

# WHY PAINTERS TURN SCULPTORS

By WORDEN DAY

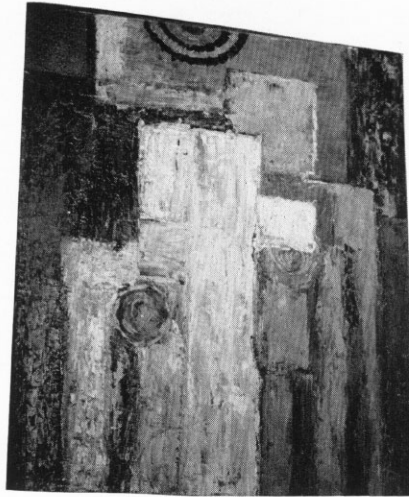
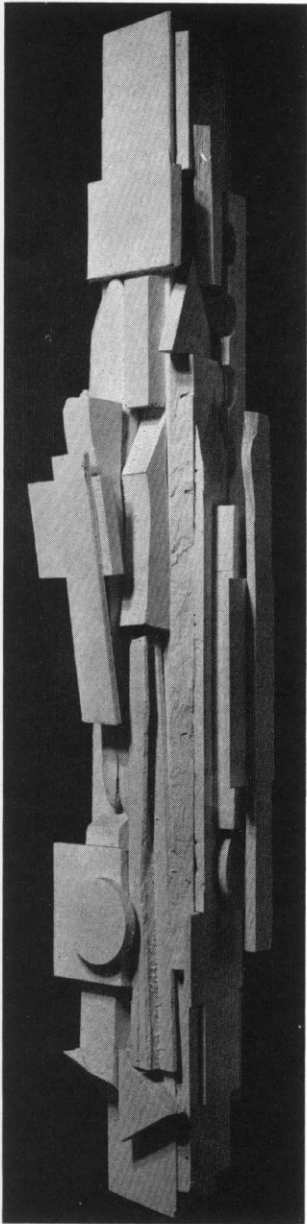
DISCOVERY and expression of the true self are the holy grail to every artist today. For some the journey is a long obstacle course of exploration with many materials and mediums before the true one is found. Many begin study as painters only, a decade or so later, to realize sculpture as their métier. Maillol said he struggled unsuccessfully as a painter for 18 years to release the creative force within himself, only to find his outlet swiftly in sculpture. In the 1930's, the serious American art students received their training primarily through such painters as Jan Matulka, Vaclav Vytlacil and Hans Hoffman. Through their wide influence emerged an image of modern American painting. Sculpture, however, had little native ground from which to evolve. Several factors gradually converged to nurture and give root to the dynamic and varied expression which American sculpture is today.

Art of all cultures and times has always been the greatest influence upon artists. In America of the thirties, magazines such as *Cahiers d'Art* offered the best opportunity to view the latest European work. Photographs of the work of Julio Gonzalez in one issue exerted a decisive influence upon the career of David Smith, a student of Jan Matulka at the time. Gonzalez, himself a painter until the age of fifty, initiated new spatial dimensions when he cut, forged and welded iron, bronze and steel into sculptural constructions. From this point on, sculpture no longer was restricted to carved, modeled or cast monoliths. Gonzalez's inventions stimulated Smith to learn the techniques of oxyacetylene welding through a job in an automobile factory. Theodore Roszak, whose ancestors, like Gonzalez's were iron workers, turned to oxyacetylene welding, as did David Hare, Harry Bertioia, Herbert Ferber and—Zogbaum. New industrial materials such as liquid plastic, plexiglas, plywood, aluminum, synthetic wood, mineral and fabric compositions, spurred a flow of new form

ideas. George Rickey turned from painting to learn mobile construction techniques from Alexander Calder's revolutionary creations in aluminum and tin. Though Calder's influence was formative upon Rickey, his own mobile constructions have a distinct style. Mallery and Scarpitta combined woods, fabrics, plastics and paint into astonishing assemblages.

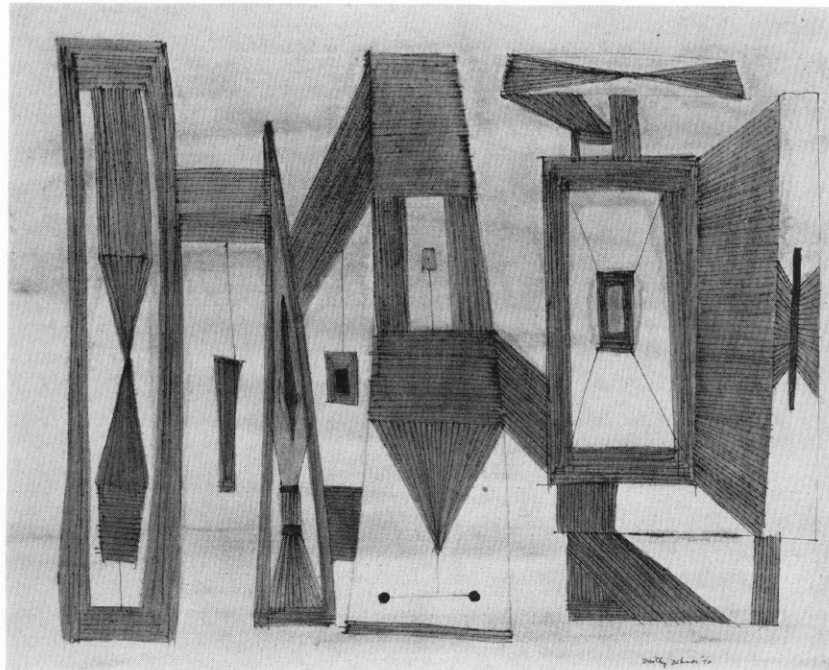
Fresh and new impetus was brought to the traditional materials and techniques of wood, stone, and metal. Louise Nevelson created a sensation with mysterious black, white and gold columns; walls and room structures assembled from found wood cuttings and turned sections of furniture; while Louise Bourgeois evoked hypnotic spells from carving, painting and grouping the same material. Kenneth Campbell laminated and carved combinations of stone into concretions and plinths of shifting planes. Reuben Kadish massed clusters of nodular forms with wax and plaster to be cast in bronze. Dorothy Dehner poured wax into sheets and thin slabs, in order to cut and assemble storied structures; already heralded in prints, watercolors and paintings a decade earlier. Her unique bronzes are cast assemblages. Leonard Baskin transferred the imagery of his prints and drawings into monolithic wood carvings and cast bronzes. Every technique of traditional sculpture was combined and extended to create an imagery distinctive to our century.

New experiments with the conventional techniques of print-making awakened yet another important vehicle of expression. Stanley William Hayter's Atelier 17 in Paris and later in New York City attracted not only many painters and sculptors, but also writers and musicians. Scoring, scraping and engraving into copper and zinc plates already provides an experience of bas-relief. Woodcutting deepens the experience and forms a bridge to high-relief and sculpture in the round, which is my own story. Many contemporary painter-



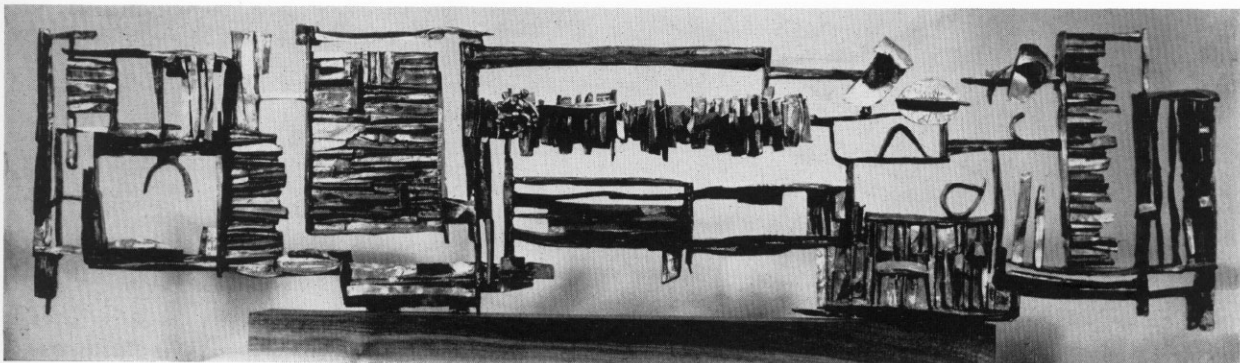
Extreme left: "Untitled" (painted wood)  
by LOUISE NEVELSON.  
Pace Gallery.

Left: "Untitled" (oil)  
by LOUISE NEVELSON.  
(Collection: the artist.)



"Structure"—1950, by DOROTHY DEHNER. (Collection: the artist.)

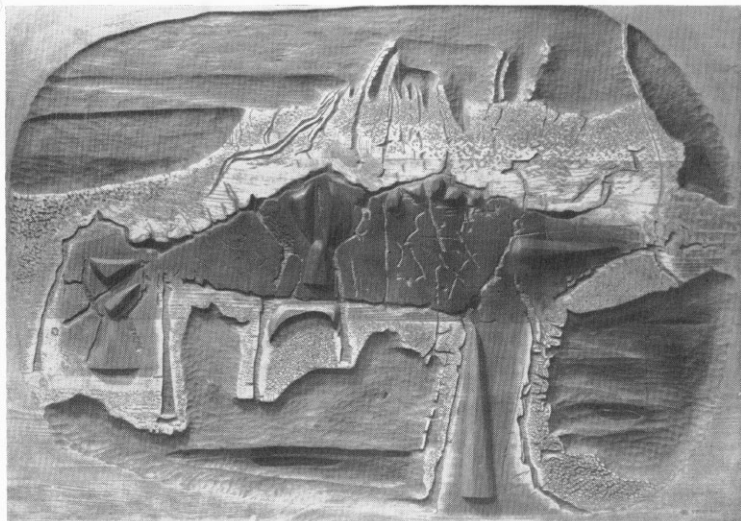
"Low Landscape No. 2"—1961 (bronze) by DOROTHY DEHNER.

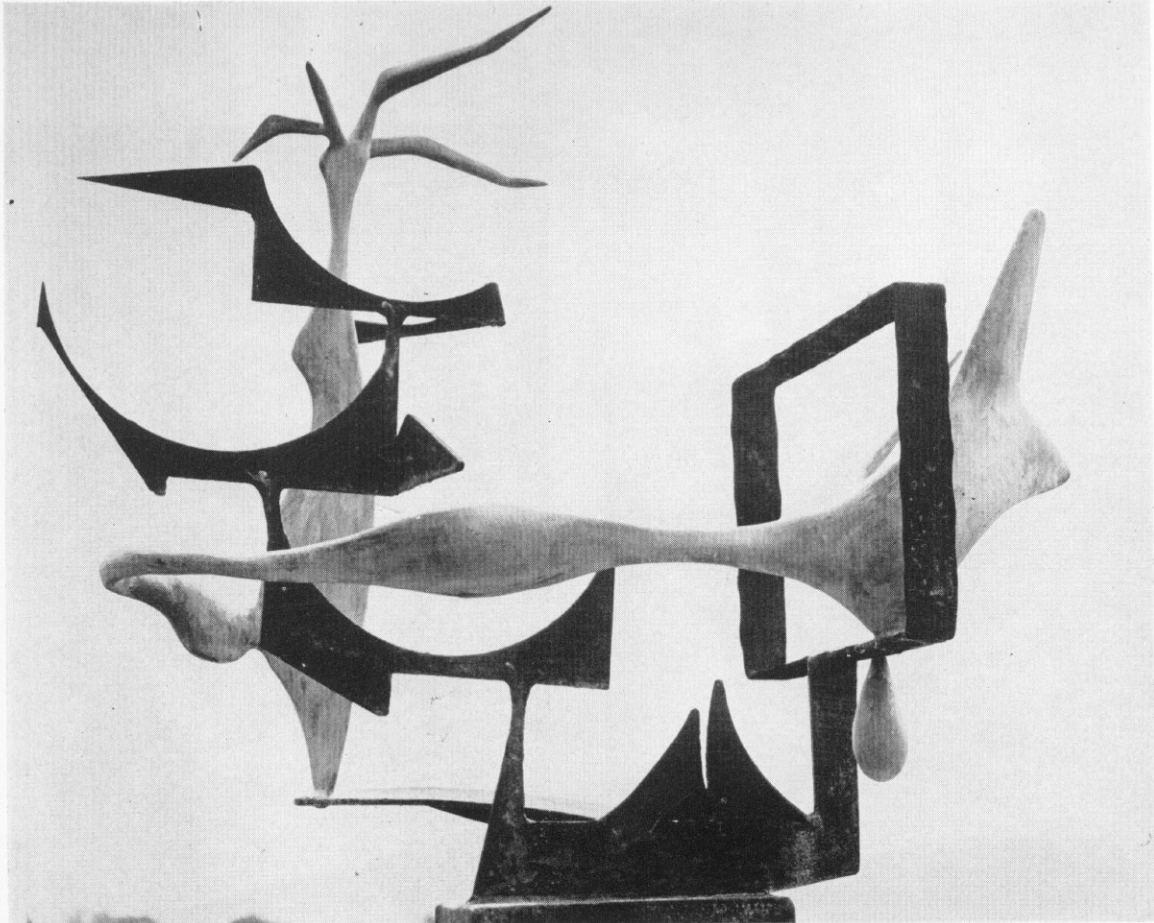




Left: "Arcane Meditation IV"—1955 (oil) by WORDEN DAY.  
(Collection: Oscar Krasner.)

Below: "Continental Divide" (wood relief) by WORDEN DAY.  
Grippi and Wadell Gallery.



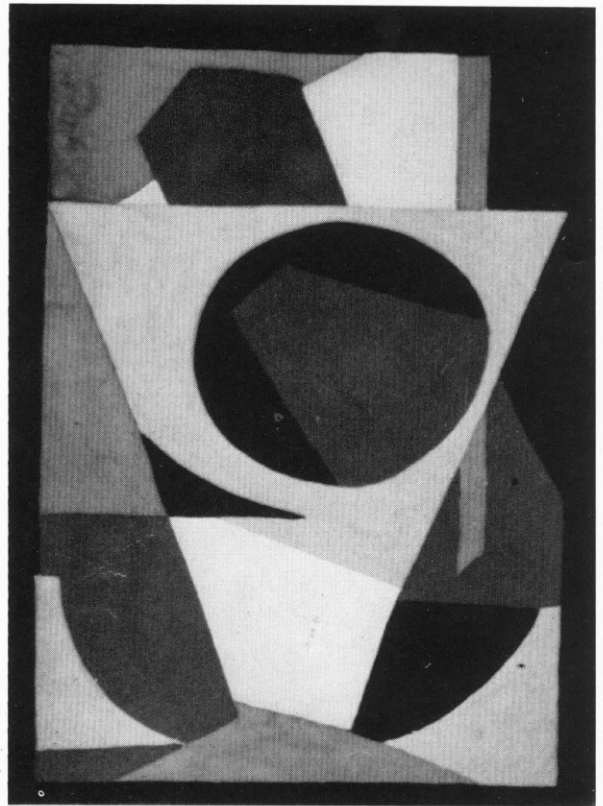
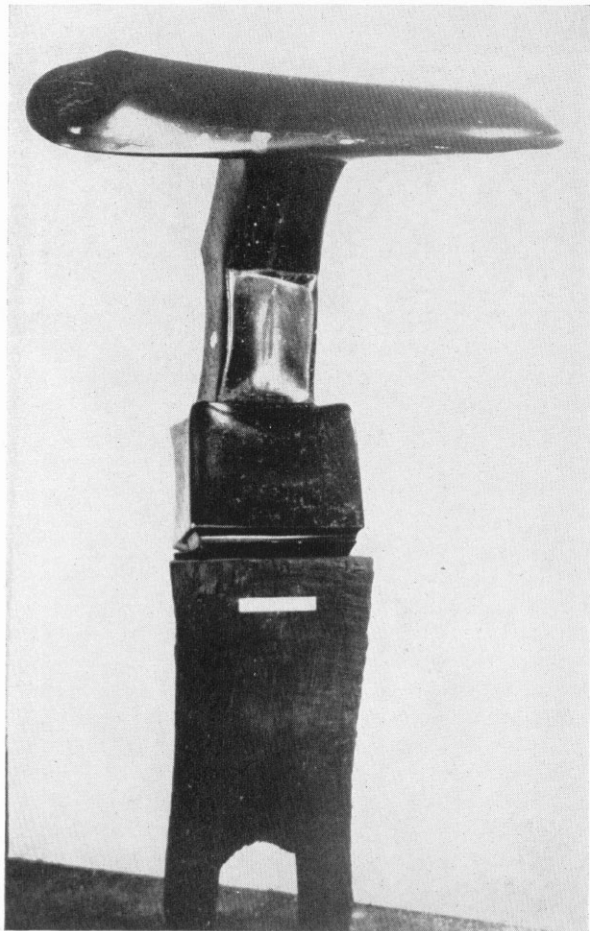


"Flight" (bronze and steel) by DAVID SMITH.

"Drawing," by DAVID SMITH.



"Supplication" (laminated black marble on wood pedestal)  
by KENNETH CAMPBELL.



"Untitled" (oil) by KENNETH CAMPBELL.



"Sea Quarry" (steel) by THEODORE ROSZAK.  
Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, Fla.



"Untitled" (mixed media) by THEODORE ROSZAK.  
(Private collection).

printmakers, such as Angelo Savelli and Michael Ponce de Leon, Omar Rayo and Boris Margo, are really creating paper reliefs; while someone like Conrad Maria-Relli found canvas-collage a stepping stone to cutting and riveting aluminum sheets into panels of bas-relief. Spreading unstretched canvas upon the floor, walking into it, pouring and dripping paint upon it, became only a step removed from a sculptural act. The fact that painting began to be spoken of in terms of creating an environment adds to the atmosphere which breeds sculpture. Time itself is contributing to the scene, mushrooming with hybrids defying any classification.

The essential differences between painting and sculpture, however, are the determinants affecting which direction an artist may develop. A painter may be ambidextrous and work with equal ease in any medium. Painting is basically, however, an art of seeing, whereas sculpture is one of feeling. Painting is in essence color-light; sculpture, form.

Sculpture requires constant handling, turning and viewing from all sides. It involves the total being and range of senses, manual dexterity and the ability to work through a series of

separate though related steps towards the final form. Sculpture, above all, involves the ability to sustain the original mood and inspiration through the various stages towards completion.

Psychological factors may be instrumental in delaying discovery of the latent medium. Early childhood prohibitions about looking at things and not touching them, so common in Western culture, are enough in themselves to create a displacement. Painters who talk about form to the exclusion of color, or are occupied with an array of tools uncommon to painters, are suspect. Sometimes there is hesitation about dropping a medium after so many years of association, particularly if successful. Perhaps even a fear of failure, lurking in the consciousness, may prevent the shift sooner.

Whatever the reasons, labels must be shed for the person who must not only be true to self; but also assert himself freely in whatever medium he chooses. Whether the time spans differ between the painting period and the sculpture matters little, as long as the true dimension is found. With few exceptions, the identity of the artist is never lost, whatever the initial medium.