

BERRELL JENSEN



A personal biography is irrelevant. This is not because it is unimportant to me but that it is so constantly important that, like history, its true perspective could only be seen when it is over. Then only could it be related to my work. On the other hand to talk about what I am trying to do in my sculpture is, in a way, to dissipate part of its very content. So I shall not be very explicit and prefer to quote from other writers who said the sort of thing I would identify myself with.

In his "concise History of Modern Sculpture", Sir Herbert Read has devoted a chapter to what he calls "the vital image" and he outlines a theme or movement in art known as vitalism. It is with this movement, I think, if with any that I would most closely align myself. Read himself quoted from Henry Moore:

"For me a work must first have a vitality of its own. I do not mean a reflection of the vitality of life, of movement, physical action, frisking, dancing figures and so on, but that a work can have in it a pent-up energy, an intense life of its own, independent of the object it may represent".

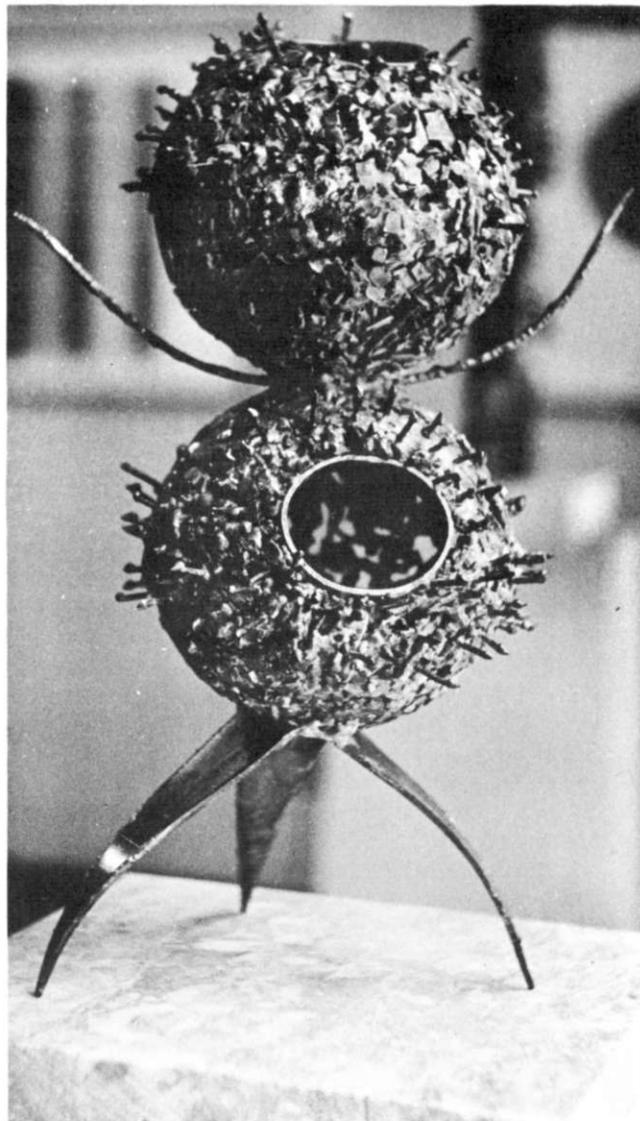
This is an ideal for which I strive even though I may often fall short of it. I mean that I do not, in the first place, try to create things that are merely attractive and pleasing to the eye but things which have within them (i.e. symbolise) natural forces and particularly, but not only, biological forces.

Reg Butler, the British sculptor (also quoted by Read) has tacitly indicated the same sort of theme in his list of sources of inspiration of modern artists, of which I have selected those that are specially relevant to my own work:

“The anatomical organisation not merely of human beings but of animals, plants, bacteria, crystals, rocks, machines and buildings. The simplicity and complexity of their forms, the disposition of stresses and strains in living and non-living structures. Recognition of the qualities of things; their hardness and softness, heaviness and lightness, tautness and slackness, smoothness and roughness. Recognition of units and similarities, rhythms and analogues, differences”.

I have been influenced by primitive and religious art. Some work is related to the iconic sculpture of Africa, Ancient Mexico and Oceania, others to religious myth such as that of Greece. Some pieces are archeological in character to suggest life's origins or the remains of bygone cultures. Most of my forms are derived from the natural world of biology.

All this has set for me broad trends and directions without necessarily dictating the precise forms and structures of my work. Here technique is obviously important. I have chosen to work directly in metal, perhaps as much for practical as for personal reasons. Oxy-acetylene welding (the welding torch is my basic tool) has great flexibility and with it I have made a great range of things from delicate jewellery to large outdoor sculpture. The result is durable and no further process such as costly casting is necessary. In any event, having acquired this technique I have proceeded to explore it as fully as possible. The metals bronze and copper have tremendous versatility as regards both form and surface treatment and their possibilities as sculptural materials are





inexhaustible so I have used them predominantly. I have also used silver, steel and lead. Lately I have found myself including the colder material - brass. The technique and the metal act as a guide and give the character imposed by the limitations they have and I express my ideas and feelings within these limitations. My own integrity is at stake if I try to show results not related to the real characteristics of the metal and techniques I use.

Berrell Jensen 1973

