

### MODERN ART NOTES

Art-focused Journalism by Tyler Green



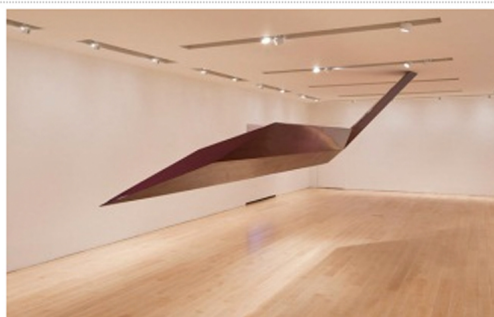
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## Robert Grosvenor's 'Tenerife' at the Whitney

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The fourth time I saw Robert Grosvenor's *Tenerife* (1966) at the Whitney Museum of American Art, I was as astonished as I was the first time: What am I seeing? What's holding that thing up? What is this thing made of? How? What? Whoa.



Art historical references rushed to mind: A line of illusionism in art that runs from Hans Holbein the Younger's *The*

*Ambassadors* (1533) through to Robert Lazzarini's *Payphone* (2002)? Yes, sort of... except, no, not quite. Those artworks present definable objects that have been push-me-pull-you-ed: A skull, a pay telephone. Maybe the Grosvenor is rooted in Dutch Golden Age Daniel Vosmaer's *A View of Delft Through an Imaginary Loggia* (1663), which abstracts architectural space into distortion, kind of like what *Tenerife* does to itself (!) and to the space around it? Nope: Vosmaer's painting may be of an imaginary space and an imaginary viewpoint, but it's still representational. *Tenerife* is a shape, suspended.

Grosvenor's *Tenerife* isn't really anything, except a hunk of fiberglass, plywood, steel and synthetic polymer lacquer carefully engineered to hang from a ceiling. Unless, of course, *Tenerife* is a reference to the gorgeous concrete masterpiece *Auditorio de Tenerife*? I looked up the Auditorio on my mobile phone, only to feel like a dolt when I discovered that while the building is intensely mid-century modern, it was designed by Santiago Calatrava and completed in 2003. So, no.

I also thought of John McCracken's fetish-finish leaning planks, the first of which McCracken made the same year in which Grosvenor made *Tenerife*, 1966. But the finishes are different. The finish of the Grosvenor is more like the iridescence of a Ken Price sculpture, the ones that somehow flatten out shimmer, even when the shimmer is applied to a curved form. But no, for lots of obvious reasons that doesn't apply. Then my mind wanders to Robert Irwin's description of how his passion for muscle cars and fantastic paint finishes led him to light-and-space art, descriptions that fill the first third of Lawrence Weschler's *"Seeing is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees."*

But *Tenerife* is none of these things. Eventually realized that part of the reason I dig the piece isn't just because it's really whiz-bang neat-o, but because it flirts with so many other wonderful things.