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SMALL SCALE MONUMENTAL SCULPTURE

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Date: May 15, 1981
In the past my metal work was very diverse and I did many different types of processes for the sake of learning them. This is an important pattern to follow when learning any discipline. As an artist matures, this gives him an important stock of knowledge to draw from in order to express himself. Techniques and process are extensions of the mind and hands which are to be used as tools of expression. Without this bank of knowledge, an artist is severely limiting his or her potential. Technical exercises are a good practice and can stand as finished objects but — techniques put to effective use to express myself is the approach which better suits me.

As the process of elimination began for my thesis work, I had a difficult time deciding what avenue to take. I did a series of pieces, before beginning my thesis, that served as a tremendous help in deciding what was to be the pursuit. After the completion of them and prior to beginning my thesis work, I studied them carefully and decided what elements or parts of those pieces I found exciting and why. A consistent quality showed up in each piece after a close examination of all the pieces as a group. There was the essence of miniaturization or the suggestion of monumentality or scale throw within each piece. This quality was very subtle but — it was there! I liked this quality very much but felt it needed to be more evident in the work. Even though it was clear to me, the
references needed to be more obvious and clear to the viewer. Clarifying this became the emphasis I would strive for in my thesis work.

There was more to it than just a play with scale from the very beginning. Foremost with the intentions of dealing with scale throw in the work is to create a presence or feeling within the viewer. To have the audience project themselves into the piece and to escape, for a brief moment, into the realm of the sculpture would be very important. To have the art work instill an ominous feeling would be the main achievement to strive for in my work. "Ominous" can be defined as "threatening," but I would like to use it in a less harmful sense as more of an excitement. As the viewer projects himself into the sculpture, he may experience a variety of feelings. The sensation may be similar to standing on the ocean's shore on a still night and hearing a noise that sounds like an iron-clad door slamming closed, echoing from across the water. Or it might be like hearing the roar of Niagara Falls while standing in the middle of the desert. It may also be similar to hearing the sound of a transformer hum, amplified a hundred times, break the quiet of night.

More realistically, this feeling can be felt by events in nature or some natural phenomenons. This ominous quality may be felt with the oncoming violence of a dark, windy thunderstorm or the insignificance one may experience when standing on the edge, overlooking the vastness of the Grand Canyon. Nature has the
capabilities to create this kind of feeling and man verges on it through his architecture and structures with some degree of success, but does not instill the same magnitude of this ominous quality. This is the main reason for the scale suggestion in my work. If these manmade elements are blown way out of proportion, they can take on this presence. The scale suggested in the work is a scale that is virtually unconstructable, therefore giving the structure a mysterious, superhuman quality.

Some of the influences pertinent to my work come from viewing architecture and other structures such as bridges, dams, and the major elements that make up such forms. It is not just a matter of looking at them but the way they are looked at. When I view these elements I try to dwarf myself and imagine the object as much bigger than normal. For example, I stand as closely as possible to a huge building and, looking up, allow the perspective to become grossly distorted. Or I lay my head on a beam that stretches up as a main support for a bridge and imagine myself standing within the confines of my eye. This is a vehicle I use to visualize the possibilities with my work.

In each sculpture, there are two basic elements that are dealt with - the structural or architectural element and a reference to suggest the scale or apparent size of that element. The second element will usually take the form of a landscape or geological formation. The first element is dependent on the second for its reference in size. Without it, there is no apparent scale throw and the element cannot stand alone.
An extension of this aesthetic can be obtained through other media. The camera lends itself very well to the expression of this type of play with scale. The use of photo-collages is particularly useful in that they give me an opportunity to visualize my work in its perspective landscape (Plates 1-4). This vehicle also gives me the chance to see other elements projected into a colossal scale (Plates 5-8). This tool has the capability to make situations appear more real, however I treat these photos as an extension of my work rather than proposed undertakings. The urge to suggest an ominous feeling is satisfied by the sculptures themselves as well as the photo-collages and need not be seen in the true scale in which they are projected. To see these works in their "true to life" situation would be breathtaking, but it is not the intention with the work. In light of this, the sculptures and photos are not treated as models for proposed monuments; they are indeed finished pieces.

Claus Oldenburg is an artist whose work I have studied in regard to his dealings with suggested monumentality. As stated in his book, Object Into Monument, "His first monuments were poetic drawings in which he placed a familiar object on a landscape, making it appear 'colossal' by equating it in size with the surrounding landscape. The view in these drawings is usually at a distance and is often aerial." Oldenburg has remarked about these drawings that they, "combine two kinds of scale - the landscape and the object - in a single space (a
6. Photo-collage of other objects
8. Photo-collage of other objects
7. Photo-collage of other objects
sheet of drawing paper.) Up to that point all my objects had been isolated; even when there were more than one in a single space the effect was a combination of fragments.\(^1\) Another aspect that is very interesting about Oldenburg's work is that his concept of scale was radically altered through his experience with flight. It was this experience and its scale disorientation that prompted him to do his monumental drawings.\(^2\) This directly related to my work as it tends to take on an aerial viewpoint. This could just be the nature of the scale throw and the play with miniatures. It is questionable whether my moving in this direction has anything to do, directly, with my experience with flight; perhaps it has a subtle influence.

Another artist whose work I have studied is the Italian sculptor, Francesco Somaini. My fascination lies mostly in his drawings and the photomontages of his sculptures placed in city settings. Somaini's works are sculptures conceived in an urban setting which become the architecture itself. This is quite a different treatment of suggested monumentality than in my work. As stated in his book, \textit{Urban Urgencies}, "The urban sculpture projects proposed by Somaini represent an ideology that results from direct personal experience. They sprouted more or less like weeds out of Somaini's experience as the author of several important public monuments now to be found in Milan, Baltimore, Atlanta and Rochester. They result from no sudden illumination; they are rather the product of a progressive and dialectical
increase of awareness. The most important contributions to the process came from dealing with monuments and their limitations, but still other factors and experiences have been of certain weight. I feel that Somaini was very frustrated with the limitations of monuments and their relative insignificance as far as enhancing the beauty of a city. He would rather see the city become the art work itself: the sculptures becoming the architecture. I too find limitation with proposed construction of my work. This is why I choose to leave my ideas in the fantasy stages and let the sculptures stand on their own and not deal with any notions of them as models. Somaini's proposals have also remained in the drawing and photomontage stages and have not been constructed. Perhaps Somaini, like myself, is satisfied to see his work in this context alone.
Sequence of Events

My work began to deal with the intricacies of miniatures, scale and the "blowing out of proportion" of that scale. The details of miniatures coming into my work was particularly exciting. These kinds of scale plays were evident in my work in the past, but their significance was unclear. The sheer enjoyment of playing with these elements was good enough for me. When my thesis work began, I did not realize that I had dealt with these concepts in the past until a photography course required that the class photograph a piece of two-dimensional work. I chose a painting I had done in my first year in college. Upon examining the composition, I realized that the same elements were evident in that painting as in my current work (Plate 9). This was just one incident; there were other past works that also relate to my thesis work.

My foremost intention was to deal with scale and the suggestion of monumentality. But, even in the earliest works there were still social statement considerations. It is important to express feelings about certain issues that are a problem in our society, or at least present an awareness to the viewer of these potential problems. For instance, the rate of technological growth is frightening and its haphazardness can become awesome. Science seems to jump into projects prematurely and I question its credibility.

In my "Great Lakes" piece, there is the social overtone of
construction taking over and dominating our environment. This is stated by the monstrous beam pushing its way up through the crust of the earth. The layout of the Great Lakes is used to give the beam its scale (Plate 10). However, this commentary was strictly secondary to the play with scale. More examples of this statement about growth of construction and urbanization came about in the pieces, "South Pacific," "Overpass" and "Monroe County Airport" (Plates 11, 12 and 13). But again, foremost was the play with scale. It wasn't until the "Las Vegas" piece that I felt I was making a strong social statement. This piece also started out as a play with scale, but as the piece progressed and before its completion, I submitted to the fact that it was a significant social commentary. The piece definitely says something about the quality of activity in Las Vegas and this is illustrated by the city slipping into a sewer (Plate 14).

After "Las Vegas" came "Hang-gliding in PA". This was strictly a fun piece and at the time I felt uneasy about making a social statement because of a lack of background knowledge. The play with scale was my concern, so the "Hang-gliding in PA" piece was good at this time; my energy could be spent in a less serious area (Plate 15).

Next came the "Pittsburgh" sculpture. In this work, the urge to reaffirm my feelings about the environment being overrun by structures and technology was rejuvenated. In the past work devoted to this area, there was one piece, "Great Lakes," that
11. "South Pacific"
was particularly successful and I realized it only at this point. This was because of the movement or apparent action going on in the piece - the beam thrusting its way through the plate (Plate 10). The other pieces seemed to be more static or passive and not as dynamic as "Great Lakes." This action helps to suggest the potential power and destructive capabilities of technology and the apparent disrespect of the land. This approach was taken with "Pittsburgh" and I feel it is the most successful piece yet. This sculpture does not make a strong social statement, but it is strong in stating a feeling of power in structure and monumentality. It wasn't until the next piece, "TVA," that a social issue was addressed as a primary goal and reason for making the piece. TVA stands for Tennessee Valley Authority and it is represented by 108 hydroelectric dam systems.4 TVA is the result of more than a century of concern over the problems and possibilities posed by the Tennessee River, which drains parts of seven states - Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi and Kentucky. The problem was multi-faceted; navigation, conservation and public power were the primary concerns of those who helped set the stage for the Authority's formation.5

Ever since its inception, the TVA has been the subject of continuing controversy and its officials have been quite concerned about the Authority's public image in the valley. The persistence of such concern is one of the reasons that a close analysis of the TVA's relations with valley cities becomes so
darter habitat. And the TVA had purchased twice as much land as needed for the reservoir, hoping to enhance the doubtful economics of the project by reselling the land at a profit.\textsuperscript{8}

This issue has been going on for approximately six years and transplants of the darter have been done in preparation for the possibility of the completion of the dam.

"While it appears that the snail darter may be lost forever unless the experimental transplant succeeds in other rivers, and the Little Tennessee River Valley seems doomed to become a large lake, the fight to preserve the valley is to be continued by the Cherokee Indians. Last month they went to court to block completion of the dam and flooding of the valley. The lake would destroy their sacred city of Echoto, plus ten other major town sites and cemeteries the Cherokees claim, and thus violates their constitutional and other statutory rights."\textsuperscript{9}

This is just one incident involved with the TVA projects. There are many more issues addressed yearly concerning problems with construction of these dams. These are issues that are brought to the attention of authorities, but what about the ones that go unnoticed or those which are covered up for the benefit of the projects?

With this background and my questioning attitude, a statement about the issue needed to be expressed. My suggested monumental aesthetic would perhaps be fitting as a vehicle for expressing this question of the TVA projects. In this piece, the dam has a definite presence and it is blown way out of
very interesting. Strangely enough, this subject has not been fully explored until recently. My major concern is that of the TVA's environmental impact on the valley area.

One issue that has had a great impact on me is the case of the "Tellico Dam Project versus the Snail Darter," a small ugly fish, about two inches in length, that finds its home in about a thirty-mile stretch of the Little Tennessee River. At the time of the Tellico construction, this was believed to be the only place in the world the darter existed. This rare fish needs cool, swift flowing water in order to exist. The construction of a dam would completely destroy this species' habitat. The Endangered Species Act was designed to prevent such an incident. The TVA committee tried to get an exemption to the Act in order to complete the project, arguing that the $120 million dam would bring jobs and progress to the region. Research by Robert Cahn, author of an article on the issue, revealed quite another picture. "The Tennessee Valley Authority's Tellico project was the sixty-eighth dam in the region. It would provide scant benefits and present huge costs in agricultural land lost, cultural and historic areas destroyed, and a species of fish exterminated. The Tellico would add a new manmade lake. But boating enthusiasts and lake fishermen already had twenty-four reservoirs within sixty-miles!"  

The article also states that "Tellico's thirty-mile-long lake would flood the last good stretch of virgin river in the entire state. The flooding would eliminate the entire snail
proportion when put into context of the map (Plate 17).

My stand on the TVA projects remains neutral for I have enjoyed fishing on TVA reservoirs and I realize they can be very beneficial as far as controlling floods and supplying hydro-electric power. In the sculptures, I would just like to call attention to the existence of these kinds of issues and create a public awareness. Although "TVA" is a serious piece making a social statement, the playfulness still exists in the juxtaposing of elements to create the scale throw.

The next and final piece, "Three Mile Island," also began with a statement in mine, potential nuclear power problems. I believe nuclear power as a source of energy can work, but it is something that is going to require time, patience, quality in every sense of the word and above all no short cuts.

"On Wednesday, March 28, 1979, 36 seconds after the hour of 4:00 A.M., several water pumps stopped working in the Unit 2 nuclear power plant on Three Mile Island, 10 miles southeast of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Thus began the accident at Three Mile Island. In the minutes, hours, and days that followed, a series of events - compounded by equipment failures, inappropriate procedures, and human errors and ignorance - escalated into the worst crisis yet experienced by the nation's nuclear power industry."^{10}

My "Three Mile Island" sculpture is a statement about the awesome power and destructive capabilities of nuclear energy and I use this specific incident to state these potential problems
The layout of the Three Mile Island area is used because this is the location where one of the worst crises happened and is one that the public can relate to. The cooling towers are blown way out of proportion in relation to the landscape as a vehicle to present the potential danger. It works well with the scale throw being addressed. The edge of the plate in this sculpture is the shape of the United States to call to mind that the problem affects the country as a whole and should be dealt with as such. That is to say that any type of nuclear disaster would definitely affect the country as a population and the country as a world power. The cooling tower form itself is ominous especially when it is presented in this scale. The towers have a quality that is mysterious and suggest a feeling similar to that of walking through the streets of a deserted town. I believe the piece makes a strong statement about nuclear power's potential danger.

An important factor in the success of these pieces is the proper use of materials and processes. Although I primarily use metal in my sculptures; my ideas are best rendered in metal. In some instances, I have used other materials because they were more suited for that particular piece. Examples are: "Las Vegas" (Plate 14) and "Hang-gliding in PA" (Plate 15). In terms of process, I have always used what would most successfully illustrate my idea. I do not feel inhibited by process and hope that this attitude contributes to the impact and success of my work.
In conclusion, this thesis has been an important stepping-stone in my life and in my work. It has fine tuned the thinking process that is so important in creating art. There are many more facets to be considered in the thought process than I previously knew existed. Not only is the concept important, but equally as important is the effective use of design, materials and techniques. Without proper use and execution of these three tools, the concept can be totally lost.

This experience has also instilled in me an awareness of some of the issues being addressed. The urge is very strong to know as much as possible about a particular topic before a statement is made about it. If the artwork can become an educational experience, it takes on a dual role, producing creative objects and also making me a more well-rounded person.
Notes


2 Ibid., p.12.


5 Ibid., p.3.

6 Ibid., Preface.


8 Ibid.


Bibliography


