



CLOSE PROXIMITY:

A Retrospective of Sculpture by

Neil Goodman



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Founded in 1981 with the mission of “making art a part of everyday life”, the Museum of Outdoor Arts (MOA) is a forerunner in the placement of site-specific sculpture in Colorado. Our art collection is located at public locations throughout the Denver metro area. From commercial office parks to botanic gardens, city parks and traditional sculpture gardens; art is placed to interpret space as “a museum without walls.” MOA also curates indoor galleries and hosts world-class art exhibitions and educational programs. Please visit our website to learn more about MOA.

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CLOSE PROXIMITY:

A Retrospective of Sculpture by

Neil Goodman

MOA INDOOR GALLERY

1000 Englewood Parkway, Second Floor, Englewood, CO 80110

Exhibiting September 15 – November 17, 2018

OUTDOOR INSTALLATION AT WESTLANDS PARK

5701 South Quebec Street, Greenwood Village, CO 80111

Exhibiting September 2018 – August 2019





CLOSE PROXIMITY: A Retrospective of Sculpture by Neil Goodman



MOA, September 15 - November 17, 2018



CLOSE PROXIMITY: A Retrospective of Sculpture by Neil Goodman



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INTRODUCTION



By
Cynthia Madden Leitner

In 2001, MOA acquired the International Sculpture Center's *Collection IV*. Many of the pieces were installed as part of the City Center Englewood Sculpture Garden.

Included were artists Magdalena Abakanowicz, Mark Di Suvero, Sir Anthony Caro ...and Neil Goodman. Of the 32 exemplary works of sculpture, Goodman's *Variable Composition II* remains a personal favorite. As Neil stated in his film produced for the exhibition, "*Everything that happens in 'Close Proximity' happens in the original MOA piece on some level. It is a classic assemblage.*"

Fifteen years later, Neil visited Denver. We had a casual first meeting at MOA, which led to a site tour the next day, and spontaneously evolved into planning a major indoor/outdoor

retrospective exhibition. We all became fast friends and enthusiastic collaborators.

Two years later and we have opened *Close Proximity: A Retrospective of Sculpture by Neil Goodman*. Three monumental sculptures are on exhibit outdoors at Westlands Park in Greenwood Village and 33 bronze installations are displayed indoors at MOA's gallery in Englewood.

Bronze, dense and heavy, becomes visually light in Neil's sculpture. He often works the bronze to an architectural capacity. Outdoors,



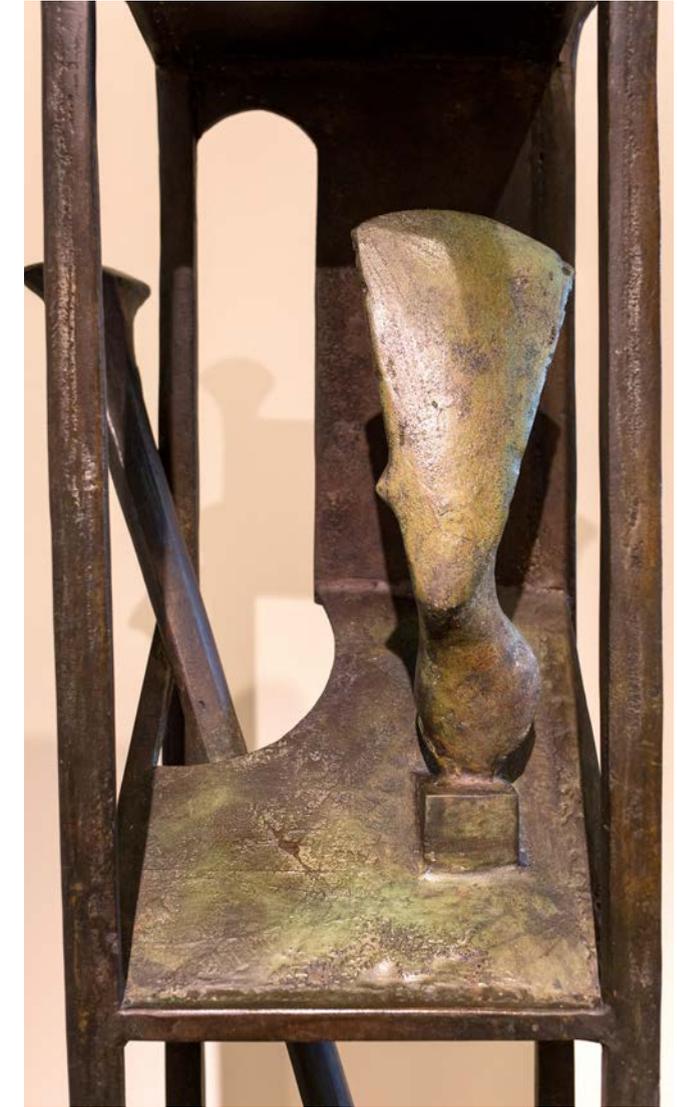
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the massive sculptures frame the landscape. Indoors, the sculptures possess iconic patterning that harkens back to archetypal familiarity. The richness of the patinas resonate the forms.

The symbolism of the 40 shapes in *Script* evoke a code or an invented ancient language. *Three Graces* — a six-foot, 400-pound bronze — is balanced and counterbalanced to set on three small points of contact. Feats of engineering and an understanding of geometrical proportion are uniquely utilized in many of the sculptures.

In *Subjects and Objects*, Neil disconnected the pieces to "*push the viewer to a more dynamic relationship with the work... they had to finish the composition.*" Neil's relationship with sculpture is that it tells a story, "*where it begins and where it ends and the middle part is always the narrative. If the viewer doesn't understand the beginning, the ending won't be grasped, so they won't want to get involved with the story.*" Neil also believes the viewer deserves aesthetic quality.

After 40 years of teaching sculpture, Neil retired this year from professorship at Indiana University Northwest. Neil's presence at IUN remains through *Shadows & Echoes*, a series of 10 large-scale cast bronze sculptures nestled →



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into the landscape of the sculpture garden in the center of the IUN campus.

Close Proximity here at MOA is serendipitous for him — perhaps as a poignant and symbolic exhibit to celebrate his past and to lead him into the next creative transition — inspiring the work to come.

The team at MOA is invested in Neil Goodman's next chapter and all of us wish him the best to come. ■

Cynthia Madden Leitner is the Founder and Executive Director of the Museum of Outdoor Arts. She has also served as a board member on the International Sculpture Center (ISC) and is a founding member of the National Museum of Women in the Arts (NMWA) for which she serves on the advisory council.



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FOREWORD

by **Margaret Hawkins**

To approach a bronze sculpture by Neil Goodman is to experience a calming drop in blood pressure and at the same time the excitement of the pure hum of attunement. It's a little like going into a trance. What is hard — metal, for instance, or life — softens, or appears to, when rendered through heat, time, breath.

This oxymoronic softness in Goodman's otherwise hard surfaces, the Brancusi-like curves of the early work but also the more subtle twists of the new pieces, comes hard-won. Goodman's laborsome process begins in carving and the work never loses its sense of the manual. Much of the work is small, calibrated to human proportions, but even the big outdoor pieces feel hand wrought.

Goodman is a sculptor in the old-school sense. He is not an orchestrator of technicians, but a maker and a builder.

Every morning after a solitary routine that involves the meditative washing of dishes and the making of coffee for his wife, he goes into his studio, formerly on the south side of Chicago and now located in a small coastal town in southern California, and works alone.

He begins a sculpture by fashioning a shape from wood or wax. It is slow going. He works until dark. (He says he likes California because the days are longer there and there's more time to work.)

When he gets the carvings right — and it takes a long time, months sometimes — he makes molds and has them cast in fiberglass, in sections if they're big. At this point he makes adjustments as possible, though the possibilities wane as the work solidifies. When he gets the adjustments right, he has the work cast in bronze and welds it together. *"My hands almost never leave the work, from beginning to end."*

This process is not conducive to improvisation. *"The creative part is quick and intuitive,"* Goodman says. *"Then you have to build the piece. The best asset for a sculptor is patience. If your brain works too quickly you don't have endurance for the labor. Every day you wake up and you pretty much know what you're going to do for the next year or so. You don't worry about whether you're happy or unhappy, you just go to work."*







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Like many artists, Goodman is attached to his unexciting routine. *"I need to become really boring,"* he says. *"It helps me concentrate."* Boring is a matter of opinion. The work he makes is anything but.

Goodman cites two seminal influences. One is the industrial landscape of rustbelt America. He grew up in Hammond, Indiana, and after getting his MFA at the Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia, he returned to the Midwest and taught for almost 40 years at Indiana University in Gary, commuting the whole time from the south side of Chicago.

"I lived by those great old bridges in Pilsen," he says, referring to the formerly Czech, then Mexican, now increasingly gentrified Chicago neighborhood. *"Those bridges are the best iron sculptures ever made."*

Pair his urban roots with Goodman's other abiding love: the elegant still-life paintings of Pierre Chardin and Giorgio Morandi, and you get an unlikely, but fortuitous mash-up. Hints of the cadenced view of factory smokestacks poking at the hazy polluted sky along I-90 are easy enough to recognize in Goodman's work, but look closer and you'll also see the stately rows and repeated patterns of domestic objects lined up on a shelf. The pulsing effect of these



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arrangements, the buzz of connectedness in the spaces between them, characterizes much of Goodman's early and midcareer work.

Early modular wall pieces are made up of separate hand-wrought objects laid out like neatly organized tools hung on a pegboard, meant to be picked up and used, shouldered, applied to some meaningful task. Mixed in are artifacts that could be from the natural world. We spot animal skulls, what might be fossilized fish, leg bones. The format suggests archeological collections in museum cases.

The arc of Goodman's career begins in representation and bends toward abstraction, as many artists' careers do. In Goodman's case, however, even the early pieces defy sculptural convention, employing painterly tropes interpreted in bronze. This translation from the third dimension to the second necessitates its own kind of abstraction and Goodman's narrative impulse gives way over time to something that feels more contemplative.

In later works Goodman lets go of the implied grid — sometimes it appears to be a net — that knits scenes and objects together. These unknitted works feel more interior, riskier, not reliant on any visible physical

structure but appealing instead to the viewer's sense of, or hope for, or perhaps even belief in, an invisible order.

What holds Goodman's work together is a subtle visual grammar that provides a through-line from the earlier organic compositions to the later abstractions. In these, Goodman emerges from the warm envelope of identifiable reference to arrive in the rarified air of the high plateau of geometry. He credits the French still-life painter with providing a foundation from which to make this leap.

"Chardin opened doors and allowed me to invent. So much of my work is about taking ordinary shapes and reconfiguring them into line and plane. The large deconstructed wall works were in essence deconstructed Chardin still-lives. The shift from base and object to wall was huge but logical."

If a series of objects lined up on a shelf is a visual sentence, a whole arrangement on a wall is a page. Goodman acknowledges this leap from written to visual language, though the language that provided the springboard wasn't English. *"Growing up in a traditional Jewish home and spending years learning to read Hebrew [I learned to think of] language as* →

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form. So many shapes are simply intuitive and once they get in your hands, they find their way."

Grappling with squiggly symbols that, when deciphered, deliver lessons dense with philosophy and history surely invested young Goodman's visual world with a sense of heightened meaning. He learned early that symbols can — *must!* — be decoded through effortful practice. Thus, much of his sculpture looks like a running code rendered in heavy metal.

And code doesn't always translate into verbal language. Goodman's later works, both those on an intimate scale and the big outdoor pieces, suggest the language of mathematical principles, equations, solutions. These principles are not exactly visible, but they're not abstract either. Rather, they seem simply real, irreducible.

This mathematical-seeming quality of the later work may have something to do with the fact that, for all its weight and bulk, Goodman's sculpture has an airiness about it, like contrapuntal music. The pauses and spaces between things are all-important. To stand with or walk around it is a little like listening to a Bach fugue, an experience both light and

lugubrious and intensely focusing. You find yourself enmeshed in pattern, and time.

Poet Howard Nemerov wrote of the "black patience" of trees, employing a word that suggests a slow action mistaken for passivity, something that happens in time, but slowly. The expression could apply to Goodman's sculpture as well, and to how it works on the viewer.

Goodman lives in wine country now. His studio overlooks a vineyard. Such an idyllic setting might seem the opposite of a daily commute to Gary, but: "*A good view with pattern and repetition creates psychic balance,*" Goodman says, of his view onto orderly rows of promising, tender vines. "*Funny how so much of visual language is based on that core.*"

His new work seems increasingly attentive to these calm notes — more expansive, quieter, slower to make. The outdoor sculpture, more airy than monumental despite its size, is about the relationship of site and form, architecture and landscape, he says. It's not so much about substance as it is about framing views. Set at a tilt, these pieces look like yawning, crooked windows.



The rhythm in this new work is slower, as Goodman says he now is. ("*I carve with a rasp now. It's slower but I like the slowness. What's the hurry?*") The rhythm is more akin to breath, which is maybe why the reclining tilt of these big pieces reminds this viewer of a recumbent Buddha resting in the landscape. And like a recumbent Buddha, which is after all only a representation of flesh around breath, these pieces also seem to breathe around a center of nothing but air. The metal is their armature but their real heart is the empty space in the middle, a void where the air goes in and out, and through, the same air the viewer breathes.

— *Interview conducted June 2018.*
Margaret Hawkins is an art critic and author who teaches writing at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and Loyola University. ■



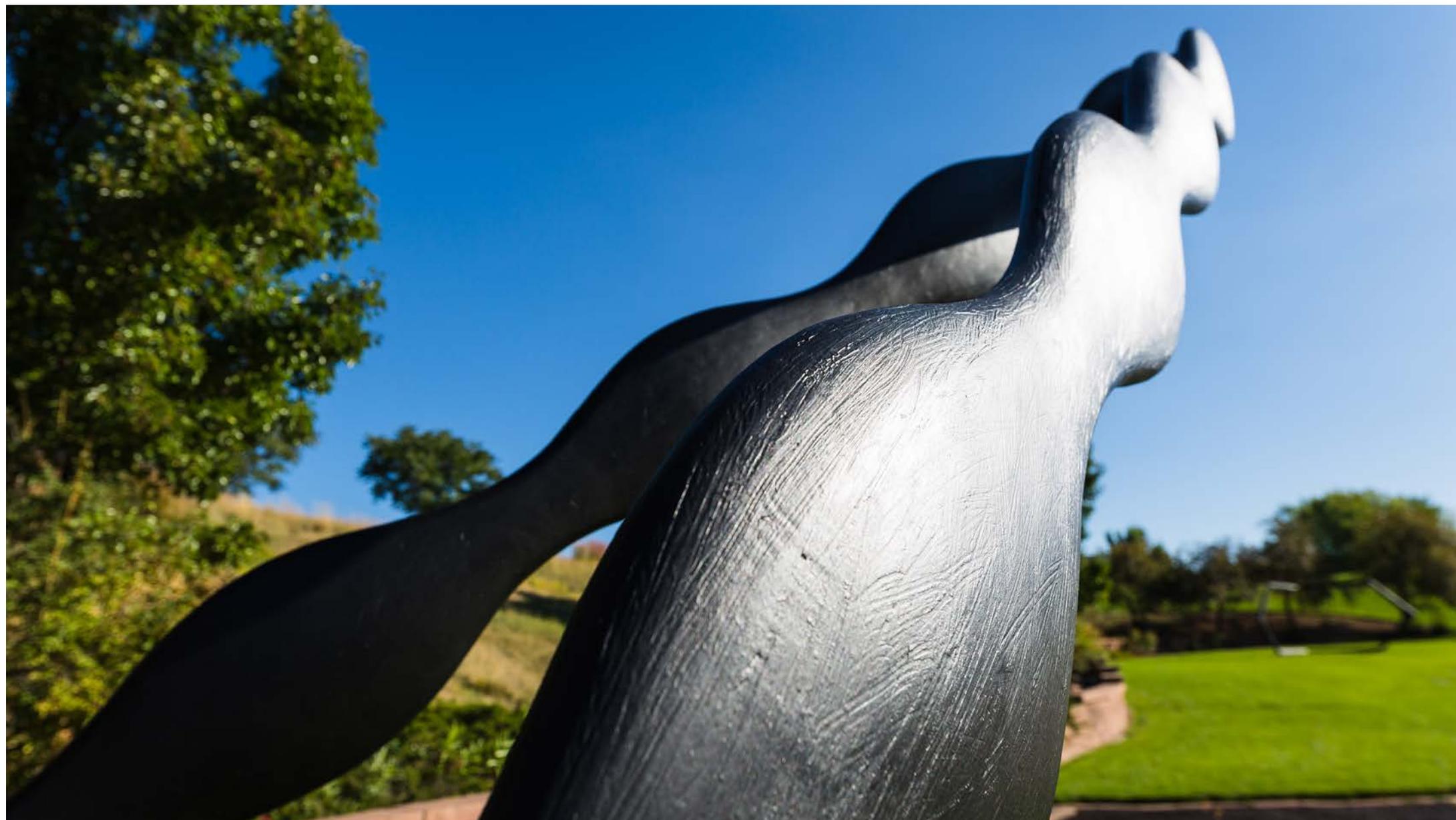
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“We look to the past
to point us forward,
measuring our ideas
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—NEIL GOODMAN





ARTIST'S STATEMENT

As artists, we live under the shadows of greatness. When we start, we look to the past to point us forward, measuring our ideas with those who have come before, and hoping to achieve something that has not yet come. A retrospective is a summing up, a rare opportunity to tell our story and to mark our history, and to see whether we will in turn become shadows for another generation. I would like to thank the MOA for all of their hard work and in letting me tell "my story."

When you begin, your umbrellas are the artists that you love. You want to be them, and in that way, they become you and influence what you make as well as what you think.

As the years pass, you begin to see them more as friends and less as mentors. You know that you are beginning to find your voice when you mostly hear your own. And if those early voices linger, you are now composing your own verses and melodies. This is your beginning as an artist and a retrospective, in the best sense, is a map that traces your path from that point forward and records your history.

This exhibition spans four decades of my work. The earliest work includes sculptures from the 1980s while mid-career work (1990–2010) focuses on wall and compositional groupings. The later work of the last 10 years (2010–2018) includes free-standing sculptures in bronze, as well as large-scale prototypes for outdoor works created from fiberglass. The dates for each work are specific, yet they blend, as I occasionally revisit themes from a bodies of work in different years or employ elements of earlier work.

The majority of the works in this exhibition are cast bronze. The work is first carved or modeled in a softer and less rigid material, and then "cast" into metal. The exhibit in MOA's indoor spaces is connected to text and symbol. The outdoor installations address architecture and landscape.

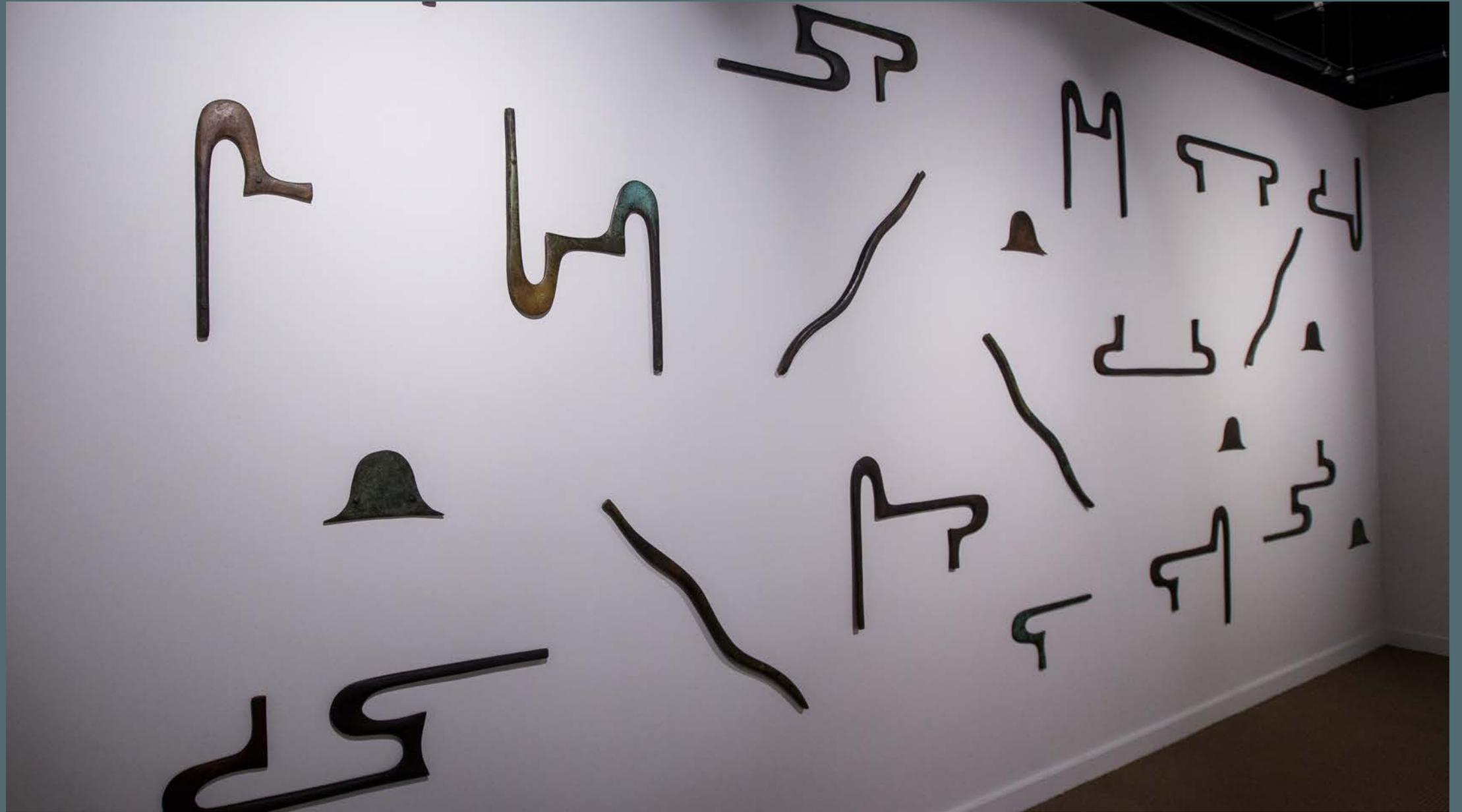
The later sculptures have also become singular as elements, increasingly three-dimensional and more ambiguous in terms of reference. Distinctively different, the indoor exhibit is linked to subject and object, while the outdoor installations are paired with site and space.



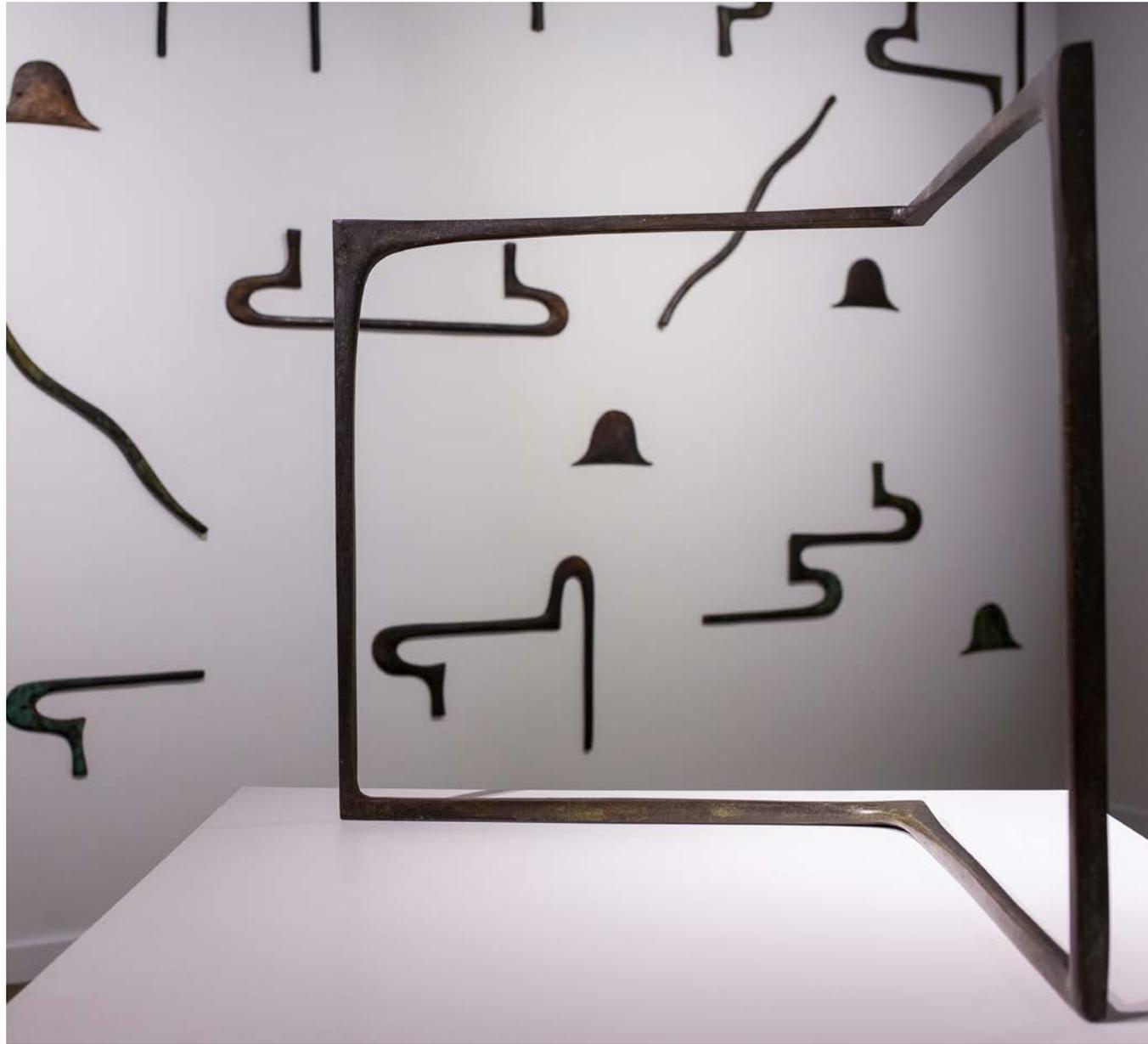
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Each body of work developed over years, even decades, found its way and then slowly transitioned into other forms propelled by new ideas. If I could see the last works when I was beginning, the relationship between older and earlier work might surprise me. One step led to another, and although the thread has always been there through the years, the line is very different from beginning to end.

We believe as artists, that we are always moving forward. A retrospective, perhaps, tells us whether this is true, and we hope that it is a clear, powerful, and engaging, representation of our accomplishments. This is the nature and privilege of a retrospective, to trace our own history, to see our "line", and to have the honor of looking back while hoping that the best is yet to come. ■



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Void as Form An Interview with Neil Goodman

by **Colleen Smith**

COLLEEN SMITH: *When did you start to understand yourself as an artist?*

NEIL GOODMAN: I went to college in 1971, a restless time. We were just recovering post-Vietnam. The youth culture, the hippies, the New Age: All that was coming on strong. Like most undergrads, I took courses to see what works. I had a friend — I still have him as a close friend — making pottery, and he said, “You should try this.” Once I was on the potter’s wheel, I realized I could have an idea and give it form — that my thought would coalesce into something to look at when I was done. I took ceramics courses and really fell in love with that.

CS: *You started creating lost-wax sculpture in 1977. What riveted you to metal sculpture?*

NG: Working with soft wax allows me to articulate and model form. With metal, you can

bring that thin shape into an articulated line, and it will stay. You can turn it, wrap it. So for an artist interested in line, casting is a better fit.

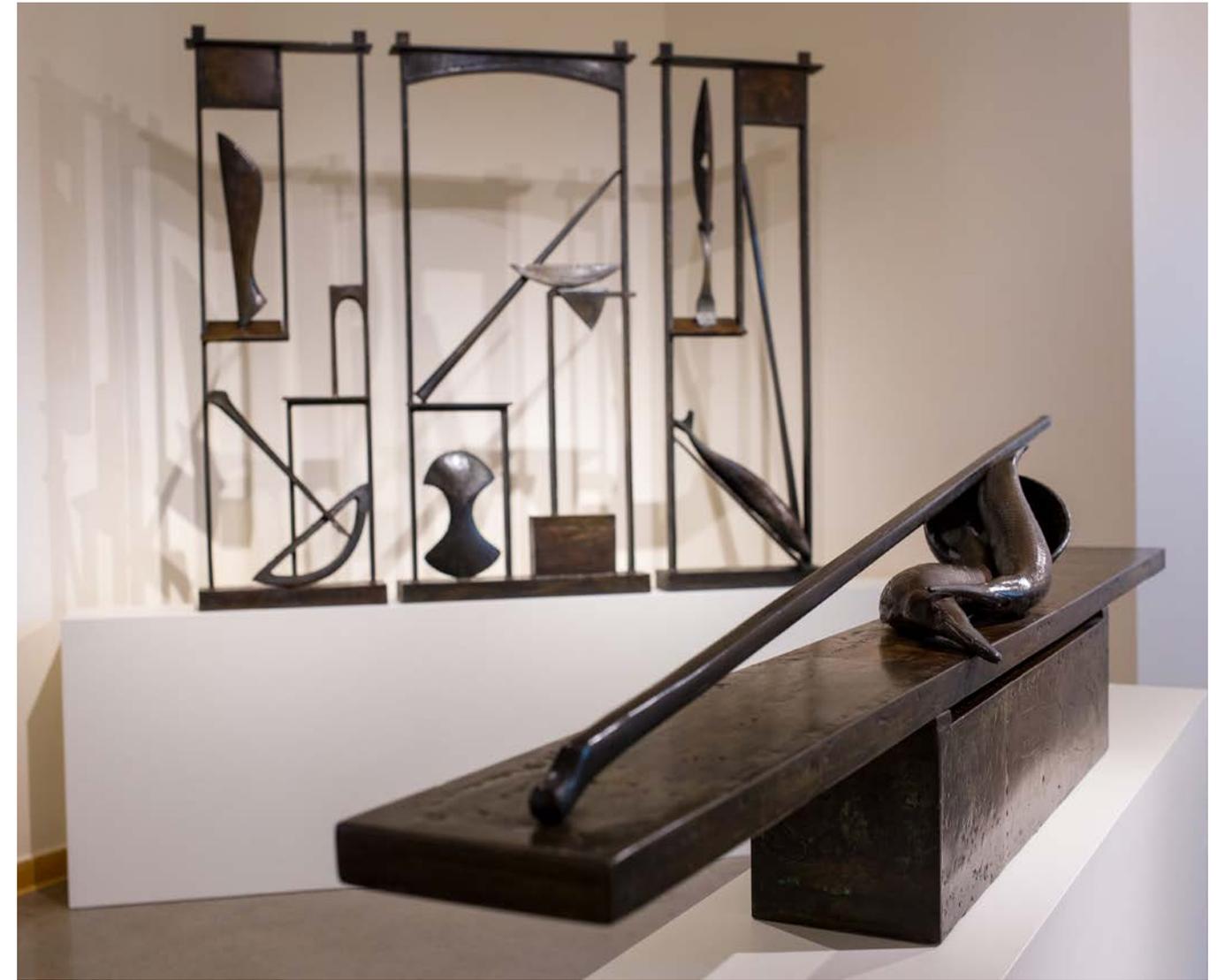
CS: *You recently stopped teaching after a long academic career. Teachers need to articulate the process to students, so in some ways it requires more consciousness of process.*

NG: Teachers have to be clear and engaging.

CS: *What do you enjoy about retirement? And what do you miss about teaching?*

NG: “Retirement” is a word that’s perplexing. My wife says I’m transitioning. I’m less conflicted about time, but I miss the mentorship. I really liked my students and the social aspect, having an audience. Most good teachers are a cross between people who can clearly convey information and actors who like to stand up and perform. I have a very external, extemporaneous nature.

CS: *So you’ve stopped teaching. You turned 65. And MOA is exhibiting your retrospective, a significant milestone marking a longstanding career. How has your work changed over the past four decades?*



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NG: As you age, shifts become harder and slower. The forms have changed, but I've tried to make forms tied into what I thought about 40 years ago. My forms evolved when my ability to deal with the language of sculpture matured. When I was younger, I wanted to make the most beautiful sculpture ever made in the history of mankind. As I got older, I tapered my ideas considerably but I'm making work that strives to achieve a perfect moment. There's something right about the work. It's correct

CS: *How do you know when your sculpture is right and correct?*

NG: I have a workingman's philosophy about what makes a good piece: When you walk by it, it's a pleasant part of your passage. It adds something simple and clear to your experience, and you can love it on a daily basis. In many museum exhibitions, what people are looking for is the bombastic, not the work they want to live with. I'm making work people want to live with. The way a sculpture operates in the psyche is not that you see it once, but that it gives you something every time you look at it. You can return to it, and it makes you feel connected to it. The idea of owning a piece of

art occupying a space is that you will metamorphose over the time, and it will seem a different piece you're living with, but that's us changing, not the art.

CS: *Your undergraduate education emphasized fine arts and comparative religions — an interesting combo. Why religious studies? And how did studying religions shape your art?*

NG: I'm interested in culture and philosophy. A lot of art is about sex and death, a response to mortality and questions of being. That's what we look to art for. Especially people who are not religious. The antidote is creativity, but that can tie us into our belief system if inspiration is past the mundane. Beethoven, Mozart, Titian, Rembrandt: We've seen extraordinary people through history with no explanation for their genius.

The antidote for religious belief is that certain people are endowed with unique powers and they are actualized in the arts. That's different than the theological idea of divine prophets in a sense because there's material evidence of genius. When you hear a concert or see a great work of art, there can be a spiritual tie. That's why it's so important to cultures to maintain



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a history of their visual language because without that evidence of the sublime, a sense of the divine becomes lost.

CS: *What are the particular challenges of your medium?*

NG: There's a lot of architecture in sculpture: the materials, cranes and construction. You can't improvise at certain points after model making. Once you're building a piece you can't make large mistakes. It's extremely costly. Sculpture has to be clear because of the use of material and the building. The discipline of labor forces you to reel things in.

CS: *What would you like people to understand about your art?*

NG: How void becomes as important as form in the later work. The area not there becomes volumetric. It's a concept of absolute nothingness as the something. It's about the nothing, not the something, and that ties into the spiritual questions about making substance out of void, creating the dichotomy and meaning of the relationship between being and not being. I've worked with sculpture as a relational activity that animates space and form. You look at the work, and the work looks



at you. My work attempts to connect the viewer to the space and create an intimate relationship between the subject and object. Hence the title for the show "Close Proximity."

CS: *What keeps you inspired after 40 years?*

NG: I keep thinking I'm going to get better. I'm finally finding what I'm looking for and getting closer to the absolutely perfect moment of void and form. Inspiration is a certain restlessness that comes and goes. You get older, and you finish a big show, and you start over. This is not just typical of artists, but for people who are project-oriented. It's the nature of the beast. What happens is something starts to percolate and becomes louder in the brain. I have a feeling, and I'm trying to find a match, and that's the frustration. It's looking for form, and overtakes you almost entirely until you resolve it, and then it leaves you amazingly empty and wondering if it's ever going to happen again. It's like falling in love.

CS: *Consuming.*

NG: Yes, but you have to get a handle on it and put things on hold when you need to for family and a job to create functionality in life. That's part of the discipline of being an artist. →

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CS: *Yet art demands a lot of love — at least from the artist.*

NG: Yes. Yes, and it's one thing to love my own work, but this retrospective acknowledges that somebody else appreciates it. Contrary to the stereotype of artists as depressive and overly emotional and in a state of exulted despair most of the time, I'm excited about this wonderful gift. Only in the arts do you get a retrospective. I see this as an opportunity to tell the story of my life with a cross-section of my art.

CS: *What is the gist of your story?*

NG: I believe in beauty. And beauty can be dark, difficult, challenging, but beauty reminds us there's something redeeming about the world. If I have any achievement, it's a softer, poetic, more reflective quality to looking that is a contrast to the culture. It's a pure moment — like looking at two lemons on a plinth. It's not theatrics. Nothing bombastic. Just the pleasure of looking. ■

Colleen Smith is the founder of Friday Jones Publishing and is an award-winning journalist, author and screenplay writer based in Denver, Colorado.

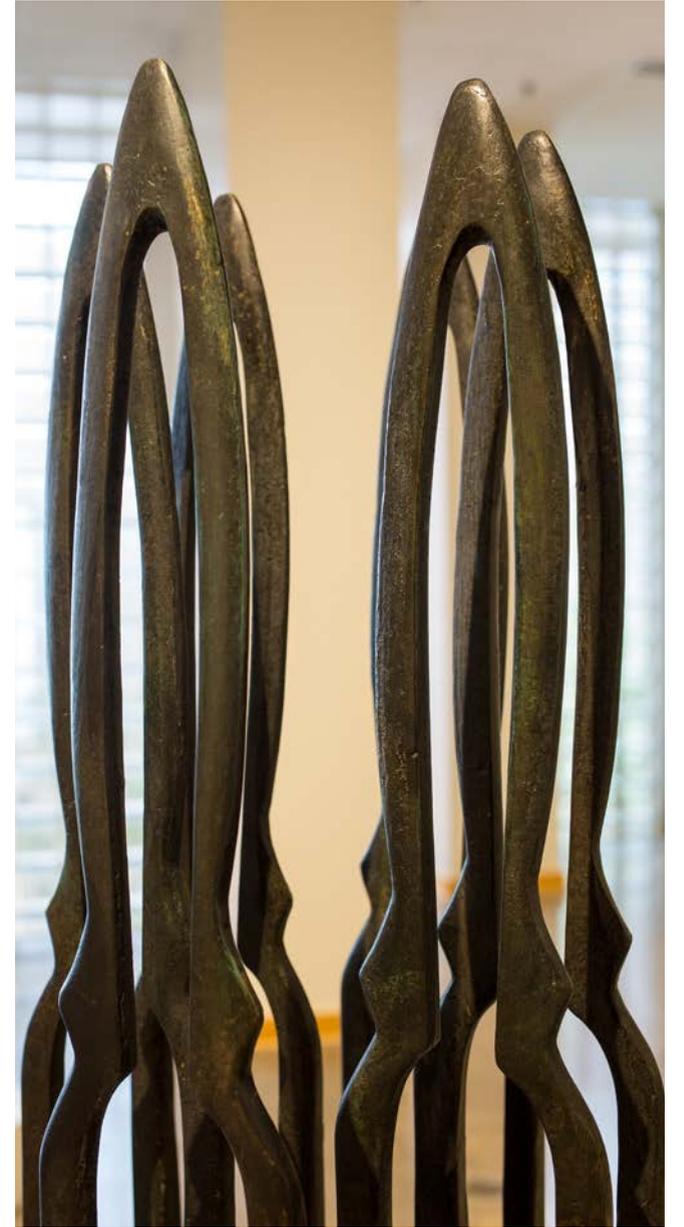




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NEIL GOODMAN BIOGRAPHY

Born in Hammond, Indiana, in 1953, Neil Goodman received his BA at Indiana University Bloomington in 1976 and his MFA from the Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia in 1979.

Upon completing his MFA, Goodman was offered a teaching position at Indiana University Northwest in Gary, Indiana. As a founding member of the Fine Arts department, he remained in that position until 2017, retiring as Emeritus Professor of Fine Arts.

Presently, Goodman divides his time between studios in Chicago and the Central Coast of California.

Over the course of his career Goodman has had more than 40 solo exhibitions of sculpture throughout the country. He has lectured both nationally and internationally, and his work has been written about and reviewed in numerous catalogs and periodicals including *Art Forum*, *Art in America*, *Art News* and *Sculpture Magazine*.

Goodman's sculpture was included in the seminal 1995 Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art's opening exhibition entitled "The History of Chicago Art 1945–1995."

Goodman's work has been commissioned and collected by museums, convention centers, corporations, sculpture parks, synagogues, universities and private residences.

In the Midwest, three of Goodman's most visible public projects include a monumental wall relief at the Chicago McCormick Place South Pavilion, a permanent large-scale bronze installation at the Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art at Northwestern University, and a freestanding sculpture at the Burnham Park Children's Garden at Soldier Field Stadium.

In 2006, Goodman completed his largest outdoor project to-date. Commissioned by Indiana University Northwest, the work entitled "Shadows & Echoes" includes 10 cast bronze sculptures in a co-designed landscape situated at the heart of the campus at Indiana University Northwest in Gary.

Presently, Goodman has been commissioned by the Brauer Museum of Art in Valparaiso, Indiana, to create an outdoor piece with projected installation in the spring of 2019.

The MOA exhibition is his most extensive museum retrospective, including works throughout the last 30 years as well as indoor and outdoor sculptures. ■



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All photography by Heather Longway

