

ARTISTS AT  
BENNINGTON

SUMMER  
1980

**ARTISTS AT  
BENNINGTON**

exhibition september 6 to october 12

**SUMMER  
1980**

Bennington College  
Bennington, Vermont

Beth Rowe,  
Director  
Artists at Bennington

participating artists:  
Vivien Abrams  
Lauren Ewing  
Heide Fasnacht

Alan Scarritt  
Rudy Serra  
Vladimir Urban

## Foreword

The show, "Artists at Bennington, Summer, 1980" is the result of eight weeks of work by six artists. The artists were invited to spend the summer doing their work and were encouraged to use the grounds of Bennington as well as the extensive facilities. In addition, it provided the opportunity for artists of diverse backgrounds to exchange ideas and to interact with composers, musicians, writers and dancers who were involved in other workshops. The unique opportunity of a Bennington summer resulted in work that is large in scale, utilizes the Bennington landscape and is experimental for the artist.

The show continues the program into the school year by placing the final works on view in this exhibition which

will be combined with individual seminar visits. The students can then examine more closely the concerns and ideas of each artist. Bennington College has had a long history of nurturing young artists and new ideas. "Summer, 1980" marks the beginning of what is hoped will be an important element in Bennington's continued commitment to what is fresh, vital and risky in the arts.

Joseph S. Murphy  
President  
Bennington College

## Introduction

by Craig Owens

Interdisciplinarity is not the calm of an easy security; it begins effectively (as opposed to the mere expression of a pious wish) when the solidarity of the old disciplines breaks down—perhaps even violently, via the jolts of fashion—in the interests of a new object and a new language neither of which has a place in the field of the sciences that were to be brought peacefully together, this unease in classification being precisely the point from which it is possible to diagnose a certain mutation. The mutation in which the idea of the work seems to be gripped must not, however, be over-estimated: it is more in the nature of an epistemological slide than of a real break...Over against the traditional notion of the work, for long—and still—conceived in a, so to speak, Newtonian way, there is now the requirement of a new object, obtained by the sliding or overturning of former categories.

Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," 1971

Until recently, artists identified themselves in terms of the objective, material factors of a specific medium: if you manipulated pigment across flat surfaces, then you were a painter; extended matter into space, a sculptor; strung words together in metrical or sonorous patterns, a poet. These conventional categories, into which aesthetic activity has been parsed since the Renaissance, were rarely if

ever questioned—except, of course, by Marcel Duchamp, whose multiplicity of effort and confusion of genre anticipated much that is "new" in recent art. Duchamp's career, his passage from painting to sculpture, to film and photography and, finally, outside of art to chess, confounds such labels as "painter" or "sculptor;" nor do these designations sit comfortably on the shoulders of the six young artists whose work is assembled in this exhibition. Alan Scarriff, for example, systematically investigates a single idea through a variety of mediums—drawing, photography, sound, video; Rudy Serra deliberately avoids the massiveness and verticality by which we recognize sculpture and appears instead to draw directly on the landscape; Lauren Ewing's use of text effectively blurs the distinctions which separate verbal from visual art.

The deliberate refusal of these artists to remain decorously within the parameters of specific aesthetic disciplines, their desire to make work which transgresses previously sacrosanct, aesthetic boundaries, may be traced to the pervasive disaffection with the terms and conditions of modernism which swept our culture in the late 1960s. At issue was the self-critical tendency of modernist works of art—Clement Greenberg's pronouncement "...that visual art should confine itself exclusively to what is given in visual experience, and make no reference to anything given in other orders of experience..." which he justified

according to an obsolete principle of "scientific consistency." This was, however, accepted as dogma in even our most advanced art schools, where it was and continues to be taught as such.

As it emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, modernism in the arts was conceived in direct opposition to academicism; when neoclassicism had congealed into a set of prescriptive rules for the production of "acceptable" works, progressive artists like Manet and Courbet abandoned ship. Barely a century later, however, modernism itself had become a set of academic formulas, and artist after artist withdrew their allegiance from it. Advancement in art would no longer result from the internal recasting of the old disciplines, painting and sculpture, but rather from their confrontation with new mediums and working methods. Thus, many artists defected to photography; others investigated the interrelations between different modalities of art. Mediums whose aesthetic potential remained uncharted, such as video, were opened to exploration; and artists began to write, not in order to explain their works, as modernist artists had done, but to claim writing as yet another arena of aesthetic activity. As artists move with increasing freedom from painting and sculpture to performance, film and video, photography, sound, and writing, it becomes apparent that the aesthetic field has undergone an irreversible

mutation, and that a new period in the history of art has been initiated.

Such multidisciplinary is characteristic of the post-modern art of the Bennington Six, but it represents, as Barthes suggests above, a mutation rather than a rupture. The term post-modernism implies, in fact, continuity through change. When these artists explore and combine different mediums, they do so without compromising the essential integrity of each; they also display an acute sense of history and reject the notion of the tabula rasa, through which many modernists proclaimed their intention to break decisively with the past. If these artists erect their work on the ruins of modernism, they nevertheless display a defensively recuperative attitude towards it. Like Levi-Strauss's bricoleur, they pick the ruins of a discredited system for shards and fragments that might, through reinterpretation, rearrangement, be reclaimed for the present.

One of the major innovations of late modernistic painting was the shaped canvas, a development of the idea that everything on the surface of a painting should refer to its structure, that image and shape should coincide. The "discovery" of this device is most commonly attributed to Frank Stella, but by the early seventies Stella himself had abandoned it, suggesting that it was exhausted and left no further room for development. Vivien Abrams, however, continues to work this area, exploiting its implicit three-dimensionality, thereby challenging

painting's confinement to two dimensions. Abrams is not, however, concerned with formal coincidence but with the surface as a carrier of information (a concern she shares with several other members of the Bennington Six). Through an intricate network of repetitions, correspondences, and cross-references, she supplants the purely visual concerns of the recent past with conceptual, intellectual ones. Abrams solicits the mind as well as the eye: her diptychs and triptychs demand to be read as well as seen, and thus shift the activity of viewing from passive contemplation to active engagement.

Heide Fasnacht also attempts to shake viewers from their traditional passivity by inviting them to participate physically in the arrangement of her work. The eight black walls of her Aperture, derived from the aperture of a camera, are mounted on wheels so that they can be moved from a position of closure and containment to one of expansive openness. Because Aperture has no fixed arrangement, it can be seen as deriving from Robert Morris's modular sculptures from the mid-sixties, such as Continuous Project Altered Daily, which, as its title suggests, was rearranged daily by the artist. Fasnacht, however, exploits the possibility of viewer modification. Unlike much contemporary art which attempts to manipulate the viewer and program response, her work solicits the viewer as collaborator. Aperture can, in fact, be read as an allegory of collaboration, of

the way in which we ourselves conspire in the generation of our own confinement or freedom.

This collaboration of external forces is characteristic of post-modern art in general and marks a deliberate rejection of the rhetoric of autonomy and self-sufficiency which accompanied modernist art. Post-modern works are frequently site-specific, embedded in the place where we encounter them, as Rudy Serra's Penbroke, five graceful, understated terraces set directly into the hills flanking the main approach to the college. Serra's terraces are graphic markers of place which record the pitch of each slope and echo the configuration of its ridge. His work thus stands in a dialectical relationship with its site: while the configuration of each part is given by its position in the landscape, the work also extracts the pictorial potential of the site. Since the elements which comprise the work are revealed to us only gradually as we move through the landscape, they also function to chart our passage through it.

Like Serra, Alan Scarritt marks directly onto the world, but he inscribes his works onto architectural space, the walls and floor of the gallery itself. This working method, anticipated by Sol LeWitt's wall drawings, effectively incorporates context into work, thereby exposing the myth of the gallery or museum as a neutral container for art. Trained as a physicist, Scarritt thus conforms to the demand of Einsteinian science that the relativity of frames of

reference be included in the object under scrutiny.

Scarritt's installation in the Usdan Gallery, Extending My Reach—two symmetrical spirals, the proportions of which were determined by the breadth of the artist's reach and the diameter of his head—is atypical, since the artist invariably supplements such visual demonstrations with sound-works, which amplify and extend their concerns. So as not to overwhelm other works installed in the same gallery, Scarritt's sound-work has been consigned to a separate location in the building. The two should, however, be experienced as a single work.

The site-specificity of both Serra's and Scarritt's work is, in part, a response to the homelessness of modernist painting and sculpture, to the crisis of the portable art work which, made for the museum, lacks any real relation to the time and place in which it is encountered. Vladimir Urban also treats the theme of placelessness, but in terms of personal history. Urban is a product of the American art system; he lives in his van, travelling from commission to commission—a nomadic lifestyle imposed upon the artist by a society which views art as something imposed upon a site from without, rather than as an outgrowth of it. Urban's asphalt diptych, Daroga (Road), a proposal for a monumental site work to be installed in the American desert and visible in its entirety only from satellites, is an emblem of this radical lack of place

which infects contemporary society. Suspended between image and diagram, its two halves circle endlessly, onanistically about their vacant centers, twin emblems of frustrated desire.

Sculpture was, of course, originally figurative ornament or decoration annexed to architecture; its detachment for its architectural base is in large measure responsible for its loss of place. In recent years, however, a number of artists—Alice Aycock, Donna Dennis, Siah Armajani, among others—have attempted to return to origins in works that rely upon an architectural idiom. These artists all exploit architecture's capacity to embody ideology, power, wealth, or austerity; in her Power House for Adam Smith, however, Lauren Ewing utilizes architecture primarily as container, a vehicle for content, which the self-referentiality of modernist art appeared to preclude. The literal contents of her Power House—a pair of pseudo-machines and a photograph of factory workers—allude to its thematic content, the American silk industry. Ewing's architecture also functions as the support for a verbal inscription, which is an allegory of capitalism, of its fundamentally duplicitous character: when the silk worm was imported to America, it brought with it the destructive gypsy moth—hence Ewing's invocation of "contagion."

Although installed in the Bennington landscape, Ewing's work is not site-specific; this is underscored by the

fact that an exact duplicate, supplemented with videotapes of the work in Bennington, is currently installed in the galleries of The New Museum in New York City. Rather, the text provides context; it locates the work within the particular nexus of political, social, and historical concerns addressed by all Ewing's work.

Beyond its purely formal similarities—the frequent invocation of the double, the pervasive use of black, a recurrent recourse to drawing—all this work manifests a common intention: to expand aesthetic practice beyond the narrow categories to which it has been consigned for centuries. This makes it particularly appropriate to Bennington College, which has always been identified with an avant-garde spirit of experimentation in the arts. Thus, the work of the Bennington Six should prove most valuable to art students as a supplement to their formal class work, not by inspiring imitation, but by indicating the range of possibilities that is open before them in the era of post-modernism.

## Vivien Abrams

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Vivien Abrams was born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1946 and now lives in New York City. She was graduated from Carnegie-Mellon University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and in 1971 received an M.F.A. from Instituto Allende, San Miguel

de Allende, Gto., Mexico. Ms. Abrams has lectured at the Akron Art Institute and at the Art Research Institute, Kansas City.

### Selected Solo Exhibitions:

- 1980 New Gallery of Contemporary Art, Cleveland, Ohio
- 1977 New Gallery of Contemporary Art, Cleveland, Ohio
- 1976 Akron Art Institute, Akron, Ohio

### Selected Group Exhibitions:

- 1980 "Small Works," New York University, New York City
- 1979 Soho Center for Visual Artists, New York City
- 1979 "New York Now," Phoenix Museum of Art, Phoenix, Arizona
- 1978 "New Talent," Marilyn Pearl Gallery, New York City
- 1977 Cleveland Museum of Art
- 1976 "Materials and Techniques of 20th Century Artists," Cleveland Museum of Art
- 1976 "Ohio Women Artists, Past and Present," Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio
- 1975 New Gallery of Contemporary Art, Cleveland, Ohio

### Awards and Commissions:

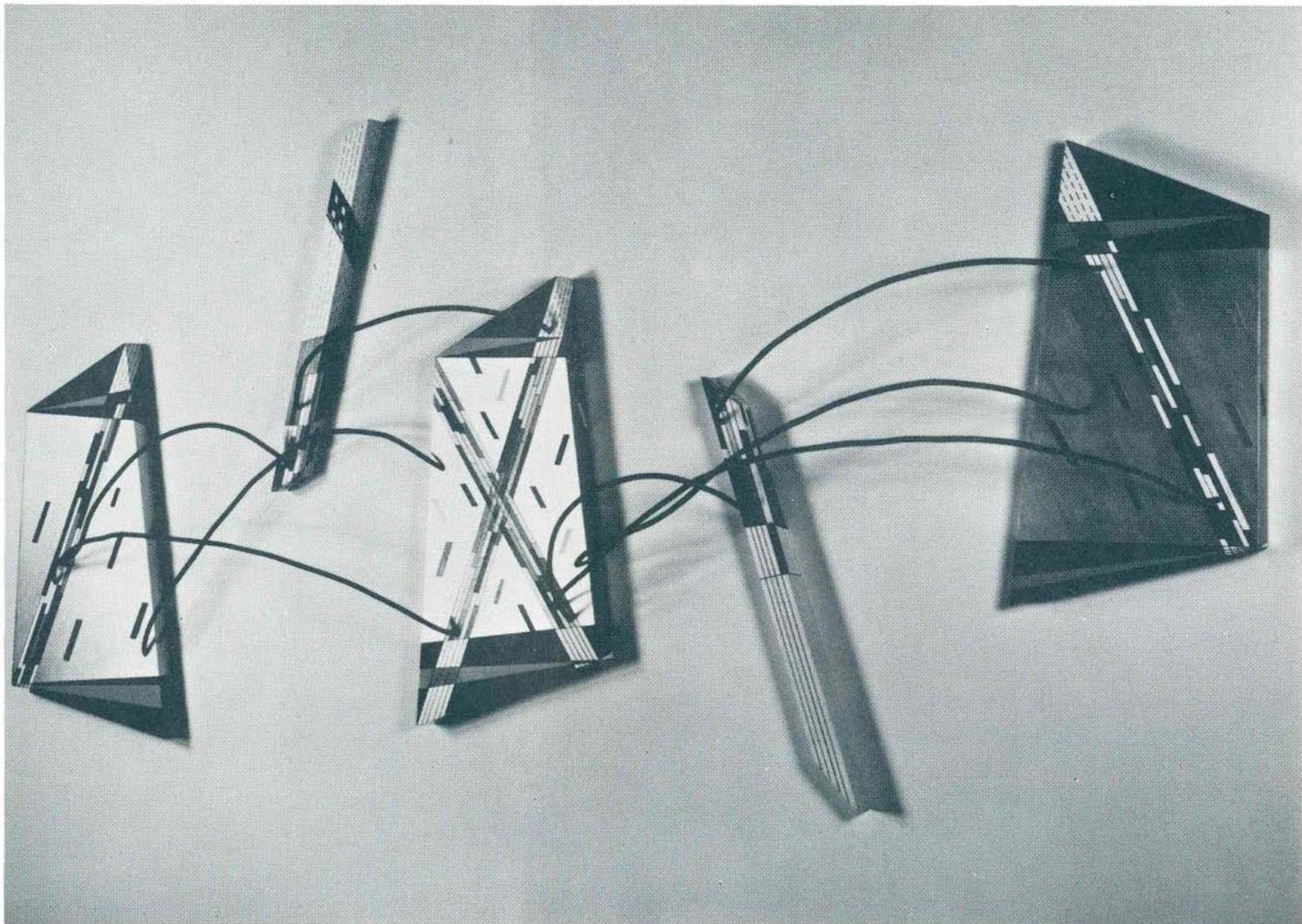
- 1980 Commission for A.T. & T.
- 1979 Special Mention in Painting, Cleveland Museum of Art, 60th May Show
- 1977 Special Mention in Graphics, Cleveland Museum of Art, 58th May Show

Vivien Abrams

Bennington Uncropping: Lightning Crossover, 1980

Acrylic and enamel on wood and masonite with

rubber hose, 58 3/4"×112 1/2"×12"



## Lauren Ewing

Lauren Ewing was born in Fort Knox, Kentucky in 1946. She was graduated from Skidmore College, received an M.A. from Indiana State University and an M.F.A. from the University of California. Ms. Ewing is presently living in

New York City but spent this past year as visiting artist at the University of California at Irvine. She is on the art faculty at Rutgers and has taught at the Rhode Island School of Design and Williams College.

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### Selected Solo Exhibitions:

1980 Institute for Art and Urban Resources, P.S. #1, Queens, New York  
1975 Artists' Space, New York City  
1974 Williams College Museum, Williamstown, Massachusetts  
1973 University of California at Santa Barbara

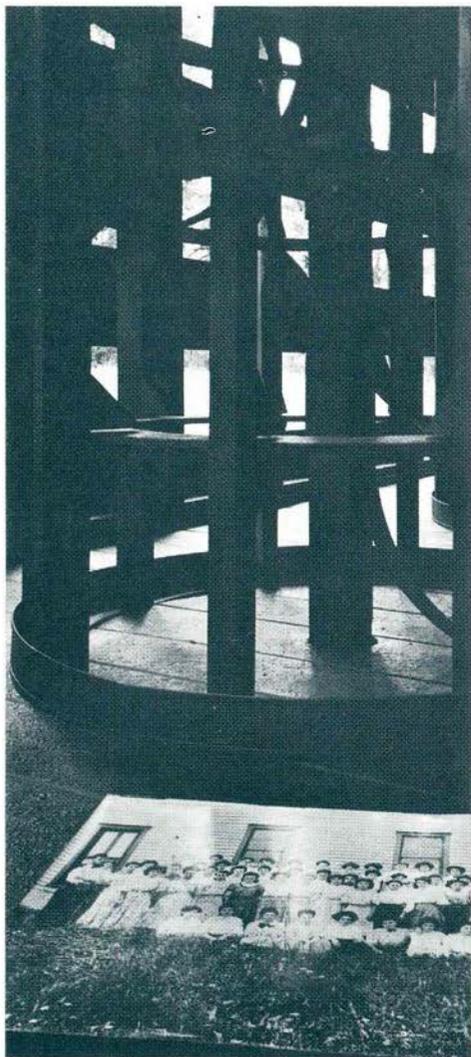
### Selected Group Exhibitions:

1980 "Marking Black," Bronx Museum of the Arts, Bronx, New York  
Video Exhibition, Franklin Furnace, New York City  
Video Exhibition, The Mudd Club, New York City  
"Sculpture 80," Maryland Art Institute, Baltimore, Maryland  
"Weber Gallery Invitational V," John Weber Gallery, New York City  
"Investigations: Probe-Structure-Analysis," The New Museum, New York City, Companion piece to work constructed at Bennington College  
"Architectural Reference," Los Angeles Institute for Contemporary Art and the University of California  
1979 "Statements/Architecture," New York University Gallery, New York City  
"Artists' Prints," New York University Gallery, New York City  
1977 112 Greene Street, New York City  
1975 "25 to 2000," N.A.M.E. Gallery, Chicago, Illinois

### Awards and Commissions:

1980 National Endowment for the Arts, Fellowship

Lauren Ewing  
A POWERHOUSE FOR ADAM SMITH, 1980  
Wood, 12'x16'x8',  
interior structures 8'x40" diameter



## Heide Fasnacht

Heide Fasnacht was born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1951. She received a B.F.A. from the Rhode Island School of Design in a self-designed sculpture program and in 1979 she was a participant in a Master's program at Hunter College.

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### Selected Solo Exhibitions:

1979 Institute for Art and Urban Resources, P.S. #1, Queens, New York  
1976 Vehicule Gallery, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

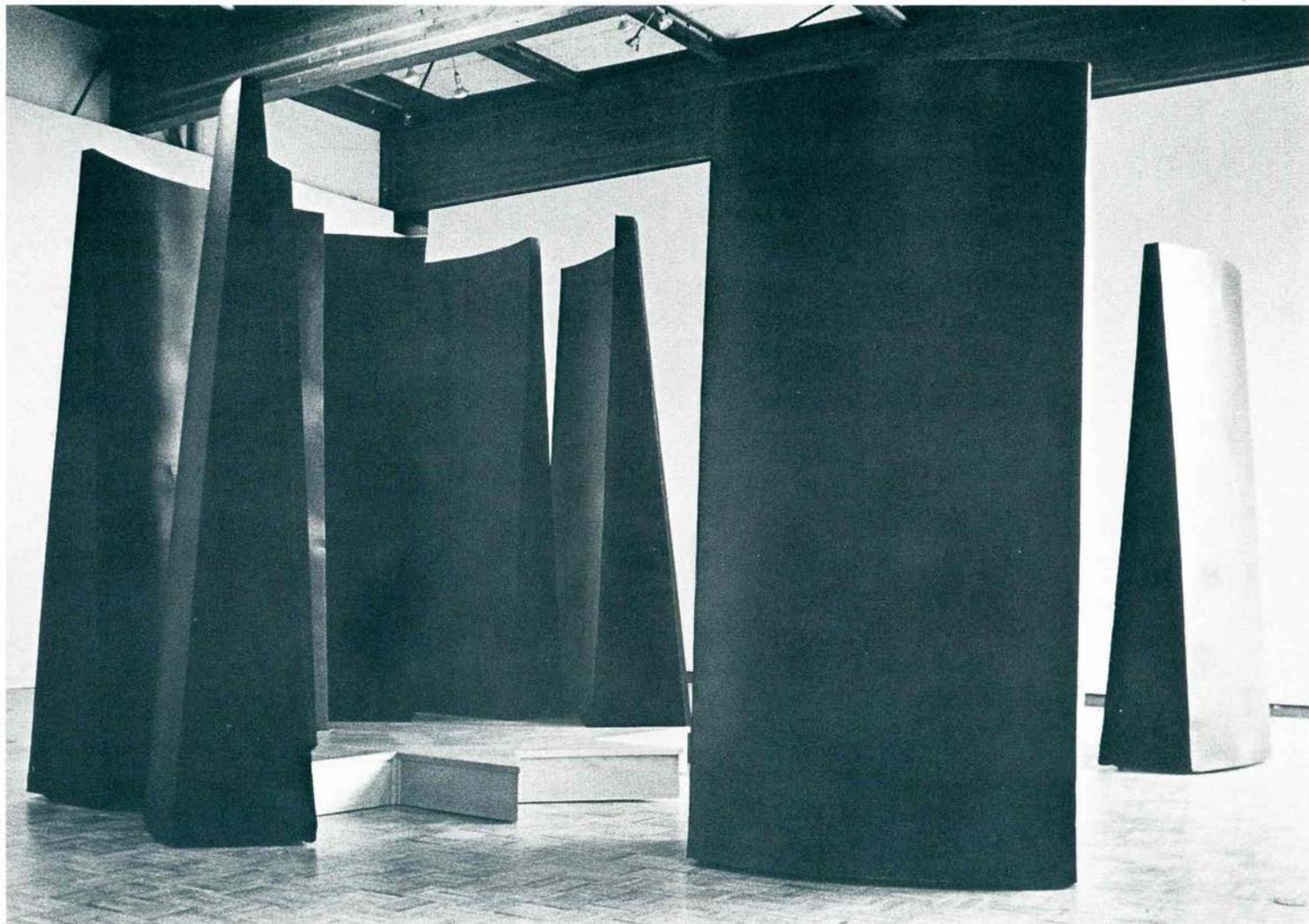
### Selected Group Exhibitions:

1980 "Art on the Beach," Creative Time, New York City  
1980 "Paperworks '80," Hudson River Museum  
1978 "14th Annual Avant-Garde Festival of N.Y.," M.I.T. Visual Research Center, Boston, Massachusetts  
1978 "Artists' Books U.S.A.," Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, California  
1977 "IX International Encounter on Video," Mexico City, Tokyo  
1977 "Documenta VI," Kassel, Germany  
1973 Palazzo Cenci Gallery, Rome

### Awards and Commissions:

1980 National Endowment for the Arts, Art in Public Places, Planning Grant  
1979 Committee for the Visual Arts, Grant

Heide Fasnacht  
Aperture (Reconstruction from Bits,) 1980  
Wood, Masonite, Height 8', variable dimensions



## Alan Scarritt

Alan Scarritt was graduated from Brown University. He also studied at the Rhode Island School of Design and received an M.F.A. from California College of Arts and Crafts. Mr. Scarritt was born in Oak Park, Illinois in 1945 and now resides in

New York City. He has taught at San Francisco Art Institute and San Francisco State University and was the founder of Site, Cite, Sight, Inc. in San Francisco.

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### Selected Solo Exhibitions:

1979 Institute for Art and Urban Resources, The Clocktower, New York City  
And/Or Gallery, Seattle, Washington  
San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, California  
1978 Target, Oakland, California  
1977 Site, Cite, Sight, Inc., San Francisco, California  
1975 Baxter Gallery, California Institute of Technology  
1973 Warren Benedek Gallery, New York City

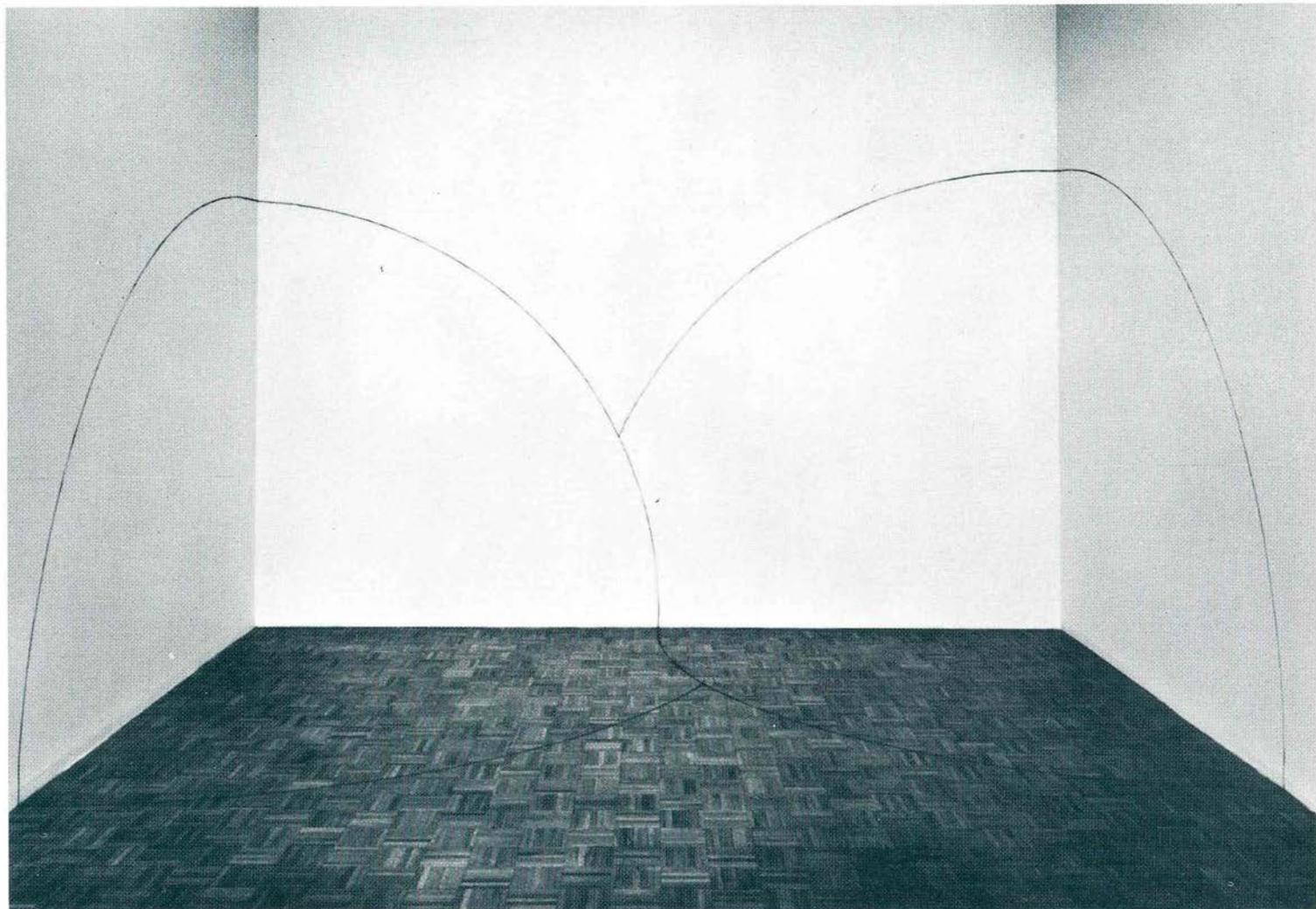
### Selected Group Exhibitions:

1980 "Space, Time, and Sound, The Seventies," San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, California  
1979 Cochise Fine Arts, Bisbee, Arizona  
1977 "Send/Receive Satellite Network," First live, two-way video transmission via satellite between artists in New York and San Francisco  
San Francisco Art Institute Annual, San Francisco, California  
1975 University Art Museum, Berkeley, California  
1974 "South of the Slot," 63 Buluxome Street, San Francisco, California  
1973 Richmond Art Center, Richmond, California  
1971 "Through the Photograph to Painting," San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, California

### Awards and Commissions:

1979 National Endowment for the Arts, Fellowship  
1971 Richmond Art Center, Curatorial Fellowship

Alan Scarritt  
Extending My Reach, 1980  
Charcoal, 14'8"×10'×10'



## Rudy Serra

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Rudy Serra was born in 1948 in San Francisco and is now residing in New York City. He has studied at San Francisco State College and in 1974 received an M.F.A. from the University of California at Berkeley. He is presently on

the art faculty at the University of Connecticut at Storrs.

### Selected Solo Exhibitions:

1980 University of Houston, Houston, Texas

1979 "Add In," California Gallery, San Francisco, California

1978 "Owens Draw," Site, Cite, Sight Gallery, San Francisco, California

### Selected Group Exhibitions:

1979 "Rudy Serra, Bill Warehim, Mark diSuvero," Hansen Fuller Gallery, San Francisco, California

1978 "Artists Working in Wood," University of California at Davis

1977 "Two Outdoor Sites," San Francisco, California

1976 "Bay Area Sampling," Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, California

1975 "Whitney Biennial," Whitney Museum of Contemporary Art, New York City

### Awards and Commissions:

1978 National Endowment for the Arts, Fellowship

1976 National Endowment for the Arts, Fellowship

Rudy Serra  
Penbroke, 1980  
Asphalt, 6"×30'×5'  
5 sections



## Vladimir T. Urban

Vladimir Urban was born in New Jersey in 1952. He was graduated from Lycoming College and attended Rutgers University and the Academy of Fine Arts, University of Vienna, Austria.

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### Selected Solo Exhibitions:

1980 Hihram T. Walker Gallery,  
Provincetown, Massachusetts  
1979 N.A.C., New York City  
1978 New Jersey Theatre Forum, Circle  
Gallery, Plainfield, New Jersey

### Selected Group Exhibitions:

1980 Artpark, Lewiston, New York  
New Jersey State Museum, Trenton,  
New Jersey  
14 Sculptors Gallery, New York City  
Hihram T. Walker Gallery, Provincetown,  
Massachusetts  
Long Point Gallery, Provincetown,  
Massachusetts  
1979 Marie Pellicone Gallery, New York  
City

### Awards and Commissions:

1980 Resident Artist, Artpark, Lewiston,  
New York  
1979 Commission for Lehrer King  
Associates  
1979 New Jersey State Council of the  
Arts, Fellowship

Vladimir Urban  
Daroga, 1980  
Tar, Steel, Wood, 9' diameter, each disc



## Catalogue of the Exhibition

Given dimensions are height by width  
by depth

### Vivien Abrams

Bennington Uncropping: Lightning  
Crossover, 1980  
painted construction  
acrylic and enamel on wood and  
masonite with rubber hose  
58 3/4"×112 1/2"×12"

Memory Structures: Parapraxis, 1980  
painted construction  
acrylic on wood  
75 3/8"×128 3/4"×3 1/2"

### Lauren Ewing

A POWERHOUSE FOR ADAM SMITH, 1980  
sculpture  
wood  
12'×16'×8'

A POWERHOUSE FOR ADAM SMITH, 1980  
series of 7 color photographs,  
installation Bennington College  
4 photographs, 16"×20",  
3 photographs, 20"×13"

A POWERHOUSE FOR ADAM SMITH, 1980  
drawing  
black crayon  
40"×92"

### Heide Fasnacht

Aperture (Reconstruction from Bits),  
1980  
sculpture  
wood and masonite  
8'×variable dimensions

### Alan Scariff

Extending My Reach, 1980  
charcoal  
14'8"×10'×10'

Finger Feed, 1980  
photowork  
contact photograph  
8 1/2"×9 1/2"

Manual Focus, 1980  
photowork  
photograph  
8"×10"

Drawn and Quartered, 1980  
sound installation

### Rudy Serra

Penbroke, 1980  
sculpture  
asphalt  
5 sections, 6"×30'×5'

Penbroke, 1980  
series of 5 photographs, installation  
Bennington College  
each 8"×10"  
1 color photograph, 16"×20"

Penbroke, 1980  
series of 5 drawings  
charcoal  
each 24"×36"

### Vladimir T. Urban

Daroga, 1980  
sculpture  
tar, steel and wood  
2 discs, each 9' diameter

Daroga, 1980  
color photograph  
10 3/4"×13 3/4"

Daroga, 1980  
drawing  
charcoal  
8 1/4"×11"

All photographs are by Jonathan Barber