

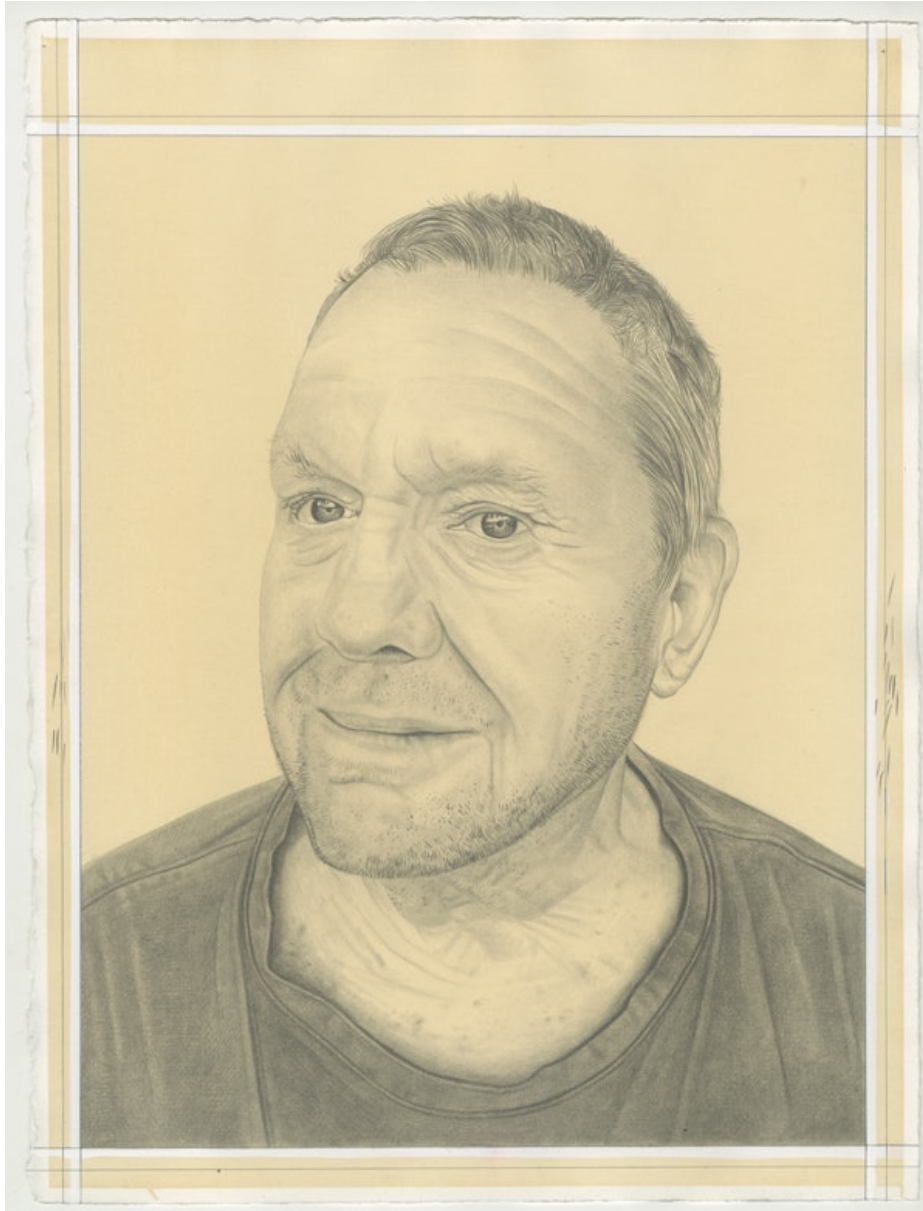
The Brooklyn Rail

Robert Grosvenor with Alex Bacon

March 2019

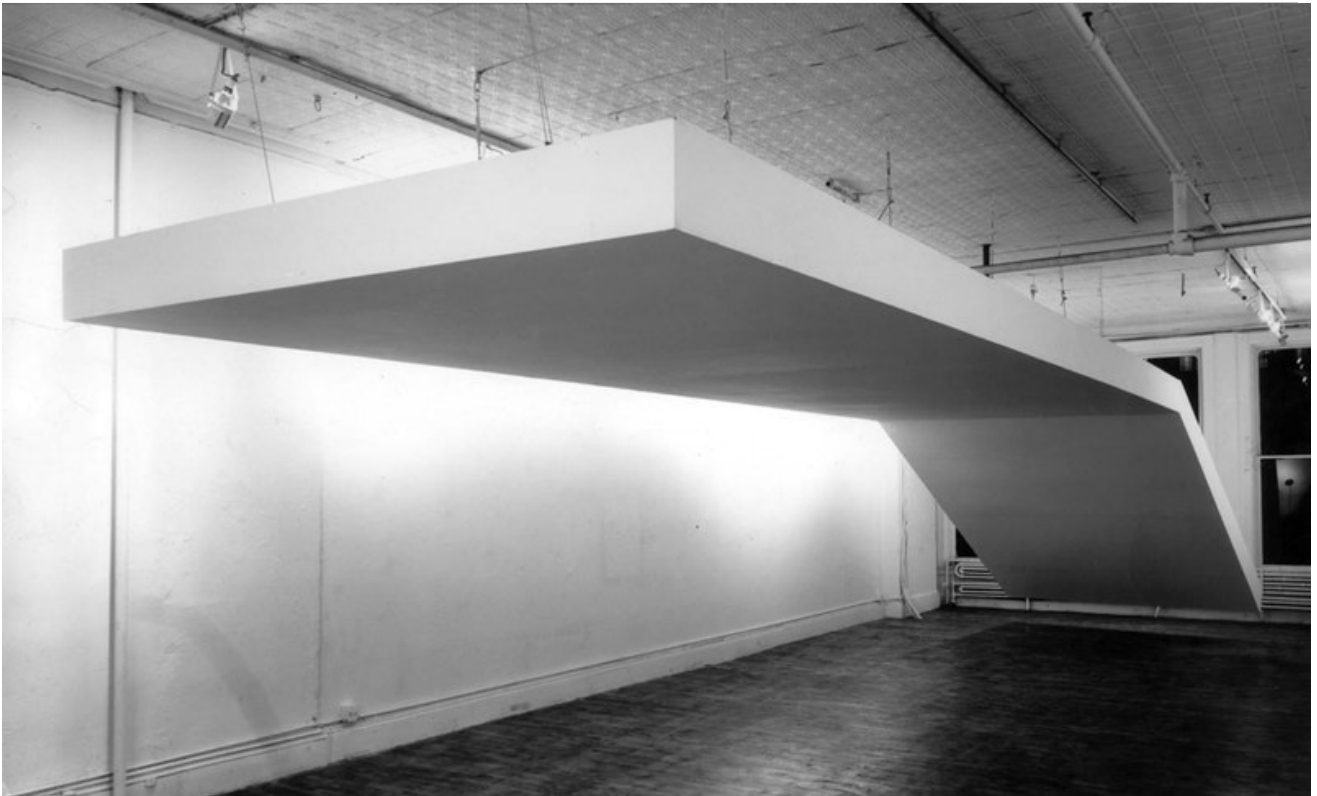
## **ROBERT GROSVENOR with Alex Bacon**

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Portrait of Robert Grosvenor, pencil on paper by Phong Bui.

Robert Grosvenor spoke with Alex Bacon over the phone from his home in the Florida Keys about important moments from his five decade career, and wide-ranging topics such as his photography, refitting of automobiles and boats, and enduring fascination with architecture, from iconic buildings to improvisational structures. Grosvenor recently recreated an untitled 1968 sculpture—first exhibited in the seminal 1968 exhibition *Minimal Art*—for ICA, Miami, where it is on view until June 9, 2019.



Robert Grosvenor, *Untitled*, 1968. Steel and plywood painted white, 120 x 480 inches. Installation view, Paula Cooper Gallery, 96-100 Prince Street, New York, 1970. Photo: Dan Lenore. © Robert Grosvenor. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

**Alex Bacon (Rail):** Did you study fine art?

**Robert Grosvenor:** I studied some painting and sculpture in France, yes.

**Rail:** What made you go to Europe when so much was happening with contemporary art in America at the time?

**Grosvenor:** It was like I went in the wrong direction [*laughs*]. I had had enough of boarding schools on the Northeast Corridor. I wanted to get away from that. I had some friends who were going over to Europe and I thought, "That sounds great."

**Rail:** [*Laughs*] Did you have a very classical training then?

**Grosvenor:** Yes. I would say it seemed very classical, drawing plaster casts, and nudes, and things like that. But I had an eye out for other things. For example, I was fortunate enough to see Yves Klein shows at the Iris Clert Gallery in Paris.

**Rail:** How did that affect you as a student, seeing this kind of work?

**Grosvenor:** I was confident. I was always told that the worst artists around that time were Fontana and Manzoni. So immediately I was attracted to Fontana and Manzoni. I usually don't go along with what people tell me to do.

**Rail:** You must have been attracted to the materiality of that work. It has a sort of concreteness, which at that moment was in a way new for painting.

**Grosvenor:** Yes, definitely.

**Rail:** When did you come back to the States?

**Grosvenor:** I think it was in 1959. I was called back to go into military service. I did that for six months. Luckily I didn't go anywhere. We just marched around Greenwich Village as far as I remember. [*Laughs*] I had some friends in the army with similar thoughts, like Peter Campus, who became a video artist. He was a good friend. I wasn't really involved in the art world at that time. I didn't know anything about American art really.

**Rail:** But then a few years later, in 1962, you start to show in group exhibitions and with the now famous co-operative Park Place Gallery.

**Grosvenor:** Yes. When I was in the army I think they had art magazines lying around. I had seen an article on the Green Gallery. Mark di Suvero had these sculptures there. I thought "Jeeze, this is interesting. I haven't seen anything like that." I met Mark and that was very important to me. Through him I met other artists. The Park Place artists and some of the artists at the Green Gallery.

**Rail:** You saw Mark di Suvero's work and then sought him out?

**Grosvenor:** I think so. It's a little vague. It was something about a room for rent in the building that he was in. And so I went down to the building and knocked on the door. He was there and I saw the wooden works piled and thought, "Oh my god! This is the person I read about in the magazine." Very serendipitous.

**Rail:** Were you making art at that point?

**Grosvenor:** I was trying to make paintings that came off the wall, and maybe the beginnings of sculptures.

**Rail:** You were already moving in the direction of turning painting into more of a material object?

**Grosvenor:** Yes.

**Rail:** Have you kept any of those works?

**Grosvenor:** No. I didn't feel that confident about them.

**Rail:** When you started exhibiting had you moved fully into sculpture?



Robert Grosvenor, *Topanga*, 1965. Wood, stainless steel, 120 x 252 x 30 inches. © Robert Grosvenor. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

**Grosvenor:** Yes, I had moved into sculpture. I think the first sculpture I made was a vertical and a diagonal. It was called *Topanga*, a silver and yellow work. That was really a nice one. I would call it my first work of sculpture.

**Rail:** That work was shown at Park Place, is that correct?

**Grosvenor:** Yes it was.

**Rail:** That seems like quite a break, to move from painting to a fabricated object. But in a certain way, your work is actually quite expressive. You must have had to plan a work like *Topanga* out before you fabricated it?

**Grosvenor:** Things came together in a way. I moved into a new loft and studio, which was a very large, expansive, beautiful, clean, open space.

**Rail:** In SoHo?

**Grosvenor:** On Broome Street, yes. I opened a magazine and there was a very small photograph of the Kitt Peak Observatory [designed by architecture firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM)]. I thought, "God, I can make this and maybe it doesn't have to touch the ground." I got some two-by-fours and put it together rather quickly.

**Rail:** So in that case you were directly inspired by architecture?

**Grosvenor:** Yes, I was. I've always been directly inspired by something. I did find myself copying things that I'd seen in the magazines, for example. I take from other artists too.

**Rail:** [*Laughs*] You must not have felt that it was copying in a negative, derivative sense. That to make a sculpture was something very different from an architectural structure?

**Grosvenor:** Yes. That's right. I've never been shy of copying things. I'm always looking at things and trying to redo them, or rebuild them, or build them myself.

**Rail:** Is that true even today?

**Grosvenor:** I think so. A little bit less true now maybe, but I'm always looking.

**Rail:** With *Topanga* you had that initial spark that came from the SOM-designed observatory and did that then generate a body of work?

**Grosvenor:** It generated one other sculpture: *Transoxiana*. It came on a diagonal down from the ceiling almost to the floor, and then back up almost to the ceiling. It's a similar type of construction as *Topanga*, which was shown at the Jewish Museum in 1966 [in *Primary Structures*]. Those were the two sculptures that were similar. *Transoxiana* came out of *Topanga*.





Robert Grosvenor, *Transoxiana*, 1965. Wood, polyester, steel, 126 x 372 x 36 inches. © Robert Grosvenor. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

**Rail:** It seems like a really bold move, to move from the floor to the ceiling. I can't think of many artists who have worked with that space. Maybe Calder to some degree. The sense of weightlessness your work conjures in doing that counteracts the stasis and heft associated with a lot of canonical Minimalism, which some people have connected you to. What made you shift your focus from the floor to the ceiling?

**Grosvenor:** It seemed like a natural thing. I mean sketching. If I draw out right now the vertical of *Topanga* and then draw a couple of lines to represent the diagonal and then sometimes, by working inside, not outside, there was a feeling above it. Then I'd go down on the diagonal from the ceiling and then maybe go up again. And you'd see a nice "V" shape to work with and I thought, "I can deal with that." It was a simple transition for me.

**Rail:** The reliance on the diagonal is also a different experience because it creates a sense of motion.

**Grosvenor:** Yes, and they both have the same cross section. They're both a square that's been tipped onto an angle. In 1966 at the Dwan Gallery I showed two sculptures. One of them is called *Tenerife* and the other is *Untitled (Yellow)*. Those are important pieces. They have a different cross section, a diamond-shaped cross section rather than a square cross section, like the previous two pieces.

**Rail:** Your work, especially in the early days, had a strong reliance on engineering and fabrication. Did you educate yourself about these things in order to make the work or did you collaborate with professionals who knew what to do?



Robert Grosvenor, *Untitled (yellow)*, 1966/2016. Aluminum and epoxy enamel, 156 x 336 x 151 1/8 inches. Installation view, LACMA, 2017. © Robert Grosvenor. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

**Grosvenor:** No. Those early cantilevered structures were really basic carpentry. They didn't require any complicated engineering. I didn't collaborate with anyone. It was just a matter of getting a screw gun and some screws and putting them together. It was quite simple, actually.

**Rail:** Are there also things that we don't see that support the cantilevered sculptures?

**Grosvenor:** There are. The original *Topanga* was screwed into the floor and there were some cables that went up to the top of the vertical and down through the diagonal, where I would tighten the cables and I was able to raise the diagonal slightly. Kind of primitive, but it did work and the motor or the energy was coming from the floor. It was attached to the floor, otherwise it would have fallen over. I guess I could have put a lot of weight in there—a lot of concrete, say—but I didn't do that. That was [Ronald] Bladen's way of doing things. Putting the weight above the floor. You couldn't see it, but it was inside the sculpture, whereas my work was physically attached to the ceiling or the floor.

**Rail:** So with the works suspended from the ceiling, there's nothing in the ceiling holding it necessarily?

**Grosvenor:** Yes. The ceiling wasn't really strong enough to support it. It's a wonder it didn't fall down.

**Rail:** All of those works you came up with in sketches first?

**Grosvenor:** Yes.

**Rail:** Were those sketches essentially architectural or engineering plans or were they more conventionally artistic?

**Grosvenor:** Rough sketches. The same sort of sketches I make today. Very simple lines.

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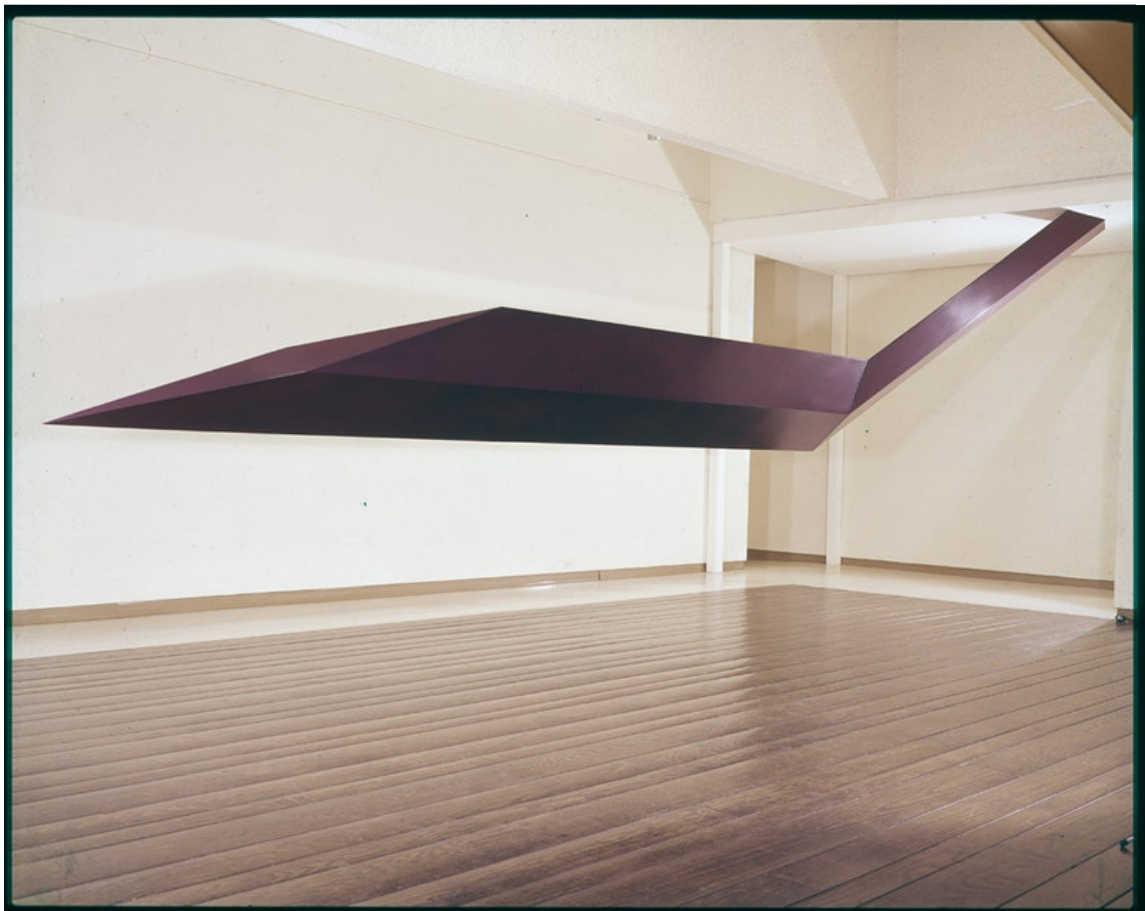
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Robert Grosvenor, *Tenerife*, 1966. Fiberglass, steel, plywood, 72 x 144 x 36 inches. © Robert Grosvenor. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.



**Rail:** What kinds of architecture do you enjoy looking at?

**Grosvenor:** All kinds of buildings. Right here in South Florida, where I am now, there's a castaways cabin that's fantastic. I like things like that very much. I've taken photographs of things like that.

**Rail:** Not to jump ahead, but it definitely seems that makeshift or improvisational architecture has a relationship to the work that you've been making since the late '70s, the '80s, even perhaps the work that was in your recent exhibition at Paula Cooper. It's interesting to think of architecture as a constant reference for your work, even back to that first piece, *Topanga*, which comes very directly out of that one SOM building.

**Grosvenor:** Yes. But not in the sense of architecture as shelter. I'm not particularly interested in that. I'm interested in the forms that I see, in the strangeness of the buildings that I see.

**Rail:** Could we speak a bit more about the shift in the work, from a square cross section to a diamond cross section?

**Grosvenor:** It had to do with a sculpture called *Tenerife*, which was a very slender diamond cross section. When I was thinking of the form of *Tenerife* it seemed to me much too bulky, and also maybe more difficult to do if it needs a square cross section. It seemed very awkward and so I thought, "I'll slim it down into a diamond cross section and that will be lighter and stronger and better in this particular case." So I did the *Tenerife* sculpture and then I did the yellow *Untitled* one using another diamond cross section, which seemed to work.

**Rail:** I'm looking right now at an installation view of the 1966 Dwan show and those two pieces that you just mentioned seem to be moving in almost opposite directions.

**Grosvenor:** Yes, that's true. One of them comes at you and then you walk around and the other one is coming in the other direction. I never thought much about that, but you're right.

**Rail:** From the image it seems as if you would've entered the door and immediately had the nose of the yellow sculpture right in front of you. It was very confrontational.

**Grosvenor:** Very confrontational. And then if you turned around to your right and looked in the other direction, you'd be confronted with that purple sculpture, the smaller one.

**Rail:** [Laughs] It seems like it was a quite a spare show. You were using just a few works to control the whole space.

**Grosvenor:** Yes. It was a beautiful space, and I built those sculptures particularly for it.

**Rail:** How did you meet Virginia Dwan? Was it through your involvement with the Park Place Gallery? I know she was one of the benefactors.

**Grosvenor:** Yes, I met her through John Gibson, who was a director at Park Place. A beautiful and wonderful woman.

**Rail:** How did you find showing at Park Place? Your work seems very different from a lot of the other work that was being shown there. Were you interested in the ideas some of those artists had about energy and the fourth dimension and things like that?

**Grosvenor:** No, I wasn't interested in any of that at all. I mean they were nice folks and we had a lot of fun, but I didn't understand their ideas or go along with their notions of public art and the fourth dimension. But I had some nice friends in that group of people.

**Rail:** The same piece that was in your show at Dwan appears a year later outdoors in the *American Sculpture of the Sixties* show at the LA County Museum.

**Grosvenor:** That was the same sculpture. It was very badly installed. I desperately tried to get them to take it down and they wouldn't. It's an indoor sculpture, not an outdoor one. It couldn't possibly survive—a ten mile-an-hour wind would have taken it down. It was just made out of plywood.

**Rail:** You weren't quite ready at that point to go outside?

**Grosvenor:** I wasn't at all ready. I wasn't even thinking about outside.

**Rail:** My sense, from what I've read, is that you don't make very much sculpture. You work very slowly.

**Grosvenor:** I make as much as I can. Let's say I *release* a few sculptures, but I *make* a lot. I just make a lot of things that aren't so good. I go in the wrong direction for three to four months and then I'll get back, hopefully, on the right track. I work regularly and very quickly, but there are a lot of mistakes. I guess that's why my production isn't so big.

**Rail:** Do you mostly make works specifically for exhibitions? With the scale, it seems you'd almost have to.

**Grosvenor:** Sometimes I built a sculpture and then the idea for the show would come up, and then sometimes it was the other way around. I did it both ways.

**Rail:** Were you also making some things in the studio just to make them?

**Grosvenor:** Yes. I enjoyed making them and I still enjoy making things—so much that I can't stop.

**Rail:** Even those early works?

**Grosvenor:** Oh, yes. Definitely. Because the plywood and the fiberglass resin I covered it with were so cheap and easy to acquire. I could make a mistake and it didn't cost anything.

**Rail:** It sounds like you don't work with assistants?

**Grosvenor:** I'd love to, but it's distracting in a way. I just like to do the work and not be held back. I have a forklift and that's my real helper. [*Laughter*]

**Rail:** Did you spray the sculptures? How were they painted?

**Grosvenor:** Yes, I did. I spray painted the sculptures with a spray gun.

**Rail:** There are works on paper related to these works. How did they come about? Would you be spraying the sculpture then turn to a piece of paper and spray that as well?

**Grosvenor:** The spray gun pattern was too large, so I had to use spray cans for the drawings.

**Rail:** Were you masking out the linear elements in the drawings then spraying over it?

**Grosvenor:** Masking them out, then spraying, then removing the tape. Yes, exactly.

**Rail:** For you were those forms related to the sculptures?

**Grosvenor:** I think they were related to the sculptures because some of the drawings are in the form of an inverted "T" shape. So, that was related to a large inverted "T" that hangs from the ceiling of the Walker Art Center now, I think. An inverted black "T." And then that relates to the two "T" shapes floating in water.

**Rail:** The Walker work is called *Untitled (Black)*. I'm curious about your titles. Are some of them places?

**Grosvenor:** Titles like *Topanga*, *Transoxiana*, and *Tenerife* were places on a map that sounded romantic and beautiful to me. Then I kind of ran out of gas on the titles and I stopped titling things. It felt more complete, simpler—not pegging down the works so much and leaving them open.

**Rail:** Was that "T" made for the 1968 *Minimal Art* exhibition at The Hague in the Netherlands?

**Grosvenor:** I made it in my studio on Broome Street and then the idea to show it there came up with John Weber, who put that exhibition together. There was also a white piece, a horizontal line up by the ceiling, then diagonal at the end. It's wild. I've recently redone that white sculpture for the ICA, Miami.

**Rail:** How did you feel about Minimalism and people who wanted to include you in that group?

**Grosvenor:** I had a good friend who was right next to me there in *Minimal Art*, Ronnie Bladen. I would talk very strongly about his work at the time, so I was very happy he and I were in the show. I admired the other works very much, but wasn't so close to them. I never considered myself a Minimalist and I don't think they considered me seriously at all. So, I was separate, in a way, from those people. I saw their work, but I did not know them. I never met Flavin. I might have met Judd once. I am not sure. I was thinking about what Bladen said to me once. We looked down at part of one of his sculptures and he said, "This is the motor for the whole sculpture." I probably thought that I could put the motor underground or underwater. I think that's what I did with that piece in the earth at Sonsbeek, and then in the floating piece I put the motor underwater.

**Rail:** Interesting. What did he mean by "motor?"

**Grosvenor:** The motor, or the energy, or the flotation gear, or the mass of the work, or the important thing that kept the visual part of it up. Maybe "motor" is the wrong word, but it's the one that Bladen used.

**Rail:** It makes sense in a way. Referencing the means by which the work operates, which can both be something functional, but also something more abstract, like the sense of dynamic energy Bladen's and your work evokes. Your work in the late 1960s seems to have arrived at an increased linearity. This "T" shaped piece is much slighter in terms of its profile, for example.

**Grosvenor:** The black piece was triangular in cross section. Then my work moved into the two floating "Ts" that were also triangular and very linear. There was not very much mass to those two floating "Ts" at all.

**Rail:** You said that at the time of the 1968 *American Sculpture of the Sixties* exhibition you weren't thinking about going outdoors and you felt that theirs was an incorrect installation of that piece. By the end of the '60s, what had opened up the outdoors for you as somewhere you could now place your work?

**Grosvenor:** I think it was getting away from Broome Street by moving to Williamsburg.

**Rail:** What made you want to leave SoHo?

**Grosvenor:** I think probably the price of the loft going up. My lease. Having an automobile and being able to drive around and see there was Staten Island and a place called Williamsburg—this was before it was the Williamsburg now. You could walk into any building and it was empty. And there was a yard with big open space, it seemed very free compared to Broome Street. I got a forklift, drove that around, and it was just good to be outside.

**Rail:** Another thing I read about you is that you are an avid boater.

**Grosvenor:** Yes, always have been.

**Rail:** The announcement poster for your first solo exhibition at Park Place looks like a diagram for some sort of nautical equipment. I was puzzling over it this morning.

**Grosvenor:** It's the blueprint of the floating two "T" sculpture. I always wanted to do something on the water. I was always around the water when I was growing up and I'm only eight feet from the water right now.

**Rail:** Being an avid boater, does that come into the work in some way? Looking at this blueprint, it seems that you really understood what to do. You understood the ballast and what you needed, structurally, to make it work. How did you do that research?

**Grosvenor:** I had a friend who was a naval architect. He made some suggestions and I made some suggestions. We put our heads together and came up with that configuration. You couldn't see any of the working parts. They were underwater, the floatation and the ballast. So, you just saw the support of the "T" and the cross—the horizontal part of the "T." We had a hard time with that, but we did get it to work, at least for a little while. The sculpture didn't last that long.

**Rail:** What happened to it?

**Grosvenor:** The waves got it, the wind got it. We did it anyway. A lot of torque on that thing, twisting around in the wind and the waves.

**Rail:** So it went to the bottom of the ocean?

**Grosvenor:** It went to the bottom, yes. It was in the Long Island Sound, a long way from my place. We did the best we could. It was a temporary installation, let's put it that way. *[Laughs]*

**Rail:** From there the work gets even more linear. Like this pipe piece that comes out of the wall. This is 1970, at PS1.

**Grosvenor:** I installed that at the beginning of the Paula Cooper Gallery, I think. Then I installed it in PS1 and various other places. That was a simple, thin line with a very slight angle to it.

**Rail:** What happened to these earlier works? In catalogues on your work they are often captioned as "destroyed." Did you dismantle the materials? What happened to them?

**Grosvenor:** I think the plywood pieces were all destroyed. That pipe piece you were just referring to, I think was used for other things. I'm not sure if I still have that or not. If you keep something for 20 years and you're moving around and there's no interest. You can't keep it forever, can you?

**Rail:** So then, by the early 1970s, the work was getting more linear and slight, and you seemed to move off the ceiling, onto the floor. Did something happen where you felt you had done enough with the ceiling?

**Grosvenor:** I had definitely done enough with the ceiling and I found another material that was cheap, which were large timbers. Then I found I could break wood and that was interesting for a while.

**Rail:** I want to pause briefly on the outdoor piece you did in the 1971 Sonsbeek exhibition. That piece is not only related to this idea of the thin line on the ground, but it also seems quite unique in the way it is submerged. It is like the earth version of the earlier floating "T" piece. Was that the idea?

**Grosvenor:** I suppose I was thinking about previous work and how much was underground. Also, I have always been interested in the trapezoid shape. I guess it harked back to the floating "Ts", where the engine was underwater and not seen. Then I thought the engine of this plate of steel would be underground like that. I also thought of it as a great weight that was sinking into the ground, which it might have done by the end of that show.

**Rail:** It's a very bold idea, also, that most of this shape and form, which is quite monumental in scale, would be invisible.

**Grosvenor:** I like that idea. A lot of the things we see in buildings are invisible, aren't they? I think it was Frank Lloyd Wright who said, "My Mile High is like a large lever." Much of the Mile High building was underground in his original drawing.

**Rail:** Then you started to break these big pieces of timber and that seems like a major development. The earlier work had certain references: to the aerodynamics of machinery, automobiles, and planes, for example. The technological aspect and finish of those 1960s pieces makes it feel like quite a big shift when you move to organic materials in the early 1970s.

**Grosvenor:** I think a lot of it has to do with the situation of the studio in Williamsburg and being outside and being next to a place that dealt in used lumber. All the old buildings were being taken apart, old wooden structures were being dismantled and there were people who dealt in the leftover material. Huge masses of timber were available and they were very, very cheap and it seemed like there was something to do with all this material that was going to waste or being sold at very, very low prices. In order to do something with them, it seemed like I could break them, change the direction of them, make a drawing on the beams. The drawing aspect is in the cracks or the breaks. I found I could get the break right where I wanted it. It was rather precise. It was not out of control. The machine I used was in this lumberyard next door to my Williamsburg studio.

**Rail:** How did you determine where to make the breaks? Was it intuitive?

**Grosvenor:** I found them in my drawings. If I drew a couple of lines, then I thought I could break it here and there, testing the proportions. I guess it had to do with the distance between the two breaks, and between the breaks and the beam or the piece of wood. I would establish proportions there.

**Rail:** Tell me more about the related works on paper.

**Grosvenor:** When I was breaking wood I started making masking tape drawings. I found that the masking tape was very much like the wood. If I broke the masking tape with my fingers it would break very similarly to the wood. So I felt comfortable with that material.

**Rail:** One connection to your earlier work is the sense of extension. If in the Dwan gallery you used just a few sculptures to activate the space, five or so years later you were using very long pieces of wood that you placed outside because they needed that much space to be seen.

**Grosvenor:** I think you're right. I didn't find the need for anything else somehow and I thought maybe outside you could concentrate on the one thing without being distracted by other things.

**Rail:** I was reading about these pieces in some articles from the 1970s. People talked about the visceral aspect of being with them. That they had a distinctive smell and coloring. Were those elements you were interested in as well?

**Grosvenor:** I was interested in a certain color, and I found that color with creosote, which is very toxic, very smelly, unfortunately. I didn't want to turn people off, but there was something about the color of it that I liked. It took me a few years to find I didn't have to use creosote. I could use motor oil and other things. Maybe because of that poisonous material and smell people thought that these sculptures were violent, but they really weren't.

**Rail:** I was curious about that element of the work. Since a lot of people at the time did talk about the "violence" and your "control over the violence of this breaking and cracking."

**Grosvenor:** Well a lot of people talked about John Chamberlain's violence, too, and he said, "All you have to do is lean against my sculptures and you'll find they'll dent right in." They were very fragile material. He talked about it like flesh.

**Rail:** So, that was not an element for you? The violence?

**Grosvenor:** Oh, no, definitely not. In fact, the opposite

**Rail:** Is the act of breaking the log not violent, in your experience?

**Grosvenor:** I don't think so. With a couple of machines and the right leverage it just cracks, very quietly cracks. It's interesting. There wasn't some great snapping.

**Rail:** I guess this interpretation is an example of the enduring macho mythos of the artist wrestling with nature.

**Grosvenor:** God no.





Robert Grosvenor, *Untitled*, 1974. Wood, creosote. 105 x 14 inches. © Robert Grosvenor. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

**Rail:** Tell me a bit more about "creosote." What is it?

**Grosvenor:** Creosote is a material that's put on railroad ties. Wood doesn't rot when it is creosoted. That's why they use it on telephone poles and railroad ties. I didn't use it to stop the rot, I just liked the color. But because of this, perhaps, railroad ties are always referenced in relation to my work. I never used a railroad tie in my life. They're the wrong size and the wrong proportions. But maybe my work *looks* to some people like railroad ties.

**Rail:** In terms of your own generation of artists, do you feel any affinity with Post-Minimalists like Bill Bollinger or Richard Serra?

**Grosvenor:** Definitely Bill Bollinger. I felt very strongly about him because he had a similar feeling as me for the horizon. He did a beautiful piece that was a floating log on a river. We were supposed to be materialists. Alan Saret was very important to me too.



Robert Grosvenor, *Three car unit*, 2012-2017. Painted steel, 60 x 185 x 140 inches. Installation view, Karma, New York. Photo: Thomas Müller. © Robert Grosvenor. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

**Rail:** You've made some recent work using cars, and a few years ago I saw an earlier piece from the '60s with a vehicular shape to it.

**Grosvenor:** You're talking about the green triangular object. It was part of an early, failed sculpture that I flipped over on the floor and turned into a sort of three-wheeled car. I had a little daughter and I thought I'd make a little car for her. It was impractical, but it looked good.

**Rail:** There are other, more recent, works in this vein. I'm looking at an image from a 2014 show of yours at Max Hetzler and there's a speed boat.

**Grosvenor:** Yes, a racing boat. I've got this hobby, making things: boats and cars. Until recently I've always kept them at a recreational level, just having fun.

**Rail:** They do seem related to your work. People have always connected your work to the interest you've had in boats, and the '60s work has a strong technological feel, which is in this work as well.

**Grosvenor:** There again. Everything I do, it's because I like the way it looks.

**Rail:** Is it functional as well as a sculpture?

**Grosvenor:** That particular boat is. It's really fast and very, very dangerous. I found the boat and then I found the motor and I put the two things together. That's all I did.

**Rail:** To get back to the narrative of your work, in the '80s your work took on a more explicit architectural presence in the sense of these coverings where it is almost as if you could enter them.

**Grosvenor:** Yes, although they were totally impractical. I think the big shift was in the large Paula Cooper Gallery space, where I was able to separate out elements of the sculptures— put one element in one corner, and another element elsewhere, and maybe a third element somewhere else again. I was able to separate things instead of just having a sculpture be one whole unit. I also think the shift had something to do with moving out of Williamsburg and New York City into Manhattan.

York City entirely. Now I live part of the year on Long Island in suburbia.

**Rail:** Where would you find these materials? It feels as if a lot of those materials were cast off. Where did you find the corrugated steel, for example, or the gazing balls, or the concrete, or the bricks?

**Grosvenor:** The corrugated steel I found in Manhattan and Brooklyn. I had a trailer at that point behind my truck and there were areas that were sort of cordoned off. They'd torn down a building on Mulberry Street. There was a huge, empty block. They'd torn down a building and there was marvelous corrugated material. It had a beautiful color and texture to it. It wasn't being used anymore, so I just picked it up and put it on the trailer, and I found certain sites in Brooklyn that had the same material. It didn't seem to bother anybody. So I took it, and I brought some of that material out to Long Island with me, and I was able to make the sculpture that was at the Renaissance Society in Chicago. I used that as the horizontal part of that sculpture. Along with concrete blocks, which I never had used before when I was in the city. They weren't available or I didn't know anything about them. But they were all over the place in Long Island.

**Rail:** How did the piece you recently showed at Paula Cooper come about?

**Grosvenor:** I think a lot about horizontal areas. I think of the floor a lot. I think of tables a lot. I obviously do quite a number of four-legged things, which could refer to tables maybe. And then I thought about how I love fiberglass. The softness of it and the flexible qualities of it. I wondered if I could make a ridiculous table that sags in the middle. I thought, "That's going to be interesting." I've always loved the catenary arch. The curve of the sag of the material.

**Rail:** Do you have an interest in design?

**Grosvenor:** Very much, yes. I have an interest in furniture design too. Automobiles as well.

**Rail:** What is your taste? Is it very eclectic?

**Grosvenor:** Oh wow. I have a long list that would take us a long time to go through. Right now I'm interested in the 1955 Citroën DS 19. I've been interested in that car for a long time. Most of the Hans Wegner chairs I like very much. And then I like things that don't have any conscious design aspect attached to them, too.

**Rail:** The three car work in your 2017 show at Karma is different from the speedboat at Max Hetzler, because these cars are no longer useful—they've been stripped down and altered by you, and in the process turned into sculptures. Had you been working on those cars for a while?

**Grosvenor:** Yes. I had been working with them for maybe five or six years. Those cars pass mainly as cars, or as nice looking objects. One of the cars runs very well, the other one runs badly, and the third doesn't run at all. If that's important, I don't know. There's nothing very expensive about those cars. I've always loved the Daf, the Solyto, and the Renault, which is to the right. Nobody particularly likes that car, but I like it, and I thought maybe I can make it a little better by doing this and that. Maybe I could make it interesting. I always wanted to put a fin on the back of that car, which I did. And then the car in the middle, which is just such an eccentric thing, you know, it just had to go in the middle. Then the car on the left, the Daf, is a Dutch car that nobody ever liked. But I always sort of thought it was cool in a way. So I smoothed it out a little bit and I felt that they looked good together, the three.

**Rail:** To close, can you tell me about your photography? What made you pick up the camera and what were you trying to capture?

**Grosvenor:** I was trying to capture some of the odd things that we see everyday, wherever we are. I was drawn to strange juxtapositions of things, why one thing is next to another, and how one thing next to another becomes something completely different. It's so interesting and strange. It's also important for me to be close to the water, so I can put things out on the water that maybe shouldn't be there. Like, I could toss in little donuts or little toy penguins. Stuff like that. I definitely think there's some humor there. A certain odd beauty, if you will.

## Contributor

### Alex Bacon

ALEX BACON is a critic, curator, scholar based in New York. Most recently, with Harrison Tenzer, he curated *Correspondences: Ad Reinhardt at 100*.