

A Group of Sculptures

by

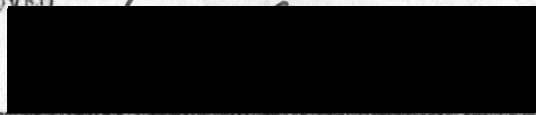
Elza Mayhew

Reproductions of the Individual Works and Statement

Presented to the School of Architecture and Allied Arts
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree
of Master of Fine Arts.

December, 1963

APPROVED



Chairman of the Terminal Project Committee

It is not my wish to discuss one by one the sculptures I present for a Terminal Project. I would like rather to suggest what the work is about, and let the sculpture speak for itself.

The artist works for many years, and makes diverse things in varying media and styles. Then he finds, if he has worked with sufficient concentration, that for the most part he is 'at home'--at his most humble, unpretending, best, most honest--in one particular manner of expression. Works in that style at Shows will attract him more than the others, good as the others may be, for he is gleaning all possible understanding of that way of expression. He is critical of himself and of others who work in this way.

Generally I like to carve. Nothing seems to decoy me from the block. I think of carving every good block I see. This is a direct approach. I feel, too, the insistence of dominant horizontals and verticals within a work. There is limited use of curves bending in and out. One must say what one means within these limitations, for there is nothing else to do. There is nonetheless room for lyricism, romanticism, which must be there, and could be more significant for being hidden. But there is no pretending to know what you are saying. You either say it or you don't.

In my sculptures I love to counterpose signs and symbols of unknown meaning as a foil against the gravity of the block. These graphic elements express a more personal idea, and, I hope, enhance the feeling of volume.

I am a slow worker, and lyrical as I may feel at the outset, I have to think a lot. I must think and think about what I want to say, until I know, and then the forms start to work. When the idea is clear, I can say it. Nothing can be done without this search, which is both

perceptual and conceptual. The work is not preordained. I rarely use models. The basic concept as expressed by divisions is clear when I start. From that point on, the sculpture slowly reveals itself on many levels. It must be composed. Herein is the excitement. But any model beyond the basic simple mass divisions would impede the development of the concept.

Like so many other artists, I don't care to explain or investigate too much what I am doing. Over-definition could limit the artist's creative expression. Some analysis can clarify concepts, but the artistic process itself is one of induction and synthesis, not analysis. Even a name can sometimes limit the meaning.

A few hints may be helpful nonetheless. Perhaps mine is 'environmental' sculpture, rather than geometric. It is not pure plastic art. I have never made anything not closely connected with the human being and his environment. Man and his longings, desires, his dwellings, the thresholds he passes over and his places of worship concern me; people, buildings, entrances through which people go in, come out; and the apprehension, the pleasure or the peace that accompanies these acts. Passages may suggest revelations of the unknown, and black holes refer possibly to far recesses of the mind.

Man's efforts to maintain the dignity of the human state have always impressed me. The rituals to which he conforms, to help maintain his position between the past and the future--these are some of the things I think about. The search brings me to forms that are strongly ritualistic, religious, meditative in essence, and to the use of a symmetry which helps express the rites by which man is able to support himself.

In the sense that the work is mainly monolithic and totemic, I am a traditionalist. It is dominantly concerned with the old inevitable sequence of past, present and future. I feel a deep involvement with this cycle. Therefore it would be difficult for me to be interested only in the 'now', with its anxieties, sordidities, joys, contradictions.

Absorption in the monolith does not exclude an awareness of form as an extension of thought. Thinking today certainly is on a different level from that of Ancient Egypt, for example. It has many more facets, is much more complex. Perhaps this is why for some years I have insisted on opening up space within the volume in various ways, which is actually a denial of the monolithic character, as are the protrusions which extend out from the block.

I do not necessarily prefer the complex harmonies of my work at present to the simplicity of some earlier sculptures. Rather I attempt to explore the possibilities of extension of meaning in formal expression, and to this degree my work is hand-and-glove with the developments of this century.

The unknown is the important driving factor, which concerns man in his desire to create. This is why I tend often to reject so-called pure plastic art. It eliminates too much of the unknown. It is not ambiguous enough to be true. The power of ambiguity in art is very great. As long as we do not know the purpose of living, to what end the human effort is directed, art can have no absolute meaning. It will manifest all man needs, what he knows and what he does not know. It is the expression of the human, impelled by he knows not what, to an end he cannot comprehend.

In direct contrast is the monotony of the known, with its one-after-another-after-another quality, which has been the deep force behind the Indian stupas, the Chinese pagodas, Mayan temples built and rebuilt, the Ise Shrine and the totems. Here is the intrigue and fascination in monotony itself, this human love of pattern, of forces repelling and attracting, of sacrifice and re-statement, out of which is the generic force.

In all these patterns there is the freedom in between and then the no-freedom. There is expansion, contraction, like breathing. Things move on and on inexorably. There is no known way out, no going back. There is the clinging, the longing for oneness, and no way out. In the search, one explores the meaning of division and no-division, overlapping, and no-overlapping. It is the interplay of the known and the unknown. The rhythm of things is the certain thing, and in its bonds the artist must express himself. It is of course allied to the cosmological philosophy that many are ultimately one, and one ultimately many.

The language of form is universal and timeless. Here are no semantics--shades of meaning, varied interpretations. In sculpture, the meaning of the work may be ambiguous, but it has only one meaning. Here is manifest the world of difference between expression in words and expression in form. Sculpture is free from the limitations of word meaning. It has its own disciplines. There is no use imposing on it restrictions which belong rightly to another means of expression. Sometimes it seems an affront to the work, to try to justify it in another medium. I must leave the works to speak for themselves.





