

Fred Sandback *June 21 – September 12, 2008*

The Nelson-Freeman Gallery is pleased to present the American artist Fred Sandback for the first time. Born in Bronxville, New York in 1943, Fred Sandback earned a degree in philosophy and then studied sculpture at the Yale University School of Art and Architecture, where he met Donald Judd and Robert Morris. The Konrad Fischer Gallery of Düsseldorf and the Heiner Friedrich Gallery of Munich were the first to devote a solo exhibition to him in 1968. Under the patronage of the Dia Foundation, a permanent display was created at the Winchendon Museum in Massachusetts, open between 1981 and 1996 and again in 2003, and several large sculptures have been placed on permanent display at the Dia Beacon in New York. Fred Sandback's work has been frequently exhibited in Europe and the United States since the end of the 1960s, but no solo exhibition has been devoted to him in Paris for 20 years.

In response to Sandback's complaints about his frustration about sculpture, George Sugarman told him in 1966: « Well, if you are so sick of all the parts, why not just make a line with a ball of string and be done with it? » Close to minimal art, Fred Sandback felt from the very beginning that he had a deep-rooted desire to create sculpture with no interior. As of 1967 he produced open sculptures, only outlined and materialized by rigid steel threads, tight rubber bands, or white, black or colored acrylic threads. These elements are projected into space and define or oppose it in a perpetual play of optical illusions. For Fred Sandback the point is to assert a volume without making it opaque, to express materiality without occupying or blocking it: volume must not be an obstacle to vision, it must not be a screen.

For this first exhibition at our gallery, we are presenting works from 1967 to 2003, including « Sculptural Studies », designed by Fred Sandback, but not produced during his lifetime.

On the ground floor the acrylic painting on wood, « White Wall Relief », reproduces in relief the concept of the display. This work is one of the last projects created by the artist in 2003. It is the only project including a series of bas-reliefs of this size. It is divided into four panels of different widths, each with diagonal incisions.

Certain pieces made of wires function according to space and are adapted to the place in which they are displayed. Thus, « Untitled (Six-part Leaning Construction) » was shown in 2002 at the Tamayo Museum in Mexico City on a much wider wall. The work was adapted to the space but at the same time kept to the proportions indicated by the artist. In the same way, a much larger version of « Untitled (Construction with Four Vertical Elements) » was presented at the Durand-Dessert Gallery in 1976.

The Polygon (1997) is a sculpture on the ground that materializes a volume but is empty inside. This impression of volume is obtained by the delimitation of the black thread that reverses the relations between the empty and the full. Under the sheet of glass, the polygon made of red acrylic thread, shown for the first time in 1975 in the Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt, has never been exhibited since. This work returns to the same principle of the empty and the full. Although the piece is empty inside, the viewer is not tempted to enter it because he is stopped by the power and presence of the sculpture.

On the next floor, after the pastel on paper from 1989, we discover a work from 1967, made with rope and two thin fragments of steel painted yellow. The angular piece made of black thread is a work created for the first time. It plays on the idea of musicality and space opened and closed by a series of vertical lines.

In a similar way, the central piece, composed of 10 vertical colored lines, delimits a space that is both opened and closed, and invites the viewer to enter into it.

« Fred Sandback is a marginal and radical figure in the challenging of the object of art that took place as of the second half of the 1960s. By the extreme reduction of means that his sculpture brings into play, by its

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uncompromising principle, the work of Fred Sandback asserts itself as an ultimate reiteration of the idea of sculpture, pushed to the verge of its own disappearance. Constantly renewing itself within the strict constraints of its own rules, Fred Sandback's art is viewed as the evanescent end of one tradition of modern sculpture.» (Valérie Mavridorakis in her monograph « Fred Sandback or Occam's Razor »)