

DANN NARDI

MIDDLE GROUND



# ABOVE and BELOW

The spiral form indicates either energy turning inward or energy streaming outward. Push the vortex of the spiral away from its outer arm to create a cone. The tip of a cone is able to withstand and to exert tremendous force because its strength is concentrated at the narrow end. The cone is one of the most stable structures known. Like the spiral, the hollow cone gathers and condenses energy or disperses energy outward. The cone, triangle and pyramid share similar physical properties and are symbols of stability, universality and timelessness.

In our disruptive environment we often seek experiences that "ground" us, by focusing and stabilizing our energy. This grounding experience is vital for change, creativity and evolution in that it leaves us open to respond completely to our immediate environment. Stability and harmony are not realized through resisting change, but result from possessing the strength and ability to respond creatively to our surroundings.

With respect to these aspects of existence artist Dann Nardi creates environments of quiet yet dynamic stability. His public spaces provide a respite from the bombardment of conflicting forces that permeate both our inner and outer worlds. They not only shape the environment but are designed to influence our mental and physical activity while within this environment.

Nardi considers the original function of a public space and how he might alter and enhance its function. He evaluates a space according to the environmental, architectural, and social relationships that already exist and that may be possible within that space. The artist then integrates his aesthetic concepts into sculptures designed for specific sites and communities of people.

Nardi's architectonic environments seem to gather, shape and redirect energy as well as offer tactile sensation through their finely handworked surfaces. They absorb, alter and reflect light with subtle complexity. Their material and formal construction express qualities both ancient and futuristic and their scale and arrangement invite human participation. Within the generic space of University Galleries, Nardi uncovered a rich source for exploring human interaction and the function of art as public space.

Debra Risberg  
Curator







## Dann Nardi: Dichotomies, Differences, and in Between...

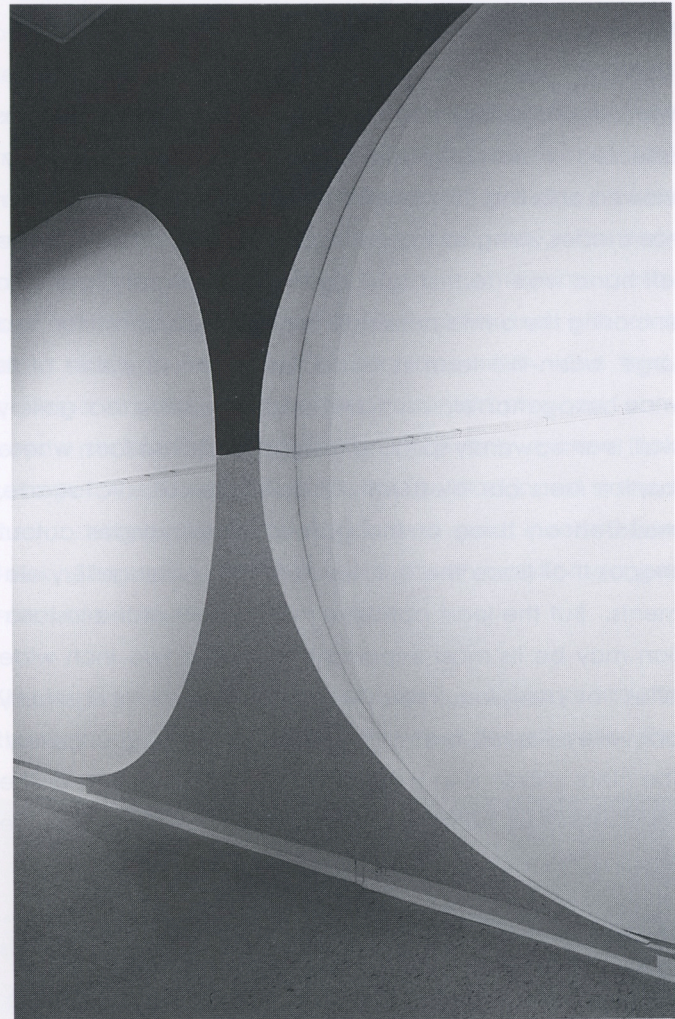
by Buzz Spector

Characterized by a subtle elegance of materiality and form, Dann Nardi's sculpture resonates at second glance. Using commonplace materials deployed in a simple structural syntax, Nardi's work doesn't scream for our attention, but viewers receptive to its quietude encounter an art of elemental dignity and unexpected emotional impact.

The industrial and architectural references in Nardi's art would seem to ally it to the Minimalist work of Richard Serra or the late Donald Judd. But Nardi is less interested in rigorous intellectual systems than in the ways his sculptural practices may instigate visual pleasure. His art shows considerable awareness of critical-theoretical discourse, but its main purpose isn't to illustrate that discourse. In a recent interview, the artist emphasized the nature of this distinction: "I don't see [my work] as intellectualized, but it is smart work." Nardi's work employs dichotomies of form and structure—inside, outside; lightness, heaviness; and indeed, light, dark—that comment, through the technical ironies of their utilization, on a range of social circumstances whose existential proportions could be seen as similar to those of the sculpture.

*Middle Ground*, Nardi's exhibition at the Illinois State University Galleries, is a project in two parts. One compo-

Left: **Four Brothers**, wood and mixed materials, each: 12.5'H x 8'diameter, 1994-95



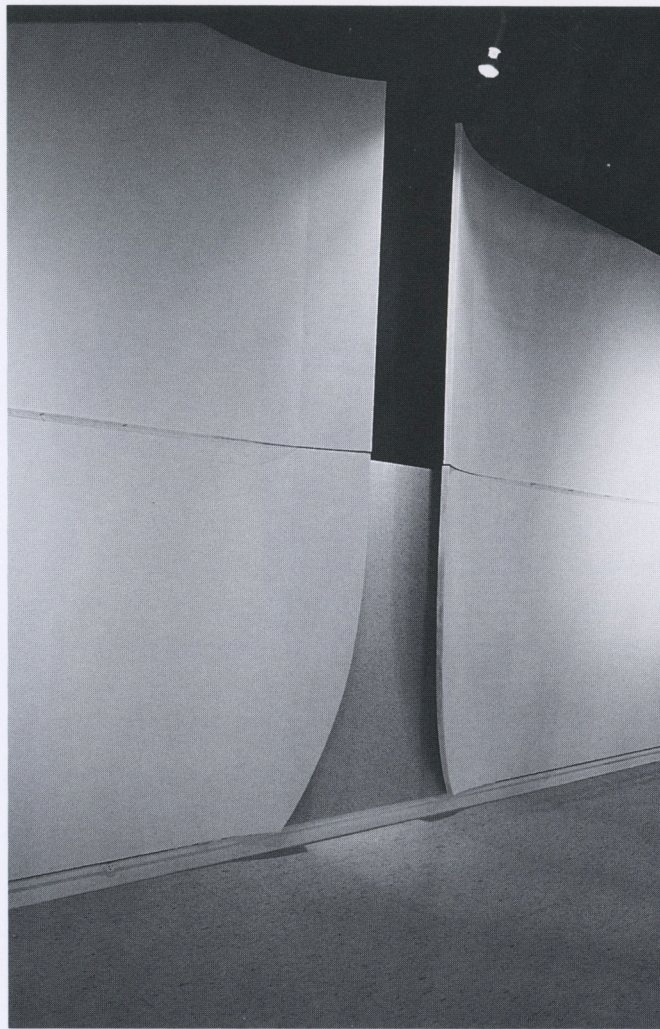
Wall installation, *Middle Ground*



ment is a survey of the artist's public art commissions and related outdoor works, documented through photographs, drawings, maquettes, and text. The other part of the exhibit is a site-specific installation that summarizes Nardi's artistic and philosophical concerns to date.

With a few alterations to the interior architecture, Nardi has affected a dramatic transformation of the main gallery. Viewers entering the room encounter a row of four columnar shapes, rising to the ceiling, positioned parallel to the left hand wall. To the right, on the floor near the partition enclosing the artist's public art project documentation, is a large, basin-like form in wood, resting on one side of its wide hexagonal rim. Also to the right, near the rear gallery wall, is an upwardly spiraling wooden staircase form whose traylike risers are filled with fertile black soil. A façade, mounted on three of the gallery walls, includes cutout shapes that trace the outlines of Nardi's other gallery elements. But the least obtrusive component of the installation may be its most important aspect: a two-inch wide "shelf" of plexiglass, mounted by one edge and slightly above eye-level, that runs the perimeter of the gallery. The clear plastic strip is mounted so that the words of the text printed by hand in black ink into its surface can be read by the shadows they cast on the wall below.

Beginning as if in the middle of a sentence, the words Nardi has written for *Middle Ground* comprise a poetic narrative of the experiences and values that shape the artist's personal vision. Nardi's absorption with "the gray



Wall installation, *Middle Ground*





*Rise And Fall* in foreground, *Four Brothers* in background



AND AS I WORK I THINK OF THESE THINGS,  
AND AS I WORK I THINK OF THESE THINGS,

THOSE THAT REMAIN, THOSE THAT RETURN,  
THOSE THAT REMAIN, THOSE THAT RETURN.

IT IS NOT NECESSARILY LINEAR THINKING,  
IT IS NOT NECESSARILY LINEAR THINKING,

IT IS MORE LIKE CIRCULAR FEELING.  
IT IS MORE LIKE CIRCULAR FEELING.

I AM HAUNTED (IN A WAY) BY THE GRAY AREA,  
I AM HAUNTED (IN A WAY) BY THE GRAY AREA,

THE LOCATION THAT EXISTS AND IS CREATED BETWEEN THINGS,  
THE LOCATION THAT EXISTS AND IS CREATED BETWEEN THINGS,

THIS SPACE WHICH OCCUPIES THE MIDDLE,  
THIS SPACE WHICH OCCUPIES THE MIDDLE,

AND RIDES THE LINE BETWEEN THE TWO,  
AND RIDES THE LINE BETWEEN THE TWO.

IT IS ON ONE HAND A LOCATION OF TENSION,  
IT IS ON ONE HAND A LOCATION OF TENSION,

ON THE OTHER IT IS ONE OF SHARING.  
ON THE OTHER IT IS ONE OF SHARING.

WITHIN THIS SPACE I LOOK FOR BALANCE...  
WITHIN THIS SPACE I LOOK FOR BALANCE...

FOR SYMMETRY ... AND I THINK ABOUT TOLERANCE,  
FOR SYMMETRY ... AND I THINK ABOUT TOLERANCE,

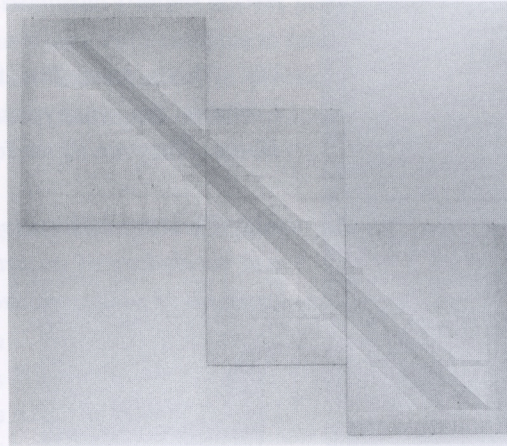
AND THOSE THINGS REGARDING LOSS AND GAIN,  
AND THOSE THINGS REGARDING LOSS AND GAIN.



I recently had the pleasure of interviewing Dann Nardi at his studio in Bloomington, Illinois. Although the visual arts inherently communicate in ways that words cannot, it is my hope that what follows will provide a further and more intimate insight into Dann's vision and process as a visual artist.<sup>1</sup>

Alison Hatcher  
April 1995

**Alison Hatcher (AH):** In the exhibition *Middle Ground* you both created a site-generated, temporary installation and exhibited the maquettes, proposals and drawings for the eight site-generated, permanent sculptures you have completed over the last thirteen years. The exhibition was an opportunity for you to alter and respond to a site, at University Galleries, Illinois State University, and at the same time demonstrate how you've responded to the permanent sites. By juxtaposing the outdoor works with the new installation, *Middle Ground*, you markedly demonstrate that your works from 1981 to the present share a formal continuity, connecting to and departing from each other. To explore your process of making site-generated sculpture, let's begin with *In Southern Crossing*, your first. This sculpture and the large studio piece, *We Are Home*, which you completed in Mattoon in 1981, continue to be benchmark works for you.<sup>2</sup> What is it about these works that continues to hold your interest?



Working drawing for *Balance of Equality*, 1991, graphite, latex on wood, 9"H x 10"W



*We Are Home*, 1981, concrete and wood, 74"H x 76"W x 38"D, Collection of the artist.

**Dann Nardi (DN):** They will always hold an emotional interest because of their place in the development of my ideas. The studio work, *We Are Home*, was really earth-moving for me. It stopped me dead in my tracks because it felt like something that was outside of me, like something that occurred through me. It offered a number of things that I wanted to take into the work that would follow it. *We Are Home* was done with one concrete form or mold. I did not have a specific idea of how high the piece would be or what configuration it would take. Things were changing daily. I wasn't waiting for the concrete to set as much as I should have. I was adding red brick dust and paint to the concrete to get the coloration. There was a lot of spontaneity within the piece.

In the interim between *We Are Home* and *In Southern Crossing*, I actually did smaller works. When you look at them, you might think the smaller pieces preceded *We Are Home*. But I jumped right to the large scale of *We Are Home* because I had to see that scale. Then after seeing it, I went back to smaller works to better figure out the concrete and the means of constructing forms which would hold up for multiple castings. By the time I did *In Southern Crossing*, only one year later, I had established better methods.





**Metiri**, 1992, concrete, earth, 5'H x 104'W x 84'D. Rhone-Poulenc Rorer, Inc., Collegeville, Pennsylvania.





*Balance of Equality*, 1991, concrete, earth, plants, 17'H x 44'W x 44'D, Martin Luther King Jr. Commons, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois





Artist working on site, constructing *Within Without*,  
University of Illinois, Chicago, Art-In-Architecture  
Program, Capital Development Board, State of  
Illinois, July, 1995.



ILLINOIS STATE  
UNIVERSITY

