Beginnings and Endings

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INTRODUCTION

I entered the School for American Craftsmen four years ago as an undergraduate. I spent two years as an undergraduate student, and one year as a graduate student, learning furniture building techniques and skills. More importantly, I learned how to think and 'see' creatively.

During these years I built many pieces of furniture, but often I felt restricted in my personal expression, since the functional considerations of a piece were of primary importance. In choosing a thesis topic I decided to disregard function and deal with pure form without application. My thesis thus concerns itself with the development of sculptural forms, using furniture building techniques with wood as the primary medium.

In deciding what route to take in this pursuit of form, one thing became essential: I would approach the subject from a personal point of view. By that I mean that I set out to use my thoughts, my feelings, and my emotions as starting points for each piece of work. Furthermore, I wanted my exploration to be accompanied by a personal exploration into my creative process. Through introspection I sought to understand what inspires me, and how I transform those inspirations into physical objects.

I recorded my thoughts by keeping a journal. While that journal in its original form comprises the bulk of this paper, I chose to make additions and deletions with the hope of achieving a clearer and more articulate dissertation.
October 4

My goal is to use form as a way of expressing thoughts and feelings. I want my artistic intent to be rationally, intellectually clear from the outset.

By freezing the human figure in time and space, I want to visually express gesture and feelings. I wish the process of sculpting to reveal the fundamental nature, the intrinsic value, the essential being of both the medium and my vision.

October 15

I'm sitting in the woodshop with four models of a piece I would like to build. I have been spending much time doing models this week -- drawing and thinking, drawing and thinking. I feel closer to a final solution, or rather, not a final solution, but a final decision as to a direction. I have not captured the essence of what it is I am trying to achieve. As a model, the piece I have decided to build appears heavy, tied to the ground, without much movement. My thoughts had been of a piece reflecting a movement, a dancer's movement, light and airy. But I must get started; I must start to carve, and to see, and to feel.

An interesting transformation is taking place. My thoughts had been of a female form, dancing, light, yet full. The piece is looking more male and muscular. It would be exciting to try to create a form which is both male and female, that had the qualities of both -- a universal being. I wonder how much will be seen. How will I convey those thoughts? Will the piece appear to be figurative? What will be seen?
October 20

As I design and get my ideas into model form I keep wondering if my ideas are too abstract. Am I losing the essence of what I am trying to express? Will the figure be lost? Must I retain human proportions in order for the piece to work visually?

"Perfect proportions are unimportant if there are feelings." ¹

October 26

I started carving my first piece on Tuesday. It's exciting using a chain saw to carve. The wood disappears so quickly! I feel as I carve that I'm stumbling in a dark room. I realize the skill involved in controlling a chain saw. I am having difficulty 'seeing' the form emerge from the wood.

Form as essence.

October 27

It is early afternoon and I have been carving all morning. The forms are starting to become more defined, but I do not know where I am going with them. It all seems too complicated, too complex, and unnecessarily so. I have been looking at and reading about African sculpture. The simplicity and quiet beauty of its forms is wonderful. There is essence in those simple forms, an eternal nature to their being.

October 31

I still feel very self-conscious about what I am doing. I am unsure about what it is I am looking for in this personal search for form. It will come if

I am persistent.

What I want is to be able to conceive an idea, and plan and execute it without struggle. I want to free my spirit to create and feel unrestrained by technique. A delicate balance exists between pushing myself to acquire dexterity and 'vision', and the need to be patient, realizing that it will take many years to attain such freedom. Western culture screams, "Hurry, you must be an expert now!"; but, deep within me a voice answers, "Patience, it will come." Not without hard work, of course, but it will come.

Grisha F. Dotzenko credits Enku, a Japanese woodcarver, with experiencing the freedom I'm searching for. Dotzenko writes:

The planning and execution are one indivisible whole. The body, the hand, and mind are inseparable parts of creative action. This simple unity of creative intent, work procedure, and unforeseen accidents is the essence of Enku's art. Spontaneity is the heart of this creative process. To achieve this, an artist must first make technique become part of his body. He must then abandon self-consciousness and self-expression and let the creative impulses take over. By complete immersion in the act of doing, a state of creative freedom is achieved, unrestrained by conventional concepts of the beautiful or the ugly.²

Along similar lines, Auguste Rodin says:

Don't you see that for my work of modeling, I have not only to possess a complete knowledge of the human form, but a deep feeling for every aspect of it? I have, as it were, to incorporate the lines of the human body, and they must become part of myself, deeply seated in my instincts. I must feel them at the end of my fingers. All this must flow naturally from my eye to my hand. Only then can I be certain that I understand.³


November 2

The piece is coming along. It is amazing to me how many times I have circled the piece, looked and looked, made a few changes, and looked some more. The process is slow, but today I realized that aspects of it can be spontaneous. The use of a ball mill, for example, enables me to quickly remove material so major changes can be easily accomplished.

How do I feel about the piece? I feel good. It is starting to move off the surface, or the ground. That is the area in which I am having the most difficulty, the point where the sculpture meets its base. I must decide what the base will look like, and how high I want the piece to be seen.

Doing sculpture is incredibly exciting. There are so many details to deal with. As in all fields, when one becomes proficient it is necessary to focus in on the details. The details, the subtleties -- those slight, hardly noticeable changes -- make a creative piece exciting. But, more often than not, these details can be seen by only a few. Should I be making my work less demanding, more in touch with those who have never learned to 'see'? I ask myself often, "Why am I doing this and who am I trying to please?" I am doing this for myself, first, and for other interested people, second. Is there a universal quality that empowers things to be 'good' or eternal for all people? I think not. I cannot do my work with the intention of pleasing large audiences. I am addressing myself to a limited public.

November 17

It is early Friday morning, around 2:30 A.M.. I awoke from a restless sleep thinking about my sculpture, which is nearly finished. I am pleased with it. I feel satisfied, and excited to do more. I especially
enjoy it in what I describe as areas of subliminal eroticism, subliminal because I did not consciously intend that this piece be erotic. I'd be carving away, and would suddenly notice a phallic, snake-like form where the arms are; I see a penis. A corresponding vaginal form materialized magically. The sculpture was intended to read 'Female Figure'. I see the form clearly, but since it is highly abstracted many people do not.

I am happy that parts of the piece were done spontaneously. These are the first signs of trust in myself to create forms that will be visually pleasing. Is that what art should be? Should it just be visually pleasing? What else? How about sensual, completely sensual; really feel the piece!? But different people do respond differently to any particular piece. I am pleased that my work elicits both positive and negative responses.

November 18

Evening. I worked in the shop all day and the piece is finished. I made a decision that I am sure will ruffle a few feathers. The traditional School for American Craftsmen walkthrough is tomorrow, and I will not put my piece on display. I want to display all my work at one time, at my thesis show. I am not ready to go public, to go naked, if you will. The work is personal, and the decision is mine.

I am excited about beginning another piece. I am going to laminate a block about the same size as the first one. I want to do another figurative piece, and try to deal with a head and maybe other extremities. Perhaps I will use the same gesture, only this time planar, linear, simpler.
November 24

I must make a commitment to my work. We talked about this. I feel that I have to recognize a sense of art within myself, rather than a 'creativity compartment' within the whole. It is the whole... commitment to finding truth, knowing truth. I have not as yet found that place within me. Maybe I should stop looking at or for the 'compartment'. It is time to realize that it is my complete being, my essence. I must use that as a way towards inspiration. My work should spring from my soul, my complete being, not from the isolated intellectual corner of my brain.

I can't separate what I call 'my work', that intangible thing, from the work itself, the actual physical pieces. They are all a part of me. I must recognize this, and believe it.

This has somehow led me to thinking about the piece I just finished. What shall I call it? I would like to title the piece, but why? It allows me to make a statement about what the piece means to me. Titles seem to restrict viewers from interpreting the piece themselves. A title is one more thing that must be considered. When do I stop? There is the finish that will be put on the piece, the base or pedestal, the light and the shadow. It is exciting, and also a little inhibiting. The physical doing of the piece was more exciting than the completion. All of those considerations, those struggles, that walking around and around, the attention to details, was exhilarating. And now the piece is finished. There it is, people are looking at it, and there is no more of, "Well, it's not finished yet, and I will take care of this or that." It is finished. Now it is time for it to be judged.

Am I ready to be public with my work? Am I ready to be judged and evaluated, and so open to so many people?
I feel very nervous about that. I had become comfortable with my furniture on display, but I had decided not to display this piece. It isn't functional, it doesn't do anything. It just is. It sounds trite, but I hope people can just enjoy looking at it. I am thrilled when I look at good art. Can I expect the same from my work? Slow down, William. That is not what you are doing, is it? Are you making sculpture to be admired and put in museums? Or are you trying to express yourself in your work, learning to see, and learning to express feelings? The latter, I hope, and I must not forget that. I must hold on to integrity. I must know what my truths are; I must live and work with integrity.

November 25

My introspection continues; my questions about art and about artists persist. The Art Spirit, by Robert Henri, has been invaluable in helping me to answer those questions. He says:

There seems to be moments of revelation, moments when we see in the transition of one part to another the unification of the whole. There is a sense of comprehension and of great happiness. We have entered into a great order and have been carried into greater knowledge by it. This sometimes is a passing face, a landscape, a growing thing. We may call it a passage into another dimension than our ordinary. If one could but record the vision of these moments by some sort of sign! It was in this hope that the arts were invented. Signposts on the way to what may be. Signposts towards greater knowledge.\(^4\)

November 26

"If all the colors are bright there is no brightness."5

Need all areas of a sculpture be exciting? Must all of those areas work together harmoniously? Or should some places be a bit out of whack, not just right, a slight bit of discomfort? It has been mentioned to me by a friend that some sculptures have a place which seems wrong, that is out of context, that might not belong. Complete harmony might lead to boredom. Tension created by misplaced forms gives a work vitality; it allows the brightness to shine through.

November 28

A part of me wants release from the rigidity of thinking that there must be a reason for every detail, and that reason should be a medium of expression. I am sometimes afflicted with an urge to do something 'for the hell of it', not for any apparent reason, not to express some feeling or emotion, but just because I feel like doing it. I do not want to fight those urges, but to use them as inspiration.

December 1

I am getting myself mentally geared up to begin a new piece. I still get afraid, and do not allow myself to jump in and do things. I continually get ideas, I make sketches, but feel horribly inadequate when it comes to doing it. There is no longer any time to think about doing it; it is time to just do it. "Those who cannot begin do not finish."6

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5 Ibid., p. 57.
6 Ibid., p. 22.
December 2

I went to school to get organized, to clear up my work space, and to start milling wood. But what am I making? What am I doing? I asked myself that as I looked over the boards of mahogany. What the hell am I doing? I do not feel that inspiration, that drive, that push to work, work, work, and create and create, and do piece after piece. I have to push myself, I have to inspire myself, I have to intellectualize everything, and feel incapable of emotionalizing my work. I think about things, I look and I search and I build. I build, I do not sculpt. Or create. Where is my inspiration? What is it buried under? Why do I get scared and immobilized when I work?

I wonder if this notion of mine of the inspired artist is real or imaginary. It has to be real. I have read things about it. Henri talks about putting emotions into your work, and its absolute importance. Yet the only emotion I feel towards my work is fear. Shit, that's terrible! What am I afraid of? I am afraid that my work is not good enough, that it will not look good, or that it will take too long to complete. But, Henri talks about beginnings, about how you can never finish that which has not been started.

We talked about the sculpture I did. Why did I choose not to show it? Is it flamboyant? The piece seems very separate from me. It sits there and I sit here. It feels like a piece of my coldest and most intellectual furniture. There is no warmth felt from it being a part of me. It does not feel like a part of me. Is that why I did not show it? Was it that I could not recognize a part of me in the piece? I am dissatisfied with the piece. Someone else did it, not I. I just do not like it. It tries too hard. Like I try too hard. It does not trust itself, it is self-conscious, it takes itself too seriously. That is why I did not
I feel unable to do work which is simple, and straightforward, yet possessing a certain rightness. Yet I can recognize it, I can feel it in other people's work -- a certain center, a rightness.

A dozen thoughts are colliding in my mind. What do I do now? Do I not do any more pieces because I feel that the first one was a failure? That is a choice. Do I do more? Do I force myself to hang in there, to feel the pain, the uncertainty, the fear, the goddamned fear!

December 3

I am reading about Jacques Lipchitz. He is quoted as saying:

Despite all the caution, my ship at times strays into boundless fantasy. Therefore two trends clearly stand out from my works: one is based on firm ground, the other stems from emotional elements. Both promote each other in permanent interchange. They either carry each other, or fight each other: they become 'encounters.' This method of work has also influenced my mode of life. All my human resources are harnessed in this fight for perfect harmony.7

The problem which Lipchitz is addressing himself to is a problem I recognize in my work. I complain of the lack of emotion, the total intellectualizing. That is what Lipchitz is calling "firm ground." But he does not see it as a problem; he gains from both the intellectual and the emotional. The "encounters" promote his work. I like his viewpoint. I must begin to see the emotional in my work and not deny its presence. It's there, it must be. I think, sure, but I also react emotionally to the world around me. That sensitivity must be present in my work. I think that my closeness

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to the piece prevents me from seeing it all.

Lipchitz says eloquently, "... ideas crop up with unimaginable speed, they are, so to speak, fickle; the artist must catch them and hold them as quickly as possible."8

December 4

The days have been strange. I feel very much alone, thinking, reading, drawing, searching my mind for ideas. I have been exploring ways of representing the figure. I am inspired by the figure, especially the movement of dancing forms.

Although it has been very quiet and very peaceful, I feel a certain tension inside of me. I do not want to contain it, but I have not determined how to direct it.

I have been reading May Sarton's *Journal of a Solitude*, and I have been able to find comfort there. There are so many people struggling, yearning to unleash their creative forces. The tension I feel is those forces struggling to be free.

December 7

I just saw a film about Georgia O'Keeffe. She spoke about spending her life, or rather, living her life "walking on a knife edge," possibly falling off one side or another. She was always happy doing it that way and would do it again.

I am gluing up my block and want to start carving by Saturday. I am being asked to predict, or define what will be happening with the piece, but refuse to. I want my moods and my feelings to dictate. I hope I have the skill to let that be released in the piece. Sometimes I think that I should be photographing the

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8Ibid., p. 12.
piece while it is in process. How important is that? Is the finished piece the important thing? Process feels important to me as the maker, but not as the viewer. What about the thesis -- presenting my work in journal form, as it happened. My documentation will be verbal and not photographic. I vacillate between studying myself and my process, between being very analytical and saying "lighten up, don't take yourself so seriously." I believe that a piece must speak for itself, but in terms of writing my thesis this personal analysis is valid.

December 9

The graduate students and the senior class went to the Gannet Newspaper offices, and were toured around by Beverly Hafner, the interior designer for the job. Much of the woodwork was done by Wendell Castle, Richard Newman, and Don Dean. The place reeked of money! Everything to the excess. I remember the time I had dinner with a friend and his family, who were poor and lived in a broken down tenement in the slums of New York City. The obvious inequality saddened me. It has been an unsolved issue for me since I began building furniture that my livelihood will depend on people with excess money.

December 18

What of the start of the new piece? It was as hard as ever to pick up the saw and start carving, although once I did the roughing out went much quicker. I am beginning to understand the manipulation of form, mass, and space. I watch these elements change as I carve, and control is developing. Also, I am more able to let go and to let my feelings enter into what I am doing.

I am excited to do a piece which is a continu-
ation of the thoughts of the previous piece. I have wanted to try that after each piece of furniture I have done, but was never able to. I look forward to using all the acquired knowledge gained in doing the last piece; I mean this in respect to the physical appearance of the piece as well as the intellectual processes that are an integral part of my sculptural attempts. As always, I am searching for balances: between the tangible and the intangible, between the intellectual and the emotional, and between what I know and what I hope to learn.

"It was a time of new acquisition. Not knowing ourselves too well, we felt no need to protect ourselves from foreign influences. For they could in fact only enrich us and make us more demanding of our means of expression." 9

December 21

It was a difficult day of work. I am experiencing trouble in defining a direction in my new piece. It is so much more complicated than the previous one! The dead ends and stone walls are creating a lack of interest. I am trying to push myself to not give up on the piece.

I spoke with Fred yesterday and I affirmed that for me, a model can only be a starting point. I do not need to try and duplicate it exactly. Reproduction is a technical skill (an important one no doubt) which will not help in my understanding of form. The model helps as a starting point, a reference for my initial carving. Soon, I must put it aside and respond to what is in front of me. 10

9 Henri Matisse, as cited in the film Masters of Modern Sculpture, Part I "The Pioneers."

10 Note: By model, I am referring to an inanimate maquette and not a human model.
"My reaction at each stage is as important as the subject. At each stage I reach a conclusion. The next time I return to the work I discover a weakness in the unity. I find my way back by means of the weakness, I return through the breach and I conceive the whole afresh."

January 7

I feel excited about a new idea. I spent a peaceful, introspective afternoon at the Albright-Knox Gallery in Buffalo, and the return trip was filled with thoughts about my life. I feel pressure; I feel pushed and pulled; I feel myself bending, the tension building and then relaxing, and then building as the cycle repeats itself. I began to visualize pieces of wood under great stress and pressure. I saw them bending more and more, under greater and greater pressure until they ruptured. I have to push the idea. I have to think of bending processes. Steam-bending comes to my mind immediately. It seems like the perfect process to execute this piece. Am I finally getting there?

"The artist is a receptacle for emotions that come from all over the place. From the sky, from a scrap of paper, from a passing shape, from a spider's web. That is why we must not discriminate between things. We must pick out what is good for us where we can find it."

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11 Henri Matisse, as cited in the film Masters of Modern Sculpture, Part I "The Pioneers."

12 Pablo Picasso, as cited in the film Masters of Modern Sculpture, Part I "The Pioneers."
January 17

Fred wandered in and we talked about my work. I had not been feeling very good about the figure I have been working on. I wanted to push the style of the last piece, which is organic and has a feeling of movement traveling around the form. But the piece has not been moving that way. I wanted to push, couldn't, and now feel confused about it. I do not know what to do. The form is not resolved and the answer is not apparent. Fred pointed out that the piece is columnar and monolithic. The gesture and the proportions give it that emphasis. That need not be considered a liability, but rather an asset. Push that! Explore that aspect, or cut the head and arms off, which would change the proportion drastically. That reduction in height would enable me to deal with movement around the piece in the same way I dealt with it in the last piece. I do not think I will deal with the piece in that manner. I need to explore new forms, as it is a "time for new acquisition."

In arriving at the point that I am, I realize how very important the initial construction of a stacked piece can be. My proportions are decided. I must decide beforehand what I want, and then create a situation where that can happen. I have been looking but not seeing. I had wanted to do what was comfortable, what I had done before. No, you can't go back....

Henri advises:

I myself have found it useful to work on two canvases, alternating them with every rest of the model. . . . in the mode just described crowd into a week a lot of experience in commencing a work. . . . The value of repeated studies of beginnings of a painting cannot be overestimated. Those who cannot begin do not finish. . . . The fact is, finish cannot be separated from a perfect commencement. 1

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February 21

I feel completely full of life in all its positive and negative sides. I live from day to day, and the only future I concern myself with is my thesis work. I notice how my figure piece changes as my moods change. The upreaching dance-like gesture has been replaced by a statue-like, almost desperate reaching up. I would like to get it resolved, finished, and get working on something else.

"What I am after is expression. I am unable to distinguish between the feeling I have for life, and my way of expressing it. . . . the whole arrangement is expressive. . . . everything plays a part."14

February 22

I am in school. I just finished a discussion with Bill and another with Fred about my figure piece. Neither one of them is pleased with how I am resolving it. The piece has been a struggle. The roughing out and the establishment of initial masses went without difficulty, but I can't seem to bring it all together. Fred commented on what he described as my timidity, and my inability to take risks. Major surgery is called for and I am afraid to cut. The piece is difficult; there are so many masses, planes, and lines. I must not get discouraged, and I must not fear making a mistake. The pressure is increasing, and I am beginning to look at my work as precious. Preciousness leads to what Fred metaphorically calls, "artistic constipation."

14 Henri Matisse, as cited in the film Masters of Modern Sculpture, Part I "The Pioneers."

February 23

I have begun work on my idea of bending pieces of wood until they rupture. I began building the mold around which the pieces of wood will be bent after steaming. Process. The road to travel before fulfilling the idea. Mold construction, planning, cutting, steaming, bending, sanding, attaching, finishing, and on and on. My relationship to process changes as a piece progresses. At the start I feel excited about finally 'doing' instead of thinking and drawing and designing. The excitement stays with me for quite a while. Then it all seems to go so slow. I get tired of the process and want to see the finished product. Maybe if I worked on more than one piece at a time the excitement from the beginning of a second piece would help me through the tedium of sanding and finishing of a wooden object.

It feels wonderful to be in the stage I am in with the steambent pieces. The whole thing is just an idea. I have done many sketches, but no models. That is unusual for me. I usually do a number of models before I do any piece. I do not want to be so safe; I want to take a chance and begin to trust myself. There is a special excitement for me to not know what the piece will eventually look like. I have begun the process, as I am sure that that will be part of the piece.

The other night, I saw the film Last Tango in Paris, by Bernardo Bertolucci. The film has stayed with me in an almost haunting way. The story line has tremendous meaning to me -- fantasy and reality, escape, love -- and the symbols relate closely to my work. I kept seeing arches and circles. They appeared in well defined ways, such as in building arches or in globe shaped lighting fixtures, and also in more obscure ways, such as the sexual positions
assumed by the protagonists. The circle symbolizes completeness, without end or beginning, a feeling of satisfaction, peaceful yet dynamic. I see an arch as a severed part of a circle, representing incompleteness, fallability, tension without a feeling of peace. The pieces of wood I am bending look like arches. There is a progression of tighter and tighter bends, and a circle is approached. The tension builds, the circle gets closer and closer, and then pop! -- it breaks.

February 24

Saturday morning in the shop, few people are here, and the peace and quiet is greatly appreciated.

I spoke too soon! Here comes someone with the usual cry of, "Willy, I need this or that." I feel imposed on so often! The woodshop is so public, and as graduate assistant I am constantly interrupted by one ridiculous thing or another. It breaks the rhythm, disrupts the flow.

I am trying hard to see, to move the form, to move the lines. The piece is constantly shifting weight, twisting, changing gesture. I do not know where it is going, only where it has been. I do not like it very much! It has been difficult at times to work on it publically. I have wanted to take it home and bring it back when it is finished. I know it is not right, yet people feel the necessity to tell me what is wrong. I want to be left alone! Yet, how do I do that without being rude? It is hard when people don't understand what it is I am trying to do. Does that really matter? Maybe not, but it is hard.
February 28

It seems two qualities are necessary if a great artist is to remain creative to the end of a long life: he must on the one hand retain an abnormally keen awareness of life, he must never grow complacent, never be content with life, must always demand the impossible and when he cannot have it, must despair. The burden of the mystery must be within him day and night. He must be shaken by the naked truths that will not be comforted. This divine discontent, this disequilibrium, this state of inner tension is the source of artistic energy. . . .

March 12

I have made the decision to stop work on my figure piece and to concentrate all my energy on the steambent pieces. I want to finish the figure piece at some later date. I would like to put it away where I will not be able to see it, and after a while return to it with fresh energy and enthusiasm. Will that happen or will I end up burning the hunk of wood? I have been looking at the piece for weeks, walking around it, turning it sideways, upside down, over and under, and still have not been able to resolve it. At what point do I abandon it and call it a failure? I have never been in this situation before. What do I do? Do I throw it away? Maybe I should keep it around as a reminder. Of what? I feel that I learned a lot from doing the piece. I improved my carving techniques, I improved my ability to see as well as increased my knowledge of form and its manipulation. I even learned to recognize a failure. I know I have to learn how to live with that. As usual, the things that are important to me are intangible. The School for American Craftsmen wants

objects. That issue has been a point of contention between my instructors and me for four years. It is irresolvable.

March 17

Steambending has been very exciting, both during the actual bending process and in the learning process. There are other techniques I might have employed to generate the forms I desired, but steambending fits perfectly with my concept. There is frenzy, the rushing to get the piece out of the steam chamber and into the bending strap. Then comes the force, the incredible force necessary to bend the piece of wood around the form. You can feel the strain on the winch, you can watch the desired piece bend, and watch your mold begin to quiver. Too much force and the piece will crack. The process is as important as the final piece; it works as a metaphor for what I am trying to say.

All along, as I was drawing and bending and playing with the bent forms, there was an excitement about how I would finally display the forms. I have decided, and it is drastically different from my initial conceptions. The bent pieces will be presented in a progression, moving from gentle bend to tighter bend until the wood has been ruptured, then slowly back to a gentle bend. I have decided to build a frame, stretch canvas across it, and then mount the pieces on the surface of the canvas. Sounds simple, except that the frame will be twenty feet long, seven feet wide, and wall mounted. Whew! I will not know what the piece will look like until it is finished. There is only one wall around here tall enough to place the piece. That wall is in the gallery, and I will not be able to see the piece mounted until just before my show!!
April 3

I have given a lot of thought to what Georgia O'Keeffe said in the movie about her life. It was that thought about living her life walking on a knife edge. My life has been the same. I have been walking along, balancing, moving up and down, hoping to keep my balance, wondering what it would be like to fall off.

I will build a knife edge and will mount a progression of bent forms on that edge. I am getting there; I am expressing my feelings in and through my work.

April 10

I have been working frenetically. My work must be ready to be hung in about three weeks, and I have only one piece that is complete. My two pieces that use steambent forms are still in process. The large one is just about finished save for one more coat of paint on the canvas. My Georgia O'Keeffe piece still has lots more work.

I have worked for deadlines before, but this one is different. I am entering a public arena. People have been asking me for months what my thesis is all about, and they will soon find out (sooner than I would like, actually).

I still cannot get over the excitement I feel working for so long on a piece and not knowing what its full impact will be until I hang it in the gallery. It is huge! I had never imagined doing a piece this large. Exciting, yes, but I am not trying to impress with size. My decision to make the piece this large was dictated by the forms and what is expressed by them. I hope that reads clearly.

My Georgia O'Keeffe piece is also very exciting. I have been involved in a personal conflict.
about the piece. My expression of a knife edge will be a large black acute triangular solid. It will have bent forms perched along the apex without any visible means of attachment. My original thought was for the black triangle to look sleek and slick, without any construction details showing. As I work on the piece I find the construction to be rather complicated, and I feel an urge to expose that complicated construction. Instead of skinning the piece with hardboard, I am considering building the structure and leaving the joinery exposed. That would create a new and different piece. It would lose the feeling of a knife edge and become, I think, very self-conscious and boastful. Again and again I tell myself that the forms must read, the forms must carry the piece. That is what I want; that is what my thesis is all about.

May 3

I can't believe it. The show is finally hung. The opening is in two days, but I feel wide open right now.

At long last, I hung my huge wall piece and titled it, So What Do You Think?. I spent all day preparing the piece for hanging. It had to be secure, as it weighs over two hundred pounds. That day, as usual, was full of frenzy. The gallery director wanted that piece up -- because of its being so large, it was important for the placement of many other people's work. Everything was ready to go. I had about eight people helping. The hanging strips were level and secure on the wall, the rope was tied on, the piece was being raised, and I felt my heart throbbing from excitement. It nested perfectly, and people began to cheer. There I was in the gallery, looking at the piece I had been working on for months. It was all
I had been dreaming about, thinking about, worrying about, and now it was done! Finished! Complete! Again, no more, "Well, I have to do this or that to it." I felt numb, empty, and confused. I could not look at the piece, and only glanced up furtively as I cleaned up the area around the piece.

Ironically, I feel very separate from the piece, and do not see it as mine. I need to warm up to it, and to not look at it for awhile. Then I will be able to study it, listen to criticism, and finally evaluate it. I need to do the same with my other piece, titled, On the Edge: Homage to Georgia O'Keeffe. It, too, was worked on up to the last moment. I need to separate myself a bit, and then look at all my work critically.

With the show finally arriving, I think about my second figure piece, as yet undone. I do not feel very good about that. My statement would be stronger if I had two figure pieces as well as the two bent ones. I know that I can still work on it and finish it, but most all of my enthusiasm for the piece is gone. It is part of my thesis work whether left undone or completed. I would like it to be completed. We will see.
CONCLUSION

May 16

The Thesis Show has been up for almost two weeks. Most of the excitement and glamour has faded, and it is time for me to consider my thesis work, each piece individually, and the work as a whole. The work being in the gallery separates it from me, and it allows me to look at it critically.

I feel much better about my figure piece, Untitled, now than I did back in December when I completed it. I no longer feel that the piece is pretentious and trying too hard, and I am now able to recognize a part of me in that piece. Emotionality in the piece also comes through. I realize the need for one to separate from his work for a period of time before reaching firm conclusions about that work.

As to the sculptural qualities of the piece, they are partly successful and partly unsuccessful. As with most of my work, there is too much mass; the piece feels heavy and tied to the surface. I do, however, see a change taking place. My furniture pieces were even more bottom heavy. Over the years there has been a transformation towards lighter, less bulky forms.

The strongest area of the piece is the upper half. That is where there is emotion, strength, clear handling of form and space, and resolution of beginnings and endings. My eye is able to freely travel the surface of the forms and can easily move in and around them. I feel pleased with the way I opened up the form as it helps with the fluidity of the work.
Of my two pieces using bent forms, the piece
*On the Edge: Homage to Georgia O'Keeffe* is the more successful. It deals well with form, and in process there was a clear step from emotion, thought, and execution. There is also a clear and comfortable division between the piece and its surroundings. It does not need, nor does it ask, to be put on a pedestal or platform.

*So What Do You Think?* comes close in all the areas mentioned, but falls short of being completely successful. I want the title to sound ambiguous in order to ask the viewer to think, but I want my statement to be clear. I want people to understand why there is a broken piece on the canvas. I want people to feel the build up of tension, the point of breaking, and a continuation of the cycle. Instead I was continually asked if the broken piece was intentional or an accident. Can't they realize that if I can bend ten pieces without breaking them, I can bend an eleventh one also? I became annoyed at what I saw as a lack of sensitivity. While that may be true, I also think that I might have handled that aspect of the piece differently and possibly more clearly.

The piece also falls short of success as a result of my decision to secure the bent forms on a canvas background. I attempted to give a feeling of flow, of process and change, but the rectangular shape of the canvas confines that movement.

As a whole, I am pleased with my thesis work, and I am happy with my choice of thesis topic. When I chose the topic of exploring form using furniture building techniques I knew I was taking a risk. I needed to take that risk and to push myself. I did not have a strong sculpture background, and I had never searched inside myself to gain inspiration for my work. The risk was worthwhile; I learned an enormous amount
about form and about myself.

I have thought a great deal about my future, and whether I will continue with sculpture or furniture. I foresee my doing both. I enjoy the way the two disciplines work together, each enhancing the other. For better or worse, introspection has become a part of my daily life. I have enjoyed keeping this journal to record my growth as I proceeded with my thesis. I know that this past year has, with all of its joys and difficulties, greatly affected my life and will stay with me always.
Almost miraculously, I finished the second figure piece I had been struggling with for so long. I decided to title it, For All of Them.

I was being pressured, from within and from without, to finish that piece. I fought those pressures all the way. I did not want to work on it, I considered it a failure, and I wanted to have no part of it. But, push came to shove, as the expression goes, and I decided I had better get down to it. If not, I knew it would haunt me for a long time.

I was scared; I had no idea where to begin. After all those miles traveled walking around and around, how could I believe that I would be successful now? But, with the Thesis Show long gone, and with my new semi-private working environment, the piece lost its preciousness, and I felt free to explore new possibilities.

I surprised myself. Within one day of carving the piece changed radically and could no longer be recognized as the same piece, which was good. It was starting to move and rise from the surface. The forms were becoming defined, their cloudiness dissipating. In a week it was completed. In school I struggled with that piece for months and I finished it in a week. Amazing!

Beginnings and endings.
APPENDIX

Plate
I - II  Untitled  . . . . . . . . . . . . . .  30 - 31
III - V  So What Do You Think?  . . . . . . . .  32 - 34
VI - VIII  On The Edge: Homage To Georgia O'Keeffe  35 - 37
IX - XI  For All Of Them  . . . . . . . . . . . .  38 - 40

Photography by Margaret Landsman
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