

10-21-1988

William Tucker

The Art Museum at Florida International University Frost Art Museum
The Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/frostcatalogs>

Recommended Citation

Frost Art Museum, The Art Museum at Florida International University, "William Tucker" (1988). *Frost Art Museum Catalogs*. 59.
<https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/frostcatalogs/59>

This work is brought to you for free and open access by the Frost Art Museum at FIU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Frost Art Museum Catalogs by an authorized administrator of FIU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact dcc@fiu.edu.

William Tucker



The Art Museum
AT FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Gaia, 1985

bronze

87" x 55" x 50"

Edition of 3

Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York

William Tucker

October 21 – November 16, 1988

Essay by Dore Ashton

Organized by
Dahlia Morgan for

The Art Museum
AT FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

University Park
Miami, Florida 33199
(305) 554-2890

Acknowledgements

The Art Museum at Florida International University is proud to have organized this William Tucker exhibition. Mr. Tucker's twenty-five year contribution to art on both sides of the Atlantic is distinguished by a vigorous evolution that is both of his times and a beacon to other artists working in the plastic arts. His work has both a unique physical presence and very strong conceptual underpinnings that will engage our audience on multiple levels. This exhibition was conceived as part of our ongoing mission to introduce prominent individual artists to our growing South Florida community.

Our small staff has been forthcoming with a tremendous amount of effort. Particularly I would like to thank Mr. William Humphreys, Museum Coordinator, who participated in every aspect of the organization, planning, and publication of the catalogue and notices for this exhibition; as well as Ms. Linda Cole, who handled the details involved with correspondence, shipping, and publications surrounding the show; and Ms. Karen Goodson, who dealt efficiently with the financial aspects and records of this

exhibition.

First and foremost I would like to thank the Lannan Foundation for their most generous grant. Their enlightened leadership and support made an exhibition and publication of this scope possible. In addition, the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, D.C., and the Florida Arts Council in Tallahassee have recognized the significance of this exhibition by much needed grants. Their support has been essential to organizing the exhibition and to publishing this extensive catalogue. I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of our Student Government Association, and the Office of Academic Affairs who offered crucial support to The Museum.

This exhibition, however, would not have happened without the cooperation of the David McKee Gallery in New York and other museums and private individuals who are listed as Lenders to the Exhibition.

Dahlia Morgan, Director

Special Acknowledgements Florida International University

Modesto A. Maidique
President

Judith Stiehm
Provost and Vice President,
Academic Affairs

Richard J. Correnti
Vice President, Student Affairs

Paul Gallagher
Vice President, Business and
Finance

Adam Herbert
Vice President, North Miami Campus

Doris Sadoff
Assistant Vice President for Ad-
ministrative Affairs

Walter Strong
Vice President, University Relations
and Development

William Maguire
Chairman, Visual Arts Department

Art Museum Staff

Dahlia Morgan
Director

William B. Humphreys
Curator/Coordinator of University
Collections

Karen Goodson
Administrative Assistant

Lenders to the Exhibition

Arkansas Art Center, Little Rock, AK
Edward R. Broida Trust, Los Angeles, CA
Dorothy Elkon, New York, NY
Anne and Martin Z. Margulies, Miami, FL
David McKee Gallery, New York, NY
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
William Tucker, New York, NY
and various other private collections, anonymously



Untitled, 1984, charcoal on paper, 45" x 30", Private collection, New York



Portrait of K, 1975, wood 6'9" x 10'12" x 10", Collection: Edward R. Broida Trust, Los Angeles

William Tucker and The Mind's Desire

by Dore Ashton

A few years ago, in a preface to a William Tucker exhibition in Rome, a fellow artist, Carlo Battaglia, used as an epigraph a resounding quotation from Lucretius:

Because, throughout the body all matter meant to do so must rise, and pushed, courses through each limb, so that with it, the mind's desire may follow.

(On the Nature of Things II, V. 266-268)

This wise recourse to a tradition is still apposite. Lucretius understood a sequence that is not only in the nature of things, but even more, is a fairly constant description of certain artistic temperaments. William Tucker's for instance. During his more than twenty-five years of intense work, Tucker has again and again probed the wellsprings of his drive to make things, allowing for that surge of rising matter that is the bodily source of inspiration, and examining that mysterious function called by Lucretius "the mind's desire." In the course of his inquiry (for all good sculpture is always an inquiry into the nature of things) Tucker has often discovered aspects of sculpture that have fallen into desuetude. He has had the temerity to resurrect them.

In the beginning Tucker was almost scientific in his experiments. He made and challenged hypotheses. He rejected received ideas. He pushed his insights to extremes. He always knew, though, that sculpture, unlike painting, had some strangely homologous relation to the human bodily presence. Both the sculptural object and the one who creates it, or contemplates it, in some measure share a space; stand within it physically, although never quite mentally. (The fact is that Tucker has been everywhere in space: he has circled it, looked down into it, pressed up from within it, sternly defined it as geometric in some ways, and as unaccountably, formlessly shifting in others. In the broadest sense he has been an investigator of perception.)

Tucker's earliest exhibited works reflect a special moment in British art history—a moment when the air was riven with impatient exclamations. Something happened in Britain of the 1960s that has still not found satisfying explanation. Tucker and his fellow artists emerging from the art schools in the early 1960s were fired with an implacable desire to blaze new trails. Their obstreperous rejections were widely noted and they were promptly labeled "the new generation." I suppose they were definable as "new" when juxtaposed with the "old" which was, of course, the single mighty figure of the one 20th century British sculptor who had attained international acclaim: Henry Moore. In any

case, they launched themselves with immense energy in a host of directions, discovering moment by moment how many alternatives there could be to the old master's vision.

Tucker's own discoveries at first took the direction, as Andrew Forge wrote in 1972 of "an unbroken meditation on the nature of modern sculpture." That meditation had taken him back to the early modern experiments with disembodiment—the first vanguard in Russia and France that eschewed palpable mass—as well as to the unique modern master, Brancusi, who had never abandoned it. Tucker experimented with reduction in the modern tradition, working at times with clear linear principles that moved toward geometry. Even in his early, seemingly geometric works—steel structures of rectilinear or triangular sections, or sometimes curvilinear derivatives of the circle—Tucker demonstrated a strong tendency to dispute the very nature of geometry as a group of externally fixed relations in space. In those earlier pieces in steel or fiberglass, Tucker had already begun to inquire more deeply into the perplexities of perception. He had begun to suspect that the sprawling floor pieces that so preoccupied the new generation were little better than reliefs, and reliefs belonged perhaps more to the domain of painting than sculpture. By 1970 Tucker was formulating a richer philosophy of his art which he would state in 1975 with prophetic clarity. (Did he realize how the words he wrote would shape his own destiny as a sculptor?) In that singular statement Tucker took the plunge: He defined sculpture in a long-hallowed tradition—the free-standing object in space, subject to gravity and revealed by light.

If Tucker had the courage to revive a traditional view of the nature of sculpture, he was never to be a dupe of traditionalism. Like the masters he studied closely—Brancusi, Matisse, Picasso, and their forebear, Rodin—Tucker held in delicate balance an active intelligence and prescient intuition. They would never permit him to rest comfortably in a given form. Tradition was not the rigid concept that incited rebellion in so many modernists, but rather represented that part of human memory that transcended time and place. Tradition provided the thread of communication that held the promise of meaning. Yielding, Tucker could draw upon the wealth of sculptural tradition without fear of contamination. In this I think he distinguished himself from so many others of his generation who became victims of their own rebellion; traditionalists, in fact, of it.

Tucker's mind's desire was not only to draw upon the imagery residing in centuries of sculptural practice, but to draw upon his entire personal culture. This included the moving works of literature and poetry he had known, as we see in the earliest sculpture in this exhibition, *Portrait of "K"*. The piece is composed of weathered timbers; members of some other lost structure blackened by time, suggesting other associations that Tucker seized upon and made his own. In this piece, with its carefully disarrayed triangular spaces and its diagonal thrust into infinity, Tucker *felt* his way through, more than he thought it through. He allowed the element of free association that has marked his work ever since to enter into play, and he declared, partly through the title, that this was no mere formal construction. Even if the viewer had no inkling of who "K" was, he certainly knew that this presence with its rough boundaries, its swelling and declining volumes, its uneasy stability, had some reference to the psychological functions of sculpture. I think, though, that the word Kafka, to which K refers, is part of the sculpture, and a significant element if we think of Tucker's oeuvre as a long meditation. The following year came *The Trap*, further exploring a theme of immense anxiety suggested not only by the irregular, toothed interior, but in the slithering perspective that insists on hinting at instability and the kind of psychological uneasiness that K could describe so well. The epitome, perhaps, of this mood is found in the rocking motion of the sculpture called *Fear*—a portrait of emotional turmoil which victims so often describe as a vise-like situation.

Allusions to fear and aggression—the iron-maiden associations with the toothed appendages in several works from 1975-9—give way in the magnificent piece begun in 1979 that I believe cleared the path for Tucker's subsequent moves. *The Rim* was constructed first in wood and only later rendered in steel. Perhaps the living vitality of wood contributed to the success of the image which, although founded on the eternal sign of the circle, has little to do with the endless repeatability of it. On the contrary, *The Rim* offers stunning paradoxes. By dividing its circular structure, Tucker has already disturbed its inherent stability. Further, in the staggered sequence of the irregular extrusions, he has made a new thing that both pierces space and describes it. The great tympanum the rim encloses is diaphanous, virtual, but is very much there as a plane. This grand, original image has other dimensions, beyond the measurable geometric formula. Its protruding members suggest the ticking-off of time. The implicit roll of any wheel engages the mind in the conundrums of mobility versus stability; ephemeral versus eternal. It is not hard to imagine this sculpture as an incitement to the kind of puzzling that led Pascal to talk of a circle whose center is everywhere

and circumference nowhere, and Borges to compose one of his wittiest essays, "Pascal's Fearful Sphere," on that baffling notion.

Not long after he completed *The Rim*, Tucker felt a craving for that other experience endemic to the history of his art: the experience of mass; of forms amassed through the building up of palpable volumes. As early as 1972 he had spoken of "evoking the spectator's 'body-experience'" but at that time he was thinking of the function of inhabiting. A decade later he was fully prepared to accept the spectator's experience as one of bodily association. The vertical object, governed by gravity, is the analogue of man himself, and is experienced not only psychologically, but physiologically as "free standing." Tucker's wide culture and intellectual curiosity stood him in good stead. The great tradition of free-standing sculpture has no temporal boundaries and an overwhelming record of brilliant strategies of renewal. In a perfectly natural step toward encounter, Tucker bought some clay—a small step toward an enormous shift in attention. From constructing to modeling and carving requires a total re-orientation, and, in Tucker's case, a courageous stance. Not that this was a total *volte-face*. Many of the formal thoughts that had accrued in earlier works were perfectly adaptable in the different approaches Tucker now explored.

But Tucker as the first spectator of what he shaped was faced with the same problems as his public. Long usage gives language a power that is difficult to break. The language of modern sculpture had for so long been a language of virtuality, lightness and defiance of gravity that it required authentic effort to rearrange its syntax. Problems that sculptors had long contemplated had been hidden for almost a century. To reveal them Tucker had to accept the principle of uncertainty; the kinds of unforeseen experiences that the very act of modelling brings to the artist.

Since the spectator is very much included in Tucker's concept of sculpture, I digress here for a moment to speak of another era when the spectator was also taken into account. During the Renaissance the astounding discoveries of ancient Greek sculptures led to a kind of general culture in which the citizens of Florence, for instance, were called upon to judge the merits of even the greatest of sculptors. They were no more flexible than the public today. They fully expected their artists to stick to their established styles. It is doubtful that the citizens would have approved of Michelangelo's Rondanini Pieta, or the impulse that motivated it. Yet, he was, in his own time, "divine," as they called him, and his contemporaries were automatically accorded lesser stature.

One of them, Giambologna—a Flemish artist who had been



The Trap, 1976, steel, 55" x 120", Collection of the Artist, Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York

drawn to Florence probably because of its remarkable, flourishing sculptural activity—was appreciated but not unduly, and still today is mentioned in art history texts with slighting disdain. Yet Giambologna undertook a sculptural problem apparently for its own sake. In the Accademia in Florence his full-scale terra-cotta maquette (with bits of straw still showing) for three figures spiralling upward in great vertical thrusts, stands some fifteen feet high, breathtaking in the evidence of an accomplished artist's will to surpass himself; to penetrate and tame a space in which a giant, Michelangelo, had left so little room. This maquette is far more affecting than the finished piece known as "The Rape of the Sabines." The curious thing is that Giambologna had not titled it. That remained for an art historian. For him, it quite evidently was a need to tackle a problem—three active human figures in a narrow vertical space.

I mention this only because I think it is important to take into account the ambition of a sculptor to surpass himself and fashion a corporal thing that can literally embody his feelings. Although Tucker instinctively selected figures long familiar to him (such as the truncated triangle, and the diagonal extension against a vertical axis) for his new turning, the mere fact that he was adding matter to an armature modified the entire enterprise. The first few works in the *Guardian* group already suggested Tucker's desire to repossess mass and define its contours through irregular and subtle gradations of light. All the edges in the seemingly emphatic figures in space are carefully softened, carrying the eye around. Profiles are made ambiguous by the insistence of surface modulation that carries with it shadow. *Guardian II* lurches into real space only to be confronted with an invisible wall. A plane, like an open palm proffered to ward off disaster, presses up against that wall and indicates to the spectator that resistance is a part of the sculptural meaning, the other part being the invisible traditional quadrature of sculpture in-the-round.

It is in the character of sculpture in-the-round to reveal itself only in a circuit. That is, the spectator can only experience the whole while circumnavigating. Each aspect opens out to another, and the various axes are sensed only as the eye and body move. In order to make an immediate impact, the sculptor must make decisions about major and minor forms. He must struggle to attain some first general shape that will enunciate the character of the work from all its viewing points. In the *Gymnast* sculptures, which followed, Tucker sought in each case a dominant action, such as leaning, stretching, arching, bending. These were not representations of the human figure making certain gestures. Rather, Tucker made use of the nature of the imagination which is forever allegorizing, or, as the psychologists call it, free-

ly associating. As the spectator regards the richly and sometimes roughly modeled surfaces, he not only feels, through empathy, the nature of the sculptural movement, but he enters the activity by moving, scanning, visually organizing his visceral first impressions. The first adjective that struck many that saw the *Gymnast* series in an important exhibition in 1987 was "powerful." The great force with which the sculptures met the ground and sprung up from it, and the feeling of monumentality, bespoke Tucker's shaping power.

I don't know if Tucker set out to portray the gods and titans as such, or if the naming of them helped to shape them. (But doesn't everything one has ever known or lived help?) I do know that I immediately thought of these single and singular figures as chthonic. Such gods are near, and from the earth (chthonos in Greek) and rise from it with titanic effort. These prodigious sculptures unlike any others on the contemporary horizon brought into force the fallen powers of solid sculpture, revived them, brought them up out of a remote past. In their cumbersome might they call upon our capacity of memory, of analogy. These lumpy accretions of matter, invested with life by the shaping hand of the sculptor who has fashioned them from the inside out and from the ground up, are uncannily present to us, while yet defying precise definition.

If Tucker calls them *Gaia* or *Ouranos* we know them to be in the realm of legend where, of all characteristics, the capacity for metamorphosis is pre-eminent. And metamorphosis occurs in many ways in these works. First there are the associations evoked by a slight detail such as a fold here or a bend there, a bump or a slight hollow, a shift from a vertical to a diagonal axis taking place deep within the bulk, the hulk of the presence. I must call it a presence rather than a form because in these gods, Tucker has made total use of the essentially circuitous vision in which, with each step, the overall contour changes, and no two sightings (for they are as mysterious as sightings from the crow's nest of a wandering ship) are ever alike. One step back and everything changes. (One of Tucker's most moving earlier sculptures in timber was called "*House of the Hanged Man*," an obvious allusion to Cezanne who had observed, as he sat day after day before the same outdoor motif, that with one slight turn of his head everything changed.) As the spectator circles these solid beings he assimilates many disturbing shapes that in sum recall human attitudes. *Ouranos* at times feels like a great foot cleaving to the earth, but at other times is like the twist of a titan's body. *Gaia* is at once amorphous and top-heavy, and a lifting body that speaks of firm, well-shaped flesh and bodily torsion. All



Untitled, 1984, charcoal on paper, 45" x 30", Private collection, New York



Guardian II, 1983, bronze, unique, 74" x 27 ½" x 57 ½", Collection: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

of the gods in the group are unsettling to the perceiver, and yet, they stand, or rather, they *loom* in the permanency their weighty manufacture bestows on them. I had the occasion to see them first in the studio and then in a gallery, and was stunned to observe how much each sculpture could maintain some immutable inner identity. In the dark glade with grassy ground of the Kroller-Muller Museum in Holland, these gods possessed the wood as brooding, domineering forces. Their sensitively rounded bases wedded them to the earth while their mass, emphasized in the darkish, greenish patinas, created a somber ambiance both at-one with nature and at odds with it.

The fact is that these sculptures do invoke many mental and psychological activities and set us dreaming. Tucker has never avoided extended metaphors. His generation, particularly in England where such psychoanalytically oriented critics as Adrian Stokes and Anton Ehrenzweig had broad contact with young artists, was well versed in the hidden functions of the mind's desire. I thought of Ehrenzweig's discussion of the persistence of the dying god as an artistic theme when I first saw these sculptures. In "The Hidden Order of Art" he speaks of "gestalt-free structures" and open form, as essential to art, and says that the perennial theme of the dying god "gains its catalytic power from its capacity to induce the critical shift of control to the deepest levels of the ego. The creative mind must identify itself with the fate of the 'dying god' in order to surrender control to the powers of the deep." While Ehrenzweig's argument is in the service of psycho-analysis, his intuition of the importance of the "powers of the deep" was sharpened by his observation of artists. The death and re-birth cycle, Eros and Thanatos, becomes the metaphor of creativity—one which can so easily be recognized in these struggling masses of matter that finally cohere in ineffability, that Tucker called gods.

Strangely enough, many of Tucker's sculptures after the gods' cycle reduced themselves in scale and no longer sought the identification of real earth and yet, were as allusive as ever. When I first saw a plaster model on a working stand in the studio I immediately thought of an ancient Greek horse, perhaps on some pediment high above my sightline. And indeed, the group of sculptures to follow were called horses. But they were as ambiguous as ever and soon I would see a bended knee, a hunched torso, and other organic variants in their postures. As in the gods, these forms can not be absolutely known, but must be fully sensed. The fact that they hover on the edge of intelligibility is essential. The spectator is arrested by some resemblance and then struggles, as did the artist, to ar-

rive at definition.

One of Tucker's most astute commentators, Norbert Lynton, has pointed out that two words have long tempered Tucker's view: physicality and visibility. Works must be not just perceptible, as are all objects in our existence. They must be actively visible. Sculpture, Lynton says, is essentially "an art not for touching":

I do not mean that there may not be in sculpture an appeal to our sense of touch; I am saying that this touching must be done with our eyes and not with the body and that it is the eyes that the sculptor is addressing himself to. In other words, tangibility is the effective illusion of sculpture, just as the effective illusion of painting is space.

In the horse series, certainly tangibility is the effective illusion. What we see everywhere is the touch of the sculptor as he presses on in his instant by instant discovery of new relations and new associations. The result of the activity of his hand is what the spectator sees, or rather, what the sculptor's cunning has *made* him see--the active tense of his endeavor.

At some point the horse, or what appeared to be more horse than elbow or knee, transformed itself for the sculptor. Tucker was troubling himself about a new piece that insistently looked to him like an upside-down horse's head. After working the piece for a long time, he arrived at *Atreus*, the important precursor to his most recent *Daktyl* sculptures. In *Atreus*, once again, there is more than a hint of the Elgin marbles with which all British sculptors are acquainted. The form is anthropomorphic--perhaps a torso--and touches, or as Tucker would say, "grazes" the ground only fleetingly, unlike *Gaia* and the other gods. The nature of stability changes. Here Tucker proposes an equilibrium of forces at cross-purposes: force of gravity pulls down, force of matter struggles up.

In the most recent works of the *Daktyl* series, the tenuous equilibrium is explicitly explored. The long train of associations from the river gods of the Parthenon to Michelangelo's reclining gods inevitably stir the viewer. I suspect that Tucker has deliberately invoked these associations. *Daktyls* are not only fingers with important joints but they are endowed with a mythic origin: they were born when Cronos' wife Rhea, in labor, dug her fingers into the earth. *Daktyls* are also the "feet" in the lines of verses called dactylic in which there are one long and two short accents. (To what lengths does Tucker's associating go? Are the long horizontal axes of the *Daktyl* sculptures with their two rising ends meant to be dactylic? Does the fact that a "foot" in poetry becomes a "finger" in etymology amuse and inspire him?)



Fear, 1979-1980, steel, 7'6" x 13", Collection: Dorothy Elkon, New York

In any case, the tension and torsion in *Daktyl III* are as much the result of a complex idea as of sensuous technique. Tucker suggests the reclining god, but there is something not at all at rest, or, if at rest, certainly resting only on a miniscule invisible point beneath its rounded flanks. Again, as in the early *Arc* and *Fear*, there is a hint of rocking, but the grand curve of this figure dominates and calms. There are many points of view from which a solid, blocky inner structure can be inferred--an inner geometry that belies the outer ambiguity produced by the quiver, the peripheries that emanate from the irregular profiles.

I imagine that Tucker's long preoccupation with Brancusi, and his pilgrimage to Tirgu Jiu has had a profound influence on his current activities. In that faraway place, so far from the British Museum, Tucker found an inspiring schema. Each of Brancusi's sculptures in that park stand free and can be grasped in their solitary tangible illusion. Yet each belongs to another order that Brancusi dreamed, in which each is unto each in spacial continuum. I see Tucker's works in a similar fictive continuum. Now he makes these massed single forms, these bodily things in which his early idea of open form is opposed to what we so carelessly call a closed form. But there is paradox here: In these single pieces,



Daktyl III, 1986-1988, bronze, 24" x 32" x 22 1/2", Edition of 6, Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York

Tucker enabled himself to be wholly absorbed in the core of the thing, the heart of the matter from which his "mind's desire" follows. His centered attention is a powerful function here. Yet, even though the flanks of his new creatures breathe slowly and heave themselves up with troglodytic deliberateness into free space, they send their energies from one to the other in a kind of universe of becoming, a long tale of epic implications, unlike any other.

Dore Ashton is a critic, independent curator, professor of Art History at The Cooper Union in New York, her books include *American Art Since 1945* and *About Rothko*.

References:

Carlo Battaglia: "Recent Sculptures of William Tucker" L'Isola, Rome, 1984

Andrew Forge, "William Tucker's Sculpture 1970-73" Serpentine Gallery, London, 1973

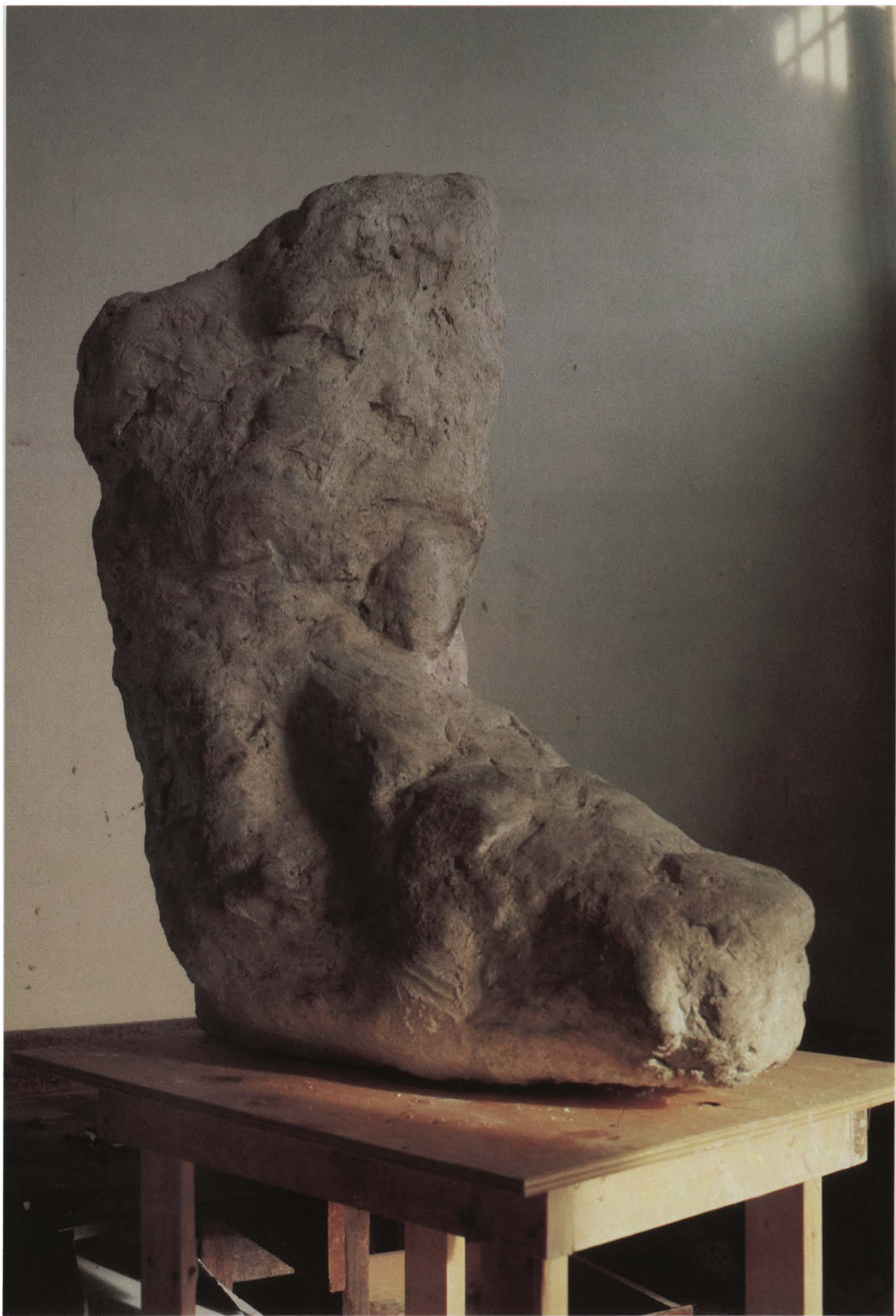
William Tucker, "The Condition of Sculpture" Hayward Gallery, 1975

Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art*, U. of Cal. Press, 1967

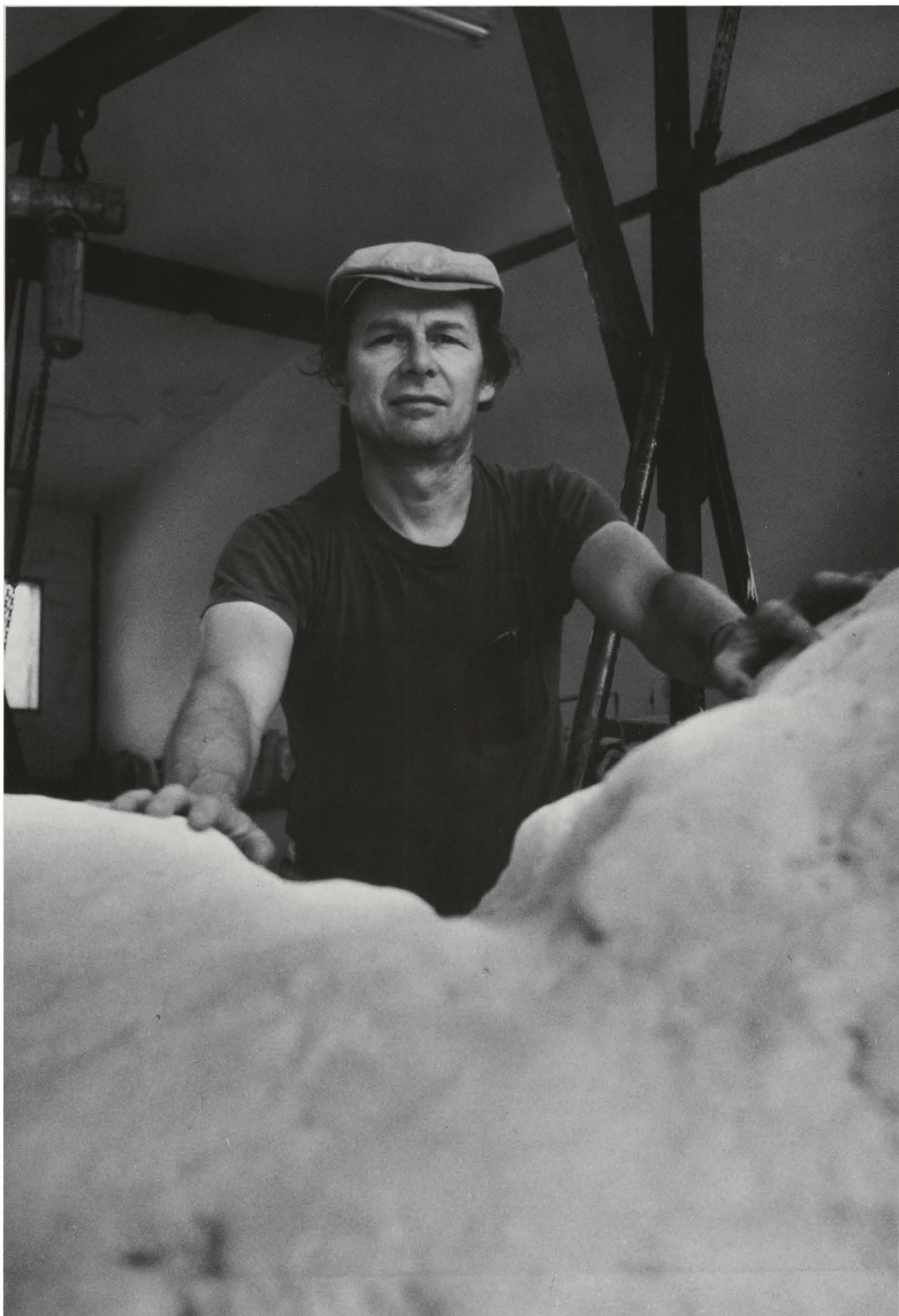
Norbert Lynton, "William Tucker's Sculptures" Arts Council of Great Britain, 1977



The Rim, 1981, steel, 14' in diameter, collection: Anne and Martin Z. Margulies, Miami



Atreus, 1987, bronze, 46 1/2" x 43" x 23", Edition of 4, Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York



William Tucker, 1988

photo credit: Edwin Avril

Interview with William Tucker

by Dahlia Morgan and William B. Humphreys

August 15, 1988

Q. Just some general questions first...I noticed that your degree from Oxford is in history. How did you come to be interested in art? Was that an early leaning or did it come later in life?

A. I was always interested in drawing, and when I was at Oxford I started to take life drawing, at the Ruskin School of Drawing, which is part of the University. And at that time, in the middle fifties, the Ruskin School was one of the few places where Americans on the GI Bill after the Korean War could study art. So there were a lot of very interesting people there. They were much more mature in their development as artists and through getting to know some of them I conceived the idea for the first time in my life that it would be possible to be an artist. I became very interested in whatever was going on in contemporary art. I used to take trips up to London frequently. On one of those trips I saw an exhibition of sculpture in Holland Park which was the first time I ever had looked at sculpture seriously. There was a show of Victorian sculpture, and a survey of contemporary British sculpture—Henry Moore and younger artists like Reg Butler and Lynn Chadwick. I was so impressed by the quality of the Henry Moore piece there, in relation to the rest of the work. The rest of the work seemed to be very accessible. I felt I could do something like that without any problem, but the Moore piece seemed to be so masterful, it was a challenge, it was an inspiration.

Q. It's interesting that one of your first experiences, in terms of your art training was to do figure drawing. Did that stand you in good stead later on when your imagery changed from more constructive pieces to what you're doing now which is definitely related?

A. At the time, there didn't seem to be any alternative in terms of thinking about sculpture, to working from the figure, there was very little abstract sculpture around and even if I'd been aware of abstraction in sculpture to start with I don't think I would have gone straight in and started to make abstract sculpture, I think times have changed a lot, in art education. I remember when I first came over to North America I was really surprised how students, who were doing courses in sculpture, had never previously modeled a figure or even a head. It was like their first experience in sculpture to make a construction.

Q. Right, it was to weld and things like that. That's my background actually so I have personal, first-hand experience of that type of education. You mentioned Moore as an influence on your work. Going back further, have you been influenced by other sculptors throughout the history of art?

A. Yes. Moore was an inspiration, I think, and has been probably until fairly recently for practically every British sculptor, just in terms of breaking out of quite a narrow provincial situation and becoming aware of sculpture in an international sense. But in terms of being a real influence on my work, hardly at all except to start with. As soon as I became aware of the possibilities of constructive sculpture, then I was influenced by Picasso, by Brancusi, by Gonzalez, by Marcel Duchamp's Ready-mades. The idea that sculpture didn't have to take the figure as its subject matter, that you could actually take any object in the environment as a starting point. And then David Smith very much. But talking about the late 50's, again, I think that I was possibly more influenced, not so much by sculptors, but by the American Abstract Expressionist painters who were being shown in Europe at that time; I was tremendously impressed the first time I saw Pollock and Clyfford Still and Motherwell and so forth.

Q. Was it their use of spontaneous gesture that influenced you?

A. Partly, but I think it wasn't really the expressionist side of their work, it was much more the kind of physical immediacy of it and its abstraction, a radical kind of abstraction. You were just confronted with the physicality of the painting itself. The pictures weren't *of* anything. The painter who was most influential at that time in Europe was inevitably Picasso. But Picasso's pictures were always *of* something so there was a degree of, however large or powerful they might be, there was a degree of distance between the painting and the spectator. That distance was totally collapsed by the experience of American painting.

Q. What is the relationship, in your work, between your drawings and your sculpture? Do you use the drawings to test the edge line or to imagine the shadow and light in relation to the texture, that type of thing?



Study for Daktyl, 1988, charcoal on paper, 60" x 50", Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York

A. I didn't really start drawing seriously for sculpture until the late 70's and I was in a studio where I couldn't physically make the constructions. It was a clean studio and I had to make the sculptures in a factory situation elsewhere. So, in order to plan the sculptures, I started to work directly on the wall, to draw the pieces out on the wall so as to figure out most of the major decisions about the proportions and so forth for the piece.

Q. Is that how you did the drawing for *Rim* that I just had sent to me?

A. Yes. Those drawings were literally elevations of the sculpture, it's very frontal sculpture. Also, they began to take on a certain amount of illusionism as well, they became more than plans, so that there was a degree of modeling involved just in order to give them a bit more reality. And then, I guess in 1980, I got a studio in Brooklyn where I could work directly on the pieces themselves so I didn't need the drawings as an intermediate area where I could work out things in advance of making the sculpture. The drawings then came down in scale and became much more concerned with the feeling of what the sculpture would be like and much more to do with light and atmosphere. But we're still talking about a time when the sculpture was basically thought of in terms of a kind of frontal, planar kind of construction. I never made drawings for the wood pieces. The wood pieces were always made much more directly. The steel pieces involved a lot of planning, so the drawings were useful in that process.

Q. The wood pieces were improvised then?

A. Much more so.

Q. And then you went through a period of having to plan things out because of the nature of the material (with the steel) and how about now in terms of working in plaster, are they more improvised now?

A. I did a lot of drawings preparatory to the first plaster pieces. But after a while I began to feel I was exhausting true possibilities of exploration of modeling, in true drawings... I deliberately stopped drawing for maybe a couple of years in order not to anticipate what was going to happen in the sculpture. The sculptures were becoming, at that point, less planar, less frontal, less architectural and much more to do with a central core; so that what started to happen was something much less predictable, as they were more fully modeled; if you would take a section through the earlier plaster pieces anywhere it would be more or less of a rectangle, but with these pieces it would be perhaps a circle, perhaps

an ellipse but in any case a much fuller form. So the drawing began to seem about a kind of planar way of looking and I wanted to get away from that. Just recently I've become more relaxed about that again and I've gone back to drawing in the last year or so occasionally, and as a way of working out very large pieces, and trying to model directly entire drawings themselves.

Q. This brings up the question of maquettes. Did you ever do them, do you do them now?

A. Sometimes. For "The Gods" series I worked from little clay lumps that were really only an inch or two high, I mean, that I could hold in the palm of my hand, or actually inside of my hand. I was trying to give the feeling that the sculpture's relation to the spectator would be the same as the sculpture to my hand. You see, I wanted that kind of complete, round, enfolding kind of feeling about it.

Q. Right. To be more inquisitive about your working methods, once you have done your little "lump," and have a sense of what you want to do, do you build an armature?

A. What has really happened in the five or six years since I have been working directly with plaster, I have become freer and less bound by any kind of planning, a kind of intellectual approach to making a sculpture. When I started, I made very solid, wooden armatures, and covered them with layers of burlap and plaster. And then built up with plaster of paris on top of that. But as time has gone by, I have used very different kinds of materials in order to make the armature less rigid, and the shell of the sculpture in plaster eventually provides its own armature. There is very little need for an internal armature once the shell really starts to build up. And so if you just have a shell there, you can make radical changes without worrying about anything inside. I will start nowadays with something quite fragile inside, like some wood lath, or even bags filled with styrofoam pieces and then put chicken wire over that and then plaster soaked in burlap on top of that. And then I build up on top of *that* with a plaster called Structolite which is a slow setting plaster that is used by masons for the rough first coat on a brick wall before applying the top coats of plaster. It has a filler of vermiculite or perlite which means that it is light and you can build up with it very thickly, and you can mix it very thick – it takes about half an hour to set up and you can mix it thick so it is like clay, and it is relatively much lighter than plaster of paris. And you have much more time to work with it.

Q. And then do you go at it with tools or your hands?

A. By and large, just hands. If I want to change the thing radically, I use an axe or a saw to cut away pieces of it when the plaster is set, and then start the same process over again with the chicken wire, and then burlap and plaster, and then Structolite.

Q. It has been about a year since I saw your work in person at the Tate. I don't exactly remember whether the touch of your hand is visible, the fingerprints, and gouges

A. I don't remember that there are fingerprints, but certainly my hand should be there. That is something I have a thing about. It disturbed me the way that sculpture had become more and more to do with tools, or with process, or just the material, and presented in a very barren, stark kind of way. I just wanted to make sculpture that was really modeled, shaped by the hands.

Q. In that regard, I would like to read you a quote that was in the Dore Ashton essay that she wrote for the catalog of your exhibition. She is quoting from Norbert Lynton and he says, "Sculpture is essentially an art not for touching." I assume he means not by the spectator, and he goes on to say, "I do not mean that there may not be in sculpture an appeal to our sense of touch I am saying that this touching must be done with our eyes and not with the body. And it is the eyes that the sculptor is addressing himself to. In other words, tangibility is the effective illusion of sculpture just as the effective illusion of painting is space." I wondered what you think about that. I had a little problem with it.

A. I went through a long period, I would say probably from the early 70's through to the early 80's, when my sculpture was very much about the difference between its physicality and its opticality. Physically it was one thing and optically it implied something else. A different kind of structure. I was very conscious of doing this – playing between the optical and the physical and creating a kind of illusion of that kind. I certainly would have subscribed to his remarks at that time. But since then, sculpture has become for me less and less to do with the optical. And that is another reason why I stopped drawing for a while. Drawing just seemed too much to do with the optical.

Q. I want to examine the sources of your imagery, and your way of going about doing a series or not doing a series. Did you plan on doing six, eight "gods" pieces, or were you just dealing with the pieces themselves first, and then the relationship of the pieces and their titles come after?

A. The titles certainly came afterward. And I didn't have any number in mind. I usually work in a group, but that often just corresponds to a year's work. There are a certain number of pieces that seem to fall within a particular period of time which also develop a theme in common.

Q. I am still trying to draw you out about the relationship to the early gods and your work. Why did you pick that?

A. Well I don't want to make too much of it. I have heard more than enough about the titles. I wanted them to have a kind of presence, which would be not ancient, but now, immediate and physical and for which the Greeks themselves had no images.

Q. How do you envision your relationship to your audience? Are you trying to communicate with them, or turn them on to something, or share anything with them? Or do you work for yourself?

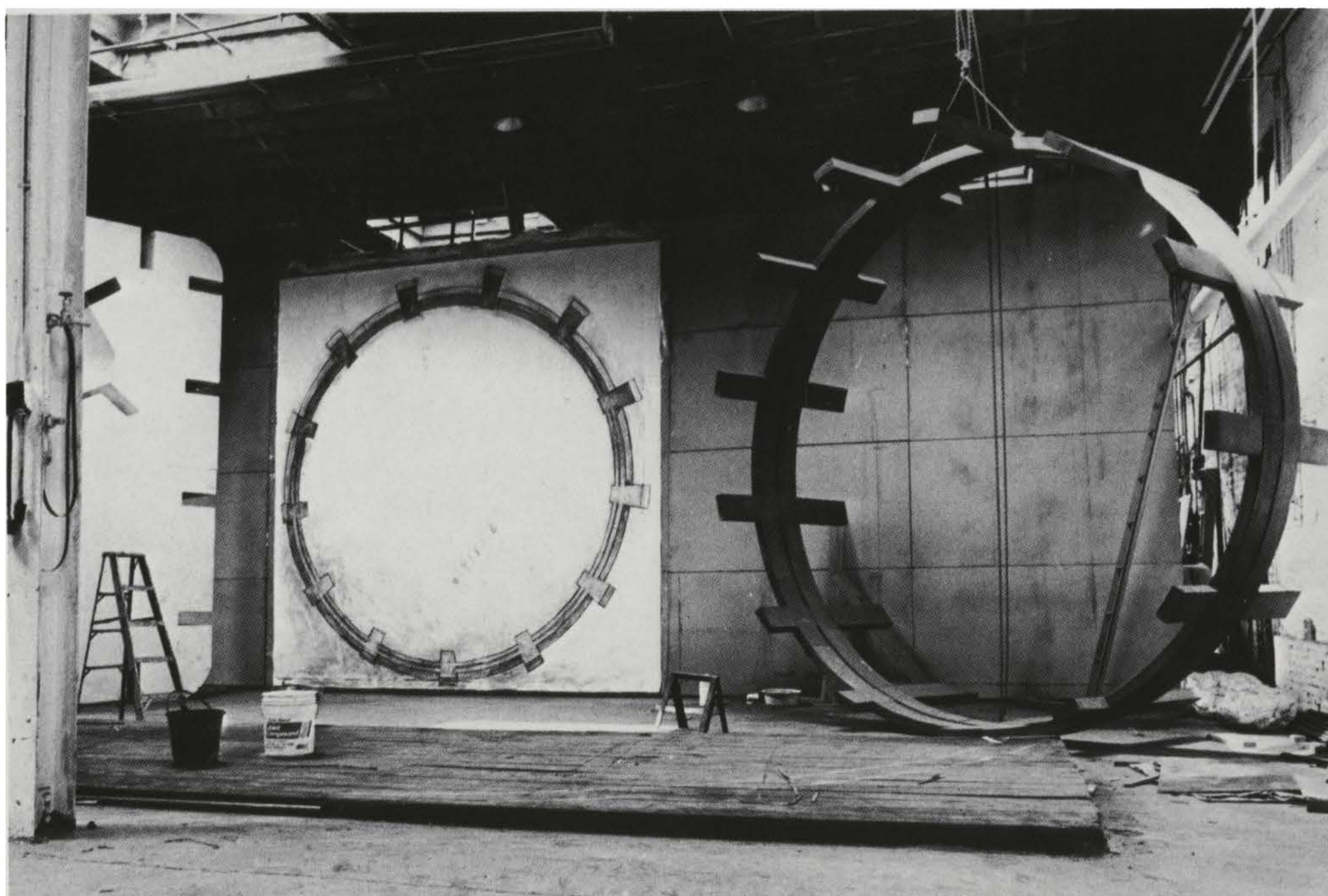
A. Everybody works for himself or herself. The audience is a very amorphous kind of quantity. There is an art audience, and then there is an audience out there somewhere, that you come in contact with, for example, if you are commissioned to do a public piece and you are asked what it is about, or what is it for, or those kinds of questions that don't enable you to hide behind the kind of alibis that artists have within the art world. The public is very anxious and eager for an explanation of something that is essentially mysterious to them.. And my feeling has changed on that. I think that it is a good thing to make things that are mysterious and there should be more mysterious things around that don't have an obvious function or explanation. Does that answer your question?

Q. Yes I am smiling. I love it – you can't see that but I am smiling.

A. I would like to put that in a more positive kind of way but find it hard without sounding pretentious about it. I think the experience of the sculpture is really diluted by explaining it. I think it is diluted by the title, even if I try to put a title on it to communicate a direct kind of experience, what happens is everyone gets off on the title and the experience may well get lost somewhere.

Q. It certainly gives critics something to write about – to connect with.

A. Absolutely!



Drawing for the Rim, 1981, charcoal on paper, 186" x 186", Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York

Q. What has been your relationship to critics, for that matter? Do you feel they have understood you?

A. Just speaking about the last few years with the kind of changes that my work has gone through, superficially at any rate, I would have thought that would have upset observers more than it seemed to have. I am pleased with how sincerely and perceptively, some critics have responded to my recent work.

Q. Do you have any other issues you'd like to address.

A. Something I have been thinking about recently is that when you are working with constructive materials such as steel, wood and so on, there is no possibility of imagery developing within the material itself. It might occur in terms of the conjunction of material, or the material itself might recall its origin and architectural

use and so forth. But what has happened in the last few years is that I have become more and more at home with plaster, not as a material with a character in itself, but as a soft substance that can be continuously modeled, but it isn't articulated by a series of separated decisions as if you were plotting and joining steel. There is something about the actual continuity of touch, of handling the material, that is very primitive, and something that isn't done much anymore. And if it has been done with the use of soft materials it is usually to give form to a pre-decided image. A figure. But to handle material so that you are handling this continuous volume gives rise to two aspects. One is the fact that you are dealing with a volume that is opaque – you can't see through it – you have to learn about it by moving around it or by putting your hands around it or by pushing the material around, so that you are working blind a lot of



Ouranos, 1985, bronze, 77" x 83" x 47", Edition of 3, Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York



Horse IX, 1986, bronze, 30" x 35" x 18", Edition of 6, Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York

time. Whereas working with the open forms of constructed materials you can see what is going on on the far side often enough, or because the material is basically rationalized, you get to *know* what is happening on the far side. There is a basic element of *not knowing* that comes about through using opaque and in itself formless materials. And the other thing is that what is intrinsic in the material is the suggestion of images. That the forms that are given to it by your working on it, inevitably starts suggesting things, or not so much things, as bodies, or parts of bodies, rocks, trees, waves, clouds, whatever. The occurrence of images is absolutely at one with the handling of the material.

Q. Talking about modeling made me think of Rodin – what is that connection?

A. I used to hate Rodin – when I first started to make constructed sculpture, Rodin was definitely “out.” I didn’t understand what he was doing – and I hated the roman-

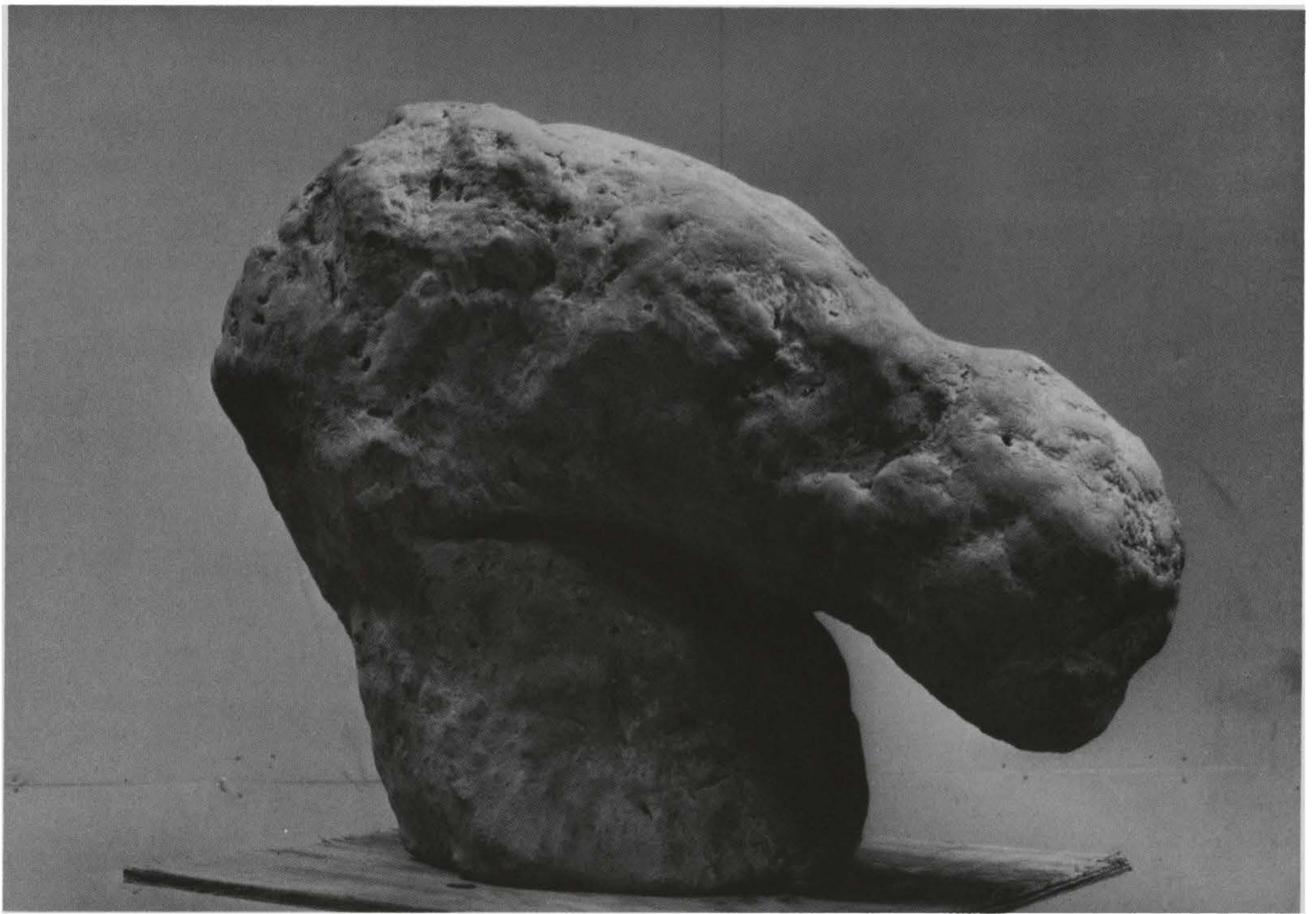
tic and melodramatic 19th century aspect of Rodin. But I saw a really wonderful Rodin show in the middle 60’s that started to turn me around – I have been getting more and more impressed with Rodin ever since.

Q. Do you consider yourself more of a romantic now?

A. Yes – I do. It is strange that when I started out, as I said at the beginning of this interview, I was very impressed by the American Abstract Expressionists who were certainly romantic. And yet, the kind of tools I had at hand at the time to make sculpture were very rational and I was working within a completely opposed tradition. So it seems what has really happened over the last twenty five years is to find a point to work comfortably within a romantic tradition in sculpture. And modeling, of course, is a way into doing that...but I don’t regret going down the road I have gone down at all. I don’t think I would have been able to get the kind of distance on it, or the understanding, to come back into where I am now.



Horse X, 1986, bronze, 35" x 36" x 21", Edition of 6, Private Collection, New York



Horse II, 1986, plaster for bronze, 24" x 14" x 31", Edition of 6, Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York



Horse III, 1986, bronze, 25" x 15" x 30", Edition of 6, Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York



Drawing for Prisoner, 1981, charcoal and acrylic on paper, 124" x 83", Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York



Horsehead, 1987, cast paper, 62" x 48" x 6", Edition of 10, Published by 3EP LTD, Santa Monica, Ca

Works In The Exhibition

Dimensions are height preceeding width.

Sculpture:

Portrait of K, 1975

wood

6'9" x 10'12" x 10"

Collection: Edward R. Broida Trust, Los Angeles

The Trap, 1976

steel

55" x 120"

Collection of the Artist, Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York

The Rim, 1981

steel

14' in diameter

Collection: Anne and Martin Z. Margulies, Miami

Fear, 1979-1980

steel

7'6" x 13"

Collection: Dorothy Elkon, New York

Guardian II, 1983

bronze, unique

74" x 27 1/2" x 57 1/2"

Collection : The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Gaia, 1985

bronze

87" x 55" x 50"

Edition of 3

Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York

Ouranos. 1985

bronze

77" x 83" x 47"

Edition of 3

Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York

Horse II, 1986

bronze

24" x 14" x 31"

Edition of 6

Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York

Horse III, 1986

bronze

25" x 15" x 30"

Edition of 6

Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York

Horse IX, 1986

bronze

30" x 35" x 18"

Edition of 6

Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York

Horse X, 1986

bronze

35" x 36" x 21"

Edition of 6

Private Collection, New York

Atreus, 1987

bronze

46 1/2" x 43" x 23"

Edition of 4

Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York

Daktyl III, 1986-1988

bronze

24" x 32" x 22 1/2"

Edition of 6

Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York

Parable II, 1980

hydrocal, wood base

12" x 32" x 26" (with base)

Collection: Anne and Martin Z. Margulies, Miami

Drawings:

Study for Guardian III, 1983

charcoal on paper

61 1/2" x 45 3/4"

Collection: Arkansas Art Center, Little Rock

Untitled, 1984

charcoal on paper

45" x 30"

Private collection, New York

Horsehead, 1987

cast paper

62" x 48" x 6"

Edition of 10

Published by 3EP LTD, Santa Monica, Ca

Study for Okeanos, 1987

charcoal on paper

60" x 46 1/2"

Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York

Untitled (Study for Sculpture), 1988

charcoal on paper

60" x 52"

Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York



Study for Okeanos, 1987, charcoal on paper, 60" x 46 1/2", Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York

Untitled (Study for Sculpture), 1988
charcoal on paper
60" x 47"
Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York

Untitled (Study for Sculpture), 1988
charcoal on paper
60" x 46 1/2"
Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York

Untitled (Study for Sculpture), 1988
charcoal on paper
60" x 50"
Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York

Study for Daktyl, 1988
charcoal on paper
60" x 54"
Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York

Study for Daktyl, 1988
charcoal on paper
60" x 50"
Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York

Drawing for Arc, 1978
charcoal on paper
106 1/2" x 360"
Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York

Drawing for Prisoner, 1981
charcoal and acrylic on paper
124" x 83"
Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York

Drawing for the Rim, 1981
charcoal on paper
186" x 186"
Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York

Study for the Promise, 1980
charcoal on paper
18" x 24"
Collection: Anne and Martin Z. Margulies, Miami

The Promise, 1982
lithograph
29 1/2" x 41 1/2"
Edition 38/40
Collection: Anne and Martin Z. Margulies, Miami

The Law, 1982
lithograph
29 1/2" x 41 1/2"
Edition 18/20
Collection: Anne and Martin Z. Margulies, Miami



Parable II, 1980, hydrocal, wood base, 12" x 32" x 26" (with base), Collection: Anne and Martin Z. Margulies, Miami



Untitled (Study for Sculpture), 1988, charcoal on paper, 60" x 52", Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York

William Tucker

Biography

1935 Born in Cairo, Egypt
 1937 Family moves to England
 1955-58 Studies at Oxford University, England
 1959-60 Studies at Central School of Art and Design
 at St. Martin's School of Art, London
 1961-62 Teaches at Goldsmith's College, London
 Teaches at St. Martin's School of Art, London
 1968-70 Receives Gregory Fellowship in Sculpture, Leeds University, London
 1973 One-man exhibition at Hamburg Kunstverein, Bochum, West Germany
 1976 Teaches at University of W. Ontario, Canada
 1978 Moves to United States
 1978-81 Teaches at New York Studio School of Painting and Sculpture, New York
 1978-82 Teaches at Columbia University, New York
 1980-81 Receives Guggenheim Fellowship
 1986 Becomes American Citizen
 Receives National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship

Lives in New York

One Man Exhibitions

1962 Grabowski Gallery, London
 1963 Rowan Gallery, London
 1965 Richard Feigen Gallery, New York
 Rowan Gallery, London
 1966 Kasmin Gallery, London
 Waddington Galleries, London
 1968 Robert Elkon Gallery, New York
 1969 Leeds City Art Gallery, (Gregory Fellow Exhibition), London
 1970 Kasmin Gallery, London
 1972 XXXVI Venice Biennale, Italy
 1973 Waddington Galleries, London
 Hamburg Kunstverein, Bochum, West Germany
 Serpentine Gallery, London

1974 Hester van Royen Gallery, London
 1976 Galerie Wintersberger, Cologne, West Germany
 1977 Robert Elkon Gallery, New York
 1978 Retrospective Exhibition, sponsored by the British Arts Council. Originated at the Fruit Market Gallery, Edinburgh and travelled throughout Great Britain
 1979 Robert Elkon Gallery, New York
 1980 David Reids Gallery, Sydney, Australia
 Robert Elkon Gallery, New York
 Powell Street Gallery, Melbourne, Australia
 1981 L'Isola Gallery, Rome, Italy
 1982 Robert Elkon Gallery, New York
 Bernard Jacobson Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
 1984 David McKee Gallery, New York
 L'Isola Gallery, Rome, Italy
 1985 Neuberger Museum, SUNY, Purchase, New York
 Pamela Auchincloss Gallery, Santa Barbara, CA
 David McKee Gallery, New York
 1987 Pamela Auchincloss Gallery, Santa Barbara, CA
 Tate Gallery, London
 Annely Juda Gallery, London
 David McKee Gallery, New York
 1988 Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, New York

Installations

1972 Peter Stuyvesant Sculpture Project, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England
 1976 *Angel*, Livingston Development Corporation, Lanark, Scotland (permanent)
 1982 *The Promise*. Grove Isle Sculpture Garden, Miami, FL (permanent)
 1982-83 *Journey*, Dag Hammarskjold Plaza, New York, NY



Gaia, 1985, bronze 87" x 55" x 50", Edition of 3 Courtesy David McKee Gallery, New York

- 1983 *Victory*, Doris C. Freedman Plaza, Fifth Avenue at 60th St., New York, NY
- 1984 *Arc and Fear*, Spring Mills Building at 104 W. 40th St., New York, NY *Guardian I*, Saint Peter's Church at Citicorp Center, New York, NY
- 1986 *Rhea*, Greenwich Plaza, Greenwich, CT (permanent)

Selected Group Installations

- 1960-61 *26 Young Sculptors*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London
- 1961 *II Biennale de Paris*, National Museum of Modern Art, Paris
- 1965 *New Generation 1965*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London *London – The New Scene*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN
- 1966 *Internationale Beeldtentoonstelling*, Sonsbeek, Holland *Eight British Sculptures*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam *Primary Sculpture*, The Jewish Museum, New York, NY
- 1967 *Sculpture in the Open Air*, London County Council, London *Guggenheim International Sculpture Exhibition*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY
- 1968 *Documenta IV*, Kassel, West Germany *Orpheus II*, 1965, exhibition of British artists, circulated by the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY *International Exhibition of Contemporary Art*, Helsinki
- 1971 *British Painting and Sculpture, 1960-61*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
- 1972 *British Sculptors*, Royal Academy, London
- 1975 *New Acquisitions: Drawings*, The British Museum, London *The Condition of Sculpture*, Hayward Gallery, London, (curated by William Tucker)
- 1976 *The Biennale of Sydney*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Australia *Arte Inglese Oggi*, Milan

- 1979 *Contemporary Sculpture*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY *Prospect Mountain Sculpture Show: A Homage to David Smith*, Lake George, New York
- 1980 *International Sculpture Conference*, Washington, DC *Contemporary British Painting and Sculpture*, Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo
- 1981 *New Work on Paper I*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY *Il Luogo della Forma*, Museo di Castelvecchio, Verona, Italy *Bronze*, Patricia Hamilton Gallery, New York, NY *British Sculpture in the 20th Century*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London
- 1983 *Monumental Drawings by Sculptors*, Hillwood Art Gallery, C.W. Post Center, Long Island University, Greenvale, NY *The Sculptural Line*, Damon Brandt Gallery, New York, NY *Artists Choose Artists II*, CDS Gallery, New York, NY *The Sculpture Show '83: Selected New Work by 50 Sculptors*, Hayward and Serpentine Galleries, London
- 1984 *Varieties of Sculptural Ideas*, Max Hutchinson Gallery, New York, NY *Drawings 1974-84*, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. *Sculptor's Drawings*, The British Council, London *The 7th Dalhousie Drawing Exhibition: Actual Size*, Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia *Seven Sculptors in America*, 1 Penn Plaza, New York, NY
- 1985 *Working in Brooklyn – Sculpture*, Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY *Transformations in Sculpture: Four Decades of American and European Art*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY
- 1986 *Recent Acquisitions*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY *Entre el Objeto y la Imagen*, Palacio de Velazquez, Madrid

Catalog Design

Terry Witherell
Art Editor, Advancement Services

Yolanda Hechavarria
Typesetter

