

NOTES

¹"The Life of Wen Cheng-ming and the School of Suchou Painting in the Middle and Late Ming," *Palace Museum Quarterly*, V, No. 4 (Summer, 1971), 27ff; VI, No. 1 (Autumn, 1971), 17ff; No. 2 (Winter, 1971), 23ff; No. 3 (Spring, 1972), 15ff; No. 4 (Summer, 1972), 23ff; VII, No. 1 (Autumn, 1972), 49ff. This has since appeared as a monograph, *Wen Cheng-ming yü Su-chou Hua-t'ai* (Taipei, 1976).

²"The Methodology of Reversal in the Study of Wen Cheng-ming," presented on January 31, 1976 at the University of Michigan Symposium on Wen Cheng-ming.

³See the *catalogue raisonné* in her thesis (Harvard, 1971).

⁴(Ann Arbor, 1976). For convenience sake, this will be designated as *Catalogue* below.

⁵This painting is available only in reproduction; neither Professor Clapp nor I have been able to examine the actual work itself.

⁶See Max Loehr, "A Landscape Attributed to Wen Cheng-ming," *Artibus Asiae*, XXII (1959), 143-152.

⁷See Clapp, p. 62, n. 13.

⁸This painting is included in the Ann Arbor exhibition (*Catalogue*, No. XXX). Marshall Wu's lecture is entitled "The Honolulu Academy of Arts **Seven Junipers of Ch'ang-shu Scroll**."

⁹For example, Clapp, figs. 22 and 35; see also *Catalogue*, No. XII, XXIX and LVI. Great masterpieces of the Wu master congregate in the Palace Museum, e.g., **Snow in the Mountain Passes, Resting under Pine Trees**, etc.

¹⁰Clapp, figs. 14, 24 and 47.

¹¹E. g., MH 32, MH 33 and MV 183 in the Palace Museum collection, Taipei.

¹²See Clapp, fig. 30 and p. 64.

"7 + 5 Sculptors in the 1950s": An
Exhibition at the Phoenix Art Museum
March 5-April 11, 1976

A collection of some fifty pieces of sculpture, sixteen drawings, and two prints, which comprises the Phoenix Art Museum's "Sculptors in the 1950s" exhibition, offers a rare opportunity to examine a pivotal decade in twentieth-century sculpture. The exhibition has a small but interesting sample of European art, but it is dominated by works of Americans which is only fair considering the importance of the Fifties to American sculpture. The American post-World War II generation is well represented by artists David Smith, Herbert Ferber, Ibram Lassaw, Isamu Noguchi, Richard Stankiewicz, John Chamberlain, and Louise Nevelson. The Europeans, Giacomo Manzù, Eduardo Chillida, Alberto Giacometti, Lynn Chadwick, and Jean Tinguely, serve as a kind of a counterpoint to the Americans. Special to Phoenix is the inclusion of the Henry Moore bronze, *King and Queen*, on loan to the museum from Norton Simon.

"Sculptors in the 1950s," originating at the University of California, Santa Barbara, was organized by Phyllis Plous who also wrote the catalog. Plous urges us in the catalog introduction to consider this exhibition as the works of "... sculptors working in the decade of the fifties who commanded serious attention by means of their accomplishments." She specifically abjures any intention to create a detailed survey of the period. She argues that stylistic links among

these artists are hard to find. Perhaps she is too cautious. There are links which unite these works in various ways and it is not unconstructive to examine these if only to try to understand why there is about this exhibition a "period-piece" look, a "Fiftyish" look if you will.

This is not meant to suggest that this "Fiftyish" look has not worn well; on the contrary, the exhibition is a particularly strong one. What is meant is that this show looks very different from a show that one might have seen in the 1930s — the exhibitions at either of the two World's Fairs in 1930-1940, for example. It also looks very different from exhibitions of sculpture one would have seen in the 1960s — more on that later.

To make sure that one's memory is not playing tricks, go back to old art magazines and recapture the look of those World's Fairs at San Francisco and New York or look at a book like Martha Chandler Cheney's *Modern American Art* published in 1939. It was the carver and the modeler who dominated the sculpture of those years. Direct carving, which Wayne Craven says Robert Laurent introduced into American sculpture in the 1920s, was the *avant-garde* of American sculpture of that period between the two world wars. "Sculptors in the 1950s" demonstrates that this technique has been overthrown in the 1950s. None of those massive stones of Zorach or the carved tree

trunks of Chaim Gross are in this exhibition. This exhibition makes it clear that the sculpture of the 1950s has a unique character all its own. It is not to be confused with what went before nor with what was to come after. Of the more than fifty pieces of sculpture in this exhibition, nothing is carved. With the exception of Nevelson's four assemblage pieces in wood and a single small terra cotta by Noguchi, all the sculpture is metal — either cast or welded. All of the American works are nonrepresentational. Only Moore, Manzù, and Giacometti use recognizable, figurative, subject matter.

This exhibition can give some clues to the historical development of sculpture during the 1950s. For this purpose one may divide these artists into three groups. Call them "the Early New Yorkers," "the Later Assemblagists," and "the European M \acute{e} lange."

The "Early New Yorkers" consist of Americans whose age and artistic development parallel the likes of Pollock or de Kooning. These sculptors matured as artists in New York in the 1940s and the early 1950s for the most part. This group includes Smith, Lassaw, and Ferber certainly, and possibly the young Stankiewicz, even though his earliest work in this exhibition is dated 1957. He was using the welding torch in the early 1950s and it is the oxyacetylene welding torch that is the common denominator of this group; that, and the abstract shapes the torch can cut and attach. Smith is usually credited with developing the torch as an artistic tool in America after seeing illustrations of Julio Gonzales' work in the early 1930s. Smith's accomplishments led several other New Yorkers in the 1940s to explore the possibilities of this technique. In the 1950s sculpture students in various parts of the country eagerly seized upon the technique. Their instructors, usually carvers and modelers, watched, often with mixed feelings.

I recall in 1954 one of my instructors, a skilled wood carver, saying in front of a particularly linear piece of welded sculpture in the Art Institute of Chicago, "But it just isn't sculpture." He had difficulty coming to grips with the way the work rejected the tradition of sculpture as mass. He was not ready to accept as sculpture a work that became a kind of drawing in space. In this exhibition, appropriately, one of the earliest works is a David Smith gouache drawing dated 1951. The drawing is essentially a horizontal form — all twists and spike-pointed endings,

balanced on a vertical strut, an anticipation of the *Agricola* series.

If Smith's gouache reminds one of a Franz Kline painting, it is helpful to be reminded of this affinity between painters and sculptors in New York in the late Forties and early Fifties. It is commonplace today when discussing the sculpture of the 1950s to warn of the dangers of confusing the aims of Abstract-Expressionist painters with those of sculptors like this group here which I have designated "Early New Yorkers." Plous's catalog makes the obligatory cautions. But one must not forget that the painters and sculptors were contemporaries and in many cases good friends. David Smith was an important figure in the New York art world. His name is invoked on page one of Dore Ashton's book *The New York School* and many times subsequently. The famous "Club" was organized in Ibram Lassaw's studio, a sculptor's studio, which served as its first regular meeting place. Herbert Ferber, as early as 1943, was a member of the Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors in the company of painters Adolph Gottlieb and Mark Rothko, among others.

These sculptors shared the same milieu as the painters. They shared the memories of the Depression and World War II; they shared in rejecting nationalism in art ("middle western art," Gottlieb described it to me); and they shared a sense of their own increasing importance as artists, coupled with a growing realization of how much events of the 1940s had freed them of dependency on School of Paris syntax.

In this exhibition each of the "Early New Yorkers" is represented by first rate works. Especially impressive is David Smith's *Tank Totem VI*. It combines so much of what this group represents. It is welded metal, industrial scrap transformed, with an additional element that so many of these "Early New Yorkers" works contain — the implication of the figure. There is the connection to the base, leg-like; the vertical middle, the torso; and some sort of conclusion at the top, the head. During the Fifties this did not impress itself on viewers as it does today. Viewers then were more attracted by the new materials and new techniques, together with the rejection of imitative details. All this obscured the implicit homage to the anthropomorphic element traditional in sculpture since pre-history.

The passage of two decades has made this anthropomorphism more apparent. It runs as

a motif through so many of the "Early New Yorkers" works in this exhibition. Lassaw's vertical pieces in the show have the same implicit reference to the figure. Not in the exhibition, but in the museum's permanent gallery on the floor above, is Seymour Lipton's work *The Knight*. For all its textured leaf-like shapes, it has the same figural connotations. It should be added, as a kind of footnote, that Smith's later work in the exhibition, like *Sentinel III* of 1957, is evidence of the direction his 1960s work was to take — away from anthropomorphism.

The group referred to above as the "Later Assemblagists" is a chronological successor to the "Early New Yorkers." In this group I place Nevelson, Chamberlain, Tinguely, and possibly Stankiewicz with his use of manufactured materials. This grouping has nothing to do with actual age. Nevelson was born before any of the previous group. Chamberlain and Tinguely are much younger. Assemblage pieces, as defined by William Seitz, make use of pre-formed materials originally intended for some other purpose. The materials in the works in this exhibition representing these artists do not totally lose that original identity. Even Nevelson's wood constructions retain a piece-by-piece process of building toward a whole.

Two works by Chamberlain in the exhibition make an interesting correlation between painting and sculpture of the late 1950s. One is a crayon drawing and the other is an enameled steel piece called *Swannano*. The drawing is a typical second-generation Abstract-Expressionist work with colored shapes jostling each other for a place in the drawing. The sculpture piece, though uncharacteristically subdued in color, has a look not unlike the drawing. The metal, apparently auto body scrap, is crumpled and twisted to produce accidental shapes and abrupt spatial transitions in a very Abstract-Expressionist manner.

The French assemblagist Jean Tinguely's work is the most discordant note in the whole exhibition. One wonders why he is included. Only one of his works in the exhibition is dated as early as the 1950s. More than that, there are other features about his work which are uncharacteristic of the other works in the exhibition. First of all, they move, being motor driven. In the 1950s, movement was associated with Calder. His pieces at that time moved with the random motion of the wind, a surreal sort of

movement, very much in harmony with their metal shapes. Tinguely's work in the exhibition moves in a clanky, predestined pattern very much at odds with the biomorphic shapes and evolving structures of most of the rest of the exhibition. He has another quality not found in the rest of the exhibition. His work has a mordant Dada humor. The very slap-dash assemblage appearance of the pieces is a parody of the power and polish usually associated with machinery. The pieces lurch through their patterns accomplishing nothing. Perhaps this humor is the most uncharacteristic thing about the 1950s. There is a seriousness about New York art in the 1950s. The New Yorkers may have been personally witty, but they were very serious about their art. Clement Greenberg has used the term "high art" to describe the kind of art in which he places great stock. One gets the sense of a religious vocation from the way he uses the term. Harold Rosenberg called the work of the Pop group in the early 1960s "Gag art," implying that those artists were not properly serious. Tinguely's attitudes and his art seem more related to the Sixties than the Fifties.

The other Europeans, in this review called the "European Mélange," are simply that — a collection of artists that apparently were readily available to the organizer. There seems to be no reason why these particular artists were chosen as opposed to others who could have been chosen.

Certainly, they are all able sculptors. Chillida's work has a resemblance of sorts to the Americans, but it is a resemblance on the same level as a comparison of Manessier to de Kooning. Why particularly Chillida? There seems to be no compelling reason. Kricke, Consagra, or Stahly, for example, could have served as well.

It is true Lynn Chadwick does represent the "New Iron Age," as British sculpture of the 1950s was sometimes called. There is in his work that abstract figuration discussed above. He has the advantage also of having been frequently exhibited on the international scene from the early 1950s at the same time as most of the other artists here. Manzù, Giacometti, and the special Phoenix inclusion, Moore, make almost traditional use of the human figure — traditional in the context of this exhibition. The installation in Phoenix places Moore's *King and Queen* near an over-life size standing female nude by Manzù in a very happy juxtaposition. The positioning of the

two sculptures could serve as a symbolic positioning of Moore in the European tradition. Moore, the radical of the 1930s, here fits very well into the line of tradition descending from Donatello. Score a point for the Phoenix Art Museum.

The only artist who does not fit neatly into my exercise in "linkages" is Noguchi. His works in this exhibition are of such a varied nature and are so original in their inspiration that they call for a reconsideration of this often overlooked artist. Perhaps he has been taken too much for granted for several reasons: he spent part of the Fifties in Japan somewhat out of sight of the art press; he has been active for so long — in the 1920s he worked as an assistant first to Gutzon Borglum and then Constantine Brancusi — and in this long career he has never been fashionably modern. His works in this exhibition range from a small terra cotta of 1953 to a large sheet steel piece begun in 1959 and only finished in 1973. In the impressive array of talent gathered for this exhibition, Noguchi proves himself to be a very strong sculptor.

With the wealth of material in the exhibition, it is perhaps unfair to speculate as to who could have been added to make the exhibition even more representative of the Fifties. Plous seems to challenge us to do this in her catalog introduction when she speaks of ". . . a diversity too wild and extensive . . . to be neatly organized. . ."

Who is missing? One might opt for the inclusion of another wood sculptor, Gabriel Kohn, for instance. Not quite an assembler in the Nevelson manner, he was rather a fabricator using pieces of lumberyard stock. Kohn, though generally better known in the 1960s than in the 1950s, was well enough known to be chosen one of the U.S. finalists in the International Unknown Political Prisoner Competition in the early 1950s.

Surprisingly absent, given the preponderantly male representation, is Lee Bontecou. Her striking metal ribbed reliefs, covered with stretched pieces of canvas, were frequently exhibited in the late 1950s.

If any one thing is missed in this exhibition, it is the potent imagery of Robert Rauschenberg. One needs to be reminded occasionally that some of Rauschenberg's major three-dimensional works like *Monogram* and *Oblisque* are very much the product of the middle and late 1950s. In that decade of metal welding something quite different was taking shape in his studio. It is in

Rauschenberg's work, after all, that we may get clues to both the painting and sculpture of the next decade.

One of the most obvious differences between sculpture in the 1950s and what was to come in the 1960s is color. A decade or more has conditioned the viewer to expect a clash of colors in any large contemporary sculpture exhibition. Sculpture in the 1950s as this exhibition demonstrates tended toward the drab, the monotone of metal or flat paint. Sprayed acrylic lacquer colors or impregnated plastics are not to be found in this exhibition. It is worth remembering that the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's "American Sculpture of the Sixties" with its veritable flower garden of colors was gathered not many years after the works in this exhibition had been completed. There is little in "Sculptors in the 1950s" which prepares us for this change in attitude toward color. This sudden interest in polychrome sculpture in the 1960s is an area for art historians to explore.

An exhibition like this reminds us that developments in art are not linear — where we are today does not predict where we will be in a decade. Phyllis Plous is to be commended for recreating a period so recent and yet so completely gone.

Jack Breckenridge

