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A Study of Three-Dimensional Form Using Steel and Non-Ferrous Metals

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A STUDY OF THREE-DIMENSIONAL FORM
USING STEEL AND NON-FERROUS METALS

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Art
Central Washington State College

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Darell Roger Midles

July, 1970

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This past year has been a developmental period which has given me confidence and direction. Up to this time I always wondered why artists become involved with related forms. Now I have a better understanding of how this comes about. I have developed a style of my own which has helped me to channel my ideas into one direction. My work is now related; each piece suggests new forms and different approaches to form I have used in the past.

It has been said that the reason artists tend to work in related forms is that they are in a rut or not creative enough to move on to new concepts. In some cases it seems that an artist does one successful piece and afterwards keeps making related works because he is afraid to start something new which might not be as successful. However, my reasons for working in related forms is more like the minimalist's thinking in doing series, such as Jasper John's "Flags." The minimalist chooses one image and does a whole series on variations of that one image; it is a matter of exploring all possibilities or ways of looking at a theme or idea. To know one side of a person is not to know him, to see one apple is not to understand all the word "apple" connotes. One interpretation or viewing of a concept does not give total understanding of that concept.

I began working in related forms and themes in order to achieve continuity in my work. This has helped me to organize my thinking and working habits, and to develop a philosophy of art. I do not mean to say that an artist should not be broadminded about other methods of

thinking and working. Continuity in his creation and execution of forms gives the artist more insight and strengthens his work by giving it more depth. I believe this achievement is an important step in my maturation as an artist, and in the progression of my work.

Though each of my sculptures are different, they do share some of the same concepts. The first small piece, Android I, set the trend. I began thinking of my work from the bottom up. I first developed the base, then what most people would consider the sculpture is developed around the form the base takes. I include the base as part of the work, in some cases it is one of the most important parts as in the case of "Turtle." The base has become my point of departure and the element which related to all my sculpture pieces. This concept came about through many drawings and has been reinforced in the process of creating all my works this year. Each piece is strongly related to its base; but each sculpture compliments its base in a different way because of its different forms. None would work without its base.

Most of the forms I use are very mechanical. This is probably a result of my two years of working in a machine shop. Though the forms are mechanical, the imagery is anthropomorphic or biomorphic. Several of my works are reminiscent of androids, mechanical people or robots; some relate to animals. However, none of my works are meant to directly symbolize any one thing. They are merely an investigation of related forms.

Each of these works has the capacity to maintain a volume of air within its form, none of them are simple flat planes. On the

other hand, none of them can retain the same amount of volume because of the size difference.

The use of materials also relates my work. I use metal with fiberglass or plexiglass in three of my pieces. All of my works were fabricated in wax and then cast in bronze, or are fabricated through welding. Four pieces have fabricated steel shapes, three have non-ferrous cast parts, most have both.

"Android I" was my first piece, the foundation from which the others developed. It has a geometric, mechanical form; but the imagery is of man, hence the name android or mechanical man. "Android I" contrasts the solid opacity of bronze against the solid, but translucent quality of plastic. The transparency of the resin gathers objects from its surroundings and makes them part of the sculpture as they are reflected or seen through the resin. The resin also shows volume which has no boundaries; by enabling the viewer to see all the way through, it expands the size of the sculpture from twelve inches to as far as one can see when looking through it.

"Turtle" is one of the most integrated works I have completed. Its different parts--hand, shell, beak, and base--form a series of four interlocking C curves. The blue of the resin in and on the shell is repeated in the blue patina on the bronze. The forms which extend from the base are all from man or animals. The hand is connected to the shell by what resembles an armadillo's armor; the beak of a bird protrudes through the turtle shell. The base deliberately offers a strong contrast; it is geometric and as lifeless as the above forms are life-like. In this piece the base is just as important to the whole as are the forms it supports. The height of the work is one of its most

prominent features. Standing at the height of a man, its presence almost poses a threat to the viewer as it confronts him face to face, as an equal.

Michael Fried ("Art and Objecthood," Minimal Art, edited by Gregory Battcock) speaks of how the size of minimal works distances the beholder. My third piece, "When the Wind Blows," stands about twelve feet high. When the wind blows, the arms swing and it actually poses a threat to anyone who approaches it too closely while it is in motion. The threat and its height tend to distance the viewer. The wind's effect on this sculpture links it with its environment; minimal art also relies on its surroundings. This work was influenced by my study of minimal art; I do not, however, consider it to be a minimal work. The forms of this piece are mechanical, but the imagery is again android.

"Android II" relates directly to "Android I;" it is the direct descendant of the original prototype. Its forms are geometric, but its imagery is man-like. This piece also contrasts opaque bronze with transparent resin. The resin portion, in this case, looks like an electronic eye. It seems to look out through the transparent resin, but the darkness of the resin prevents the viewer from looking back. It is inscrutable.

"Suspension" reflects distorted images and colors of the viewer and other objects in its surroundings. This sculpture, like the others I have discussed here, uses the environment as part of its total expression. The figure, although human in form, creates a fictional or dreamlike quality. The reality of the bronze figure is contrasted by the dreamlike quality of its reflection in the stainless steel

sheet which supports it. The viewer's world, reflected along with the figure, becomes part of the dream.

All six of my sculptures have a science fiction, an alien-but-equal-creature quality. All seem to have a silent but challenging presence. Three gain this partially through size; three others by their human-machine quality, and the inscrutable depth created by the visual effect of the resin. Each of the six confronts the viewer in an equal manner; their presence is almost a challenge, especially in the case of the three larger works. Their presence tends to distance the beholder; they have an objecthood as in the case of minimal art.

Each of the six relates to its surroundings in a different way. The two with resin include the surroundings by reflection and transparency. "Turtle," standing at the height of the viewer, is as much a part of the surroundings as the viewer. "When the Wind Blows" relates to its surroundings through the effect the wind has on it. "Suspension" relates by way of its distorted reflection of its environment. This relation to environment is also a characteristic of minimal art.

In this discussion I have tried to show the interrelation of my sculptures, and to call the reader's attention to the mood they set. I have also discussed my feelings and thoughts about these works in order to clarify their relation to my progress. The names I have used to refer to the sculptures were only for the sake of convenience and are fictitious. I prefer to leave my work untitled.

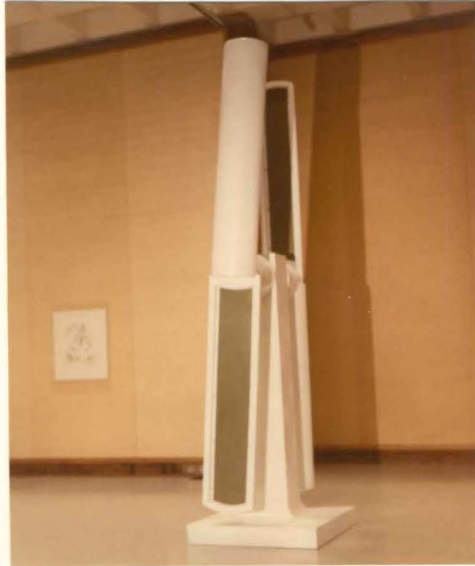
ANDROID I



TURTLE



WHEN THE WIND BLOWS



ANDROID II



SUSPENSION



UNTITLED

