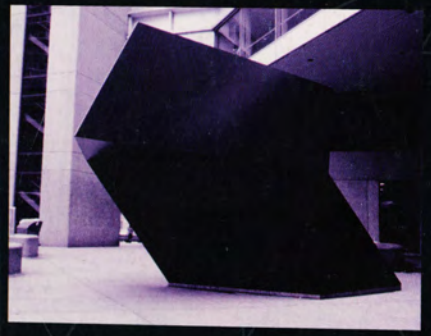
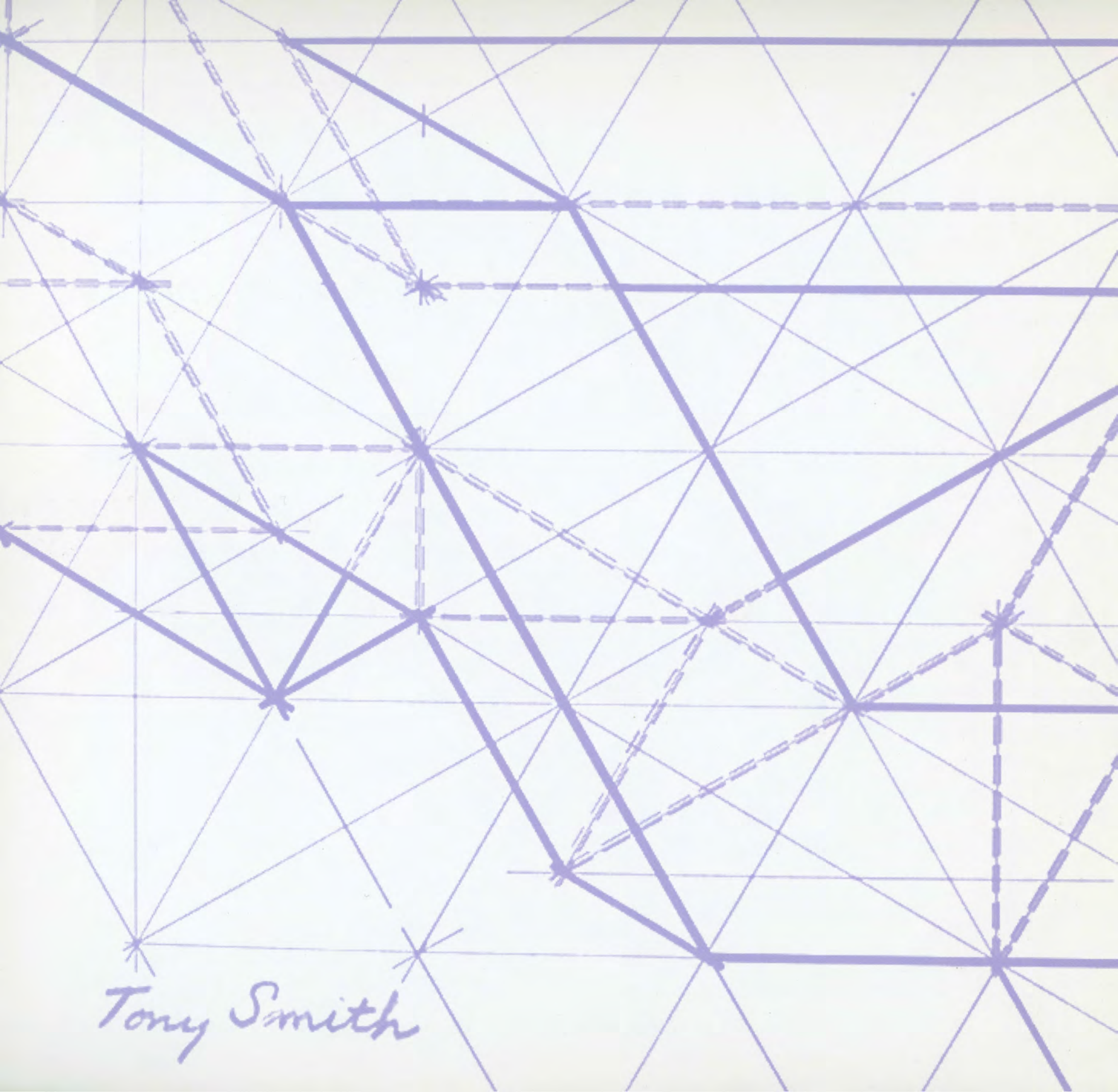
TRACING TONY SMITH'S TAU


Tony Smith

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Curated by

William C. Agee
Evelyn Kranes Kossak Professor of Art History, Hunter College

with

Rachael Grygorcewicz, Barbara Rockenbach and Samantha Springer
MA Candidates in Art History, Hunter College
and
Katy Rogers and Sharon Suchma
MA in Art History, Hunter College, 2004

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The Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Art Gallery
at Hunter College
New York City

Tony Smith, 1967. Photograph by David Gahr

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FOREWORD

In 1978 I invited Tony Smith back to teach in our graduate program. He had taken time off as his health was failing. He was incalculably influential on so many of our lives—both personally and artistically—and I knew just his presence would be inspirational to all of us. To mark the occasion, a dozen of his closest colleagues organized a luncheon for him at Le Petite Ferme, then a small restaurant on Lexington Avenue with a pleasant garden. It was a most memorable event for all who attended. Tony and I continued to have private lunches together until he passed away in 1980. At one of these I mentioned to him how thankful I was for his help and advice and how I knew many of my generation on the faculty felt the same way. I wondered what we could ever do to thank him—for many of us he helped secure teaching jobs, exhibitions and fellowships. In his most casual speaking manner he instructed me: "It's simple. You just do the same for the next generation. That's how it works."

When a few years later I was asked by then President of Hunter, Donna Shalala, to advise the college on the purchase of art for Hunter's new buildings, I saw this as a chance to memorialize this ideal expressed by Tony Smith. For me, *Tau*, forever marks the gift of one generation to the next, and the duty we have as artists and teachers, so beautifully and completely exemplified by Tony Smith, to pass on these gifts and to assist those who follow us. In this regard, I consider the placing of *Tau* at the very entrance to Hunter, as one of our most important accomplishments.

I wish to thank our colleague William C. Agee, Kossak Professor of Art History, and his five assistant curators MA candidates and recent graduates of Hunter's Masters in Art History Program—Rachel Grygorcewicz, Barbara Rockenbach, Katy Rogers, Samantha Springer and Sharon Suchma—for this most instructive exhibition. Bill Agee conceived the show and enthusiastically pursued the development of the idea from its inception, inspiring and working closely with his fellow curators who added immeasurably to the interest this exhibition and catalogue evokes in Smith's many-faceted career. They were ably assisted by Gallery Curator Tracy L. Adler. In addition they received valuable information and advice from current and past faculty who were all colleagues of Tony Smith: Robert Swain, Doug Olson, Vincent Longo, and Jim Shepperd. Special thanks to Professor Emeritus Robert Huot, who had the foresight to create the original video of the installation and dedication ceremony of *Tau*. We wish to thank Jane Smith for all her support in mounting this exhibition and for her assistance in many matters over the years. We are also grateful to the Herbert Ferber Foundation and the Wolf Kahn and Emily Mason Foundation for providing needed financial assistance in the mounting of this exhibition and the publication of this catalogue. We are, as always, indebted as well to the Friends of the Hunter College Art Galleries for their support.

We extend our appreciation for the restoration of *Tau* to a number of people whose assistance was vital. Within the college thanks are especially due to President Jennifer Raab who insisted on the necessity to complete this project and aided us in seeing it through. Also crucial to the restoration were Vice President Len Zinnanti and his staff and Director of Facilities Danny Velez. Outside the college we are indebted to Sarah Auld of the Estate of Tony Smith, without whose persistence and constant advice the restoration might not have been completed. We also wish to thank Alfred and Don Lippincott, who provided important technical advice and the firm of Albert Pearlman, Inc., for completing the work to restore *Tau* to its original beauty. We are grateful as well to the Tony Smith Estate for providing financial assistance in the restoration of this most meaningful sculpture which graces the entrance to Hunter College.

Sanford Wurmfeld

Phyllis and Joseph Caroff Professor of Fine Art, Hunter College

Tony Smith with Hunter staff

PREFACE

This exhibition celebrates the twentieth anniversary of the installation of Tony Smith's monumental sculpture, *Tau*, at the southwest corner of 68th Street and Lexington Avenue, the focal point of Hunter College. The sculpture is a monument to the arts at Hunter, indeed, it celebrates all that is best about Hunter, its enormous energy and intellectual ferment, the creativity and achievement of the students and faculty alike. Smith taught at Hunter for almost twenty years, from 1961 until his death in 1980. There is good reason to believe that his teachings and contact with faculty and students contributed in no small measure to the emergence of his mature sculpture in the early 1960s, of which *Tau* is a prime example. We can also see *Tau* as a proud symbol of Hunter College's long and distinguished contribution to New York, a visible, permanent embodiment of its commitment to improving the quality of life in the city. *Tau* is a major monument of modern art, certainly one of the great public works of art in New York, or any other city, for that matter. It stands as a tribute to the worldwide distinction and recognition achieved over half a century and more by Hunter College and its Department of Art.

Yet for all its imposing presence, few at Hunter outside the Art Department know much if anything about the work or the artist who made it. Tony Smith and his art are internationally acclaimed, and both artist and his work hold a secure, if still little understood, place in the history of modern art. Therefore this exhibition is dedicated to informing the Hunter and broader community about Tony Smith, an exceptional man and artist, and *Tau*, an exceptional work of art. The exhibition and catalogue trace the genesis of *Tau*, how and why *Tau* came to be at Hunter College, how Smith and his art developed, where *Tau* stands in our history of art, what it led to, its place, its influences, its importance and most of all, how the extraordinary power and beauty of *Tau* came to be. We hope this investigation will serve its intended purpose of increasing our understanding of the artist and his work that graces this small plaza at Hunter. In order to provide ongoing information about Smith and *Tau*, we have now permanently installed a plaque as a source for Hunter faculty and students, as well as the community. The 2004 restoration of the work, its retrieval from a decline in its condition over the last few years to its original glory, also warrants celebration through the exhibition.

The exhibition has been prepared under my supervision by five Hunter graduate students, all candidates or recent graduates of the Masters program in Art History. They are Rachael Grygorcewicz, Barbara Rockenbach, Katy Rogers, Samantha Springer and Sharon Suchma. They have worked long and hard with enthusiasm, skill and commitment. They have been in name and in fact the curators of the show, selecting the works to be included, writing the primary essays, chronology, and bibliography for the catalogue, as well as overseeing the installation and design of the catalogue. In every sense, this is their show.

On behalf of this group, I wish to thank first and foremost Jennifer Raab, President of Hunter College, for her concern and interest in *Tau*, indeed, for her deep interest and appreciation of the fine arts at Hunter and for her enthusiastic support and assistance throughout the project. We are grateful to the Tony Smith Estate for their financial support towards the restoration of the sculpture. Sanford Wurmfeld, Chair of the Art Department and Director of the Hunter College Art Galleries, endorsed and supported the exhibition from the start and added much vital information. Tracy L. Adler, Curator of the Galleries, and herself a distinguished graduate of the Hunter MA program, was instrumental in the preparation of the exhibition and the catalogue. Her guidance and assistance has been crucial at every turn, and her gifts and diligence as an editor vastly improved all of our essays. Seth Pauley provided continuing and enormously skillful assistance and advice in editing our essays and we are grateful to him for this vital contribution. Alex Roy, Senior College Laboratory Technician, assisted the editing of video documentation.

Jane Smith, Tony Smith's widow, deserves thanks for her continued support and encouragement. Sarah Auld, Director of the Tony Smith Estate, provided vital assistance and information at all stages of this project and we owe her a particular debt of gratitude. We also appreciate the participation of Matthew Marks Gallery and Mitchell-Innes & Nash. Old friends and colleagues of the artist, among them Sanford Wurmfeld, Vincent Longo, Robert Swain and Jim Shepperd, shared invaluable insights about Smith and his work which greatly benefited us. Joan Pachner, the leading authority on Smith, has been an unstinting, generous source of information and guidance throughout the project. Anne Finkelstein designed the catalogue with her usual skill, for which we are also grateful. Rebecca Quaytman and Mrs. Fran Scoppettone graciously invited us into their homes, designed by Smith, and kindly shared their recollections and knowledge of these projects. Finally, we must thank the lenders: Antonia Smith Robinson, Jim Shepperd, The Tony Smith Estate, and Annette and Robert Swain, who allowed us to borrow their works on which the exhibition is dependent. We are grateful to them for their generosity.

William C. Agee
Evelyn Kranes Kossak Professor of Art History, Hunter College

TONY SMITH AND HIS TIMES William C. Agee

Tony Smith's monumental sculpture *Tau* (pl. 30), conceived in 1961-62, constructed and installed in 1984, stands alone, a solitary beacon on a busy corner in New York.[1] Although it is at the hub of Hunter College, few know anything about it or the man who made it. There is something familiar about this, as if his legacy has come full circle, for before Smith (1912-1980) came to national prominence in the 1960s he was unknown beyond a small circle of colleagues and friends. His rise to fame was meteoric; he went from obscurity in 1966 to the lead story and cover of *Time* magazine in October 1967 (fig. 1). This made it seem, incorrectly, as if his work had also come from nowhere, having blossomed overnight, as *Time* reported it.[2] And who was he, exactly? *Time* described him as formerly a "minor" architect, and "Sunday painter of geometric abstractions," a "semiprofessional Irishman," who lived not in New York, but in South Orange, New Jersey, of all places.[3] Faint praise, indeed. For all his sudden fame, the body of his work was unknown and misunderstood. Today, almost forty years later, little has changed.

Yet Tony Smith was a major American artist who changed the landscape of modern art in ways we are just coming to recognize, let alone understand. He had a history—a long history as a serious artist that we can now trace in detail. True, he worked in three media, a rarity; his output in all three was small, but highly significant, reminding us that for certain things, a few is enough. And, in fact, he was unusually, even fiercely independent, making him seem to stand apart and alone; and he had been isolated, early in life, quarantined by illness and separated from his family when he was four until the age of ten, an isolation that no doubt affected his character and creative development. However, far from being an isolated figure in our history, Smith was very much a man of his times, an artist with a distinctive past that is only now recognized as having true continuity. For all his independence he was an artist who has an important place in the history of modern art, as an active participant and often as a pioneer in the major currents of his times. Further, his art, we now understand, was marked by the wholeness and integration of three interrelated media, all equal parts of Tony Smith as, above all else, a single entity, an artist, of high stature and achievement.

Smith was born in 1912, the same year as Jackson Pollock, one of his oldest and closest friends, placing him squarely in the generation of the Abstract Expressionists, all born between 1900 and 1915. If Smith was late to reach full maturity and achieve recognition—he did not have his first one-man show until 1966, when he was in his mid-fifties—this was not unprecedented. Hans Hofmann (1880-1966), an artist whom Smith knew well in the 1940s, did not begin to paint seriously until the mid-1930s, and only reached his peak after 1958, when he was in his late seventies. Like Hofmann, from whom he may well have taken a lead, Smith needed to let his peers reach and work out their statements before he could realize his own. Hofmann worked in many styles and was thought to lack focus, but we can now see his—and Smith's—art as the multi-faceted expression of a large talent that was not restricted to one medium.

There was something classical about this, as if Smith were akin to a modern Renaissance man who explored multiple disciplines, not surprising since he had received a rigorous Jesuit education that shaped and fueled his prodigious intellect and learning. His Jesuit training taught him a sense of men and artists serving the Church in a multitude of ways, not limited to a single field. For example, he later observed that he knew Bernini was a great architect as well as a sculptor, and that certain people were artists, who happened to do many things.[4] Nor was his training in the arts unusual. He had been exposed to older art in his early years by his cultured and prosperous family, and by the mid-1930s, he was taking classes at the Art Students League, the fundamental starting point for many artists of his generation. There he studied anatomy with George Bridgeman, drawing with George Grosz, and painting with Vaclav Vytlacil, instructors with varied approaches that would have in good part shaped Smith's aesthetic directions. From Bridgeman he would have learned classical drawing methods based on close study of the body and its movements; from Grosz, an old German expressionist and dadaist, he would have assimilated a painterly art based on inner states of mind, feeling and being; Vytlacil, an early proponent of non-objective abstraction and member of the American Abstract Artists group, would have demonstrated the possibilities of non-referential abstraction, built on a clear and firm structural foundation. In a real sense, these are at the heart of the very qualities we find in *Tau*, conceived some thirty years later. For *Tau* is based on classical, rational proportions, a massive grouping of geometric shapes, yet with a presence whose internal movements suggest those of a body in dynamic and expressive motion. His early interest as a very young man in Jay Hambidge's enormously influential book *Dynamic Symmetry,* which proposed classical canons and ratios of root rectangles as the basis of painting, and had been in wide circulation since 1919, also connects Smith with an earlier generation of artists, the pioneering modernists.[5]

1. Cover of *Time* magazine. October 13, 1967

2. Untitled, 1933. Oil on canvasboard, 8 7/8 x 6 7/8 in. Collection Daniela Frua de Angeli Rivetti

3. *Die*, 1962. Steel, oiled finish, 72 x 72 x 72 in. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

To see the interconnection and continuity within Smith's art we need only look at the pointillist cube in Untitled from 1933 (fig. 2) and follow its evolution into the 1962 *Die* (fig. 3), the work by which he first gained attention, and even notoriety. This sculpture, an icon of sixties art, is a steel cube, six feet in dimension. To many, it is devoid of human reference, an embodiment of all the negative criticism surrounding Minimalist art. Smith, one of the first, if not the first artist to use an industrial fabricator, had famously ordered the piece by telephone, making it seem as if the work had been done by idle whim, absent of thought and feeling. But the 1933 painting makes it clear that the possibilities of a pure geometric shape, here specifically a cube, had intrigued him for thirty years and that the idea behind *Die* had been worked out long before. So, too, critics of *Die*, who saw it as the end of art, have been unaware that the piece evolved from a smaller, preliminary version, known as *Black Box* (1962; fig. 4), whose format had been suggested by a small index card file box that intrigued him in the office of his friend and colleague, Eugene Goossen, then the chair of the Hunter Art Department. As he considered the larger version that became *Die*, Smith understood its six foot extension as paralleling the reach of the Vitruvian man in Leonardo's famous drawing, the most human of all measurements and references. This measurement of scale involves the reality of man, in its most fundamental sense, and therefore is deeply humanistic in intent and meaning. It explains why Smith famously said about *Die* that he was making neither a monument nor an object.[6] Nor was this simply an arcane classical reference, for it points to vital concerns of the modern artist. It suggests, for example, Willem de Kooning's pointed remark that the idea of Cubist and Futurist space seemed irrelevant to him—all he needed was the space around him, the space marked by his extended arm and hand—a concept put into practice in several paintings of the late 1940s.[7] Or consider the circle paintings of Kenneth Noland, done between 1958 and 1963, many of which are six feet square, the same unit of measure, indicating the reach, touch and presence of man. Smith's enlargement of a smaller, common object into an outsized image even finds parallels in Pop Art, also emerging in the early sixties, as in Claes Oldenburg's proposed monuments for Central Park in New York which included a giant hotdog or slice of pizza enlarged to monumental scale. If these references are not enough, then we can consider the multiple references of the very word, *Die*, to see just how fraught with meanings and references this supposedly blank piece really is.[8]

In the mid-1930s, Smith made other paintings, such as Untitled (c.1934-36; pl. 1), composed of strong, clear and overlapping geometric shapes and rich black coloration. These, too, are the very elements he preferred throughout his life, and that appear later in his work from the sixties, both in sculptures such as *Tau* and also in large scale abstract paintings (pl. 20). We can look still further into the 1960s by comparing Smith's staircase painting, Untitled, of c.1936 (fig. 5) with the abstract illusionism that marked the painting of Ron Davis and Al Held. Smith's paintings of the 1930s suggest an awareness of Mondrian, Malevich and the abstract artists of the Bauhaus, all constructivist artists that can be seen as the progenitors of Smith's approach to art. Smith, like most artists of his generation, was educating himself at the newly opened Museum of Modern Art in New York. There, the permanent collections and textbook exhibitions were a running seminar that informed countless artists, then and now, about the history of modern art. The Museum was founded on the Bauhaus principle of the interrelation and equality of all the arts, of architecture and design as well as painting and sculpture, all understood as part of a single, concerted impulse to transform the moral and visual basis of the world around us. It was all art, all connected as one, a credo that deeply affected

4. *Black Box*, 1962. Steel, oiled finish, 22 ½ x 33 x 25 in. Private Collection

5. Untitled, c. 1936. Oil on canvasboard, 8 x 10 in. Private Collection

6. *Scoppettone House*, 1952. Interior view of trusses.
Photograph by Sharon Suchma

7. *Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock and Tony Smith*, 1951.
Photograph by Hans Namuth

8. Jackson Pollock, *Blue Poles*, 1952.
Enamel and aluminum paint with glass on canvas, 82 7/8 x 191 5/8 in.
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Smith and that surely reinforced his Jesuit education, doubtless impacting his art and thinking, then and throughout his life.[9]

With a nascent interest in architecture and design coupled with his grounding in abstract painting, it is not surprising that in 1937 he enrolled in the New Bauhaus in Chicago. He stayed only a year, but there he would have absorbed further lessons in abstract art and its possibilities. It started him on a career in architecture, with mixed and inconsistent results, until he finally gave it up out of frustration in 1953. His own work was shaped to a large extent by the immense influence of Frank Lloyd Wright with whom he worked in the late thirties. Wright was something of a father figure for Smith, who deeply admired the visionary genius and the huge ambition of Wright, and who showed him a new way of thinking about the country and the world, on a large and expansive scale. From Wright he learned the possibilities of modular systems, a way of organizing the organic patterns and structures that were the very foundations of the natural world. The free flowing organicism of Wright, coupled with the rigorous structures and modules of Le Corbusier informed much of Smith's own architecture; we can see this combination in the Fred Olsen house he designed in 1953 in Guilford, Connecticut. Wright's architecture, its insistence on a deep connection with nature, was certainly key to the development of Smith's own sense of the organic structure underlying all nature and art, beliefs that he expanded in his lengthy manuscript *The Pattern of Organic Life in America*, written between 1943 and 1945.

But perhaps most importantly, Smith's work with Wright instilled a deep sense of a work of art—a house or anything else—as something built, something constructed—almost literally with one's own hands, a trait first developed by working with his father, an engineer who manufactured water works. A likely first impression of *Tau* is of something built, constructed as an architect builds a house, and while Smith made a clear distinction between sculpture and architecture, the massiveness of *Tau* and the other sculpture suggests the presence, scale and extension of something with its roots in an architectural past. Even more specific to *Tau* (the title refers to the T cross, and the nineteenth letter of the Greek alphabet), we find the same T-shaped support structure in at least one of his architectural projects, the Scoppettone house in Irvington, New York, built in 1952 (fig. 6).

Smith met painters such as Fritz Bultman and Gerald Kamrowski at the New Bauhaus, a place Smith understood to be as much a school of painting as of architecture. Through them he expanded his circle of painter friends after settling in New York in 1945. He became closely associated with Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman, the artists in whom Smith most deeply believed (fig. 7). Smith's romantic, Irish and visionary spirit, and his wide ranging intellect and learning fit perfectly with the mood of the 1940s and the emerging Abstract Expressionist group. He was widely admired and respected,

and he became something of a mentor to Pollock, Newman and Rothko. He knew their work well, bought it when he could and installed it, as well as prodded and encouraged them. His presence was invaluable to their development; but it was as if Smith was living through them and it came at the expense of realizing his own artistic vision. His own sensibility took years to ferment and clarify, to fuse the two apparently contrasting sides of him, the romantic visionary that saw art as something vast, "entering the world of the mind and spirit and light," with the literal approach of the architect, that understood rational systems and art as something built.[10] This could happen only after his friends had worked out and expanded their own art statements. Nor was it was easy for him to develop an abstract geometric art in the midst of the predominantly painterly and expressionist art of the 1940s.

9. Untitled Sculptures, 1953-1955. Mixed media, Tony Smith Estate, New York

The turning point for Smith came in 1953-55 during his stay in Germany, where he had gone to accompany his wife Jane, who was pursuing a singing career. Getting away from his tight circle of friends and their mutual dependence freed Smith to pursue his own art independently. So, too, away from New York and the dominant mode of expressionism, Smith felt emboldened to explore a more hard-edged geometric art, especially in Germany where the heritage of the Bauhaus was still alive.

Of special importance was the independence it afforded from Pollock, the towering figure of his generation whose imprint every artist had to define for himself and work through, just as earlier artists had had to come to grips with and work through Cézanne and Picasso. Smith had last seen Pollock in 1953, after he helped Pollock get started in 1952 on his last great and truly major painting, *Blue Poles* (fig. 8). Smith seemed to understand this was the effective end of Pollock (who died in 1956 but did little painting in the last two years of his life) as a serious, let alone dominant, artist; it was as if he had seen his good friend through to the conclusion. By leaving for Germany he could now be free of Pollock, free to move into his own maturity.

Pollock's death brought on a major reassessment of art, a consideration of just where art and painting stood, and where it might go thereafter. Allan Kaprow's seminal text on "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," published in October 1958 (*Art News*), best defined the situation.[11] Kaprow believed that in the wake of Pollock, to fulfill his possibilities, the next step was for artists to move into three dimensions, into the vast, physical world around us; to best do this, younger artists will take advantage of all media, and no longer be known as painters, sculptors or dancers, but simply as artists, exploring the full range of possibilities of the world. Donald Judd, in his writings that defined so much of the 1960s, also spoke of how Pollock's art demanded that the artist move into three dimensions, although Judd's art took a totally different path from Kaprow's work.[12] Later, Frank Stella and other young artists understood that Pollock was the starting point for new departures in abstract art, effecting a break with the past as radical as Manet's own rift with the 19th century Academy.[13] It was as if Smith was prescient about these matters; he was well prepared to carry out the implications of Pollock's art, an art of three dimensions and of a vast size and scale, but only Pollock's death gave him the latitude, the impetus to carry out these possibilities. Smith had long understood that one is simply an artist, that one used any means to achieve the new and heroic scale implicit in Pollock's lessons. Smith himself began to fulfill these lessons by his own move into three dimensions with *Throne* (pl. 12), his first finished piece, done in 1956-57, immediately following Pollock's death, the key year in the reassessment of American art. In fact, of Smith's first sculptures, done in Germany in 1953-55, a small untitled piece features three dimensional loops extending from a flat supporting surface that clearly come directly from Pollock (fig. 9).

Within three years, Smith had entered the most productive phase of his life, leading to a series of large-scale works from the 1960s that includes *Tau*. It is no coincidence that these were the years during which he began teaching at Hunter, and surely the new energy he felt from faculty and students alike fed this remarkable group of sculptures. In these years, Smith held a crucial and pioneering position in the history of post-1945 art that has gone largely unnoticed.

In 1953-55, in the series of *Louisenberg* paintings, Smith found a way to incorporate the organic patterns of nature and the world with a variant of the modular system inspired by the vision of Frank Lloyd Wright. These works fused biomorphic forms (based on circular and peanut-shaped components) within a grid system that became the paradigm for the joining of the organic with the geometries of his post-1958 sculpture. He had also been influenced by the theories of close-packing in D'Arcy Thompson's book *On Growth and Form* (1917). These paintings (fig. 10) pointed the way to a new clarity that marked Smith's art and indeed the new art of the sixties. In this we can define Smith as a key "bridge" figure between the Abstract Expressionists and the younger Minimalists of the sixties. In his mature, post-1958 art, Smith was a Janus-like figure, facing both back and forward, connecting the concerns of two generations.

10. Untitled *(Louisenberg)*, 1953-54/68. Acrylic on canvas, 99 3/4 x 139 3/4 in. High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia

In *Tau* and other work of the time, Smith kept many of the characteristics shared by his old friends, developing an art infused with a romantic, deeply emotional nature. His was an aggressive art, asserting itself in the hostile territory of the world, a mood we surely feel in *Tau*. For Smith, art was on the edge of consciousness and dreams, seeking to enter the world of the "mind and spirit and light," as Smith expressed it, an art of a spiritual quest in the tradition of Malevich and Brancusi.[14] His art was improvised; after starting from a beginning form or impulse, it could then grow and move into space in vectors and shifts that were unpredictable. His forms could meander like the poured lines of Jackson Pollock, as Joan Pachner has astutely observed.[15] Smith had no studio, and seldom made preparatory drawings, preferring to work with models, allowing his instincts take over and guide the path of the underlying tetrahedrons and octahedrons. There is a tension, classical in its roots, between the rational, geometric structure and the unexpected, improvised angles and thrusts of *Tau*. His art is filled with constant formal and emotive surprises. John Chandler, correctly, termed Smith an often capricious, whimsical artist.[16] His work, then, is deeply human; it relates to the body, and we experience it kinesthetically. The viewer reacts to it as if it were a living, moving presence, subject to quick, even irrational changes in mood and feeling, going in all different directions. In front of *Tau* one cannot help but think of Hunter itself, a community of a thousand languages and pursuits, but all structured and united by a firm and clear foundation. This keeps the work from ever being predictable or formulaic, telling us once again that science can only be an initial guide for the artist's intuitive and creative impulses, which are finally the determining factors in any art.

Other analogies to an older art abound. The shape of *Tau*, as well as its size and scale, while singular, refer to and at least in part spring from the massing and density of Pollock's mural-sized paintings of 1950 and 1952. The use of monochromatic black alone also relates Smith's work to widespread use of the color in the fifties and early sixties. It can be traced to several sources: Pollock's black and white paintings of 1951-52, as well as those of Franz Kline and Robert Motherwell of the same time; de Kooning's of 1948-49; the all black sculpture of Louise Nevelson done in the fifties; the black stripe paintings of Frank Stella done in 1958-59; and the all-black paintings of Ad Reinhardt, begun in the early 1960s. In turn, Richard Serra's massive walls of thick black pigments, a signal achievement of the late nineties will surely call to mind Smith's own massive black walls.

The massing itself of *Tau*, can be said, in a real sense, to refer to a long tradition within modern art, prior to Pollock, namely the drive to retain the monumentality of classical art in a modern format. We can trace this drive to the large-scale classical nudes of Renoir in the 1880s, Cézanne's wish for an art made with the authority and dynamism of the Old Masters found in the museums, and the volumetric figures of Maillol and Picasso, as well as Matisse's shift in 1907 to oversized figures. By 1950, Abstract Expressionist sculpture, notably the work of David Smith, had become flat, frontal and pictorial, open and light weight, suggesting a type of drawing in space that moved dramatically away from the old norms of classical weight and density. This meant a new freedom for sculpture, a new inventiveness that could rival the innovations gained by painting over the last half century. Smith, in effect, was not willing to give up the old qualities that had always characterized sculpture, that of its mass and bulk. It is one of Smith's signal accomplishments, therefore, that he was able to preserve both aspects, the old and new, in his work. So, too, is his preservation of another old quality of classical sculpture, its multiplicity of views that demands that we walk around it and experience its constantly shifting, changing perspectives that unfold in both real and metaphorical time.

After 1958, Smith moved toward a greater clarity and openness of shape and form, understanding that much of later Abstract Expressionism had become overworked, lacking in directness and articulation of its surfaces. The course of much art since Caravaggio has been toward a greater directness and clarity, to eliminate that which is expendable, like language itself, for economy and immediacy of expression. We see this in Smith's work and that of other bridge figures such as Hans Hofmann, or his Hunter colleague Ray Parker, as well as Al Held and younger artists, Frank Stella and Donald Judd among them. Smith was not a Minimalist, but he did show the way for how earlier art might be taken to new and fruitful conclusions, of how a new kind of sculpture like *Tau* could develop out of painting and in Smith's case architecture. Where Smith had once been content to follow, he now led the way for a younger generation.

Smith's work in architecture, his belief in the grand vision for America that he learned from Frank Lloyd Wright, was surely crucial in the development of the heroic scale of work in *Tau* and his other sculpture of the early 1960s. With ever increasing confidence, Smith's work continued to expand dramatically in sheer size as well as scale, and complexity, culminating in the massive *Smoke* (fig. 11) of 1967 that filled the entire first floor of the Corcoran Gallery. His example pointed the way for an entire generation of young artists working in three dimensions to think on a new size and scale, to make it big, take it outdoors and make it as large as conceivable, with a new and unparalleled ambition in American art. With *Smoke*, Smith reached an unprecedented size and scale, pointing the way to a new kind of sculpture, one that became a literal environment, engulfing the viewer and the space. No longer was sculpture a single discreet object, around which the spectator moved. Rather, it was now to be a multiplicity of spaces and shapes in and through which the viewer could and indeed had to move. No longer something built and placed arbitrarily, now it was something that took its determining form and shape from the existing space itself—that reacted to and defined the space for which it was planned. It stood independently, self-supporting and contained within itself, with no old-fashioned pedestal necessary.

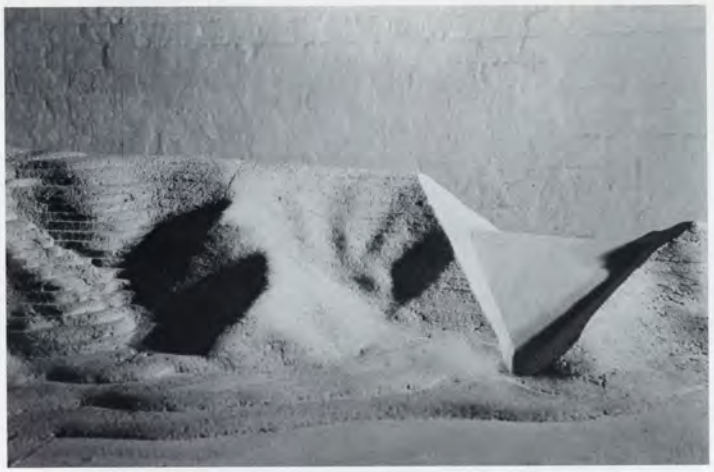
Thus *Smoke* stands at the beginning of key developments of the sixties, the start of environmental art, continued in his own *Stinger* (1967-68; fig. 12) and site-specific art, developments which have shaped the course of much art today. Smith should also be seen as a key figure in the public art movement that began to blossom in the sixties. The structure of *Smoke* was based on the open space grid, which Smith had been working on since the 1930s. The old geometries of the Bauhaus in the 1930s were now reconfigured to fit the needs of a newer art. Such was the huge scale of *Smoke* that it seemed to burst its bounds, to want to move beyond the building, into open and unlimited spaces, and this is precisely the course taken by much subsequent sculpture—something as big as the space of the landscape itself. From this, it is little wonder that Smith was a pioneer in using the land itself as the locus of art. While the earth pieces of Robert Smithson, Walter de Maria, James Turrell and Michael Heizer are the icons of earth art today, Smith's work in this vein, *Mountain Piece* and *Haole Crater* (figs. 13 and 14) of the late sixties, stand as forerunners of this entire development.

Tau still stands by itself, proud and independent as Smith himself was, but in the deepest sense, it is not an isolated work, any more than he was an isolated artist. In it we can trace a veritable history of art, a rich and compelling story of art from the second half of the twentieth century, as well as the history of a remarkable man, an artist and teacher, a symbol and a living embodiment of the best of Hunter College.

William C. Agee
Evelyn Kranes Kossak Professor of Art History, Hunter College

11. *Smoke*, 1967. Painted plywood mock-up, 288 x 576 x 408 in. Installed at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., October 1967 – January 1968, in the exhibition *Scale as Content* (subsequently destroyed)

12. *Stinger*, 1967–1968. Painted plywood mock-up, 72 x 384 x 384 in. Installed at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1968



13. *Mountain Piece*, 1968. Styrofoam model, Dimensions unknown

14. *Haole Crater*, 1969. Concrete, 84 x 498 x 498 in. Not realized

NOTES

1. Because Smith seldom dated preparatory drawings, the precise sequence of the works from the early sixties is difficult to pin down. I have relied on the extensive and impeccable research of Joan Pachner, independent scholar (see Works Cited) and Sarah Auld, Director of the Tony Smith Estate for the dating of *Tau* and other sculptures of this period. A full scale mockup in wood was made for an exhibition in 1980.
2. Hayden Herrera, "Master of the Monumentalists," *Time* magazine 13 October 1967, 80.
3. Herrera, 82.
4. Paul Cummings, Interview with Tony Smith, Orange, New Jersey, 22 August 1978, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington D.C. and New York: 16.
5. Cummings, 5-6.
6. Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture [Part 2]," *Artforum* 5, no.2 (1966): 20.
7. Willem de Kooning, "What Abstract Art Means to Me," Talk delivered in conjunction with the exhibition *Abstract Painting and Sculpture*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 5 February 1951, first published in *Museum of Modern Art Bulletin* 18 (1951), 4-8; reprinted in *Willem de Kooning: Collected Writings* (Hanuman Books: Madras & New York, 1988), 58-61.
8. Anna Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," *Arts* (1990): 44-63.
9. Cummings, 1, 14-15.
10. Tony Smith, *The Pattern of Organic Life in America*, unpublished manuscript, (New York: Archives, Tony Smith Estate 1943), unpaginated.
11. Allan Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," *Art News* (1958); reprinted in Ellen H. Johnson, ed., *American Artists on Art: From 1940-1980* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 57-58.
12. See especially, Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," *Arts Yearbook 8* (1965); reprinted in Ellen H. Johnson, ed., *American Artists on Art: From 1940-1980* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 105-111. See also Donald Judd, "Jackson Pollock," *Arts Magazine* (1967); reprinted in *Donald Judd, The Complete Writings, 1959–1975* (Halifax: The Press of the Novia Scotia College of Art and Design, and New York: New York University Press, 1978), 193-95.
13. See William S. Rubin, *Frank Stella*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 28-29, and note #38, 152.
14. Smith, unpaginated.
15. Joan Pachner, "Tony Smith's Drawings," in *Tony Smith: A Drawing Retrospective*, exh.cat. (New York: Matthew Marks Gallery, 1995), 81-82.
16. John N. Chandler, "Tony Smith & Sol LeWitt: Mutations and Permutations," *Art International* 12 (1968): 16-19.

Photographs from

THE INSTALLATION OF *TAU*

at Hunter College on September 8, 1984

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THE PRESENCE OF *TAU*: Influences and Interpretation Samantha Springer

At 7 a.m. on September 8, 1984, the installation of Tony Smith's *Tau* (1961-62/1984; pl. 30) began at the southwest corner of 68th Street and Lexington Avenue in Manhattan. Looking down Lexington Avenue that Saturday morning would have afforded an unexpected view of a flatbed truck carrying *Tau* in two pieces. Together weighing 15,000 pounds, each piece of painted black steel measured approximately seven feet high and twenty-one feet wide. Documentation of the event showed the loaded truck easily towering over a bus at the stoplight. Donna Shalala, then President of Hunter College; Sanford Wurmfeld, Chair of the Art Department; Jane Smith, Tony Smith's widow; and former colleagues and students watched as the artist's first work to be placed on permanent display in a public space in New York City was pieced together. Unfortunately for Smith, the work's realization in 1984 came more than twenty years after its inception and four years after the artist's death in December of 1980. On the twentieth anniversary of its installation, the sculpture remains a *presence*, the term Smith preferred, dominating the plaza. *Tau* is a steady fixture at Hunter College, and although most people walking through the plaza are effected by its *presence*, few outside the art world know anything about the work or its artist. Besides being a massive, industrial work of art, what is *Tau*? The history of this work provides insight into the development and intention of *Tau* in the context of Smith's body of work and influences.

In 1961-62, *Tau* was one of a series of new works conceived by Tony Smith (1912-1980) as a "speculation in pure form."[1] He said of his work, "I'm not aware of how light and shadow falls [sic] on my pieces. I'm just aware of basic form. I'm interested in the thing, not in the effects...."[2] For Smith, the impulse to work with geometric and mathematically determined forms provided infinite possibilities. The seemingly predictable permutations of form and inflexibility of steel as his chosen medium hide a method based on a kind of automatism. Smith developed his own visual language using modular elements, often recombining forms in different configurations to create new works. Smith described his working method as possessing "a certain element of surprise...but it's not calculated. I suppose the best way to put it would be that in working with the maquettes [small preliminary models] I think, well, that's sort of interesting; I wouldn't know how to seek it out because I can't visualize in advance."[3] This automatic, stream of conscious method of working emerged early in his career and resulted from his direct involvement with the Abstract Expressionists during the mid-1940s. His indebtedness to their innovations is most evident in his drawings, especially those from the late 1940s and 1950s. In reference to one of these drawings, Joan Pachner noted the "meandering, 'intestinal' black line, pulsating with life, seems to have emerged from an automatic drawing..." creating an overall composition that utilized the entire drawing surface echoing the sensibility of Pollock's dripped lines (fig. 15).[4]

Upon examination, Smith's drawings and paintings from before and around 1961 display similar ideas to those expressed in his sculpture and provide some insight into the process that brought him to *Tau*, as well as other works based on the tetrahedral/octahedral system. The paintings included in this exhibition (pls. 1, 15, 16 and 20) show Smith's tendency to create compositions out of fields of color. Each color forms a single mass, whether organic or geometric, creating tension by pressing one against another. The black and white ink drawings from 1961 (pls. 18 and 19) rely on a similar compositional tension. In these works the white of the paper acts as the negative space, or background, containing the black form. Smith's reversal of black as form, rather than acting as shadow or void, foreshadows the color and attention to edge and profile that solidify the surrounding space of his sculpture. The ink drawings relate specifically to *Tau*'s form in that the negative space moves underneath the form lifting it up away from the ground line. Although some formal connections exist, these contemporary drawings were not preliminary sketches for *Tau*, or any other sculpture.

15. Untitled, c. 1949-50. Ink on paperboard, 8 5/16 x 24 3/4 in. Private Collection

In interviews from the late 1960s and early 1970s Tony Smith maintained that he had no studio and worked out the ideas for his sculptures in his head and with maquettes rather than drawings. He explained that, "we think in two dimensions—horizontally and vertically. Any angle off that is very hard to remember. For that reason I make models—drawings would be impossible."[5] This use of three-dimensional guides built from cardboard and tape, and sometimes painted black to view them as whole forms, is well documented. Contrary to his assertions, there are numerous small-scale sketches as well as more-polished drawings for both executed and unrealized works, especially from the early 1960s.[6] The drawings from 1962-65 (pls. 25, 26 and 27) represent some of the rectilinear sculptures in their finished form. It is possible to visualize, by looking at the models, how Smith might

have manipulated the maquettes and smaller pieces in order to create related, but unique forms. Smith created several models of *Tau* in different dimensions, including one of these cardboard maquettes (pl. 28). Some were painted black, and all were portable in size and weight. A full size plywood mockup of *Tau* was finally created for an exhibit at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1980, just before his death, but it was not until 1984 that The International Welding Co. in Newark, New Jersey realized *Tau* to its full specifications and in its intended material, steel.

Although Smith drew a strong distinction between architecture and sculpture, once stating: "Architecture has to do with space and light, not with form; that's sculpture,"[7] there is no doubt that his work as an architect during the 1940s and 50s later influenced his sculpture. Smith himself cited *Tau's* relationship to architecture, including his plan for the Brotherton House (Mt. Vernon, Washington; pl. 7) built in 1944 and an unrealized project for a Catholic Church designed in 1950.[8] His passion for architecture based on geometry, as in the original cube shape for the Scoppettone House (Irvington, New York; pl. 10) and the pentagonal site plan for the Olsen House (Guilford, Connecticut; pl. 9) emerged in his sculpture through the cube-system pieces and tetrahedral/octahedral forms.

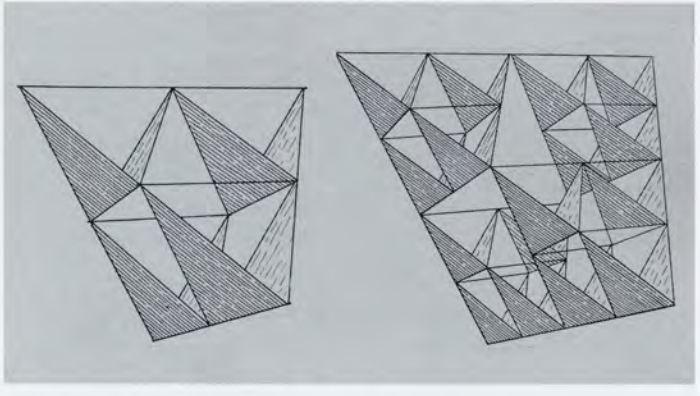
Smith's earliest sculpture, *Throne* (1956-57; pl. 12), is based on a tetrahedral joint. But it was not until five years later, in 1961, that he designed works completely out of triangulated solids. Among them are *Spitball*, *Duck*, and *Amaryllis* (pls. 17, 31 and 32), from 1961-65. They resemble *Tau* because they are based on the same space-lattice of tetrahedra and octahedra, and consist of only two or three trajectories. *Duck* (1962), which was probably based on *Beardwig* (1962; pl. 22), has the strongest resemblance to *Tau*, especially when the form is rotated, but it is unclear which came first. Due to a lack of documentation and Smith's contradictory recollections, the exact dates and sequence of many works are difficult to determine with any precision.

During the 1960s Smith's work ranged from cube system pieces, such as *Die* (1962; fig. 3) and *Free Ride* (1962; fig. 16), to tetrahedral/octahedral works, such as *Cigarette* (1961; fig. 17) and *Spitball* (1961; fig 18). He felt they were all fundamentally connected, "whether based upon rectangular prisms, tetrahedra, or other solids, [they] may be thought of as part of a continuous space grid."[9] He may have been developing the concept of the space-lattice, or space grid, a three-dimensional grid constructed of tetrahedra and octahedra based upon the equilateral triangle as early as the 1930s. The concept of the space-lattice, so basic to his functional and speculative work, was drawn from several sources. Alexander Graham Bell's use of the tetrahedron, described in his article "Tetrahedral Principle in Kite Structure," the analysis of the "close-packing" of cells in D'Arcy Thompson's *On Growth and Form* (1917), Jay Hambidge's structural logic based on the theory of the Golden Section in

16. *Free Ride*, 1962. Steel, painted black, 80 x 80 x 80 in.
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

17. *Cigarette*, 1961. Steel, painted black, 180 x 312 x 216 in.
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

18. *Spitball*, 1961. Steel, painted black, 137 x 168 x 160 ½ in.
The Baltimore Museum of Art



19. Four-celled and sixteen-celled tetrahedral kites,
National Geographic Magazine. Washington, D.C., 1903.
Vol. 14, pg. 226, figs 14 and 15.

Dynamic Symmetry (1919), Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion House (1944-46), Le Corbusier's system of proportions based on the human scale, the modular system of planning based on the hexagon used by Frank Lloyd Wright—an early mentor in his career (1938-40)—and even Smith's own architectural work, were significant influences in its development.

The space-lattice provided a means for visualizing open and closed space as an integrated whole. In the case of the tetrahedral space-lattice, all space, empty or occupied, is delineated by a grid of tetrahedra and octahedra in three dimensions. Growth in an isometric grid is regular and predictable. Smith's sculptures, however, evolved organically, through trial and error, within the grid. His work was recognized as relying "heavily on Hambidge's theory of the Golden Section and the links it established between 'ideal' geometry and the patterns of organic life represented by the spiraling of natural forms described by permutations of this basic Greek paradigm."[10] *Tau*, much like his other sculptures, resembles a seed in organic crystal growth from which it seems the space-lattice could extend interminably.

Vincent Longo, a longtime friend and colleague from Bennington College in Vermont and later at Hunter, (where Smith taught from 1958-61, and 1962-1980 respectively) recalled the equilateral triangle as being Smith's favorite shape because of its isometric structure.[11] A regular tetrahedron is a solid pyramidal space contained by four equilateral triangular surfaces and six equal edges. When tetrahedra are connected at the corners the empty space between them creates their counterpart, an octahedron (fig. 19). *Tau*'s structure is a specific configuration of these basic geometric shapes. The scale of the whole is based on the size of the equilateral triangle. Each planar surface is comprised of one or more equilateral triangles; the sculpture's total of nine planes, when joined, create a triangular solid, which can further be defined in three-dimensional terms as five tetrahedra and three octahedra (fig. 20).

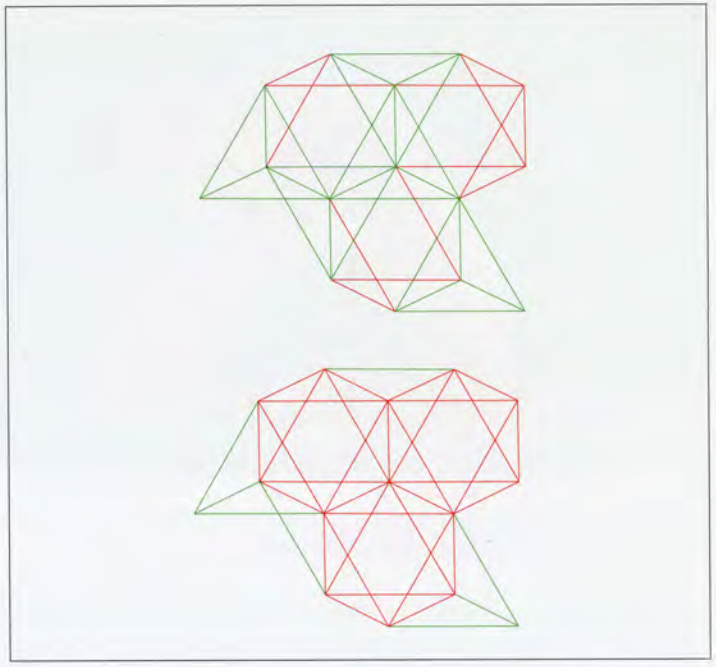
Most of Smith's modular sculptures were meant to be placed outdoors, but Smith's culminating work based on the space-lattice, *Smoke* (1967; fig. 11), was designed for an interior space in the Corcoran Gallery. There are, however, no extant documents explaining his intended location for or specific meaning of *Tau*. The lack of information on this work leads to necessary speculation about its meaning and intention, beginning with its name.

The title, *Tau*, cited by many colleagues, most likely refers to the nineteenth letter of the Greek alphabet (fig. 38). Seen from the 68th Street entrance to the West Building, *Tau*'s silhouette actually resembles the letter in its modern lowercase form. This resemblance may have been the reason Smith chose the title *Tau*, as he typically named pieces by association after their inception. The silhouette may have a further autobiographical reference as the first letter of his name and one of his nicknames, "T", recalling the heraldic

image of a large golden T that hung in the living room at the Stanley Road house.[12] The word itself, *tau*, has many meanings. It is the emblem of the Phoenix, a pastoral staff, a kind of beetle and a variety of fly. The Tau Emperor is a type of moth, and in Egypt, the sacred tau is a sign of life and part of the *ankh* symbol.[13] Tau is also a T-shaped cross, like the one on which St. Anthony was crucified. It is even possible to find in the ceiling trusses of the earlier Scoppettone House a t-shaped cross resembling *Tau* (fig. 6). Additionally, Tau is an alternate spelling for Tao, or "the way," in the eastern philosophy Taoism, based on the *Tao te Ching* by Lao Tsu. This connection to Taoism implies that the sculpture's upward movement reflects the enlightenment Smith sought through this philosophy as expressed in an excerpt from his unpublished manuscript, "The Pattern of Organic Life in America" of 1943-45: "the way—the acceptance—what is meant by religion...as the Tao...an acceptance of man's material limitations."[14]

Its construction in steel, a manmade material, roots *Tau* in the modern industrial world, while its name alludes to older ideas and symbols, connecting the past and present. Its massive form recalls the monoliths of ancient monuments, particularly Stonehenge. Similar to ancient monuments "[l]andscape and site are integral to [Smith's] thinking and his work....his sculptures [are] mostly created for outside exposure, structurally and scalewise."[15] *Tau* exists in a concrete landscape. Although Smith found his work best suited to rustic sites, he also felt it worked well in urban settings. The version of *Duck* at PepsiCo (fig. 21), an outdoor sculpture garden in Purchase, New York, makes an interesting comparison with *Tau* because of its contrasting environment. Located on the vast green lawn of a corporate headquarters and dappled by the shadows of a nearby tree *Duck* begins to dissolve into its surrounding because the matte surface fluctuates according to the light. This sculpture is approachable and steady, which has as much to do with its bottom-heavy form as the open space around it. In this setting the viewer is not forced upon the work, unlike the confrontational presence of *Tau*.

From his earliest sculpture, *Throne* (1956-57), Smith chose matte black paint as a finish for his works in order to minimize associations with color and the three-dimensional phenomenon color can create.[16] Smith's belief that all color is symbolic suggests that his choice of black has meaning too. Perhaps it is symbolic of void, yet in forming a void Smith has left behind a presence. This reversal of negative and positive space relates back to the ink drawings of 1961, in which the black creates rather than negates form. The only anomalies of color in his outdoor sculptural works are those he made specifically for urban settings, such as the yellow of *Light Up* (1971; fig. 22), in Pittsburgh, and red of *Last* (1979; fig. 23), in Cleveland. Smith chose these colors to make them stand out against the homogenous black or white of the buildings behind them. Former student and longtime associate, Jim Shepperd recalled a vapor blasted stainless steel model of *Tau* (1961-2/1968),



20. Three-dimensional line drawing of *Tau*, with tetrahedrons and octahedrons delineated. Drawing by Samantha Springer

21. *Duck*, 1962. Steel, painted black, 136 x 166 x 111 in. The Donald M. Kendall Sculpture Gardens at PepsiCo, Inc., Purchase, New York. Photograph by Sharon Suchma

22. *Light Up*, 1971. Steel, painted yellow, 249 x 198 x 343 in.
University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

measuring a couple of feet high. This version had a uniform gray surface that dispersed light evenly across its surface and prevented harsh contrasts between planes. The unique surface allowed the sculpture to come together as a whole, but also prevented it from standing out against a background. In its black shroud, however, *Tau* remains distinctive.

These connections and analysis inform the sculpture, but tell us only so much about the intended meaning of *Tau*. In 1970, Gene Goossen, then Chair of the Art Department at Hunter College, where Smith was a professor from 1962-1980, wrote the following about experience and meaning: "most sculpture in recent years has attempted to transcend objectness by emphasizing the symbolic content of the work, Smith's pieces transcend objectness by emphasizing the symbolic content of the *experience* of the work."[17] This *experience* relates directly to the space the sculpture occupies and the people who interact with it. *Tau's* relevance to its site on Hunter's West Plaza goes beyond Tony Smith's role as Distinguished Professor at Hunter College and his stature as a major artistic figure. Not being precious about his work, Smith would have embraced his sculpture's interaction with the public and surrounding space, which seems to encroach upon it. Although the viewer may feel forced into close proximity of the work—closer than is usually permissible with artwork—it is precisely this engagement that is significant.

When creating his sculptural works, Smith conceived of planes as enclosing space, defining exterior areas and directing the activity around them. He related this concept to painting stating, he was, "mainly involved with trying to make an equilibrium.... To relate that to sculpture, the same thing happens in three dimensions that happens in two. Forms tend to have their masses, their own centers of gravity, but it seems (and this is a hangover from architecture) that I think of walls, which enclose space and also define the exterior space."[18] *Tau's* planar surfaces and defined edges echo its location in an urban setting, and its basis on the space-lattice reflects the greater grid system within which it is set—both at Hunter College and in the City of New York.

While Tony Smith is best known for his later work from the 1960s and 1970s, *Tau* is an exemplary expression of his full body of work. Discussing the physical experience of Smith's sculpture, Goossen wrote: "A piece may be suggestive of vertigo, it may reach out to the extent of its own physical capacity to support itself, but it never over-reaches and becomes *actually* threatening... It lives within a world of reliable form."[19] Leaning at an angle and in counterpoint to Hunter's West Building, *Tau's* irregular form stands in tension to the rectilinear city grid system of horizontal blocks and vertical buildings, invoking such an experience. As the viewer moves around the form it changes and even appears to move itself, from one side leaning toward the viewer, from the other falling away. The sculpture is unpredictable and complex, an effect enhanced by its size, mass and unique form. From a glance one can visualize a cube, such as *Die*, from every angle, whereas *Tau* requires the viewer to actually walk around it. The surrounding structures offer views of *Tau* from almost every perspective, from below on the subway stairs to above on the enclosed walkways. Although at first it may seem foreign, *Tau* becomes a familiar and welcome sight to regular visitors. Standing on the plaza as an important emblem for Hunter College and the City of New York, *Tau* provides a sense of artistic history in the public realm—its most significant meaning contained in the experience of its being.

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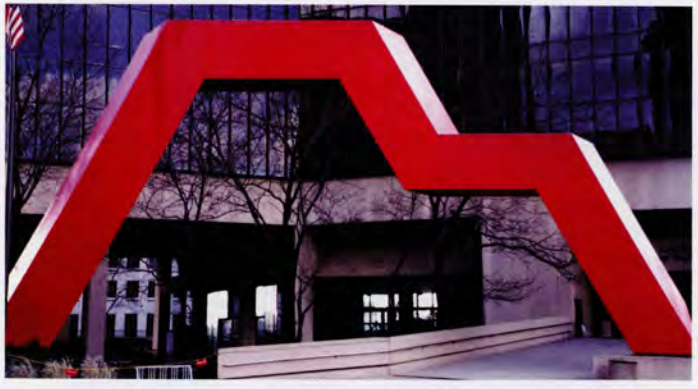

23. *Last*, 1979. Steel, painted red, 420 x 900 x 84 in.Ohio Building Authority, Cleveland, Ohio. Photograph by Sharon Suchma

NOTES

1. Samuel J. Wagstaff, "Talking with Tony Smith," *Artforum* 5 (1966): 18.
2. Wagstaff, 18.
3. Lucy R. Lippard, "Tony Smith: Talk about Sculpture," *ArtNews* 70 (1971): 49.
4. Joan Pachner, "Tony Smith's Drawings," *Tony Smith: A Drawing Retrospective*, exh. cat. (New York: Matthew Marks Gallery, 1995), 81-82.
5. Wagstaff, 18.
6. Pachner, 90.
7. Wagstaff, 16.
8. Joan Pachner, personal correspondence, New York, NY, 11 September 2003, 2.
9. Samuel J. Wagstaff, *Tony Smith: Two Exhibitions of Sculpture*, exh. cat. (Hartford, CT: Wadsworth Athenaeum and Philadelphia: The Institute of Contemporary Art, 1968), 6.
10. Robert Storr, "A Man of Parts," in *Tony Smith: Architect, Painter, Sculptor,* exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 17.
11. Vincent Longo, Professor Emeritus, Hunter College, New York, personal interview, New York, NY, 30 October 2003.
12. Abby Zito, *The Mind of Tony Smith*, unpublished manuscript (1982), © Abby Zito, 10.
13. "tau," *Compact Oxford English Dictionary,* Edmund S. Weiner, ed. John Simpson, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd edition, 1991).
14. Tony Smith, *The Pattern of Organic Life in America*, unpublished manuscript (New York: Archives, Tony Smith Estate, 1943), unpaginated.
15. E.C. Goossen, *9 Sculptures by Tony Smith,* exh. cat. (Newark: Newark Museum and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, 1970), 9.
16. Lippard, 71.
17. Goossen, 6.
18. Lippard, 68.
19. Goossen, 5.

Tau, 1961–62/1984. Steel, painted black, 168 x 258 x 148 ¼ in.
Collection of Hunter College of the City University of New York,
Purchase, Dormitory Authority of New York State

"TO EXPRESS SOMETHING OF THE EARTH RAISED ABOVE IT"[1]: Tau as Public Sculpture

I. *Tau*

Rarely do you find anyone really looking at *Tau*. The sculpture is an unseen presence on Hunter College's West Plaza. Students walk by daily on their way to class or *en route* to the subway. They sit near it to have lunch or lean against it to smoke a cigarette. Occasionally *Tau* offers protection from the rain or shelter from the wind. It serves as a central point of the college's main common area. In a recent article that appeared in *The New York Times*, the West Plaza was described as "not intrinsically inviting but compared with the surrounding gridiron of narrow sidewalks, it is practically an oasis."[2] Because the sculpture appears as an extension of the surrounding architecture, it is not perceived outside its context by those who interact with it most often. Despite this, it is the Hunter community and New Yorkers who live and work around 68th Street and Lexington Avenue that *Tau*'s monumental existence celebrates.

Tau's role on the Hunter campus has as much to do with its placement in relation to the surrounding architecture as it does with the artist's melding of sculpture and architecture in his work. *Tau's* creator, Tony Smith, was both an artist and architect during his fifty-year career, which spanned from 1930-1980. The distinctive qualities of Smith's early architectural projects from the 1930s and 1940s can be seen throughout his artistic career reflected in his later paintings and sculptures. As a result of his architectural background, he had a strong sense of how his sculptural works should interact with architecture in an urban environment. He felt that his sculptures should not compete with the architecture nor be considered precious art objects to be placed on a pedestal. Smith preferred his public sculptures be used, interacted with, and integrated into the surrounding environment. Therefore, the fact that *Tau* is treated as a functional object akin to an architectural structure would appeal to Smith.

Beyond this, there is a competing drive within Smith's sculptural work that entreats viewers to take notice of *Tau* and other sculptural works like it. In his words, "This country demands a tremendous—abstract form—here we must build for the ages! The diamond is after all an earth product—as are steel and glass—to express something of the earth raised above it. Entering the world of the mind and spirit and light."[3] Smith's words emphasize his desire to create artworks that rise above functional objects and direct viewers to contemplate the work in the realm of "the mind and spirit and light." These words appear in an unpublished manuscript Smith wrote in the early 1940s, "The Pattern of Organic Life in America." The manuscript is an interdisciplinary reflection on how architecture and art could create a language to symbolize America. Smith argues that art needs to become integrated into the fabric of American culture, not exist as something additional or extraordinary. In a cover story about the artist that appeared in *Time* magazine in 1967, Smith emphasized this point in relation to public art "Art is becoming a tangible reality to the public. People are beginning to pass this stuff on their way to work. As art becomes public in this way, people will develop a judgment about it, a sense of universal style."[4]

24. *Tau*, 1961–62/1984. Steel, painted black, 168 x 258 x 148 ¼ in.
Hunter College of the City University of New York,
Purchase, Dormitory Authority of New York State

II. Looking at *Tau*

Tau is bigger than us. It looms and dominates the environment. To fully understand it you have to look up and walk around the structure. Upon exiting the subway station at 68th Street and Lexington Avenue, *Tau* appears from its base upwards as you ascend the stairs. (fig. 24) Moving up the stairs, its dark presence comes into view starkly outlined against the mostly glass building behind. Once at the top of the stairs, you have to walk around *Tau*, even crossing Lexington Avenue to view it fully in the context of the plaza and surrounding buildings. (fig. 25)

The experience is very different when you return to stand near or under *Tau*. Much like an architectural structure, *Tau* dwarfs and surrounds. If you don't look up to understand *Tau's* shape and delineation, it is easy to imagine that it is attached to the surrounding buildings—an architectural canopy serving as extended shelter. This feeling is accurately described by Joan Pachner in an essay on how Smith's sculpture and architecture relate, "Tony Smith's 'presences' confound the boundaries between architecture and sculpture, between monuments and objects. His works are structures which do not function as shelters, yet they depend for their form on evocative forms and spaces like caves, gates and mazes."[5]

III. How *Tau* came to Hunter College

In the 1970s Tony Smith was on President Wexler's College Master Planning Committee. The committee was charged with planning the new Hunter buildings at 68th Street and Lexington Avenue; the buildings that are now the East and West buildings on the Hunter campus. Because of a city budget crisis in the 1970s, the building project stalled and the new buildings were literally left as holes in the ground until money could be found to complete them. Ulrich Franzen was chosen as the architect for these new buildings in the 1970s, but the buildings were not completed until 1984. Because of the fiscal crisis, the master plans that were drawn up in the 1970s were tied to bonds. In the early 1980s, the bonds were released under Donna Shalala, then President of Hunter College. The college was presented with two options: go ahead and build according to the original plans even though the plans were outdated and inadequate to meet the college's needs, or alter the plan and jeopardize the bond money in the process. President Shalala decided to go ahead with the original plans, recognizing that the new buildings would require renovations almost immediately after completion. This was the better alternative to a redesign that might delay the process by as much as ten years.

Fortunately for Hunter College, written into the original bonds was a percentage of money to be allocated for art in the new buildings. Sanford Wurmfeld, Chair of the Department of Art since 1978, submitted a proposal that the acquisition fund be used to buy art of distinguished alumni and former faculty members. The idea was to purchase art that would support Hunter College's distinguished artistic history. The budget for these purchases was a modest $360,000. Wurmfeld proposed that the funds be used for two significant purchases: a major sculpture by Smith for the plaza of the new buildings, and a Robert Motherwell painting for the lobby of the West Building adjacent to the new gallery. Motherwell was an Assistant Professor at Hunter from 1950-1960. He returned to Hunter in 1971 as a Distinguished Professor; a position he held for one year. Wurmfeld felt that both Smith and Motherwell were major figures in the New York art world with a strong connection to Hunter.

To decide which Smith to purchase, Wurmfeld assembled a committee of the colleagues closest to Smith including Bob Swain, Doug Ohlson, Jim Sheppard, and E.C. Goosen. They first concluded that Smith's tetrahedronal/octahedronal pieces would be a better fit for the plaza space rather than his cube system pieces. Also, many on the committee felt the octahedron and tetrahedron pieces were the greatest in Smith's *oeuvre*.

Generation (1965) and *Moondog* (1964) were initially considered, but were far too expensive to purchase. The three strongest contenders then became *Tau*, *Amaryllis* (1965), and *Spitball* (1961). At the time there was some confusion about which pieces were under the control of Smith's widow, Jane Smith or his longtime dealer Xavier Fourcade. The Tony Smith Estate determined that the rights to *Amaryllis* and *Spitball* belonged to Xavier Fourcade, Smith's dealer at the time, and Jane Smith controlled the rights to *Tau*.

Amaryllis (pl. 27) was an early favorite because of its size and scale. When the committee talked to President Shalala about the work, she immediately saw a danger in the fact that *Amaryllis*, and *Spitball* (fig. 18), each have an integral 4-foot high platform. Shalala pointed out that this would be too great an invitation for students to climb on the sculpture. This logic led the group to consider *Tau* as the strongest candidate. Shalala ultimately thought *Tau* was a better fit for the students, the space and circulation in the plaza area.

The committee had some concerns about *Tau* because it was never realized during Smith's lifetime. The committee, in general, was reticent about a posthumous construction. Yet, it was precisely Smith's methodology that his work be built using specifications and not necessarily under his direct supervision that made this work easier to contemplate. Smith had left very specific plans for the piece and these documents assisted in determining Smith's vision for *Tau*. Another advantage of purchasing *Tau* was that it directly benefited Smith's widow. This is something that the committee felt strongly about.

Wurmfeld remembers discussions with the committee and Jane, "We all thought that *Tau* would work [on Hunter's West plaza]."[6] In addition to the committee of Smith's former colleagues and friends, Wurmfeld also had input from a group of students enrolled in a course he was teaching on site-specific sculpture at this time. Wurmfeld tasked his students with building a scale model of the plaza space. The students analyzed this space and the effects of placing certain forms in the space. The class focus was on the aesthetics of space and they spent a significant amount of time visiting other public sculptures in Manhattan to

25. *Tau*, 1961–62/1984. Steel, painted black, 168 x 258 x 148 ¼ in.
Hunter College of the City University of New York,
Purchase, Dormitory Authority of New York State

analyze the way they were installed. They also researched how Smith thought about sculpture, space, and architecture. Smith's own backyard full of sculpture in South Orange, New Jersey gave them insight into how Smith saw his sculpture in relation to architecture and nature. Using the student's block architectural model of the West plaza, Jim Shepperd and Sanford Wurmfeld had a model of *Tau* built to scale situating the sculpture within the context of the West plaza, and their work resulted in the placement of the work as it appears today.

Initially, *Tau* was planned to line up with the edge of the West Building behind it. Committee member Jim Sheppard, a student and associate of Smith's, as well as an adjunct professor at Hunter for 10 years, argued that Smith would not have wanted his sculpture on the same axis as the building behind it. Because Smith felt strongly about his sculpture not being architecture, Sheppard felt the sculpture should not act as an extension of the building, and instead be placed in counterpoint to the architecture (fig. 26). Sheppard chose the counterpoint based on what he felt "would have been Tony's sensibility."[7] When the model of *Tau* was placed in the plaza model in this way, the committee decided it looked and felt right for the space.

IV. Urban Space and the Grid

Joan Pachner, a noted scholar on Tony Smith suggested caves, gates and mazes as appropriate analogies for Smith's sculptures.[8] While *Tau* is not exactly like any of these structures, as architectural and geometric forms they inform an important aspect of *Tau*'s placement on the Hunter plaza and within the grid of New York City. Jim Shepard recognized the importance of the grid when he suggested that *Tau* be placed at an angle to the buildings behind it, thereby drawing attention to and disrupting a strict grid structure of streets and building. In a letter to fellow Hunter faculty member Fritz Bultman, Smith himself acknowledged the constructed order of New York City as, "A solid with the buildings and spaces between the buildings forming a 'closepacked' order…In New York we already have the grid plan…It is just that we cling to the conception of the buildings and blocks being masses and the space a void."[9]

Smith understood cities and public urban spaces as being made up of structures and space between the structures. According to Smith, the areas occupied by structures and those spaces between them were equally important. Empty space is not a void, but rather an open space as opposed to a closed one. In terms of *Tau*, this concept can be understood by viewing *Tau* as an object within the urban grid and the space around it as part of the experience of perceiving *Tau*. Joan Pachner describes the importance of the space around Smith's work in terms of the art experience, "Smith's design depended on the blank sides of buildings, on the layout of the streets to define the space, and on the people themselves to animate it. He felt that they added a positive, dynamic presence to his work. Many of his site-specific pieces were thought to be

26. *Tau*, 1961–62/1984. Steel, painted black.168 x 258 x 148 ¼ in.
Hunter College of the City University of New York,
Purchase, Dormitory Authority of New York State

complete only with the interaction of visitors with the form he created."[10] Smith did not choose the location of *Tau* although he might have agreed that *Tau*'s power as a public sculpture increased by the interaction that takes place around it. President Shalala, Wurmfeld's committee and students all recognized the importance of this interaction when placing *Tau* in its current location.

For Smith the grid was a physical and philosophical device for structuring his ideas. Evidence of Smith's use of the grid to structure forms can be seen in his *Louisenberg* paintings from the early 1950s. Smith painted the *Louisenberg* paintings while in Louisenberg, Germany in 1953-55. These paintings consist of organic, non-linear forms organized within a strict grid pattern (fig. 10). The grid's visibility varies depending on the colors used in the foreground and background. Employing the grid, Smith was able to establish an underlying order for the seemingly random shapes and colors. These paintings exemplify Smith's view about the city as a grid. While in Germany, Smith developed his ideas about urban design and structure through analyzing medieval towns and relating that experience back to America's urban landscape. The *Louisenberg* paintings illustrate the concept of the grid in two dimensions while Tau's placement in the city grid extends this idea into a third dimension. As Smith imagined the city grid formed by objects and space between objects, the *Louisenberg* paintings illustrate the negative and positive spaces created by organic shapes on a grid.

V. Classifying *Tau*

What is *Tau*? We know it is a sculpture installed on the Hunter campus four years after the artist's death. Smith conceived of the work, but its realization was the work of a fabricator in Connecticut, and its placement the result of thoughtful deliberations by Smith's friends and colleagues. This issue of authorship is further complicated by the fact that there are very few writings specifically addressing *Tau* and therefore not much is known about Smith's intention for the work. Consequently classifying *Tau* is challenging.

Is *Tau* a memorial? It was chosen and purchased to mark Smith's commitment to teaching at Hunter and thus stands in commemoration of Smith's life and work at Hunter. However, this reading is one clearly not intended by the artist himself who was very specific about which of his works were meant to be memorials. His unrealized design for the Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial (1960) was expressly meant to be a memorial public structure (fig. 27). If *Tau* has become a sort of memorial to Smith, it is because the sculpture has come to symbolize Smith's ideas and contributions, not because the sculpture itself was designed as a memorial.

Is *Tau* a monument? For most of urban history, large sculptures in public view have been monuments. Until the early 20th century, all large-scale, three-dimensional artwork displayed outdoors commemorated an individual, group, or historical event. With the advent of avant-garde art practices in the late 19th century and the notion of art for its own sake, it became more difficult to create public art that illustrated coherent or universal values. Furthermore, abstract sculptures have increasingly become the form of choice. As a result it is no longer possible to label all outdoor sculptures as monuments. Thinking about *Tau* as a monument is problematic. Is it a monument to Hunter College? To New York City? To the students? It serves all these functions. It is a monument to Smith, the new buildings, and the history of the Department of Art. But this is a subjective rather than intended reading. To the average viewer, the work is an object without a specifically designated objective.

So what is Tau? It is neither easily defined as memorial nor monument. Harriet Senie in "Urban Sculpture: Cultural Tokens or Ornaments of Life," creates a category for works such as Tau calling large-scale public art works 'urban sculpture.' She describes 'urban sculpture' as artworks that are monumental in scale and placed in public areas but do not necessarily reflect the content or values shared by the community in which the sculpture is placed. By calling public sculpture in an urban environment "urban sculpture" only the placement of the object is considered, not the content or possible implied shared values.[11]

"Urban sculpture" does seem a fitting classification for *Tau*, but what Senie's ideas or what any strict classification of a work of art does not take into consideration is the real life of the work of art. Smith may not have intended *Tau* to be a memorial, a monument, or an urban sculpture, but it has become all of these things in some way during its twenty-year life on the Hunter plaza. As a posthumous work, it is impossible to document Smith's feelings about how and where he intended *Tau* to be placed. Smith may never have gotten beyond the conception stage with the full scale version of *Tau*. Yet, to Smith's friends and colleagues at Hunter, *Tau* was intended as a memorial to Smith and a monument to modern art. As Sanford Wurmfeld stated, "We all passionately believed in Tony's sculpture.... We wanted it to represent us. We wanted to show the world that this was the home of important modern art."[12] *Tau* has come to symbolize the visual arts at Hunter as Wurmfeld and his colleagues hoped. *Tau* also serves as a memorial to Smith's work at Hunter both as mentor and colleague for almost twenty years from 1962-1980. Hunter College felt it was doing something great for New York City by displaying *Tau* for all the public to see.

VI. *Tau*'s Importance

The October 13, 1967 cover of *Time* magazine pictured Smith under his sculpture Smoke installed in the Corcoran Gallery. In the accompanying article "Master of the Monumentalists," the monumentality of Smith's sculptures was discussed in relation to their role in the urban environment. The architecture and urban planning of modern American cities demand public sculpture of a monumental scale. The author Hayden Herrera, a graduate of Hunter's Masters program in Art History, compares the relationship between art and architecture of ancient cities to the modern situation, "Egypt matched its pyramids and temples with obelisks and sphinxes, while Greece's Parthenon was glorified by the handiwork of Phidias... Obviously, something larger is needed to match the scale of today's American cities." [13]

Why is a discussion of *Tau* and its existence as public sculpture important now? *Tau* is an example of Smith's work that is monumental in scale and in spirit. Its vastness is a call to greatness, a call to enter "the mind and spirit and light." His description of that art is as educational as the works he has left us:

> I view art as something vast. I think highway systems fall down because they are not art. Art today is an art of postage stamps. I love the Secretariat Building of the U.N., placed like a salute. In terms of scale, we have less art per square mile, per capita, than any society ever had.[14]

Tau is difficult to name. It is neither a monument nor a memorial. Nor is it urban sculpture in the strictest sense. While it may not be Smith's monument, *Tau* is a monument to Smith. What matters most is what *Tau* and many of Smith's sculptures have become to those who know them. If the call of *Tau* is not enough to actually make you look at the sculpture, heed Wurmfeld's words about *Tau* and Hunter, "Hunter is an important art program and college....*Tau* is a part of that history."[15]

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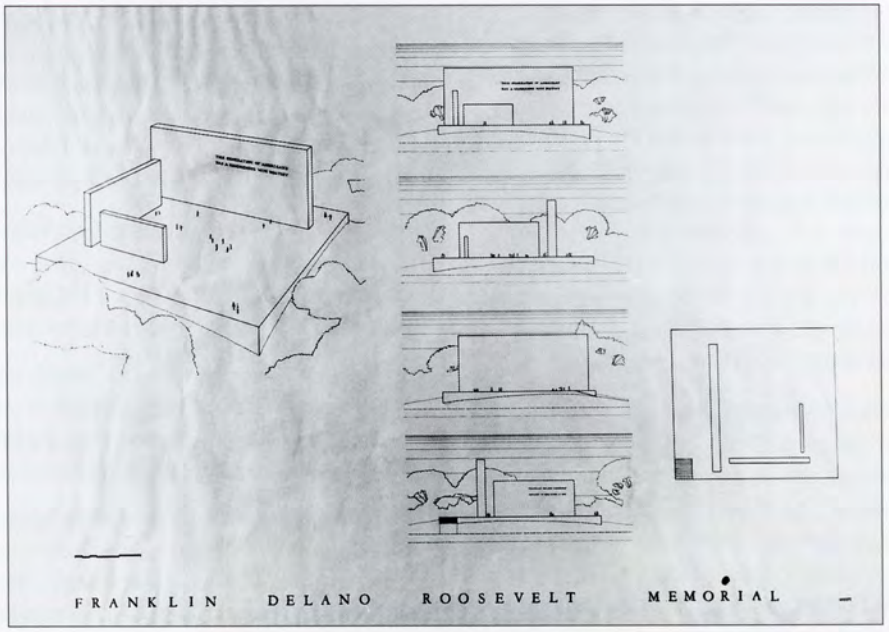
NOTES

1. Tony Smith, *The Pattern of Organic Life in America*, unpublished manuscript (New York: Archives, Tony Smith Estate, 1943), unpaginated.
2. Christopher Gray, "Streetscapes/Hunter College on 68th Street and Park Avenue; Industrial-Style Main Building Raised Storm in 1940," *The New York Times*, 8 February 2004, section 11, 9.
3. Smith, unpaginated.
4. Hayden Herrara, "Master of the Monumentalists," *Time* magazine 13 October 1967, 86.
5. Joan Pachner, Tony Smith: *Architect, Painter, Sculptor*, Ph.D. dissertation (New York University: Institute of Fine Arts, New York, 1993), 362.
6. Sanford Wurmfeld, Professor, Hunter College, New York, personal interview, New York, N.Y., 27 January 2004.
7. Jim Shepperd, Associate of Tony Smith, personal interview, New York, N.Y., 18 March 2004.
8. Pachner, 362.
9. Except from a letter from Tony Smith to Fritz Bultman, 2 July 1954.
10. Pachner, 401.
11. "Public sculpture implies content or values that are understood and shared by a large segment of society. It is their seemingly traditional placement in an "urban plaza" that is largely responsible for the mistaken expectation that these works are or should be both public in content and/or monumental other than in scale. Let's use instead the term "urban sculpture," which refers only to placement and carries with it no implied expectations. It is, after all, the urban setting that accounts for the problems of the genre: scale, significance and its relationship to architecture." Except taken from Harriet Senie, "Urban Sculpture: Cultural Tokens or Ornaments of Life," *ARTnews* 78 (1979):108.
12. Wurmfeld interview.
13. Herrera, 80.
14. Samuel J. Wagstaff, "Talking with Tony Smith," *Artforum* 5 (1966):17.
15. Wurmfeld interview.



27. *Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial* (perspective),1960. Ink on paper, 30 1/4 x 43 in.
Tony Smith Estate, New York

TONY SMITH: BEYOND MINIMALISM Katy Rogers

For the moment one has made a statement, or more hopeless still, attempted a generality, the precise opposite then appears to be true, sometimes simultaneously with the original thought one had... [s]o with the multiple levels of an art not so simple as it looks.[1]

Tony Smith is often thought of as a Minimalist sculptor by art historians and the public, a notion perpetuated ever since the rise of Minimal art in the late 1960s. His work is imposing, stoic and industrial and thereby seems at first glance to fit under this rubric. Yet, on closer inspection, his work, both formally and intentionally, does not display the normative qualities of Minimalism *qua* Minimalism. This essay is an attempt to explore how Smith differs from the Minimalists and why this question is pertinent in understanding and appreciating his *oeuvre*.

Three questions immediately arise from this argument: What is Minimalism? Why has Smith been associated with the movement? How does Smith's work comply with or differ from the criteria of Minimalism? The most direct approach to answering such questions is to look at the primary documents of the era: the writings of those artists who identified themselves as Minimalists, and the articles by critics and art historians of the time.[2] In general, these writings define Minimalism as the paring down of form to create artwork stripped of the appearance of the artist's hand and pictorial space. Tony Smith appears in documents from the era both in interviews and discussions of the group as a whole. In 1967, Michael Fried chose to discuss Smith in his seminal critical essay on Minimalism titled "Art and Objecthood."[3] Fried cites Smith's interest in the relationship between viewer and object as distinctly Minimalist (he calls the movement "literalism") going on to state, " [t]he experience alone is what matters."[4] Fried joins this point with other common qualities of Minimalism: that the work is industrial, geometric and imposing.

To be sure, there are similarities between Smith's work and that of Minimalists such as Donald Judd, Robert Morris and Ronald Bladen. The repetition of simple geometric shapes combined to create massive forms is common to Smith and the Minimalists, as are the stark, unadorned surfaces they employed. Each is known as a Minimalist because of the simplified, industrial aesthetic that removes the hand of the artist from the art. Yet, this issue is more complex than this surface reading belies. Art historians continue to reassess the fact that movements of the past, as named and perpetuated by critics and historians, are conceptual generalizations and often fail to reflect the nuances of an artist's work. That is not to say that scholars come to an agreement regarding a specific movement. As we will see, Harold Rosenberg argued against Smith being labeled a Minimalist as early as 1967.

Tony Smith belonged to the generation of Abstract Expressionists. His friends included such artists as Jackson Pollock and Barnett Newman, and his work was influenced by literary and philosophical figures that were integral to the New York School such as James Joyce, T.S. Eliot and Sigmund Freud. There are numerous anecdotes about Smith's love for Joyce, an author revered by many Abstract Expressionists. However, it is clear that Smith's work is neither easily defined as an Abstract Expressionist or Minimalist although his work shares some ideas in common with both. Although his sculptures were often comprised of repeated, geometric forms and visually share more in common with the Minimalists, the way he toyed with these components in an improvisational rather then studied manner alludes to Abstract Expressionism. Curator Robert Storr recognized this when he wrote, "Caught between two generations and two artistic camps, Smith thought like the members of the first but made art that was easily confused with that of the second."[5]

Born in 1912, the same year as Pollock, Smith was older than the Minimalists and his works show a progression through so-called Minimalist forms before that movement ever crystallized. His earliest sculptural efforts date from the latter part of the 1950s. Perhaps the best example of this is *Throne* (1956-1957; pl. 12), a piece composed of three-dimensional triangles extended to create a work of complex shapes that at first glance seems to create a simple form. In 1961, Smith completed *Cigarette* (fig. 16), *Marriage* (fig. 28) and *Spitball* (fig. 18), all works that involve unadorned geometric shapes executed in industrial steel on a monumental scale. These early works echo the forms and thrust of later pieces like the one this exhibition centers upon: *Tau* (conceived in 1961-2; pl. 30).

28. *Marriage*, 1961. Steel, painted black, 120 x 120 x 144 in. The Country of Norway, Oslo

Tau embodies the true difference between Smith's project and the Minimalist agenda. *Tau* commands the space around it and exhibits an intricate system of geometric shapes pieced together into a whole. It displays the use of a multifaceted aesthetic vocabulary that, in comparison to the use of single shapes so often found in the work of Donald Judd from the 1960s, stands apart from the Minimalist rhetoric of the discrete repetition of a single shape. It is as though Smith takes a Minimalist tendency and expands it exponentially, pulling from all types of backgrounds. In some cases Smith did use single units as final sculptures, as in *Black Box* (1962; fig. 4), but he did not adopt this style as his ultimate artistic goal or as an endpoint of any kind.

Harold Rosenberg explored this difference in the nature of Smith's work in a 1967 article for *The New Yorker*.[6] As a proponent of the Abstract Expressionist movement, Rosenberg wrote extensively on this subject, even going so far as to coin another name for it: Action Painting. Rosenberg was deeply interested in how those members of the Abstract Expressionist generation aimed to express the act of painting and not the painting as an end in itself.[7] With this in mind we can look at how Rosenberg approached the work of Tony Smith.

Discussing a Bryant Park installation of Smith sculptures in early 1967 (fig. 29), Rosenberg stated that the works on view look back to earlier Constructivist works and defy the assumed tenets of Minimalism on several levels. The works are open, airy and "incomplete," which flies in the face of the solid, "factual" work of the Minimalists. Rosenberg wrote:

> With the Symbolists of the turn of the century, "pure art" was an art of metaphysical essences. Smith's structures are pure in this Symbolist sense, as quiet and solitary as the space under a viaduct at midnight. Minimalist constructions have an exactly opposite character; stripped of metaphysical intimations, they assert their purity by confronting the art public with an aggressive challenge to its expertness, like something offered "as is."[8]

Here is the root of Smith's alternate aesthetic: his works are never "as is." Smith sought to imbue them with something deeper, something one might find in other pursuits such as spirituality, philosophy or literature. In order to understand this, we must look at how he unified his sculpture with his other passions.

The philosophy apparent in *Tau* has been discussed in other essays, yet deserves reiteration here. One of the possible meanings behind this work can be found in ancient texts where Tau (also Tao) means "the way." Smith's interest in Eastern philosophy and spiritualism influenced not only his selection of titles, but the impetus behind the artworks as well. Literary influence comes to the fore in works such as *The Keys to Given!* (1965; pl. 33) and *Gracehoper* (1962; fig. 30), both inspired by the work of James Joyce, a constant muse for Smith.

Formally speaking, these two works do not appear to ever present themselves "as is." Beneath their industrial shell lies an intricate mathematical equation of space, form and temperament, calculated to express the artist's desire for monumentality, his interest in the spiritual and his articulation of natural phenomena.[9] These concerns dovetail with his view of the work as a whole. This is best understood through his writings and interviews, which will be considered in relation to the views expressed in Minimalist writings and interviews.

29. *Bryant Park Installation*, 1967. Photograph by David Gahr

30. *Gracehoper*, 1962. Steel, painted black, 272 x 288 x 552 in. The Detroit Institute of Art

In 1966, Robert Morris wrote in two articles for *Artforum* about his interest in the gestalt of Minimal work.[10] He stated, "In the simpler polyhedrons, such as cubes and pyramids, one need not move around the object for the sense of the whole, the gestalt, to occur. One sees and immediately 'believes' that the pattern in one's mind corresponds to the existential fact of the object."[11] He continued, "[o]nly one aspect of the work is immediate: the apprehension of the gestalt. The experience of the work necessarily exists in time."[12] Here we see what Morris was really interested in: the moment of understanding when first presented with a work, not the moments of more thorough comprehension that follow that initial response. It is the gestalt of the work that Morris felt impacts the spectator.

Smith wanted to explore how his work could continue to interact with the viewer. He said, "I'm interested in the inscrutability and the mysteriousness of the thing. Something obvious on the face of it (like a washing machine or a pump) is of no further interest.... We can't see it in a second, we continue to read it."[13] Smith wanted to build a relationship with the viewer over a period of time with the emphasis placed on a continued interaction versus an initial response. It is this significant ideological difference that explains the formal differences between Smith's work and that of Morris and other Minimalists, such as Ronald Bladen. Smith's work is rarely understood fully at the first glance and requires the viewer to walk around the work and experience it from multiple viewpoints.

When the sculpture *Smoke* (1967; fig. 11) was installed at the Corcoran Gallery in 1967 another equally imposing sculpture was erected for the same exhibition, *The Big X* (1967; fig. 31) by Ronald Bladen.[14] Formally speaking, both involve massive black structures that are comprised of what initially appear to be simple geometric forms. Yet, after the initial reaction (one could say the gestalt) the similarities end there. *The Big X* is exactly what its title describes it as: a monumental letter X measuring 22 x 26 x 14 ft. It is forceful in its concreteness and simplicity. In contrast, *Smoke* is an almost delicate network of spider's legs that envelope the space, rather that divide it. Smith's work is powerful in the sense of enclosure and quietude, as Rosenberg noted earlier, surrounding and engaging the viewer on both a monumental and personal level. It is this aspect of his work paired with the fact that *Smoke* changes from different viewpoints while *The Big X* is understood as a large "X" from all angles, that reveals the non-Minimalist tendencies of Smith's work.

What is truly at stake in the argument that Tony Smith is not a Minimalist? By locating Smith within this movement we risk defining how his work is interpreted and analyzed. As a teacher, he played a role in the formation of the Minimalist movement through his influence on a younger generation of artists, but he did not consider himself a Minimalist.[15] In a letter from 1968, Smith identified himself with three artists: Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, and Clyfford Still—all of whom are associated with the New York School. There is no similar evidence of Smith connecting himself with the Minimalists. By introducing the use of large, industrially fabricated, geometric forms in his work of the 1950s, and shaping the Minimalist movement through his teachings, Smith contributed to the advent of Minimalism yet stood apart from it.

More significantly perhaps, by designating Smith a Minimalist we lose the character with which he imbued his works. We fail to see the sharp overhangs, the open latticework of certain sculptures—the delicate balance in all of his pieces. The nature of his work is unique in that it is so varied as to include all manner of expression. He began in industrial design early in his career at his family's plant in New Jersey. Throughout his lifetime, he worked as a painter, architect, educator, and sculptor, and recorded his diverse passions in a personal journal *"The Pattern of Organic Life in America"*—all of which influenced the art he produced. Even in viewing a sampling of his work, Smith's diverse interests emerge and make clear the artist's multifaceted career.

To see how a Minimalist definition fails to suit Smith, one need only let his work speak for itself. It is complex and varied, with concerns that do not easily fit into any one style or medium. The work functions apart from both the generation he was a part of, the Abstract Expressionists, and that which he is associated with, the Minimalists. Smith never did quite fit into a particular category either stylistically or methodologically. He functioned more as a bridge figure between the different media and generations. It is because of this that Tony Smith must be studied as an individual and not as a practitioner of a particular movement. In the words of the Abstract Expressionist Robert Motherwell, "To speak of Tony as a 'minimalist' is soft-eyed. The monumental 'simplicity' of his sculpture is the reduction of essences of a complex mind and a primordially vital one."[16]

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NOTES

1. Barbara Rose, "ABC Art," *Art in America* (October – November 1965): 57-69; rpt. in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 297.
2. As seen primarily in Gregory Battcock, *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968).
3. Michael Fried. "Art and Objecthood." *Artforum*, vol 5, no. 10 (June 1967): 12-23. rpt. in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 128-129.
4. Fried, 131.
5. Robert Storr, "A Man of Parts," from *Tony Smith: Architect, Painter, Sculptor*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 12.
6. Harold Rosenberg, "Defining Art," *The New Yorker* (February 25, 1967): 99-109. rpt. in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 298-307.
7. Harold Rosenberg. "The American Action Painters" in *The Tradition of the New* (New York: De Capo Press, 1960), 23-39.
8. Harold Rosenberg, "Defining Art," *The New Yorker* (February 25, 1967): 99-109. rpt. in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 307.
9. This is not to discount the fact that other artists grouped under the rubric of Minimalism used complex equations in the execution of their works, for example, Donald Judd.
10. Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture [Part 1]," *Artforum,* vol. 4, no. 6 (February 1966): 42-44; Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture [Part 2]," *Artforum,* vol. 5, no. 2 (October 1966): 20-23. Rpt. Gregory Battcock, *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 222-235. The articles were combined into one essay in the Battcock reprint.
11. Morris, 228.
12. Morris, 234.
13. Samuel Wagstaff, Jr., "Talking with Tony Smith." in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 385.
14. The exhibition was entitled "Scale as Content," organized by The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., on view from October 7, 1967 to January 7, 1968.
15. See Storr, 20; and Joan Pachner, "Tony Smith: Architect, painter, Sculptor" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, Institute of Fine Arts, 1993), 169-70.
16. Robert Motherwell, "In Memoriam: Anthony Smith," rpt. in Stephanie Terenzio, ed. *The Collected Writings of Robert Motherwell* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1992, 1999), 246.

31. Ronald Bladen, *The Big X*, 1967. Painted wood, 264 x 312 x 168 in. Installed at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., October 1967–January 1968, in the exhibition *Scale as Content* (subsequently destroyed)

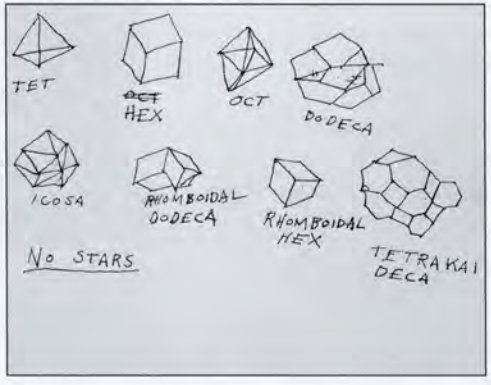
THE CLASSICAL OVERTONES OF TONY SMITH Sharon Suchma

Tony Smith's *Tau* (1961-62/1984; pl. 30) is an ideal example of American modern art from the 1960s. Made from industrial production methods, the modern medium of steel, and located within an urban environment, *Tau* embodies the principles of its age. Though a departure from the traditional materials and techniques of sculpture making (such as marble which must be carved or bronze which must be cast by the artist), it possesses a fundamentally classical spirit. *Tau* draws upon the order, measure, and balance of volume and mass inherent to classical principles of organization. Classical has many inferences and can be defined in myriad ways. In particular, as a critical standard of quality achieved through "attention to form with the general effect of regularity, simplicity, balance [and] proportion."[1] In this respect, *Tau* endures not only as a benchmark of excellence, but as an emblem of Smith's classical inclinations.

Conforming to a critical standard implies a continuum—that a criterion of distinction has, over time, been established which thus allows for a recognition of something as classical. Many of Smith's sculptures refer to works from the past. This is not achieved through a direct visual replication of sculptures from antiquity, but rather through a shared vocabulary of elements such as unity, balance, the use of simple forms (such as basic geometric solids), integration with the environment and monumentality in either size or aspiration. Dore Ashton wrote, "And didn't Smith dream of ancientness...and think of the great vanished monuments, and tell a reporter that he really wanted to place his presences on great avenues, like a great avenue of sphinxes?"[2] *Tau* represents Smith's drive to produce lasting presences that hover above yet share our space. The great avenue it rests upon is Lexington, and like the guardian sphinx before a pyramid, one must pass *Tau* to enter the Hunter campus. The significance here lies in how Smith took the classical conception of size and presence and adapted it to a contemporary form and setting. *Tau* therefore epitomizes the way he used the materials and industrial apparatus of our world to create a modern classic.

In his *Timaeus* (355 B.C.), Plato described the geometric foundation of the world, in which there exist a group of figures called polyhedra. Polyhedra, which means "many faces" in Greek, are solids bound by plane polygons (or faces) that meet and intersect at edges. There are five of these which are known as Platonic solids: the tetrahedron, the cube, the octahedron, the dodecahedron and the icosahedron. The Platonic solids are regular in that each face is a regular polygon, that is, a straight-sided figure with equal sides and equal angles. Smith was exposed to Greek and Latin authors, such as Plato, during his Jesuit education in both high school at St. Francis Xavier in Manhattan and college at Fordham University and Georgetown.[3] Plato's ideas of solids within mathematically definable systems of growth are also found in Jay Hambidge's *The Elements of Dynamic Symmetry* from 1918, a book of profound impact on Smith. Hambidge asserted that "the study of dynamic symmetry is obtained from three sources: from Greek and Egyptian art, from the symmetry of man and of plants and from the five regular geometric solids [the tetrahedron, cube, octahedron, the dodecahedron and icosahedron]."[4] Perhaps the result of such classical studies, Smith often used Platonic solids as starting points for his sculptures. In 1961, he explored these building blocks essential to his sculptural work though a series of drawings (fig. 32). In *Tau*, tetrahedra make up the total form. The way these solids meet together and build up or out is visible in two plaster sculptures of Smith: *Tetrahedron* (1961; fig. 33) and Wingbone (1962; fig. 34). *Tetrahedron* shows the three dimensional form of the equilateral triangle, making visible the points of axis and its open planes. *Wingbone* shows how these forms can be joined together to create larger extensions, in a way that the interior relationships are just as visible as the external appearance. The creation of and emphasis on volume is a prominent feature of Smith's sculptures.

The simplest polygon is the triangle, a universal form that spans many cultures. On the occasion of his first show in 1966, Smith quoted Michelangelo, "always make a figure Pyramidal, serpentlike, and multiplied by one, two and three."[5] The Great Pyramids at Gizeh are a part of such an ancient tradition. They show the strength, stability and longevity of regular geometric solids on a monumental scale. Smith stated "I've always admired very simple, very authoritative, very enduring things".[6] Robert Motherwell, in his eulogy to Smith, said "His 'American' sculpture is universal, like ancient Egypt."[7] The universality of Smith's sculptures lies in their achieving a lasting and powerful expression.



32. *No Stars,* c. 1965. Ink on paper, 7 15/16 x 9 15/16 in. Private Collection, New York

One of Smith's most literal renderings of the pyramidal form is *Eighty-One More* (1970; fig. 35). This piece consists of a flat triangular grid upon which fifteen tetrahedra rest. They are equidistant, measured by triangular incisions on the ground plane. Smith offers three different types of a triangular form: the pyramids themselves, the two-dimensional carvings of the triangles, and the greater triangular form achieved through the placement of the pyramids. The classical spirit here involves an inventive use of repetition. It is as if Smith has brought a mathematical lesson on addition or multiplication to life, embodied in a sense of growth. He shows the actual unfolding and development of an equation through the use of organic forms and patterns.

In 1968 Smith used a large-scale polygon in his model for *Mountain Piece* (fig. 13). It remains an unrealized project, intended for a mountainside in Valencia, California. The model for the piece shows an upside-down triangle deeply cut into the side of the mountain. It appears a veritable negative to the positive space occupied by pyramids, a foil to the presence they assert within their environment. The pyramids dominate the flat space of their landscape with their mass and projection above the land, while the triangular incision of *Mountain Piece* exists as a void in an immense mound. Smith's interest in an isolated polygon reflects the timelessness of such classically rooted forms.

In *For P.N.* (1969; fig. 36) Smith continued to use the motif of the inverted pyramid. Four half octahedra are present, inverted to form the base of a square table-like form. Smith takes forms from the past and rearranges them as to pose new questions and present new possibilities. As Frederick Turner explained, "The classical genres of art...only come alive when they are stretched to accommodate new material, hybridized with other genres, or deepened by an unprecedented twist."[8] While *For P.N.* is comprised of basic geometric forms and made from the traditional medium of bronze, Smith combined its interior forms into a decidedly modern configuration and welded rather then cast the sculptural form. His ingenuity simultaneously makes him classical in his ideals and modern in his innovation.

By focusing on the formal relationships within his sculptures, Smith was able to imbue them with a sense of balance. One of the formal devices Smith used was symmetry between parts in relation to the whole, a classical method employed to attain a sense of unity and endurance. The classical aspiration for balance involves a perfection of proportions and an ideal of beauty. Smith executed both an internal and external sense of balance. The internal harmony is achieved by the spatial organization of the solid forms within the work. The external symmetry is perceived when all possible angles are considered. His sculptures are intended to be walked around, presenting several visual perspectives that collectively complete a unified view. *Duck* (1962; pl. 31) is an example of Smith's mastery of achieving an equilibrium of proportions. Its balance is created through the tension between the projected form and its base. Though the upper section implies a trajectory that shoots out diagonally, its thrust is actually curtailed by the presence of more than one plane surface at the top. More specifically, the horizontal plane at the top of the diagonal diverts the implied course. Smith used a formal system based upon a classical language to attain symmetry.

Smith stated, "I have such a Hellenistic view of things that when I see something that strikes me as abortive, it terrifies me."[9] This horror concerns that which is unnecessary and static. Most of his works, on the contrary, embody movement and extension. Such tendencies evoke the classical

33. *Tetrahedron*, 1961. Plaster, 38 x 48 x 43 in.
Private Collection

34. *Wingbone*, 1962. Plaster, 26 x 25 x 118 in.
Collection Chiara Smith, New York

35. *Eighty-One More*, 1970. Plywood mockup painted black, 55 3/8 x 498 x 432 in.
Installed at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1971 (subsequently destroyed)

36. *For P.N.*, 1969. Welded bronze with black patina, 28 x 80 x 80 in.
Tony Smith Estate, New York

spirit that is exemplified in the contrapposto stance of freestanding Classical Greek sculptures. In *Tau* stability is achieved through a shifting of weight that likewise considers the overall balance of mass and extension of proportions, vertically and horizontally. Smith's *The Snake is Out* (1962; fig. 37) has a stability created through the turning, or transfer, of weight. Despite the work's structural stability, it appears restless. The cantilevering planes create this visual sense of movement. The fluid rhythms of line and form found within Smith's sculptures recall his interest in Hambidge's principle of dynamic symmetry. Based in part on proportional systems used in Greek and Egyptian art, the dynamic, to Hambidge, "is a symmetry suggestive of life and movement."[10]

In addition to classical principles such as stability, harmony and symmetry, some of Smith's sculptures allude to classical subjects as suggested by their titles. *Tau* is an example of this. Though it is unclear why he gave the work this title, the word itself has a multitude of associations with ancient cultures that possessed strong visual aesthetics. Tau is a letter in both the Greek and Hebrew alphabets, and Smith's *Tau* resembles the Greek letter (fig. 38). As a word it has biblical origins, used to describe a "mark" or sign.[11] There is the Tau Cross, a symbol associated with the Christian saints Anthony and Francis, as well as the thieves' crosses that were next to the cross on which Jesus Christ was crucified.[12] The St. Anthony association is particularly worth noting as in Western art he is commonly depicted holding the Tau Cross or wearing it on his robe.[13] The subject of the temptations (or miracles) of St. Anthony was a popular one, painted by a large number of artists, including Hieronymous Bosch, Mattias Grünewald, Francisco de Goya, Diego Velázquez and Paul Cézanne. Though the crosses depicted in these works vary at times, some bear a striking resemblance to Smith's own *Tau*, as is the case with this sixteenth-century German image of St. Anthony (fig. 39). Moreover, in the Middles Ages small Tau Crosses could be found on the robes of certain military and religious orders, and sold as medals or badges for protection.[14] Just as Smith's sculptures hark back to ancient civilizations, tau, conceptually, has its own history as well.

Another important association that exists between Smith's sculptures and classical ideals is the interest in creating a space for reflection and experience. Upon reviewing the definition of a sanctuary as a sacred place, Smith wrote that, "sanctuary seems like my word."[15] Smith's *Smoke* (1967; fig. 11) certainly makes reference to the chapel structure. A tetrahedral space-lattice, *Smoke* compiles two tiers of vertical supports joined together by a series of ascending diagonals, which peaks to form a steeple-like filial. The overarching triangular form of *Smoke* recalls a pyramid. A side view evokes references to classical architecture such as the ancient Roman Sanctuary of Fortuna Primigenia in Palestrina from the second century B.C. (fig. 40), a structure made up of levels of columns and steppes connected by ramps that taper in width as the uppermost section is approached. *Smoke*, too, involves both an ascent and an experience: an ascent in the visual sense and an experience of participa-

tion by walking within the veritable temple skeleton. *Smoke* was illustrated on the cover of *Time* magazine in October 13, 1967 with the headline: "Sculptor Tony Smith: Art Outgrows the Museum." *Smoke* does literally outgrow the museum with its scale, vertical thrust and the experience of interacting with it.

As a sculptor, Tony Smith explored forms that expanded upon mathematical truths. *Tau*, like the Egyptian pyramids and Greek sculptures and architecture, celebrates this use of logic through geometry. According to Robert Hobbs, *Tau* appears as a "temple guard" of some "science fictional realm."[16] This statement reinforces the striking presence *Tau* asserts, but also refers to a merger of the ancient and the progressive; of massive stone temple guardians amidst an environment of steel and glass. *Tau* exemplifies the classical in its rational system of proportions and geometrical precision. *Tau* has clean, crisp edges and sharp angles, creating lines that complement the grid of the city streets. It stands as a modern monument—its fabrication made possible by an industrial age. Its medium is steel, reflecting the skeletal frames of the surrounding buildings and modes of urban transportation, subway, bus and car. The monochrome black color enhances the visual harmony and coherence as the matte patina echoes the black forms of the city: the asphalt streets, automobile tires and subway grids. *Tau*'s scale acts as an intermediary between the largeness of the buildings and the smallness of their inhabitants; it is a liaison between different worlds—the temple guards in a science fiction realm, or sphinxes along an avenue.

Joan Pachner called Smith a classical modernist "in the sense that he searched for wholeness in the world, for underlying patterns, for order that tied together the seen and unseen worlds."[17] The structure and proportion of his sculptures unite the world of the present with works of the past. "I can think of no situation in modern life," Smith avowed, "that enjoys the kind of objectivity that I associate with the Acropolis at Athens, the Forum at Rome."[18] This objectivity concerns a purpose or goal to provide public access to different spatial experiences. His works present those "emotional explanation[s] of the world about us, within us" that Smith believed we needed to see.[19] In the revolutionary spirit of Modernism, he posed new challenges of form, space and motion, while maintaining a foundation of the classical canons of logic, stability, repetition, and a self-sustaining balance. In keeping with the classical practice of mounting monumental sculptures in front of important public buildings, *Tau* stands at the entrance to Hunter College's main campus. Tony Smith has thus given the Hunter community its own sense of grandeur and timelessness, classical in spirit and in form.

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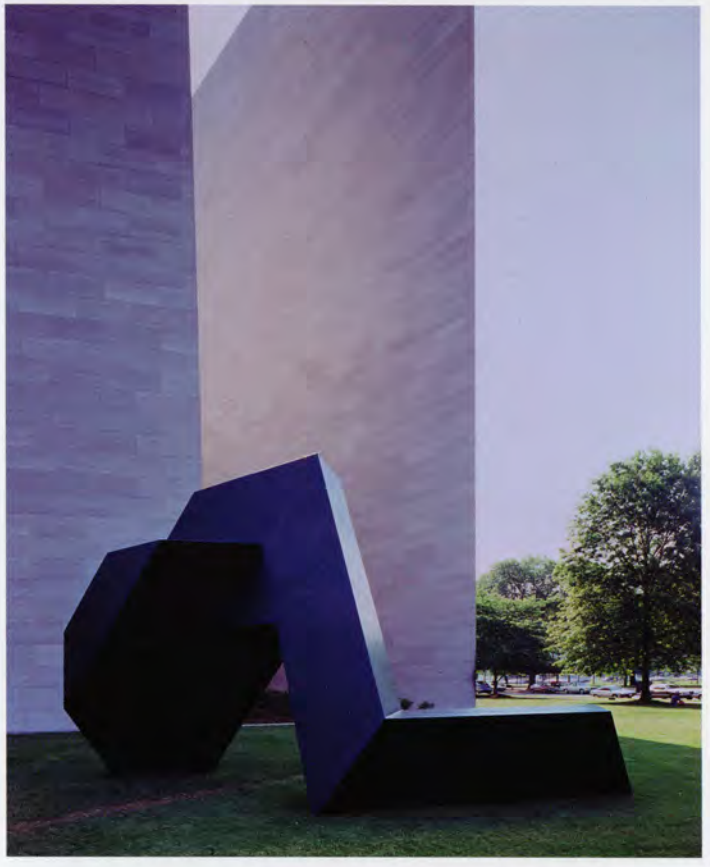
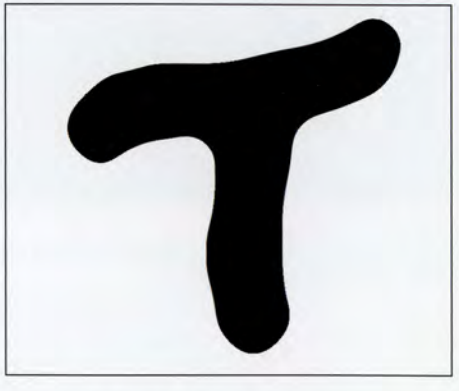
MA in Art History, Hunter College, 2004



37. *The Snake is Out*, 1962. Steel, painted black, 181 ½ x 278 x 226 in. The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



38. Tau (drawing of Greek letter)

NOTES

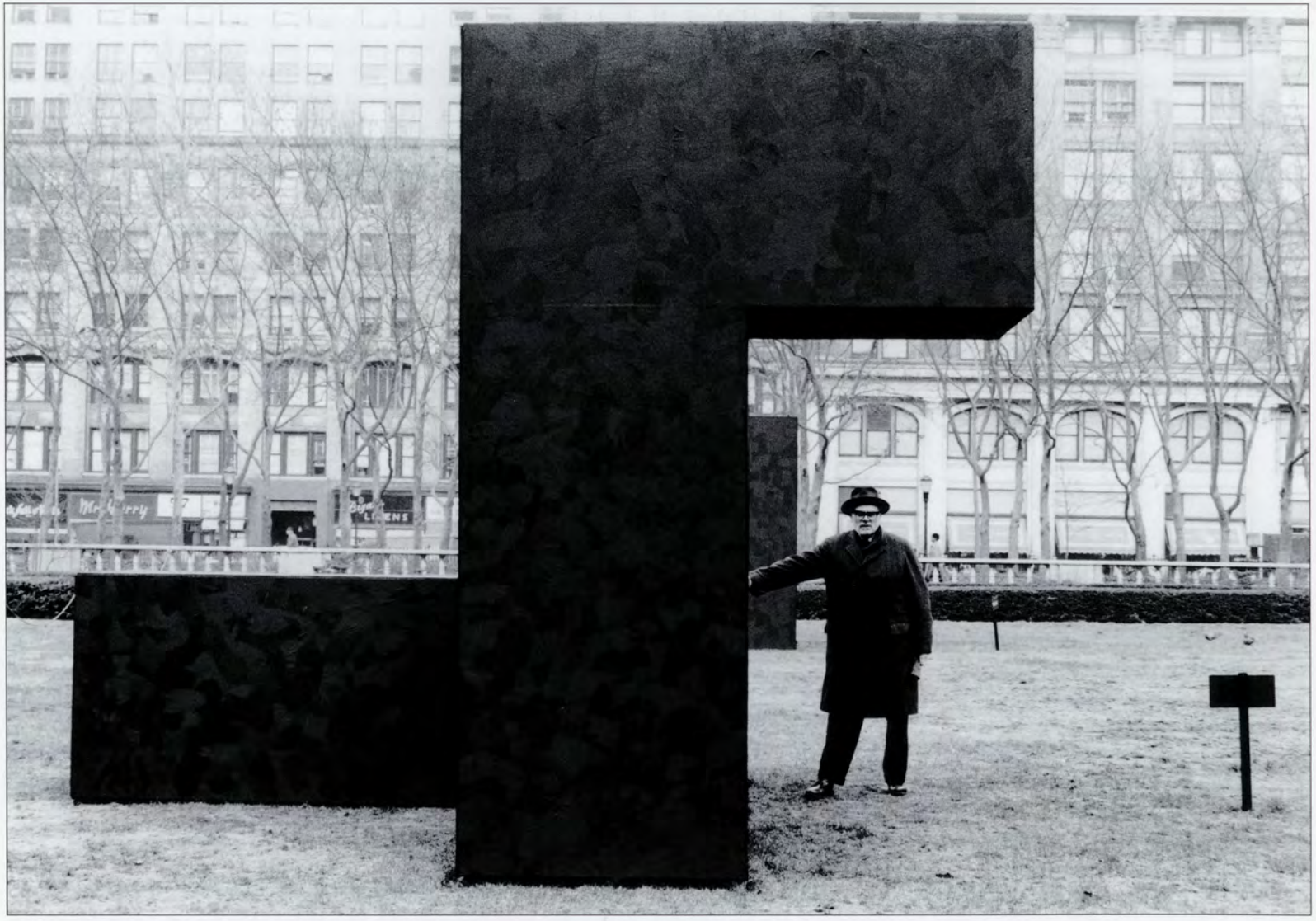
1. *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language: The Unabridged Edition* (New York: Random House, 1967), 273.
2. Dore Ashton, "'Sculpture on the Edge of Dreams': Tony Smith," *Out of the Whirlwind: Three Decades of Arts Commentary* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987), 197-203.
3. According to Abby Zito, "The Jesuits taught him logic, mathematics, philosophy and Greek," from Abby Zito, "The Mind of Tony Smith," unpublished manuscript, 1992 in *Tony Smith: Architect, Painter, Sculptor*, organized by Robert Storr, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 194.
4. Jay Hambidge, *The Elements of Dynamic Symmetry* (New York: Dover Publications, 1967), xvi.
5. Zito, 194.
6. Lucy R. Lippard, "Tony Smith: Talk about Sculpture," *Art News* 7 (April 1971): 48.
7. Robert Motherwell, "In Memoriam: Anthony Smith," *Art Press* 57 (March 1, 1982).
8. Frederick Turner, *A Culture of Hope: The New Birth of the Classical Spirit* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 9.
9. Quoted in "The Sculpture of Tony Smith by Sam Hunter," *Tony Smith: Ten Elements and Throwback*, exh. cat. (New York: The Pace Gallery, 1979), 6.
10. Hambidge, xv.
11. It can be found in the books of Genesis, Exodus, Ezekiel, Job, Numbers and the Apocalypse. Its particular meaning in these respective scriptures would, of course, depend on the translator. Generally, though, it either symbolized a mark of protection or salvation.
12. The Tau Cross is also called the Old Testament Cross, given its predominance in the early books of the Bible, as well as St. Anthony's Cross (as St. Anthony, per legend, used it to dispel all temptations).
13. It may also be relevant that Anthony is Tony Smith's proper (and Christian) name, and so being raised in a Catholic family St. Anthony likely would have been recognized as Smith's patron saint.
14. For more on this see Timothy B. Husband, "The Winteringham Tau Cross and Ignis Sacer," *The Metropolitan Museum Journal: Essays in Memory of Guy C. Bauman* 27 (1992): 19-36.
15. Tony Smith, *The Pattern of Organic Life in America*, unpublished manuscript (New York: Archives, Tony Smith Estate, 1943), unpaginated.
16. Robert Hobbs, "A Meditation on Tony Smith's Sculpture," *Tony Smith: Paintings and Sculpture*, exh. cat. (New York: The Pace Gallery, 1983) 5-10.
17. Joan Pachner, personal correspondence, New York, NY, 26 February 2004.
18. Smith, *The Pattern of Organic Life in America*.
19. Smith, *The Pattern of Organic Life in America*.

39. *The Temptation of Saint Anthony,* 1532. German; Made in Swabia. Colorless glass, silver stain, vitreous paint; Diam. 8 in. (20.3 cm) The Cloisters Collection, 1982 (1982.433.5) The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Detail of 39.

40. *Sanctuary of Fortuna Primigenia*, Palestrina, Italy, late second century B.C.

CHRONOLOGY Rachael Grygorcewicz



Tony Smith at Bryant Park, 1967. Photograph by David Gahr

1912
Tony Smith is born in South Orange, New Jersey, on September 23, the second of seven children to a prosperous Irish Catholic family. His father, Peter Smith, owns and runs the family business, the A.P. Smith Manufacturing Company, which was founded by his own father in the 1800s.

1916
At the age of 4, Smith is diagnosed with what is thought to be tuberculosis. This debilitating disease prohibits him from attending elementary school on a regular basis. In order to avoid spreading the ailment to his brothers and sisters, Smith is kept from having contact with his family.[1] Instead, he spends most of his younger years in a makeshift shelter in the backyard of his family home with a personal nurse. His only recollection of the time is that something differentiated him from his family, but what specifically this was, he did not understand.[2]

1926-1930
A teenager still living in New Jersey, Smith commutes to St. Francis Xavier, a Jesuit high school in Manhattan. His father encourages this, despite the long and tiresome commute, made particularly difficult since Smith is still weak from his childhood illness. Smith's interest in art develops during these years although he does not recall a specific event that generates his attraction. He does not create anything at this time, but begins to notice the paintings his mother brings into the family home. His father also has an appreciation for art and exposes Smith to new artists such as George Luks and John Sloan. Despite Smith's developing interest, his father discourages him from pursuing a career as an artist.

1931-1934
After graduating from Xavier in 1931, Smith continues his education at Fordham University for two semesters, followed by two years at Georgetown University.[3] Although very intelligent, Smith is not serious about his studies and returns home before completing his degree. Upon his return, he pursues his interest in art and literature. He takes a job, which would last for two years, managing a bookstore in South Orange, New Jersey. He is an avid reader of modern English literature, especially the works of James Joyce, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot. Smith quits the bookstore and turns to the family business where he works for his father as a toolmaker, draftsman and purchaser.

1934-1936
He enters the Art Students League where he takes his first formal art classes all the while working at his family's factory during the day. At the Art Students League Smith takes night classes in drawing, painting and anatomy and studies under George Grosz, Vaclav Vytacil and George Bridgeman.[4] His paintings are most influenced by the ideas of Vytacil, a teacher whom Smith would later credit as being one of the greatest artistic influences. Smith's style reflects this admiration, as Vytacil teaches Smith the notion that both positive and negative space should be given equal importance on the canvas. This concept is reflected in many of his paintings from the 1930s and 1940s and later, in his sculpture.

1937
Smith enrolls at the New Bauhaus in Chicago. He is interested in painting and drawing as well as design, and he feels that architecture is a practical way to combine these arts. At the Bauhaus, Smith studies photography, drafting, sculpture and metalwork. His experience in his father's business, where he became knowledgeable about American techniques in fabrication, becomes useful when he takes a class in metalworking taught by Lazlo Moholy-Nagy. Smith often corrects the professor during his lectures and as a result, Moholy-Nagy himself appoints Smith head of the metal workshop.

1938
Smith leaves architecture school because of a creative disagreement with Moholy-Nagy and returns home to New Jersey, unsure of what his next step will be. He has no job and almost no money. Additionally, his father refuses to fund his artistic pursuits. He describes himself as being in a "catatonic state," both confused and depressed, feeling completely lost.[5]

Later this year, he reacquaints himself with a photographer friend whom he had known from the Bauhaus, Laurence Cureno, who brings Smith to Frank Lloyd Wright's Ben Rebhuhn House in Great Neck, Long Island. Smith is able to explore the house intimately and he is astonished by Wright's architecture. The experience encourages Smith to pursue a job on a Wright project when he learns of an available position at a site in Ardmore, Pennsylvania. He initially serves as a carpenter's helper and later advances to bricklayer. This is one of the first jobs in which Smith actually builds something on site as opposed to merely executing designs in a classroom. He connects architecture, engineering and drafting and learns the trade by "trying it" on this project.[6]

1941-1942
Smith moves to New York City into an apartment in Greenwich Village. He lives near friends Fritz Bultman, Sydney McFadden and Gerome Kamrowsky and immerses himself in the New York art world by visiting various galleries and museums. It is through Bultman that Smith first meets Jackson Pollock and Tennessee Williams, two significant influences who later become friends.

In 1942, two years after working on the Wright project, Smith undertakes one of his most complex architectural undertakings, a house for L.L. Brotherton. The Brotherton House uses a hexagonal grid as the form and proves to be an ambitious undertaking for the young architect.[7]

Tony Smith in backyard in New Jersey, 1966. Photograph by Rudy Burkhardt

1943

Smith meets Jane Lawrence, his future wife, through Bultman. After a five-day courtship Smith proposes marriage, and nine months later they marry in Santa Monica, California, with Tennessee Williams acting as best man. The couple then moves to Hollywood in order for Jane to pursue her career as an opera singer. In the same year, Smith produces "The Pattern of Organic Life in America," an unpublished philosophical account of his artistic ideals that will inform his later work.[8]

1944-1945

Smith returns to the East Coast to design and construct a studio for Bultman in Provincetown, Massachusetts. While working there he becomes familiar with many artists, including Frederick Kiesler, who introduces Smith to the many of the New York City art galleries including Peggy Guggenheim's pioneering *Art of this Century* Gallery. Smith also meets Buffie Johnson, who later introduces him to enduring friend and painter, Barnett Newman.

The Smiths settle in New York City once again and Tony Smith reconnects with Jackson Pollock. He also develops friendships with other Abstract Expressionists, in particular Mark Rothko and Clyfford Still.[9] Ironically, despite his ties with Pollock, Smith meets these artists through Jane, who is not personally involved in the art world and met Rothko by chance.

1946-1953

Smith teaches at New York University's School of Education from 1946–1950. In 1946, Rothko gives his Eighth Street studio to Smith who uses it as a classroom for his students at NYU.[10] He also teaches at Cooper Union and Pratt Institute of Art from 1951-1952.[11] Students remember his great admiration for Abstract Expressionist painting. One student, George Segal, recalls Smith bringing a Rothko to class to show how the artist uses color to project an "inside mood."[12] Smith emphasizes abstraction as a form unto itself and encourages his students to stress the two-dimensionality of painting when filling their canvases with color.

1953-1955

Smith leaves New York and moves to Heidelberg, Germany, to accompany Jane, whose career in opera is soaring abroad. Spending the next two years in Germany has both positive and negative effects on his career. By leaving New York in the 1950s he distances himself from the Abstract Expressionists when their careers are at their peak. Despite this separation, Smith takes advantage of his time abroad, traveling throughout Europe seeing both modern and classical art and architecture in Germany, Italy and France.[13] Unfortunately, this separation leads to isolation because Smith knows no one but his wife in Europe, and she is occupied with her own craft.

Smith returns to his original love of painting. He paints the *Louisenberg* Series, based on a grid with circular shapes contained within a pattern. His time abroad is to be one of his most artistically productive periods. Smith also becomes a father as he and Jane have their first daughter, Chiara, who is born in Nuremberg in 1954.

1955-1958

Upon returning from Europe, the Smiths live at his family home in South Orange where twin daughters Seton and Beatrice are born in July of 1955. He returns to teaching at Pratt and NYU, as well as a new appointment at Bennington College (1958-1961). He ceases all architectural work and turns toward sculpture, also teaching it in the classroom. He creates his first sculpture, *Throne* (1956). The sculpture is realized during a class lecture as he demonstrates to his students the advantages of the tetrahedral shape over right-angled structures.[14]

1961-1963

In 1962, Smith begins teaching at Hunter College in New York City where he remains until 1980. He teaches a variety of advanced studio classes including painting, photography and drawing.

Despite an automobile accident in 1961, which leaves him seriously impaired and in declining health, Smith produces his most celebrated works in the early 1960s.[15] He is extremely productive and creates a series of sculptures based on the favored tetrahedral module. Each piece is related to and evolves from a previous work. He prefers to work out his ideas using maquettes and small

models, rather then through preliminary sketches. In 1961, Smith creates his first environmental piece, *Cigarette*, which invites the viewer to walk through, sit on and fully interact with it.

He creates his first steel sculpture, *Black Box* in 1962. This piece, perhaps one of Smith's most important works, derives from an index card file box that sits on the desk of his colleague, E.C. Goossen at Hunter College. Smith is fascinated with its form and sketches it scaled up to five times its actual size while removing the object's original detailing. *Free Ride* and *Die*, both made later that year, directly evolve from *Black Box*.[16]

During this period, Smith also creates *Beardwig* (1962) and *Duck* (1962), as well as *Tau*, conceived in 1962.

1964-1966

Smith's sculptures become public for the first time in 1964, when curator Samuel Wagstaff becomes interested after seeing them through friend, Ray Parker. Wagstaff selects *Elevens Are Up* (1963) for the exhibition *Black, White and Grey* at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut.

The exposure in Hartford leads to increasing interest in Smith's sculpture. In 1966, *Free Ride* is selected by the Jewish Museum in New York to be exhibited in its influential *Primary Structures* show. Later that year, Samuel Wagstaff curates Smith's first one-man show *Tony Smith: Two Exhibitions of Sculpture*, which is simultaneously on view at the Wadsworth Atheneum and the Philadelphia Institute of Contemporary Art. In the catalogue essay, Wagstaff states that Smith is one of the "best unknown artists in American art."[17] In 1966, Smith also receives the Longview Foundation Art Award and the National Council of the Arts Award.[18]

1967-1974

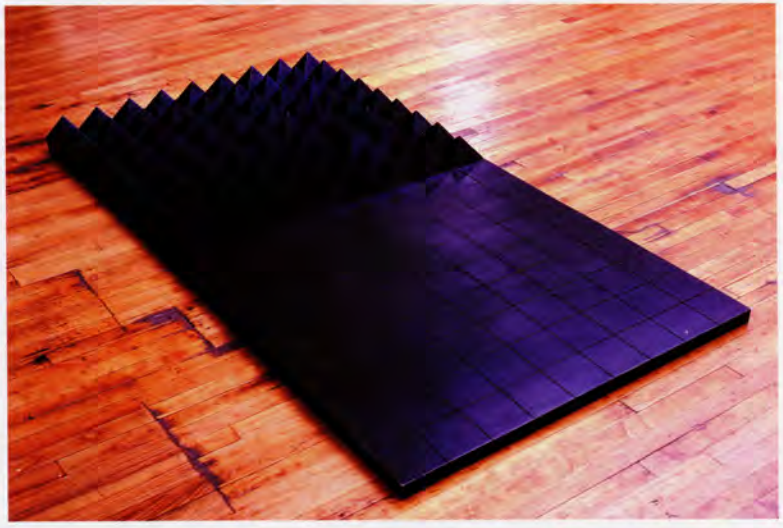
Smith is quickly becoming more well known as eight of his large-scale sculptures are chosen to be shown in the *Sculpture in Environment* exhibition in Bryant Park in New York City in early 1967. Later that year, another notable sculpture, *Maze* (1967), is included in *Schemata 7* at the Finch College Museum of Art. He also has his second one-man show at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. Additionally, his works are exhibited abroad in Germany, Switzerland and France.

Smith continues to unveil his works to the public in 1967. His seminal piece, *Smoke*, is included in the exhibition *Scale as Content: Ronald Bladen, Barnett Newman, Tony Smith*, at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington D.C.[19] *Smoke* (1967), his largest sculpture to be realized in full scale, is produced in wood rather than metal due to the expense of the material. *Smoke* is a variation of the 1964 sculpture *Moondog*. It is based on the elongated, stretched octahedral form which later evolves into *Smog* (1969), and finally *Smug* (1973).[20] Both Smith and *Smoke* are featured on the cover of the October 1967 *Time* magazine, leading to increased notoriety.

In 1969, Smith designs *Haole Crater* for the University of Hawaii in Honolulu where he briefly takes a teaching job during the summer. In 1970, four major museums in Smith's home state of New Jersey organize a one-man exhibition, *Seven Sculptures by Tony Smith*. He is further recognized in 1971, receiving a fine arts medal from the American Institute of Architects.[21]

In the late 1960s Smith works on four major projects that display the magnitude and maturation of his art. He designs *Hubris* (1969; fig. 41), a public site-specific work intended for the campus of the University of Hawaii. He also designs an immense indoor piece, *Batcave*, to be installed at Expo '70 in Osaka, Japan. At the same time, Smith is designing a public water garden and an enormous three-dimensional addition to a naturally-occurring fissure in a mountain in California.[22] These four projects are based on the tetrahedral module that Smith used throughout his career, although they are completely distinct in their physical appearance. These variations of the module further exemplify the diversity of Tony Smith's sculptures.

Mountain Piece (1968), although unrealized, is commissioned by Samuel Wagstaff. This piece takes Smith's work to a completely new level. Known as one of his later "earthworks," the piece is comprised of a large-scale concave groove cut into a mountain.



41. *Hubris*, 1969. Cast bronze with black patina, 5 x 82 ¼ x 41 in. Private Collection

Smith begins to experiment with color and medium in his sculpture. He creates the steel piece *Light Up* (1971), and paints the piece an intense shade of yellow. He goes to Italy to make *For Dolores* (1973-74) a work carved in marble, a medium that is new to him.

In the 1970s, Smith's notoriety continues to grow and his work is featured in a variety of group exhibitions in the United States and abroad. His work is included in the Whitney Museum of American Art's *Annual Exhibition* three years running from 1971-1973 and the extensive survey *200 Years of American Sculpture* (1976), also at the Whitney.

1975-1980

Among the last sculptures that Smith conceives in the final period of his life are *One-Two-Three* (1976), *Throwback* (1977) and an untitled sculpture based on a series of Five Cs (1980). *One-Two-Three* explores Smith's notion of mathematical continuance within sculpture, as each individual piece is derived from the previous one. *Throwback* is thought to be one of his most figurative works, as it there is a strong sense of life and movement pulsating throughout its horizontal shape.[23] The untitled piece done in 1980 is made up of a single shape that resembles the letter "C" repeated five times and placed in five different positions.

In 1978, *Tony Smith: Models and Drawings*, is featured at the Montclair State Museum in New Jersey. In 1979, Smith's later sculptures are exhibited at the Pace Gallery in New York City in an exhibition entitled *Tony Smith: Ten Elements and Throwback*.

Smith takes a brief leave from Hunter to teach at Princeton University from 1975-1978. He also receives a series of accolades in the 1970s, including the College Art Association Distinguished Teaching Art Award (1974), and becomes a member of The American Institute of Art and Letters (1979).[24] A year before his death, he returns to Hunter, where he finishes his teaching career.

A wooden mock-up of *Tau* is created and exhibited at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in the *Twenty American Artists* show in late 1980, a few months before Smith's death. In December of that year, Smith dies of a heart attack at the age of 68.

1984

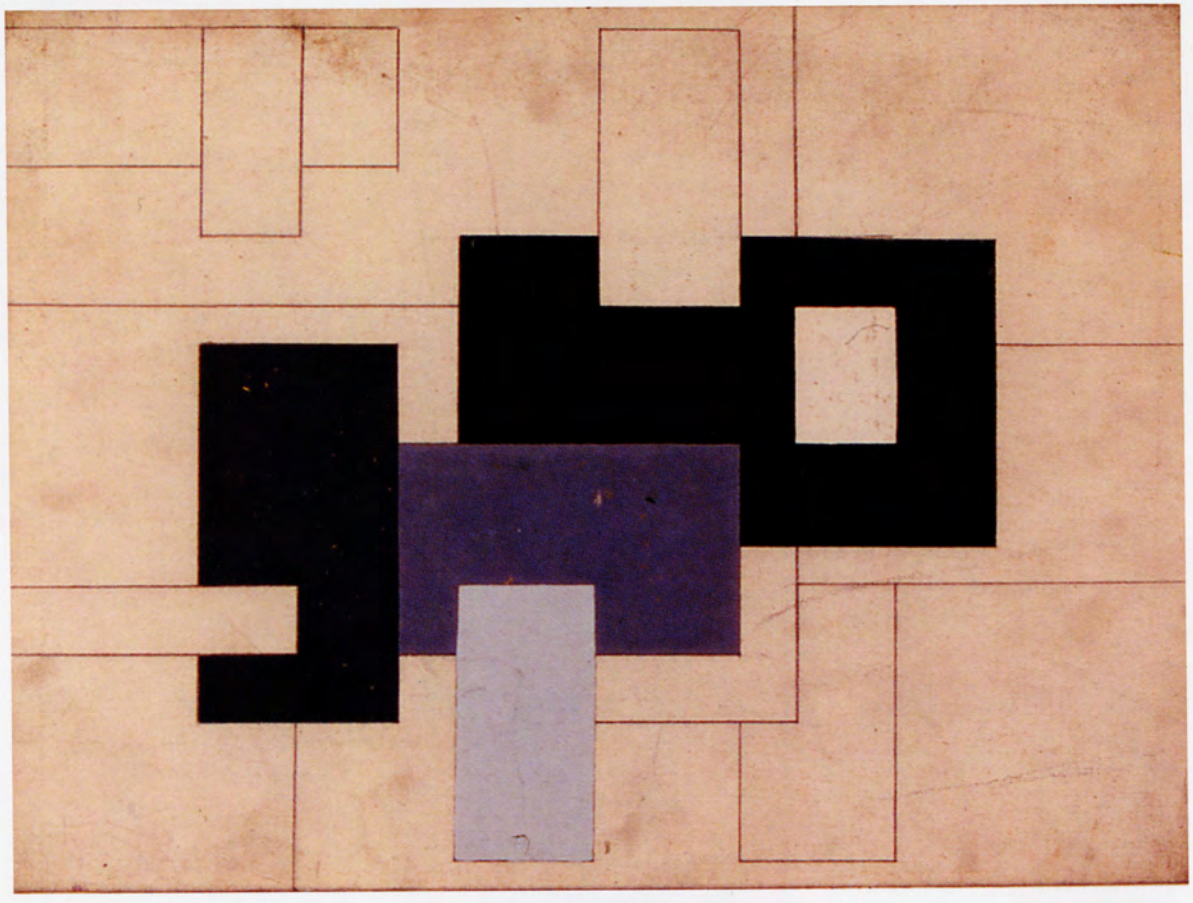
Smith's works are exhibited at Hunter College Art Gallery in the show *Tony Smith Drawings.*

On September 8, *Tau* is installed at Hunter College's West Plaza, located at 68th Street and Lexington Avenue in Manhattan. *Tau* is Smith's first public sculpture to be installed permanently in New York City.

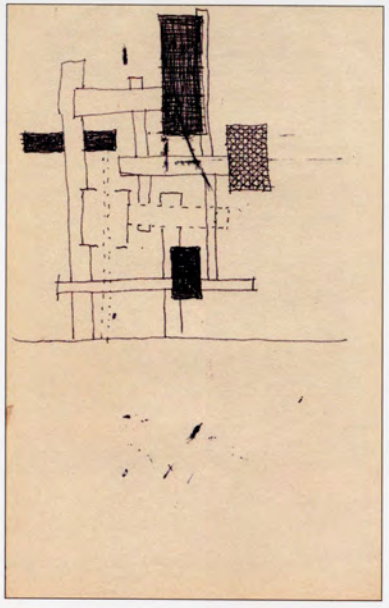
NOTES

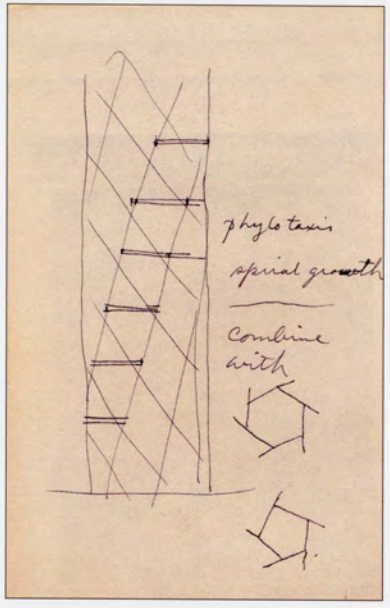
1. Joan Pachner, "Chronology," in *Tony Smith Architect, Painter, Sculptor*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 184.
2. Paul Cummings, Interview with Tony Smith, Orange, New Jersey, August 22, 1978. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C. and New York: 34.
3. Pachner, 184.
4. Joan Pachner, "Paintings and Drawings," in *Tony Smith, Architect, Painter, Sculptor*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 70.
5. Cummings, 23.
6. Cummings, 26.
7. John Keenen, "Architecture," in *Tony Smith: Architect, Painter, Sculptor*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 38-39.
8. Pachner, 70.
9. Joan Pachner, "Tony Smith Paintings: The Interwar Years," in *Tony Smith Paintings: A Survey of Early Works from the 1930's and 1940's*, exh. cat. (Chicago: Robert Henry Adams Fine Art, 2001), 11.
10. Sam Hunter, *Tony Smith: Ten Elements and Throwback*, exh. cat. (New York: The Pace Gallery, 1979), 3.
11. Pachner, "Chronology," 185.
12. Robert Storr, "A Man of Parts," in *Tony Smith: Architect, Painter, Sculptor*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 14.
13. Storr, 21.
14. Storr, 25.
15. Storr, 32.
16. Pachner, "Sculpture," in *Tony Smith: Architect, Painter, Sculptor*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 128-129.
17. Storr, 32.
18. Pachner, "Chronology," 185.
19. Storr, 30.
20. Lucy Lippard, "Tony Smith: Talk About Sculpture," *ArtNews* 70 (1971): 48-49.
21. Pachner, "Chronology," 185.
22. Lucy Lippard, *Tony Smith* (New York: Harry N. Abrams and Stuttgart: Verlag Gerard Hatje, 1972), 22-23.
23. Pachner, "Sculpture," 133.
24. Pachner, "Chronology," 186-187.

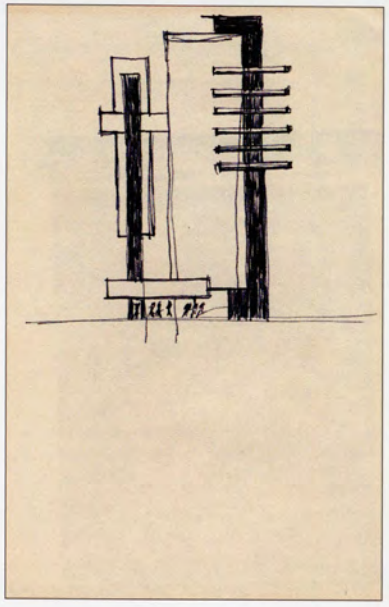
PLATES

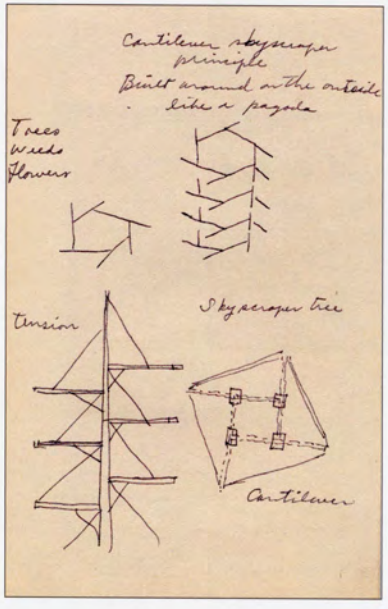


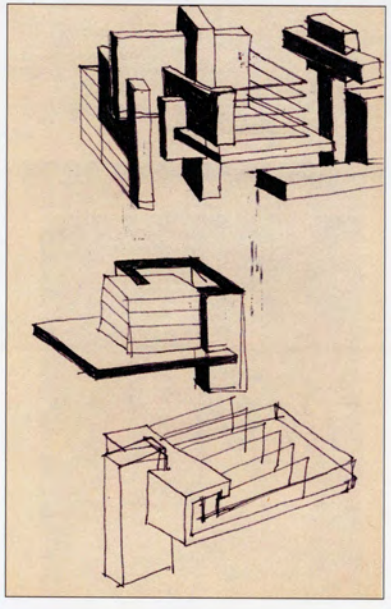
1. Untitled, c. 1934-1936. Oil and pencil on canvasboard, 11 7/8 x 16 in. Jane Smith, New York



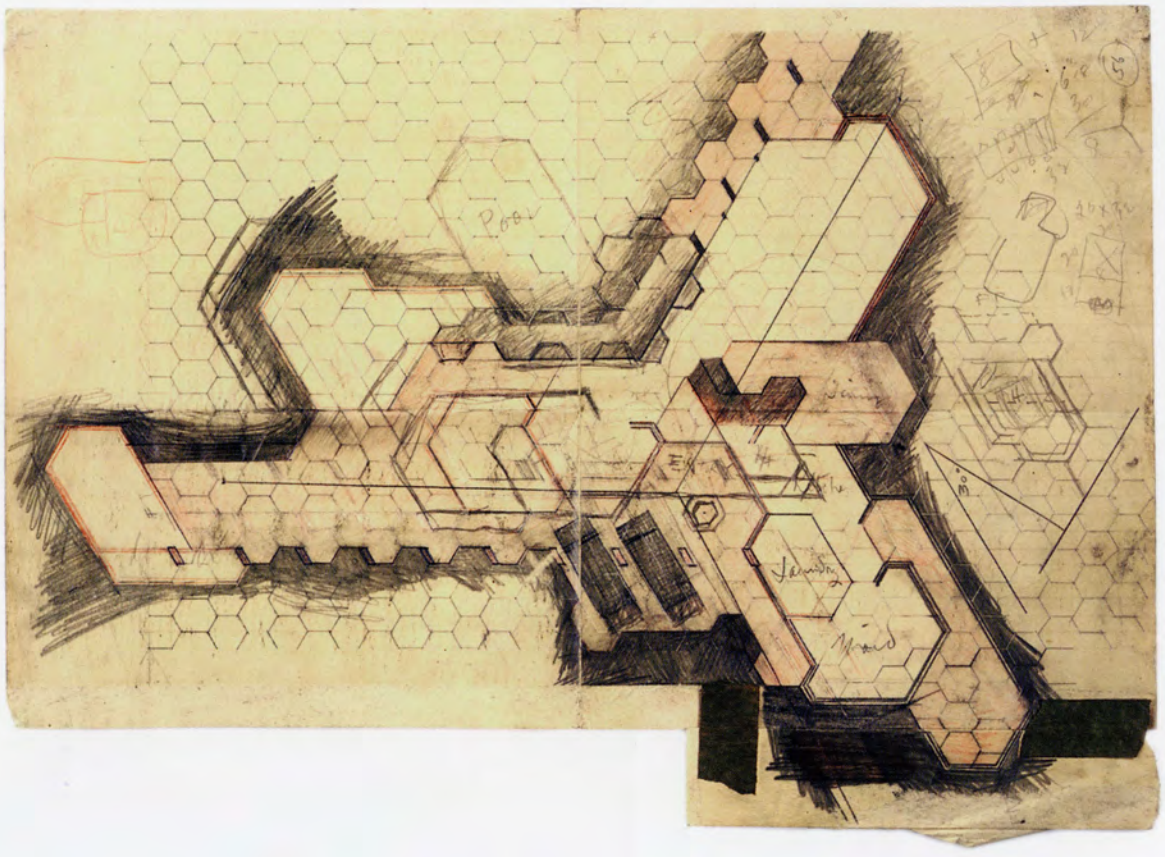




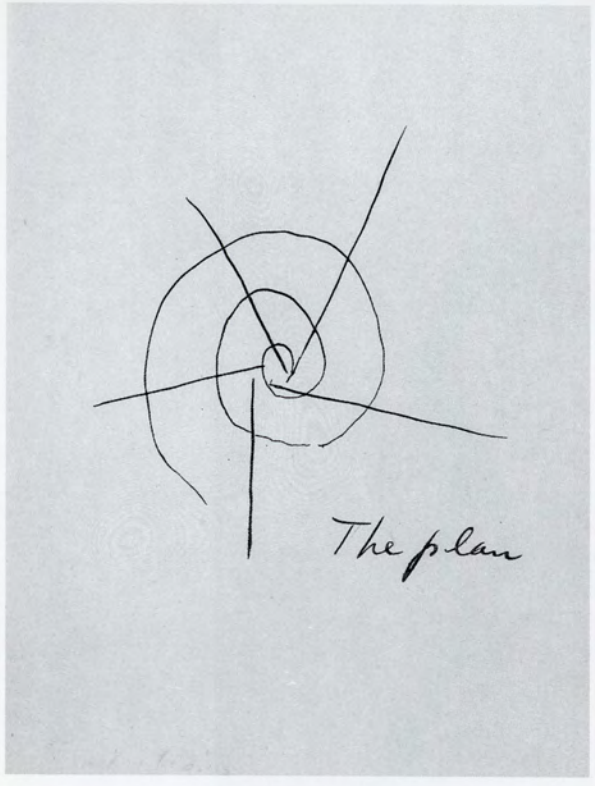




2.–6. Five pages from Tony Smith's unpublished manuscript *The Pattern of Organic Life in America,* 1943. Ink on paper, each 7 7/8 x 5 in.
Tony Smith Estate, New York

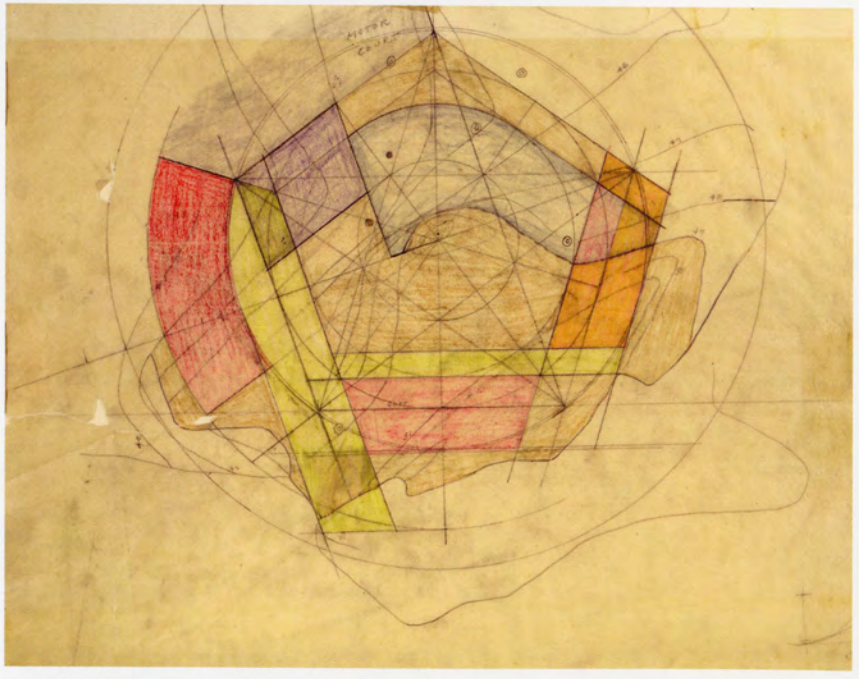


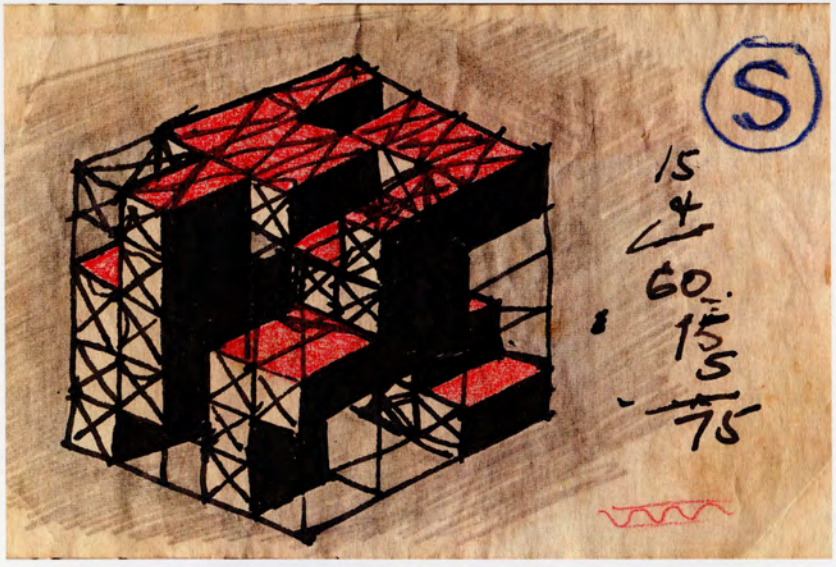
7. *Brotherton House Plan*, c. 1944. Colored pencil on paper, 11 15/16 x 19 1/16 in. Tony Smith Estate, New York



8. Page from a sketchbook, c. 1951. Ink on paper, 9 11/16 x 7 1/2 in. Tony Smith Estate, New York

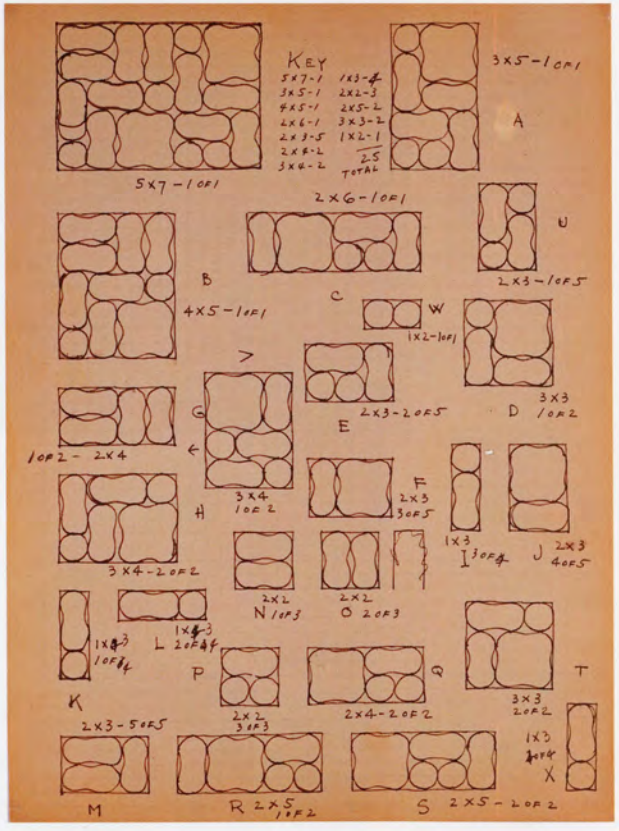
9. *Olsen House Site Plan*, c. 1951. Colored pencil on paper, 18 3/4 x 23 7/8 in. Tony Smith Estate, New York

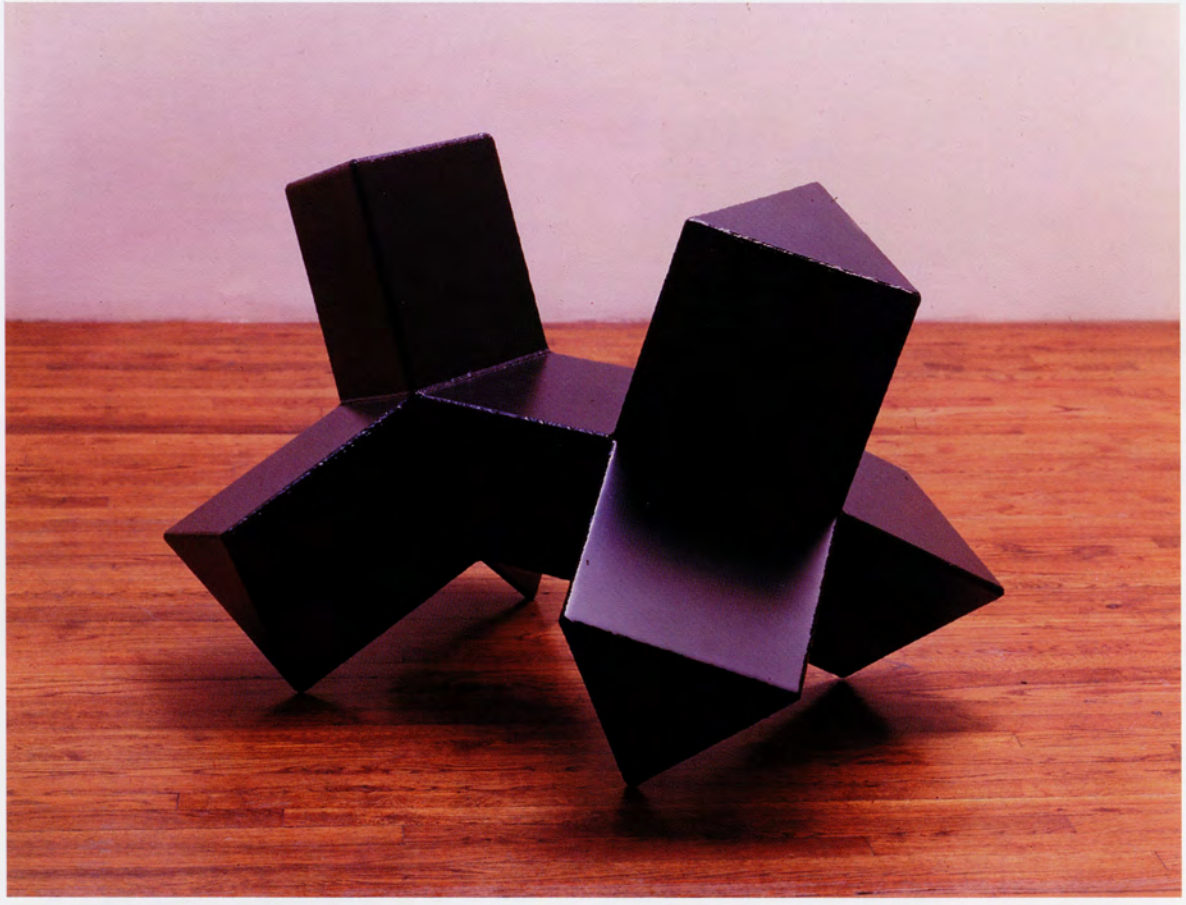




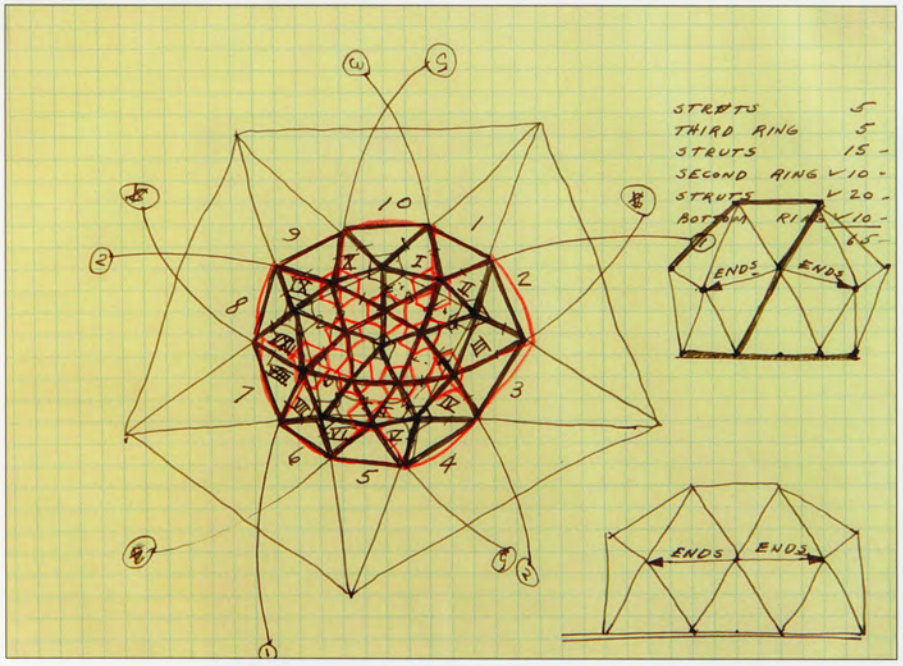
10. Untitled (drawing related to Scoppettone House), c. 1952.
Ink and pencil on paper, 6 x 5 in. Tony Smith Estate, New York

11. Untitled (study for *Louisenberg* paintings), 1953-1955.
Ink on paper, 11 ¼ x 8 ¼ in. Tony Smith Estate, New York

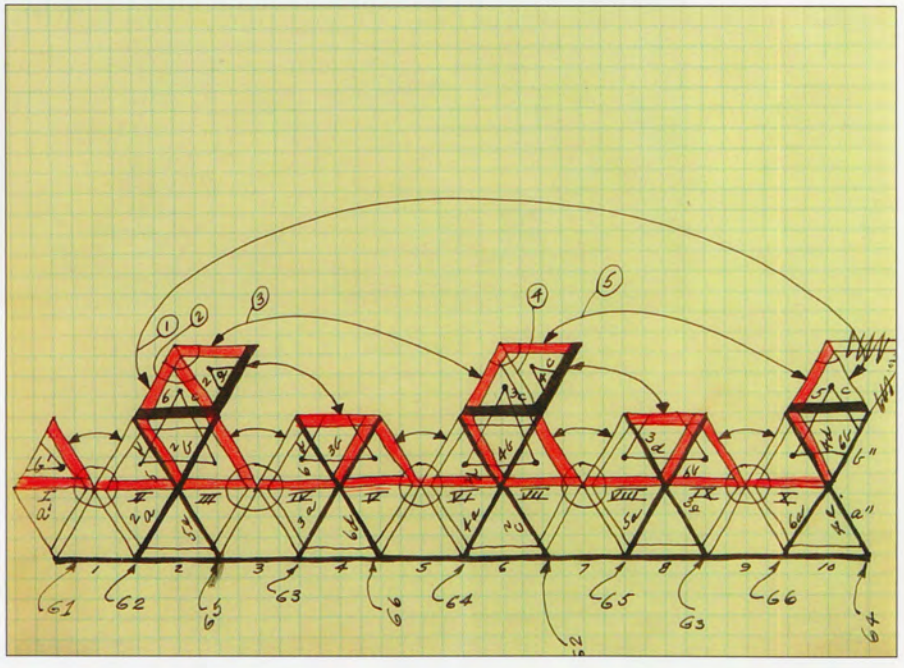




12. *Throne*, 1956-1957. Steel, painted black, 28 x 39 x 32 in. Tony Smith Estate, New York



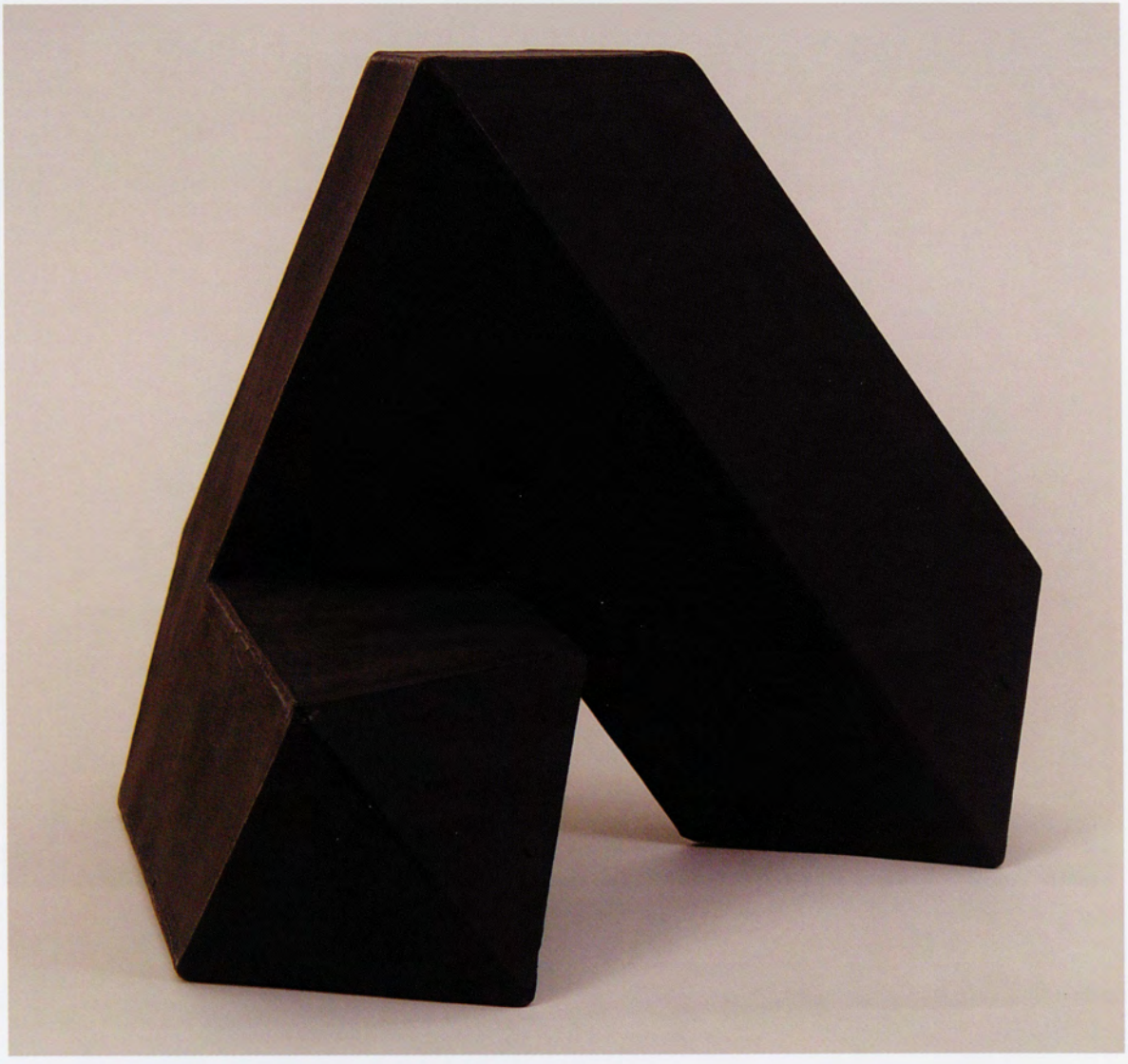
13. Untitled, c. 1960s. Ink on paper, 8 ½ x 11 in.
Collection of Jim Shepperd



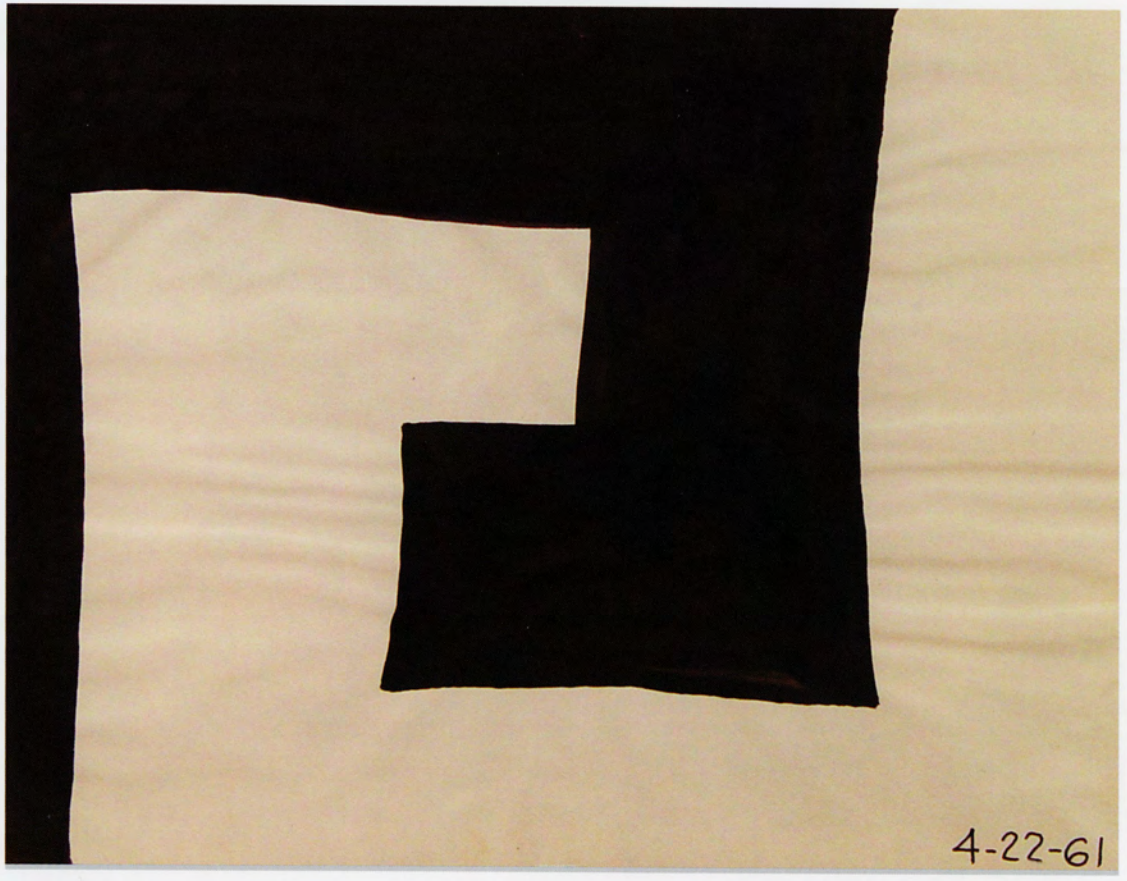
14. Untitled, c. 1960s. Ink on paper, 8 ½ x 11 in.
Collection of Annette and Robert Swain

15. Untitled, 1960. Oil on canvas, 50 x 60 in. Jane Smith, New York

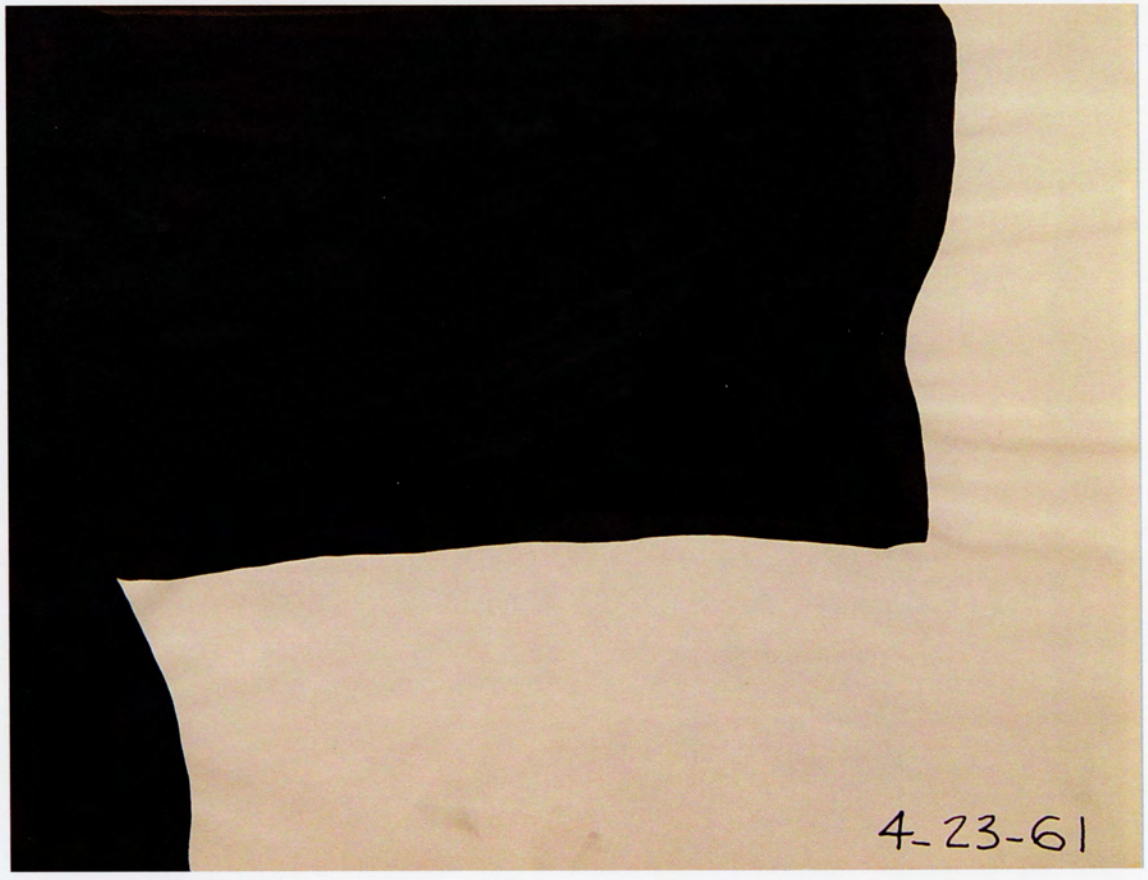
16. Untitled, c. 1961. Oil on canvas, 24 x 30 in. Jane Smith, New York



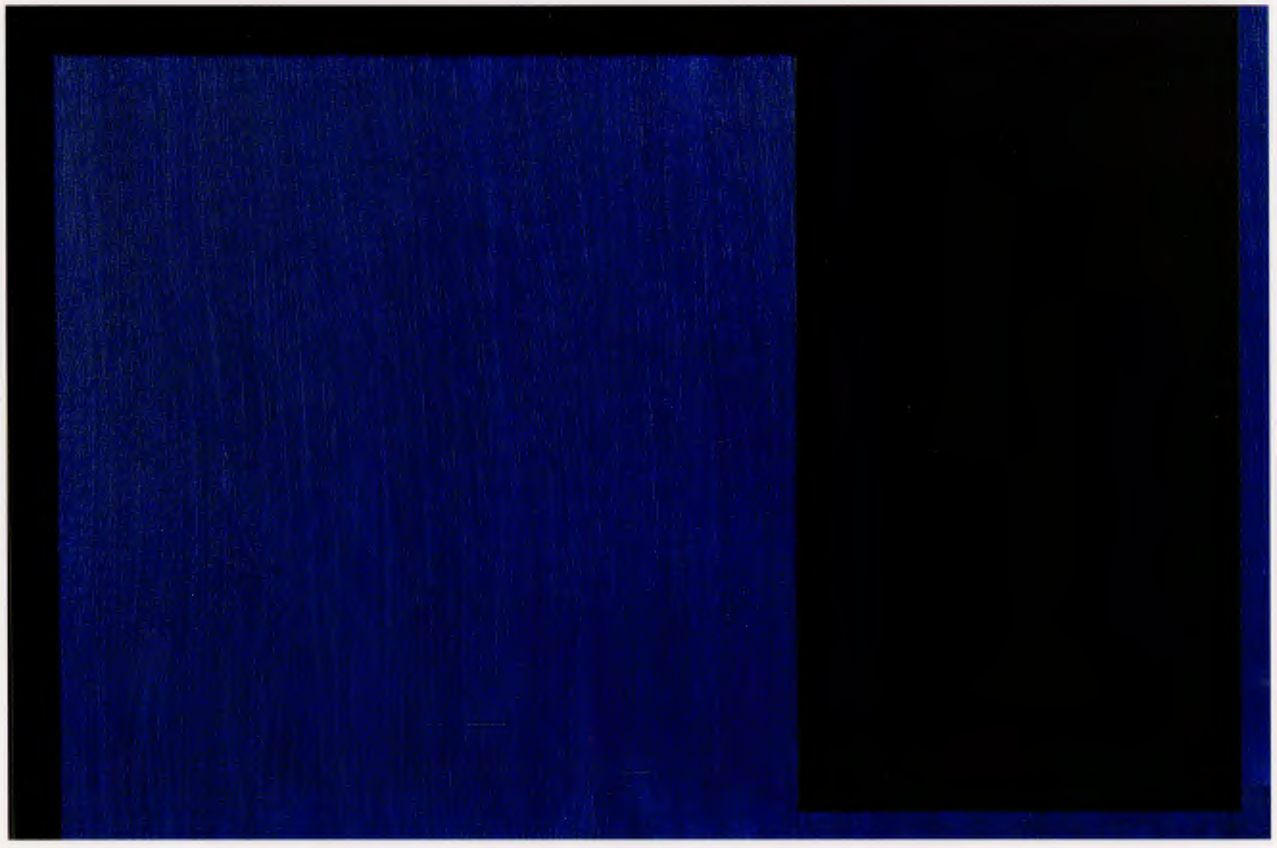
17. *Spitball*, 1961. Cardboard model, painted black, 11 ½ x 14 x 14 in. Tony Smith Estate, New York



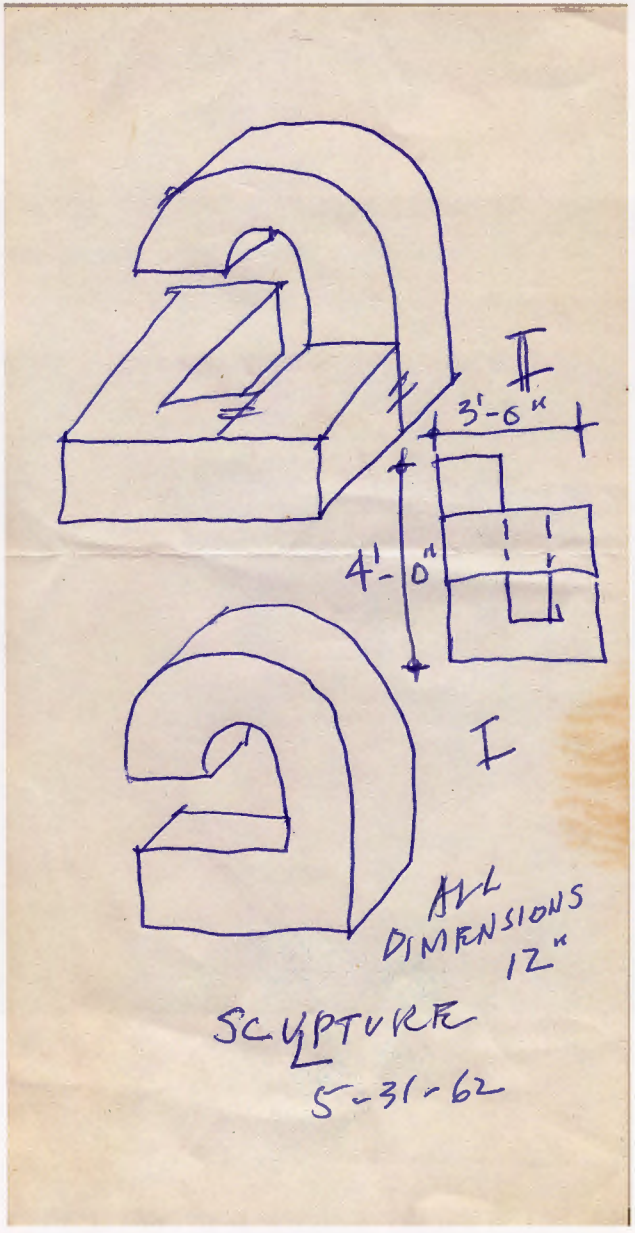
18. Untitled, 1961. Ink on paper, 11 x 13 7/8 in. Tony Smith Estate, New York



19. Untitled, 1961. Ink on paper, 11 x 13 7/8 in. Tony Smith Estate, New York

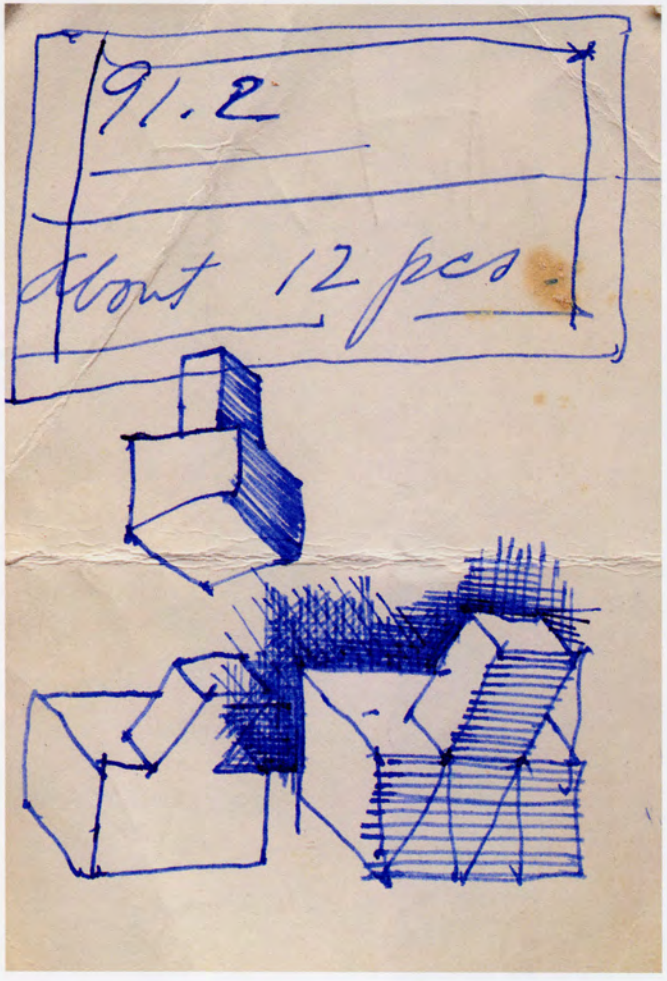


20. Untitled, 1962. Oil on canvas, 24 x 36 in. Collection of Jim Shepperd

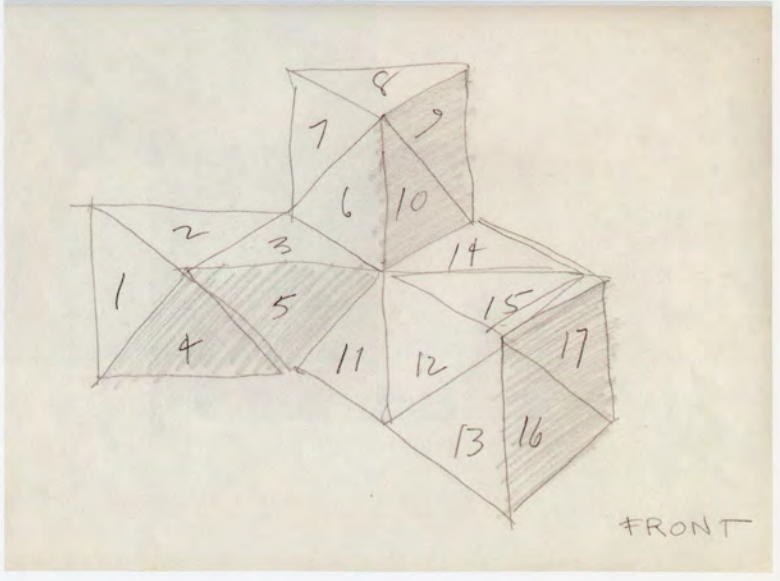


21. Untitled, 1962. Ink on paper, 8 3/8 x 4 1/4 in.
Tony Smith Estate, New York

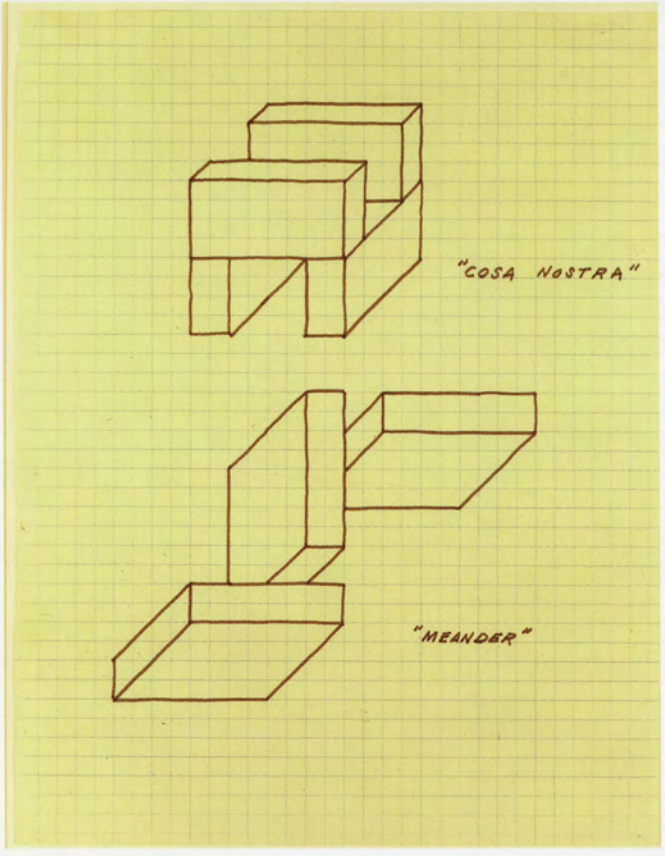
22. *Beardwig*, 1962. Steel, painted black, 42 x 36 x 36 in.
Tony Smith Estate, New York



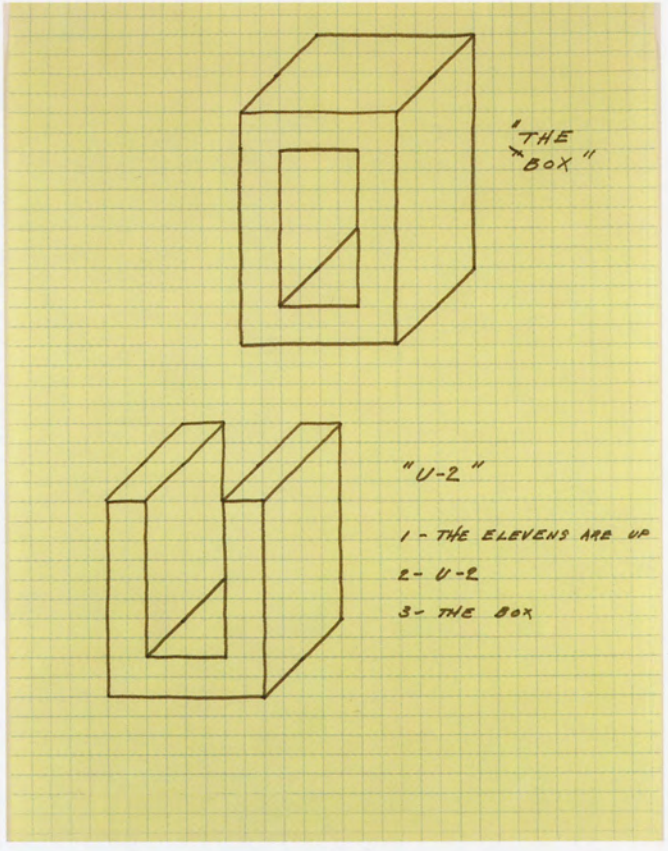
23. Untitled, n.d. Ink on paper, 5 x 3 in. Tony Smith Estate, New York



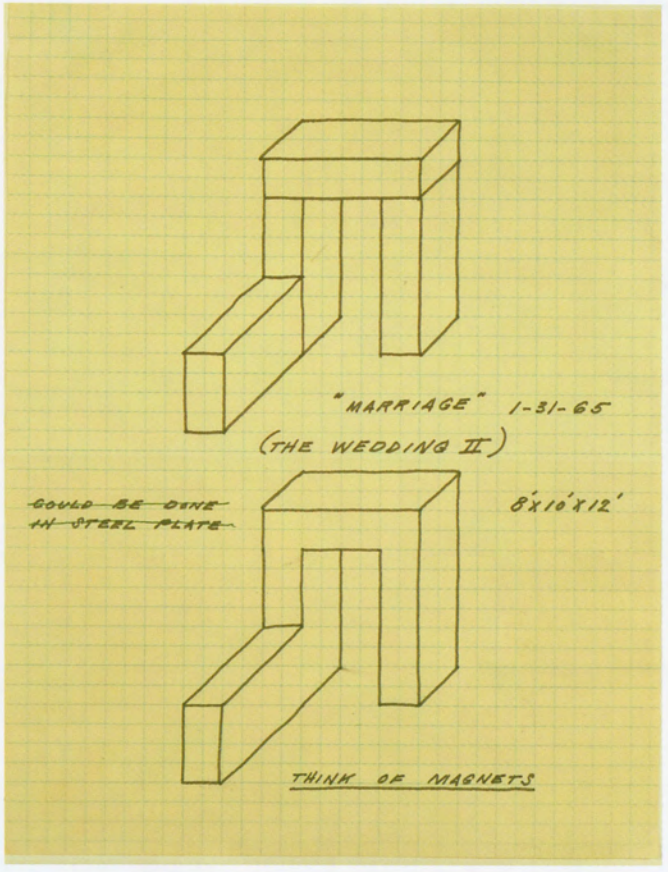
24. Untitled, c. 1960s. Pencil on paper, 9 x 12 in.
Tony Smith Estate, New York



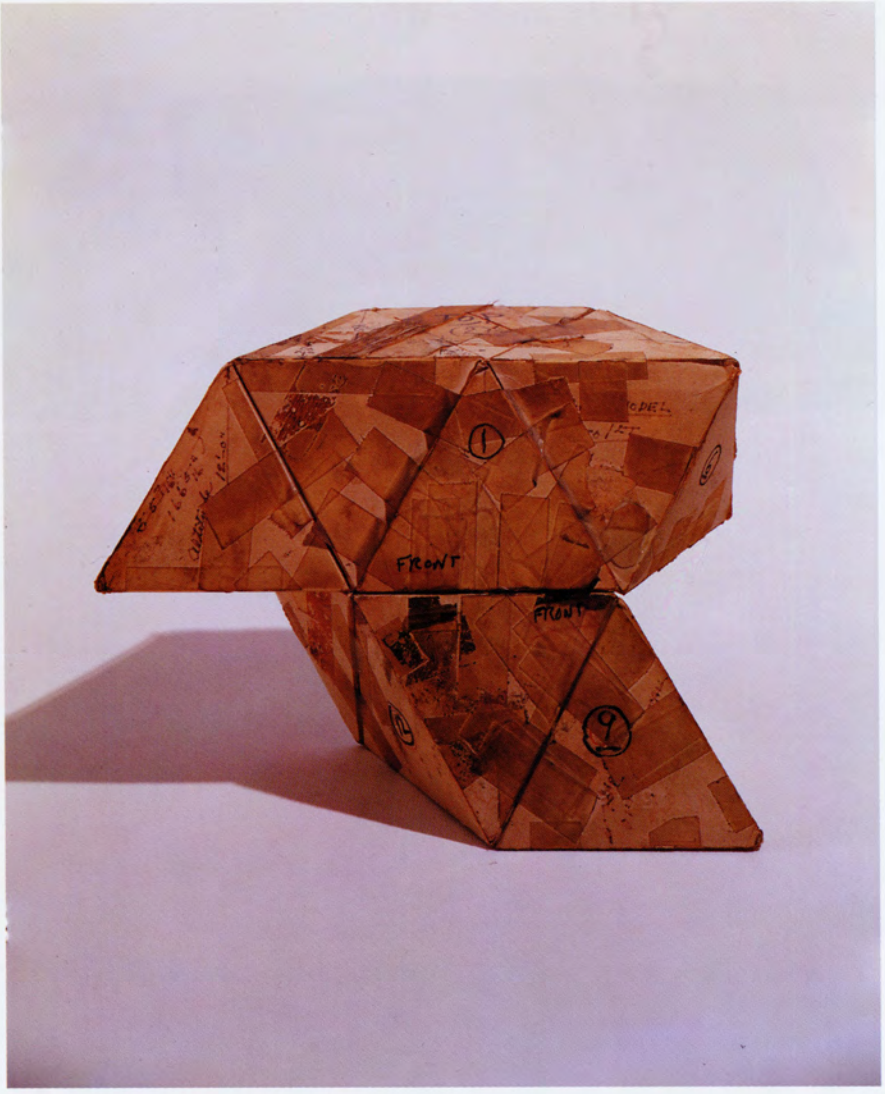
25. Untitled, c. 1962-1965. Black marker on yellow graph paper, 11 x 8 ½ in. Tony Smith Estate, New York



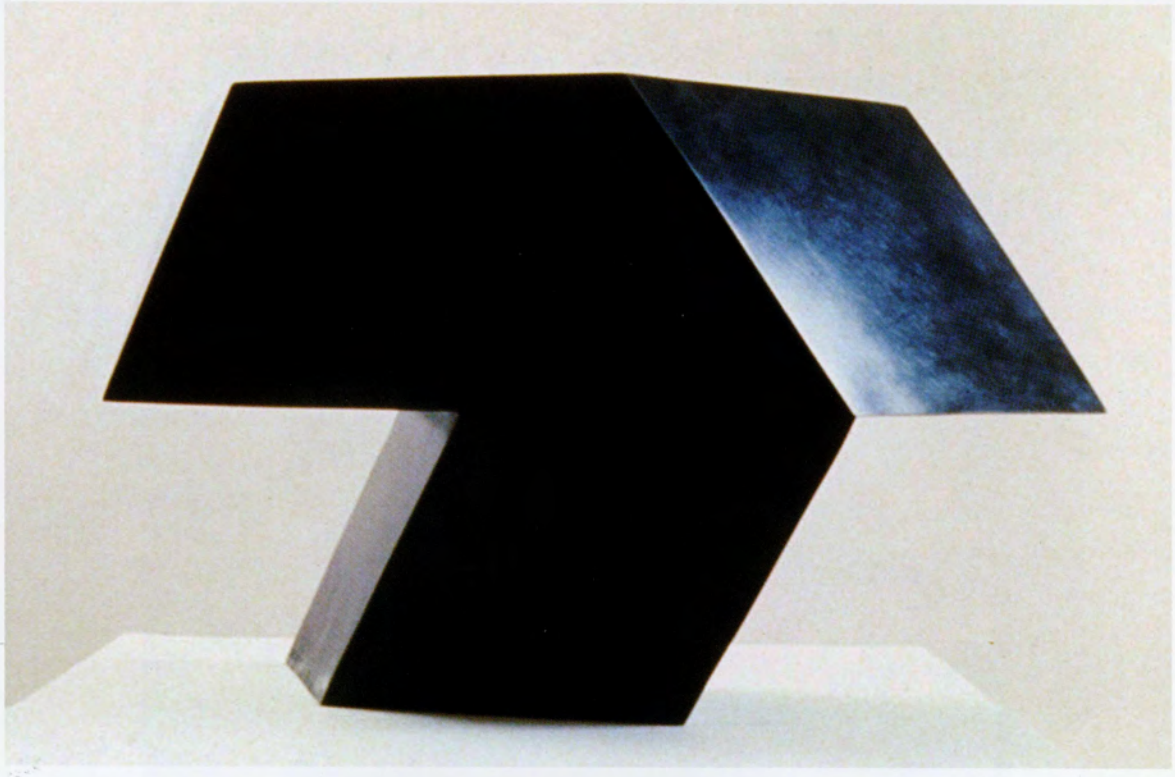
26. Untitled, 1962-1965. Black marker on yellow graph paper, 11 x 8 ½ in. Tony Smith Estate, New York



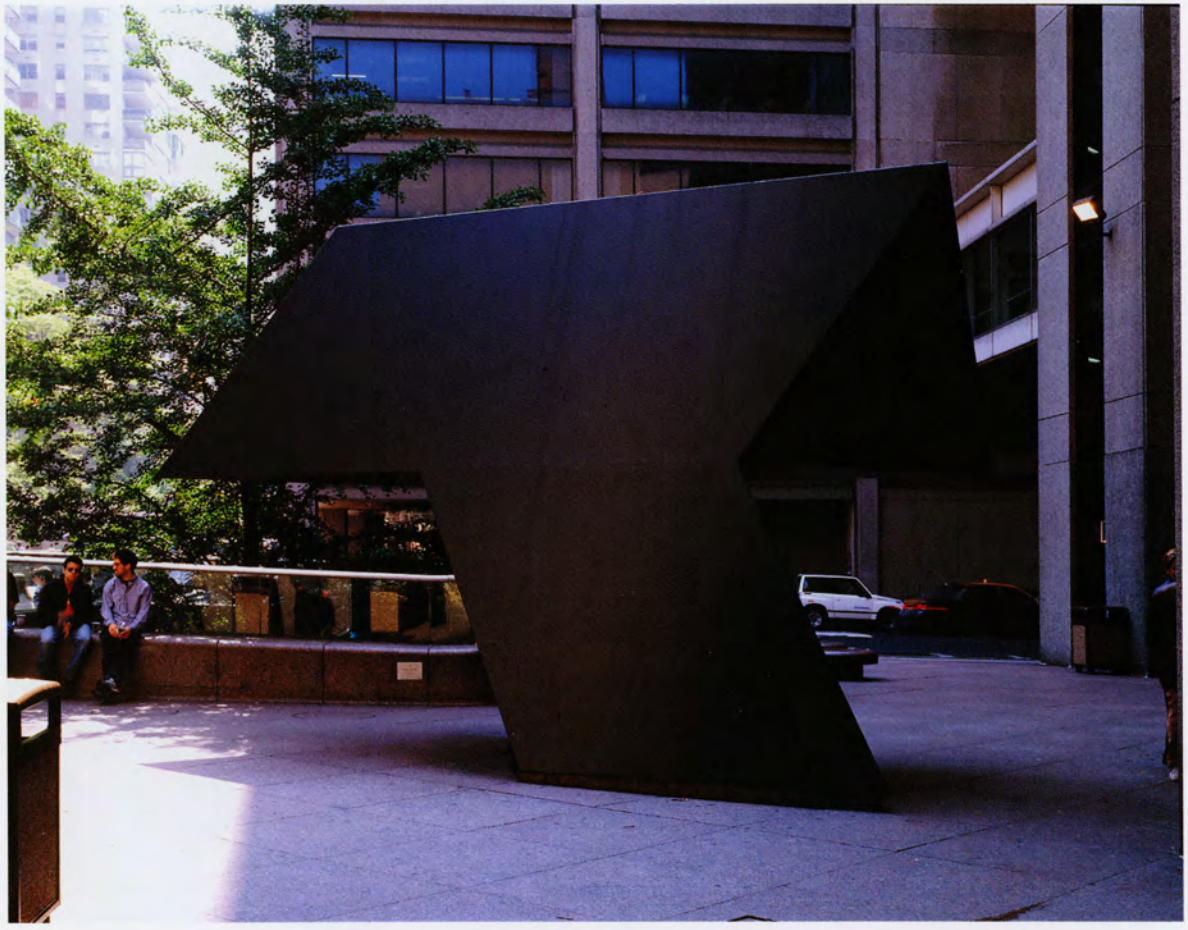
27. *Marriage*, 1965. Black marker on yellow graph paper, 11 x 8 ½ in. Tony Smith Estate, New York



28. *Tau*, 1961-62. Cardboard model, 6 ½ x 10 x 6 in. Tony Smith Estate, New York

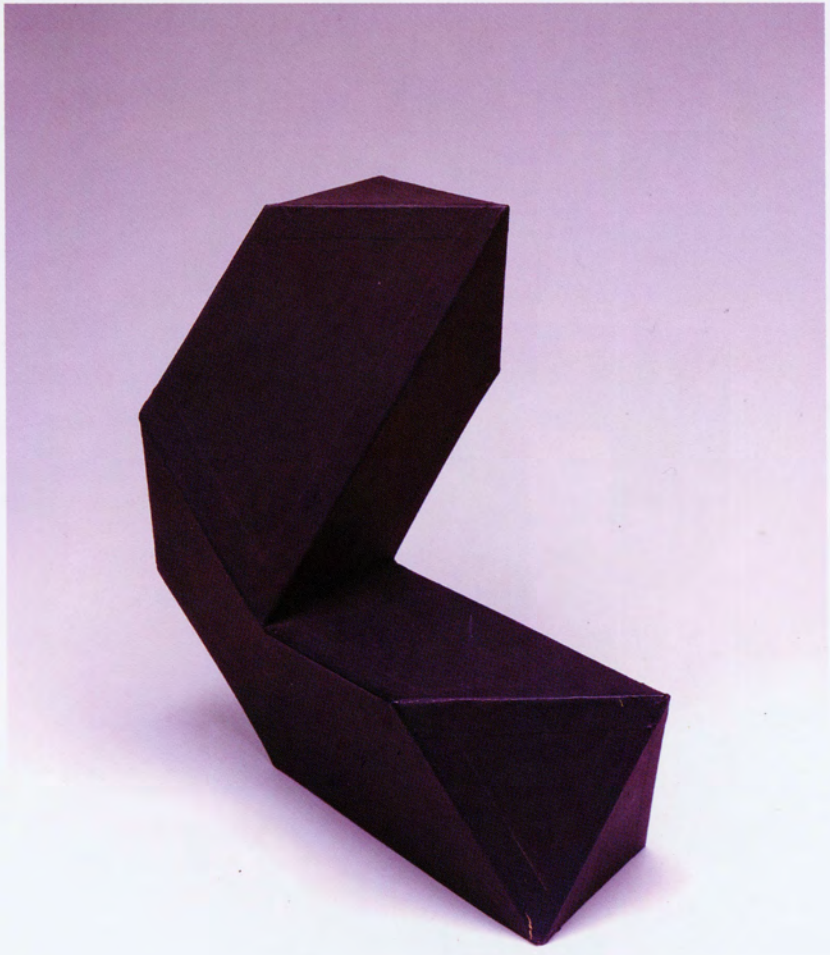


29. *Tau*, 1961-62. Cast bronze with black patina, 15 x 20 x 12 in. Collection of Antonia Smith Robinson



30. *Tau*, 1961–62/1984. Steel, painted black, 168 x 258 x 148 1/4 in. Collection of Hunter College of the City University of New York, Purchase, Dormitory Authority of New York State

31. *Duck*, 1963. Plaster model, 10 3/4 x 13 x 8 3/4 in. Tony Smith Estate, New York



32. *Amaryllis*, 1965. Cardboard model, painted black, 10 x 7 x 10 in. Tony Smith Estate, New York

33. *The Keys to Given!*, 1965. Cardboard model, painted black, 16 x 16 x 16 in. Tony Smith Estate, New York

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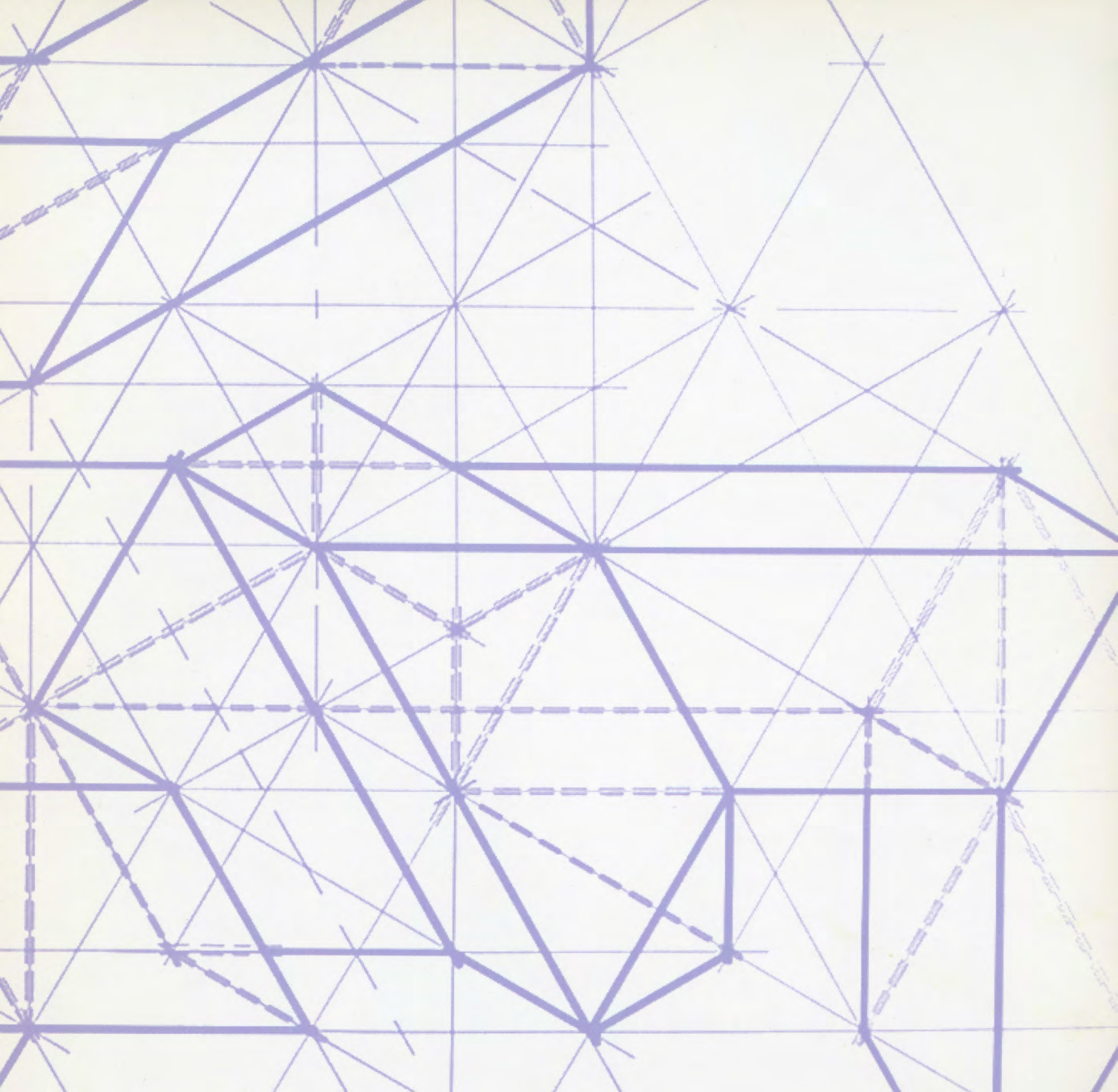
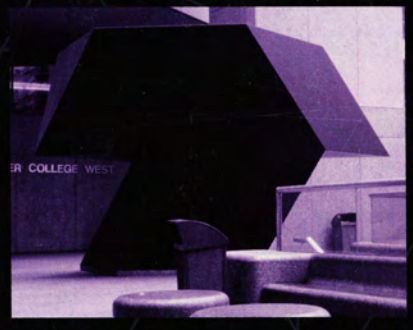
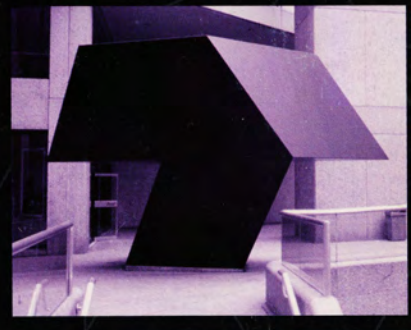
Deborah Garwood
Lynn Harlow
Gabriele Hoffmann
Lynda Klich
Robin Moore
Thomas Pihl
Lynn Sullivan
Rosemarie Tishelman
Lisa Vergara
Joanne Kester Weinberg









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