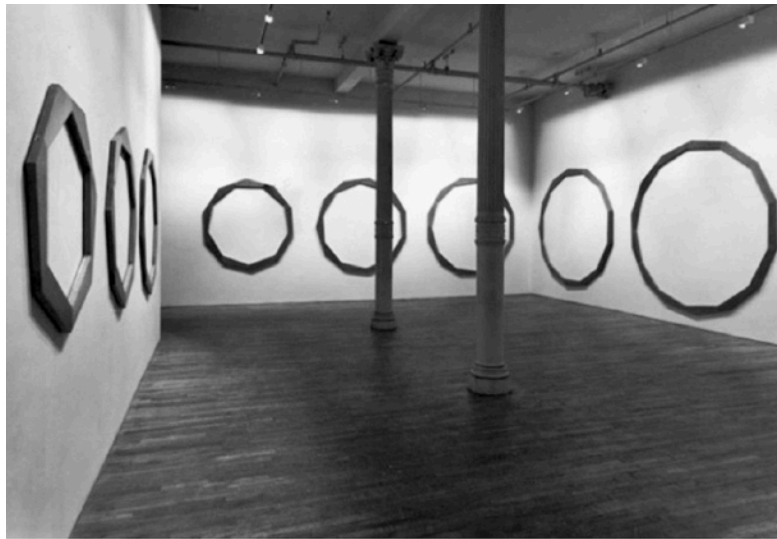




July 26 - August 24, 2019

# BERNARD KIRSCHENBAUM

## *SELF PORTRAIT*



BERNARD KIRSCHENBAUM, *Self Portrait*, 1980

In September 2018, to inaugurate our representation of the Estate of Bernard Kirschenbaum, Postmasters staged the exhibition of his early works.

Bookending our 2018-19 season, we are pleased to announce the second solo presentation of Kirschenbaum, this time centering around *Self Portrait* - his major 1980 wall sculpture of interlocking polygons.

**Bernard Kirschenbaum**  
**Self Portrait, 1980**  
cherry wood  
13 parts, 24 cm to 312 cm diameter (9.5 to 123 inches)  
originally shown at Max Hutchinson Gallery, New York

A set of thirteen progressive geometric shapes (triangle, square, pentagon, hexagon, heptagon and so on) separated and spread around the gallery space, *Self Portrait* is the largest single work we have ever shown.

*Self Portrait* is deceptively simple: a seemingly symmetrical, circular work, suggesting a perfect abstract order, no references, no up or down. Yet under the surface it is also a swirl of shapes, all different, yet ultimately perfectly fitting into each other. The nested vortex they form is reminiscent of the archetypal wormhole pattern appearing often in early computer animations.



Not incidentally made of cherry wood (Kirschenbaum is a German surname of Lutheran or Ashkenazic origin meaning "cherry tree"), *Self Portrait* is an embodiment of a search for order and underlying structure, a deeper system, and, ultimately, meaning.

In a self-portrait, we look the artist in the eye. The artist's assertion is not simply, "this is who I am," but "this is the way I want to present myself in the world", "this is the way I want you to see me." And the case of Bernie Kirschenbaum is not different. He might have lived through and witnessed hell, but his art, including his *Self Portrait*, is a tireless search for order and beauty-in-chaos (or elegance in randomness, to adopt the parlance of Kirschenbaum's fields of exploration: mathematics and computer science.)

We know from biographical facts and from the art he left behind that Kirschenbaum sought to mitigate the trauma of his war experience and the tumultuous times he lived through with his quest for the beautiful.

Bernard Kirschenbaum was a soldier in United States Army from 1943 to 1946. He fought in Europe in World War II, and took part in the liberation and closing of several concentration camps. Whether by fate or by chance, he became one of those unexpected symbols of history, one of the soldiers in an iconic photo of Allied and Russian troops shaking hands on the Elbe River.

From the early 1970s Kirschenbaum used computers in the design and fabrication of his sculptures, large scale abstract hard-edge works that embody the simultaneous simplicities and complexities of geometry and beauty inherent in mathematical constructs. For *Self Portrait* and a group of related instruction-based works, before being realized as sculpture Kirschenbaum's programmed forms were first executed by plotters - the precursors of digital printers.

Along with *Self Portrait* the exhibition includes a group of works with a set of progressive polygons as subject. In *Untitled*, (1996) and the *Accumulations* series (1985, printed in 2012) Kirschenbaum applied a randomizing algorithm to the same vocabulary of shapes to explore endless permutational complexity.

The Estate of Bernard Kirschenbaum is the first artist estate to be represented by Postmasters Gallery. The artist's early engagement with topographics and computational systems feels increasingly prescient in our digitized contemporary moment.

Bernard Kirschenbaum (1924-2016) had a sizable and influential presence in early sixties and seventies downtown New York art community. He was an integral part of the early years of Park Place Gallery, 112 Greene Street Space, Sculpture Now Gallery, and Anarchitecture Group. He was one of the first artists to be shown at Paula Cooper Gallery.

A native New Yorker, Kirschenbaum studied horticulture and architecture at Cornell University and the IIT Institute of Design (founded as the New Bauhaus) in Chicago, respectively. He worked with Buckminster Fuller and exhibited, among other places, at Park Place Gallery, Paula Cooper Gallery, 112 Greene Street, Sculpture Now Gallery, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Max Hutchinson Gallery, Galerie Nordenhake, Malmö and Stockholm, Malmö Konsthall, and Moderna Museet, Stockholm.