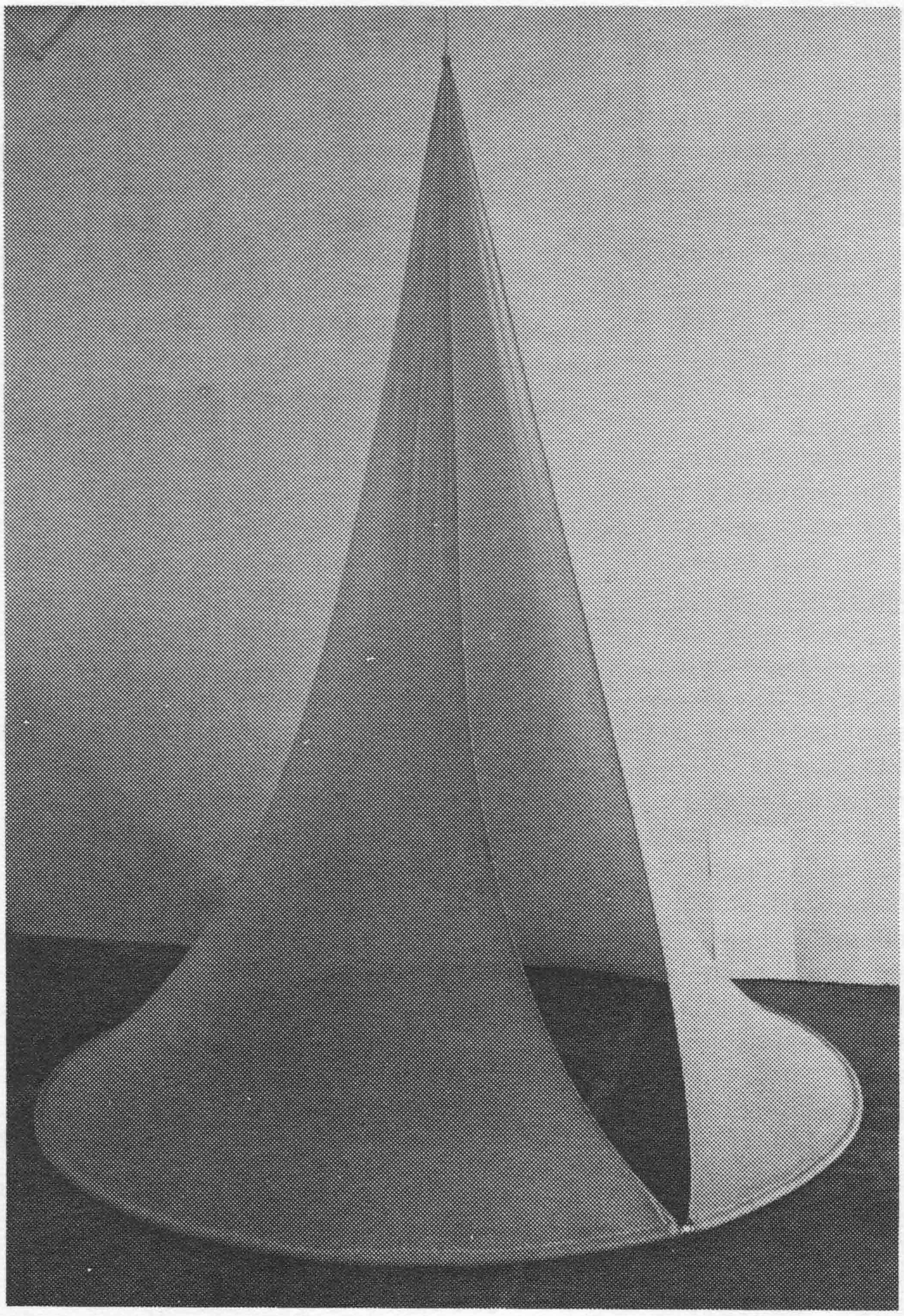
Ursula Schneider
MATRIX/BERKELEY 1

University Art Museum
February - April 1978

Cones, 1978 (detail)



Ursula Schneider often speaks of "clarifying feelings" or "clear and essential images" when talking about how she develops her imagery. Schneider's approach to art is a traditional one in that she uses physical and pictorial symbols to objectify different mental conditions. One of her early series of works completed in 1972 consists of abstract shapes cut and burned out of clear vinyl and painted with acrylic. These shapes, pinned directly to the wall and in some cases spreading out horizontally as much as eleven feet, resemble huge wings. Later, Schneider completed a number of works situated in corner spaces which consisted of nylon monofilament and fragile membranes of vinyl. These works suggested a soft opening into the corner, an invitation to mentally project yourself closer to it. In 1976 she made a work entitled Two Moons and Six Masks which consisted of a large three-dimensional environment in which masks, made of human hair and sewn together over molds of human and animal faces, were pinned to two abutting black walls. Suspended in front of these walls and hanging free were two flat moon shapes, also painted black. Like her "wing" pieces, the fundamental or iconic character of this imagery has a psychological force akin to the art of ancient cultures.

Schneider's most recent work, currently exhibited in MATRIX and titled Cones (1978), consists of five tentlike structures made of a thin cotton scrim material weighted at the base with metal tubes and pulled into a conical shape by a thin wire attached to the ceiling. The dimensions of each cone vary slightly. They are approximately eleven feet high and nine feet in diameter.

Each of the cones reveals an individual manner of suggesting volume and containing space. One cone wraps around space in a spiral formation, another with tautly stretched scrim appears bloated as if a solid form, another drapes loosely, suggesting volume in a very subtle fashion. Each cone has an opening or doorway and is large enough to accommodate one person at a time. In talking about the piece, Schneider emphasizes that she does not conceive of it as a group of fragile art objects to be viewed from a distance. Rather, she hopes the cones will be explored from many different viewpoints, including entering the cones themselves. It is her intention that the viewer's perception of the work not be a static one, that it change and reveal itself as one moves through it.

Entering the cones involves both a visual and psychological transition. On a rudimentary level, it is a transition of moving from exposed exterior space into a protected interior space. Although tentative in physical structure, they tend to operate as metaphors for shelter, offering their occupant a private space isolated from the public space of the gallery. When inside these forms, one experiences an intimacy of scale not apparent from outside the works.

Color plays a central role in the perception of these works. Schneider integrates color and three-dimensional form through the technique of staining. While painters working in the 60's first used this technique extensively to merge the pictorial image of a painting with its canvas ground or support, Schneider utilizes staining to overcome the problem of color as mere covering for three-dimensional form. This staining, along with the natural translucent character of the cotton scrim support, makes these forms highly sensitive to light. Each cone is stained differently and reacts to light in a unique way. A soft and hazy staining of the cloth filters in light of the same character. In such a case, color appears to resonate within the volume. Our perception of the density of the cone walls changes as we move from the outside to the inside. When standing outside a number of them, their walls appear dense or opaque, but from the inside translucent, creating the sense that space and color are expanding outward.

Schneider talks about the individual cones in terms of objectifying different emotions. When occupied, each cone creates a deliberate atmosphere which evokes peculiar mental sensations. When viewed in relationship to her earlier works, Cones reflects an approach to abstraction bordering on the surreal. Schneider is constructing models for internal feelings.

Born in Zurich, Switzerland in 1943, Ursula Schneider received a BFA from the Ceramic School of Bern and subsequently attended the Kunstgewerbeschule in Zurich. Schneider moved to the United States in 1968. She received an MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute where she currently teaches painting. Ursula Schneider is represented by the Braunstein/Quay Gallery, San Francisco.

MA

Works in MATRIX:

Cones, 1978, cotton scrim, metal tubing, monofilament. Individual cones approximately 11' high, 9' diameter, dimensions of installation variable. Courtesy Braunstein/Quay Gallery, San Francisco.

Selected one-person exhibitions:
Braunstein/Quay Gallery, S.F. '74; Oakland Museum of Art '75; College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland '76; Braunstein/Quay Gallery, S.F. '76.

Selected group exhibitions: San Francisco Art Institute '71; Richmond Art Center, CA, Biennial Painting Exhibition '71; University Art Museum, Berkeley, CA, Bay Area Underground '72; Quay Gallery, S.F. '72; University Art Museum, Berkeley, CA, Recent Acquisitions '73; University Art Museum, Berkeley, CA, Women Artists from the Museum Collection '73; Pomona College, Claremont, CA '73; San Francisco Art Institute, Six Painters '73; Quay Gallery, S.F. '74; Whitney Museum of American Art, NYC, Biennial Exhibition '75; Hansen-Fuller Gallery, S.F. '75; Museum of Fine Arts, Fort Worth, Texas and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Exchange: DFW/SFO '75; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, Painting and Sculpture in California: The Modern Era '76; Whitman College, Walla Walla, Washington, 3 Californian Artists '77; Scripps College, Claremont, CA, Paper Art '77.

Selected bibliography about Schneider:

Chipman, Jack. "A Studio Report," Artweek, vol. 4, no. 17 (April '73) p. 13.

Frankenstein, Alfred. "Six Painters: Some Explorations in Art," The San Francisco Chronicle (Oct. 19 '73).

Ross, Elizabeth. "A Breathtaking Phenomenon," Art, vol. 3, no. 1 (Jan.-Feb. '75).

Bicentennial Exhibition of American Women Artists (Las Vegas, University of Nevada '76).

Dunham, Judith. "Bay Area/Texas Art Exchange," Artweek, vol. 7 (Feb. 28 '76).

Frankenstein, Alfred. "Impressive Texas Art in Exchange," The San Francisco Chronicle(Feb. 8 '76).

Ratcliff, Carter. "Report from San Francisco," Art in America, vol. 56 (May-June '77) p. 55.

Muchnic, Suzanne. "A Paper Chase at Scripps College," The Los Angeles Times (Dec. 12 '77).

MATRIX is supported in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, a Federal Agency.