

JOHN VAN ALSTINE

SCULPTURE AND DRAWINGS

OCTOBER 24 - NOVEMBER 14, 1997

KENDALL CAMPUS ART GALLERY
MIAMI-DADE COMMUNITY COLLEGE





CHALICE III 1997
aluminum, granite
and bronze
103h x 43w x 22"d

FINGERS 1997
bronze and granite
26h x 39w x 16"d



front cover: CORNUCOPIA 1997
steel 80h x 23w x 32"d

back cover: FINGERS 1997
pastel and mixed-media on paper 20 x 30"



JOHN VAN ALSTINE

Statement

ABOUT SCULPTURE

Stone and metal, specifically rough-hewn granite and found-object steel, are central in my sculpture. A major focus throughout my work is the interaction of these materials. On the most basic level the work is about the marriage of the natural with the human-made.

I use stone as an *assemblage* element, the way a welder uses steel, rather than in the traditional manner of subtraction — starting with a block and carving away what is not needed. For me, the rough, “found object” granite has always communicated a sense of timelessness, durability, and weight. The acceptance and use of this material in an elemental state are akin to the use of stone in a Japanese Garden and are suited to the issues I want to address. Granite that has been split or ripped open conveys a sense that an internal spirit is being revealed. This feeling is reinforced by the presence of flickering mica that seems alive and elusive.

In contrast to the timelessness of stone, both in general and as a sculptural medium, the found-object steel is very time specific — 20th century industrial. These industrial or structural characteristics inherent in the metal are often employed in the work and used to physically connect stone elements. The strength of the metal allows for a “choreographing” or “floating” of the stone that is otherwise earthbound, making it appear light and paradoxically giving it a greater sense of weight. (Recently some of the non-stone elements have been cast in bronze to expand the range of the work and allow for multiple use and longevity in outdoor installation — see below.)

Through the years I have used this personal vocabulary developed from the combining of stone and metal with a variety of intents and nuances. Some of the issues I have explored are the inherent nature of the materials, personal navigation, vessels, tools and implements.

Recently tools and implements have been a focus of my work. Sculptures in which the overall arrangement echoes or refers to the shape of tools — **Implement XXII** (1994), **Auger I** (1997) — appear with regular frequency. Here the final sculpture may suggest a hand tool such as a hammer, adze, drill, ax, etc. Similarly works like **Tiller I** (1994) imply a connection to agricultural implements that one might imagine hooked to a horse or tractor. In other instances real tools such as anvils are incorporated into pieces as in **Ara III** (1996) and **Cornucopia** (1997). The anvil is of particular interest because of its direct association to metal work and its physical resemblance to an altar ("ara" is Latin for altar). For me the anvil is the place in the studio where ideas are both conceptually and physically forged. It is the spot where the spirit of the work is born and released. In all cases, tools are seen as extensions of the artists' hands, allies in their aspirations and symbols of their labors and ultimate accomplishments. Such sentiments recall the values and beliefs of past sculptors such as Rodin and David Smith. My **Implement** series is indeed close in spirit and informed by their works, especially Smith's *Agricola* series (1951-52) composed, in part, of farm machinery and tools.

A relatively new direction in my work that is reflected in this exhibition is the incorporation of found organic objects that are cast in bronze. For example, frequently I use clean, geometric arcs or partial circles as one of the formal devices to connect and activate my stones. These "connectors" have typically been clean edged, machined, found-steel objects that contrast dramatically with the rough-hewn stone as in **Auger II** (1997). In works like **Implement XXXIII (Konos)** (1996), the casting process has allowed me to continue using the arc, here a ram's horn, yet promotes expansion into a new range of objects that combine and juxtapose fresh visual information and associations. Similarly, **Fingers** (1997), which employs a cast

bronze section of an animal antler, reflects and expands on earlier works that incorporate real tools such as rakes, pitchforks and the like.

ABOUT DRAWINGS

I am primarily a sculptor. Drawing for me fills several needs not satisfied by working with stone and metal. These materials dictate a process that is slow and removed from the hand. Stone is worked with a chisel, metal with a torch or machine tool. Drawing is very immediate and tactile. In contrast to the creation of a sculpture, which is typically long and drawn out, there is a great sense of accomplishment and gratification in developing and completing several drawings in one work session.

My approach to drawing is very much like working with clay, a material I no longer use but enjoyed precisely because of its immediacy and response to touch. I often equate my drawing process to that of clay modeling — adding material by building up layers of pastel or charcoal, removing or excavating through the layers by vigorous erasures. The drawing is “shaped” rather than “drawn” in the traditional sense.

The drawings exist in a symbiotic relationship with the sculpture. Some are used in problem solving while the sculpture is underway. Others investigate a specific detail or motif that may or may not find its way into the three-dimensional form as in **Vessel (gold)** (1992) and **Ara (red)** (1997). In **Ara (green)** (1989), **Pique VI** (1997) and **Fingers (red)** (1997) the finished sculpture or scale model served as an inspiration for a drawing.

Because of the limited color range of the granite and steel, I find that I need a place to express color. Drawing provides this. Working with pastel has opened me to the power of color and is one reason I often now use bronze, with its wider range of patina options, in my sculpture.

APPRECIATION

This exhibition provides me with a satisfaction which I have been seeking for ten years. I have always wanted to see more of John Van Alstine's work. It may seem a drastic measure, to transport it to Miami from the opposite limit of the eastern states, but it is with the generous intention of sharing it with our community of students, sculptors and people who otherwise appreciate strong, creative work.

We wish to thank Nohra Haime Gallery, Manhattan, for her generous assistance with this exhibition. Her enthusiasm for the artist first brought his work to my attention.

Most of all, we thank John Van Alstine. It would have been enough for him to have married so unerringly the noble materials which compose these monumental (if not always large) works. He has also been of enormous assistance with all of the logistical problems pertinent to an exhibition of this kind.

Robert J. Sindelir

Director

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