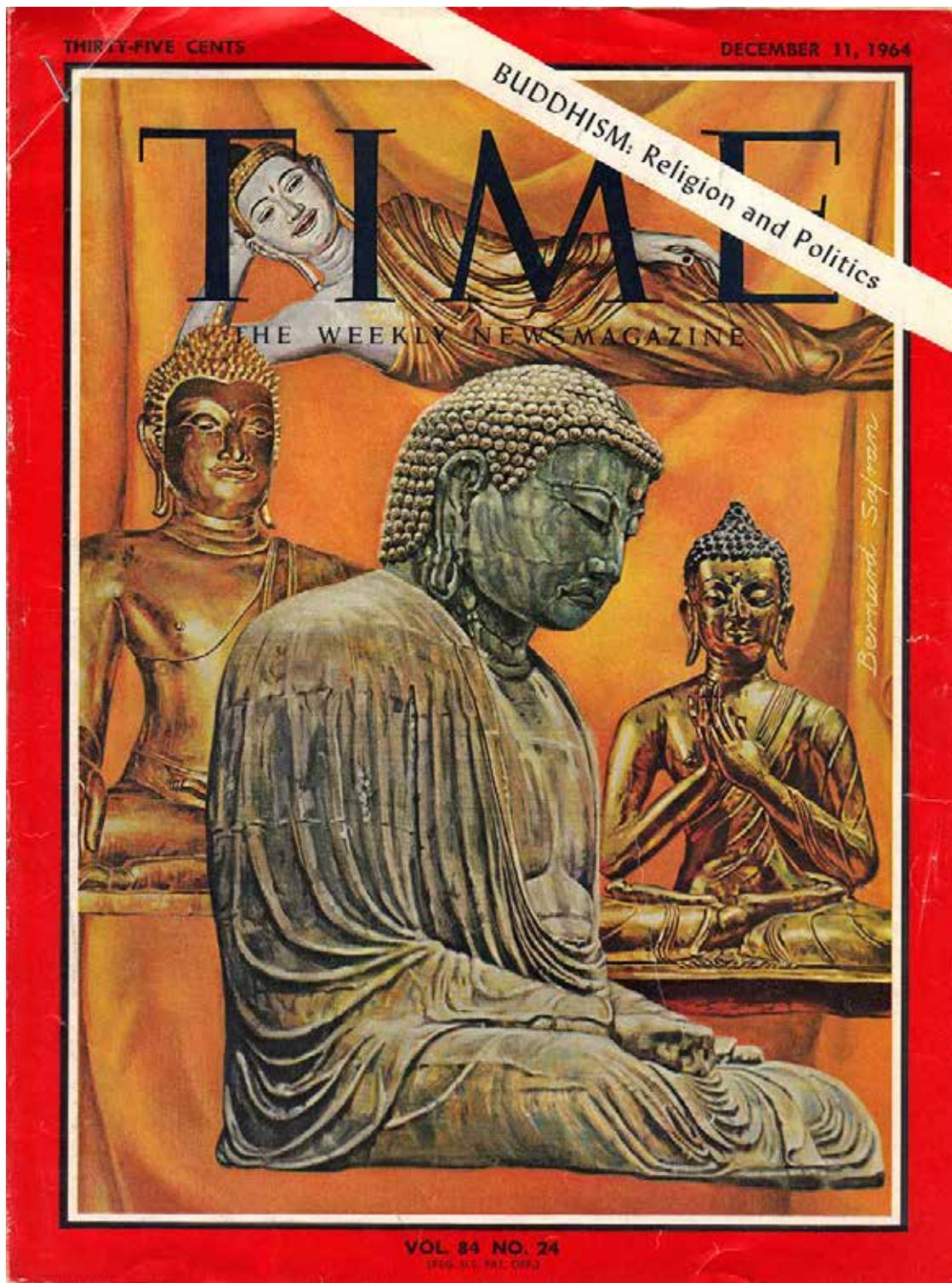


the art of
elias friedensohn

articles & reviews



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ART

SCULPTURE

Era of the Object

Put a bronze man upon a bronze horse, and who salutes? Put a plaster Eisenhower in a real Jeep, and the art world cheers. For in today's sculpture, both traditional subject matter and traditional techniques have gone by the board. Where once marble and bronze held sway, sculpture is now made of plastics, automobile fenders, even fur, carpeting and burlap. In place of the commemorative bust, the symbolic nude or heroic grouping, there are now polyester broads, overstuffed light switches, 3-D inside-out doughnuts, stuffed-leather totems, and well-welded rem-

of bright plastic paint. The result is a spate of new polychromists (see opposite page). Among them:

• ROBERT HOWARD, 42, who has taught art at the University of North Carolina for the past 14 years. His abstract *Landscape XVII* is welded steel painted with two subtly clashing shades of red that seem to warp the solidity of the sculpture. "To do something like it in bronze would cost me \$3,000," he says, "but I go out to the junkpile and pick up steel for 6¢ a pound."

• JEREMY ANDERSON, 43, is a San Francisco sculptor who prefers working in natural-finished wood. He painted the upper reaches of his attenuated *Composite Mythology* green to harmonize its grain. Hardly shocking when compared with Brancusi, the slender shape looks at once like ephemeral femurs knocking on a knee joint and a pinch-waisted dancer on toe point.

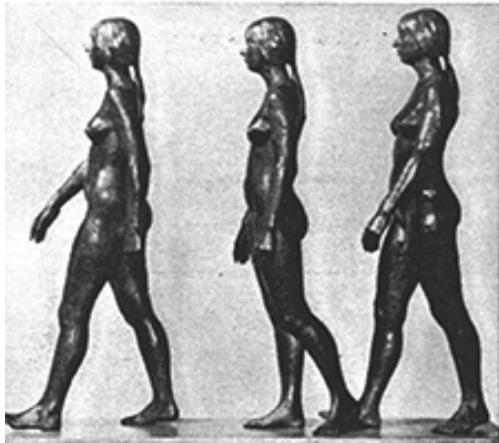
• H. (for HORACE) C. (for CLIFFORD) WESTERMANN, 42, is a Los Angeles-born rambler who usually turns out carpenter's daydreams consisting of mirrors and precision mitering. His work at the Whitney is a drum-shaped totem of wall-to-wall carpeting. Says he: "I don't know why I named it *The Plush*. If I liked analysis, I'd be a writer."

• ROBERT HUDSON, 26, working out of San Francisco, creates polychrome assemblages straight out of Spike Jones and his City Slickers.

The iridescent blue hand was his starting point in *Charm*; he then kept adding things until, says he, "it has a whole world in it." Why paint it a profusion of colors? "I dig painting too," says Hudson. "What the sculpture can't say, the paint can."

• ELIAS FRIEDENSOHN, 40, like many other artists today, shifts easily between painting and sculpture. His delicate pencil drawings and scruffy oils, which emphasize "the masks people wear which stand in the way of communication," have won him Fulbright and Guggenheim fellowships. His *Pyramus & Thisbe* is a dial-version of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* lovers, who can communicate only through a hole in a wall. In the painted epoxy sculpture, Thisbe appears only as an ear modeled inside the back door of the pay phone.

Victorian Finishes. No matter how questionable its content, much of the new sculpture is painstakingly crafted. The practitioners of junkyard assemblages have dwindled. Brutalism for its shock effect is on the wane. A new trend is the number of works that are neatly packaged in boxes, which Sir Herbert Read recently thought should be labeled "furniture" rather than



MILLER'S "MARY: WALKING SEQUENCE"
Among polyester broads, a triple image.

nants of the new Iron Age. The definition of sculpture has broadened until it has become an Everyman art, and the results exist more as a fascinating collection of objects than ideal worlds of form.

Best show of the year to assemble the artifacts of the new sculpture revolution is Manhattan's Whitney Museum sculpture biennial, which opened this week with works by 123 sculptors, 50 of them newcomers. Variety is the show's sole common denominator, but the overall impression leaves one fact inescapably clear: the past decade has changed sculpture more than it changed in all the time between Michelangelo and Rodin. Sculpture is no longer a quintessence of form, something to be isolated, set apart and contemplated. Instead, sculpture may plug in and light up, move by machinery or breezes, invite the viewer to play with it. Says Whitney Associate Curator Edward Bryant: "Sculpture wants to come down off the pedestal and create its own environment."

Plastic Patina. Some contemporary sculpture now jostling for *Liebensraum* in the living room cries less for the patina of age than for the quick eye jab

"sculpture." Random objects glitter behind glass in the work of Joseph Cornell and Mary Bauermeister; even Louise Nevelson's newest darkling oots of woodwork are kept as purely as blackfish in glass bowls.

Neatness of execution, however, was not always a virtue even to Rodin, although aptness of thought was. The vogue for primitive art has led some sculptors to making fetishes. Edward Kienholz, 37, assembles objects from Grandmother's Victorian parlor and makes them into a wild and woolly revulsion called *The Four Bears*, which is composed, or decomposed, of a life jacket, a night table, and the extremities of a stuffed bear (whose sawed-off head nuzzles into a broken goldfish bowl). The human figure, when it appears, seems almost a wry joke. William King, 39, for instance, makes 7-ft. figures out of burlap and metal that are raucous commentaries on the self-pride of mankind. Richard A. Miller, 42, casts a conventional bronze nude. But he does it three times in the exquisite feminine gait clearly following Eadweard Muybridge's sequence photo experiments of the 1880s of a walking nude. Frank Gallo, 31, scoops up plastic like ice cream and molds a life-sized nude slouched in a cantilevered sling chair as if she were left over from last night's orgy. Ideal for a living room.

There is proof, too, at the Whitney show that older sculptors are still going strong. Lipchitz looks more curvy than cubist in his bronze *Lesson of a Disaster*, a tripod sprouting flames. Noguchi's smooth, pierced-granite *Black Sun* continues to exploit Oriental eclecticism in graceful abstraction. But the average age of the Whitney's choices is 43. Even younger sculptors are experimenting with new approaches to the object. Some may make sculpture from it.

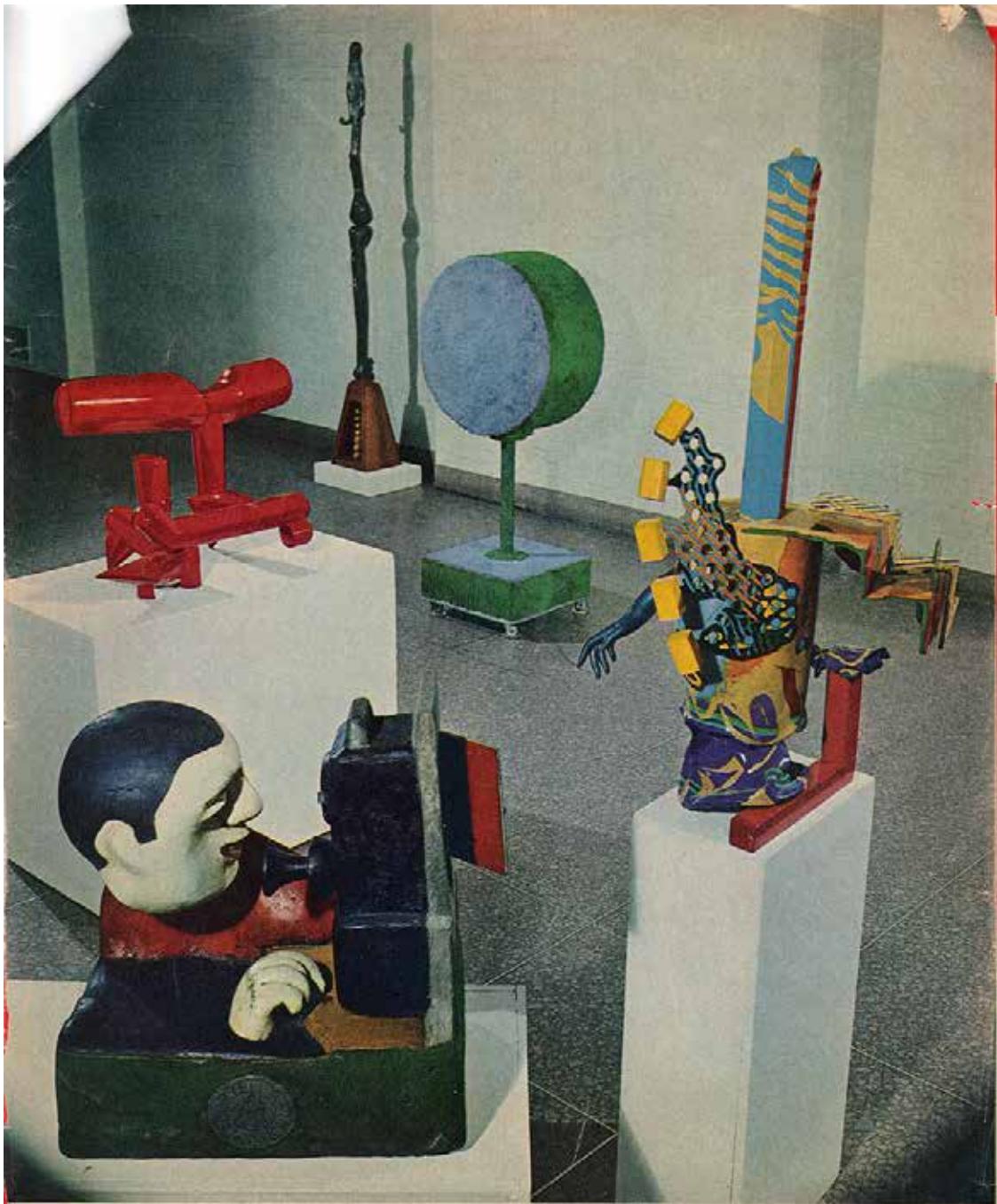
ARCHITECTURE

A Room of His Own

Skyscrapered Manhattan, taken as a whole, is one of man's most fascinating architectural conglomerations. But when it comes to singling out individual masterworks by the greats of modern architecture, the pickings are slim. Frank Lloyd Wright and Mies van der Rohe get only one building each (the Guggenheim Museum and the Seagram Building); Marcel Breuer's first structure (the new Whitney Museum) is only now going up; and Pier Luigi Nervi is relegated to a bus station at the north end of the island. Last week Finnish Architect Alvar Aalto, one of the acknowledged deans of modern design, managed to get his foot in the door. It was for a room, some 4,350 sq. ft. of conference space, atop the new Institute of International Education. The view overlooking the United Nations gardens and the East River is good. The view inside is even better.

Spaghetti Reeds. There might have been no room at all for Aalto but for the enthusiasm of Edgar Kaufmann Jr., a

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COLOR REPLACES PATINA at the Whitney's roundup of sculpture, from Elias Friedensohn's telephonic *Pyramus & Thisbe* (bottom left) to Robert Howard's red *Landscape XVII*. Jeremy

Anderson's lean, green *Composite Mythology, Number 5*, H. C. Westermann's beacon-like, velvety *The Plush* and Robert Hudson's madcap combine of man and machine called *Charm*.