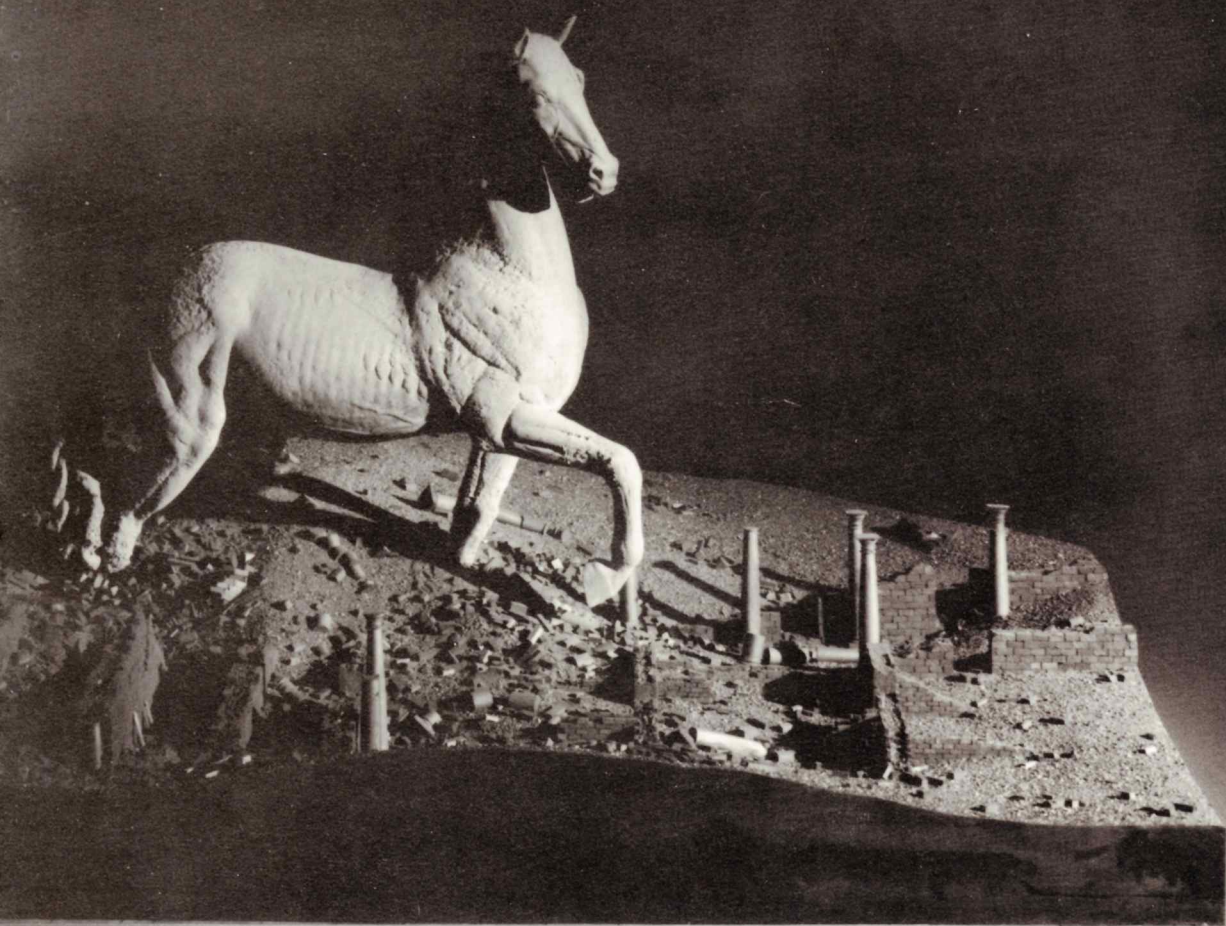


WANDERING INTO MEMORY

Sculpture by Anne and Patrick Poirier

May 22–October 31, 1989





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Storm King Art Center

Mountainville

New York

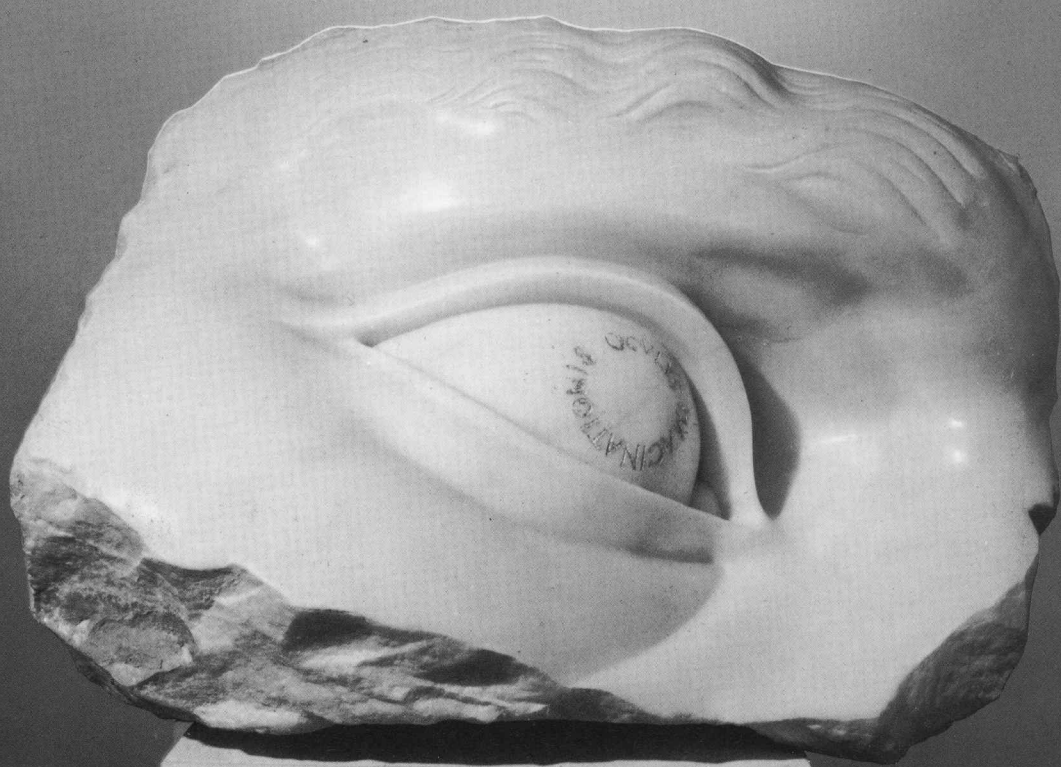
It is with great pleasure that Storm King Art Center presents *Wandering Into Memory: Sculpture by Anne and Patrick Poirier*, the first full-scale museum exhibition of the artists' work in this country. The objects featured are inspired by the Poiriers' urge to fathom humanity's collective unconscious and to bring about a deeper appreciation of history and culture.

Storm King Art Center is indebted to a number of individuals for their generosity and assistance in bringing this exhibition to fruition. Anne and Patrick Poirier's extensive efforts were invaluable. Our deepest thanks are due to the lenders of works of art in the exhibition: Elyn and Saul Dennison, Kitty and Herbert Glantz, Livia and Marc Straus, Ileana Sonnabend and Antonio Homem of the Sonnabend Gallery, Alexandra and Christopher Middendorf of the Middendorf Gallery, and of course the artists. Additionally, we thank the French Action Association of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which contributed funds allowing Anne and Patrick Poirier to participate in the installation of their exhibition and to attend the opening events.

We would like to acknowledge with warm gratitude other individuals whose involvement has been essential to the project. David Collens, director of Storm King Art Center, curated and installed the exhibition. Advice and support came from Cynthia Hazen Polsky, vice-president of the Board of Trustees. Joan Marter, professor of art history at Rutgers University, has written an astute and informative essay. The Poiriers' essay clarifies their artistic sensibility and choice of imagery. Greer Allen carefully designed this publication. Thanks are extended as well to the entire staff at Storm King Art Center who participated in all aspects of the exhibition.

H. Peter Stern

President



Myth and Metaphor

The Art of Anne and Patrick Poirier

Oculus Memori—

*It is the gaze of memory which, for centuries,
has been absorbing the sun, the images.*

*A gaze that would want to render an account
of the dialogue between centuries and cultures
that the eyes of ancient statues seem to express.*

—Anne Poirier¹

From the temples of Angkor to the Mayan pyramids of Tikal, from Hadrian's Villa near Rome to classical ruins in Turkey, Anne and Patrick Poirier have traveled widely to explore the art and architecture of ancient cultures, and to relate them to our own. If the classics of Greek literature—the dramas of Euripides and Sophocles—the writings of Dante, the great plays of Shakespeare, continue to speak to modern man, so too the art of earlier civilizations can communicate. The Poiriers have acknowledged this:

Archaeology, Architecture, and Mythology are privileged metaphors that try to establish in space or put on stage the phenomena of the unconscious. That is why the remotest mythologies, the sites that are most ancient and farthest away still interest man today: because, intuitively, he knows that somewhere there is an affinity between those distant and forgotten myths, those lost worlds and a little-known part of himself.²

For the Poiriers, views of the ancient world cause romantic reverie, while the modern era provokes cool cynicism. Their architectural ruins can be related to the psyche of Western man as the end of a millennium approaches. Their images are reflective of our own culture, of its decadence and decay, and their mythical realms encourage psychic journeys of self-discovery.

In this exhibition, a special installation on the grounds entitled *Fall of the Giants* gives compelling expression to the Poiriers' use of myth as metaphor for the human condition in an aging century. Made of marble and aluminum, *Fall of the Giants* includes a door cut into the hillside—suggesting an opening to an underground (burial) chamber. A truncated column is located on the hill above the walled entrance to this chamber, while column drums are strewn below. One drum is pierced by a gleaming metal arrow, while a colossal eye (evoking the ruins of ancient statuary) peers out from

¹ Quoted from "Anne and Patrick Poirier Interviewed by Jerome Sans," in *Lost Archetypes: Anne and Patrick Poirier* (Bath, Great Britain: Artsite Gallery, 1986), p. xv.

² Statement by Anne and Patrick Poirier (translated by Regina Hablutzel) in Cynthia Jaffee McCabe, *Artistic Collaboration in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, 1984), p. 188.



marble fragments. As in a previous sculpture, *The Death of Enceladus*, a giant arrow appears to have fallen from the sky, driving the Giants back into the earth.

For their impressive presentation of architectural ruins, the Poiriers were drawn to one of the most dramatic wonders of the Mannerist period, the *Hall of the Giants* by Giulio Romano.³ The journey to this room in the Palazzo del Te might even parallel the discovery of the Poiriers' installation. At Mantua, as at Storm King Art Center, the other works of art provide limited preparation for the overwhelming effect of a full-scale battle between the Gods and Giants. While the Poiriers represent the aftermath of the struggle by using architectural fragments—and an underground chamber suggesting that the Giants have retreated to their subterranean realm—at Mantua colossal columns break into drums, and massive stone blocks topple onto the cowering Giants. Two images draw sustained attention: the terror-filled eyes of the Giants and the powerful thunderbolts hurled by Zeus.

But aside from the visceral sensation of surprise, even terror, elicited by these forms, the story of the fall of the Giants seems a fitting metaphor for a dying century—when the “giants” of modernism have been brought down, when the idealism of the early decades of the twentieth century has vanished. Modernism failed the twentieth century. The utopian dreams elicited by advances in modern technology changed to nightmares as technology was turned against man. The development of atomic weapons, and other efficient means of genocide during the war years, were followed by the toxic destruction of the environment, and the continuous threat of nuclear annihilation in recent decades. Patrick Poirier has spoken of “the shock of the daily flow of violent images which comes to the surface at times. But it is even more a reaction to the violent shock felt when confronted with places that have been devastated by war: all has changed, all has been overturned, giving the impression that one has jumped into another time, another world.”⁴

The Poiriers join the classicism of the past to contemporary life, not only to inspire the reverie associated with classical fragments, or to evoke a romantic nostalgia for the past, but as a search for self, for stasis in a chaotic world. As Freud mined the subconscious for the true explanation of human behavior, so the Poiriers dig through the ruins left by past civilizations. Anne Poirier noted: “To give a visual image of our memory, Freud takes ancient Rome with all the superimposed strata of dif-

3 See Egon Verheyen, *Palazzo del Te in Mantua* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 1–7.

4 Quoted from an interview with the Poiriers in *Lost Archetypes*, p. xvii.

ferent periods; a Rome in ruins of course, with missing elements. And when Jung attempts to develop the theory of the collective unconscious, he uses, not ruins, but architecture."⁵

The joining of architecture to classical ruins in their art can be related to the Poiriers' personal interests that came together in their work as a couple. In recent years artist-couples have gained attention for their collaborative efforts (Edward Kienholz and Nancy Reddin Kienholz, Bernd and Hilla Becher, and Helen and Newton Harrison come to mind). The Poiriers present their art as an unusually successful, seamless collaboration that has extended over two decades. Both artists were born in 1942, Anne Houllévigie Poirier in Marseille; Patrick in Nantes. Both were educated at the Ecole des Arts Décoratifs, Paris (1962–67); both were Prix de Rome recipients for study in the Italian capital beginning in 1968. Their artistic collaboration began before their marriage in 1968, and continued in 1970 when they had a joint exhibition in Rome, and made a project for an international exhibition in Osaka, Japan. Even now the Poiriers' workshop includes shared concepts and lifestyles. Their reduced palette concentrates on the opposition of black and white, and that reductivism is echoed in their black and white clothing.

Anne and Patrick have noted that the association of architecture and archaeology which is so prevalent in their work can be explained by their personalities: one with a builder's mentality, and the other having a taste for excavation, inventory, and archives. The artists have acknowledged that they grew up surrounded by architectural ruins. Children of the 1940s, their early memories include bombed buildings and the razed sites frequently found in French cities shortly after the war. Anne Poirier recalled her girlhood play in destroyed houses or empty lots full of ruins, while Patrick's home was bombed during the war. Personal history, therefore, joins with the mysteries of the past, of cultures far removed from their own, as sources for their art.

At Storm King Art Center, the *Fall of the Giants* provides a fitting analogy for fin-de-siècle angst, for the restlessness and disillusionment of contemporary life. Other works in the current exhibition serve as similar reminders that the post-modern era appropriates from various cultures to dialogue with the present. Exemplary of some of the Poiriers' earlier projects *Pegasus* is a miniaturized version of an archaeological ruin. Pegasus, a winged horse, was the offspring of Poseidon, and sprang

5 Ibid., p. xii.

from the dead body of the monstrous Medusa. In this charcoal, wood, and plaster sculpture, the horse is represented without wings, wandering over a charred landscape. Architectural fragments include the ruins of a classical temple, and the remains of an amphitheatre, reminding us of the death of a highly-developed civilization from the ancient world. Dramatic lighting focuses attention on Pegasus, and evokes the melancholic state suggested by these ruins. We are also reminded of the presumptuousness of the mortal Bellerophon who attempted to ride Pegasus to Olympus. While Bellerophon fell to earth, and wandered about lame and blind, Pegasus continued to Olympus where he carried thunderbolts and lightning to Zeus. Stuart Morgan suggested that the site found in the Poiriers' *Birth of Pegasus* and the previous *Blasted Landscape* (both with ruins of a temple and amphitheatre) were based on a site in Asia Minor, the supposed locus for the mythical battle between the Gods and Giants.⁶ Thus the Poiriers cause us to ponder both the creation and the destruction of a vast civilization simultaneously.

Elsewhere in this exhibition, archaeological fragments fabricated of polished aluminum or bronze give individual expression to some of the great themes explored in the outdoor installation. The giant eye is an image that appears frequently in the Poiriers' art. At times the artists refer to the giant Ephialtes, who engaged Ares in battle, but was pierced in the left eye by an arrow shot by Apollo, and died after being shot by Heracles in the right eye. In *Eye with Tear*, a bronze rivulet (most likely blood from the pierced pupil) causes the fragmented organ to teeter more than six feet above the floor. The Freudian "eye of knowledge" has been blinded in rage. In ancient works arrows are often signs of brutality and destruction. Here the aftermath of a violent act has a profound visual impact.

In another example, a polished aluminum column collapses and falls into fragments, and an eight-foot empty frame entitled *Vanitas* (Irony of Memory) suggests the vacuousness of contemporary art (and life), where artifice often serves as well as substance. A large drum of a classical column, transformed from marble to an industrial metal, is entitled *Fragility of Power*, further suggesting the limitations of human ambition. *Roma = Amor* includes five-foot-high bronze letters that can be read from either side to form the two words of the title. Does the work express ambivalence to the grandeur that was once Rome, or a mourning for the classical past that was deeply loved?

6 Stuart Morgan, "Journey Without Maps," in *Lost Archetypes*, pp. 26–27.

VANITAS



In their work the Poiriers also provide a commentary on the art world. Their sculpture is post-Conceptual and a continuation of the postmodern trends of the 1970s: Arte Povera in Italy, and American earthworks and land projects. These environmental projects have been transformed by the Poiriers into miniaturized sites or given colossal dimensions. Technology as art is rejected, while the *métier* of sculpture is presented in metaphorical terms: the Cyclops forged lightning bolts for Zeus, as a fitting parallel for the artist working bronze and steel. The Medusa's gaze turned men into stone, but in the Poiriers' sculpture her head appears on the sword of her own destruction. Like Hephaestus, the metal plates forged by these artists join earthly powers and cosmic forces.

The Poiriers' art is profound; their motifs are archetypal. The allegories implicit in their classicized fragments, whether in marble or aluminum, speak directly. In Europe the Poiriers have been honored repeatedly with solo exhibitions since 1970. In the United States they have been included in numerous group exhibitions. In 1986 the Poiriers completed *Promenade Classique*, their first permanent installation in this country, located at TransPotomac Canal in Alexandria, Virginia. Their design features fragments of "classical" statues, sited in view of the neoclassical architecture across the river in downtown Washington, D.C. Is this sculptural project a romantic meditation on classical ruins? Do the artists intend to warn of the imminent demise of an empire? Or are these archaeological fragments an updated reference to the seventeenth-century classical garden, evoking memories of the mythic past?

The gaze of a statue is the last element to be worn away with time. Limbs may crack and fall off, surfaces may become worn, but the "eye of memory" remains—the link of the piercing and pierced eye that joins ancient cultures to our own—that reflects ancient sites while scrutinizing the present. The riddle remains unsolved and the mystery is sustained. While evoking the metaphysical, the Poiriers have wandered into memory. Their journeys have included landscapes of experience and landscapes of desire. Both physical journeys and mental wanderings have joined to inspire the enigmatic allegories, the private visions.

Joan Marter

Professor of Art History
Rutgers University
New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1989



Excavation

*At first there was Chaos, an unfathomable void, then Gaia,
the bountiful earth, and Eros, god of love the most beautiful
of all the immortal gods.*

Thus begins the universe according to Hesiod's *Theogony*, one of the most beautiful and most ancient founding poems of our memory. From Chaos were born Erebus and Night, the dark one. Gaia gave birth to Ouranus, the starry sky who covered her in a perfect and total embrace and gave her immense and terrible children: Kronos, time, Mnemosyne, memory, and the violent-hearted Cyclops. Night gave birth to children still more beautiful and more terrifying: Daylight, also Sleep and Dream and their sister Death.

From the beginning, the sets and actors of an immense theater were in place on the scale of cosmos. There unfolded the myths, those great collective dreams of humanity which try to give an explanation of the universe around us and of our own psyche and to stage, in violent conflicts and erotic intrigues, the forces and the pulse that rule nature and the human soul.

For the Greeks, the explanation of the universe was not purely scientific. Above all it was poetic and dramatic. One could almost say that for them the universe was art's creation, that reality was only a necessity for the existence of art. Or that the real world was only a reflection of the poetic world which was the true reality. The Greeks invented the theater of the universe. They built the most beautiful theaters in history and the plan of these theaters was circular, in the image of cosmos and time. And doubtless they were right. The day when there is no poetic explanation of the world and of the psyche, and when science and technology have killed myth, man will be body without soul and the universe matter without spirit, which Mnemosyne and Eros will have abandoned.

It is wrong to believe that those myths and ancient geneses do not concern us any more. The human soul is made of memory and forgetfulness: these constitute being. Without memory, man is nothing but an amnesiac living in a perpetual present, nostalgic for a past that has escaped, exiled from himself and his origins. Freud and Jung have largely explained the role of memory and myth in our psyche. They drew heavily from archaeological and mythological sources, and from the world of archetypes. Far from banishing these obsolete ideas, from consigning the ancients to oblivion, they reclaimed them from the dust of history to give them flesh and blood and to show that the unconscious of modern man was partly constituted by that forgotten memory. Freud said that ancient statuary represented "the eternity of

our passions." This is what we have felt when scrutinizing the gaze of statues in gardens and ruins: those dreams and myths are not dead. The mythical theater goes on playing somewhere in us and around us.

Among these myths there is one that has especially fascinated us and still fascinates us: the myth of the battle between the Gods and Giants. It is a myth of upheavals and violence, of storms and earthquakes, and of menacing forces always ready to unchain themselves. In it the Giants were hurled down from the top of Olympus, home of the Gods, that they were trying to scale by stacking mountains upon mountains. The Gods drowned the Giants in a deluge of iron, stone and fire. The Giants, sons of Gaia, the earth, were repelled by the heavenly Gods into the depths of Tartarus, the lowest region of the underworld, from which they periodically tried to escape.

For many years we as artists have been passionately involved in this fight of inhuman scale between the telluric forces and celestial forces, the forces of order and those of chaos, shadow and light, conscious and unconscious. Of these never ending battles, we have given life to several episodes through works of art located in places very different and sometimes very distant from each other. These works appear as if the remains of battles, that took place in a very far elsewhere, were hurled to earth following hazardous trajectories. The giant *Ephialtes*, 1982, lies at the bottom of a gorge in an immense garden, blinded by the arrows of Apollo and the lightning bolt of Zeus. (Collection Giuliano Gori, Villa Cella, Pistoia, Italy.) Further away at the Picasso Museum, Antibes, France, on the shores of the Mediterranean, *Encelade*, 1983, is buried under a chaos of marble. In the garden of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Epinal, France, the eye of *Mimas*, 1983, is reflected in black water. In other places the remains of unidentified Giants have been found. (*The Fountain of Giants*, 1984, Villeurbanne, France, and *Classical Promenade*, 1985–86, TransPotomac Center, Alexandria, Virginia.) Still elsewhere, immense columns have trembled on their bases and have tumbled down with unheard violence. (*The Grand Black Column*, 1984, Suchères, France, and *Exegi Monumentum Aere Perennius*, 1988, Luigi Pecci Museum of Contemporary Art, Prato, Italy.)

Very recently after a *storm* in a great park in North America, a landslide uncovered marble fragments of unknown origin. The excavations immediately undertaken revealed architectural elements of classical shape next to a pile of shapeless, seemingly obscure blocks. A large marble column, very well preserved, was entirely excavated and erected on the fringe of the diggings. The archaeologists have also uncovered a beautiful door frame, curiously filled with all kinds of debris of diverse

origin. Some fragments of inscriptions are being studied presently and may bring some information. But the most important discovery of all consists of an eye of gigantic proportions, sculpted from a large block of gray marble, which seems to be a fragment of a colossal statue. The present state of the diggings does not allow us to know to which effigy of a God or *king* this giant eye belongs. But the entire work, *Fall of the Giants*, was discovered after a *storm* in the sculpture park at Storm King Art Center.

Anne and Patrick Poirier

Paris, 1989



Anne and Patrick Poirier

Born in 1942, Marseilles and Nantes, France. The couple has traveled and worked together since their marriage in 1968. They live in Paris, and work primarily in France and Italy. They have a son, Alain, 19 years old.

Selected Awards

1967–71

Prix de Rome, Villa Medici, Italy

1977–78

DAAD, Berlin, West Germany

1979–80

P.S.1 Institute for Arts and Urban Resources, Long Island City, New York

Selected Installations

1973

Neue Galerie, Collection Ludwig, Aachen, West Germany

1977

Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin, West Germany

1978

Academie voor Schone Kunsten, Bruges, Belgium
Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, West Germany
Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France
Sonnabend Gallery, New York

1979

The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Philadelphia College of Art, Pennsylvania

1980

Carpenter Center for Visual Arts, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts

1984

The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York

1985

Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, California

1988

Sonnabend Gallery, New York

Selected Group Exhibitions

1976, 1984

Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy

1977

DOCUMENTA 6, Kassel, West Germany
Europe in the 70s: Aspects of Recent Art, Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois

1982

Twelve Contemporary French Artists, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York

1987

Avant-Garde in the Eighties, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California

1988

Classical Myth and Imagery in Contemporary Art, The Queens Museum, Flushing, New York

Special Projects

The Poiriers have realized major outdoor works in France, Germany, Italy, and the United States, as well as theater and opera sets in Düsseldorf, West Germany, and Rome, Italy.

Bibliography

Anne and Patrick Poirier. Esslingen, Germany: Galerie der Stadt Esslingen, Villa Merkel, 1987.

Gintz, Claude. "Ruins and Rebellion," *Art in America* (April 1984): 148–151.

"Anne and Patrick Poirier Interviewed by Jerome Sans," *Lost Archetypes: Anne and Patrick Poirier*. Bath, Great Britain: Artsite Gallery, 1986.

McCabe, Cynthia Jaffee. *Artistic Collaboration in the Twentieth Century*. Washington, D.C.: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, 1984.

Selz, Peter. "Alternative Aesthetics: Quests for Spiritual Quintessence," *Arts* (October 1987): 46–49.

Sculpture

- 1 **Eye with Tear**, 1984
Bronze
77 x 8 x 8 in.
Lent by Kitty and Herbert Glantz,
Brooklyn, New York
- 2 **Pegasus**, 1984
Charcoal, wood, plaster, blue pigment
42 x 92 x 61 1/2 in.
Lent by Marc and Livia Straus, Chappaqua,
New York
- 3 **Untitled** (Sword with Hand), 1984
Bronze, water
57 x 27 1/4 x 24 in.
Private Collection, New York
- 4 **Untitled** (Gold Mask), 1986
Bronze
92 x 13 x 13 in.
Lent by Ellyn and Saul Dennison,
Bernardsville, New Jersey
- 5 **Untitled** (Eye with Column Inscription),
1986
Marble
22 x 12 x 15 in.
Lent by Middendorf Gallery,
Washington, D.C.
- 6 **Untitled** (Eye with Word Inscription),
1986
Marble
24 x 17 x 10 in.
Lent by Middendorf Gallery,
Washington, D.C.
- 7 **Golden Book**, 1986
Gold leaf on paper
1/2 x 9 1/2 x 12 1/2 in.
Lent by Sonnabend Gallery, New York
- 8 **Golden Book**, 1986
Gold leaf on paper
1 1/4 x 10 1/4 x 15 in.
Lent by Sonnabend Gallery, New York
- 9 **Golden Book**, 1986
Gold leaf on paper
1 1/2 x 12 x 21 in.
Lent by Sonnabend Gallery, New York
- 10 **Fragility of Power**, 1988
Polished aluminum
59 x 46 x 46 in.
Private Collection, New York
- 11 **Roma = Amor**, 1988
Bronze
60 1/4 x approx. 230 in.
Private Collection, New York
- 12 **Unstability on Stability**, 1988
Polished aluminum
49 1/2 x 39 1/2 x 39 1/2 in.
Lent by Sonnabend Gallery, New York
- 13 **Unstable Stability**, 1988
Polished aluminum
89 1/2 x 131 1/2 x 75 in.
Private Collection, New York
- 14 **Vanitas** (Irony of Memory), 1988
Polished aluminum
100 1/2 x 75 x 6 in.
Private Collection, New York
- 15 **Fall of the Giants**, 1988-89
Marble and stainless steel
Approx. 12 x 47 x 30 ft.
Lent by the artists
- 16 **Roma = Amor**, 1989
Lead, lights
24 x 50 1/4 x 1 3/4 in.
Lent by the artists

Works on Paper

- 17 **Void**, 1987
Photograph on aluminum with paint
82 1/4 x 51 1/2 in.
Private Collection, New York
 - 18 **Origin**, 1987
Photograph on aluminum with paint
82 1/4 x 51 1/2 in.
Private Collection, New York
 - 19 **Collapse**, 1987
Photograph on aluminum with paint
82 1/2 x 51 1/2 in.
Lent by Sonnabend Gallery, New York
 - 20 **Fragility**, 1987
Photograph on aluminum with paint
82 1/2 x 51 1/2 in.
Lent by Sonnabend Gallery, New York
- Fifty-eight Drawings**, 1986-88
Charcoal, ink, watercolor, crayon,
photographs on Arches and Verger paper
Various sizes. Lent by the artists

