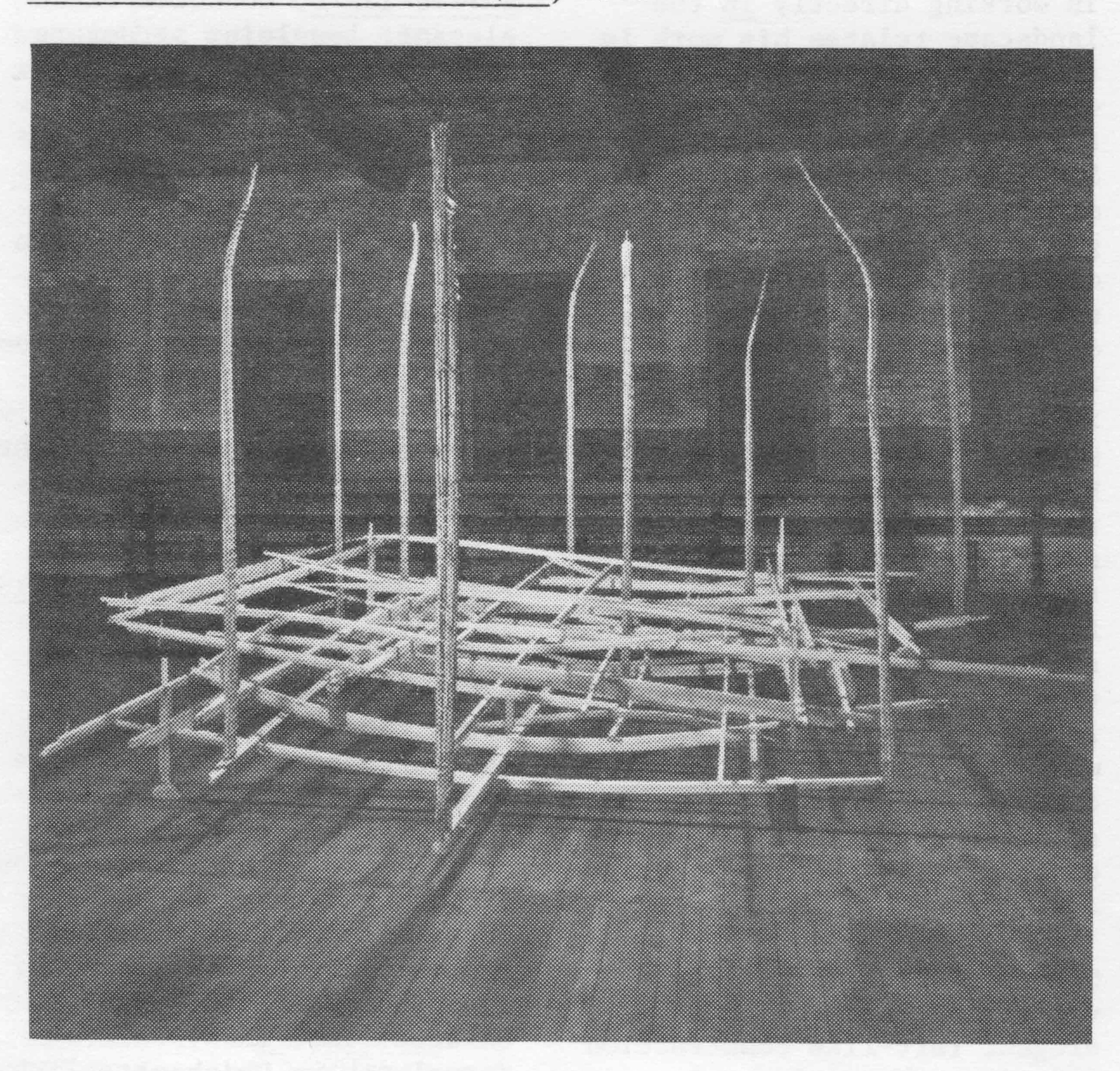
First Gate Ritual Series 10/78, 1978



Michael Singer's sculptures are a result of his response to nature. Singer's outdoor works -- until recently, perhaps, his best known--consist of light-weight materials such as bamboo, phragmites (marsh reeds), saplings, twigs, wood and stones lashed together and intricately balanced into configurations which enhance an appreciation of the remote landscapes into which they are placed. Singer's interest in working directly in the landscape relates his work in a broad sense to the Earthwork genre within contemporary sculpture. What characterizes Singer's approach from that of others working within this genre is his interest in drawing attention to the visual subtleties and processes of the environment without imposing upon or restructuring it to any significant degree. Singer's outdoor projects bear such an intimate relationship with their environment that they are at times barely distinguishable from it. They are in direct contrast to the radical alteration of the landscape which resulted from numerous Earthwork projects, as well as from outdoor sculpture in general-so often characterized by its contrast with the landscape.

Singer's works have taken a variety of forms, such as an elegant raft-like construction poised on the surface of a secluded pond and a 70-foot grid of reeds hovering slightly atop a grassy marsh. These works literally interact with the elements of their surroundings, often changing their formal character in response to water, wind and sunlight. They eventually disintegrate back into the landscape or are dismantled by the artist, leaving no trace of their existence. In recognition of his sensitivity and respect for the environment, the United States Department of the Interior and the Smithsonian Institution have sponsored major outdoor projects by Singer.

Over the past few years, Singer has concentrated on creating indoor works for several museum and gallery spaces around the country. Singer's MATRIX project, entitled First Gate Ritual Series 10/78, consists of an elegant, low-lying structure made of slendor, overlapping, and slightly bowed, wooden strips held together with dowels in a complex mesh of curved horizontals balanced a few inches off the floor on variously sized stones. Punctuating this horizontal structure are vertical bundles of phragmites which ascend approximately ten feet, subtly puncturing the stream of light which floods down from the rear skylight of Gallery 1.

First Gate Ritual Series 10/78 is a feat of actual and compositional balance, resembling a kind of intricately engineered water vehicle. Since no two component parts of the work are alike, Singer's configuration is the result of a finely adjusted distribution of weights, tensions and material densities. Singer has integrated this system of interdependent tensions and balances into an overall formal scheme which establishes a striking series of visual rhythms based on a static network of curves and countercurves. One critic aptly described these curves as "waves," creating the illusion that the entire configuration is floating in space slightly above the floor.

The essential characteristic of Singer's sculptures is the linearity and openness of their structure. His sus-

pension of linear elements in space establishes a sense of dynamic equilibrium verging on the pictorial. First Gate Ritual Series 10/78 reflects a clear understanding and extension of the concepts of spatial drawing pioneered by Alberto Giacometti, Julio Gonzales and later, David Smith. Also, like Giacometti's and Gonzales' works and Smith's earlier works, Singer's sculptures seldom slip into purely abstract configurations, but rather appear as semirepresentational forms. The vertical bunches of phragmites in First Gate Ritual Series 10/78, for example, project a strong anthropomorphic character, while the bowed, horizontal units of wood may be seen as metaphoric reference to landscape contour or moving water.

Singer's art has also been affected by Asian and Indian architecture and philosophy. An early work presented in the MATRIX/HARTFORD project at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut was titled Sangam Ritual Series 9/76. Speaking of that work Singer stated "This piece takes its name from the Sangam, a holy shrine in India where rivers join together to form one. Usually a shrine is built at this spiritual site." (MATRIX/ HARTFORD ARTIST'S SHEET #23). Similarly, in First Gate Ritual Series 10/78 the "first gate" refers to the Japanese torii, a wooden gateway at the entrance to Shinto shrines. Traditionally the Torii is characterized by a curved wooden horizontal beam.

Michael Singer was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1945. He received a B.F.A. from Cornell University in 1967 and did graduate study at Rutgers University in 1968. In the early 1970's, Singer spent much of his time in Vermont where he began to build works in remote settings and to use materials associated with nature. He received a Fellowship Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1974, and a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1976. Singer maintains studios in New York City and Northampton, Mass. and is represented by Sperone Westwater Fischer, Inc., New York.

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Works in MATRIX:

First Gate Ritual Series 10/78, 1978, stones, wood and phragmites, 9' x 13' x 15'. Lent by Sperone Westwater Fischer, Inc., New York.

Selected one-person exhibitions: Sperone Westwater Fischer, Inc., NYC '75; Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT. "Michael Singer/MATRIX 24," Sept.-Nov. '76; Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, MA, Feb.-March '77; Art Museum of South Texas, Corpus Christi, TX, July-Sept. '77; Neuberger Museum, Purchase, NY, Sept.-Dec. '77; Greenberg, NY, Nov.-Dec. '77; Portland Center for the Visual Arts, OR, May-June '79.

Selected group exhibitions: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NYC, Ten Young Artists --Theodorin Award Show '71; Finch College Museum of Art, Contemporary Wing, NY, Projected Art--Artists at Work '71; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NYC, Recent American Art '75; Nassau County Museum of Fine Arts, Roslyn, NY, Nine Sculptors: On the Ground, In the Water, Off the Wall '76; Rice University, TX, Drawing Today in New York '76; Kassel, Germany, Documenta 6 '77; Bear Mountain Inn, NY, Artists in Residence 1975, 1976, 1977 '77; Hurlbutt Gallery, Greenwhich, CT, Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Richard Long, Brenda Miller, Michael Singer '78; Sperone Westwater Fischer, Inc., NYC, Drawings and Other Works on Paper '78.

Outdoor Commissions:
Pelham Bay Park, NYC (June '72), under the auspices of the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs;
Saratoga Center for the Performing Arts (July '73), sponsored by State University of New York; Heckscher State Park, Long Island, NY (Oct. '73), sponsored by New York State Arts Council; Everglades National Park, Homestead, FL (Jan-March '75), sponsored by National Endowment for the

Arts; Bear Mountain Interstate Park, Harriman, NY (July '75), commissioned by America the Beautiful Fund; Chesapeake Bay Center for Environmental Studies, Edgewater, MD (March '76), commissioned by the Smithsonian Institution; Nassau County Museum of Fine Arts, Roslyn, NY (April '76), commissioned by the museum.

Selected bibliography about Singer:

Collins, Tara. "Michael Singer," Arts, vol. 50, no. 6 (Feb. '76) p. 11.

Keller, Andrea Miller.
"Michael Singer: MATRIX 24,"
Wadsworth Atheneum (Sept. '76).

Lippard, Lucy. Bending:
Works by Michael Singer (Northampton, MA: Smith College of
Art '77).

Linker, Kate. "Michael Singer: A Position In, and On, Nature," Arts, vol. 52, no. 3 (Nov. '77) pp. 102-104.

Siegel, Jeanne. "Notes on the State of Outdoor Sculpture at Documenta 6," Arts, vol. 52, no. 3 (Nov. '77) p. 132.

Forgey, Benjamin. "Art Out of Nature Which is About Nothing But Nature,"

Smithsonian, vol. 8, no. 10

(Jan. '78) pp. 62-69.

Sheffield, Margaret.
"Natural Structures: Michael Singer's Sculpture and Drawings," Artforum, vol. 17 no. 6 (Feb. '79) pp. 48-51.

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