The head as subject matter in sculpture
by Lewis Daniel Acker

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF APPLIED ART
Montana State University
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Abstract:
The purpose of this thesis is to come to a fuller and clearer understanding of my own position in
relationship to the most prominent subject matter of my work - the human head.

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towards the subject of the head; 2. The writing of my own personal convictions concerning my
philosophy of sculpture in general and the place of the head as subject matter in my own work.

There is only one specific conclusion involved in this paper besides the hope that it will give me a
better understanding of myself and my work and perhaps provide me with more intelligent questions.
The single conclusion is that in spite of the wide variety of sculptors discussed they have one thing in
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today's art. Perhaps a new outlook towards the examination and investigation of the figure can provide
a needed revitalization and direction for art on all levels.
THE HEAD AS SUBJECT MATTER IN SCULPTURE

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to come to a fuller and clearer understanding of my own position in relationship to the most prominent subject matter of my work - the human head.

I hope to accomplish this by two means:

1. The study of the feelings of a variety of master sculptors towards the subject of the head;
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There is only one specific conclusion involved in this paper besides the hope that it will give me a better understanding of myself and my work and perhaps provide me with more intelligent questions. The single conclusion is that in spite of the wide variety of sculptors discussed they have one thing in common - a background built on the study of the human figure. This study is missing in much of today's art. Perhaps a new outlook towards the examination and investigation of the figure can provide a needed revitalization and direction for art on all levels.
INTRODUCTION

I do not consider myself a professional or amateur artist, but a student artist. As a student I have seen only glimpses of what is uniquely mine in my work instead of the influence of a teacher or master. I am curious to find out more about what is original in my work and hope to discover a few indications of these things in this thesis.

As Andre Malraux wrote in The Psychology of Art, "...what characterizes the creative process is less the abundance of the artist's means of expression than his ability to discern across a cloud of imitation, what is his very own; to discern it and to organize it."
STATEMENT OF PHILOSOPHY - SCULPTURE IN GENERAL

In sculpture as in all art it is necessary first of all for the artist to have something to say, a point of view, a philosophy of life. Without this element his work becomes mere exercises in technique, devoid of all human significance. Yet the human factor in art is the most important:

Drawing did not begin with the sketching of a figure, but with the hieroglyph; indeed it seems that the destiny of the fine arts was uniquely this: to load the sign with as much of the human element as it could bear.¹

To me the most direct way of filling my work with the human element is to express myself through the human head and figure. I believe in them as a source from which to grow. The direction this development will take can only be suggested here. But no matter what the direction, I have always believed that in the future I will be further along than I am today.

What makes sculpture itself unique is its three dimensionality. It can not only be seen, but also touched and held. It is a solid, tangible volume that becomes a presence which must be confronted rather than merely something to be viewed. Sculpture is made to be touched, for touching confirms what the eye sees and sculpture is an art of confirmation. Its substance is shape rather than color, consolidation instead of expansion, concentration in place of experimentation.

This is not meant to infer that sculpture should be neat, slick, and complete. Such an interpretation would ally it with the academic sculpture of the nineteenth century. On the contrary, each piece of work is, in a sense, a study. It is "unfinished" not because it isn't polished but be-

¹André Malraux, excerpts from The Psychology of Art, Department of Fine Arts, Colgate University, Hamilton, New York, 1962, (mimeographed).
cause the piece as a whole isn't complete, and never can be. For me, completeness implies a finality that produces sterile, precious sculpture in which nothing is left open to question.

The subject of the human head holds the most interest for me and is an unending study. I can never find out everything about it. Giacometti was once told that everybody knew what a head was and replied by saying, "No, nobody knows. We can only try to discover."\(^2\) This searching and discovering is the most important part of the work. It is the means, not the end that is important. If one works properly the results take care of themselves.

The sculptor's material has become more important in this century. My own preference, or perhaps prejudice, is for natural materials—clay, wood, and especially stone. Not only does stone provide the greatest challenge for me, but it also makes me aware of the importance of man's relationship to nature as well as his relationship with himself and other men. My attitude towards my medium is one of respect. It is more than just a tool or vehicle, but it does not determine the form of the sculpture. I impose my conception on the material and at the same time try to work within the limits of a particular stone.

As a foundation for sculpture drawing is important, and when the subject is the head and figure, drawing is a necessity. In the words of Henry Moore, "A moderate ability to 'draw' will pass muster in a landscape or a tree, but even the untrained eye is more critical of the human figure

because it is ourselves."\(^3\) And ourselves as the most important things in our lives, form the foundation from which we can reach out to better understand others. A drawing can be just as solid as a piece of sculpture and as well constructed without being a diagram. In this respect drawing can approach a three dimensional experience which leads the way to sculpture. I draw to express myself, to learn more about the head and figure, or just for the enjoyment of drawing itself. In any case, drawing is a constant. I will never reach a point where drawings will not be necessary or significant to my work either as a preliminary step for sculpture or as an expressive medium in itself.

The next step in my background involved clay modeling as the first three dimensional experience and one that I plan to return to over and over again. Modeling is important not only because the work can be built up piece by piece, but also because it can be easily destroyed and rebuilt. It is a more spontaneous medium and lends itself to exploration.

Craftsmanship is perhaps the least important facet of sculpture for as with all the technical aspects of art it can be learned. It is important, however, as a means of becoming more involved with the material, as a helpmate towards freer expression, and as discipline.

Craftsmanship is necessary to a degree in order to give form to the artist's imagination. His imagination is helpless without the means to put it into effect.

Knowledge of the material, its unique qualities and limitations, and the acceptance of those limitations, allows the artist to make full use of it.

Discipline and preparation are, in a way, synonymous. Discipline, whether as a study of craftsmanship or the human figure, is the same as preparing one's self for a fuller and more lasting expression. Ivan Mestrovic, who felt the demise of traditional discipline in modern art very strongly, once said,

The young people of today do not wish to study, so they will not learn anatomy or carving. Money is what they want, and freedom, but they do not prepare themselves for either. They feel no reverence for art, so their work will not endure.4

I don't believe in years of tediously detailed anatomy lessons. Rather whatever anatomy is necessary should be given according to the student's ability to control it. Anatomy can become an integral part of a work without overwhelming it. But the fact remains that Mestrovic hit squarely upon the lack of a strong foundation in many students. Not only is the lack of a starting place missing in many cases, but also missing is the desire for any such basis. Unfortunately, efforts to stop this trend seem to be becoming more and more rare. Instead it is perhaps the common occurrence when "...mere flair is confused with disciplined growth, when it is really only a continuation of infantile or juvenile release."5 It may be that an outlook towards the human figure as a vital and dynamic source would add a new direction and energy to much of today's art.

The present age of abstraction holds valuable lessons, lessons which can be learned and put to use. It is not my position to cling to naturalism. Detailed portraits hold no interest for me. I believe that abstract shapes can be used to point up the main concern of a piece of sculpture. In this way they do not become ends in themselves, but means to an end. In the words of Leonard Baskin,

I do not close my eyes to the great formal discoveries of the modern movement. On the contrary, my desire is to learn those lessons and to complete them to my purpose.  

My purpose is to use more or less abstract forms as foils for the head in order to make the head more important and dramatic. In my thesis work (which will be discussed in more detail later) the drape and hair mass serve this purpose in the Sienna stone as do the hair mass and chest shape in the white one. There are many areas in abstraction for a student to explore, but for me I doubt if they will ever be more than subordinate to the exploration of the head and figure.

The master sculptors discussed in the following pages cover a wide area. They reach from one world to its opposite and also include several steps along the way - from "realism" to abstraction, from the Western tradition to Oriental thought. Yet in spite of their differences these artists have a common starting place in the human figure. Rodin began with the head and figure and kept them as the center of his work, and Giacometti retains the head as the center of his efforts. One of Henry Moore's aims is to learn more about the human body, and even though they became unimportant for Brancusi, the head and figure formed the basis of his early work.

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AUGUSTE RODIN (1840-1917)

To Auguste Rodin the human head was important as a reflection of an individual's inner character. He believed that the spirit of his subject could be realized in his face if one looked critically and carefully enough. In Rodin's own words, "One has only to look at a human face to find a soul..."7 To him,

...no feature deceives; hypocrisy is as transparent as sincerity. The inclining of the brow, the least furrowing of the eyebrows, the tendency of a look may reveal the secrets of the heart."8

Rodin's concern was with the character of the individual. Unlike most of his predecessors and many of his contemporaries who thought of sculpture only in terms of idealized heroes, nymphs, and fawns, Rodin was interested in searching for the basic motivating feelings of a particular person. "Suffering, desire, tenderness interested him only in so far as they were expressive of an individual existence..."9 In this respect twentieth-century sculpture owes much to him. He formed a difficult and, until recently, unappreciated transition between two eras. He discovered that "...nothing has more importance for us than our own feelings, our own intimate personality."10 He had seen "...that each one of us ... places the center of the universe in his own soul."11 Rodin wished to release and reveal the hidden aspects of an individual character rather than look for a common bond among

7Somerville Story, Rodin, Oxford University Press, New York, 1939, p. 15.
8Ibid.
11Ibid.
men. He was interested in what he saw, not how he saw, and what he saw was hope or despair, joy or sorrow, conflict or serenity, desire or frustration. The search for these traits was perhaps Rodin's greatest challenge: "..... there is no artistic work which requires as much penetration as the bust and the portrait."\textsuperscript{12} The subject of the head itself, however, did not make up the greatest part of his efforts.

The totality of the human figure formed the center of Rodin's work. To him every muscle and gesture, every movement of the body, sharpened his picture of the person's inner self:

In reality there is not a muscle of the body which does not express the inner variations of feeling. Outstretched arms, an unconstrained body, smile with as much sweetness as the eyes or lips.\textsuperscript{13}

"The body always expresses the spirit whose envelope it is. And for him who can see, the nude offers the richest meaning."\textsuperscript{14} Truly the nude did offer the richest meaning for Rodin who brought it back to a meaningful place in art. He was constantly drawing and modeling from the models he kept moving around his studios. As they moved he would try to capture a pose that appealed to him or ask the model to hold a particular attitude while he quickly pushed the clay into shape. Rodin was a devoted student of the human figure all his life and in this area no separate part was as important as the overall attitude and movement of the whole body.

But Rodin gained most of his fame and fortune from doing portraits and busts. Many of these pieces, like "Madame X" for example, reveal the influ-

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 137.
\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., pp. 43-44.
\textsuperscript{14}Auguste, Rodin, \textit{Art}, Small, Maynard and Company, Boston, 1912, p. 165.
ences of the times which he later disregarded completely. This attempt to make stone into breathing flesh was one of the sculptor's early fascinations and compiled with the academic attitude towards material at the time. The idea was to simulate flesh, to impose skin-like qualities on the stone. This outlook strongly contrasts with the point of view of many sculptors today who feel that the material participates in the creation of a work of art. They work with the material instead of trying to manipulate it.

"The Age of Bronze" as an early figure seemed so life-like to some critics that they believed it could have been cast only directly from a live model! At this time Rodin felt it necessary to transform his material into something else: "You almost expect, when you touch this body to find it warm."15

"Every masterpiece of the sculptor has the radiant appearance of living flesh."16 This goal was especially apparent with stone. Rodin rarely carved himself. He gave clay models of his conceptions to craftsmen who transferred them into marble in the style of the times. Stone carving never held the challenge that clay modeling did for Rodin and many of the stones look it. They were probably the most popular of his works during his lifetime, but did the most to ally him with the lesser sculptors among his contemporaries. Rodin himself realized this and once said of his famous piece called "The Kiss", "Undoubtedly the intertwining...is pretty, but in this group I made no discovery. It is a theme treated according to the academic tradition."17

16 Ibid.
Rodin progressed from "Madame X" and "The Kiss" to what may have been the peak of his career with the "Monument to Balzac". He realized that imitation alone would not produce "good" sculpture. It became necessary for him to dramatize the expressive content of the face or figure at the expense of anatomical details. In Rodin's words:

First I made close studies after Nature, like "The Bronze Age". Later I understood that art required more breadth - exaggeration in fact, and my aim was then ... to find ways of exaggerating logically - that is to say by reasonable amplification of the modeling. That, also, consists in the constant reduction of the face to a geometrical figure, and the resolve to sacrifice every part of the face to the synthesis of its aspect.18

In the Balzac (1891-98) Rodin makes the dressing gown into an abstract, nearly cylindrical shape which does its own part in revealing the character of the writer as well as dramatizing the head. It is said that when Antoine Bourdelle saw the Balzac in Rodin's studio he felt that the hands were too distracting and Rodin immediately knocked them off. This probably couldn't have happened in the years before. The rough surface of the Balzac is also an innovation. "Sculpture is quite simply the art of depression and protuberance."19 Clay was the artist's favorite medium and became increasingly a means of exploration. In years to come Rodin would turn to more experimental sculpture and provide a stepping stone to twentieth century abstraction. He modeled suspended, dancing forms, and taking the human figure as the source of "... the mystery of life ..."20 he experimented in joining figures and

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hands in a piece of sculpture. To Rodin a hand could be seen in a figure or a figure in a leg or a tree in a figure. Everything stemmed from the center of his work - the human body. Rodin's legacy was recognized by Brancusi when he called the "Monument to Balzac", "The point of departure of modern sculpture."  

Alberto Giacometti's approach to the head in sculpture is one of personal encounter. In the faces of others he discovers himself. "Giacometti releases himself of his own image through that of others."22 This accounts for the basic similarities among his heads, for in a sense they are self-portraits. "By a dialectical process, the bust enables him to escape from figurative constraint and find through man his own nature and nature itself."23 Here instead of Rodin's attitude of delving into the inner life of an individual and expressing what he found, there is a man who looks into everyone with the same eye. In his own words, "I make a head to see how I see, to know how I see, not to make works of art."24 Giacometti wants to discover more about how he sees, not what he sees. He is concerned with finding out more about himself and humanity as a whole instead of with what is felt to be the essence of a particular person's character. In fact, "the more Giacometti questions their appearance, the more he disindividualizes them."25

The head remains the focus of Giacometti's work, but the human figure plays an important role. At first Giacometti stepped back from the model to reduce distractions, and therefore view the figure as a whole. When he did this, however, his work became elongated, lean and sparse. The distance he felt was necessary to see the total figure became a gulf, a gulf that surrounds his figures and maims and raves them ("Woman, Shoulder Broken"). Perhaps his gaunt figures more than his heads support his belief

23 Ibid.
that, "A work of art is an illusion. If you heighten the illusory quality, then you come closer to the effect of life."26

But for Giacometti nothing can equal the excitement he finds in the human head. "That is the greatest of adventures - to look at one face everyday and never fail to find something new in it."27 The heads of his brother, Diego, and his wife have been two of his favorite subjects. He has done Diego's head over 1000 times but the more recent ones satisfy him less than the first one which he did at the age of thirteen. Even in his figures, the head remains as the focal point,

As roads lead to a city, so the myriad lines that make up a Giacometti figure converge on the face. It is the burning center of his work.28

In spite of his intense concentration on the subject of the head, however, he feels his task of "representing nature" will never be finished. There is no such thing as success for Giacometti. There is only the great adventure of continuous searching. Not one piece of sculpture is ever completed. His work is perpetually in progress. As soon as a piece is taken away to be exhibited it loses all interest for him. "Eventually I have to let somebody take the piece away. It's merely an interruption. I begin all over immediately. I continue, I fail again."29 The one certainty in his life is that he knows he can never succeed in reproducing his vision of the head:

26 Ibid, p. 35.
Still the problem is to seize the whole. And that's precisely what entralls me - the very impossibility of it. If I could solve it, I would lose interest. Happily, there is no solution.\(^3\)\(^0\)

Each piece of work gives this sculptor only an idea for the next piece, and instead of answers provides only more questions.

Giacometti will never be able to reproduce his vision of reality. He knows that art is an illusion. He,... belongs to a generation that discovered the absurdity, the impossibility, that lies at the root of all artistic activity - and on them this discovery acted as a stimulant. They are, one might say, rock-bottom optimists. It is the road that matters, not the goal.\(^3\)\(^1\)

This search for the impossible is the greatest challenge and the intensity with which Giacometti approaches it stems from a deep sense of urgency - an urgency that made what was to be a temporary studio twenty years ago become a permanent one. This urgency in turn grew from the artist's first realization of his mortality. Since witnessing the slow death of a friend, Giacometti has always been aware of the imminence of death.

Giacometti's sculptures dramatize through stark, slashed figures and scared, ravaged faces the realization of the vast emptiness which separates men from themselves and each other. In 1946 he experienced a visual reality of this absurdity in a theater:

Suddenly, I ceased being able to follow what was happening on the screen. The people and objects on the screen became mere spots, black and white spots, without any meaning. I turned away from the screen and started looking at my neighbors. It was a completely unknown sight. The unknown, the

\(^{30}\)Ibid., p. 71.

mysterious was the reality around me, no longer what was going on on the screen. 32

Since then the direction of his art has become clear. "This awareness of the void that separates human beings, accentuates their dimension and condemns them to solitude, is the driving element of his creation."33 In the artist's own words:

If they feel the void around the head I shall have won. If I succeeded in painting the void behind the face, the abyss it opened would be fearful.34

It is this void that has torn at Giacometti's works and nearly devoured them (at one time he carried four years work in six match boxes!) It is also this emptiness that he accepts and dares to explore. There is nothing desperate in Giacometti's life or work. He is resigned to the impossibility of his task and asks only that he can continue to work on and on.

His heads, however, are not merely those of derelicts wandering in an indifferent world. Not only are they victims, but also survivors. Just as Giacometti himself lives with and survives the reality of personal isolation, so does the "Small Bust", for example. After realizing the possibility of the void perhaps man can bounce back again resigned and more able to reach out across the gap that separates him from his fellow man. Giacometti is concerned not only with man's alienation, but also with his common bonds. One of these bonds may be his ability to live on spirit alone. Certainly possessions are meaningless to this artist. His awareness of his mortality

32Ibid., p. 37.
34 Ibid.
is so great that he can't accept possessions of any kind. He feels too temporary. Giacometti's man is stripped to the core without the protection of material possessions. He is completely vulnerable, but he survives.

At every moment men gather together and separate, then draw near in an attempt to join each other again. In this way, they are endlessly forming and transforming living compositions of an unbelievable complexity. It is the totality of this life that I want to seize.35

The complete re-establishment of a meaningful relationship with an illusory world is impossible, but the effort to do so is a necessity.

Technically, Giacometti presses, carves, and gouges his pieces into shape. His technique fits his medium and his medium fits his purpose. His figures and heads become drawn and spare in spite of the sculptor's efforts. What was once promised as a six foot figure fit into a match box when it was finally delivered. The rough hewn surfaces of his work follow from the fact that what he has to say cannot be stated sleekly or prettily.

All of his heads, moreover, are painted or sculpted to be viewed head-on. In keeping with the forcefulness of what he has to say his heads assault the onlooker with the directness of a gunshot. This is not sculpture to be mused over from all sides, but sculpture that must be confronted head-on.

Yet, in spite of their ravaged appearance, the heads all seem to have an added height and stature that enables Giacometti's smallest pieces to seem larger than life-size. The neck and shoulder shapes have been given an added lift which makes them more than just isolated victims. In this respect perhaps his work points toward a renewal of strength and effort for man to resist the bonds of solitude.

HENRY MOORE (1898-)

The head as a separate entity has existed for Henry Moore only in relatively recent times. Since the late 1940's when Moore conceived of it as a "magical vessel" the head has been transformed into an independent structure. Previous to this time the head was merely a knob-like appendage in work that treated his two main themes - mother and child and the reclining figure. The head did become important in itself, however, as a "Sheltering Uterus" for the inner being of man.36 The helmet head series evoked the idea of a protective covering for this interior motivating and animating principle of the body, thus carrying over the mother and child theme.

Although only a small part of Moore's work (about one-tenth) concerns the head alone it is an important part of all of his work. When asked why the heads of his figures seemed so unimportant he replied:

Actually, for me the head is the most important part of a piece of sculpture. It gives the rest scale, it gives to the rest a certain human poise, and meaning, and it's because I think that the head is so important that often I reduce it in size to make the rest more monumental.37

In other words, perhaps if the head remained the same in relation to the rest of the body it would have little significance for Moore. As the first measure or sign of scale it is important because it then gives the rest of the figure significance. In his reclining figures Moore often reduces the head in proportion to the rest of the body and in the 1930's it became little more than an offshoot of the trunk. Yet later the head grew into an autonomous totality. According to Erich Neumann:

The motif of the head, its melting down as well as its enlargement beyond what the head normally signifies plays an important role in Moore's work. It is as if the emotional accent affected this part of the body more than any other.\footnote{Neumann, Op. cit., p. 36.}

Around 1940 Moore began experimenting with the subject of the head and gave shape to his idea of the body as a cavity and a vessel. The first heads of this period played the part of a protective shell, covering an independent form. They were made up of an abstract shape only partially enveloped by a helmet-shaped shell. They showed the most obvious influence of Moore's constant mother and child conception, and gave actual three-dimensional shape to the idea that man's soul is hidden behind his face. These heads became the forerunners of the more famous helmet heads.

A second series of heads about 1950 offered another way of approaching the head. "Head" is a hollow shell made of thin strips. It is an anonymous head that is only a mask concealing nothing. Perhaps here Moore sees man estranged from his rightful relationship to the world around him. To Moore this relationship is one of mother and child, man dependent on Nature. In the twentieth century man has become more dependent on science and technology and is constantly trying to control and surpass Nature. As long as this is continued man faces emptiness in his life. He becomes increasingly more concerned with power and ultimately with destruction than with the regeneration and renewal exemplified by Nature.

The helmet heads are all made up of two separate entities: small independent figures enclosed by the "helmet". In "Helmet Head #2" the
...soul dwelling 'in' the body is ... concretized in a new way, and the common human experience that in a person's face there is an inner being looking out through the eyes of the body has become plastic reality.\textsuperscript{39}

It may be that for Moore this statement itself is enough, but "Helmet Head #2" lends itself to a following up of his earlier heads. The mouth is obviously the outward manifestation of the inner figure, but the eyes provide the key to it. In what may be their terrified stare perhaps man realizes that he is losing control of his world, that technology has out-distanced the man, and that a new relationship between man and his environment is necessary.

Unlike the two previous sculptors discussed, only about one-tenth of Moore's work involves the head alone. However, he is a constant student of the human figure. One of the main objects of his work is, "... to learn and understand all that can be learned and understood about the human figure."\textsuperscript{40} This is the fundamental basis of Moore's work and every two or three months he takes several weeks and does life drawing. He believes that an ability to draw from life is a necessary prerequisite for a sculptor: "In my opinion, long and intense study of the human figure is the necessary foundation for a sculptor."\textsuperscript{41} Moore also believes that because of the subject the sculptor must not only draw, but draw well. "A moderate ability to 'draw' will pass muster in a landscape or a tree, but even the untrained eye is more critical

\textsuperscript{39}Ibid., p. 104.
\textsuperscript{40}Vera and John Russell, "Moore Explains His Universal Shapes", The New York Times Magazine, November 11, 1962, p. 60.
of the human figure because it is ourselves.\textsuperscript{42}

But Moore's concern lies more with man's relationship to Nature than with his relationship with other men. For him Nature is not alien or just indifferent but an intimate part of man's life and important to his awareness of himself. The reclining figure is one of Moore's recurrent subjects because it can be related to landscape more readily than a standing one. Moore relates the human figure to basic shapes which exist in Nature. This is one of his main objectives:

... to reestablish... the universal truths of our emotional life in terms of, 'those universal shapes to which everybody is subconsciously conditioned and to which they can respond if their conscious control does not shut them off.'\textsuperscript{43}

These archetypal shapes Moore discovers in rocks, water-worn pebbles, trees, sea shells, and many other things. They are not perfect, symmetrical forms for they have lost their symmetry in their reaction to the elements and growth. They suggest shapes to him for his work - shapes which have an original vitality:

Sometimes I do things which are ... probably more tender in their point of view ... but other times, mostly it's a power. It's what appealed to me as a young man about Mexican sculpture - its terrific strength, its terrific stony tension and vitality.\textsuperscript{44}

This energy is to Moore what beauty was to the Greek or Renaissance man:

For me a work must first have a vitality of its own. I do not mean a reflection of the vitality of life, of move-

\textsuperscript{42}Ibid.
ments, 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 subject it may represent.45

Moore's point of view places man and Nature together, "for man and rock, the animate and the inanimate are an expression of the same mysterious force, they are exposed to the onslaught of the same trials."46

The sculptor's treatment of his materials corresponds with his belief in the common bond between man and Nature. The material participates in the creation of the work.

Every material has its own individual qualities. It is only when the sculptor works direct, when there is an active relationship with his material, that the material can take part in the shaping of an idea.47

His conviction is one of truth to material. He searches for forms natural to the material by studying objects in Nature and many times ideas for pieces are suggested by the objects he studies. Establishing a vital relationship with the carving is important. The stone or wood is not merely an object onto which the sculptor imposes his conceptions, but a unique object in Nature like man himself which is to be worked with rather than overcome. The sculptor must remain in control, but not in conflict.

The "Memorial Figure", for example, in many ways resembles a landscape. The various parts become mountains, shores, and valleys. The "Head" shows the influence of Moore's observation of the hollow shape of sea shells and perhaps the helmet idea was suggested by the artist's fascination with the mystery of caves.

46 Ibid., p. iv.
47 Ibid., p. x.
CONSTANTIN BRANCUSI (1876-1957)

For Constantin Brancusi the subject of the human head is a shape. It is a shape close to that of the primal egg form to which it can be reduced.

As one of the most unusual sculptors of the twentieth century, Brancusi believed in natural forms similar to Henry Moore. The major difference is perhaps the one which separates the Eastern and Western halves of the world. Although Moore's work is in general more complex than Brancusi's, "... its complexity proceeds from its humanity - its involvement in human destiny." Brancusi's will to reduce an object to its essence is, on the other hand, based in detachment: "There is an aim in all things. In order to attain to it one must become detached from one's self." "I am no longer in this world, no longer attached to my person, I am far removed from myself among essential forms." His outlook towards Michelangelo provides the contrast between the two worlds on another level, "Michelangelo's threatening heads and contorted slaves seemed to him to be frightening and unnatural: As he once said, he would not like to sleep under the same roof in his studio with such creatures, but preferred to live with his gentle peaceful animals." It is hard to believe that Brancusi was once influenced by Rodin and that Rodin actually asked him to study with him in his studio. But the "Sleeping Muse" shows that Brancusi's early work did in fact owe much to Rodin. It included heads of children, figures, and even detailed anatomical

50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., p. 25.
To Brancusi, Rodin had made sculpture human again at a time when it was plagued with fleshy imitations of an idealized human form. The following two reproductions show the continuing progression towards the reduction of the form and the removal of extraneous details. The second "Sleeping Muse" shows the real break with naturalistic shape. The eyes, ears, and hair are barely suggested and the nose is greatly simplified. The features become shapes rather than eyes or ears. The shape of the head as a whole becomes more important. The "Blond Negress" is an example of the culmination of Brancusi's work. The head is completely simplified into universal shapes which transcend individuality and the physical world. Here is an example of the artist's definition of beauty as absolute equity or balance.\textsuperscript{52}

Taking as his basic philosophy the writings of an eleventh-century Tibetan monk - Milarepa - Brancusi believed that the loss of self was necessary in order to become part of a wider universe. In turn his work should provide liberation for the observer from physical attachments and reveal the harmony and serenity of spiritual calm. Brancusi was "... a man who has come to terms with the earth and creation, who has lived close to nature, and has discovered spiritual equilibrium, a living calm of the soul."\textsuperscript{53}

This is the message he wished to pass on to mankind - the possibility of spiritual "deliverance" and absolute harmony. There is no conflict, anxiety, or even drama for Brancusi. There is only the attempt to be one with universals and this transcendant harmony is brought about by "...constantly re-

newed meditation and concentration on what is essential."  

The human head played an increasingly smaller role as Brancusi's work progressed. More and more he turned to animals for his subject matter. As creatures of nature without the confusion created by consciousness and the burden of intellect they provided a unified subject.  

The head was used, however, and because it is closely related to the egg form it is fundamental to the sculptor's point of view. The egg shape is important to much of Brancusi's work as a symbol of renewal and regeneration. It "... embodies a mysterious inner growing: it is the force of developing life...."  

The egg takes on its unique shape by the natural processes of its growth. In this way also the work of art takes form itself as the artist releases his creative energy on the material. The material here as a natural object plays a major part in the creation of the sculpture. Direct carving is a necessity, for the medium and the sculptor merge. In Brancusi's own words, "Your hand thinks and follows the thoughts of the material."  

When he works he is completely relaxed. He is in a spiritual state of harmony. He prepares himself — something that he feels is more difficult than the work itself — and then goes to the material in a state of calm. He explores all the possibilities of his material as he works and without previous

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55 Ibid., p. 29.
57 Ibid., p. 22.
drawings or studies. He attempts to reveal or unsheath the inherent characteristics of the material.

Here also polishing becomes an integral part of the sculpting, not merely a decorative afterthought. The fine polishing that is characteristic of many of Brancusi's pieces results in bronzes that reflect around their whole surface and stones which exude an inner glow and seem to be transparent to a depth of several inches. Not all of his work is polished. It depends on the qualities of the specific medium, but the ones that are polished seem to have an additional transcendency or unreality. As Giedion-Welcker says, "Their transparency becomes transcendence."\(^5^8\) Thus the surface treatment not only maintains simplicity, but becomes an integral part of the sculptor's philosophy.

\(^5^8\)Ibid., p. 25.
AUTHOR'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE HEAD AND THEIR APPLICATION

The human head has always been more important to me than the figure as a whole because I believe it reflects most directly what man is, his spirit, and his condition. It becomes a key to whether he is a part of his world, or a stranger, helpless or in control, able to confront himself and his world or barely salvaging an existence.

The problem of the head is one of personal confrontation and provides the greatest challenge for me. It is a way of seeing, not an exercise in drawing, shape, or texture. Of course, as a student some of it must be these things, but what makes a work of art rather than an exercise or a gathering of information is the stating of a personal point of view. Decoration and design alone don't interest me.

Achieving a likeness isn't one of my goals either. I want to gather all the information I can about the structure of the human head, but I want to put this information to my own use. I am not interested in "capturing" an individual's unique characteristics and don't believe that I could even if I wanted to. All of my portraits would look similar, for the desire to express myself would overrule the details of what I saw. I am not concerned with revealing the basic traits of a person's character. Rather I look for a common denominator or, if I don't actually look for it, it seems to be obvious in the outcome of my work. The heads involved in the thesis are just that. They were not meant to resemble anyone.

Technically, the two stones are a culmination of what I have learned so far. I am curious about the structure of the head and believe that I will never learn all there is to know about it.

But the problem isn't merely to make heads, or a head with a neck or
a head with a neck and shoulders. Instead I try to magnify the significance of the head through the use of "supporting shapes", so to speak, which in themselves help me to express myself.

In the draped head, for example, the shape of the drape acts as a foil or a contrasting element. Hopefully, this points up the head itself and increases the interest and variety of the sculpture as a whole. The same thing applies to the hair mass which cannot be just slapped on the head as an afterthought. As part of the sculpture as a whole it can also become a sculptural mass in itself which serves to further dramatize the head. The shoulders also provide a flow to the head free from major distractions as well as point up the tension and action of the turn of the head. Distractions, in this case, involve the use of details or embellishments which, from my point of view, would disrupt the main interest and direction of a work of art.

The total shape of a sculpture is just as important as that of its individual parts. In the robed head the overall irregular, triangular shape helps to form a solid condensed sculptural mass. It also adds to the height of the piece and to its vitality by providing tension between the head and shoulder area.

In the white stone the abstracted chest shape hopefully provides interest to the whole piece while at the same time staying simple enough to provide a flow upwards, thus dramatizing the head itself. The hair mass again forms a background for the head. Height is also important and is accentuated by the chest shape and the neck.

The surface treatment of both stones was meant to develop contrast. I haven't found polishing to be an integral part of either piece, and so far
for me is an unnecessary and often dangerous refinement, especially for the student. The glossy smooth surface that results is usually taken to be the sign of a completely refined "professional" piece of sculpture. But surface can easily become an end in itself, thus making shape insignificant, and shape, not surface, is the most important in sculpture.

In developing an idea for these pieces I went from the idea to drawings, then to clay studies. Just as the drawings are starting places for the clay studies so are the studies a beginning to the stone. The clay models provide the basic shape and size of the stone, but they do not predict the finished work. In both stones the angle of the head was changed and the hair mass was either started from the beginning or expanded. The heads themselves were not developed in the studies and the problem of texture was left open. The use of calipers or a pointing machine have no place in carving. The object is not to make a duplicate of a study, but to create a piece of sculpture that has an energy and vitality of its own.
THE DEVELOPMENT OF TWO STONES
CONCLUSIONS

There is one main conclusion that developed during the research for this thesis and that is that all four artists discussed have the same starting point - the human head and figure. In spite of the wide variety that their work represents all began with the study of the human form and all except Brancusi made it the focal point of their art.

By their example it is obvious that the study of the figure can lead in many directions. It can become the center of an artist's efforts or a jumping off point.

In any case, it does provide a starting place and a basis from which to grow and develop. This beginning can be interesting and exciting, simply because it involves ourselves. It is because I believe that art is a deeply personal experience that this is important. Also, I feel that a renewed faith in the study of the human form and its possibilities can add a needed freshness and vitality to much of contemporary art.
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