

THE REEMERGENT FIGURE

SEVEN SCULPTORS AT STORM KING ART CENTER

MAY 20—OCTOBER 31, 1987



Foreword

The subject of our exhibition this season is figurative sculpture created within the past decade. Many individuals in the art world—artists and collectors, critics and historians—have recently shown renewed interest in figurative expressions. This exhibition surveys the sculpture of seven prominent artists. They draw on varied aesthetics, reflecting their international experiences and use of a range of materials from fibers to bronze and lead.

The generosity of the artists and lenders has made this show possible. We are grateful for their enthusiasm and support, and extend a special thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Warren Adelson; Salvador Ala and Caroline Martin; The Baltimore Museum of Art; Paula Cooper; Xavier Fourcade; Samuel and Ronni Heyman; Mr. and Mrs. William Mack; Thomas Segal; Gian Enzo Sperone; Allan Stone; and Angela Westwater.

David Collens, director of Storm King Art Center, organized the show, selected the objects, and planned the installation. We are indebted to Cynthia Hazen Polsky, vice-president of the art center, for her assistance with this exhibition. Art critic Suzi Gablik has written a provocative essay which takes into consideration the diversity of contemporary figurative sculpture. Greer Allen deserves praise for his sensitive design of this publication. Finally, thanks go to Linda Steigleder, assistant director, who was involved with all aspects of the exhibition, as well as to the rest of the staff.

H. Peter Stern

President

Cover

Antony Gormley *Land, Sea, and Air II, 1982-83*

Copyright © 1987

Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, New York 10953

Joel Shapiro *Untitled, 1985-86*



Evocations of the Dream Body

By Suzi Gablik

K U B L A I K H A N: I do not know when you have had time to visit all the countries you describe to me. It seems to me you have never moved from this garden.

M A R C O P O L O: Everything I see and do assumes meaning in a mental space where the same calm reigns as here, the same penumbra, the same silence streaked by the rustling of leaves. At the moment when I concentrate and reflect, I find myself again, always, in this garden, at this hour of the evening in your august presence, though I continue, without a moment's pause, moving up a river green with crocodiles or counting the barrels of salted fish being lowered into the hold.

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

A true change of worlds, the Yaqui Indian sorcerer Don Juan tells the anthropologist Carlos Castaneda in *The Fire from Within*, happens only when the assemblage point moves into a crucial threshold where seeing is not done with the eyes, it is alignment. Provided the seer has enough energy to sustain the force of alignment, he is able to hook another great band of emanations and consequently to perceive other worlds. This means that once the assemblage point (which has a fixed position) moves beyond a certain limit, it can assemble worlds entirely different from the world we know. But if your belief system comes from a mind-set that discounts all such phenomena and makes the idea of other worlds unthinkable, then you have the life situation of modern man, who has left the realm of the unknown and the mysterious and settled down in the realm of the functional, where the comprehension that our total awareness is multidimensional, participating simultaneously in many reality systems, has become irrelevant and superfluous. In the modern world view, the mind has become hostage to a drastically reduced vision of reality, structured by a cognitive interest in prediction and control. The world as an emanation of spirit, of visionary powers and archetypes and animated possibilities, is not congruent with the world of mechanization, which requires matter-of-factness as the prevailing attitude of mind. This disillusioning effect of the modern world view is not simply a matter of the intellect, it is woven into the very fabric of consciousness itself. The writer Flaubert, for instance, tells how as a child he had a forewarning of life as a "nauseous

smell escaping from a vent;" he boasted sadly that he had come into the world bored and that there was neither cure nor explanation for boredom; it was torture for him to have to eat, to dress or to stand on his feet. Modern consciousness accepts the idea that the human condition is essentially one of alienation—that this is modern man's defect. That the world has lost its power to enchant is understood as the psychic catastrophe of the modern soul.

How long this shrinkage in the scope of human experience can remain plausible is debatable, but the spirit of our times is definitely one of deconstruction rather than reconstruction. In the face of the radically relativizing, unmasking, delegitimizing character of postmodern consciousness, the question of what we are going to do about it asserts itself in almost pristine simplicity. "Everyone seems to be saying 'I am setting up a new stage,'" writes the poststructuralist critic Jean Baudrillard, "but in this space, in this new light, no one will ever move, there will be no play." Because the instinct for transcendence has been suppressed in our culture, we have lost our visioning capacity; we have lost the ability to "dream forward." "The problem is nothing," states Joseph Campbell, "if not that of rendering the modern world spiritually significant." Postmodern sensibility is wary of higher synthesis and reconciliations, but the choice now seems to be to advance to the frontier where we can again glimpse our transcendence, or else to remain entangled forever in our disillusionment.

There are some artists, however, who seem poised as if for a moment of intense revelation—for whom negation and faith stand as if balanced on the tip of a question mark. They are the metaphysical rebels, who attack a shattered world in order to demand unity from it. No longer addressing purely plastic issues in their work and radically questioning the modernist theory and definition of sculpture, the shift in orientation that they are manifesting in this exhibition is definable as the recovery of a more archaic figuration that is, on the whole, interior, wishful, imaginal. Concerned with the possibility of mythic thinking in our present situation, they seem to be asking whether such thinking is possible at all today and if so, in what way.



Antony Gormley, whose silent, concentrated figures are made by casting his own body, says, "For me, sculpture uses physical means to talk about the spirit, to refer to things that cannot be seen. . . . I use the whole body as if it were a face. Gestures have to involve the whole body." Frozen in states of witnessing or waiting or praying, Gormley's figures seem enraptured, as though undertaking to penetrate all the enigmas of the universe. Within a year having come to the skeleton and the eyelids, fearful lest by some means they find themselves to be a mere simulacrum—a projection of another man's dream—each day they increase the number of hours dedicated to dreaming.

Magdalena Abakanowicz's *Backs* exude the same devotional intensity, a deeper cognition beneath the surface of ordinary awareness. Spellbound, mute, imagining identical rites perhaps in other circular ruins somewhere, they are threshold figures, functioning in two worlds at once: temporal in the human appeal of their figurative denotations, while at the same time opening to eternity, grounded in a dreamlike and mythological realm beyond space and time. We are set apart from each other, they seem to say from that timeless zone, and yet we yearn for the harmony from which we are cast out, for the profound insights and forces of our depth-consciousness, which the ancients evoked through trance-like states, meditation and religious rituals. Sometimes, according to Abakanowicz, people come and sit down next to the sculptures on the ground. And for all those who can live only in an atmosphere of human dialogue, this silence is the end of the world.

Sandro Chia's *Boy with Ram* was looking for his twin when he was separated from the umbilical cord by which he was attached in the collar bone. Having exhausted all supplications to the deities of the earth, he threw himself across the ram's body and implored its unknown help. That evening, at twilight, he dreamt of the statue. He dreamt it was alive, tremulous, a creature of flesh and blood.

In Richard Rosenblum's sculpture *Manscape*, made from the roots of dead trees, the figure of a man becomes a walking landscape. The rational mind, geared to a subject-object model of cognition and action, creates alienation, for alienation is a peculiar form of detachment, of distancing. Uprootedness is part of modern alienation; salvation means belonging, *rerooting* ourselves in the cosmos. In *Man-*

scape, the boundary between self and world dissolves, until everything exists in a state of radical interpenetration and the universe—no longer external to ourselves as indifferent bystanders—becomes almost intolerable it is so rich and bright. As with Gormley's isolated figures, and Joel Shapiro's gesticulating oblongs, in Rosenblum's work there is this subtle awakening to ecstasy; tilting, balancing on a single leg, big toes nervously arched in an ever spreading network of diverging, converging and parallel moments, *Ponygirl* can see through the earth's eyes. It would be easy to mistake the rhythmical, geometric movements of Joel Shapiro's untitled bronzes for a kind of minimalist abstraction, but there is some kind of soul-process, some thrust into life actualizing the human self, which is incarnating here. The soul is attracted to these experiences, and will, consciously or unconsciously, find itself involved in them again and again.

What is it in our technological and social environment that leads to alienation? Can alienation be overcome? Can we do more than just complain about it? It is by evading anxiety that we convert it into unawares, to neurotic forms, which return to haunt us. Jonathan Borofsky's chattering men (sharp, mocking, indifferent to the other's three-sided reply) are archetypal for the person who acts and feels like an automaton, whose meaningless chatter has replaced communicative speech. If man lives under conditions which are contrary to his nature, he cannot help reacting.

How can we give our culture back its myths, its dreams that have been stripped away, breathe life into the ancient archetypes? By shifting emphasis from the rational sphere of ideation to the more obscure, subliminal depths out of which dreams arise, the locus of the soul or psyche. The dreamer's being invades what it touches, diffuses into the world. "In a cellar at dawn," we can almost hear the squat ancestral figure brandishing a scythe in *Dreamers Awake* created by Tom Otterness, "I have severed the jugular vein of sacred bulls against a black rock. During the lunar year, I have been declared invisible. I shrieked and was not heard, I stole my bread and was not decapitated. The purpose which guided me was not impossible, though supernatural. I wanted to dream a man; I wanted to dream him in minute entirety and impose him on reality."



Magdalena Abakanowicz

The fact is that Western culture is unbalanced, and seems to be at a stage where the conflict between these opposing states of consciousness is rapidly reaching a climax. It is the artist, when all is said and done, who brings the dream images of a mythology to manifestation. It is the artist who can contribute to the rediscovery of ecstasy and metaphysics as crucial dimensions of human life. As soon as we begin to shed our cultural conditioning, geared to domination, control and self-preservation, it becomes apparent there are other levels of consciousness beyond the taken-for-granted world of ordinary reality. To suppose that the neurology of consciousness is set for all time in the rational hemisphere of our brain is a mistake; different organizations may be possible in the future with a more mediated harmony between the two modes of thinking. The sickness of our time is not the absence of mythic vision, which is ever present in the unconscious, but the stubborn denial that it exists—or has any meaning. Our situation is not an inexorable fate, however, and the framework of implicit assumptions that are characteristic of modernity is not the absolute it presents itself as. If it is true that in the world view of disenchanting, scientific rationality the mind has become hostage to a selective vision of reality, then the misgivings of modern culture may yet end abruptly; but not without some forewarning. The delusion that matter is solid has already been broken; presently, it is the consciousness of man that is undergoing dramatic change. "With relief, with humiliation, with terror," writes Jorge Luis Borges, "he understood that he also was an illusion, that someone else was dreaming him." The signals of transcendence are beginning to appear.

Born Falenty, Poland, 1930

Educated at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts

Lives and works in Warsaw;

teaches at the University of Fine Arts, Polzan

Magdalena Abakanowicz grew up in Nazi-occupied Poland, leaving her with a keen concern for politics and humanity. She studied painting and drawing, then in the early 1960s turned to fibers and sculpture. Her large-scale hollow figures are molded from plaster casts using common burlap, cotton gauze, nylon, horsehair, hemp, flax, and sisal stiffened with resin and glue. Devoid of appendages, these figures suggest the cycle of man's life from fetus to old age, birth to death. As in other works, the artist has imbued *Backs* with a cautious optimism about the human condition and the effects of forces such as science and religion.

Backs 1976-82

Eighty figures in three sizes: 24 x 19 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 21 $\frac{3}{8}$;

27 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 22 x 26; and 28 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 23 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 27 $\frac{1}{4}$ in.

Lent by Xavier Fourcade, Inc., New York



Jonathan Borofsky

Born Boston, Massachusetts, 1942

Educated at Carnegie-Mellon University
and Yale School of Art and Architecture

Lives and works in New York

Borofsky makes paintings, sculptures, and whole environments that expose the cultural violence, political issues, and social anxieties of our age. The artist is best known for his "chattering" men—cast aluminum male figures, often equipped with mechanized parts and voices. Certain themes are repeated in his work, such as the man with a briefcase and the running man. In these images, Borofsky strips man of overlays and points up what is humorous, ironic, or untenable about the average daily routine.

Spinning Figure 8 with Three Chattering Men 1986

Aluminum tubing, motor cable, wood primer, bondo,
electric motor, and speaker

Figure 8: 96 x 48 x 12 in.

Three men, each: 82½ x 24 x 13 in.

Lent by Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

Head in the Trees 1986-87

Enamel on aluminum

40½ x 69½ x 7⅞ in.

Lent by Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

Sandro Chia

Born Florence, Italy, 1946

Educated at the Istituto d'arte
and the Accademia di Belle Arti

Lives and works in Rome and New York

Sandro Chia is known for both his neo-expressionist paintings and robust sculptures. The bronze sculptures are large with sensuous, molded surfaces. His imagery is rich, primarily based on emotional and personal experiences; objective interpretations of the human figure are combined with imaginary and allegorical themes. Many works convey a sense of pathos and explore the relationship between fathers and sons. In *Twins' Father*, the artist seemingly draws on the legend of Romulus and Remus, twin sons of the Roman war god Mars; however, Chia takes liberties with this allegorical antecedent and relies heavily on his own highly-charged fantasy world.

Boy with Ram 1983

Painted bronze

60 x 26 x 36 in.

Lent by Sperone Westwater, New York

Dionysus 1983

Bronze

108 x 48 x 48 in.

Lent by the artist

Reflective Man 1985

Bronze

70 x 48 x 48 in.

Lent by the artist

Twins' Father 1986

Bronze

67 x 19 x 17½ in.

Lent by the artist



Antony Gormley

Born London, England, 1950

Studied at the Slade School of Art

Lives and works in London

Antony Gormley molds lifesize hollow figures out of sheets of lead. Each figure is naked, without detail, except for a web of soldered lines that serve as a frame of reference for the form within space just as axes do on a globe of the world. For Gormley, the body is a vehicle for exploring human nature and the meaning of existence. In *Land, Sea, and Air II* three figures pose in fetal, kneeling, and standing positions. Their eyes, noses, and ears are open, emphasizing the fact that the skin is a shell; simultaneously the openings serve as passages for the inner self to communicate with otherworldly realms. Gormley's figures are metaphors for spiritual not material or emotional themes.

Land, Sea, and Air II 1982-83

Lead and fiberglass

Land: 17¾ x 40½ x 21 in.

Sea: 75 x 19½ x 12½ in.

Air: 46½ x 27 x 20½ in.

Lent by Samuel and Ronnie Heyman, Connecticut

View 1985

Terra-cotta, plaster, fiberglass, and air

Figure: 19 x 20½ x 41 in.

Pot: 19½ x 20 x 48 in.

Lent by Salvatore Ala and Caroline Martin, New York

Sound 1985-86

Lead, fiberglass, air, plaster, and water

76¾ x 29½ x 19 in.

Lent by Mr. and Mrs. William Mack, New York

Tom Otterness

Born Wichita, Kansas, 1952

Studied at the Art Students League

Lives and works in New York

Inspired by mythology, folklore, and popular culture, Tom Otterness creates decorative lattice screens in addition to his well-known robot-like figures such as *Dreamers Awake*, exhibited here for the first time. The almost life-size robots, cast in bronze with moveable parts, appear simplistic and playful but upon closer examination they reveal complex narratives about love, death, and time. *The Annunciation* has an unusual genesis; it is a permutation of earlier pieces called *Adam and Eve* and *Untitled* with the male and female assuming three different configurations. Otterness has changed the arrangement and roles of these protagonists to invoke and celebrate various historical and popular themes.

The Annunciation 1985-86

Bronze and cement

Female: 60 x 60 x 32 in.

Male: 39 x 30 x 32 in.

Lent by Brooke Alexander, New York

Animal Lattice 1986

Cast bronze

120 x 36 x 12 in.

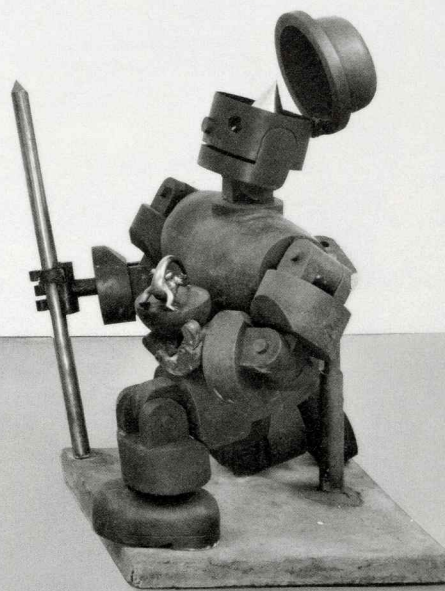
Lent by Brooke Alexander, New York

Dreamers Awake 1986-87

Cast bronze

30 x 51 x 43 in.

Lent by Brooke Alexander, New York



Richard Rosenblum

Born New Orleans, Louisiana, 1940

Educated at Cranbrook Academy of Art, Cleveland Institute of Art, and California School of Fine Arts; studied anatomical dissection at Harvard Medical School

Lives and works in Newton, Massachusetts

To make sculpture, Richard Rosenblum begins with gnarled roots and trunks of trees that suggest archetypal characters. He alters the found parts and assembles abstract figures; the final forms are cast in bronze or epoxy. These massive creatures, despite their wrinkled and pitted surfaces, are lyrical, awesome, and unique in that they combine landscape and the human figure.

Manscape 1984-85

Bronze

96 x 72 x 36 in.

Private Collection

Ponygirl 1985

Wood

70 x 55 x 31 in.

Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Warren Adelson

African Medicine 1986

Bronze

16 x 9 x 5 in.

Lent by Allan Stone, New York

Brickbottom 1986

Bronze

84 x 65 x 31 in.

Lent by Allan Stone Gallery, New York

Joel Shapiro

Born New York, New York, 1941

Educated at New York University

Lives and works in New York

Critics have credited Joel Shapiro with helping to reintroduce the human figure into contemporary sculpture. Shapiro's work derives from minimalism, but incorporates narrative elements such as representation, drama, and autobiography that were rejected by minimalist artists of the 1960s and 1970s. His abstract assemblages of rectangular solids and other geometric forms merely suggest parts of the human body. Many of these boxy featureless forms are frozen in space amid dance routines or other action: some wave their arms or kick their legs, others stretch or dive. Until recently, Shapiro's pieces have not been large-scale, but because of their density and use of negative space they have always commanded sizeable viewing areas.

Untitled 1982-85

Bronze

53¼ x 58 x 42 in.

Lent by Thomas Segal Gallery, Boston

Untitled 1985

Bronze

117½ x 132 x 72 in.

Lent by The Baltimore Museum of Art: Ryda and Robert H. Levi Sculpture Garden Fund

Untitled 1985-86

Bronze

168 x 145 x 130 in.

Lent by Paul Cooper Gallery, New York

Untitled 1986

Bronze

19¾ x 27 x 14 in.

Lent by the artist

Untitled 1986

Bronze

32¾ x 47 x 46¼ in.

Lent by the artist



