

John Newman

ON THE OTHER HAND
SCULPTURE MULTIPLES

SECOND THOUGHTS
PRINT SERIES

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NEWMAN ASIDE

INTRODUCTION

by Adam D. Weinberg

In one of his few attempts at being an art historian, Edward Hopper wrote about fellow painter Charles Burchfield: "It is difficult to disentangle the threads of influence that go to make an art. Even an artist's own testimony is not always sure evidence, so confused is the trail usually." Perhaps this is why Hopper himself was so taciturn, not wanting his words to be confused with his deeds.

John Newman is a teacher by inclination and also by profession. Accordingly, he not only delights in discussing the origins, meaning, and production of his work, but he also is compelled to share his thoughts and investigations with his students. One has only to talk with Newman a short while to discover that his ideas obsessively spiral through his brain like the twists and turns of the helices that haunt his images. Newman is also a remarkable polymath. He can knowledgeably discuss concepts in fields ranging from mathematics and philosophy to linguistics and, of course, art history. His avalanche of ideas and words, however, can be taken only as partial explanations of his

works, for ultimate revelation resides in the experience of the art itself—in this case, a suite of six linocuts, *Second Thoughts I–VI*, and six sculpture multiples, *On the Other Hand*, each individually titled, produced in collaboration with Tyler Graphics.

One sees in these prints — produced after the completion of the sculpture multiples — an extraordinary variety of forms reflecting a wealth of sources: *Second Thoughts III* ambiguously suggests Celtic manuscripts, German Expressionist prints, and classical architectural decoration; *Second Thoughts IV* variously recalls Tibetan mandalas, Surrealist automatic writing, and topological diagrams. Similarly, a sculpture such as *Tautological in Blues* relates simultaneously to a skeletal structure and high-tech forms, while *Starting from Scratch* implies a laboratory trial and, seen head on, a de Chirico-like mannequin. Lest one think that all of Newman's sources are so erudite, the collapsible pumplike form in *Second Thoughts I* appears to be a shape borrowed from the fantastic inventions of Rube Goldberg, while *Hanging in*

Air, with its monstrous mutant eyeball forms, is pure science fiction. What one sees — or, more to the point, experiences — is the layering of system upon system and structure upon structure. Newman grafts one type of knowledge onto another. He creates conceptual and visual segues between forms so that the subjects cannot easily be defined.

The loaded character of these works is made pointedly clear by many of the titles, which are precisely and intricately engineered as the works they identify. *Starting from Scratch* (*Das Fingerspitzengefühl*) which, literally translates as "fingertip sensitivity," consists of two identical red-orange spoutlike forms adjoined by a stainless steel laboratory armature. On one side they tightly sandwich a square of industrial felt, while on the other, two Japanese bamboo tea whisks delicately touch. The title is a metaphor for the process of making sculpture, a characterization of the interplay between the bamboo forms and an obvious reference to the tactility of the materials themselves. The work's twofold, bilingual title reveals the

artist's infatuation with language and the relation of linguistic metaphors and structures to the elusive forms he constructs in three dimensions.

Shapesphere's Aside is equally laden. This sculpture involves three ambiguous shapes: a burnished black, pneumatic looking "O" shape appears to haplessly constrict an unsuspecting, contorted, plasterlike form — which in turn, unwittingly compresses a coral-colored, segmented trumpet shape. All are caught in an inescapable chain reaction. The black form hints, perhaps, at the sphere. Together the black and white elements predominate, while the delicate pastel paper structure seems to have been parenthetically introduced. Similarly, the work's title yields a multiplicity of readings. It is simultaneously a pun, a literary allusion, and a metaphor. Newman's somewhat sardonic wit is exposed in this title, as it is in so many others, such as *Fit to be Tied* and *Hanging in Air* (*at the end of the rope*.)

The materials that Newman draws upon to produce the sculptures (most definitely aided by Tyler and his brain trust) further confirm the artist's

penchant for layering sources. Each material has specific cultural, scientific, or art historical references: the Kozo washi paper suggests the hollow semi-translucent forms of Japanese lanterns; the coils of hemp rope imply a connection to the madcap assemblages of H.C. Westermann; and the black nylon stocking relates Newman's art to the gender and sexual concerns in works by artists of his own generation.

Like Newman's explanations of his own work, detailed analyses of his subjects, titles, and materials remain inadequate. The complexity and often contradictory character of his inspirations are often so incongruous that, in effect, they cancel each other out and force viewers back on their own visual and visceral experience of the art itself. In trying to unravel his sources, one realizes that they are too plentiful and ambiguous to pin down, and that knowledge of them isn't crucial to the ultimate success of the work. Despite all the clues provided, art such as Newman's is about losing track of origins.

The artist and architect Frederick Kiesler, whose hybrid creations upset

traditional distinctions between sculpture, design, and architecture, once wrote: "The artist creator has always been in search of the basic laws of the world he lives in. He tries to express the unknown *with* the known, contrary to the scientist, who tries to find the unknown *in* the known." Like Kiesler, Newman uses the vocabularies of many disciplines and combines them in original ways. In reaching for a new paradigm, he pushes the limits of what a work can contain.

Nevertheless, Newman's art does not address modernist, formal concerns. Unlike Kiesler, his search is not for universal forms of expression *per se*. The prominence and importance of subject matter, no matter how convoluted, is as significant as the pictorial construction itself. The density of Newman's sources connects his work more to the art of his contemporaries than to the art of the past. Paradoxically, however, it is in formal terms that the disparate sources of Newman's art are reconciled. We, both the artist and the viewer, can discuss and analyze the "known", that is, the sources and formal

elements of the work. It is what Kiesler terms the "unknown" that is indescribable. This inexplicable gestalt, for lack of a better term, casts Newman's work into a visually and experientially coherent whole and causes his prints and multiples to appear deceptively and disarmingly simple.

Despite their intellectual heterogeneity, the six linocuts are relatively uncomplicated in their technique, and have an effortless and childlike honesty about them. Newman has, in fact, related their rawness to linocuts he has printed himself and refers to as "potato prints". These linocuts are modest in scale, predominantly black-and-white; each has a single-colored form and all are printed on natural Okawara paper. They have the intimacy and unpretentiousness of bookplates. They are simultaneously explosive and self-contained. The images seem to reveal various stages in the evolution of forms, from the structured to the amorphous. As Newman has said, "Such images suggest states of coherence. Some elements are in formation, others are already formed."

The sculpture multiples, on the other hand, are technically complex, and required extensive engineering and testing of materials. They took nearly three years to complete (the prints took roughly three months). Moreover, the range of shapes, textures, and colors that Newman has achieved is vast. Yet the overall effect is remarkably direct. Like the central element of each print, each multiple is a variation of a simple form which loops, twists, turns, bends, and holds. And each form has a single, unifying axis, sometimes made literal through the use of a pole. The delicate balance of these axes is an appropriate visual metaphor for the balancing act Newman tries to achieve between the complex and the basic, the formal and the conceptual. Unlike the scientist, who in searching for the unknown *in* the known makes things increasingly complex, Newman, expressing the unknown *with* the known, makes things appear unavoidably simple.



ON THE OTHER HAND

SCULPTURE MULTIPLES

HANGING IN AIR (AT THE END OF THE ROPE)

STARTING FROM SCRATCH (DAS FINGERSPITZENGEFÜHL)

FIT TO BE TIED

THE BEGGED QUESTION

SHAPESPHERE'S ASIDE

TAUTOLOGICAL IN BLUES



HANGING IN THE AIR

(AT THE END OF THE ROPE) 1992–1995

29 ¼ x 9 ¾ x 13 ½ inches (75.6 x 23.9 x 34.3 cm)
Hand-molded Kozo fiber handmade paper, primed with MSA varnish, painted with gesso, sized and gilded with variegated leaf, sealed with one layer of blue aniline dyed shellac and top coat of clear shellac; spheres are hand-molded Kozo fiber handmade paper, filled with polystyrene, primed with MSA varnish, gessoed

and hand-painted with acrylic paint in graduating colors of red, orange and yellow, mixed with white; and a top coat of clear polymer varnish. Sugar pine wood base and birch wood pole are coated with pigmented polyurethane. Hemp rope attaches sculpture to pole.

Edition: 8 plus 1 artist and 1 publisher copy



STARTING FROM SCRATCH

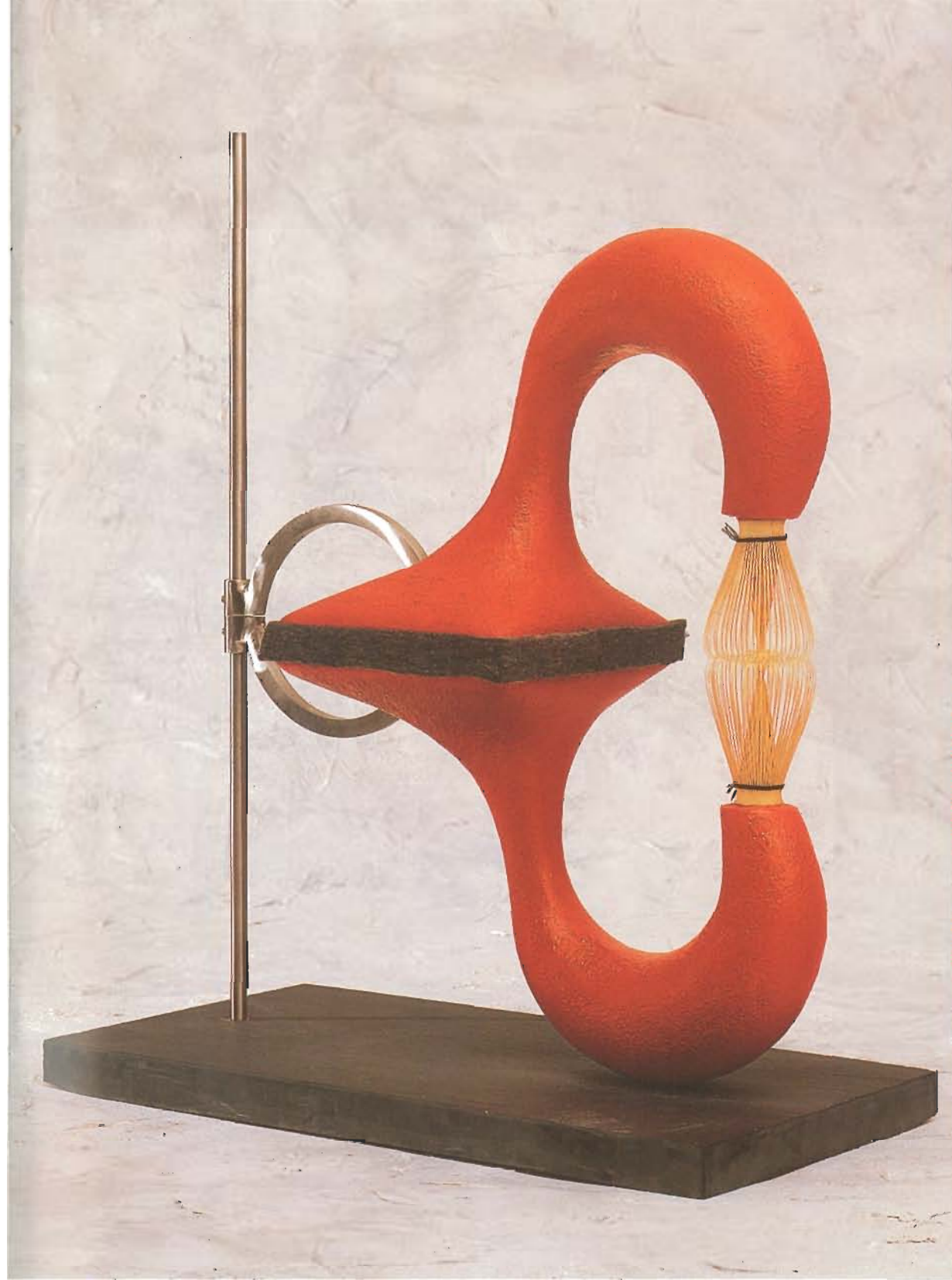
(DAS FINGERSPITZENGEFÜHL) 1993–1995

21 x 8 ¾ x 17 ½ inches (53.3 x 22.2 x 44.5 cm)

Cast polyester form, hand-painted with cadmium red light oil paint; industrial felt; machined stainless

steel rod and “C” clamp, Japanese bamboo tea whisks; mounted onto black slate.

Edition: 5 plus 1 artist and 1 publisher copy



FIT TO BE TIED 1993–1995

35½ x 23¼ x 11⅞ inches (90.2 x 58.8 x 30.3 cm)
Copper frame with purple and green lacquered cast
polyester, partially covered with sheer black nylon;
black Neoprene tubes strung with white twine;

mounted onto black acrylic base with gun blued
steel pipe.

Edition: 5 plus 1 artist and 1 publisher copy



THE BEGGED QUESTION 1994–1995

12 3/8 x 8 x 4 1/4 inches (32.0 x 20.3 x 10.8 cm)

Patinated cast aluminum; with glass, hand-painted with "*Couleurs vitrail*"; mounted onto cobblestone with threaded metal rod.

Edition: 5 plus 1 artist and 1 publisher copy



SHAPESPHERE'S ASIDE 1994–1995

23 7/8 x 14 x 18 inches (59.2 x 35.6 x 45.7 cm)

Cast polyester form coated with white latex stucco paint; cast polyester form coated with stove black paint and burnished; hand-molded Kozo fiber hand

made paper bulb form, coated with thin layer of pink pigmented acrylic paint; mounted onto hand-ground sandstone rock.

Edition: 5 plus 1 artist and 1 publisher copy



TAUTOLOGICAL IN BLUES 1994–1995

26 ½ x 21 ¼ x 15 ½ inches (67.3 x 54.0 x 39.4 cm)
Poplar wood spine; polystyrene board and pine
wood disks covered with conforming stretch gauze
bandage, coated with white pigmented fiberglass,
and hand-painted with enamel spray paint in
graduating hues of dark to light blue and white,
coated with two layers of both matte and gloss

clear enamel spray paint. Two opaque white
acrylic plastic discs perforated and threaded with
72 rayon/cotton strands of three graduating blue
hues and white; mounted onto cast melamine
polyurethane base.
Edition: 5 plus 1 artist and 1 publisher copy

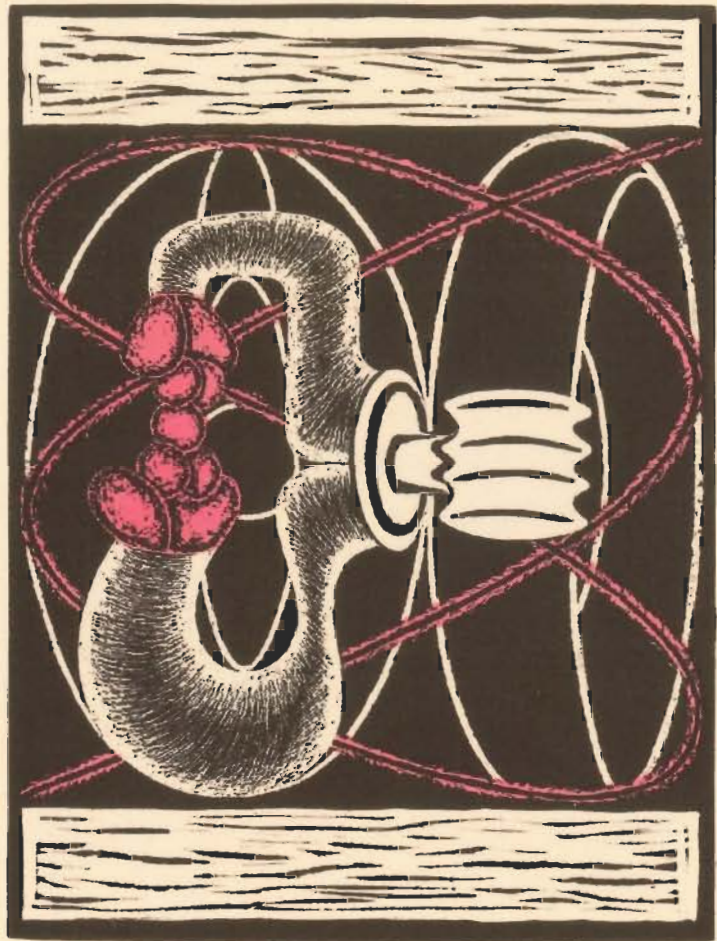




SECOND THOUGHTS

PRINT SERIES

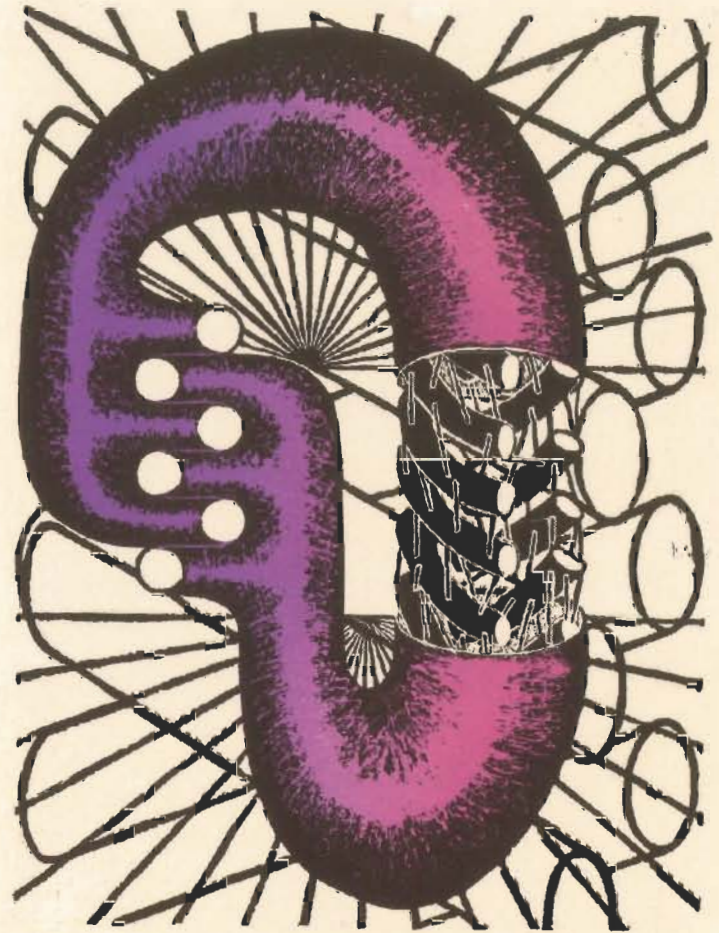




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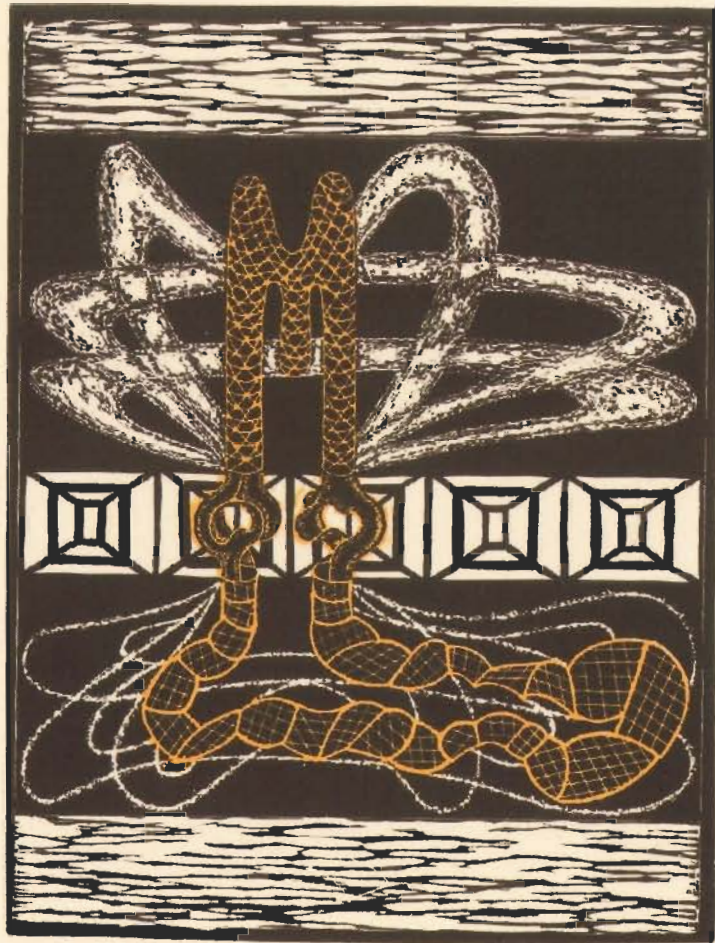
Joseph Beuys
1955



RTP

II

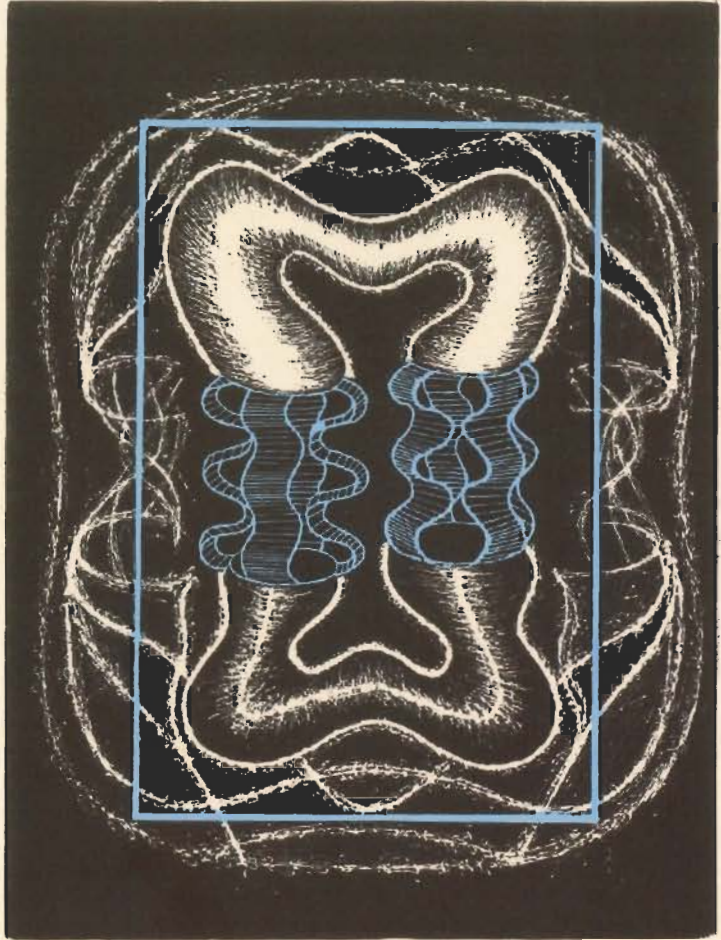
Joseph Beuys
1955



RTP III John Ayden 1995



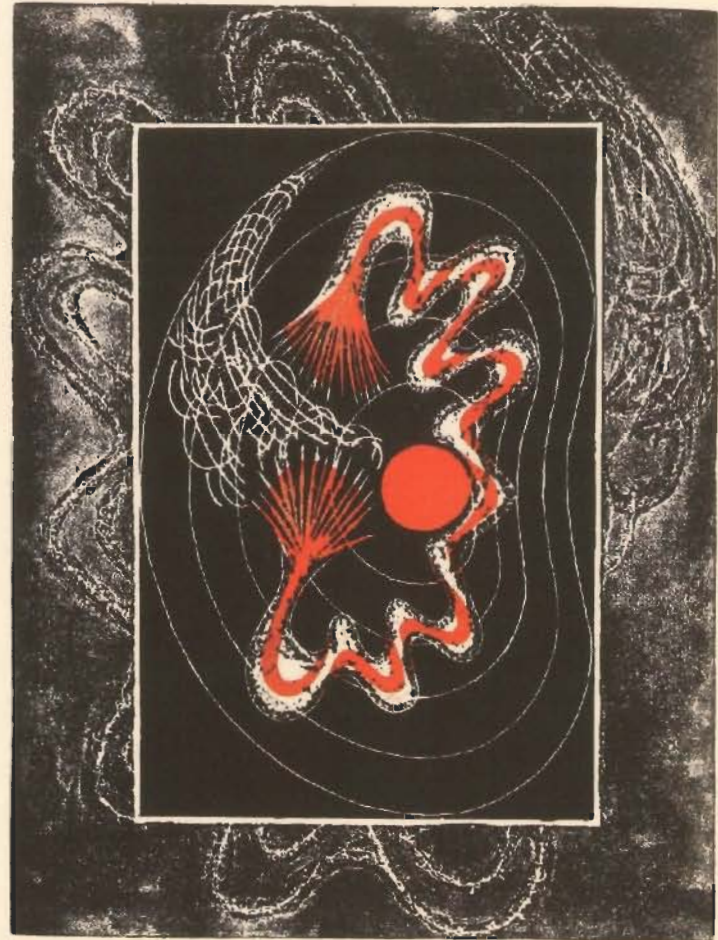
RTP III John Ayden 1995



RTP

II

John M.
1977



RTP

II

John M.
1977

**Notes:
ON THE
OTHER HAND**

John Newman's new series of sculptures are the fruition of a project he and Kenneth Tyler began in 1992 during a trip to Japan. For three years the series has evolved, beginning in a humble way, employing papier-mâché of Japanese Kozo sheets. As the project grew in complexity, however, additional materials and techniques were employed including polyester and aluminum casting, gilding, bandaging, sculpting, and painting.

The artist collaborated with Tyler in the creation of the six sculpture maquettes. Kevin Falco also worked closely with Newman, assisting with maquettes and collaborating with the artist in building the original prototypes for *The Begged Question*, *Hanging in Air (at the end of the rope)*, and *Tautological in Blues*. Falco fabricated *Hanging in Air* and *Tautological in Blues* with the assistance of Robert Meyer, who helped create and gesso the papier-mâché



top:
Editioning of sculptures
in TGL artist's studio.

second from top (left):
Kevin Falco and John
Newman painting spheres
for *Hanging in Air*
(at the end of the rope).

second from top (right):
John Newman assembling
elements for *Starting
from Scratch* (Das Finger-
spitzengefühl).



third from top (right):
Yasuyuki Shibata applying
paper bulb form to
Shapesphere's Aside.

spheres and double-horn shapes. The artist painted these spheres with Falco.

Newman and Falco were also assisted by John Hutcheson, Rolf Kaul, Michael Mueller, Yasuyuki Shibata, and Tom Strianese. Hutcheson and Strianese assisted Newman in the prototype preparation for the base and editioning of the bases for *Tautological in Blues*.



third from top (left):
Newman sculpting clay
maquette for *The Begged
Question*.

third from top (middle):
Newman shaping base for
Tautological in Blues.

bottom:
Kenneth Tyler working
on early version of
Tautological in Blues.

Kaul ground the bases for *Shapesphere's Aside*. Mueller did all spray priming for *Hanging in Air*. Shibata hand-molded the paper bulb forms for *Shapesphere's Aside* and affixed them in position onto the sculptures.

Collaborators outside of the workshop were Charles Spademan and Russell Gerlach of Gerlach Frames, Inc., who formed and welded the copper frames for *Fit to be Tied*; Jon Lash and Michelle Post of Johnson Atelier, who cut and strung the Neoprene tubes and supplied and fitted the nylon covering for *Fit to be Tied*; and prepared the rod and "C" clamps for *Starting from Scratch*; Lash also was responsible for the patinated cast aluminum for *The Begged Question*; and James Mills of Sculpture Cast, who formed all the cast polyester elements for *Starting from Scratch* (Das Fingerspitzengefühl) and *Shapesphere's Aside*.



top:
John Newman preparing
study for linoleum image
for *Second Thoughts VI*.

bottom:
Christopher Creyts
printing *Second Thoughts
III* edition.

middle:
Yasuyuki Shibata cutting
color linoleum block for
Second Thoughts II.

**Notes:
SECOND
THOUGHTS**

John Newman began this suite of prints after completing the sculptures from his *On the Other Hand* series, carving the linoleum blocks in his Manhattan studio and at Tyler Graphics.

Tyler printed the first set of black proofs for the series, testing various papers. Newman decided that Natural Okawara, machine-made paper worked best with the imagery and he drew on proofs. Selected proofs were then used as guides for carving the second color linoleum blocks for each of the prints. Newman, assisted by Christopher Creyts, and Yasuyuki Shibata, carved the color blocks and the images were further proofed by Tyler, Creyts, Anthony Kirk, and Gedi Sibony. The images were then editioned by Creyts.

ARTIST'S CHRONOLOGY

1952
Born in New York City

1972
Completes Independent Study Program, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

1973
Receives B.A. from Oberlin College, Ohio

1975
Receives M.F.A. from Yale School of Art, New Haven

1979
Included in exhibition *Six Sculptures* at Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston

1980
Included in exhibition *Painting in Relief* at Whitney Museum of American Art, Downtown Branch, New York

1984
Commissioned through the Department of Transportation, Washington, D.C., for large-scale public sculpture at Stamford Railroad Station, Connecticut, and for large-scale wall relief at Northrop Industries, Los Angeles; included in exhibition *Sistovaris Collection* at the Musée Atheneé, Geneva, Switzerland

1985
Included in exhibition *Whitney Biennial Exhibition* at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

1986
Receives grant from the National Endowment for the Arts

1987
Included in exhibition *New Acquisitions* at Walker Art Center, Minneapolis

1989
Commissioned for large-scale outdoor sculpture at Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, New York; and General Mills Outdoor Sculpture Park, Minneapolis; included in exhibitions *Art in Place*, Whitney Museum of American Art; *Four Americans: Aspects of Current Sculpture* at The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn

1990
Completes ten mixed-media prints at Tyler Graphics; receives New York Foundation for the Arts grant; included in exhibition *The Unique Print: 70's into 80's* at Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

1992
Completes four lithographs and one mixed-media wall sculpture at Tyler Graphics; receives John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship; included in traveling exhibition *Innovation in Collaborative Print-making: Kenneth Tyler, 1963-1992*, originating at Yokohama Museum of Art, Yokohama, Japan; traveling exhibition *John Newman: Sculpture and Works on Paper* at Fort Wayne Museum of Art, Indiana; appointed Director of Graduate Studies, Yale School of Art, Sculpture Department

1993
Completes *Loop Hole* and *Loop Hole Hand-Colored* at Tyler Graphics; traveling exhibition *John Newman: Sculpture and Works on Paper* originating at Fort Wayne Museum of Art, Indiana; solo exhibition at Gerald Peters Gallery, Dallas

1995
Commissioned by Dai Nippon Printing Company, Ltd., Tokyo, Japan, to create sculpture *Upward Turn* for site of Center for Contemporary Graphic Art and Tyler Graphics Archive Collection in Uzumine, Japan; completes lithograph *Upward Turn (Study)* at Tyler Graphics; also completes sculpture multiples *On the Other Hand* and linocut series *Second Thoughts* at Tyler Graphics.

Currently lives and works in New York.

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