Sobel, Dean, Jackie Winsor, Peter Schjeldahl, and John Yau. 1991. *Jackie Winsor*. Milwaukee, Wis: Milwaukee Art Museum.

Jackie Winsor's Sculpture: Mediation, Revelation, and Aesthetic Democracy

Dean Sobel

Throughout her nearly 25-year career Jackie Winsor has demonstrated a unique vision, sensibility, and commitment to her work. She began making sculptures at a time when most of her contemporaries, believing that painting had become a dead-end practice, turned to alternate forms of artistic expression beyond the realm of traditional object-making. While many turned to activities such as performance and body art, process art, earthworks, and diverse forms of Conceptual Art, Winsor's sculpture, though logically grouped with the works of other Postminimalists, is somewhat more difficult to place. Unlike many of her contemporaries who also turned to sculpture during the mid- to late 1960s, ranging from Bruce Nauman's fiberglass castings of his own body to Barry Le Va's scattered arrangements of felt and steel, Winsor's work is chiefly centered around the creation of single, symmetrical shapes that reveal the purity and clarity of form. Using only a modest vocabulary of what have been called "classical" or "neoplatonic" shapes (cylinder, sphere, cube, pyramid) and somewhat ordinary materials (rope, bricks, wood, cement), her work is a mediation of not only form and material, but also space, surface, and process — essentially the basic elements of three-dimensional art.

The ideas for Winsor's sculptures might appear to flow effortlessly from some predetermined agenda — some see her *oeuvre* as a single statement rather than a succession of individual entities. However, each piece is carefully considered during long periods of planning, much like dance in which the final performance is presented effortlessly after lengthy rehearsals. The final execution of each Winsor sculpture usually requires substantial expenditures of time and energy, either over repeated durations of a single process, such as wrapping, nailing, or painting, or in single marathon sessions, as in the concrete pieces which must be fabricated in an uninterrupted stretch.[1] Subsequently, on the average she produces only three sculptures a year (about 75 works since 1967), and unlike many artists, including most of her Postminimalist contemporaries, she does not make drawings or prints. Each Winsor sculpture, in fact, has such a unique sense of dedication, concentration, and resolution that it prompted one critic to describe her succinct *oeuvre* as "a small body of perfect work."[2]

Winsor has remarked that an artist's work, especially her own, is a reflection of the artist's inner self,[3] adding "basically, you make things out of the structure of who *you* are."[4] Certain facts from Winsor's personal life offer insights into her character and approach to her art, thus providing clues to what that "structure" might be. Vera Jacqueline Winsor was born in 1941 in St. John's, Island of Newfoundland, to an environment of small fishing villages on the easternmost section of Canada. The second of three daughters, her fraternal ancestors came to North America from the British Isles more than two centuries earlier. She was reared in a rather old-world manner often without the luxuries of indoor plumbing and modern heating systems. Her father, an engineer, was frequently transferred so the Winsor family traversed between almost a dozen residences in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick during the 1940s. Due to her father's recurring bouts with pneumonia (exacerbated by the coastal fog) coupled with his hopes for his daughters, the Winsors moved to

Boston in 1952. For a family accustomed to the broad expanses of rural Canada, the density of urban Boston was a difficult adjustment. Although Winsor spent her teens in the Boston area, she returned to Newfoundland during her summers.

During her junior year of high school Winsor was selected to attend art classes at two local art schools in the Boston area, the Massachusetts College of Art (MassArt) and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts. After graduation she was accepted into the Massachusetts College of Art and in 1961 she began taking the broad array of studio art courses necessary to obtain her undergraduate degree.[5] During the summer of 1964, following her junior year, Winsor attended the Yale Summer School of Art and Music in Norfolk, Connecticut, where she became acquainted with older, more established artists, namely those who visited from New York.[6]

Winsor's work at this time centered on figure drawing and painting, and while at Norfolk, landscape painting and photography. She was developing a keen interest in representing singular forms, inspired in part by the simple shapes she photographed and those discovered at Norfolk painting directly from nature. During this time, Winsor, like many artists in this formative stage, encountered a series of "art crises" which resulted in a complete abandonment of painting:

> It was a crisis of what to paint. At summer school, which was in the country, we were expected to paint outside from nature. There were a lot of trees around, but they didn't have that central focus on the human figure. It took most of my time there to figure out what in the world to paint, and then how to paint it. When I went back to [the Massachusetts College of Art] I went back to the model in the middle of the room, and that precipitated my second crisis. That crisis never resolved itself in painting. It never worked for me again; it failed me, or I failed it. . . . My lack of success [at painting] compelled me to figure out what was going on. First I started eliminating the things in painting that I loved that weren't essential. Strokes got eliminated, then color got eliminated, texture of any sort got eliminated. Finally I had a stretched gessoed canvas sitting around with a big box of paints underneath it, and I never did another painting.[7]

Fig. 5. *Untitled*, circa 1966-67. Wood, plaster, and paint. Approx. 10 x 17 x 6" (25.4 x 43.2 x 15.2 cm). Collection of the Artist, New York, New York.

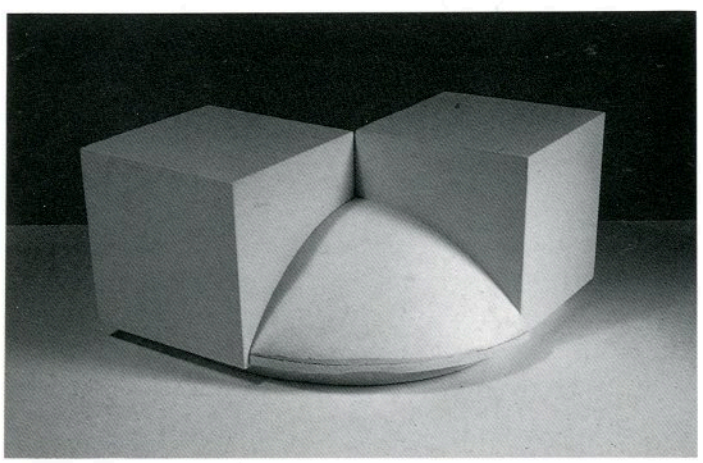
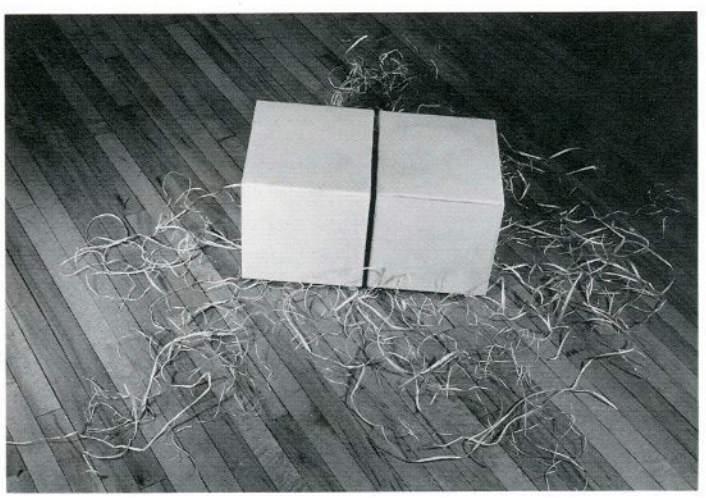


Fig. 6. *Untitled*, circa 1966-67. Masonite, rubber, and painted metal strips. Approx. 18 x 36 x 18" (45.7 x 91.4 x 45.7 cm). Destroyed.



After receiving her B.F.A from MassArt in 1965, Winsor continued her art training at Douglass College, Rutgers University, New Jersey. Rutgers was initially chosen because of its close proximity to New York City, where she could see firsthand the work of the current avant-garde; however, after the first few months she realized that the graduate program (Joan Snyder and Keith Sonnier were among those also enrolled at that time) and its *laissez-faire* policy toward her own work also made Rutgers a conducive working environment.[8]

Upon entering Rutgers, Winsor made abstract drawings of bulbous, muscular shapes. She also made a movie of a figure with other still life motifs (apples, fish, glassware), an outgrowth of the photographs she made at the Yale Summer School. Both of these activities were the result of her fascination with simple, biomorphic forms. She also began to make small relief collages as a way to create works that had very refined yet expressive presences. These reliefs eventually led to sculptural works. Using ceramic, plaster, rubber, wood, and polyester resin Winsor crafted three-dimensional versions of the biomorphic shapes that had been developing in her drawings — mostly partial hemispheres and bone-like forms cast in a limited range of whites, grays, and grayish-pinks (fig. 5). Although she initially grouped a number of these forms together to form small table-top installations, she increased their size to full body scale and situated them on the floor. A slightly later variation consisted of two Masonite cubes covered in industrial rubber and surrounded by white strips of metal (fig. 6). Like the earlier cast pieces, this work downplayed color and composition while emphasizing the forms, materials, and surfaces of the sculpture.[9]

After receiving her M.F.A. from Rutgers in the spring of 1967, Winsor moved to New York City with Joan Snyder and Keith Sonnier (who was now her husband) and established a combined living space/studio in a walk-up on Mulberry Street. Although the studio was small, noisy, and had no plumbing, these were acceptable, even commonplace sacrifices for artists determined to live and work in New York. Winsor's primary goal during her first year in New York, beyond mere sustenance, was simply to keep making sculptures. While fabricating her last works at Rutgers it became evident that the resin she had been using in some of her sculptures posed considerable health threats, so her first priority was to familiarize herself with new materials until she could completely replace the resin. Her first sculptures in New York consisted of a range of materials we now associate with "anti-formal" sculpture, including rubber sheeting, tubes, cord, and even hair, that she combined with cast elements to form small abstract configurations. At this same time she began using lengths of secondhand rope dipped in either latex or

Fig. 7. Installation of various early rope works, circa 1967.

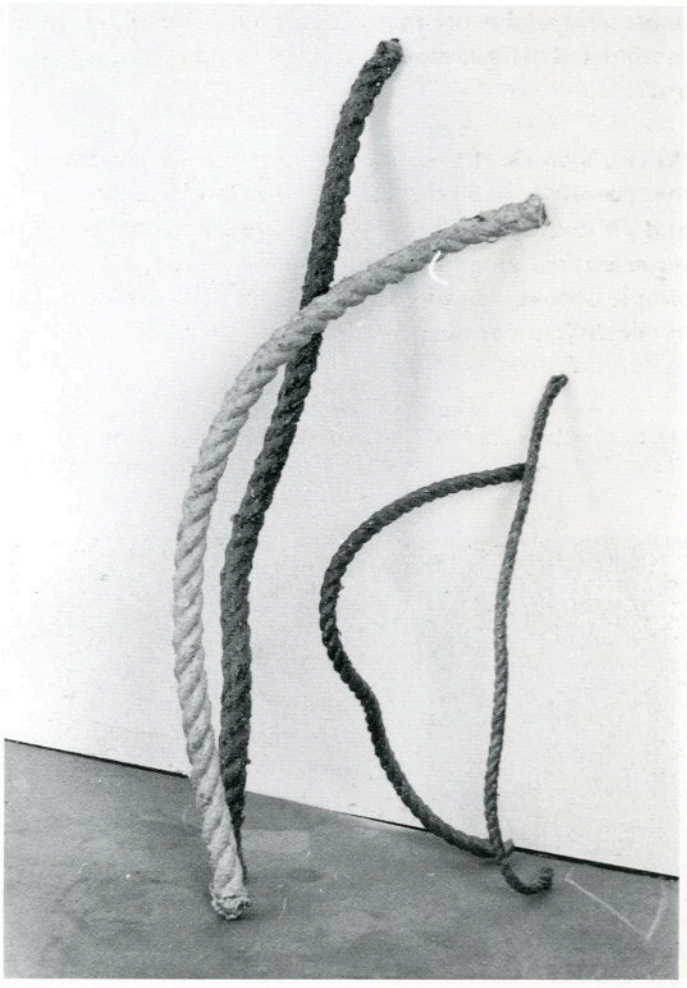


Fig. 8. Studio interior showing various rope works, circa 1968.

polyester resin which allowed the rope to conform to certain linear shapes (fig. 7). She found greater possibilities in extended lengths of rope which she could form into upright sculptures. After a number of trials and errors (and more than once arriving at her studio to find that these sculptures had either drooped or completely fallen over), she decided to run a metal rod through a braided coil of rope. This directly led to her use of larger four-inch rope and the result was *Rope Trick* (cat. no. 1), the beginning of Winsor's "mature" work. Just over six feet tall, the trunk-like verticality of *Rope Trick* reveals a greater sense of assuredness and a more refined Minimalist aesthetic than any of her previous attempts. While the work's somewhat humorous title implies a fanciful illusion, the work is more specifically a representation of singularity and repose, ideas that had interested Winsor since her summer at Norfolk. Although the work has drawn comparisons to Brancusi's *Endless Column*,[10] Winsor's primary goal was not to present a form that would elicit the classical, timeless qualities associated with the Brancusi, but rather to situate a visually and physically compelling form in space.

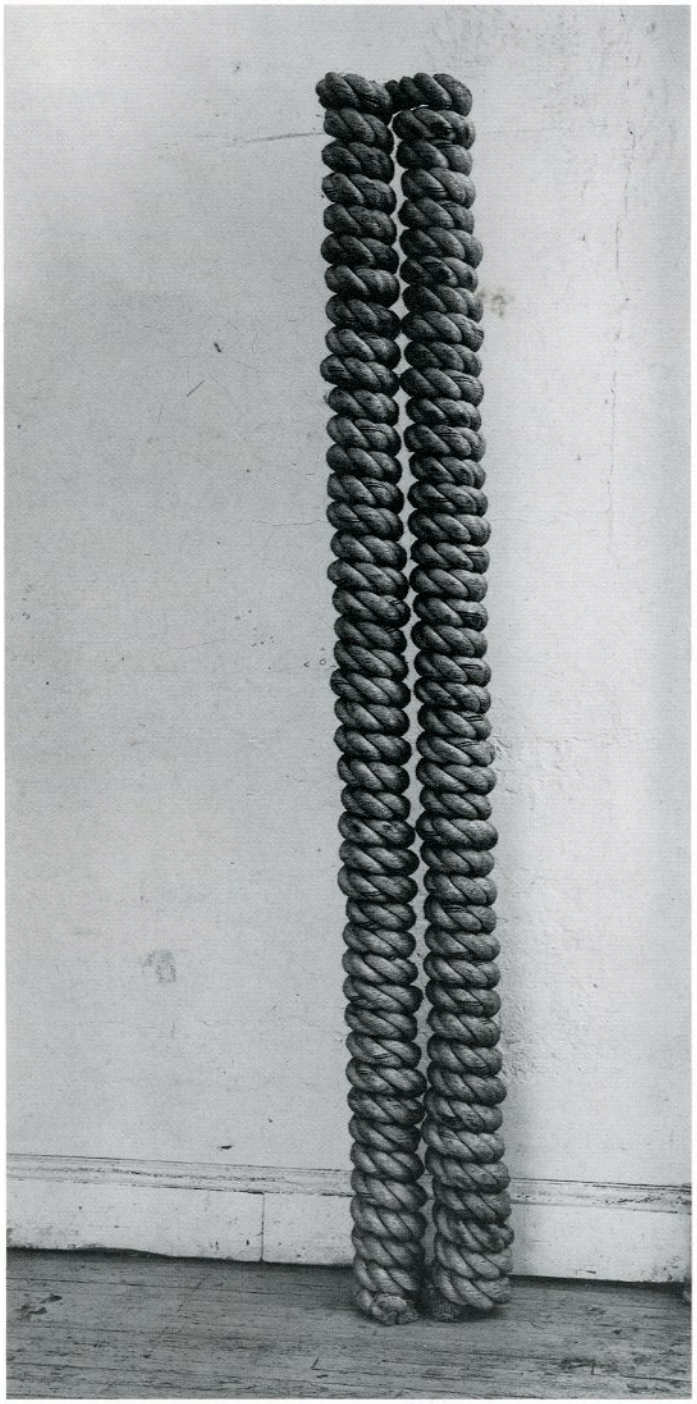
During 1968 and early 1969 Winsor completed a number of other rope pieces, ranging from a simple, doubled version of *Rope Trick* in which one length of rope drew the form of an arch to the most complicated in the series — two wheels formed from a continuous length of four-inch rope supported and kept upright by a rope axle (fig. 8). A number of cylindrical forms of various sizes were also made at this time, including *Dark Vertical Cylinder* (cat. no. 2), in which darker rope was coiled together to broaden the proportions of *Rope Trick*. The human scale and almost muscular ridges of these rope pieces give them an anthropomorphic quality. They also contain certain irregularities (the upright pieces have the tendency to lean slightly) which reveal that these somewhat imperfect forms were not machine-crafted, like much first-generation Minimalism, but rather were made by Winsor herself.

Regardless of the path that eventually led Winsor to this kind of sculpture, the outcome was certainly nurtured by the prevailing Minimalist and Postminimalist aesthetic that captured New York during the mid-sixties. Although Winsor was aware of the works of the first-generation Minimalists, including Robert Morris, and her Postminimalist peers such as Bruce Nauman and the late Eva Hesse, she was more interested in New York's experimental dance companies. She was especially drawn to the works of Yvonne Rainer and made an effort to see all of her New York performances. Winsor felt a special affinity toward Rainer's revolutionary theories about movement (or "phrasing," which Rainer defined as "the way in which energy is distributed in the execution of a series of movements"[11]), choreography, and approach as an artist.[12] Rainer's 1968 lecture/performance of "The Mind is a Muscle" at the Anderson Theater in New York particularly intrigued Winsor because of its relationship to the anthropomorphic minimalism she was exploring in her own works. Much of Rainer's intention was to put the body back into abstraction and to use motion to create a shape. Rainer's performances were often elaborations on a particular activity or "task" which Winsor saw as analogous to the rudimentary tasks she performed in her own work.

After moving into a new studio space in 1969 at the intersection of Canal Street and the Bowery in lower Manhattan, Winsor made a number of permutations of

Fig. 9. *Untitled*, 1969-70. Rope. 9" [diameter] x 146" (22.9 x 371 cm). Teheran Museum of Contemporary Art, Teheran, Iran.

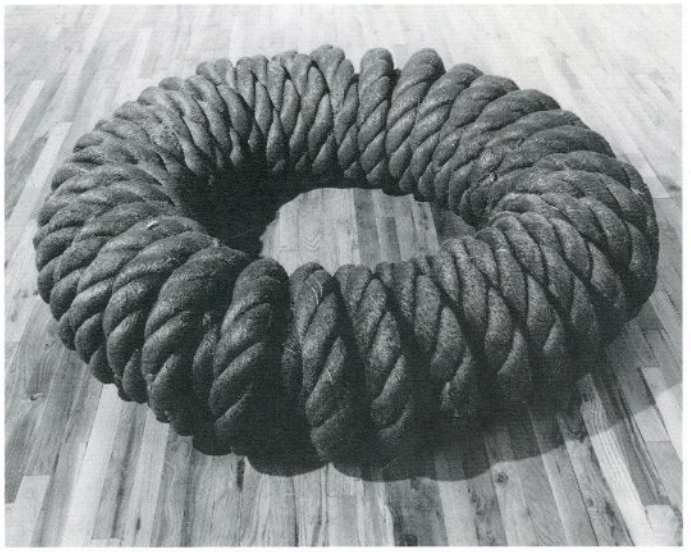
Fig. 10. *Double Column*, 1970. Rope. 96 x 18 x 6" (244.8 x 45.7 x 15.2 cm). Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, New York.



Rope Trick, including *Untitled*, 1969-70 (fig. 9), a coil of rope twice the length of *Rope Trick* laid down on the floor, and *Double Column*, 1970 (fig. 10), two joined columns of one continual length of coiled rope, as well as other circular, wheel-like structures, including *Double Circle* (cat. no. 3) and *Double Bound Circle* (fig. 11), which placed a greater emphasis not only on the shape of the sculpture but also on the open interior space contained within the circle. The more solid appearance of these works was due to their floor orientation (prompted by the immense vibrations of the truck and subway traffic on Canal Street that eventually caused any upright piece to fall over) and Winsor's growing exaggeration of weight and solidity of forms.

After bringing the rope pieces to a conceptual end, Winsor conceived of a number of sculptures that incorporated the qualities she admired about the rope, namely its natural color and composition (hemp), the systemic process from which it is made (from twine to rope to coil), and its density, which seemingly fills the rope with potential energy. Virtually all of Winsor's best-known works of the early seventies, including the brick works, the wood lath pieces, and the first bound

Fig. 11. *Double Bound Circle*, 1971. Rope. 16 x 61" [diameter] (40.6 x 155 cm). High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia.



log works, were conceived together around 1970, although it would take nearly three years to execute them. Among these works is the first piece in which she cut the continuous lengths of rope — a sculpture called *Chunk Piece* (fig. 12) made from a length of rope cut into several three-foot sections. She then bound these sections together a few inches from their frayed ends to establish a dense cylindrical form. The loose ends enhance the beauty of the natural hemp while creating a tension with the tightly bound rope in the middle. As a result, *Chunk Piece* has an even greater sense of solidity and energy.

These qualities were further magnified in *Nail Piece* (cat. no. 4), a work she finished just prior to *Chunk Piece*. *Nail Piece* represents another breakthrough in which Winsor combined two distinctly different materials. Winsor began *Nail Piece* by joining together two seven-foot planks with thousands of nails until nail heads mottled the entire surface, top and bottom. Over three months, she repeated this process, plank by plank, until the work was nine planks high and the entire piece was imploded with tens-of-thousands of nails. (The top and bottom planks, the only surfaces visible to count, each contain roughly 4000 nail heads.) Although she did not make a precise measurement of the weight of the materials before the piece's execution, her intention was to fill the work with nails. The wood was soft and absorbed the nails, requiring more and more to be added until the weight of the two materials turned out to be equal, roughly fifty pounds of each, an aesthetic democracy that will become increasingly evident, as well as increasingly conscious, in her work. In a 1976 interview she explained:

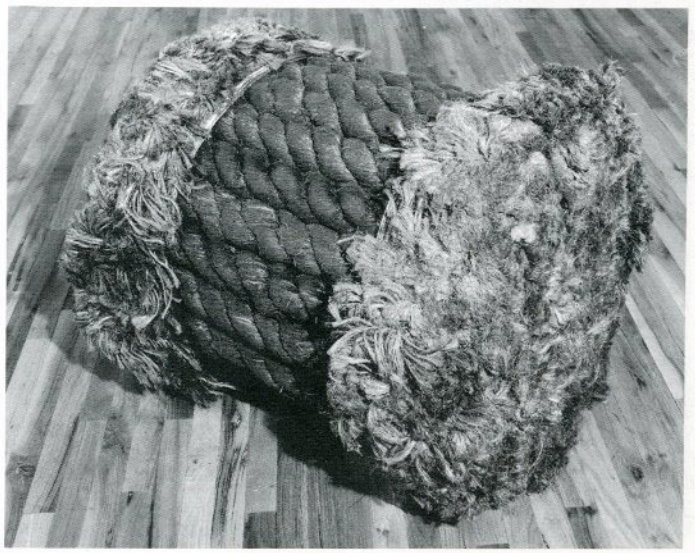
> When I started using other materials, it was their *in*completeness that interested me. In *Nail Piece* . . . the wood planks and nails seemed very separate compared to the early rope pieces where there was one element. In using more than one material the incompleteness of each unit seemed to allow space for them to exist together, and this balance between them created the boundary. . . . Bringing the materials together really meant putting the nails into the wood, making them become part of the wood, creating a new balance, not so much of volume of materials as a weight balance — fifty pounds of wood to fifty pounds of nails.[13]

In this same interview Winsor explained how the variables of time and process became important aspects of her work:

> It was the first time that the amount of time . . . of slow time. . . it took to build a piece seemed important. Here a balance or one to one relationship was created between "making time" and "perception time." Originally it wasn't my intention to put so many nails in the piece, but it seemed to take that much time to instill the piece with its own energy and presence . . . to seem complete.[14]

Winsor's next sculptures reveal a further broadening of her vocabulary of forms and materials. The first was a series of wooden lath pieces in which flat strips of wood were nailed together to form simple shapes such as a

Fig. 12. *Chunk Piece*, 1970. Rope. 28" [diameter] x 36" (71.1 x 91.4 cm). Private Collection.



box, (*Fence Piece*, 1970 [fig. 13]) and a cylinder (*Cylinder Lattice*, 1970-71 [fig. 14]). A small series of red brick works based on vaguely architectonic forms scaled to human proportions soon followed, including *Brick Dome* (cat. no. 5), an igloo-like hemisphere made from red bricks and concrete, and *Brick Square* (cat. no. 6), a fortress-like square constructed out of five layers of red bricks. In a slightly later piece, Winsor formed cement into a perfectly rounded 18-inch ball, *Cement Sphere* (cat. no. 7), perhaps the most minimal sculpture she has ever created.[15] This work, intended as a compact distillation of the brick works, was scaled so that it was more graceful and mobile than the earlier brick works, yet its weight (approximately 150 pounds, intentionally scaled to approximate the artist's own body weight) and downward thrust of its shape make it difficult for one person to lift.

Fig. 13. *Fence Piece*, 1970. Wood and nails. 49 x 49 x 49" (124.5 x 124.5 x 124.5 cm). Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, New York.

These important works feature distinctive shapes that, on formal and psychological levels, function very differently. In *Brick Dome* Winsor emphasized the solid exterior mass — an awareness of the interior is confused since it is impossible to determine whether or not the piece is solid. (The piece, molded around a plastic armature, is actually hollow, though it weighs close to 3000 pounds.) In *Fence Piece* and the more squat *Brick Square*, the mass of the square forms (positive space) is mitigated by the openness of the center (negative) space.

Fig. 14. *Cylinder Lattice*, 1971. Wood and nails. 48 x 36" [diameter] (121.9 x 91.4 cm). Wexner Center for the Arts, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.

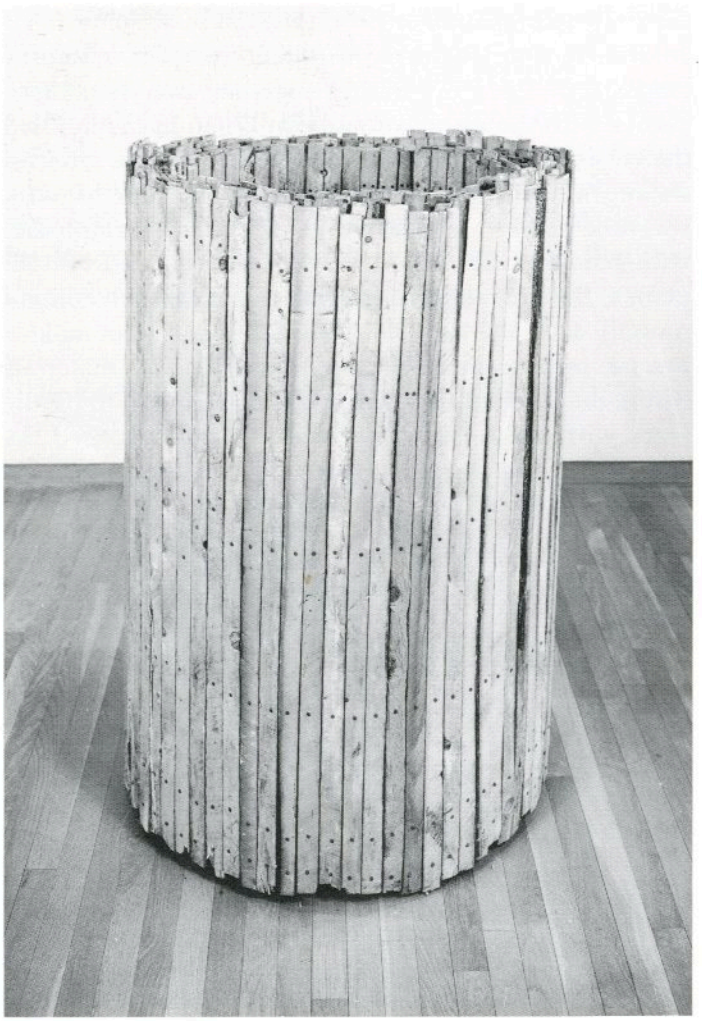
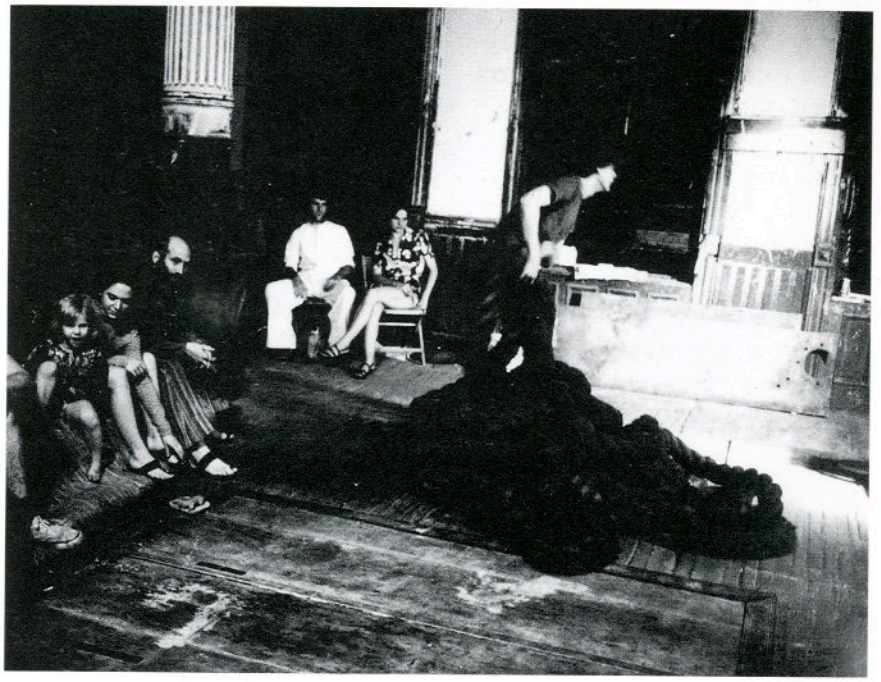
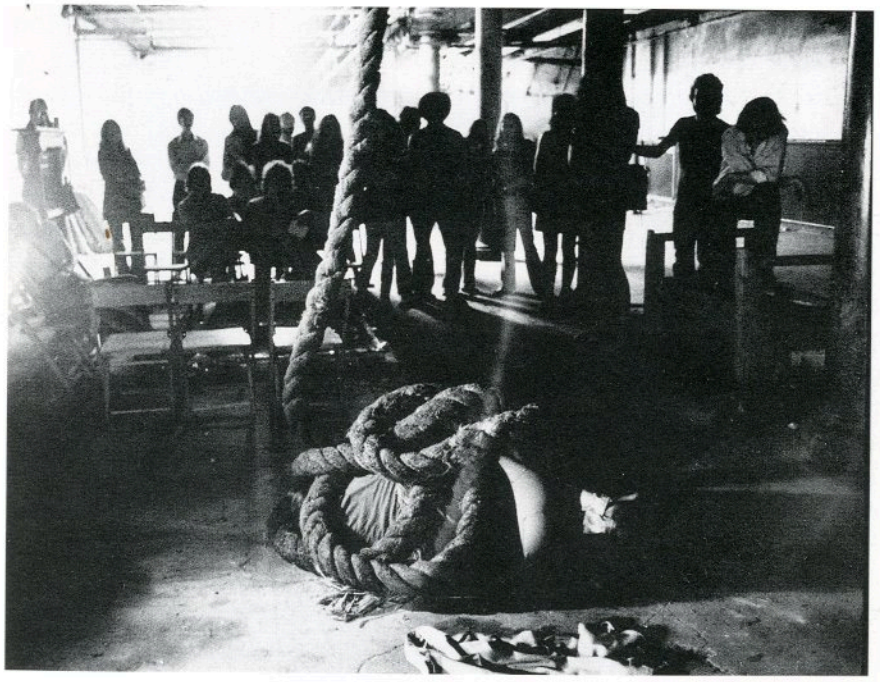


Fig. 15. Views of *Up and/or Down*, performed at 112 Greene Street, June 29, 1971. Photographs copyright © Peter Moore.





The diminutive, though commanding *Cement Sphere* occupies the least space yet it is instilled with the most density and energy; and since it rests on a single point, it conversely appears the most poised and complete. Curator Ellen Johnson, an early supporter of Winsor's work, has compared Winsor's sculptures of this time to Cézanne's apples stating,

> Cézanne's painted fruits are as indestructible and everlasting as the rock of Mont Sainte-Victoire; and Winsor's sculpture obstinately proclaims mass, weight, and density, properties she combines with space in such a way that mass and air tend to become one solid substance.[16]

The self-contained, restful quality associated with works such as *Cement Sphere* can be interpreted as another example of Winsor's recurring anthropomorphic intent. This interest in exploring the narrative and even metaphorical side of Minimalism is one of the central characteristics of Postminimalism. Winsor has suggested that viewers should relate to her sculptures "the way you might relate to a sleeping person, to the potential energy that is manifested in a dormant state."[17] She has also remarked that her sculptures, especially those which are completed after considerable amounts of intense labor, are imbued with the same sense of age and experience that can be detected in an elderly human being. She explains,

> When you look at someone who is 80 years old, you know they're made up of lots of days and weeks and months and years. Part of your reading of them as being this age of life is that you know they have gone through a kind of volume of experiences, and I'm interested in that relationship of time and who somebody is. I relate that to the human being and I relate that to the pieces I make.[18]

The burgeoning social consciousness of the early 1970s revealed surprising obstacles to women artists working at this time, especially the lack of opportunities available to them. New York's system of galleries, critics, and even the social groupings among artists supported the work of male artists. Reflecting back on the period prior to the women's movement, Winsor recalls having had "a clear idea of my invisibility."[19] While certainly some women artists were enjoying critical and commercial success, including Louise Nevelson, Lee Krasner, Louise Bourgeois, Agnes Martin, and Helen Frankenthaler (all of whom, with the exception of Frankenthaler, were in their late fifties or sixties), exhibition opportunities in New York's museums and galleries were surprisingly limited for emerging women artists.[20] Only eight women were among the 143 artists chosen for the 1969 Whitney Museum of American Art Annual Exhibition, which prompted the now-legendary pickets outside of the museum.[21] Winsor was immensely supportive of the women artists movement and although she did not participate in the more aggressive tactics practiced by some of her contemporaries, she attended the earliest organizational gatherings for this important movement.

Winsor's work had begun to appear in selected exhibitions partially as a result of the women's movement. In 1968, curator and critic Lucy Lippard chose five of the early resin works to be part of an exhibition titled *Soft Sculpture* that toured the country.[22] In 1970, Winsor showed a selection of her rope works in what she considered her first significant exhibition, the Whitney Annual, even though she believes her inclusion, as well as that of many other women artists, was due to the concerted efforts by the curators to include more women following the somewhat embarrassing pickets the previous year.[23] Her work was also included in the watershed *26 Contemporary Women Artists* exhibition also organized by Lippard for the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art in Ridgefield, Connecticut in 1971.

In June of 1971, Winsor participated in a group presentation of performance works at the alternative space 112 Greene Street. Winsor's 20-minute work, *Up and/or Down*, her only performance piece, featured a "soft, rounded female" channeling 500 pounds of four-inch rope through a small hole in the ceiling where a "long, lean male" tugged the rope through what was a hole in

Fig. 16. *Bound Grid*, 1971-72. Wood and hemp. 84 x 84 x 8" (213.4 x 213.4 x 20.3 cm). Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, Paris.

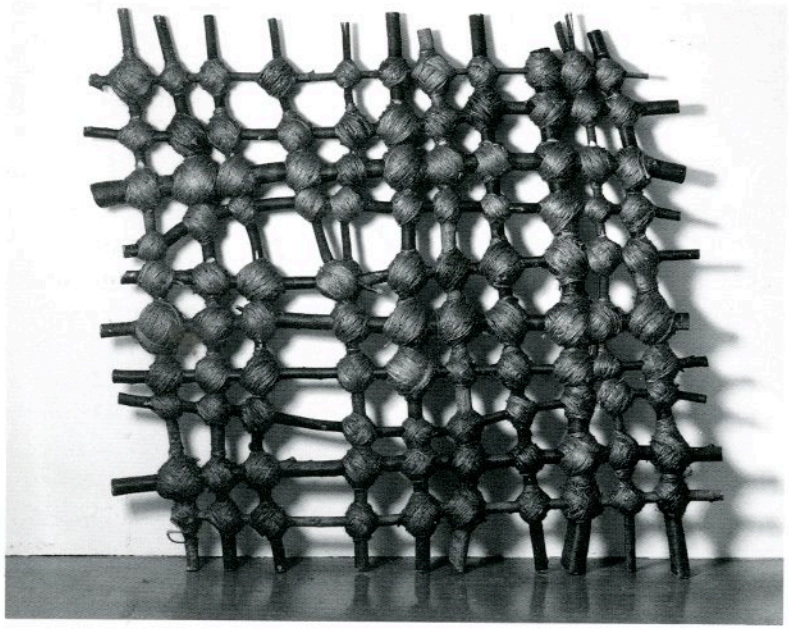
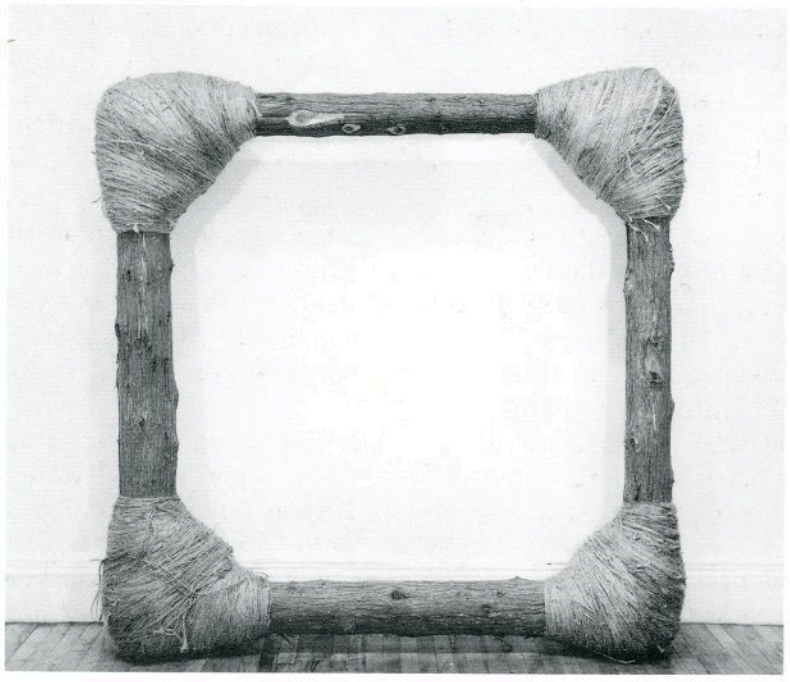
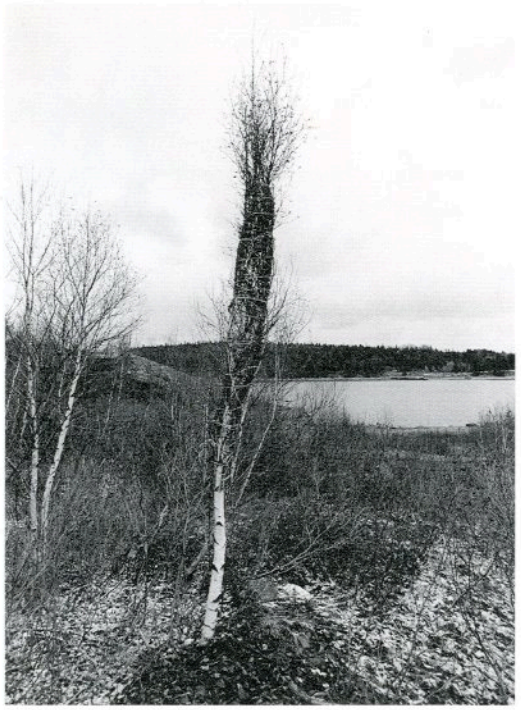


Fig. 17. *Bound Square*, 1972. Wood and hemp. 75 ½ x 76 x 14 ½" (191.8 x 193.1 x 36.8 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York.



Figs. 18. *30 to 1 Bound Trees*, 1971, in progress.



30 to 1 Bound Trees, 1971. Installation at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax, Nova Scotia (no longer extant). Wood and hemp. Approx. 240 x 60" [diameter] (609 x 152.4 cm).

his floor above. The action was then reversed, with the male lowering the rope onto the female, who was now curled-up on the floor, until it covered her entire body (see fig. 15).[24] Winsor's explanation of this performance reveals that it was closely related to the concerns of her rope sculptures:

> What I wanted to bring out was the kinesthetic relationship between the muscularity of the performers and the muscularity of the rope and the changing quality of the rope as it was being moved. The scale and weight of the rope forced the performers to conform to its properties rather than the other way around.[25]

Winsor's next series of works, executed during 1971-73, consisted of trees, logs, or branches bound together with twine garnered from lengths of four-inch rope she meticulously unraveled. The first, *Bound Grid* (fig. 16), was a gridded network of tree branches wrapped with twine at their intersections. The irregularity of the individual branches (one even spans out to form a "Y") resulted in a structure that deviates considerably from the perfect Minimalist grid. The next in the series was *Bound Square* (fig. 17), a massive leaning frame constructed from four six-foot logs bound together at their ends. The logs used here were much broader than the branches in the gridded piece, giving *Bound Square* a sturdier and grander impression. This work can also be seen as an enlarged detail of one of the units of *Bound Grid*. In *Bound Logs* (cat. no. 9) the wood was much denser and heavier than what was used in *Bound Square*. Here Winsor used longer logs for the sides (about nine feet tall) and shortened the top and bottom logs to create a towering, almost totemic form. The area of negative space was reduced to a narrow passage which emphasized the qualities of muscularity, density, and weight in both the wood and large rounded balls of twine at both ends.

Out of these early bound works came Winsor's first outdoor piece, a 1971 site-specific installation titled *30 to 1 Bound Trees* (fig. 18) created for the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax in a nearby woods. This installation consisted of 30 individually bound young white birch trees that were bundled around a larger tree still rooted in the ground. The result was a single vertical form in which the outer trees served as a protector of the living tree within. Like much of her work up to this point, this installation was an investigation into giving objects an inert power and energy. In this instance she was attempting to give an actual living force (the trees) even greater psychological impact. In May of 1972, Winsor made her second outdoor piece in a dense woods near Richmond, Virginia (fig. 19), this time out of narrow saplings bound into a shelter-like cube that resembled a primitive, open-air hut.[26]

Fig. 19. *Virginia Piece*, 1972. Installation at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia (no longer extant). Wood and hemp. Approx. 96 x 96 x 96" (244 x 244 x 244 cm).

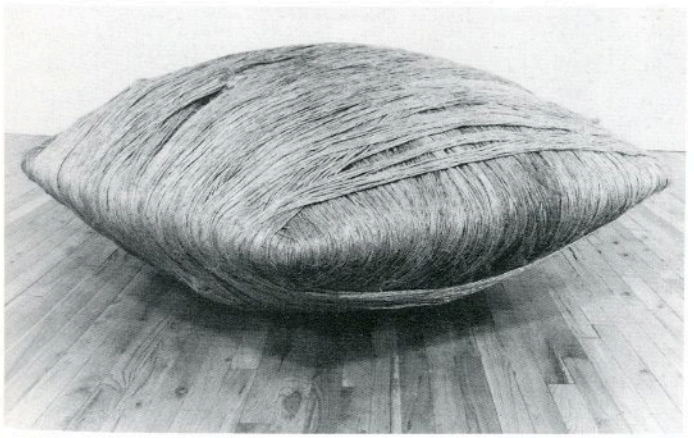
In two other pieces associated with this series, the wrapping process was increased in order to diminish the visual presence of the wood. During a six-month period in 1972, Winsor unraveled lengths of four-inch rope and then wrapped the resulting twine around the ends of four short logs until an equal number of large balls of twine emerged in a piece called *Four Corners* (cat. no. 8). The sturdy logs were virtually concealed under the bulbous volumes of tightly wrapped and packed twine. In a slightly later work, *Plywood Square* of 1973 (fig. 20), Winsor wrapped twine around a single sheet of plywood resulting in an impacted lozenge-like form whose title provides the only clue to its inner core. In both of these pieces one form or shape (the "under-shape") gave way to the final shape (e.g., the square frame to four spheres and plywood square to ovoid, respectively). This building of one geometric shape to another, and its implied transformation, will reoccur in later works.

The sense of labor and energy poured into each Winsor sculpture is perhaps strongest in these bound works. Winsor's solemn techniques and guileless forms have often been compared to the ritualism of primitive art.[27] These qualities are perhaps most apparent in works such as *Nail Piece*, which has certain formal relationships to African nail-encrusted fetish objects, and the bound pieces, where the wrapping process seems reminiscent of some sort of primeval ritual. Kirk Varnedoe has acknowledged that Winsor "articulated the basic experiences of weight and scale . . . and showed how simple rule-bound tasks could by dint of gritty insistence express a personal catechism of toil."[28] In contrast to the formulaic methods of the Minimalists, he explains that in Winsor's work, "math shaded into mantra," concluding "the syntax of Minimalism served both as ground and as foil for the articulation of work that, without specific reference to tribal or pre-historic cultures, nonetheless set the terms of a new allusive primitivism."[29] Critic Hilton Kramer, normally not a supporter of Minimalist or Postminimalist sculpture, believes that this "primitivism" is what gives Winsor's work its significance:

> There is a yearning in [her] work for the kind of meaning that the sculpture in a primitive culture could take for granted: the meaning that derives from a traditionally ordained ritual function. It is in this yearning that the true significance of Jackie Winsor's sculpture lies — a yearning that attempts to convert the slick forms of Minimalism back into the language of primitive feeling.[30]

The aspects in Winsor's work that these critics associate with "primitive" art are more closely related to the feeling of ritualism practiced by German artist Joseph Beuys than to art of third-world cultures. Beuys similarly elevated highly idiosyncratic materials (fat, felt, butter, copper) to the status of "art" while giving them new and highly metaphorical meaning. For example, Beuys's messianic "*aktions*" and his assertion that his materials either retain or conduct human warmth and energy suggest his art should not be considered solely for its formal qualities. Beuys's juxtaposition of materials in sculptures also reminiscent of Minimalist shapes, such as his *Rubberized Box*, *Fat Corner*, and the *Fond* works in which stacked layers of copper and felt formed a conceptual battery cell, somehow seems related to Winsor's energy-impacted forms. Winsor's first encounter with Beuys's work occurred very early in her career when she saw his installation at the *Documenta 4* exhibition in

Fig. 20. *Plywood Square*, 1973. Plywood and hemp. 25 x 53 x 53" (63.5 x 134.6 x 134.6 cm). The National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.



Kassel, West Germany during her first European trip in 1968. She was intrigued to learn of Beuys's art and life — Beuys was also raised in a northern rural environment (Cleves, Germany), and his *Felt Suit* sculpture, inspired by the fat and felt that Tartar tribesman purportedly wrapped him in after a near-fatal crash in the Crimea during World War II, reminded Winsor of stories of her infancy in rural Canada, where the custom had been to prepare babies for sleep by covering their torso with a layer of goose fat kept in place with a flannel undergarment to protect and preserve body heat during cold winter nights.[31]

By the mid-seventies Winsor had been introduced to a number of artists whose work she had been seeing in various exhibitions around New York. She even met Joseph Beuys during his first visit to America in 1974. As one might expect, Winsor's preference was for sculpture that described the "physicalness of what the artist was doing."[32] Among her peers, this included Richard Serra, who articulated the elements of material, space, and mass, and the somewhat later activities of Gordon Matta-Clark, best known for cutting large sections out of condemned buildings, but whose outlandish "happenings" and exhibitions of such things as "fried photographs" were also earning him a considerable reputation among New York's art circles.

In 1973, Winsor made two works using plywood, a material she had used previously as the core for *Plywood Square*. In these works reduction replaced the distinctly "additive" nature of her previous sculptures.[33] In *Laminated Plywood* (cat. no. 10) she hatched nearly half the mass from the top of a four-foot wide platform made

Fig. 21. *1 x 1 Piece*, 1974. Wood and nails. 45 x 45 x 45" (114.3 x 114.3 x 114.3 cm). The Detroit Institute of the Arts, Detroit, Michigan.

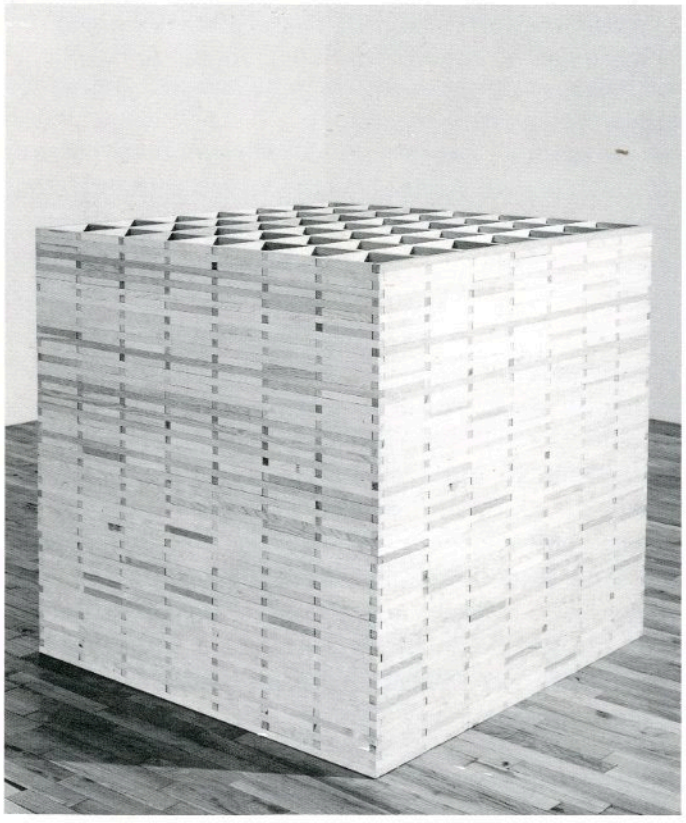
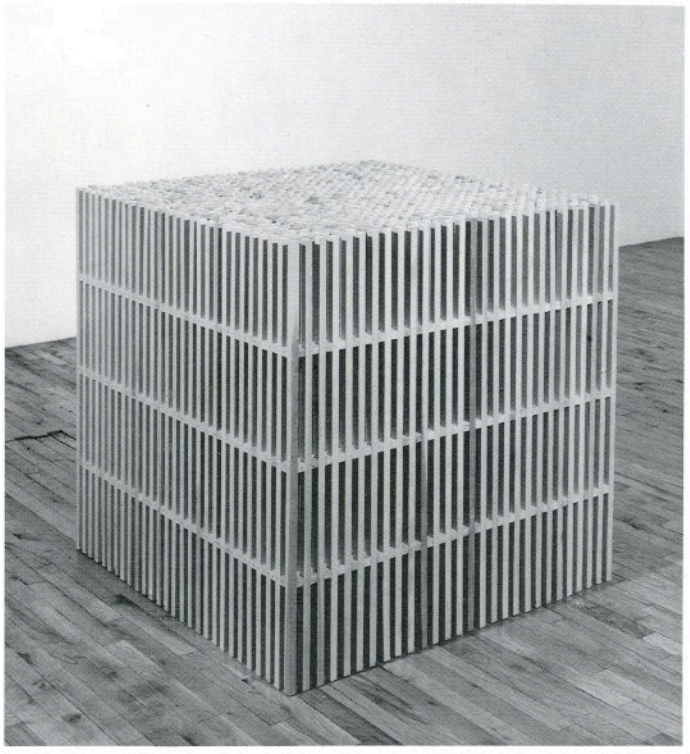


Fig. 22. *55 x 55*, 1975. Wood and nails. 40 x 40 x 40" (101.6 x 101.6 x 101.6 cm). Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York.



out of laminated sheets of plywood. The result was a rough, crater-like structure that documented her fervent gouging. In *Laminated Grid* (fig. 1), a less aggressive version of *Laminated Plywood*, Winsor used a circular saw to "draw" a gridded pattern of squares on the top of a similar laminated plywood structure. The free-hand lines created by the power saw resulted in grid lines that were predictably imperfect which, again, heightened the awareness of the artist at work.

In October of 1973, Winsor had a successful debut at the Paula Cooper Gallery, her first one-person show in New York. Her work subsequently began appearing in a number of important group exhibitions, both in the United States and abroad. Beginning in 1974, she made a number of sculptures based on the cube, a form she would use almost exclusively for the next ten years. Like the requisite paint drips of 1950s Abstract Expressionism and the American flag of 1960s Pop Art, by the mid-1970s, this "perfect," rational, and non-referential form had become an emblem of the Minimalist aesthetic. Winsor comments on her reasons for choosing the cube:

> At first, using combined materials was about holding the materials together as one. The forms were derived from the specific character of the material I was using. [In the next body of work] I wanted the forms to be more neutral — and I selected a cube to work with. I wanted the focus to be on what went on within the form. The focus [of works such as *Fifty-Fifty*] was much more about creating a balance between the physical grid and an intangible grid — bringing openness and airiness into the pieces and still retaining [the sculpture's] solidity.[34]

These first cube works were constructions made out of square strips of one-inch pine joined together with nails.[35] In *1 x 1 Piece*, 1974 (fig. 21), Winsor began by laying out a grid of 49 squares (seven squares wide by seven squares deep). She continued to build up this framework one layer at a time until it was 62 layers tall. The finished piece took on the shape of a large box (the 50th square) with an open top to reveal the gridded sub-sections. The sides were solid and patterned by the variation of the individual pine strips. This systemic nature was repeated in *55 x 55* (fig. 22), in which the pine strips were arranged vertically. The 28 vertical sticks were separated horizontally by small one-inch sections of pine creating three "floors" trisecting the cube into four sub-sections. The title of this work was derived from the sum of the 28 areas of wood (positive space) and the alternating 27 areas of air (negative space), which are of equal importance for Winsor. *Fifty-Fifty* (cat. no. 11), a three-dimensional grid constructed by stacking pine strips while alternating the direction of the horizontal rows, is held together by more than 20,000 nails, all requiring pre-drilled holes and countersinking the nail heads. Winsor's patience and attention to details adds both emotional warmth to the geometry and allows the piece to sit so serenely complete.

Fig. 24. Installation view of *Fifty-Fifty*, 1975 (cat. no. 11), showing image of circle formed within gridded network of wood strips.

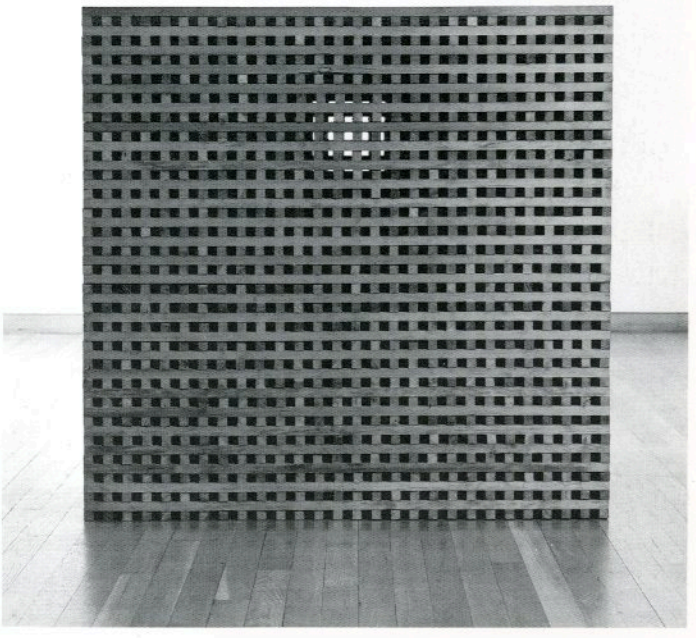
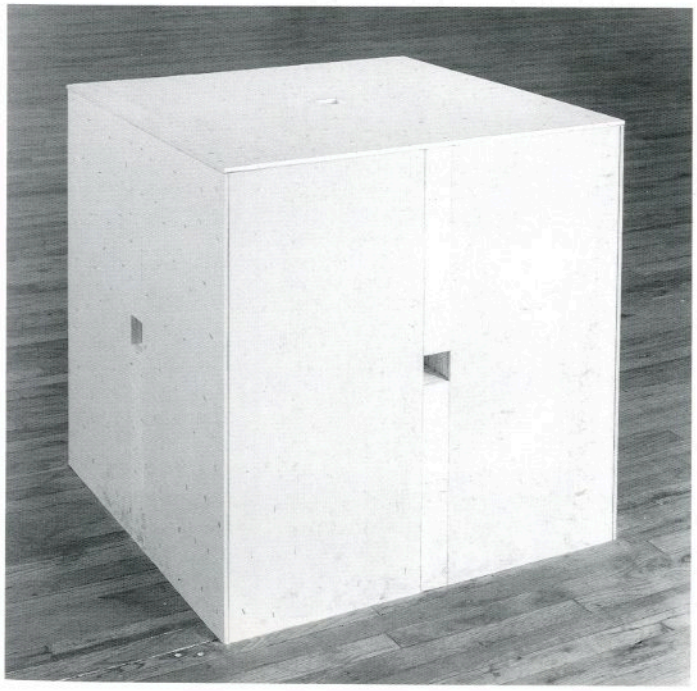


Fig. 23. *Paul Walter's Piece*, 1974. Copper and wood. 29 x 32" [diameter] (73.7 x 81.3 cm). Collection of Paul Walter, Princeton, New Jersey.

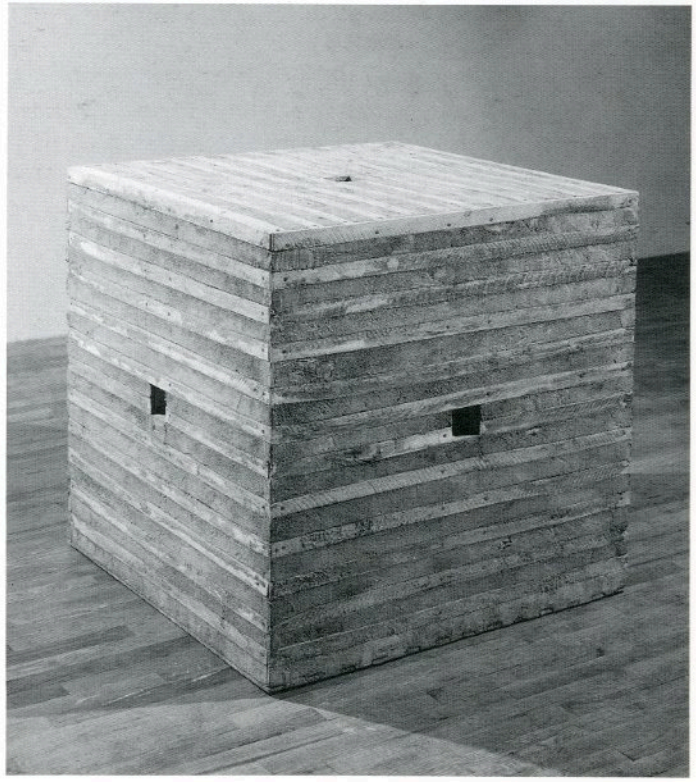
Concurrent with these pieces in 1974, Winsor completed a commission for art collector Paul Walter's weekend home near Princeton, New Jersey, consisting of 1/8-inch thick copper wire wrapped around a bundle of sticks (fig. 23). Unlike the ease with which rope and twine can be wound, Winsor discovered that wire had the tendency to slip, making it very difficult to work with; however, its beautiful color (which changes over time as it oxidizes) and rigidity (which also differs greatly from the more languid twine) provided new opportunities and challenges. The Princeton commission has similarities with earlier wrapped pieces in that it shows a developing interest in shaping a rounded form out of the otherwise cylindrical bundle of saplings. This recurring desire to merge these two geometric shapes was also reinforced by her discovery of how a circle is formed within the gridded construction of *Fifty-Fifty* when it is viewed from a distance (see fig. 24). Winsor will continue to integrate these two forms in works of the 1980s.

Fig. 25. *Sheetrock Piece*, 1976. Sheetrock and staples. 33 x 33 x 33" (83.8 x 83.8 x 83.8 cm). Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, New York.



In 1976, the last of the wrapped pieces were made, #2 *Copper* (cat. no. 12) and the related #1 *Rope* (fig. 3). #2 *Copper* was made out of three separate concentric squares or "fences" (made from two-by-two inch sticks) placed inside one another. (The outer, middle, and innermost fences consisted of six, four, and two vertical sticks per side.) The sticks were supported by two horizontal runners (much like *1 x 1 Piece*). At each intersection, Winsor wrapped lengths of "#2" industrial copper wire until two melon-sized balls of copper were formed. On completion, the sculpture when viewed from above is a grid of copper with the bulbous coils showing a marked similarity to the earlier *Bound Grid*. From the side, it resembles the construction of *1 x 1 Piece* with the copper creating a horizontal bed or "floor" which structurally holds the piece together.

Fig. 26. *Cement Piece*, 1976-77. Cement, wire, and wood. 36 x 36 x 36" (91.4 x 91.4 x 91.4 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York.



Figs. 27. Views of *Burnt Piece*, 1977-78, in progress.