

SCULPTURE AND INTROSPECTION

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*Approved 5/16/66
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SCULPTURE AND INTROSPECTION

How can one penetrate my dreams, my instincts, my desires, my thoughts; which have taken a long time to elaborate themselves and bring themselves to the light, above all seize in them what I brought about, perhaps, against my will?¹

So protested Pablo Picasso. And Henry Moore said:

It is a mistake for a sculptor or a painter to speak or write very often about his job. It releases tension needed for his work. By trying to express his aims with rounded-off logical exactness, he can easily become a theorist whose actual work is only a caged-in exposition of conceptions evolved in terms of logic and words.²

Why should an artist explain his work? Should not the work stand on its own merits? Two eminent artists have stated that an artist's verbal explanation is either impossible or actually harmful to the artist.

This writer has chosen to try to show to others the creative process as she experiences it. There are two reasons for this. The writer felt impelled to explore her own thought processes from curiosity and a hope that understanding would actively benefit her work. The second reason was to explain this to others, notably non-artists, who may look at a work of art and have no idea why and how the artist arrived at this conclusion. This lack of understanding

¹Brewster Ghiselin, The Creative Process, p. 52.

²Ibid., p. 68.

between artist and non-artist is ages old. Artists have sometimes tried to explain their work to the public, but there are difficulties involved. Some artists remain silent, maintaining that their work says everything. Also, the creative process is often vague and hard to express logically, and the public may have no patience with an artist who cannot "say what he means." The writer feels that understanding between artist and public is to be desired, and she hopes this paper will be a step toward this understanding. For as Henry Moore concludes, "It is likely, then, that a sculptor can give, from his own conscious experience, clues which will help others in their approach to sculpture...."¹

This particular process was carried to the conclusion of a standing female figure (Illustrations nos. 11, 12, and 13). All explanation of this process must be read with this end result in mind, and the conclusions might or might not be transferable to other works of art. The writer will begin by telling of artists who have influenced her with regard to this particular sculpture.

As a freshman she saw a picture of the prehistoric Venus of Willendorf, a small fertility figure. She admired the skill with which these bulbous masses were interrelated so that the figure expressed the maternal idea and became an interesting sculpture. A sixteenth century French sculptor, Jean Goujon, expressed in stone feminine sculptures with high breasts and rounded contours. She had admired

¹Ibid.

contemporary British sculptors such as Reginald Butler, Kenneth Armitage, and Henry Moore for several years. She had seen a film showing a sculpture by Butler of a standing nude girl stretching in the sun, slides of Armitage's figures with large bodies and tiny, thin arms and legs, and examples of Moore's feminine archetypes, as rolling and convoluted as the British countryside. Degas' sculpture, "Little Dancer," had a pert pose and way of staring into viewers' eyes. Perhaps the most direct influence was Marino Marini's "Pomona" figures. Of these it was said:

...these overripe, healthily sensual, supremely maternal female figures. They bear in them the ancient, blind mystery which palaeolithic man already tried to interpret in the Venus of Willendorf.¹

Marini combined beautiful masses with significant contours. If only the silhouettes of these figures were shown one could see the suggestion of mass and admire the outline.

These influences by other artists sank out of the writer's conscious mind or only briefly re-appeared in association with other things. At times the artist might be able to acknowledge outside influences only after, if ever, completion of the work. For example, after finishing a model of a reclining female the writer realized that the pose was reminiscent of Ingres' "La Grande Odalisque." Mention had been made of the strange distortion of the back

¹Em. Langui, Marino Marini, p. 7.

and hip, and this model might have been an attempted resolution of this problem, buried for over a year.

Georges Rouault stated:

In truth, I have painted by opening my eyes day and night on the perceptible world, and also by closing them from time to time that I might better see the vision blossom and submit itself to orderly arrangement.¹

After "opening her eyes" to the works of other artists and the world about her, the writer "closed her eyes" and allowed the images to sink into subconsciousness and adjust themselves into "orderly arrangement."

Ben Shahn stated, "I am actually more inclined to work with images than with ideas."² The writer, too, worked with images, in this case the image of a standing female nude. She can trace this image back to a small sketch made in the margin of some class notes (Illustration no. 1). Henry Moore has stated a sculptor's reasons for using sketches:

My drawings are done mainly as a help toward making sculpture--as a means of generating ideas for sculpture, tapping oneself for the initial idea; and as a way of sorting out ideas and developing them.³

At this time these many and various artistic influences must have meshed and coalesced into this image. This

¹Ghiselin, op. cit., p. 56.

²Jack Summerfield and Lorlyn Thatcher, ed., The Creative Mind and Method., p. 42.

³Ghiselin, op. cit., p. 71.

merging happened approximately two years ago. The two following quotations may explain the vagueness of the first creative stirrings:

Creation begins typically with a vague, even a confused excitement, some sort of yearning, hunch, or other preverbal intimation of approaching or potential resolution.¹

The invention may appear spontaneously and without apparent preliminaries, sometimes in the form of a mere glimpse serving as a clue, or like a germ to be developed; sometimes a fragment of the whole, whether rudimentary and requiring to be worked into shape or already in its final form; sometimes essentially complete, though needing expansion, verification, or the like.²

The first sketch was only a groping, a shadow of the image. It was found unsatisfactory, and clarification over the months began, with more sketches and refining of forms. At this time the writer began drawing from the figure, learning correct anatomy, etc. This knowledge undoubtedly contributed to the image, but the writer was not consciously aware of it. To get the "right" pose and the "correct" relationships of parts the writer worked in several media--notebook sketches, felt tip pen on acetate, and finally a small bronze casting in the spring of 1965 (Illustration no. 2). When this bronze sculpture was completed the writer consciously felt that this image did not totally reflect the image in her mind's eye, so she went back to more sketches (Illustration no. 3). During the fall

¹Ibid., p. 4.

²Ibid., p. 5.

of 1965 the writer worked on large plaster figures (Illustrations nos. 4, 5, and 6), feeling the need to work larger after a year of small bronze sculptures. She did many studies in terra cotta for these three figures, but a standing female figure appeared only once or twice. However, after these figures were completed, the writer decided to do a life-size sculpture. The image of a standing female figure reappeared and was considered. More sketches (Illustrations nos. 7, 8, 9, and 10) followed during the winter, clarifying the form. When the form was reasonably solidified in the mind, practicalities emerged. The armature, of styrofoam for bulk without weight and welded steel rod for strength, was planned and made. Problems such as a base to support the weight of the figure and casters to allow the sculpture to be moved freely were solved. These problems were given little intrinsic aesthetic consideration and were always subservient to the image.

One night as the writer was reading, not thinking of the sculpture, she was suddenly struck by an image of the completed sculpture. She could see exactly how it would look. She could feel the contours--how the hand would rest against the hip, the shape and expression of the face, the surface texture and coloring. There was a feeling of assurance--no longer vague gropings. Even through the actual production of the figure, the interaction with the media, this image remained. Sudden visions such as these might or might not come before the work is begun and might not be borne

out in the end. The worth of the vision might be only in the confidence it gave the artist.

While actually working on the figure the writer for the most part carried out the image as she had resolved it in her mind. She did not use sketches to guide her. Their purpose was through. Changes were suggested by the medium, the tools used, suggestions by others, and the change between two-dimensional sketches and three-dimensional plaster. Henry Moore states, "A sculptural idea which may be satisfactory as a drawing always needs some alteration when translated into sculpture."¹

With the completion of the figure came a cessation of the image. One felt released from something which had been holding one. This easing of the bonds might be temporary, since it has been impossible for the writer to create something which satisfied her for very long. This dissatisfaction might provoke another try at the same image in the future.

The writer would like to explain some of the aesthetic considerations which ran through her mind during this process of creation and were embodied in the work. Though there was no one conscious "idea" behind the figure, it might have been a provocative yet maternal woman. She wished to show the figure of a fairly young woman--one whose bodily forms were held up by muscles. During the actual

¹Ibid., p. 71.

creation of the work, however, the forms became more sloping. The figure had looked too "cute" and naive, and the slight aging of the body expressed womanliness and maternity more adequately. The forms were to be full, and, though the figure was not consciously meant to be pregnant, it could be construed so. So that the fullness and roundness of head, breasts, belly, and buttocks would not appear overblown, the thinness and straightness of neck and legs were juxtaposed. The arms, long but full, acted as a middle ground between the curved and straight line. A straight line is not as interesting as a curved line, so neck and legs were curved subtly. The juxtaposition of curved and straight elements created a tension in the work. One could follow the ins and outs of the contours from the bottom to the top of the sculpture.

The writer had three conscious reasons for choosing a female nude as a subject. First, the subject was familiar to her. Second, a female figure is composed of soft, rounded forms which she preferred to angular, stiff forms. A sculpture composed of rounded forms is more inviting to the touch. An important consideration of her sculpture is its tactile quality. The use of the rasp and chisel and the final surface patina heightened this feeling. The figure could then be sensual, not necessarily sensuous or sexual, though the feelings are related. The sculpture was to give pleasure through the sense of touch as well as sight. The third consideration was the intellectual problem of

re-organizing a complex structure like the human body into simpler forms re-assembled in an original way.

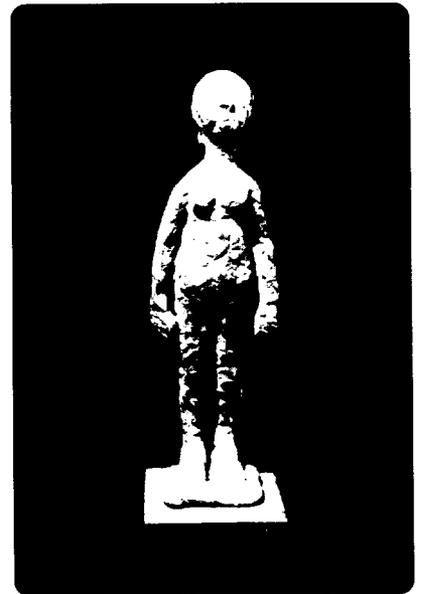
The writer hopes that this paper will aid in the comprehension of the creative process. Regardless of whether others benefit, the writer feels she has gained insight into her own thought processes, knowledge which she feels can only benefit her in her further creative study.

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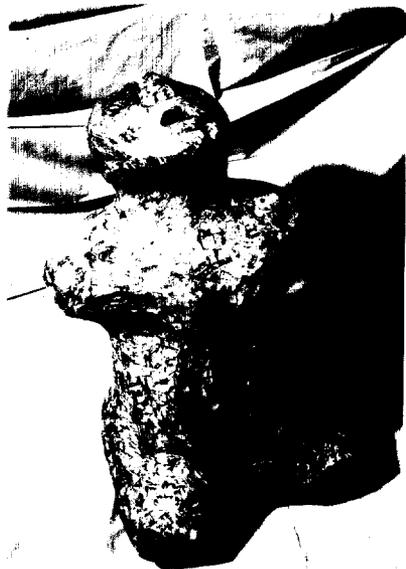
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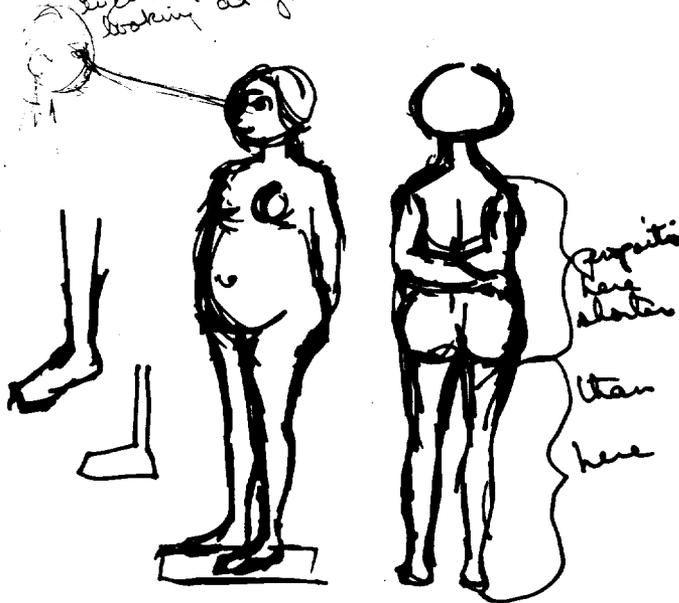
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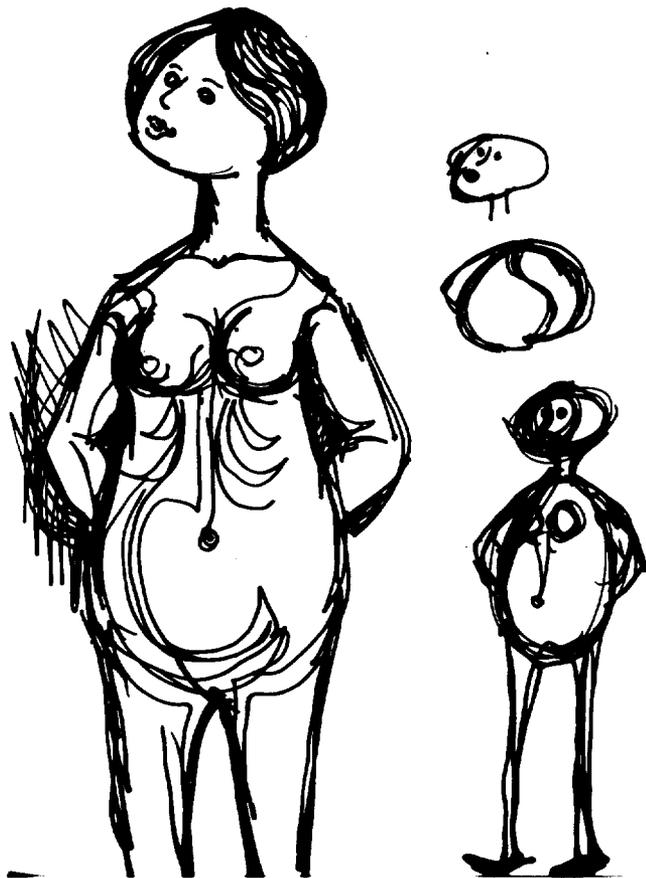
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eyes important -
looking at you

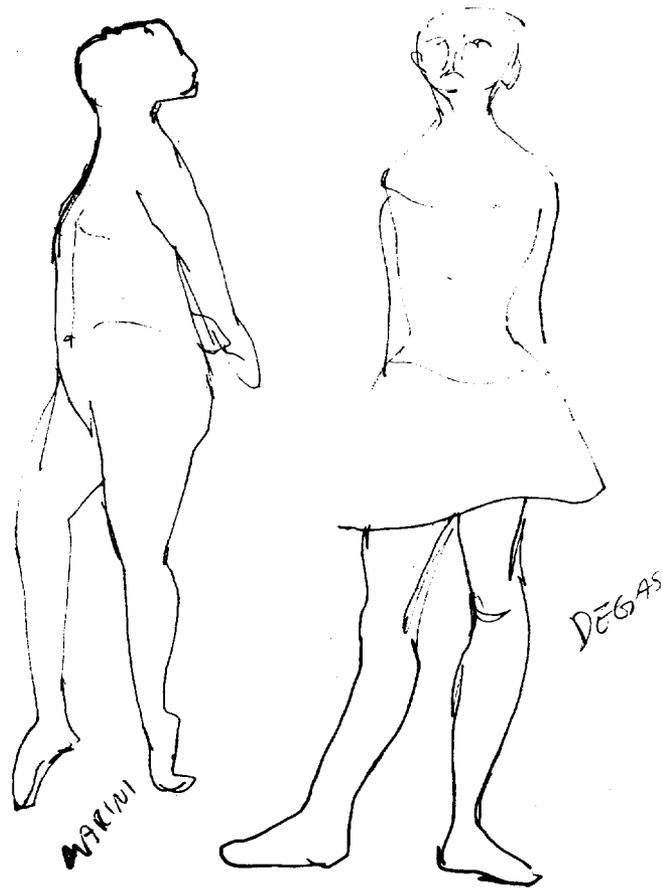
Greek goddess of
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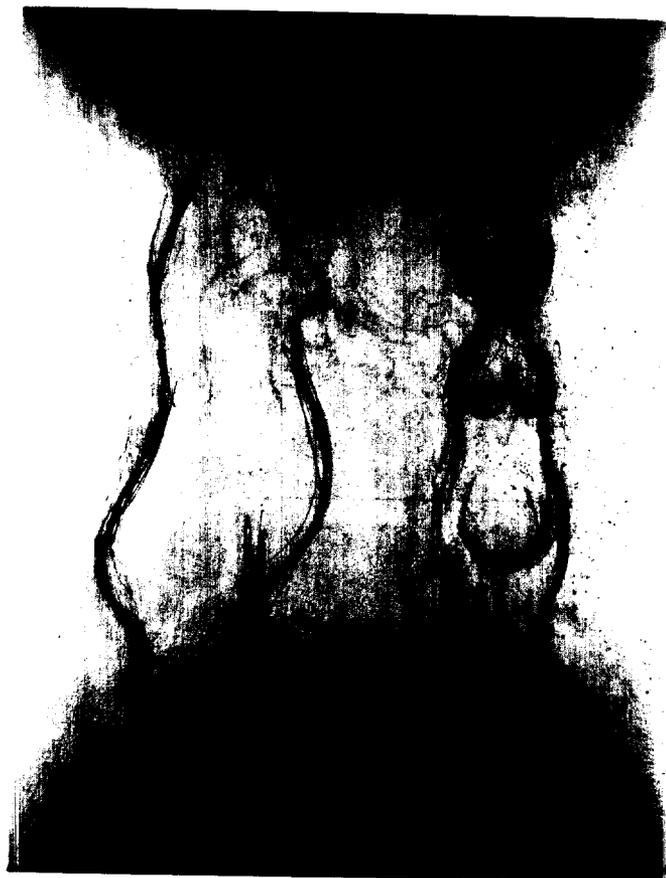
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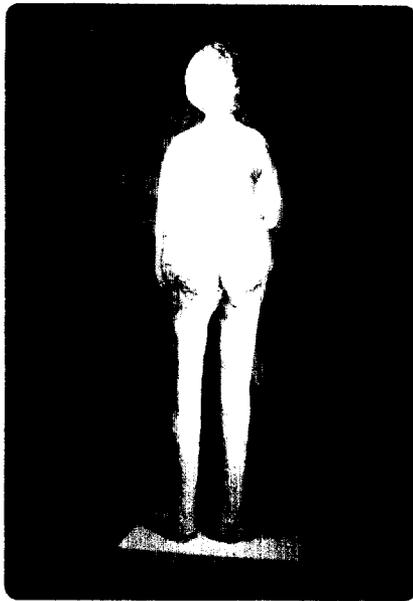
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