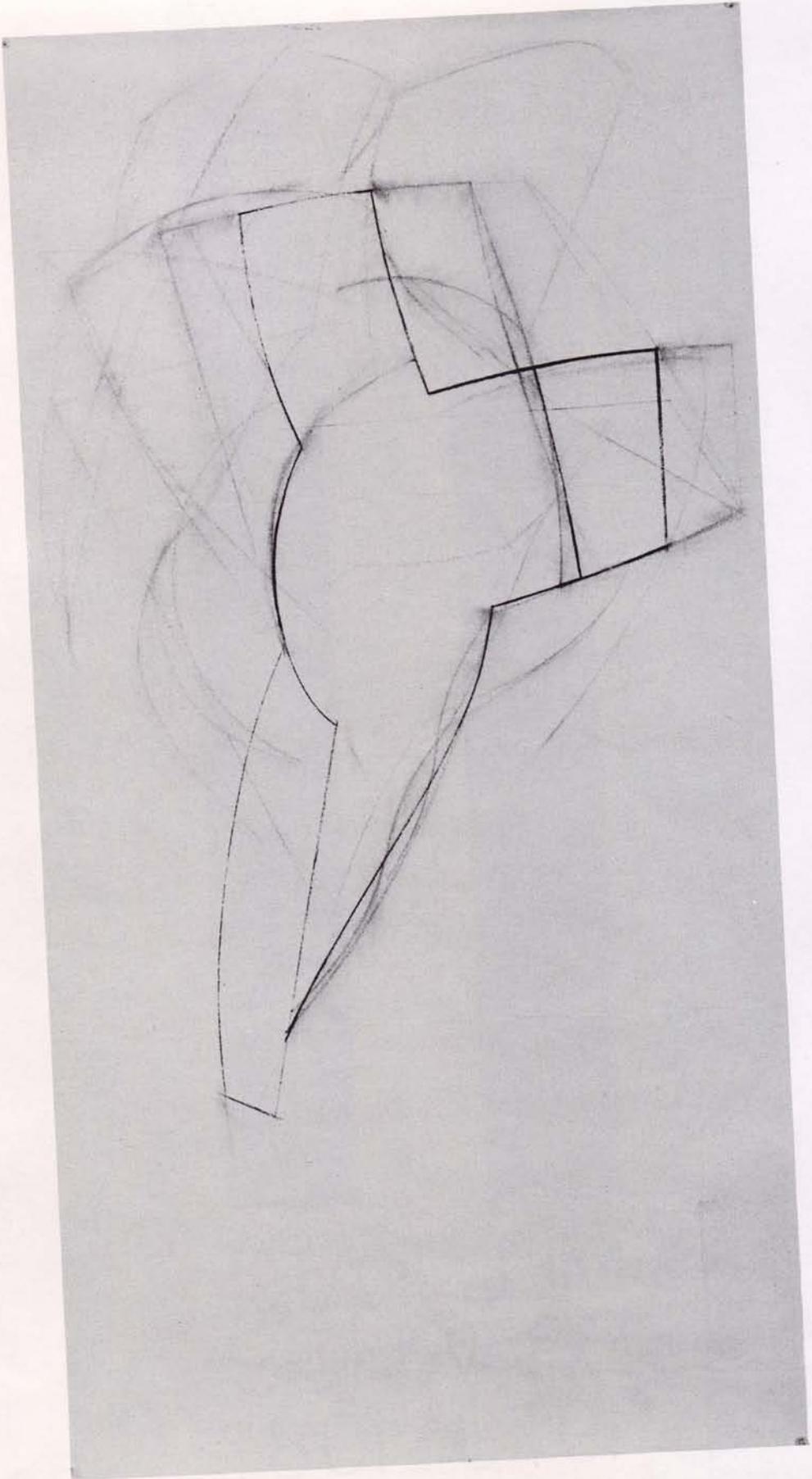




MEL KATZ
DRAWINGS
1973 · 1981



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MARYLHURST COLLEGE
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INTRODUCTION BY PAUL SUTINEN

CATALOG DESIGN BY SCOTT McINTIRE

The Gym exhibition program is sponsored by the Art Division of Marylhurst College for Lifelong Learning, an accredited Liberal Arts college. Kay Slusarenko, Chairperson, Terri Hopkins, Exhibitions Director, Paul Sutinen, Program Assistant.

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Mel Katz is represented by The Fountain Gallery of Art in Portland, Oregon; and the Linda Farris Gallery in Seattle, Washington.

It isn't often that one has a chance to look back over a period of years and follow another person's train of thought, line of inquiry, or method of working. This exhibition tried to do just that.

It presents drawings by Mel Katz from the years 1973 to 1981. It is in effect, a limited retrospective. It is a look back at one aspect of Katz' work — the drawings as they evolved over a seven year period.

By setting these parameters we are trying to encourage focus and a depth of understanding of drawings, which with few exceptions have not been previously exhibited. They are a partial record of the development of Katz's ideas for other work. They are also innately interesting products and by-products of that process.

MEL KATZ AND DRAWING AS PLANNING

BY PAUL SUTINEN

In art the elements of "drawing" are line, shape and composition. The elements of "painting" are color and the tactility of the surface. In "sculpture" there are three dimensions and concomitant involvement with form, weight and volume. When one says that a painting "shows a good sense of drawing" one is saying that the painter handles line and/or shape and/or composition well. Oftentimes these elements are more important in an object called a "painting" than the painting elements (color and surface).

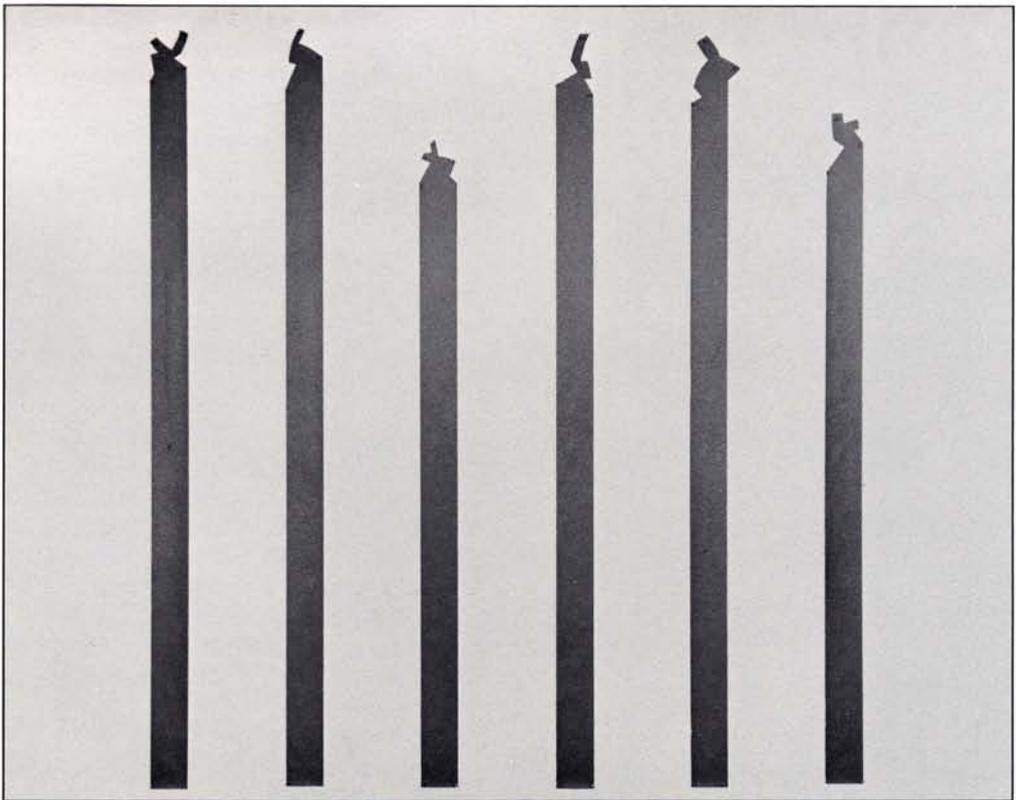
Throughout history drawing has been a planning medium. Metaphorically one "draws" ideas out of the mind. In writing the planning out of thoughts is called "outlining" or "sketching" and one can "draft" an architectural plan or an essay. Through drawing the abstract ideas of the mind can be made concrete very quickly. One can see what one was thinking about and find the holes in the logic, correct misproportions, or even find that the great idea in the hazy ruminations of the mind completely dissolves when put onto paper.

The "old masters" hardly ever made drawings for any purpose other than planning or recording facts of face and place (the sketch was the snapshot of the time) for later reference in figuring

the details of paintings. Drawings were not made of "noble" materials for "noble" purposes. Drawing was the low man on the totem pole of art. But within the last century art changed. The hierarchy of art mediums disintegrated and artists have made drawings for their own sake, giving drawings the same care in "finish" that their paintings might have. Drawings became end products to be exhibited and collected.

Mel Katz says that he "used to do drawing" earlier in his career, meaning that he made drawings with a sense of final finish. His early paintings were made in the brushy abstract-expressionist mode that held sway in the 1950s and early 1960s. Abstract expressionist painting stressed the immediacy of working things out on canvas as one went along and pre-planning was generally to be avoided. The drawings that Katz did at this time were works on paper combining line and wash. They were complete for themselves and were not plans for future projects or studies for the problems of paintings. But in the last decade or so Katz's work and working methods have changed and so his drawing has changed too.

Katz no longer makes drawings for their own sake. He uses drawings for the



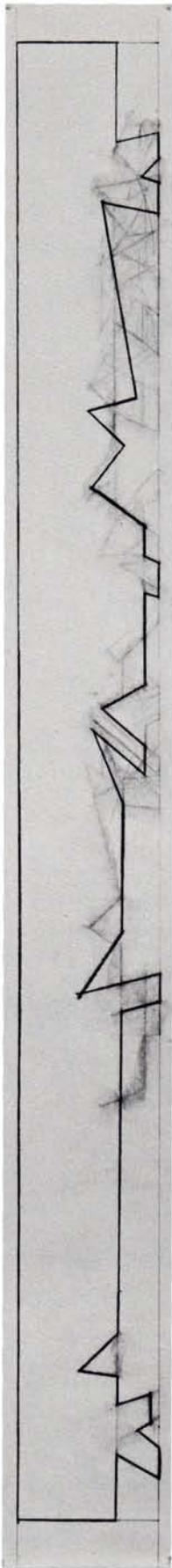
classical purpose of thinking and planning, but that does not mean that the drawing is just a rudimentary map. The resulting works on paper have an identity and strength of their own.

In 1966 Katz's ideas about painting shifted. The small curvilinear shapes previously found inside the rectangles of stretched canvas expanded into large bulbous or ribbon-like forms which no longer stayed within the bounds of a rectangular painting. Within a few years the rectangle in fact was nowhere to be found. Katz was making "shaped" paintings in which the forms painted on the support (no longer canvas) determined the outer shape of the painting. By the late 1960s Katz had developed a new support, a flat sandwich of hardboard backing from formica sheets and fiberglass. The drawing that Katz did to plan these works was made directly on the surface of the hardboard. Once Katz found the outer shape that he liked for a particular piece it was cut out and painted submerging the drawing. But problems with the construction of the hardboard/fiberglass support led Katz to other materials which in turn led him to a new way of drawing, a way that leads to the works in this exhibition.

In 1971 Katz began a series of paintings that he calls the *White Series*. For

these works the support was cast polyurethane supported with fiberglass. To make these works molds had to be built and the pieces were cast with the assistance of professional plastics fabricators. The technology necessitated pre-planning because the cast shapes could not be modified. "I had to know what I was doing," he says. In the planning process Katz made full scale drawings for the works sometimes over six and a half feet tall. The quality of these drawings in vine charcoal on white butcher paper was transferred somewhat to the finished piece. To the smooth pristine white plastic surfaces of the *White Series* pieces Katz added a few incidents of black pastel line continuing the actual curving edges of the piece onto the surface. These lines hinted at the illusion of space as if the faces of these pieces were made up of overlapping shapes.

The next group of Katz's works, the *Green Pieces* and the *Grey Pieces* made in 1974 also included line drawing, but with greater connection to the actual outside shape. This small group of works, made on a smaller scale than the *White Series* (not over three feet in any direction) grew out of an understanding of form gained from his working process. In making the *White Series* Katz



had made templates from tagboard and found that the leftover scraps were often interesting shapes in themselves. He fastened these shapes together with ordinary brass paper fasteners to make lively larger shapes that had a flying feeling when they were exhibited on the walls of the Fountain Gallery in 1975.

The *Green* and *Grey* pieces were developed through free swinging drawings in charcoal on butcher paper, the method for most of Katz's planning drawings. These drawings reveal Katz's thinking process. The outlines of *Green Piece* emerge from a tangle of rubbed out charcoal lines — the residue of decision. One can see how the outside shape is developed from a combination of other shapes combining curves and straight lines. The process seems to be: draw a line, draw another line, make a shape, make another shape, connect the shapes, correct the shapes, feel for proportion, rub out, correct more, continue the process until it feels right. In writing this process would be called "making a first draft" and "editing". The lines drawn on the surface of the end-product *Green Piece* are placed differently, but still strongly suggest that the whole piece can be analyzed into separate parts. Interestingly the *Green Piece* is reversed from the original drawing.

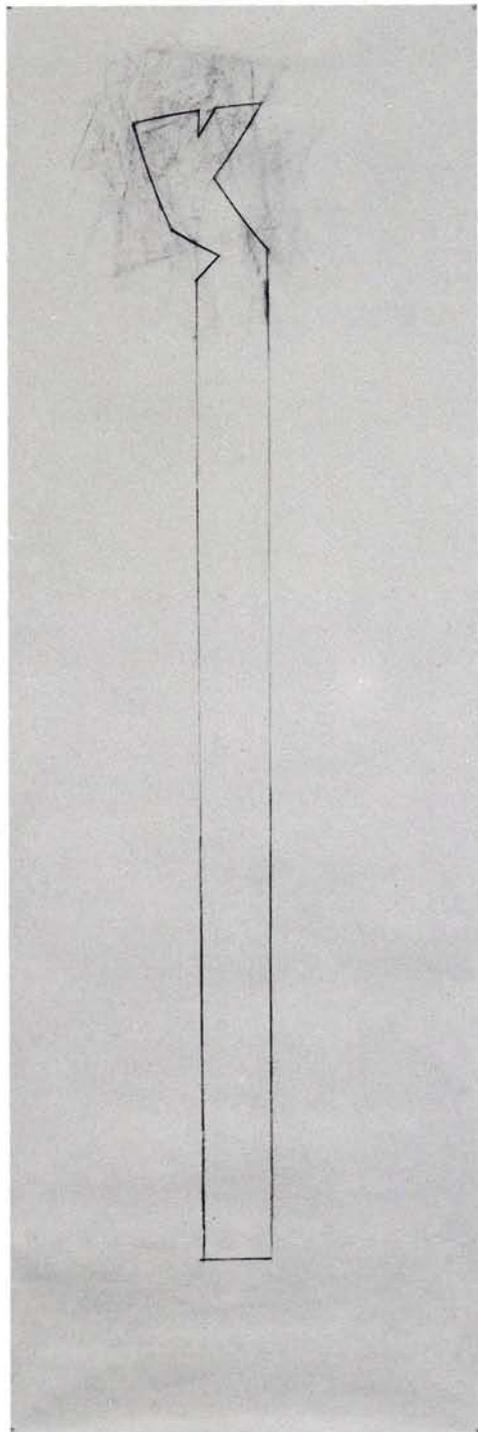
In the next series called the *Pre-Posts* (1975) a columnar stalk appears between or below the more complicated shaped portions. Evolving from these works were the various groups of the *Post Series* (1976-1978), seven to nine foot tall works, each consisting of a narrow shaft with rectilinear parallel sides evolving at the top into an oddly shaped finial. (Though these works are called *Posts* they still hang on the wall as do all of Katz's works to date.) In the *Posts* Katz's curvy shapes are gone as is the line drawing on the surface. But color returns flooding the front surface of the *Post*. The top shape, just a bit wider than the shaft, seems to have been made in a few short crisp cuts (though actually the piece was originally fabricated whole and not modified).

Somewhere along the line the drawings for these pieces began to be made with a few cuts. Katz isn't sure when he began to draw his charcoal along the edges of cardboard templates instead of using freehand drawing in his planning

process, but it was sometime during the evolution of the *Post Series* (though he had used templates earlier when drawing on the plastic surfaces of his pieces). He began to rapidly cut freehand lines into cardboard with a knife, "making my own french curves," he says. Again the process of making pieces influenced the making of the drawing and then the drawing determines the finished piece — making templates for fabrication of the pieces leads to making templates for development of the drawing. (Making patterns, drawing around them and cutting out shapes also related to Katz's upbringing. His father worked in his uncle's tailoring business and Katz remembers patterns being laid out and stacks of material being cut.)

Since 1979 Katz has been having his vertical shapes cut from wood. Instead of outlined shapes seen against the wall, the first wooden pieces, the *Sawtooth Series*, were notched along the front in a regularly repeated motif and given a thin single layer of color on the front side only. Because of the repeated motif only short sections of template were needed for their manufacture. Recent works in progress do not use repeated motifs but are conceived as bolder carvings still bandsawed along the face of the wood beam (and some continue the shape around the work to the wall side). When Katz found it necessary to have a better conception of how the wooden pieces would look he did a couple large scale drawings that portray ideas in three dimensions. They were studies to see if his conceptualizing was on the right track and once he determined that the scale of wooden post was correct he returned to developing ideas as full-scale outline drawings via the draw-it-on, look-at-it, rub-it-out method that has been his way of thinking things through for the last decade.

This is the first time that these drawings have been publicly shown. Though the drawings in this exhibition are, in a sense, steps in the process of making other artworks, they assert themselves apart from that process. They are finished drawings without involving concerns about "finish". Their strength lies in the residual information they carry about their own making as well as the grace of the final lines. They are direct, purposeful, not refined. What they are about is the rugged nuts and bolts of thinking.



- COVER
- "Drawings For Wafer Series", 1981, 96" x 9"
- INSIDE COVER
- "Drawing For Green Piece", 1979, 44" x 28"
- PAGE 5
- "Templates for Post Series #2", 1977, 96" to
108" x 5"
- PAGE 6
- "Drawing for Wood Post Series #1", 1980, 96"
x 9"
- PAGE 7
- "Drawing for Post Series #1", 1976, 92" x 10"
- BACK PAGE
- "Drawing for Post Series #1", 1980, 96" x 9"

DIMENSIONS OF DRAWINGS ARE SAME AS ACTUAL WORK.

