



Art | Basel
Basel | June | 18–21 | 2015

Siah Armajani, *House Above the Bridge*, 1974, mixed media, 10.3h x 18w x 4.8d in (26.2h x 45.7w x 12.2d cm)

Art Feature Sector | Booth T11

Siah Armajani: Bridges

Alexander Gray Associates presents recent and historical work by Siah Armajani (b.1939), highlighting the artist's ongoing interest and study of bridges. For Armajani, "the bridge is not a metaphor, it is not a simile. It is a bridge for its own sake. It brings together the art with what is below, above, before and what is after." Reflecting on the bridge as both the physical embodiment of a connecting structure and a conceptual framework has enabled Armajani to cross cultural spheres between his native Persian and adopted American cultures, becoming one of the first architectural elements, and the most enduring, to appear as a repeating motif in his six-decade practice.

Armajani moved to the United States from Iran in 1960 to study philosophy at Macalester College in Minnesota. While his early education in Tehran and exposure to Persian literature and poetry was key to his connection with the symbolic meaning of bridges, it was during this time when his interest in American vernacular architecture grew and the physical structure emerged in his practice. In his 1960s objects, including *Paul Bunyan's Matchsticks* (1968), Armajani deconstructed the truss systems of wood bridges, providing the basis for his later models and celebrated public works. *House Before the Bridge* and *House Above the Bridge* (both 1974–1975) continue Armajani's conceptual exploration, re-creating the simple construction techniques of early American bridges and the parallel wooden planks used to build farmhouses, yet undermine the assumptions that a bridge should span something physical, and a house must provide shelter. Rather, the bridge stands as symbol for passage, both material and psychological. The reflection of the large-scale sculpture, *Street Corner No. 3* (1995), encourages this symbolic nature by establishing a new sense of place as much as articulating an existing one. Continuing the perceptual illusion that recurs in many of Armajani's early models, art historian Nancy Princenthal notes, "the first disjunction these bridges illustrate is between visual and bodily sensation, between what is presumed from sight and prior knowledge, and how that presumption can be overturned by physical experience."

Fusing multiple experiences through art is a pivotal idea in Armajani's vision and production, exemplified in his literary and cultural interests that are not bound by his Iranian heritage, but also in his ongoing engagement with European and American philosophers, writers and thinkers. Drawing on this connection are his early calligraphic works from the 1950s with his most recent drawings from the "Tomb Series" (1972—ongoing), including *Tomb for Frank O'Hara* (2015), which pay homage to those who have inspired his artistic philosophy.

Armajani has been the subject of over fifty solo exhibitions since 1978, including surveys and retrospectives at Parasol unit, London (2013); Nelson Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO (2008); Musee d'art Moderne et Contemporain, Geneva, Switzerland (2007, tour); Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid (1999, tour); Lannan Foundation, Los Angeles, CA (1992); Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland (1987); Westfälisches Landesmuseum, Münster, Germany (1987, tour); and Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, PA (1985). A retrospective is planned for the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, MN in 2018. Armajani's work has also been included extensively in group exhibitions internationally, in venues such as Minneapolis Institute of Arts, MN (2011); British Museum, London (2006); House of World Cultures, Berlin (2004); Carnegie International, Pittsburgh, PA (1988); Museum of Modern Art, New York (1984, 1970); Art Institute of Chicago, IL (1982); and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1981); among others. Armajani's work is in over forty public collections, including the Art Institute of Chicago, IL; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA; Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX; British Museum, London; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Musee d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Geneva; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA; Nelson Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO; and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN.