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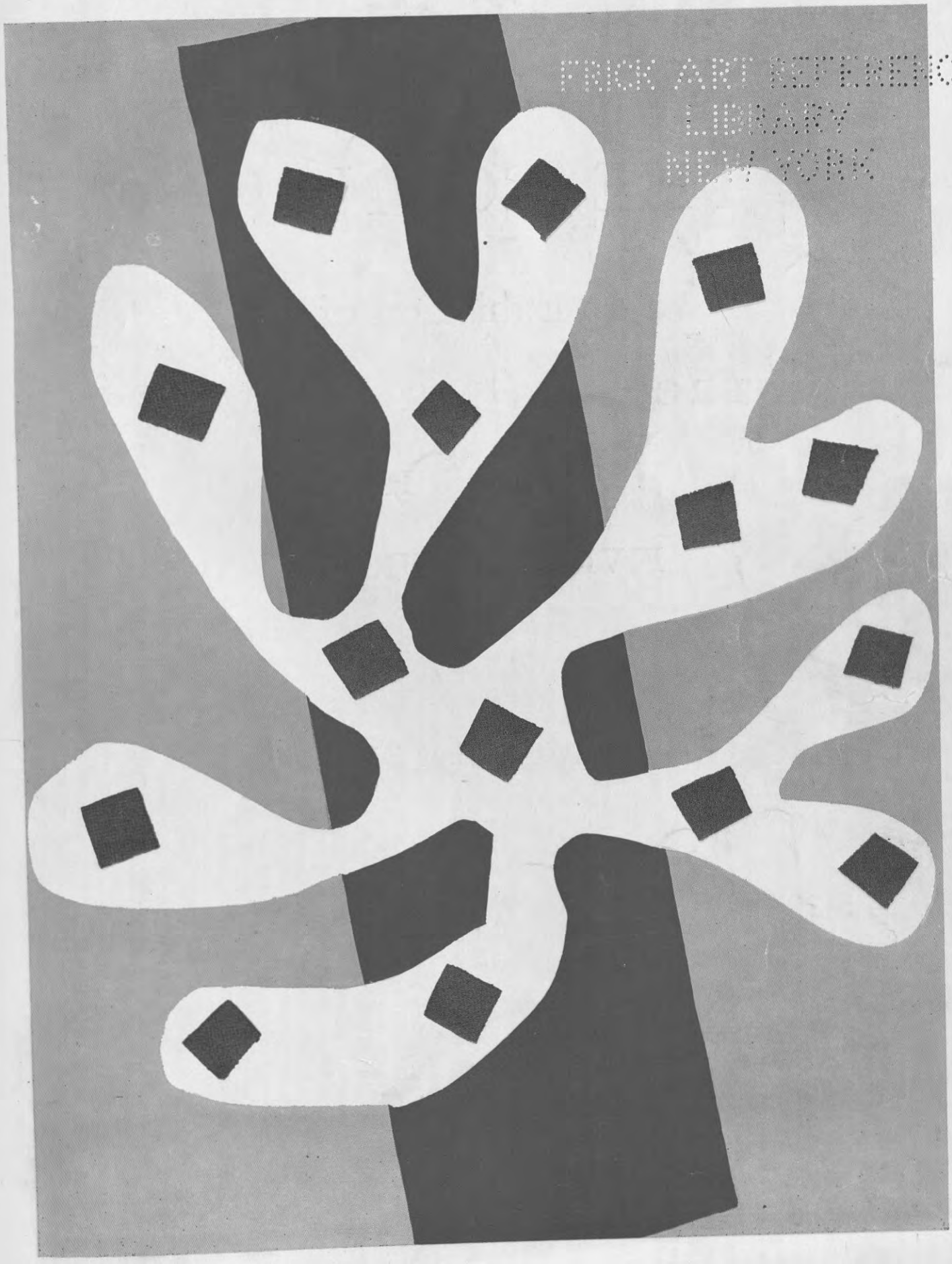
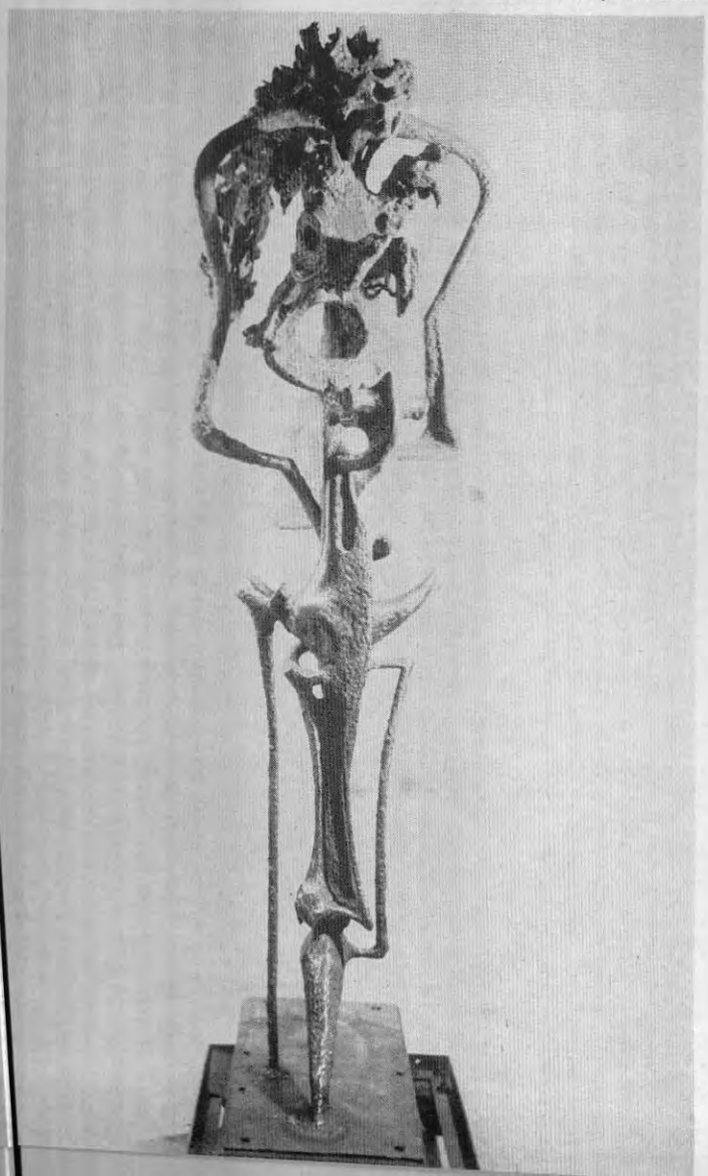


The sculptor at work with his torch.

Roszak's 1951 drawing, *My Wife*, reflects his enthusiasm for the ripe sweeping curves of Bernini and Gaudi.

Hound of Heaven, 1954, 6 feet high, in the steel with brazed copper and nickel-silver surface that Roszak has made famous and is widely imitated.



By Howard Griffin

Totems in steel

Interview with Theodore Roszak; his retrospective of constructions and fiery sculpt opens at the Whitney Museum, New York

To go into Theodore Roszak's studio with its bins of scrap metal, anvil, steel plate and bars of iron—a room above a Greenwich Village printing-plant—is to enter a different world —a modest enough room but clearly a place of intense and single-minded achievement. And the author of the various steel sculptures around me is a man close to fifty, Polish-born, with greyish-green eyes, a large stubborn nose and sandy hair.

The small room has all it can do to hold the many fabrications of welded and hammered steel (many of which are being shown in his retrospective exhibition at the Whitney Museum; to Nov. 11): *Raven*, inspired by Poe but not without resemblance to a medieval chastity belt; *Mandrake*, a fecund kind of poison growth made from copper and steel; *Skylark*, an 8-foot star-faced skeleton, the right hand raised in imperious invocation, and the left wing slanting downward.

Roszak sees I am observing a large, still unfinished work built around crescent and floral motifs.

"That one I call *Cradle Song*," he explains. "It comes out of an experience with my little daughter, Sara Jane. At the age of two, she had several dreams in which she saw a cradle in the stars. She'd tell me about this object that she clearly saw and we'd work at it and then she'd tell me more, and I'd work more at it and this is the result. Something of the exploding star forms has appeared in this, too. From an engineering point of view, it's the most difficult and ambitious piece I've tackled; three years have been spent on it already. Children ask extraordinary questions, sometimes not wanting an answer. One night at Cape Ann, my daughter turned to me and asked: 'Why is the moon so sharp?' and this reminded me of other naïve and anxious questions she had asked, such as 'We *do* have the biggest army in the world, don't we, daddy?' Later, out of this, came a sudden desire on my part to create something that would embody, side by side, the soft probing quality of the child-mind and the terrible menace that surrounds it everywhere."

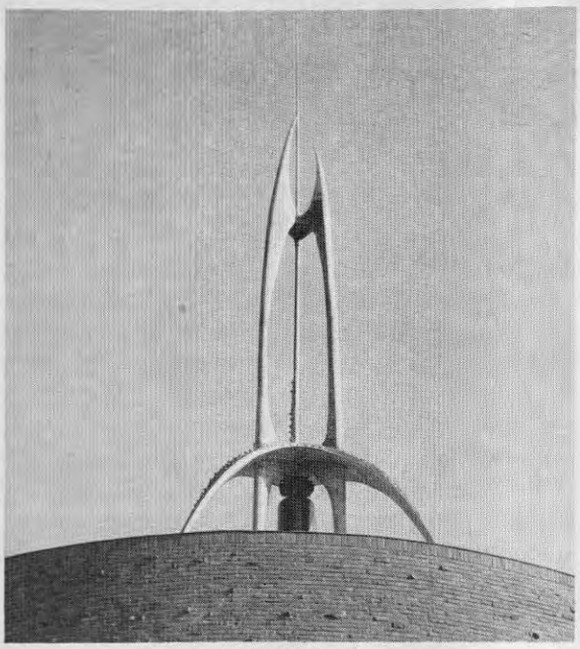
Looking about me, I am impressed by the highly charged nature of the forms and I inquire exactly how a particular work is produced.

"It begins," Roszak says, "with drawings. I find it important to have a good notion of what I'm going to do before I do it. I've always drawn, and I draw now more than ever. Drawing, of course, is how the child begins to express himself on fences and sidewalks. Perhaps, now, even the child does not so often

begin in this way. Because of technologic change he finds other material nearest to hand: wire, glass, tin. Drawing, for me, acts as an agent by which I can clarify my thinking, perhaps even improve on the final sculpture itself, by making the mistakes in drawing. When I make a drawing, it is not so much the foreground as the drawing suggested in the background that is important. Often that background drawing will be the next sculpture that will emerge. The details half-hidden, as it were, in the drawing may suddenly assume for me a meaning and this, to me, is a source of pleasure and surprise. An insignificant part of the drawing, some bit I had not noticed at the time, may give rise to a complex set of relationships, and to another drawing, and then after that to another piece of sculpture. It is self-propulsive."

"What follows after the drawing?"

"Then comes the armature, which is a three-dimensional steel wire sketch in space. It becomes welded with other things and just remains there. You sometimes have to put in temporary struts or supports. The importance of the armature is parallel to the engineering construction of a building. In a sense, the armature *is* the sculpture, and the sculpture cannot be better than the armature. Once the basic relations have been fixed, you cannot afford to make a mistake. It would be like discovering, after having put up a building, something is wrong with the windows. This wire drawing is covered by sheets and one has to decide which points to con- [Continued on page 64]



Roszak's most recent commission is the 45-foot three-pronged spire on top of a non-denominational chapel designed by Eero Saarinen at M.I.T. [right and above]. The spire's base is decorated with aluminum reliefs—photographed in the artist's studio [below]. They were so placed that they can be seen only from the sky.