

# Statements by Sculptors

## CECILE ABISH

*Duration of the Sculpture is Possession of a Surface*

The surfaces upon which I work do not belong to me. The surfaces are the property of institutions, galleries, and individuals. When finished, the sculpture I build cannot be separated from the surface. The materials I use, boards, marbles, mark the surface. The surface enters the work. In working on the sculpture I temporarily take possession of the surface, and alter the surface's intrinsic relationship to the other adjacent surfaces. Prior to building the sculpture, the surface is called by another name. It is called the floor, or the ground. The clearings in the finished sculpture are formed by boundaries that also delineate a set of new surfaces, and the possibility for a new vision.

The thousands of marbles add a hard but penetrable surface to the surface . . . this new surface is an omnidirectional translucent flowing surface that does not obliterate the view of the surface beneath, it only obliterates the meaning of the word, floor. The floor has become part of the sculpture. In this respect building sculpture is also a political act of taking possession of a surface . . . and of using surfaceness to give shape to the sculpture. The sculpture is, in a sense, something that the surface's owner can only accept after relin-

quishing the word, floor. Everywhere surfaces await the coming of sculpture. The coming of the new vision, as floors will drop away, and the boundary lines will be drawn.

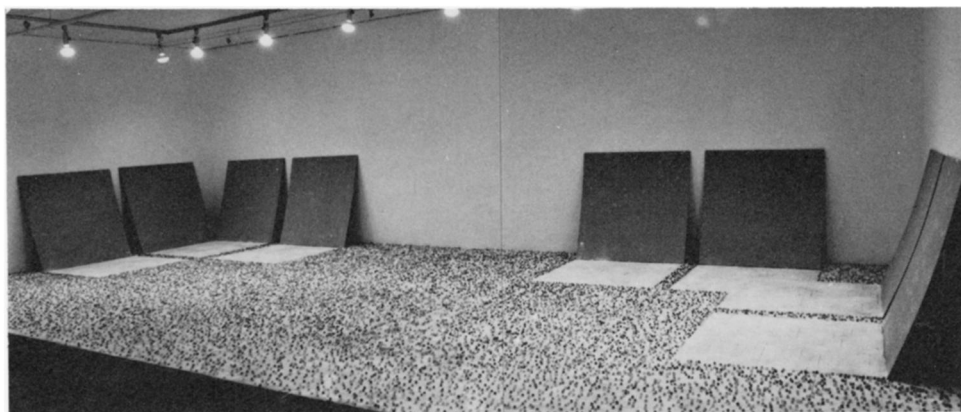
Cecile Abish's sculpture was exhibited at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, Oct. 15–Nov. 5, 1975.

## CARL ANDRE

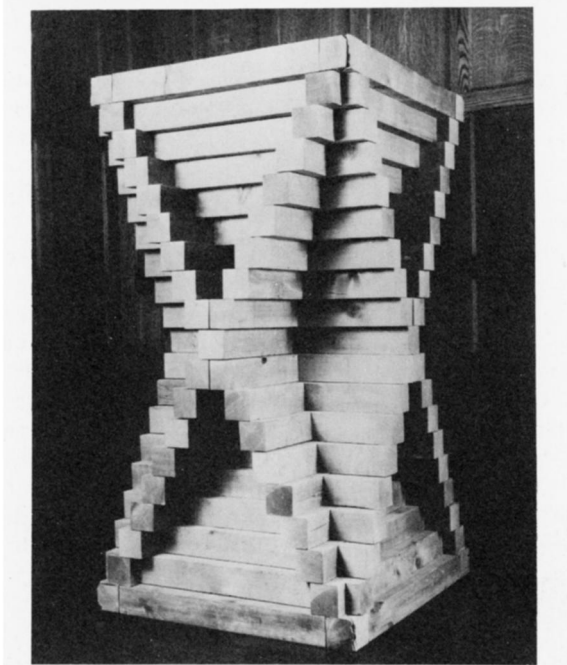
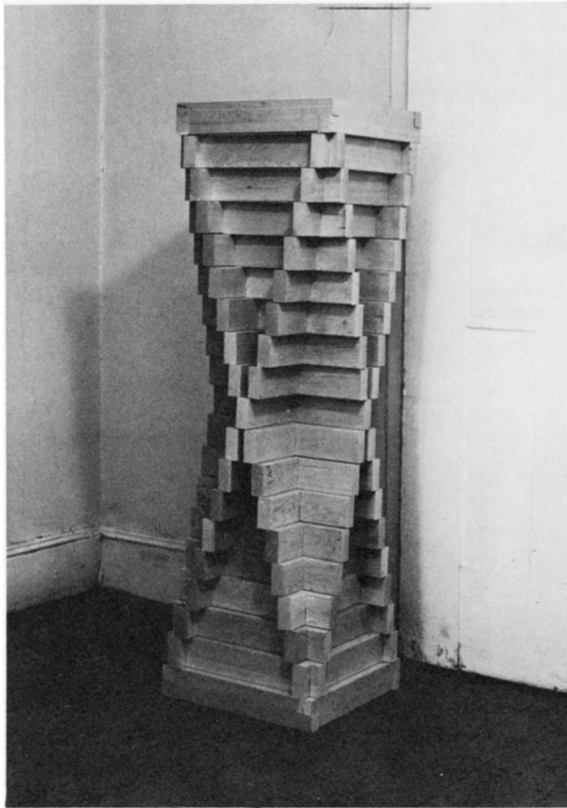
*Versions of Witness: A Note on Sculpture and Scholarship*

Wayne Andersen in his recent book *American Sculpture in Process: 1930/1970* (Boston, New York Graphic Society, 1975) includes a brief discussion of my work, especially *Cedar Piece*, 1964. His assertions as to the etiology of that work nowhere account for the fact that *Cedar Piece*, 1964, is a remaking in 4" × 4" cedar of a destroyed 1959 *Pyramid* originally cut in identical configuration in 2" × 4" fir. The origins of *Cedar Piece* must be found not in 1964 but in 1959.

Professor Andersen incorrectly states that I "started out as a painter" whereas I began to make art seriously in 1958 as a sculptor cutting into wood after the inspiration of Brancusi.



Cecile Abish, *How 4 into 4 into 3, homosote, marbles, baking soda*, 1975. (Michael Walls Gallery, N.Y.)



Carl Andre, *Cedar Piece*, 1959 (remade in 1964).

There is no way to overstate my debt to Frank Stella but, contrary to Professor Andersen, I was never his classmate at Andover and did not meet Stella until five years after I had left there. It was in fact through Hollis Frampton and his consuming interest in Ezra Pound that I came to study and admire the works of Brancusi and it was Frampton who introduced me to Stella in 1958 after I had started cutting my first pieces.

In 1959 Pop art had not yet emerged as a discrete cultural

phenomenon and when it did I felt, and continue to feel, repelled by it. The referents of Pop art do not lie in industrial production at all but in the chants and fetishes of sale produced by commercial art studios in the service of packaging and marketing. The works of Duchamp, Rauschenberg, Johns, and Warhol have never been sources of inspiration for my work although I know Stella was greatly influenced by Johns in his early paintings. It was Stella who introduced me to those artists of our time, David Smith, Pollock, de Kooning, Reinhardt, and Newman whose works represent to me the level of extraordinary aspiration which makes art worth doing.

When I was cutting the *Pyramids* in 1959, Judd, Morris, Flavin, and LeWitt and their works were unknown to me and I am not sure any of them had as yet undertaken works in what could be recognized as their mature styles. Since they certainly were unlikely to have heard of me before 1964, no case whatever can be made for priority or innovation or influence in the *Pyramids*. Art is not, in any event, a babble of conflicting claims to the invention of new ways to play old games. My only claim for *Cedar Piece* is that, except for the change from 2" x 4" to 4" x 4" stock, it owes nothing to events or works or writings subsequent to 1959.

Carl Andre has most recently exhibited at Sperone Westwater Fischer, New York, the Ace Gallery, Vancouver, and the Dan Weinberg Gallery, San Francisco.

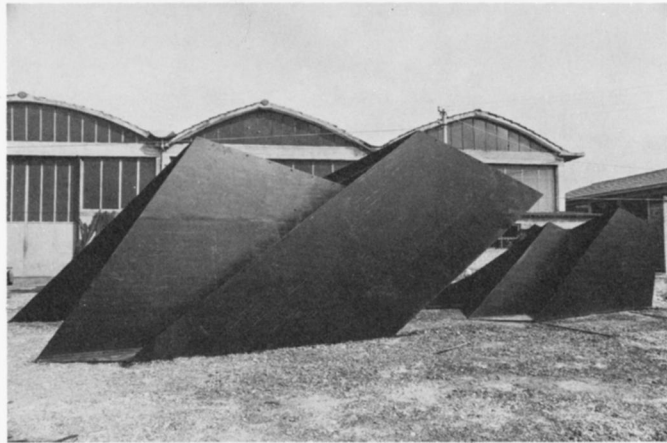
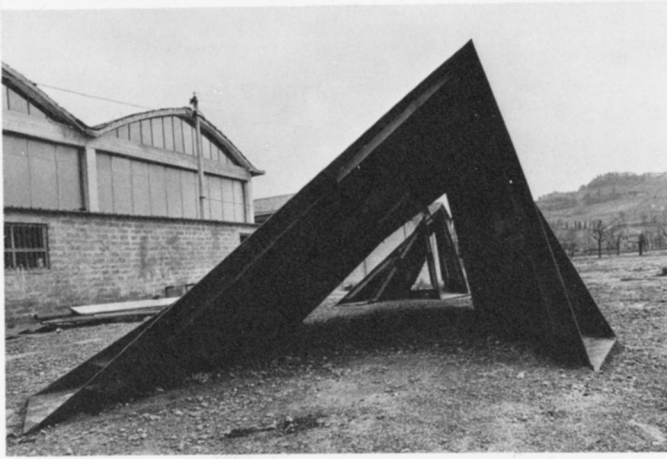
## BEVERLY PEPPER

If I talk about the formal problems that involve me, it is because the abstract language of form that I have chosen has become a way to explore an interior life of feeling. In this way, my forms mirror an emotional reality. The problems which I have consistently tied to my work concern the question of sculptural illusion. Put briefly, I wish to make an object that has a powerful physical presence, but is at the same time inwardly turned, seeming capable of intense self-absorption.

The works of highly polished stainless steel made in the late 1960s achieved this kind of dualism, primarily through the mirrorlike finish of their surfaces. Those surfaces acted to emphasize the actual density and weight of the steel. At the same time, they made the physical bulk of the sculpture withdraw behind a screen of reflections.

Under certain light conditions and from certain angles this reflectivity picks up the sculpture's environment—sky, grass, earth. This causes the work almost to disappear, so that all that remains visible is the network of blue enamel line that indicates the interior faces of the forms. From other angles, the surfaces reflect into one another, causing geometries to appear which are not part of the physical format of the work. But even though these internal reflections are illusions, they prefigure the actual shape the crystalline forms will appear to have when viewed from another angle. In this way the reflected illusions seem to be the sculpture's *anima*—appearing to generate its total being, from within the shifting depth of the mirror.

Reflection may be the most obvious way to generate illusions, but there are other ways that are equally direct. One of these is forced (and therefore false) perspective, which I began to concentrate on in the early 1970s. *Exodus* (1972), for



Beverly Pepper, *Alpha*, 1974.

example, is a large stainless steel pyramid which contains a pyramidal void. Because of the eccentric relationship between solid and void, the position of the inner space becomes highly illusive. From an opening on one facade of the work, the void appears to be tunneling in a different direction from the one revealed by the other side of the sculpture. So when the viewer actually moves around to that other side of the work and sees another triangular opening, it is not clear that the two openings into the inside of the volume are related. The illusion is that somewhere inside the sculpture the continuity of the inner form has been disrupted, or diverted from one configuration to another.

It is the perspective relationship between mass and void that causes this apparent shift. The effect of this is that the inner reaches of a very simple geometrical form seem mysteriously to create relationships whose logic is not clear to the viewer but is instead very private. A result of this mysteriousness is that the massiveness of the physical form is suspended as the viewer tries to correlate the flat shapes formed on the front and back of the sculpture.

In my recent work I have tried to maintain this precarious balance between the physically self-evident and the sense of an elusive inner logic. In *Alpha* (1974) I used four triangular sheathes—joined to form two pairs—to give an intense experience of the generative power of the interior, from which the sheathes develop or peel away. As in *Exodus*, we have here two parts of a work which are obviously related to one another but are puzzlingly incapable of logical fusion.

As I think about the decisions I made while working on *Alpha*, I now realize they came from the same emotional source that has informed all my work. I want the sculptures to seem to be creating relationships which are very simple yet, at the same time, are beyond the viewer's grasp. I want it to seem as though an inexplicable coherence works inside the sculpture to generate external aspects of its physical being which are always unexpected, because unpredictable.

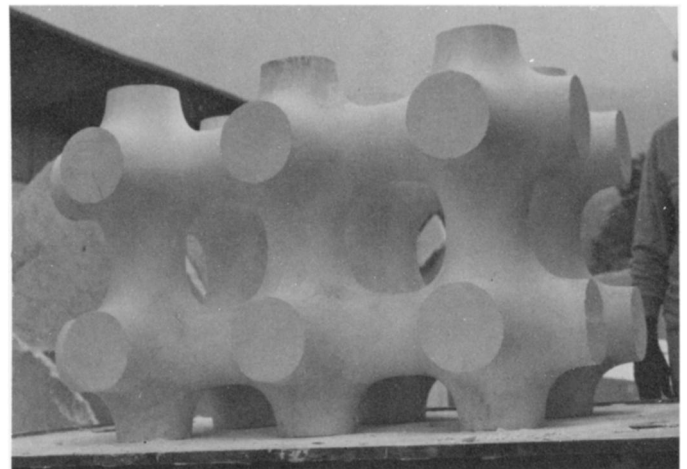
**Beverly Pepper** has received an NEA grant for a monumental sculpture for Dartmouth College. Her sculpture was recently seen at the Metropolitan Museum and Art Center, Miami, and will be shown in San Diego, San Francisco, Portland, and Seattle.

## TONY SMITH

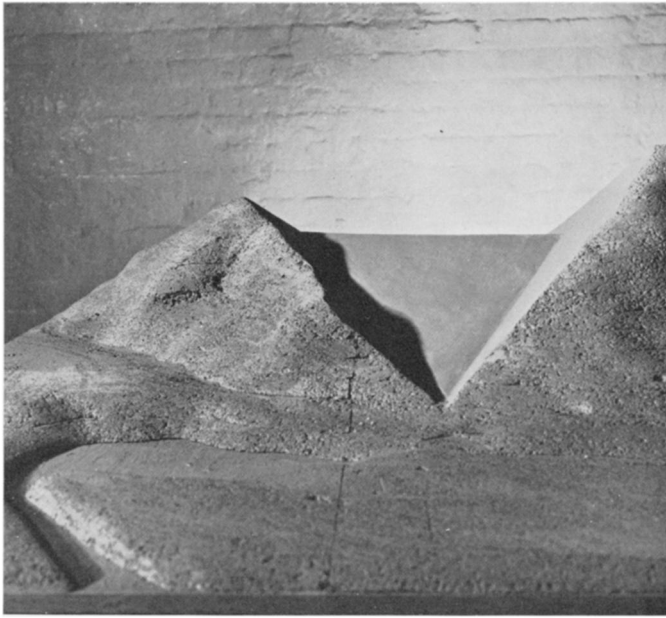
Unrealized projects are always present, and in any attempt at a summary (particularly at this time of year) they rattle around a bit: the church, the Roosevelt Memorial, *Round Mountain Cut*, *Hubris*, *Lunar Ammo Dump*, and the granite-paved, downtown, square, city block for Minneapolis are as valid as they ever were.

The model for *Round Mountain Cut* will be cast in bronze, and this straightforward scheme will thus assume a Surrealist character not intended in the original conception. Mock-ups of *Hubris*, and two related pieces, *81 More*, and *Five by Five*, will be shown at several museums in northern Europe during the spring and summer next year. I shall be forced to build a private model of the Minneapolis square, framed with a symbolic sidewalk, so that real people (become giants because of the reduced scale of the pavement itself) can trace out vectors in an imaginary polis. The array of prisms for *Lunar Ammo Dump* cannot be reduced, and requires the actual siting on Walter Netch's Chicago Circle Campus to make sense.

Current work follows several tracks. Besides three very large and more or less typical structures now being fabricated, others take directions established in the last few years. There are studies already carved, or now being carved, in Carrara marble at Pietrasanta. These are derived from Fermi surfaces, and although conforming to modular grids, their aspects are more voluptuous than those of previous work. These pieces are intended for indoors, both for convenience



Tony Smith, study for a Fermi surface, 1973.



Tony Smith, *Round Mountain Cut*, 1968.

in analysis and for protection from our corrosive atmosphere. They are, therefore, of domestic size, not much more than a meter in their smallest dimension, so that they can be taken through doors and not overload the floors. One of these sculptures, which is being carved now, began as a plasticene model about 6" × 6" × 9". This was cast in bronze in 1973. In the summer of the following year it was enlarged about seven times in plaster. It is now being cut in stone. Eventually it will be made of inflated vinyl 56' × 56' × 84'. This enormous size is required so that people can walk under the arches in order to experience the interior with a minimal awareness of the outer environment.

A similar array of units based on the three axes of cubes assembled in two tiers of six each uses straight lines and flat planes instead of the curved Fermi surfaces. The units came from a sort of three-dimensional cross with an open center which I did many years ago. The replication of this unit in a grid is similar to the structure of one of the sponges. A version in which the cubes are 32" on a side, giving overall dimensions of 64" × 64" × 96", is being cast in bronze in Pietrasanta. A large version in steel, about 32' high, will be fabricated in this country.

About two dozen pieces are being cut at this time from South African black granite. These are about three feet long and are composed of flat surfaces. They are not, however, structured by crystal lattices. They are made by joining con-

gruent planes of regular solids or parts of solids. These sculptures are extremely simple, almost featureless, and reveal nothing but their positions, except through long exposure.

These pieces came about because of dissatisfaction with earlier works when placed in architectural settings. The geometrical character of these earlier sculptures seemed most compatible in landscaped areas, on lawns, against trees, in situations where their large, simple and clear planes were seen in contrast to the open spaces, or the smaller grain and irregular patterns, of nature. But in my hands the crystal lattices tended to produce linear forms which emphasized silhouettes and openings when they were placed in more urban environments. What was plastic in suburbia, became graphic in the city. Angles in these configurations created a visual static when seen in relation to the columns and spandrels of contemporary buildings.

I wanted to make the new work so condensed that it compelled attention, not only to its position in the general environment, but to a focus, a magnetic center, or a center of gravity, within itself. These low-lying, huddled structures have been based on economical relationships of planes and masses with emphasis on the material substance rather than the surrounding or interwoven space.

Many paper maquettes were made in developing these exercises, and from these about two dozen were selected as models in masonite to be used as patterns in cutting the granite. But, as their number increased, they appeared to lose some of the weight which had been intended. They were made twice, and then three times their original size. It is the last group which is now being cut in stone.

A longer range, probably final, project was suggested by the Philadelphia College of Art show of labyrinths. I shall first make a corrugated cardboard structure similar to the fabrications for Expo '70 in Osaka and the Art and Technology show in Los Angeles. But the cavelike configuration is not suited to public places, or to the attendance of large crowds. So I want to create a maze from the same components but for a smaller space (in Chicago, spring '76). This would be an experiment on the way to a large walk-through, and crawl-through, curved-surface structure in topological space, and modeled on the enveloping and enclosed volumes of the labyrinth of the ear. The material would be translucent plastic formed in three-dimensional approximations of Klein surfaces. It would rest in a semi-depressed area somewhat like that of the crypt in the Vierzehnheiligen.

**Tony Smith** won the Distinguished Teacher of Art Award presented by the CAA last year.