



Art in America

MARCH 2000

JENNY SAVILLE CARNEGIE INTERNATIONAL
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Art in America

March 2000

Pots, Politics, Paradise by *Kenneth E. Silver*

Picasso's enthusiasm for ceramics after WWII helped revive a regional craft in the south of France.

78

Carnegie Ramble by *Edward Leffingwell*

Film, video and photography stand out amid the sprawling array of works at the current Carnegie International.

86

Floating in Gender Nirvana by *Linda Nochlin*

In disturbing large-scale paintings of fleshy nudes, British artist Jenny Saville gives her lush figures a conceptual slant.

94

The Colors of India: Raghubir Singh by *P.C. Smith*

The late Indian photographer's boldly hued images abound with references to his country's history and culture.

98

Not Lost, Not Found: Bill Bollinger by *Wade Saunders*

A fellow sculptor recounts the cautionary tale of one of the most original talents of the late 1960s, who plummeted from acclaim to obscurity.

104

Painting in the Present, Tense by *Marcia E. Vetrocq*

The canvases of German artist Thomas Scheibitz feature exhilarating color effects and ambiguous shifts of scale.

118

Front Page

39

Review of Books

49

Sue Taylor on Abigail Solomon-Godeau's Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation and Linda Nochlin's Representing Women. Ken Johnson on Griselda Pollock's Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories and Rosalind Krauss's Bachelors

Report from Oporto

58

Sorting Out the '60s
by *Elisabeth Sussman*



Review of Exhibitions

122

New York, Boston, Atlanta, New Orleans, Chicago, Kansas City, Dallas, San Antonio, Santa Fe, Los Angeles, Venice, Berkeley, Warm Springs, Seattle, Rotterdam, Prague

Artworld

160

Cover: Jenny Saville, *Hyphen* (detail), 1999, oil on canvas, 9 by 12 feet. Photo courtesy Gagosian Gallery, New York. See article beginning on page 94.

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Not Lost, Not Found: Bill Bollinger

In the late 1960s, sculptor Bill Bollinger showed with—and was routinely compared to—such other emerging artists as Richard Serra, Keith Sonnier and Bruce Nauman, all of whom admired his work. Today, 12 years after his death, Bollinger is forgotten, and his radically original sculpture has been lost virtually in toto. Here a fellow sculptor traces Bollinger's career, uncovering the dark realities of a life in art.

BY WADE SAUNDERS



Part 1

Richard Serra: There were a lot of good people in that show ("9 at Leo Castelli," December 1968). Nauman was in that show, there were a few interesting Italians in that show—

Chuck Close: Eva Hesse was in that show.

Richard Serra: Eva Hesse was in the show. There was a really talented guy—I don't know what happened to him—Bill Bollinger.

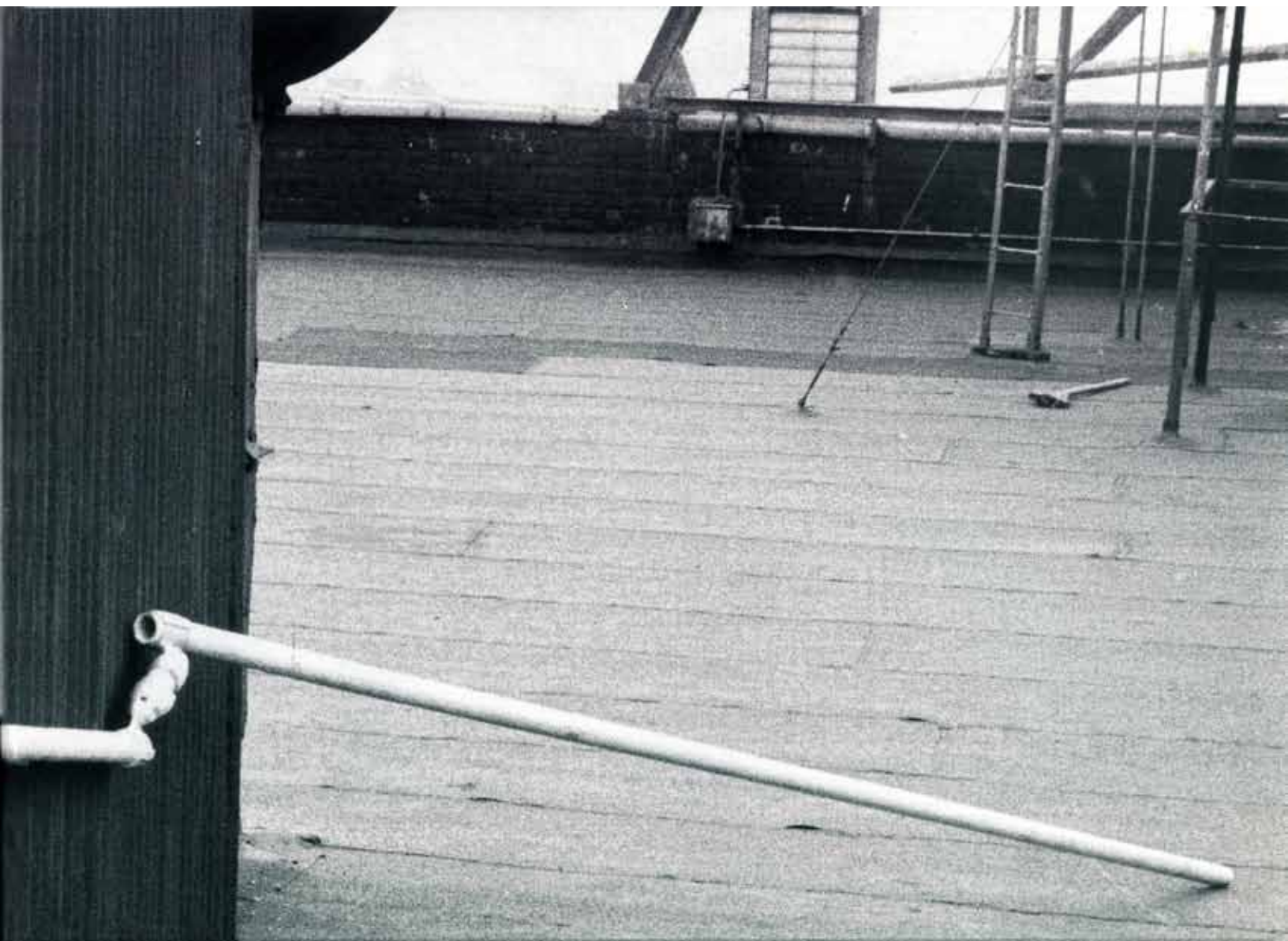
Chuck Close: Bollinger was very interesting. There were some beautiful Sonniers in that show, the best he ever did, I think.

—New York City, Oct. 2, 1965, from *The Portraits Speak: Chuck Close in Conversation with 27 of his Subjects* (New York, A.R.T. Press, 1997)

I'm not going to be doing the same damn thing all my life.

—Bill Bollinger, quoted by Howard Junker, *Newsweek*, July 29, 1968

History, we are told, is written by the winners, in the art world as elsewhere. Fellow artists, curators, dealers and some critics recognized William (Bill) Bollinger as one of the important sculptors exhibiting in New York City in the late 1960s, yet his work is now invisible, and few remember his name. Bollinger's sculpture mattered, and I decided to write



about him so others would know his work. The writing took longer than I'd planned. Two intertwined stories follow; one concerns Bollinger's sculpture and life, the second my passion for his work. This account is incomplete, but there's been no other in 25 years.

The first gallery show I remember seeing remains the best I've ever seen. A couple of the pieces from that day belong to my imaginary museum. It was December 1968; I was 19 and visiting New York City. The exhibition, called "9 at Leo Castelli," had been curated by Robert Morris for the gallery's warehouse at 103 East 108th St. The nine were Giovanni Angelino, Bill Bollinger, Eva Hesse, Steve Kaltenbach, Bruce Nauman, Alan Saret, Richard Serra, Keith Sonnier and Gilberto Zorio. Rafael Ferrer added an unsolicited leaf installation in the stairway.

To make the work titled *Mustee*, Sonnier had painted a rough, horizontal latex rectangle onto the wall, flocked the latex and then pulled free the upper half, so that it flopped down in front of the still-attached lower portion. The work was an elegant move from painting into sculpture and subtly linked the fixed and the floating. Nauman's *John Coltrane Piece* was a 36-inch square, 3-inch-thick, 400-pound aluminum plate laid on the floor, with the word "dark" written on its unseeable, mirror-finish bottom surface. Serra showed three

works. One, *Splashing*, he made by throwing molten lead into the juncture between wall and floor. In another sculpture, untitled then but now known as *Prop*, he used a leaning 8-foot pipe-like roll of lead-antimony sheet to pin a 5-foot square lead-antimony sheet to the wall. Bollinger took a 50-foot length of 6-foot-wide chain-link fencing, anchored one end flat to the floor and then gave the fencing a half twist, so it ran, rose up, and descended again to be anchored flat. An embodied gesture, it held its own in tough company.

Some critics are reported to prefer writing about art to looking at it. In the *New York Times* of Dec. 22, 1968, Philip Leider decided that Sonnier had "mounted" a sheet of thin adhesive latex on the gallery wall, mistook Serra's rolled-up lead sheet for "a heavy steel pipe," and twice described Serra's thrown lead as "heavy silver paint." That such a powerful figure as Leider, then the editor of *Artforum*, couldn't look accurately at the works reinforced my enthusiasm for these artists. I thought of Bob Dylan's *Ballad of a Thin Man*: "Something is happening here, but you don't know what it is, do you Mr. Jones?" According to Leider, Nauman "[was] showing in company much too heavy for him." But I had become his fan. And Serra's. And most of all Bill Bollinger's.

Crushes are inexplicable, so I don't know precisely

why I responded so emphatically to Bollinger's work. I wasn't making sculpture at the time, because I couldn't construct things as perfectly as I wished. As a suburban kid, I had tangled with chain-link fences that kept me out of places, so I enjoyed seeing the material used for nonexclusionary purposes. And by climbing over such fences, I had learned that chain link is springy, a quality manifest in the piece. When I started working again, two years after seeing the Castelli show, David Smith and Anthony Caro were my influences, not Bollinger. Nor has my work since drawn closer to his, though to this day I remain impressed by the ease and scale of Bollinger's sculpture.

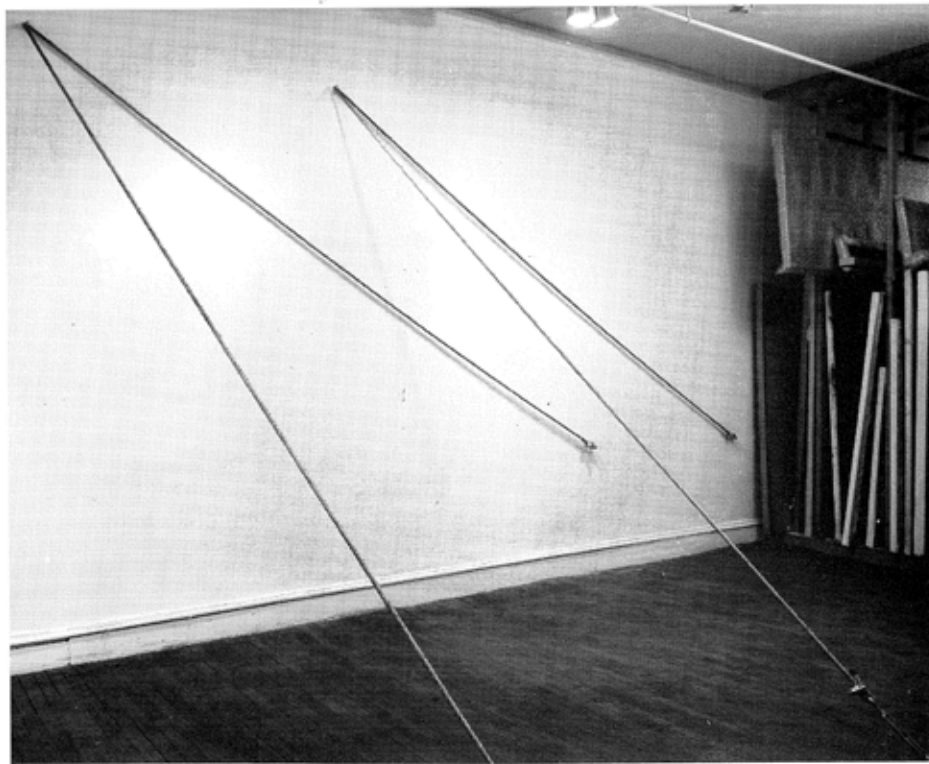
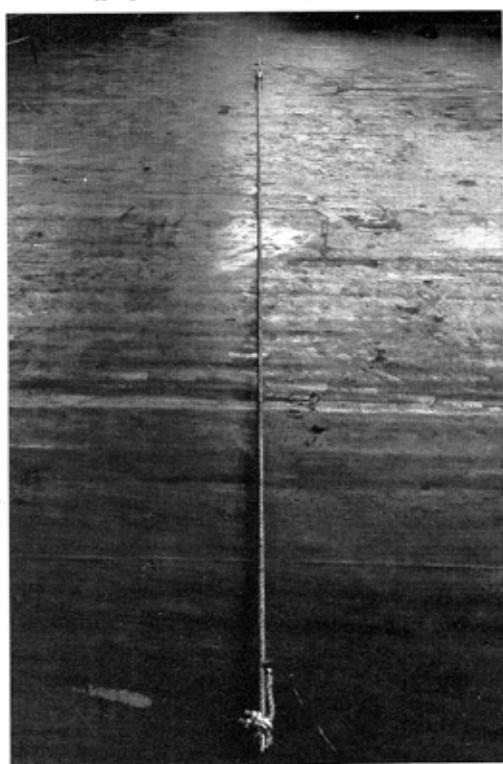
A month later, in January 1969, I went to Bollinger's show at the Bykert Gallery. I loved the way he investigat-

One of Bill Bollinger's untitled pipe sculptures, 1967, 2-inch aluminum pipes with universal joint, 34 feet long overall; on the rooftop of his Sunset Park, N.Y., studio. Photo courtesy ARTnews. Inset, magazine spread featuring Bollinger (on floor at center) with (from left to right) Keith Sonnier, Bruce Nauman, Robert Ryman, Robert Morris, Richard Tuttle and David Lee; Time, Nov. 22, 1968. Photo Robert S. Crandall.



Above, view of untitled jointed-aluminum pipe pieces; installed at Bykert Gallery, New York, December 1967-January 1968. Photo Geoffrey Clements.

*Below left, Untitled, 1968, 1/2-inch-thick rope, black tape, eye bolts, turnbuckles, approx. 25 feet long. Photo courtesy Galerie Ricke, Cologne.
Below right, Untitled, 1968, two 1/2-inch-thick ropes, eye bolts and turnbuckles, approx. 8 1/2 feet high; in the back room of Bykert Gallery.
Photo Geoffrey Clements. Courtesy ARTnews.*



ed the industrial—in this instance, graphite powder, sweeping compound, sprayed paint—and was happy seeing the graphite tracked down the red-carpeted staircase of the gallery's townhouse and out onto the 81st Street sidewalk. The installation was amazingly direct.

The next year I saw his *Evergreen Joe Hemmis* in the "1970 Annual Exhibition: Contemporary American Sculpture" at the Whitney Museum. Bollinger arranged 30 over-long, two-legged, 30-inch-high wooden sawhorses made of two-by-fours in a circle 300 inches in diameter. He pushed the legless ends together on the ground so as to form a virtual hub, from which the crossbars radiated up and outward like the spokes of a giant horizontal wheel. The two legs of each sawhorse touched those of its two neighbors, forming a round, crenellated barrier. Bollinger made magic with a lumpen material.

I was living in New York when he exhibited at O.K. Harris Works of Art (469 West Broadway) in 1972. He constructed very long, rough wooden skids which he assembled into semi-geometric structures. Though akin to certain of Donald Judd's pieces, Bollinger's were different in feeling. Judd's fabricators produced works that were both technically perfect and cold, while Bollinger built things himself, simply and quickly. These sculptures were intuitive, circumstantial and remarkably light, despite their up to 16-by-16-by-6-foot scale.

When I saw Bollinger's 1974 O.K. Harris show, his third in the gallery, I didn't imagine it would be his last in New York. For these works, Bollinger had worked in an iron foundry, creating his forms directly by digging out the sand packed into the foundry's corrugated steel flasks, as Julius Schmidt had started doing in the late '50s. (Dorothy Miller included Schmidt's iron castings in her seminal "16 Americans" show at the Museum of Modern Art in December 1959.) Bollinger's rough iron castings looked to have come from another world, and remain among the most resonant and indigestible pieces I've known.

I called Bollinger out of the blue in 1975 and drove up to Poughkeepsie to meet him for the first time. I remember his ocher-yellow International pickup named Ramona and my asking him to explain the difference between half- and three-quarter-ton trucks (it's the rear axle bearings). We went to his work space to see three large carved-log sculptures that impressed me. The logs still had their bark and looked almost unformed, but were strangely animated by the beaverlike marks of an axe. Bollinger had fixed the works in a limbo: they weren't trees, they weren't logs, they weren't lumber, but some degree-zero of sculpture.

For me his sculpture was exemplary, yet fewer and fewer people seemed to care. Most of us have a certain amount of arcana stored away in our minds, and Bollinger's sculpture became my private knowledge.

In late 1979, I was writing an article about the reappearance of casting in contemporary sculpture and wanted to include Bollinger's cast-iron pieces from the early '70s. I contacted him in Rhode Island, where he had been teaching, and we arranged to meet in New York City. I asked what had happened to the log sculptures I had seen in Poughkeepsie. He said no one else had seen them, since he had left them behind when he moved, and the landlord had cut them up and burned them for firewood. Bollinger had brought down a couple of small welded-steel sculptures made from scraps he found in the studios at the University of Rhode

Island. I was torn: he had been my hero, but I thought these pieces were awful.

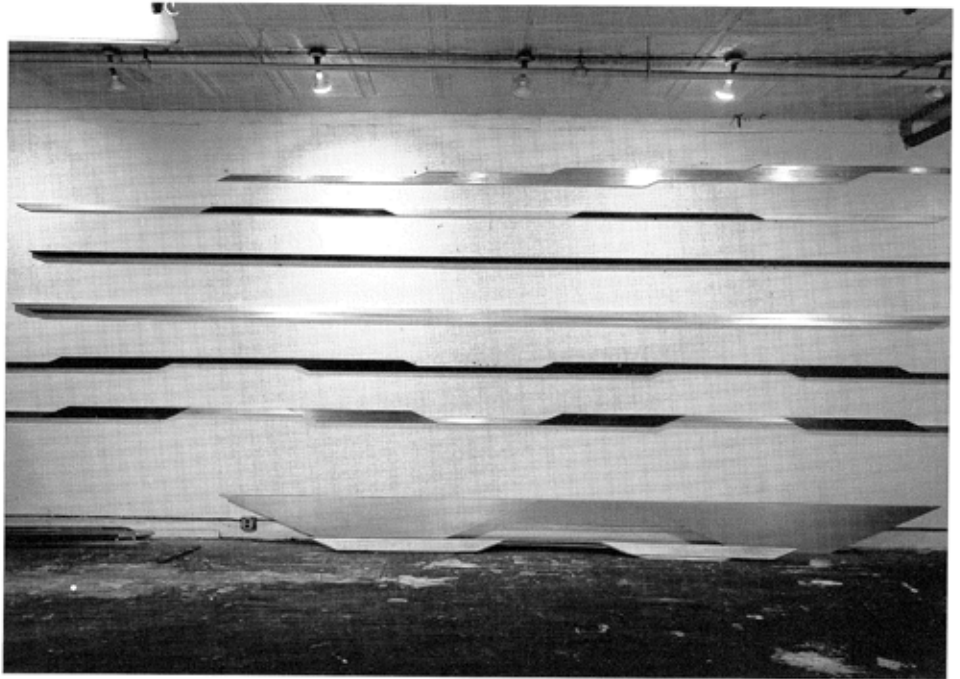
In May 1990, I saw the Whitney Museum exhibition "The New Sculpture 1965-1975: Between Gesture and Geometry" and was surprised that Bill Bollinger was not included, since he manifestly belonged alongside Lynda Benglis, Eva Hesse, Barry Le Va, Bruce Nauman, Alan Saret, Richard Serra, Joel Shapiro, Robert Smithson, Keith Sonnier and Richard Tuttle. I wondered how the two curators could have missed out on Bollinger. I didn't know where Richard Marshall had been during that decade—he started at the Whitney in 1973—but I knew that Richard Armstrong had only moved to New York City in the late '70s; perhaps a late arrival on the scene accounted for their neglect of Bollinger.

I remembered that the sculptor Peter Gourfain had been Bollinger's friend, so I called him to ask about Bollinger. Gourfain was surprised. "Don't you know Bill's dead?" He had died on May 27, 1988, aged 48, from alcoholism. I recently learned that Bollinger had

From the beginning, Bollinger's sculpture made clear his unusual sensitivity to the qualities and possibilities of scarcely transformed industrial materials.

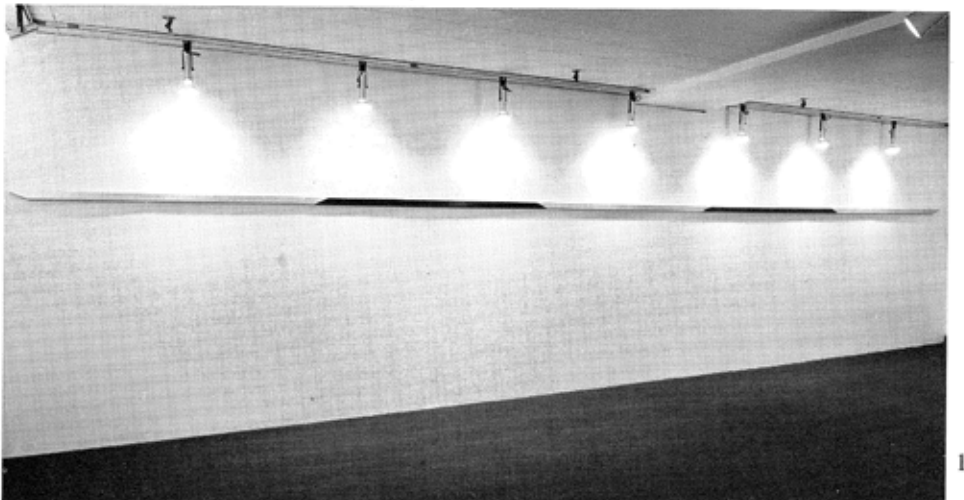
had a gastro-intestinal hemorrhage and had bled to death. His 19-year-old son James was alone with him at home when the bleeding started.

I wanted to write about Bollinger's sculpture. Gourfain gave me Jim Bollinger's address in New Mexico. In August 1990, I sent him the first of several letters explaining my interest in his father's work. He didn't reply.



A series of aluminum extrusions in Bollinger's SoHo studio, September 1966. Photo Geoffrey Clements.

Anodized aluminum extrusion, 1966, 36 feet long; installed at Bianchini Gallery, New York, December 1966. Photo Nathan Rabin. Courtesy ARTnews.



writing at all here. It would be photographs; the rest would be fragments of cloth, bits of cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech, pieces of wood and iron, phials of odors, plates of food and of excrement."

Part 2

I put the work between me and you, not myself between you and the work.

—from Bill Bollinger's notes, quoted by Harris Rosenstein in "The Bollinger Phenomenon," *Art News*, September 1969

I do what's sufficient.

—Bill Bollinger, *Newsweek*, July 29, 1968

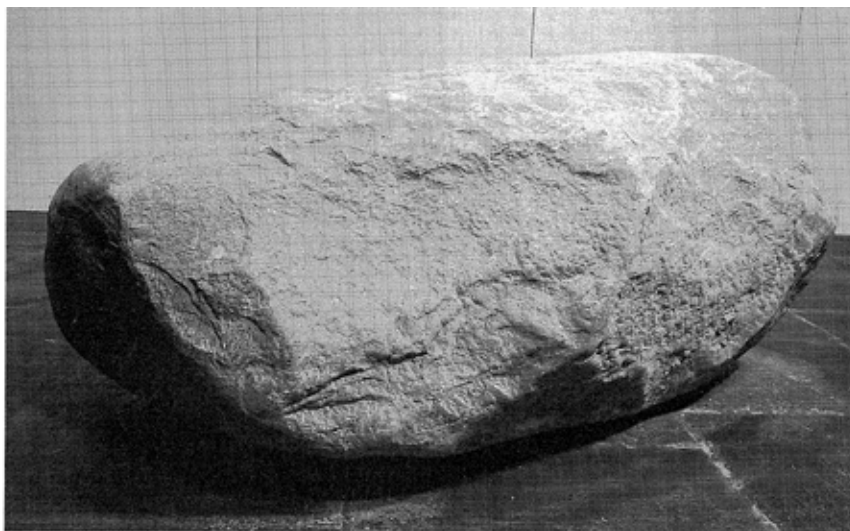
Bill Bollinger was born on July 15, 1939, in Brooklyn and raised by his mother, a school teacher. He graduated from Manhasset High School in 1957 and from Brown University, where he studied aeronautical engineering, in 1961. He moved to New York City in 1961, briefly attended the Art Students League and made paintings until the mid-'60s. By 1965 his work had become increasingly sculptural. He bolted large shaped lengths of blue Dacron to opposite sides of a central aluminum bar so that the plane of the painting twisted. After this work, he machined two oblique facets, which suggested the intersecting planes, into a long aluminum bar and eliminated the attached fabric entirely.

From the beginning, Bollinger's sculpture made clear his unusual sensitivity to the qualities and possibilities of scarcely transformed industrial materials, which he explored as might an engineer. He invented his sculptures: his imagining and devising often more evident than his hand. Some sculptors criticized his work for being easy, which certain pieces were if understood strictly as sculpture. You had to appreciate invention to catch his particular genius.

The earliest photos I have were taken around September 1966 by Geoffrey Clements in Bollinger's studio on the northeast corner of Crosby and Howard streets in SoHo. Thirty sculptures are depicted. Using for scale the 4-by-8-foot plywood sheets visible in his constructed partitions, the 140-inch-long work that collector Larry Aldrich later bought and some subsequent gallery photographs, the 30 pieces appear to have ranged from about 5½ to 36 feet in length, to have been variously 2, 4, 6 or 8 inches high and 2 or 4 inches deep—excepting two anomalous sculptures on the floor. The works were composed of very elongated parallelograms and regular trapezoids. While the sharp angles in this series varied between 25 and 30 degrees, they were invariant within each piece. In all but four sculptures, the two ends were symmetrically divergent rather than parallel.

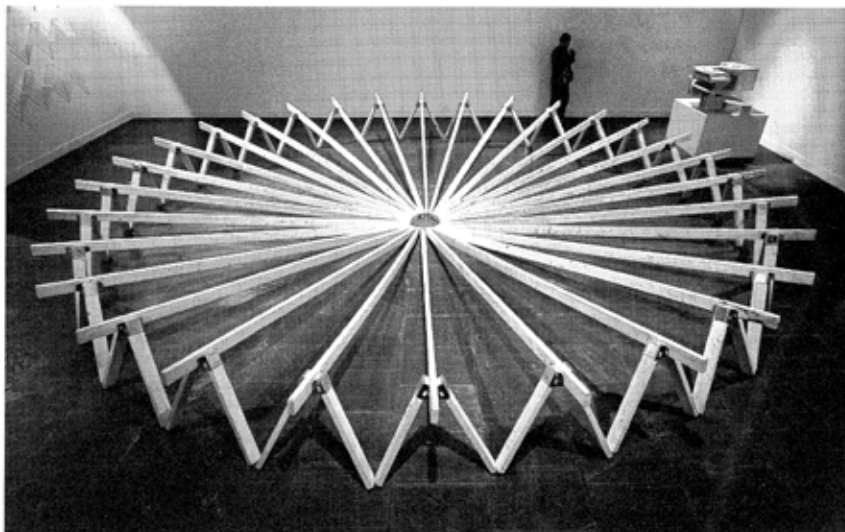
I believe the works were made with varying lengths of 2-by-2-inch U channels bolted together, up to four abreast and two deep, their open sides always facing the wall. One advantage of U channel would be that the front side of the sculpture could remain visually solid while the back was accessible, so separate elements could be commercially machined, anodized and then precisely and invisibly assembled. (The collector Robert Scull commissioned a similar piece, but made from larger stock, for his taxi garage.) The majority of the works were chrome, black anodizing playing off the silver aluminum.

Bollinger originally planned to exhibit with Klaus



Stone, 1969, approx. 2 tons, 30 by 36 by 48 inches; in "Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials" at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, May-July 1969. Photo © Estate of Peter Moore/licensed by VAGA, New York. Courtesy Whitney Museum.

Evergreen Joe Hemmis, 1970, customized wooden sawhorses, 30 inches high, 300 inches in diameter; in "1970 Annual Exhibition: Contemporary American Sculpture" at the Whitney Museum. Photo Bernard Gotfryd.



Kertess, whose Bykert Gallery was scheduled to open its doors on Sept. 20, 1966, in the old Green Gallery space at 15 West 57th St. Just as Kertess was about to open, Bollinger instead joined the Bianchini Gallery, across the street at 50 West 57th, where his friend Dorothy Herzka (soon to become Mrs. Roy Lichtenstein) was Paul Bianchini's eyes and ears on the street. Bianchini had shown Elaine Sturtevant's early appropriations, as well as the work of Lee Lozano and Gary Kuehn; Robert Ryman had his first one-man show there in April 1967, just before the gallery closed for lack of a backer.

Bianchini gave Bollinger his first solo show in December 1966. All the sculptures were made of aluminum; the largest measured 30 feet by 2 inches by 2 inches, and even the smaller pieces were skinny like the horizon. In a brief *ArtNews* review from December 1966, Diane Waldman discerned a relation to Barnett Newman's sculptured zips; certainly implications of extension and speed were concerns of both artists. Harris Rosenstein, in his September 1969 *ArtNews* article (to which I'll return several times), saw these sculptures as the final distillation of the artist's earlier

multipanel painting: "What is being maximized here is the ratio of energy-to-conspicuousness." For me, the angling and stacking of the aluminum channels functioned analogously to an airplane's flaps, which, though small, radically alter airflow and thus the plane's vector.

Bollinger probably developed the pieces by manipulating length, position, angle and color; staring at the results; varying this and changing that. The viewer's eyes were invited to read each aluminum bar as shorthand suggesting the hue, direction and geometry of one or more implied planes. Bollinger used span to complicate matters: how we read a part "locally" often contradicted how we read it within the ensemble. These pieces played possum. The photo negatives of them which Bianchini forwarded to me in July 1999 arrived in a filing envelope annotated "Moldings."

Judging from a 1967 photograph shot for Bianchini, Bollinger kept exploring the aluminum works in the beginning of that year, but I've found no further details.

When Bianchini closed, or just before, Bollinger joined the Bykert Gallery. He exhibited there in a three-

For the log pieces, he used the fact that every floating log positions itself in a single and unique manner. Bollinger moved his work forward and still kept his hand out of it.

person show (with Donald Bernhouse and Clark Murray) in 1967. Among the other artists Kertess represented during that period were Robert Duran, Peter Gourfain, Ralph Humphrey, Brice Marden, Paul Mogensen, David Novros, Deborah Remington and Richard van Buren. Chuck Close and Alan Saret joined the gallery a little later, and Barry Le Va and Dorothea Rockburne later still. Bollinger's first solo show with Bykert ran from Dec. 2, 1967 through Jan. 3, 1968 and was reviewed by Emily Wasserman in *Artforum* (February 1968).

The three (or more?) sculptures in the show resembled giant, skinny, misaligned nutcrackers and were all made the same way. A less-than-1-foot-long, two-headed, doubly adjustable aluminum connector (assembled by Bollinger from stock Speed Rail brand scaffold fittings) held and separated one end of each of two roughly 2-inch-outer-diameter aluminum pipes of unequal length. The pipes ranged from 7 feet to 30 feet long, and their relative positions also varied; in two pieces one pipe was on the wall and one touched the floor, in a third both pipes were on the floor. Though powerful physical things, the works were remarkably matter-of-fact. The formal decisions concerned only the pipes' relative positions and lengths, and the sculptures' placement.

Wasserman wrote, "As one member extends to reach

the floor, it creates a warped, though invisible plane in relation to the diagonally placed wall pipe to which it is attached." In his *Art News* feature Rosenstein spoke of them as, "concretizing the twisted-plane concept." In the little Euclidean geometry I remember, any pair of lines intersecting in three-dimensional space generate a unique plane. Skew lines are just skew lines and, when taken two together, they don't specify a plane. Bollinger positioned and locked the bridging connectors in these works to keep the pipes askew. For me, his subject was precisely the absence of any plane: the viewer strove to see something that the artist had evacuated. The sculptures were conditional; the turn of an Allen key could make them straight lines. The 20-foot pipe on the floor linked to the 30-foot pipe which started on the room's wall and then extended well out into the space of a second room—and which passes off the surviving photograph's edge—was surely a response to that particular space.

From the beginning, Bollinger chose the scale necessary to his meaning, but often it was one inhibitory for private collectors. And, excepting the work that Larry Aldrich bought and later donated to his museum, I don't know of any Bollinger pieces in public collections. In 1968, the artist appeared in *Time* magazine's Nov. 22 issue: "I feel ridiculous, selling my work at a gallery," says Bollinger, who would prefer to make his work in quantity and sell it cheaply at a department store." While in those days art and talk were much less commercially oriented than they are now, few artists proposed to vend in stores. In carrying out the commercial experiment, Bollinger made smaller versions of the pipe pieces, priced at around \$30, but he found few takers. His sculptures rarely looked—or sold—like conventional art.

Bollinger worked intensively from 1968 through the summer of 1970. Among sculptors of his generation, particularly the 10 highlighted in "The New Sculpture 1965-1975," Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra and Eva Hesse exhibited most widely in this time span.

Nauman averaged a solo show every three months, Serra and Hesse a group show per month. The fragmentary resumé I've constructed for Bollinger for these 30 months includes six one-person exhibitions and at least 24 group shows, most in important museums or galleries. In that period, he showed at least as frequently as Robert Smithson, Keith Sonnier and Richard Tuttle, and considerably more often than Lynda Benglis, Barry Le Va, Alan Saret and Joel Shapiro. I mention Bollinger's peers because his work was intertwined with theirs; they were like jazz musicians trading riffs. The reader may ponder the close relationships between some of Bollinger's pieces and those of his now better-known contemporaries.

When I started writing, I had photographs of two 1968 sculptures made prior to the "9 at Leo Castelli" show in December of that year. The first photo, judging by the electrical outlets, was shot at Galerie Ricke in Cologne, Germany, where Bollinger had a solo show from May 8 through June 4, 1968. Rolf Ricke was the European dealer most committed to this generation of American sculptors. Between 1968 and '70, he gave two solo shows each to Bollinger and to Serra, one each to Sonnier, Le Va and Nauman, and included varying constellations of these five artists plus Hesse in at least seven group exhibitions, plus several art-fair stands.

The image from Galerie Ricke shows a 6-by-9-foot piece of standard wire grill, the kind used to reinforce cast concrete slabs, leaning against the wall. (In an American version, the grill was more squiggly and oriented vertically, and, in a third, the grill measured 8 by 16 feet.) The bottom edge of the grill was set just far enough out into the floor so that the weight of the grill, light though it was, began to act on its shape, causing the plane to sag slightly in toward the wall. The plane deformed, but the grid remained invariant. There was at the time a certain insistence on flatness in painting, and saggy planes weren't popular in Minimalist art. Bollinger took the opposite tack, and let the grill do what it was going to do. He saw building materials as things he could use and make art out of. At a moment when grids were primary, his sculpture was the thing (in) itself.

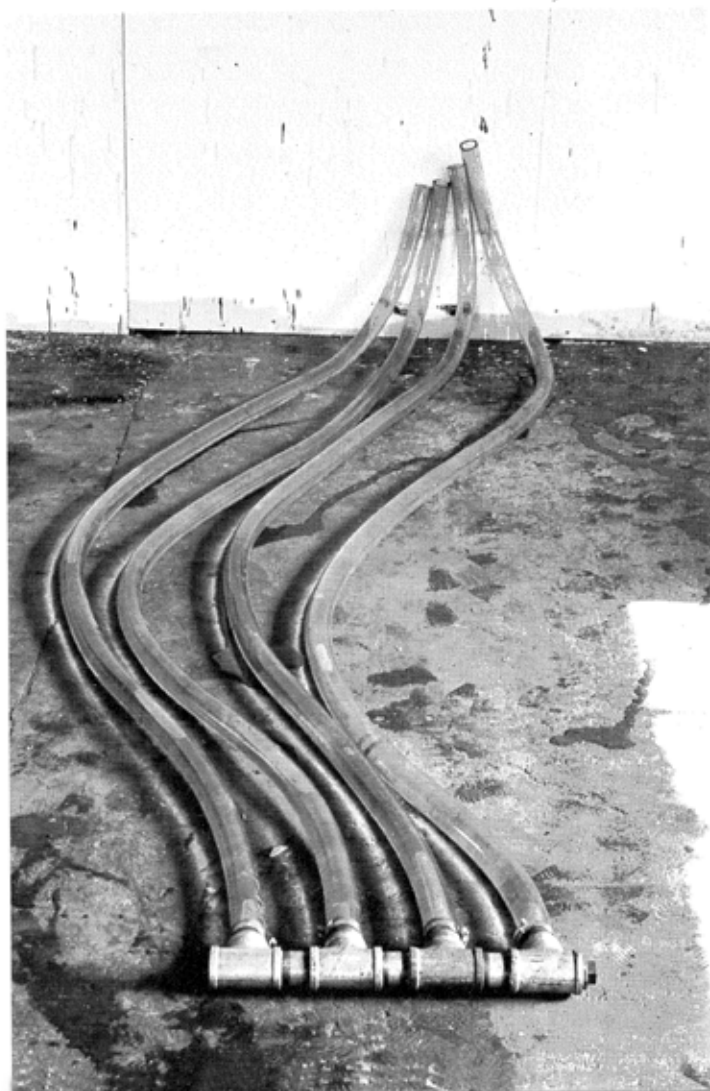
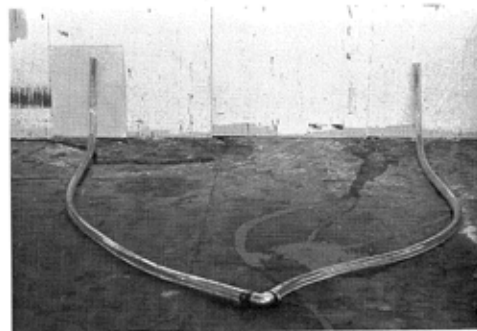
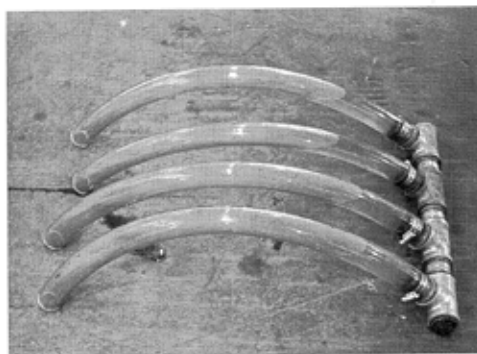
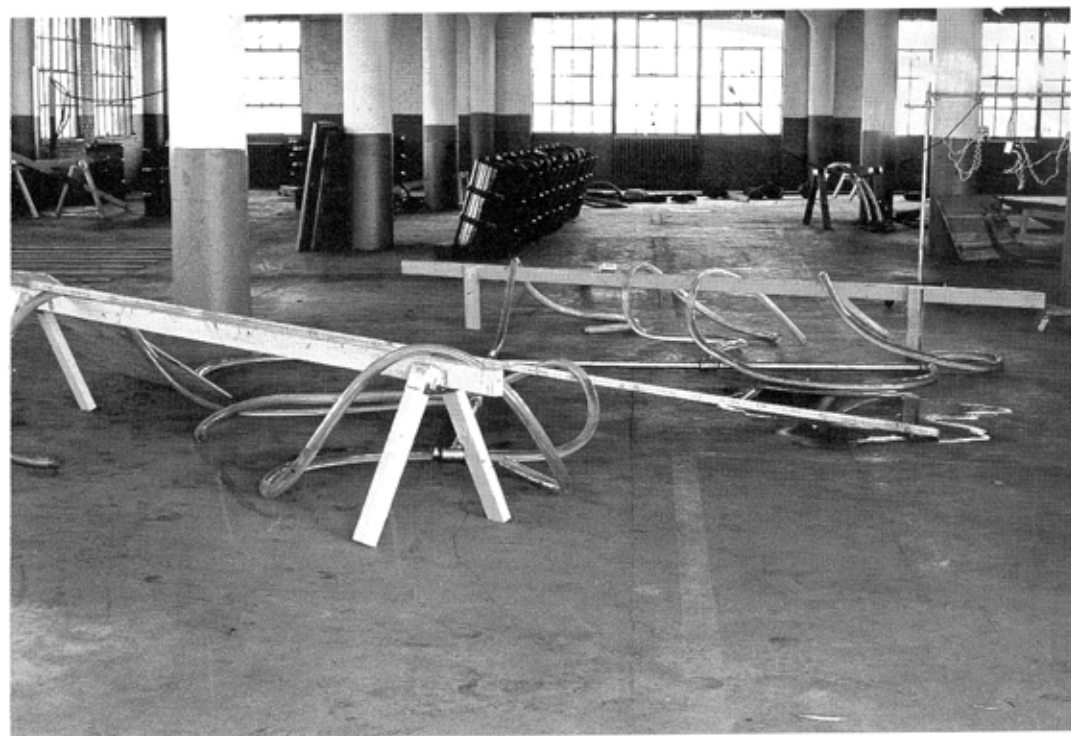
The second 1968 picture was taken in Bykert's 57th Street space, to guess from the lights and floor, probably during a late spring group show including Gordon Hart, Brice Marden, Alan Saret, Richard Tuttle and Ian Wilson. Bollinger set two eye bolts in the wall and a third out in the floor; he ran a ½-inch rope up from the floor bolt, across the wall from the first to the second ring, then back down and out to the floor bolt again, and tensioned the rope with a turnbuckle. He repeated the entire process about three feet to the left. The two taut ropes on the wall were parallel, as were the two running down to the floor.

Almost the only published writing by Bollinger that I've found is a brief catalogue text, for a group show at Finch College, New York, in which he writes about several works. Concerning a 1967 rope piece, he noted:

[It consists] of a rope stretched between two terminals (eye bolt) located in floor at variable distances apart, or in floor and ceiling making the rope vertical. I regarded the content of this piece as the state of tension of the rope line and the manner of anchoring the piece into the space. I was not interested in composition and the vertical-horizontal placement was chosen for its neutrality. I realized from this piece that I am not interested in the esthetics of form but in the fact of form. I have considered my work since then as not primarily expressive through form but declarative through state.

Cologne Float-Piece, Dec. 20, 1969, log, approx. 17 feet long, 8 inches in diameter; in the Rhine River. Photo courtesy Galerie Ricke.







This spread, a variety of Bollinger's 1970 "water works."

Opposite page, top left, installation view of the artist's exhibition at the Starrett-Lehigh Building, New York, April-May 1970.

Opposite page, top center, two untitled pieces using clear-plastic tubing, iron pipe fittings and water; at the Starrett-Lehigh.

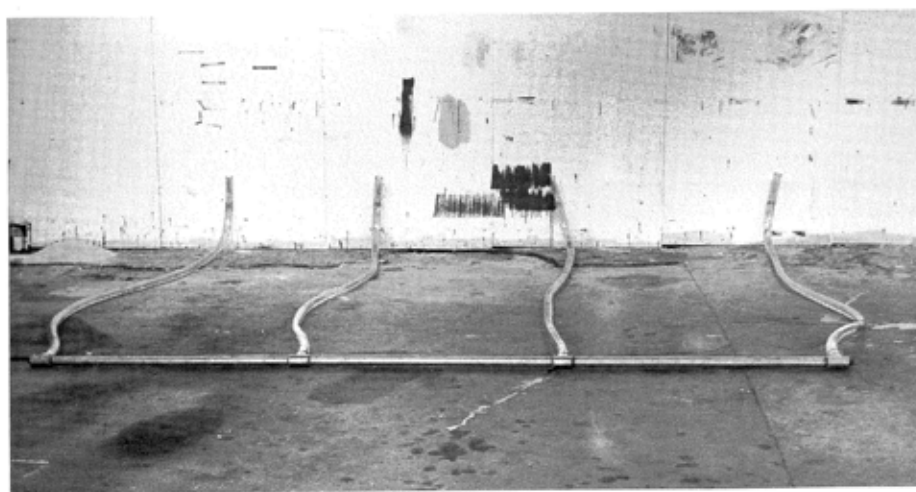
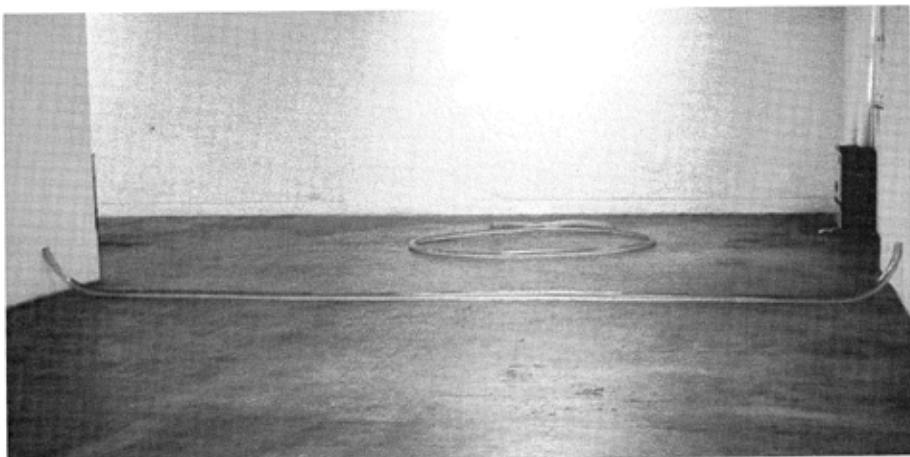
Opposite page, center left, Untitled, two wheelbarrows filled with water; possibly at Galerie Ernst, Hannover.

Opposite page, bottom left, Boston Common, 55-gallon drums, water, rubber hose; at Galleria Sperone, Turin.

Opposite page, bottom right and this page bottom, two untitled clear-plastic tubing pieces with metal pipe fittings; both at the Starrett-Lehigh.

This page, center, view of Route 23 (foreground) and Shelter Rock Road, both clear-plastic tubing filled with water; at Galleria Sperone, Turin.

This page, left, untitled steel beam and clear-plastic tubing; in the artist's Hillsdale studio. Photos this spread courtesy Galerie Ricke.



The 20 works Bollinger developed for his self-financed show of 1970 all involved water's innate tendency to seek its own level. No comparable rule governs art-world reputations.

Contemporaries such as Hesse, Nauman and Serra, among others, linked the wall with the floor. Bollinger's work was more literal than most of theirs, given that he tightly tied the wall to the floor, and also more fugitive, since his sculpture was temporary and physically insubstantial, being just two ½-inch ropes and some ordinary hardware. The piece was all implication. We could see the lines as delimiting a sort of wedgelike solid, or as outlining two oblique but parallel planes or as describing a diagonal plane sloping up from the floor to the wall, where it joined its implied shadow veering right. What I get from the photograph is an in-your-face neutrality. No reading is favored.

In a 1968 letter to a European curator, Bollinger wrote, "I will be happy to participate in your show if you feel my new work conforms to your idea of what you want to show. The work does not exist at all as plan beyond the basic idea. It is all very easy to execute, does not exist until it has been executed, ceases to exist when it has been taken down." These ideas weren't unique to or first expressed by Bollinger, but with him they had radical consequences. Ephemeral works survive only as long as there is someone around to keep telling their story, a dispensation not granted Bollinger.

He traveled by freighter on at least one leg of his 1968 trip to Europe for the Ricke show. The surface of the Atlantic Ocean is one of the earth's more extensive curved planes, and this sea passage was important to him: water, and other materials which behave like fluids, figure repeatedly in his subsequent sculpture. The announcement for his 1969 show at Bykert featured a photo that he had taken at mid-Atlantic during the previous year's passage. Harris Rosenstein noted, "He came to think of ground as 'transparent material—a field of matter or energy, fluid and penetrable, something learned from the sea, where this is more apparent.'"

Bollinger's year culminated in the December show "9 at Leo Castelli," which was presided over by Dorothy Lichtenstein, not by the gallery staff. The exhibition was reviewed by Philip Leider in the *New York Times* (as mentioned above), Max Kozloff in *Artforum* and Gregoire Müller in *Arts*. For Leider, Bollinger's fencing "produce[s] a curve of astonishing purity and loveliness, a curve which the openness of the mesh allows the viewer to perceive in a variety of rewarding ways. But the piece, in the context of the show as a whole, seems prissy and over-arranged, and too dependent upon conventional 'beauty.'"

Judging from his oeuvre, beauty wasn't Bollinger's thing, though the elegance of his take on the physical world is often apparent. While Serra's works at Castelli had the density of a black hole, Bollinger's sculpture was light as hydrogen, evanescent despite its length. The chain-link fencing offered a range of

Wrote Bollinger: "I came to understand surface as a continuous foreground existing independently of objects." This is the kind of thought that riding a fast motorcycle may prompt.

visual densities depending on the viewer's vantage, while remaining physically constant. As with a Möbius strip, one wasn't always certain which side of the mesh one was seeing, and at moments the piece seemed to be a single surface. Bollinger may have been thinking about the ocean—that fluid, penetrable and drowning plane—since he made a wave. The fencing rose from an expanse of rough concrete, curled, broke and was reabsorbed.

Bollinger had a solo show in January 1969 at Bykert, which had moved from 57th Street to Richard Feigen's old space on the second floor of 24 East 81st St. The exhibition filled two rooms and the connecting hallway. Bollinger's project was, in part, to explore the physical and visual behavior of different sorts of particles—those free to move and those fixed in place.

He covered the farther half of the first room's floor with an industrial black graphite powder. The far edges of this graphite field were sharply delimited by the gallery's white walls, while there was no front edge per se. In his article, Rosenstein described this piece from the perspective of Ernst Mach's studies of visual perception, which Bollinger knew: "In the graphite work, then, the wall edge is seen sharply (an accentuating response), while the interior graphite surface is in softer focus and the diffused edge at mid-floor is a fading continuance of it. In essence the work is a high-to-low energy gradient, a discharge or spill, the kind of thing that takes sense in its initiation but not in fiddling with it afterwards." Paul Mogensen, a lifelong friend, traded a painting for the sculpture.

I remember the graphite as beautiful, a soft, full, almost puffy black, whose top surface wasn't a skin but a topology of billions of particles. The sculpture held its space with singular intensity and holds my memory as no subsequent powder-on-the-floor work has. It was noumenal. For Bollinger the piece continued his work with wire mesh: "I had been using screens as a material for making curved planes. I came to use them simply as screens, open-ended modulated coverings. The graphite floor piece of 1969 was also understood as a screen, enough discipline being imparted to granular material by the room shape, the loose open edge retaining the desired quality of openness and extensibility." The graphite was both a passive, light-absorbing powder and an active substance, whose extensibility, during the exhibition's run, produced a dark-to-light gray scale starting in the gallery and then fading down the building's steps.

In the second room, Bollinger roughly sprayed gray paint in irregular meanderings across the parquet floor, which he then covered with a loose layer of green sweeping compound. The "arrangement" of the sweeping compound altered as people walked around the room. One saw only areas of the painted design at a time, and never took in the whole. On a side wall,

Bollinger sprayed a roughly 3-foot-in-diameter disk of black paint spreading out to a fuzzy perimeter, like an intense, negative sun. The paint particles were fixed in place, but they conveyed another sense of a particulate field, as the black form's perimeter faded out into the white painted wall. Rosenstein remarked, "The blob is not 'placed' to command a pictorial space nor is it fussily modeled. Rather it explodes into existence as a literal thing." Bollinger saw the disk in a particular way: "The paint blob on the wall . . . was simply a surface. By virtue of its location and material used and consequent associations, perhaps read as a picture of a surface, but intended as a sculpture of a surface."

In late 1968 Bollinger was one of nine sculptors to be awarded \$5,000 grants by the National Council on the Arts (the NEA's predecessor). His son James Mach was born in early '69. Bollinger exhibited in "Op Losse Schroeven" (Square Pegs in Round Holes), which opened Mar. 22, 1969, at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. Bollinger shared room 9 with Serra and Sonnier; Nauman had room 8, and room 10 featured Joseph Beuys, Walter de Maria, Neil Jenney and Panamarenko. Bollinger showed a leaning wire-mesh work, a rope piece and an aluminum-pipe-and-plastic-tubing sculpture, the plastic replacing the Speed Rail fittings. He exhibited other versions of these works in "Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form," which opened the next week at the Kunsthalle Bern. It was the major international show of that year and established Harald Szeemann as a pivotal curator.

Bollinger had two works in "Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials" (May 19-July 6, 1969) at the Whitney Museum. The exhibition featured most of the notable sculptors of his generation—as well as Philip Glass, Steve Reich and Michael Snow—and it was unusual for its time because the artists were allowed to work on site. Bollinger's first piece was one he had earlier proposed to Szeemann: "Stone. A stone as large as possible, preferably rounded, placed on ground or floor." He installed a 30-by-36-by-48-inch, 2-ton rock near the elevators at the exhibition's entrance, its texture much like that of the Whitney's stone floor. Bollinger's rock wasn't linked to an anterior situation by map or document, like Smithsonian's "non-sites" with their dialectic between here and there. In an exhibition where a number of artists made works that didn't look like art, Bollinger's *Stone* was even more matter-of-fact, since it was neither made nor altered, nor did it refer back to another place. (I think of it as playing off the Whitney's mineral architecture—half German blockhouse and half medieval stone castle.)

I have no photograph of Bollinger's second Whitney Museum sculpture *Cyclone Fence*, but it was closely akin to a piece photographed (and exhibited?) at the Bykert Gallery in 1969. Both were chain-link sculptures on the floor, made the same way. The Bykert work looks to have been around 5 by 30 feet, the Whitney piece was listed on the consignment sheet as being 8 by 25 feet. In *Art News* Rosenstein described the Whitney sculpture: "In a flat, rectangular 'rug,' here and there along its length several adjacent transverse rows of chain links had been snipped partly free to permit telescoping row upon row." The piece was quite subtle, like a wrinkled carpet that remained flat. Bollinger had again altered a screen, introducing a subtle "noise" into its regularity.



Above and near right, Bollinger riding his motorcycle, 1969, from a series of photos for the "Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials" exhibition catalogue. Photos Robert Fiore. Courtesy Whitney Museum.

Robert Fiore photographed, for the "Anti-Illusion" catalogue, a number of the artists at work on their pieces. Bollinger figures in two five-picture sequences, both times riding a motorcycle. In one series, he and then his bike progressively appear on the very near horizon line; the artist seems to get no closer to us, just more in view, like the rising sun. In the second series, we see Bollinger and the cycle from a rear, three-quarters view. We watch as he pulls away, overtakes a large panel truck and, visually, becomes part of it. Bollinger had written, "I came to understand surface as a continuous foreground existing independently of objects." This is the kind of understanding that riding a fast motorcycle may both

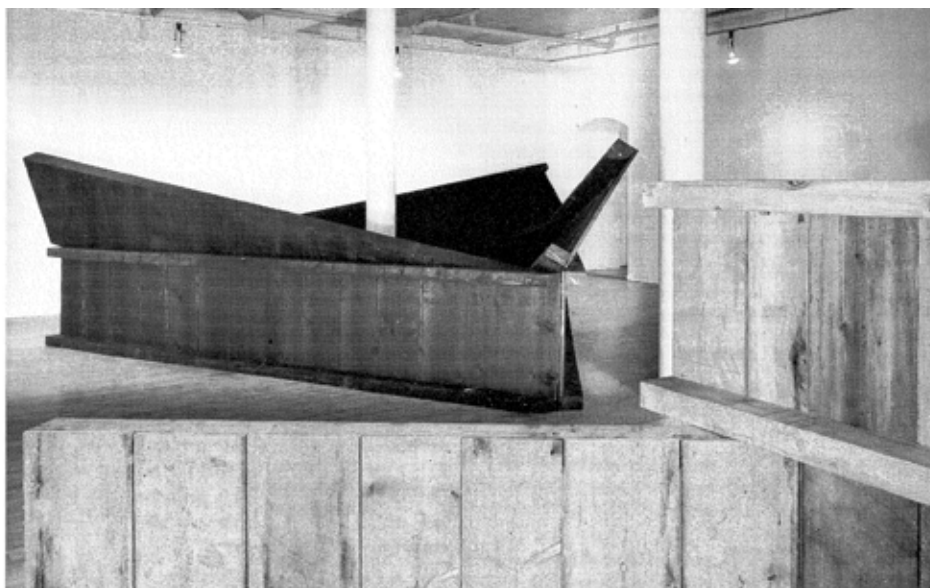
prompt and reinforce. Bollinger was "working" in these pictures, but not in the manner of the other artists Fiore depicted. Fiore lost almost all of his photographic work when his house burned down in 1978; miraculously, these negatives were archived at the Whitney.

The Whitney's "Receipt of Delivery" for the two "Anti-Illusion" pieces was annotated as follows: "Artist did not wish to have either the fence or the stone returned. A man from Santini took the fence, and Auer took the STONE to the dump."

In many of his 1969 sculptures, Bollinger explored raw materials rather than industrial objects; besides the graphite at Bykert and the rock at the Whitney, he did a number of works with sticks and logs. He showed a floor sculpture of tree branches in "Number 7," a May group show at Paula Cooper Gallery put together by Lucy Lippard. The July exhibition "Letters," organized by Phillip M. Simkin for a Long Beach, N. J., venue, included many of the artists in "Anti-Illusion." Bollinger's photocopied letter in the loose-leaf catalogue provides the following details: "Am glad to hear you can obtain logs. I can use 7 or 8, as I told you. In addition I will need a few hundred feet of manila rope—about 3/4-inch—nails, and something to serve as an anchor. . . . It doesn't matter where the logs are dropped—if any moving is required it will be simple to do once the logs are afloat. But it should be on the bay side."

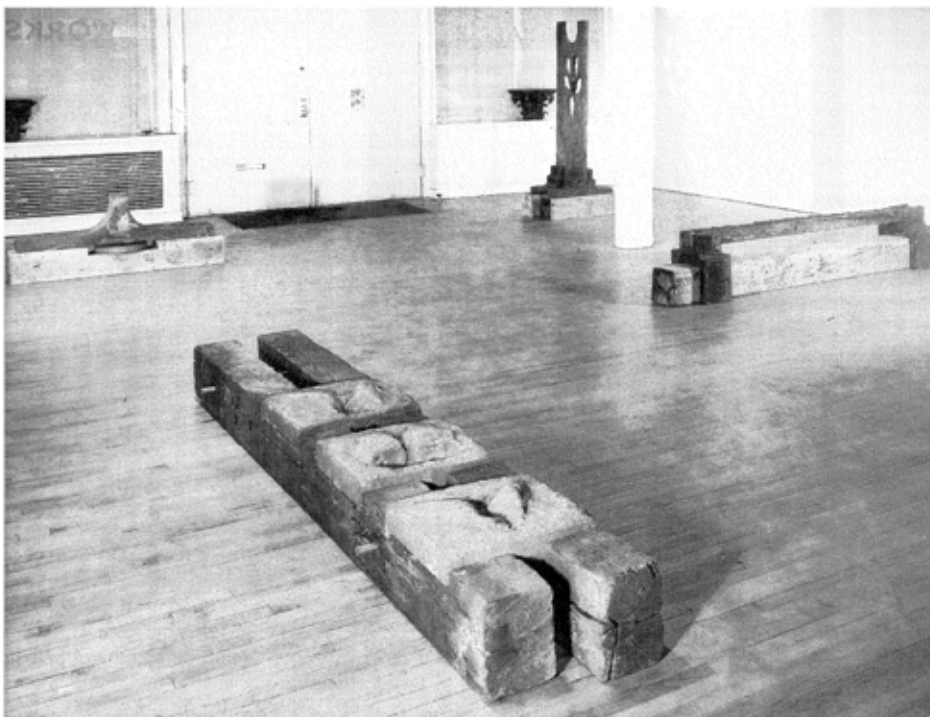
Lippard included Bollinger in "557,087" (Seattle's population then) at the Seattle Art Museum in September 1969; of the 61 artists in the show most remain well known. In *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*, Lippard wrote:

It was the first show I know of in which the work was spread out not only from indoors to outdoors but for a radius of some fifty miles around the city. Though maps were provided at the museum, it seems safe to say that no one but myself and museum assistant Anne Focke ever saw the whole show. Bollinger's giant (several tons) log was right in



Installation view of untitled "ramp constructions," wood, 5-, 10- and 15-foot-long units; in Bollinger's solo exhibition at O.K. Harris Works of Art, New York, February-March 1972. Photo Eric Pollitzer.

Untitled cast-iron-and-wood sculptures; solo exhibition, O.K. Harris Works of Art, February 1973. Photo Eric Pollitzer.



front of the museum, but *Artforum's* reviewer [Peter Plagens] never noticed it.

Lippard generously provided me with some photographs of the log arriving and installed, and in her correspondence she noted: "I executed all the works, with friends' help, since there was no money to bring the artists." Bollinger's initial proposal, as transcribed by Lippard for the exhibition's catalogue (95 4-by-6-inch index cards) had been: "Large log (to be selected in Seattle), floating in a lake or bay." A second version of the show, "995,000," opened in Vancouver in January 1970.

Elayne H. Varian chose Bollinger for the December 1969 group exhibition "Art in Process IV" at the Finch College Museum of Art. He showed 12 drawings, 12

photographs of "related material" and *Droplight*. Bollinger wrote in the catalogue:

The suspended DROPLIGHT piece is hung from a ceiling more or less centrally in a room, high enough from the floor so as not to cast a distinct light pool on the floor, diffusing light evenly and avoiding specific focus other than the fact of the form of the suspended fixture, bulb, and wire leading by the most expedient route to outlet. In previous DROPLIGHT pieces the bulb was flat on wall or floor, the light bleeding from the point source of maximum brilliance out in declining intensity to indeterminate edge: the light source regarded as an anchor point of the piece equivalent to the anchor point of the plug in the wall; the anchor points serving to integrate the piece into the surfaces of the place, and the flexibility of the wire and diffusion of light stretching the location of the piece and making it part of this surface.

The cast-iron pieces were vivacious, though cast iron is a dense and dull material. Bollinger was riding the dragon, bringing into the world sculptures scary, rude and true.

The use of a DROPLIGHT piece in this exhibition was dictated by available space. The idea of hanging it from the ceiling was suggested by the room given, which has outlets in the ceiling. The idea of locating the bulb centrally in the space rather than on a surface was suggested by my wife who pointed out to me the fixture hanging over my typewriter.

Bollinger remained interested in indeterminate edges; at Bykert it had been darkness fading to light, at Finch the contrary. His means had changed, not his subject.

He had a solo show with Galerie Ricke in Cologne in January 1970 and an overlapping exhibition at Galerie Sperone in Turin. The announcement for the Ricke show is a photograph, taken on Dec. 20, 1969, of a long log floating in the Rhine River at Cologne. The log parallels the road bed of the large Hohenzollern bridge, visible in the background. The image suggests different ways of traversing waters, while connecting back to Bollinger's interest in the parallel and skew, and in the nature of planes. With the logs on land, Bollinger was, perhaps, interested by the way they could be seen and unseen, an aspect which functioned all too well in Seattle. With the water-borne logs, he played with the mobility of floating things, however heavy. More abstractly, he used the fact that every floating log positions itself in a single and unique manner. Bollinger moved his work forward and still kept his hand out of it.

Upon his return to the U.S., early in 1970, Bollinger, then 30 years old, set out to organize a large exhibition of his work in New York. No public institution had offered him a solo show, and he may have wanted to follow up on his recent European works at a scale impossible in Bykert's space. Klaus Kertess agreed to the project with the understanding that Dorothy Lichtenstein, who had known Bollinger's work since her days at Bianchini, would help with expenses, sit the show and handle public relations and sales. Bollinger rented a 19th-floor industrial loft in the giant Starrett-Lehigh Building, that beautiful, Moderne-facaded warehouse designed by Ely Kahn at 601 West 26th St. in Chelsea, a landmark which 30 years later has become home to a growing number of art galleries. Bollinger developed the 20 works on site during the month(s) preceding the show, mixing his understanding of physical science with his inventiveness and energy. For reasons unclear, Mrs. Lichtenstein withdrew from the project a short time before the Apr. 20 opening. According to his own account, Kertess wasn't enthusiastic about the pieces, and he worried that he would have to pay some of the rent and be responsible for manning the exhibition while running the 81st Street gallery as well. Bollinger had invested around \$10,000 in the show and thought the sculptures among the best he'd done.

He constructed a sort of water works. Rosenstein described the show's general aspect in his May 1970 *Art News* review: "Many of the pieces here are . . . configurations of interconnected transparent plastic piping, their open ends curled up on sloping boards or draped over sawhorses to hold the water in, and arrangements of 55-gallon drums, also partly filled with water and all interconnected by stubby sections of rubber pipe hung over the rims to establish equal water levels by siphon action." He also noted that Bollinger was interested "in finding a grounding element for his sculpture other than the actual earth surface (or the floor as its surrogate) because work tied to such a reference could not be self-contained." The open water within each piece formed a level surface, which would have risen or fallen uniformly had water been added or removed.

In a generous and perceptive *New York Times* review of May 17, Peter Schjeldahl remarked on the show's ambience, "which in this instance includes the creak and rumble of heavy industry proceeding on neighboring floors and a lordly view of the Hudson through slightly grimy windows. This is a *real* place. When set in the jewel-box, somehow fictive space of a gallery, work like Bollinger's tends to be so jarring that one can scarcely respond to anything but the shock waves." Schjeldahl further noted:

In few cases is anything fastened to anything else, except where it is necessary to cap or connect pipes and hoses to keep water from escaping. Things are simply leaned or strewn or piled together the way they might be in a "natural" setting in a factory or on a farm. . . . [Bollinger] uses things in ways in which they are supposed to be used or in ways that seem reasonable given what they are. Thus, saw horses are used to support things, barrels and hoses are used to contain water, logs are stacked in racks constructed to hold them, etc. What one gets are "phenomena," physical demonstrations of simple abstract principles—"containment," for instance, or "support," as one experiences directly the fact of fluid being held in, or of objects being held up. Which is not to suggest that the primary thrust of Bollinger's work is didactic à la Mr. Wizzard.

The central and biggest sculpture was four lengths of large clear plastic tubing, each connected to the same cross fitting and filled with water. The four ends were raised low on each of the four walls of the large room after running out along the floor from the center. The water filled the tubing to the same level at the four ends. This work acted to tie the show together. In another piece, Bollinger laid down two parallel wooden beams about 20 inches apart and then used them to support eight alternately tipped 55-gallon steel drums set side-by-side and interconnected by siphons. In the work, the level water niftily played off the opposed diagonal thrusts of the drums; the sculpture was both static and dynamic.

A third piece was a large galvanized cattle-watering trough half-filled with water in which floated a locust log with its bark still on. Instead of drifting to one side of the tank, as one might have expected from having watched things adrift in open water, the log stayed centered in the middle. Any ripples in the water, whether from air currents or ambient vibrations, reflected off the tank walls and "anchored" the floating log in place. Schjeldahl caught that spirit: "Paul Valéry once speculated that the number of mental operations involved in the creation of one line of poetry by a good poet must be astronomical. Bollinger's log-and-trough piece may be seen as a

working model of one such operation—a leap of imagination that ends up making perfect sense."

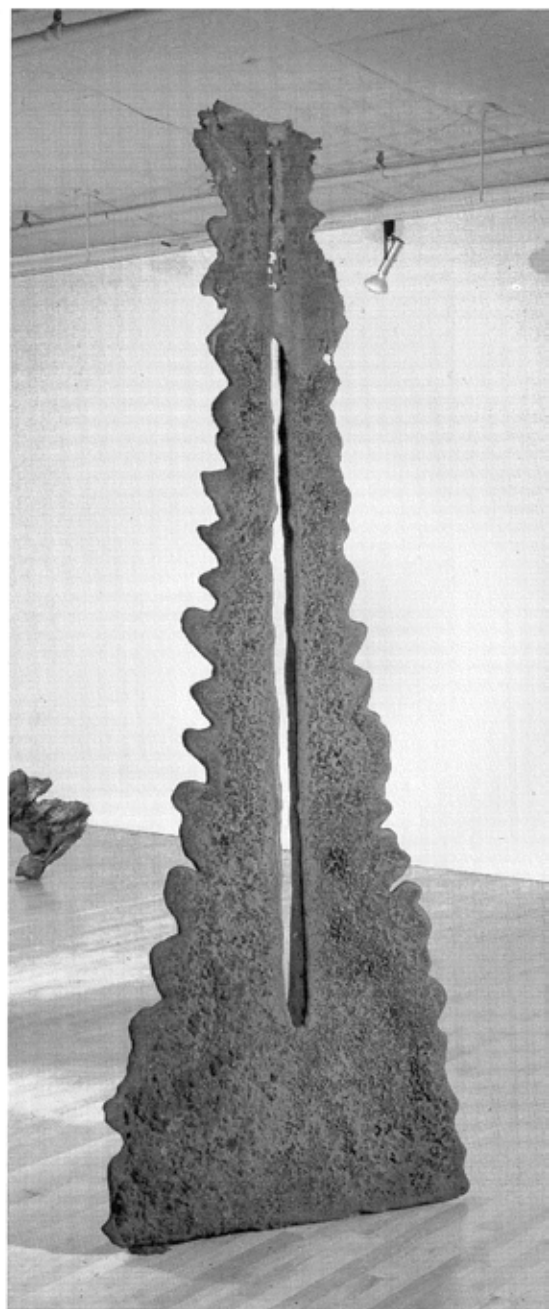
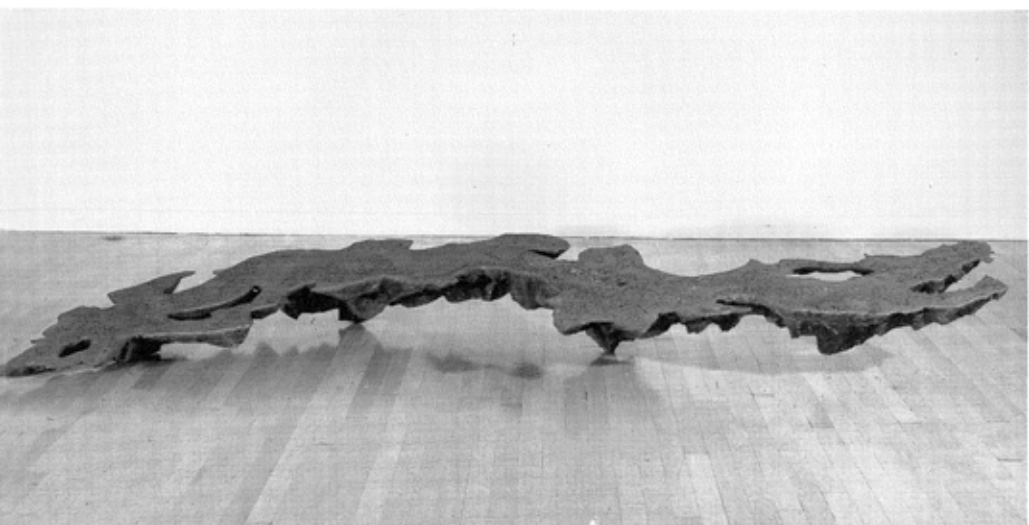
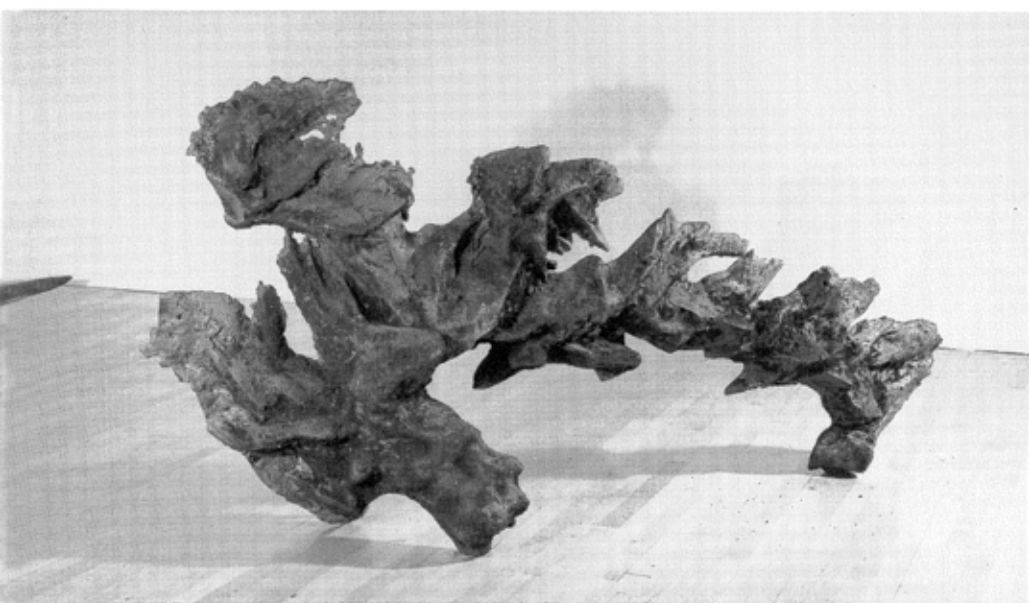
The exhibition ended Bollinger's working relationship with Kertess and did little for his career. Afterwards Bollinger showed far less frequently than he had before.

He was included in "Using Walls Indoors" at the Jewish Museum in May 1970. He participated in Kynaston McShine's "Information" show at the Museum of Modern Art (July 2-Sept. 20, 1970), probably the most important exhibition of that season. Bollinger's wooden sawhorse sculpture in the "1970 Annual Exhibition: Contemporary American Sculpture" at the Whitney Museum was singled out for praise by Hilton Kramer in the *New York Times* and by Douglas Davis in *Newsweek*. Bollinger's wife left him sometime during the year.

Bollinger's solo show at O.K. Harris in February 1972 was his first with Ivan Karp, the gallery's owner. It occupied the gallery's two large front rooms and comprised at least six large wood sculptures, all made about the same way. Bollinger first nailed up long wooden modules—roughly 30 inches wide and constructed like shipping skids, though the artist insistently termed them "ramps"—out of rough-sawn 3-by-6-inch beams spanned by 1-by-12-inch planks, like two joists with attached flooring. These elements he assembled into works that ranged in scale from medium to large, becoming progressively more elaborate. The simplest piece was a single flat ramp or plane, on which were laid six three-by-sixes; in a second construction, a horizontal ramp supported a

continued on page 143





Images this spread are from Bollinger's solo exhibition at O.K. Harris Works of Art, January 1974. All works are cast-iron sand sculptures. Photos Eric Pollitzer. Courtesy Jim Strong and O.K. Harris.

Above, Sharparoon.

Top left, on pedestals, small versions of the Empire State Building and a pyramid.

Remaining works are based on lake topographies.

Bollinger

continued from page 116

second shorter ramp standing vertically on its end, with the far corners of the L shape linked by a pair of sloping beams. In a third sculpture, three ramps, each stood up on edge on a long side, were arranged in a sort of irregular Z, whose middle element rose up diagonally. One of its ends abutted the first ramp's end, while its other end rested atop the third ramp's beginning. The arrangement was stabilized by a fourth, shorter ramp, standing on its end, placed so as to connect the first element to the double-height juncture of the second and third elements.

In this exhibition Bollinger may have been looking at different sorts of enclosures. Two pieces had an implied volume, two more were both closed and open, and two were fully closed. The defining of space was most schematic in the first work. The six 3-by-6-inch wooden "lines" delimited a geometric figure resembling a canoe seen from above, with the hexagon's vertices falling on the rectangular ramp's perimeter. The plane of 1-by-12-inch boards, sandwiched between the two long and parallel beams below and the six shorter wood lengths above, was perceived differently at the extremities of the construction than it was in the piece's center. It shifted from surrounding to surrounded.

In the photographs of the show, the L-shaped sculpture has a figural quality that I don't remember from the time. Its space is somewhat like that of Bollinger's doubled-rope work: a volume is marked off but not held. In a fourth piece Bollinger constructed a sort of large trough. A long ramp on the floor supported two like ramps set on edge to make low walls; the ends were closed off by two shorter ramps stood vertically on the floor. Though the form looked logical and familiar, it was an invention, not a copy of something existing. The interior surfaces of the sculpture were smooth planes, while its outside was visually more complex, like a half-sheathed wood-framed house. The work's ends rose up past its sides, rendering ambiguous the enclosed volume's limits, since the "interior" space was bounded more or less definitively.

I remember being very moved by a piece composed of three ramps, each oriented vertically on a long edge, forming an equilateral enclosure containing three like, but canted, ramps, these latter positioned with one corner on the floor and a second atop the wall at the next vertex, so that they rose and veered out from within the triangular pen. The sculpture was creosoted a deep black and surrounded one of the gallery's cast-iron columns. Though its geometry was simple and regular, the piece was perceptually complex, seeming to rise and rise and rise while remaining anchored to the floor. The darkness had a different quality in the center of the sculpture than on the outer sides: I thought it was like looking down into a ship's hold.

Bollinger started working with cast iron during 1972. He initially may have cast in Hillsdale, N. Y., since he did make a casting there that was so large that it remained on site after the foundry itself had closed. Later, he cast at the Patch Wegener Foundry in Rutland, Vt.

I'm uncertain what he was trying to do in the pieces exhibited at O.K. Harris in February 1973. These works mixed new and recycled wooden beams with cast-iron elements. He clearly had become interested in forming material and in leaving the trace of his touch. One sculpture included a thick and heavy iron slab whose top surface was a writhing sea of deep handprints. (Previously, he had roughly painted flat black handprints on a wall at the Jewish Museum.) In a second work, he had cut into parallel wooden beams so that three chunky iron castings locked down on them. Bollinger's works rarely gave priority to expressiveness or suggested his psychological state, but here the iron always sat atop the wood and most times wrapped around it like a wrestler pinning an opponent to the floor. The iron's extremely rough facture reinforced the seeming violence. And where Bollinger's installations generally had sprawled, this one was arranged orthogonally, as though each sculpture had its precise territory and not one inch more.

Bollinger had a solo show at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y., in September 1973 and then a seven-year retrospective at Bennington College, Vt., in November 1973. Further details of these shows have vanished.

His third show at O.K. Harris opened in January 1974. Nancy Foote perceptively reviewed the exhibition in *Art in America* (May-June '74). All the works were unique iron castings; Bollinger handled the metal as if it were water. He had previously cast the shape of Manhattan Island as well as rough, industrial versions of the *Nike of Samothrace* and the *Elgin Marbles*. Here a number of the sculptures recorded the shorelines of particular lakes, fairly true to their map shapes, whose names, in certain (all?) cases, became the titles, only one of which—*Lake Winnepesaukee*—I've been able to recover, from a photo caption.

To make the pieces Bollinger dug out packed foundry sand, which is chemically treated to be somewhat self-adhesive, then filled the voids with molten iron. The metal that was in contact with the sand picked up the trace of his hands and implements; the top surface of the iron, open to the air in Bollinger's mold, recorded the aleatory changes of the metal shrinking and pulling as it moved from liquid to solid. Though variable, these textures summoned open water. Bollinger sometimes ignored the lake bottoms' topographies, rendering them as craggy rather than as gradual and making the lakes "deep," so that his castings would be thick enough to stand upright. When they were tilted up after casting, the orientation of the sculptures contrasted with the obvious way they had been poured. Present gravity contradicted past gravity.

I loved these sculptures when I saw them, and their photographic images still make me shiver. Despite their weight, the pieces felt light; though fairly literal renderings, the works were pure inventions. Their stances looked familiar, but they held space in new ways; they were vivacious, though cast iron is a dense and dull material. Bollinger was riding the dragon, bringing into the world sculptures scary, rude and true.

He had his last solo show of sculptures at the West Bank Art Center in Minneapolis in the spring of 1975. In a letter to a close friend, Bollinger described his state just before the opening:

Bollinger had attitude, loathed anything conventional, hated compromise and fools, cared about his work more than his career. His life unraveled. There were contributing factors.

Have extended myself as always beyond bankruptcy and exhaustion in a solitude too vivid to narrate. I do not pre-judge the response but the work is good enough to pass totally unrecognized. Once more the arbiters of my destiny are a passel of folk not known to appreciate any ruffling of their complacency. More hangs on this show than should and I wish I had something more than a peashooter to make a last stand with. I hope to greet the issue with fortitude.

Though melodramatic, Bollinger's assessment was accurate: his war was over and he had lost. He was 35 years old. If photographs of the Minnesota sculptures exist, they are among his papers and, so far, unavailable.

Bill Bollinger's works were fresh, singular and inspired. I miss them.

Part 3

Water is life and like art it finds its own level.

—announcement for Bollinger's show at Galleria Sperone, Turin, Jan. 24, 1970

A number of people described Bollinger in his prime as the most intense person they've ever known—simultaneously rough and refined. He understood intuitively how things worked and read voraciously to understand why they did, saying in the *Time* magazine article quoted above, "What gives a man power today is not what he has, but what he knows." He had attitude, loathed anything conventional, hated compromise and fools, cared about his work more than his career. Over time, he lost the professional connections that might have helped him weather rough passages. His life unraveled. There were contributing circumstances.

In reconstructing Bollinger's resumé I was struck by the dates of his solo exhibitions. The New York gallery season traditionally starts just after Labor Day and runs until Memorial Day, with June given over to group shows. But dealers typically exhibit their favored artists in October, November, March, April and May, since December, January and February are notoriously slow months for sales. Bollinger's six one-person shows in New York galleries all opened on or after Dec. 1 and closed before Mar. 5. Three of his four solo European shows were likewise in the dead of winter. This consistent scheduling was surely dispiriting, possibly destructive.

In choosing his galleries, Bollinger seems to have cared as much about the floor plan as about the dealer. When I asked him about Klaus Kertess, whose gallery, in its time, had been my favorite, Bollinger replied, "I liked his uptown space." When he parted company with Kertess, in 1970, he had the opportuni-

continued on page 144

Bollinger

continued from page 143

ty to work either with Ileana Sonnabend at Sonnabend Gallery or with Ivan Karp at O.K. Harris Works of Art. He chose to go with Karp, who had a large ground floor venue at 469 West Broadway and also shared some traits of temperament with him. In hindsight, Bollinger's decision seems misguided, not least since the prominent artists who showed at O.K. Harris were principally realist painters and sculptors.

Bollinger's time in the art world, roughly 1966-74, coincided with the hegemony of *Artforum*, which hosted an enviable group of writers. Though *Artforum* may not have had a definite party line esthetically speaking, it was far less catholic than today's art magazines. The catalogue for "The New Sculpture 1965-75" reprints 35 articles from that decade; 70 percent of them had originally appeared in *Artforum*, including almost all the longer monographic features. Although Philip Leider (*Artforum's* editor through 1971), Max Kozloff, Robert Pincus-Witten and Emily Wasserman reviewed Bollinger's work in group or solo shows, none were strong supporters. This left him out of luck with the magazine that counted.

Bollinger had a little money in the '60s and early '70s, when few of his friends had any. Once in the early '70s, he was driving with his son Jim in his old truck, and the passenger door flew open. Bollinger just caught Jim with one hand and steered the truck to a safe stop with the other. He went straight to a truck dealership and ordered the three-quarter-ton ochre-yellow truck I later saw. He sold his old truck to Richard Nonas.

Bollinger was macho. His mother sometimes aided him financially. He may have bridled at needing her help.

In the early and mid-'70s, Bollinger had a long and wrenching custody fight. His ex-wife had joined the Upper West Side Sullivans—a psychologically based cult that required members to cut off all relationship with their families—and placed Jim, then not three years old, in a boarding school in Claverack, N.Y. Though Bollinger loved and needed New York, he moved out of the city to be nearer his son. He sued for custody and lost. After the trial, the very elderly judge said that he always gave custody to the mother unless she was insane or a drug addict. Bollinger was lacerated. He went to court a second time. His mother-in-law testified on his behalf against her daughter, and this time he prevailed. In the '60s, he had traded work with Brice Marden; Bollinger sold the painting to pay his lawyer. But the toll on his life and his work was more than financial.

He taught at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design and at the University of Rhode Island at times in the later '70s. In 1976 he had a second son with a woman he had met in upstate New York. They named him Jackson, after Jackson Pollock.

Cut off from New York City, Bollinger progressively lost his professional, artistic and personal bearings. He wasn't a drinker in the late '60s; he began drinking seriously in the course of the '70s. At the end of the decade, he tried to get back into the New York art world. But a lot had changed in a few years, and he was given the cold shoulder or treated like a ghost by certain of the dealers, artists and critics he had

known. He was stunned. He drank more and more. He was so alive that he had to work hard to kill himself.

The last large sculpture I've seen—in photographs—is a welded-steel construction set on metal wheels. An attached cast-bronze plaque reads:

LUKE THE DRIFTER
BILL BOLLINGER 1977
FOR JIM & JACKSON
LONG MAY YOU RUN

Bollinger drifted. He averaged a move every couple of years between finishing college and dying at 48. Luke the Drifter was the alias that the great country singer Hank Williams used when recording atypical material. Williams died, aged 29, of alcoholic cardiomyopathy, in the back of a car taking him to a New Year's Eve gig. His recording career had spanned seven years. Bollinger knew a lot about a lot, so the presentiments of his title were true presentiments.

Bollinger surely had heard the song "Pictures From Life's Other Side" recorded by Luke the Drifter on June 1, 1951. The lyrics and music are copyright 1951 by Hank Williams (Acuff-Rose Music/Hiram Music administered by Rightsong Music, Inc.), though painter Tom Nozkowski notes that the song was around as early as the turn of the century and was recorded several times in the '20s and '30s. The first two verses (of four) are:

In the world's mighty gallery of pictures
Hang the scenes that are painted from life.
There's pictures of love and of passion
And there's pictures of peace and of strife.
There hang pictures of youth and of beauty
Of old age and the blushing young bride.
They all hang on the wall, but the saddest of all
Are the pictures of life's other side.

Just a picture from life's other side
Someone that fell by the way
A life that's gone out with the tide
That might have been happy some day.
She's watching and waiting alone
Just longing to hear from a loved one so dear
It's just a picture from life's other side.

Bollinger also put his love for his two sons on the sculpture's plaque. They were the center of his life, his letters, his often epic stories. In the decade before his death Bollinger worked as a welder and as a manual laborer to support them and himself. In December 1985 he married Jackson's mother. Shortly thereafter he separated from her and went to ground in Pine Plains, N.Y. Peter Gourfain received a brief letter from him dated Jan. 15, 1988, which closed: "Jim's at Brown Univ. & likes it ok. Jackson has a 30 lb. compound bow he handles very well. As for some of the others—well as Leif [Eriksson] said—better the ice than their way. All's true that holds true." A rough drawing showed a solitary figure sailing away in a small open boat.

Bill Bollinger's death in May 1988 passed unremarked in the art world, and more than a decade later many who knew him still don't know that he's dead. In his 1970 show in the Starrett-Lehigh Building, Bollinger demonstrated that water finds its own level. But the art world doesn't behave like water. Some artists and oeuvres never find their just level, or any level at all.

We artists like to imagine that art endures, though life doesn't. In fact, our work may disappear in the

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decade after we die, or even while we're alive, as Bollinger's did. And the traces of our passage through the art world are tenuous. If a gallery closes, its records usually disappear. When Frank Kolbert took over the Bykert Gallery in 1975, Kertess left him the gallery's archives. I've heard that Kolbert later traded them to pay off a legal debt; I couldn't trace the records. Even museums' exhibition archives are surprisingly fragmentary.

Photographers are the art world's informal historians, since they usually keep their black-and-white negatives. Eric Pollitzer, who shot many of the shows at O.K. Harris in the '70s, sold his roughly 90,000 large-format, black-and-white, art-related negatives to the photographer Jim Strong. Strong recently moved his studio and had less room for Pollitzer's negatives and no requests for prints. He returned about a third of the negatives to the still extant galleries and is storing the rest for now. But many photographers vanish, negatives and all, and with them disappear the last accessible trace of certain art works. Among the photographs to which I was unable to gain access to were those taken by Harry Shunk, who had photographed the Castelli warehouse show in 1968. My letters and calls to him were in vain, and, although the Castelli Gallery has prints of these photographs, their archives have been inaccessible for almost two years.

An art-world saw runs, "If you want a long career, choose your widow(er) carefully." Unless someone is passionate about keeping an artist's work in view, the oeuvre often slips from public consciousness and physically vanishes. In *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, James Agee quoted from the Bible: "And some there be which have no memorial; who are perished, as though they had never been; and are become as though they had never been born; and their children after them." [Ecclesiasticus (Apocrypha) 44:9]. The passage continues "But these were merciful men, whose righteousness hath not been forgotten." □

I was able to "see" Bollinger's sculptures and exhibitions again (as well as some I'd missed) because Rolf Ricke and Harald Szeemann generously shared their exceptional archives and because I was helped by photographers Bernard Gofryd, Nathan Rabin, Jim Strong and, especially, Geoffrey Clements. The late Harris Rosenstein's writings in Art News were crucial, as was the Art News picture file. I thank Paul Bianchini, Lucy Lippard, Charles Worthen, Art & Project Gallery, O.K. Harris Works of Art and three friends of Bill Bollinger—Fran Cohen, Peter Gourfain and Paul Mogensen. Anne Rochette helped me write.

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