

$$E=mc^2$$

*Fred Sandback
Callum Innes
Günter Umberg*

“Contradiction provides the dialectic that makes it possible to see”

Jeremy Gilbert Rolfe, ‘Appreciating Ryman’, *Arts Magazine*, 1975

The elegant and deceptively simple poetry of Einstein’s equation $E=mc^2$ seemed an appropriate key to this exhibition. As a title it suggests that at some perceptual level, contradiction — matter and its inverse, absence and presence, visible and invisible — are at the core of the mysteries that each of these artists consider.

Fred Sandback’s work, more clearly than any other artwork I know, speaks to the complexity of simultaneous presence and absence. The dis-equilibrium that these ethereal drawings evoke in us remind me most recently, at an experiential level at least, of Richard Serra’s monumental *Torqued Ellipses*. How odd that Sandback’s whispering haikus are capable of matching the visceral jolt of tonnes of corten steel.

Viewers’ tentative circumnavigation of Sandback’s delicate sculptures speaks not so much of a fear of entanglement in the delicate thread, but exposes their intuition of some real but indiscernible presence in the implied plane, as palpable as that of glass. As viewers we become almost hyper-aware of our position vis-à-vis the sculptures. Everything slows as we adjust to this newly attuned sense of our extremities, our edge, our own spatial implications.

Two resolutely black Günter Umberg paintings were installed at either end of the gallery — works of such manifestly material presence, that dematerialise in front of your eyes. Layer upon layer of dense pigment held together with the gentlest of binders. In contrast to Innes’s humid pigments, Umberg’s works share a very particular paint quality, their dryness and density, their absorbency and containment — complete and self-sustaining.

Henry Staten, the American philosopher wrote of Umberg’s work “Densely compressed materiality. These pictures strive towards the centre. Their molecules are compacted by attracting one another. It seems inevitable that these pictures are small as if they have contracted so as to unify mass and strength...” To comprehend Umberg’s ‘dark matter’ requires patience as we adjust to recalibrated perceptions of light, colour and body.

Though they may appear to occupy polar positions, my sense was that Sandback and Umberg end up in close conversation. Sandback’s ‘immaterial materiality’ and Umberg’s ‘material immateriality’. Between them, Callum Innes’s paintings chart the mutability and transience of matter in suspension. That moment when light and dark are in contest — Innes draws this nexus moment out and in so doing our registration of time. He allows us inside that instant. The conundrum of whether darkness proceeds light or vice versa is played out in Callum’s sensitive un-painting: form suggested as much by the removal of pigment as by its addition.

Callum Innes
Untitled, 2008
shellac and oil
on canvas
174.5 x 162.5 cm



So between the apparent polarities of the Sandback sculptures and the Umberg paintings, Innes's *Agitated Vertical* reached out to both. As one moved about the gallery the vertical threads of the Sandback would insinuate themselves into the vibrating vertical line in the centre of Innes's painting, momentarily 'completing' it. Fleeting as this completion was, it immediately made one question whether in Innes's painting, the removed area was the form amidst the black flanking space or perhaps it was the reverse that the removed area was a slender rent in the black mass?

Sitting in relative isolation on the gallery's east wall was the *Untitled Shellac* painting. Though it didn't participate in the complex formal contradictions of absence and presence that the balance of the artworks engaged in, it nonetheless was critical to the exhibition's make-up. As in Vija Celmin's *Night Sky* or *Desert* images, one is presented with a vista that is both immense and intimate — galactic and microscopic. If Umberg's molecules have gathered and compressed to unify mass, Innes's puts us inside the micro-moment when E does indeed equal mc^2 .

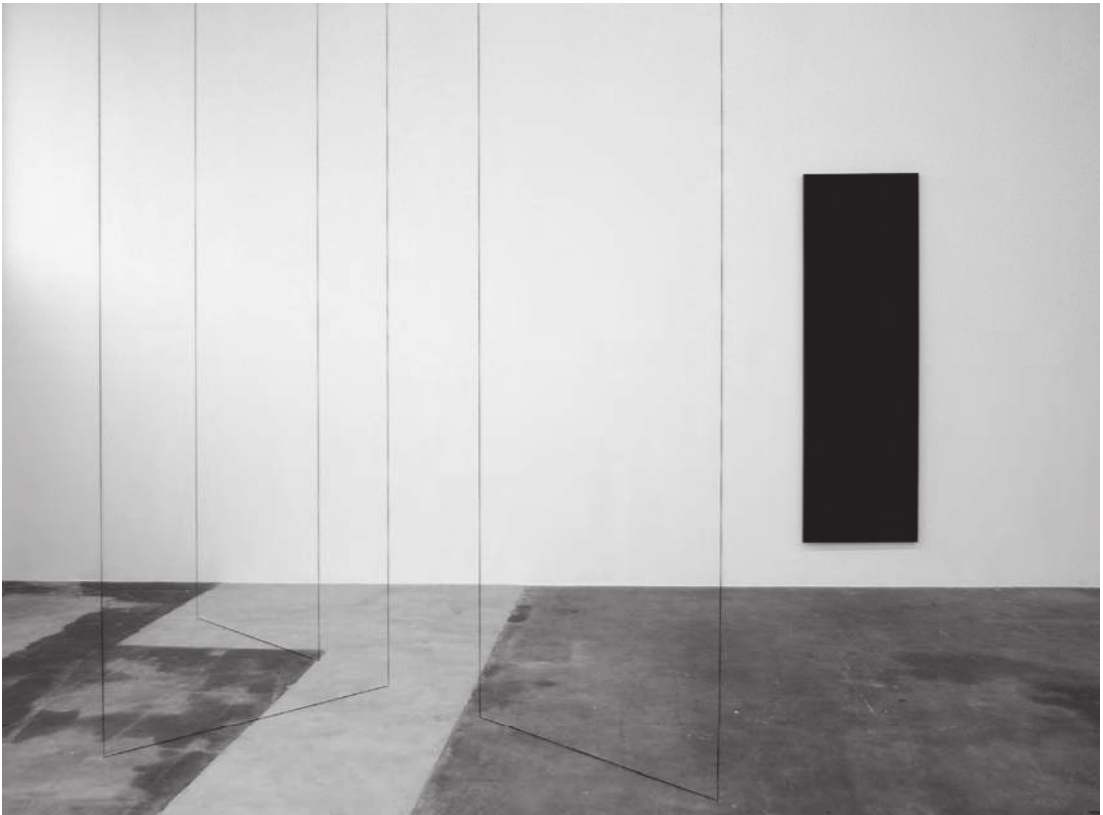
The poignancy of this collaboration rested largely on the clarity of the positions they take as artists. Their exploration of shared territory offers us such a compelling visible mystery.

Finally let me warmly thank Callum Innes, Amy Sandback, and Günter Umberg, each of whom have shown support beyond measure for this gallery and reciprocated our enthusiasms offering knowledge and generous opportunities. I would also like to make mention of David Gray at the Sandback Foundation for his efficiency and assistance, and the patient and entertaining Amavong Panya whose exemplary installation of the Sandback solo exhibition (May/June 2008) with Amy was the best tutoring possible for appreciating these wondrous sculptures.

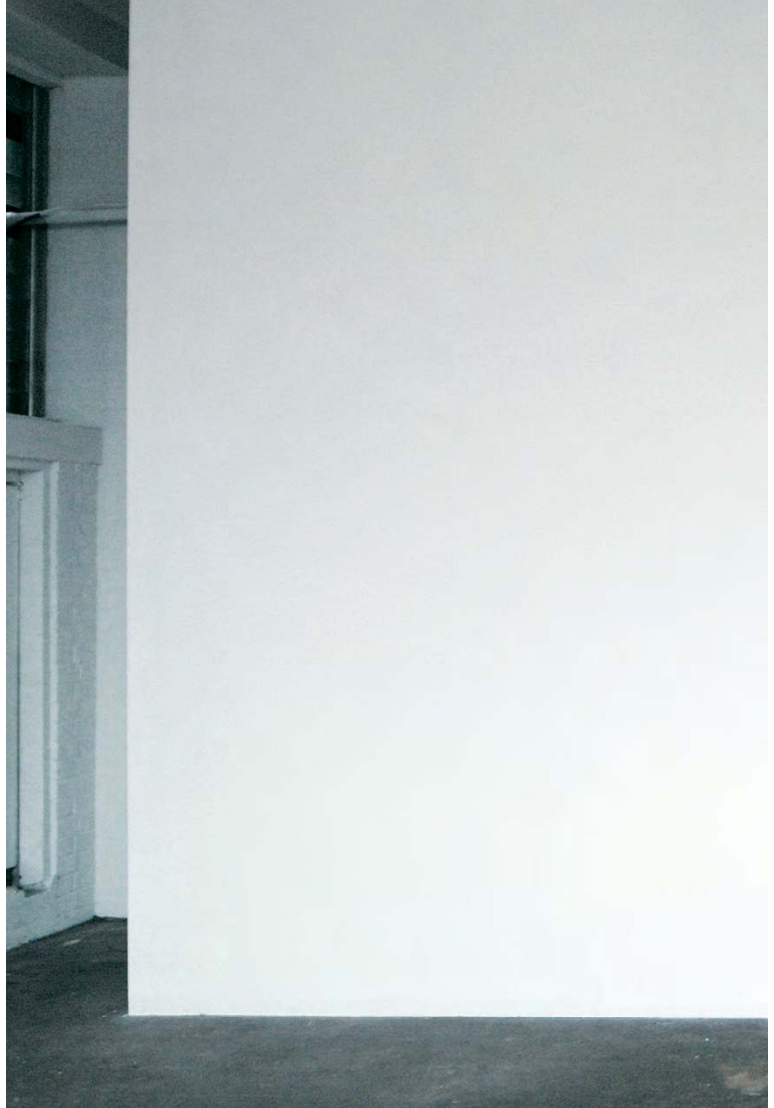
Andrew Jensen 2009

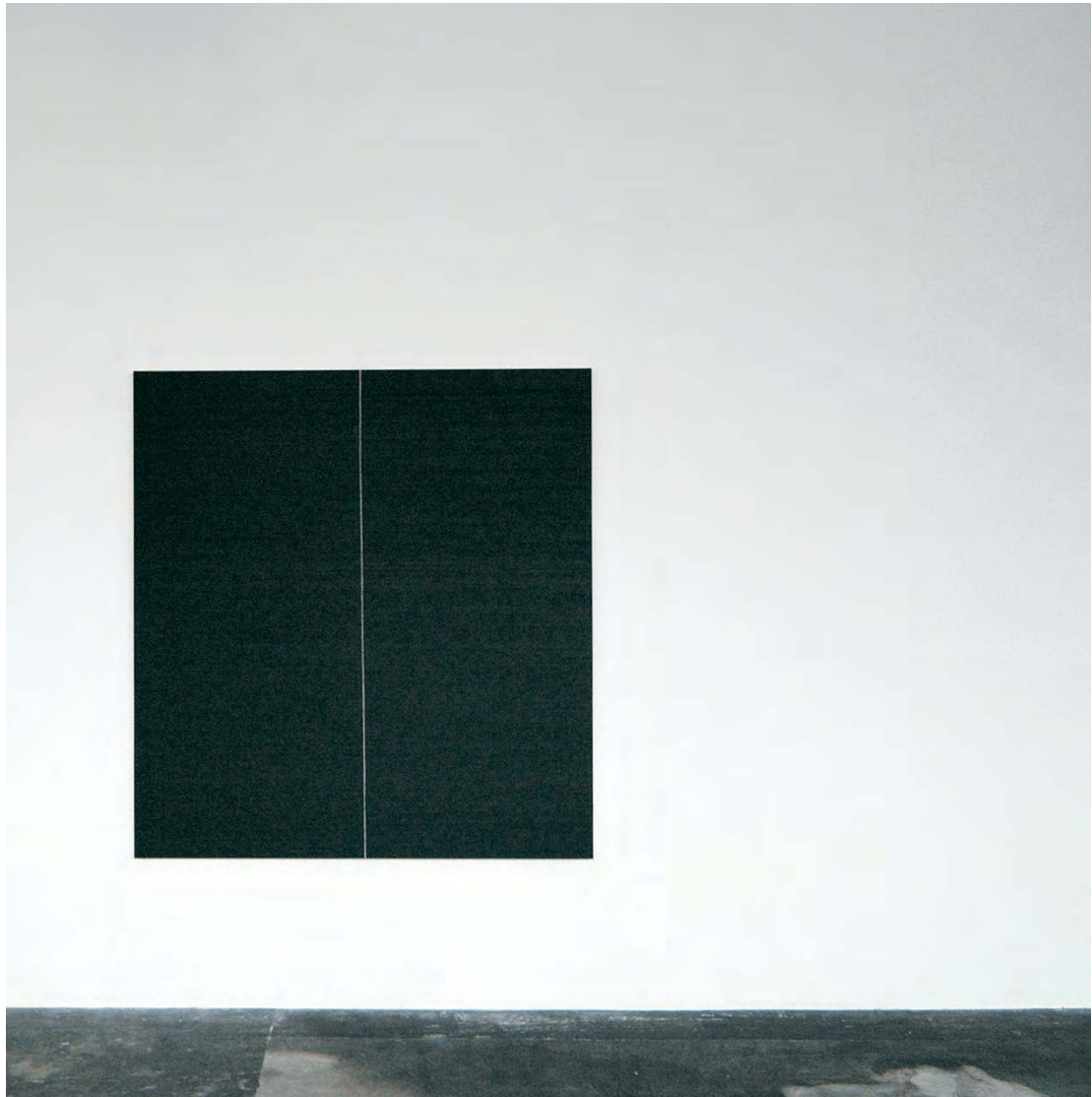
Fred Sandback
*Untitled (Sculptural Study, Three-part
Construction)*, 1987/2009
black acrylic yarn
ceiling height x 274.3 x 91.4 cm

Günter Umberg
No Title, 1992
pigment, dammar on wood
220 x 70 x 4 cm



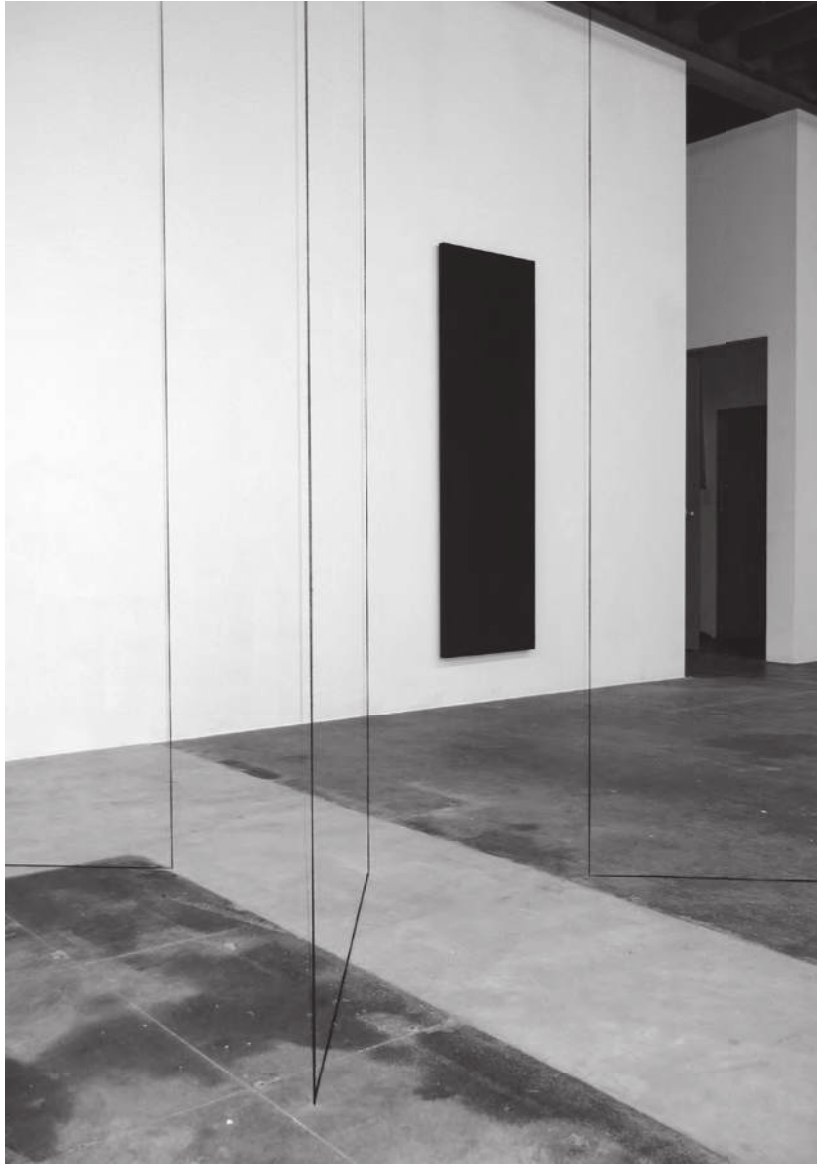
Callum Innes
Agitated Vertical, 2007
oil on canvas
174.5 x 162.5 cm





Fred Sandback
*Untitled (Sculptural Study;
Three-part Construction)*,
1987/2009
black acrylic yarn
ceiling height x 274.3 x 91.4 cm

Günter Umberg
No Title, 1992
pigment, dammar
on wood
220 x 70 x 4 cm



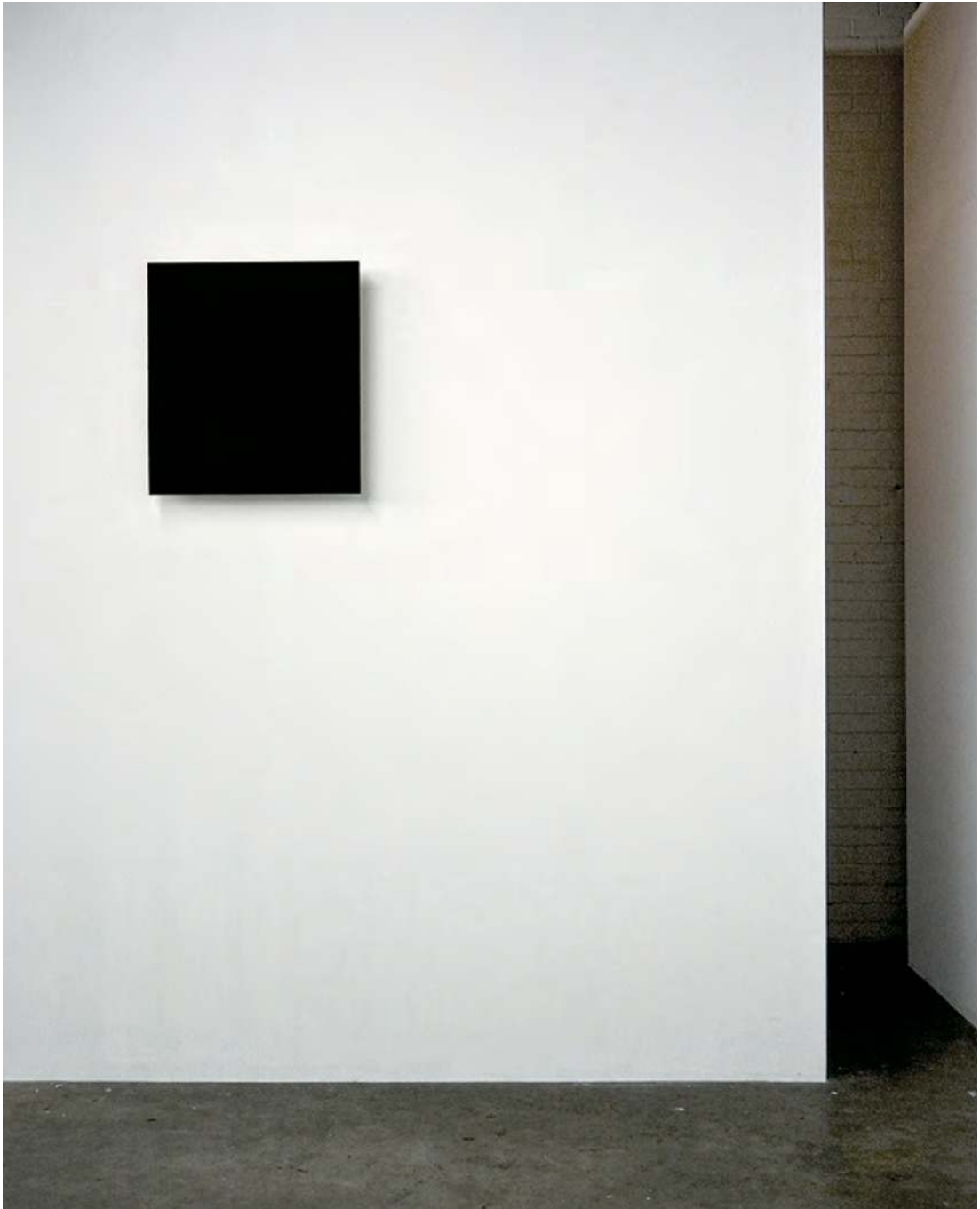


Fred Sandback
*Untitled (Sculptural Study,
Three-part Construction)*, 1987/2009
black acrylic yarn
ceiling height x 274.3 x 91.4 cm

Günter Umberg
No Title, 1992
pigment, dammar on wood
220 x 70 x 4 cm



Günter Umberg
No Title, 2007
pigment, dammar
on wood
76 x 70 cm





Günter Umberg
No Title, 2007
pigment, dammar on wood
76 x 70 cm

Callum Innes
Untitled, 2008
shellac and oil on canvas
174.5 x 162.5 cm



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