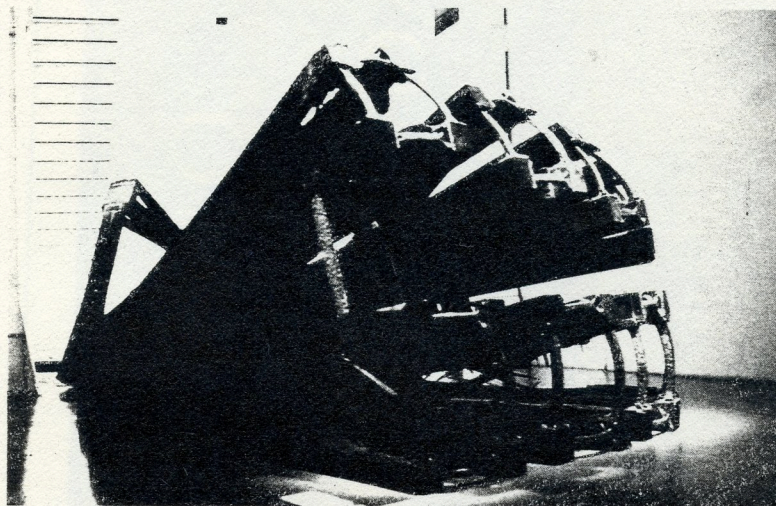


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**PHILIPPE  
STAIB  
GALLERY**


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CONTEMPORARY SCULPTURE

**ZERO HIGASHIDA**
 PHILIPPE STAIB  
GALLERY


Zero Higashida, *Perspective #1*, 1991, mixed media. Installation view.

It is difficult to believe that this ensemble of wood and steel sculptures, accompanied by several oil paintings, constitutes Zero Higashida's first solo exhibition. Ranging from the quietly poetic to the powerfully expressive, his work is precocious; it not only feels wise beyond its years, it literally looks old. Indeed, Higashida's sculptures of split wood and torn metal covered by dull black ink look like charred relics. They hover ambiguously between the natural and the industrial, the found and the constructed, the raw and the refined.

Higashida's sculptures unself-consciously draw attention to process, featuring cuts and tears that suggest simple, direct gestures. This is especially true of metal works such as *Drawing*, 1989, a large, inked sheet of steel that alternately clings to and billows from the wall. Punctuated by four cuts on its periphery, the steel takes on the look of torn paper. The smaller rectangular steel shape in *Untitled #3*, 1989, bears a jagged cut held together by thin steel strips. The tension produced by these opposing forces of attack and reparation is Higashida's trademark. In *Small Tension*, 1989, the artist has split the tall, rectangular wooden beams only a

bit, while in *Grove*, 1990, he has done so more completely. The former consists of a relatively closed form with only a few rifts along the wood's grain, while the latter has been cloven into four parts and rejoined by irregularly shaped welded steel plates at top and bottom.

In each of three flat, opaque paintings from 1991, lines and shapes float in mottled fields of color. These visual poems add an odd note to this show in which the limits of vision are repeatedly explored sculpturally; they read like hypothetical walls, waiting to be shattered.

Dominating this space is the large *Perspective #1*, 1991, which most dramatically stages the tension created by splitting and binding. The violence of the artist's attack on eight massive wooden beams, each split into quarters and pried apart by steel supports, is considerable. Stacked in double rows of four, the beams are bound together at one end, rising up and yawning open at the other like a huge set of jaws cruelly held apart by spikes. In both its title and its configuration of converging orthogonal lines, this work evokes Renaissance perspective even as it explodes ordered vision. Here geometry is undermined by bending and

splintering; the insides are turned out, and radically different points of view vie for prominence.

Higashida willfully thwarts the viewer's visual complacency in *Untitled #202*, 1991, a work that consists of a small chunk of wood bound by steel bands. What might logically have been the base has been tilted up, causing the peak to jut out at an odd angle. In *Shadow*, 1990, twin top-heavy pillars engage in a relationship of call and response that denies the viewer easy access, much less a comfortable vantage point. Equally disorienting is *Perspective #2*, 1991, a work in which three suspended beams connect in an angular zigzag.

Higashida's sculptures recall a range of disparate traditions, from Constructivism to Cubism to post-Minimalism, yet they resist familiar Western formal dialectics. What is most impressive about this show is the artist's ability to synthesize an unmistakably Eastern grace of gesture and a raw, Western expressivity, without compromising either. —JPB

—Jennifer P. Borum