Finch College Museum of Art / Contemporary Study Wing

SCHEMATA 7

Interviews with the artists by ELAYNE H. VARIAN:

WILL INSLEY

MICHAEL KIRBY

LES LEVINE

URSULA MEYER

BRIAN O'DOHERTY

CHARLES ROSS

TONY SMITH

Opening May 12, 1967

Museum Hours: 1 to 5 P.M., Closed Mondays

Finch College Museum of Art

Contemporary Study Wing

62 East 78th Street, New York, N.Y. 10021

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Foreword and Acknowledgement

The purpose of this exhibition is to show the attitude of contemporary sculptors to scale and enspheric space by giving each artist a gallery in which to exhibit the result of his visionary schema or plan. The working title for the show was WALK-IN SCULPTURE which emphasized the desire of artists to introduce the viewer to a visual and physical involvement in space, either actively or passively. It is possible to have positive (enclosure) and negative (exclusion) attitudes to a defined space, and each of the works represents a different attitude to what one might begin to call the ecology of the art-artist intercurrent situation.

This exhibition poses this penetrating question also: Is the artist a Utopian pointing the way ahead of the crowd or is he the interpreter of the present—the revelator whose intensified inner sense must express itself in terms that illumine the vision of others.

In the interviews with the artists, the effects of their various backgrounds and college experiences on their personal philosophies, were particularly explored, emphasizing their philosophy of teaching with the aim of clarifying their approach to aesthetic development.

On behalf of the Trustees of Finch College, it is a pleasure to thank the participating artists for their inspiration, knowledge and interest which have made it possible to present this timely exhibition. We express our appreciation to the following galleries for their help: Byron, Fischbach, Park Place and Stable. Our gratitude is also extended to Dorothy Greene-Pepper for her enthusiastic assistance, Lia Libson for her cooperation and the Student Museum Committee for its constant aid. Credit is due the following photographers: Jim Collier, David Dalton, David Gahr, George McCausland, Carlos Pizzi, Allen Rattner, John F. Waggeman, Taylor and Dull. For special assistance, we wish to thank Dianne Aiello, Judith Jones and Mrs. William A. Potter, Head of Volunteers' Activities.

ELAYNE H. VARIAN
Director
Contemporary Wing
Finch College Museum of Art

Will Insley

You were teaching at Oberlin College, I believe, when you were awarded a grant by the National Foundation of Art and Humanities. Did you enjoy your teaching experience?

I enjoyed teaching and being with younger people. Sometimes we only see people with whom we agree and it gets a little cloistered after a while. At Oberlin I taught both painting and drawing. The trouble is that schools still tend to divide art up into little packages of painting, drawing and sculpture . . . and I don't believe in that . . . nor do most artists. Drawing is a means of putting down an idea, and I do not think that it is an end product in itself.

It might turn out to be an end product.

Yes, but that isn't the reason for making it. In the drawing classes I gave the students projects, for which some made plans or drawings and then a model. In the painting classes I gave problems, too, and explained that there were many opportunities for making a work of art. The first thing we did was to remove the easels from the room . . . though a few crept back in as time went on. Actually the last problem I gave them was to make a painting and they all felt quite relieved. Previously, they were assigned the problem of designing an environment, which they did by making scale models, because I wanted to get them to think in scale. I did try to open up their minds a little bit, and the students built some very interesting pieces.

What kind of scale?

Well, architecturally that one inch equals one foot, but also one has to think of the scale of a person. I had to keep an open mind and be sympathetic toward the ideas of others. One of the things was to rescue these people who were determined to go through abstract expressionism, inch by inch, which was simply wasting their time, because after they had finished one painting they should know the problems.

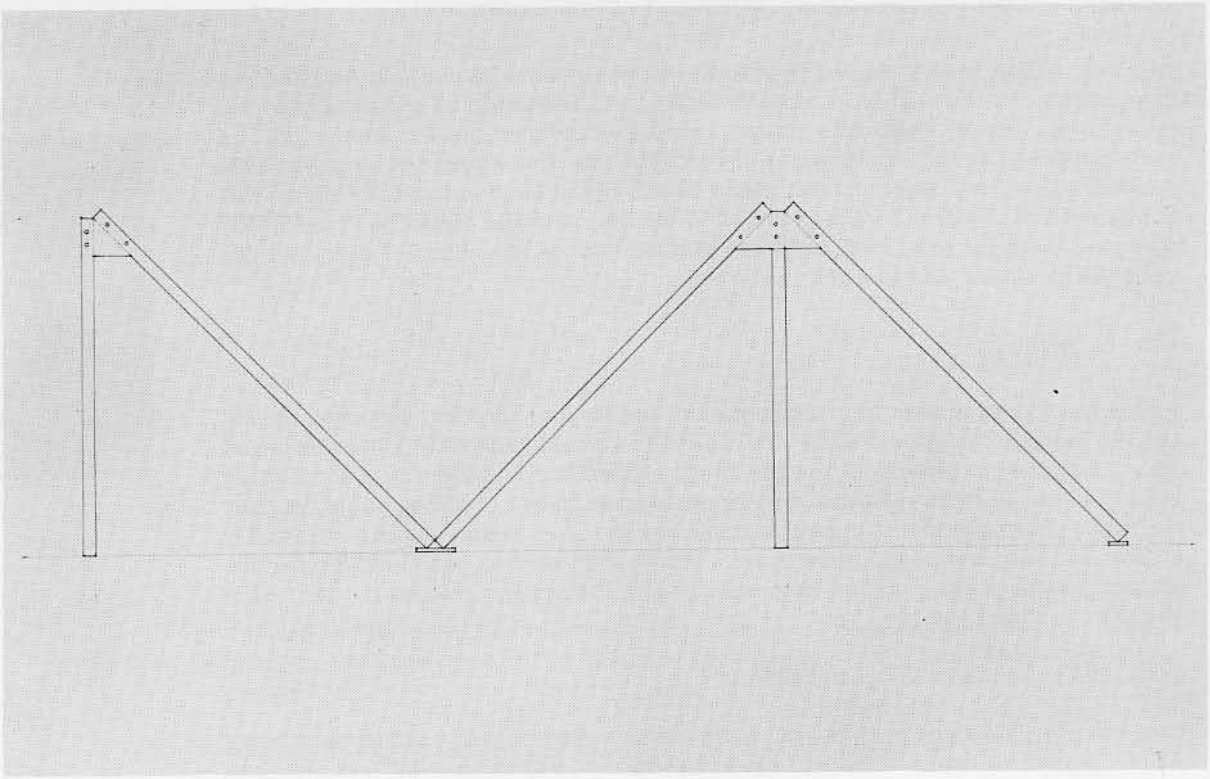
Had your earlier experience as a student affected your teaching attitude?

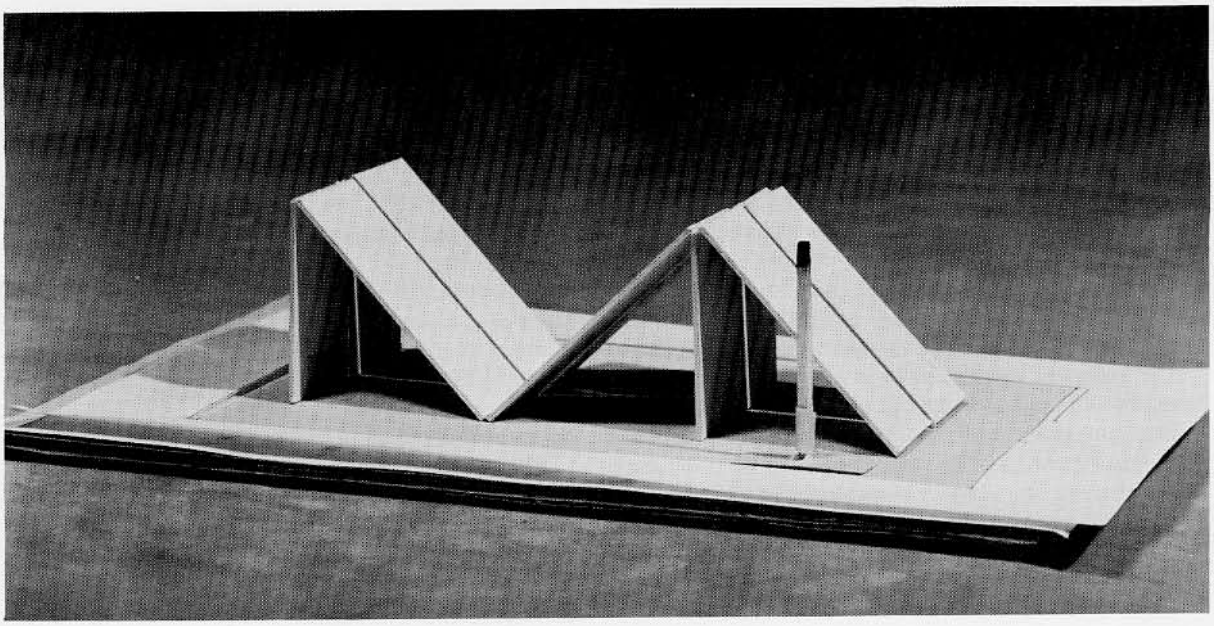
When I was of the age to go to art school, the courses were simply not preparing us for what we would now consider the legitimate direction of pure visual thinking. If there was something we wanted to do, we realized they would never have thought of it as art, and so we began to go into other fields and as we studied we saw the possibilities of using that kind of knowledge to create a different kind of art—I wouldn't call it new since in a sense, there's nothing new.

When I first came to New York as a painter, I hated it. I realized painting had no meaning for me, and I began using architectural forms, forms that I was using at school, except that at school I used them for practical reasons. So that when I began thinking as an architect and not as what you might call a traditional artist, things began to make sense.

Was your philosophy challenged by the teachers at the college?

Yes, at all times. Well, there were two of the newer teachers who were sympathetic and that made it worthwhile. There was, though, an undercurrent of challenge (but no open battles) from the studio faculty who had settled in the art department years ago and their ideas hadn't really extended.





Drawing for FLOOR STRUCTURE

Model for FLOOR STRUCTURE 4'10" x 8'2½" x 17'10"

You keep speaking of architecture. Is this part of your background?

Yes, after getting a B.A. degree from Amherst I received a Bachelor in Architecture degree from the Harvard graduate school. At first I wanted to be a painter but then turned to sculpture. These structures I am now working on are the competion of a cycle because I am now getting back to architecture. These I am showing are just a beginning since my other designs would be too big to build indoors. These models are meant for interiors—pure idea things. While they could be outdoors, I specifically designed them for exhibition purposes and even more specifically I designed this structure for one of your first floor galleries.

What is the title?

I think the title of a work of art is irrelevant, but for identification purposes we will call the piece in this show FLOOR STRUCTURE. I wanted something that was based on a 4 x 8 sheet of plywood. I like the interior space to be different from the outside space, a little bit more removed, so that people can go in it, but they might hesitate. So that it is a space that is denied to them. My structure at the Allen Art Museum is square and very few people want to walk into it; they want to go around it. I like the idea of people going around it and experiencing it visually. Children run through it and want to slide down it.

Then, that structure could be made larger?

Yes, but every time you change your scale, you are dealing with a different problem. At this point I no longer think there is any validity in designing individual pieces of sculpture. I do not think this idea of plunking a piece of sculpture down in front of a building works. Now, I'm thinking of working on a model for a city block, so we have a large enough environment for people to walk through it. It wouldn't be related to a building—but it would, of course, become part of the city.

Do you believe that structures could be used to conceal utilitarian constructions such as an underground garage?

In the Midwest they have underground parking lots with parks on top and they always look silly because they don't seem to belong there.

The one in San Francisco, surrounded by municipal buildings, works like magic. I was completely unaware that this park was doing double duty.

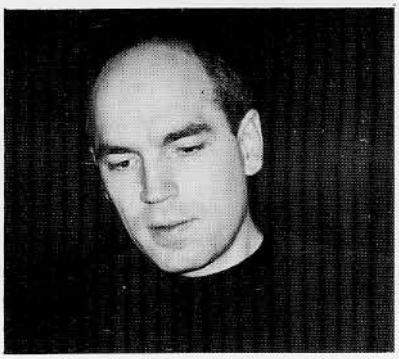
My feeling is that you have built a structure underground and there is an old, nostalgic notion to put grass and trees on top of it and pretend it isn't there. I would like it to be obvious that this is a structure and that there is something going on underneath. The top should become a pure three-dimensional environment. It wouldn't have any grass or trees. It would just be all a solid hard thing, cold and removed. All the old temples . . . though their religious function has no meaning to us today . . . still function as visual space—certain spatial relationships always have meaning—a universal language.

Your work has changed since I visited your studio last fall.

I am now interested in the space between the painting and the person looking at it. It is more architectural. Like a person seeing a door and knowing he can walk through it. That gives a more specific relationship between you and him. I am using this relationship in my painting and in my structures. I am going to continue my structures as mostly scale models, since no one is about to give me a city block. This is one more step in getting away from the consideration of "a painting" or "a sculpture" as an isolated object. Now the painting becomes the wall and the sculpture simply becomes exterior space.

The idea is to destroy our life history; the students I taught at Oberlin have the obligation to destroy what we are doing; and we are going to have to fight back.

Michael Kirby



It interests me to find that two thirds of the artists in this exhibition majored in other fields before turning to art as their primary interest in life. What was your background?

I majored in psychology at Princeton from which I graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1953. Then in the Army I was a motion picture photographer, allowed to write, edit and photograph films. I went on to graduate school in the theatre division at Boston University and worked in stock, directed one off-Broadway show and stage-managed others. Finally that way of life was too much for me—to be constantly looking for work instead of creating. It was then that I decided to put my emphasis on the visual art and devote my life to that.

I had been teaching speech at St. Francis College while getting my MFA degree in theatre, wrote my book on HAPPENINGS and other articles such as THE USE OF FILM IN THE NEW THEATRE, edited an issue of the Tulane Drama Review in 1965 and of course, did performances at various colleges. These are basically like happenings in structure but I do not call them that because they have actors and acting which does not fit my definition of a "Happening".

As I understand it, your performances are structured. Do you use mixed media?

Yes. For example, the performance at Bennington College and Expo '67. One can use films and slide projections to produce an image and compare that image with a live figure performing a very simple act, like firing a pistol, with the slide representing action which is frozen, or the motion picture without sound to show the way different people perform the same act. In one performance there are ten different images, each lasting about 3 minutes; the tape recorder is the first image and is not a complete structure in itself . . . so that later when people see the scene they are going to remember the tape and will be involved with memory and expectancy. People begin to expect the next variation and we have to give them variations they do not expect. One image uses superimpositions and another image use a fugue type structure with two identical live performances going on at the same time. I think of the whole as cubistic, looking at the material from unusual angles and points of view. We are using the material of traditional theatre with an entirely different antological approach.

What are you doing with your "performances" at present?

I'm working on a performance for Bennington and we're using a scene from John Webster's THE WHITE DEVIL, which I've edited somewhat. Since I have a twin brother, he and I are both playing one character and we have three girls who interchangeably play two parts. I am interested in the comparison with the way he

reads a line and the way I read a line, with the way each of the three girls reads the same line. On tape, I can compare these readings. I taped these comparisons, edited them, putting them together, using tape loops of a musical type structure, where the meaning of the lines is not important at all. The tone of voice, the length, the quality are more important. I'm also doing a performance on May 10th at the Fashion Institute of Technology.

You have worked both in drama and the visual arts. Do you keep them separated?

Yes. They are separate but my performances and sculpture are related. I have been working at sculpture since 1957 or 1958 with time off for writing and performances but I consider myself primarily a sculptor. I also feel that my present work is my mature work and would disregard my earlier works.

Your sculpture has a very personal and interesting concept.

Well, from the esthetic point of view, I would agree with you. Of course, what I am working with is universal but I am investigating new ways of seeing and, from that point of view, I do believe that I am going in my own direction. When we look at a sculpture, here in the gallery, we ignore the gallery, the walls and everything around us. This is an unconscious mental attitude that operates habitually. I feel that art has dealt with states of mind and that is something I am working against. I am against the set of an hermetic work of art, a work of art cut-off and self-sufficient. As the viewer becomes aware of the relationship of the sculpture to the room, a certain tension exists. All of my pieces have that kind of content in them.

I would like to see if I could describe to your satisfaction the piece of sculpture you will have in this exhibition. It consists of three parts, one of which has two elements. One part stands in the center of the gallery and has six faces. Each face is looking at a specific part of the room and this is reflected in the face by means of a photograph of that area of the room. Another part is a WINDOW PIECE reflecting inside what may be seen outside the window showing relative distances. Tremendous tension exists between each face reflecting each other and a specific area of the gallery. Does this sculpture have a name?

I consider this not one piece of sculpture but three, namely, FLOOR PIECE, WINDOW PIECE and COLLECTION FRAMES. Each piece has its own system of seeing. The FLOOR PIECE and the WINDOW PIECE are definite, the other is really one piece now, in two parts. Sometimes the work is separated by space, but it's still the same piece. This is not one sculpture; the three are separate. It would be three pieces, in four parts. I create them individually and do not think of any relation, although sometimes I end up getting more and more elaborate, so that I may end with one piece that has ten or eleven different parts.

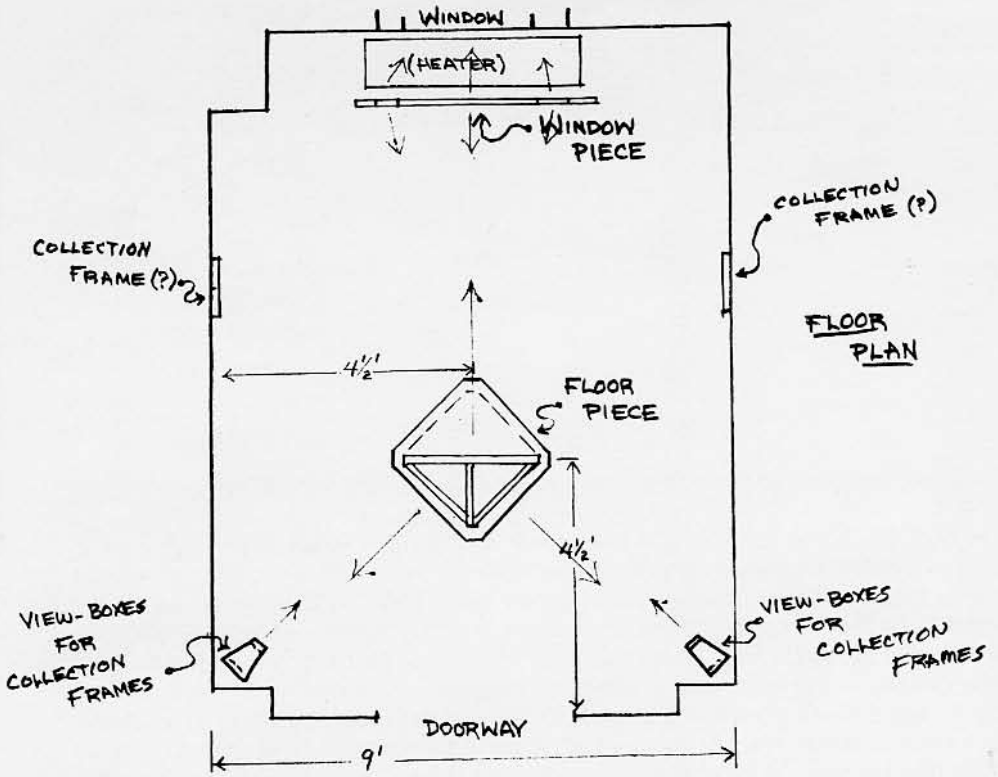
Are all pieces related to each other, with their photographs and mirrors?

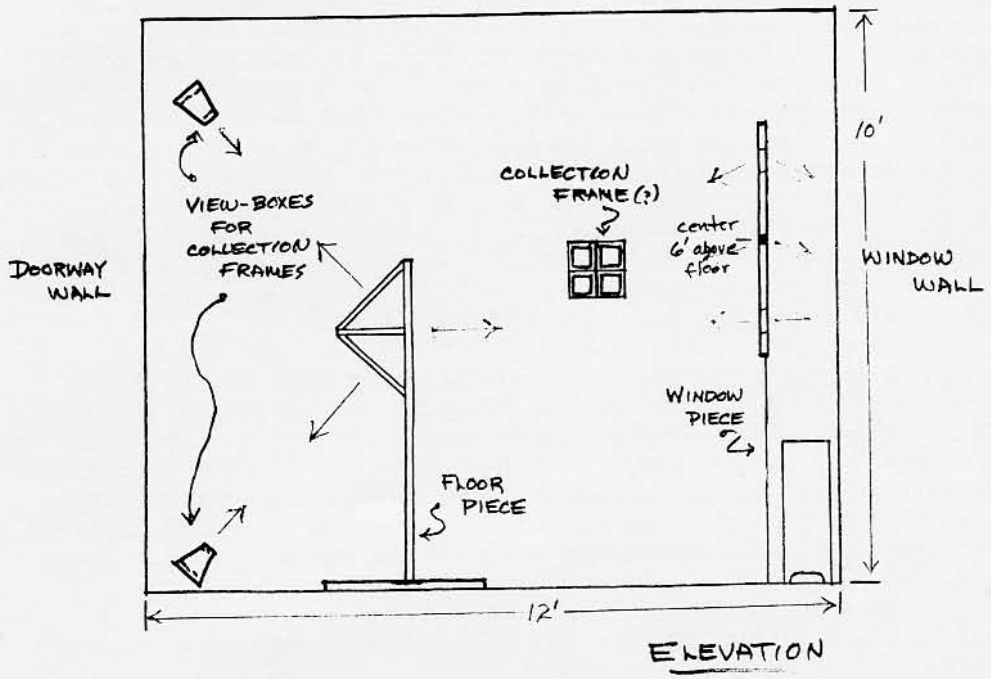
Well, each piece relates to the room that it's in. If other pieces are in the room, naturally that piece will relate to the others, but there is nothing necessary about it. Although my sculpture uses representational material, I consider my work abstract. I'm not making any comment on the things represented themselves. The photographs are merely a device to create an abstract structure. A photograph is not really realistic, any more than acting is the thing itself—you never get that real in acting.

In my sculpture in this exhibition, some of the photographs are "mirror-photographs"; others are "window-photographs". The FLOOR PIECE will reflect the four corners of the room, the opposite wall, the ceiling and includes the imaginary section that is not there. The aluminum holding the photograph is buffed to a mirror finish so you get some reflection.

What would you like to do eventually with your structures?

I would like to place pieces outdoors in a landscape that could relate to views miles away, working also with the tension and pressure of time.

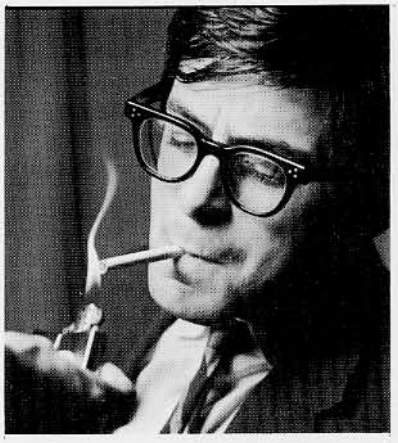




Drawing of ELEVATION and FLOOR PLAN for

WINDOW PIECE	47″ x 47″
FLOOR PIECE	68″ x 28″ x 19″
COLLECTION FRAMES	each 9″ x 6″

Les Levine



Do you feel that your early background has influenced the work you are now doing?

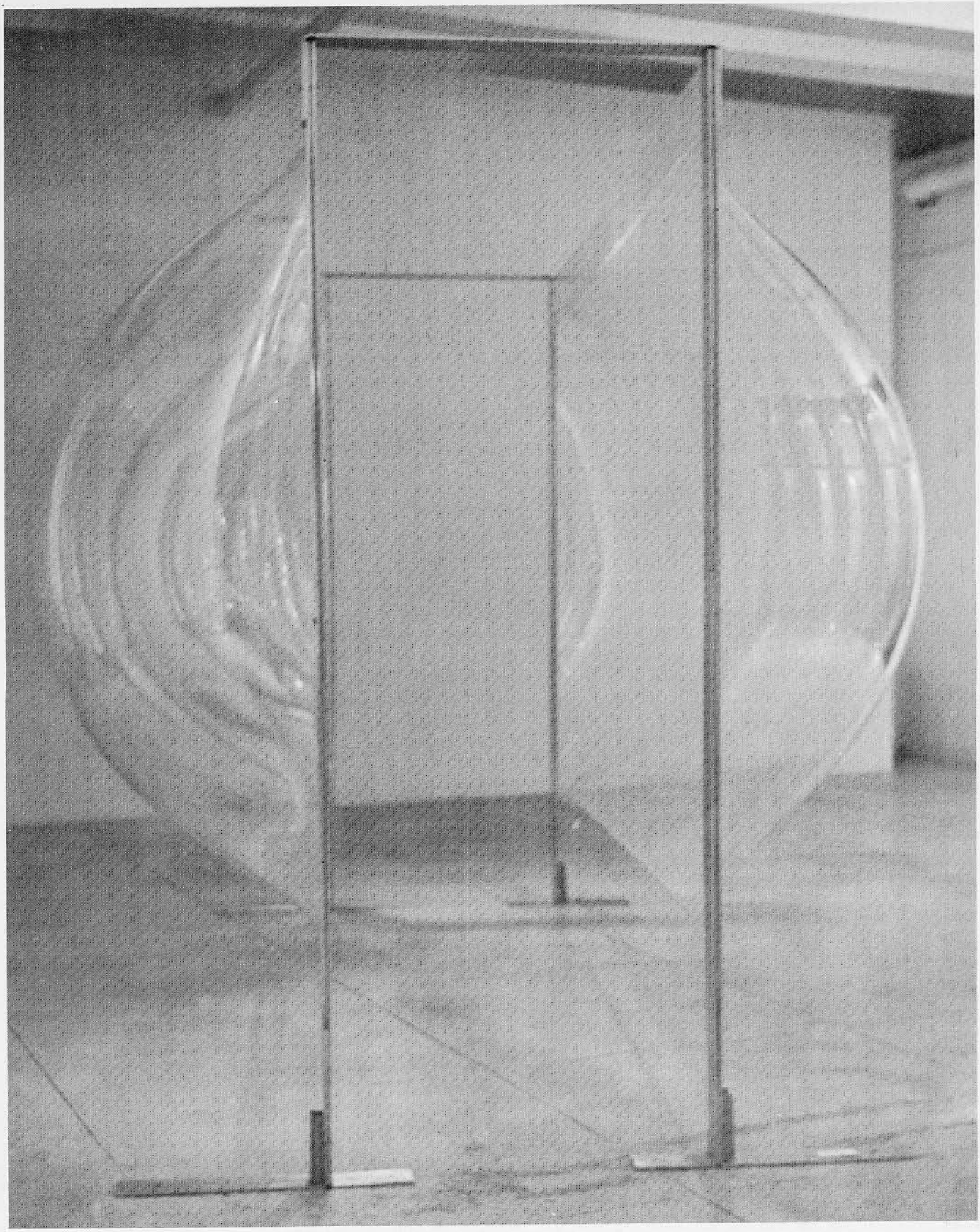
I was born in Dublin, Ireland and lived there for fourteen years. My early years in Dublin certainly influenced my personal attitudes. I think that being Irish gives one some of that dogmatic attitude that Irishmen have. Then, in London, I went to the Central School of Arts and Crafts (that is the Royal Academy, equal to a college), but I did not graduate from there because I could not find a great deal of interest in the course, which was very academic. I changed from fine art to design in my second year and after two years of that I quit. It did not seem important to graduate. That I am able to continue at all now I attribute to the fact that I left when I did. I am certain that I would not be able to create fine art if I had continued. It is destructive to creative art, that the fine arts courses as you get them in art school, rather than at the philosophical level of university lectures, have nothing to do with art at all; they have to do with one man's idea of how art should be made to look right for his idea. It was some kind of authority over me that I did not want. In retrospect, what it has meant is that I have gone into areas of materials and techniques, using engineering and other things that I would never have used. The STAR MACHINE shown here would never have been made if I were a fantastic draftsman because it has nothing to do with graphic ideas at all. If I believed in the idea that it was good for me to be a good painter, a good draftsman, I do not think my work would have mattered too much today. Certainly it would not be breaking the kind of ground that it is trying to.

What was your purpose in making the STAR MACHINE?

The purpose in making this piece was to make a piece that would be so close to not existing and yet exist. I have said many times that I wish I were completely invisible—that I were just an idea, rather than a physicality of any kind. In this piece, that is what I was trying to achieve more than anything, the idea that you sense space and you feel it the way you feel cloth or any textural thing like space—not a graphic image of space in the way painters will paint one square red and another blue, knowing that the red square, being the same size, is going to appear larger because red is a more intense color and is going to appear closer; that is a graphic demonstration of an illusionist space, whereas what I am after is the experience of the space. The STAR MACHINE itself is purposely meant to be barely there—if it could be less there, I would be even happier.

Well, you are working with a kind of visual-non-visual space.

I am trying to create an art that does not rely on contemplation—is not a contemplative device of any kind—but is one that involves the person in a kinetic experience. By kinetic I mean a relationship of movement to his own body, not kinetic in the fact of art that moves, probably in the sense that you feel your arm moving out and that is a sensation of some sort. When you walk into the STAR MACHINE you feel a type of space—you become totally aware of the space and then you realize all of a sudden that you can not see that space; you can feel that it is there, so that the work is



STAR MACHINE 84″ x 86″ x 120″

concerned with sensation and experience rather than some kind of intellectual contemplation. Going along with that idea, the piece was made with no distortions at all. Some artists would say: "Well, if that were distorted, the room would move and so forth . . ." But you see, I am not interested in illusionistic things at all. I am interested in reality. It may be a very small reality, but it is that. It is like flopping into a chair—as real as that sensation; it is your body moving through space. Illusions are interesting, but they are not for me.

Did you watch the development of the STAR MACHINE at the factory?

In order to make a piece like the STAR MACHINE I work for about nine months and most of my work is done in my head. I spend most of my time thinking about the work. The most I ever do is make up a little model when I think I am close to the idea and then I photograph the model. By photographing and enlarging a model I can make it look like a large piece. When I finally do decide what should be done with the piece, I pick up the phone and call the factory and give them the instructions and they send it to me when it is finished. I do not go to the factory at all because there is a point where creativity has stopped. You have to realize that it is not the beginning and end of your artistic life.

When I first started, I would go to the factory and get involved in being told "this can't be done." Most of the things that I have done in the plastic area are things that are being done for the first time. Naturally, people would tell me: "It would be better if you did it this way," because they did not want to get involved in something that might end up a failure. Through dealing with them, I have learned their language, the technical words that are used by engineers, so that I can give my orders by phone. By not going I save myself the problem of somebody saying to me "Will you change it?"

You had an exhibition called THE SLIPCOVER I believe.

That was at the Ontario Gallery of Art which is the Art Museum of Toronto. The whole room was completely mirrorized—floor, ceiling, walls—with a plastic that is metallized. In this room there were eight walls; two inflated and deflated all the time, so that you had this constant sensation of the space changing, getting larger and smaller. While this was going on, quietly there were six projectors constantly projecting images into the room—not just random images, but images of exhibitions that had taken place in that room for the past year—so that you had the new version of the room and all that space along with the memory of what it had been, and the room became information about itself.

Please tell me about the film you have made, I would like the opportunity of previewing it.

The film is called CRITIC. It was made by having fifteen New York critics come to my studio and I video-taped about three minutes of each of them talking. They were given a choice of topics, but most of them chose to talk about criticism. It was unrehearsed, unedited. My point was that criticism and art are two different things; reading critcism is a completely different experience from dealing with art. The idea of having critics once removed on television and removed from television onto film is the same kind of removal that you get when you look at art through the critic's eye.

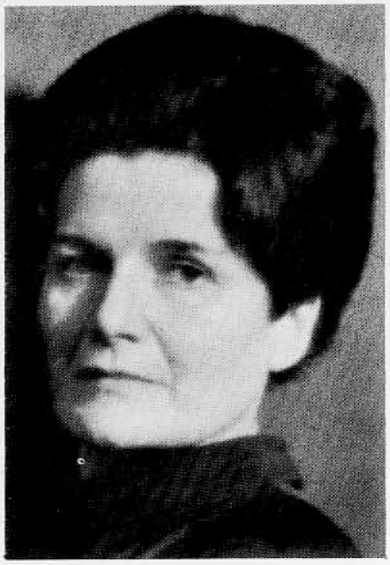
Did each critic explain his bias?

I think their biases came out very clearly—they tended in some small way to let you know their bias.

For the finished film did you edit or add anything?

This is an enormous difficulty that people have, not only in my work in sculpture, but also in the television thing that I do. They do not understand what intellectual repose is. They do not understand that reality in itself is the strongest element that anyone can use.

Ursula Meyer



What formal training have you had and are you teaching now?

I was born in Hanover, Germany and studied at the Bauhaus for a year and a half, specializing in ceramics. Later I received my degrees in America, the B.A. in 1960 and my M.A. from Columbia University in 1961. I am an Assistant Professor at Hunter College teaching Art and ceramics and ceramic sculpture, emphasizing in teaching the use of ceramics as a structural material, which was exemplified in my last one-man show at the Amel Gallery in 1964.

Would you tell me something about your philosophy of teaching?

One has to have competence in one's own field and know how to impart that competence to the young person. The best teacher in the creative arts is the one who achieves the most with the least amount of guidance and interference. I feel it is a very creative job to "unpeel" the creative personality of the young student . . . bringing out the latent talent.

When I first saw your work two years ago, you were working in Cor-ten Steel and masonite and your scale had changed from your early work. I was particularly interested in your large walk-through sculpture THE THREE BLUES. I had the freedom of walking in and around it and the proportions were so perfect.

When you came to me and spoke of walk-in sculpture I thought of sculpture tailored to man. It made me think of the Renaissance statement: "Man is the mode and measure of all things". It became interesting to me to compare this notion with our contemporary concept. The buildings in the Renaissance, churches, palaces, ships and machines derived their dimensions from the proportions of man. Renaissance man was divine and, therefore, his proportions were considered ideal and of the utmost perfection and the dimensions of buildings evidenced this concept. Would it not be preposterous if contemporary architects and engineers were to apply anthropomorphic proportions to their buildings and machines? No longer is the man the measure of all things, but the things have become the measure of man. This reverse process is succinctly exemplified by the astronaut strapped to his seat in the "wraparound space" of his capsule. By the same token Marshall McLuhan calls the Volkswagen a "wraparound car". I believe that scale and proportion in sculpture relate to the image of man—as the artist perceives it—here and now.

How do you feel about color in sculpture?

I do not believe that color should be "superimposed", I mean added as a decorative touch. Color has to be an integral part of sculpture. If the piece is devoid of formal complexities color gives it a completion which otherwise it would not have. I apply the "frontal approach" in the THREE BLUES which you saw in my studio. In pieces that are utterly simple, "frontal approach" makes a great deal of sense. However, most of my sculpture is devoid of color. Thinking in terms of color relates only seldom to my concept of form. There is one neutral color in THE LAWS shown in this exhibition. This work may appear simple but it is not: it is not only what it is, but it is also all the possible variations of what it could be. The idea of inner logic of form or of related forms is paramount. Radical abstraction or reduction calls for the understatement of material, color and texture. The result is a no-material and a no-color treatment. I feel that too much concern with material and for that matter craftsmanship can get in the way of art.

How has your sculpture developed from the model I saw?

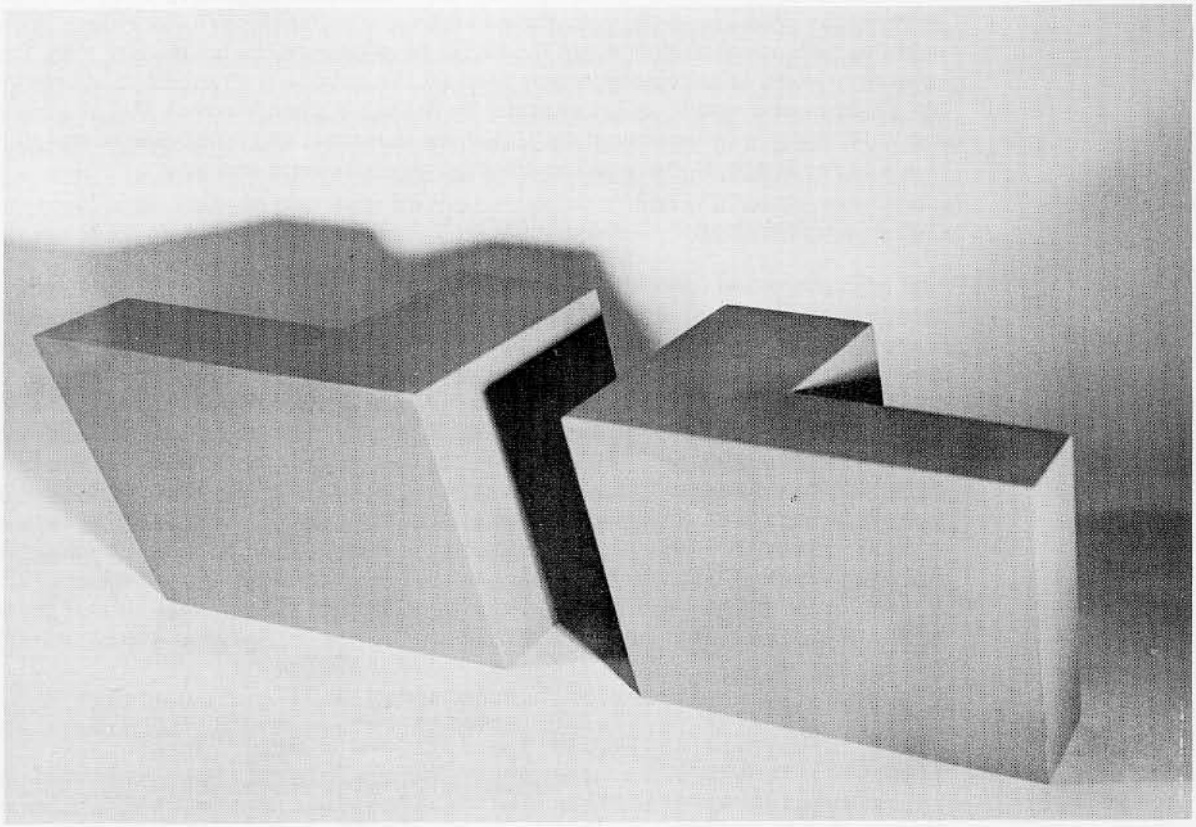
There was something in the model which did not satisfy me. I felt it was something too pleasing. I think that anything in art which has value comes more as a shocking than a pleasing experience. It makes me sceptical when a work is too easy and non-demanding.

What change did you actually make?

At first the organization of the two identical forms of THE LAWS was asymmetrical. Then I decided to use opposites, positioning the two forms symmetrically. This change made an enormous difference. It brought to mind the poet's line, "God, Thou great symmetry" quoted by Weyl in SYMMETRY.

I noticed that rather than being a compact whole your sculpture often consists of several elements or modules.

Yes. I am interested in the simplification and the split you observed is a direct development of simplification. Formal relationships are expressed in terms of various discrete forms. I think if we work with modules we might just as well go all the way and present them as such, unconnected with each other. Rather than being part of a fixed whole, the module becomes "liberated" relating to other modules as form and value in its own right. THE LAWS consists of two modules, offering many different possibilities of positioning. The inherent complexity of relationships is so strong that this work can be arranged in thirty-six variations and many more. Confronted with this richness of possibilities it is up to the artist to make the final decision. I do not think I would offer a sculpture with thirty-seven possibilities as a "do it yourself" proposition. The choice signifies the artist's commitment.

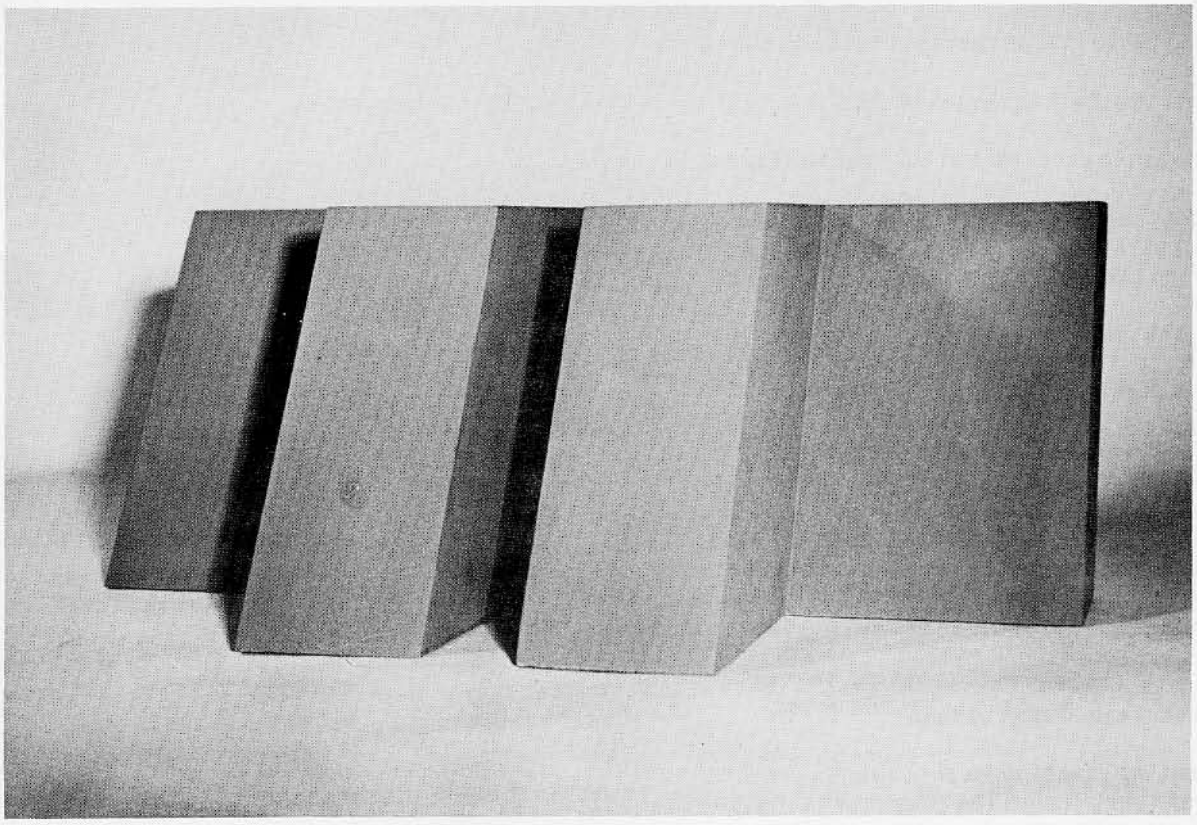


Model for THE LAWS 73″x 194″x 132″ (2 Modules)

What is the basic formal concept of your art?

Almost all of my sculptures relate in one way or another to the square, ergo the cube. For me the square is the most beautiful man made form lending itself to an endless wealth of ideas. All other geometric forms can be derived or related to the square. Above and beyond its inherent form potential it is also charged with spiritual energy. The "most simple geometric forms" have fascinated Western scientific minds since Plato in terms of their mathematical exploration. In the Orient for thousands of years devotees and philosophers have used the square or the square in the circle called mandala for meditation exercises. To me the contemplative aspect of art is essential.

The block like structure of my sculpture THE LAWS declines at an angle of thirty degrees which lends energy to the concept. I thought of the tables of the laws, the laws of nature, the laws of logic, the laws of symmetry, the laws of society, strong and powerful, seemingly threatening us with their weight, yet immutable, immovable, impersonal and unconcerned. . . . In calling my sculpture THE LAWS I thought of all of this and none of this. A title is unimportant and should not be mistaken for a message. This title has endless meanings hence none at all.



Model for THE LAWS 73″ x 194″ x 132″ (2 Modules)

Brian O'Doherty

You were born in 1928, in County Roscommon on the West Coast of Ireland. Do you feel that being Irish influences your work in any way?

I think it does very much. I did some work in the early fifties in Ireland which was hard-edge abstraction—very little was being done there at that time. Having been raised in a welter of Celtic twilight and sentiment, this was a sort of denial of it. That is why for me anti-romantic stance of art now is extremely useful. I went to art school in Dublin very early on. That art school is a phenomenon of obsolescence, should be kept in a museum, you know, and preserved. A total antique, it is the National College of art in Dublin. I went there when I was a medical student. I worked rather hard because I would go to medical school and then to art school at night.

That is a very full program.

Well, I have always liked having a number of streams going at the same time. I practiced medicine for three years in Dublin, Ireland and down the country. I do not regret that at all. I have not left medicine because it was something I disliked, but just for something I liked more. I try to keep up with what is happening in medicine.

When did you come to America?

In 1957. I was at Cambridge in England early in 1957, and I was doing work in experimental psychology there, in visual perception which allowed one to see very early the first signs of OP coming. It is not anything I am keen on particularly, but I was interested in the framework that provided me with the obvious message that was coming down the chute.

You came over here in 1957 and went to Harvard. What did you study there?

I continued that work and took a degree at Harvard, an S.M. in hygiene, as they call it. That is a Master of Science reversed.

Was it then that you were at the Boston Museum?

That was the following year, 1958 to 1961. That is when I did the television shows.

They were excellent and educational. You appeared so relaxed.

They were interesting to do and very wearing because one had to plot out all the moves. I wrote all camera directions. We used to go through three rehearsals. Most art on television discredits both art and television.

It was after that that you were on THE NEW YORK TIMES?

Yes, 1961 to 1964.

Were you working in art during these times?

I was doing some things in Boston, mostly drawings. When with the TIMES, I stopped. Some of the rules at THE NEW YORK TIMES, by the way, were that you could not make art, could not exhibit, nor be on juries. Although I was allowed to break a rule; I had an interview program, DIALOGUE, on Channel 4. It covered all the arts, one show a week for three years.

I am interested now in discussing your work as an artist and specifically your sculpture in this exhibition.

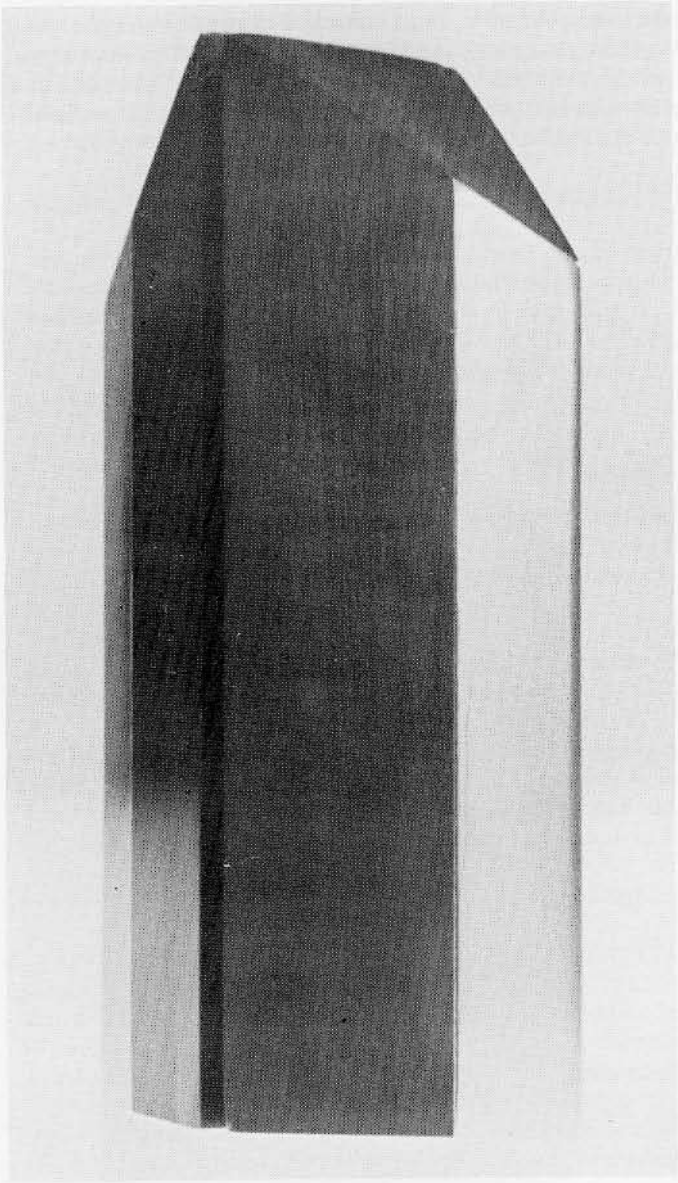
I am working in three series right now. One is a series of labyrinths, which are the main thing really. The other is a series of pairs, and sometimes the pairs are put together. The third is a series of paintings, which is very unusual for me, that arise out of the labyrinth idea. I have been thinking for some time that painting has got to learn to be just a surface again, to be very flat again. At the same time, I have had a certain interest in the recovery of deep space on the surface. I have sort of worked

this out from the labyrinth design, translated onto just flat glass. It is painting on glass that I think does this, and I am working larger, three and four feet now. That's large for glass, which weighs a ton.

One of the things that strikes me about the whole development of non-romantic art here, is that it is so late. It happened in literature long ago. The fact that it is so late happening is evidence that art is not ahead of its time but behind it. The artists are just catching up with their time now. I think the reason for that was abstract expressionism with its apotheosis of the individual; it is really a frontier climax of romanticism, Delacroix on the frontier. As such, it has a sort of attraction in a mythical fashion, just as Marshall Dillon does. The degree of its success kept other things from happening, or masked them.

Well, it did give an aesthetic freedom which we had not had before.

It is a curious heroic movement, really, because it is so varied in fact and so monolithic in myth and so many things can be traced to it. I think in the next ten years, we will be able to see the way things passed through it. I like also the fact that once you remove the romantic narcissism of expressionist abstraction, the artist is allowed to be what he wishes to be; to be a scholar, to be a philosopher, to be a connoisseur, to be a thinker, to be like a lawyer or a shop-keeper without any moral depreciation.



Model for PAIR 7′ x 2′ x 2⅝′ x 2⅝′
(2 Modules)

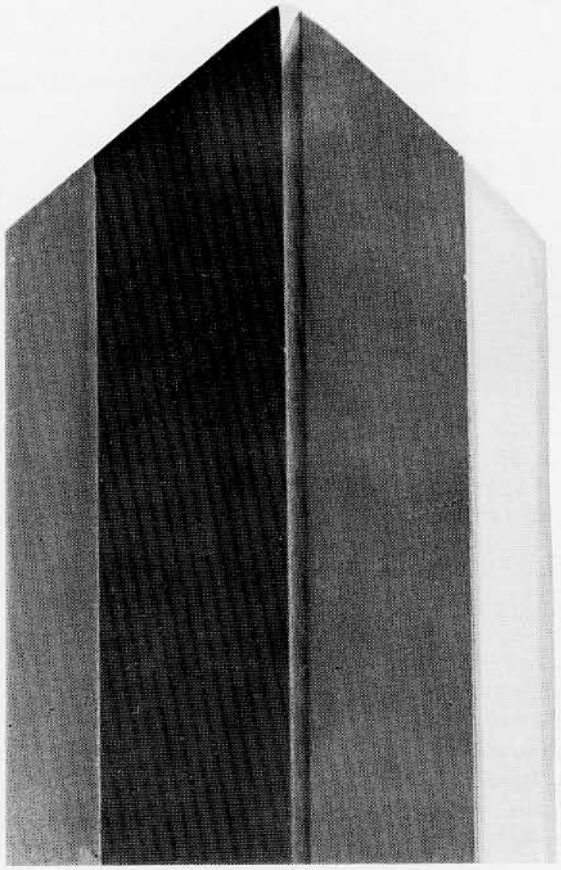
I want to get back to talking about your work, PAIR. Do you want to describe it?

It is two standing pieces, triangular in section, identical in form. Seven feet high at the back, at the apex of the wedge, 5½ feet high, there is an inclined section from the 7 to the 5½ feet. Part of the sides are covered with aluminum, so that they function both as space and as solid; virtual and actual; and also they are set up back to back so that there is a sliver of space used as a reflecting material also.

May one walk between them?

No, it is too tight for that. The work has two basic positions: back to back and leading edge to leading edge. The first position is preferable. PAIR is a one of a series of "double" pieces. Sometimes the halves are identical, sometimes mirror images, that is, right and left-handed. They are all made of an opaque (painted) and a reflecting surface (1/32 inch aluminum). The work is based on fractional (disproportionate) measurements.

Although the pieces are easily conceptualized, that is, "understood", actually looking at them denies rather than confirms this concept. Thus, they are more easily clarified in memory than in fact, with the eyes closed rather than with the eyes open. Thus, looking at the work becomes a form of not seeing it. I would hope that the under-sophisticated would apprehend this instinctively, and the over-sophisticated artificially. (I am not much interested in those that lie between.) Should this be understood as a dialogue between a whole and its parts, or as a system of relationships, or as a perceptual proposition or gestalt, the work (and the viewer) fails. The work's real nature could be emphasized by illuminating the work momentarily at intervals in a dark room containing the viewer, or by a series of photographs, but these "aids" should be denied.



Model for PAIR 7' x 2' x 2⅜' x 2⅜'
(2 Modules)

Charles Ross

I know you are really an Easterner, and yet you are known as a California artist.

I did not become a sculptor until I went to California.

Your first degree is in mathematics?

I began at Penn State University, studying physics, and was not very interested in that. After two years I needed a more urban environment, so I went to Berkeley and received a degree in mathematics. During my last year, I became interested in sculpture. Actually, I had always been interested in the theatre and had worked in theatre at Penn State and Berkeley. They were doing very traditional theatre at Berkeley, and I lost interest and decided to take an introductory course in sculpture.

Did you begin with mathematical solids, or something creative?

My interest was in mathematical logic and in set theory. I was studying this and intended to continue until I took that first course in sculpture under Sydney Gordin. I went directly into the masters sculpture program. In that senior year when I was getting my A.B. in math, the faculty waived most of the beginning sculpture requirements and put me directly into the masters program, so I received a M.A. degree in sculpture.

What did you teach at Cornell?

Sculpture, an introductory course, and the welding program. My work before this was welded steel sculpture. In the welded sculpture, I started out with the Dilexi Gallery. This sculpture was organic, almost classical in its organization. I am not at all interested in doing that any more.

What happens when you teach? What kind of problems do you propose to your students?

I think the major effort in teaching is getting students to be able to see. The problems are dependent upon how the student's work is developing at the moment. I do give a lot of process problems. We set up some rules for a piece of sculpture, and the students work with the rules and the sculpture is as different as people are.

Tell me about the dance programs and what you did at the Judson Theatre.

Yvonne Rainer and I did a piece that was called ROOM SERVICE. We both did the choreography and performed independently in it. I built the structure right through the dance; Yvonne and another dancer led two teams in a follow-the-leader fashion through the environment that I was filling with constructions so that the dancers would have to deal with the changing environment all the time. Three people in the line would pass, then for instance a wall would go up so that the other people would have to scramble over the wall to keep in the same path. It made a very interesting feed-back situation between what I was doing and what they were doing.

Would you give me a definition of what is meant by a "Process Situation"?

Yes. You define a procedure, a method of acting or rules for moving across the room; perhaps a different set of rules for each participant. The scheme is completely tightly formed; it is totally organized, without knowing the result. This summer I expect to be working with Group 212 in Woodstock. It is a group of artists, filmmakers and dancers organizing a collaborative school. At that time, I hope to concentrate my energies on the process of setting up structures for generating movement situations using the natural environment.

Your sculpture was included in eleven important exhibitions in 1966-67. I would like to know something about the philosophy behind your new work in Prism Sculpture.

There are three aspects to my work, and they happen simultaneously. When you look at one of the prisms, you see the form of the piece, you see into it and you see through it, all simultaneously. You experience two realities in one moment of time because things may be seen in natural space and in prism space. Neither you nor others may enter the space seen in the prisms, yet you may see others in that space. The pieces act as windows between the two realities. The space that you see in the prisms is not an illusion, it is an optical reality; a transformation of the existing space.

When I saw your show I felt this in the perpendicular, triangular pieces, but not in the horizontal ones.

It works differently with the horizontal pieces; they are conceived as islands of prisms in space, evenly distributed. As you approach these prisms, depending on your distance from them, you either see images of the ceiling, across the room, the floor, or the light broken down. This changes depending on your location. This puts you in touch with the space you are in in several different ways. When you are walking toward them and the floor turns into the ceiling, you experience a spatial shift in your own reading of the gallery.

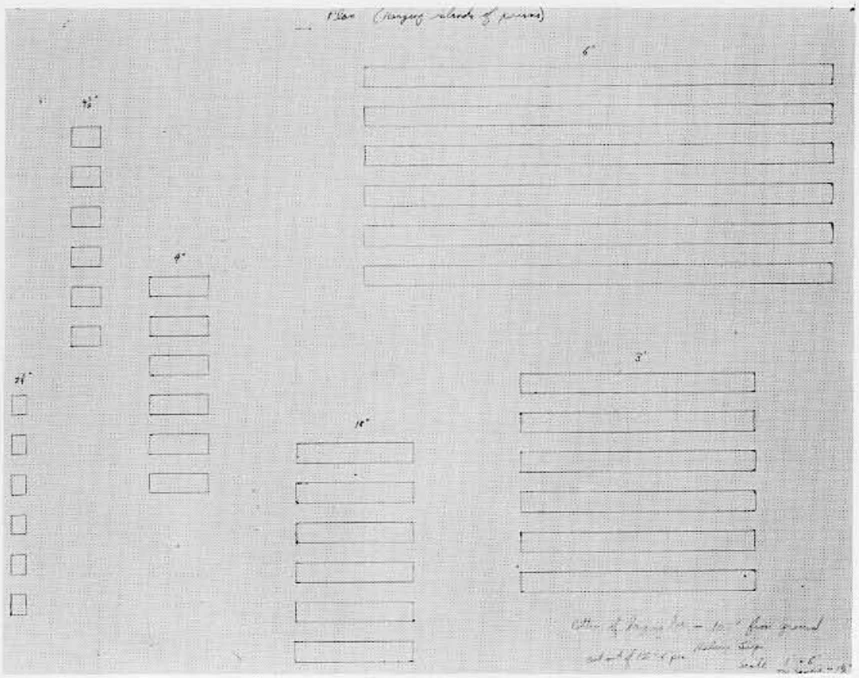
Is this piece that you have described for this exhibition called THE ISLAND OF PRISMS?

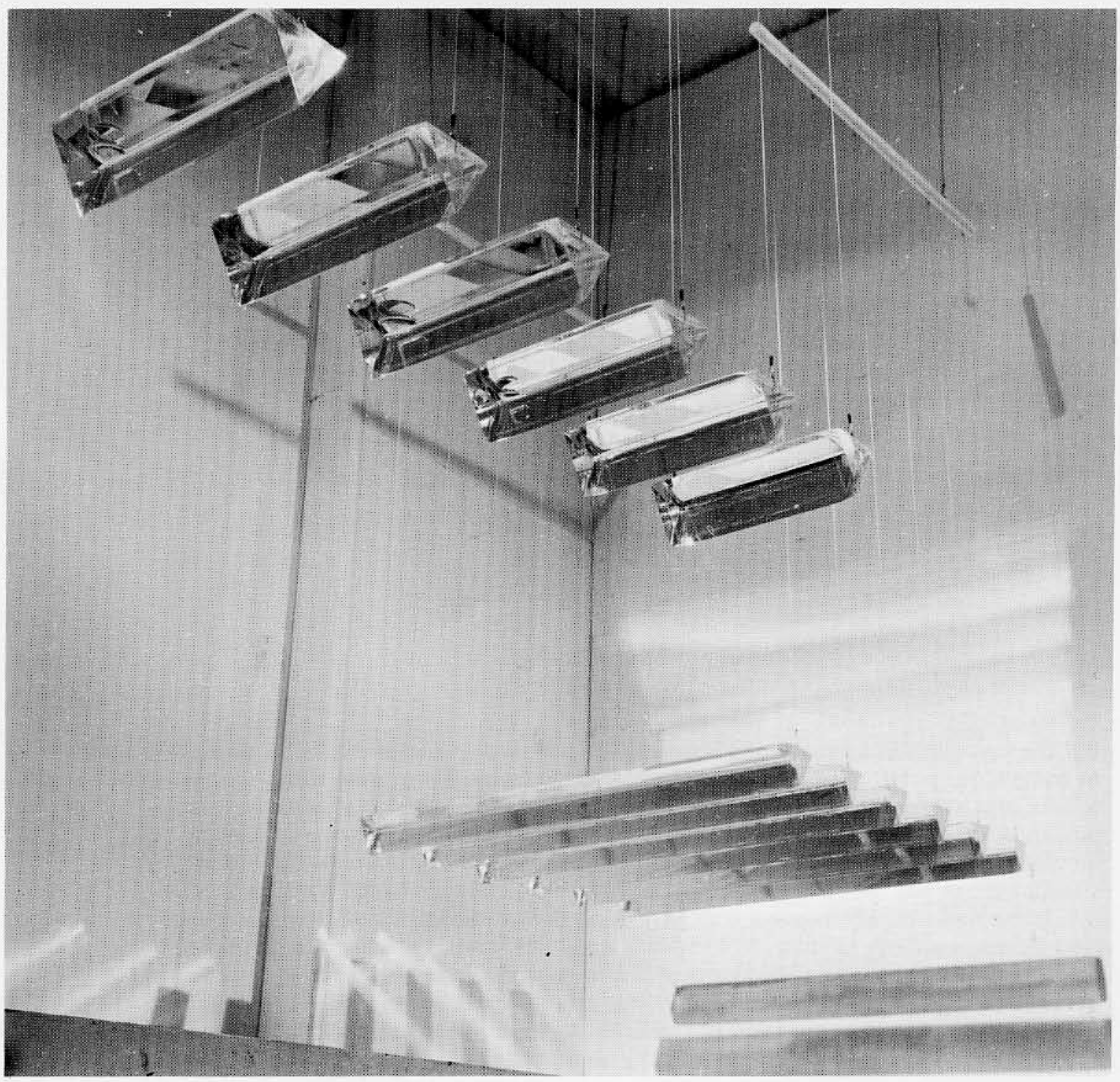
They do not have names; they have descriptions. For instance, I would describe this as six sets of prisms with six prisms in each set. The prisms are three inches on a side and are spaced three inches apart within each set. That is, they are spaced evenly, the same distance apart as they are wide, producing a perfectly regular grid. The sets are identical except in length. Length is determined by consecutive halvings of the longest set: six feet, three feet, eighteen inches, nine inches, four and a half inches, two and a quarter inches. The sets are evenly distributed in space and hang at chest height in a plane parallel to the floor. The evenly distributed islands of prisms that you may walk among define a plane that slices the space into two parts.

The perception of space and light through the prisms changes character with the changes of length of the sets. The long set emphasizes a second optical space, the medium sets, a repetition of images, and the small set, bits of light. In this case, although the prisms do not control the space, their placement does, since it fills and divides the room. The prisms have emerged out of my previous work with modular generating systems in sculpture and my environmental work with the dance.

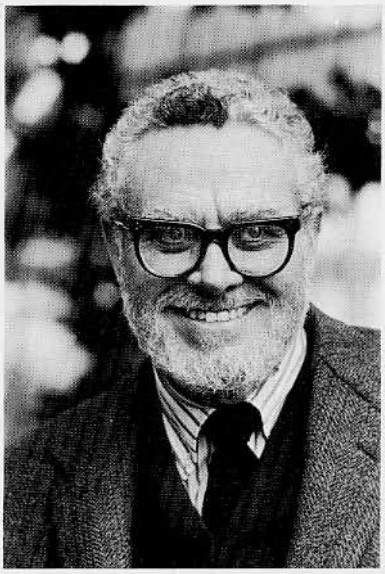
Drawing for ISLANDS OF PRISMS

ISLANDS OF PRISMS 3′x 3′ 9″x 3′





Tony Smith



Your exhibition in Bryant Park gave not only gallery-goers but all of New York an opportunity to see your work. Congratulations on that exhibition and on your excellent one-man shows in 1966 and 1967 at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford; the Los Angeles County Museum and the Detroit Institute of Fine Art. Does your early background relate to the work you are now doing?

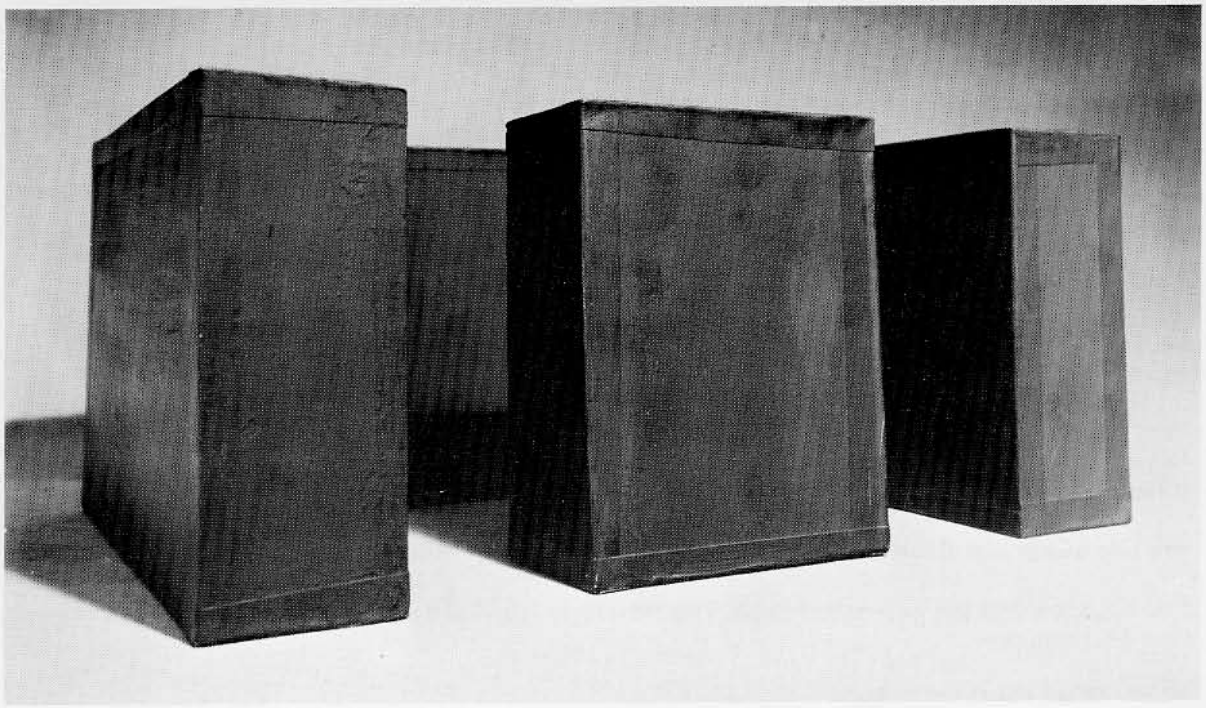
I attended the Art Student's League in New York and the New Bauhaus in Chicago. It was my intention to go on to architecture—that was the reason I went there—but it was just starting at that time and was not as stimulating as it is now. The following year I worked for Frank Lloyd Wright but I have never had formal architectural training. I worked on drawings, buildings, estimates and mainly did supervisory work. Since then I have done mostly residences and a few other building projects. I am a designer, not an architect, but I feel that this architectural background is evident in my present work.

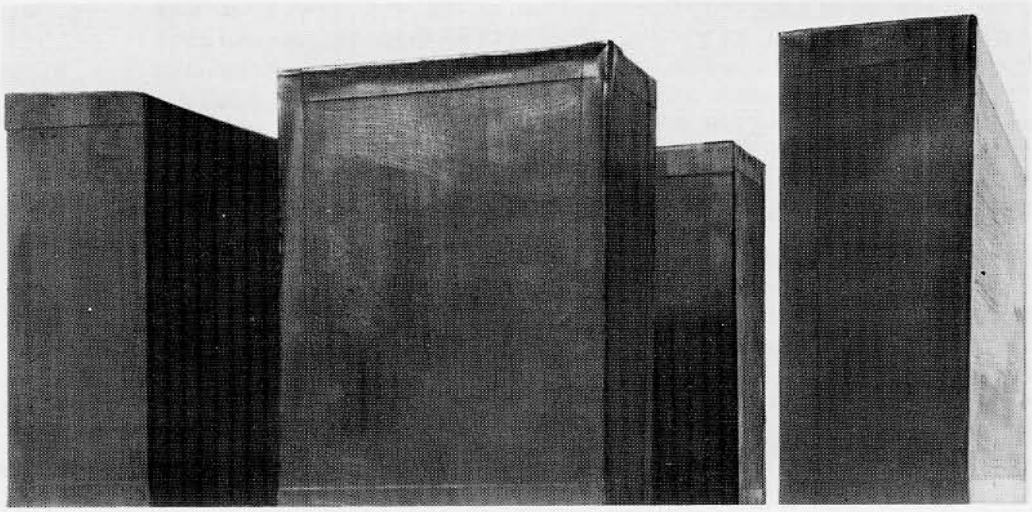
Do you teach sculpture at Hunter College?

I teach painting and I try to relate my own experience to whatever problems we are dealing with and see in what way the student can verbalize it or give some kind of structure to it, which would be related to other ideas and knowledge generally. I can't stand exercises. I would rather have a student involved in some emotional way and do something which I would consider, well, perhaps, spontaneous or not fully realized, in order to see some of the unconscious potentials as well as something that has been developed in any way. I do not believe that I am particularly interested in the quality of work as such. I do not have standards of work. I am much more interested in the students' approach and attitude—am much more interested if I feel that the student is learning through the work and relating his experience to his developing knowledge as a general thing. I think my ideas are very much like a liberal arts approach for any other subject. It is simply an instrument—since every discipline has certain limitations—to make it possible to think about it with some clarity and at the same time relate it to other experience.

Recently I read a statement by you on "Modules." Can you explain further the ordering of plans for structural regularity rather than bi-lateral symmetry?

For the last couple of thousand years most buildings have been based on symmetry of some kind, by far, most of them on bi-lateral symmetry. There were relatively few towers and, of course, almost no buildings were symmetrical at that point as total buildings. However, there were domes, which are symmetrical, but they were usually incorporated in structures which were basically either radial or bi-lateral. Therefore, I think we can say that almost all buildings were based on bi-lateral symmetry. So this is the basis on which plans were regulated at this period of time. At the beginning of the twentieth century, factory buildings, commercial buildings, etc., began to be regulated according to bays, according to column centers, without any organic symmetry or anything based on point, line, or plane being imposed on them, so that it would just be a repetition of units. It did not make any difference where a building ended. For instance, Mies Van der Rohe has said of the repetition in New





Model for THE MAZE 6'8"x 10'x 30" (2 Modules)
6'8"x 5'x 30" (2 Modules)

England factories that they run out; that is, that the bay sides, the small windows between the wall sections, are so small and repeated so often that it is impossible to comprehend the building as a complete unit. At the same time, architects began to take over this column-spacing as the basis on which buildings would be organized. This gave them far greater freedom and flexibility in regulating the plan. They were not reduced to introducing elements of false masks and all sorts of things just for the purposes of symmetry; they utilized as much of the building envelope as possible. As soon as we begin to think of front and back we are almost always involved in some form of bi-lateral symmetry, unless, of course, it lacks symmetry altogether, which is a much more contemporary idea.

Do you have the drawing of the design for the structure entitled THE MAZE that you created for this exhibition?

Yes. I realize it is not a maze in the sense of being confusing but I think the over-all impression is that of a complicated structure. Instead of having any obvious order, it has a sense of many elements which are either opened or closed passages.

Are you aware that Brian O'Doherty is very interested in labyrinths and wells?

I do not know him but we are both Irish. This interest in labyrinths comes from New Grange, I suppose.

How high will the structure be?

It will be 6 feet 8 inches. Leaving 3 feet and 30 inches on each end of the gallery, which is the width of an ordinary door on either side, the piece is 10 feet long by 30 inches wide by 58 inches high. When I was given the dimensions of this gallery, I decided to use a five-foot module, dividing that again in half, and thus making 30 inches the size of the units. I did not think of the symmetry of the piece as I was doing it, but I just happened to notice when I was making this drawing that the central part is a five-foot square; the part including all the passages is a ten-foot square; then if you take the extension along the room, it is a fifteen-foot square; if you extend 30 inches on either end like that, the entire thing becomes a twenty-foot square. So that you see it is a lot of expanding squares. Then, on the other hand, if you take different divisions of the thing, for instance, if you take all these squares and carry them through, they make a grid which inter-penetrates—the two sets of grids inter-penetrate one another. In a certain sense, it is a labyrinth of the mind; you can see that it becomes quite complex, but at the same time, everything falls in very, very simply. In height, it is just a half of the height of the room in which it is being exhibited. I just noticed it after I did it. I did not design it that way. But I suppose, after a time, some kind of organization becomes second nature.

I think my pieces look best with very little light. In my studio I like to show them at dusk without any lights on and I have canvas stretchers over the windows so that there is a very subdued light. In my studio they remind me of Stonehenge. I like dawn or dusk light. Since there is nothing else in the room, I think that if light is subdued a little, it has more of the archaic or prehistoric look that I prefer. Actually, my work is best presented when it is outdoors surrounded by trees and shrubs where each piece can be seen separately by itself.

Catalogue design by Roberta Kimmel