

CURATOR'S STATEMENT

SHAPING THE SPIRIT, RECENT SCULPTURE BY RICHARD HUNT
SEPTEMBER 5 – OCTOBER 25, 2008
MAIN AND EUCLID AVENUE GALLERIES

MAQUETTES FOR PUBLIC COMMISSIONS

Richard Hunt began filling commissions for outdoor public sculpture in 1967 and has completed between two and six commissions every year since, many in his hometown of Chicago and across states of the Midwest, as well as the rest of the country. The maquettes, or working models, of seven projects in the foyer and the Main Gallery present a range of public works from the last ten years and an unrealized 1991 proposal for Settlers Landing in Cleveland. In downtown Cleveland, on West Third Street, between St. Clair and Lakeside Avenues, one can see the magnificent bronze double sculpture of *Sentimental Scale and Wedge*, commissioned by Cuyahoga County for The Justice Center in 1977.

Hunt's public commissions have become increasingly formal in presentation with the base developed in a symbolic and striking manner. Some suggest architectural forms, as the crazily out of kilter, Piranesian, suspended stairways of the lower half of the *Tower of Aspiration* or the direct evocation of a lighthouse for *And You, Seas*. Severe geometrical shapes allude to twentieth century sculpture that is pure geometrical form, as in the base of *Muskegon Rising*, a 50-foot stainless steel sculpture that towers at the center of a flat Michigan town. Others are designed in a clear homage to the Beaux Arts style, derived from Greek and Roman models, as with *Build-Grow* for a downtown Washington, D.C. plaza and *We Will* on a Chicago avenue. Finally, some combine the modern geometry with the classical Beaux Arts, as the columnar bases of the Settlers Landing project and *Growth Columns*.

These formal bases act as foils, or as grounding, for the exuberance of the shapes that they support. Above, inside, or below these bases erupt and soar emotive forms in metal to stir the spirit. The commission for Springfield Village Park, Augusta, Georgia, is a compelling example of Hunt's use of materials and forms to different aesthetic, symbolic, and emotional ends. The bright stainless steel *Tower of Aspiration* is looming, angularly sliced, jaggedly open, and disorienting, with hints of a positive outcome only at the very top. The darkly patinated bronze fountain, *And They Went Down Both Into The Water*, below the tower, is a closed sculpture with massive, yet fluid and sweeping forms, suggestive of nature's power in the rush of water and the profundity possible in a spiritual life.

SCULPTURES

Richard Hunt, a second generation Abstract Expressionist, received the first influential critical and curatorial praise for his sculpture when he was still a student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in the late 1950s. His work is in a direct lineage from many of the early to mid-twentieth century masters.

The sculpture in the Euclid Avenue Gallery and three pieces in the Main Gallery, all made within the last ten years, were conceived as individual pieces. Like the art of certain Surrealist artists with whom Richard Hunt finds a particular affinity – as Julio González, Wilfredo Lam, Sebastian Matta, Arshile Gorky, Isamu Noguchi, and early David Smith –

these sculptures' abstract shapes retain a suggestion of naturalistic forms altered by the subjective, inner landscape. Parts may evoke a wing in flight, a bent or swaying tree

branch, antlers, fluttering streamers, a writhe of mist, or a leaping flame. Among these material flights are often found more formal geometric forms that are paired or aligned in a staggered manner suggestive of the efforts of early twentieth century Italian Futurists like Umberto Boccioni, whom Hunt also admires, to turn the solid into the immaterial or to simulate or suggest motion through a material object. Certain smaller cast elements may recall the gestural paint applications of the Abstract Expressionists.

Richard Hunt's sculpture of recent years has become increasingly direct in presentation and materials. Some of his work is still made in the traditional manner with models of wax that are cast into bronze or stainless steel at a foundry, but much is immediately constructed from bronze and stainless steel sheet metal, cut and welded in his studio. The evidences of the artist's hand and working methods are left clearly visible, both in the fluid, rounded, flattened, and quickly finger-shaped forms of the cast pieces or in the roughly cut edges, the marks of the metal rasps, the stains from the welding heat, and the unpolished welded joints on the sheet metal pieces. These working methods and their final presentation in the finished pieces imply an artist so long at the top of his field and so secure within himself that his creativity emerges apparently unfettered by troubles of design or production method.

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