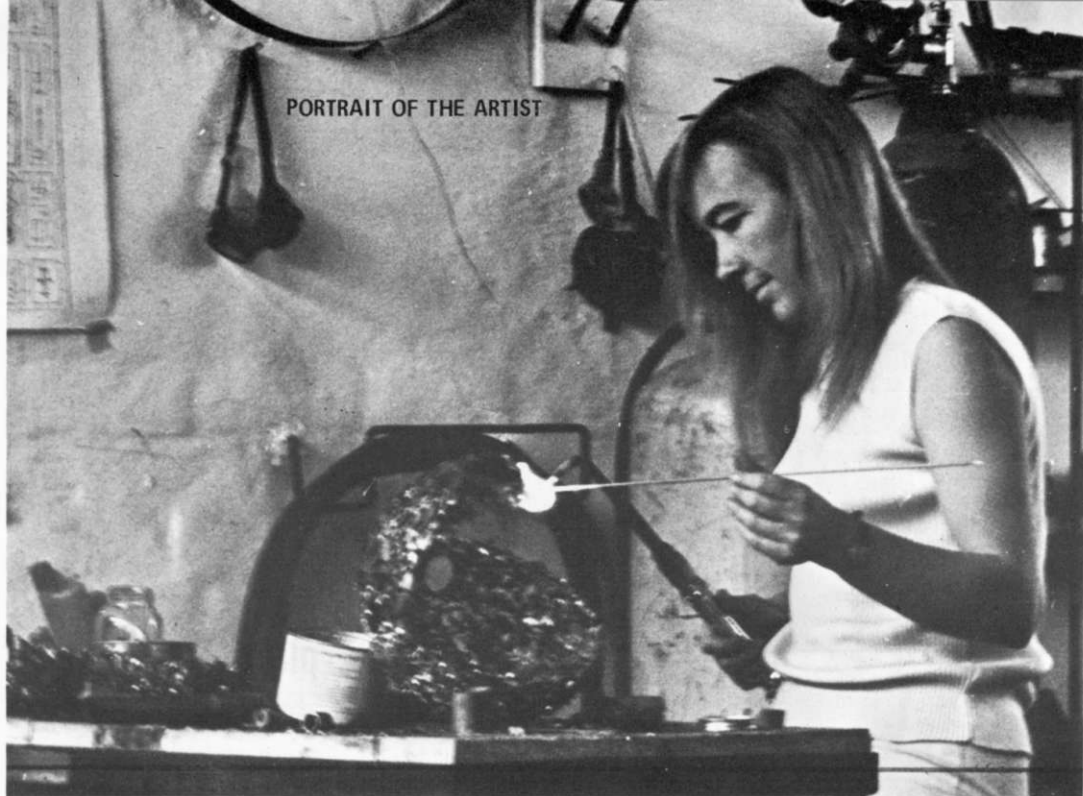
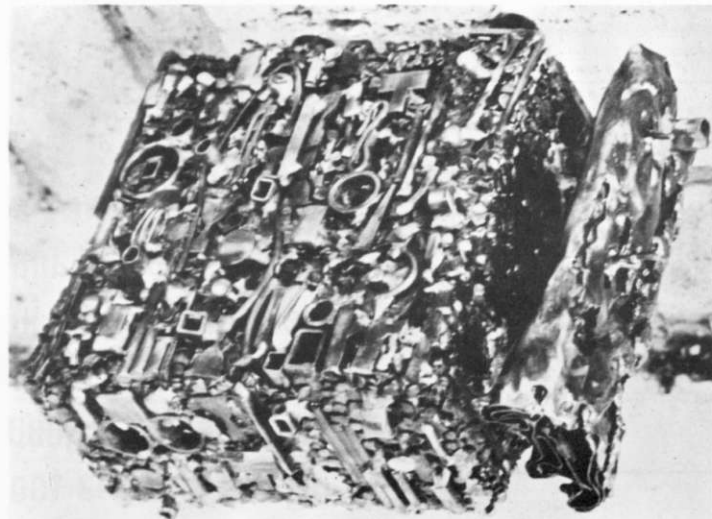


PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST



Berrell Jensen

(This interview - which inaugurates a new series in which an artist's own words are recorded on tape and transcribed with a minimum of editing - opens with Berrell Jensen discussing the Pop direction taken by much modern sculpture).



BJ: The ready-made objects of Pop Art have already existed in a state in which they were interesting; so that I don't have to make another statement on the same thing. They are interesting in themselves, and although I may enjoy them for what they are, bits of metal and bolts and nails, I don't feel I have to make use of them as such in sculpture. Not exactly as they are, that is.

Interviewer: You like to convert the ready-made into something else?

BJ: Yes, I'm not interested in the ready-made as an art object, even though I may enjoy its shape.

Interviewer: You have said you were influenced by the objects of ancient civilizations. Does this still apply?

BJ: Yes, the mystic object, something which has in it a hidden meaning and which inspires a sense of mystery, always fascinates me. An idol, for instance, often has some implicit mystic force. It is this

sense of hidden meaning that I try to communicate in my work.

Interviewer: Are you drawn to old cultures, such as the Maya or Aztec?

BJ: Not as much as I was. My interest is now more on the sociological level.

Interviewer: But you're not trying to get a message across?

BJ: No, not a message. I find my interest concentrated more on scientific developments - which also have for me a sense of the mystical. Take space travel. And then natural formations also interest me -

Interviewer: Geology, for instance?

BJ: Geological formations and microscopic objects, the basic elements of life. The consumer object as such doesn't interest me ... and I suppose this makes me a square! Actually, it annoys me to a certain extent when I see sculpture about which I say to myself: Oh yes, that's a cog from a so and so, that's a dome from a such and such and these four bolts have been used to put them together in that way. All that slightly irritates me - although of course it has a right to exist. It's just my personal feeling ...

Interviewer: It's like the stage fairy: you don't like to see the wires and pulleys?

BJ: Yes, I don't like to be made too much aware of how a sculpture is constructed. I'd rather the object existed because of itself than for one to become too consciously aware of the object and what it's made of.

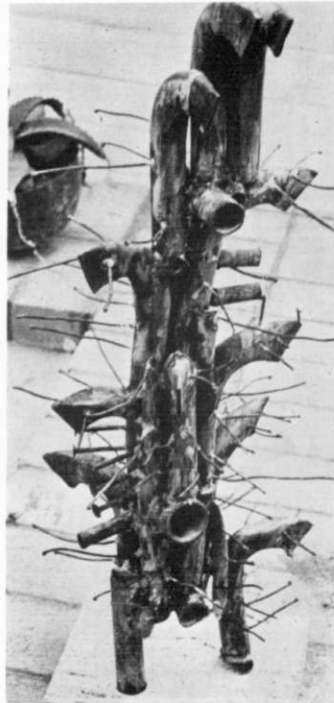
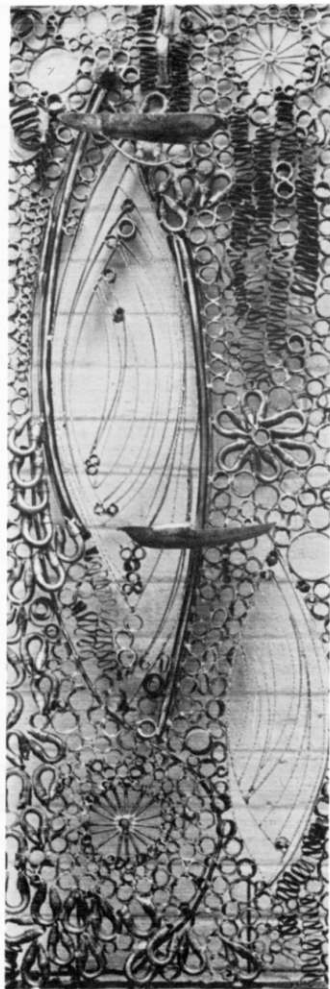
Interviewer: As I see it then, you like to change objects and give them a life of their own?

BJ: Yes, so that they take on their own existence, not just using them for what they are.

Interviewer: Why are you particularly drawn to the sphere?

BJ: Because for me it is a universal symbol, I find it fascinating ... symbolizing the smallest cell, the beginning of life, and also the cosmos, the universe the astronauts are exploring. And that's why I'm interested, not in the secondary things, the consumer objects glorified for themselves, but in the universal.

(Interviewed by the Editor)



Berrell Jensen is South Africa's best-known sculptor in welded copper and other metals. She has held one-man shows in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban, is represented in many public and private collections and has executed several major public commissions, including a large copper relief panel for the new President Hotel in Cape Town. Her latest one-man exhibition opens in Gallery 101 on November 20.

Opposite Page: (Top) Berrell Jensen at work in her studio; (Below) one of her 'mystic objects' in welded metal.

This Page: (Above) A screen fountain, 6 ft. high, in welded copper, for a new building in Durban.

(Top) From science fiction or a fantasy herbarium? This weirdly beautiful sculpture is made from copper tube. (Above) A close-up of one of Berrell Jensen's wall panels.