

**COLOUR AND SCULPTURE : AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE USE OF  
TWO DIMENSIONAL MEDIA IN SCULPTURE**

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"Sculpture is resistant stuff, hard to fantasise about".

Robert Hughes.

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Creative images which are normally called 'art' can be distinguished as either 'plastic' or visual. Both these forms throughout the history of art have relied to a greater or lesser degree on the use of colour. It is my intention to investigate specifically the changing role which colour has played in sculpture - the 'plastic' media of the visual arts and to chart the technical and aesthetic reasons for the use of colour. This investigation will encompass the historical perspective, the material qualities, aesthetic considerations, transitional codes and methods of approach in sociological frameworks and the examination of colour as a metaphysical element in the presentation of three dimensional media.

Colour has been used to decorate sculpture since pre-historic times and through the centuries its meaning has changed, from its functional use to enhance verisimilitude, to its use as an emotive and sensuous entity.

These two functions have never been mutually exclusive although, episodically, according to artistic tastes of the times, one may have had precedence over the other. Taste in colour has been based on the intuitive, the sociological and latterly, the psychic demands of the artist. It is one of the main components of the work of art which can change its meaning.

Herbert Read begins his discussion in the "Meaning of Art" with a definition of beauty. "Man responds to the shape, surface and mass of things present to his senses, and that certain arrangements in the proportion of the shape, surface and mass of things result in a pleasurable sensation, whilst the lack of such arrangement leads

to indifference or even to positive discomfort and revulsion" (Read, 1950: 16). He further states that this sense of beauty is a fluctuating phenomenon with manifestations in the course of art history which are often baffling in that other people in other periods have different connotations of beauty - hence primitive art.

Whether the problem is looked at historically or sociologically, art has often been, or often is, a thing of no beauty. Colour in sculpture follows the same precepts.

Colour has been used to enhance form and to destroy form. Read divides the use of colour into three categories - the heraldic, the harmonic and the pure (Read, 1950: 44 - 46).

The heraldic is perhaps the most basic. In this mode colour is employed for its symbolic significance. A child for example, if he has free choice of colours, always paints a tree green, a volcano red and the sky blue, though a tree may be brown, a volcano black and his habitual sky grey. In medieval art, apart from the representation of nature, which follows the childlike mode, the colours are apt to be governed by rigid rules - rules not determined by the artist, but by the custom and authority of the church.

Harmonic colour depends on tone which John Ruskin describes in "Modern Painters" as "the exact relation of the colour of the shadows to the colour of the lights. Once artists had started to look at objects in relation to light and shadow, tonal values of relative intensity had to be regulated to some sort of scale.

Dominant tones were selected (sometimes arbitrarily, but more often in conformity with some 'style' or workshop tradition) and all other colours were scaled up or down to a restricted distance from these dominant tones" (Read, 1950: 41).

The use of 'pure' colour in its modernist sense, owes much to Constable's revolt against this harmonic tradition. Under the empiricism of Paul Cézanne, form was conveyed directly by colour irrespective of light and shade, and a consciously manipulated pattern of colour intensities created the illusion of three dimensional form. Persian miniaturists had used this mode centuries before as a device for decorative effect rather than for intellectual control.

Robert Hughes in his book "The Shock of the New" describes Cézanne's way of seeing as an adding up and weighing of choices - in essence, the psychological metamorphosis of the artist as emulator of images to the artist as creator of images.

Under the aegis of Picasso and the Cubists, the aesthetic criteria which had formed the spine of Western art underwent the fastest change in art history. "Picasso predicated his art on physical sensation. He had an unequalled ability to realise form: to make you feel the shape, weight, the edginess, the silence of things ... His cubist constructions of around 1912 such as the metal guitar attest to his extraordinary gift of thinking laterally, beyond the given categories. It is doubtful whether any single sculpture had ever had, by such deceptively humble means, a comparable effect on the course of its own medium. This rusty tin guitar is the point from which Russian Constructivism, via

Tatlin, begins its course; in the West, it initiates a tradition which leads to David Smith and Anthony Caro and the era of assembled and welded sculpture" (Hughes, 1981: 29).

Having traced the changing modes of colour usage in a general sense, it is apposite to attempt to describe the evolution of sculptural modes of expression.

The Encyclopedia Britannica defines sculpture as "the art of representing observed or imagined objects in solid materials and in three dimensions" (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1971: 97).

Naum Gabo, in an essay entitled "Sculpture: Carving and Construction in Space", 1937, defines the characteristics which make a work of art a sculpture. He establishes the following criteria: "It consists of concrete material bounded by forms. It is intentionally built up by mankind in three dimensional space. It is created for this purpose only, to make visible the emotions which the artist wishes to communicate to others" (Chipp, 1968: 331).

Henri Gaudier-Brzeska's definition from a manifesto first published in Wyndham Lewis' 'Blast' in June 1914, states that "Sculptural energy is the mountain. Sculptural feeling is the appreciation of masses in relation. Sculptural ability is the defining of these masses by planes" (Gaudier-Brzeska, 1965: 34).

Together with Roger Fry's essay on "Ancient American Art", this manifesto had a decisive influence on Henry Moore, the arch-sculptor of our time. Fry postulates a thesis which suggests that the

general habit of design in different ancient civilisations exists as an isolated aesthetic apart from all other human activities. He suggests that all artists in any culture, self-consciously explore the delicate balance between the representational and purely formal considerations, resulting in images which transcend the boundaries of ritualistic tradition and external or accidental sociological factors - in other words, there are certain artistic criteria which are intrinsic to all works of art, independent of origin (Fry, 1951: 74).

Moore, curiously enough, although separated temporally by five centuries from another arch-sculptor of his times, Michelangelo Buonarrotti, shares one salient criteria with him. Both eschewed the use of colour as an adjunct to sculpture although for aesthetically antithetical reasons which I shall explore later. It was during these five centuries that colour disappeared almost totally from sculpture. With the exception of the Spanish school, colour was subverted to the 'truth to media' ethic which in its purest tenets, died a natural death at the end of the nineteenth century with the last of the great humanist sculptors, Auguste Rodin.

The sculptural performance of Michelangelo was the apogee of the High Renaissance - the point at which a whole civilisation moved rapidly from adolescence to maturity. John Weightman in "The Concept of the Avant-Garde", puts it succinctly when he says: "Before the Enlightenment, that is the days of Old Western Man, whether Pagan or Christian, the work of art could be looked upon as a monument embodying permanent truths and existing in a sort of eternity, outside the life-span of the individual artist who had

created it" (Weightman, 1973: 25).

Michelangelo was a passionate specialist interested almost exclusively in the male human body. These figures have no environment - they exist in their own right and they are the first to proclaim the kind of individualisation which we in the latter part of the twentieth century have come to take for granted. Before, the creation of individual sculptures had always been subservient to religious or secular patronage. This period (from Michelangelo to Moore) in sculpture consolidated the traditional attitudes that sculpture equals volume of mass. Michelangelo said that: "Only those works that could be rolled down a mountain without breaking anything were good" (Michelangelo, 1956: 148). In his opinion, anything broken off was superfluous. Space interested him only in so far as it was a spot in which volumes could be placed or projected.

Moore regarded space as an absolute element, released from closed volume. "It became a malleable material element. It has become a reality of the same sensuous value as velocity or tranquility and is incorporated in the general family of sculptural emotion where up to date, only the weight and volume of mass had been predominant. It became clear that new sculptural emotion demands a new method of expression different from those which have been used before" (Moore, 1968: 593).

Materials in sculpture play one of the fundamental roles. The genesis of a sculpture, as distinct from the two dimensional flat surface of the painter, is determined by its material. "Materials

establish the emotional foundations of a sculpture, give it basic accent and determine the limits of its aesthetical action ... There is no limit to the variety of materials available and each material had its own aesthetic properties. Carved or cast, moulded or constructed, sculpture does not stop being sculpture as long as the aesthetic qualities remain sympathetic to the basic properties of the material" (Gabo, 1968: 330).

Appreciation of sculpture depends on the ability to respond to form in three dimensions. Henry Moore believes that to understand sculpture, the viewer must: "... get the solid shape, as it were inside his head, whatever its size, as if he were holding it completely enclosed in the hollow of his hand. He must mentally visualise a complex form from all round itself; he knows while he looks at one side what the other side is like; he identifies himself with its centre of gravity, its mass, its weight; he realises its volume as the space that the shape displaces in the air ... Further, he must, for example, perceive an egg as a simple solid shape, quite apart from its significance of food, or from the literary idea that it will become an egg".

Constantin Brancusi's influence on Moore's attitude to material was profound. Both men shared a devotion to the 'truth to media' of the various materials which they used. Both believed that these inherent qualities could only be 'released' (as did Michelangelo) by attacking the material with the appropriate tool and finding, by slow sensuous manipulation, the maximum aesthetic effect in form and surface quality. This attitude was to dominate early twentieth century sculp-

ture until Picasso, Braque and Gauguin began to exploit the forms and motifs of Oriental and African art. African art, brilliantly and emotively coloured, and remote in its 'otherness' to Western culture, gave declining Western art a healthy shove forward into a new vitality - and with it came the resurgence of colour into sculpture. Allied to other formal considerations such as Alexander Archipenko's exploration of mass rotating around a central hole and the development of new techniques and materials such as steel, perspex and glass, sculpture moved away from the stifled academic norms of the previous two and a half centuries to become what critic Clement Greenberg describes as an ambitious: "... breaking of fixed notions about what is possible in art and what is not" (Greenberg, 1968: 579).

## CHAPTER ONE

### PRIMITIVE AND PRE-CHRISTIAN ART

For the purposes of this dissertation, the term 'Primitive' is used loosely to include works from the pre-Christian era. The rise of Greek Platonic philosophy marks a distinct change in the use of colour as an emotive factor in sculpture and heralds the oeuvre of the monolithic, homo-centric image. It is at this point that sculpture departs from the utilitarian and function-oriented to the commemoration of man as monument to religious ideals. This ideology (figurative iconography) later became secular and became extravagant during the Russian socialist revolution and the Victorian era and still lingers today in the West as the enervated statuary seen in most public plazas.

Paul Klee says of colour: "... that it directly influences the soul. Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings" (Klee, 1968: 152). The use of colour in primitive art is indivisible from form and function. "Primitive man lived in a more or less unconscious state. This does not mean that he was without understanding, but that he perceived his environment in a naive manner, and was therefore in a better position to experience it directly and, if he represented it artistically, to do so with freshness and vigour" (Lommel, 1966: 12).

The creative factors in primitive art differ completely from those of Western art. Primitive cultures neither condemn nor question popular cultural values but reflect them. Art symbolised individual and tribal security, understood in such terms as weather, prestige, health, children, wives and crops.

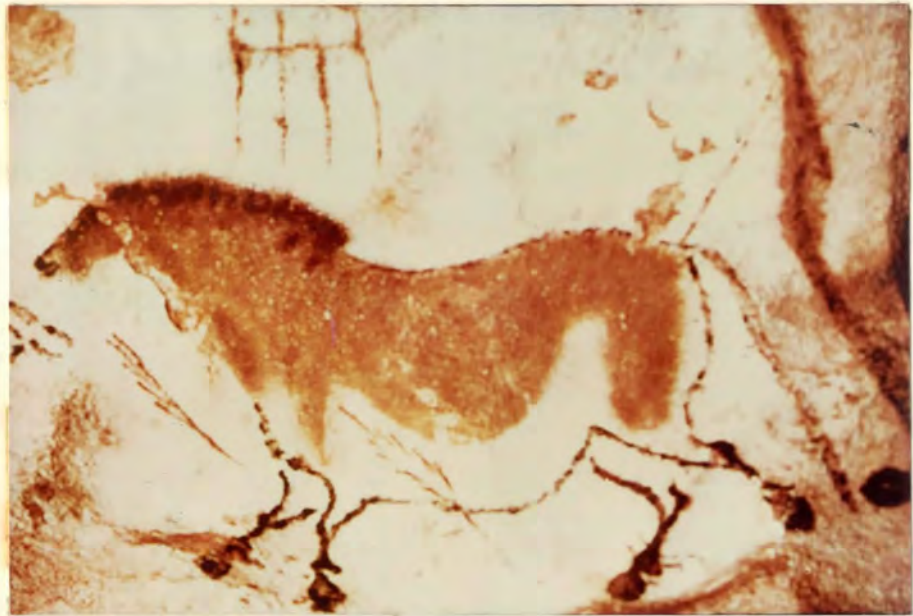
There are two important elements which the Western viewer must grasp to understand primitive art - content and expression. The former is a deeply felt emotional experience (religious or magical) which is based on psychological needs. The latter, expression, is the actual infusion of this religio-magical faith into the piece of sculpture itself. This co-ordination of content and expression - the organic relationship of sculpture to psychological needs - places African sculpture specifically amongst the great art traditions. It was these aesthetic qualities, the balance of form and communicative values which prompted the Cubists' cultural plunder and thus, the initiation of the modern movement in art.

#### ANCIENT AND CYCLADIC SCULPTURE

The earliest known examples of colouring in primitive art occur in the 'graffiti' of the cave artists of the Dordogne in Spain. One can only assume that colour was used to enhance versimilitude as the pictures were intended to capture and contain the imagined powers of the animals concerned and are conceived of as a magical means of ensuring the supply of game.

These early drawings consist of black outline with a thin monochrome filling. Subsequently, these outlines were filled in with two-colour modelling. Rocky projections, areas of natural shadow and features of the rock face were often made use of and may have even provided a starting point for the artist. The polychrome paintings of Altamira display a high degree of naturalism in the drawings. Effects of movement and volume are achieved with the most basic materials - charcoal and earth colours.

Geometric patterns and signs occupy only a small part and were pro-



1 Horse, Cave painting, Lascaux, France: 15,000 - 10,000 BC



2 Cattle, Bovidian Period, Tassili-n-Ajjer, Algeria: 5000 - 1200 BC



3 Detail of cave painting, Lascaux, France: 15,000 - 12,000 BC

bably added for magical purposes. Australian aborigines unconcernedly infused geometric symbols in naturalistic rock pictures which turned out to be stylised representations of artifacts or animals important to their existence.

Pottery was invented in the Neolithic era about 7000 BC. The earliest forms of coloured decoration consisted of circular and spiral designs. By 4000 BC, these abstract designs were blended with naturalistic figures of animals. Around about 3000 BC - 1000 BC, small female funerary figurines, symbols of oriental fertility belief, were found. So-called 'Cycladic' idols (of which there has been a resurgence of interest because of their contemporary feel) were a development in marble from these clay figurines. These steatopygous figures are a kind of sculptural 'short hand', an abstract symbolic conceptual art. The usual decorative technique was deep incision, often encrusted with white paste made from shells, or filled with red ochre, black,



4 Minoan Goddess, Crete: 16,000 BC. Faience



5 Cycladic Figurine. Fourth century BC. Ceramic



6 Gold Bull from Ur, Mesopotamia: 2600 - 2400 BC.  
Gold on wood core



7 Stag Standard. Alaca Hüyük, Turkey:  
2400 - 2000 BC. Bronze inlaid with silver



8 Tiger, Chow Dynasty, China: 1027 - 221 BC.  
Bronze inlaid with silver



9 Leopard, Benin. Nineteenth century.  
Ivory inlaid with copper pins

white or red paint (1 - 5).

#### INLAID COLOUR AND METAL SCULPTURE

The development of urban cultures fostered the introduction of technical skills of bronze casting and metal working. Colour was introduced as inlays of semi-precious materials or in conjunction with the juxtaposition of coloured metals. This appeared to be common practice amongst early civilisations (6 - 8).

These techniques continued to be used in so-called primitive cultures for a staggering period of twenty two centuries and encompass most ethnic cultures. Curiously enough, these techniques are largely absent in European art from the inception of Greek homo-centric culture (9 - 11).



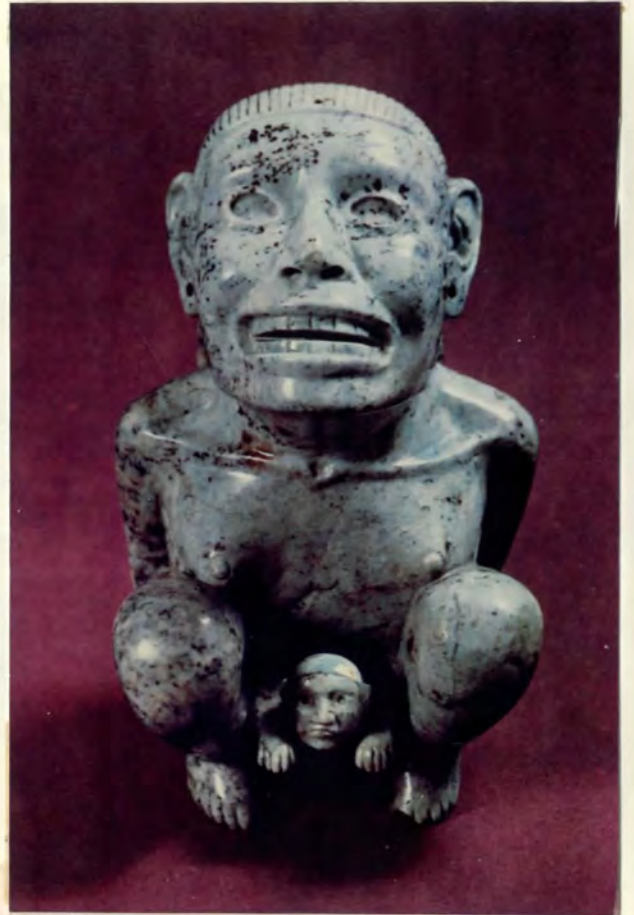
10 Mixtec mask. Oxaca, Mexico: c. 1200 AD.  
Wood covered with mosaic, mother-of-pearl  
and shell



11 Tutankhamen. Eighteenth Dynasty, Egypt.  
Gilded wood inlaid with glass and semi-precious  
stones



12 Early Romanesque Riquary. Fifth century AD.  
Gold plate and silver gilt over wooden core  
with semi-precious stones



13 Tlacolteutl, Goddess of Childbirth. Mayan, Mexico.  
Undated. Stone



14 Hei-Tiki Pendant, New Zealand. Nineteenth century.  
Nephrite inlaid with mother-of-pearl

However, with some exceptions and usually used as a display of religious power and wealth, there are examples in post-Christian art (12).

#### COLOURED MATERIALS

Although not specifically related to the manipulation of colour on the surface of three dimensional media, it serves to mention here briefly the use of coloured materials in sculpture. Although rooted in



15 Gudea of Lagash, Sumerian: c. 2150 - 2050 BC.

Diorite



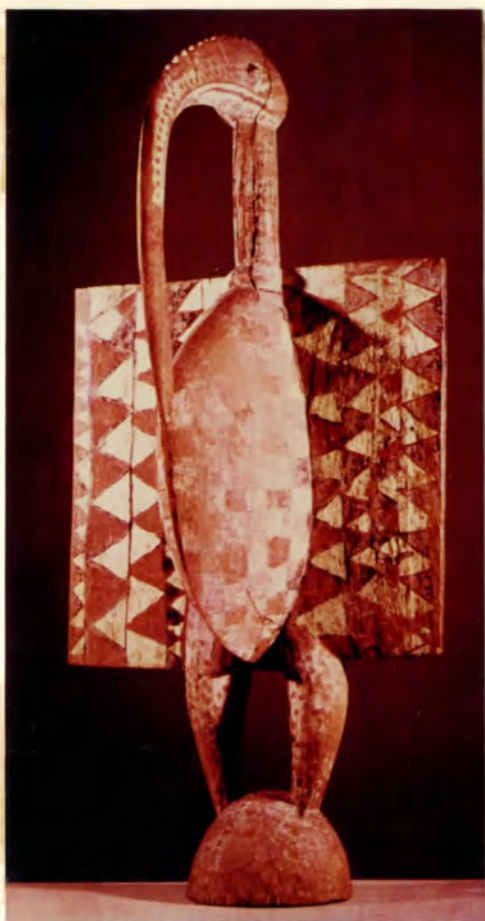
16 Pectoral Mask, Beni, Benin, Nigeria. Undated.

Ivory



17 Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, 'Red Stone Dancer',

1914. Stone



18 Senufo Standing Bird, Ivory Coast.  
Twentieth century. Wood

19 Pair of figures, Melanesia. Nineteenth century.

Wood



20 Malanggan Spirit Canoe, Micronesia. Nineteenth century. Wood

functional technique, the coloured material itself imbues the sculpture with an ether or emotive dimension which emanates directly from the material. Ancient and contemporary Zimbabwean soapstone may be included in this category (13 - 17).

#### COLOUR IN ETHNIC SCULPTURE

Colour in African sculpture is primarily ritualistic and symbolic. It is seen as a tool for vitalising and vivifying surface. It also serves as a visual vehicle for ostentation. Traditionally, the design format is geometric, the commonest colours being red, white and black. If use is made of blue, green or yellow, this usually indicates Islamic influence. Intense colour and figured scenes, found usually in coastal regions, betray European influence. Characteristically, brushes are not used - feazed sticks, feathers or fingers give a raw urgency to surface. The addition of earth pigments, beads and other artifacts contribute towards the organic and ritual-mythic tenor of African sculpture.

Most painted primitive sculpture is recent in origin. Due to the perishable nature of wood which forms the basis of these works and some ethical considerations which emanate from tribal love, most date from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the six illustrations presented, there is a certain homogeneity of style despite the fact that the countries of origin are widely displaced.

Colour is delineated by line and is chromatically low-keyed. Pattern is the dominant factor and is generally geometric. It is my hypothesis that geometric pattern evolves more easily on three dimensional form than random marks and that the line demarcation



21 Canoe Prow, Solomon Islands. Nineteenth century.  
Wood



22 Djanggawul, Australia. Nineteenth century. Wood



23 Eskimo Mask. Nunivak Island, Alaska.  
Nineteenth century. Wood



24 Guli Mask, Ivory Coast

of colour assists in the visual reading of form volume. Early twentieth century painter / sculptors tend to follow the same format and logically moved from the serial juxtaposition of flat surfaces placed in front of one another as executed by Jean Arp, to more complex and multi-dimensional ways of dealing with painterly marks on three dimensional surfaces.

#### FIGURES

Most of these primitive figures have a basis in reality and cannot be regarded as formally abstract. However, the confluence of design, colour and form conform to the precepts of twentieth century modernism. This combination of violent dislocation of form with psychic intensity was to provide fertile fuel for the Cubists war on nineteenth century academic sterility (18 - 23).

#### MASKS

The mask is an ancient and polyethnic form. Because they were created for ritual purposes and they are highly stylised and emotive, they are perhaps the most universal examples of three dimensional painted form.

N.B. (All masks illustrated are wooden and are dated as far as is possible). I have divided them into three categories: bi-colour, patterned and linear (24 - 38).



25 Hunter's Mask, Dogon, Nigeria



26 Ngi Secret Society Mask, Fang, Gabon. This mask's universal simplicity has its direct counterpoint in Brancusi's bronze head of 'Mademoiselle Pogany', 1913 and Modigliani's 'Head' 1912



27 Iroquois Mask, Canada, 1890



28 Wayang Topeng Mask, Java



29 Shaman's Mask, Alaska: 1900



30 Saibai Island Mask, Papua, New Guinea



31 Tshmslain Mask, British Columbia, 1870

Patterned



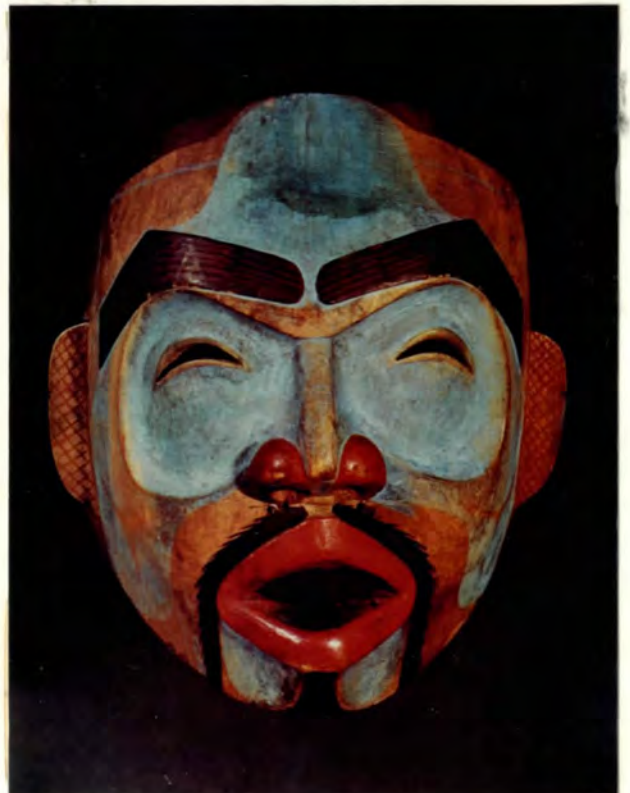
32 Kakilambe Mask, Baga, Guinea



33 Antelope Head, Arabinda, Upper Volta



34 Kwakiutl Mask, North America



35 Haida Mask, North America

Linear



36 Kifwebe Mask, Basonge, Congo



37 Sakrobudi Mask, Ghana



38 Thai Theatre Mask, Thailand

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE HUMANIST PERIOD: GREEK TO ROCOCO

Principally, from the early Nilotic and Aegean civilisations onwards, colour in sculpture changes its function. As sculpture moved from the anonymous personification of general theistic belief to being the specific vision of a singular artistic personality, colour becomes subservient to form and is only used to heighten or confirm reality. It does, however, remain as a major factor in the decoration of architecture, religious, household and personal artifacts and in manuscripts and books. Its use was to become increasingly intellectual and sophisticated.

Stylised aesthetics of beauty were built upon with each era (Greek pottery, Byzantine mosaic and frescoes and the Gothic and Baroque tradition. Wherever there was a strong emotive tradition of wood-carving as in Germany and Spain, sculpture was painted, although always subservient to the dominant strictures of religiosity and the dictates of wealthy patronage.

Sculptural forms became more and more complicated demanding a high degree of technical skill. Expensive and rare materials were increasingly used until the congestion of form reached its effulgence and finally nadir in the Rococco period. The anonymous sculptor became the eponymous sculptor and the idealised human body became the particular.

The development of the Humanistic tradition is a long and slow process extending over centuries. Perhaps, with the exception of the Greeks, the abstract modernist break with formal tradition has no



39 'Standard of Ur', Egypt: c. 2600 - 2400 BC. Shell, red limestone and lapis lazuli in bitumen base



40 Detail from the Palace at Babylon: 604 - 562 BC.  
Polychromed brick

precedent in art history.

#### NILOTIC, AEGEAN AND GREEK

Up to this period, colour was used holistically. The evolution of art forms in this period reflect a move from magical and animistic belief to religion in its broadest sense. Art within the framework of primitive cultism existed only as a function of worship or propitiation - the main emotion being fear. The change occurs when the sense of transcendental values began to achieve an intellectual insight into beauty of life and all living things and the artist became sympathetic to his world, not fearful of it. There was no real change in the psychological working of the artist's mind, only a difference in the way religion is perceived by him.

Early Egyptian and Sumerian art is animistic. The Egyptian believed that there was a force called 'Ka' which was the counterpoint to the body. Although invisible, it continued through life and accompanied it through death into the next world. Mummification preserved the 'Ka' and in order to secure the necessities for the spirit world, it was mandatory to paint or carve on burial chamber walls and to inter small effigies and artifacts which would function normally in the hereafter. Tomb sculpture, both bas-relief and three dimensional, is the dominant art form. Traditional artistic canons were rigid and conventional as evidenced by hieratic frontality, front-eye view in the profile face and flat narrative perspective. Colour is flat and crudely representational and is combined with sophisticated linear detail (39).

A further superb example of the same technique executed some fifteen hundred years later confirms these artistic norms which dominated



41 Rhotep and Nofret: Fourth Dynasty, Egypt.  
Painted limestone



42 Nefertiti, Amarna Period, Egypt.  
Painted limestone and plaster



43 Etruscan Head. No date. Terracotta



44 Enthroned God. No date. Painted terracotta

all painted sculpture over a two thousand year period (40).

Early Egyptian painting on three dimensional form (fourth century BC) contrasts markedly with that of the late Amarna period. In the latter, particular stylistic features and delicate modelling in colour are recorded for the first time - in essence, an early attempt at representative portraiture (41 - 42).

The final break with thirty centuries of Egyptian tradition came only with the adoption of Christianity. It was in the Aegean islands, with Crete as centre of focus, that the democratisation and visual curiosity that determines the patterns of European art first became evident. Foreshortening and perspective developed and there was a move away from the processional frieze. Over a period of two centuries, archaic Greek sculpture began to develop kinetic movement and to see the human figure in the round: movement and anatomy were studied and sculpture became a whole instead of a sum of parts. The embodiment of 'soul' or suggestion of inner life remained missing until the era of Byzantine art, but the legacy of the Greeks - the passion for the expression of physical beauty - the inherent grandeur of the human animal - was to form the physical basis for every subsequent phase of European art.

Colour was used extensively in early Greek and Etruscan sculpture although only vestigial evidence remains on the surfaces to be seen today (43 - 44).

Corinthian potters developed the black figure technique which was to dominate Greek pot-painting until the late sixth century. Figures



45 Attic Black-figure vase, Exekias, Greece: c. 530 BC

were painted in dark silhouette on red clay. Anatomical detail was shown by engraved line and some colours, including white and purple were added (45).

With the discovery of hollow-cast bronze technique in the fifth century BC, colouring of sculpture evanesced excepting for relief sculpture for architectural decoration which remained brightly painted in flat colour.

As skills in illusionistic two dimensional painting developed, individual sculptors like Nikias and Apollodorus used colour in thin glazes to tint skin and drapery.

Although polychromed sculpture remained fashionable until the disintegration of the Roman Empire, colour remained subdued and was used mainly to heighten reality. By 200 AD, classical culture had become little more than a literary affectation and had ended up as an instrument of official Roman propaganda. With the rise of Christianity, and the ensuing spiritual crisis, the move in art forms became deliberately anti-classical.

#### BYZANTINE, MEDIEVAL AND GOTHIC

At the onset of the Dark Ages, pre-Christian art was fundamentally crude in terms of Hellenic tradition. Colour, treated by the Egyptians and the Greeks as a useful or decorative addition, was now used in the form of mosaic for full-blooded emotional ends. Mosaic was a rigid, inflexible medium which imposed severe strictures on the artist using it. Used intensively, over large surfaces for nearly eight centuries, it expressed, as Eric Newton puts it:

"The full expression of a mystical Christianity in terms of oriental



46 Theodora. Byzantine mosaic

opulence" (Newton, 1956: 88).

Byzantine sculptural form was essentially two dimensional and was characterised by a respect for iconography and craftsmanship, manifest in ivory carving, low relief sculpture, jewelry, miniatures, frescoes and icons.

Barbaric art (c. 300 - 600 AD) stemming from Teutonic sources in northern Europe, displayed a highly developed sense of pattern combined with an almost total indifference to the figure arts. Early Christian, Celtic and Anglo-Saxon monumental sculpture deserves mention here because it was practised at a time when no one else in Europe was using this three dimensional art form, and in this respect, it anticipated the tastes, if not the methods, of the Romanesque (46).

With the rise of Carolingian emperor Charlemagne (768 - 814 AD), the form which the decorative arts were to take became a direct confrontation between the stylised ornamentation of Barbaric art and the figurative styles of early Christian art. Within the turmoil of feudal warfare which was to dominate Europe in the tenth and eleventh centuries, there rose a landed aristocracy which demonstrated its respectability by the endowment of religious foundations. This heralded a head-on collision between the church and secular powers over who should control the assets of the church - the ecclesiastics or their lay patrons.

The great churches, monumental sculpture, metalwork and new styles of painting which emerged as the Romanesque revolution were a deep-



47 Crucifix, German: c. 970 AD. Wood



48 Gabel Crucifix, German: c. 1304 AD. Wood

rooted and spontaneous urge of society to come to terms with the higher aspects of human life which up until now had been neglected - in effect, an attempt to become civilised.

New decorative ideas came into vogue and problems arose in the presentation of the human form with a subsequent return to the achievements of classical figure art.

The Roman barrel vault reappears as an architectural device to provide vertical accent in the space that it covered, usually over or around the figures of saints and forming a symbolic as well as a physical centre for the church. The proliferation of arches was part of a process whereby the church became a more comprehensive and satisfactory image of the heavenly mansions. Other aspects of the same process were the intensification of surface ornament of which monumental sculpture has come to be regarded as the Romanesque art form par excellence.

The progress of Romanesque sculpture resembled that of archaic Greek sculpture in that the ultimate significance of the third dimension lay in the greater realism with which the images were endowed. However, whilst Greek art was concerned with idealised human physical perfection, the Romanesque was concerned with the antithesis between body and soul. Nearly all these sculptures are reliefs, superbly adjusted to fit into the uncongenial shapes and inconvenient angles of capitals, doorway jambs and tympana. It is almost impossible to detach a given piece of carving however expressive, from its architectural background without robbing it of a good deal of meaning (47 - 48).



49 Martinus, the Presbyter, 'Virgin and Child'.

1199 AD. Wood

Colour, which is strong and strident in Romanesque art was confined to stained glass, enamels and manuscript illuminations. It is during the twelfth century that sculptors in stone break away from their parent body, the masons, and move into the role of independent image-makers.

Essentially, the problems confronting the Gothic sculptors of this period were two-fold. In terms of expressing the special relationship between God and man, the human 'soul' had to be portrayed and secondly, vitality of the soul had to be expressed by the visible gesture and facial expression which often involved the portrayal of extreme forms of emotion.

It is within the works of German Masters of Bamberg and Naumberg that what could be called the emotional participation of characters begins to emerge. In their quest for realism at all costs, figures became highly charged with emotion and surface colour is used as an adjunct to dramatise realism (49).

In Gothic eyes, the main purpose of paint was to colour surfaces - mainly surfaces which did not lend themselves to other forms of decoration such as stonework and books. It is usually wooden sculpture which is coloured in flat colours with little attempt made to simulate three dimensionality.

#### RENAISSANCE TO ROCOCO

With Giotto, the divorce between painting by sculptors for versimilitude and illusionistic representational painting by painters becomes apparent. With his power of lucid synthesis, buildings and mountains began to form a backdrop to the frieze of painted actors and the

abstract concept of space in painting became a tangible component of composition. Giotto regarded himself as a narrative painter. His concern was to tell the story by establishing the emotional relationship between the people depicted in the frescoes. His characters are intensely and completely realised and their surroundings are equally convincing. Eric Newton describes this shift in artistic perception as 'period-vision'. "It seems that throughout the history of art, the pivotal vision of a singular personality is often responsible for strategic developments in the way that artistic reality is seen and interpreted. It seems that at any given moment in the development of vision, only certain limited qualities or aspects of information are acceptable. What is acceptable becomes the artist's visual raw material. To admit anything that is not a part of contemporary currency is to take grave risks and is the mark of the adventurous spirit.

Giotto is one of these figures. He is a starting point for a new epoch in art history. There is hardly an aspect of art during the next few centuries that is not traceable to him - Fra Angelico developed his sweetness, Masaccio his sense of drama, Raphael his balance, Michelangelo his sense of gesture, Piero della Francesca his sense of space and many later painters, his feeling for landscape" (Newton, 1956: 105).

From now onwards, painting and sculpture divide into separate disciplines with separate pursuance of their specific qualities - illusionistic two dimensional form and projected three dimensional form.

Illusionistic, representational two dimensional colour is to reach

its zenith with the seventeenth and eighteenth century schools of European painting and sculpture moves toward total three dimensional rendition of the human form in all its permutations as practised by Michelangelo and the Humanist school - an ethic which was to last until the late nineteenth century and the emergence of Giotto's peer of the twentieth century, Pablo Picasso.

It is perhaps pertinent to comment briefly on the development of the sculptural criteria which were to form the basis for the academic tradition of the twentieth century. These tenets were to be reviled and rejected by the precursors of the modern movement into abstraction - in painting, the Impressionists and in sculpture, Auguste Rodin.

With the discovery of optical science, Masaccio fused an articulated world of figures in space with a sense of expressive gesture. What Masaccio did was to recapture, after a lapse of centuries, the central belief of Hellenic art - that the human body was both noble and beautiful. Produced one century later, Donatello's 'David' is the first free-standing nude figure since classical times. Formal organisation not only expressed volume in space but also the individual character and significance of the figure.

Colour surfaced briefly as a surprising off-shoot with Luca della Robbia's introduction, for economic reasons, of the glazed terracotta figure. Using intense blues, yellows, greens and purple with ivory-white, these figures are simply and broadly modelled. Through a following of stone cutters (the Desiderio group), who were interested in primarily securing exquisite surface effects, the un-



50 Luca Della Robbia, 'Lady', Italy. Polychromed ceramic

compromising realism and formal structure of Donatello gave way to surface delicacy and technical virtuosity (50).

With Michelangelo, the human figure is used as a vehicle for generic ideas. Peter Fuller, at the end of his essay on "Moses, Mechanism and Michelangelo" says that: "Only someone with Michelangelo's exceptional sensitivity to medium and materials enabled him to produce an enduring representation which transcends his own time. He uses the expressive potentialities of stone in relation to anatomy in such a way that they speak vividly of 'relative constants' at the level of psychology of emotion. His skill embodies absolute command of the human figure as vessel for the most profound emotional content" (Fuller, 1983: 75).

"This is the beginning of monolithic, centripetal sculpture, dominated by the idea of mass presenting a continuous surface and enclosing a volume which is motivated from the centre. This opaque solid which carried the either human or transcendental meaning on its surface was the means of exchange where the forces within were made known to the viewer through colour, surface variation, outline and gesture. These were read in terms of the culture of his time" (Ferber, 1968: 555).

This ethic was to form the core for sculptural practice for nearly four centuries embracing the Mannerist movement of the High Baroque and reaching an apogee in the congested rhetoric of the Rococco period. Much of Renaissance sculpture is eclectic. Artists continued to admire and emulate their predecessors in a spirit half-way between heroworship and parody.



51 Joseph Anton Feuchtmayer, 'Putti', 1775. Tinted marble



52 Gregorio Hernández, 'Pieta', Spain, 1775

Complicated gesture, stylistic tricks and mastery of surface gave rise to hectic, overstated tortured narrative works which lacked the monumentality and profundity of the High Renaissance. With the development of the Rococco style, an epicurean delight in the fleshly and a desire to amuse began to dilute the heroic and philosophical tenets of the sculptural tradition which Bernini had inherited from Michelangelo (51).

Colour in sculpture tended to vie with painting, the dominant art form. The exaggerated inflection of modelling and the use of coloured marbles throttled the lucidity of sculptural form. Spanish sculpture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which was entirely religious, pushed the art of trompe-l'oeil realism farther than any other school had done. Wooden statues were painted in life-like colours and were sometimes jointed dummies covered with luxurious clothes and jewels. Eyes were often enamel or agate and real hair was used for eyebrows and eyelashes (52).

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### CHAPTER THREE

#### THE MODERN MOVEMENT: THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS

1900 - 1930

Robert Hughes, in a review on a retrospective exhibition of modern sculpture at the National Museum of Modern Art in Paris, in 1986, puts the ethos of twentieth century sculpture in a nut-shell when he says "Modern sculpture after 1910 wanted the liberty that painting had already claimed - the unobliged liberty of thought itself. It extracted new models from the changing culture around it, from painting, music, anthropology and psychoanalysis, from the idea of the 'primitive' and the dream of a utopian machine future" (Hughes, 1986: 48). The point of departure for him is around 1880 when, to borrow the mordant phrase of Claes Oldenburg many decades later, sculpture was statuary depicting: "... bulls and greeks and lots of nekkid broads" (Oldenburg, 1986: 48).

The sculptor in that day was responsible for commemorating the dead, illustration of religious myth or dogma and expressing social ideals. "The aim and meaning of the work was rarely in doubt. With statues, good or bad, from garden gnomes to Marcus Aurelius, you knew where you were" (Hughes, 1986: 48).

Hughes makes a point regarding the differences between statuary and sculpture which is fundamental to understanding the momentum for change as far as 'modern' sculptors saw it. Statuary was an accepted form of social communication via the human figure and served social consensus.

"One of the criteria of modernity itself was the degree to which

sculptors angled their work away from these accepted norms. The fundamental grammar had to change. Even if the iconography reflected the long tradition of figure art, as do the body-haunted objects by Matisse, Picasso, Brancusi, Miró, Giacometti and others, the approach was loaded with a new depth of cultural resonance, flexibility of invention and powerful aggression, and in totality, provided access to the inner psychology of the artist" (Hughes, 1986: 48).

Hughes postulates that there are two main lines in modern sculpture. "One addresses itself to nature, the other to culture. The first descends from Gauguin's Tahitian sojourn and from Matisse's early bronze nudes and heads. It winds through expressionism and emerges as a 'primitive' strain whose Great White Gods are Picasso, Brancusi and Giacometti. Its consequences include the Surrealist fascination with play and dreams, the abstract expressionist interest in gesture and archetype, the ritual-mythic sculpture of Joseph Beuys and the recent work of 'arte povera' sculptors like Mario Merz and Giovanni Anselmo.

"The other line begins with Picasso's sheet metal guitar of 1913 which is everything statues have not been: not monolithic but open, not cast or carved but assembled from flat planes. This branch supplies the leitmotif of constructivism. Posited on rational systems, modern materials, urban technological rather than trival metaphors, and underlined by other arts and disciplines like music, architecture and mathematics, this art heads down the minimalist track" (Hughes, 1986: 48).

"The displacement of space, the mark of traditional sculpture, was largely to disappear from twentieth century sculpture. Space becomes pierced and held in tension. Spaces and shapes form a complex, of which the parts are interdependent but not centred. This sculpture of extension is neither massive nor monolithic, nor does it present a continuous surface. Its elements are not oriented to a centre nor are they projections from a central mass. It is now an art of discontinuous forms suspended in space. It may be said to have abandoned the idea of surface altogether so that instead of enclosing a volume, its shape allows the free use of spaces as essential parts of the sculpture. The eye no longer moves over a surface. One becomes involved with these spaces as if there were a kinetic compulsion to move into them and about them. There no longer is the constraint to think back and front and, without recourse to illusionism, sculpture has become truly spatial ... it can carry its strength through 'lines of force' which are not necessarily enclosed in a biological envelope. In contemporary sculpture this has opened a new way which marks a radical divergence from the old" (Ferber, 1986: 554).

Marble, wood and bronze remain fundamental materials, but they are used in unorthodox ways. In addition, the sculptor could use any kind of junk, from cardboard to celluloid, down even to his own excreta.

Colour was reintroduced by early twentieth century sculptors for its optical value and was used to create illusion or to abstract texture. It broadened the structural relationships of a wide class of objects and the human form, and was a means of dissipating variation of light

falling on three dimensional surfaces. Henri Laurens, an early Cubist sculptor, commented that: "Colour fixes the components of sculpture, so that a red volume remains red regardless of the light" (Laurens, 1978: 106). Adolf Hildebrand postulated that: "Proportions of form are expressed by colour without regard to the special meaning which colours may have in nature" (Hildebrand, 1978: 106).

Jean Arp used colour to create an alternative to painting and sculpture while metaphorising nature. This revision of the old axioms of the role of colour in sculpture blurred the canons of mutual exclusivity between painting and sculpture which had developed from the Renaissance. It was to surface again in the sixties to transmogrify further the boundaries between three dimensional form and the canvas until, in the eighties, the distinction made between what is painting and what is sculpture is polemical. New notions of an interdisciplinary multi-media image-based iconography are now being formed.

Three centuries of mannerism, academism and decadence stretch between the last great work of Michelangelo and Rodin's 'The Age of Bronze'. Thousands of sculptors had followed the academic ideal - pursuit and renewal of beauty - as sculpture's highest calling. Above all, sculpture had become a souvenir art, memorialising those who had served country, science and thought. It was a status symbol in aristocratic and middle-class homes and was seen as a narrowly defined art, less flexible and susceptible to change than painting. By 1900, conscientious critics were exposed to a mind-numbing confrontation at the annual Parisian Salon of thousands of chimerical white plaster and marble depictions of Parnassus or 'la vie moderne' (which manifested itself as the glorification of all forms of

labour. It was overkill to skill.

Auguste Rodin's revolt directly challenged this overkill. He believed that some sort of stylistic integrity had to be restored to sculpture. By working from life in movement, he cancelled the old credentials of period style by insisting upon unselfconscious style or no style at all. Rodin realised that the illusion of life could not be given except by the representation of movement.

He had the original idea of making truncated figures (borrowed from classical remains) which had the effect of lifting sculpture out of the normal subject matter into a sphere where its abstract qualities of line, mass and tension dominated the response that it evoked. The open surfaces of his bronzes, probably translated from gestural drawings done to capture movement, liberated sculptors from the 'strait-jacket' of finish. His exclusive attachment to the human body however, limits his effectiveness in art history. The greater part of modern sculpture is concerned with other kinds of form.

His modernity lies in his visual realism, his sensibility to volume and mass and his unity of concept - in formal terms - a return to a proper sense of sculptural values. Adolf Hildebrand's treatise on the simplification of form, 1907, together with Medaro Rosso's transient and formally indistinct small sculptures in wax form the bridge between Impressionism and the old order.

The reappearance of colour in nineteenth century sculpture / statuary is largely due to a painter, Jean-Léon Gérôme, who made a considerable number of sculptures. His flesh-tinted marbles were Salon



53 Edgar Degas, 'The Little Dancer of Fourteen Years', 1880. Bronze



54 Henri Godet, 'Femme-Fleur', c. 1900.  
Patinated and enameled bronze



55 Chiaparus, 'The High Kick', c. 1926.  
Cold painted bronze, ivory and onyx



56 Pablo Picasso, 'Guitar', 1912.  
Sheet metal and wire

sensations and initiated a vogue in applied colour and chryselephantine for small domestic sculptures.

"The academic attitude of the Salon was against the use of applied colour on the grounds that it hid the sculptor's genius and brought his work into dangerous proximity with nature" (Hildebrand, 1978: 106).

The use of naturally coloured materials was tolerated but was limited to the intrinsic colour of stone and colourful chemical patination of bronze (53).

Art Nouveau and Art Deco, although not considered mainstream sculpture, used colour extensively. The 'new art', born in revolt of the dull pretensions of revivalism which had been the norm for most of the century, spawned numerous artists who worked colour onto their statues. However, colour remained within the realm of a purely decorative element (54).

Art Deco figurines, post World War I, were designed to appeal to the bourgeoisie as decorative objects suitable for gifts and retirements, but nevertheless, reflect artistic preoccupations of the time. Colour is highly decorative and above all 'fashionable' (55).

The late David Smith, one of America's outstanding sculptors of the twentieth century, frequently contended that modern sculpture was created by painters. Certainly, to some extent, early painter / sculptors like Degas, Renoir, Picasso, Modiglian and Matisse must have exerted considerable influence on the way in which colour



57 Pablo Picasso, 'Glass of Absinthe', 1914.  
Painted bronze



58 Karl Schmidt-Rotluff, 'Adoring Man', 1917.  
Painted wood



59 Herman Scherer, 'Sleeping Woman with Boy', 1926. Painted wood

was used.

Fauvism, rooted in Gauguin's flat unrepresentational use of colour, was already established when Picasso and Braque, using as synthesis the simplified solids which are characteristic of African carvings, were concentrating on the search for a cognitive three dimensional language which would result in the so-called Analytical Cubism movement. Cubism took a limited range of objects and destroyed their individual integrity (parts of a body mingled with parts of tables). Traditional perspective was abandoned and objects were viewed from several points at once. Picasso pushed these investigations into the medium of sculpture opening up new concepts in sculptural space and design. Picasso is attributed with having more affinity with the 'tribal' in its widest sense, than any other pioneer modernist. His virtuoso ability to grasp and synthesise what is described as 'the informing principles' of art form transcends culture, politics and history, forming the 'Gestalt' for modernism. The adulteration of the differences between painting and sculpture owed much to Picasso's use of colour in his wooden as well as his bronze casts. All surfaces were eligible for his ideas on colour. This entailed an intuitive logic of line and texture and was neither descriptive or narrative (56 - 57).

Early German Expressionists used colour in sculpture for self-expressive ends rather than descriptive realism. Using the then fashionable corrupted African imagery and translating it literally, these experiments, although interesting, were abortive and quickly disappeared (58 - 59).



60 Fortunato Depero, 'Toga and Worm', 1914.  
Metal and board



61 Alexander Archipenko, 'Woman with Hat', 1916.  
Polychromed wood



62 Henri Laurens, 'Guitar and Clarinet', 1920.  
Polychromed stone



63 Giocomo Balla 'Fist of Boccioni - Lines of Force',  
1915. Wood and cardboard

In early modern sculpture, colour has a certain light-hearted insouciance (60).

Alexander Archipenko used colour in various ways - at times as an anatomical feature and at times for optical effect. Using varying tones and tonal values, he achieved new optical effects by playing colour with and against shape creating the illusion of planes or dramatising textures. Archipenko pioneered the 'symbolic' use of space. By hollowing out the interior of the figure he created an articulated void giving the sculpture what he called 'an associative centre'. This device established the modernist premise:

sculpture may be occupied by and actually move in space - the anti-thesis of Rodin's precept that 'sculpture is the art of the hole and the lump' (61).

Colour was the special pre-occupation of sculptor Henri Laurens. He emphasised its function in eliminating the variation of light on sculptural form believing that sculpture should have its own light (62).

Futurist Giacomo Balla's use of intense colour to dramatise completely abstract form provides a link between Archipenko's architectural use of space and Arp's paradigm of flat colour on projected surfaces (63).

Jean Arp is the fore-runner of that movement in sculpture which used abstract organic shapes and arbitrary, non-descriptive colour to create a world of metaphysical fantasy. Primarily a Dadaist, he drew his forms from organic sources and influenced by Surrealism,



64 Jean Arp, 'Birds in an Aquarium', 1920. Painted wood



65 Jean Arp, 'Fleur Marteau', 1916. Oil on wood



66 Kurt Schwitters, 'Merzbau', 1920 - 34.  
Wood assemblage

exploited ambiguities of form that were biomorphic in character.

He devised a type of relief consisting of thin layers of wood shapes deliberately avoiding any rational process in drawing or cutting. Using flat unmerged colours, he preserved the independence of colour and shape by mutual contradiction as to location of the edge. Colour now arrives as a fully fledged component of sculpture (64 - 65).

'Chance', the watchword for Dada, gave rise to some interesting developments in sculpture. Kurt Schwitters, the lyric artist of Dada whom Robert Hughes calls the 'Saint of reclamation', made art from oddments picked up on the streets. Instead of painting junk, he transposed it into art. The common theme of these compositions constructed from urban waste, was the city as compressor, intensifier of experience. It was to find its intellectual parallel in the seventies in Warhol's ascerbic attacks on the anaesthetisation which the modern urban dweller lives in, as well as the seventies 'find and dump' school of sculpture. His 'Merzbau' in Hanover, (destroyed in 1943), a reliquary construction, loosely Cubist, spread through two floors of his house, predated Joseph Beuys', Edward Kleinholz's and George Segal's use of non-art materials to create an 'environment' or space which was sculptural in identity (66).

Dada widened the development of sculpture by obliteration of the formal distinctions between the painting, the relief, the sculpture-in-the-round and the ready-made object. These works became objects without qualification simply by being removed from normal environment and position - as Jean Arp said of Dada: "It is an attempt to teach man what he has forgotten - to dream with his eyes open"

(Arp, 1964: 9).

### Summary

The legacy of the first generation of modern sculptors is a complex one. Basically, these artists sought to restore power, profundity and poetry to their medium. Intellectual freedom was the right to greater choice. They wanted originality and the right to redefine sculpture from their own experience or rediscover what it had been at its origins. This sculpture is based on audacious concepts of material, suspension of explanatory detail and alteration of sequence, application of expressive and non-descriptive colour, penetration of mass by space and alliance with light to create form. They assumed responsibility for either re-forming nature or inventing the vocabulary of a new sculptural language. Justification for all these innovations depended solely on the internal logic and character of the sculpture itself.

### 1930 - 1960

Sculpture from the thirties onwards tends to divide into two parts - the anthropomorphic school which concreted the legacy of Arp - and the constructivist school which was initiated by Gabo and Tatlin.

The Surrealist movement was largely responsible for the way in which colour was used in the early part of this period. Joan Miró's idiosyncratic and quirky iconography was based, as with Arp's, on their love of organic shape. Both shared a similar sort of visual humour. His abstract organic and brilliantly coloured shapes were to influence American sculptor and designer, Alexander Calder. Calder began to experiment with abstract wire constructions which displayed immediate mastery of constructed space - sculpture which had austere coloured geometric forms suggesting constellations and universes.



67 Alexander Calder, 'Little Spider', 1940.  
Metal and wire



68 George Sugarman, 'Orange Around', 1977.  
Polychromed aluminium

During the thirties, he created motorised mobiles - essentially elements moving in three dimensional space. In the late forties, the growing interest in monumental sculpture provided him with opportunities to make kinetic forms in which rotating coloured elements changed the visual totality (67).

During the thirties, modernism, particularly Cubism and Abstraction, seemed to have been driven underground. Both Marcel Duchamp and Frances Picabia, who had moved to the United States, continued to work in the Dadist / Surrealist manner, laying the groundwork for the generation of young sculptors such as Reuben Nakian, Seymour Lipton, Herbert Ferber and Michael Lekakis who were to emerge after 1945. Most or all are linked to Abstract Expressionism and it is a sculpture which is characterised by the use of the oxy-acetylene welding torch resulting in labour intensive and excessively worked surfaces. These surfaces demand slow reading and are often topologically complex. Light was the crucial modulator of form and edges were vital. The surface becomes the carrier of meaning with the expressive personal mark being favoured.

George Sugarman's sculpture of this period is typically disjunctive. Using brilliant colour, he accretes compositions of contiguous but decidedly irregular shapes. He was pioneering in his use of the floor as site and innovative in his attitude to the dislocation of form (68).

Much of the fifties sculpture has been forgotten largely because of factors connected to cycles of taste - a malaise which became endemic with the rapidly evolving movements of the sixties and



69 César Baldaccini, 'Compressions Dirigées', 1956. Metal

seventies. Art magazines, curators and collectors all tended to favour new artists together with the fact that a number of sculptors in the sixties wrote well and published readily: in their polemics, mostly Minimalist oriented, they gave the Abstract Expressionists short shrift. The vocabulary of the fifties sculpture is biomorphic, generally legible and human-scaled and contains some elements of construction. Applied colour is used extensively and freely. In a sense, these sculptures predicate, with subtle differences, the eighties return to nature-based expressive form as practised by people like Nancy Graves and Italo Scanga.

Jean Dubuffet and Jean Tinguely, both working in the Surrealist oeuvre, had an unerring instinct for farce. Hughes describes Dubuffet's parodies of almost all subjects as having: "The hasty genital urgency of street graffiti" (Hughes, 1981: 265). His polymorphic sculpture in polyurethane was brilliantly coloured, amoeboid in form and redolent of abstract doodles. This 'art brut' ethic, which in a sense has close affiliations with German Expressionism, gave rise to sculptors like Germain Richier and César Baldaccini.

César, an assemblage sculptor in the Schwitters tradition, used metal detritus from auto junk yards to create works in which the primary expressive element is the gruesome texture of the surface. Here, the decay of materials convey a larger message of decay in which there is still a kind of order and beauty. Colour is used here as a reminder of life that once was, creating emotively powerful imagery (69).



70 John Chamberlain, 'Le Colonel Splendide', 1964.

Polychromed polyester resin



71 Jean Tinguely, 'Baluba No. 3', 1959.

Mixed media, animated



72 Eduardo Paolozzi, 'Last of the Idols', 1963. Polychromed wood

John Chamberlain, using the same idiom as César, injects an element of humour into his auto-junk compositions extending his material into fibreglass (70).

Jean Tinguely's raffish machines are a reminder of the link between Duchampian Dada, the Surrealist humour of Miró and Calder's kineticism. "... they subvert the established order and convey a sense of anarchy and individual liberation which would otherwise not exist" (Hulten, 1983: 320). He is a master of the ludicrous and the whimsical - an element largely absent from the 'serious' sculpture of the fifties (71).

Humour in sculpture seems to surface in waves. Picasso has always used wit and humour as a catharsis for his more potent messages. It appears that the introduction of any new technology inhibits humour and until the oeuvre has 'settled down' and become an established mode, artists, particularly sculptors, do not feel free to overturn the boundaries of media.

Eduardo Paolozzi, working in Britain in the sixties, neatly effects the compromise between nascent Pop ideas, Surrealism and Constructivism. Using cogwheels, wheels from toy motor cars and similar small objects, he created intricate surface patterns upon wax sheets which he then formed into slightly monstrous creatures which were subsequently cast in traditional bronze. These were later painted brightly and were recognisably humanoid - witty fantasies based on comic strip characters (72).

An early David Smith construction indicates his interest in directly



73 David Smith, 'Helmholtzian Landscape', 1946.  
Painted steel

applied colour to metal. He began his career not certain of whether he wanted to be a painter or sculptor and these early works rely on a kind of draughtsmanship in metal. Soon after this, his work becomes increasingly industrial in style and handling. He was to exert a decisive influence on Antony Caro. Under the persuasive influence of critic Clement Greenberg, the work of these two men was to define the future directions of Constructivist sculpture (73).

The state of sculpture in the early part of the twentieth century needs some assessment. Modernism itself developed through the experimental vanguard of painters like Picasso, Modigliani and Boccioni and as a result, the new styles arose in two dimensions rather than three. The sculptor tended to exist on the fringes of group activity and it was only due to the idiosyncratic development of people like Brancusi, González, Ernst and Giacometti that the search for new archetypes was conducted. Up to the War and in the period following, the group who were to become most prominent were British - Moore, Chadwick, Butler and Armitage - all of whom were exponents of a romantic figurative style which owed something to Surrealism.

With its emphasis on cubic volume and shape, the use of applied colour, affected by Henry Moore's firmly held views on the 'truth to media' ethic, was hardly evident at all.

One exception to this was Italian Marino Marini. Obsessed by the pervading war psychosis, his 'Horse-and-Rider' series became, for him, in the 'Geurnica' tradition, a symbol for man's suffering. The works exhibit grooved and slashed surfaces in which colour,



74 Marino Marini, 'Horse and Rider', 1950.  
Polychromed bronze



75 Marino Marini, Detail from 'Warrior', 1960.  
Polychromed plaster



76 Barbara Hepworth, 'Pelagos', 1946. Painted wood

worked in an arbitrary series of geometric areas, is frequently a dominant feature (74 - 75).

Humanistic sculpture of this type was not, however, the only option open to artists during the fifties. Some tried to evolve an idiom which would supply an equivalent for the abstract painting of the time.

In Britain, Barbara Hepworth, working alongside the archetypal sculptor of the twentieth century, Henry Moore, used subdued colour in her constructivist - organic forms. Her work, influenced by Cornish land and seascapes, has a poetic irrationality allied to formalist concerns (76).

#### Summary

This period highlights the emergence of the highly personalised style of individual sculptors. No longer necessarily bound to any particular movement, sculptural form still teeters on the brink of the explosion in media which was to occur in the ensuing twenty years. Colour is still relatively conservatively used to delineate form or to emphasise specific features and has yet to dominate and completely integrate into sculpture.



77 Frank Stella, 'Montenegro', 1975. Lacquer and oil on aluminium



78 Frank Stella, 'Shoubeegi (Indian Birds)', 1975. Mixed media on aluminium

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE SIXTIES AND SEVENTIES

From the sixties onwards, the psychological centre of gravity of art shifts from Europe to New York. The burgeoning art market and increasing wealth and sophistication of buyers nurtured a host of art-world stars and a plethora of diverse and succinctly named movements - Op, Pop, Colour-field, Minimalism and so on. Mainstream 'modernism' was in full swing.

One man, who is, in a sense, pivotal to the way in which the boundaries between the world of objects and the painted canvas became blurred, is American Post-Painterly Abstractionist Frank Stella. Despite the fact that Abstract Expressionism, with its frenetic brushwork and personal emotional approach was at its peak, he was determined to create an art which was rational and orderly. His philosophy was closely related to the group of sculptors who became known as the Minimalists.

In 1960, Stella began to cut notches out of the centre, corners and sides of his canvases so that the 'image' and the canvas became an inseparable unit. Colour was initially confined to flat areas. In later works, free brushwork is applied to irregular shapes (77 - 78).

Historically, Stella is regarded as a painter but his devices were to exercise a powerful influence on eighties artists like Robert Morris, Elizabeth Murray, Nancy Graves and Michelle Stuart. All four artists fuse two dimensional imagery with three dimensional texture using colour to coagulate both dimensions. This ethic is



79 Elizabeth Murray, 'Duck Foot', 1983.  
Oil on four canvases



80 Robert Morris, 'Untitled', 1983 - 4.  
Pastel with painted Hydrocal frame



81 Nancy Graves, 'Footscray', 1985. Aluminium relief on canvases



82 Michelle Stuart, 'On Part of Memory being Alaska: Black Star ... Sky Dome of the North', 1985 - 6.  
Encaustic with plants, earth and rocks

analogous to the early collage techniques of Braque and Picasso, the difference being that the method of colour application is conditioned by the spontaneous reading of all surfaces, both projected and flat (79 - 82).

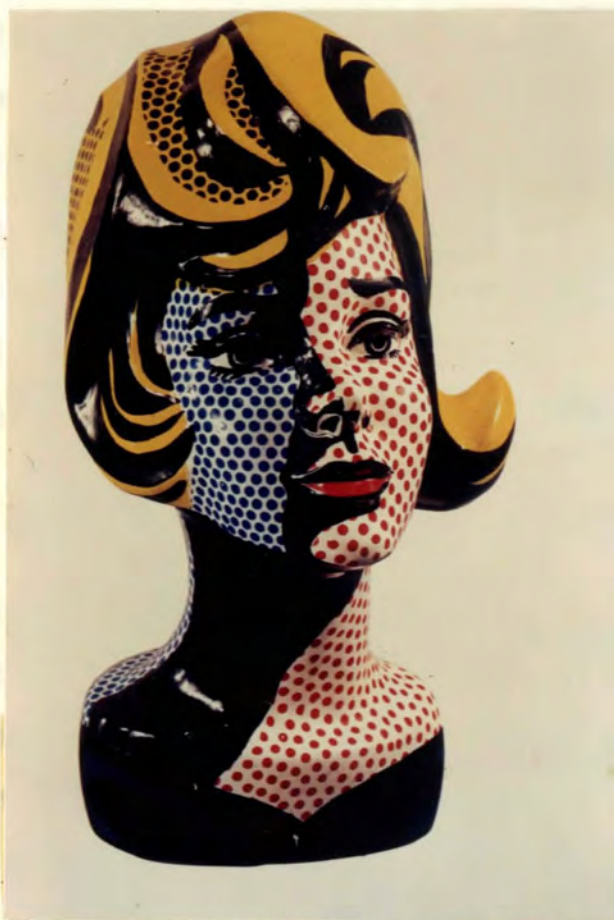
#### POP ART

Pop art is normally thought of as an American movement but it was actually born in England in the mid-fifties and was concerned with popular culture and its implications - movies, space fiction, billboards and machines: in effect, aspects of the contemporary scene considered to be anti-aesthetic. Translocated to the United States during the sixties, it was an art form which held natural appeal for American artists living in the midst of the most blatant and pervasive industrial and commercial environment and was a major reaction against the prevailing Abstract Expressionism. In the sculptural field, a Texan sculptor called Robert Rauschenberg is generally credited with establishing the directional ethos of 'modern' sculpture. To him is owed much of the basic cultural assumption that a work of art can exist for any length of time in any material, anywhere, for any purpose and destination, from the museum to the trashcan. His ready-mades, following Duchampian tradition, differ from the kind of romantic effulgence of the Surrealist sculptors.

His combine paintings attempted to create a unity out of impermanent materials, topical events and the specific interests with which he was at that time concerned with. He tended to work with things that were either so mangled or so abstract that they were unrecognisable except as objects. Colouring them provided a code of accumulative meaning turning them into magical-circumstantial



83 Robert Rauschenberg, 'Monogram', 1955 - 9. Freestanding combine with paint



84 Roy Lichtenstein, 'Ceramic Head with Blue Shadow', 1966.

icons. He liked enacting whole histories within an image, layering allusion upon allusion (83).

Colour is an intrinsic part of this style and very often the impact of the sculpture depends upon it. Taken from the riotous, brash colour of the poster, hamburger stands, domestic commodities advertising material and the comic strip, artists like Roy Lichtenstein used flat hard-edged colours in oil or acrylic allied to precise drawing (84).

With the era of Andy Warhol and the baleful irony of Pop art, sculpture under the aegis of Claes Oldenburg, became as critic Barbara Rose put it: "... a low, vulgar representational art of formal significance" (Rose, 1981: 357). The resurrection of Schwitters' 'trashcan' ethic was well under way.

Oldenburg exemplifies Picasso's ability to recomplicate the ordinary, at the same time depriving the object of function (85).



85 Claes Oldenburg, 'Two Cheeseburgers with Everything', 1962. Burlap, plaster and enamel



86 Escobar Marisol, 'Ruth', 1962. Polychromed wood



88 Manuel Neri, Untitled standing figure number one, 1980. Bronze with enamel



87 Antony Donaldson, 'Red 'n gold', 1970. Polyester resin

### FIGURATIVE ART

Figurative art has always existed in the twentieth century as a polar opposite to the abstract and cerebral modes of high modernism. Whilst escaping the label of 'academic', there are several realist sculptors who have made important contributions in this area. The use of colour on surfaces is the main factor which separates them from the connotations of the classical nineteenth century Academy.

Escobar Marisol's work may be described as pop-assemblages in that she uses 'store-bought' material together with autobiographical detail to create Surrealist-oriented images (86).

Figurative eroticism was a particularly British characteristic of the Pop era. Few of the leading artists - Allen Jones, David Hockney, Antony Donaldson - were free of it. Donaldson's visual repertoire was based on variations of the pin-up (87).

Manuel Neri, a Californian, uses applied colour on white plaster forms and marble in a way which alludes to the roots of all classical sculpture but is contiguous with a completely contemporary feel (88).

Of the sculptors associated with Pop art, the most impressive is George Segal. Preferring to be called an 'object-maker', Segal cast figures in plaster from life and set them into environments. The figures, sometimes coloured, are left rough and unfinished, existing like wraiths in an edgy and mysterious world (89).



89 George Segal, View of the studio with 'Walk / Dont Walk', 'Red Girl Behind Red Door', 'Black Girl Behind Black Door' and 'Post no Bills'. Plaster with mixed media. C. 1960 - 4.



90 Edward Kleinholz, 'The State Hospital', 1964 - 6.

Mixed media construction

Edward Kleinholz has in common with Segal the creation of elaborate tableaux which embody a mordant criticism of American life. His 'The State Hospital' is one of the most macabre images of this cen-



91 Duane Hanson, 'Florida Shopper', 1973.  
Fibreglass and polyester resin



92 John de Andrea, 'Dying Gaul', 1984. Polyvinyl polychromed in oil

ture (90).

Colouration in sculpture is taken to the ultimate in the work of two Hyperrealist sculptors, Americans John de Andrea and Duane Hanson. Technically, the work derives from Segal, but the figures emerge as simulcra of the real thing. Both men present a gallery of cruelly and acutely observed portraits of the American social classes (91 - 92).

A further development in this veristic style is the work of British sculptor John Davies whose blanched, semi-clothed figures, often embellished with strange contraptions of board and wire, are like human talismans. Monolithic in an eerie and suspended stillness, they owe some affinity to pre-war Surrealism. Davies says of sculpture that "... it has an incredible power since it inhabits the same dimension as you do" (Davies, n.d.) (93 - 94).



93 John Davies, 'Figures on a Railing', n.d. Plaster and mixed media



94 John Davies, View of the exhibition, 1975.  
Plaster and mixed media



95 Jonathan Borofsky, 'The Dancing Clown', 1982 - 3.  
Mixed media



96 Keith Haring and Kermit Oswald, Untitled (Totem),  
1983. Installation and enamel on wood

Jonathan Borofsky is a marginal outsider in figurative sculpture of the eighties. Seeking to vivify the entropic effects of Minimalism, he substitutes randomness, if not chaos, for geometric order - low life for high art. Devising Zen-like environments through humerous and cryptic figures set in an electrically animated carnival-like atmosphere, his works encompasses aspects of Installation and Kitsch (95).

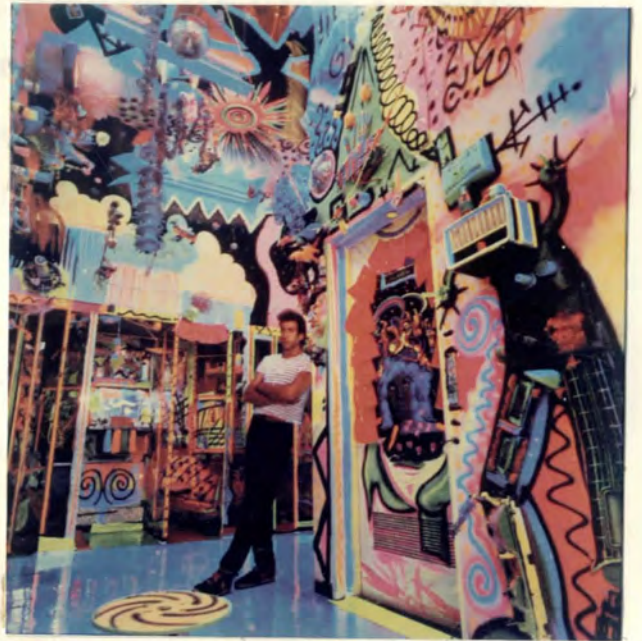
Borofsky's earlier figurative works were associated with the sophisticated end of the Graffiti movement which came directly from the urban culture of New York city. Kenny Scharf, Keith Haring and Nikki de Saint Phalle owe their decorative and superficial styles to this oeuvre and whilst their styles are not essentially 'serious' art, it may be considered as an anecdotally interesting facet of figurative folk art (96 - 98).



97 Nikki de Saint Phalle, Figures, n.d. Papier-mâché



99 Pol Bury, '16 Balls and 16 Cubes on 7 Shelves', 1966. Polychromed wood



98 Kenny Scharf, 'Closet No. 7', 1985. Mixed media installation



100 Louise Bourgeois, 'The Blind leading the Blind', 1947. Painted wood.

The Blind Leading the Blind, ca. 1947  
painted wood, 67 1/2 x 64 1/2 x 16 1/2  
Private collection

CONSTRUCTIVISM, MINIMALISM, EARTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL ART, CONCEPTUAL ART, INSTALLATION, KITSCH AND GRAFFITI ART

Constructivism, initiated during the preceding decades under Piet Mondrian and later Naum Gabo, became a major direction in both American and European sculpture in the late fifties and early sixties.

What the large audiences who flocked to the exhibitions in the sixties looked for was an art which had made a successful alliance with the machine and which could therefore be thought of as having attuned itself to modern technological civilisation. Belgian artist Pol Bury's works can be regarded as contemporary equivalents of eighteenth century automata. Using simple mechanisms with a penchant for slow movement which is almost illusionary, he is one of the most subtle exponents of early kinetic art (99).

Louise Bourgeois is not easily categorised. Born in 1911, she is one of America's distinguished stone-carvers but has worked in nearly every medium. In the mid-fifties, she constructed abstract clustered forms which resonate with fetishistic and phallic overtones. Her work has been slow to emerge as much of it ran counter to the mainstream of the fifties and sixties. Colour is an intrinsic part of her iconography (100).

In Britain, Victor Pasmore and Antony Caro extrapolated the geometric, linear mode initiated by America's premier Constructivist sculptor, David Smith, by incorporating colour as an important element (101).



101 Victor Pasmore, 'Relief Construction in White, Black and Indian Red', 1962.  
Transparent projective relief



102 Antony Caro, 'Midday', 1960. Painted steel



103 Craig Kauffman, 'Untitled wall relief', 1967. Pressed plastic

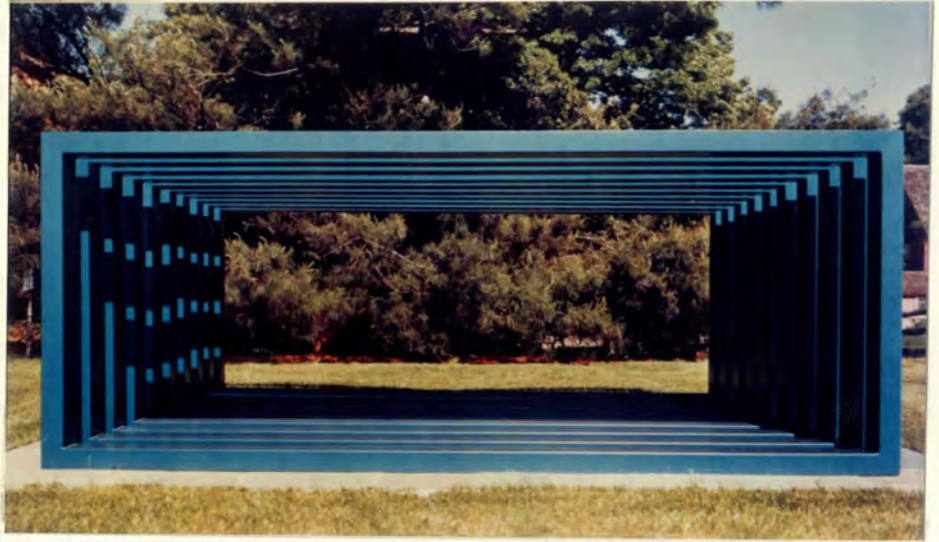
Caro, innovative in the abolition of the base altogether, tended to make sculpture which is rambling and horizontal, strongly affecting the space surrounding the work. Using dense, flat colour or allowing colour effects to weather on Cor-Ten steel, these forms alter spatial perception and range from the extremely elegant to the massive and brutal (102).

The term 'Minimal Art' was coined by British philosopher Richard Wollheim in 1965. He used it to describe the kind of contemporary art object that relies, for its aesthetic impact, on a paradoxical absence of art content. Because of its extreme simplicity of form and reliance on industrial materials, colour becomes especially important for impact.

Craig Kauffman, considered a Structuralist, produced a series of vacuum-formed, factory-made rectangles with rounded corners which were a vehicle for what he calls "... a passion for a kind of colour, a sensual response to material" (Kauffman, 1983: 387).

It is an open question whether these works should be classified as sculpture or painting. Together with John McCracken, whose reputation rests on a series of brightly coloured wooden slabs which lean against walls, these works are to sculpture what Rothko was to painting (103).

American Donald Judd carried the Minimalist objective to a point of mathematical precision. He repeated identical units, normally quadrangular, at identical intervals. Despite their monumental scale, Judd's sculptures are detached from the spectator: they raise fundamental questions concerning the nature and even the



104 Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1966. Painted steel



105 Pablo Picasso, *'Figure Découpee'*, 1960. Concrete



106 Arman, *'Long Term Parking'*, 1982. Concrete and steel

validity of the work of art. Can an absolutely mechanical arrangement of identical solids constitute a work of art? Judd is the apotheosis of the Minimalist movement and is the stylistic precursor for the increasing demand for colossal works for architectural schemes and public plazas. His ethic, with its conventions of repetitive mechanical units came under fire for its sterility in the organic revivalist movement of the early eighties (104).

Picasso, still prolifically active in the sculptural field constructed a series of vast concrete images for public spaces which reflect his definitive iconography and make use of superbly orchestrated colour components (105).

Junk sculpture continued to reflect contemporary aesthetics but also found its way into public parks and architectural settings. Arman's monumental piece relies heavily on applied colour for effect (106).

Extravagant use of colour in environmental sculpture was to be taken to fantastical lengths by Earth artists. Based on a psychological hostility to museum display and material possessable art, artists like Christo Jaracheff and Lita Albuquerque constructed gigantic ephemeral works in the eighties covering vast expanses of geography. Christo heightened the disparity between nature and his imposed formal organisation of material by using vivid colour in the form of polypropylene sheeting. His work is extraordinary both for its size and scale and degree of technical difficulty



107 Christo Jaracheff, 'Surrounded Islands', 1983. Polypropylene

(107).

Contrary to conventional Minimalist sculptors who were preoccupied with cubic volumes which have a 'closed' Gestalt, Earth artists extended their imagery to include the notion of the infinite. Many works are not only inaccessible but could only be understood from the air or from photographs or other documentation. Here the importance of the original concept, as well as that of the documentation seems more pertinent than the actual physical embodiment of the work: the phenomenon which critics have called Conceptual Art.

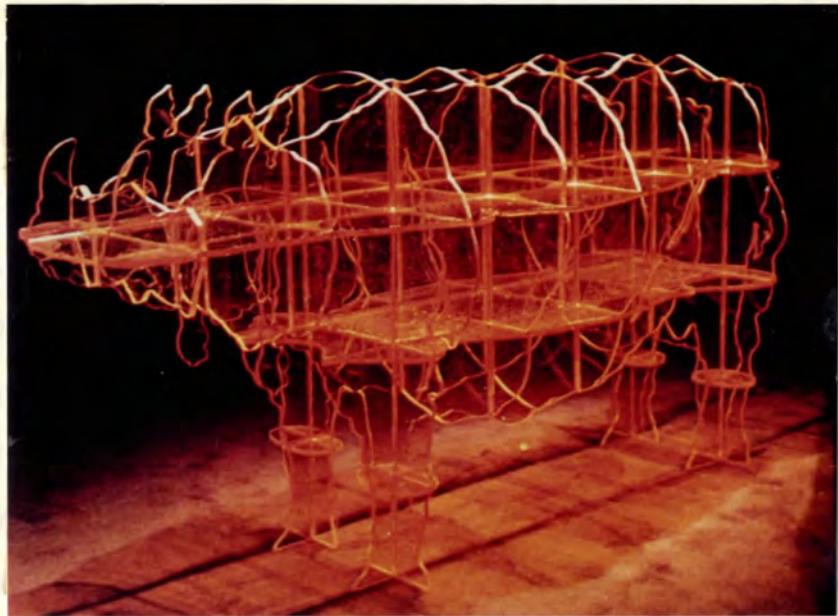
Concept art places reliance upon inscription in addition to the images and thus has important links to Pop art, the first movement in the sixties to give prominence to the comic strip which Pop artists used as source material. It was left to Conceptualist Joseph Beuys, Europe's most contentious artist of the latter twentieth century, to redefine radically the role of the artist in society. Beuys was born in 1921, so he witnessed most of the major art movements of the century. Through his work, he proceeded to provoke acknowledged concepts, not just as a sculptor, but as a human being engaged in any area of creativity. Aside from his performances, lectures and teaching, his work is wrapped in personal myth and imbued with shamanistic ritual. He is unsurpassed at using laconic, gritty abandoned things to suggest a tragic sense of history.

Like Warhol, he was a superb manipulator of the media, without which he may well have remained an eccentric curiosity. Beuys' widened concept of art in which the whole process of living itself is the creative act, endorsed the ground-swell of disillusionment





108 Joseph Beuys, 'Plight', 1985. Piano with felt



109 Gino Marotta, 'Rhinoceros', 1970. Perspex



110 Joseph Kosuth, 'Neon Electrical Light English Glass Letters', 1966



with the philistine commercialised art-hype of the seventies (108).

### Summary

Sculpture during the sixties and seventies is awesomely complex in scale and diversity. Dominated by rhythms of fashionable movements, the general trend was towards a public and populist sculpture - accessible to the public and flamboyant in terms of colour. Technological advances in material and an open mind on the part of artists, saw the use of electricity and high-Tech devices like holography being incorporated into the definition of art. Colour is now an essential component of sculpture, used extensively to inform surfaces and intensify form. It is, however, still used adjunc- tively in the sense that it sits on top of form and has yet to become fully integrated.

The 'intelligent mark' in sculpture is the specific preserve of the eighties sculptor and is allied to a shift away from fashionable imagery to a tighter, and in a sense, more conservative, self-reflective and intimate sculpture.

With few exceptions, sculpture remains identifiably three dimensional conforming to traditional canons. The subtle alliance between the illusion of painting and the materiality of form has still to crystallise (109 - 110).



111 Nancy Graves, 'Fenced', 1985. Bronze, steel with polyurethane paint

CHAPTER FIVETHE EIGHTIESTHE ORGANIC REVIVAL

Of the sculptors who emerged from the analytically logical spirit of the seventies, Nancy Graves is perhaps the most important. Robert Hughes has written of Graves that: "Her images of the life beyond our own bodies have acquired a swarming, teetering richness, a lyricism of impulse and a sharp oddity of tone that looks like and feels like no one else's" (Hughes, 1986: 54).

No one uses bronze the way Graves does. Historically an ancient material, bronze casting has declined during this century because of its associations with academic stolidity. Casting found objects and specimens of anthropomorphic forms, Graves assembles these diverse elements and welds them directly on the foundry floor. She then patinates and enamels the bronze skin in a rich range of acid chromatic hues which eliminate every connotation of the bronze's metallic origin.

When the metal is fired for enamelling, unlimited effects of bonding, fusion and encrustation subvert the 'respectability' of the bronze, breaking down the barriers between painting and sculpture.

Her compositional instincts are keenly economic, with difficult feats of equilibrium accomplished through sudden visual accident and plenty of wit. Her sculptures are neither representational objects nor taxidermic duplication but meditations, abstract in essence if not in appearance. Graves condenses the legacy of the twentieth century in that she does not separate abstract from re-



112 Judy Pfaff, '3D', 1983. Installation and mixed media



113 Dorothy Gillespie, 'Magic Carpet Slides', 1986. Painted aluminium



114 Italo Scanga, 'The Abbey', 1983. Oil on wood



115 Mel Kendrick, 'Large Mahogany with Holes', 1984. Wood

presentational art: she accretes both (111).

Judy Pfaff and Dorothy Gillespie use colour in their installations on a grand scale blurring the distinction between painting and sculpture (112 - 113).

#### ANIMISM AND MYSTICISM

Italo Scanga, Mel Kendrick and Robert Berry are three examples of sculptors who continued to work within the framework of animism and mysticism - aspects of the organic revivalism of the eighties. Their synthesis of the primaeval and Western art is laced with allusion and irony, dispelling the seriousness of the high art of the recent past. Colour is used as scarification or as a tattooing device to create emblematic totems (114 - 116).



116 Robert Berry, 'Jaywalking Hand', 1987.

Painted aluminium



117 Peter Reginato, 'Waiting for Miró', 1984.

Enamel on mild steel



118 Peter Reginato, 'Casanova Brown', 1984.

Enamel on mild steel

## METAL SCULPTURE

The use of colour in constructed metal sculpture has been attacked as a kind of drawing in space. Sculpture is much easier thought of as a space-displacing mass and in this kind of sculpture there are pitfalls. Chief among them is the possibility that the work may look like doodling in space or that the proliferation of line can become tedious. By the same token, the paring down of material accentuates the importance of space and can emphasise line. Colour and value contrasts accentuate the structural relationships within the whole.

Sequences of colour can carry the eye through the sculpture and either attenuate or abruptly change visual response. Attenuation and repetition of colour can separate and unify three dimensions. Abrading causes irregularities of colour and texture which constantly change effects of light and colour.

For a generation of new sculptors including Peter Reginato, the use of applied colour provided an answer with what to do with the surface while reinforcing sculptural intention. Reginato believes that: "Every time that you use a colour you create a spatial relationship" (Reginato, 1985: 54). By concealing the steel with colour, a dynamic is formed between the line, shape, size and negative and positive areas (117 - 118).

The return lately to traditional sculptural materials like bronze is an interesting phenomenon. The scale is generally smaller and is usually made by the sculptors themselves instead of jobbing out. It carries with it the accreted legacy of sculptural history and is



119 John Newman, 'Jeter par Terre', 1985. Painted steel



120 Joel Fisher, 'After Balzac', 1984. Bronze

either representational or ambiguously abstract and often displays the current trend of referentiality. There appears to be a return to substantiality - a sense of weighted volumetric form - which was largely neglected in the seventies. Deconstructed colour, in its applied modernist sense, is being used with increasing subtlety and is absolutely necessary for the development of full formal meaning (119 - 120).

## CONCLUSION

Art in the eighties is provocatively directed at the informed rather than the mindless. The turn of the decade has seen a frenetic return to a recognisable image and opened the door to narrative, allegory and symbolism. Interest has once again risen in tribal art, archaic and crude form, prehistoric artifacts and archeological remains.

In sculpture, it has resulted in a shift of focus from object to image - from the thing to its appearance. Sculpture and its counterpart, image, merge to form an image-based sculpture, achieved by exuberant use of colour, theatricality and a return to figuration.

What distinguishes the new sculpture from all previous related movements is the 'bricoleur' attitude which uses objects and materials recovered from the mass-media culture and turns them into the symbolic, the absurd or politically engaged image.

The fact that objects have evocative powers was a well-known precept. New sculptors, however, have discovered the magical quality in the mass-produced, cheap commodities. Being so numerous, they represent a sort of reversed rarity. The notion of metamorphosis is essential to most of this sculpture.

The dual condition of the new sculpture - industrial skin and organic allusion - incorporating everything from painting to object, from theatrical mode to installation, is new beyond doubt. "The new sculpture is connected with a fundamental change of intention.

The imperative of stripping bare all components of art, from material and working process to its social context, has been replaced by the principle of metamorphosis. The material facts of the medium are not hidden - they are transformed. Sculpture takes on a new ontological and aesthetic status in the border area between the two conditions. It is at once materiality and illusion, presence and absence" (Dimitrijevic, 1984: 22).

Colour has been a powerful catalyst in this revolution.

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