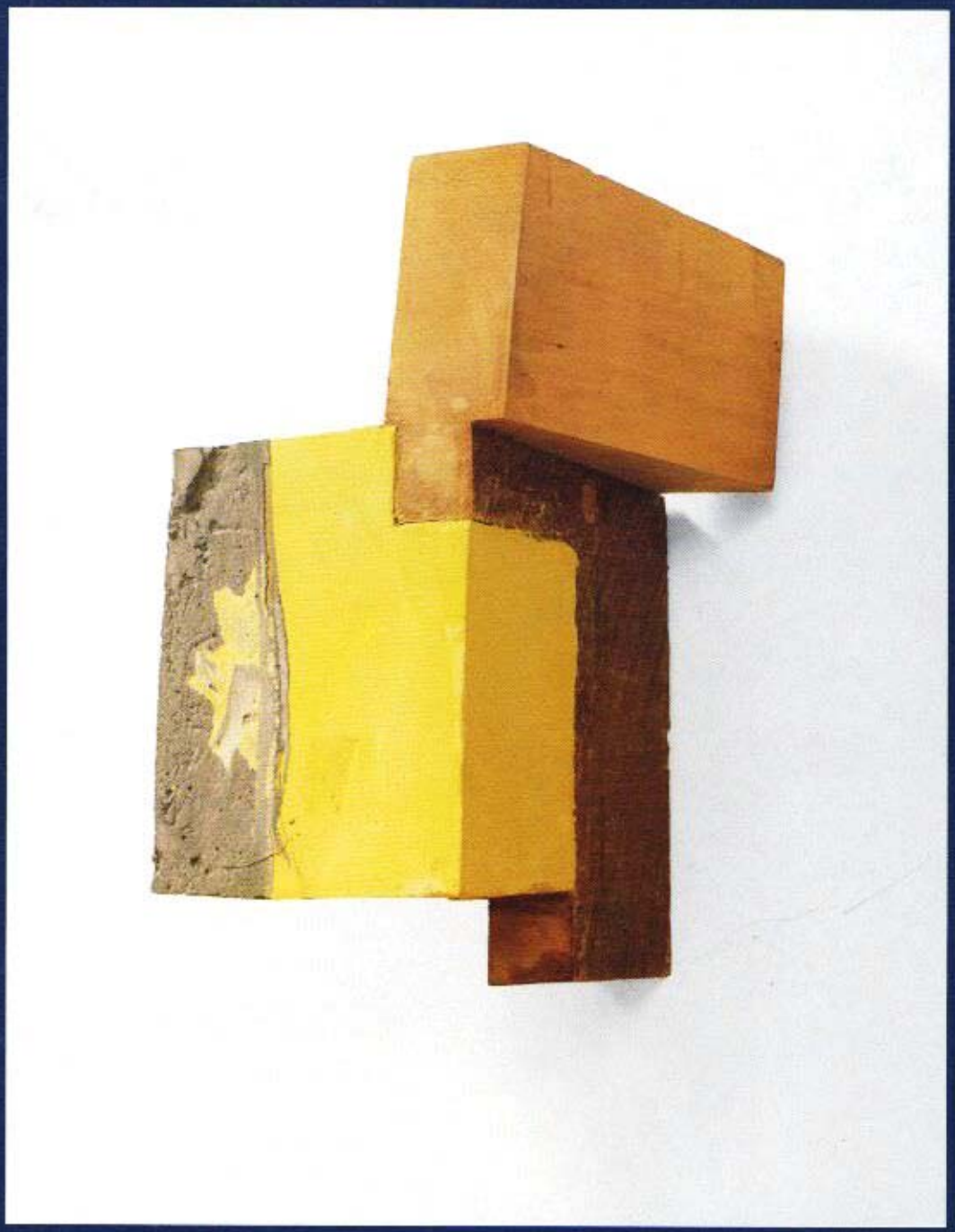
Michael Gitlin 1982-1989



Michael Gitlin 1982-1989

Exhibition Curated by Elaine A. King

with essays by Kenneth Baker and Yigal Zalmona

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Introduction

This exhibition is comprised of drawings and sculptures created by Michael Gitlin from 1982 through 1989. Its intention is to provide the viewer with a sampling of key works by this artist, who began his career with a strong Modernist-Minimalist foundation but who has, over time, transcended his earlier sensibility to produce a powerful, highly individual body of work. At a time when the international art world grapples with Post-Modernist issues and a redefinition of the meaning of art, it is relevant to examine the work of Michael Gitlin, who retains a strong reverence for Modernist ideals and who does not claim to be artist either as "redeemer" or as cynic. This writer finds such grandiose missions suspect and subscribes to Donald Kuspit's notion of "the Good Enough Artist." Welcoming genuine expression, I laud Michael Gitlin for upholding his convictions in an era marked by trendy zealots who purport to be in possession of absolute truths.

As in the theatre world, an excellent production is always the result of a large cast of characters who have worked long and hard together; this art exhibition is no different. First, much respect, affection, and gratitude goes to Akram Midani, the former Dean of the College of Fine Arts, Carnegie Mellon University, for his unwavering support of the Carnegie Mellon Art Gallery and my vision of its purpose. Without him, this endeavor would never have become what it is today. And I extend my sincerest appreciation to the Board of Directors of the Gallery for its support of the Gallery's programs.

I am grateful to Michael Gitlin for agreeing to exhibit his work in our gallery and for the time and energy he contributed to this undertaking. Without the loyalty, hard work, and conscientious attention to detail contributed to this project by the Gallery's devoted staff, this exhibition and catalogue could never have become a reality — much love and appreciation go to Sandra Nevel and Kristen Rockwell, who have devoted endless hours to this enterprise. James P. Nelson and Christopher Fetter are to be commended for their skills in installing this exhibition. Also, a thank you to Susan Prescott for the time she spent compiling and organizing data in the initial phase of this exhibition.

Yigal Zalmona, Chief Curator for the Arts at The Israel Museum in Jerusalem, and art critic Kenneth Baker contributed insightful essays about Michael Gitlin's work, and to each of them I extend my gratitude. The excellence of this publication is the result of the keen mind and eyes of Fannia Weingartner, who edited the manuscript. A special thank you goes to Joan Morse Gordon for her fine work on the biography and bibliography. Jak Katalan of Lazin & Katalan is responsible for the catalogue's exquisite design. Martha Harris transcribed the interview tapes of the conversations with Michael Gitlin. And John Davis of the John Davis Gallery in New York provided the Gallery with important information at the outset of this project.

Generous grants from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, the Howard Heinz Endowment, and an anonymous patron of the Gallery helped to make this exhibition possible — the Gallery is most appreciative of their belief in, and support of, our programs. Contributions were also made by other supporters listed elsewhere in this catalogue. Thanks are also due to a special friend in Köln for his support of this publication, and several other donors who elect to remain anonymous. Much of the work on display came from private collections and I want to thank all of the collectors for lending their drawings and sculptures. Their names appear on a separate list in this publication. Finally, a note of gratitude to Scott Farrow for his support and understanding.

Elaine A. King, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, History of Art
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A Conversation with Michael Gitlin

by Elaine A. King

EAK: Michael, your background intrigues me. You grew up in Israel, and were educated there. As a young artist you studied at Pratt Institute in New York. How did this diverse background affect you as an artist?
MG: From my parents I absorbed European values and this, together with my Israeli education, prepared me for my American experience. I am torn between the European and American dichotomies. It puts me in a very special position: that of the emigré. But this is not an anomaly in American culture, it is a part of it. However, by saying this I don't want to minimize the context in which I work — my traveling between New York and Israel and the involvement I have with people both here and there. Europeans deal with psychological and mythical postures. They see Duchamp's readymades as media for cultural commentary. In Europe there is no innocence. American art retains a certain innocence, a tremendous faith in the popular image. It's a challenging context in which to make art. Johns and Warhol have legitimized this momentum we call Americana. But American art has another momentum as well which has had more meaning for me: the sublime, elitist cultural pursuit represented by Newman, Rothko, and the Action-Painters Pollock, Kline, and De Kooning.
EAK: Did your early art training in Jerusalem play a role in shaping your ideas as an artist?
MG: I was trained first as a painter and a printmaker. I never studied sculpture. My teachers were cultural refugees. At the Bezalel Academy where I studied in Jerusalem their influences were very much in evidence. They represented a German tradition and the School of Paris. Theirs was a formal approach to painting affected by Clement Greenberg's precepts.
EAK: So you have a very strong Modernist foundation?
MG: I was affected by the Abstract Expressionist school, specifically by Pollock and De Kooning. Pollock, in particular, interested me because of his combination of energy and abandon based on an absolute grid-like logic.

I've always pointed out to students that they should take a very close look at Pollock and notice that nothing is smudgy there. If this man, in fact, danced on his paintings, how come there are no footmarks? The fact of the matter is that when he chose his colors, he chose them very carefully. When he placed them on top of one another he did it logically and very coldly. I'll expand on this when we get to talking about works of the 1970s. Okay?
EAK: Yes. What made you decide to come to New York?
MG: In 1970 my father had a sabbatical. At that time he asked me whether I wanted to do some graduate work in America. My response was "Why not? I'll come to New York for a year or two and get my M.F.A. at Pratt Institute and go back." So, I came to New York and I got my M.F.A. at Pratt, and I stayed, and stayed.

EAK: What was it like in the early '70s being an artist in a competitive place like New York City?
MG: My studies at Pratt were uninspiring and I had little contact with the art world at this time. I went to a lot of jazz clubs. My first professional participation was in a group show — new talent at the Betty Parsons Gallery in 1974.
EAK: Who were your teachers at Pratt?
MG: The two I liked were George McNeil and Ed Dugmore.
EAK: It's clear in your work that the roots of your forms stem from Minimalism. Also, I'd say the fact that you combine different materials and use things in an untraditional way connects you to the thinking of certain Post-Minimalists. Morris, Bochner, Le Va, Sonnier, Hess come to mind. They were so important in breaking away from the traditional use of materials and the traditional definition of sculpture-making and Minimalism.
MG: Morris no, but artists like Gordon Matta-Clark and Joel Shapiro were certainly important, as were others who were doing similar work at the same time: Palmero, Beuys, Efrat, Tevet, Rückriem, and Neustein. These artists were extricating themselves from a situation that the Minimalists had set up. There was a time when there was a sense of restriction regarding sculpture which relates to how the Minimalists saw their object-making. Personal touch was taboo. Reference to anything but the purist Platonic concept was frowned upon. The system was hermetic. We felt that the Minimalists had painted themselves into a corner. As a result my generation had to refer to Pre-Minimalist work. We went back to the Modernist tradition.
EAK: Can you talk about your artistic evolution in the '70s from being an artist who primarily did drawings and prints to becoming a sculptor?
MG: In 1973 I worked with paper as a sculptural material. Doing that demonstrated a certain way of thinking

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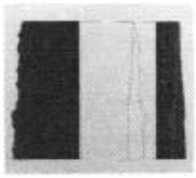

through process. There was an aspect of performance connected to the works of this period. A logical sequence was strictly observed in the making of a piece such as *Drawing of a Tear* (1973). However, within a year paper was too thin for me. I was searching for a more solid material, capable of existing three-dimensionally. I very naturally moved to plywood, which was inexpensive and less arty than paper. I needed something substantial enough to bite into with an axe.

EAK: Yes, I can understand this. A textural quality is evident in your work. I see this as an extension of your drawing and printmaking background. Can you comment on that?

MG: It has less to do with a textural quality, whatever that means, than it has with a transmission of energy through the use of a tool. Hacking at wood was like action-painting. I needed something very physical. The axe is a primitive tool and was an outlet for aggression.

EAK: The early '70s were a violent time! Do you think the social climate of the United States precipitated this? The Vietnam protests, social upheavals, and the crisis in the Middle East. Do you think these events had an impact on you as an artist?

MG: It's questionable how art relates to the political arena. The Yom Kippur War affected me deeply, but how, and if, it came to be reflected in the work is unclear. Artists from the '70s whom I respect have nothing in their work that relates specifically to a political situation. An artist can be a political person. But in American tradition he has no special purchase to political formulations. The American sensibility is a heroic sensibility: the evolving characteristics of an artist are a fierce singularity and independence.

EAK: Let me interject. It's very interesting how certain Minimalist works do correspond to the events of that period. I mean, Serra's thrown lead, the glass and cleaver pieces of Barry Le Va, and Chris Burden's art. There was a lot of violence in their work. There was cutting-up. There was throwing, crushing, etc.

MG: This may relate to the times. But I prefer to see the younger artists' new work as a reaction to the formal thinking of the older generation.

EAK: Since I view art contextually, I cannot separate it from the society and times in which it is created. However, I also see the late '60s artists breaking away from the Greenbergian formula.

MG: And the strict ontological thinking of the Minimalists.

EAK: What role have the drawings played in the evolution of your sculptural forms, and what about now? Which came first? And how do you view the drawings?

MG: In 1982 I was researching new forms. One way to go about this was to draw. In time, the drawings stopped being sketches for the sculpture and became something else. For the most part, I cannot conceive of the sculpture I do now in drawing form. There might be a germ of an idea but it develops and changes as I work.

EAK: Your drawings convey a sense of continuity. They read as a type of figural abstraction. They appear fluid and somewhat transparent. This is in contrast to the monolithic quality that pervades your wall and floor sculptures.

MG: The drawings give me a freedom to do whatever I want. They are not tied to gravity nor other physical restraints. They are autonomous, independent of the sculpture, despite the fact that they reflect a mental and psychic accumulation of experience relating to the sculpture. I do not make drawings and sculpture as separate events, although they are separate acts. But the gap between them reflects an experience, rather than a pragmatic view of cultural discourse. It is very intimate.

EAK: They are related to your artistic thinking but do not function like "floor-plans" for the sculptures.

MG: They have a life of their own. They may relate *to* the sculpture, but they are not *about* the sculpture. I do not feel comfortable making sketches for the sculpture because they are not intended to be "floor plans."

EAK: Nevertheless, they are an extension of your thinking and an extension of the sculpture?

MG: Both.

EAK: What you're saying is that your sculpture results from a "hands on" process and development of your ideas?

MG: That's right. And as far as the drawings go, it's interesting to me to find that I'll do a drawing and I'll be working on a sculpture and I'll go back to the drawing, which will lead to a sculpture, which will lead to a drawing, and there's no rational sequence. In other words I don't make a drawing and then make a sculpture.

One thing leads to another. They feed off each other.

EAK: It's an inner dialogue within yourself.

MG: No, it's a dialogue between something that is flat and something that is not.

EAK: So it is accurate to say you employ an additive method in constructing your art?

MG: I work in a way that allows me to add and subtract material. I need to be able to make changes. I don't conceal the way a work is made. Whether in the '70s or now the process is always self-evident. It is important to me that the work be read as well as felt.

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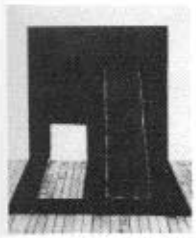

EAK: Can you cite specific pieces as examples?

MG: Well, all the pieces made between 1974-75 that I entitled the *4 x 8 Series, 1974-75,* I started with a 4' x 8' sheet of plywood. That was a given, standard industrial unit. I would paint it black, draw a line on the wood, and hack at it with an axe. The resulting jagged edges were an integral part of the work. The broken components were then relocated in a room, using the wall and floor as supports. Doing this heightened my awareness for my need to disconnect the planar sheets from the wall.

Later, as my work changed and developed, being able to reconstruct the process became less important than it had been in the '70s. Although the actual treatment of the materials is still very concrete, each piece is not preconceived, as in the past. Now the sculpture is initially vaguely defined and assumes its form through work.

EAK: Why did you choose wood as your primary medium of expression?

MG: I like the warmth of the wood; it is organic. I like the manageability of it. Wood is a convenient material to use when you want to arrive at results fairly quickly. It has mass without too much weight. It can be cut, hacked, attached to, etc. The notion of working in stone has seemed too formidable. Remember, I wasn't trained as a sculptor. And as for metal, I didn't want to weld. To this day I feel slightly uncomfortable around metal workshops.

EAK: I see a really interesting connection with the wood. The wood lends itself to giving you linear planes. And I see a definite connection to Constructivism and Cubism that pervades your work. Do you acknowledge this link and that you have built on certain of those formal and theoretical issues?

MG: I like your idea. Pre-Minimalist work has much of what I have an affinity to. The Cubists' and Constructivists' heritage provides images of modern art and structures of visual thinking that are starting points for new formulations. While I may refer to the structure of Cubism in my drawings or sculpture, the work has nothing to do with the *content* of Cubism. I also feel connected to Cubist ideas in the way that they are transmitted through David Smith's work. He re-worked the abstract language the Cubists formulated, but where they began from a figurative starting point, he works from within a non-objective context. Like him, I too am inclined to the compositional, relational, and hierarchical in sculpture.

The Constructivists interest me because of the additive method they employ in their work. I like their use of industrial materials. (Although I use materials that relate to labor and not to production, whereas their stuff relates more to production.) While not influenced, I am much moved by their utopian ideas. I envy the enthusiasm they had; their urge to participate actively in the shaping of their immediate future, their delirious curiosity about new discoveries. My generation shares little of all that.

EAK: Tatlin's pieces came to mind — especially *Corner Counter Relief* (1915) — when I first became aware of *Broken Infinity* (1985-1988). Were you influenced by his art?

MG: Tatlin's corner piece is a fundamental work for anyone engaged in wall/architectural sculpture. *Broken Infinity* was conceived in 1985, but only executed in Bonn in 1988. In the work, one beam goes through a wall. I didn't invent this. Bob Grosvenor did this in 1966 when he went through a ceiling to the floor of the space above. We all use a certain vocabulary that was established in the past and extend it. The idea for *Broken Infinity* crystallized while I was working on my wall pieces. That may bear a more direct relationship to Tatlin. I made *Broken Infinity* because it was a project I had wanted to execute for some time and the rooms at the Bonn Kunstverein allowed it. It was a wonderful opportunity to just expand, to take over a whole space.

EAK: As an artist you build on Modernist references and theories. You're building a structure on top of those ideas that you absorbed. What separates you from the appropriating artists in the '80s is that you are not cynical. You have a reverence for Modernism — Constructivism and Cubism appear to have served as a foundation for you.

Displaced, 1988, 40x37x36, mixed media on wood, collection: Vera List, New York

MG: Yes, I'm the last one to believe in tongue-in-cheek art. I understand those who are dealing with appropriation, but my heart isn't in that aesthetic. It's too specific, sometimes one-dimensional. When I look at their objects, I understand them. I locate them in space, in time. I think they're very clever, sometimes cynical, but I rarely feel anything.

EAK: Perhaps the cynicism overrides their art.

MG: I do detect a certain pain in the cynicism, and I'll give them that much credit.

EAK: Your more recent works reveal a synthesis of two distinct tendencies in your thinking. The torn planks of the '70s appear to give way to solid chunks of wood assembled in a tentative manner. These are evolving into rhythmic, multi-angular planes evocative of a gestural, figurative movement. The somber black is replaced with bright colors, interacting with the naturalness of the wood. And, you tend to use primary colors — yellow, blue, green, and red. Can you address the relationship of color to your sculpture throughout the '80s?

MG: Let me talk about my earlier work before answering this. I used one color in the '70s — black. I saw it as a marking color which I used to define certain sides of works. I made a series called *Demarcations,* which involved using wood, placing it against the wall or on the floor, marking it, and then displacing it. It was a territorial kind of occupation, marking boundaries and so on. Black was a natural color to use. I moved away from that in 1981 through a whole series of diagonal pieces. This was my first change from the strictly vertical-horizontal grid-like approach. My relationship to color is, on the one hand, functional, and on the other hand, purely emotional.

From 1982 on, color in my sculpture took the form of different materials that were used in conjunction with the wood. I use a mixture of plaster, sawdust, and pigment. When combined these elements function as a raw material with its own identity. In *Exposed* (1982) there is more of this sculptural material than the wood.

EAK: I find that your use of color relates to your painting and printmaking background. You seem to use color with form to extend sculptural space. I sense a Hoffman idea of push-pull.

MG: It's interesting you should mention Hoffman because I have a piece from 1982 which is entitled *Push and Pull.* The title is no coincidence. It was one attempt at tongue-in-cheek titling, because the piece is very static, and, just like Hoffman's paintings, it does have this feeling of push and pull to it.

In *Green Shelter* (1985) the frontal plane, which is painted green, connects with the back plane, which is green as well, thereby compressing the volume of the sculpture. The green paint functions perceptually in this work. However, in *Acid Flow* (1986) I decided to use yellow simply because I felt the need for that color.

EAK: It seems as though your use of color functions as a type of skin. However, I also see you using color to alter the linear relationships between the forms. You almost use it to introduce a sense of contradiction and it interrupts the natural grain of the wood or the form.

MG: The color and the forms are not antithetical. Often the color is the form. However, when you take a wooden structure, and go against it or with it with a new sculptural material, this new substance may interrupt the rhythm of the solid form. There's a tentative, ambiguous structural phenomenon going on. The colorful substance interacts with the wood and creates a new sculptural entity in which what is supporting what is not always clear.

EAK: I view this as a way of your introducing a new textural boundary by extending the sculptural form. Also it appears as if you are creating an organic-geometric dichotomy, as if you are purposely introducing an element of chaos to the mathematically constructed logical planes.

MG: Yes, but I don't feel there's a dichotomy there. I don't feel they're antithetical. It may feel like chaos, but what I'm trying to express in concrete terms is my constant relationship to ambiguity.

It's not as if I pour paint on a structure and sometimes the paint assumes form and sometimes it doesn't. This paint is as thick as clay, and I'm giving it shape. It doesn't take its form only from the rational underpinning that's there. It's not as if we have a deliberately shaped object covered up in an emotional, contradicting way so that they work against each other. Instead, they have become a whole new entity.

EAK: Your response evokes our discussion about Pollock. You're saying that your use of color is very deliberate. It may have a more spontaneous feel, but in fact, it is preconceived. It is as deliberate as Pollock putting down color or throwing the line in a particular way.

MG: I agree, but one mustn't knock the spontaneity in Pollock's work. Let's take an analogy from another field, a jazz musician like Charlie Parker, who was as spontaneous and inventive as any musician in the history of jazz. He stuck to a basic 32-bar framework. And that's how it is with my art, yes, the paint is deliberate and it's chosen, but a lot of strange things happen over which I have no control.
EAK: The materials themselves contribute to this on-going process.
MG: They do. And I try to keep it simple. You may notice that in most of my pieces I use just one color.
EAK: I think that's true and evident in a piece like *Green Shelter* (1985). However, in *Acid Flow* the textural colored material feels as if a glob were penetrating through the piece. In *Torque* (1989) the use of the solid opaque black has a connection to the way you used green in *Green Shelter*. However, it now resembles an inlay in the wood.
MG: In *Acid Flow* I poured the paint over the structure. I let it assume a form on its own. In *Torque* I was very definite about how the painted material would appear in the final piece.
EAK: You were in total control?
MG: Yes. I structured the flow of the paint by taping off certain sections.
EAK: Perhaps it's the textural surface that alludes to the illusory spontaneity.
MG: Yes, it's just that I have a lot of difficulty with the word *texture* because it's one of those buzz words that's used whenever something is slightly seductive.
EAK: Perhaps the word is not "textured" but "organic." The latter implies a much more earthen feel in contrast to the geometric planes of the planks of wood.
MG: Yes, but it's a complex issue. Wood is a very organic material, but a material that undergoes a commercial process.
EAK: A definite sense of contradiction pervades your sculptures. They appear strong yet fragile. This is evident as early as 1980. What was the name of the piece?
MG: *Nostalgia.*
EAK: Yes! Upon closer examination of this work, one sees that a fragile state is apparent and a tenuous condition exists, implying an impending state of almost collapse or destruction. Can you address this?
MG: *Nostalgia* and works such as *No Beneficiaries* (1986) have a form which looks as if it is about to fall apart. In fact, this is only an illusion. In terms of their structure, this piece and others from the *Temporary Shelters* series are quite sound. If the work seems to be difficult to grasp it may be because it deals with unsettled matters. *Pending Resolution* is a title that speaks for itself.
EAK: What role do the titles play in relationship to the forms?
MG: I try to make them as specific as possible.
EAK: Are your titles literal to the process of constructing?
MG: Sometimes they are literal as in *Grey Cast* (1988). Concrete thinking is also evident in works such as *Displaced* (1986) where one unit was wrenched and displaced. In other cases the titles are metaphorical, *Temporary Shelter* for instance, or relate more to my feelings about a work than the process of making it. *No Beneficiaries* (1986) or *Open Enclosure* (1984) would fall into that category.
EAK: The structures you create are somewhat awkward in that they cannot be viewed from a single vantage point. One must move around your sculptures in order to experience them. Is this deliberate in order to engage your viewer?
MG: I would say so. If I'm trying to deal with experiences that are contradictory, as you mentioned before, or ambiguous, the notion of perceiving and grasping a piece from one point of view wouldn't work. The fact that one must walk around a sculpture is very important.
EAK: Another thing I observed in studying your art is that the wall continues to be a constant element. You appear to go back and forth, struggling to free your work from the structural support of the wall and create free-standing pieces such as *Double Shield* (1988), *Displaced* (1988), and even *Nostalgia* (conceived in 1980 and then completed in 1986). Its Stonehenge monumentality alludes to a turn of direction. However, throughout the '80s you continue to make very strong wall pieces simultaneously with the floor sculptures.
MG: I started doing the wall pieces as an extension of being a painter. I progressed from painting to the torn paper pieces. It's interesting that the early pieces at Betty Parsons Gallery in '74 were wall pieces hanging

slightly away from the wall, but still attached to it. I've often thought about why this dependence on the wall continues as a motif throughout my work. I think it has to do with the fragility of the pieces and the fact that they need a basic structure. The wall is there and it does not share the exact space I stand on. Unlike the situation with the free-standing pieces, it's a combination of the physical presence of the sculpture coming out of the wall and the cerebral activity of looking at something that is not in the same space as the viewer occupies. On the pictorial plane my commitment to the wall is sometimes a "psychological weakness." The free-standing pieces are a struggle with my doubts.

EAK: Do you see the wall constructions as perhaps a type of drawing in space?

MG: It's one way of looking at it. Certainly *Broken Infinity* is a drawing in space as was the *Demarcation* series shown at Documenta '77. I was dealing with a given space in a certain way — with corners, with walls, with floors, with ceilings. So, yes, the earlier ones can be viewed as types of drawings in space. The current pieces are works that transcend those earlier concerns.

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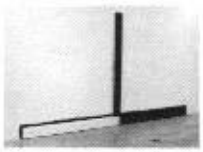

EAK: A sense of flux is evident in most of your art. This shifting and changing characterizes a lot of the work of the '80s. The earlier pieces were more static. The later pieces convey a sense of dance-like motion. However, *Torque* retreats back to an earlier sensibility. One gets the feeling from the way you placed the black color that it is about to start rolling down the planar shaft.

MG: Yes, a sense of flux is there. I think some of the pieces are about a frozen moment in time and space. This goes back to an early *Demarcation* piece; in that instance I painted a plank of wood that was placed against the floor and the wall, cut in half, and then raised. The implication was that if I raised one component I could raise the other as well. The piece was about a latent situation and an activity that actually took place.

EAK: Time is a vital element in your work. However, it appears that you are very interested in space and in structured relationships. The architectural spatial quality that pervades your work calls to mind house construction, shelters, and elements related to building. This sensibility comes through in the 1970s, in *Demarcation I*. Works such as *Open Enclosure* (1984), *Spatial Twist* (1984), and *Recycled Fragment* (1984) are very Constructivist. A dance-like essence suffuses these linear constructions. The elements come off the wall and reach out.

MG: *Demarcation* was done in 1976. Each piece I did at that time was preconceived prior to its construction. But the 1982 pieces from the show — *Exposed, Black Counterpoint* — and others are much more condensed in terms of the mass, and were the beginning of an attempt to come out into space. *Demarcation* was more like a painting exercise, but carried out on the wall using very thin material.

The plaster and wood pieces of 1982, the *Push and Pull* piece, and *Green Counterpoint* (1983) are all very dense works that attempt to engage the viewer kinesthetically as well as cerebrally. Pieces that came later on, such as *Accumulation Inside Out* (1985), *Space Link, Recycled Fragment,* and the other piece that you mentioned, *Encroached Ark*, tried to engage people even more, to the point where they could walk under the piece, get inside, and become part of it. Later on these, in turn, became a little thin for me. In 1986 I started doing such works as *Your Head or Mine* and *Fragile Sanctuary*, which were a combination of the early plaster pieces and the volumetric pieces such as *Encroached Ark*. In other words, I needed both — the denseness and the massiveness of the early pieces and the volume of the 1985 pieces. The synthesis is what I was after.

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EAK: You are an artist who seems to recycle your artistic vocabulary. And I think particularly in pieces like *Your Head or Mine* and *Fragile Sanctuary* one observes that synthesis of multiple ideas and resolutions. The massiveness comes back, but at the same time, the more linear planar constructions found in *Yellow Bridge* or *Space Link* co-exist within the mask-like forms. I think this is a real strength in your art: you don't shed anything, but you continue to build on past explorations. Isn't this method related to a Constructivist concept?

MG: That's right.

EAK: When one observes your art, it would seem logical to call it non-objective sculpture. What is it about? What are you trying to convey? Why are you doing it?

MG: As any artist would tell you, you do it because you have to. Whenever I am in Amsterdam I go to the Rijksmuseum. It houses a small Vermeer. When I see it I experience one of those frozen moments of time when I connect with an artist and his or her gift to us, and for a moment I am transformed. I would hope that people who see a good work of mine, of any artist, are similarly transported. All the rest is day to day. I don't

have any political premises for my work. I do not believe art can change society. A good work connects with good works in the past and becomes a part of our lives, of culture.

EAK: That's a vital answer and a difficult goal. Am I correct in saying that you are an artist in the late '80s who continues to work within a Modernist sensibility? How do you feel about the rejection of Modernism today in our current Post-Modern "Age of Appropriation?"

MG: Brancusi, Boccioni, and Tatlin continue to interest me, as does Smithson. His *Spiral Jetty*, doomed to disintegrate, is a far cry from commodity pieces given legitimacy by the end of the '80s hype. However, one positive aspect to contemporary culture is the recognition of the validity of individual discourse.

As I mentioned before, the "Age of Appropriation," as it's termed right now, is interesting to me as an anecdote in our history. I don't think it's really going to do much. The arch-appropriator of all time was Duchamp. And I'm much more connected in my mind with early Conceptualists like Robert Smithson, whose total engagement with art and life created a positive impact on the art world.

EAK: I couldn't agree with you more. As a matter of fact, I feel that the rise in the cost of art and of art as entertainment in museums, has escalated so drastically in the last few years that it has gotten out of hand. However, let's get back to Michael Gitlin. Where do you see your work going today? Do you see changes?

MG: Well, I can only say that I sense some changes coming. What they will be, I don't know. I think if we knew exactly where things were going, we wouldn't want to take the journey.

Height precedes width, precedes depth. All measurements are in inches.

a. Installation, 1974, Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, collection: Artist

b. *Drawing of a Tear*, 1973, 39x29½, cardboard and ink on paper, collection: Artist

c. *4x8 Series, #10*, 1974-75, 48x48x48, acrylic on wood, collection: The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

d. *Demarcation I*, 1976, 90x168x1½, acrylic on wall, floor, and wood, collection: Artist

e. *Space Link*, 1984, 48x63x37, acrylic on wood, collection: Artist