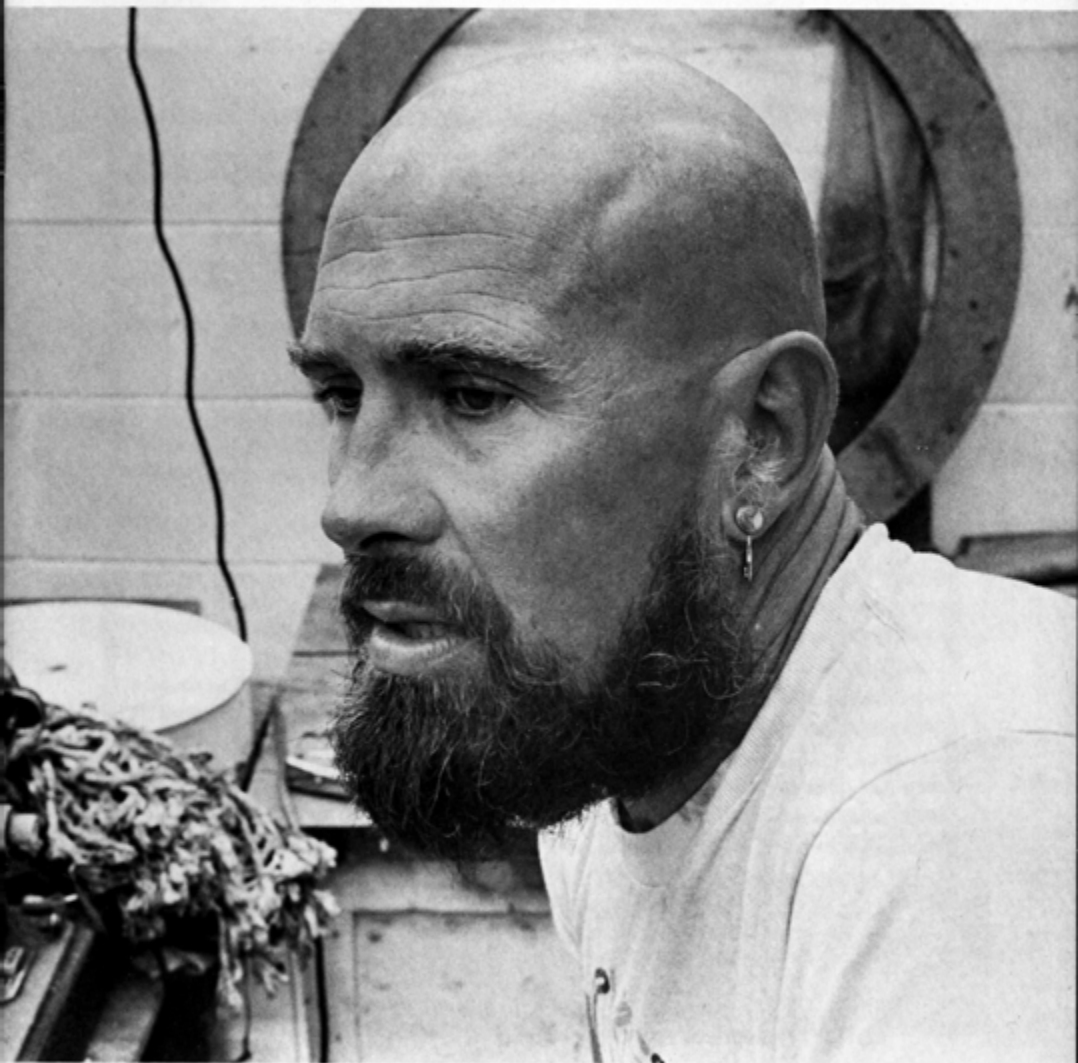


# ALAN SHIELDS

DIMENSIONS OF A CHEERYSTONE



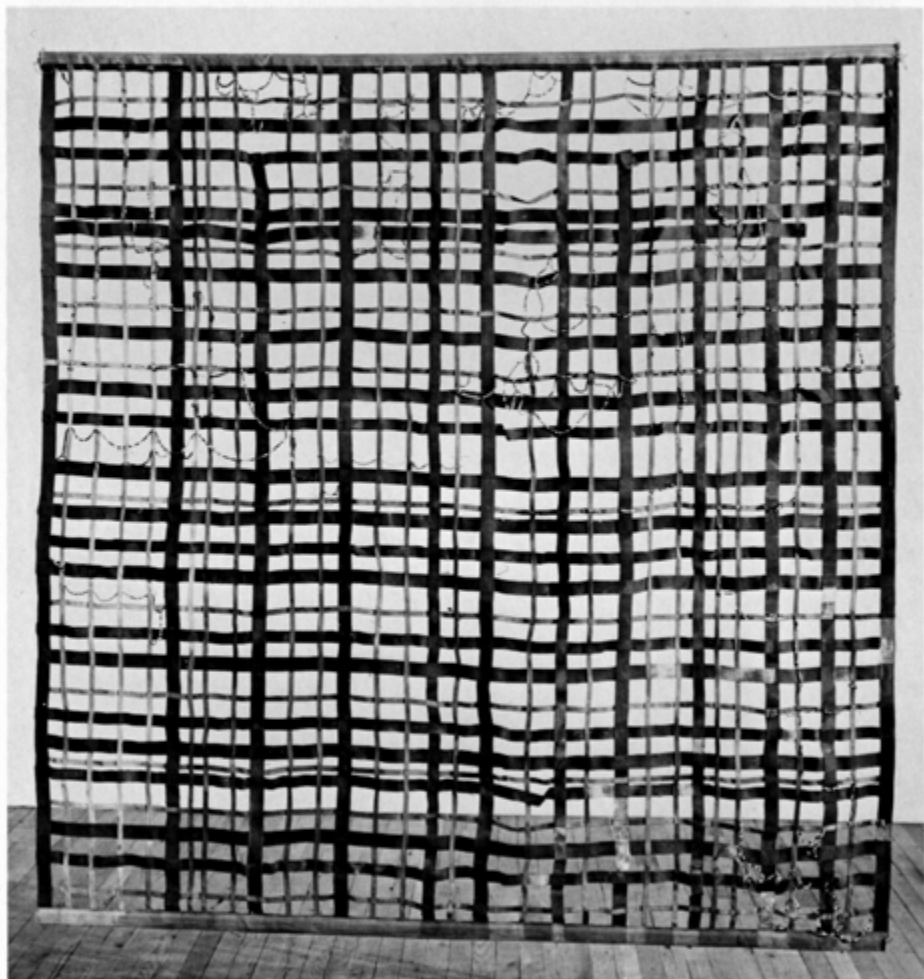
*Special thanks to Thom Thompson, a member of the Stony Brook Art Gallery Advisory Committee, who served as guest curator for the exhibition, and to the Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, for their generosity and cooperation.*

**PHOTO CREDITS:** *Geoffrey Clements, Eeva-Inkeri*

**COVER:** *Photographs by Thom Thompson*

# ALAN SHIELDS

DIMENSIONS OF A CHERRYSTONE



*SHAPE-UP, 1976-77*

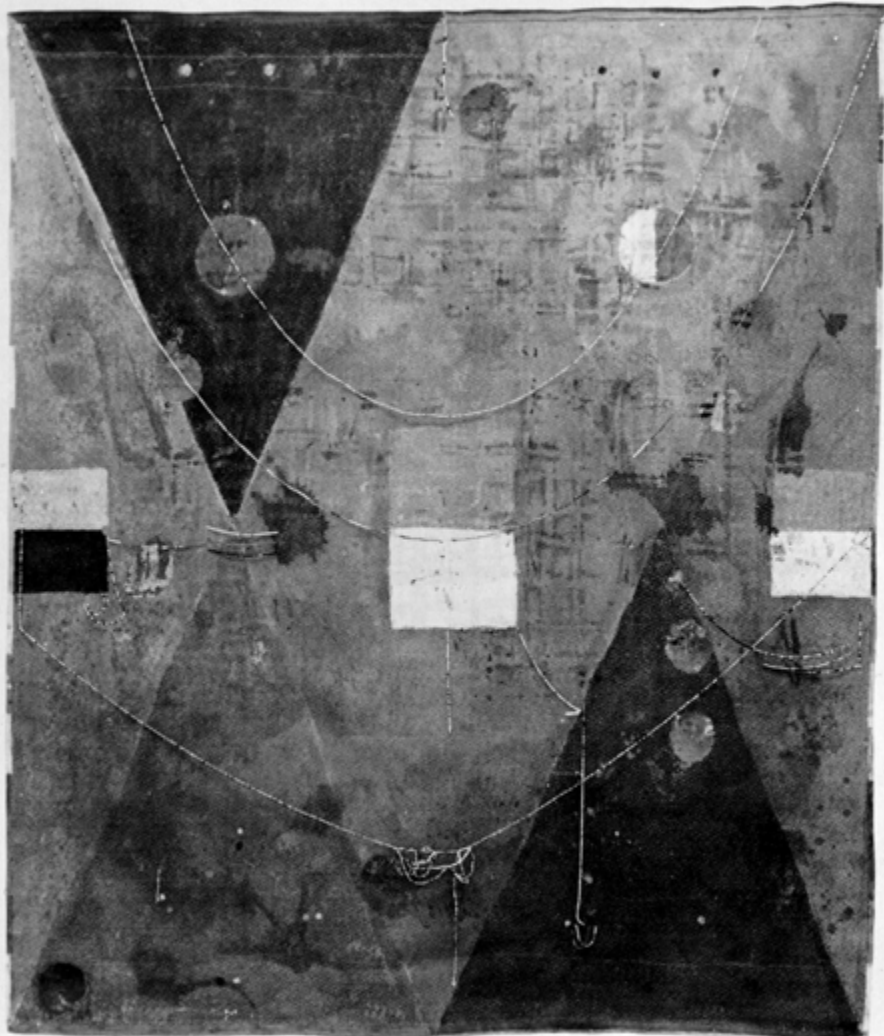
SEPTEMBER 17 - OCTOBER 19, 1982

**ART GALLERY, FINE ARTS CENTER**

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT STONY BROOK

ALAN SHIELDS

COMMISSIONS OF A CHERYSTONE



UNTITLED COCOA MAT PAINTING, 1972-75

## A CONVERSATION WITH THE ARTIST

*Interview conducted and written by Thom Thompson*

*Alan Shields was on the phone: "Try and get out here early because the greenhouse gets hot around noon these days."*

*At 7 a.m. on the Greenport to Shelter Island Ferry, carpenters, plumbers, and housepainters take up most of the space. By the time you turn off your engine and pay the fare, the gate swings open depositing you on the other side.*

*Alan Shields lives with his young family in an expanded cottage on an ever-expanding corner about a hundred yards or so from the deepwater bays of Shelter Island. As you approach his corner of the island you notice colorful strands of beads stretching clothesline high from the rear deck of his house to the garden. They shoot mysteriously off into a grove of trees only to reappear as you change your point of view. Eventually they converge at the top of a trellis that leads to his greenhouse studio. The following conversation took place there on August 5, 1982. - T.T.*

**A.S.** - One of the things that thrills me about the show at Stony Brook is that the space itself has a lot of vitality. There's a lot of varying heights, a lot of different-feeling spaces. There's a space in the corner where there's light coming from two directions, there's a low ceiling space and there's a big tall space that is artificially lit but very volumetric. A lot of my pieces are flexible in that way: they can be changed to make them more suited to the space. *The Divided Eye*, being six triangles, can be hung in varying configurations. Being a module of an equilateral triangle, the most obvious configuration is a hexagon having all of the apexes pointed toward the center. It has been shown, where the physical properties of the showplace warrant it, in a long horizontal band.

**T.T.** - So the environment influences not only what you show but how its shown?

**A.S.** - Yes. The *W.S.A. John Wilkis Tun* piece has been shown numerous times. Sometimes it becomes a wall and at other times, considering the size of the space, it becomes a three-dimensional sculpture.

**T.T.** - You seem to use basic geometric forms in your work -- triangles, rectangles, and circles appear and reappear.

**A.S.** - In the development of what I call the vocabulary of my work, a series of different forms do appear and I use them visually and physically in determining shapes that the canvases take. For instance, I use the square and increments of the square. I like to work with fairly pure geometric forms to start with and then, by overlapping and integrating them, create still others.

**T.T.** - Do you become involved in geometric progressions?

**A.S.** - In a sense I do. I've made pieces that are three-dimensional, equilateral triangles, assembled as flat-sided pentagons. Free-standing floor pieces.

**T.T.** - Is *Whirling Dervish* an example?

**A.S.** - Yes. That's an excellent example. It epitomizes the concept of putting together five triangles and creating a flat-sided pentagon form. I consider it a theatrical piece in that your point of view, your eye, always shifts as you move around it: you come upon it from one angle, or another angle. When you stand right next to *Whirling Dervish*, you can see the other side, because it's low. This varying point of view goes through all of my work, from the grid works and the three-dimensional works, as well as the canvases. I try to invite people to come in contact with my pieces, sometimes physically, but mostly from this kind of changing viewpoint idea.

**T.T.** - The title "*Whirling Dervish*" is very descriptive of the piece.

**A.S.** - Yes it is. I had an experience with a dervish in Morocco some years ago that was quite unexpected, as they almost always are. From other descriptions I've heard you never know they're coming.

**T.T.** - Are titles important to your work?

**A.S.** - Sometimes they're just proper names, and sometimes they give you an impression of an idea. The titles misdirect people as often as they direct them.

**T.T.** - Some of the painting on *Whirling Dervish* creates a visual "stop." Is this intentional?

**A.S.** - It's nice to try and create something that does that unexpected thing. As you're moving around, the thing is changing. As a dervish is moving around, spinning faster and faster, they'll stop. That can be as big a shock as them coming on in the first place. You get sort of hypnotized by them and don't want them to stop. Patterns that don't have any interruption don't interest me much.

**T.T.** - When you work on a painting do you preconceive the piece?

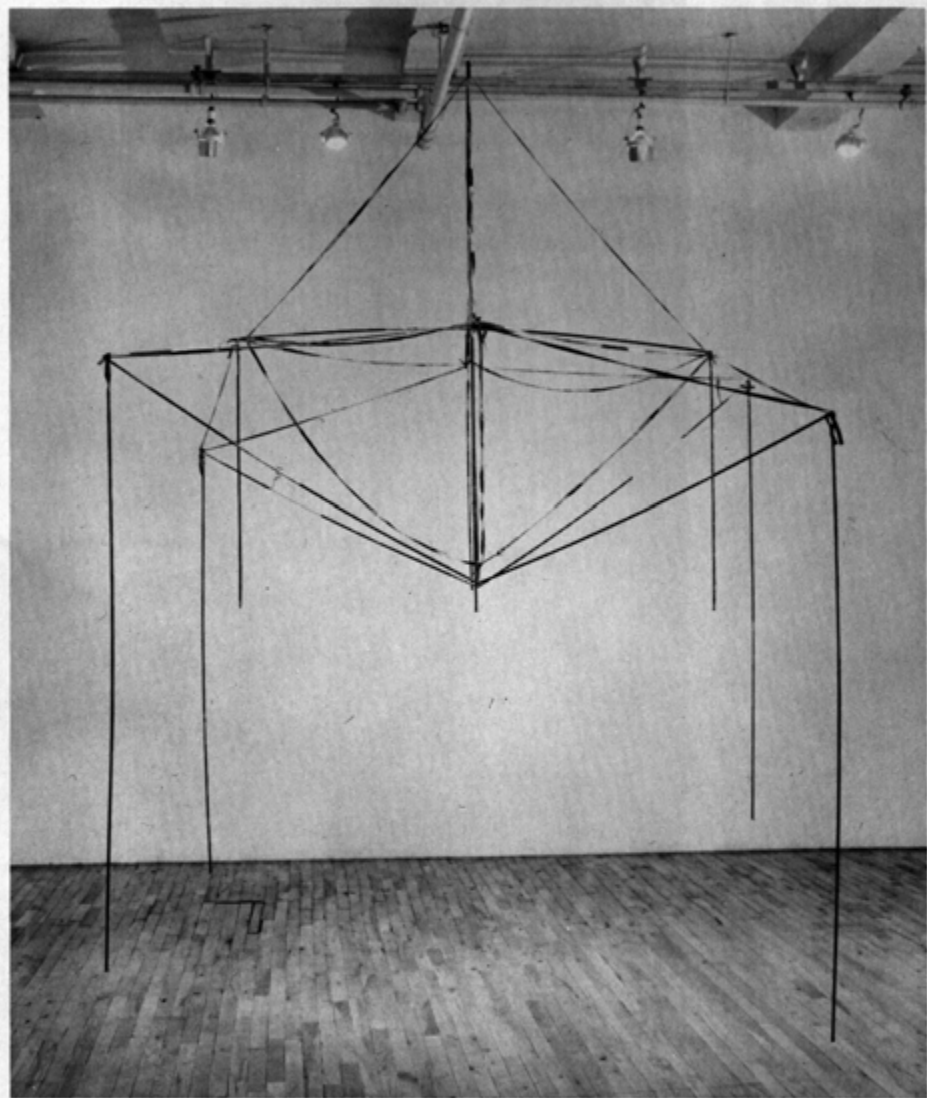
**A.S.** - They're more like evolutions than preconceived visual images. I preconceive as far as necessary to get the ball rolling but then inevitably, I'll interject divisions of that or varieties in the patterns. I really feel like somehow or another I try to discern what the thing is about. Unconsciously I will do something that either by accident or deliberately will change the concept around from what it had been the day before. A grid or shape that will hang on the wall is enough of a starting point. Presently, I'm taking larger canvases and cutting them up, collaging them together.

**T.T.** - Some pieces you've worked on for two or three years. Is it difficult for you to let pieces go?

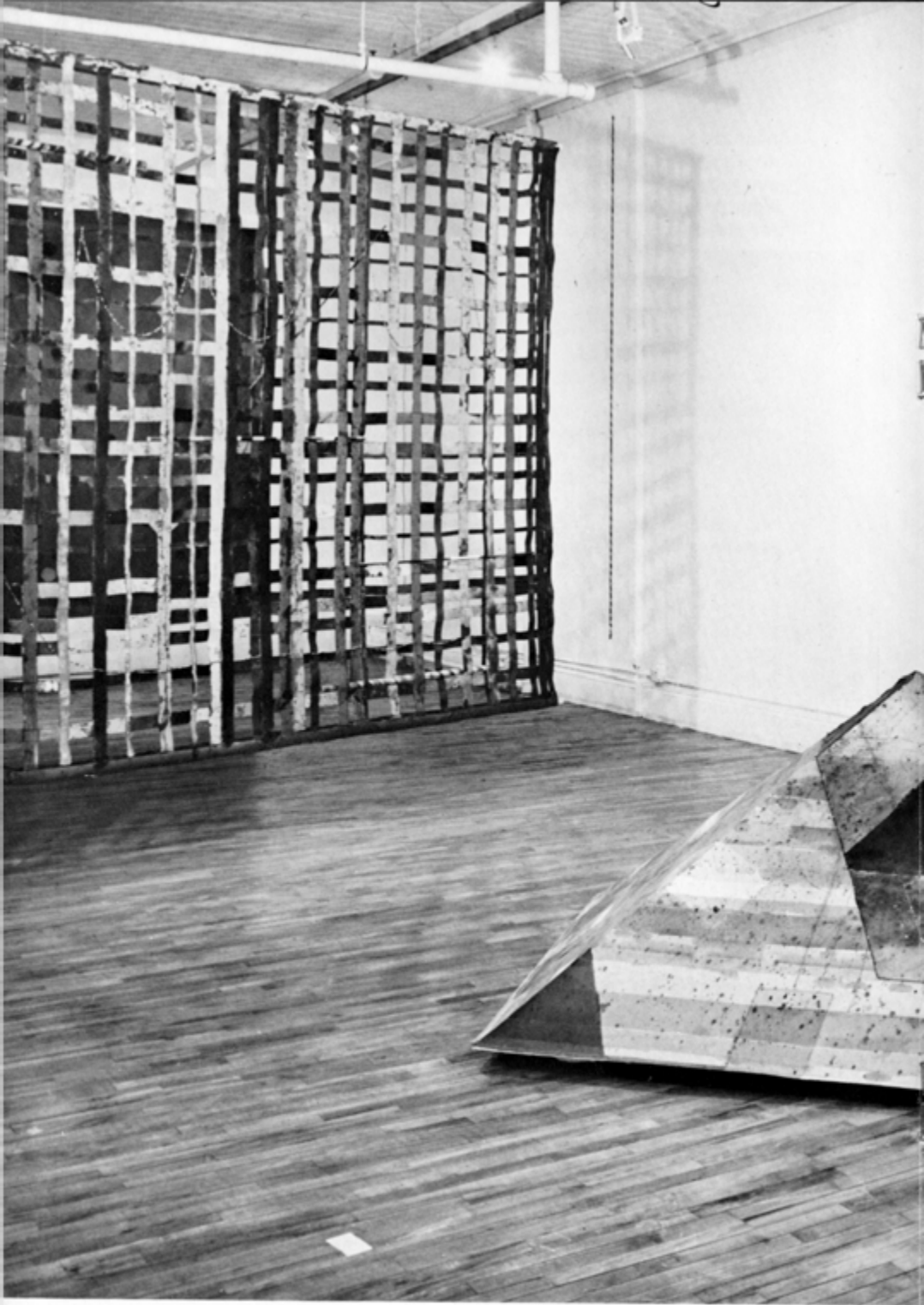
**A.S.** - I have gone back and worked on pieces as much as two years after I said they were completed. I don't often have the opportunity to go back and make changes once pieces are taken from the studio. I have no qualms about it. I feel it's my prerogative to go back and change things.

**T.T.** - Do you categorize your work into painting, sculpture, drawing?

**A.S.** - I call most of my work painting. I call some of the three-dimensional works drawings. There's one piece called *Prince Lip Wrapper* which is a three-dimensional volumetric drawing. It has a linear quality due to the elements in it. If you call something a drawing



*PRINCE LIP WRAPPER, 1977-78*



*Installation View, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, 1970: foreground, WHIRLING DERVISH.*





and it stands out in space, then it puts the viewer's intellectual curiosity into it. If they say "He's crazy -- that's not a drawing," that's enough of a response.

*T.T.* - Where did you learn how to sew?

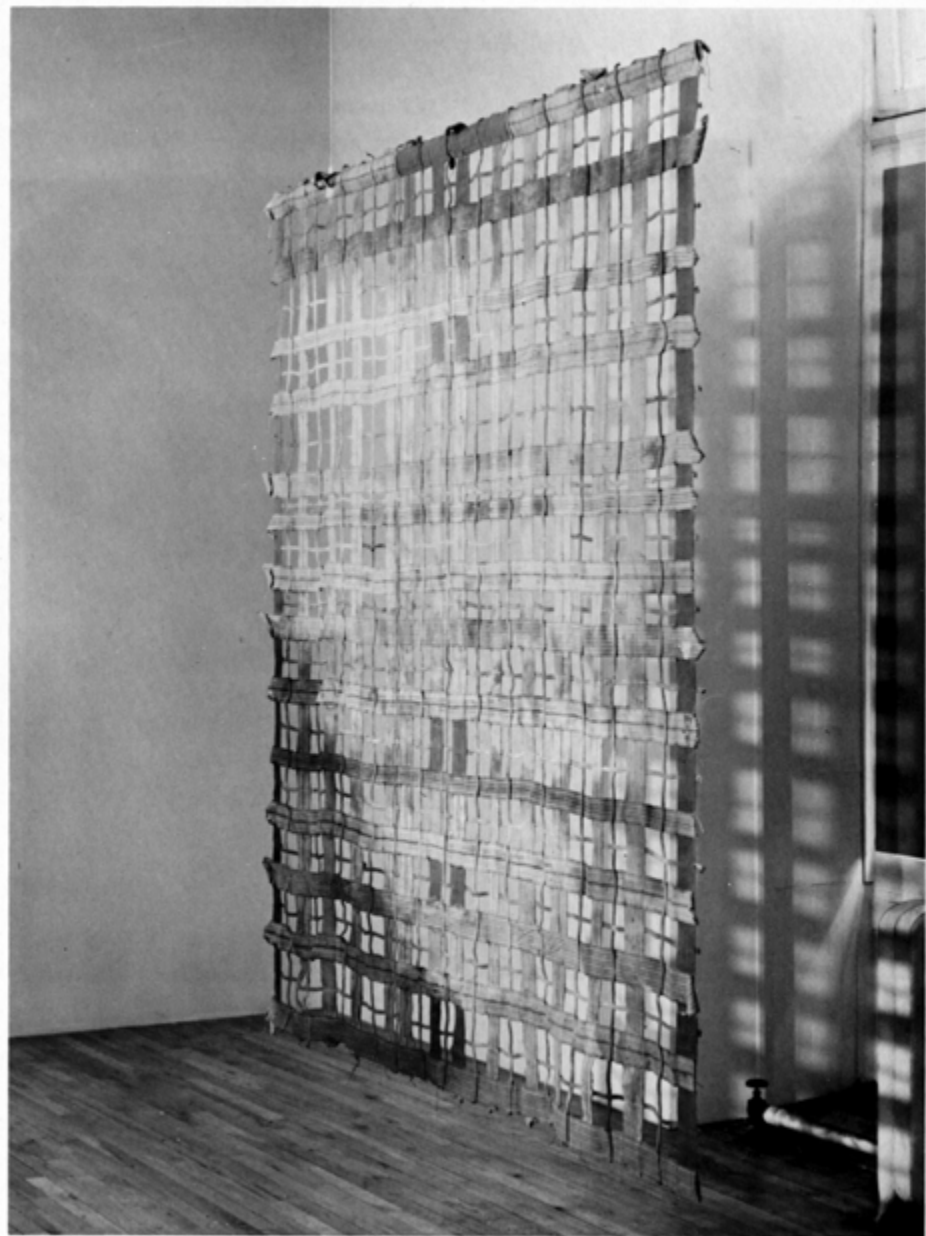
*A.S.* - Well, sewing I learned at an early age. My sisters both sewed, my mother sewed. It was common around our house -- there was more than one sewing machine around. It was just natural to pick it up and use it. For some reason I picked up on sewing and have made it a part of my vocabulary of skills that functions as welding does to a sculptor or carpentry would be to anybody's vocabulary of skills.

*T.T.* - Is the stitching structural or aesthetic?

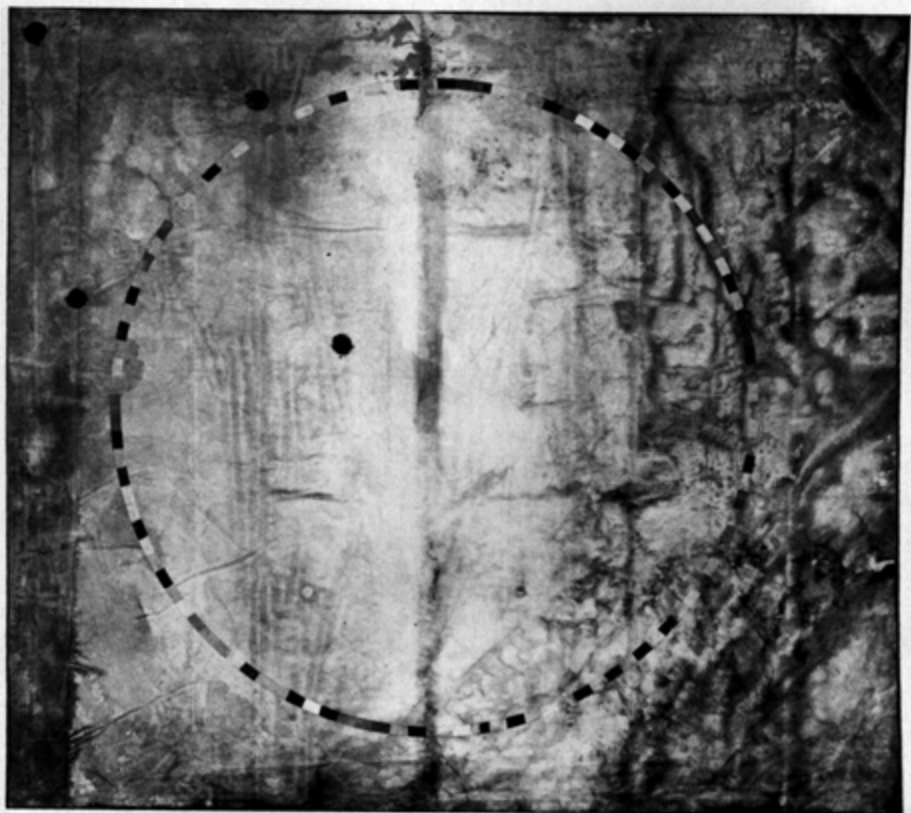
*A.S.* - The stitching is a drawing element. But, putting together these works I feel that certain things are necessary. I need to have good structural stitches around the canvas to hold the forms. I've always said that I wanted the works to be as well constructed and as durable as a work would be if it were created on a stretcher. There is no fraying out or changing of the work as it matures or grows up. I've got it pretty well established. Its physical presence should be pretty well maintained. At some points I have to consider these things not as paintings but as cloth and fabric. As I'm pushing it through the machine or as I'm manipulating it around here, the flat surface is not the thing. The development of it as a structure is important. It's not going on a stretcher.

*T.T.* - You seem to have been able to successfully integrate your family, your art, and your other interests into your life.

*A.S.* - Well, one of the lies I perpetuate is that I'm really not serious about anything. I'm not so serious that art is the end all nor am I so serious that fishing or anything is the end all. It's all a matter of keeping a smile on your face and the mood of the moment light. I have a lot of varied opportunities, and have been fortunate enough to keep expanding those opportunities, so the success for me has always been that pleasure in my life -- the pleasure of doing it. If I'm fishing or planting a garden, whatever, I take it all with equal seriousness or equal lack of seriousness, whichever you want to call it. I don't get hung up on any one thing. I guess the idea is that if my painting career doesn't work that's not going to spoil everything. If my garden fails, it's not going to spoil everything. If I don't catch any fish, it's not going to spoil everything. It's just part of the whole thing. I like to keep and have enough interest so that I don't just have one thing to talk about or one thing to think about. Art isn't just about one thing, anyway. It's about many things. There's a lot of ways to approach it. I just keep trying to approach it freshly and lightly. It's not the case with me to further only one goal or have one purpose. It improves your patience to have more than one interest. I've known artists who've gotten hung up in one particular mode or particular way of doing things. If that didn't work there was no other idea to fall back on. When I first came to New York it impressed me that the most interesting artists were the ones who could talk about other things. If their concepts were narrow and you talked with them once, you've experienced it. The more variety you have in your concepts the more comfortable you're going to be with your life.



DIET LIMCA, 1980-81



EGYPT CIRCLE, 1979-80

## SELECTED ONE PERSON EXHIBITIONS

Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, 1969, 1970, 1972, 1974, 1976, 1978, 1980, 1982

The New Gallery, Cleveland, 1971

Galerie Sonnabend, Paris, 1971

Galleria dell'Ariete, Milan, Italy, 1972, 1975

The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1973

University of Rhode Island, Kingston, 1973

Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, 1973

Madison Art Center, Madison, Wisconsin, 1973

Galerie Aronowitsch, Stockholm, 1973

Texas Gallery, Houston, 1974

Museum of Art, University of Kansas, Lawrence, 1975

Musee de Saint-Etienne, Saint-Etienne, France, 1976

Portland Center for the Visual Arts, 1976

Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1976

Musee d'Art Moderne de Strasbourg, Strasbourg, 1977

Moore College of Art, Philadelphia, 1977

P.S. 1, Long Island City, 1978

Williams College Museum of Art, Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts 1979

Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine, 1981

Fine Arts Museum of the South, Mobile, 1982

Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vermont, 1982

## SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Akron Art Museum; Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College; Art Institute of Chicago; Boston Museum of Fine Arts; Brooks Memorial Art Gallery, Memphis; Cincinnati Art Museum; Cleveland Museum of Art; Dallas Museum of Fine Arts; Ewing Museum, Illinois State University; Fogg Museum, Harvard University; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum; High Museum, Atlanta; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; Indianapolis Museum of Art; Kansas State University; Metropolitan Museum of Art; Museum of Art, University of Kansas; Museum of Modern Art; National Gallery, Washington, D.C.; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Rutgers State University; Staatliche Museen, West Berlin; University of Pennsylvania; Vassar College Museum of Art; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Whitney Museum of American Art.

## EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

*Entries are listed chronologically; height precedes width. All works are on loan courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.*

1. WHIRLING DERVISH, 1968-70  
Acrylic, thread, canvas, 38 x 107 x 107 inches
2. HART SUNKISSED-LIE, 1969  
Acrylic, thread on canvas, 92 x 304 inches
3. W.S.A. JOHN WILKIS TUN, 1969  
Canvas, thread, acrylic on wood structure, 99 x 99 x 203 x 86¼ inches
4. BIG AUNT RED, 1970-72  
Acrylic on canvas, 92 x 37 inches
5. THE DIVIDED EYE, 1972  
6 sections, each approximately 120 x 129 inches
  - a) IMAMOU/RAGEDY ANNE, acrylic, thread, string, cotton belting on canvas
  - b) OFFSHOOT, acrylic, thread on canvas
  - c) GRINGO, acrylic, thread on canvas
  - d) MESCALARO/NICHOLAIS & LUKEY (A PAIR OF DOUGH-DOO-BIRDS), acrylic, thread on canvas
  - e) EL ROPO, acrylic, thread on canvas
  - f) LA PECHE, acrylic, thread on canvas
6. UNTITLED COCOA MAT PAINTING, 1972-75  
Acrylic on cocoa mat, approximately 117 x 91 inches
7. SEND US A BELL, 1975  
Acrylic, thread, cotton belting, 294½ x 5 ⅞ inches
8. SHAPE-UP, 1976-77  
Acrylic and beads on canvas, belting grid, 71 x 73½ inches
9. PRINCE LIP WRAPPER, 1977-78  
Metal rings, rods, canvas, approximately 131 x 116 x 128 inches
10. BABE'S BIG PRIZE, 1979  
Acrylic, thread, beads, canvas belting, 142¾ inches (diameter)
11. EGYPT CIRCLE, 1979-80  
Acrylic, thread, canvas, 116 x 130½ inches
12. DIET LIMCA, 1980-81  
Cotton belting, acrylic, thread, aluminum, 77½ x 77½ inches

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT STONY BROOK

THE FINE ARTS CENTER



**art gallery**

**PREVIOUS EXHIBITIONS AT THE ART GALLERY**

- 1975** FACULTY EXHIBITION
- 1976** MICHELLE STUART  
RECENT DRAWINGS (AN AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS EXHIBITION)  
SALVATORE ROMANO
- 1977** MEL PEKARSKY  
JUDITH BERNSTEIN  
HERBERT BAYER (AN AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS EXHIBITION)
- 1978** LEON GOLUB  
WOMEN ARTISTS FROM NEW YORK  
JANET FISH  
ROSEMARY MAYER  
THE SISTER CHAPEL
- 1979** SHIRLEY GORELICK  
ALAN SONFIST  
HOWARDENA PINDELL  
ROY LICHTENSTEIN
- 1980** BENNY ANDREWS  
ALEX KATZ  
EIGHT FROM NEW YORK  
ARTISTS FROM QUEENS  
OTTO PIENE  
STONY BROOK 11, THE STUDIO FACULTY
- 1981** ALICE NEEL  
55 MERCER: 10 SCULPTORS  
JOHN LITTLE  
IRA JOEL HABER  
LEON POLK SMITH
- 1982** FOUR SCULPTORS  
CECILE ABISH  
JACK YOUNGERMAN

*Acting Director* ..... LYNNE SILKMAN

