

CREIGHTON MICHAEL: CONSTRUCTIONS 1990

Creighton



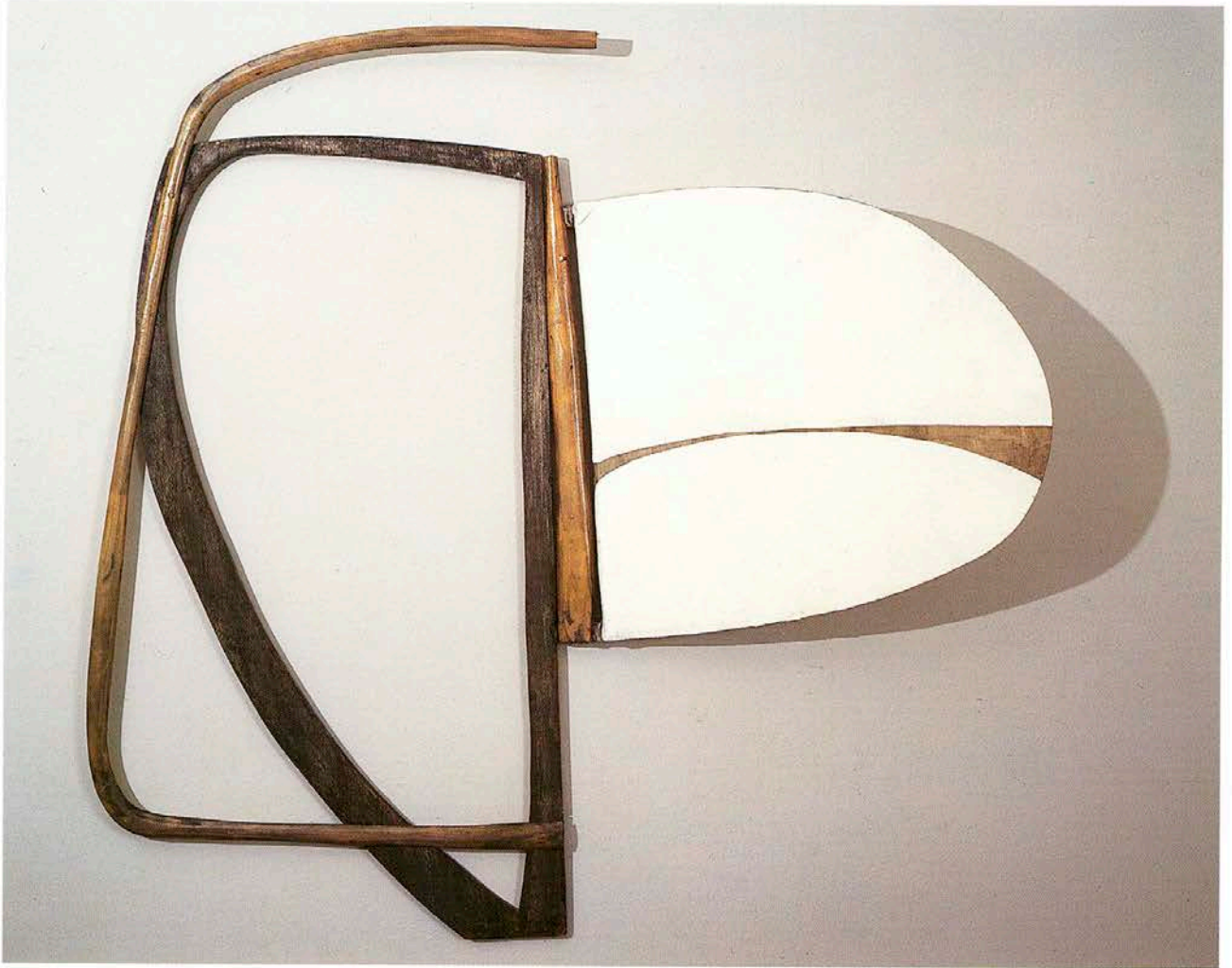
**CREIGHTON MICHAEL: CONSTRUCTIONS 1990**

Introduction by Nancy Princenthal

December 15, 1990 – January 16, 1991

**RUTH SIEGEL GALLERY**

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*Navigator (2)*, 1990, 51×53×7¼ inches, linen, shellac on wood

## INTRODUCTION

Illusionism is hard to sustain in painting and the graphic arts, but the conventions of picture viewing help. For the sculptor who wants to exploit the illusionistic capabilities of line and surface – to convince the viewer that a three-dimensional object is elastic or vaporous, impenetrably dense, transparent, or merely a shadow of some other, absent figure – the task is all the more difficult. “I’m a sculptor by default,” Michael says, meaning that it is just this challenge, to defy the intransigence of solid matter, and to realize in actual space the ambiguous, shifting dimensions of pictorial form, that impels his work.

Michael’s techniques are not those of traditional sculpture and he has no sense of eminent domain about his medium, no interest in carving or modeling, or even in creating forms that seize the space around them. His means are those of expedience; he uses wood, mostly, and also cloth, metal, and hardware, assembling them with a sense of carpentry that is accomplished without being self-important. The great majority of Michael’s sculptures hang on the wall, and even those that sit on the floor have a kind of spatial diffidence, covering ground by image rather than bulk.

A work usually begins either with a kind of automatic drawing using a saw instead of a pen, and ends when the eccentric wooden shapes that result are assembled, reshaped, reassembled, and altered so that their surfaces are sometimes covered with a fine net of painted lines, a haze of color, or a pitch-black mask. Often, a negative shape generated by one sculpture becomes the starting point for another. Juxtaposing arcs of wood covered in graphite, Michael achieves the impression of a blurred line; when these and white-washed elements graze the wall, they evoke a sense of erasure; in both cases, the effects are fully intentional. Michael was trained as a painter, and still in part works like one, stretching canvas across wooden frames and applying paint. These painted elements are not, however, pictorial, but rather abstract components that function only within the sculptural composition as a whole.

Michael is not the first to abjure sculptural traditions by constructing his work – he could, if he chose, claim as predecessors Picasso's early Cubist assemblages, or the welded drawings in steel that Picasso and Gonzalez together pioneered, and the descent of this tradition through David Smith and his heirs. Instead, Michael refers to painters, including Francis Bacon, Antoni Tapies, and Lee Bontecou – a diverse group of artists who variously explore a range of human experience trapped within palpable graphic matrices, mediators between the painterly and the sculptural. He discusses the influence of calligraphy and hieroglyphs, and of magic; of science fiction, and the surreal precision of Northern Renaissance painting. He is interested in things that are not what they seem, or in symbols that acquire significance half by resemblance, and half by cultural agreement.

Over the last decade, Michael's work has gradually shed its skin, in reality and metaphor. His sculptures of the early '80s rely on cloth or paper stretched over wooden armatures. Like model airplanes, they engage issues of balance and loft; they often hover just a few inches from the floor, in the moment of greatest levitational suspense. By 1986, the wooden skeletons began to emerge from within these paper forms, coursing through the space around them in quick arcs and angles.

The newest sculptures still reveal Michael's interest in the skin of forms – its tensile strength, its adaptive coloration, its vulnerability. But this skin has been reduced to a secondary element. One new body of work is called *Harcourt*. The term is old French for fortified court and ties together an only loosely related body of work like all the titles of Michael's series. In *Harcourt*, a void recurs, in the form of a black, painted element. This element pushes the work into the wall, casting the sculptures' linear wooden elements as "successive approximations" (in Michael's phrase) of the surface from which they hang. As always, the compositional principles are as much graphic as volumetric, a matter of sweeping lines and their shadows, elliptical recesses and prominences.

*Navigator*, another new series, relies on positive painted elements. These cameo linen and muslin canvases are not, as one might expect, uninterrupted spacial planes. Instead, they are fractured by painted extensions of the linear wooden elements that frame them and by similarly illusionistic extensions of the shadows thrown by those wooden elements. Like *Harcourt*, the title of this series reveals a narrative undertow to the work, a concern with the processes of shipbuilding, and also with a fluid kind of movement.

With its subtleties, economies, and spatial feints, Michael's work presents its pleasures slowly. But for the patient and attentive, its rewards are ample.

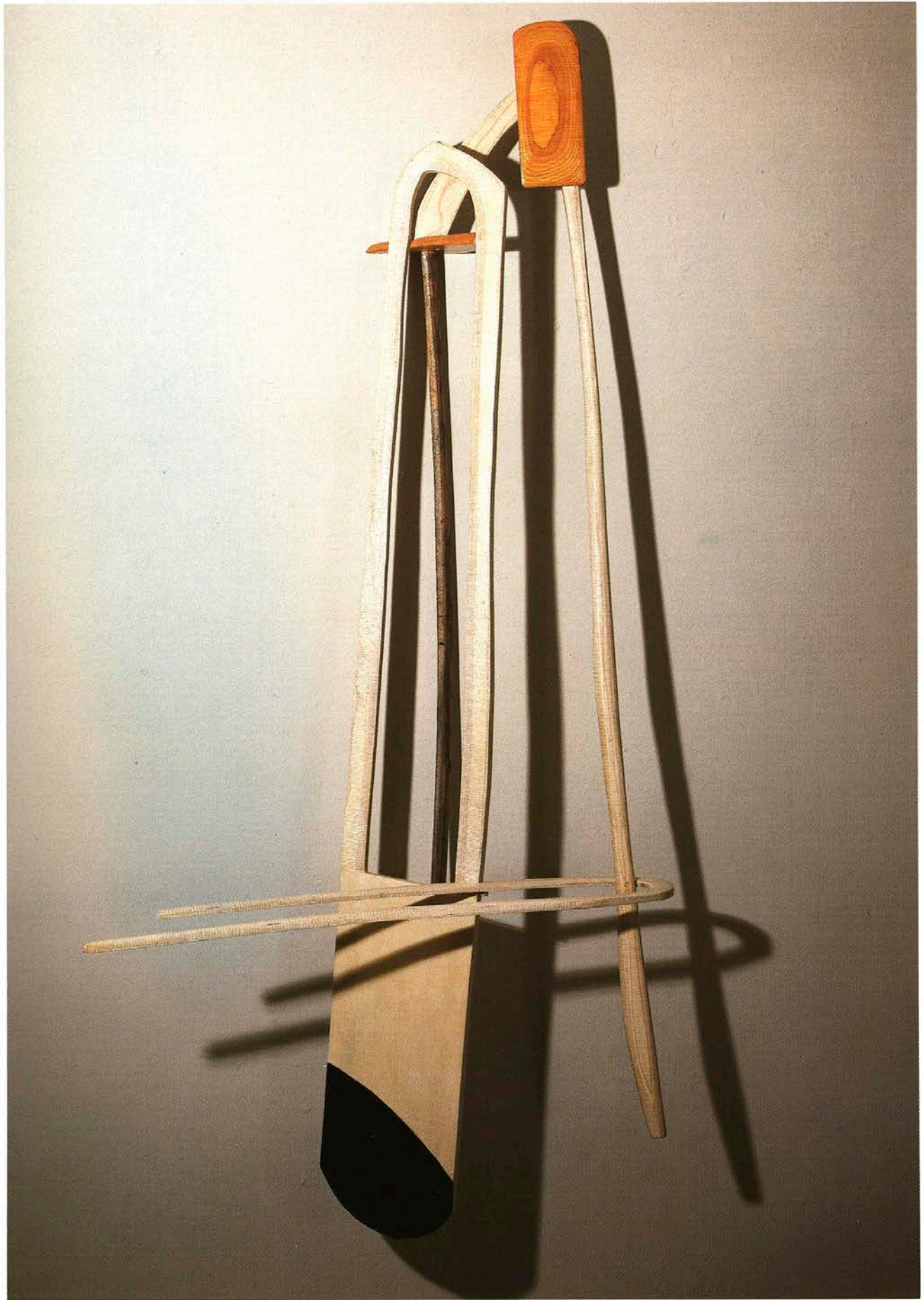
Nancy Princenthal

*Navigator (3)*, 1990, 47×40×14½ inches, oil on wood and muslin





*Harcourt*, 1990, 66½×32×17 inches, shellac and graphite on wood

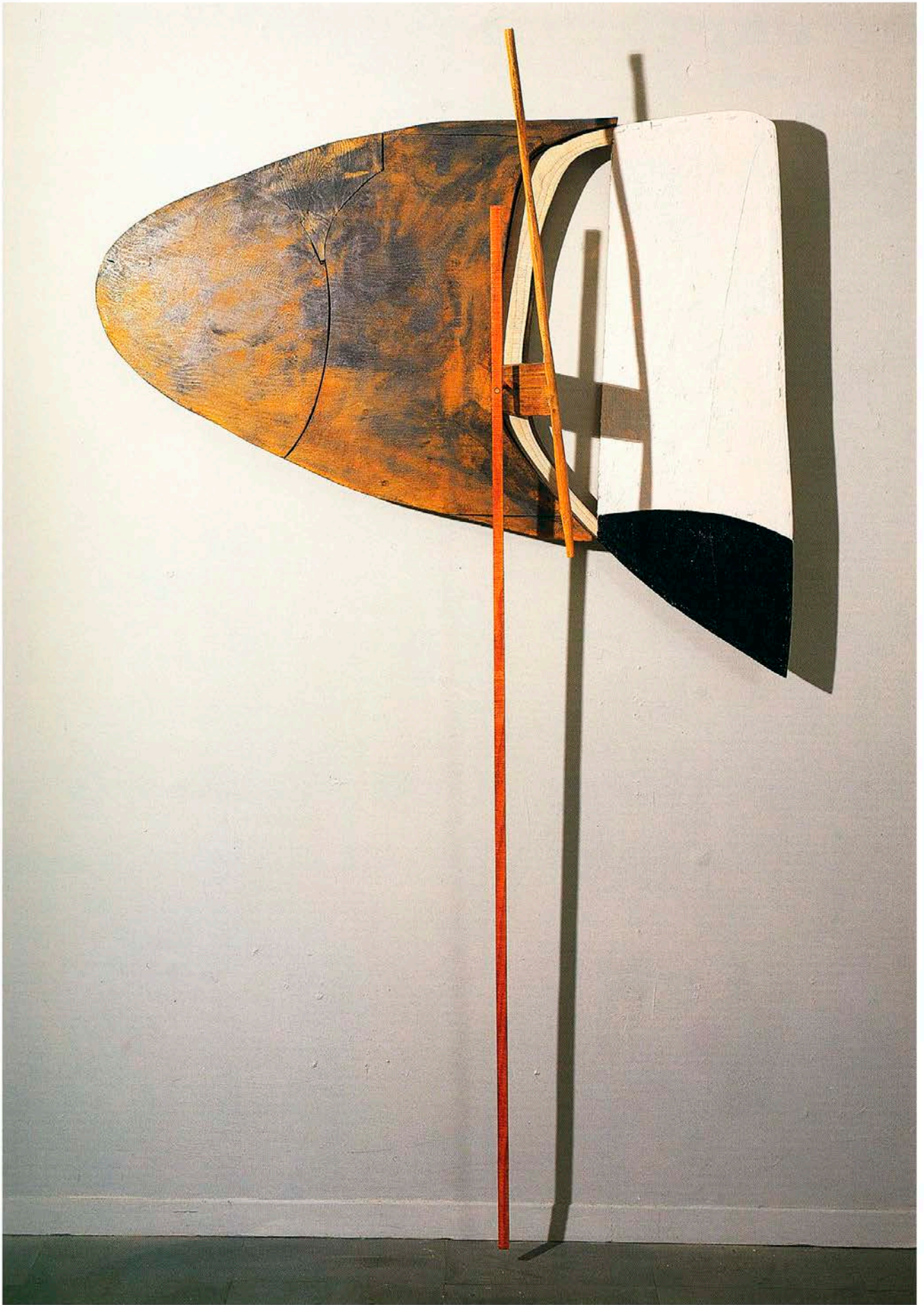


*Harcourt (3)*, 1990, 67×72×4¼ inches, shellac and graphite on wood



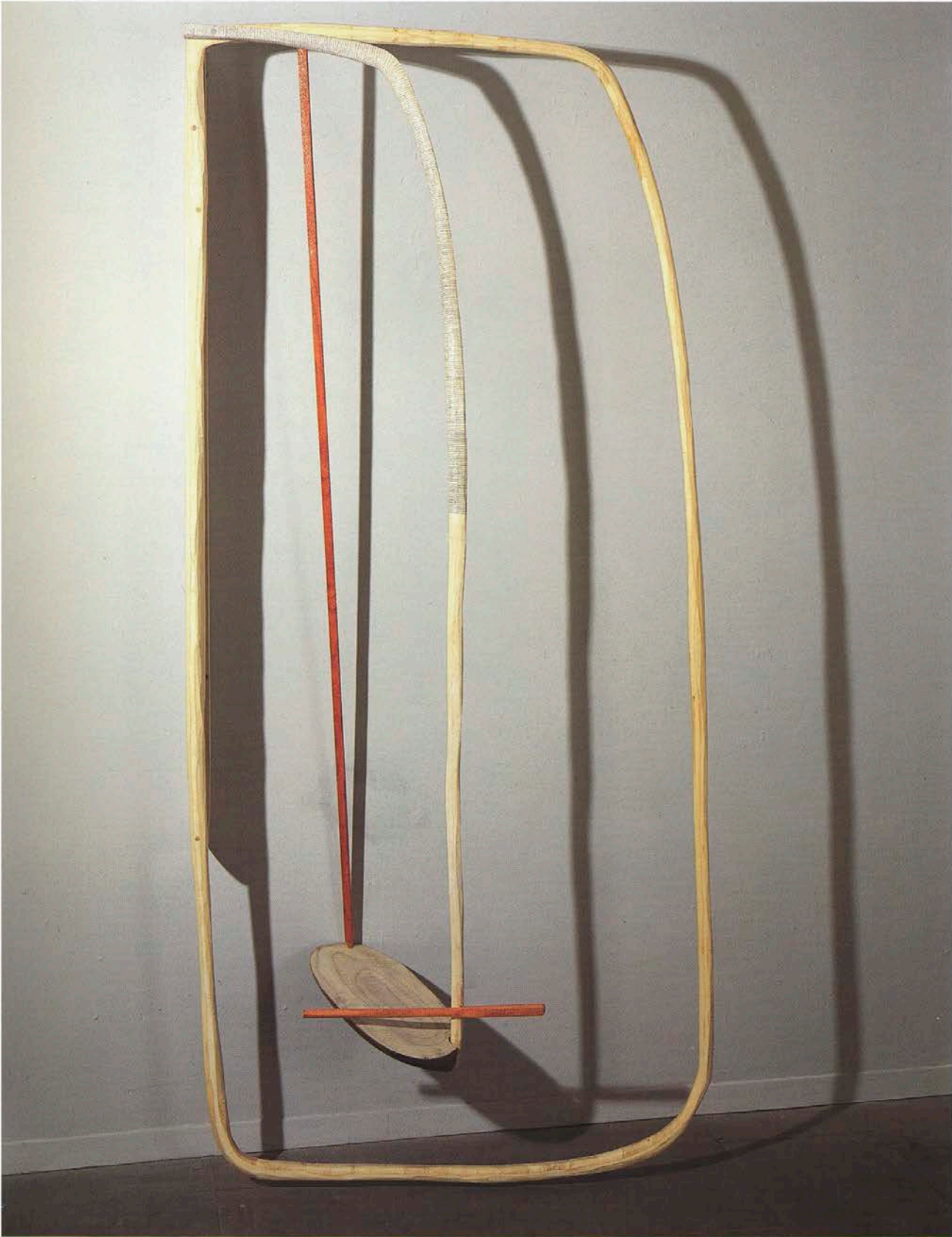


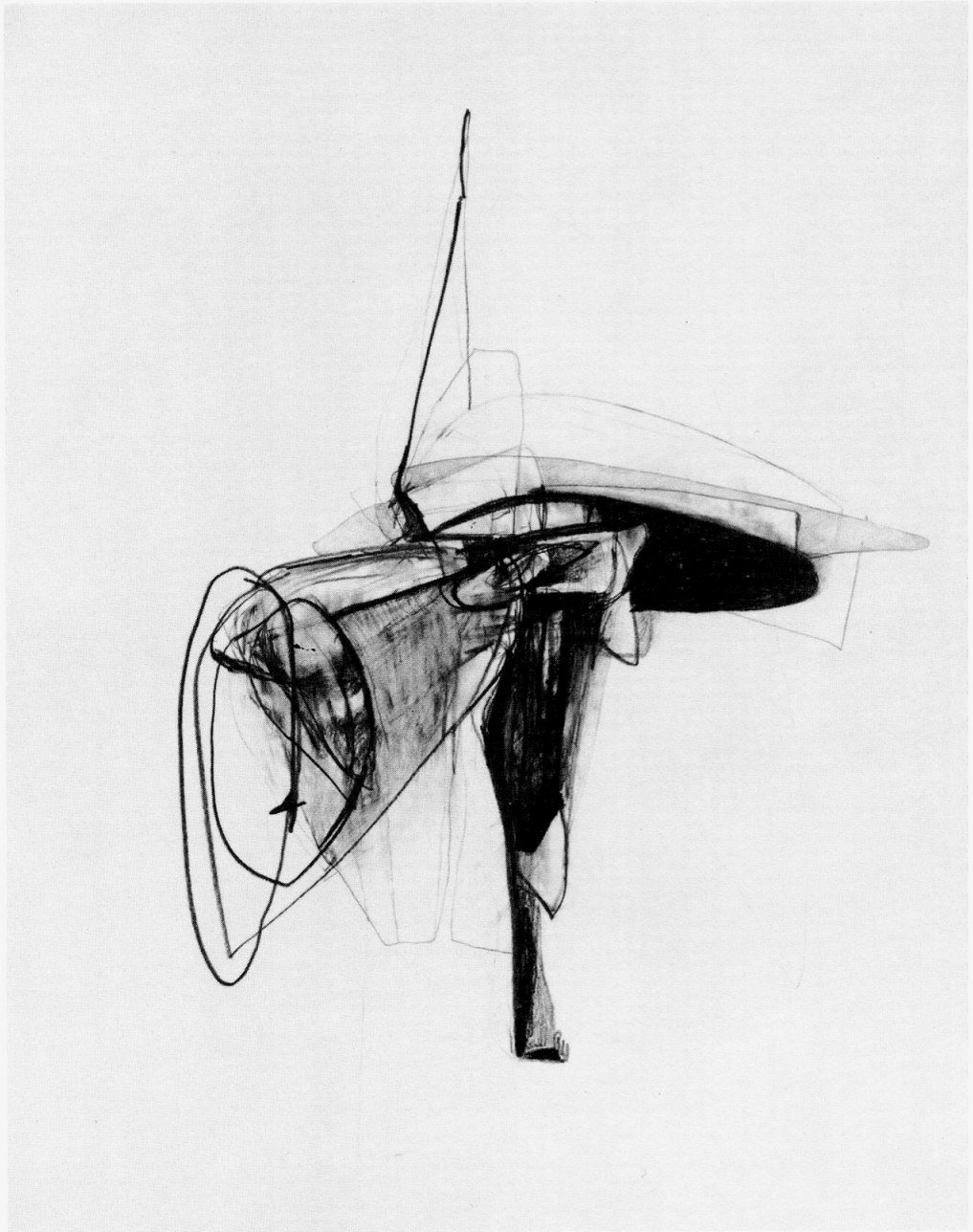
*Harcourt (4)*, 1990, 69¼×41×7¼ inches, shellac and graphite on wood





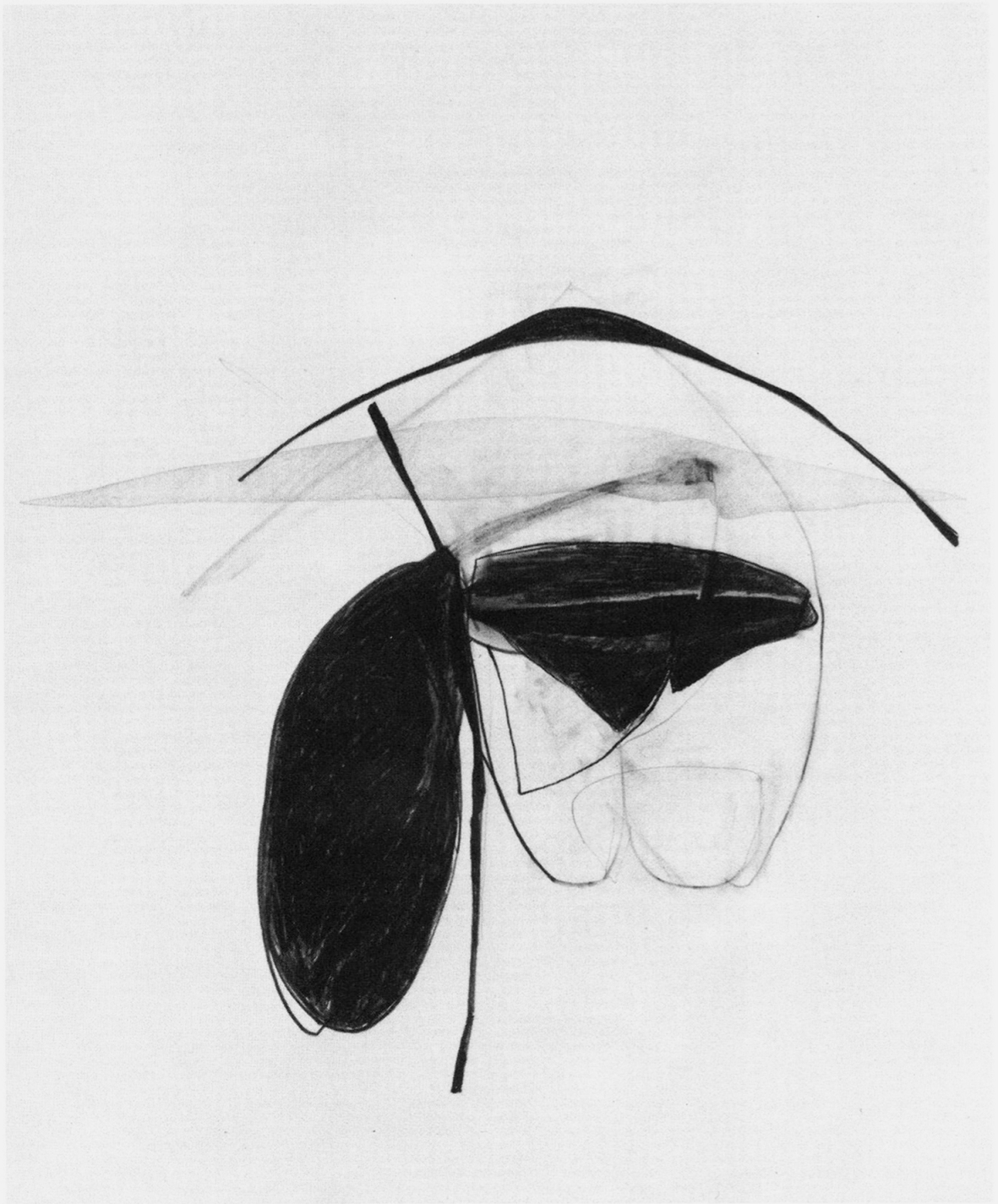
*Harcourt (5)*, 1990, 79×34½×14", shellac and graphite on wood





*Harcourt*, 1989, 17×14 inches, graphite on paper





*Harcourt (3)*, 1989, 17×14 inches, graphite on paper

## BIOGRAPHY

### 1949

Born in Knoxville, Tennessee

### 1971

Graduated University of Tennessee, Knoxville  
(Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree, with honors)

### 1976

Graduated Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee  
(Masters Degree)

### 1978

Graduated Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri  
(Master of Fine Arts Degree)

### 1985

Recipient of Edward Albee Foundation Fellowship  
Recipient of Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant

### 1987

Recipient of New York Foundation for the Arts  
Fellowship

### 1990

Living and working in New York City and vicinity



## ONE MAN EXHIBITIONS

### 1990

Ruth Siegel Gallery, New York City  
Pence Gallery, Santa Monica, California  
Haines Gallery, San Francisco, California  
Robischon Gallery, Denver, Colorado

### 1989

Ledis-Flam Gallery, Brooklyn, New York

### 1988

Nina Freudenheim Gallery, Buffalo, New York  
David Beitzel Gallery, New York City  
Pence Gallery, Santa Monica, California

### 1987

High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia  
Saint Louis Gallery of Contemporary Art,  
St. Louis, Missouri  
Craig Cornelius Gallery, New York City

### 1985

Craig Cornelius Gallery, New York City

### 1982

Just Above Midtown, Inc., New York City

### 1981

Ten Windows on Eighth Avenue at Fifty Third Street,  
New York City (Installation)  
Cemrel, Inc., St. Louis, Missouri

## GROUP EXHIBITIONS

### 1990

*Seven Sculptures*, Mandeville Gallery, University of California, San Diego

*Working on Paper: Contemporary American Drawings*, High Museum of Art, Atlanta

*Forces of Nature*, Long Island University, Brooklyn, New York

### 1989

*Pb Works on Lead*, Nohra Haime Gallery, New York City

### 1988

*In the Making: Drawings by Sculptors*, The Sculpture Center, New York City

*Innovations in Sculpture*, Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art Ridgefield, Connecticut

*Paper: Form and Substances*, New Jersey Center for Visual Arts, Summit

*Selection from the Berkus Collection*, Long Beach Museum of Art, California

*Highlights of the Edward F. Albee Foundation: Seventeen Years at the Barn*, Rosa Esman Gallery, New York City

*Nomadic Visions: Recent Work by Six New York Sculptors*, Art Gallery, Southeastern Massachusetts University, North Dartmouth

*Kindred Spirits: Metaphysical Insights of Seven Sculptors*, George Ciscle Gallery, Baltimore (traveled to Trabia-MacAfee Gallery, New York City)

### 1987

*Contemporary Silverpoint Drawings*, Leslie Cecil Gallery, New York City

*Sculpture: Material Transformations*, Rosa Esman Gallery, New York City

*Primitive Elegance: David Hall/Creighton Michael*, Checkwood Fine Arts Center, Nashville

*Hybrids: Thirteen New York Sculptors*, Addison/Ripley Gallery, Washington, D.C.

*Wings Over Brooklyn, Part II: The Birds*, Prospect Park, Brooklyn, New York

*Petah Coyne, Joy Jacobs, Patrick Kelly, Creighton Michael*, Grand Street Gallery, New York City

*Ten Perspectives*, Adams Memorial Gallery, Dunkirk, New York

*Painting into Sculpture*, The Rotunda Gallery, Brooklyn

### 1986

*Materials*, Segal Gallery, New York City

*Archaic Echoes*, The Center for the Arts, Muhlenberg College, Allentown, Pennsylvania

*Drawings by Sculptors*, Nohra Haime Gallery, New York

*Natural Sources, Abstract Sculpture*, P.S. 122, New York

*Two Sculptors: Creighton Michael, Ed Rothfarb*, East

Hampton Center for Contemporary Art, New York

*Transformations*, Richard Green Gallery, New York City

Craig Cornelius Gallery, New York City

*Wall Sculpture*, Saxon-Lee Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

*Sculpture Dialogue: Anchorage & New York*, ARCO Gallery, Visual Arts Center of Alaska, Anchorage

*In the Third Dimension*, Zimmerman Saturn Gallery, Nashville

*The Sculptural Membrane*, The Sculpture Center, New York City

### 1985

*Sculpture: The Language of Scale*, The Bruce Museum, Greenwich, Connecticut

*Expectations 3: Paperworks*, Pratt Institute Manhattan Center Gallery, New York City

*Sixth Annual Paper in Particular National Exhibition*,

Columbia College, Columbia, Missouri

*Unaffiliated Artists III*, Hillwood Art Gallery, Long Island University, Greenvale, New York

### 1984

*Transformation of the Minimal Style*, The Sculpture Center, New York City

*Constructed Image/Constructed Object*, Alternative Museum, New York City

*On Relief*, 80 Washington Square East Galleries, New York University, New York City

*Selections*, The Rotunda Gallery, Brooklyn, New York

*Irregulars: Wall Work*, Henry Street Settlement, Louis Abrons Art for Living Center, New York City

### 1983

*Steel and Nylon: June Lathrop and Creighton Michael*, Small Walls, New York City

*Alternate Take: Mic-Nic*, Central Park, New York City

### 1982

*Textured Planes*, Procter Art Center, Bard College, NY



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