

T H E  
**SCULPTURAL  
MEMBRANE**



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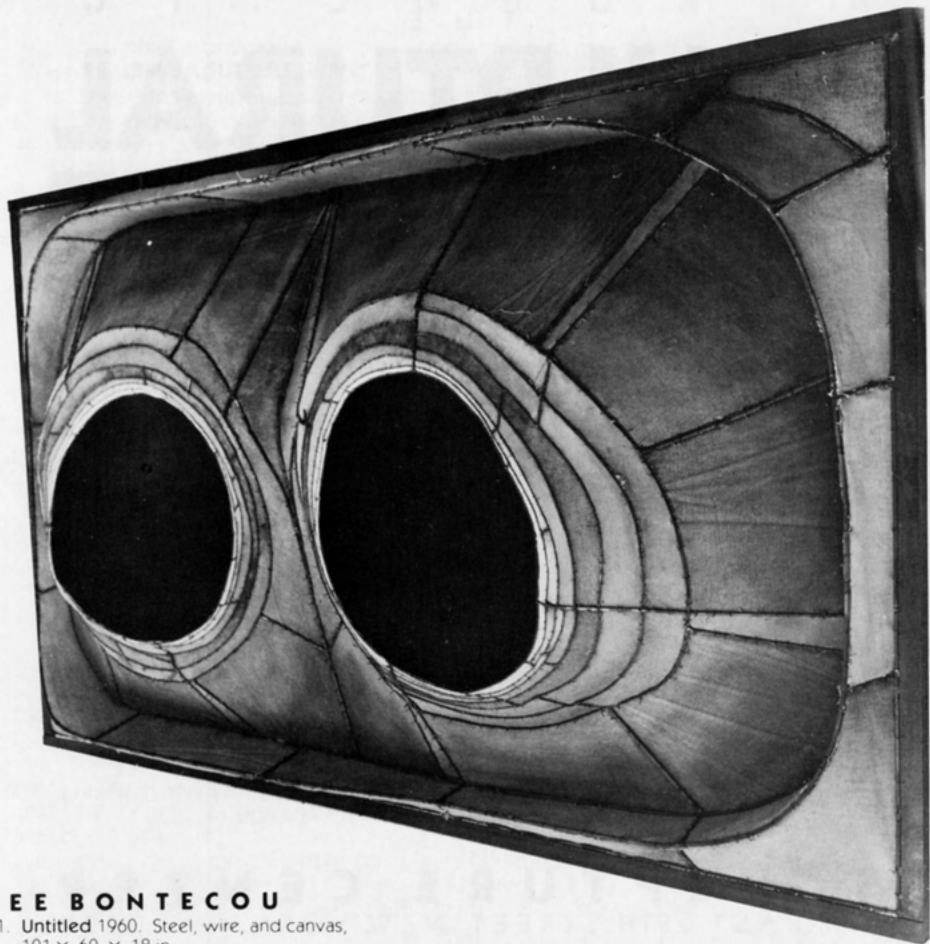
L E E B O N T E C O U  
RALPH DICAPUA ROSEMARY MAYER  
NICK GHIZ CREIGHTON MICHAEL  
CAROL HEPPER STEVE WOOD

CURATOR: DOUGLAS DREISHPOON

**NOVEMBER 8 - DECEMBER 2, 1986**

PARTIALLY FUNDED BY THE NEW YORK COUNCIL ON THE ARTS, EUGENE AND ESTELLE FERKAUF  
FOUNDATION, AND SAMUEL AND MAY RUDIN FOUNDATION, INC.

**SCULPTURE CENTER**  
167 EAST 69TH STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10021



**LEE BONTECOU**

1. *Untitled* 1960. Steel, wire, and canvas,  
101 × 60 × 18 in.

# I N T R O D U C T I O N

The idea of organizing an exhibition of contemporary sculpture around a "skin and bones" theme developed over a period of two years. **THE SCULPTURAL MEMBRANE** focuses on objects made by covering a skeletal armature with an equivalent "skin," and conceptually, this idea has diverse precedents. Some of its earliest prototypes are native Indian wigwams and tepees; later aerodynamic extensions include gliders and zeppelins. That such an approach is the modus operandi for a group of contemporary sculptors sparked my curiosity, and through numerous studio visits the parameters of this idea were defined and clarified. I would like to thank the artists for their time and cooperation; at the Sculpture Center, Marian Griffiths and Skipp Cooper for their support and assistance; Barbara Knight for designing this catalogue; the New York State Council on the Arts, Eugene and Estelle Ferkauf Foundation, and the Samuel and May Rudin Foundation, Inc. for providing funds that permitted the realization of this exhibition and its catalogue.

From the initial conception of this project Lee Bontecou offered an obvious precedent, and her inclusion was a deliberate choice.<sup>1</sup> Several sculptors candidly praised her monumental assemblages, and the stylistic affinities between her work and theirs was clear enough. Bontecou's inclusion, however, does raise some questions, most of which pertain to her withdrawal from the New York art scene after a meteoric rise to recognition during the 1960s. While such questions and their implications are certainly relevant, they lie outside the scope of this essay. Of greater pertinence here is her work's historical significance and its impact on selected contemporary extensions.

From about 1960 to 1974 Bontecou sustained a highly visible profile within the international art scene. Along with Louise Bourgeois, Eva Hesse, Louise Nevelson, and Ruth Vollmer, Bontecou was one of a small group of women making experimental sculpture during this period. Bontecou's work, like the others', evolved out of Minimalism, but subverted its formal purity through varied materials and associative images. From her first one-person exhibition at Leo Castelli's in 1960, Bontecou continued to receive mixed reviews. One critic lauded her sculpture for its "primitive, oppressive, and unmitigated individuality," while another considered her "a very limited artist using a dead-end image that she can only repeat, elaborate and endlessly re-explore."<sup>2</sup>

Provocative and difficult, Bontecou's reliefs elicited a host of descriptions. They were variously described by writers as, "blowers, extinct volcanoes, craters, **vagina dentata**, crustaceans, carapaces, the 'skeletons' of buildings and boats, the 'flesh' of sails and tents, flying machines, fuselages, orifices, obsessive, sado-masochistic, menacing, mysterious, forbidding," etc., and characterized as images that "extend from something as social as war to something as private as sex."<sup>3</sup> While most critics struggled to elucidate these strange pieces, Bontecou preferred them untitled, and her personal statements reinforced

Fulton Street fish market during the early morning hours shows an imaginative quest for sculptural materials akin to Bontecou's jaunts to Canal Street and Ghiz's paper chase.

Hepper spent most of her adolescence in South Dakota. As a biographical footnote this fact is worth mentioning for several reasons. Her materials have always been products of the natural environment, and her earliest work incorporated weathered bones and various hides. In this work she achieved an architectonic monumentality that evoked indigenous Indian shelters—tepees and wigwams—already mentioned as precedents. Her conception of an open wooden lattice between stretched skin achieves a spatial expanse and openness that, to my mind, recalls the Western Plains of her youth. Her abstract configurations are robust and uninhibited. Many dance. Rhythm and movement are integral aspects of Hepper's work, and some of her titles ("Three Stroke" and "Seven Stroke Roll") reflect her former involvement with drums and music.

The impetus for this extended series, which began with watercolors and drawings, was archaeological as well as formal. Mayer copies examples of ancient containers from books and at the same time researches their original functions and contexts. A scholarly preoccupation with context establishes a basis for the conceptualization of sculptural equivalents. Mayer's drawings and watercolors are faithful reproductions of specific pieces, while her sculptural counterparts, though modeled after ancient prototypes, distort specificity into highly eccentric shapes. Mayer, also uses skeins of wood as structural underpinnings. These thin struts, varying from ting and willow to cedar, have an inherent elasticity that permits bending and curving. For "skin" Mayer uses rag vellum that she fixes with rabbit glue. Her pieces are personal and anthropomorphic. There's a wonderful poetry in their warpage and distortion. The notion of vessel, as a container or resonator, has metaphorical implications that extend the meaning of this work.

Projection is a central characteristic of Creighton Michael's work. Many of his pieces veer off walls and suspend from ceilings. Their shapes appear streamlined. Internally, their latticework evokes the frames of lighter-than-air zeppelins and the skeletal membranes of birds' wings. The synthesis of geometry, technology, and nature within a single sculptural model alludes simultaneously to Constructivism and Surrealism. The images he generates, however, are ultimately more biologic than mechanistic, more intuitive than systematic. This distinction is significant because it underscores a unifying sensibility within this selected group. In Michael's case, the degree to which his work is inflected by imagination and free association is clearly seen in his charcoal and silverpoint drawings. (This is also true of DiCapua, Hepper, and Wood, all of whom produce spontaneous drawings on a monumental scale.) Diverse images, some figurative, others topographical, commingle within these intimate sketches, which highlight two central aspects of his work: associative innuendo and the subtle surface articulation of his sculpture. Like Ghiz and Wood, Michael paints and textures many of his pieces. By doing so he reinforces personality and touch.

An attitude towards making objects without preconception is a vital aspect of Steve

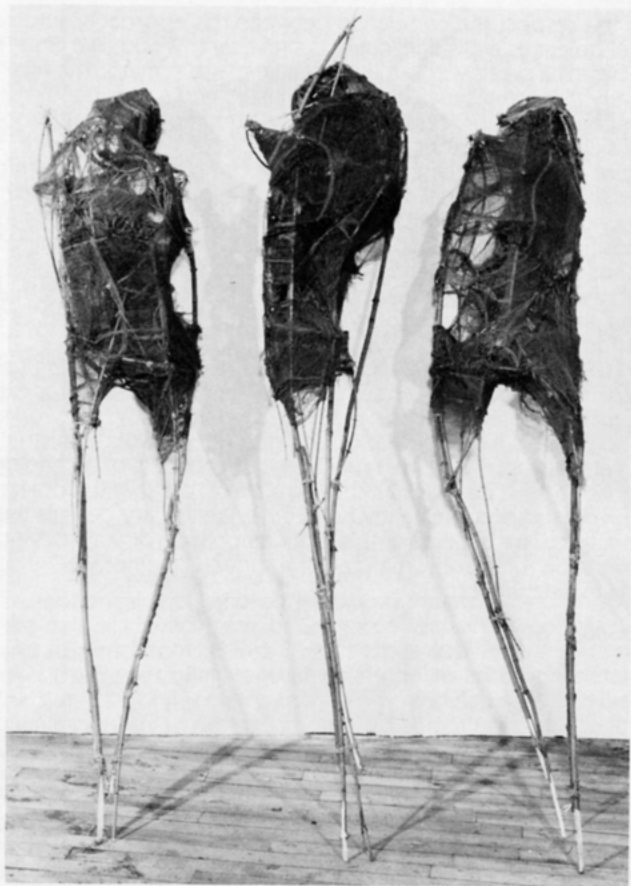
Wood's work. In this respect the correlation between this approach, automatic drawing, and the sculptural object as a biologic entity is significant. Wood, like Ghiz, Hepper, and Michael, usually begins a piece without a particular image in mind. The final object is arrived at intuitively through a series of hits and misses and a continuous manipulation of materials. The emphasis is on process, spontaneity, and improvisation. Wood uses polyester as his "skin," and he fabricates armatures out of wood and wire. Since 1983 he has made sculpture using these materials. Though recently he has shifted his priorities to work of a smaller scale and material orientation, for the purposes of this exhibition and its catalogue, his previous work is addressed. One could call these creations foreboding. Like unearthed remains from some paleolithic site, they evoke human and animal associations. They are vessels for long-forgotten feelings and sublimated emotions. Primitive yet strangely elegant, these ominous forms imply greater cycles of time, death and resurrection, deterioration and regeneration. For Wood they represent signposts of internal change and transformation.

**THE SCULPTURAL MEMBRANE** implies an attitude towards making sculpture, related as much to materials as to ideology, and within this theme each sculptor explores his/her own extensions and permutations. Besides a reductive simplicity, the works selected for this exhibition also possess a quality that can be described as pre-industrial. I'm not suggesting that materials used in certain pieces aren't products of technology, or that particular pieces don't have complex internal structures, but that the objects themselves are simply conceived and predominantly hand-built. Preliminary designs and models notwithstanding, constructional aspects of this work emphasize organic development over premeditated execution. Ultimately, the idea of a surface "membrane" grounds these sculptural objects in a natural order.

Douglas Dreishpoon  
October 1986

## NOTES

1. From about 1960 to 1969 Bontecou produced an extended series of monumental sculptural reliefs from a variety of materials and objects. **The Sculptural Membrane** focuses on work of a particular ilk and image. Pieces constructed around an elaborate scaffolding covered with canvas or fabric are the selected precedents for this theme, not her steel reliefs, assemblages layered with zippers and detritus, or her later vacuum-formed plastic fish and flowers.
2. Donald Judd, "Lee Bontecou," in *Arts*, 37 (Jan. 1963), p. 44; John Coplans, "Higgins, Price, Chamberlain, Bontecou, Westerman," in *Artforum*, 2 (Apr. 1964), p. 40.
3. These terms were compiled by Richard S. Field in *Prints and Drawings by Lee Bontecou* (Middletown, Connecticut: Davidson Art Center, Wesleyan University, 1975), p. 4.
4. "Sculpture: New Talent U.S.A.," in *Art in America*, 49 (1961), pp. 36-37.
5. Dorothy C. Miller, "Lee Bontecou," in *Americans 1963* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1963), p. 12.
6. Information on Bontecou's early work is taken from a lecture she delivered at the State University of New York, Purchase, on April 15, 1986.



**RALPH DICAPUA**

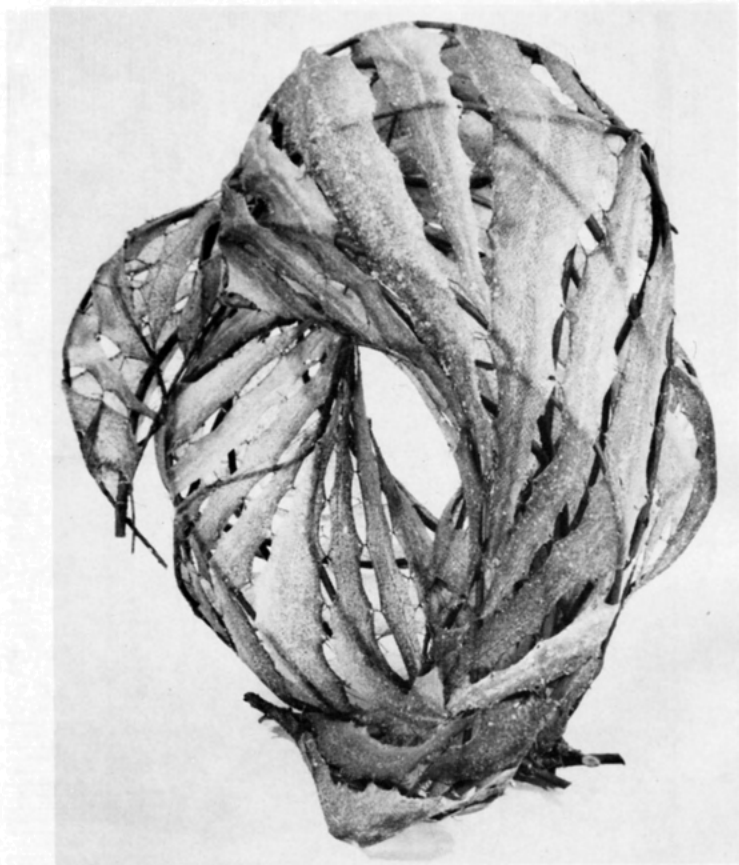
2. *Untitled* 1986. Fabric and wood, four units,  
each unit 72 x 20 x 20 in.





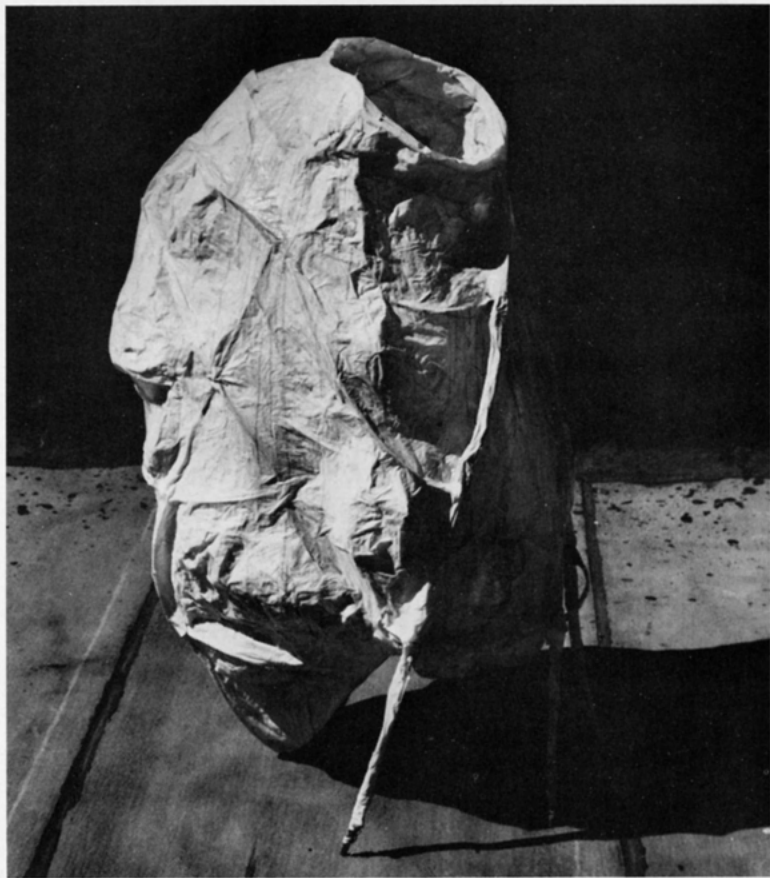
**NICK GHIZ**

7. *Theodora* 1985. Wood, wire mesh, paper, glue,  
and paint, 91 x 50 x 12 in.



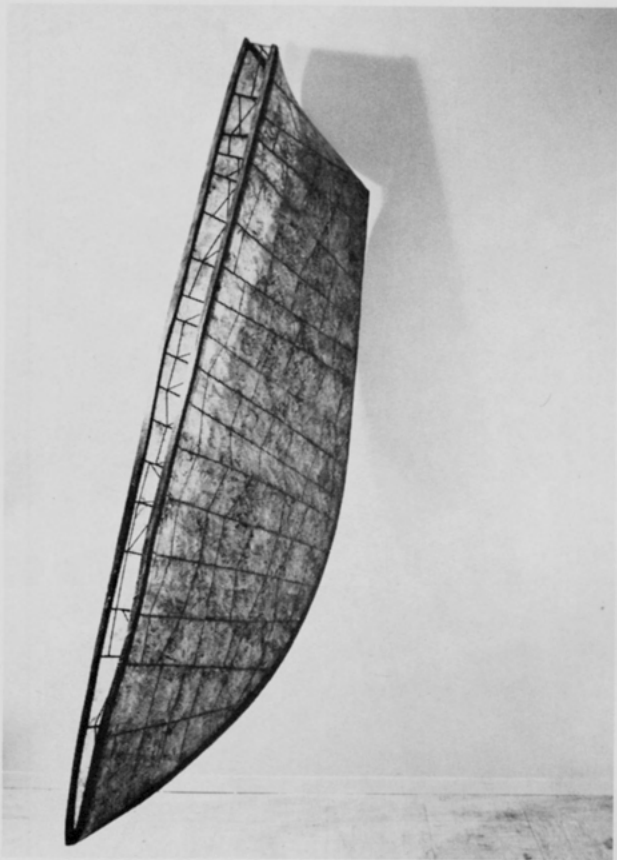
**CAROL HEPPER**

11. **Three Stroke Roll** 1986. Fish skin, copper wire, willow, wax linen thread, and pigment, 40 x 40 x 27 in.



**ROSEMARY MAYER**

16. **Standing Basket** 1985. Wood, rag vellum, and rabbit glue, 48 × 49 × 23 in.



**CREIGHTON MICHAEL**

19. *Blind Horn #5* 1985. Wood, paper, charcoal, brick dust, and acrylic, 84 x 8½ x 28½ in. Private Collection, New York



**STEVE WOOD**

25. Tycho 1985. Wood, wire, polyester, metal powders, and pigment, 84 x 25 x 11 in.  
Courtesy Baskerville/Watson Gallery, New York

## RALPH DICAPUA

### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1986** Merwin Gallery, Illinois Wesleyan University, Bloomington, IL.  
Manchester Community College, Manchester, CT.  
Winfisky Gallery, Salem State University, Salem, MA.
- 1985** **No Immunity**, Atrium Gallery, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT.  
**Social Vehicles/Individual Apparatus**, Sculpture and Drawings, Art Works Gallery, Hartford, CT.  
**Past Sensitivities/ Present Realities**, Sculpture and Sound Installation, Thornes Performance and Exhibition Gallery #3, Northampton, MA.
- 1984** **Information/ Too Much. Not Enough**, Sculpture and Sound Installation, Herter Gallery, Amherst, MA.  
**Cries of Isolation/ Whispers of What We've Left Behind**, Drawing and Sculpture, Berkshire Artisans Community Arts Center, Pittsfield, MA.
- 1983** **A Collective Effect/ Me, Myself and All of Us**, Performance, Herter Auditorium, Amherst, MA.  
**Three From the Back/ Covert Aggression**, Performance, Herter Auditorium, Amherst, MA.

### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1986** **Three Person Exhibition**, Zone Gallery, Springfield, MA.  
**Expression/ Oppression**, Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans, LA.  
**Evils of Power**, College of Visual and Performing Arts, Southeastern Massachusetts University, North Dartmouth, MA.  
Springfield Museum, Springfield, MA.
- 1985** Ariel Gallery, New York, NY.  
Berkshire Museum, Pittsfield, MA.
- 1985** **Artists for Survival**, Mobious Gallery, Boston, MA.
- 1984** **Drawings Uncovered**, Invitational Drawing Exhibition, Berkshire Artisans Community Center, Union Gallery, Amherst, MA.
- 1983** **Progressive Images**, Sculpture and Drawing, Union Gallery, Amherst, MA.

## NICK GHIZ

### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1979** Heidenberg Gallery, New York, NY.  
**1977** Hunter College Gallery, New York, NY.  
**1976** Notre Dame University, Baltimore, MD.

### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1986** **Transformations**, Richard Green Gallery, New York, NY.  
**Materials**, Segal Gallery, New York, NY.
- 1985** **Notions of Contemporary Surrealism**, Vanderwoude Tannebaum Gallery, New York, NY.  
**Figures**, The Institute for Art and Urban Resources, Project Studios One (P.S. 1), Long Island City, NY.
- 1984** **Installations on Broadway**, New York, NY.
- 1983** Brooklyn Army Terminal, Brooklyn, NY.
- 1980, 1979, 1978, 1977** Heidenberg Gallery, New York, NY.
- 1975** Grimaldis Gallery, New York, NY.

## CAROL HEPPER

### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1987** Dahl Fine Arts Center, Rapid City, SD. Traveled to South Dakota State University, Vermillion, SD.
- 1984** Ritz Gallery, South Dakota State University, Brookings, SD.
- 1982** The Institute for Art and Urban Resources, Project Studios One (P.S. 1), Long Island City, NY.  
WARM Gallery, Invitational Space, Minneapolis, MN. (Jerome Foundation National Competition)  
Coffman Gallery, University Of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.
- 1981** Brookings Cultural Center, Brookings, SD.
- 1980** Flagler College Gallery, St. Augustine, FL.
- 1979** Flagler College Gallery, St. Augustine, FL.

### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1986-87** **AMERICA: Art and the West**, Fine Arts Museum, Houston, Texas. Traveled to the Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, Australia. (Organized by the American Australian Foundation for the Arts).
- 1986** **Transformations**, Richard Green Gallery, New York, NY.  
**Materials**, Segal Gallery, New York, NY.
- 1985** **The Black Room, Civilization**, New York, NY.  
**Women of the American West**, The Bruce Museum, Greenwich, CT.
- 1984** **Sculpture Invitational**, University Galleries, South Dakota State University, Vermillion, SD.  
**West Coast Store Art**, Five and Dime, New York, NY.
- 1983** **New Perspectives in American Art: 1983 EXXON National Exhibition**, Solomon R.

Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY.  
South Dakota Biennial VI, South Dakota  
Memorial Art Center, Brookings, SD.

- 1982 **South Dakota Experimental Artists**, 55 Mercer  
Gallery, New York, NY.

## ROSEMARY MAYER

### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1985 Pam Adler Gallery, New York, NY.  
1982 **Moon Tent**, Installation, The Hobbs House,  
Lansing, NY.  
**Scarecrow/Snow People/Mayday**, A&M  
Artworks, New York, NY.  
1981 **Hours**, Minneapolis College of Art and Design,  
Minneapolis, MN.  
1980 **Sculpture from the Seventies**, Interart Gallery,  
New York, NY.  
**Work of Rosemary Mayer**, The Art Gallery,  
Malott Hall, Graduate School of Business and  
Public Administration, Cornell University,  
Ithaca, NY.  
1979 **Snow People**, Installation, Lenox Library  
Garden, Lenox, MA.  
**Recent Work**, 461 Park Avenue South,  
New York, NY.  
**Recent Work**, 55 Mercer Street, New York, NY.  
1978 **Work of Rosemary Mayer**, State University of  
New York at Stony Brook, Stony Brook, NY.  
**Work of Rosemary Mayer**, University of  
Massachusetts, Amherst, MA.  
1976 **Recent Work**, Monique Knowlton Gallery,  
New York, NY.  
1973 **Rosemary Mayer**, A.I.R. Gallery, New York, NY.

### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1986-87 **Paper Now: Bent, Molded, Manipulated**,  
Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH.  
1984 **Drawings**, Forum Gallery, New York, NY.  
1983 **The White Walls Papers**, Swen Parson Gallery,  
Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL.  
1981 **Creative Artists**, New York State Council on the  
Arts Sculpture Award Recipients, Arnot Art  
Museum, Elmira, NY.  
**Words as Images**, Renaissance Society,  
University of Chicago, Chicago, IL.  
1980 **Times Square Show**, Collab Projects,  
Times Square, New York, NY.  
1978 **Overview**, The Institute for Art and Urban  
Resources, Project Studios One (P.S. 1),  
Long Island City, NY.

## CREIGHTON MICHAEL

### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1985 Craig Cornelius Gallery, New York, NY.  
1982 **Wall Structures**, Just Above Midtown, Inc.,  
New York, NY.

### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1986 **Two Sculptors**, East Hampton Center for  
Contemporary Art, East Hampton, NY.  
**Small Scale Sculpture: Anchorage and New  
York**, Visual Arts Center of Alaska,  
Anchorage, AK.  
July, Craig Cornelius Gallery, New York, NY.  
**Wall Sculpture**, Saxon-Lee Gallery, Los  
Angeles, CA.  
**Drawings by Sculptors**, Nohra Haime Gallery,  
New York, NY.  
**Transformations**, Richard Green Gallery,  
New York, NY.  
**Natural Sources, Abstract Sculpture**, P.S.  
122, New York, NY.  
**Archaic Echoes**, The Center for the Arts,  
Muhlenberg College, Allentown, PA.  
**Materials**, Segal Gallery, New York, NY.  
1985 **Sculpture: The Language of Scale**, The Bruce  
Museum, Greenwich, CT.  
**Exceptions 3: Paperworks**, Pratt Institute, Pratt  
Manhattan Center Gallery, New York, NY.  
1984 **Constructed Image, Constructed Object**,  
Alternative Museum, New York, NY.  
**Transformations of the Minimal Style**,  
Sculpture Center Gallery, New York, NY.

## STEVE WOOD

### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1986 **Centric 17**, California State University, Long  
Beach, CA.  
1985, 84 **Baskerville + Watson**, New York, NY.  
1983 **Eason Gallery**, Santa Fe, NM.  
1981 **Main Gallery**, University of California, Irvine, CA.  
Helen Shlein Gallery, Boston, MA.  
1980 **Bertha Urdang Gallery**, New York, NY.  
List Art Center, Brown University,  
Providence, RI.  
1979 **Williams College Museum**, Williamstown, MA.  
Center for the Arts, Wesleyan University,  
Middletown, CT.

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1986** **Boston Collects**, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA.  
**After Nature**, Germans Van Eck, New York, NY.
- 1985** **Affiliations**, Whitney at Fairfield County, Stamford, CT.  
**Notions of Contemporary Surrealism**, Vanderwoude Tannebaum Gallery, New York, NY.
- 1984** **Seven Sculptors in America**, One Penn Plaza, New York, NY.  
**Timely Objects**, Diane Brown Gallery, New York, NY.
- 1983** **New Sculpture: Icon and Environment**, Independent Curators, Inc., New York, NY.

## WORKS IN EXHIBITION

Dimensions are given in inches. Height precedes width precedes depth. All works are courtesy of the artist unless otherwise noted.

### LEE BONTECOU

1. **Untitled** 1960. Steel, wire, and canvas, 101 × 60 × 18 in.

### RALPH DICAPUA

2. **Untitled** 1986. Fabric and wood, four units, each unit 72 × 20 × 20 in.
3. **Apparatus** 1985. Fabric and wood, three units, each unit 96 × 36 × 18 in.
4. **Untitled I** 1986. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 66½ × 44½ in.
5. **Untitled II** 1986. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 65½ × 42½ in.

### NICK GHIZ

6. **Arduino** 1986. Wood, wire mesh, paper, glue, and paint, 63 × 10 × 19 in.
7. **Theodora** 1985. Wood, wire mesh, paper, glue, and paint, 91 × 50 × 12 in.
8. **Up Stairs from the Tao** 1986. Wood, wire mesh, paper, glue, and paint, 57 × 22 × 20 in.
9. **Barabas** 1986. Wood, wire mesh, paper, glue, and paint, 16 × 10 × 5 in.

### CAROL HEPPEL

10. **Swarm** 1986. Deer hide, wire, willow, wax linen thread, and pigment, 54 × 47 × 44 in.

11. **Three Stroke Roll** 1986. Fish skin, copper wire, willow, wax linen thread, and pigment, 40 × 40 × 27 in.
12. **Beekeeper** 1986. Fish skin, copper wire, willow, wax linen thread, and pigment, 51 × 30 × 29 in.
13. **Untitled** 1986. Charcoal on paper, 72 × 52 in.

### ROSEMARY MAYER

14. **Small Cauldron** 1985. Wood, rag vellum, and rabbit glue, 22 × 29 × 23 in.
15. **Twisting Urn** 1985. Wood, rag vellum, and rabbit glue, 56 × 30 × 24 in.
16. **Standing Basket** 1985. Wood, rag vellum, and rabbit glue, 48 × 49 × 23 in.
17. **Golden Goblet/Mycenae** 1986. Watercolor on paper, 17 × 14 in.
18. **Two Copper Vessels/Mycenae** 1986. Watercolor on paper, 17 × 14 in.

### CREIGHTON MICHAEL

19. **Blind Horn #5** 1985. Wood, paper, charcoal, brick dust, and acrylic, 84 × 8½ × 28½ in. Private Collection, New York
20. **Muleshoe** 1986. Wood, fiberglass, and acrylic, 10 × 22 × 64 in. Courtesy Craig Cornelius Gallery, New York
21. **Shell** 1986. Wood, fiberglass, paper, and acrylic, 39 × 24 × 15½ in. Private Collection
22. **Drawing I** 1986. Silverpoint on paper, 10½ × 7½ in. Courtesy Craig Cornelius Gallery, New York
23. **Drawing II** 1986. Silverpoint on paper, 10½ × 6½ in. Courtesy Craig Cornelius Gallery, New York
24. **Melmoth #3** 1976. Charcoal on paper, 12 × 18 in.

### STEVE WOOD

25. **Tycho** 1985. Wood, wire, polyester, metal powders, and pigment, 84 × 25 × 11 in. Courtesy Baskerville/Watson Gallery, New York
26. **Great Wave** 1985. Wood, polyester, epoxies, metal powders, pigment, and concrete, 58 × 36½ × 16 in. Courtesy Baskerville/Watson Gallery, New York
27. **Empty Vector** 1983-84. Wood, polyester, epoxies, metal powders, 44 × 24 in. Private Collection
28. **Objects in a Room** 1986. Mixed media on paper mounted on board, 50 × 30 in. Courtesy Baskerville/Watson Gallery, New York





# **SCULPTURE CENTER**

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