

METAL SCULPTURE: MACHINE-AGE ART

MICHELANGELO complained about noise and marble dust in our profession," says Sculptor David Smith, "but I finish the day looking like a grease monkey." Sculptor Smith's complaint reflects the rise of a new phenomenon in the art world: a flood of wire and metal shapes that is turning many a sculptor's studio into something resembling a blacksmith's shop, where the oxyacetylene torch has replaced the hammer and chisel, a welder's mask the smock.

The result is a bewildering jumble of new forms and shapes—forged, soldered, puddled, riven and wrought—that can look as crude as slag-heap clinkers, as ethereal as tomorrow's TV aerials or as menacing as the latest rocket launcher. But the trademark of the whole metal sculpture school, its practitioners agree, is "openness." Unlike the built-up masses of modeled sculpture or the chiseled-down solids of stone and wood, metal sculpture uses materials that give maximum strength with a maximum sense of space.

"Faceless, Raceless." The sculpture welders have inevitably had to dodge their share of critical brickbats. When Britain's Reg Butler won a \$12,670 prize for his *Unknown Political Prisoner*, a welded, cage-like construction that looked like a cross between a gibbet and a prison guard's lookout tower, an outraged refugee artist seized the first opportunity to pound it into scrap (TIME, March 23, 1953). In Los Angeles, Sculptor-Welder Bernard Rosenthal's 14-ft. *American Family*, now decorating the new Police Facilities Building, brought from one city councilman an enraged blast ("A shameless, soulless, faceless, raceless monstrosity"), and from six taxpayers a suit for its removal.

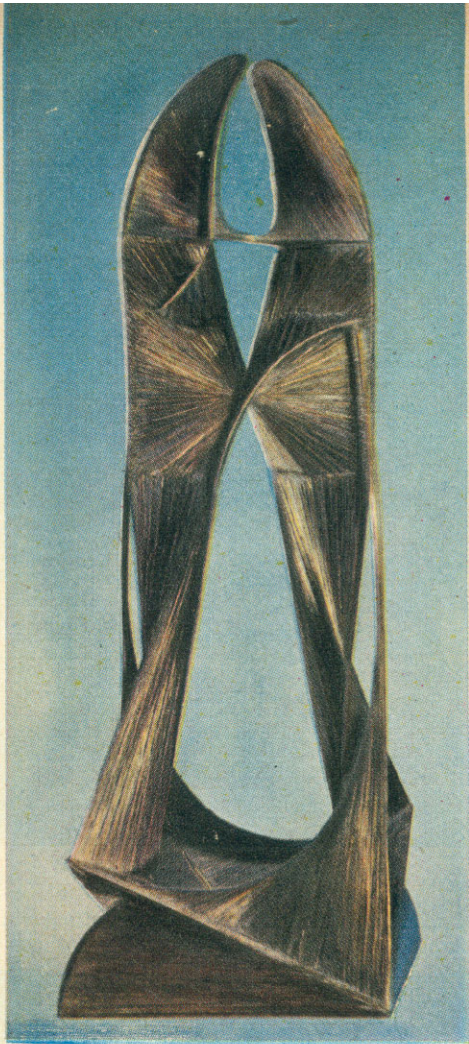
But welded sculpture is also finding new customers. It is cheaper than cast works, and, by its nature, each object is unique. Collectors are now buying it to decorate Texas and Hollywood patios and Manhattan rooftops. Topflight modern architects—Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, Eero Saarinen, *et al.*—are using it to decorate new library façades, chapels, and new college buildings.

Back to Vulcan. The metal sculpture school has roots as far back as Vulcan. Its immediate antecedent is constructivism, proclaimed by two Russian-born brothers, Naum Gabo (now in the U.S.) and Antoine Pevsner (now in Paris), who in 1920 revolted against cubism: "Depth alone can express space. We reject mass as an element of sculpture . . ." By approaching the problem like engineers, Gabo and Pevsner (*see color page opposite*) turned out metal objects that have the smooth, polished beauty—and the coldness—of a mathematical equation.

A more fiery spirit was the late Spanish-born Julio Gonzalez, son of a Barcelona goldsmith. A tutor to fellow *Barcelonés* Pablo Picasso, Gonzalez hammered out of sheet iron figures in praise of the peasant girls of his native land (*see cut*). Among the first of the Americans was Mobile-Master Alexander Calder, who strung together cut-out metal forms to create a moving, pulsating world of abstract form slowly moving in space.

Up With Scaffolding. Most American metal sculptors now feel that the form is an obvious part of their heritage. The techniques of welding and brazing are taught in high-school shop courses throughout the U.S.; the materials, iron and steel, can be found in any junkyard. The inspiration for

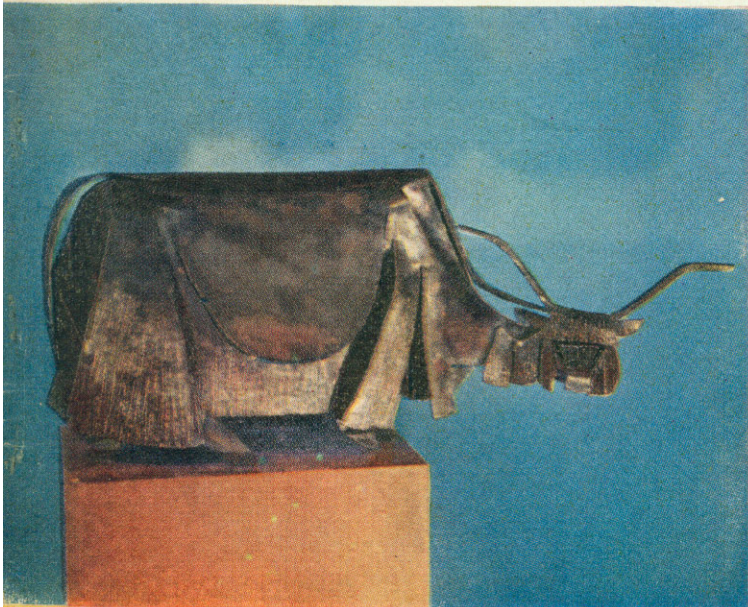
PEASANT GIRL, called *La Montserrat*, is hollow statue made of sheet metal by Spanish Sculptor Julio Gonzalez in 1937.



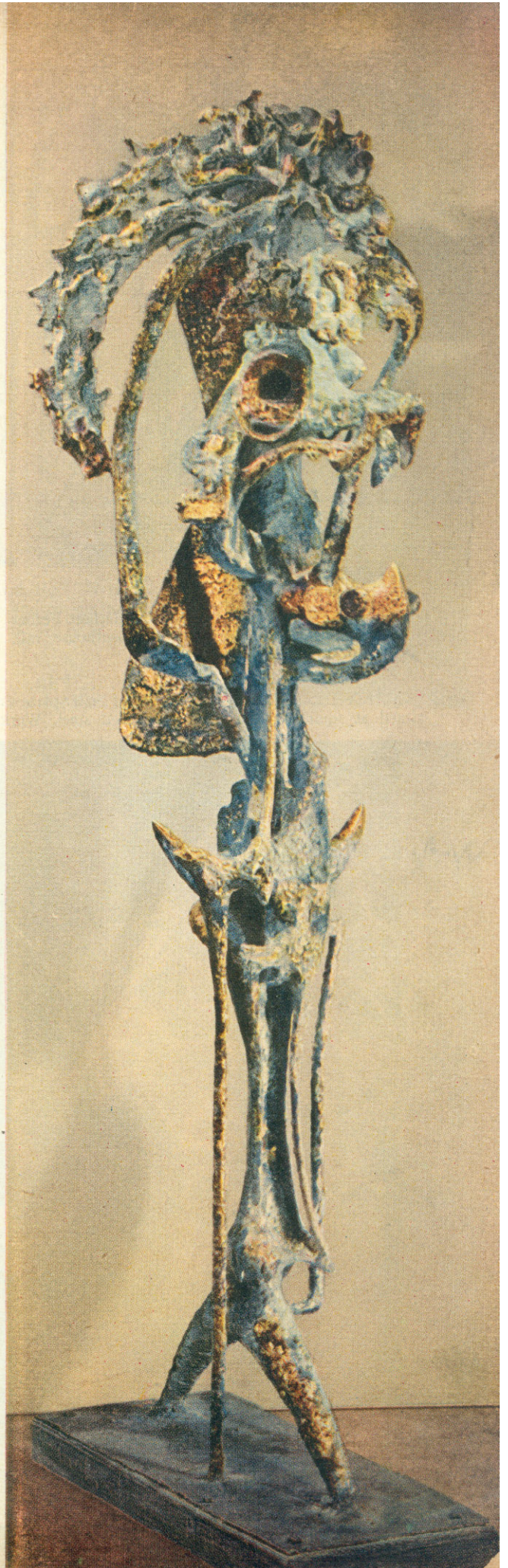
TWINNED COLUMN is an abstract bronze by metal-welding pioneer Antoine Pevsner.

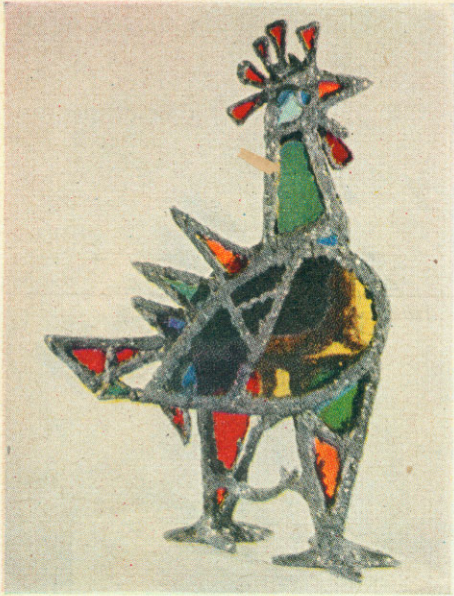
"HOUND OF HEAVEN" by Theodore Roszak uses tree, animal and bird forms to make jagged, 6-ft. symbol of man's quest for self-knowledge.

Photographs By Robert Crandall



YAK, made of brazed and welded sheet steel, is work of Oregon sculptor, Tom Hardy, 33, who specializes in animal subjects.





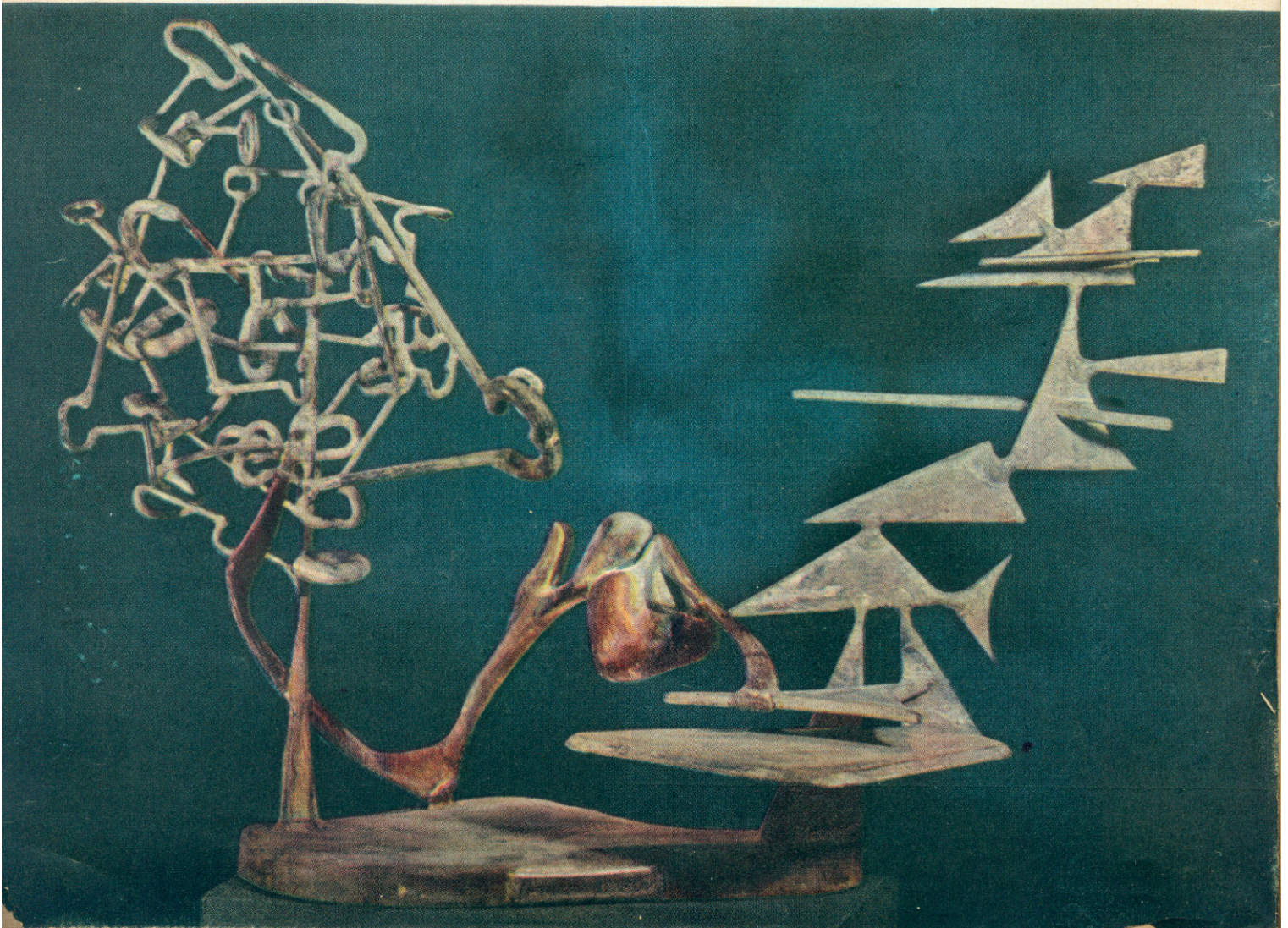
GAMECOCK by Emmanuel Viviano uses leaded stained glass to make bird's plumage.



ROOFED SCULPTURE by Herbert Ferber suggests metal garden for penthouse rail.

"FAMILY DECISION" shows arrows of boiler-plate thickness aimed at squirming confusion of welded steel. Work is by

Sculptor David Smith, who got started in a Studebaker assembly plant, turned out his first steel sculpture as early as 1933.



many of the new space concepts is as easy to find: in the confused welter of the modern city-scape with its forest of TV aerials, bridges, air-raid-siren platforms, metal scaffolding and skyscraper girders. In the hands of U.S. sculptor-welders, this new handling of space has resulted in a myriad of styles from a long roster of native talents.

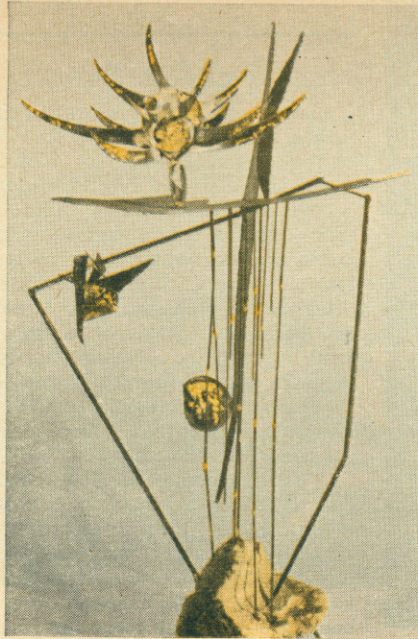
Herbert Ferber, 49, dentist turned sculptor, welds together forms as spiny as cactus and as flowing as underwater foliage. Seymour Lipton, 51, also uses curved and unfolding plant forms to give a sense of enclosed space that, to Sculptor Lipton, suggests a "togetherness . . . of feeling and meaning, of inside and outside, of past and future." Egyptian-born Ibram Lassaw, 42, is the mystic among sculptor-welders; his brazed metal rods seem to float in the air like airy skyscraper girders. David Hare, 38, a color photographer turned surrealist, can put together a few jagged pieces of metal and dangling rods that, gilded with gold, suggest a sunrise.

Tanks & Survival. By contrast Chicago-born Emmanuel Viviano, 47, aims more to please than disturb, uses brilliantly stained glass to match the plumage of eagles and gamecocks. Tom Hardy, 33, a onetime sheep rancher in Eugene, Ore., takes his inspiration from animal forms. Theodore Roszak, 48, a wartime aircraft and armored tank designer, turned his back on an industrial design career to study "primitive, simple survival characteristics, for instance, how a plant survives in the U.S. Southwest."

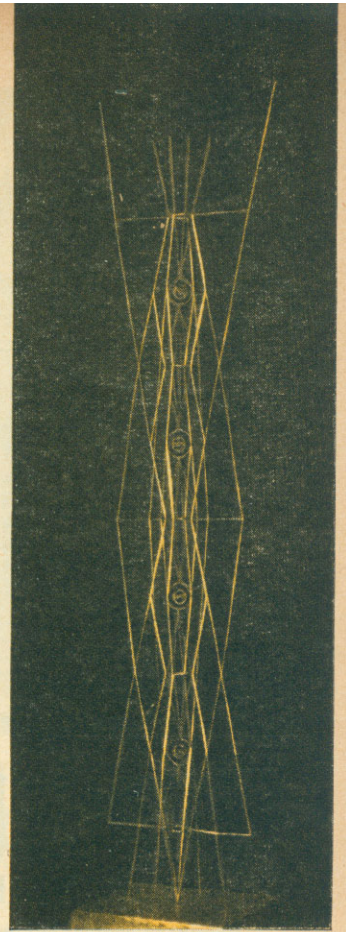
Richard Lippold, 40, an engineer and industrial designer before he took up sculpturing, has a more affirmative motive. Lippold does not hide his love of geometric form ("The fragile snowflake appears in more variations of form than any kind of 'permanent' sculpture"), but his take-off point is the human emotion. His *Primordial Figure* (see cut) is a kind of family totem, with the outline of a wasp-waisted male figure with hands upraised superimposed on a skirted female figure. To critics who complain that his finished work looks more like aerial rigging and radar antennas than sculpture, Lippold replies: "Our faith is in space, energy and communications, not in pyramids and cathedrals."

These objects a few decades from now may be back on the junk heap, or they may prove to have been the testing ground for a new way of seeing in an age of electronics, supersonics and atomic power. At the moment they represent a continuing effort to rework the common materials of the age. By using techniques borrowed from airplane factory and auto assembly lines, modern-day sculptors are finding new ways to express man's place, or lack of it, in a fast-changing, highly technical and anxious age.

"MACHINE," made by Britain's Reg Butler, shows man with welded bronze apparatus.



"SUNRISE," by David Hare, is represented by welded rods and cut-out metal.



"PRIMORDIAL FIGURE" is a geometric wire construction by Sculptor Richard Lippold.

