Art in America

DECEMBER 1982/$3.50
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THE EXPRESSIONISM QUESTION, I

Contemporary Voices: Morley, Golub, Rothenberg, Schnabel, Fischl, Snyder, Salle and more
German Expressionism/'40s Figurative Expressionism/Kandinsky/'50s Sculpture

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DECEMBER 1982

SPECIAL ISSUE: EXPRESSIONISM, I

Cover: Malcolm Morley's *Burial of Catastrophe*, 1976, oil on canvas, 18 inches diameter; private collection, Essen, Germany. See "Expressionism Today: An Artists' Symposium," beginning on page 58.

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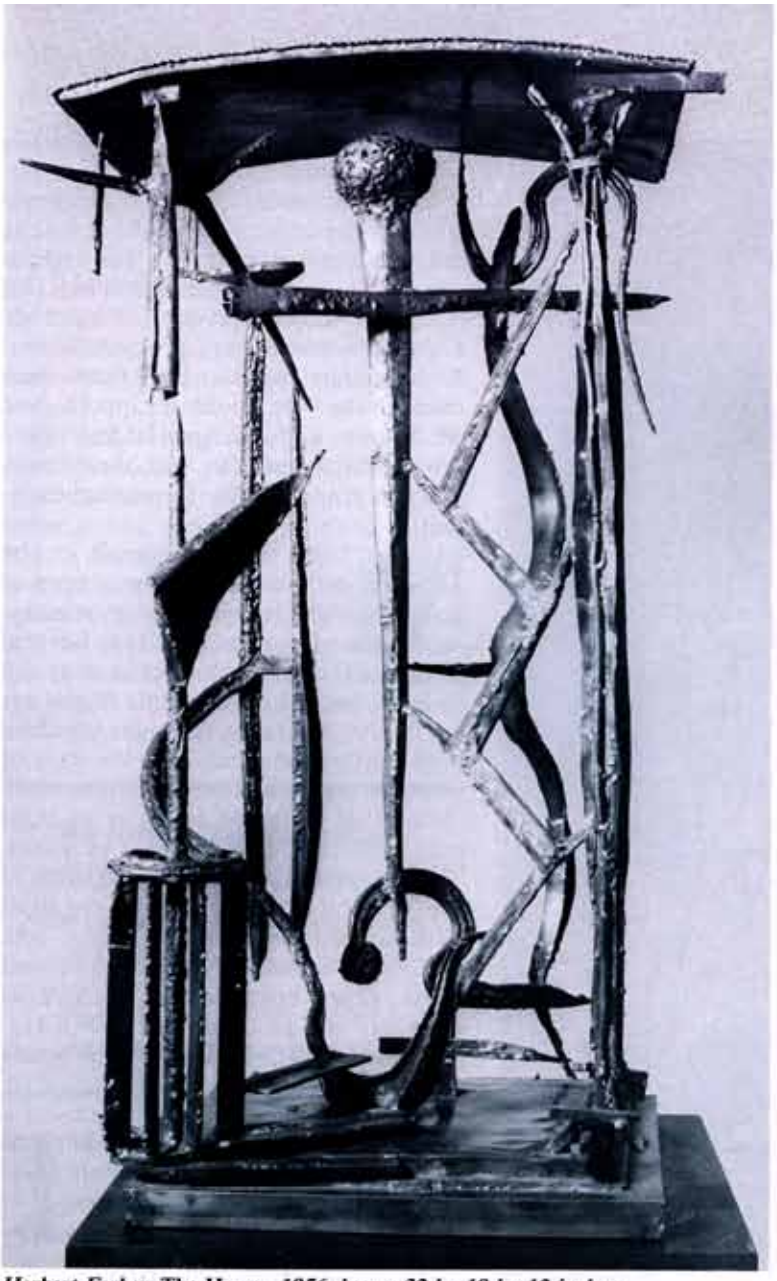
Ibram Lassaw: Ornytion, *1961, bronze, steel, nickel, silver, 33 by 20 by 10 inches. Zabriskie Gallery.*

Michael Lekakis: Apotheosis, *1964–72, oak on elm and pine base, 91 by 46 by 46 inches.*

Touch and Eye: '50s Sculpture

Often linked to Abstract Expressionism, the ten sculptors discussed below were relatively inconspicuous during the '60s and '70s. Among the traits they share are their references to both myth and nature, their transcendental yearnings, and their acute sensitivity to the physical surfaces of their works.

BY WADE SAUNDERS



Herbert Ferber: **The House,** *1956, brass, 32 by 19 by 12 inches. Collection Roy Neuberger. Photo courtesy Knoedler Gallery.*

Raoul Hague: **Roberts Choice,** *1946, poplar, 47 inches high. Fourcade Gallery.*

Perhaps we are entering a period of underground art, and men like Raoul Hague, Phillip Pavia or Reuben Nakian will fill catacombs near their studios with works which will be the marvels of the future.

—Thomas B. Hess, *Art News*, January, 1955

I got interested in New York sculpture of the '40s and '50s—the sculpture of the Abstract-Expressionist period—in part because no one else was. Much of the work of those decades has faded into historical incorporeality; many of the sculptors are known mostly by a few photographs repeated in books, or by a solitary piece hauled in and out of a museum's dark storage. Since the sculpture is so hard to see, we forget that several important sculptors worked alongside the Abstract-Expressionist painters. Why did the sculpture drift from sight? What were its methods and aims, its feel? What is in the work for us now?

Among the sculptors who came to prominence after World War II, Alexander Calder, Joseph Cornell, Isamu Noguchi and David Smith are now enshrined. All had significant careers in the '30s and had attracted some unassailable form of support by the late '50s—in Noguchi's case, for example, the architectural establishment—which would carry them through the maelstrom of the '60s and '70s. Of the other sculptors active in the '40s and '50s, only Louise Nevelson and Louise Bourgeois have grown in reputation since 1960. Nevelson's elevation is as much hagiographic as artistic: the small pleasures in her work are crushed by the large meanings heaped on it. Bourgeois was very slow to emerge because much of her work ran counter to the prevailing stream in both the '50s and '60s. But recognition has finally come. She currently has a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art; some of her older pieces are now being issued in editions, a sure sign of acceptance.

Instead of discussing these six artists on whom plenty has been written, I shall look at ten sculptors whose work generally receded from view in the '60s and '70s. All are linked or linkable with Abstract Expressionism—a term which pleases no one, but which won't go away. In the '50s, Herbert Ferber, David Hare, Ibram Lassaw, Seymour Lipton and Theodore Roszak worked in direct metal, a way of building a sculp-

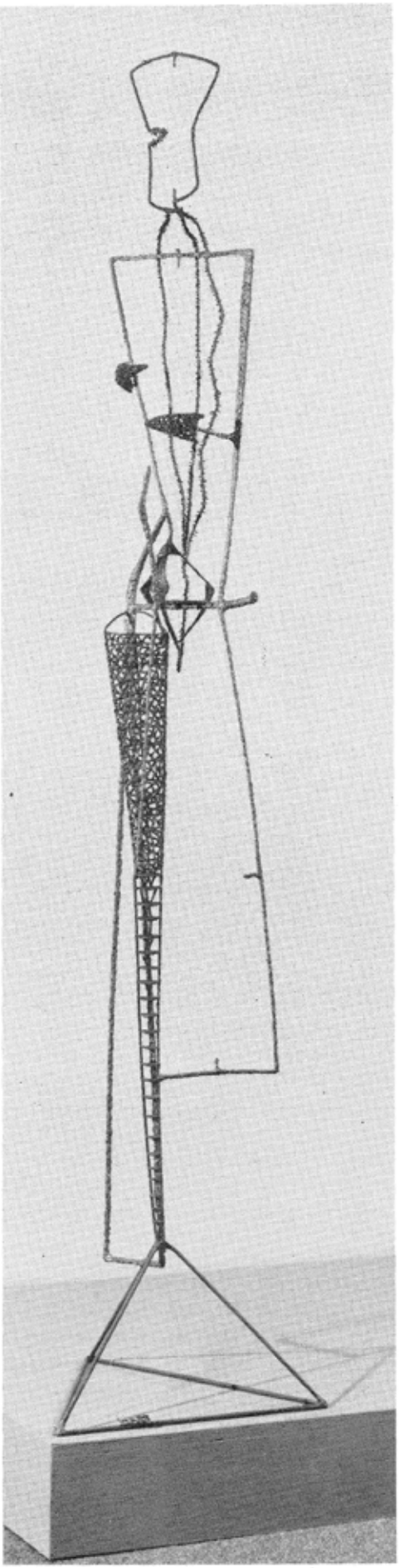
Author: *Wade Saunders is a sculptor who writes on art. He exhibits at Charles Cowles in New York and his recent works are on view at Jeffrey Fuller Fine Art, Phila., Dec. 3-Jan. 8, '83.*

ture up through welding. Raoul Hague, Gabriel Kohn, Michael Lekakis, Reuben Nakian and Phillip Pavia played off the carving/modeling tradition. While these artists were acquainted with each other and a few were friends, they were socially closer to painters than to one another. And with age the gulfs among them seem to have widened, and admiration for one another's work has diminished.

Most of these sculptors received a healthy share of museum support and critical examination throughout the '50s. This diminished in the '60s and virtually disappeared in the '70s. All save Pavia showed at the Museum of Modern Art, eight in Dorothy Miller's influential, nicely catalogued "Americans" shows, Nakian in a 1966 retrospective; and all except for Pavia are in the museum's collection. Most of them have represented the United States in the São Paulo or Venice biennials. All are in the Whitney Museum collection and they average 12 Annual/Biennial appearances apiece between 1946 and 1970. Roszak was shown 22 times at the Whitney! None of them have been in a Biennial since 1970. Ferber, Hare, Lassaw, Lipton, Roszak and Nakian were included in the Whitney's *200 Years of American Sculpture* in 1976. Kohn died in 1975, Roszak died in 1981; the remaining eight are still working. Ferber has enjoyed steady support in certain quarters; several of the others are beginning to exhibit again. Hare's sculpture was at New York University's Grey Art Gallery this summer; Pavia and Nakian opened major gallery shows in October; a Hague exhibition is slated for Chicago. Still, they remain historical rather than household names.

Among the many other sculptors connected with Abstract Expressionism, Peter Agostini, John Chamberlain, Richard Stankiewicz, George Sugarman, Mark di Suvero and Wilfred Zogbaum, all slightly younger, need mention. Abstract Expressionism was more a first style for them, and they shared attitudes with the sculptors emergent in the '60s—witness Judd's repeated sympathetic notices of Chamberlain. Their work had a playfulness—most obvious in Stankiewicz—which was a salutary contrast to the solemnity of the older artists, and which helped their work to make a quick impression on the scene.

Frederick Kiesler and George Spaventa were important figures in the '50s as well. Kiesler's *Galaxy*, a 1948 stage set for Milhaud's *Le Pauvre Matelot*, is



***David Hare:* Figure and Window #1, *1950*, brass and steel, 80 inches high. Collection the artist. Photo courtesy Hamilton Gallery.**

sensational sculpture, but he aimed at a sculptural architecture, not an architectural sculpture. George Spaventa was a presence among sculptors, but he did very few pieces in the '50s and his generally small scale rendered his sculpture almost private. Willem de Kooning's bronzes are great Abstract-Expressionist works, but they were made in the '70s. Richard Lippold, José de Rivera and George Rickey were prominent in the '50s, but their sensibility is pronouncedly Constructivist.

Many factors figured in the progressive disappearance of Abstract-Expressionist sculpture after the '50s. Several of these factors are connected to cycles of taste, and so are endemic to the art world. At museums, younger curators tend to attach themselves to the work of younger artists and strive to dissociate themselves from the loyalties of their predecessors. Galleries come in waves. The galleries that became dominant in the '60s and '70s opened after the mid-'50s. Conversely, Samuel Kootz, who had shown Ferber, Hare, Lassaw and Pavia, closed his gallery in the '60s, as did Charles Egan, who had shown Hague and Nakian. This is not the whole picture, of course, but gallery cycles are a factor. Collectors tend to be active for only a certain period as well, and new collectors favor new artists. All these things help to explain why some of these sculptors were left without a market or an audience.

The art magazines changed as well. Phillip Pavia's *It is*, the house organ and scrapbook of Abstract Expressionism starting in '58, ceased regular publication in 1961. (A last, isolated issue came out in 1965.) *Art News* and *Art Digest/Arts Digest/Arts/Arts Magazine* were the important magazines in the '50s. At *Art News* Tom Hess featured a number of these sculptors in his "artists at work" series in the '50s, and he remained loyal and committed to the Abstract Expressionists—putting Pavia on the cover in 1966, for example—until he left the magazine in 1972. *Arts*, under Hilton Kramer's editorship in the late '50s, carried a lot of material on sculpture. After Kramer left in 1961, Don Judd was the writer at *Arts* most concerned with sculpture and he tended to support the upcoming generation. *Artforum*, which dominated the '60s, favored younger artists.

Robert Goldwater and Harold Rosenberg supported the Abstract-Expressionist sculptors during the '50s and continued to do so sporadically

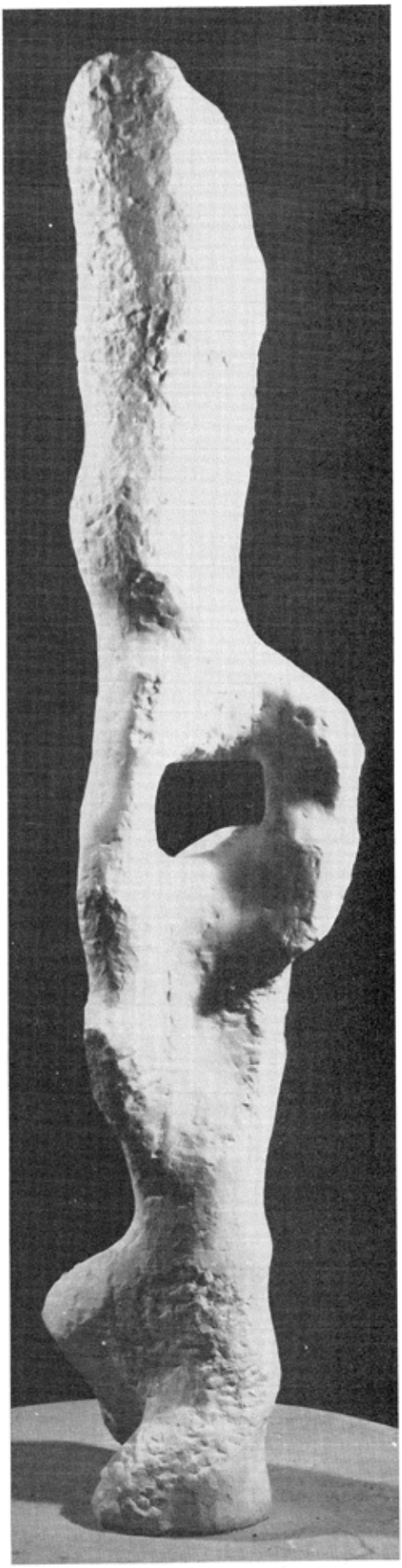
until their deaths in 1973 and 1978. Clement Greenberg had been supportive of American sculpture in general in the late '40s, but by 1956 he had kind words only for David Smith. Hilton Kramer is the chief remaining advocate for '50s sculptors, many of whom he had championed even when taking a dim view of many of their painter colleagues.

Critical writing could be romantic in the '50s decade. Kiesler's *Galaxy* was recently shown at the Grey Art Gallery; notes in the brochure included Alfred Barr's description from 1952: "*Galaxy* is a drifting raft where common sense, watched by skeletons of the four winds, will die of thirst. *Galaxy* is a conspiracy for discrediting Cadillacs. *Galaxy* is the tomb of know-how, the supreme anti-technological gazebo."

We forget that important sculptors worked alongside the Abstract Expressionists. Why did their sculpture drift from sight? What's in the work for us now?

The artistic community of the '50s had many of its roots in the government-supported art programs of the '30s and was kept somewhat together in codified talk formats of which "The Club" was the longest-running and most important. The constant discussion among artists at the twice weekly sessions suggested that issues were being rigorously examined. But Robert Goldwater argued in *It is* that people took much for granted. "The proceedings always had a curious air of unreality. One had a terrible time following what was going on. The assumption was that everyone knew what everyone else meant, but it was never put to the test; no one ever pointed to an object and said, see, that's what I'm talking about (and like or don't like)." Artists of the '60s knew to get to the point, and made the Abstract Expressionists look windy, and thus silly.

The scene wasn't professional in the '50s. There was an art world, not an art market. Most Abstract-Expressionist artists had a catch-as-catch-can schooling, followed by 15 or more years of studio work before any of them came close to making a living from art. Sales were few. For example, of the 25 post-war sculptures included in Roszak's 1956 retrospective—which started at the Whitney and went to the Walker, the Los Angeles County and the San Francisco Museum—only eight had been sold, and only two of his 17 pre-war constructions were borrowed from private collections. (Feeling, of course, ran against commercialism and conventional behavior.)



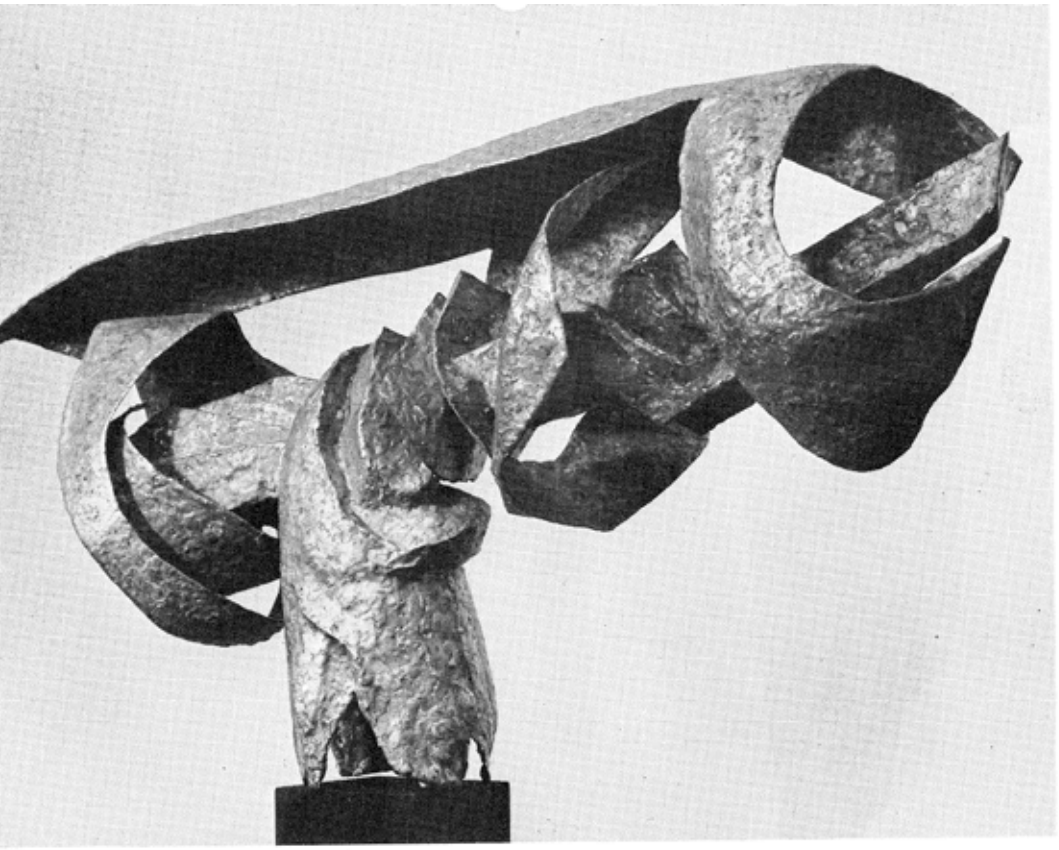
Phillip Pavia: **Battery Park,**
early 1960s, marble, 62 inches high.
Photo John D. Schiff.

Later, the requisites and style of the art world changed. Most '60s artists were college trained, and a number achieved relatively quick financial success. Museum recognition began to come to artists much faster in the '60s; a number of leading figures were accorded retrospectives by the time they were 40. A number of sculptors of the '60s wrote well and published readily; in their polemics, mostly Minimalist oriented, they gave the Abstract Expressionists short shrift.

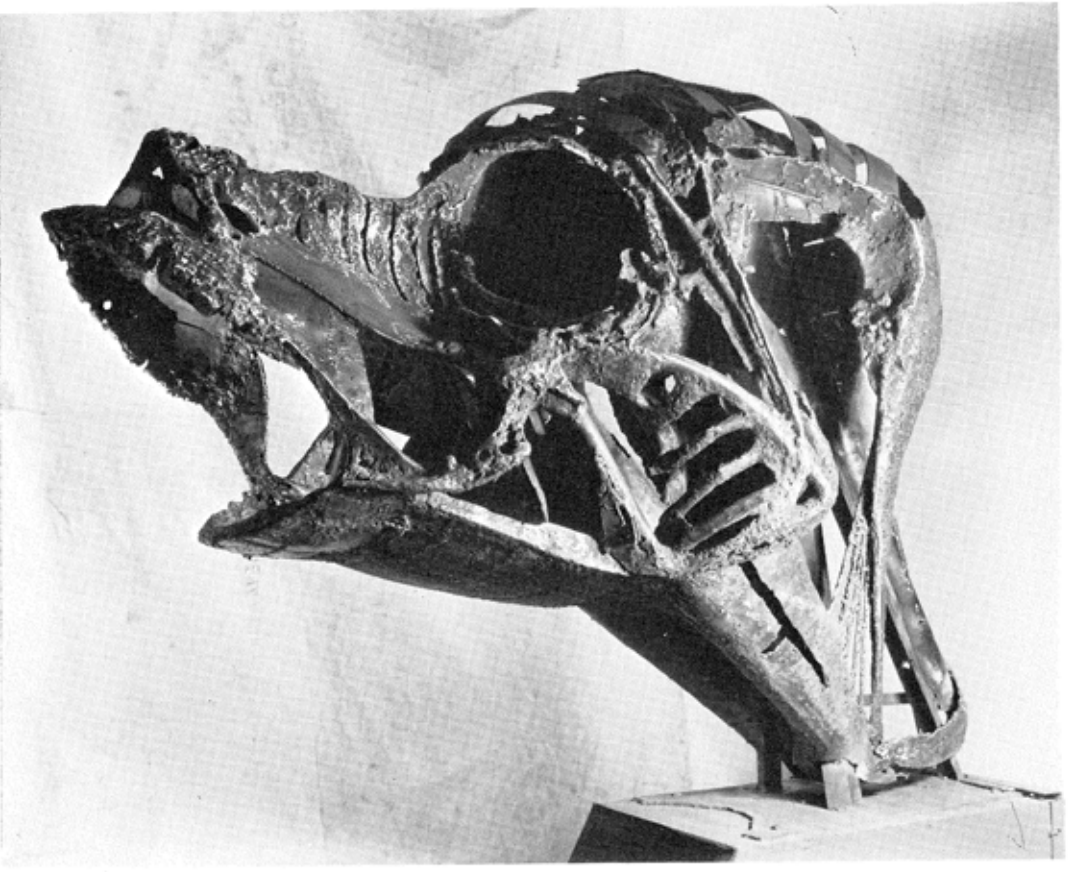
Reputation and hence visibility is to a degree maintained by individual effort. When the art world began to change, many of the Abstract-Expressionist sculptors were past 50 and some may have lacked the initiative necessary to keep showing regularly when they were no longer actively sought by galleries. Painting dominated the '50s; sculpture was strong in the '60s. But the older sculptors had little in common with the sculptors ascendant in the '60s. Most of the sculptors of the Abstract-Expressionist generation had worked in and abandoned a style before the '50s; they weren't about to accommodate their way of working to the coming times yet again. The scene shifted in painting as well; of the '50s painters, only Newman, Reinhardt and Rothko remained visible, partially because their canvases could be aligned with Minimalist concerns and/or Color-Field work.

In the '50s, certain architects made genuine and repeated efforts to work with sculptors. Ferber, Hare, Lassaw, Lipton, Roszak, Nakian and Pavia executed large works for buildings. Among Lipton's commissions are three sculptures for Temple Israel in Tulsa, five sculptures for Temple Beth-El in Gary, a piece for the Inland Steel Company Building in Chicago, and a piece for Philharmonic Hall at Lincoln Center. Taking their cue from the client, the sculptors generally accommodated their scale and subject matter to the architectural context.

It was suggested that sculptors had much to teach architects and a rosy image of collaboration was projected by several writers. In 1961 Wayne Andersen ended a catalogue essay as fol-



Seymour Lipton: **Storm-Bird,** ***1953, nickel-silver on steel, 36 inches long. Collection Rockefeller family.***



Theodore Roszak: **Iron Throat,** ***1959, steel, 42 inches high. Photo courtesy Roszak family.***

lows: "Ferber will develop further and point out new possibilities for a fusion of architecture and sculpture. The next step will still be his to take, but sooner or later the architect will grasp hold of these ideas and bring them into actuality through a cooperative creative venture. A new phase of architecture could then begin." If anything, the reverse has happened.

Sometimes a single exhibition signals the start of a new decade. Jasper Johns's show of paintings at Castelli in January 1958 marked such a moment in painting. In sculpture the '50s ended when Mark di Suvero showed eight pieces, including *Hankchampion* and *Barrell*, at the Green Gallery in October 1960. Sidney Geist, himself a sculptor of the generation under discussion, wrote in *Arts*, "the real stuff of history is made of those moments at which one can say: From now on *nothing will be the same*. One felt this at Di Suvero's show. Here was a body of work at once so ambitious and intelligent, so raw and clean, so noble and accessible, that it must permanently alter our standards of artistic effort."

Roszak was a leader among sculptors of this period in giving anxiety shape. His mix of sexual organs, bones and quick-moving spectral creatures is unsettling.

Any definition of Abstract Expressionism as it refers to sculpture has to come from the work itself. Yet one can generalize at least somewhat: the sculpture gropes toward the transcendental, often through the fusion of antonyms. In discussing Phillip Pavia's work, for example, Tom Hess discerned three "dialectical" obsessions: "plane," "symmetry" and "thickness." Lipton constantly plays polarities—inside/outside, biological/technological—against one another, and related tensions are evident in Ferber, Lekakis and Nakian.

Myth with its combination of natural and supernatural offered a way out of the figuration through which these sculptors had come up. Myths were seen as floating free of particular cultures, reaching toward the universal. Leda and the Swan—an image of desire, transformation and tragedy—is ideal subject matter for romantic and rebellious temperaments and was repeatedly treated by Nakian and Hare. Sexual references are also evident in Roszak's and Hague's work. Depiction was as much symbolic as actual.

Surrealism, which came to New York in the '30s with exiled European artists, was pivotal to American art in the '40s. A number of American sculptors adopted both Surrealism's anxiety, which was reinforced by their wartime experiences, and its biomorphic formal

canon, which they often retained well into the '50s. Natural allusions—animal, vegetable and mineral—abound. The forms don't swell like Arp's; they are angular, eroded, almost never fully closed—the broken shell, not the whole egg. As with Abstract-Expressionist painting, a work was seen as slowly becoming an independent entity durings its making. A piece was finished when the artist was closed out of it, or when it spoke back to the artist.

These '50s sculptors were intensely conscious of their materials; this is suggested ironically by their insistence that their materials did not determine the look of their work, but were just a means to an end. John Flannagan's genius had kept the ideas of direct carving alive through the '30s; the reverberations of his principles can be heard in the '50s. The sculptors used materials which would carry the meanings they wished, but their meanings often sprang from their handling. They tended to use materials that were labor intensive, or they used materials in a way that made them labor intensive; either way, they worked slowly. These sculptors made limited use of assistants: the existential development of a work is a private activity and touch is hard to delegate. They didn't sell a lot of work by today's standards so there wasn't pressure to produce rapidly.

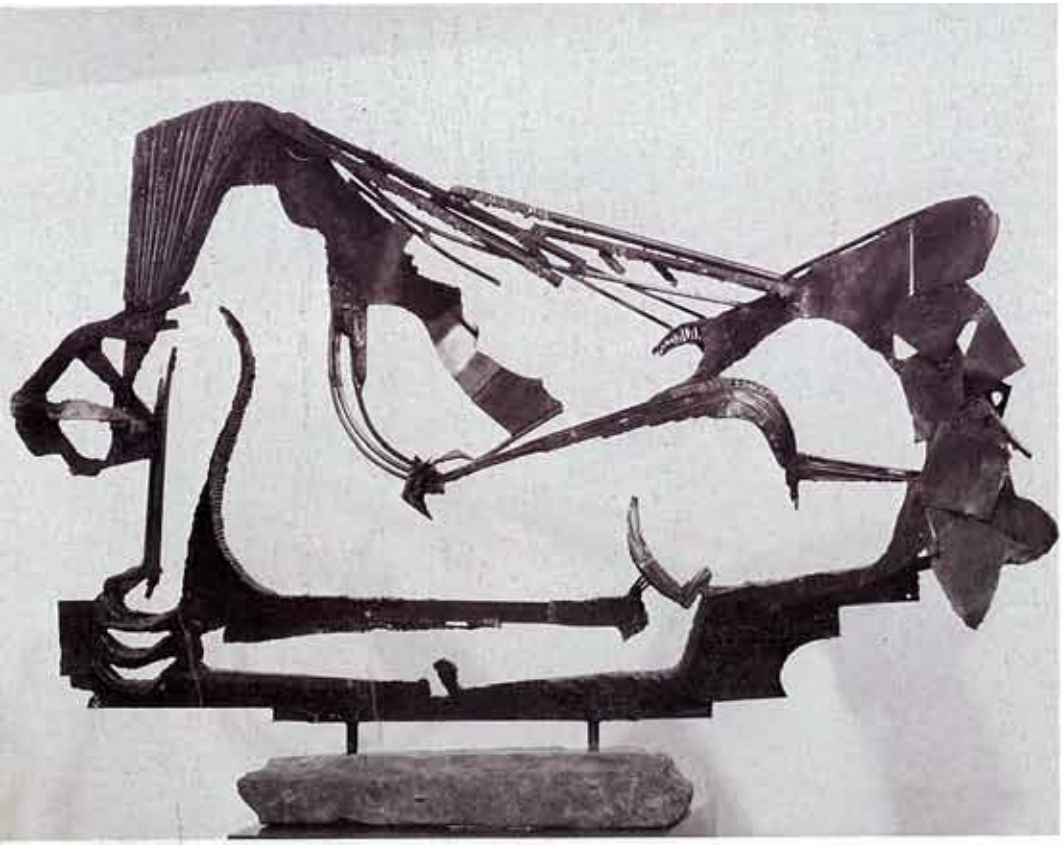
Fifties sculptures have very worked surfaces. The surface is a carrier of meaning with the expressive personal mark being favored, though the chosen materials were sometimes uncooperative. A strong transformative urge came with the late-'40s adoption of oxygen-acetylene welding torches. The metal surface was rarely left alone: it was hammered, twisted and ornamented with puddles of weld. Surfaces like this demand a slow reading because they are so worked, and are often topologically complex. Light was the crucial modulator of form. Edges, as the junctures of differently lit planes, were vital.

Seeing was still a pleasure and a necessity for these artists. Eye was esteemed. Raoul Hague was explicit about this. "In the last thirty years," he wrote in 1956, "of all the artists I have known, there have been only three whose eyes I could trust—Gorky, Tomlin, and Guston—and I have used them all in my development." Real visual sensitivity is rare. That certain people in the '50s were recognized as having acute eyes isn't unusual; that they are today remembered fondly by artists is perhaps more so.

Gabriel Kohn: **Ventura VIII,** ***1969,***
wood construction. Photo courtesy Edmond Kohn.

Reuben Nakian: **Garden of the Gods II,** ***1981–82,***
plaster, 9½ by 18 by 7 feet. Marlborough Gallery.

The actual sculpture of the '50s slips away from my generalizations. I'll discuss the ten artists individually, starting with those who worked in direct metal—Hare, Ferber, Lipton, Roszak and Lassaw, and then move to the carvers/modelers—Lekakis, Kohn, Pavia, Nakian and Hague. I am chiefly interested in their sculpture of the '50s. But with many of these artists, their work is so consistent that the entire oeuvre warrants examination.



David Hare: Leda and the Swan, at Sea, *1962, steel, 7 feet long. Guggenheim Museum.*

Seymour Lipton:* Earth-Forge II, *1955, nickel-silver on monel metal, 54 inches long. Brooklyn Museum.

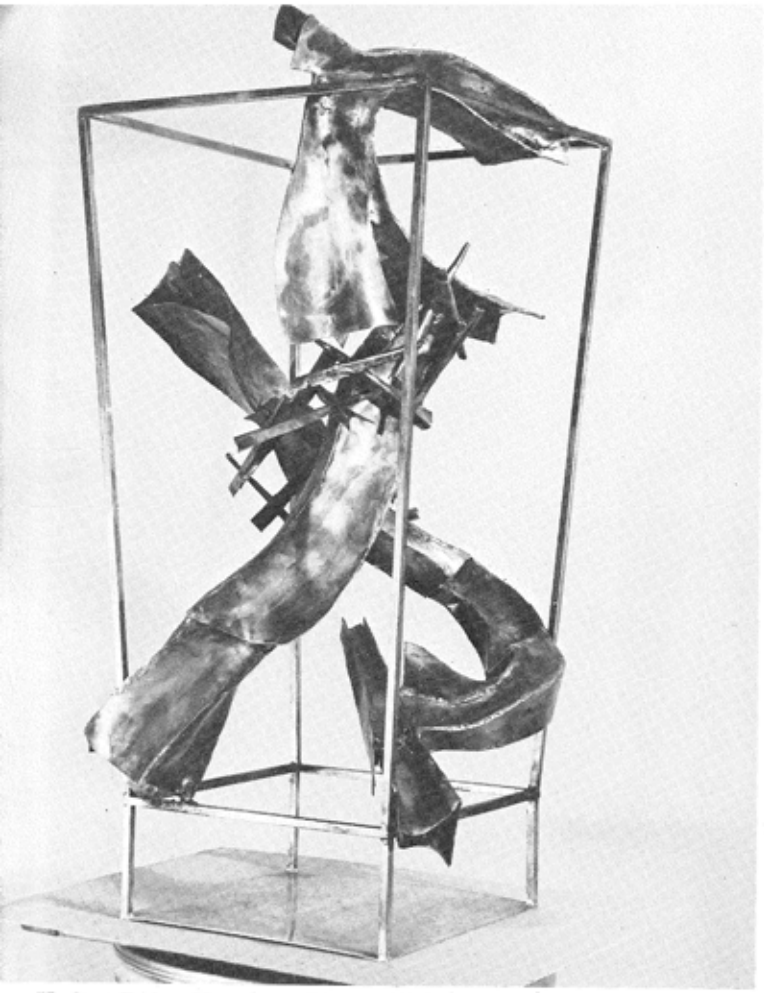
Critics are sympathetic to David Hare (born 1917) but uncomfortable with his art: they note his biography before they discuss his work—he co-edited the Surrealist magazine *VVV*, showed at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of this Century and then at Kootz, shifted from sculpture to painting in the '60s. Recognition came early to Hare; he developed mostly in public. His sculpture looked smack in the center of Surrealism, and later equally central to Abstract Expressionism. As these movements have receded the work is perceived as beached.

In a way Hare's subject is will. He seems to propose that most anything that can be thought can be rendered. Hare gets an idea and then looks for the best way to put it across. Since he knows what he means to say, he doesn't always scrutinize his pieces to see if they work on their own. Though he enjoys making things, he doesn't listen for the response in his materials and so gain from practice. This unlooked-at-ness and quick confidence—which may be a leftover from the Surrealists' trust of impulse—is what now leaves writers uncomfortable with his sculpture.

But Hare has notable strengths: he's genuinely restless and ambitious, and so necessarily inventive, and he has a sure feeling for ambiguity. His cement pieces of the '40s show a practical knack for construction—the parts are cast in molds made from plastic sheets and then joined—while finding a subtle sculptural analogue for the amorphous space of Surrealism. When he drops Surrealism he drops mass and turns instead to line, plane and spatial suggestion. His line is great some of the time. When artists draw in space they often use standard steel stock, which is too much a given to take on personal meaning. Hare's line in a piece like *Figure and Window I*, 1952, has a richness as suggestive as mass.

He has a good grasp of space and void, and sometimes his sculptures movingly convey otherness. Leda flashes into view splayed out open over the swan but she disappears as we walk around it. Though visible she isn't palpable; she can't be moved from negative to positive space, from there to here, by us or by her swan.

Herbert Ferber (born 1906) is a little out of place in this company because he has become more, not less, known with time. His remaining in the public eye is the result of two interconnected factors. He was the only one in this group to progress in a "'60s-formalist" manner: he dropped obvious depiction, smoothed out his surfaces and flattened his sculptural space in the '60s. After the death of David Smith, he was supported by some of the curators and writers who had championed Smith. Ferber was also canny with his choice of galleries: he shifted from Parsons to Kootz in 1953, and then moved to Emmerich in 1960, which he left in 1977 for Knoedler. Ferber paints and



Herbert Ferber: **Homage to Piranesi II,** ***1962, copper, 36 by 19 by 19 inches. Photo courtesy Knoedler Gallery.***

Herbert Ferber: **Apocalyptic Rider I,** ***1947, bronze, 11 by 14 inches. Collection the artist.***

since the early '60s has alternated shows of sculpture and painting.

Ferber's sculpture of the '40s is very much of its period. He worked in direct metal—mostly lead and brass—with a spiky, biomorphic vocabulary and an often mythic content. Pieces were titled *Surrational Zeus I, Apocalyptic Rider II, If I Touch Them They Bleed (Game I)*. The sculpture is generally legible; we look past the forms toward Ferber's meaning.

His sculptures often have constructed perimeters. He appears uncomfortable with wide-open, three-dimensional space and doesn't evidence a natural gift for full sculptural composition. In the '50s he increasingly tended toward formats which corralled space or toward shapes with a strong graphic presence. A number of his pieces are caged or framed. The cages function like prosceniums directing our eyes inward; they slow down the movement of space—as a breakwater protects a harbor—and help his forms cohere. More recent pieces extend laterally across space with a shallow, pictorial depth. Ferber is best in these spatially limited formats and he seems to recognize this.

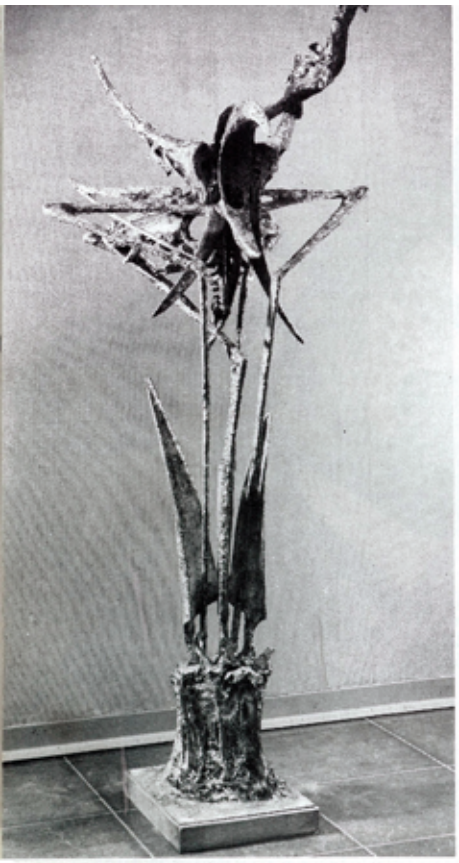
Besides lessening his compositional problems the cages permitted him to keep his content while simplifying his surface and shapes. The cage and its calligraph/figure are evenly matched antonyms; each prevents the other from looking melodramatic. Ferber has generally avoided extruded shapes. His material is metal, but it doesn't seem bound to its industrial history as Caro's does. In the cage sculptures, such as *Homage to Piranesi I*, he balances the wrought figure against a frame of manufactured stock and so points up the difference. Even as he has upped his scale, smoothed his surfaces and chilled his meaning in the '60s and '70s, he has retained a quirky way of making three-dimensional forms from flat stock that has been cut and bent to gain a glacial sensuousness.

For '50s sculptors, a work became an entity during its making. It was finished when the artist was closed out of it, or when it spoke back to the artist.

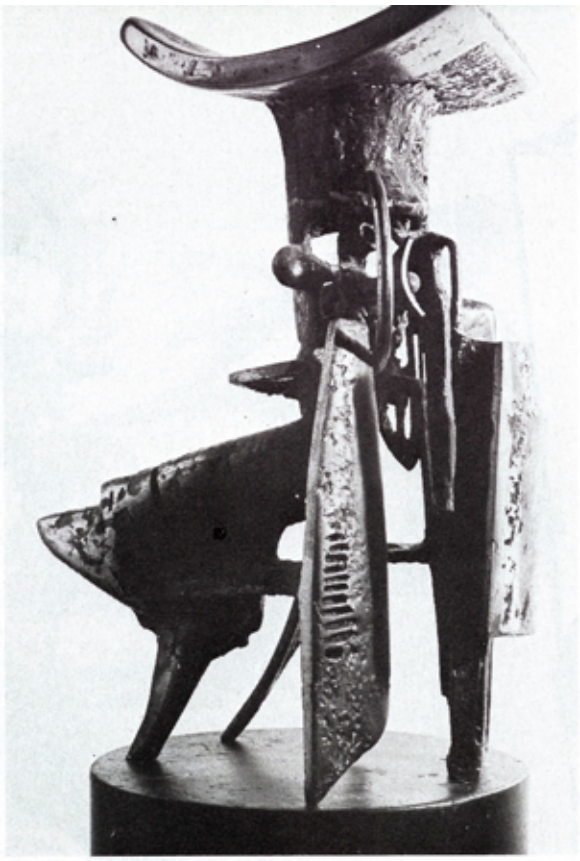
Seymour Lipton (born 1903) was extremely successful in the '50s and '60s and his pieces are in almost every public collection. In many ways his sculpture looks the official part that its wide distribution would suggest it must: the work is confident, durable, simultaneously distinctive and bland; it is obviously and optimistically themed, and has a consistent technical and esthetic style.

Lipton's constructional method merits discussion because he has used it unremittingly for 30 years and because it so determines the appearance of his work. His pieces are drawn on paper and then rendered at 1/7 scale in sheet metal. Measurements are taken from this maquette, multiplied up, and then transferred to thin sheets of monel metal—a high nickel copper alloy. The shapes are cut out and various copper-based alloys are brazed onto them. The sheets are then bent, paired with other sheets, and brazed into hollow human-sized structures. The sheet is too thin to lay genuinely flat and too hard to render compound curves smoothly, so the planes bow or sag slightly and the arcs and edges are somewhat irregular.

Lipton works his themes through his forms, which are abstracted rather than



Theodore Roszak: **Sea Sentinel,** ***1956, steel brazed with bronze, 9 feet high. Whitney Museum.***



Theodore Roszak: **Rodeo,** ***1965, steel, 24 inches high. Photo courtesy Roszak family.***

abstract. In his book on Lipton, Albert Elsen enumerated pod, leaf and bud shapes; helmets, shields and daggers; boxes, books and coffins; and sails, wings and leaves as recurrent images. Things that are small in life become large in the sculpture, and vice-versa; the rendering is loose and the references sometimes ambiguous and multiple. The shapes are assembled into images or stories. Lipton describes the piece illustrated, *Earth-Forge II*, thusly: "Here, in a sculpture with an economy of forms, we find a suggestion of some energy machine in a biomorphic casing. Of course the metaphor deals with the living forces of life in the winter soil waiting to meet the sun."

His sculpture believes in itself; it never evidences doubt. I like the work the way I like certain movies I'm embarrassed to admit having liked once outside the theater. Like genre work, the sculpture gets right down to content; it doesn't fuss around with subtle distinctions of shape, surface and edge; there's a blissful self-absorption. Lipton's composition is insistent. Two parts merge to one as in sex or one thing splits into two as light divided from darkness. The work has the inflated airs of a Lipchitz or a Moore but it is done with limited resources and weighs a twentieth as much. Looking at his interior spaces I'm fascinated the way I am when I look into a meat grinder: how can the screw turn constantly but never go anywhere?

Theodore Roszak (1907-1981) alone among these sculptors produced an exceptional body of work in the late '30s and early '40s, sort of Buck Rogers meets Moholy-Nagy. The vehemence with which he renounced his mirthfully subversive Constructivism after World War II is startling. When he dropped Constructivism he dropped both its vocabulary and outlook: his forms go from swelling and vertical to concave and horizontally extended, his surface from machined and smooth to handwrought and roughly textured, his color from bright and applied to dark and inherent, and his tenor from puckish to angst-ridden. Though raised in Chicago, Roszak was born in Poland and elected to spend nine months in Prague when he had a traveling grant in the '20s; with its threatening air and gnarled forms his postwar work is of the European forest, not the open American prairie.

Roszak started his career in painting and printmaking and continued to work in those mediums until his death in 1981. No matter how process-derived or roughly assembled his sculpture may look, almost all his pieces were carefully rendered in preparatory sketches. His drawing style is suggestive of science-fiction illustration, virtuoso with academic overtones. Roszak was obviously attracted to the romantic quality of science fiction, and probably liked its intimations of a natural history. But science fiction's visual style is so distant from that of '60s and '70s art that when it appears in Roszak's work we wonder if we are dealing with high art at all.

Roszak was a leader among sculptors of this period in giving anxiety shape. His mix of sexual organs, bones and quick-moving spectral creatures is unsettling. What is the great *vagina dentata*, like an ellipse punched through a pineapple, doing at the center of *Night Bloom*? What is one to make of a six-foot-high by 12-foot-wide relief of a butterfly, or of a skull and throat springing at you like a howling jack-in-the-box?

Roszak's surface is an unsettling as his imagery: we can't decode the marks and sometimes can't even figure out how they got there. His interest in flight and space, his commitment to legible symbols, his distance from any scene, and his increasingly fantastic style took Roszak's work ever further from contemporary taste. But his sculpture never got flaccid. His pieces remain aggressive.

The connectedness of all things, and the consequent insufficiency of any one thing, is a theme in the writings and work of Ibram Lassaw (born 1913). He describes the universe as "an unbroken chain of dependence in which every organism has its part." This connectedness is reinforced with the Abstract Expressionist's sense "that the man and his work are the same metaphysical substance," as Irving Sandler has it in a piece on Lassaw. His sculpture is insistently linked to his personality and beliefs. The work doesn't seem to be looked at in isolation either when he makes it or when others write about it. Consequently, while deeply felt, the pieces occasionally fail visually.

Lassaw was one of the first abstract sculptors in America, and at age 23 was among the founders of American Abstract Artists. He has been committed to Constructivism for almost 50 years; one senses that he loved its orderly structure but was temperamentally unsuited to its coolness. He describes his purchase of welding equipment in 1951 in almost zen terms, as finally permitting his thought and technique to fuse. His sculptures aren't welded together,

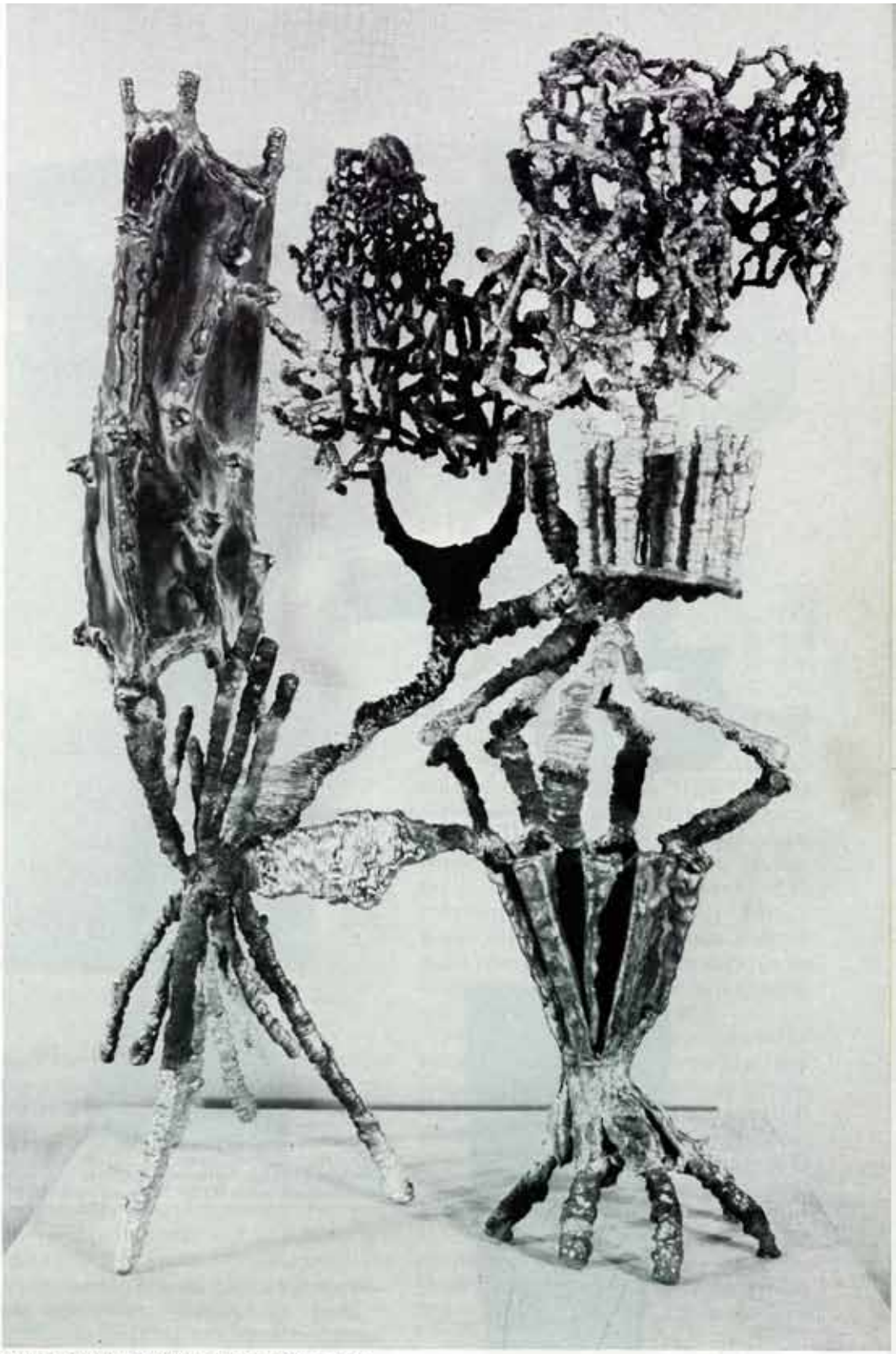
Ibram Lassaw: **Intersecting Rectangles,** ***1940, steel and lucite, 27½ by 19 by 19 inches. Collection the artist.***

Everything in Lassaw's work goes against the monolith. Although gridded, his space is amorphous. Nothing is closed off; parts interpenetrate and merge. Sections seem to float forward and back as in a night sky.

they are made of weld itself, slowly. They grow like stalagmites.

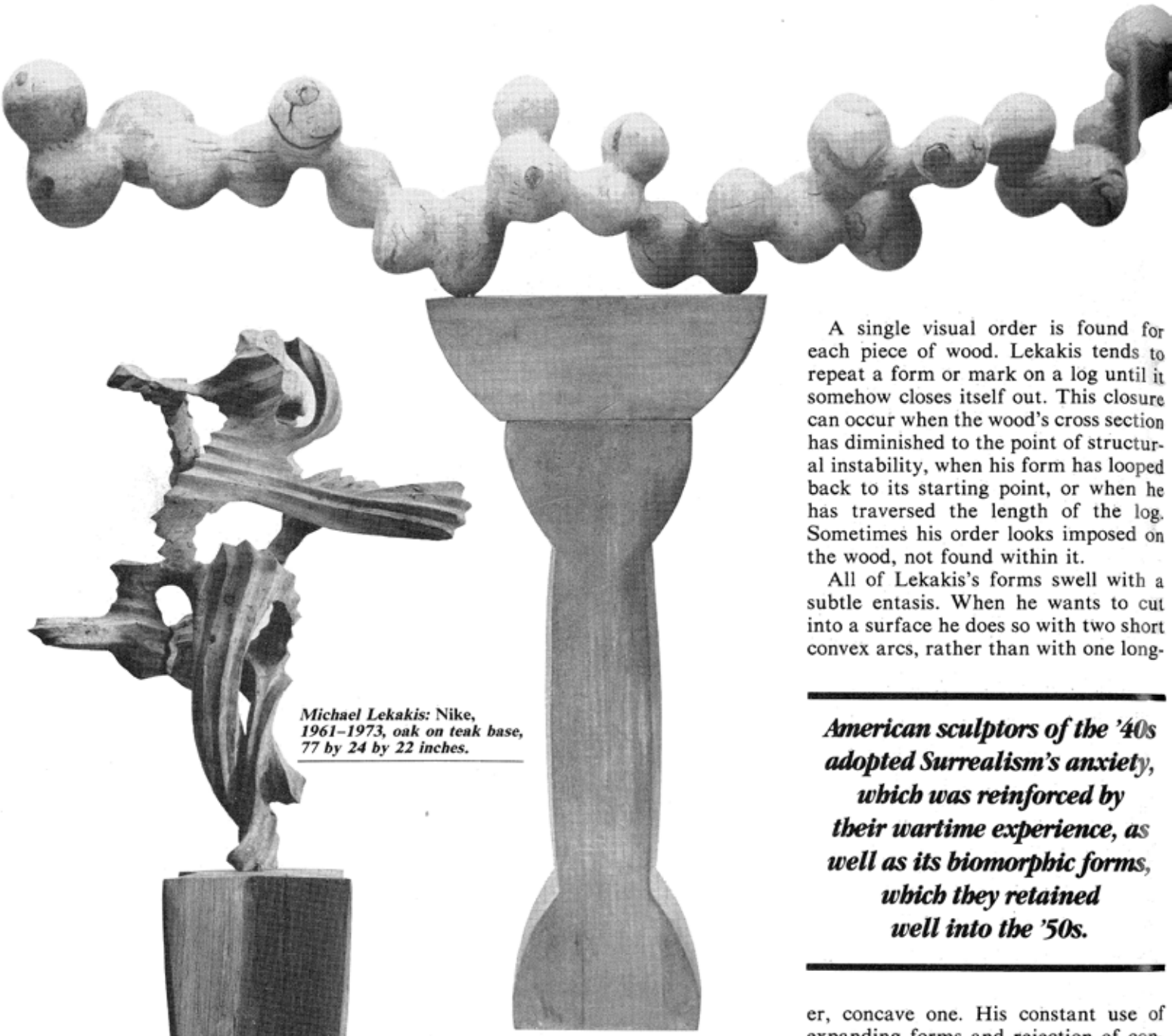
Everything in Lassaw's work goes against the monolith and the singular presence it implies. Although gridded, his space is extremely amorphous, almost soft-focus. Nothing is closed off; parts interpenetrate and merge. Sections seem to float forward and back as in a night sky. (His titles are frequently celestial.) Though the sculpture is in the round, it is all visible at once, because transparent. Despite being extremely various, Lassaw's pieces of the '50s become somewhat predictable—in scale, color and composition—so we stop heeding their meaning.

Lassaw's process is accretional; we can tell where he started and how the piece grew. Beginning in the late '50s he adopted growingness as his subject matter and produced a series of strange pieces which Donald Judd described in *Arts Magazine* as "resembling crinoids, coral, and other assembled, antrorse sea forms." We can almost mistake them for copies of the life-forms Judd describes until the welding sets us straight. Unlike his earlier work, they don't look like sculpture and remain hard to locate; this helps make the pantheism they so obviously embody believable, and the pieces surprisingly moving.



Ibram Lassaw: **Sui Shih,** ***1961, various alloys, 28½ by 19 by 13 inches. Collection the artist.***

Though he has lived and worked in New York all his life, Michael Lekakis (born 1907) has stayed largely outside the art world. He has had only one New York gallery exhibition in the past 30 years and his small show at the Whitney in 1973-74 was his last museum show in America. He has associated more with writers than with artists, and the few articles written about his work have



Michael Lekakis: Nike, *1961–1973, oak on teak base, 77 by 24 by 22 inches.*

Michael Lekakis: Galaxias, *1949-61, oak on mahogany base, 62 by 75 by 16 inches.*

appeared outside the art press.

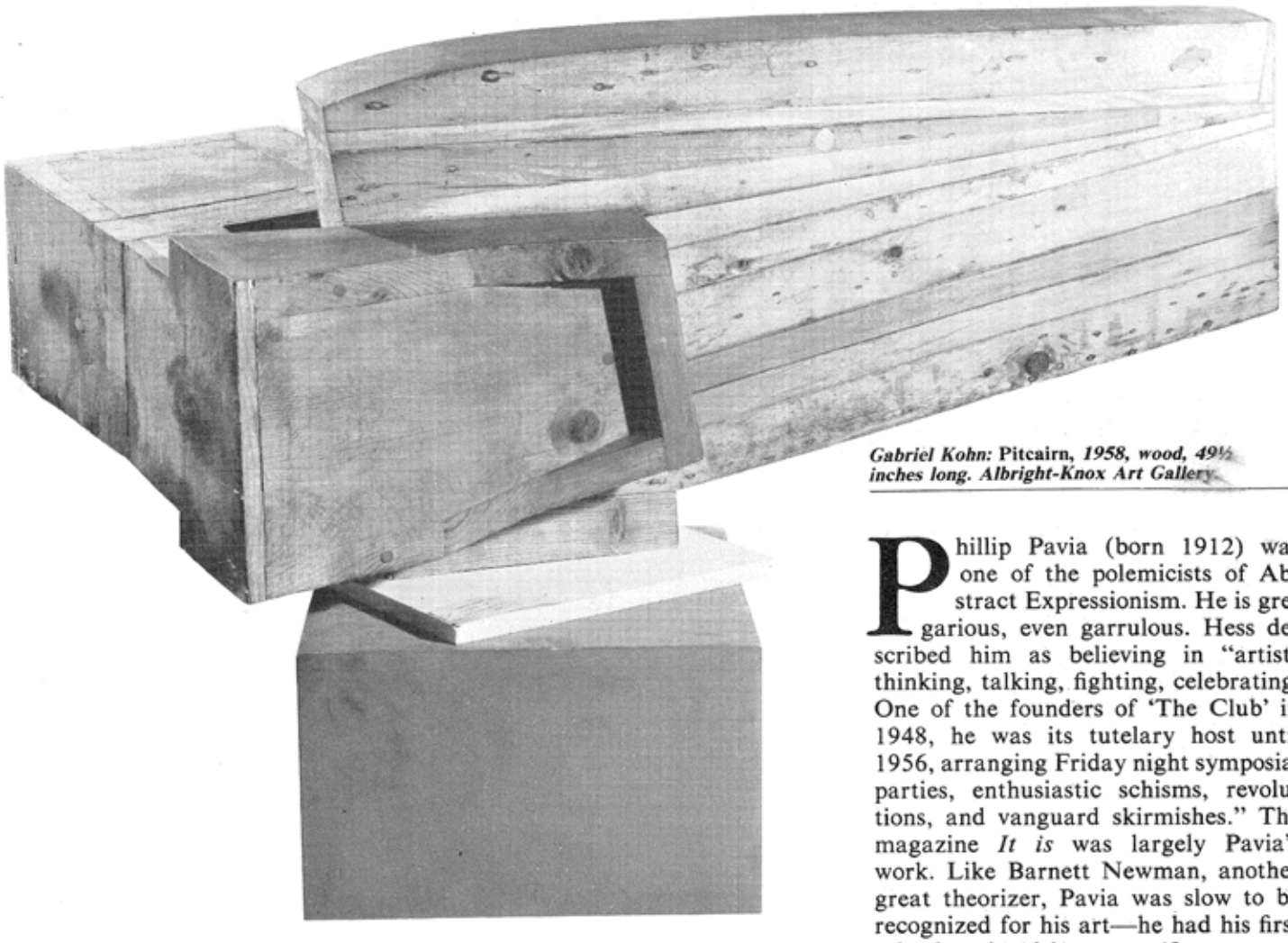
Most of Lekakis's sculptures are carved in wood; he always has a number of works going because he takes several or more years to finish any particular piece. His formal structure is almost invariable: an intensely carved element—often linear and sectioned—is mounted on a flat-topped, monolithic base. The union of the two parts is broadly suggestive of a marriage of opposites, with the bottom having a strong gestalt and so able to be understood from any aspect and the top developing asymmetrically in the round. The pieces are consistently human-scaled, with tall carvings placed on squat bottoms and vice versa.

A single visual order is found for each piece of wood. Lekakis tends to repeat a form or mark on a log until it somehow closes itself out. This closure can occur when the wood's cross section has diminished to the point of structural instability, when his form has looped back to its starting point, or when he has traversed the length of the log. Sometimes his order looks imposed on the wood, not found within it.

All of Lekakis's forms swell with a subtle entasis. When he wants to cut into a surface he does so with two short convex arcs, rather than with one longer, concave one. His constant use of expanding forms and rejection of contracting ones is a detail which suggests a philosophical basis for his decisions. Lekakis believes that there are laws for all processes. If he can uncover the laws of form for sculpture they will be analogous to and so illuminate the laws of nature. His best pieces convey this cosmogony.

American sculptors of the '40s adopted Surrealism's anxiety, which was reinforced by their wartime experience, as well as its biomorphic forms, which they retained well into the '50s.

Gabriel Kohn's work progressed erratically. Though committed to sculpture from his teens, it was only in 1956 that Kohn (1910-1975) found a style he could develop. Illness and severe injury made it difficult for him to work after the mid-'60s. Though his career is compressed into ten years and 40 odd pieces, his work is exceptional and a clear bridge from the '50s into the '60s. His voice is that of an Abstract-Expressionist: "My objects . . . are the result



Gabriel Kohn: **Pitcairn,** *1958, wood, 49½ inches long. Albright-Knox Art Gallery.*

of a deliberate and planned deed—executed for the purpose that this act will result in a meaningful form." "I did my work because it had to be done. It is a natural thing, and I'm doing what I like to do and what comes to me. That's what I do." But Kohn's sculpture is of the '60s with its geometry, its all-important scale, its part-to-part organization. His major work is constructed, not carved or modeled, but it has a warmth like that seen in the works of Nakian or Hague.

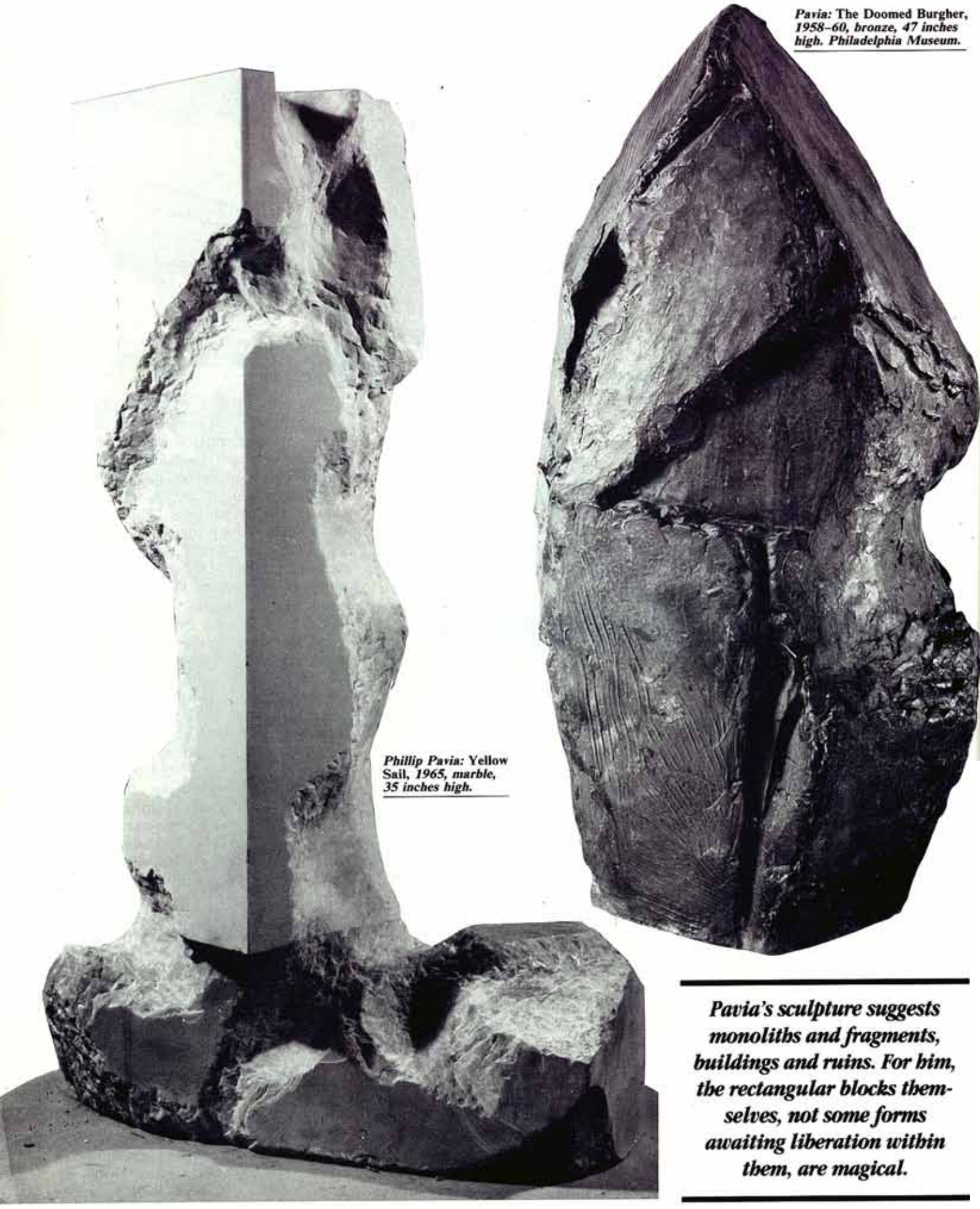
The diagonal and the curve are visually central to most of Kohn's sculpture. Things may thrust in one direction, but they are brought back by their own curve, by progressive attenuation, or by a rhythmic counterpoint elsewhere in the piece. Kohn laminated flat planks together to make his masses, and played the resultant gridded surface off against the baroque movement of the composition. That his masses are not homogeneous undercuts their solidity, and gives them a lightness that in turn causes the arcs and diagonals to soar or float more than they might otherwise. On the other hand, we can start examining his surfaces as we might cross-hatching and become absorbed in their rhythm. Though often likened to those of a shipwright, his constructional techniques in their fundamental crudeness and instability are more akin to those recommended for home-made furniture by a do-it-yourself magazine.

Kohn's work still seems fresh, possibly because it embodies so many opposing tendencies or systems, so that as one aspect passes out of style another comes in favor. His sure sense of scale was very in tune with the '60s. In fact, Kohn visualized his pieces in elevation and drew them in plan. Though he had flashes of envy toward architecture, his sculpture isn't architectural, but his control of scale is. He had a sure feel for syntax, as the term has come to be used in discussing Caro's work: Kohn's sculpture comes to life through the part-to-part relations of its discrete units. His usage remains crisp.

Phillip Pavia (born 1912) was one of the polemicists of Abstract Expressionism. He is gregarious, even garrulous. Hess described him as believing in "artists thinking, talking, fighting, celebrating. One of the founders of 'The Club' in 1948, he was its tutelary host until 1956, arranging Friday night symposia, parties, enthusiastic schisms, revolutions, and vanguard skirmishes." The magazine *It is* was largely Pavia's work. Like Barnett Newman, another great theorizer, Pavia was slow to be recognized for his art—he had his first solo show in 1961 at age 48.

His abstract sculpture is anthropocentric, suggestive of monoliths and fragments, of buildings and ruins. This suggestiveness arises from the quarried blocks of stone—as suited to building as to sculpture—that have always surrounded him. (Pavia, a stone-carver's son, apprenticed in a stone-carver's studio, was close to John Flannagan.) The rectangular blocks themselves, not some forms awaiting liberation within them, are magical for Pavia, full of hints and associations. As Hess noted, "Pavia's is the opposite of Michelangelo's Law, which deals with liberating the image by carving it loose from its block of stone." His pieces are strongly axial, suggestive of the four-sidedness of his blocks or of the human body.

Despite shifts from stone to bronze, back to stone in the '60s, and back to bronze in the '80s, Pavia has kept after certain feelings for three decades. His sculpture is very rooted in the ground, and emphasizes gravity. He works verticality against repose. Anything erected eventually falls down. Only in sculpture can a carried load be kept



Pavia: The Doomed Burgher, *1958–60, bronze, 47 inches high. Philadelphia Museum.*

Phillip Pavia: Yellow Sail, *1965, marble, 35 inches high.*

Pavia's sculpture suggests monoliths and fragments, buildings and ruins. For him, the rectangular blocks themselves, not some forms awaiting liberation within them, are magical.

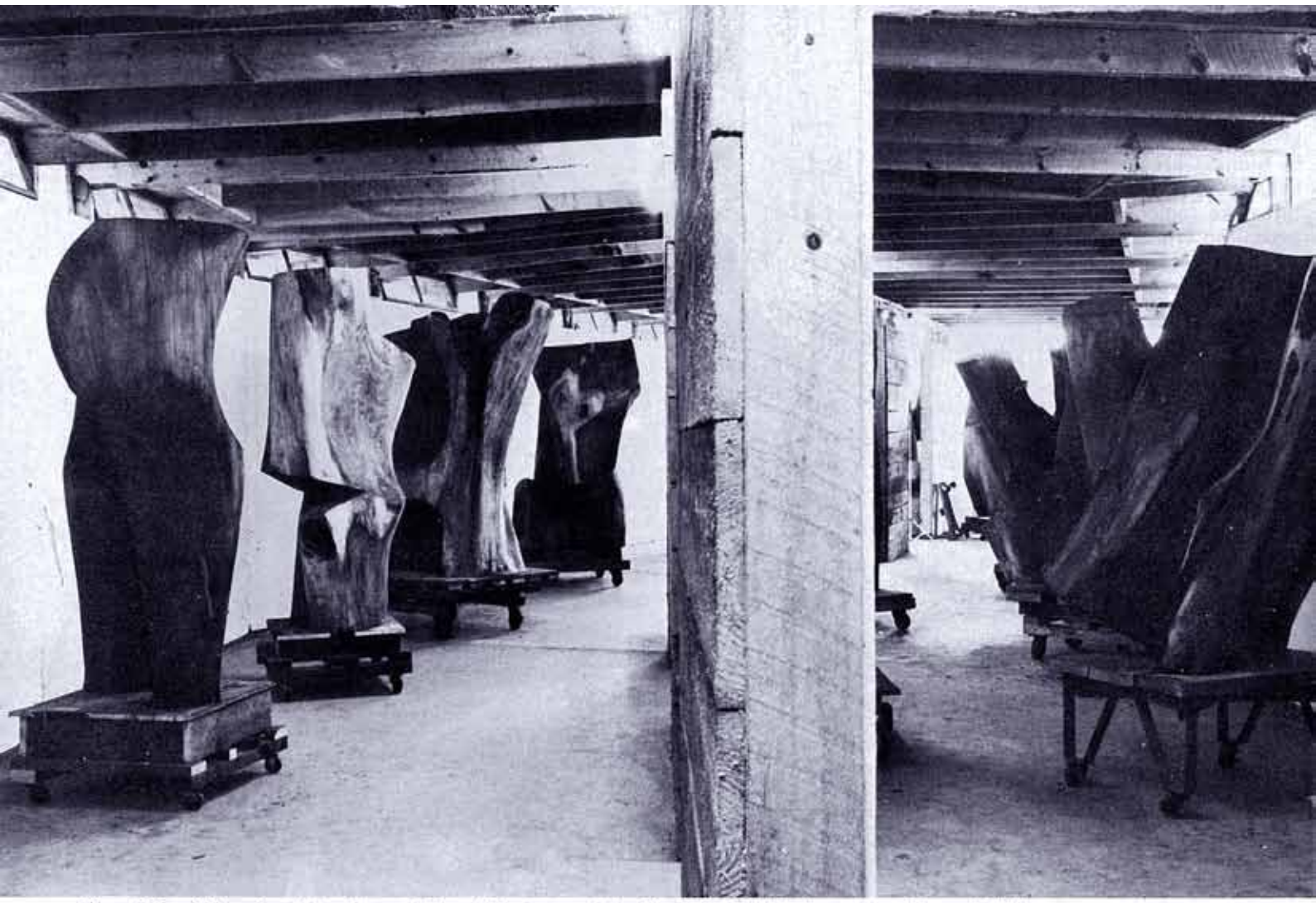
aloft indefinitely. His abstract bronzes give a strong sense of being carved, and in limning erection and collapse they behave like building stone. The sculptures are sometimes like ruins, in between the order possessed by buildings and the disorder of landscape. There is a suggestion of expanse. We tend to look out across them.

The human head, with its faceting, its soft-hardness, and its incident must seem like the ideal sculptural subject to Pavia. His huge head of John Kennedy is at the Metropolitan Museum and he has recently completed a number of bronze busts. The way he chisels into the edge of his stone blocks to make a lighted surface, or softens the juncture of planes in his abstract bronzes of the '60s is suggestive of human features. Pavia gets a momentary, photographic stillness by his quiet use of light and mass, which plays off his quick planes and physical attack.

Reuben Nakian (born 1897) has been showing for 57 years. But it was only after World War II that he settled on well-known mythological and historical themes as his apparent subject and the dimensions of time as his underlying one. An awareness of short time and long time—instants and eternity—sustains his oft-repeated narratives. Character can reveal itself in an instant—as St. Peter's does when he denies Christ—and take a lifetime to change. Zeus's

Reuben Nakian: **Hecuba,** ***1960–62, bronze, 7 feet high.***

Nakian: **Leda and the Swan,** ***1980, bronze, 10¼ by 16¼ by 8¾ inches. Marlborough Gallery.***



View of Raoul Hague's sculpture in one of the artist's storage sheds. Photo Lee Friedlander, courtesy Fourcade Gallery.

union with Leda was light and fleeting, but the shadow of their daughter Helen was long and dark. Nakian doesn't have an in-between mode: like his themes his pieces are either quick in their execution, composition, legibility and meaning, or rock serious.

These mutually exclusive tendencies—the momentary and the permanent—have run side by side in his work since the '50s. While swiftly incising numerous erotic narratives on terra-cotta plaques and playfully exploring every possible coupling of woman and god/satyr/animal in smallish terra-cotta groupings, Nakian has also done a number of much larger, meatier pieces in plaster for casting in bronze and directly in steel. Even though the large pieces sometimes arise from smaller ones, their impact and meaning is radically different.

Zeus in his various shapes is the chief male protagonist in the smaller works, and sexual pursuit and consummation the constant theme. This isn't courtly love; Nakian is on his knees looking up at these women; they have great thighs and tiny heads. (He seems to have avoided rendering heads since estab-

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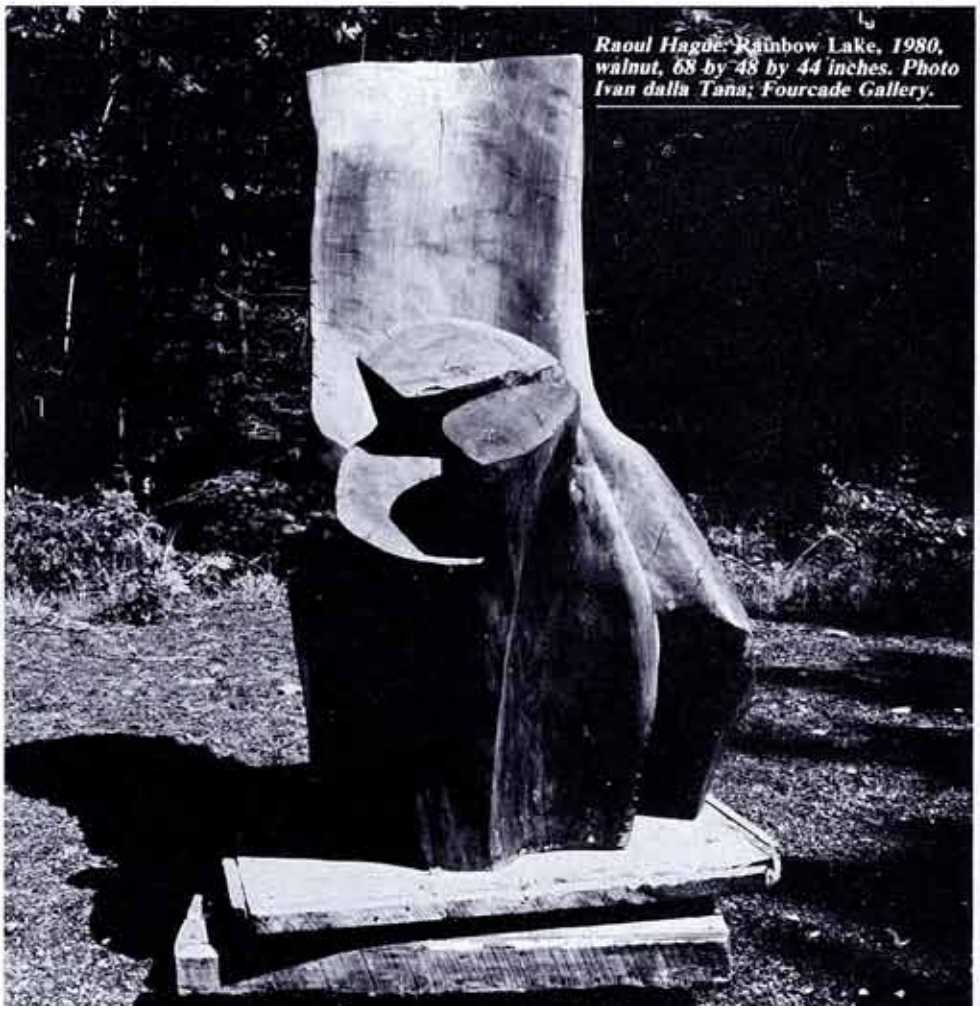

Raoul Hague: Rainbow Lake, 1980, walnut, 68 by 48 by 44 inches. Photo Ivan dalla Tana; Fourcade Gallery.

Touch and Eye: '50s Sculpture

Continued from p. 104

lishing a reputation as a portraitist in the '30s.) The sinuous clay cylinders used to render Leda's limbs and the swan's neck knot energetically together. In clay the pieces are sunbathed and expressive; cast in bronze editions their light dims. Things outside Nakian's immediate control—like casting—sometimes appear beyond his expressive control or interest.

In his great, elegiac pieces of the '50s and '60s Nakian used a scaffold of steel pipes to support either cloth dipped in plaster and handled like drapery or curving plates of steel. He turned to steel because he couldn't afford to cast the plaster pieces in bronze. Nakian's scaffolds come as much from the armatures used by academic sculptors for their monumental mock-ups—Nakian worked for Paul Manship in the teens—as from Constructivism. With Nakian they suggest billboards, buildings coming up or down, and skeletons. The scaffolds are sensed as stable structures, but seen from the rear a work like *Hiroshima*, 1967, threatens to topple. The pieces are very frontal: they are wider than deep, his planes move up and across space more than back into it. Though his themes are painting-conscious and baroque, Nakian's conjoining of line and surface is spare and sculptural. In his drawings and reliefs Nakian developed a fast, fluid line; in the big pieces the line becomes the stable underpinning for his flowing surfaces.

The big sculptures are involved with loss. The pieces are difficult; they all took several years to do; a number were destroyed in being worked out, and Nakian lacked the money to have others cast. The drapery stands in for the figures from his small pieces, and the scaffolds for his Mediterranean settings. Nakian was born in America of Armenian parents and these large, dark pieces suggest a world gone; Troy and the Trojan War—seen from within the walls—recur as subjects.

Raoul Hague's best carved wood pieces can stand with any American sculpture. Hague (born 1905) seems to know this and has been undeterred by the neglect that has attended his career: he has had only two gallery shows in his life, one with Egan in 1962 and one with Fourcade in 1979. In describing him, Gerald Nordland hits on the Abstract-Expressionist nexus of work and being: "Hague confines his actions to the arena of the studio. He has paid his dues, acquired his skills, purified his knowledge and thereby made himself into *his* vision of the artist. His works proclaim his identity."

Hague, who changed his name from Heukelekian when he worked briefly as a tango dancer, is Armenian. He came to America from Turkey in 1921 and spent the '20s and '30s in New York. Since his army discharge in 1944, he has lived simply and independently in the country in order to be able to work uninterruptedly and without accommodation to material pressures. He cares passionately for the single log he is living with and carving; everything else is unimportant to him. His work is human-scaled. It almost has to be: Hague's studio can only hold an 8-foot log. He has built spare, curving sheds to store his completed sculptures, but is otherwise uninterested in them. Though he removes his chisel marks, Hague is indifferent to grinder traces and careless about cracks. When finished the pieces weigh several hundred pounds. They are kept on dollies for maneuverability and shown on low bases to bring them nearer eye-level.

Hague started as a figurative sculptor and still develops his work from the relations of large, usually simple, carved shapes. His sculptures are worked from single logs, never pieced. He sometimes uses tree forks which permit greater lateral extensions and are less valuable to saw-mills. In the '40s and '50s his surfaces swelled and subsided like flesh; more recently he has introduced sharp, flat planes which render the pieces less specific, much more abstract. The shapes are sometimes wholly in view, but often they originate or terminate around a side. Having limited himself to a single material and approach, Hague of necessity has become acutely conscious of scale, orientation, composition; his subject is form. His matter-of-fact titles usually combine the name of the wood and its place of origin.

Hague's work remains ambiguous. Readings are suggested, not fixed. We can see pieces as independent objects, or as fragments of trees, figures, sculptures. He takes the rough, sawn ends of the log as given, and often leaves them alone. The abrupt break helps connect his piece to some absent whole. Reviewing "12 Americans" at the Museum of Modern Art in 1956, Leo Steinberg described *Log Swamp Pepper Wood* (a wonderfully stately title) as

> a fallen torso, a sculpture of a sculpture that has lost its support and now lies on its side. What makes it moving is precisely that stubborn juvenescence which persists. And its wood grain serves to emphasize that this is but a distillation of its motive power, that the theme is not the superficial look of antique art, but the great surge and sinuous torsion of a stub of a body.

You have to walk around these pieces slowly. No view is privileged, or predictable, or quick, because they have all been wrestled and wrestled with and only then recognized. The forms and their ordering appear logical but are wholly invented and rarely repeated. The sculpture is passionately, violently patient. □

A number of sculptors discussed here will have (or have just had) exhibitions in the 1982-83 season:

Seymour Lipton's retrospective is at the Mint Museum, Charlotte, N.C., until Jan. 2, 1983, and then travels to Greenville, S.C., Nashville and Springfield, Mo., closing in early 1984 in Montgomery, Ala.

Reuben Nakian showed recent sculpture at Marlborough, New York, Oct. 7-Nov. 3, '82.

Phillip Pavia showed his recent portrait busts at Max Protetch, New York, Oct. 20-Nov. 13.

Raoul Hague will have a mini-retrospective at the Arts Club of Chicago, Jan. 10-Feb. 10 '83.

Herbert Ferber will show recent paintings at Knoedler, New York, Mar. 12-31, '83.

David Hare's paintings will be on view at the Hamilton Gallery, New York, during February '83.