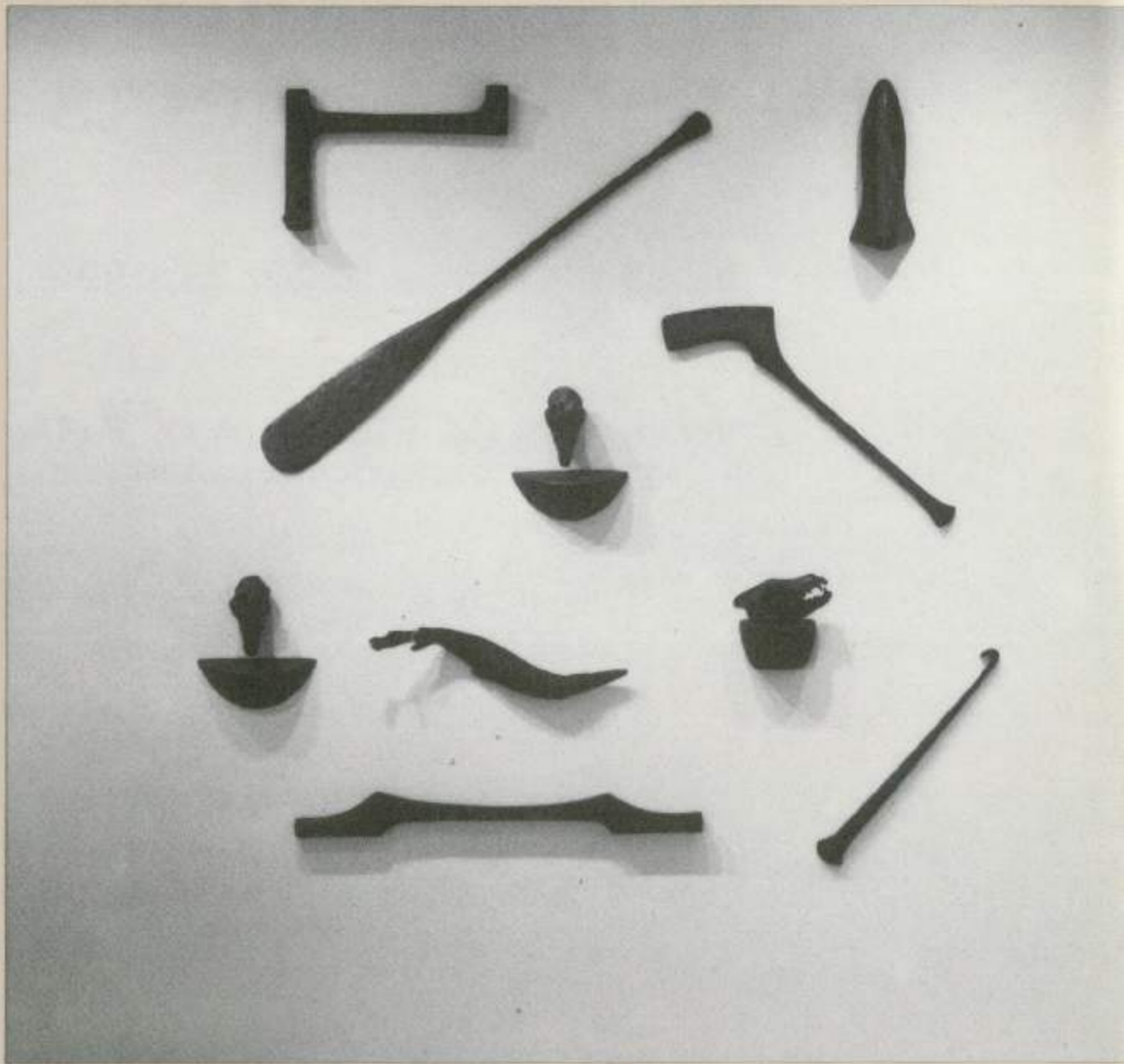


Neil Goodman Subjects/Objects

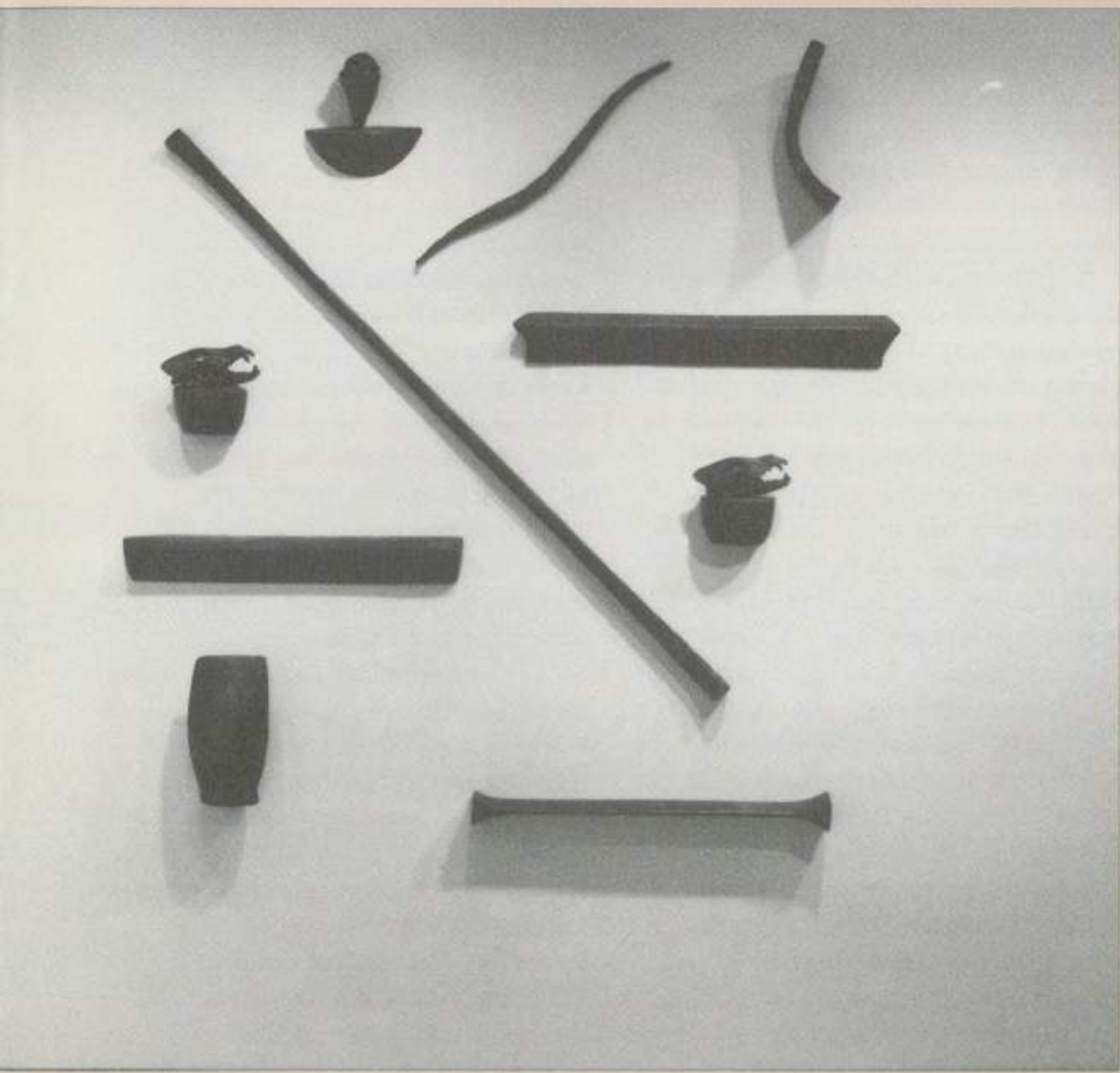
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Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art
University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma









Neil Goodman, Subjects/Objects and The Devaluation of The Constructivist Imperative

In Neil Goodman's *Subjects/Objects*, the sum of the parts is not greater than the whole. Although careful inspection of each of the 47 sculptural elements which comprise the installation custom-built for The Fred Jones Jr. Museum Of Art yields a visual treasure trove, the work's lowest common denominator consists of the space between each elements, namely, the white wall of the Museum. Mr. Goodman, after all, is a sculptor. In sculpture, the artist purposefully manipulates space towards a desired end. Whence Mr. Goodman's end?

Indeed, individual elements are striking; some posit a particular texture, as with the fish-fragment; some evince mathematical precision, as with the geometric shape of a cube; some reveal a sense of passed time, as with the patina and seeming desuetude of the piece as a whole. Furthermore, witness the particular way the artist has spread out the installation onto three walls, as if each wall represented consecutive pages of a book written in some indecipherable though nonetheless beautiful script. Finally, the sculptor inaugurates various rhythms within the piece via the contrasts of organic with geometric shapes, horizontal with vertical lines, metamorphosis with the realized.

As alluring as each element might be, the work's cynosure is otherwise. The sculptor specifically wants the viewer to focus on the area between the elements. This much he tells us when we compare this piece with an earlier work, *Triptych*, 1988.

In the latter, the artist, echoing the Surrealist dreamscape sculpture of Alberto Giacometti (Think of *The Palace At 4 a.m.*), configures the same seemingly random assortment of objects as in the former, establishing the same sort of tension created by the juxtaposition of round with square, representational with abstract, organic with man-made. The difference, though, resides in the fact that, whereas the pieces in the latter are embedded in, suspended from, hung off of, a trellis-like support structure like Christmas tree ornaments, in the former, they are not.

Consequently, two points merit articulation. In *Subjects/Objects*, Mr. Goodman creates significance in the manner in which he has removed the support structure for the objects present in *Triptych*. He has taken the objects, seemingly coherent when viewed in a particular context, i.e., as part of a trellis structure, part of a literal context, as a work of art, and decontextualized them, made them free-floating signifiers symbolic of nothing in particular. Like a list of ingredients with no recipe. As such, they confound our expectations: Is it art because it hangs in a Museum? Is it art because an artist made it? Is it art because we view it? Or is a combination of all three? The work no longer resonates with *frisson*, the chill provoked by such famous Surrealist similes, "as ubiquitous as the chance encounter between an umbrella and a sewing machine on an operating table." They are random pages of a dream-catalogue. Freud, meet Sears-Roebuck.

The second point of comparison corroborates the first. It evaluates the material which serves as the locus of transition between the sculptural elements. In *Subjects/Objects*, it is the space of the gallery walls, in *Triptych*, it is the same material as the objects themselves, that is,

bronze. It is as if, in the former, Mr. Goodman has shattered the image and sequence of dreams and hung them out on a Cubist grid, a fusion between the synthetic Cubism of Juan Gris, the Constructivist ordering of Mondrian, the Surrealist dream-vistas of Yves Tanguy. In *Triptych*, the sculptural objects belong to that same context as the trellis which supports it. As such, it operates with the tradition of formalism, where the objects refer to nothing external, only to art about art about art. It is self-referential. Here, meaning is a hard nut to be cracked.

Not so with *Subjects/Objects*. Meaning is open-ended; it is anyone's business. Nothing mysterious here. The elements are held in place, figuratively if not literally, by the white of the Museum wall. In his transition from *Triptych* to *Subjects/Objects*, Mr. Goodman has removed the implied stage of synthetic Cubism and replaced it with air. As such, the piece heralds the end of one era (formalism as the artistic component of Modernism), the beginning of another, one characterized by a state of *detente* between the art object and its viewer (Modern art can be said to have posited a Cold War between the two). In other words, the artist involves the viewer at the beginning of the creation of meaning whereas with *Triptych* the viewer takes the work of art as a given. The viewer doesn't see the work in the round (the back of each element is against the wall), as a finished piece, because the viewer completes it. The viewer is presented with a working hypothesis. Such an operation is decidedly a-formal, that is, the work is not sealed off from the viewer's lived experience. Significance of the work is synonymous with its viewing. The viewer must supply the syntax and grammar to the basic units of sculptural vocabulary provided by the sculptor. The viewer has replaced the artist as the work's

generator-of-meaning. This much is embodied in the title's two components, "subjects" and "objects." The grammatical slash between the two implies that the two are distinct entities. Subjects, that which the piece is about about, objects, their mere physical presence. There is no correlation between the two, at least not in any clues provided by the sculptor. The work permits the viewer to get into the act.

The implications of the preceding analysis are decidedly moral. Mr. Goodman is no distant and omniscient Wizard of Oz; instead, he discounts the ideal of the artist-as-shaman, the artist-as-genius. He demonstrates that art does not, cannot, provide insight into any "big" picture. Rather, he forces the viewer to come up with their own solutions. He abdicates a little responsibility. Good for him. He states his esthetic in black and white: he enables the viewer to understand how notions of ecology - the interrelatedness of everything (art, viewer, Museum, artist) have replaced Platonic ideas of sacred and inviolate beauty.

A work of Mr. Goodman's, similar to *Subjects/Objects*, was criticized recently because it wasn't sculptural enough. This because it was mounted on the wall, and thus thwarted viewing-in-the-round. This ignores the way in which Mr. Goodman has stretched the traditional notion of sculpture reaching out into the viewer's space to incorporate that of the Museum. In *Subjects/Objects*, each object resonates with sculptural activity, the space of the Museum wall being seen as the crucial transitional element between articulation and incoherence, meaning and chaos, art and, well, life.

James Scarborough
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FJMA

Neil Goodman

BORN:

Hammond, Indiana, 1953

CURRENT RESIDENCE:

2400 S. Oakley Chicago, Illinois 60608

(312) 523-6386

EDUCATION:

Indiana University, (1971-76)

B.A. Fine Arts, Religious Studies
Bloomington, Indiana

Kansas City Art Institute, (1977)

Post Graduate Studies in Sculpture

Tyler School of Art, (1977-1979)

M.F.A. Sculpture and Ceramics

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

CURRENT POSITION:

Indiana University Northwest

Associate Professor of Fine Arts (1985-1994);

Gary, Indiana

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS:

(One Person Shows)

- 1993 **Neil Goodman Selected Works, 1985-1991** Rockford Museum of Art, Rockford, Illinois
Subjects-Objects, Recent Bronze Sculpture, Struve Gallery, Chicago, Illinois (catalogue)
- 1991 **Large Scale Bronzes**, Struve Gallery, Chicago, Illinois (catalogue)
- 1990 **The Bellingham Series: Small Scale Bronzes**, Struve Gallery, Chicago, Illinois
- 1989 **Chicago View, Selected Works from the 1980's** Indianapolis Center for Contemporary Art, Herron Gallery, Indianapolis, Indiana (catalogue)
- 1988 **Recent Bronze Sculptures**, Struve Gallery, Chicago, Illinois (catalogue)

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS:

(Group)

- 1994 **The New Pier Show**, Chicago, Illinois
Furniture, Ingles and Associates, Birmingham, Michigan
- 1993 **Nautical Visions**, Shedd Aquarium, Chicago, Illinois
Five Sculptural Viewpoints, Evanston Art Center, Evanston, Illinois
- 1992 **Chicago International Art Expo**, Donnelly Hall, Chicago, Illinois
Art for the Blind, Hadley School for the Blind, Lake Forest, Illinois

Contemporary Still Life, Rockford College, Rockford, Illinois (catalogue)
IUNW Faculty Exhibition, Gary, Indiana

- 1991 **Chicago International Art Expo**, Chicago, Illinois
Art Miami '91, Art Exposition at Miami Beach, FL
- 1990 **Sculpture Chicago**, Klein Gallery, Chicago, Illinois
Judith Racht Gallery, Hand Crafted Furniture, Lakeside, Michigan
- 1989 **Chicago International New Art Forms Expo**, Navy Pier, Chicago, Illinois (catalogue)
Curators Choice, Survey of Contemporary Indiana Artists, Northern Indiana Arts Association, Munster, Indiana (catalogue)
- 1988 **Sculpture**, Southern Illinois University Museum of Art, Carbondale, Illinois
Chicago International Art Expo, Navy Pier, Chicago, Illinois
- 1987 **National Sculpture**, Foster White Gallery, Seattle, WA
Chicago International New Art Forms Exposition, Navy Pier, Chicago, Illinois (catalogue)
Art at the Armory, Seventy-fifth anniversary exhibition, New York
- 1986 **Models for Large Scale Sculpture**, Randolph Street Gallery, Chicago, Illinois
Sculpture, Dart Gallery, Chicago, Illinois
Chicago International New Art Forms Exposition, Navy Pier, Chicago, Illinois (catalogue)

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Books and Catalogues:

- Struve, Keith. **Neil Goodman: Subjects-Objects**. Struve Gallery, Chicago, Illinois 1993.
- Schneeman, Liane. **Still Alive, Contemporary Still Life** The Rockford College, 1991.
- Struve, Keith. Neil Goodman: **Large Scale Sculpture**. Struve Gallery, Chicago, Illinois, 1991. Catalogue published by Struve Gallery, **Furniture, Neil Goodman** in conjunction with Chicago International New Art Forms Exhibition, Navy Pier, Chicago, Illinois, 1989.
- Northern Indiana Arts Association, **Curator's Choice: Indiana**, page 15. Munster, Indiana.
- Yood, James. Julia Fish. **Chicago View:**

Selected Works from the 1980's.

Indianapolis Center for Contemporary Art, Indianapolis, Indiana, 1989. **Chicago International New Art Forms Exposition**. Catalogue of exhibition, 1989 (also 1988, 1987, 1986). Sachs, Sid. **Golden Years: Tyler's 50th Anniversary**, Tyler School of Art Invitational, page 22, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1984. Rabb, Madeline. **Mile of Sculpture**. Chicago Sculpture International page 24, Chicago, Illinois, 1983. **Chicago International Art Exposition**. Catalogue of exhibition. Frumkin & Struve Gallery, Chicago, Illinois, 1983. Evans, Robert. **Illinois Museum Invitational**. Springfield, Illinois, 1982. **Chicago Prospective**. Department of Cultural Affairs, page 9, Chicago, Illinois, 1980.

SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS:

A.G. Becker, Chicago, Illinois; **AT&T, Chicago**. Corporate Center, Chicago, Illinois; **Brunswick Corporation**, Skokie, Illinois; **Crown Consolidated Industries**, Chicago, Illinois; **JMB Reality, Corporate Headquarters**, Chicago, Illinois; **Indiana State Museum**, Indianapolis, Indiana; **Indiana University Northwest**, Gary, Indiana; **Ingles and Associates**, Detroit, Michigan; **Kirkland and Ellis**, Chicago, Illinois; **MacDougal Publishing**, Chicago, Illinois; **Moraine Valley Community College**, Palos Heights, Illinois; **Richar Interiors**, Chicago, Illinois; **Rockford Museum of Art**, Rockford, Illinois; **Sears Corporate Collection**, Hoffman Estates, Illinois; **Skidmore, Owings and Merrill**, Chicago; **Tokai Bank, Ltd.**, Chicago; **Tribler & Orpitt**, Chicago, Illinois; **Van Dan Bergh and Associates**, Chicago, Illinois.

PUBLIC COMMISSIONS:

Temple Jeremiah, Large Scale Relief, Northbrook, Illinois
City of Chicago, Public Library
Anti Defamation League of Chicago Awards Trophy

SELECTED PRIVATE COLLECTIONS:

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Cornelus & Marian Bakker, Spokane, Washington
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Dr. Maurice Bodgonoff, Chicago, Illinois

George Danforth, Chicago, Illinois
Richard Del Vesco, Chicago, Illinois
Bruce Doblin, Chicago, Illinois
Allen & Wanda Erhardt, Lombard, Illinois
Michael & Angela Fitzimmons, Riverside, Illinois
Michael Goldman, Washington, D.C.
Patty Gilford Design, Chicago, Illinois
William & Virginia Gordon, Darien, Illinois
Carl Horn, New York, New York
Daniel & Wendy Kahn, Chicago, Illinois
Burton B. Kaplan, Wilmette, Illinois
Harold & Barbara Kiwanas, Munster, Indiana
Larry Kramer, Chicago, Illinois
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Linda Lee, New York, New York
Maxine & Ronald Linde, Chicago, Illinois
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Sandra & Mike Perlow, Chicago, Illinois
Anne Peters, San Francisco, California
Claire & Gordon Prussian, Chicago, Illinois
Dan & Susan Real, Burr Oaks, Illinois
Walter Richter, Gloucester, Massachusetts
David C. Ruttenberg, Chicago, Illinois
Judy Schenker, Highland Park, Illinois
Brian Simmons, Chicago, Illinois
Fred & Sandy Stare, Chicago, Illinois
John & Earlene Taylor, Iowa
Ken Whitener, Chicago, Illinois
James & Mary Jo Wino, Pittsburg, Pennsylvania
Stephen Wolf, Chicago, Illinois

CRITICAL REVIEWS: (National)

Stephonus Heidacher, New Art Examiner, October 1987
David Snyder, New Art Examiner, March 1987
Joel Fisher, New Art Examiner, April 1986
Vito Acconci, New Art Examiner, January 1986
Giacometti Furniture, New Art Examiner, January 1985
Claire Lieberman, New Art Examiner, December 1984

GALLERY REPRESENTATION:

Struve Gallery, 309 W. Superior, Chicago, Illinois 60610; (312) 787-0563