A SERIES OF SCULPTURES: THE WINGED FIGURE

by

Hugh O'Neall Merry, Jr.

An Essay Submitted in Lieu of Thesis
To the Faculty of the
DEPARTMENT OF ART
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS
In the Graduate College
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

1964
STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

This essay has been submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for an advanced degree at The University of Arizona and is deposited in the University Library to be made available to borrowers under rules of the Library.

Brief quotations from this essay are allowable without special permission, provided that accurate acknowledgment of source is made. Requests for permission for extended quotations from or reproduction of this manuscript in whole or in part may be granted by the head of the major department or the Dean of the Graduate College when in his judgment the proposed use of the material is in the interests of scholarship. In all other instances, including reproduction of the work of art, permission must be obtained from the author.

SIGNED:  

APPROVAL BY PROJECT SUPERVISOR

This essay has been approved on the date shown below:

Ralph J. Turner  
Instructor  
May 1, 1964  
Date
PREFACE

This essay has been made as brief as possible. The purpose of the analysis is to enable the viewer of the sculptured works, which comprise the largest portion of the thesis project, to more fully understand the meaning of the Winged Figures. Comments on particular pieces have been made only where they seemed really necessary. Ultimately the forms must speak for themselves. The essay should be regarded only as an introduction to the sculptures.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figures 1-30</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of References</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Life-Death. Welded Steel Sculpture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Drawing. Winged Figure with Trumpet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Drawing. Winged Figure with Trumpet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Drawing. Winged Figure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Drawing. Winged Figure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Drawing. Study of Birds in Flight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Drawing. Winged Figure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Drawing. Winged Figure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Drawing. Winged Figure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Collage. Winged Figure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Collage. Winged Figures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Collage. Winged Figure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Sculpture. Steel. Winged Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Sculpture. Steel. Winged Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Sculpture. Winged Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Sculpture. Winged Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Sculpture. Winged Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Sculpture. Winged Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sculpture. Winged Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Sculpture. Winged Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Sculpture. Winged Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Sculpture. Winged Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Sculpture. Winged Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Sculpture. Winged Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Sculpture. Aluminum Head Study no. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Sculpture. Aluminum Head Study no. 1, right side view of figure 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Sculpture. Aluminum Head Study no. 2, front view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Sculpture. Aluminum Head Study no. 2, right front view of figure 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Sculpture. Aluminum Winged Figure, front view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Sculpture. Aluminum Winged Figure, left side view of figure 29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"Man is a child of nature, subject to its vicissitudes, compelled by its necessities, driven by its impulses, and confined within the brevity of the years which nature permits its varied organic form, allowing them some, but not too much, latitude. The other less obvious fact is that man is a spirit who stands outside of nature, life, himself, his reason and his world."

Historically, man has required of art that it serve him in deep and purposeful ways. Art has functioned to help man adapt to his environment, to supply some of his spiritual needs in his search for a truth more enduring than the reality of appearances or of historical fact.

The emphasis on the material developments of the past one hundred years has not changed man's need for the experience art can offer. This experience is particularly valuable in enabling man to understand his peculiar condition: earth-bound, of the flesh, but possessed of an insatiable desire to grasp the immaterial, the super reality of the spirit. Art has always expressed the tension between the two poles of man's nature--the tangible and the intangible. Eustace Haydon considers the achievement of the twin ideas of soul and spirit to be the most momentous event of the intellectual history of the pre-scientific age.

In time, this concept split the universe into two parts--the unseen, intangible, spiritual realm and the material, actual world--and created the classical duality of body-soul, material-spiritual, this world-otherworld. It built a spiritual world to become a safe harbor for ideal values unattainable on earth . . . .

This "classical duality" has very much interested me and provoked my search for forms that can relate to this aspect

of our nature. It is hoped that by brief examination of the ideas involved the presentation of the sculptured forms which are the major part of this thesis will have fuller meaning.

Art can pass beyond the superficial to the sublime, move from mere contingency to the ideal, and can in the process become a dominant expressive force, beneficial, and probably necessary to man. Edward Gall describes the characteristic in man thus served by art as "... the innate tendency to aspire from the phenomenal world in which he finds himself to the transcendent and ideal world which is his real home."¹ I am in full sympathetic agreement with this concept and have sought for the parallel in visual symbols appropriate to sculpture.

If by probing beneath the surface of his instinctual and emotional levels the artist is able to come closer to a world of ideal existence, this inner world must have a strong, positive relationship to the world of reality, for it is in the fusion of these two worlds that man best exploits his true nature. Dean Inge reminds us that

We live in two worlds, which are so far related to each other that if we deny all reality to either of them, the other fades away or loses all its determining features. If mind is only an epiphenomenon, it becomes as otiose as the gods of Epicurus, and we are left with a naive realism which cannot be seriously treated as a picture of reality. If the

¹Mysticism Throughout the Ages, Edward Gall, p. 139.
visible world is a mere phantasmagoria, we are left with an empty heaven, like the Nirvana of Indian thought. In grasping at infinity we arrive at only zero.

The union of the two worlds through the expressive synthesis of art challenges man to make his finest efforts. It is man's gift to discover a world not of appearances but a more significant world, a world as he thinks it should be or a world of parallel harmonies to those of nature.

Man needs the evidence of his duality; he needs a device to transport him from the real to the spiritual. In response to this need, man shows himself endlessly ingenious in using symbols capable of carrying the meaning of his duality, if only imperfectly.

No symbol can present the fulness of the reality. No particular can contain all the nature of the universal it seeks to represent. It is useful, however, and true, if it leads in the right direction . . .

A great gulf exists between the material conveniences science has supplied and our impoverished solutions to the deeper questions men ask themselves in each age. The artist is consciously responsive to the currents of his own time as he understands them, and I have shared a general concern over this disparity. Enormous technological inventiveness

---

4Art and Religion, Von Ogden Vogt, p. 90.
has been expended on making the workaday world more convenient, more comfortable, easier. Our age feels capable of producing far-reaching changes not imagined in previous historical periods. Yet it has become a cliche to call our time the "Age of Anxiety!" We bear an ever-increasing load of intellectual knowledge but our emotional world atrophies. We seem unable to absorb and harmonize knowledge. It is urgent that we invent, or perhaps discover anew, an abiding synthesis around which moral and ethical values can be constructed.

I am concerned with finding the forms which reflect involvement with the continuing issues of morality, ideals, and beauty. With this in mind I investigate the significance of my own plastic forms, my symbols. I question my production as a means of conveying ideas.

The theme incorporated in the winged figures of the thesis is not a recent development in my work nor a final solution for me. Long before my interest turned to the forms of the winged men I was directly involved in the problems of portraying the tension between mind and matter. In earlier work I developed a recurring theme of contrasting elements. One of the more serious efforts during this time was a life-sized, welded steel sculpture called "Life-Death" (Figure 1). The gestures of the figures were in direct opposition: the female figure was stable, well-balanced, while the male figure fell backwards, secured only by the counterbalance
of the female who grasped the male with one arm. Tension between the two figures, though partially unresolved as to correct meaning, suggested the contending polarities of our nature, if only unconsciously.

To be sure, I could not have begun my winged figures nor followed the course I took without somewhere along the line experiencing the disquieting effect of Michelangelo's Bound Slaves and four Boboli Garden figures. The Slaves and the rock-imprisoned captives are to be not slaves of the real world, but contain instead an inner suffering of a more universal character. These works helped direct me and stabilize my search, for in them I first understood how plastic images could embody a great classical antithesis. In Michelangelo's attempt to spiritualize the character of his forms he embodied the tortured soul in the guise of the slave. It was not man liberated fashioned in stone but man caught in the active struggle for freedom, not from chains or bounds but from the weight of matter.

The four Boboli Captives, their bodies barely emerging from the stone, seem helplessly enmeshed by life's inhibiting forces, by the internal doubts that continually plague man. The intellectual and emotional content bursts through the rock with immeasurable cogency; the stone is the vehicle through which a powerful force of life itself passes. The figures struggle with instinctive gestures, but their
strength is broken by sheer weight. Laux interprets these attitudes and relates them to us:

Our unremitting chains bind us only from the outside; but their irons, manacles and chains, imprison and torment their souls at all hours without respite.6

After beginning the winged figure series I recalled the Duino Elegies and Rainer Maria Rilke's use of the angel symbol. I returned to the poems, reread them and discovered a relation with my own ideas. Rilke was absorbed by the theme of the duality of man. In describing the angels of the Elegies Leishman writes of them:

The angel may be described as the hypostatisation of the idea of a perfect consciousness--of a being in whom the limitations and contradictions of present human nature have been transcended, a being in whom thought and action, insight and achievement, will and capability, the actual and the ideal, are one. He is both an inspiration and a rebuke, a source of consolation and also a source of terror; for, while he guarantees the validity of Man's highest aspirations and gives what Rilke would call a "direction" to his heart, he is at the same time a perpetual reminder of man's immeasurable remoteness from his goal.7

Particularly in the first two Elegies, the predominant symbol is not the angel of the Christian heaven but a being who vouches for the recognition of a higher degree of reality in the invisible.8 It is the symbol of the conflict of

6Karl August Laux, Michaelangelo's Julius Monument, p. 102.
7J. B. Leishman as quoted in Duino Elegies, Rainer Maria Rilke, pp. 87-88.
8Ibid., page 87.
body and soul creating tension between the ideal state for which man strives and the state of being. In this final analysis by Leishman I found a real kinship with my feelings:

The ideal of complete and undivided consciousness, where will and capability, thought and action, vision and realization are one, is the highest Man can form, and yet, so impossible is it for Man to realize this ideal, to become like the angels, that it is rather a rebuke than an inspiration.9

The winged figure of the thesis is the product of an accumulation of experiences but represents only a particular point in the search for forms to embody the concept I choose. The winged man for me is an image of a central theme of existence. It stands for the struggle of the artist to obtain a heightened degree of reality by seeking that which is invisible, beyond him, but vital to his nature. Niebuhr makes the point that common to all alike is the necessity to be liberated from the world of reality and the desire to find access to another more perfect world.

Nature supplies particularity but the freedom of the spirit is the cause of real individuality. Man, unlike animal existence, not only has a centre but he has a centre beyond himself ... This capacity for self-transcendence which distinguished spirit in man from soul ... is the basis of discrete individuality ... .10

The winged figure appeared in my work as a natural development

9Ibid., p. 89.
coming from my involvement in the great theme phrased above, from my search for a form commensurate with the degree of plasticity I commanded, and from my experience with the repertory of forms long used in art.

Originally, the first forms which grappled with the theme were without wings, but in pairs, and sexless. They were in pairs because men share only with other men their spiritual aspirations. This is not the "mark of the beast." Still searching for an expression of the transcendent, I made a single figure, similar in anatomy to the paired figures, but with one wing (Figures 13, 14). It was not enough to express the bond between men, to be given form was the essence of the bond: the yearning for God, for the ultimate creativity. This abstraction is not visible, but wings carry birds beyond sight, perhaps wings on man can symbolize his need to deal with things unseen. It is a very, very old motif and I could use it again. The winged figure of the thesis is indeed a "search form," a figure not the familiar one of Christian Annunciations, yet not excluding the memory of it; a figure lumpish at the beginning of the series, but with wings hinting at the possibility of flight; a figure of transition.

Inge has given much thought to the role of symbols representing in art this particular aspect of man's nature. He sums up his ideas by saying:
A symbol is the representation of some moral or spiritual truth under the forms of natural things. Its object is suggestion or insight, it is a kind language. Images are taken from natural relations and used to express more universal or ideal relations. The symbol is the indirect presentation of a concept which cannot be presented directly . . . . We need symbols because we belong to two worlds . . . . We need a bridge to take us across from the temporal to the eternal, from the visible to the invisible, from appearance to reality, from shadow to substance . . . . It is the function of symbolism to unite, not to separate the two worlds.11

It is this transcendent factor, the irksome polarity of natural existence, that I represent in my winged figures.

No previous form has so strongly stimulated me, plastically and emotionally, and never have I been able to sustain as complicated an evolution. Although the winged figure satisfied me as containing the suggestion of the classical duality of man's nature I often questioned the adequacy of the actual form. In the beginning I used the human form as a basic symbol for man's connection with the earth, with visual reality, and the wing as a symbol for man's desired union with the spiritual world. The balance between the two elements would be resolved as the actual work progressed.

The earlier winged figures were frontal and static, simplified, flat and free of garment. The pose was solid, the feet almost root-like in their gravitational attraction to the earth. The figures were consciously expected to

11Inge, p. 73.
awaken speculation through the tension between the material heaviness of the body and the tensely folded wings.

A major problem concerned the degree to which the figures should be rendered anatomically. This was a problem in achieving clarity of expression and in avoiding a tendency to play with line for the sake of decorative quality. The figure should be unmistakably human, but not identifiable with ourselves in any specific way. Nor did I desire the universality of the Greek ideal; a lower common denominator would more aptly express the distance that separates man from his aspirations.

The anatomy of the wings during the development of the theme became another problem, to find a satisfying relation of the wings to the figure. How large were the wings to be in proportion to the figure? Should they seem actually big enough to take the figure aloft? How and where should they be attached to the body? Should they replace arms? Should they be spread? Fluttering? Folded? How much detail should be given the representation of the feathers? These formal problems were worked out in a series of drawings. At first the drawings of winged men were purely decorative in style and lent little constructive information to the plastic forms (Figures 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9). It became necessary to execute formal studies of bird wings, of wing structures and wings in flight to actually give the
wings a more natural appearance in the plastic forms (Figure 6). Along with the drawings were five very large collages representing flat, vaguely defined men, inactive but surrounded with a flutter of wings (Figures 10, 11, 12). In all of the studies the contrast of the bodies with the activity of the wings was the major concern.

The heads of the figures demanded considerable attention since the simplification of the anatomy of the body placed a large burden of expressiveness in the faces. The heads with their faces must be the middle ground between the opposition of wings and body. The shape, though, must be in natural, rhythmic relation of the lines of the body. But should the faces be looking at the sky, trying to pierce the mystery of distance? At this point several head studies were made experimenting with different attitudes and expressions (Figures 25-28). I admired the drawings of Leonard Baskin, and surely my memory of his winged figures conditioned the attitudes I gave my figures, though I avoided his sense of the macabre and the implication of death. The final effort skirted any specific expression, but tried to capture a sense of alertness, as though aware of a sudden wind change, or perhaps intensely listening for a voice that comes only from within. As the work advanced, I noticed points of resemblance between my figures and the gargoyles and chimeres of Notre Dame and Chartres, and a new examination
of these sculptures suggested to me a line or an attitude which could be useful in giving to my figures a more brooding quality.

I felt a particular need during the process of development to rework the earlier efforts of joining two figures together. This was to suggest that

... the significance and consequence of this are not confined to the individual concerned ... since none can live to himself alone, and all men, indeed all forms of life, are "bound each to each." 12

The two figures were to be joined in an effortless gesture (Figure 23). The tension was to remain in the gravity of the bodies and the flight potential of the wings. In some of the dual winged figures the wings are dwarfed, as if to deny the possibility of man's achieving a spiritual goal. These poor wings could never lift the figures from the ground. The wings are sometimes in flight activity, but the figures always remain earthbound. Other wings are spread tentatively, questioning the atmospheric conditions for flight.

The final effort in the series for the thesis is a single cast aluminum figure somewhat larger than the others (Figure 29). Here the body is arched in a more active way, giving support to the action of the wings which are drawn back in the effort of flight. The figure, united with the

12Gall, p. 17.
wings in a strong parallel rhythm, is meant to indicate a supreme effort of man to abandon the earthbound condition, to soar to his ideal. And the rhythm is to suggest the possibility of success. All is caught in the upward movement. But this is at best a test of strength and the figure is not yet in flight. I hope that the symbolism here is one of repeated efforts towards spiritual goals, for that seems to me the essence of our understanding of the duality of our nature. This has long been a central theme of philosophers and artists and I expect it will appear again and again in my own work.

I am fully aware that the plastic forms which embody this theme are not totally prepared to carry the burden assigned to them. If my effort falls short of the idea involved, it is due to my lack of experience with my plastic forms. The theme is vital to me as an artist and as a man; I look for the plastic means to communicate it more fully. The winged figure expresses my struggle to gain strength as an artist, but my desire is to elevate it from this personal arena to some more universal meaning.
Figure 1.

Life-Death. Welded Steel Sculpture. Figures approximately life size.
Figure 1
Figure 2

Drawing. Winged Figure with Trumpet. 12 in. by 14 in. Pencil on white paper.
Figure 2
Figure 3

Drawing. Winged Figure with Trumpet. 12 in. by 14 in. Pen and ink on white paper.
Figure 4

Drawing. Winged Figure. 14 in. by 16 in. Pencil on white paper.
Figure 5

Drawing. Winged Figure. 12 in. by 14 in. Pen and ink on white paper.
Figure 5
Figure 6

Drawing. Study of Birds in Flight. 12 in. by 14 in. Pencil on white paper.
Figure 6
Figure 7

Drawing. Winged Figure. 12 in. by 14 in. Pen and ink on white paper.
Figure 8

Drawing. Winged Figure. 14 in. by 16 in. Pencil on white paper.
Figure 9

Drawing. Winged Figure. 12 in. by 14 in. Pen and ink on white paper.
Figure 10

Collage. Winged Figure. 60 in. by 72 in. Paper on canvas.
Figure 11

Collage. Winged Figures. 60 in. by 72 in. Paper on canvas.
Figure 12

Collage. Winged Figure. 60 in. by 72 in. Paper on canvas.
Figure 13

Sculpture. Steel. Winged Man. Front View. H. $28\frac{1}{2}$ in. Figure first formed in plaster over steel armature. Plaster then covered with thin steel stock, 1 in. square. When the plaster was completely covered the core was removed by cutting the figure in half. It was then welded together again and burnished with an electric brush.
Figure 14

Front detail. (See Figure 13).
Figure 15

Sculpture. Winged Man. Study no. 1. Front view. H. 20\(\frac{1}{2}\) in. Figure first produced in clay over wire armature and then cast by conventional waste mold methods in Hydrocal B-11, a highly refined plaster. The figure is finished with a synthetic patina.
Figure 16

Sculpture. Winged Man. Study no. 1. Back view of Figure 15.
Figure 17

Sculpture. Winged Man. Study no. 2. Front view. H. 20\(\frac{1}{2}\) in. (For method of execution see explanation for figure 15.)
Figure 18

Sculpture. Winged Man. Study no. 2.
Back view of Figure 17.
Figure 19

Sculpture. Winged Man. Study no. 3. Front view. H. 19½ in. (For method of execution see explanation Figure 15).
Figure 20

Sculpture. Winged Man. Study no. 3.
Back view of Figure 19.
Figure 21

Sculpture. Winged Man. Study no. 4. Front view. H. 19½ in. (For method of execution see explanation Figure 15).
Figure 22

Sculpture. Winged Man. Study no. 4.
Back view of Figure 21.
Figure 23

Sculpture. Winged Men. Front view. H. 36 in. (For method of execution see explanation Figure 15).
Figure 24

Sculpture. Winged Men. Back view of Figure 23.
Sculpture. Aluminum Head Study no. 1. Front view. H. 8\(\frac{1}{2}\) in. excluding base. First produced in clay over wire armature and cast in aluminum by dripping small amounts of aluminum into waste mold with acetylene torch. Pieces of mold then welded together with aluminum rod.
Figure 26

Sculpture. Aluminum Head Study no. 1. Right side view of Figure 25.
Figure 27

Sculpture. Aluminum Head Study no. 2. Front view. H. 9½ in. excluding base. (See explanation Figure 25 for method of execution.)
Figure 28

Sculpture. Aluminum Head Study no. 2.
Right Front view of Figure 27.
Figure 29

Sculpture. Aluminum Winged Figure. Front view. H. 36 in. (For method of execution see explanation Figure 25).
Figure 30

Sculpture. Aluminum Winged Figure. Left side view of Figure 29.
LIST OF REFERENCES


