



Thoughts on Sculpture

I MAJORED IN SCULPTURE AND PAINTING at Goldsmiths College of Art, London University 1962 to 1966, and I continue to maintain a keen interest in sculpture. The first recollection I have of making sculpture is of carving a female wooden torso at high school.

At Goldsmiths College I studied head and figure modeling under Ivor Roberts Jones (1913 - 1996), and made constructions in metal and wood under the instruction of sculptors Kenneth Martin (1905 - 1984) and William Tucker (1935 -). Ivor Roberts Jones taught a Rodinesque, expressive approach to life modeling. Martin was an abstract structuralist and built his sculptures largely by regular proportional movements, whereas Tucker, also an abstract sculptor, was exploring differing spatial variations of the same shape, utilizing a flat, three-dimensional, sectional and/or volumetric interpretations. Tucker's teaching approach challenged students to work by using their imagination. I recall him having us cover a newspaper ball-like shape with plaster, which he then asked us to shape to a perfect form. Having laboriously perfected this egg, he then asked us to cut it into two pieces and rejoin them. His thinking on the variables and interpretation of form had a profound influence on my development in my first year at art school. Tucker was part of the 'New Generation,' a group of British sculptors who were beginning to be widely exhibited at that time and made their debut in the U.S.A. in the early 1960s. He was also teaching at St. Martins School of Art with another 'New Generation' sculptor, Anthony Caro (1924 -). Caro's way of using steel was by far one of the most imaginative and poetic of the British sculptors at that time. I saw Caro's 1961 sculpture 'Early One Morning,' a recent acquisition by the Tate Gallery, and was enthralled by his playful use of proportions and dimensions of steel in space. Since then, I have come to know Caro and his work, and the works of Julio Gonzales (1876 - 1942), Pablo Picasso (1881 - 1973), David Smith, (1906 - 1965), Tim Scott (1937 -), and Peter Hide (1944 -). I have found the work of these artists to be stimulating and influential on my own approach to sculpture.



Goldsmiths College of Art sculptural studies.



Painted wood sculpture, 1979
36 x 48 x 40 inches (approx.)

Unfortunately, since art school I have only periodically been able to make sculpture, largely due to my having an excellent second (wooden) floor studio for painting which was not conducive to working with steel, the medium I would choose to work with.

Edmonton is home to a vital community of steel sculptors, since Peter Hide, a former student of Anthony Caro's at St. Martins College of Art, joined the staff of the University of Alberta in 1977. Well before Hide's arrival, in the early 1970s, Alan Reynolds of Edmonton, and Doug Bentham of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan were active sculptors. But the Edmonton community developed and strengthened by Hide's instruction of students, some of whom continue to develop their own practices. Clay Ellis, Ken Macklin, Isla Burns, Catherine Burgess, Sandra Bromley, Vesna Makale, Lyle Lis, Andrew French, Ryan McCourt, Rob Willms, Royden Mills, Cesar Alvarez, Kelly Joyner, Bianca Khan, Linda Maines and Mark Bellows are a few of his students I recall.

In 1978 and 1979, during the years of my separation and eventual divorce from my first wife Patricia, while running two households I had little money for paint and canvas. Inspired by a visit to the Emma lake Artist Workshop in 1979, where painter Friedel Dzubas and Museum of Modern Art NYC curator John Elderfield were the workshop leaders, I began building sculpture in wood. Dzubas was making some steel pieces and commented that my sculptures *Emma Rock* and *Emma Roll* were "Baroque". I continued for a couple of years to construct a group of wood pieces, some of which I coloured by coating them with fiberglass. Initially I painted them, but I was looking for a more permanent solution to preserving them. Some of these pieces no longer exist, or are in poor condition if they have been outdoors. The fiberglass coating was not as successful as was planned, and those that do survive are in varied condition. Many smaller pieces remain, in good condition, mostly painted and uncoated with fiberglass.

I worked in a constructivist manner, mainly with volumes, assembled from commercial wood sections and found natural wood shapes. These elements afforded me a vocabulary of organic and geometric proportions on which I used colour as a generally transformative, interpretive and unifying element. I applied one colour all over and then painted in variations to unify the forms. This process of using colour to unify three-dimensional movements is the same principle that I have been using in my illusionistic paintings since 2000. In both my sculpture and my paintings, the optical push and pull, and the figure ground relationship of colour are a means to explore and increase the expressive range of the work. The shading and modeling, absent for so long in abstraction, offered new possibilities for associative imagery in abstraction.



Emma Roll 1979
Painted wood sculpture 26 x 54 x 18 inches (approx.)



Thupelo Black One 1987
78 x 40 x 24 inches*
Painted steel

Thupelo White One 1987
76 x 45 x 26 inches*
Painted steel

When I taught Art Fundamentals courses to first year students (1969-1990), I found the teaching of introductory sculpture to be engaging. Working with such students was a fulfilling experience, as I was able to address with them the basic elements of three-dimensional form: linear, planar and volume, and sculpture in the round.

In 1987, I was invited to be the workshop leader in Johannesburg, South Africa for the Thupelo Workshop, organized by William Ainsley, Director of the Johannesburg Art Foundation. Ainsley was himself a painter who, together with his wife Feeka, offered multiracial classes. They were pioneers in art education in South Africa. While at that workshop, I made a group of steel sculptures (pages 384-385). These sculptures were inspired by scrap steel I found at that local yard. The steel suggested a collage approach, using cut out sections of steel sheet plate, regular steel sections, and irregular molded steel. I based these sculptures on a vertical movement of the figure, similar to the sculpture I made later for the 'Edmonton Sculpture by Invitation' exhibition at the Edmonton Court House in 1987, entitled *The Juggler* (page 386).



Thupelo Black One 1987
78 x 40 x 24 inches*
Painted steel

I find the additive and subtractive assembly process that is possible in welded steel sculpture allows me to build spontaneously and discover new forms during the construction process. Unlike painting, which tends to be a cumulative and additive process that rarely allows for undetectable subtraction, sculpture in the constructivist mode grants such a freedom of subtraction, which, as a process working, I find to be potentially revealing.

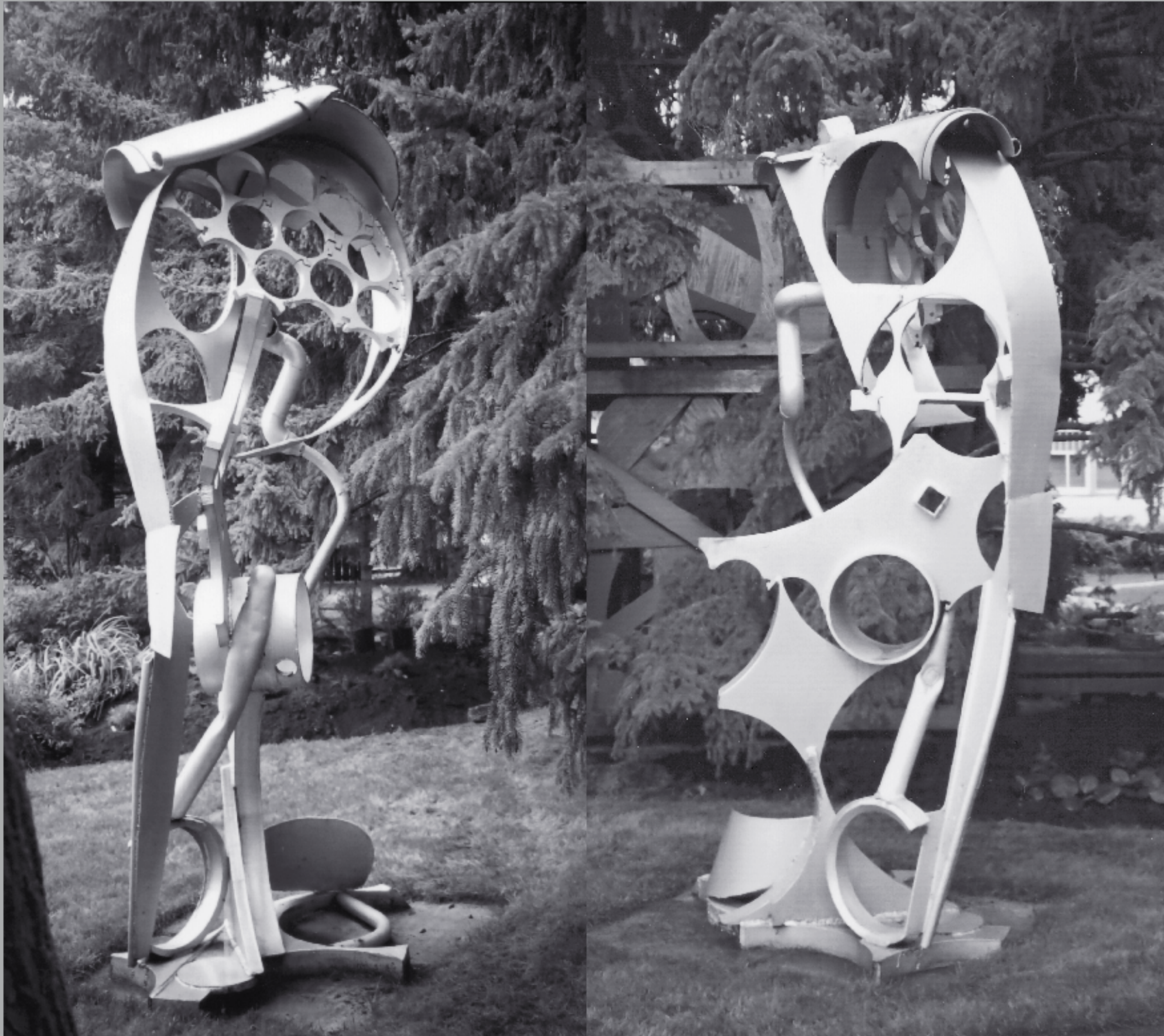
I would like to make more sculpture. Sculpture allows me to explore a depth of physical dimension that I can only allude to in painting. I find that working with this three-dimensional reality engages my senses and my personal need to make things. I like to garden, landscape, and design and renovate houses, and wanted at one point to be an architect. I make sculpture, as I do painting, for self-revelation, and to satisfy my need to visualize and create. I see in nature a life force that parallels my self-understanding and provides stimulus to the nature of my own invention. I am nature, bound by my culture and human condition, which I express in my art. I hope others will find my work stimulating.



Thupelo Two 1987
70 x 38 x 20 inches*
Painted steel



Thupelo Three 1987
72 x 43 x 18 inches*
Painted steel



The Juggler 1987
144 x 42 x 48 inches*
Painted steel

* size is approximate