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THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

THE WORK OF JOHN DAVIES

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO:

THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN & COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES

AND

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE

FACULTY OF FINE ART

DEPARTMENT OF SCULPTURE

BY

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APRIL 1985

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INTRODUCTION

John Davies is a hermit by many standards and one who has worked outside the tide of Art-Sculpture as it has progressed in England.

Unlike many of his contemporaries he lives and works away from the hub of the London Art world; quietly he exhibits as an individual only every second or third year, usually an indicator to change in his imagery and means of; it also explains the considerable amount of work that appears readily in front of our eyes.

Probably he is quite aware of the influence which time and place have in all the works he makes. The former denotes the process of change and thought, the latter, in conjunction, attains the mentality of insight which is mirrored in all his work, from the drawings, now more developed and hence important, to the sculptures more diverse; heads miniature/ larger than life. Even his figures are less than life size (all of this work is modelled, which is a complete departure from past experience, but one which could even determine the scale used).

Odd that a man should spend so much effort and time with the human image, perhaps not now since we are back in vogue again, but for almost sixteen years or more, he has meticulously pursued what we are apt to call the "human condition". Again and again, the mystery of a person - persons unobtainable in our present form - constantly seeking what we can not grasp. Davies pushes and pulls this illusive element, dealing with the facts of we, as we are, in the moments of our lives, even in the simple, so much so that we overlook it.

Lately some of his work almost enters the arena of the literal, transformed into the visual, but affecting your sense such that you instinctively know and yet confuse in explanation.

In his present format a reduction has taken place on the one hand and an enlargement on the other. The figures and heads are as

small as 8" and 1/2" respectively and some of the drawings larger than life 47" and 59": the figures were, he admits, studies for his more established work. But they seem to have proceed during time to attain something of their own quality, which, as it happens, was one of his concerns in '82, that he might be able to create a whole environment or environments by putting together numerous or single miniture figures.

In the past the drawing seemed an addition to the sculpture, although now the standing is more ambiguous, the sculpture could almost be an addition to the drawing. Yet it had to be stated that drawing and 3 D. seemed always to go hand in hand, one coping with the inefficiencies of the other. Unconsciously he adapted ideas to the flexibility of the nature of the medium- drawing, more imaginative, space not restricted, vastness on a page and 3 D. a reality which observes a relationship to space.

In the present context his work almost intorates a definite statement which is again a departure from previous means, when it seemed that your instinctive observance could see and identify, but could not reduce the visual image to a standard interpretation. Coupled with this is the view that not only are particular relationships seen in space as "object", but the object is also "treated" which tends to compound the image and also continues to question the relationship of the nature of 3 D. and its elements and that of drawing and its elements, since the 3 D. heads are figures are also painted, engraved and marked, to a greter or lesser extent.

On the IIth of May 1984, Davies had his 6th major exhibition; for my purpose I have cited only four, these I consider to be the exhibitions which show definite change in work. Of the above stated exhibition in the Marlborough Gallery in London'and much to the surprise of many, the effect in scale changed the emphasis of relationship from a person to a life size figure (object) to an object nevertheless striking yet intensively different in the awareness of .

Figures balanced, climbing up and down rope ladders, ropes, active and anxious, borroxed partly a circus scenario, but oddly

aware of another place, naked, yet another departure, painted, the skin almost dirty!

Tensely gazing beyond you and me, eyes wild with fear, excitement, a separation existing between the activity and how they do it, why seemingly such a separation, since more often my action is an extension of what I am thinking, what I am seeing. This separation, isolation, subjugation in the past highlights the awareness which is still instinctive.

A friend commented that their pensive stance, gave her an uneasy feeling, a totally unassuring image, but one which made her reflect between the differences of what she is and knows and what this miniature of minature^s embodied. A sense I think of understanding, which depends on personal perception of self, against unconscious and conscious perception of the images.

Davies himself, in the introduction to the catalogue, gives a simple indication to the work "I have tried to write an introduction for the catalogue, but concluded that it is not important what I say" (1).

My approach to his work has been firstly to draw a parallel of historical background within the context of British Art; it mainly traces the dominant ideas and influences up to the present day. I have not attempt to make a comparaisn between Davies and what else went on, rather the parallel only places him in time, particularly from '68 onward.

Graham Beal explains that Davies did not share anything with the "Abstract Modes" in '72 "The difference stemmed directly from his aims" (2). Davies, he says, summed it up as trying "to make things that are like people, rather than like sculptures" (3). Beal states that he felt isolated as a sculptor at the time and "He was not aware of the work being done in the States by photo-realist sculptors like Hanson and De Andrea" although he knew the work of Keinholz, he did not actually like it. "...too crude and gross" (4). Even now his relationship to the rest of British sculptors remains a distant one.

The secon chapter takes the four major exhibitions . The

two in the Whitechapel ('72-75) and the two at the Marlborough ('80-84) . The purpose being to look at the artist's intention, techniques and means of working.

The final chapter consists of nineteen questions which I sent to Davies concerning his work; although he declined to answer them I have used them by trying to provide my own answers in relation to my own judgement, using of the information at my disposal, although, as critical information on Davies is quite scarce, some of my conclusions may seem somewhat circumstantial.

Nonetheless, as Davies has stated in the letter returned with the questions, "I am reluctant to explain my work...I am the sort the artist who finds that hard... I think you must speculate from there" (5).

FOOTNOTES INTRODUCTION

- (1) John Davies, "Recent sculpture and drawing", p.I
- (2) Graham Beal, "John Davies' sculpture and drawing", p.I
- (3) Ibid
- (4) Ibid
- (5) John Davies, "A letter", p.I

PARALLEL HERITAGE

British art can be seen as a combination of influences, some
of which are not necessarily British, but the result is
a unique style. The influence of the past is not
merely a matter of style, but of attitude. The
attitude of the artist is what matters.

At the end of the 50's in England, young painters
were looking for a new way of working. They were
not satisfied with the traditional way of painting.
They wanted to express their ideas in a new way.
They wanted to create a new language. They wanted
to create a new style. They wanted to create a
new way of working. They wanted to create a
new style. They wanted to create a new way of
working. They wanted to create a new style.

The first group to do this was the Young British
Artists. They were a group of young painters who
were looking for a new way of working. They were
not satisfied with the traditional way of painting.
They wanted to express their ideas in a new way.

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I. BACKGROUND

British art can be seen as a combination of influences, prior to the war many of the ideas emanated from Europe, but post-war England tended primarily to have local concerns which later turned to American ideas and which have now returned to European/local base.

At the end of the 50's in England younger sculptors split in their attitude toward working, for they felt that the ideas then in use, mainly within Expressionistic figurative sculpture had become a 'cliqued mannerism' .(I)

They considered it a reflection of the tension and anxiety of the post-war years and therefore felt that returning to a form of abstraction would create a more accurate language. But these concerns in turn formulated to different attitudes . One saw it as a non-referential language, and therefore a goal in itself, the second thought that abstraction itself was not the goal , but rather the means of finding a new form of subject matter, one more suited to the contemporary ethos. Yet both groups felt that contact with mainstream sculptural traditions was more important than continued local ones. In particular the legacy of Moore.

The first group turned to early 20th century sculpture and the pioneers of the modern tradition, the second to a more anonymous and ancient tradition which emerged from Primitive and Archaic sculpture: the work of Brancusi and Picasso provided the suggestions for new direction.

Separate from these 2 groups a third formed from the belief that traditional distinctions between genres like painting and sculpture were no longer feasible and hence the attitude to materials processes and forms became more open. This was the basis of working in the Weimar Bauhaus,

consequently it was part of a larger growth outside Britain.

Post war American Art had been infected by Expressionistic abstraction; it was, according to Harold Rosenberg, "the transcription of an artist's inner emotions by the means of a pictorial or sculptural act".(2) Rosenberg was equating the work itself with the physical body of the artist who made it, and the work consisted of a material surface and an interior which opens illusionistically behind that surface. His analogy between the psychological interior of the artist and the illusionistic interior of the work makes impossible to see the pictorial/sculptural object as a metaphor for human emotion.

This was the rhetoric of the American artists of the 1950's and hence from this perception it was rejected by Jasper Johns whose work in the mid 50's constituted a radical critic of abstract Expressionism and he therefore provided the immediate source material for minimalism.

According to R. E. Krauss his rejection was performed through works such as 'Bronze ale cans', 1960. Cast in bronze and painted surface -replicating the appearance of the originals- and in 'Target with 4 faces' 1955.(3)

Johns' drawing simply replicates the internal divisions of a commercially produced object, his exploitation of the design of a 'readymade flat target' deprives the painting of the specific kind of suggestive illusionistic space.

Johns' reading of the readymade reinforced his opposition to the whole idea of art as pure expression, his understanding led not toward, but away from the expression of self. He saw the readymade as pointing to the fact that there need be no connection between a final art object and the psychological matrix from which it issued.

Since in the case of the readymade this possibility is precluded from the start, so that the readymade has another use completely . e.g. The Fountain, Duchamp, it was only selected

by him.

Judd and the minimal artists made work that refuted the uniqueness privacy and inaccessability of experience. The art which emerged in the States in the early 60's staked everything on the accuracy of a model of meaning severed from the legitimizing claims of a private self.

Minimal sculptors began with a procedure for declaring the externality of meaning. They reacted against a sculptural illusionism which converts one material into the significance for another: stone to flesh . (4)

Moore in the British context was a proponent of this illusionism . 'Whether it was concious or not is debatable for in 1936 a Surrealist group was formed in London, the same year as the international Surrealist exhibition at the Burlington gallery. In England many of the artists and writers wanted to assume a revolutionary stance without submitting to the arid dogmas of the socialist realism. Moore was one of them. (5) He had given symbolic importance to central interior space from which he felt that energy of living matter was derived; it became so important because as 20th century sculpture discarded realistic representation as a source of major ambition and turned to far more generalised and abstracted plays of form, the possibility arose as it had not for naturalistic sculpture, that the sculptural object might be seen as nothing but inert material, if Moore had made conspicuous use of eroded stone or the rough hewn wooden block it was not to serve this material untrasformed. Instead he wished to create the illusion that at the center of this inert matter there was a source of energy that shaped it and gave it life. In using sculpture to create this metaphor Moore and Co. were establishing the abstract meaning of their work, they claimed that the process of creating form is for sculpture a visual meditation on the logic of organic growth itself.

Under this 'logic of organic growth', the influence of Moore especially was away from any decisive figuration, and towards an art of shape-making of suggestive forms. He had invested the expressive forms of Picasso and De Chirico-the anguished bestial heads and the disquieting Muses- with values that were the opposite of disquieting, a kind of primitive humanism :forms that had once conveyed standard absurdity were now asked instead to stand for the fusion of man and the natural order, a permanence.(6)

This 'permanence' was what the younger generation of British sculptures wanted to overcome , yet it seems as already identified in 3 separate groups to have evolved by both rejection and absorption of Moore's 'permanence'. Some turned to a morphology of simple monolithic shape, tendency to abstraction in form and not content, totemic images and egg-head-shapes, since such archaic or primitive forms were felt to carry archtypal references and therefore association and not specific illusions. Thus potent if vague metaphor replaced the 'hybrid monster'.

The use and means of materials was decernably new, but remainig was this belief in the universal archtypal for conveying basic truths of an imotive intuitive order. From another perspective certain artists were more disillusioned and therefore regeneration of content was superceded by a need of a more indepth re-examination of the premises of sculpture itself.

Antony Caro seems to be chosen by many as the catalyst for these concerns, many giving emphasis to his influence in St.Martins.

But it would seem that Caro arrived at such a point of dominance by a combination of circumstance and probable decision.

He had apprenticed himself to Moore as an assistant, so in the mid to late 50's he had worked within Moore's tradition of the figure and bronze casting. He had moved toward an archtypal imagery, but by '59 he had rejected the human figure in favour of working abstractly, involving improvisation and spontaneity, -his early work had enjoyed enormous international acclaim- (7) ' the pitted bronze saurian head and grotesque violently wrenched limbs of 'Woman waking up' 1955. (Tate).

In 1959 Caro visited the States where he met Clement Greenburg and Kenneth Nolen; Nolen's hard edge painting is supposed to have influenced him , but more importantly he met Smith in the autumn of '59 and it was he who really provided him with the basis for new direction (it would seem that he may have understood the motivation behind Smith's work). He began to work, he believed more freely, to explore, he destroyed the plaster pieces and began using steel, welding and bolting found forms, (eg. "24hours"). He considered that the work of Smith was derived from Cubist precedents, hence the basis of his direction.

Smith was in fact working from a perception which was anchored firmly in the traditions of Surrealist and Constructivist sculpture, although he rejected the principles of geometric, organic constructivist sculpture, also thematically "for by using the theme of Totemism Smith puts distance between himself and the kind of technological content that characterised orthodox constructivism". (8) Caro declaimed to work with Totemic imagery.

The 'Formal Abstraction' which developed within the concerns of Caro's work and followers had moved by '67 to a more 2 dimensional plain and had entered a pictorialism, almost a decorative quality; according to Krauss "The problem was that decorative pictorialism was a risk that was run by the younger generation of English artists, who followed Caro,

such as Scott, Tucker and King who all increasingly shifted from a concern with large inert sculptural volume to this pictorial mode".(9)

Scott had argued that abstract American painting opened up for most artists an enormous extension to art.

The risk was obvious for in Kynaston McShine's "Primary structure's" exhibition at the Jewish Museum in New York in 1966 (10) Caro, Tucker, King and other St. Martin's sculptures met decisive opposition. Decorative elegance influenced by Hard edge abstract painting in which modernity was interpreted as novelty of form or colour proved no match for the leaner approach of Andre, Le Witt, Morris and Judd, in whose work craftsmanship and composition played little part and neither modernist reductivism nor constructivist theory had served as precedent.

An interesting note here is that Judd says that Philip King's early work possessed the quality of a wholistic unitary volume which dispenses with an internal armature forming all attention on the elaboration of its surface.

According to Judd the kind of sculpture made by Chamberlain and King created the Aesthetic Territories that became to be known as minimal art; he saw within their work the possibility of an entire realignment of sculptural practise. More importantly our notions of what a sculpture means.

But alas King's initial insight would seem to have been absorbed by the St. Martins ethos.

By '63 Barry Flanigan and others in St. Martins were reacting to the prevailing ethos, in a letter to Caro in 'Silence,' a student magazine, Flanigan states, "Rejection has been a motivation for me....am I deluded ...or is it in these times positive human assertion, directed in the channels that lead

up to the clouds, perhaps a mushroom cloud. Is it yhat the only useful thing a sculptor can do, -being a 3 D. thinker and therefore one hopes a responsible thinker- is to assert himself twice as hard in a negative way ... I might claim to be a sculptor and do everything else but sculpture this is my dilemma".(II)

In '66 John Latham reduced Greenburg's 'art and culture' to a test-tube of goo and was fired from St. Martins.

And in the same year a retrospective of almost all the works of Duchamp was held in London, then in '67 in America Fried published 'art and objecthood'. Inside the formalist camp Fried distinguished between "literalism"... Judd, and "modernism"....Caro, favouring the latter.

Fried's understanding exposed the heart of Flanagans's issue; to behave as Latham did and call it art was impossible in the existing terms, hence Duchamp became the necessary catalyst for new terms, -particularly the readymade, therefore British work was now only beginning to retrace the steps of Judd and Co.- yet stateside Carl Andre had already moved even further along with the concerns of minimalism.

Andre said "my first problem has been to find a set of particles, units and then combine them according to the laws which are particular to each particle". Rather than by a law which is applied to the whole set eg. glueing, welding, riviting.(I2)

Andre considered that the properties inherent to a specific material could be used to compose the work as though what was being taped was major, as a readymade instead of some aspect of culture. This work, which came to be known as "process art", of which Eva Hess was a major preponent, was interested in the principle of transformation as the observable rather than the work, the kinds of transformations that were

employed in making, those that cultures used to incorporate the raw materials of nature, such as smelting in order to refine or stacking in order to build. -the point of his "Bricks" in the Tate.

It may also be noted here, how it is only a short step from this to Performance and Environmental Art. If we ask who makes these decisions, generates the processes, we see how the artist himself became the subject of sculpture and his own actual environment the sculptural "space". He with his capacity to generate art was now the sculptural "object". (I3)

In Britain by '67 the work of Mc Lean, as in the photographs of "Vertical ice sculpture" and Long's records of travel had challenged the precepts of Caro and Co., their perception should temporary arrangements of site materials and a denial of constancy in time and space. (I4)

The most common British replacement for object making was the marriage of language and photography, particularly in books; the work of Gilbert and George 'Side by side' (book) 1971. Hamish Fulton 'Hollow line' 1971.

Critics uncertain of terms of reference for this work isolated its most obvious elements, phraseology such as 'deobjectification' or 'dematerialisation'. The term 'Conceptual art' was unveiled before an English audience in 'Art-language' in 1969. , in an article by Sol le Witt, it stressed that art's concern was a change in consciousness.

Hilary Chapman states that the concerns of young British sculptors in the 70's was marked by an awareness, not of sculpture alone, not of the product or the object, but of the sculptor's varied connectiveness with his art -the momentum again gained from Duchamp. (I5)

IN '68 Keith Arnatt noted the paradox Flanagan had described to Caro : sculpture defined the terms they both inherited , they were unworkable unless definitions of all kinds could be shelved or altered or confused.

As well as a St. Martins' polarisation, there was one which emanated from the Royal College; Fenella Crichton characterised it as 'Symbols -Presences and Poetry', -and a resurgence of the Romantic tradition. Baudelaire's non-definition, "Romanticism is precisely situated, neither in choice of subject matter, nor in exact truth, but in a way of feeling"(I6) She states, these sculptors use forms which above all have a degree of personal meaning, hence always an important dimension which is private. Nevertheless the preponents under this flag were such individuals as Carl Plackman, Martin Naylor and Kenneth Draper.

Under the heading 'Paul Neagu', H. Chapman states"....sculpture now is marked by a new subjectivity, sculptors seek to identify with the subject of the sculpture, it may be a shape, an image, a fragment even a line." (I7)

Coupled with these elements are those of the forms and materials which developed from the welded steel and plastic of the '60's to the more frequent use of materials more closely related to everyday experience. Hence the work in the '70's tended to have numerous formats from minimal and conceptual basis to interchanges of surrealist and assemblage derivatives.

The concerns in the Royal College centred on work which was often theatrical and devices employed blattant. But by the mid '70's many had moved away from visual histrionics into areas more subtle and emotionally ambiguous. Much of the work suggested human activity as in 'Generator', 1975; Paul Neagu, Carl Plackman 'Raft of the medusa' 1975 or as extreme as M. Poybter who used life-like tableaux with sarcastic overtones,

(18)' Doris on the beach' 1973. Plackman used objects drawn from ordinary life extensively, but imbuing them with new symbolic function; much of the work was intended to communicate on a more intimate, conversational level and rely on the active involvement of the viewer.

For Neagu his work functioned as a bridge between intuition and reason.

The present work resides in an area between 'discourse and presence'. According to Michael Newman the sculpture takes "its place as both a literal object or event in the world, where it is unavoidably present and functions as a representation within a discourse of object and images which has reached a crisis and turning point in the late capitalist consumer society". (19)

While the elements of discourse and presence have been important to modern work in general, the specific context has changed.

Newman feels that the awareness of mediation can no longer be contained by the self reflexive questioning of the formal support of the art-work.

Hence the re-emergence of the object in 'Recent British sculpture' and therefore a new understanding of concept, process and context. This began a return to object-making toward the end of the '70's. In "British sculpture now"(20) Kunz points out two particular features in relation to the work of these artists, they all showed plastic objects and no installations as extensions of the sculpture. Some manipulate existing industrial products, as Woodrow and Vilmouth, others tend more to build and form objects/ sculptures, "which display association with organic, biomorphic shapes and act as a kind of vocabulary - abstract,

non-illustrative , non-figurative, but abounding in covert illusions to biomorphic or antropomorphic body shapes". Techniques include stone working, wood laminating, plaster modelling, etc.

There are 2 basic constants also underlining the work; a link exists in similarity of origin of materials between Cragg and Woodrow, although the approach is different and a sensual/biomorphic constant occurs in the work of Kapoor, Cox, and Deacon.

In regard to Cragg and Woodrow, the use of "refuse " material recalls the 'Nouveaux Réalistes' in the '60's and all the variations of the '70's ; Deacon's plant shapes recall the formal world of the '50's, Cox's abstract shape with vegetable form and content the stone-work still widespread in the '50's and lastly Kapoor's references to Indian culture popular in the '70's among western devotees of the Orient, although deeper observation reveals the diversity of interpretation of the individual artists. "Cragg and Woodrow challenge the natural materials in much '70's art.(.....) In recycling used commodities and stereotypical images, their sculpture is able to reflect on the process of production and consuption...."(21) in present society.

They interrogate the materials, stereotypes and mechanisms of our consumer society, which in certain terms is a return to the source material of '60's 'Pop Art', yet from a completely different approach - since 'Pop' in its transformation of rubbish into art, ultimately served to celebrate the values of consumer culture.(22)

Issues raised in Cragg's work extend from social fragmentation, - the fragments are plastic dicards and the configurations become explicit images as in 'Britain seen from the North' 1981.

- to the relationships between art and not-art, sculpture and painting, gallery and street, the mediated and the directly experienced. "Red chair, green vase." 1982., packing cases, chair and vase covered in hand-drawn scribbles and arranged into "compositions". The assertive identity of the components even though receding behind the unifying "drawing" questions the basis of the "Aesthetic" presence which the sculptures themselves strongly evoke. -the image is continually disturbed (23) by the assertiveness of the material.

In the case of Woodrow whose work in '79 was concerned with fossil type identity of refuse machines -the object identity was artefact. -He then moved to "de-invent" the object, taking it apart and using the parts to build a shadow-object, a functionless 3dimensional of the original.

Woodrow realised that in our consumer society the product image has become more important than the object itself.

In present work, 3D. images are cut out from discarded washing-machines and car doors, but remain attached by an 'umbilical cord', recognising that both object and image function as language within the discourse of consumption. Also contained in his work his social criticism present, but not always explicit. His method has remained constant although subject matter has moved from nature, the primitive and violence to mass-media, religion and power. Lately the surreal and bizarre have surfaced in Locus Solus a lamp converted into an eye (24) with a large fly on the blue painted iris and the rim cut to form a necklace upon which hangs a diamond teardrop.

The work of Deacon explores the area between discourse and presence, it involves a continuation with British sculpture of the late '60's and early '70's and also goes back to symbolist art and poetry eg. Rilke's sonnets to Orpheus, have been a main subject in Deacon's sculpture since '78-79. (25)

A materialist aesthetic is asserted by the plainness of the materials, eg. wood, steel, leather, linoleum, all having domestic and kitsch connotations and by the means of fabrication, simple and evident, usually riveting, glueing, sewing.

The effect of the work is not located in some mysterious essence inherent in the sculpture, but rather in the relationship between object and viewer, in which the viewer recognizes his shared experience.

Therefore Newman states that the sculpture is a continual sense of disclosure; the work incorporates multiple reference and connotation, especially muted sexual illusions - the skin, enclosed volume, the literal inside and outside of the work are vehicles for imaginative introjection or exclusion of the viewer.

Finally in Kapoor's sculpture, presence is dramatised through an oscillation between object and image, tactile surface and gestalt.

The sculpture evokes the original object while rendering it at the same time unattainable, his recent work - mud covered matrix coloured with pigment - recently gilded - have moved from antropomorphism and covert body imagery to a more abstract concern with stillness + movement, rotation + center. (26)

Thus stand the concerns of work which run to the present day.

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER I.

- (1) Nairne and Serota, "British sculpture in the 20th century" p. 167
- (2) R.E.Krauss, "Passages in modern sculpture", pp.255-256
- (3) Ibid. pp.256-258
- (4) Ibid. p.259
- (5) Timothy Hyman, "Figurative sculpture since 1960", p. 85
- (6) Nairne and Serota, p. 185
- (7) Timothy Hyman, p. 185
- (8) R.E. Krauss, p. 161
- (9) Ibid
- (10) Nairne and Serota, p.197
- (11) Ibid
- (12) R.E. Krauss, p.279
- (13) Hilary Chapman, "Arts review" 29 (4 Feb. 1977), pp. 82-86
- (14) Nairne and Serota, p. 204
- (15) R.E. Krauss
- (16) Nairne and Serota, p. 223
- (17) Hilary Chapman, "New British sculpture"; Arts Review
- (18) Nairne and Serota, p.224
- (19) Michel Newman, "Recent British sculpture", FLASH ART, n°115 (Jan. '84)
- (20) Martin Kunz, "British Art now", Art Museum ('82)
- (21) Newman, p. 49
- (22) Ibid
- (23) Michel Newman, "Fragments and Emblems"
- (24) Newman, "FLASH ART", p.52
- (25) Ibid p.52
- (26) Ibid p.54

THE WORK OF JOHN DAVIES

This chapter follows the work of Davies since leaving the Leeds School of Art in 1953. It is intended to show how his work has developed and to discuss his work in relation to the work of other sculptors of his generation. It is intended to show how his work has developed and to discuss his work in relation to the work of other sculptors of his generation.

THE WORK OF JOHN DAVIES

He began his training in 1953. At Manchester, studied design, then went to Leeds in 1955. He studied sculpture at Leeds from 1955 to 1959. He was a member of the Leeds School of Art from 1955 to 1959. He was a member of the Leeds School of Art from 1955 to 1959.

Consequently there have been many exhibitions of his work. His work has been shown in many exhibitions. His work has been shown in many exhibitions. His work has been shown in many exhibitions.

His work at present is a continuation of his work since 1959. His work at present is a continuation of his work since 1959.

Most of the work referred to has been shown in one or more of the exhibitions mentioned above. Most of the work referred to has been shown in one or more of the exhibitions mentioned above.

Within this period his work has been shown in many exhibitions. Within this period his work has been shown in many exhibitions.

2. INTENTION, MEANS AND TECHNIQUES

This chapter follows the work of Davies since leaving the Slade. He was interested in what seemed to him to be "two worlds", the world of art and structure and the other world outside the studio; "there was such a disparity between them that I wanted to combine them. I wanted my sculpture to be more like life in the street." (1)

He began his training in '63. At Manchester, studied design, then went to Hull to paint, and lastly in '67 to the Slade to study sculpture. He taught for a year at Cheltenham Art College and had a studio in Stroud, Gloucestershire. In 1970 he received the Sainbury award and had moved to Faversham in Kent, where he has continued to work.

Davies in the actual fabrication of his work is quite ordinary, almost simple but the way he mediates his materials has proved to be so illusive to many who observe him.

"I want to make something very simple that includes everything" (2) and of his earlier work he says: "I was trying to make a figure, not a piece of sculpture, but more like a person". (3)

Consequently these have been the basic criterion upon which he has worked since '69. The way to look at him and his work can only be done through this aperture, his making is as much apart of the finished product as are the sources, and the mentality which assess and produces.

His work at present is a culmination of all that has been made and rejected in the intervening years.

Most of the work referred to has been shown in one or more of the individual exhibitions - of which there have been four since 1972 - in 1975, 1980 and 1984 -; the intervening periods are those during which the work has changed, his ideas evolved and his means become more precise; of his work in 1981 he says, "I want to make something more ordinary, I find the ordinary just as extraordinary now," (4).

Within this consideration his observations seem to inquire into the ordinary "rituals" that we perform each day. By taking and using the "ordinary" he arrives at something identifiable yet illusive;

work from the beginning '67-72 stands out as quite "unordinary".

He has indicated that it was engaged in a very imitative, illusionistic reference to the real world. His means in relation to this work are described by N. Wadley as follows: "Davies' first essay in fixing the extraordinary/ordinary was to confront this absolute readymade reality with invented "devices", or to submit it to the performance of strange rituals" (5). The readymade reality refers to his early use of life casts.

Norbert Lynton found reference to a piece of work which Davies did while still in the Slade. It is identified by the above statement. The work is dated Nov/Dec. '69; it consisted of several photographs of life sizes figures in a notebook, placed in sequence, the scene: a very wide space in a hall with dividing walls, whose ceiling is supported by a steel column. There are two chairs and an electric heater, with a coiled flex, the figures are involved in urgent but undefined action; Lynton considers that one would be tempted to go through the sequence and invent a script which would give meaning to the actions.

- _ a man leans against a column;
- _ then against a wall hiding his hand;
- _ other men appear to be in consultation;
- _ two disguised come from opposite directions;
- _ each ignores the other;
- _ whose faces now look as if they have been erased;
- _ at the end there is a man leaning against a wall knocking on it;
- _ he throws away his disguise;
- _ in the last photograph he is gone as well, nobody remains. (6).

In many respects Davies' first exhibition in the Whitechapel follows this scenario, although there is no sequence of events as portrayed by the photographs, instead all the figures are contained in one room but action is obvious and separate in each instance.

Here spectators in viewing could actually become a part of the activity, since the figures are firstly lifesize, but more importantly inhabit the same space as the viewer. The nature of the activity is determined by the positioning and addition of devices. The "ritual"

action is ambiguous, yet this serves to heighten the spectator's awareness of "presence of ".

In this collection "Young man" (69-71) was begun when teaching at Cheltenham; it was a self portrait, a student made a mould of Davies' head and body, he himself made a mould of his hands and he cast it in polyester resin in Faversham, in his studio.

The jacket was worn by him, the rest was clothing bought in jumble sales, the hair a nylon wig and the hands and face coloured with oil paint.

All the figures are made in a similar fashion, only the addition of devices varies, from the stance of "Young man" to the obscure horn tied to the head of "Man waiting" (1970), to the complexity of ritual "Three figures" (1971) and "For the last time" (1972).

Marina Vaizey says of the work: "His men are set in attitudes of expectancy, and melancholy, some involved in strange rituals, the figures set round the rim of a circle chalked on the floor...The faces are whitened, rather than tinted, some wear hats of a quasi-ceremonial nature; others wear nose masks." (7)

According to Catherine Lampert an additional source of immediacy of these figures, lies in their "drab, baggy cloths and inward gazing expressions, stiff bodies terminating in spread fingers. The preponderance of cloths over skin gave the figures a hollow look."

A second room in the Whitechapel contained another aspect of his work. Here heads stood fixed to poles of head height, but here also offered an insight into the other means of Davies. "Confronted with one or more of these heads, the spectator was drawn into deciphering any clues to the individual beneath the mask - to reading the eyes". (8). He is referring to the devices fixed to the heads, the first head of "William Jeffrey with Device" (1972) was made from a plaster bandage mould, using fibreglass to form a shell.

Davies considers the polyester resin an unpleasant material, he adds fillers and pigment to disguise its synthetic appearance.

Initially he painted the head to a high degree of realism but found it unsatisfactory and unconvincing, he realised that something else was needed. Therefore a device became necessary - a means whereby the

head could remain intact and the features undistorted.

The "device" could be the thing that was altered to affect the head, consequently he tried many different forms until he found the head beginning to be less an object and more a person.

The "device" caused something to occur between it and the head, producing a human aspect, which was not there when it was removed.

A series of heads were made from the initial mould of "Jeffrey" in '72 ; five were completed. The life size head was painted flesh colour, over which were fixed two blue cones of chicken wire, one over the head overlapping one, on the back; five imitation pearls were suspended from the cone, before the face, three behind; lead fishing weights were attached to the wire, the head was fixed to a 68 inch high metal pole. Of the series this was the third and had the most complex device used.

Another, again using chicken wire which was stretched over a wire frame, over a horn shape which covered the nose, forehead and mouth but left the eyes visible. Lastly two pieces of dowelling, one resting horizontally on the bridge of the nose, the other parallel to this on the tip of the nose; both fixed by wire round the ears, the eyes look out through the space between the dowelling.(9)

"Dogman", another of the heads in the exhibition, was originally modelled in clay, then cast in fibreglass, the white base colour is in the resin, oil paints were used on the surface - again it is fixed to 68 inch pole, attached to the nose is a silvery gray form with a black tip. It stretches down on either side of the mouth and across the upper cheek bones to behind the ears.

In terms of the heads he has worked dually, both in modelling and life casting, although neither technique is satisfactory. The detailed life cast could be a successful means of making an image of a person, yet for Davies it is not. He finds that in modelling that the appearance is too object-like and its qualities material rather than the quality of people.

As indicated concerning "W. Jeffrey", he does not distort features rather he works on the surface of the cast; often he says they seem too detailed and perfect, having the quality of photographs where there is an excess of detail compared with the impression one would

have by just looking. These, he considers, are the most difficult to work, the less specific are often the easiest to adapt.

Davies is often surprised that, although life casts may be precise records of all the physical details of a person, they communicate so little about a person.

The potential for plastic expression has always existed in Davies' single heads. The devices escaped their normal associations with pantomime and instead become inconspicuous, formal elements of the work, genuinely assimilated to communicate the "Alter Ego". (I0)

"I'm always amazed about faces, all you've got to work with is two eyes, nose and a mouth, but it's a whole world,.... that's very concentrated. They're not just objects, they emerge as something that looks back at you." (II)

A third area of his work is the drawings, of these in this exhibition M.Vaizey said they "are of figures, alone or in groups set in empty interiors" (I2). This element of Davies' work is not to be taken separately from everything else.

Davies' drawings capture the quirkiness of his personages, but also, and far more strongly, the terror and isolation of their world. (I3)

He says that drawing is very important to him: "I can describe the whole place. ... I did some drawings of people looking at the moon.... some ideas just aren't sculptural. You can't suspend the moon". (I4)

In later work the drawing has become both a means in itself and an element in regard to the sculpture.

By the exhibition of '75, again in the Whitechapel, the work had become more refined, the formal techniques he was using contrasted with the life cast realism of the figures and the devices were now less obvious.

At this point as well the inclusion of the means of drawing in the sculptural work had taken place. He says "It probably comes from the sort of marks that I make when I'm modelling the bodies, when I'm marrying them up to the cast heads and limbs." (I5)

Much of the work in this period was still in the extreme, but evolving change could be seen in the work presented from "Old enemy" ('73-75) - "Lesson" (73-75) to "Figure with slats" ('74-75). And in the heads from "Shell device" (73-75) - to "Head with line" (74-75).

In regard of this work he says "The last things I showed got incredibly real, but unreal to me. In frustration, I once threw paint over them and it blanked out the absolute realism" (I6).

The paint accounted for the monochromatic bland colouring that most of the figures were drenched in.

What is curious about this work is that change is very evident, right across the whole spectrum which makes one wonder, is it that Davies' work seems like a diary of the changes in his perception rather than a definitive statement of something that ends at a point: the work implies continuation, continued living and struggle; a sense of hope can almost be taken from the continued evolving of the work.

The obsessive objective for Davies is the extraordinary sense of a moment or of relationship, or of an individual beneath the most ordinary situations. "Things that people do over and over again". (I7) His recognition of the moment can come from observation, thought; or the moving around of figures in a drawing. "The sources of any one work are very deverse". (I8).

Some he says are obvious; "Orchard man" ('74) was based on men he had watched spraying or picking apples.

He describes when he used to go coursing - when they caught the hare they put it in a bag - "Visually that was very striking,

I remembered it" (19).

At the time he was trying to make a figure with a raised fist, which didn't work out. "It was too frozen...I picked up a bag and put it in his hand - it's as bitty as that sometimes. I often forget how they got started." (20)

What is certain is that for Davies the making is a way of seeing, of understanding, of shaping his perceptions of that around him. It defines his relationship within his life, to life.

He says "Sometimes when I look at what I do I think of it in terms of my relationship with the world, I find that quite disturbing, but it must be a fair reflection of what I see and my understanding of things" (21).

With regard to this "The Lesson" (73-75) implies a sense of relationship; the two figures face to face create an intimate space, but one in which they are unable to touch, distance is evident in the staring eyes, the hands are rigid, in fact both are fixed on the verge of embrace.

The templates serve to heighten the sense of this work, especially of an isolation which contains a paradox; intimacy without touch, without contact, drenched in watery gray, yet another element of their embrace.

Included is the appearance of a base on which many of the figures had begun to be placed; they have the effect of creating definite space within which the piece exists and space which signifies separate existence from that of the viewer's.

He seems to value the pull between their independence and the degree to which they share our environment.

N. Wadley says "The eloquence of the work and its comment on the ordinary world centers on the impassive, moving closeness of the heads... The relationship ...is enigmatic and oblique and various: it opens up a comparable array of thoughts and feelings" (22)

A point which is difficult to grasp is that Davies spends a colossal amount of time and energy making, and that the three specifics run concurrently, that is the life size figures, the heads and the drawings, all giving expression to different elements of his ideas.

Yet it happens that one means can trigger possibilities for another: "Head with line Device" ('74), a portrait drawing which ended at the neckline and was much closer in its linear mechanics to the 3 D. heads. In fact in this version the means of drawing were applied and exaggerated beginning with the natural lines suggested.

Therefore the crevices around the ears and mouth and other apertures were traced and in tagliò-like filled with ink, then wiped clean so that the eyes were framed in black.

In other works he has marked out the layout of bones beneath the surfaces of the fingers, back and then juxtaposed the information with the imposition of a crudely drawn grid. He again terms these as "devices". They indicate a movement away from the extremes of those used in "William Jeffrey" in '72. Yet they also point to the amount of experiment that he does in making, until it appears as he wants it, for example on "Path Figure" ('74-75) the lines of a suit collar and seams were drawn onto the congealed mass of the woolen-resin garment.

All these facts point out the continual change, for, as stated, instead of just external covering, the cloths actually become part of the surface. It would seem that it began with the "Lesson", when he threw the watery gray over it and discovered that it reduced the realism.

"Path Finder" ('74-75) is yet another step, and the means of both lead to yet another step as seen in "Figure with slats" (74-75).

The cloths are firmly a part of the surface, as is the means of drawing. All these things serve to heighten the viewer's perception, possibly the bases become a necessary, to distinguish each individual piece.

One curious "Figure" ('74-75) stands bare-footed on planks, but the impression is not of a base, rather a raft for in his outstretched hands he holds two pieces of cloth: a means of signalling!

The work in this exhibition in particular testifies to the changes that happen in his work, for if you notice the dates on the work usually point to when begun and when finished e.g. '73-75, '74-75, '75 indicating also that time in making is major.

Nicolas Wadley says "...it would be more true to compare the

evolution of any figure's role to a period of improvisatory rehearsals" (23).

Since, after undergoing changes during the making, each figure spends a long time in a studio - a vast space, the upper floor of a converted protestant church.

There are about two dozens figures there at any one time. Some are engaged in activities, some lean on railings, other stand in a corner as if in a more or less idle conversation... A world in which relationships build up poses change, the germ for a final form of work emerges.

Davies says that for every one that emerges there twenty that have not. Of the making he says "The heads get changed a lot... Recently I've been obliterating, grinding or filling off all the very real aspects, like the skin-pores and so on. For the arms I get someone to come in for a day or two and cast lots of alternatives, which I've worked out, either by posing myself or by drawing... they often get altered by changing the joints... you just saw through at the elbow or wrist and put a bit of aluminium through. It's fairly limited but you can change quite a bit " (24).

In regard to his methods he explains "...I learnt something about resin and fibreglass in college, but what I know using filler and pigment I've just found out, mostly by accident, ... very low-key technology" (25).

Although he feels that he needs to spend time learning more about modelling and about how the body works..."I do find that a restriction... I can sometimes see exactly what I want a figure to do, but haven't got all the resources, I don't work much from life, but I want to gather information" (26).

By the exhibition in Marlborough Gallery in Nov/Dec. 1980 many of the means are already referred to, could be readily observed in the work.

Relationships were definitely a major concern, "figures borne on shoulders" ; a sense of the everyday commonplace might not be the first thing that strikes the spectator - the literal form, relating to his lifelong interest in the circus - yet comment on the ordinary is expressed by the "moving closeness of the heads".

An element apparent in "The Lesson" ('73-75).

The literal form denotes activity, but the activity draws the spectator into the environment, where closer inspection can be made. From this perspective it is then possible to see what is happening, of this he explains that his interest is in less extreme circumstances, as can be seen when two or three people are talking in a pub. "I've become interested in the idea of couples - that sort of relationship, more ordinary, but extraordinary - not so stressed, I suppose" (27).

The men on the railing, were from seeing men, on the coast near his home, standing against the sea-wall, looking out to sea. "Initially it was more to do with the way people looked at landscape and its preminance compared with ours" (28): the drawing, "Two Figures and the Moon" ('79-80) relates to this. Two facets of the same moment - it is an example of the duality of his work, an aspect of his work examined in more depth in the next chapter. - firstly he used breeze blocks, but "formally it didn't work as a wall".

Later he found the answer when on a roof with safety railings, "so I got some... and sat the men on them, that seemed to be the answer" (29).

As the intuitive is important to the spectator it would also appear to be a major faculty within Davies' decisions of making. He explains to N. Wadley that at the start the figures were "loafing"- but things happened in the relationships between figures, - resultant from his way of working, "You've got a lot of time ... the other day I changed the gesture of one of the hands so that it's not in repose" (30).

He says that this and other changes give the impression that "They are involved in making some awful decision"; before, it had looked calm, which was what he had originally wanted - "just people enjoying being in the sun". He also explained that after making the piece he found a photograph of fishermen at Whitley Bay, which shows just what he wanted. Indicative of most of this work, "they're timeless human occupations".

Of the group on the railings, he explains, "The arms won't be like that tomorrow, God knows, if it will even end up as a group, or a single figure leaning over a railing. I don't know" (31).

As previously mentioned, the realism is held back by a succession of interacting means, the poses are commonplace, the very real aspect removed or ground down. Since they are all stripped to the waist, the marriage of the modelled torso to the cast head and arms is often exposed, hence the surface retains not only some working colour changes, but also traces of the working drawing, hair is painted on and the colouring - a near-monochrome gray cast all over, including cloths, features such as the lips and eyebrows, sometimes fingernails - are picked out in strong unnatural colour.

The effect of all these elements is to produce compelling poise between the very real presence of the figures and their explicit and equally real artifice. This is what he likes about theatre's simultaneous reality and remove from reality. "I like what happens to anybody when they get on the stage - standing looking at the audience : it's very magical" (32).

At this point the other facets of Davies' work must be mentioned, for, as seen previously, he works with more than just life size figures. The heads like the former have also also been refined, they have become more individual personalities, and in contrast to the previous, Davies says, he is more conscious of who the individuals are, although they are not portraits.

Again the realism has been held back mainly by similar means, but a separate presence exists in these heads. Their shape, expressions and individual features dominate, but it is how he has used these that appears so striking. This schematic hair, or lack of, the eyebrows, lips and eyes, the marking on the surface,

all lend toward giving character. One is very quickly back in the world of private presences: disquieting, elusive, inward-looking. They also have the effect of making you look again at the figures, especially their faces which tend to make you wonder what is the connection between the activity and how they gaze.

It would also seem that in the period directly after the '75 exhibition, Davies set about making/modelling smaller heads. "The heads, that's very concentrated, they're not just objects, they emerge as something that looks back at you" (33).

In regard to this work and interlinked with, the men on the sea wall, Davies explains that it is the quality of the ordinary and something else. Of the latter he says that some of the "small faces develop qualities almost by accident: something quite beautiful, gentle" (34). In a certain sense they move toward his drawing, in that he builds them up from scratch, whereas the others are adaptations. They could also thought of as experimental, in that he admits himself that he laments not having a solid base in modelling methods and anatomy. These could the examination of possibility. Other aspects of note are variations in the monochromatic colour - light to dark - and an increase in lines actually scratched on the surface.

William Feaver says of them "They are phenomenal, whitened slightly and overlaid with pencil marks, stains and abrasions, each one a perfect identity" (35).

A consideration to be made is that most of the work is both preparatory model and finished work.

Finally of this work the drawing has evolved to a different dimension, entertaining all that he can do in that illusionary space and all that has occurred and is to come.

These drawings refer more to the individual heads in a fact, than to the figures, in terms of the lines which construct them. This means serves as image and as record of change; clearly the expression attained here refers to the illusionary capabilities of this medium and offer fresh source material for use on the

heads. They give yet another insight into what it is that he wants to show and, as with the 3 D. work, the ideas are changing. Earlier drawings had small beings gesticulating in large rooms that were littered with fragments of paper and barely recognisable objects. In later works the rooms had no figures in them. Instead they were inhabited by objects that had been used by people. Now the whole space is often occupied by one head or portions of, and the space is given its depth by a combination of the lines that construct the face which emerges from the black, blue or gray-toned variations of the background. All these elements are part of the "Device".

This section continues the path through his work to the present day. During two days of discussion with Nicholas Wadley in 1980 Davies said "Maybe if the figures were smaller and occupied an area, say the size of a table top, maybe they would carry some air with them - some real space rather than just the space of the base" (36).

This is exactly what has happened of the exhibitions of May-June '84; all the figures are half life size and smaller. He explains that they were intended as models for life size work - "My studio is now full of them, hence the exhibition. It remains to be seen whether they need to be made life size" (37).

Much experimentation can be seen in this work; as he indicated they were meant as models, yet as models there is a lot of attention to detail, particularly in the heads. In some respects the modelling gives the impression of agile animals, with the addition of human characteristics. Again he uses the activity to heighten the viewer's awareness, and you begin to realise that the activity has nothing to do with what is seen in the face, in particular the eyes. They are not aware of their own activity, they climb, sit or stand aimlessly on trapezes, balance on tight ropes staring distantly, - reminders of "The Lesson".

The making is again inherent with the means, marks of modelling absorbed by the resin and pigmented fibreglass and here, as with all his work, detail has been picked out by various additions. Like the drawing on, of ribs etc. with black ink, filing the surfaces, scorching to blacken, - bringing up the marking, in yet others, details are scratched onto the surface. Those picked out include nails or feet and hands, eyes and hair, mouth.

The intense expression in each face and its type vary from that of "(A) Figure climbing rope ladder (DARK)" ('82-84) to the nervous tension in the face and hands of "Balancing man" ('82-84); here there is intense detail in the hands - drawing closer to the artist's wish to express the extraordinary in the ordinary!

The only indication which Davies made in regard to this work is as follows "All I hope is that there is something of the human

circus - life circus here" (38).

Perhaps one of the first direct statements about he thinks and wants to express. Some photographs from his studio show other aspects with which he is working, they have some of the qualities of his early drawing. On one shelf is written "HARVEST", above the activity speaks for itself.

The two other areas included in this exhibition pertain to the heads and drawings. Again the making has had very definite effect. In particular the heads and occasionally masks have all been modelled, some are as much as three times normal size.

Here the making dominates, especially the different types of marking. Expression is created by lines scratched and cut into the surface, the shape of the features magnified or reduced. The three largest heads, average about 42 inches, their expressions have been pushed further by inclusion of colour:

- "Head with blue eyes" ('83-84)

- "Head white with lines" ('83-84)

- "Brown painted head" ('83-84)

The effect ranges from anxious to worn and passive. The eyes dominate.

As is the case with the other 16 heads, ranging in size from 18 and 1/2 to 9 inches. These vary in expression and treatment and there has been more use of colour - as indicated in the titles, e.g. "Head (red/cream)" ('83) or "Head of C.R. (red line)" ('82-83). An understanding of the effect of treatment can be seen into two heads modelled on the same person, S.H.; one has the lines normally seen and the second has had parallel lines inscribed into the surface producing a much older impression - like an old man who had worked out in the sun all his life.

Nevertheless each gives a different impression, the drawing and marking accentuating the "natural" contours and features. Again the dates, '82 -83, '81-84, '83-84 giving an idea as to which experiment preceeded another. Hence the possible use of more or less information in making.

There are many new ingredients in his work, not least the

introduction of a mask - again modelled - "Mask of D.Y." ('82-83), that of a woman.

He has continued the smaller heads in many variations, size and tone. Three are actually all black and surfaces are smooth, although with the "Head of V." ('81-84), you become aware that the marking from drawing, painting and scouring can sometimes create a sense of a face depending on the density of tone or either by adding or subtracting of black - of note this piece have been carved and not modelled..

The difficulty with looking at Davies' work , is that no particular area dominates continuously; rather they all contribute to each other: the heads to the drawing, the drawing to the sculpture and vice versa.

The final area in present work, exists in the drawing; it is stronger now than ever and as with the 3 D. heads has increased in size and complexity, certain aspects are even more literal as indicated by certain titles, for, as he once said, "These groups are much less obscure to me, so a description seems fair enough" (39) e.g. "Triptych for Gods, Kings, Politicians and Popes" ('83-84): pleading hands reaching up to touch a distant face, or "Head/Hands of a Meths Drinker (A)" ('83). As always there is a flexibility which exists in Davies' drawing, the sense of a face, a feeling, a mood seems to be expressed more readily and the image seems more characteristic of a person.

Lastly many of the means used in the latest 3 D. heads are expressed more definitely in the three larger drawings, in many ways they seem almost anatomical studies of the muscle (facial), the actual means of our expression.

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 2.

- (1) John Davies, Tate Gallery report, (London) 1975 pp. II7-II8
- (2) Nicolas Wadley, "The sculpture of John Davies", Art International 24 (1981), pp.147- 157
- (3) Tate Gallery report, pp.II7-II8
- (4) Nicolas Wadley, "John Davies' recent sculpture and drawings"
- (5) Wadley, "The sculpture of John Davies"
- (6) Norbert Lynton, "John Davies' work", 1970-80, pp.5-13
- (7) Marina Vaizely, "John Davies", Arts Review 24 (1972), p.43I
- (8) Wadley, "John Davies' recent sculpture and drawings"
- (9) Tate Gallery report
- (10) Catherine Lampert, "John Davies", Studio International, 191 (Jan-Feb. '76), p. 84-85
- (11) Wadley, "J.D.' recent sculpture and drawings"
- (12) Marina Vaizely, Financial Times, (London), 7th July 1972
- (13) Edward Lucie-Smith, "Attitude to drawing", '74
- (14) Wadley, "J.D."
- (15) Ibid
- (16) Ibid
- (17) Ibid
- (18) Ibid
- (19) Ibid
- (20) Ibid
- (21) Ibid
- (22) Ibid
- (23) Wadley, "The sculpture of John Davies"
- (24) Wadley, "J.D."
- (25) Ibid
- (26) Ibid
- (27) Wadley, "The sculpture of J.D."
- (28) Ibid
- (29) Wadley, "J.D."
- (30) Ibid
- (31) Ibid
- (32) Wadley, "The sculputre of J.D."
- (33) Wadley, "J.D."
- (34) Ibid
- (35) William Feaver, "The World", Art News (Feb. 1981), p. 20I
- (36) Wadley, "J.D."
- (37) John Davies, "Recent sculpture and drawings" (May II- June 23 1984), Marlborough
- (38) Tony Godfrey, Burlington Magazine, August 1984
- (39) Wadley, "J.D."
- (40) Wadley, "The sculpture of J.D."

1. THE SUBJECT

This last chapter is more of a judgement of all that has been so far stated. For behind all work there are many more aspects which contribute to both the way and what he does.

I made two attempts to gather very precise information from John Davies himself, but as the latter explained above, his life is work and speculation as to what is left to be done is not his perception.

JUDGEMENT

Valley described his attitude to life as being an active presence, both in the character of his work and his character. This is in essence a child. His imaginative art, increased and refined by his scientific and artistic training, his scientific and artistic training and his scientific and artistic training.

During his life and work in Paris and then in London, his discussion with Valley, the environment stimulates his work. The information he will give you is not intended to be a book to be read but to be used as a tool to see the way to the job, to the fact he used in working. It is the surrounding countryside, hence it is not easy to see people picking and choosing angles. The style of the countryside are reflected in what he does: "Buckley's" (194), for example, a farmer carrying water.

Over the way he works, with 3/4 of his time between major exhibitions, there does not seem to be the pressure of time that exists in the city, in particular London which is not far away.

The following material consists of all the questions that I sent to him; I have used what information I have gathered from most sources to answer them.

3. THE RESULTS

This last chapter is more of a judgement of all that has been so far stated. For behind all work there are many more aspects which contribute to both the man and what he does.

I made two attempts to gather very precise information from John Davies himself, but, as the letter enclosed shows, his life is work and speculation as to what it says must be left to the viewer and his or her perception.

Nicholas Wadley describes him accurately "I think ... he remains an elusive presence, both in the character of his art" and his own character. "His is in essence a quiet, highly sensitive art, increasingly refined and simplified. He is a potent image-maker. His fibreglass figures and heads ... his simple drawings are both secretive, private and eloquently expressive" (40).

Davies lives and works in Faversham and from what I can gather from his discussion with Wadley, the environment stimulates his work: the information of how people live and enjoy themselves, from the men on the sea wall to the pub, to the fact he used go coursing. Kent is the surrounding countryside, hence it is quite easy to see people picking and spraying apples, the tasks of the countryside are reflected in what he makes; "Bucket Man" ('74), for example, a farmer carrying water.

Even the way he works, with 3/4 years between major exhibitions; there does not seem to be the pressure of time that exists in the city, in particular London which is not so far away.

The following material consists of all the questions that I sent to him; I have used what information I have gathered from various sources to answer them.

- 1. In relation to John Wragg (taken from page 188 'Figurative Sculpture in the 1960's'), according to Timothy Hyman in British Sculpture in the 20th Century, John Wragg quoted Schopenhauer as follows: 'Take note, young man, that the portrait must be a lyric poem, through which a whole personality, with all its thoughts, feelings, and desires, speaks.' Would you agree with John Wragg's estimation?

Yes No

Comment:

John Wragg had made a head of Rilke in polyester resin in 1955, - similarities existed to the concerns of John Davies who he knows and admires. The above was Wragg's estimation as to what the image should strive to achieve; Davies' work embodies much of the struggle to achieve such an estimation of the human, since his goal has remained only, the means to fulfilling it have altered.

2. Timothy Hyman says of your use of devices (from British Sculpture in the 20th Century)

"This creation of an allegoric resonance brings him close to the mystifications of surrealism; these devices resemble the obsessional arbitrary objects that hover directly in front of some of Magritte's figures."

This extract is more related to your earlier work, e.g., Dogman or Old Enemy, but did Magritte or surrealism in general have any influence on your ideas?

Yes

No

Comment:

If one were to consider some of the imagery in Kafka's "The Trail" and accept that Davies used this imagery, then it would be possible to consider the work of Magritte.

What is evident is that Davies used the devices to reduce the realism; it is probably our association to past reference that defines his use as surrealism. Magritte's work was described thus "His surrealism derives not from the "sleep of reason", but from his brand of non-utilitarian lateral thinking and, though the patient interrogation of object with which we are apparently most familiar" (I), the object in Davies' case is the figure and head.

3. In relation to your source material, in the catalogue of John Davies work 1970-1980 in German, Norbert Lynton refers to Bertold Brecht and a number of his works in theatre (e.g., The Caucasian Chalk Circle or opera of the 3 coins).
Did you find any semblance in Brecht's views of the human condition in relation to your perception in your own work?

Yes No

Comment:

I considered that this was related particularly to his early work and to a possible link to the Caucasian Chalk Circle and all the imagery of "For the Last Time" ('72); more the circle on the floor but nevertheless Davies does have a deep interest in theatre. "I like what happens to anybody when they get on stage, standing looking at the audience; it's very magical" (3).

Brecht believed that art should not be just a lyric contemplation, rather it should be used to verify the existing traditional values, which is an analogy to Davies' ideas. Brecht created a new kind of epic theatre, one in which the classical unity of space, time and action were rejected, since he believed that the spectator should not be a passive observer; rather, as reason was the way the writer wrote, thus reason was how the spectator should look! Hence, according to his anti-romantic conception of Art, he wanted reason to be a component of the artistic product, either, or as an instrument for its fruition.

Finally Brecht's imagery was vivid. In a sense he could be said to use "Devices" on the stage; he put cartoons and pieces of paper that contained reflections and comments on the facts that were represented in the play.

4. Did F. Messerschmidt's work have any effect on you when at the Slade?
Taken from page 104 British Sculpture in the 20th Century).

Yes

No

Comment:

This question was asked in relation to original sources or influences. Timothy Hyman was reminded of the heads created by this German, who was talked about in the Slade, shortly before Davies' arrival there, and one of his beak heads appeared in an early picture by Patrick Proctor.(5)

Of work from this period I have only a photocopy of "Young Man's head" ('68), exactly the period Davies spent at the Slade. The only features on this almost oval shape are a nose which appears stuck on two eyes peering through two apertures and an almost normal mouth and chin, which emerge at the base of all the smooth shape. In many respects it reminds me of a burns victim - or related accident - where the bandaging has seemed to erase all other detail.

5. Is the change in your work since 1980 linked to your perception of yourself in the real world?

Yes

No

Comment:

Of the new things, the situations are now as extreme "Maybe I'm seeing things in a different way. If you look at what you do, you see yourself changing" (6).

Wadley considers that all of the figures are extensions of just one person (7). The possibility exists, firstly because many of the elements come from Davies' own experience, and secondly because, as from "Young Man" ('69-71), right through all his work there seem to be self portraits; "Man with Ring" ('75), even one of the figures in "The Lesson" ('73-75).

He has previously said that the arms and even the body can be casts of himself; heads are a probable, since one was taken for "Young Man" and many of the means of today had origins there.

6. (From N. Wadley, Art International, 1981/vol. 24/147-57).
 "Maybe the liberal form of these works relates to his life long interest in the circus? . . ." Partly question, partly comment by N. Wadley.
 Does the circus and its imagery have an input into your work? - even an unconscious input?

Yes

No

Comment:

Yes, this is an aspect of his life, an interest and, as "The Hare in the bag", his daily life is very much a part of his work and he uses it in his perception of his work.

The best evidence can be seen in the figures shown in the 1980 exhibition and more recently in May-June '84, again in the Marlborough, he uses the vivid acts, the means of entertainment - the trapeze artist climbing, singing, balancing precariously about the audience; even "Old Enemy" ('73-75) resembles a circus harlequin holding two poles with padded ends.

7. Your drawings seem to acquire a sense of isolation, different to that of your 3D work, is it that they offer the immediacy that exists in painting?

Yes No

Comment:

If we go back to "Hull" ('64), it can be found that Davies actually began as a painter, but more importantly, here the approach was achieved from the Bauhaus; they did not separate painting from sculpture, students were encouraged to explore and combine materials of all sorts.

In his discussion with Wadley, when he talks of his art, it is more often in terms of painting, since it creates its own reality, a complete parallel world of atmosphere, light and life.

He explained that he gave up painting because of frustration with the edges, but that the drawing is still very important. "I can describe the whole place - that can't be done in sculpture, one can't have someone walking across a field, unless you put the figure in a field" (8).

He feels that sculpture has not the same capability, it "usually seems to impose an area around itself, a set distance from which to stand and look at it... I'd like to make a crowd of people - so that they spread outside your field of vision... I've always wondered whether I was trying to do what painters do" (8).

Catherine Lampert says of his drawing "The artist has no difficulty placing his drawn figures in a convincing context. Normally the paper has been formally divided by horizontal line, in the bottom half are layers of soft media, chalk and pencil, which form a spongy base. This imagery void distances the figures outwards into a realm appropriate to their appearance" (9).

8. In relation to your figures, particularly of the late 70's and into the 80's, there seems to be an obvious marking of the surface in terms of seams and joints and actual drawing, which tends towards an actual 'surface'. Could this 'surface' be as it were, (all the surface area including clothes and objects) the window to the nature of the relationship - could it be said that the external 'surface' is actually the internal aspect of life?
Do you find that you are using the means of drawing, as in 'surface' in your 3D work?

Yes

No

Comment:

"If we consider how complex the idea of "surface" has become - "The Cubists and Constructivists broke up formal surfaces and reconstructed them according to physical principles, showing how space was a function of relations between planes... surface was used in a literal albeit complex and abstract way" (IO).

Surface thus picked up a meaning and reference within the limits set by a theoretical framework.

Brancusi "drew a metaphysic around his sculpture", so that surface reflected the essence of the object, metaphorically.

Hence in John Davies' sculpture the material of the surface, the cloths, the masks on the face, the objects held by figures and later the surface with all its markings, scorching, engraving, monochromatic grey, all constitute the "surface" - in a way akin to Degas and Matisse; we take the surface which works on many levels as a metaphor for the many levels of man himself, of the sculpture and his relationship with others and the world.

Keeping in mind that the inner world no longer exists as Degas etc. approached it, for today, as Krauss says of Minimalism, "A level on which it may be seen is renewing and continuing the thinking of Rodan and Brancusi; the work of both men represented a relocation of the point of origin of the body's meaning, from its inner core to its surface" (II).

Therefore in John Davies a powerful quest for identification through "drawing on the tension between control and freedom, which makes man what he is. All the forms of "Device" are expression

of the ambiguity between freedom and control!..." (I2).

9. Does your environment away from the hub of the London art world allow you to see more clearly your aims?

Yes

No

Comment:

Evidently it does, Norbert Lynton says "Davies is a quite man, loving and estimating the solitude, he needs to work slowly, continuously and self-critically far away from London, far away from the world of Art - even if they are positive towards him!" (I3)

"Some times when I look at what I do I think of it in terms of my relationship with the world" (I4).

There is no specific statement to answer the above question, my only "yes" comes from his imagery/mentality, the actual making and the time spent doing it.

10. Going back to your years in Manchester and then Hull, did you find Reg Butler's ideas in particular with regard to the figure, of interest?

Yes No

Comment:

It would seem that the meeting was actually in the Slade, where Reg Butler taught, and that the influence came not from a similar approach to the figure, but the mentality that was behind what he did.

Butler's present work has more affinity now with the American Superrealists in its form, a long way from his entry for the "unknown Political Prisoner" in 1953.

possibilities - life size or larger a prerequisite - scale is dependent on his needs.

The surrealism as such is in reference to the "Devices" employed in the early work, particularly the heads on poles, and again as time passed the use and extreme grew less, so that by '73 they tended to be incorporated in the existing features rather than adding forms, noses, horns etc.

11. In Peter Moore's Liverpool Project 3, on the section on 'Pain'.
The introduction states that you are a "... surrealist too and like
Boydand Evans, seizes our attention through his partial realism".
Are you consciously aware of this?

Yes

No

Comment:

As previously said, the partial realism is something with which he has struggled through all of his work, firstly it was a formal component, one which no longer exists; Davies has not worked with any life casting since he made the men on the railings, rather all his recent work has been modelled or carved. The means defining a new format, the material causing new effects, new possibilities - life size no longer a prerequisite - scale is dependent on his needs.

The surrealism as such is in reference to the "Devices" employed in the early work, particularly the heads on poles, and again as time passed the use and extreme grew less, so that by '75 they tended to be incorporated in the existing features rather than adding forms, noses, horns etc.

12. Would you agree with Norbert Lynton's statement (in John Davies work 1970-1980 catalogue in German) where he says: "Davies' figures were not theatre pretending to be life, they were life pretending to be theatre."

Yes No

Comment:

Norbert Lynton said this in the light of what he felt Davies' early work was. He explains that the show in '72 was "dominated by sculpture which were dramatic in their silence, ...A brooding silence intent on something" (I5).

He concludes that words are not sufficient to describe, to show the tension which the figures put between "presentation and life". Hence he said "In rare blessed moments, ...Theatre can be misunderstood as life" (I6); usually we are sitting there waiting for this "moment". Davies always seems to be chasing the "sense of a particular moment... if something does come out, it has the sense of something very real ...arrived at in all sorts of odd ways, irrational ways" (I7).

13. From the same source, as number 12, Norbert Lynton makes a reference to Franz Kafka when he says that". . .already in his early state his work has the clarity of Kafka. Do you see any link to the ideas of Kafka?"

Yes No

Comment:

In a sense, as in the work of Kafka, the reader/spectator has to get involved before they begin to see where the plot leads them.

But of even more significance, there are many close resemblances to Davies' early work up to '72. In Kafka's novel, "The Trial", he relates the perplexing experiences of a man ostensibly arrested on a charge, never specified, but within the patterns of the complicated narrative, Kafka is trying to explain some of the fundamental diæmmas of human life. "It reads like the transcript of a protracted, implacable dream in which reality is tangled with imagination" (18).

The story centers on K. and his battle against an unknown charge and a faceless accuser. But the most interesting part in relation to Davies' imagery is found in the last chapters, especially Chapter 8, "The commercial traveller" and Chapter 10, "The end" (19). (Davies' father was a commercial traveller as is his brother).

Here the imagery is quite vivid. K. had gone to his advocate to dismiss him, but the advocate does not make the task easy. He uses the commercial traveller to show K. an example of his power, ability and position. Block, the traveller, is standing in front of the advocate who is on his bed. "From the moment when the advocate's voice was heard, Block averted his eyes and stood merely listening, gazing into a far corner, as if to meet a shaft of light from the advocate's eyes was more than he could bear" (20).

K. says "Kneel on the floor or creep on all fours if you like," Block to K. "Before the Herr advocate, who admits us here, both of us... out of charity - you're an accused man, too, and have the same charges on your conscience" (21).

Block listened with downcast eyes, as if it were a duty laid upon him. "It was humiliating even to be an on-looker".

The client ceased to be a client and became the advocate's dog. "With lack lustre eyes he looked down, his glance was partly vague and partly turned upon Block."

"A man in a loose-hanging black garment with snuff box in his left hand; he was gazing at K. ... He started pointing with his right hand, still holding a pinch of snuff in his fingers".

"He stretched out an arm and pointed with sharply bent forefinger to a spot immediately before the pulpit".

Life = "The verdict is not so suddenly arrived at, the proceedings only gradually merge into the verdict".

"The door-keeper in his furred robe, with his huge pointed nose and long thin tartar beard...".

"Two men ... in frock-coats, pallid and plumb, with tophats that were apparently uncollapsible".

"Two babies reaching with their little hands towards each other although not able to move themselves from the spot".

"He was repelled by the painful cleanliness of their faces... the cleansing hand, had been at work in the corners of the eyes, rubbing the upper lip, scrubbing out the furrows at the chin".

"...he suddenly realised the futility of resistance".

"The moon shone down on everything with that simplicity and serenity which no other light possesses".

"...his posture remained contorted and unnatural-looking, ... he merely turned his head, which was still free to move...he raised his hands and spread out the fingers...with failing eyes K. could still see the two of them, cheek leaning against cheek, immediately before his face; watching the final ACT...".

Many of the quotes refer to imagery quite vivid - and hence the possibility exists that Davies actually used some of them in pieces such as "The Last Time" (172); two figures crawling, one seated, one standing. Their existence is confined to a circle chalked out on the floor, two kneel in subjugation, the third is standing there in order to observe, to take orders, to protect the judge. It seems like a session - consider the extracts from Kafka's work - "There are no illusions to law or right, we hardly

await them" (24).

The imagery suggests overtones of domination or an acceptance without questions. The piece seems like the theatre of the Absurd, but as the previous chapter, the 2nd chapter, implies, the use of "Devices", half masks etc., was an attempt to acquire a sense of the human, as Davies says "Casting will only give so much" (22).

It seems rather a simple conclusion, but then that is another of his aspirations to express the "extraordinary by the ordinary", some what like the way some novelists make a single condensed point by "devious, often circuitous, allusive means" (23).

14. Would you consider that the imagery of Beckett, has any parallels with your own world?

Yes

No

Comment:

Much of Davies's work confronts the condition of man in the present context of living, in particular man's relationship with himself and how he perceives all that effects him .

In many respects Davies is like Beckett, who is quite private and mysterious, his work reflects a deep experience of life, much of it deals with a search for identity and the passage of man through life. Much of his work is rich in vivid imagery, and one novel seems to provide parallels at least to an aspect of Davies.

Company takes many views of one man's memory of his existence, the way in which he writes brings the reader into his mind, into his memory. The whole passage of work wanders through his early childhood, through periods of intense concentration and then the reader begins to understand that the condition expressed is that of being 'alone' - with yourself.

" Moonless starless night." (25)

15. When in the slide did you view the work of Caro and his followers (King, Tucker and Scott, and then the work of such people such as 'Gilbert and George', McLean, Long and Flanagan) with any consequence?

Yes No

Comment:

When Flanagan made his rejection in '63 in Silence, student magazine, Davies was just beginning painting in Hull, where work was in the constructivist style, hence the arguments going on in St. Martins then, may have had little effect.

The only conclusion I can make is that, as Davies' early piece suggests - a combination of theatrical means and phototexts, - which formed the piece referred to by Norbert Lynton, in his article on Davies . This in a sense, would be (26) a combination of the St. Martin and Royal College ethos, although more toward the latter's sources and means.

16. Do you have any interest in the way that other artists work with the figure, either past or present (e.g., Degas, Matisse, Giacometti, Segal or Gormley?)

Yes No

Comment:

Of Degas he says, in the "... figures of dancers you are more aware of the making, his thumbprints and so on, than you are in his paintings, where there's light and atmosphere -much more life." (27)

More than Giacometti's work, itself, "I like the attempt, the will.... the man sitting down with a stick looking at the model -on and on and on, trying to make what's happening over there, happen over here -it's a mad occupation." (28)

Of Segal he states that he is not concerned with reconstructed environments for his figures. Rather he values the pull between their independence and the degree to which they share our environment, he finds imitative reference to the real world crass " like putting something stuffed in a glass case, which in a way is what I started from". He includes Kienholz and Hanson, in the above.

In regard to casting figures as Segal does, he says "there wouldn't be enough room for adjustment -and the sense of, (29) is unlikelike"-. He feels that there is something special "about the time spent making, that allows you to absorb what is going on", unlike Davies' work, that of Kienholz, Hanson, and Segal is firmly locked in time. Much of their work stems from comment on American culture, beginning with Pop art in the '60's.

If we go back to minimal art we can find that it shared a common source, a newly awakened interest in the Duchampian readymade -Jasper Johns' work of late '50's, made it available to these artists in the early '60's,- hence as Judd had employed readymades from commercial sources, so did Pop artists; the difference being, that minimalist's used elements into which content of a specific nature had not been built, whereas Pop artists worked with images that were highly infected, such as photographs, movie stars and comic books (30)

Much of the super realistic work stems from the same growth.

Kienholz's work deals with social commentary on American life, -often using deep satire, eg. The wait '64-65. growing old in America. (31)

Segal's classic tableaux is usually narrative and realistic genere, Fried said " Frozen moments in real life....". Segal says of Cinema 1963. "I love to watch people..... to look as bluntly as I could at people in their environmentsagainst garish light, illuminated signs." -American urban life!(32)

Hanson, a super realist, claims that his work focuses on the archtypal common man, who appears to him to be appalling in his banality and unaware of his absurdity, - The common man.

In this case he has an American background.

His work is satirical, often with a political edge. (33) According to Edward Lucie Smith "the nearest thing to American veristic sculpture now being done in Europe is in Mme Tussard's studios, as new celebrities in wax join the ranks of those already immortalized. (34)

Regarding Gormley, I can find no mention in Davies' comments, he was included so as to provide a parallel with the concerns of 'new' work going on in England, especially the resurgence of the figure as image in sculpture, explicit or otherwise.

In regard to the present work by artists, such as Woodrow, Cragg or Deacon, Gormley's work is the most 'figurative'; his concerns follow such areas as the natural versus the man made and also identification; (35) not only in a simple sense of recognition, but also in terms of how we connect and respond to the world around us.

17. According to Norbert Lynton, the possibility to move between the mediums of sculpture and painting existed in Hull, did you find this an addition to your way of seeing?

Yes

No

Comment:

Again the evidence of both past and present work seems to testify positively.

"The actual material seems to get in the way in sculpture." (36) He considers that in sculpture: "no background, no surrounding, just the object", and therefore the demands of that make it more formalised, "it seems a very different occupation to me".

For him the background in the studio becomes part of the piece, "clues about place or time. I always like the fact that the figures have shadows that stretch outside their orbit - across the room, up the wall, so they spread outside your field of vision- , like you get in a painting". (37) Of work made in '74, C. Lampert says, "in both versions the language of painting had been applied and exaggerated, beginning with the opportunities nature's lines suggested". (38) In much of the work, he combines elements from one means with that of another, he seems to have no fear about barriers between the different media and means, he decides and uses.

Even the grey chalky washes which began by accident have become a means having an identity with the means of painting. And finally the latest work contains heads which have colour added in various ways, usually the details.

18. Is the increased activity in the recent drawings and 3D figures meant as a device?

Yes No

Comment:

Evidence would suggest that it is another form of device, he repeatedly refers to achieving a more simplified means, since he finds the 'ordinary just as extraordinary'. Hence he draws to a greater extent on his reservoir of personal experience and interests; namely the circus and the immediate environment in which he lives.

He explained to Nicolas Wadley that he felt the means he had been using were too extreme, even quite obscure, and that he should now be able to achieve the same 'sense' without having to resort to the 'extraordinary'.

"The equivalent for the device now is more in what they are doing, it's in what they are ".(39)

In fact, if you look at his last show, he explains that the figures were only models for life size work, but the dominant ideas have become heads and drawings. The latter even write literal since the clues included are more definite, especially the titles; in the past he said "I've got you all into one meaning. I don't see the point." (41)

19. There would seem to exist 3 separate sensitivities in your work, that of your drawing, the figures and lastly the heads which have acquired a more profound life unto themselves, not greater or less than the others, only different?

Yes No

Comment:

As he said in Sep/ Oct. 1980, "I'm always amazed about faces (40); he explains that the eyes, nose and mouth are basically all that you have to work with. And with them he has.

Beginning with the many variations, coupled with and without devices up to '72 and by '74, many had become masks rather than physical extensions. He had also begun to model the much smaller version. It would seem that more detail goes into the heads now than ever, particularly the means that he has gained from drawing, the pencil and other media have changed to inscribing surface, which is more sculptural in nature.

The other point here is that he had modelled all of the latest versions and the magnification in scale has had a bearing on their impression and treatment. He did not study the traditional means for sculpture; most of what he knows was trial and error, but with regard to the scale, it allows greater treatment as in a drawing the larger, the more marks can be made and they seem experiments with various means to achieve various expressions.

In fact, if you look at his last show, he explains that the figures were only models for life size work, but the dominant areas have become, Heads and Drawings, the latter even quite literal since the clues included are more definite, especially the titles; in the past he said "Names would seal them into one meaning. I don't see the point." (41)

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 3.

- (1) Robert Short, "Imagery of Surrealism", p.II2
- (2) Ibid
- (3) Nicolas Wadley, "The sculpture of John Davies", Art International 24 (1981), pp. I47-I57
- (4) Brecht
- (5) Nairne and Serota, "British sculpture in the 20th century", p. I94
- (6) Nicolas Wadley, "John Davies' recent sculpture and drawings"
- (7) Wadley, "The sculpture of John Davies",
- (8) Wadley, "Recent sculptures and drawings"
- (9) Catherine Lampert, "John Davies", Studio International 191, (Jan-Feb. '76) pp.84-85
- (10) Hilary Chapman, "New British sculpture", Arts Review 29, (Feb. 4th 1977), p. 82-86
- (11) R.E. Krauss, "Passages in modern sculpture", p. 279
- (12) H. Chapman, pp.82-86
- (13) Norbert Lynton, "John Davies' work 1970-80", pp.5-13
- (14) Wadley, "J.D."
- (15) Lynton, pp.5-13
- (16) Ibid
- (17) Wadley, "J.D."
- (18) Franz Kafka, "The Trail", (Cover of Penguin Modern Classics, England 1978)
- (19) Ibid pp.I84-245
- (20) Ibid p. 210
- (21) Ibid p. 212
- (22) Graham Beal, "John Davies' sculptures and drawings", pp.I-6
- (23) N. Wadley, Art International, pp.I47-57
- (24) Lynton, pp.5-13
- (25) Samuel Beckett, "Company", p.76
- (26) Lynton, pp.5-13
- (27) N. Wadley, "J.D."
- (28) N. Wadley, Art International, pp.I47-57
- (29) N. Wadley, "J.D."
- (30) R.E. Krauss, p.249
- (31) Patricia Hills and Robert K. Tarbell, "The figurative Tradition", (1980)
- (32) Ibid
- (33) Edward-Lucie Smith, "Realism rules OK!", Art and Artists II, (Sep. '76)
- (34) E. Lucie Smith, "Superrealism", (1979)
- (35) The Sculpture Show, London (1983)
- (36) N. Wadley, "J.D."
- (37) Ibid
- (38) C. Lampert, pp.84-85
- (39) N. Wadley, "J.D."
- (40) Ibid
- (41) Ibid

4. CONCLUSION

The beauty of John Davies' work is that you do not know where it will go next. In any one aspect there are many possibilities; although his concerns have altered in detail, the overriding goal is still a search and struggle with the dominant human nature in the context of how he lives.

Davies' work could probably be seen in terms of a mirror image; as his perception of self changes so does the work.

All his sculpture, from the beginning to the present, have overtones of domination/subjugation and the associated questions of willing/unwilling participation. From '74 - 80 pairs or groups of figures - the single ones wore a large amount of paraphernalia. "Bucketman" not only carries two buckets, but supports a semi-circular device on his shoulders and a black cannon ball-like sphere on his head - almost an enforced balance. Although Davies has his own reasons for selecting these bits and pieces, reasons which are often motivated by purely banal concerns (1), the "Yoke" surrounding the head was to function as a background and "locate the head firmly in space in much the same way that a painted portrait is fixed by the surrounding canvas" (2). But, as shown before, many of the devices occur during the process of making the sculpture, more often they contribute to rather than unravel the enigma of each figure and its activity.

Of the figures and heads presently modelled the large heads represent an attempt "to get very close to people, to look down their ears and their noses" (3). Davies also compares our relationship to the large heads to that of a baby and an adult. "One hand on a giant head's cheek appears minute and we shrink to a subordinate state" (4) - again the question of domination and subjugation occurs and as always the paradox exists, who or what decides the outcome, the viewer or the sculpture.

FOOTNOTES CONCLUSION

- (1) Graham Beal, "John Davies' Sculpture and Drawings", p.2
- (2) Ibid
- (3) Ibid, p.4
- (4) Ibid

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7 Partridge Lane,
Faversham,
Kent.

70.

Dear Robert Gleeson,

Thank you for your letter and questions - I have been trying to reply to your letter for weeks and worried that I cannot do justice to your questions.

I am reluctant to explain my work and if you are writing a thesis about my work you will have to take into account that I am the sort of artist who finds this hard - I think you must speculate from there, I cannot do better than to make the work - and ask you to respect my reluctance to explain to you. Only respond to my work as you wish, I have done all I can in creating it. I hope my work touches the heart more than the eye. Making sculpture is demanding and exhausting and I cannot explain at length but I try to do - My main concern is with making sculpture which is articulate and it is difficult for me then to engage in qualifying in words what I strive every day to create -

It is not in my nature to answer your questions - for this I apologise & hope you will understand.
With best wishes

Yours sincerely
John Davies

BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

1946 Born in Cheshire

1963-67 Manchester College of Art-Design -Painting. Hull College
of Art-Painting

1967-69 Postgraduate, Slade School of Art-Sculpture

1969-70 Sculpture fellowship, Gloucestershire College of Art

1970-71 Worked in Kent Courtesy of Sainbury Award

Now living and working in Kent

John Davies

- | | | |
|----|---|------|
| 1. | <u>Bronze A'le Cans</u> , Jasper Johns | n. 9 |
| 2. | <u>Target with moulds</u> , Johns | " |
| 3. | <u>Bicycle Wheel</u> , M. Duchamp | " |
| 4. | <u>Girl with hands one on top of the other.</u> | |

Henry Moore

- | | | |
|-----|---|-------|
| | | n.10 |
| 5. | <u>Without title</u> , Robert Morris | " |
| 6. | <u>Zig VII</u> , David Smith | n.12 |
| 7. | <u>Brillo boxes</u> , Andy Warhol | " |
| 8. | <u>Twin tube with chain saw</u> , Woodrow | n.18 |
| 9. | <u>Britain seen from the north</u> , Crass | " |
| 10. | <u>Red chair, green vase</u> , Crass | n.19 |
| 11. | <u>Head of William Jeffrey with device</u> ,
John Davies | n. 25 |
| 12. | <u>For the last time</u> , John Davies | " |
| 13. | <u>Old enemy</u> , J.D. | n.28 |
| 14. | <u>Head with line device</u> , J.D. | " |
| 15. | <u>Figure with slats</u> , J.D. | n.28 |
| 16. | <u>Lesson</u> , J.D. | n.32 |
| 17. | <u>Figures with the moon</u> , J.D. | " |
| 18. | <u>Men on the railings</u> , J.D. | " |
| 19. | <u>Figure with rope ladder</u> , J.D. | n.36 |
| 20. | <u>Balancing man</u> , J.D. | " |
| 21. | <u>Head with blue lines</u> , J.D. | n.37 |
| 22. | <u>Triptych</u> , J.D. | p.38 |

- | | | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|------|
| 23. | <u>Metts Drinker (A), J.D.</u> | n.33 |
| 24. | <u>Bucket Man, J.D.</u> | n.41 |
| 25. | <u>The rights of man, R. Macritte</u> | n.43 |
| 26. | <u>His studio, J.D.</u> | n.48 |
| 27. | <u>New born, Brancusi</u> | n.49 |
| 28. | <u>The table, A. Giacometti</u> | n.60 |
| 29. | <u>Cinema, G. Seagal</u> | n.70 |
| 30? | <u>Work in studio</u> | n.64 |
| 31. | <u>Work un studio</u> | " |
| 32. | <u>John Davies' work, 1963-84</u> | n.93 |

ILLUSTRATIONS

view, Vol. 24,
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 chapel Art
ctural
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 1974
 achen (Neue
 gs.
 ry) 1975
 uda Fine
 erpentine
 n *Arts*



John Davies



R. Rauschenberg - Coca-Cola plan
1936 Milano, Coll. privata

-1-



J. Johns: Bersaglio con calchi in gesso 1955
New York, Coll. Mr. e Mrs. Leo Castelli

-2-



-3-

H. Moore: Ragazza con la mani una sopra l'altra 1930
Londra, British Council


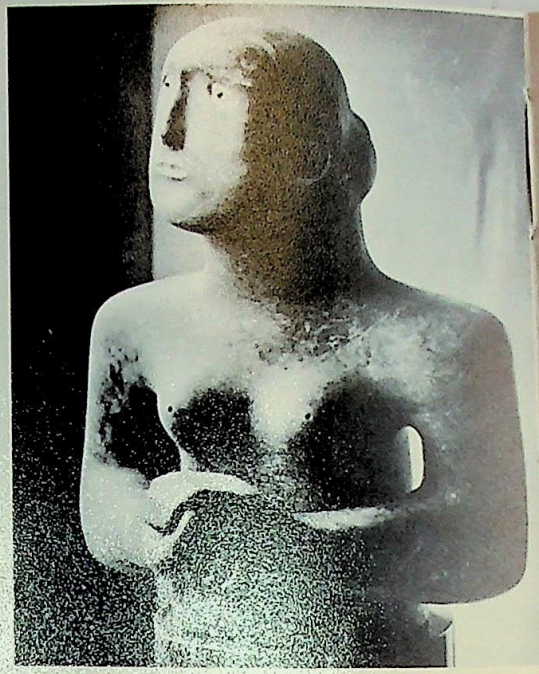
Foto di Henry Moore

Appunti di Henry Moore sulla scultura

In Note on SPACE AND FORM in sculpture

One does not see form in solid objects... If there is no distance or the possibility of the form being seen from a different angle - the form is not form - it is only a solid object.

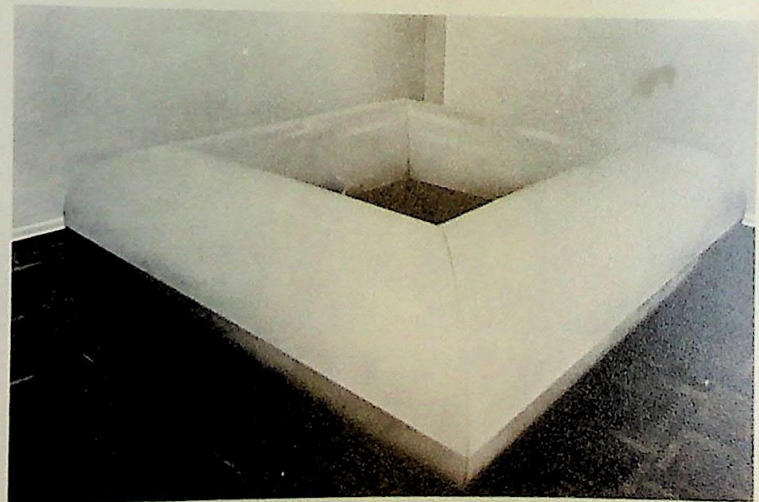
At the same time the form is not a solid object... It is not a solid object because I am trying to make a form which is not a solid object. It is a form which is not a solid object. It is a form which is not a solid object. It is a form which is not a solid object.

Il rapporto con la forma più intensamente è trovata di sempre.

-4-

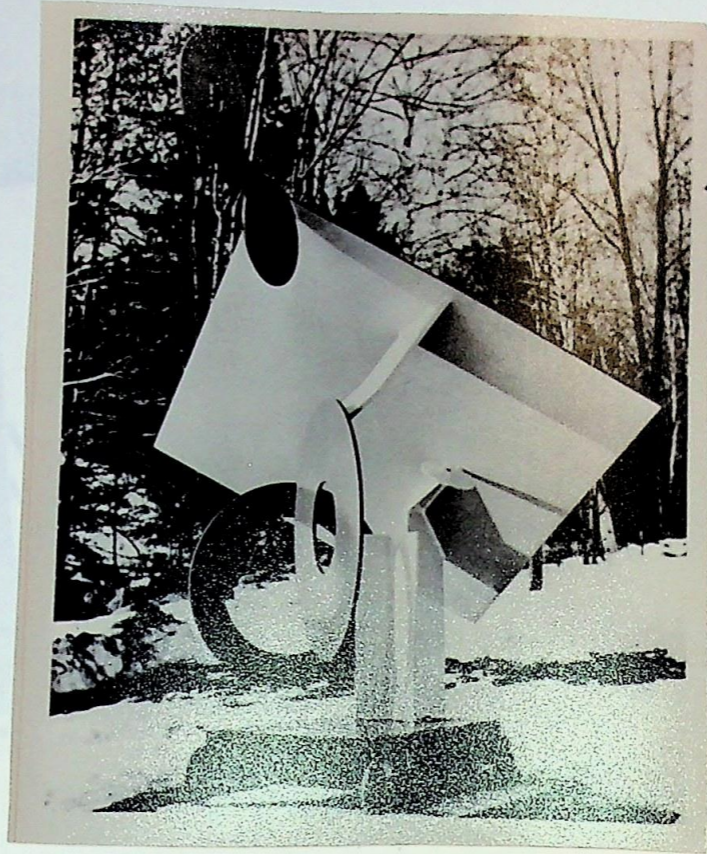
«L'oggetto è solo uno dei termini nell'estetica più recente. E in certo modo più riflessivo perché la consapevolezza di esistere nello stesso spazio dell'opera è più forte che nelle opere precedenti, con le loro molteplici relazioni interne. Si è più consapevoli di prima del fatto che si stabiliscono delle relazioni man mano che si percepisce l'oggetto da diverse posizioni e in diverse condizioni di luce e di contesto spaziale. Ogni relazione interna, sia che venga stabilita da una divisione strutturale, o da una ricca superficie, o da qualsiasi cosa, limita il pubblico, qualità esterna dell'oggetto, e tende ad eliminare l'osservatore ad un grado tale che questi dettagli lo spingono in un'intima relazione con l'opera e al di fuori



dello spazio nel quale l'oggetto esiste.

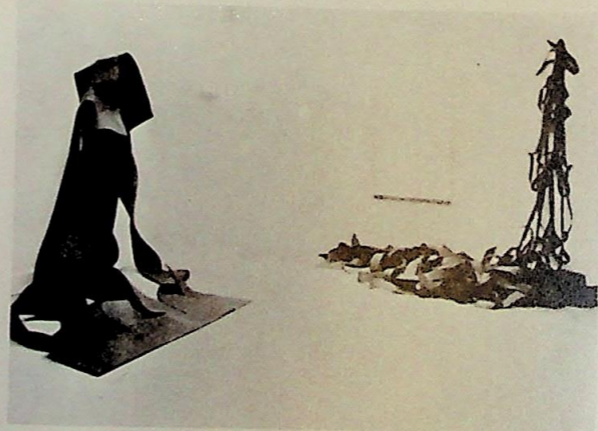
Mentre l'opera deve essere autonoma nel senso che deve essere una unità autonoma, ta per la formazione della Gestalt, il tutto indivisibile e indissolubile, i maggiori termini estetici sono dipendenti da questo oggetto autonomo ed esistono come variabili non fissate

-5-



-6-

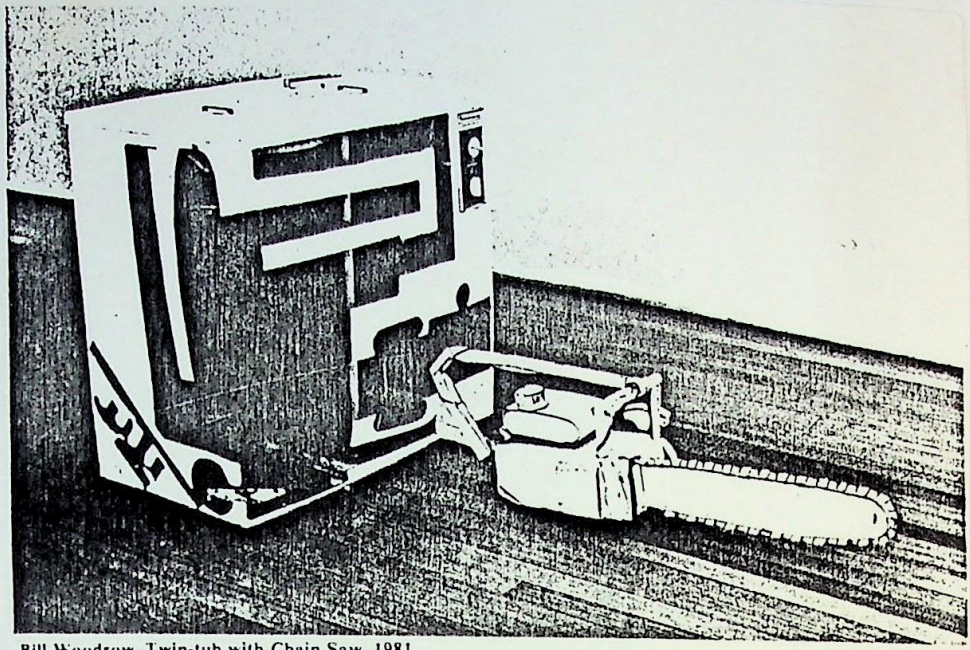
R. Morris: Pezzi di feltro 1967-68
Parigi, Galleria Iléana Sonnabend



Happening di
Jim Dine tenuto
a New York nel 1963
(riprodotto per gentile
concessione della
rivista « Sipario »)

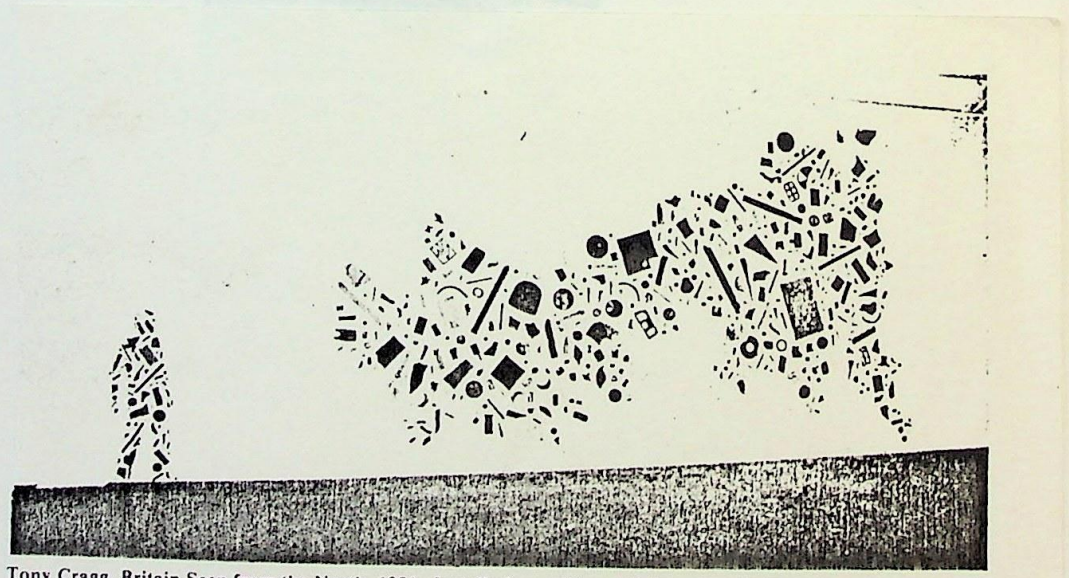


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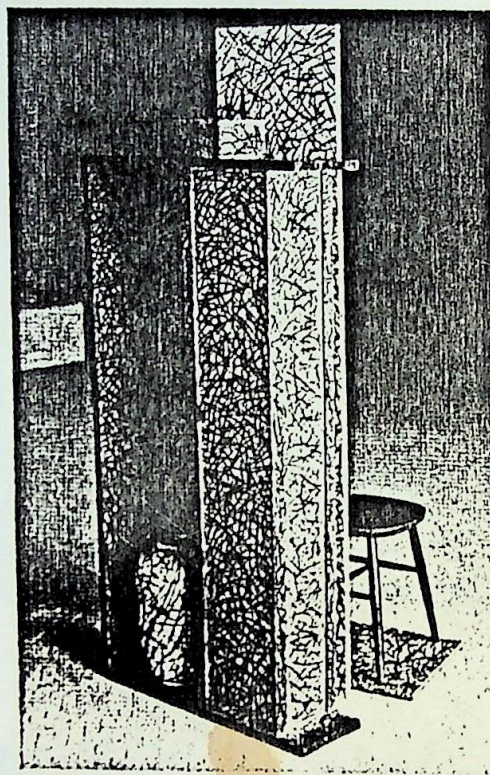
Bill Woodrow, Twin-tub with Chain Saw, 1981.
 Courtesy Lisson Gallery, London. Photo Edward Woodman.

-8-

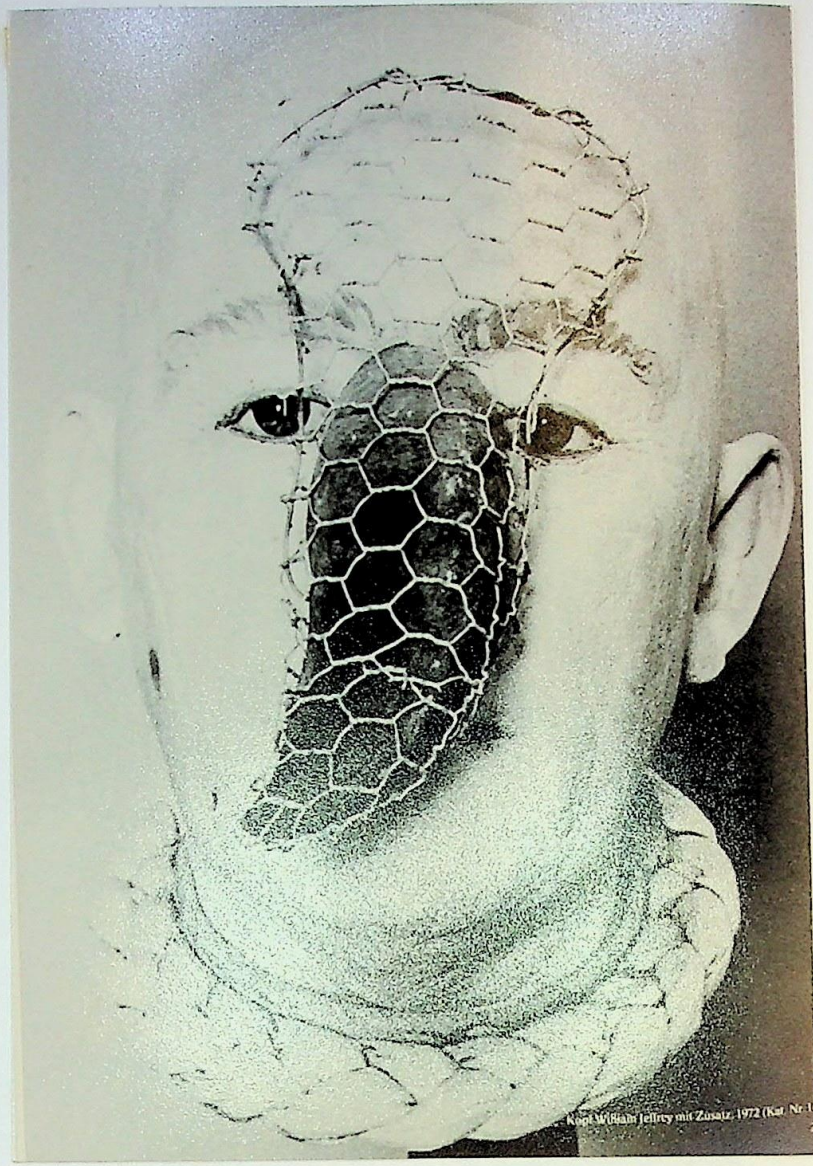


Tony Cragg, Britain Seen from the North, 1981. Installation at Lisson Gallery, London.

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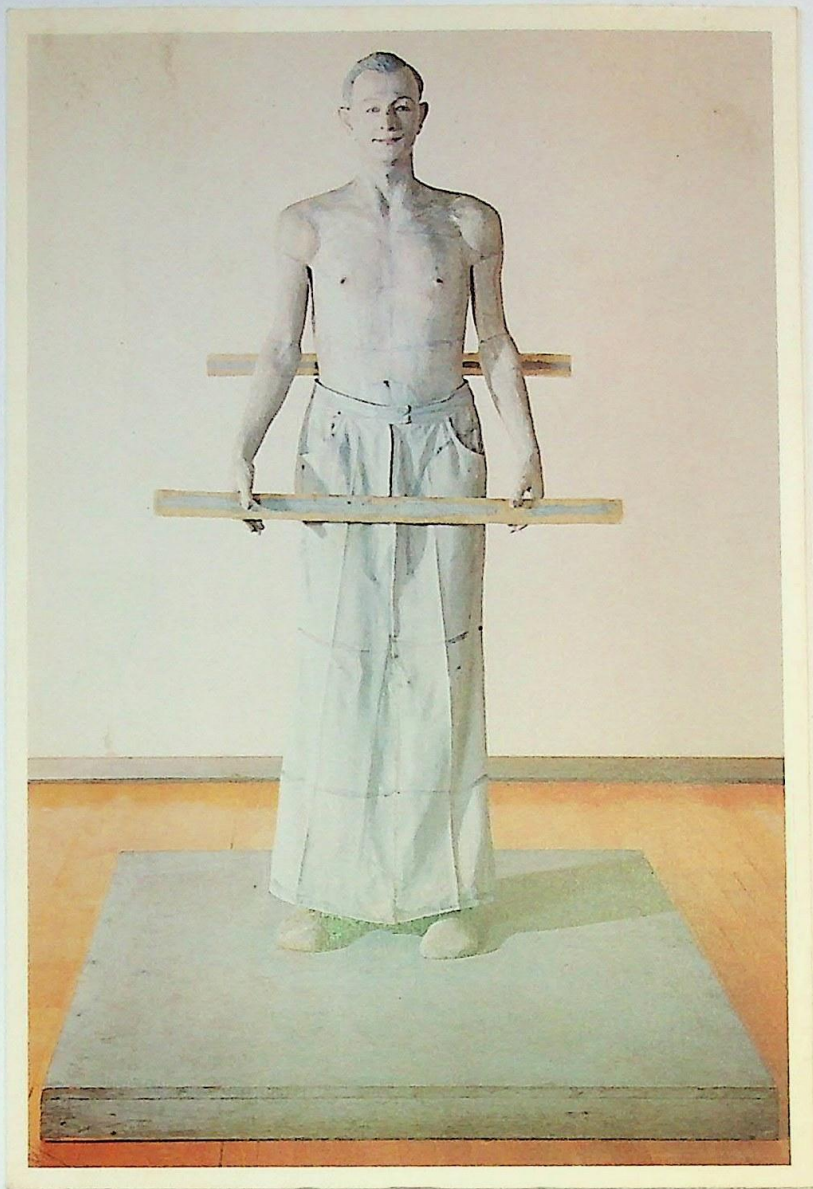
Tony Cragg, Red Chair, Green Vase, 1982.



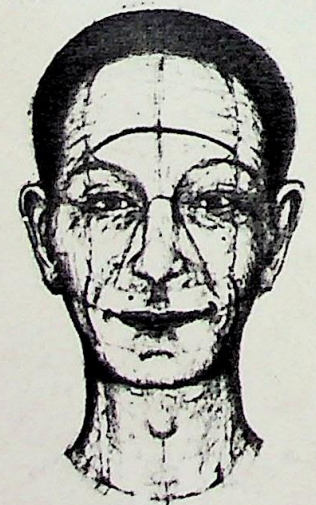
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-12-



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Head with line device, 1974
 pencil, biro, pastels on paper
 37.5 x 32.4 cm

-14-

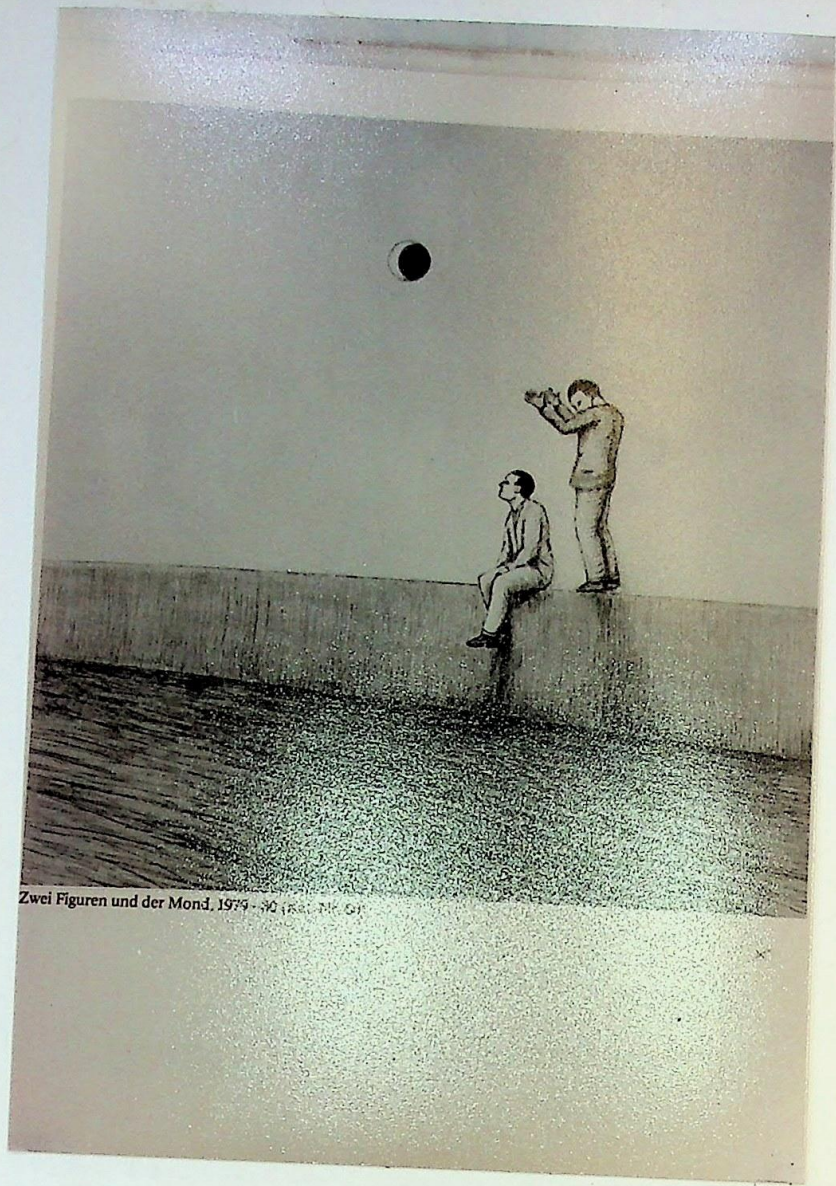


John Davies *Old Enemy* 1973-75

-15-



Lektion (Detail), 1973-75 (Kat. Nr. 3)



Zwei Figuren und der Mond, 1979-80 (Kreide, 21x24 cm)

-17-



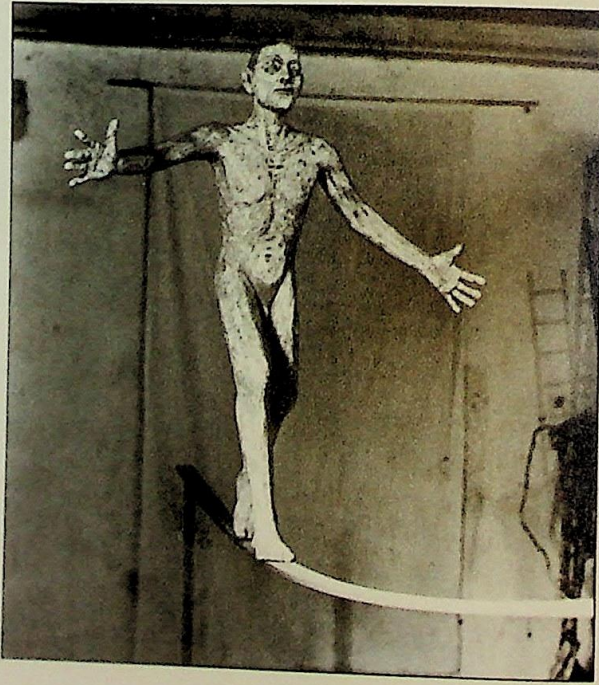
Figure holding bag (detail)

The Orchard Man, 1974. Private Collection, London

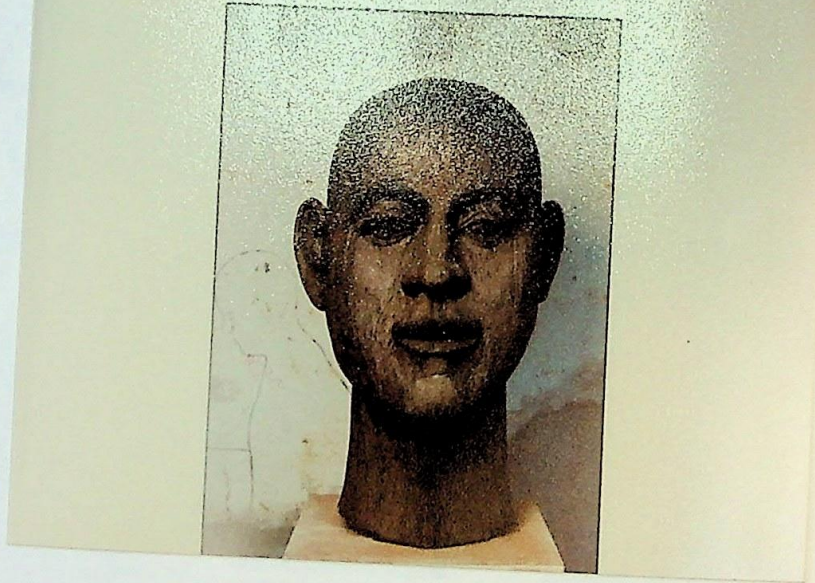
-18-

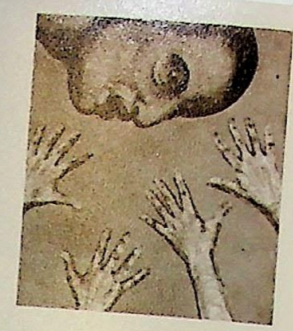


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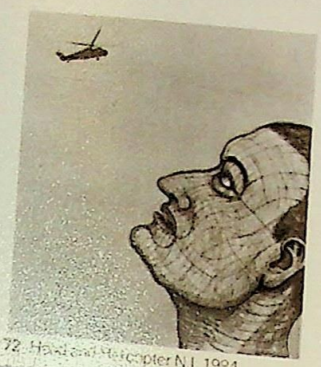


-20-





65 Triptych 'For Gods, Kings, Politicians and Popes' 1983-84



66 Head / Hands 1983-84

69 Figure on Tiresias 1982-84

72 Head and Helicopter N.I. 1984



75 Head / Hands, Maria Dinkler (A) 1983



79 Drawing of P.W. (Robert) 1982-84



83 Three Quarter Head of D.Y. 1982-84



76 Head (Chin cupped in hand) 1982



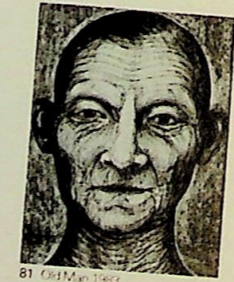
80 Drawing of V. 1983-84



84 Head (Unfinished / Finished Drawing)



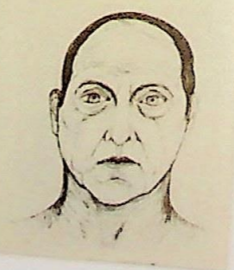
77 Face P.W. 1982-84



81 Old Man 1983

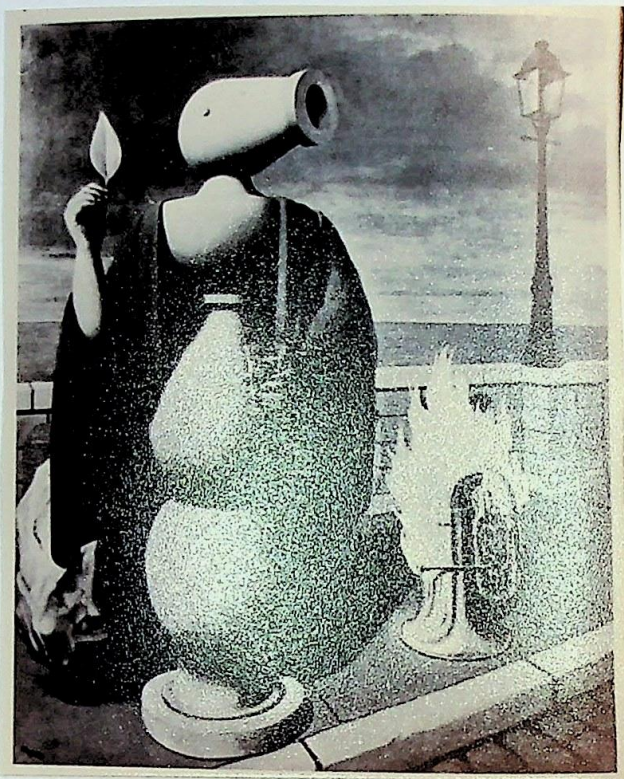


85 Drawing of D.Y. (Blue background)

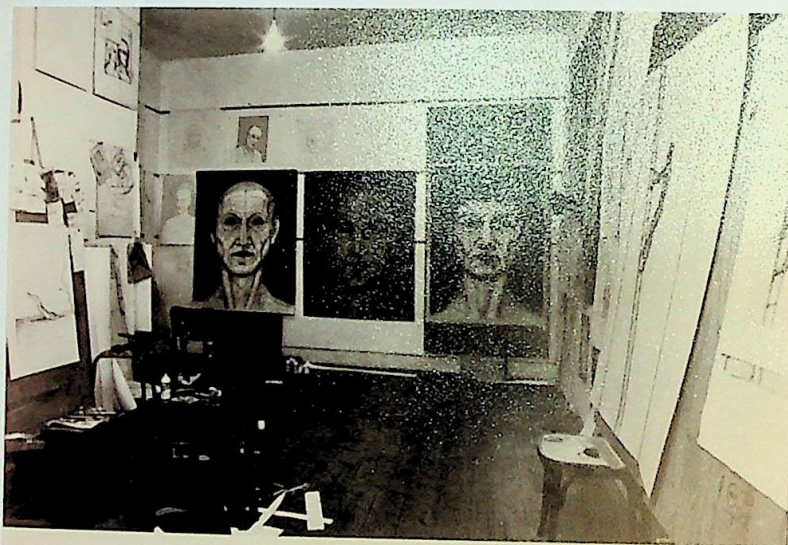


John Davies. *Bucket Man*. 1974. Mixed media, life size. Collection of University of East Anglia (Sainsbury Purchasing Fund). St. Dunstons Church, Whitechapel.



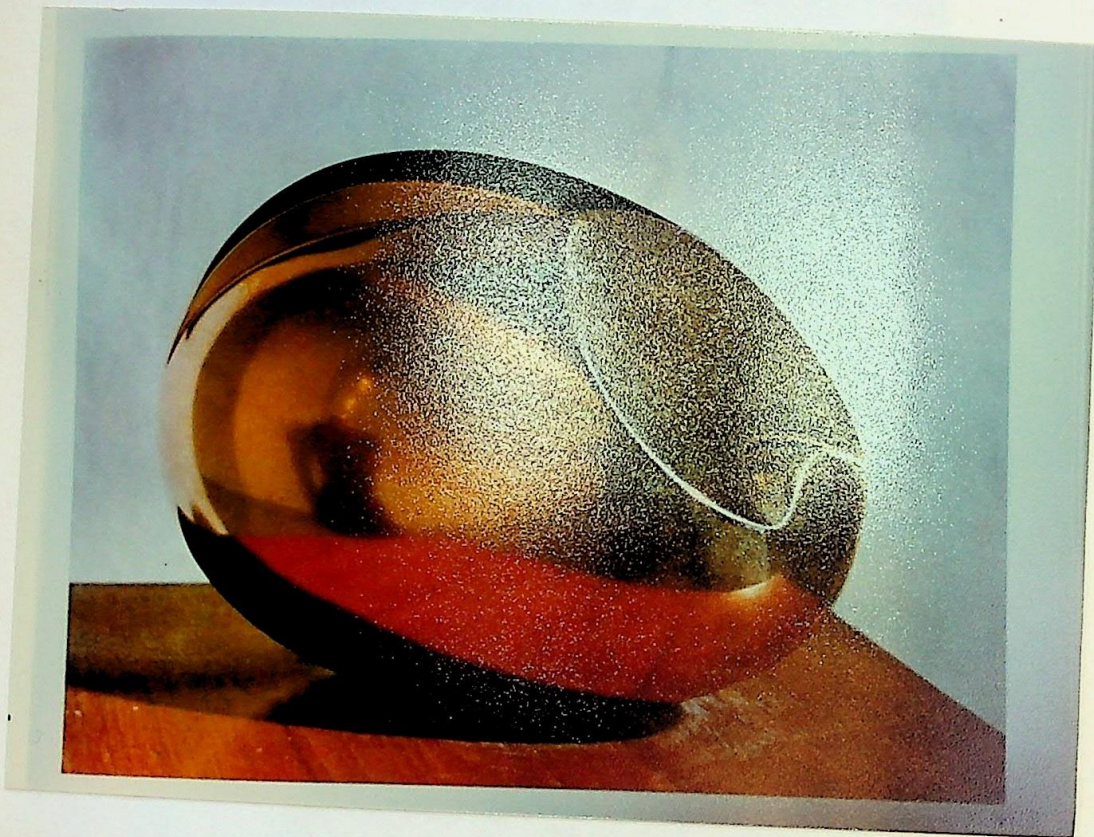


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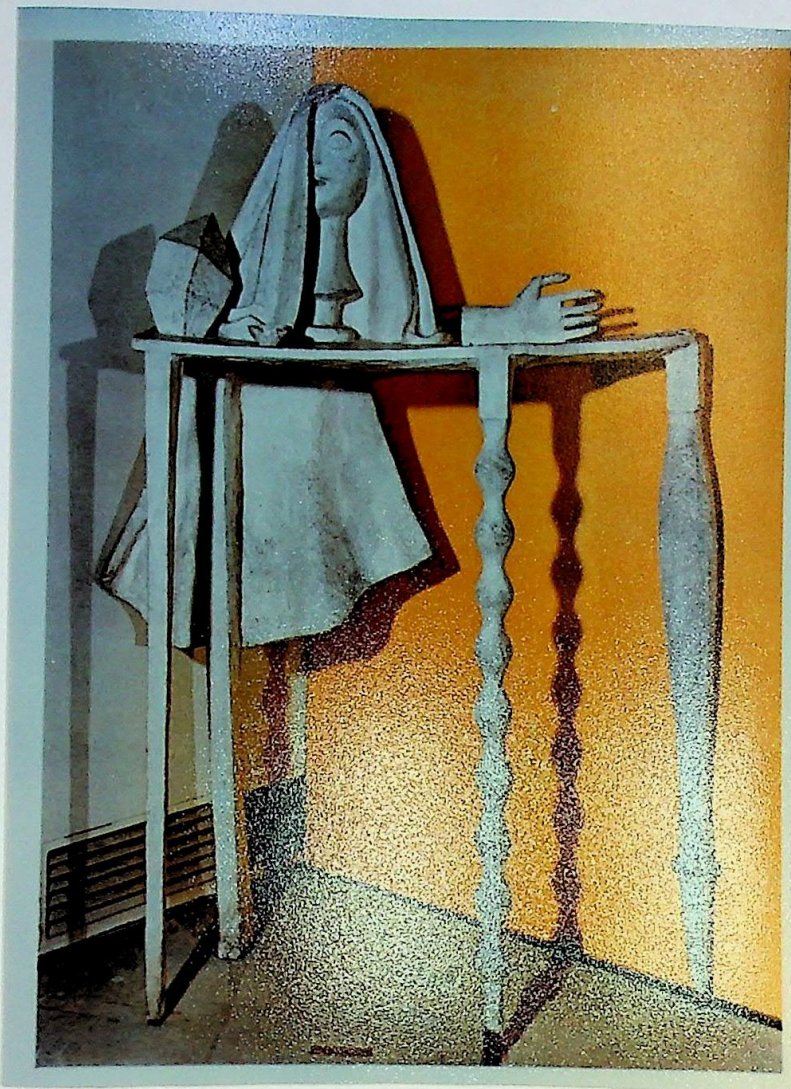


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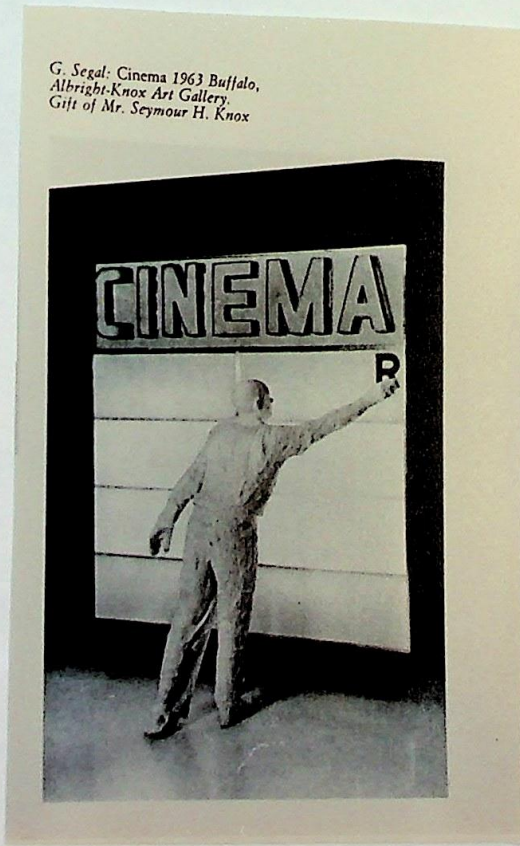


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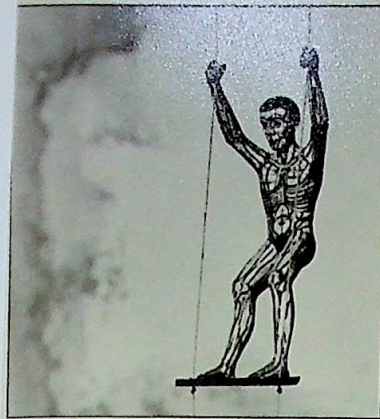


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G. Segal: Cinema 1963 Buffalo,
 Albright-Knox Art Gallery,
 Gift of Mr. Seymour H. Knox



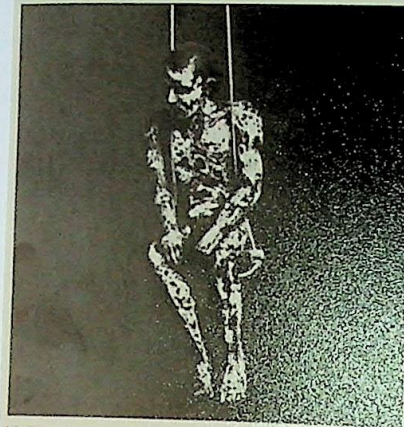
-29-



15 Figure on Trapeze (black ink lines) 1962-84



18 Figure on Rope (with Rings) 1961-84

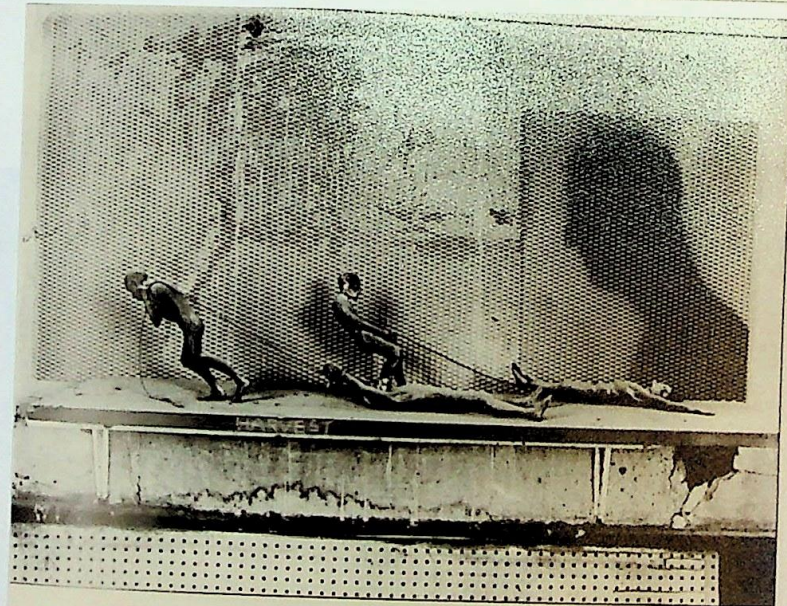


17 Figure on Wire (darkened) 1961-84



13 Figure on Stump 1961-84

-30-



-31-



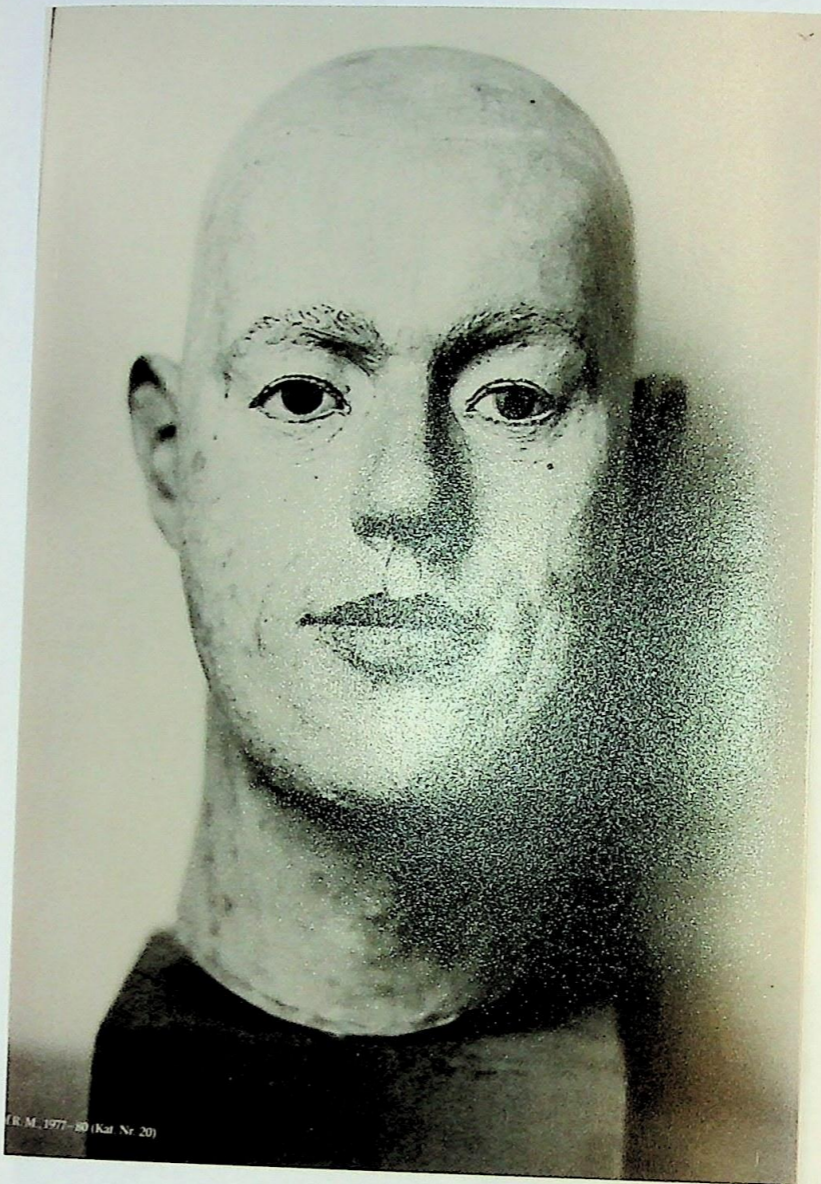


-32

Kopf Nr. 13, 1976 (Kat. Nr. 31)

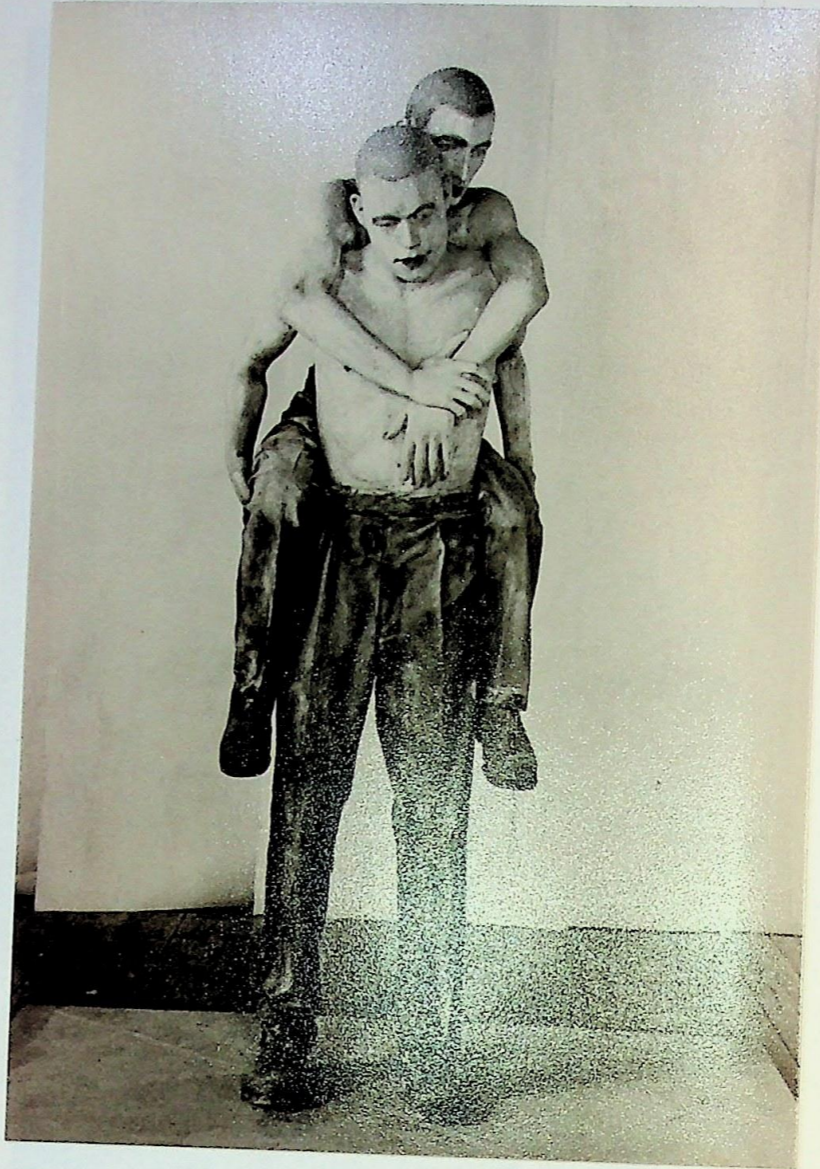


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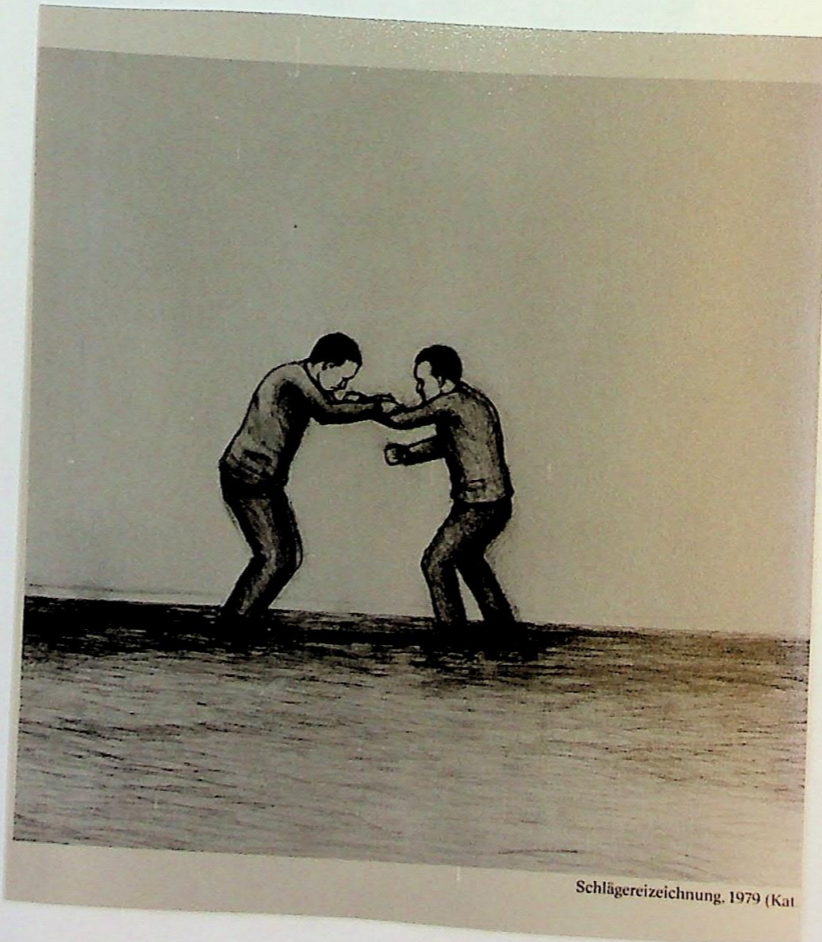


- 3 4 -

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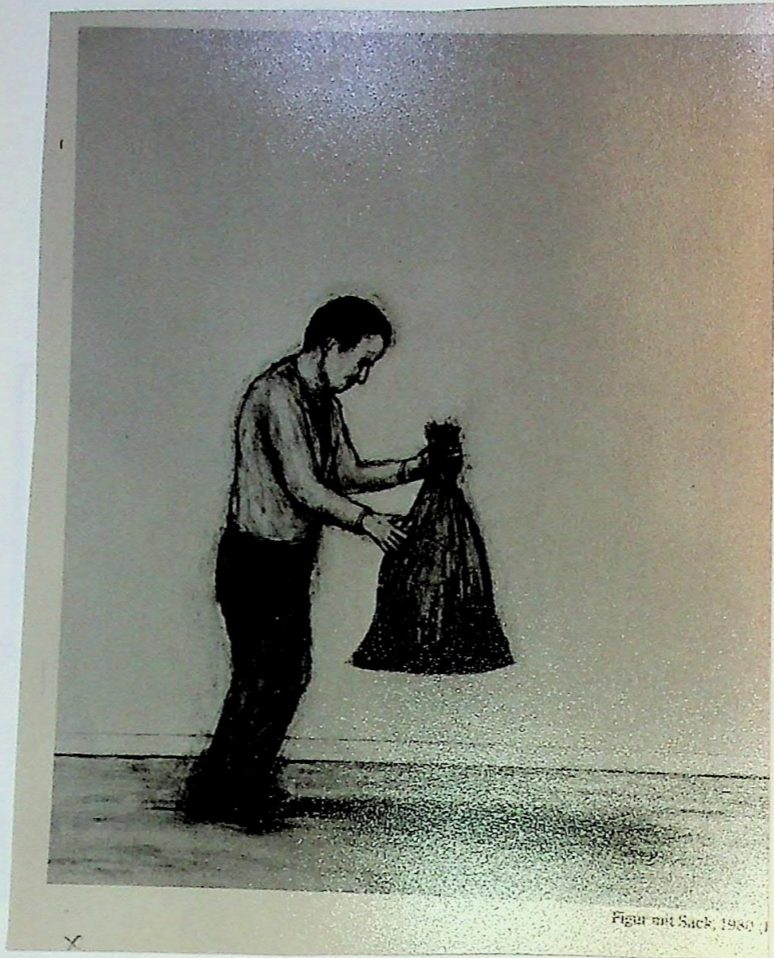


37
-35



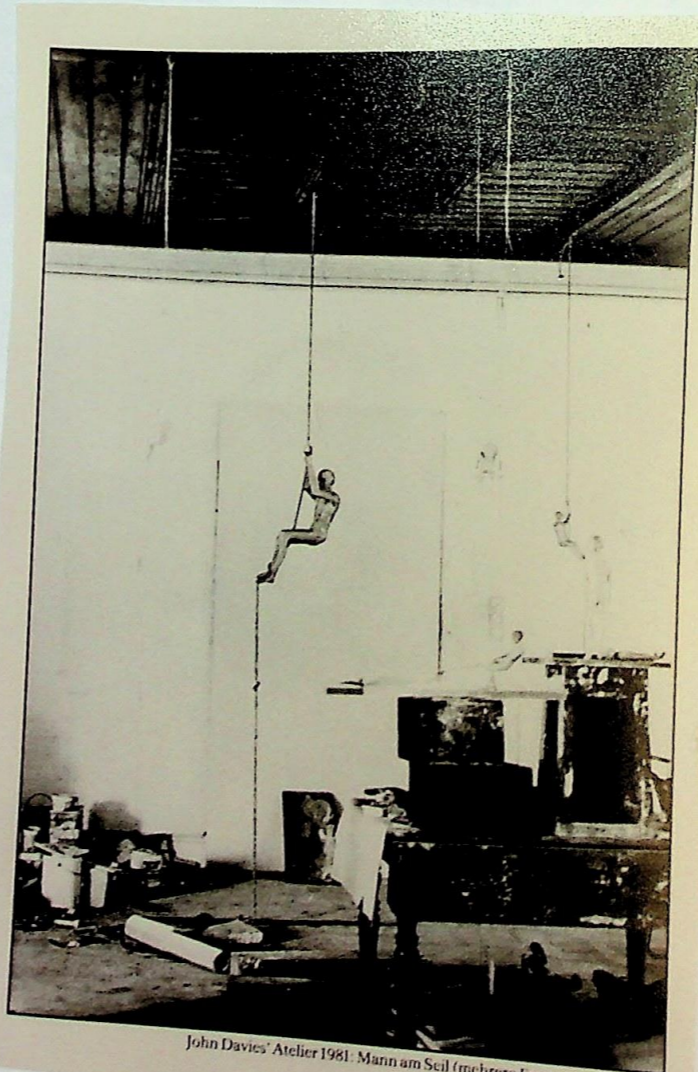
-36

Schlägerezeichnung, 1979 (Kat)



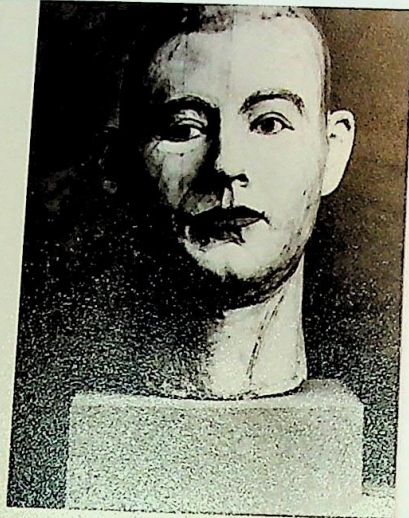
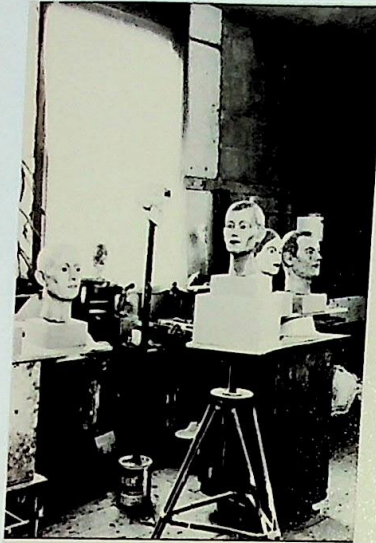
- 37

Figur mit Sack, 1980

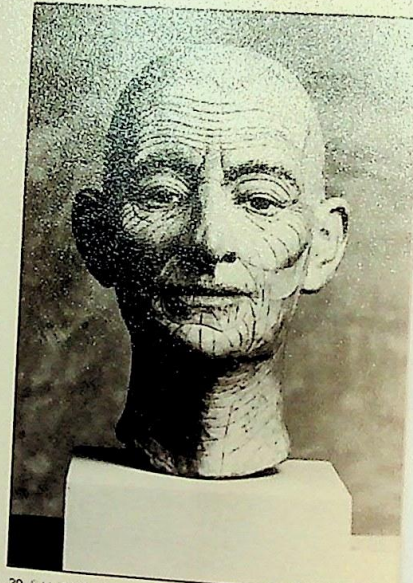
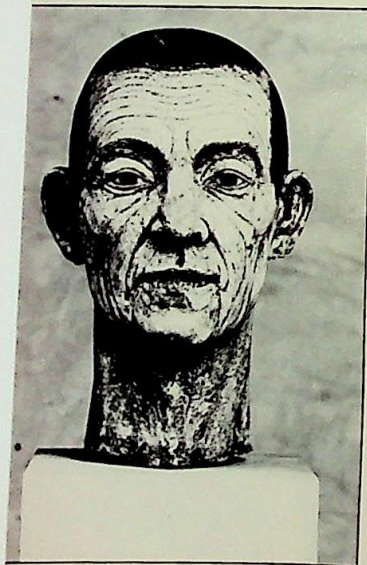


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John Davies' Atelier 1981: Mann am Seil (mehrere Fassungen in Arbeit)

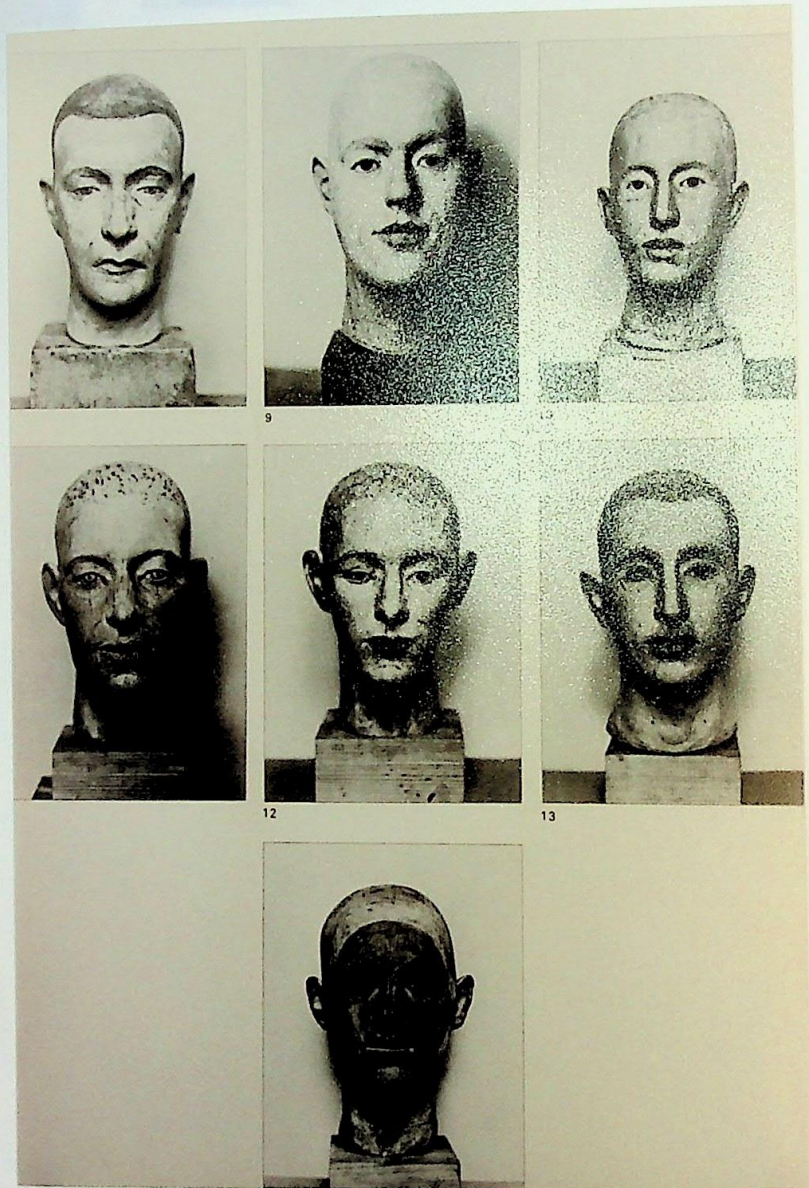


29 H. H. M. 1981 84

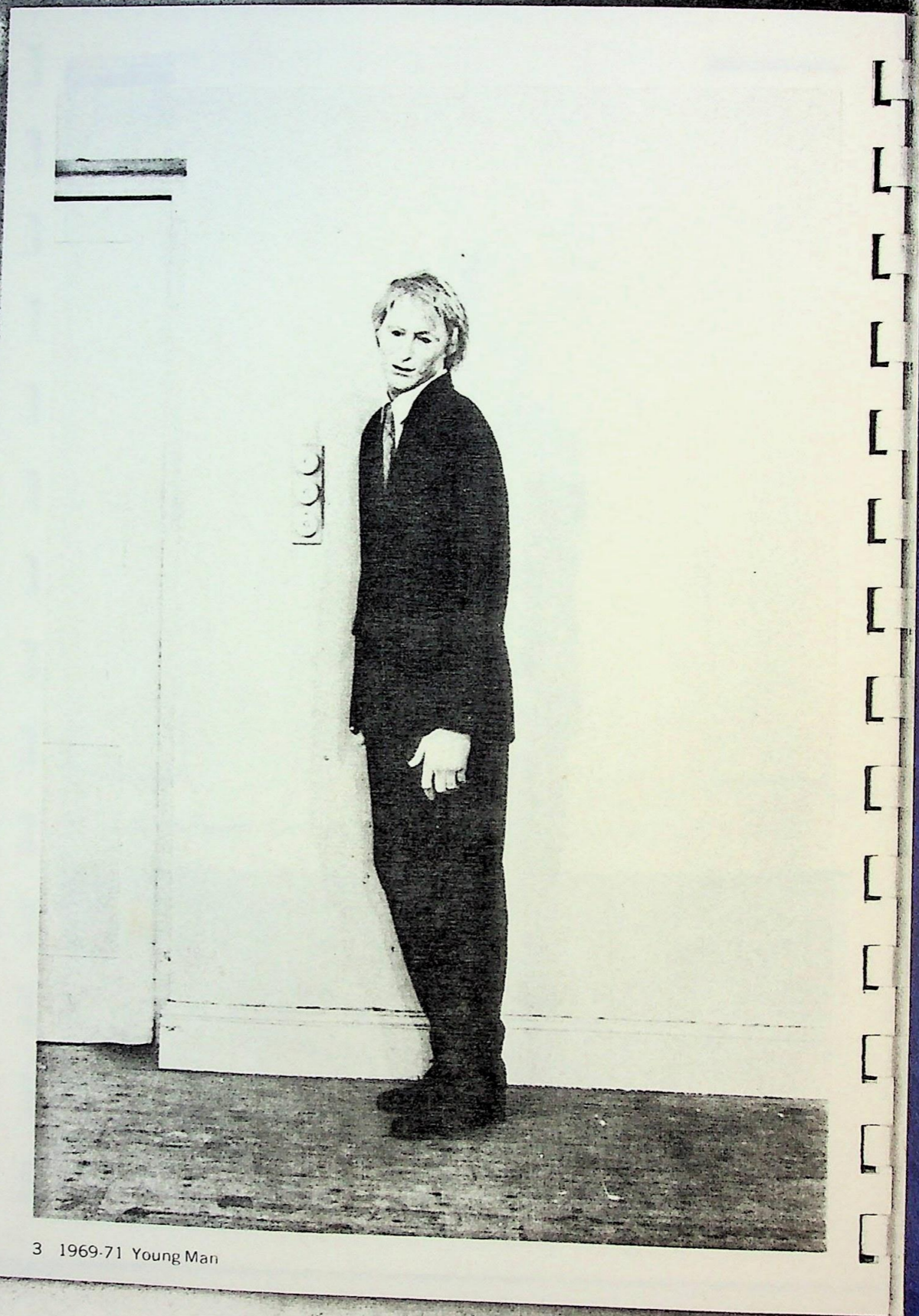


30 S. H. M. 1981 84

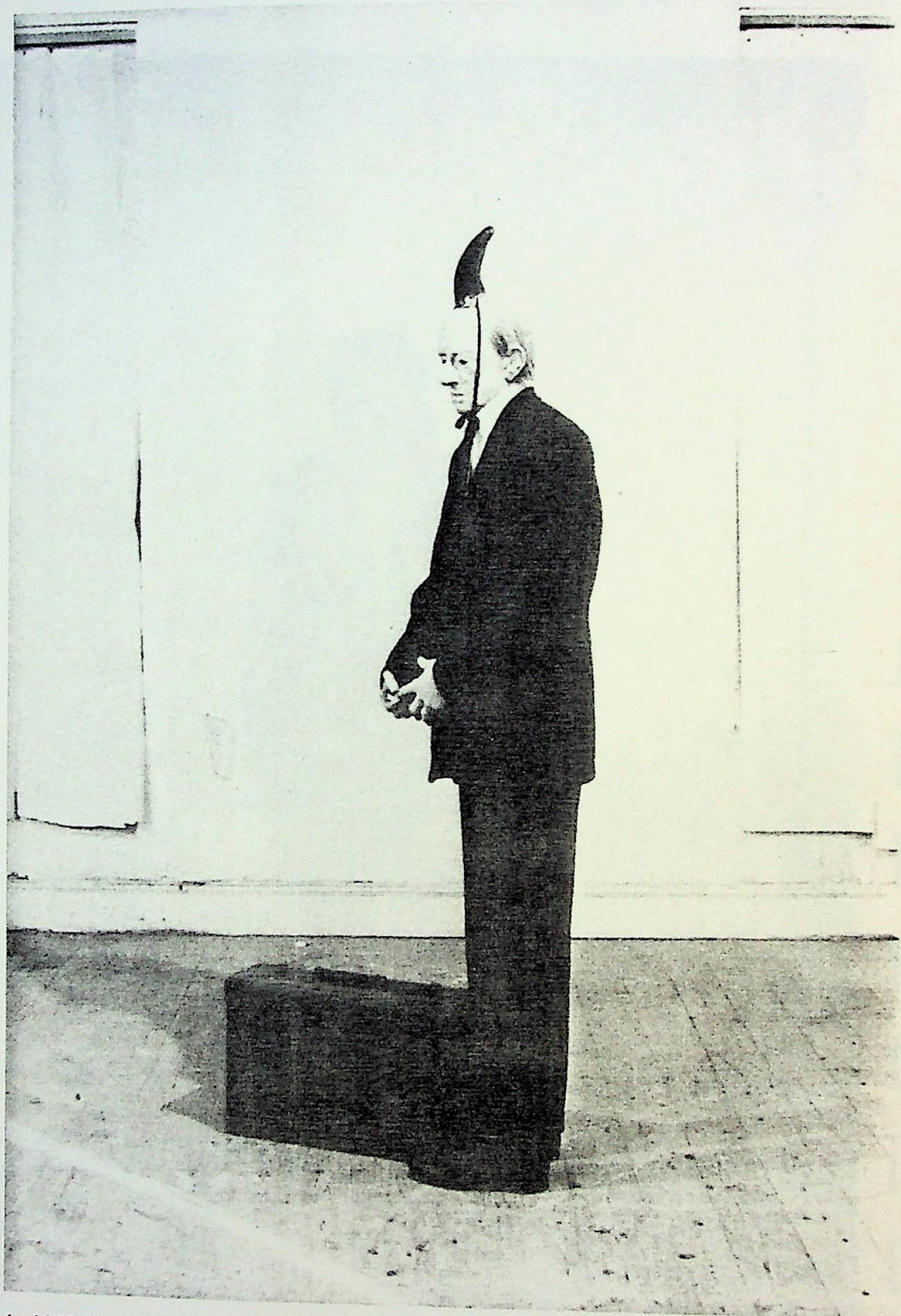
- 39



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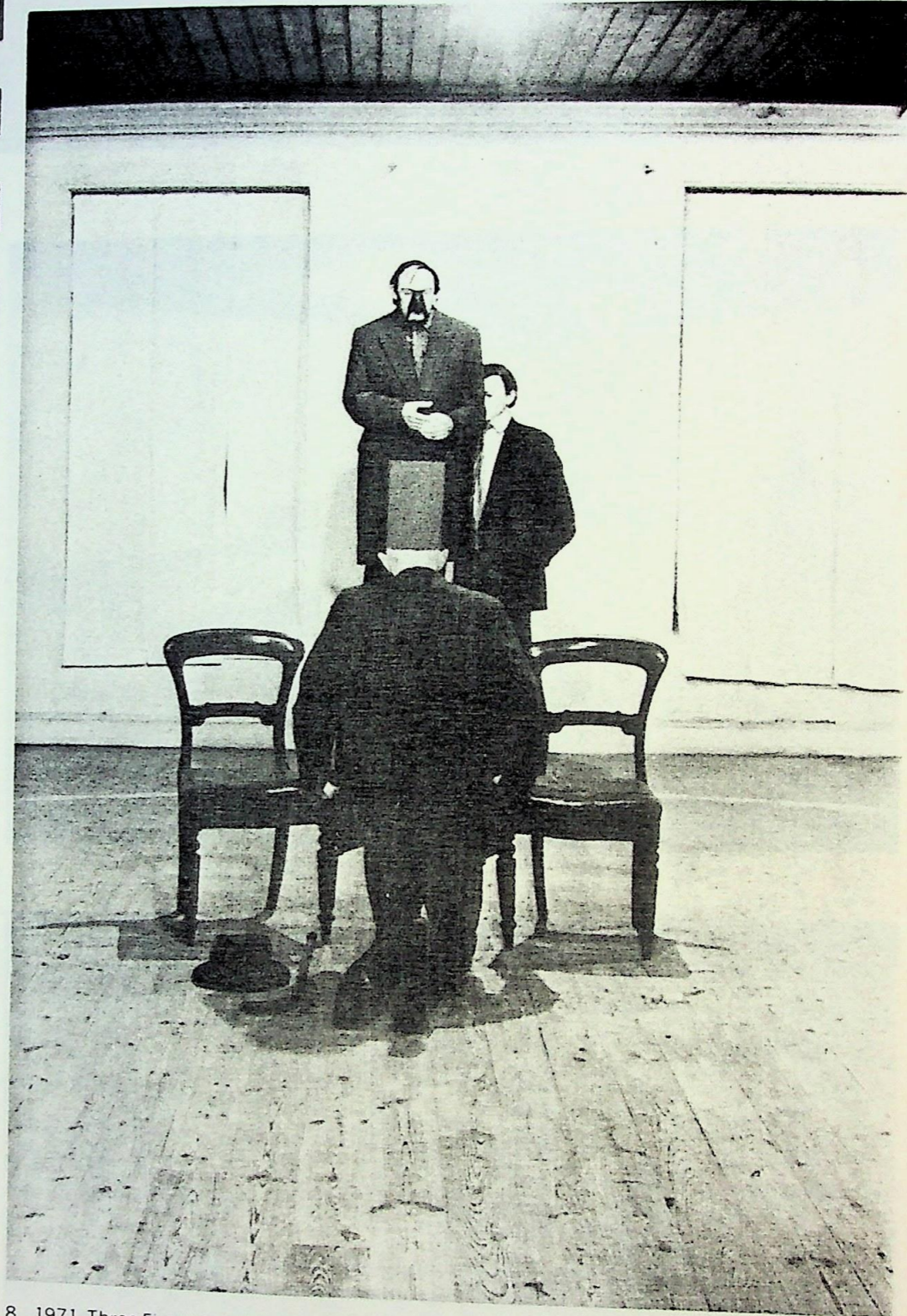
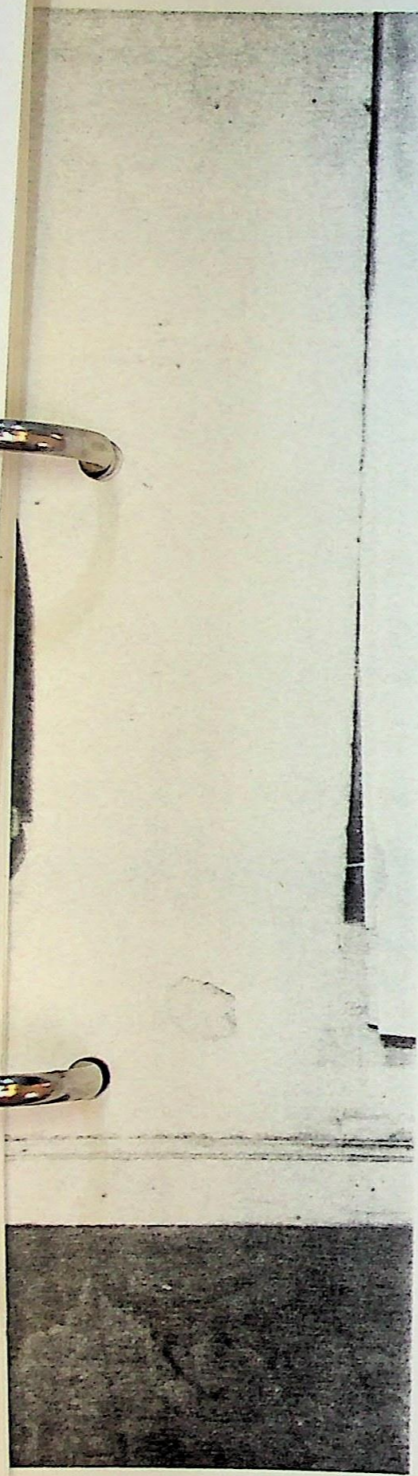
3 1969-71 Young Man



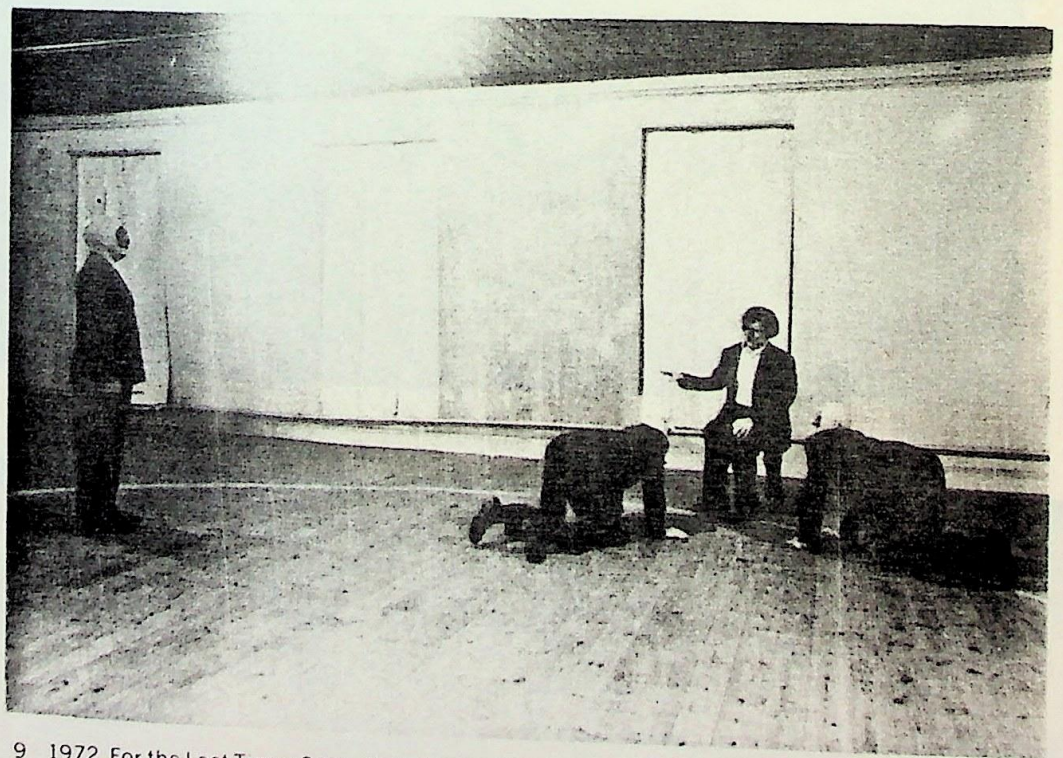
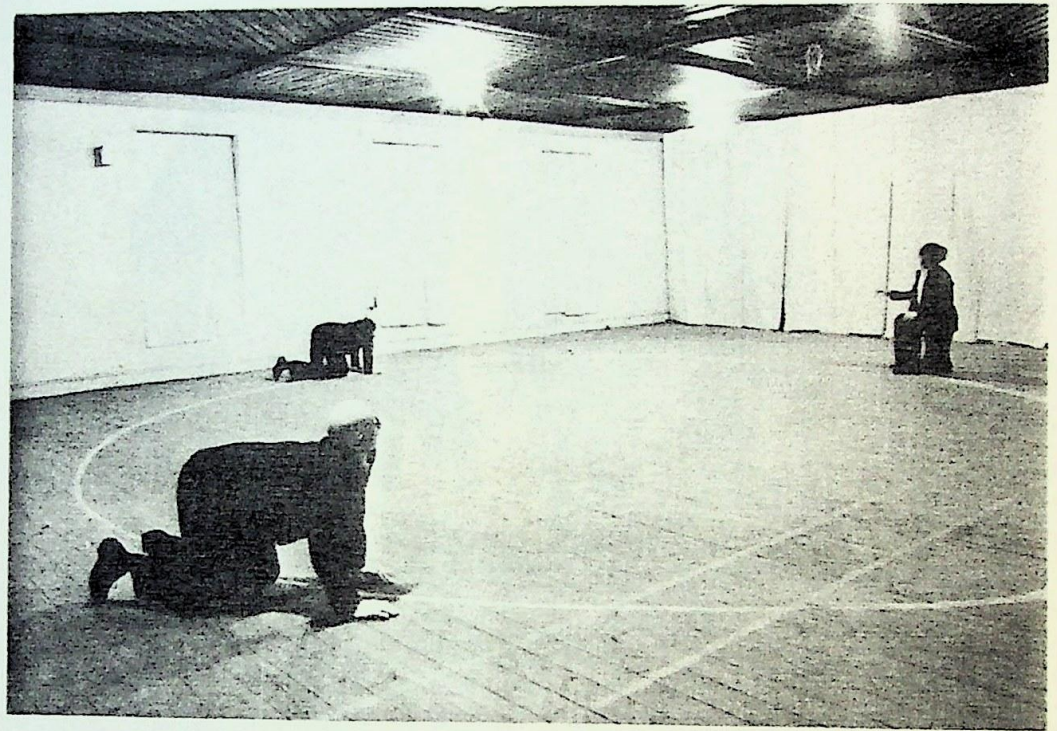
4 1970 Man Waiting



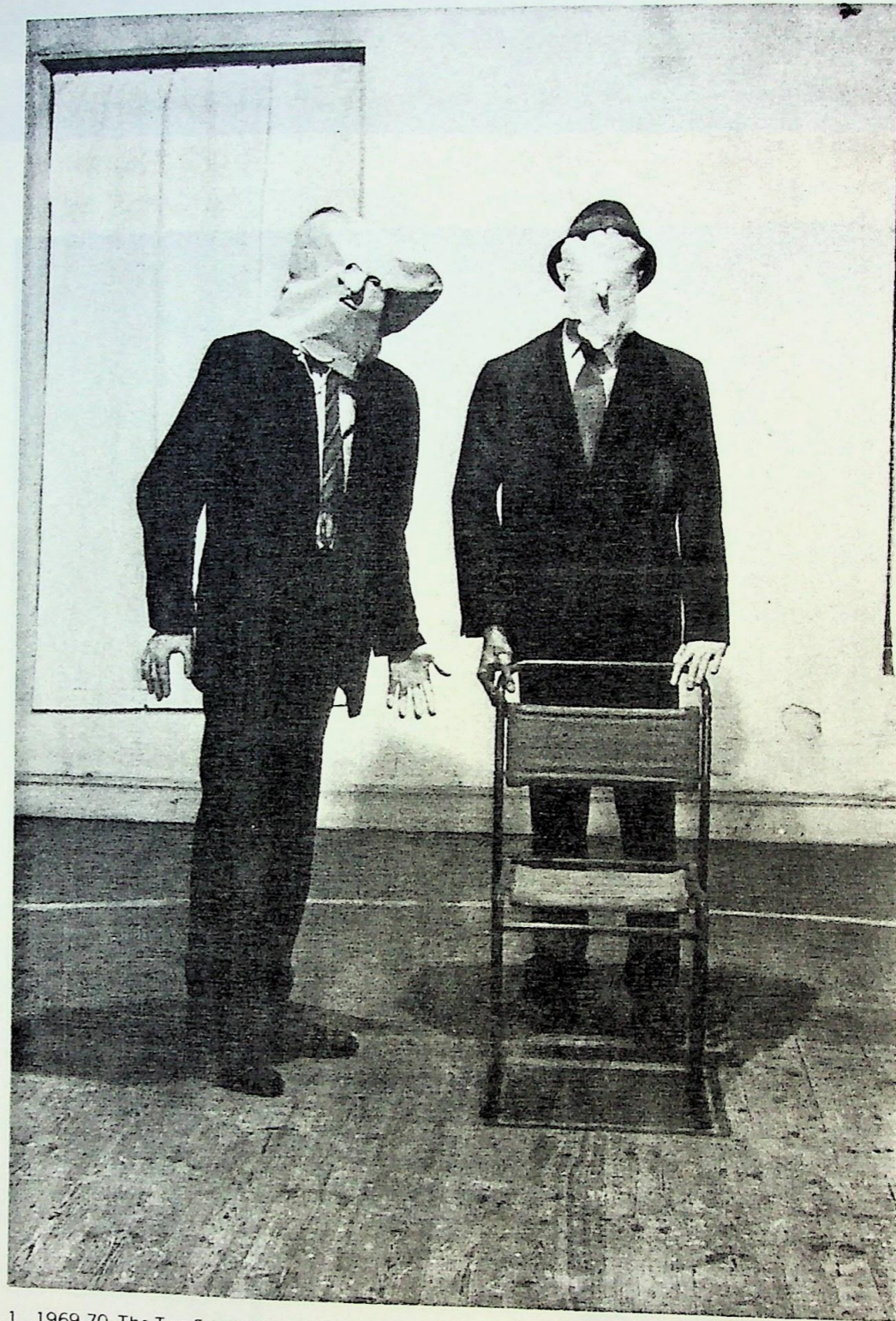
7 1971 Man with closed eyes



8 1971 Three Figures: 1 standing, 1 standing on a chair, 1 kneeling



9 1972 For the Last Time: 2 crawling, 1 seated, 1 standing



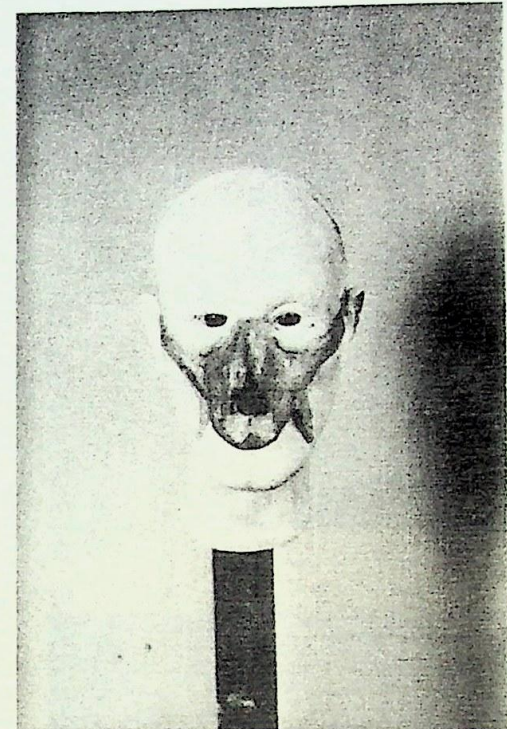
1 1969-70 The Two Friends



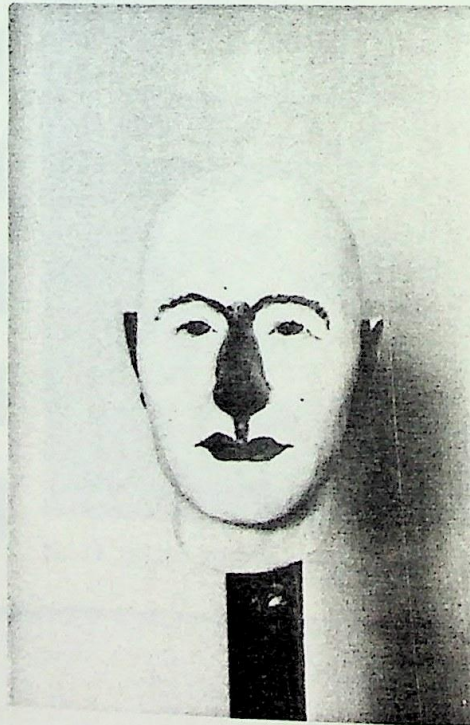
10 1968 Young Man's Head Collection of Sir Robert and Lady Sainsbury



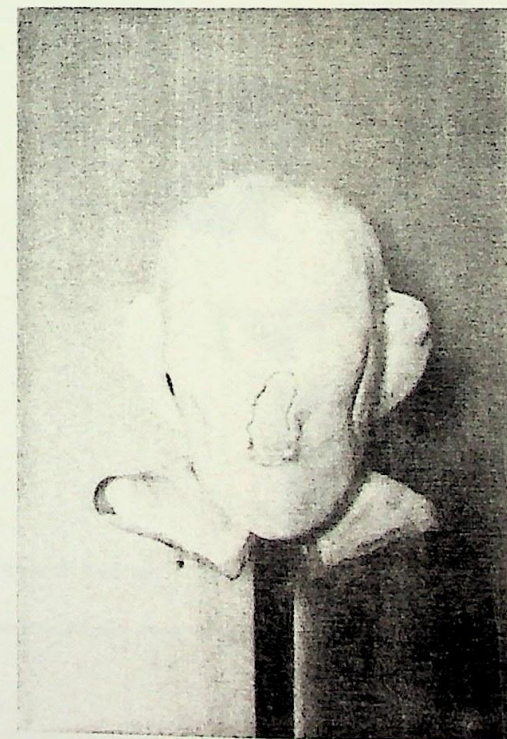
12 1971-2 Uplees Man



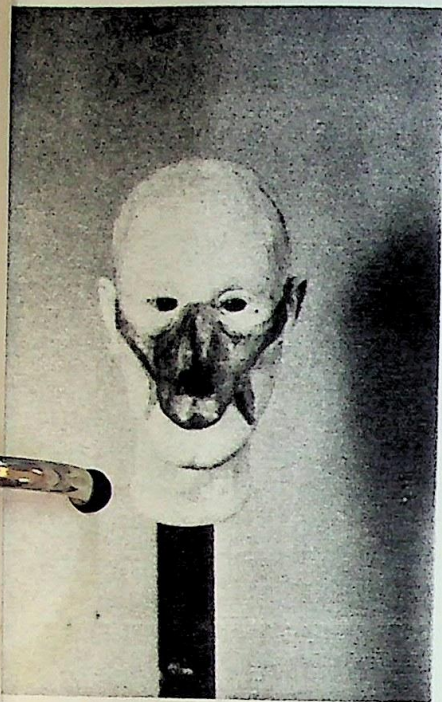
13 1972 Dogman



14 1970 Fool



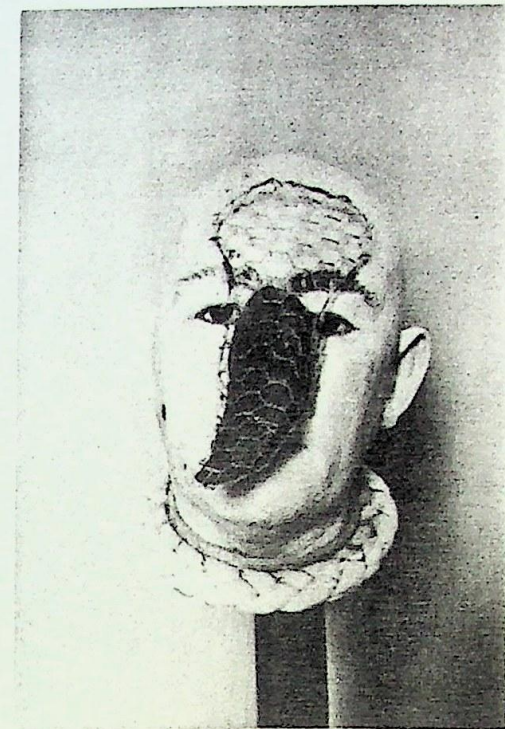
15 1969-70 Pink Head



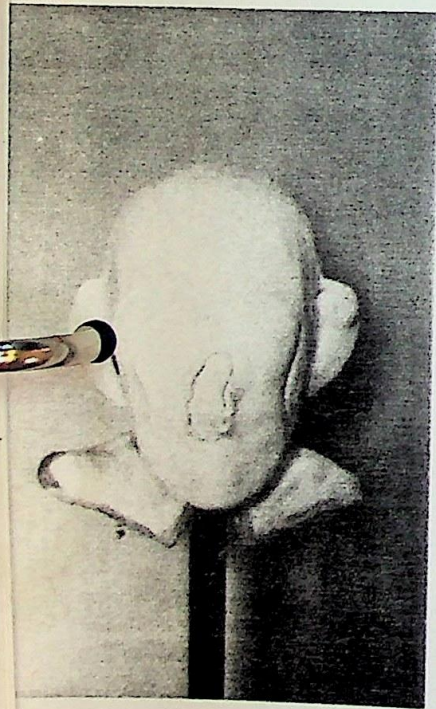
1972 Dogman



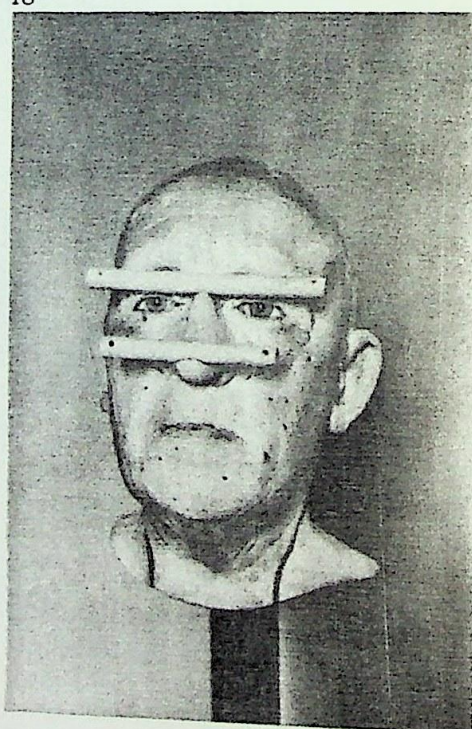
16



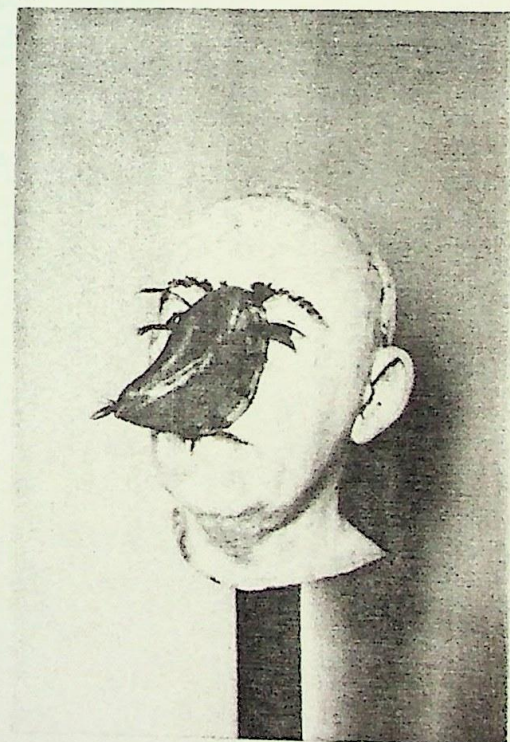
17



1969-70 Pink Head



18



19

16, 17, 18, 19 1972 Four heads of William Jeffrey with devices