

NEW YORK REVIEWS

Up Now

Chen Zhen

P.S.1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER  
Through June 16

Shanghai-born artist Chen Zhen, who died of a blood disease in 2000 at the age of 45, is the subject of this impressive tribute exhibition, consisting of installations, sculptures, and drawings from 1997 until his death. Intimate and detached, familiar and exotic, the works here adroitly cross-reference cultures from ancient Chinese rituals to contemporary hybrid genres.

P.S.1's grandest room is dominated by the monumental *Jue Chang—Fifty Strokes to Each* (1998). The installation, first presented at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, is based on Buddhist and Chinese practices, and is the centerpiece of the show. Here, Chen improvised drums by stretching animal hides over more than 100 chairs, stools, and beds collected from all over the world. He then strung these "drums" onto an enormous open weathered-wood frame, reminiscent of market stalls. Viewers are invited to bang away, using sticks supplied for that purpose. The thunderous din that results serves as both Asian-style jam session and communal therapy.

The late works reverberate with intimations of mortality. *Black Broom* (2000) transmogrifies a household implement into an outsize object of menace, its bristles replaced by intravenous tubing and hypodermic needles—intrusive Western methods as opposed to traditional Chinese medicine. *Crystal Landscape of Inner Body* (2000) suggests a portrait of the body, Western-style. Made of clear glass blown into the shapes of internal organs and bones, the objects are spread randomly over a glass table as if postautopsy. Disconnected and decontextualized, their fragility is a reminder of the body's vulnerability. The sculpture *Inner Body Landscape* (2000), consisting of a multitude of candles, where candles symbolize individual lives, is a more generalized but interconnected landscape of the body and stands for a Chinese point of view.

*Zen Garden* (2000), one of Chen's last works and unrealized, is represented by a maquette and drawings. Large illuminated alabaster organs pierced by surgical instruments were planned for the center of a garden and seem curiously at odds with the site's meditative purpose. Like most of the show, this work transfixes and discomfits, a fitting response to an artist who reveled in paradox.

—Lilly Wei

Jorge Oteiza

HAIM CHANIN  
Through May 31

A singular event: the first New York show of a major Spanish modernist sculptor, Jorge Oteiza, born in the Basque country in 1908. The eleven pieces presented here date from the 1950s and the 1970s and are accompanied by six constructivist collages from the 1940s. So, while this is in no sense a retrospective panorama of Oteiza's career, it is a fascinating glimpse into at least two decades of his production.

The final liberation of sculpture from monumentality and commemoration took place during the first decades of the 20th century, thanks to the connection between Picasso and the man who taught him how to work metal with an acetylene torch, Julio González. It is true that Daumier, Degas, and Rodin (among others) had begun to free sculpture from pedestals, but it was really the great modernists, Alexander Calder especially, who caused sculpture to be reborn.

Oteiza's work derives from that early sculptural revolt, because it puts into practice a modernist esthetic concept: drawing in space. The point of Oteiza's sculpture is not to invade and occupy space but to define it, make it visible by surrounding it with a solid yet ethereal shell.

The perfect example of this idea is *Tribute to Leonardo* (1958), a work in iron from Oteiza's "Metaphysical Boxes" series. At first glance we are inclined to link it to a Minimalist block, but then we see that its seams are left open. We are invited to look inside, where we discover not darkness but light made visible. Oteiza's box is not a container but a fence.

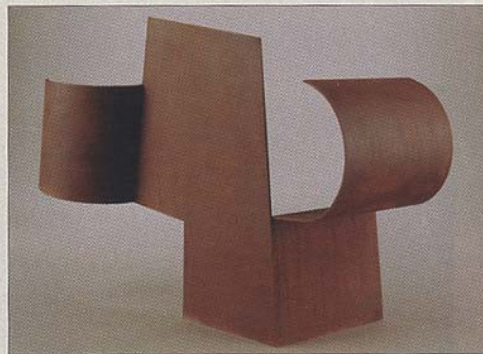
The antithesis of Oteiza's metaphysical box would be *Homenaje a Galíndez* (Tribute to Galíndez, 1957–58), an "open" iron piece. The effect here can be seen as analogous to what happens in certain Gestalt drawings: our minds supply the missing lines. Here we have a sculpture, a physical presence, that represents a physical absence—the sphere that takes shape through our imagination.

This is the effect Oteiza achieves in all of the pieces here, the paradoxical representation of absence through presence and presence through absence.

—Alfred Mac Adam



Chen Zhen, *Jue Chang—Fifty Strokes to Each*, 1998, mixed media, 8' x 32' x 33'. P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center.



Jorge Oteiza, *Homenaje a Galíndez* (Tribute to Galíndez), 1957–58, iron, 14 1/4" x 32 1/4" x 13 3/4". Haim Chanin.