

JOEL FISHER

Swiss Institute, New York

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September 15 - October 30, 1988

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

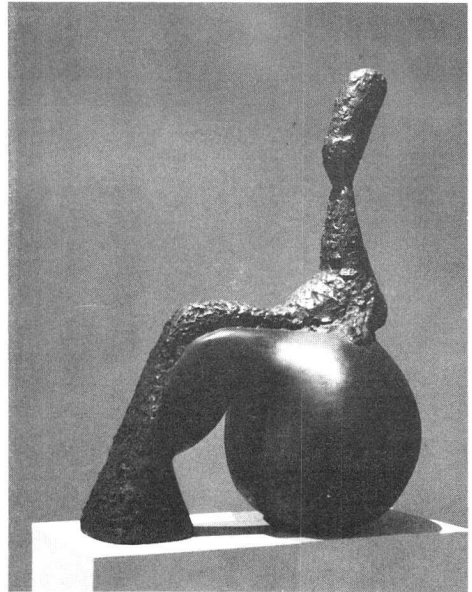
The Swiss Institute is particularly pleased to exhibit Joel Fisher's works as its first collaboration with a non-Swiss artist in the exhibition "Marianne Eigenheer, Joel Fisher." Fisher's and Eigenheer's works have many similarities and showing their works together enhances the significance of each. Furthermore, Fisher as individual and as artist has always been highly regarded and appreciated in Switzerland. His work has been seen there in most important exhibitions and is widely collected by Swiss.

I am especially grateful to all the individuals, who made works available for the exhibition. My appreciation goes to the Diane Brown Gallery for their cooperation. Without the generous financial support of the Union Bank of Switzerland this project could not have been realized, therefore we extend our gratitude to them.

Finally, I would like to thank Joel Fisher, who despite his heavy exhibition schedule agreed to collaborate with the Swiss Institute on this project. His patience, good humor and interest to all the details have been instrumental to the success of this exhibition.

Z.W.

Seed, 1987
Bronze
40 × 29 × 22 inches
Collection of
Mr. Edward Downe Jr.



THE RANDOM IN ART

Random, without definite aim, direction, rule or method . . . A random event results from a series of infinite variables. Randomness follows only the laws of probability.

A random event can be constructive or destructive. An accidental encounter can result in love and friendship, but also in hatred and death. A random discovery may foretell a savior or reveal future destruction. Drawing a number or a card may bring luck, joy, wealth, or disappointment.

Despite acknowledging the existence of the random, a rational and logical world, such as that of science and the classical Greeks, equates randomness with aberration and consistently attempts to explain its occurrence through reason. In other words, it seeks to turn the accidental into the intentional.

In the field of creativity, randomness has often been a generative factor. In a century such as ours dominated by scientific and technological advances, artistic creativity has been repeatedly governed by accident.

The sentence or image game of the "Exquisite Corpse," beloved by the Surrealists, was played by several people, each of whom added a word or a part of image without benefit of either predesign or knowledge of the previous contributor's intention.

Accident was also an important component of Abstract Expressionism. Jackson Pollock created his all-over paintings by dripping paint directly on canvas, leaving the ef-

fect, if not the intention, to the immediacy. Helen Frankenthaler executed her color field paintings by pouring paint at random from coffee cans onto the canvas.

During the late sixties and the seventies, many Postminimalists frequently integrated accident in their works. Richard Serra created sculptures by splashing molten lead at the angle where floor meets wall, and Lynda Benglis made rubber “rugs” by simply pouring latex on the floor.

Randomness has been increasingly a generative component of the twentieth century artistic process. But as artists respond to chance and accident in widely different manners, it is interesting to investigate how one contemporary artist comes to grips with randomness.

The Work of Randomness

Joel Fisher’s approach to randomness is as unique as fascinating. Slightly younger than the Postminimalist generation, Fisher makes drawings and sculptures that resemble familiar subjects, but develop exclusively out of random occurrences.

The generative elements in Fisher’s work are felt fibers which stick to the handmade papers when he rests them on felt pads to dry. Unlike the Surrealists’ Exquisite Corpse creations or Serra’s splashed molten lead, where chance acts on periphery almost as a supplement to bring the artistic process to an end, Fisher’s work usually establishes a strict structure within which chance is allowed to function. Thereafter he

takes command, and ingeniously integrates the random in his operating process and combines both skillfully and harmoniously together. The result is sculptures resembling real things in life, such as human and animal figures, trees, and objects.

Fisher’s approach to creation could be called Aristotelian. Like Aristotle, who explains any incident through reason and intelligence and makes it appear as an expected event, Fisher causes the accidental in his work to resemble the intentional. In Fisher’s creativity the random event is not meant to engender shock or confrontation, but rather to encourage engagement with the artistic process. This is why our response to Fisher’s sculptures differs markedly from our reaction to Jackson Pollock’s action paintings or to Serra’s splashes of molten lead.

Subtlety is another important aspect of Fisher’s approach. Fisher works slowly and reflects before making each decision and carrying it through in his work. His creation is marked by keen insight and an ability to penetrate deeply and thoroughly into a problem. The artist has stated: “I want my work to take its time.” Such characteristics endow Fisher’s work with a tremendous sense of openness to further questioning and interpretation. The viewer is never secure in knowing where the work comes from, to what it relates, and how it has been created. Fisher adds “I want to keep things open.”

Fisher first makes handmade paper which he places on a felt pad to dry. The wet paper absorbs various felt fibers. He then chooses usually one

to provide potential for his work, and carefully copies the fiber in a considerably larger scale, on the same paper and in close proximity to the actual fiber. Fisher calls these hairline drawings “apographs.”

This procedure might seem simple, but it is subtle, mysterious, intelligent, and demanding of the viewer. By drawing the shape of the felt fiber next to it and presenting both to us, Fisher has already played on our understanding of the notions of accidental and intentional and the differentiation we make between them. The drawing, which initially was and in reality still is the copy of the felt fiber, appears as the real thing. A viewer looking at the work sees at first glance the drawing, while the fiber remains unnoticed. If he subsequently comes to recognize the felt fiber, it is solely through its relation to the drawing. In other words, that which has come into being as the result of an accident, becomes the indicator for recognizing the accident. Chance brings about reality and reality reflects chance.

Sometimes Fisher creates sculptures from the “apographs.” The process of translating two dimensions into three is another challenge for him, and the procedure is a very slow one. It requires trying out various possibilities, imagining the different tridimensional translations that one drawing can take and filling in the gaps where necessary. Thus, a single drawing may result in several sculptures. Paradoxically, these sculptures usually resemble real and mundane subjects. Once more Fisher’s subtlety plays a game with us. The figures, trees, and objects we see are only imaginative translations

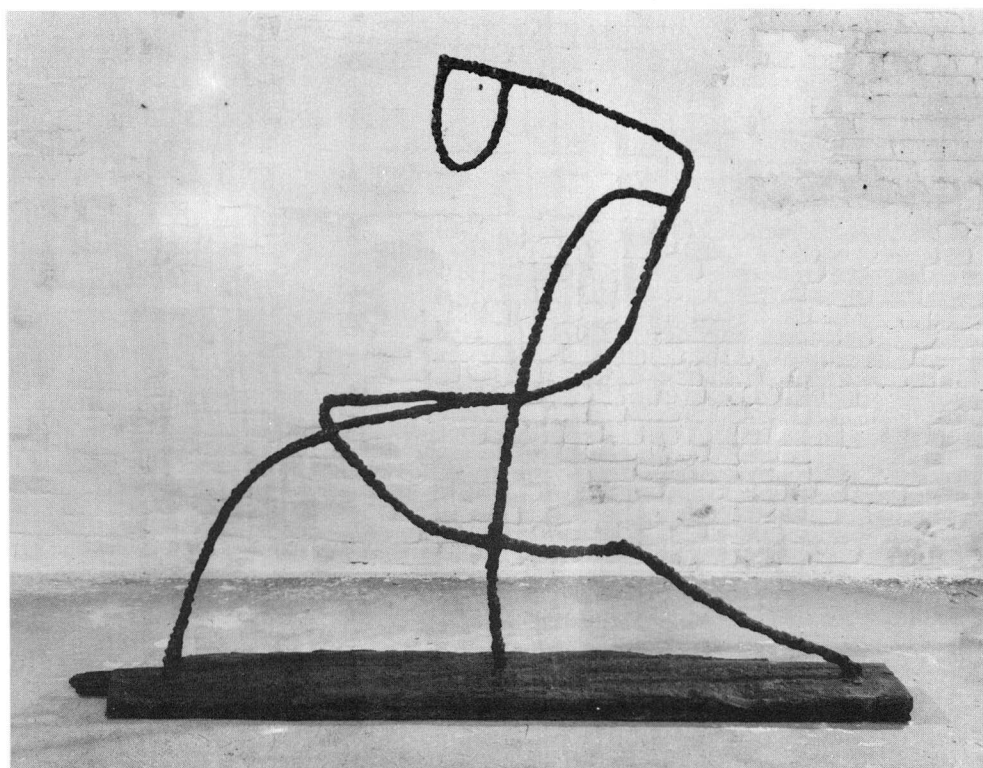
of the “apographs,” which are themselves copies of reality transcribed from accident. The sculptures thus have a “false identity” and resemble things they are not in reality.

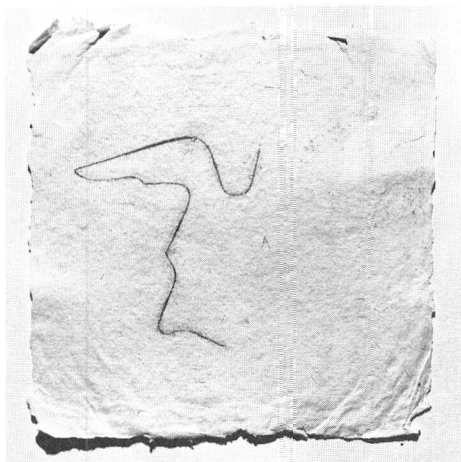
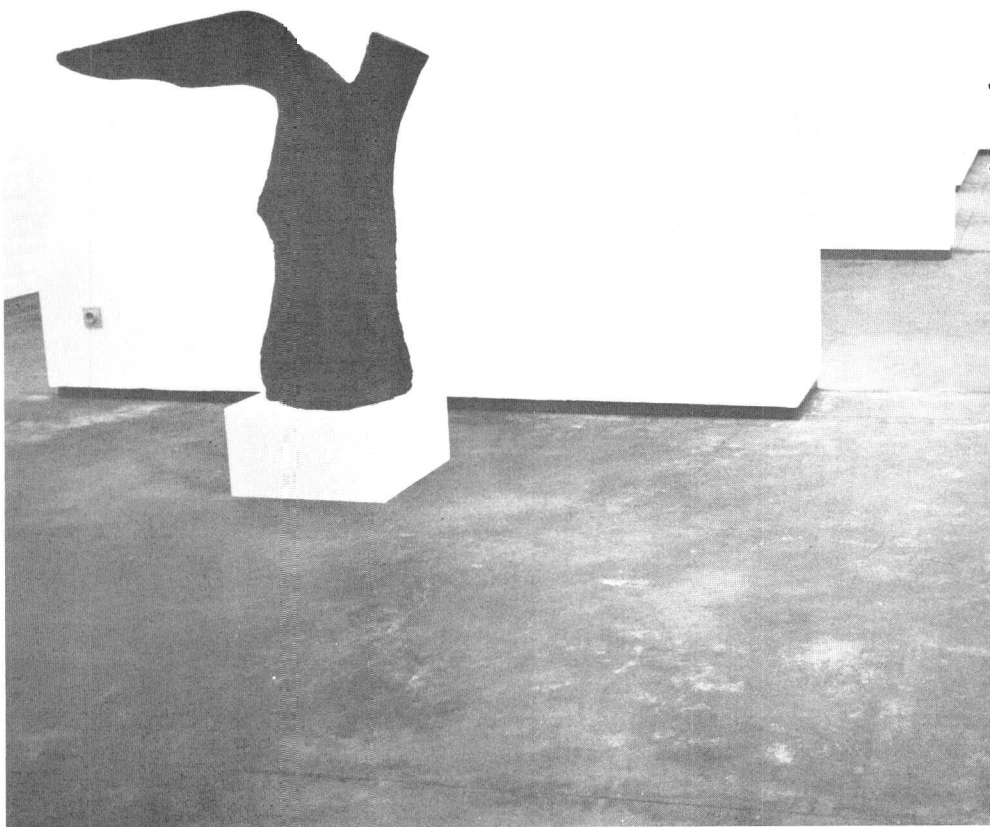
Fisher’s way of coming to grips with randomness exhibits a fresh artistic approach. The result of his more than two decades of experimentation and creativity proves that the random can be an extraordinary impetus to artistic endeavor.

Chance, accident, and randomness all come from the realm of the unreal. They ignore the standard and highlight issues that do not commonly come to mind; this is the source of their power. The fabulous sculptures of Joel Fisher are testimony that if the randomness is carefully integrated into the artistic process, it will enhance the mental grasp of reality.

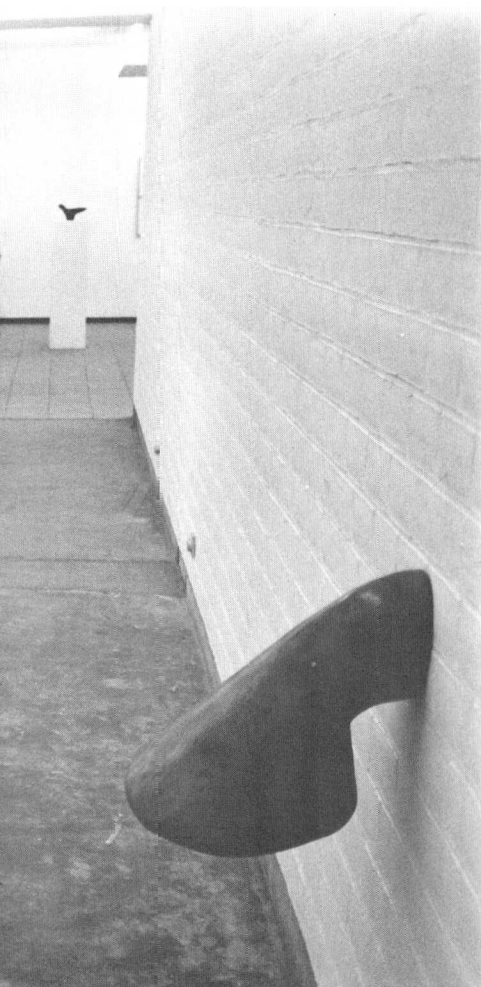
Ziba de Weck

Untitled, 1988
Bronze
61 1/2 × 78 1/2 × 13 inches
Collection of the artist

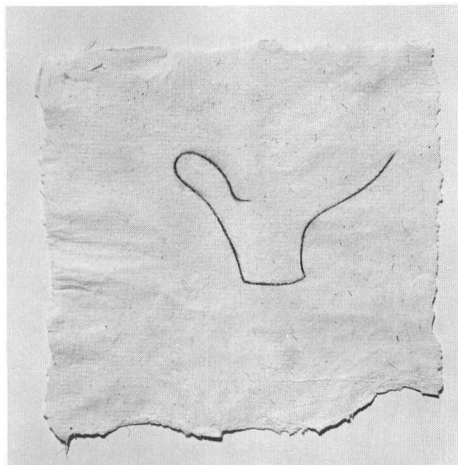




Drawing for *Tree*, 1985
Pencil, charcoal, and found fiber
on handmade paper
Approximately $6\frac{1}{4} \times 6\frac{1}{4}$ inches

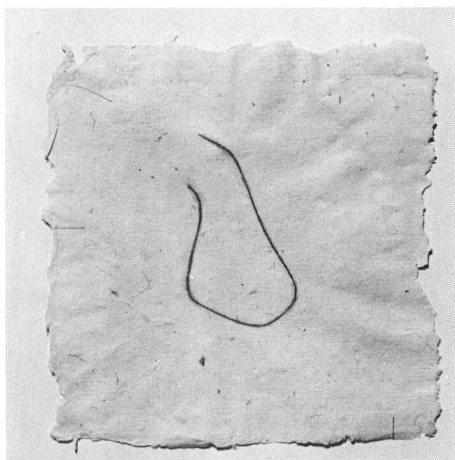


Installation view, Galerie S65, Aalst, Belgium
February 1988. On the right *Hoof*, on the
left *Tree*, and in the background *Lip pot*.



Drawing for *Lip Pot*, 1983
Charcoal, and found fiber
on handmade paper
Approximately $6\frac{1}{4} \times 6\frac{1}{4}$ inches

Drawing for *Hoof*, 1980
Charcoal, conte and found fiber
on handmade paper
Approximately $6\frac{1}{4} \times 6\frac{1}{4}$ inches

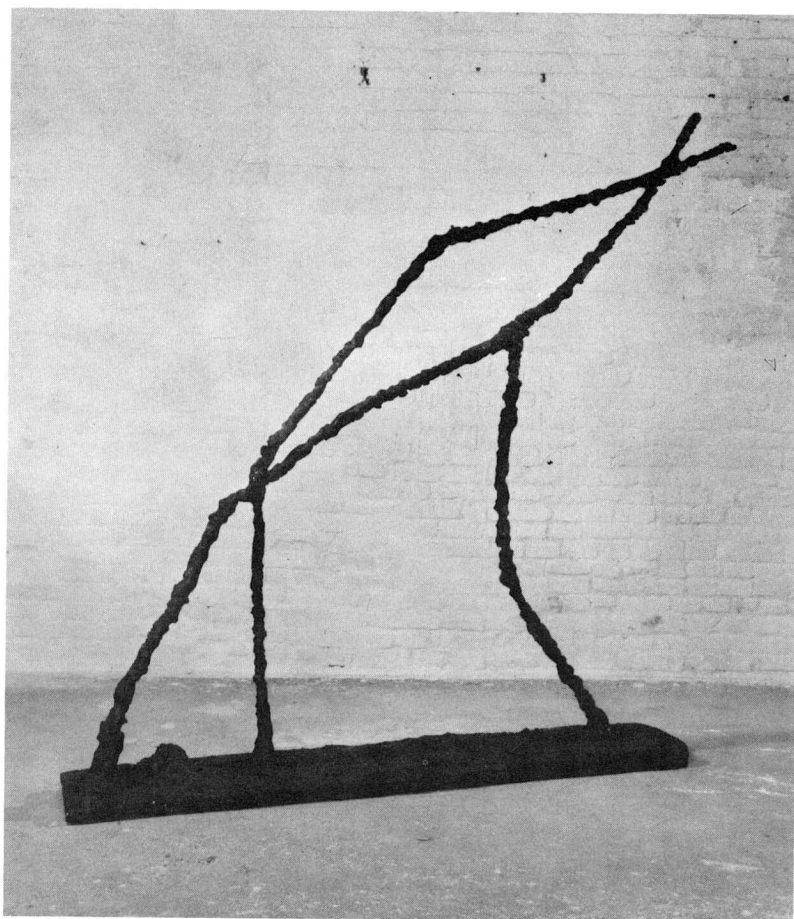


Untitled, 1988

Bronze

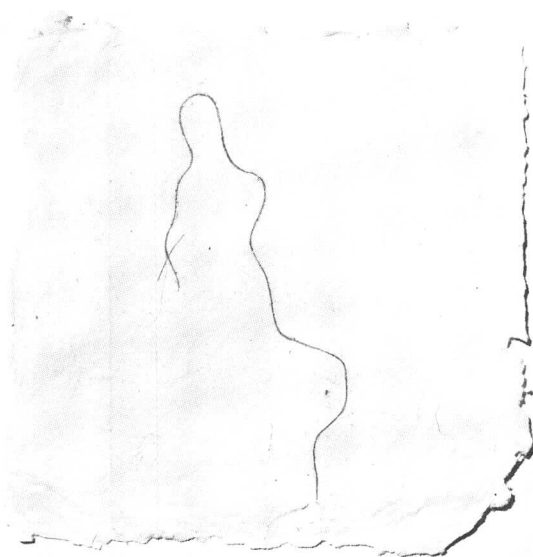
71½ × 70½ × 13 inches

Collection of the artist

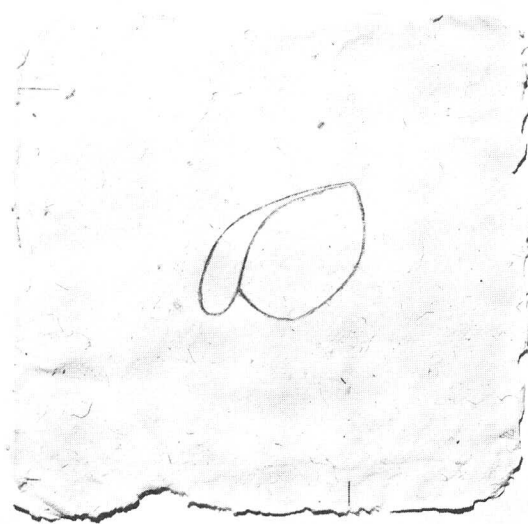


Untitled, 1988
Bronze
65½ × 50½ × 12½ inches
Collection of the artists

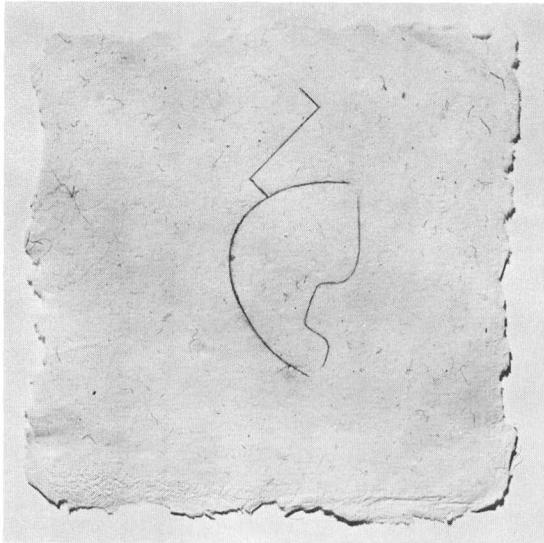




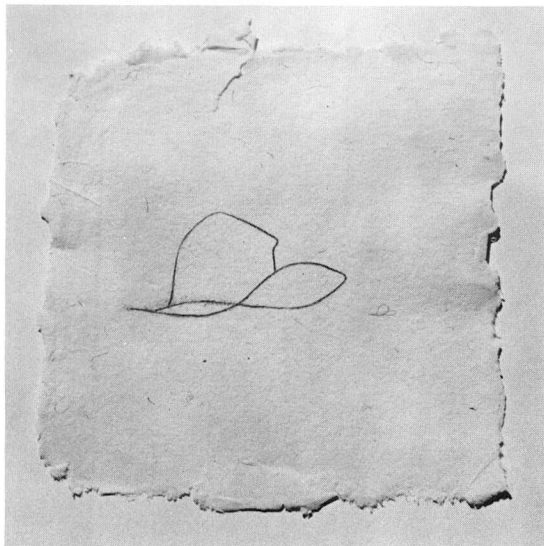
Drawing for *Bollard & S*, 1982
Pencil and found fiber
on handmade paper
Approximately $6\frac{1}{4} \times 6\frac{1}{4}$ inches



Drawing for *Cap*, 1980
Conte crayon and found fiber
on handmade paper
Approximately $6\frac{1}{4} \times 6\frac{1}{4}$ inches



Drawing for *Ear*, 1985
 Pencil, charcoal, conte, and found
 fiber on handmade paper.
 Approximately $6\frac{1}{4} \times 6\frac{1}{4}$ inches



Drawing for *Hat*, 1985
 Pencil, charcoal and found fiber
 on handmade paper
 Approximately $6\frac{1}{4} \times 6\frac{1}{4}$ inches

JOEL FISHER

Born 1947, Salem, Ohio

SELECTED ONE-MAN EXHIBITIONS

- | | |
|------|--|
| 1970 | Whitney Art Resources Center, New York |
| 1971 | Victoria & Albert Museum, London
Nigel Greenwood, London |
| 1972 | Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, Paris |
| 1974 | Galerie Folker Skulima, Berlin |
| 1975 | Staedtisches Museum, Moenchengladbach, Germany |
| 1976 | Max Protetch Gallery, New York |
| 1977 | Museum of Modern Art, Oxford
Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels |
| 1978 | Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam |
| 1979 | Gallery Michele Lachowsky, Brussels |
| 1980 | Gallery Toni Gerber, Bern |
| 1981 | LYC Museum, Brampton, Cumbria |
| 1982 | Riverside Studios, London |
| 1983 | Galerie Farideh Cadot, Paris |
| 1984 | Kunstmuseum, Luzern
Diane Brown Gallery, New York |
| 1986 | Dart Gallery, Chicago |
| 1987 | University Art Gallery, Berkeley |
| 1988 | Diane Brown Gallery, New York
Gallery Shimada, Yamaguchi, Japan |

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- | | |
|------|--|
| 1972 | Paula Cooper Gallery, New York |
| 1973 | Penthouse Gallery, Museum of Modern Art,
New York
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Grenoble, France
"30 International Kuenstler in Berlin," Bonn |
| 1975 | "American Drawings," Levenskussen Museum, Germany |
| 1976 | "Handmade paper: Prints and Unique Works," The Museum of Modern Art, New York |
| 1978 | "The International Drawing Triennale," Wroclaw, Poland |
| 1979 | "Pittura-Ambiente," Palazzo Reale, Milan |
| 1981 | "New Works of Contemporary Art," Fruit Market Gallery, Edinburgh |
| 1982 | "Choix pour Aujourd'hui," Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris |
| 1984 | "An International Survey of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture,"
The Museum of Modern Art, New York |
| 1985 | "Spuren Skulpturen und Monumente ihrer Praezisen Reise," Kunsthau, Zurich |
| 1986 | "Skulptur Sein," Kunsthalle, Dusseldorf |
| 1987 | "Structure to Resemblance: Eight Sculptors," Albright Knox Gallery, Buffalo |
| 1988 | "Marianne Eigenheer, Joel Fisher," Swiss Institute, New York |

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Dimensions are in inches;
height precedes width
precedes depth.

SCULPTURES

Seed, 1987
Bronze
40 × 29 × 22
Collection of Mr. Edward Downe Jr.

Untitled, 1988
Bronze
65½ × 50½ × 12½
Collection of the artist

Untitled, 1988
Bronze
71½ × 70 × 13
Collection of the artist

Untitled, 1988
Bronze
61½ × 78½ × 13
Collection of the artist

Ear, 1988
Bronze
60 × 54 × 7½
Collection of the artist

DRAWINGS

An installation of 40 drawings
from different periods

Swiss Institute
35 West 67th Street
New York, New York, 10023

Director: Ziba de Weck
Assistant: Ariane Braillard

Gallery Hours:
Monday-Friday 2:00-8:00 pm
Saturday-Sunday 2:00-6:00 pm

Gallery talks:
will be organized by appointment

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