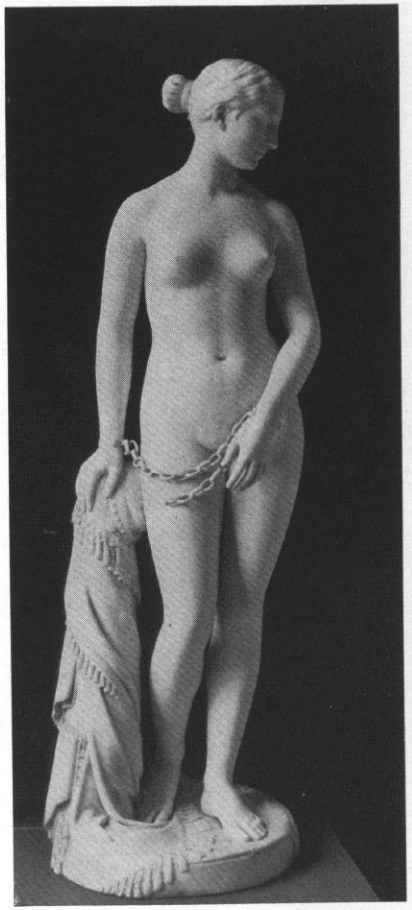
A view of some
recent American sculpture

From India to Paris and from antiquity until the Age of Reason, the sculptor remained a spokesman for the popular enthusiasms of his culture. He gave shape to the accepted public images of religious faith and community pride, and in return he received the patronage of his culture's ruling powers. But sculpture today, like other arts and sciences, has become in many respects a private interest, as the sculptors themselves have turned toward specializations which are of less and less interest to the wide public.

In historical and primitive societies, plastic distortion developed unconsciously. The spirit of Egyptian sculpture, for instance, differs radically from that of the Romanesque or African; each depends upon its own kind of line, thrust, and sheared angle. This unconscious use of expressionist means among artists of other eras has become a deliberate aesthetic in our own, and a preoccupation with abstract emotive form underlies most of modern sculpture.

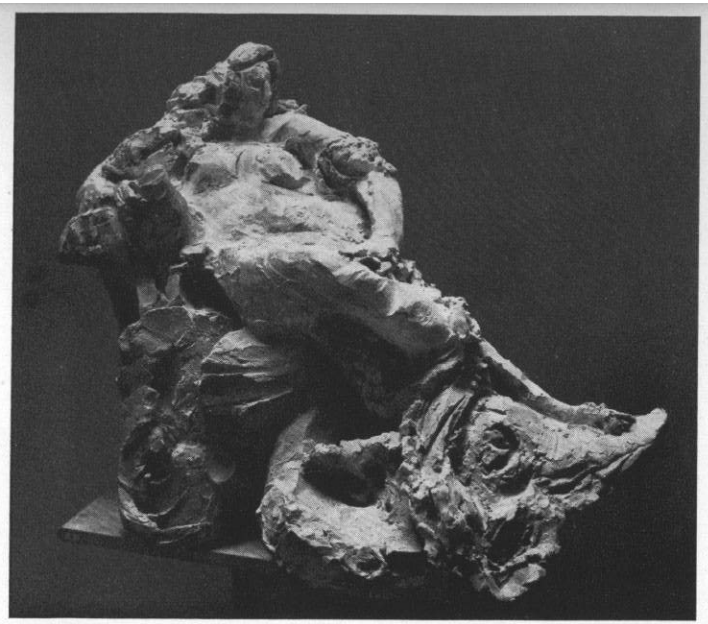
Moreover, in our time a new awareness of the relationship between the sculpture and the space in which it stands has aroused a special interest in the qualities of that space itself. Empty air has become a positive, malleable element. It flows and encloses; it is trapped or

1 *Artist unknown:* WEATHER VANE
(sheet iron)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Index of American Design

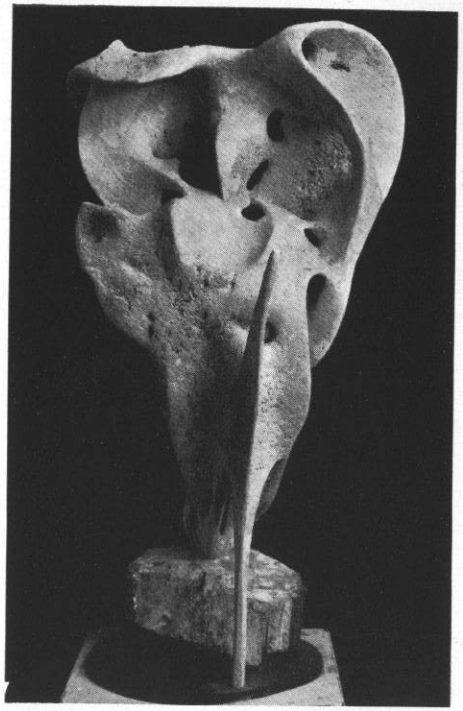


2 *Hiram Powers:* THE GREEK SLAVE *(marble)*
Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey

Figures 1 and 2, both of the nineteenth century, show the dual American tradition: creative artisan and academic artist.



3 *Reuben Nakian:* VOYAGE TO CRETE *(terra cotta)*
Collection the artist, Stamford, Connecticut

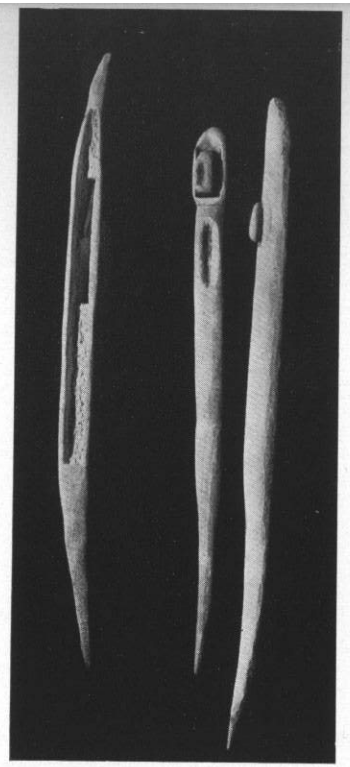


4

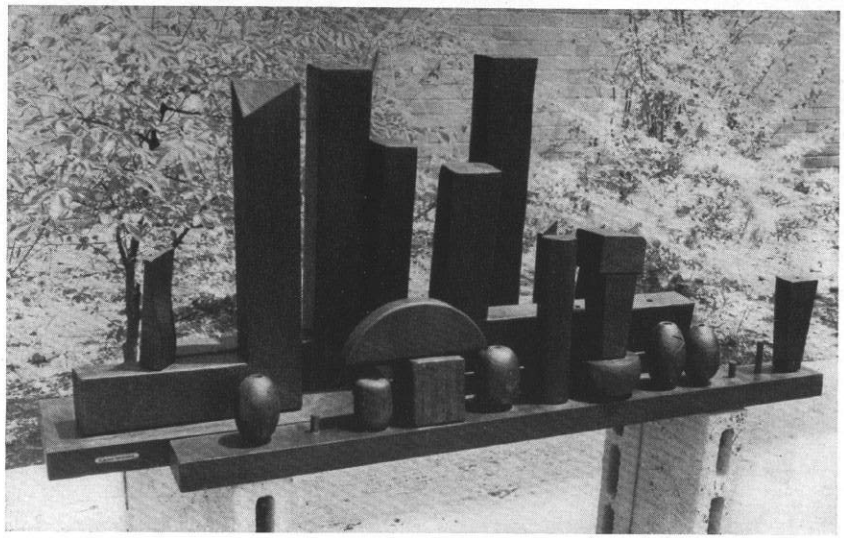
Rhys Caparn: MARSH BIRDS IN MOONLIGHT *(Densite)*
Courtesy Meltzer Gallery, New York

5 *José de Creeft:* SLAVES *(green stone)*
Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York

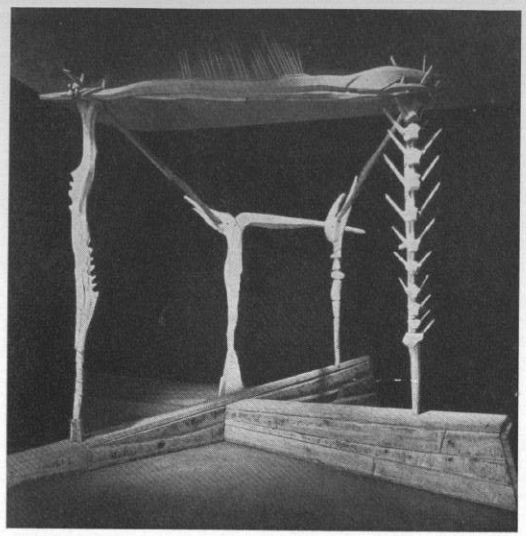
6 *Polygnotos Vagis:* FISH *(bronze & wood)*
Alexander Iolas Gallery, New York



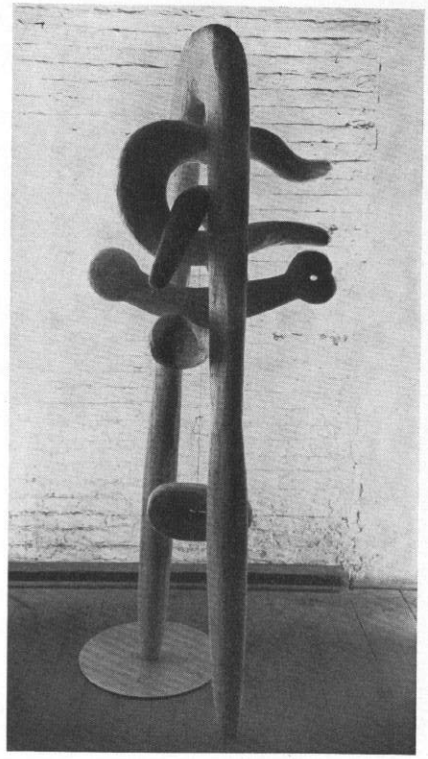
7
Louise Bourgeois: PRESENCE NO. 2 *(wood)*
Courtesy Stable Gallery, New York



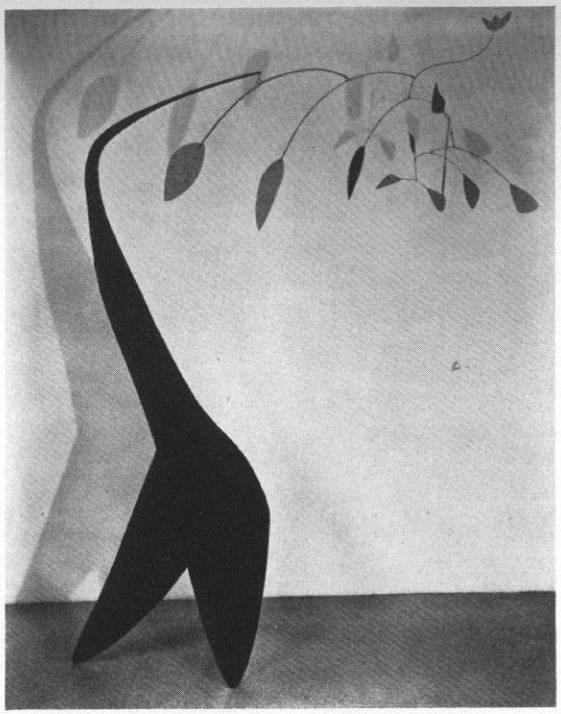
8 *Louise Nevelson:* LITTLE CITY AT DAWN *(wood)*
Collection Mr. & Mrs. Ben Mildwoff, New York



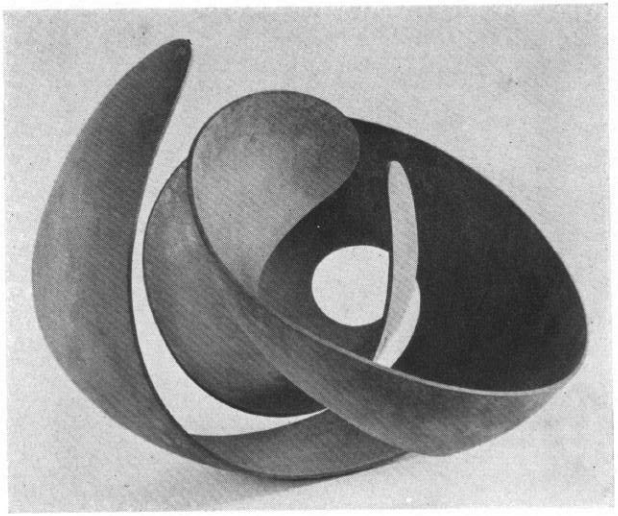
9 *Frederick Kiesler:* GALAXY *(wood)*
Private collection



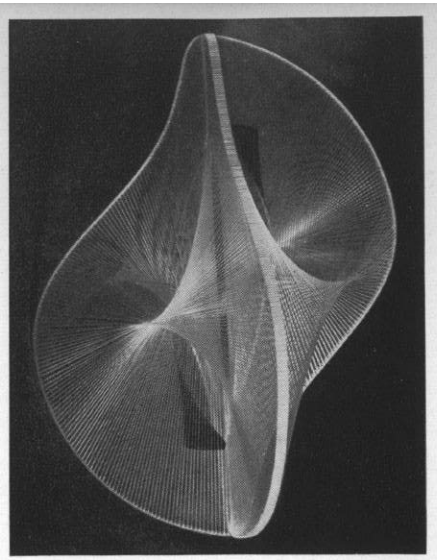
10
Isamu Noguchi: CRONOS *(balsa wood)*
Stable Gallery, New York



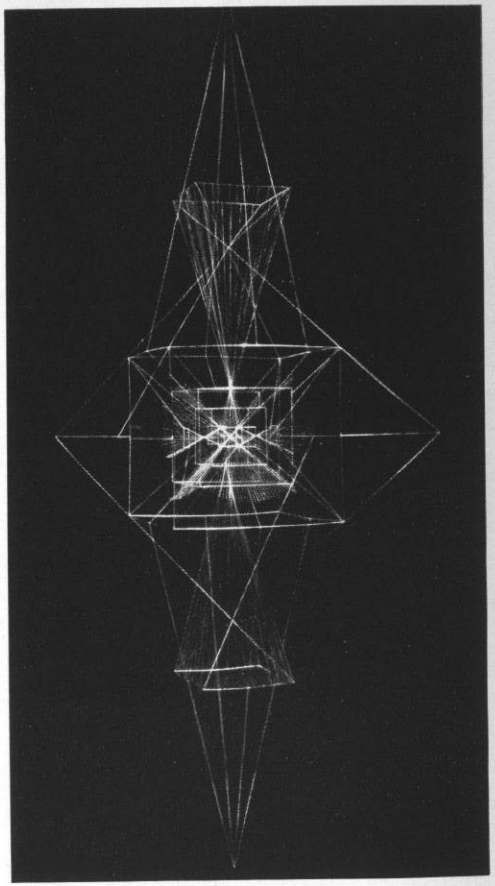
11 *Alexander Calder:* MOBILE *(aluminum & steel)*
Arts Club, Chicago



12 *José de Rivera:* CONSTRUCTION, 1949 *(copper)*
Grace Borgenicht Gallery, New York

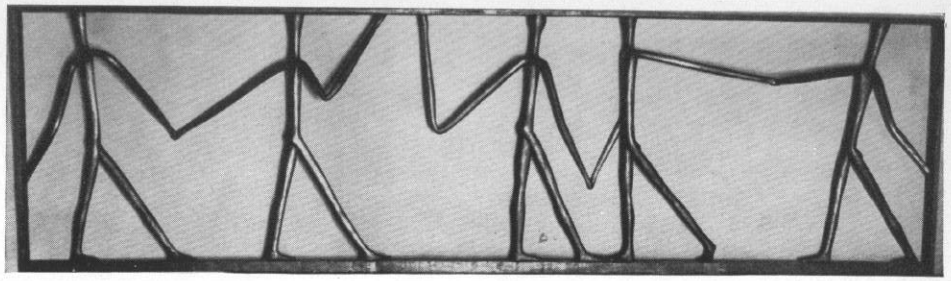


13
Naum Gabo:
LINEAR CONSTRUCTION
IN SPACE, NO. 2 *(plastic threads)*
Collection Mr. & Mrs. Samuel A. Marx,
Chicago

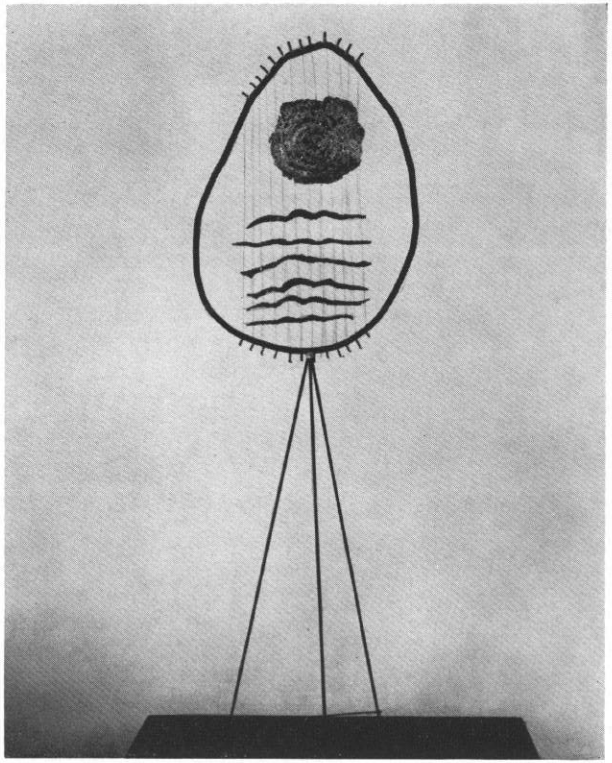


14

Richard Lippold:
VARIATION NO. 7, FULL MOON
(wire & brass rods)
Museum of Modern Art, New York

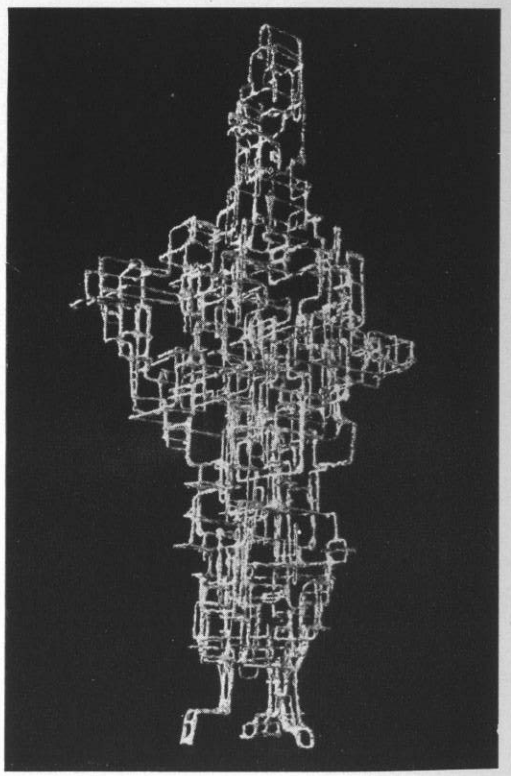


15 *Mary Callery:* AMITY *(bronze)*
Collection the artist, New York

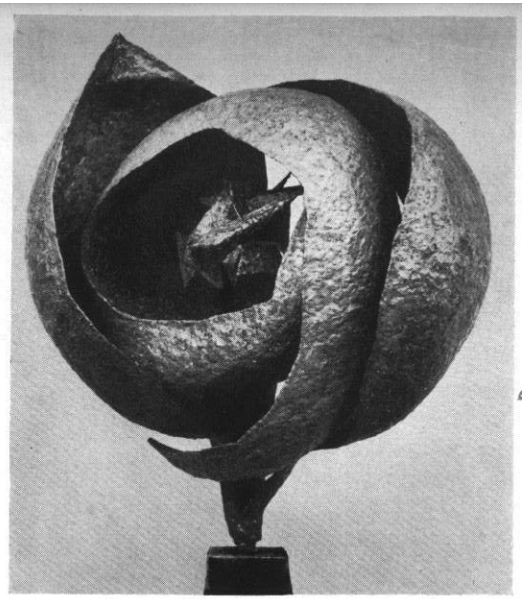


16 *David Hare:* SUN AND WATER *(steel & bronze)*
Courtesy Kootz Gallery, New York

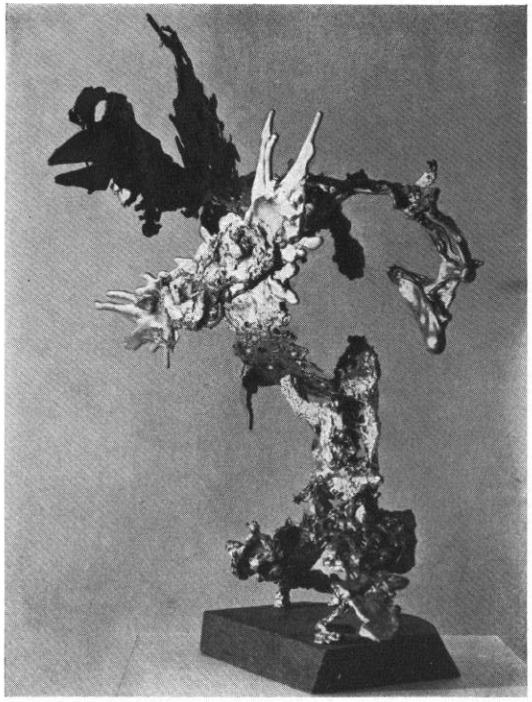
17
Herbert Ferber: " . . . AND THE BUSH WAS NOT CONSUMED"
(copper, brass, lead, & tin)
Congregation B'nai Israel, Milburn, New Jersey



18
Ibram Lassaw: MONOCEROS
(bronze)
Courtesy Kootz Gallery, New York

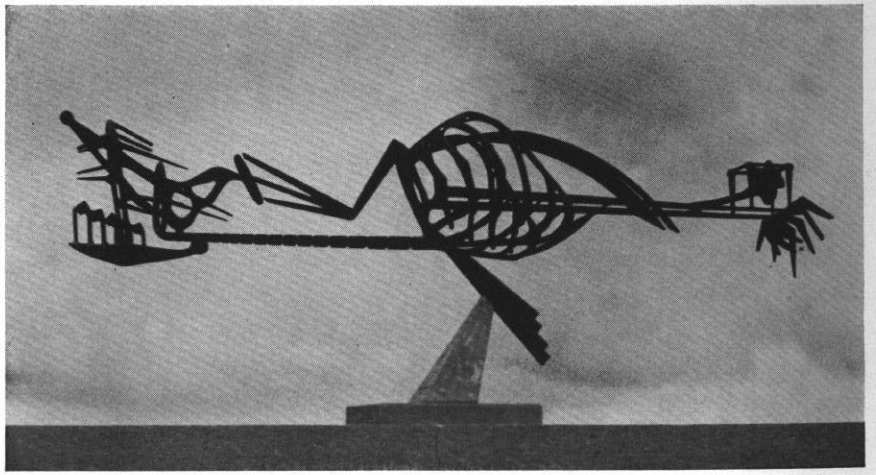


19 *Seymour Lipton:* SANCTUARY *(nickel-silver on steel)*
Museum of Modern Art, New York

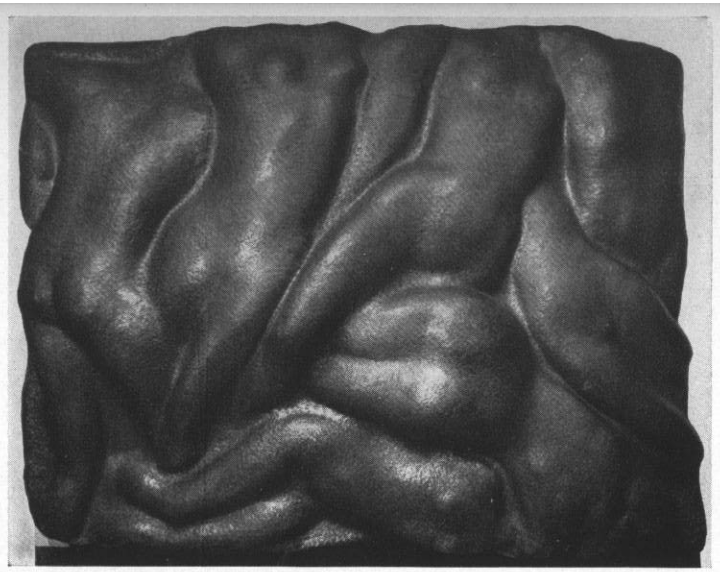


20
Calvin Albert: ATTACK IN THE WIND
(lead alloy & bronze)
Grace Borgenicht Gallery, New York

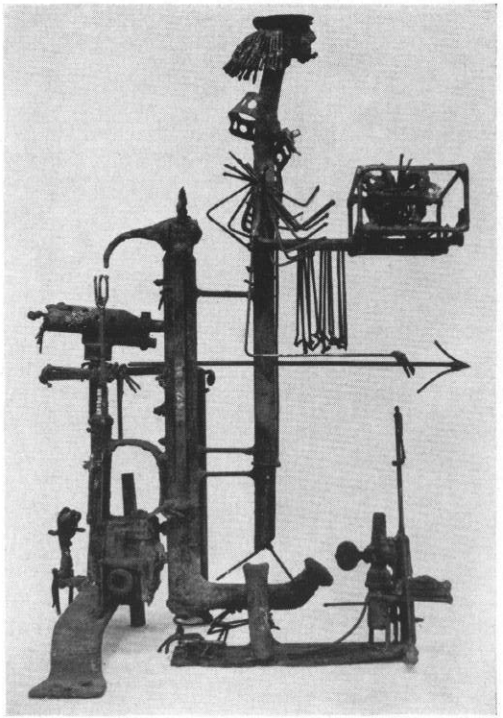
21 *Theodore Roszak:* SPECTRE OF KITTY HAWK *(steel)*
Museum of Modern Art, New York



22 *David Smith:* ROYAL BIRD *(stainless steel)*
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis



23 *Saul Baizerman:* EXUBERANCE *(hammered copper)*
Collection the artist, New York



24
Richard Stankiewicz: FUNEREAL PIECE *(steel)*
Collection the artist, New York

released; it is heavy or fluid, soft or rigid, dead or dynamic. Its qualities depend upon the contours of the sculpture which approaches it from within. This theme of space, provoking many theories and plastic essays, is dominant in modern sculpture.

The first such note of modernism was struck in the late nineteenth century by Rodin. As a symbol for space, he took from the post-impressionist painters the light which fills it; he showed how light could be made to crumble over a rough surface, glance from a jagged one, or lie tranquil in a cupped expanse. Rodin's followers, elaborating the theme, experimented with new materials to suggest new surface effects: rough stone, grainy wood, aluminum, molten metals, and plastics. Rodin's subject was the human body and the extreme positions to which it can be contorted. His followers have abstracted from the body its activities—thrust, twist, stretch, rest—and they manipulate abstract shapes which engage in these same actions.

Against this background, European sculpture has developed in the present century, and as in the past American sculpture has followed it and has added elements of its own. The classic mode, for example, handed down from antiquity through the Renaissance to neoclassic France and eventually to the "romantic revival" in nineteenth-century America, brought many artists from the United States to Europe in search of classic models—a search which in architecture produced such eloquent structures as Mount Vernon and Monticello and in sculpture gave us Horatio Greenough's toga-clad *George Washington* and Hiram Powers's *Greek Slave* (*figure 2*).

The post-Rodin ferment in Europe during the first years of this century produced only a diluted influence upon American sculpture for a decade or more. Until late in the 1930's—long after Picasso had cast his first cubist bronze—the American academy seemed to reconcile a "modern" look with the sentimental subject matter of the Parisian Salon. Nevertheless, under the surface the tide had begun to turn after the 1913 Armory Show in New York, which introduced Brancusi, Lehmbruck, and Maillol to the United States. Younger European sculptors, versed in the new theories of art, were traveling westward: Lachaise had come to America in 1906, Nadelman came in 1917, Archipenko in 1923. Young Alexander Calder, on the other

hand, continued in the American tradition by going to Paris where he met Klee and Miro.

As long as social realism was a major theme in American art—that is to say during much of the twenties and thirties—it was difficult to tell the academicians from the advance guard. For example, very different artists like Jo Davidson, Minna Harkavy, Oronzio Maldarelli, and others stood in the advance ranks as long as social problems were uppermost in the American artistic conscience, just as Ben Shahn and John Steinbeck occupied prominent positions in their respective arts. But in the two past decades the ranks have separated, and now the academic sculptor and the *avant-garde* move in different directions.

One way to present contemporary sculptors is to consider them in relation to the various techniques which they employ: thus we have modelers, carvers, constructors, and metalworkers.

Probably the most ancient and spontaneous sculptural technique is modeling. The prehistoric *Venus of Villendorf*, for instance, was pressed from damp mud into a rudimentary female form. But more often the fragility of clay has consigned it to a minor role in the history of art. When the major cultures bid for immortality in everlasting stone, the modeler was reduced to making household gods and cooking utensils. On the other hand, the special flexibility of clay, wax, and plaster have continued to recommend them to some artists in all periods. Michelangelo used them to evolve his compositions. Renoir and Degas, when they transferred their studies of light from paint to sculpture, looked for materials which could capture the dappled, flickering effects of their modeling. Rodin modeled exclusively. Recently, however, two factors have brought about a modern decline of modeling among advanced sculptors: the interest in the sculptural uses of modern metals, and the popularity of *taille-directe* carving. The Russo-French sculptor Jacques Lipchitz is one of the few who still work in plaster and clay, but his influence, like Rodin's, is felt less among modelers than among metalworkers. Actually, the greatest influence upon American modelers has been the work of Maillol, who reopposed the concept of classical mass and balance to Rodin's aesthetic of evanescent action.

There is a good reason why the influence of Maillol's style has not had deeper influence. During the years when Maillol was doing his important work, another group of progressive artists was experimenting in massive sculpture, carved directly in wood and stone, and their experiments led them quickly into abstraction. The European artist most responsible for this new direction in sculpture was Brancusi. In spite of an inauspicious introduction to America—in 1928 his *Bird in Space* was designated a taxable "manufacture in metal" by the United States Customs Office—the forms he created became the basis for the American carver's vocabulary. Later adopted by Arp, Max Bill, and Archipenko, and passed on to Henry Moore in England, these forms often parallel the natural shapes of germinating organisms. Over swelling contours light moves in unbroken curves—such is the structural effect they seek. In a more complicated form the imagery is often reinforced by themes from surrealism or the primitive arts, and various organic shapes are grouped in complex arrangements which suggest purely abstract psychological or sensual associations. Modigliani, Lipchitz, and Max Ernst invented the first images in this style.

Europe, again, offered the original impetus to sculpture in our third classification. When the notion of suggesting deep space on a two-dimensional canvas first challenged early Renaissance painters like Uccello, the means they used were lines receding to an imagined point. Similarly, lines were the means adopted in 1920 by two Russian sculptors, Pevsner and his brother Gabo, to examine the nature of abstract space. This new style, constructivism, was quickly joined by a number of other European movements—neoplasticism, suprematism, the Dutch De Stijl, the Italian futurism—each with its own aesthetic of pure space or pure motion.

For their studies of space and its directions, neither wood nor stone was feasible, and so the space-sculptors turned to plastics and such metals as aluminum, materials which would combine light weight with tensile strength. Interest in texture disappeared as new materials were adopted with uniformly smooth surfaces, from which light is reflected in long shimmering lines or sharp accents. As variations of texture and the convolutions of the massive block disappeared, linear

and volumetric rhythms became important; rhythmic patterns were based on the quick and slow repetition of lines and angles and the spaces they outline, punctuated with short, flat planes. As traces of the artist's hand disappeared, the works of the constructors began to look suprahuman, cerebral, fabricated. The subjects which attract modelers and carvers—biological and surrealist images—were no longer pertinent. Instead, a vocabulary of purely abstract relationships—close to music, mathematics, and architecture—was developed. In the United States, where some artists are technicians with scientific or industrial training, the constructors have found a particularly congenial milieu.

American direct-metal sculptors, who compose a fourth classification, are excited partly by the flexibility and partly by the drama of the medium in which they work. The qualities of metal worked in a molten state are limitless: textures which are sleek, broken, or bubbled; flat forms or ragged masses; off-balance structures or perfectly poised compositions. The sculptors themselves often work in hazardous circumstances. Their equipment includes welding irons and oxyacetylene torches, tanks of compressed oxygen and gas; helmets, goggles, masks; barrels of cold water to cool the hot metal; pokers and pincers to handle it.

There are, however, traditional precedents for the technique: Rodin's broken surfaces and Brancusi's *taille-directe* attack on stone and wood. The first essays directly in copper, lead, and iron were by the Spaniard Pedro Gargallo, who worked as early as 1914. The forms he invented remained stereotyped and descriptive, but his technique was adopted a decade later by his compatriot, Julio Gonzalez. Picasso was the next European to try direct-iron sculpture; Giacometti, Lipchitz, and others followed; and in 1933 the first American metalworker, David Smith, produced his first composition.

The metalworkers have sought their imagery in many places. In part, since the molten metal must be worked at high speed, they are more or less at the mercy of the material itself; as in Dada and surrealism, accidental shapes and patterns may figure largely in the thematic development of individual compositions. Rodin's use of the human body to symbolize abstract actions has also influenced the

metalworkers. Expressionist, primitive, and romantic subjects are all workable: the metalworkers employ a dramatic vocabulary based on nature.

In a way, the metalworkers have brought American sculpture to a full circle from its beginnings. In the early 1800's one of the commonest images on the American scene was the sheet-iron weather vane (*figure 1*), hammered and forged by primitive artisan-sculptors and brought to life in the winds. The subjects most often represented were semiabstract natural figures. Two centuries later America's most famous sculptor, Alexander Calder, has invented the mobile, which shares every quality of the weather vane except its function.

Photographic illustrations have been chosen of works by twenty-two contemporary American sculptors working in these modes. This brief sampling of some outstanding works of contemporary American sculpture is accompanied by a biographical and critical statement on each of the artists whose works are represented.

THE MODELERS

REUBEN NAKIAN; *figure 3*. Born in 1897 on Long Island of Armenian ancestry, Nakian studied and worked with Manship and Lachaise. He lives now in Stamford, Connecticut. He works directly in plaster, modeling semiabstract figures which are often based on mythological types. Nakian's special achievement is a double play between heavy, hardly-modeled forms and a brilliantly elaborate surface; in a multitude of whorls, indentations, finger prints, and clay fragments, his pieces reflect light in countless variations of density and color. The compositions of Nakian's sprawling, reclining, and dancing figures are poised in imbalance, bolstered by rocks or swirling waves. The spirit is baroque: massive forms out of literature and myth, disposed in whipped, undulating, oblique positions, with a surface texture, like Rodin's, pinched and ploughed to scatter the fall of light.

RHYS CAPARN; *figure 4*. Miss Caparn, who was born in New York in 1909 and lives there today, is a modeler who works directly in plaster and, most lately, in a synthetic material called Densite. She

produces semiabstract, movemented figures of animals and birds and images of abstract sensation. Her forte is the delicate, lithe line, expressing in rapidly modeled, slender forms the quick action of her subjects.

THE CARVERS

JOSÉ DE CREEFT; *figure 5*. De Creeft was born in Guadalajara in 1884 and came to the United States in 1929. He carves directly in massive lumps of stone with ovoid contours, employing dramatic, billowing cloud forms and floating figures and varying the roughly scarred natural textures of the stone with smoothly polished areas. Returning again and again to the egg-like, organic shape, de Creeft searches in the natural stone contour for suggestions of form. His is a type of sculpture which has become an important minor theme in American art.

POLYGNOTOS VAGIS; *figure 6*. Vagis was born in 1894 on the Isle of Thasos in Greece. He has been a citizen of the United States since 1919 and has made his home on Long Island. In the organic, classic tradition made vital in this century by Brancusi, Vagis produces works which are close to the rudimentary—suggestions of form released only more or less from the enfolding rock. He is one of the few nonacademic sculptors in America who are carving directly in hard stone. The images Vagis chooses for subjects are organic and mythological: animals, birds, goddesses. Quite often he casts in bronze and then combines this contrasting texture with wood and rock, not in the manner of a Dada pastiche, but rather, like Brancusi, in order to obtain the effect of reverberating formal contrasts.

LOUISE BOURGEOIS; *figure 7*. Born in Paris, Miss Bourgeois has lived in the United States since 1938. She now lives in New York. Working in the surrealist tradition invented by such artists as Max Ernst and Arp, she carves in wood, only slightly changing the original form of a branch or pole. With only a few shearings and gougings, she suggests boat-like shapes, staffs, totemic and phallic images. Her carvings are sometimes single forms, sometimes sprouting clusters of forms.

LOUISE NEVELSON; *figure 8*. Miss Nevelson was born in Kiev in 1904 and came to the United States after a period of training in Europe and several years of archaeological studies in Central America. She worked for a number of years in Rockland, Maine, and then settled in New York. Miss Nevelson works in terra cotta, stone, and wood, carving or modeling chunky, semiabstract forms which suggest human figures, cities, buildings. Many of her compositions linger on the borderline between surrealism and abstraction; they suggest on the one hand portentous moods of a blackened, geometricized city, or on the other simply the abstract, cumbersome weights of the human body.

FREDERICK KIESLER; *figure 9*. Kiesler, born in Vienna in 1892, now lives in New York. Though direct carvers in wood and stone have usually manipulated their materials in the mass, choosing organic, contained images, Kiesler has adopted a surrealist language and has dramatized it in carving by introducing the element of spatial tension. Correalism, as he calls his aesthetic, stems from the space theories of De Stijl and is based on the observation that, between two separate but conceivably reconcilable forms, tension is established: wrenching apart the various members of a single work irresistibly forces the eye to reassemble them. The figures of Kiesler's twelve-foot-high wood *Galaxy*, carved in vaguely anatomical shapes, lean and strain toward one another like the struts of a tent under stress. Kiesler has pioneered in sculpture, painting, and theatrical architecture in Europe and the United States.

ISAMU NOGUCHI; *figure 10*. Born in Los Angeles in 1904, Noguchi grew up in Japan and has returned there several times since then. Today he lives in New York. He carves directly in stone and wood, works in clay and terra cotta, and has recently experimented with household objects in paper and wood. He draws on primitive

Japanese and surrealist sources for many of his images, although some of his more simplified, suggestively organic shapes stem from those of his first teacher, Brancusi. In these works—his *Cronos* is an example—the simple interlocked forms move in slow rhythms through repeated, lax curves. In the Orient, Noguchi studied the forms of ancient Japanese mortuary figurines, and their gaping, haunted visages have recently come back to him in his own small terra cottas.

THE CONSTRUCTORS

ALEXANDER CALDER; *figure 11*. Calder was born in Philadelphia in 1898 and lives now in Roxbury, Connecticut. Son and grandson of a sculptor and an architect, he made his first construction in the 1920's in Paris, when he regaled the American colony with a circus of wire, beaverboard, and felt. From wire caricatures Calder moved, under the influence of Léger and Miro, to movable sculptures which turned on a single axis from a stable base. By making the leap to free-hanging, constantly moving, and endlessly changing constructions, Calder invented an original idiom and one for which America is internationally known. Although serene and unemotional perfectionism is the keynote of the constructivism from which he derives, Calder has added sport, chance, whimsey, and wit in a play of forms akin to the imagery of Miro. The changing volumes of space tracked out by the mobile are enhanced by the endless designs of looping, springing arms and the subsidiary patterns of cast shadows.

JOSÉ DE RIVERA; *figure 12*. Rivera was born in New Orleans in 1904 and lives today in New York. He studied sculpture in Europe and worked in foundries and machine shops. Since 1940 he has developed his present abstract style in metals and plastics. His constructions explore the boundary line of curved, ovoid space. Flat tongues of metal curl and overlap and a pervasive attraction is set up between facing curves. Some of his constructions are simple calligraphic twists or loops of stainless steel tubing. Primary colors are sometimes introduced to activate the otherwise bland surfaces.

NAUM GABO; *figure 13*. Born in Briansk, Russia, in 1890 and living now in Woodbury, Connecticut, Gabo is a brother of Antoine Pevsner and with him a founder of the constructivist movement in 1920. Replacing the aesthetic of massive sculpture with one of lines and planes, the constructivists explored ways to delineate empty space by marking its various patterns of direction. Gabo works with metals, plastics, and glass—twentieth-century materials which combine delicacy and permanence. His works present rows of threads turning and pulling between bent sheets and struts; they look like mathematical models describing algebraic equations. Their appeal depends upon the variety of rhythmic line-space themes, the elegant and subtle changes of pace and direction which the eye pursues.

RICHARD LIPPOLD; *figure 14*. Born in Wisconsin in 1915, Lippold now lives in New York. Until 1941 he worked as an industrial designer; since then he has applied his engineering precepts to sculptural problems in the constructivist mode. His rigid and descriptive constructions suggest natural forms like snowflakes (*5 Variations within a Sphere*) or trees (*World Tree*, for the Harvard University project designed by Gropius). His *Variation No. 7, Full Moon* is everywhere static and equipoised. But within the rigid frame of cubes and triangles, an explosion of stainless steel and nickel-chromium wires captures the expanding light with grace and precision. These are images on the final thin line between art, mathematics, and engineering.

THE METALWORKERS

MARY CALLERY; *figure 15*. Born in New York in 1903, Miss Callery studied in Paris during the 1930's. Her sculptures are arrangements of reedy, tubular forms, posed in friezes of dancers, athletes, or single images of gracefully disposed figures. The friezes in particular establish a delicate balance between monotony and elegance.

DAVID HARE; *figure 16*. Hare, who was born in New York in 1917, combines several techniques in making his direct-metal sculptures. He clips out flat, jagged panels of metal, then joins them with welded

iron rods and textured shapes made from metal dripped into shallow, open molds. His surrealist images frequently refer to standing, isolated human figures, derived from Giacometti. Others are abstract descriptions of natural phenomena—sunshine, rain, lightning.

HERBERT FERBER; *figure 17*. Ferber was born in 1906 in New York, where he lives today. By 1945 he had developed his present abstract style. He works directly in metal, welding together elongated hollow shells of bent tin. A thick surface of dripped lead, brass, copper, and other alloys both strengthens this shell and adds textural variety to the surfaces. "... *And the Bush Was Not Consumed*," commissioned for the Congregation B'nai Israel synagogue in New Jersey, symbolizes the Old Testament theme of the burning bush. Thorny, scythe-like forms dart upward, intersect, pierce, and crisscross like flames or branches, while here and there brittle clusters of short, thin, iron rods suggest sparks. Lately, Ferber has been working in brass and copper; these new scarf-like forms, polished to a high gloss, suggest a more decorative phase to come.

IBRAM LASSAW; *figure 18*. Born in Alexandria, Egypt, in 1913, Lassaw now lives in New York. By the time he was sixteen years old, he had broken with the tradition of massive form and begun experiments with open constructions of metal. He now works directly with molten metals, letting droplets of bronze and other alloys fall onto skeletons of wire. By applying chemicals and heat, he induces changes of color which suggest scattered clusters or points of agglomerated tension. In formal terms, Lassaw combines the constructivist's open, suggested space forms with a more romantic theme of textured and luminous surfaces and free, suggestive images. His trembling structures ramble upward or along the horizontal, describing a hive of internal spaces which spill into one another, build and diminish, enlarge and collapse.

SEYMOUR LIPTON; *figure 19*. Lipton, who was born in 1903 in New York and still lives in his native city, is a dentist as well as a sculptor. Since the 1940's he has worked directly in sheet metals and molten

lead alloys. For a time he used hollow, molded lead shells filled with cement, but the soft contours of these shapes led to static, bulky compositions. Lipton's recent style is based upon cut-out steel shapes joined by droplets of metal and coated with a thick layer of alloy. The resulting flat forms have great strength and can still freely overlap, twist, and curve into space. From the cupping action of these forms, Lipton has developed an aesthetic which suggests organic growth: *Sanctuary* is a solution of tensions between flat, curving shells and a spearing nucleus in the enclosed ovoid space.

CALVIN ALBERT; *figure 20*. Born in 1918 in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Albert is one of the younger sculptors who are working directly with molten metals. To capture the evanescent explosions and spatterings of the liquid lead which he uses, he pours it into water or wax, over flat surfaces or over steel armatures, or onto metal screens. When the hardened shapes are welded together, an active movement is suggested between the accidental textures and contours and the controlled directions of the forms.

THEODORE ROSZAK; *figure 21*. Roszak was born in 1907 in Poznań (now Poland) and lives today in New York. Until 1945 he worked in a geometric abstract mode; since then he has worked directly in molten metal. He uses the metal in mass, building up solid forms, then grinding and elaborating the brazed surfaces. He exploits textural qualities characteristic of both Rodin's fluid surfaces and Lipchitz's jutting ones; but these abstract qualities are carried much further in the direction of expressive imagery. The action of his abstract shapes—the tensions they establish between themselves and the space into which they claw, ripple, and gouge—suggest a plant and animal imagery. Qualities of violence, surge, and speed of motion are expressed in the baroque tradition where light and shadow are prominent structural elements.

DAVID SMITH; *figure 22*. Born in Indiana in 1906, Smith, who now lives in Bolton Landing, New York, learned metalwork in an automobile factory before he turned to sculpture in 1931. Influenced