.

Art Review

Pecoraro's new exhibition at Rubicon Gallery in Los Altos is a beauty. It consists of 19 sculptures, variations on one theme. Developed about three years ago, the artist describes the works as "prismatic constructions."

They appear very simple. First Pecoraro airbrushes a sheet of styrene, which like a painting, goes against the wall.

Next he extends a smoothly-beveled Plexiglas shelf on a horizontal plane, two-thirds of the way from the top. On this shelf he places — in carefully routed grooves — several pieces of shaped Plexiglas.

Each work in the series has a totally separate visual identity as a result of variations of shape, arrangement of forms and color.

Some of the Plexi pieces are clear, others incised with a colored line, and still others, painted. Whether in brilliant orange, glowing like a sunset, or a hazy violet, recalling a foggy morning, or in iridescent bronze, shimmering like the sunlight, they are all quite lovely.

With curving arcs and planes, the image that meets the eye is one of soft-edge tonalities. We're in a world of light and shadow, yet every unit has a clear and distinct edge and obeys a strict geometrical order.

I think of Pecoraro in terms of Constructivism. This movement, a major force of 20th-century modernism, in its purest form begins with the art basics of color, shape and space.

It functions as pure visual creation, referring only to the object itself. The leading Constructivist painters, Mondrian and van Doesburg, began with and stuck to squares, rectangles and primary colors.

Sculptors like Gabo, Tatlin, Pevsner, exploring space, often used such building materials as glass, steel and plastic.

Pecoraro employs the language and technology of Constructivism with a delicate touch. Poetic and lyrical, his prismatic pieces with their interweaving colors of the spectrum show a sensibility close to that of a painter like Rothko.

No surprise perhaps, for Pecoraro began as a painter, working in a realistic style.

Nature, the landscape, has always been his thing, the sky with its changing light his special province. When Pecoraro painted the sky, it looked like the sky.

But he wasn't imitating nature; he was creating the environment in his own terms. And that's what he's still doing in these new "prismatic constructions." He makes his environment real.

The ingredients may be different. He's replaced canvas with styrene and Plexiglas, and he gives visible form to ideas and visions originating in the landscape he fueled in his own imagination.

Besides these qualities the work is further enhanced by opposing elements. These tensions make the road to harmony and balance all the sweeter.

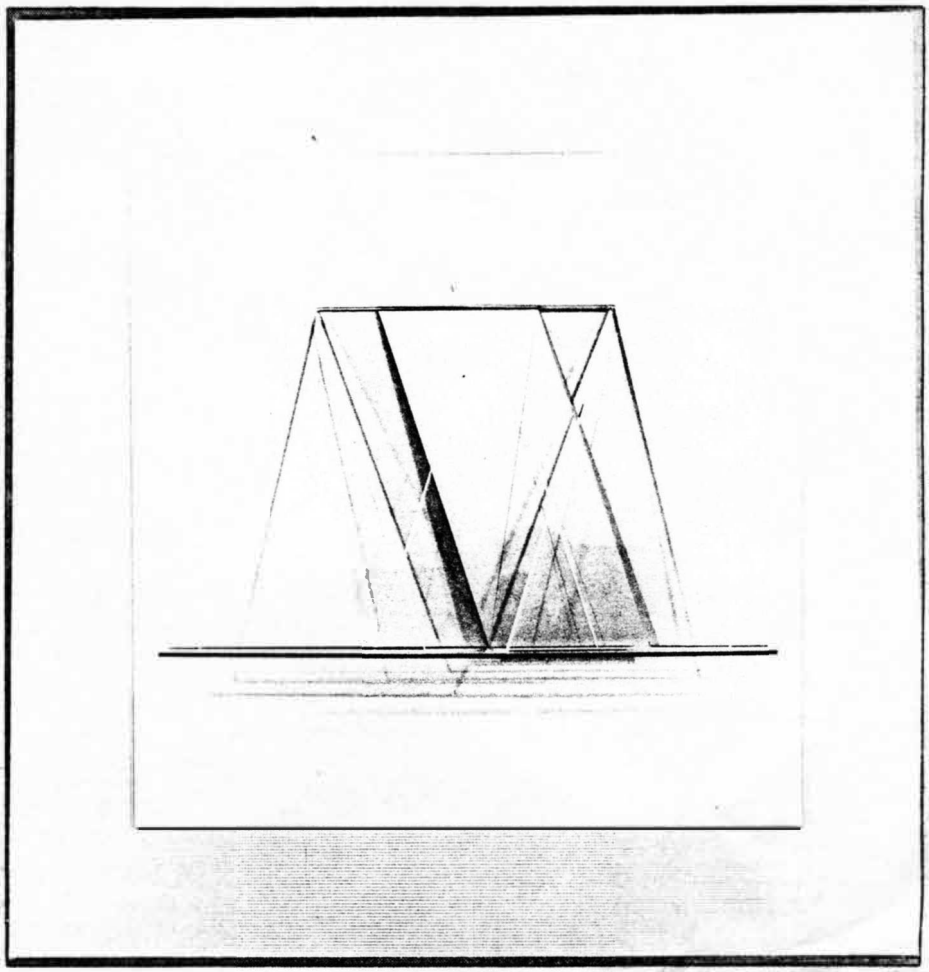
"My work has already had to have some conflict in it," Pecoraro says. The fragile look of Plexiglas against styrene strong enough to outlive bronze is one set of opposites he finds intriguing.

Some others: "I like to play around with symetrical and asymetrical forms, I like the play of smooth against texture."

Texture is the newest addition to Pecoraro's work. Previously all surfaces were smooth, the airbrushed ones velvet-mat finished.

Here, the Plexi forms are still smooth, the styrene background, in most cases, textured. The texture has two effects. Colors are more varied, altered by the angle of light, and the forms are more complex, as another shape is added to the array.

SALVATORE PECORARO will present a slide-lecture of his work at Mission College, Santa Clara, on May 9, 7 to 9 p.m. His show at Rubicon Gallery, 398 Main St., Los Altos, closes May 7. Gallery hours: Tuesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday and Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more information, call (415) 948-4848.



Prismatic Construction #70, airbrushed acrylic on canvas, styrene and Plexiglas, by Salvatore Pecoraro