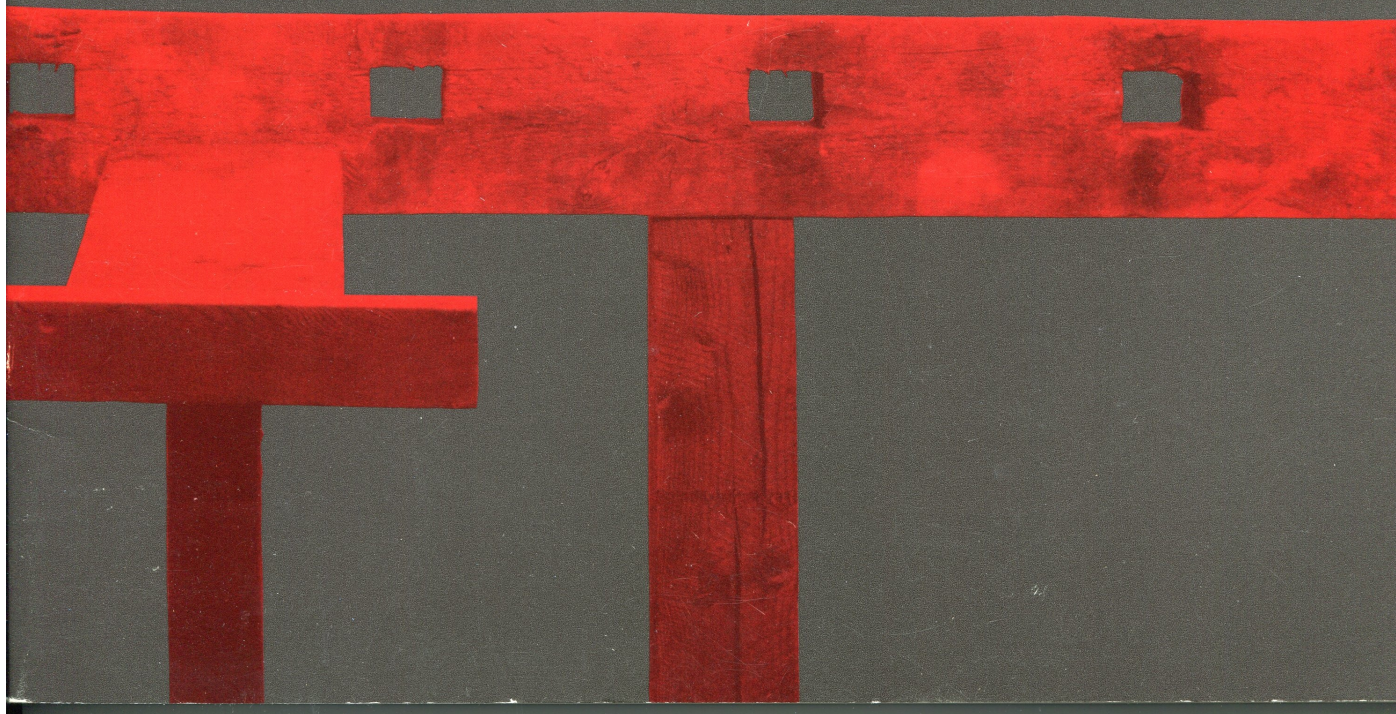
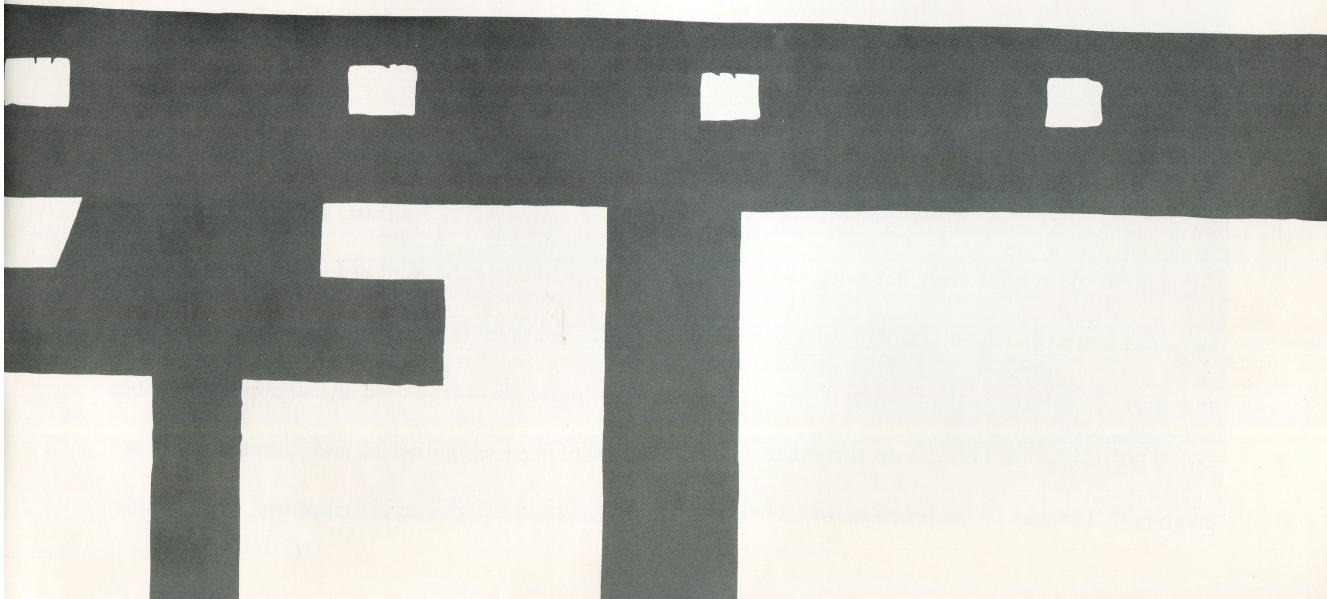


BUDD  
HOPKINS



# BUDD HOPKINS

SCULPTURE



**I**n 1953, when I first arrived in New York as a young art student, no one had a clear idea of what Abstract Expressionist sculpture should look like, least of all the sculptors. I was enamored of painting, Abstract Expressionist painting, and beside its dynamism, sculpture seemed very nearly a dead issue, a kind of outdated craft. Since no one can be more passionately certain of such things than an art student, I refused even to consider sculpture a viable possibility. At the time David Smith was, of course, the dominant figure in that medium, and though I deeply appreciated his rough, thoughtful friendship and his mastery of craft, his work seemed to me more immediately connected with Cubism and Surrealism than with anything I associated with DeKooning or Pollock or the other Abex painters I admired. The problem was obvious:

Abex was a *painterly* movement, in which gesture, improvisation and speed of attack were all-important. In this kind of jittery, anguished, internalized art, *edge* was something that happened inadvertently, a by-product of impulsive marking, even in the work of “clearer” painters like Rothko or Motherwell or Kline. It was hard for me to conceive of any sculptor routinely *neglecting* edges, remaining unconcerned with silhouettes, while somehow handling masses successfully. If an Abex painting contained a myriad of complex, “accidental” elements within an enclosing—neutral—frame, the outer edge of a sculpture always presented itself, by contrast, as a fixed, deliberate, inescapable fact. A kind of forced precision inevitably marked the entire sculptural enterprise. Sculpture also seemed inconsistent with the Abex idea of impassioned attack and “automatist” drawing. David Smith’s steel sculptures, for example,

Altar

1983, Wood

81½" × 111" × 14"



were always clean and technically immaculate, patiently made, as it were, and to me they always seemed closer in their craftsmanship to Stuart Davis than to Kline or DeKooning. In fact, when I saw the recent Julio Gonzalez retrospective at the Guggenheim, I was surprised to see that the Spanish artist appeared to be much more of an “expressionist” than did his American descendant. Gonzalez’ curving planes of iron and steel often seemed ragged and torn, his rough stone bases chipped and irregular. Since much of Gonzalez’ early work had a lapidarian precision, this occasional violence was obviously a deliberate, expressive choice—and an emotion almost non-existent in David Smith’s oeuvre.

In the early and middle nineteen fifties a number of other sculptors were exhibited frequently in the context of Abstract Expressionist painting—art-

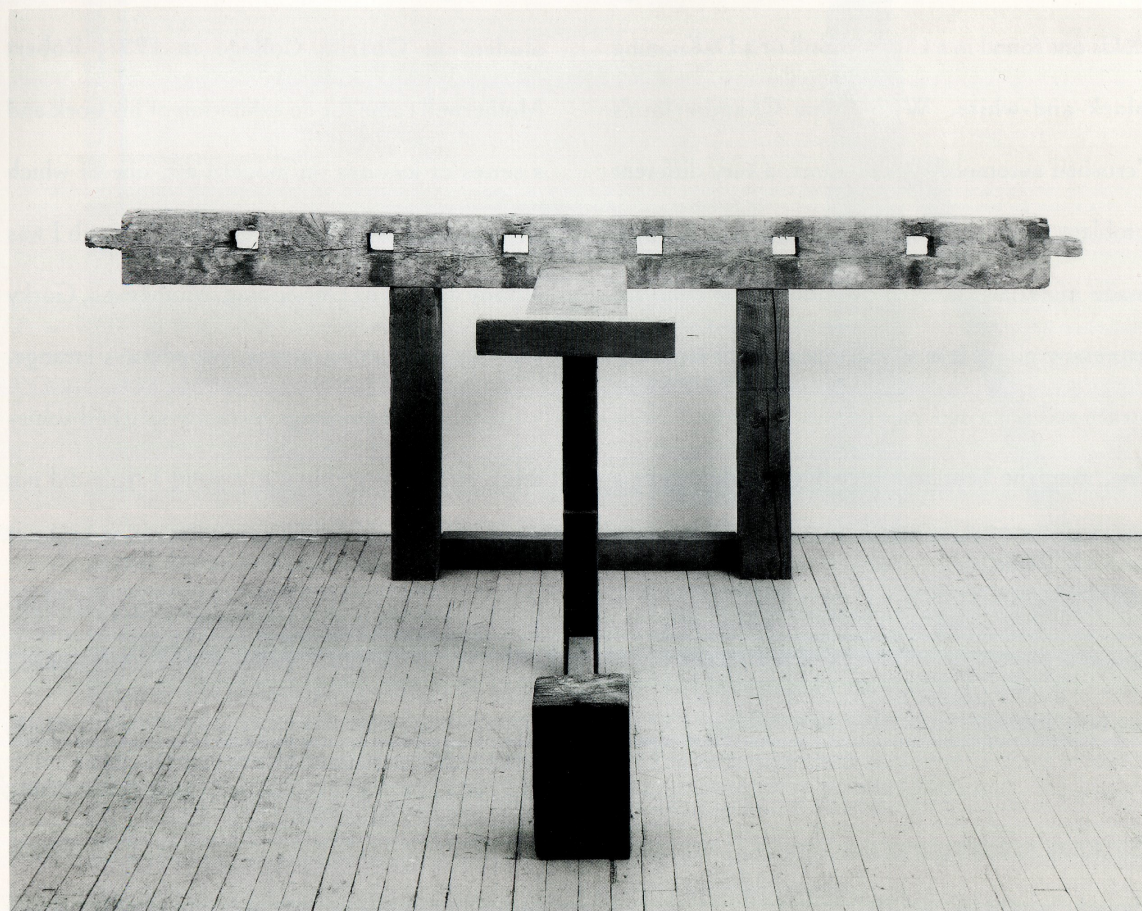
ists such as Ibram Lassaw, David Hare, Seymour Lipton, Theodore Roszak, Herbert Ferber and John Chamberlain. Lassaw created fragile constructivist grids, armatures upon which he dripped melted metal of varying kinds to achieve a beautiful, “accidental” surface. Alfred H. Barr Jr., in his book *Masters of Modern Art*, reproduced a Pollock and a Lassaw on facing pages, making a point, one supposes, about the “drip” technique in painting and sculpture. But the Lassaw was, in essence, a constructivist work, slow, careful and almost mystically precise, closer finally to Mark Tobey than to Jackson Pollock. Some of Lassaw’s later works incorporated geode-like stones within his dripped metal surfaces, but these sculptures veered closer in feeling to a kind of late-Surrealist hybrid object. Flower- or plant-like images also dominated Hare’s, Lipton’s and Roszak’s work in these years, preventing me from regarding them as truly Ab-

Horizontal Altar

1985, Wood, 43" × 118" × 81"

Collection Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum N.Y.C.

5



stract Expressionist. They seemed to be actual *things*, bizarrely organic things to be sure, but still things: diabolical cacti, pregnant pods or carnivorous sunflowers—not the charged, abstract energy fields one found in a Clyfford Still or a DeKooning black-and-white. With John Chamberlain's "crushed automobile" sculptures, a very different problem arose: his highly associational, factory-made materials diverted attention away from his expressive goals. It is amazing how much more abstract cadmium red paint is, or a dripped black line, than the bent fender and rear bumper of a wrecked '49 Chevvie. No matter how one thought about it, Chamberlain's compacted disorder could never be confused with the emotional grandeur of the best Abstract Expressionist painting.

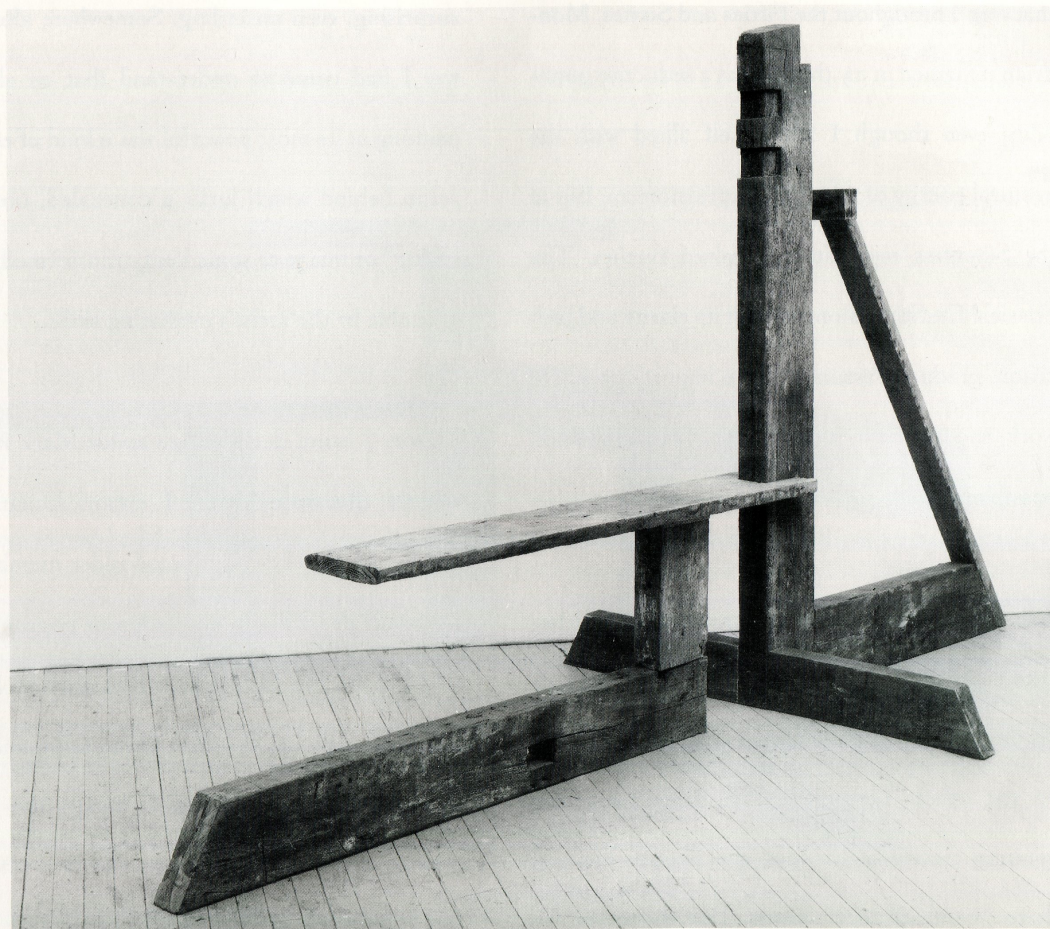
For these and other reasons I was a painter who thought sculpture almost completely beside the

point; how I came to be obsessed with the medium thirty years later is surprising even to me. But the source of this obsession has something to do with another painter—Piet Mondrian. When I was a student at Oberlin College in 1952, Robert Motherwell came for an exhibition of his work and a series of lectures on modern art, one of which was a moving talk about Mondrian. Though I was already dazzled by DeKooning, Motherwell, Gorky and the other Abex artists, Mondrian's strange, white, classical paintings instantly satisfied something very deep within me, a need I truly did not understand. In an attempt to clarify my thoughts I wrote a short, cautious, admiring piece on Mondrian's work for the Oberlin literary magazine. I made drawings after his paintings. I tried, actually, to make my own Mondrians. There was something about the clarity, the finality and yet the *arbitrariness* of his paintings that held me in thrall. I was

Altar

1985, Wood

80" × 60" × 139"





twenty when I first saw reproductions—slides—of his work, and they had the hypnotic force and purity of icons. After all these years I am still affected that way. Throughout the Fifties and Sixties, Mondrian remained in my thinking as a seductive possibility, even though I felt myself allied with the gestural energy of Abstract Expressionism. But in the Seventies my painting evolved further. The classical De Stijl vision, with all its clarity and precision, gradually assumed more importance in my work, and for the first time *sculpture* began to seem possible.

Art-making has always been for me a struggle between unedited, emotionally subterranean needs on the one hand, and a classical ordering instinct on the other. Throughout the later sixties my painting clearly dwelt upon the tension between these “contradictory” needs. But the more my

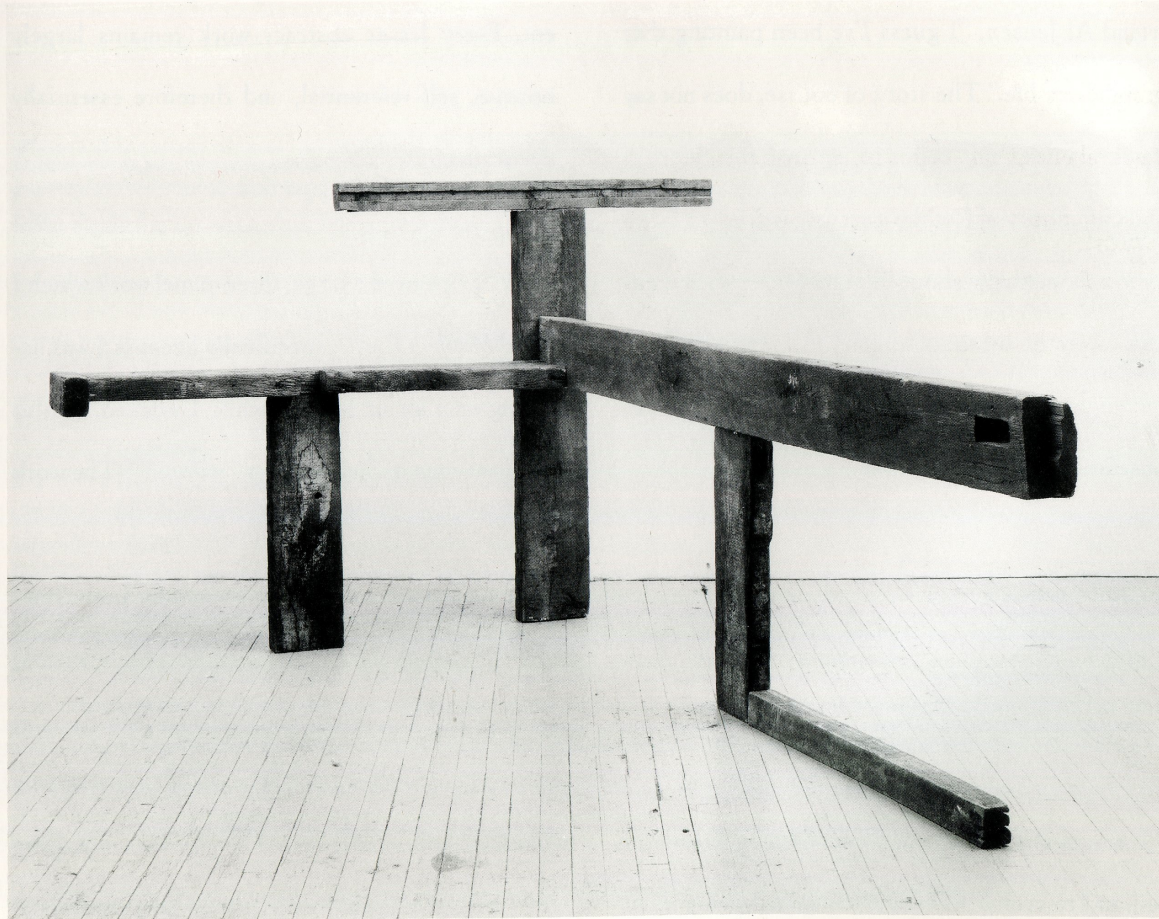
paintings came to seem at first glance more orderly, more classically focussed, the more these newly “simplified” images began to strike me as surprising, even unsettling. Somewhere along the way I had come to understand that an abstract painting at its most powerful was a kind of esthetic scrim behind which lurks a concealed, obsessive “thing” or image of some kind, transformed, made palatable by the artist’s mediating skills.

A story I heard decades ago about Mark Rothko exactly illustrates what I mean. During his childhood, Rothko often heard older members of his family describing the murderous pogroms carried out by the Cossacks in the part of Russia where he grew up. For him, these tales of horror were fixed upon one indelible image: the Jewish men of one village had been marched out to a forest and made to dig a large, square grave. Then

Left Altar

1985, Wood

51 $\frac{1}{4}$ "  $\times$  103"  $\times$  79 $\frac{1}{2}$ "



they were cold-bloodedly slaughtered and dumped into the pit they had been forced to dig. One evening in the nineteen-fifties, after a great deal of alcohol and confessional talk, Rothko said to his friend Al Jensen, "I guess I've been painting that grave all my life." The story, of course, does not say it all—it does not begin to exhaust the richness and complexity of Rothko's art but it does go far to explain something about its power. Behind the casual layers of subtle color and the softly brushed rectangles of paint one can glimpse that terrible, obsessive image, imparting its black emotion—emotion one can sense even without knowing this bit of history. DeKooning put it well when he remarked that content, after all, is nothing more than a glimpse.

Abstract art has a special power simultaneously to veil and to reveal. While refusing to *name*, it is at

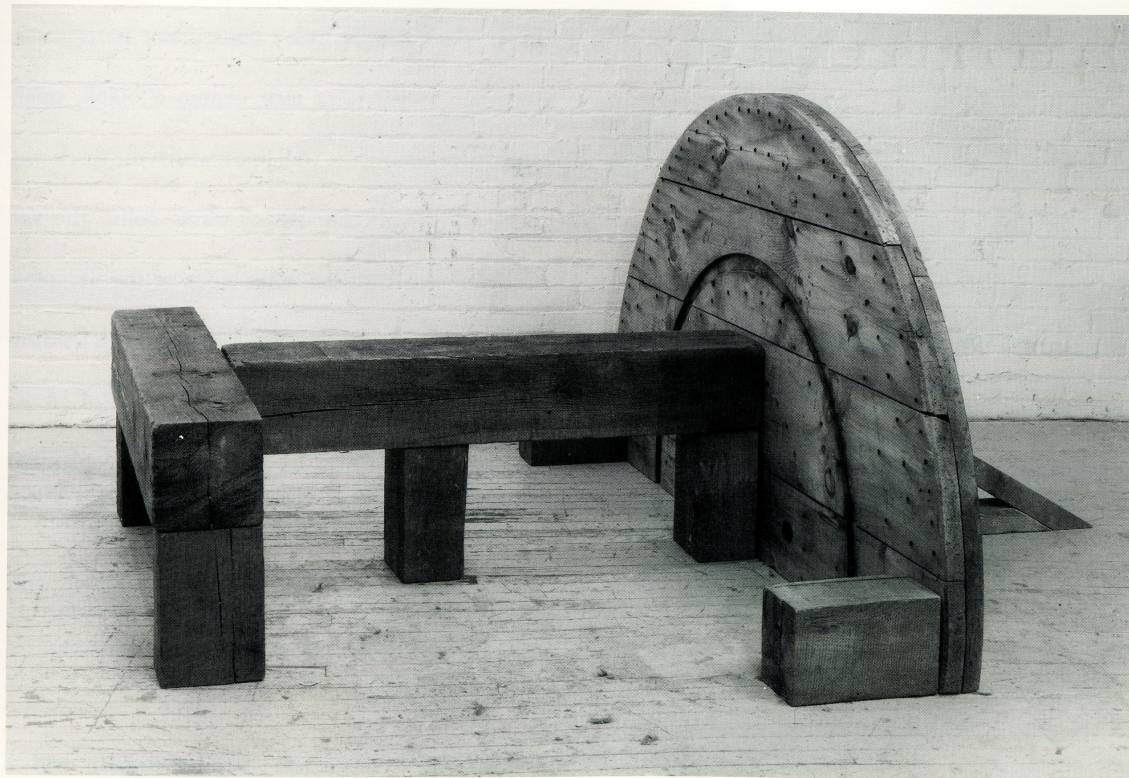
the same time able to utilize the emotional fuel lying just beneath its surface, fuel which flows from partially hidden obsessive images. Every great abstract work is, in a peculiar way, almost transparent. Every lesser abstract work remains largely opaque, self-referential, and therefore essentially decorative.

In 1972 I painted a large, three-panel work which I titled *Mahler's Castle*, specifically because I was listening to a lot of Mahler while I worked. (I also liked the idea of "Mahler" as "painter.") The work was more symmetrical than anything I'd ever attempted before, and though it was resolutely "formal" and abstract it also embodied architectural values. As I moved the painting here and there in my studio I realized that it worked best when its bottom edge actually rested on the floor. Hanging the work on the wall made it read as a traditional

Curved Altar

1983, Wood

42<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" × 94" × 77<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>"



*painting*, but when it was down, resting on the floor itself, it began to resemble, in some elusive way, a building. The uprights became supporting “columns” and a thick horizontal unit became an architrave. When viewed “through” its surface scrim of abstract color and shape, *Mahler’s Castle* showed itself, mysteriously, to be a temple.

It took me a few years to understand the implications of what I’d done. Eventually I took the cue and produced *Hera’s Wall*, an installation that consisted of a “Temple,” four “Guardian” paintings, and a small, free-standing “Altar.” The “Temple” and “Guardians” were wall works, symmetrically displaced, as if the triptych structure of *Mahler’s Castle* had expanded into five separate paintings. One was fully architectural and the flanking four suggested figurative presences—Guardians at the Temple gates. *Hera’s Wall* was both more literal

than anything I’d ever done before, and more symbolic. Since all five wallworks had irregular silhouettes, the door leading to sculpture was now fully ajar.

The Temple at the center of this ensemble clearly referred to the architectural system of post and lintel. And this Temple’s constituent parts came together to form, at *their* center, a blank, open square, revealing the wall upon which the work was hung. Through the use of warm color, the reflected light from the inner sides of the Temple’s square illuminated this blank gallery wall, lending it a subtle glow. Thus, at the very center of *Hera’s Wall* there was a void, an opening, a perfect square of wall transformed by reflected light into a charged precinct. Everything pointed to this blank, inner space, a place for contemplation.

*Hera’s Wall* provided me, all of a sudden, with a

Sky Altar

1986, Wood

105" × 36" × 93"



three-part vocabulary and a hieratic syntax: Temples, architectural works which have open, “charged” spaces at their very centers; Guardians, which become almost figural presences . . . attendants . . . sentinels flanking the Temple; and Altars, table-like structures which provide flat, lifted surfaces for implied rituals. How I arrived at this three-part object-world I do not know. Pursuing obsessions to their sources, running them to the ground, as it were, has never interested me. Though I can be coolly rational in many ways, I allow my art to encompass all the mystery it seems to need. I never go prowling around in the basement of my mind, shining flashlights into dark corners. One never knows what disturbing things might be inadvertently stirred up—and lost—that way.

The Guardians remain within the province of painting. The paint is brushed onto clean, flat sur-

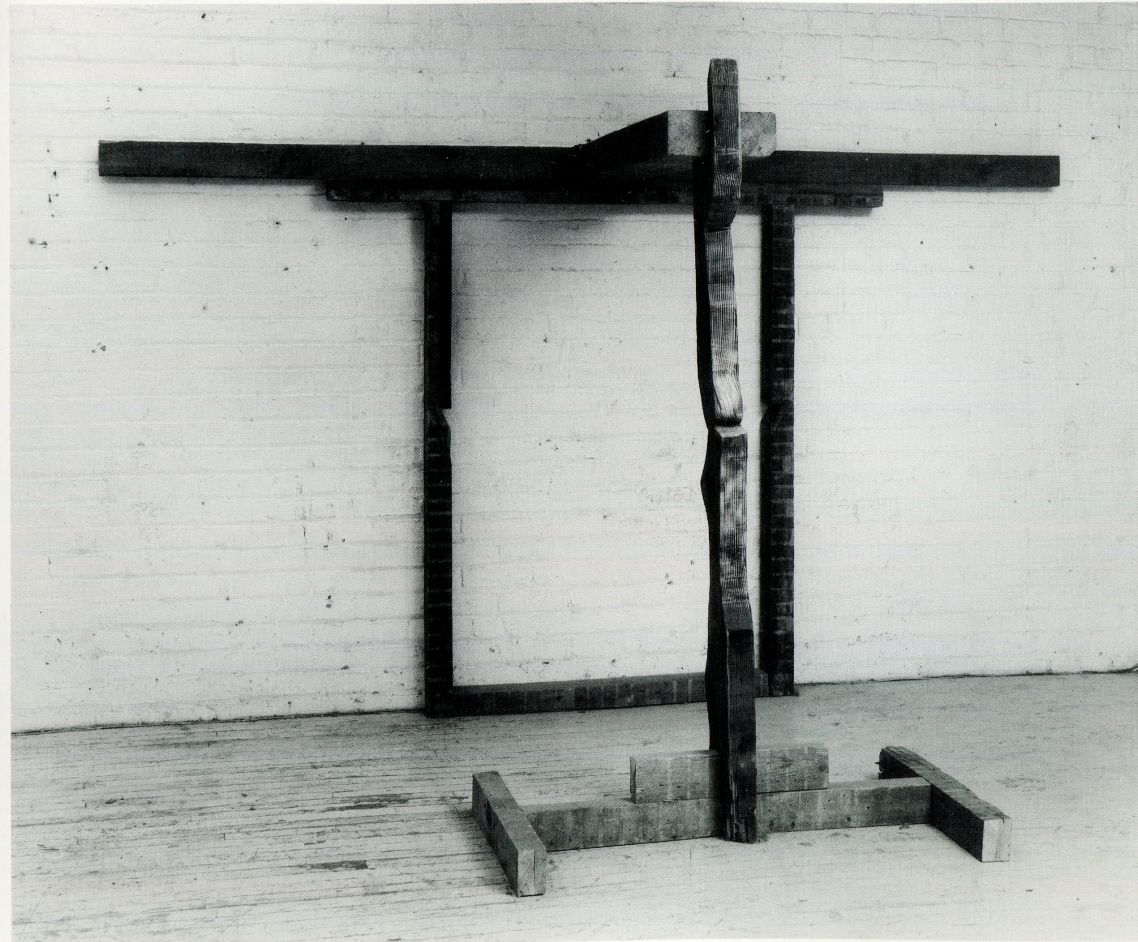
faces and the color is strong. The Temples exist somewhere between sculpture and painting—but they are essentially architectural in feeling. Some Temples are wall works, some are free standing, but they are always pure in color and smooth of surface. The Altars, however, gradually became fully-developed sculpture, free-standing and constructed of rough, aged wood. Seasoned boards, heavy, notched roof beams, studs salvaged from nineteenth century buildings—my fascination with this kind of raw material has deepened over the years until it, too, is almost obsessive. The subtle emotion that arises in the presence of this particular material remains one of the most important aspects of my sculpture.

I don’t know why I care so much about this old, weathered wood, but I’ve glimpsed more than a few clues. There is, first of all, the unmistakable

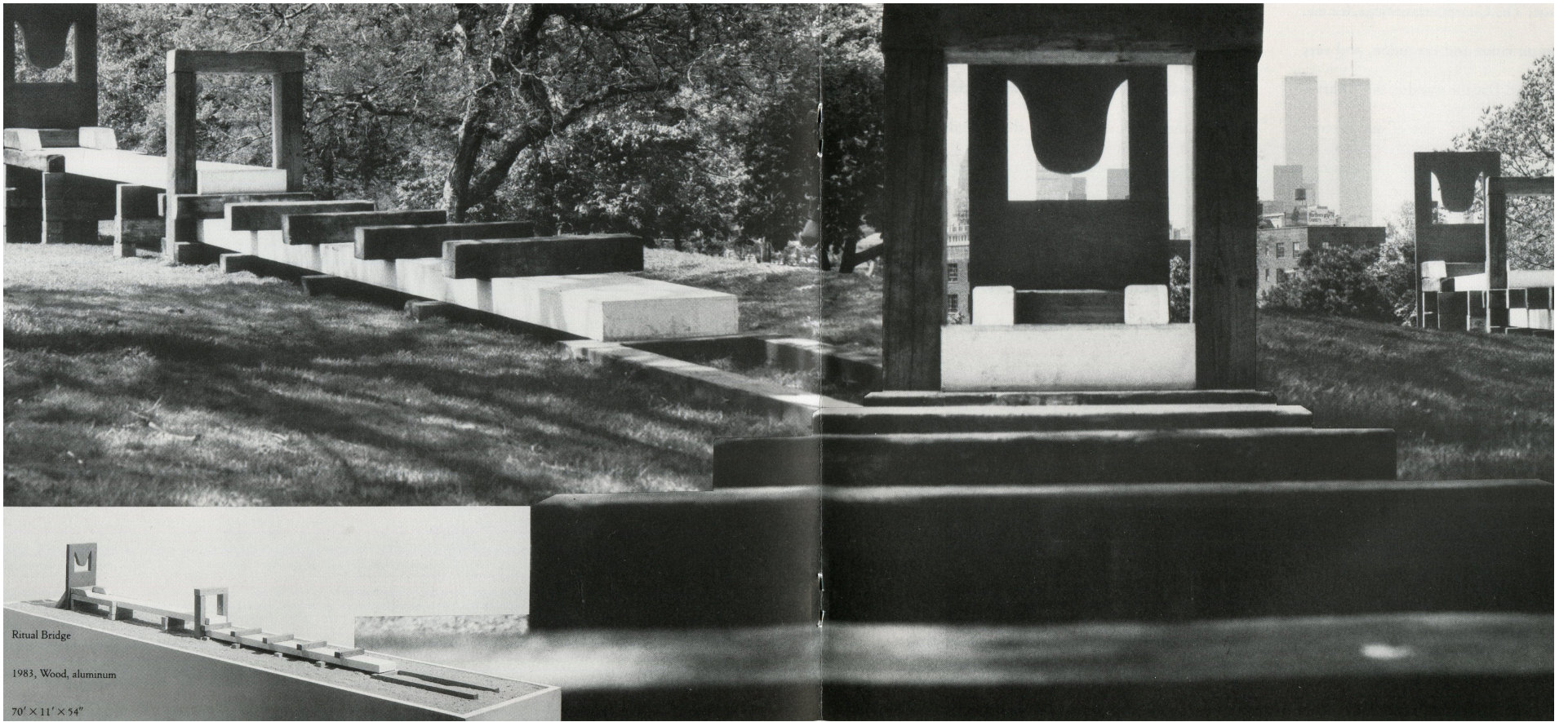
High Altar

1986, Wood

70¼" × 115" × 71½"







Ritual Bridge

1983, Wood, aluminum

70' x 11' x 54"

resonance of age. The Guardian paintings, for me, are fresh, clean in color and execution, and very much of the present. But the wood in the Altars is literally timeless . . . distant . . . not of our century. The contrast of time implied by the juxtaposition of Guardians and Altars forces each into a wider, more profound context, creating for me a strangely reassuring uncertainty.

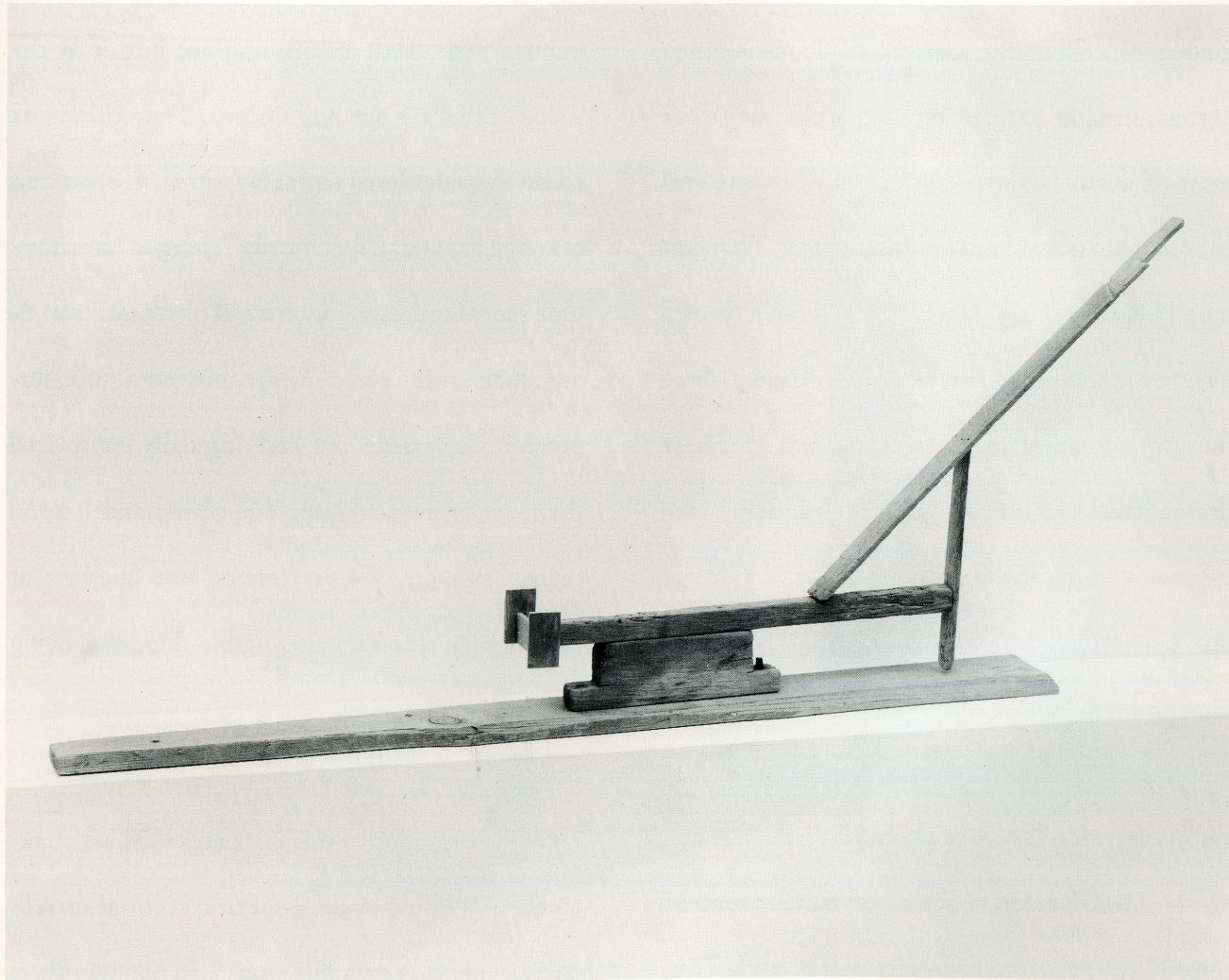
The range of forms I use in the Altars is minimal. The sculptures are usually frontal, symmetrical, "primitive." They are always assembled from a few clear units in relationships based on the right angle, yet there is often one diagonal beam in clear opposition. The Altars are uncluttered in silhouette and simple in the way they are put together . . . and yet they possess other, seemingly contradictory qualities which strongly root them in the twentieth century. The basic structural premise of all these

works is that of cantilever, a method that almost invariably creates a sense of dynamism rather than classical stability. The sculptures are meant to be light on their feet, airy rather than ponderous, open rather than monolithic. Though table-like surfaces are usually implied, friends have described to me other kinds of disturbing images they sense "behind" the straightforward carpentry. Above all I want these wood pieces to suggest specific, but unknown, "things," man-made objects whose nature and purposes are no longer clear. Once, in order to make an adjustment, I had to raise my early 1983 *Altar* a few inches off the floor. I put it on a wooden slab, where it suddenly looked like an abstract *sculpture*, a formal work of art, and I hated the transformation. When I took it off the slab and restored it to its proper place on the floor, it became what it had been—a strange "thing," an object of unknown origin, function and history.

Sky Altar

1986, Wood

24<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" × 4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" × 20<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>"



In 1982 my wife, April Kingsley, and I visited Greece in what was for both of us a long-awaited esthetic and spiritual pilgrimage. In Crete, at Knossos, we walked the length of something the guidebook called "the sacred way." It was a, long, narrow, straight path paved in marble, and since most of it was below ground level, once one embarked upon it there was no turning away. That evening I began making sketches for a version of such a sacred way, but one that would be elevated above the ground rather than cut down into it. These drawings led to a series of improvised models and eventually to my *Ritual Bridge* of 1983, a work set up in a temporary version in Brooklyn's Fort Greene Park. There one walked, first, into what might be called a laid-down portal, and then stepped up onto the lower level of the bridge. Next, the visitor traversed a series of ritual obstacles placed at regular intervals across this level. Then

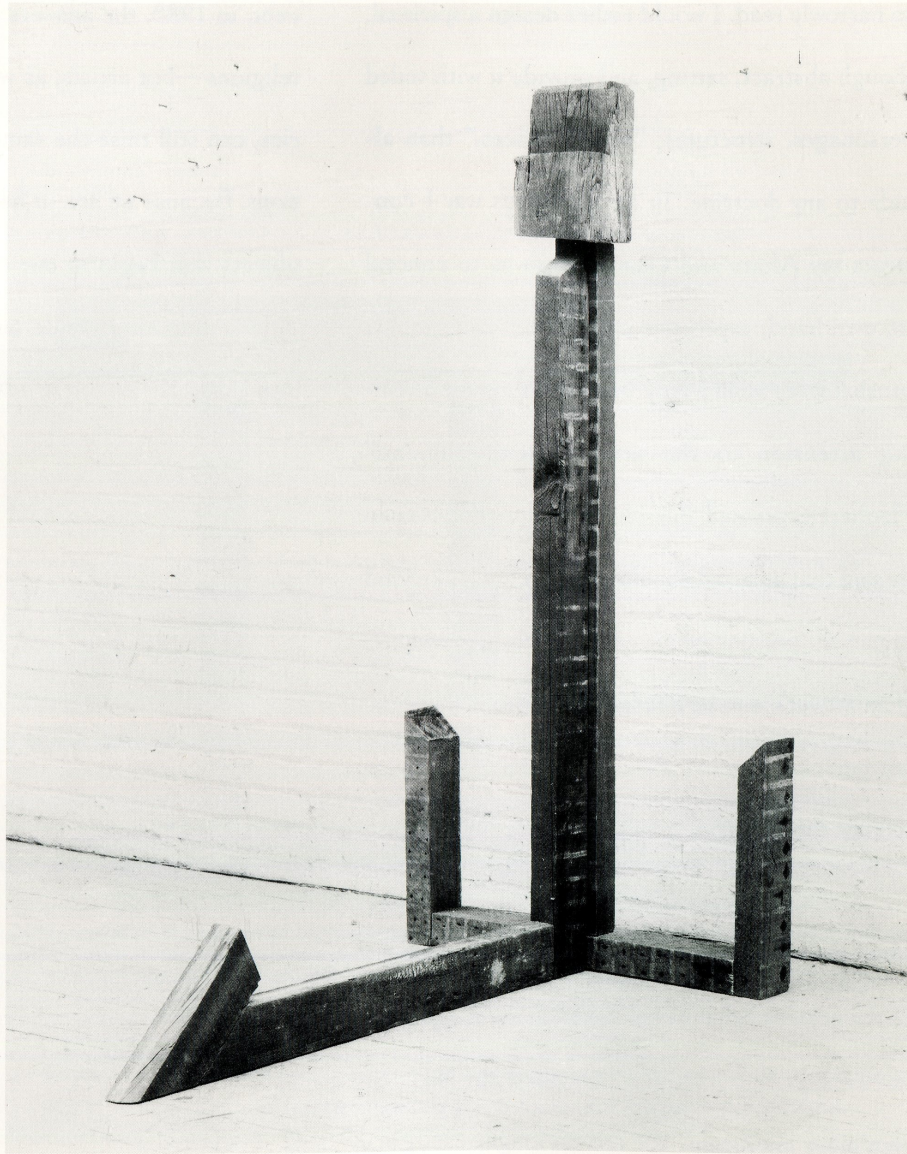
he, or she, was forced to crouch beneath a low gate in order to ascend to the second level. This part of the bridge was higher and free from obstacles; at its terminus was a kind of altar, an eleven-foot high wooden stele, with an opening cut into it in the shape of the Minoan bull's horns. The work, in its totality, was designed to imply a ritual, a separation from the ground, a specifically "charged" territory. One morning I came upon a tall black man standing alone on the *Ritual Bridge*, playing a flute, improvising his music as I had originally improvised the form of my sculpture. He played and I stood there, listening. We understood one another; at that moment the same intangible thing was being evenly shared.

With the exception of this work and a few early maquettes I have never used specific cultural or religious symbols in my sculptures; I do not want them

Sentinel III

1986, Wood

66 $\frac{1}{4}$ "  $\times$  34"  $\times$  49 $\frac{3}{4}$ "



so narrowly read. I would rather design a spiritual, though abstract, setting, and provide it with veiled personages, structures, "sacred spaces," than allude to any doctrine. In an analogous way I construct my Altars and Guardians so as to conceal my own hand; expressive carving and calligraphic brushstrokes would only limit meaning by diverting attention to the artist's "temperament." Flaubert expressed this idea most cogently when he said that an artist should be in his work like God in nature: present everywhere but visible nowhere. If an artwork is to be a refuge from noise, flamboyant personal touches should not be allowed to interrupt the silence.

Over the many centuries from Lascaux to Athens to the present, what has changed in art is endlessly fascinating. But what has remained the same is even more important. We can no longer easily ac-

cept, in 1988, the answers provided by traditional religions—but artists, as we have done for centuries, can still raise the same transcendental questions. Because we are, at heart, mediators, making objects that begin in our own physicality, and yet ultimately point outside ourselves to all the final mysteries.

■ Budd Hopkins

Portal

1987, Wood

112" × 73<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" × 57<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>"



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■ Budd Hopkins

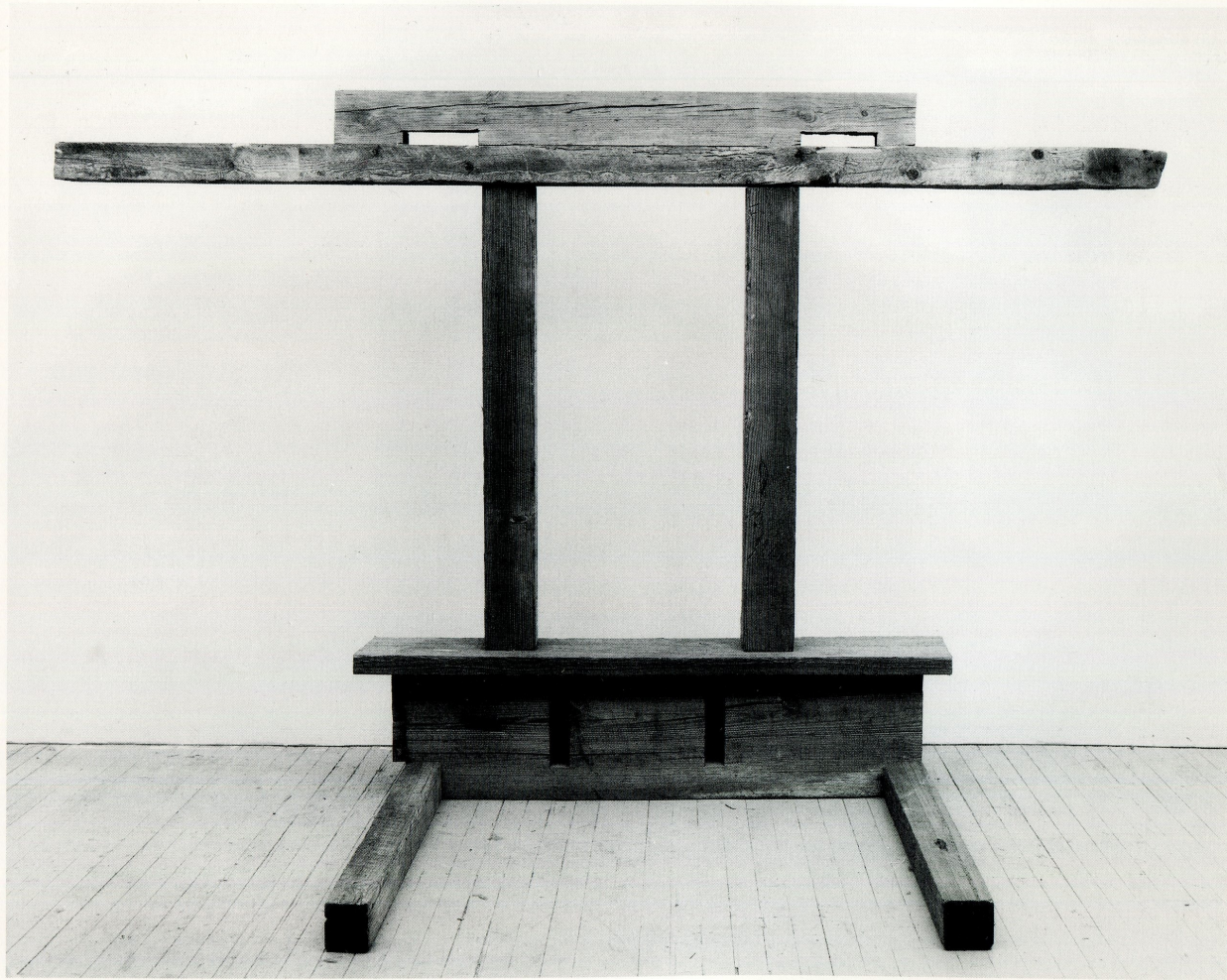


Portal

1987, Wood

112" × 73<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" × 57<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>"

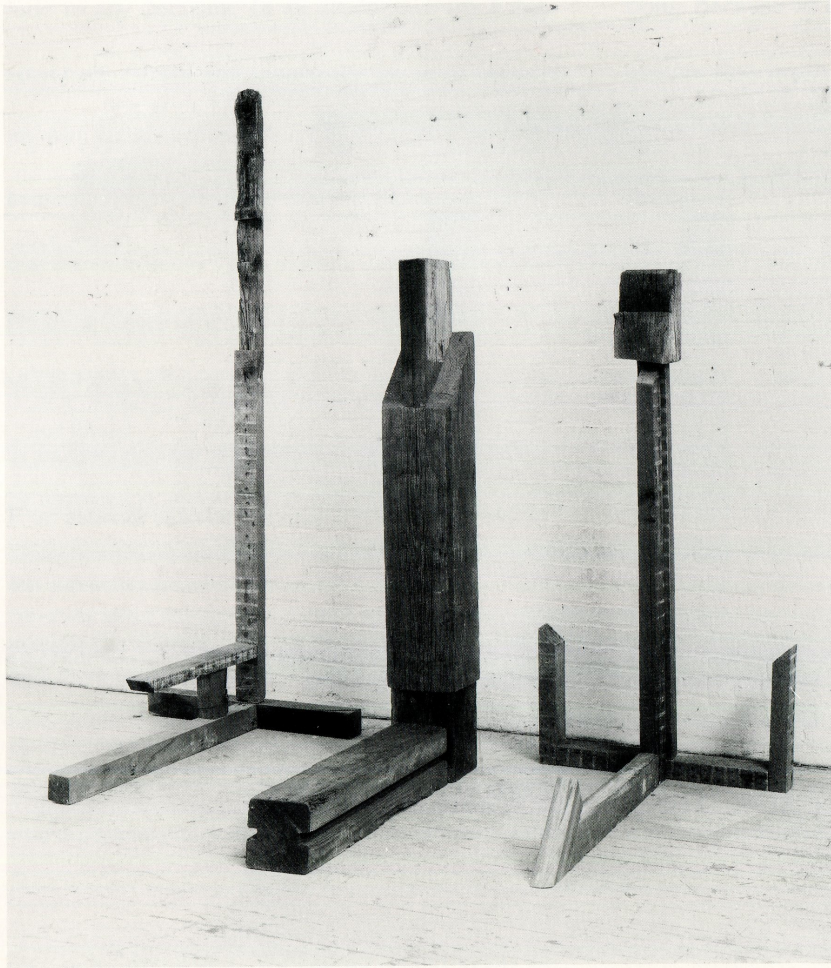
23



Sentinel II, 1985, Wood

King, 1986, Wood

Sentinel III, 1986, Wood

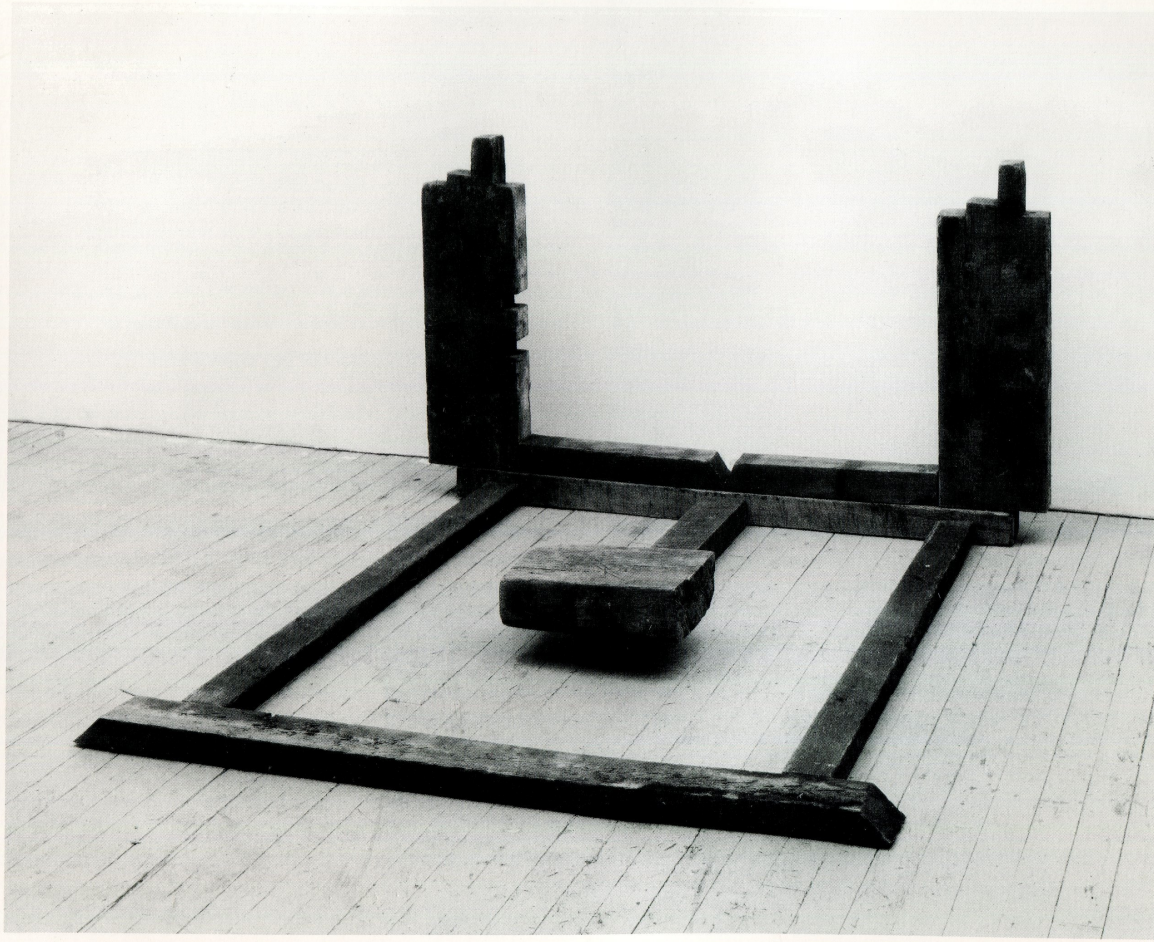


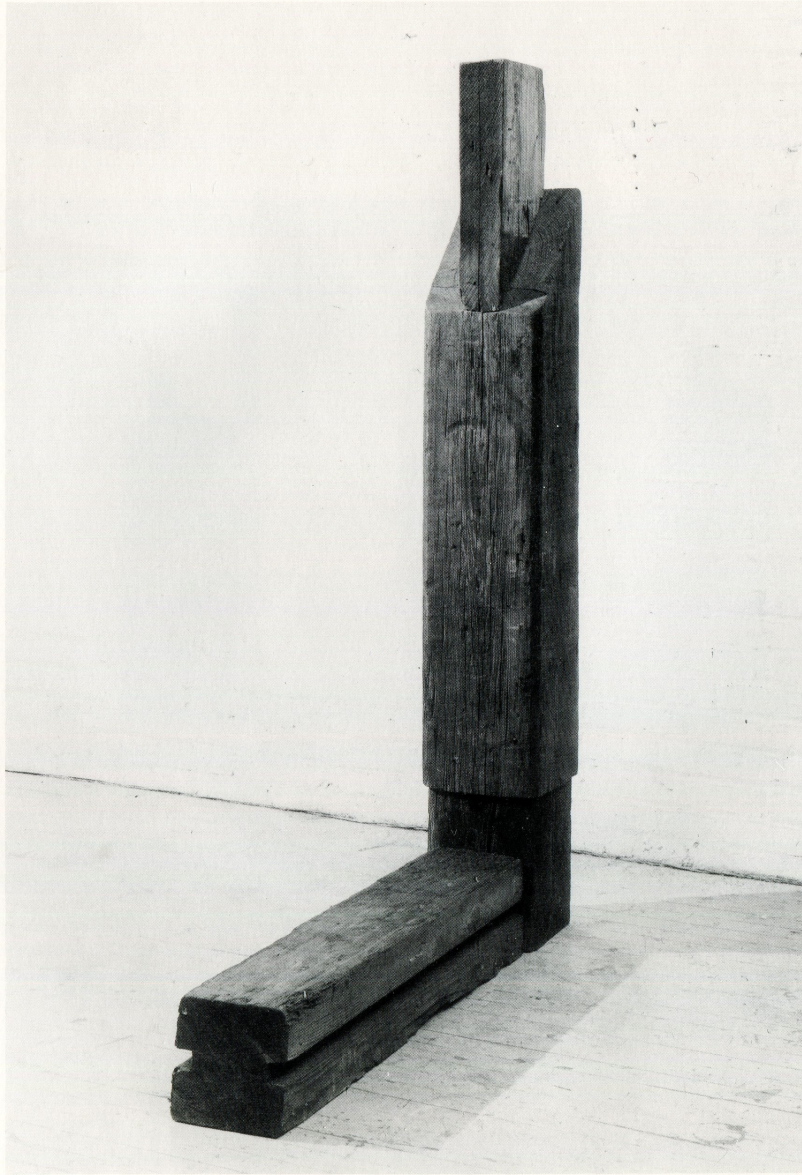
Floor Altar

1986, Wood

31½" × 53" × 55¼"

25





King

1986, Wood

68<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>" × 49<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>" × 10<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>"

Sentinel I

1985, Wood, 57¼" × 36¼" × 19¾"

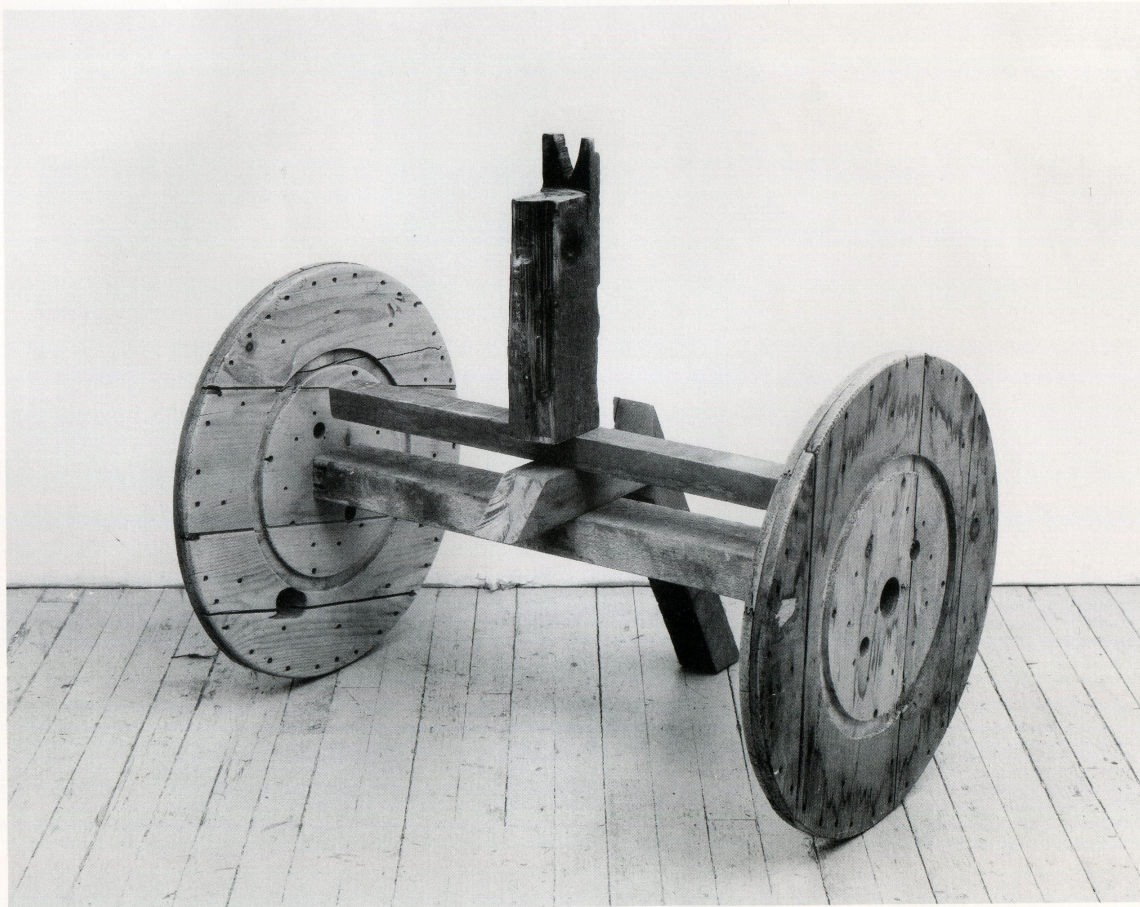
Collection Susan and Don Bennett



Chariot

1985, Wood

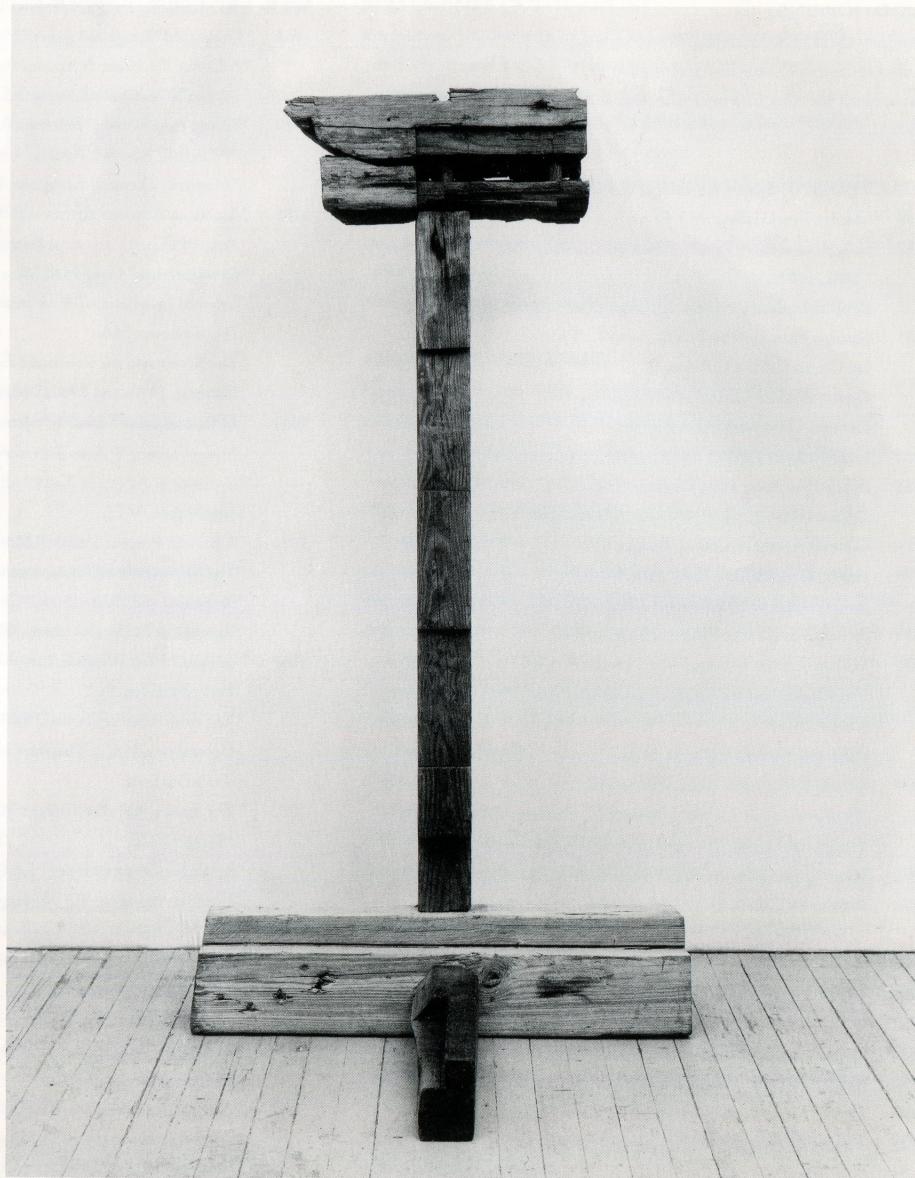
33" x 36<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" x 26<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>"



Sentinel

1984, Wood

66" x 34" x 26 1/2"



## BUDD HOPKINS

Born June 15, 1931, in Wheeling, West Virginia.

Studied at Oberlin College and graduated in 1953.

Has lived in New York City since that time, and has exhibited widely since 1955.

## SELECTED ONE-MAN EXHIBITIONS

- 1988 Marilyn Pearl Gallery, N.Y.C.  
1987 Longpoint Gallery, Provincetown, MA. (And 1978, 1980, 1982, 1985).  
Emilson Gallery, De Pauw University, Greencastle, IN.  
1985 Marilyn Pearl Gallery, N.Y.C.  
Jan Cicero Gallery, Chicago, IL.  
Keystone Junior College, La Plume, PA.  
Denison University, Granville, OH.  
1982 Lerner-Heller Gallery, N.Y.C. (And 1978, 1980, 1981).  
1981 Fedele Fine Arts, Print Retrospective. N.Y.C.  
Colburn Gallery, Univ. of Vermont, Burlington, VT.  
1979 Cultural Activities Center, Temple, TX.  
1978 Andre Zarre Gallery, Early work. N.Y.C.  
Johnson Gallery, Middlebury College, VT.  
1977 Pelham-von Stoffler Gallery, Houston, TX.  
1975 William Zierler Gallery, N.Y.C. (And 1972-1974).  
Tirca Karlis Gallery, Provincetown, MA. (And 1958, 1960, 1962-1974).  
Landmark Gallery, Collages. N.Y.C.  
1974 Galerie Liatowitsch, Basel, Switzerland.  
Weatherspoon Art Gallery, Univ. of N. Carolina, Greensboro, NC.  
Kresge Art Center, Michigan State Univ., East Lansing, MI.  
1973 Huntington Galleries, Major Retrospective. Huntington, W.V.  
1971 Poindexter Gallery, N.Y.C. (And 1956, 1962, 1963, 1966, 1967, 1969).  
Hurlbutt Galleries, Greenwich, CT.  
1968 Philips Exeter Academy, Exeter, N.H.  
1967 Reed College, Portland, OR.  
1966 Obelisk Gallery, Boston, MA. (And 1964).  
1965 Bradford Junior College, Bradford, MA.  
1963 Kasha Heman Gallery, Chicago, IL. (And 1962).  
1959 Zabriskie Gallery, N.Y.C.

## SELECTED RECENT GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1988 "Opposites," Longpoint gallery, Provincetown, MA.  
"A Living Tradition: Selections from the American Abstract Artists," Voasa, Rovaniemi and Joensuu Museums, Finland.  
1987 "Recent Acquisitions," Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, N.Y.C.  
"American Abstract Artists," City Gallery, N.Y.C.  
"Homeric Themes," Longpoint Gallery, Provincetown, MA.  
1986 "American Abstract Artists—1936-1986," Bronx Museum of the Arts. NYC  
"Crosscurrents," Guild Hall Museum, East Hampton, N.Y.  
"Celestial Installations," Provincetown Art Association and Museum, Provincetown, MA.  
"The Severe and the Romantic: Geometric Humanism in American Painting, 1950s and 1980s," Marilyn Pearl Gallery, N.Y.C.  
1985 "A Rational Imperative," Sculpture Center, N.Y.C., and the Ben Shahn Gallery, William Paterson College, N.J.  
"Crossovers: Artists in Two Mediums," Bennington College, Bennington, VT.  
1984 "American Postwar Purism," Marilyn Pearl Gallery, N.Y.C.  
"The Ways of Wood," Sculpture Center, N.Y.C.  
"Swimming and Other Pools," Getler/Paul/Saper, N.Y.C.  
"Varieties of Sculptural Ideas," Max Hutchinson Gallery, N.Y.C.  
1983 "Bridges," Pratt Institute. Large site-specific work in Fort Greene Park, Brooklyn, N.Y.  
"American Abstract Artists," Weatherspoon Art Gallery, Greensboro, N.C. ; The Art Gallery, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL.  
1982 "The Americans: The Collage," Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, TX.  
"Eccentric Constructivism," Jan Cicero Gallery, Chicago, IL.  
"The New Spiritualism," Fleming Museum, Burlington, VT.  
1981 "The New Spiritualism," Jorgensen Gallery, Univ. of Connecticut, Storrs, CT., and Oscarsson Hood Gallery, N.Y.C.  
"All in Line," Dintenfass Gallery, N.Y.C.  
1980 "All in Line," Lowe Art Gallery, Syracuse, N.Y.  
"Geometric Tradition in American Painting 1920-1980," Rosa Esman Gallery, N.Y.C.  
1979 "Collage: American Masters," Montclair Art Museum, Montclair, N.J.  
"American Abstract Artists: The Language of Abstraction," Betty Parsons Gallery, N.Y.C.



- 1975 "Forms of Color," Akron Art Institute, Akron, OH.  
"Images of Power, Sources of Energy," Neuberger Museum,  
Purchase, N.Y.  
"Two Decades of American Painting," Solomon R. Guggenheim  
Museum, N.Y.C.

#### PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

- Ackland Art Museum, Chapel Hill, NC.  
Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin, OH.  
Brooklyn Museum, NYC  
Carnegie-Mellon Art Museum, Pittsburgh, PA.  
Corcoran Gallery, Washington, D.C.  
Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, DE.  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, N.Y.C.  
Joseph Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.  
Huntington Galleries, Huntington, W.V.  
Newark Museum, Newark, N.J.  
Norfolk Museum, Norfolk, VA.  
Oklahoma Art Center, Oklahoma City, OK.  
Provincetown Art Association and Museum, Provincetown, MA.  
Reading Museum, Reading, PA.  
San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco, CA.  
Saulsbury Gallery, Cultural Activities Center, Temple, TX  
Weatherspoon Art Gallery, Greensboro, N.C.  
Whitney Museum of American Art, N.Y.C.  
Williams College Museum, Williamstown, MA
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA.  
Philips Exeter Academy, Exeter, N.H.  
Reed College, Portland, OR.  
University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA.

#### FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

- New York State Council on the Arts, Special Project Grant, 1982  
National Endowment for the Arts, Fellowship for Painting, 1979  
John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship for Painting, 1976

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Sacred Spaces—The Book of Temples, The Book of Guardians, The Book of  
Altars*, printed by the artist, New York, 1982. 24 pages, 42 illustrations.

#### STATEMENTS BY THE ARTIST

- Provincetown Arts*, Summer, 1987, "The Observer as Intruder: Budd Hopkins  
on Sculpture and UFOs," A Conversation with April Kingsley.  
*Artforum*, Sept. 1975, "Remarks on their Medium by Four Painters."  
*Art In America*, July-August 1973, "Budd Hopkins on Budd Hopkins."  
*Art Now: New York*, Vol. 4, No. 2. Statement.  
*Arts Magazine*, April 1972, "Concept vs. Art Object," with Douglas Huebler,  
April Kingsley.  
Baur, John I. H. and Goodrich, Lloyd, *Young America 1960*, Praeger, N.Y.,  
1960. Statement.  
*Allen Memorial Art Museum Bulletin*, Vol. XIV, No. 3, 1956. Statement.

#### ARTICLES BY THE ARTIST

- Provincetown Arts*, June, 1986, "The Collages of Fritz Bultman."  
*Drawing*, March-April 1984, "DeKooning's Drawings."  
*Artforum*, Summer 1979, "Franz Kline's Color Abstractions: Remembering  
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