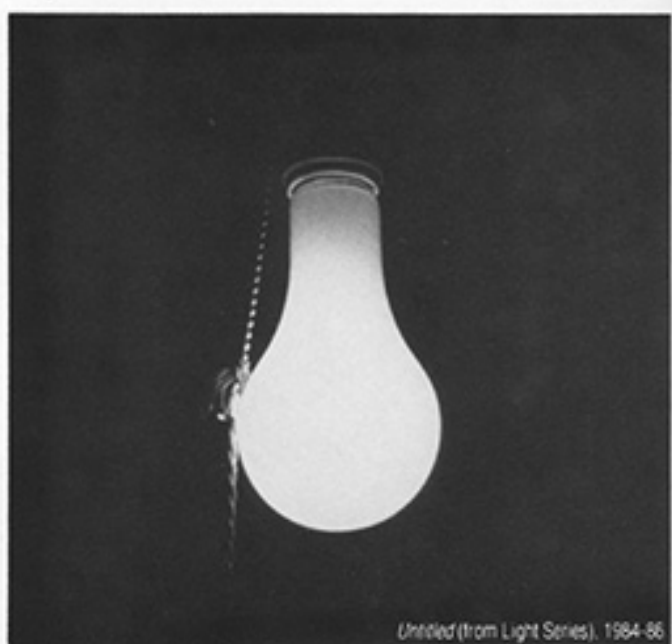


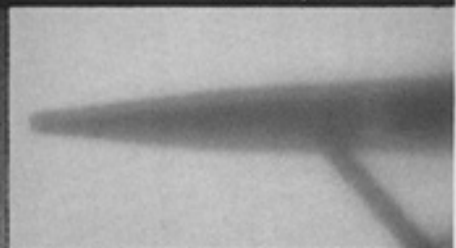
## Lewis Stein

Heidegger writes of our involvement with the world in terms of a "concern." A relationship to "ready-to-hand" entities is one manifestation of this concern. In a narrow sense these entities can be seen as tools or equipment, or more broadly as having a structure of "in-order-to" or "for-the-sake-of." Heidegger presents hammers as a representative example of a "ready-to-hand" object. In our everyday dealings we perceive the hammer not as "a perceptual cognition" but in terms of its potentiality, or its potential relation to our bodies to realize our concerns. Heidegger calls this latter mode of perception "circumspection." When we seize the hammer and test its worthiness, we are operating in this mode of perception. However, when we use the hammer, our relationship to it shifts. The hammer is subordinated to the hammering, to our in-order-to. In this mode, the hammer, despite our direct relationship to it, no longer exists; it is no longer perceived.

Heidegger describes how radically all this can change. There can be a breakdown. The head can come flying off the hammer. Only in circumstances like these can we become aware of the processes of the in-order-to and for-the-sake-of. It is also at these times that the equipment, in its "conspicuousness of unusability," demonstrates itself most clearly in its character as "ready-to-hand," and at these times we can become aware of the larger context — the world — in which we have previously operated unaware.



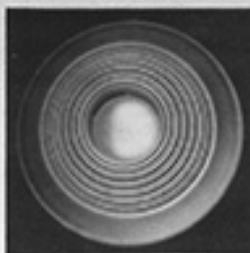
Untitled (from Light Series), 1984-86



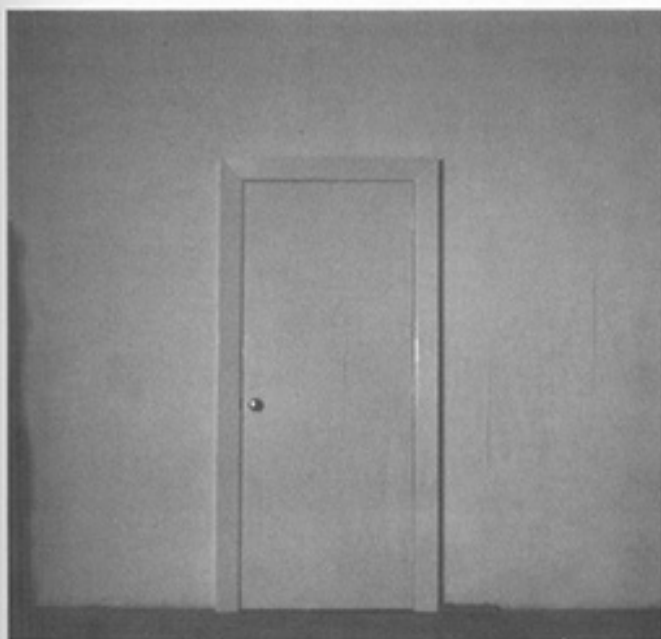
Untitled (from Shadow Series), 1985



Untitled (from Surveillance Series), 1984



Untitled (from Light Series), 1984-86

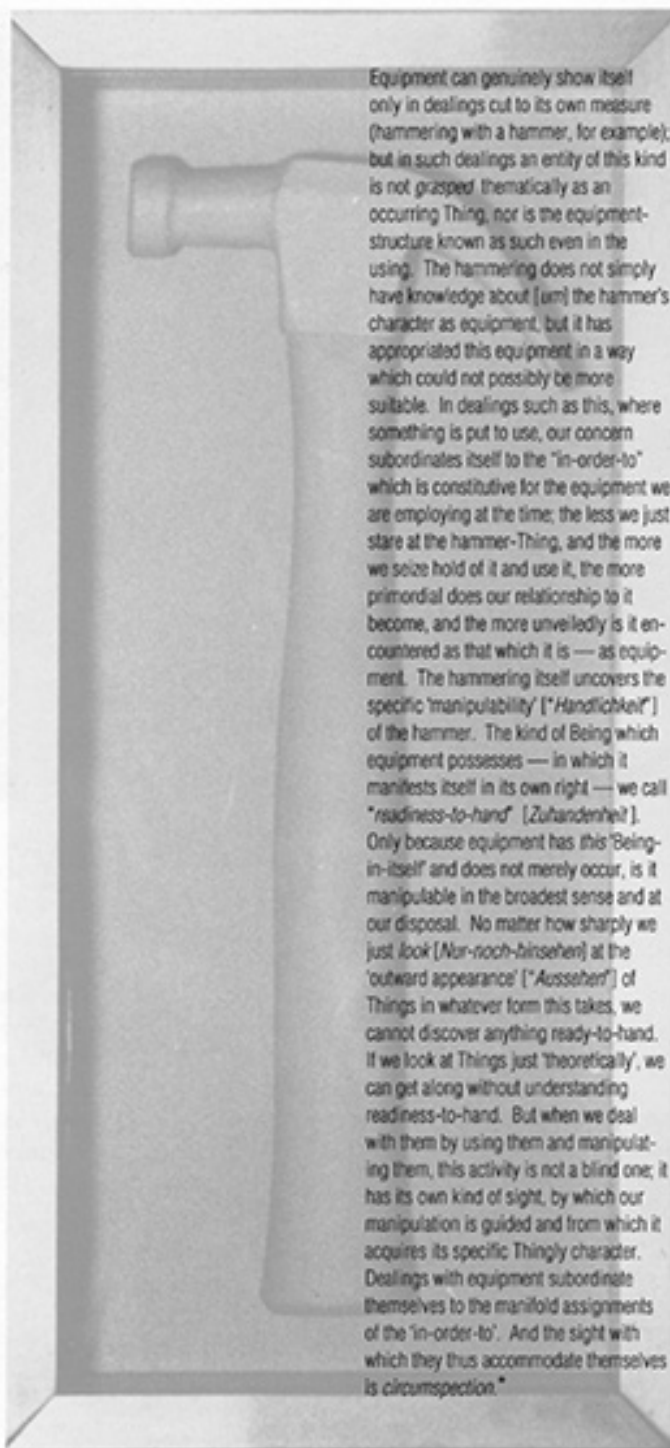


Untitled, 1968-72, (chained door).

"Chained door" (1968-72) consists of a single solid-core door in a door jamb secured to a wall. A regular door chain is fixed between the door and the jamb from the inside. Under optimal conditions, ten or more identical doors would be placed at regular intervals in an exhibit space. The doors do not lead anywhere. The viewer has two options: either to try one of the doors or to resist their call. In either case, the body's action is determined in relation to the doors. An attempt to open one of the doors will result in a sudden jolt. The question remains about the other doors. Are they all the same?

The works designated "hammers" (1967-74) are a series of ten hammers. Each object consists of a 16-oz. claw hammer mounted on a board which forms the bottom of a sealed polished aluminum box with a plexiglass window. The head, handle and background are each painted a different bright pastel color, beautiful in a way that subverts or mocks the masculinity usually associated with hammers. Their placement on a low platform encourages the viewer to stand directly in front of each hammer respectively and to peer down at it; the object's seductiveness notwithstanding, the sealed box prevents any manipulation.

\*Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., Copyright © 1962). Reprinted by permission of Harper and Row, Publishers.



Equipment can genuinely show itself only in dealings cut to its own measure (hammering with a hammer, for example); but in such dealings an entity of this kind is not grasped thematically as an occurring Thing, nor is the equipment-structure known as such even in the using. The hammering does not simply have knowledge about [um] the hammer's character as equipment, but it has appropriated this equipment in a way which could not possibly be more suitable. In dealings such as this, where something is put to use, our concern subordinates itself to the "in-order-to" which is constitutive for the equipment we are employing at the time; the less we just stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly it is encountered as that which it is — as equipment. The hammering itself uncovers the specific 'manipulability' ["Handlichkeit"] of the hammer. The kind of Being which equipment possesses — in which it manifests itself in its own right — we call "readiness-to-hand" [Zuhandenheit]. Only because equipment has this 'Being-in-itself' and does not merely occur, is it manipulable in the broadest sense and at our disposal. No matter how sharply we just look [Nur-noch-hinsehen] at the 'outward appearance' ["Aussehen"] of Things in whatever form this takes, we cannot discover anything ready-to-hand. If we look at Things just 'theoretically', we can get along without understanding readiness-to-hand. But when we deal with them by using them and manipulating them, this activity is not a blind one; it has its own kind of sight, by which our manipulation is guided and from which it acquires its specific Thingly character. Dealings with equipment subordinate themselves to the manifold assignments of the 'in-order-to'. And the sight with which they thus accommodate themselves is circumspection.\*