

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

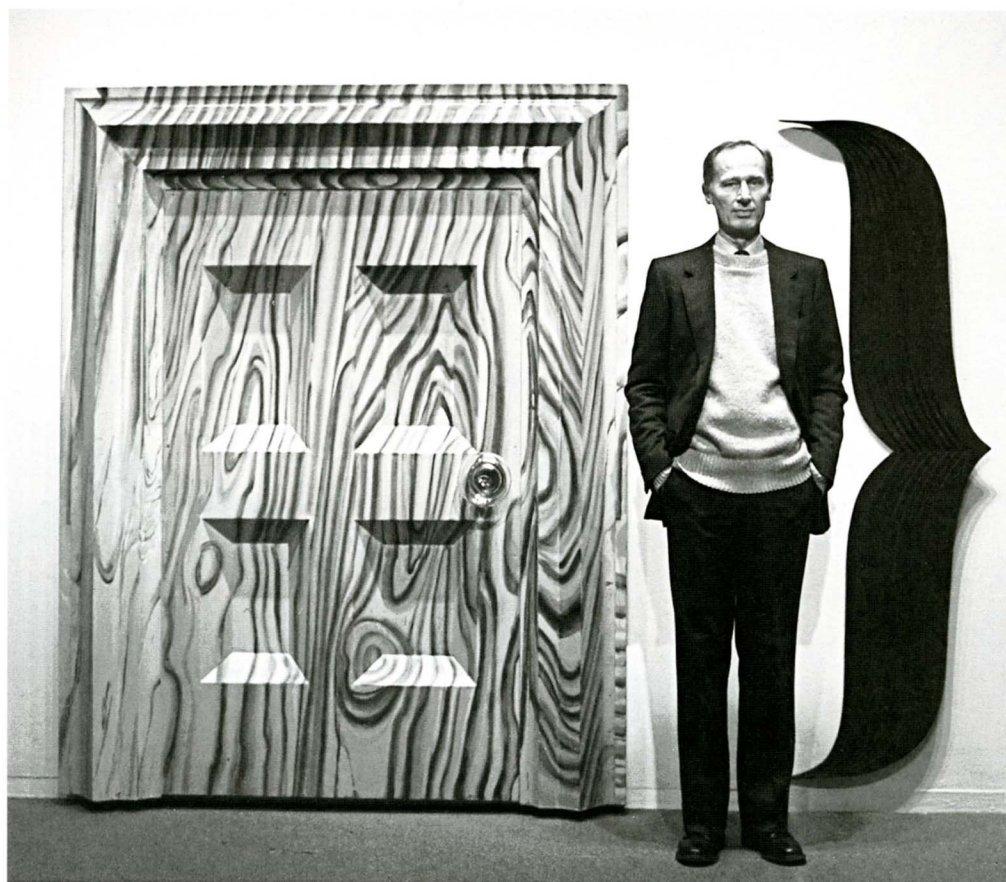
Art in America

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

MUSE

Richard Artschwager with his sculpture *Door*, 1983-84. Courtesy Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive.

CURRENTLY ON VIEW: "Richard Artschwager!" at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; "Richard Artschwager, blps," at various locations on and around the High Line, New York, both through Feb. 3, 2013; and "Richard Artschwager: The Desert," at David Nolan Gallery, New York, through Dec. 22.



Sincerity

By Richard Artschwager

I CONSIDER MY INSPIRATION to be sincerity. Truth.

We're born with sincerity. A baby is sincere when it cries or yells—as anyone who has had kids knows. Sincerity comes naturally, a reaction to the whole environment. But it gets complicated very quickly.

We learn from our parents early on that we have to be afraid here and there. We learn the yes and no. We start with sincerity, and then we find we can play with it, by being insincere. At some point we like insincerity better—or we find sincerity more interesting, the objective truth. We have to distinguish between instincts and

things that we contrive, and both affect our behavior. Con-
niving has to be learned—we all get proficiency in that, to various degrees.

We can learn to be hypocrites. Some people make a career of hypocrisy, while others find it more interesting to go for the truth. It's just this animal recognition of what is or is not, which we have very early. You know—before you get to any kind of belief or religion.

Actors on a stage—they're practiced hypocrites. It goes with the work. They have to know how to do that, and it's not easy. I haven't known many actors, but my guess is that

by the time they're five years old they want to hop around and say, "Look at me!"

Living in this society: I hope people are motivated by something that's friendly. That may be overly optimistic. But I think that there's a natural tendency toward civilization.

When I was a teenager, I had a conversation with my dad. He said, "Well, Dickie boy, it's time for you to decide. You seem to be into art and you're sort of interested in science, but can you do both of them?" And I decided I didn't really have a choice. All the good stuff had already been done in science, and I wanted to be original, which would mean discovering something that hadn't been done yet.

Curiosity—that's number one. Always protect curiosity in oneself—and certainly in one's kids. One doesn't want to cheat them by being a hypocrite with them. You make something and then it doesn't go anywhere, and you fiddle with something else.

I've always tried to make something that wasn't there before. You take yourself—physical, mental—as material. Starting things and resolving them, and feeding one's curiosity—that gets more specialized over time.

Mostly what we artists make are toys. There should be some kind of immediate appeal—much as a toy has to

a child. The best of capitalist society is toys. Of course, there's a lot of the pleasure principle operating on Wall Street—I could have had fun with that. I try to play games with the viewer. Is there any pleasure in looking at something? Or playing something, if it's a musical instrument?

The "blps" are my best cheat. I make myself a constant, as a manufacturer would do—make a brand and start from there. And then the viewer consumes it—by looking at it. I had a good run of those things.

There are commercial artists—and there are workers. I have never wanted to be a professional anything, to this day. I really like the idea of just hanging around. We can't do that, of course, which I realized early on. I asked myself, "How am I going to do art that is not commercial art?"

Art is useless looking, or useless seeing—these objects are not necessary to life. We start with the pleasure principle—we're born with that—which is healthy. And the pleasure principle is a constant in life—we always go back to it. ○

— As told to Faye Hirsch

Richard Artschwager's retrospective, which debuted at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Oct. 25, 2012–Feb. 3, 2013, travels to the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, June 16–Sept. 1, 2013.



Piano Grande,
2012, laminate
on wood, 46 by
79½ by 35 inches.
Courtesy Gagosian
Gallery. Photo
Robert McKeever.