Art in America

November 1985 $4.75

Special Section: Interviews with Younger Sculptors/Hockney's Stage Designs
Ratcliff on Caravaggio/Report from Moscow: Soviet Art Today

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November 1985

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Talking Objects:

Interviews with Ten Younger Sculptors

Over the last five years, while painting has occupied the art-world limelight, a new generation of American sculptors has been quietly reinventing the syntax of their medium. Below, one sculptor's critical assessment—and ten interviews he conducted with his peers.

BY WADE SAUNDERS

I decided to write on my generation of sculptors (born roughly between 1946 and 1955) because no one else had, and because I'm closer to their work than to any other. In art criticism, current American sculpture is loosely imagined to comprise, among others, Vito Acconci, Lynda Benglis, John Duff, Nancy Graves, Michael Heizer, Bruce Nauman, Dennis Oppenheim, Richard Serra, Joel Shapiro, Keith Sonnier, Richard Tuttle and Jackie Winsor, artists now in their 40s who were largely known and understood by the early '70s. The sculptors who have come to critical prominence more recently—Siah Armajani, Scott Burton, Martin Puryear, Italo Scanga—are of that generation or older, though their sculpture is sometimes closer to the work of my generation. Among sculptors born after World War II, only Alice Aycock, Chris Burden and Judy Pfaff have been much written about (as opposed to reviewed), and all three do or have done installations, a form endorsed by critics.

Many younger sculptors exhibit regularly, a number live off sales, some are included in important museum shows. But we've emerged individually, and in general, strong similarities within our generation have been missed. Though not a movement, we aren't all that separate. The particular mix of cultural elements we grew up with (sex and drugs and rock 'n' roll; television, cars and Vietnam) ties us together as a group and somewhat separates us from the artists of the decade preceding and those of the decade following.

Our sculpture marks a change. We make things ourselves, instead of jobbing them out. Our scale is generally smaller than that of the preceding generation. Our passion is for the centuries of modeled or carved figures and objects that preceded Minimalism. Installation work is downplayed. Sensing a relatedness in our work, I was curious about the opinions and ideas underlying it, a topic on which criticism was mum. Conversations with the sculptors themselves seemed the shortest route to answers.

Among other stimuli prompting this series of interviews, a few bear mention. Since 1982-83, English sculptors have been more visible and discussed in American art magazines than New York sculptors or those in Los Angeles or Chicago. Sculpture has been the most active element in the British art scene of the '80s, and Tony Cragg, Anish Kapoor, Bill Woodrow et al. did arrive as a seemingly neat package, press kits and catalogues included. But here in America painting has so dominated exhibitions and criticism in the last five years that no sense of the issues common to our own sculpture has emerged. It can even be argued that besides the English work, the new sculpture most visible in New York is by painters: Chia, Paladino, Stephan, Schnabel—even Dine and Samaras. Coming as it does so directly out of their painting, this sculpture is generally accessible or familiar in a way that the work I'm interested in is not.

Sculpture is not a three-dimensional version of painting. Seeing how the Museum of Modern Art has recently been installing modern sculpture—frontally on a stage you couldn't enter in their 1984 "International Survey of Painting and Sculpture"; against the wall or behind glass in the "Primitivism" show—I've wondered if the curators there remember that most sculpture is made to be viewed in the round, that its physical presence in space is crucial to its meaning.

Sculptors younger than the group I've interviewed are now appearing—Jon Kessler, Chris Macdonald, John Monte, Joel Otterson, Garnet Pruit—who have taken cues from our work as we did from the Minimalists and Post-Minimalists. It took many of us a long time to find our way clear of Minimalism, to deflate those hollow boxes. We had to work to make a context for ourselves, one in opposition to work that in certain senses we held dear. The fairly open context we've helped create in this period of benign critical neglect, the context in which these younger artists have developed, warrants elucidation before it is submerged by all the sculpture to come.

I know the work of some hundred American sculptors of my generation. The sculpture is divisible into rough categories of representational, referential or ambiguously abstract, plus installation and Constructivist-derived work, the latter most often in welded steel. The sources and meanings of welded steel work generally continue in the tradition familiar from the '60s, so I've chosen to focus on sculptors in the other groupings, particularly those who make objects. My short list of artists—Tom Butter, Ronnie Fischer, Joel Fisher, Roni Horn, Mel Kendrick, Donald Lipski, John Newman, Judy Pfaff, Judith Shea and Robert Therrien—is arbitrary and New York-centered. Bryan

Wade Saunders is an artist who writes about art. A review of his most recent New York show appears on page 161, and his work is currently on exhibition at the Portland (Ore.) Center for Visual Arts (Nov. 7-Dec. 15).

Hunt declined to be interviewed, as did Tom Otterness. Other sculptors could just as well have been selected. If space and time had permitted, I would also haved liked to interview Deborah Butterfield, Loren Calaway, Jill Giegerich, Don Gummer, Angela Ho, Rebecca Howland, Barry Ledoux, Mark Leve, Robert Lobe, Nancy Rubins, Christy Rupp, Peter Shelton, Martin Silverman, Steve Wood and a number of others. My side in these interviews, which were recorded in question and answer form, has been edited out. Some of the quotes have been resequenced. The artists have checked and sometimes altered the texts.

Each interview went its own way. No generalizations fit all the artists, but certain themes appeared repeatedly. As noted above, many of us share a slow emergence from the long shadow of Minimalism. Minimalism was and remains partially sustained by strong writings by artists and critics. But in Minimalist work, rhetoric and object—the artist's theory and the viewer's experience—are often disturbingly divergent. In fact, the ideas are sometimes more persuasive in print than in actuality, where the sculpture appears mute or oppressively barren. Developing during the years when Minimalism prevailed, we knew more what sculpture couldn't have—figuration, personal touch, history—than what it could. We emulated that toughness and spareness by leaving things out of our early work, tying up loose ends, effacing our own viewpoint. For the most part, our sculpture gained its own identity and took flight only at the moment that we scrapped, one by one, the reductivist tenets of Minimalism.

Our work is made in and derives from the studio, where individual attitudes and personal working methods dominate. By all standards of radicalism established in the '60s, our sculpture is conservative—in its modest scale, in its independence from the space in which it is to be exhibited, and in its recourse to bases. For us a base just establishes the height at which the work should be viewed. We've accepted certain conventions so we can examine others.

Generally we understand ideas through forms, theory through repeated practice. The work of my generation has gotten good as we've individually found ways to do things quickly. Since our ambitions are visual rather than theoretical, we choose working processes for their usefulness, not their significance. When Richard Serra, Bill Bollinger and Joel Shapiro first used casting (1969–74), the specific properties of the process, the flow and set of the metal, were central to the meaning of their sculpture. For us, casting is just a practical way to make certain forms permanent and authoritative.

Because it's important that variations be tried quickly and that invention be courted, our work is often composed in a somewhat improvisatory manner. It tends to evidence numerous successive decisions. Fabrication in metal is seldom chosen because it is slow and resistant to casual form- or mark-making. Often our sculptures remain provisional until finally completed, quite unlike works fabricated from blueprints. Though our sculptures' scale is increasing as skills develop, capital accumulates, and larger working and exhibition spaces become available, our pieces generally exist at the size of studio objects rather than public constructions. Working large inhibits chance-taking, slows change. If most existing public sculpture is any indication, large-scale work must be alienating even for its makers.

We strive for an inclusiveness of means and ends. Our sculpture is sensuous and emphasizes touch, shows a resurgent interest in color, and is sometimes markedly comedic. Organic materials and forms are increasingly evident, as is handwork; this organic aspect may partly derive from the accretional way we work. Color has often been regarded askance in Western sculpture, but it offers us both a way of mixing three-dimensional and flat imagery and a way to separate our work from the natural-material monotone of Post-Minimalism. Likewise the informality in our work—its irony—dispels the aura of high seriousness surrounding the art of the near past.

Recent sculpture, like current painting, is full of quotation. For example, Mel Kendrick's work is strongly reminiscent of early modern sculpture, Cubist and Constructivist work in particular. Bryan Hunt's waterfalls often suggest figureless Rodins, and his new work is explicitly figural. John Newman's reliefs summon up the ghost of Theodore Roszak and the Surrealist-Expressionist angst of the '50s. The connections are often so strong that it can be argued that the work of these younger sculptors is representational—though what is depicted is earlier art, which has been transformed, with time, into familiar subject matter. It is the look of these earlier works, not their meanings, that is quoted. Throughout history, with derivative (as opposed to invented) styles, the meaning—deliberately or necessarily misunderstood—never remains the same.

More than anything else, an insistent quality of reference sets our sculpture apart from that of the older generation and connects it to that of the younger. In accepting references, even representations, we've really opened up the language of sculpture for ourselves. It's worth remembering that from the mid-'60s through the mid-'70s only a handful of representational sculptors—Edward Kienholz, Red Grooms, George Segal, Paul Thek, Nancy Graves, Nancy Grossman, Robert Graham, Luis Jimenez, Sig Rennels—were at work and taken seriously by younger artists.

The change in sculpture has been obvious to close observers for three or four years and is now beginning to be noticed more widely. Kendrick, Newman and Therrien were included in the '85 Whitney Biennial, as were Giegerich, Hunt and Otterness. Our differences are self-evident. It is time that our commonality be understood as well.

The preparation of these interviews was partly supported by a grant to the author from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts.

Interviews appear on pages 112–137.

A Footnote on Generational Categories,
as observed by Thomas B. Hess three decades ago:

"Younger" . . . means "younger than 'old.'" "Older" (commonly used in the phrase "older generation") also means "younger than 'old,'" but implies "older than 'younger.'" There is no such thing as an "old" artist; he is a "master," "pioneer" or "veteran." Only art students are younger than "young." To tabulate:

age	*appellation*
0-23	art student
24-39	young
29-51	younger
42-64	older (generation)
33-57	veteran (exhibitor, Surrealist, etc.)
38-69	pioneer (Realist, Abstract-Expressionist, etc.)
64-100	master (also means dead 7 or more years)

"Generation" usually means about 7 to 10 years; it can mean as few as 2. Its traditional span, a third of a century, is called a "period." ("Great Expectations, Part 1," *Art News*, Summer 1956)

Tom Butter

Born 1952, Amityville, New York. Education: Philadelphia College of Art, BFA 1975; Washington University, St. Louis, MFA 1977. Currently lives in New York. First group exhibition: "Art for the '80s," Gallery Durban, Caracas, Venezuela, 1980. First solo exhibitions: Grace Borgenicht, New York, Lawrence Oliver, Philadelphia, 1983. Most recent exhibition at Grace Borgenicht, New York, 1984; forthcoming exhibitions at the Morris Gallery, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Nov. 1-Dec. 29, 1985, Lawrence Oliver, Philadelphia, Dec. 1985.

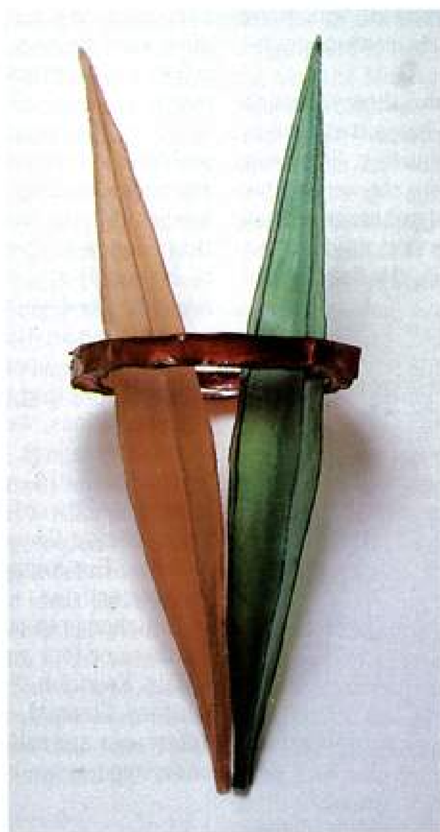
The purity of the Minimalist idea and the purity of their solutions made it very difficult to follow. It was an endgame that was very interesting, but one that you couldn't move any further. The Minimalists narrowed and reduced, so I felt I had to open things up again; it was just too narrow for me to operate in. Andre's work for me is about the beauty of order. You can take squares, you can put them side by side and you can make a larger square. That's a very specific type of feeling. Any art orders; it gives you a way of thinking about a particular aspect of feeling.

Sculpture makes images just like painting. The difference is that in sculpture, what you see is what you get, while in painting, what you see involves a spatial illusion. I made a decision when I first started making sculpture that I was mostly going to make floor pieces. All sculpture depends on its relationship to the human body; the viewer looking at it relates it to his body in some way or another. You perceive things in sculpture partly through your kinesthetic sense. Once sculpture is on the wall, it's in relief—the wall is working like canvas, holding the sculpture up. Its autonomy as an object is lost.

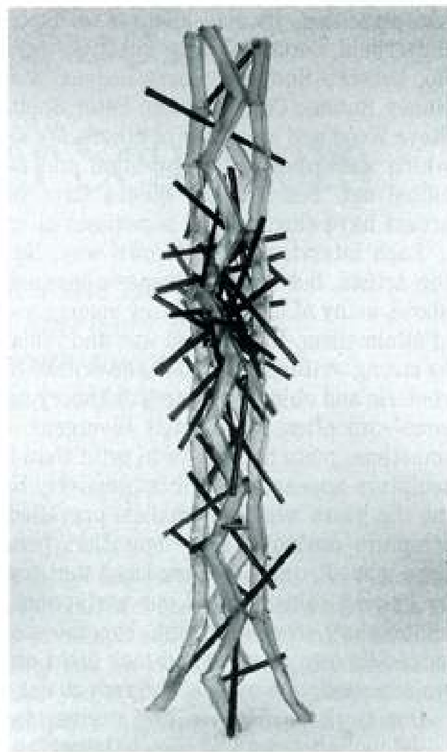
I want to do everything in my sculpture. I want it to look like it's wet and dry, alive and dead, geometric and organic; I want it to have everything at once. For this new bunch of pieces I decided I was going to work with the same form repeated, in this case an inflated form. I was going to use it many different times, I was going to make the color less sweet—those are the sort of formal limits I placed on myself. I've done things that for me stretch the way forms are put together, and what kinds of forms can go together, and how they function together. There are references to lots of different kinds of things—boats and airplanes, fish and fowl, bones and skeletons, flowers, sleek things that move through fluids. The forms have to be interesting.

The work doesn't speak a whole lot about process. There is process in the work, but it isn't the issue. A piece may have a drip or a wave of resin, but the work isn't really about these things. It's more oriented around the issue of fabrication in the sense of putting things together. You can build directly when you fabricate, with no hidden or in-between stages.

A lot of attention now is on "media-critical" work. Sculpture is not a flat thing, so it doesn't have that kind of image potential. All visual mass-media imagery is flat; you don't have three-dimensional mass media. Everyone likes to look at this kind of work, art that mimics the media while supposedly criticizing and deconstructing it. The assumptions and ideas that surround a piece are thought of as being much more interesting and real than the way it is made or actually looks. Irony is a big deal for everybody. In some people's minds sculpture becomes an esoteric endeavor. I can't possibly see this being true. I find meaning in form. That's a very traditional concern, which isn't highly valued right now. I think there are objects yet to be made that will be interesting in the sense that they will make you understand the world differently. Essentially that's what good art does.



Tom Butter: **D.H.** *(edition of 5), 1985, fiberglass cloth and polyester resin, 32 by 12 by 12 inches.*



Tom Butter: **L.J.**, *1984, fiberglass cloth and polyester resin, 101 by 22 by 21 inches.*

The personal and the formal coexist in all art, and it's often best when a parity is established. The resulting tension is what I'm interested in getting at with my work.

I have an aversion to groups. I like being on the outside.

Tom Butter: T.T., 1984, fiberglass cloth and polyester resin, 92 by 56 by 18 inches. Works this page and opposite, Borgenicht Gallery.

R.M. Fischer: 1983 installation titled "Water Under the Bridge" at the Brooklyn Bridge Anchorage. At center, Fountain, *1983, stainless steel, cast plastic, electric light and water, 72 by 72 by 72 inches. Works this page and opposite Baskerville + Watson Gallery.*

R.M. Fischer

Born 1947, New York. Education: Long Island University, BA 1971; San Francisco Art Institute, MFA 1973. Currently lives in New York. First group exhibition: "Art on the Beach," New York, 1978. First solo exhibition: Artists Space, New York, 1979. Commission for a gateway to MacArthur Park, Los Angeles, 1985. Most recent exhibition at Baskerville + Watson, New York, 1985; forthcoming exhibition at Daniel Weinberg, Los Angeles, Dec. 1985.

Hollywood films are like modern sculpture, 20th-century sculpture. As an object-maker I'd like my work to come up to the level of Hollywood films. I see Hollywood films as being much more heroic than art. I could pick out one artist or another as heroic or optimistic, but I see Hollywood films epitomizing it much more clearly. Right now people are looking for heroes, so I think it's appropriate.

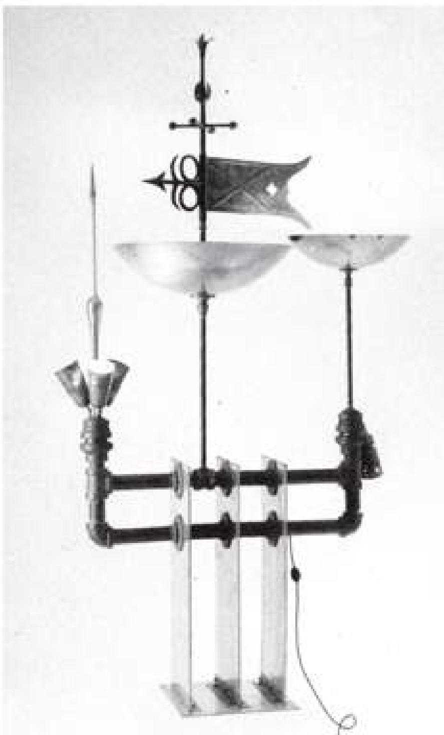
I think of my work as deriving from media, like Mullican's or Brauntuch's, though not as specifically. I don't see the work of Longo, Sherman and Lawson as critical of media; I see it as a sort of celebration of media. I feel I'm celebrating media as well. I have no criticism of it at all. I think they see it the same way. I don't think it's a bad thing, or that it is something to make comments on, as if you need to make a comment on it. It is what it is; it's a phenomenon. Either you find it visually or psychologically exciting or you don't; it's not a good or a bad thing in my mind. There's no morality issue involved for me.

I decided to go with the lamp thing to make my work on one level accessible and on another level difficult. I try to have it all ways at once; the more I go on, the more I push the idea of having it all ways—making an object that has a little bit of everything, a little bit of crudeness, a little bit of slickness, a little bit of art, a little bit of design, a little bit of use, a little bit of nonfunction. I imply an object that is sort of multifunctional. In a way it's similar to films or magazines where everything becomes one experience. All images kind of flow together. Advertisements and editorial become one thing. I guess that's what I've always tried to do with the objects, make them contain as many different kinds of sources and sensations as possible.

The lamp forces me to maintain a kind of restraint. The fact that the lamp has to *work* forces me to do certain things; there has to be a reason for this thing to be out there. The extremities of my pieces either have to be illuminated or have to have a certain kind of dramatic thrust, a sort of optimistic thrust. The lights have this kind of optimistic emphasis; I'm trying to replace that in many cases now with just the thrust of the finial, to create some kind of futuristic, gothic, celebratory or religious thing.

For somebody to believe in these objects, I have to give them something that they can accept. If it's too quirky or too out of line with their own view of the world, they're not going to believe it. They're just going to walk away from it and say that's crazy. For me it's easy to be crazy. I need to try for this total logic that someone will believe in. That's important to me.

I'd like these lamps to appear as if they were meant to be like this, as if they weren't even made by somebody; I want them to look manufactured—though obviously there is a handmade quality, to a degree. I don't like to emphasize the craftiness, though. Basically, a lot of my decisions are the simplest solutions to a problem, rather than the most elegant. I try to make the end product somewhat elegant overall, but everything is together in a nuts-and-bolts kind of way.



R.M. Fischer: **Columbus,** *1984, brass, steel, zinc, aluminum, lights, 104 by 60 by 30 inches.*

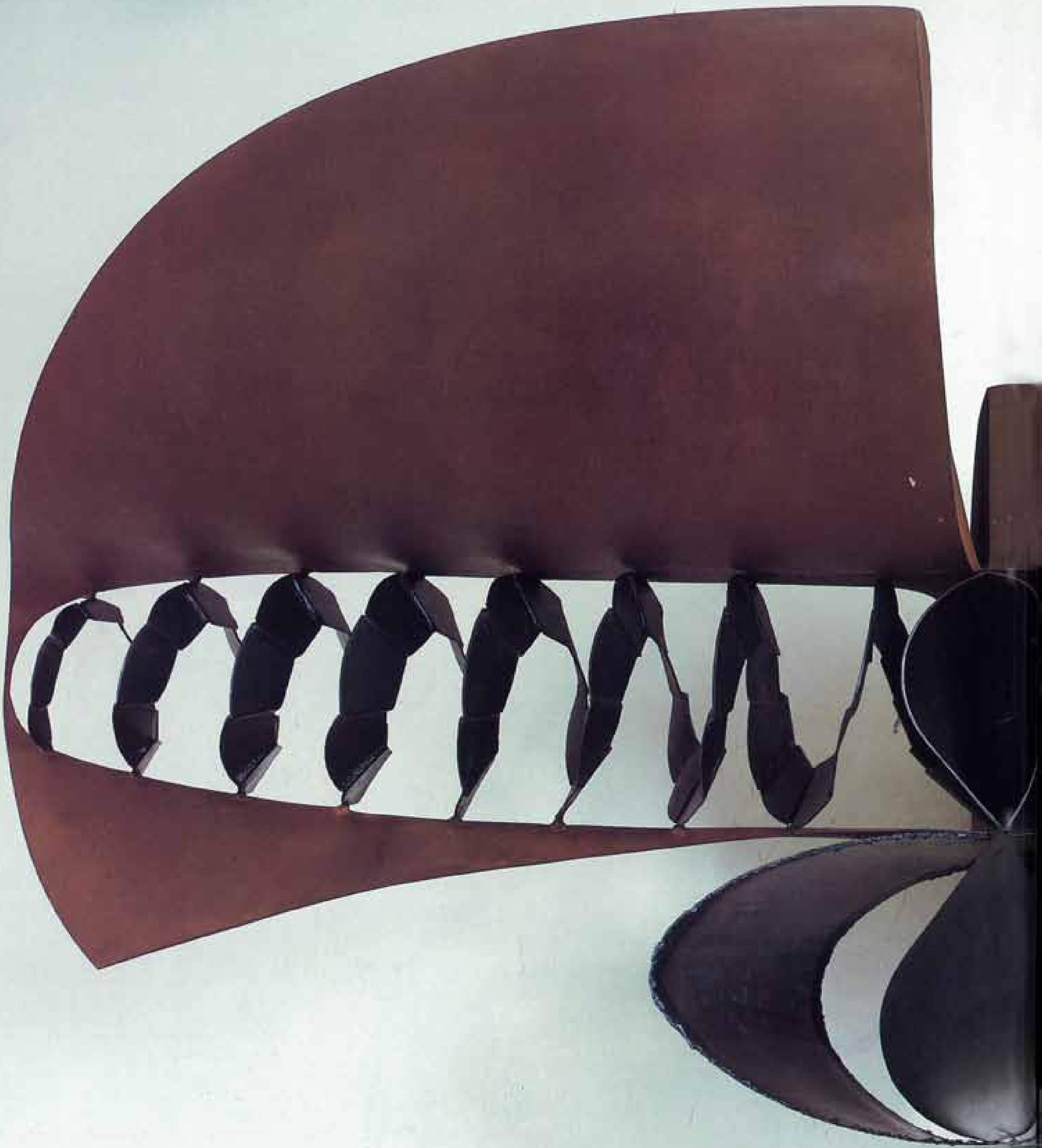
R.M. Fischer: **Scribe,** *1985, copper, aluminum, brass, marble, steel, 19 by 16 by 10 inches.*

I think these are real objects that exist in the real world, and they're not meant to be seen at a distance in terms of experience. I'm more interested in the way my sculpture makes you perceive space. I think they become even more interesting in people's homes than they are in galleries. I think Scott Burton's pieces and Brancusi's fit in the home the same way.

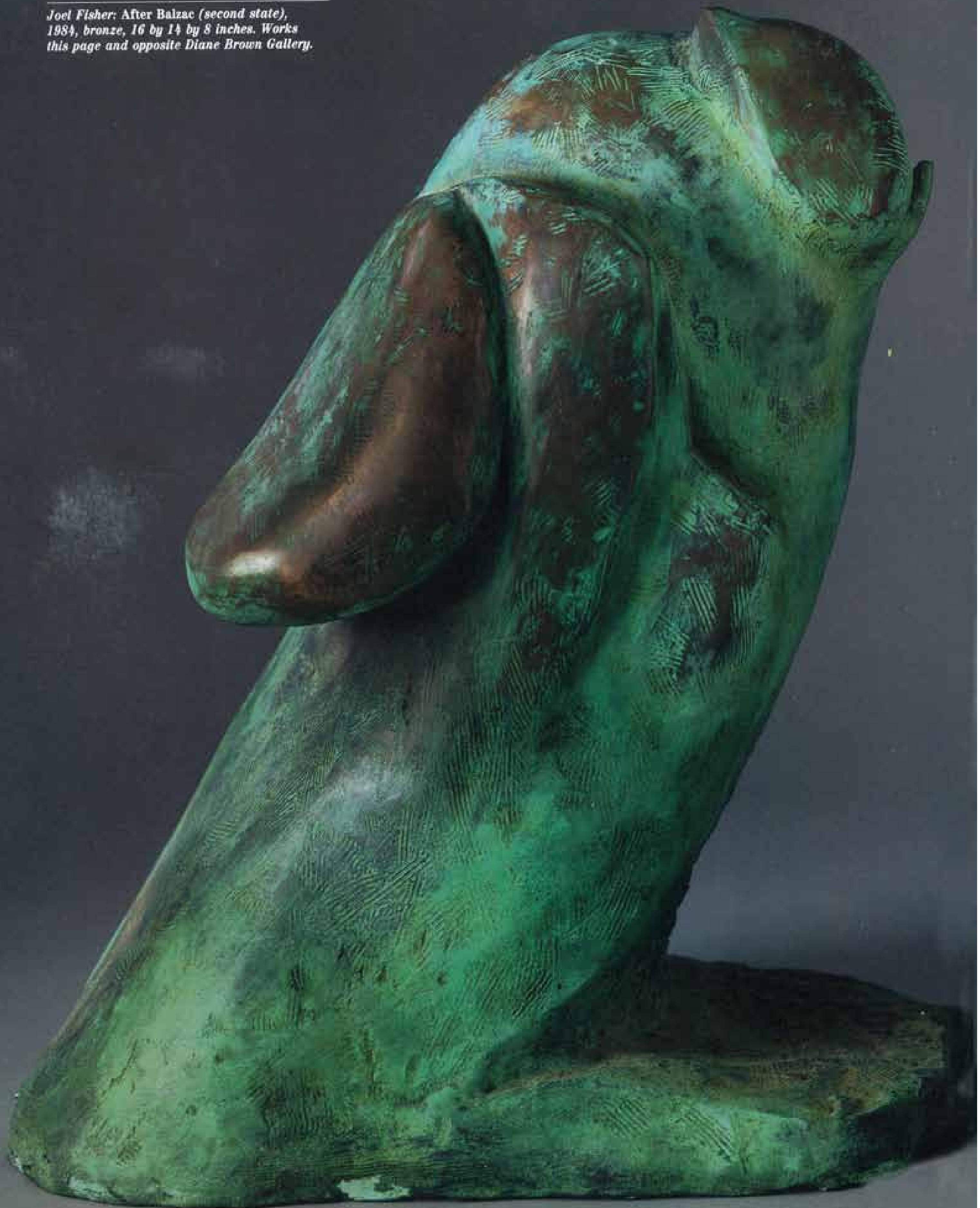
I feel I'm very conservative when it comes to materials. Taking real things and transforming them or transforming their context and content somehow seems more interesting than being a designer. Making a form is being a designer more than a sculptor. My stuff is about assemblage, collaging or juggling things, rather than design. There are so many great things out there already, it seems to me you don't have to invent a shape, it's already there for you.

I don't feel that the notion of lamp or furniture is very interesting to me any more; it was in the beginning, because it was a way of making the work accessible to a larger audience, and it was a way of bringing people into the object. I was able to use a lamp, which everyone knew about, and then play with that so I could abstract from it without totally alienating. Once having established that situation, though, it seems less interesting. Maybe there are other ways into doing work—and I'd like to see what those ways are.

I've been trying to work towards this quasi-religious, inspirational quality. This is my own fantasy. It would be as though you're walking into some cathedral, and there's this object that has meaning to you immediately, you don't really know why. Not just meaning in terms of regular meaning, but almost a little bit like the AT&T bulding. If it seems that lighting helps to create the effect I want, I'll use that; if I don't think it's necessary for a particular piece, I won't use it.



John Newman: Air Screw, *1985, treated steel, 87 by 52 by 34 inches. Collection the Department of Transportation, Washington, D.C.*



Joel Fisher: After Balzac *(second state), 1984, bronze, 16 by 14 by 8 inches. Works this page and opposite Diane Brown Gallery.*

Joel Fisher

Born 1947, Salem, Ohio. Education: Kenyon College, BA 1969. Currently lives in New York. First group exhibition: Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio, 1962. First solo exhibition: Whitney Museum, Art Resources Center, New York, 1970. Most recent exhibition at Gallery S-65, Aalst, Belgium, 1985; current exhibition at Diane Brown, New York, Nov. 1985.

It was Minimalism and Conceptualism that allowed me to see art as something very basic to my life. The whole idea of reductive thinking was very exciting to me—trying to get back to fundamentals, trying to see how far back one can go. And it was also important when I realized that we can never get back to Adam. Actually, Noah is more important to us than Adam, more relevant. He's a second Adam, who kept a cultural seed for further growth.

I got some harsh surprises when I started out. One was when I first started making paper. I thought I was involved in fundamental issues of painting, but when I showed my work to my painter friends they said, "That's not painting, it's just blank paper." In retrospect that kind of response was better than support because they named blankness as the issue for me to think about. Blankness became a place for me where reduction could reverse. It was at this time that I started calling my stuff sculpture rather than painting, though I rarely produced freestanding objects. Another surprise was when I started doing drawings that required that you look at the paper fairly carefully. But in fact people didn't. I discovered that my own tradition didn't offer the best audience for my work; these people were the least able to see what I was doing.

My drawings are copies of fibers or hairs left on the sheets of paper from the felt blankets I use when I dry them. I choose one of the forms or shapes and enlarge it to occupy the page. Some years ago I started to use the drawings as plans for sculptures. Sometimes the same drawing can yield several different sculptures. I'm committed to this sequence of fiber to drawing to sculpture only to the extent that it allows me an incredibly inventive source to work from. The forms come to me as neutral, and then gain significance as I work on them. They absorb a lot.

The drawings allow me a real sense of abundance, because the forms are more inventive than anything I could come up with. I like them a lot because they don't come from me. And they're a source I'm quite comfortable with—as some people might use their dreams as a way to start out.

I started concentrating on doing freestanding sculptures when I was in England, roughly from 1976 to 1982. During that period my work developed without much outside influence or hindrance. The isolation helped, because I had reached a point in my work where I felt trapped, where my decisions were getting more and more limited. I didn't want to undermine the work I'd done before, and yet I didn't know how to proceed.

Finally I just decided to play around and make each new piece out of a different material. I used wire and soap and coal and plaster and clay and wood and fiberglass and almost anything I picked up. By the time I finally repeated myself, making a second plaster piece, there was a spontaneous tumble to the work, and I was free. Still, I didn't want to show those sculptures at first: I thought of them as private works, made mostly for my own purposes. But with Nigel Greenwood's encouragement I did show them in his gallery (1979), and they looked great. My hesitance dissolved, and I went on with the work.

Joel Fisher: **Horus,** ***1984, bronze, 32 by 11 by 9 inches.***

Joel Fisher: **Drawing for After Balzac,** ***1981, pencil, fiber on handmade paper, 6 by 6 inches.***

I think my work deals with real things, with how vision works, how we fill in the gaps in what we see. It is absolutely related to that process by which we look through a window and ignore the reflections, or fill in the areas that are blocked from view. In that sense, my work, far from being eccentric, is quite centered, dealing, to the best of my knowledge, with life as we know it, with questions about naming, with questions about how we see things or how imagination works in real life. I think Surrealist imagination has a lot to do with fantasy, and less to do with the everyday but quite complex imagination that allows someone to drive a bus.

It may be that each of us is eccentric in relation to whatever mainstream art is. Many of the sculptors of my generation make use of some form of quotation in their work. These quotes do something different from what quotes have done in the past: they don't represent content, they represent the representation. It's a serious method and maybe dangerous, but if we are trying to rethink form in one way or another, quotation is not an inappropriate way to go about it.

I'm looking at pottery as much as at sculpture nowadays, wondering why a slightly different curve can bring an otherwise static pot to life. Maybe that committment to visual refinement is getting more important to some in the new generation of sculptors. I think it is wonderful how much of the environmental work from California is very slow. There is a reason to stay with it longer, and it gets better rather than worse. And yet so much else in the visual world is about the immediacy of the image. Even Minimalism had a quickly fixed image. If there is a new work developing, I would like it to give itself up quickly and slowly at the same time. I think I can have both, but if I do have to choose there is no question that my choice would be for it to take its time.

Roni Horn

Born 1955, New York. Education: Rhode Island School of Design, BFA 1975; Yale School of Art and Architecture, MFA 1978. Currently lives in New York. First solo exhibition: "Kunstraum," Munich, 1980. Most recent exhibition at Burnett Miller, Los Angeles, 1985; forthcoming exhibition at Maeght-Lelong, New York, 1986.

I never felt a strong connection to Minimalism, either from an art-critical point of view or a purely artistic one. Minimalist art is, in a sense, antidialectical: things are self-contained almost to the exclusion of nonideal relationships. In my early rubber floor pieces [soft black rubber cast into wedge forms which taper from two-inch thickness to thin edges over 12 feet], I was attempting to formally integrate platonic notions of the ideal with the imperfections of immediate, circumstantial reality. The thicker areas of the rubber forms retain the platonic integrity of the original casting; the thinner areas are deformed by the imperfections of the floor itself. Here the interest is in the imperfections, which create the territory necessary for ideal forms to exist at all. These pieces want to exist eccentrically in the space; they could never be placed in the center. Instead, they create an imbalance that develops a centering.

With the exception of my early works, which utilize platonic shapes, the visual aspect is the last thing that comes to me. I work instinctively towards a certain kind of experience that I want to crystallize—and then the object comes into being. The object is not the end; what I'm interested in is the experience it provides for—how it incites and animates dialogue. I'm not very involved with the third dimension in the traditional way we define sculpture. I'm more concerned with human consciousness and the way it synthesizes experience.

Art provokes or denies a certain sense of humanity through the dialectic it sets up or fails to set up with those experiencing it. My work is in part a critique of the ways, so pervasive in the television and entertainment industries, of placing the viewer in a passive relationship to the world. This cultivation of passivity is a by-product of the domestication of technology. It gives me the sense that America is dying of entertainment—dying of lack of contact or dialogue.

As for influences, indigenous building was one source that presented ways to incorporate experience and context into my work with a vitality that goes beyond the merely visual or formal. Any architecture indigenous to a given region involves the notion of presence, of dwelling or staying in place and responding to it. Every aspect of these structures is dictated by a wonderful dialogue with climate and context—from the slant of the roof to the thickness of the walls, to their exact orientation in the world. That sort of less seen but highly sensible relationship became very influential in my work. My work has also been strongly affected by the solitary journeys I have made throughout Iceland. Iceland, for various reasons of geology and isolation, provides for an extremely direct and intensely present experience. It is a place which knits together, through strength of presence, the more and the less visible aspects of experience without awarding priorities in the ordinary way.

In my gold piece [a 4-by-5-foot foil-thick mat of pure gold], I wanted to give gold back its corporeal form. I had always experienced gold as an anonymous yellow metal, further adulterated by the abstraction of mythology. I wanted the taste of gold. I wanted the experience of splendor, directly, so I made this piece. I accepted its sensationalism, a by-product of the "intrinsic" value of gold, as one of the forces that would govern the experience of this work. However, I was also interested in the fact that gold has mundane qualities as well, like answering to gravity—that it's not a totally mythological or pecuniary thing. When I took the basic gold mat and folded it into various forms, I found that simple daylight funneling throughout the folds of the gold created an intense, ember-orange glow. It was my first experience of gold.

Object of Constancy [seven six-foot solid lead rods twisted into a helix form, 1980] is the only work in which I explored the notion of a thing which dwells in itself. I was thinking of a form which has no consequential relationship to context other than proximity—a truly portable object. There is a layering of "constancy" in the piece: its least visible aspect being lead's chemical inertness. Then there is the constancy that comes from predictability—the helical form with its repetitive elements and its linear aspect. But the work's most critical constancy is its lack of connection to context. The formal complexity of the internal structure—that is, the helix itself—isolates it from immediate circumstance. You wind up with something immobilized by its own perfection.

Like most of my other works, *Cobbled Lead(s)* [a 1983 installation for the courtyard of Munich's Glyptothek Museum, in which 300 square feet of granite cobblestones were replaced with 22 tons of cast lead equivalents] is concerned with dwelling in the world—with the possibility of a thing creating a location, a specific animation of place. Especially with this piece, but also with a lot of the indoor work, I think of myself as a kind of landscape sculptor. And here I look to Constable and Turner—to their work as a manifestation of an insistent relating-to-place, in particular of the way landscape qualifies place: landscape is an attachment to the unpredictable. So, with *Cobbled Lead(s)* I broke the symmetry of a classical structure, both experientially and visually. I inserted this dull, quiet, soft and massive lead into the ground. I placed it so that pedestrians would traverse it, moving from the hard resilience of granite to the massive dullness of lead, and then back onto the stone. It was no more than an interval of slower passage; maybe there was a slightly amplified sense of gravity. I was thinking of a short walk upon a larger world—more friction. It seemed to be enough to set this difference into this austere place.

In the end I keep coming back to this desire to circumvent things which interface between actual experience and perceptions of it. Even so simple a thing as identity mediates experience. Naming: the detour of identity. It seems to me that the individual who relies too heavily on language to connect with the world lessens the chance of experiencing it.

Roni Horn: **Group 2 #II (Hollowed Mass: Ellipse)**, *1984, cast lead, 16½ by 7½ by 4 inches.*

Roni Horn: Heavy Metal Work (Gold), *1980–82, 18 pieces (each 60 by 3 by .008 inches) of fine gold, compression welded in parallel arrangement to form a rectilinear mat, 4 by 5 feet; the mat may be moved to assume various forms. Works this page and opposite Galerie Maeght Lelong.*

Mel Kendrick: Large Mahogany with Holes, *1984, mahogany, 52 by 24 by 17½ inches. Works this page and opposite John Weber Gallery.*

Mel Kendrick

Born 1949, Boston. Education: Trinity College, BA 1971; Hunter College, MA 1973. Currently lives in New York. First group exhibition: "Invitational #1," John Weber, New York, 1976. First solo exhibition: Artists Space, New York, 1974. Most recent exhibition at John Weber, New York, 1985; forthcoming exhibition at Margo Leavin, Los Angeles, Nov. 23-Dec. 30, 1985.

Is there a new generation of sculptors? No one really seems to like anyone else's work that much. I feel more of an affinity with the ways of painters than of sculptors, and that's kind of odd. If I see a generational break, it's that identification. I always envied painters that they had their paints and canvas and could be in the studio and zero in on one thing. My way of working with wood now is exactly the same. I'm here. I've got everything I need. It's all very self-contained, as opposed to earlier when I was trying to pick up parts and hardware and trying to construct both objects and contexts.

If the question is what do I like about painting, it's the feeling of the duration of decision-making: you see part of where it came from and part of where it's going. Like Cy Twombly—you get the feeling of drawing and erasing and thinking and making marks and trying to figure out how to make marks to fill the canvas and, simultaneously, how and where to leave it empty. All the history visible in a painting is usually nonexistent or not visible in a sculpture—particularly in public sculpture or outdoor stuff like that at the Storm King Art Center.

As for coming out of Minimalism, I never had a sharper idea about art than when I first came to New York and Hunter College in 1971, and got indoctrinated. There were Morris and Andre, and it was very clear what art should be at that point. But it was also clear that art was staked out in a circle, and that all you could do was try to be smart and find little niches—in between Ryman and Mangold, say. It was all very dogmatic. With "The 'Bad' Painting Show" at the New Museum in 1978, something came from a whole other place and helped loosen things up. Suddenly, what I had been doing seemed dogmatic; the rules had been broken. I started thinking, whose rules are these that I'm following anyway? That was the really important thing. I kept thinking that I was doing something for someone else, that someone was looking over my shoulder. If I was good at following the rules, everything would go fine. Dropping the rhetoric of Minimalism was liberating, because clearly all bets were off. By 1980, I think a lot of work had gotten very dry, my own included.

The advances I made were in no way theoretical; I was just taking something I saw while working and saying, "That's interesting." It was always, "Can I allow myself to do this?" If I found an interesting joint in one of my big sculptures, where the beams came together, say, could I accept that small area of wood as a sculpture itself instead of connecting it back into the big piece?

In order to work the way I do, I've accepted certain things—that it's okay to put sculpture on a base, for one—and accepted that you don't have to keep on challenging those notions. I've accepted this stuff about sculpture so I can go back and work on the objects and think about what it means to make something to begin with. You can't fight every convention.

After having no real technical training whatsoever—I never welded, never worked with the figure—it's really interesting to learn about wood, about chiseling; to learn to chisel by chiseling. Coming out of Minimalism I have an incredible wealth of things and information to explore, things I've never done. Since I didn't learn the traditional stuff, I don't have to forget it now.

There are several stages in my work. I set up the original piece of wood or select it, and that can mean drilling it or grooving it or, lately, chiseling the bark off the logs. I like working with hand tools. I play those marks against the saw cuts. Each piece is from one piece of wood. It's not a challenge to use the whole block; it's just a way of working. It gives the pieces an internal logic that is not necessarily retrievable—but whatever I've done to the piece you can sense it. Somehow this part relates to this other part, though you don't have to go around trying to match it up or figuring out how it happened.

I can't think of a way to change scale without changing materials. It wouldn't really make sense to me. The scale of the tools and the scale of the wood keep it here in the loft. You don't need much scale to do things. It's strange when you put things on bases. Suddenly this is the most traditional form of sculpture, but also the most revolutionary. There is a reason to go around the sculpture, to look at all the sides. The need for three-dimensionality got me away from the wall; wall-work seemed kind of easy, like sculpture with one side left out.

We all make forms in a certain way. I think what we've each found is a way to make shapes that would be a pain in the ass to do any way but the way we do them. I wanted to deal more with color, and what's happened is something I swore I wouldn't do. I've gotten involved with these exotic woods and the color of the woods. I fear most this notion that I know what I'm doing, because everything about my work involves not knowing and trying to figure it out within each piece in front of me.

Nauman is crucial to me because he brought drawing back into sculpture. His show at Castelli in 1981 was the most exciting sculpture I had seen in a long time; it was so immediate and seemed to be about actually making things. I didn't care what his proposals were, I just looked at those pieces as objects, and as objects that didn't seem to rely on the rectangular room.

Shows like the "Content" show at the Hirshhorn last fall ["Content: Contemporary Focus 1974-1984"]—which skipped most of the sculptors of our age group—seem like the same old stuff: give someone a room and have them write a statement. It all goes together. Every time there's a big show and there are no objects, no sculptural objects, it becomes clearer to me that objects are what's really interesting.

Mel Kendrick: **Ebony with Three Legs,** *1984, ebony, 25 by 12 by 10¼ inches.*

Donald Lipski

Born 1947, Chicago. Education: University of Wisconsin, BA 1970; Cranbrook Academy of Art, MFA 1973. Currently lives in New York. First group exhibition: "Michigan Artists," Detroit Art Institute, 1972. First solo exhibition: Contemporary Arts Foundation, Oklahoma City, 1974. Most recent exhibition at Germans van Eck, New York, 1985; currently in "Working in Brooklyn/Sculpture," Brooklyn Museum, New York (until Jan. 6, 1986); forthcoming participation in Zurich Art Fair with Germans van Eck, Feb. 1986.

I became very conscious of the issue of rules in my work a number of years back. Around Christmas 1979, I went to Bulgaria for two weeks through the State Department to set up a show. I spent a lot of time talking to the artists in Varna. Many were unhappy because they operated under a huge number of rules. Some were very obvious—like a lot of the artists were printmakers because that's a good socialist art form. Other constraints were more invisible or insidious; but everything contributed to this small set of choices they were allowed to make.

I brought two things back with me. One was a barbell that I got at a department store in Sofia that was shaped just like the handset on a telephone; the other was a walker that I got at a flea market in Berlin. At home my phone had been turned off; I had huge amounts of letters and stuff to deal with, so I unplugged the phone from the wall and put the barbell on it. The walker was there next to it. Over the next year sculpture starting coming into the space and filling it up. All my work since then comes out of that. I call the work *Passing Time*, because at the moment I knew nothing about it except that I was keeping busy. Over time I started to understand the relation between the work and my trip to Bulgaria.

When I came back from Bulgaria, I just started making stuff without thinking about any of the rules that we operate under, rules like "just what is legitimate activity for an artist, what makes sense, what goes with what, what doesn't." At one point someone said that one of my pieces reminded him of Donald Judd, another of Jackie Winsor, another of Joel Shapiro. I looked at all the things and said, "Yes, yes, it's true." But that's the sort of rule I'm talking about—that you aren't supposed to make something that reminds you of Donald Judd, let alone stuff that reminds you of all these different people at once. But who cares, so what? It's a rule I wasn't thinking about.

I feel like I'm a pretty classical artist, not in the sense of being set off against romanticism, but rather in working with an existing canon of forms. In that way I'm traditional. I take this canon of forms and it becomes my storepile. However, in doing that I have the whole world to choose from, so it's wide open. It's a pain in the ass to fabricate things, and it doesn't seem very necessary. Occasionally there will be a fabricated part where there is something I need that I don't already have and can't find.

I don't think too much about stuff like whether my pieces have space or not. Space isn't an issue to me; more important is the question of axiality. There are people who have a bias toward vertical or toward horizontal, or something like that; the fact that vertical relates to a person and that horizontal relates to the landscape doesn't mean shit to me. I don't even know that I believe it, let alone think it's important. That's the sort of stuff sculptors talk about.

I'm trying to make a new object; yes, they have formal properties, but they are secondary. My forms make themselves in some sense. I choose my materials and they direct the form.

The reason for having all this stuff around is instant access. If I'm walking down Canal Street or looking through a hardware store in Sweden, if there's something that appeals to me, if I think something is substantial enough as an object, has enough resonance, I just bring it home, not for the sake of collecting, but to expand my palette. I just did some work in Indianapolis. All I had to work with was what I got from this one federal surplus depot. It was like having to paint with three colors.

Donald Lipski:* Building Steam *#318, 1985, tin-snips, cloth, rubber tubing, 13 inches long.

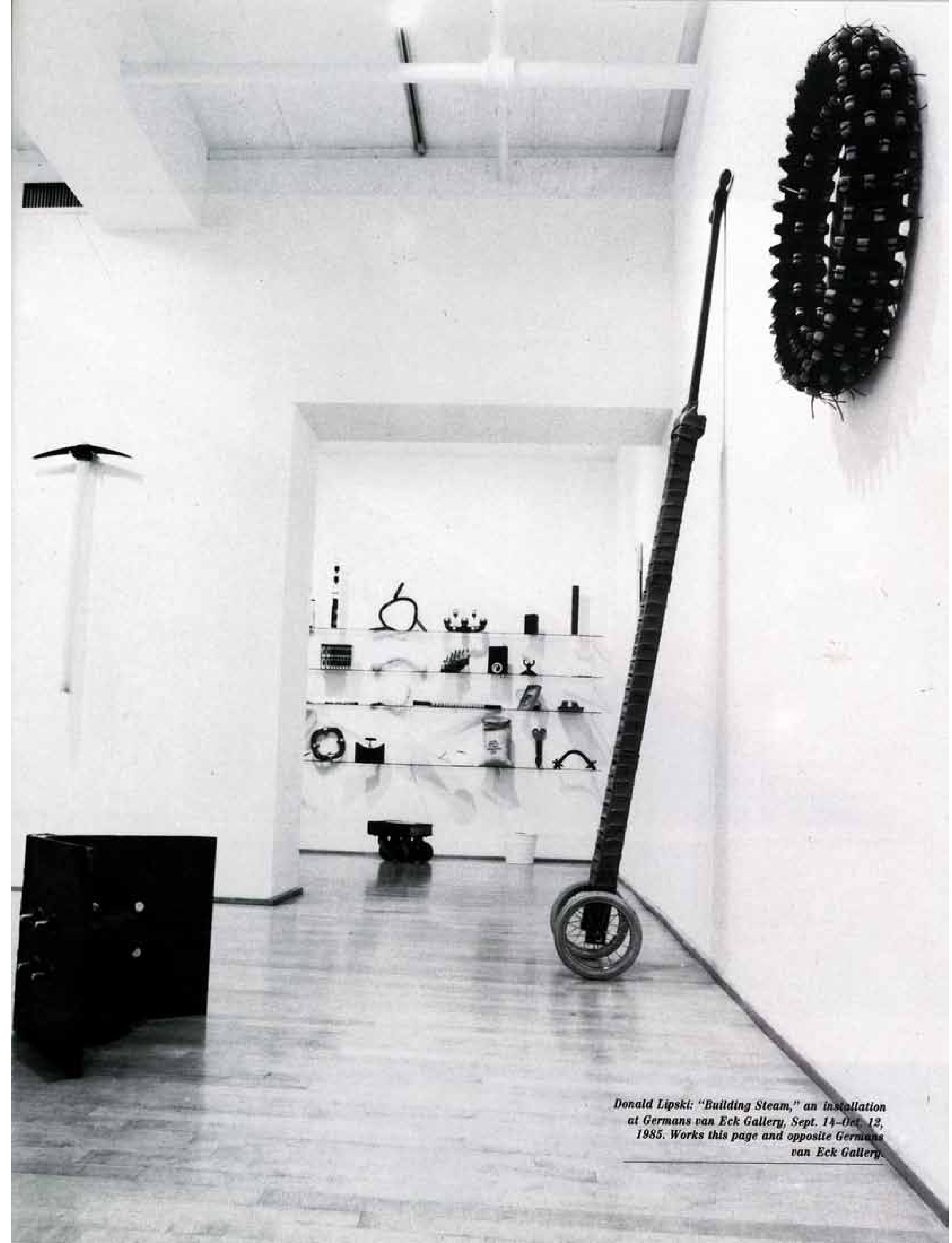
Donald Lipski:* Building Steam *#265, 1984, orange buoy, metal plates, 10-inch diameter.

I like paraffin; it's beautiful to me. I don't think about it metaphorically, as flesh or fat, or different things people have suggested, though all those things are true. To me it's just very beautiful. I shy away from anything that's very technical. I wasn't trained as a sculptor, so I glue my stuff together, or tie it together. I can melt wax on the stove and pour it in. Fabrication takes much too long. Usually I can even find the brackets that pieces hang from. Same casualness with the wrapping. If there is a form and I don't like the surface of it for some reason, or just want to clean up the form, I'll wrap it.

Though I haven't junked any of the larger pieces, there are ones that I've made something new out of. Sometimes I find an object I love, but what I did with it the first time wasn't the right thing to do with it; or more interestingly, sometimes an object that I've done something with sits around so long that it becomes a raw object to me, becomes a component in a new sculpture.

When I was a kid I'd do things over and over and over. Rote activity is very soothing for me; it's when I relax. My work has always been thought of as being obsessive, but I don't know what that word really means. If anything I have the opposite of a fixed idea. I don't relate to the word obsessive. A better word is dedicated. If you are dedicated to a mode of working, if you take someone who spends this many hours in the studio, I don't know if that's obsessive—but it's seriousness. There are other words that people use about my work that I can't stand. Detritus. Fetish. A better word for me than fetish is charm; it implies that something has an actual magic in it. The best of my works are art charms.

More than anything you just try to keep busy, try to keep reassembling the world.



Donald Lipski: "Building Steam," an installation at Germans van Eck Gallery, Sept. 14–Oct. 12, 1985. Works this page and opposite Germans van Eck Gallery.

Judith Shea: Custom Angle, *1985,*
wax, felt, wood, 23 by 75 by 13½ inches.
Willard Gallery; photo courtesy L.A. Louver
Gallery.

John Newman

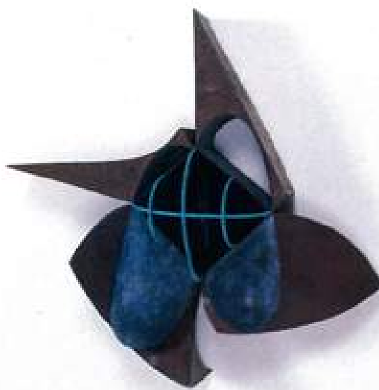
Born 1952, New York. Education: Oberlin College, BA 1973; Whitney Museum of Art Independent Study Program, 1972; Yale School of Art and Architecture, MFA 1975. Currently lives in New York. First group exhibition: "Sculpture and Drawings," 112 Greene Street Gallery, New York, 1975. First solo exhibition: Center for Advanced Visual Studies, MIT, Cambridge, Mass., 1977. Included in Whitney Biennial, 1985; most recent exhibition at Daniel Weinberg, Los Angeles, 1985.

Ten years ago I really liked the idea that Sol LeWitt's work was sort of perfect—complete, intact, like a computer program or a chess game. I was making two-sided wooden sculptures that came out perpendicular to the wall. You'd look at one side, you'd go around and look at the other. It was a way to get at meaning—through comparison—"How is this different from that?" Later they seemed to me much more like devices for a largely mental involvement; their physical existence seemed beside the point. Within the brackets I had set up I could make almost perfect work, but eventually I realized that outside the brackets was the "world." All art-making involves a personality at work; that's the starting point. So I ended up wanting to break the brackets in the interest of a greater empathy between the viewer and the work, between me and the making. I couldn't be satisfied with "figure-it-out" art.

Formally, you could say my recent sculptures are stretched and pulled, twisted and reoriented versions of my wooden wall pieces, but the attitude is completely different. Before, I wanted my work to be exclusive of any association or reference so that it would be primarily cerebral, apprehended like a structural model. In practice, the two-sided pieces seemed esoteric, emptied out and in a sense manipulative: if you didn't look at them my way, you weren't seeing them at all. Now I'm fascinated with the enormous wealth of reference that comes into play when you do something as simple as, say, curve a plane. That curved surface suddenly is full of implications—sexual, biological, technological, baroque. I like this inclusiveness; it allows you to pack the work with ideas.

After the two-sided pieces I just started looking at all sorts of stuff that I was attracted to, regardless of whether it was part of the visual rhetoric that I felt I was "raised on"—ethnographic stuff; primitive, Japanese and medieval armor. I became more interested in how things were made, how they felt to me, rather than how useful they might be in illustrating a polemic.

This is an extremely open time for sculpture right now. There's a need for a lot of individuality, for work that's emotional in character but carries lots of information. It's work that's complex without being committed to difficulty for difficulty's sake. I see it as being like a tuber, something you have to find and dig up for nourishment. It's not going to be standing there frontally, abbreviated, high volume in the culture.



John Newman: **Orbiter**, *1985, bronze with patina, 50 by 46 by 21 inches.*

My sculpture comes out of the impulse to make something that I have never seen before. I want people to look at my work and ask themselves, "What the hell is that thing, and what, for that matter, am I doing standing here asking that question?" I think sculpture is also oddly appropriate to our time. It's sort of a cross between writing a diary, building a model and making a movie. It's very personal, yet lets you use technology. It seems like this big exciting production—machines, trucks, cranes—but at the same time you're also just out there banging on this thing. So it's sort of a cross between Vulcan's forge and Sputnik.

The more I've been thinking about sculpture, and subsequently the tradition of sculpture, the more I've been thinking about tactility, surface, texture, color, light. In my work the surface is the form: these are exoskeletons; there is no internal armature. In this regard my work bears some relation to painting, but also to fossils, to armor, to basic principles of topology. I use the color to separate out areas and order their claims on the viewer's attention; it's a way of establishing visual priorities. I get the color by mixing different metals or finishing the metal in various ways: I am not building a place to paint on. I like the feeling that the color is inherent in the material itself.

John Newman: **Mother Tongue**, *1985, bronze with patina, 50 by 45 by 11 inches.*

I don't think of my work as bas-relief; it's sculpture on the wall. This is sculpture that I've given a purposeful axis of viewing, a purposeful direction. By creating a purposeful orientation you're implying that it's something like an image, as opposed to a thing in a temporal space. When I showed at Pat Hamilton's gallery in 1983, this great thing happened. The opening was packed, but around my piece there was a perfect semi-circle of empty space. The sculpture really commanded an area far larger than the thing itself. In a funny sense, viewing sculpture is a little like two dogs approaching one another. Where does your space begin, where does mine end? How close can I get, can I get closer? Can I stick my nose in there, or not?

John Newman: Jeter Par Terre, 1985, bronze with patina, 60 by 40 by 10 inches. Works this page and opposite Daniel Weinberg Gallery and Jeffrey Hoffeld Gallery.

Judy Pfaff: 3-D, 1983, installation piece made of mixed mediums and occupying a room 22 feet wide by 35 feet long. Photo Waring Abbott. Works this page and opposite Holly Solomon Gallery.

Judy Pfaff

Born 1946, London. Education: Washington University, St. Louis, BFA 1971; Yale School of Art and Architecture, MFA 1973. Currently lives in New York. First group exhibition: Razor Gallery, New York, 1973. First solo exhibition: Artists Space, New York, 1975. Most recent exhibition "Illuminating Color," Pratt Institute, New York, 1985; installation for Wacoal Corp., Kyoto, Japan, 1985. Currently in "Working in Brooklyn/Sculpture," Brooklyn Museum, New York (until Jan. 6, 1986); forthcoming exhibition at Holly Solomon, New York, Dec. 1985.

Artists like LeVa, Tuttle, Saret, Serra, Nauman and Morris were my favorite sculptors when I was in school. I liked process. Those sculptors seemed to give words like "gravity" such weight, or "truth to materials" such virtue. So much had to do with definitions, territory and signature. At that time, that work and its premises excited me in every way. My work really does come out of that period, except that increasingly I had a hard time with the idea that things were so right, so secure—that there were so many seemingly neat circles. The originally expansive, impressive thoughts I was attracted to began to seem tiny and snuggled in.

My work is not about the facts: illusions, distortions and mind changes carry more weight for me. What I do is really variable in every way, like story-telling and narrative. With Minimalism if you had figuration, or too much in the way of reference, you were dead. It's hard now to even remember that that was the arena.

Since then, there seems to have been a steady increase in the specificity of imagery, from Andre and LeWitt to Shapiro and Benglis, to us, and to the younger artists just coming up now, like Jon Kessler. It's like touching ever closer on a subject, and then saying it full out.

I tackled what I thought was sculpture just by opening up the language for myself as far and as wide as I could in terms of materials, colors and references; I tried to include all the things that were permissible for painting, but absent in sculpture. So the first pieces I made had huge titles, taking in whole histories or archeologies. For example, one I made in 1977 is called *The World Is Flat: Images for the Floor*. I don't know what this penchant is for making a whole cosmos, but it's certainly there for me. Perhaps it's that if I can pay attention long enough to corral all my thoughts and note them, they will create an unexpected whole. I want the latitude of shifting thoughts in regard to materials, colors and references. I can't be bound by how they "should" relate to one another. By going after a certain speed traditionally reserved for painters, I'm reaching for a crossing over of ideas and a weaving of thinking and making.

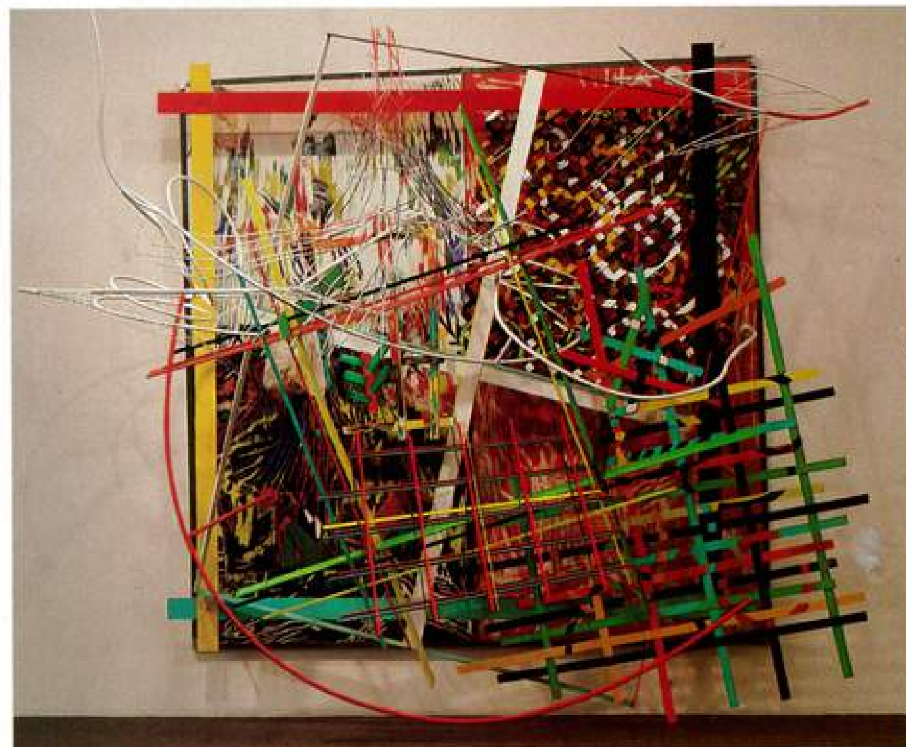
Peripheral vision is and always has been crucial to my work. If you can look and see it all at once—then there is a false sense that you know it. I think that if half of the work is in back of you, you'll never be coaxed into believing you know or see it all. It's important to be able to put enough artifice and enough casualness and enough surprise and enough reason in a work. I need to run sequences on a large enough scale so as to be analogous to the seven blind men describing the elephant.

With every new developmental stage, I feel I can take on more imagery and more implications. Being able to understand more equates with getting better. I'm working towards an ever increasing vocabulary. And always I keep hangovers from previous work. I can identify each line from a certain stage fondly, and each piece tends to incorporate all that has gone before.

As stylized as they are, my figurative pieces from 1978 and '79 represent very real and personal dilemmas, and actual people I knew. It is understandable that given the time, and given the tendency then to formalist interpretation, they were never read that way, as people in conflict. I was very leery of the work being too expressive, telling too much—like this is the person I'm in love with. If you looked hard enough and knew me at the time, though, you could tell. The potential for autobiography in those pieces got too close, and I backed away from them.

I like real things like tree branches—they create something very peculiar and nice in an installation. Usually they are the freest aspect of my work. Most parts of my work are controlled and muscled into place, and then there is the beautiful aspect of nature, this naturally beautiful line. And it is the only thing that I didn't make. Sometimes something you just pick up has such fantastic integrity. Some things that just exist are perfect.

What's happening now in sculpture seems really wide open and generous . . .taking all sorts of permission and running with it, full out.



Judy Pfaff: Untitled, 1985, mixed mediums, 168 by 132 by 96 inches.

Donald Lipski: Building Steam #266, *1984, electric light bulb, stand and water, 10 by 15 by 6 inches. Germans van Eck Gallery.*

Judith Shea: Overtones, W.G., #100, *1985, bronze, 11 by 30 by 12 inches. Works this page and opposite, Willard Gallery.*

Judith Shea

Born 1948, Philadelphia. Education: Parsons School of Design, BFA in Fashion Design, 1969; Parsons School of Design, BFA 1975. Currently lives in New York. First group exhibition: Artpark, New York, 1974. First solo exhibition: "Studio Project," Clocktower, Institute for Art and Urban Resources, New York, 1976. Recent exhibitions at Willard, New York, 1984, "Judith Shea and Robert Moskowitz," Hayden Gallery, MIT, 1985, "Body and Soul: Recent Figurative Sculpture," Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, 1985; forthcoming exhibition at Willard, New York, 1986.

My first associations in the art world were mostly with Minimalist sculptors and their constant talk about rules—how to look at Don Judd's work, how to learn from Carl Andre. I remember ten years ago feeling absolutely straightjacketed—always trying to figure out whether my work was *right* according to that logic. In some of my earliest pieces I feel that the articulation of the ideas may be as interesting as their realization in the sculpture.

The idea of the concept being so beautifully thought out is really something that's connected to Minimalism for me. It's interesting, because that was a period when there was terrific writing about art, and then you'd see the work and think, "So *that's* what all this was about?" The ideas are so beautiful; they fit together so well. Intellectually it's really how you'd like the world to be; it's really neat. Yet the work is in many ways just really stingy.

One big difference between artists my age and the Minimalists is that we tend to like some sense of hand work, some evidence of the individual's skill or craftsmanship—not necessarily a highly skilled execution, but a sense of the touch of the human hand. Whereas Minimalism wants to look as if no hand ever touched it, and glorifies fabrication—the machine-cut edge, and so on. There are exceptions, of course. One example for me is Robert Grosvenor's creosoted wood pieces, which have a strong emotional presence and a sensual, worked surface, as well as the pure formal power of the object in space.

The '70s were such an interesting and eclectic time—but a difficult one for painters. How far could you go with Minimalism beyond Ryman or Marden? I think painters found a way out before sculptors did. All the recent focus on painting has created, in a positive way, a situation of adversity for sculptors our age, where there is something very real to work against; there is a need to work for more visibility, not just for yourself, but for a whole kind of work. Suddenly a couple of years have passed and you ask, "When was the last time I saw a great sculpture show?"

One thing the recent expressionistic painters have done for us in both their painting and their sculpture is to make all manner of subject matter acceptable. Some of their sculpture has been really instructive to me. I've seen instances where I've felt that what you could use well in paintings—emotional, sentimental, romantic or mythical material—didn't translate well, or as easily, into sculpture. It just looked like sculpture from the past, while the painting comes out of history but goes beyond it.

An important influence on me in this vein was a trip to Greece two years ago. In classical sculpture, particularly of the so-called Severe Style, I found a whole vocabulary of formal compositions of figures, most strikingly in pedimental sculptures. I couldn't get over the integration of forms, both figural and architectural, with story and emotion. I felt sure that centaurs, for example, were invented in mythology because of their perfect proportions for fitting into a triangle. And the cool severity of the forms, which dominated the spiritual aspects, seemed to make the work impacted and resonant.

I've long been conscious of a certain structural history of clothes. In older clothing, the formal concentration is on the material; how you throw it on yourself is clothing. Later the concentration moves to anatomy and the manipulation of anatomy—the building out of one area and the smothering in of another. The movement is from a two-dimensional to a three-dimensional handling of the garment. My own work started with a not very anatomical version of clothing as a form in itself, but it has gotten increasingly anatomical.

One of the things that's really visible in my new work is a greatly increased emotionalism. There are a couple of pieces with more than one figure. You open up whole different associations by doing that; you emphasize interaction. Formally, you can get beyond the single figure, into the juxtaposition of metals, of colors, of figures, of forms. For example, in a recent piece called *He and She*, the female form is very contained, essentialized—unmistakably female, even stereotyped. It comes down to a kind of essence of the female, almost like those little fetish figures, where it's so unmistakably female that that's what it's about. The male form, which is in the shape of a big coat, is extremely open, and is as much about the cloth as about the figure. The female figure is very tightly contained with an empty space inside, and the male is very open, its empty space almost more prominent than the container. The space represents two kinds of characters, or two opposites of form and personality. In the clothing framework, there's the dress and the coat—the idea of the thing that covers the body and then the thing that covers both of those together. So the piece is not just about representing the gesture of the figures, though that's increasingly important for me; it's more the fact that with these figures I'm involved with the use of open and closed space.

Judith Shea:* Standing There, *1984, bronze, 36½ by 11½ by 9½ inches.

It dawned on me recently that there was never a point where I considered giving up clothes as sculptural elements, and it's strange, because in the first years I was working this way there was absolutely no place for it; I constantly had the sense that it never was going to be taken seriously. The Pattern and Decoration movement was important for me that way, since at least it has a focus on cloth. I never felt that my work was basically connected to that esthetic—what I was doing was so formal and unornamented—but P & D definitely opened opportunities for my work to be seen. I think the movement was infatuated with design, ideologically speaking, and I was reacting against design—so we crossed, but going in very different directions.

Robert Therrien

Born 1947, Chicago. Education: Brooks Institute, Santa Barbara, BFA 1970; University of Southern California, Los Angeles, MFA 1973. Currently lives in Los Angeles. First group exhibition: "Nine Artists," Occidental College, Los Angeles, 1975. First solo exhibition: Ruth S. Schaffner Gallery, Los Angeles, 1975. Most recent exhibition at Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1984; included in Whitney Biennial, 1985. Forthcoming exhibition at Leo Castelli, New York, May 1986.

There is a thread that carries through most people's work so that it either becomes more and more abstract, or less and less. I'm finding that as mine becomes less and less abstract in appearance—its shape more obviously derived from common objects—it also gets more thickly surrounded *by* abstractions, in the sense of associations or ideas it may refer to.

I try to stay with themes or objects or sources I can trace back into my personal history. The further back I can trace something as being meaningful to me in some way or another—in my lifetime or in my memory or in my subconscious—the more I'm attracted to it. Not all the objects or the forms that I use are of that type, but the ones that are most meaningful I can trace back pretty far; for instance, the place I think of as the snowman [*No Title*, 1983, cast bronze plated with silver].

I was interested in the idea of that type of structure—three things piled upon each other—because a snowman seemed like a very sculptural thing, sort of a gestural thing for a person to do; a snowman might be a kid's first sculpture. I can remember making snowmen when I was quite young in Chicago, and I have a memory or a feeling that it was sculptural, though perhaps not consciously. But I'd like to believe that I had some sort of idea of sculpture at that time, perhaps just a tiny one.

I was also interested in how basic that type of structure really is. The first sculpture that anyone ever made for decorative purposes might have had that structure—a pile of three rocks. So in that sense my sculpture seems primitive.

The snowman's a good example of a work that I see as not very abstract. I see it as an imitation of a real-life object, or an interpretation of one, yet there seem to me to be more associations or metaphors, or more little stories you can make up about it, than about a purely abstract form. Most of my things aren't really constructed in the sense of having more than one part. That's a trait of my work: it usually has a type of symmetry to it, and a type of weight; and it's a unitary construct. It's not made up of different parts that you look at at different times.

I know that the kind and quality of surface have something to do with the presence of the object. For a while it was taboo to be concerned with surface, but when you think about it objectively, that is what you're looking at; you aren't looking at the structure or the interior of a sculpture or painting, so the surface actually *is* what the object is. It's important that the surface reads in relation to what you are referring to. For instance with the snowman, since the reference has something to do with ice or snow, I thought of silver—that type of reflective tonality seemed appropriate. The surface is reflective enough to see movement in if you walk past it, but if you hold up your hand, you can't recognize its reflection.

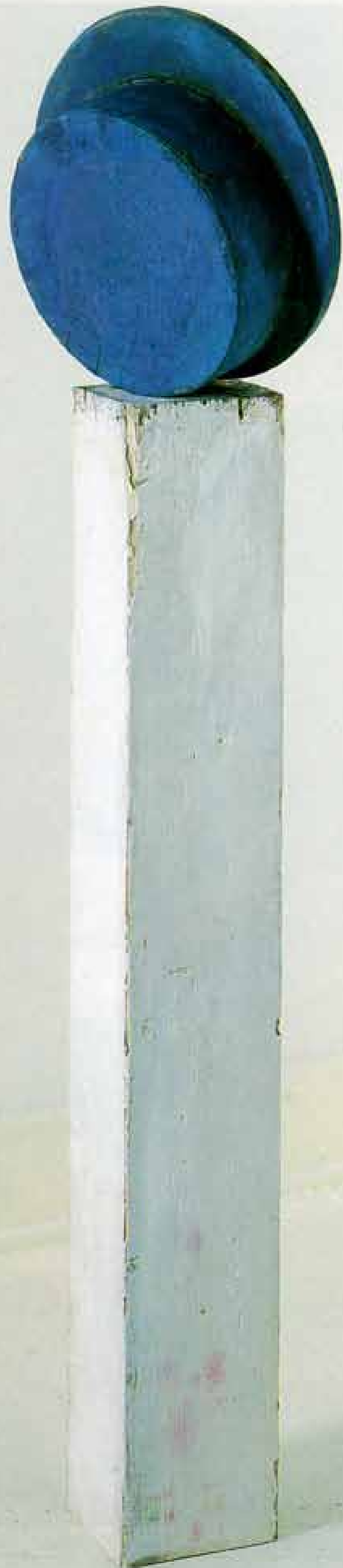
Robert Therrien: No Title, *1983, silver on bronze, 36 by 16 by 16 inches. Collection Teresa Bjornson.*

The piece I think of as the keyhole is cut bronze. It's about five inches high and an inch thick, and it hangs on the wall at about keyhole height. It's a little sculpture, and I usually put it on a huge wall by itself; from the distance it appears to be a hole, which you'd expect it to be because it's a keyhole shape. Then when you walk up to it, you see it's three dimensional. What attracted me at first was the shape, but what kept my attention were the references or metaphors that it suggested. Those metaphors have to do with voyeurism or looking. The keyhole is a looking symbol, a secret-looking symbol, so maybe it was not the original, direct reference that drew me, but the associative ones. I've done a lot of keyhole pieces in different ways because I remain interested in that shape. It's basically a cartoonish keyhole, the kind a locksmith might use on his logo.

When I come back to a shape more than once, I think I'm looking for the way it should be. With the keyhole I'll eventually find out the perfect version and do it; then I'll be done with that. The snowman is probably the same. There aren't any images that I've finished with yet—I just keep reinterpreting them. I do eliminate some, though, when I don't feel enough connection with them. I don't use the coffin form any more. It doesn't seem like a symbol that came from my subconscious. It's a death symbol, and of course everyone has connections and associations and experiences with death. But I don't feel that I have a strong connection with it any more, so I recently stopped using it.

The piece I think of as the cone [*No Title*, 1985, bronze] seems more abstract to me than the snowman sculpture. A lot of people see it as a hatlike shape. Actually, it originated in some drawings, and was a two-dimensional form before I made it three dimensional. What I had in mind was a version of the old one-point perspective you'd use to show railroad tracks curving off into the distance. I was fascinated with that vanishing-point form for awhile because it seemed like the first, most basic form of primitive perspective. Though I made that shape into a sculpture, I still see it two-dimensionally.

I wish I knew more about the ideas I'm working with. I'd like to continue to make psychologically probing work, but I'd like to eliminate all the middle stages of sketching and developing things at different scales—the step-by-step work. I always feel best when I have an idea and just carry it out.



Robert Therrien: No Title, *1984, wood, enamel, bronze, 50 by 12½ by 3¾ inches. Collection the artist. Photos Douglas Parker.*