YURI SCHWEBLER
THE SPIRITUAL PLANE
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Curated by John James Anderson
American University Museum
at the Katzen Arts Center
Washington, DC

ALPER INITIATIVE FOR WASHINGTON ART
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During my research on the Jefferson Place Gallery in 2016, I went on a wild lark trying to find an archive for Yuri Schwebler. That resulted in a 3,000 word essay, published on the International Sculpture Center’s blog, re:sculpt. The article almost didn’t happen, since it was roughly 2,000 words longer than they typically allowed. The web manager, Karin Jevert, fought for the article’s publication. Thanks to her efforts, the article was published, and it generated some renewed interest in Schwebler’s work.

Throughout the 1990s, Enid Sanford and a group of supporters attempted to organize a memorial exhibition after Yuri’s death. Absent a willing gallery or museum, those efforts didn’t come to fruition. It’s with great gratitude that, 30 years later, Jack Rasmussen gave it the green light: an exhibition between 2 and 3 decades. Despite the cancellation of the exhibition, due to the international pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus, I want to extend my thanks to Jack, Carla Galfano, Sarah Leary, Jessica Pochesci, Kevin Runyon, Kristi-Anne Shae, and the rest of the staff, assistants, and volunteers who would have helped make this exhibition come together had circumstances remained “normal.” Fortunately, we still have the catalog, and we have Elizabeth Cowgill to thank for that, as well as the generous support of Carolyn Small Alper whose legacy thrives through the exhibitions of Washington art that she championed.

The exhibition also would not be possible without the mindfulness of Enid Sanford and Anthony Cafritz, who have been custodians of Yuri’s work and archive these many years. The volume of material they have allows for great insight into his life and process. Thanks also to all the people who put up with my interviews and inquisitive emails to fill in the gaps, and expand the story: Henry Allen, Allen Appel, Marissa Bridge, Diane Brown, Anthony Cafritz, William Chewning, Rory Connell, Mary Connele, Alice Denney, Holly Fairbank, Nina Felshin, Lee Fleming, Ben Forgey, Gay Gladding, John Gossage, David Hamilton, Lynda Roscoe Hartigan, Frank Herrera, Joel Holub, Caroline Huber, Frederick Kellogg.
Additionally, there are a number of archives who were kind enough to explore their files on my behalf, allow me remote access to materials, or just let me in the door. These include Andreas Benedict, Lehmbueck Museum, Duisburg, Germany; Ed Cardoni, Executive Director of Hallwalls, Buffalo; Gwenlyn Coddington, College Archivist & Special Collections Librarian, McDaniel Hoover Library; Alexandra Reigle, American Art and Portrait Gallery Library; Karen Schneider, Head Librarian, Phillips Collection; Rachel Trent, Digital Service Manager, Gelman Library, George Washington University; Laura Vookles, Chair, Curatorial Department, Hudson River Museum.

Thanks to the number of individuals and institutions willing to lend work to make this exhibition a possibility: Elyse Benenson, Anthony Cafritz, Don Carren, William Chewning, Ted and Suzanne Fields, Nina Felshin, Ben Forgey, John Gossage, Lynda Roscoe Hartigan, Frank Herrara, Caroline Huber, Frederick Kellogg, Ann Klingenbrsmith at Iowa Wesleyan University, Marti Mayo, Mark Power, Paul Richard, Enid Sanford, and Alan Stone.

Thank you to Lee Fleming. Her suggestions and criticisms of the first draft strengthened the essay, because of her keen editorial eye and deep knowledge of Schwebler and his work.

And finally, thank you to Ben Forgey for contributing his remembrances of Yuri, and for his years of reporting on the work of his friend. The reporting of our art critics—in particular for this catalog, the writing of Lee Fleming, Benjamin Forgey, Paul Richard, Henry Allen, Nina Felshin, David Tannous, Tom Dowling, and Bob Arnebeck—provides the first draft of any history of art. Without art criticism, the record and importance of art will be lost. In a time when journalism is under perpetual attack, it is important to remember the value of journalism—all journalism—and how the record of our past can shape our future.
YURI SCHWEBLER: THE SPIRITUAL PLANE

By John James Anderson

IF MEMORY LINGERS: A PREFACE

Writing about Yuri Schwebler requires unwinding a messy web of facts, references, ideas, and contradictions—some of which may be apocryphal. By today’s standards, Schwebler’s early career seems an impossible rise, one that required a lot of luck and timing. Within three years of being discharged from the Army Reserves and Walter Reed’s psychiatric ward, he managed to have two museum shows and an appearance on national television—all without a college degree, much of a track record in Washington, or anywhere else for that matter. It was as if he fell to earth fully formed. Once established in Washington, he branched out with some national and international successes, thanks to a little help from friendly connections. Within a decade of arriving in Washington, he would move to New York in anticipation of a larger national launch, have a museum show, and then… disappear. A decade after leaving for New York, his name would re-emerge in Washington with the news that he was dead. A spark. A flash. Gone. An enigma.

Writing about his work, Schwebler stated that it had a “cyclic structure.” It “begins as an idea, crosses three planes of reality—the mental, the physical, the spiritual—and ends as an idea.” It was a process that could be repeated “in the memory of those who saw the artwork and were touched by it and the artist…”1

Unfortunately, 50 years after he began making work in Washington, and 30 years since his untimely death, those who saw the work have also begun slipping into the spiritual plane. His surviving works still maintain their austere beauty. However, many of his most notable pieces no longer exist, survived by photos, news accounts, and the fading memories of those who saw them. It’s only recently that Schwebler’s archive has been rediscovered, giving fresh insight into the “mental plane” of the work. While the pandemic of 2020 has prohibited the retrospective exhibition of surviving objects (physical plane), the effort of this catalog is to let the ideas of the artist and his work linger a little longer within the confines of the spiritual plane.

A CHANCE FOR REBIRTH

Schwebler was born November 21, 1942, during World War II, in Feketic, Yugoslavia, about 30 miles south of the Hungarian border in present-day Serbia. At the time, the country was occupied by Axis forces, and his father had been conscripted into the German Army. In 1944, as Russian forces moved into the region, his family fled to Germany. Captured, his father spent the next few years in a Russian work camp. When the family emigrated to Delaware in 1956, Schwebler anglicized his name to George to fit in. He learned English, and often ran away from home, hitchhiking or riding the rails, to escape his abusive father (whom he referred to as his step-father). Eventually he went into foster care, completed high school in 1962, and attended Western Maryland University in Westminster. There, Schwebler played football, wrestled, studied philosophy, and exhibited in a couple student art exhibitions. He also struck up an acquaintance with the abstract expressionist Clyfford Still, who resided nearby. Still’s advice to the young artist: go to Washington.

Schwebler was drafted into the Army Reserves in 1965, working for a time as a surveyor and a typist. By 1967 he moved to Washington, found work at the Washington Evening Star and the architecture firm Hayes, Saey, Mattern, and Mattern,
THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH

During the summer of 1971, a celebration along Washington’s “gallery row” on P Street NW featured a number of conceptual projects. Among them: sculptor David Stanton’s wooden grill with burning charcoa...
alley would fill with sunlight. Then, the light would crawl away. It's possible to think of him staring at the event with the same wonderment of a child watching a bug crawl across the ground, like seeing the world again with fresh eyes: magic!

Schwebler outlined the sun’s progress down the alley for those 52 minutes. On any other day, the celestial event would misalign. The following year on August 23, like the markings for Magnetic North, the demarcations would have worn away. As Forgey explained, “[t]he main point... is that this art is social and ethical rather than conventionally aesthetic... it mixes with life itself with little care for categories. It cannot be conventionally traded in the art marketplace, nor can it be conventionally preserved. It will last a short while, and it will last longer in the memory of those lucky enough to connect with it, but that’s about all.”

While a work like Alley might later inspire curator Walter Hopps to call Schwebler the “prince of the poets of space,” it was Magnetic North that revealed his sense of humor in the process of its making. While surveying and spray painting the word “Magnetic North” on buildings, he and his assistants wore yellow hard hats with the label ARDHATCO stenciled on them. The hardhat suggested the “workers’” authenticity, but the label was simple wordplay. Schwebler used wordplay elsewhere. For Drawing Table: Table Drawing, he drew a drafting table onto the tabletop of a drafting table. He became known for handing out pencils with the inscription “This Is Not A Drawing Tool.” With a few words he transformed the pencil from drawing tool into art object by conceptually negating its function: not a drawing tool. However, if sharpened, it would cease being an art work and become a tool once again. The same would be true of the drafting table if the tabletop were erased or smudged from use. Other wordplay was less successful, like Exact Level: Level Exact, which was little more than a level, horizontal on the wall, with the title stenciled above and below. The title played off the trademark Exact Level & Tool Mfg. Co., but who says “level exact”? Functionally it wasn’t as successful as either the pencil or table: if removed from the wall it would destroy the art object, but the level could just as easily be put back on the wall.

Forgey’s article was a gift: a quarter page tucked into the middle of the A section on a Friday night. Without the coverage it’s less likely Schwebler would have received his first gallery exhibition six months later. Max Protetch and Harold Rivkin, owners of the Protetch-Rivkin Gallery, ran the only DC space dealing primarily with conceptual art. But their gallery irked some in the community since they almost exclusively exhibited New York artists like Dennis Oppenheim, Sol Lewitt, and Vito Acconci. Corcoran director Walter Hopps suggested they show some local talent. Upon seeing Schwebler’s work, the dealers gave him carte blanche to do as he wanted for an exhibition in March 1972. The result was Tool Alchemy—Phases of the Moon, which consisted of three rectangles outlined on the floor, with a separate geometry in the center of each rectangle made from spoon-rubbed aluminum powder. Each rectangle was illuminated by a single bulb and framed by a column of eight plumb bobs descending from the ceiling. The bulb and the plumb bobs, suspended by golden cords, represented the sun’s direct light. The aluminum on the floor marked the phases of the moon: the reflected light. They were the first of several symbols Schwebler later would weave into projects when appropriate.

Also in March 1972, Forgey first wrote about Schwebler’s most audacious proposal, converting the Washington Monument into a sundial. A conceptual drawing accompanied the article. At the time, Sundial was still just a proposal; seven weeks
later it was approved by the National Capital Parks for installation the following winter.17 Two weeks after its approval, Washington Post Style writer Henry Allen wrote in greater depth about the project, including a comprehensive survey of Schwebler’s conceptual California beach series, a mention of Hair Piece, and a reference to as yet unseen sculptures of plate glass, spirit levels, and plumb bobs that sat in his yard, which Schwebler would adjust every night, like “turning up the heat in the house.”18

More eye opening were Schwebler’s quotes: “[A] Rembrandt is just an antique. The concept behind the work was forgotten centuries ago. If the concept is gone, why should the object exist? A lot of painters today are creating instant antiques.”19 This was a surprising statement from a former painter, and perhaps the underlying reason he stopped. Schwebler continued, “I want the lifetime of my objects to correspond to the lifetime of my ideas. Like chairs. When chairs lose their conceptual function—as something to sit in—we bust them up for kindling.”20 While the brash comments were an embrace of ephemeral work, an understanding that art is something that can live in the mind (perhaps only lives in the mind of the beholder), before the end of the decade it would be clear that Schwebler considered this to be one of several potential directions for his work.

PACKAGED THE RIGHT WAY
In July 1972 the Phillips Collection announced the appointment of curator Richard Friedman, formerly of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Castelli Gallery. Known for his eye for new talent, Friedman may have seen the Beverly Court exhibition at Pyramid Gallery in January 1973. An exhibition of 10 artists (Schwebler among them), it wasn’t unified by any style, but by the fact the artists all lived in the same building. One evening Schwebler surprised fellow artists and Beverly Court residents Allen Appel and Allan Bridge with the news that the new curator was coming to see their work. In the end, Friedman gave only Schwebler a show. “I packaged what I wanted to do the right way,” Schwebler recalled in a 1978 Washington Post Magazine story. “I gave the curator a new idea—put sculpture in the garden at the Phillips.”21

The inspiration for Schwebler’s Phillips Collection show was 2/3 Perfect, a simple rectangular column he had presented at Pyramid Gallery. Constructed from glass, with plumb bobs in the center, its design echoed columns within the space. “All hardness has been softened,” noted Washington art critic Paul Richard, commenting on the effect the glass had on an otherwise classical and rigid building support as it turned disappeared or appeared solid as it reflected the gallery around it.
Titled 2 as 3 Sculptures, the five sculptures Schwebler created for the Phillips Collection Garden each consisted of glass panes, most angled at 60°, held together by turnbuckles and spirit levels. Plumb bobs dangled from their apexes, or toward a base vertex. As then Corcoran curator Nina Felshin would suggest in her article for Woodwind, depending on the angle of the viewer, the triangular shapes might nearly disappear or alternatively entrap the elements of their surroundings by reflecting brick or greenery. These glass sculptures broke from the element of time implied by works like Hair Piece or Magnetic North, although Schwebler continued to explore the alchemical possibilities of light apparent in his Protetch-Rivkin show, or within Alley to Which the Sun Was Tied. Light was, after all, bending the objects surrounding the sculptures through their reflections in the glass. But a mathematical element also came into play: the “perfect number” six. “About a year ago I began consciously to determine my sculptures by numerical values as both a mathematician and alchemist would,” Schwebler wrote in the exhibition’s pamphlet.

At face value, the five sculptures in the garden seemed deliberately imperfect. “In each of the sculptures shown in the Phillips Collection garden the two sheets of glass are trying to become triangles—a series of ‘2 As 3.’” In other words: the series presented two sides of a triangle attempting to become three sides. Most obviously, the third side is completed by the spirit level in four of the five sculptures. However, this is where clever visual puns come into play. Schwebler bisected each equilateral triangle through the middle with a plumb bob. As a result, he very subtly defined two right triangles with angles of 30, 60, and 90 degrees. The two right triangles form the third equilateral triangle. The same overall design was also true in the fifth sculpture, No. 3, which consisted of two panes of glass vertically parallel to each other, with plumb bobs between them. The glass panes called attention to the vertical legs of the right triangles, defined by the plumb bobs bisecting an equilateral triangle that was defined by steel cables and the ground. “Out of weakness often comes creativity,” Schwebler wrote to conclude the essay. These multiple reads into the work certainly added intellectual heft. But they didn’t outshine the elegant beauty created from spare materials with the simplest design.

There was, of course, an additional read. These were the “yard sculptures” Henry Allen referenced in his Sundial article, and they were easily accessible and personal works for Schwebler to create. The plumb bob and spirit level were borrowed from his experiences working as a carpenter, and surveyor. The glass, however, was “borrowed” from an old People’s Drug Store scheduled to be demolished on the corner of 22nd and P Streets near Dupont Circle. Schwebler worked construction periodically with a group of other artists called Art Crew, organized by Allan Bridge. “Architects liked to work with us,” recalled Allen Appel, “because if they wrote “Do Not Remove This Wall,” on a wall where we were working, we actually didn’t remove it, where many other crews would just knock it down.” Schwebler rented a truck and suction cups to remove the windows of the abandoned store, and convinced the Art Crew to help with the heavy, difficult, and dangerous job. Technically, their acquisition was an act of theft. “Yuri later told us he had no permission, just in passing, which is the way Yuri was.”

THE FOLDED FIVE TO THE CHOPPERS

On November 3, 1972, collector and Corcoran Gallery CEO Vincent Melzac, appointed to reorganize the museum’s beleaguered finances, punched Corcoran director Gene Baro in the mouth. (Baro had been hired by Melzac to oversee the art side of the museum after Walter...
Both were soon fired for the bloody brawl, leaving Corcoran School of Art dean Roy Slade as acting director. This didn’t sit well with some artists in DC. Slade had a background in 19th-century art, and the board was interested in steering the museum away from contemporary shows. Sculptor Rockne Krebs, one of the city’s artists with a national reputation, wrote a letter of protest and withdrew from an exhibition from the gallery. As Schwebler recalled, “After the Krebs thing… I knew Slade needed friends, and I had a great idea—pyramids. I told Slade I wanted to use both atriums at the Corcoran, something no artist had ever done before.” This collaboration gave Slade leverage with local galleries, promising to show the work of area artists. All protests of his appointment blew over.

Schwebler’s vision: construct three pyramids out of brick to a height of six feet, and six smaller pyramids cast from aluminum. Both sets of pyramids were designed to the exact proportions of the pyramids at Giza, their bases predetermined by the design etched into the Corcoran’s atrium glass floor. Unfortunately, Slade calculated the 30-odd tons of bricks would collapse the floor. Schwebler had one week to consider a different material and pull the project together.

“Yuri would come up with these ideas,” Appel recalled. “Then, he almost always asked Allan Bridge how to do it.” In the case of the pyramids, Schwebler couldn’t figure out the math to construct them—ironic for a guy who was basing some of his work off of cosmologically significant mathematics. Bridge, however, was a master carpenter, and figured out the amount of wood necessary to build a hollow pyramid to the appropriate angle. He was also responsible for determining how to mix the chemicals and materials that coated the final structure. Most important, he prevented Schwebler from accidentally entombing one of the 30 assistants who came to help build the pyramids over the course of the week. (The same couldn’t be said for Slade’s chair, which lived inside a pyramid throughout the exhibition.) Nearly 50 years later, the lack of credit to Bridge, or anyone who helped Schwebler, still gets him angry, as he referred to Bridge not by name, but as “a geometrician-painter crony.”

The following month, Washington finally experienced an adequate snowfall. Schwebler and friends surveyed and plowed the 30-foot-thick blanket of snow with machines borrowed from a local construction company. With the snow, the conceptual artwork, by declaring it “not a drawing tool.” With Sundial, he was transforming the art and architecture of a monument into a tool, and by virtue of the transformation, a conceptual artwork, without directly impacting the structure or the grounds surrounding it (unlike Lita Albuquerque’s The Red Pyramid six years later, which removed turf and filled the bare ground left behind with brilliant red dry pigment to define the corners of an imaginary red pyramid buried beneath the Washington Monument). Once the snow melted, the conceptual artwork, and tool, would revert back to its origin as monument.

However, it’s likely it wasn’t the functional twist that interested him as much as the stark discovery that he wanted others to see, much like he experienced when watching sunlight fall into the alley behind his friend’s apartment. “I realized I had never seen the shadow of the Washington Monument because it was so huge,” Schwebler told CBS News. When he did see it, he stood at the end of the shadow and watched it move at a pace of four feet per minute. “You can actually see the earth move, or feel it move, as that shadow goes right along,” Schwebler concluded. Once again, with just the barest of design and using the simplest materials, he had created something magical and transformative.

For a man the Army had discharged just three years earlier because he seemed unable to keep it together, he had managed all right, at least where the art world was concerned.
In 1975, Hopps commissioned Schwebler to complete an installation for a stairwell at the National Collection of Fine Arts (now the Smithsonian American Art Museum), where he was a curator. Initially entitled Chico's Bridge, the work was never installed, possibly because the large panes of plate glass frightened the staff who might walk beneath. In 1976, Hopps tasked Schwebler and painter Michal Hunter to create a replica of the Robert Rauschenberg combine Minutiae for a PBS broadcast of a Merce Cunningham dance. Rauschenberg and Cunningham were bickering over who had ownership of the original work; Hopps commissioned the replica so that Cunningham had something to dance around on PBS, while the piece Rauschenberg created could live at the museum for a retrospective of his work.

With Hopps in Schwebler’s corner, other doors opened. In 1976 and 1977, he was invited to make site-specific sculptures at Artpark near Niagara Falls, and for the 10th Biennale of Young Artists in Paris, respectively. In both locations he would create simple and elegant installations, precisely made from the sparest of parts, and responding to their environments: to the numerous Native American tribes in western New York state, and to the lattice ironwork of the Eiffel Tower in Paris.

Artpark was founded in 1974 in honor of Robert Smithson. Schwebler’s installation, Six Sculptures Between the Numbers 3 and 4, was, again, math inspired. Consisting of six teepee-like structures, the legs of each cone were multiples of three (3, 6, 9, 12) or four (4, 8, 12). In the center of each hung a “plumb bob” of volcanic rock. While the plumb bob materials deviated from the original alchemic properties of gold and silver—light and reflected light—they had more to do with what they pointed to: the magma below the earth’s surface. It was another opportunity for Schwebler to play with the idea of cycles. Liquid magma pushed through the earth’s surface, cooled into rock, and was appropriated by the artist to use as a weight that pointed to its origin. Cycles were certainly present in other works, like Alley, Magnetic North, and Sundial, which dealt with the earth’s daily or annual rotation. Even his early beach pieces dealt with the cycles of the tide, influenced by the moon’s effect on the earth. On a long enough timeline, that volcanic rock will eventually return to the molten river from which it formed.

The Paris Biennale promoted exciting art by young artists, and Schwebler had been nominated by Hopps. He proposed suspending 12 cables from the six columns on either side of the pavilion in the Palais de Tokyo at the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. The cables would crisscross, forming an X—the Roman numeral for 10, for the 10th Biennale—and his iconic plumb bobs would dangle from their intersections. The number of intersecting cables was later revised to 10, resulting in the title Dix X—dix is the French word for 10. Although such a simple-looking project, it became the most expensive work in the underfunded biennial.

The cost is amusing, considering the piece was also a bit of a dick joke. Schwebler liked to mispronounce the work as “Dicks Itch,” perhaps playing off a stereotype of postwar relationships soldiers had with French women, or winking at his own reputation as a Lothario. It could be he just liked puns, as letters from 1976 between him and U.S. Commissioner for the Paris Biennale, Nina Felshin, referred to Artpark as “odd park,” because it was in the middle of nowhere.
RECREATION OR ANTIQUING

In September 1975, Schwebler outlined a series of works to complete in the coming months (and years). It reflected on earlier works made in California, and suggested a way of reworking earlier tool pieces. “Those pieces need to be redone because they are important in my development,” he wrote. “Instead of the funky way they were presented originally they should be presented in boxes. Tool boxes—after all they are now objects at rest now [sic].” In a way, the need to do this seemed an ironic twist to his earlier statements that railed against painters making instant antiques. For an artist who “made art that railed against painters making instant antiques. For an artist who “made art that railed against painters making instant antiques. For an artist who “made art that railed against painters making instant antiques. For an artist who “made art that railed against painters making instant antiques. For an artist who “made art that railed against painters making instant antiques. For an artist who “made art that railed against painters making instant antiques. For an artist who “made art that railed against painters making instant antiques. For an artist who “made art that railed against painters making instant antiques. For an artist who “made art that railed against painter’s making antiques,” he was by definition would interact and eventually might break the piece.

However, by his own estimation, this was an area he was still defining for himself in the early part of the 1970s. As he wrote, “Within my cyclic structure...the art work begins as an idea, crosses three planes of reality—the mental, the physical, the spiritual—and ends as an idea. A process which may be repeated continually. The six-fold metamorphosis that an artwork undergoes is illustrated in the following chart:

**MENTAL PLANE:**

**Concept—Realization (artist)**

**PHYSICAL PLANE:**

**Creation—Destruction (the thing itself)**

**PERCEPTION—Recreation (audience)**

In recreation, which takes place both in memory of those who saw the artwork and were touched by it and the artist, is the only stage where a work can have existence after it has physically disappeared. As memory fades the art idea will die with it, but if the memory lingers there is a chance for rebirth which may trigger a new chain of events.

Undoubtedly, several of Schwebler’s earlier works had Duchampian qualities, with their punning titles, or by the simple insertion of a functional tool into an art context. Yet, given the sincerity of his “Cyclical Structures Manifesto,” it’s unlikely that any effort to recreate past works, and encase them in boxes, had the cynical motivations that Duchamp presented in his Boîte-en-vale, or “box in a suitcase.” Those works contained reproductions of his earlier pieces in order to question the authenticity of the original. By contrast, Schwebler was creating coffins for old work. These pieces were recreations of the idea, not reproductions of past work. They were “objects at rest,” works in the “spiritual plane.”

It wasn’t a new process. Schwebler began boxing artifacts in 1971. The large sculpture Three Pound Stars presents a sheep comb on a scale at the base, with a plumb bob attached to the top: a Dada-esque borrowing with the golden touch of Midas dangling above. Additionally, the concept of making work that replicates an ephemeral, conceptual work was something he had done since late 1973. Around the same time he placed pyramids inside the Corcoran, the larger concept was to reconstruct a pyramid on the National Mall between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument. Although never approved (and likely never formally proposed), the goal was to raise a large silver balloon lifting four golden chords in the shape of a pyramid. A plumb bob would of course dangle through the center. Additionally, illustrations of the conceptual pyramid on the National Mall were superimposed onto a series of commercially available post cards, and later exhibited at the Jefferson Place Gallery in 1974. However, these were less like artworks in his spiritual plane and more like exhibition mementos in the gift shop.

The “Tool Boxes” finally saw an audience in Schwebler’s 1977 exhibition at Fraser’s Stable Gallery. Writing in the Washington Star, critic David Tannous said, “Schwebler plays power games with these artifacts, balancing tensions and masses, measuring lengths and forces, restraining objects and releasing them, tapping with the concept of a work’s limitations as he whips its component parts in and out of an ‘Enclosing’ box.” While some boxes neatly contained their tools, others allowed rulers and plumb bobs to break the confines of their sarcophagi. The works were charming. While each contained some assemblage of tools, many seemed like tools themselves: as if they might measure the rotation of the earth from your living room wall.

Recycling happened outside the gallery, too. By 1978, Schwebler repurposed the forms of past Phillips Collection garden sculptures for the postage stamp front lawns of the nearby homes of William Chewning and Frederick Kellogg. Chewning received two tall pink granite plinths titled Noon Mark, similar to 2 As 3 No. 1. Kellogg displayed the v-shaped Fifty-Fifty, similar in composition to 2 As 3 No. 7. Stone replaced glass, causing each work to appear heavier. Schwebler as alchemist and magician didn’t mind viewers seeing the wires, and the contrast between thick,
With the decade coming to an end, the presentation of rocks and glass seemed to close a cycle. The decade began with Schwebler on a beach, working with sand and rock. At Diane Brown Gallery, he was working with the same elements, only with the sand having been turned into glass. With the ideas contained in their boxes, Schwebler could bury them; they didn’t need to linger with him any longer. He had new ideas to consider in the new decade.

SPACE ART: ART SPACE

When Mary Connole walked into the opening of Schwebler’s last exhibition with Diane Brown in 1980, Schwebler stalked through the gallery with a six-pack of cheap beer clinging to his belt. As the bartender at Columbia Station, she had gotten to know Schwebler well, and they became friends. He looked at her with a twinkle in his eye and an impish smile. “It was a sort of, ‘can you believe this?’,” she recalled.43

A decade creating site-specific works and installations eventually led to commissions, both in the front yards of DC residents and for communities in Europe. Past conceptual projects had been transformed into intimate Cornell-like boxes of rocks, glass, and mirrors, which Diane Brown had previously exhibited and sold. Their predecessors—“Tool Boxes”—boxes with rulers and plumb bobs—were also highly coveted at Fraser’s Stable. For this last exhibition at Diane Brown, Schwebler presented the contraptions used by sculptors to scale models of the head, body, and horse. Similar devices were used in ateliers dating back centuries, as Schwebler visually noted in The Scale of Man, which included an armature designed to look like Michelangelo’s David. Another Renaissance nod was included with the piece The Scale of the Horse which positioned a drawing of a horse’s skeleton—vaguely reminiscent of Leonardo’s great (and never completed) equestrian monument for Ludovico Sforza—on the wall behind the scale. Clearly, these tableaus still possessed some of the same DNA of earlier pieces—the artist’s tools in a defined space. While the tool boxes had Duchampian and Dadaist qualities transforming the everyday object into a work of art, these were a step beyond. The gallery setup suggested a conceptual albeit “working” sculpture studio, with its many components. Schwebler was making sculptures of the things that helped figurative sculptors make figurative sculptures. “It seemed to be punching holes in the establishment of the art community.” Connole thought, aware that although Schwebler liked the attention and celebration of an opening, he also disdained some of its pretensions. Despite the commercially successful and covetable boxes of his recent exhibitions, in the service of moving his work in a new direction, he had deliberately created works that were impossible to sell. “A lot of the art at that time was a sort of, ‘fuck you.’”44

Forgy, who liked the work, called it something else: schoolmasterish, like being lectured to. “This is perhaps another way of saying that the piece does not quite attain that magical presence, that necessary interaction between space and object, that characterizes Schwebler’s best works…”45 At the time it may have been unclear how far Schwebler would take the work, but it became clear what direction the work would take Schwebler: he was headed north. There was an exhibition on the horizon.

The previous summer, while attending a residency in Paris through the Georges Pompidou Foundation, supported by the Menil family foundation (another Hopps connection), Schwebler communicated with Richard Koshalek, director of the Hudson River Museum, about having an exhibition. The two met years earlier, when Koshalek was working in Washington with the National Endowment for the Arts. Since becoming director, his goals for the under water museum were to make it solvent, ask Red Grooms to redesign the book store, and bring innovative contemporary artists in to exhibit.46
The idea he proposed to Koshalek became The Studio. Building on the concept behind the Diane Brown Gallery exhibit and informed by documentary photographs, Schwebler would reconstruct the chaotic space of Alexander Calder, the controlled environment of Mondrian, the tight quarters of Giacometti’s Table, the bulky objects and tools of Brancusi, and the improvised working conditions David Smith encountered in Volt, Italy. These tableaus represented the “materials of the studio.” Recent works from the Diane Brown exhibition would represent the “tools of the studio.” Older works—like Drawing Table: Table Drawing—and others in progress would represent the “structures of the studio.” Included with the exhibition was a dance by Holly Fairbank, titled Shared Space, a performance piece echoing what dance troupes often did throughout the city: share space with artists to rehearse. Undoubtedly, Schwebler’s experience reconstructing Rauschenberg’s Minutiae, at the Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, NY, (Nov. 15, 1981–Jan. 10, 1982), cast: T. Cummings, H. Fairbank, P. Miller, M. VanVort. Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, NY, (Nov. 15, 1981–Jan. 10, 1982), cast: T. Cummings, H. Fairbank, P. Miller, M. VanVort.

To complete the project, Schwebler left DC for New York, and moved in with Allan Bridge. Bridge had shed the geometric abstractions he once painted in Washington, along with the conceptual morality machines inspired by his years of shoplifting. He had given up on art and remade himself as a full-time master carpenter, working his trade. However, a few months of living with Schwebler had likely awakened that conceptual art sensibility. In October 1980, Bridge posted bills around town promoting The Apology Line, where people could call and leave an apology on an answering machine—a precursor of sorts to Frank Warren’s postcard-based PostSecret. But Bridge also found Schwebler impossible to live with: He was erratic, and kept odd hours. Some nights Bridge might find him blasting the Talking Heads at one in the morning. The living relationship became untenable, and Bridge wrote a note to Schwebler, requesting he move out—that he’d rather have a friend than a tenant who was remiss in paying rent. It’s also likely he had been kicked out because Schwebler made a pass at Bridge’s new girlfriend, Manissa, whom Bridge would later marry.

Fortunately, Schwebler had been splitting his time between Bridge’s apartment, and a studio space at the Fine Art Museum Long Island (FAMLI), in Hempstead, where he was an artist in residence. It is likely he retreated to this space, taking full advantage of the “residency.” It was a large shell of a space, occupying what had once been the basement floor of a Grant’s Department Store—more than enough room to create sculptures of the spaces where sculptors made sculptures. There was some irony to this task. Past roommates don’t recall Schwebler’s studio. At the Beverly Court, Appel remembered Schwebler converted one room into a little white-walled gallery to show curators his glass sculptures. The rest of his spaces were just messy heaps of junk. Frank Herrera recalled a summer in West Virginia where Schwebler ditched studio time to fix a truck, bought with NEA money. And when he was awarded a studio at the Johnson Avenue Workshop, run by Rockne Krebs and Sam Gilliam, he used the space to plan his Corcoran exhibition, not to physically make sculpture.

Joel Holub, a high-school senior in 1981, worked briefly for Schwebler as a studio assistant in Hempstead; Schwebler was the first professional artist he had met. It was awkward; unlike raking lines for Sundial, or constructing pyramids in the Corcoran, Schwebler didn’t seem to know what to do with the help this time. He showed Holub some past works, and works in progress. They moved some completed sculptures around, preparing them to get moved into a summer exhibition space at FAMLI while also making more space to complete work before the fall opening. Although Holub didn’t think Schwebler was living there—and didn’t know how anyone could, considering it was a bit moldy—it was clear from the beer cans and cigarette butts that he was spending a lot of time there. Holub asked if the debris on the floor was intended to be an installation. Eventually, it became the sculpture Orange Front Studio Site. Schwebler could be forgiven for not knowing what to do with an assistant. He had a lot on his mind. Apart from scrambling to get all the work completed, his friendship with Bridge had self-destructed. The Hudson River Museum, now under the directorship of Peter Langlykke, was in financial distress, and there were concerns to show curators his glass sculptures. The rest of his spaces were just messy heaps of junk. Frank Herrera recalled a summer in West Virginia where Schwebler ditched studio time to fix a truck, bought with NEA money. And when he was awarded a studio at the Johnson Avenue Workshop, run by Rockne Krebs and Sam Gilliam, he used the space to plan his Corcoran exhibition, not to physically make sculpture.

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It might close.53 Its past director, Koshalek, was now 3,000 miles away, working as the new deputy director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. While the Hudson River Museum was attempting to fix its finances, Schwebler was working on NEA grants—both with the museum and individually—to be able to afford the performance choreographed by Fairbank.

By the time The Studio opened, everything came together. The Hudson River Museum received financial support for the exhibition from the NEA, as well as favorable reviews for both the dance and the installation. The New York Times called it “a thought-provoking, esthetically stimulating and very beautiful show.”54 Things appeared to be looking up for Schwebler as well. In 1982, he would receive a $25,000 NEA Grant for his proposal to continue the work he had started at the Hudson River Museum. His plans included tableaus of Joseph Cornell’s studio, the destruction of Kurt Schwitters’ Merzbau, and a sculpture dedicated to Tinguely.55

Unfortunately, little would come of it. The Hudson River Museum would be his last major exhibition. There’s no record of any effort to make the work he proposed to the NEA, apart from a possible sketch for Tinguely’s Throne. Although he continued to make work, Schwebler’s life would take a different direction.

WHAT HAPPENED?

Sculptor Anthony Cafritz didn’t get to know Schwebler until late in 1982. In 1981 his mother, artist Enid Sanford, had divorced his father and moved to New York. There, she happened to encounter Schwebler, an art-world friend from DC whom she remembered as one of the few men who might pay visits to the studios of women making art. They dated. After the conclusion of The Studio, they bought a house in Milton, New York, a property along the Hudson that included an acre of the river in the deed. Cafritz helped Schwebler clean out the studio space in Hempsted, Long Island, and move the items to Milton. They spent two days loading a box truck, and Schwebler taught the young sculptor—then a student at Bennington—how to move many of the heavy items in his studio. He also shared

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with Cafritz his hopes for future work. He wanted to recreate all of the pieces from the exhibition at the Hudson River Museum into steel or cast bronze for an outdoor setting, like at Artpark. He wanted to think of the works as architecture.56

Schwebler also shared visions from his childhood that kept haunting him. During the war, as his family escaped to Germany, he recalled haystacks on fire, and bombed-out buildings with nothing left but stairways to nowhere. He wanted to make these into environments, too, and spoke specifically of an enclosure that would contain large “hay stacks,” made from strands of brass. A butane torch would be hidden inside, and shoot flames from the top.57 Aside from some beautifully haunting drawings of burning hay fields, these works never came to be.

One possible explanation, Cafritz speculated, was the energy Schwebler spent overseeing the renovations to the house. As Sanford recalled, Schwebler didn’t need to do that. And for all intents and purposes, he probably shouldn’t have. He had just received an NEA grant to expand the series of artist studios. However, he also lacked a working space, and needed to build out a studio space in the garage.

Unfortunately, the Hudson River Museum exhibition became the launch that wasn’t, for many logical reasons. Although John Caldwell’s review of Schwebler’s exhibition hailed the Hudson River Museum as “quite simply the best place in the New York metropolitan region to see the art of our own day,”58 it was far easier for New Yorkers to get to MoMA, the Guggenheim, or the Whitney, than it was to travel up to Yonkers.
The exhibition also ran in the middle of recessions that wouldn’t end until 1983, after the close of the exhibition. By then, too, Conceptualism had fallen out of vogue, unless it embraced the banality of a vacuum cleaner in a vitrine. More established artists like Rauschenberg, Nam June Paik, Ellsworth Kelly, and Frank Stella got the big museum surveys. Meanwhile, painting was hot; the New York gallery system was fawning over Jean-Michel Basquiat, Keith Herring, David Salle, and Julian Schnabel.

The big champions of Schwebler’s work had also moved on. Koshalek was in Los Angeles at MOCA. Apologetic that he missed Schwebler’s big show at the Hudson River Museum, he was still interested in helping him. He wrote Schwebler in 1982, and requested catalogs to share with colleagues in Los Angeles. Schwebler got the big museum surveys. Meanwhile, Pollock, whom Koshalek knew about his psychiatric stays at Walter Reed, or in California after the collapse of his marriage, fewer knew he had been married. Practically no one knew of an apparent suicide attempt in the mid 1960s. By 1990 his mental health was again poor, and ultimately led to his suicide. On March 3, 1990, Cafritz came to the house in Milton, where he found Schwebler in the front seat of his truck, parked inside the closed garage, which doubled as his studio. Three Camel unfiltered cigarette butts were in the ash-tray, and his head was resting on a pillow, propped up on a book about Jackson Pollock. He was 47.

CYCLIC STRUCTURES AND COINCIDENCES

Considering Schwebler was never a paint-thrower, it’s an odd detail to know about the Jackson Pollock book. But he had, in the past, given Pollock’s work some thought. Within his statement about Hair Piece, Schwebler argued that modern art objects could be categorized as either residue of the creative process or a record of creative development. “When Jackson Pollock dribbled paint on a canvas to express a certain feeling and then stopped when this was transferred in paint, his painting may be considered a record of his mood on that day.”61 And there are, at least, similarities between the men. Pollock was an artist who, arguably, also committed suicide. Both men died in their vehicles in their mid-40s, after a lull in art-making, and estranged from partners. Pollock died in 1956, the year Schwebler came to the United States. And, while there is no evidence to suggest Pollock’s studio was ever considered for a Schwebler artwork, he was likely well aware of Hans Namuth’s photos of Pollock working in his studio. (The Pollock-Krasner studio opened to the public in 1988.)

There are other coincidences. For some, it’s important not to hew too closely in them as cycles. But some seem unmistakeable.

His identity is one such example. Born as Yuri, he came to the United States and changed his name to George, a chance to be reborn. While he was casually known as Yuri after being drafted, it was after he left the Army Reserves that he could officially shed the name George: a chance to be born again as Yuri, as symbolized by Hair Piece.

As noted previously, the early works of the 1970s—conceptual beach sculptures and tool sculptures—were reimagined in boxed sculptures by the decade’s end. This relationship is also symmetrical, beginning with rocks and sand on a beach, and ending with rocks and glass (made from sand) in a box. All is now history. The tool pieces came after the beach pieces, and the tool boxes came before the boxes of glass and rocks. Bookends are also evident in the 1980s, which began with an exploration of artist studios. A decade later, the artist would be found dead in his studio.

With enough levity in creativity, a case can be made about his artistic career within the confines of both his Cyclic Structures Manifesto and the perfect number conceptually undergirding some of his early work. He spent the decade of the ‘60s studying to become an artist: the mental plane. He spent two decades, in the 1970s and 1980s, being an artist: the physical plane. Over the last three decades, he has been remembered for his art: the spiritual plane. 1 decade + 2 decades + 3 decades = 6 decades, or 60 years. 60 is also the number of degrees in an equilateral triangle, just like the sculptures inspired by the perfect number 6, exhibited in the Phillips Collection garden.

It’s worth noting that shortly after Schwebler’s death, a group of friends attempted to organize a memorial retrospective of Schwebler’s work in Washington. The Corcoran seemed a logical choice, given how much press he had generated for the institution when playing pharaoh. But they weren’t interested—Roy Slade had long since left the museum. The Phillips Collection wasn’t interested either, and most of the galleries that had once exhibited his work had closed. Efforts continued throughout the ‘90s, but never found a taker.
Schwebler’s exhibition of pyramids at the Corcoran in 1974 wasn’t accompanied by a pamphlet or catalog. At present, the American University Museum has four works by Schwebler in its possession: three of which were part of the 9,000 works offered to the university in the Corcoran Legacy Collection. When it became clear that the museum’s 2020 schedule would be severely impacted by the global pandemic, it presented a strange coincidence. Although Schwebler was still not getting his memorial retrospective, at the very least he got a catalog.

The Spiritual Plane

As a part of The Apology Line, Allan Bridge would record messages as Mr. Apology. Shortly after Schwebler’s death, he recorded this message in response to a caller whose friend had committed suicide. Allan: Around the same time you made this call, I learned that an old artist friend of mine had committed suicide. We were tight for a long time but we had a falling out not long after I started the Apology Line so I haven’t really seen him much for the last 8 or 9 years. However, now that I heard that he’s dead, I keep thinking about him all the time— he keeps popping into my thoughts.

Unfortunately, the work that initially survived him. In the thirty years since his death, numerous works have gone missing, or have been consumed by mice and molds. Even his last remaining outdoor sculpture in DC, Fifty-Fifty, has been losing its battle with time and the elements. Stone was preferred to glass when installed in the front lawn of Frederick Kellogg. But years of water penetrating its surface, and expanding with freezing, has caused pieces to crack and fall off. Such a naked display of entropy certainly fits the canon of work initially defined (in Washington) by Magnetic North, Sundial, and Alley. Only Fifty-Fifty is disappearing over the course of decades rather than weeks, days, or minutes. Although, it’s hard to say whether Schwebler would be fine with his work crumbling in the front lawn of his friend and lawyer. It’s true: he once noted, “I’m interested in not imposing on the space but… dealing with the structure of the space, and somehow showing something that I saw in the place…” His Cyclical Structures manifestly certainly supports the work drifted into the Spiritual Plane, and then disappear- ing. Others writings criticize the art world more broadly, stating “Art objects… do not follow cyclic change. They are conceived, manufactured but then are maintained beyond the cyclic life of the concept.”

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These three statements aside, he did leave behind a paper archive. The memorial retrospective that had been planned could not have been made without it, nor could the catalog. It seems Schwebler’s work was as rigorously documented as it was created, and he left behind a cache of writing, photographs, plans, preparatory studies, and drawings. It’s likely because he still thought some of those concepts were worth recalling. And, technically, none of them are truly his: like the shadow of the Washington Monument moving, he just happened to see them and point them out. Ironically, by pointing them out, he has imposed himself on those spaces and ideas. Can any artist of a certain age look at the Washington Monument and not think of Schwebler?

On their own, the ideas he pointed out remain timeless. While Schwebler may eventually drift away from memory, the ideas will likely linger, and live independent of Schwebler. Unquestionably, future generations of artists will be able to look at the Washington Monument and point out its shadow to others; they too will watch the earth move.
Yuri Schwebler, *Drawing Table-Table Drawing*, 1971. 48 × 37.75 × 34 in. Courtesy of Enid Sanford.


Dix X, 1977. 10 steel cables strung through the courtyard of the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France during the 10th Biennale de Paris. Image courtesy Hudson River Museum Archives.


One quality that I remember with special fondness about the multifaceted art Yuri Schwebler created during the 1970s—his extraordinary Washington decade—is its intimate relationship with the city itself. This quality showed itself most characteristically in certain pieces he did early in the decade, and in this brief essay I will concentrate almost exclusively on these works.

Both literally and figuratively, Yuri left his marks on Washington. Mind you, it is not possible today to make a comprehensive tour of these marks. Though they were conceived specifically for their particular places—and even in a singular case for a particular day of the year—Schwebler’s outdoor works in DC also were intentionally impermanent. Ephemeral, in the art jargon of the day.

The thing is, though, they also were thoroughly original, poetic, challenging, and spirit-lifting. That is to say, they were memorable. Schwebler liked moving about the capital city, and he did so with an acute sense of its symbolic resonances and hidden possibilities. More than any artist I can think of, he had it in him to expand our comprehension of familiar streets and buildings by extending our range of references.

In the most daring instance of this almost uncanny ability, Schwebler went directly to the centerpiece of Washington’s monumental core. I’m referring, of course, to the world’s tallest masonry structure, the beautiful and always amazing Washington Monument. For four days in 1974, under Schwebler’s direction, it became the centerpiece of the world’s tallest sundial.

The idea came to the artist in 1972. It was bold, but simple: trace hour lines in the snow. He planned the piece meticulously, researched the correct solar angles, made the necessary drawings and, in Christo-like fashion, overcame bureaucratic hurdles. In truth, to its lasting credit, the National Park Service pretty much loved the idea from the get-go. After that, all they had to do was wait for the weather to cooperate.

As it turned out, that took a couple of years, but when the day finally arrived things went like clockwork. The weather was perfect: snowy night, sunny day! At dawn, after a nice snowfall leaving three to four manageable inches of snow on the monument’s grassy knoll, Schwebler stood at the obelisk’s base to indicate where each of the hour lines should start, with a friend (landscape architect Gordon Riggle) standing on the perimeter. The NPS plows began plowing. Hour by hour throughout the day, the plows followed the sun as it created the lengthy shadow lines, and the shallow layer of snow left over after the plowing quickly melted down to green grass. The transformation was complete!

For casual passersby, initially at least, the monumental mise-en-scène must have been both startling and puzzling. All those long, spanning-new pathways leading straight to the great obelisk: what could they possibly mean? But with the monument’s long shadow leading the way, the tale revealed itself day by day until, on day four, the melt was total and the show was over. But, like the words and actions in a great play, it was impossible to forget.

Fortunately, Yuri had a professional photographer friend who also was a licensed pilot. This gentleman—John Bowden, at the time a colleague of Yuri’s (and mine) at the Washington Star—volunteered to do a fly-over to shoot the obelisk/sundial from above (if proof be needed that times have changed, ponder the prospect today of getting permission to fly a private plane over this hallowed turf: zero). The resulting photograph was a good match to an old aerial photograph of the site Yuri had altered in 1972 to demonstrate his concept to federal officials—real life not so much imitating art as validating it.

Every place has layered meanings, and Schwebler was adding rich, new contemplative layers to the venerable obelisk and its grounds. The Washington Monument “stands” for a man, a vertical tribute to a founding national hero. It also is an intentionally outstanding marker for an important place in the city named for this man. It symbolizes the hero and the place and ties together the historical narrative of the national mall. These are the monument’s key cultural functions. By converting the monument even temporarily to...

the sun as a drawing tool! And then, without any conventional artistic huffing and puffing, he was focusing on great natural forces that shape our lives on our planet: the gravitational pull of the sun that keeps us on our daily circumnavigation around it, the earth’s rotation on its axis, and the operation of its own field of gravity, and the seemingly miraculous, life-giving relationship between the two.

Time also figured prominently an earlier urban piece: Alley To Which the Sun Was Tied—on August 23, 1971, to be precise, from 5:41 to 6:41 p.m.

Again, the idea was straightforward, original and directly affecting. Schwebler had observed a slice of bright sunlight as it sneaked between the sharp edges of two downtown buildings, defining a brilliant, narrow path on the grainy macadam surface of a downtown alley. He decided to document this riveting passage with stenciled notations on the macadam along with the full title, in stenciled yellow letters.

To observe this phenomenon in real time was mesmerizing—you knew exactly what was going to happen and then, suddenly, it did! With decisive alacrity, right on time. Though entirely predictable it felt like magic, and, in a way, it was. Schwebler was doing something audacious in its simplicity: he was using the gnomon for a giant sundial, what Schwebler did in essence was “discover” and memorialize the element of time in this celebratory place. Time in its quotidian function, regulating the rhythms of our busy daily lives; in its familiar yet always mysterious sense of marking the continuous passage from present to past, and in its even more awesome sense of eternal passage—time before history, before culture.

The six Magnetic North pieces Schwebler placed around and about in the early ’70s revealed a mischievous wit that often enlivened his art. The process of making these totally improbable art works pieces was itself fascinating (and lots of fun for a couple of young artists). Yuri would locate and line up two surveyor’s points that happened to correlate with what a compass told him was the direction of the magnetic pole—between two humdrum light poles on opposite sides of Florida Avenue NW, for instance, or from a point on the south side of broad Massachusetts Avenue to the long vertical slice of a building’s corner on the north side. Then, wearing hard hats with the official-sounding but meaningless label ARDHATCO, he and a friend would trace a line on a paved sidewalk or street with stenciled yellow or silver arrows and capital lettering indicating the direction: MAGNETIC NORTH.
Washington is a city of well-educated people but I’m not sure how many of our busy walkers got the point of those words at first pass (it took me a while, and I was, more or less, forewarned). The nature of the “destination” was the key. As opposed to the fixed position of the geographical north pole—often referred to as “true north”—the magnetic north pole is related to a mass of molten iron in the earth’s core and consequently, for reasons even science cannot quite figure out, it shifts position over time.

So, were these artworks a sarcastic commentary in this capital of competing political certitudes? A suggestion of mysterious instability in a city of monumental memorialization? A reminder that things are not always what they seem to be? All of these, and more?

Schwebler was sometimes categorized as a conceptual artist and, while it is true that ideas played a crucial role in all of his works, he was fundamentally a humanist who wanted his art to communicate a sense of life’s complexity, urgency, brevity, and beauty. He certainly did that in these unique “in the city” art works and, in the process, opened up intriguing new ways to think about urban context in general and, with memorable specificity, that of Washington, DC.
YURI SCHWEBLER BIO

1942 | Born November 21, Fakist, Yugoslavia.
1956 | Emigrated to Wilmington, DE.
1961 | Moves in with foster parents on the Delmarva Peninsula.
1968 | Marries Joanne Hedge and moves to California.
1969 | Teaches classes and exhibits at the Sausalito Art Center, Sausalito, CA.

Abandons painting, and begins first conceptual works: Sonoma Mountain Project.

1970 | Separates from Joanne Hedge Schwebler, and institutionalized at the Mendocino State Hospital. Returns to Washington, DC. Activated by Army Reserves, and institutionalized at Walter Reed General Hospital. Creates Hair Piece, leading to his discharge from the Army Reserves.

1971 | Returns to work at the Washington Star. Makes first glass sculptures at his home in Waterford, VA. Creates “Magnetic North” series, part of the P Street Exhibit. Creates Alley to Which the Sun Was Tied behind Muth Art Supply, near 1300 block of New York Avenue.

1972 | Writes reviews of exhibitions for Marian Cleary at Franz Bader Gallery (February), and Ray Johnson at Jacobs Ladder Gallery (March), for the Washington Star.

Writes proposal to National Endowment for the Arts to support his works.


Model for Chico’s Bridge, maquette for site-specific sculpture displayed on the 3rd floor of the National Collection of Fine Arts. Private commission Moon Mark, for William Cheowning.


Private commission Fifty-Fifty, for Frederick Kellogg. Private commission Circle, for Barbara Battin Friedler.


March 3, 1990 | Schwebler found dead by suicide in his studio in Milton, NY.

Permanent Collections: American University Museum, Washington, DC.

Iowa Wesleyan University, Mount Pleasant, Iowa.

Lembruck Museum, Duisburg, Germany.

All events and exhibitions Washington, DC, unless otherwise noted.

* Denotes solo exhibition.
JOHN JAMES ANDERSON

John James Anderson is an artist, writer, and curator, living and working in Southeast Michigan. As a professor at Prince George’s Community College, he curated media-based exhibitions supporting the curricula offered by the Art Department, including WYSIWYG, Drawing Perspectives, Painting into Sculpture, and Fabricated (about 3D printed art, co-curator with Joshua DeMonte and Davide Prete). Since leaving academia, his focus has been the history and artists of the Jefferson Place Gallery. In 2017, Anderson curated Making a Scene: The Jefferson Place, for the Alper Initiative for Washington Art at the American University Museum, which focused on the first six years of the gallery. Since, he has co-curated three exhibitions (with Meaghan Kent, and Caitlin Berry) in the series, “Women of the Jefferson Place,” for Marymount University, Arlington, VA, those exhibitions focused on the works of Hilda Thorpe, Mary Orwen, and Jennie Lea Knight. He also wrote the catalog essay for Built and Unbuilt: The Public Artworks of Sam Gilliam and Rockne Krebs, for an exhibition organized by Day Eight (a non-profit which supported the creation of the archive website, jeffersonplacegallery.com, in conjunction with Making a Scene). He has written for Washington City Paper, Art in America, Sculpture, and The Washington Times. He is represented by Adah Rose Gallery, Kensington, MD.
MISSION STATEMENT

The Alper Initiative for Washington Art promotes an understanding and appreciation of the art and artists of the Washington Metropolitan Area. We provide and staff a dedicated space located within the American University Museum, to present exhibitions, programs, and resources for the study and encouragement of our creative community.