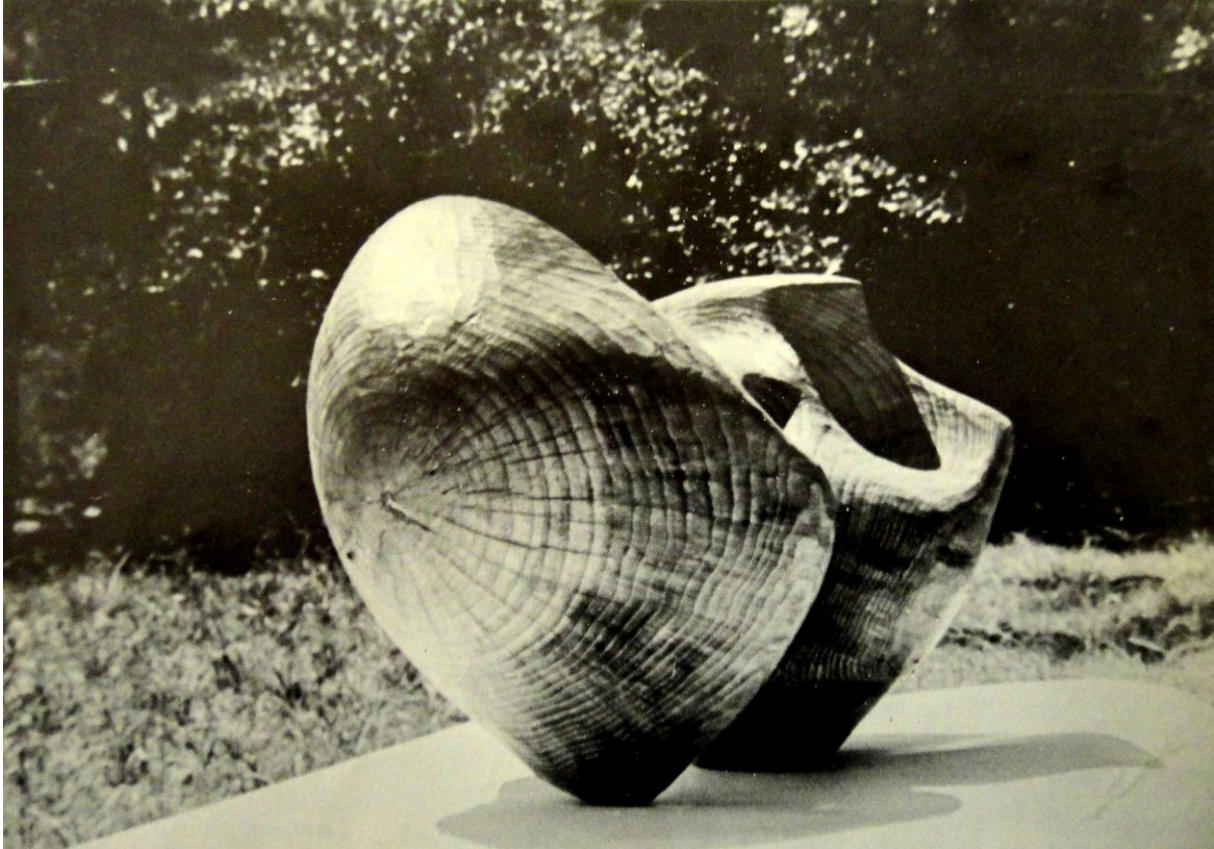


Peter DAVIS

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peter davis



Peter Davis is an enigma if one believes that an individual's development is likely to show a consistent pattern and a degree of predictability. Of course, this view is true only up to a point and Peter Davis' life presents an interesting example of the complex interplay between natural abilities, social forces and chance events which create a pattern in retrospect but defy accurate prediction at any particular point in time.

This is not the place to attempt a psychological analysis of the artist's life but here, briefly, is the succession of phases: English public school-boy, salesman, civil servant, member of the Kenya police, big-game hunter,

estate agent, shopkeeper, furniture-maker, industrial designer, woodcarver, sculptor. Only the last four have some coherence. The key to the lack of general continuity lies, I believe, in two facts: firstly, as a child, Peter Davis had very little family life and formed no close bonds with his parents, and secondly, the whole trend of social expectations to which the son of a high-ranking English army officer was exposed, was irrelevant to his real aptitudes. The result was a man who, at the age of 20, had no tailor-made rôle to step into and no clearly defined goals to pursue. He spent the next ten years looking for them.

This was by no means a disaster. A

man who has literally to find himself without any guidelines to start with, who has to proceed by trial and error and perseveres against what could easily be regarded as a life of failure or at best a series of pointless ventures, finally achieves an unshakeable independence. More than this: he acquires a zeal and a sense of purpose which makes the average product of our programmed society seem like a ventriloquist's dummy.

Achievement brings further perils, of course. These are insidious and subversive since they come from within. Pride, arrogance even, are necessary conditions of success when one has

not only to climb a tall ladder but also to construct it and make the tools for the job as well. But, having climbed, these same qualities may choke and stifle the imagination thus preventing the ultimate achievement of transcending the limitations of ones own personality and thus being free to apply unfettered energy to ones life work. This is the challenge that Peter Davis now faces.

His exhibition at the Lidchi Gallery in June (opening on the 12th) comes appropriately at virtually the midpoint of his life (he is 36) and represents the end of youth's stumbling quest for individuality and purpose. These he has now found: he is a professional sculptor and can be nothing else.

His first exhibition two years ago showed his potential but not the realization of his abilities. The majority of present works are in a different category in terms of form, emotive power and concept. The technique, as before, is flawless but in the best pieces the beauty of the wood is distinctly secondary to the vitality of the image.

Most sculptors in wood have been totally seduced by the sensuous qualities of the material and have seldom gone beyond the mere depiction of the smooth contours of the human form. Peter Davis, on the other hand, has begun to use some of the rugged textures and the gnarled forms of certain woods which a lesser artist might have regarded as deformities to be excoriated or excised. The result is a profound statement of the complexities of organic form in which process is the vital factor. I am referring here to the symbolization of growth, decay, symbiosis and fertility. It is in the exploration of this process-oriented organic image that Peter Davis' future development and, ultimately, his contribution to sculpture will probably lie.



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