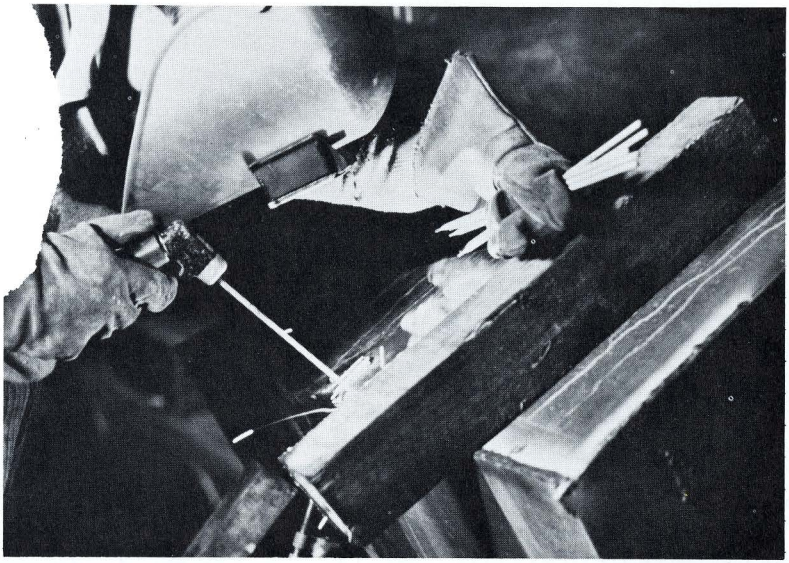


Barry Cogswell / RECENT SCULPTURE

The Capilano Review interviewed Barry Cogswell at his home in May 1977. Ron Sandor (who has assisted Barry with his work) was present with Ann Rosenberg.

The drawings shown next are details from *Working Drawing #2: Two Columns of Space*. The working drawings were made to finalize and clarify all aspects of the sculpture's design. Detail One shows a sectional plan and side elevation of one unit of *Two Columns of Space*; Detail Two illustrates an exploded view of the unit drawn to clarify the shape and placement of each plate, and a transparent view to make final the placement of the inner structure.

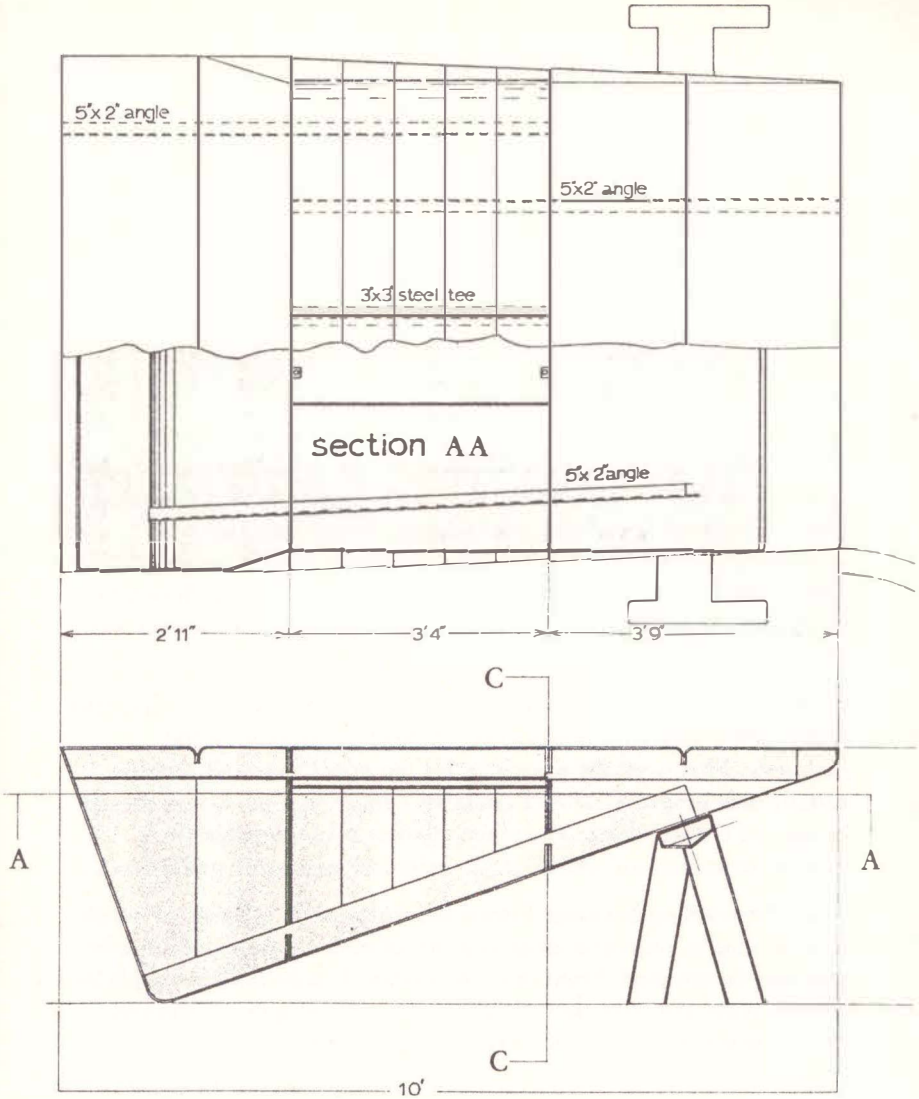
Most of my sculptural ideas are developed through sketches, maquettes and rough working drawings to the stage of a final balsa wood maquette. Final working drawings like the ones illustrated here are usually only produced when I am fairly certain that the design should be carried out in full size and when all aspects of the fabricating process, structure and details of the sculpture are clearly understood.

From the working drawings I draw the sculpture in full size, at which time all angles, radii and measurements of each separate plate can be precisely determined. From this information I make fullsize templates of each plate and from these templates the steel supplier shears and bends the metal to the tolerances of $\pm 1/16''$ and $2°$.

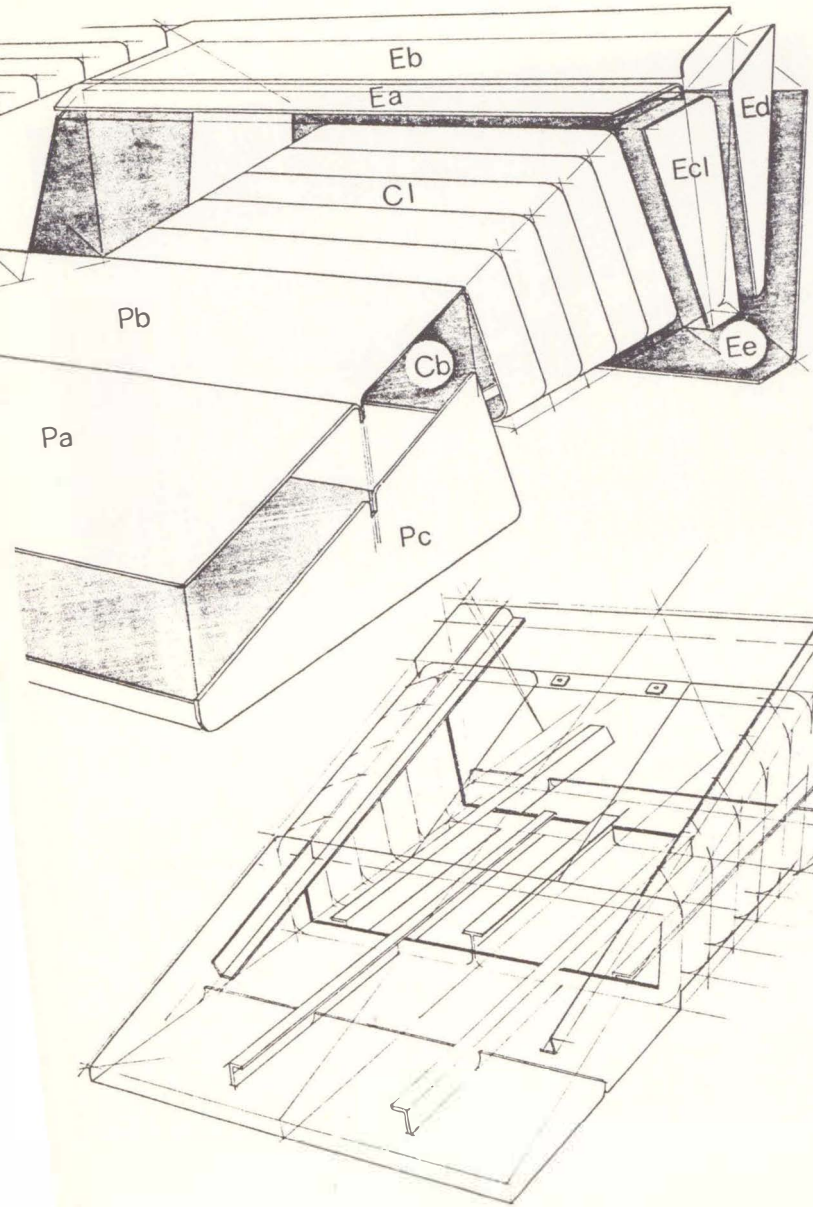
I then fit, weld and finish the plates to the form that was finalized in the working drawings.

As each unit in a given sculpture may be fabricated upside down and in a number of sections, it is rarely possible to make any changes once the plate has been delivered. Only after the sculpture is completed and lifted into position do I see the piece finally and know whether my concepts of scale, material use, form and space were actually correct.

— BARRY COGSWELL


5"x 2" angle
5"x2" angle
3"x3" steel tee
section AA
5"x 2"angle
2'11"
3'4"
3'9"
C
A
A
C
10'

section DD



DESIGNED
DATE
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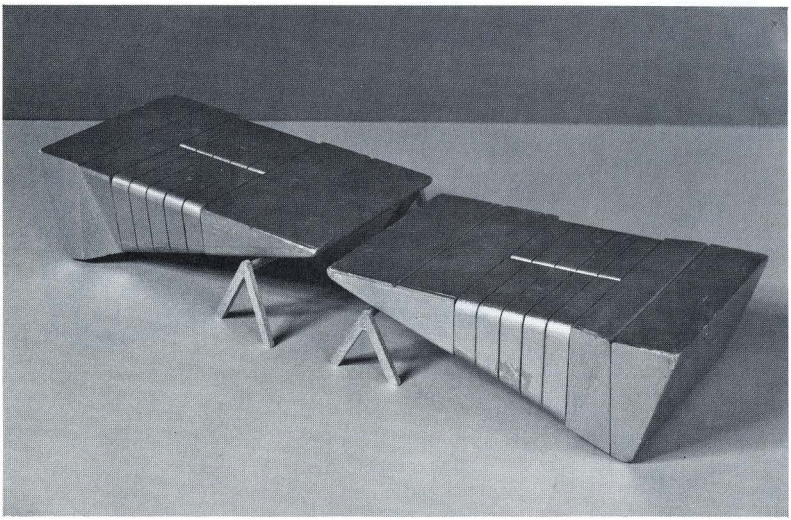


IMAGES

arc welding

Integrated Plane, 1975, corrosion-resistant weathering steel, ht. 5′, l. 8′6″, w. 8′6″ (commisioned for the City of North Vancouver).

detail one: *Working Drawing #1: Two Columns of Space*, 1975, scale approximately ¾″ to a foot.

detail two: as above.

early maquette for *Two Columns of Space*, 1976, balsa wood.

working the metal.

Barry and Ron moving sculpture.

Barry placing *Pressure Group 5* in site.

Pressure Group 5, 1976, corrosion-resistant weathering steel, ht. 6′8″, l. 11′, w. 5′6″

Two Columns of Space, 1976, corrosion-resistant weathering steel, ht. 3′4″, l. 20′, w. 8′.

Photography: 1, Pierre Coupey; 2, 9-13, Barry Cogswell; 3-4, Dominion Blueprint Company; 5, Tod Greenaway; 6, Elizabeth Wooten; 7, Maureen Wight; 8, a passer-by. Printing: Abbott & Tincombe; Tod Greenaway; Murray Skuse.

INTERVIEW

BC I grew up in a house where people seldom ever sat down. Everyone was working the whole time. . . . I feel guilty, *terrible*, when I don't do any work. I've been making things since I was small.

AR Were they usually hollow?

BC Well, when I had some horrible disease as a kid of about five, I made trucks out of paper. Three-dimensional cars and trucks. I can't remember where I got the information from, but I made the pieces with little tabs on them so there'd be something to fold and glue and it was really kind of weird because people were rather impressed by these things. They were just little, only about three inches.

RS I bet you didn't tear the paper either. . . .

BC Oh, no, I was *terribly* careful. (Laughter.) There was a total lack of freedom. . . . I came from a non-artistic background [which was, however] kind of cultured in the rigid English sense where everything is academic and correct. . . . I was at boarding school and we never did any art there. I took my examinations in art but we never did any classes in art . . . and if you'd mentioned the name of anyone other than Picasso, I wouldn't have known who it was. So it was very difficult for me to understand what the guys at Hammersmith Art School were talking about. I was older and more mature than the others (I had been in the army) or I was older but artistically less mature. And I don't think that was a help at all because I really didn't understand what art was. There was very little intellectual process involved in my getting into art. *It was all tactile.* That's why I chose pottery because it was something that was easy to understand, simple, fundamental; it has only been recently that the processes of art have become interesting to me. Principally I was concerned with function and design.

RS Well, did you want to be an artist when you were a kid?

BC I always wanted to draw; I never wanted to go to art school . . . (at least that's how it was for the three or four years before I *decided* to go to art school). I was always going to be a farmer, till I was seventeen. Then I wanted to be an air force pilot. But I was always painting and drawing; there's a houseful of paintings beginning when I was nine and they're really pretty good. . . . They were water colours of the things I liked — country cottages — although they showed a total lack of understanding of what art is about. When I was at art school . . . I was totally turned off painting because we were all expected to paint figures, Impressionist-type figures. . . . It was just the style of art that was expected amongst first and second year students at that time and you were supposed to be excited by people and essentially I wasn't. I used to do very tight figure paintings which for example, were of a bird's eye view of things. So this one snow scene I did was a totally white canvas (like Malevich); at the bottom was the top of a railing, at the top was the bottom of some stairs. It was a very, very high perspective of a snow scene; it was a street with a kid at one corner and another kid at the other and a snowball in between. And there was another one of a window cleaner with a view of the building as though looking down from a high perspective. That was the thing that excited me, *perspective*. I sketched buildings, not people, and light. I used to like to sketch at night when the light was shining on the buildings and you got this perspective thing with different planes of light, different planes of colour. . . .

AR Ah, now it's emerging. . . . Did the English sculpture scene have any effect on you?

BC I took sculpture as a student up to second year level but it was just a foundation course. When I came to Canada my interest was in design, centred on Italian design; the focal point of my interest was Milan. While I was aware of all the usual British artists like Kenneth Armitage, I really wasn't influenced. . . . The one event that really excited me was an exhibition at the Royal College of Art in about 1964 and most of the people in it made very large plaster forms like huge beds. I've never seen anything develop from them . . . essentially they were like rooms with figures in them, all full size, characters lying there . . . principally the show was concerned with space.

RS Process is really important in your work, isn't it.

BC Yes, in the fifteen years since I started art school I have essentially been concerned with learning how to handle materials, so that when I finished working with cast ceramics and plastics, I started with wood, and since then I've been working with steel. The thing is, that I was trying to be a designer. . . . Being a designer implies that you are making "products" — they have to be things that are going to sell and I realized that the concerns that I had with the things I made as a furniture designer, for example, had little to do with these concerns. I wanted to make things exactly the way my imagination wanted them and if I designed something that would require three weeks to achieve a certain piece of detailing, it's not going to be produced [commercially] by anyone. I was more or less requiring a piece of furniture to be considered as a work of art because I brought to its making the same kind of concerns that I think Richard Prince would put into his pieces (*The Capilano Review*, Issue No. 7). So I saw a piece of furniture as a piece of sculpture, really. . . .

AR So it was more of an evolution than a decision that brought you to sculpture after you came to Canada.

BC Yes. . . . (Pause.)

AR Then, what makes you tick?

BC I see myself as a perfectionist in my work and the same thing applies to a lot of other things. The fact that I feel uncomfortable when I'm dealing with people is therefore rather like a way of being imperfect, so I tend to cut that side out. And if I'm dealing with other people and things just don't seem to be going right, then I hate it. . . . I don't have the ability to say hang on for three years when it'll be O.K. I want it to be right now, or I don't want it at all. [On the other hand] . . . it would really be nice to sell something now, so I'd have the resources to make more! The only thing that really worries me is getting killed in a car crash or something, I need time — I have enough work planned to keep me going for the next five years. I see that everything I'm doing is just a process and in time something is maybe going to come out of it.

AR Do you consider your work a success?

BC Since I was at art school my whole time has been something of a disappointment . . . [yet] actually, I'm glad there's nothing that I've ever done that became *successful*. . . . or I would be turning out desks [for example] . . . by the hundreds, and another thing about rejection . . . is that you keep on trying. I don't really get much stimulation from conversation — I just really like to make things.

Youth is supposed to be a formative time and I used to spend my holidays then with my dog on the cliffs at my parents' home on the Isle of Wight. And that is how I need to spend my time now, walking, and all the ideas flow out. I believe that the process of creating or imagining art has to do with the realization of the subconscious *historic* mind which has taken a lifetime of [learned] material and bonded it with a prehistoric memory of things, and brought forth a personal . . . a kind of material realization of these influences. . . . So while I'm doing everyday things, like walking the dog, I'm actually planning a piece of sculpture.

AR Is the kick that you get, then, highly abstract and intellectual? Not so much the doing of the work — that's not even fun — but the whole process of drawing through, visualizing something that will take up half the yard.

BC I don't know where the kick comes from.

RS I was going to say, *kick*'s a bad word. . . .

BC I don't know where the pleasure comes from; I just find that I spend my time thinking [about my work].

AR Well then, you must enjoy thinking about it or you wouldn't do it. I don't mean some kind of *cheap* pleasure.

RS I think the pleasure he gets relates to . . . to the fact that when he learns something totally . . . then he is intrigued to put himself into the position to start all over again. The enjoyment comes from learning a new process . . .

BC Yes, I think you're right. The pleasure or the kick comes from knowing that you can do something. When I first came over here, one of the things that I knew I wanted to do was to become self-sufficient. . . . I made my own clothes, my own pots, grew my own vegetables. It's great to be able to handle everything that you're going to need. I don't like the idea that we use so many things that we're totally out of contact with.

RS In a sense I get a picture of independence, almost to the point of isolation.

BC I see myself as being a hermit.

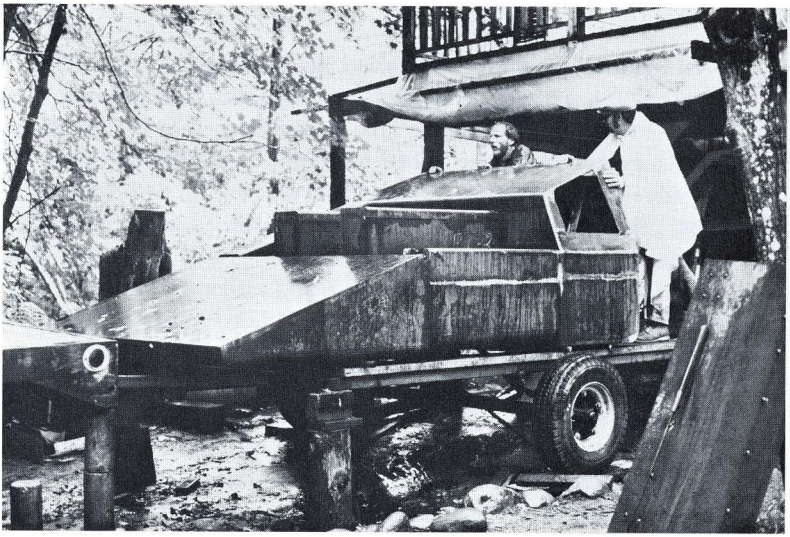
AR You were saying earlier that you're trying to understand what art is, but you've never said what you think it is. Do you want to try that one?

BC No, I don't! (Laughter.) But what we could talk about is what my stuff is about.

AR O.K. Shoot!

BC At one point, about 1973, I became involved in making sculptures that were attempting to describe forms in space. I came to the conclusion that energy is created *off* a plane, so that if you take a flat surface and finish it sharp, there is an energy created that is *continued* beyond that point where the plane is physically terminated. If you put a curve on it (the flat surface) the energy will follow that surface so that it wraps around the curve to contain space.

In the *Triple Plane Series* (polished aluminum cubes with three slots in them) the idea is that the pieces of sculpture should somewhat, visually, disappear in part because they take onto their surfaces everything that is around them but also because they are such simple forms they should be less interesting to the spectator than the way the planes go off to infinity. Then, what I started to do with *Integrated Plane* (North Vancouver Municipal Hall) is to re-emphasize the piece itself by letting it absorb all the elements on the North Shore (the sun, mountains and sea) on the one plane that contains them. From then on I started to work in such a way that the important elements of the sculpture become, equally, the planes that are described outside the sculpture, and the sculpture as object itself — always trying for a balance.



. . . What I am trying to do in *Two Columns of Space*, for instance, is to suggest two columns of energy in space and at the same time the weight of the "columns" is indicated by the weight of the sculpture and the trestles it is supported by. Where it *goes off into space* is not much more important than the aesthetic sense of the piece itself. . . . It should be positioned in an open area where its full effect would be possible — Simon Fraser University would be ideal. The more I see this piece the more it grows on me — I still don't quite understand it. It has a presence which the other pieces don't have.

I am noticing now a continuity in my work, the subconscious things. . . . There is a diagonal element that runs through all the pieces I've done over the last seven or eight years which I've just become *aware* of. From certain viewpoints some of my works have exactly the same form whether they are two-dimensional or three-dimensional. And it was ages before I recognized that much of my work has elements of two and three in it: two units made of three sections; three units made of two sections; two units with three minor units supporting them; two units with three planes cut in each. . . .

In the final design for the piece I am working on now, called *Single Column*, there's a big breakthrough into five elements. When I was finished with the final design I saw that the elements came together and, lying in bed one night, I realized that from the side it had a series of vertical elements (except two diagonal lines); that from the end, horizontals . . . well, I can't explain all aspects of the mathematical proportions . . . and I realized that the plan view is a series of trapezoids and although I hadn't planned it all the angles relate: they're either 10 degrees, 12½ degrees or 15 degrees — a two-and-one-half degree progression. The sculpture is concerned with creating a column in space that everything supports. At the moment I am working on a three-dimensional plywood mockup of *Single Column*. I am making it like a piece of sculpture (though it won't hold together very long) because I want to see it in three dimensions and full size, to ensure that everything is correct before I make it into steel. I estimate it will weigh close to 12,000 pounds and I can't afford to make mistakes with that kind of material commitment.