

Melvin Edwards

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November 12—December 11, 1981
University Art Gallery
State University of New York at Binghamton

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

I have been making sculpture for 20 years. I have tried to use and develop forms of power, vitality, and creative continuity. I enjoy the sculptural processes and challenges. The scope of my work has been from miniature to monumental. The small scale *Lynch Fragments*, (1963-66 and 78-81) are full of personal emotion and sculptural intensity. The problems and processes of life and art are in balance: I like tension and balance. My art relationships are serious and long-lasting; from the 1952-55 art classes of Mrs. Ethel Ladner to New York, New Jersey, Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Zambia, Kenya, Cuba, Ohio, California, Egypt, and Mexico. I have seen freedom and creativity fought for and struggled with by committed men and women. Just moral and social concerns help with creative clarity.

My first group of large painted outdoor planar-linear works were made in Minneapolis in the summer of 1968; variations of these themes are present in my works today. They are the contrast of mechanical geometry with the hand-drawn and formed line or planar edge; the use of implied volume and silhouette. Linear materials (chain and barbed wire) are used for variation of visual fact poetic-historic implication. "Works" in B-wire and chain, my Whitney Museum exhibition of 1970, used phenomena and symbol at the same moment, a kind of implied welding. My sculpture *Angola* celebrated the independence of African Angola during the Museum of Modern Arts 1976 U.S. Bicentennial show, "76 Jefferson." The Black and African "Festac 77" exhibition and festival united creative artists of all the arts from all of Africa and the

diaspora. We had a beautiful reunion thanks to Nigeria.

The Studio Museum in Harlem organized a survey of 2 aspects of my work in 1978: the original *Lynch Fragments* of 1963-66 and the *Rockers and Painted Works* of 1972-78. This exhibition presented the first version of the *Homage to the Poet Leon Damas*, *Pretty Little Rocker* and *Dancing in Nigeria*. Variations or maquette versions of *Homage to the Poet Leon Damas* have gone to Martinique, Kenya, and Zambia, while the large version has been extended and environmentally installed at P.S.1 in 1980 and the Everson Museum of Syracuse in 1981.

The 1980 "55 Mercer Exhibition" with *Memories of CoCo*, *Conversation with Norman Lewis* and the new 24-piece, *Lynch Fragment group A Luta Continua* (1978-80), was especially intense and rewarding in its dedication to family, friends, and struggle.

In March of 1981, the New Jersey State Museum in Trenton exhibited 6 of my large scale works out of doors around the museum. The work most clarified by this space and installation was the 3-part *Homage to Billy Holiday and the Young Ones of Soweto*, which was loaned from its permanent home at Morgan State University.

I am currently at work on a monumental 18' x 30', 2-part stainless steel commissioned work for Mt. Vernon Plaza of Columbus, Ohio. This exhibition for SUNY-Binghamton contains a sample of large and smaller works, some of which are new and extend my involvement in an architecture related aspect of my sculpture.

I am basically the same kind of person and artist that I have always been. I draw a lot, I eat too much; I struggle most with sculpture. I love my family, I miss those who are gone, and with the help of my good friends, I will do my part in the struggle.

As this exhibition is with my brother, Gregory, I know that the steel won't be so heavy, and has the blessings of our ancestors.

Melvin E. Edwards, Jr.
October, 1981



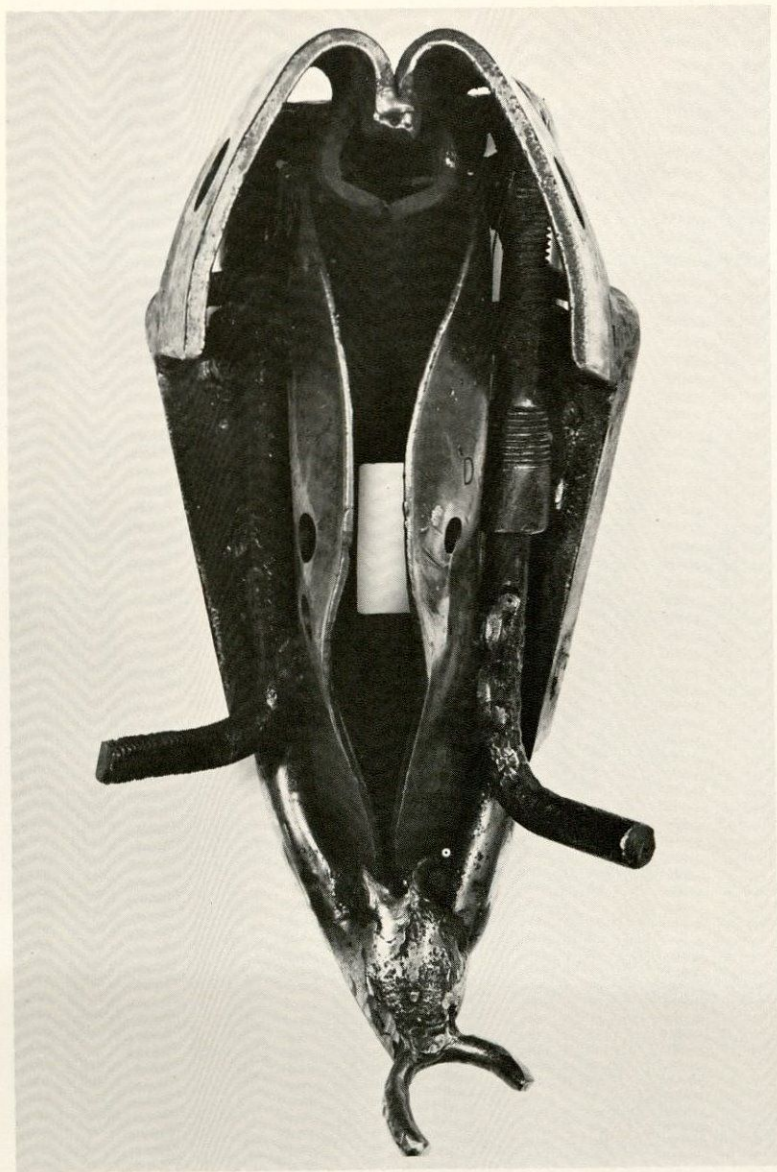
Seven, 1975
Steel, 16" x 12" x 7"



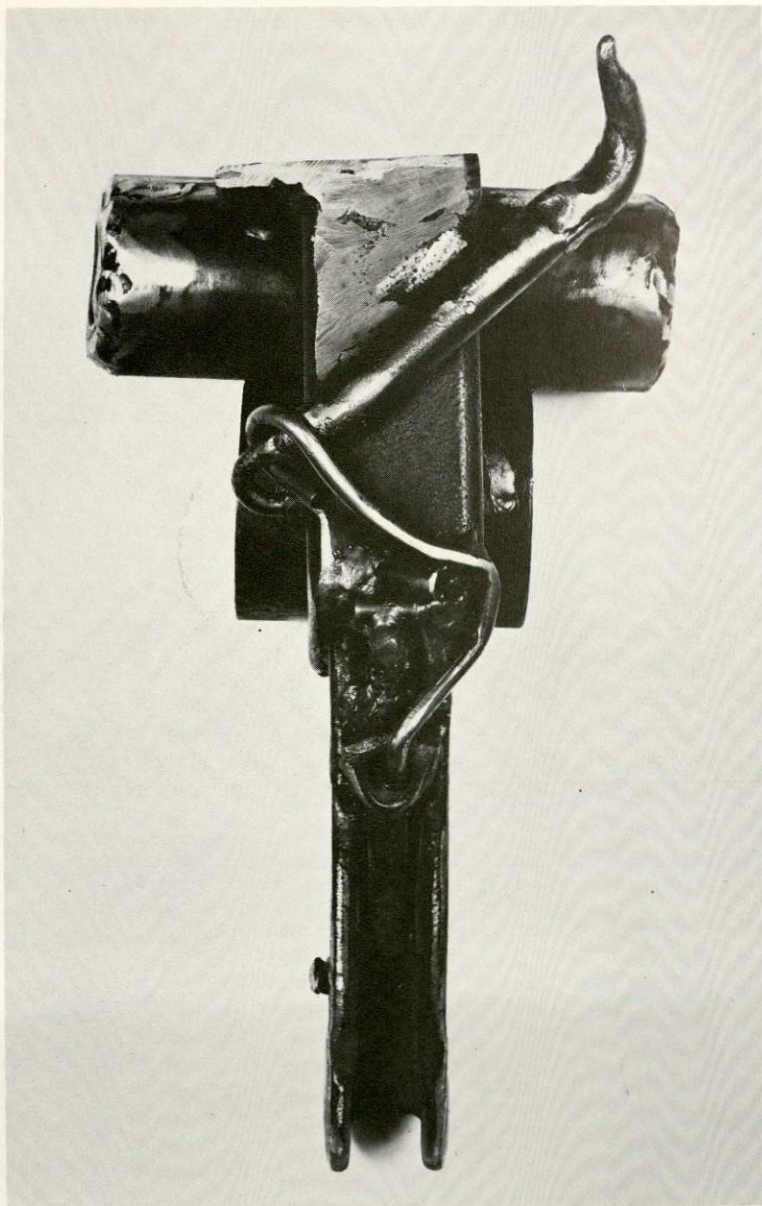
Ntrytry, Luxor Version, 1981
Steel, 7' x 4' x 4'



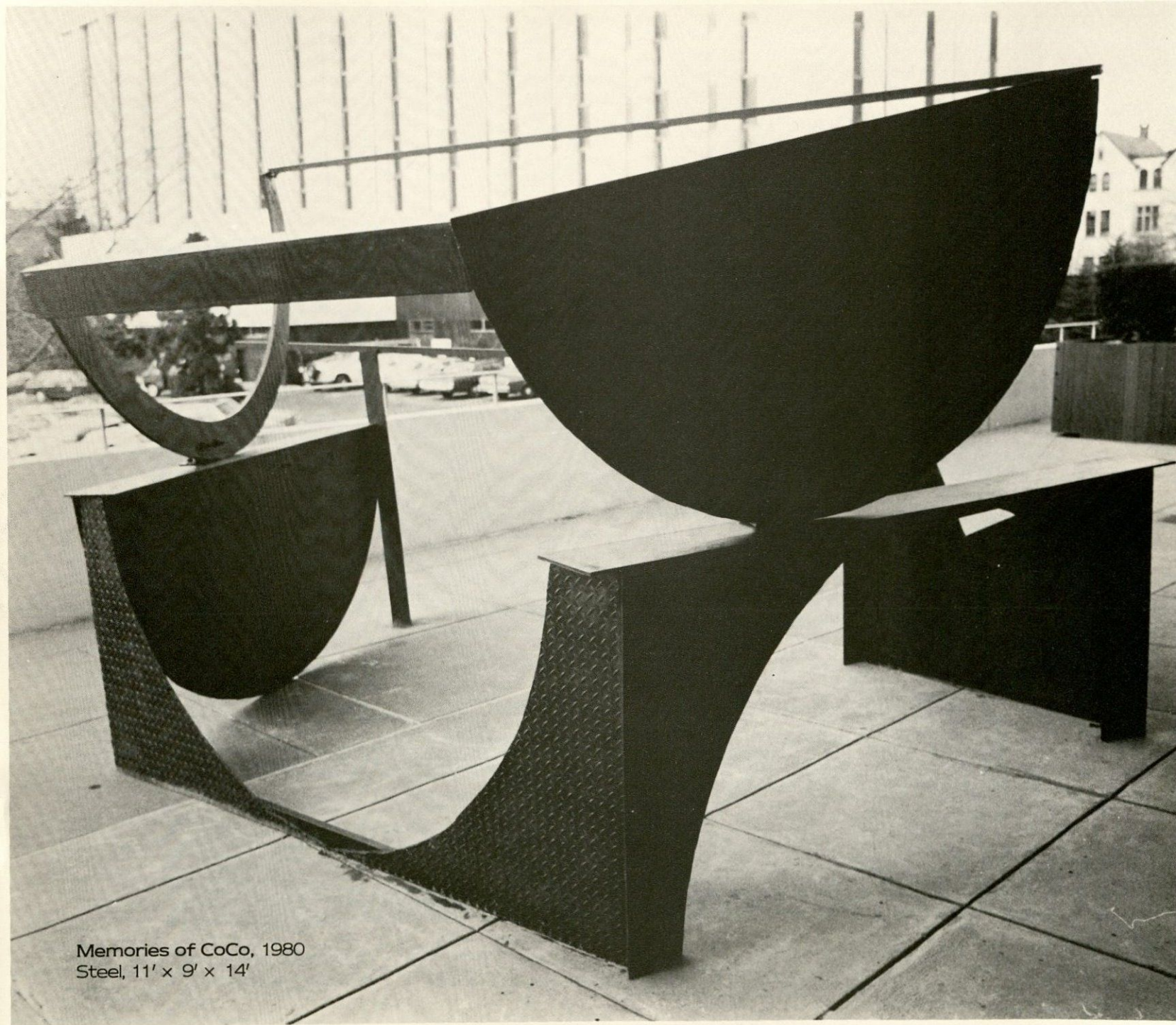
Mt. Vernon Plaza Variation, 1981
Steel, 9' x 12' x 6'



Silent Voice, 1980
Steel, 12" x 5" x 4"



Soweto, 1980
Steel, 13" x 6" x 5"



Memories of CoCo, 1980
Steel, 11' x 9' x 14'

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

The central lines of interest in my drawings are abstraction and symbolism. Abstract Expressionism was the first strong influence that I related to in the early 1960's. Exposure to abstract works of art provided the basis for my initial philosophy regarding aesthetics and fluid expression of ideas.

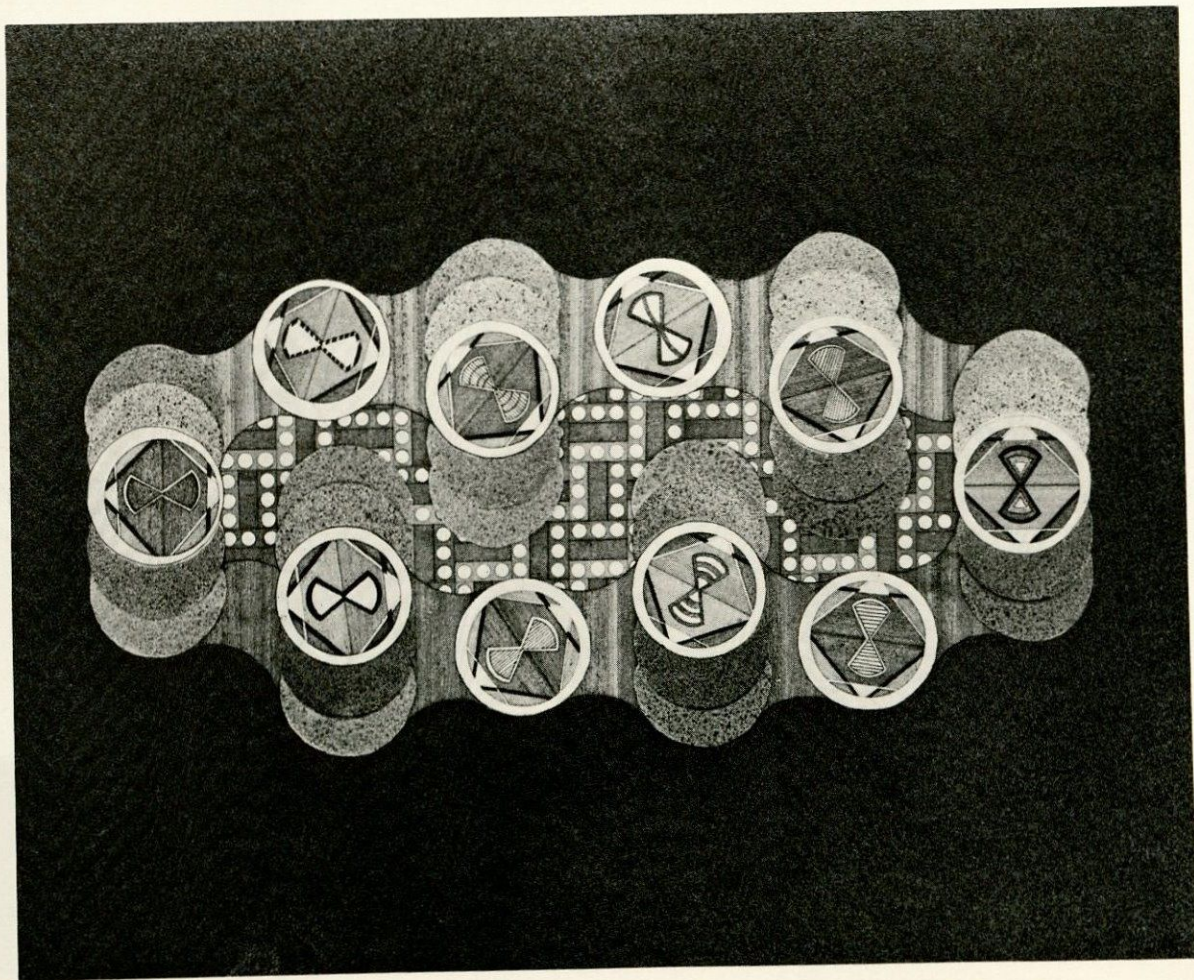
I became actively interested in symbolism after a friend pointed out specific symbols in European paintings. Intuitively, I knew that an understanding of symbols was the key to African art. I felt that if I could gain insight into that body of work my mission in art might be revealed. I began researching the examples of West African imagery available in Southern California and learned that traditional African art is endowed with meaning and purpose. The content of the work is symbolic, and it is an information storehouse whose accessibility depends upon the capacity of the observer. I felt that I had found the missing legacy of generations of African Americans, and I vowed to make this information stick in my personal imagery. I experimented with African symbols which led to the use of Asian, Indian, Native American and European traditional symbols.

It occurred to me that an intuitive understanding was not sufficient to manipulate literal symbols without initiation into those traditional cultures. Thus, I began to turn inward for material. I felt that valid symbols could be created from observations of my own inner being and from emotions generated from within my family structure.

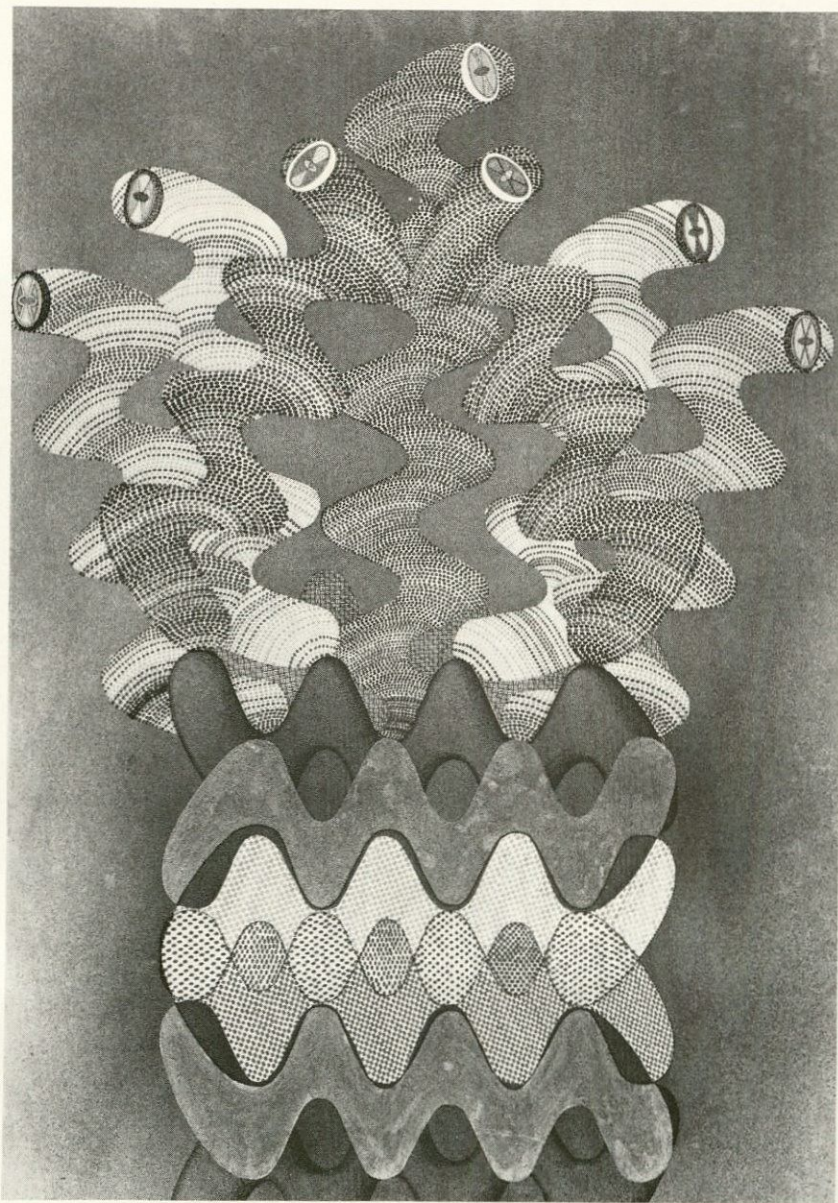
Observations of my inner life suggest imagery ripe for external expression. A foundation in ab-

straction coupled with a desire to create effective symbols allows me to translate emotion into visual image. This translation is a continuous process, and it requires a special attention — one that is open and confident. The process transforms the artist and exalts the symbol. When attention is present with emotion, and I am alert to the gyrations of my inner states, it is possible to use the rhythm of creation to conjure visions.

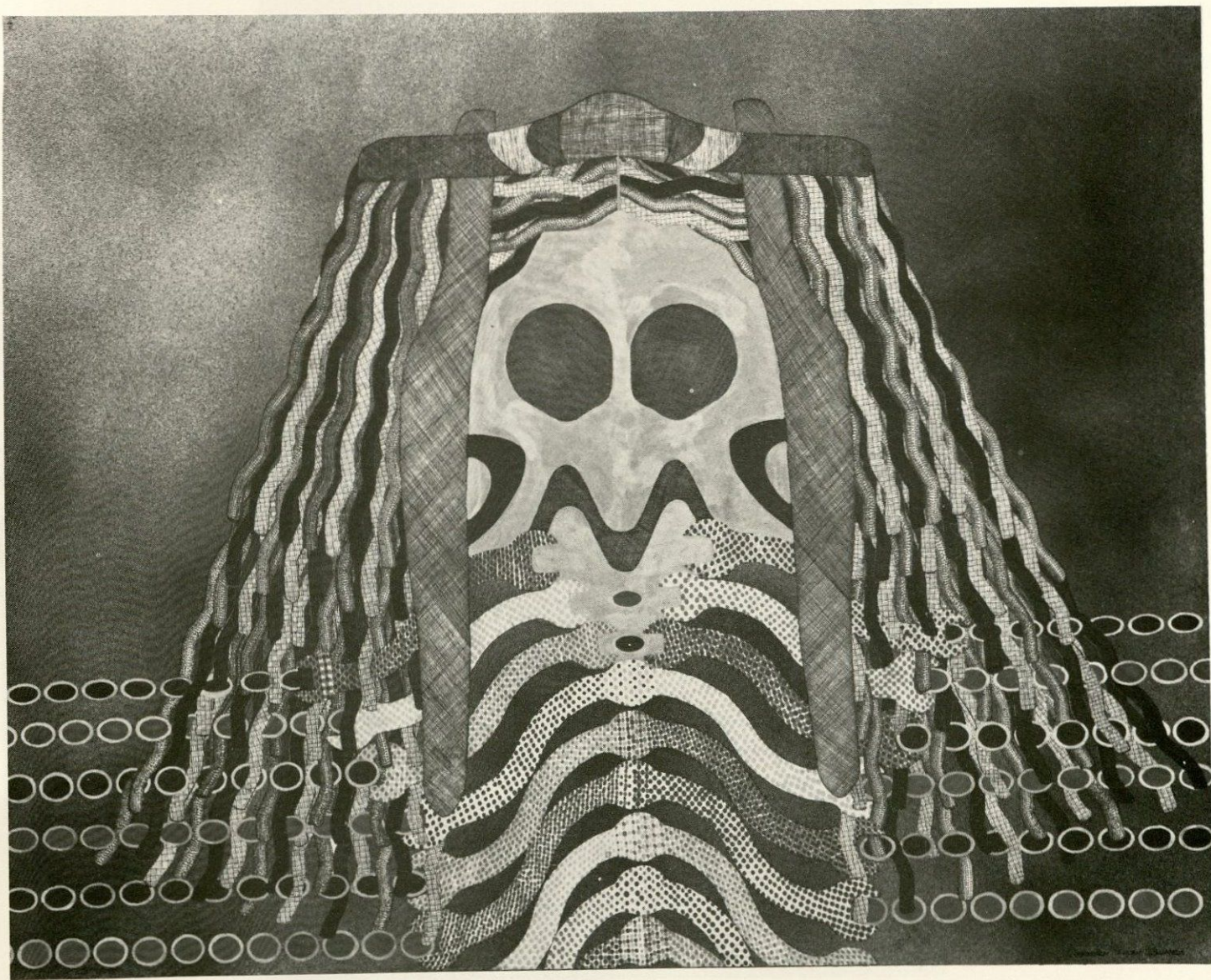
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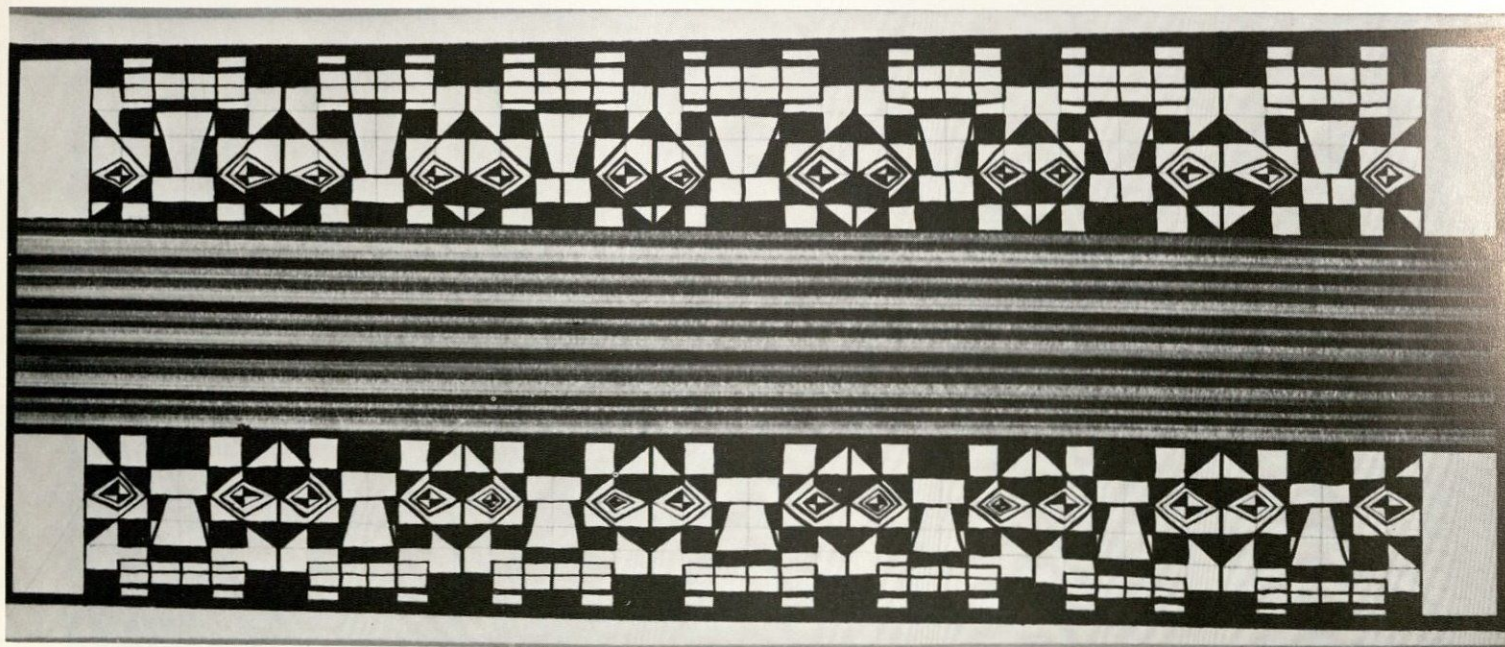
Facing the Music of the Spheres I, 1974
Ink on paper, 18" x 24"



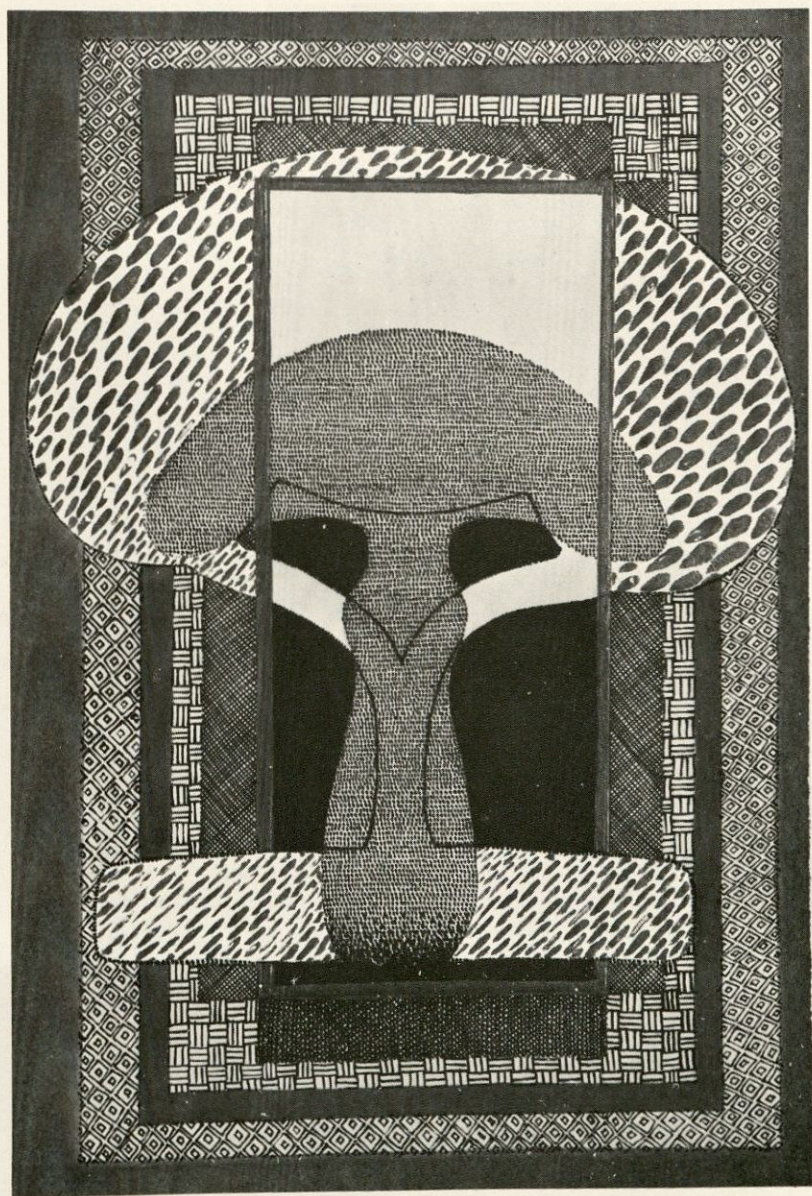
Burnout in L.A., 1976
Ink on paper, 40" x 30"



Spirit, 1977
Ink on paper, 40" x 50"



Untitled, 1971
Ink on paper, 9" x 19"



The Mrs. and the Master, 1981
Ink on paper, 12" x 9"

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