

AN INTERPRETATION OF THE  
FOUR EVANGELISTS  
IN SCULPTURE

by

CHARLES H. PORRESTER

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

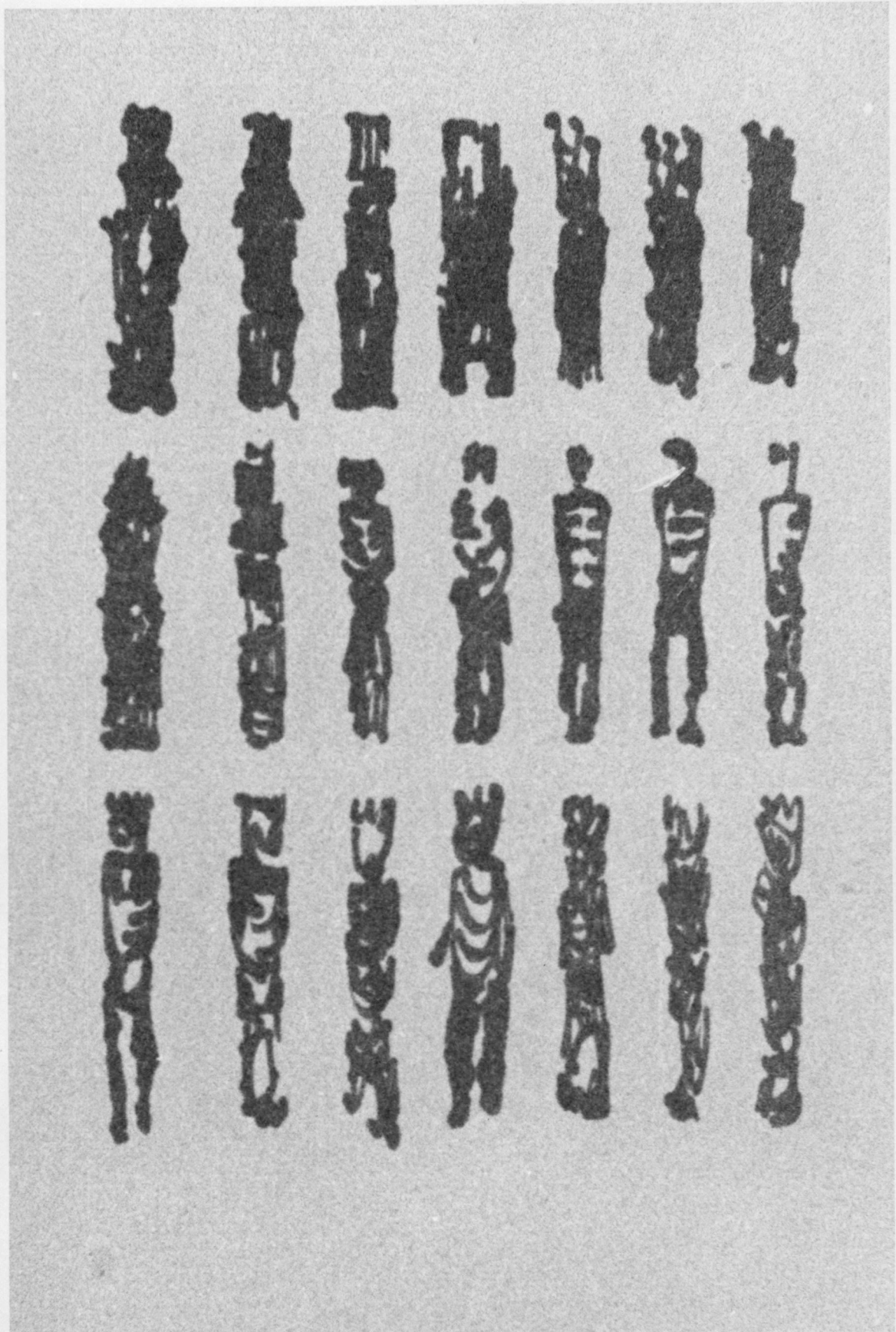
June 1960

APPROVED

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of the thesis adviser.

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(Adviser for the Thesis)



Felt Point Drawing. 8 by 11 inches.

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## INTRODUCTION

At the end of the nineteenth century a great English critic wrote that we must turn to poetry "to interpret life for us, to console us and sustain us." In the twentieth century we have moved away from the literary world of Matthew Arnold to a new appreciation of the basic art forms which do not speak to us in words. Sculpture communicates with modern man in a direct, even primitive manner, which defies the complexity of our times.

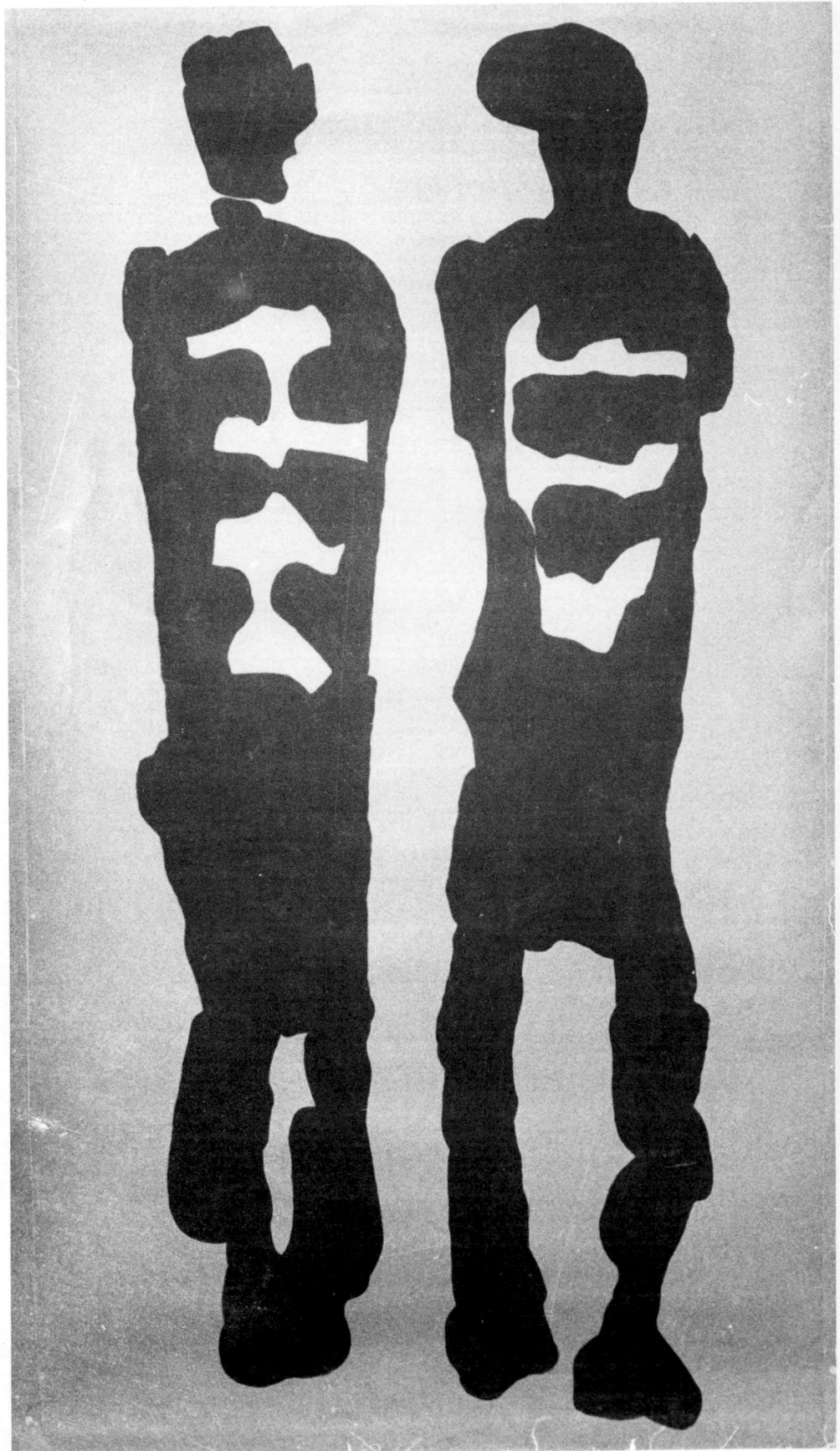
Each sculptor reflects to some degree his contemporary society and his cultural heritage of the past. The sensitive viewer of his sculpture must share these bonds or at least understand them. For those who can "enter into" a work of sculpture there is the possibility of grasping the whole of life through a sculpture, for its meaning can be an aspect of the whole world, not just a fragment of it. There cannot be many who receive so much from a work of art . . . but for these few I feel that sculpture can offer an insight into the meaning of human existence.

## STATEMENT

The theme of the work for my thesis project is derived from the four Evangelists of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The gospel message which they wrote down and the traditional legends of their lives provided the inspiration for these sculptures.

Some of the sculptures are interpretations of the Evangelists themselves, while others may be called symbols which are related to the spiritual content of the gospels. In the Middle Ages various symbols evolved for each Evangelist. These symbols were supposed to show that the Old Testament forecast the events of the New Testament. The four creatures mentioned in Revelations 4:7 and Ezekiel 1:10 were the bases of representing Matthew as an angel, Mark as a lion, Luke as an ox, and John as an eagle.

I have sometimes accepted these symbols as a starting point for my sculpture, because I value the role of tradition in Christianity. However, I am mindful of the fact that Biblical scholars of all religious viewpoints agree that we know



Oil Study. 3 by 5 feet.

very little about the Evangelists themselves. The major source of inspiration for my sculpture is the Gospels themselves, not the personalities of the unknown authors. And thus my symbols are attempts to evoke the spiritual presence of the Gospels.

My conception of this project is not limited to the sculptures discussed here. These sculptures belong to a stream of creativity which I am continuing to develop. For this reason I have been reluctant to give any of my sculptures the name of a particular Evangelist. I feel that all of these sculptures have evolved from my general reaction to the Evangelists and their message. It is possible that the future will see a rendering of John in cement, for example, but my inspiration until now has not led me to emphasize the individual Evangelists.

The sculptures are abstract rather than representational because I felt that a representative portrait of each man meant an emphasis on transitory material ideas rather than on the eternal spiritual reality. Although at times I have been sufficiently close to reality to recall the image of a man in my sculptures, I have striven to be far enough away from material reality to stir the imagination and spiritual resources of the viewer. This, in a sense, is the greatest



Plaster Relief. 24 by 36 inches.

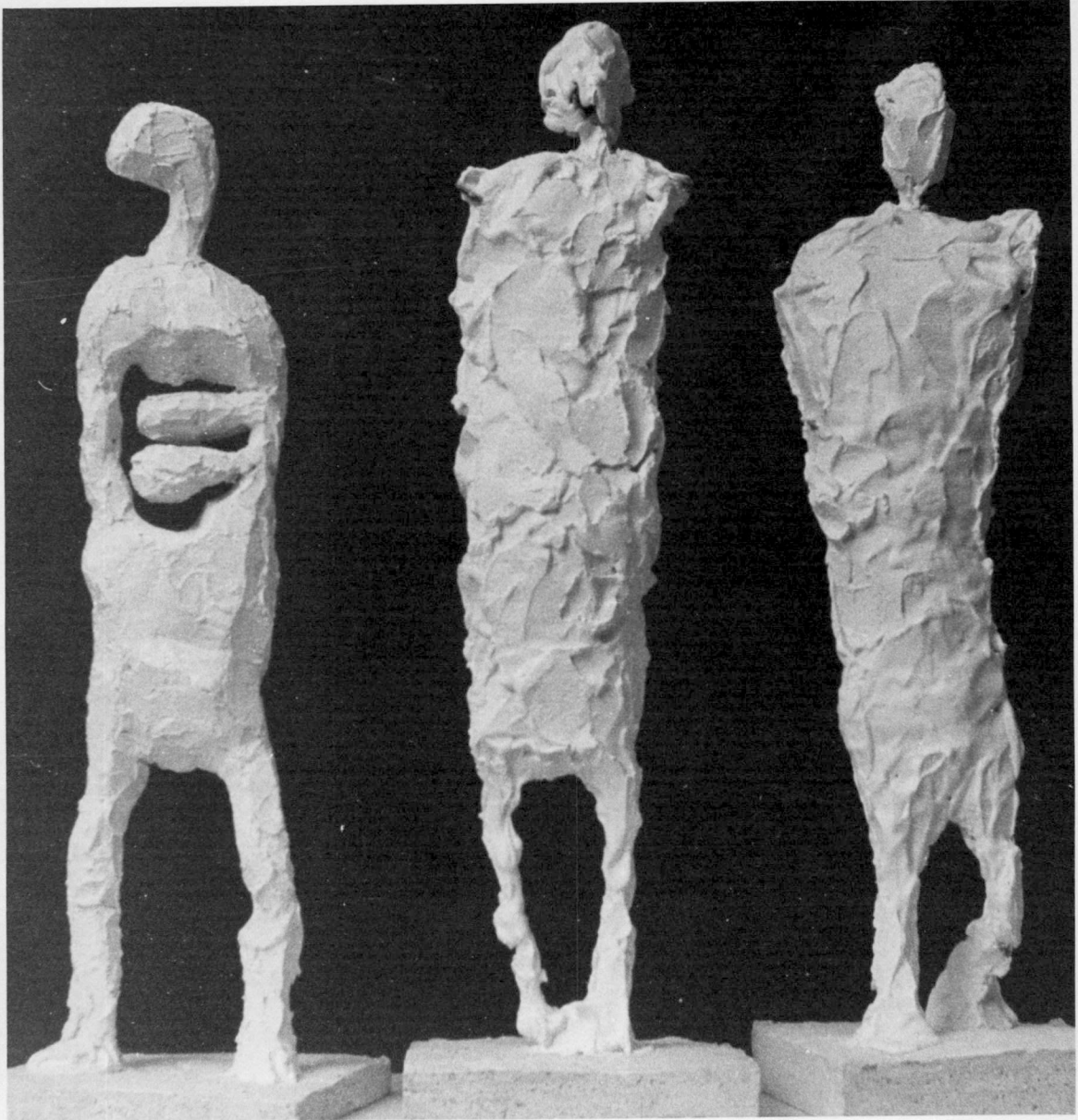


strength of abstract sculpture: it permits the sculptor to emphasize the major motifs in his theme without fearing the intrusion of physical details.

My point of departure in developing the sculptures was a series of felt point drawings, often rendered after reading or contemplating a passage in the Gospels. Each drawing was completed in a matter of seconds . . . before allowing time for the intellect to interpret the process while it was being executed.

Hundreds of these drawings were rendered. I preferred this method because of its spontaneity and speed, and its ease of technique. The drawings developed as I allowed myself to be drawn more deeply into the spiritual content of the Evangelists' writings. Little attempt was made at evaluation of the facts gathered--the only expression was a total impression through the quick drawings which were constantly scanned for form and content.

I chose the drawings to be developed further by a purely intuitive selection. The form had to please me: the drawings had to appeal at once to my mind as having sculptural possibilities. Sometimes the drawings represented complete sculptures while others were only a section or a view of one plane in a sculpture. However, a drawing had to present



Plaster Studies. 18 inches.

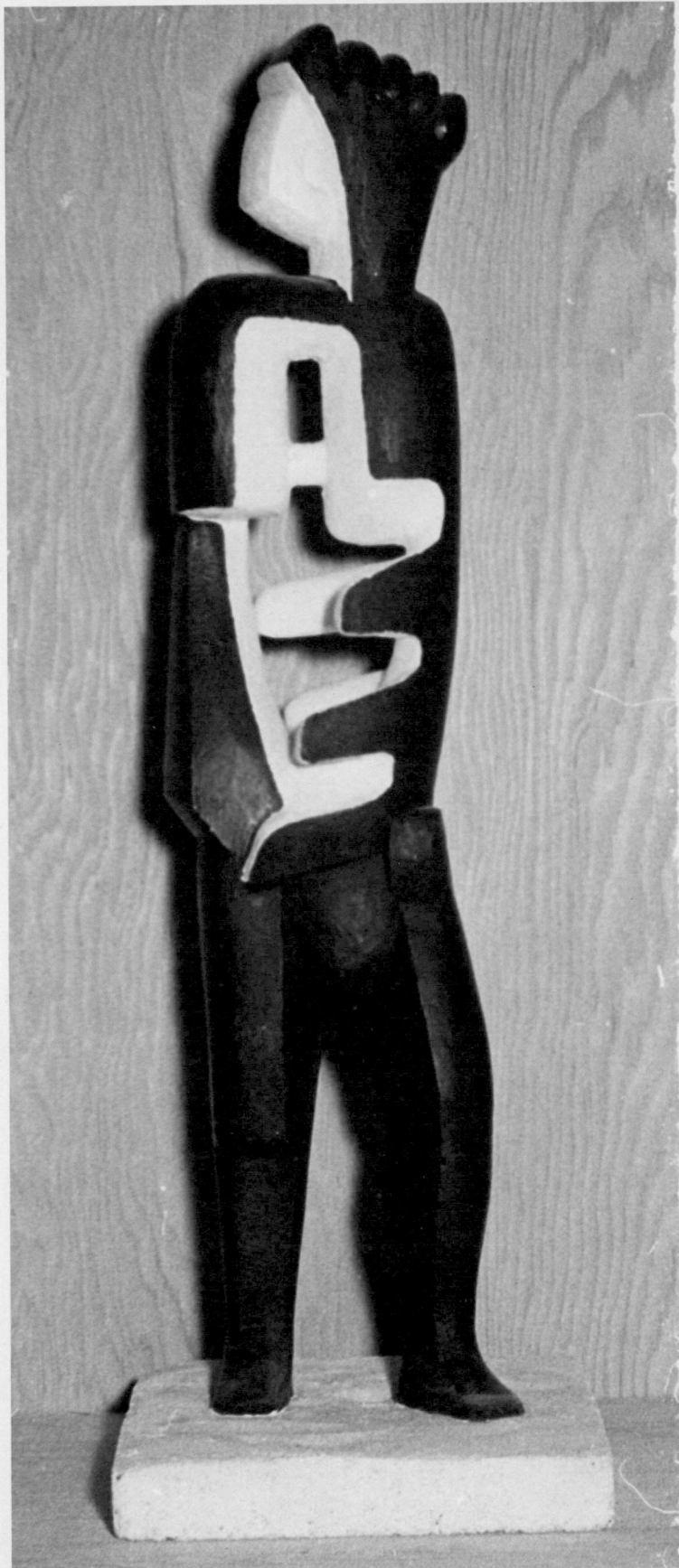
itself to me not as a silhouette but as a three dimensional form, and only at that time did I translate the sketch into a clay model.

Reliefs and three dimensional models in plaster, usually about one and one-half feet in height, marked the early transitional stage between the drawings and the completed sculptures. When these models had been executed in plaster, I explored my ideas further with work in several mediums. These included welded metal sculptures and oil paintings.

It is important to stress, however, that while the Evangelists developed out of these models, the symbols are the result of ideas which came to me in more or less complete form. I sketched the ideas for symbols in more detail than was done for the drawings preceding the models, and I rendered the symbols directly in metal and cement.

One of the primary problems which concerned me in the development of each sculpture has been the destructive elements of light. This is a relatively new concept since sculptors of the recent past have been mainly concerned with the constructive elements of light as it is used in defining a volume.

I have described the role of light as destructive because this approach has particular validity for the sculptor dealing with volume. When a sculpture is pierced by holes,

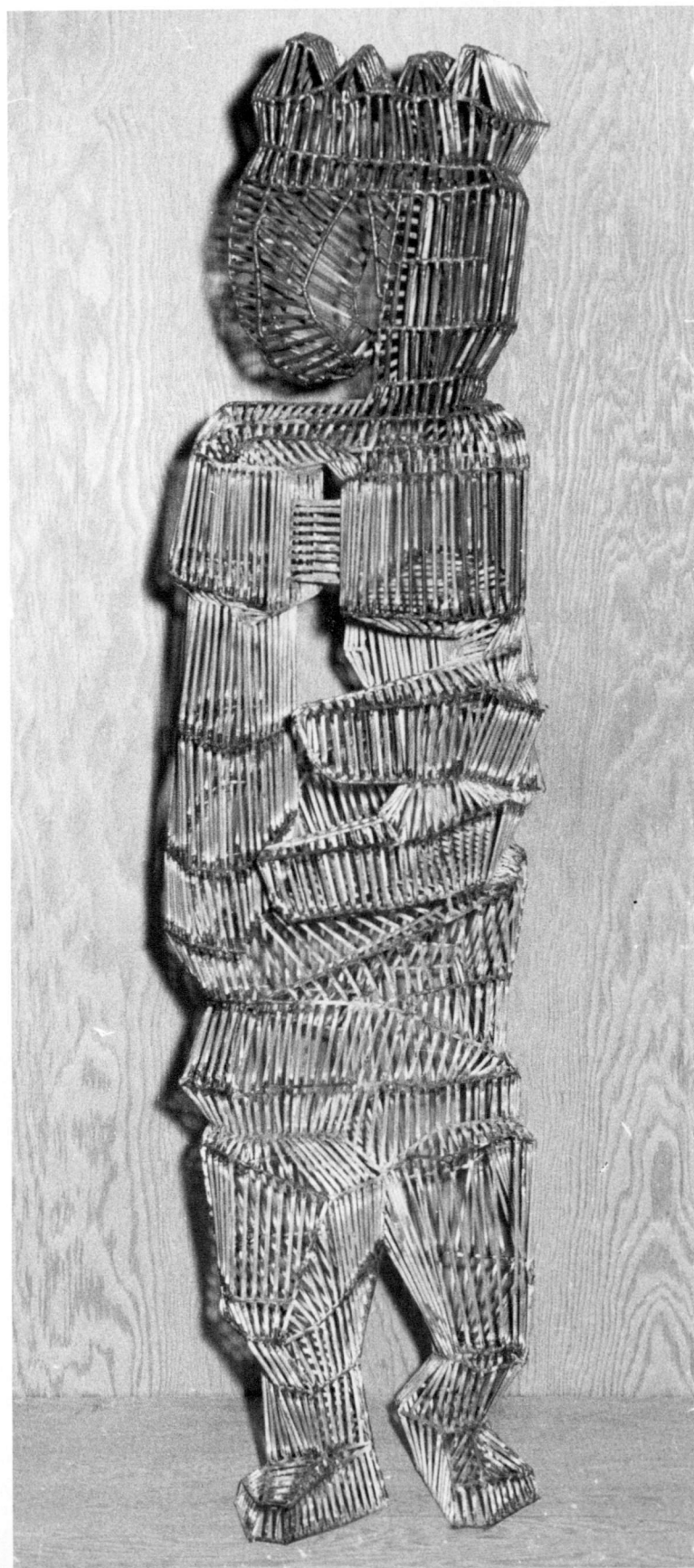


Plaster Study, Painted. 18 inches.

the destructive elements of light may quickly reach a critical point and nearly consume the visual form. A simple example of this phenomenon is seen in nature when the sun is behind the trees in the winter season. The light appears to crawl around the branches, diminishing their diameter and making the smaller twigs completely invisible.

My sculpture is a mass existing in space. This mass consists of one or more volumes which are hollow and thus create interior space, a space in which the sculptor has created spiritual detachment from the material world.

It is in this context that I speak of the importance of the space in and around a sculpture. "Sculpting with air" is not an absurd idea when one considers the importance a sculptor puts on the air surrounding his sculpture. It is precisely at this point when one grasps the meaning of the tension-filled voids in my sculpture that I feel the viewer can begin to understand the purpose of my sculpture.



Welded Metal Study. 36 inches.

## DESCRIPTION OF SCULPTURES

The sculptures of the Evangelists are presented in the order in which they were executed.

Each sculpture has been formed and modified according to the demands of its material. I wished to achieve an artistic freedom in working with my materials that would be reflected in work which is not academic or alien to its material.

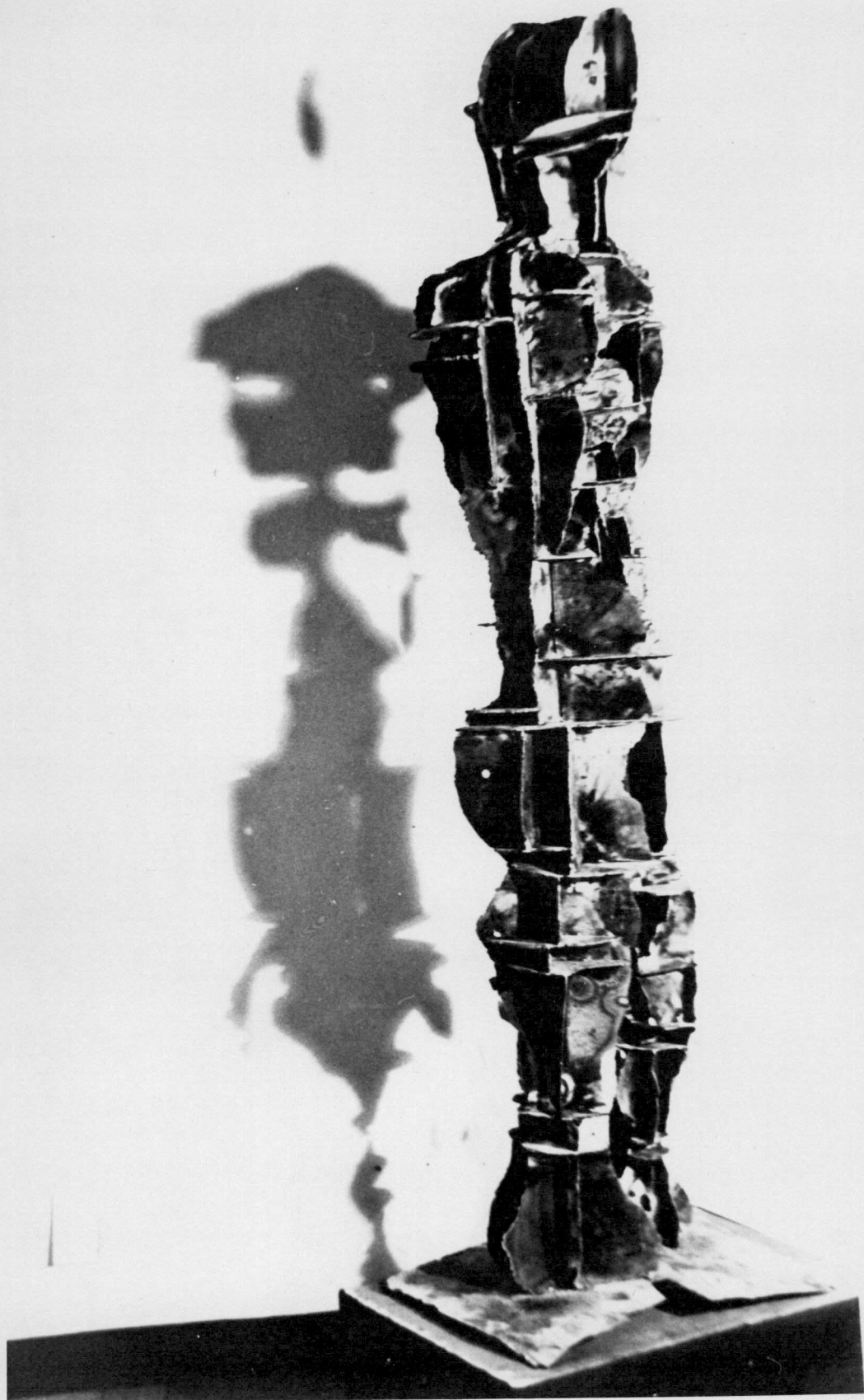
This freedom of approach was exemplified in my use of cement. I emphasized the modeling potential of the material rather than molding it. When cement is used plastically, it offers the sculptor an inexpensive yet permanent material which allows the opening of the form just as bronze can do.

Steel was also used in these sculptures in a manner which allowed spontaneity of expression. In this respect the arc welder was superior to the oxyacetylene torch in joining metal.

The development of my conception of the Evangelists is evident in the time sequence of the sculptures. This development appears to be identified with a lessening of the brutal manner of Evangelist I and the growth of a more sensitive, spiritual effect in Evangelist II and in those following it.

Evangelist #1 reflects an initial consciousness of the struggle of the Evangelists to record the Gospel under the constant threat of martyrdom. The burned metal expresses a rough, almost brutal effect which I felt was typical of the early Christian era. The material is steel plate braised with the oxyacetylene torch. Height seven feet.

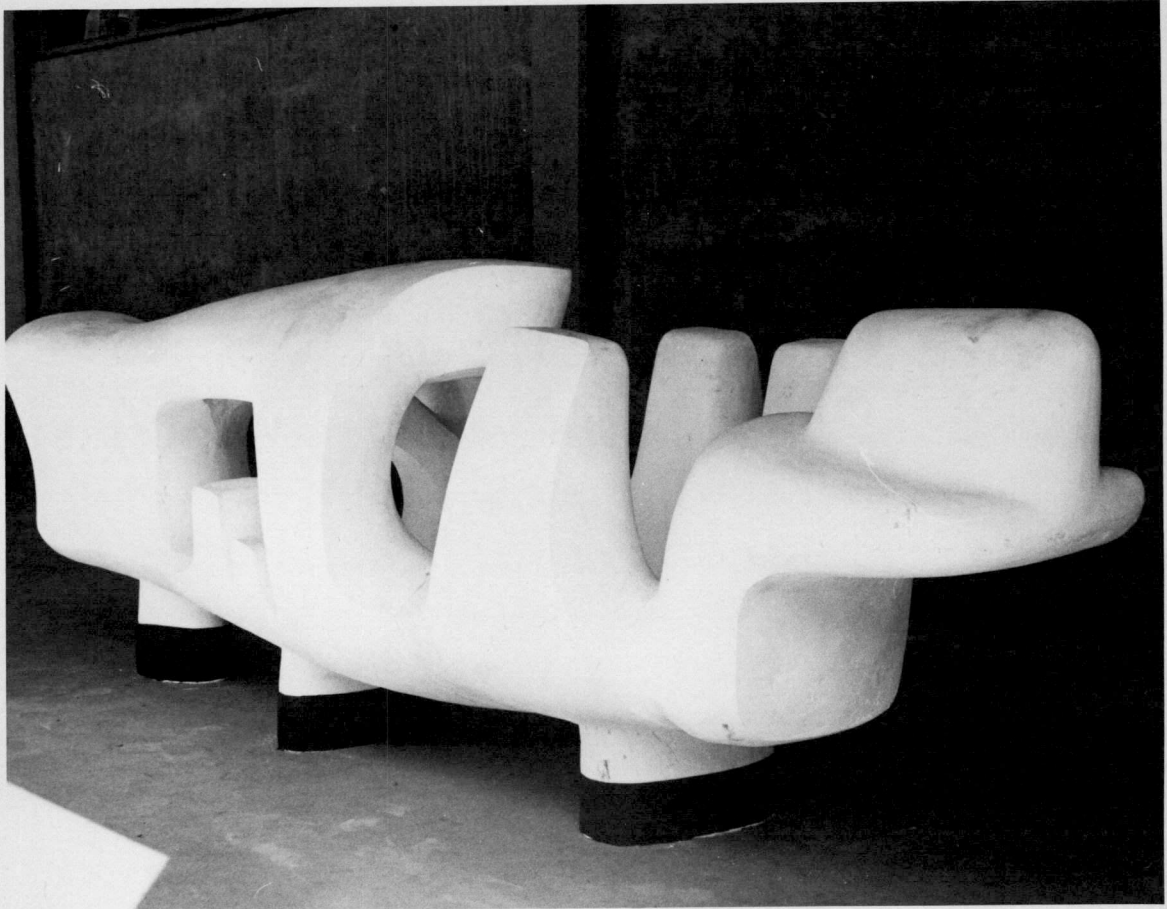




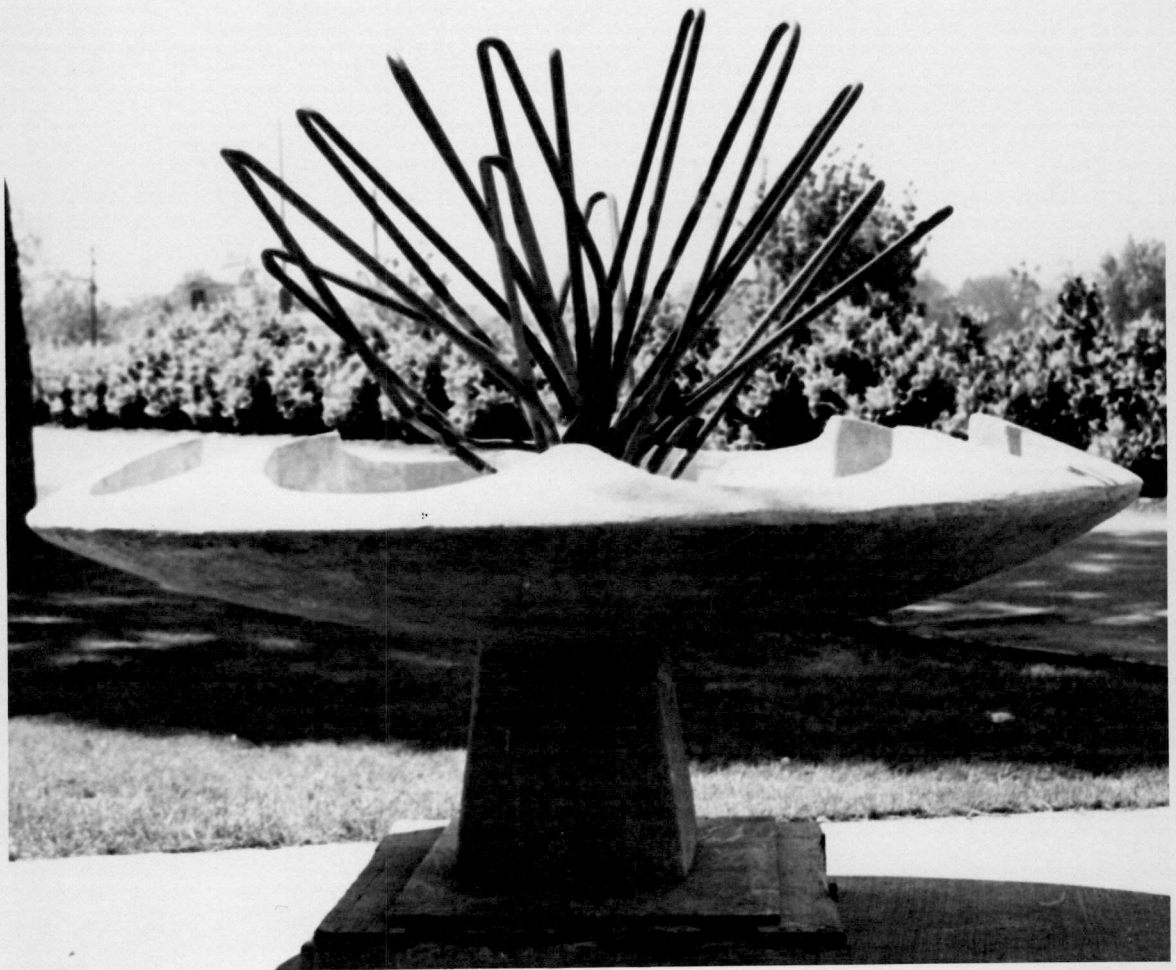
Symbol #1 originated from the lion which was the ancient symbol of Mark. The cement form suggests the lion's mouth, but the interior space is used to project intimacy and contemplation rather than the overwhelming power that some of the Evangelists may suggest. Height three feet.



Evangelist #2 owes its inspiration to the spiritual teachings reported in the Synoptic Gospels. The figure of the Evangelist is also related to the early fish symbol used by ancient Christians. The sculpture was made with plaster on a chicken wire framework suitable for dividing and casting in aluminum. Length twelve feet.

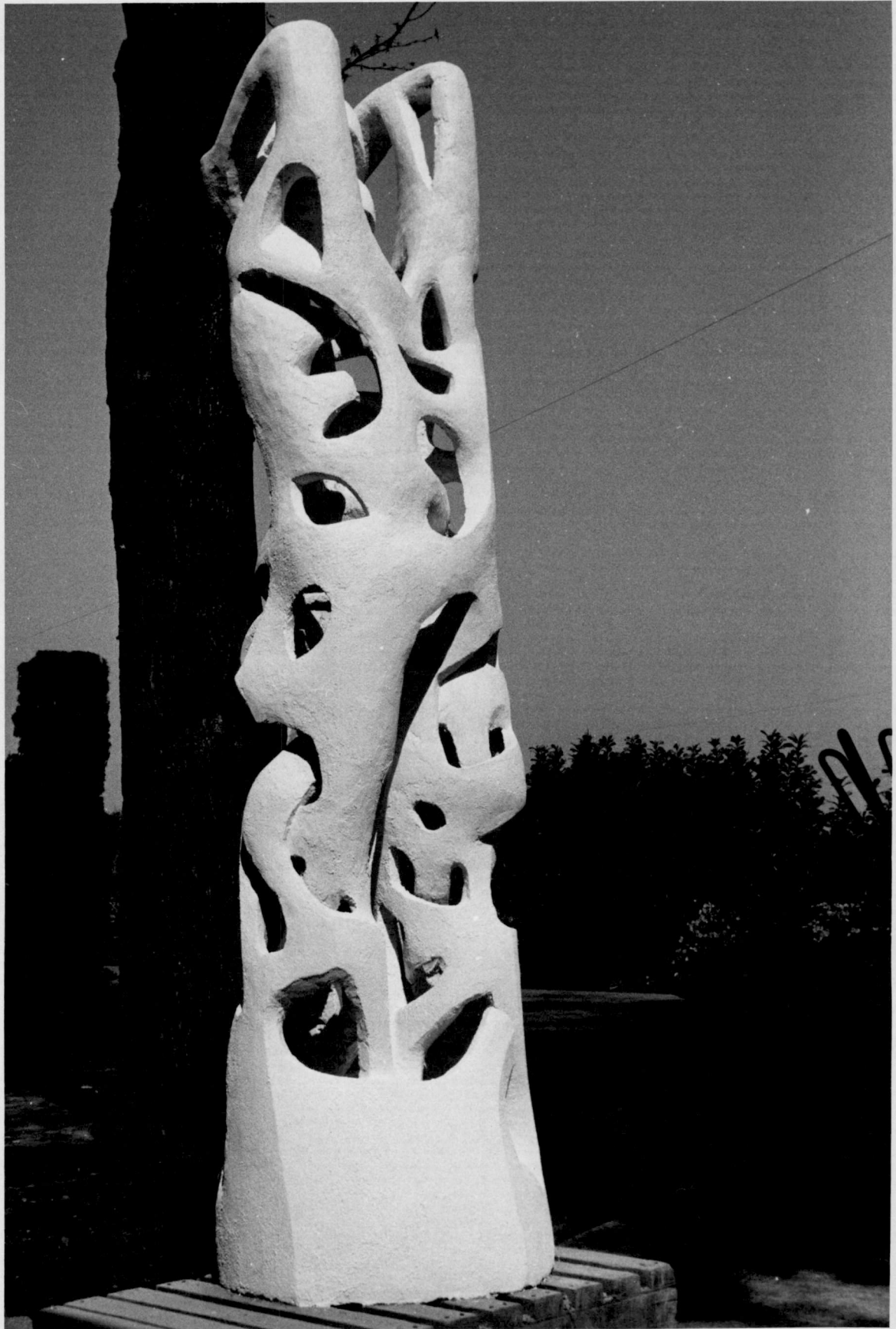


Symbol #2 was derived from Matthew's symbol, the angel. The wings of the angel are suggested by the copper tubing set in cement. Width six feet.



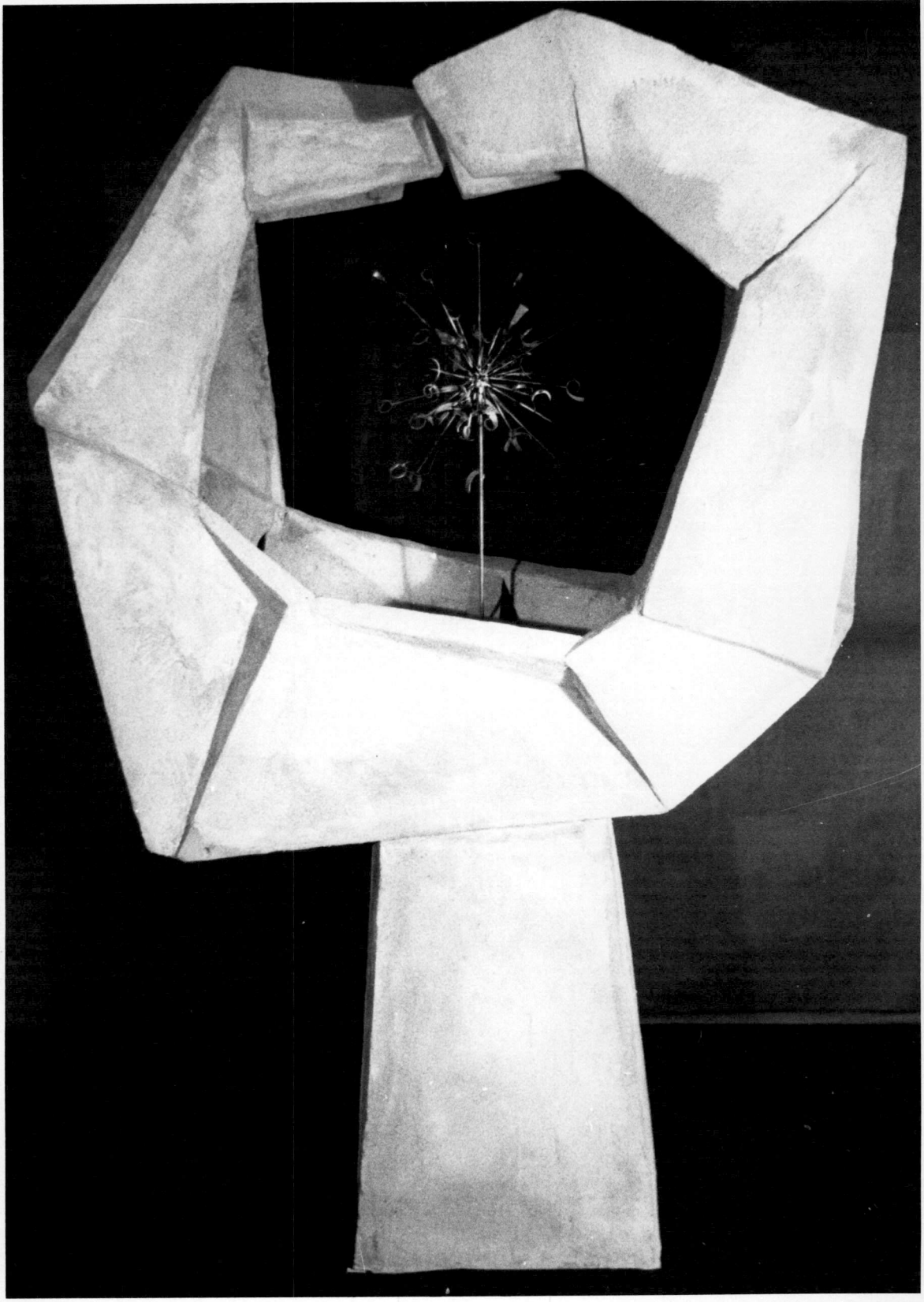
Evangelist #3 shows the figure of an Evangelist with his head turned upward and his arms in back of his head. The cement sculpture follows the Christian belief that each Evangelist was an inspired writer. Height nine feet.





Symbol #3 is related to the ox, the symbol for Luke. The horns of the ox are found in the shape of this cement sculpture, but the steel forms in the sculpture are meant to symbolize the seed of truth planted by the Gospels.

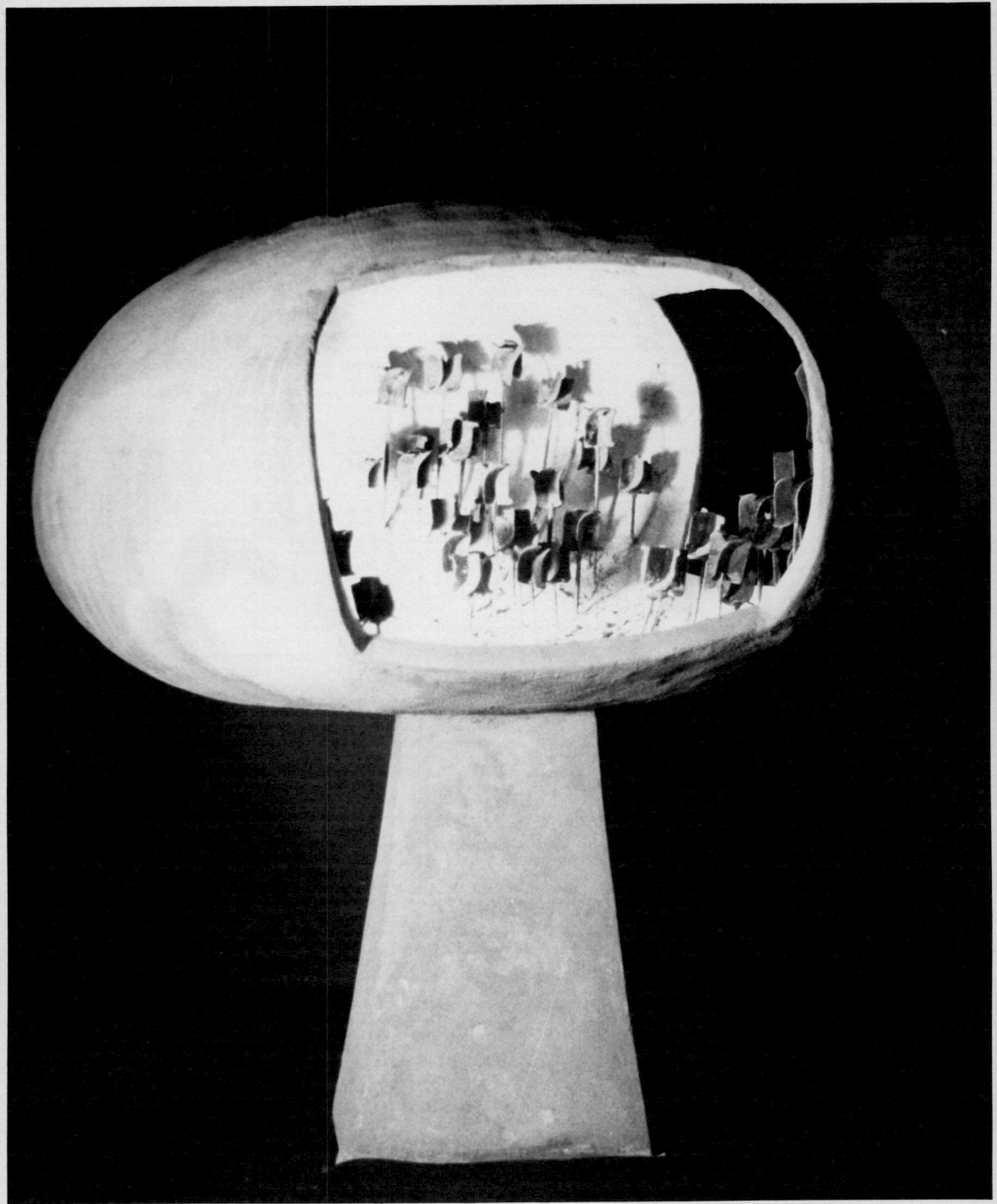
Height five feet.



Evangelist #4 was inspired by the Gospel of John who emphasized the spiritual side of Jesus and the importance of salvation. The raised hand of the sculpture points upward as a symbol of John's preoccupation with eternal life. The material is steel which has been arc welded. Height ten feet.



Symbol #4 evokes the atmosphere of the catacombs where the early Christians in Rome took refuge. The material is reinforced cement with cast iron forms in the interior space representing a spiritual growth. Height four feet.



Typed by  
DOROTHY E. FORRESTER