

## FRED SANDBACK

Through October 16 at Barbara Krakow Gallery • Boston, MA • [www.barbarakrakowgallery.com](http://www.barbarakrakowgallery.com)

In what could be the most meditative show in Boston this season (and internationally at the Venice Biennale this summer), the sculptures of Fred Sandback have the transformative presence of weather. Made of a few tautly stretched strings of acrylic yarn, the sculptures penetrate the interior gallery space in performative configurations that establish an unexpected gravity.

Sandback, who died in 2003, was, like Piet Mondrian, an artist with a deep and narrow focus engaged in making visual objects that seek to eliminate the gulf between art and ordinariness. Sandback situated his art in what he called “pedestrian” space—the space we move through and through which we experience the routine alterations of day-to-day living. Sandback’s work reorients our way of being in space and in time.

The sculptures and works on paper at the Barbara Krakow Gallery may suggest minimalism and its plainspoken factualism, but minimalism was art with a tough, industrial posture, whereas Sandback’s work suggests the adventurous nuance of cartography and the haptic precision of stringed instruments. Indeed, Sandback brought a musical tempo to his approach to composing with space.

Sandback regarded the installation of his work as interpretable and adjustable whenever dictated by the requirements of a new site. In the Krakow Gallery, the installation, *Untitled (Sculptural Study, Four-part Vertical Construction)* (1986/2007), employs four floor-to-ceiling stretched lines of red acrylic yarn each six inches apart, forming a plane six inches from and perpendicular to the adjacent wall. The yarn imparts softness to the linear strictness of the structure and its red color shimmers in the white space of the gallery. Demanding recognition of its visibility, the work tunes its specific spatial and temporal environment.

Less obviously read as sculptural alterations are works Sandback made for installation on floors or walls. *Untitled (Sculptural Study, Three-part Wall Construction)* (1985/2007), is an

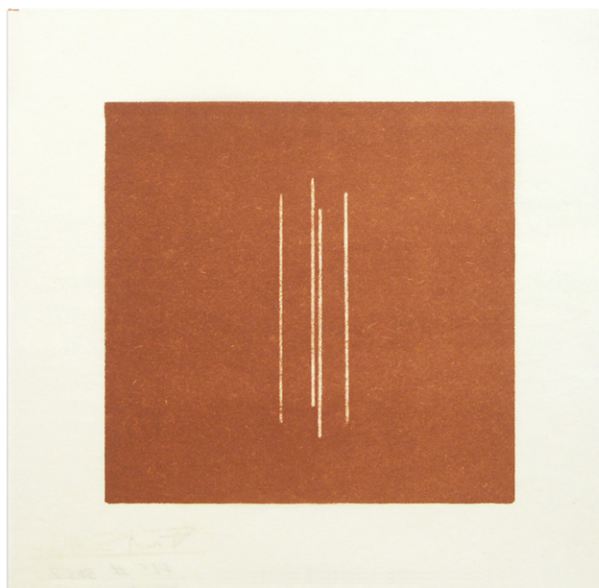
arrangement of three black strands of yarn at non-right angles to each other and to the rectangularity of the wall. Were the yarns extended, they would intersect with one another. The threads hint at perspective drawing and lead the eye to imagined depths, while simultaneously denying the illusion. The lines also flirt with the angled shadows on the upper wall cast by the clerestory windows of the gallery

my intentions, to respect its particularities.” This statement from an interview in 1992, published in “Sans Titre: Bulletin d’Art Contemporain,” expresses an intensely refined artistic methodology delivered from a posture of modest personal presence. Sandback sought object expression rather than self-expression. His sense of “pedestrian space” implies two ideas: a space that admits walking through and an ordinary, prosaic space. This second sense of ordinary space is worth reconsidering as one experiences the sculpture. The evanescent geometries of space harnessed by the artist have a timbre of specialness that depends on the discovered visibility the sculptures present. This achievement may challenge Sandback’s claim about pedestrian space since it might be that the intersection of the sculpture with the space (and ourselves) alters everything ideally, thereby revealing a set of utopian moments of space.

Being less connected to the room in which we see them, the works on paper more conventionally manifest specialness. Were we to handle them it would be with care, even with gloves. Just as the papers are imbued with observable and deliberate attentiveness or artistry, so are the spaces of the room that the sculptures occupy. Sandback claimed to not wish to “transform”

the gallery space, but, in fact, the space is transformed in a special way. Art transforms. Evidence of this is in how we attend to art differently than how we attend to anything else. The reason is fairly simple: Art is made, unlike other things, primarily to be looked at for what it visually manifests; nothing else has that feature as its primary purpose. Sandback’s work secures the visual to the imagined while nearly dissolving the threshold between them.

—David Raymond



Fred Sandback, *Untitled*, lithograph, image: 5 1/4 x 5 1/4", paper: 7 1/4 x 7 1/4", 1977. Edition of 30. Courtesy of Barbara Krakow Gallery.

space. Interestingly, the irregularity of the Krakow Gallery space becomes more noticeable as the wall piece engages our attention. Rather than dominate the space of the gallery, or conversely, be dominated by the gallery space, the sculpture merges with it in a symbiosis that feels oblivious to the necessity of other meanings. A close inspection of the work reveals its bas relief character. The wall on which it is installed is not absolutely flat and the yarn’s shadows over the surface concavities assert the sculpture’s slight volume and its distinctness from the wall.

When it came to explaining his work, Sandback was as clear as his goals were pragmatic. “My intention is to utilize the space, to bring about a co-production between it and