

**EARLY WORK
BY FIVE CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS**

**RON GORCHOV
ELIZABETH MURRAY DENNIS OPPENHEIM
DOROTHEA ROCKBURNE
JOEL SHAPIRO**

THE NEW MUSEUM

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November 11 - December 30, 1977

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INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This exhibition is the indirect result of two incidents in 1969. One was my first visit to Elizabeth Murray's studio. She was no longer doing the work I had expected to see. The new work looked primitive, reminding me somewhat of Navaho sand paintings, and it was completely unlike anything I had seen by other contemporary painters. Each time I visited her studio over the subsequent years, I was repeatedly puzzled by the most recent work, but found I was able to understand or interpret the work immediately preceding it. Murray's work has always required time for me to absorb and reflect upon. The fact that it has consistently resisted immediate interpretation has been one of the most intriguing aspects of the work and, for me, perhaps the most gratifying.

The other incident is a story told to me by Ron Gorchov about my first visit to his studio early in 1969. An enormous, curved, intensely colored and outrageously messy painting stood on one wall. Gorchov recalls that I looked at it briefly, sat down at the table with my back to the painting, and spent an hour talking with him over coffee. The painting, *Mine* (1967), was such an aggressive and outspoken presence, violating in every way accepted formal criteria, that there was no way at all for me to deal with it at the time.

This exhibition is an opportunity to re-examine early work by five artists whose importance is clearly established in 1977, but whose earlier work rarely, if ever, received public exposure. It is an opportunity for artists and public to explore some of the issues raised by this work in relation to more recent pieces that have since had exposure and even have become well known. Our intention, in this exhibition, is to examine these crucial early works in the light of the evolution of the artists' careers to date, and to see in what way these pieces anticipated present concerns. The exhibition is part of a series which, periodically, will re-examine early work by artists both in and out of New York City.

The work shown here was all done between 1966 and 1973. No attempt has been made to select pieces from a given year, or to draw analogies by date between the early work of the five artists. They were selected because, for each individual, they are pieces which were generative of a large body of subsequent work, or which in some way contained the seeds of later concerns, now more fully developed. The artists have no stylistic bonds; rather, their concerns are disparate, their ages varied, their origins diverse. The only unifying characteristic is that their work was, even in its earliest manifestations, idiosyncratic, and remains so today.

The pieces were selected by the artists in conjunction with myself, Susan Logan and Allan Schwartzman of *The New Museum* staff. We gratefully acknowledge the support of the following people, without which the exhibition would not have been possible:

The Paula Cooper, Droll/Kolbert, and John Weber galleries assisted with the research and provided biographic and bibliographic information; Pat Steir designed the catalog; Joan Greenfield produced it; Warren Silverman photographed the work for publication. Cheryl Cipriani compiled the biographies and bibliographies and tirelessly assisted with numerous aspects of the exhibition. The manuscript was typed by Charlie Soule, proofread by Maureen Reilly and Andrea Pedersen, and edited by Tim Yohn. Peter Dworkin and Laurie Hawkinson helped install the exhibition.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to *The New Museum* staff and the many volunteers who worked under extraordinary pressure, for long hours, to make the exhibition possible. We, in turn, especially thank *The New Museum's* trustees for their unstinting and uncompromising support. Finally, we are grateful to the lenders, and to the artists above all, without whose extraordinary cooperation the exhibition could not have taken place.

M.T.

The late 1960s and early 1970s in New York, even from the vantage point of only half a decade, seem to have been a period of transition in painting and sculpture. Generally, large, monolithic, nonfigurative minimal forms were replaced by a heterogeneous, multi-faceted, pluralistic art, in which conventions were discarded entirely or borrowed from other areas of investigation. This brief period was characterized by an increasing breakdown of singular forms, and the emergence of an art whereby the process of making the work dictated its final form. The sculpture of Carl Andre, Michael Heizer, Eva Hesse, Barry Le Va, Alan Saret, Richard Serra, Keith Sonnier, Richard Tuttle and others showed a concern with the inherent properties of the materials used by them, as well as an emphasis on the bodily manipulation of those materials by an active physical force. Generally, their sculpture was accumulative, flat, distributional, and incorporated a temporal element; the finished work clearly could be seen as the result of a process that evolved in real time and real space.

In painting, minimal forms and non-imagistic work prevailed in the late 1960s. However, figuration made a comeback as a viable pictorial mode, with "new realism" at one extreme of the spectrum. At the same time, artists originally known to be painters or sculptors, such as John Baldessari, Lynda Benglis, Robert Morris and Bruce Nauman, made brief incursions into the areas of film, video and performance. Dancers, filmmakers, performers and writers—among them Scott Burton, Peter Campus, Yvonne Rainer, Paul Sharits, William Wegman—moved into other areas normally considered to be the province of fine arts. Conceptual or non-object oriented work such as that of Mel Bochner, Hanne Darboven, Hans Haacke, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner explored the esthetic possibilities of language, number and measurement. Still other artists like Robert Irwin and James Turrell explored the possibility of reducing art to a pure perceptual experience unaccompanied by an object.

The process of change from an art of permanent, visible objects to an art predicated on non-art materials, esthetics, values, or on change itself, resulted in understandable critical confusion. After years of "mainstream" esthetics, the heterogeneous and dematerialized nature of art at the decade's end implied the loss of a standard of judgment, since progress could no longer be measured by objective criteria. It seemed that if there were no clearly defined boundaries within which a work of art must function to be recognized as such, then the traditional methods of evaluation were doomed to fail.

Ron Gorchov, Elizabeth Murray, Dennis Oppenheim, Dorothea Rockburne and Joel Shapiro are five artists who participated in that brief history of change; to a certain extent, they have been responsible for it, each in a different way. All five artists were in some way harbingers of a shift in sensibility—Gorchov, Murray and Shapiro with their emphasis on personal, idiosyncratic, stylistically inconsistent or anti-formal modes, Oppenheim and Rockburne with their concerns for extra-art sources, materials and methods.

Because of the radical demeanor of their work at the time it was being made, the early work of these five artists was rarely seen and written about. For the most part, they emerged in the early 1970s without benefit of critical support¹ and only a few astute and adventurous collectors bought their work at the time.

The artists' exhibition history, at the time they were doing the work shown here, is sparse. Dorothea Rockburne showed one piece in the 1970 "Whitney Museum Annual of Contemporary American Sculpture"; her first solo show at Bykert Gallery was not until 1971. Ron Gorchov had solo exhibitions at Tibor de Nagy gallery in 1960, 1963 and 1966, but when he began to move

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away from flat rectangular canvases toward the curved, saddle-shaped format he has since used, he stopped exhibiting, and did not show again until 1972 at the Everson Museum in Syracuse, New York. Dennis Oppenheim did not exhibit before 1969, when the Jewish Museum showed a slide/tape/film presentation; he first showed in a New York gallery in 1968 (at John Gibson Gallery), and even then a European audience was more receptive to the issues raised by his non-object oriented work than was the New York audience. Joel Shapiro first exhibited in a group exhibition in 1969 (*Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials*, at the Whitney Museum of American Art). In 1970 he had his first solo show, a small exhibition at the Paula Cooper Gallery, and he did not show again until 1972. Elizabeth Murray was part of a group show only in 1972, and her first exhibition was not until 1974, at the Jacob's Ladder Gallery in Washington, with Joseph Zucker. She was in a small group show at Paula Cooper with John Torrealano and Marilyn Lenkowsky (1974) which met with little critical response.

The point here is not that the emerging talent was not recognized early, but that the context in which work is made will determine how that work is seen. Often, because artists work against the mainstream or the prevalent esthetic, it is difficult to evaluate individual works in the context of what is being done by the majority of artists at a given time. Since we are in such proximity to our own history (ten years is scarcely enough time to judge accurately the character of the entire "modernist" era), the early work of important contemporary artists might be more accurately evaluated in relation to its own context, that is, to the work of the particular artist which followed

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from or was generated by it. Thus, in a sense, it is fruitless to attempt to characterize the late 1960s by comparing the earlier work of these five artists to each other; nevertheless, it is possible to discuss in each individual case the seminal nature of these pieces, either stylistically or ideologically, in relation to the works that succeeded them.

Ron Gorchov has been an idiosyncratic painter from the start, in terms of his work and his attitudes toward it. The evolution of his work between 1966 and 1970 is prototypical of a key change in painting in the period, which has to do with the concept of flatness. Although *Predella* (1966) is painted on a traditional rectangular stretcher, its romantic, impassioned and improbable color sensibility and its painted organic forms hint at the biomorphism which was to emerge years later; its sensuous, tactile surface repudiated the prevailing tendency of dispassionate, analytic, minimal forms which eschewed illusion, psychology and symbolic reference.

When Gorchov, in 1967, began to work in what he refers to as the "extra dimension" of the shaped canvas, he was in the vanguard of the period. With *Mine* (1969), Gorchov curved the painting out of two-dimensional space into the space shared with it by the viewer. Rather than modifying the lateral parameters from their traditional rectangular configuration, Gorchov changed the space of the painting in front of it, making it a three-dimensional object on which a pictorial event transpired. Unlike Frank Stella, who constructed a painting from the inside out so that the final

shape of the frame literally expressed the initial impetus of the form at its core, or Jasper Johns, who made the pictorial image and the painted image equivalent, Gorchov imposed upon the viewer's space, thereby sharing the conventions not of sculpture (which is detached and can be walked around), but of the proscenium stage. *Mine* looms over the viewer, reaches out to encompass and to transform the entire space shared by the two. Thus, the painting takes on the power of another presence, as demanding and particular as that of the viewer's own. This is the effect of the peculiar saddle-like shape, which both extends and recedes, curves in and out at the same time, no matter what the size of the piece.

Mine is pivotal, because in this painting Gorchov located the arena—the alteration of the shape of the support—in which he has worked subsequently. Moreover, when it was painted, it was unique in heralding a return to an expressionist, pluralistic, romantic sensibility in painting, at a time when it appeared that such tendencies were only to be found in sculpture. *Mine*, says Gorchov, "did everything I didn't want a painting to do."² His original intention in extending its corners at top and bottom out into space was to soften the edges of the rectangle. Instead, the corners became aggressive, giving added emphasis to the intensity of the color and the idiosyncratic, paddle-like forms arrayed across the canvas. The painting was executed with two spray guns, one filled with paint, the other with a solution of hot water and alcohol, so at the moment the paint was applied it was simultaneously removed. The intensity of the colors (Radiant Red, Radiant Blue, Radiant Green and Radiant Yellow) and their violent transformation from pigment to drip to spray to vapor are fixed in the very moment of greatest flux, so that all states of application—from the thickest pigmentation to the most ethereal vaporization—are apparent. This extraordinary range of surface can be seen in *Figure*, Gorchov's most recent painting to date; when viewed in relation to *Mine* (installed temporarily at the same time in the studio), it seems to be the apotheosis of the earlier painting.

Gorchov made a curved wooden structure on which he painted close to twenty works; only *Mine* seemed able to sustain itself on this new support. After this, he worked on a series of structural exercises, of which *Set* (1971) was one. *Set*, a four-part stacked painting approximately 13 feet high, is situated in a corner, which it completely dominates without denying or confirming the nature of the corner as an architectural element. A salient feature of *Set*, besides its wrapping around the space behind it (unlike later work, which opens to the space in front of it) is its enormous size. "With small works, you can fudge over mistakes," Gorchov says. "I wanted to make big mistakes, so you could see them." It was *Set* that ultimately led Gorchov back to the curved structure which, when further refined, resulted in the configuration he has used ever since, in seemingly infinite variations of proportion and size.

Elizabeth Murray's work participated differently in the shift of sensibility. Until only very recently, Murray retained a traditional rectangular format in her work. However, she was one of the first painters to accept inconsistency of scale, size, image, and attitude, and to play upon its attendant freedoms. Her work stands as one of the earliest and most thorough explorations of a contemporary synthesizing sensibility. Murray is now able, in a single work, to incorporate both specific reference to earlier painting styles, and intense, personal symbolic references. Hers is an art of accumulation and assimilation, an aformal, non-relational kind of painting unlike anything else in the late 1960s.

Elizabeth Murray's attitude, exemplified in the early work, shares with

Gorchov's an interest in "taking chances." Thus in 1969 Murray countered the prevailing predilection for very large works, by doing paintings such as *Beer Glass* (1969) and *Untitled* (1970). The content of these small paintings, which resembled crude hieroglyphs, Navaho sand paintings, or primitivistic pictographs, stemmed from earlier figurative work based on transformational, fantastic images, in which a violent, Abstract Expressionist rendering seems to have collided head-on with a kind of Chicago School whimsical imagery.

Madame Cézanne in Rocking Chair (1972) appears at first glance to be stylistically incompatible with both preceding and subsequent work, yet one can see in the permutation of forms from panel to panel an iconography which continues into later work, in a more isolated and direct manner. The *Madame Cézanne* painting, which is one of a series of works, both large and small, done at the time, is also whimsical and formally improbable despite its underlying grid structure. The narrative sequence, in which Madame Cézanne falls from her chair, is disjunctive and resembles a filmic sequence in the style of Alain Resnais, say, rather than the straightforwardness of John Ford. In all of Murray's work animation is suggested through her use of odd and highly personalized shapes. In works like *Wave Painting* and *Up-Step* (both 1973) animation is conveyed not by serial or sequential images, but in the organic quality of the marks themselves.

While Murray's early work appeared to change radically every six months, the seeming inconsistencies of style from painting to painting in those years became the foundation for a stylistic melee that occurs in single paintings. In every new painting of Murray's, humor and irony, combined with an extraordinarily eccentric use of color and shape, make for an inversion of almost every stylistic convention in the history of twentieth-century painting.

From 1967 to about 1972, Dorothea Rockburne could not be said to defy the contemporary canons of painting simply because her work could not be characterized as painting. Working in an area between painting and sculpture, she rebelled against the strictures of neither, because she was interested in an altogether different aspect of art making—that is, in the properties of materials themselves rather than what they could be made into as sculpture or painting. Rockburne's work, unlike Murray's, is analytic in nature, but not in effect. Her intellectual interest in the nature of form was at the other extreme from Murray's concerns, but equally at odds with the prevalent Minimalist esthetic. While, in the late 1960s, unitary, non-inflected, so-called primary forms dominated both painting and sculpture, Rockburne's work took forms apart, dissected them, and altered them to reveal the infinite possible permutations of each, both singly and in series.

Even in early pieces like *Tropical Tan* (1966), the creasing of the metal suggests possibilities for unusual manipulation of material. These possibilities were explored further in *Black Ivory* and *Fire Engine Red*, in which the metal was not simply creased, but bent to form a self-framing edge, so that each piece not only refers to all of its own possibilities but *becomes* them. Rockburne's work thus expresses a change in attitude in the late 1960s, wherein the process of making the work becomes not only the motivation for the work, but the final product. It is not that the actual process results in the piece; rather, the implied, imagined or conceptualized process predicates the final form of the work. Mathematics and set theory were the underpinnings, providing a conceptual structure of possibility or potentiality, a scope that an actual or literal process alone could not provide. To this end, Rockburne experimented freely with ordinary materials that were unusual in a late 1960s context; by using thin sheets of steel and industrial paint, materials not characteristic of traditional painting, she emphasized the qualities of the materials themselves. The paper, grease, oil, graphite and chipboard works which immediately followed were sculptural in effect, yet utilized more transient, lighter materials. In Rockburne's case, the relationship between early and more recent work is clearer than in Murray's,

since Rockburne has focused and refined her earlier interests rather than amalgamated them into single works; this reflects a sensibility that is analytic rather than synthetic.

The genesis of her present concerns, in the most immediate sense, is in her use of color. The earlier intention, shown in the three paintings in this exhibition, to use color as a physical (rather than optical or illusionistic) element is reiterated, although clarified and refined, in the recent *Robe* series (1976). *Tropical Tan* contains two distinctly layered colors which separate from each other in a non-illusionistic way; in the *Robe* series, with its wider range of hues, color becomes an element of pure form, "a facet of the identity of certain shapes."³

The formal configuration of the 1966 works, with their folded and/or creased metal, is the first impetus for the systematic manipulation of an extraordinary variety of materials—cardboard, vellum, carbon paper, kraft paper, chipboard, linen, graphite, oil—from which a particular topology evolved as a result of examining the potential inherent in the material itself. If this potential is expressed in formal terms, it relates to specific states of feeling, as precisely delineated as her materials are manipulated. Even while such earlier works as *Tropical Tan* dealt with more concrete aspects of being, the impetus for emotional as well as formal specificity was already to be found in them.

Two of Joel Shapiro's earliest pieces—a square of dyed monofilament stapled to a wall, and a distributional array of wooden sticks (both 1969)—manifested the esthetic concerns of process and "anti-form" of such other radical sculptors of the time as Barry Le Va, Robert Morris, Richard Serra, Eva Hesse, Alan Saret and Lynda Benglis. Immediately afterwards, however, Shapiro's work began to deviate sharply from these concerns and to move into an area of subjective, psychological, or internalized formal consciousness. This change in intent was first expressed in a radical alteration of scale. Whereas the distributional pieces had been large, the handformed clay and porcelain pieces that followed were small, intimate gestures, isolating the process of physical activity as the result of an emotional or psychological state, the residue of which, through that activity, was located in the piece itself. The sense of autobiography as a result of physical activity in Shapiro's work (rather than the traditional sense of autobiography as the re-enactment or record of past events) was an early manifestation of attitudes which became prevalent in the area of performance art several years later.

While his work, like Rockburne's, is analytic rather than synthetic, prompted by an urge toward clarification rather than accumulation, Shapiro shares with Murray and Gorchov a predilection for change, as method as well as a formal means to an end. The earliest Shapiro piece in the exhibition, a small compressed lead shape (one of two such pieces made at the time) expressed the activity of the hand on a malleable material. The focus here was on how the mere making of a work could imbue it with content. It was an attempt to transfer meaning to the inert, passive form of the lead. The works that followed, such as the untitled terra cotta piece of 1971, dealt with the alterations of a single shape which could be hand-held. Each permutation of the basic circle (there are approximately five dozen) carries the implication of the same kind of emotional or energy transfer that occurs in the lead piece, except that in the 1971 work the energies are multiplied and diversified. In still later work, when Shapiro began casting, the energy or content of the pieces became increasingly independent of the artist's hand, so that the content became more a question of the symbolic and psychological meaning of the form itself. Thus, the tiny houses, horse, and chair shown in 1974 took on a primal quality in addition to their specific meaning in Shapiro's developing personal iconography of forms.

In two 1971 pieces made of gauze and plaster, a new aspect of self-containment is to be detected. The pieces consist of pale, enigmatic, con-

ical shapes. Despite the hand-made character of their unfinished and tactile surfaces, the shapes are autonomous and not expressive of a specific physical manipulation, as is the case with the component terra cotta works. Situated on the floor with considerable space around them, they convey a sense of self-containment, the creation of a specific space imbued with meaning which carries over into the houses and cast forms which succeeded them. The forms are abstract rather than specific, and avoid the suggestion of real objects or situations. They are, however, the first pieces which could be described, in Shapiro's words, as "holding a space."

Like Shapiro, Dennis Oppenheim at the outset shared the concerns of other vanguard artists. His work fell into three categories—earthworks and large scale outdoor projects; installations; performances, video, film and body-related works—which from the start were, in his words, "fired by a real dislike for the way things were, for the way objects were absorbing the viewer's intentions," and which involved the inversion of the conventions of artist vs. spectator, subject vs. object. His was an art of mental activation, based on the belief, in 1967, that "there was nothing left to make."

While Oppenheim's large-scale earthworks of 1967-69 appeared firmly situated in the progressive esthetics of outdoor, on-site situations, these concerns changed in 1969 to the use of his own body as an object. Each time Oppenheim's work has appeared to be rooted within a mainstream, it shifted, so that to look back on it now, in the light of such marionette pieces as *Attempt To Raise Hell* (1974), *Theme for a Major Hit* (1975), or *Search for Clues* (1976), is to see that he has always been involved in a pluralistic and heterogeneous investigation of the ways in which art can be made to establish its own context, or to extend beyond its own formal parameters. Because Oppenheim looked outside the conventions of object-making at an early date, he was one of the first contemporary artists to explore the possibilities of incorporating conventions from such non-art areas of investigation as theater, architecture and psychology. Radical shifts of style and media in his work which earlier earned him the reputation of being "critically . . . one of the most unmanageable artists around"⁴ now seem consistent with the current "post-movement period," as Oppenheim describes it. Moreover, the flavor of his work throughout—ironic, terrifying, mysterious and often perverse—has enriched and complicated its emotional intent and effect. Few other artists expressed such interests at a time when conceptual, intellectually rigorous, distanced and impersonal work was the norm. Oppenheim assimilated aspects of psychology, personality, irrational and illogical methods or interests, while the majority of artists opted for autonomous and formal methods and results.⁵

The *Tables* (1966), consisting of wooden structural members isolated on rolled vinyl "padded" tables, three feet high, were an early inversion of late 1960s Minimalism, since they isolated specific component parts of a potential sculptural structure. They were the reverse of a process or "anti-form" esthetic, since the configuration of the pieces is arrived at by presenting isolated elements that *could be* rather than *were* used in a sculptural process. That is, Oppenheim presents the projected potential for a piece of sculpture through decompartmentalization rather than suggested construction.

The *Site Markers* (1967) share this element of inversion by locating visual situations that already exist and re-examining them in an art context. There are ten markers, each containing a document describing the existing site and location; the sites pinpoint horizontal elements or situations, removing them even further from the notions of traditional sculpture. Engaging in a similar dialectic, the *Viewing Stations* (straightforward platforms on which to stand) present the activity of pure viewing as an object. What is to be viewed, whether it is an indoor or outdoor space, thus becomes pure context.

In part, Oppenheim's radical shifts of style are occasioned by a working

method with which he plays devil's advocate with his own sensibility, testing each aspect of his thinking (for instance, the concept of working outdoors and altering the landscape) by immediately reversing the procedure (working indoors on intimate, body-related pieces). The marionette pieces, in which small surrogate figures perform in ways that the artist (or the viewer) is unable to—slamming violently into a large bell at eye level, every 100 seconds; dancing continuously; being the victim of a vicious murder—further the aspects of inversion and self-reflection that have characterized Oppenheim's work all along. The marionette acts as an object imbued with meaning by virtue of its activity; earlier, Oppenheim transferred meaning to the object by using the body itself as a sculptural element.

Understanding the body as both subject and object permits one to think in terms of an entirely different surface. . . . One can oscillate from the position of instigator to victim. Take the phenomenon of grabbing: instead of grabbing clay, you grab your stomach. For the first time, instead of imposing form manually, you are feeling what it is like to be made. You might have felt your hands picking up a piece of wood and stacking it, but you have never felt what the wood felt.⁶

Oppenheim was able to transfer this intensity of feeling to a surrogate figure because of our sympathetic response to the human form of the marionette. Thus, aspects of the early work can be seen as the initial attempts to share experiences with the viewer not through the use of an object *per se*, but through an activity, either conceptual, physical or empathetic. He expresses an increasing need "to get close to the spectator" through his work.

Each of these five artists, in a different way, has pointed to the emotional motivation for and response to their work as an added element in it. In some cases, it is part of an essential continuum which is seen more clearly from the present perspective. Rockburne's desire to "work in an area which is not limited" is a shared concern; Oppenheim "tries to leave things undone"; Murray is interested in "losing control"; Gorchoff tries to do what he "can't and shouldn't"; Shapiro talks of having "no finite solution or stance." A concern with magic, with the transformation of experience, with the extension of possibility and with change as a method of working, rather than with formal strategies, is characteristic of their work and of the art of the mid-1970s.

What the five artists have in common, then, is not a shared set of stylistic conventions, but an eschewing of polemic in their work; they are concerned with the clarification of ideas and emotional states, with the support of other artists and ideas which may be different from their own, and with the growth of their own work and ideas in a personal rather than ideological idiom. In this respect they are prototypical. Their work and attitudes—pluralistic, aggressively idiosyncratic and variable—emerged, as Dennis Oppenheim puts it, "by traversing the mainstream" rather than by going against it.

Marcia Tucker

Footnotes

1. Unless otherwise noted, statements by artists have been made in conversation with the author in September, 1977.
2. Robert Pincus-Witten was an early (1970) supporter of Joel Shapiro and Dorothea Rockburne; Carter Ratcliffe also wrote favorably about Rockburne. Gorchoff and Murray did not receive any critical attention until around 1974, although Gorchoff's very early work of about 1960 was reviewed. Oppenheim's work was intelligently appraised by Jack Burnham (1970) and an informative series of interviews was published by and with Willoughby Sharpe in 1970 and 1971.
3. Naomi Spector, "New Color Work by Dorothea Rockburne," in *Working with the Golden Section, 1974-76*, John Weber Gallery, New York, 1976, n.p.
4. Kenneth Baker, review, *Art in America*, May 1973, p. 103.
5. Among the other "conceptual artists" working along similar lines at the same time were John Baldessari and Bruce Nauman, both West Coast artists. Oppenheim, who left the San Francisco Bay Area in 1966, may have been, like them, influenced by the emotional climate of the area. The wit and irony of West Coast art in the late 1960s differentiates it from that of such East Coast conceptualists as Lawrence Weiner, Joseph Kosuth, and Douglas Huebler.
6. Willoughby Sharpe, "Interview with Dennis Oppenheim," *Studio International*, November, 1971, pp. 186-193.

SL: When you look back over your work from different periods what things surprise you the most?

RG: My new work really surprises me a lot. Then there's one painting I did in 1956. It's a large painting, probably eight feet tall by six feet wide. It's on four pieces of paper glued onto heavy linen fabric and sewn together. It was the first painting I did where I felt like I could do something unusual. Then the next painting that really surprised me was *Mine* in 1969. I couldn't do anything for a while after that because it really had to be more refined to get anything done.

SL: Was that the first curved canvas?

RG: Yes. Since then almost every painting has really been a surprise. Like I've really been shocked. I've been amazed I've been able to do something with such a strict format for so long. Recently a young painter asked me what direction I thought my work will be taking. Well, I have no idea. I said that as long as I feel that the work has a certain power to it, then I'll keep doing it. When you feel as if you're losing your power, that's when you want to cast around for another means. It's really that I'll keep doing this kind of work as long as it gives me a feeling of discovery.

SL: You have said of *Mine* that after you finished it, you had to rationalize its structure. What do you mean?

RG: I realized I couldn't go on unless I could build the stretchers more easily. Also I hated the curves in it; I wanted softer corners. I had to study those curves, really work it out and rationalize it so I could understand it well enough to make many.

SL: How did you study it?

RG: Mostly trial and error.

SL: How important is the idea of being rational in your work?

RG: The only reason I think to be rational about anything is to make the work easier to realize. You can't materialize them, unless you rationalize them to some extent. When something is rational, you have a way of saying how to do the work.

SL: So it's a method of being able to work.

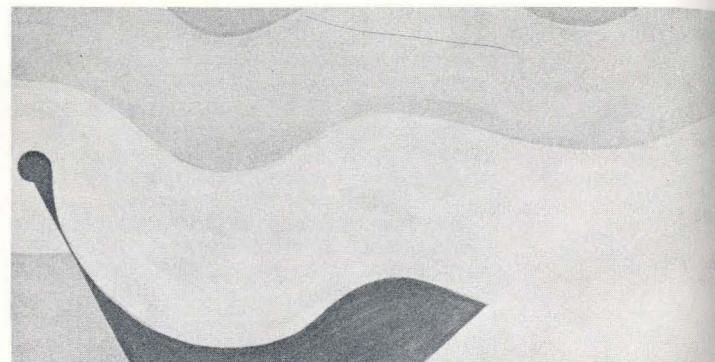
RG: Yes. If everything is just built one of a kind, it can be gerrybuilt. Do you know the expression, gerrybuilt? It means no system. You can make almost anything that way. But I wanted them to be able to do a lot of things. I wanted them to stand shipping and to be very movable. They can be handled pretty easily without damaging the canvas. The canvas is fragile. The stretcher is designed to give a backing. Those were all the rational reasons. They have nothing to do with the art.

SL: It's interesting that you talk about the construction of the painting in terms of defense of protecting the fragility, yet the structure gives an aggressiveness to the painting.

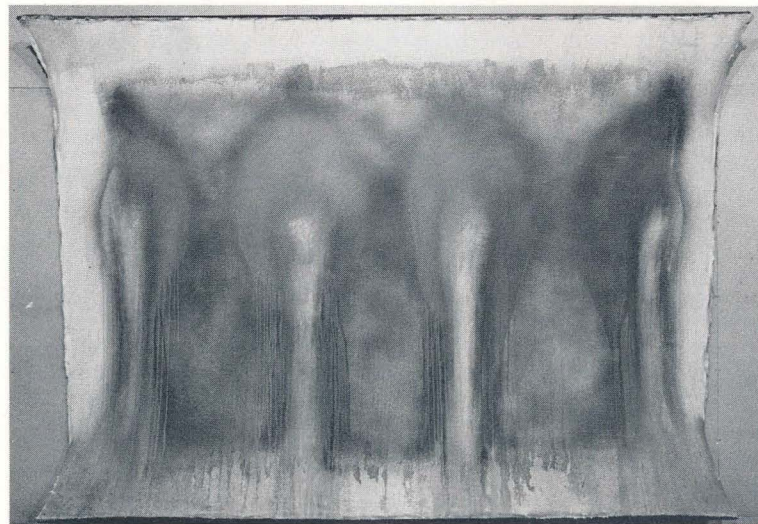
RG: I don't think that makes the paintings aggressive. I mean first of all they're exposed, the surface is very fragile. The reason I think that people think they're aggressive is because they're unfamiliar. I think the more positive word would be affirmative. They declare themselves and I suppose that's aggressive. The shape isn't more aggressive than other art.

SL: Your work is very symmetrical. What do you think about symmetry?

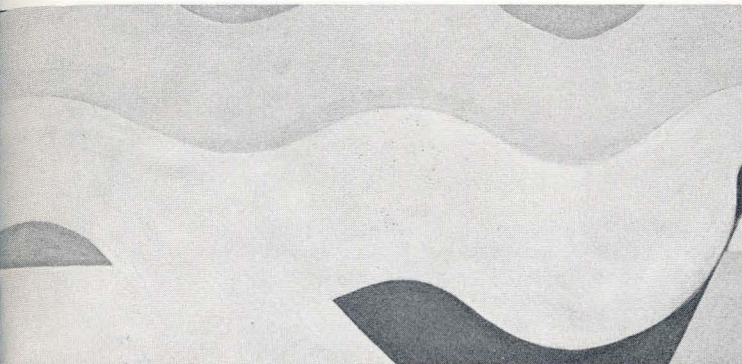
RG: I don't like symmetry. I never thought that I'd be doing symmetrical paintings. That's one of the surprises in my new work. I got interested in



RON GORCHOV

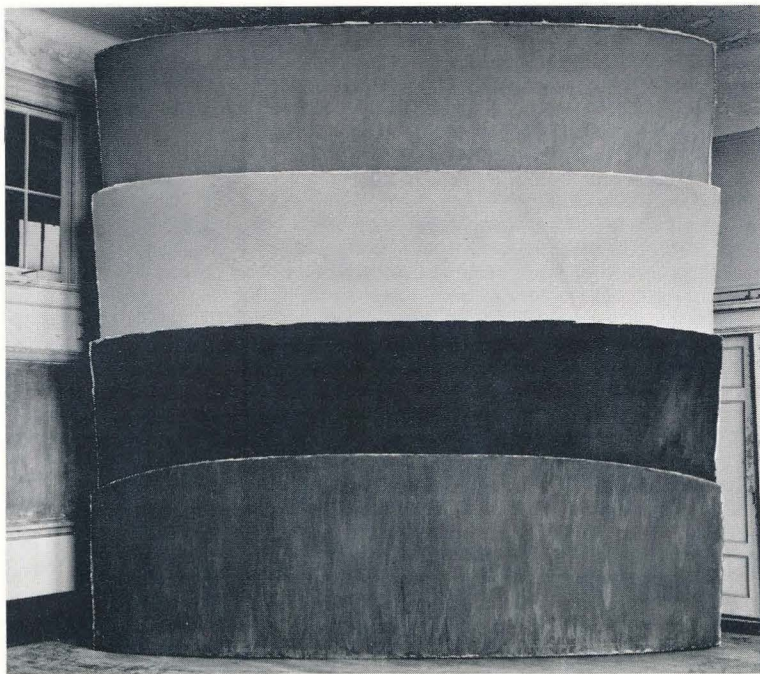


Ron Gorchov: *Mine* (1968-69)
Photo credit—Warren Silverman



Ron Gorchov: Predella (1966)
Photo credit—Harry Shunk

AN INTERVIEW BY SUSAN LOGAN



Ron Gorchov: Sef (1971)
Photo credit—Harry Shunk

symmetry because I don't understand it. I don't like it. I have a kind of traumatic reaction to it. It repels me. I've been doing these paintings because there's still the fascination or repulsion with symmetry.

SL: It's as though the paintings have the most reduced kind of symmetry, almost primitive.

RG: "Primitive" has so many connotations but I think it's definitely elementary. Also it's not exactly symmetrical. It's about as good as I can do without measuring. It's just symmetrical enough to be confusing.

SL: Is it important to you what you can do without measuring, I mean without being exact?

RG: That's not a consideration either. It's just too much trouble to measure. If it's going to be more trouble to redraw until I get it right, then I'll measure. But then the funny thing is it usually drifts off after I've been painting awhile, which is fine.

SL: Is your own physicality a consideration in the measurement and size of your work?

RG: It's not really but I think it's part of the way I limit the work.

SL: So you are your own limitation for the size of your work.

RG: Right. I try not to put the marks out of reach.

SL: How does color relate to your work?

RG: Well, I'm more conscious now about colors than I used to be. When I started painting, my idea of color was to get as many different colors and shades in a painting as possible while having it look relatively simple. The other thing that I tried was to do paintings that no one could walk away from and say that it was a yellow or a red painting. I remember thinking of paintings by Piero della Francesca or Rogier van der Weyden which strike me as being no particular color. So the idea of those early paintings was to do a painting that had a lot of strong colors in it from which you could walk away thinking they were neutral. And every now and then, I want to do that again. Some paintings I do now satisfy that in a way.

SL: Do you make your own paint?

RG: Oh yes. I mean I don't make them all but many of them I do. I grind them right on the spot. I'm really interested in the pigment. I'm always interested in the right pigment system with the least amount of binder to make it stick. So, I'm really more interested in the mechanics of color than its hue. When I'm looking for a color, I'm looking for a certain feel to it, how it's going to spread. In almost every case, if it spreads right, it's going to be the right color.

SL: Do colors have certain associations or meanings for you?

RG: Well, if I'm aware of associations, I try not to make them. I try to add my own sense of life to traditional associations. For instance, I know that red and black are supposedly colors of death, tragic colors. If I'm aware that I'm doing a painting that has a heavy historic and poetic connotation, like those colors do, then it's really an important decision to add my own feelings to it so that I change the tradition of that color. The idea is to change the tradition of the color.

SL: I'm curious about why you use two colors and how your attitude toward color has changed.

RG: Well, I may find that a particular color repels me. I won't be able to use it at all. And that's exactly the color that I would want to use or try to use

maybe a year later. When I just can't touch the color, I can be sure that eventually I'll get around to really wanting to see it. Many artists, in my opinion, explore colors only at a certain point, when they're ready for it. Once I've explored a particular color or group of colors, then that color or the feeling for that color is finished for me. I won't be using it that much for a while. A lot of the development in my work is trying to get the maximum experience of any particular color. Then I go on to the next, go on to find what makes it live. Every time I start to do a painting that might be blue, for instance, it is because it seems to me at that moment that I've really never done a blue painting. I'll remember blue paintings I've done, but say that was another blue. "Now I want to really do blue." As to the question of the marks being another color, the marks are meant to make the painting more what it is.

SL: What things that you see particularly affect your experience of color?

RG: When I'm out of my studio, particularly at certain times of the day, every color looks absolutely fabulous, especially in certain light. Those are terrific moments, when I feel like I've never seen a color before. How you perceive color becomes a gauge for how you feel. Depression, morale, and feelings are associated with seeing color.

SL: Do you ever anticipate the effects the colors in your paintings are going to have on other people?

RG: It's hard, I can't really say. I guess I do. For instance, I did a painting in 1975 for an artist who hasn't been able to live with it. She loved it, but found it tough to live with. It's just too strong. There's been a certain limit to the amount of time that people have been able to live with me. I can see that paintings could be really hard to live with. Maybe the ones that are the toughest to live with are the ones I'll have to keep.

SL: Do you have any strong feelings about what you absolutely *don't* want your paintings to be?

RG: No, as a matter of fact, if there were something like that, I'd be really interested in doing it. You know, whatever you fear would be what you have to do. I wish I knew something I couldn't stand.

SL: How does exhibiting your paintings affect you?

RG: Exhibiting has to do with the desire for a public viewing and showmanship. I suppose I've gotten interested in that, but I wasn't interested in it for a long time. Exhibition is more about giving as wide a public as possible an inside track on what the source of my creativity is. But judging my own work . . . there's a lot of work that I don't show anybody. I just keep it here and put it away. If you had as many children as I make paintings, some of them might be ugly or maybe dullwitted, something like that. You wouldn't push them out into public so fast. You'd give them a chance to find out what else they can do. I think of them as helping to instruct my other work. I would think that if you had lots of children, you might have an idiot or two. If you were really humanistic, you'd give them a chance to be instructors for your more brilliant children, who would learn patience and kindness. They would become more perfect being around the children that have to be kept closer to home. In the old days, rich people took care of all their kids. Nowadays people just get rid of the dopes.

SL: Do you feel that selling your work is similar to exhibiting?

RG: Well, they're related. But about selling my work, I think that artists are more materialistic than most people. It's a different kind of materialism, but

in a way they're more materialistic than businessmen. Businessmen often aren't interested in the matter of what they do; they just want profit. Whereas artists really want to make things out of matter, to transform matter. I really think that artists feel that if they don't know what matter is, they're not going to understand spirit. And the fact is that transforming matter, doing wonderful things with matter — all that costs money. The whole idea of the art marketplace as a world for testing is very worldly. I think that part of a lot of artists' destinies is not to be sheltered in monasteries or cloisters, in institutions beyond the world, but to be tested by the world.

My rationalization for selling work is a whole other thing. My major passion is to make art and I can't take care of all the art I make. So I want someone to take care of it for me. In a sense, people just have to be bonded to prove to me that they can take care of the work. So selling serves a double purpose. It takes care of me so that I can make more art and it proves to me that the art will be cared for.

SL: What things outside of art influence your work?

RG: A lot of things. Movies, for example. Just the tonality of movies, like the tonalities of 1940's technicolor movies, really influence my colors.

SL: There was something in some reviews of your work in the late fifties that said you were influenced by the architecture of old movie houses.

RG: Yeah, it's true. Some of those movie houses were sort of Byzantine and Oriental. The movie houses had an idea of ancient splendor, an Oriental idea. That kind of splendor just doesn't exist anymore. They used to have ballrooms, grand pianos covered in gold leaf, incredible vases, eighteenth-century paintings, Baroque thrones, hangings and rugs, marble floors.

SL: Your paintings are so elemental that I would never have suspected that you have a taste for the Baroque.

RG: Right. These paintings are just simply pared down. The whole idea is that paintings are like stopping time, static images. You don't need much to make time stand still.

SL: Are there any artists who have particularly influenced you?

RG: Well, it's pretty well known that I was close to John Graham. Also Tony Smith was my first supporter and first big influence. Then after that, it's been younger artists who've been the biggest influence on me, like Marilyn Lenkowsky and Lynda Benglis. I've also been interested in Al Held, as an argument against what I'm doing. Work doesn't always have to be like yours to influence you. If something that someone else is doing is considered so important, then you've got to come up with something that can be compared to it as another context. My work is in many ways a response to certain artists' work. That's how artists influence each other—by creating the context, asking the questions, and giving a response. Certain conditions have to exist before you can do something, you know. Most art is based on conditions that an artists suddenly sees as an opportunity. Almost all good art, I think, has a lot to do with that.

SL: How do you feel about showing this early work?

RG: This is really a terrific opportunity. As a result, I'm sure that I'll think more about experiments with things that might not get shown for many years. You know one of the most interesting things you can do is to go back say fifteen or twenty years and remind someone of a particular situation. You'll remember it and remind them—"You were sitting there, you said such

and such, and I said . . ." Recently, I titled a small painting *Retarded Terror* because I had just seen Carl Andre that night before I did the painting. I knew him back in the early sixties. We were teasing each other about the old days. Once he had come to see my paintings and said, "You know, you're a terrific painter, but your paintings are *retardataire*." You know, the French

RON GORCHOV

Born in Chicago, Illinois, 1930. Educated at the University of Mississippi (1947-1948), Art Institute of Chicago (1948-1950) University of Illinois (1950-1951, BFA).

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1960 Tibor de Nagy, New York City
- 1963 Tibor de Nagy, New York City
- 1966 Tibor de Nagy, New York City
- 1972 Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York
- 1975 Fischbach Gallery, New York City
- 1976 Texas Gallery, Houston, Texas
- 1977 Susanne Hilberry Gallery, Birmingham, Michigan

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1958 Stable Gallery, New York City
- 1959 National Art Show, New York City
- 1960 "Young America 1960 — Thirty Painters Under 36," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City
- 1961 Tibor de Nagy, New York City
American Federation of the Arts (Traveling Show)
- 1962 "The 1961 Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture," Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
- 1963 "22nd International Watercolor Biennial," Brooklyn, New York
Fine Arts Series, Hunter College, New York City
- 1964 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia
Fischbach Gallery, New York City
Tibor de Nagy, New York City
- 1965 Waddell Gallery, New York City
"Enamel Show," Multiples, New York City
- 1966 Westmoreland County Museum, Westmoreland, Pennsylvania
- 1970 "The 1950's Revisited — Twentieth Anniversary Exhibition," Tibor de Nagy, New York City
- 1971 Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York
- 1973 Fischbach Gallery, New York City
Bykert Gallery, New York City
- 1974 Texas Gallery, Houston, Texas
John Doyle Gallery, Paris, France
Cologne Art Fair, Cologne, West Germany (John Doyle Gallery, Exhibitor)
Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York
- 1975 Clarkson Town Hall, New York City
- 1976 California State University, Northridge, California
"New Work/New York," California State University, Los Angeles, California

word for "not hip."

SL: You mean not avant-garde?

RG: Right. So when I reminded him of that time, he said, "I didn't say your paintings were *retardataire*. I said you were a 'retarded terror.'" The thing is he remembered. He had to come up with something.

School of The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois

Fine Arts Building, New York City

Lowe Gallery, Syracuse, New York

The Johnson Gallery, Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vermont

Hallwalls, Buffalo, New York

"Recent Abstract Painting," State University of New York at Brockport, Brockport, New York

"New York — Downtown Manhattan: SoHo," Akademie der Kunst and the Berliner Festwochen, Berlin, Germany

Susanne Hilberry Gallery, Birmingham, Michigan

1977 "Biennial Exhibition: Contemporary American Art," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City

"Recent Abstract Painting," Tyler Art Gallery, State University of New York at Oswego, Oswego, New York

"Recent Abstract Painting," Michael Rockefeller Art Gallery, State University of New York at Fredonia, Fredonia, New York

Ghislain Mollet-Vieville, J.P. Najar Galerie, Paris, France

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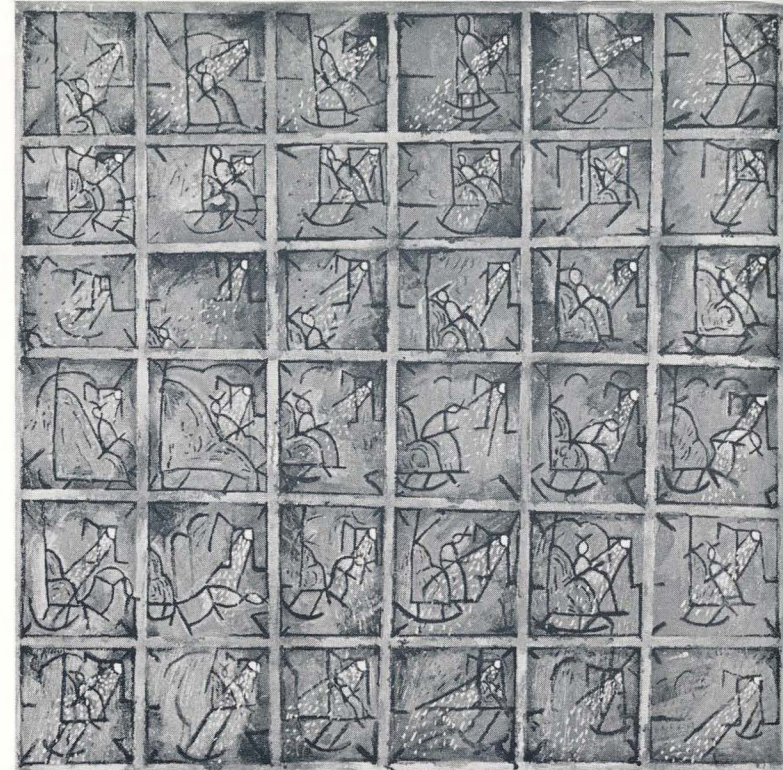
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Elizabeth Murray: *Beer Glass* (1969)
Photo credit—Warren Silverman



Elizabeth Murray: *Up-Step* (1973)
Photo credit—Warren Silverman



Elizabeth Murray: *Madame Cézanne in Rocking Chair* (1972)
Photo credit—Warren Silverman

ELIZABETH MURRAY

AS: Your earlier work shown in this exhibition is visually quite diverse. When I first saw the work, it didn't seem to be connected, but the more I looked and thought about the work, the more apparent a connection became, but it's masked.

EM: For me it isn't masked. The clear connection to me would be the paint, which I'm very involved in. And I see real connections in the way I feel about the paint, the way I manipulate the paint and use the paint from one painting to another. And the other connection is the move into a deeper use of shapes. I see how I've used the same shape again and again in different ways. Also the work has become more open to color.

AS: Was the color intuitive in the earlier works?

EM: Yes. There's a mushing around with color, a fear of it in those paintings, but not in the two green ones [*Wave Painting*, 1973 and *Up-Step*, 1973]. Looking back on it, I remember thinking, "Oh, green." In the smaller paintings

[*Beer Glass*, 1969, *Untitled*, 1970, and *Madame Cézanne in Rocking Chair*, 1972] I didn't feel confused. I wanted what was happening to happen, but it took a long time. There's a search for consciousness. It was more like mushing through, walking through the swamp until you find a blue, and the blue's okay. I feel I'm more direct now; I'm able to get there more directly with less anxiety.

AS: What do you think about when you are painting?

EM: I think . . . I don't think, and that's what I enjoy about it. When I step back and look and start getting ideas about it . . . I don't want them. Work is not about thinking, it's an action and a response. I feel more in tune with it and happiest with myself when I'm just immersed in it.

AS: How conscious of the act of painting were you when you did works like *Madame Cézanne in Rocking Chair*?

EM: Perhaps more than nowadays. But still the decision, the choice came



Elizabeth Murray: *Wave Painting* (1973)
Photo credit—Warren Silverman



Elizabeth Murray: *Untitled* (1970)
Photo credit—Warren Silverman

AN INTERVIEW BY ALLAN SCHWARTZMAN

from an urge, not from an idea. The way I started that painting was the way I start most of my paintings: by making a big mess. Then I used tape to organize the compartments. I still use tape a lot. I think of it as making molds or templates. I wanted to do those little images inside those compartments. I had done drawings around that feeling, that theme. You could call that a logic, or a rationale, but I don't think it comes from a rationale, I think it comes from the unconscious. You feel the irrational first and as that develops it begins to be more conscious . . . "Well, I'll use tape and I'll make compartments and inside the compartments I'll make the little figure going in and out." I work on them for a long time but I try to avoid fussing. I used to fuss more. This is going to sound a little weird, now I don't think this is sadistic, but maybe it is: they finally feel finished when after all my efforts — I usually have a lot of problems with them — I can just say, "Fuck it, I want this to happen." Sometimes the scariest thing is when the

tension between controlling and giving in breaks and I'll think "You just can't put pink next to black" and then I'll think, "Oh yes you can" and I do follow the urge and I feel a real joy. That's when they feel finished to me. I've done it. It's spent. It's over with. I can put it away. All that takes a long time, and I usually don't quit until I have the experience of somehow transforming my expectations of what it's going to be.

AS: Was there a specific visual source for the *Untitled* painting of 1970?

EM: Somehow I know it's related to Cézanne's *Card Players*. What I was thinking about was a moon rising and a reflection — a moon, the little half circle; the little squiggly thing was the reflection of the moon; those little triangle things were a little pine tree; and the straight lines are ripples in the water.

AS: The images are very ambiguous. They can be seen as many different things, say hats, or an Indian motif.

EM: Yes, a lot of people brought that up about my work then. And it does have that feeling, in the off symmetry and the way I framed it and then framed it again on the inside, and in terms of a sign kind of thing and a symbol kind of thing. It's similar to the way that the Indians use a sign or a symbol and flatten it out and just plump it down there. But at the same time, I know that symbol in my work is absolutely there—always—in terms of color and in terms of shape. In a way they do feel like very physical symbols, like that little squiggly symbol I'm saying is the reflection of the moon rising behind the river flickers in and out. And I'm interested in the shape too. I've used that shape over and over and I want to use it again, but I have to find the right place to put it. That big comma shape [from a recent painting in the studio] is also a real birth shape for me. I'm aware of the connections. I think that they disturb people sometimes, because that kind of use of symbol can be disturbing.

AS: That kind of ambiguity makes the work so interesting.

EM: I think there's a gap there then, and that's what I've always felt the most curious about—what people call reality. There's reality and there's dream, and then there's an in-between place which is really real. Maybe that's what you're calling the ambiguity or the tension, as when you get the conscious and the unconscious and just pull them together and then drop down through the middle someplace, which is not really known. It comes from the conscious and it comes from the unconscious and it pulls down into this empty place.

AS: Has scale always been a preoccupation?

EM: I really consider it a lot. I work into it intuitively, but a half inch is really important when I decide what the size of something is going to be. But now, with these shaped canvases I can't have that much control. In this recent painting each side is one inch shorter than the previous one, causing weird angles. They have to be made intuitively. The people who made those for me had to just lay the wood on top and mark it off, so it didn't come out to the exact dimension I gave them, but it came out the shape I wanted. It's nice to give the plan to someone you trust who's going to make a beautiful stretcher and get it back and lose the control. I like losing the control. As I'm making them I'll start something one way and turn it upside-down. It's in those ways that you go backward and forward.

AS: You haven't been doing much drawing lately. . . .

EM: No, I haven't. In the last two or three years I seem to go in and out. A couple of years ago I realized that I really do like to draw but I do it so well, it can get really slick and I know it's not good for me—it's just an activity—so then I stop. But I get an urge every once in a while—it hasn't come for about a year now—that I can really do something that feels really creative and new to me, even if it's the same thing. I think that as my painting has become more involved I work out everything right there. And that's been very satisfying. There doesn't seem to be any energy left that I want to put into a drawing.

AS: So you used to use drawing to work out problems?

EM: Yes. I used drawing to work things out. The paintings came more out of drawing then. But when I began to get back to oil paint, the drawings began to stop for me. I did a lot of drawing when I was pregnant and when my son, Dakota, was an infant, and that was just about all I could do. After he was born I felt a real urge to work, so I did a lot of drawing then because it was easier. My life really changed when I had a child. Everything changed. Without my even giving it a thought or having an expectation that it would be so, it totally changed my work and my creativity. I think of it as being the basic awakening thing.

AS: Do you look back at older works?

EM: No, I never do. I'm not that into the past. I know they're all connected and I could not do what I'm doing now without having done the others; although I do feel fond of them, as though they're all my children. I don't

have any paintings I didn't feel complete with, because I just change them and change them until they feel good to me. I've only once shown a painting I didn't feel good about, then I got it back and changed it after it had been shown. They're like old friends, but I don't feel possessive about them, as though they have to have their hair slicked back. I feel pretty much at ease with them.

AS: Where were you before you came to New York?

EM: I came here from San Francisco. I spent about three years there going to graduate school. I was so serious about my work that I wouldn't talk to anybody at all, I just worked and did a lot of reading: Einstein and things like that to find out about physics, science, and philosophy; James Joyce, novels; I think I was using up the intellectual part of myself, really getting rid of my mind. I met Carlos Villa out there. He was doing beautiful enormous paintings that were influenced by Still, but they were alive and had spirit. I had never seen paintings like that before. He was free and had fun and painted a lot. His painting and his attitude influenced me enormously, even though I wasn't really aware of it at the time. I started to do these enormous twenty-foot paintings, which was really good for me. Then I got married and got my first teaching job in Buffalo, New York in 1965. We decided to go to Buffalo because I was determined to come to New York City, which was my fantasy city. Since I never looked at maps very much, I thought, "Well, Buffalo's in New York State." We stayed there for two years and tried to save up enough money to come here. My work changed radically because it was very lonely there, just the two of us in this old house. That was Pop Art time. I was real interested in the cartoon stuff that Lichtenstein was doing, I thought Warhol was incredible, and I got interested in Oldenburg. Then I began to do this really weird fantasy stuff. I sort of went against myself, backtracked and regressed in terms of the images I began to use. I was using images more and more, but I got something out of my system, which was very good because I began doing sculpture—these incredible things you just couldn't get out of the studio, made of plywood and stuffed canvas and things like that.

AS: Did you have a formal background in Chicago?

EM: Pretty formal. I learned how to paint in a traditional way, which I found really frustrating, but I learned how to draw, which I didn't find frustrating; actually I always enjoyed drawing from the model. When I was at the Art Institute, I lived and worked in the museum. After four years I knew every painting in the place, which is what made me decide to be an artist in the first place. Before that, I was going to be a commercial artist in the first place. Then I started looking at paintings while walking through the museum to get to the school. Then one day I saw the first painting that really clicked with me. It was that Cézanne painting with the basket of apples tilting forward and the little brioches piled up geometrically. I thought, "Wow, maybe I could make something like that." It was as if the spirit of it talked to me. It had never occurred to me that I could be a painter like that. In my last year I was going to quit school and go to California. I thought, "This is ridiculous. I can't be an artist. It's too hard." But then I did a painting and it seemed like a miracle to me. I still feel it's a miracle, a first awakening. All of a sudden I let go of something and I started screwing around with the paint and I knew—that feeling has never left me—it was right, and I didn't give a shit about what anyone else thought about it. It was a wonderful feeling—it was the first time in years that I felt I didn't need anyone's approval for something.

AS: Has the development of your art been, then, an un-learning process?

EM: I think it is an un-learning process. I heard some place that schools don't educate you, they regress you. They can be good and helpful, but I think that basically they take you and they shove you into a thing. . . . I read something really terrific the other day about the expression "The empty mind is the devil's workshop." The writer was saying, "No, that's not true.

An empty mind is God's workshop." When your mind's empty, you have a vessel where something can come in. I can remember thinking, "You've got to keep your mind working," that thoughts are the things that are really important. And I think I've always known that I'm happiest when I'm empty, when I'm just standing there involved in it; when I've lost my mind. . . . But when you're raised in a way that makes you think you must have those ideas going all the time, it's difficult. Actually, science does interest me, because it's empirically based; there you can get some facts. They're finding out incredible things that the mind can't encompass, that it can't grasp.

AS: When you first came to New York, how did you feel about your work being so different from what was being shown?

EM: I didn't pay much attention to it. That was just the way it was. And actually there's a lot of work that's different from mine that I really like. It's that they were doing a different thing, they were on a different path. But I never felt antagonistic or isolated. That's why knowing Jennifer Bartlett and Joel Shapiro at that time was good for me and helpful, because they seemed to be out there in the mainstream. But I was involved in other things and I worked very hard, and it was as though I was finishing some fantasy I had about being different. I got pregnant and I was very absorbed in that. Without being so conscious of it, I think I just wanted an integration in my life. I was going to have a baby and do my work, and I felt a little separated, but not really isolated. I believed I was an artist doing my work. It was just a simple decision. Painting was what came naturally to me and it was what I should be doing. At the time people were putting painting down, saying painting was dead. I've never really thought about it too much. It just seemed natural to me. Of course, a lot of people were painting then.

AS: It seems that in the late sixties there was a strong distinction between what was "acceptable" and what was "unacceptable."

EM: Right. I remember when an artist I admire very much came over to my studio. He looked at what I was doing and said, "This is really adolescent."

ELIZABETH MURRAY

Born in Chicago, Illinois, 1940. Educated at the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois (BFA 1962), Mills College, Oakland, California (MFA 1964). Lives and works in New York City.

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1974 Jacobs Ladder Gallery, Washington, D.C. (with Joseph Zucker)
1975 Paula Cooper Gallery, New York City
(with James Dearing)
Jared Sable Gallery, Toronto, Canada
1976 Paula Cooper Gallery, New York City

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1972 Whitney Annual, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City
1973 Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City "Contemporary American Drawings," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City
1974 "American Abstract Painting Today," Whitney Museum of American Art, Downtown Branch, New York City
"Cologne Kunstmarkt," John Doyle Gallery, Cologne, Germany
Group Show, Galerie Doyle, Paris, France
Three Person Show (with Marilyn Lenkowsky and John Torreano), Paula Cooper Gallery, New York City
"Drawings and Other Work," Paula Cooper Gallery, New York City
1975 "Thirty Artists in America, Part I," Michael Walls Gallery, New York City
"Faculty Show," Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
"Faculty Show, California Institute of Arts," Paul Mellon Art Center, Wallingford, Connecticut
1976 "Recent Work," Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vermont

He really wasn't trying to put me down, I just think he was trying to figure out where I was at. At first it hurt my feelings a lot, but basically it didn't bother me very much; I could field it. There is a core—I think everyone has it—it's not right or wrong, it's just what you're doing and how you're growing and developing. I wasn't feeling *really* pressured to do the work and I had things that were of the utmost importance to me, like taking care of my child. But I don't want to give the impression that I don't pay attention, that I'm not conscious of what goes on with how people look at painting, for instance, or how people feel about attitudes and theories about art. I don't read art criticism anymore because I just don't like it, I wonder, "God, how can people think that way?" And basically that has always been my attitude. As a student I would read every *Artforum*, and I didn't like it, but I thought I ought to. When I did read it and started to show, it always seemed very negative. I used to get hot about it, and at the same time I enjoyed it when they said, "You can't paint." It gave me energy more than put me down; I enjoyed it, like that high school rebellion you feel. But inside I've always thought that much criticism is a little foolish. Art can't be systemized, and the more you try to put it into a system, the more you go against what art is. So the difficulty is built in. The real positive thing about art is that it's out of control. It's not negative, it's essentially positive. It's not going to hurt anybody. It's a positive kind of energy in the world. The minute you start to systemize energy, it fouls it up because that's not what energy is about. Energy's about expansiveness, and systemizing is about contraction. So difficulties begin to happen. Yet there's no one to blame. . . . It's all like raising a kid. The kid has got to be civilized in some way or else it's going to be a monster. Yet there's this whole incredible thing about children that's neither good nor bad, but just beautiful, which you want to keep. You want to let them be themselves and not become rigidified, which takes a lot of awareness to do. I think that many people involved in the power places of the art world need to be more aware that art's about releasing energy, not about restraint.

"Looking at Painting," Hallwalls, Buffalo, New York

"Scale," Fine Arts Building, New York City

Group Show, Sales and Rental Gallery, Baltimore Museum of Art (organized by Brenda Richardson)

"Recent Abstract Painting," State University of New York, Brockport, New York

Group Show, Gallery of July and August, Woodstock, New York

Group Show, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York City

Group Show, Paula Cooper Gallery, Los Angeles, California

"New Work/New York," California State University, Los Angeles, California

Opening Exhibition, Susanne Hilberry Gallery, Detroit, Michigan

1977 "1977 Biennial Exhibition," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City

"Nine Artists: Theodoron Awards," The Guggenheim Museum, New York City

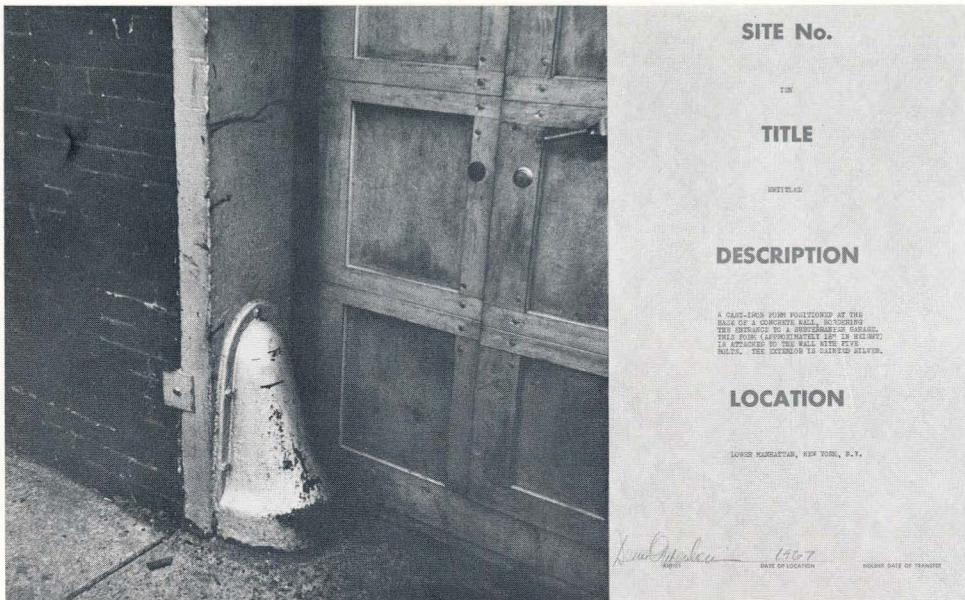
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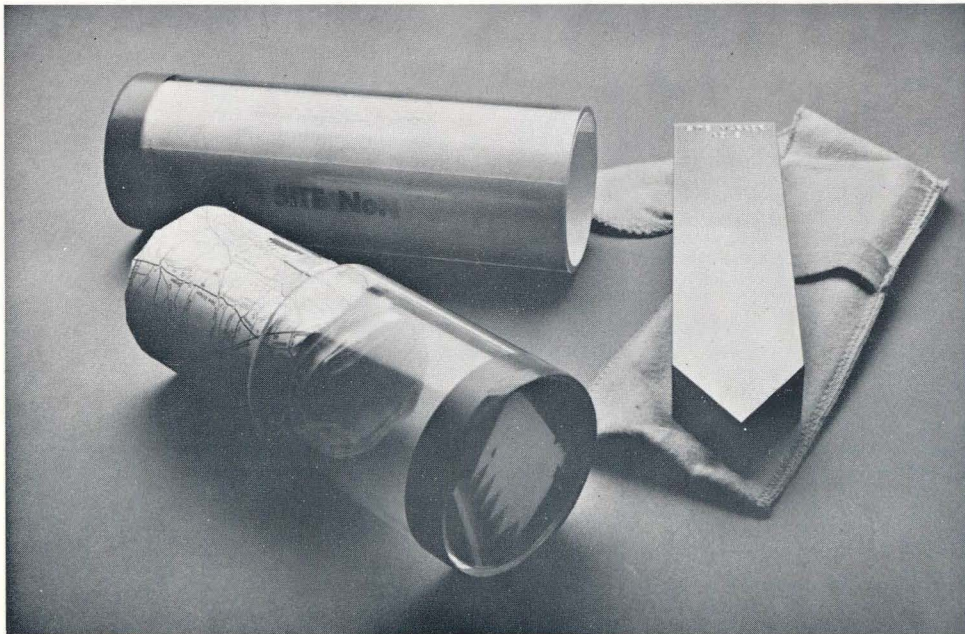
- California State University, Fine Arts Gallery, *New Work, New York*, Los Angeles, California, October 4-28, 1976
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City, *1977 Biennial*, February, 1977



Site #10

Dennis Oppenheim: *Site Markers with Information* (1967)
Photo credit—artist

Re-executed in 1974



DENNIS OPPENHEIM

AS: What kind of work were you doing before the earliest piece in this show, the *Untitled Tables*?

DO: The *Tables* were done in 1966, and I came here the summer of that year. Before that I was a graduate student at Stanford University and was doing a tremendous amount of work, most of which I rejected afterward. Graduate school is a time for relieving all the malignancies that occur during all those years in school. It's a good time to do bad work. The work was very versatile, in kind of a West Coast neo-dada idiom. They essentially were didactic, dealing with aesthetics. The work wasn't free from any disciplined placement in terms of aesthetics, so it was a somewhat labored attempt to describe aesthetic consciousness at that time, which was the beginning of Minimalism. I was waging wars, combating certain beliefs in contemporary thinking.

AS: What makes the *Tables* an important piece?

DO: It deals with stripping down, in this case, a minimal function, that is, on these tables there are three simple structural members, a 2 x 4 L brace and a T brace. Essentially these are structurally what's found in certain minimal forms; it's taking them out of the context of sculpture and showing them as an entity. Here I began an inquisitive reach into what's behind certain things I felt at the time were blocking roads. Looking at 2 x 4's that are essentially unattached members or facets that could go into the construction of a more formalized object and considering this on top of a table, in a pristine position, was the kind of laceration of structure that I was trying to instigate. It's important in terms of the thinking process. In comparison with the other works that occurred at that time which succeeded or failed in proportion to that piece, it stands up well.

AS: When did the conceptual work surface?

DO: The more radical work occurred in 1967, if we assume the *Site Markers* were radical; they were a lineal extension of the aspirations of the *Tables* piece, the *Tables* being partly about stripping things down, wanting to find alternatives to the logic surrounding object making. The *Site Markers* piece is an engagement that asks for travel, moving out of the studio and looking, rather than making objects. Here one is bombarding existing fragments with conceptual sense data, by displacing the energy from manual production to conceptual "claiming." But like many radical positions or cathartic gestures, they can burn out, become redundant too quickly. So pursuing the

AN INTERVIEW BY ALLAN SCHWARTZMAN

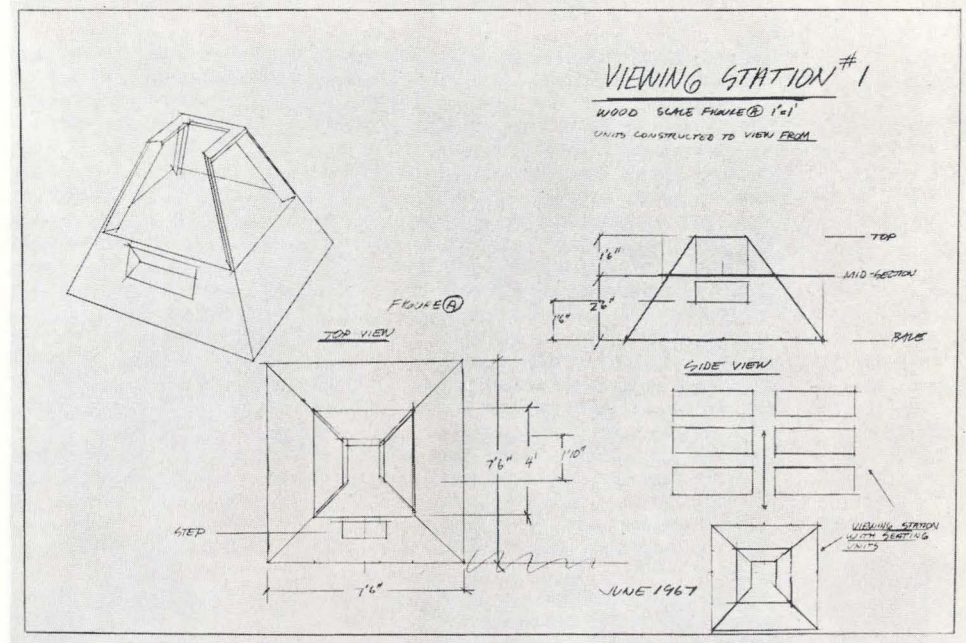
site marker concept and claiming things that already exist for any period of time would in my mind become redundant. It was just a temporary platform. It was a rigorous one because it made so much sense, because on the other side it was rejecting the world of redundant forms that were instigated by the artist and suggesting there are no forms worth making. One replaced making with thinking. It was muting manual production and opting for an art of mental activation. There are various examples of why one would believe this, just by looking at the sterile pursuits of the Minimalists in 1965 and 1966, and pushing these things to the zero point. So the alternatives were obvious in terms of physicality. You would either go down below the ground or you would deal with more horizontal, ground related situations. The whole notion of horizontality seemed to conjure up aspects of distance that were never allowed sculpture. Once we consider the alternatives that were being called for because of the stagnation of Minimalism, we can't help but find ourselves calling upon energies that were never really considered in art making before. These energies were partly in the form of conceptual distance, the activation of things through another agent. An example would be some of Huebler's early pieces with the postcards—this whole energy thing finally became an issue.

AS: Before you started travelling, had you determined that the works were to be horizontal to the ground and that they would be remnants of structures that had once been in use?

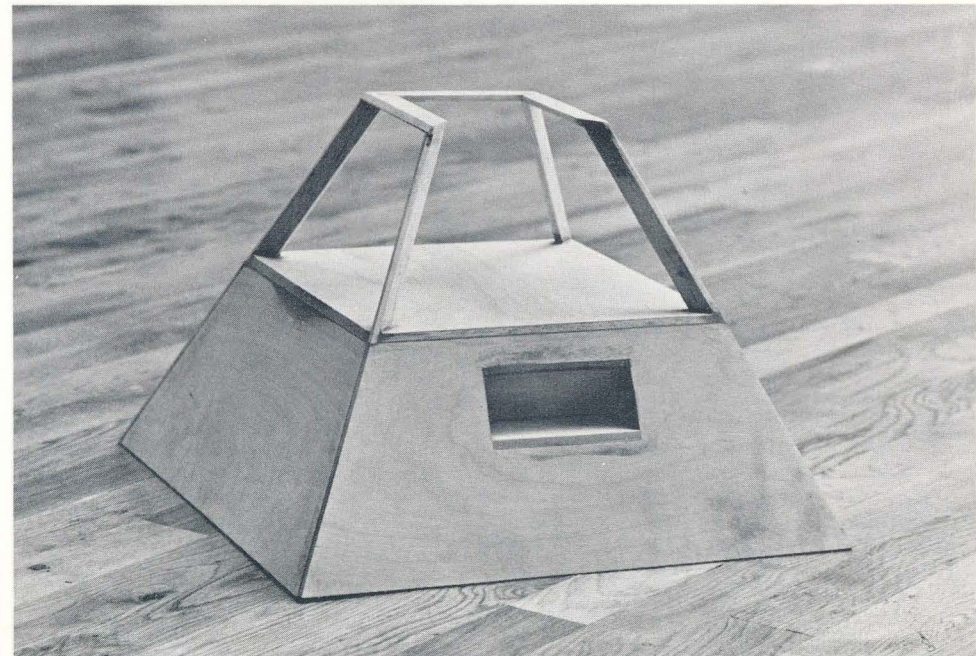
DO: Well, there was an aesthetic at play here. I would say that my eyes were trained downward, I was looking at ground-based fragments. Certainly things that had lost their function, thereby floating in this un-utilitarian position, were focused upon. The pressure regarding the ground position was a feeling shared by many people. There was no panacea here; it's not like this sensibility has since bred the most virtuous work, but in 1966 and 1967 there was an almost magnetic attraction to horizontal scanning within the context of place opposed to isolated objects. It was almost a gravitational pull. I think this is due obviously to the fact that I was rejecting, like many others, the condition that supposed things to include vertical imposition and controlled placement.

AS: Were many people aware of the work you were doing then?

DO: No. My work wasn't really known until 1967. At that time I was still in Smithtown, Long Island, and had just made the *Site Markers* series, the *Viewing Stations*, and a series of proposals for gallery spaces which in-



Dennis Oppenheim: *Viewing Station for Gallery Space #1* (1967)
Photo credit—Warren Silverman



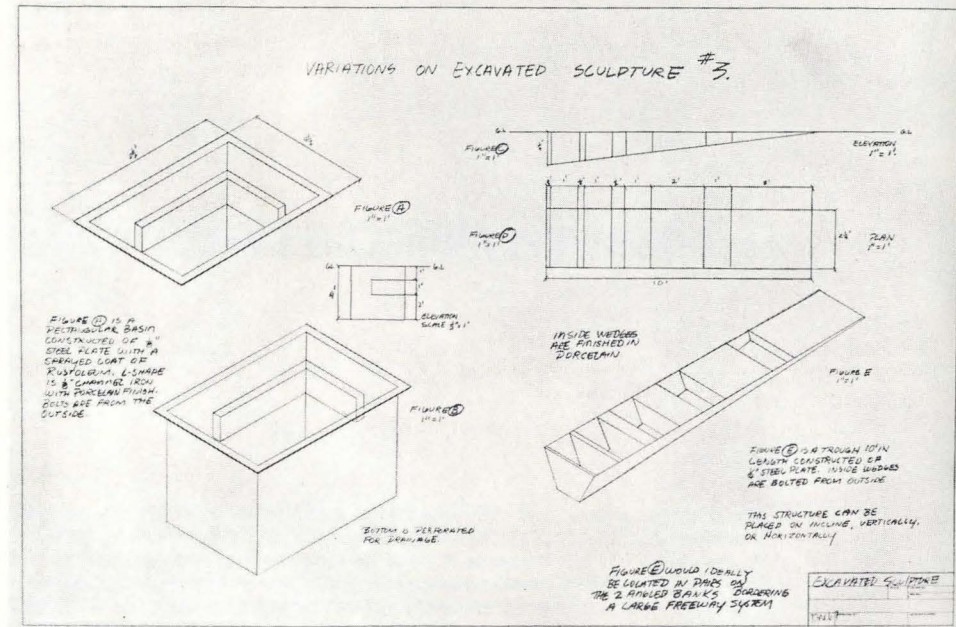
volved limited walking corridors, tilted floors, and angled ceilings. Obviously I was trying to instigate a number of final acts upon the gallery space on one hand, and with the other dealing with the dynamic alternatives such as outside space. I tried to burn out these final thoughts about interior space. At that time I had more or less assumed the position that there was no object to place inside the gallery, so I constructed these gallery alterations, which connected themselves to the space. Some of these ask the viewer to conform to the imposition, like angled corridors. This may have led to the *Viewing Stations*, which were works to view from, rather than to look at; these propositions led to thinking of outside space. The *Viewing Stations* involved a simple turning or focus, a feeling of pure viewing as an energy, an almost solid thing that could be considered. Again it was putting the pressure on viewing and leaving out the object; perhaps these thoughts aren't important to later pieces, but they service the early, more cathartic forms of inspection. They were never systematically extrapolated from later on, so the *Viewing Stations* did not become a work that embodied all the pieces that came after. Perhaps the thinking process is still similar, but I think again that period of the late 1960s precipitated radical platforms to step on but leave behind. If I was firm about the belief of pure viewing, I would still be standing on that viewing station looking outward. Whether one works inside or outside is no longer an issue. Issues come and go.

AS: How has your concern with the viewer's relation to the work changed since then?

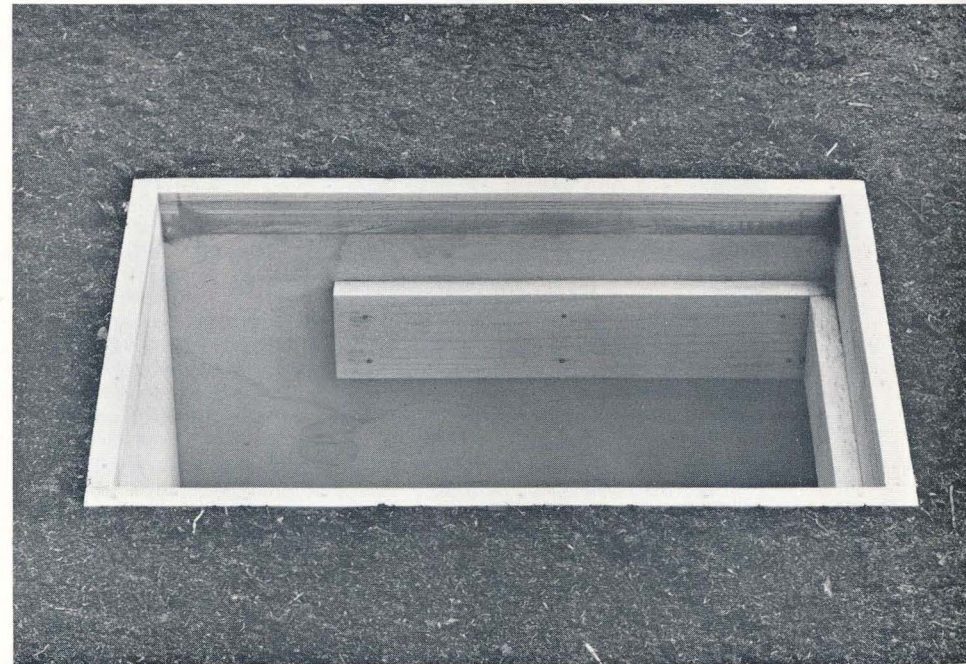
DO: As early as 1969 I was countering this belief in outside space with continued projects dealing with interior installations. In other words, I was pursuing this course of land-based projects, and as a threat to it—which is another method I used and still use—I set up forces against it, opposing it; I pursued these other courses to test the stability of this form I thought I would commit my life to. These alternate tasks or systems that I set up began to shake it; in other words, I realized that I *wasn't* totally committed to land as an alternative to gallery space. As soon as I had built up the height of this belief of an alternative to interior space, I was already countering it. I was also making probes into performance and internalized works that use subjective situations. It was a very convoluted, suspicious period, full of groping . . . each move brought an extension that tried to disprove it. With this double-edged force I began to travel on varied terrains. I was doing large outdoor works one week and then dealing with intimate kinds of personal body-related activities that would stimulate works that again would materialize in outside spaces. These three or four missiles were moving at the same time.

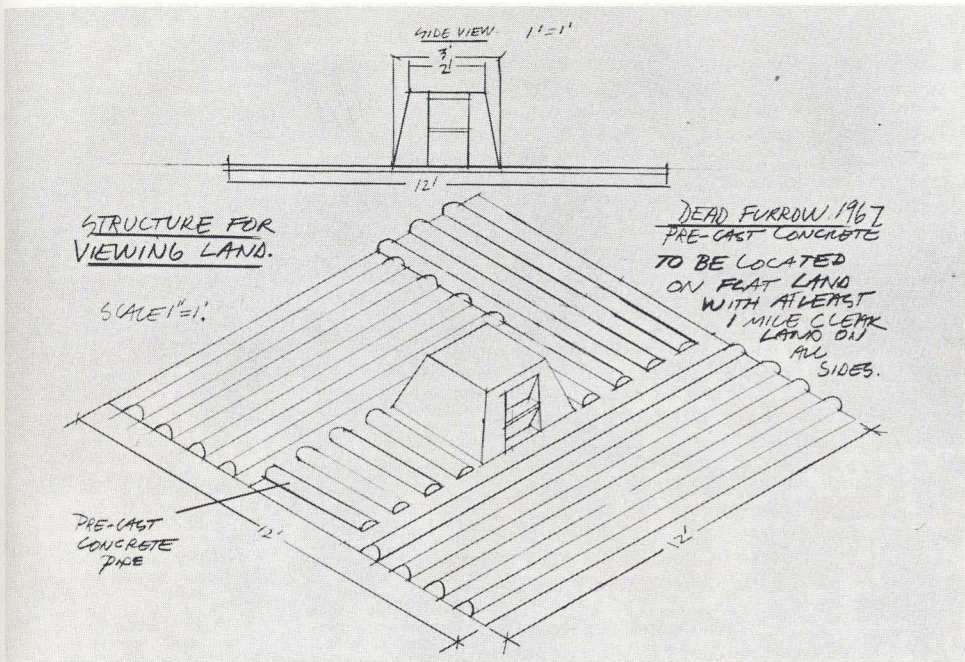
AS: As for the works of the late sixties, such as *Annual Rings*, was it important or necessary to actually execute the work?

DO: I was pretty close to Lawrence Weiner at that time, and, of course, he believed it wasn't important to execute the work. But it was necessary because the element of physicality in regard to my pieces was far more strenuous than his, and it was impossible to extrapolate completely by doing either a model or a drawing, or any kind of restricted version. Doing the snow pieces bred the sensibility of operating on land. It heightened the body gesture and was instrumental in my moving toward the body works later that year. The actual spanning of land became a striking experience in regard to sculpture. Walking over a piece for hundreds of steps and still being on the work—this activated terrain was a real reach for sculpture. It was hard to control it, to confine oneself to works that didn't want to extend themselves into alien systems. 1969 was a rich period for vast projects. It became hard to confine one's work if not to formal idioms, just to communicating them within sculpture or art perimeters. One was tempted to carry it away from the art context into real time structures. So there was a tre-

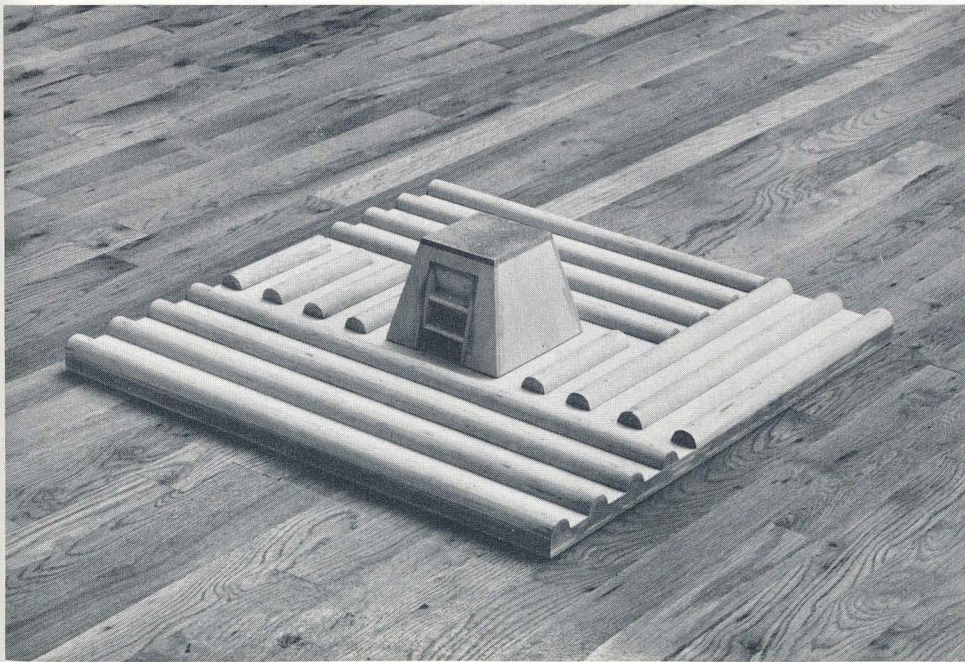


Dennis Oppenheim: *Variations on Excavated Sculpture #1* (1967) Re-executed in 1977
Photo credit—Warren Silverman





Dennis Oppenheim: *Dead Furrow* (1967) Re-executed in 1977
Photo credit—Warren Silverman



mendous thrust to radicalize the whole concept of what artists *do*. It was a dangerous thing to control. Going too far with it you completely burnt out your bearings as an artist, and you open up these tremendous demands for learning other disciplines, the need for information was incredible.

AS: How did you feel about showing these works in a documentary form?

DO: This was always a problem. I haven't fully ironed that mess out. At the time there was a lot of criticism for this *seeming* disparity between what one thought they were doing and what they ended up with, so the suspicion about the two dimensional residue of photography and film were strongest in the early seventies. As soon as this material was shown—was it the piece, was it information about the piece? So there was a great deal of suspicion about the legitimacy of the document.

AS: Did that confusion bother you?

DO: No, well I had a rather flippant way of handling it. Knowing how the energy was being used by myself in engaging the piece, I had a very close understanding of the distinction between the piece and the information being passed on via the photograph. I would always say it was a photograph and it's all that remains from the work. I wasn't going to strap this cathartic episode which was occurring by very stringent requirements regarding the residual communication of the work. I really was basking in this energy. It was difficult to force the work through viable forms of receivership.

AS: When did you become more concerned with communication?

DO: I became interested in installations after being caught in this manner of alienation between what I was doing and what people were seeing. Experiencing that for a period of time moved me towards works that more easily confronted people. But hopefully these works included a heightened sensitivity from past gallery-bound works.

AS: Were you doing installation work at the time when you did the first body pieces?

DO: There were a few installations being proposed, around 1969, but I did four films with Bob Fiore, all dealing with process. One showed my arm rolling over this cording, leaving the imprint. It was about using elements that go into manual conditioning of form, like in this case, downward pressure. The artist became the instigator and the victim of his own act. At the time I was rolling my arm across the cord, I was registering the indications of its pressure, its own exertion. The body was seen as subject/object. In terms of sensory feedback I was experiencing my own drawing—it registered on my body. Holding a pencil and moving it over paper is one sensory experience, but registering lines in this manner on the same instrument used to instigate the force is certainly a higher form of experience.

AS: When did you become less interested in your body as object and more as a vehicle for autobiography?

DO: Well the body related works began early in 1969 with a piece called *Ground Maneuvers*, in which I had special grooves put in my shoes which would leave certain imprints in the ground. It was considered an on-going work, which would evolve over the winter months. It had a lot of formal and structural goals, one being a system by which a network of patterns joined with traffic occurring around it and through it. Again I think the word activation is good, because it explains plugging in, affecting, overlapping, an on-going real time system. So those early body related works set a platform for a series of works, most of which dealt with structural aspects. *Reading Position for Second Degree Burn* was about painting, the material interchange, when I use my fingernail, had structural interest in a process of growing material on the body. At this time I did a series of pieces with my children in which the work needed to extend itself from the source. I began to consider aspects of heredity, the passing of energy outside the body. After coming from large scale land-based pieces and retracting into

the body, which was one of these attack methods I was describing, came an attempt to find out if this preoccupation with external works was going to hold up. Body related works became a profound alternative. It was a rich area. The works dealt with getting close to the material, becoming the material, becoming the object. In the second stage I could call it, the work was fully internalized and needed to be released again, it needed to be extended. Then came all the pieces dealing with extension in 1970-71: *Extended Armor*, *Extended Expression*, and *Two Thousand Foot Shadow Projection*. These were attempts to extend the body energy or affect things from a distance. Sometimes I used my children as agents, as devices in which things can be moved outside of my perimeters. In *Extended Armor* I'm actually pulling hair out of my head, blowing it down this channel and trying to manipulate it at greater distances. When I reached certain conclusions within that area of work I began to deal with autobiographical projects. In a way, it was the third stage of the body works.

AS: What did this develop into?

DO: It developed into areas I'm still concerned with, the area of interrogation of motive. This body of work asked questions about the nature of intent, what's precipitating the act. When the work became autobiographical it permitted this delivery of questions toward a self. The engaging of these questions in the work became the substance of the work. It was a much closer aptitude than making sculpture—this was about the pitfalls of methodology, or of process and production. They were usually stimulated skeletal views into the frailty of decision making. These works admitted things, showed procedures, uncovered secrets—things we usually keep camouflaged. So there was a supposition that nothing is as important as knowing why we do what we're doing. Obviously a continuing display of virtuosity in production of works was one possibility. But what precipitated the autobiographical performance body-related pieces was this feeling that it is a trap, a superficial preoccupation in comparison to work which interrogates itself. The hope was in this internalized rush, this probing of all these conditions one has been using, that one could extricate it for a viewer, surface it, display it, somehow congeal all this introspection in mid-air and finally communicate the origin of impulse—what makes us make these things. It would, in fact, register as a new form in the very mechanics demanded in its release. It's hard to explain, but it was a much more ambitious undertaking than these other idioms: body works and earth projects.

AS: Do you use your own body now?

DO: No. It's not out of the question that I would do something with my own body, but I haven't for a number of years. A lot of extraneous things are occurring that make that not really an issue. Essentially I feel as if I'm doing what I've always been doing. It has the same motions. There are always distractions, but I think I have the largest arena I've ever had at my disposal, which is what I've always tried to do. Rather than burn these things out completely, I try to leave some of them undone, leave enough room for spinoffs. There's something about going into the ground forever, I mean the distinction between demands made on one spiritually pursuing a whole versus the state of mind that scans and touches. I've always preferred the scanning state of mind and I've always related more to the act of touching than the act of digging. Thus I've established a lot of space to return to, a lot of space that will present itself later in various things.

AS: In 1973 Jack Burnham spoke of the ritual content of your work. How important is this aspect of your work?

DO: Ritual is an injected ingredient within the installations, some of the outdoor pieces, the video tapes, films, and performances. It's an objectively placed idiom necessary to move the work away from certain kinds of sterility. For instance, *Predictions*, a piece shown at Sonnabend in 1972, which

Burnham talked about in "The Artist as Shaman," was essentially a systems piece. It showed these electric trains rigged so that they almost collided at a certain point. The track represented an actual track and train system. I had gone out to this track and recorded a future collision date after months of deliberation. It was a piece that used elements of traditional magic. The artist became magician. Magic is basically what we're all trying to do. I think we all want to astonish, to escalate to those points that are magical. Employing works that have elements of real time, situation, place, as well as elements of a more theoretical nature, like traditional magic, is the kind of mixture I thought necessary to position work on an elevated platform . . . In several works the elements of less tangible phenomena were included to accelerate the work, to give a different kind of substance or body to work that was wallowing in a kind of real-time abyss. In other words, these pieces were dealing in very dry, in some cases didactic interrogational networks; it was just an intuitive move to mix this with less tangible phenomena. It wasn't some kind of cosmic brainstorm or a profound realization that this is where the hierarchy was going. It was a controlled decision. I think a sensible one because of the formal sterility of a lot of thinking of that period, especially the more conceptually based linguistic works. *Predictions* is about art process . . . predicting collisions of trains is quite like predicting our own course. We're trying to figure out what to be tempted by as artists, what not to be tempted by, how to build up our sensitivity towards fractures that are just beginning and that open up to large points of view. These are all related to the process, which as I explained before has become the content of so much work. Work is either indirect statements about the process of making art or just very straightforward autobiographical gushes of that with the hope that these deliverances will congeal as art somehow on the other end.

AS: Then your work became more concerned with human and emotional states—more directly tied to an emotional response, like the marionette pieces.

DO: The marionettes are post-performance pieces, that is, they come from not wanting to perform. I'm still very uncomfortable with them; I'm not making them anymore, because they involved a return to what looked like figurative art. But essentially they're surrogate performers. They express the desire to have a stand-in, something to take the burden of still seeing room within the performance idiom but not wanting to perform within it. Also these things could do things that I can't. But again there was a danger of associations with an area of art I didn't want. I didn't want to force it back to these traditional idioms. So it required having these surrogates possessed with so much inherent substance that they would justify themselves. It's hard for me to justify making these in view of what I've done before—the direct rigors I had gone through, dealing with a lot of material, performance, body art, all these land pieces, and then making a doll that was going to be as active as all that.

AS: The marionettes demanded more of a direct response from the viewer.

DO: Yes, that was another need, after doing these large outdoor pieces, to get close to a spectator. The marionettes straddle zones of performance and sculpture in ways I haven't seen before—like the dancing surrogate which in essence is performing constantly, like a loop. It's essentially a rigid object; it's always there. So that's a coupling that I don't think was very successful. Before, I wanted to make a work that essentially is ongoing, that continues. It's not an object, yet it's not a performance either—it's in a place between.

AS: How do you feel looking back at the old pieces in the show?

DO: Well, these are carefully selected pieces . . . it seems to me any artist would recognize the important beginnings of his eventual pursuits. For me this early period was a potent one. There are strong feelings behind the works. They came as indicators of something vast in the future.

DENNIS OPPENHEIM

Born in Mason City, Washington, 1938. Educated at School of Arts and Crafts (BFA 1965), Stanford University (MFA 1965). Lives and works in New York City.

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1968 John Gibson Gallery, New York City
1969 John Gibson Gallery, New York City
Gallery Lambert, Paris, France
Gallery Lambert, Milan, Italy
1970 Reese Palley, San Francisco, California
John Gibson Gallery, New York City
Pennsylvania Art Museum, Erie, Pennsylvania
Washington State University Crossman Gallery, Whitewater, Wisconsin
1971 Yvon Lambert Gallery, Paris, France
Gallery Lambert, Milan, Italy
Harcus Krakow Gallery, Boston, Massachusetts
Gallery 20, Amsterdam, Netherlands
1972 Sonnabend Gallery, New York City
Nova Scotia College of Art, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada
Mathais Fields, Paris, France
Tate Gallery, London, England
L'Attico, Rome, Italy
Gallery D, Brussels, Belgium
1973 Rivkin Gallery, Washington, D.C.
Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, Paris, France
Gallery Forma, Genoa, Italy
Gallery D, Brussels, Belgium
Gallery Mayor, London, England
Museum of Conceptual Art, San Francisco, California
Sonnabend Gallery, New York City
1974 Gallery Forma, Genoa, Italy
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands
John Gibson Gallery, New York City
Gallery Oppenheim, Cologne, Germany
Gallery D/Gallery Oppenheim, Brussels, Belgium
Paolo Barozzi, Milan, Italy
1975 Gallery Schema, Florence, Italy
Gallery Vega, Liege, Belgium
P.M.J. Self Gallery, London, England
Gallery Lambert, Paris, France
Gallery Oppenheim, Cologne, Germany
John Gibson Gallery, New York City
The Kitchen, New York City
Film Anthology, New York City
Gallery Lambert, Milan, Italy
Gallery Castelli, Milan, Italy
Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels, Belgium
1976 M.L. D'Arc Gallery, New York City
Framartstudio, Naples, Italy
Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, Netherlands
Bo Alveryd Gallery, Kavlinge, Sweden
1977 M.L. D'Arc Gallery, New York City
John Gibson Gallery, New York City
Multiples, Inc., New York City
Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts
H/M Gallery, Brussels, Belgium
Hans Meyer Gallery, Dusseldorf, Germany
Gallery D, Brussels, Belgium
CARP, Los Angeles, California
University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Rhode Island
Yvon Lambert Gallery, Paris, France
Francois Lambert Gallery, Milan, Italy

GROUP EXHIBITIONS (Only group shows from 1968-1969 are listed.)

- 1968 "Language II-III," Dwan Gallery, New York City
1969 "Earthworks," Dwan Gallery

- "Sculpture Annual," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City
"New Media—New Methods," Museum of Modern Art, New York City
"March," Seth Siegelau, New York City
"Ecologic Art," John Gibson Gallery, New York City
"The Artist's View," Jewish Museum, New York City
"Earth," Cornell University, Ithaca, New York City
"Eugenia Butler Exhibition," San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, California
"Return to Abstract Expressionism," Richmond Art Center, Richmond, Virginia.
"Art By Telephone," Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois
"587-087," Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, Washington
"Contemporary American Drawings," Fort Worth Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas
"955,000," Vancouver Art Museum, Vancouver, Canada
"Place and Process," Edmonton Art Gallery, Alberta, Canada
"Land Art," Fersehgalerie, Berlin, West Germany
"Prospect," Staktische Kunsthalle, Dusseldorf, Germany
"Op Losse Schtoeven," Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Holland
Galerie Swart, Amsterdam, Netherlands
"When Attitude Becomes Form," Bern Kunsthalle, Switzerland
"Art After Plans," Bern Kunsthalle, Switzerland

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DOROTHEA ROCKBURNE

MT: How did you feel about the earlier work—from 1967—as you did it? What were some of the things you were consciously concerned with?

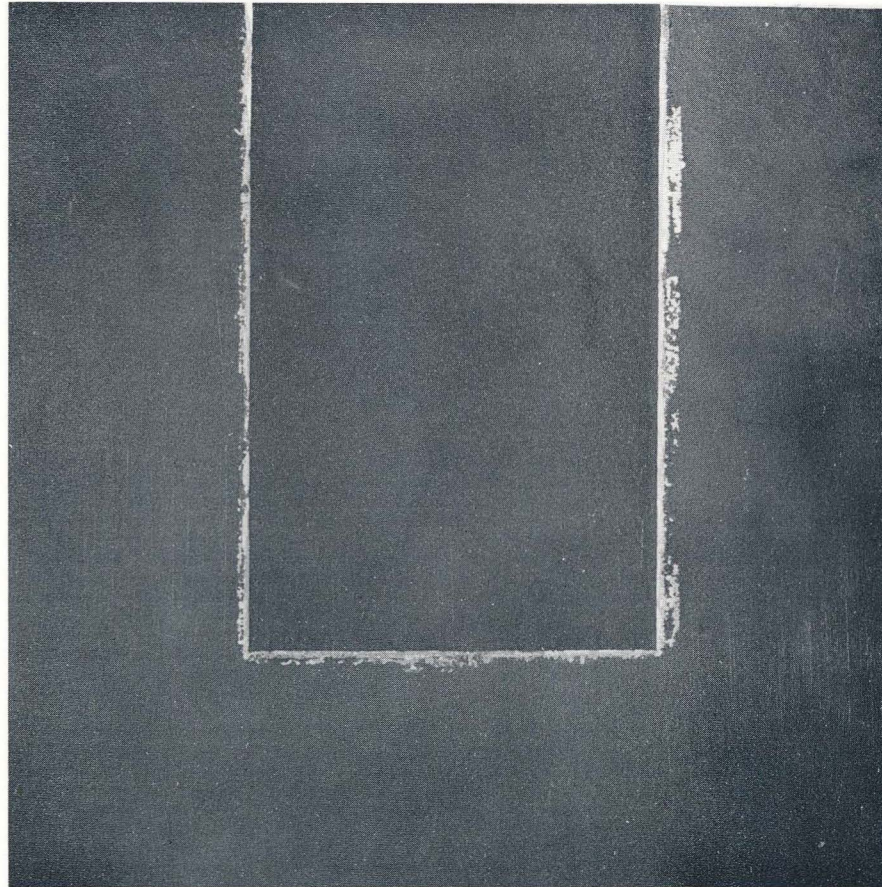
DR: I know that I was interested in the tensile strength of the iron and the tensile strength of the paint, since one was fluid and one was solid. I wanted to see if the paint would hold up against the iron in a visual and philosophically esthetic sense. There was something about literally pulling a skin over a skin.

MT: It seemed to me that those pieces were extraordinarily successful in creating a tension between an exact physical presence and an elusive optical sensation, so that the pieces seemed to hover between painting and

sculptural concerns, so as to be neither rather than both.

DR: Yes, I was thinking of working in some undefined area between painting and sculpture. I remember a kind of playing with certain things; for instance, one of the reasons for creasing the metal—as well as a structural reason—was to play with light and shadow in a traditional sense, but at the same time in a different way, in other words to work with shading, but not shading of my own creation. Actually, this has carried through in all the work. In *Drawing That Makes Itself* it's a very conscious concern. It's also working with light and shadow, but the method is different.

MT: Were the early works untitled?



Dorothea Rockburne: *Black Ivory* (1967-68)
Photo credit—Lee Brian

AN INTERVIEW BY MARCIA TUCKER

DR: They were titled only as to the commercial color of the paint. One is called *British Brown*, one is called *Fire Engine Red*.

MT: Is there a difference in your later titling?

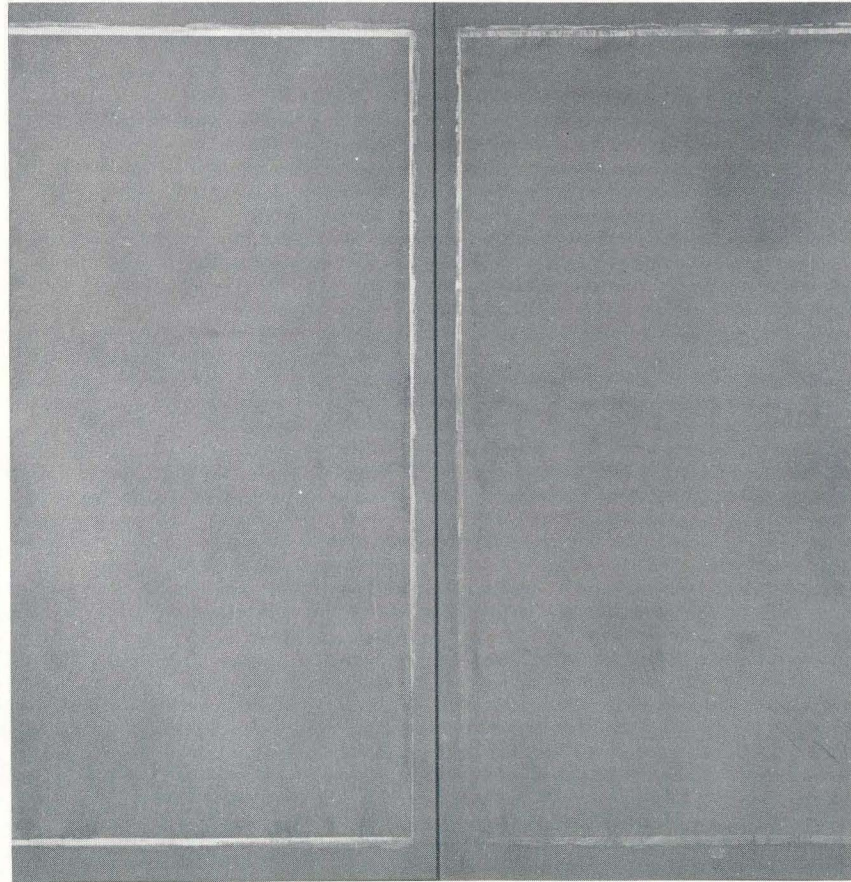
DR: Yes, because the objectness in this early work lies within a kind of strength of material, and simple content, and even looking at these works and dealing with them myself after they were done, I realized that I wanted to use more complex forms of operation. For one thing, at that time, I didn't want to make individualized objects, and that's why I worked with set theory, so that the pieces would encompass a room and each element in the room would interact, even from one room to another. That's how *Syllogism*,

which was done in 1971, came about. It utilized memory as an element. All of those titles have to do with something about myself, but something which correlated in the work in a way which was more complex than that.

MT: Did you make a conscious decision to use titles that refer to physical or ontological states?

DR: Yes, the meaning resides in the work, but in some way you can begin to approximate that meaning in language if you speak in a zig-zag fashion and melt layers of language. The titles of a lot of the work I've done are about the meaning of the work . . . *Object Identity Class*, *Inverse Class*, *Drawing Which Makes Itself*.

Dorothea Rockburne: *Fire Engine Red* (1967-68)
Photo credit—Lee Brian



MT: Looking back on it now, do you find the relationship between your early work and more recent pieces is clear?

DR: Yes. In my post-student years, I was consciously trying to make every possible mistake. Whatever the position was, I tried to push it. At a certain point, I began to know I was on the right track. It's like the look of an idea, if an idea can have a look—if you can preconceive an idea as visual, which I always have. I could see that I was headed in the right direction, that where I was going was expandable. That's one of the things that's always interested me, working within an area that was not limited.

The early painting I'd done was involved with the skin pulled over a canvas, and reflective of an absorptive light and all those kind of things. That's why I used wrinkle-finish paint, because it interested me to see how the surface could interact with light.

MT: Do you feel that these particular works began to explore other concerns out of which later works grew?

DR: Yes. Also, I was interested in sheets of things, and that's the reason for working in the area between painting and sculpture—for instance, a sheet of metal and a sheet of paint, which later got translated into a sheet of cardboard and a sheet of paper and a sheet of oil. I'm still working with tough tensile and soft tensile properties.

MT: What is it about sheeting that interests you?

DR: Well, for one it's not metaphorical. It always seemed to me that everything I looked at had the form of a sheet—like a film, or a movie, for instance. In a certain sense, it's one sheet/frame/place next to another. Or an object seems to me to be a sheet of one thing and a sheet of another, like this table, with the folded metal sheet and the top sheet, and so on.

MT: There's been a lot of discussion about the relationship of your work to mathematics, or set theory. To what extent do you see the origins of your work as so specific?

DR: That's a difficult question, because one of the reasons that math interests me is that I felt it correlated to states of being. For instance, the notion of set theory came about at the same time as Karl Marx's writing, and I don't think that one is disconnected from the other. It's not that math just comes out of nowhere. It's related to the society too, and some of the notions in math, like discrete and indiscrete, which are used in math all the time, seem to me ideas that come directly out of specific emotional states.

MT: I wonder if you'd also like to talk about how you were thinking about color in the earlier work compared to your thinking about it now.

DR: One of the things that interested me was that the substance be the same all the way through. I didn't want one color on top of another in any sense. I wanted a solid sheet of one color.

I didn't want the color to enter the ground in any way, nor did I want to exert any control myself over the pigment. And something about working industrially intrigued me at that time, of course, as it did other people. The panels were fabricated, and therefore it followed to use industrial paint in a certain way—heat-dried paint and so on. In relation to the way I'm using color now some of the background is in the recent work, because it's adhering to the gesso, but it's not in any way entering the canvas surface. In other words, it's a sheet of canvas, a sheet of gesso, and one or more sheets of pigment. One color isn't mixed with another. Where there's a mixture it's done by layering one sheet on another, so that a thin layer of blue is used

over a thin layer of yellow in order to get a green. In other words it's not mixed on the palette.

MT: What about your color sensibility? How do you choose the color?

DR: Well, a lot of it has to do with some sense of the pigments themselves. I think of the pigments as being a natural kind of thing, as yellow ochre being an earth color and cobalt blue being a mineral, and so on. Among other things some of the choices are based on liking what they're made from.

MT: Color seems to be the primary vehicle for the description of an emotional state. Isn't the world of color one which has an added dimension of feeling to it?

DR: I don't think so. You can use anything and have a dimension of feeling in it. *Disjunction*, the piece shown at Bykert Gallery that had a pool of oil in it, was for me a very emotional work, and it's not involved with color in the usual sense at all.

MT: In 1967 what kinds of things were you looking at? What interested you then?

DR: Mostly I was looking at dance, and that experience was very important to me. The emphasis was never of the physical access that it gave you, it was on concept, and it was that that carried over into the work.

Then, as now, my interests were with ancient art. I spent a lot of time in the Brooklyn Museum, looking at Egyptian things from Tal El Armana, and Assyrian things. These have been my concerns all along, aside from the work of friends.

I know that one of the things that interested me very much, and was a constant source for me, was watching my daughter learn; it taught me how to learn.

MT: In what way?

DR: Again, I can't exactly draw a parallel. But there's something that happened that had a big influence on my thinking. When my daughter was small, we made a chocolate cake together and covered it with sugared violets, and she was very excited by it. It was a rectangular cake, and she asked to cut it. When she did, she cut a pie-shaped piece out of it, because she had only experienced circular cakes. It jarred my thinking. I can't exactly say how, but I know that a lot of my thinking in the carbon paper work, which involves displacement, came out of that experience.

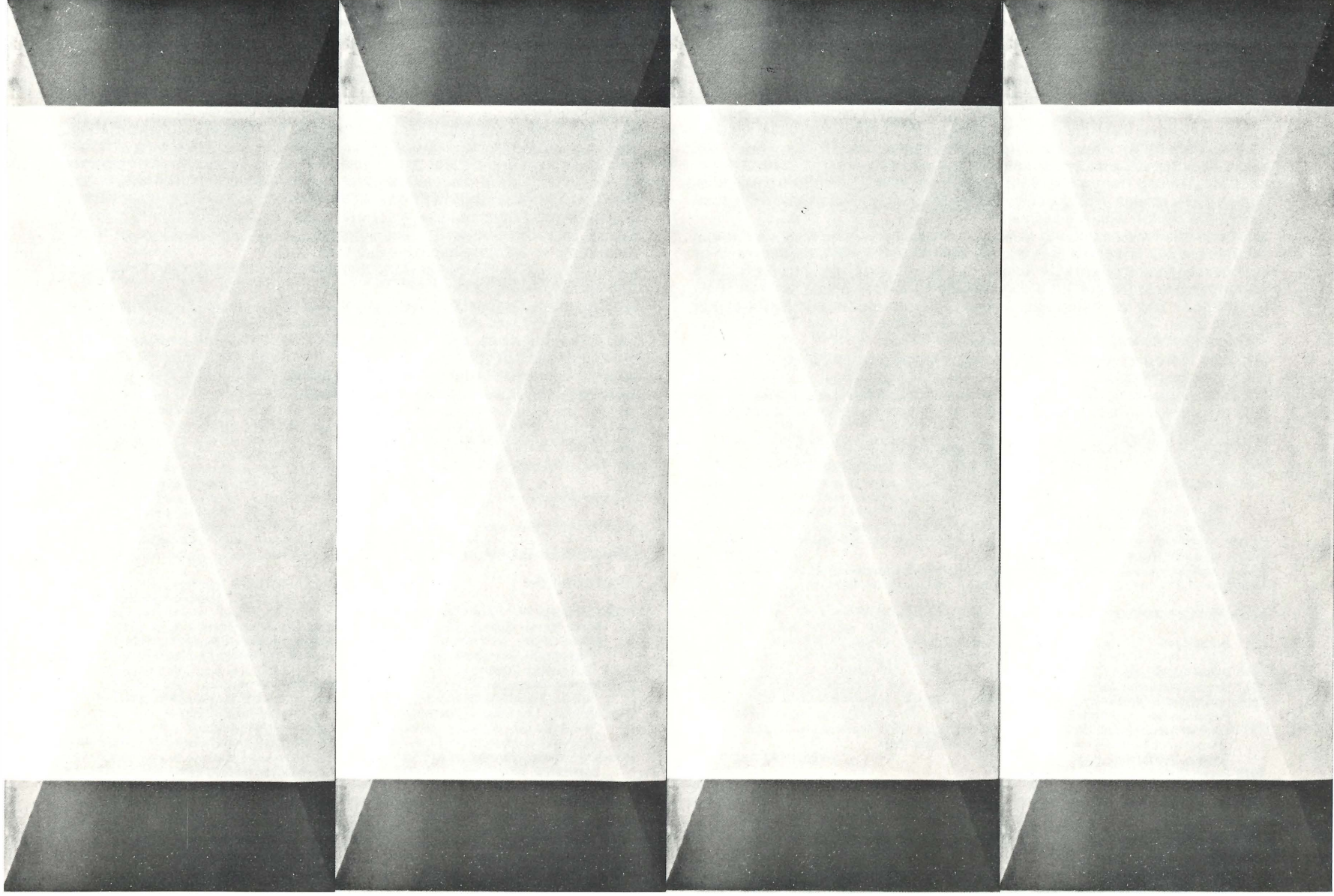
MT: Isn't there also a relationship between the carbon paper pieces and these earlier works in terms of something that turns back on itself?

DR: Yes. It started very simply. I didn't want to do a painting that involved stretcher bars and canvas, because the stretcher bars never seemed to have a function other than to represent external limits. In a way, that seemed to be an element you weren't supposed to see. In taking the fresco off of the wall there seemed to be this extra thing that went along with the process of making a portable wall. It was one of those things I thought was a bad habit for me in my previous work. So the first work involved aluminum, and they were self-framed; in other words, the aluminum is cut and bent, and forms a self-framing edge, which is the structural reason for doing it. Those are the paintings that are coming from Florida. And having done those for structural reasons, it seemed logical to fold it, to crease it, in this way.

MT: How do you judge your own work? What do you see as "good"?

DR: One element is surprise. I have to work in a way which is not predictable to me. Often things come up in the work that tell me something about my

Dorothea Rockburne: *Tropical Tan* (1967-68)
Photo credit—Warren Silverman



life. For instance, this new work is open in a particular way, and represents some kind of step toward change. After I'd done it, although it's just the beginning step toward something else, I realized that my life was in fact changing on almost every level. It's a way of working I have. Anytime I've tried to do something that I already knew how to do, even though I thought I had wanted to do it for different reasons, I couldn't do it. There's also something about the look of work corresponding to the look of the people who do it; that is, I think that very often unconsciously or subconsciously objects contain statements about the person who makes them. That's what I was saying about math. I suppose that even pure math came from a level of experience deriving from a set of emotions completely different from mathematics. Even though an object can be designed for utilitarian purposes, they reflect the person who made them.

MT: Does this have something to do with the way you judge your own work?
DR: Not entirely, it's partly that, but it really has to do with an assimilation of experiences, not only art experiences, but things like place. One such place was the piazza in Sienna. It's a very awkwardly shaped space, uneven. It's a kind of bowl, and as people walk across it they disappear into the bowl and emerge again. The space is peculiar—kind of wiry, in a way. The buildings on the site necessarily have odd corners.

MT: Was there any particular place that affected you as far as these 1967 works were concerned?

DR: New York, Lower Manhattan. You know, all of lower Manhattan was a kind of wasteland then. Nobody lived on the lower West Side, it was very industrial and very deserted.

MT: How do you feel now, looking at these earlier pieces?

DR: In a way, I'm much more comfortable with them now than when they

were done. I think it's because of a continuous thread with what the work is now. It's as though one has a few concerns and they're done and redone, changed and so on, but the initial concerns in the Robe Series aren't all that different than in the early paintings.

MT: Is there an implication that the work is not necessarily evolutionary or progressive, but that a work or series of works within an artists' career may be paradigmatic?

DR: Yes, I think that's right. Certain aspects of the content of the work absolutely do not evolve. This is one of the reasons, for instance, why one can look at early art and be just as excited by it as by looking at contemporary art today; nothing is discounted or has been disqualified, the way it has been in the physics of Giotto's day. At the same time, there's another aspect of work which I think of in terms of expansion, because the nature of learning has partially to do with specific operations, and combinations of these operations, so learning implies expansion.

MT: Do you feel, in the earlier work, that there's anything you've been able to discover in looking back at it?

DR: One of the things that one must come to grips with is the acceptance of who you are. Lived experience is often contradictory, in that you don't always feel the same, even when you continue to work on one piece. Even within the span of taking a work out of my studio and installing it in the gallery, I find myself with a whole set of different feelings. In the first place, there were the initial reasons that motivated the work; then at the gallery there is the actual eye/hand co-ordination. There's an extraordinary range of feeling. In a sense, looking at my own work, I must come to grips with . . .

MT: What you are?

DR: No, *who* you are.

DOROTHEA ROCKBURNE

Born in Verdun, Quebec. Educated in Canada and the United States. Lives and works in New York City.

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1970 Bykert Gallery, New York
- 1971 Ileana Sonnabend Galerie, Paris, France
- 1972 New Gallery, Cleveland, Ohio
- Bykert Gallery, New York City
- Galleria Toselli, Milan, Italy
- University of Rochester Art Gallery, Rochester, New York
- Galleria D'Arte, Bari, Italy
- 1973 Bykert Gallery, New York City
- Lisson Gallery, London, England
- Hartford College of Art, Hartford, Connecticut
- Daniel Weinberg Gallery, San Francisco, California
- Galleria Toselli, Milan, Italy
- Galleria Schema, Florence, Italy
- 1974 Galleria Toselli, Milan, Italy
- 1975 Galerie Charles Kriwin, Brussels, Belgium
- Galleria Schema, Florence, Italy

1976 John Weber Gallery, New York City

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1970 "Language IV," Dwan Gallery, New York
- Paula Cooper Gallery, New York City (with Diaó, Van Buren et al.)
- Bykert Gallery, New York City (with Marden, Matta, Stephan, Van Buren, Hesse)
- "Paperworks," Museum of Modern Art Penthouse, organized by Pierre Aproxine (with Marden, Tuttle)
- Drawing Show, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York City
- "Annual Exhibition (Sculpture)," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City
- 1971 Janice C. Lee Gallery, Dallas, Texas (Two-person show with Van Buren)
- "Projected Art—Artists At Work," Finch College, New York City
- "Materials & Methods: A New View," Katonah Gallery, Katonah, New York (with Hesse, Sonnier, Saret et al.)
- "Works for New Spaces," Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota (with Flavin, Van Buren, Irwin et al.)
- Bykert Gallery, New York (with Benglis, Marden, LeWitt, DiDonna, Tuttle, Ryman)
- "Art of the Twentieth Century," Stedelijk Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven, Holland (with Beuys, Modrian, Stella, Louis, Manzoni, Yves Klein, Sonnier)
- "Recent Acquisitions IX," Museum of Modern Art, New York City
- "Art Systems," Museum of Modern Art, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- "Masters of Modern Art," Museum of Modern Art, New York City
- "Invitational," University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts

- "Rockburne, Fisher, Ryman," The New Gallery, Cleveland, Ohio
- 1972 "Kent Invitational Exhibition, Focus on Women," Kent State University, Kent, Ohio
 "White on White," Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois (with LeWitt, John, Marden et al.)
 "Art in Process," Finch College, New York City (with LeWitt, Warhol, Indiana et al.)
 Art Gallery, University of Rochester, Rochester, New York City
 "Documenta 5," Kassel, West Germany
 Spoleto Festival, Summer 1972, Spoleto, Italy
- 1973 "17th American Exhibition," The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago Illinois (with Flavin)
 "Options and Alternatives: Some Directions in Recent Contemporary Art," Yale University Art Gallery, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut (with Serra, Martin, Tuttle, Baer, Snow et al.)
 The Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, Ohio
 "Works in Spaces," San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco, California (with Irwin, Antonakos et al.)
 "Young American Art," (Drawing Exhibition organized by Steingrim Laursen) originating in Copenhagen, Denmark and traveling to Oslo, Hamburg and Stockholm, January-October
 Fogg Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts
 "2D into 3D," New York Cultural Center, New York (organized by Susan Ginsberg) January 19-March 11
 "Arte Come Arte," Centro Comunitario di Brera, Milan, Italy (with Tuttle, Baer, Kelly et al.)
 "Whitney Museum Annual," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City
 Drawing Show, Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey
 "Some Recent American Art," The Museum of Modern Art, New York City, for tour in Australia and New Zealand (organized by Jennifer Licht)
 "Contemporanea," Palazzo Taverna, Rome, Italy
 "American Drawing," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City (organized by Elke Solomon)
- 1974 "Choice Dealer's/Dealer's Choice," New York Cultural Center, New York City
 "Line as Language: Six Artists Draw," Princeton Art Museum, Princeton, New Jersey
 "Basically White," Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, England
 "Recently Acquired Drawings," Museum of Modern Art, New York City
 "Eight Contemporary Artists," Museum of Modern Art, New York City
- 1975 "Mel Bochner, Barry Le Va, Dorothea Rockburne, Richard Tuttle," The Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, Ohio
 Tendances Actuelles de la Nouvelle Peinture Americaine," Musee d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, France (organized by Marcelin Pleyne)
 "34th Biennial of Contemporary American Painting," Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
 "Milan," John Weber Gallery, New York City
 Galerie Aronowitsch, Stockholm, Sweden
 "Fourteen Artists," Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, Maryland
 Graphic Work, Städtisches Museum, Monchengladbach, Germany
 "Drawing 3," Städtisches Museum, Leverkusen, Germany
 "Modern Painting: 1900 to the Present," Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas
 "Painting, Drawing & Sculpture of the '60s and '70s from the Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection," Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and The Contemporary Arts Council, Cincinnati, Ohio
 "The New Image," High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia
 Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Bologna, Italy
 "Prints," Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Canada
- 1976 "Line," Visual Arts Museum, New York City, and the Philadelphia College of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
 "Drawing Now," Museum of Modern Art, New York City (organized by Bernice Rose)
 "Ideas on Paper 1970-1976," The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
 "Drawings/Disegno," Cannaviello Studio d'Arte, Rome, Italy (organized by Achille Bonita Oliva)
 "Photonotations," Rosa Esman Gallery, New York City
 "Today/Tomorrow," Lowe Art Museum, University of Miami, Miami, Florida
 "On Consideration of the Curve," John Weber Gallery, New York City

- "Three Decades of American Art," Seibu Museum of Art, Tokyo, Japan, (selected by the Whitney Museum of American Art)
 "72nd American Exhibition," Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
 "American Artists 'A New Decade'," Detroit Art Institute, Detroit, Michigan and Fort Worth Art Center Museum, Fort Worth, Texas (organized by Barbara Haskell)
 "Drawing Now," Museum of Modern Art, New York City, traveled to Kunsthau Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland; Staatlich Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, Baden-Baden, Germany; Graphische Sammlung Albertina Wien, Vienna, Austria (organized by Bernice Rose)
- 1977 "Prints," Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Massachusetts
 "Prints," Neuberger Museum, Purchase, New York
 "Inaugural Exhibition," The Drawing Center, New York City
 "Spectrum-77 (Painting Sculpture)," Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, Missouri
 "Less is More," Sidney Janis Gallery, New York City
 "Biennial," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City
 "XX Collection Exhibition," University Gallery of Fine Art, College of the Arts, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio
 "Documenta 6," Kassel, Germany
 "Extraordinary Women," Museum of Modern Art, New York City

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- Bourdon, David. "Three Women Manipulate Geometry, Earth and Old Masters," *The Village Voice*, November 22, 1976, p. 85
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- Pleyne, Marcelin. Musee d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, France, *Tendances Actuelles de la Nouvelle Peinture Americaine*, 1975
- Spector, Naomi. John Weber Gallery, New York, *Dorothea Rockburne: Working With the Golden Section, 1974-76*, "New Color Work by Dorothea Rockburne," New York City. John Weber Gallery.
- Rose, Bernice. The Museum of Modern Art, New York City, *Drawing Now*, 1976
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SL: When you began to go back over your earlier work for this exhibition, did you look at it as a chronology or did you see relationships in the work that didn't have to do with chronology?

JS: You mean when I look at the work do I see it chronologically or in terms of ideas? I see it in terms of ideas. I'm not really interested in the chronology, because I don't think it occurs chronologically. The idea occurs in time, but it doesn't. There's no such thing as linear progression. Is that what you mean by chronology?

SL: I'm not quite sure.

JS: Well, you may be doing something and you begin to see a reference back five years, eight years where something re-emerges from that area. There's nothing chronological except that it occurred at one time. I don't think about it in terms of that sequence.

SL: But do you think about progression as some work being more highly developed or better than other work?

JS: No, there are probably things that interest me more, but maybe that's the undeveloped work, I don't know. If you dealt with a problem at one time and didn't resolve it the chances are that you're still dealing with the problem. It really depends on what I'm interested in now and whether I can see that in past work, whether it helps support it. But you mean, is there one theme that is developed and developed? Yes, "How can you make sculpture?", "What is necessary to do the work?" But somehow I don't think you can look at work that way. I mean you can look at Mondrian, Rothko—at a mature body of work that way, but I don't think you can look at developmental work like that.

SL: So you mean that you consider all your work developmental?

JS: Yes, I hope so. I think that if it's good sculpture, it's interesting work. But I don't see anything as a finite solution or some finite stance where I have explored all the possibilities of a situation. I don't think anybody of this generation has. It seems a bit precocious. When I say developmental I mean some ongoing process of work.

SL: But with you there's such a diversity in kinds of material and approaches.

JS: I don't see that, not at least for the last six years.

SL: Well, I was looking at the work from 1969 to 1977 and taking it as a whole body of work.

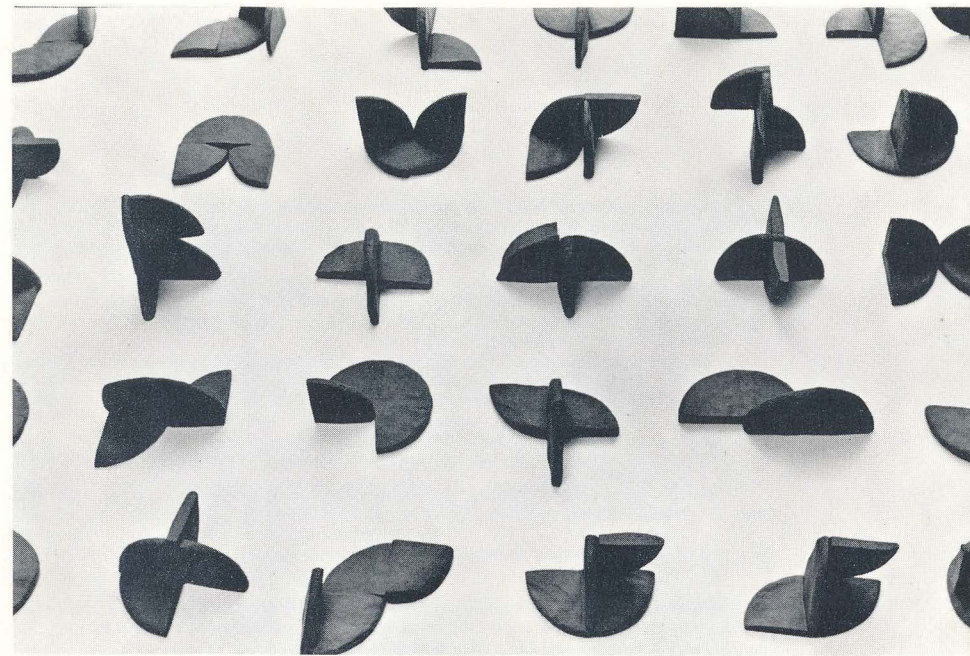
JS: Yes, well the early work is early, not necessarily student work, but I was never content with it. I was trying to find something that was more in touch with what I was about. I mean casting right now seems to be, more comfortable, more appropriate—the way I want to see a piece happen and the way it happens when casting, where it appears, defined externally.

SL: You said that you felt that the work of 1969 was shown prematurely.

JS: Not prematurely. I mean that they weren't well received, in my opinion, not that they were premature. You know, it was an odd situation, I did this big piece and somehow I feel that the better pieces were smaller. It was the first time I was showing in a public situation. I had a tendency to build a piece up. The scale changed and I just was not content with it. It's very hard to work if you have to build it in a situation. It's considerably different from exhibiting work that's been finished because the public place becomes your studio, so you're really working in public, rather than exhibiting in public. I don't know if it's premature. I may not have been mature enough to deal with it. I'm not sure.

SL: Do you feel that having an exhibition influences the work that comes after?

JS: Well, yes. Usually there's a sort of confusion attached to an exhibition—you know, a kind of frenzy in getting everything ready. I usually don't find myself working a week later. It all depends on how well it goes. If the exhibit is successful and you feel good about the work, you know that you have ideas and you just pursue them. It really has nothing to do with the exhibi-



Joel Shapiro: *Untitled* (1971)
Photo credit—Warren Silverman

JOEL SHAPIRO

tion *per se*. Everybody reacts to public exposure, public criticism, but to what extent it really influences your work I don't know. If anything, you have a more objective situation to look at your work, in a public space.

SL: What non-art things influence your work?

JS: My entire experience influences me. If you're working and engaged in a problem, anything that supplements that problem, provides any solution, or anything that's even remotely connected to it becomes interesting. I mean, I could be engaged in a piece and go to the worst movie in the world and it might become interesting; somehow it fits into the network that I'm involved with. You see, I think if you're making objects, somehow you're putting whatever experience you're dealing with into that piece. In a sense, work almost becomes like a diary. When you go back and look at it, it really is.



Joel Shapiro: *Untitled* (1971)
Photo credit—Warren Silverman

AN INTERVIEW BY SUSAN LOGAN

I'm just saying that anybody who is making objects is dealing with or is engaged with space. A lot of my pieces are an attempt to control that specific situation. You know, sometimes they activate physical space, but other pieces activate a more psychological space, it's more abstract, but that space, if you think about it in certain terms, becomes a little house or something. What you're doing is keying off that part of someone's head. I mean, my God, you've got so much experience with right angles. Your whole perception of the piece is based on that experience.

SL: The pieces like the houses, chairs and coffins have been associated with memory. What do you think of the idea?

JS: I think it's inevitable that memory is associated with the work to some extent. The chairs don't evoke memories, but they're about memory, about

the recall of one's experience with chairs. But not all the pieces are about memory. I mean some are just a chunk of space. Holding a real space is not really about memory. It's much more. I think my chairs are about that too. You think of them in terms of your experience with that right angle in space. So the most interesting thing about that work is that it also deals with an abstract notion simultaneously and you can't just say that's just a chair. You have to deal with what it's doing in space, what the implications of that chair is. It's an image that's referential, unless the piece is functioning so dynamically and on such a specific level that maybe then you could overcome associations. If it's very much in the present, then that becomes memorable. But I think some of the houses depend on memory. Well, perhaps not so much memory as some kind of internal space. I'm not really clear about it because I think the work I'm doing now has less specific kinds of references.

SL: What do you think made the shift for you from doing the things that are non-figurative to the things that have a set iconography?

JS: Different interest.

SL: Different interest?

JS: Well, if you see the work as some locator of experience, an experience inside yourself, the work has an internal reference to some metaphoric thought. The analogy would be to use language to describe an experience. The language is never commensurate with experience, right? And I'm saying there's something that you don't quite know about, that is not necessarily describing your intention but you're doing it as you can do it. Even if something is abstract, it's still referential on a certain level. But then, you're talking about a specific iconography. When I did those clay pieces in 1970, I felt that if I made something with my hand, that was the only way I could make a place—that's the amount of faith I could put into something, so that became important. My reasons for doing something are personal and always self-referential, so it's some kind of transformation of experience. See, usually you're making something that has some dimension to it, then there's some place that structures the dimensions and sometimes it's something quite external like the shape of your hand, a figure that you're copying or something more intimate. That's why I think there's figuration in all work, it is figured around a certain thought.

SL: Do you see that difference in your work between the abstract pieces and the representational or figurative pieces?

JS: Yes, of course I do. I was looking for particular ways that would express whatever I was feeling. My feelings at that time were polarized and distinct. I connected with a particular figure that indicated some location of an idea that I could not articulate. Then there are other times when I really don't know what it's for, where you just sort of . . . it depends on what strikes me. I think that anytime I chose to use something that has specific associations like that I would always end up denying it. It would always be that whatever indication was presented, there was always something antithetical to it. I still work that way.

SL: Do you think the scale of the work is more important than the idea of the piece?

JS: I don't think that ideas are that important—I mean they're the kernel. Scale is about the realization of a concept, about transformation of a concept, about transformation. If you make a form you're creating scale. I would say that is the critical thing in work as far as I'm concerned. Without scale, the work doesn't exist. It's in the translation of some thought into work that you establish scale. On the most banal level, when you're thinking about chairs, you could go ahead and make a chair, but if you change the scale it would carry certain implications.

SL: Does scale only carry certain implications if it's not normal?

JS: No. If you look at a Clyfford Still painting, it is all about scale. In other words, you have a sense of the person behind the work, something that re-

fers back to the individual who did the work.

SL: Would you think of your sculptures as miniatures?

JS: No, that's not what they're about. I think that in a miniature the intention is smallness. A miniature doesn't deal with the space around it or with one's experience of a situation. I guess a miniature could do that. I never really looked at miniatures. Well, I've looked at Indian miniatures and they don't seem that miniature to me. They have a different sense of scale but I don't think it's miniature. In fact, I think that my sculptures are quite normal in scale. If one were to look at the history of sculpture, one would see there is nothing extraordinary about it. It's the contraction of scale that accentuates certain qualities of our own experiences of those certain objects. I try to use the size that's appropriate to the content.

SL: The works from the time when you were doing things like the forged pieces seemed to be very concerned with process. Was that a main concern?

JS: Not really, I mean to some extent it was establishing a way of working which proved interesting. It was an important way to work but all that materiality and process, I couldn't care less about.

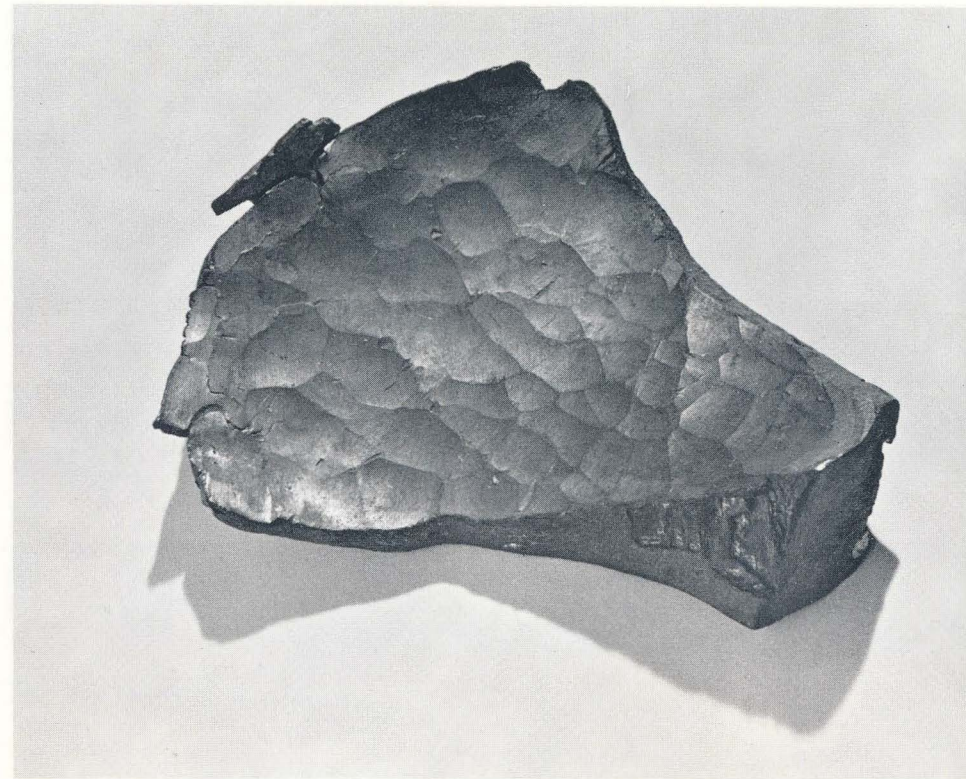
SL: But it did concern you then?

JS: Sure it did, but I think it was a false concern. Well, not false, but I think what the process ultimately transforms is more interesting. After that, I started to deal with a much more psychological or symbolic area. Somehow to relocate my interest rather than make an assumption, such as about the procedure, that is as interesting as the result. I don't think that you just have an idea in your head—it has to be realized. There's a certain kind of work that you have to put out in order to see something. It's a naive notion that labor has a value in itself.

But I think that process is important; you know, I may work for two months before I locate what I like, where I would like to be. Yet, the idea of process was a fairly good place for me to begin. My feeling was that if I were hitting a piece of metal eventually something would happen to it. It's the same when working with a particular image. You know, you start messing around with paint till you come up with something, with some sort of necessity. The more I think of the whole idea of process, it's only real importance is that it makes very few assumptions. At that time, there was a tremendous faith in some natural order of things. It was a way to work. Starting with the idea of process, I felt that I could meander all over the place and not have to justify it.

You do perceive things from the outside and change them. That's a psychological process. Now *that* transformation is what work is about. That's what scale is about. If you're not seeing it in the work, there's nothing else to deal with. You know, if you have been carrying something around for ten years before it manifests itself in the piece, it has a whole different identity. It all really affects the physicality and those are the things that I'm immediately involved in. I would say that the most interesting work is always the work where you can't locate that transformation that led the work into some other place. Then the work has a kind of vitality.

If you took a work and cut into it, there would be a real indication of the kind of thinking that went into the work. And when a piece is made, that would affect the form. I have done it, you know, with the houses and things like that, really located something as an entity where suddenly it has the capacity to conjure up your sense of whatever it may be. And if you are doing a piece like that you almost have to cast it. If you sat down and welded the piece together and got involved in that process, it would seem to me that that process would overwhelm the experience of the piece. That's what I'm talking about as something externally defined, depending on how one conceived of an idea. Forging a piece, hitting a piece with a hammer, what does that mean? In a way it's about a real lack of definition. It's an attempt to define something in order to move on. You don't stay there.



Joel Shapiro: *Untitled (1970-71)*
Photo credit—Warren Silverman

JOEL SHAPIRO

Born in New York City, New York, 1941. Educated at New York University (BFA 1964 and MFA 1969). Lives and works in New York City.

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1970 Paula Cooper Gallery, New York City
- 1972 Paula Cooper Gallery, New York City
- 1973 The Clocktower, Institute of Art and Urban Resources, New York City
- 1974 Paula Cooper Gallery, New York City
Galeria Salvatore Ala, Milan, Italy
- 1975 The Garage, London, England (with Jennifer Bartlett)
Walter Kelly Gallery, Chicago, Illinois
Paula Cooper Gallery, New York City
- 1976 Paula Cooper Gallery, New York City
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois
- 1977 Max Protetch Gallery, Washington, D.C.
Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York (organized by Linda Cathcart)
Suzanne Hilberry Gallery, Detroit, Michigan



Joel Shapiro: *Untitled* (1971)
Photo credit—Geoffrey Clements

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1969 "Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City
Paula Cooper Gallery, New York City
- 1970 "Hanging/Leaning," The Emily Lowe Gallery, Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York
"Drawings and Watercolors by Young Americans," The Akron Art Institute, Akron, Ohio
"Viewpoints 4," The Picker Art Gallery, Colgate University, Hamilton, New York
"Paperworks," The Museum of Modern Art, New York City
"Sculpture Annual," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City
- 1971 "Recent Acquisitions," University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts
"Works on Paper," 31st Annual Exhibition, The Society for Contemporary Art, The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
"Paula Cooper Gallery Exhibition," Windham College, Putney, Vermont
"Twenty-six by Twenty-six," Vassar College Art Gallery, Poughkeepsie, New York
"? Kid Stuff," Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York
- 1972 "Paula Cooper Gallery Exhibition," Greenwich, Connecticut
"Painting on Paper," Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut
"Small Series," Paula Cooper Gallery, New York City
- 1973 "The Last Picture Show at 100 Prince Street," Paula Cooper Gallery, New York City
"Opening Group Exhibition," Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
"Art in Evolution," Xerox Square Exhibit Center, Rochester, New York
"American Drawings 1964-73," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City

- "New American Graphic Art," Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts
- 1974 "Choice Dealers/Dealers' Choice," New York Cultural Center, New York City
"Painting and Sculpture Today: 1974," Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, Indiana
"A-Z," 410 West Broadway, New York City (with Joseph Zucker and Richard Artschwager)
"71st American Exhibition," Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
"Works on Paper," Virginia Museum of Art, Richmond, Virginia
- 1975 "Spring Group Exhibitions," Paula Cooper Gallery, New York City
"Painting, Drawing and Sculpture of the '60s and '70s from the Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection," Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and the Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnati, Ohio
"Collectors of the Seventies, Part III, Milton Brutton and Helen Herrick," The Clocktower, New York City
"Fall Group Exhibition," Paula Cooper Gallery, New York City
"34th Exhibition," Society for Contemporary Art, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
- 1976 "Gestures," Gallery of July and August, Woodstock, New York
"Scale," Fine Arts Building, New York City
"Critical Perspectives in American Art," Fine Arts Center, Gallery, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts (sent to Venice Biennale)
"Roelof Louw, Marvin Torfield, Joel Shapiro: New Sculpture, Plans and Projects," Fine Arts Building, New York City (organized by Rosalind Krauss)
"Ideas on Paper 1970-1976," The Renaissance Society, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
"Group Exhibition," Paula Cooper Gallery, New York City
"International Tendencies 1972-1976," Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy
"Paula Cooper Group Show," Galerie Mukai, Tokyo, Japan
"Soho," Akademie der Kunst, West Berlin, West Germany
Biennale of Sydney, Art Gallery of New South Wales, North Sydney, Australia
"Project Rebuild," Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, New York University, New York City
"Opening Exhibition," Suzanne Hilberry Gallery, Birmingham, Michigan
"FIAC," 3^e Faire International d'Art Contemporain, Paris, France
"Abstract Images," Willard Gallery, New York City
- 1977 "1977 Biennial Exhibition," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City
"Improbable Furniture," Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (and travelling)
"Drawings," Galerie Nancy Gillespie-Elizabeth de Laage, Paris, France
"A Question of Scale," Visual Arts Museum, New York City
"Ideas in Sculpture 1965-1977," Renaissance Society, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
"Documenta 6," Kassel, West Germany
Group Show, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York City

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Krauss, Rosalind. *Critical Perspectives in American Art*, Fine Arts Center, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts, "Subjecthood and Objecthood," 1976
Krauss, Rosalind. Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois, *Joel Shapiro*, 1976
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City, *1977 Whitney Biennial*, February 1977
Delahunty, Suzanne. *Improbable Furniture*, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, "Furniture of Another Order," 1977
Cathcart, Linda. Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York, *Joel Shapiro*, 1977

RON GORCHOV

PREDELLA, 1966
Oil and acrylic on canvas
31" x 131"
Collection of Tony Smith

MINE, 1968-1969
Acrylic on canvas
100" x 130"
Collection of the artist

SET, 1971
Oil on Canvas
154" x 154"
Collection of the artist

ELIZABETH MURRAY

BEER GLASS, 1969
Oil on canvas
14" x 16"
Collection of Jennifer Bartlett

UNTITLED, 1970
Oil on canvas
30" x 20¼"
Collection of Jenny Snider

MADAME CEZANNE IN ROCKING CHAIR
Oil on canvas
35½" x 35½"
Collection of the artist

UP-STEP, 1973
Oil on canvas
31" x 50"
Collection of the artist

WAVE PAINTING, 1973
Oil on canvas
58" x 58"
Collection of the artist

DENNIS OPPENHEIM

UNTITLED TABLES I, II, III, 1966
Re-executed in 1977
Vinyl and wood
40" x 28" x 60"
Collection of the artist

SITE MARKERS WITH INFORMATION, 1967
Re-executed in 1974
Series of ten anodized aluminum markers, parchment documents, and photographs
Site markers 8" x 2" x 1"
Collection of the artist
(Original site markers were given to Robert Smithson and Herbert and Dorothy Vogel)

VIEWING STATION FOR GALLERY SPACE #1, 1967
Blue line print and 14" x 14" x 14" scale model for 90" x 90" x 90" structure
Wood
Collection of the artist

VARIATIONS ON EXCAVATED SCULPTURE #1, 1967
Re-executed in 1977
Blue line print and scale model
Wood
Collection of the artist

DEAD FURROW, 1967
Re-executed in 1977
Sepia print and 24" x 24" x 6" scale model for 144" x 144" x 36" outdoor structure for
viewing land
Wood
Collection of the artist

DOROTHEA ROCKBURNE

TROPICAL TAN, 1967-1968
Wrinkle finish paint on black iron
Four panels, each 48" x 96"
Collection of the artist

FIRE ENGINE RED, 1967-1968
Wrinkle finish paint on aluminum
Two panels, 96" x 86½" overall
The Lannan Foundation

BLACK IVORY, 1967-1968
Wrinkle finish paint on aluminum
45½" x 45½"
The Lannan Foundation

JOEL SHAPIRO

UNTITLED, 1971
Terra-cotta clay
Dimensions variable, up to 51 components
Collection of the artist

UNTITLED, 1971
Porcelain
Four parts, each 8" x 2½" x 1½"
Collection of the artist

UNTITLED, 1970-1971
Cast and forged lead
Approximately 4" x 2½"
Collection of Robert Grosvenor

UNTITLED, 1971
Gauze and Plaster
Parts 1 and 2, each 5" diameter x 12"
Part 3 destroyed
Collection of the artist

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