

RICHARD STANKIEWICZ

Through Oct. 27. Washburn Gallery, 177 10th Avenue, Manhattan; 212-397-6780, washburngallery.com.

Richard Stankiewicz's sculpture resists abbreviation. The 11 untitled assemblies of found steel beams and machine parts in "Richard Stankiewicz: Sculpture From the 1950s-1970s" at Washburn Gallery vary enormously: A vertically mounted speaker component dangling two braided tresses of wire looks like a fetish object. A rectangular frame onto which this scrap-metal pioneer welded a few objects — a triangle in the shape of a waving pennant, the heel of a pipe — is self-conscious and austere. An 18-inch-high knot of twisted I-beams looks very much, from one side, like a goat, complete with bolts and a pocket of pebble-speckled concrete to suggest its hairy haunches. A large pipe with a cutaway to an intricate interior of smaller pipes and machinery is a didactic diagram of the artist's function: to slice the surface off reality and expose its strange internal mechanism.

But they all shift and recede under your eyes in the same disconcerting way. Part of it is the surfaces. Too irregular to register simply as orange or brown but too muted to form clear patterns, the deep layer of rust that covers every one of Stankiewicz's sculptures softens corners, pits planes and makes even the most stolid shape look about as permanent as a dune. Mostly it's the delicate way he put his pieces together, carefully getting right up to the edge of a recognizable shape but never quite crossing the line.

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