

# COMPLEX VISIONS

Sculpture and Drawings

by

**Alice Aycock**

Storm King Art Center

May 21–October 31, 1990



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Storm King Art Center  
Mountainville  
New York



## Acknowledgements

This season Storm King Art Center celebrates its thirtieth year. To commemorate this very special anniversary, the Board of Trustees and staff are delighted to present *Complex Visions: Sculpture and Drawings by Alice Aycock*. This exhibition is an important overview of the artist's key works, spanning nearly twenty years from Aycock's mythic architectural scenerios and mixed-media installations to her recent complex models of the universe.

Alice Aycock is a sculptor of singular imagination, a pivotal figure in the field of contemporary art. Her major thirty-two-foot-high outdoor work, *Three-Fold Manifestation II*, was a 1987 gift from the artist to the Art Center's permanent collection. This sculpture and the other works in the exhibition, including three additional large-scale outdoor installations, are compelling examples of Aycock's continuing exploration of science, ideology, and the human mind. Her fascination with enigmatic cultural systems—of thought, belief, and technology—is translated into sculpture and drawings that are visually and physically complex, multi-referential, and open to interpretation.

This exhibition was realized, in part, with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts. Major contributions to the exhibition were made by James H. Ottaway, Jr., and the Ralph E. Ogden Foundation. Additional support was provided by an anonymous donor. The reconstruction by Alice Aycock of the 1973 site-specific sculpture, *Low Building With Dirt Roof (For Mary)*, was made possible by a grant from the Lannan Foundation, Los Angeles.

Sincere thanks to these outside sources for their generous support. Storm King Art Center is indebted as well to a number of individuals for their generosity and efforts, foremost among them the artist herself. Without her help and cooperation this exhibition could not have been realized. We express warm thanks to all lenders to the exhibition: Alice Aycock; The Brooklyn Museum; Allen Logerquist; Henry S. McNeil, Jr.; the Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University; the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, University of Nebraska-Lincoln; Martin Sklar; Thomas Schulte, Joyce Nereaux, and John Weber of the John Weber Gallery; and a private collector in New York City.

Special thanks are extended to other individuals whose involvement has been critical to the development of the project. David R. Collens, director of Storm King Art Center, curated and installed the exhibition. Wise counsel and support came from our Trustee and vice-president, Cynthia Hazen Polsky. For the exhibition catalogue, Jonathan Fineberg, professor of art history at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, has contributed an in-depth interview with the artist and an insightful essay. Maureen Megerian, associate curator of Storm King Art Center, has written a thoughtful introduction. I recognize and thank the entire staff at Storm King Art Center for their dedication to all aspects of *Complex Visions: Sculpture and Drawings by Alice Aycock*.

H. Peter Stern  
President

## Introduction

By Maureen Megerian

In the south fields of Storm King Art Center, a distanced view from the central hilltop, Alice Aycock's *Three-Fold Manifestation II* rises majestically from the ground. A monumental sculpture thirty-two feet in height, this work holds its own, visually and physically, as part of the Art Center's collection of large-scale sculpture by other such noted American artists of the post-1945 era as Alexander Calder, Mark di Suvero, Alexander Liberman, and Louise Nevelson. But this exemplary, recent work by Aycock stands out in several ways in this collection, of which the primary strength is bold, space-consuming steel sculptures inspired by the legacy of David Smith. Its painted white surface, for example, is strikingly unique, its intricate structure appears both sturdy and ethereal, and its overall presence makes vivid formal allusions. Does the work suggest stacked, tipped amphitheaters, the shape of DNA, a metaphorical wedding cake?

The proliferation of Aycock's artworks on the Art Center's grounds prompts additional comparisons, analogies, and responses. Sculpture is Aycock's primary medium, but because her concerns are with issues that are more than simply sculptural, her work creates an especially dynamic and contemporary dimension in this landscape. Aycock came to prominence in the American art world on the heels of the aesthetic dominance of minimalism, during the 1970s when emerging artists were making far-ranging formal and conceptual investigations. While Aycock's

work embraces certain minimalist tendencies it also embodies aspects of conceptual art, earth art, and performance and body art, thus encouraging a wider interpretation than much of abstract, monolithic post-war sculpture. Aycocock's free-standing sculptural objects are not often simply configured or easily visually understood. She appreciates abstraction and clean, geometric forms not as formal elements in themselves but often in constructions that are deceivingly wondrous and/or baffling. Her early important architectural and landscape-oriented projects are seminal to the development of contemporary outdoor sculpture. Drawings are also an integral part of the artist's production, a medium where fanciful, often complicated ideas are first approached and sometimes most completely realized.

All of Aycocock's work is informed by a quirky sensibility. Her voracious fascination with history and culture is correlated with the workings of her mind. It is her wily insistence that these realms are intricately connected. The artist's interests encompass a wealth of world knowledge, but specific influences and references found in her work include ancient civilizations, medieval and Renaissance architecture, the Industrial Revolution, and modern physics. Many works concurrently explore personal and familial fears and fantasies among them feelings of shelter and confinement and a captivation with human flight and time travel. As Jonathan Fineberg explains in his essay, the subject of Aycocock's

art is not so much her myriad sources and allusions as it is her own mental processes—the wrapping of her mind around manifold concepts and the visual and physical translation of her own systems of thought.

Aycocock's ambitious projects have tremendous visual, emotional, and conceptual power that derives, at least in part, from their great potential for spectator engagement. Her pool of references and her manipulation of them presupposes her work's openness to interpretation by the viewer. In early pieces, such as *Low Building With Dirt Roof (For Mary)* and *The Machine That Makes the World*, viewers could physically enter the space of works that in turn accorded them a temporal, theatrical dimension. More recent sculptures, although allowing for less actual physical interaction, encourage a psychic involvement as viewers project their own imaginations into the object's labyrinthine interstices. This artist does not hold a viewer at bay.

Alice Aycocock's art is highly acclaimed and has been widely exhibited internationally, yet Storm King Art Center has the privilege of presenting the first major exhibition of selected works of the artist in an American museum. This exemplary selection, *Complex Visions: Sculpture and Drawings by Alice Aycocock*, is indeed cause for wonder and celebration.



Fig. 1. Eunice Winkless' Dive Into a Pool of Water, Pueblo, Colorado, July 4, 1905.

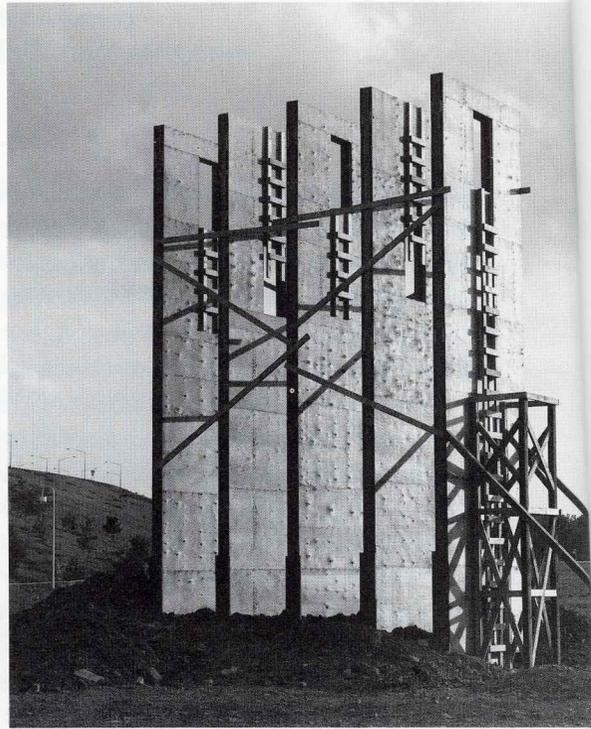


Fig. 2. *The Beginnings of a Complex. . . Excerpt Shaft #4/Five Walls, 1977. Art Park, Lewiston, New York (destroyed).* Photo: A. Aycok.

## Alice Aycock, Reflections on Her Work

An Interview

with Jonathan Fineberg

"Part One" of this conversation took place while viewing slides of the artist's work in February 1982 at the College Art Association meeting in New York City during a session called "Issues of Intention: Three Artists" [organized by Dr. Fineberg]. Alice Aycock and I recorded "Part Two," in December of 1989, looking through reproductions and drawings in the studio. We have kept the two interviews separate so as to preserve what they might suggest of the evolution in the artist's thought over the intervening seven years.

### Recorded in 1982:

**Alice Aycock** I was sitting one day playing with my postcards and I put four postcards together which indicate some of the ideas that I've been involved with in my recent work. It's a little difficult for me to explain these ideas to you; they are about sensations, images, and feelings. The first image is of a fifteenth century Italian painting from Siena. It's an angel of the annunciation and I became intrigued with this angel because of the position of its body—it appeared to be levitating. I began to think a lot about the Middle Ages and why it was that so many of the figures seem to be off the ground as though they were just hovering; they weren't walking normally. It seemed as though they were not confined by the laws of gravity as we are. And more and more as I would think about these things I would also think about the Industrial Revolution for some reason. I began to ask myself 'Why did the Industrial Revolution come about?' 'Why did

science develop?' and 'How did it develop out of a system of thought that was so illogical, that had turned its back on causality, that involved magical thinking?' 'How did we get from one place to another?'

The second postcard is a nineteenth century photograph showing a man in mid-air, leaping from one rock to the next. It seemed to me that he was definitely attempting to leave the normal conditions of the world, which have to do with conforming to gravity. I felt that the Middle Ages were involved with desire, with wishing, with imagining, with trying desperately to do something which had to do with levitation or flight. But it could be called a 'state of desire,' which was a state I could identify with as I was attempting to make my art, to push it farther than I could actually go, to get somewhere that I hadn't quite thought of yet.

The third is another photograph from the early twentieth century [figure 1]. It's of a woman named Eunice Winkless who went from town to town and she leapt from a scaffold on a horse into a pool of water. That was her act. Once again it seemed to me that this was attempting to defy gravity, an individual trying to leave the ground and fly through the air like a bird.

My fourth picture shows Wilbur Wright on the glider test that preceded the first flight. It seemed to me that there was a strong relationship between the position of Wilbur's body on that glider and the position of the angel's body in the air. These are specific examples of some general

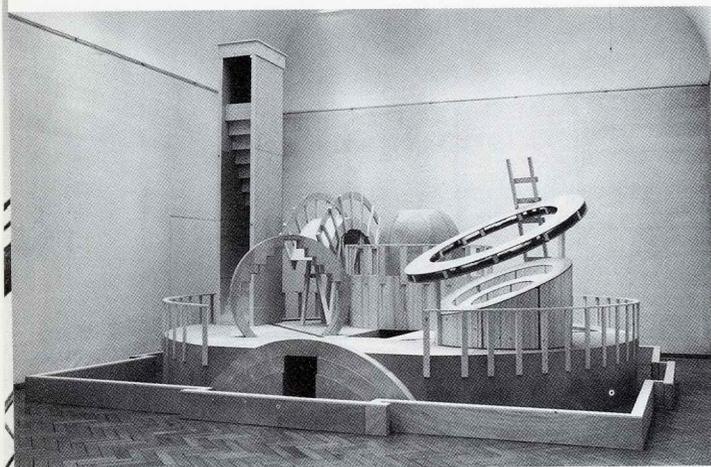


Fig. 3. *The Angels Continue Turning the Wheels of the Universe Despite Their Ugly Souls, Part II*, 1978. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands (destroyed). Photo: A. Aycock.

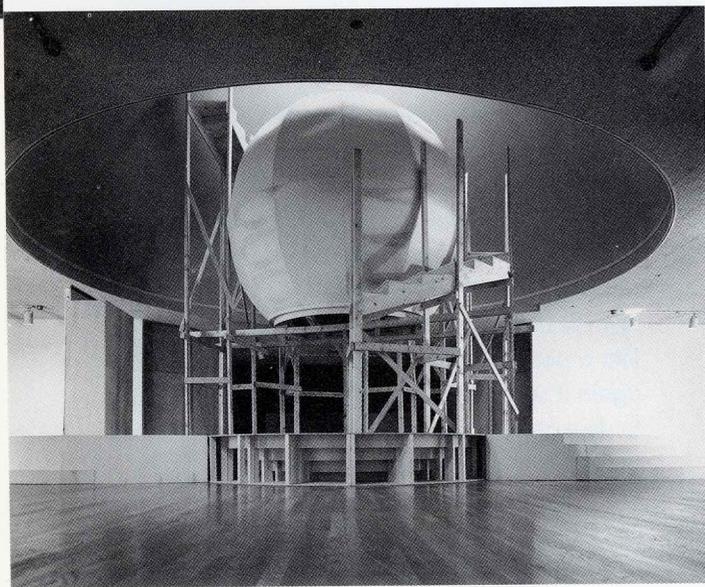


Fig. 4. *Explanation An. Of Spring and the Weight of Air*, 1979. Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, Ohio. Photo: Ron Forth.

questions I am always asking myself in some form. 'What is the nature of invention?' 'How does coming up with a new idea in the world relate to art making?' 'How does the way people produce tools—whether they're arrowheads or rocket ships—relate to the structure of their minds?' These are questions that in some way motivate the work that I do.

In 1977 I built a piece called *The Beginnings of a Complex...Excerpt Shaft #4/Five Walls* at Art Park [figure 2]. It was meant as an impermanent piece. The walls are twenty-eight feet high and they are made out of plywood and timber. One went underground through a tunnel to enter the piece, then climbed up the back of the walls and went through doorways and ladders in the air. It was a kind of aerial maze that attempted to evoke sensations of vertigo and weightlessness.

*The Angels Continue Turning the Wheels of the Universe Despite Their Ugly Souls, Part II*, from 1978 [figure 3], has a lot to do with fantasy; there is no longer a possibility for the spectator to enter the piece. I asked myself to try to design a series of structures that one could inhabit if one were in a weightless state, if one could walk upside down and didn't have to conform to the laws of gravity. The piece is very symbolic.

**Jonathan Fineberg** Can you elaborate on the symbolism for me?

**AA** Certain elements, for instance the square frame around the piece and the series of trenches on the platform, came from an Islamic diagram describing how a rainbow was formed. It's a beautiful diagram, it's totally inaccurate but it intrigued me. A lot of times I pick these things not to be pedantic by putting little references in, but because I'm looking for something that I

haven't seen before. I find these things in art; I also see them in the world. I am very intrigued by diagrams and particularly diagrams that aren't symmetrical, but are complex and mysterious and enigmatic. So I spend a lot of time flipping through books where there are schemes for various systems, particularly ideas about the world, how it works, how the world was supposed to be shaped, and so on. They're all wrong; there's never been one that was really accurate and that also fascinates me, the fact that these schemes are really works of the imagination.

**JF** Can you say a little bit more about your idea of a 'state of desire,' what it means, and how it is manifest in this example?

**AA** Well, I think for me there are certain desires to fly which we have fulfilled in a certain way, although we haven't in the fact that we are unable to fly in the way we do in our dreams. But we can move through the air. It seems to me that one can't simply say 'I want to do something' and then proceed in a very logical fashion. But perhaps it is necessary to project yourself farther into another place where you can't go, where for certain reasons you are unable to be, to almost fall asleep, to go backwards and to dream it and wish it and just want it. It seems to me that new world views never seem to be a process in which one sits down and writes out five or six ways to do it. It is always like falling asleep and dreaming. For me, 'states of desire' have to do with magical states, wanting. When you've exhausted everything in the world, every way that you know how to get something, I think we all go back and rely on just wanting it and using what we would call 'unscientific means' of getting it. These are magical ways of dealing with the world. This

also seems to me to be related to certain ideas in science, advanced physics, quantum mechanics, where there are phenomena under examination that defy logical thinking, causal thought. Thinking about these phenomena seems to me to be related if not to magical thinking then to a kind of thought process other than normal logic. So I was interested in the Middle Ages just to tie up these two areas, to sort of get to where we are now by going back to something that I was slightly familiar with. In terms of my own work I think that it's just simply the desire to push farther, to go beyond the known structures, and, in a sense, the work is a metaphor for that.

The tower in *The Angels Continue..., Part II*, where the steps go sort of normally and then there's a break and then they go upside down, was a metaphor for what I was trying to get at: There is a normal system that you are accustomed to and then all of a sudden something intervenes and the world is completely changed around and you have to develop a new way of dealing with it, a new structure in order to get somewhere else. *Explanation An. Of Spring and the Weight of Air* [figure 4], built for the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati in 1979, is part three of this series (*The Angels Continue Turning the Wheels of the Universe*). The Center had a dome, so I decided to build another kind of dome structure that went up into that dome and I set it on a stepped platform which, again, was taken from some tantric drawings that I saw about the universe. The diagrams just provide systems. The more diagrammatic they are, the more I can project structures on them—three-dimensional structures—and imagine and fantasize on these things. I wrapped the dome with scaffolding-like stairs, so it's quite obvious, you know, a stairway to heaven or something. I was thinking a lot about this woman

Eunice Winkless who leapt from the scaffolding into the pool of water and so it was really a kind of tribute to her.

I built *The Game of Flyers* [figure 5] in Washington D.C. in the winter of 1979-80. I gave myself the problem of constructing a game that would enable you to fly and I was also thinking about a war, especially World War I. I sat down with a lot of books and began to fantasize about just what war is about. The piece is a synthesis of certain things; there are trenches and wheels in the air, there's a fifty-foot ladder that leans against a building, and a platform that comes out over that. The ladder is very precarious and you can either climb up or leap off of it. I see it as a kind of nineteenth century industrial piece. Looking down on it, it operates like a ground plan or a game. From this point of view there are a lot of trenches and steel shapes. In these steel troughs we put fire and water and we enacted a minor performance in which people climbed the walls and there was fire and all that kind of thing.

It was a very satisfying piece for me because of the fence. Even though it's visually obstructive, it meant that I could do something on a large scale that was somewhat exotic in terms of public art but that people couldn't get at the piece and harm themselves. People could perform inside the piece—people who were invited to perform—and passers-by could vicariously experience the piece that way. So it was a good situation. It was very much in the city, right in the middle of the downtown area. There was an Aztec game called the 'game of flyers' in which they climbed a pole and there were huge birds on ropes and I saw at least a drawing of these Aztecs climbing on these birds and flying around the pole. Whether that's a fantasy or not

I don't know, but that inspired the piece.

The title of *The Machine That Makes the World*, 1979, is intended to be very bombastic, to suggest a great deal more than what the piece [figure 6] is actually capable of doing. It's a wooden structure, about forty feet long, with a series of steel doors that one has to go through. The steel doors are raised up. There's a guide who takes you through and you go underneath and it really feels as though you are putting your head under a guillotine when you go through these doors. Then you get inside and there are three circular rings. The walls are on casters and rotate around and you're turned inside the piece and then turned back out again. I wrote a subtitle for the piece when it was first exhibited that goes: 'An amusement park, a lunatic asylum, a prison-house, a market-place, a battlefield, paradise—now they're really all the same thing, aren't they?' I was thinking of *The Machine That Makes the World* as a kind of institutional piece in that all the compartments and the gates suggest the regimentation that institutional space has. The big wheel, which relates to the Duchamp *Chocolate Grinder*, dislocates that institutional space; in other words, instead of continuing on with that grid the wheel subverts the order.

In 1979 I made a piece called *How to Catch and Manufacture Ghosts* [figure 7] and this particular piece started a series of works that I am still involved in. I had read somewhere that when people first discovered electricity and magnetism it was still magical to them and they thought that they could literally conjure or manufacture ghosts, that they could build a machine that would do this. When I started getting involved with more industrial imagery and technology I thought that I would have to give these

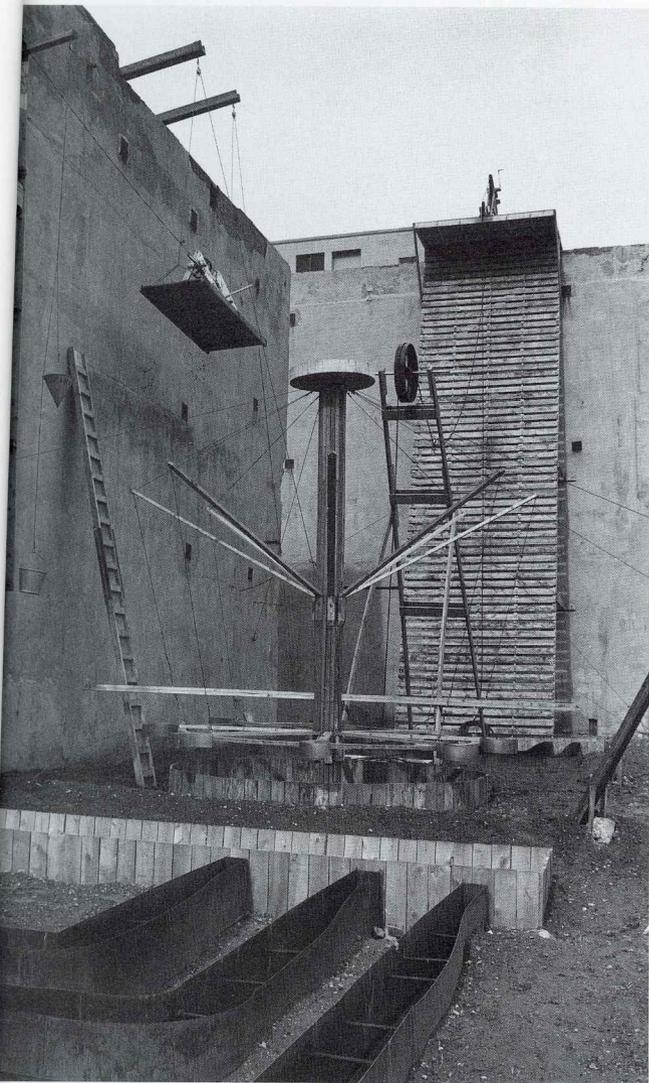


Fig. 5. *The Game of Flyers*, 1980. Washington Public Arts, Washington, D.C. (destroyed). Photo: A. Aycock.

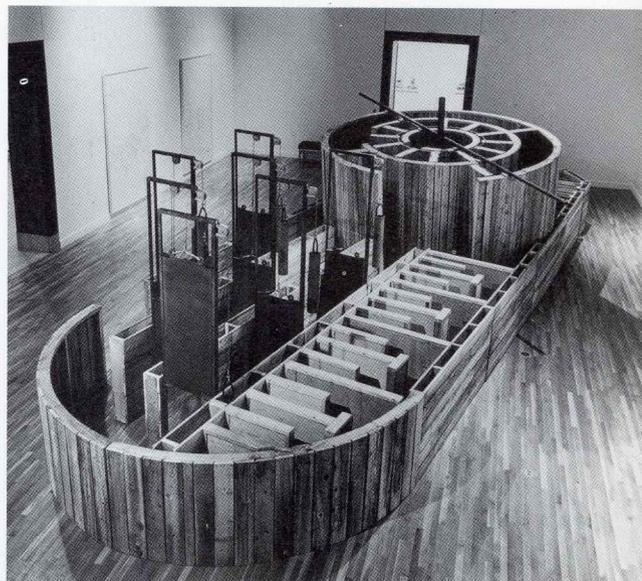


Fig. 6. *The Machine That Makes the World*, 1979. Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Gift of the Artist and Klein Gallery.

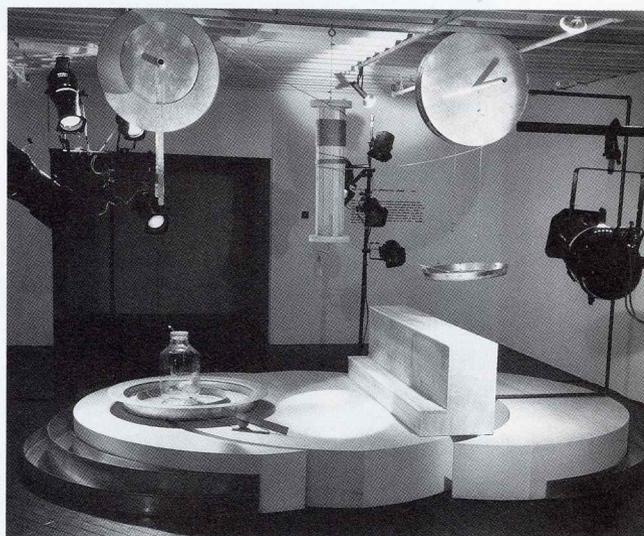


Fig. 7. *How to Catch and Manufacture Ghosts*, 1979. The Artist and John Weber Gallery, New York. Photo: John A. Ferrari.

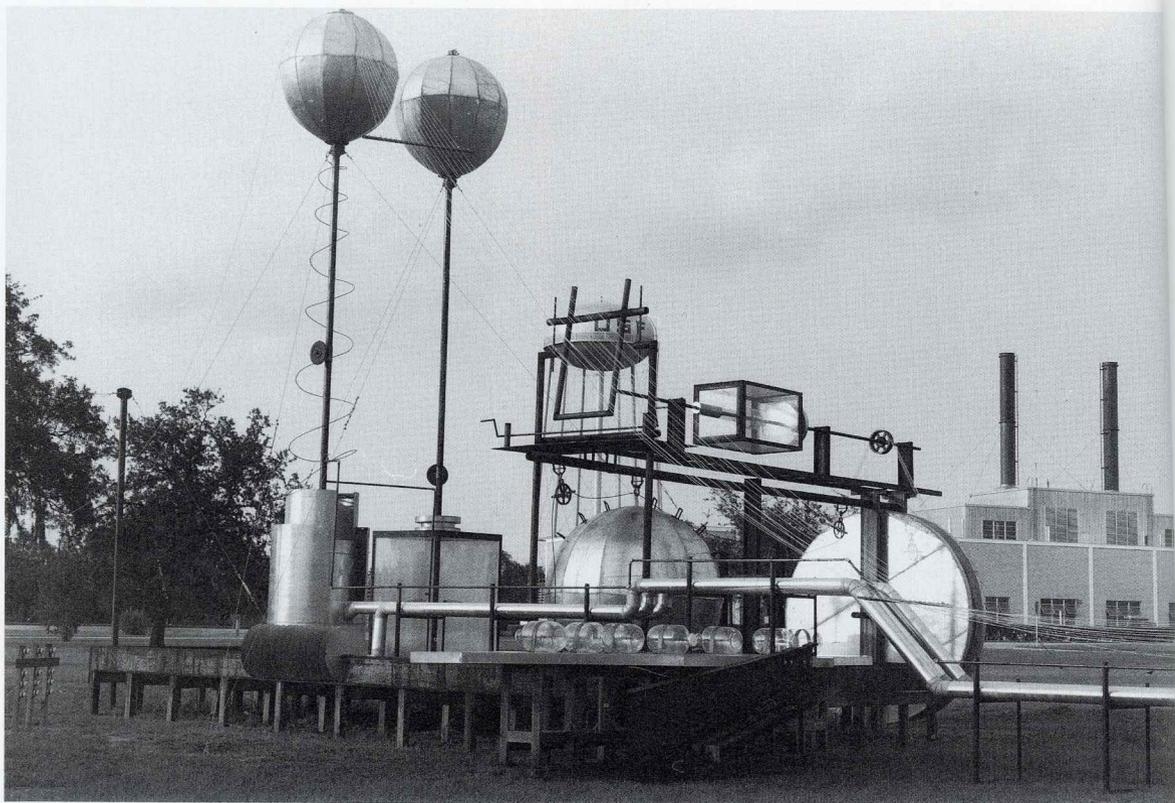


Fig. 8. *Collected Ghost Stories from the Workhouse*, 1980.  
University of South Florida, Tampa (destroyed). Photo: A. Ayccock.



pieces a function of some sort and it seemed to me that the best function would be something that was impossible, like manufacturing a ghost. It's a broad kind of category that you can fill in with a lot of stuff.

I was reading recently that demons can take any form: what if I could transform myself so that I could be any form whatsoever? And what if I could move through space and time like a particle? That is the kind of desire that underlies some of this work. So instead of thinking about a phenomenon such as the wind, I want to *become* wind, make my body wind or make my body fire or make my body radio waves going into the universe. Those are the kinds of feelings that motivate all the most recent pieces.

In the case of *How to Catch and Manufacture Ghosts* I thought to myself, well, a ghost probably comes out of light. So I got a lot of theatrical lights and someone came and sat on a bench and blew bubbles into the air at a pan of water in which there was a bottle with a little bird inside. The bird was connected to a lemon battery, copper and zinc, a simple battery that I got out of a science book for children. On the wall there were quotations from the writings of a schizophrenic; he was a very literate person and he was asked to write down his dreams. This person really felt that he was the air, he thought that he had created Alaska, he felt speed moving through his body, he felt himself being pushed along the walls, and all the time he seemed to be experiencing sensations which we can only imagine. In one of his writings he said 'sometimes I dream my mother dreaming me and that's how I travel home. Suddenly I'm beside her sweeping the floor.' I thought that little sentence stood for what I was trying to do.

This schizophrenic that I was so fond of also wrote another passage, which I quoted in the announcement and put on the wall for the first showing of *How to Catch and Manufacture Ghosts* because it suggests the kind of thinking with the simultaneous insertion of multiple levels of diverse matter that I go through when I make a piece. That applied especially to the works from 1972 through 1979 and it also characterized the kind of writing I engaged in myself when I wrote about those works. I'll read the quotation to you:

*For three hundred years they let me eat that beef stew...or corn soup undisturbed. And then, suddenly, when I wanted to eat a whole restaurant full of food, I was told I couldn't because other people might get hungry...I myself was Adam years ago, or perhaps a crown prince. We were sitting at home at the table....Then somebody—maybe me—would think that the food on my father's plate or my brother's looked better and would try to exchange it...[but] perhaps all these stories are the same story. That somebody was starved,...and then when he ate the corn, all was well again.*

In 1980 I built another piece in the series *How to Catch and Manufacture Ghosts* at the University of South Florida at Tampa. I subtitled the piece: *Collected Ghost Stories from the Workhouse* [figure 8]. I took a lot from very early experiments in electricity. Parts of the piece move, like the group of galvanized drums which I called 'agitation canisters.' When I was a child I thought that my soul looked like the inside of a washing machine, like the agitation part of a washing machine. So I designed this with a movement like that. There are bits and pieces of things that I arranged, I would say, in a poetic way with no attempt to be true to the original

experiment. It's as though I stumbled across it and I put things together according to my own fashion; I take a structure that I find somewhere and I mix things up and use them for my own needs so to speak. The platform, which is about twenty feet in diameter, also has moving parts. Three of the rings turn around in different directions. Originally there were supposed to be birds in cages but we never put them in because it would have become a problem trying to maintain them among various other things.

I made *The Savage Sparkler* [figure 9] in 1981 and again the title suggests more than the piece actually does. I don't mean this in the sense that the piece failed to live up to my expectations as a piece of sculpture, but that the nature of the subject matter is to take on an impossible task. This piece has a series of rings or drums which turn at different speeds and in different directions. Some parts turn very fast, whipping up and generating air. Some of this has to do with fantasizing about reactors and atom smashers and looking at the design of some large particle accelerators, wind tunnels, and various things like that. There is a frame with hot coils on it suspended above the piece and there is a green fluorescent light that is really a kind of theatrical thing. I have always been fascinated by the hot cobalt-blue water that is associated with reactors and so I use this greenish kind of light just to create a certain sort of mood.

In the spring of 1981 I built a piece in Zurich called *The Charmed Circle* [figure 10] from the series entitled *The Miraculating Machine*. It's very diagrammatic, more notational than a lot of my pieces. There is a platform that turns around and, again, it is intended to set off sparks—although that was a problem we had, a mechanical problem—but the platform provided

a sort of center for the piece around which were a lot of other structures. It is meant to simulate and refer to amusement parks, loop-the-loop and all of that sort of stuff—things that make you feel as though you are spinning in outer space without any sense of direction. In the back there was glass with a very strong light on it that sort of gave it a halo.

**JF** Many of your works have a potentially dangerous or threatening aspect, like the hot coils in *The Savage Sparkler* or the guillotines in *The Machine That Makes the World*. Is this an inherent risk of inhabiting the 'state of desire' or do they come from experiences of the world?

**AA** An artist should be able to use everything possible: illusion, theatricality, and also the world. A work of art should have aspects in it that the world has, and living in the world is risky. It also seems to me that every piece of architecture that I've ever visited asked me, well not to endanger myself really, but there was a certain life or death quality about it. There were things that were made out of tremendous need, and they did force you to physically put yourself in some sort of state—not dire risk but there was something about it that was more than just walking in and out of a room and saying 'oh, isn't that nice.'

**JF** Give me an example.

**AA** There is this wonderful well in Orvieto designed by Sangallo and it has steps that wind down deep into the earth. It has two sets of staircases that wrap around each other; you descend down one and ascend the other and there are frequent window ledges where you stop. You look up and you look down and you feel as though you are suspended in air; you experi-

ence vertigo and claustrophobia at the same time. It's a very consuming physical and psychological experience. I've always been attracted to that aspect of work that I have seen; when I saw the well in Orvieto it somehow verified for me the impulse behind my earlier piece, the 1976 *Project for a Circular Building with Narrow Ledges for Walking* [figure 11]. It is not as though I really had any desire to harm anyone at all, in fact I go out of my way to do these kinds of things and then set them off and put signs all over them. It's just that a work of art has something in it that is not just—well, it's sort of like crossing a street in New York City.

**JF** When you conceive a piece is your work principally a plan and drawings which can be constructed, taken down, and recreated by technicians? Or are a lot of things done on the spot?

**AA** We do a lot of planning and we do a lot of things on the spot. With *The Charmed Circle*, for example, I had some vague diagrams but I had to wait until I could really see the space. Then I went in there and designed it on the spot, very fast—in about two weeks. This was much more relaxed in its design than some other pieces. By the time my pieces are finished there are good working drawings, but it's still really necessary that I be there to install the work, except for a very few pieces in which I have really arrived at something and I am certain that I'm not going to make any changes.

**JF** What kind of staff do you have? And what role do they play in your work?

**AA** I have a very good staff. I have for some time had one person who has built a number of the pieces, Andrew Ginzel. And what happens is that I will come up with an idea and get it to a

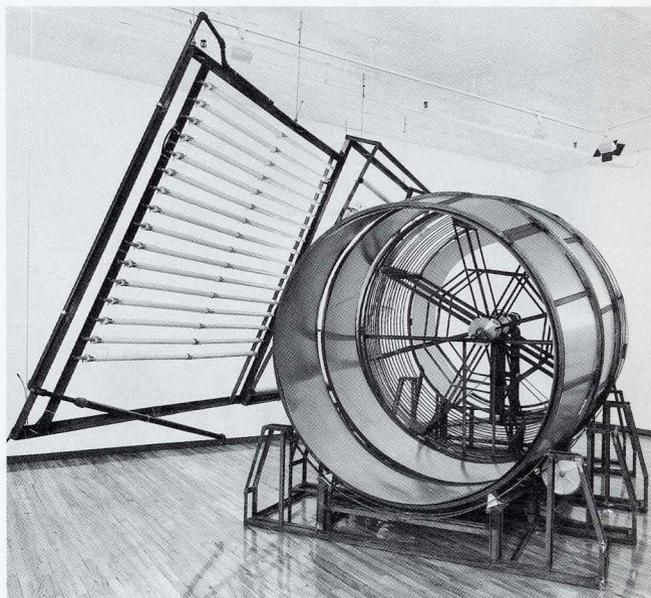


Fig. 9. *The Savage Sparkler*, 1981.  
State University of New York-Plattsburg Art Museum.  
Photo: Jon Abbot.

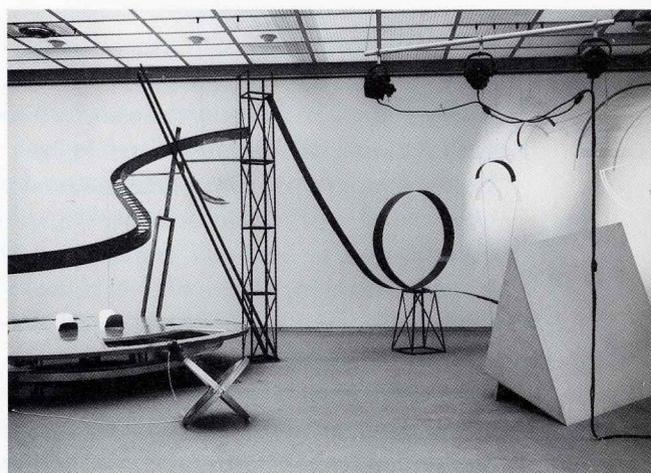
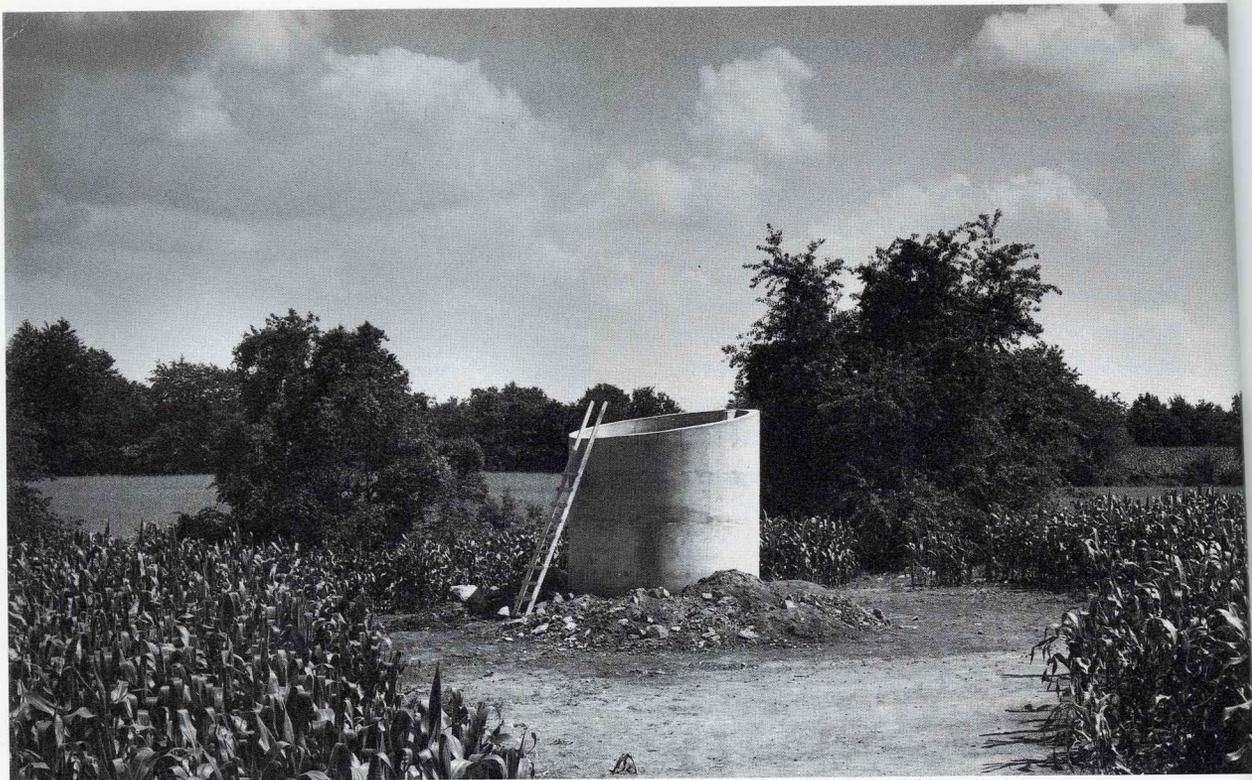


Fig. 10. *The Charmed Circle*, 1981. Kunsthau, Zurich, Switzerland. Photo: Walter Drayer.



certain state of formation and then he will come over and we'll talk about the idea and I will begin to draw it as a sort of presentation drawing. Then he will begin to make working drawings and we'll go back and forth between what is necessary structurally, what I would like to do, and what money we have to work with. We discuss how we're going to solve the problems, what we're going to get rid of, what we're going to keep, and then other people come in and usually there's a crew of anywhere between six people to fifteen or twenty to build the piece. [Note of January 1990: In recent years Lawrence King has replaced Andrew Ginzel. Carlos Martin and David Troutman draw and make models and do some fabrication; in

Europe Luigi Kurmann has done a great deal of fabrication. Wenda Habenicht, Jesse Rosser, and Sandra Korsak have done administrative as well as fabrication work, and Tom Anderson does structural engineering.]

**JF** Why is there such an involvement with technology in your recent work?

**AA** It's a very subjective attempt to deal with technology. I have this book called *Magical Experiments* and that is the way I see it. I'm not interested in using technology just to have the hardware; I want to crack it open. A machine is a tool and the tool is a mental extension of your body and sometimes it becomes so removed that

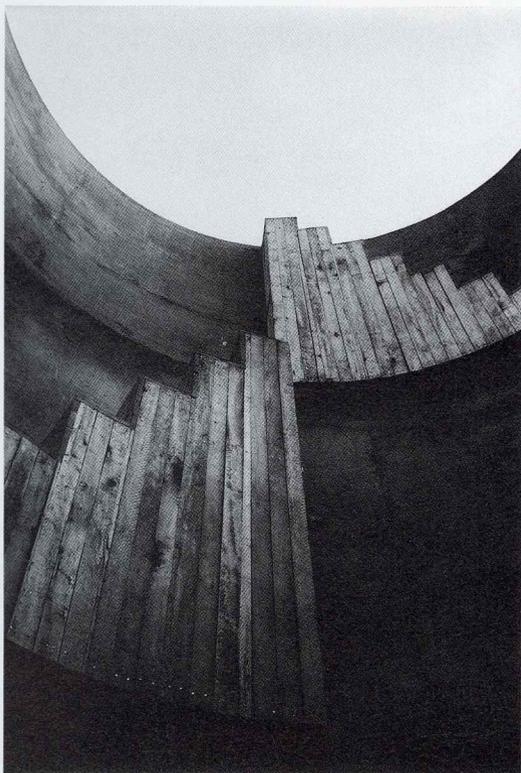


Fig. 11. *Project for a Circular Building with Narrow Ledges for Walking*, 1976. Silver Springs, Pennsylvania.  
Photo: A. Aycock.

you no longer understand how it reflects on the structure of your mind. It's *that* that I'm interested in, the structure of the mind. It's not computer art. I don't go to Bell Laboratories and ask them to help me out. I would certainly love to talk to some of those people, but my work is a very personal attempt to deal with the period that we are in. I think the obvious mentor for something like this would be Duchamp who really had one foot in the Middle Ages and the other in quantum mechanics, and played very poetically with these ideas. I just attempt to deal with what is around me. I've always been very interested in history and I play with history. It's also necessary to play with science.

**JF** It seems as though wood dominated in your work of the seventies whereas industrial materials came to the fore in your recent work.

**AA** I think that materials come from the ideas. But it got to be where I understood carpentry really well and when you are traveling and making these pieces and you fly into a city and they say, 'okay, in two weeks I want a big installation,' and you know that there is a lumber store there and it is a general sort of skill that people in a gallery have. I found myself in a hole after a while, I really wanted to expand the materials. It was a tremendous relief when I left the wood behind because originally it was done for pragmatic reasons and then all of a sudden it

became like marble or bronze—a material that signified art and is what it is regardless of content instead of being a functional material that serves the idea.

**JF** I sense an affinity in your work with the Russian Constructivists, especially their theatre designs.

**AA** That was some of the best sculpture ever made. It was marvellous and I loved the relationship between the drawings and the sculpture. They were working with space in a way that defied gravity. I was very attracted to it.

**JF** Why the switch from pieces allowing people inside to making pieces where people were forbidden?

**AA** First of all, it's very worrisome that someone might hurt themselves. Secondly, you exhaust a set of ideas and you want to move on. I don't make sculpture to reassure myself of what I already know; I make it to find out about something I don't know. I also wanted the pieces to be very directed experiences on my part, into which you projected yourself and fantasized. But when a sculptor designs large scale public pieces people don't necessarily know how to behave. You may want them to behave as if they're in a church and they mostly behave as though they're on a football field. So it just seemed as if it were necessary to step back and reassess that situation. Now I like the idea of the *potential*. With *Hoodo (Laura) Vertical and Horizontal Cross-Sections of the Ether Wind*, from the series *How To Catch and Manufacture Ghosts*, 1981, there's a steel part spinning around on glass, and when you walk into the room you fantasize about that thing spinning around the glass and flying all around the room. There's that *potential* that you feel and

that's the sort of sensation that I like you to fantasize about but I obviously don't want it to occur.

### Recorded in 1989:

**JF** Your 1973 *Low Building With Dirt Roof (For Mary)* [figure 12] seems to have been a seminal piece for you. You set a number of persevering themes in it—the claustrophobia and physically menacing aspect, the role of childhood memories, and the creation of spatial structures that provide stage sets for imaginary narratives. I recall your mentioning to me that the piece followed out of a trip to Egypt and took immediate inspiration from the claustrophobic experience of compressed space in the tombs.

**AA** Yes, the corridors in the Egyptian tombs, but I think that piece had more to do with a concept of a first house in the sense that Joseph Rykwert wrote about in his 1972 book *On Adam's House in Paradise: the idea of the primitive hut in architectural history* and also in a mythological sense. What would a first house be?

**JF** By 'first house' do you mean a primordial house?

**AA** That's exactly what I mean. Only it was my interpretation of what I would want for myself.

The *Low Building* also had to do with my interest in Gaston Bachelard at that time and his ideas in *The Poetics of Space*. The first chapter of the book is entitled 'The House. From Cellar to Garret. The Significance of the Hut' and he has a whole discussion of the concept of the hut, and of the house, and of the experiences that one

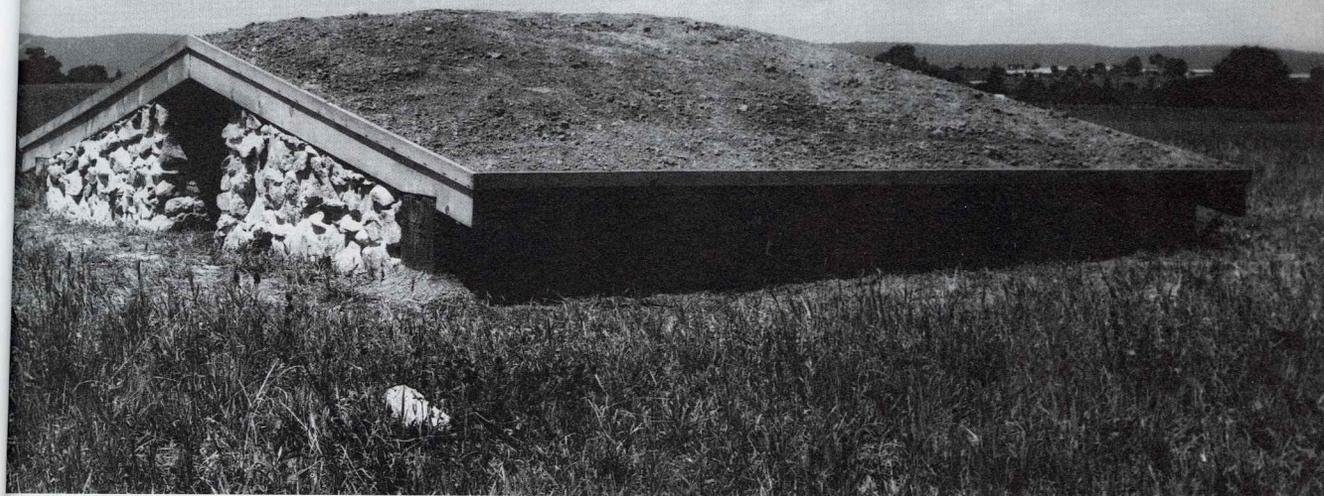


Fig. 12. *Low Building With Dirt Roof (For Mary)*, 1973. Gibney Farm near New Kingston, Pennsylvania (destroyed). Photo: A. Aycock.



Fig. 13. *A Simple Network of Underground Wells and Tunnels*, 1975. Merriewold West, Far Hills, New Jersey (destroyed). Photo: A. Aycock.

has in the basement, and in the attic, and the associations with up and down, and the kind of claustrophobic experience of the cellar and the feeling of burial down there. You know, in the first houses people actually did bury their dead in the floors.

So although I was yet to build all those pieces that dealt with vertigo or dealt with the euphoria of heights or dealt with the constriction of being underground in tunnels (as in *A Simple Network of Underground Wells and Tunnels* of 1975 [figure 13]), it was the beginning of that investigation. *Low Building* was almost like an imploded cellar and attic because of the pitched roof which signified being underneath the eaves up high in the house and at the same time it was low—set into the ground like a potato cellar, or some kind of underground cellar. The doorway is thirty inches high, the front facade is twenty feet long, and the pitched roof slopes down to twelve inches. You'd go in and you could barely sit up straight; your most comfortable position was lying down. And so it's almost like you're up in the attic, perhaps right underneath the eaves, stuffed up underneath them but you're also on the ground with all the smell of earth.

*Low Building* had something like seven tons of earth on top of it and it was planted with grass. But it was in a field, so if there was wheat in the field one year the wheat blew in, or the alfalfa blew in, or whatever, and the roof continued to grow. There was a double sensation in *Low Building*—you felt very secure and protected and at the same time you were conscious of the weight of the roof in that it could also, you know, implode, and that made you claustrophobic. I think those are also the dual sensations about an ancestral home—it is both protective and suffocating. So that's really what that piece was about.

Also I had gone to Greece in 1970 and was very, very taken by the tumulus tombs and the tholos tombs like the tomb of Agamemnon in Mycenae. There were several lesser tombs scattered throughout the site too. One had a kind of pitched roof lintel and some were open so that you could just look down into them—they had fallen in. I began to think a lot about all those ideas, especially about what my first house would be if I were to have constructed a house, if I had been Adam or Eve. I was thinking about a house that I would feel my beginnings came from, you know, sort of associating all of those things together with Bachelard. I was also heavily into the idea of a kind of space that by its dimensions caused a certain kind of physical response to those dimensions, and thereby a psychological response and then later a symbolic or memory response. So there were all those different levels, and so that's how the *Low Building* got built.

**JF** The *Low Building* seems to have a lot of associations to ideas of burial and death.

**AA** Yes, I always hate to bring this up, but the year I went to Greece my niece was killed in a tragic accident. She was on her bicycle and she was killed. She had always been sick with the same disease my brother—who died of it in 1987—was sick with [cystic fibrosis] so that this sense of imminent death or burial was always there in my ancestral home. And then of course, unexpectedly, she died in this tragic accident. And I had this dream, that there was this house set into the hills of Greece—I don't know if I had this dream before or after the accident. This old wooden house with a pitched roof was set into the dry, barren, ancient fields of Greece. And when I say set into it, I mean the tholos tombs are literally carved into the hills, you know, you

walk deep into the hill, and so that's the way this was. And then my brother came to my house and he got me and he took me by the hand and he—he was naked actually—and I ran through these hills. And he took me to this house and took me up into the attic, where this little child, this little girl, was dead on the bed. I think there was also a cemetery in this house. And that's what the house—the *Low Building*—came from about two years later. So, it's all of these memories.

I know there's a cemetery in the old wooden house that belonged to my great, great grandfather. Behind the house is the family cemetery and I saw my ancestors' graves. So I was taking all this stuff and putting it together—almost dreaming, the way a child looks at his ancestors and is somewhat in awe, you know, of that. And then dreaming that into the mythology of Greece. You know, almost in a megalomaniacal way. Throughout much of the work, there is this sense of pervading death or memorializing or whatever. And it comes from these very specific, real experiences in my life that were there continually. I mean the accident—it was almost absurd in a way—in conjunction with what we knew, almost from the beginning, would occur anyway. So all of these things got blended together and I suppose when I made the piece it was a way of making her a tomb and making myself a house. And also the fact that early on in architectural history the house and the tomb were the same. And even when they got separated, the tomb—like at Cerveteri in Italy—was a large scale house basically, built like an Etruscan house with beds.

I think that all of these ideas were sort of germinating in that little piece and then they became the architectural pieces where you have under-

ground labyrinths and even *The House of the Stoics* [figure 14] which look so beautiful from the exterior but you go in and there are all those ladders that you climb and those towers; it's very claustrophobic. You are in prison; it's almost like a vertical tomb. In other words *Low Building* was the germ for a lot of that architectural work.

**JF** Evidently you knew about the tholos and tumulus tombs before you went to Greece?

**AA** I had done a paper, for me a fairly complex paper, following the development of the tholos tomb from that corbel-vaulted, little, earth dome, to classical Greek, circular temples, to Bramante's *Tempietto*. I followed that strand through historical time—it gets forgotten and then another culture picks it up and remembers it and develops it and it culminates in the *Tempietto*. So when I went to Greece I was really verifying the results of this intellectual adventure I had taken in the library and I went to all the tholos tombs that I could find, to all the remains of the classical circular buildings, and then later on to Rome and the *Tempietto*. To me, the *Tempietto* was so interesting because it became such a developed form and yet the seed was in the tholos tomb; then as the seed cracked open it became the fully developed, complex seed for the architecture that followed it.

I'm getting away from the *Low Building*. But if I could make the kind of leap from that germinating little house—which was very naïve, I think—to something as developed as the *Tempietto*, where I could pull all this architectural and personal history in and synthesize it into this kind of little gem that would then become an architectural metaphor for something that would follow after it, then I would be very happy. All the work that I've done has never really

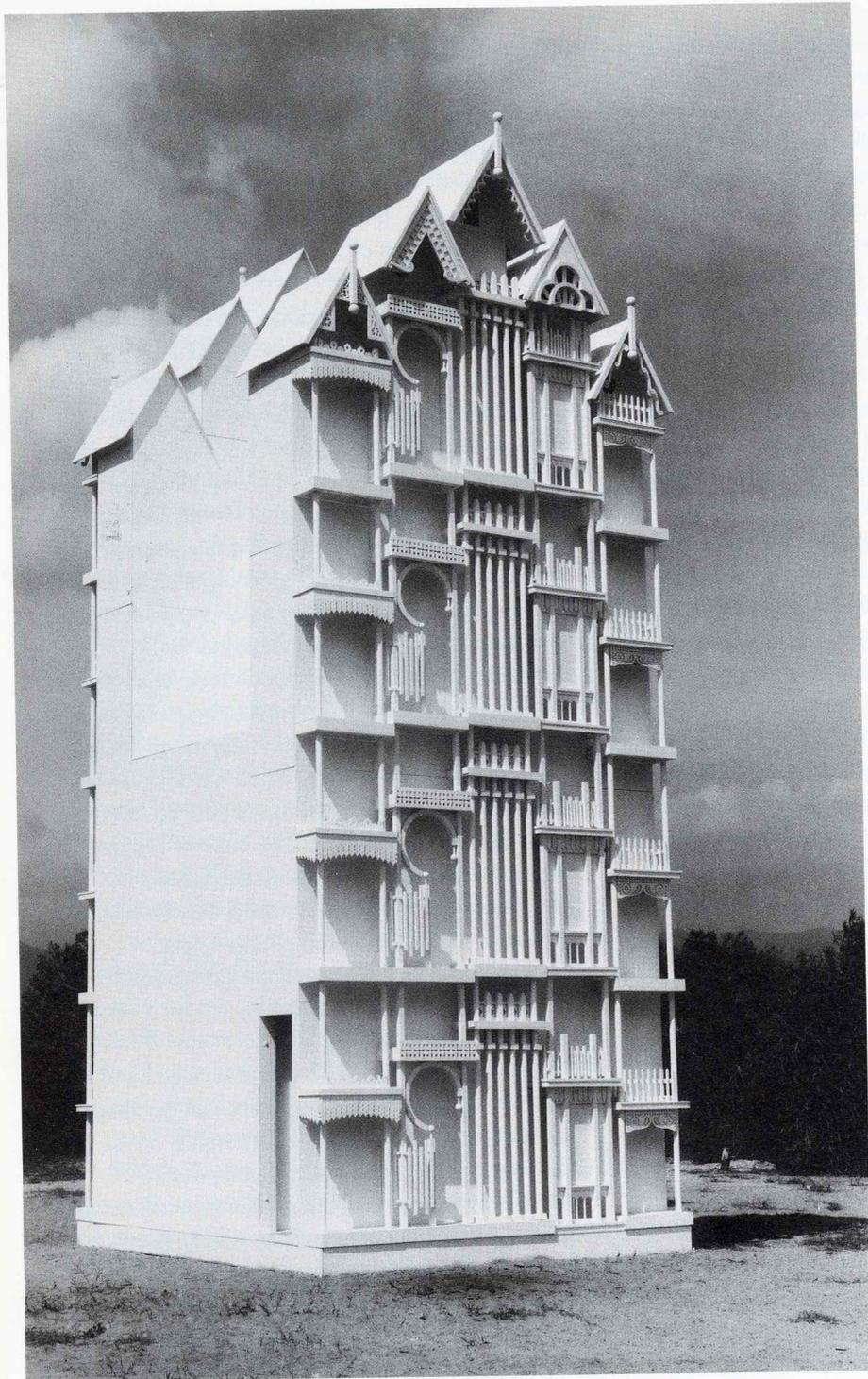


Fig. 14. *The House of the Stoics*, 1984. International Contemporary Sculpture Symposium, Lake Biwa, Japan. Photo: A. Aycock.

achieved that goal, which was there in 1973 and which I think is still something that I'm searching to do as I rifle through the pages of architectural and technological history.

The search for a kind of synthesis in a visual form—you know, a paradigm—haunts me and causes me to continue. It's a quest that seems somewhat archaic right now, because we are inundated with the notion that the *avant-garde* is dead, that the ability to innovate in the way that Cubism innovated, or Constructivism innovated, is impossible today. And I would say that I feel myself up against this wall and yet it's a quest that I don't and *cannot* forget, because it's what really compels me. When I feel like quitting I think, 'oh, but what if you could invent such and such that has never been quite put together that way before, so let's try it again,' regardless of the prevailing ideology in art criticism. I think that the notion of the exhaustion of ideas is absurd. Culture changes, human beings change. If people invented for 10,000 years of recorded history that we can see, they're going to continue to do it, whether or not people say that that notion is dead. It's just a fact of human whatever, they have to.

**JF** The intermingling of architecture and nature in the *Low Building* seems also present—in a more deliberately artificial way—in the drawings for the new piece you are planning for Storm King Art Center [figure 15].

**AA** One of the things that intrigued me about the tholos tombs minus the romance, minus the mythology, minus the personal, was the way the earth became architecture. At Cerveteri, the Etruscans carved the tombs out of the earth, so to speak, so that you get a real synthesis of architecture and landscape and there's this inver-

sion where nature becomes artificial or becomes architecture. There will be a kind of artifice with nature in this piece, but it will be at the top, it won't dominate, but nature will ascend, a nature that has been composed into an artifice. Whereas in the reconstruction of the *Low Building* at Storm King Art Center, I will just throw on seeds or let things blow in by the wind, this will be made almost like a Japanese or a medieval alchemical garden in which nature is made to conform to a vision.

**JF** The drawings for this new piece not only have these elements of the *Low Building* but I also see reflections of the mechanical and electronic pieces like *A Salutation to the Wonderful Pig of Knowledge* [figure 16] and some of the faceted mirror pieces like *The Descent and Reascent of the Soul II* [figure 17] in them.

**AA** They would begin to pull things together again.

**JF** In the mid-eighties you seem to have done a number of projects that involved microcosms of the universe like *A Representation of the Second World: Plan, Isometric, and Section*, 1984 [figure 18].

**AA** That's the Babylonian world. It goes along with this idea I had of looking at and reading about different cultural concepts of the universe and then trying to make structures which somehow embodied those concepts. The Babylonian world was a pyramid floating on water over an inverted pyramid and the sunken part, in the water, had these connecting tunnels that you could crawl through. They also drew how the sun and the stars would come up and wrap around. So I designed it as though it could be built, although it would be pretty hard, and col-

ored it in rainbow-like colors. It's a fantastic structure. You would be sitting at the center of that pyramid, floating on water, and these big ladles would come around like a jump rope and scoop over you and then dig down into the earth and come back. Let's say you're sitting in a twenty foot pool of water on one of these stepped pyramids and it's as though the horizon just scoops around. It was a fantastic idea, but so was that of the Babylonians.

**JF** In *The New and Favorite Game of the Universe and the Golden Goose Egg* it looks like you made a spiral board game of all these microcosmic schemes from earlier pieces.

**AA** It was taken from a board game—those beautiful nineteenth century English board games. They did them on World War I; they did them on absolutely everything and they often have spirals. There was one called 'The Golden Goose Egg Game' in which each time you come up with a concept of the way the world is and then it's overthrown, you get a golden goose egg. Through the years I noticed that I would take a cosmology, say a Babylonian cosmology, a Hindu cosmology, and I would then invent structures that would supposedly illustrate those cosmologies. So I inserted pieces chronologically in this drawing, starting with Babylonian and then I invented others to fill in. During the Greek period there were a lot of crazy ideas about the way the world looked. So some of it is new inventions and some of it is older pieces that actually got built and it ends with the starry sky. It's a big drawing and also has some text on it explaining each section.

**JF** Do the works based on explorations of different languages concern language as a kind of cosmology or world view too?

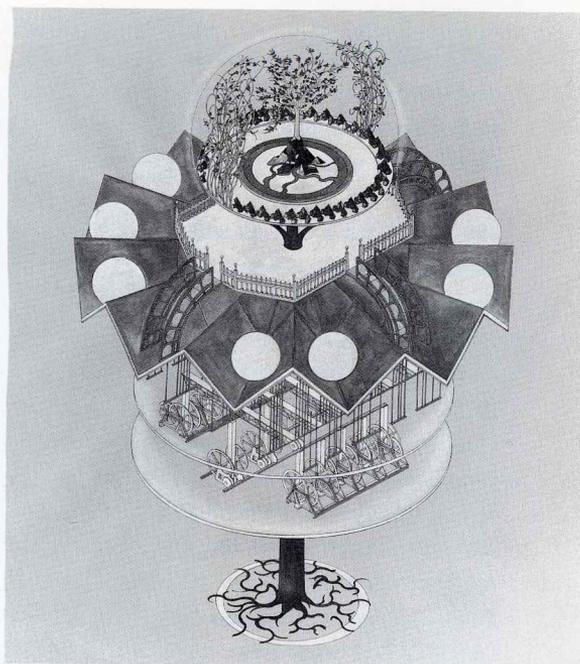
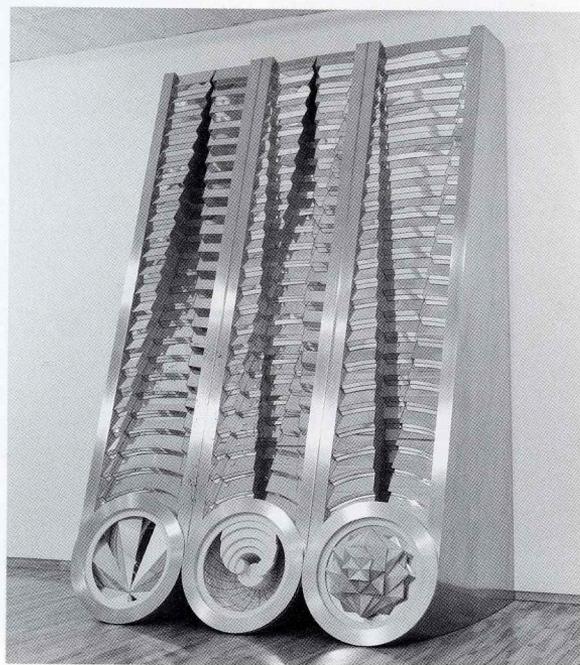


Fig. 15. *Fantasy Drawing for Storm King Sculpture*, 1990. John Weber Gallery, New York.

Fig. 17. *The Descent and Reascent of the Soul II*, 1988. John Weber Gallery, New York. Photo: Mark America.



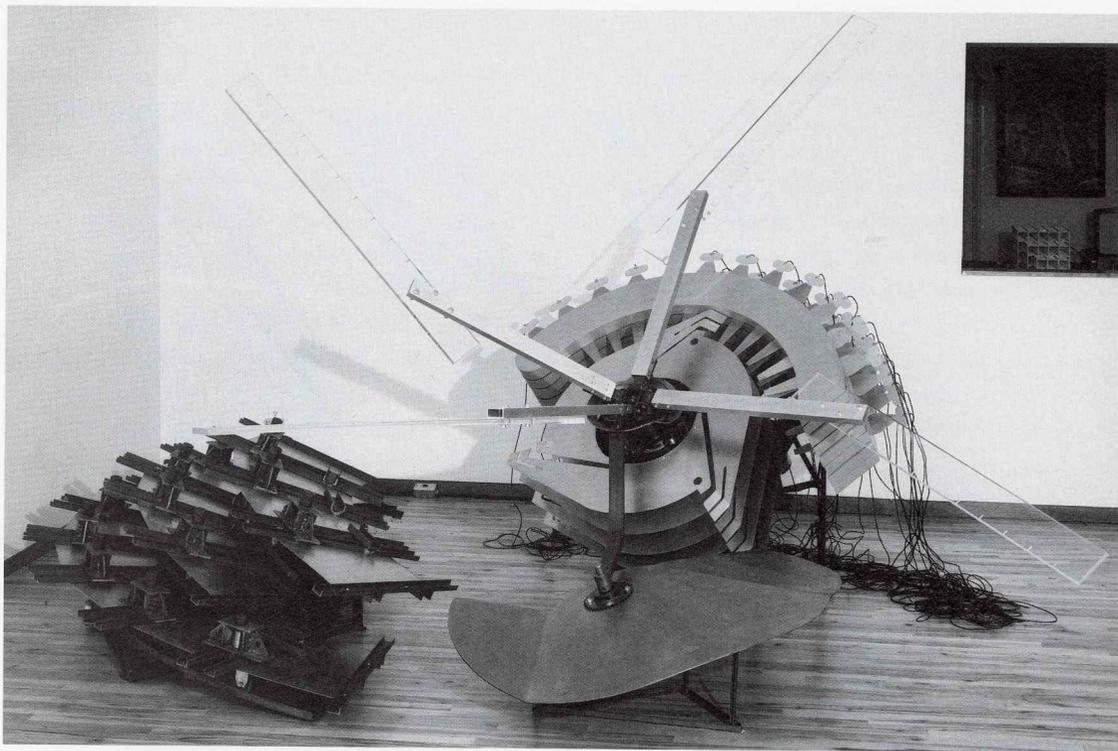


Fig. 16. *A Salutation to the Wonderful Pig of Knowledge*, 1984.  
John Weber Gallery, New York. Photo: Fred Scruton.

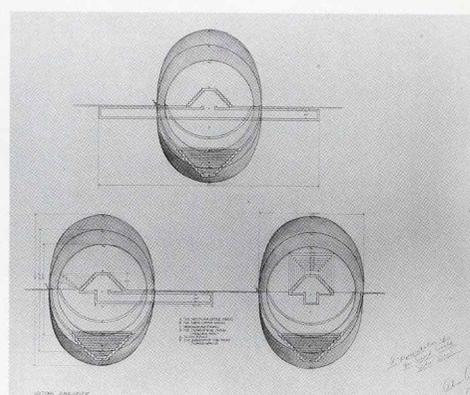
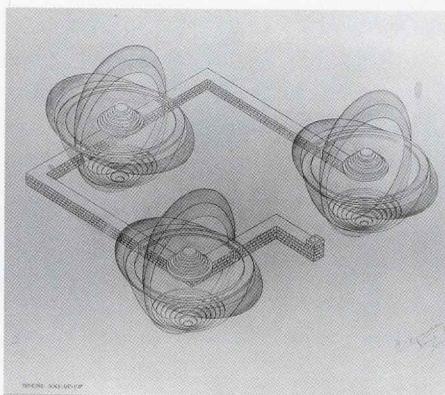
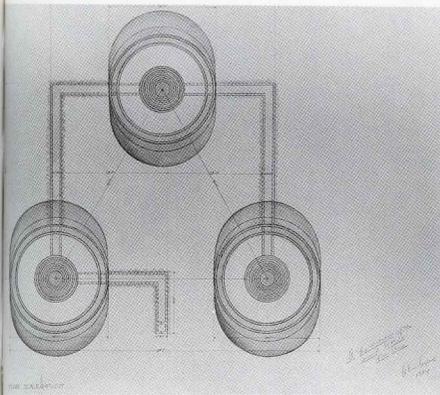


Fig. 18. *A Representation of the Second World: Plan, Isometric, and Section*,  
1984. The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York. Anonymous gift.



**AA** Absolutely, I see language as a structure—a conceptual structure and a visual structure. In *The Garden of Scripts (Villandry)* [figure 19], which is also a huge drawing, I took scripts from different cultures—we have Sanskrit, we have Aztec, we have Chinese, we have Egyptian hieroglyphics, I forget, hobo language, Mesopotamian cuneiform, we even have some Indian pictographs. I took all these scripts and I three-dimensionalized them so they became sculptural. Then, using the plan—I thought I was using the plan of Villandry but it's actually another chateau garden that resembles it—I took these scripts and I made them into precincts, as though they were topiaries; I three-dimensionalized them into various topiary gardens, so to speak. That's why it's called *The Garden of Scripts*. You walk in and you walk through all these languages. Some day I will do a sculpture or a building that's been generated by some of these forms.

**JF** While you were doing these drawings of cosmic schemes you simultaneously continued to develop ideas from pieces like *Hoodo (Laura)*, *Vertical and Horizontal Cross-Sections of the Ether Wind*.

**AA** *The Universal Stirrer* [figure 20] is a small piece of that kind. It consists of three pieces of glass inserted within each other, part has been mirrored, there's empty space in the middle, and glass all around it. Inside is this device made out of galvanized steel that spins. Now as it spins it elongates and contracts so it's constantly changing its shape and we have a little light on it which casts a moving image on the wall. This piece has to be seen in subdued light so it casts a kind of mirage of itself. Also the center part expands and contracts as it spins—it's always changing its shape. It is unattainable; it's the

notion of the genie or the infinitely transformational; it's able to change its form. *The Universal Stirrer* was the closest I got to that idea at that point.

*The Universal Stirrer* is a softer kind of piece, one of the least gritty pieces of that period, whereas blade machines, like *The Thousand and One Nights in the Mansion of Bliss* [figure 21] and *Glance of Eternity* [figure 22] embody the other side, the gritty reality of what I was doing in that two or three year period. *The Thousand and One Nights* is meant to be an ironic title; it's like going to Las Vegas and gambling your whole life savings away and being in bliss the entire time. It is a kind of culmination of the smaller blade machines as well as of pieces like *Hoodo (Laura)*, *The Savage Sparkler*, and the first *How to Catch and Manufacture Ghosts*.

I thought of the large blade machine, *The Thousand and One Nights*, as an image—a collapsed, synthesized image of technology. When I began to get interested in the relationship between science and magic during the late seventies, I was looking for an image that would sum up that relationship for me, get to the heart of the matter. The image of the large blade machine I see as having its origins in something simple like a plow, an arrowhead, or a knife—devices that were originally used simply to, in the case of the arrowhead, acquire food or in the case of the plow, to till the land so that people could plant the land and feed themselves. These things were extraordinarily significant inventions in the history of technology, allowing man greatly enhanced control over nature.

You can follow this image of a blade or knife in

my work as it transforms itself into a waterwheel and a windmill and a turbine and a Cuisinart and also into the crescents of the moon. It starts with something early—the phases of the moon, the big dipper—until it evolves into a source of tremendous benefit and even survival: it becomes a turbine; it moves from food to energy and transportation and it is also a weapon. This image of the large blade machine moving very slowly is incredibly seductive and it is also very, very sinister, terrifying. I wanted that double edge, like the *Low Building*.

**JF** *The Universal Stirrer* is very constructivist, like the *Space-Light Modulator* of Moholy-Nagy. It seems as though a lot of the work of this period has a constructivist connection.

**AA** It does, but that's throughout all my work. It's clearly not there at all in the *Low Building* but *Five Walls* of 1977 and the Documenta piece of the same year both had a constructivist feel, like a Meyerhold theatrical set. The constructivist aspect has never really gone away, it gets blended in. In a recent proposal for a piece in Miami, I literally looked at constructivist drawings and patterned some of the pieces after some really wild hand movements of constructivist drawings.

**JF** *Leonardo's Swirl* [figure 23] seems to be an exploration of Leonardo's drawings of violent motion. Is that what drew you to Leonardo?

**AA** Everything draws me to Leonardo because of his interest in the whole world. Robert Fludd, Leonardo, Marcel Duchamp, you know, I've got my little pantheon of people and they are related in the way they think and draw and in the way they look at the world. I'm always threading through Leonardo, looking for ideas but I guess

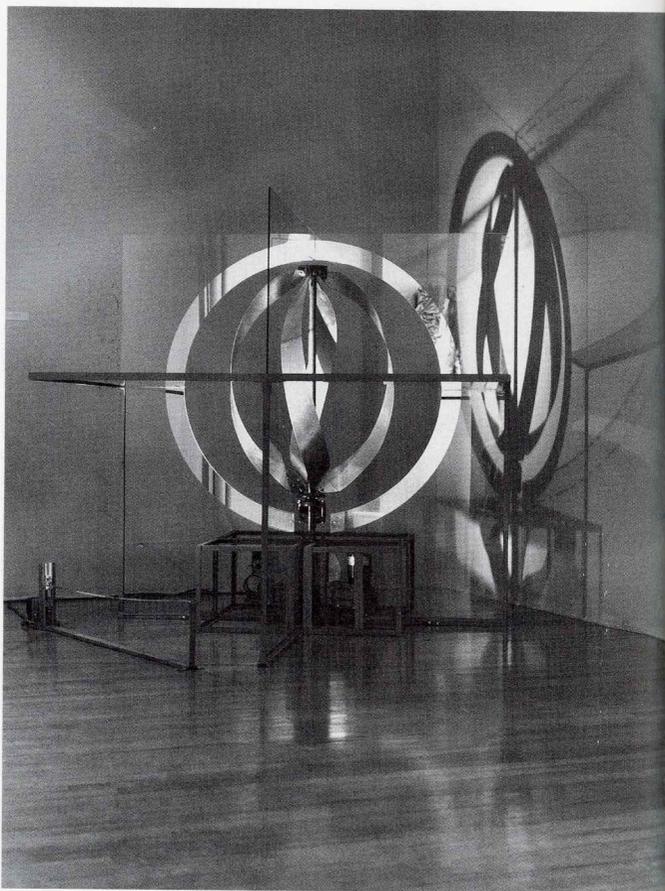


Fig. 20. *The Universal Stirrer*, 1984. The Artist and John Weber Gallery, New York. Photo: A. Aycock.

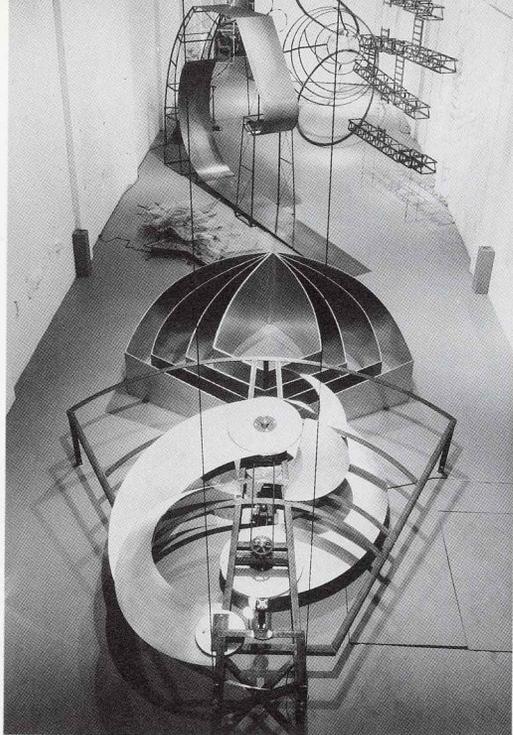


Fig. 21. *The Thousand and One Nights in the Mansion of Bliss*, 1983. Gemeentemuseum, Den Haag, The Netherlands.

Fig. 22. *Glance of Eternity*, 1982. Henry S. McNeil, Jr., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Photo: A. Aycock.

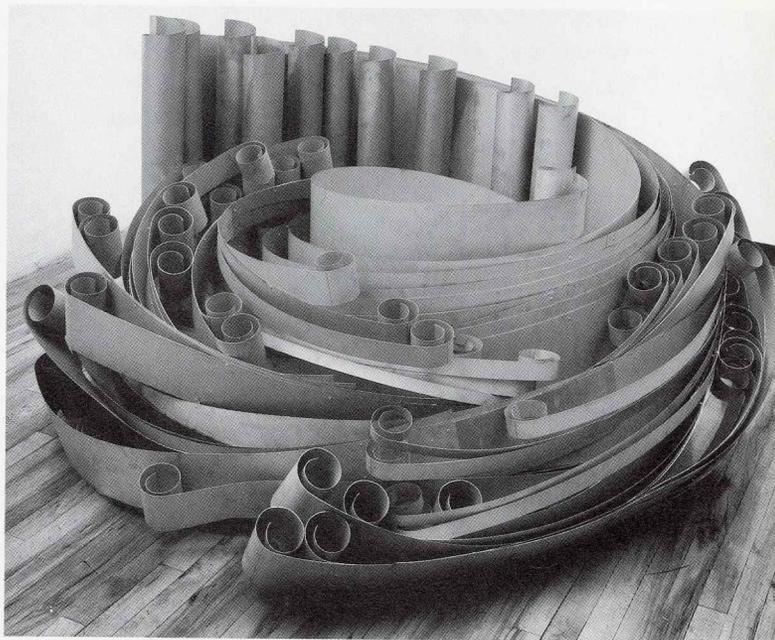
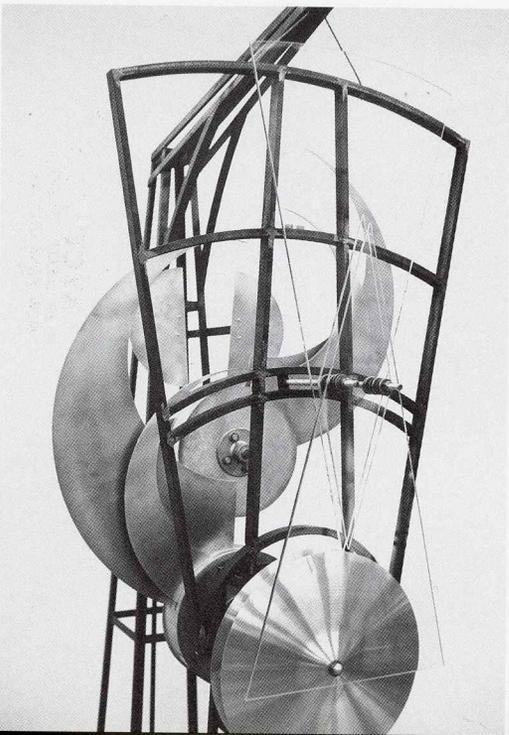
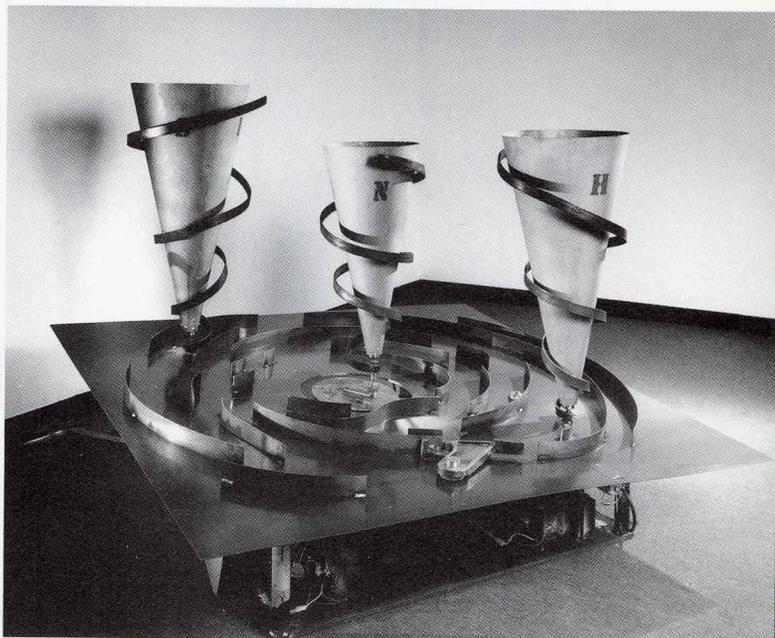


Fig. 23. *Leonardo's Swirl*, 1982. The Oliver-Hoffman Collection, Chicago, Illinois. Photo: Fred Scruton.

Fig. 24. *Greased Lightning*, 1984. The Jewish Museum, New York. Museum purchase with funds provided by Miriam R. Passerman, Louise and Gabriel Rosenfeld, and Steven and Harriet Passerman in memory of Maxwell W. Passerman. Photo: Rick Gardner.



bases for making these structures that are very disoriented. I'll look at a plan of a theater and then I'll make it vertical so that the steps are not steps that you can walk on and the steps move up all over the place. They're not quite of this world. Whereas the blade machines and the *Low Building* were very much rooted in the world itself, these pieces have much more to do with the idea of levitation as in pieces like *Explanation An. Of Spring and the Weight of Air*.

**JF** So these are about getting to heaven?

**AA** Yes, and I think that *The Descent and Reascent of the Soul II*, the stepped mirror piece [figure 17], is very much about that imaginary, unobtainable experience too. The way the steps are sloped a human could never really walk up them. There's no way—unless you went into a weightless space—you could walk on those stairs. But the reason why it was mirrored was because I was thinking, well now what will a soul look like? A soul to me is only a reflection of something else, you cannot image it, so to speak. That's why it's almost transparent.

**JF** In *The Descent and Reascent of the Soul II* what is in the circles at the bottom?

**AA** Those are cosmological, taking cosmological diagrams and imagining what they would be like if they were thought of in a three-dimensional way. They came from the faces of seventeenth century scientific instruments and I think that the rosette—I'm trying to remember—probably comes from something that Leonardo designed or some kind of astronomical symbol that would have been on compasses and things like that. The step structures came from Robert Fludd—the seventeenth century mystic.

The same diagrams also turned into the blade machines. His diagrams just keep getting transformed into another thing. The same diagram became steps in one piece, in another I turned it into the outline of a blade machine, in other things it would have become something else. Fludd thought he was inventing diagrams that explained the universe, he inserted everything his God ordered into these hierarchical structures. Robert Fludd keeps coming back, no matter what phase I'm in.

**JF** *The New and Favorite Game of the Universe and the Golden Goose Egg* contains a small drawing of the *Project for the Milan Triennale: Study for the Thai Universe* of 1985 which in turn relates to the *Three-Fold Manifestation II*.

**AA** In the actual piece you have the amphitheatre turned vertically, which is a lot like *Three-Fold Manifestation II*, bringing back the architectural interest. These are stepped and there's a long space at the base of each tower—a space of dislocation. The *Project for the Milan Triennale: Study for the Thai Universe* also relates to *The House of the Stoics*. The Thais have the idea that the whole world is a series of towers on the back of a fish. And I translated the fish to that small amphitheater disk; I really liked the idea of this huge structure so imbalanced or so disproportionate to what it was sitting on.

**JF** Now *Three-Fold Manifestation III* [figure 27] looks like a collapsed version of the second one.

**AA** It is, and it's also a collapsed version of a larger piece that was made. *The Six of Pentacles: To Know All Manner of Things Past and Future* [figure 26] also has all these bowls in it and every one of those bowls is a different cosmological diagram that has been three-

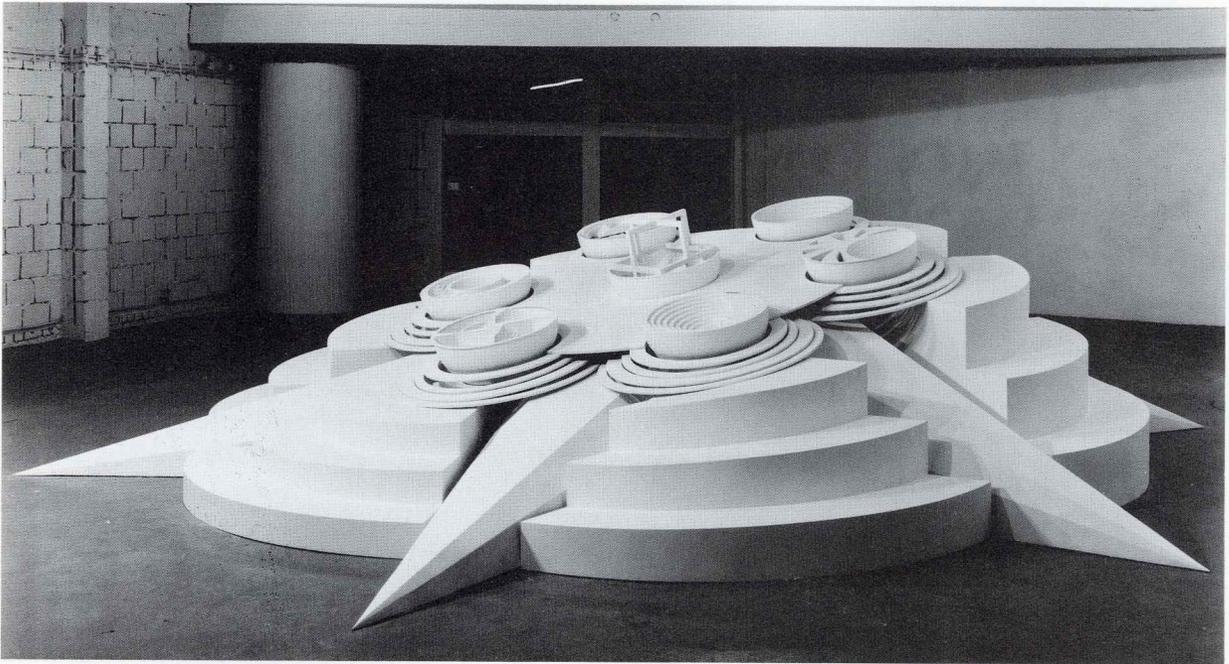
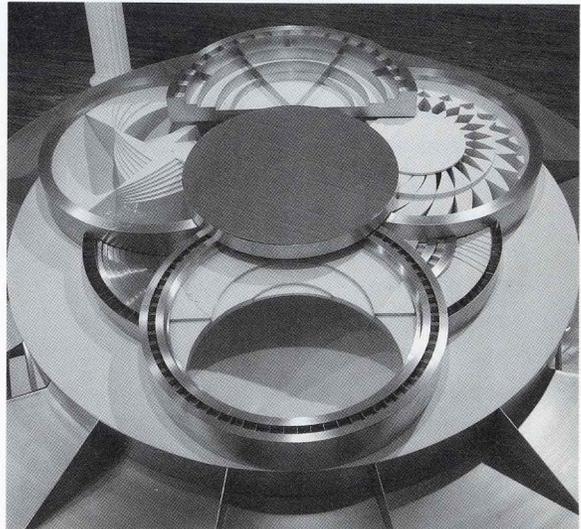


Fig. 26. *The Six of Pentacles: To Know All Manner of Things, Past and Future*, 1987. Kunstforum, Stadtische Galerie Im Lenbachhaus, Munich, West Germany. Photo: Philipp Schonborn.

Fig. 27. *Three-Fold Manifestation III*, 1988. John Weber Gallery, New York. Photo: Mark America.



dimensionalized. The piece is about twenty-five feet in diameter and it is more of a piece of architecture, whereas *Three-Fold Manifestation III*, which followed from it, is more of an object or an instrument.

**JF** So this followed *Three-Fold Manifestation II* that is in the permanent collection of Storm King Art Center, previously installed in New York in the Doris C. Freedman Plaza, Central Park South.

**AA** *Three-Fold Manifestation II* came first, then *The Six of Pentacles*, and then *Three-Fold Manifestation III*. *Three-Fold Manifestation I* was done in Israel and these things are related to the Cabala too; they are steeped in medieval mysticism. They stemmed as well out of the investigation of the language of magic signs. I began to see the Fludd things and the magic signs and symbols as somewhat the same kind of thing. There was a six of pentacles that I found on a pack of tarot cards; I picked up on it and imagined it into that sculpture. Then I went back and inset the astronomical schemes into the bowls. So it sort of flows back and forth.

Then last year I made a drawing called *The Dance Garden with Magic Symbols* in which I took—and don't ask me why it happened—diagrams of minuets and I used them to construct pathways inside three-dimensionalized magic diagrams. Each one of these diagrams gave you a certain power. This idea came from a text I found that dates from the fifteenth or sixteenth century and is Cabalistic in origin, I think. Each of the diagrams are labeled with a specific power, for example the power to become invincible, to cause love or hate, and so on. What I got interested in, and am still interested in, is the fact that at a certain point,

language—whether it's the mark or a symbol—was so powerful to people that they really thought that they could get all the food they wanted, they could read people's minds, they could fly in the sky, they could transform themselves into any kind of animal, you know, all of these sorts of things.

I three-dimensionalized these signs, made them into a structure almost the way the *Tempietto* became a three-dimensional embodiment of the ideals of the Renaissance. I use these things as the beginnings of something to stimulate my imagination and then I imagine the structure on top of that. A lot of the drawings follow this system of dealing with script and seeing what happens when it becomes architecture or becomes three-dimensional.

**JF** The drawing for *The Great Watchtower of the East* [figure 28] would be an example of that.

**AA** Yes, and *The Six of Pentacles*. *The Great Watchtower of the East* is a labyrinthine, meandering path which is stepped and I see it as dealing with threes: a head region and two side regions. In this case the diagram I three-dimensionalized was taken from an Indian, tantric diagram. My interest in people like Robert Fludd and in medieval European alchemy is related to my fascination with tantric art, especially the way the more abstract tantric drawings can sometimes be extremely simple and yet refer to ecstatic, mental states. Some of the drawings which attract me the most have titles like *The Five Regions of the Head Penetrating Into the Outer Boundaries of the Universe* and have something to do with the body penetrating into cosmic space. It just interests me that people would try to portray

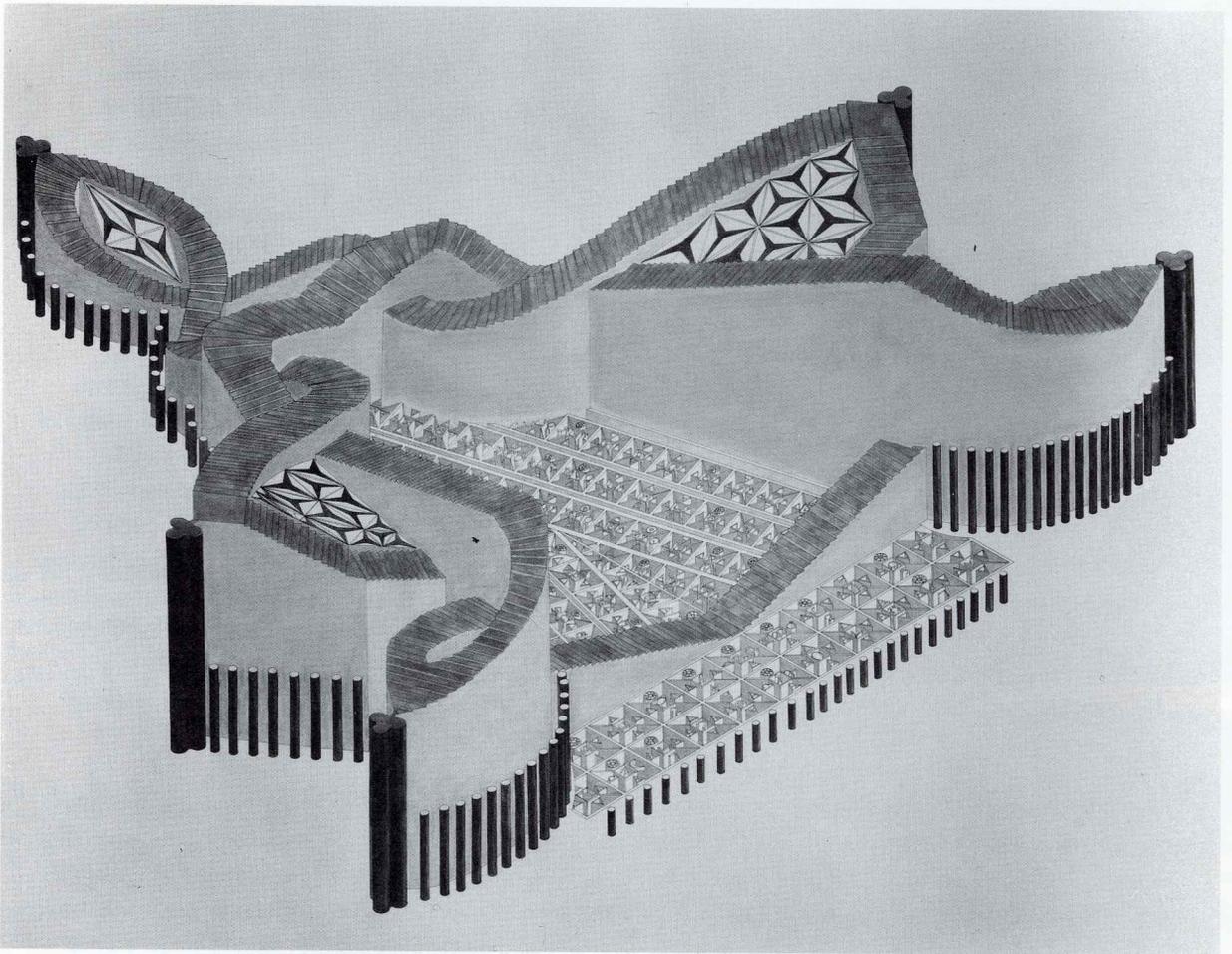


Fig. 28. *The Great Watchtower of the East*, 1988. John Weber Gallery, New York. Photo: Fred Scruton.

both a state of mind and then what the space of the universe looks like in the same drawing. Both of these things are very difficult to depict.

For *The Great Watchtower of the East* I three-dimensionalized this tantric symbol into a series of steps, surrounded by columns, and in the very center I inserted compartments derived from medieval alchemical signs; they were sort of like rooms which ostensibly one could meander through as well. When I started thinking about doing the commission in La Jolla, California, for the summer of 1989, called *The Island of the Moons and the Suns* [figure 29], I began with this three-part construction in *The Great Watchtower of the East*. I translated the drawing so that the steps became pathways for water and troughs that contained water. For some time, I had been interested in using concrete to construct a garden and water space that would be peaceful and lovely and almost opulent in its decoration and very artificial at the same time.

Some of my earlier pieces dealt with concrete and I wanted to use it again. I've always liked the material. Concrete has a massiveness to it. It also relates well to a natural setting because through time it takes on the stains of rain water and moss growing on it and whatever else falls on it in nature. I wanted to get back to some of those earlier ideas and I also very much wanted to create a garden artifice. In the center is this design through which water emerges and then it flows down and through other areas of the piece. It was a different way of making a fountain; instead of spraying water, the water moves in intricate loops through designs which force the water to take on their patterns. I wanted something that was euphoric and theatrical and not so much of this world—set apart in space and in time even though it existed

in a natural setting.

Some of the tantric drawings which have interested me for a while, back to 1985 or before, have to do with a mountain called Mount Meru. It supposedly sits at the center of the universe and from this sacred mountain everything else is generated. The sacred mountain has many different plateaus and one encounters various islands along the way. One of the islands that I loved the best was "the island of the rose apple tree." I would sit and think about these things: what was "the island of the rose apple tree" like? The makers of the tantric drawings illustrated these concepts with very intricate details; they were landscape concepts and they were also concepts of heaven in various stages. I would vascillate back and forth between more ecstatic states of mind and then much more aggressive and worldly and frightening states of mind when I was thinking about these tantric drawings.

I started translating some of these designs into the intricate patterning and negative spaces that you see in concrete in *The Island of the Moons and the Suns*. This investigation which resulted in the La Jolla piece actually began in an earlier piece made in Bellingham, Washington, called *The Islands of the Rose Apple Tree Surrounded by the Oceans of the World For You Oh My Darling*, 1987 [figure 30]. The Bellingham piece is a simpler, more strictly horizontal work and the water moves very slowly through it, around two concrete, tomb-like forms and into these curvilinear extensions out in space. It was intended as a kind of memorial. Just as the *Low Building With Dirt Roof* brought up the house and yet also a penal aspect, this piece brought out the tomb-like quality of it while at the same time the water flows throughout, suggesting a

Fig. 29. *The Island of the Moons and the Suns*, 1989. J. Robert Orton and Ming Mur-Ray Orton, La Jolla, California. Photo: A. Aycock.

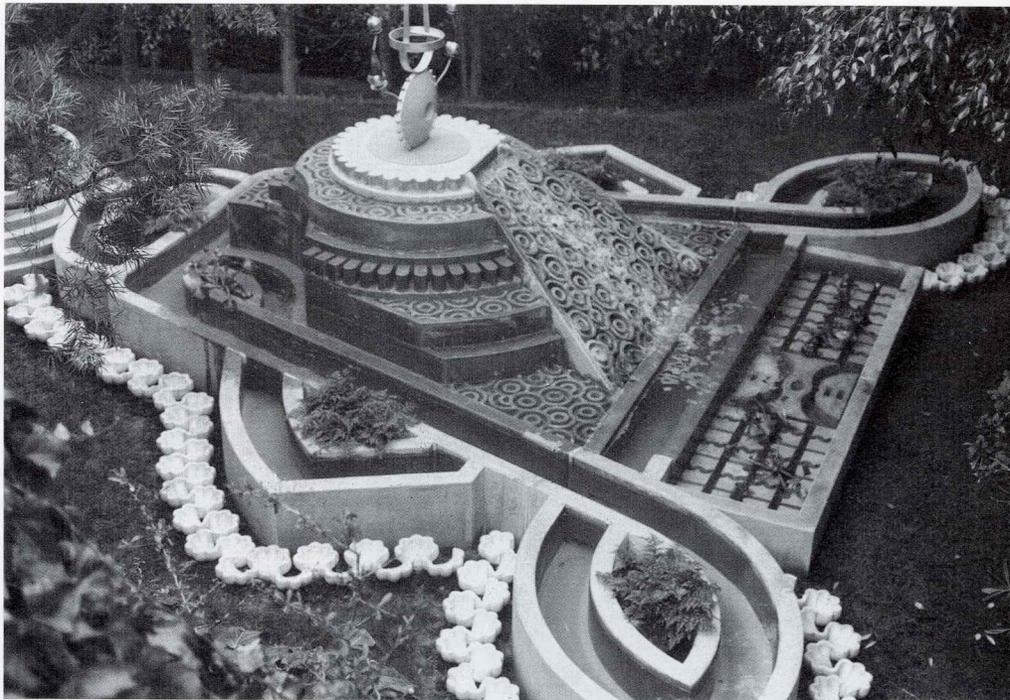
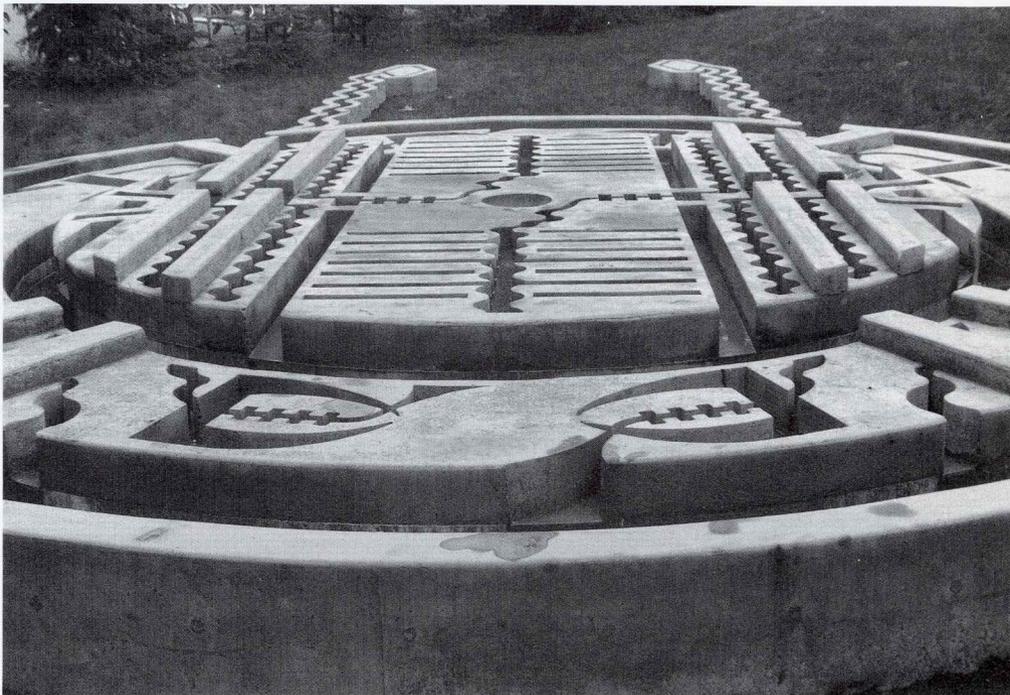


Fig. 30. *The Islands of the Rose Apple Tree Surrounded by the Oceans of the World for You Oh My Darling*, 1987. Western Washington State University, Bellingham, Washington. Photo: Daydre Phillips.



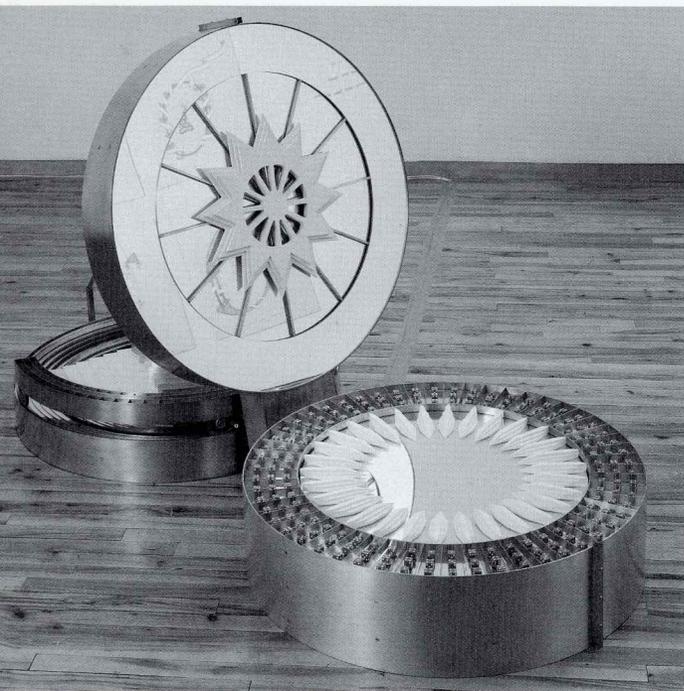


Fig. 31. *The Dice Game: For Diverse Visions*, 1986. Martin Sklar, New York.  
Photo: Fred Scruton.

cleansing and purification as well, not just death; water provides life. I have always wanted to build a series of very, very small islands in the middle of a body of water. And these islands would be made out of concrete and earth and be a fantastic, separate, artificial world. Some of the more recent, larger, outdoor works—like the water works in Bellingham and La Jolla and *The Universe Wheel*, 1988, for Buffalo, New York—reflect on the smaller and more delicate indoor works.

**JF** *The Universe Wheel* is also like a large astronomical instrument that you can sit on. Is that a reflection on a piece like *The Dice Game: For Diverse Visions* of 1986 [figure 31]?

**AA** It is and also on *The Descent and Reascent of the Soul II* and the *Three-Fold Manifestation III*. *The Dice Game* came after leaving all those motors and steel, that violent period. It was more or less coming to terms with all of that and it again came from looking at astronomical instruments, compasses, navigational instruments. There are exquisite compasses in three parts which open up. So I used them as models and on one side *The Dice Game* is a kind of roulette wheel with those red dice and the association to gambling games and then the other side has a kind of cosmology. It's mirrored,

stepped, circular, it has a kind of vortex.

*The Dice Game* related to *The Glass Bead Game: Circling "Round the Ka-Ba"*. The Ka-Ba is that black box in Mecca where everybody goes and then they circumnavigate it in this kind of rapturous, hypnotic dance. I have photographs with this whirling dervish of thousands of people around this black box. So what I did was I fantasized those people into a kind of astronomical game.

*The Dice Game* is mirrored, *The Glass Bead Game: Circling "Round the Ka-Ba"* is not. The vortex is very deep in *The Glass Bead Game* and the house floats above it in the drawing. In *The Dice Game* it's shallower and you've got various gameboards around it, which were also taken from astronomical diagrams—that's also in *The Glass Bead Game* drawing. Then vertically sandblasted into the mirrors of *The Dice Game* is a cosmology; it's just very faintly visible. It's a symbol of the world and there's a mirrored wiper that just keeps wiping over it and erasing it. On one side it's all about the intensity of a profane world and on the other side the transparency and elusiveness of this other sort of life that just keeps being unattainable and erasing itself. That's the best way I can explain *The Dice Game*. It's still not quite verbal for me. It's one of

my favorite pieces though. And it was also an attempt to make a small piece that really had power without relying on traditional modernism or pedestal sculpture. It harks back to those things where you have a sign and you draw it and you get that power. In this case you would see, hallucinate, you would have visions. I was trying to make it an instrument, the way sculpture was at one point in time, when it had a magic quality.

**JF** You're not just talking about premodern, you're talking about prehistoric as at Lascaux?

**AA** Yeah, the caves and also when you went into Africa, and also I think when you went into the Parthenon and you saw Athena up there, that was a pretty heady experience that sculpture was the deity. Sculpture really had a tremendous magical quality to it for some time and I wanted to get back to that. I also realized that often I rely on scale. You know, that's one of the things that I can do, I can take some little incidental thing that's in a diagram and scale it up and it becomes something. I wanted to see what would happen if I didn't rely on scale this time; if it would still work. *The Dice Game* appears to be a pretty sophisticated little instrument but it harks back to an older tradition even though it doesn't look primitive.

## Alice Aycock's Impossibilism

by Jonathan Fineberg

That Alice Aycock will at one moment draw inspiration for a sculpture from an electronic circuit chip (as in *Large Scale Dis/Integration of Micro Electronic Memories*), the next instant from an Aztec game amalgamated with a World War I tactical plan (in *The Game of Flyers* [figure 5]), or an Islamic diagram that attempts to explain rainbows (in *The Angels Continue Turning the Wheels of the Universe Despite Their Ugly Souls, Part II* [figure 3]), is a strategy destined to baffle categorizers and iconographers alike. But the particular identity of the sources turns out to be almost beside the point. It helps very little to know the specific, fifteenth century, Sienese *Annunciation to the Shepherds* in which the artist saw an angel that looked to her as if it were hanging in mid-air, because the idea which she got from this work has nothing to do with the intended iconography of the Italian painting. This painting merely provided a springboard for Aycock's fantasies about levitation and flight. "I felt that the Middle Ages were involved with desire," she told me, "with wishing, with imagining, with trying desperately to do something which had to do with levitation or flight. But it could be called a 'state of desire,' which was a state I could identify with as I was attempting to make my art, to push it farther than I could actually go, to get somewhere that I hadn't quite thought of yet."<sup>1</sup>

Any work of art contains a whole world view; the relations between the artistic elements pro-

vides a concrete model from which one can abstract a way of structuring ideas. An artist's recognizable "style" results naturally as the most adequate embodiment of the artist's ideas and of her or his way of thinking. Aycock's "style" conveys her fascination with what lies just beyond knowing, with what she calls a "state of desire." Her works involve the awesome mechanisms of the universe, ominous forces, magical events, layerings of ancient civilizations, dream-like juxtapositions and sentimental memories. The bewildering multiplicity and obscurity of her sources mirrors her experience of the overwhelming complexities of the world and expresses her drive to master them. Aycock's thought process—not the references to history, science, or myth—is the central subject matter of her art and any single sculpture or drawing represents only a small fragment of it at a given moment in its ongoing evolution.

This sense of growth and change—with its continuous expansion of narrative elements—is an unusually prevalent feature of Aycock's style. Her works always feel intellectually open-ended; the thought isn't finished with an individual piece, one sculpture is only the most that could be said by the time construction on it had to stop. Aycock expresses this not only in her reworking of many pieces when she reinstalls them at successive showings, but in the elaborate networks of interrelated ideas which she weaves from one work to another, frequently over several years. The permutations of her ideas about a celestial alphabet exemplify this. In a study for her 1979 *Explanation An. Of Spring and the Weight of Air* [figure 4], Aycock quotes from the *Zohar* (the *Cabala*): "He who travels in the early morning shall look carefully to the east. He will see there something like letters marching in the sky, some rising, others descending. These brilliant charac-

<sup>1</sup> Interview with the author in his session, "Issues of Intention: Three Artists," of the 1982 College Art Association annual meeting held in New York City.

ters are the letters with which God has formed heaven and earth..."<sup>2</sup> The suggestion that heaven and earth came from words bears on Aycock's persistent belief that "every configuration could be read if it could be decoded, and then you'd be able to understand its content."<sup>3</sup> As to Baudelaire for whom all of nature was a cipher, Aycock sees all material things as a kind of writing for which we need to learn the alphabet.

In this sense an Aztec game reveals the underlying nature of its civilization, a medieval city plan provides a map of the medieval mind. Aycock's 1982 drawing of *The St. Gall Pantomime* is a map of the artist's mind in response to the famous medieval plan of St. Gall. Loosely using the plan as a basis for free association, Aycock reconstructed the layout incorporating her own previous pieces as suggested to her by individual parts of the original plan. In place of the monastery church with its long nave and its apse and radiating chapels, Aycock inserted an isometric allusion to her 1979 *The Machine That Makes the World* [figure 6] and references to her 1975 *Project for Three Concrete Chambers Entered Through an Underground Tunnel*. Elsewhere she referred to *A Simple Network of Underground Wells and Tunnels*, 1975 [figure 13], to *Project for a Vertical Maze: Four Superimposed Cruciform Buildings*, 1975, and to her many other mazes and complexes of tunnels and wells.

In Aycock's 1981 *The Charmed Circle* [figure 10], the theme of an object or system as a lan-

guage to be read took inspiration from quite a different quarter. The concept for this sculpture developed out of a diagram depicting the jet of particles emanating from a proton when it is struck by a high energy neutrino in a linear accelerator. Aycock used the diagram as a stimulus for fantasy. For example, the title plays on the word "charm," which generally denotes a personal quality of quasi-magical attractiveness but also serves as a technical term in subatomic physics. By implication the artist suggests a mystic element in physics to which she refers even though this particular scientific diagram has nothing to do with "charms" in the technical sense. One of the intriguing aspects of subatomic events is that they cannot be seen. We only have knowledge of them by their traces and this symbolic remove suggested the concept of an alphabet to the artist—an alphabet of the atom.

In the summer of 1982 Aycock executed a group of five sculptures on a field in Italy; she described the pieces as "five galaxies coming together on a plane as diagrams."<sup>4</sup> Each work differs markedly in character from the others and each has its own nexus of ideas which in their turn generated a sequence of further pieces. In this composite work Aycock superimposed five mental maps in which one can read five complete systems of events and ideas. The juxtaposition of different world views or conceptual frameworks—suggesting the relativity of mental structures—is an underlying theme of this work. In November of 1982, the artist made both a drawing and then a small sculpture entitled *Celestial Alphabet*. They portray a set of characters that seem part Hebrew, part Arabic as the imagined alphabet of the angels (which, in the sculpture, have little lights so that they even twin-

2 See *Alice Aycock: Projects 1979-1981* (Tampa: University of South Florida, 1981), p. 27.

3 Alice Aycock in conversation with students in the author's Columbia University seminar, in the artist's studio, spring 1983.

4 Conversation with the artist, July 3, 1983.

kle like stars). In January of 1983, the theme of the celestial alphabet appeared again in a group of pieces for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago.

The theme of the legible system in these sculptures is only one of many layers of meaning, albeit an important one. Each work also has other threads which weave in the same way back through a different set of relationships within Aycock's oeuvre. In addition to its involvement with the celestial alphabet *Explanation An. Of Spring and the Weight of Air*, for example, also relates to a sequence of works which include the 1973 *Low Building With Dirt Roof (For Mary)* [figure 12] and the 1976 *Wooden Shacks on Stilts with Platform*. These works, predominantly made in wood, create imaginary stage sets for Aycock's fantasies; she referred to such works as "pieces for my body"<sup>5</sup> because the design in each case suggests acting in a specific way—whether this means actually participating physically or only as an imagined act. In *Low Building* the artist intended the viewer to crawl into the space under the seven tons of earth and experience both a sense of panic or claustrophobia and a kind of womb-like state of calm dreaming—sensations she had experienced in the corridors of the Egyptian pyramids.<sup>6</sup> In works of the late seventies—like *Explanation*—the structure demands a purely imagined involvement, doing things that defy gravity or require some magical intervention. As Aycock pointed out about *Wooden Shacks*: "It extends an invitation to reach a point which in fact cannot be reached."<sup>7</sup>

5 Alice Aycock in her lecture to the students in the author's class at Yale University, 1981.

6 1981 Yale lecture.

7 Margaret Sheffield, "Alice Aycock: Mystery Under Construction," *Artforum*, September 1977, p. 64.

The shift from actual participation to imaginative empathy occurred in the mid-seventies, and as a part of that change the artist began developing fantasy protagonists to carry out the action. These characters have become involved in increasingly elaborate narratives which often continue from piece to piece. These sculptures provide extremely specific props or scenarios which imply to the artist that certain fantasy activities will take or already have taken place there. *Explanation*, for example, provides a stage for the nineteenth century circus performer Eunice Winkless who traveled from town to town diving from a high scaffolding—on horseback—into a pool of water. Only someone who could fly upside down could ascend the stairs in *The Angels Continue Turning the Wheels of the Universe Despite Their Ugly Souls, Part II*, 1978—indeed Aycock had in mind a particular flying personage, a Sicilian hysteric whom the artist saw from behind in an old photograph and imagined flying around the room on the ceiling and on the walls during a religious trance.<sup>8</sup>

These pieces in which Aycock explores participation—real or imagined—have a legacy in Action Painting (Pollock and de Kooning) in that one re-enacts a physical experience which leads one to an emotional and intellectual experience. The vocabulary for these works also has a debt to the detached and tightly controlled experimental approach of Aycock's teacher Robert Morris. Like Morris, Aycock treats her materials in an exceedingly functional way; they merely serve the idea. But Aycock's work couldn't be less like Morris' in that her subject matter is intensely emotional, literary, open to irrational experience

8 Conversation with the artist, July 7, 1983.

and complexity, and dominated by explicit personal fantasy.

In most of Aycock's works of the eighties, the story line or participatory aspect had little or no role. Works like *Celestial Alphabet*, *The Nets of Solomon*, and the series of blade machines like *Glance of Eternity* [figure 22] and *Preliminary Study for a Theory of Universal Causality* seem to be about psychological states, intellectual models, a deeply subjective metaphysics, and cosmic phenomena. Even works like *Donkey Kong* (named after the popular video game) and *The Loop, The Loop* (summoning up images of the amusement park) are existential explorations rather than narratives. This development began to manifest itself around 1981 in works like *The Charmed Circle*; the desire to move through time and space like a particle expressed itself there but was such an abstract and unvisualizable action as to leave almost no room for empathic engagement, and the forms seem to embody the ideas rather than provide a stage set which implied them.

Aycock's *The Miraculating Machine in the Garden (Tower of the Winds)* of 1982 is perhaps the *summa* of this latter phase of Aycock's development. It doesn't imply a story through artifacts, it doesn't assume empathic re-enactment. It orchestrates a wide variety of associations into a highly evocative setting and prompts a reflective mood. One source for the work was a theory, still current until the late nineteenth century, that "ether winds" radiate through all matter and provide the electro-magnetic energy which animates everything.<sup>9</sup>

9 1981 Yale lecture.

*The Miraculating Machine* has elaborate antennae, vacuum jars, coils and cyclotron pipes—a romantic, scientific apparatus like something out of *Frankenstein*, capable of harnessing awesome natural forces. The work conjures anticipation of mystical possibilities and stirs excitement about the power of scientific discovery. But it also conveys a curious nostalgia for an era of absolute faith in progress when the ideal of comprehensive knowledge seemed possible. Many of Aycock's favorite sources for new ideas—like the nineteenth century *Complete Encyclopaedia of Illustration*—date from such a time. Although the overall structure of *The Miraculating Machine* came from a clock and a furnace, Aycock took many of the details from the *Encyclopaedia*. One feels litheness but also fragility in this sculpture; it stirs an alertness to undercurrents of danger, one seems to hear every sound like a deer in the wood. It also projects a kind of protective warmth, whence the "garden," a feeling of peaceful enclosure and retreat into the private world of one's own imagination.

Aycock's next series, the blade machines,<sup>10</sup> have a strikingly dangerous character. Aycock has always courted danger in her sculpture, indeed she does so with obvious pleasure; fear has an almost erotic quality in many of her works, not unlike the excitement of a terrifying amusement park ride. *Project for a Circular Building with Narrow Ledges for Walking*, 1976 [figure 11], provides a precarious walk spiralling down the inside of a deep well, *Low Building*, 1973, stirs the anxiety of being buried alive, *The Machine That Makes the World* only lets the viewer into

10 In 1971 the artist positioned four industrial fans around a pile of sand, making a piece called *Sand Fans*. The work centered on the movement of the sand in a vein reminiscent of the "process art" of the late sixties, but the exposed blades prefigured the blade machines.

its center after he or she passes through a sequence of what Aycock described as "guillotine-like" steel doors,<sup>11</sup> and the 1981 *The Savage Sparkler* [figure 9] has exposed red-hot coils and heavy steel parts that spin at great speeds. "Edgar Allan Poe stories... were my bedtime stories when I was a kid," she explained, "and later I used to read a lot of ghost stories before I would go to sleep just because I liked to scare myself for the pleasure of it."<sup>12</sup>

The element of actual risk in Aycock's work lends it a particular expressive intensity. This is especially true of the blade machines. Yet they also concern celestial themes such as planetary motion and thoughts on eternity and the infinite. The real danger of the blades opens up a feeling of vulnerability, which in turn evokes and magnifies such thoughts. Aycock arrived at the shape of the blades by abstracting patterns from the cosmic diagrams of an obscure English mystic of the early seventeenth century named Robert Fludd and then translating them into steel.

It helps to know that the blade design came from the drawings of Robert Fludd because it suggests a cosmological dimension to the meaning which Aycock's titles, such as *Glance of Eternity*, confirm. But tracing all the myriad associations and "sources" for this, or any, Aycock work would be a hopeless task. Ultimately it would also be only

of peripheral importance because such sources serve more as raw material than as an integral theme in the subject matter. Whereas in the work of a nineteenth century artist such as Courbet, for example, the artist's political views and their sources are one of the major layers of conscious subject matter that caused him to choose a certain object and treat it in a particular way. Personality and world view of course also have a defining relation to Courbet's style but they are not his explicit subject. The shift to an existential-based aesthetic in art after World War II markedly accelerated the tendency of twentieth century artists to look at "style" as a mode of thinking, based in reality, and to turn their primary attention to it as a subject matter. What is centrally important in Alice Aycock's blade machines is not that the blade pattern came from a book on Robert Fludd (though it's worth knowing this too), but that one can extrapolate from the interaction of elements within the work, from the work's relation with other Aycock works and statements by her, a point of view about reality, a way of seeing the world. The evident complexity of identifying the sources and her free association to them has more meaning here than the intent of the sources themselves. Aycock associates the danger of the relentlessly sweeping blades with cosmic questions; she uses mechanical processes and industrial materials to evoke the fantastic; and she endows the aesthetic form with a mysterious, magic power over events. In all, the work embodies a broad faith in the artistic imagination as the arsenal for the impossible assault of one woman on a large and bewildering universe.

11 1981 Yale lecture.

12 1981 Yale lecture.

## Checklist

### Sculpture

- 1 *Low Building With Dirt Roof (For Mary)*, 1973  
Stones, wood, earth, 12 x 20 ft.  
Lent by the Artist  
This 1990 reconstruction by Alice Aycock has been made possible by a grant from the Lannan Foundation, Los Angeles
- 2 *How to Catch and Manufacture Ghosts*, 1979  
Wood, water, metal, glass, 10 x 15 x 8 ft.  
Lent by the Artist and John Weber Gallery, New York
- 3 *The Machine That Makes the World*, 1979  
Wood and steel  
8 ft. x 12 ft. 1 1/2 in. x 38 ft.  
Lent by the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Gift of the Artist and Klein Gallery
- 4 *Model for the Savage Sparkler*, 1982  
Steel, sheet metal, electric heating elements, fluorescent lights, 15 x 72 x 48 1/4 in.  
Lent by the Artist and John Weber Gallery, New York
- 5 *Greased Lightning*, 1984  
Steel, galvanized sheet metal, sheet metal, theatrical rainbow lights, an incandescent light, glass, motorized parts, 56 x 72 x 72 in.  
Lent by The Jewish Museum, New York. Museum purchase with funds provided by Miriam R. Passerman, Louise and Gabriel Rosenfeld, and Steven and Harriet Passerman in memory of Maxwell W. Passerman
- 6 *The Universal Stirrer*, 1984  
Metal, glass, electric motor, 5 x 5 x 5 ft.  
Lent by the Artist and John Weber Gallery, New York
- 7 *The Dice Game: For Diverse Visions*, 1986  
Brass, mirror, plexiglas, wood, plaster, dice, motors, 45 x 36 x 88 1/2 in.  
Lent by Martin Sklar, New York
- 8 *Three-Fold Manifestation II*, 1987  
Steel painted white, 32 x 14 x 12 ft.  
Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, New York  
Gift of the Artist
- 9 *The Descent and Reascent of the Soul II*, 1988  
Mirror, wood, aluminum, brass, 11 x 7 x 4 2/3 ft.  
Courtesy of John Weber Gallery, New York
- 10 *Three-Fold Manifestation III*, 1988  
Mirror, wood, aluminum, brass, 3 x 8 ft.  
Courtesy of John Weber Gallery, New York
- 11 *Fantasy Sculpture I*, 1990  
Wood, steel, stone, copper, lucite, moving parts, plants, 20 1/2 x 18 x 33 ft.  
Lent by the Artist

### Works on Paper

- 12 *Collected Ghost Stories from the Workhouse*, 1980  
From the series *How to Catch and Manufacture Ghosts*  
Pencil on paper, 42 x 54 in.  
Lent by Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts. Anonymous gift
- 13 *The Miraculating Machine in the Garden*, 1981  
Pencil on mylar, 36 x 42 in.  
Lent by Henry S. McNeil, Jr., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- 14 *A Representation of the Second World: Plan, Isometric, and Section*, 1984  
Watercolor, graphite, pencil on paper  
Three panels, each 27 3/4 x 39 1/2 in.  
Lent by The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York  
Anonymous gift
- 15 *The House of the Stoics*, 1984  
Mixed media on paper  
Diptych, each 44 1/2 x 30 in.  
Lent by Allen Logerquist, New York
- 16 *The Glass Bead Game: Circling "Round the Ka-Ba"*, 1985  
Mixed media on paper, 57 1/2 x 83 in.  
Private collection, New York

- 17 *The Garden of Scripts (Villandry)*, 1986  
 Pen on paper, 78 1/2 x 60 in.  
 Private collection, New York
- 18 *Greased Lightning*, 1987  
 Blue pencil on paper, 49 7/8 x 38 in.  
 Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, New York  
 Gift of David W. Bermant
- 19 *The New and Favorite Game of the Universe  
 and the Golden Goose Egg*, 1987  
 Ink, pastel, watercolor on paper, 102 1/8 x 60 in.  
 Courtesy of John Weber Gallery, New York
- 20 *The Dance Garden With Magic Symbols*, 1988  
 Mixed media on paper, 7 x 9 5/6 ft.  
 Courtesy of John Weber Gallery, New York
- 21 *The Great Watchtower of the East*, 1988  
 Mixed media on paper, 59 7/8 x 83 3/4 in.  
 Courtesy of John Weber Gallery, New York

## Biography

Alice Aycock

Born in 1946 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Alice Aycock holds a bachelor of arts from Douglass College at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, and a master of arts from Hunter College of The City University of New York. Through her travels—to Japan, Egypt, Greece, and Mexico, and extensive trips to Europe—she has pursued special interests in architecture and archeological sites. Alice Aycock has lived and worked in New York City since 1968. Her son, Halley Christopher, was born in 1986.

## Selected Teaching Positions

Senior critic, Yale School of Art, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, 1988-present

Assistant Professor, Hunter College of The City University of New York, 1982-85

Visiting Artist, Williams College, Williamstown, Massachusetts, 1974; Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island, 1977; Princeton University, New Jersey, 1979; San Francisco Art Institute, California, 1979

## Awards

National Endowment for the Arts: Artist's Fellowship, 1975, 1980, 1986

New York State Creative Artists Public Service Grant, 1976

## Selected Solo Exhibitions

1977  
*Studies for a Town*, Project Room, The Museum of Modern Art, New York

1979  
*Explanation An. Of Spring and the Weight of Air*, The Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, Ohio

1980

*The Rotary Lightning Express*, P.S. 1, The Institute for Art and Urban Resources Inc., Long Island City, New York

1983

*The Nets of Solomon, Phase II*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois

"Retrospective of Projects and Ideas, 1977-1983,"  
Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart, West  
Germany (travelled)

1985

"Alice Aycock," Serpentine Gallery, London, England

1987

*The Six of Pentacles to Know All Manner of Things,  
Past and Future*, Kunstforum, Munich, West Germany

### **Selected Group Exhibitions**

1978

"Made By Sculptors," Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam,  
The Netherlands

1979

"Biennial Exhibition," Whitney Museum of American  
Art, New York

1980

"Projects: Architectural Sculpture," Los Angeles Institute  
of Contemporary Art, California

1981

"Machineworks," Institute of Contemporary  
Art—University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia

"Metaphor: New Projects by Contemporary  
Sculptors," Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden,  
Washington, D.C.

1982

"Venice Biennale," Italy

1984

"Content: A Contemporary Focus, 1974-1984,"  
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden,  
Washington, D.C.

1986

"Sittings: Alice Aycock/Richard Fleischner/Mary  
Miss/George Trakas," La Jolla Museum of  
Contemporary Art, California

1987

"Documenta 8," Kassel, West Germany

1989

"Making Their Mark," Cincinnati Art Museum, Ohio  
(travelled)

### **Sited Works**

1973

*Low Building With Dirt Roof (For Mary)*, Gibney Farm,  
New Kingston, Pennsylvania (destroyed)

1975

*A Simple Network of Underground Wells and Tunnels*,  
Merriewold West, Far Hills, New Jersey (destroyed)

1976

*Wooden Posts Surrounded by Fire Pits*, Nassau  
County Museum of Fine Arts, Roslyn Harbor, New  
York (destroyed)

1977

*The Beginnings of a Complex . . . For Documenta*,  
Kassel, West Germany (destroyed)

1980

*Collected Ghost Stories From the Workhouse*,  
University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida (destroyed)

1984

*The House of the Stoics*, The International  
Contemporary Sculpture Symposium, Lake Biwa,  
Japan

1987

*Three-Fold Manifestation II*, Doris C. Freedman Plaza,  
New York City

1989

*The Island of the Moons and the Suns*, J. Robert Orton,  
Jr. and Ming Mur-Ray Orton, La Jolla, California

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