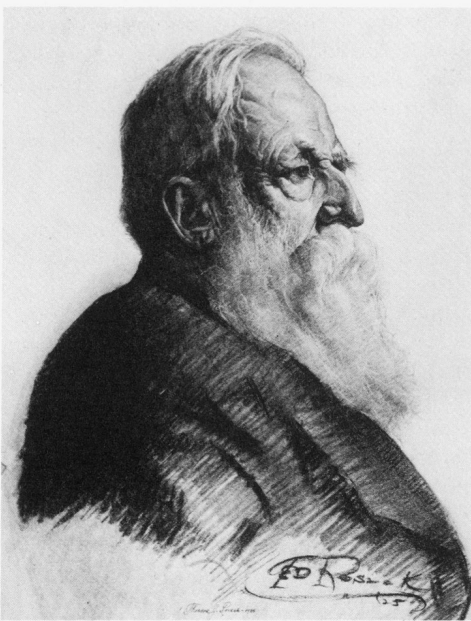


**THE
THEODORE ROSZAK
BEQUEST**

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
January 21–March 18, 1984



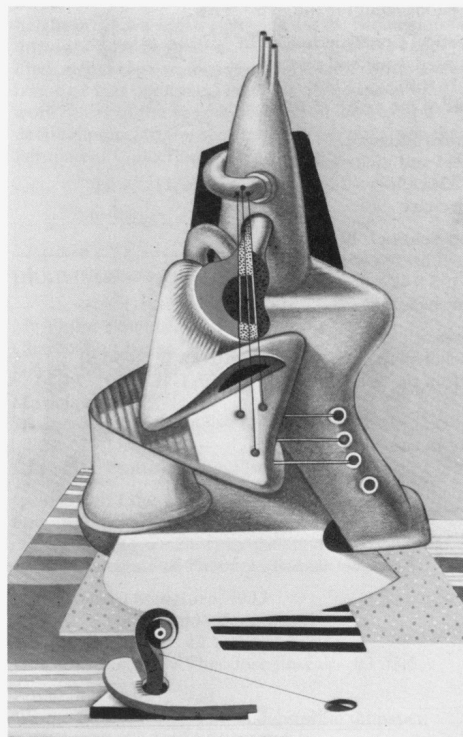
My Violin Teacher, 1925

WHEN HE WAS about seven years old, Theodore Roszak's talent began to reveal itself and was then developed through drawing. At thirteen, he received a national prize in a contest sponsored by the *Chicago Herald Examiner*. His childhood drawings, much like those of other children, depicted battle scenes and knights on horseback. At fifteen, Roszak enrolled at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, continuing for three years, until 1925, when he started to teach there. *My Violin Teacher* (1925), a remarkable accomplishment for an eighteen-year-old, gives some indication of his precocious talent and its response to traditional drawing instruction.

The Roszak family, living in the Polish section of Chicago, had an interest in music. Theodore studied music for several years, and these two demands on his talent were in conflict until well into the 1930s, as is demonstrated in his *Portrait Sketch with Violin* (1932), as well as in the monumental drawing *Violin Torso* of the following year.

Roszak spent the academic year 1925–26 studying in New York City with Charles Hawthorne at the National Academy of Design. Although Hawthorne was one of the leading teachers in the country, Roszak found his instruction unsatisfactory and returned to Chicago. There he soon received a scholarship from the Art Institute which allowed him to travel in Europe from 1929 through 1931.

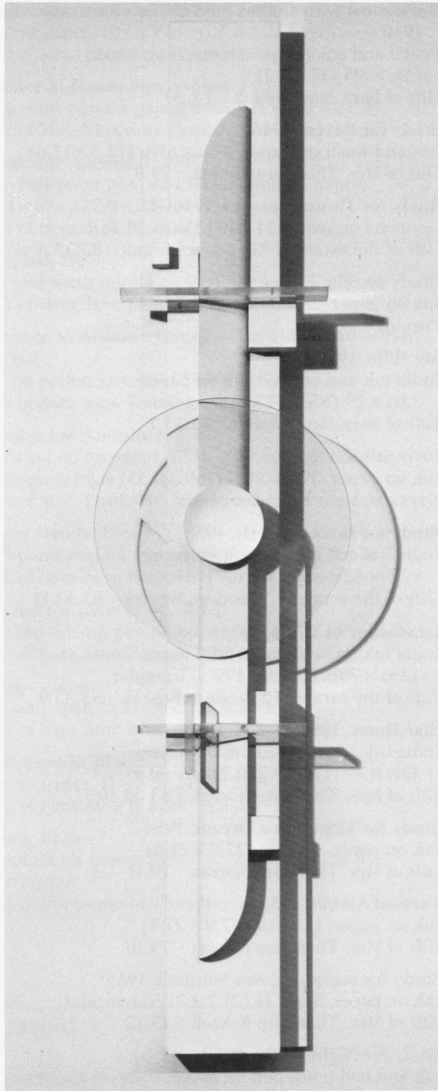
The European experience proved to be a turning point in Roszak's artistic development. He visited France, Germany, Italy,



Metaphysical Structure, 1933

and Czechoslovakia, eventually setting up a studio in Prague for nine months. It was in Prague that he came into contact with modern art and architecture. His paintings at the time—he had thus far no thought of sculpture—reflected his newfound interests in the accomplishments of de Chirico, Klee, Picasso, Léger, the Constructivists, and the Surrealists. The art he discovered convinced him of the aesthetic validity of modernism and he became an ardent partisan.

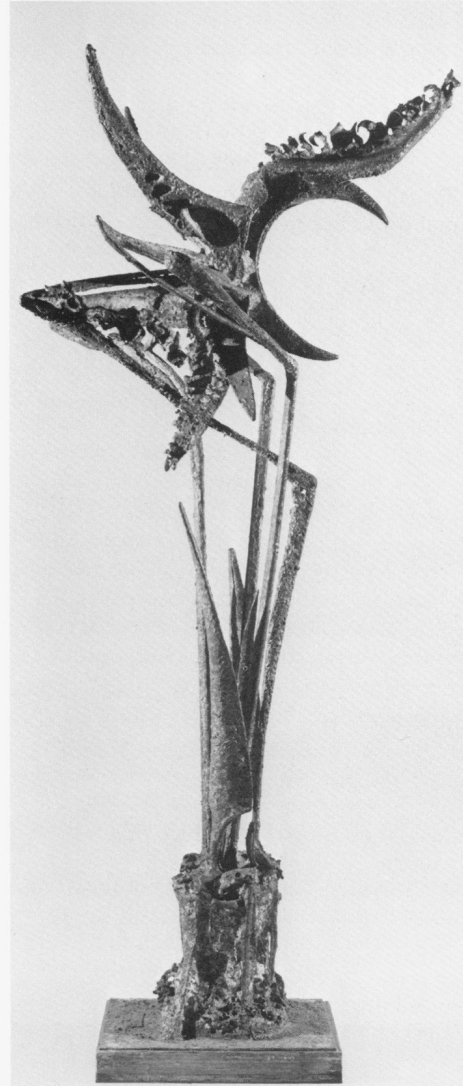
Soon after Roszak's return to America, he was included in the first Biennial Exhibition held at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1932. A few months later, he was represented in "Painting and Prints by Chicago Artists," which opened at the Whitney Museum early in 1933. From this exhibition, the Museum purchased *Fisherman's Bride* (c. 1933). A romantic image, *Fisherman's Bride* reveals late Cubist and Constructivist influences and the remnants of naturalism. The landscape of Staten Island, Roszak's new residence in 1933, is referred to in the lower left quadrant of the picture. The composition is a recapitulation of ideas learned abroad and, while not as imaginatively adventurous as *Violin Torso*, it does refer to those juxtapositions of nature, man, and manmade materials that would henceforth characterize his work. *Violin Torso* could also be construed as a self-portrait, executed with the purpose of exorcising the demands made on his talent by music. Stylistically, the drawing combines something of de Chirico's spatial concepts with the enigmatic Surrealism of Max Ernst.



Vertical Construction, 1943

In the late 1930s, Roszak became increasingly challenged by the need for three-dimensional expression. By 1936, he was producing pristine sculptural constructions, influenced by the Bauhaus aesthetic. There was no radical break with the formal concerns of his two-dimensional work, but rather a direct evolution from painting into sculpture. These reserved, mechanical, and perfected forms continued for about a decade, only to be challenged in the mid-1940s by an innate emotionalism which emerged in baroque, disquieting images such as *Thorn Blossom* (1948). This sculpture reflects a synthesis of Roszak's careful observations of plants, animals, the human figure, and the sea.

Rozzak was a compulsive draftsman who produced hundreds of small sketches that often led to larger drawings, which were themselves frequently transformed into sculptures. Drawing was the physical revelation of his insight into the imaginative process. In searching for the proper combination to elucidate his statement, he manipulated shapes throughout sheets of sketches. He would combine freehand and ruled lines and shift perspective and viewpoints to arrive at a desired configuration. By moving away from the rigid formality found in the constructions of the mid-1940s, Roszak's images assumed a character of devastation, which might reflect his concern with individual man struggling against nature or the destructive effects of World War II. His art resolved itself into signs of terror, of sundering, or of devouring conflict. The elegance of the constructions was replaced by mottled,



Sea Sentinel, 1956

gritty, textured surfaces which increased the emotional impact of his expression. In these years, we see the beginnings of the apocalyptic vision that would reach fruition in the 1950s and remain a significant element in his work. *Star Burst* and *Landscape (or Dirge)*, both of 1954 and both unrelated to specific sculptures, present a vision of worlds in collision, of earth-rendering cataclysms drawn with a multiformity of line and wash that is rare for the art of this period.

In the 1950s, Roszak's drawing studies for individual sculpture became refined and linear isolated explorations. Often small fragments of a larger image would suggest a new form or motif, and the initial image would be dropped forever. His sculptural process of welding and brazing also informed the textures of the drawings.

Guided by an inner logic, Roszak's drawings, for all their exploratory invention, are never capricious. The line, in its search for the image, remains strong, individual, and directed. He always refers to the accumulated experience of his previous work. The sky in *Fisherman's Bride* is not so different in form from the sky in *Wave* (1976). But the meaning and content vary and the implications of Roszak's early romantic enthusiasts are now covered by impeding darkness and a tumult of waves. Serenity is lost in a timeless space and man is no longer safely harbored by the earth.

PAUL CUMMINGS
Adjunct Curator, Drawings

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Dimensions are in inches, followed by centimeters; height precedes width precedes depth. Dimensions of drawings refer to sheet size unless otherwise specified; sight refers to measurements taken within the frame or mat opening. The accession number of a work refers to the year of acquisition and, after a decimal point, to the sequence of its addition to the Permanent Collection during that year.

DRAWINGS

My Violin Teacher, 1925

Charcoal on paper, 21¼ × 16½ (54. × 41.9) sight
Gift of the estate of Theodore Roszak 83.33.4

Musicians, 1932

Watercolor, ink, and gouache on paper, 12¾ × 11⅞
(31 × 29.1)
Gift of the estate of Theodore Roszak 83.33.2

Cubist Still Life, 1933

Graphite, watercolor, and gouache on paper,
5¾ × 9⅝ (14.6 × 24.4) irregular
Gift of the estate of Theodore Roszak 83.33.1

Metaphysical Structure, 1933

Crayon, gouache, and ink on paper,
23 × 16⅞ (58.4 × 42.1)
Gift of the estate of Theodore Roszak 83.33.5

Study for Airport, 1934

Watercolor, gouache, ink, and graphite on paper,
22⅞ × 29 (58.1 × 73.7) irregular
Gift of the estate of Theodore Roszak 83.33.6

Construction work drawing for Vertical Construction, 1940

Pencil and colored pencil on graph paper,
3⅝ × 4⅞ (8.6 × 12.4)
Gift of Sara Jane Roszak 78.19

Study for Vertical Construction, 1940

Pencil and colored pencil on graph paper,
8¼ × 6⅝ (20.9 × 17.6)
Gift of Sara Jane Roszak 78.18

Work sheet with studies for Vertical Construction, 1940

Pencil and colored pencil on graph paper,
6⅝ × 8¼ (15.6 × 21)
Gift of Sara Jane Roszak 78.20

Study for Raven, 1946

Ink and wash on paper, 4⅝ × 6⅝ (12.5 × 17.6)
Gift of Mrs. Theodore Roszak 79.8

Study for Thorn Blossom, 1946–47

Gouache on paper, 14 × 10 (35.6 × 25.4)
Gift of the estate of Theodore Roszak 83.33.3

*Study for The Furies, 1950

Ink on paper, 25 × 38¾ (63.5 × 98.4)
Purchase 51.29

My Wife, 1951

India ink and colored ink on paper,
33½ × 29 (85.1 × 73.7) irregular
Gift of Sara Jane Roszak 83.33.7

Invocation, 1952

Ink on paper, 39½ × 20⅞ (100.3 × 53) sight
Neysa McMein Purchase Award 77.29

Study for Invocation III, 1952

India ink and colored ink on paper,
92⅝ × 42⅞ (235.8 × 107)
Gift of the estate of Theodore Roszak 83.33.11

Landscape or Dirge, 1954

India ink and colored ink on paper,
42¼ × 78⅞ (106.8 × 199.1) irregular
Gift of the estate of Theodore Roszak 83.33.9

Star Burst, 1954

India ink and colored ink on paper,
43½ × 79 (110.5 × 200.7) irregular
Gift of Mrs. Theodore Roszak 83.33.10

Study for Thistle in a Dream, 1954

Ink on paper, 11 × 8½ (27.9 × 21.6)
Gift of Mrs. Theodore Roszak 79.11

Vertical Ascent, 1954

Ink on paper, 11 × 8⅝ (27.9 × 21.7)
Gift of Mrs. Theodore Roszak 79.10

Study for sculpture, Sea Sentinel, 1955

Ink on paper, 8⅞ × 11 (21.7 × 27.9) irregular
Gift of Mrs. Theodore Roszak 79.12

Study for Night Flight, 1958

Ink and ball-point pen on paper,
8⅞ × 10⅝ (21.7 × 27.8)
Gift of Mrs. Theodore Roszak 79.9

Study—Invocation V, 1958

Ink on paper, 10⅝ × 8½ (27.8 × 21.6)
Gift of Mrs. Theodore Roszak 79.14

Cluster of Heads: Space-Man, 1959

Ball-point pen on paper, 8⅝ × 11 (21.4 × 27.9)
Gift of Mrs. Theodore Roszak 79.13

Heads for Aeronaut, 1959

Ink, ball-point pen, and blue pencil on paper,
11 × 8⅞ (27.9 × 21.7)
Gift of Sara Jane Roszak 79.16

Untitled, 1959

Ink and wash on paper, 10½ × 7⅝ (26.7 × 18.6)
Gift of Sara Jane Roszak 79.22

Homage to Antonio Gaudi—Barcelona Cathedral, 1960

Ink on paper, 11 × 8⅞ (27.9 × 21.7)
Gift of Sara Jane Roszak 79.17

Studies for Sculpture, 1960

Felt-tip pen on paper, 10⅝ × 8⅞ (27.8 × 21.7)
irregular
Gift of Mrs. Theodore Roszak 79.15

Three Heads, 1960

Ball-point pen on paper, 10⅝ × 8⅞ (27.8 × 21.7)
Gift of Sara Jane Roszak 79.18

Studies for Invocation, 1962

Ink and felt-tip pen on paper, 11 × 8½ (27.9 × 21.6)
Gift of Sara Jane Roszak 79.20

Study—Meteor, 1962

Ink on paper, 11⅞ × 8½ (28.4 × 21.6)
Gift of Sara Jane Roszak 79.19

Armature in Bloom, 1965

Ink on paper, 11 × 8½ (27.9 × 21.6)
Gift of Sara Jane Roszak 79.21

Wave, 1976

Graphite on paper, 39⅝ × 62½ (100.6 × 158.8)
irregular
Gift of the estate of Theodore Roszak 83.33.8

PAINTING

Fisherman's Bride, c. 1933

Oil on canvas, 29 × 27 (73.7 × 68.6)
Purchase 34.24

SCULPTURE

Bi-Polar in Red, 1940

Metal, plastic, and wood,
54 × 9 × 9 (137.2 × 22.9 × 22.9) with base
Burroughs Wellcome Purchase Fund and the National
Endowment for the Arts 79.6

*Vertical Construction, 1943

Painted wood and plastic,
76 × 30 × 5 (193 × 76.2 × 12.7)
Gift of the artist 57.7

Thorn Blossom, 1948

Steel and nickel-silver,
33½ × 18½ × 22½ (85.1 × 47 × 57.1)
Purchase 48.6

Sea Sentinel, 1956

Steel brazed with bronze,
105 × 42 × 45 (266.7 × 106.7 × 114.3)
Purchase 56.28

Invocation V, 1962

Nickel-silver, 115 × 50 × 20 (292.1 × 127 × 50.8)
Gift of the artist in honor of John I. H. Baur 74.70

*Not in exhibition

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Whitney Museum of American Art
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New York, New York 10021

Design: Antony Drobinski
Photography by Geoffrey Clements;
the artist in his studio by Anton Kamp



Theodore Roszak in his studio, 1957