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'Albert Paley and the
Paradox of Iron'

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by

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The urge to embellish and the love of ornament are basic to human nature. In all ages and cultures people have demonstrated a persistent impulse to decorate. The universal appeal of ornament is precisely its uselessness. Because ornament does not serve any particular function, it is essentially free: free to move the eye, to intrigue the mind, to rest the soul; free simply to delight. (1)

In America, as in Britain, the background of blacksmiths working today is a varied one. In a number of cases the interest in forged large-scale metalwork emerged from a background of training as a jeweller. Such is the case of Albert Paley, probably the best internationally known metalsmith working today. His works are widely known and have been considerably responsible for the contemporary revival of American large-scale ironwork. The American Blacksmiths Association of North America (ABANA) was founded in 1973 with 27 members, to preserve a dying craft; it now has a membership of 1,500. Paley wrote a paper on jewellery techniques for ABANA's first meeting. Now he writes manuals on monumental ironworking techniques.

Based in Rochester, Upstate New York, Paley produces monumental works in steel. From the most public of sculptures and magnificent gates to intimate brooches and even an outlandish bed, he has done just about everything that can be done with metal. In spite of all his incredible achievements, he remains a very modest man who sees nothing special in what he does. It is very difficult to agree with his self-assessment. 'The community should recognize that they've got a genius in their midst' says Richard Muhlberger(2), director of the Museum of Fine Arts in Springfield, Massachusetts.

Through my research for, and writing of this thesis, I have deepened an existing interest and admiration for the creative genius of Albert Paley. I have studied his work

in detail, tracing its development from his early days as a jewellery student at the Tyler School of Art right up to the present.

In order to understand his work properly I looked at apparent influences but found that they were superficial. His style is quite unique. As Wylie Sypher has written,...

A genuine style is an expression of a prevailing, dominant, or authentically contemporary view of the world by those artists who have most successfully intuited the quality of human experience peculiar to their day and who are able to phrase this experience in forms deeply congenial to the thought, science and technology which are part of that experience. (3)

Paley believes strongly in total integration between a piece of his work and its surroundings, whether architectural ornamentation or bodily ornamentation. He also thinks that his work should make reference to the past, but, he adds, 'Like architecture, sculpture must reflect our time.' (4) Although some of his work is quite reminiscent of some 13th and 14th century metalwork, for example, the west central door of the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, it is not however a mere restatement of past art. Instead, in Paley's work we witness a unique and very personal interpretation of what has gone before.

FOOTNOTES TO INTRODUCTION

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- 3 Wylie Sypher quoted in Knight 111, Carleton,
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CHAPTER ONE

'ALBERT PALEY'S WORKING ENVIRONMENT'

Like Superman, Albert Paley is a man of steel. In his hands, steel turns to rubber as he twists, bends, turns and forms the metal into seemingly impossible shapes. In a sense, Paley is a modern-day blacksmith, but he is more than just an expert craftsman. He is an artist who has forged a new way of looking at what is perceived as a hard, unyielding material. He has taken rigid, inflexible iron and has curved, compressed and swirled it as one would casually mould clay. In doing so, he has created a new vocabulary for the craft.

In the past twenty years Paley has revived a somewhat moribund art, architectural metalwork and developed a unique, personal vocabulary that exploits the plasticity of iron. When Paley began to work in iron in 1969, there was no great master to teach him his chosen trade. The last great master of architectural metalwork was Samuel Yellin of Philadelphia.

Born and raised in Poland, Yellin attended a Polish school that specialised in the arts and crafts. He was soon recognised by the iron master as a highly talented and dedicated student, and he was given a place in the master's workshop as an apprentice when he was eleven years old. There, he learned all aspects of the blacksmithing process from making nails to forging and decorating the most elaborate gates. He worked in several shops in Germany, Belgium and England before emigrating to Philadelphia in 1906.

Yellin's training and exposure to the wrought - iron revival in Europe endowed him with a certain philosophy about design and workmanship:

There is only one way to make good decorative iron work and that is with the hammer at the anvil, for in the heat of creation and under the spell of the hammer, the whole conception of a composition is often transformed.(1)

To develop the necessary aesthetic judgement, Yellin believed it crucial to study the best examples of the past. He said,

I am a staunch advocate of tradition in the matter of design. I think that we should follow the lead of the past masters and seek our inspiration from their wonderful work. They saw the poetry and rhythm of iron. Out of it they made masterpieces not for a day or an hour but for the ages. We should go back to them for our ideas in craftsmanship, to their simplicity and truthfulness.(2)

A sensitive and cultivated designer, much of his work was based on medieval originals, using the same traditional techniques. Although he did not hesitate to use the latest technology to save time, he claimed that 'the perfection of mechanical means of production ... has blinded many to the simplicity of the means which produced the great works of the past.' (3)

In the February 1918 issue of Art World, Hanna Tachau wrote

Mr Samunel Yellin is a craftsman who dares to defy the modern tendency of utilizing devices other than the hammer and anvil for working in iron. He is a devout follower of tradition, caring deeply for the great examples of his art, and so all of his work, from the smallest details to the splendour of imposing gates and delicate grills, is wrought by hand. To him, the past is a treasure-house from which he gathers material for his own creations. He is deeply stirred by the wonders of the Italian Renaissance, when the craftsman expressed perhaps better than in any other period his understanding of the fitness of design to the material.(4)

He established a workshop in Philadelphia in 1906, which by the 1920's was employing 300 craftsmen, whose work was essentially traditional in concept though highly inventive in detail. He designed work mainly for religious and other institutions all over the United States.

Yellin suffered a serious heart attack in 1930 and although he recovered, his health never really returned. It is hard to know how much time Yellin actually spent at the anvil during the last ten years of his life but this has been considered as his most creative period. He died in 1940, leaving no direct successor.

Therefore, in his chosen field of architectural metalwork as a contemporary art form, Paley was, and is, alone. He says 'I'm the only one doing what I'm doing - maybe that's because it's so hard to do. But I can do anything I want with metal. It's the only way I can express myself'(5). His enthusiasm to recapture the knowledge and techniques of the past, through a collection of artefacts, is understandable.

When the subject of architectural iron is mentioned, people are most likely to think of Hector Guimard's Art Nouveau entrance gates for the Paris metro, (fig 1) made in 1900, or, in America, Yellin's gothic gates at Yale University. Although Paley has looked to the past and studied the work of the great masters of metal, particularly from the Art Nouveau period, he has a very definite perception of what a contemporary artist should be. He feels that one cannot simply reproduce turn-of-the-century designs. It is necessary to him to give contemporary definition to his medium and produce work that is a product of its own time.

The correct environment is of utmost importance in creating a piece, according to Paley. 'For me, the heat, the noise, the smoke, all help create an environment and allow certain things to happen. The piece is a by-product of that environment'(6). The environment in which Paley works is a building resembling several two-car garages in a rundown, industrial area of Rochester, upstate New York. The studio looks like something out of the Dark Ages and is the kind of facility that gave industrialists a bad name.

Everything there is on an industrial scale; the gantries and hoists to convey the bars of steel; the blower on the forge, which is so massive Paley can have a working fire in 20 minutes. Tanks of acetylene and oxygen are lined up and connected to an endless number of hoses sprawling across the floor. Row upon row of hammers, wrenches and pliers stretch across one wall while piled up against another are hundreds of industrial steel rods. In the front, there is a turn-of-the century pneumatic hammer that Paley discovered lying unused in a nearby factory. When in action, it delivers 30-ton blows 250 times a minute.

Across the room is another old and strange looking machine, which turns out to be a 'twisting' machine (fig 2). This was actually made from an old elevator motor with a gear reduction that makes it turn once to every 300 revolutions of the motor. One end of an iron bar is clamped into a stationary vice and the other into a chuck-like device attached to the motor. When the motor is switched on, the bar begins to slowly turn. Since one end is held securely in place, it twists and twists and twists seemingly hundreds of times, creating fine ridges like those of a machine screw.

Paley studies junkyards across the western tier of New York State, constantly bringing back old castings, fence sections, in fact just about anything in metal that strikes his fancy. Adding to the existing inventory of tools is a major preoccupation.

The demand for Paley's work has become so great that he hires at present 12 assistants to work in the studio with him. This allows a number of projects to be executed at the same time. His workshop has become a virtual training ground for students and apprentices. They come from all

over America and sometimes Europe to work with Paley, eagerly wanting to learn all they can from this new master. It's not unusual in Rochester to see a set of gates that look very similar to Paley's only to find that a former worker of his has executed it. But Paley doesn't want to judge the work of past employees and diplomatically refrains from answering the question of whether some have borrowed heavily from his style. To answer that, he says, would be to 'lose sight of what its about'.(7)

These assistants, all dressed similarly in heavy duty protective clothing with earphones, safety glasses and gloves, constantly shouting to be heard above the continuing noise, seek Paley's approval and advice on each piece as it is being created. Nothing leaves this studio with the Paley Studios stamp until it has been personally approved by Paley himself.

Because of what he creates, many think of Paley as being quite old. In fact, he is only 46, and as he puts it 'a product of the 60's'(8). With his long, curly hair tied in a pony tail and hidden under a bandanna, a drooping reddish moustache, and heavy work clothes, he looks like one of America's last hippies.

Born in Philadelphia in 1944, son of Dorothy Appelgren and Albert Raymond Paley of Swedish and Irish - English descent respectively, he is the eldest of three children. Between the years 1962 and 1969, Paley attended the Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia. He found art college during the 60's a particularly interesting place to be. There he experimented with various media such as painting, sculpture and weaving. He concluded that the loom was too tedious, paint too submissive and the block of marble too open-ended. He found that working with metal most suited his

temperament and his need for a material that was physically resistive. He took up jewellery making and soon attracted attention with avant -garde brooches, neck-pieces and bracelets that were large, complex, three-dimensional and almost impossible to wear.

Despite the fact that he had become quite an accomplished goldsmith, he still felt somewhat restricted. He grew quite disillusioned with the concept of merely designing work to adorn the breasts of beautiful affluent women.

In 1969, he moved to Rochester to teach at the School for American Craftsmen at the Rochester Institute of Technology. There, he began experimenting with iron, teaching himself the techniques of blacksmithing from books and museums. He feels that working with iron was simply a natural extension of his work as a goldsmith. The basic problems of designing for a human form or an architectural space are the same. Only the scale is different.

Three years later he entered and won a competition to design two portal gates for the Renwick Gallery in Washington, DC (figs 3,4). 'We really took a chance because he'd never executed large-scale ironwork before', recalls Lloyd Herman, then director of the gallery. 'But his drawings complemented the building's ornamentation and were still highly original' (9).

Since then, Paley's works have appeared in over 150 national and international exhibitions, many of them one-man shows.

At the start of his career, Paley made use of the full repertoire of the goldsmith and jeweller but he has progressively restricted his materials until steel relieved

on rare occasions with bronze and brass, is all that remains. Through such concentrated use of this one material, he has gained an intimate knowledge of it.

Paley sees steel as submissive while at the same time resistive. It is strong, rigid, brutal, yet he can make it sensitive and fine. This paradox inspires him and enables him to manifest in steel the ebb and flow of movement he sees in nature. His work is documentary, recording in frozen motion a particular interaction between artist and material.

Paley's techniques reflect so closely what he terms 'the organic order of being' (10), that the finished works often give the initial impression of having formed themselves without the intermediary of the artist. Each of his compositions are, in his own words, 'a question that comes out in a design context' (11). The viewer, in his investigation of the object, reverses the process; by exploring the design, he arrives at the questions it poses.

Paley's art is romantic, but not solely on an evocative level. His rejection of what he senses as the sterility of modernism in metal and the encroachment of machine productivity in the crafts is totally in keeping with his faith in humanism and the personal integration of art. From the maker, through the process of making and including the finished work, this idea of a total work of art, is the reflection of a modified historicism. This is parallel with the aesthetics of the International Arts and Crafts Movement of the last century and the beginning of this.

The movement's principal goals were to restore the 'joy of labour' by a return to handcraftsmanship and to promote simple uncluttered interiors by a unification of all art objects that embodied an aesthetic of 'honesty'. Honesty, in both workmanship and design, was evoked as a prime article of faith. Things, in other words, should beautify, never conceal, and a metal should never be made to do anything out of character (12).

Paley is emotionally absorbed by the character and qualities of pure metal, most notably steel in its linear and extruded capabilities. In terms of simple process, his jewellery and large metalwork pieces are the result of an advanced and sensitive understanding of his material. His facility with metal and the often spectacular results are not as important to him, however, as the 'direct involvement with the material and spiritual challenges presented by each new project.'

1949

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 1

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CHAPTER TWO

'INSPIRATIONS, APPARENT INFLUENCES
AND THE EMERGENCE OF A STYLE'

Albert Paley's work is accepted and respected: his position as one of the more influential American metalsmiths is secure. With its sinuous, whiplash forms, Paley's style is uniquely his own, but not without roots in the past. He accepts the heritage of past crafts and their traditions. He looked to the past and studied great masters of metalwork before beginning his own career in iron. He saw and admired the jewellery of Rene Lalique at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon and the sometimes outrageous work of Antonio Gaudi in Barcelona, which he found particularly interesting.

Gaudi was born in the market town of Reus, the son of a coppersmith. As a result, he grew up with a knowledge of metal and its limitations. His initial success came about after he had moved to Barcelona in 1869 at the age of seventeen. There, he met some older architects like Juan Martorell, who later caused him to be given charge of the Sagrada family project in 1884. Until 1900, Gaudi was capable of mixing a "respectable" version of neo-gothic and modernism, with the more imaginative and excessive experiments carried out for private clients. From about 1900 onwards his work as a whole tends to grow increasingly in the direction of free experimentation and a single-minded pursuit of his own interests. He is quoted as having said

The ornamentation must be natural and based on the purpose of our life. There is no question of our imitating any particular style: We must rather work out a system of lines and curves in harmony with the given topographical condition, the climate, and the meteorology of the locale. The result will constitute a style.(1)

This theory is very much in keeping with Paley's opinions on the matter. He sums up his basic attitudes toward what he does in the following remarks:

With all the decorative work - all the tables, lamps, lecterns etcetera, -there's a purely pragmatic side. Whatever gets made has to work as it is supposed to do. It has to open easily, it has to latch properly, and so forth. After that comes the question: "How do I personalise the statement? "The answer is based on my own lineage of work, my own personal experience. And that's necessarily very subjective.(2)

The critical point is that Paley takes a contemporary view of past styles. As T.S. Elliot put it, 'the modern poet is modern precisely because he uses past poetry in his own way and for his own purposes to deal with the present'.(3)

Paley's objects, for him, assault the anonymity and sterility of much that is modern: They are designed in full active discourse with what they confront; the jewellery with avant-garde fashion, and the steelworks with, at times, very hightech architecture.

Positive influences on the formation of Paley's work and aesthetics include Stanley Lechtzin and Philip Fike. Lechtzin, a remarkable metalsmith, was one of the first to develop the process of electro forming in America, a process that is now used almost worldwide. As Paley's mentor at college, he has only one word to describe Paley as a student 'exceptional!'.(4)

Lechtzin was concerned with structural foundations in metal work, the underlying logic to a piece. He is also responsible for bringing Philip Fike's accurate recreations of Etruscan fibulae to Paley's attention. The idea, as with the antique fibulae, that the working necessities of a piece were integral to the design of the entire work

fascinated Paley. It had bothered him that even in the finest jewellery, quite often, a beautiful surface would be unharmoniously joined with a cheap, mass-produced finding. By contrast, the forms of Fike's fibulae were determined solely by the integration of the functioning mechanical aspects and the complete look of the object as jewellery. The structurally integrated work of some contemporary German jewellers reinforced these ideas and helped lead to Paley's belief in the total integration of form within metalwork. This is a principle which has remained constant to Paley's work since.

Paley's compositions are so well resolved that they appear simple. Their unity and integrity alone could merit the term "organic" which has often been used to describe them. Because of this quality, Paley's work has mistakenly been seen as derivative of the turn-of-the century Art Nouveau style, whose exponents turned for inspiration to the derivation and often imitation of plant forms. Unlike Art Nouveau designers, Paley does not mirror plant contours or mimic their blossoms; the shapes of concern to Paley are those that the steel assumes itself in reaction to the stimuli he provides. In an interview for The Washington Post, he said that ...

People always ask me if the whiplash forms I use often come from the Art Nouveau period. I explain that the shape comes about because when the iron is hot it has a great deal of natural movement. It just flows into curves, and when it is cooled, you've frozen the motion.(5)

He says that he feels a closeness to the Art Nouveau movement but

in the context in which it's used it's a misunderstanding. It's a natural assumption, but it's a shallow association. I think if you actually look at art nouveau forms, the derivation, the detailing, the structural integrity and all of that, the work's totally different. But sure, there are those relationships. There is a complexity, there is craftsmanship, there is a refinement of materials and a basis in functionalism.(6)

The stylistic similarities between Paley's work and that of the Art Nouveau period are apparent but only superficial. While the influence and shared sensibilities are there, his work, as with the work of Gaudi and Guimard, is not merely a restatement of past art. Paley is an artist who extends his own perception and that of his audience, through a constant exploration of his medium. He does not see himself as a manufacturer of functional metal objects or as a craftsman who faithfully reproduces established designs.

He says that what he's trying to do is find the extremes of the material, to understand its vocabulary, and then to develop a design context that can utilize it. He says that he's...

Looking for an emotional balance rather than an intellectual dialogue. Usually in any one piece, there's a given movement, a sense of time, a certain rhythm that happens and I function within that.(7)

He feels that...

There is an alignment with what Abstract Expressionism was about, you have certain materials and they have certain characteristics and behave in a particular way.(8)

He feels a kinship to Jackson Pollock, one of the most successful Abstract Expressionist painters. Although Paley's roots are more deeply steeped in the craft tradition whereas Pollock's are exclusively in the fine arts, there is a definite similarity between the two. Pollock had a solid understanding of his material and how it would react to certain surfaces when splattered or dribbled. Pollock created 'a dialogue with his material' Paley notes. 'The paint would drip and splash and glob. The canvas is the record. The direction and format came from the artist, but the paint was what did it.'(9)

Paley finds in iron immediacy, plasticity and diversity. Iron allows a great flexibility in exploration of form; the most rigid rod or plate can be bent into taffy in its red-hot state, allowing the artist to give free rein to his intuitive response to the material as he shapes it into desired forms. As another iron worker has said: The simplicity and directness of the method is like being able to draw into the air. /

Paley says that, ...

The plasticity of iron and steel was what initially attracted me to them. The inherent characteristic gave me an understanding of those materials and a design theory founded in paradox. The acknowledgement and acceptance of the dichotomous nature of the materials that present opposite and seemingly contradictory states at the same time and at the same place - movement and stagnation, rigidity and plasticity - created a perceptual reality founded in change and alterability basic to the organic. The tool imprints, incisions, tears, twists, and burns record the evolutionary nature of process and form development. Movement basic to the organic, of which we are a part, made visible in the steel becomes a foil to human gesture resulting in empathy and anticipation through this visual dialogue. (11)

The examination of Paley's drawings reveals very little. There are sheets of considerable elegance related to each commission, but they are presentation pieces rather than working drawings. They illustrate the artist's concept for the benefit of a client, but they do not document its genius. Evidently, paper serves him poorly in the development of his ideas and is used only when he has no access to the material of his choice. Metal is the source of Paley's inspiration and his concepts come about through its manipulation. The drawings give two dimensional form to objects whose whole reason for being is their three-dimensionality. Moreover drawings work against the spontaneity of Paley's work. Beginning with a basic concept, he responds to the inherent plasticity of the metal as he works and thus gains a better understanding of what is possible.

Each Paley piece has been a research project in which he has explored the nature of steel or some other material to determine its applicability to organic form. For example, in the series of plant stands which he began in the 70's he investigated the use of twisting, one of the oldest and most basic techniques for working metal. For years Paley had avoided the twist, which he regarded as something of a cliché. Yet no effort to reconstruct and expand the vocabulary of metalworking could avoid having to deal with such a classically simple procedure for transforming linear steel bars into decorative three-dimensional form.

In some plant stand vertical elements, he has applied as many as a hundred twists, exploring what happens when the material is subjected relentlessly and continuously to compressed energy. The heated turned steel begins to knot up like a twisted rubber band and, as it cools, freezes the movement imposed by the lathe. Each twisted element is a unique creation, unlike any other twisted bar in existence and records a precise moment in the creative art.

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CHAPTER THREE

'AVANT-GARDE JEWELLERY AND MONUMENTAL METALWORK BY

ALBERT PALEY'

Paley used to be a jewellery maker, he is now a metalsmith. Over the past twenty years, his products have shifted in purpose and scale , but the basic principles of his art have stayed consistent. Whether a brooch or an architectural gate, his forms result from a complexity of interrelated processes: the organic making of a thing, the influencing connectives with tradition and the wilful sense of creating new responses to the expectations certain objects demand.

Nearly from the start of his career after finishing college, Paley's work was a response to the then current domination of Danish Modern and its slick curvilinear simplicity , as in the metalwork of Georg Jensen, one of the forerunners of Danish Modernism (fig.14). Paley was suggesting a style that according to Gary Griffin, another contemporary metalworker, was an 'organic, raw view of naturalism' (1). To the blandness of Jensen's jewellery, Paley offered a nearly rococo delight in complexity. All of his metalwork has evolved from the intent to clearly depict the rationale of the piece in its complete form, no matter how complex. An almost moral imperative is at play, compelling him to show the entirety of the piece and what he calls 'it's self-reflexional logic', and to modulate the form in reference to the object's situational context.

The most common criticism of Paley's jewellery during the late sixties and early seventies was that it failed to address the problems of jewellery and instead dealt with purely sculptural issues: the pieces were too complex, too large and they overpowered rather than accentuated the wearer. Some of his earlier jewellery pieces were dated between 1966-1969. This was the time in which he was doing his graduate teaching assistantship at the Tyler School of Art as part of his Master's degree. They were particularly

complex, far too avant-garde for the time in which they were produced. Examples of these are two brooches (figs. 15 and 16), both made in 1968, and the pin (fig. 17) also made in 1968.

One of the most aesthetically beautiful pieces of his earlier jewellery is the silver and gold sectional brooch (figs. 18-21) made in 1969. Although again quite complex in design, it has a uniquely rich textural quality. The way in which he has used the inlay of 14 carat gold and oxidised silver is unusual. He has worked the surface with a hammer to achieve a rough texture. He has also used a large number of forged elements in this piece, which is interesting as this was the year that Paley began his involvement with large-scale steel. It is interesting to note that the forged elements in this piece are very similar to those which come later in the large work, the Chattanooga fence in particular, which was commissioned in 1974.

For Paley, his jewellery was complex as it was due to a pronounced fascination with various materials - gold, ivory, delrin, precious stones- and their juxtaposition with each other. An obvious example of this is the pendant (fig 22-27) which is dated 1973. In this piece he has made use of a variety of materials which include silver, copper, labradorite and moonstone. It is a very complex piece, with so many different elements demanding attention. He has included hanging elements, hinged elements, rivetted pieces, carefully faceted stones, forged parts, almost every goldsmithing technique he knows. It has become more of a technical exercise than anything else. However, this highly imaginative and very creative piece is absolutely superbly made. Despite the fact that there is so much happening in the piece and that there are so many different elements involved, each single piece has received such an

incredible amount of attention and care. It is important to note that a large part of the fabrication of this piece is the result of a clever use of rivetting. By working this way , Paley can achieve a higher quality of finish on each individual element before attaching them to each other. With such a complicated piece, this is definitely the most suitable method of fabrication. His jewellery was larger than most but the size was dictated by its proportion to a human scale.

Nowhere is it prescribed that adornment is limited to a point on a lapel or a circle around the neck. Ornament could legitimately be an element in any total bodily orchestration, balancing and complementing the body . It follows logically that ornament need not be limited to a static point either. Since the context of jewellery is the human body, the integration of that adornment to its context calls for an ergonomically engineered form.

When at rest, these Late Baroque type pieces were seen as fantastically crafted sculptures. When worn, they possess another set of forces: those that are created by the wearer's body movements in relation to the carefully positioned pivots and hinges of the piece. For Paley, the human body is a motive stage, almost constantly in motion. Linear elements of the brooch move in rhythms to the motion of the body, rings act as external metaphors of knuckles and joints when fingers flex, and pendants, counterpoint the swelling and deflation of the wearer's breathing.

For Paley,

The unity of the object is primary, not just in the integrity of the three - dimensional structure and the interrelationship of elements but also in the environmental application. The jewellery is not an arbitrary form but is interrelated with human form. Bodily proportion, contour and movement are the foundation to design development rather than direct craftsmanship. The jewellery acts as a focal point accenting human contour, emphasizing and dramatizing (2).

Many of the pieces include hanging elements or light reflecting crystals which respond to movement, thus functioning as a counterpoint and accent to human gesture.

He contends that designing for the human form and designing for architectural space are extremely similar, both bring focus and accent to their specific sites. In this way the creative process does not change whether he is fabricating a brooch or an archway, only the material and means of production.

As a jewellery maker he soon found himself a rebel against existing standards and attitudes: the role of ornamentation and sexuality, the relationship of form to function and the integration of jewellery with its context. Near Baroque jewellery designs represented a radical break with what art students were being taught was 'modern'.

From about 1974 onwards, Paley's jewellery forms became far less complex. This change was the result of both a refinement of his sense of jewellery design as well as a progressive involvement with forging processes. A number of reasons exist as to why Paley changed from a personally precious ornamentation to architecturally functional design, not least of which were a growing disillusionment with the elitism of spectacularly affluent jewellery and a desire to become more intimately connected with the process of working with metals. To fabricate his kind of jewellery, a certain distance between the artist and the metal was necessary, such as carving wax models, constructing moulds and casting. The immediate contact with the material while forging steel was, for Paley, an important sign of an even greater integration of forces. The forger would have to touch the metal directly by sheer force and casual action and not dictate its form through indirect methods.

At first, Paley's sense of jewellery design was simply applied to a larger scale and translated into steel. In 1972, he competed for and was awarded a commission from the Smithsonian Institute to design and fabricate a pair of portal gates for the Renwick gallery. He says that,...

At the time I was a practising goldsmith involved with body ornament. In addition to creating one-of-a-kind pieces of jewellery, I had become involved in basic research with ferrous metalworking. My design concepts and my formal approach to the Renwick Gates project were primarily based on my design sensibilities as a goldsmith coupled with a basic understanding of the plastic nature of iron and steel manipulation (3).

The Design in Steel Award presented by the American Iron and Steel Institute for the Renwick Gates (fig 3) coupled with the iron fence commission for the Hunter Museum of Art in Chattanooga, Tennessee (fig 28) are what established Paley as an architectural metalsmith. His

main direction for these works was to research and to develop an aesthetic for iron which would establish a contemporary form and design context for a material and process that so heavily suffered under the weight of historicism (4).

The monumental Renwick Gallery Gates are, in essence, architectural jewellery. Unlike his small-scale jewellery, however, the Renwick gates display a new emphasis on the material vocabularies of bunching, banding, curving, compression and interpenetration. What strikes one first about these gates is the opulence of material and form, bordering on overstatement. From a central stalk of thickly bunched steel rods, interspersed with elements of copper, brass and bronze, the gates blossom, meandering throughout the frame with vine-like sinuosity, foliating the portal with a screen that is both solid and transparent. The details - delicate tendrils of steel, tight coils of brass, precious inlays of copper and bronze and the precise fashioning of bolts - all contradict the gate's apparent massiveness and nearly three - quarter ton weight. (fig 4)

The most spectacular aspect of the Chattanooga fence is the wilful abandonment of predictable structural appearance. The lineaments ramble and swirl in grand gesticulation. Lengthy horizontal units are only barely integrated with the reed-like uprights, rhythmically choreographed across the base. The fence has been described as metal rambling and swirling in a rhythm that seems more like a sketch or calligraphic design than a rigid steel structure.

Steel has seldom been as broadly gestural, as fluid and malleable on such a grand scale. Paley sees steel as submissive while at the same time strong: it is a material that 'easily accommodates itself to intuitive and free forming and not one that closely follows some arbitrary, limiting logic'(5). Steel, forged steel, as Paley uses it, becomes a supple, fluid and loose substance, spanning great distances with surprising ease, flowing through itself and comfortably interweaving itself. The ease with which Paley works the steel refers back to certain of his earlier jewellery pieces where the silver, gold and thin elements could form casual, sensuous shapes.

He is distinguished from traditional ironworkers because he moulds, bends and twists iron as though it were rubber into supple-looking shapes that seem to defy the resilient nature of his material. His works are filled with slim shooting tapers that often curve into large swooping shepherd's hoods: tendril-like willowy spires and tightly twisted metal rods draped over horizontal bars like snakes. One critic described the effect as 'frozen motion' (6).

The most challenging and yet successful commission of Paley's career to date was for the New York State Senate Chamber in Albany. Designed in the 1870's in a Romanesque style, the New York State capital building was noted for

its magnificent materials and generous spaces, but it drew complaints from politicians who spoke of millions wasted in architectural details. John Mesick, architect of the project, recognized an affinity between Paley's style and the 19th century ornamentation. The metalsmith's use of coloration through contrasting metals, was an important aspect of this affinity, as was the refinement of materials. It was he who contacted Paley for the commission in 1979, after he had seen the artist's Portal Gates at the Renwick Gallery. Paley eventually submitted three proposals, one of which was chosen.

In his design concept, Paley considered structure and ornamentation to be of equal importance. Using traditional blacksmithing techniques, Paley fabricated the gates in his Rochester, New York, studio with the help of seven assistants. The two sets of gates, completed in 1980, took two-and-a-half years from conception to completion; six months for the design phase, a year for negotiating the contracts and a year for the actual work. For a total cost of \$150,000, the state got spectacular steel, brass and bronze gates measuring 14 - feet high, 12 - feet wide, and weighing two tonnes. 'That's probably the most monumental project, ' Paley says 'it was the most challenging. We did something so far beyond our capabilities and it came off so well'(7). He says that it is ' by far the best thing I've ever done'(8). (fig 29-32)

The gates are forged and fabricated of mild steel, brass and bronze. The steel was sandblasted, then chemically treated to blacken it, burnished with a penetrating oil and finely waxed. The brass and bronze were taken up to a satin finish and then lacquered and waxed so that they never need polishing.

After they were completed the gates were transported to Albany in a flatbed truck on to which they had been hoisted with a crane. In Albany they had to be carried up six flights of stairs with six landings, and were lifted with hoists and hydraulic jacks. It took 15 men 15 days to get them from the street level to the Senate ante-chambers and then accomplish the installation.

The gates are noted for their symmetry, which harmonises with the building. Their dimensions are impressive: each individual portal is six feet wide and weights 3,000 pounds. Each set is within a Romanesque arch, and on either side of each gate are 18-inch Corinthian columns.

The Albany gates are being spoken of as the largest such work commissioned in the U.S. in the last 50 years. Paley finds it very significant that an individual studio craftsman was called upon for such an undertaking. He also thinks that the choice of his style bespeaks what he calls a 'post - modern' mood among many architects today, a viewpoint that is sympathetic to ornamentation as a humanizing ingredient in architecture.

Some smaller pieces from the last 10 years or so demonstrate the loosening up of Paley's work. In his commissioned garden gate, dated 1976, he was worked within a frame as he did with both the Renwick Gallery gates and the Albany gates, although these earlier works were more restrained. In a series of plant stands which began in 1979, the metal is twisted, knotted, stretched and coiled around itself. These forms are more free and spontaneous. Here, the rigid, resistive steel approaches supple fluidity. Paley's metalwork is sensual, its forms are soft and compliant, its surfaces are taut and even creased in places, like stretch marks on skin.

Over say, the last 15 years, Paley's large metalworks have become simpler, more concise expressions of his physical participation with the gestures and vocabulary of steel. The simplification of form that has taken place paralleled what occurred in the jewellery: instead of material exuberance and the filling of a frame or object, we are confronted with joyful open gesturing. Smaller objects; tables, lecterns, chandeliers continue to emphasize the central stalk which supports the focal blossom. There is a clarity of gestural expression, a sweeping movement rather than a framed containment.

There seems to be no limit to the creative genius of Paley. His work seems to grow so naturally from strength to strength. In his recent and spectacular work commissioned in 1973 for the Wortham Theatre Centre in Houston, Texas, he has introduced a new feature into his work. Until now, he had used steel in its natural form and colour. Here, for the first time in his career, his sculptures are painted. (Fig 33-34). It was not possible to discover what caused the introduction of colour to Paley's work, but it does seem to be a natural progression. The columnar elements have as many as five coats of metallic pigment and the steel banners have from 12 to 15 layers of colour. The range of colours he has used include the expected pewter and gold tones along with deep emerald greens, violets, and transparent wine reds, all colours that complement the rose-to-burgundy scheme of the building itself and highlighted it with gold paint along the edges.

This untitled piece , which is a permanent installation was commissioned by the theatre's designer Eugene Aubry. The sculpture and the 28 bronze pull-plates for the center's front doors were budgeted as a line item at \$500,000.

Paley visited the site when it was raw concrete and tried to get a feel for what the space would be. There were a number of considerations - some practical, some conceptual - to take into account. He received the final okay on the basis of his drawings in 1983 and began fabrication. The project lasted the best part of five years from conception to completion in 1987. Working with nine to 14 assistants in his Rochester workshop, Paley cut, forged, welded and polished the steel into elegant sentinels, some of which were made up of as many as 400 separate parts.

There are eight beribboned columns of steel flanking the 'grand staircase'. These sentinels create a ceremonial procession of welcome. The building's interior is a post-modernist cavern, reaching 65 feet in height from the ground level, where Paley's piece begins, to the vaulted ceiling of the grand foyer, where the ornament reaches its maximum height of 28 feet and width of 22 feet. Paley's flowing sculptures barely dent the space that surrounds them but they succeed in humanizing it, and, in defining the passage from the outside world into the magical world of the performing arts.

These decorative columns are not purely sculptural. Their function is not an independent artistic statement but instead one defined by principles of architectural ornamentation. Scale and form are subservient to the space they are supposed to enhance while retaining their individuality of presence. The four pairs of columns symbolise the passage from one existential plane to another, physically and psychologically. The ascent from the building's entrance to its interior is marked by the progressive increase in size and movement of the columns. Also, the descent, after a performance, is gradual, easing the transition from a magical experience into daily routine.

Paley compares his columns to the Greco-Roman tradition of placing architecture in relation to the landscape and in terms of decorating architecture in times of celebration. As the columns rise and flow with sinuous movement, they soften the severity of the geometric interior and, with their beribboned appearance, promote a festive air.

2. Statement by the artist.
Interview, Robert R. J.
"Encounters of Albert Paley"
from Michael S. Allen Arts Center, 1987, p. 3.
3. Statement by the artist.
Paley, Albert.
"Albert Paley: The Art of Metal"
Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, Massachusetts,
1986, p. 3.
4. Ibid.
5. Interview, Robert R. J.
"Encounters of Albert Paley"
Encounter
Volume 1, no. 4, Fall 1989, p. 44.
6. Quoted in Allen, pp. 31-32, p. 32.
7. "Albert Paley & Albert Paley"
American Craft
November 1981
American Craft Council, p. 18.
8. Ibid.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. Gary Griffin quoted in 'Albert Paley's Albany Gates',
American Craft
April/May 1981 P 18,
American Crafts Council.
2. Statement by the Artist,
Sobieszek, Robert A.,
'Metalwork of Albert Paley'
John Michael Kohler Arts Center, 1980 P 9.
3. Statement by the Artist,
Blair, Claude
'Albert Paley: The Art of Metal'
Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, Massachussetts,
1986, n.p.
4. *ibid.*
5. Sobieszek, Robert A.,
'Metalwork of Albert Paley'
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7. 'Albert Paley's Albany Gates'
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8. *ibid.*

Albert Taylor is a man of great ability, and his work in the field of the history of the United States is well known. He is a man of great ability, and his work in the field of the history of the United States is well known. He is a man of great ability, and his work in the field of the history of the United States is well known.

CONCLUSION

Albert Taylor is a man of great ability, and his work in the field of the history of the United States is well known. He is a man of great ability, and his work in the field of the history of the United States is well known. He is a man of great ability, and his work in the field of the history of the United States is well known.

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Albert Paley is an artist whose works are original, personal and resonant with profound meaning. He is also a craftsman who is directly and passionately involved in fashioning objects from raw material. Ignoring the conventions of the contemporary art world, he grounds his objects in down-to-earth functionalism.

Paley's primary concern is that his work should be totally integrated with its surroundings, whether a piece of jewellery or architectural ornamentation. He believes strongly that architectural ornamentation must not overpower the architecture it is to decorate. He says 'I'm not trying to create a piece of sculpture and impose it on an architect's building. Architectural ornamentation should harmonize with and add to the unity of the composition.' (1). Paley also thinks that his work should make reference to the past, but like architecture, it must reflect our time. His goal is to give contemporary definition to his material and produce work that is a product of its own time.

Paley's work would not have been in favour as little as 50 years ago, when the rise of modern architecture led to the demise of ornamentation in favour of clean lines and flat, undecorated surfaces. Therefore it comes as no surprise that Paley welcomes the growing interest in post-modern architecture, with its frequent use of historical allusions and more ornamentation.

Both Paley and Wendell Castle, a contemporary woodworker, have been appointed tenured professors and artists-in-residence at the Rochester Institute of Technology. This is an unprecedented occurrence for the school. He says

The R.I.T. arrangement is fantastic. It allows us to do our work and be involved with the Institute in more in-depth projects. With the new emphasis now in architectural embellishments in furniture and all the related arts, philosophically, what the school stands for and what is happening in the culture is pretty parallel. (2)

Paley is obviously a very busy man but contrary to the romantic image of the artist/craftsman it is not always his art work that takes up his time. As he says 'It's awfully simplistic to think all you've got to do is make the work.'
(3)

When it comes to business Paley is no free spirit. Prices for his work range from \$7,000 for a small plant stand or table to \$30,000 for a larger one. Gates can cost up to \$300,000, depending on the amount of work.

He is perhaps best representated in Washington, D.C. That is in part because Barbara Fendrick of the Fendrick Gallery has given several shows of his work and has done her utmost to promote him. Also, the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation, as part of its efforts to beautify 'America's Main Street', commissioned Paley to design 800, seven-and-a-half foot diameter tree grates and 30 benches, all in cast iron, his first efforts in that medium. ^

Looking to the future, he wants to continue his work in architectural ornamentation. As one architect noted with incredible understatement, 'Albert will never do jewellery again!'

That is probably true, and, having designed and built gates and just about everything else possible, one can expect him to extend his reach even further as he develops and refines his aesthetic.

FOOTNOTES TO CONCLUSION

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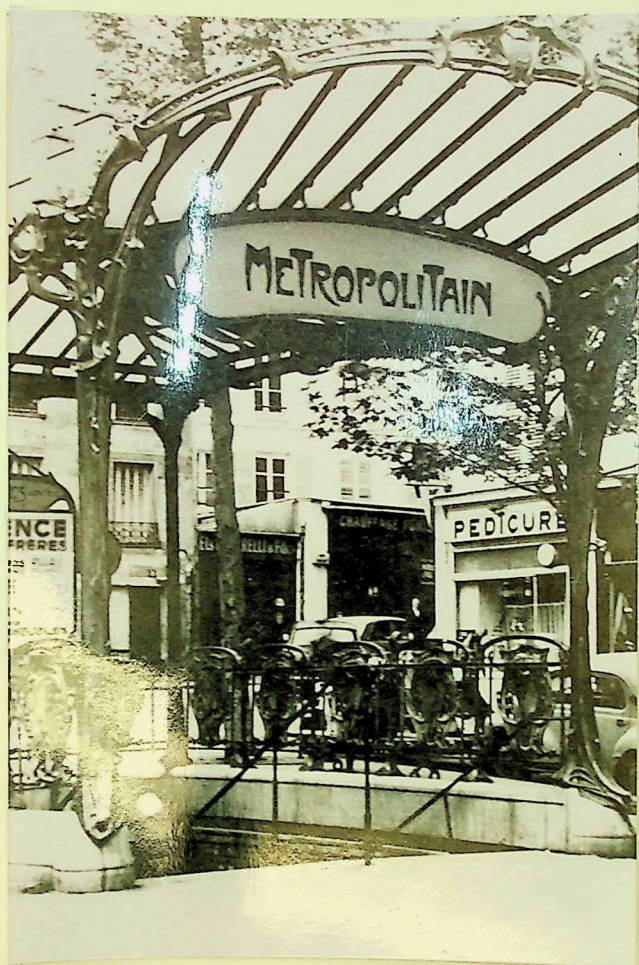
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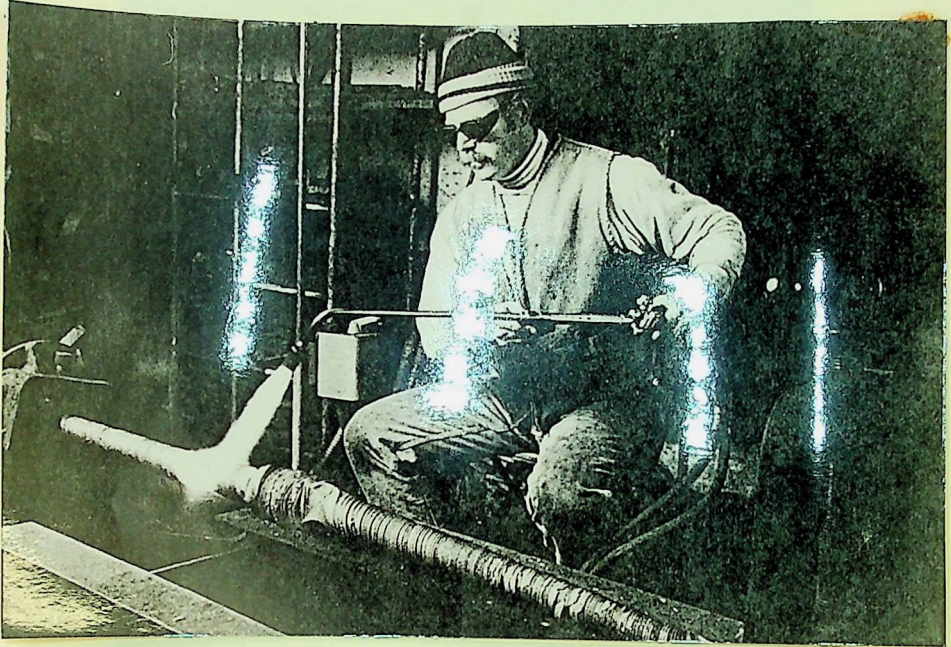
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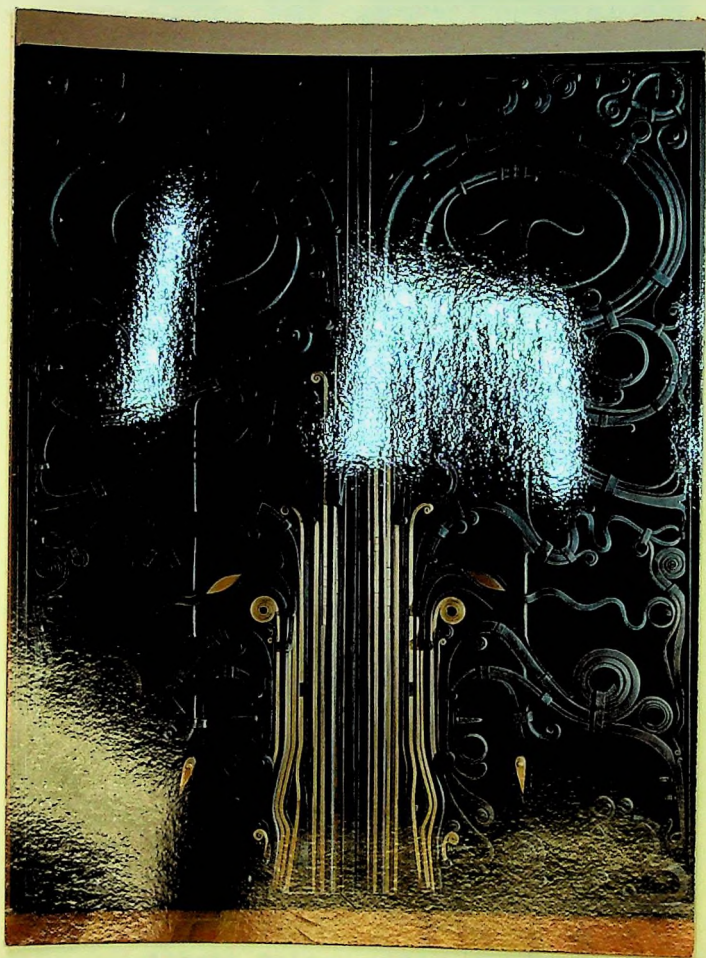
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(1) Entrance to Paris Metro Station,
Hector Guimard 1900
Forged Steel and Cast Iron



(2) Albert Paley heating a steel bar at the 'twisting' machine



(3) Renwick Gallery Gates, Washington, D.C.
Albert Paley, 1974
Mild steel, brass, bronze and copper
Forged, fabricated and inlaid
72.5' x 90.25 x 3"



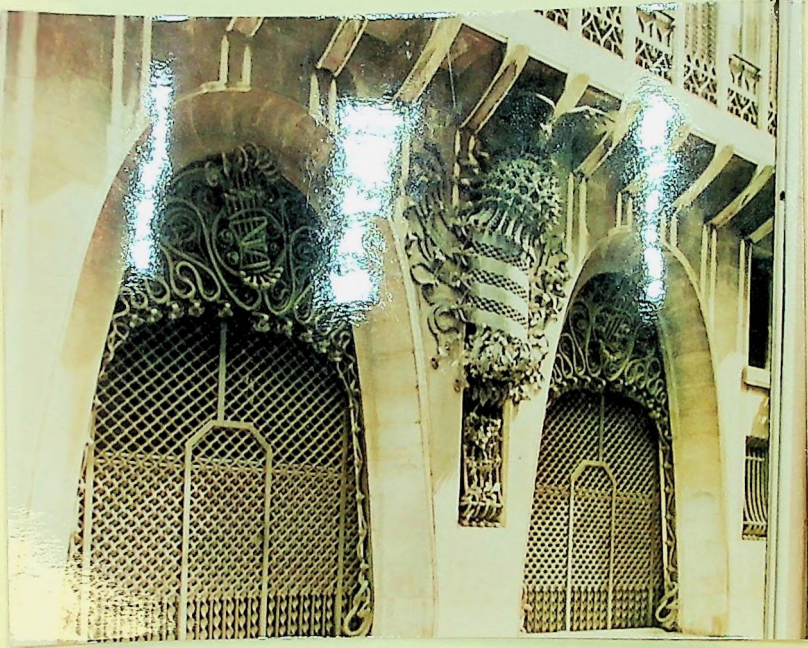
(4) Detail of Renwick Gallery Gates,
Albert Paley, 1974



(5) Brooch, Rene Lalique
Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon



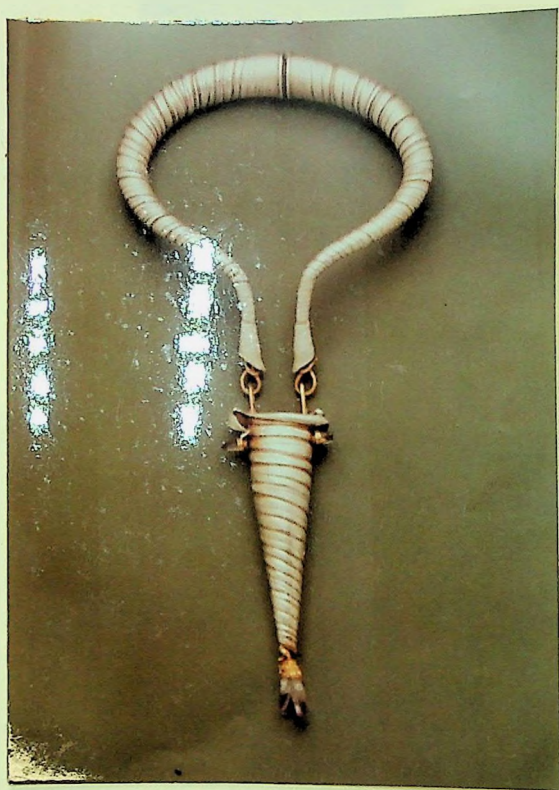
(6) Brooch, Rene Lalique
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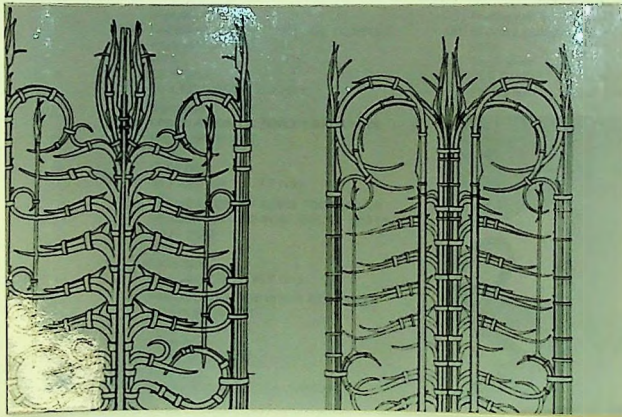
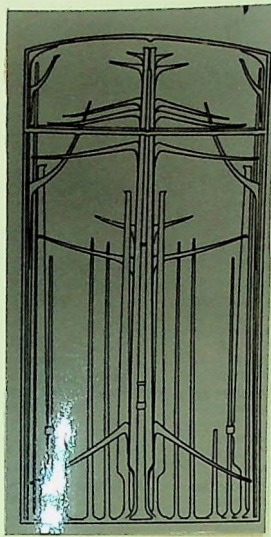
(7) Decorative Ironwork for Hotel Front,
Antonio Gaudi, Barcelona



(8) Torque, Stanley Lechtzin
Resin and Electroformed copper.



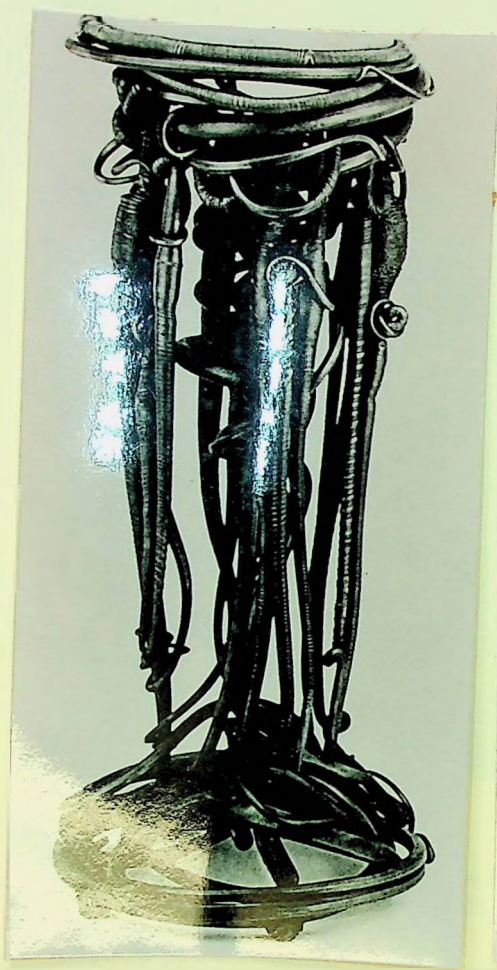
(9) Torque, Stanley Lechtzin



- (10) Proposal drawings, Ablert Paley,
 (top) 1977 gate 16' x 8"
 (bottom left) New York State Senate Chamber
 gates 1978, 9.5 x 8"
 (bottom right) New York State Senate Chamber
 gates, 1978, 9.5 x 6 5/8"



(11) Pair of Plant Stands, 1979
Albert Paley
Mild steel, forged and fabricated
97 x 14.5" and 92.5 x 16"



(12) Large Plant Stand, 1983
Albert Paley
Mild Steel, Limestone,
4' 7.5 x 2" diameter of base
2' 2" diameter of top



(13) Detail of Large Plant Stand.



(14) Necklace, Georg Jensen,
Cast Silver



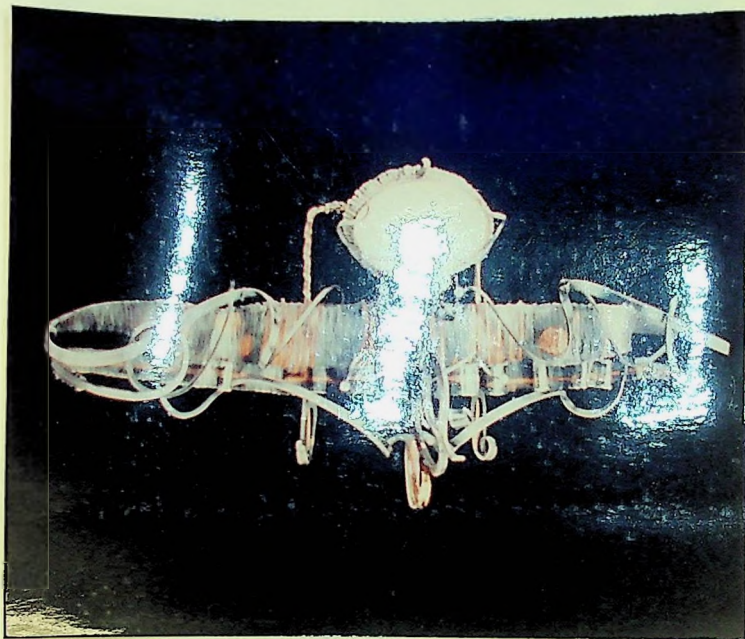
(15) Brooch, Albert Paley, 1968
Bronze, Silver, 14 Kt gold ivory
geode, 4.5" x 2.5" c 1.75"



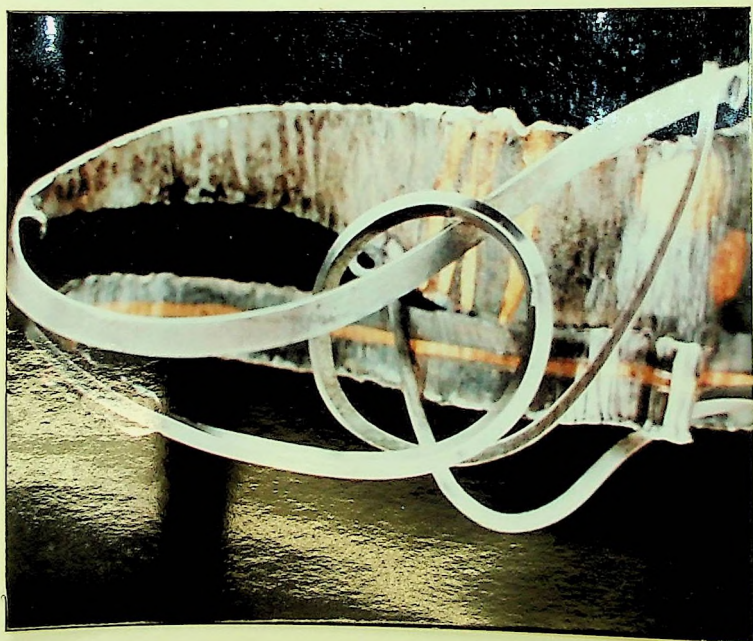
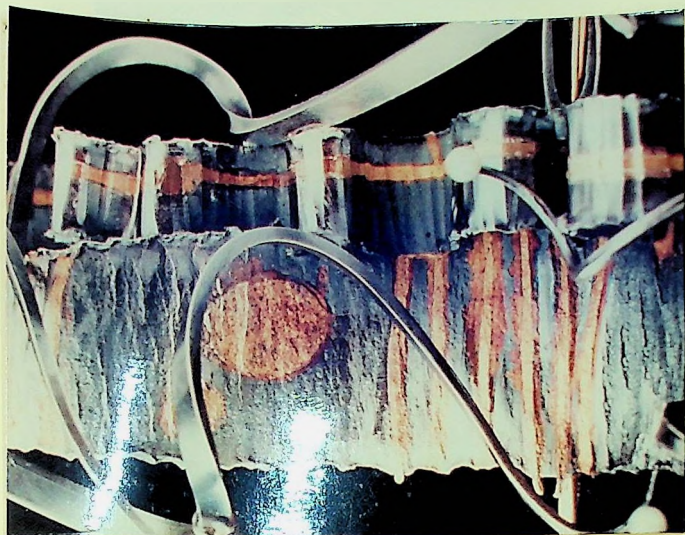
(16) Brooch, Albert Paley, 1968
Bronze, Silver, 14 kt gold, quartz,
garnet, 5.75" x 2 7/8 x 4"



(17) Pin, Albert Paley, 1968
Silver, 24 kt gold plate, pearls
labradorite, 4" x 3.25 x 1.5"

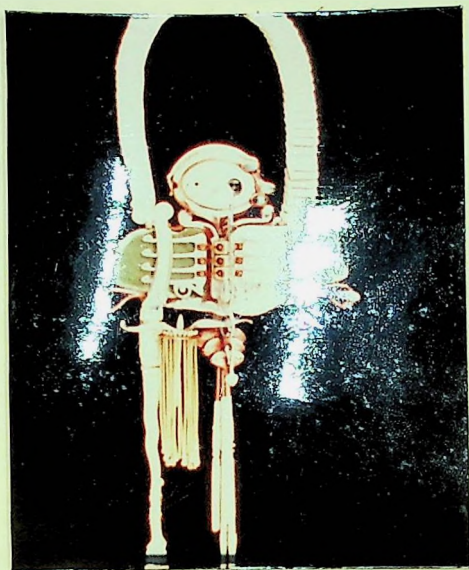


(18) Sectional Brooch, Albert Paley, 1969
Silver, gold inlay, 14 kt gold, ivory,
10" x 5.5" x 3"



(19) - (21)
Details of Sectional Brooch,
Albert Paley, 1969

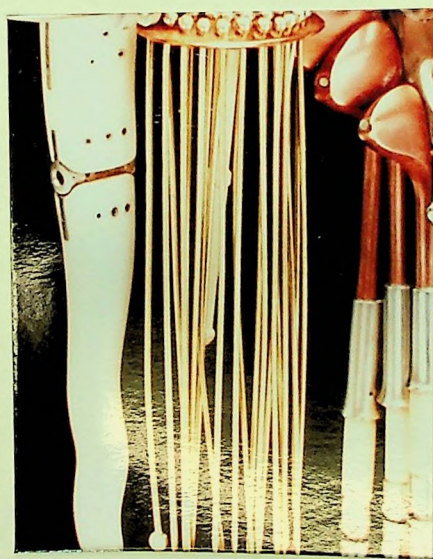


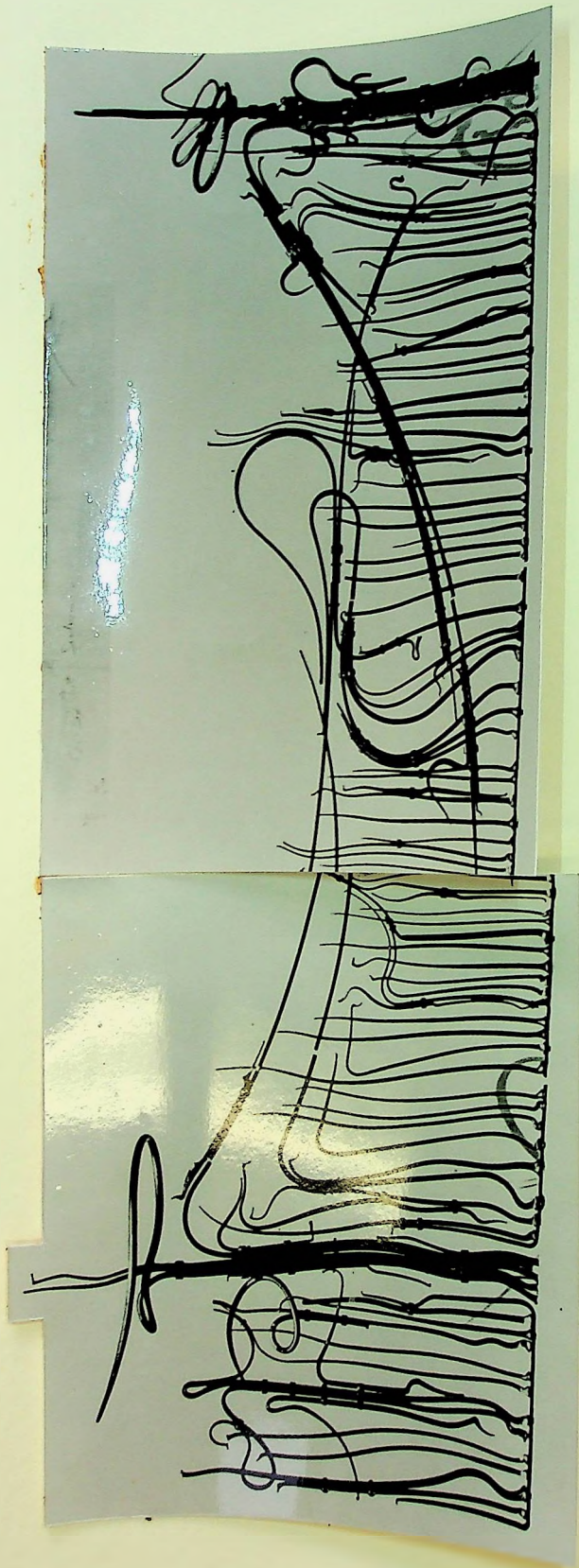


(22) Pendant, Albert Paley, 1979,
14 kt gold, silver, copper moonstone,
Labradorite, 21" x 8.75 x 1.5"



(23) - (27)
Details of Pendant
Albert Paley, 1979.





(28) Fence for the Hunter Museum of Art,
Chattanooga, Tennessee,
Albert Paley, 1974,
Forged Steel.



(29) Gates for the State Senate
Chamber at Albany,
Albert Paley, 1974,
Mild steel, forged and fabricated,
Bronze and brass



Vatican Candlestick, Albert Paley, 1977
Mild Steel, 9'6" x 2' 8" diameter.

Detail of Vatican Candlestick
Albert Paley, 1977





