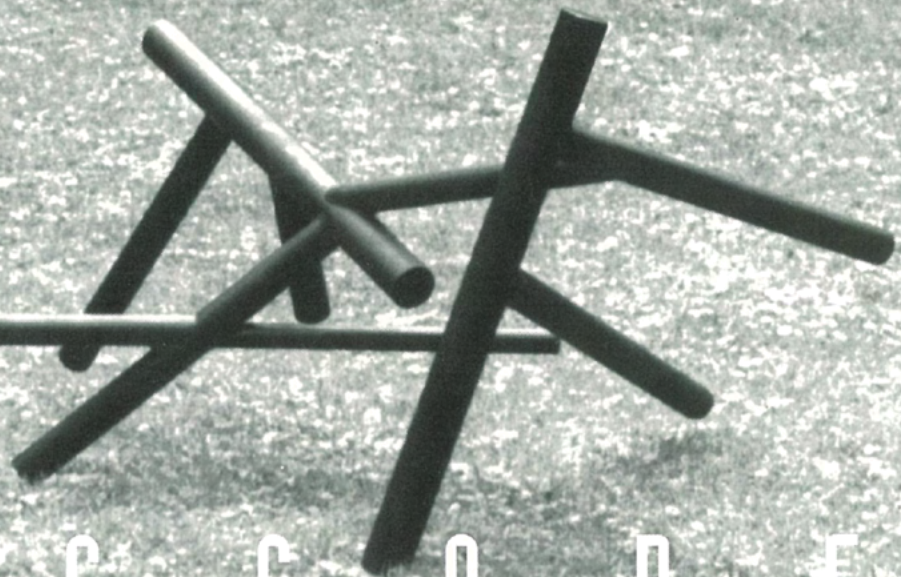


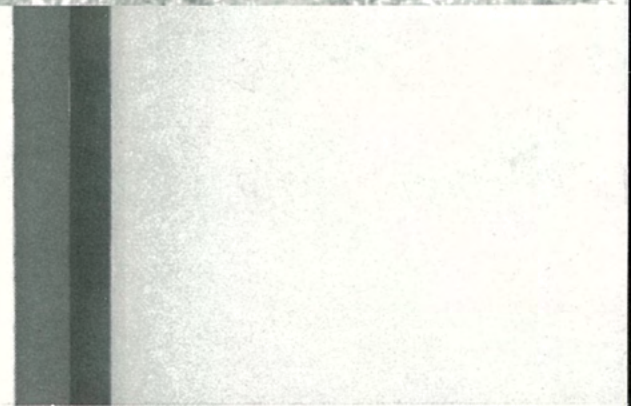


C R E I G H T O N  
M I C H A E L :



L A N D S C A P E

KATONAH MUSEUM OF ART





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C R E I G H T O N  
M I C H A E L :

DECEMBER 4, 1994

*through*

APRIL 16, 1995

L A N D S C A P E

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KATONAH MUSEUM OF ART

Project Director: Katherine Moore

Executive Director: George G. King  
Director of Development: Diane Discenza  
Director of Education: Yvonne Pollack  
Registrar: Evelyn Fay  
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supplied by the artist.

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on the cover, from top to bottom:  
detail, *Conifer 594*  
*Vector 494*  
detail, *Melt 594*

## FOREWORD

With this exhibition the Museum is delighted to present new drawings, paintings, and sculptures of Creighton Michael that illustrate the artist's dialogue with the landscape. For these sculptures, Michael has chosen a singular element from earlier work—that of the black painted tubular skeleton—and enlarged it to a scale and form that directly relates to nature, and specifically to the Museum's own outdoor environment. Michael's work has always explored various aspects of the human experience, and, as this exhibition demonstrates, he does so not only with his

sculptural expressions but also with serene diptych paintings and drawings.

Creighton Michael has lent an invaluable amount of energy and time to the planning of this exhibition, and we are grateful for his efforts; it has been a wonderful experience for us to see these new pieces evolve over the course of the past year. The Museum is honored to be the first institution to exhibit the artist's newest work, particularly his outdoor pieces. Cynthia Nadelman's thorough understanding of and affinity with Michael's work has resulted in a clear and

penetrating essay for this catalogue. As project director, Katherine Moore continues to demonstrate her varied skills and broad interests in capably taking on diverse exhibitions, and we thank her for her contributions to this project. The fabrication work for the sculptures was done by M & S Ironworks and we appreciate their participation in the exhibition. As always, bringing new work of important artists through exhibitions like this could not be done without the generous support of the Exhibition Patrons of the Katonah Museum.

GEORGE G. KING, *Executive Director*

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#### EXHIBITION PATRONS

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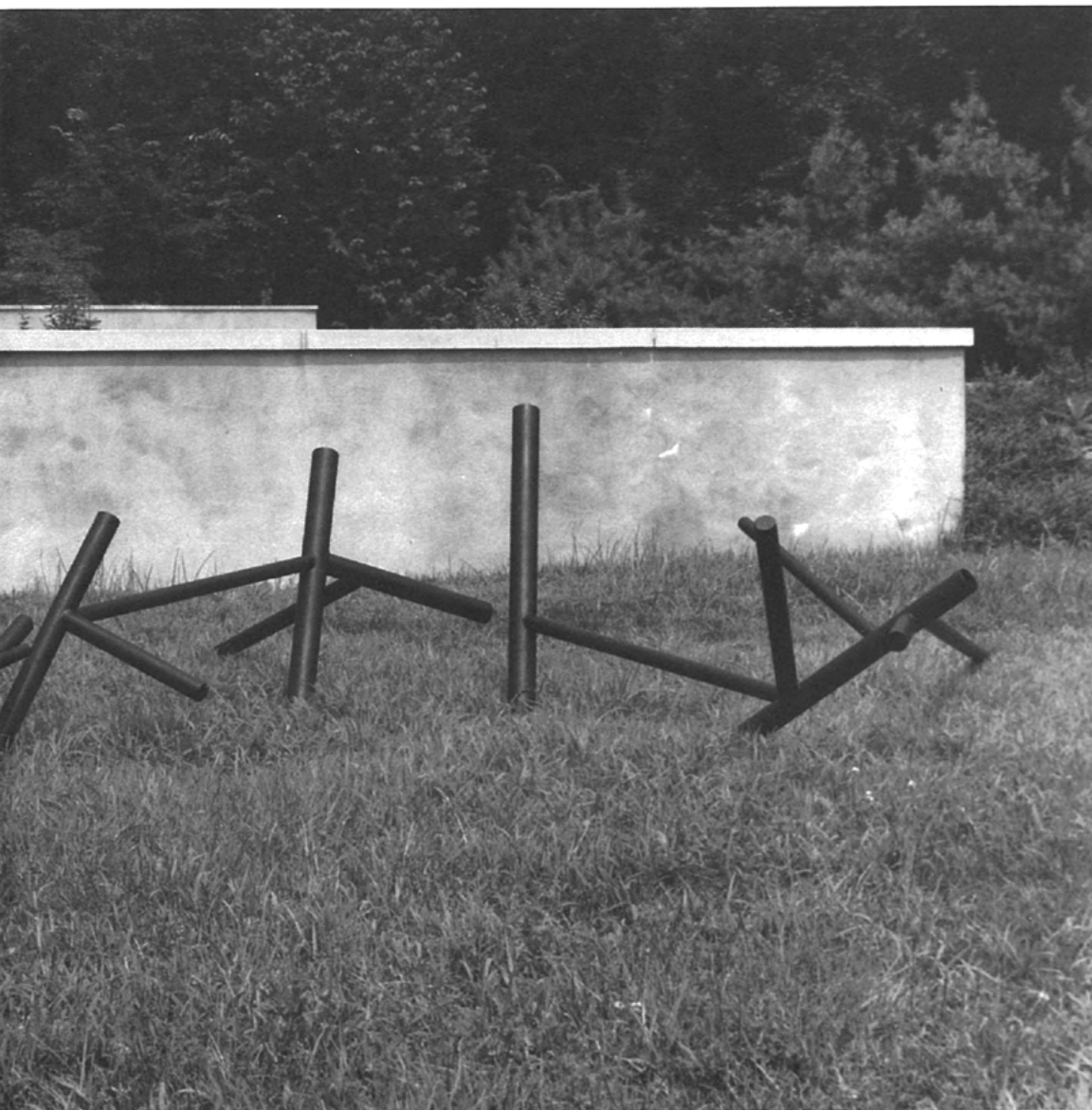
Watching an artist evolve is surely one of the pleasures of following an artistic career that is allowed to flourish. Creighton Michael's output of the past ten years has provided ample opportunity for indulging such pleasure. Yet the magnitude of the leap he has recently made, spurred on by the Katonah Museum's invitation to show both outdoor and indoor work—beginning in the dead of winter—is stunning.

Since moving to a rural part of northern Westchester County some four years ago, Michael has been exceedingly open to the influence of his natural surroundings. As a native Tennessean, where, even in the city, one is never too far from the country, perhaps his receptivity to this—albeit eastern—version of the landscape was already in place. On top of this, the severity of the winter of 1993-94 left even those most impervious to nature reeling from its blows.

Now that the project he devised has been completed and is ready to be shown, the timing seems inspired. The work he has created, or pulled from the flow of his ongoing investigations, is as tightly conceived and executed as a well-prepared shelter from winter storms.

While hardly oblivious in his recent work to the fertile, burgeoning, obvious, and hidden aspects of local and specific nature, Michael has chosen, in the work for this show, to focus on a sparer, more abstract view of nature. In so doing, he

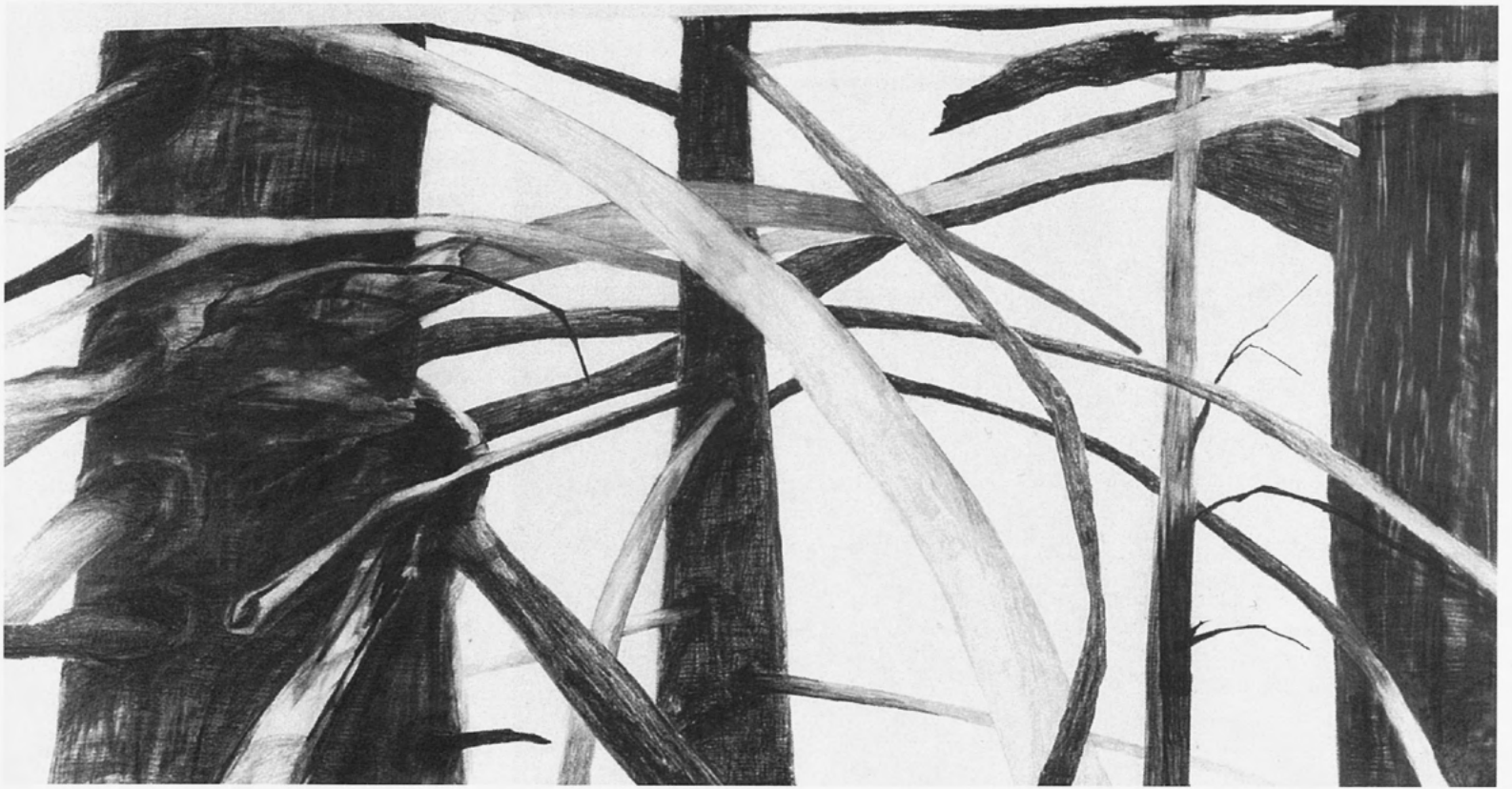




*Vector 694*

explores the role of landscape in determining an esthetic, and vice versa. As an artist who begins as a draftsman, Michael is fascinated by the existence and growth of lines. The dialogue between lines found in nature and constructed lines is certainly one of the cornerstones of this show. How the way in which we look at these phenomena determines our definition of landscape—real and artistic—is an important theme.

The *Vector* series of sculptures was specifically conceived for the Katonah Museum's outdoor space, where, especially in winter, the dominant visual element is the verticality of dark conifer tree trunks against the greyish gravel of the Sculpture Garden. Michael pared down his often quite complex sculptures to the basic elements of their construction—dowels, which are usually wood but in this case, larger, pipelike versions in steel painted a soft, dull black. The jaunty, quirky linear forms of these sculptures echo the configurations of trees and branches as seen in nature, mediated by esthetic deliberations. These works touch on Michael's traditional interest in structure, while avoiding the role of structure as a support for something else. They are allowed to range freely, even playfully, pointing—as vectors will—toward questions of linearity. Does line begin as a tree, a horizon, the human form? Where do lines end? Why do they



*Conifer 494*



stop? What is the role of the artist in defining or controlling any of this? One of these sculptures is actually a three-part piece, which Michael will alter over the course of its being shown, adding an element of season-specificity to the more conventional one of site-specificity. The beauty of these works is that they are not really specific to any place—or time—just inspired and given momentary heft by these factors. These are important works for Michael in that they signify a return to sculptural basics in a material that is new for the artist. From here, almost anything is possible.

Indoors, in his breakthrough *Conifer* drawings, we see Michael exploring the same territory. But here, he exploits the seemingly utter randomness of certain real lines in nature, namely conifer branches at the point where they jut out from tree trunks and meander unpredictably into space. In his first “realist” drawings in years, he frames increasingly longer segments of tree trunks and jutting branches. The idea for this imagery came to Michael as he looked up into the conifers in the Katonah Museum Sculpture Garden; only later did he decide to focus on a cropped, head-on view of segments of the trunks—almost as if he were up in the tree with a movie camera, trying to get a picture of the whole, piece by piece, frame by frame. These handsome, cool drawings, with their varying shades of grey on stark white paper, seem as much about abstraction and where the concept comes from as any of Michael’s outwardly more abstract earlier drawings. They center the artist in nature, linking him up with other artists who have mined this vein, from

Hudson River painter Thomas Cole to video artist Mary Lucier.

The same terrible, uncontrollable, yet beautiful randomness of things seen in nature at given moments is the subject of the third component in Michael’s treatment of landscape—his painting diptych series, *Melt*. Here, a sense of time—whether the time it takes to glimpse a particular object or event, or the time it takes for a thing to last, say, until it melts—is at the heart of Michael’s explorations. These diptychs also emphasize the sense of sight, as the second panel in each of them is like a window, or a light source. In each of these second panels, Rhoplex-covered paper—fortuitously tinged with a wavy, horizonlike watermark which accidentally formed on the roll of paper and which Michael has deliberately retained—is stretched across a steel frame. The painted canvas segments appear to present black shapes on a cool white background. In fact, they are white painted over black in layers, in a technique called a limited palette.

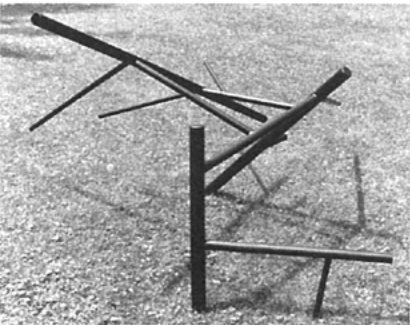
The knowledge that the black forms in the paintings are really negative areas gives particular weight to the idea that what they represent are places where snow has either melted or never reached, or cracks in ice-covered bodies of water, or roads cutting through snow-covered landscape. The unpredictable configurations of lines and wedges and other shapes are strangely similar to those of the tree branches in the *Conifer* series, or, for that matter, to the lines of the *Vector* sculptures. What is really the subject of these works is the relationship of how we see and conceptualize landscape to the entire lexicon of how we see or conceptualize

anything. And, of course, to how all of this is translated into art.

The diptychs are kind of a watershed for Michael, as it were, in that they symbolize the divergent yet connected relationship in his oeuvre of painting and sculpture. He started out as a painter and has been renewing his acquaintance with that medium since moving to the country from Brooklyn and being inspired by new imagery. His sculpture, on the other hand, has often employed the very type of Rhoplex-covered paper seen in these second panels, stretched over airy frameworks that his new sculptures exploit for qualities of their own. Since drawing on paper has also been a consistent activity for Michael, there is a further link in these works to another aspect of his art. In format, then, they are a kind of culmination and reminder of much of what he has done so far.

By limiting his project to a few major concepts and visual ideas, thoroughly, compactly, and consistently carried out, Michael has touched on big and little issues. He has created three distinct but interrelated bodies of work—inspired by local landscape and climate and yet poised for the infinite, or how we perceive it. Better yet, and much more in keeping with his own stated intentions, he has captured fleeting moments of human interaction with nature in three different mediums and vocabularies. He has opened new vistas in nature and esthetics, sharing his discoveries in these areas with the viewer through his multifaceted art.

CYNTHIA NADELMAN



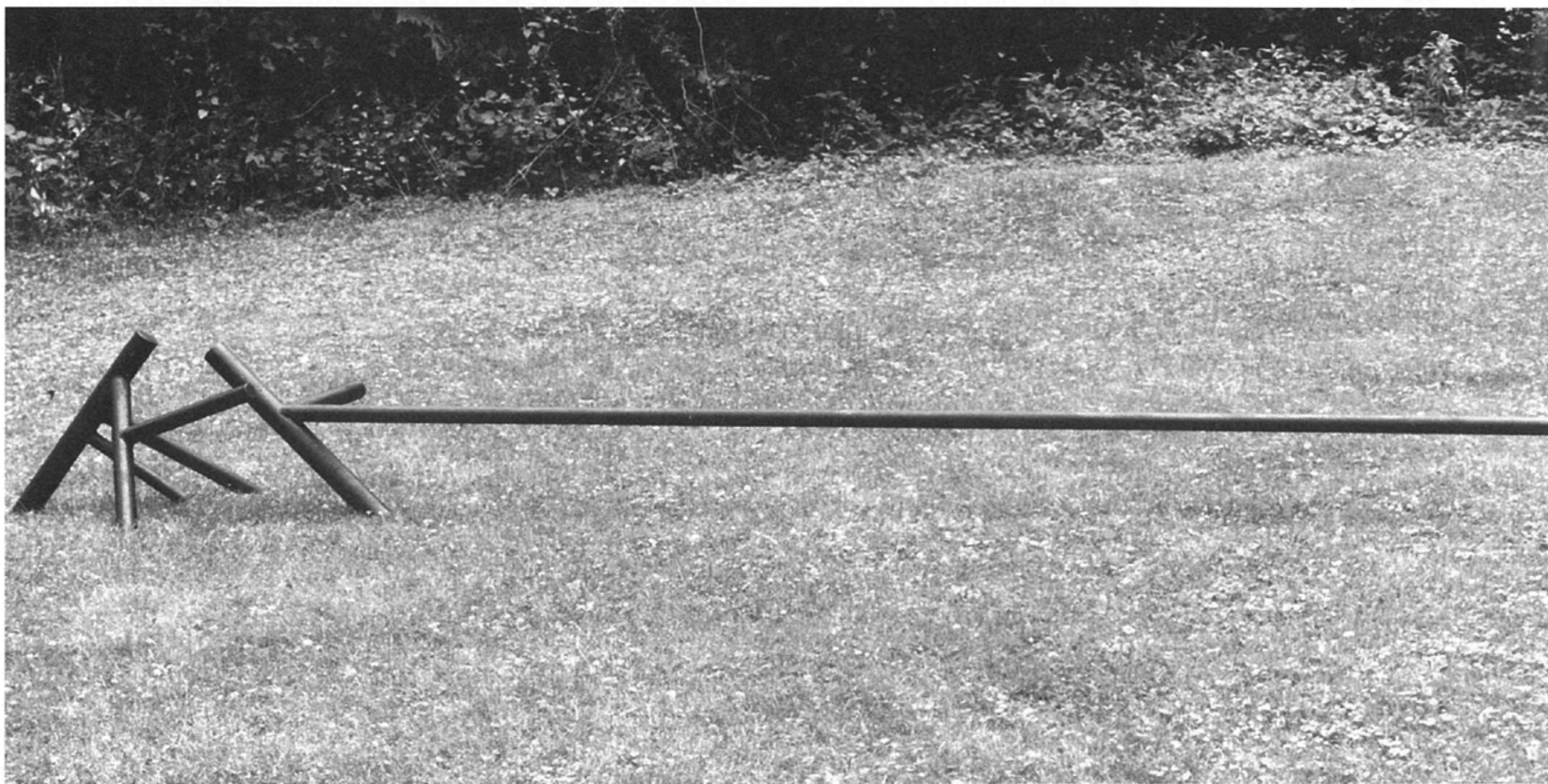
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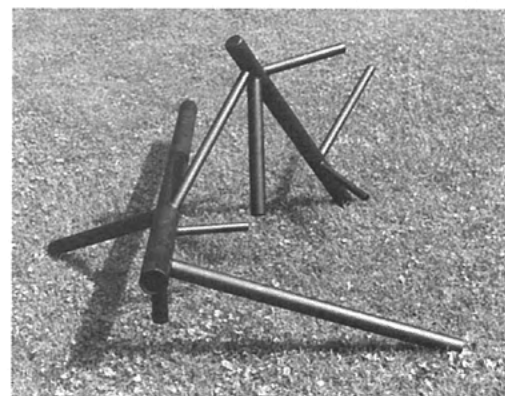
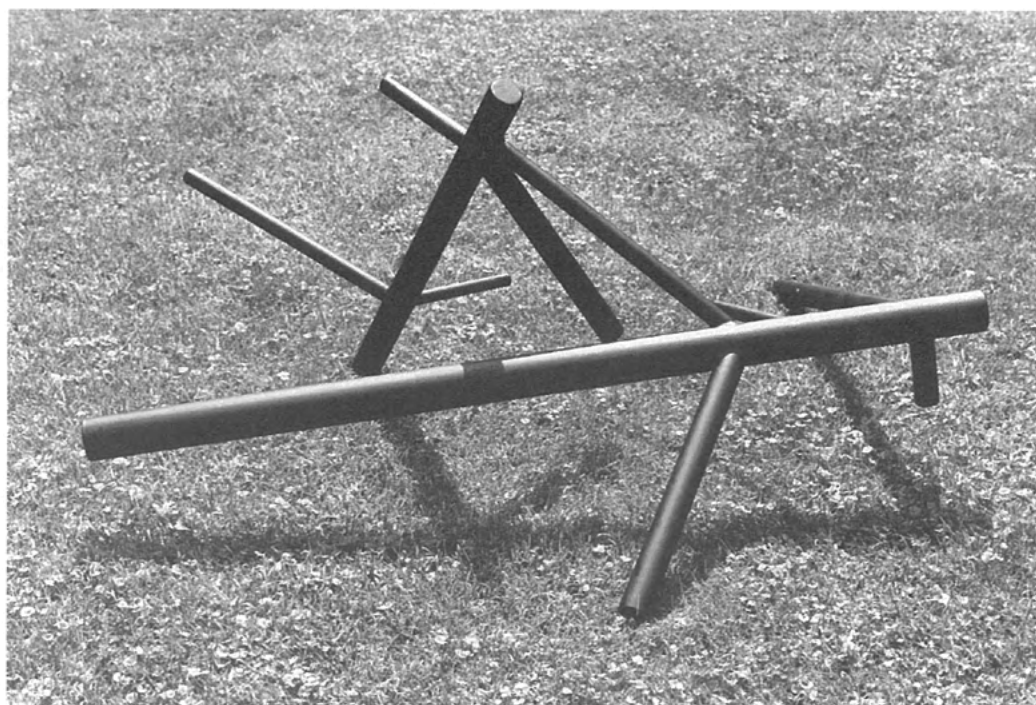
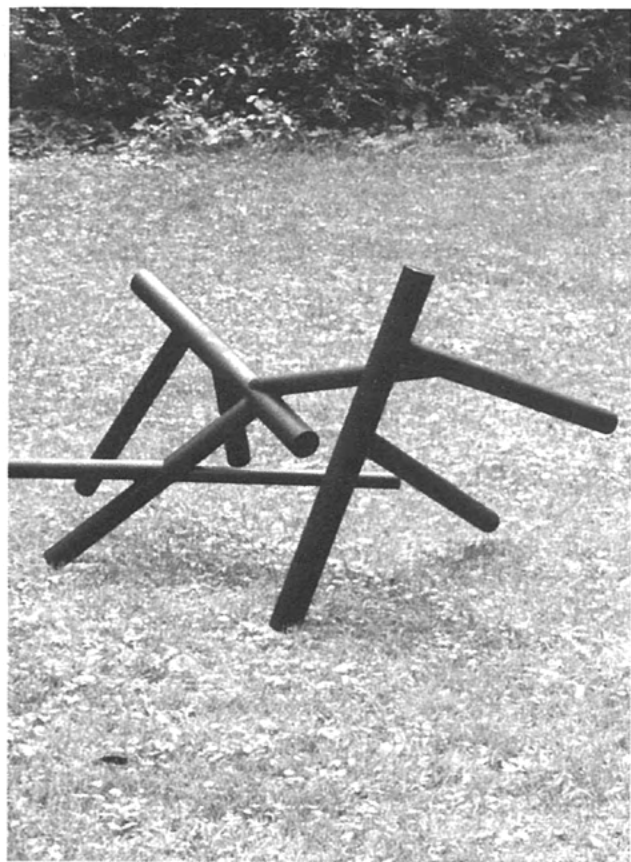
*Vector 194*  
two views



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*Vector 294*  
two views

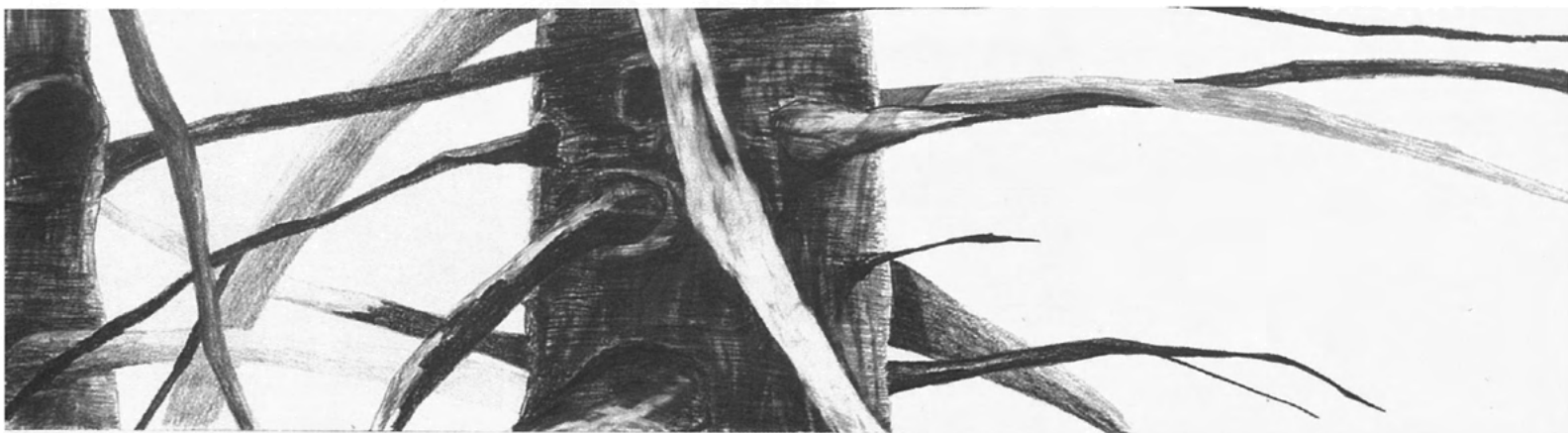




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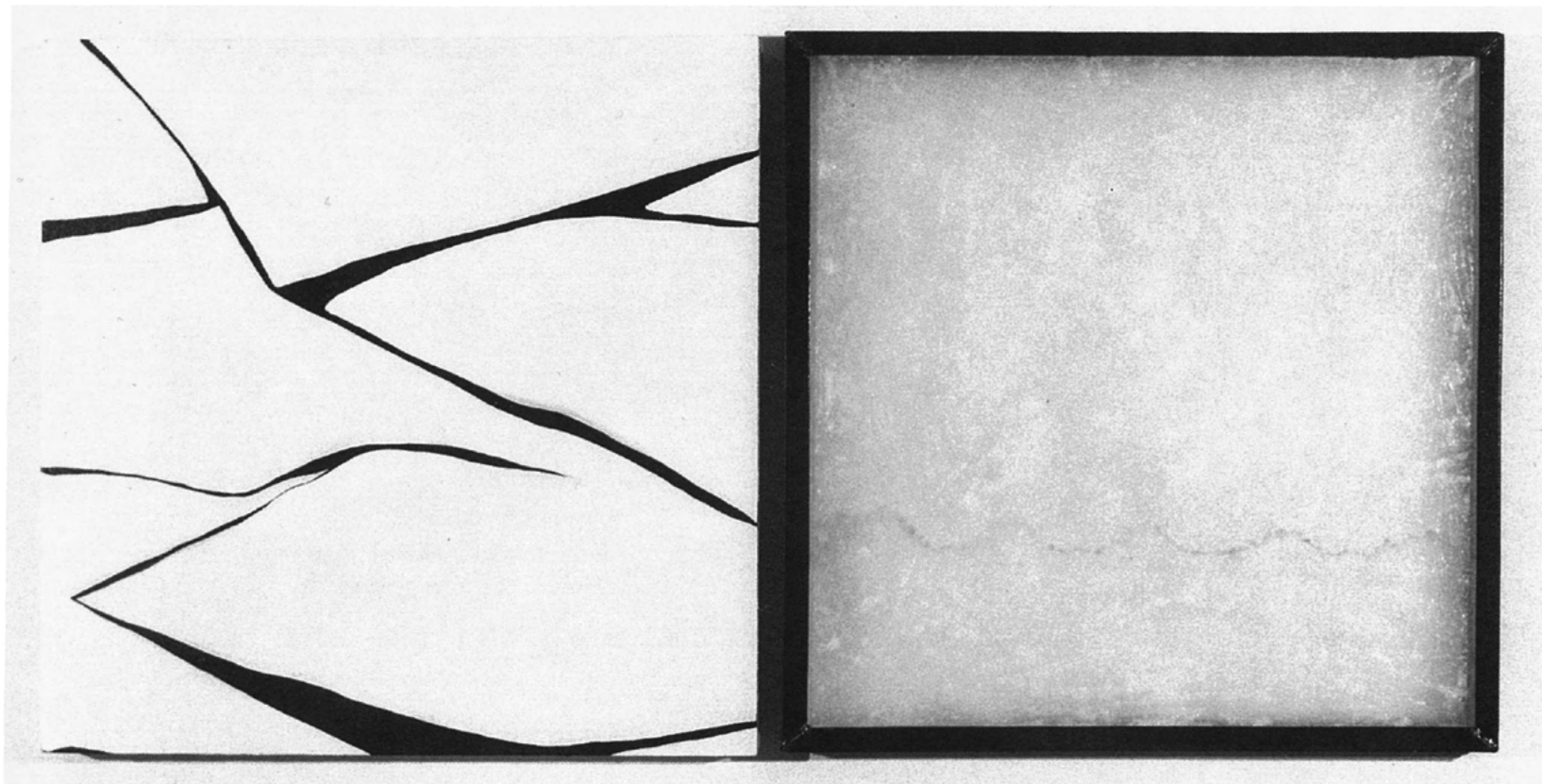
*left: Vector 494*

*Vector 594*  
two views



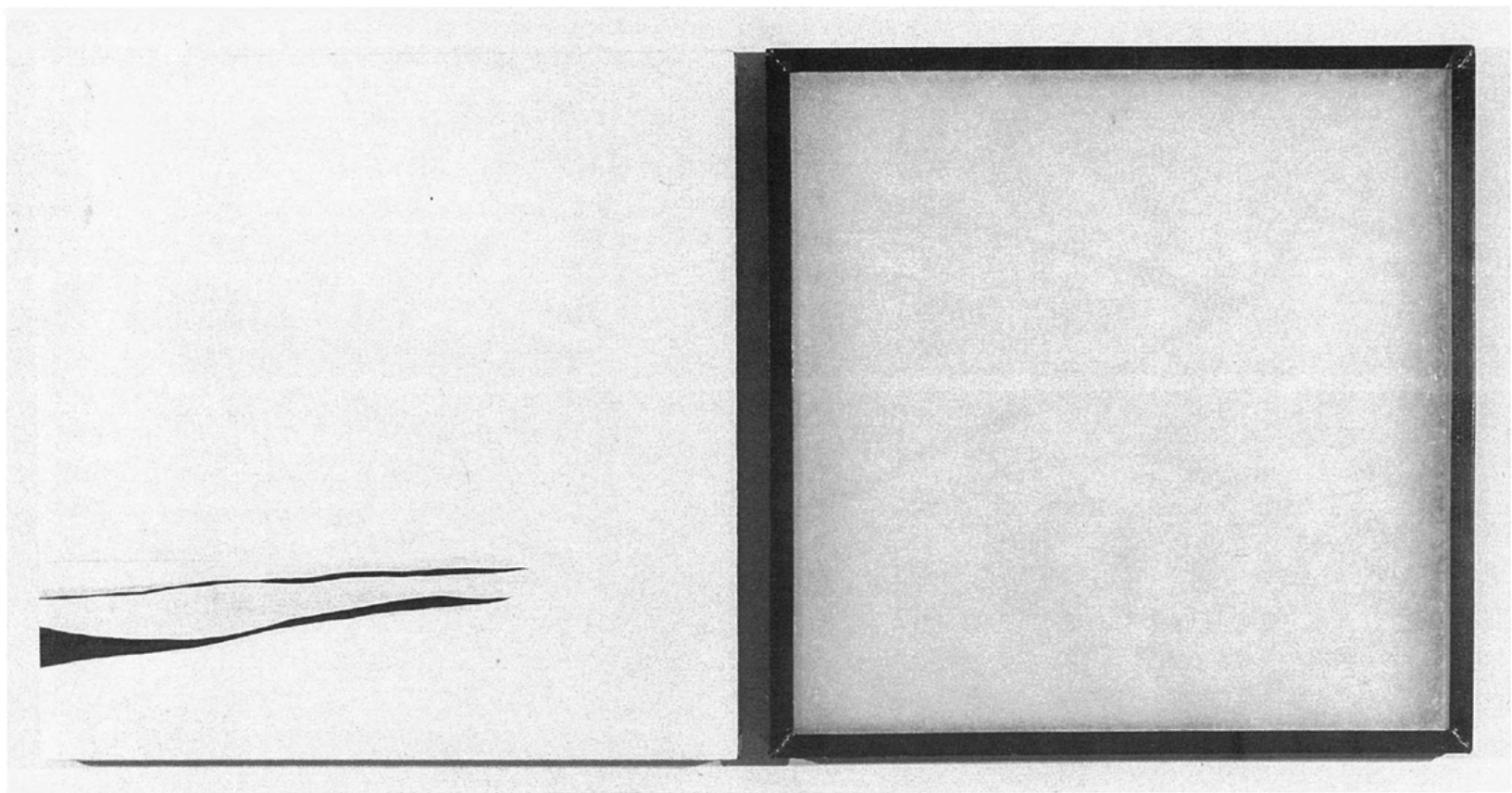
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*above: Conifer 294*  
*below: Conifer 594*



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*Melt 494*



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*Melt 594*



# CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

All works are dated 1994

## *Sculpture*

All works are of painted steel

*Vector 194*, 48 x 105 x 88

*Vector 294*, 33 x 84 x 56

*Vector 394*, 62 x 67 x 122

*Vector 494*, 28 x 192 x 49

*Vector 594*, 27 x 60 x 48

*Vector 694*, three sections: 37 x 94 x 65,  
29½ x 76 x 47, 34 x 76 x 111

## *Drawings and Paintings*

*Conifer 294*, graphite on paper, 12 x 40

*Conifer 494*, graphite on paper, 20½ x 40

*Conifer 594*, graphite on paper, 11 x 40

*Melt 494*, steel, paper, acrylic, oil on  
canvas, 30 x 60 (diptych)

*Melt 594*, steel, paper, acrylic, oil on  
canvas, 30 x 60 (diptych)

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*All dimensions given in inches  
height x length x depth*

# CHRONOLOGY

1949 Born in Knoxville, Tennessee, raised in Memphis, Tennessee, and after 1963, Nashville, Tennessee

1967-1971 Studies at University of Tennessee, Knoxville (BFA 1971, painting)

1971-1972 Studies at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee (MA 1976, art history)

1972-1976 Heads the studio arts program at Grace St. Luke's Episcopal Day School, Memphis, Tennessee. Studies art education at the University of Memphis

1976-1978 Studies at Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri (MFA 1978, painting and multi-media)

1978 Moves to New York City

1982 First solo exhibition in New York City at Just Above Midtown, Inc.

1985 Receives grant from Pollock-Krasner Foundation, a fellowship from Edward Albee Foundation, and a Visiting Professorship (painting) at SUNY, Buffalo

1986-1991 Adjunct Faculty, Freshman Foundation, Rhode Island School of Design

1987 Receives fellowship from New York Foundation for the Arts

1989 Marries Leslie Cecil

1990 Moves to northern Westchester County, New York

1991 Moves studio from Brooklyn to Ossining, New York

1992 Birth of son, Balin Cecil Michael

## SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

Katonah Museum of Art,  
Katonah, New York, 1994

Robischon Gallery,  
Denver, Colorado, 1994, 1992, 1990

Littlejohn/Sternau Gallery,  
New York, New York, 1992

San Antonio Art Institute,  
San Antonio, Texas, 1992

Ruth Siegel Gallery,  
New York, New York, 1991

Pence Gallery,  
Santa Monica, California, 1990, 1988

Haines Gallery,  
San Francisco, California, 1990

LedisFlam Gallery,  
Brooklyn, New York, 1989

Nina Freudenheim Gallery,  
Buffalo, New York, 1988

David Beitzel Gallery,  
New York, New York, 1988

High Museum of Art,  
Atlanta, Georgia, 1987

Craig Cornelius Gallery,  
New York, New York, 1987, 1985

## SELECTED PUBLIC EXHIBITIONS

David Winton Bell Gallery, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island

The Brooklyn Museum, New York

The Denver Art Museum, Colorado

High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia

Neuberger Museum of Art,  
Purchase, New York

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inside front and back covers:  
detail, *Melt 494*



