

JOHN DUFF

January 18 – February 28, 2026

In 1968-9, an assemblage of green-painted clamshells and steel wire announced a constructivist or accretive trajectory in John Duff's practice. Here, sculpture doesn't arrive at a set goal but adventures semi-blindly toward form while leaving all the steps of its process exposed, because whatever it might become is mainly a question of how it gets here. Such works seem to tap natural forces of growth and change while mobilizing whatever materials are at hand, and conceal nothing. Made in Duff's former Suffolk Street studio shortly after he arrived here from California, this early sculpture is shown now for the first time at Reena Spaulings.

A fiberglass "wedge" and other works from the mid-1980s have a more integral or totemic presence. These lightweight forms explore a tension between the wall and the object, jutting out or arcing through space while at the same time withholding inner hollows and voids. Duff's fiberglass objects are often painted on their insides, introducing further tensions between sculptural form and painterly surface, opacity and translucence. Duff has been described as a sculptor who "reinvents tension as an absolute goal of art," but in these works tension could rather be seen as a productive condition, their engine. Any sculptural resolution between inside and outside, surface and volume, process and final form, comes as an eccentric, sometimes clunky and often funny new thing in our midst, which might explain the at once elegant and awkward aspect of certain works by Duff. Their daring feels more vulnerable than heroic.

The most recent works on view involve precarious combinations of cement, Styrofoam, welded steel, found objects and Turtle Wax. Stacked foam spheres submit a geometric problem to the influence of high heat, chemical reaction, gravity and accident. The welds are rough. Brutalist cement forms a sensitive crust or skin, stained with brown shellac or brightened with pale green Turtle Wax and an orange string. A found bicycle chain becomes the perimeter of a pond-like area of cement levitated on three legs. Another new sculpture suggests a scale model of a gladiatorial arena, with heavy metal steps descending to a stage-like accretion of cement. In these works, density interacts with dispersion, hardness plays against ramshackle fragility, concrete makes contact with foam and foam with fire, generating wild structures that seem to want to unfold an alien space in the gallery.

Works dating back to one of Duff's earliest exhibitions in San Francisco, 1967, tightly bind metal pipes, tree branches and rope with black cloth tape, creating forms like mummified shadows.

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John Duff

Black Divide, 1984
molded fibreglass, resin, plywood
43.18 x 113.03 x 39.37 cm ; 17 x 44 1/2 x 15 1/2 in

JD/S 49

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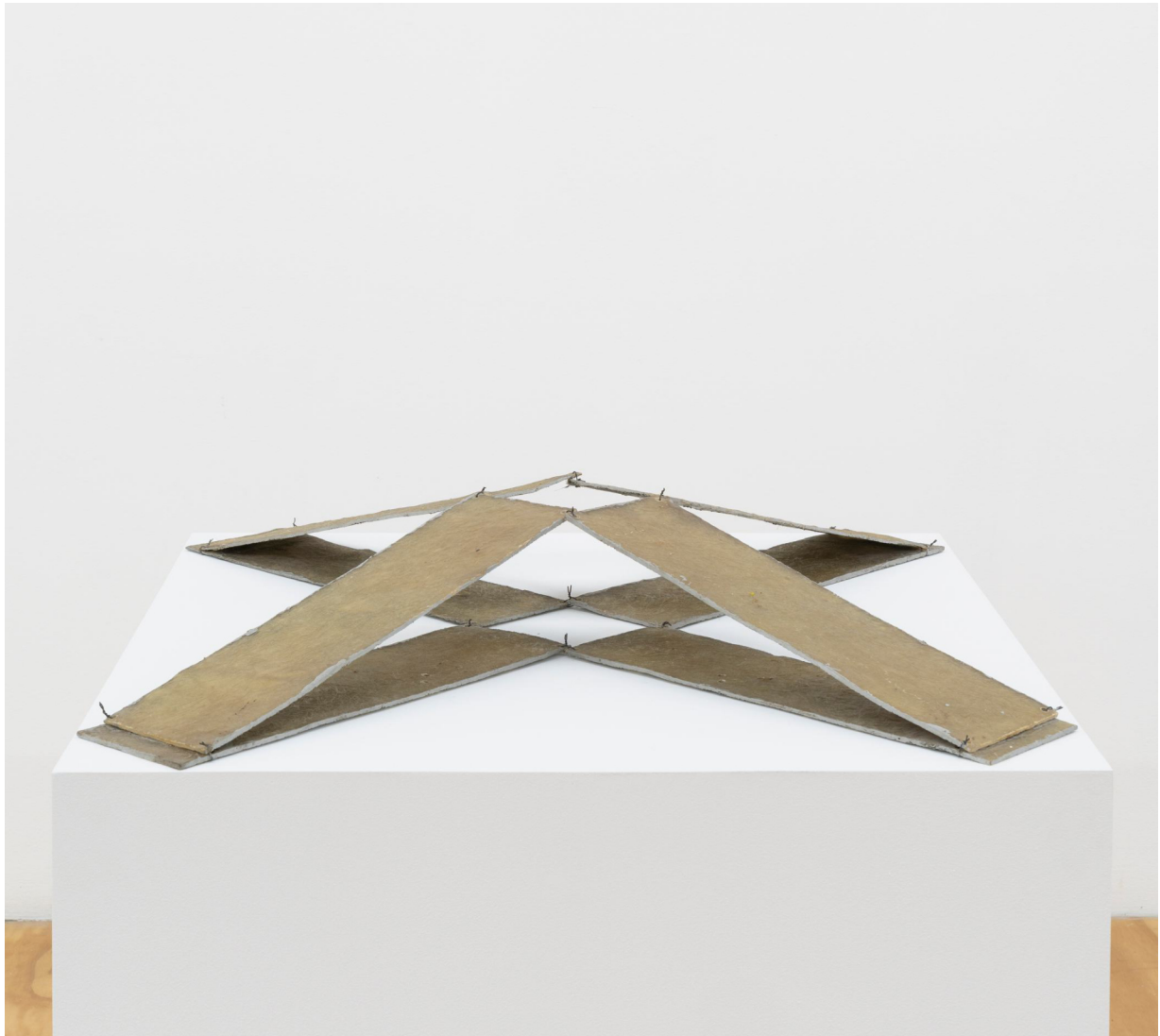


John Duff

***Untitled*, 2025**
cement, bicycle chain, screws
6.35 x 43.18 x 25.4 cm ; 2 1/2 x 17 x 10 in

JD/S 30

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John Duff

***Untitled*, 1970**

fiberglass, wire, shellac, paint

10.16 x 82.55 x 82.55 cm ; 4 x 32 1/2 x 32 1/2 in

JD/S 35

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John Duff

***Untitled*, 2025**

steel, concrete, shellac

12.5 x 36.5 x 36.5 cm ; 4 7/8 x 14 3/8 x 14 3/8 in

JD/S 36

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John Duff

***Untitled*, 1968**
clamshells, wire, paint
dimensions variable, 106.68 x 63.5 x 38.1 cm; 42 x 25 x 15 in

JD/S 48

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John Duff

***Untitled*, 2024**

bricks, cement, rubber, asphalt, glass bottle
8.5 x 15 x 10 cm ; 3 3/8 x 5 7/8 x 3 7/8 in

JD/S 34

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John Duff

***Graphite Curved Wedge*, 1983**
shellac, graphite and fiberglass
185.42 x 17.78 x 23.49 cm ; 73 x 7 x 9 1/4 in

JD/S 43

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John Duff

***Untitled*, 1967**

tree branch, rubber, rope, cloth tape

184.15 x 8.89 x 15.24 cm ; 72 1/2 x 3 1/2 x 6 in

JD/S 42

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John Duff

***Yellow Wall Piece*, 1967**

resin and wood

38.1 x 22.86 x 29.21 cm ; 15 x 9 x 11 1/2 in

JD/S 44

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John Duff

***Untitled*, 2025**

Steel, cement

60.96 x 27.3 x 35.56 cm ; 24 x 10 3/4 x 14 in

JD/S 33

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John Duff

***Untitled*, 2025**

concrete, steel rings, metal rods, wood rods, plastic, turtle
wax, shellac

17.78 x 33.02 x 35.56 cm ; 7 x 13 x 14 in

JD/S 31

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John Duff

Untitled, 1969
fiberglass, wood, wire, shellac
30.75 x 31 x 2.5 cm ; 12 1/8 x 12 1/4 x 1 in

JD/S 40

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John Duff

***Stump*, 2025**
styrofoam, cement, Steel, wood
43.18 x 60.96 x 53.34 cm ; 17 x 24 x 21 in

JD/S 27

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John Duff

***Untitled*, 2025**
styrofoam, cement, screws
45.72 x 45.72 x 45.72 cm ; 18 x 18 x 18 in

JD/S 29

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John Duff

***Untitled*, 2025**
styrofoam, cement, screws
40.64 x 40.64 x 40.64 cm ; 16 x 16 x 16 in

JD/S 28

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John Duff

***Untitled*, 2024**

wood, cement, paint

43.18 x 16.51 x 2.54 cm ; 17 x 6 1/2 x 1 in

JD/S 39

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John Duff

***Untitled*, 2024**

steel, concrete, turtle wax

78.74 x 71.12 x 22.86 cm ; 31 x 28 x 9 in

JD/S 41

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John Duff

White Oracle 2, 1983
fiberglass, wood, paint
181.61 x 12.7 x 30.48 cm ; 71 1/2 x 5 x 12 in

JD/S 45

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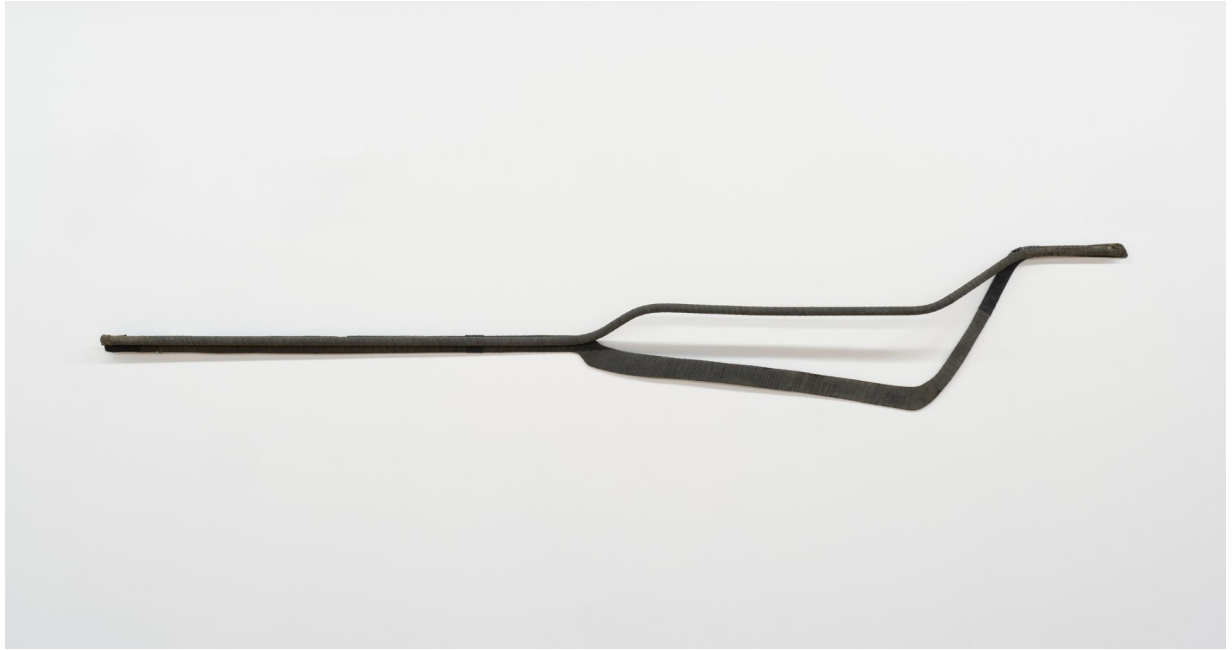


John Duff

Untitled, 2024
cement, turtlewax, string
31.5 x 17 x 3in;

JD/S 46

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John Duff

***Untitled*, 1967**

aluminum pole, wood, cloth tape

38.1 x 222.25 x 10.16 cm ; 15 x 87 1/2 x 4 in

JD/S 47

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John Duff

Untitled, 1968
bamboo, wire, resin
204.47 x 50.8 x 5.08 cm ; 80 1/2 x 20 x 2 in

JD/S 50