



Jim Stark

We are pleased to present in the University Art Gallery an exhibition of bronzes by Jim Stark, Instructor in sculpture in the Department of Art and Art History. With few exceptions, the pieces shown have been executed in the past two years, and cast in the Foundry which he established at SUNY-Binghamton. Stark explores how rounded shapes and swelling curves can twist into blunt edged geometric forms or trail off into fragile stems. The multiple effects that can be achieved through the polishing of bronze are most visible, and frequently contrasted are smooth, highly finished surfaces with rough textured passages. The bronzes are enhanced dramatically by light, and where the play of light is at a minimum as in the relief sculptures, Stark adds a dimension of color. Subtle tones of green, rose, and yellow are applied to surfaces and uniquely create color palettes in bronze. The manipulation of rhythmic shapes and the probing into the color possibilities of bronze imagery offer the viewer an expressive embodiment of biological and geometric models.

With gratitude we acknowledge the assistance of the Student Association whose financial contribution facilitated the publication of this catalogue. We also wish to thank Donald Bell for designing the catalogue, Christopher Focht for photography and James Marrow, Assistant Professor of Art History, for writing the introductory essay. Thanks also go to Walter Luckert and Kathy Gleason of the University Art Gallery who have helped make this exhibition possible.

Mary Newcome
Acting Director

University Art Gallery

State University of New York at Binghamton

March 3 - 24, 1974

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JIM STARK • SCULPTURE

Sculpture has always been the characteristic medium of artistic expression of all that is archetypical and elemental in human form. From the Venus figurines of pre-history, through the semi-divine and heroic statues of Egypt, Greece and Rome, the figures of Sluter and Michelangelo, and the modern works of Maillol, Lachaise and Henry Moore, sculpture has served as the essential vehicle for statements about the basic expressive properties of corporeal form. No matter what the illusionistic capabilities of graphic representation, the sculptural form has never been displaced in its directness of association with the primal and the magical: the mask, idol, totem and amulet are all works of sculpture.

The sculpture of Jim Stark is, above all, an exploration of the qualities of the fundamental forms of nature. Stark's forms are primarily anthropomorphic, but animal and vegetal forms are also to be found, sometimes simultaneously. Stark's real subject matter is biomorphic form — the forms of life.

Stark's sculpture partakes of the elemental and the magical in its primary concern with the essence of life. This quality is apparent in the pod-forms of the vegetal works (No. 8, 14), with their obvious evocation of germination, but is no less apparent in the anthropomorphic figures which are composed of the structural elements of animal life forms: of bone, organs and muscle. The forms alternatively swell and twist, they stand erect and droop, displaying latent and kinetic energy. Even the most skeletal of the figures (No. 10, 23), reminiscent of fossils from some primordial landscape, retain the association with growth peculiar to organic forms. Stark succeeds in capturing the generative principle of nature: his figures are animated by the fluent power of life.

Working within his vocabulary of life-forms, Stark explores different expressive and formal problems. His expression ranges from

near-brutal strength (No. 10) to maternal composure (No. 5); from graceful physical exuberance (No. 12) to tragic defeat (No. 24). One of his standing figures (No. 18) attains a mood of solitude analogous to that in a Giacometti statue. A reclining figure (No. 6) exhibits a nobility and monumentality comparable to that of the so-called Dionysius of the east pediment of the Parthenon. But Stark's expression is not simply catalogable. Although his figures are in one sense elemental ones, they evoke multiple associations, associations appropriate to every facet of the life process, from Eros to Thanatos.

Amongst the formal problems with which Stark deals in his sculpture, perhaps the most striking is the integration, or juxtaposition, of organic and inorganic forms. In the two extrusions (No. 1, 2), organic forms blend into geometric, abruptly truncated (faceted) ones; in *Merry Thought* (No. 7) and *Fallen Totem* (No. 23), bone forms are pierced, as it were, by perfectly round rods, again faceted at the ends; and in the reliefs (No. 3, 4, 11), different kinds of natural forms (anthropomorphic, landscape) are combined with geometric ones. One need have no knowledge of Stark's predominantly organic vocabulary to detect the tension between forms of such a fundamentally different order, and one readily suspects the intrusive element in the harsher machined forms. The jarring contrasts between organic and inorganic form are intentional and mirror the basic incompatibility between nature and technology. In the extrusions, natural forms (materials) are drawn into geometric ones, and are irretrievably lost in the process. In the reliefs, the anthropomorphic forms are in harmony with the landscape, as if growing with or from it, but the arbitrary geometric contours, the circular hole of *Heartland* (No. 4) and the evenly measured and numbered diagonals of *Medallion* (No. 11) encroach upon, truncate and disrupt the natural fluidity of organic form.

The largest piece in the show, *Pendulum* (No. 17), continues the theme of organic versus inorganic form, but extends it. The pod-like pendulum is in uneasy balance with the mechanical system of pulleys which suspends it and with the geometric cylinder and faceted rod to which it is made fast. This work, however, introduces the dimension of motion, and therefore time, which is only implied in the other works. The pendulum is a totemic clock, measuring epochal time in its regular, ponderous sweeps. The motion of the pendulum, the passage of time, intensify the tenuous equilibrium between natural and man-made systems.

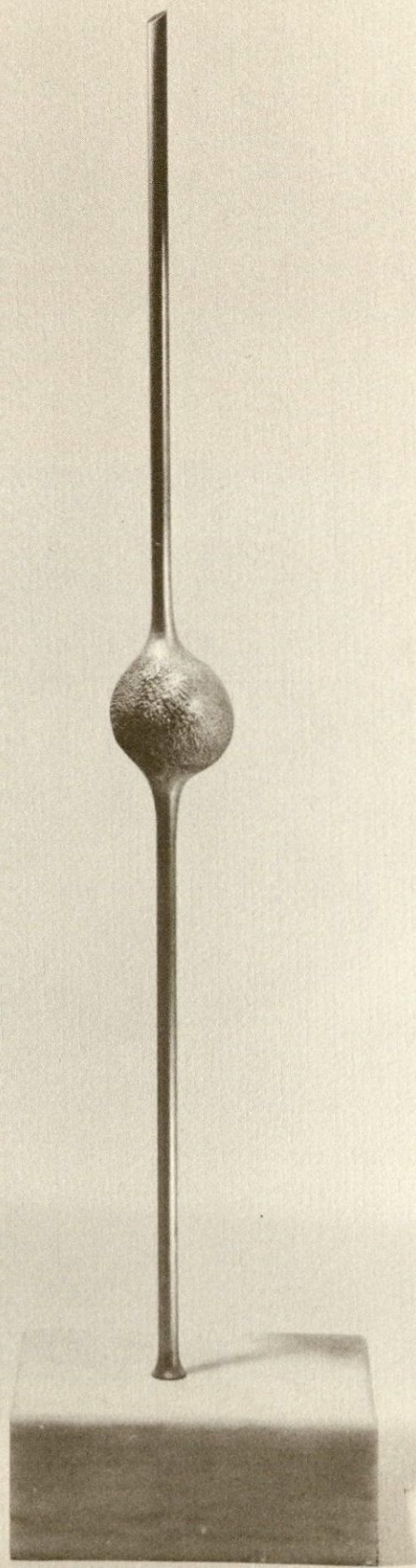
Stark's sculpture is an act of homage to life. In his forms the artist manifestly probes for the germ of procreativity which seems to vitalize all organic matter. The sculptor would identify the generative principle of nature, understand its powerful but elusive rhythms and enshrine them in his inflexible medium; the same extrusions which, from one point of view, represent the transformation of natural into geometric form, represent, when read in the other direction, the artist's attempt to create vital organic form out of the inorganic. Stark explores the nuances of human expression in these life forms, thereby identifying the life process itself as the true source for all human expression. Finally, the incompatibility between organic and inorganic form is Stark's unveiled metaphor for the danger technology poses to the continuation of organic life; his swelling pods are imprisoned in geometrically formed and faceted rods like the botanical version of an ectopic pregnancy.

Stark knows, as we do, that he cannot unlock and master the generative secret of life, and that he cannot resolve, in his art, the irreconcilable tensions between nature and technology. But he probes these enigmas, nevertheless. Stark's sensibility, and his vocation, demand the attempt.

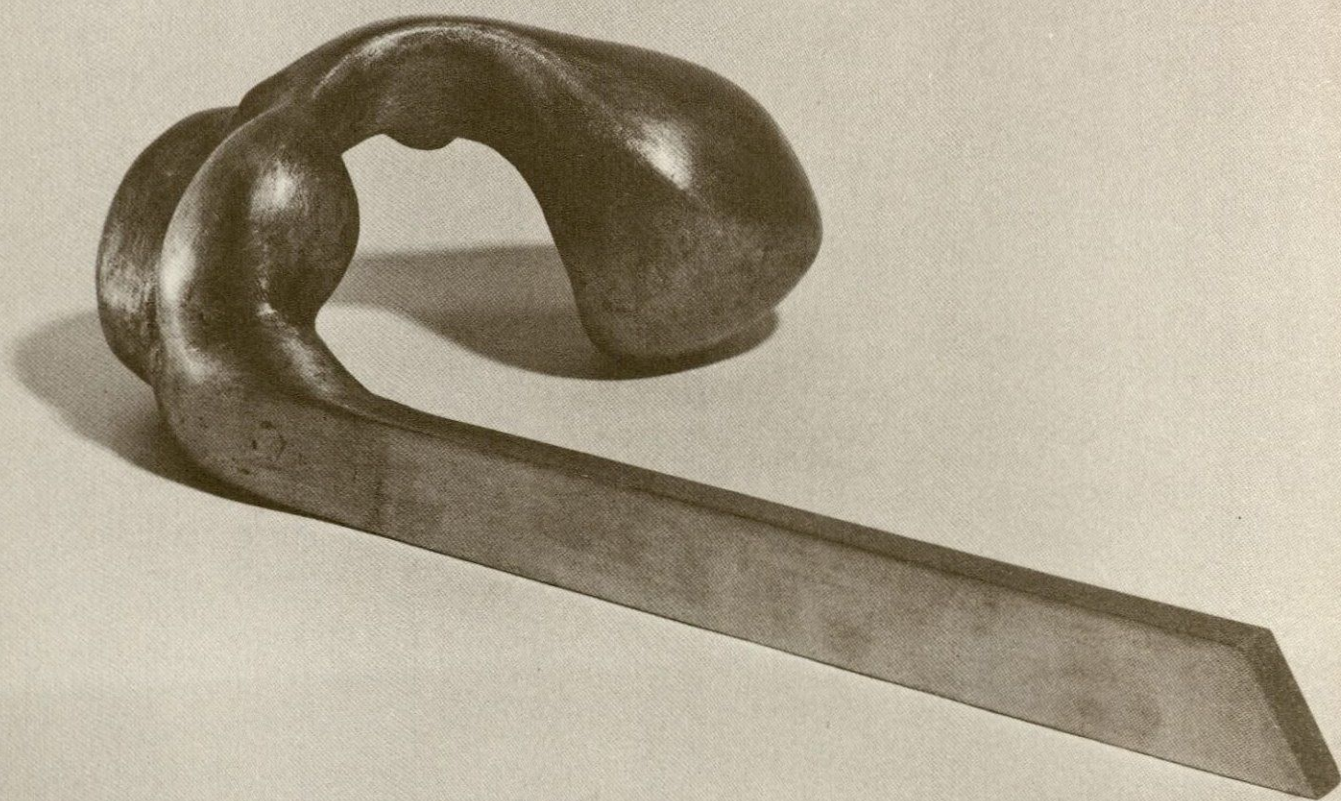
James Marrow, March 1974

8 GOLDEN ROD

5



2 SQUARED EXTRUSION





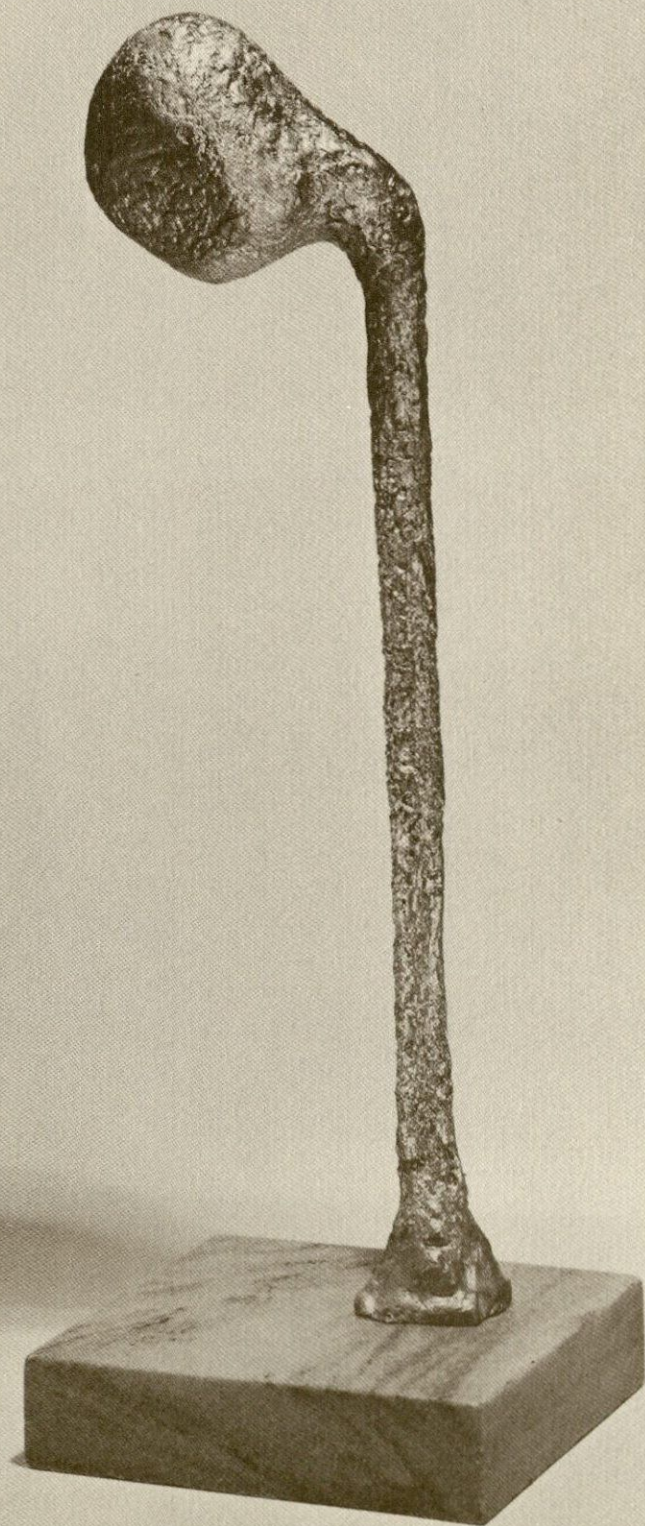
5 SEATED FIGURE

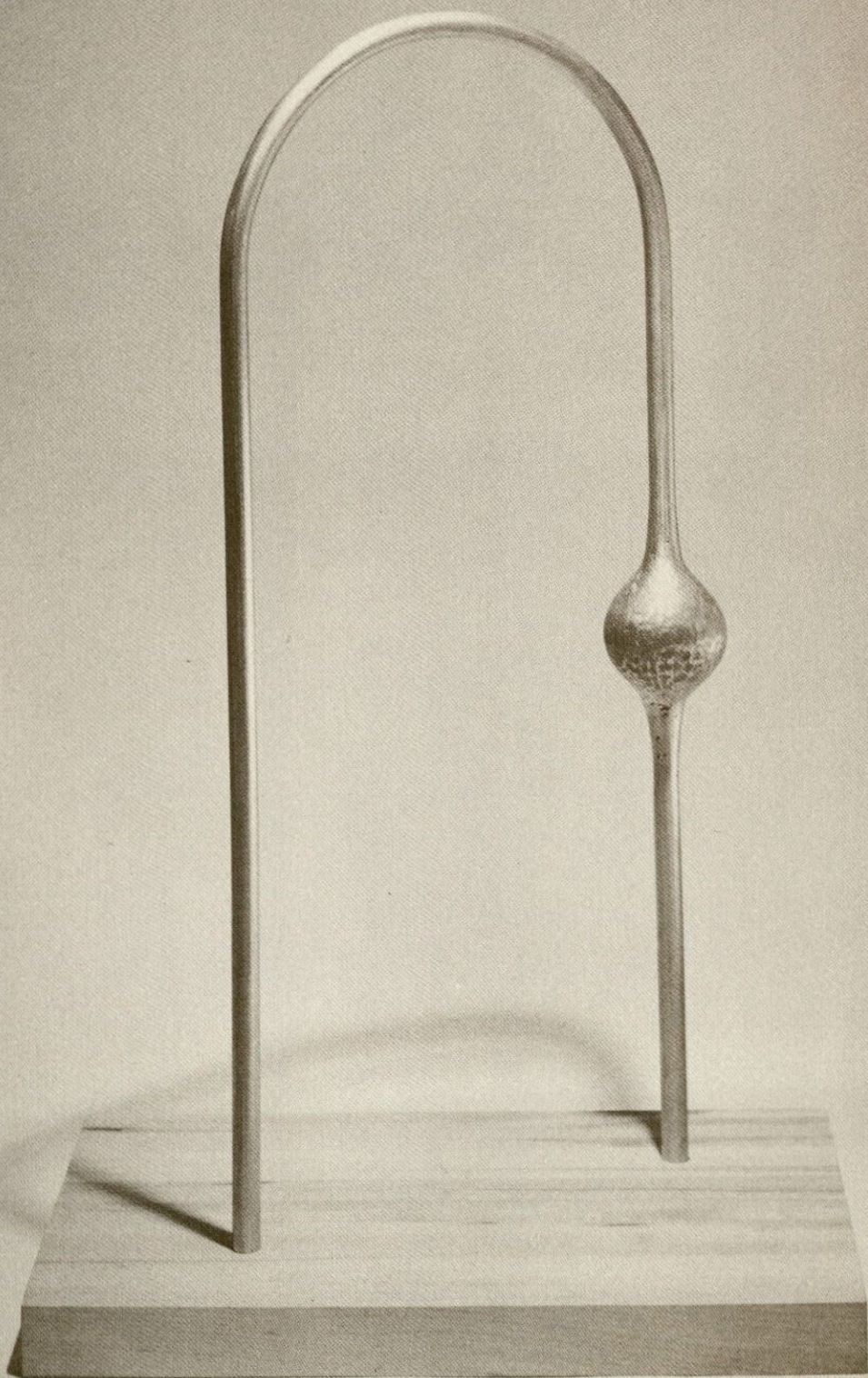
22 SEATED YOUTH



18 STANDING FIGURE

9





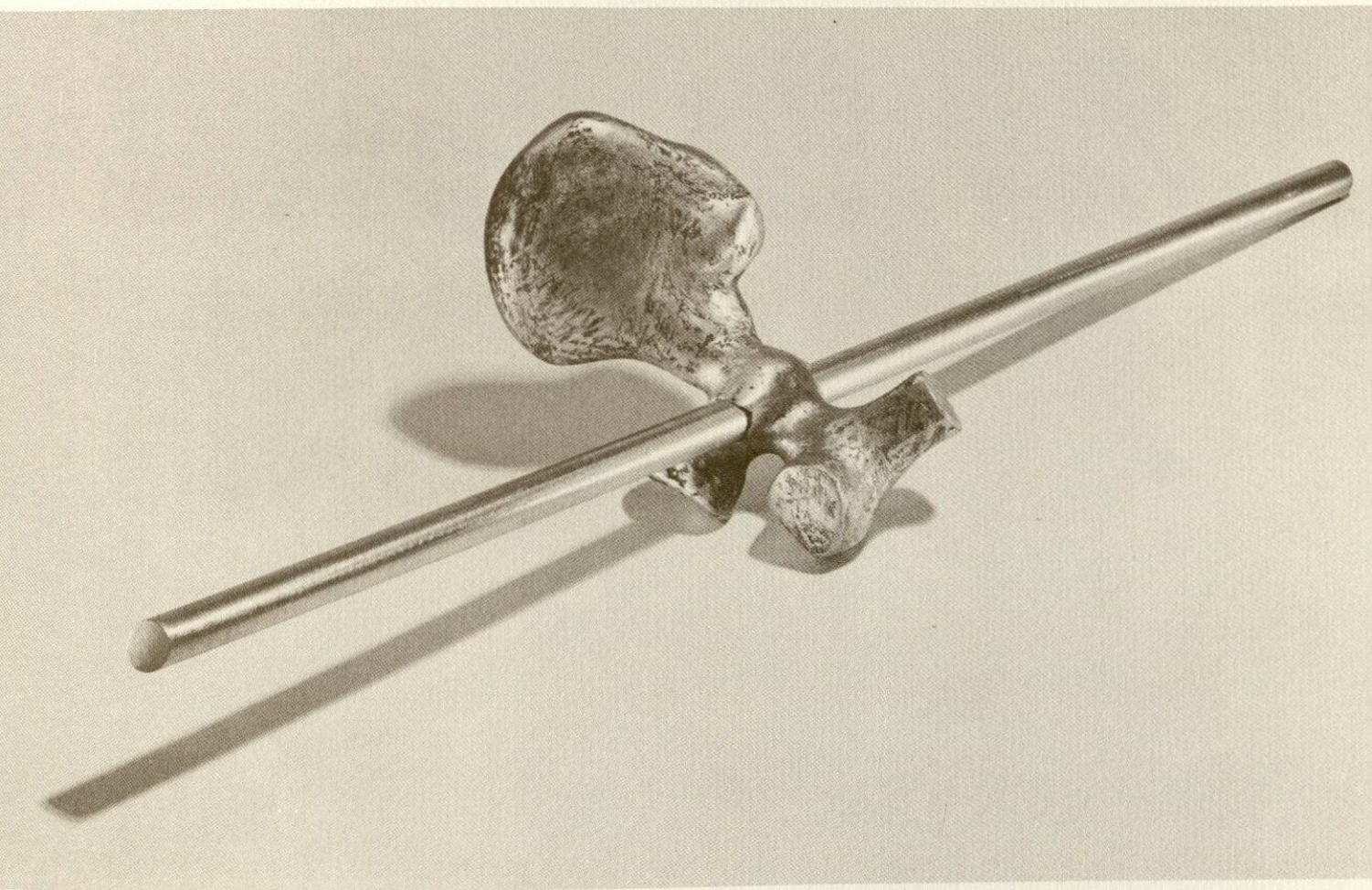
14 WICKET



16 SLEEPING HEAD

6 RECLINING FIGURE





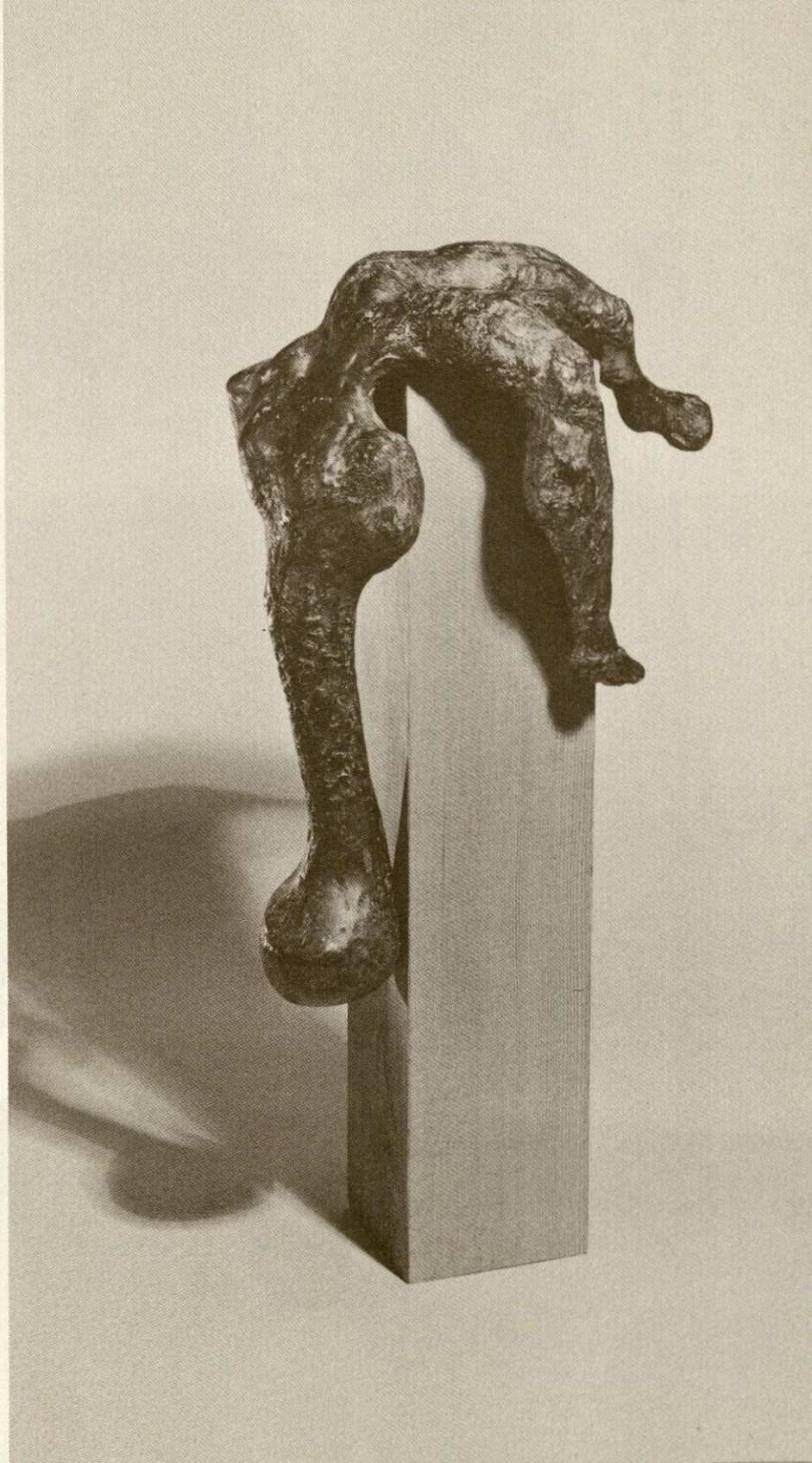
23 FALLEN TOTEM



19 SPENT FIGURE

24 FALLEN MAN

15





20 MATRON

CATALOGUE

1. ROUND EXTRUSION 5" x 16"
- *2. SQUARED EXTRUSION 10" x 21"
#1 of an edition of 3
3. DIPLEX 12" x 22"
4. HEARTLAND 12" x 22"
#1 of an edition of 3
- *5. SEATED FIGURE 12" x 13"
- *6. RECLINING FIGURE 8" x 13"
7. MERRY THOUGHT 11" x 50"
- *8. GOLDEN ROD 15" x 64"
9. ACETABULUM 6" x 10"
10. RECLINING FIGURE ON ROUND BASE
- *11. MEDALLION 23"
#1 of an edition of 3
12. FIGURE WITH POINTED TOE 9" x 17"
13. RECLINING FIGURE IN TWO PIECES 7" x 10"
- *14. WICKET 15" x 34"
15. DIPTYCH WITH SCEPTER
#1 of an edition of 3
- *16. SLEEPING HEAD 7" x 8"
#1 of an edition of 3
17. PENDULUM
- *18. STANDING FIGURE 23"
- *19. SPENT FIGURE 6" x 8"
- *20. MATRON 5" x 6"
21. LAME DUCK 5" x 7"
- *22. SEATED YOUTH 6" x 8"
- *23. FALLEN TOTEM 10" x 35"
- *24. FALLEN MAN 10" x 20"

*illustrated