Richard Artschwager!
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Throughout this volume Richard Artschwager is variously described as “an outsider,” “an inveterate oddball,” “idiosyncratic,” and as using “design materials with a high ilk factor to create paintings and sculptures that have continued to strike just the right notes of offbeat realism and abstraction.” Indeed, since he arrived on the scene in the late 1950s Artschwager’s work has resisted stylistic definition. Even today, almost fifty years after his early exhibitions at Leo Castelli Gallery in 1964—where his work was presented with that of Christo, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and Frank Stella—his art, having been extensively exhibited, collected, and written about in the United States and abroad, continues to fly in the face of prevailing modes of art making. This is especially surprising given the “anything goes” permissiveness of today’s art world. One only needs to look at Artschwager’s loopy, intensely colored oil-painting in the Driver’s Seat (2008; p. 183) with its humorous, nonsensical subject of a distended, mannequin-like yellow figure seated in a blue hoop—that one may assume is a steering wheel—levitating in a bright green, yellow, and blue landscape as proof of his singularity. As this drawing suggests, despite the wackiness of the world he presents, Artschwager is in control. Given the hallucinatory eccentricity of his output and materials, such as Formica, Celotex, and rubberized horse hair, one might assume that Artschwager is a Surrealist on an excursion through dream worlds. However, his art, like his craftsmanship, is decidedly precise and strategic in its explorations moving afield the territories of Pop, Minimalism, Photo-Realism, and appropriation. The artist navigates his way through and beyond prevailing styles, heightening our awareness of those styles and differentiating himself from them. By poking fun at them and himself, Artschwager reminds us that styles are constructs created by the internal logic of each artist’s work and the shared characteristics among groups of artists. For example, Description of Table (1964; p. 111) and Construction with Indentation (1966; p. 103), both with theatrical faux surfaces constructed from Formica on plywood, not only mimic the forms of minimal objects by artists like Donald Judd but also problematize the “truth to materials” edict and ridicule uselessness. Artschwager is a court jester taken seriously by his contemporaries even as his work critiques, deides, subverts, and extends their practices. All this to say that Artschwager is insistently himself as proposed by Richard Artschwager!, the title of the exhibition and this book. He is an artist who has deftly evaded being co-opted by the styles of others—a particularly remarkable achievement given the longevity of his career and the prominence of his work.

For decades the Whitney Museum of American Art has brought Artschwager into our fold having first exhibited his work in 1966 in Contemporary American Sculpture: Selection I and in the Annual Exhibition 1966: Contemporary Sculpture and Prints. That same year, the Whitney acquired its first Artschwager sculpture, Description of Table, thanks to our patrons Howard and Joan Lipman, who are largely responsible for building the Museum’s post–World War II sculpture collection. Today, the Whitney possesses the largest holdings of his art by any museum—a collection recently and significantly augmented by Emily Fisher Landau. In 1988, then Whitney curator Richard Armstrong curated the first comprehensive survey of the artist’s work, Richard Artschwager. Now, in association with Yale University Art Gallery, we are honored to present a retrospective organized by Jennifer R. Gross, Seymour H. Knox Jr., Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at that institution. While this exhibition confirms Artschwager’s place as a central figure in the history of twentieth-century American art, it also reminds us that the construct we call the history of art comprises distinctive voices of individual artists who are as important for their differences as they are for their connections to each other. And few are as distinctive in this period as Richard Artschwager.

My most profound thanks are due to Richard and Ann Artschwager who have worked closely with Jennifer Gross to create a distinctive survey, which embodies the artist’s unique sensibility at critical moments in his career. Together they identified works and helped secure loans essential to the success of the exhibition. Jennifer, who travelled the world to view nearly every major Artschwager object from which to make a selection, is to be lauded for her perseverance, passion, and insight. Her love of all things Artschwager, including a deep understanding of the artist’s history and connection to the art of his time has made for an exhibition that does more than simply relate a story, but brings its originality to life. I am also grateful to Jock Reynolds, Henry J. Heinz II Director of Yale University Art Gallery, whose commitment to Artschwager’s accomplishments assured a successful collaboration between our two museums. We are delighted to share this exhibition with the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, and I extend my warm thanks to Ann Philbin, Director, for sharing our enthusiasm for Artschwager’s work.

I am greatly indebted to those who share the Whitney’s commitment to exhibitions of this scope and ambition. The unstinting support of the Broad Art Foundation, Allison and Warren Kanders, Alice and Tom Tisch, and Mr. and Mrs. Harrison Augur was essential to the realization of this retrospective. Without the generosity of the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, it would have been impossible to produce this remarkable catalogue. This volume also benefited from the kindness of other supporters, including Maura and Mark H. Rosin, Anna Marie and Robert F. Shapiro, and a Yale University Art Gallery endowment created with a challenge grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Lenders always play a vital role in the success of retrospectives and Richard Artschwager is no exception. More than sixty lenders in the United States and abroad graciously agreed to share their works with viewers—a testament to the artist’s legacy and his importance today.

Adam D. Weinberg
Alice Pratt Brown Director
Whitney Museum of American Art
The evolution of Richard Artschwager’s remarkable oeuvre since his retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1966 attests to this artist’s unflagging creativity and sustained prescience as an observer of contemporary culture. It has been a rewarding privilege to work with Richard and his wife, Ann, and to undertake an in-depth study of more than five decades of his work in preparation for the exhibition and this catalogue.

It is a tribute to the Whitney’s longstanding commitment to individual artists that it will be the first venue for this retrospective, a natural extension of a long history of presenting Artschwager’s work since 1966. As this exhibition came together, the Yale University Art Gallery was in the midst of a significant renovation and expansion. The Whitney stepped in to lead the organization, tour, and publication, facilitating a unique partnership.

My foremost gratitude is extended to Adam D. Weinberg, the Whitney’s Alice Pratt Brown Director, for his passionate and unflagging support of this project from its inception. His zeal for Artschwager’s work is inspirational and has been formative to my research and reflections on the form the exhibition should take. I am deeply appreciative of his encouragement and mentorship as well as the scholarship he contributed to this volume.

Jock Reynolds, Yale University Art Gallery’s Henry J. Heinz II Director, supported the collaboration with the Whitney as well as my research in the midst of the Yale University Art Gallery’s ambitious expansion, signaling his unwavering commitment to the vital role of contemporary art in our culture. His enthusiastic admiration for Artschwager’s work laid the foundation for similar reactions from countless artists, collectors, and institutional colleagues as we moved forward with the project.

The ownership of art is a form of cultural stewardship, and the exhibition would not have been possible without the generous commitment of its lenders. I am extremely grateful for the private collectors and public institutions that have been willing to share their works with the general public.

My work as an outside curator was greatly facilitated by the Whitney’s extremely professional and hardworking staff. Chief Curator and Deputy Director for Programs Donna De Salvo embraced this enterprise wholeheartedly and lent her sage experience working within the Whitney’s Marcel Breuer-designed building. Christy Putnam, Associate Director for Exhibitions and Collections Management, juggled the scheduling and execution of the tour with calming cheer and nimble institutional navigation. Lauren Dicentro, Exhibitions Coordinator, and Kate Hahn, Assistant Exhibitions Coordinator, more than ably attended to every detail of the exhibition and tour. Mark Steigelman, Design/Construction Manager, guided the exhibition into form. I am grateful for the able assistance of Justin Romeo and Jennifer Lenventhal of the Director’s Office for their deft skill and humor. My gratitude is also due to the following groups of people for their able and generous assistance: Carlin Bemingham, Assistant Head Preparator; Anita Duquette, Manager, Rights and Reproductions; Rich Flood, Marketing and Community Affairs Officer; Seth Fogelman, Senior Registrar; Meg Forsyth, Graphic Designer; Molly Gross, Senior Publicist; Kowea Hammond, Rights and Reproduction Assistant; Matthew Heffernan, Assistant Registrar; Nick Holmes, General Counsel; Jeffrey Levine, Chief Marketing and Communications Officer; Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, Associate Director for Conservation and Research; Kathryn Potts, Associate Director, Helena Rubenstein Chair of Education; Matthew Skopek, Assistant Conservator; Stephen Soba, Communications Officer; Carrie Springer, Senior Curatorial Assistant; John Stanley, Chief Operating Officer; Emile Sullivan, Associate Registrar; Farris Wahbeh, Manager, Cataloguing and Documentation; Margie Weinstein, Manager of Education Initiatives; and Alexandra Wheeler, Deputy Director for Development.

Beth Huseman, Interim Head of Publications at the Whitney, made the creation of this book a pleasure. She was ably assisted in the endeavor by Brian Reese, Publications Assistant. Sue Medicott and Nenisa Dominguez Vales enabled an innovative yet beautifully apt book. The skilled work of photographers Ben Blackwell, Jason Mandella, Chris Gandhir, and Tim Thayer has allowed many wonderful Artschwager works to find their proper place in the history of his oeuvre. David Frankel wove the catalogue texts into a compelling collection of different approaches to Artschwager’s work; David’s challenging questions always encourage better scholarship. Daphne Geismar turned the exhibition catalogue into an object of desire that honors the practice of the artist it presents. Her work sets the standard for the design of art books today.

The colleagues whom Jock Reynolds and I work with to realize ambitious projects at the Yale University Art Gallery are Pamela Flacks, Deputy Director for Collections and Education; Jill Westgard, Deputy Director for Museum Resources and Stewardship; Jessica Labbe, Deputy Director for Finance and Administration; and Laurence Kanter, Chief Curator and Lionel Goldfrank III Curator of European Art. They have each lent a guiding hand to this enterprise. Susan Matheson, Molly and Walter Baress Curator of Ancient Art, who was the Art Gallery’s Chief Curator when the exhibition was first developed, provided steadfast encouragement. Brian McGovern, Assistant Director for Museum Resources and Stewardship, assisted with funding support. John Rhchen, Director of Visual Resources, and his department’s staff were instrumental in providing photographic assistance for the catalogue. Tiffany Sprague, Director of Publications and Editorial Services; Lynne Addison, Registrar; and Amy Dow, Senior Associate Registrar, shared sound advice and experience during the planning of the catalogue and exhibition tour. Their assistance is deeply appreciated.

Numerous undergraduate and graduate students have helped us with their excellent research and writing on the works included in the exhibition. Bahij Chancey, Megan Conroy, Helen Goldenberg, Nicholle Lamartina, Elisabeth Thomas, Lara Weltgen, and Sophia Somin Yoo all made vital contributions to the realization of the exhibition and catalogue. Their passion for knowledge was a source of perpetual encouragement as we sought to bring Artschwager’s work to a new generation of admirers.

I would particularly like to thank Kathleen Chaffee, Horace W. Goldsmith Assistant Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, and Amy Canonicus, Museum Assistant for Modern and Contemporary Art, for their tireless efforts that brought this project to fruition. They made a complex journey truly enjoyable, and their thoughtful scholarship and fresh insights into Artschwager’s work were always in our attention to detail, have been instrumental in forming the structure the exhibition and catalogue have taken.

At the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, Ann Philbin, Director; Anne E. Iglewski, Senior Curator; Brooke Hodge, Director of Exhibition Management and Publications, and their colleagues enthusiastically came on board for the exhibition. Portland McCormick, Director, Registration and Collections Management at the Hammer, capably handled the receipt and care of works in Los Angeles. The Hammer Museum shares Yale’s vision for bringing contemporary exhibition programming to the students and artists in their community, and it is always a pleasure to work with them.

Acknowledgments
Special thanks are due to Bob Monk, Director of Gagosian Gallery, who has been generous with his assistance and genuine passion for this exhibition. He has been a knowledgeable resource, and he and his staff have been most helpful in locating and navigating the loans for the tour.

I would like to thank all those who assisted the research for the exhibition by sharing their knowledge and enabling access to artwork and archives: Naomi Abe at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; L. Clifford Ackley at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Brooke Alexander and Owen Houhoulis, Brooke Alexander Gallery; Richard Armstrong, Director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Foundation; Wendy Hurlock Baker at the Archives of American Art; Michael Baunach; Cindy Buckner at the Grand Rapids Art Museum; Andrew L. Camden; Barbara Castelli; Eileen Cohen; Katrien Damman; Gabriella De Ferrari; Leah Dickman and Jen Schauer at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Dr. Stephan Diederich and Katrien Kessler of the Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Jessica Duffett at Leo Castelli Gallery; Carol Eiel and Tiffany Danekhar at Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Peter Freeman, Laura Frond, Vicki Gambrell at the Broad Foundation; Gary Garrels and John Zarboul at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Pia Gottschaller; Rebecca Hart at the Detroit Institute of Arts; Rhona Hoffman; Linda Ianger, Frances Katz; David Kiehl, Curator and Curator of Prints, Whitney Museum of American Art; Catherine Kord; Laura Malone; Donald B. Marron; Sarah Miller; Marsha Miro; Bernhard Moser; Jillian Murphy, Gagosian Gallery; Heidi Naef at the Schaulager; Albert Oehlen; Mary-Ellen Powell at the Weisman Foundation; Sabine Roeder at the Krefeld Museum; Pamela Sanders; Ian Schall and Lissa Cramer at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art; Dieter Schwarz, Director, Kunstmuseum Winterthur; Michael Semff at the Staatsliche Graphische Sammlung, Munich; Rebecca Tümpman and Ian Alteveer at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Ron Warren, Mary Boone Gallery; Daniel Weinberg; Barbara Weiss; Queenie Wong of Sonnabend Gallery; Donald Young; and Del Zogg at the Broad Foundation.

Particular thanks are due to Silke Sommer, whose invaluable labor in assembling a catalogue raisonné of Artschwager’s work based on archives organized by Ingrid Schaffner was essential to the expedient realization of the catalogue and exhibition. I first came to know of Richard Artschwager’s work in the 1980s when I worked downstairs and across the street from Leo Castelli and Mary Boone where he exhibited his work. I am deeply grateful for her assistance and profoundly respect her devotion to Richard and his work.

Jennifer R. Gross  
Seymour H. Knox, Jr., Curator of  
Modern and Contemporary Art  
Yale University Art Gallery
To find our way toward seeing the world from the perspective of Richard Artschwager, we might start by making an imaginative journey away from his work and toward the places from which this enigmatic artist first learned to look at things. Such an excursion would help us to remember that the playing field of culture is grounded not only in the landscape of galleries and museums but also in a visual context much more commonplace and out in plain sight—that everything of interest is, as Artschwager has said, "all right there."1

This exercise is a rather simple endeavor, not metaphysical but rooted in physical knowledge—knowledge of the mesas outside Las Cruces, New Mexico, where the artist grew up. Looking out toward the unbounded horizon in that topography, we are conscious that each of us is but a small mark or molecule in the universe. This expansive framework, and its shifts in scale determined by context and perspective, left a permanent impression on Artschwager, establishing his sense of how his art lives in the world. As he sees it, both art and life, like cacti that shimmer in and out of focus on the desert horizon, exist through our visual affirmation.

This maximal view of the world is counterbalanced by the disciplined training in close looking administered by both of Artschwager’s parents. His mother, Eugenia, a painter, taught him to draw and to “focus on the edges.”2 His father, Ernst, was a scientist who wrote his doctoral dissertation on the anatomy of the potato,3 studying the microscopic mutation of material as fact. He was also an amateur photographer. Artschwager, by his own account, grew up focused on the structural underpinnings of all organic and inorganic phenomena. He learned at an early age to know and value his world one image after another, from snapshot to camera pan, a habit he has come to believe is integral to his capacity to recognize art when he sees it:

I was taught to look under stones, in dusty corners, at what is directly in front of me—that’s the hard part. What is art? Coming from my background, je-ne-sais-quoi is not very much evidence… I’m lost to metaphysics… I don’t know much about art but I’ll know an art if I see one. I’m thinking like Archie Bunker here… So I try… casting a wide net, salvaging any object, image or event that captures my attention.4

Artschwager’s voracious commitment to looking as a means of valuing the world is what has motivated his practice as an artist for over half a century. His sculptures,
That first entirely blip-filled show took place at Konrad Fischer’s Düsseldorf gallery, a former open-air passageway that only the year before had been fitted with glass doors and turned into an exhibition space (fig. 72). It nonetheless was already seen as one of the most cutting-edge galleries in Germany. Here Artschwager sited a swarm of blips to emphasize the gallery’s odd arched shape and its continuity with the outside world. Throughout the late 1960s and early ‘70s, he continued to place blips to focus awareness on the work of others in group exhibitions, on architecture, to alter the plane of viewing, and to set things in motion, challenging viewers to figure out, as he put it, “which is the ornament and which is the thing ornamented” (fig. 70). The blips and their photo-documentation transformed everything from art spaces and city streets to interstitial rural environments into the focus of a kind of aesthetic attention that was simultaneously pictorial (photogenic), sculptural, and transient. The heterogeneity of the settings created by what Artschwager called his “essay into high graffiti” lay at the core of their appeal to an art world increasingly attuned to ideational practices, and to the movement of the art object from conventional museum and gallery presentations into the environment, alternative spaces, and the pages of publications (fig. 73). During this period, Artschwager appeared key into movements with which he otherwise had little kinship: environmental and Conceptual art.

In 1968, for his second invitation to participate in a Whitney Annual, Artschwager installed a hundred blips made from various materials (wood, horsehair, paint) around the museum, in a work entitled 100 Locations (fig. 75). That same year, for Harald Szeemann’s iconic exhibition Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become
paintings, and drawings are evidence of his expedition into the unpredictable waters of aesthetics, applying the skills he learned as a biology student at Cornell University. The result is an oeuvre that is confrontational and confounding, whimsical and exquisite. It started in the late 1950s with paintings of the New Mexico landscape and has come full circle in recent drawings that embrace the same panoramic horizons. This time, however, as Artschwager has reached the age of eighty-eight, his purview is a window not onto the world but beyond it. His art is now illuminated with color and firmly sourced in his imagination, and in the pleasure of exercising the innate capacities as a maker that he has honed over a lifetime. He has fulfilled his stated artistic ambition in life, “to be original.”

Besides Artschwager’s unrelenting capacity to surprise us, what stands out about his career as we look at it retrospectively is that he has maintained his unique position as an outsider, prophetically anticipating how his culture would see things a few years or decades in the future. His grisaille paintings on Celotex, while their sources in media imagery once made them seem detached, today appear hauntingly nostalgic and beautiful. The hard-edged forms of his sculptures from the 1960s, with their wood-grain-evoking Formica surfaces indexing photography, presaged twenty-first-century eyes all stoked up on technology and fast looking. When they first appeared, they were often perceived as obdurate and unfamiliar; today they seem to assert a genuine human pathos, coming into focus just on the near side of the shimmering disconnect between our lives in real time and our visual, emotional, and intellectual investment in the unrelenting tide of images delivered to us by the Internet; images that have become, for many of us, our primary connection to the world. Addressing this slippage between what is real and physical and our expectation, determined by media culture, of something more real is what Artschwager, in his 1990 essay “Art and Reason,” described as the disengagement between our
social and our physical experience of space, and has been at the heart of all his artis-
tic endeavors.

If you ask Artschwager about his work, he will time and again refer you
to “Art and Reason.” The essay shows that this seemingly outsider practitioner has
been working into the box of art history all along—if from the outside, the real
world. In a 2002 interview, when asked whether he felt vision in our culture had
fundamentally changed, he replied with a reference to this essay:

Yes, but I’m not talking about the apparatus, I’m talking about our being
in a primarily social, as opposed to primarily physical, space. Our physical
space has been eroded to the point of being endangered, it survives where
there are few people and lots of space and where a person or persons can
reside in pleasurable solipsism—watching, listening, not editing or throwing
anything away.... Social space is language-bound and language is always
subject-predicate, a Proutian abridgment of the Event which, for instance, allows
no excluded middle... Just think back to that time when people
lived in the country. One didn’t look at red and green lights—in other words, particles—in order to cross the street but rather at the full field of vision.
And so it is with Matisse. When you sweep your eyes over it, you’re seeing
it as it was intended to be seen, it’s so simple. 10

The career trajectory of this late bloomer is well rehearsed in the literature. 9

Artschwager’s life reads like a great American novel, a John Steinbeck epic from the
first half of the twentieth century, in which, however, the “aw shucks” protagonist
rides off over the horizon of the twenty-first looking less like an everyman and more
like an enigmatic, sharp-eyed character invented by Cormac McCarthy. Around the
age of forty, almost twenty years after he served in World War II and was wounded
in the Battle of the Bulge, Artschwager had an epiphany that making good objects,
functional furniture—the craftsman’s profession by which he had kept his family
fed and his mind and hands ably occupied—was not the same as making good in his
head. Since the production of useful furniture had become a boring reality, he began
to push the envelope of taste and tradition as he knew it. Speaking of his motivations
in the studio while making this transition, Artschwager has stated, “I had learned
that by then—things that are unthinkable, check ‘em out. That’s the chief way for
finding originality if originality is the target.” 10

In 1960, Artschwager sent off a few letters and slides to a handful of art dealers
who hung a shingle in New York at the time. Unconnected and middle-aged, he achieved a success that would be the dream of every young artist when Ivan Karp,
who was working for Leo Castelli, immediately wrote back proposing to include him
in a group exhibition. The ingenue artisan-artist became an international sen-
ation in less than three easy steps. Artschwager would work with Castelli for the
next twenty-five years.

What is compelling about this chronology to an art historian is not its reality as
a career fantasy but the fact that it threw Artschwager, the mature craftsman,
into a hothouse of young scene-makers such as Lee Bontecou, Jasper Johns, Roy
Lichtenstein, Marcel, Robert Rauschenberg, Frank Stella, and Andy Warhol, and
this in the formative years of the contemporary art market. These were legendary years at the Castelli Gallery, and Artschwager bubbled along, making and exhibiting idiosyncratic work that seemed to adapt like a chameleon to every current art dia-
logue without ever submitting to any particular school of thought. 11

Artschwager’s presence in the art world blurred all the set categories. His
pictures and objects sobered up Pop, lightened up Minimalism, and made Conceptual art something other than just a thinking man’s game. How could someone remain so methodically committed to the formal values of sculpture and painting during
three decades when they were considered déclassé, yet also keep his insouciant finger
so firmly on the pulse of an art culture that was being thoroughly upended by media
culture? He has maintained this in-advance and slightly out-of-sync position in the art
world ever since.

Artschwager’s paintings and sculptures were motivated by questions raised in
his own head both about art and about living in the present, about the moments
and values reflected in the newspaper he read at the kitchen table each morning.
In time, his work would come to examine that kitchen table, the chair he sat on, and
the plate off of which he ate. For Artschwager, this subjective axis was where art
just might appear, its issues addressed by what he could make with his own hands
and reckon with his own eyes. As for the viewer’s engagement with this process,
Artschwager made clear in his studio notebook that he was not indifferent to the
broader impact of his observations: “The art is what happens to the spectator by prior
arrangement of the artist.” 12 If you follow his thinking from work to work over the
years, it is uncanny how many times, and on how many levels, his decisions touched
the broader art dialogue while the journey remained clearly his own.

An anecdote Artschwager tells about how, at the age of forty, with a young
family to support, he found the license to commit his life to making what he calls
“useless objects” 13 could come from a playbook coauthored by Timothy Leary and
Marshall McLuhan: he was inspired by watching a children’s cartoon show on tele-
vision, a chance encounter that determined his life’s work.

There was a television program that gave me whispered instructions. It was
a children’s morning program of animated cartoons, moderated by a police-
man. He told about his son who would spend his time in the garden, nailing
boards together. Any kind of boards, just nailed together. Because of this
inscrutable anti-social behavior the father, in anger and in sorrow, decided
ded to send his son on summer camp. Well, it happens I had a lot of scrap
1/4-inch plywood. What came out was a nailed stack of plywood about the
size of a human figure, weighing about 40 pounds, hung from the
ceiling by a chain. This was one of the private works whose making filled
up my spare time. 14

That nailed stack of plywood was Portrait Zero (fig. 3), made around 1961 and still
standing as one of Artschwager’s most concisely brilliant reductions of his lifelong
formal painterly and sculptural concerns. This is a sculptural image of painting, a com-
poiste of image surrogatesthat occupy the realm of neither painting nor sculpture
but hang in midair like an aesthetic piñata begging the recognition and misapprehen-
sion of Clement Greenberg. This is Artschwager’s first work to introduce the picture
plane into the physical space occupied by sculpture. It is supreme, as in Suprematist,
and still
...
by exposing covert social and political agendas had confirmed Artschwager’s thoughts about subject matter, form, and the importance of making art as a mode of cultural claim-staking, as though he were on special assignment for Mr. Rogers.

Road to Damascus (1960; fig. 4), made around the same time as Portrait Zero, is one of Artschwager’s first mature drawings. It presents a man who appears to be seated with his arms under a table so broad that it fills the sheet of paper end to end, its edge reading as a horizon. Pinioned behind the table, the man looks as though he were under interrogation. Even more startling than the positioning of this figure is the fact that the artist has erased his eyes out of their sockets and off the page. The erasures read both as voids and as signs of force, as though his eyes had been blown away. The work’s title evokes the biblical story of the alpha apostle Paul, confronted by a vision of Christ on his way to Damascus. This persecutor of Christians was temporarily blinded by the encounter and experienced a complete change in his perspective on the world and in his sense of his life’s calling. While remaining a religious zealot, Paul became a follower of Christ rather than his foremost denouncer.

It is intriguing that Artschwager, who is not religious, should have attached a narrative of radical spiritual conversion to this early work. He appears to be referring to his own epiphany, the moment in which he became blind to the finely crafted furniture he was making and the truer vision it led him to in his work. Artschwager had come to the realization that art lay as much in the seeing as in the making—that it lay in one’s perspective on things, not just in craft. While he would continue to be an object-maker whose attention to detail was “fanatical,” he was determined that his future efforts would be applied to things to be looked at, to what he identified as the “useless” realm of art.

The image in Road to Damascus of a solitary, limbless figure pinned down by a boundless horizon also exemplifies the intimidatingly honest and empathetic tenor that would underlie Artschwager’s artistic practice from that moment on. While scientific in his formal inquiries, Artschwager has never given up a primarily humanistic approach to making art. Although he has fiercely fought to keep out inflections of the personal “I”—shunned in the wake of Abstract Expressionism, which was thought to have overdosed them—he has always been excruciatingly human, an accounting of the sobering isolation inherent in the individual’s confrontation with the world. Like the stoic work No (1961; fig. 5) by his peer Jasper Johns, to whom he has admitted a debt, Artschwager’s art harbors the universal vulnerabilities and banal realities of the human journey.
13. Portrait II, 1963
Formica on wood
65 x 25 x 15 in. (165.1 x 63.5 x 38 cm)

19. Triptych, 1963
Acrylic on wood and formica
38 x 144 x 1 ¼ in. (96.5 x 365.2 x 3.2 cm)
14. Counter II, 1965
Formica on wood, with metal turnstile
H 15 x W 48 x D 21 in (38.2 x 121.9 x 53.3 cm)

15. Seifi, 1966
Formica on wood
H 15 x W 28 x D 17% in (38.2 x 70.5 x 43.8 cm)
22. Destruction III, 1972
Acrylic on Celotex, with metal frames
74 × 88 in. (188 × 223.5 cm) overall

23. Destruction II, 1972
Acrylic on Celotex, with metal frame
40 × 48 in. (101.6 × 121.9 cm) overall
The forced calm of such observations was interrupted by Artschwager’s creation of a series of objects that updated his early work Portrait Zero, and its multiple picture planes, with a consideration of the invisible influence of time on matter. Journal II (1991; fig. 30) is a relief that hinges in the corner of a room, spreading out on both adjoining walls. Its left side is a sweep of rays, painted with a wood-grain pattern in grisaille, that rush into the room’s corner, where they appear to hit with force. There they transform into an assembly of planks, constructed not of wood but of Formica and rendered in color, that spays out on the wall to the right. A literal image of creation as a burst of moving atoms coming into form as matter, or alternately, read right to left, of matter transmuting into energy, the work draws our attention to the fact that the matter we see is only one of its moments in time, only a temporary arrangement of its molecules. The means by which Artschwager chose to engage this imposing concept, usually relegated to the stewardship of physicists and philosophers, is the highly accessible tool of comic innocence. In manifesting the aural resonance of comic book onomatopoeia, with its pows, blams, and splats, the work has a witty, exaggerated literalness, even while it physically embodies the abrupt disconnect between our intellectual and our physical experience of the world. Journal II inspired a number of shattering, splattering table and chair reliefs, such as Splatter Chair I (1992; see fig. 118), which punctuated Artschwager’s installations of this period with visual force. Along with these dramatic pieces, and in keeping with the oversized expectations of the 1980s art market, works such as Organ of Cause and Effect III (1986; see fig. 128) and Door II (1992; see fig. 130) took on a theatrical scale. If in the 1960s Artschwager’s work had been perceived as kitsch, tasteless, even vulgar, in the 1980s the consumer aspirations of the art world seemed to have caught up with him. His exhibitions with his dealer of these years, Mary Boone, had the aura of stage sets, and the sense of intimate reflection in his work of the previous decade was replaced by a sharp irony. In The Cave (If you lived here, you’d be home now) (1992; fig. 31) and other pieces Artschwager returned to the subject of the glamorous interior, now seen within frames and through mullions stylized with an exaggerated grisaille finish. He also continued to paint domestic interiors, but now they were animated by molten decorative patterning and infusions of color from pieces of Formica inset into the Celotex surface. Works such as Sitting and Not (1992; fig. 32) and Taj Mahal II (1997; see fig. 140) explore how imagination helps to bridge the gap between what we know and what we see. The mullions reinforce the viewer’s exclusion from images that emulate the luxury domestic settings familiar in advertising and travel and home-design publications.

In 1981, in the Hayden Gallery at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Artschwager created his first large-scale interactive sculptural installation, Janus III (Elevator) (see fig. 34), a chrome-and-Formica elevator cab with its own interior lighting. Visitors could enter, press buttons for up or down, and hear an audio track of rushing sound, like that of a moving elevator. He created variations on this work over the next few years, exhibiting them at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, in 1988 and at the Ludwig Museum, Cologne, which acquired the piece in 2002.

In the 1980s and ’90s, Artschwager took his furniture-inspired sculpture out of the museum and gallery context and into the world through a series of outdoor commissions, mediating human scale in built public environments. These austere, functional seating groups, made primarily in granite, were often complemented by live trees and natural settings, which counterbalanced their somber presence with living...
40. Bowl of Peaches on Glass Table, 1973
Acrylic on Celotex, with metal frame
19 1/2 x 25 in. (49.5 x 63.5 cm)

41. Rights of Man, 1991
Acrylic on Celotex, with painted wood frame
47 3/4 x 62 in. (121.2 x 157.5 cm)

42. Exclamation Point (Chartreuse), 2008
Plastic bristles on a mahogany core painted with latex
65 x 22 x 22 in. (165.1 x 55.9 x 55.9 cm)
122. *Table Proposed in the Presence of Enemies*, 1989
Wood, Formica, and aluminum
118 x 60 x 74 in. (300 x 152.4 x 188.1 cm)

123. *Organ of Cause and Effect III*, 1986
Formica and latex paint on plywood
118 x 65 1/4 x 46 in. (300 x 166 x 117 cm)
1923
Born on December 26 in Washington, D.C. His father is a botanist, and his mother is a painter
1931
Spends the winter in Munich with his sister and their mother, who is attending art classes at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste
1935
Family moves to Las Cruces, New Mexico, where Artschwager lives until going to college. Begins spending time at his father’s laboratory at the New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts and taking trips with his mother to the desert to draw
1941–43
Studies biology, chemistry, and mathematics at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York
1944
Drafted into the U.S. Army and suspends his studies. During his tour of duty in Europe, he is wounded in the Battle of the Bulge and reassigned to an administrative position in Frankfurt. Later works in counterintelligence in Vienna
1947–50
Returns to the United States and completes his BA at Cornell. Relocates to New York, where he studies with French painter Amédée Ozenfant and works as a door-to-door baby photographer
1950–53
Works as a bank clerk and a cabinetmaker, among other occupations. Opens a joinery workshop with his brother-in-law and begins making simple, well-crafted furniture
1953–57
Expands furniture-making activities and hires several workshop assistants. Attends life-drawing classes at night
1959
Exhibits landscape paintings at Art Directions Gallery in New York
1960–61
Begins making sculptures out of wood and Formica and paintings based on found photographs
1964
Work is introduced at Leo Castelli Gallery in New York, as part of a group exhibition with Christo, Alex Hay, and Robert Watts. Later that year, participates in a group exhibition with Roy Lichtenstein, James Rosenquist, Frank Stella, and Andy Warhol
1965
First one-person exhibition at Leo Castelli Gallery
1966
Kynaston McShine includes Artschwager’s work in Primary Structures, the first major exhibition of Minimal art, at the Jewish Museum in New York
1967
Develops “blps” while a visiting professor at the University of California, Davis. Uses rubberized hair in sculptures for the first time
1968
First one-person exhibition in Europe, at Konrad Fischer in Düsseldorf
1969
Closes commercial furniture workshop
1973
First one-person museum exhibition, at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago
1974
Participates in American Pop Art, at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. Begins work on the “Door Window Table Basket Mirror Rug” series of paintings and drawings, which he continues for the next three decades
1978
Spends six months in Hamburg as part of a residency program sponsored by the city council
1983
First exhibition at Mary Boone Gallery in New York. Begins work on Sitting/Stance, a public commission for the Battery Park City residential and commercial complex in Lower Manhattan
1988–89
Retrospective at the Whitney Museum; exhibition travels to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, the Palacio de Velázquez in Madrid, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, and the Städtische Kunsthalle in Düsseldorf
1990
Designs the stage set for a production of Dore Schary’s adaptation of Christopher Marlowe’s The Tragedial History of Doctor Faustus at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles
1990–91
Realizes the outdoor sculpture Generations for the Elvehjem Museum of Art at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Creates the first works in the series “Splatter Pieces”
1992
Makes first works in the series “Crates”
1993
Receives Skowhegan Award
1995
Receives Carnegie International Prize
2002
Designs facade for the gallery Georg Kargl BOX in Vienna, inspired by Adolf Loos’s 1908 designs for Vienna’s American Bar
2008
Designs, in collaboration with StudioMDA, a facade for the David Nolan Gallery in New York

Chronology
### Exhibition History

**One-person Exhibitions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Exhibition</th>
<th>Institution and Location</th>
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<td>Leo Castelli Gallery</td>
<td>New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>1968</td>
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<td>1975</td>
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<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Daniel Weinberg Gallery</td>
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<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Galerie Nons Ltd.</td>
<td>Hamburg, Germany</td>
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<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Jared Sable Gallery</td>
<td>Toronto, Canada</td>
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<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Leo Castelli Gallery</td>
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<tr>
<td>1979</td>
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<td>1982</td>
<td>Kunstverein Hamburg</td>
<td>Hamburg, Germany</td>
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<td>Morgan Gallery</td>
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<td>1987</td>
<td>Asher/Faux Gallery</td>
<td>Los Angeles, Calif.</td>
</tr>
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</tbody>
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**Poster for Zu Gast in Hamburg**: Richard Artschwager, Kunstverein Hamburg, Germany, 1978

**Arthur at work in his studio during his residency in Hamburg**: Germany, 1978

**Note to the reader**: An asterisk denotes a modest exhibition catalogue.
This catalogue was published on the occasion of the exhibition Richard Artschwager! curated by Jennifer R. Gross, Seymour H. Knox, Jr., Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, Yale University Art Gallery.

Whitney Museum of American Art
New York
October 25, 2012–February 3, 2013

Hammer Museum
Los Angeles
June 16–September 1, 2013

This exhibition is organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, in association with the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven.

Significant support for the Whitney’s presentation is provided by The Broad Art Foundation, Allison and Warren Kanders, Alice and Tom Tisch, and Mr. and Mrs. Harrison Augur.

This publication is made possible by a grant from the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. Additional support provided by Maura and Mark H. Resnick, Anna Marie and Robert F. Shapiro, and a Yale University Art Gallery endowment created with a challenge grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

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Whitney Museum of American Art
945 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10021
whitney.org

Yale
Yale University Press
302 Temple Street
P.O. Box 209040
New Haven, CT 06520
yalebooks.com/art

This publication was produced by the publications department at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York: Beth Huseman, interim head of publications; Beth Turk, associate editor; Anita Duquette, manager, rights and reproductions; Kiowa Hammons, rights and reproductions assistant; Brian Reese, publications assistant

Project manager: Beth Huseman
Editor: David Frankel
Proofreader: Susan Richmond
Indexer: Susan G. Burke

Designed by Daphne Geismar
Production by The Production Department
Set in Frutiger Next
Color separations by GHP, West Haven, CT
Printed and bound by Midas Printing, Hong Kong

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Gross, Jennifer R.
Richard Artschwager! / Jennifer R. Gross ; with contributions by Cathleen Chaffee, Ingrid Schaffner, Adam D. Weinberg.
pages cm
This catalogue was published on the occasion of the exhibition Richard Artschwager!, curated by Jennifer R. Gross, Seymour H. Knox, Jr., Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, Yale University Art Gallery.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 978-0-300-18531-7 (hardback)
N6537.A72A4 2012
709.2—dc23
2012019138

Cover: detail of Untitled (Diptych), 1963 (fig. 51); frontispiece: detail of Door, Mirror, Table, Basket, Rug, Window D, 1975 (fig. 134); pp. 46–47: detail of Destruction V, 1972 (fig. 23); p. 74: detail of Locations, 1969 (fig. 80); pp. 90–91: detail of Locations, 1969 (fig. 80); p. 98: detail of Chair/Chair, 1987–90 (fig. 105); pp. 126–27: detail of Description of a Table, 1964 (fig. 117); pp. 172–73: detail of Chair/Chair, 1987–90 (fig. 105).

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