



Joel Shapiro

Born:
New York, NY, 1941

As the son of scientists (Shapiro's father was an internist and his mother a microbiologist) who were also interested in art, Joel Shapiro took art classes as a child, considering it "fun," but never a potential career. Shapiro attended college at New York University, graduating with a liberal arts degree in 1964, with the intention of becoming a physician. However, after graduation he spent two years in the Peace Corps in India, and it was there that he decided to become an artist. Returning to New York, Shapiro rented a studio and registered for graduate work at New York University, earning his M.A. in 1969. He soon won critical acclaim for his small-scale works that had an implied human presence, such as sculptures of houses and chairs. Shapiro is best known for his large-scale geometric sculptures that resemble the human form.

However, he does not add anything extraneous to the basic figure, making sculptures that are devoid of "individuating" detail, sexual identity, narrative or identifying context. Through the human figure, Shapiro investigates the very nature of abstraction. Shapiro has achieved a reputation as a significant modernist sculptor. He has been called a Post-Minimalist because his work provides a link between the Minimal art of the 1960s and the "content-laden" art of the late '70s and '80s.

Since his first one-person exhibition in 1970 at the Paula Cooper Gallery in New York, Shapiro's work has been the subject of nearly 150 solo exhibitions and retrospectives. In 1982, for example, the Whitney Museum of American Art organized a major mid-career survey of Shapiro's work that traveled to the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto and San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art (1982-84). In 1999 the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield, Yorkshire, England exhibited Joel Shapiro: Sculptures 1974-1999, and in 2001 the Metropolitan Museum of Art featured five sculptures by the artist in the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Roof Garden. Shapiro. In addition, Shapiro has worked on numerous public commissions and projects, including a project for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. The artist has also participated in numerous Whitney Biennials (1977, 1979, 1981, 1989), Documenta in Kassel, Germany (1977, 1982), and the Venice Biennale (1980).

Throughout his career, Joel Shapiro has been honored with numerous awards including an Award of Merit Medal for Sculpture given by the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, NY (1990); Skowhegan Medal for Sculpture (1986); Brandeis University Creative Arts Award (1984); and the Visual Art Fellowship for the National Endowment for the Arts (1975). The artist currently lives and works in New York.