

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, MAY 5, 2000

ART IN REVIEW

'True Grit'

Michael Rosenfeld Gallery

24 West 57th Street

Through tomorrow

Given that there is arguably and intermittently a feminine sensibility, this striking show excavates its darker side, as found in the art of seven women from the 1950's and 60's, just before the full-blown emergence of the women's movement. That timing may be germane to the sense of smoldering anger and ungratifying power that much of this work exudes, as well as its indelicate uses of techniques like sewing and jewelry making.

The show includes some usual suspects: examples of Louise Bourgeois's early wood sculpture, of Lee Bontecou's glowering reliefs and of Louise Nevelson's black compartmentalized black sculptures, as well as a plainer, more totemic Nevelson from 1955. Less familiar are exam-

ples of Nancy Spero's dark, furious gouaches from 1960, the later rose paintings of Jay de Feo and three wire sculptures by Claire Falkenstein, which suggest ostentatiously enlarged brooches. Especially impressive are the two sewn-leather reliefs and a wood sculpture by Nancy Grossman, which may have been influenced by Ms. Bontecou's and Nevelson's work but have a kinky strength all their own.

This ensemble, which has been organized by the critic and independent curator Arlene Raven, expands the notion of the feminine — right into so-called masculine territory. The work coheres formally and emotionally without any loss of individuality. If it had been produced by male artists, it would probably have been brought together at the time it was made, shaped into a movement, given a label and batted back and forth across the net of critical discourse countless times. It may or may not be better this way.

ROBERTA SMITH