



ANGLE/
EDGE/
PLANE/

THE SCULPTURE OF RONALD BLADEN

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PLANE: The Sculpture of Ronald Bladen**, organized by Sam Yates, Director of Galleries at
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ANGLE/ EDGE/ PLANE/

THE SCULPTURE OF RONALD BLADEN

ANGLE/EDGE/PLANE THE SCULPTURE OF RONALD BLADEN (1918 - 1988)

Ronald Bladen was born in Vancouver, Canada in 1918 to British immigrants.

From the age of 4 through 14 he lived in Washington State before the family's return to British Columbia, Canada. Interested in art from an early age, he began art school in Vancouver in 1937 before moving to San Francisco in 1939 to attend the California School of Fine Arts.

Two years later, he trained and worked as a welder and toolmaker in the navy shipyards for the war effort. The skills that he acquired during that time would not only provide him with employment opportunities later but would also serve him well with the construction of future sculptural projects. From 1947 to 1955 he was married to actress Barbara Gross and after their separation he joined a communal household with writer Michael McClure and painter Al Held. Through them he met and became friends with other artists and writers including Jack Kerouac, Henry Miller, and Allen Ginsberg. During these years in San Francisco, Bladen continued to make paintings and lived the "Beat Generation" life. The poets he associated had a great influence on his approach to the creation of his own visual art.



In 1956, he followed his friend Al Held to New York where he met many new artists who became fast friends. It was after this move that Bladen turned his creative energies entirely to sculpture. He participated in an artist run gallery and began to show some of his sculptures in galleries downtown. However, it was the landmark exhibition *Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculptors* organized in 1966 by the Jewish Museum in New York and *Scale as Content* at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington DC the following year, that propelled Ronald Bladen to national attention. Bladen's *Three Elements* in the *Primary Structures* exhibition, which brought the language of minimal sculpture into the public

eye, received much acclaim amongst the work of younger artists that included Carl Andre, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, Walter De Maria, Dan Flavin and others. Likewise, Bladen's *X* was a signature sculpture in *Scale as Content* which also included the work of Barnett Newman and Tony Smith. Bladen's critical acclaim and his magnetic personality, led to teaching appointments at Columbia University (1974-76), Parsons New School of Design (1975-78), the School of Visual Arts and guest lectureships at Yale (1982-83) and Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (1981-82). He received much recognition for his work including a Guggenheim Memorial Award (1970) and a National Endowment for the Arts Award (1977). His sculptures were included in numerous important exhibitions both nationally and internationally and he successfully obtained commissions for his large-scale outdoor sculptures that are in various locations around the country.

In a 1995 essay on Bladen's work for the Weatherspoon Art Gallery, Douglas Dreishpoon writes of the artist's smaller sculptures: "The sculptural models Bladen constructed out of plywood and painted with black enamel paint served the same function as drawings... When it came to making sculpture, he preferred to work directly with his materials. He spoke of "dreaming a sculpture," his method of conceptualizing beforehand its dimensions and technical construction. These models can also be seen as improvisations, which, given his involvements with jazz, is an appropriate analogy. But they primarily served as a means of facilitating the production of sculpture. Preliminary investigations were generally conceived on a small scale. Subsequent variations were scaled up an inch to the foot, so that a piece, despite its larger format, would still be considered a study, though one that is further developed. Each model, whatever the scale, initiated an idea."

In a *Brooklyn Rail* review of a 20-year posthumous exhibition in 2008 at the Jacobson Howard Gallery, Ben La Rocco suggests that although many artists such as Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Carl Andre, Robert Morris and others looked to Bladen as a father of Minimalism, Bladen's sculptures came to be seen as more romantic and poetic than the harsh geometry, void of emotion, and industrial look of the art works usually associated with Minimalism. La Rocco called the exhibition a "modest reminder of Bladen's maverick confounding of what were thought to be inherently inexpressive industrial materials with geometry into a very personal and poetic subject matter. Bladen used crisp, black geometry in unabashedly emotive sculptures. ...The sculpture[s] [are] proof that intense, emotive expression can exist in hard-edged geometric form."

The Ewing Gallery would like to acknowledge the Loretta Howard Gallery, New York, and the Ronald Bladen estate for the loan of the works on exhibition. We offer a special thank you to Loretta Howard, Creighton Michael, and James Clark for their consultation and support of this exhibition.

SAM YATES
DIRECTOR, CURATOR
THE EWING GALLERY OF ART + ARCHITECTURE

"...a work whose dynamic shapes might be viewed as an extremely abstracted portrait bust of the jazz saxophonist."

Reni Feinstein
"Ronald Bladen at Jacobsen Howard Gallery"
Art in America, March 2009

Ron played the saxophone himself, often recording himself on homemade tapes and performed with a group of his 1960s Park Place Gallery artist friends like Richard Van Buren, John Chamberlain, and Frosty Myers. Even John Coltrane occasionally joined in as I remember... His radio was always tuned to only one radio station ever - WKCR - the New York jazz station. IN 5/4 TIME, FUGUE, and SILVER IN C SHARP were based on music and BIRD SONG (for CHARLIE PARKER), COLTRANE and DEXTER'S DREAM (for Dexter Gordon) were made for the musicians he loved.

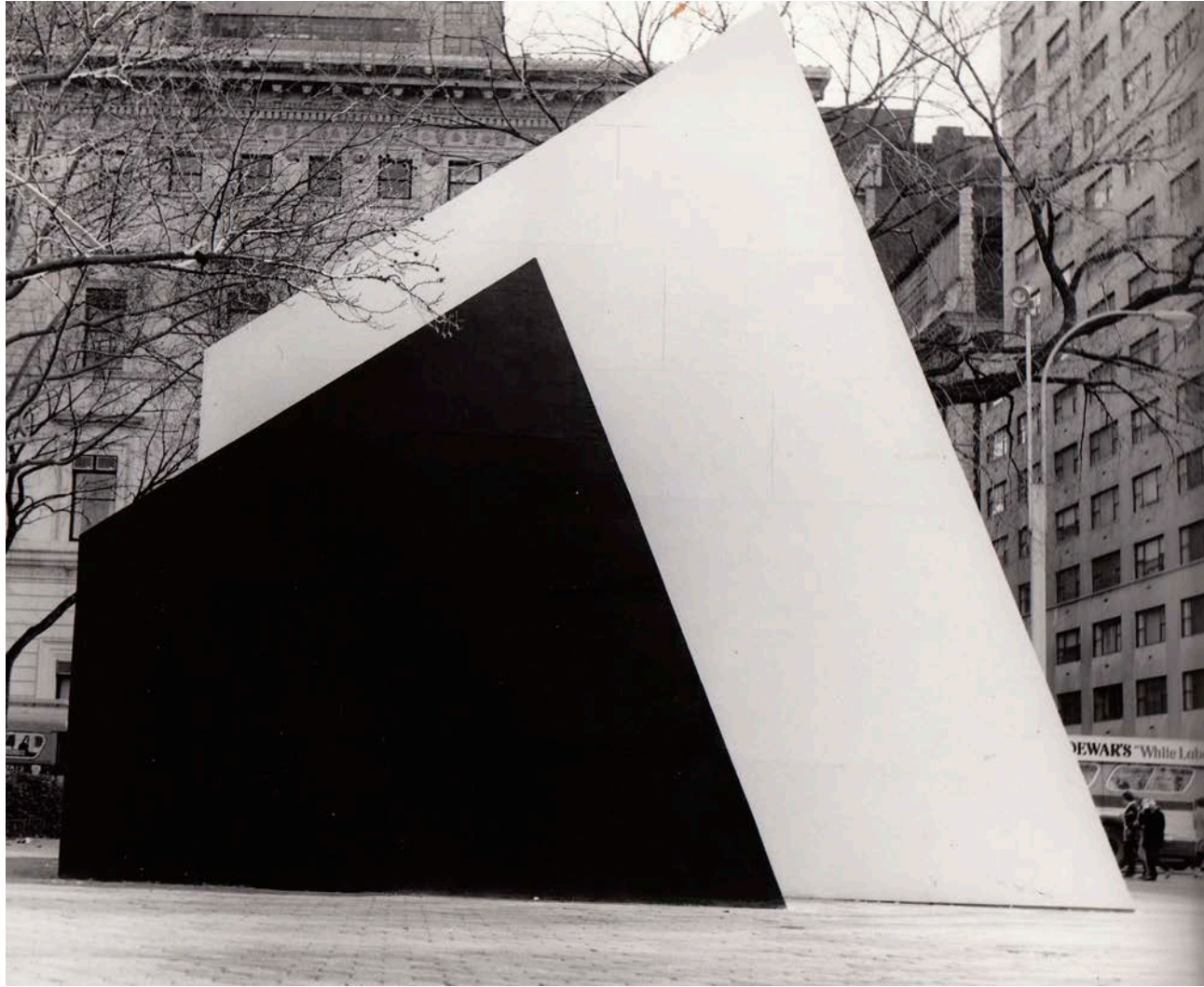
Larry Deyab
"Notes on Ronald Bladen Sculpture 2012"
Art Deal Magazine



COLTRANE, 1970
PAINTED WOOD
30 x 16 x 16.5 INCHES
EDITION 2 OF 3



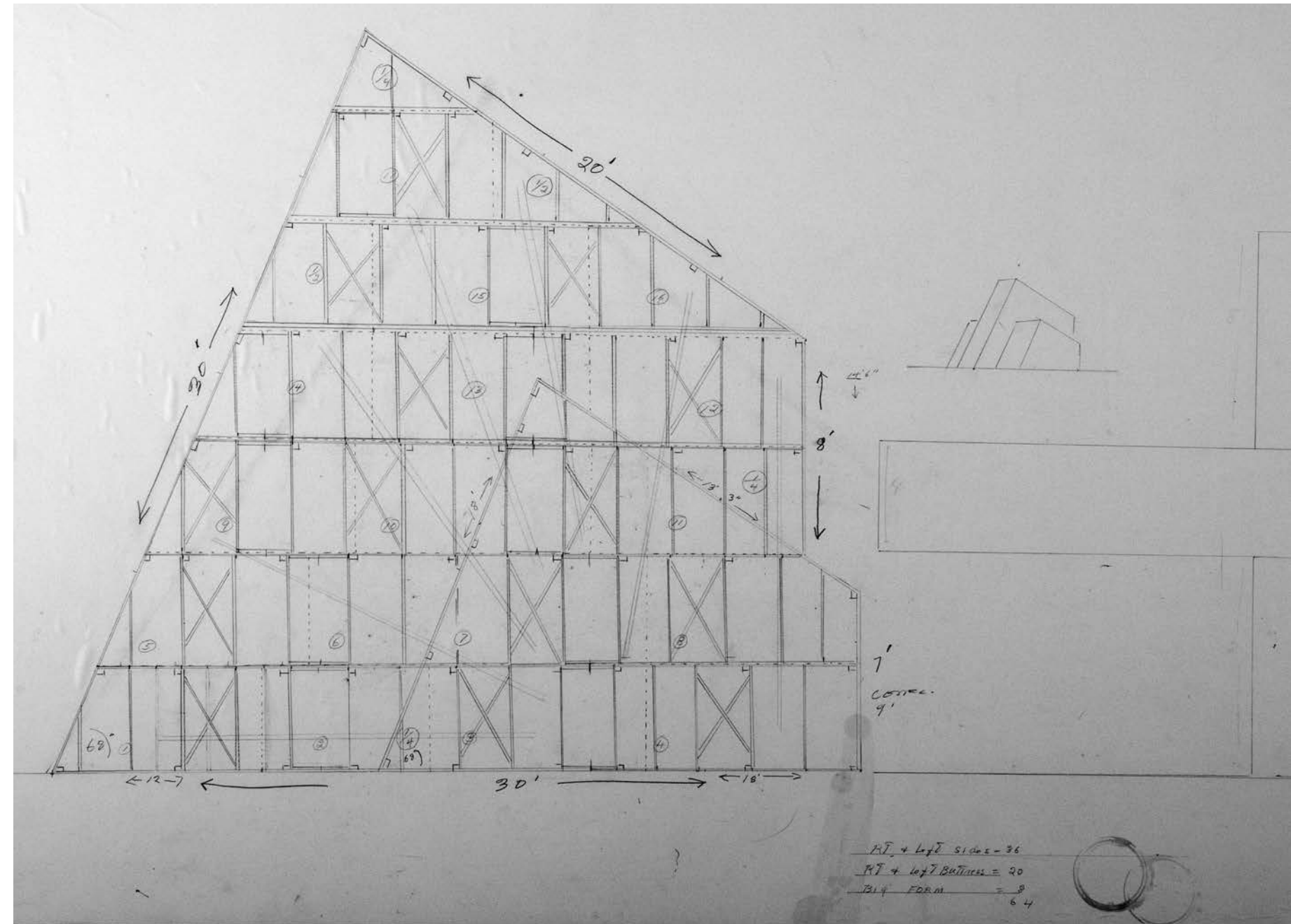
COLTRANE, INSTALLED
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEBRASKA, LINCOLN IN
1970.



Bladen made a single form from three joined parts; a large, white form is sandwiched between two identical, black shapes. Speaking of his use of these colors, Bladen said, "...The white and the black are philosophically opposed. The white..., it's acceptance, it's love, it's gentle, it's very moving; and the black becomes slightly forbidding – totally different in experience..." In KAMA SUTRA the black is the supporting shape; it appears solid and sturdy. The white shape fits within the black forms while simultaneously ascending upward. As initially installed in monumental scale on the Doris Freedman Plaza in Central Park, New York 1977, the works addressed the surrounding architecture.

Tiffany Bell
 "Ronald Bladen: Large Scale and Presence"
 Ronald Bladen Sculpture 1969 - 1981

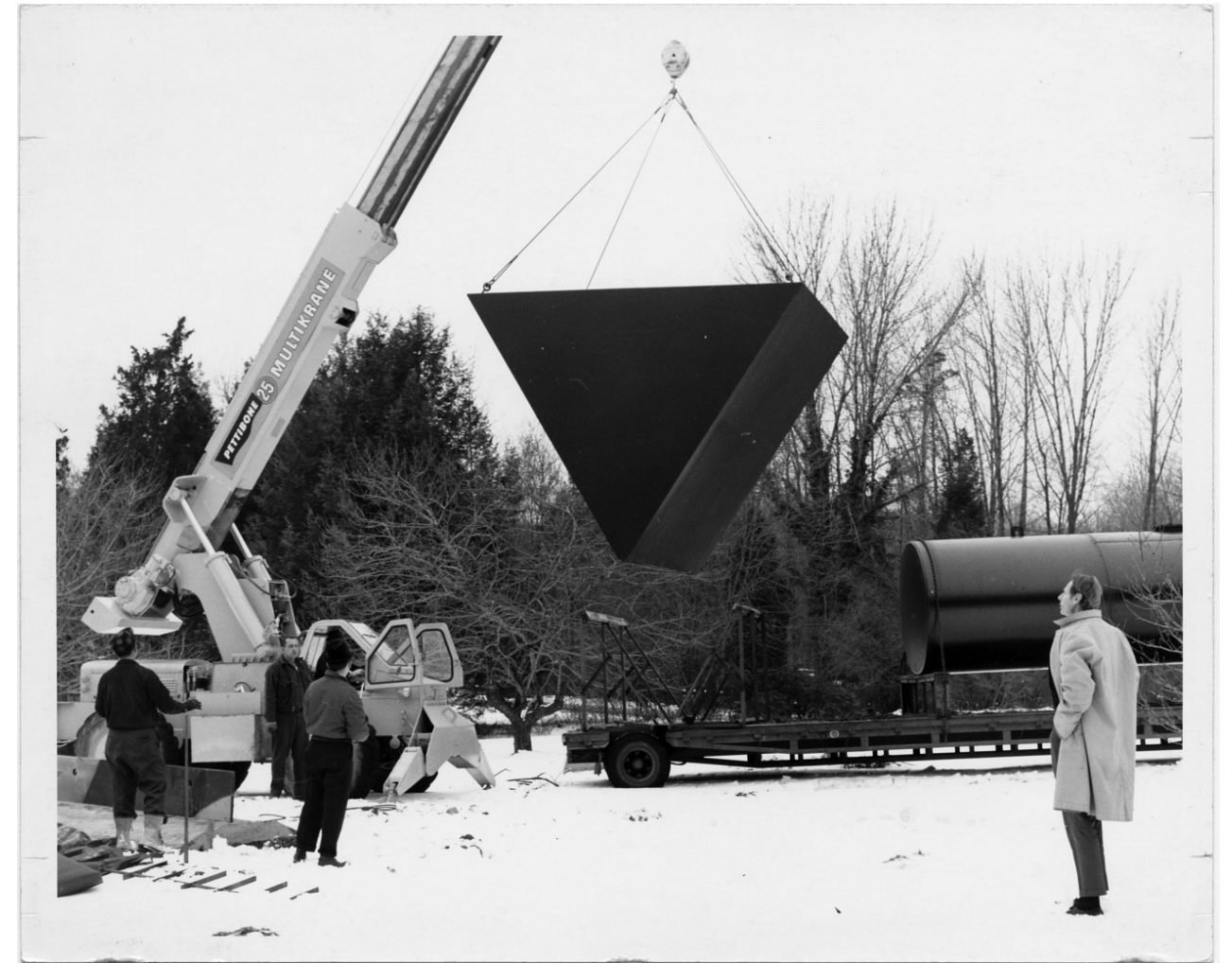
KAMA SUTRA, 1977, DORIS FREEDMAN PLAZA, CENTRAL PARK, NEW YORK CITY



KAMA SUTRA, 1977, TECHNICAL DRAWING: GRAPHITE ON PAPER, 41.5 x 68 INCHES



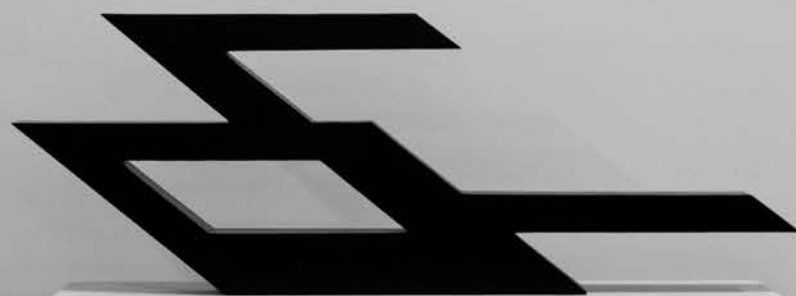
BLACK TRIANGLE, 1966, PAINTED WOOD, 9.25 x 9.75 x 13 INCHES, EDITION 2 OF 3



What BLACK TRIANGLE does to space is not a matter of definition but of emphasis. The great slanting planes with their implications of infinity neither draw upon nor enclose space, but slice it, alter it...When such structural works first appeared on the scene, the word architectonic was most often used to describe them. But architecture is shelter and closure that can be experienced. Bladen's work only has scale in common with architecture. It is sculpture made of planes, non-sculptural in the sense that its formal simplicity and weightlessness are unfamiliar in the historical confines of sculpture concerned with volume or line, but sculptural in the sense that it is nothing else, and that far more than the work of other structurists, it insists upon taking the initiative, no matter how understated the results of its actions may be.

Lucy Lippard
"Ronald Bladen's Black Triangle"
Artforum, 1967

RONALD BLADEN WATCHING THE INSTALLATION OF BLACK TRIANGLE IN 1969. PHOTO BY JOHN A. FERRARI



BLACK LIGHTNING, PAINTED WOOD, 29 x 72 x 6 INCHES, EDITION 2 OF 3



"...He was creating small works that had been or might have become models for huge pieces had he lived. But in their own right, they are fully resolved works. Bladen invented a rich variety of volumes and shapes. Many of these works are based on the upward aspiring diagonal, the heroic diagonal – a metaphor for transcendence as in... BLACK LIGHTNING (1981)...His intention in these sculptures, which is evident even in the small scale models, was, as he said, "to reach that area of excitement belonging to natural phenomena such as if a gigantic wave poised before making its fall...The drama is best described as awesome of breathtaking." Bladen's humane variant of minimalism extended its range in fresh and dramatic directions.

Irving Sandler
"Ronald Bladen"
Ronald Bladen Sculpture of the 1960s and 1970s



BLACK LIGHTNING, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON



ANGLE / EDGE / PLANE
THE SCULPTURE OF RONALD BLADEN

The chevron is an ancient symbol used on shields, as insignia, or in language as punctuation, or as a mathematical sign. Here Bladen abstracted the image by placing it in precarious balance and by repeating the form. Repetition is a compositional strategy used a few times. The artist stated that while a "single image gives you the opportunity of packing all the power into a single statement," he was also interested ("on rare occasions") in "the multiple image... dealing with a complexity of rhythms which leads one to a kind of infinity.

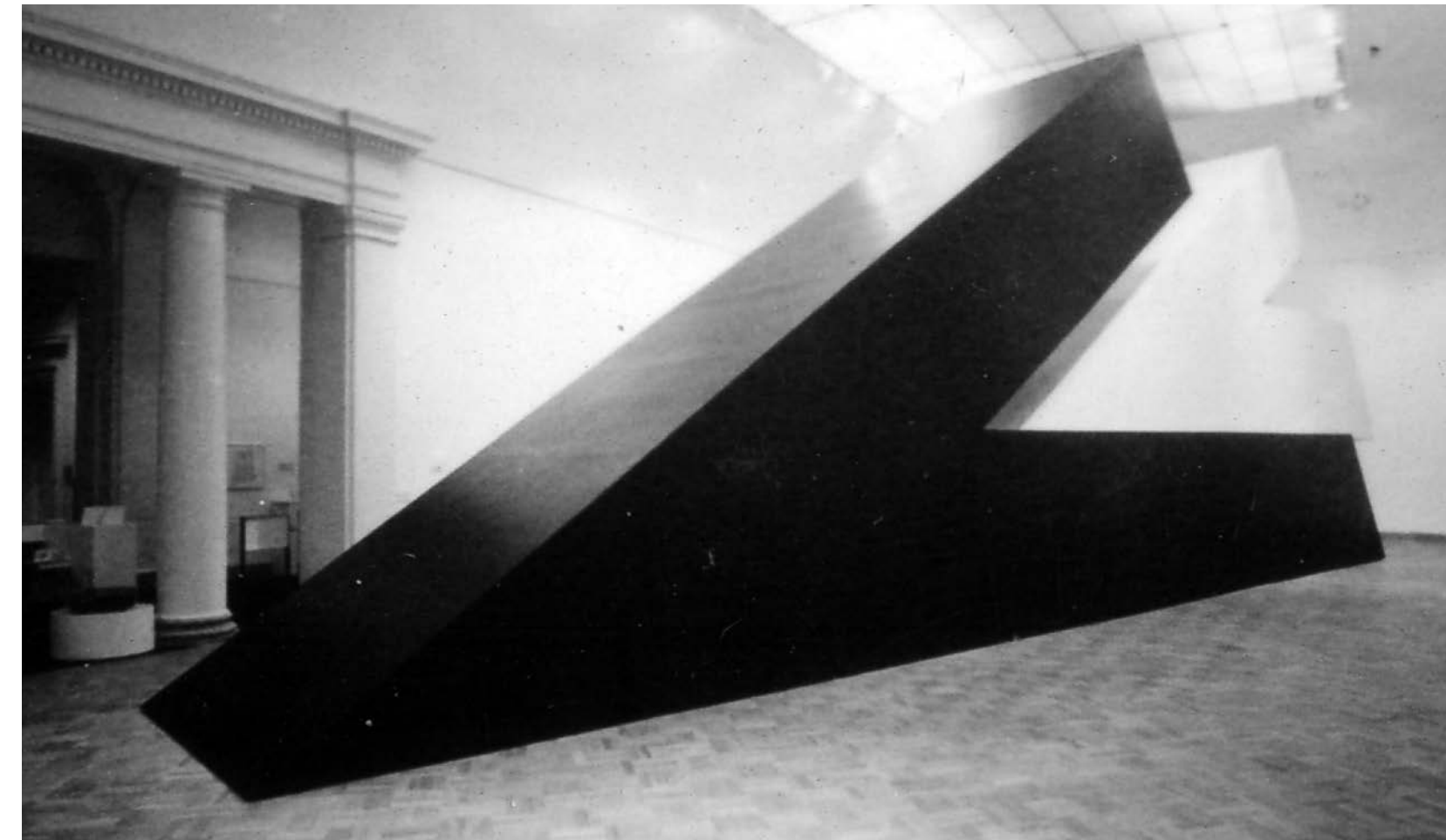
Tiffany Bell
"Ronald Bladen: Large Scale and Presence"

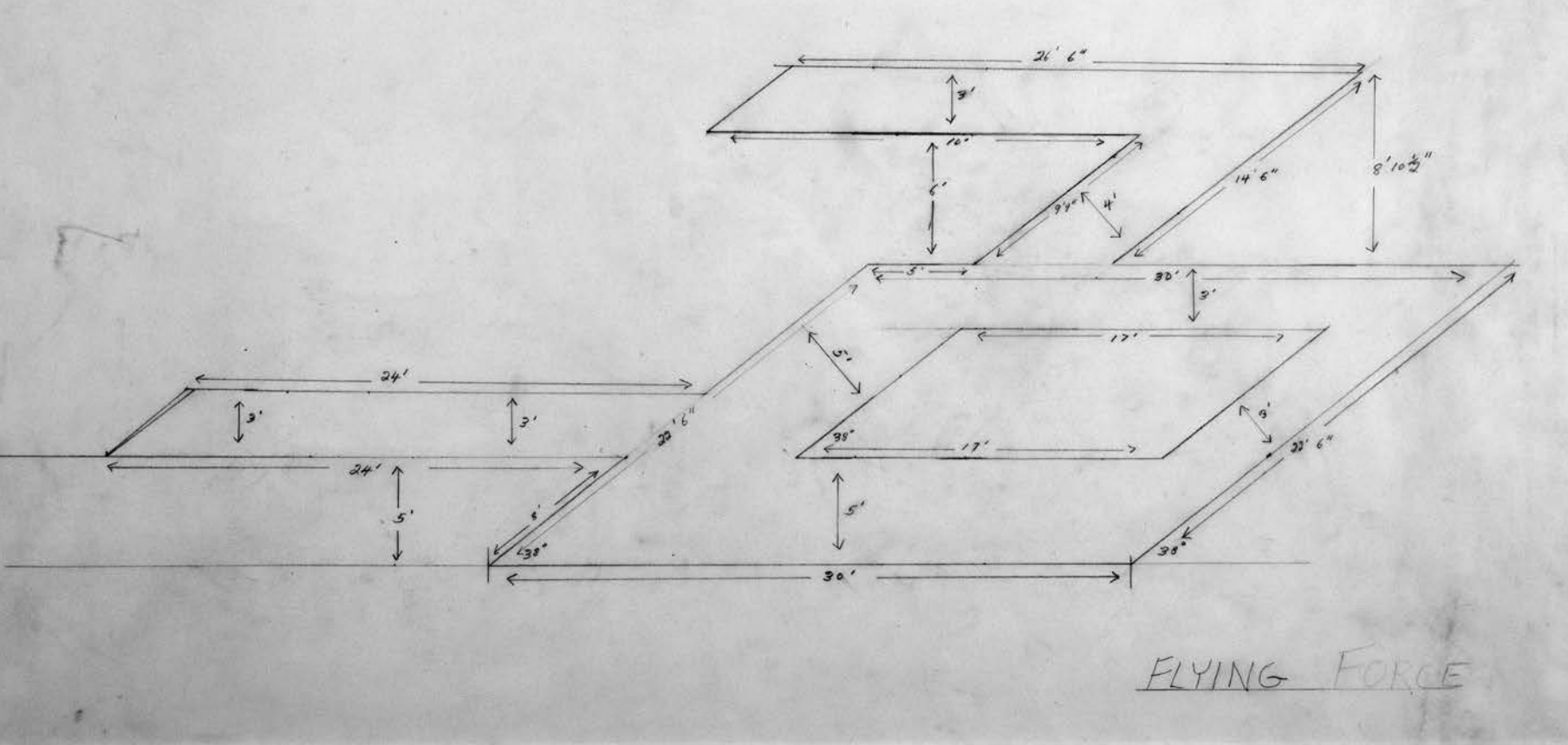
RAIKO was commissioned in 1975 by the Galerie Schmela in Düsseldorf, Germany. From 1957 until his death in 1980, Galerie Schmela was owned and operated by art dealer, Alfred Schmela.

Alfred Schmela passionately sought out and promoted new and self-conscious artists emerging in the changing social, political, and cultural landscapes of postwar Europe and United States. "Go to Galerie Schmela" was the insider tip for those in the young European and American art scene. Schmela was one of the first in Germany to exhibit the "new" Americans Gordon Matta-Clark and Bruce Nauman. Arman, Robert Indiana, Robert Morris, Kenneth Noland, Richard Tuttle also exhibited at Galerie Schmela.

The artists shown by Schmela represented various and often overlapping tendencies such as Monochrome, Kinetic Art, Performance or Happenings, Nouveau Réalisme, Spatialism, Auto-Destructive art, and a general fascination with perception and technology.

Isabella Zuralski-Yager
"Welcome to Alfred Schmela's Art Gallery!"
The Iris, Behind the Scenes at the Getty





During a period of the roughly three years Ron and I worked together, he competed to get two big sculpture commissions, one in Omaha, Nebraska and the other in Broward County, Florida. Both commissions were for airports and the sculptures *BLACK TOWER* and *SEVENTH VOYAGE* were the results.

Larry Deyab
 "Notes on Ronald Bladen Sculpture 2012"
 Art Deal Magazine

"FLYING FORTRESS (Model), 1974-78, looks nothing like a fortress. Yet, one can feel the warrior-like impetus and assault and pure power of righteous defense, the knowing that one is battling for a just cause, in its slanted-forward, recklessly thrown configuration."

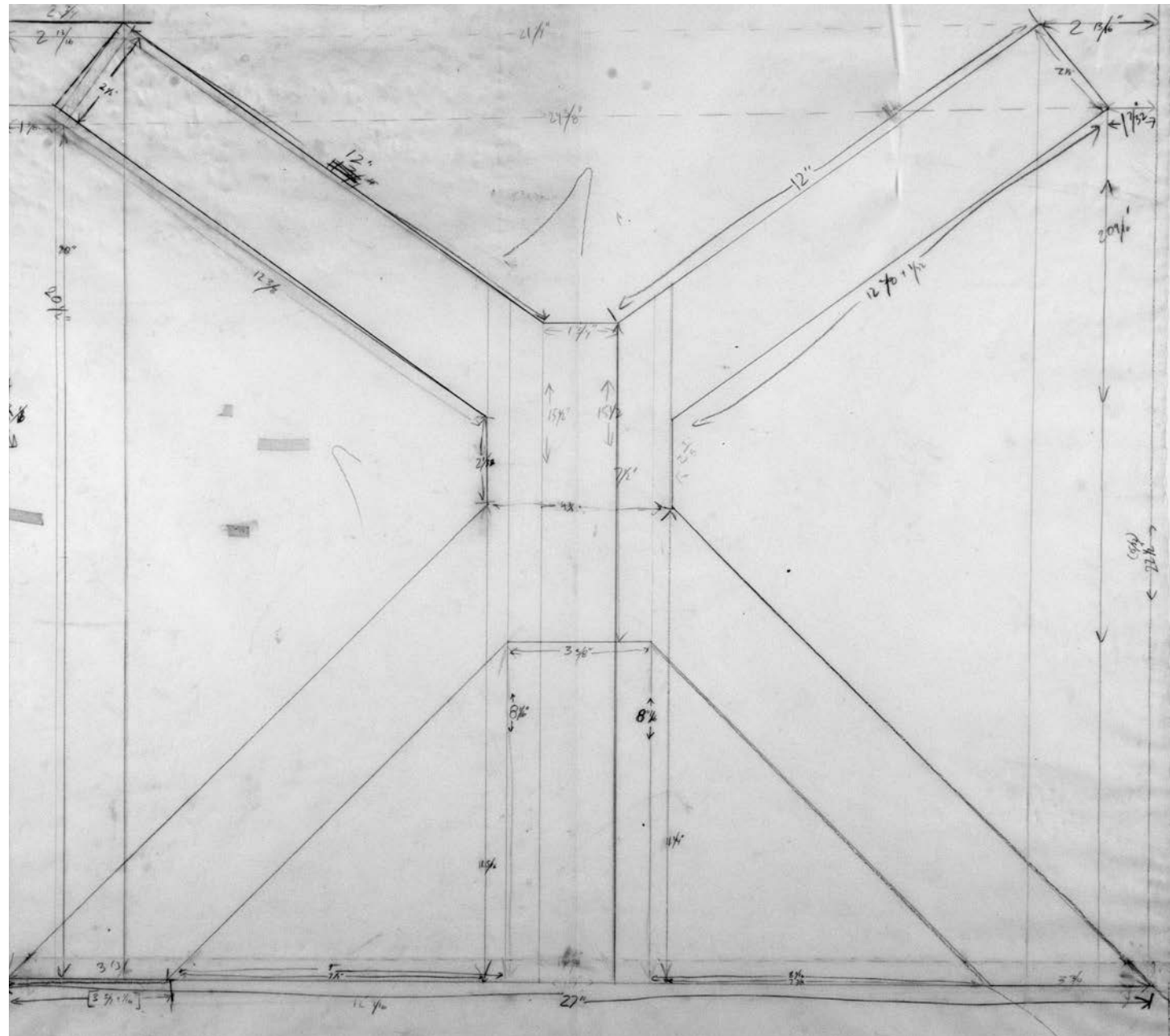
Mark Daniel Cohen
 "The Plummet - Measured Face: The Geometries of Ronald Bladen"
Ronald Bladen: Sculpture of the 1960s and 1970s

The *FLYING FORTRESS* model has been shown at Kunshalle Bielefeld, Germany, Weatherspoon Art Gallery, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, The Sculpture Center, Nationalgalerie Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. The maquette is now in the permanent collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art.

"After a competition that included entries by Richard Serra and Claes Oldenburg, Bladen was selected to create FLYING FORTRESS to stand in front of the engineering school at the University of Düsseldorf. The project was canceled after the director's sudden death."

"Ronald Bladen: Heroic Shapes"
 Loretta Howard Gallery

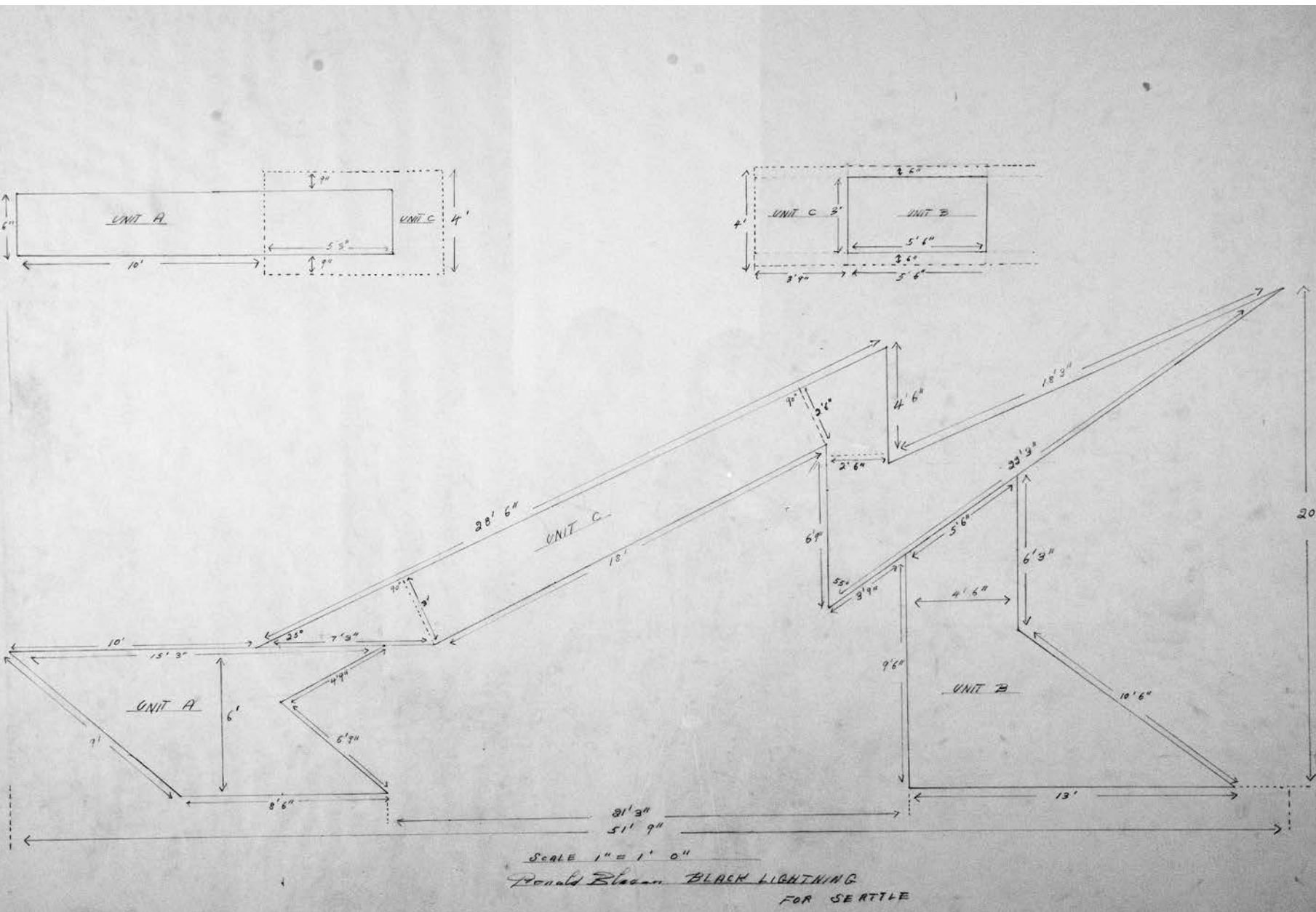




X, 1965, PENCIL ON VELLUM, 42 x 30 INCHES



X, 1967, INSTALLED IN SCALE AS CONTENT, CORCORAN GALLERY, WASHINGTON, DC



BLACK LIGHTNING, 1981, TECHNICAL DRAWING, PENCIL ON PAPER, 42 x 60 INCHES

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

COLTRANE, 1970
PAINTED WOOD
30 x 16 x 16.5 INCHES
EDITION 2 OF 3

KAMA SUTRA, 1977
SCULPTURE: PAINTED WOOD
28 x 20 x 30 INCHES
EDITION 2 OF 3

TECHNICAL DRAWING: GRAPHITE
ON PAPER
41.5 x 68 INCHES

BLACK TRIANGLE, 1966
PAINTED WOOD
9.25 x 9.75 x 13 INCHES
EDITION 2 OF 3

BLACK LIGHTNING, 1981
SCULPTURE: PAINTED WOOD
29 x 72 x 6 INCHES
EDITION 2 OF 3

TECHNICAL DRAWING: PENCIL
ON PAPER
42 x 60 INCHES

RAIKO, 1975
SCULPTURE: PAINTED WOOD
20 x 8 x 54 INCHES
EDITION 2 OF 3

DRAWING: GRAPHITE ON PAPER
28 x 38.5 INCHES

FLYING FORTRESS, 1974 - 78
SCULPTURE: PAINTED WOOD
23 x 66.5 x 6 INCHES
EDITION 1 OF 3

TECHNICAL DRAWING: PENCIL
ON PAPER
30 x 42 INCHES

CHEVRONS, 1974
PAINTED WOOD EXHIBITION
COPY
NINE UNITS: 36 x 80 x 11.5 INCHES
EDITION OF 3

BLACK TOWER, 1986
SCULPTURE: PAINTED WOOD
33.5 x 40 x 27 INCHES
EDITION 1 OF 3

DRAWING: GRAPHITE ON PAPER

THE SENTINELS, 1971
SCULPTURE: PAINTED WOOD
16 x 17 x 15 INCHES
UNIQUE TO ITS SIZE, FABRICATED
BY STUDIO

TRACING OF DRAWING: PENCIL
ON VELLUM
36 x 62 INCHES

STADIUM, 1969
PAINTED WOOD
14 x 43.5 x 30 INCHES
EDITION 2 OF 3

X, 1965
PENCIL ON VELLUM
42 x 30 INCHES

THREE ELEMENTS, 1965
PENCIL ON PAPER
42 x 88 INCHES

ANGLE / EDGE / PLANE
THE SCULPTURE OF RONALD BLADEN

