

A SERIES OF FIGURES

by

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STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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Previous to a discussion of the thesis series I will offer a brief statement of my attitudes which account for salient factors in the development of the content and form of the series. As the purpose of this essay is to present my understanding of a particular group of sculptures, it is by no means my intention to convey a complete personal philosophy.

I feel now that at one time I had an inadequate range of interests. Sculpture was the only activity about which I was seriously concerned. It became my realization that I had need for a strong outside interest, something about which I was vitally concerned, something about which I was impelled to know everything, but something outside the scope of three-dimensional expression. This might be nothing more than the solidification of opinions and beliefs. And if the necessary knowledge was not present to form those beliefs, then I should acquire that knowledge. In other words, I had to have a supply reservoir to feed the urge to work in the medium with a direction. Or, it might be called the fuel for sculpture. I have become convinced that a sculptor cannot be adequately gratified by the inherent worth of the medium or the sculpture on which he is working. He has to have fuel to work with--to make his efforts meaningful. For a sculpture to have meaning the sculptor must have definite goals, beliefs, and convictions.

A re-evaluation of myself and my environment revealed that goals and directions and solid beliefs are so attenuated in our world that I, like most of my peers, had almost none. Insecurity arises to a great extent out of deficient personal direction, which is caused partially by a lack of knowledge of the basic factors around which our lives are formed. Government is a mystery to many and is therefore distrusted. Religion is something of which most people have inadequate knowledge, but they nevertheless ridicule it. Moral concepts are vague and intangible to great numbers of people. An insecure individual is very susceptible to any philosophy that purports to solve his problems, soothe his insecurity, and generally fill the blank places in his life. It appears to me that even though these are only partial, they are basic reasons for the resultant activities of my generation. These activities are part of movements going on about us whose underlying aim is extremely detrimental to our society. It seems that pending danger is either disregarded or unrecognized by the tremendous numbers who are actively or sympathetically involved in the movements. They are blinded by immediate apparently worthy goals. For the rebellions in our culture, the individual warrior has reasons, but they are usually as superficial as the depth of thought behind the action. In the area of man's ignorance the greatest expoundings may be heard. Simple, though it is, this truth is playing a vital part in the events that are shaping the destiny of our society.

This, then, is the background for the crusaders of my terminal series. Each sculpture is a symbol of a man who is on what appears to him, in his shallowness, a crusade. I have, for the most part, tried to refrain from analysing my work as I produce it. There was a time when I fell into a habit of analysing my work and every movement through which I went to produce it. It ended with my only thinking about pieces of sculpture, not being able to do them. I had picked through and muzzled my feelings to complete noncommitment and langour. The result was frustration and a productive stand-still. So, I began forcing myself to work as intuitively as possible. I tried to work only for the feeling I was experiencing and not consciously analyse and tear it apart; to keep the emotion for the expression in sculpture. (I will not attempt to explain emotion. Due to its complex functions and activities involving all of one's conscious and unconscious movements, physical and mental, emotion remains somewhat of a mystery to me. Suffice it to say that emotion is that indefinable quality, drive, or impetus which helps define our positions and attitudes.) The artist, in my experience, must have these philosophies, convictions, and emotions to make his actions and his work meaningful. The work, then, becomes the product of the physical reaction to his emotions. The emotions felt are the vitalizing factor in the artist which impels him to the medium, and it is through the gratification of working with a medium that he can bring the indefinable

or abstract feeling to a visual reality. Both concepts are necessary in sculpture--emotion, and interest and ability in a particular medium. For, an attempt to express a concept or feeling in a medium about which a sculptor has a misunderstanding, or bias, or a fear will fall short of a successful expression. The resultant work is likely to be stiff and inhibited, and will probably lack a full exploitation of the medium. Quite often a person will stop working before a peak of expression is attained because of a negative feeling or misunderstanding of a medium. Conversely, a misunderstanding of a medium will often result in an over-refinement, an over-working, or carrying the medium past its point of maximum expression. In this area the works will usually lack a fluid or spontaneous quality which is a life-giving factor in a sculpture, all of which will detract from the formal qualities and the expressive intent. This indicates to me the necessity of a working knowledge of various media for a sculptor. And if a sculptor goes purely on the intrinsic qualities of the medium he achieves an exercise which is a cold statement; one which appears to me as a design problem without meaning other than as an arrangement of forms. That is not to say that all non-objective sculpture falls under this generalization, as the pure arrangement of forms can be very pleasing. It is my opinion that one can be quite excited about a design or a composition. One can be captivated by a color relationship or textural subtlety. But, this depends on the observer's thoughts as stimulated

by the abstraction he is beholding. Kindled in the mind of the observer is an emotion which becomes an integral part of the perceived sculpture. A reaction to Cesar's "Marseilles" could be an example of this concept. Relative to the size of this non-objective piece of sculpture (eight feet high) the actual form of its mass is simple and refined. It is a vertical rectangle whose sides are bowing very subtly outward. Mr. H. H. Arnason, in the publication, Modern Sculpture From the Joseph H. Hirshhorn Collection, comments on the "Marseilles" as being "... a great architectural, sculptural relief whose surface is built up of a large number of small, regular, shifting and overlapping planes, gradually compressing into a closely textured, vibrating central area." It is the textural exploitation, then, that is a stimulant to a mental image. Kohn's and Higgin's sculptures are refined arrangements of positive and negative forms which, because of the foreign images they recall, are agents that stimulate a mental response in the observer.

Form in sculpture, to me, means the arrangement of the material of the sculpture into defined masses. As these forms are refined they are simplified. As irregularities, or smaller areas on a larger form, are done away with, the overall form will tend toward a more easily understood, defined shape, as a cube, pyramid, cylinder, or sphere. From this it may also be stated that, as an extreme, if an entire sculpture were refined to its utmost it would be a glossy

sphere. The opposite extreme would be a group of forms so numerous and arbitrarily placed that no specific overall volume could be discerned in the sculpture or any part thereof. Therefore, the higher the definition of these masses, the less ambiguous their form.

Another consideration is that form is relative to the size of the piece of sculpture. In the "Marseilles" the form is not complex regardless of the fact that the sculpture is made of small pieces of steel plate, each plate or module having a form of its own. If the shape of a particular module in a sculpture is lost in the form defined by a larger group of similar modules, then the shape of that particular module becomes a part of the mass of the modules, or the texture, of the larger form.

In "Crusader IV" (Figures 5-7) the size of the modules which make up the whole form are so great compared to the size of the sculpture that the forms of the individual modules had to be arranged to help define the greater, overall form. Here the modules nearly leave the realm of the texture and become forms of the sculpture.

There are two problems present in the series of crusader figures. The more obvious one is to be able to detect an overall development from the beginning through later studies. And the second, which is really a part of the first, is to adequately convey, visually, through the expression of the sculptures their intended meaning. By this, one is led to believe that I had a clear understanding of the

intended meaning before and during the execution of the crusader series. This was not the case. As a matter of fact, almost all during the period of time in which I was working on the crusaders their meaning was vague; not thought of in words and sentences. Rather, there was an urge or a drive to produce a three-dimensional statement that would better answer the emotional demands I was experiencing.

"Crusader VI" (Figure 11), for instance, made me "feel" more like I was seeing a true representation of my emotions than did "Crusader V" (Figure 8). Therefore, "Crusader VI" was more successful to me. So, a specific statement of all the emotions that inspired the crusaders is an impossibility. A partial explanation has previously been made. For the viewer the rest must be surmised from observation of the sculpture itself. Admittedly, neither I nor anyone else has a complete understanding of all the emotions that stimulate any action. This is a partial reason why I think it is futile for an artist to analyse his work. I did not analyse the crusader series (and, therefore, myself) until it was necessitated by this essay, so that all of the following is retrospective.

Lack of clarity of intention is evident in "Crusader I" (Figure 1), as a perusal of the method of construction will indicate. I began with two flat sheets of steel cut in the shape of the silhouette-- a front sheet and a back sheet. (By silhouette I mean the farthest edges of a sculpture right or left, up or down from the observer.

Figure 1

CRUSADER I

1964

Welded Steel on Wood, height 43 inches.



A sculpture has an infinite number of silhouettes, as a sculpture may be viewed from an infinite number of angles. Human or semi-human figures, such as the "Crusaders", automatically appear as front, sides, and back to me. And the simplification of silhouette in the "Crusaders" is that of the sides of the figure.) After making slices in the steel with a cutting torch and pulling the pieces out or pushing them in to make the desired modeling, I welded the whole thing together. ("Crusader I", as is the case throughout the crusader figure series, displays a concern for the distortion of form; a horizontal distortion and a generalization or "massing" of the major forms of the human body. Again, the reasons for this concern are not wholly understood further than that this distortion seems to intensify the expressive content.) I had, then, a completed figure but without a resolved method of presentation. I wanted to leave the front of the figure visible and the silhouette immediately comprehensible. So, to get this and a balanced yet active composition I settled on the present solution. Although it is a bound figure (or possibly because it is bound) it expresses the violence inherent in the category of people which I perceive.

"Crusader III" (Figures 2-4) is done in direct plaster upon a welded armature. Using this method I was able to get a fluidity and action in the pose I was unable to attain in the previous work.

Figure 2

CRUSADER III

1964

Direct Plaster on Steel Armature, height 28 inches.



Figure 3

CRUSADER III

1964



Figure 4

CRUSADER III

1964



Due to the strong iron skeleton within, it was possible for me to place the figure on two legs without fear of technical weakness.

I view a plaster sculpture as a step toward a bronze casting; it is easily preserved and relatively durable; it may be considered as a finished statement until the monetary hurdles of casting large pieces in bronze may be cleared.

At this point I also became dissatisfied with human legs in connection with the meaning of the sculpture. I wanted something that would be more expressive in relation to the continued experimentation with the massing of the major forms of the body. I decided upon goat-like legs. They would not only contrast to the large masses and give a lift to the sculpture, but would also lend to the meaning of the sculpture. By the addition of this symbol of moral degeneracy the inconsistency and incongruity of the philosophies of the subjects of my "Crusaders" is expressed. Due to the smallness of the legs, the arms had to be made either thinner or shorter. The latter, along with a diminished or nonexistent head, turned out to be the better alternative as a means of maintaining balance and movement in the sculpture. Even though there is a forward movement in the sculpture, the feet, or hooves, appear to be too solidly attached to the base.

Since having a large plaster balanced on such a small area as one leg would have been technically as well as aesthetically impractical, I constructed the "Crusader IV" (Figures 5-7) of welding rod. This

Figure 5

CRUSADER IV

1964

Welded Steel, height 9 inches.



Figure 6

CRUSADER IV

1964



Figure 7

CRUSADER IV

1964



sculpture is much smaller than the third in its series, and, due to the material used, lent itself to a freer relationship with its base. The greater elasticity of steel permitted a wider range of area and angle of attachment to the base than did the structure having the brittle plaster around it. The steel sculpture, however, could not be attached any place on the base, as physical and visual balance had to be considered. Here, the massing of the bodily areas was refined to two major areas in the front and four in the back; two on each side. Preservation of the natural black steel color of the welded pieces of sculpture was brought about by the application of a coat of spray-on clear acrylic plastic. Touching the base with only one foot the crusader appears to be running toward its goal full speed.

Probably a necessity to work in a larger scale led me back to the direct plaster-on-armature method. In "Crusader V" (Figures 8-10) I feel that I came closer to solving the problem of the attachment of the goat legs to the human torso. Along with this achievement a lightness of foot was afforded the sculpture by a more experienced planning and construction of the iron skeleton.

"Crusader VI" (Figures 11-13) is the first attempt in what was for me an entirely new medium; modeled wax, cast into bronze. Until this time clay had always been a medium which allowed me the greatest freedom in handling. But micro-crystalline petroleum wax permits an even greater amount of manipulation. Due to the cohesive

Figure 8

CRUSADER V

1964

Direct Plaster on Steel Armature, height 25 inches.



Figure 9

CRUSADER V

1964



Figure 10

CRUSADER V

1964



Figure 11

CRUSADER VI

1964

Bronze, height 6 inches.



Figure 12

CRUSADER VI

1964

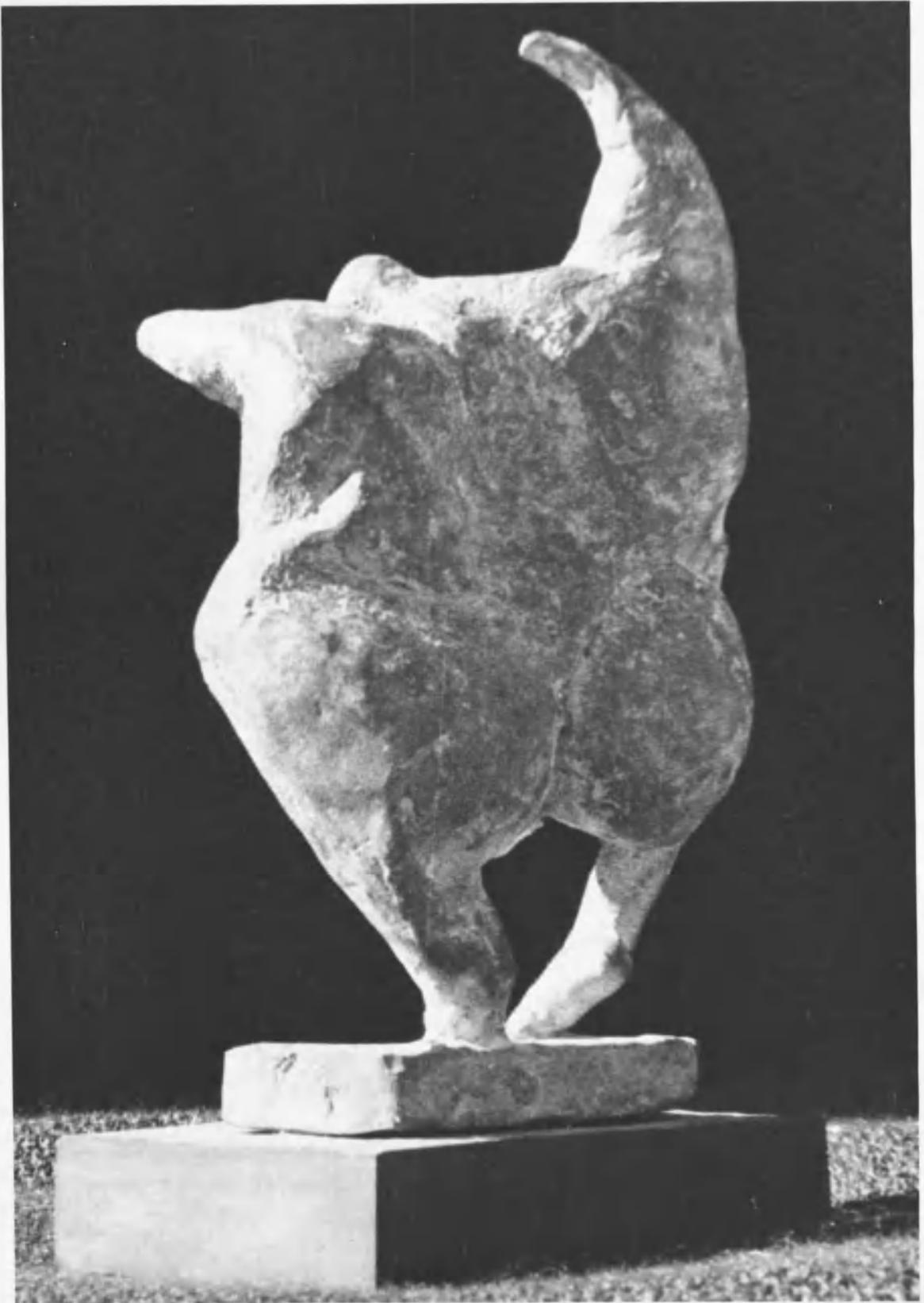


Figure 13

CRUSADER VI

1964



property, proportional lightness, and malleability, the necessity of an armature is minimized. In "Crusader VI" a greater refinement of the areas of the body takes place, pushing the torso in the direction of becoming one unit-form with legs and arms as motivating appendages. Still, the violence and the urgency of attitude are maintained in the sculpture.

In "Crusader VII" (Figures 14 and 15) the plaster technique was again employed. Here, greater lift from the proportionally smaller legs, as well as an even greater simplification of bodily areas, becomes evident. The torso becomes a unit organization with subtle surface indications of the nature of underlying areas. A dependence on the silhouette is expressing itself quite forcefully.

The simplification of silhouette is the primary development of "Crusader VIII" (Figures 16-18). Its sweeping outline contrasts to the more coarsely stated areas within. Even though this is a bronze cast of a wax model the sculpture seems to express the natural qualities of metal first being cut, stamped, or shaped by machine, and the more plastic, modeled, qualities of wax second. "Crusader VI" (Figures 11-13), on the other hand, reversed this relationship. Both bronzes have a patina of an antique green with a yellow-bronze color showing through the higher, more easily abraded surfaces. The reason for acquiring the patina was that after seeing the pieces in their natural bronze color for some time, I began to



Figure 14

CRUSADER VII

1964

Direct Plaster on Steel Armature, height 14 inches.



Figure 15

CRUSADER VII

1964



Figure 16

CRUSADER VIII

1964

Bronze, height 5 inches.

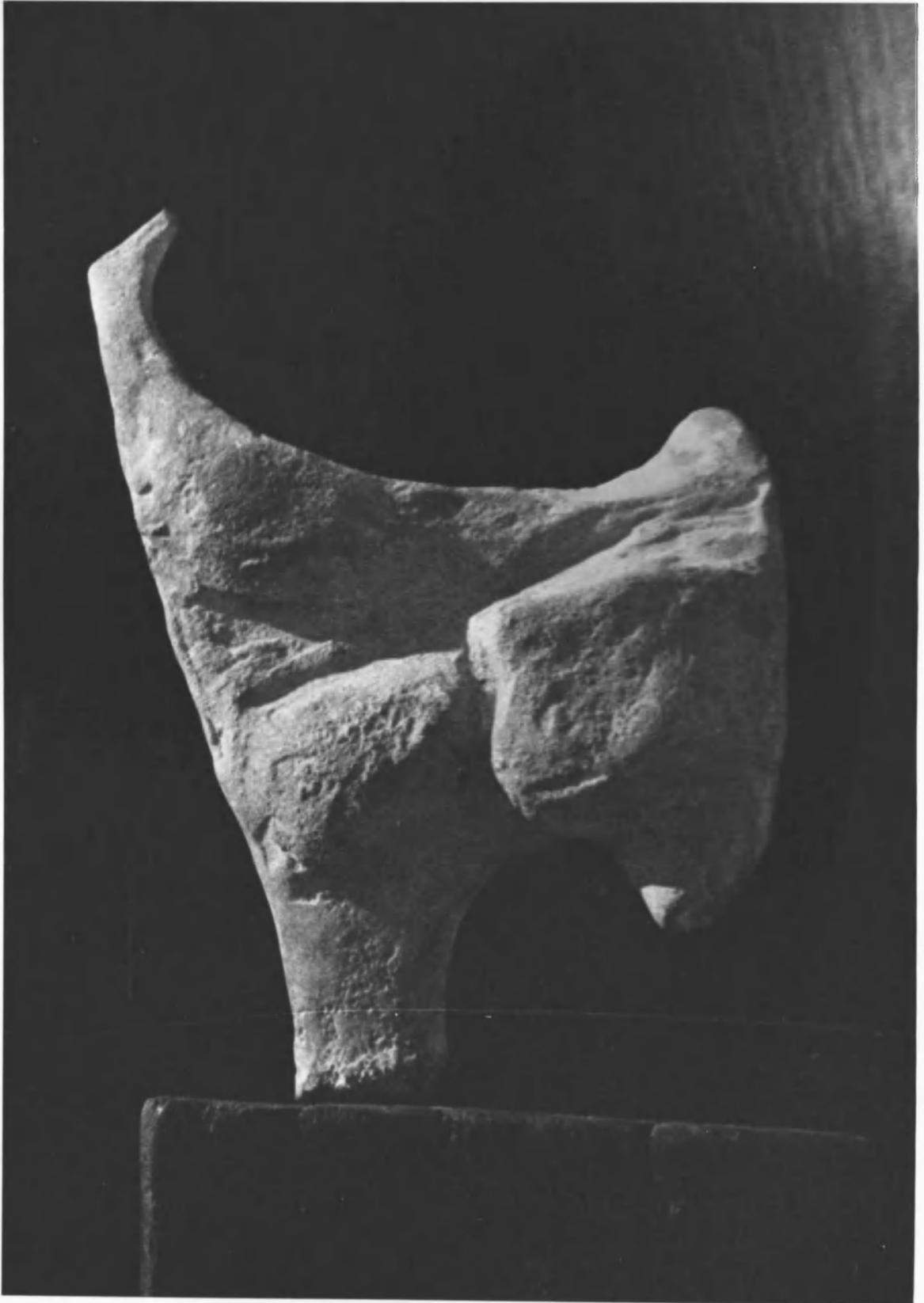


Figure 17

CRUSADER VIII

1964



think of them as being plastic. This was due to all the bronze-colored plastic on the market. Thus, the patina. The bronzes were first bathed in sulfuric acid and rinsed with water. Then they were dipped in a solution of ammonium chloride and allowed to sit in the air overnight. Next day, they were washed thoroughly and rubbed in water.

Throughout the crusader series the trend has been toward greater abstraction. This is quite evident in the final statement of the series, "Crusader IX" (Figures 19-21). The silhouette, in this sculpture, is no more important than the areas of the body which are themselves simplified and unified. The torso becomes a collection of parts that work together to make the whole. The upward movement or lightness of the previous pieces has been forfeited in the lower areas of this work to achieve a lightness above. The left arm jutting upward, along with the lengthened vertical left leg, send the observer's eye to the top of the sculpture regardless of viewpoint. The movement, then, occurs within the sculpture and by the actual placement of forms rather than by position of the sculpture alone.

The coloring of the plaster sculptures is for the purpose of mellowing the harsh glare of the natural plaster. If the light value of plaster is not decreased light tends to reflect into receding areas, otherwise dark, minimizing the desired three-dimensional qualities thereof. I first apply a coat of linseed oil to the surface of the plaster. After that has soaked in, a coat of oil paint in the form of a turpentine

Figure 18

CRUSADER VIII

1964



Figure 19

CRUSADER IX

1964

Direct Plaster on Steel Armature, height 26 inches.



Figure 20

CRUSADER IX

1964



Figure 21

CRUSADER IX

1964

wash, is applied. It seems that after a few months darker and lighter areas caused by inconsistencies in surface porosity tend to even themselves to a uniform value. Until this time the natural darks and lights caused on the sculpture by its forms are confused by the varying values of the patina.

Because there are so many books on the subject, I have refrained from any lengthy discussion of techniques as employed in my sculptures. The purpose here has been to support my work by disclosing some of the factors which explain my activity in, and the meaning of my sculptures.

Every sculpture has been a problem. Through each solution I have not only gained knowledge of the medium, but of myself; of my feelings; and of my environment. Each sculpture in this terminal series, as I produced it, was a more satisfactory statement to me than the previous. And, even though the development of the series is not a continuous trend from less abstract to more abstract, the overall movement has been toward a breaking down, or "massing", of the bodily areas. These areas are then arranged to express their intended meaning. As yet I have not produced sculpture that adequately expresses my feelings and thoughts. Possibly this is the reason I am compelled to strive again and again to find satisfactory solutions.

As is to be expected the views I have expressed will undoubtedly alter themselves somewhat as my life proceeds. But these are the things I feel now, and these are some of the reasons for the work reproduced here.