

Joe Segal
“Intersection”
by Ted Weeks
Art Critic/Contributing

The recent metal and wood sculptures by Joe Segal are visually the most economic that he has yet created, appearing at first glance as minimalist. Conceptually, however, these pieces certainly comprise more than what the viewer visually sees.

Segal projects through each of these sculptures and essential quality while also portraying the dualities that stem from his creative process. These include opposing materials of warm, organic wood and cold metal, sculpting versus industrialized fabrication and mentally contemplative versus physically active procedures. He explains:

“I think of my work as a union of rational and emotional behavior. The processes of working the wood are very active – at times violent – while the application of the metal elements is technical and almost mathematical.”

One of Segal’s sculptures that most exemplifies the essence of his approach to materials is the beam-like work titled “Core”. Architectonically massive in character, rough in cutting and sensual in its burnt finish, the wood is juxtaposed with the shining edge of a deeply imbedded aluminum band, which is the sculptures core. Echoing the machined regularity of the metal band, Segal makes eight similar cuts along the work’s edges that form nine evenly repeated sections, their spatial order contrasting sharply with the irregular surfaces and grain patterns of the wood.

Geometric elements favored by the artist include the circle and the line. Segal uses the circle to symbolize introspection, completeness and the acknowledgement of the cycle. In opposition, he employs the line to connote



Globe, 1996, wood & stainless steel, 22” x 22”

“Sculpture is the intersection of materials and processes. Each, with their own properties, redefines the other. As a result of this interaction, the nature of the materials used may be liberated or obliterated. The exploration of this relationship between intension and repercussion defines my work.” - Joe Segal

the non-completing segment, or a passage. Composed of both aspects, the eclipse particularly intrigues the artist, since it can evolve as either a line or a circle in its early state. After frequent explorations Of the eclipse, when it no longer conveyed what the artist wanted, he “...started working with the circle and the line in context of a wooden beam.



Core, 1996, wood & aluminum 9" x 55"



Return, 1996, wood & stainless steel, 12" x 84"

I'm intrigued by beams because they are geometric shapes extracted from an organic form. Most people don't look at lumber that way."¹

The charred black surfaces of "Time" reveal Japanese qualities reminiscent of raku, and imbue this piece, like others, with a nocturnal character, a sense of deep space. This work reflects Segal's admiration for the aspect of Japanese art that reduces a concept to its essence. This Japanese aesthetic is reflected in the artist's references to joinery, where wooden sections are connected without

"In contrast to man's need for order and control is nature's apparent irregularities but the tree is as successful in its design as a functioning man-made structure." - Joe Segal

extraneous non-wood fasteners. The addition of the non-wood elements transports the ancient Eastern allusion to our post-industrial experience.

To complete the aesthetic experience, the viewer needs to contemplate the central dynamic of additive versus subtractive sculpting that underlies these works.



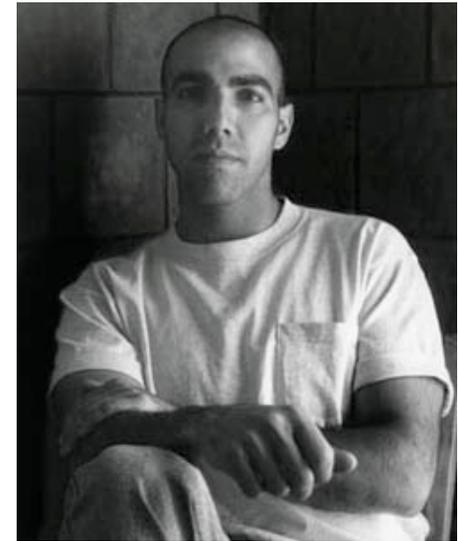
Time, 1996, wood & aluminum, 52" x 32"

Among the most recent pieces, "Return" originally was a cypress beam. More than any other example in this series, "Return" reveals branch stubs that result from breaking away unwanted wood along beam's grain. The appearance of knots as branches epitomizes the transformation represented by the sculpture. Although the seven segments of "Return" seem as though they might be separate pieces, they are all part of the continuous beam.

At twelve-inch intervals, six steel cables encircle the column at each of its cuts. These cable elements appear to pull together the split exteriors of each section while supplying metallic contrasts to the charred wood. Their repeated twelve-inch placements produce a sense of order that juxtaposes the natural material's nonconformities.

Joe Segal's recent sculptures haunt the viewer through their psychological tensions of conflicts, interaction and resolution. One reacts with projected physical and aesthetic alarm at the intrusiveness of the metal separators which paradoxically act at times as bridges or magnetic joiners. The artist through basic yet powerful geometric shapes mysteriously compels visual and tactile responses. Segal's work forces the viewer to confront the merging of materials, procedural dichotomies and their individual essences.

*"Since material cannot be put back, as in the case with modeling, I find the results of carving to be very honest. The sculptures are formed during a specific period of time, and if nothing else, they serve as evidence of that passage."
- Joe Segal*



1 "An Interview with Joe Segal," by Paul Karabinis, Director, University of North Florida, Jacksonville, Florida, from 1996 catalog.