

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

**Gross Domestic Product**

A Written Accompaniment to the Thesis Exhibition

by

**Lesley Ann Menzies**

A PAPER SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF FINE ART

DEPARTMENT OF ART

CALGARY, ALBERTA

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The undersigned certify that they have viewed and read and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, respectively, a Thesis Exhibition and a supporting written paper entitled "Gross Domestic Product": An accompaniment to the Thesis Exhibition, submitted by Lesley Ann Menzies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.

Marcia Perkins

Supervisor, Marcia Perkins  
Department of Art

Jed Irwin

Jed Irwin  
Department of Art

Carol R MacDonnell

Carol MacDonnell  
Department of Art

Patrick A. Lloyd

Patrick Lloyd  
Department of Art

Walter May

Walter May, Alberta College of Art

September 21, 1994

Date

## ABSTRACT

The exhibition Gross Domestic Product explores the formal and conceptual transformation of everyday domestic objects into sculptures that reflect my particular ideas relating to those objects.

The accompanying support paper begins with an introduction on the use of common objects in Twentieth Century sculpture. The paper investigates the work of artists Claes Oldenburg, Richard Artschwager, and Gathie Falk to provide an art historical context for the work in the exhibition. In support of the formal and conceptual aspects of the work, the paper explores appliance design and advertisement, and the resultant ideologies about housework. The paper concludes with an analysis of the work in the exhibition as it pertains to art, design, and personal history.

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Figure 8	<u>Washing Machine - 2 1/2d Model, 1994</u> .....	p. 40

In the MFA program my focus has been the formal and conceptual transformation of everyday domestic objects into sculptures that reflect my particular ideas relating to those objects. A review of my work from the past four years reveals a decided interest in things: lamps, furniture, household appliances, coats, shoes and the like have been the mainstays of my source material for art-making. The shift I made in 1993 from working exclusively in two-dimensions (drawing) to working in three-dimensions (sculpture) helped embody this interest. I am not completely certain why this shift occurred. The most likely reason is that it suddenly seemed pointless to make a representation of a three-dimensional object on a two-dimensional surface (paper) to hang on another two-dimensional surface (wall). Drawing had lost its fundamental relevance and since I was interested in the objects that surround and involve me daily, it made sense to make "objects" (sculptures) about them. Perhaps I am also suffering from an object-conscious hangover from the materialistic, consumer-driven Eighties. Whatever the reason, six months into the graduate program, I became a devout believer in the supremacy of stuff.

The shift I made from drawing to sculpture does not propose that the two are mutually exclusive. Often there is drawing in sculptures as there is sculpture in many drawings. To illustrate, I generated many of my own drawings by tracing the profiles of three-dimensional objects onto paper to establish a matrix. I then worked up the drawings, filling in various areas with value to develop the structure. These drawings had little "drawing" in them -- no mark-making to speak of and little, if any, use of line let alone line variety. They were still interesting drawings but possibly only because they dealt *so* much with sculpture. They seemed to be about the objects I traced, the play between shape and the illusion of form, and the investigation of space through over-lapping and modulating shapes. The observation that I was making drawings about sculpture, likely suggested that I should make sculptures that were about drawing.

My first venture into three-dimensions resulted in sculptures that dealt substantially with sculpture issues -- mass, form, space -- but were essentially flat. By this I mean they were identical on both sides. It was as if I had stuck two drawings back to back. The sculptures did not necessarily invite viewers to walk around them and be rewarded for their effort. I was making sculptures based on everyday household objects which are symmetrical, so why was I concerned about the sculptures being the same on both sides? I believe that after many years of making art and ignoring the inherent idiosyncrasies of various art forms, it was time to stop ignoring them and deal with them as part of my work. The notion of making a painting that is about painting (or sculpture that is about sculpture) did not seem as irrelevant as many would have us believe. This is not to say that this is *all* either a painting or a sculpture should be about, although if I were to continue making sculpture, then I should deal with those things specific to sculpture -- otherwise, why bother doing it? The resultant work will be addressed (collectively and individually) later in this paper. The investigation into both drawing and sculpture has led to my discovery of the gray area that exists between the two. My combination of drawing and sculpture which I refer to as "2 1/2-dimensional" and the results of this exploration will also be discussed later in this paper.

### **"Sculpture" versus "Object"**

As noted previously, the source material for my sculpture, three-dimensional or otherwise, is everyday domestic objects. It is only recently that the common object has become a focus in the context of art and been allocated a place in the history of art as a distinct genre. Increasingly, everyday objects assert their presence in art. Exactly what an object becomes once it is removed from its expected context is uncertain. The familiarity of the object as used in art might lead a viewer to look at it as simply another kind of sculpture.

But it is not so straightforward. Any attempt to differentiate between the two is difficult and unnecessary. Yet people persist in doing so.

In his 1985 article "Rummaging Among Twentieth-Century Objects," art historian and critic Dennis Adrian attempts to define precisely what distinguishes object from sculpture. In his effort to differentiate between the two, Adrian identifies four principal, (and in some cases alarmingly archaic) characteristics of sculpture: volume and mass; material; subject-matter; and singularity. Sculpture, he proposes, is concerned entirely with mass and volume and their "reciprocal evocations," and with activated and displaced space; objects do not push space around. Sculpture *per se* is usually fabricated out of "some neutral material of more or less indeterminate form, such as bronze or marble..."; objects then, by inference, are made of traditionally non-art materials. Sculptural subject-matter centers almost exclusively on the figure; objects tend to adopt typically non-sculptural subjects such as still-life. Because of the nature of their material fabrication, sculptures can appear in multiple editions; objects are singular, unique.<sup>1</sup> To his credit and in spite of his outdated notions of "sculpture" and "object", Dennis Adrian arrives at the awkward definition of "object-sculpture" which he feels best describes the situation. He has been unsuccessful in separating object from sculpture but has successfully established a hybrid that combines the two.

Lynne Cooke in her 1991 article "Richard Deacon: Object Lessons" also attempts to define this somewhat fuzzy area. Cooke sees British artist Deacon's "object-sculptures" as ambiguous. Even Deacon's more referential pieces with their thwarted utility and their arbitrary placement position them in some other realm. A sculpture of a pot, she suggests, "...meets a generalized definition of a pot but because it did not behave conventionally, it became, instead, more of an object, something *like* a pot."<sup>2</sup>

Cooke's and Adrian's proposals to categorize "object-hood" seemed to me entirely reasonable, given the nature of my visual arts background in abstract-formalist sculpture

where the classifications of "object" and "sculpture" are clearly and conclusively established. "Sculpture" as I was exposed to it, seemed to preclude any obvious external reference -- something that would clearly taint it and render it "object". My research on the object within twentieth-century sculpture, including my own studio research, seems to indicate that, as Adrian concedes, decisive classification is inaccurate and inappropriate. Lynne Cooke's suggestion of the resultant work being "something *like*" its source is most sensible.

But why this obsessive desire to categorize and define? Frustrated with the semantics -- "object", "sculpture", "object-sculpture" -- a colleague chose to think of sculpture as a verb rather than a noun. Instead of making a sculpture, he simply sculpted a recognizable thing. It was producing that was important, not what the product was called.

This question of the blurring of distinctions between "object" and "sculpture" was exacerbated by the object-makers of the 1960's Pop Art movement and the debate has raged on for years following. For sculpture in the 1960s, "object-hood" was a central issue. Lynne Cooke identifies the opposing camps:

"On one hand there was the work that adhered to a Greenbergian aesthetic, exemplified in the sculpture of Anthony Caro. On the other, there were the various attempts to make assertively three-dimensional things; things which like most plastic things in the world, were grounded in actuality."<sup>3</sup>

This issue was addressed *ad nauseam* in articles such as artist Donald Judd's 1967 "Specific Objects" and critic Michael Fried's 1972 "Art and Objecthood". Clearly there is no solution to the supposed problem of "object" vs. "sculpture." In the context of my work and this paper, it is simply an intriguing if petty distinction but one that should be discussed (in brief) nonetheless. Having dredged it all up yet again, it is appropriate at this point to present some examples which will be variously referred to as "object", "sculpture", and "object-sculpture", if only for the sake of noun variety.

### **Claes Oldenburg: the things of the world**

Artist Fernand Léger's prophetic realization that modern industry produces objects that have an "incontestable plastic value" was to be the keystone of the Pop Art movement.<sup>4</sup> One of Pop's early names, "The New Realists," was fostered in part by shows such as the 1963 "International Exhibition of New Realist Art" held at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York. The name makes obvious reference to the perceived parallel between the Pop artists' created images and the source material. Pop art was seen as "the engine of war against traditional painting and sculpture."<sup>5</sup> It was an immediate predecessor against whom Pop rallied: Abstract Expressionism. Pop did not seek to destroy art outright; rather, it presented an outward-looking alternative to "counteract the effects of a rarefied Abstract Expressionist atmosphere."<sup>6</sup> Pop artists thought the "empty decoration" of Abstract Expressionism was over-intellectual, inward-looking, and disaffected.<sup>7</sup>

In an effort to communicate with a less-specialized non-art public, and to acknowledge the world around them, many artists, including Claes Oldenburg, turned to everyday objects as source material. For Oldenburg, common objects represented a logical choice -- they had the ability to affect a wide range of people that abstraction could not. Oldenburg maintained that abstraction was "not complicated enough to do that."<sup>8</sup> "I am for an art," he wrote in 1961, "...that does something other than sit on its ass in a museum."<sup>9</sup>

Oldenburg's work lies somewhere between "sculpture" and "object." Although his created objects deal directly with "sculpture" issues -- space, volume, mass -- they are simultaneously recognizable as things: "fan", "telephone", "drain pipe." Oldenburg recognized that, as Bernice Rose puts it, "form had meaning insofar as it fed back into life. Form cannot merely be an end in itself; it must also be the means or the vehicle of expressing content."<sup>10</sup> What Oldenburg sought was "significant form." Oldenburg described his objects as the "...handles' I reach for to get my message across."<sup>11</sup>

In The Anxious Object critic Harold Rosenberg attempts to sort out just *exactly* what messages an Oldenburg object conveys. A piece of pie rendered in plaster, he asserts, is neither a fake pie that seems real nor a real pie lacking in "pie qualities." Rosenberg suggests that perhaps it is the "bastard child of illusion" and that its only reason to be is to "enter into the process of aesthetic imagination": the realm of art. Yet even this does not seem suitable as he reasons that the piece of pie is "purposely not like art any more than it is like pie."<sup>12</sup> Oldenburg's objects resemble reality just enough to make the viewer reflect on what the reality is. A valiant effort in definition by Rosenberg but where, precisely, does that leave Oldenburg's things?

Oldenburg has not delivered a definitive treatise on the nature of his "object-sculptures." He says of them simply: "Some things I am attracted to do not seem to be liked enough. By choosing to re-make them, I may help them. I wish the best for all things."<sup>13</sup>

Many writers less concerned with precisely what Oldenburg's things are, comment on the compelling human presence of these objects or suggest that they evoke the human figure. Examples such as 1961's Two Girls' Dresses are described as being "still warm with life."<sup>14</sup> Barbara Haskell specifically cites the skin-like quality of Oldenburg's soft vinyl objects and generally notes that all of his objects -- food, clothing, tools -- are associated directly with human use. Haskell adds that, like most object-makers, Oldenburg infused his objects with his own associations and physical characteristics.<sup>15</sup>

The comfortable and reassuring human presence of his objects is at odds with the disconcerting nature of their de-contextualization. Oldenburg's objects are isolated from their usual surroundings and deprived of their regular functions. Four sagging kapok-filled canvas hand-mixers hang on the wall but their isolation only increases their autonomy. It is the viewer's responsibility to make any associations. Clearly, however, they do not depend on their regular context for visual impact.

This de-contextualizing is more characteristic of Oldenburg's later work. Earlier objects existed in a re-created version of their natural environment. The Store clouded the distinction between object and sculpture. In The Store, art and reality were unified yet each maintained, to some degree, a distinct identity.<sup>16</sup> In 1962 Oldenburg set up shop in a real store on East Second Street in New York where he offered for sale his created objects. A three-foot-long ice-cream cone was available for \$69.95 and even the price would have a material reality and be offered for sale. The Store put to the question just what, precisely, was for sale: art or object? This situation mirrored that of the Pop Art movement in general. It reflected the use of material culture in art and non-art and the use of art as object in material culture.

In his efforts to properly "reconstruct the world", Oldenburg searches for the true essence of the stuff of that world. He explains:

I always begin from a real thing. The difference is whether I leave it alone, extracting all I can from it and imposing nothing, or...sink it in the impure soup of myself and all associations.<sup>17</sup>

Oldenburg is constantly distorting through contrast or contradiction, or exaggerating the physical properties of his objects in order to discover what remains constant. Oldenburg's objects are bigger, shinier, lumpier, softer, and harder than any of the source objects but the distortion or exaggeration is not at the expense of recognition. In Oldenburg's hands, a small, desk-top mechanical metal fan becomes a ten-foot, limp, organic vinyl fan suspended from the ceiling. But despite the drastic change the object is still recognizable as a fan. The sense of the original structure is intact. The surface appearance is altered but, as Barbara Rose asks, has its fundamental reality changed? Oldenburg's ten-foot fan has obviously lost its utilitarian role. But if the viewer accepts Dadaist Marcel Duchamp's idea that the fan's utilitarian reality represents only one of its many levels of reality, then the viewer must take stock of those realities remaining. Oldenburg has manipulated the physical



characteristics but what remains still indicates "fan" to the viewer. The answer to Barbara Rose's question must be that the object's fundamental reality is *unchanged*. Oldenburg has discovered the fan's significant form.

Obviously, form is important in Oldenburg's objects in the way that form is important in purely abstract sculpture. But Oldenburg's materials insist that he relinquish absolute authority over form. By his own admission, Oldenburg has always been attracted to materials which seem to have a life of their own. The sensuous vinyl of Oldenburg's soft objects surrenders the form ultimately to the forces of gravity. The soft pieces are new ways of "pushing space around" and deal with "sculpture" and "object" simultaneously.<sup>18</sup>

Most notable of Oldenburg's object-manipulations is scale. Oldenburg admired the way cars filled an interior showroom and so decided to increase the scale of his objects. His 1962 show at New York's Green Gallery represented his first such enlargements. Not only are the objects displaced from their usual environment and stripped of their ability to function, their ordinary dimensions are exaggerated. His goal was to over-emphasize the elements he wanted to re-experience.<sup>19</sup> The result: Oldenburg's ordinary objects are extraordinary. The change in scale also causes the viewer to question the perception of reality -- where do these objects belong? The radical change in scale simply reinforces the fact that Oldenburg's objects are re-creations, not imitations. Ellen Johnson suggests that the increase in scale might also acknowledge, as does much of Pop Art, the immeasurable object-consciousness of the Americans and of the age.<sup>20</sup> But to what extent do Oldenburg's objects condemn or condone this obsession? Oldenburg is not so much condemning the materialist centered American as he is sharing personal experience. As Ellen Johnson points out "...granted part of his experience on which he comments consciously or unconsciously, is the immense, vulgar, and wonderful American love of things."<sup>21</sup> As she points out, this may harbor caustic appraisal as well as open acceptance but ultimately Oldenburg does not preach.

Perhaps it is best to look to Oldenburg's monument proposals for the answer to the question regarding the degree of social commentary in his work. Monuments were a way for Oldenburg to re-impose, more literally, the objects into the larger context from which they were extracted.<sup>22</sup> Oldenburg claimed the first suggestion of a monument came to him in a taxi-ride into New York. He conceived of a sky scraper-sized rabbit situated in mid-town Manhattan. "It would cheer people up seeing its ears from the suburbs."<sup>23</sup>

Many of his early proposals were fantastical: a giant piece of pie to sit on Ellis Island; giant toilet-tank floats to mark the tides in the Thames; giant bowling balls to rumble down Park Avenue. Commenting generally on his object-monuments, Oldenburg championed the "poetry of scale."<sup>24</sup> He explained, simply, that playing with scale was what his object-monuments seemed to be about. Oldenburg questioned accepted values, in this case those attached to size. Beyond the technical accomplishment of actually making the thing, why, he asked, is a four-hundred-foot clothes pin more valuable than a four-inch clothes pin?<sup>25</sup>

Oldenburg's monuments are a satire on the banality of American life, the absurdity of the urban environment, and the irrelevance to modern culture in general of the heroic monument.<sup>26</sup> They are site-specific and the object selected for each site represents the essence of that space. The monuments are both serious and humorous: the proposed giant concrete-block War Memorial which started life as a giant butter pat is sited at the most effective target-point in New York for a nuclear drop; the proposed traffic-light colored ten-story bowling balls would roll in quick succession down Park Avenue, (arguably) one of the most dangerous streets in New York. Of the bowling balls, Oldenburg explained: "You must be very quick if you want to get across...you'd have to calculate the frequency and speed, etc., and there would be experts on that and betting, I suppose."<sup>27</sup> Yet even in the apparently more serious monument proposals, Oldenburg maintains that the original idea was conceived in formal terms only. As for social commentary, Oldenburg maintained that,

as an artist, he was sensitive to events around him but his statements about such events would obviously take a visual form. As such, they would be open to a number of interpretations based on each viewer's associations. Of the monuments, Oldenburg maintains that his message is the same as his sculptures -- humor is the only weapon for survival.<sup>28</sup> "Works of art, of course, are comparatively innocuous; they lead to contemplation, not action. The artist can afford to be irresponsible; he is a harmless eccentric in his delusional world."<sup>29</sup>

### **Richard Artschwager: objects of symbolic function**

Richard Artschwager, another harmless eccentric in an equally delusional world, came to the attention of the art world in the mid-1960s, when Pop and Minimalism were gaining currency. He is alternately identified with either movement, among several others, because of the superficial resemblance his work bears to the identifying characteristics of either movement. But as Roberta Smith explains: "he's not abstract or stylish or well-proportioned enough for the Minimalists; he's too pessimistic and whole-heartedly *bourgeois* for Pop;...and he's too interested in material and process for the Conceptualists."<sup>30</sup> Artschwager has somehow, and in my view admirably, defied categorization by critics and historians. Artschwager's objects marry Pop Art and Minimal Art, representation and presentation, painting and sculpture, two-dimensions and three-dimensions, and object and sculpture.

Artschwager's objects have the *look* of primary, geometric structures. They are simple cubes or combinations of cubes covered in Formica -- his signature material. But Artschwager's objects are not pure enough to conform to orthodox Minimalism. Minimalist guru Donald Judd points to the problem of the objects' obvious external references that so taint them.<sup>31</sup>

Although his use of common objects as referent reflected the current trend in Pop Art to use the mundane as a parody of both material culture and high art, Artschwager's reasons were more personal. It is only logical that his objects should in some manner refer to furniture, since he made his living designing it and manufacturing it. As Artschwager increasingly lost touch with the people for whom he made the furniture, the task became repetitive and anonymous. As he explained, "the furniture had lost its essential connection" and he began to see the furniture not as things but as representations.<sup>32</sup>

Artschwager's furniture objects made their debut at the same time Claes Oldenburg was showing his 1963 piece Bedroom Ensemble. Bedroom Ensemble was created in response to the garish artificiality and glamour of things he experienced living in Los Angeles. This work furthered Oldenburg's exploration of the single environment and the exploration of the contradictions contained within the individual objects. Oldenburg has rendered the softest room in the house in the most severe geometric forms and in the hardest surfaces. He has stripped the furniture of its function: the mirror distorts, the bed is solid, and the drawers do not open. Oldenburg also distorts the viewer's visual perception. Bedroom Ensemble's contents are constructed, literally, in single-point perspective. The rhomboidal shapes look correct from one view but as the viewer moves to either side the objects become distorted and disproportionate. Oldenburg's "upholstered perspective" explores the relationship between the perception of two-dimensions and three-dimensions and the representation thereof.<sup>33</sup>

Artschwager's works deal with many similar ideas although his furniture-objects do not depend on a *manufactured* context for impact. Instead, Artschwager intended his objects to assume their normal roles in ordinary homes. Furniture, he determined, is nearly always in context; "you can put it almost anywhere where human beings are around without its being irrelevant."<sup>34</sup> But the familiarity of recognizing a furniture object in its normal setting is offset drastically by Artschwager's severity in form and surface. Artschwager's

objects are only surrogate furniture -- a mental substitute for the real thing. Like Oldenburg's, Artschwager's furniture-objects challenge our perceptions of reality and question the roles of the objects they resemble. They are referential but ambiguous. They look like furniture but they are not. They are objects of symbolic function that establish their own reality elsewhere.

Donald Judd's dismissal of Artschwager's "improper minimalism" is puzzling in light of Judd's insistence in the Minimalist treatise "Specific Objects" that "half or more of the best new work in the last few years has been neither painting nor sculpture."<sup>35</sup> Artschwager's work is just that -- neither painting, nor sculpture ... nor furniture.

His best-recognized object, Table with Pink Tablecloth from 1964, deals cleverly with those troublesome gray-areas in-between. Table with Pink Tablecloth is a solid cube completely veneered in Formica: beige Formica imitates the wood table, pink Formica imitates the diagonally placed tablecloth, and black Formica imitates the space underneath the table. As Artschwager explained of the work, "It's not sculptural. It's more like a painting pushed into three-dimensions. It's a picture of wood [and] the tablecloth is a picture of a tablecloth."<sup>36</sup> Table with Pink Tablecloth represents, for Roberta Smith at least, "the domestication, satire, and apotheosis of the Minimalist box."<sup>37</sup>

In Artschwager's 1963 work Table and Chair, he stifles the everyday objects' functions. The space under both table and chair is solid, represented by cream-colored Formica; the furniture represented by wood-grain Formica. The act of presenting the space under the table as solid confounds the table's function. Still the chair hovers. The two objects are perpetually linked in our minds, but Artschwager manages to forever separate them, making their use uncomfortable and clumsy. Artschwager's objects contradict their utility -- chairs are too tall and ill-proportioned to sit on, handles are attached to walls, doors do not open.

Artschwager transforms the object into an image of itself; his nominative titles cue context and mock the object's reality. Walker from 1964 mimics an apparatus which is designed to support and steady the weak. The object's obvious bulk and weight would handicap the able. What remains is a heavy, static form completely at odds with its purported utility. Artschwager pinpoints the root of the object's function without changing its structure. His objects assert their unsaleability and their functionlessness in a bizarre parody.

Artschwager's use of Formica assists in the parody and insists on the simultaneity of object and image. Formica exists between the boundaries of representation and presentation. It was in his furniture-manufacturing days that Artschwager discovered Formica, "the horror of the age," and it attracted him because, as he explained:

It worked differently because it looked as if wood has passed through it, as if the thing only half existed...It was a picture of a piece of wood [and] if you take that and make something out of it, then you have an object. But it's a picture of something at the same time it's an object.<sup>38</sup>

Formica, like the object it covers, is already one step removed from reality. Artschwager's furniture-objects effect a displacement of reality and champion the dysfunctional. They do not work, but it does not matter. Artschwager created the paradoxical *trompe-l'oeil* object.

### **Gathie Falk: icons in praise of the commonplace**

If "veneration of the ordinary", to use Gathie Falk's words, was in vogue during the 1960s and early 1970s then Falk was not out of step. In spite of this, Falk remains relatively obscure in comparison to an artist such as Claes Oldenburg. It is, however, beyond the scope of this paper to speculate on the reasons for such an oversight. Falk, a Canadian based on the West Coast, is a painter, ceramic sculptor, and performance artist. Falk cited a particular work of Claes Oldenburg's as revolutionizing her idea of sculpture. In Falk's mind, Oldenburg legitimized the use of ordinary things in sculpture. To that point, Falk's

only exposure to sculpture had been limited to abstract work of the 1950s which she found to be somewhat confusing.<sup>39</sup>

Falk has been variously affiliated with Pop, Surrealist, and Funk Art sensibilities, but like Richard Artschwager, she defies concise categorization. Her objects do not subscribe to a particular stylistic dogma; they are a part of her personal iconography. Falk is interested in the activities of everyday living which, as she explained, include the following:

...eating an egg, reading a book, washing clothes,...together with slightly exotic events such as shining someone's shoes while he is walking backwards singing an operatic aria, sewing cabbage leaves together, smashing eggs with a ruler as in playing croquet...<sup>40</sup>

She described her subject-matter as *personal* rather than domestic, or as Marguerite Pinney described, "the paraphernalia of living."<sup>41</sup>

Falk does not differentiate between her everyday life and her art. The objects she makes are often physical manifestations of memories. The eggs she traded for candy at the corner store in her childhood become the ceramic eggs used in her performance piece Some are Egger than I ; the produce she boxed and un-boxed at her first full-time job at Safeway becomes 30 Grapefruit . Falk's re-created ceramic objects are like Artschwager's furniture-objects: the 30 Grapefruit are surrogates for the real things. Falk's objects reconstruct both past and present, her "persistence of memory" resulting in a slightly surreal nostalgia. This combination has led critics to dub Falk, somewhat disparagingly, the "homey eccentric."

The interdependence of Falk's life and her art is confirmed by the presence of her created objects in her house. As Doris Shadbolt remarks, "her art is at the same time the context, the expression, and the substance of her life."<sup>42</sup> Falk explores the outer limits of Richard Artschwager's intent to incorporate his pseudo-furniture into an ordinary context. The result is a peculiar juxtaposition of real objects and created objects that would be the envy of any Surrealist.

Falk lives in the confusion between art and reality. A visitor to her home could expect to find 1968's Pink Chair and Fish, a found-object -- a 1930s chair, elevated on a pedestal, coated and stiffened by numerous layers of enamel paint, then flocked and varnished, with one ceramic fish placed on each arm and a starched-stiff lamé jacket hovering behind the backrest -- immediately adjacent to a stack of thickly-glazed ceramic fruit. In Falk's hands, the real found-object borders on art and the ceramic created-object borders on reality.

Falk's mastery of various media is extensive but it is her use of ceramics that commands attention when in particular association with her subject-matter. Critic Art Perry suggests that Falk's "light-hearted" concerns outweigh any heavy art issues in her work and, as such, the anti-elitist presence of ceramics is her ideal medium.<sup>43</sup> Falk's stated reasons are less ideological. She uses clay for the same reasons Oldenburg uses vinyl. Clay is malleable and flexible; it is a "living" material she likens to the surface of skin.<sup>44</sup> Ceramics also allow for the application of surface color and finish for that "more real than real" effect like that Claes Oldenburg sought. In 30 Grapefruit a thick, syrupy glaze runs over the surfaces of the highly realistically rendered fruit. Falk's ceramic fruit looks more juicy, more luscious than the real thing but the surface treatment forces the viewer to confront the reality of the created-object. In the same manner, a hard, ceramic pillow is flocked to mimic the softness of the real object. Falk's surfaces deny their appearance. As Joan Lowndes suggests, "all is a game as objects made with art materials meticulously simulate the real while real, practical objects are "glamorized into art."<sup>45</sup>

Critics recall Chardin in reference to Falk's reverence for ordinary things. In the spirit of Chardin, Falk makes "icons in praise of the commonplace."<sup>46</sup> But Falk's reverence is not without an ironic edge. Falk elevates her objects to the status of art by "preserving" them. She locks a green ceramic banker's shoe in a bootcase; seals two real shirts first in a



coat of polyester resin and then in a plexiglass box; and encases a piece of unspoilable ceramic fruit in a solid block of resin.

Food, furniture and clothing -- Falk's is all much the same subject-matter as that of Claes Oldenburg or Richard Artschwager. Yet critics persist in regarding Falk's things as "woman-oriented objects": certainly female if not feminist. Falk rejected this simplistic categorization in the following terms:

When people deal with me as an artist, it's usually as a *woman* artist. They seem to need to point out that a lot of my work has to do with domesticity. This annoys me because, in the history of art, most of the great painters have dealt with such things. Still lifes have been the fodder of almost every artist...domesticity doesn't seem to me to belong to women more than to men.<sup>47</sup>

As a (*woman*) artist working in ceramics, Falk is automatically associated with Judy Chicago, another (*woman*) artist working in ceramics. Chicago gained considerable notoriety in the 1970s with her then-controversial work The Dinner Party. The Dinner Party integrated visual and political (feminist) content. A volunteer on the project described it as "a standard-bearer in the class-struggle based on the division between men and women."<sup>48</sup> It is difficult to separate Chicago's artistic and political agendas. In its installation, The Dinner Party is accompanied by abundant supporting literature. It is also difficult to ignore the Feminist Art Program "Womanhouse" which Chicago established with the help of artist Miriam Shapiro. As Lucy Lippard suggests, The Dinner Party "absorbs the usual prejudices against crafts, against feminism, and against Chicago as a personality."<sup>49</sup>

Intended political content or not, ideological implications imposed on work by others seem an inescapable situation for many (*female*) artists. In her catalogue text for the 1975 exhibition "Some Canadian Women Artists", of whom Gathie Falk was one, Mayo Graham sought for some commonality among women artists' work. Graham, then Assistant Curator of Contemporary Canadian Art for the National Gallery, cited involvement with

textures, "seriality", and domestic subject-matter as particularly specific to women's art. Graham then expounded on craft-traditions, home-making functions, "emotive" sensitivity, and the link between repetitive female-tasks and biological cycles as they pertain to working serially in art.<sup>50</sup>

Gathie Falk's polite dismissal of both Mayo Graham's condescending text and Art Perry's line of questioning in reference to the text ends this discussion. When asked by Perry if people went to the show looking for "woman-oriented objects", Falk responded in kind by asking simply, "Did they find them?"<sup>51</sup> Gathie Falk presented her view of the world through her objects and on her terms without preaching or pointing fingers.

### **(Dirty) Laundry**

I do not intend my work to contain any overt criticism of the current or historical social and economic position of women. Like Gathie Falk, I see myself as "artist" and am reluctant to be labeled "feminist-artist" or even "woman-artist." I see it as situational -- I happen to be female and I happen to make sculptures of objects that are generally associated with women and so-called "women's work." Upon viewing my work, many people ask immediately if I am a feminist. I am puzzled by this question and do not know how to respond. Like Falk, I am dismayed that people find it necessary to categorize. "Feminist" is a complex and loaded term I neither want to ignore nor to accept -- particularly as it pertains to my studio work. My work encompasses my own experiences and if others choose to see a larger statement, I will not dissuade them.

Like Oldenburg, my impetus for using domestic objects is initially a response to form. Like Artschwager, it makes sense to make sculpture about the objects I use. In my home, housework, including laundry, is a contentious issue. If it is ever resolved, I will resort to another domestic current affair for reference. Like Falk, I believe that domestic

objects are no more the property of female artists than they are of male artists. My sculptures point to the *nature* of the domestic chore, regardless of who might be doing it.

I realize however, that I am making these sculptures in the context of an MFA program in an academic institution, and as such, I am required to address certain issues pertaining to the "*content*" of my sculptures. Again, I cannot say that the politics of the social and economic position of women is of specific interest to me or of particular relevance to my work. If I have a commitment to change the socio-economic status of women, my energy will be better spent elsewhere. It would be ludicrous to believe that a 750-pound concrete ironing board will induce change.

I will admit to a fascination with the idea that, as Adrian Forty suggests, intelligent, reasonable people believed that household appliances "...could turn housework from laborious drudgery into a few minutes pleasure."<sup>52</sup> Clearly this idea was fostered and exploited by the manufacturers of such products. But as Forty asks, how could such an absurd idea ever seem real? He explains: "The willingness of rational people to believe that appliances could remove work from the home was made possible only through a whole set of ideologies about housework, and to a large extent it was domestic appliance design that was responsible for making housework seem what it was said to be."<sup>53</sup>

For example, in the era of industrialization, manufacturers were quick to capitalize on the perceived efficiency of the factory and styled their appliances accordingly. If a factory could churn out vast quantities of products daily, then by designer- and consumer-logic an appliance that *resembled* a piece of factory equipment would certainly have similar capabilities. This scheme backfired in the 1950s when those working in the factories began to purchase home appliances. "The presence in the kitchen of an object that looked like a machine...made housework look disturbingly like real work, a comparison that everyone was anxious to avoid."<sup>54</sup> It was then the designer's task to propose a new deception.

If product design merely *suggested* labour-saving potential, then product advertisements guaranteed it. Advertisements endowed appliances with unlimited capabilities. A 1944 Westinghouse pamphlet claimed that its product not only eliminated wash-day, but promised to *add* "...an entire new day..." to the week.<sup>55</sup>

In her exhibition catalogue Mechanical Brides, Ellen Lupton, curator of contemporary design for the Cooper Hewitt, shows several examples of appliance advertisements that promised the world -- or at least all the help in it. A 1946 Bendix automatic washer advertisement claims that the machine does "all the work of washing!" It explains: "...because it washes, rinses, damp-dries — even cleans itself, empties and shuts off — all automatically..."<sup>56</sup> As Lupton reminds us, there is still the gathering, sorting, loading, unloading, ironing, folding, and putting away. *All the work?*

Ignoring the statistics that suggest appliances have *not* brought a reduction in the actual number of hours of housework, manufacturers persist in describing their products as labour-saving. "The myth that the work once done by servants has been taken over by gadgets and machines has been repeated so often that it has acquired the authenticity of historical truth."<sup>57</sup>

Economist Juliet Schor in The Overworked American charts the constancy of housewives' hours noting that in the 1920s the average was 51 hours/week and in the 1980s the average was 49 hours/week. Yet this constancy coincides with the technological revolution in domestic labour. Household appliances had the enormous potential to save women countless hours of work, but as Schor contends, none but the microwave oven actually did.<sup>58</sup>

The worst offender cited as having increased hours of work is laundry. Susan Strasser, in Never Done: a History of American Housework, confirms evidence of the "staggering amounts of time" devoted to laundry.<sup>59</sup> Formerly a two-day ordeal -- Monday for washing, Tuesday for ironing -- laundry has, as a Westinghouse pamphlet promised,

become an "odd moments" job. Strasser maintains that instead of actually reducing laundry time, the automatic washer has only restructured it.<sup>60</sup> Admittedly, the automatic washer receives dirty clothes and dispenses only slightly-damp clean ones, so why has there been no substantial reduction in time?

It seems that the efficacy of modern equipment relative to the rising standards of domestic cleanliness has resulted in a permanent equilibrium with no actual reduction in time. Schor explains that in the early 1900s, washing would have been, at most, a once-a-month chore and by the 1920s, a once-a-week chore. By the 1950s we did laundry after we wore a garment once.<sup>61</sup> It is now a considerably less arduous chore but one we are doing with increasing frequency. In defense of progress, and in further condemnation of household appliances, Christina Hardyment offers the concession that "biological detergents...have arguably taken more work out of washing than the machines themselves."<sup>62</sup>

As an active participant in household drudgery, I suspected many of these facts for years. Although the impetus for making sculptures of household appliances was a response to form, the sculptures have evolved because of the absurdity of the entire situation -- mechanical servants indeed. The research has forced me to examine my particular obsession with laundry -- is it really the job or is it the rising standards of cleanliness with which I have difficulty? If I subscribe to today's standards of cleanliness, then how can I complain about the associated chores?

### **"Object" versus "Sculpture"**

It is assumed that artists look at art, and to some extent this art must influence the development of their own work. In this paper, my discussion of Claes Oldenburg, Richard Artschwager, and Gathie Falk is not a discussion of those whose work influenced my own. Rather it is a presentation of artists whose work is similar in nature -- for the purpose of

context. This is not to say that I ignore art completely. To be honest, if I was given the choice of either a gallery or a store to explore, I would choose the store almost every time. The things that influence and interest me are to be found largely in stores. I am interested in the works of artists such as Richard Deacon, Tony Cragg, Clay Ellis, Martin Puryear, and Dale Davis (to list a few), and to some degree their work might influence my own. I am certainly interested in these sculptors' fabrication methods as they pertain to my own studio activity (see Richard Deacon, galvanized sheet steel, and Wash Tub, later in this paper). Still, I am more likely to make a sculpture based on a chair rather than one based on a Tony Cragg sculpture -- objects show me *what* to do, sculptures show me *how* to do it. Since my work is *about* everyday objects, I *look* at everyday objects.

Interests and influences *per se* and the reason they are influences, include the following: Le Corbusier's 1925-1928 Grande Comfort chair for its slab-shaped cushions, overall proportions, and meticulous details; Mies van der Rohe's 1929 Barcelona chair for all the same reasons as above, for its adherence to the Horatio Greenough/Louis Sullivan slogan "form follows function" and to Mies' credo "less is more", and because it is better than anything produced in the way of deliberate sculpture that year; the Nash Metropolitan, the Volvo Canadian, and the Volkswagen Type III Notchback for their puffiness; the Philco Predicta television because it is a horizontal rectilinear box, surmounted by a bloated "ovalized" cube, all balanced on spindly wire legs; the Homer Laughlin Company's Harlequin novelty creamer and service water pitcher because of their bulginess and the awkward placement of their handles in relation to their bodies; George Nelson's furniture from the 1950s for its clarity of form and its balance of mass with volume and component part with whole; Charles Eames' 1950 ellipse table for its horizontality and its shape, and his 1950 shell chair because of its sensuous profile and the play between the chair body and its wire-strut base; 1950s shaped handbags because of their severe and often peculiar form and the contrast between the scale of the purse and the scale of the person holding it;

Shaker stoves because of their awkward but still somehow elegant configuration; Shaker work tables because of the hand-made wooden wheels that only move in one direction, the table's proportions, and its studied precision; Doug Menzies' 1957 ash and satin-walnut "hi-fi" for its sheer size and weight, its proportion of body to little wire legs, its accompanying speaker cabinet that is as big as a dresser, and mostly for its almost complete functionlessness in contrast to its considered construction and elegant if clunky appearance.

### **Size and Weight**

I don't really consider my sculptures as that large *or* that heavy. This self-deception is fostered in part by a predilection for big things. For example, the coffee table in our home is an enormous monolith; it is a four-foot square by two-foot tall veneered-wood lump. I am also *so* accustomed to the massive sculptures made in my native Edmonton that my own do not seem that large. The self-deception is also possible because the scale and weight of the sculptures is essential to help convey their meaning. As a result, their size and weight are not inappropriate in the context of the work and so do not seem excessive.

To explain, in his book "Objects of Desire," Adrian Forty discusses the aesthetics of housework. Styling, he suggests, was dictated by the intended user. "While it would be an overstatement to suggest that the form of such appliances was wholly determined by the class of labour for which they were intended, it would at least be true to say that as long as they were made principally for use by servants, it did not matter greatly to the people who bought them if the appliances were heavy, clumsy, and crudely assembled."<sup>63</sup> With the advent of the servantless middle-class, manufacturers realized that a styling change for the heavy, clumsy, and crudely assembled appliances was necessary to convince buyers of the products' labour-saving potential. As Forty explains, if the appliances *looked* more efficient, they would be *thought* more efficient.

In my guise as appliance designer, I choose to maintain the heavy, clumsy, and crudely assembled style. I do not intend to persuade buyers of my appliances' labour-saving potential because, as we have seen, there is none. I make no concessions to efficiency and very few to style. I subscribe to the Horatio/Sullivan credo "form follows function." If laundry is staggeringly laborious then my appliance will reflect that. Rather than deceive the consumer, my appliances carry a caveat -- housework *is* work; it is thankless and endless tasks that should be rewarded with cold hard cash instead of the so-called "superior currency of emotional satisfaction."<sup>64</sup>

## Materials

In drawing, materials are unimportant. One type of paper is not substantially different from another -- its surface might vary slightly, and its color -- but it is still fundamentally "paper". Any "novelty" paper like Mexican bark paper is simply too inherently interesting to ruin with a drawing. For years I have used one type of charcoal and one type of drawing paper. For the reasons cited above, it simply did not occur to me to try anything different. When I did attempt a drawing on another material like plywood, it felt as though I was trying to draw my way out of a sculpture problem. It is unfortunate that I have such prejudices about paper and that I am so convinced of its limited capacity; but paper just seems to be paper and does not carry meaning the way other materials can -- at least the way I used it.

Sculpture presents a vast array of materials with which to experiment. Claes Oldenburg speaks about the "sullen stubbornness" of wood and describes cardboard as "downright hostile."<sup>65</sup> Falk's preference for ceramics and Artschwager's love/hate relationship with Formica suggest to me the significance of materials to both the sculptor and to sculpture. In this respect also it is important to recognize that materials have built-in associations.



I am constantly amazed that my corrugated-cardboard sculptures are considered maquettes, regardless of their scale and degree of finish. This is because many see cardboard as a temporary or throw-away material and, as such, only suitable for a mock-up of a "real sculpture." This Dennis Adrian-like categorization baffles me. I do not believe that cardboard is any more disposable than plastics, wood, or metal. I recognize that cardboard *is* one of the most recycled materials; still, the comments regarding my use of it were even more puzzling given the nature of the two objects I constructed from it. The two objects are my "2 1/2 dimensional" washing machine and ironing board. I see corrugated cardboard as a material that is considered allied with neither sculpture nor drawing. The cardboard is made of paper but, because it has a thickness, it is more like wood or metal -- so not *necessarily* a drawing material. Since it is not as substantial as wood or metal, it is more like paper -- so not *necessarily* a sculpture material. Because my two objects are both sculpture *and* drawing, corrugated cardboard represents the ideal material.

#### ....Labels

Titles are important. The appropriateness of the term "Gross Domestic Product" was immediately apparent. "Gross" most certainly refers to the scale of my work though I confess my preferred definition of gross is the archaic one: immediately obvious, glaringly noticeable usually because of inexcusable badness.<sup>66</sup> It suits me to think of "inexcusable badness" as it relates to the nature of domestic duties and the appalling consumer-deception committed by appliance designers. It is gross -- inexcusably bad -- to make non labour-saving products look as though they are.

Titles, like the source objects themselves, trigger associations. Claes Oldenburg explains:

What is written about my pieces is not often about them at all. It is about the thing that the name of my piece refers to, calls up in the mind. If a critic has had a bad experience with a hamburger...he applies his dislike to my piece

called 'Hamburger.' If someone reads in a paper that I have made a 'Hamburger,' he does not have to get out of his chair to see the show — he only has to remember the last hamburger he had. If an artist has called his work a 'hamburger,' what else could it be?<sup>67</sup>

I use titles to set expectations and then let the sculptures confound them: a "*multipurpose* ironing board" that serves no purpose; "*sensible* shoes" each made from fifty pounds of lead. As my sculpture progresses, I find I rely less on irony in the title. The titles "Washing Machine" and "Wash Tub", for equally confounding sculptures, seem more pointed and allow viewers to make their own associations and insert their own adjectives. This change is due in part to the typical development in studio work where ideas and results become more refined. I find that as my sculpture evolves and I become more confident, my reliance on ironic titles disappears and titles become more suitably deadpan.

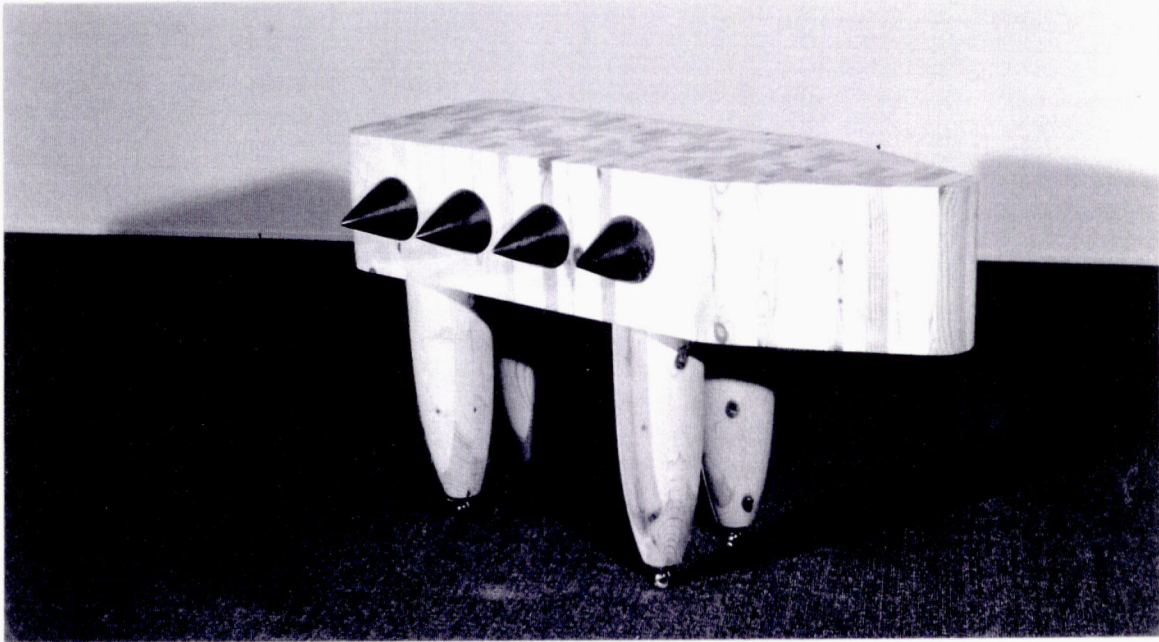
Obviously humor -- irony, deadpan -- is important in my work. Like Oldenburg, I believe humor is one weapon for survival. My work also exhibits a certain assertiveness: another weapon for survival. I use humor to defuse situations. It is also a palatable alternative to my tendency to complain about housework and innumerable other things.

A work that uses humor is no less relevant or informative than one that does not; it is simply a different approach. If it makes work more accessible, that should go a long way to justify its use. For the most part, art is taken far too seriously. I agree with Claes Oldenburg -- it is comparatively innocuous. As an artist, I am a "harmless eccentric" in my "delusional world."

### **My Work in the Show(room)**

The first sculpture I made in the MFA program is the Multipurpose Ironing Board, a 5' long x 20" wide x 12" thick, solid pine slab, surmounting four bloated lathe-turned legs (Fig. 1). This rather cumbersome sculpture teeters on disproportionately tiny steel wheels. The impetus behind this sculpture was a large and rather well-worn butcher-block table

(sold, unfortunately) that I encountered in a local antique store. The size, form, and undulating surface of the butcher-block table suggested that it might translate into an interesting sculpture.



**Figure 1.** Multipurpose Ironing Board, 1993

Since I have been working with the shape of an ironing board for the past several years, I conceived of a combination household tool with its main association that of the butcher block. This is not a new concept. Christina Hardyment writes of the *Mulparvo* phenomenon. The 1920s *Mulparvo* ("much in little") "claimed to combine washing clothes, washing dishes, beating eggs, and mincing meat for sausages in one adaptable whole." (p.63) I wanted to produce a useful tool that claimed to combine only two functions -- food preparation and ironing -- but one that would, over time, become too worn and wavy to facilitate ironing: planned obsolescence. In the case of real appliances, I am appalled at this manufacturing ploy. General Motors, whose goal was production and sales, pioneered planned obsolescence to ensure continued economic achievement.<sup>68</sup> In the

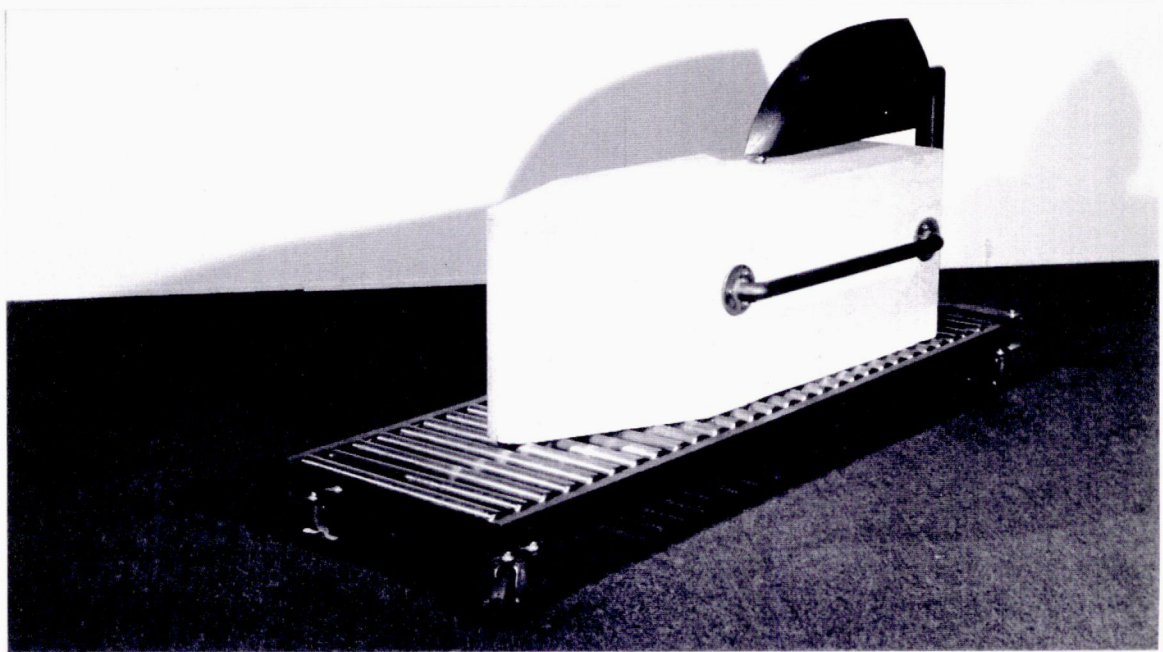
Multipurpose Ironing Board, planned obsolescence should be regarded as a dividend, since as its capacity to enable ironing vanishes, so will my most despised household chore.

It is this same enthusiasm for ironing that inspired the four bullet-like points that line either side of the Multipurpose Ironing Board. Variousy described as mock-violent and medieval, the rather dangerous-looking points evolved from the metal rosettes on the sides of butcher-block tables. The rosette's function is to cap the tie-rods that reinforce the laminated slab. In the Multipurpose Ironing Board the bullet-like points are also functional. Situated at thigh-level, they are there to inflict an unpleasant wound in the event you should come too near. This provides extra insurance in case the nature of domestic drudgery is an insufficient deterrent in and of itself.

The industrial, machine-like Multipurpose Ironing Board - Convenience Model is a suitable foil to the animal-like butcher block version (Fig. 2). This work has its roots in a small concrete and steel ironing board/coffee table I made in 1991. The 1993 model is loosely based on the formal relationships in a George Nelson slatted bench and storage cupboard. Since this was my "convenience model", it should *appear* to function in some small capacity. Ironing, however, is not worthy of too much assistance lest one should be encouraged to do it. The ridiculousness of spending vast quantities of time and effort to make clothing flat should not be ignored.

The sheer physical presence of the Multipurpose Ironing Board - Convenience Model belies the invisible nature of this household chore. An ordinary thin, portable, and collapsible ironing board is now a solid concrete monolith 54" long, 20" wide and 20" tall. The concrete is supported by a seven-foot long steel-roller conveyor. Steel pipe handrails run the length of the ironing board and enable the user to glide the concrete slab back and forth on the conveyor. Fixed in place and hovering above the ironing board's surface is an enormous wooden iron. The only point of contact between the two elements is a tiny metal wheel at the tip of the iron -- an ineffectual device for a job which depends on pressure and

surface area. One is again discouraged from ironing since the task involves enormous effort to move the giant board instead of the considerably smaller iron. This combination tool makes ironing look extremely laborious if not impossible. Like Richard Artschwager's sculptures, the Multipurpose Ironing Board - Convenience Model is an object of symbolic function. It feigns utility and speaks the truth about ironing.



**Figure 2.** Multipurpose Ironing Board - Convenience Model, 1993

The materials in the sculpture -- concrete, steel, graphite-coated wood, industrial casters -- refer to that "most potent metaphor for efficiency," the factory.<sup>69</sup> My object's design ignores the niceties of colour and the refinement of styling, which convince the user of anything other than the true nature of the job. For example, the concrete has not been treated to a slick finish-coat to disguise its true character. It is not Artschwager's imitation wood. It is what it claims to be: heavy, industrial concrete.

But not all is as it seems. The mock exhaust pipe that kicks out behind the conveyor alludes to a fuel-driven model. It is grossly incongruous to the overtly manual operation



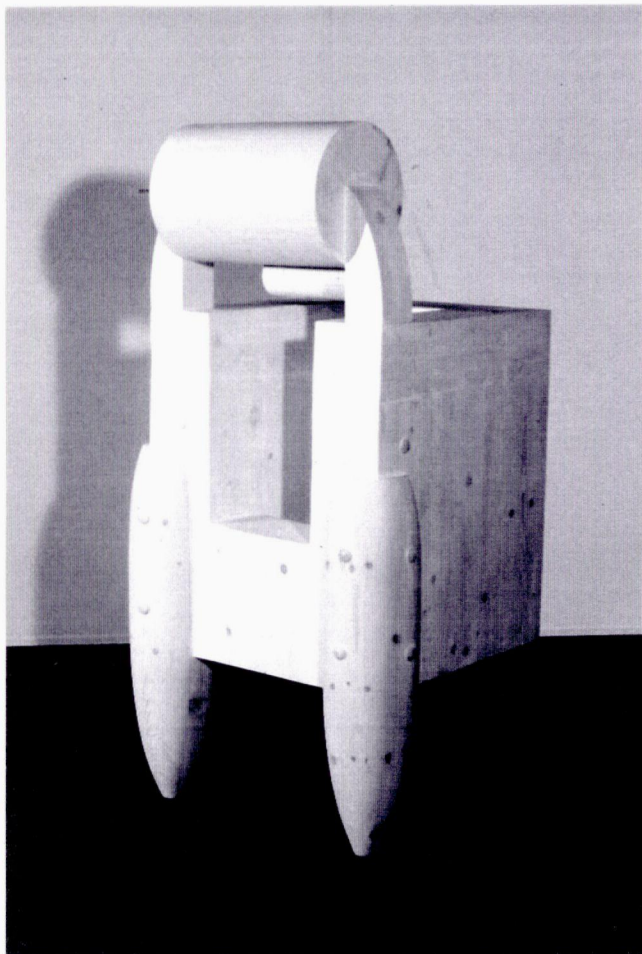
of the Multipurpose Ironing Board - Convenience Model. The exhaust pipe's reason for being is largely visual -- there to provide a formal counterbalance to the wooden iron. Its top is sealed and it exhausts nothing. It reiterates the functionlessness of the piece and mocks designers' efforts to change our perception of a chore instead of the nature of a chore.

This design practice is in keeping with many so-called "developments" and their inherent deceptiveness. For example, in the push-button age (one of the stylistic periods within the decade Thomas Hine calls Populuxe: 1954 - 1964), appliances were endowed with vast arrays of buttons with appealingly effortless one-finger operation. The push-button offered no real technological advancement; it was entirely symbolic. It offered the promise that the machine was "competent and complex."<sup>70</sup> As Hine writes of the push-button laden blender, "Which beats harder, one had to ask, "liquefy" or "puree"?"<sup>71</sup> Like the push-buttons, my exhaust pipe is entirely symbolic. It offers nothing but the empty promise of combustion-engine assistance. Multipurpose Ironing Board - Convenience Model is neither convenient nor multipurpose. The anachronistic machine-like style of this sculpture proposes my desire to return to the heyday of the commercial laundry. As Christina Hardymont asks, "why didn't the mechanization of wash-day simply mean more efficient, cheaper laundries rather than reintroducing work into the home?"

Another of the peculiarities of the Populuxe decade was the obsession with streamlining. The concept of streamlining was best embodied by the tailfin, conceived by Harley Earl, then head of the Art and Color division of General Motors. In 1944 Earl saw Lockheed's plane, the P-38 Lightning, and the tailfin-era took flight. Tailfins became the obligatory automotive add-on for the next twenty years. It was *the* "new shape of motion."<sup>72</sup>

Whereas in Multipurpose Ironing Board - Convenience Model, a modicum of streamlining is appropriate because parts of it actually move, the only part that I have

streamlined is the stationary wooden iron. The appropriateness of streamlining products that do not move was discussed by designer Harold van Doren. He advocated the following: "If it helps to sell merchandise, that should go a long way to justifying its use."<sup>73</sup> Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., curator of the Museum of Modern Art's "Good Design" exhibitions, confirms that form might indeed follow function, but "style follows sales."<sup>7</sup> It is an ironic coincidence that I streamlined part of my sculpture Washing Machine (Fig. 3). The original object on which Washing Machine is based, the 1939 Maytag "Master", was designed, I later discovered, by Harold van Doren Associates.



I had no unusual combination-object in mind for this sculpture. The stimulus was, simply, the Maytag "Master". I wanted to make my own version in a deliberately incongruous material and make it as subtly awkward as the original. The "Master" developed when manufacturers were beginning to hide the mechanics of their machines behind sheet-metal enclosures. With few visible working parts save the wringer attachment, I chose to emphasize the formal relationships between body, legs, and wringer.

**Figure 3.** Washing Machine, 1994

Le Corbusier argued that "...machines functionally resolve themselves into combinations of simple geometric forms that are beautiful in themselves."<sup>75</sup>

While thinking about this object, I realized that my previous sculptures had been too symmetrical, too much the same on both sides, too flat. I resolved to focus less on the idea behind the object -- multipurposelessness, inconvenience -- and think more about the object itself, and about sculpture itself. A blocky body, a wringer system, some legs, and no fixed "concept" provided a more flexible situation for developing the sculpture. For example, the body was originally enclosed on four sides with the only access to the central volume from the top. Because I added the wringer on the top, I had to cut away the front wall to open up the sculpture. The more visible central volume then balanced the mass of the wringers. Initially, I also imagined my version with four legs hugging the corners of the body as they do in the original. Four legs became three. My parabola-shaped rear leg provides a necessary change in the structure of the sculpture. The cantilevered back corners entice the viewer around the sculpture.

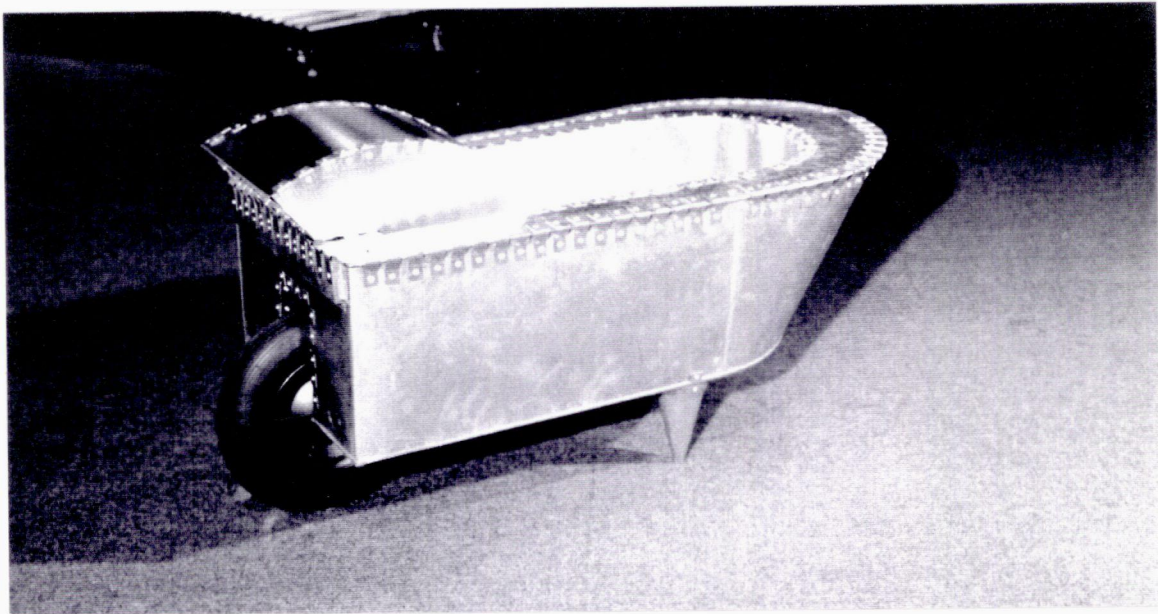
Washing Machine is a more visually interesting sculpture because of this approach. Although the discussion on this piece has been largely on its formal qualities, this does not mean that the work has no "meaning". Form and meaning are interdependent.

To explain, the parabola-shaped leg is not solely an interesting form. The rear leg instantly "modernizes" my machine by some twenty years. My deliberate style modification mirrors a typical design situation. For manufacturers and consumers alike, the changing image of ordinary life demanded new objects with an equally new image -- even when old appliances did a sufficient job. Objects were seen as representatives of a lifestyle and not as tools.<sup>76</sup> My gracefully bulky Washing Machine has leapt from 1939 to 1959 on its modish rear leg alone. "Functionally", it remains in 1939.

Wash Tub developed in much the same way (Fig. 4). I saw the source object -- a galvanized steel "cowboy" bathtub -- in a lecture given by a local sculptor. Its formal and



conceptual potential was irresistible. I constructed a mock-up in my studio so I could spend time staring at it before I bought one at the local hardware store. I then sunk the galvanized bathtub in "the impure soup of myself and all associations."



**Figure 4.** Wash Tub, 1994

I suspect the tub appealed to me because of the associations from a recent six-week stay in Britain. There I refused to lug all of my clothes to the Laundromat to pay over *six* dollars per wash load. As a result of my stubbornness, I did all my washing in the bathtub in my flat. Hand-washing was only moderately effective; still, stubbornness prevailed. The galvanized "cowboy" bathtub is similar in form to that bathtub in the flat.

The galvanized steel calls to mind ordinary wash tubs. The source object also resembles a wheelbarrow. Wash Tub and its multifunctionless nature evolved in response to the formal characteristics of all these referents. For example, the small front legs, like those on a claw-foot bathtub, look too insubstantial to support the bulk of Wash tub and its potential load. The pneumatic wheel is derived from the wheelbarrow, but is placed on the wrong end to ensure that its load is extremely awkward to discharge. The original handle

on the tub is inappropriate for such a cumbersome machine. Its awkward placement ensures Wash Tub will tip unpredictably when moved. The drain is obviously an enlarged version of that in a bathtub. It serves to balance the volume of the bloated wheel-well. The enlarged drain and wheel-well substantially reduce the capacity of the tub resulting in another ineffective appliance. Bathtub, wash tub, wheelbarrow -- the ideal combination object, with no dedicated services. Like Richard Artschwager's furniture objects, Wash Tub is referential but ambiguous.

Wash Tub, like both versions of the Multipurpose Ironing Board, is also a relative of the fantastic combination tools that were proposed by appliance manufacturers. The Thor company's Electric Servant promised an appliance with attachments that included an ironer, a stirrer, a food-mixer, a masher, and a radio. Its streamlined white cabinet and highly adaptable motor challenged even the Mulparvo.

Again, personal associations explain, in part at least, why Wash Tub exists. I like things to be neat but I do not put things away. I prefer to consolidate. The illusion of neatness is easily achieved by simply reassembling and relocating piles. The wheelbarrow is an ideal tool for pile consolidation and relocation. I also like things to be clean. Wash Tub's association with dirt-removal -- from clothes and self -- appeals to my compulsion for cleanliness. Since I have little compulsion for the act of cleaning, the functionless nature of Wash Tub is there, as usual, to dissuade.

The following explains, in part, why Wash Tub looks as it does. In London I saw the work of sculptor Richard Deacon. Deacon uses galvanized sheet steel extensively. I had originally decided to fill the tub with concrete to give mass to the form. On seeing Deacon's work, the thought of making a "skin work as structure" seemed more appropriate.<sup>77</sup> In my other work, to fake a thickness is heresy. It is inconceivable to fake thickness or imitate materials when they are essential to the meaning of the work. Wash

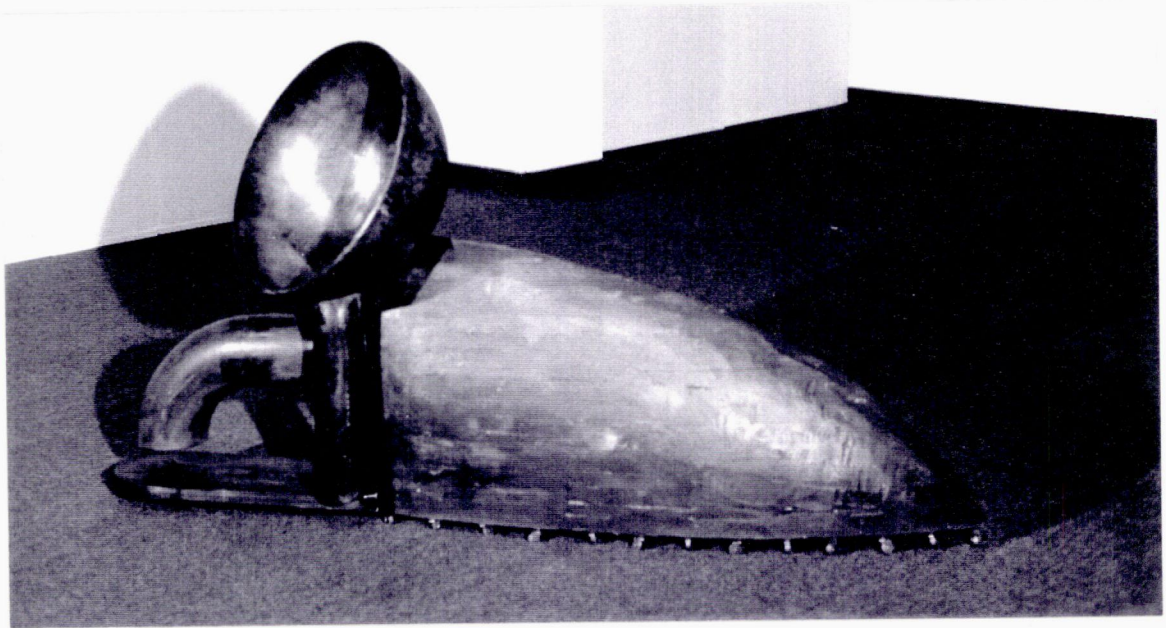
Tub does not have to be heavy. Its primary association is that of an industrial tool, so the fabrication methods for sheet metal are appropriate to convey this.

I had many reservations regarding the "found object" nature of the "cowboy" bathtub. Curiously, I did not have the same feeling towards the steel-roller conveyor I purchased for the Multipurpose Ironing Board - Convenience Model. In my mind, the conveyor was just a component whereas the "cowboy" bathtub is *nearly* the entire sculpture. I was concerned that I would be unable to make the bathtub my own -- that it would still resemble a store-bought item. My doubts about the "found objectness" of this sculpture were untenable. The lack of rivets and tabs on the bought tub portion and the pneumatic wheel still suggest "found object" but in the context of the whole sculpture, I believe they are sufficiently integrated with my fabricated portion. Still, I am hesitant to abandon my uncertainties regarding the "found object" in general. "It is a mistake," says George Basalla, "to assume that commonplace objects do not engage us emotionally."<sup>78</sup> In his article "Transformed Utilitarian Objects," Basalla proposes that we become aware of the degree of our emotional involvement with ordinary objects when we interfere with their form, size, or material.<sup>79</sup> By my definition, a "found object" is one that has not been sufficiently interfered with. There must be some indication of "emotional involvement" in order to justify its use. I believe this is a healthy attitude which will ensure that I sculpt and tamper with, not just find and leave as is.

How do my rules apply when the found object (of sorts) is from one of my own sculptures? Big Iron is an elaboration of the iron from Multipurpose Ironing Board - Convenience Model. The incentive for Big Iron was to make a sculpture similar in nature but one that was more self-contained (Fig. 5). Multipurpose Ironing Board - Convenience Model is a collection of parts: conveyor, ironing board, iron, exhaust pipe. Washing Machine also appears to be constructed from component parts -- legs, wringer, body -- but is more self-contained. This might be due to materials, the one-material sculpture being



more singular. Possibly it has to do with profile, or scale? Whatever the reasons, for Big Iron, I isolated the iron, enlarged it, added a steel bowl, a rear platform and a pipe, and put the entire thing on wheels. It was important to try the elicit the same feelings I got from Washing Machine in a sculpture that used dissimilar materials.



**Figure 5.** Big Iron, 1994

This sculpture's bulk, like the concrete ironing board, is supported by a roller system. In Big Iron it is in the form of numerous tiny wheels that line its perimeter. Rather than merely sit on top of a conveyor, the wheels are extensions of the object -- like the legs on a centipede or like the wheels on an armoured personnel carrier. The "exhaust pipe" and bowl have been physically and visually connected to the wood iron in several places. The result is that Big Iron is seen as a whole and not, I hope, as an assembly of parts.

Big Iron's steel bowl is derived from a gas heated iron I saw in local antique store. The Coleman Model 4a Instant Lighting Iron has a hollow ball mounted at the rear of the handle to contain the fuel. The only reference I have found to ironing equipment with a

similar attachment is Christina Hardymont's description of a pleating machine: a tool heated by paraffin contained in a large spherical reservoir perched behind the handle.<sup>80</sup> Like the exhaust pipe in Multipurpose Ironing Board - Convenience Model, the bowl and steel pipe allude to a fuel-driven model. The bowl in Big Iron, rather than containing fuel, performs like a satellite dish broadcasting exhaust.

Sensible Coat is made from a found material. I discovered the coil-spring mattress covering on the street and thought it interesting -- it also came with a ready-made pattern. The pattern left by the coil springs resembled the sort I recall seeing on chenille bedspreads. Initially I wanted to make what is variously known as a duster or house dress: a household uniform. I was unable to find an authentic pattern or even an adaptable contemporary version. It was important that the garment was associated with housework. The suggested equivalent of a bathrobe was inappropriate since it connotes relaxation, sleep, and leisure. The coat, plain and simple, presented an acceptable compromise. Associations confirmed this alternative. The maxims "never scrimp on a coat" and "buy sensible shoes" are certainly the sagest pieces of advice my mother has ever offered.

Of the coat, I am frequently asked where I bought it, yet I know of no ugly, uncomfortable coat shops in the city. I will take the compliment. It is a welcome alternative to the more common "...did you make that yourself" query that home-sewers dread. Still, am I missing something? Possibly the matching shoes and hanger in conjunction with the presentation make it look store-bought.

The matching Sensible Shoes are brown crystalline wax. They were made in wax as moulds to be cast in another material, but the brown wax so complemented the coat, I was compelled to leave them. They are large, bullet-like slip-ons, 15" long. I believed that pointed shoes made ones feet look smaller. Anxious for my feet to appear less large, I wore nothing but. I equated narrower with smaller. It was not until someone informed me that pointed shoes actually make your feet look *longer*, that I abandoned the uncomfortable

things forever. My gross self-deception about the illusory capacity of pointiness explains the length of the Sensible Shoes.

Design history explains the points. All things -- appliances, cars, even shoes -- were subject to the enthusiasms of the age. Shoes benefited from the same design philosophy that spawned the tail-fin. In an age when speed was paramount, it was only logical that shoes, "associated with the rather antique activity of walking", were modified accordingly.<sup>81</sup> By 1956, shoes, like cars, were noticeably longer and noticeably sharper. Feet, however, do not come to a point. Form follows not function, but fashion. But my water repellent and thick soled Sensible Shoes are sensible, despite their concession to pointiness.

Cruel Shoes are also pointy. The shoes are the same "style" as their waxy counterparts. Cruel Shoes are made of lead: fifty pounds in each shoe. They will never wear out because you can never go anywhere in them. Today, as in the Populuxe decade, there seems "little glamour in walking with the near universal use of the automobile", so what does it matter if the shoes are unusable? Sleek, silvery, and pointy, *they* are glamorous even if walking is not.

I am obsessive about things matching but it is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze my compulsion. Suffice to say that Cruel Shoes have a matching coat. (Can matching handbags be far off?) Household Armour is intended to be as glamorous but unfunctional as the shoes. It is handmade (link by tedious link) steel mail and weighs in at over 70 pounds. The process I liken to knitting and it is reassuring to know that I am as slow at making mail as I am at knitting. My slow knitting process is such that by the time I completed a garment, it was out of fashion and I would not wear it. Household Armour is the perfect garment. There is no potential disappointment because it is already out of fashion -- unless the revival of medieval armour is imminent -- and it is inherently unwearable because of its weight. Like Sensible coat, it is durable but its uncomfortable

nature ensures it will never be worn. Still, it is a seductive garment: it entices touching if not wearing.

My fabric Laundry Baskets also entice touching (Fig. 6). They are based on a source object with increasingly limited use. My own turquoise plastic laundry basket is disintegrating; the brittle plastic breaks with every use. I am reluctant to dispose of it because I am attached to it and new ones are not made in turquoise. It collapses in on itself when carried. Laundry Baskets also collapse in on themselves. Exhausted, they slump forward. These pieces also have as their origin a drawing of a laundry basket I did in 1991. The drawing showed the basket in perspective. In keeping with that particular drawing convention, the fabric baskets are also in perspective: the back edge is higher than the front edge. They are also slightly flattened -- the exaggerated oval refers to both the convention of foreshortening and the deplorable condition of the squashed source object.

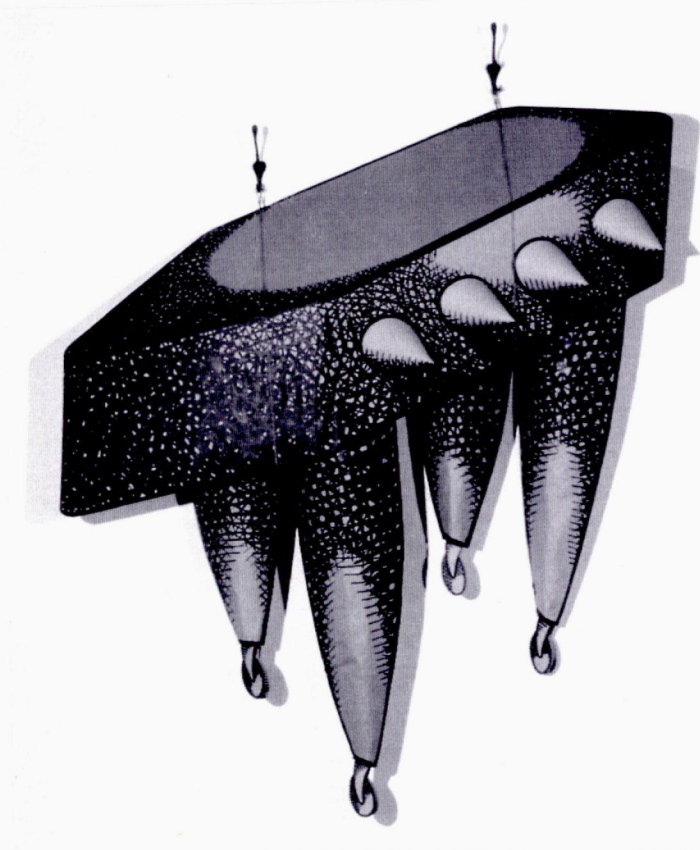


**Figure 6.** Laundry Baskets, 1994



I did not find the fabric for Laundry Baskets as I had done for Sensible Coat. The grey wool blanket was a conscious choice. Apart from the impressive but subtle range of greys, the wool blanket imparts a degree of utility. It is a semi-functional object in that it provides warmth but at the expense of comfort. I had originally intended the laundry baskets to be more soggy than they appear but the idiosyncrasies of fabric forced me to reconsider my original idea and the laundry baskets became the consistency of Gumby -- or a puffy, distended version thereof.

I have briefly discussed my 2 1/2-dimensional objects in the section on materials. They are worthy of more discussion because they mark a discovery during my transition from drawing to sculpture. It is important to note that my first in-between object, the Multipurpose Ironing Board -- 2 1/2 d Model, did not come in-between.



The cardboard version was a result of the impossible mathematical equation  $2d + 3d = 2\frac{1}{2}d$ . After I struggled with drawing for the first six months of the program, I hit upon an idea which would make my drawings seem more like objects. Cutting them out, like paper dolls, made drawing fundamentally more relevant. They were things, not just pictures of things.

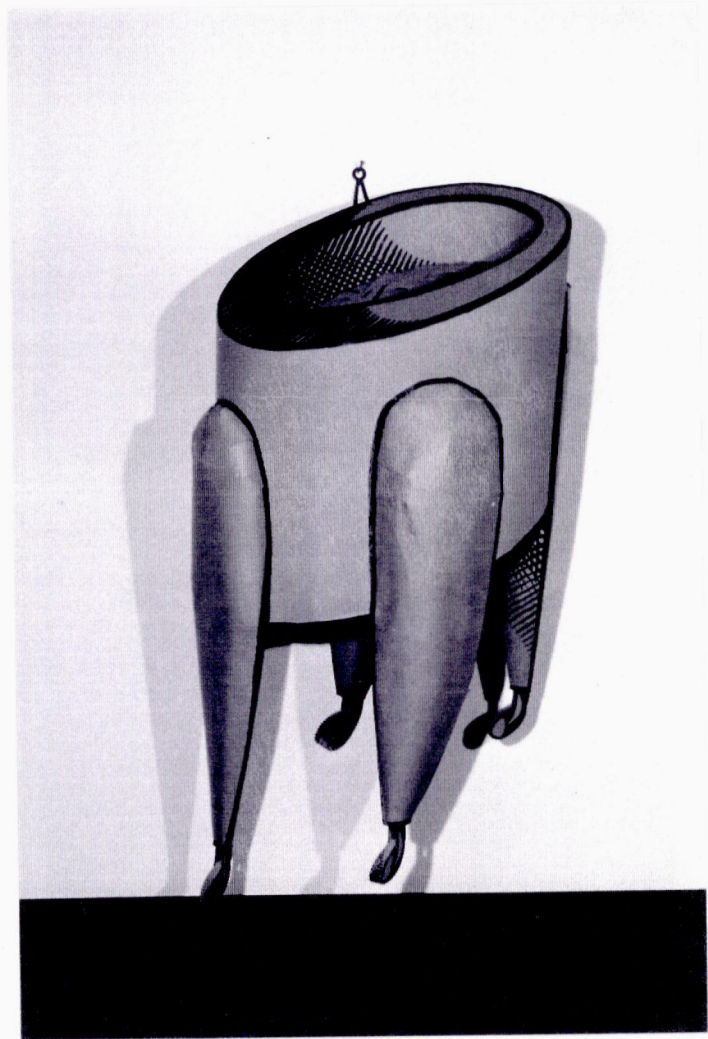
**Figure 7.** Multipurpose Ironing Board - 2 1/2 d Model, 1993



My full-scale, cut-out ink drawing of a multipurpose ironing board was cross-hatched for the illusion of form. The laminated wood version followed the drawing. These two objects were together in my studio for sometime before they suggested that their combination might be worth investigating.

Multipurpose Ironing

Board - 2 1/2 d Model and Washing Machine - 2 1/2 d Model are the results of my investigation (Fig. 10, Fig. 11). Fabricated from corrugated cardboard and constructed in perspective, they marry drawing conventions with sculpture conventions. The two objects are wall mounted -- hanging like some sort of distended drawings. They allude to being fully three-dimensional because of the use of perspective, a drawing convention. Neither totally flat nor fully volumetric, their moderate depth places them somewhere in-between.



**Figure 8.** Washing Machine - 2 1/2 d Model, 1994

They are modeled with cross-hatching, a drawing convention, to imitate the way light defines a three-dimensional form. But they are already three-dimensional and do not need the assistance of hatching to convince us of that.

They are reminiscent of Claes Oldenburg's "hard versions" of sculptures where "light and shade [are] ironically applied like a vestigial chiaroscuro to objects that [are] already three-dimensional."<sup>82</sup> Multipurpose Ironing Board - 2 1/2 d Model and Washing Machine - 2 1/2 d Model use conventions but are unconventional.

## Conclusion

My objects are, to use Lynne Cooke's explanation, something *like* washing machines, or something *like* ironing boards. Cumbersome and peculiar, they are recognizable enough to call into question the nature of the source object; they trigger associations based on our prior use of similar things. I do not see, as Donald Judd did, that obvious external references *taint* my "sculpture" or, as the Abstract Expressionists might have had us believe, undermine sculpture's pretense. Rather they "invoke the borderline" between real objects and sculpture.<sup>83</sup> As sculptures, they disrupt the familiarity of the source object and make one look at the peculiarity of form or the nature of the materials as they pertain to my attitude towards the source object. They pose as utilitarian things.

I have recently discovered that my object-sculptures can now also *be* utilitarian things. In the process of making my three-dimensional objects, I continued to do small sketches. These sketches, in addition to helping me resolve sculpture problems, were interesting little drawings. They suggested that I had not given up completely on drawing. I now find my sculptures provide an impetus to return to drawing as a focus. Rather than trace found objects, I am anxious to use my own work as subject matter. My investigation into household appliances for the purpose of this paper has also interested me in product advertisement. It is my intention to produce a series of mock-advertisements for my own objects.

My disinterest in drawing generated an interest in sculpture which has, in its turn, generated a *re*interest in drawing. It would seem that during the course of this degree I have come full circle.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Dennis Adrian, "Rummaging Among Twentieth-Century Objects," Art Journal 45, no.4 (Winter 1985), p.345.

<sup>2</sup> Lynne Cooke, "Richard Deacon: Object Lessons," Richard Deacon - Whitechapel Art Gallery, 25 November 1988 - 22 January 1989, p.8.

<sup>3</sup> Cooke, p.13.

<sup>4</sup> Lippard, Pop Art (New York: Frederick A. Preager Publishing, 1966), p.16.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara Rose, "Dada Then and Now," Art International , 7, no.1 (January 1963), p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> David Irwin, "Pop Art and Surrealism," Studio International , 171, no.877 (May 1966), pp.187, 190.

<sup>7</sup> Lippard, Pop Art , p.22.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Friedman, Oldenburg, Six Themes (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1975), p.9.

<sup>9</sup> Barbara Rose, Claes Oldenburg (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1969), p.190.

<sup>10</sup> Rose, Claes Oldenburg, p.35.

<sup>11</sup> Claes Oldenburg, Claes Oldenburg: Tate Gallery Exhibition Catalogue, June 24 - August 16, 1970 (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1970), p.8.

<sup>12</sup> Harold Rosenberg, "The Anxious Object," in Gregory Battcock, ed., Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1968), p. 63.

<sup>13</sup> Oldenburg, p.8.

<sup>14</sup> Ellen Johnson, Modern Art and the Object (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1976), p.145.

<sup>15</sup> Barbara Haskell, Claes Oldenburg: Object into Monument (Los Angeles: The Ward Ritchie Press, 1971), p.100.

<sup>16</sup> Lippard, Pop Art, p.110.

<sup>17</sup> Rose, Claes Oldenburg, p.32.

<sup>18</sup> Ellen Johnson, "The Living Object," Art International 7, no.1 (January 1963), p.32

- 19 Oldenburg, p.7.
- 20 Johnson, Modern Art and the Object , p.146.
- 21 Johnson, Modern Art and the Object , p.146.
- 22 Marco Livingstone, Pop Art: A Continuing History (New York: Harry N. Abrams inc., Publishers, 1990), p. 214.
- 23 Rose, Claes Oldenburg, p.103.
- 24 Ellen Johnson, Claes Oldenburg (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1971), p.37.
- 25 Oldenburg, p.8.
- 26 Rose, Claes Oldenburg, p.103.
- 27 Haskell, p.100.
- 28 Rose, Claes Oldenburg, p.103.
- 29 Rose, Claes Oldenburg, p.108.
- 30 Roberta Smith, "The Artschwager Enigma," Art in America 67, no.6 (October 1979), p.93.
- 31 Coojse Van Bruggen, "Richard Artschwager," ArtForum 22, no.1 (September 1983), p.45.
- 32 Steven Henry Madoff, "Richard Artschwager's Sleight of Mind," Artnews 87, no.1 (January 1988), p.116.
- 33 Johnson, Modern Art and the Object , p.28
- 34 Van Bruggen, p.45.
- 35 Judd, p.78.
- 36 Claude Marks ed., World Artists 1980 - 1990 (New York: The H.W. Wilson Co., 1991), p.42
- 37 Smith, p.95.
- 38 Jack Bankowsky, "Richard Artschwager," Flash Art no.139 (March/April 1988), p.82.

39 Gareth Sirotnik, "Gathie Falk: Things That Go Bump in the Day," Vanguard 7 (February 1978), p.10.

40 Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker, Gathie Falk Retrospective, (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1985), p.7

41 Marguerite Pinney, "Gathie Falk," Arts Canada 25, no.4 (October/November 1968), p.37.

42 Doris Shadbolt, "Tableau is her Form: Gathie Falk," Arts Canada 29, no.2 (Spring 1972), p.31.

43 Art Perry, "British Columbia: Sculpture in the 70s," Artmagazine 9, no.38/39 (June 1978), p. 105.

44 Danzker, p.59.

45 Joan Lowndes, "Glorious Fun-k Art of Gathie Falk," The Province, Vancouver (30 August 1968), p.10.

46 Sirotnik, p.10.

47 Danzker, p.17.

48 Lucy R. Lippard, "Judy Chicago's 'Dinner Party'," Art in America 68, no.4 (April 1980), p.115.

49 Lippard, "Judy Chicago's 'Dinner Party'," p.116.

50 Mayo Graham, Some Canadian Women Artists (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, 1975), pp.16-19.

51 Art Perry, "Interview with Gathie Falk," Pacific Time, Vancouver (no date cited), p.10.

52 Adrian Forty, Objects of Desire, (New York: Panteon, 1986), p.207.

53 Forty, p.208.

54 Forty, p.217.

55 Susan Strasser, Never Done: A History of American Housework, (New York: Pantheon, 1982), p.268.

56 Ellen Lupton, Mechanical Brides: Women and Machines from Home to Office, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993), p.19.

57 Forty, p.209.

58 Juliet B. Schor, The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure, (New York: Basic Books, 1991), p.8.

59 Strasser, p.105.

60 Strasser, p.268.

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63 Forty, p.216.

64 Forty, p.218.

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66 "gross," Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary.

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68 Hardyment, p.63.

69 Thomas Hine, Populuxe, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), p.66.

70 Forty, p.217.

71 Hine, p.124.

72 Hine, p.124.

73 Hardyment, p.55.

74 Hine, p.83.

75 Hine, p.62.

76 Hine, p.66.

77 Hine, p.62.

78 Hine, p.68.

79 Hardyment, p.63.

80 Cooke, p.9

81 George Basalla, "Transformed Utilitarian Objects," Winterthur Portfolio XVII, no.4 (Winter 1982), p.198.

82 Basalla, p.199.

83 Hardyment, p.71.

84 Hine, p.111.

85 Johnson, Modern Art and the Object, p.32.

86 Cooke, p.13.



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APPENDIX ONE  
SLIDES OF THE EXHIBITION

1. **Multipurpose Ironing Board, 1993**  
wood, graphite, casters  
34 1/2" x 29 1/2" x 54"
2. **Multipurpose Ironing Board - Convenience Model, 1993**  
concrete, steel, wood, graphite, casters  
44" x 27" x 98"
3. **Multipurpose Ironing Board - Convenience Model, 1993**  
detail
4. **Washing Machine, 1994**  
wood, acrylic, casters  
62" x 31" x 44"
5. **Washing Machine, 1994**  
detail
6. **Wash Tub, 1994**  
galvanized steel, pneumatic wheel  
24" x 26" x 54"
7. **Big Iron, 1994**  
wood, graphite, steel, casters  
44" x 20" x 78"
8. **Sensible Coat, 1992**  
100% unknown fibres, steel hanger, mdf  
48" x 48" x 6"  
  
**Sensible Shoes, 1993**  
wax, mdf, steel  
6" x 11" x 16"
9. **Sensible Coat, 1992**  
detail

SLIDES OF THE EXHIBITION  
CONTINUED

10. **Household Armour, 1993**  
steel mail, steel hanger mdf  
48" x 36" x 16"
  
- Cruel Shoes, 1993**  
lead, mdf, steel  
6" x 11" x 16"
  
11. **Cruel Shoes, 1993**  
detail
  
12. **Laundry Baskets, 1994**  
wool blankets, foam, mdf  
26" x 38" x 18" each
  
13. **Multipurpose Ironing Board - 2 1/2 d Model, 1993**  
cardboard, ink, string, steel coat hooks  
80" x 66" x 16"
  
14. **Washing Machine - 2 1/2 d Model, 1994**  
cardboard, ink, steel  
54" x 42" x 30"

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