

The Fruitmarket Gallery

Exhibition Archive

Fred Sandback

Exhibition 18 March – 14 May 2006

Fred Sandback (1943–2003) studied philosophy and then art at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. Graduating in 1969, Sandback made his first mature sculptures in 1966. His singular style was developed and is perhaps best understood in the context of Minimalism, a term coined in 1965 to describe the objects, sculptures and installations of a number of American artists, including Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt and Robert Morris.

Sandback's work is profoundly important to the history of modern and contemporary art. While not exactly site-specific, his sculpture engages closely with the architecture and spatial atmosphere of its location, the viewer involved not only with the work itself, but the way in which it alters the experience of being in a particular space. Sandback was always closely involved in the installation of exhibitions, both making new work in response to the site, and monitoring the relationships established between existing sculptures in relation to the site. Mindful of this, the works in this exhibition are well documented in terms of their exhibition history, and have clear installation instructions. As the artist writes in the notes for one of the works, when the form of a sculpture is so slight, getting the measurements right becomes absolutely crucial.

The exhibition at The Fruitmarket Gallery begins with three works which introduce several of the artist's main concerns. *Untitled (Vertical Construction in two Planes)*, 1977, uses Venetian red acrylic knitting yarn to trace planes in space, the yarn seeming to hover, taut, above the floor. *Untitled (Seven-Part Vertical Construction)*, 1987, connects floor and ceiling seven times, each line of yarn staking out its own territory in relation to the others and to the viewer, who feels invited imaginatively to join the lines in their occupation of the gallery. *Untitled (Relief)*, 1998, is one of a group of reliefs which started to appear in the artist's work towards the end of his career, the tiny wooden panel with

its convergence of sharply-incised lines seeming to capture a fragment of something vast.

In the small gallery, *Untitled (A Series of Sixteen Two-part Works)*, 1974, allows a glimpse of the effect that small changes in the installation of Sandback's work can have on the work itself and on the space it occupies. The piece, designed for the John Weber Gallery in New York, changes over time. Throughout the course of the exhibition, all of its sixteen variations will be seen.

A substantial selection of drawings is included in the exhibition. These trace Sandback's preoccupation with and understanding of space, line and colour. Rarely seen alongside his sculpture, these drawings offer a fascinating insight into the development of Sandback's sculptural language. One group relates closely to the wooden reliefs, while another is a series of propositions for sculpture, including installations at the Chinati Foundation and at Dia: Beacon. A third testifies to Sandback's interest in colour and its influence on perception, his understanding exemplified in the small, 'broken line' sculpture which accompanies them. Also in this room is an extremely early work, a kind of sketch in wire and Perspex, and the latest work in the exhibition, a relief tracing the lines of a Piet Mondrian painting. The resolute black of the relief disguises yet also evokes the primary colours of the original painting, colours over which Sandback himself had such demonstrable mastery.

The majority of the sculptures in the upstairs Gallery are enclosed, geometric forms, several of which, like *Square Floor Piece*, 1969 (which was included in Harald Szeemann's epoch-defining exhibition *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form* at the Kunsthalle Bern in 1967), have a long exhibition history. The earliest are made from coloured elastic cord, with or without steel rod. This was the material initially favoured by the artist, and it allowed him to create forms like *Untitled* 1967, a piece in

Brittany blue cord in which Sandback seems to make the cord turn a corner to make a sculpture which, for all the simplicity of its form and materials, has an arresting power. The crisp, sharp contours of this work differ markedly from the more subtle, matt tones of *Untitled*, 1971, in which the painted grey and blue lines seem to shift in relation to each other as you approach the sculpture.

Different again is the fuzzy, soft outline made by the acrylic yarn from which *Untitled (First Construction)*, 1978 is made. The confident, gestural geometry of this work marks out a different kind of space from that enclosed by the more self-contained works around it. Installed in relation and proportion to the space, this work seems to cut into the gallery, slicing an invisible plane through the space.

Although clearly indebted to Minimalism, which provides an initial context in which to judge his visual language (seen most clearly perhaps in the painted steel cubes of *Untitled*, 1968), Fred Sandback's work resists much that the designation of his work as Minimalist implies. His sculpture has a marked generosity towards its audience, and, though carefully measured, is neither mathematical nor impersonal. It is not, as might somehow be expected, 'difficult' art. Sandback's work is emotional, perceptual and somehow touching. It reaches out to the viewer, transforming our understanding of line, colour, volume and space.

'There's only a certain amount of control that you can have over a situation. I'm interested in working in that area in which the mind can no longer hold on to things. The point at which all ideas fall apart'. Fred Sandback, 1975



For a full list of all events pick up an Events Calendar

Curators' Talk

Saturday 18 March, 3–4pm. Free.

Christiane Meyer-Stoll, Curator Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein in conversation with Fiona Bradley, Director, The Fruitmarket Gallery

Adult Workshop

Saturday 15 April, 11am–5pm. Tickets £12/£10 conc. Booking essential. 10 places available.

Artist Samantha Clark will run a workshop enabling participants to make drawings and sculpture inspired by Fred Sandback's use of colour, space and line. All materials provided. For further details contact the bookshop.

Drawing in Space:

The Work of Fred Sandback

Thursday 20 April, 6.30–7.30pm.

Tickets £4/£2 conc. Booking essential.

Edward Saywell will lead a tour of the exhibition focusing on three key issues in Sandback's work: the notion of 'pedestrian space', the experience and realisation of sequence and time, and how Sandback used the conventions of drawing within his sculpture. Edward Saywell was previously Curatorial Associate in the Department of Drawings at the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, which has substantial holdings of Sandback's work.

Ways of Seeing: Gallery Tour

Thursday 27 April, 11.30am–1.30pm. Free. Booking essential.

An opportunity for people aged 60 and over to enjoy a guided tour of the exhibition, led by Education Manager, Tracy Morgan and freelance educator, Mary Keegan. Including an overview of the Minimalist movement and an opportunity to discuss Fred Sandback's work

To book for all talks and events, contact

the bookshop

P 0131 226 8181

E bookshop@fruitmarket.co.uk

Opt in For Art

is The Fruitmarket Gallery's two-year programme of work for schools and youth groups. For further information contact:

Johnny Gailey

Opt in For Art Co-ordinator

P 0131 226 8186

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Reading Room

Resource material and an exhibition interpretation film presentation of Curator Christiane Meyer-Stoll discussing the work in the exhibition is available in the gallery reading room.

The exhibition DVD is available from the bookshop priced £15.

Gallery Information Assistants will be on hand daily for impromptu tours and to answer any questions.

We welcome group bookings from colleges, universities and community groups. These must be booked two weeks in advance of your visit. For further information or to book a group tour contact Tracy Morgan, Education Manager

P 0131 226 8183

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Access and Location

The Fruitmarket Gallery is an accessible venue with a lift to the upper gallery. Centrally situated behind Edinburgh Waverly Rail Station, the Gallery is close to major bus routes on the Royal Mile, North Bridge, Waverly Bridge and Princes Street.



Fred Sandback
Photos: Alan Dimmick