ROBERT KANTOR

the HOPE series

AND OTHER SCULPTURES

written by Daniel Kany

This book has been published in conjunction with the exhibition
Robert Kantor: The Hope Series
on view at the Center on Contemporary Art (CoCA) from July 15 through September 3, 2006.

The exhibition has been organized by CoCA and curated by Daniel Kany.

Project Management by Daniel Kany
Designed by Kari Young
Edited by Amy Gautschi
Primary photography by Kevin Syms
Produced by CoCA Editions
Printed by Pollard Group, Tacoma, WA

For dimensions, height precedes width precedes depth.

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410 Dexter Ave N
Seattle WA 98109
www.cocaseattle.org

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INTRODUCTION

Robert Kantor is a beaming light in the cultural landscape of Idaho. His sense of vision and ability to realize what he sees go far beyond his business acumen, his sophistication or even his art. He is a man who sees community within culture and the future within even the baby steps of the present. He sees the world as a place for family, friends and humanity.

It was a great day for Boise State University and for me personally when Bob and I finally saw his major sculpture *The Rising Star of Boise State* installed here on the campus. It is a strong, lively and approachable sculpture. I have said before that it is a symbol of the growth and transformation of Boise State into a metropolitan research university of distinction.

I know that one of Bob's major mobiles was recently installed in a California children's hospital and that makes sense to me. These are uplifting works. They are accessible to the expanding minds of children and young people yet they offer something to those minds. They present lighthearted peace and sweeping forms. Bob Kantor's works can make you think. They are easy to see but unexpectedly complex. As well, because many of them move, they are different every time you see them and this makes you appreciate the space around them, changing light and the landscape. They offer a great sense of place. Of course, for a campus setting that is a fantastic quality.

On the surface, *The Hope Series* sculptures could hardly be any more different from *The Rising Star of Boise State*. However, they do have much in common. The pieces seem very clear to you the moment you see them, but they begin to blossom with depth and interest from the first moments of your encounter. They embody balance

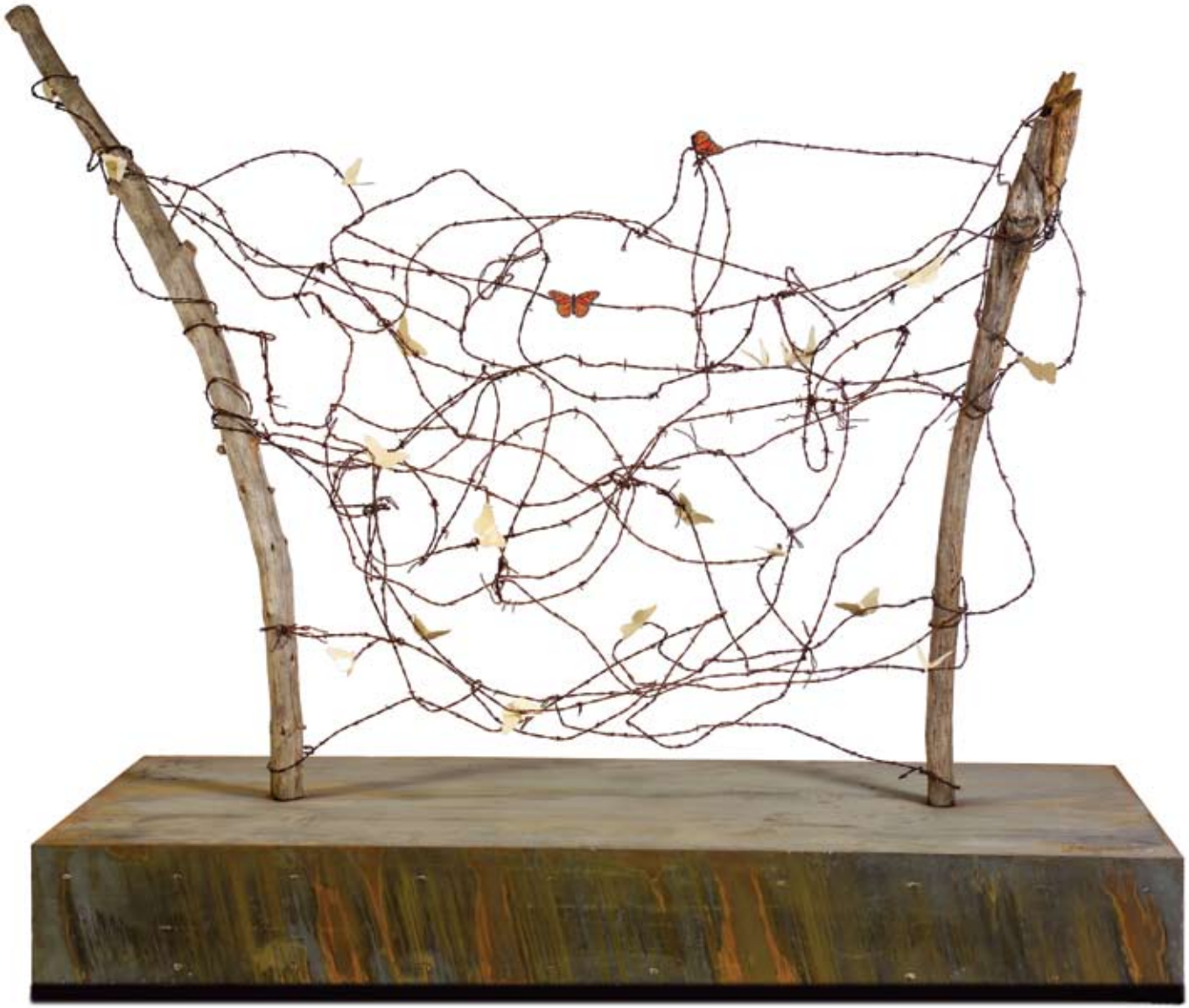
Hope 3

and a foundation from which complexity can be lucidly articulated.

A university is a place where young minds learn to build the future, but it is also where they learn the lessons of the past. *The Hope Series* is about some very dark moments of history that must be remembered in order for such atrocities never to happen again. Bob's work handles the subject with appropriate gravity and respect.

I know and like Bob Kantor. I admire his accomplishments and I appreciate his civic focus and moral clarity. I think he is a great sculptor.

Robert Kustra
President, Boise State University



Camp Hope

BALANCE

ROBERT KANTOR'S HOPE SERIES

by Daniel Kany

FIRST ENCOUNTERS

Before visiting Robert Kantor's Shoshone studio for the first time, I talked about Kantor's work with Idaho sculptor Joe Castle, a friend whose work I deeply respect. Joe told me about a sculpture he had seen in Kantor's studio—a piece featuring barbed wire stretched menacingly between two raw wooden posts. The piece, Joe explained, was perched on a rather massive and beautifully rusted steel box worthy of its own spot in a minimalist showcase. I hesitated for a moment when he described butterflies perched on the rusted wire, but Joe was insistent: "They pull you in. They get you close to this thing, and the closer you get, the more the plinth lifts it above you. It's really strong." He finished: "It's awesome."

I had already seen several of Kantor's pieces at his home in Hailey, Idaho. Particularly impressive was a 40' mobile, which shared his living room with a tiny, gem-like Alexander Calder mobile that stood on a nearby desk. Outside the house were three more Kantor pieces, notable for their flawless placement in the landscape as much as their scale and formal content. The moment I saw them, I realized that I had driven past a Kantor piece, a stark black and white divided mobile, during my first visit to Sun Valley. In some ways it celebrated the possibilities of Calder's split achievements with his stabiles and his mobiles. It claimed an entire field to itself, and, on first inspection, the black and white forms could not have been more settled into the snowy twilight landscape, itself simplified to the retreating white snow, the evening-darkened flora and the black of the streaming road over which my car was sailing. The glimpse was fleeting, but the crepuscular image was compelling. It was spare and strong art in the powerfully spare landscape of the famously beautiful Wood River Valley. I was impressed.

Camp Hope, detail

What was notable about my conversation with Joe Castle was that while he had previously spoken of Kantor's work in formal or even mechanical terms, that was not how he talked about the piece from the Hope Series. Joe is a well-trained sculptor and serious artist, so when he speaks about actual works, he tends to speak in objective terms: form, material, scale, color, technique, etc. Joe's own work, however, is based in rather ineffable qualities of refinement and form. I thought it was rather telling that Joe spoke about the Camp Hope piece largely in subjective, experiential terms. He found it a moving piece (emotionally, not mechanically), and, less than a week later, I found myself having the same kind of experience.

CASINGS

There was a great deal of other work in Kantor's studio that was fantastic, but it largely had different concerns of content, displaying play, wit and a metaphor-extending sense of balance. One of the most striking differences was that while the other work took more time to reveal itself, the Hope Series pieces hit me hard and fast. In addition to having this experience with Camp Hope, I had a similar encounter with Hope 3, which features a U.S. Army helmet perched on the front of a huge bomb-like object. While in photos the helmet might indicate a head and make the piece biomorpically fish-like, in person it surprised me. The helmet marked a sense of scale and made the explosive device huge—and all the more dangerous. It also instilled a bizarrely dizzying sense of place somewhere between a cowboy riding the atomic bomb (to our shared doom) in Stanley Kubrick's Cold War dark comedy Dr. Strangelove and the impossibility of the human body to occupy that space (if it exploded, it would vaporize any living thing that close). The sculpture said to me that people and bombs are incompatible. The oddity about the latter comment, for me at least, is that it brought to mind the relationship of predators and prey: In the end, they need each other to survive/exist. This did not make logical sense to me—either then or now—but it was what I felt. In retrospect, I am quite certain it had to do with Kantor's sense of evenhandedness. His work seems to accept reality and respect the viewer. With him, history becomes our stage and our shared experience, while our scars mark our path just as much as our footsteps might. High ground for Kantor is where we all escape the flood—not some imbalanced judge of moral partisanship.

Hope 3 in Kantor's Shoshone studio

Kantor working on *Hope 3*. Photo by Kevin Syms

The inclusion and effect of the butterflies on the pieces might at first seem too direct or too ephemeral, but they play many roles and can lead the viewer down varying paths. With the first bomb piece that I saw, the most lasting effect was a decisive split between the bomb as explosive device of great potential energy and the butterflies as the outcome of a split identity: a caterpillar that has been transformed. The balance of the two—bomb/cocoon and butterfly—struck me as disquieting and complex. Moreover, a "casing" is both the technical term for a cocoon and the part of an artillery shell or bullet that holds the powder (i.e., a shell casing). While the rust on the bombs in Kantor's Hope Series might indirectly imply times of peace by the fact that they have gone unexploded for so long, it also indicates a sense of violence inherent in transformation. Burning after all is the process of oxidizing—as is rusting. And so those bombs were burning slowly—moving at a snail-like pace to expose their dangerous contents.

In *Camp Hope*, only two of the many butterfly forms are colored in a way that makes them seem alive. The others are rendered in a grayish material: They could be dead; they could be ghosts; they could be simply other than our focused pair; they could be many things. The relation of the pair to a Noah's ark kind of thinking came to mind right away, but the pair was only part of a complex balance. The fact there are two immediately makes the viewer feel the number of the gray butterflies was not left to chance either. There is a rich history of number symbolism in Judaism (known as "gematria," meaning numerology) stemming from the tradition of Kabbalah. Kabbalism is most often thought of as a hermeneutic (interpretive) tool for delving into mystical understanding of the Torah. Its esoteric caché has made it appealing to many artists, such as Barnett Newman, for adding subtle depth and meaning, or even fundamental structures, to their work.

Kantor's choice of 18 gray butterflies indeed was not a matter of chance: "18.... This is the number that represents life. Life in all forms, and permutations."[1] As well, the number two, represented

[1] Shalom Kantor, untitled letter to his father, Robert (n.d.). The entire section on 18 says: "18.....This is the number that represents life. Life in all forms, and permutations. The word for life in Hebrew is chai (חי) where the חchet==8 and the yudי=10. With that in mind.... you should know that yud יon its own stands as an abbreviation for the name of God and the chet חon its own can break down into the letters that spell out love aleph(1), hey(5), vet(2) 1+5+2=8 חיי So.... It would not be a stretch to say that one who had G-d and Love had Life...." When he wrote this letter, Shalom Kantor was in his final year of Rabbinical school at The University of Judaism in Los Angeles.

Kantor working on *Hope 3*. Photo by Kevin Syms

by the letter *bet* (ב), goes further than the breeding potential of animals—it has a solidifying and foundational meaning: "Two is a very special number because the letter *bet* (ב) stands for the Hebrew word for house (בַּיִת - *bayit*), and if you turn a *bet* on its side it becomes the shape of a house. But a house is not truly complete until there is a family living within it, and the basis of any family is a couple. Thus, for a home to be complete and the letter *bet* to be complete there must be **TWO** people living in harmony within."[2]

THE KINETICS OF MEMORY

The late-era ordinance that Kantor uses in the *Hope Series* instantly brings to mind World War II. *Camp Hope* is probably placed by most first-time viewers as a memento of Nazi concentration camps. In short, we see these as "post-war art." While these works also place themselves in the context of contemporary art, it probably makes more sense to start with the more pressing, though elder, term.

"Post-war art" brings to mind anxious and often twisted forms. We usually think of "monumental" sculpture in the senses both of scale and goal. The term "monument" comes from Latin roots that both allude to issues of memory: *monumentum* (n. memorial) and *monere* (v. to remind). Post-war art is essentially about memory and its vicissitudes. Another critical—though perhaps less obvious—element of post-war art is the quality of *proximity*. Post-war art comes upon us like a fresh scar or even an unhealed wound. It is undigested fodder. It is the mark and warning of trauma: The scar undoubtedly remains, and the questions turn to whether or not the wound will ever or even *can* ever heal. That point, however, is where people differ: Some want to forget, while others desperately want us all never to forget. Of course, how much we want to remember is a different story altogether.

When we look at a wound, we often judge how recent it was in order to gauge the level of injury and where it falls in the healing process. Scars are often merely signs of a bloody experience that has fully healed—other than leaving a visible physical mark. On the body, we might notice a limp, a missing or crumpled limb, or a blinded eye. We understand as well, however, that the physically legible trauma can be a sign of wounds that go deeper to places of the mind and emotion. In this light, we see that memory is not just a marker of the past but a reminder that the past can and often does affect our

[2] Ibid.

future. Events from the past that color our current thinking will stay with us, or at least return, in the times to come. People do not live in the past so much as they live with memory. If a seemingly lost thought casts light on the present, the reawakened memory can rear its head again some other time. We know, too, there are many things within us that have not yet had the chance to awaken from the depths of our minds as kernels of memory. Marcel Proust savors such thinking in his *Remembrance of Things Past*: "The past" Proust surmises, "is hidden in some material object…which we do not suspect. And as for that object, it depends on chance whether we come upon it or not…."[3] Here we find the image of an object containing potential energy, and memory akin to a minefield in which these objects can spring their energy upon us without warning.

Proust was not a naïve thinker by any stroke: The memory-triggering image of tea and cookies from his aromatically bourgeois upbringing was perhaps more poetic and less serious than what Sigmund Freud found in his trauma-soaked research. But Proust's notion of the "involuntary memory" (*mémoire involuntaire*) allows us the idea that the starting point for the path of memory is often not merely uncharted, but indeed *unsuspected.* The experiencer can find herself suddenly following an ancient path in an unexplored land—a path that was inexplicably laid by her own footsteps. However, we don't pretend memory is all-powerful. We get things wrong. We are confused by dreams and the stories of others. Our perspectives change dramatically—for example, try remembering what a page looked like before you learned what the letters were and that they were arranged into things called "sentences" and "words." Memories change the way they function as our perspective changes. Of course, we know proximity does not always make things more legible: Again and again we speak of the "20/20 vision of hindsight"—one might think our judgment improves as we lose sight of the details in the expanding distance, thus equating simplicity and clarity. However, Freudian theory sees this process as complex and consequential: Our memories represent a wellspring of culture, community, triumph, spirituality and even love.

Kantor's *Hope 3* is directly related to the idea of memory as minefield. While many viewers will assume the piece is built around an air-dropped bomb, it is actually a *paravane,* which is a very different object. A paravane is a device that is dragged by minesweeper ships to help guide the razor-sharp wires that cut mine-mooring cables; in that role, it also sacrifices itself by letting mines detonate

[3] Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way,* vol. 1 of *Remembrance of Things Past* (1912-27), translated from the French by C. K. Scott Moncrieff (1922): this book is free from copyright and is available online at sites such as www.authorama.com.

Above: *Hope 3:* in Kantor's Shoshone studio
Preceding page: surface detail
Following page: *Camp Hope* detail

on it. The idea of an explosive-dredging device used to find and release dangerous elements is related to the kinetics of memory in Kantor's *Hope Series*. But like the sculpture, there is more to the use of paravanes: They have an active and assertive role as a weapon used to hunt submarines. As well, they have been used to protect ships other than those charged with finding hidden mines.[4] Kantor's use of the paravane is interesting since it is not that readily recognizable as an object. While it has a non-military use in commercial fishing, Kantor offers context to the viewer by placing a WWII-era U.S. infantry helmet on the front of the object. There is a marriage here of Navy and Army that could only mean invasion. "Riding" the paravane leads us to think of D-Day and Erwin Rommel's famously well-developed German defenses of the French coast. D-Day, of course, was the first bold stroke of the liberation of Europe and, consequently, the concentration camps.

ATROCITY / HOPE

Kantor has insisted on the openness of content in his work. "Most of the time when I am struck by an idea for a sculpture," he explains, "I might be sleeping or just waking. At that point, I get up and immediately make a sketch. Because of this," he continues, "I don't pretend to control or have dominion over the meanings in the work. If I don't *feel* something in the piece, I don't make it." In other words, Kantor develops ideas about the content and how he experiences it in his sculptures over time. Sometimes their meanings to him change.[5] At the opening of an exhibition, for example, a viewer explained to Kantor that when she saw *Camp Hope*, she had no doubt the butterflies were the

4. Paravane (weapon). (2006, April 17). In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 21:21, June 6, 2006, from http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Paravane_%28weapon%29&oldid=48778525.
"The **paravane** is a form of towed underwater 'glider'. (…) Initially developed to destroy naval mines, the paravane would be strung out and *streamed* behind the towing ship. If its *wings* or the tow cable snagged the cable securing a mine then the mine and the paravane would be brought together and the mine exploded harmlessly. The cable could then be retrieved and a replacement paravane fitted. Explosive paravanes were developed by Burney (Lt. Charles Dunnistoun Burney, the paravane inventor) as an anti-submarine weapon, as the 'high speed sweep'. It was a paravane, containing 80 lbs of TNT towed by an armoured electric cable. The warhead was fired automatically as soon as the submarine touched the paravane or towing cable, or by hand from the ship's bridge. It could be quickly deployed into the water, could be towed up to 25 knots, and recovery if unsuccessful was reasonably simple."

5 This to be a very refreshing and honest approach by an artist to his work. It shows respect for what the viewer sees and experiences. For an approachable and compelling consideration of the issues of context and how they affect meaning in art, I recommend reading John Berger's highly influential *Ways of Seeing* (London, Penguin, 1972).

"In reflection, we do not see ourselves simply, but in perspective. Art does not clarify what we see, but it allows us to understand what we are doing and, sometimes, even why."

souls of persons held in a Nazi concentration camp. The way she saw it, the souls, like the butterflies, could not be contained by the wire or the walls.

In recalling this encounter, Kantor was clear to point out that while it had not been his conscious intention, the viewer was not wrong, and, indeed, her story had impacted how he would experience the piece from then on. "It brought to mind two poems with which I was familiar from my Jewish upbringing," he recalled, "and although I hadn't been thinking about them specifically at the time, they are part of what makes up my world view." One poem was written by a child who passed through Teresienstadt on his way to Auschwitz: Pavel Friedmann wrote "The Butterfly" on April 6, 1942. He recalls in the text the last butterfly he encountered during his seven weeks in the ghetto: It was "dazzlingly yellow" and was leaving because "it wished to kiss the world goodbye." He finishes: "That butterfly was the last one./Butterflies don't live in here,/in the ghetto."

The other poem is a personal plea by a mother who lost her two young sons in the slaughter of 100,000 Jews by the Nazis on September 29, 1941 in the ravine called "Babi-Yar." While the images

Above: *Camp Hope*, detail.
Following page: *Hope 3*, detail.

within the poem, including the white doves, do not translate directly into Kantor's work, one can deeply sympathize with the author's attempt to reach forward and move past the loss while never forgetting her two sons.

Babi-Yar

I'd have picked the right beam for a crib to be swung on,
And have cradled and cradled my Yankel, my young one.
But in fire and flame the hut fell to ashes;
Where then am I to rock my boy, my precious?
To nettles, thorns and thistles
The village road surrenders;
The hushed white doves
Have been transformed to cinders.
I'd have chosen a tree; my cradle would have hung there;
I'd have taken my Shloimel, sung him and sung there;
But I've not one thread of his pillow-case,
And of his shoes not so much as a lace.
Not a twig, not a leaf…
The hearty oak
Is a heap of coals
That smolder and smoke…
I'd have cut off my braids, completely undone them,
And have hung my darlings' cradle upon them;
But I don't know where they are now, the bones—
the priceless bones of my two little sons.
Help me, mothers, help me
Tear the music from my breast!
Help me, mothers, help me
So Babi-Yar may sleep.

By Shike Driz
(Anonymous translation from the Yiddish)[6]

Tens of millions of people were killed during WWII, but the power of this poem lies in the fact that

[6] I find this is a widely published and translated text. The version here is from an old hand-typed copy belonging to Robert Kantor.

every loss is personal. Rather than relying on an anesthetically objective word like "genocide," the point here is to come closer to Kantor's inclination toward the subjective and the personal. "I want to welcome people to bring their own experiences with them when they view my works," explains Kantor; "I can't put everything that helped develop my sensibilities into my sculptures in some legible way. Even if I could, I wouldn't." It might be the serious content of the *Hope Series* that drove Kantor to use the monument form for these works: They are sites of reflection and meditation.

While Kantor does not consider his work "religious" or "Jewish-driven," his being Jewish brings him closer to the atrocities of WWII. Born during the war, Kantor explains: "(I have) monotheistic Jewish beliefs, but my moral bases are close to others'. I feel very much part of the broader Judeo-Christian beliefs of our culture as a whole."

Camp Hope is about atrocity. But the piece would not have any structure or form if Kantor did not establish a sort of *dialectical* balance between the horror of historical fact and the inspiring ability of the human soul to move forward with hope paired with the desire to live. The piece challenges the viewer to believe in a desirably bright future while acknowledging the potential (and often realized) darkness of human transgression. And so it is a work about hope as well.

While the term "dialectic" might seem to be an overly complex word for "balance," it is appropriate because Kantor is a dialectical thinker, and this way of thinking comes across in his work. *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines "dialectic" as "(t)he process especially associated with Hegel of arriving at the truth by stating a thesis, developing a contradictory antithesis, and combining and resolving them into a coherent synthesis." Or, alternately: "the Marxian process of change through the conflict of opposing forces...." In his mobiles, the *Hope Series* and his world view, Kantor continues to focus on "balance" as a dynamic rather than static element: He refuses to form his structures by raw symmetry. Having established balance in the work, Kantor's path might seem inevitable, but it is always rigorously achieved.

What, then, is the story here? What is at stake? Is it Truth or Change? The obvious answer, taking lead

Hope 2

from the dictionary, is that both are correct: Life is a dynamic force and is only true in the context of change. In a certain sense, herein lies the core of Kantor's sculptural production—especially the mobiles. But to consider these questions brings the artist's *Hope Series* into a critical point in his sculptural production: By setting off one element perfectly in balance against another, he empowers even small forces to shift that balance. Balance can mark the state some call the "tipping point," poised delicately on the brink of change. Politically, balance usually tells us not about unity but about people divided; and in that context, there tend to be just about as many losers as winners. In this light, it seems that the "allover" balance of a Jackson Pollock painting is very different from the airtight perfection of Piet Mondrian. It also makes us shiver to remember that Adolf Hitler was elected—democratically—by a far wider margin than most recent American presidents. But even these men are the signs of changing times, of electoral rhythms, and of how people never stop shifting the way they see the world. Life, Kantor's art hints, is dynamic, and to see it is to track a moving target.

American Sculpture in the Wake of World War II

The Regionalist painter Thomas Hart Benton, widely considered one of the great American artists, was a huge and influential figure in the 1930s. Much of his work from that time focused on the toil of the worker. His Depression-era work, for which he is most noted, was solemn but respectful; spare but not desperate. His *Fence Mender* of 1940 is very much in this vein: A solitary figure mends a barbed wire fence in a faraway field. The earth is tilled but rocky, and a vibrantly cloudy sky fills most of the image. The man and his patient horse are somewhat distant, and one might imagine the only sound to be a gentle breeze. And while the composition opens to the big sky, we sense the end of the open range with the advent of barbed-wired compartmentalizing, like the closing of a book.[7] It's classic Benton—hardworking, virtuous and isolated in America—yet Benton made this image on

[7] Barbed-wire was invented in the western United States to contain livestock; functionally, it ended the era of the open range. See Ray, Emily and Wynell Schamel. "Glidden's Patent Application for Barbed Wire." *Social Education* 61, 1 (January 1997): 52-55.

Thomas Hart Benton, "The Fence Mender", 1940. Faith 40. Lithograph on wove paper, watermarked BFK RIVES, full margins. Published by Associated American Artistis in an edition of 250. Signed in pencil. 9 15/16 x 13 14/16 in. Courtesy Catherine E. Burns Fine Prints.

an expedition to buy horses for the French Light Artillery during their preparations for WWII.[8] For many it comes as a surprise to learn Benton was Jackson Pollock's teacher. But he was a great leader in a time of transition: Between these two artists, it could be said that the torch of American art passed into a new era.

Following WWII, the United States of America became the world's leading power militarily, economically, politically and culturally. In many ways, its cultural ascension was the most unlikely and difficult to achieve. Many artists, large numbers of them Jewish, fled Europe as the Nazis gathered power. Their ranks included musicians, writers, composers and, of course, painters and other visual artists. With this influx of talent arose the problem of reconciling the goals and trajectories of American art with the history-fixated art produced by the European-led visual culture. Previously, Americans were judged by how well they could assimilate and master the issues sanctified by their European counterparts. There was no way for Americans to take the fore except on foreign terms. Europe was America's cultural Mecca. The art world would have to change.

The answer lay in reforming cultural grounds for success. With the acceptance of Freudian notions of the subconscious[9], the art world found a back door around refinement. It also offered an alternative to the European notion that cultural shifts needed to be an educated and conscious response to the

[8] In *The Lithographs of Thomas Hart Benton*, the artist commented about this image—common scenes in which there are barbed wire fences. This one was found in middle Nebraska in 1939 on the trip during which horses were bought for the French light artillery. Creekmore Fath, ed. *The Lithographs of Thomas Hart Benton* (University of Texas Press, 1969).

[9] One way to describe the shifts at stake here is in Freudian terms: The *avant-garde* could be said to have shifted from a scouting model hinted by the military source of the term to something more "Oedipal" in structure. In fact, many Americans think the role of the avant-garde is to destroy its predecessors rather than build on their achievements. In *Oedipus Rex*, the son kills the father, marries the mother, becomes king, finds out what happened, scratches his eyes out and then wanders blindly in a direction rather remote from "happily ever after." This idea could also be described as being closer to "fashion" and its rather violently ephemeral concerns (e.g. oh-that-is-so-last-season). I, for one, see this role of the "hip" in art to be dangerously shortsighted and ill-advised insofar as it allows for the forgetting of all but the previous season against which it reacts.

art that preceded it: This Hegelian model of cultural progress was prevalent among the giants of art history such as, for example, art historian Heinrich Wöfflin and art collector Albert Barnes. In the Surrealist movement of the 1920s and '30s, artistic Modernism found one of its most fertile and transgressive tools. The Surrealist object was not only formed outside of traditions of art education, such as those espoused by the French Academy and the artistic establishment, it was supposed to be formed *pre-consciously*. It was, therefore, not an art of educated intention but rather of sublimation, emotion and other places guided by the uncanny every bit as much as by the canon. But Surrealism was still European, and the United States had reason to want new and fertile ground. American art dealers, collectors and critics championed the notion of an artist who struggled with his genius and personal demons to express himself triumphantly through a given medium such as painting: Art was the trace of this process. Of course, this notion did not devalue education and refinement, but rather it embraced and valued the experience and psychological processes (and therefore biography) of the artist. Critical artistic sensibility, one could say, was transferred from public notions of history, connoisseurship and the language of styles to internal processes of expression. It was a move from sophistication to the gut.

The idea of the Surrealist object did not fit with André Breton's original definition of Surrealism as "automatic writing" with the goal of "concrete irrationality."[10] However, Surrealist painting and objects ultimately captured the imagination of both sides of the Atlantic. Two critical terms for the Surrealist Object include *transformation* (such as when Picasso put handle bars over a bicycle seat to make a bull's head) and *uncanny combinations* (such as Dali's lobster telephone). In this sense, Kantor's combining butterflies and bombs has everything to do with Surrealism, as does his visionary process. But compared to the psychologically conflicted and humble productions of Dada and Surrealism, much American post-war art, especially sculpture, sought the scale of the monumental. In its material and often technological grandeur, the scale of this work evoked the heroic even as its content addressed the tragic. The *Hope Series* has a foot in this camp as well.

[10] George Heard Hamilton, *Painting and Sculpture in Europe* 1880-1940. (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972), pp.418-419. Hamilton mentions that André Breton, Paul Eluard and others noted a "crisis of the object" in a 1936 edition of *Cahiers d'art* and that later in the year the first Surrealist sculpture exhibitions occurred. Indeed, in 1926 the Surrealist magazine *La Révolution surréaliste* announced a coming sculpture exhibition that never occurred.

In some ways, the movement to the monumental marked something of a step backwards for sculpture. William Rubin gives Picasso complete credit for inventing "constructed sculpture" (as opposed to modeled or carved solids) and liberating sculpture from the monolithic. But he notes that by the advent of WWII, the majority of the most important sculptors had returned from this mode to more traditional means.[11] Notable of Kantor's *Hope Series* works is their ability to instill the tragic with a sense of monumentality even though they are very much constructed sculpture. While they rely on the precedence of works by Duchamp and Picasso for the inclusion of "readymades" or "found objects," *Hope 2* and *Hope 3* are clear about seeking to be monolithic. To see the bombs as phallic or even *Id*-driven (in the Freudian sense) offers a possibility of dark irony in these works. Kantor somehow resists this or lets the idea lose out to another more rigorous (though positive) future. For Kantor, hope is not sweet naïveté.

And while ambitious post-war American sculpture had a taste for conflict and angst, it could not quite convey the irony and dark humor one sometimes found in American literature and film.[12] Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* and Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse 5* had no equally hard-hitting counterparts. When they did arrive, American art enthusiastically espoused irony and oddity. Rauschenberg's humorous objects achieved the strangeness of Surrealism but with the intelligently insightful play of Cubism. Andy Warhol's brilliant work, such as fake boxes of *Brillo* pads, helped birth Pop Art—cultural commentary that was based specifically in the mechanisms of the marketplace as opposed to the machinations of the "military-industrial complex." With the advent of Postmodernism, styles could be changed or added as one might change one's clothes: style as accessory.

[11] William Rubin, *Anthony Caro*. (NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 1972). Rubin writes that "Picasso's concept of construction did become a point of departure for a handful of sculptors—notably the Russians Tatlin, Rodchecko, Gabo, Pevsner, but also Laurens (…), Gonzalez and Calder. Their broadening of Constructivism notwithstanding, the eve of World War II found most of the best modern sculptors—Brancusi, Lipchitz, Arp, Giacometti, Matisse, Moore, and Picasso himself—working with modeled or carved solids within the aesthetic range these methods impose." (p.16.)

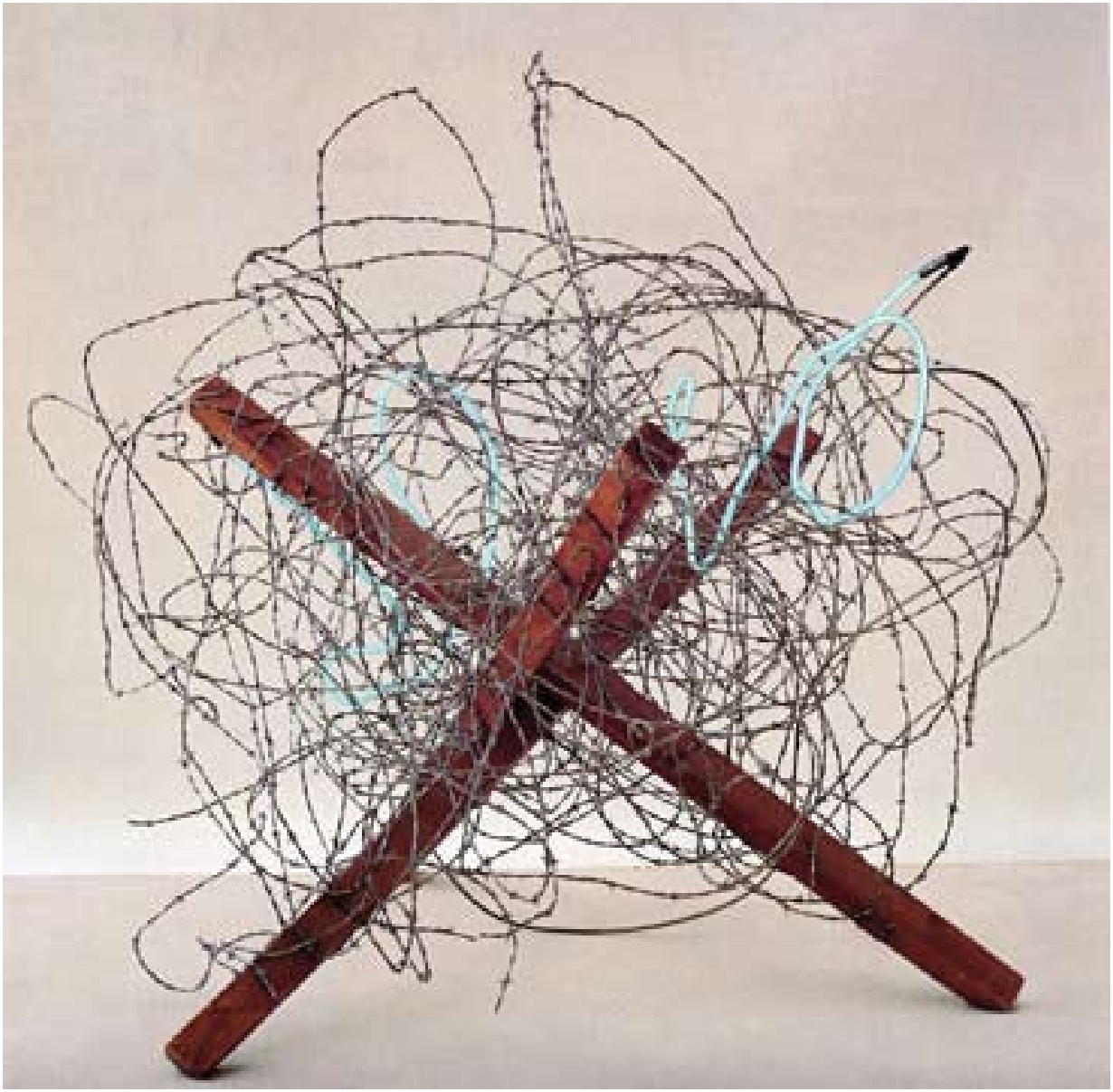
[12] There was some dark and ironical work being produced in the United States, but it was a small percentage of sculpture at the time. One notable sculpture exhibition was Jean Tinguely's *Homage à New York* which was displayed at MoMA in 1960 and, as intended, burst into flames and destroyed itself.

Above and preceding page: *Camp Hope,* detail.
Following page: James Rosenquist, *Tumbleweed*, 54 x 60 x 60", chromed barbed wire, neon and wood, 1963-66, collection of Virginia and Bagley Wright.

James Rosenquist's *Tumbleweed* (1966) is a direct predecessor of Kantor's *Camp Hope* in its use of barbed wire. Rosenquist is a giant of post-war American art and one of the major figures responsible for the now-common strategy in painting of placing seemingly disparate images together. (We now think of this practice as Postmodern, but the artist has been historically considered a Pop Artist). Rosenquist's *Tumbleweed*, however, is laden with witty and ironic commentary about the veins of conflict in post-war American art. It features what appears to be a Nazi-style anti-vehicle obstacle (like the ones that blocked the beaches attacked on D-Day) frenetically wrapped with barbed wire. Rosenquist claims he got the idea for the piece by watching tumbleweed loll and surge across the lonely roads of the American Southwest. But even superficially, Rosenquist is not telling the whole story.[13] Barbed wire, when used in the big sky landscape of the American West, is strung efficiently to stop cows from wandering. Barbed wire laid in a frenzied scribble on the battlefield is intended to hold up soldiers so they can be shot as they struggle to cut through. Combined, the two main elements of *Tumbleweed* make a fantastic comment on the oppositional conflict between object-oriented Minimalism and the gestural painting of Abstract Expressionism. The wooden interior stands in for the modular coldness of Minimalist sculpture while the barbed wire is a hysterical reference to the frenetic gestures of Pollock and his fellow painters. The seemingly odd element in the sculpture is a bent tube of neon. In some ways, it pulls the viewer in; it clarifies the focus on play and wit. It is campy Americana while it jokes about "impenetrability" and "enlightenment." In short, it makes *Tumbleweed* sparky.

The works from Kantor's *Hope Series* are not light in the sense of funny, but they do allow for weight to be cast off from some brutally heavy issues. Many works that address the Holocaust do not offer

[13]Peter Schjeldahl, "Time Pieces: James Rosenquist at the Guggenheim," *The New Yorker*, (Issue of 2003.10.27). Schjeldahl's thoughts about the piece are interesting and instructive but his reading is quite different than mine. He writes: "There are often shaggy-dog sorts of stories behind Rosenquist's works. While driving at night on a visit to Texas, the artist was fascinated by tumbleweeds looming in his car's headlights. The memory spawned the sculpture "Tumbleweed" (1963-66), a tangle of chromed barbed wire around three crossed wooden beams, threaded with a curlicue of glowing blue neon tubing. Knowing the source of the piece is remarkably and instructively not helpful. The specificity of the forms and materials and of their respective associations anchor "Tumbleweed" in the here and now, as a touchstone of modern sculpture that improbably combines surrealistic giddiness and matter-of-fact minimalism."



obvious spiritual refuge for the viewer. A particularly strong and relevant example is George Segal's 1984 *The Holocaust* at Lincoln Park in San Francisco. Eleven of Segal's signature white cast-from-life monochrome figures are featured in this piece: ten in a tangled heap with another standing behind barbed wire stretched between two poles. The immediate effect is Baroque in the sense that it is disturbingly confusing and not easy to capture as a single image. Segal's figures can strike the viewer as a welcoming everyman or as uncanny automatons unnaturally devoid of color. The prone figures, though confused in their layout, are very close to each other, and this has been interpreted by many as portraying a sense of human solidarity.[14] Moreover, these figures are not the desperately emaciated bodies we expect to populate a concentration camp: Indeed, they are robust. Their solidity, however, is not comforting; in fact, it is more geared towards making the viewer associate or sympathize with the figure standing behind the barbed wire. To enter the piece, Segal has the viewer descend a few steps. It is a subtle gesture, but it implicates the viewer by literally bringing him into the work. If the figure were emaciated, it would be more likely the viewer would see that person as "other" rather than a reflection of the self in another time and place. These are very different solutions than those Kantor put into effect, but they work on the same level. In *Camp Hope*, for example, Kantor uses a plinth both to mark a site and raise high the barbed wire, thereby more completely containing the viewer. Rather than employ a figure with whom to empathize, Kantor uses the viewer's natural inclination to regard the butterflies from a measuredly close distance as a mechanism by which to implicate her directly and personally.

KANTOR AND CALDER

Although it is less apparent in the works from the *Hope Series*, Alexander Calder is the greatest influence on Kantor's art. "If it were not for the presence of Alexander Calder in my life," explains Kantor, "I would probably never have ventured into the world of creating art." Kantor sees in Calder's art much more than the mobile format: From his first encounters with the master's works in New York in the 1960's, Kantor was moved by the egalitarianism, the balance and the musical possibilities of the work. "Creating mobiles is a passion for me, as it must have been for Calder. I am grateful for his influence and am flattered when people perceive his presence in my work. But most of my

[14] Leo Bersani & Ulysse Dutoit, "George Segal: the Holocaust, 1984 - Lincoln Park, San Francisco, California," *Artforum* (February 1999).

George Segal, *Holocaust Memorial,* (San Francisco, CA), 1984, photos by author.

mobiles are spontaneously created, and any real similarities to the shapes of Calder's mobiles, in all probability, do not exist."

For American sculpture, it could be argued that Calder holds the clearest place in the eyes of the public. Unlike great teachers such as Henry Moore, whose students Barbara Hepworth and Lynn Chadwick (among others) are celebrated for their proximity to Moore, the American public seems to grant Calder full ownership of his sculptural strategies. It might be the difference between how art audiences see refinement versus how they perceive invention—Calder is probably most thought of as an inventor. Or it might be an American art audience phenomenon of focusing on who did it first. Regardless of why, American artists who have chosen to make kinetic works or mobiles have worked under the giant presence of Calder.

In much of his work, Calder's indebtedness to Miro's organic forms is obvious.[15] But Calder's first step towards success was the outcome of his wire circus figures (such as the ever-popular piece that has a perpetual home in the foyer of NYC's Whitney Museum of American Art). Of course, it is his mobiles for which he will always be known. Calder is usually credited with inventing the form known as "the mobile"; indeed, the term "mobile" was coined by Marcel Duchamp for Calder's works for a 1931 exhibition in Paris.[16] However, there were other kinetic and balanced works produced by artists, such as Lazlo Maholy-Nagy and Alexander Archipenko, that appear prior to Calder's. And while much of that kinetic work was motorized, some of it was not. It appears the first sculptural mobile was created by Man Ray, who exhibited a Dada work in 1920 that would now be called a "mobile." It consisted of about 30 wooden coat hangers cascading from each other.[17]

[15]We tend to think mostly of Miro's painting and graphic production, but he was a very important and influential sculptor as well.
[16]San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, "Calder Web Feature: The Breakthrough Years, 1925-34" (in conjunction with *Alexander Calder: 1898-1976* organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. in 1998). "During a visit to Calder's studio on the rue de la Colonie in 1931, fellow artist Marcel Duchamp became particularly fascinated by one of Calder's motor-driven sculptures. Duchamp suggested the term "mobile"—in French, a pun that suggests both motion and motive—to describe this work, as well as the new category of kinetic art to which it belonged. In February 1932, *Calder: ses mobiles*—an exhibition arranged and named by Duchamp—opened at the Galerie Vignon in Paris. This exhibition featured thirty-one "mobiles," including *Object with Red Ball* (1931), and *Pantograph* (1931)."
[17]Michael Kimmelman, "Man Ray's Beginnings" (*New York Times*): January 6, 1989.

Robert Kantor, *Stainless Steel 12 Hearts*, 9 x 11' 8", stainless steel, 2004.

George Rickey (1907-2002) was a great American sculptor who is best remembered for his supremely engineered and well-balanced kinetic pieces featured in many of the most important collections of American sculpture.[18] When asked to comment on the extent of his debt to Calder, Rickey replied to his interviewer: "I'll leave the percentages of indebtedness or divergence to you to determine, but I will suggest that it's much too rich a field for any one man to exhaust."[19]

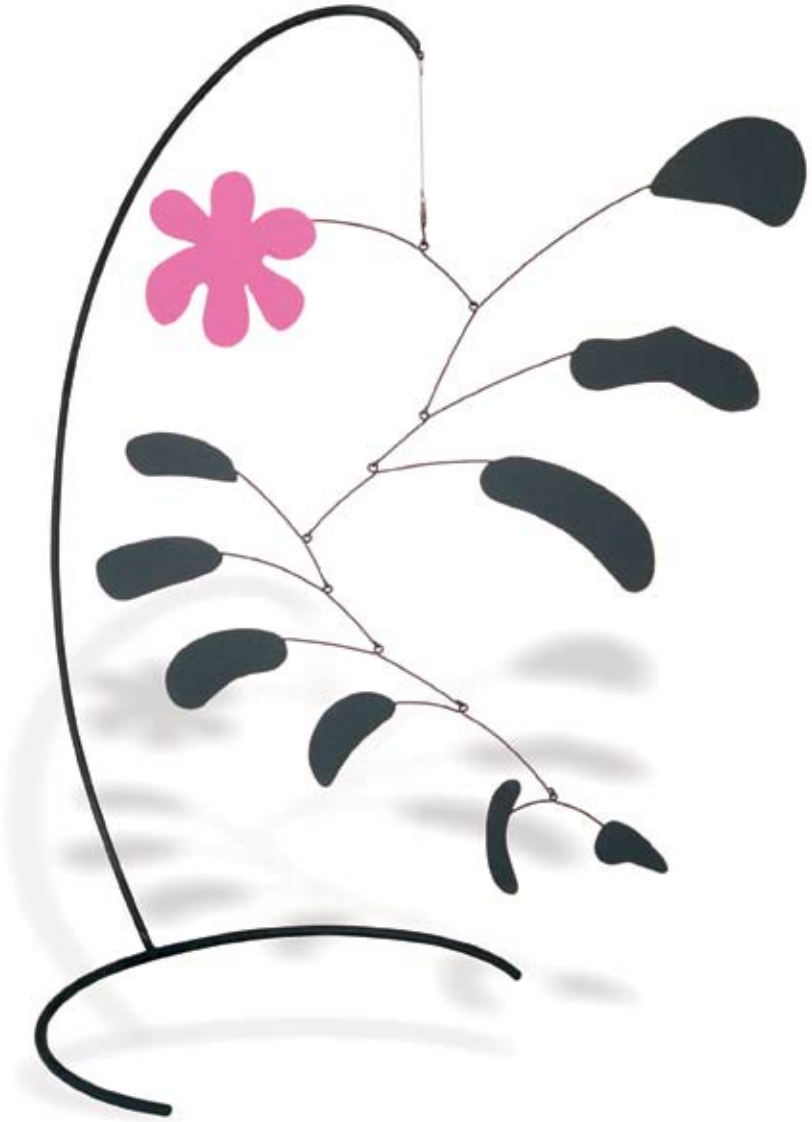
The Modernist movement would have suffered if no others had followed Manet and Monet to Impressionism and its offshoots, or if painters had left Cubism to Braques and Picasso alone, thinking it to be just a whim of style rather than a new possibility for content. While the works from the *Hope Series* are not mobiles, they were developed within a body of work by Kantor that is very heavily focused on the mobile form. Moreover, because of the context of Kantor's work, the *Hope Series* must be considered in the light of the artist's major production—his mobiles and suspended works. Rather than hanging the *Hope* pieces from the ceiling or a free-standing armature, however, the artist specifically chose to hold them up with steel rods. To consider the alternative is to consider very different sculptures—works that would be much more of the moment, more alarming and more actively deadly in feel to the viewer. Kantor's solution brings the works closer to the form of the monument as well as releases them from the consideration of real-time potential energy. Kantor's plinth and pole are a clear gesture towards the art of the monument.

Contemporary Art Context

Chinese artist Qin Yufen stretched 5.75 miles of barbed wire into a spiky cloud in the Mattress Factory in Pittsburgh. The sculptural installation also contained a great number of colorful balloons, many

[18] In many ways, the great American achievement in the plastic arts of the 20th century can be seen in its sculptural production rather than painting. Although trained in France in the Academic style, Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848-1907) and some of his contemporaries, such as Daniel Chester French (1850-1931) and Frederick MacMonnies (1863-1937), developed American sculpture to the point that they were later well-respected and noted for their innovations even among their European counterparts. Among the greats of 20th century sculpture (e.g. Constantin Brancusi, Pablo Picasso, Henry Moore, Alberto Giacometti, Vladimir Tatlin) have to be included the names of many Americans, such as: Alexander Calder, David Smith, Anthony Caro, Mark DiSuvero, Robert Rauschenberg, Sol Lewitt, Carl Andre, Louise Nevelson, Manuel Neri, Anthony Gormley, Robert Smithson, Richard Serra and many others. Others, such as Marcel Duchamp and Isamu Noguchi, spent a great part of their careers in the United States.

[19] Selden Rodman, *Conversations with Artists* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1957) reprinted in Jorn Merkert and Ursula Prinz, *George Rickey in Berlin* (Berlinische Galerie, 1992), p. 42.



Above: Robert Kantor, *Fuscia Flower,* painted mild steel, 3' x 2' 9", 2003
Following page: Qin Yufin, *Beautiful Violence, approximately 10' x 40' x 10', 5.75 miles of barbed wire, multicolored balloons, framed text, 8 channel audio, part of the exhibition "Visual Sound" at the Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh, PA, USA: photo courtesy of the Mattress Factory.*

of which were popped by the barbs, as well as sound elements (Chinese flute sounds from tiny speakers). The 2001 installation, *Beautiful Violence*, according to the artist, is also about balance. "My installations are greatly influenced by Chinese garden arrangement. Their forms," she continues, "follow the rules of harmony and are like breathing in and out, opening and shutting. My installations are like Chinese gardens in being concerned with the balance of opposites. There is symmetry and irregularity, stasis and dynamism. Putting the ever-identical into a series concentrates the mind."[20] As described by the artist, Yufen's incredible installation is meditative and vague. The barbed wire is being used for its rhythm and texture. But Yufen, who now works in Berlin, was born in Qingdao, China in 1954 and comes from an artistic culture that is specifically and often misleadingly vague about the content of art. Considering her Chinese upbringing and current residence in Germany, it is almost impossible not to feel the barbed wire as the violent captor of the colorful balloons. The piece is rife with political metaphors about freedom and the insistent will of those who would deny it.[21]

In the 2005 Center on Contemporary Art (CoCA) Annual in Seattle, juror Ernesto Pujol included *Bombardment*, a work by a young artist that featured a bomb casing suspended from the ceiling by heavy chains. The bomb housed four small video screens that featured animated cartoons. The artist, Tivon Rice, altered the "hokey, dated cartoon characters" to "create a vague, subjective narrative (to disarm) the bomb as well as the television."[22] Rice's project was semiotic in nature (i.e., dealing with signs and their ability to convey meaning) and used history as the definer of the bomb rather than vice versa. Rice's strategy, he explains, "was to play off the inherently sinister object that it is, and compare that to the objective & pervasive nature of contemporary media." Rice's *Bombardment* is a witty piece intended to comment on strategies of the news media. It is a piece intended to collapse humorously under its own ironic structure. Unlike Kantor's bomb sculptures, it does not offer or expose its own vantage point: It offers commentary free of partisanship.

This is not to say that Rice's and Kantor's work do not share values. Rather than showing the bombs as defending the United States from the Soviets, for example, the bombs in these art works are

[20] Qin Yufen quoted in Alice Grünfelder's "A sounding emptiness" (2003) posted on www.culturebase.net.
[21] Images and a sound file for *Beautiful Violence* can be found at www.mattress.org.
[22] Tivon Rice, untitled email to author, March 26, 2006.

"sinister" and deadly. For them, War is a monster: a mindless evil. And while one laughs at the absurdity of defending war, the other reminds us that war is an undeniable fact of our history. War, Kantor, tells us at his darkest, is part of who we are now, and we need to accept that to move on. There is a generational difference between Rice and Kantor and perhaps that exposes something about their viewpoints. Kantor was born during a war in which many of the victims were targeted civilians. In addition, he has lived through other wars in which the Americans who were killed had been called to duty through the draft. Rice, a graduate student at the time of the 2005 CoCA Annual, has not known a "representative army" as created by the draft and probably lives, as many young Americans do, in perplexed awe of those who would choose to be professional soldiers. Rice muses: "It is ironic that a so-called smart bomb points toward a need for intelligence."

Contemporary Political Context

Though they lie in the shadow of WWII, the sculptures from Kantor's *Hope Series* are relevant to issues in the world today as well. At this time, the United States is at war in Afghanistan and Iraq and facing a potential military standoff with Iran. To the shock of many, Hamas has democratically earned the leadership of the Palestinian Territories. It has now been more than 60 years since the fall of Hitler and the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps, which means the youngest American soldiers who fought in the war are now several years past the average life-expectancy in the United States. The eye witnesses are dying; in a few years, none will be left. The maturity and evenhandedness of Kantor's art is a well-timed reminder of the delicacy of political balance and what is at stake.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's now-famous letter to President Bush provides an important object lesson for Americans about understanding conflict in the Middle East. It also underscores why Kantor's concerns with memory and history matter. Ahmadinejad tells Bush that he is a teacher and uses reports of his conversations with students to illustrate a Muslim world view. He considers the founding of the state of Israel to have been a political outcome of WWII, and, because of that, he claims to doubt the Nazi-led genocide. He writes:

> "Throughout history, many countries have been occupied, but I think the establishment of a new country with a new people, is a new phenomenon that is exclusive to our times."

Ahmadinejad reminds the reader that the history of things past is inextricably bound to

memory—both of which are then used to guide our political decisions. Moreover, he tells us he is a teacher, and this is what he is teaching his students; and as the leader of a populous country, these thoughts lie at the core of what he communicates to the inhabitants of Iran. Amadinejad's letter also brings to mind the aphorism: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." The first time this quote appeared was in the Spanish philosopher George Santayana's 1905/6 book, *Life of Reason.*[23] And yet it is more apt in the context of Kantor's art than its origin would reveal: The quote was made truly famous when William L. Shirer made it the epigraph for his monumental work, the *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany*.[24]

BUILDING A SHARED PATH

Kantor's sculptural work is most often boldly and unapologetically celebratory. Even his work that specifically relates to Jewish ritual is more wrapped in celebration than any weighty laws of tradition: For example, Kantor infuses the familiar form of a m enorah with creativity and uplifting energy. Some of Kantor's production has also focused on sculptural playthings for children such as slides and swing sets. He even commissioned several hot rod painters (who decorate cars) to design and execute panels for a recent mobile titled *Hot Rod.* Kantor is a man who sees joy in life and makes this present in his work. But he is also a serious man: For Kantor, joy and balance are to be appreciated and celebrated but never taken for granted. The *Hope Series* serves to remind us that all of Kantor's work marks a social commitment.

The *Hope Series* is a small body of works, consisting of three freestanding sculptures and an installation piece Kantor will be constructing for a July 2006 exhibition at CoCA. Contained within these pieces, however, are significant ideas for Kantor about his own sculpture, art in general and culture. This series is notably different from most of his sculpture because it is so weighty and, for some viewers, very painful or difficult. The seriousness with which Kantor treats the subject matter of the *Hopes Series* also leads him to a more intense consideration of modernist sculpture and

[23]George Santayama, *Life of Reason*. (NY: Scribner's, 1905/6). See also the online Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/santayana/).
[24]William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany.* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1960). Shirer was one of the most famous journalists in the world and had to cease his CBS radio broadcasts from Berlin in 1940 because of Nazi censorship. His *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* is considered one of the most definitive books about WWII. It is more than 1200 pages and is still in print.

Above: Tivon Rice, *Bombardment*, detail.
Preceding page: Tivon Rice, *Bombardment*, W48" H10" D10"
(length of steel chains/height of installation is site-specific) Steel, CRT monitors.

issues of representation in 20th century culture. Memory and history are important dimensions for these works, and Kantor chooses to underscore their complexity rather than write them off as single-dimensional concepts.

Kantor has chosen to treat the works in the *Hope Series* in such a way that they never feel autobiographical: The work is not about Robert Kantor but rather a shared set of events and circumstances. In many ways, this reaches far beyond the common artistic notion of self-expression and moves in the direction of more traditional goals of the monument. But Kantor finds a way to go further still than a monument's prescription of respectfully saluting civic experience: The *Hope Series* is about building community through accepting the past and envisioning a brighter future. Despite its clear references to violence and atrocity, it finds a way to be sculpture not so much about healing wounds of the past as it is about building a shared path to the future.

"There are flowers everywhere, for those who bother to look."

—Henri Matisse

Camp Hope, detail from December 11, 2002 with live (and uninvited) butterfly. Photo by Mary Garrett.

The Butterfly

The last, the very last,
So richly, brightly, dazzlingly yellow.
Perhaps if the sun's tears would sing
against a white stone…

Such, such a yellow
Is carried lightly 'way up high.
It went away I'm sure because it wished to
kiss the world goodbye.

For seven weeks I've lived in here,
Penned up inside this ghetto
But I have found my people here.
The dandelions call to me
And the white chestnut candles in the court.
Only I never saw another butterfly.

That butterfly was the last one.
Butterflies don't live in here,
in the ghetto.

Pavel Friedmann 4/6/1942

the

HOPE

series

DK: What is the story with the real butterfly in *Camp Hope*?

RK: *Camp Hope* was finally completed on December 11, 2002 after a year of accumulating the materials such as the wire, the gnarly wooden posts; creating the butterflies and actually welding and constructing the sculpture. It was 10° outside the studio in Shoshone, Idaho.

After I placed the final colorful butterfly on its barbed wire perch, I stood back and away from *Camp Hope* to see the final piece and take in the completion of the vision. Within five seconds I saw something fluttering across the room towards the sculpture. To my indescribable surprise, I saw it was a small, richly colored butterfly or moth. It flew around the sculpture for a minute—during which I may have forgotten to breathe—and finally landed on a window sill just above the sculpture.

I went into the adjacent room to tell my welding partner and main fabricator, Mary Garrett. She deftly brought her camera and shot pictures of the butterfly in the window above *Camp Hope* and on the barbed wire of the sculpture where it alighted a few moments later.

Mary and I both felt blessed by this experience. The butterfly ultimately succumbed to the Idaho winter but it can be seen on one of the posts of *Camp Hope* where its remains have been placed.

Robert Kantor, *Camp Hope,* 91" x 104" x 51", various media: mild steel, wood, barbed wire, plaster, paint, glass beads, butterfly; 2002

DK: Outside of their metaphorical meanings, are the butterflies intended to lure the viewer close?

RK: The closer you get to the pieces, the more threatening they are, but the more present the butterflies become. Proximity is really important.

Above: Mary Garrett, photo of butterfly in the Shoshone studio, December 11, 2002.
Opposite: Detail of *Camp Hope*.

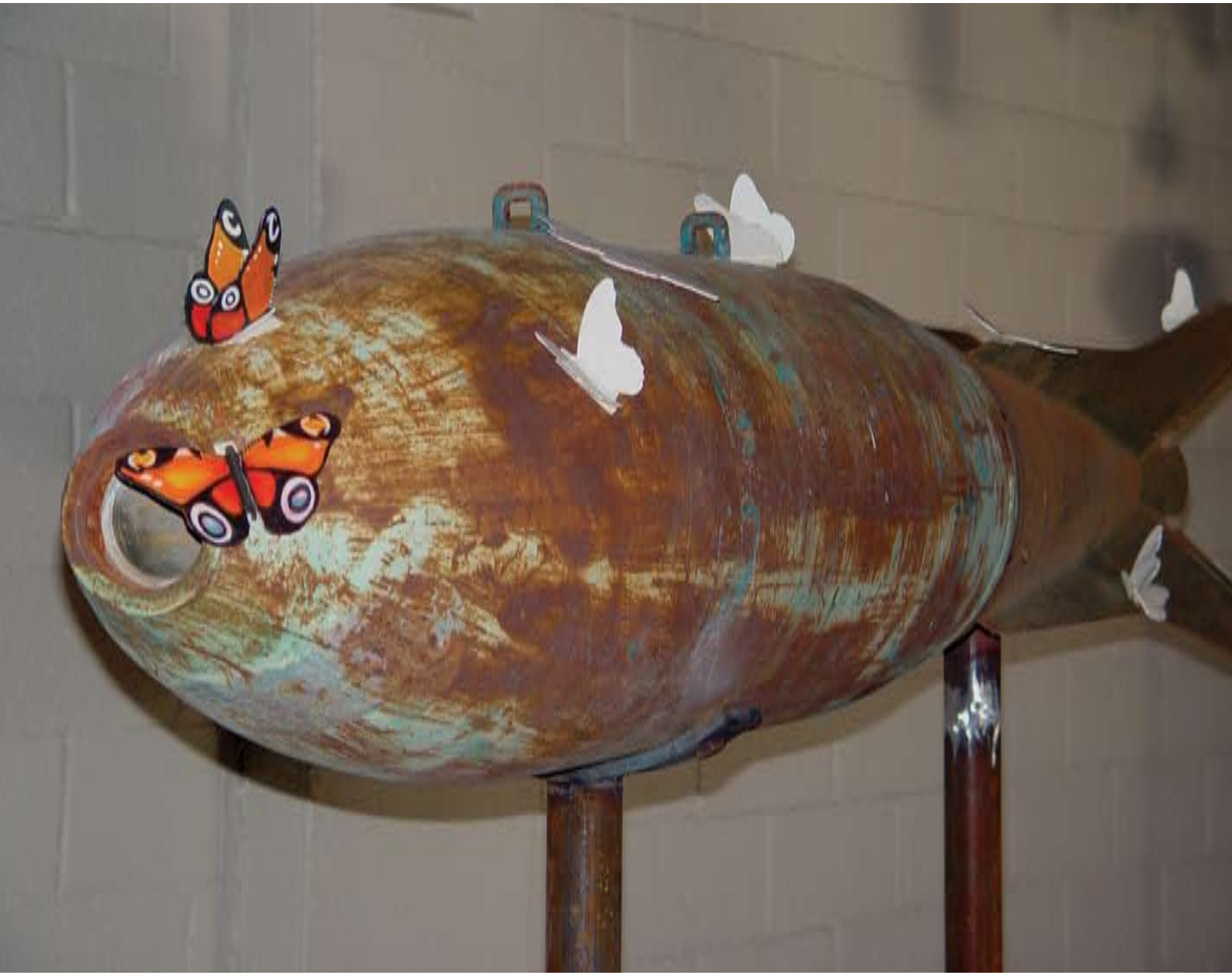
DK: The heavy bases are part of why the Hope Series is different than the rest of your work; where did the bases come from?

RK: I woke up with this one morning and sketched the piece that turned out to be Camp Hope. The sketch included the base. The clear impact was that viewers would have to walk around the piece and could not go through it. The fact that it is 8' wide is imposing. I want the base to be tall enough and have enough mass to stop you in your tracks. The feel of dirt, sand and rust is very earthy.

Robert Kantor, *Hope 2*, 74" x 96" x 48", various media: mild steel, bomb, plaster, paint, glass beads; 2003

DK: Is there a spiritual impact to waking up with the image of a sculpture in your head?

RK: Absolutely. Sometimes the designs for my art do not form in my conscious mind. The inspiration often comes while I am dreaming at night or just waking up. Even to me such creations seem to be the result of rather mysterious forces and as a result, as you put it, they frequently have spiritual impacts.



DK: When developing ideas for new works, do you think in terms of objects or themes?

RK: My ideas often come to me as images, but I do tend to think about work over time in terms of themes. They can be pretty abstract or subtle but I often spend a great deal of time with a certain theme in my head. When I become possessed by some theme, such as the power of life in the *Hope Series*, my real goal is to express my emotional convictions about (that theme). I set out to do this by creating what my mind dictates through what my skills allow. The more I work, the more my abilities expand and the more I find that even my subconscious mind thinks in terms of what I have the ability to make. Translating metaphors into process into material is subtle stuff and I don't think it really benefits art to try to explain that process.

Robert Kantor, *Hope 3*, 82" x 96" x 48", various media: mild steel, paravane, US military helmet, plaster, paint, glass beads; 2003

DK: Do you set out to make specific bodies of work?

RK: Rather than creating work for a market or for a specific gallery show, I create works just because I am compelled to do so. This is why I am glad to have shows: I feel fortunate to be in a situation where people can see my sculptures and come away with whatever experience they get. There are themes that are consistent in my work but I do not want to tell the audience what to think when they see it. I try to see it with open eyes as well.

Below and opposite: *Hope 3*

other sculptures

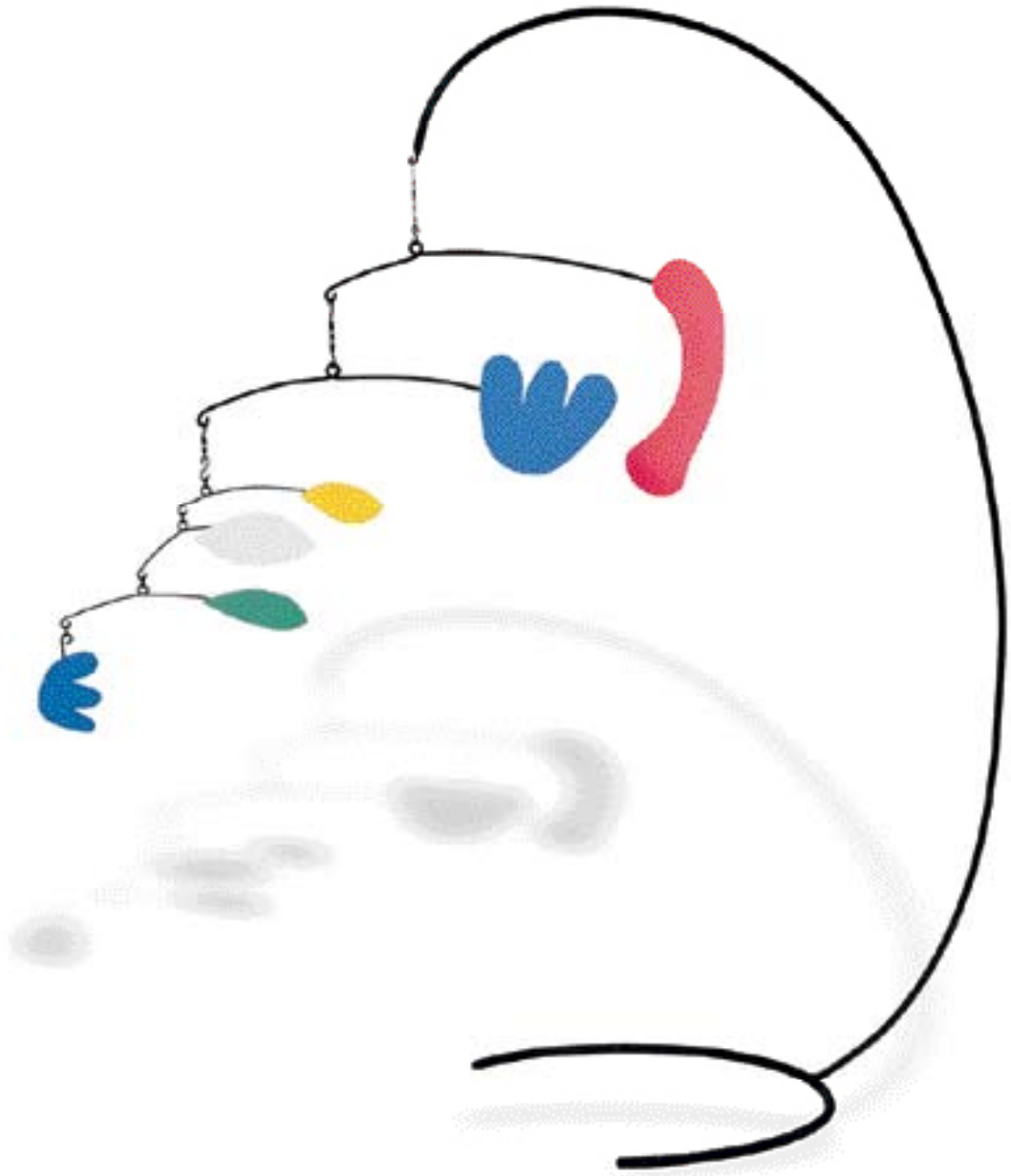
DK: Why is Calder your major artistic influence?

RK: If it were not for the presence of Alexander Calder in my life, I would probably never have ventured into the world of creating art. But Calder did enter my life in the early 60's after I attended shows of his work at the Whitney and Guggenheim museums in New York. He has remained my mentor and major influence. Jean-Paul Sartre wrote of Calder's mobiles that they were "neither wholly alive nor wholly mechanical… mobiles do not seek to imitate anything because they do not seek any end whatever, unless it be to create scales and chords of hitherto unknown movements—they are lyrical inventions, technical combinations of an almost mathematical quality and sensitive symbols of nature." I would say I am more moved by the egalitarian, self-complete sense of Calder's work that Sartre writes about than by any of his specific works.

However, I am compelled to send various forms, that my imagination and hands conjure up, through space. Creating mobiles is a passion for me, as it must have been for Calder. I am grateful for his influence and am flattered when people perceive his presence in my work. But most of my mobiles are spontaneously created and any real similarities to the shapes of Calder's mobiles, in all probability, do not exist.

Installation view of solo exhibition at Ochi Gallery (Ketchum, ID), 2002. Photo: Kevin Syms

Catch,



"The seven red pieces arranged in a circle around the central crossing refer to the seven days of creation and to seven as the number symbolizing transformation cycles. Emphasizing a consonance of center and surround, the weight of steel in the seven pieces that circumscribe the territory of Creation is precisely the same as the weight of the center standing element. The total number of pieces comprising the whole comes to eight, the Cabalistic number considered to be a symbol of life. One realizes that all of Kantor's works mean to gather the elusive sap or beingness of life itself into steel and color."

—Mary Hull Webster

DK: How do you develop the iconic forms that often repeat throughout your work?

RK: There are artists who go into the studio every day; sometimes their production is closer to craft and sometimes it is more of an intellectual approach. I could not make it happen on demand. My sculptures come from inside. I believe that inside of most people is a Mecca of experience that can generate intense and interesting emotional responses; some keep it bottled up forever. This is my outlet. For example, the form for S-heart happened with my hand in less than a minute: I just picked up the pencil and it came out but I immediately knew it was important to me.

S Heart

DK: Tell us about 12 Hearts.

RK: 12 Hearts it is also a butterfly piece. Each side of a butterfly is a heart form. In this there are 12 hearts interconnected and of all sizes. For me, they represent the 12 tribes of Israel. The 12th heart is a little tiny piece at the top of the mobile. It is a child's heart. In that sense, this is a family piece as well as a community piece. It is moved by the wind so even on that level it connects to the landscape. The original maquette is 12" and I turned that into a 12' mobile. The process is exciting to me and the scale is key.

"Among the larger pieces, exuberant color and solid, flat shapes composing Red Star and M Star bring to mind Matisse's joyful late cutouts that—even fixed in two dimensions—imply movement, delight, and wind. (...) From interdependence and a center established between two views of understanding and physical existence, a balance point and the gravitational center of a gyre, is located."

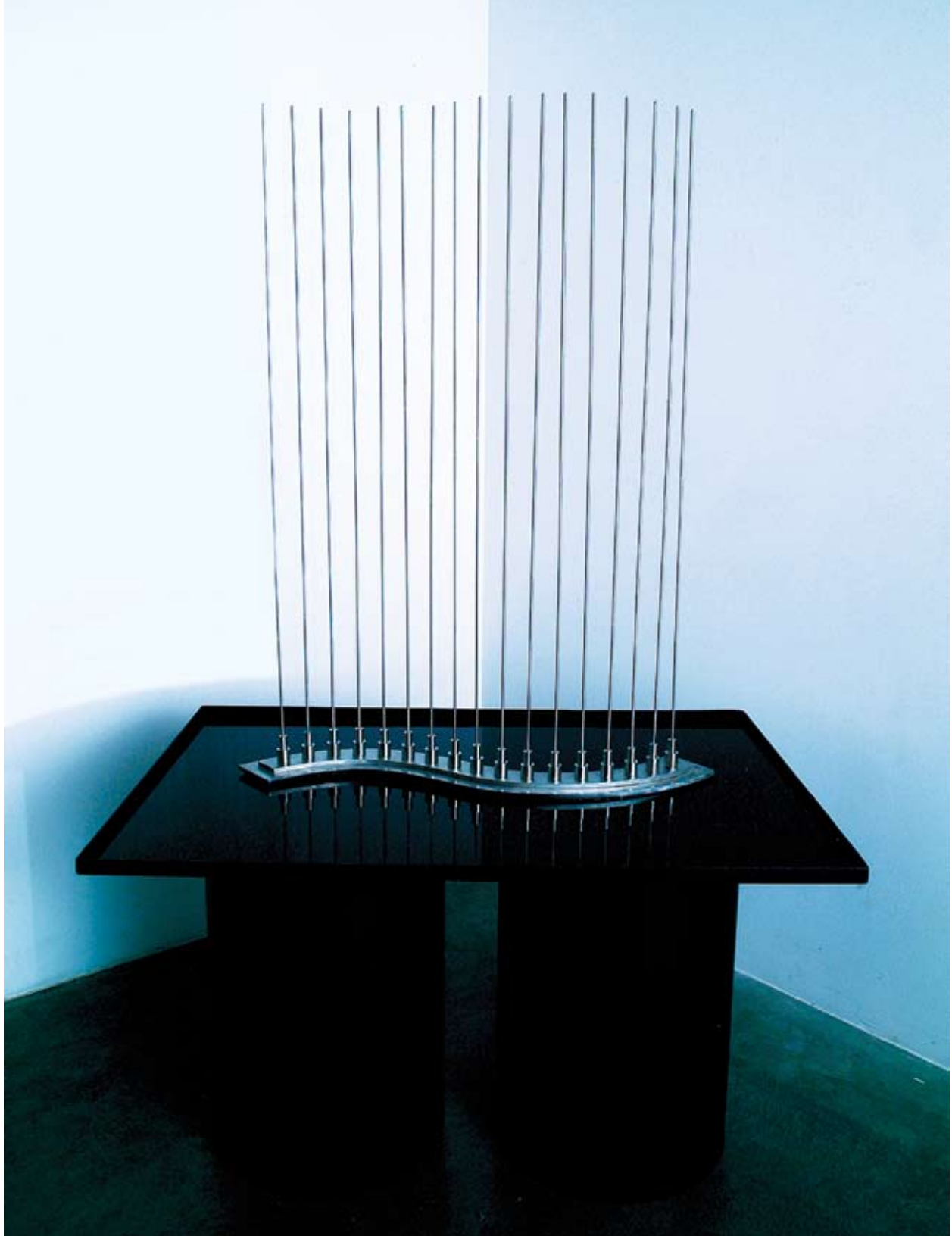
—Mary Hull Webster

Red Star

”Nature as a model for form and balance, and sometimes as an intended site, has been a primary concern of this artist who loves the wind in the aspens of his Idaho landscape. Thulies, a piece that interacts with nature in terms of site, features a slightly curving base from which tall reeds extend vertically into space. This work is meant to be a sculptural lens set into a natural environment. It brings with it a rich dialog about art or culture as a mediating prism through which we experience nature—or through which nature becomes paradoxically more visible.”

—Mary Hull Webster

Thulies



"Fortune may have yet a better success in reserve for you: those who lose today may win tomorrow."
—Cervantes

Hot Rod

DANIEL KANY is a curator, art dealer and art historian. He has held curatorial and director positions at Columbia University's Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library (NYC), William Traver Gallery (Seattle) and Friesen Gallery (Sun Valley and Seattle).

Kany was trained in art history at Bowdoin College (Maine) and the Johns Hopkins University (Baltimore). He has curated numerous exhibitions including *The Empire State Building: A Dream Well-Planned* at the Museum of the City of New York and *3x5: Stories of the Americas* at Museo Sacro (Caracas, Venezuela; NYC and Santa Fe). Kany's most recent exhibitions at Seattle's Center on Contemporary Art (CoCA) include *Evidence: Photography by Mateo Zapata Zachai* and *Yumi Kori: Infinitation.*

Kany's publications include *Lino Tagliapietra: Maestro* (2004) and *La Ballata del Vetro Soffiato* (2002). Kany is working to publish a book on Mateo Zapata Zachai in late 2006.

ROBERT KANTOR

b. 1943

Robert Kantor grew up in Dallas, Texas. He graduated from the University of Colorado, where he studied art history and English literature. Kantor was a graduate fellow at New York University in 1964 when he first began making mobile sculptures.

After receiving his law degree, Kantor's first case in private practice was representing the San Francisco artists who had been arrested for selling their works in the street. Kantor and the artists prevailed and the result is still visible today with the display of their street artist licenses. As an attorney, Kantor negotiated a record deal for Mickey Hart of the Grateful Dead. This began a close friendship and long association with the band. Kantor's work in the arts was broad. He was, for example, the executive producer of several movies including a 1976 Jodie Foster/Martin Sheen film; he also worked with Editions Press to produce and distribute prints and sculptures by artists such as Karel Appel and R.C. Gorman.

Kantor's intense focus on his own large scale sculpture began in the 1990's when he opened a welding shop in Shoshone, Idaho with his primary fabricating assistant, Mary Garrett.

Kantor is represented by the Ochi Gallery in Ketchum, ID. He also shows with the I. Wolk Gallery in St. Helena, CA and RVS Fine Arts Gallery in Southampton, NY.

Robert Kantor lives in Hailey, Idaho with his wife Sondra.

Special thanks to Mary Garrett, Rick Araluce, Sondra Kantor, Amy Gautschi, Dennis Ochi, Robert Kustra, Kari Young, Tom Schonhoff, Carla Peterson, Joseph Roberts, Michael Sweney, Dino Martini, Mike Jasso, Chelsea Noggle, Kolya Panisnick, Alby Allen, the Board of the Center on Contemporary Art and its fabulous members.

All Robert Kantor sculpture photographs by Kevin Syms.
On site studio photographs by Mary Garrett unless otherwise noted