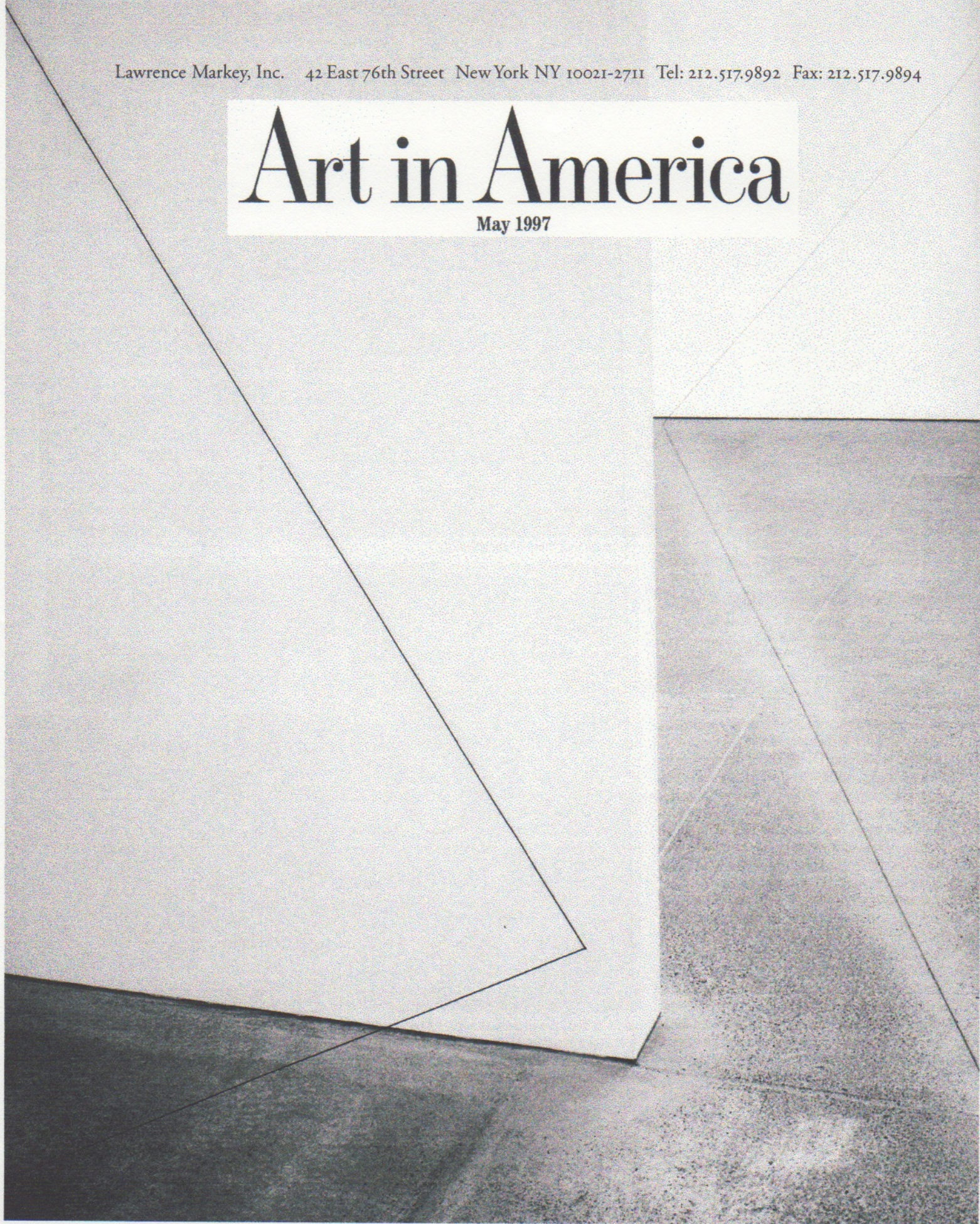


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# Art in America

May 1997





# Lines of Inquiry

*For nearly 30 years sculptor Fred Sandback has evoked room-filling volumetric forms using the most minimal of materials—ordinary colored yarn. Below, he discusses the origins, means and purposes of his deceptively simple practice.*

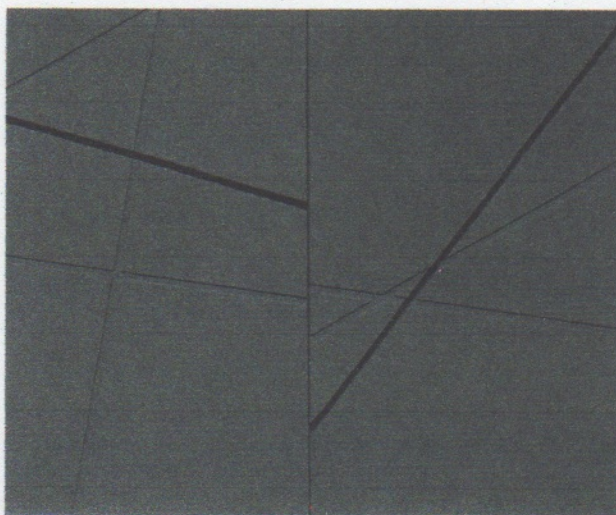
## INTERVIEW BY JOAN SIMON

This interview was conducted Sept. 1, 1996, by telephone from Westport in upstate New York to New Hampshire's Rindge, where Fred Sandback had just returned after completing the installation for his Manhattan exhibition at the Dia Center for the Arts [Sept. 12, 1996-June 29, 1997] and preparing a survey of nearly 30 years of drawing at Lawrence Markey Gallery, New York. He was getting ready to fly to Cologne via Boston and Frankfurt if Hurricane Edouard didn't intervene (it did not). In Cologne, Sandback opened a show of his work at Galerie Rolf Rieke; he went on to Zurich for his exhibition at Galerie Annemarie Verna. Follow-up conversations took place in November 1996.

In this interview, Sandback discusses an almost 30-year career that he characterizes as "a nomadicized existence." His is a sculpture practice that puts him on the road often to construct works at different sites, and he will sometimes rebuild the same piece in different places over the years. Sandback travels with a duffel in which he carries his materials: skeins of ordinary acrylic yarn. His signature medium is a single strand of yarn which he stretches point-to-point within a room to create geometric figures that simultaneously define pictorial planes and architectural volumes. A floor-to-ceiling line may be repeated four times, creating an open screen or wall-like stand within a room. Similarly, a pair of room-high rectangles, set at an angle to each other, each constructed of a baseline flush with the floor and two verticals, function as independent frames or portals. Though fixed in space, they seem to shift dynamically as our sight lines change when we walk around them or pass through them. Made of air and edges, Sandback's sculptures are Minimalist in concept and in image; they are also quite literally minimal in weight, mass and materiality. Thus Sandback's works offer the Platonic form of the Minimalist primary object. They precisely define real volumetric forms in real space, but forgo the mass of a tangible object.

Sandback's palette of yarns (he has also used string, wire or elastic cord) has varied over the years to include intense yellows, reds, oranges, pinks, purples, blues and greens, as well as more muted tans, browns, grays and light blues. He has experimented with fluorescent hues, and for a time in the '80s used multicolor cords made up of banded increments, each several inches long. He also often uses black or white. His colors are selected, in part, to assure visibility, to allow a line to be clearly evident but not obtrusive in situations as different as a Neo-Classical marble staircase, a room whose modernist glass curtain wall reveals a garden beyond, or the "white plasterboard cube," as Sandback calls it, which is his typical framework and often a deliberate choice. The point is for the edge to be evident wherever it is located, but never so visible as to call undue attention to itself.

Slightly rough-textured, Sandback's material absorbs light as it intensifies



*Fred Sandback: Untitled, 1996, bas-relief diptych, acrylic house paint on wood panels, 9 1/4 by 11 1/4 inches. Photo Cathy Carver.*

*Opposite, Untitled (detail), 1996, two-part vertical construction, light-brown and dark-gray acrylic yarn, dimensions variable; installed at the Dia Center for the Arts, New York. Photo Cathy Carver.*

and strengthens our perception of his supple, thin line. The line also has a certain glow, an aura of sorts; the fuzzy, hairy surround of the yarn's constituent fibers functions almost the way bits of charcoal or pastel dust do to amplify the density of a linear trail.

Sandback's constructions echo the down-to-earth yet utopian Russian Constructivist precedents of Malevich and Tatlin. This is especially true of his corner installations, where triangles are played off two walls and the floor, dynamically charging the rectilinear architectural supports. One thinks also of a more immediate lineage of American geometric abstractionists, especially given Sandback's Yale training. The edge that defines and floats Sandback's planes is not unlike the edge determining perceptual shifts between color fields in Josef Albers's paintings. (Though Albers's color course was still taught at Yale when Sandback was an undergraduate, Albers himself was no longer teaching.)

Sandback was born in 1943 in Bronxville, N.Y. He attended Yale as an undergraduate, studying philosophy and sculpture (BFA, 1966), and as a graduate student in art (MFA, 1969). He began to exhibit publicly while still at Yale. His first solo gallery shows were in Germany in 1968, at Galerie Konrad Fischer, Düsseldorf, and Galerie Heiner Friedrich, Munich. His first New York gallery show was at Dwan in 1969. His first solo museum exhibitions took place in Europe at Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, in 1969, and at the Kunsthalle Bern in 1973. His first large-scale solo show in the U.S. was at New York's P.S. 1 in 1978 (and the very first nongallery show at the Clocktower in 1974). He has continued to show frequently at museums and galleries in Europe and the U.S. His more recent peripatetic practice has included exhibitions at the Städtische Kunsthalle, Mannheim (1986); the Kestner-Gesellschaft, Hannover (1987); the Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster (1987); and a traveling show at the Yale University Art Gallery, the CAM in Houston and Magasin 3, Stockholm (1991).

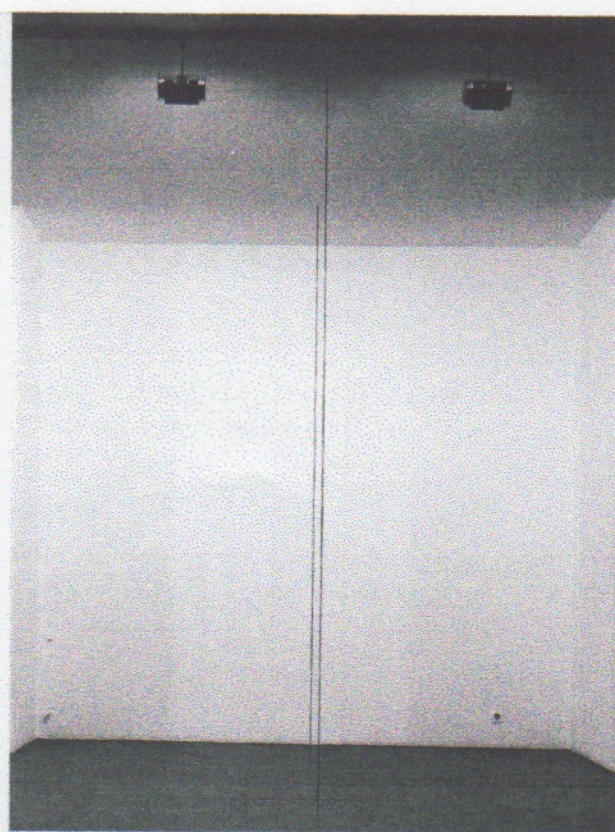
Among Sandback's museum shows must be counted those at the Fred Sandback Museum in Winchendon, Mass. Under the patronage of the Dia Art Foundation, the small museum opened at 74 Front Street in 1981 and closed this past summer. Sandback's relationship to Dia is long-standing. Heiner Friedrich, who showed Sandback in his Munich gallery, later established the Lone Star Foundation; it subsequently became part of the Dia Art Foundation, which was founded by Friedrich, Philippa de Menil (now Fariha Friedrich) and Helen Winkler. Sandback's current exhibition at the Dia Center for the Arts, New York, contains eight string installations and three small wood bas reliefs, a new development in his work. The wood pieces are being shown for the first time in New York.

—J.S.





*Untitled, 1976, two-part construction, Venetian-red wool yarn, dimensions variable; installed at John Weber Gallery, May 1976. Photo John A. Ferrari.*



*Untitled, 1992, two-part vertical construction, acrylic yarn; installed at Galerie Rolf Ricke, Cologne. Photo Ralph Hinterkeuser. Collection the artist.*

## Drawings in Space

**Joan Simon:** You once referred to your use of thread or yarn as being akin to using a pencil.

**Fred Sandback:** It's a very basic way of expressing yourself, which is not too encumbering. I'm lucky to have a medium that allows me to stay light on my feet. It really is like drawing.

**JS:** Is it true that what prompted you to begin to use that line, that piece of string, was an off-hand remark? I believe it was George Sugarman who made the comment . . .

**FS:** Yes, it was George Sugarman. He was a visiting artist at Yale, and there was a "crit" of some kind. It was 1967. I rapped painting, groused about narrative, pictorial content, material content, signifying content. George sort of snapped, "Stretch a piece string between two points and leave it be." Perhaps he prompted me to do exactly that.

**JS:** When you did take that piece of string, you stretched it not just between two points but stretched it so that it described a volume.

**FS:** The string suggested the outline of a piece of lumber, a two-by-four, lying on the floor.

**JS:** In some ways it sounds like a lot of things Bruce Nauman was doing around that time. You were surrounding, making the edge of the invisible visible. He was doing the opposite. He was casting the space between plywood boxes, or the space underneath a chair—making solids from the negative, empty spaces within the surrounding edges.

**FS:** I thought those pieces were great. I knew them through documentation. I don't think I had ever seen them at that time.

**JS:** From this low thing, the size of a piece of wood, what happened? How did you continue?

**FS:** When I started, I had no idea it would be an ongoing thing for 30 years. The string provided a

medium and a basic modus operandi; I felt entirely at ease in a nonobjective framework. Pretty soon I wanted to find a way to define volume to get away from sculpture's pictorial qualities.

**JS:** Why did you want to get away from pictorial space? You've mentioned it a number of times—in relation to Gabo, and in your complaints about sculpture to Sugarman.

**FS:** Well, Gabo, along with Albers, was one of the two greats of the contemporary academy of art. You could feel his presence all over the place. And while his work has certain things I wanted or could imagine I wanted in sculpture, it also struck me as wrong. It seemed to be, well, to be telling stories about abstraction, making up old stories. It wasn't itself abstract.

**JS:** What were the early metal rod pieces you made? And why did you stop making them in the late '60s?

**FS:** I welded the metal pieces to partially define the boundaries of imagined solid volumes, but soon began to want to diminish that reference to a closed volume.

**JS:** When and why did you start using color in the string pieces?

**FS:** Well, they have to be some color or other. I use color in simple constructive ways—to make a piece more recessive or aggressive, louder or softer, warmer or more brittle—and to balance the relationships that various pieces have as they coexist with each other and with a particular environment. Color did service from the beginning. The first pieces were high-key colors. I thought the string had to be more visible, which wasn't so.

## Nuts & Bolts

**JS:** Would you talk a bit about the craft of what you do? How you select the yarn, work with it, where you buy it?

**FS:** I buy my yarn at Wal-Mart, and I use the acrylic kind, not because it's cheap but because woolen fibers are too short for a line to remain taut under tension. This limits my palette, and I am on the lookout to broaden it.

**JS:** What is the relationship of your sculptures to your work on paper—the drawings, the prints?

**FS:** The prints and drawings have always shared speculative and documentary relationships to my three-dimensional pieces in varying ways. The cut drawings I showed at Nolan/Eckman two years ago and the new bas-reliefs are the first things I've made which don't do this.

**JS:** What are the cut drawings?

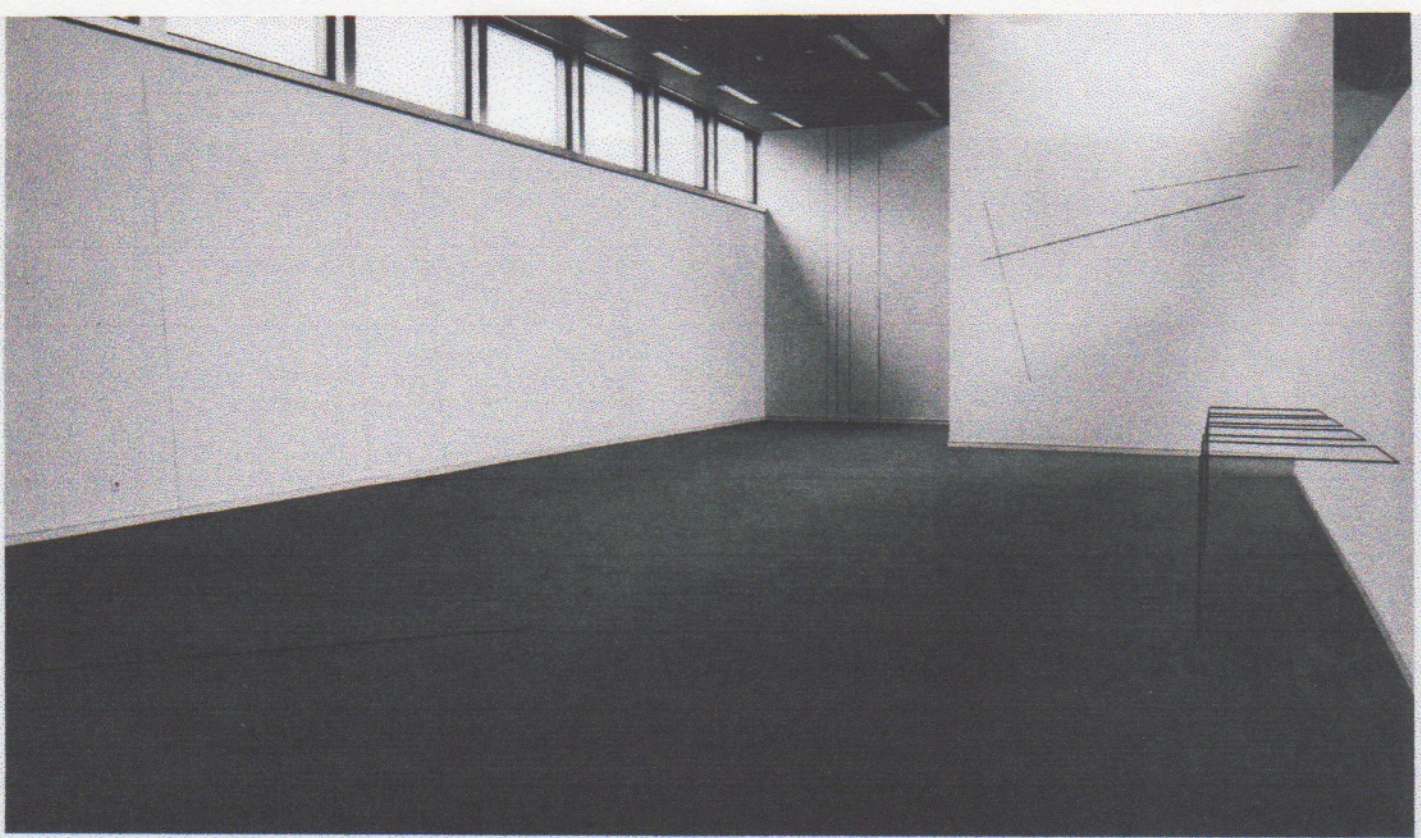
**FS:** Those were made with a matte knife on matte board. The line I generated was sort of nowhere. It wasn't negative in the sense of a cut making a removal—just a slight pushing aside.

**JS:** How is your work sold? Is it sold by diagram, with instructions? Do you provide a formal certificate? And when it is sold, are you supposed to reinstall it, and to supervise any later reinstallations?

**FS:** A limp piece of string needs at least diagram, instructions and a certificate and, in the case of most pieces that refer beyond their own boundaries, my help as reinterpreter; but, to the extent that a practical canon of interpretation starts to emerge, this job becomes more assignable, as ultimately, of course, it has to be. From repeated reconstructions there emerges a general sense of what these things ought to look like.

**JS:** Something that distinguishes your work from much Minimal work, and related Conceptual work, is that you have rarely been involved with mathematical systems, or even measurements. You said not long ago that you stopped measuring, and began to work more intuitively, even with pieces





Installation view of untitled works from (left to right) 1986, 1986, 1985 and 1968/83; installed at the Kunsthalle Mannheim, 1986. Courtesy Galerie Fred Jahn, Munich.

you had built and previously measured before. How and why?

**FS:** To the extent that a piece addresses its particular environment in a way that I arrive at intuitively, a set of previous measurements can only be a hindrance.

**JS:** Your work depends on the room as its support. From early on there have been some frequent motifs, positions, operations: lines stretched floor-to-ceiling; diagonals bisecting a room; a right-angled U-shaped form that functions

as an apparently freestanding element within a room. And your work has always had a very important relationship to the floor. Someone recently commented at the Dia space that there was a kind of rubbing visible in the floor—as though the line had been stretched and had abraded the floor. I wondered what you thought of these ghost effects?

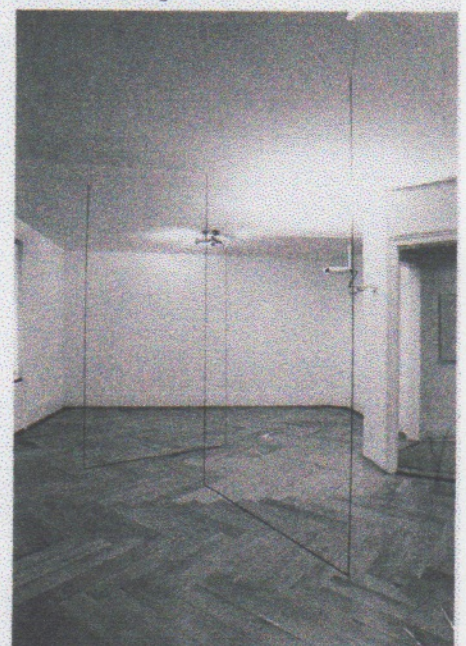
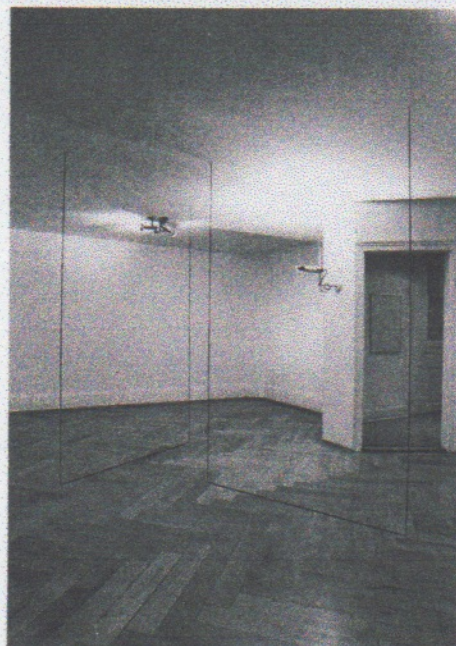
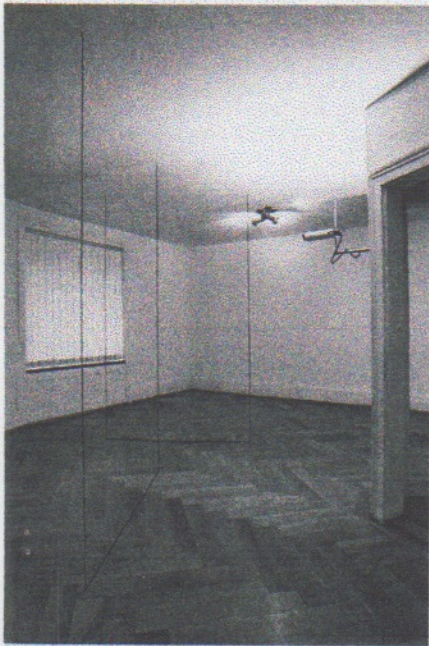
**FS:** The ghost on the floor is the ghost of a clean gallery. Everything else shows wear and tear except the areas right next to the lines where

people decline to walk. I don't especially like that, but I've decided to live with it. Some of these things are rather like drips on a painting—as I get used to them in my proceedings they may move from being leftovers to being constituents.

**JS:** You once said that the relationship of a room to your works was that of a dance floor to a dancer.

**FS:** It's like canvas to the painter or stage to the dancer; it's what I have to build off of.

Three views of an untitled two-part black yarn sculpture from 1976; installed at Annemarie Verna Galerie, Zurich. Photos Thomas Cugini.





**"It was 1967. I rapped painting, groused about narrative, pictorial content, signifying content. George Sugarman sort of snapped, 'Stretch a piece of string between two points and leave it be.'"**

### **More Lines: the Bas-Reliefs**

**JS:** You said the other day that some big transitions had recently occurred in your work. Presumably you were referring to the new, small wood-panel pieces?

**FS:** Well, I don't know if it's been a big transition. It's been a sort of through-the-looking-glass thing. Of getting away from the limitations of that framework of interior space. The wooden things have bold lines cut into flat, irregularly shaped panels. The line functions visually from all the way across the room. So when you look at one of these works, it's not in a drawing space, it's in a sculpture space. The works are fragments—or they appear to be fragments—of possible sculptures. It's been a year since I began to have the idea to show a drawinglike thing. I tried to saw into the panels or cut them with an ax.

**JS:** You are referring to the multiple criss-crossing grooves cut into the shallow wood panels? These have complicated intersections of lines; the effect is almost puzzlike, especially compared to the simplicity of structure of the yarn works.

**FS:** Yes—they forgo the clearer structure of the yarn sculptures—it's not at all clear where the lines start and where they stop. It's ironic that the low reliefs are wood panels on the wall. Though they provide a partial exit from the residual pictorial quality of the yarn pieces, the fact that they ended up on the wall has its own pictorial aspect. They're in some more known sort of space, the space of bas-relief.

**JS:** Can you talk about why you made these works so small?

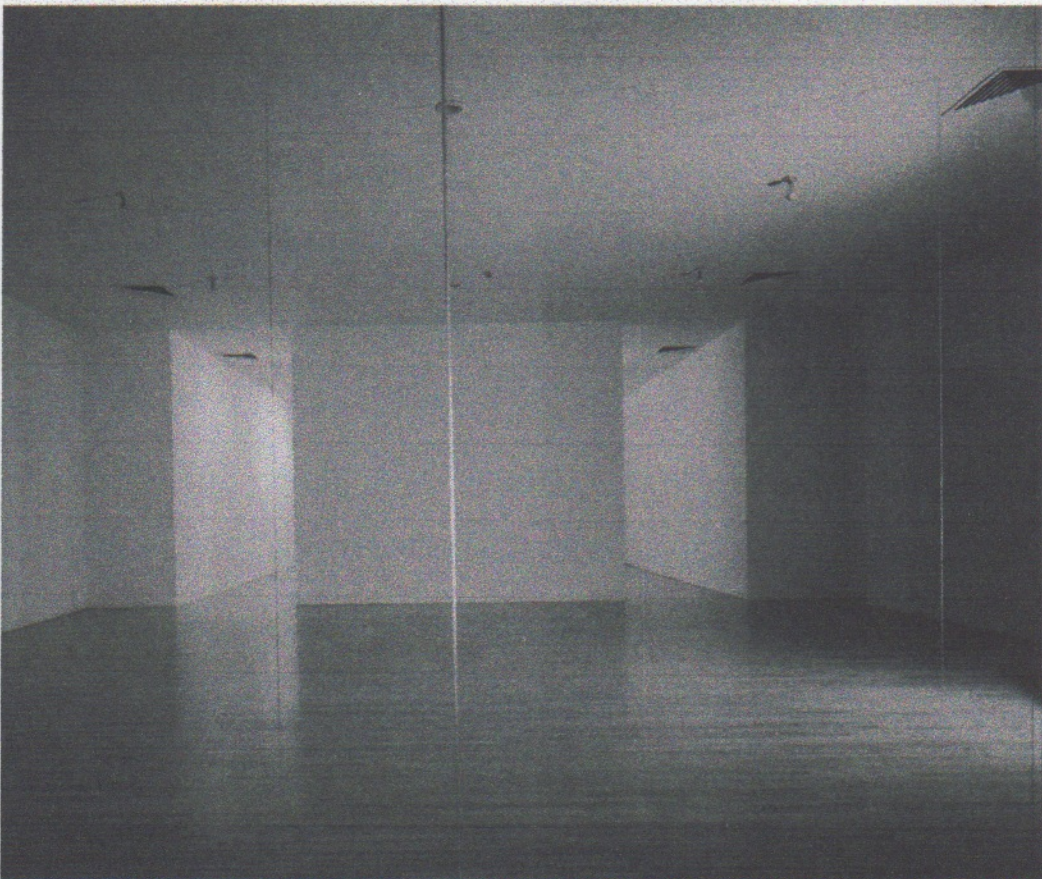
**FS:** Well, they seem like they have to be small. As the size increases, the lines become more trapped by the panel—at least that's how it seems to me right now.

**JS:** What about their color?

**FS:** They are painted with acrylic house paint. The red ones are the same paint I used for my house and the panels are for the most part #2 pine—often scraps from the kindling pile.

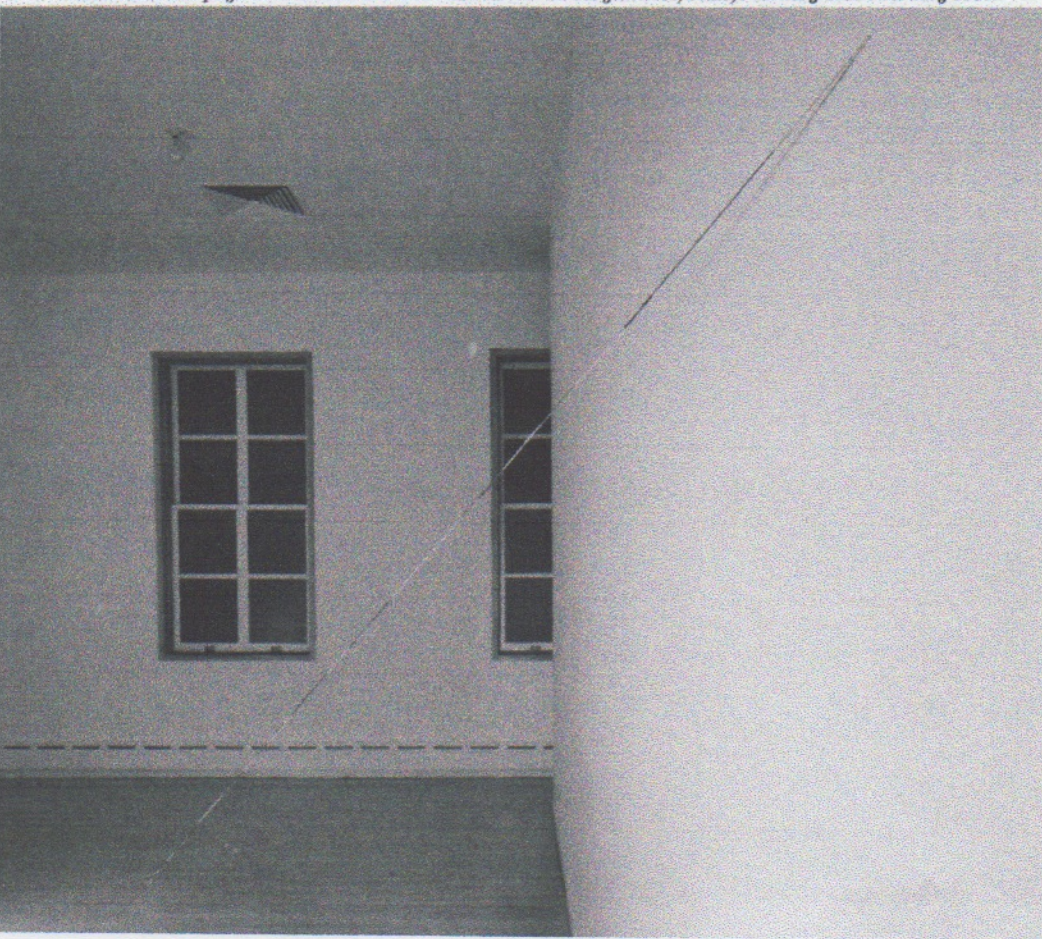
**JS:** You make these wood pieces in the studio and take them to another place for exhibition. You are not building in the space, as you have been with the yarn pieces for the past 30 years.

**FS:** It's a big burst of fresh air for me to work with my whole concentration in the studio. One of my frustrations is that I got myself into always using the dynamics of the buildings I worked in, and so became bound temporarily to the specific site. The new pieces extricate me from that segmentation of experience. Maybe it's just a circular little side-

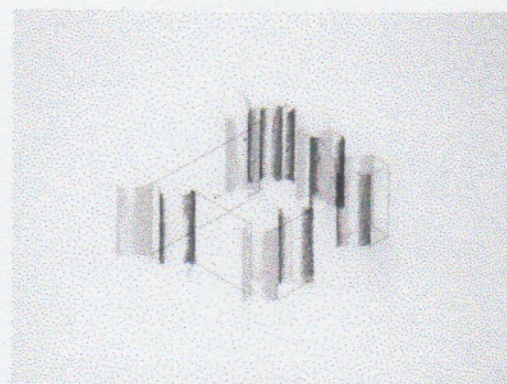
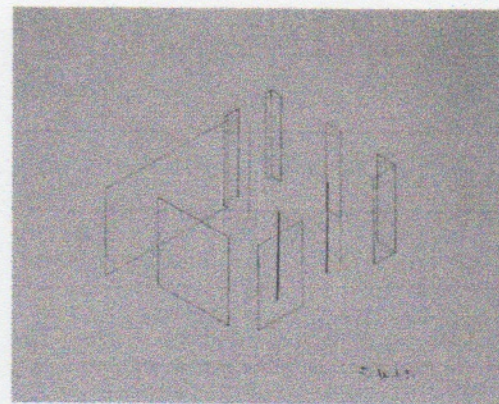
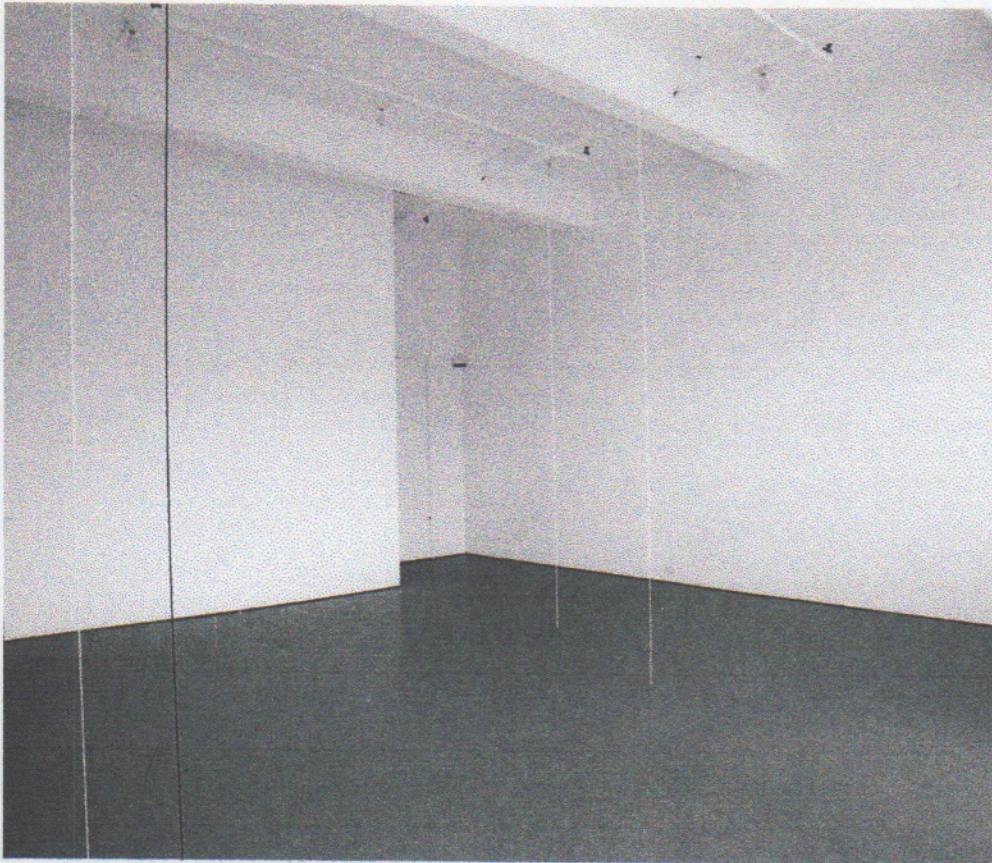


*Above, Untitled, 1988, six-part vertical construction with three colors, acrylic yarn, dimensions variable. Collection the artist.*

*Below, Untitled, 1988, red, yellow and blue acrylic paint on acrylic yarn, dimensions variable. Collection the artist. Both works this page were installed at Dia's 155 Mercer Street galleries, SoHo, February 1988-February 1989.*







*Above, Untitled, 1990, seven-part vertical construction, acrylic yarn, dimensions variable; installed at Lawrence Markey Gallery, New York, 1990.  
Top right, Untitled, 1991, graphite and colored pencil on paper, 8 1/2 by 11 inches.  
Bottom right, Untitled, 1991, pastel and graphite on paper, 22 1/2 by 30 inches. Works this page courtesy Lawrence Markey Gallery.*

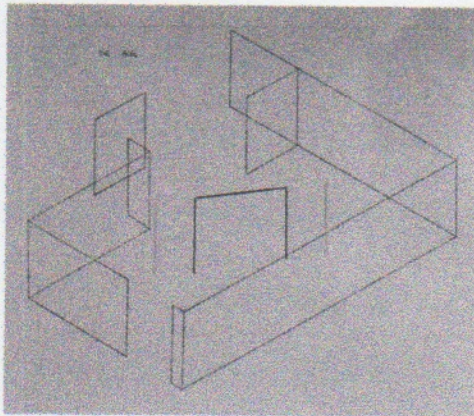
road, but it's very gratifying.

**JS:** And how did you install them at Dia?

**FS:** They claim an equal amount of space and the same sort of space as the generously proportioned string sculptures. There's 7,000 square feet of space at Dia, with 11 sculptures in it; three of the 11 are these shallow relief things. Each pretty much occupies a wall.

**JS:** Could you talk about the difference for you between size and scale? The yarn works are almost immaterial, the edge a very fine line, defining usually a very large volume of space. There's a

*Untitled (one of thirteen drawings for a MOMA project room), 1978, pencil and pastel on paper, 7 1/2 by 8 1/2 inches.*



diagonal line in the Dia show that bisects a 30-by-30-foot room. Nearby is one of the new wood pieces, a diptych actually, barely a foot square.

**FS:** These pieces seem to have somewhat similar scales in their relationship to their surroundings, but need different aspects of size to accomplish this.

**JS:** Why are dimensions not listed on the checklist for the Dia show, but the color of yarn for each untitled work is?

**FS:** The checklist is just a guide for the visitor—color and placement are indicators enough of which piece is which; beyond that, I didn't want to communicate an interest in numerical measurements, which I don't have.

**JS:** Could you also talk about what you perceive to be the differences between working in tandem with a site, site-specific works, and environments?

**FS:** Inasmuch as a line that I draw inevitably makes reference to where it is drawn, it needs to in some way work in tandem with its place and so is specific to it. "Environment" suggests to me a work that eclipses the given environment for the sake of a new one.

## Looking at History

**JS:** Critical writings about your work usually invoke the Russian Constructivists, and then usually go right to David Smith and Mark di Suvero. What art-historical names do you see in your lin-

eage? Would you choose the same ones that others bring up when they discuss your work, such as Tatlin, Gabo, Giacometti, David Smith...?

**FS:** Do I have anything to say about it? Giacometti was a major love affair. Recently I picked up David Sylvester's book on Giacometti—found it still very relevant to me personally, now. The Russian Constructivists weren't particularly important to me. "Real sculptors" who were up there with Michelangelo—that was my first major love affair. I spent the summer in Paris when I was still an undergraduate and had no glimmer of what art was. The stuff I saw there—sculptures of Michelangelo, Maillol, Rodin, Brancusi—that was the big package of inspiration for me.

**JS:** Lisa Liebmann, in a catalogue essay written in 1984 about your work, "The Cabin at 8 a.m.," noted, "Threadlike lines and variations on cat's cradle were something of a surrealist fetish during the thirties, and in New York during and after the war." She cited works by Matta and Ernst, and the first major exhibition by the expatriates, "First Papers of Surrealism," assembled by Breton and strung together by Duchamp in '42 in that huge, room-sized web of string. She talked of Giacometti in relation to your work and also likened your materials, the string, pens and pencils, to the tools of automatism.

**FS:** What a marvelous image that Duchamp set was. But did that inform my thinking? No, not at any conscious level. It surely comes into focus



now—it's a wonderful thing to think about and to play off of. I don't think it was then.

**JS:** What about Pollock?

**FS:** The idea of "overall" painting was much more stimulating to me at the time than were the particular paintings.

## Dia, Then and Now

**JS:** I was thinking about your closing the museum of your work that Dia sponsored for almost 15 years, and about your preparations for a show of your work at Dia in New York. What kind of exhibition do you conceive this show to be?

**FS:** It's not a retrospective. It's what I wanted to do at a given moment. But it's got some retrospective aspects to it. There are two big sculptures from a series that Dia owns. One was built in 1978 in a big exhibition at P.S. 1; the other was built in 1977 for an exhibition where the New York Earth Room is now, organized by Judd to benefit the War Resisters League. Aside from those pieces, everything is contemporary or else contemporary-dated and ongoing.

**JS:** Can you explain a bit what you mean by contemporary, as opposed to contemporary-dated and ongoing?

**FS:** Images that occurred here for the first time are contemporary; new conceptions of an earlier image might be dated 1968/1996.

**JS:** Your relationship with Dia goes back a long time. Could you fill in some of the background of how the Dia artists—Flavin, Bob Whitman, La Monte Young, Chamberlain, De Maria, Judd—came together? Did all of you know each other?

**FS:** Pretty much, although I didn't have particularly close bonds with many of them.

**JS:** You were one of the artists who developed your own museum under Dia's patronage. Were you all aware that these different museum spaces devoted to different artists were being made?

**FS:** Was there any kind of group consciousness there? No, it seemed to be rather the opposite—there was something of an isolating aspect. You could concentrate on your own work in your own environment. It tended to keep people home on the farm.

**JS:** How did the invitation to work on your own museum come about?

**FS:** It was casual. I presented the notion. There was a small building in Winchendon—a former bank—that was very cheap and derelict. And I needed a place to work. Very rapidly, sponta-

neously, the idea grew. Work started on the building in '79, and it opened to the public in '81.

**JS:** How would you describe the difference between how you worked before you had the place and after?

**FS:** It was a little hard at age 37 to start to have a place that was in some sense permanent. Not hard, but a little peculiar, or at least premature, to start tending your own legacy.

**JS:** What did you show there?

**FS:** A series of installations that were commissioned by Dia, and some that developed spontaneously.

**JS:** Which, for example, were commissioned? And are any of these in the Dia exhibition?

**FS:** There was a mix, which I had the freedom to determine—pieces #5 and #10 in the current Dia exhibition are part of a series of "Ten Vertical Constructions," two others of which I built in Winchendon. The mix of things I showed there was probably about 50/50.

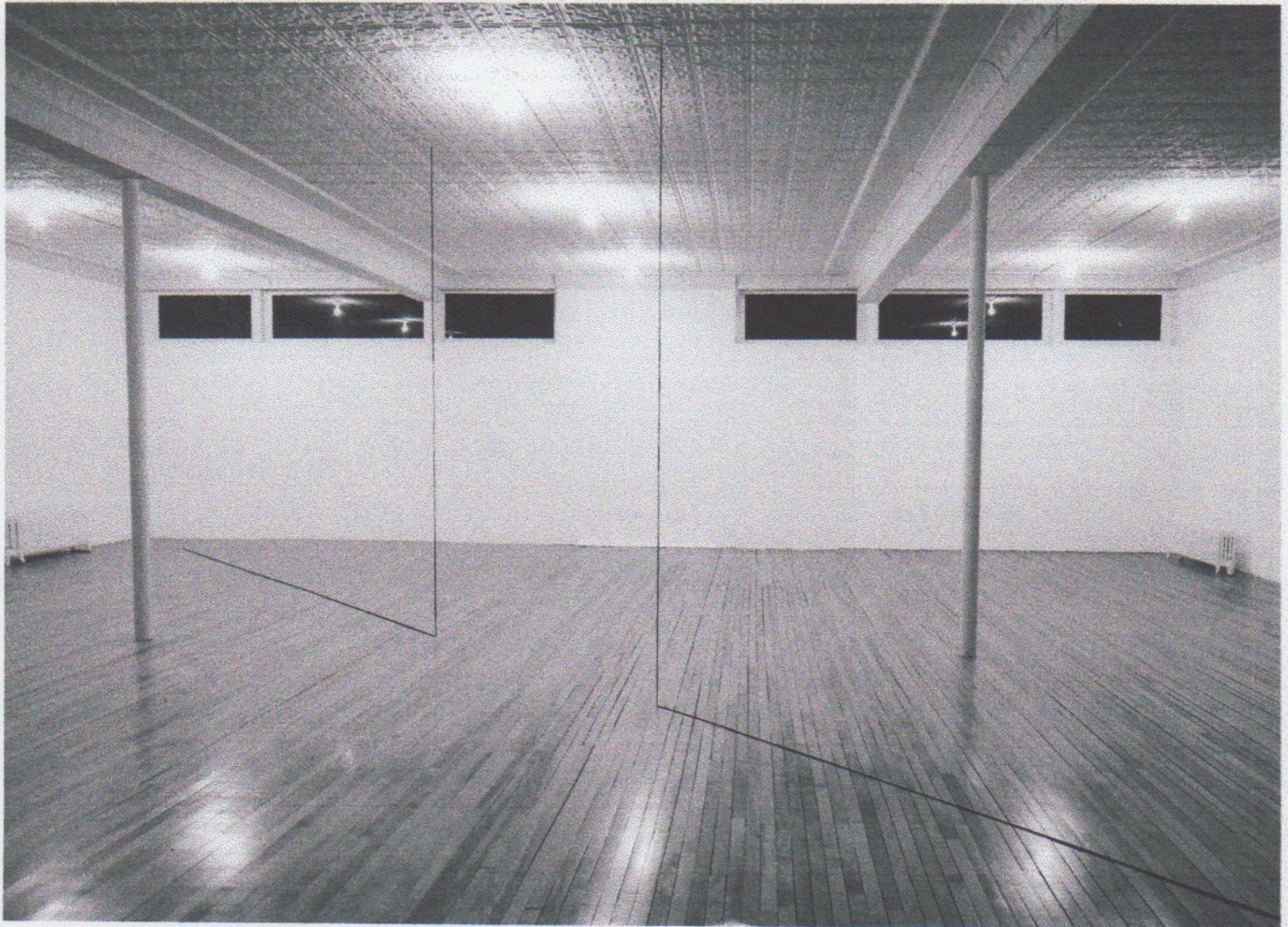
**JS:** The commissioned pieces are still owned by Dia?

**FS:** Yes.

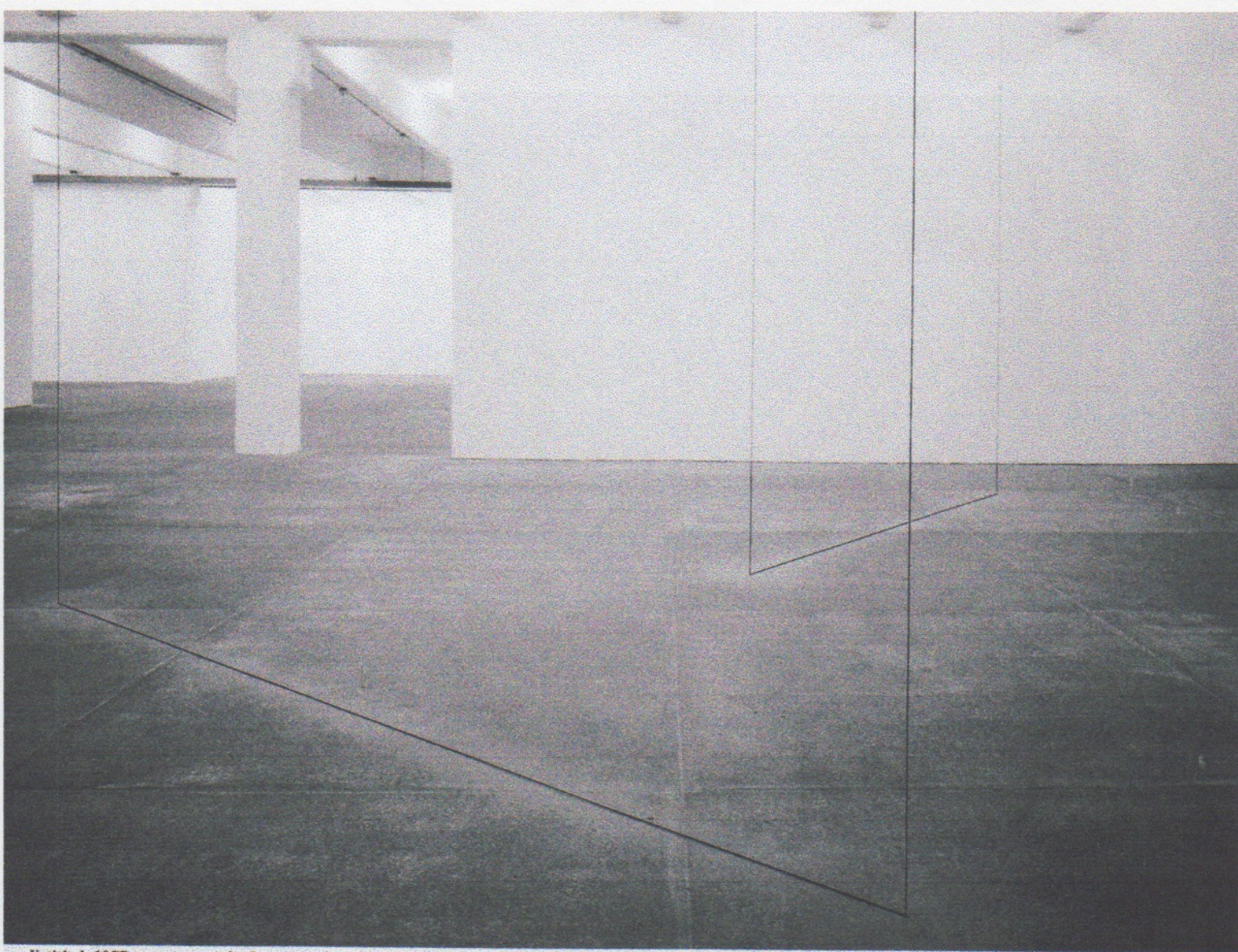
**JS:** When the museum was open to the public, how did you administer it?

**FS:** We kept regular gallery hours, we did advertis-

*Untitled from the "Ten Vertical Constructions" series, 1977-78, two-part construction, black acrylic yarn, dimensions variable; installed at the Fred Sandback Museum in Winchendon, Mass. Collection Dia Center for the Arts.*







*Untitled, 1977, two-part vertical construction, black acrylic yarn, dimensions variable; installed in 1996 at Dia. Collection Dia Center for the Arts.  
Photo Cathy Carver.*

ing, and we arranged the local education program.

**JS:** Who is "we"?

**FS:** I and my curator/director Jean Fincke.

**JS:** How did the decision come about to close the museum?

**FS:** I initiated the decision and my colleagues at Dia concurred. I felt that the relocation to the new building Dia is planning for its permanent collection will serve these functions better.

**JS:** Was 74 Front Street sold?

**FS:** Yes.

## Early Days

**JS:** Where were you born?

**FS:** I was born in Bronxville, N.Y. My father was a commercial artist. We were a pretty unstable family. Moved around a lot. To a certain extent you went where the work was. Commercial illustrators never spent a long time in one place. For a while we were in Hartford. Then he was in Florida, where Dad really wanted to be. He was not that good at staying a long time in places, and he was not around that much in my life.

**JS:** Were you one of those kids who had a talent

for drawing, or cartooning in your notebooks, and the like?

**FS:** Yes, I always made art. Like our son Peter, now a sculptor and professional woodworker, I seemed always to have to be pushing something around.

**JS:** What sent you off to Yale, and did you have any idea that you would study art?

**FS:** No. Because my father was cast somewhat as the black sheep—as that which you did not want Fred to become. I was supposed to not be an artist. I think I went to Yale because it was expected by my family—continue the family tradition—and to a certain extent I found my way to the art department out of contrariness.

**JS:** Was it unusual for a graduate student to be exhibiting in commercial galleries, as you did?

**FS:** Yes, my first exhibitions in Europe and at the Dwan Gallery in New York predate my graduation. Though it was what many of us thought was supposed to happen next, it was regarded with a certain amount of skepticism as well, both by myself and my contemporaries.

**JS:** The way you work, the craft, the materiality of the line and the immateriality of the structure,

reminds me of something you said about a year ago, that you made stringed instruments and long bows.

**FS:** They were not amused at the Yale art school when, applying for admission, I told them that I had done such things. That did not fit into their agenda. My relationship to such things is persistent, and I'm sure it's quite connected to the sculpture that I make, though it's hard for me to define that relationship.

**JS:** And I think you also talked about caning, someone close to you made caned furniture.

**FS:** Oh yes. Uncle Fred, the antique dealer, the restorer of furniture. That was a very nice early image. Uncle Fred would cane chairs, and I would watch. Uncle Fred sort of defined my masculine role model—he and his partner Dominic Marcarelli, who utterly amazed me when I was five or so by transforming a log into a naked female figure.

**JS:** Did you actually work with him?

**FS:** No, I never did. I always liked it, though. When I was old enough to go to the Peabody Museum by myself one of my favorite exhibits was a demonstration of how to make snow shoes.

*continued on page 143*



## Sandback

*continued from page 93*

**JS:** I know you are an expert archer, and have built long bows. Didn't you tell me that you also built kayaks?

**FS:** This was my job for any number of summers, to teach young fellows how to make cloth-covered boats. Very economical use of materials. Very light and airy.

**JS:** You're a trekker, climber, kayaker. In addition to traveling to make your work, you are in a very real sense an explorer, a world traveler—I think you're the only person I know who's gone to the North Pole. There are obviously lots of levels to your use of the word "nomadicized."

**FS:** I think that's funny. I'm very much a stick in the mud. But by a strange confluence of things I have become this traveling guy.

**JS:** You said Yale was really an arena for painters when you were there. These were the post-Albers years, when Jack Tworok was the director. Thinking about Tworok just made me connect your new wood intersecting incisions to his linear motifs.

**FS:** A nice connection. He was kind, generous with his attention, though we didn't have an ongoing exchange.

**JS:** How often did visiting artists come?

**FS:** There were many of them. Very illuminating. Samaras came, Morris, Judd.

**JS:** Which were the most interesting to you?

**FS:** Judd was one; Morris another. I think those

two guys were the main two that appeared on my horizon.

**JS:** Both of them were writers and artists. I'm trying to imagine what each was like in the studio as a critic.

**FS:** Morris was a guy who needed a lot of stimulation. Liked to see things happen, was full of suggestions and parrying back and forth. Don would watch. He was a good watcher. Morris was more concerned with *modus operandi*, with how one did things, with schemes for making things. And I don't think that was what Judd wanted. I think he was watching for—no surprise—specific qualities in people's work.

**JS:** You also studied with George Kubler while you were at Yale?

**FS:** Yeah, a friend and I didn't want to take our history of art course. We were very cheeky and said maybe we'll have lunch with the master every week. And the wonderful thing about a place like Yale is that you could do things like that. Kubler had no use for contemporary art—it was not where his mind was. I think he regarded it as pretty peculiar, retrograde. But he was very kind, and he kept inviting us to talk about it. It wasn't a class. He and two guys, two students, had lunch together.

### Points of Viewing

**JS:** Your work allows for a kind of shyness on the part of your audience; a viewer can keep a good distance from a work and take it all in. But also the works allow for a very intimate address; you are invited to walk up to them, and through them.

Viewers want to get up close to the yarn and touch it, and while the works are ephemeral, they are not really as delicate as they appear. The new, small wood panel works also have that double approach. You can't stand still and hold a "one-point" perspective for long. You have to keep walking. In this regard, I'm fascinated by your use of the term "pedestrian space," a characterization that you and a friend—

**FS:** Dan Edge—

**JS:**—first used in 1968. What did you mean?

**FS:** It was related to the idea of wanting to get off the pedestal, get off the canvas. And I think it was coined with an awe of other cultures where art seemed to fit in the middle of things rather than on the periphery. That seemed to be a good description in general. I wanted to be in the middle of it, whatever "it" was. Whether it was culture, or life—whatever. I didn't want to be over on the side looking at it. I wanted to be in the middle of it. Pedestrian space had a different intonation but it certainly was related to the literal space that Don Judd wanted to occupy.

**JS:** The words "pedestrian space" also seem to capture the performing aspect of the work.

**FS:** It's got the foot. The foot in them. □

*Fred Sandback's exhibition remains on view at the Dia Center for the Arts, New York, until June 29. His other spring shows are at Rhona Hoffman, Chicago [May 2-June 14], and the University of Michigan Museum of Art [May 17-Sept. 23].*

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