

## Barry Cogswell / ETHIOPIAN LANDSCAPE; BRITTANY LANDSCAPE

*The Capilano Review* published its first article on Barry Cogswell in Issue No. 11. He had just completed *Two Columns of Space* (1976) for his own pleasure. This work like others he has since designed was the result of meticulous *prevision*. Sketches, rough working drawings and even final full-scale drawings from which manufacturers' templates could be taken ensured that no aspect of the sculpture — apart from impact upon a final site — was unanticipated. Two subtly shaped wedges, supported on trestles, in turn support the air above. The curvature and the grooved surface treatment, like mathematics, like contemporary engineering and architecture, invite a cerebral response. The metallic heft of those apparently solid forms, the velvety russet patina of Corten steel, the mysterious, shadowed hiatus between the parts expect a visceral recognition of natural, or supernatural allusions. The action of atmosphere on metal. The rusted remnants of a man-made object whose purpose is forgotten. A sacrificial altar awaiting a double offering. A contemporary dolmen open to ritualistic lovers.

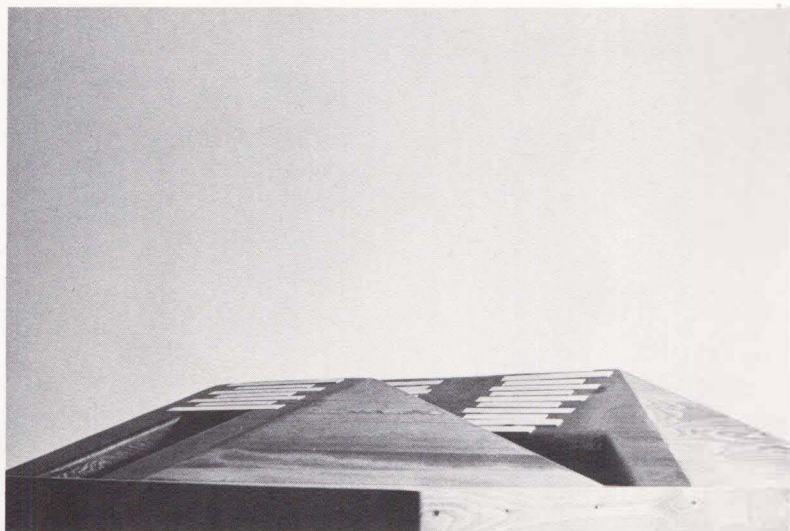
For Cogswell then and now "the process of creating or imagining art has to do with the realization of the subconscious historic mind which has taken a lifetime of learned material and bonded it with a historic memory of things to make a kind of material realization of these influences."

It was with works like *Two Columns of Space* that Cogswell first began to understand the nature of his sculptural interests. He was already certain that "energy is created off a plane, so that that energy is continued beyond the point where the plane is physically terminated." He knew that forms could direct the eye to a recognition of the volumes of space supported by them. He noticed that his work tended to have elements of two and three in it — two units with three minor units supporting them; two units with three planes cut in each. Some of the formal and numerical relationships indicated here have



remained consistent in his art. The significant changes in recent years however, occur in three areas. First, whether working to commission or for himself, Cogswell has found ways of conceptualizing his work *in a site*. Secondly, the formidable solid pieces of his *Two Columns of Space* phase have given way to works that either explore the graphic divisions of a surface by placing steel and concrete beams on the ground or by conceiving the horizontal wedges as negative wedges cut into the ground, or by making an exploded or transparent version of the previously opaque forms. Finally, through a more careful titling of the works and the occasional use of a symbolic device, Cogswell has begun to ensure that his works have the *historic* associations he has wished them to possess.

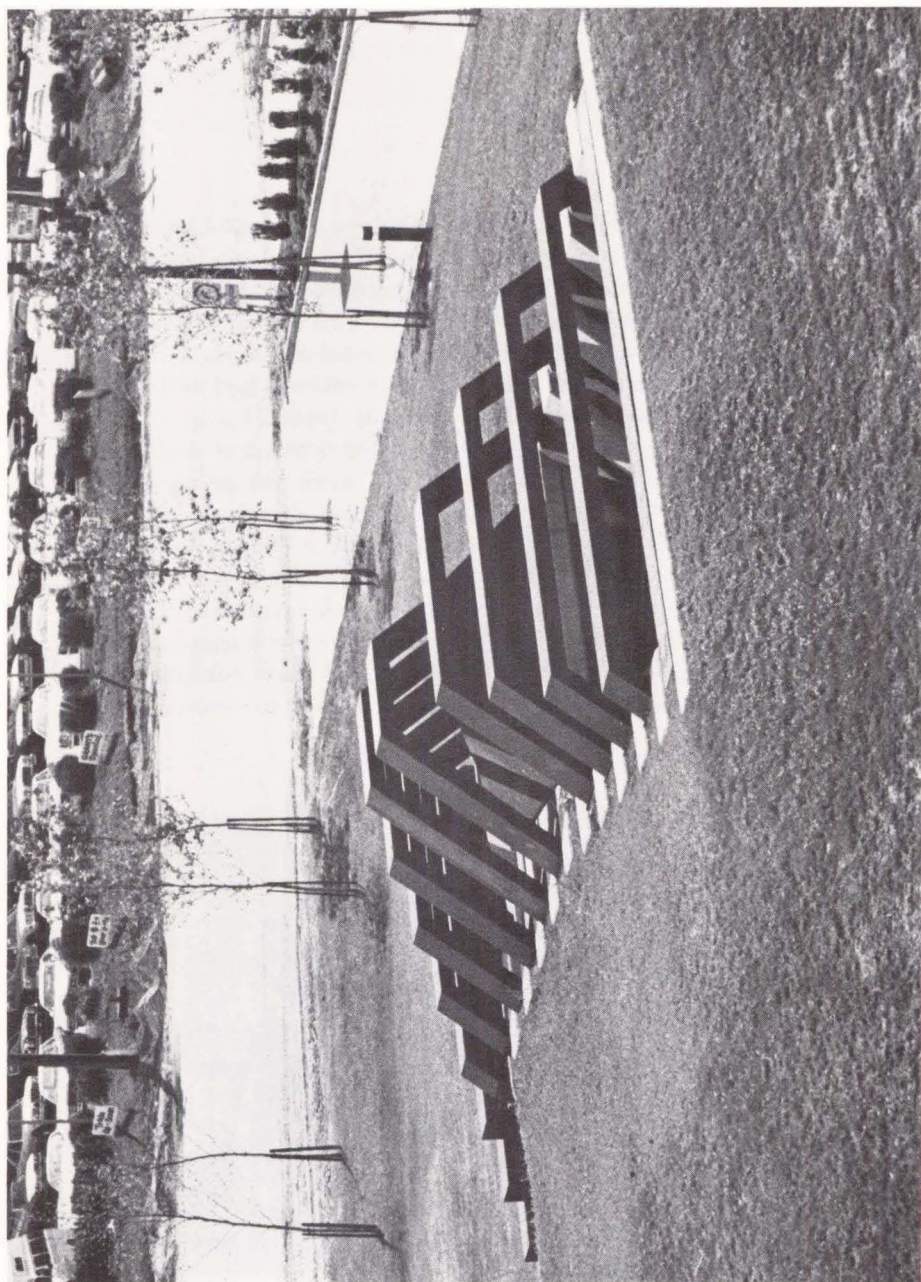
*Silbury 3* (1978) gives first evidence of these three important developments. The finely-wrought maquette in wood suggests a man-made landform, a double pyramid in shape. There are yawning, wedge-shaped entries and grids of concrete "beams" lie over the

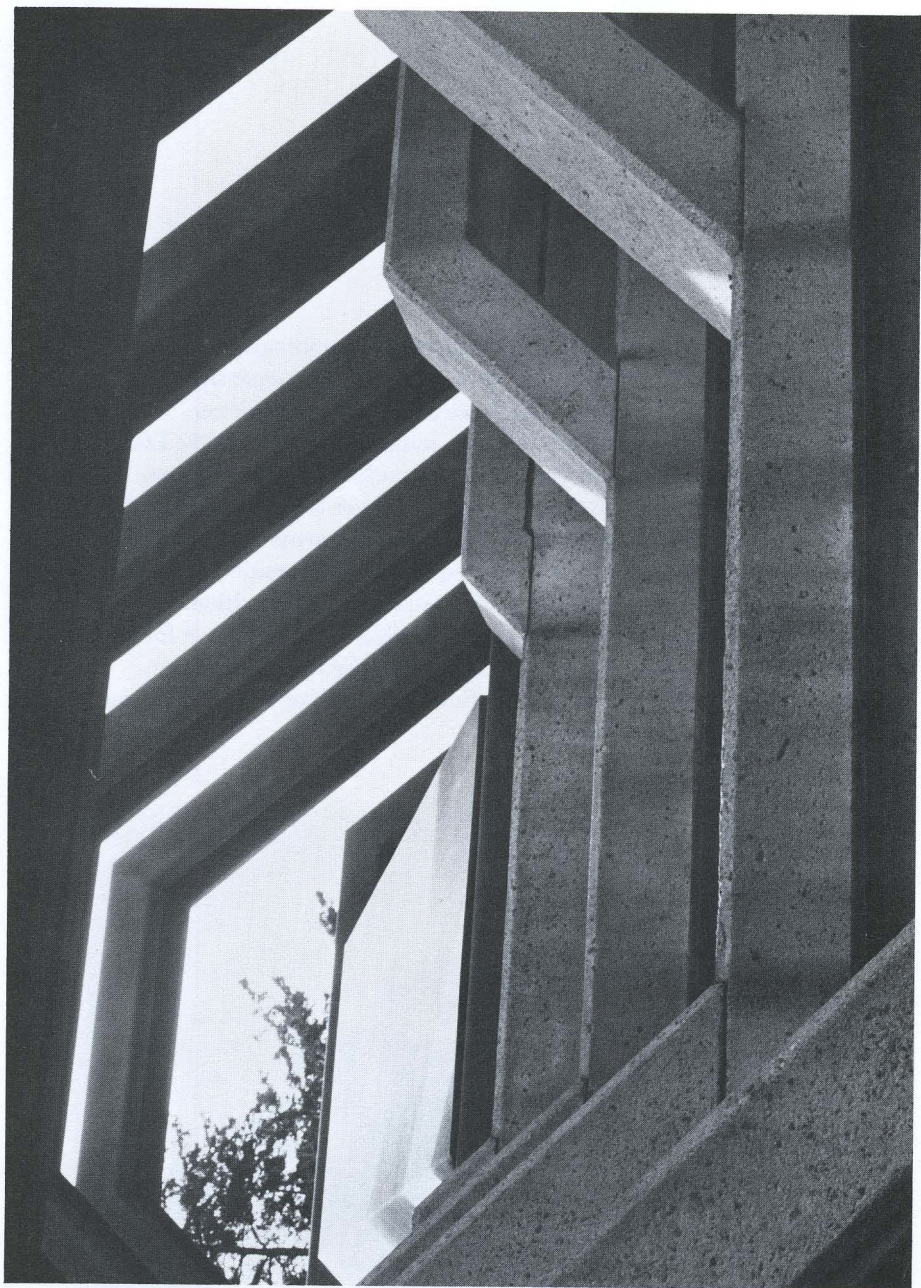




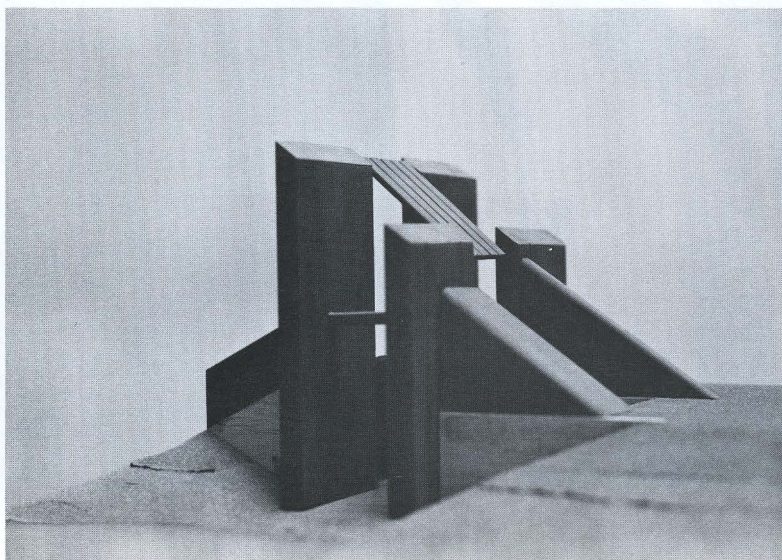
suggested earth work. At Edmonton with *Long Burrow* 6 Cogswell had the opportunity to make such a piece. Here one looks over a series of beams down onto a gentle, excavated slope-sided path towards another beam series resting against a man-made mound. At Surrey's federal Taxation Data Centre *Structured Dolmen 2* (1979) further explores these ideas. There beams of concrete and steel are set above and within a landscaped site. From the front *Structured Dolmen* looks deceptively simple: a truncated pyramid of steel beams over a similar inverted pyramid of concrete beams containing an opaque pyramid. The overview down the slope away from the Taxation Data Centre shows that although the overall form of the piece is simple, the sum of the component parts creates an illusion of complexity. And to look within the heart of the work is to finally discover its graphic intricacy, where the colour and texture interplay is strongest and where sunlight when we are lucky enough to have it, further complicates the work with cast shadows.

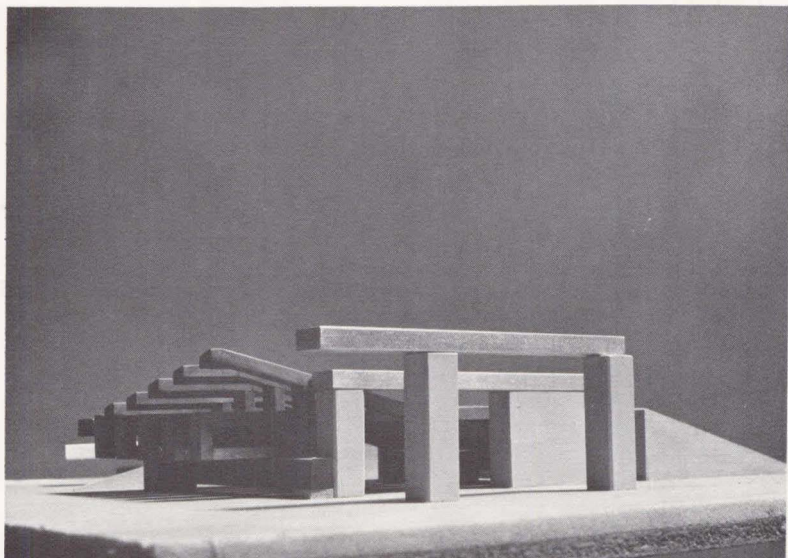






Two other maquettes indicate a successful combination of architectonic and allusive form with prepared landscape site. The first was an alternative entry for the Surrey competition's winner, *Structured Dolmen 2*. More than the sculpture chosen for the Data Centre, it evokes Stonehenge with its ascending tripartite arches. The multibeam grid that would have acted as cover for the site mound and as the sloping roof between the vertical elements looks back to the concept for *Silbury 3*. The second of them was made as an entry for the Captain Vancouver Memorial sculpture competition. Here a series of metal posts and beams was intended to carry the eye forward to a two-stage concrete and aluminum gateway that remembers Stonehenge and is like the post and beam portals of Arthur Erickson's Museum of Anthropology.





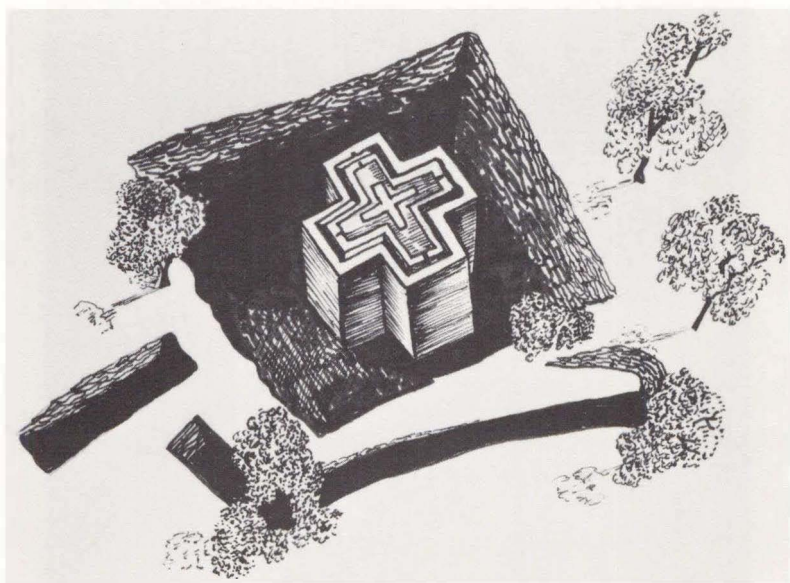
A different kind of possibility was presented to Cogswell when he was invited to participate in The Winnipeg Perspective *Sites* Exhibition of 1980, along with Steve Higgins, Mark Gomes and Susan Schelle. In effect, it was a show that sought to bring the contemporary landwork indoors. For this occasion Cogswell made a stunning two-part gallery installation composed of plasterboard, masonite, construction grade woods and glass. It was *Silbury 3* recreated in materials that are suitable for interior spaces, a Silbury illuminated from within.

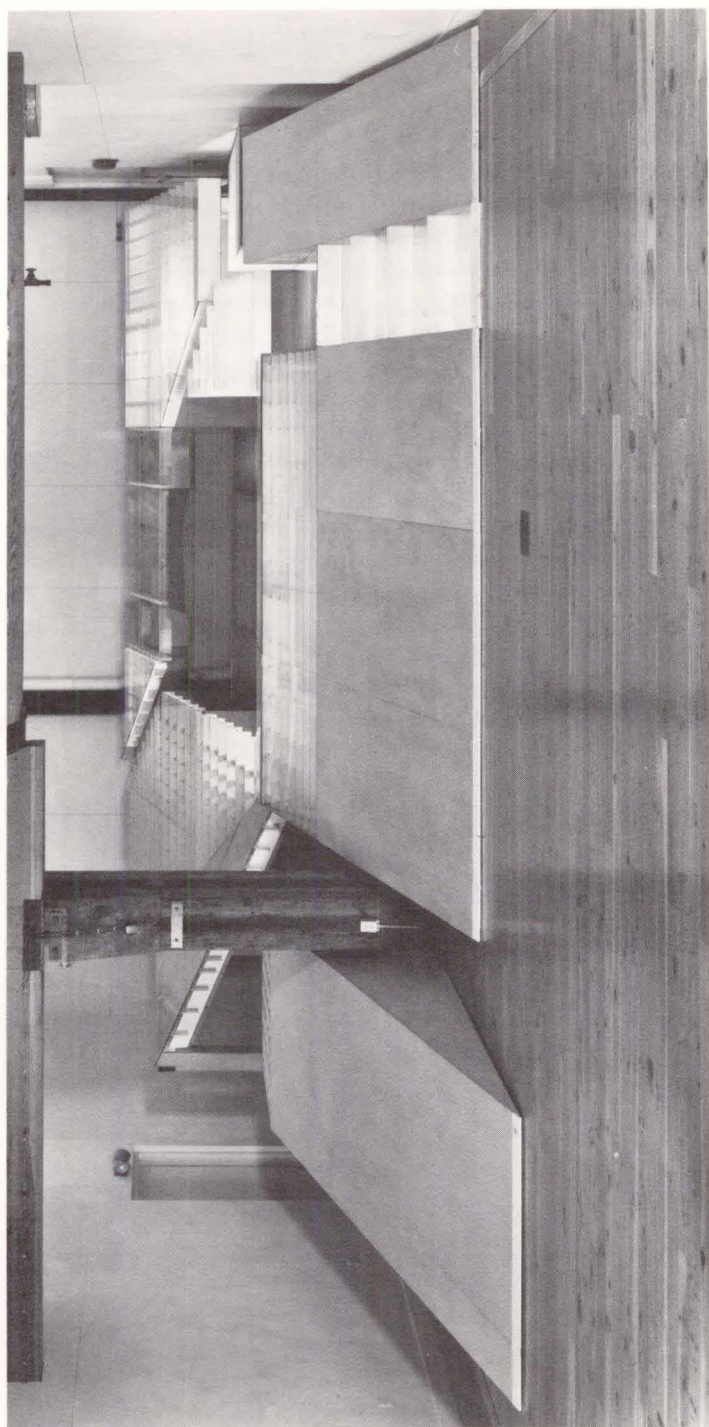
Cogswell hopes that his recent construction “will elicit in the viewer responses similar to those [he] experienced when coming upon previously inhabited sites from other cultures. These responses include that feeling of being a trespasser in a land of wonder — a place where



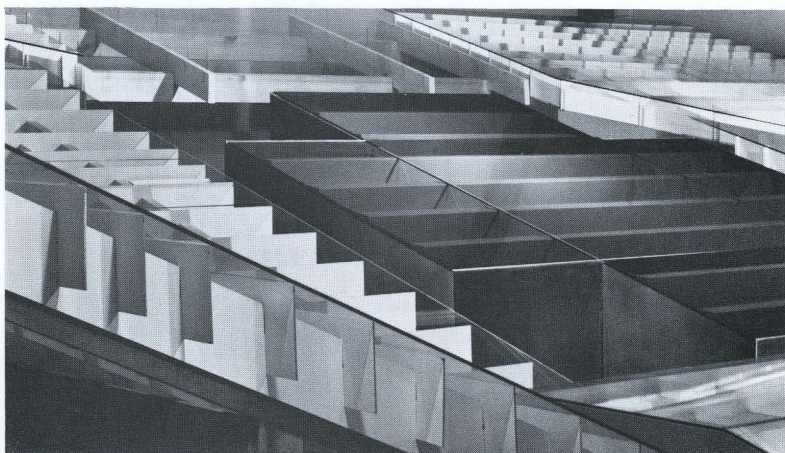
the past is still present, and where the land is hallowed and sanctified by the beings who dwelt there and the rituals that they enacted.” Although he is attempting to recreate some sort of geographic/historic archetype, he is not interested in resorting to the materials of the past but rather prefers to make constructions of the present with current materials and technology in a modern aesthetic. For the direction of his current art, he has acknowledged two principle sources — the influence of American Earth Artists and the area of England called Marlborough Downs. This windswept district contains many prehistoric monuments — Avebury Ring, Woodhenge, Silbury Hill and burial grounds called Long Barrows and Round Barrows. Like nearby Salisbury Plain where Stonehenge is situated, this land is unforested. Cogswell spent many weekends and vacations in the landscapes near his parents’ home. There his subconscious memory absorbed the sacredness and mystery of these monuments.

The indoor sculptures Cogswell made for two Vancouver galleries November/December 1981 continued the investigation of the sacred site. *Ethiopian Landscape* placed within the Charles H. Scott Gallery of the Emily Carr College of Art and Design owed its central cruciform image to the African rock-cut church illustrated here. This





inner heart, this smokey grey graphite-tinted motif was contained, like its Ethiopian counterpart, within a plane-like enclosure. Everything about it invited us to see, to move towards the symbol. Gentle slopes of beige particleboard led the eye upwards; a stairway sheathed in glass urged us to climb up to the glassy roof suspended over white masonite grids. *Ethiopian Landscape* glowed like a forbidden city of light, a future-time vision of Krypton, the perfected universe of Superman. Although it was possible to approach the work, one could not mount it. Although it was possible to get close to the cross centre by walking under the sculpture's highest point to the left in the gallery, even then the object of desire was out of reach. Cogswell orchestrated a tension between goal and its potential attainment.

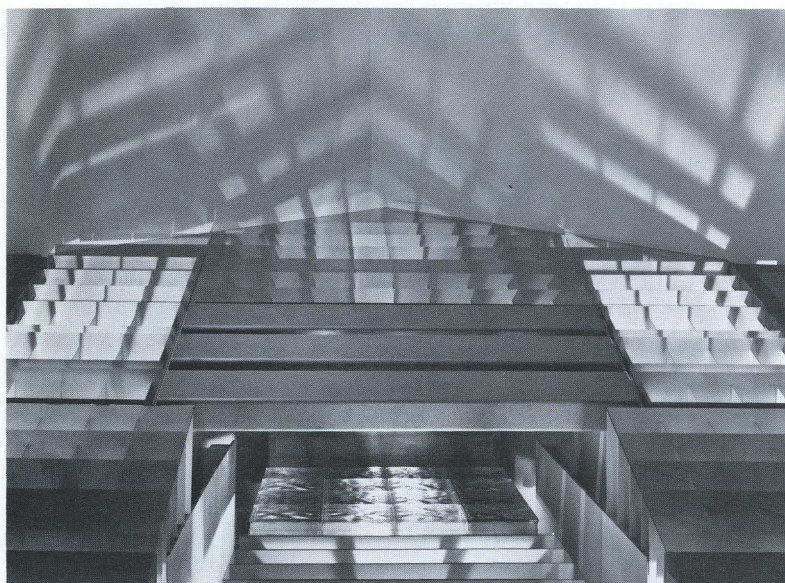


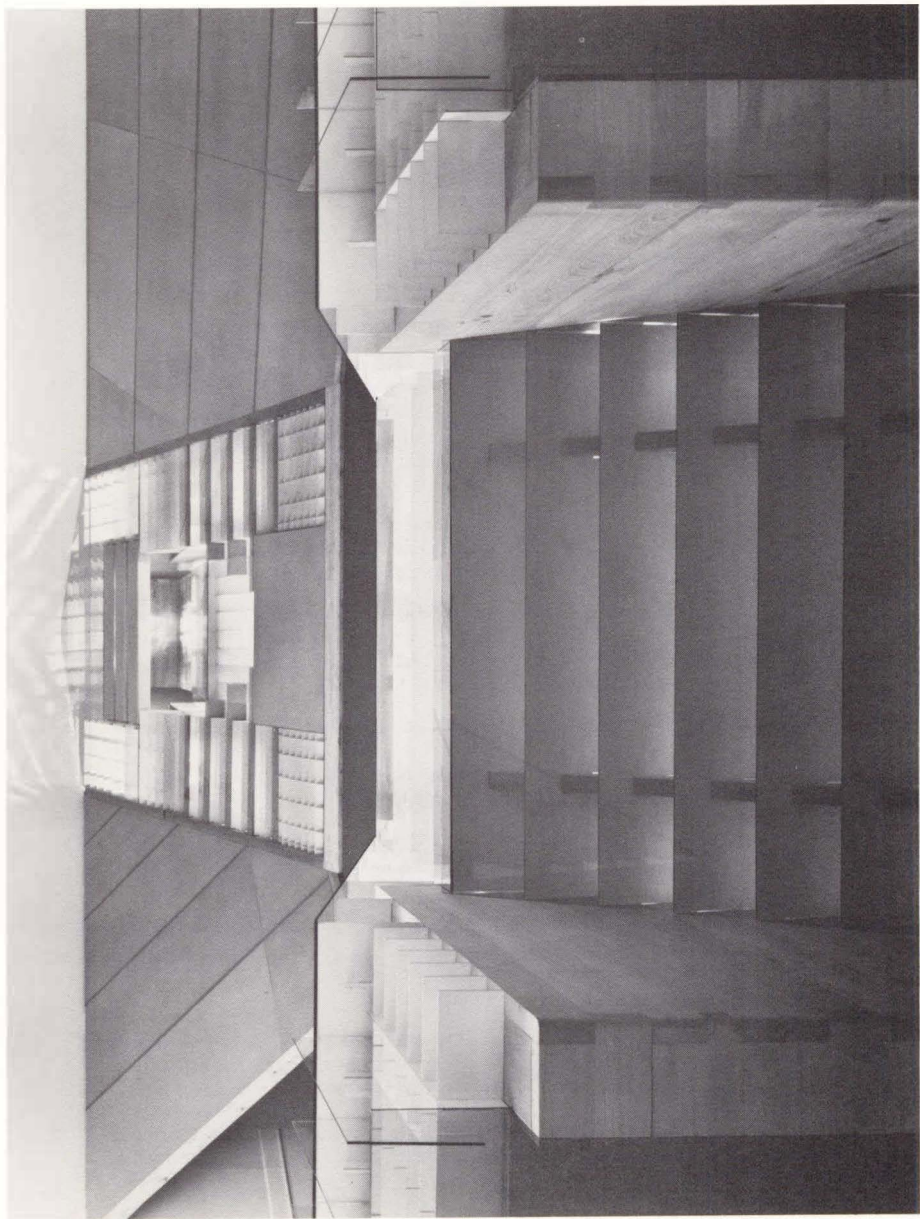
The two-part sculpture at the Vancouver Art Gallery embodied similar objectives. Here the historical source — the prehistoric dolmen — was less overtly present in the form of *Brittany Landscape*. However the reference to an altar, a reliquary of precious glass and wood was unmistakable and as inaccessible as before. In the foreword to the exhibition catalogue, Cogswell wrote:

*"I have been unable to come to any clear decisions about the existence of a God or gods, but, being intrigued by man's historic and sometimes heroic quest for spiritual knowledge, and being aware of the easy way he has misused his orthodox religious doctrines, I've come to view the cross and altar symbols as metaphors for spiritual wisdom: delicate, fragile, desirable, but more importantly, almost unobtainable."*

Prefabricated in his studio, erected briefly in the galleries for which they were designed, these landscapes will have continued life through catalogue and review documentation. They are/were sculptures; they do/did exist. But in the rooms where they once were, no hint of the existence of these spiritual sites remains.

— A.R.





## Barry Cogswell / IMAGES

*Two Columns of Space*, 1976, corrosion-resistant weathering steel, l. 20', ht. 3'4", w. 8' in the artist's collection. *photography*: Barry Cogswell.

*Earth Form 'Silbury 3'*, 1978, wooden maquette for a sculpture in brickwork and concrete beams to the scale of l. 89'6", ht. 13'6", w. 84'8" including earthwork. Model is in the artist's collection. *photography*: Barry Cogswell.

*Long Burrow 6*, 1978, earthwork, concrete, corrosion-resistant weathering steel, l. 120', w. 30', depth 5'. Sculpture was made for the Commonwealth Sculpture Symposium and is owned by the City of Edmonton.  
*photography*: Chris Newell.

*Structured Dolmen 2*, 1979, corrosion-resistant weathering steel, concrete and earthwork, l. 56', ht. 13', w. 28' (three views). Work is at the Federal Taxation Data Centre, Surrey, B.C. *photography*: Barry Cogswell.

*Untitled*, 1978, maquette for sculpture in concrete, weathering steel to the scale of l. 35', ht. 19', w. 32' including earthwork. This model, the second design submitted for the Federal Taxation Data Centre competition, remains in the artist's collection. *photography*: Barry Cogswell.

*Untitled*, 1979, maquette for sculpture in concrete, weathering steel and aluminum to the scale of l. 47', ht. 9', w. 45'3", including earthwork. The model was made for the Captain Vancouver Memorial competition and is in the artist's collection. *photography*: Barry Cogswell.

*Site Slope*, 1980, glass, wood, plasterboard, l. 42'6", ht. 9', w. 28' (one of two units shown) as installed at the Winnipeg Art Gallery. *photography*: Ernest Mayer.

*Ethiopian Landscape*, 1981, clear, green and grey glass, construction lumber, hardboard, particle board, l. 24'6", ht. 9', w. 35'9" (two views) as installed at the Charles H. Scott Gallery at the Emily Carr College of Art and Design. *photography*: Jim Gorman.

*Brittany Landscape*, 1981, clear, green and mirrored glass, construction lumber, hardboard, particle board, l. 24'9", ht. 9', w. 35' (two views) as installed at the Vancouver Art Gallery. *photography*: Jim Gorman.

*COVER IMAGE*, detail *Ethiopian Landscape*. *photography*: Jim Gorman, colour separations courtesy Vancouver Art Gallery.

### *bibliography:*

Barry Cogswell: *Ethiopian Landscape*; *Brittany Landscape*, 1981, Emily Carr College of Art and Design & Vancouver Art Gallery (catalogue).

"Recent Sculpture," *The Capilano Review* #11 (1977), pp. 113-131 (includes interview).

*The Winnipeg Perspective 1980 — Sites*, Winnipeg Art Gallery (catalogue).