

1970

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NEON LIGHTED HEAT DUCTS AS SCULPTURE

By

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Presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

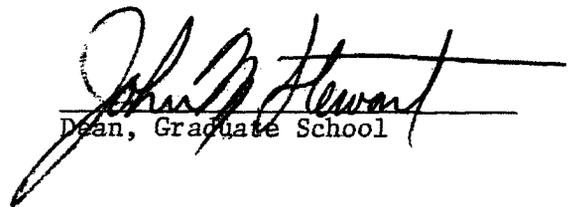
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

1970

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INTRODUCTION

The sculptures presented here constitute my terminal project for the Master of Fine Arts degree.

The Thorndike-Barnhart dictionary defines sculpture as the "art of carving or modeling figures out of wood or marble." And though sculpture is still being made by this method and from these materials, there has been a great surge toward more contemporary materials and forms by many artists in the past five years.

The painter, Edward Hopper, once said of a printmaker friend:

"If etching were merely a craft, he would be a very good etcher, but we know it can be a means of self-expression."¹

A similar statement may be made about sculpture and hopefully this self-expression can be resolved as a personal creative experience in a media which is the natural conclusion to all other forms.²

These sculptures make up a body of work which is a personal creative experience in three-dimensions. The various pieces are not just physically well constructed forms of painted sheet metal with neon tubing on them, but are works which are meant to visually express my response to various social problems and contemporary events.

¹Carl Zigrosser, Prints, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, c1962.

²T. J. Waddell, c1970.

INFLUENCES WHICH HAVE GIVEN DIRECTION

For the past three years or so I have been interested in a constructional approach to sculpture. Because of this approach to the making of sculpture, many different types of material and several different styles have been explored. Recently, though, I have limited myself to an exploration of sculpture with a combination of two media. These two media (sheet metal heating and cooling ducts and neon tube lighting) have helped me to develop a clear personal expression in sculpture. Probably some of the strongest influences which have given direction to these works have come from the environment in which we must all function. The sheet metal forms, the colors of paint and neon available are things which can be seen in a commercial context almost anywhere, any day of the year. And yet these things are not seen, they are "tuned out" because they are part of a larger forboding and persistent entity which challenges the individual to act or react, as the case may be.

Parallel to this is my response to and involvement with contemporary materials in order to make various statements concerning our environment and society, its structures, nonstructures, functioning and nonfunctioning.

APPROACH TO FORMS USED

The forms selected for the sculptures shown (as was stated earlier) are all hot and cold air transfer ducts. The only criteria used in choosing them was their visual impact and appeal to me. I made no

changes of basic shapes for any of the forms, although in some cases caps were used to cover open ends so that the neon tubing could be attached more easily. These forms were decided upon by visiting various construction sites and sheet metal firms in and around Missoula. Soon particular shapes began to emerge as stronger visual and, consequently, stronger sculptural statements. These shapes were then ordered from Missoula Sheet Metal, Inc.; the painting was done by the Turmell-Demoris Auto Body Shop and lighting was fabricated by Walford Electric, all of Missoula, Montana.

APPROACH TO COLORS USED

Individual colors for the various forms are chosen on the basis of visual compatibility with the units and the neon tubing. In most cases, however, the neon is not added until all painting is completed. The colors of the neon tubing are also selected to harmonize with and support the total form.

The neon must be lit so as not to cause a visual malfunction, and it is for this reason that the real colors, parts, forms, etc. are able to interact to the fullest. When lighted they do work and are a harmonious, total, personal creative experience of unified, cohesive, sculptural statements.

EXPLANATIONS OF INDIVIDUAL FORMS

1. Magno Totem No. 1. 11 3/4 in. x 11 3/4 in. x 100 in.

This piece, a very linear sculptural unit, is reminiscent, to me, of totems, obelisks, and the like. It is a contemporary totem for the "modern man" who needs function as well as form. Originally the totem was the emblem of a tribe, clan, family, etc.¹ and was designed to symbolize each tribesman's identity with the tribal unit.² But the "modern man" also needs a symbol to identify him with and unite him to the tribal unit, i.e., society.

This piece, Magno Totem No. 1, and its sister piece, Magno Totem No. 2, are contemporary in form and function but symbolize the support of the tribal unit which "modern man" needs to help him function successfully in society.

2. Magno Totem No. 2. 11 3/4 in. x 11 3/4 in. x 100 in.

This piece is another contemporary totem with different "carving" done in the neon lighting. It also carries the same symbolical aspects of Magno Totem No. 1.

3. Magno Snake. 8 1/4 in. x 28 in. x 98 in.

This long snaking piece ends in a visual (optically kinetic) forked tongue of red and blue neon. These colors vibrate and visually distort

¹Clarence L. Barnhart, ed., Thorndike-Barnhart Dictionary, Doubleday and Co., Inc., c1956.

²Carl G. Jung, Man and His Symbols, Doubleday and Co., Inc., c1969.

the vision of and disorient the viewer, making it somewhat displeasing to look at, just as it was and is, for the Indian and is also for all mankind, hard to listen to someone who is speaking with a forked tongue, i.e., the used-car salesman, the harranguer on television selling his cheaply-made, poorly-constructed wares, etc., etc.

All too often we are taken in, sold something against our will, smoothly tricked into signing a contract for unwanted encyclopedias, sewing machines, vacuum cleaners, pots and pans and the like, just as, in many cases, the Indians of what is now the "United States" were shrewdly cajoled into parting with their land, gold, furs, and various other goods.

4. Magno White Love/Truth. Top - 16 in. x 16 1/4 in. Bottom - 8 1/4 in. x 28 in. Height - 25 1/4 in.

This small piece with its two intensities of yellow neon loops gives beautiful soft after-images that I like to think of as LOVE and TRUTH. These two things are probably the most necessary and important intangibles of our contemporary society and their after-images should always be with us, no matter where or when we turn. Of course, the love I am speaking of is not just that physical and sensual love which is so common (here today and gone tomorrow), but instead the love which is also truth. And the love which for the sake of all mankind, no matter how many times we may fail, will continue to overcome the hurts of the world.

5. Magno Black Fire. 21 3/4 in. x 72 1/2 in. x 77 1/2 in.

This large flat-black piece with red neon tubing only on the top is a statement against all the war and bloodshed in our own country and in

other countries as well. The beating, killing, rape, etc., of innocent people, i.e., bystanders, villagers, animals and the like from the beginning of time to the end of all time has become so common-place that we hardly take note of it. Therefore, I have topped the large flat-black hulk, oppressive and menacing as it is, with red neon "fire" which after death will consume all that is left. From this consummation will come a purification that hopefully then will produce a new order of peace, love, truth and freedom.

6. Magno Stump (Parts "A" and "B"). Each Part - 14 1/4 in. x 20 3/8 in. x 28 1/2 in.

This work, shown in two parts composed of two sections each, is a "cool" piece which maintains a certain aloofness. This aloofness is indicative, of course, of our contemporary society in its unwillingness to become involved, i.e., the silent majority. Hopefully, the viewer will become more aware of his/her inactivity or "coolness" and feel the pricks of this inactivity. Thus eliciting a response of positive action in some direction or other for the good of all mankind.