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CARROW, DAVID MICHAEL. Steel Structures. (1975)
Directed by: Mr. Gilbert F. Carpenter. Pp. 6

This thesis consists of a group of steel sculptures exhibited at the Weatherspoon Gallery of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro from April 27-May 11, 1975. On file in the Jackson Library of the University are 35mm color slides of the thesis.

STEEL STRUCTURES

by
David Michael Carrow

A Thesis Submitted to
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in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts

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Approved by


Thesis Advisor

This thesis has been approved by the following
committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The
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CATALOG

All sculptures are constructed of steel. Dimensions give height, followed by width, then depth.

1. Zigzag, B. L. 87"x12"x9"
2. Discs, Over and Under 91"x18"x24"
3. Three Discs 108"x48"x60"
4. Quorsty 106"x55"x72"
5. Circles and Cylinders 86"x36"x24"
6. Zack 66"x12"x6"

The exhibition consists of a group of free-standing steel structures on which I have worked the past year. These begin as an idea for an expression of my experience; observing, imagining, and working with certain forms, objects, images, and materials. In attempting to create a formal reality corresponding to this expressive intent, I find that these ideas are both modified and refined as each piece evolves in a successful direction.

During the course of work, other dimensions are encountered which affect the outcome; the restrictions and possibilities found in the process of manufacture, personal changes during the span of time involved, aesthetic reaction to the gradual physical clarification taking place which stimulates reflection and criticism. The original idea is modified because of a need to satisfy a set of on-going and changing visual, expressive, and practical criteria.

The pieces themselves are made up of steel parts, in the main commonly available shapes such as rods, bars, pipe, tubing, angle, and plate which have been cut, bent, twisted, and otherwise worked and either welded or joined mechanically. The structures are vertical, frontally oriented, more open than monolithic, and involved with incorporating the space around them. Their visual constituents are planes, angles, edges, corners, curves, volumes, straight lines, and the spaces created by the combination of steel shapes.

My scale is a human one, size being limited to what can be made by me and moved around as necessary, as well as what I feel a person can relate to in terms of the image I am trying to present. The work does not involve a change of state as in casting, ceramics, or printing, although I do strive for an ambiguity between the nature of the material used and the physical qualities it finally assumes. Examples are a soft surface on a steel fabrication or a common structural shape such as a piece of angle iron losing its primary identity by having other shapes cut into it. I am not presently concerned with reproduction, with blowups, or with large scale fabrication from models and drawings.

Each piece stands on a base of some kind. Each base is different but all are attempts to integrate the base into the whole, to make it part of the sculpture rather than something the sculpture stands on, so that the sculpture stands on the floor.

Every step of the process is critical and yet finish seems the most demanding in terms of time, effort, and attention. I strive to achieve the point of finish that is dictated by the piece and the material. Materials such as wood, stone, and clay are often appealing in a partially finished state, whereas unfinished metalwork has a quality which disturbs our sensibility. The pieces have not been painted; various surface irregularities and working marks exist. I have used some simple processes to give a more

uniform color and to prevent rust, such as oxidizing oil on the surface with heat, waxing, and using a clear laquer.

As I see it, the acceptance of most art is based to some extent on its ornamental or decorative function, regardless of a work's original intention. I believe I am incorporating some ornamental ideas into my work rather than consciously trying to reject or minimize them. Steel and iron lend themselves to ornamental passages and have done so historically.

That I have come to work directly in metal is a matter of temperament, both of my own and of the metal. Steel is a tough and unyielding substance yet it can be manipulated and worked in many ways. It is the basic structural material of our time because of its strength, workability, availability, and relatively low cost. Steel is ductile, strong, can be bent, twisted, cut, forged hot, welded, ground, sawed, machined, and finished to various degrees by grinding, sanding, and filing. Color is achieved by painting, plating, chemical processes, and naturally occurring oxidation.

Perhaps a piece begins with the association of two or more things encountered in my everyday observation; found or collected objects, sketched, seen, or imagined forms. This association may promote drawing as a means of evolving ideas, or it may require obtaining or manufacturing objects in order to place them in juxtaposition. An initial

arrangement is made, however satisfactory, which is subject to considerable change through addition, subtraction, and rearrangement as time and criticism have their effect. Small sketches and photographs help to catalyze this process. Certainly my experience of the world of sculpture as well as other man made and naturally occurring entities provides much of the basis for my judgments.

It is difficult for me to relate my sculpture to new work being done at the present time, for although I see an occasional correspondence I feel it must be a feature of this era that there is no evident course for an artist to follow, no general movement of which to be a part. For the artist today the only hope of certainty is to direct himself to the areas in which his imagination finds involvement.

It is easier to look back a few years and acknowledge modern sculptors whose work has been influential; especially Brancusi, Gonzales, Giacometti (and the idea of Surrealism in general), certain American sculptors influenced by the Surrealists who took up direct metal work and came to be grouped under the Abstract-Expressionist heading, some of whom are still productive artists today; Hare, Roszak, Lipton, and to a lesser extent Lassaw, Lippold, Ferber, Chamberlain, Stankeivich, and Goto. David Smith has been a very strong influence as well as people who seem to be associated with ideas emanating from his later work, including Zogbaum and Caro the English sculptor. Seeing the work of

Calder and Tinguley has undoubtedly opened up the possibilities of kinetic sculpture as has that of Rickey and Von Schlegel.

Other influences come from areas outside recent art. I find myself drawn to decorative patterns, in ceramics, fabrics, metalwork, for the rhythms and proportions they offer. Stylizations such as Egyptian hieroglyphics and relief carvings, ancient Chinese bronzes, religious icons, and primitive sculpture, through order, symmetry, and a sense of purpose of object or image can create an air of mystery as well as a sensitization to subtle variations on the basic pattern. The necessary logic of technology as found in machinery, weapons and armor, tools and hardware, especially handmade iron implements, older farm equipment and machine tools, not to mention large open form structures such as towers, bridges, cranes, refineries, boilers and so forth, is a compelling influence on my visual ideas.

It seems self evident that naturally occurring plant and animal forms provide the most basic formal relationships found in art.

There are many possibilities for developing my own sculptural ideas which include the use of kinetic material, the combination of different materials such as carved wood and stone with steel or other metals, and the possibility of working entirely in hand forged steel shapes instead of commercial shapes.

In time I may move away from the symmetry which exists
in much of my work, to a more expansive configuration.