

LARRY BELL: Early Work



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Front Cover:

Larry Bell, War Babies, 1962

Photo by Jerry McMillan



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LARRY BELL

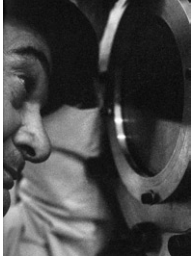


Larry Bell's innovative sculptural work is integral to the development of the clean, clear look of Los Angeles art. Significantly, several series of paintings preceded the artist's well-known cubes and environments of the later 1960s. These early works, from the years 1959 to 1963, show a progression from paintings influenced by Abstract Expressionism, to early shaped canvases, to Bell's incorporation of geometric form within paintings.

Bell's inquiry was driven by his sense that the image should relate directly to the plane of the canvas. In these early works, Bell focused on visual perception and his questions led him to eliminate distractions such as gesture and tactile layering of paint. That focus on planes and the reduction of gesture meant that the image could suggest volume. In a work from 1961, *Untitled*, Bell introduces the illusion of a sculptural volume as well as the use of mirrored glass. Other pieces included in the exhibit employ glass, wood and paint and demonstrate the artist's interest in the medium of reflected light.

As Michele De Angelus has summarized, "... Bell expanded the two-dimensional illusion of a geometric form into actual space: his canvases became thick panels with the addition of clear and opaque, black and white glass and mirrors."

Frank Lloyd



Of Months Of Thought

Painting was a way of training for intuitive thinking. There was only one goal, that whatever I make is interesting and should make me feel good.

Starting with paint, brush and canvas I tried to find an image that was distinctly different from my immediate peers. I was influenced by the works of artists from the Abstract Expressionist movement, especially Willem de Kooning. I realized that every one of my peers and teachers were influenced by him also.

The early works in the show seem “in perspective” to be very clear of his influence. I had a strong desire to control the space of the image I was working on with the manipulation of paint strokes made by wide brushes.

It seemed to me that the image should relate directly to the plane of the canvas I was working on. A canvas that was square should have an image that was in some way related to the square. A rectangular canvas needed an image that was related to that shape and so forth. Eventually, I got bored with the limitations of the surface and the architecture of the substrate. The dilemma was: where do I go from here?

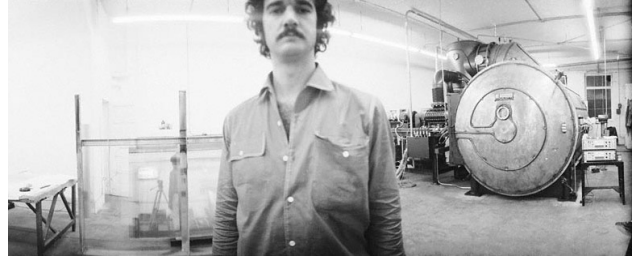
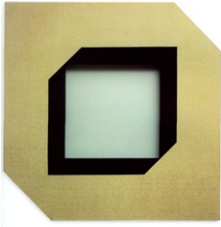


As the compositions got more organized and the brush strokes more even, I decided to eliminate a lot of the gestural aspects and textured layering of the paint. The intrusions of the texture of the brush in the paint became a distraction.

I had decided that the image of the square or rectangle could be suggested to have a three-dimensional quality to them. Simply put: the image could suggest a volume. One volume, with one color of paint, on one color of canvas. It was important that the color of the cotton canvas have as dramatic a presence as the color of the paint.

One other thought occurred to me about this: Why not make the canvas plane suggest the volume, and paint a variation of the volume with one color on the surface? After making a small series of variations, I found myself with limited resources to continue.

I realized that by looking at these constantly shifting images (simple image on simple form) that the walls had entered the study also. As I became more concerned about the finish of the edges of the canvas, my eye was forced to look at the wall immediately present. The dimension of everything had just changed in my head.



Several works in this show include an effort to see into the piece and include the wall behind as a symmetrical bonding to the space the works are presented. *Conrad Hawk* is one of the first manifestations of that thought. A volume, within a volume that one could look into, and find another volume is made by the wall itself.

Ultimately an illusion of a volume is a limitation in itself. An illusion will only be just that: “an illusion.” I decided to move away from the wall as in painting, and make volumes that had weight and mass as part of the presence of the volume. All of a sudden the work had taken me from painting of illusion to sculpture. I chose to eliminate the canvas and make volumes out of glass.

The first sculptures in glass were “tesseract” shaped constructions; they resembled the shape of the canvas but had the three-dimensional reference to a cube volume. They were also incredibly heavy. Mirrors played a big role in this work. I liked the fact that the light was reflected back directly to the viewer, leaving a blank or empty space where the construction stood. It was a painful job to make the mirrors do what I wanted. I had to find another way to get the glass to be reflective on both sides of a single piece

of glass. When I learned about a coating technique called “Vacuum Deposition of Thin Films,” my studio life changed drastically.

After experimenting with the process with a company that did it, I decided to acquire this kind of equipment and learn to do the process myself. It was a serious commitment, probably the biggest commitment I would make after deciding to be an artist in the first place.

Most of my associates thought I was crazy to go to such ends just to work, but I was on a path that I felt needed total control of the media of working with light and its interface with the surface of the glass. By this time, I was aware that my media had more to do with the interface than it did with the glass material. Glass had three qualities that were interesting to me: it transmitted, reflected, and absorbed light at the same time.

By changing the nature of any of those three qualities it was possible to do an infinite number of variations to get an equally infinite number of results to work with. The thin film process only changed the nature of the light and not the nature of the surface. It still looked like a piece of glass.

Larry Bell



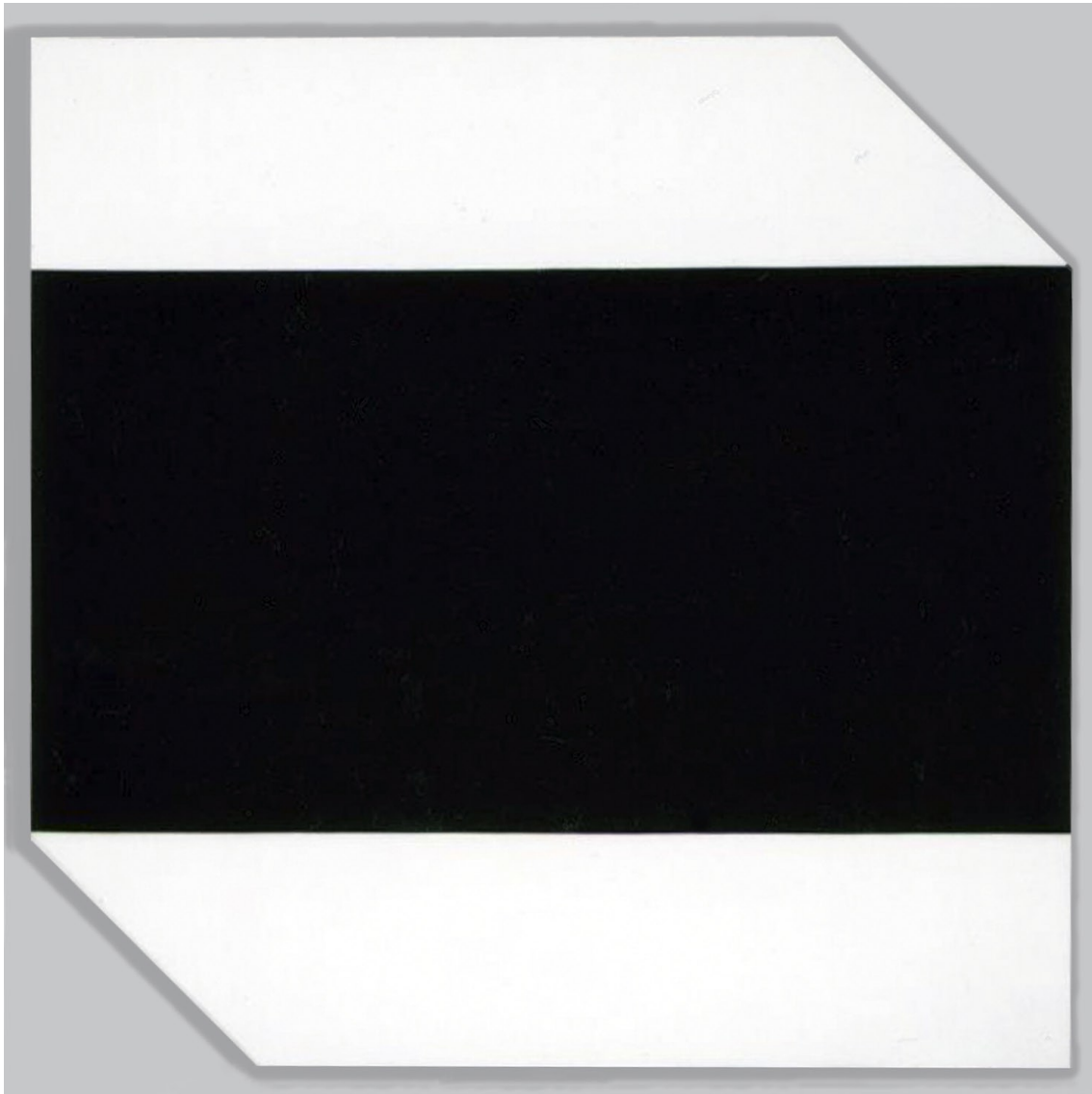
L. Bell's House, 1959
oil on canvas
48 x 60 inches
Private Collection



Untitled, 1959
oil on canvas
39 ½ x 39 ½ inches



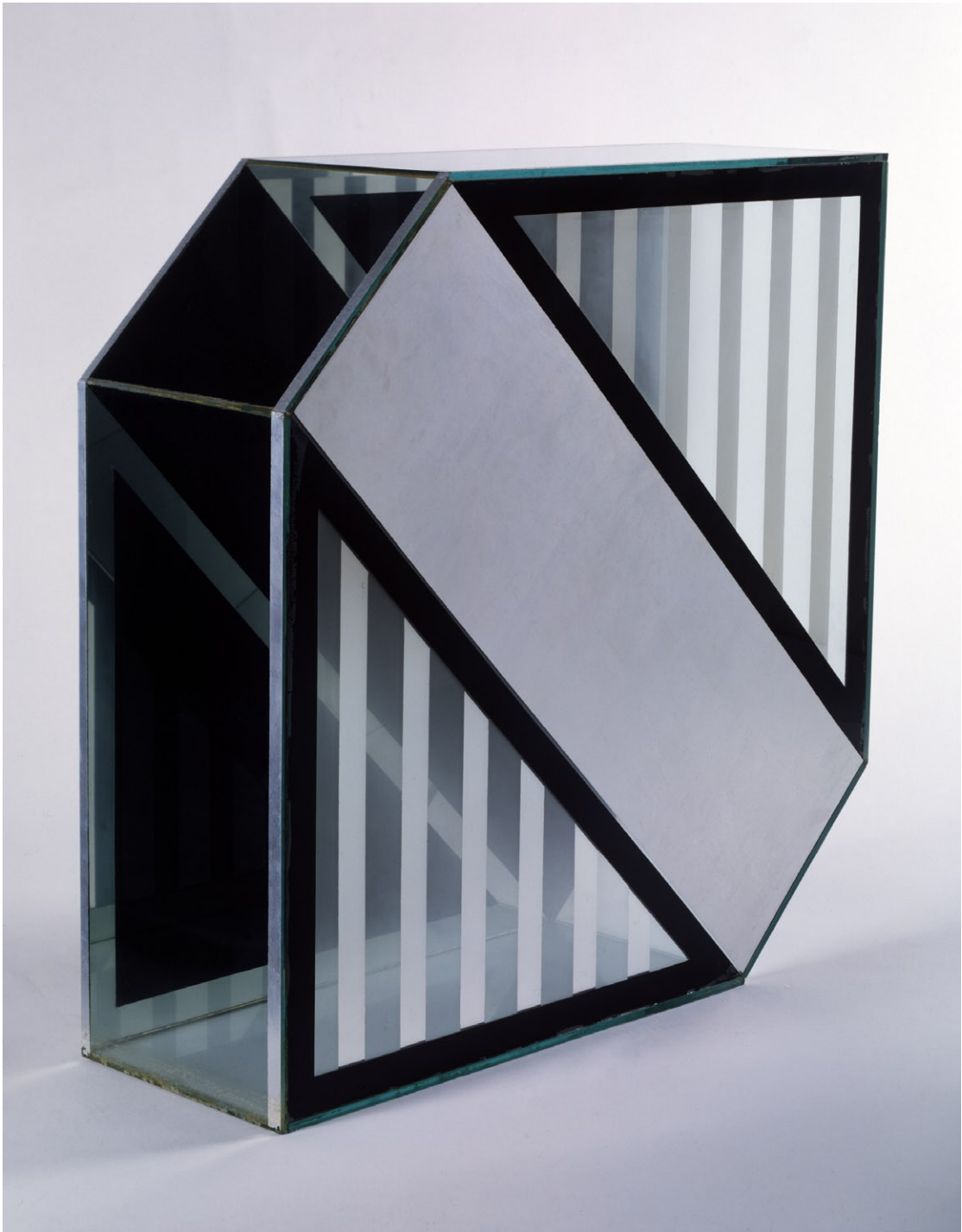
Untitled, 1960
mixed media, acrylic on paper
26 x 36 x 2 inches
Private Collection



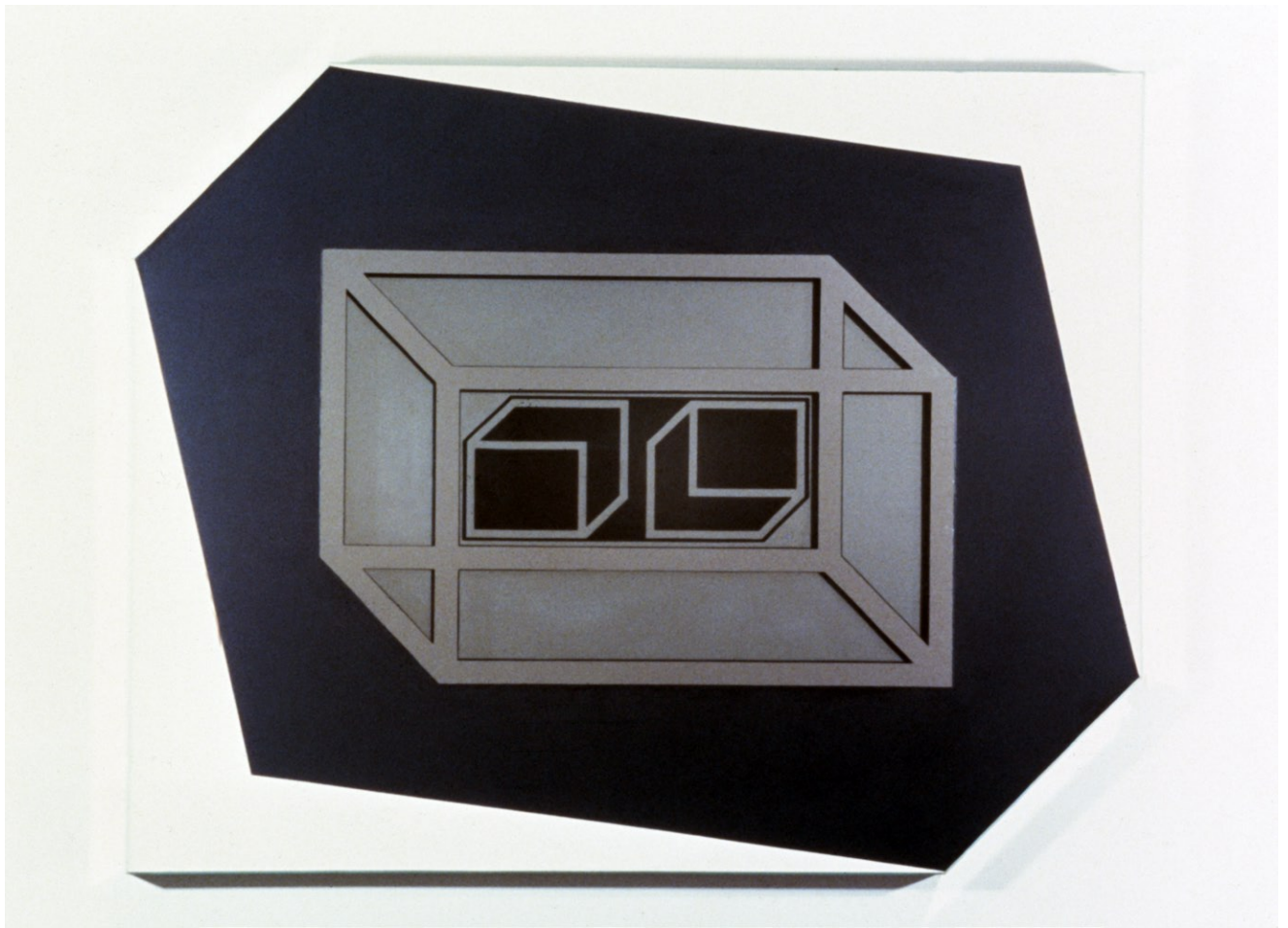
My Montauk, 1960
acrylic on canvas
66 x 66 inches



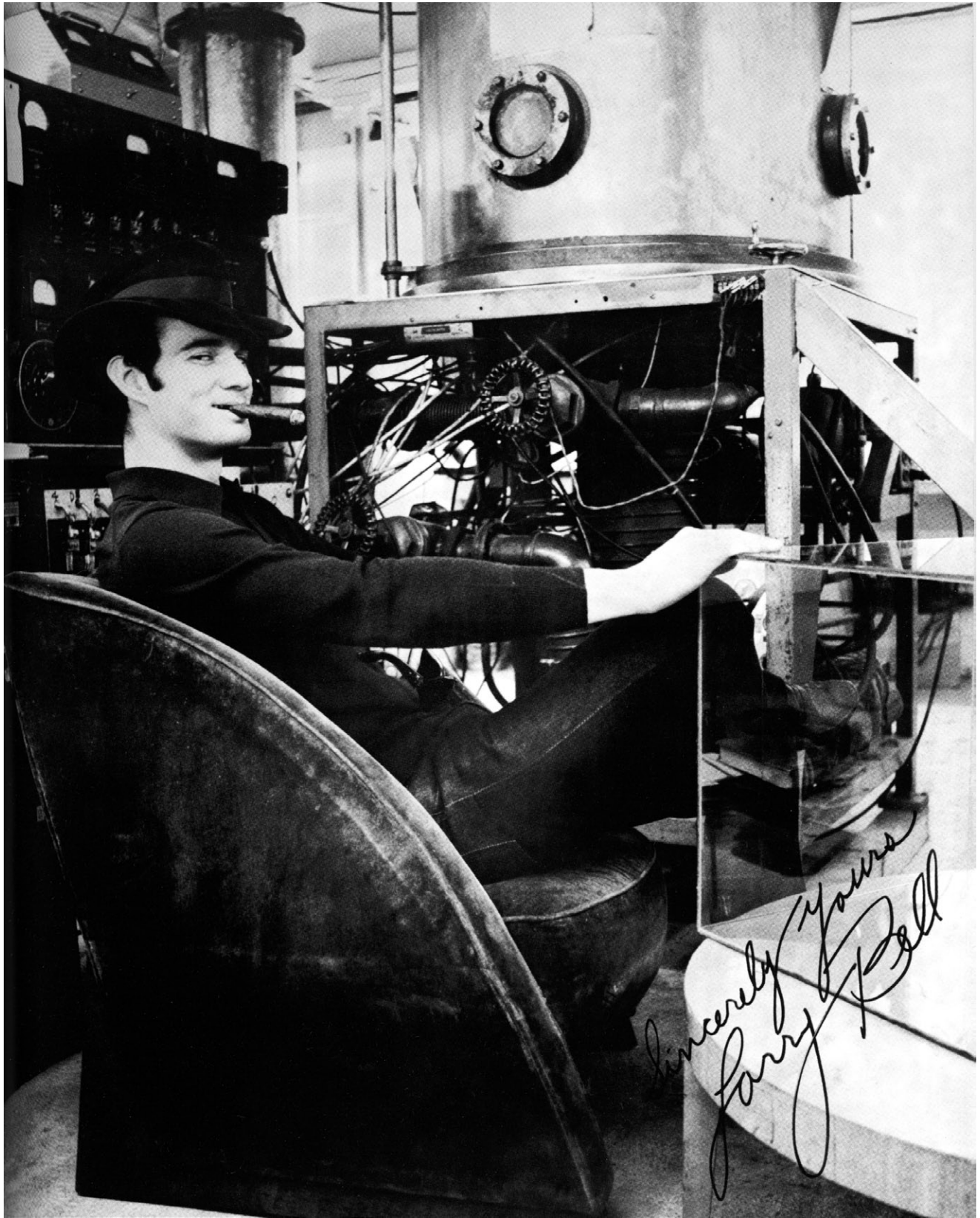
Untitled, 1961
Mirrored glass, wood, paint
12 x 12 x 5 inches



The Aquarium, 1962-1963
mirror, glass, paint, silver leaf
24 x 24 x 8 inches



Untitled, 1962
mirror, acrylic & canvas
53 x 66 x 3 inches



LARRY BELL

1939 Born in Chicago, Illinois
Lives and works in Taos, New Mexico and Venice, California

One Person Exhibitions

- 2011 *Early Work*, Frank Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica, California
Larry Bell: In Perspective, Carré d'Art-Musée d'art contemporain, Nîmes, France
- 2010 *Portraits of Joan: New Collages*, Frank Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica, California
- 2008 *New Small Works*, Bernard Jacobson Gallery, London, England
New Works on Paper, Logan Fine Arts, Houston, Texas
New Small Works, Jacobson Howard Gallery, New York
New Works, Seiler + Mosseri-Marlio Galerie AG, Zurich, Switzerland
Works on Paper, Frank Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica, California
- 2007 *New Work*, Haines Gallery, San Francisco, California
New Sculpture, Danese Gallery, New York
Bernard Jacobson Gallery, London, England
- 2006 Frank Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica, California
Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris, France
Annandale Galleries, Sydney, Australia
- 2005 Alan Koppel Gallery, Chicago, Illinois
McClain Gallery, Houston, Texas
Jacobson Howard Gallery, New York
Pace / Wildenstein, New York
Bernard Jacobson Gallery, London, England
- 2003 St. John's College Art Gallery, Santa Fe, New Mexico
- 2002 Roswell Museum & Art Center, New Mexico
Kiyo Higashi Gallery, Los Angeles, California
SkoRidder AS, Oslo, Norway
- 2001 Gallery Gan, Tokyo, Japan
- 2000 Larry Bell Annex/New Directions Gallery
Center Galleries, Center for Creative Studies, Detroit, Michigan
- 1999 Museum Moderner Kunst Landkreis Cuxhaven, Ottendorf, Germany
Wood Street Galleries, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
- 1998 Seljord Art Association, Seljord, Norway
Bergen Kunstmuseum, Bergen, Norway
- 1997 Reykjavik Municipal Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland
The Albuquerque Museum, Albuquerque, New Mexico

- 1996 Art et Industrie Gallery, New York
Braunstein/Quay Gallery, San Francisco, California
- 1995 Indigo Gallery, Boca Raton, Florida
Denver Museum of Art, Close Range Gallery, Denver, Colorado
- 1994 Kiyo Higashi Gallery, Los Angeles, California
Braunstein/Quay Gallery, San Francisco, California
- 1993 New Directions Gallery, Taos, New Mexico
Kiyo Higashi Gallery, Los Angeles, California
- 1992 Tampa Museum of Art, Tampa, Florida
Kiyo Higashi Gallery, Los Angeles, California
Janus Gallery, Santa Fe, New Mexico
- 1991 Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York
Tucson Museum of Art, Tucson, Arizona
Braunstein/Quay Gallery, San Francisco, California
New Directions Gallery, Taos, New Mexico
- 1990 Galerie Montenay, Paris, France
San Antonio Art Insitute, San Antonio, Texas
Galerie Rolf Ricke, Köln, Germany
Kiyo Higashi Gallery, Los Angeles, California
- 1989 Musée d'Art Contemporain, Lyon, France
New Directions Gallery, Taos, New Mexico
Kiyo Higashi Gallery, Los Angeles, California
- 1988 Gemini Editions Limited, Los Angeles, California
High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia
Laguna Art Museum, Laguna Beach, California
Kiyo Higashi Gallery, Los Angeles, California
- 1987 Galerie Gilbert Brownstone & Cie, Paris, France
Kiyo Higashi Gallery, Los Angeles, California
- 1986 Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, California
Amarillo Art Center, Amarillo, Texas
Boise Gallery of Art, Boise, Idaho
- 1985 L.A. Louver Gallery, Venice, California
Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, California
- 1984 Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, Colorado Springs, Colorado
- 1983 Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, Lincoln, Nebraska
ARCO Center for Visual Arts, Los Angeles, California
- 1982 Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan
Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Marion Goodman Gallery, New York
Museum of Fine Arts Santa Fe, New Mexico

- Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, California
- 1981 The Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, New York
L.A. Louver Gallery, Venice, California
Tally Richards Gallery of Contemporary Art, Taos, New Mexico
- 1980 Tally Richards Gallery of Contemporary Art, Taos, New Mexico
- 1979 Multiples Gallery, New York
Sebastian-Moore Gallery, Denver, Colorado
Janus Gallery, Venice, California
Marion Goodman Gallery, New York
- 1977 Hayden Gallery, M.I.T., Cambridge, Massachusetts
- 1975 Fort Worth Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas
Tally Richards Gallery of Contemporary Art, Taos, New Mexico
- 1974 Marlborough Art Gallery, Rome, Italy
- 1973 Oakland Museum of Art, Oakland, California
Bonython Gallery, Sydney, Australia
Pace Gallery, New York
- 1972 Pace Gallery, New York
Felicity Samuels Gallery, London, England
Pasadena Art Museum, Pasadena, California
Wilmaro Gallery, Denver, Colorado
- 1971 Pace Gallery, New York
Ace Gallery, Los Angeles, California
Mizuno Gallery, Los Angeles, California
Helman Gallery, Los Angeles, California
Ace Gallery, Los Angeles, California
- 1970 Pace Gallery, New York
Ace Gallery, Los Angeles, California
Galerie Rudolf Zwirner, Koln, Germany
- 1969 Mizuno Gallery, Los Angeles, California
- 1967 Galeria Ileana Sonnabend, Paris, France
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands
Pace Gallery, New York
- 1965 Pace Gallery, New York
Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles, California
- 1963 Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles, California
- 1962 Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles, California

**Museum
Collections**

- Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York
The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
Fredrick R. Weisman Collection, Los Angeles, California

Hammer Museum, University of California, Los Angeles, California
Laguna Art Museum, Laguna Beach, California
Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, California
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California
The Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark
Mark Taper Forum, Los Angeles, California
Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, California
Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, California
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York
Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, California
Oakland Museum of California, Oakland, California
Orange County Museum of Art, Newport, California
Philip Morris Foundation
Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Arizona
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, California
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, California
Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, Washington
The Tate Gallery, London, England
University of New Mexico Art Museum, Santa Fe, New Mexico
The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota
The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York

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