

Notes

1. Fred Sandback, "Remarks on my Sculpture 1966–1986," *Fred Sandback Sculpture 1966–1986*, (Mannheim: Kunsthalle, 1986), p. 12.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., pp. 12–13.
4. Ibid., p. 13.
5. Sandback and a friend coined the term to define space that was "literal, flat-footed and everyday. The idea was to have the work right there along with everything else in the world, not up on a spatial pedestal. The term also involved the idea of utility—that a sculpture was there to be

- actively engaged, and it had utopian glimmerings of art and life happily cohabitating." (Ibid).
6. Fred Sandback, quoted in *74 Front Street: The Fred Sandback Museum, Winchendon, Massachusetts* (New York: Dia Art Foundation, 1982), p. 4.
  7. While a student at Yale School of Art and Architecture, in 1967 Sandback took courses from both Robert Morris and Donald Judd.
  8. Fred Sandback, quoted in *74 Front Street*, p. 4.
  9. Ibid.

Selected Bibliography

*Fred Sandback* (Zurich: Kunsthau, 1985).  
*Fred Sandback: Diagonal Construction/ Broken Lines. Skulpturen und Zeichnungen* (Hannover: Kestner-Gesellschaft, 1987).  
*Fred Sandback Sculpture* (New Haven and Houston: Yale University Art Gallery and Contemporary Arts Museum, 1991).

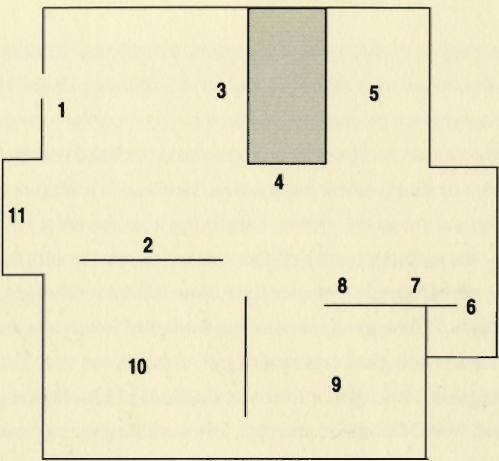
*Fred Sandback: Sculpture 1966–1986* (Mannheim: Kunsthalle, 1986).  
*Fred Sandback Vertical Constructions* (Münster: Westfälischer Kunstverein, 1987).  
*The Art of Fred Sandback: A Survey* (Krannert, Illinois: Krannert Art Museum, 1985).

Fred Sandback was born in Bronxville, New York, in 1943. After studying philosophy at Yale College, he entered the sculpture program at Yale University School of Art and Architecture, receiving a B.F.A., then, in 1969, an M.F.A.. Since the late sixties, Sandback has exhibited widely, both in the United States and abroad. Dia Center for the Arts has more than forty works by Sandback in its collection.

Support for this exhibition has been provided by the members of the Dia Art Council, the major annual support group of Dia Center for the Arts.

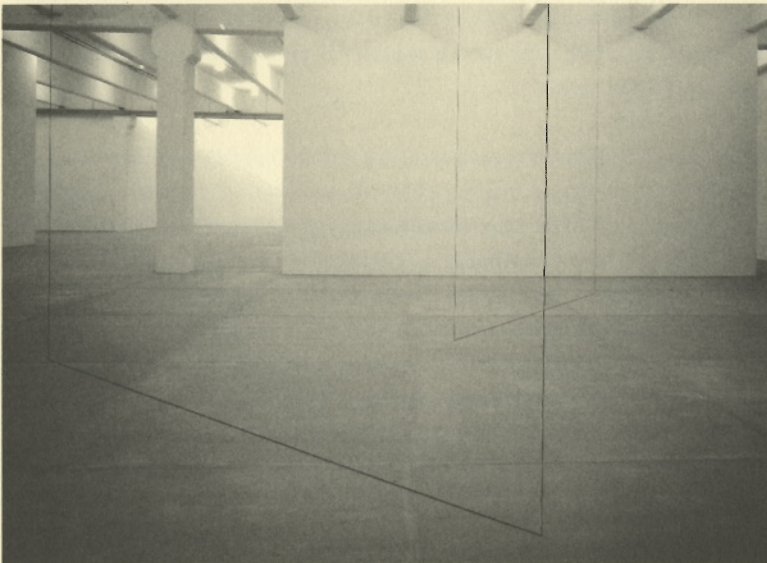
Mark Taylor will lecture on *Sculpture* on Thursday, April 3, 1997 at 6:30 pm at Dia.

Site Map and Checklist



1. **Untitled** 1992  
Acrylic yarn (terra cotta)  
Collection of the artist
2. **Untitled** 1977/1996  
Acrylic yarn (light blue)  
Collection of the artist
3. **Untitled** 1996  
Six-part vertical construction  
Acrylic yarn (white)  
Collection of the artist
4. **Untitled** 1996  
Bas relief, diptych  
Acrylic housepaint on wood panel  
Collection of the artist
5. **Untitled** 1977  
Four-part vertical construction  
Acrylic yarn (black)  
Collection Dia Center for the Arts
6. **Untitled** 1996  
Acrylic yarn (light brown, dark gray)  
Collection of the artist
7. **Untitled** 1996  
Bas relief  
Acrylic housepaint on wood panel  
Collection of the artist
8. **Untitled** 1992/96  
Two-part vertical construction  
Acrylic yarn (pink)  
Collection of the artist
9. **Untitled, diagonal (one of four)**  
1970/96  
Acrylic yarn (cardinal red)  
Collection of the artist
10. **Untitled** 1977  
Two-part vertical construction  
Acrylic yarn (black)  
Collection Dia Center for the Arts
11. **Untitled** 1996  
Bas relief, diptych  
Acrylic housepaint on wood panel  
Collection of the artist

Sculpture



Untitled, 1977. Photo: Cathy Carver

September 12, 1996–June 29, 1997

548 West 22nd Street, New York City

## FRED SANDBACK

### *Sculpture*

“The first sculpture I made with a piece of string and a little wire was the outline of a rectangular solid...lying on the floor. It was a casual act, but it seemed to open up a lot of possibilities for me,” Fred Sandback wrote in 1986, looking back over twenty years of activity to a seminal sculpture he had executed in 1966.<sup>1</sup> The key implications of that determining impulse remain at the heart of his practice today. For, in wanting to create sculpture that did not have an inside, he found through his seemingly “casual act” the means whereby he “could assert a certain place or volume in its full materiality without occupying and obscuring it.”<sup>2</sup>

For three decades, Sandback has pursued these governing insights with remarkable consistency and inventiveness, creating a body of work that is informed by a signature style and yet, as a result of the close interdependence of each work with the architectural site in which it is realized, ever different in its manifestations. Arguably still the best commentator on his work, the artist has elucidated his abiding wish “to be in some sort of constituting material relationship with my environment” in limpid forthright terms: “My feeling persists,” he avowed, in that same article from 1986, “that all my sculpture is part of a continuing attitude and relationship to things.... The sculptures address themselves to the particular space and time that they’re in, but it may be that the more complete situation I’m after is only constructed in time slowly, with the individual sculptures as its constituent parts.”<sup>3</sup>

Sandback has seamlessly integrated older with newer pieces for his odyssey through Dia’s second floor gallery. He orients and grounds the viewer in a particular place, a specific situation, by means of a stringent selection from his deliberately circumscribed lexicon—each sculpture newly parsed for the site. “I don’t feel that once a piece is made, then it’s done with,” he explained. “I continue to work with older schemata and formats, and often begin to get what I want out of them only after many reworkings. Though the same substructure may be used many times, it appears each time in a new light. It is the measure of the relative success of a piece, not necessarily that a new structure emerges, but that a familiar one attains, in its present manifestation, a particular vibrancy or actuality.”<sup>4</sup>

The character of any particular work is relative to its site, the proportions and forms subtly calibrated in response to the architectonics of the area each inhabits. Both the actual measurements and the tone or hue of the yarn may be adapted or altered as the artist

intuitively adjusts a work with each new presentation, to each new location. In these sculptures, space takes on not only definition but an incorporeal palpability, often to the point where the spectator concentrates less on the edges, on the yarn demarcating the forms, than on the planar or volumetric components contained within. Whether transparent geometries or simple linear trajectories, Sandback’s sculptures unequivocally occupy the same physical site as the viewer. Inhabiting what the artist has dubbed “pedestrian space”—the ordinary matter-of-fact space coextensive with that of the viewer and of the site—they reveal themselves over time, from different vantages, and according to different perspectives.<sup>5</sup> The apprehension of his work thus involves a process of bodily based viewing, a phenomenological experiencing of each piece in situ. Yet Sandback has been careful to distinguish his sculpture from certain kinds of installation practices, many of which also evolved from Minimalist precepts. His work is never environmental, if that implies disregarding the context. On the contrary, as he states: “It incorporates specific parts of the environment, but it’s always coexistent with that environment, as opposed to overwhelming or destroying that environment in favor of a different one.”<sup>6</sup>

Burgeoning during the heyday of Minimalism, Sandback’s work has distinguished and differentiated itself from that of his immediate forbears by his eschewal of the reductively literal and of the concrete as its primary mode of being.<sup>7</sup> He explores material relationships via the incorporeal rather than through physical matter—via the interplay of vacancy and volume—while recognizing that the illusory and the factual are inextricably intertwined. “Fact and illusion are equivalents,” he asserts: “Trying to weed one out in favor of the other is dealing with an incomplete situation.”<sup>8</sup> Elaborating on this, he stressed, “In no way is my work illusionistic. Illusionistic art refers you away from its factual existence towards something else. My work is full of illusions, but they don’t refer to anything.”<sup>9</sup>

In choosing from his repertoire those three-dimensional works to be included in this exhibition, Sandback eliminated early pieces which utilize metal rods or wire, focusing instead on his now preferred medium, acrylic yarn. While for him yarn in itself carries no significant connotations, its slightly fuzzy, soft contours conjure a less crisp, less rigid line than that produced by metal, just as its matte surfaces absorb rather than reflect light. Taken together these qualities permit the pieces made from yarn to coexist more subtly with their ambience than did their predecessors. The artist also excluded from this selection works employing multicolored lines of the kind that had preoccupied him during the mid-eighties, works which forged a highly dynamic relationship with their milieux.

Into this finely wrought mix, he has introduced an entirely new body of work. Composed sometimes of one, sometimes two panels, these small, painted, wooden works seem to assume an identity by drawing on his printmaking practices rather than on his three-dimensional sculpture. Compared both with his own plastic work as well as with prints made by his contemporaries, Sandback’s graphic work is remarkable for the attention he pays to the material process by means of which each print is generated. These reliefs similarly evoke their origins, through stressing both their physicality and their surface textures. By contrast, they are fundamentally different from his previous sculpture in that line is now conjured by drawing in negative—by elimination. Whether principally shadow or tone, it appears as an absence as distinct from an edge or linear trajectory. Although quite small in size, these reliefs have a deceptively ambiguous scale, largely because in cross-section the dimension of any single line is roughly commensurate with that of any drawn, nearby, in yarn. The reliefs, therefore, appear to be fragments of something vast—segments from a larger context, yet, at the same time, miniature objects.

Through the introduction of these new sculptures, Sandback has greatly enriched and complicated the language of this exhibition. Within a matrix that encompasses the strictly linear alongside planar and three-dimensional forms, free-standing and wall-based sculptures, together with hybrids that straddle these two zones, he has incorporated a body of work which exists on and in relation to its supporting planar surface and yet extends far beyond it into the surrounding space. Fact and illusion have been newly interwoven, their interdependence revealed in unexpected ways. Moreover, by reconfiguring once more the relationship between the empty and the substantive, Sandback has created a space that has a wholly different sense of corporeality to it from anything found hitherto in his art. In these reliefs, he persuades us that the apparition of space derives not from the linear negative, but from the physical plane between these gaps. Given that these linear trajectories do not inhabit a single plane but overlap, and hence exist in depth, space for the first time in Sandback’s art seems to have neither boundaries nor limits.