

NCAD

SPRING 1979

GRADUATING THESIS.

" I AM AN OBJECT-MAKER "

Submitted by:-

Veronica McDaid

I N T R O D U C T I O N

" The practice and appreciation of art is individual, art begins as a solitary activity, and only in so far as society recognises and absorbs such units of experience does art become woven into the social fabric "

Ruth Benedict (Patterns of Culture) p.153

Generally I feel that art appreciation is a snobbish thing that people at a certain social level feel they have to cultivate. I would rather look upon myself as someone who takes photographs, someone who draws or whatever because in my opinion there is too much reverence put on the words "art" and "artist". The artist to me has become, as it were, "too big for art", he is blown up to gigantic proportions. He is described as

" A person of trained sensibility, a developed imagination, a capacity for expression and deep insight into the realities of contemporary life" *

If I was to put a description on a "doer" or "artist" I would describe him as someone who pursues an activity which they themselves need and want to do and in so doing are not concerned whether it is regarded as what society call "ART". It appears to me that after a drawing etc., leaves the "doer" it exists then as a physical expression to be interpreted, understood and accepted by whoever sees it. Therefore, I feel there is no denying that it is then a portable indoor/outdoor commodity which can do no more than decorate a selected space.

* "THE DE-DEFINITION OF ART", Harold Rosenberg (p.57).

I do not see "art" as a religion or is it in any way "elite". I consider "art" to be a victim of a simple confusion, if not something more sinister. There is a failure to distinguish it's function in society. Who says it needs a function ? is it not enough that it is enjoyed by both artist and viewer ? .

I hold this attitude strongly in mind with my own work, the value and regard I have for all pieces of work is if it's to be enjoyed, enjoy it. With view to this I am going to discuss the work of Wendy Taylor and Claes Oldenburg, who's work I favour for it's personality, humour, simplicity, realism and it's irony.

The thesis will be divided into four sections. I want to discuss Wendy Taylor's work in the first section. Secondly, I will discuss the work of Claes Oldenburg in less detail, because I feel it is a little pretentious on my part to discuss the effect his sculptures have on me when I haven't actually experienced them live. Thirdly, I would like to give a brief account of my own work and finally in the last section I will discuss the personal element which I feel exists very strongly in both Wendy Taylor's and Claes Oldenburg's work, and in some way my own work.

"Why make sculpture?" I asked her. "Why do people walk
around the world, visit the museum, see produce a beautiful
work?" she asked in reply. "By why did two great men
burst into tears when a petal fell off the chrysanthemum
they were taking to the Flower Show?"

WENDY TAYLOR

Wendy Taylor

" Why make sculpture ?" I asked her. "Why do people sail around the world, swim the channel or produce a beautiful rose ?" she asked in reply. "Or why did two grown men burst into tears when a petal fell off the chrysanthemum they were taking to the Chelsea Flower Show ?"

Wendy Taylor *

Wendy Taylor was born in Stamford, Lincolnshire in 1945. She studied in St. Martins School of Art during the affluent 60's. Although she is only 34 and as once described in a review as someone who "looks as if she might paint flowers, or stick sea shells on to little lacquer boxes" she is in fact a qualified welder. She first exhibited here in Ireland in September 1976 and had her second one woman show here in February 1979.

In the 60's American Minimalists presented the simplest possible forms, such as cubes and rectangles, in order to focus attention not on touch, but on the act of looking. By offering only primary geometric shapes, they highlighted the discrepancies between the perfect distortions seen by the observer. Wendy Taylor's work developed from simple geometric shapes such as circles, influenced by Minimalism, to become gradually more complex and more intimately bound up with perception and optical illusions.

Her works which are mainly three dimensional make a joke as it were about ordinary everyday things and their functions. Experiencing her sculpture nudges us out of our conventional way of seeing, there is a shift in our perception and suddenly we are faced with contradictions of all kinds. Because the work is so perfectly made and convincing our consciousness accepts these absurdities as the norm. The affect is startling, the law of gravity no longer exists, the impossible is happening, the space becomes altered and a weightless sensation is experienced.

" I see myself as an inventor, money is not my object, my concern is to take on a challenge and to try to make something from it".

Wendy Taylor *

Although her sculptures are based on visual puns, and are jokey, Wendy Taylor takes her humour very seriously. For her the clown has the same importance in life as the tragedian because she provides the means to reach a broader audience.

" If I make something that most people won't give a second glance to, then a part of me has failed. Art, in my terms is a means of communication".

Wendy Taylor *

Once the bizarre humour of her work has the audience entranced, they can then proceed to discover and evaluate the content of the sculpture. She has all the expertise discipline to give form to sometimes disturbing ideas. Her environment obviously is the source of her inspiration but with her unique perception she selects ironies which exist in her daily life and uses them in a most unusual and individual way.

Beginning in 1970, she made many sculptures that explored the phenomenon of chains in compression. (She exhibited

* " HAYWARD ANNUAL 78" Sarah Kent

these sculptures in her first exhibition, in Ireland). These sculptures are remarkable not only because of the materials which are themselves exquisite from the point of view of appearance but her sense of exactness, her appreciation of the artistic elements of form, balance, tension and spatial relationships leave nothing to be desired. She avoids any of the emotive associations of chains other than using them simply for their strength and uses them as a means to make a naturally curving line which everyone knows is strong. Here, however the paradox enters, she uses the strength of the chains to hold up heavy weights in the air, attached to nothing. She defies any of the normal associations of gravity or of the weight of objects in space. The most immediately apprehensible sculpture in her chain series is the "Sky Hook", this is a giant hook, like one attached to a ship, hooked in thin air, with a large chain descending from it to the floor and curling lazily there. To make these impossibilities possible Wendy Taylor welds the links together to transform the chains normal, gravity controlled sluggishness into a rigidity that can support quite heavy elements.

In 1973 she worked on her "Time Piece" Sundial now outside Tower Hotel, next to Tower Bridge. Although she can do all the work on the materials herself, skilled welders from a nearby factory worked for several weeks on it. This piece worked very successfully and the welders became seriously committed to the project.

Obviously the medium presents a challenge to Wendy Taylor, more recently she is working with bricks, again to

" make the apparently impossible happen" *

and with the same success here as in her chain series. Using bricks in a very peculiar way she explores the unusual circumstances of bricks in tension.

" The idea for the bricks came mostly, I think, from Sunday walks, I live in an area where they are always tearing things down and rebuilding, so you pass piles of bricks and those little sample walls" **

A visit to Berlin also made her think about walls, and she used to work in the middle of a building site. These sculptures are also based on visual puns, creating the same absurd paradoxes. Her brick works are very large partly so that the work can be made to function in relation to a given environment, but also to make it accessible to larger numbers of people.

" I am an object-maker and unfortunately public sculptures are expensive because they have to last. I am delighted, though, if someone is willing to commission one so that it can be in a public place".

Wendy Taylor ***

The individual bricks for these brick sculptures are cast to shape from a composite of terrosa ferranta, resin, sawdust and

* HAYWARD ANNUAL 78 Sarah Kent

** "AN IRISHMAN'S DIARY" Pro-Quindune (The Irish Times February 22, 1979)

*** HAYWARD ANNUAL 78 Sarah Kent

pigments so that these unlikely forms could be constructed again. I have to remark on her expertise in the constructing of her sculptures making the red bricks look as if they were pliable. The "Brick Knot" is a beautiful example of these sculptures, it is a 44ft. long pier built to resemble a knot however, I feel that it compels you to think that it was tied after completion. This one sculpture took one year to complete and cost over £2,000 in materials alone.

Wendy Taylor's second exhibition in Ireland consisted of two large pieces one of these huge brick pieces is a 10ft. square carpet of bricks, it's flat except for one corner which is lifted up and held, it seems, by a rope, but naturally no rope no matter how tensed could hold a material like brick in a curve. The bricks are curved although they all appear to be the same size, but precise measurement shows that there is a subtle change in their composition to allow them to achieve the desired lift without disturbing the evenness of their geometry. Whatever about the calculus involved, the conception is in itself simple and carried out with enormous skill and panache. There is great warmth and simplicity in this piece and personally I find this piece remarkably calming.

The second large piece in the exhibition was an arch which consists of two pillars surmounted by an arch. The pillars are of brick but the arch emerging from it is metal, it is an armature in the shape of bricks.

"Writing about building materials, the American Architect Louis Kahn said " if you think brick and...you consider

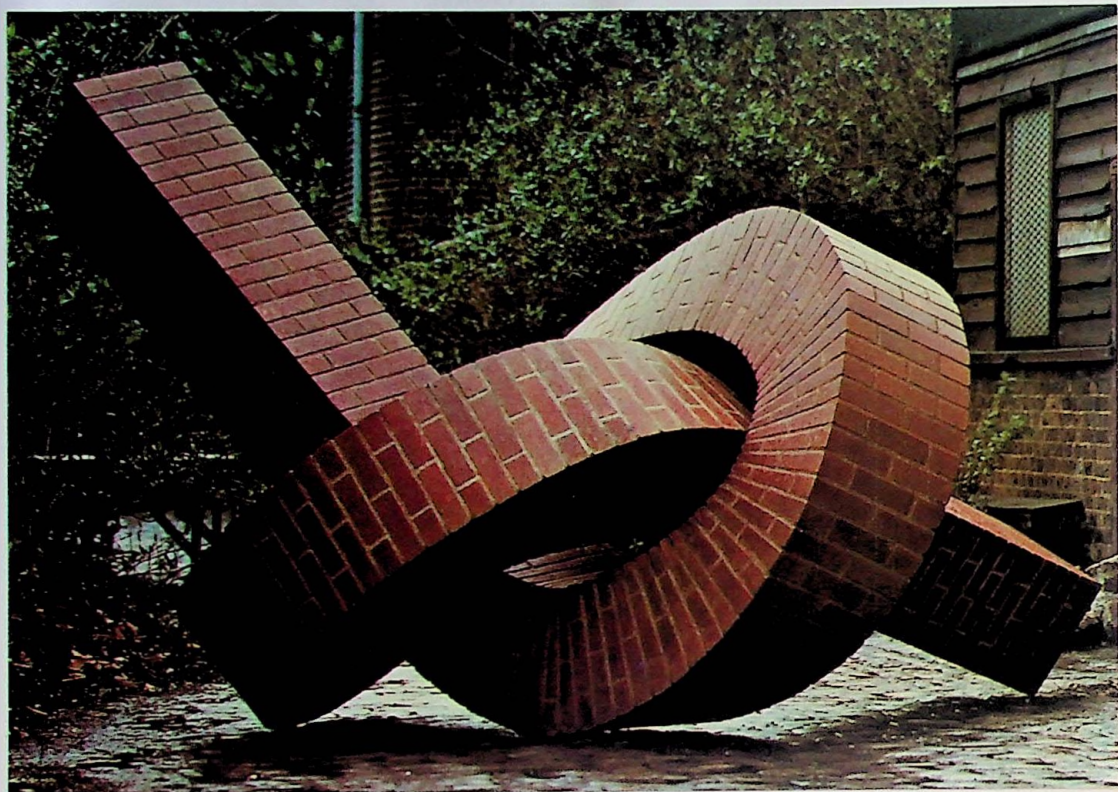
the nature of brick, you say to brick: 'What do you want brick ?' Brick says to you: 'I like an arch' " For him bricks and archways were synonymous. Wendy Taylor's archway sculpture can be seen as a witty perversion of these purist principles. Her bricks seem to have materialised leaving the grouting plaster to cement only empty space, and the pillars to support a mortar skeleton". * Wendy Taylor.

This sculpture I feel is a work about the different feelings different material evokes in a unified shape. It is highly successful in that but personally I feel it lacks the fascination and excitement of the other two larger brick pieces.

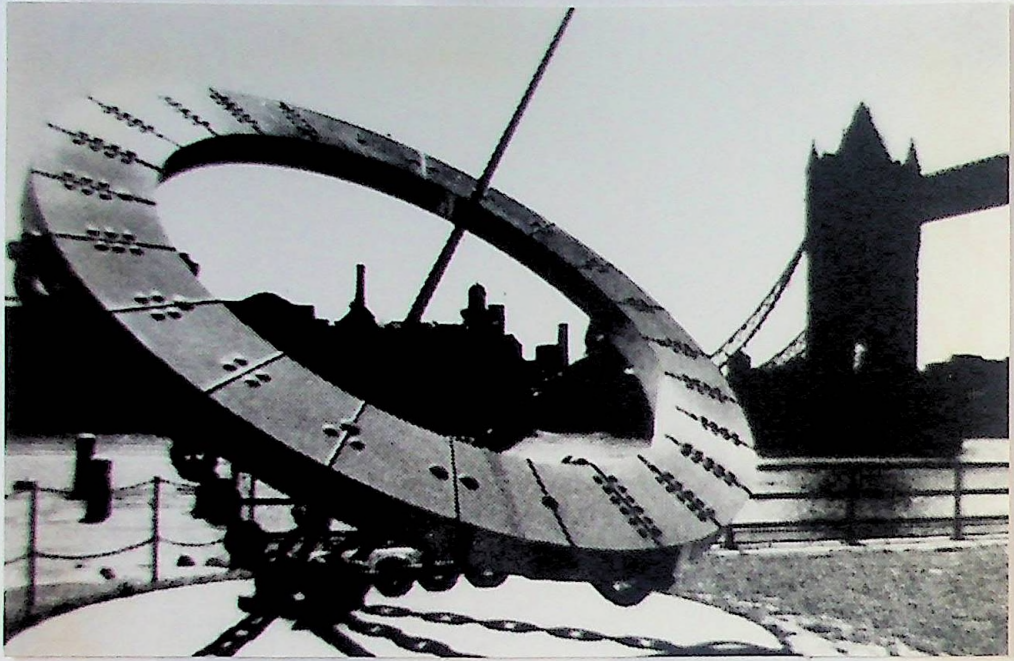
I also find her smaller pieces lacking in the same freshness that exists in her larger pieces. They express, with great technical mastery a development of Magritte's paintings. The clouds made of stone and the rocks that float directly I feel inspire in some way Wendy Taylor's rendering of soft materials in real undisguised brick. Her still life's which include a brick bottle and especially attractive brick banana is particularly reminiscent of Magritte. Although these small pieces are immensely attractive they do not have the same effective fascination, perhaps this is just a personal preference on my part that I feel, with the larger sculptures I feel involved when I'm beside them. They create such an inquisitive feeling inside and lift you out of the norm for a short duration leaving a very relaxing and calming atmosphere.

* "HAYWARD ANNUAL '78" Barbara Rose (P.6).

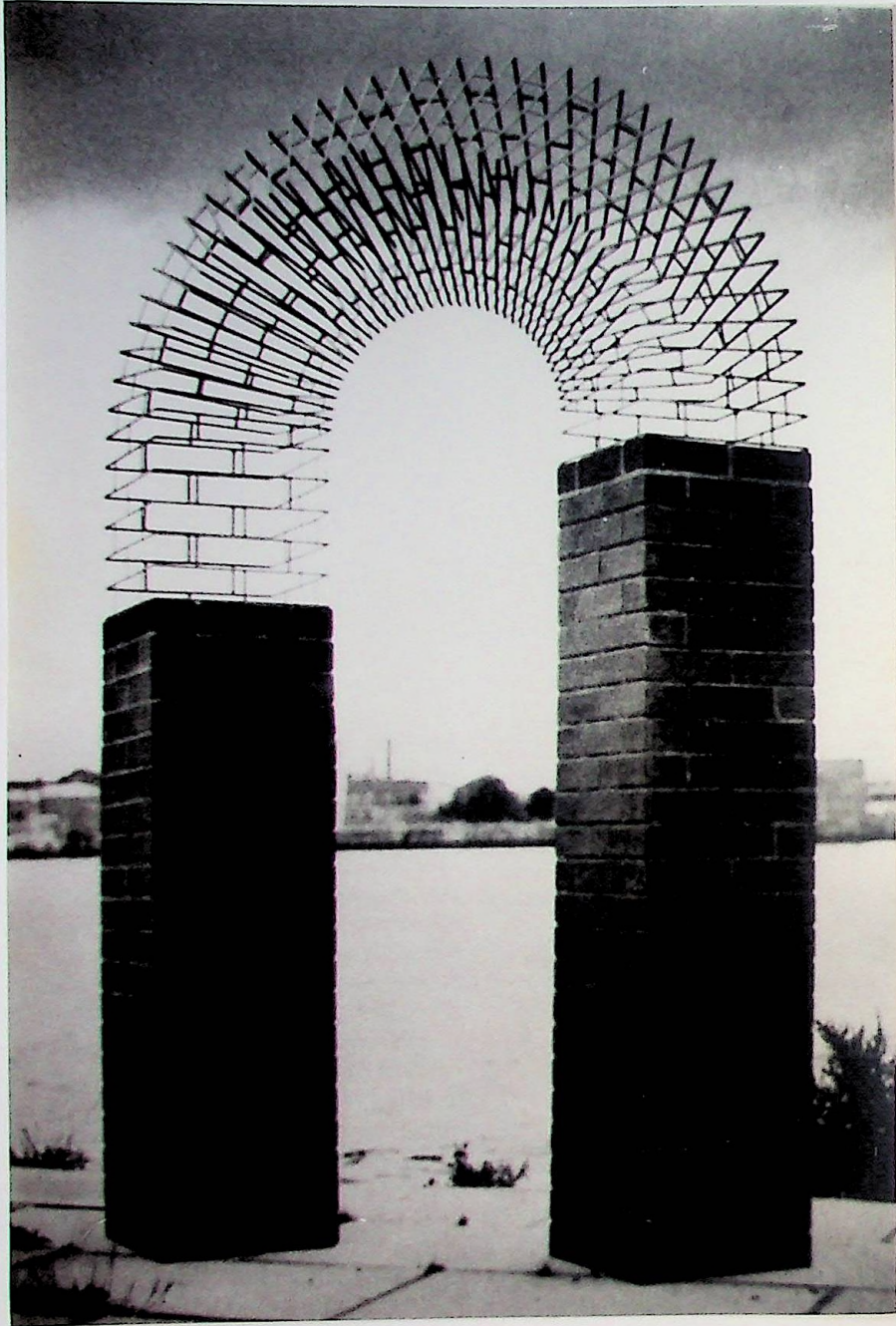
I've only experienced Wendy Taylor's sculpture on these two occasions but I feel that to experience them in their own environment would even add more shock and excitement to these "impossibilities", or should I say "possibilities" ?



BRICK KNOT 1978



TIME PIECE. 1973.



BRICK ARCH. 1978.

"Everything I do is completely original - I made
it up when I was a little kid."

Clas Oldenburg

CLAES OLDENBURG

" Everything I do is completely original - I made
it up when I was a little kid ".

Claes Oldenburg *

* "CLAES OLDENBURG" Barbara Rose (p.9).

Claes Oldenburg was born in Stockholm in 1929 and by the time he had reached the age of seven he had already been exposed to a number of diverse environments which could be the reason for his later hypersensitivity to his surroundings and to cultural change. Nominally, Oldenburg is a Pop artist, and is thought to be one of the earliest and most forceful. But his practice of art and his attitude towards it are however radically different from those of the typical so called pop artist. I feel that to apply the Pop label to him tends to obscure the nature of his work.

Although Oldenburg's sculptures are very simple he does carry some of his works to an extreme.

" Like the ancient philosophers and poets who first observed that life is marked by change and paradox. Oldenburg attempts to delve beneath surface appearances in order to discover more fundamental realities and find the universal constants of human experience in the flux of modern life " *

More consciously and consistently than most other artists, he sifts and refines everyday experience in order to discover the greatest common denominators among phenomena. Oldenburg's dictum that

" nothing is irrelevant, everything can be used "

Claes Oldenburg **

* "CLAES OLDENBURG" Barbara Rose (p.9).

** "CLAES OLDENBURG" Barbara Rose (p.9).

reveals his intention to create an art as overflowing as life itself.

" I make my work out of my everyday experiences, which I find as perplexing and extraordinary as can be. The result is plotted and the paths lead through impossible darkness ". *

Oldenburg's insatiable curiosity manifested itself at an early age and has continued right through his life. He felt himself drawn by conflicting urges, but rather than ignoring his personal conflicts he based his work on oppositions, making an art of the impossible, the discredited, the difficult. Basically I see Oldenburg's work as being very responsive to the environment which he lives.

" I always begin from a real thing, the difference is whether I leave it alone, extracting all I can from it and imposing nothing, or on the other hand, sink it in the impure soup of myself and all associations, and in a direct, naive way, reconstruct the world". **

In Oldenburg's work, regardless of what motivates him to respond to everyday experiences, the meaning is left open. The content is psychological, based on instincts common to everyman, rather than symbolic.

* "CLAES OLDENBURG" Barbara Rose (p.35).

** "CLAES OLDENBURG" Barbara Rose (p.143).

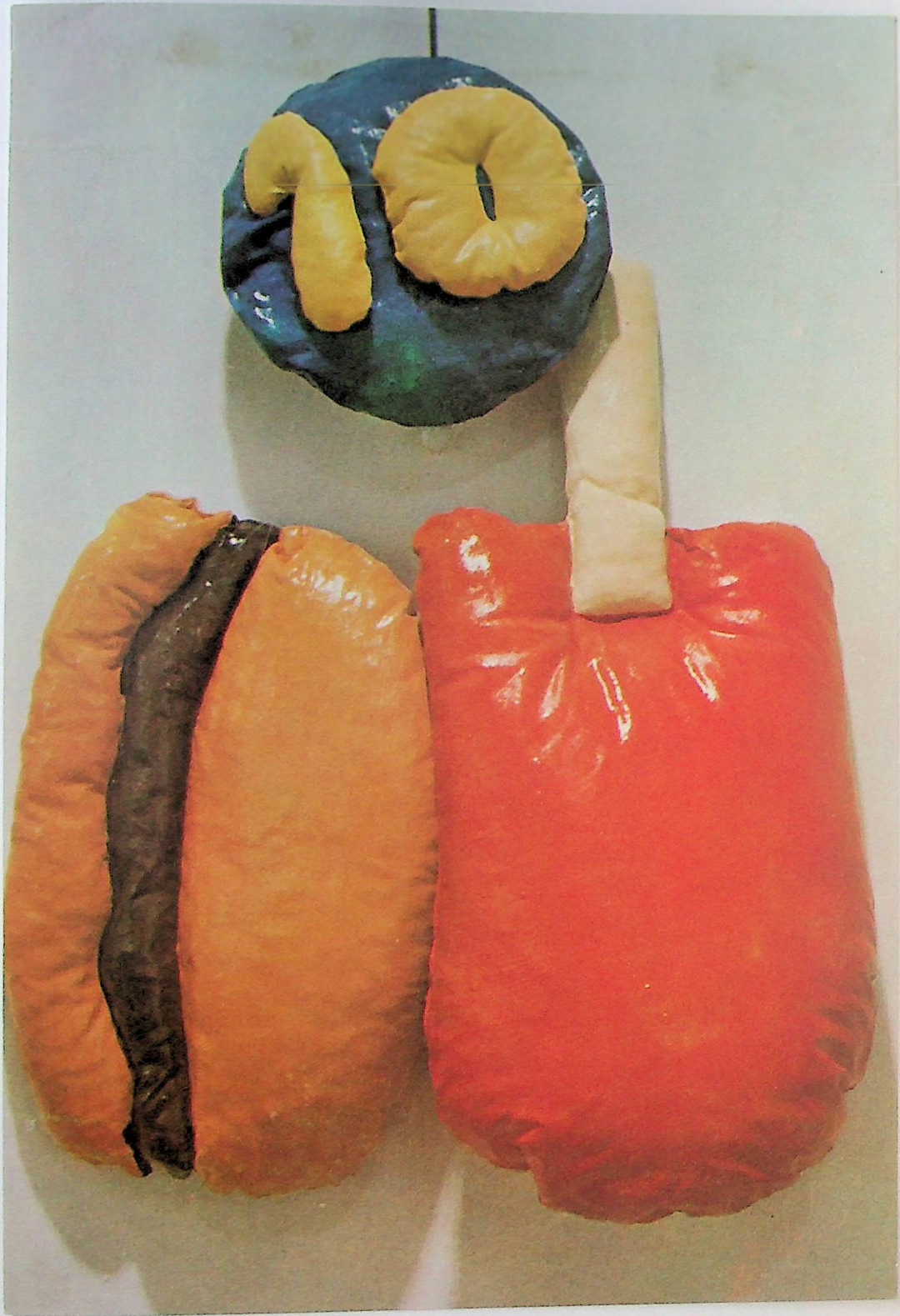
personally I feel Oldenburg's most radical and original works are his soft sculptures which he began in 1963. By subjecting his sculptures to the force of gravity he not only "humanized" the products of industrial society but created work with built in permutations, whenever one touches or moves one of these pieces, it simply settles into a new position.

It is his own immaterial fantasy, his own shifting vision and view of space that he seeks to freeze and capture in his work. His imagination obviously works by the principle of challenge and response. His soft sculptures can be taken with ease, the credibility of them transports us into a whole new world as it were.

The monuments are meant to be taken seriously in that they are true symbols of our age and reveal the choices open to society, but I also feel that they are meant, by their extravagant exaggeration, to shock people into consciousness of what is really happening. The erection of these monuments would mean that people had seen that they had the power to control their lives and modify their environment.

As I have mentioned in my introduction the regard and value I have for all pieces of work is that if it is to be enjoyed, then enjoy it. This attitude is very important to me especially where Oldenburg is concerned because even though his work can assume many different forms, it can also support a host of meanings be they sexual, ironic, witty, as well as being a very serious social comment. When I see any of Oldenburg's works

I certainly feel that they are very personal responses to his experiences and I appreciate them for their radicalism and individuality.



HAMBURGER, POPSICLE, PRICE . 1962



GIANT BLUE MENS PANTS. 1962

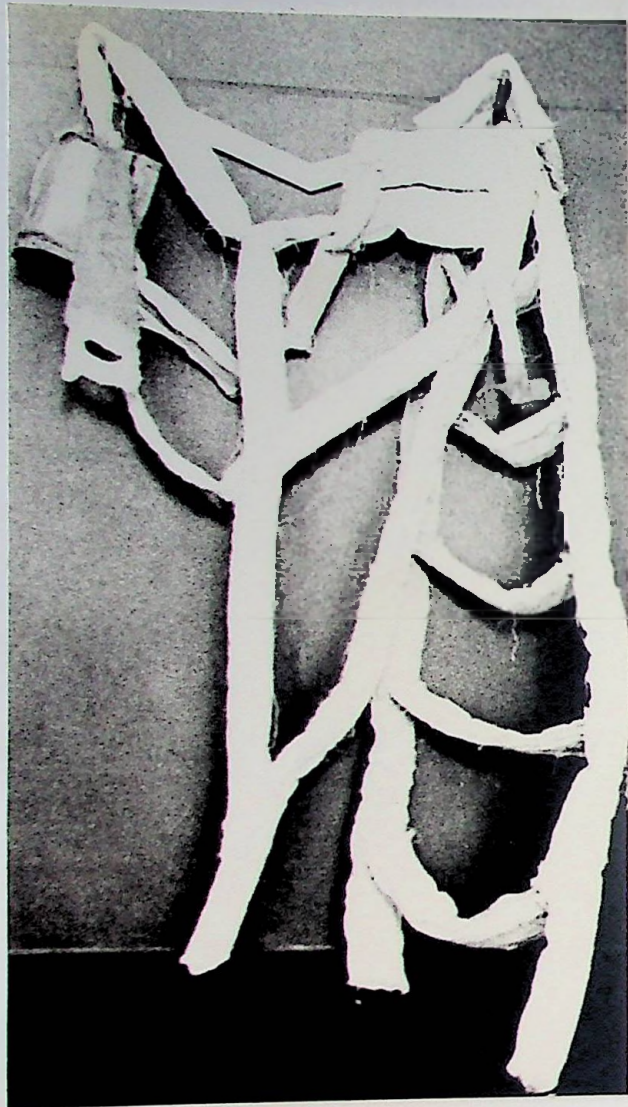


SWITCHES SKETCH. 1964

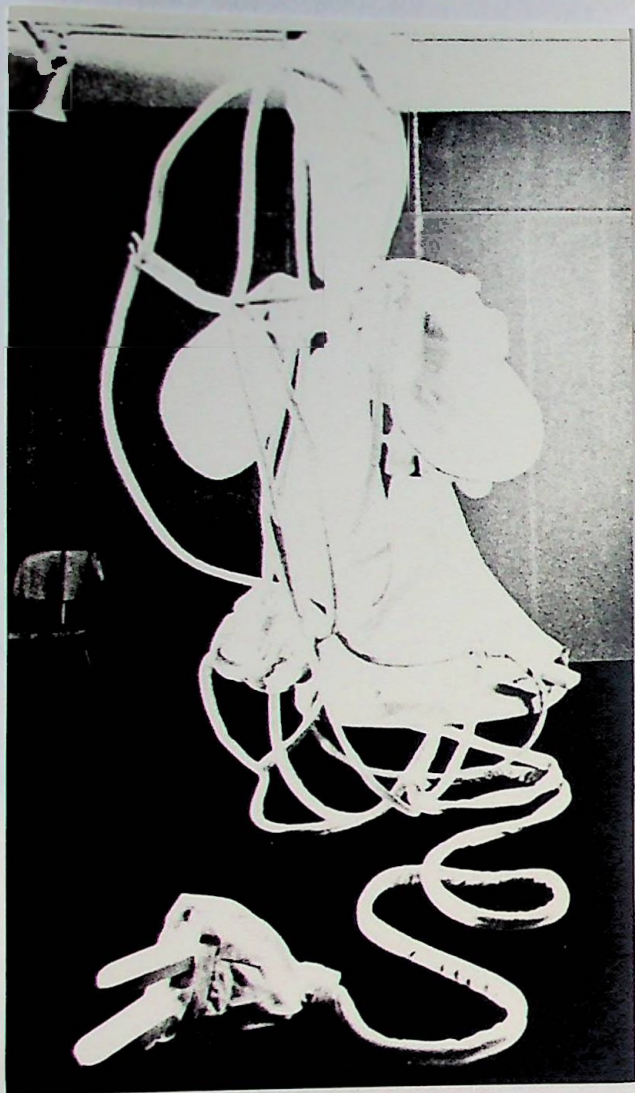


GIGANT ICE-BAG

1969-70



SOFT LADDER, HAMMER, SAW, BUCKET. 1967.



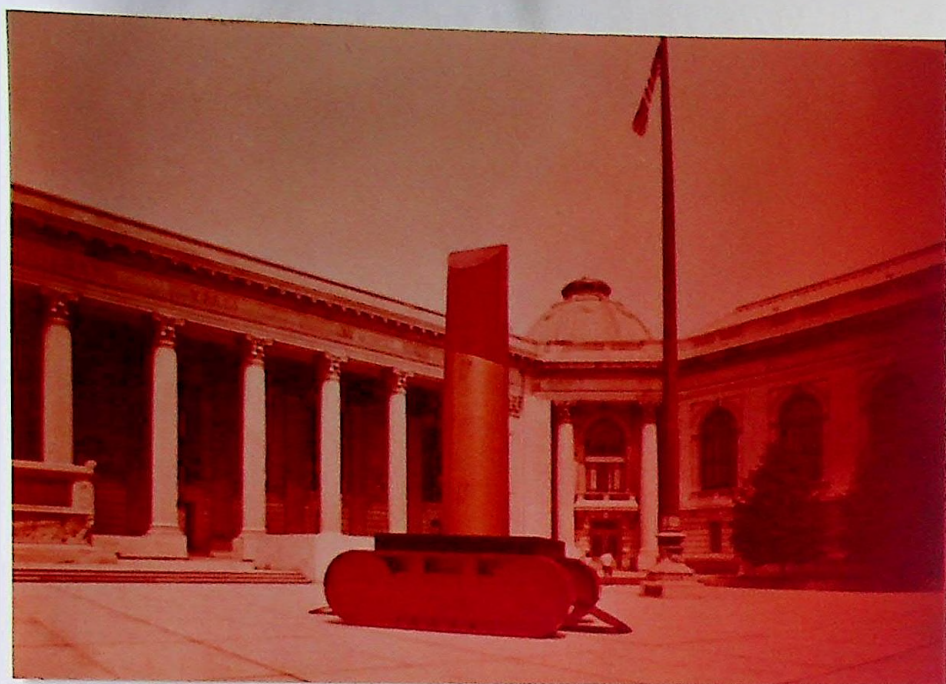
GIANT SOFT FAN - "GHOST VERSION" 1967



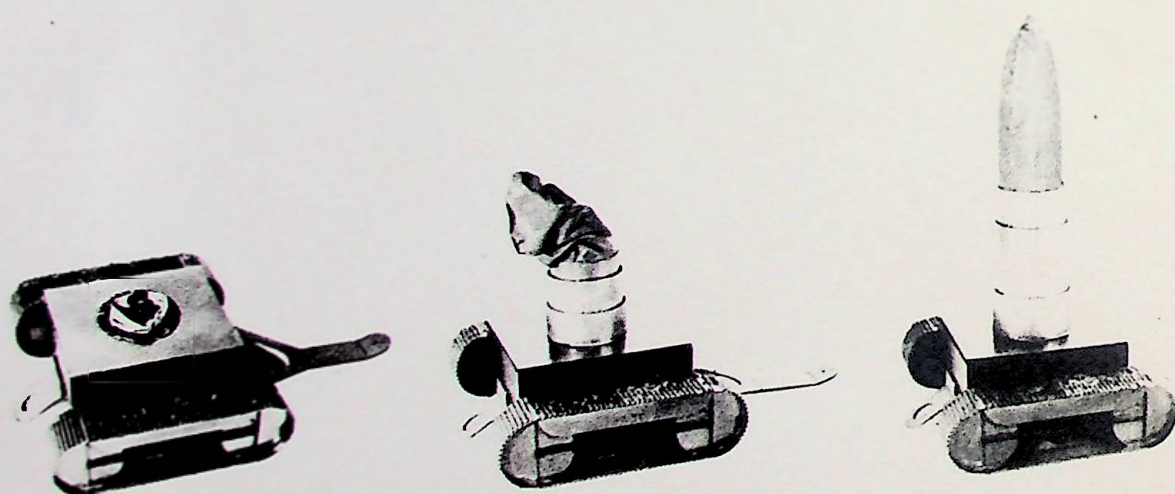
SOFT BATHTUB. 1966



GIANT SOFT DRUM SET. 1967



LIPSTICK MONUMENT IN SITU AT YALE UNIVERSITY 1969



MONUMENT FOR YALE UNIVERSITY :
GIANT TRAVELING AND TELESCOPING LIPSTICK WITH
CHANGEABLE PARTS SHOWING THREE STAGES OF
EXTENSION (MODEL) 1969.

MY OWN WORK

I have already mentioned in my introduction that I prefer to look upon myself as someone who takes photographs, someone who draws or whatever. Looking at myself this may give me the freedom to do what I want therefore I am not concerned whether I am making "art" or not. I strongly think that if people stopped making "art" for the "art society" and made it for their ordinary selves instead, that work unlike anything which has ever been evolved before would emerge.

The sources of inspiration in my work have always been my inner and outer responses to everyday life, whether they are concerned with people, land, objects or whatever. My ideas are very spontaneous, when I respond to a situation I seek to capture and freeze that exact situation immediately in order to relate my response to it.

My work begins as a "solitary activity" but once it is finally completed my personal experience is then exposed to the public for them to accept or reject it. The excitement and enjoyment for me is when I actually observe something which contains visual ironies and am then able to recreate a reality from them.

My work is a great challenge for me because I am constantly aware of my surroundings and always alert to observe subtleties which I find in everyday life.

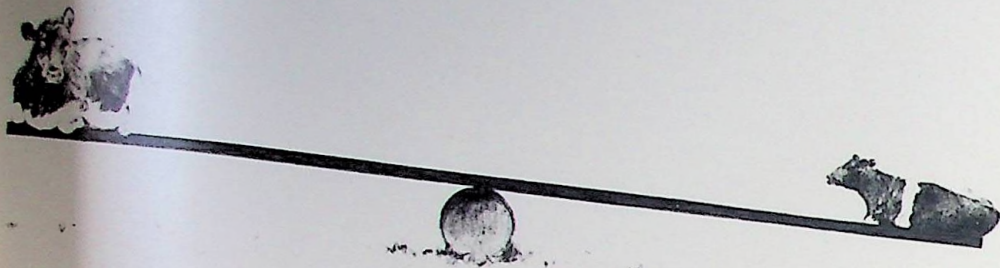
I am never certain that my idea will always work, I cannot predict what my next idea will be however, this does not bother me because I feel that I will always respond to situations no matter how subtle they are and if I feel the urge or necessity to re-

create the situation then this is enough reason for me to go on working.

When I'm taking photographs in a landscape I feel the urge to keep clicking the camera because I find that it offers me an endless amount of ideas that I want to recreate. My imagination plays a big part in my way of seeing things because I tend to get carried away when I see two cows standing in a field I almost imagine the conversation, a flock of sheep bleating together what stops one thinking of a choir ?

I would consider my work as being very visual, it doesn't require anything of the spectator only to relax and feel free to incorporate his/her own meaning to it if they wish. I am well aware that it may not have any great intensity but I do know that it's content is my communication, my expression of what I see around me therefore it's meaning is left to the viewer.

















When I saw the work of Taylor and Oldenburg, I found their
feeling that they were expressing a part of their personality,
and that being the case, I immediately felt that I
could not help but feel that I would experience the same
feeling from their work because both their work
seem to have a personal response to small, simple everyday
situations etc.

I relate my own work with theirs because I feel that from an
observatory point of view I am very similar to both Taylor
and Oldenburg. Having read about both Taylor's
work and Oldenburg's work as regards the value which I have
in their work, I still look to their work as objects to be
studied and experienced.

C O N C L U S I O N

When I experienced Wendy Taylor's sculptures, I stood there feeling that I was experiencing a part of her personality. Her work being simple and pure I immediately felt comfortable and calm. I feel that I would experience the same feeling from Claes Oldenburg's work because both their works reveal their personal responses to small, subtle everyday situations etc.

I relate my own work with theirs because I feel that from an observatory point of view I am very similar to both Wendy Taylor and Claes Oldenburg. Having read about both "artists" hasn't altered my opinion as regards the value which I have for their work. I still look to their work as objects to be enjoyed and experienced.

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B I B L I O G R A P H Y

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|------------------|--------------------------------|----------|------|
| LIPPARD LUCY R. | POP ART | LONDON | 1966 |
| ROSE BARBARA | THE WORK OF
CLAES OLDENBURG | NEW YORK | 1970 |
| ROSENBERG HAROLD | THE DE-DEFINITION
OF ART | LONDON | 1972 |
| SPIES WERNER | THE RUNNING FENCE | LONDON | 1977 |
| TOMKINS CALVIN | THE WORLD OF DUCHAMP | U.S.A. | 1966 |
| WOLLHEIM RICHARD | ART AND IT'S OBJECTS | U.S.A. | 1968 |
| | HAYWARD ANNUAL | LONDON | 1978 |