

A PROJECT IN SCULPTURE
CREATIVE SCULPTURE IN DIFFERENT MEDIUMS

by

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This thesis involves the producing of five creative pieces of sculpture, one for each of the methods included in the term "Different Mediums" referred to in the title of the thesis. There will be more than five figures shown at the oral examination for in some fields the scope can be better shown by more than one figure. But five as a minimum has to be considered as there are five different mediums to be presented in the thesis.

These five mediums, stating them here merely for the purpose of specifying and later each to be gone into in more detail are, one, plaster; two, ceramic; three, wood; four, metal (sprayed and pounded); and five, stone.

I do not mean to give the impression that these five methods are the only methods open to the sculptor. But these five are the most important, the ones mostly used, and include the greater portion of the field of work.

The figures photographed and shown in this thesis are, for plaster a standing masculine figure; for ceramic a head; for wood a standing feminine figure; for metal a bronze feminine head (sprayed); and an aluminum mask (pounded); for stone a masculine figure cut in marble, and a two figure,

masculine and feminine, composition cut out of Oregon volcanic sandstone.

Now, having given a brief statement of what has been done and why in regards to the "different mediums" angle of the thesis, I think the next step should be an analysis of the other part of the title "Creative Sculpture" with emphasis upon the word "creative". It is only after this is done that a clear and sound analysis of each piece can be given.

The word "creative" in itself may be a reasonably small word, but when it comes to its use in art it covers a large field. A field not only large in size but one which varies with almost an equal diversity of scope in the interpretation of the individual using it. Therefore, I will attempt to control the word and use it only in regards to the work on display, and only as a key to unlock the door that opens up the background of study and thought that produced said work.

In my work, with one exception the plaster piece, the use of the word "primitive" with the thoughts that it conveys must appear and enter the minds of even the most casual observers.

Now, "primitive", I believe, will make an excellent starting place for the beginning analysis of the word "creative". I have already attempted to show this thought in my abstract, by stating that a knowledge and recognition

of the sculpture of the African, Mayan, and early Egyptian civilizations, I consider, necessary for appreciation of many of the elements of modern sculpture. All of which I have tried to present and bring out in my work in some form or other.

Before going any further in my analysis of "creative" and its connection with "primitive", I will attempt to answer one objection that has several times been brought up and that is: How can a Caucasian of Northwest United States and the twentieth century have any true appreciation of the background that produced the primitive art of the civilizations just mentioned.

Now I am not going to try and answer this question for anyone else but myself. Maybe, the step between the two, American twentieth century and the other civilizations is so great there can be no true ability of the one, twentieth century, to accurately present any of the others. As I stated, I am not going to attempt to deny or to affirm this question on the whole, though my personal likes and dislikes are that it is not an impossible step, human nature being human nature no matter where and when you find it. But I am going to say that even though it may be true on the whole, that the step is normally almost impossible, insofar as I am concerned I don't believe it applies in that way.

And I don't believe it applies for this reason: First,

up to the age of seven I lived in the deep south and was brought up by a negro mammy, that my own mother contends I thought more of than I did of her. Then I was carried to Mexico and spent the next three years upon a mine located one hundred and fifty miles from a railroad and sixty miles from the nearest white person. Here primitive Aztec children were my sole companions for play. As to the importance of these facts, I have but to refer you to the psychologist and the Catholic Church both of which say in regards to the character background that stays with the individual for the rest of his adult life: "Give us a child until he is seven and anybody can have him from then on".

This thesis will only actually deal with three primitive civilizations. These three are, as mentioned before, African, Mayan, and early Egyptian, (Egyptian up to two or three hundred B.C.). There are other primitive civilizations but these are the ones that have formed the background for my study of primitives. And the ones I believe by far the most important in the analysis of the word "primitive".

The fundamental simplicity of the basic form is the cardinal principle of thought that travels through the primitive sculpture, and is caught and expressed by the modern movement in sculpture. This statement is a springboard that throws us right into the center of "primitive", "creative", and "modern sculpture".

The above paragraph simple sounding in itself still carries along with it many tangent points, but for the major truth of it "fundamental simplicity of basic form" this travels, when correctly observed, unmolested through the African, the Mayan, and the Egyptian. The basic form of the rounded sculpture of all three civilizations strives for the same principle of simplicity -- a fundamental simplicity of basic form that does not make the form an abstraction, but that does remove from it all the elementary, secondary forms of naturalism. And this primarily, I believe, is the thought lying behind creative, and modern as well as primitive and therefore serves as a major link uniting the three.

The word "primitive" by many becomes very much confused in its interpretation and usage. This confusion results with association of primitive with savage. An association that has very little connection with the arts of the civilizations discussed. Savage implies crude and unfinished, primitive does not. Savage implied rough and unornamented, primitive does not. In both there is one similarity, the childish quality. As much as I hold savage art inferior to primitive art I am willing to admit it does have also the childish quality primitive has, but I do contend there exists the distinction between a smart child and a stupid child in said childish quality existing in both. The smart child representing the findings and the results of the

primitive and if not stupid, at least backward one representing the savage.

Primitive sculpture is not an unfinished sculpture and is not an undecorated sculpture, (notice I do not use the word decorative but use the word decorated). In fact primitive sculpture is a highly decorated sculpture another point that is often overlooked by many observers of primitive art. For example, pictures in art magazines (often reputable magazines) that show a piece of sculpture not only crude and unfinished, but absolutely devoid of any surface decorations either added on, or cut into the basic form, and called examples "primitive art". This certainly shows a very little knowledge of primitive sculpture. The illustration might be called an example of savage art but primitive -- no.

Primitive sculpture is highly decorated, either by adding upon the basic form, or by cutting into said form. The Mayan is more decorative than the other two. For in the Mayan these decorations are not only used for ornamental purposes as in the others but have a very symbolical meaning as to religious and tribal customs. The Egyptian is the least decorated of the three, but added decorations are, nevertheless, there to quite a noticeable extent. The African is richly decorated.

From the above statement it may sound, at the restat-

ing, as paradoxical to say that the fundamental simplicity of basic form is the link uniting these three primitive arts. But after analysis of the arts, rounded sculpture in particular, it will still prove true. For it will be found that these rich and at times profuse added ornaments are so placed upon or cut into that the basic form has not been insured or abused by their usage.

So to show and speak of primitive sculpture as something free from ornaments, except in a few Egyptian examples, is presenting a false conception of the subject discussed.

Modern sculpture in its attempt to break away from the naturalistic, sentimental sculpture that preceded it reverted back to the primitive, but in many cases still overlook this decorated character of the primitive. An oversight that the sculptors in the last ten or twenty years have begun to realize and while, still keeping the fundamental simplicity of basic form, have begun to remedy by the adding of decorative elements.

Before going from this first part of my thesis, the creative, to the second part, discussion of the technical ends involved in the different mediums, I would like to mention an interesting angle. An angle apparent and symbolically similar in all primitive art, no matter how far apart and disconnected geographically, phaellic symbolism. Phaellic symbolism the symbolizing and worship of the sex organs as a religion.

It is a short step from the use of geometric forms as phaellic symbols to their use, knowledge, and appreciation free from symbolism. A knowledge and use shown by their usage in the decorative system of all primitive civilization.

The Egyptian and the Mayan civilization offer an excellent example for study of similar use of geometric symbols. Separated by three thousand miles of ocean, one a produce of Africa the other a produce, remotely of Asia and, perhaps, Asia and the South Sea Islands, there should be no grounds for explanation on similar racial characteristics. That is, ignoring the possibility of any such continent as Atlanta, connecting Africa and South America, as a theory being in no way substantiated by any sound findings of natural history, or evidence of negro blood in the Mayan civilization.

The Mayan pyramid is clipped and blunted at the extreme top. The Egyptian pyramid has a pointed apex. But both are basically the same geometric form. The decorated square, the triangle often in groups of three, the ordinary cycloid and the vertex cycloid, the parabola, the ellipse, and, of course, the circle are some of the geometric symbols found plentifully in the arts of both civilizations.

The use of two and three bars over a half circle; spear heads, in a row; circles in a row; the decorated

cylinder; circle within a circle; one, two, or three bars emerging into a circle are elements of design that appear in both civilizations. (In the relief, in the matter of perspective, with his capable expression of attitudes, spacing, and competent use of the "three quarter view", the Mayan sculptor was superior to the Egyptian.)

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The second half of my thesis takes up the discussion of the different mediums and an analysis of the pieces to be displayed.

The first step nearly always employed for all mediums, an absolutely necessary in the plaster and ceramic, is the original creation of the work in clay. I have not referred to clay as a medium, for it is not. Clay is just a step in the working of other mediums as it, itself, is not permanent and therefore deserves no such classification.

But the reason the clay figure is absolutely necessary in plaster is that it is from the clay figure that the mold is taken. The mold into which the plaster is poured, and from which the plaster cast is produced.

The two forms of molds are the piece mold and the chip mold. The piece mold is the one in several parts, parts that eliminate the undercuts that may have existed in the

clay figure. From a piece mold an unlimited number of plaster cast may be taken. The chip mold is in less parts (usually only two or three parts) than the piece mold. But it, the chip mold, is destroyed, hacked away, in obtaining the plaster cast, and consequently only one cast is obtainable from such a mold.

The ceramic method is similar to the plaster insofar as a necessity of an original piece in clay, and the need of the taking of a mold. But there is this distinction right from the first, and that is, that there is no such thing as a chip mold in ceramics. For the material poured into the ceramic mold is not plaster but a liquid called slip which never develops the strength to stand up under the hacking of a chip mold.

The slip form taken out of a mold in ceramics has to be fired to develop a lasting strength. And then after the first firing for strength, if color is desired, it has to be sprayed and refired for glazing.

The plaster piece will be solid. A ceramic piece will have a hollow center. A plaster piece can be painted or colored by several different processes, but never as successfully as a ceramic. For a ceramic with all the choice of glazes and the permanency of a refiring of the selected glaze into the piece itself has a big advantage over the plaster. Both are about the same strength. The ceramic due to the breakability of the slip cast originally taken

out of the mold is a more delicate and harder to handle method than the plaster, and, of course, due to the need of firing, is longer and more involved. But, stating my own personal opinion, ceramic justifies the additional labor and time in the superior quality of the results obtained in the end over plaster.

Wood like stone involves as the first step, and one that may save a lot of subsequent trouble, the careful selection of the proper type of material to be used in regards to kind and soundness. A piece of wood or stone with a flaw or a crack, or a seam or check can cause a world of trouble. The flaw or crack may be so hidden that even a careful inspection may not discover it, if that is so then it is just -- too bad. But nearly all cases a thorough inspection of material with a knowledge of its particular qualifications will discover these hidden imperfections. Two principles in wood cutting that are just as true as they are in stone are, first, cut in, and second, always leave until the last and final step a margin of safety. You can always cut down and cut off but you cannot, without showing it, add on if you have cut too far down or too much away.

Stone the selection of material is even more important than wood. For stone can vary even more than wood, for example, the hardness of marble and limestone as compared

to the chalky quality of tufa and sandstone. And this variation makes itself decidedly felt in the manner in which you have to work, the tools you use and how you use them. But always remember one thing, no matter what type of stone you are working upon cut towards the center of your piece, don't cut towards a breakable edge.

Metal sprayed, while obtaining excellent results, is not as interesting a method to the worker as metal pounded. For metal sprayed simply involves the creating of a plaster figure, and, then, the taking of said cast to an equipped foundry and having desired metal, usually bronze, sprayed upon it.

But metal pounded is a process done by the worker himself. The process cannot be any better defined than by the used word "pounded". For pounding on a sheet of metal until obtaining the desired shape is exactly what is done. But the use of "Burgandy pitch" sometimes called "shoemaker's wax" should not be overlooked. For if after the rough pounding into shape has been done you desire a more delicate modeling, this pitch must be used as a cushion to keep the metal from cracking.

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The piece designated as figure 1 is a plaster piece.

It is a copy of Farneses' Hercules. It was done for definite purpose -- to improve my knowledge of the tools necessary for good work. And by tools I am not referring to any of the tools of stone cutting, wood cutting, etc, but I am referring to the tool whose importance cannot be overlooked, ability to model in clay, and ability to make a piece mold and obtain a plaster cast.

I spent four months in making this copy of Hercules in clay. And when I finished I did not have a work of art and I certainly did not have anything creative. But I had decidedly improved my ability to handle clay and my knowledge of mold making and plaster casting.

Figure 2 is a ceramic piece of work. And good, bad or indifferent, it is a creative piece of work for I worked from no model and upon no preconceived idea, except to produce a head that while not an abstraction was still free from all the complicating minor little forms that the naturalistic head contains.

It interests me from a psychological angle to see that had I been copying African art, I could not have given a better expression of it than I did in this head. While actually when I made the head, I had absolutely no knowledge of African art.

Figure 3 is a figure in wood, taken from a plaster original made by me. The idea I had here was somewhat

similar to basic idea behind figure 2 and that was to produce a human figure, this time an entire figure, in simplified naturalism. I also had a desire to stress the monumental qualities and proportions of the human body. Qualities and proportions that are so much more beautiful and sculpturist when treated in this simplified manner. I had a desire also to produce a composition that would be in keeping with the material it was to be presented in, wood. Wood a material not as strong or force representing as stone, but, nevertheless, a material representing qualities of endurance and strength in keeping with the monumental character of the piece.

Figure 4 is sprayed metal, bronze, upon plaster. Here I was also working to obtain a simplified naturalism, but not as much so as in figures 2 and 3. Here I wished to obtain more naturalism, for the head was a study from a model and I desired to have it look like her, at least, to a recognizable extent. But still I wished and tried to keep a certain simplification, and not let this desire to have it look like the model in any way interfere with the value of the composition as a whole. In other words, the composition was first, looking like the model was second.

Figure 5 is a pounded metal piece. It like figure 2 also had no model and no preconceived idea except the idea of producing a composition with basic elements of unity,

balance, and rhythm. This piece has also been several times referred to as an excellent rendition of the spirit of African art. And it too was made before I had any knowledge of African art.

Figure 6 is a piece in stone. This study was done with the idea of doing something closer to the abstract than anything I had ever done before, and for that matter ever done since. Here the simplifications were carried much further than in the other piece, example, facial features completely left out. This piece was done more along the Egyptian line of sculpture. And here I had a knowledge of the type I was doing while doing it. I was studying Egyptian art all the time I was creating this piece. (Note, as far as I am concerned I like this piece the least of any piece I have on display. It fills the sculptural qualities of a series of three dimensional masses arranged in a harmonious composition, but to me the forms are cold, uninteresting, with too much blank space, and too little warmth and feeling.)

Figure 7 is also stone. Here from the first I started working with a definite purpose, and this purpose was to combine my natural tendency and seemingly inborn liking for African art, as shown by figure 2 and 5, with a year's study of African art, and a knowledge of what it was all about, into the biggest, and I hope best, piece I

had ever made. A piece where the composition and its requirements took precedence over everything else. And a piece that following this out and adapting the result of my studies, truly expressed the value and worth of primitive art.

FIGURE I

Medium Plaster

HOWARD BOND
MADE IN U.S.A.



FIGURE 1

FIGURE II

Medium Ceramic



FIGURE 2

FIGURE III

Medium Wood



FIGURE 3

FIGURE IV

Medium Bronze (Sprayed)



FIGURE 4

FIGURE V

Medium Aluminum (Pounded)

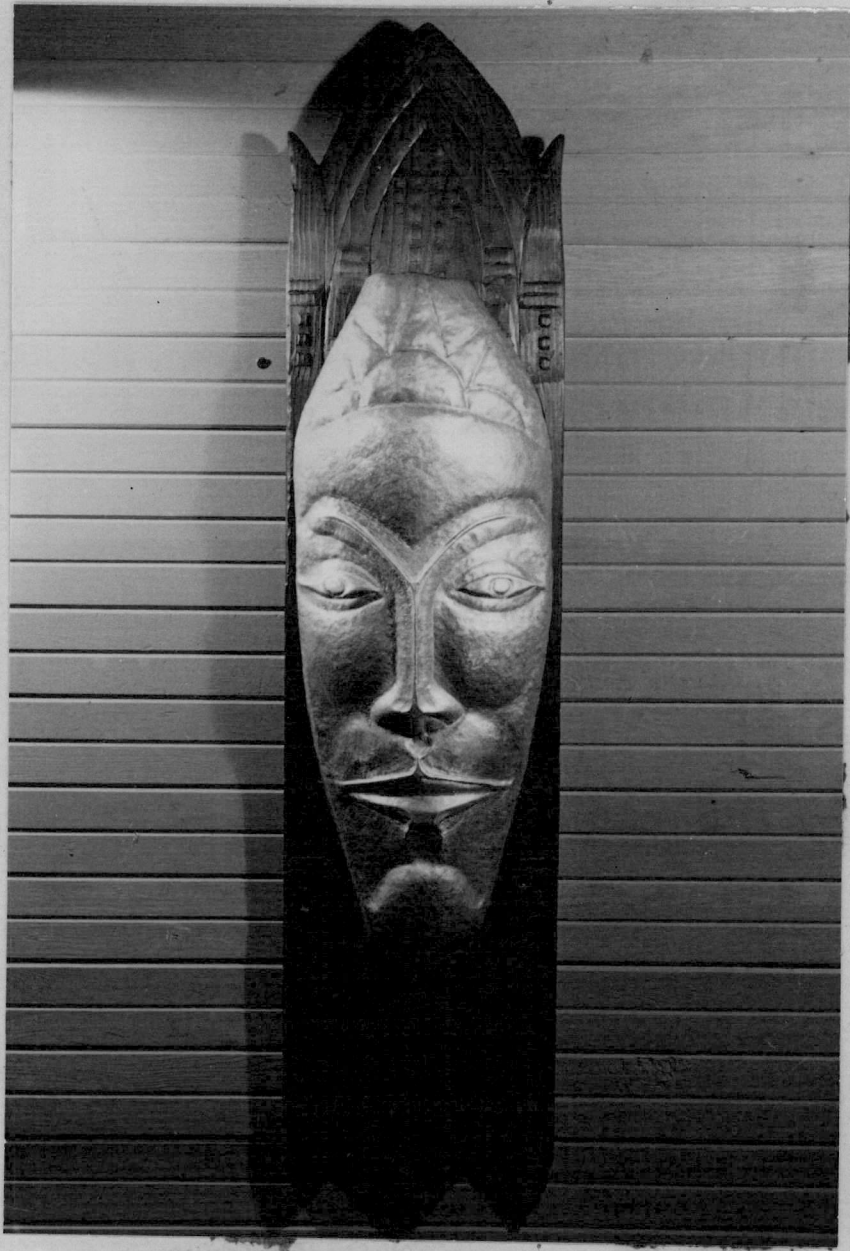


FIGURE 5

FIGURE VI

Medium Stone (Marble)



FIGURE 6 ✓

FIGURE VII

Medium Stone (Sandstone)

HOWLAND PAPER CO. MADE IN U.S.A.



FIGURE 7 ✓

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