San Francisco Chronicle Kenneth Baker Saturday, August 9, 2008

Mark di Suvero's "Mayakovsky" (1976) anchors a non-thematic group show titled "Summer in the City" at the John Berggruen Gallery.

The style of this rusted steel construction will surprise no one familiar with di Suvero's work. But the 32-year-old piece stands out by its up-to-the-minute feel. Its internal zigs and twists of form still correspond to the jaggedness of our daily experience.

The modernist origins of constructed sculpture in the work of Picasso and Julio Gonzalez, and their reinvention by David Smith, stood much closer to the time when di Suvero made "Mayakovsky" than to our moment.

The chain at the work's center, whatever di Suvero may have thought of it in 1976, reads now as a metaphorical tether to art history, and perhaps as lineament of the artist's desire to see each new work of his own connect solidly with the last.

"Mayakovsky" breaks into frames that close and open upon one another as a viewer circulates the piece.

Though as abstract as you please, "Mayakovsky" has a kind of narrative rhythm, less like that of a story than like the free verse of the Bolshevik poet for whom di Suvero named the piece. Like free verse, "Mayakovsky" had to create the form through which to persuade us of its artistic merit.

The work's title also seals an association between the spiral element at the sculpture's core and Vladimir Tatlin's design for the unbuilt "Monument to the Third International" (1919), an architectural monstrosity but a Constructivist classic.

Perhaps a mute political thought shows itself in the direct connection di Suvero made between the chain and the spiral.