Figure 7. *Mandrake*. Steel brazed with copper, 25½ x 40 inches, 1951. Theodore Roszak, American (born in Poland), 1907–. Gift of The Cleveland Society for Contemporary Art. 64.4

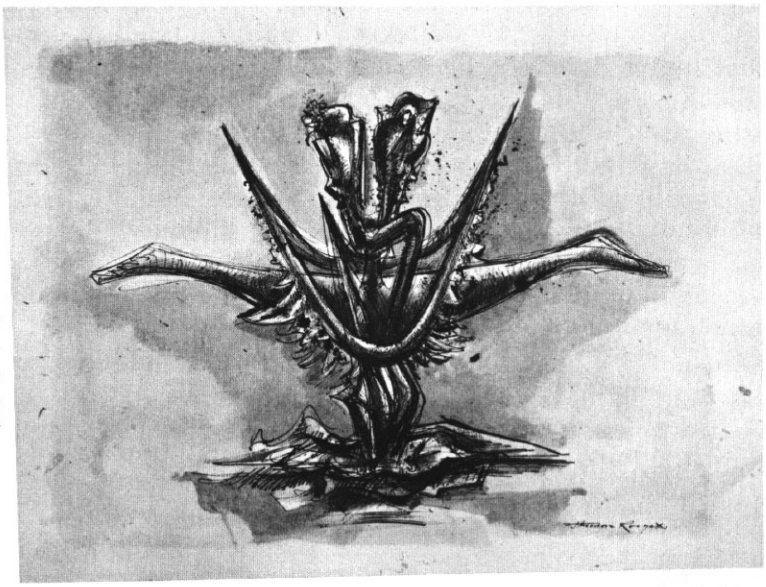

Figure 8. Drawing for *Mandrake*. Pen, ink, and wash on paper, 11 x 15-3/16 inches (to edge of paper), 1951. Theodore Roszak. Contemporary Collection. 64.2

Go and catch a falling star,
Get with child a mandrake root,
Tell me where all past years are,
Or who cleft the devil's foot,
Teach me to hear mermaids' singing,
Or to keep off envy's stinging,
And find
What wind
Serves to advance an honest mind.[15]

Theodore Roszak is one of the major artists who took part in the formative stages of the so-called Abstract Expressionist movement in the 1940's and 1950's. Born in 1907 in Poznan, Poland, he came with his family to the United States in 1909, settling in Chicago. When he was twenty-four, he moved to New York, where he first made his living as a draftsman and lithographer, and then began his career in fine art as a painter. His first works in sculpture were influenced by the geometrical forms of the Constructivist tradition, particularly by the works of Moholy-Nagy and Amedée Ozenfant. Only in 1946 did the biomorphic, spiky metal sculptures that are usually associated with his name begin to appear.

From 1947 through the early 1950's Roszak completed a series of powerful and symbolic works in welded steel brazed with brass, bronze, copper, and nickel, which were based on subjects drawn from literature, personal memories, and Existentialist ideas. The works completed during this time comprise one of the most important groups of sculpture by one artist in modern times. Among them are: *The Spectre of Kitty Hawk* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York); *Recollection of the Southwest* (Maremont Collection); *The Whaler of Nantucket* (Art Institute of Chicago); and *Mandrake* (Fig. 7),[16] which was recently presented as a most welcome gift to the Contemporary Collection of the Cleveland Museum by The Cleveland Society for Contemporary Art.

The mandrake is a reputedly poisonous and narcotic plant, usually found growing in the Mediterranean area, although one form of it is found throughout the northern zones of Europe and America. It grows with forked roots causing it to bear a rough resemblance to the human figure, and it is fabled to emit a terrifying shriek as it is torn from the earth. Both its appearance and its narcotic and poisonous reputation established a prominent place for it in old chronicles of magic and witchcraft.

The sculpture by Roszak resembles a plant form, but it also includes a winged motif which may be related to other subjects on which the artist was working around this time (e.g., *Spectre of Kitty Hawk* and *Fire-bird*). Seeming to grow up, out of the main body of the piece, is an irregular, plant-like form. The coarse, pitted, and scorched surface and the tortured and jagged shapes suggest certain fearful apprehensions and, above all, the spread "wings" create an appearance which is particularly ominous.

Roszak's works often have associations even more specific than those suggested above. About *The Whaler of Nantucket,* for example, he has written: ". . . in my sculpture of *The Whaler of Nantucket* I tried through forms to project symbolically the pursuer and the pursued, an enigma that I fear is still with us in the modern world, as it has been in the past. . . . Would my sculpture of the Whaler have any meaning to anyone who did not know of Melville or had not read *Moby Dick?* Well, I hope so. After all, I was not interested in translating Melville or in illustrating *Moby Dick!* I tried to find a symbol in sculpture that would sum up the life of Melville and the protean imagery of his work . . . but strictly on my own terms, shaping a visual metaphor that if successful, would speak for itself."[17] Or consider his words about *Spectre of Kitty Hawk:* ". . . The *Spectre* is the pterodactyl, an early denizen of the air both savage and destructive. Present-day aircraft has come to resemble this beast of prey, hence the re-incarnation of the pterodactyl at Kitty Hawk . . ."[18] The Cleveland piece was done four years after *Spectre,* but this terrible metaphor apparently continued to haunt the artist. The traditional association of the poisonous and magical mandrake plant with the form of man himself, when further related to the metaphor of the winged beast of prey and the aircraft, creates an evocative image suggesting a profoundly pessimistic attitude concerning the irrational and destructive powers of man's nature.

In addition to this very important gift, the Museum also acquired, by purchase from the artist, a drawing for the sculpture (Fig. 8).[19] Roszak is another modern artist who is a highly skilled draftsman, and one who always works out the ideas for his

sculpture beforehand in drawings. In an interview in 1949 he said: "My method of working consists in making the drawing of an idea, which establishes an interrelation between lines, colors, and tensions, when it is given a three-dimensional interpretation in iron wire. The tensions may increase or diminish as the work progresses, but in the long run they determine the final character of the planes and masses." He also said: "Drawing, painting, and the building of constructions are all directly connected with my love of metal." Thus, for Roszak, the creative act is a continuous and integrated process of thinking, feeling, drawing, sketching, and working out the final form of the work of art. The "feelings" and "ideas" of the artist may be partially inspired by the technical process even though they are normally in command. He says: ". . . there is a constant interaction between material and ideas and there is no denying that the work of the hand can itself inspire ideas. This incidental effect of the material is valid when it keeps a proper relation to the whole. The ideas it suggests are accessory to the inner creative effort that is in control."[20] Again he says: "The forms that I find necessary to assert, are meant to be blunt reminders of primordial strife and struggle, reminiscent of those brute forces that not only produced life, but in turn threatened to destroy it. I feel that if necessary, one must be ready to summon one's total being with an all-consuming rage against those forces that are blind to the primacy of life-giving values. Perhaps by this sheer dedication, one may yet merge force and grace."[21]

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Even before the overwhelming success of abstract art in the post-World War II period, Stuart Davis was one American painter who had long been working in an abstract and semi-abstract way. He was born in Philadelphia in 1894 and died in June 1964. His father was art editor of the *Philadelphia Press,* and among his friends and employees were a number of young artists including John Sloan, William Glackens, Everett Shinn, and George Luks. They comprised half of the group that was later to achieve renown as the "Ashcan School" (sometimes called "The Eight"). Davis moved to New York at about the time that Robert Henri, another member of this group made the same move and opened an art school where Davis studied for several years. In 1913 he exhibited five water colors in the Armory Show, where, for the first time, he encountered and was impressed by Fauvist and Cubist works. Part of 1928 and 1929 he spent in Paris. After returning to this country he taught at the Art Student's League and held a government post from 1933 to 1940.

Davis' painting followed a continuous and consistent development from the 1920's through to his death this year. Until the 1940's most of his paintings, like the famous "Eggbeater" pictures of 1927 and 1928, began with motifs from nature, usually cityscapes or still lifes. All of them, however, were composed on Cubist principles. During the 1940's a number of almost completely abstract works appeared, and at the same time the format of many of his pictures changed. Until this time, he tended to develop the main motif in the center of the canvas, respecting the traditional conventions of object and background, even though quite flat. Now, however, many of his pictures began to take on an "all-over" character in composition. Planes multiplied and became smaller, overlapping and interrelating in ways which tended toward the destruction of the old clear-cut figure-ground relation, and creating complex visual tensions on the picture plane. The colors of these pictures are intense and contrasts are sharp. The motifs which appear irregularly, without providing a "subject" in the usual sense, are based on posters, billboards, and other paraphernalia of the advertising and commercial world so much exploited today by the "Pop" artists. These are hard-edged, brilliant, rhythmically staccato works, analogous to virtuoso jazz performances that Davis loved all his life.

The painting acquired by the Museum (Cover and Fig. 9)[22] is dated "1957–60." It is the final oil study for a large mural at the Research Center of the Heinz Company in Pittsburgh (Fig. 10). The date of its completion (1960) seems to indicate, however, that Davis continued to work on it after the completion of the mural in 1957. Further evidence that this is the case can be seen in a number of variations in the relative values of hues, which even the black and white photographs make clear. It is one of the most completely abstract paintings ever done by the artist, containing only a few barely recognizable motifs,