

LAWRENCE ANTHONY



R E T R O S P E C T I V E

Midlife Riders
wood and acrylic paint
1976
Lent by Dr. and Mrs. Bland W. Cannon

LAWRENCE ANTHONY
R E T R O S P E C T I V E

SEPTEMBER 13 - OCTOBER 26, 1996
RHODES COLLEGE, CLOUGH-HANSON GALLERY

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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No exhibition can take place without the generosity of the collectors who allow their walls and homes to be emptied so that the show can come into being. My thanks to Mrs. Amelia H. Anthony, Lawrence Anthony, Dr. and Mrs. Bland W. Cannon, Stephen B. Crump, Mrs. Ted Faiers, Jessie and Harold Falls, Jack and Anna Farris, Freddi and Joe Felt, Helmuth and Betty Gilow, May Maury Harding, Pinkney and Janice Herbert, Mr. and Mrs. Tom Howard, Barbara and Pitt Hyde, Al and Carol LaRocca, Mary Ann Lazar, Dr. and Mrs. Myron Lewis, Joanne Markell, Jim and Suzanne McDearman, Charlotte and

Michael McLain, Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Fred and June Neal, Mrs. Cooper Y. Robinson, Sally and John Thomason, Professor and Mrs. James F. Williamson, and the private collectors who wish to remain anonymous.

Deep thanks go to Anne Anthony whose memory provided so many dates, titles, and potential lenders. And finally to Lon, who first made the paintings and sculptures, and then worked very hard to help pull this show together. He spent hours on the phone with me, and many more on the computer answering my countless E-mail messages. Throughout, he brought his humor, stories, memories, and many creative abilities to the project. I couldn't have done it without him.

Marina Pacini
Director
Clough-Hanson Gallery

FOREWORD

In the middle of our campus stands a large multfigured sculpture titled, appropriately enough, *Campus Life*. I walk by it almost every day, and with each pass I focus on a different figure. Sometimes it's the student on a skateboard who I presume is hurrying to class. At other times I empathize with the man resting on his rake, or acknowledge the woman pointing her camera at me. Occasionally I take the time to encircle the sculpture, allowing my eye to play over the dogs and pigeons underfoot, the professors chatting, more students on the way to and from class, even the musician toting his guitar. Installed in 1977, *Campus Life* nearly marks the midpoint of Lon Anthony's career at Rhodes. As is typical of so much of his work, the sculpture documents the look and sensibility of its time, while also celebrating human community as a dynamic, charming, ever-changing, and inclusive structure.

From the perspective of 1996, we can see that the idea of community expressed in *Campus Life* defined Lon's involvement with Rhodes, as well as with Memphis itself. From his arrival on campus in the fall of 1961 until his retirement last year, he was a central presence in our collective life. He guided the Department of Art through countless changes, including several gallery spaces, various studios, many departmental faculty, and even more students. He remained unflagging in his commitment to integrating the study of art with the broader curriculum of the college, while also insisting that the production and study of art was an all-consuming passion that could sustain one throughout life. Professor Jameson Jones, the dean who hired Lon, recently reflected that his great contribution to the college was the manner in which he demonstrated the substantial intellectual and spiritual interrelatedness between studio art and the liberal arts.

In this regard Lon's story was part of a larger narrative of assimilating the visual arts into the academy in the quarter century

following the end of World War II. At the very moment he began teaching, it was still unclear whether art and academe might be well matched. Artists worried about how creativity could be assessed—let alone taught to others—and how their often personal vision would be supported, nurtured, and interpreted. Administrators wondered how to accommodate the sometimes unusual needs of creative individuals. As it turned out, the match was a good one, both nationally and here at Rhodes. Sometimes anarchic and Rabelaisian, Lon's presence on our campus demonstrated just how important it was to keep our community open to the prospect of new experiences and other perspectives.

Now, as we begin a new chapter in the history of our department, we find that we have to do so without the guidance of Lon Anthony. But what we do have is a remarkable legacy—represented at Rhodes by *Campus Life*—reminding us of the importance of maintaining community bonds and keeping our focus wide. It is an impressive legacy, as this retrospective so clearly demonstrates, and I hope that we can continue to work in the spirit he so generously bequeathed to us.

David McCarthy
Chair, Department of Art

THE ART OF STORYTELLING

Lawrence Anthony's sculpture ranges from biblical and mythological subjects to studies of contemporary life and romance. Underpinning the work, whether of a specific subject or of a single figure, is a strong narrative component. That Lawrence is a consummate verbal storyteller comes as no surprise. Many of his sculptures seem to have stepped right out of one of his tales. Attempting to find the best way to tell his stories, he has experimented with a variety of materials and methods. Never content to work with one medium, he has since his days in college moved back and forth between a variety of sculptural techniques. Regardless of his medium, he predominantly works in a whimsical representational style that is best suited to his narratives. The interest in people and materials, however, dates from his youth.

Lawrence, who was born in Florence, South Carolina, in 1934, became interested in art at a young age. He recalled, "I had started drawing very early. There never seemed to be much paper around, so that most of my work was confined to the blank pages in the front and back of gothic novels my parents received from the Book of the Month Club. I'd draw Hitler and Hirohito with American bombs

falling all around them, and then throw in a picture of my ideal woman, Veronica Lake. Right from the beginning, my subjects were figures."¹ Early caricatures of criminals such

as *Firey Eyes Frankie* and *Toupé Tommy* are clearly related to his later work with their simplified forms and bold outlines. His adult experiments with materials are also grounded in earlier investigations. "I can recall taking a hot poker from the fireplace and making carvings on the mantelpiece. I also left interesting impressions on my uncle's hallway banister with the aid of a screwdriver. I don't know that my family loved art, but they were remarkably tolerant."²

From these early beginnings, Lawrence inexorably moved toward pursuing a career as an artist. During his junior year at Washington and Lee University in Virginia, which did not offer a major in art, Lawrence decided to quit school to become a painter. A concerned dean talked him into staying by designing a special degree course in fine arts for him that included comparative literature, some art history, and painting classes taught by artist-in-residence Marion Junkin. Upon graduation

in 1956, he went to work in the engineering design department of a paper com-



Firey Eyes Frankie
pencil on paper, c.1945
Lent by Mrs. Amelia H. Anthony



Toupé Tommy
pencil on paper, c.1945
Lent by Mrs. Amelia H. Anthony

pany. At his parents' for dinner one night, he met a professor from the University of Georgia who suggested that Lawrence study with Lamar Dodd, chair of the Art Department at Georgia. Soon afterwards, Lawrence accompanied his father to a funeral five miles from Athens. He took his portfolio and went to meet Dodd in hopes of gaining admission to the program. When Dodd discovered that Lawrence had studied with his old friend Junkin, he accepted him without even looking at the work.

Lawrence entered the M.F.A. program as a painter in January of 1958. He quickly ran into problems, though, because his painting professors, most of whom were working in the current abstract expressionist style, were not supportive of his interest in figuration. *My Town* (1961) is a later example of the compromise he crafted: a recognizable cityscape is built from abstract planes of color with black lines picking out the details of roofs, windows, and doors. The loose blocks of color that form the sky are typical of the painterly language of abstraction in the early 1960s. In his second semester, he was steered by Leonard DeLonga—the one sympathetic painter who was experimenting with sculpture himself—toward sculpture and the last half of his time in Athens was spent welding. Although the metal he worked with came in odd shapes that easily could have been turned into nonobjective three-dimensional designs, his work remained figurative. Welded and made with crude tools, the resulting forms, although figurative, were distorted. In sculpture, however, Lawrence could pursue his interest without engendering the same criticism he encountered with his paintings.

After graduating in 1959, Lawrence spent a year traveling in Europe. Concentrating on looking at art, he made only a few drawings. During his time in England, he saw and was impressed with the work of Barbara Hepworth, Kenneth Armitage, and Henry Moore, among others. At the Royal College of Art he saw the experimentation with such

new materials as fiberglass and plastics, but oddly enough, used solely to imitate bronze. Lawrence realized that with these new materials he could create large-scale sculptures working by himself, without a foundry, and that he could introduce color by mixing pigment into polyester resin. Instead of bending steel and iron he could model in clay and plaster, both of which were easier to manipulate. When he returned to the United States, he started working in polyester resin producing such pieces as *Metamorphosis* (1965). After a few years, he gave up these new materials because they were so toxic.

In 1961 Lawrence moved to Memphis, began teaching at Southwestern at Memphis (now Rhodes College), and embarked on his professional career. Almost immediately he began exhibiting his work and winning prizes. In 1963, when he won the Goldsmith Purchase Award in the Eighth Annual Mid-South Exhibition, his sculpture *Bretons* entered the collection of the Brooks Memorial Art Gallery (now Memphis Brooks Museum of Art). As a result of the award, later that year he was given a one-person show at the gallery. He has exhibited widely in one-person and group shows ever since at such museums and galleries as the Arnold Finkel Gallery, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; University of South Carolina, Columbia; Delgado Museum of Art, New Orleans, Louisiana; Mint Museum, Charlotte, North Carolina; Terre des Hommes Pavilion, Montreal, Canada; U.S. Embassy, Bern, Switzerland; and Virginia Art Museum, Richmond. His art is included in the collections of CBS Broadcasting, Sacramento, California; Metropolitan Opera Company, New York City; and Tennessee Arts Commission, Nashville, among others. Throughout, he was artist-in-residence and eventually chair of the art department at Southwestern. He enjoyed teaching, working on his own sculptures alongside of the students. Unlike painting, which he felt he needed to do in private, Lawrence believed the mechanical aspects of making sculpture were enhanced by the human contact.

1. Donald La Badie, "Anthony's talent is yards wide," *Commercial Appeal*, Memphis, TN, June 17, 1979.

2. Ibid.

Because of the time constraints of running the department, lack of studio space, and other factors, by 1965 he turned almost exclusively to making sculpture.

On his résumé, Lawrence states: "My life's work in drawing, painting, and sculpture has drawn from the human figure as its main source and has dealt with the relationship between figures through the physical, spiritual, and emotional ties that bind us together." The statement, despite its brevity, addresses the importance of subject matter and alludes to the range of materials Lawrence works with. In 1961, for example, he created works in the following media: oil, oil and lacquer, tempera, encaustic, polymer on tempera, clay, steel, concrete relief, terracotta, polyester resin and fiberglass, woodcut, and bronze. This variety continues to the present with new techniques and materials alternating with the welding, casting, and carving that he has done since the 1960s. As he moved from one medium to the next, he was, and still is, deeply engaged in telling stories or creating characters that seem to have stepped out of one of his anecdotes. A brief survey of some of Lawrence's artworks shows the range of his materials and the wit and humor he brings to the tales he tells.

Lawrence's earliest sculptures are welded steel such as *Adam and Eve* (1961). Among the benefits of welding are that it requires very little equipment: a single torch is used to cut and weld, and the only other tools needed are a vise and hammer. Though the constructive process results in a crude finish, this was not a problem in the early sixties. Told with an economy of means, the story of Adam and Eve and the tragedy that has befallen them as they are forced out of the Garden of Eden is captured succinctly. The lacework canopy of the balloon-shaped tree that towers over the two figures is decorative but also serves to define the space the couple inhabits as they cower under its branches. Already covering their nakedness with a handful of leaves, the rough angular

figures are separated from each other by the tree of knowledge. A series of gestures moves the viewer through the story while also creating a humorous view of the fall. The serpent is descending the tree trunk and seems ready to strike at Eve's hand, which is pointing accusingly at her nemesis while Adam points at Eve. It is as if all the principals are involved in the blame game.

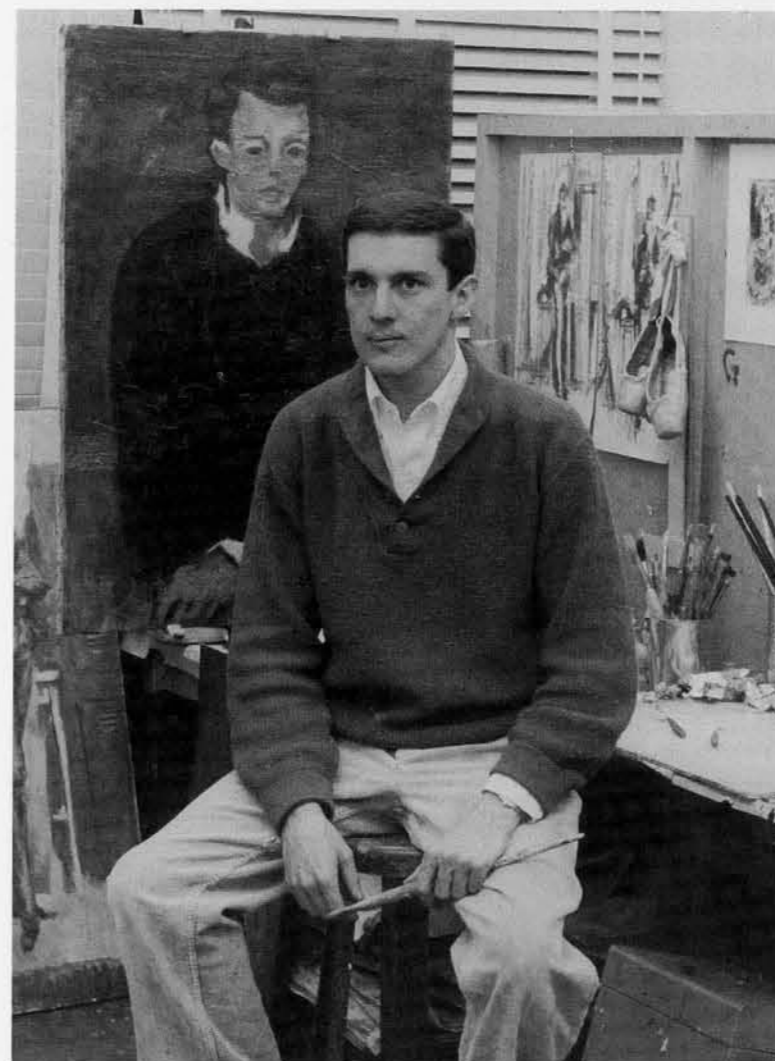
Unhappy with the fact that in welded steel he could not capture the kind of subtle quirky line he had mastered in painting, Lawrence began experimenting with carving and casting in 1960. The actual process employed was not as important to him as the pursuit of the line. In his 1972 carving *Martini Man*, which was cast in bronze in 1981, he felt he recaptured the line he wanted, foremost in the contour. Although individual body parts are simplified and distorted, he introduces enough variation—as in the shoulders—to make the piece complex and vital. The geometry of the body is contrasted with the more biomorphic forms of the head: the asymmetrical dome of the forehead, and the curves of the protruding chin and the cheeks. Almost cubist in their angularity, the simplified forms of the body reflect light off the surfaces that both increases the three-dimensionality of the work and underscores the beauty of the bronze surface. According to Lawrence, "With cast pieces, I could get very controlled, subtle variations and relationships between one plane and another. I could deal not only with form, but personality, the nature of the person, and the subtleties of expression that were not possible in welding."³ All of which brings the viewer to the consideration of just who this character is. With his turtlelike neck he appears to be trying to extend himself, if only to deliver a punch line. In his dinner jacket and bow tie he looks like the consummate party-goer; martini in hand, he conjures up the image of James Bond, although this cocktail drinker is a far remove from the suave original. One wonders if he is someone Lawrence had encountered or whether he just represents a type that appears at all parties.

Color was the other component Lawrence constantly experimented with. In the 1950s he painted welded steel with encaustic, a technique where the pigment is suspended in wax; he fused pigment with polyester resin in 1960. Searching for the perfect sculptural canvas to paint, he created *Midlife Riders* (1976). Lawrence constructed the sculpture out of wood rather than carving it;

tic as his forms, to unify the piece and underscore the comic mood. Balancing on unicycles, their angular bodies tilting in a variety of directions with arms and legs extended, the figures explode into space. As is typical of Lawrence's work, the riders break the convention that the base of a sculpture inscribes the space that the figures will inhabit. Fearless, the figures seem oblivious to the precariousness of their positions.

When Lawrence returned to painting welded steel, instead of using encaustic, he found he could control the color better by applying it directly to the surface, as can be seen in *Muggy in Miami* (1977). The farcical title of the piece sets the story in motion while capturing the loopy quality of the sculpture that is reminiscent of early cartoons and gangster films of the thirties and forties. The hoodlum on the right, apparently related to *Firey Eyes Frankie*, points a pistol at the lady whose handbag is now in the possession of the second robber. All three figures are reduced to simplified distorted body parts, as exemplified by the tubular arms of the right-hand thief or the curve of the woman's raised arms that mimic the snaky palm trunks behind her. At the same time, other features are exaggerated to the point of caricature, as, for example, the oversized two-tone shoes of the blue-coated crook. The color heightens the comic effect: the pink and green plaid jacket on the handbag-and-bludgeon-wielding bandit serves both to poke fun at the figure while also further enlivening the scene. The fact that the victim is the stereotypical blue-haired Florida denizen, as well as such details as the natty attire—the pink-striped collar and floral print tie—of the right-hand desperado, just add to the fun.

In *Mother and Child* (1981), carved soon after the birth of his son Philip, Lawrence explored a more traditional subject. As in the work of Rodin, the smooth bodies of the figures emerge from sections of roughly carved stone. Curled up on her back, the mother cradles the child resting against her



Lawrence Anthony in his studio in graduate school, 1958
Lent by the artist

using scraps of lumber and pieces he fabricated, he built up the figures. He then painted the three cyclists in his distinctive high-keyed palette, which is as loosely naturalis-

3. Interview with the author, July 8, 1996.

stomach and knees. It is difficult to establish where the body of the mother ends and that of her child begins, much as one conceives of the relationship between a young child and its mother. Also pulling the figures together are the beautiful striations of the alabaster; one stripe moves from the mother's shoulder, across her hand, and over the child's back almost like an umbilical cord. Offsetting the coolness of the stone is its warm pinkish color. The figures, stone, and color unite to create a sensuous representation of motherhood.

In direct contrast to the loving image of motherhood is *Circe* (1991). A sorceress encountered by Ulysses in his wanderings, Circe is renowned for feeding visitors food tainted with a magic potion that turns them into pigs. Ulysses, forewarned by Mercury, ate an antidote that protected him so he could then force Circe to return his men to their human form. Lawrence is accurate in his depiction of the myth: that is a Greek temple behind Circe, and the ship in the upper right is recognizable from Hollywood films. He lends it a contemporary air, however, with his fantasy of Circe, who appears as a voluptuous lounge singer resembling Veronica Lake. A large part of the tongue-in-cheek quality of the piece comes from the almost-transformed pigs to Circe's right, who still wear their Greek helmets and sandals, and the fact that regardless of their state of transition, no one appears to care. The soldiers and pigs are entranced with their enchantress and who can blame them? In their devoted attention, they are no less fawning than Las Vegas concertgoers. Working with a modicum of space, dozens of figures are arranged across the surface of the sculpture, running from low to very high relief. The complex multfigured piece exemplifies another of Lawrence's experiments with materials: the figures are roughed out in Styrofoam; reinforced with wood, steel, and fiber; modeled and carved with acrylic mortar; and finally painted with acrylic resin.

With these wall pieces, which are so close to paintings, Lawrence's work comes almost full circle to where he started in graduate school. Color, which he was interested in from his early days as a painter, is fully integrated and is in fact central to the effectiveness and success of his art. Lawrence has found the perfect way to meld his strengths as a colorist with his sculptural abilities. The resulting works have a "weird theatrical ambiance" that he likes.⁴ When the wall pieces are properly lit, they take on a kind of hyperrealistic magical quality that they would not otherwise have. They are like miniature tableaux where he controls the actors and the action. His idiosyncratic view of human relationships is explored, however, without sarcasm.

Lawrence wedded his interest in figuration to a freewheeling experimental approach to materials and in the combination found his life's work. Over the years, his creative way of thinking and making forms has not changed, but the different processes he employed have evolved. Moving from a monochromatic welded *Adam and Eve* to a marvelously polychromed *Circe* made out of a variety of materials, he has plumbed the depths of human experiences, bringing a sense of joy and wry humor to the process. The distortion of the figures actually makes them more universal, so they could represent either all or parts of each of us. The whimsical picnicker in *Time Past and Time Future Contained in a Peanut Butter Sandwich* or the fantastic figures in the two versions of *Cocktail Party* capture a myriad of characters and types at their leisure. The transition from the fearless middle-aged figures of *Midlife Riders* to the more thoughtful, staid soul at the end of his journey in *Last Bolt* encompasses the stages of life. Throughout, stories of human existence are told in a manner that welcomes the viewer into Lawrence's own engagingly idiosyncratic view of the world and its denizens.

Marina Pacini

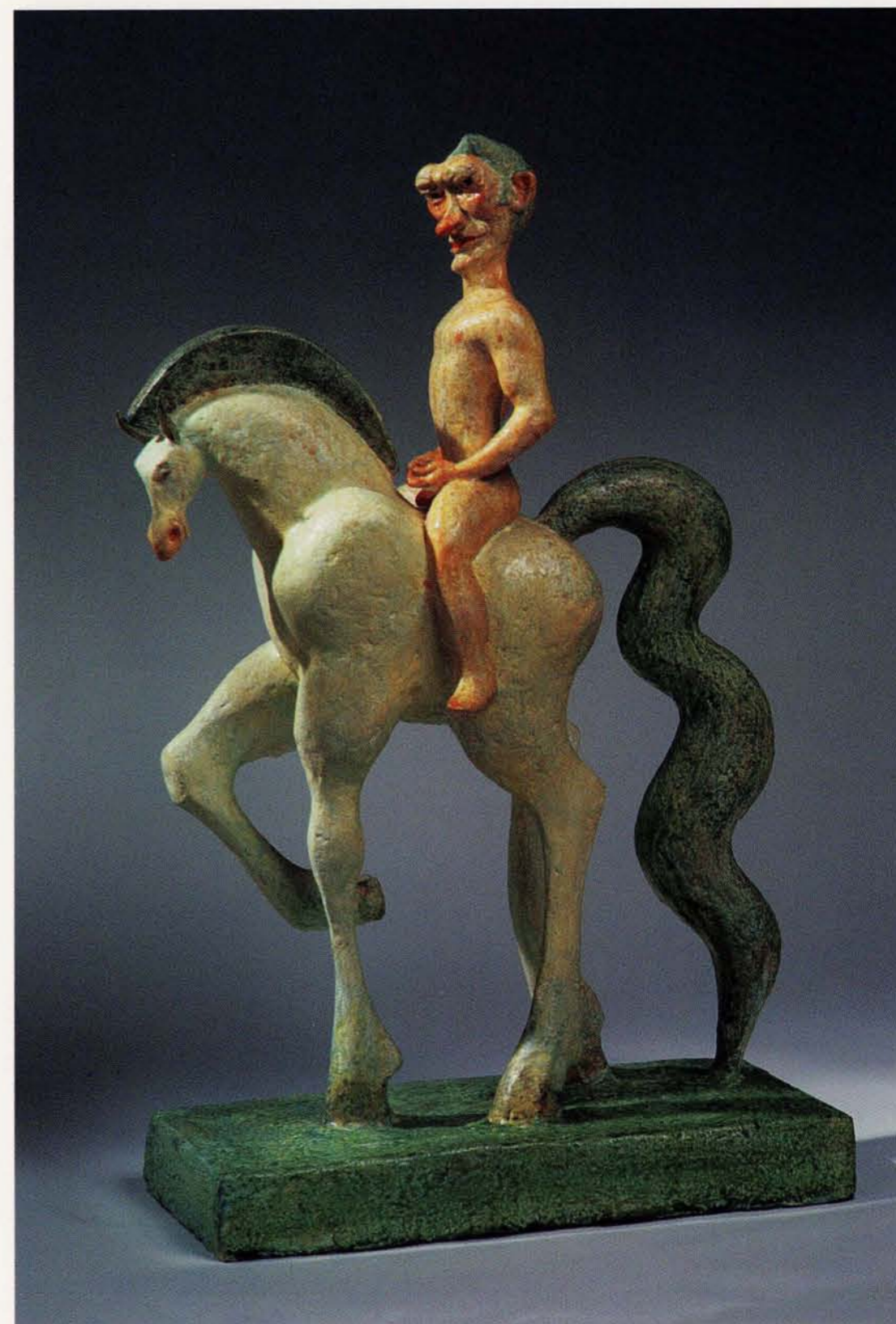


Campus Life
copper
1977
Collection of Rhodes College

4. Interview with the author, June 24, 1996.



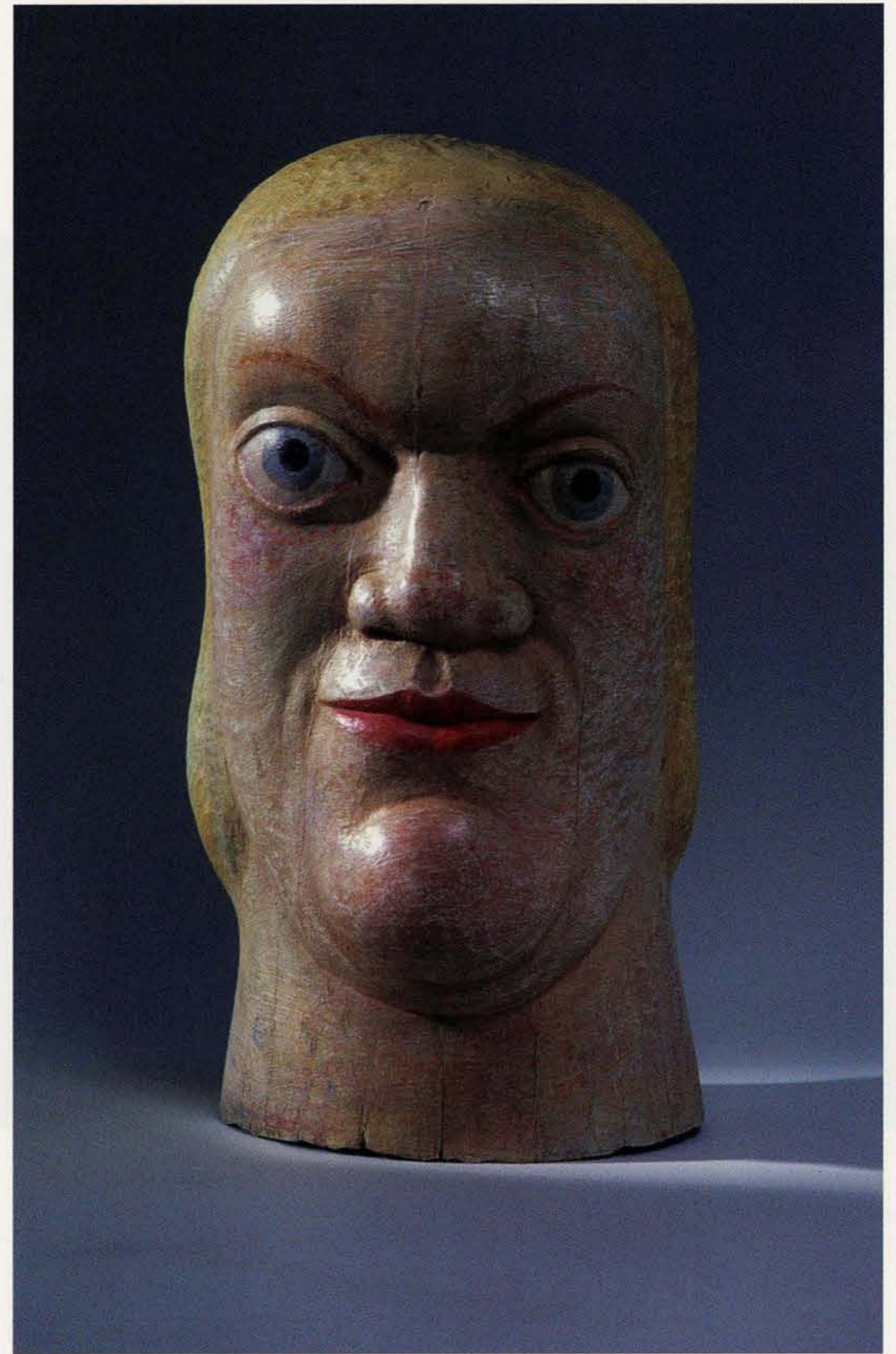
Circe
mixed media
1991
Lent by the artist



Last Bolt
mixed media
1990
Lent by Jessie and Harold Falls



Mother and Child
alabaster
1981
Collection of Mrs. Cooper Y. Robinson

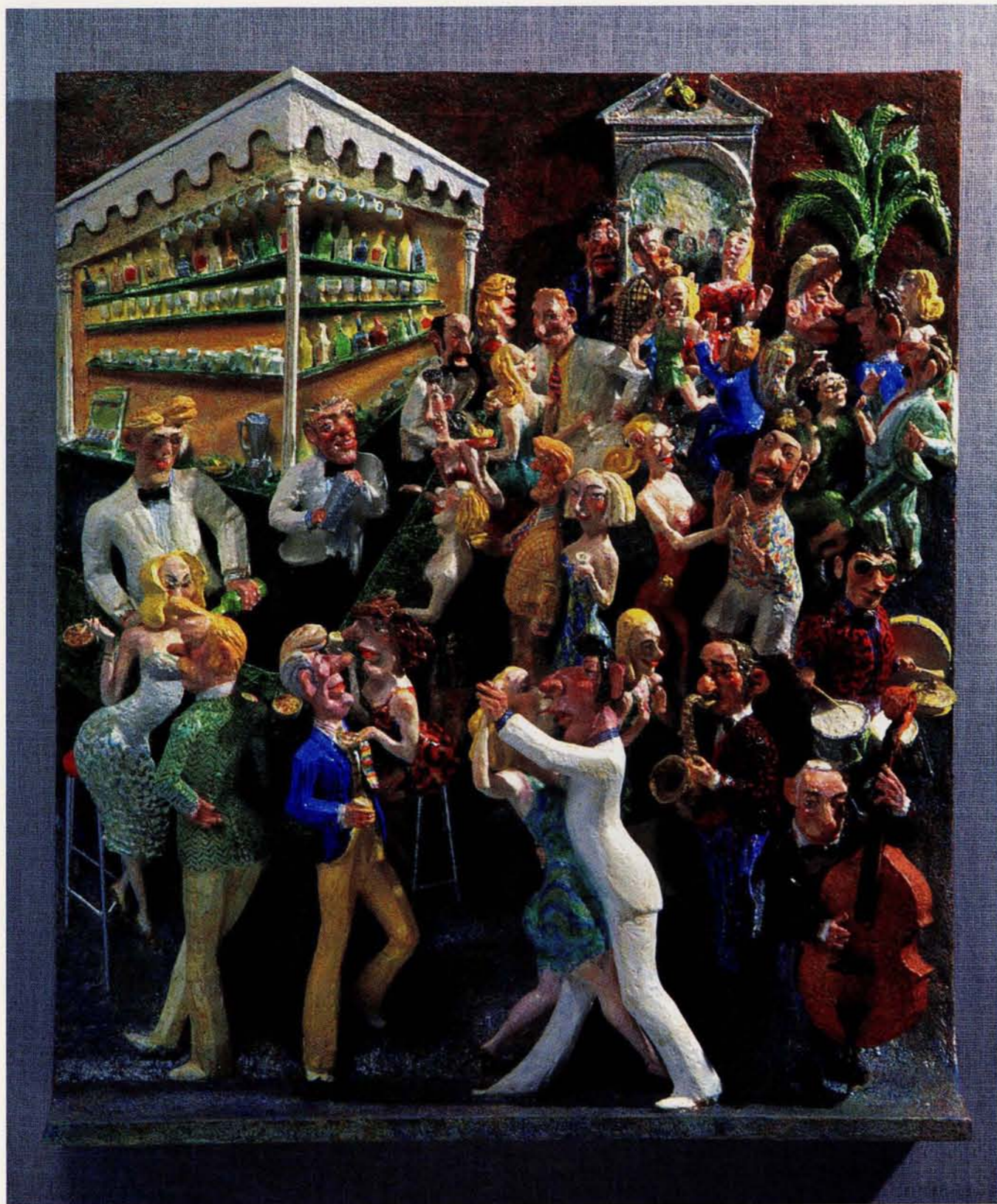


Annie
figwood
1974
Lent by Helmuth and Betty Gilow



Cocktail Party, two panels
mixed media
1987
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Tom Howard





Bar Scene
mixed media
1995
Lent by the artist



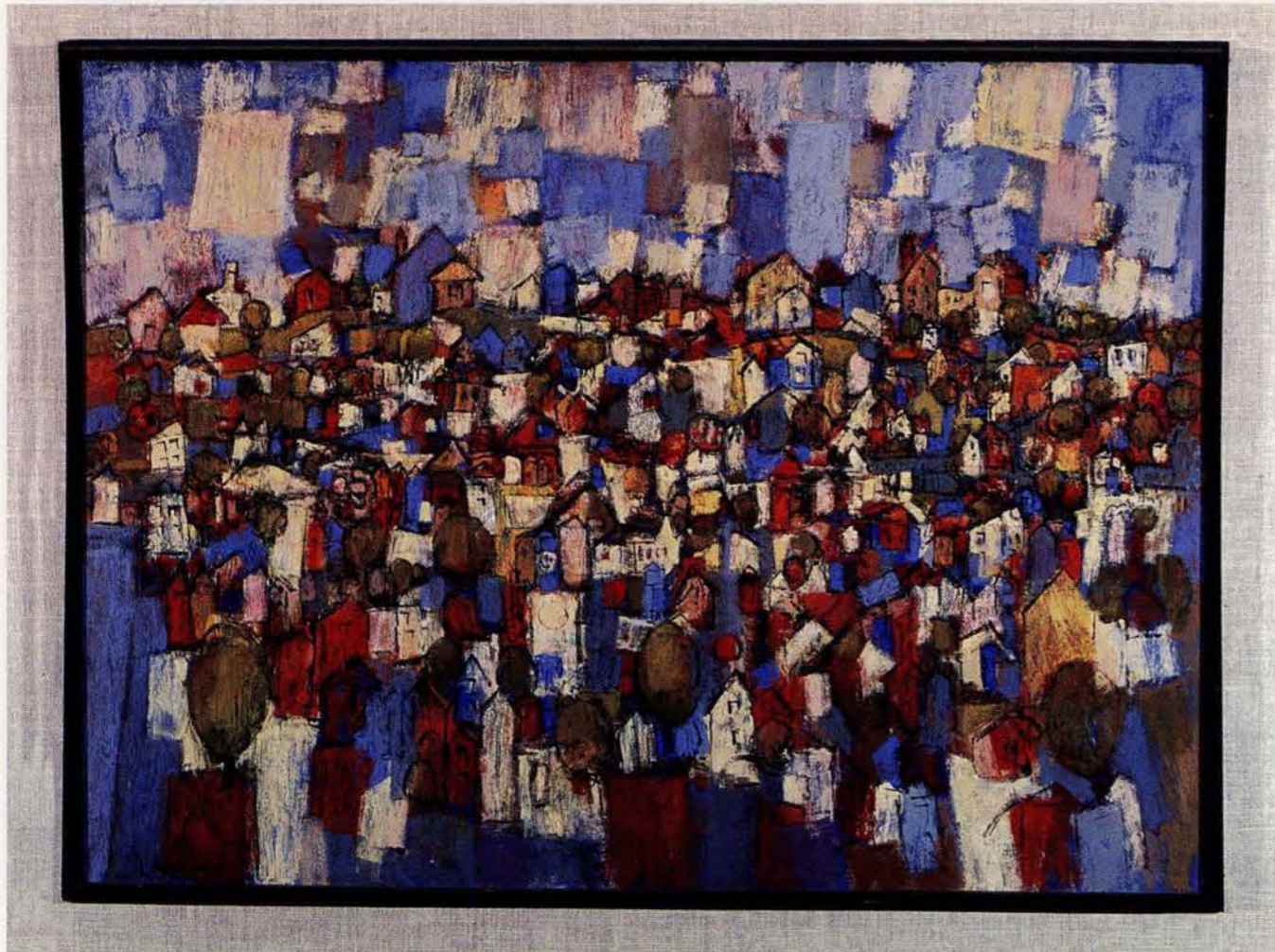
Time Past and Time Future Contained in a Peanut Butter Sandwich
steel, wood, and paint
1975
Collection of Stephen B. Crump



Muggy in Miami
steel and oil paint
1977
Lent by Mary Ann Lazar



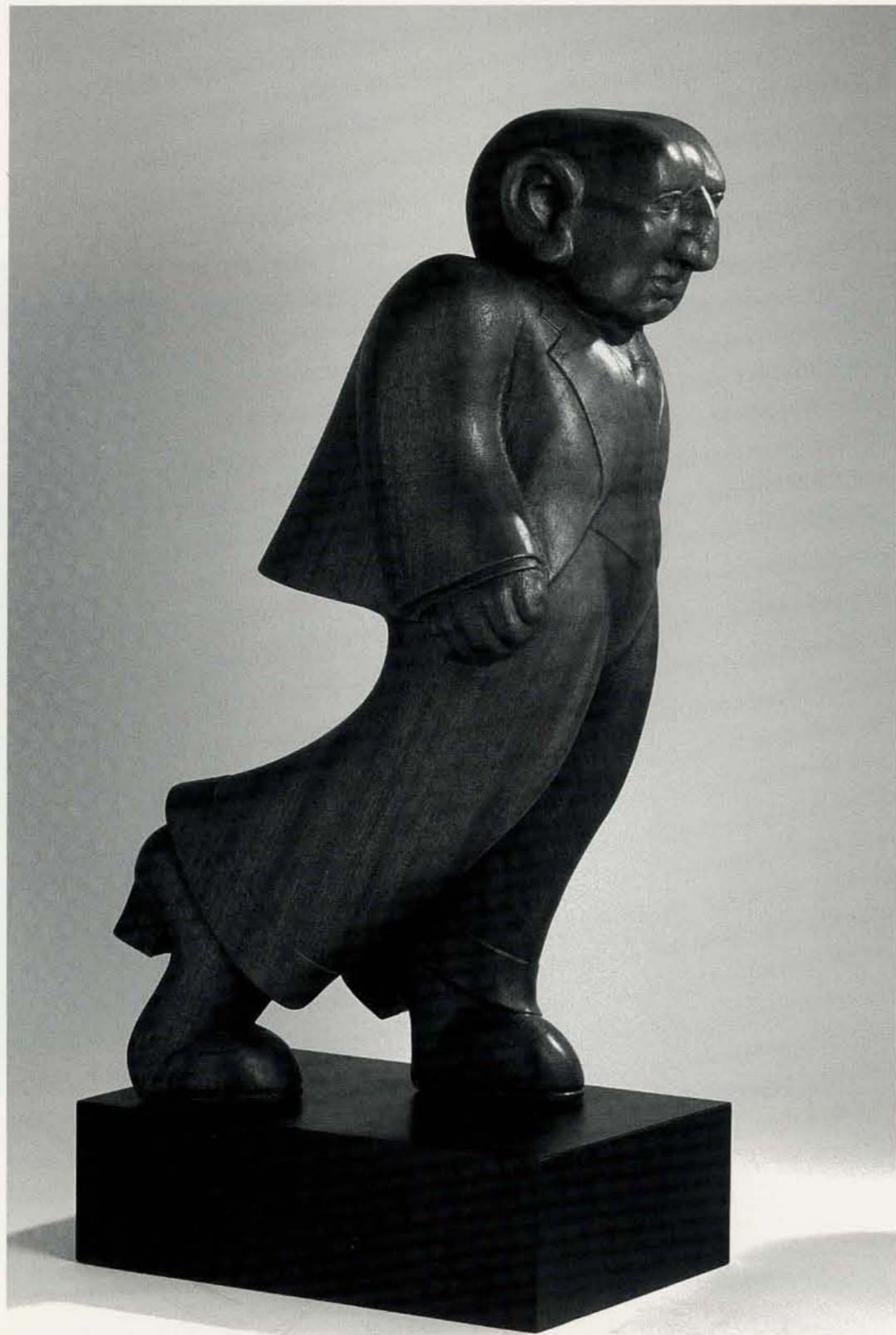
Watermelon Dream
glazed ceramic
1961
Lent by the artist



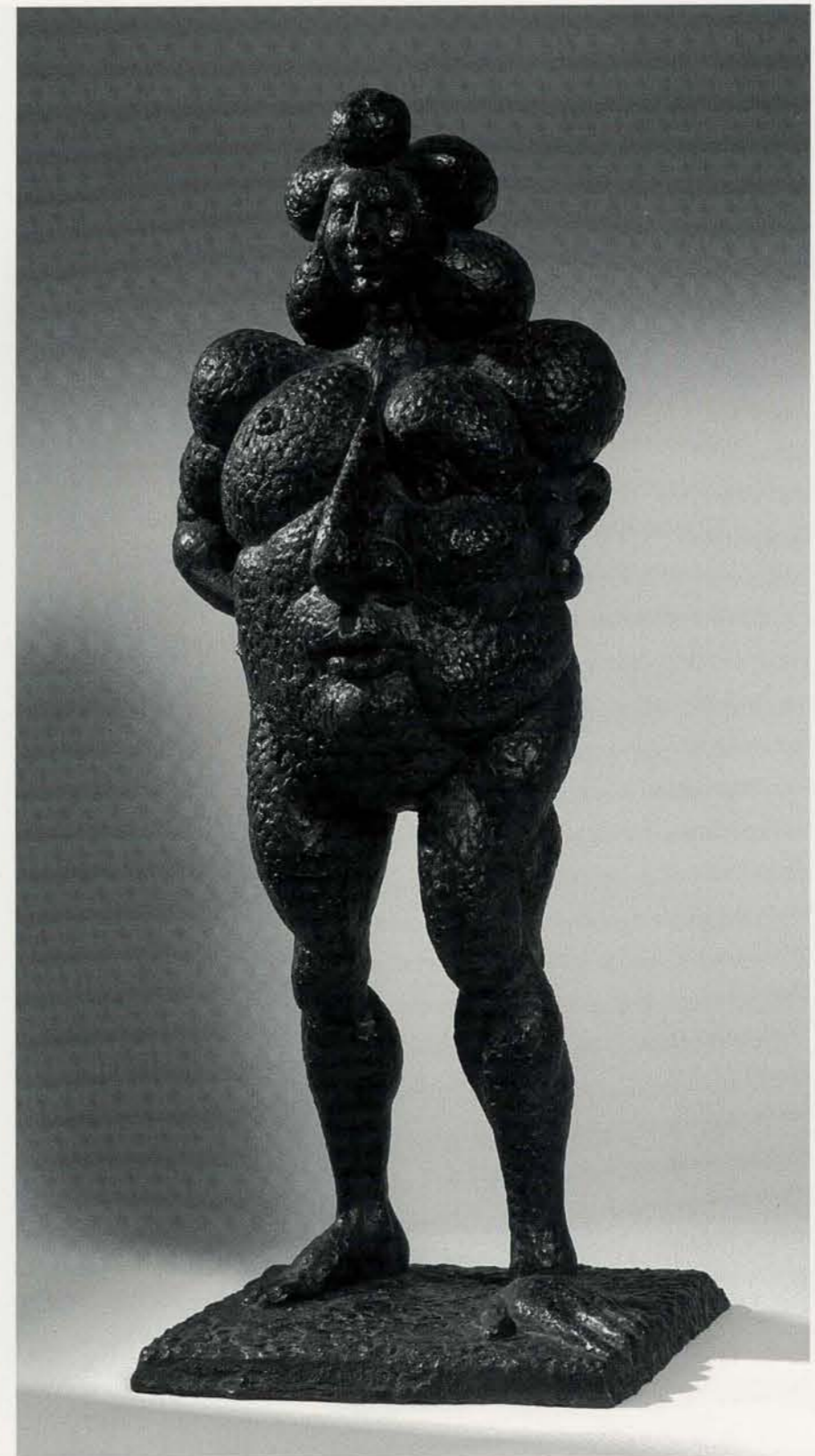
My Town
Elmers glue, sand, and pigment on plywood
1961
Lent by Fred and June Neal



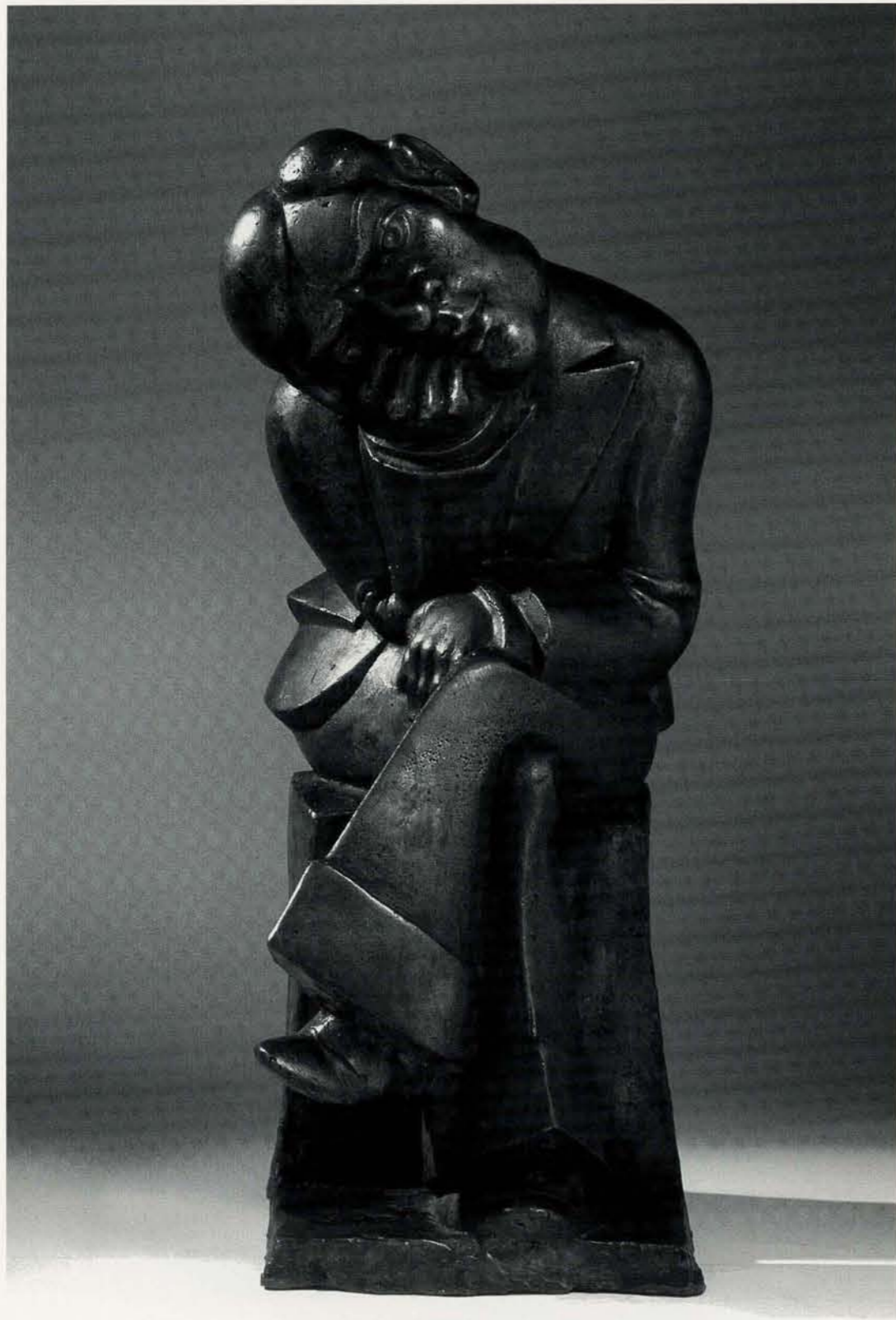
Cocktail Party
bronze
1974
Private collection



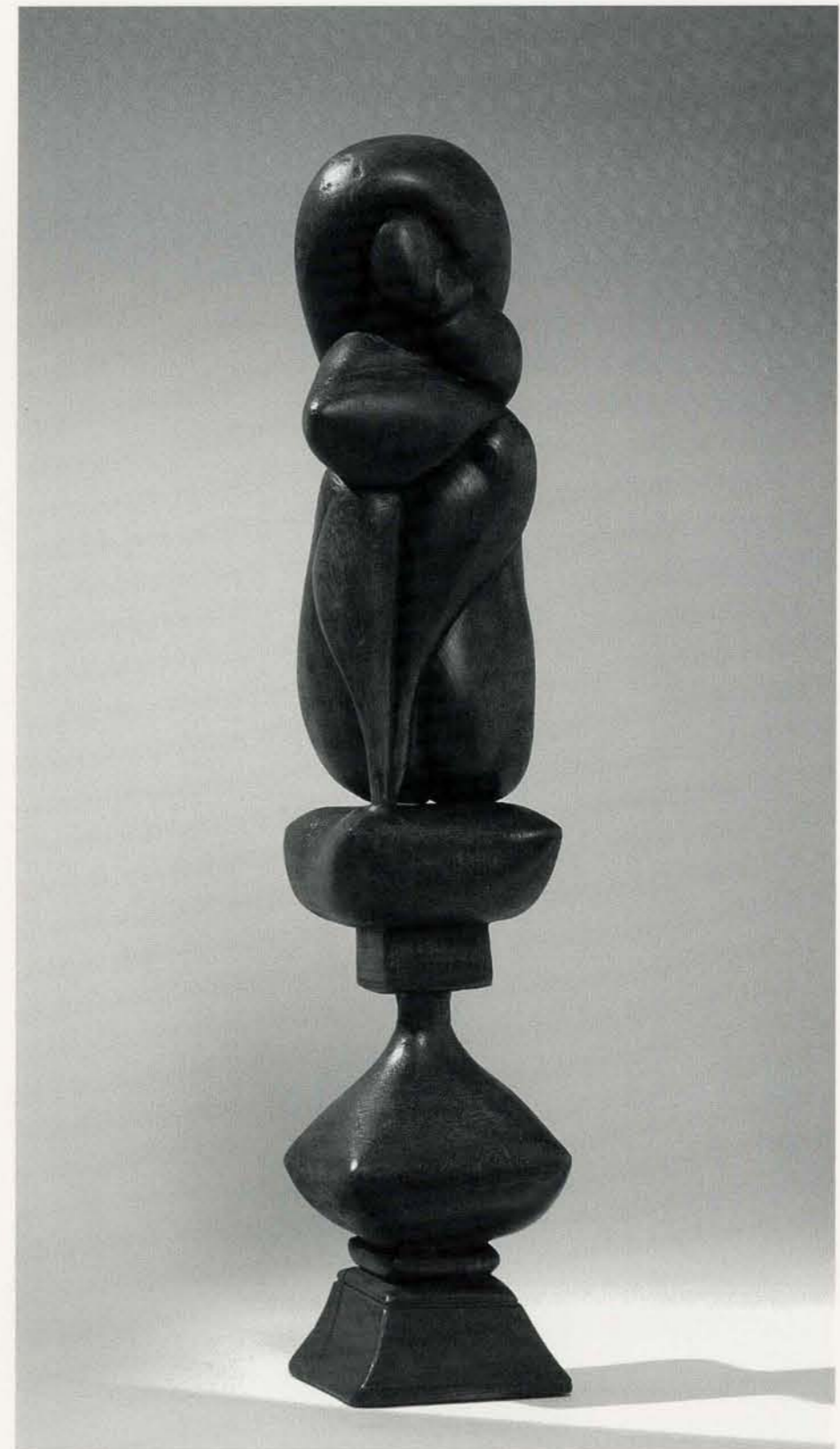
Quietly Flows The Don
mahogany
1972
Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis, TN; Eugenia Buxton Whitnel Funds 73.26



Metamorphosis
polyester resin and fiberglass
1964
Collection of Mrs. Ted Faiers



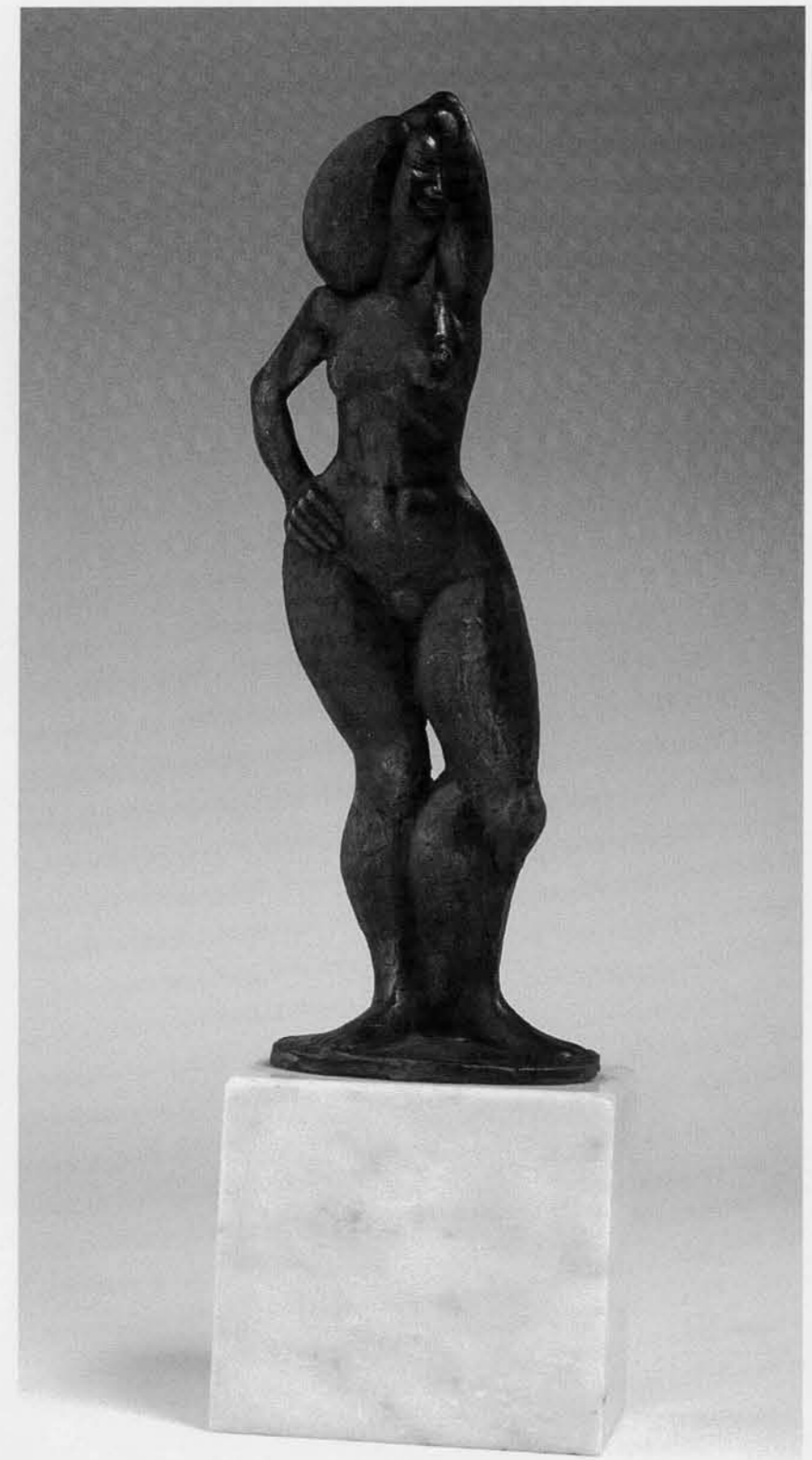
Thinker
bronze
1964
Lent by Barbara and Pitt Hyde



Woman
cedar
1960
Lent by Freddi and Joe Felt



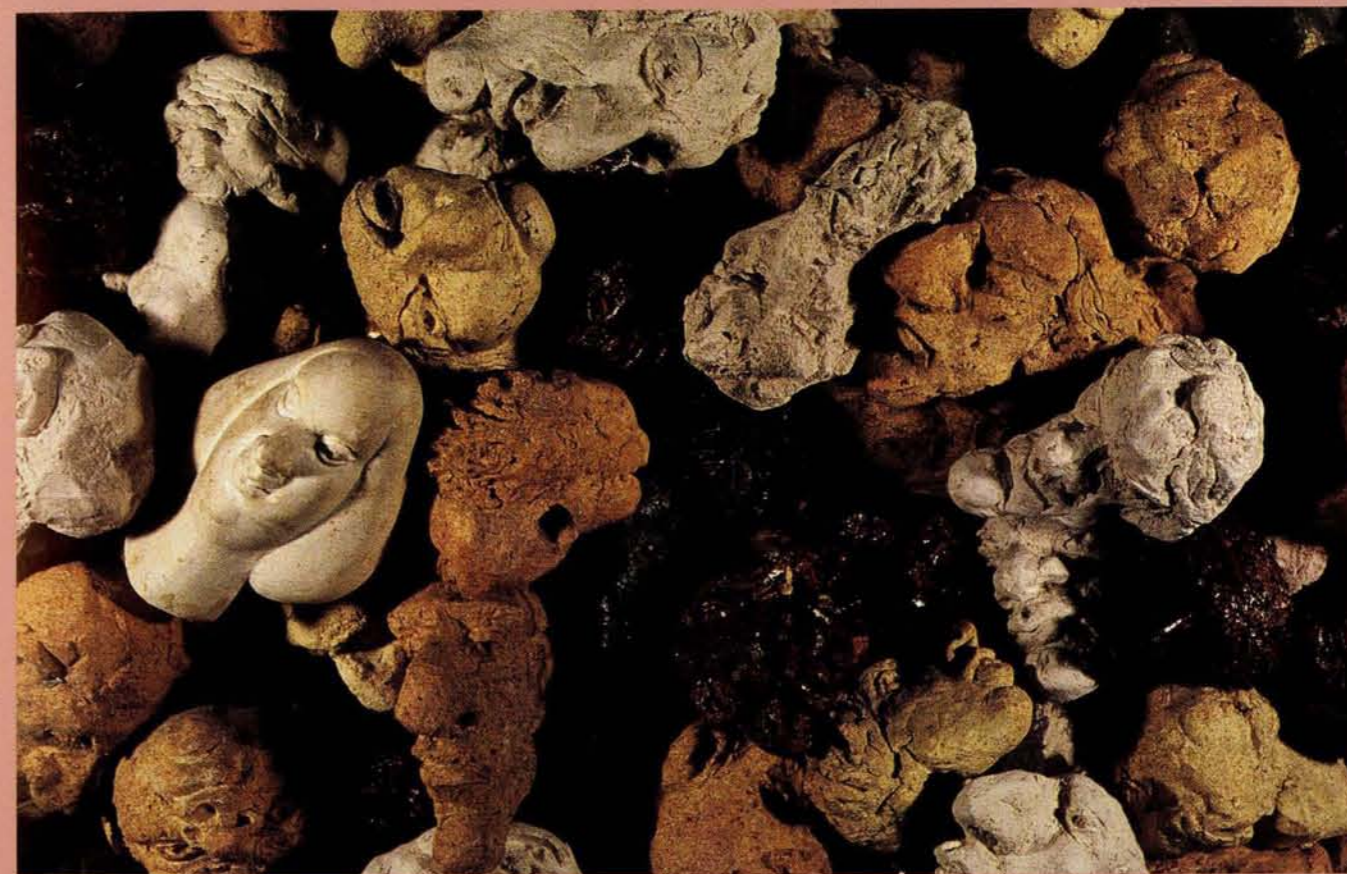
Martini Man
bronze
carved 1972, cast 1981
Lent by Dr. and Mrs. Myron Lewis



Venus
bronze
1981
Lent by Jim and Suzanne McDearman



Adam and Eve
steel
1961
Collection of Rhodes College



Rejected heads by Lawrence Anthony

Marina Pacini, Curator
Kevin Barré, Catalog Designer
Carlisle Hacker, Catalog Editor
David Nester, Photographer
Jaco Bryant Printing Company, Printers



Harlequin (Study for Theatre Memphis Harlequin)

steel

1978

Lent by Sally and John Thomason