4. HEAD STUDIES

12. HEAD
1. THE TUNNEL
AIDRON DUCKWORTH
AN EXHIBITION OF RECENT SCULPTURE

held in the galleries of the
JOE AND EMILY LOWE ART CENTER
under the auspices of
THE SCHOOL OF ART | SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
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Introduction by
LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER
DEAN | THE SCHOOL OF ART

Comments by
AIDRON DUCKWORTH

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1. ORGANIC FORM
3. SPECTATOR GROUP
The search for the personal will which motivates both creativity and communication through the study of figure and form is the theme of this exhibition and indeed the entire artistic effort of Aidron Duckworth. The object of that search is to be found in nature but the discovery is the sole responsibility of the artist whose depth of understanding and skill in its identification present that new object which we call the work of art. It is the embodiment of a creative act, which has nothing to do with the traditional notion of beauty inherited from classic Greece, but is essentially the presentation of personal truth which must be fresh, genuine and recognizable.

This is Duckworth's second year as Assistant Professor and head of the sculpture program at Syracuse University and his second in this country as an exhibiting artist. He was born January 23, 1920, in the market town of Spalding in Lincolnshire, England, the son of a dynamic engineer who had been active for many years on civil engineering projects in India. After finishing high school he studied engineering at the Polytechnical Institute in Lincoln, and held a part-time position as apprentice with the Anglo-American firm of Ruston Bucyrus,
working in the various areas of welding, casting, pattern-making and machine testing so that he acquired a remarkable combination of practical and theoretical experience so essential to his later career as a designer and sculptor.

This changed with the outbreak of World War II in 1939. He enlisted in the Royal Field Artillery and saw service in France and Belgium until Dunkerque, then went into officer training and served in Africa under Montgomery and later in Syria, Persia, Iraq, Palestine and other Middle Eastern countries. Having served as divisional staff officer for two years, he was appointed to the senior War College in Haifa in 1943 and after graduation was transferred to the War Office in London as an Intelligence Officer. Latterly he taught at Aldershot Officer Training School until his resignation from the Army in 1948.

From early youth, Duckworth had maintained an active interest in painting and sculpture, but it was always treated as what he called a "suspect hobby" not for serious consideration as a profession. During the service his leave time was spent at art schools and lunch hours in London were usually occupied at the Tate and National Galleries. Professional training as an artist began in 1948 with the study of sculpture at the Anglo-French Art Center in London. He spent two years at the Chelsea School of Art with sculpture as his main interest and another three years at the Royal College of Art, concentrating on product design. Following graduation in 1954, he took a position as chief designer for the firm of H. K. Furniture ltd. in London. With his wife, the distinguished ceramist Ruth Duckworth, he then developed his own design offices in 1955 and maintained a successful career as an industrial designer, particularly in the
field of furniture and product design until 1962 when he gave up practice to become an independent sculptor.

During this period he had traveled extensively on the Continent, not only to the great artistic centers of France, Italy and Germany, but also on broad tours overland from the Netherlands to the Dolomites, from the Arctic Circle to the Ruhr Valley. The impact of such an experience of transfer from the bleak desolation of a prehistoric wasteland to the first bush and bird, the first primitive house and village to the black clouds and teeming activity of twentieth century industrial society, posed a frightening problem to which somehow the artist must reply. The necessity for serious concern became even more imperative when he faced industrial America early in 1965 on his arrival in this country to teach at the University of Illinois in Chicago. A tour of the American Southwest and Mexico the following summer confronted him with the vast open spaces and awesome monumental forms of nature in a scale even greater than Stonehenge. In the same mood his discovery of the magnificently primitive and elemental sculpture of ancient Mexico served to clarify his own answer to the problem of a significant sculptural expression which we see in this exhibition.

In Duckworth's artistic development, the communication of visual creativity, which he calls the art of teaching, became an essential ingredient. He had some exposure to teaching in the military service and at Kingston School of Art, but his first real challenge appeared in the art schools of this country where a veritable kaleidoscope of traditions, reactions, group ideologies and strong individualities serves to confuse and frustrate the young artist.
finding his own aesthetic fulfillment. Duckworth's position has been stated many times and is perhaps most clearly reflected in the comment accompanying this exhibition. What he expresses in welded steel, wood and concrete, whether moulded, carved or "assembled," is essentially the philosophy he proposes to his students. The search is for personal truth, the means is primarily through the figure and the discipline of drawing, the medium is the endless variety of the sculptor's materials and their technical mastery. "The barrier to the recognition of truth," he says, "is fear and the attendant sloth, personal vanity and protective tradition which it shelters."

The now traditional cry of "freedom from fear" is not limited to political and social problems, but encompasses the aesthetic as well. In an age of what Jean Cocteau once called "monstrous vulgarity," where words, expressions and forms have lost their meaning through ignorance and misuse, we need to return to the true meaning of "realism." It is not the obvious world of the recognizable object, nor intellectualized realm of psychological or symbolic association, but the inner reality of the spirit as revealed by artistic form. In the hands of an artist, the rubble, rust and crumbled ruins so characteristic of our man-made landscape have become extraordinary instruments of clairvoyance and indeed, Dubuffet has become a dominating influence on the new art of this decade. It has a striking brutality, but also deep tenderness, and in the struggle to reach beyond the sentimental, Duckworth notes that brutality sometimes provides the safer course.

There is no conflict here between the frequently divergent roles of artist and teacher as a creator—or discoverer—of new values. The artist is also a teacher...
simply because the process of discovery is conditioned by and integral to com-
munication. Not long ago Duckworth organized an exhibition of "found ob-
jects" on one of the lawns adjacent to the Art Center on the University campus. It was com-
posed of the most ordinary objects: water-worn boulders, a crushed
automobile, twisted farm machinery, and gaunt, rusted and jagged girders from
a discarded building site. Compared with the monumental and man-made
sculpture on the surrounding campus, these objects were profane, but in their
stark character and striking arrangement they stood strong and clear with an
air of challenging innocence. They were a denial of quality in execution and
mechanical craftsmanship: their justification was an appeal to the imagination
and the acceptance of phantasy and its potential stimulation in everything
which surrounds us. Though much discussed and severely criticized by students
and the public, the teaching function of this modest outdoor exhibition was
successful and the grove still continues to serve as an intriguing center of
artistic interest.

Duckworth's sculpture represents a series of achievements along this road of
aesthetic progress. Non-historical as it may seem, the search for this new
realism has its own tradition that is uniquely of the twentieth century. It defies
classification as to style. It is neither Cubist nor Fauve, neither Dada nor Sur-
realist. Indeed its exaltation of the raw and naked material through primitive
forms carries a pioneering spirit of great promise. Though he has exhibited his
sculpture on a professional basis only during the past half dozen years, this
promise is already a materialized achievement. Its immediate background had
to do with man's "ritualized environment" as expressed in more abstract
constructions. His return to the figure and the significant personal form reflects
the new challenge.
There is nothing so poignant as the ultimate loneliness of the individual. He is born alone, he loves alone, he dies alone. Throughout the successive phases of my work I have tried to express this isolation. The problem is communication. To communicate is to touch and where touch is prohibited is silence. But where to touch? It hardly matters. And how to touch? Only those who love know how. Foot touches foot, needle pierces cloth, chisel cuts wood. Where love is absent there may still be skill to excite admiration, so communication is qualitative.

There are different types of communication. A viaduct or an airplane can communicate a poetry of imaginative daring. A machine tool presents a direct declaration of powerful purpose. By the same token, a well shaped leg should merely communicate an ideal capacity to move and the breast an ability to feed. But these are potentialities. They have no value if the will to use them is absent.
So I search for this elusive will. I search to create abstractly figurative sculpture of such power that it sits as serenely undisturbed in a garbage heap as in the most carefully designed setting. A mountain is superbly unaware of the planes that fly over it or the men that crawl over its surface. The illusively quiet, reflective core of man absorbs me, his fear and curiosity, his wanting to go forward and retreat at the same instant, his organization and rituals, his frail insignificance in his setting, (yet for him he is of significance), the ambitious, visionary, poetic, quality of man and the earthy profundity of woman.

In 1960-63 I expressed this theme in a "Spectator" series of bronze, concrete and welded steel sculptures. These were isolated figures and groups of figures caught in a moment of unguarded contemplation. After this came a period of two years when the dominance of the environment over the individual was expressed in constructions of wood, concrete and ceramics. Slowly the ritual significance of color began to assert itself which spanned the latter part of the 1964-65 constructional period and the return to welded steel.

Here man in his ritualised environment, and man in isolation, his fear, pride and imagination, were expressed in form and polychrome. But during this period a visit to the southwestern states of America, Mexico and Guatemala developed a need to express this theme in clay and concrete. In May, 1966, I began the series of clay modellings, cast in concrete, which I show in this exhibition. Although largely monochrome they are for me a summation of my work to this time.
CATALOG

SCULPTURE

1. ORGANIC FORM
   Welded Steel
   7' x 5' x 5'
   1960

2. FIGURE
   Bronze
   4' x 3' x 1 1/2'
   1961

3. SPECTATOR GROUP
   Concrete
   4' x 6'
   1962

4. HEAD
   Welded Steel with Patina
   App. 3' x 3' x 1' 8"'
   1963

5. DETAIL OF FIGURE
   Welded Steel & Concrete
   6' 6" x 3' x 1' 6"'
   1963

6. PANEL
   Wood, Ceramics, Fiberglass, Paint, Plaster
   6' x 6'
   1964

7. GERMINATION
   Welded Steel
   6' 6" x 2' x 1' 8"
   1965

8. INITIAL PROCESSION
   Welded Steel and Paint
   3' x 2' 6" x 1' 4"
   1965

9. DREAM
   Welded Steel & Painted Concrete
   3' x 1' 6" x 8'
   1966

10. HEAD OF "HIGH PRIEST" GROUP
    Welded Steel and Encaustic
    7' x 2' x 1'
    1966

11. HEAD
    Black Ceramic
    App. Life Size
    1963

12. HEAD
    Black Concrete
    11" x 12" x 10"
    1966

13. HEAD
    Black Concrete
    7' x 7" x 8"
    1966

14. FIGURE
    Grey Concrete
    7' 3/2" x 5" x 5'
    1966

15. EARTH MOTHER
    Pink and Grey Concrete
    45" x 28" x 24"
    1966

DRAWINGS

1. THE TUNNEL
   Ink, Wash and Crayon
   24" x 18"
   1966

2. WOMAN
   Ink and Wash
   24" x 18"
   1966

3. WOMAN
   Ink, Wash and Crayon
   24" x 18"
   1966

4. HEAD STUDIES
   Ink and Conte
   24" x 18"
   1966

5. FIGURE STUDIES
   Ink and Conte
   24" x 18"
   1966

6. HEAD
   Wax Resin, Ink and Wash
   24" x 18"
   1966
WOMAN