

zingmagazine a curatorial crossing

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**FRED SANDBACK: LAWRENCE MARKEY GALLERY,
NEW YORK, NEW YORK**

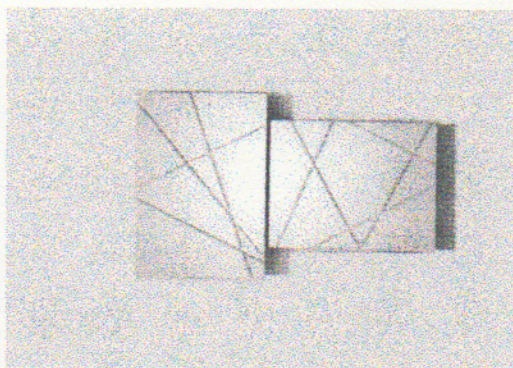
Ours is not an era in which to exercise restraint. The epigraph of this epoch, if there is one, extols us to live our fantasies to the fullest. At any cost. The multiplicity of new means and materials around us constantly tempts us to do something, whatever this something might be and regardless of its need for being. In the current state of technological development in which we find ourselves the highest challenge seems to be not to produce. Or perhaps to produce very little. Such is the actual question presented to anyone working with art at the moment. (And the same goes for architecture.) For we seem to be doing things just because we can afford to do them. For folly. And so there we go, taking over every inch of the landscape around us with complete disregard to restraint. The retrospective exhibition of Barbara Kruger's work at the Whitney Museum of American Art is the confirmation, and I guess the sanctioning by the museum institution, of such practice. No room was left for the viewer to breath. Kruger's art precipitated over one's head as a blast from an irked god. But the problem with being so peremptory is that style ages fast. And on that account, if one is just looking for the comfort of being surrounded by nostalgia, the Pucci boutique on East 64th Street will provide a more rewarding experience. (A detour: The current investment in architecture by the art world has prompted a gold rush of sorts by many who believe that any idea can translate into architectural terms. Hence projects such as Barbara Kruger's commission for landscaping around the LA MOCA and Ronald Jones's project for a public piazza in Chicago based on a garden pattern found in Auschwitz. But I will not go there.)

Given this chaotic background, the exhibition of Fred Sandback's new work at Lawrence Markey Gallery had the refreshing effect of scrubbing one's face off all the maquillage. Down with excess and gloss. All the works in this exhibition eluded the viewer either by their diminutive scale or by the very nature of its making. There were installations with yarn, of a blue so pale as if their structure were disappearing into thin air. Also pocket-size bas-reliefs which made me wonder whether Sandback ever has trouble storing or shipping his artwork. But most amazingly, and completely unknown to myself, were the incision drawings on board. These small scale works, a development from the bas-reliefs or vice-versa, are among Sandback's most illuminating works. They are at once abstract and concrete, and convey a sense of architecture that is truly Modern, an architecture of essentials where space is configured to stimulate one's mind.

The incision drawings can be seen as "traits," in the Derridian sense, for they display marks left by one's hand. But more pointedly these marks aim to map a space, and in doing so they come closer to Lucio Fontana's "Concetto Spaziale." Like Fontana's paintings they expose the wonder and violence of space. The eye, and the mind, move from the violence of the act—scratches on one's retina—to the beauty of the space configured. Because these incisions were made in different angles, as one moves from one point to another, the drawing will reveal new configurations. Virtual space, angles, corners, walls. More Zaha Hadid, less Frank Gehry.

It's not that these drawings are necessarily inventive, although they are about invention itself. They play with our mind's power to see planes, dimensions, intersections. Sandback, it seems, is not after an effect but rather the demonstration of an effect. Nor is he interested in artifice either. The yarn installations, for instance, do not conceal any aspect of its making or its material, and it is this aspect that make them differ from works such as James Turrell's light installations for instance. Fred Sandback does not put on a spectacle, although his work is spectacular.

Ezra Pound wrote in *Make It New* that "We appear to have lost the radiant world where one thought cuts through another with clean edge, a world of moving energies *mezzo oscuro rade, risplende in sè perpetuale effecto*, magnetisms that take form, that are seen, or that border the visible, the matter of Dante's *Paradiso*, the glass under water, the form that seems a form seen in a mirror." I can't think of any other way to describe the art of Fred Sandback, but to say that it attempts to recover that radiance referred by Pound.



Fred Sandback, UNTITLED BAS-RELIEF, DIPTYCH,
white acrylic paint on wood panels

AS Bessa
Brooklyn, New York
2000