

PHAIDON

SCULPTURE TODAY

JUDITH COLLINS

Many sculptors, curators and dealers have helped me with ideas and information about contemporary sculpture, far too many to mention personally, so this can only be a general expression of my gratitude. Three people at Phaidon Press have been of special assistance: David Anfam; Emmanuelle Peri, for tracking down the most recondite illustrations; and Julia Rolf, forester extraordinaire, who stayed calm when all about her was agitated. The biggest thank you goes to Barbara Lloyd, for walking every step of the way with me.

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ENDPAPERS

Wolfgang Laib, *Pollen from Hazelnut*, 1993. Pollen
from hazelnut tree. 320 x 360 cm (138 x 141 ½ in)

Alexandra Bircken, *Gewachs*, 2005. Plaster, wool,
wood, stones, fabric, plastic, thread. 130 x 80 x 64 cm
(51.5 x 31.5 x 25 in)

Eva Rothschild, *Diamond Day*, 2003. Powder coated steel,
wood. 200 x 200 x 200 cm (78 ¾ x 78 ¾ x 78 ¾ in)

Richard Deacon, *What Could Make Me Feel This Way 'A'*, 1993.
Bent wood, cable ties, screws. 28.6 x 56 x 48.3 m
(93 ft 10 in x 183 ft 9 in x 158 ft 5 in).
Sprengel Museum, Hannover

All works are in private collections unless otherwise stated

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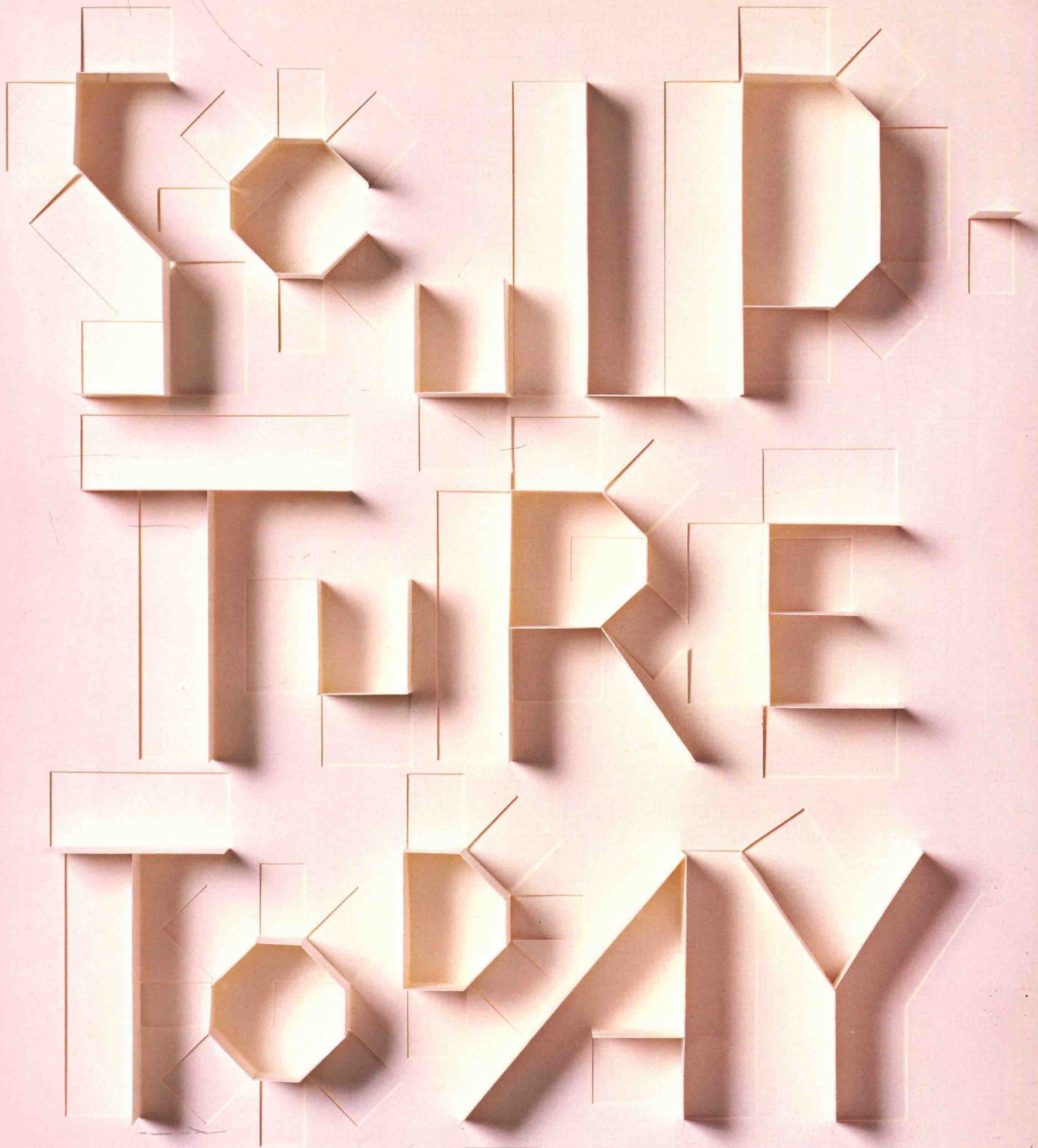
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Sculpture has probably changed more during the last thirty years than at any other time in its more than 30,000-year history, and it has changed because we have changed. The invention and complexity of the contemporary world is matched by the invention and complexity of contemporary sculpture. This book attempts to explain the major trends of contemporary sculpture, but the reader will ask: what is 'contemporary'? The dictionary defines it as 'of the present period', but in order to understand the present period, we need to know what causes brought about its trends. To do this, it is necessary to look back a generation or two, which takes us to the late 1960s and early 1970s.

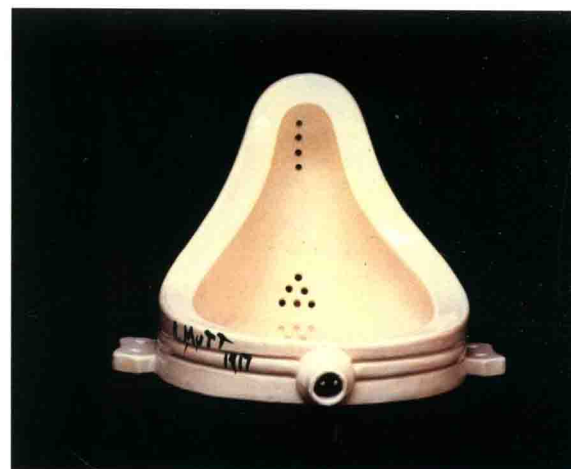
Art historians, critics and curators tend to identify and label trends and 'isms', so that an unwieldy creative mass can be given some kind of order. Artists usually ignore these labels and carry on regardless, only watching each other to see what is happening. The last three decades have witnessed the rise and fall, and in some cases, the rise again, of modernism, postmodernism, Conceptualism, Minimalism, Post-Minimalism, Arte Povera, Neo-Expressionism, Land Art, Neo-Conceptualism, Dematerialization, Neo-Dada, Maximalism, Process Art, abstraction and figuration. Although these and other labels are discussed in the following chapters, *Sculpture Today* is not arranged according to isms or chronology. This means that in some instances divergent works by the same sculptor will appear in the context of different chapters.

We are living in a non-linear time, where things happen simultaneously in different places. We are also in what seems to be a period of transition, partly caused by the shift from one millennium to another. If one asks the question, what is sculpture today?, it is not possible to give a simple answer. Ernst Gombrich, in his enormously successful book *The Story of Art*, stated: 'There is no art, only artists,' so perhaps it is feasible to follow him and say, 'There is no sculpture, only sculptors.' The book's eighteen chapters and extensive illustrations offer an explanation that is plural, rather than singular, and provide a comprehensive overview of the activity of the last thirty years, celebrating both the vitality and diversity of sculpture made globally. The enormous array of materials, forms, techniques and concepts that have been presented under the term 'sculpture' indicate that the discipline is no longer an immutable art form with fixed boundaries and rules. Indeed, its success stems from the very opposite: it can expand its terms of reference with unflagging energy, and appear inexhaustible and capacious. Although almost anything can be brought into play to create sculpture, the use of video is not included here. Kinetic and lens-based works introduce more than can be dealt with in this volume. Installation/environmental art is included, however, since it is part of the expanded field of sculpture.

The most radical change worldwide since the 1970s has been the exponential increase in electronic and digital technology, the development of the internet, and the global increase in mobile communications. This has changed the way in which we think about ourselves as human beings, and about the concepts of space and place, factors crucial to the production of sculpture. There is a new sense of geography, which is more political and economic than physical, and less bound to maps, territories and boundaries. Additionally, the way in which we access knowledge has changed, and, for example, the history of international art is now instantly accessible to a worldwide audience. There is more source material and imagery than ever before, and this bewildering, unedited mass seeps into the unconscious and affects it. Artists are possibly more aware of this than the rest of us, and the sculpture they are making today reflects this.



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1 Constantin Brancusi, *Bird in Space*, 1927. Bronze. 118 cm (72 ½ in) high. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

2 Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917. Porcelain urinal. 60 x 23.5 x 18 cm (23 ½ x 9 ¼ x 7 in). Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington

3 Pablo Picasso, *Guitar*, 1912-13. Sheet metal and wire. 77.5 x 35 x 19.3 cm (30 ½ x 13 ¾ x 7 ½ in). Museum of Modern Art, New York

4 Henry Moore, *Recumbent Figure*, 1938. Green Houghton stone. 88.9 x 132.7 cm (35 x 52 ½ in) Tate, London

So in order to assess where sculpture is today, it is necessary to see where it comes from. There was a great shift in art at the end of the 1960s and early 1970s that, with hindsight, is seen as the end of modernism. This ism reigned supreme from the time of Cubism to the early 1960s. Modernism, which prioritized painting above sculpture, is characterized by a rejection of realistic and academic art, and a concentration on issues such as form and colour. Critics who promoted modernist views and ideas about art were British and American -- Roger Fry, Alfred Barr, Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried. When modernism collapsed, the emphasis shifted from painting to sculpture. Until then, sculpture had been overshadowed by a predominantly painterly aesthetic, which promoted as primary the idea of the coloured plane. The painter Barnett Newman described sculpture as 'what you bump into when you back up to see a painting'. Sculpture began to adopt the flat mode of painting, utilizing the wall and the floor as its new area of activity. In the mid-1970s, when this book begins, there was a surge of sculptural action, involving artists of different generations, nationalities and outlooks.

For want of a better title, the 'ism' that followed modernism was called 'postmodernism', and this term entered the lexicon of artistic practice and theory in the 1970s, originally used to describe a new kind of architecture. A significant book of that time was French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), which dealt with social rather than aesthetic matters. Lyotard suggested that contemporary society was rejecting its grand, universal and powerful structures, such as religion, gender and capitalism, in favour of more local, personal narratives and myths. His text described a world that was anti-establishment, fragmented and given to voracious borrowing from other cultures and ideologies. Certainly, the fragmentation, borrowing and collage elements cited in his book began to find their way into contemporary sculpture, where they still remain.

The art historian and critic Rosalind Krauss published the seminal essay 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' in *October* magazine for spring 1979, which was one of the first texts to investigate postmodernism in sculpture. She described how, over the previous ten years, some 'rather surprising things have come to be called sculpture', and went on to rehearse what sculpture had been up until that date. Mostly it had been 'a commemorative representation' that 'sits in a particular place and speaks in a symbolic tongue about the meaning or use of that place'. This representation was 'normally figurative and vertical', and was sited on a pedestal. When she tried to define sculpture of the 1970s, and she was writing about American sculptors, she felt that they were the first to venture into the expanded field, and that their work was located somewhere between landscape and architecture, between nature and culture. Sculpture had come down off the pedestal and was no longer 'figurative and vertical'. The vertical axis that had predominated since the beginning of sculpture was being replaced by a horizontal one, by work that lay directly on the gallery floor or the earth. The traditional processes by which sculpture had been made -- modelling and carving -- were being rejected. The new orientation for sculpture and the lack of a base meant that different processes and presentations appeared, the most prominent of which were stacking and scattering, which needed no manual dexterity or craftsmanship to execute. Monolithic, solid forms gave way to more open, extended ones, and weight and mass began to lose their supremacy.

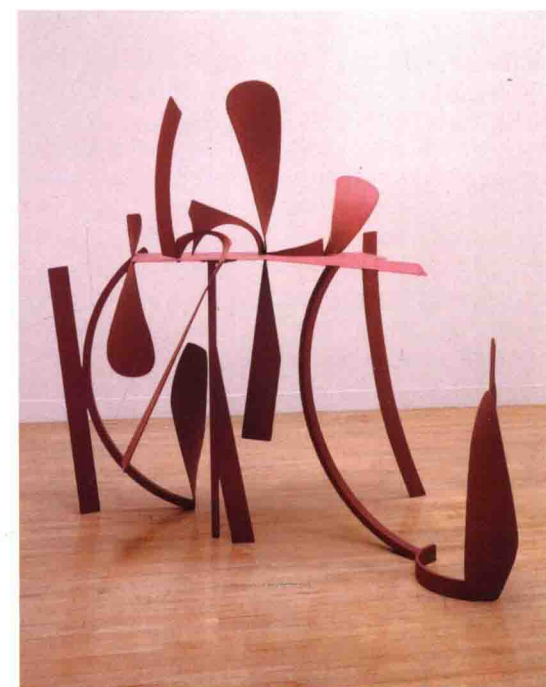
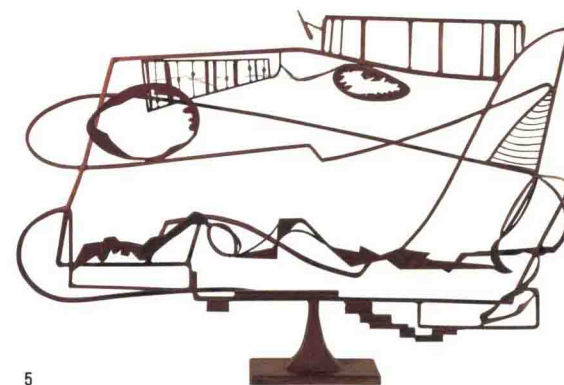
Krauss looked for the godfathers 'who could legitimize and thereby authenticate the strangeness' of these new sculptures, and she cited Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) and Constantin Brancusi, the latter artist being responsible for 'expressing parts of the body as fragments' and for transforming the way in which sculpture relates to its base. Brancusi made his bases as important as the sculptures they supported, and they were usually made from stacked pieces of rough wood, which were detachable, rearrangeable, and appeared improvised. He simplified his shapes and polished his bronze forms until they resembled machine-made industrial products, such as his *Bird in Space* (1). Equally important in Paris at the same time, though not mentioned by Krauss, were two other artists, Marcel Duchamp and Pablo Picasso, who introduced further new ideas, techniques and materials into the world of sculpture, and whose influences, like that of Brancusi, were still being worked out in the postmodern period and continue to cast their shadow even today.

Duchamp gave up painting in 1912 and eschewed the shaping of materials in his studio in favour of choosing and exhibiting industrial or domestic manufactured objects, which he called readymades. The most celebrated and notorious of these works was *Fountain* (2), a white porcelain urinal bought from the Mott Works Company in New York. Duchamp's only interventions, after choosing it, were to turn it upside down and sign it with the fictional name 'R. Mutt' and the date. He submitted it to the jury-free 'Independents Exhibition', but it was rejected by the hanging committee. Duchamp's readymades challenged ideas about authenticity and originality in art. Picasso initiated opened-up constructed sculpture in 1912 with his two versions of *Guitar* (3), the first made from cardboard and the second from sheet metal and wire, both of which he hung on the wall like paintings. Picasso's materials and his methods were new in the history of sculpture. Carving and modelling were rejected in favour of rough constructions made from overlapping or intersecting planes.

Picasso's investigation into the interdependence of space and volume was carried forward by sculptors who dealt with the human figure, prominent among whom were Jacques Lipchitz (1891-1973), Alexander Archipenko (1887-1964) and Henry Moore. They all simplified and opened up the female human figure, notably by carving holes through the forms (4). They described this as allowing space to be enclosed by material, instead of the other way round. Moore began to break up the female figure into separate parts, which led him to make comparisons between human anatomy and the landscape. He also continued to work with the fragmentation theme that Rodin and Brancusi had begun.

Moore worked with wood, stone and bronze, but a sculptor who returned to the sheet metal used by Picasso for his ground-breaking constructions was David Smith. He learned to weld and created his early sculptures of the 1940s from scrap iron and steel, often parts of agricultural implements. Smith turned away from figure sculpture and instead created welded abstract forms that were often equivalents for the landscape surrounding his rural studio in upstate New York, such as *Hudson River Landscape* (5). Welding introduces form without mass, a sense of strength allied to delicacy, and an even greater openness to sculpture. Smith's linear metal arabesques were described as 'drawing in air'.

Anthony Caro, who worked as an assistant to Henry Moore, changed his style after seeing some new sculptures by Smith in America, and he too made constructions from industrial metal offcuts, which he painted in bright, commercially available colours, disguising the reality of their heavy steel bars and girders and making them appear effortless and almost weightless, impervious to the power of gravity. Caro equally turned away from the figure, and his spare but elegant sculpture *Orangerie* (6) actually uses segments of metal ploughshares, which he purchased as scrap. An orangerie is a greenhouse in which citrus trees are grown, and the title could well imply that this sculpture was inspired by forms in the natural world.



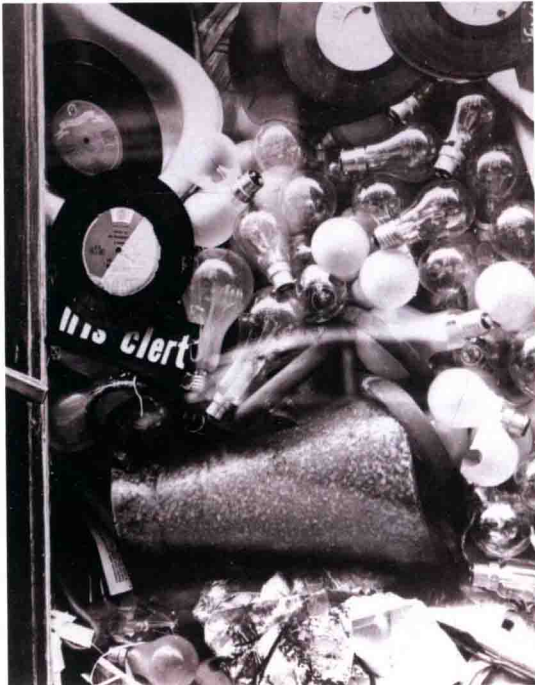
5 David Smith, *Hudson River Landscape*, 1951. Welded painted steel and stainless steel. 125.7 x 190.5 x 42.5 cm (50 x 75 x 16 7/8 in). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

6 Anthony Caro, *Orangerie*, 1969. Steel painted red. 225 x 162.5 x 231 cm (88 1/2 x 64 x 91 in). Collection Kenneth Noland

7 Arman, *Le Plein*, 1960. Mixed media. Dimensions variable. As installed at Galerie Iris Clerf, Paris

8 Marcel Duchamp, *Mile of String*, 1942. String. Dimensions variable. As installed at 451 Madison Avenue, New York, 14 October-7 November 1942

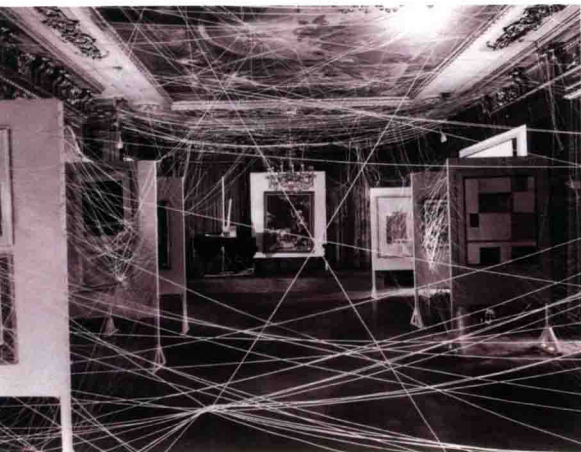
During the 1970s a number of American artists produced substantial theoretical writings that have been more influential for new developments in recent sculpture than those of critics and historians, and the most significant cluster of them were coterminous with the collapse of modernism. Two sculptors -- Robert Morris and Donald Judd -- helped both in terms of practice and theory to effect a transition from the formality, purity and self-sufficiency of modernism to a new definition of what art was and how it could be interpreted. Between 1966 and 1968, Morris wrote four texts on sculpture under the general heading 'Notes on Sculpture', which were published in the American art magazine *Artforum*. The first -- 'Notes on Sculpture: Part 1' -- appeared in the February 1966 issue and mainly discussed simple, three-dimensional objects of the kind he had been making in painted plywood for a few years, in terms of viewer participation. Morris felt that the context in which the work was shown, the way light fell on it and the way the viewer walked around it, altered the perception of its shape. His focus on the relationship between the viewer and their experience of a three-dimensional object helped to introduce the concept of phenomenology into the world of sculpture.



7

The writings of a French philosopher -- Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-61) -- lay behind Morris's ideas. Merleau-Ponty's book *Phenomenology of Perception*, published in France in 1945, was translated into English in 1962 and quickly established itself as essential reading for artists and critics pondering the reception and appreciation of works of art. Phenomenology is a philosophical movement that stems from the writings of Edmund Husserl at the beginning of the twentieth century. It looks at what presents itself to us in conscious experience, and then at the essence of what we experience.

Sculptors in the postmodern period started to experiment with the various ways in which their work could be experienced. However, Marcel Duchamp was the first artist to manipulate the space of an art gallery with two interventions: *1200 Coal Bags*, 1938, and *Mile of String*. He hung the coal bags from the ceiling at a Surrealist Exhibition at the Galerie Beaux-Arts, New York. The *Mile of String* appeared at another Surrealist Exhibition held at 451 Madison Avenue, New York (8); the string actually measured three miles in length and was strung in cobweb-like forms across the gallery and in front of the other exhibits. Duchamp's friend at that time, the art dealer Sidney Janis, recalled that Duchamp undertook this remarkable feat in order to 'symbolize literally the difficulties to be circumvented by the uninitiated in order to see, to perceive and understand, the exhibits.' Duchamp remembered that the string was gun-cotton, which burned in places under the light-bulbs -- 'it was terrifying, but it worked out alright.'



8

Yves Klein continued this idea of altering the experience of visiting an art gallery with his presentation *The Void (Le Vide)*, at the Galerie Iris Clert, Paris, from 28 April to 5 May 1958, which consisted of a totally empty gallery, whose walls were newly painted with white gloss. Klein positioned himself in the empty space, only allowing ten visitors at a time, confining their stay to three minutes. Three thousand people came on opening night, and the police had to be called to control the crowds. The empty space of the gallery deeply affected its visitors both emotionally, aesthetically and viscerally. Arman followed with an exhibition entitled 'Le Plein' at the same venue in October 1960, the invitations for which were printed on sardine cans. He completely filled the gallery space from floor to ceiling with two truckloads of domestic rubbish. Visitors could only look at the show through the window, and from there they saw a bewildering conglomeration of crumpled paper, used light-bulbs, records, buckets and the like (7). Klein said of Arman's installation that 'The universal memory of art was lacking his conclusive mummification of quantification.'

Six years later, Andy Warhol created an enchanting installation called *Silver Clouds* (9), which filled one room of the Leo Castelli Gallery in New York. The visitor was confronted by several large, pillow-shaped balloons, made of mylar and filled with a mixture of oxygen and helium, which were specially created with the assistance of engineer Billy Klüvur. The balloons floated around the gallery, moved by the air currents created by the visitors. Several recent gallery installations, notably one by Martin Creed, have revisited this idea. Warhol was also largely responsible for the introduction of popular and accessible imagery -- food, money, film-stars, publicity material, newspaper photographs -- into the canon of fine art. He turned to the everyday imagery of popular culture and invested his sculptures with instant realism. Like Brancusi earlier, Warhol was interested in a mass-produced look, and avoided the handmade character in favour of anonymous surfaces, with no evidence of the artist's hand. In 1964 he was included in an exhibition at the Bianchini Gallery, New York, titled 'The American Supermarket', and for this he created painted wooden replicas of the cardboard containers used by the American food and drinks industry, such as Coca-Cola cans, Heinz ketchup bottles and Campbell's Soup tins (10). These were so life-like that the original designer sued.

Richard Artschwager, who was included in the same exhibition, had previously worked as a furniture maker and designer and was inspired by the appearance on the market of the plastic laminate sheeting called Formica, which he described as 'a picture of a piece of wood'. Formica is a material that mimics another material, so Artschwager used it to make sculptures that mimic household furniture. His *Table and Chair* (11) comprises a pair of simple, generalized forms, and the artist has animated the surface by setting into it coloured and textured plastic laminate sheeting usually found on kitchen tables, where it is valued for its heat-resistant and wipe-clean qualities. The sides and top of the table are covered with pale Formica, while strips of wood-grained Formica illusionistically describe its legs; the chair is treated in the same manner. The irony here is that the table and chair are functionless, although visually they appear fully serviceable.

Tony Smith, who died in 1980, was given a major retrospective at MOMA, New York in 1998 and several reviews stated that his sculptures looked fresh and contemporary again. Smith's most famous work is *Die* (12), a large, six-foot cube of oiled steel, with a 'black and malignant' presence. It was fabricated for him by the Industrial Welding Company in Newark, New Jersey, and its dimensions were determined by the proportions of the human body. Its size and brooding presence require the viewer to walk around it and experience the relationship between himself, the object and the surrounding space, since no more than two of its sides can be seen at any one time. Although the work's form could not be simpler, its title invites many readings: the roll of a die, the name of a type of casting, or death. Smith did state that the dimensions bring to mind the colloquial phrase 'six feet under'.



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9 Andy Warhol, *Silver Clouds*, 1966. Helium- and oxygen-filled metallicized plastic film. Each 91.4 x 129.5 cm [36 x 51 in]. As installed at Castelli Gallery, New York

10 Andy Warhol, *Campbell's Soup Box*, 1962. Casein, paint, pencil on plywood. 55.9 x 40 x 40 cm [22 x 15 7/8 x 15 7/8 in]

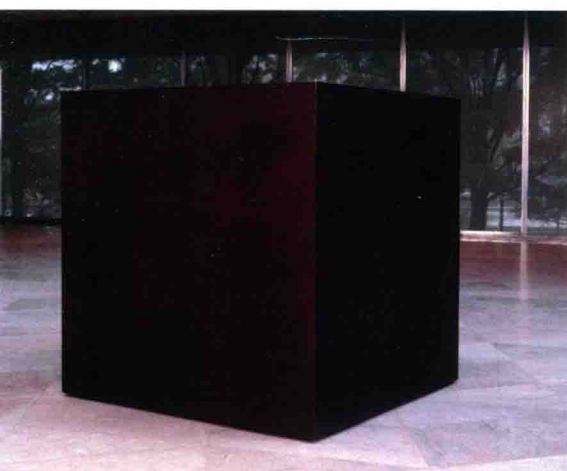
11 Richard Artschwager, *Table and chair*, 1963-4. Melamine laminate, wood. 75.5 x 132 x 95.2 cm, 114.3 x 43.8 x 53.3 cm [29 1/2 x 52 x 37 1/2 in, 45 x 17 1/4 x 21 in]. Tate, London

12 Tony Smith, *Die*, 1968. Steel. 182.9 x 182.9 x 182.9 cm [72 x 72 x 72 in]. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

13 Eva Hesse, *Contingent*, 1969. Cheesecloth, latex, fibreglass. 350 x 630 x 109 cm [138 x 248 1/2 x 43 in]. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra



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Among all these male artists working at the end of the 1960s, there was a distinctive female presence -- Eva Hesse, who achieved rapid prominence through her use of unconventional sculptural materials, such as latex, cheesecloth, rope, string and rubber tubing. These materials were soft and flexible and as a result her sculptures, such as *Contingent* (13), were given an amorphous air, dangling and wobbling from walls and ceilings. Hesse attempted to make something that was 'non art ... from a total other reference point', and after her early death in 1970 her contemporary Carl Andre said: 'Perhaps I am the bones and the body of sculpture, and perhaps Richard Serra is the muscle, but Eva Hesse is the brain and the nervous system extending far into the future.'

Following on from these major discussions about form, material, subject matter and context, sculptors began, in the 1980s, to ignore their nationality in favour of an international sense of creativity. They came to regard themselves as citizens of the world, able to work anywhere and to speak the universal language of art, often describing themselves as itinerant workers or nomads. Yet only a decade earlier, nationalism played a part in the development of contemporary sculpture. In the mid-to-late 1970s, German and Italian painters, and a British group of sculptors, emerged to great acclaim, wresting the notion of the avant garde away from America. Subsequent hot spots were Latin America and Eastern Europe. During the same period, there was also a major shift in gender -- for the first time in the history of world art, many of the most significant artists working in three-dimensions were female. In 1997, the art critic Germano Celant stated that the 1960s and 1970s had been dominated by encounters between America and Europe, the 1970s and 1980s were characterized by a confrontation between male and female, while the 1980s and 1990s were defined by the celebration of multiculturalism. Although his assessment of these decades was somewhat glib, it was also largely accurate.

From the mid-1990s, modernist attitudes about form and content were revisited and opened up for lively renegotiation. There appeared the reinvention of popular or 'amateur' uses of material and technique, and an interest in disrupting the conventionalist distinction between representation and non-representation. Art exchanged much with the pop-media culture. There were reappraisals of older discussions and a strong nostalgia for the 'Swinging Sixties' and brightly coloured British New Generation sculpture. A vogue for kitsch Baroque emerged. Recently, there has been a shift to the handmade, to craftsmanship. At the end of the twentieth century, 'isms' were invented by the dozen, to try and catch hold of what was going on. But art is not now a sequential series of movements; it is more a network of artists, critics, dealers, curators, collectors, galleries and art magazines that all intertwine. Buzz words are 'interaction' and 'collaboration' between artists. The partnerships of Fischli & Weiss, founded around 1980, and Gilbert & George, established in 1969, have been the model for more recent partnerships. In the twenty-first century, there is no prevailing orthodoxy; artists are multi-taskers who work across categories and boundaries, and often do not have studios. As the art critic and philosopher Arthur Danto wrote in *After the End of Art* (1996): 'Ours is a moment, at least [and perhaps only] in art, of deep pluralism and total tolerance. Nothing is ruled out.'

