

# THE CAPILANO REVIEW



It was  
not easy, all that silence.

—MICHAEL REDHILL, *Reason Is The Night*

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*Literature (With  
the Coast of Africa  
in Flames.)*

*Ex Machina*

COVER

Richard Prince

BACK COVER

Richard Prince



## Michael Redhill / FOUR POEMS A CERTAIN BELIEF

We are the machine  
that drives this river —  
swimmers in the heart,  
its languid blue muscle.  
We mingle and our stomachs  
move the north star  
slowly downstream.  
Maybe we are the current  
striving for horizon's thin arm,  
or the shore collecting its thoughts.

We pass its blue unthinking elbow,  
fast stones, unstopping.  
The river turns white  
with its own ideas,  
its version of midnight.  
The water is thrown vast —  
desire is the motor that moves us.  
The morse of our arms  
causes the shoreline.

Later, three mouths at the delta.

## REASON IS THE NIGHT

“Blind with eyes like stars, like astral flowers,  
from the purblind mating sickness of the beasts  
we rise, trout-shaken, in the gaping air...”

—Robert Hass

Think back to that afternoon,  
its creature sky. There were  
dark birds at the feeder.  
Sharp yellow finches flecked  
the dusk and the three of us  
ate a quiet dinner  
in the mottled air.

In the evening  
she and I held each other by the window.  
You finished some wine and  
told us a story. It was  
not easy, all that silence.

Some nights  
stories of the carelessness  
of other people drowned out  
the stars. We didn't  
talk about reasons.  
Our reasons were in the night poses  
of that front room.  
What else was there?

Now, some nights  
my body forgets the way she slept  
against it, there is no sense memory.  
Down the street  
she is dreaming a different lake  
and a long breath elongates you  
in our thoughts. You know  
what promises are  
gasping in their boxes.

Now think back to that afternoon again.  
Many things made us happy.  
A thought rose off the lake  
and moved towards us.

## THE GROOM IS UGLY AS THE NIGHT

A child has caught the bouquet.  
The grandmother watches the bride,  
her face floats like a foreign coin in the crowd.

*"The bride is too pretty."*

Nine-year-old boys ogle her. The in-laws  
have started a fight. Everyone  
says they're happy when asked.  
The mascara-ed aunt parades her stole, her  
husband is armed with wedding clichés  
and a wide tie. He can do  
the nickle trick. The band is stoned.  
Now the photographer snaps the guests  
with mouths full of gravlax. Four languages  
fill the air and fall to pieces over the  
dance floor.



## UNTITLED

“All my blood is gone . . .”  
—Osip Mandlestam

Early Sunday morning. Rain.  
Entwined in the small bed  
no violence distracts us.

The sleepy pulsing of the rain  
has the relevance of skin.  
My hand on your belly, the rain  
stirs there also.

Could sleep carry us on  
further, these slow times  
of peace among us. Are you  
also fooled by the smooth poses  
of trees outside our window?

## Toni Sammons / TWO POEMS IF WE'RE NOT DROWNED

It may be true that the more we encounter  
the more we discover and know about ourselves,  
if we're not drowned.

— Natsume Soseki, *Sanshiro*

The sea dragged much of the sand away,  
uncovering a sea-midden of stones,  
one-room lime castles, iced glass.  
From her window she can hear  
it slapping and chuckling over these

and thinks, I might write  
an autobiography  
just to unravel  
a continuity. Love stirs  
us as much as whatever trips  
those turtles toward the same white beach.  
Sea cradles rock with tides,  
like all of us; glass lattices  
knit up dark water.  
Against all this is held  
a steadiness of trees.  
Sometimes.

If  
your grandfather is a sheep,  
you may be able to read the sky;  
today, clouds and sky flow away  
with flimsy irresolution  
as though they may have held,  
and dropped, the answer.

The child left, and it was no one's  
doing. If you were gentle  
as an island fox, if you  
lay long without speaking  
close to the flat of the land  
and drank the very salt from the air

like a crystalline ice plant  
cleaned the air like that

a child still would be leaving

Different ways of knowing  
might be a goal. Old ways

are tuned to a pitch  
we can barely hear,  
reach toward each other

through our plans and thinking.  
which also bind us: ropes of wind.  
Some things alert us, some put  
to sleep. Red-lilac kelp crabs  
glowing through strands of eelgrass,  
with all their difficult legs, are better  
than the forever fountain  
in the garden, and emerald kings  
and queens. Mystery  
outpaces us, a commitment  
at least as long as life. Still,  
it is a smile that springs  
a smile loose; another  
face  
wakes up my face.

## POEM FOR A HIATUS

You turn in a tight orbit. Indifferent. I ache,  
but Greeks could see you anytime, the singular  
arc of your averted cheek  
shimmering like an aspen leaf. And you won't  
come down, through begging full moons  
through crisp and slender moons  
through red sickles cutting loose  
great strands of wind. You turn from any  
guardian or embrace, wanting what  
you want, paws brighter  
than water, going after  
night honey,  
sky honey.

I said, I'll leave you now. But I only wanted  
to watch the seconds clock around your face.  
When I finally tried it, you went down  
toward a rocky horizon; for the second time  
I reel myself in, gasping for air,  
alone again. The moon  
lies all along the sill  
in irregular flakes,  
something tangible  
from childhood: dried milk  
on flannel sheets.

But six months more of this  
and you'd hate me. I fumble  
toward the coast, wings trying  
to be fins again, not wanting  
to watch you wonder  
what it is  
I think I want

which was: your voice  
rumpling the air around me, meeting  
wave for wave this loud ripple. You could  
have stayed in sight, and shown  
me how to swim this sky; not like this,  
my writing to you from sea in failing light,  
pencil marks on slanted waves. But you were right,  
we write what we can't live:  
these poems are ghosts.



## Ken Rivard / THREE PROSE PIECES MORE COMMON

Here is a desert scene from nearly forty years ago and an atomic explosion has just occurred. Mannequins are used to measure the effects of an atomic bomb on the human body.

A car and truck parked in the background have all doors opened to make this research as realistic as possible. A farmer mannequin leans against the truck. Looks like he just completed the rolling of a cigarette when the bomb went off. The farmer appears to be reflecting on his existence as his cigarette waits to be lit. Although it is still early in the experiment, the farmer mannequin's skin seems healthy. Only the brim of his straw hat is singed by the heat. The rest of his clothes might be made of some miracle cloth.

In front of the farmer is a city couple. The woman mannequin, in a yellow chiffon dress, stands at a forty-five degree angle to the ground. Her exposed legs are decomposing. Her arms have disappeared. But she looks somewhat philosophical about her arms; maybe she realizes that more efficient artificial limbs will be available in a few short years. Next to her is the city husband mannequin. He stands almost at attention. He is blond-haired, wears a dark brown rumpled suit, white shirt and a bright red tie. The fringes of his clothes are not miracle-made. There are also many loose threads springing out of his shoulders. He'll survive though because he's got that strong silent stare on a perfectly chiselled face, a face that has sold many a suit of clothes from a department store window, a face more common than today's.

# THE TANIA CAROUSEL

(for Tania Laniel\*)

On the carousel today there are only two riders. One is a woman trapeze artist taking a break from rehearsing her new act. The other is her midway barker boyfriend. Both want us to feel the newness of their passion in the same way the sky teases the horizon with pre-dawn light.

The woman is dressed in white tights and her hair is tied in a thick knot above her left ear. On her head is a two-tone red beret, and her tiny ears are wooden spools recently planted into the sides of a perfectly oval head. Other circus performers call her a veteran of love because of her glowing skin. The veins on her hands are invisible, as if she did not want to reveal the strength in each of her fingers. And she is a woman of little waste because there is absolutely no flabbiness in her arms and legs. The horse she rides wears a first prize medal of sorts around its neck. But the animal's eye is bashful, perhaps because it cannot handle success as well as the woman.

Because the boyfriend wears a red jacket, red pants, pink T-shirt and a straw hat, he could be mistaken for an overflowing cotton candy machine. There are unusually thick pads in his shoulders that appear to force him to lean with his right hand on the back of his girlfriend's saddle. The barker wants everyone to believe he is completely concentrating on his girlfriend and is not the least concerned with customers throwing darts at balloons. Even his horse's mouth is wide open as if it too were enthralled with the trapeze artist. But the horse does not wear a single medal. And the barker's looks, which are those of a pretty boy mannequin, are covered in flashy clothes which try to hide a personality that went from boy to bland in record time. On this warm afternoon, the trapeze artist silently tells herself that her boyfriend will change. Soon.

Although it seems their electricity comes from an aging generator, the two lovers show promise. Maybe they both belong in a place where they can get on and off a carousel whenever they wish, a place where voltage is unnecessary, a place so far away from the homes we can never run away from.

\* Tania Laniel is a Calgary artist.

## PULSING THROUGH THEIR OPTIMISM

The rain falls as if it were cheese being grated by clouds. Under the rain two brothers stop raking leaves and offer their faces to the sky. Mouths are wide open and eyes are squeezed shut. Since the rain is so clear and abundant, the boys are confident that it will quench their thirsts. And anyone who can keep a mouth open that long has got to be optimistic.

The bigger brother wears a white T-shirt with a faded crest that could be a birthmark. He holds on to the handle of his wooden rake as if it were anchoring him to the ground. His teeth are in the way of some of the raindrops and his tongue playfully tries to keep count.

The smaller brother has ferocious concentration. His closed eyes trap more rain than his mouth, and he'll need to stand longer in the rain to get rid of his thirst. But the boy doesn't care; he's had lots of practice either crying without the rain or faking tears for the fun of it all.

There are absolutely no logical reasons for this behaviour in the rain. There is only hypnotic pulsing in each boy's chest, a pulsing that is timed with each real and imagined burst of cloud.

## D. C. Reid / IT COMES WHEN IT COMES

Mist blows at Mynydd Heulog.  
Stinging pinheads,  
                                swarm around the window.

Inside,  
winter bones keep us warm.  
Elizabethan timbers  
wrenched from roof sockets,  
100s of years old, burned  
for a Saturday's warmth.

They boil in the grate.  
Wind presses this solid  
stone cottage,  
bulges

the window  
ever so slightly  
in

at me.

I start to say I hate the wind, but catch my dissatisfied reflection in the small window. I bring one of Sarah's paintings to the light and search for her. She's in them somewhere, layered among her brushstrokes, like a drift of autumn leaves. Her canvasses are heavy, left in damp corners like discarded moods. "They'll rot you know."

Sarah shrugs and wrinkles her lip, holds her hands apart. One hand holds a knife, the other an already buttered Bara Brith loaf.

"Do you ever get up in the night?" I ask.

“Whatever for?” Sarah says. This is the same question her sister had asked before I married her; Nichola’s used to it now. The kettle boils and Sarah makes a tray at the small kitchen counter that forms one end of the livingroom. The rest of the room looks crowded with a love seat, an afterthought table and a ratty chair by the fire.

Sarah's strokes are sweeping bands of pink, shaping bodies sleek as summer legs. There are far off rumpled bedrooms oozing purple light, people imitating statues in gallery windows. Naked, her people recline, sip at straws and wait. Something is going to happen any second now. Sunlight grows through windows and walls. Plants wave tendrils on lopsided tables. Not content with waiting, they throb from their 2D worlds like octopus.

"Do they flow from you or through you?"

"Sorry? Oh, I play with the colours until they're done, I expect."

"That's how you do them, not where they come from."

Sarah concentrates on the teapot. Her fingertip just touches its lid. We haven't seen each other in years.

"Let's have tea and a bikkie first. I love the chocolate ones."

"Would you cut off a hand?" I persist. "Leave a husband if it came to that?"

Sarah curls away in her loveseat,  
arms around her knees.

A thin pencil  
of light  
draws her cheek.

Is she too young  
to be serious?

Am I too desperate?  
Is it really like drinking or breathing?  
Is it really a need?

If she threw her  
knife in the air  
it would hang there  
slicing  
the thickening air.

"What is this anyway?" I bring over a hazy pastel I know perfectly well is dim trees and shrubs in pink and yellow, hills of brown flame. I have no armour in half-light, in futzy wind.

"Why does it have to *be* anything?" Sarah tries to take the paper drawing. First one hand and then both pull at it. It shifts back and forth between us until I see Nichola in her eyes. I let go with a



wide emerald valleys,  
abandoned quarries,  
roads, pubs, a fever of people and poems,  
the pulsing sea.  
I can't believe there's anybody  
but us

"Well, what do you want?" I try. Fog climbs the window between my fingers.

"Don't we all." Coal purrs in the small stone fireplace capped with a crooked timber. The grey hardness is softened by her prints, sunshine flowers, fishing boats lying on their sides, round roly sheep leaping fences. On one stone shelf are a jar of shiny coins, a bottle of wine and two long stemmed glasses.

"Nichola will miss me," I say pulling back.

We skirt her white-washed walls on slate stepping stones mortared, it seems, where they fell. She has brought them down the mountain in buckets, left them with her muddy trowel and mortar board. The back smells of damp and creosote, fish fertilizer. There's a rotten boat, ribs pinched by the sea.

Sarah laughs at careless ways, at me for noticing. "They're beautiful, really."

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"Silly Billy. On a good day you see everything." Sarah holds her arms wide, sure she will see when the storm goes away. It comes when it comes; hedges crisscrossing hills, fields of new-cut hay, trees greening over water that speaks as it falls, trilliums by a ditch of standing water. People wait naked by rusty barbed-wire fences, frozen explosions of lichen on the blackened posts. They lean together, imperfect and human, all bony outcrops, warts, hairs, drooping breasts, slack bellies. Hands gesturing, they will speak any second now. Can she feel them breathe and beat? Doesn't she want to?

I hate the wind, I think. God, I hate it.

Sarah looks at me now, sideways and up as at someone who has said something not quite right. Her eyes turn past me to the back of her mind, trying to remember

something she almost heard me say.  
She lets go of me to concentrate,  
though her arm remains out, stretched  
toward me, the fingers reaching out  
to touch me. She will do so  
in a moment, in a sisterly,  
neighbourly way.

And she will say,  
"How can you hate the wind?"

Her chest begins to fill,  
a heart beats,

my heart

a little uneven  
a little disappointed  
a little relieved  
a little high strung.

It jumps around a frying pan,  
fibrillates like crazy.  
Feels every sizzle.

## Sandi Johnson / THREE POEMS

### HOW HE ENTERED

There's a naked man in the house.  
He entered through the rosebush;  
was closer than perfume to the rose.  
He'd lived among flowers, and worn many for the sun.  
His heart, the size of the moon, was too strong to topple.  
In the centre, where he lived, the wind,  
the colour of the air,  
was love.

He didn't knock, simply slid under the door,  
like a letter. The doorways grew round, like a poem.  
He slept under the bed, near the filing system—  
the shoebox. It was all very clear from there:  
the pollen and the darkness;  
hounds barking in the air;  
bridal veils and patent shoes.  
It was all under the bed.

## WHAT THE NAKED MAN SAW

He lived most of the day in the stairwell;  
wore his homburg in the key of C.  
He was barely visible,  
like the window of light in a lightbulb,  
or the single opening in a screen.  
He saw what crept into the corners —  
satyrs, manticores, monsters all.

He saw more than shadows.  
In the space between shadows,  
he saw Ovidian creatures  
born of darkness to the light;  
liquid, dancing chameleons;  
private things, like dreams and songs.  
The house was a keyhole around him.

There were passages, corridors of the heart.  
He heard thunder in the cranium;  
saw a fearful angel looking in.  
He knew the script; knew too much.  
The people, by closing their ears,  
were trying to stop the world.  
It moved in his heart like blood.

He knew the roof was only crayoned:  
the sky was falling in.  
The world wanted to be heard.  
A bow slid across a blade of morning grass:  
long grass fiddled in the sun.  
He saw the moon tremble in a drop of water:  
heard the earth sing;  
saw stars, like pollen, float into its singing mouth.

## THE NAKED MAN AT A WESTERN MOVIE

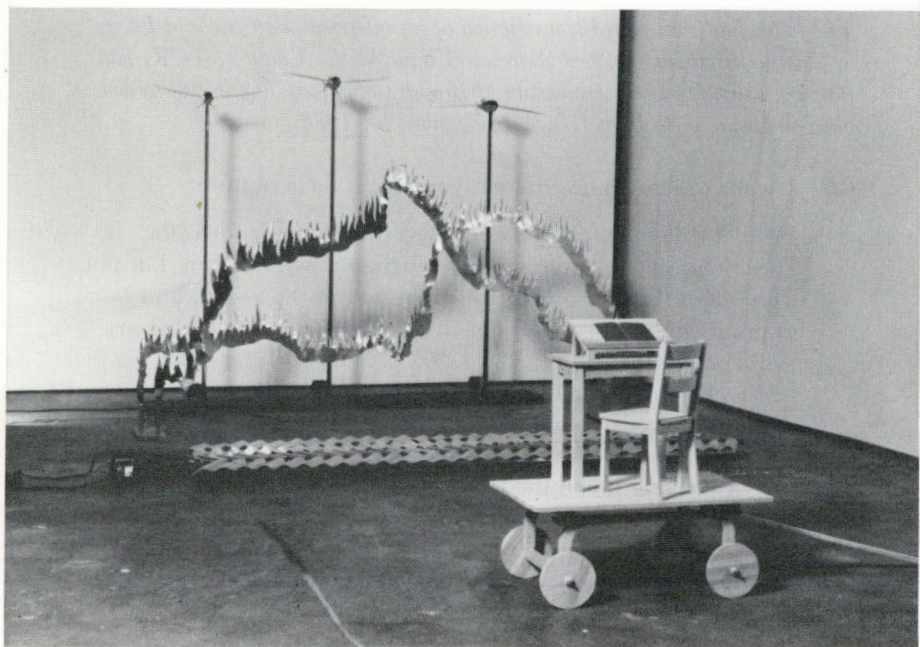
It was a John Ford film,  
and the naked man wore cowboy boots.  
Bette Hutton worked the concession,  
cooking over an open fire.

The hero was a victim, and he could sing.  
Scenes flooded with primary colours,  
and bugles blaring.  
Horses thundered in pursuit.  
He was born in the year of the cinema.

After the movie, the theatre was empty.  
There was the sound of hooves, hollow on the earth,  
and tumbleweed blew in the aisles.  
From the projection room, came the ring  
of the farrier's hammer;  
sparks sizzling white and blue.



## Richard Prince / RECENT SCULPTURE



## INTERVIEW

*The following is an edited transcription of an interview with Richard Prince by Camille Breitman, Student Associate Visual Media Editor of TCR, and Barbara Larivière of the University of British Columbia. The interview took place in Prince's studio at UBC on November 24, 1988.*

**CB** I want to know how you get your ideas for sculpture.

**RP** Well, I think one can talk about getting specific ideas for specific pieces. One gets grand schemes now and then, but not very often. I think one is just interested in the world, and I think if you're curious about the world, ideas for making art will come to you.

I've been making art now for about twenty years, and taking it seriously, and have a store of images which I've already made, each one tending to lead to another. Normally, one is walking down the street, driving a car, reading a book, watching television, going to see a movie, and all of a sudden some piece of visual or literary information will jump out and for whatever reason it's captured, and you say, "Now there's an interesting notion about which to make a sculpture."

**BL** I find your style is quite a cool style, or it appears to be quite cool because of the materials you use, yet it all relates back to objects in nature. In the waves, and the flying fish, there appears to be a romantic element in your work. How do you feel about that coolness versus nature?

**RP** How one gets one's ideas is distinct from the origins of style, which are equally complex. One of them is the fact that I have a certain method, or a certain set of skills, and the physical skills become determining factors in the making of the work. With certain kinds of tools, certain kinds of things are easily produced. In the use of wood, a certain kind of joinery will be

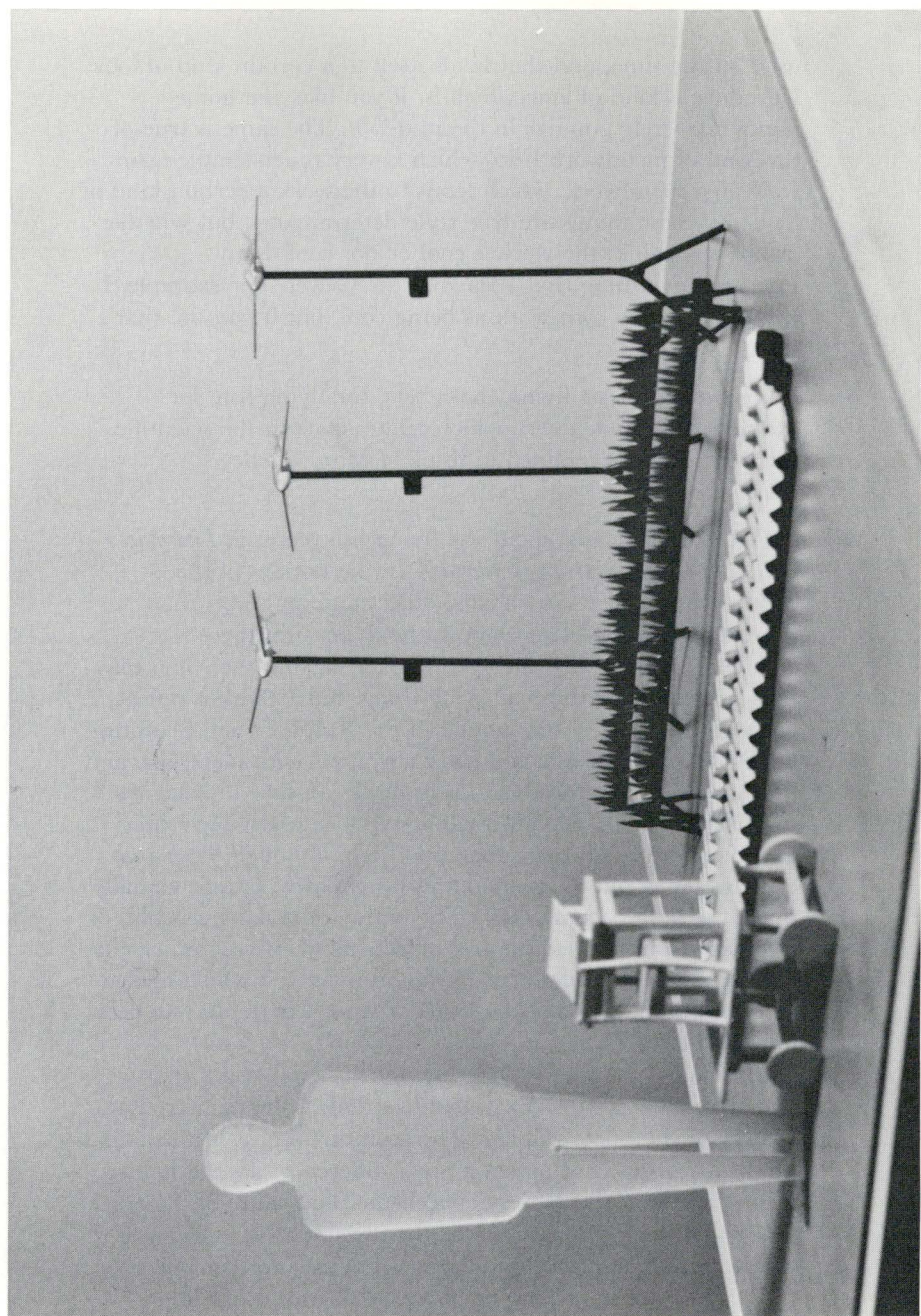
used all the time, and that lends itself to a certain kind of look. I produce a kind of look which is, if you like, the home-handyman style popular in the mid-'50s. The same is true of the kind of metalwork I do, which is very much simple farm workshop metalwork, which lends to the work a certain kind of look. All these things are true style determinants, but whether or not one thinks the work is cool or not cool, is an interpretative thing that I leave to the viewer. For example, I wouldn't see my own work as being cool, but if you do, that's fine.

*BL* When you combine living characters, the flying fish, for example, with machinery which relates back to the scientific revolution, one is inclined to think of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* robot.

*RP* Let's talk specifically about the flying fish piece, in *Literature (With the Coast of Africa in Flames)*. In the notions of the contrast between a mechanized object and an object that represents a living being such as the flying fish, there is a common concern with the robot-maker, in that the robot may be a substitute for the real living thing. But I think it reflects back even farther, to the notion of the sculptor's act. Sculpture is an odd way to perform a metamorphosis with materials, and that's what the sculptor's job is to do. I can take a piece of marble, as a sculptor, and I can carve it into a living being, and therefore I can turn stone into flesh, although I can't go quite as far as old Pygmalion and his Galatea; I can't actually make the flesh become alive. The notion of making a robot, or of making any of these natural objects move, is very much that of trying to create the image of life in an object which has no life. I think that's really the heart of what I'm doing, the heart of the sculptor's act.

The sculptor works in the same dimensional realm that we live in. It's not an illusory world like that of the painter or the drawer or the photographer. The sculpture works in the actual physical world. That makes a great difference; it's the nature of this constant opposition between the physicality of the object made and the illusion of life, or the illusion of whatever you're trying to represent in the sculpture. This always remains a much more constant kind of conflict than can occur in painting, where the viewer automatically accepts the notion of the illusion as being built into the nature of that medium.





*CB* Would you say that's one of the reasons you go to model-making as opposed to drawing for your initial studies?

*RP* Well, it might be. I think there's a much more pragmatic reason, which is that I'm not a very good drawer, and I've never enjoyed the act of drawing. Somehow, I've just never become accustomed to doing it, and therefore it's not part of my vocabulary of action. However, from the very beginning, ever since I've been a child, I've made things in a craftlike sense, and so that's something that I'm much more familiar with, and it's also something I'm much better at. I like the three-dimensional or physical qualities of an object, so I tend to do all my preliminary work in that form. It's only since about 1980 that I've begun to make models leading to a large object—or in some cases not leading to a large object. It comes out of certain practical considerations; for example, the time invested in making a large piece can be considerable, as can the economic outlay. Therefore one wants to test ideas out, in a simpler and perhaps cheaper form. And a quicker form, too. Model making is a very practical way to go about doing that. And for me, it's more practical, and more enjoyable, and more satisfying than drawing.

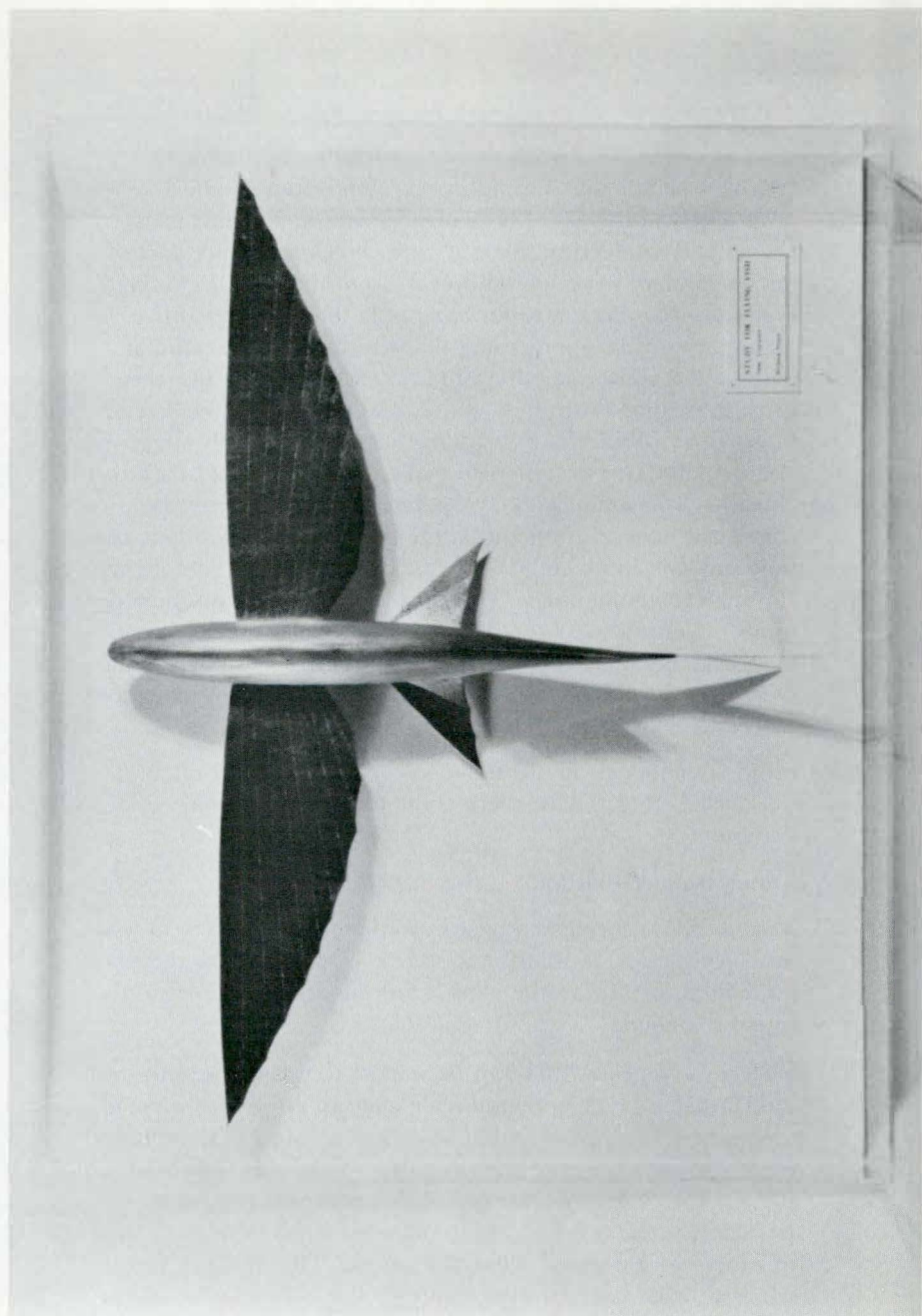
*CB* I find your models so attractive in themselves that I often wonder whether the art piece is the model or the final sculpture.

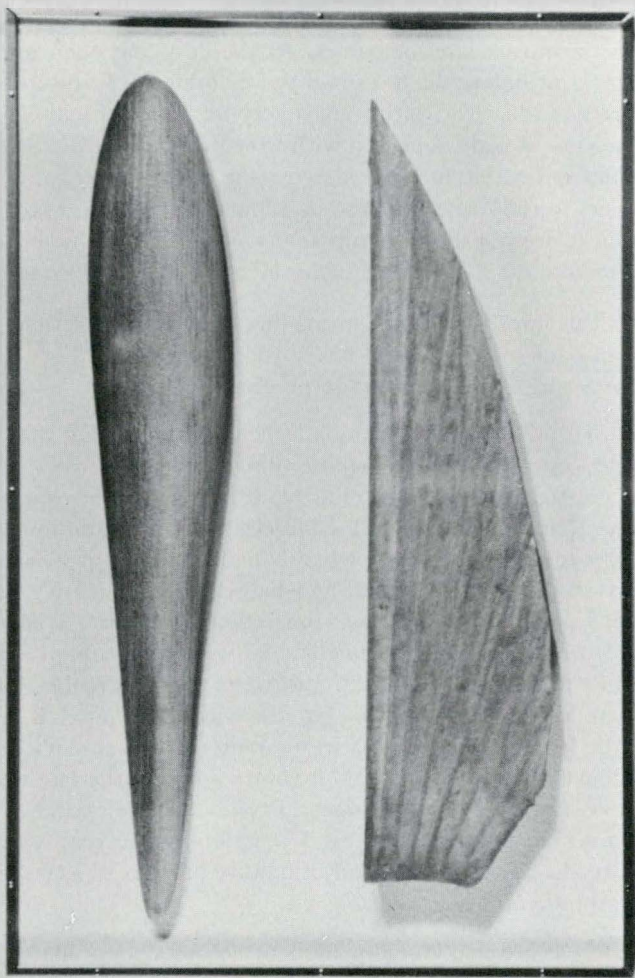
*RP* I often wonder that too.

*CB* A sculptor can be encouraged in contemporary society to make an object larger, so that the grandeur is what startles the individual, but I find the models are the actual art pieces, the rough diamonds.

*RP* Well, in some cases they can be, except that there is built into model-making that notion of scale change. Now with some of the objects this idea of scale is very precise, and in some the notion of scale is either played with or extremely imprecise. Of the work presented in this article, for example, the piece, *Literature*, presents a number of different scales of objects, some of which are extremely clear and simple. The flying fish are what we would accept as normal fish size, whereas the waves are presented at some anonymous information size. It happens to be the size available in sheet metal siding. The flames are







almost arbitrary size for flames, yet the desk and chair are very precisely at half scale, too small to be children's furniture and too large to be toys. So it's got a very odd kind of scale, and the notion of scale is played with very particularly, because I wanted to be able to break down some of the theatrical barriers to the piece, but also to allow the viewer to roam within it, from a more omnipotent viewpoint. I wanted the viewer to have the sense of being in control of the viewpoint.

*CB* Does this interest in scale, in making things to perfection, reflect back to your initial interest in architecture? For architecture is really an art in precision. . . .

*RP* Well, I think it can be. I think largely it's something that was trained into me, by just making things as a child, whether it was plastic models or model airplanes or any of the other things that I made as a kid. I noticed that if I made something well, it looked better than when I made it badly: it was more satisfying, or worked better, or whatever. So I think it's just a habit I got into, doing things precisely. Eventually, it became a defensible stance in the intellectual way. One thing is that we live in a world of objects, and we're all of us really very precise at criticizing objects. No one accepts a toaster if the handle falls off. Somehow I see no reason why art can't be made as well as a toaster. So it comes down to the fact that we do live in a world of real objects from which we expect a certain kind of quality, and so I function in that real world too and try to put the same kind of quality into art objects. It's something you learn to do.

*CB* When you are making your models, do you choose the materials at that point, or is it after the models have been finished, when you start working on the larger piece, that you choose your materials?

*RP* I've always known the final scale of the eventual object that I wanted to produce, within fairly reasonable limits, and therefore the models themselves are intended to represent materials which are conceived of as part of the original piece.

*BL* The origins of your work seem to be in the scientific revolution. What brought this to my attention was the picture you have of Henning Brandt, the discoverer of phosphorus, which was apparently one of your inspirations for *Tropic (Mercury Pump)*. I felt that you'd obviously seen and thought about the discovery of phosphorus, and that that had led you to — not to the phosphorus itself — but to the scientific revolution. The Henning Brandt picture symbolizes the anomalous nature of scientific revolutions. Could I ask you to talk about science and the way you use machinery in combination with nature?

*RP* What you're saying is true. But my interest in the scientific revolution is mainly as an image of any kind of change, or more precisely, what might be my romantic or literary attachment to that image of change — that's what is at heart exciting.

Your initial question has to do with the nature of materials. One often can get excited by a material *per se*, and use that as a background, or use that inspiration of the nature of material, to try to form a piece. Both the pieces, *Tropic*, for example, and *Ex Machina*, are fundamentally based on the idea of exploring the nature of material. In one case, the idea is to present the material — this molten gold-like substance — as a substance pure and simple in itself, as a substance of awe, or wonderment, or magic. In that case it refers very directly to this image of Henning Brandt and the discovery of phosphorus by Joseph Wright of Derby. Because that image itself presents the wonderment of the discovery by the alchemist-philosopher who's produced purified phosphorus.

But for me, it's not the scientific revolution *per se* that I'm interested in. I'm not exploring the idea of science, but am excited by the notion of scientific discovery as a model for the creative act. Obviously in this case, it's my own creative act, making a discovery about some aspect of the visual or physical world; I use that as the moment of excitement, and then build a piece around that.

\* \* \*





CB I'm interested in the functional aspect of your work.

RP You mean the fact that certain parts work?

CB Yes, exactly. Could you elaborate on this?

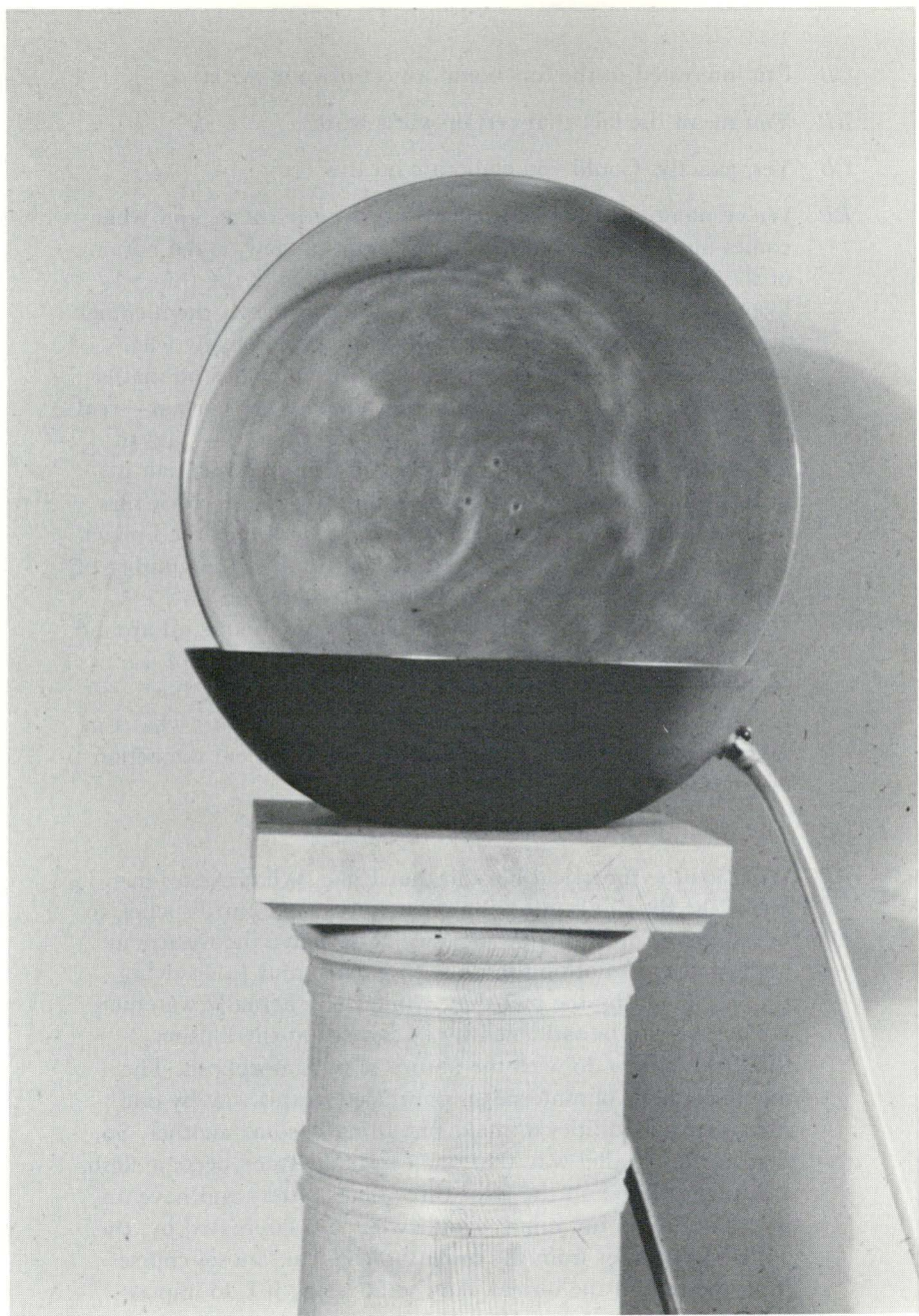
RP We've mentioned Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* robot, and what comes out of that, from the artist's point of view, is the notion of the theatre. It has to do with illusion. One of the things I like about making the works move is that it makes them come alive for me. I know they come alive in a kind of silly way, sometimes—fish flapping their wings are ridiculous no matter how you look at it. But it's just that blend of the normal—real life—and the ridiculous—the surreal and the odd—that to me makes the notion of the mechanism working essential: it brings the whole piece to life. One thing I've accepted is that we live in the world of machines, and, second, that the impact of machinery on our lives is vast. If you think of the number of electric motors in the average middle-class kitchen in Vancouver, it's astounding. We have electric motors all around us all the time. I find it's part of our world, so why not use them? But I use them not just because they're there, but because they actually cause things to happen. That's what I'm saying by them. The theatrical happening is where the action of life starts.

CB The visual illusion?

RP Well, it's the theatrical illusion that I like. What excites me about the theatre is our willingness to suspend our disbelief, to watch actors on the stage, who we know leave the theatre at night and have nothing to do with Romeo and Juliet dying. I'm fascinated by the fact that, while we're actually watching a play, we can be saddened by it, can cry at the illusion. I think this has to do with the nature of metamorphosis. The metamorphosis of materials is paralleled in this way by our metaphorical abilities to make one thing become another. So that in the parallel way that one can make stone become flesh, I can see printed on the page three black letters and have an image of dog in my mind. That's what I'm fascinated by, the ability to transfer from the unreal to the real, and of course from the real to the unreal. And so at heart, if I do impose motors in the works, it's to bring that reality into question.

\* \* \*







CB Perhaps what we could do next is look at each piece individually and ask you to explain where it came from, what it's about. Let's start with *Ex Machina*.

RP I always think of the series as being in the order of literature, *Ex Machina* and *Tropic*, but that's perhaps only because I constructed them that way. Let's start with *Ex Machina*. The disc image is something that I've been playing with for many years and I like it because of its simplicity, its clarity, and the fact that it's such a nice basic image. As a disc form it has the ability to be fully three-dimensional. But the specific piece itself arises out of the notion of trying to get gold to flow from A to B and back again. You mentioned romantic literature—

BL Well, romantic literature, and more than that: I mean the fountain of youth, or the elixir of life, or alchemy.

RP That's right. If we go back to Henning Brandt, of course we move into alchemy. Another image of romance is the notion of the search for El Dorado, that mythical Golden Man of the New World, the man who annointed himself with gold every morning and dived into the sacred lake. And it's that kind of romantic image, Pizarro's search for El Dorado, or Ponce de Leon's search for the fountain of youth—the ultimate search for the holy grail, without religious connotations. Also, specific images. I remember watching, oddly enough, a television programme, PBS or the Knowledge Network perhaps, talking about the refining of gold in South Africa. There was one image of all this molten gold being poured into ingot forms. I saw all this beautiful molten gold flowing from one terraced ingot to the next terraced ingot down, until one would fill up, and overflow into the next one down—it was the most beautiful image—and at that moment, that's when I started conceiving this piece. Because, naturally, when you're thinking—the image of gold is there—the thoughts of El Dorado are fairly easy to dredge out of one's memory, but at that point I thought wouldn't it be incredible to have a river of molten gold flowing through your livingroom. And it starts with that simple, basic domestic thought.

*BL* And then you ask, "Can I make it?"

*RP* That's exactly what happens.

*BL* It's a modern day attempt to be an alchemist.

*RP* Well, an alchemist, or else just —

*BL* A magician, because it's all an illusion?

*RP* I like the idea of art as magic; that's an interesting way to look at it. But after that, it comes down to a functioning piece. I went to the workshop the next day. I knew I couldn't actually make the river of molten gold and had to find some substitute. As I was doing that, putting it together as an image, a number of source materials came to mind, which I used. One, for instance, is this image of the broken column, which is something I had seen in photographs of a museum in southern France, which intrigued me tremendously, because I like the notion of the column which can't support itself. It's kind of like revisionist history, perhaps, the notion of history as being something which is both reality and interpretative reality, or unreal reality. The cart on which the column is placed is similar, in a way, to the column. I actually like these carts and vehicles in the sculpture, because I like the notion of the instability and insecurity they provide for something you might think was extremely stable and heavy. It comes out as a fascination with the history of technology and transportation.

*CB* That recurs in literature as well.

*RP* Yes, the Rolling Scholars' desk is on a cart; it recurs in many earlier pieces, and in pieces being developed. The architectural entablature on which the gold column is posed is a kind of nice way to get back to the architectural reference which is implied in the column, and to help root the thing in both slightly artificial and romantic notions of classical architecture. But all of these pieces form an insecure architectural framework or support system for the action at heart. It's like the chemist's bench becoming the support for the experiment on top, the experiment with the gold. These become not only physical supports as in the chemist's bench, but also intellectual historical supports for the idea of the experiment in the first place. I think they'll all go together as one piece.

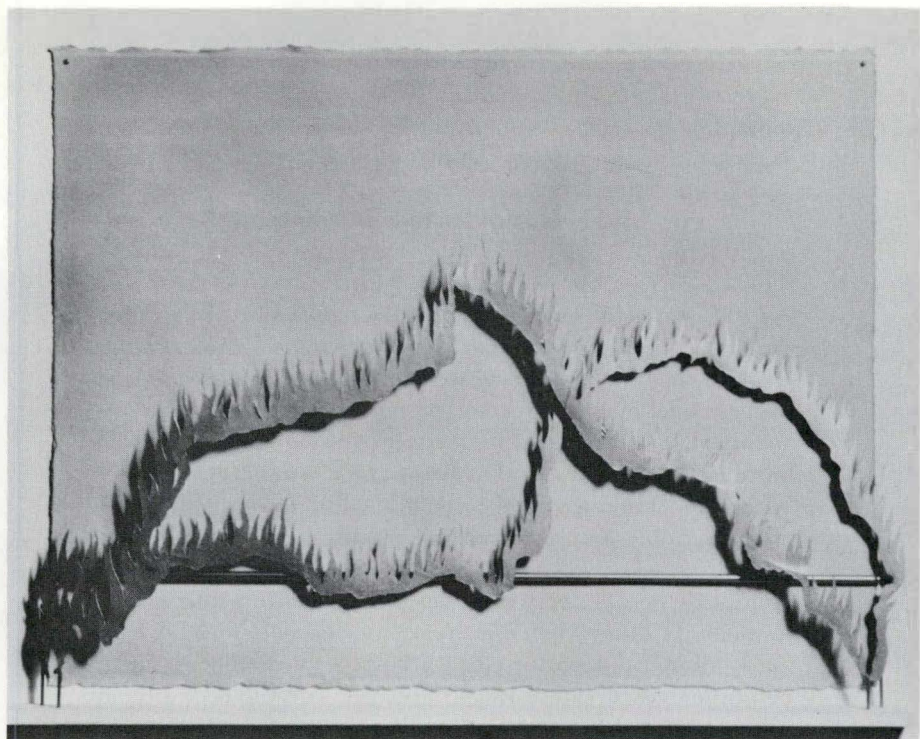
This is seen equally well, I think, in the piece called *Tropic*, or the mercury pump piece, where there's obviously a chemistry bench portrayed, in the style of the nineteenth or eighteenth century. I was in the Museum of Technology in Paris and saw Lavoisier's work bench there, on which he did initial experiments in gases and the theory of gases. The bench itself has a specific origin in a real chemist's bench, but it has an intense romantic association, that of the discovery of science itself. And of course of Lavoisier's sad end in the French Revolution.

*BL* It's difficult to tell whether you're a realist, or whether it is symbolism, or whether it is abstraction of reality. There's a strange combination of the functional aspect, the intellectual concepts that are behind it, and the romantic; it's very difficult to try to pin you down.

*RP* I don't think it's sensible to categorize me in some set way, and say, "He is a formalist," or "He is a minimalist," or anything like that. The fact is I produce each object to have meaning and they're not done innocently or naively. I intend them to have meaning. I don't necessarily demand that the viewer see in them exactly what I put into them. I want to present objects with a certain kind of potency, so that they can be interpreted by the viewer, so that they do have a visual life of their own. I'm not there to explain the pieces once I go. The only explanation the viewer might get is the title alone, and one would hope that the works themselves have enough visual impact to cause the viewer to question why they were made in this way, and to be able to search into his own mind or areas of interest to begin to understand the piece.

*CB* How does the burning coast of Africa come into the sculpture?

*RP* Well, one thing is that the world of the mind, which is what I believe the sculptures are all about, need not necessarily be descriptive. It's possible to have thoughts about one area of knowledge, and thoughts about another area of knowledge, and to be able to bring those together, perhaps in the old surrealist tradition, and hope that the impact of these two kinds of knowledge will produce poetic resonance. That's what I was hoping for, in this piece, which has certain realistic elements. For example, the flying fish. The fish come out of the Folk Art style tradition, which means that you're imposing on the work one level of resonance here, the notion of the simple object which imitates the real, and it's simplicity is very clearly and directly stated in the piece. There are other very simply directed images, for example the crude representation of the waves. There's a certain mechanistic elegance in the galvanized steel roof cladding being used in imitation of the waves, with the ripples of waves in the sand bars when the waves have passed by. All these become representations of the real thing. The burning coast of Africa connects to that theatrical representation of literature, the notion of reading. It's the one thing which, although it is a real element, with real fireplace-sized flame, is a direct response to the need to put another level of poetic resonance into the piece. Initially the flames had been conceived to be flat bars of flame, and if you look at the initial model of the piece you notice them this way. But the actual flames themselves, in the shape of the coast of Africa, came out of one of those serendipitous situations where I had phoned a friend and mentioned to him that I'd just completed making the ocean; he was chiding me in a humorous way for my arrogance in having attempted to make the sea, and he said, "What's next? the entire coast of Africa?" That's when I got the inspiration to change the flames from a flat bar of flame into one representing the shape of Africa as you see in on the map. It has actually both coasts of Africa, the east coast sitting in front of the west coast. You can see it on this side, it's basically from Algeria through to South Africa, and it was just a way of lightening the piece both visually and intellectually, which goes back to the thing you were talking about initially, a fascination for romantic literature. I don't think it's romantic literature in the literal





way: that is I'm not actually following the poems of Wordsworth, Browning and so on, but I am by nature a romantic, as I think I state in the catalogue. But it's a question of romantic inspiration in the best sense of romance—that which causes one to have reveries about the nature of real life. Out of a reverie about the idea of literature came the notion of trying to portray what it was like to read. It's a very hard thing to portray, the notion of literature.

I did actually conceive the piece as a unit, once I had made the first flying fish, and made the first flying fish flap its wings. It was a question of altering some of the pieces. This was done in the model-making process, through that serendipitous comment, and finally, at the end, by looking at the piece very hard and asking myself what had to be changed. Between the initial model and the final piece, there are quite a number of changes. Some were changed for reasons of visual design. But basically it was conceived as a unit. It was conceived on this large scale to talk about that aspect of literature which I enjoy so much. It's that when one opens a good book, a well-written book, all of a sudden the words that you see disappear, and you're presented with a series of images, and the book becomes as real as a real experience. Now in this case I used a theatrical model, because like a theatrical model it emphasizes the nature of our willingness to suspend disbelief, in these black marks on the page, and to begin to see those as the real image. That's what fascinates me. So this piece again parallels that theatrical suspension of disbelief and looks at the literary suspension of disbelief.

*CB* Is there any political statement at all?

*RP* No. And I'm not unaware of the situation in Africa—you can't open a newspaper without being aware of it. But it's not the Africa of the newspapers; it's the Africa of literature. The piece is literature, and the Africa of literature that I respond to is that notion of darkest Africa, that kind of Africa which resonates not in the flames as in the burning down of houses, or the "necklace" and the people in South Africa, but in the notion of the campfire around which one sits, in the notion of the story of Africa. I have at home a wonderful small book which I picked up at a second hand store once, and it's called—the title is written in green and the spine is gold—it's called *Stories by English Authors: Africa*. And it's all stories by

nineteenth century writers, stories of the Africa of my childhood reading. This is not a political Africa; it's a literary Africa. And it may be artificial. But oddly enough, it's as real as the real Africa. And that's what this piece states: that the reality of literature can be ascribed to the real world.

*BL* It seems that there's this conflict in you, though. There's this coolness in your art because of the materials and because of the machinery that propels the living imagery.

*RP* I don't believe that in visual art one has to get a physical tactile response to enjoy art. So I don't worry about that in my own pieces. I set them up and, yes, there is a certain kind of coolness and distance that I function with in my own work. But my primary enjoyment of them and other visual art is visual, so that is actually built into the nature of the pieces themselves. In the case of the pieces encased in acrylic boxes and so on, it's partly done for protection; it's partly done to enhance the precious nature of the objects, to give them that precious museum feel. But at the same time, I don't try, in the case of something in an acrylic box, to restrict the enjoyment of it, because as I say, the enjoyment I feel in sculpture is fundamentally visual and intellectual as opposed to tactile and intuitive.

*BL* The piece *Literature* is broken into four different components. Your other pieces all seem to be attached, held together as one unique piece; this is the only one that I can think of where the work is broken up into four distinct pieces.

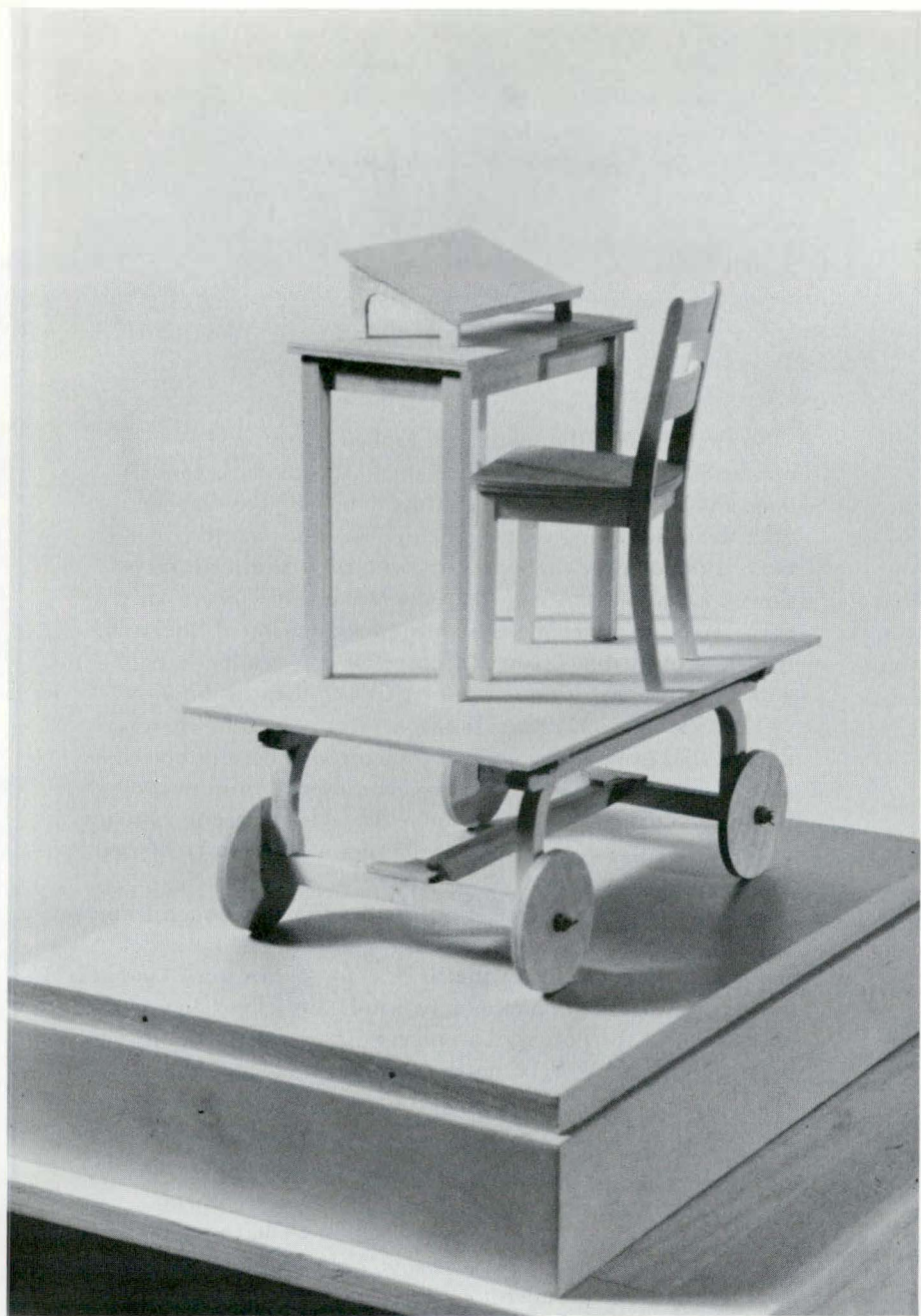
*RP* It has to do with the nature of scale, the nature of theatre, the intimacy of the piece. Although the piece is quite large, and the pieces have a physical separation between them, I knew they would be presented in a gallery context, and therefore would have the definition of being one piece by having sufficient space around them. I did not want to unify the pieces, for example, by putting them on some kind of other floor, or platform, because I think it would emphasize too much the theatrical nature of the work; in other words, it would cause the thing to be more about theatre than I wished.



While it sits on the floor, each of these pieces relates to the others, and yet also allows the viewer to relate to them directly, by being able to walk through and among the pieces, and to stand on the same floor on which the pieces stand. Now that also implies the notion of viewpoint, and I've been fairly careful to try to set it up in such a way that the viewpoint, which I intended to be the first viewpoint of the piece, follows the cart over the waves to the flying fish beyond. I've always set it up in galleries so that that's the initial viewpoint. And I think that because of our anthropomorphic notions of nature and beasts, and confronting other people and so on, that most of us would tend to feel that if I'm going to look at this, I want to face the fish, rather than face the fishes' tails.

*BL* Yet, just as in Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*, where there are four different people, and the books show each of their viewpoints, and there's an order to the books, so in your piece you can go from the scholar's chair, to the waves, to the burning coast of Africa, and you can go to the flying fish, and you can look at the story behind each one of those. They are four characters in a play, and there is distinct interplay between the four pieces, and yet at the same time they hold their individuality in their origins and in their space and form.

*RP* Yes, there are those separate elements, and each element is intended to be read as a particular thing; you have to make it very clear what's behind those objects by their representations. For example, the Rolling Scholar's desk, which I very precisely based on a library chair and a standard kind of table, so it would have a very sensible and immediate feel: almost anybody who looked at that would read it as being a standard library type chair, and then it was put on the Rolling Scholar's cart for very specific reasons. One is that it implies linearity, the same kind of linearity we have in reading a book; it also provides a temporal implication. It's interesting that you mention *The Alexandria Quartet*, because I didn't really understand that temporal implication until I'd gone to Egypt and had a chance to look at a lot of Egyptian sculpture, and to study Egyptian history, and realize that so often in Egyptian art the objects were placed on sleds to imply that movement through time, through life. In other words, that we're born, we live and then we die, that we go forward on some kind of a path.

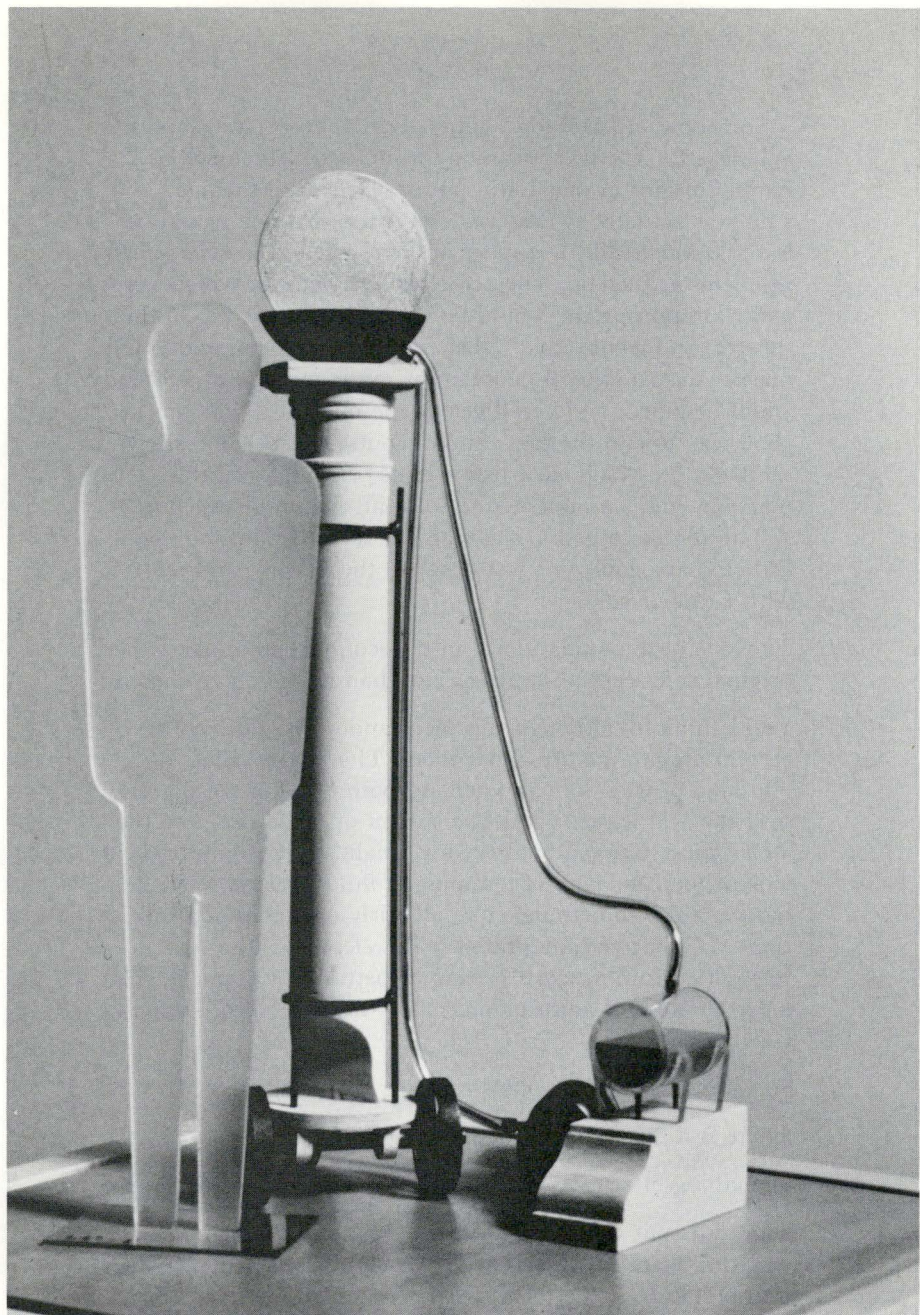


So that sense of the temporal, implied by the cart as opposed to a sled, is very important to this piece, because it does involve itself, not only indirectly, but directly in time, with the slow pacing that the flying fish raise, counting out six beats a minute. Or the waves, moving back and forth very slowly. Like counting out the beats of the waves, there's a rhythmic aspect, so time is both implied and stated directly in the piece. And that's part and parcel of how reading a book, and literature, takes time. I hope that's evident in the piece.

The title of *Ex Machina* initially was "El Dorado." It was part of that original inspiration. I changed it because the title seemed inappropriate to the work. It didn't seem to imply what I wanted, which was a fairly theatrical device to raise up in an artificial way this disk of gold and allow it to be viewed as an object of wonder.

The piece has certain religious implications, although I don't think it's about religion as such. But certainly the notion of invoking awe in an object that is dear to you, or some kind of absolutely immediate aesthetic response, has its parallels in religion. And the notion of an object placed upon a column to raise it up, to make it be noticed, has religious parallels. I think of Venice, for example, and the two columns in the Piazzetta outside the Piazza San Marco, where St. Theodore conquers the crocodile, on one side, and on the other side sits the lion of St. Mark, on the top of his column. Political parallels exist in all the columns in which we have figures of victory, or of liberty, of Napoleon or Nelson standing on the top. So there are parallels for the use of the column and for the notion of religious or political theatre, which is how those things fit.





Somehow “El Dorado” didn’t seem appropriate to that. Whereas *Ex Machina*, meaning “from (or of) the machine,” implies origins in that Latin phrase, *Deus Ex Machina*. This was actually a theatrical chair device which would be lowered almost like a trapeze in Greek theatre to solve all the problems at the end. The actor playing Zeus, or whichever god was appropriate, would be lowered from the top of the theatre, and would say, “Okay, you’ll marry you, and you’ll marry you, and you’ll be unhappy, and you’ll go to jail, and you’ll be killed, and you’ll get all the money.” That was a good way to end the play, and of course this became known as the *Deus Ex Machina*. I like it in its original form, this machine-god coming down to solve all the problems! But calling the piece god in the machine seemed a bit too much, a little too arrogant, so I just dropped the “Deus” and was left with *Ex Machina*.

*BL* The lack of the human form in the sculpture also makes the original title seem less appropriate than what you’ve chosen.

*RP* Yes, I think so, although this piece and *Tropic* do have a certain human quality about them. They do parallel, in an odd kind of way, human size, and both of them are slightly over-life—at least *Ex Machina* is a bit over-life size, and the *Tropic* piece is actually about my height, so it’s about right to look at, but this kind of pumping of fluids from A to B and back again is something we’re all fairly conscious of at all times. It has a certain kind of body reference, a human reference. Humanized is perhaps a better way to put it, there’s a certain kind of anthropomorphic—not reference—but resonance.

*BL* So we’re back to the robots that are people again.

*RP* There is that robotic element to them.

*BL* Something of arteries, these fluids contained by machines.

*RP* That does put the robotic element back in, although I wouldn’t want to stress that too much as the single obvious interpretation of the piece, because it’s certainly not. But it’s one or more of these layers that one tries to build into the piece.

*BL* The important thing is that the scientific revolution did have a tremendous impact on your choice of subject matter.

*RP* That's absolutely the case. I live in the modern world that's been shaped so much by the scientific revolution. You mentioned Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as source material, and I think in an odd way it is. *Frankenstein* is one of the first pieces of modern literature. It's a model for much contemporary thought about the nature of our own humanity, of our relationship to technology, the deep implication of technology gone wild, the implications of our control over that technology. Of course, one of the things one always talks about, as a sculptor, is the nature of the control one has over a piece, both while constructing it, and to some extent, after letting it loose on the world.

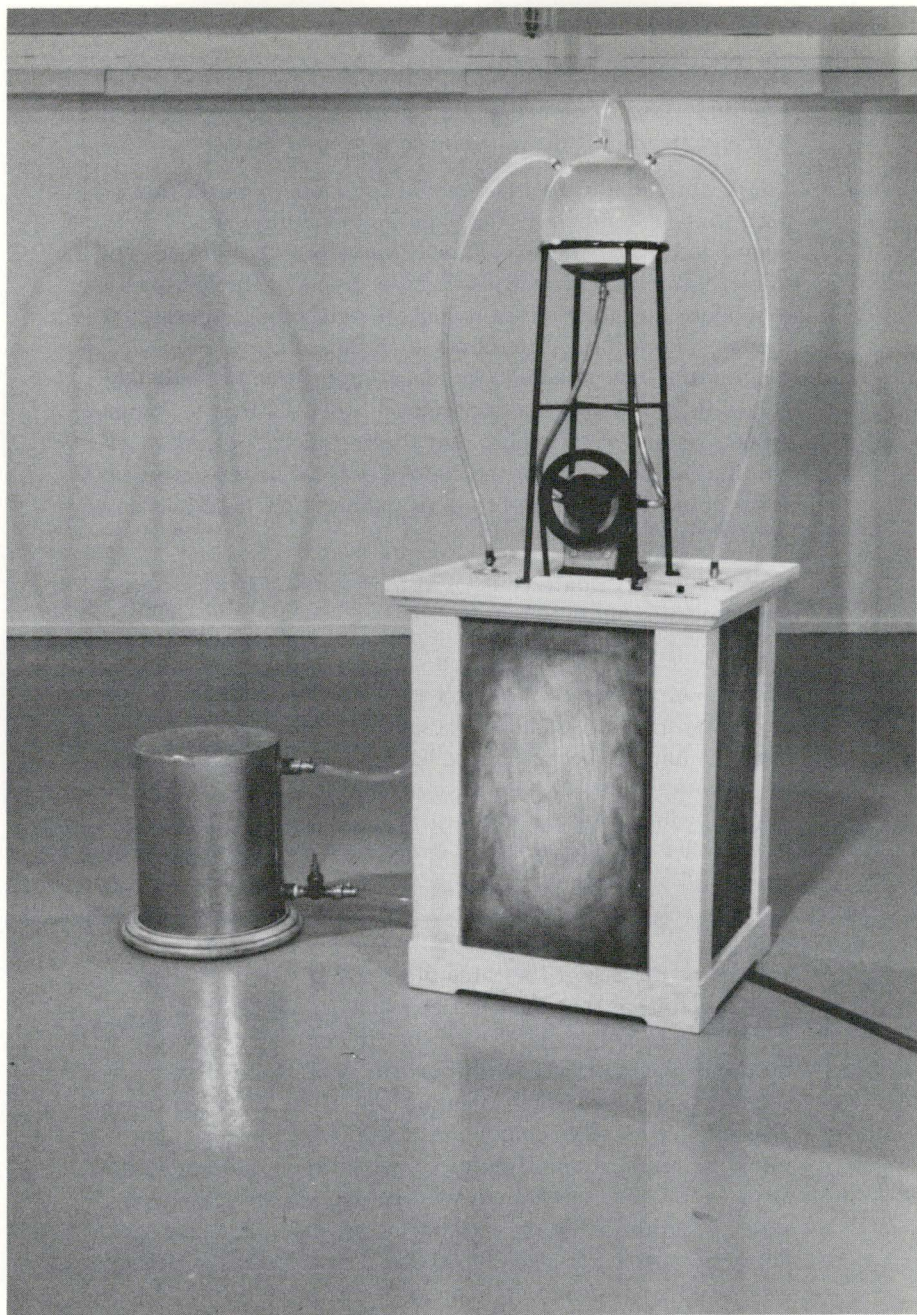
*BL* If you had to evaluate yourself as part of one particular group, or a type of sculptor —

*RP* Well, like everybody else, I'm a contemporary sculptor in a contemporary time. But I don't see myself as belonging to any particular group. I don't at the same time think of what I'm doing as unique, because there have been other sculptors in the twentieth century who have utilized machinery, and I'm just following in their fairly largish tradition. I can think of many other precedents, that I can get from the library books which talk about that.

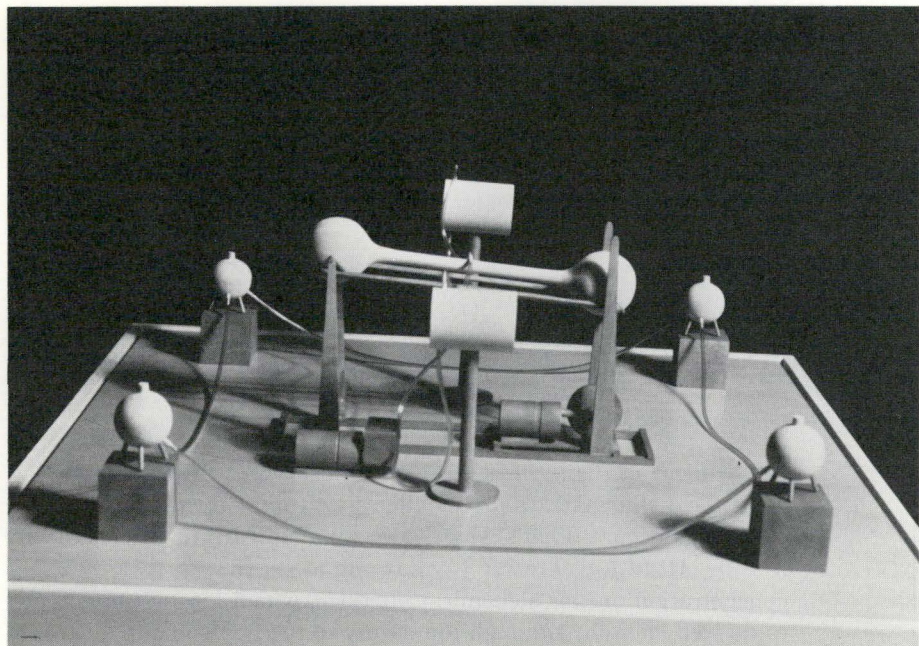
*CB* How did you get the name for *Tropic*?

*RP* *Tropic* was the last of the three pieces constructed. It comes out very much from that image of Henning Brandt and the discovery of phosphorus. I used that image when I tried to set up the problem of how to support the glass globe. The construction is somewhat different from that, for visual reasons. The title of the piece comes out of wanting to give a slight romantic implication to the piece, which the notion of Tropic, as in Tropic of Cancer, links with geography and cosmology, which are implied by these things in the piece, and mercury pump because I felt it really needed a description of itself in a way *Ex Machina* didn't. The heart of this piece is this notion of pumping, of one material being moved to pump against the other all the time.









The heart of the piece is this glass globe, where this magic alchemical change takes place, where two things are mixed yet no change occurs. That's what it was all about. In the original, *Massing Model for "Tropic,"* I was trying to get the concentration on this alchemical interface, which I wasn't able to do well enough, although the nature of the fluids might have been clearer in the original model. But the nature of the point of interaction, which was critical to me, was not. That comes back to the image of Henning Brandt, where the entire focus of that sculpture is also the source of light, in this glowing chamber of phosphorus.

*CB* Does this ball light up?

*RP* No, the ball does not light up, no. It obviously is a very bright, attractive area; when the piece is lit, it's the piece that attracts all the light. It's also the piece that is in front of your eyes; it's evidently the focus of the action. When a viewer presses the button, all of sudden there's a cascade of silver bubbles falling through the water.

*CB* They look like air bubbles but it's actually mercury.

*RP* Mercury splashing through water. The other reason for the name "Tropic" is that I wanted a name that is non-specific for this piece, for I wanted the concentration to be more and more on the nature of the interaction itself, the physical response, rather than intellectual response.

The other implication of "Tropic," the one I hoped might connect, is that notion of the geographic one, the Tropic of Cancer, that is, the Tropic as a reality.

*CB* Does that fit in with the mercury pump?

*RP* Yes, because that's what it is. It is a mercury pump. Also, it implies the age of discovery. It's a very obscure thought, (or plot?) I must admit, and one of the things that we mentioned before is the notion of coolness. This work visually perhaps is cooler than all of the others. The colours are grey and white and black. It has no other colour involved in it at all. Graphically, or emotionally, it's a very cool piece. It takes this hot notion of tropics and cools it down to a much more abstract notion of geography as opposed to region. That's something I tend to do in a lot of pieces. I do impose a certain distance in all the work in that way. I see them as tools almost for meditation, tools for contemplation, as opposed to scientific instruments. None of these objects, despite their scientific look, in any way at all proves anything. They make no scientific experiments whatsoever, and they don't claim to do that. But they are all tools for contemplation.

*CB* And in the other pieces, do you talk about religion as contemplation?

*RP* I don't think contemplation is necessarily linked to religion.

*CB* Meditation?

*RP* Yes, but those are human actions and not necessarily religious.

*BL* There's no religious connotation in your work, is there?

*RP* No, I've never thought there was. I think there's human connotation.

*BL* And no political overtones?

*RP* They tend not to be political. I don't see them as political. Although some people do not see this — and see them as only political because of their own intense beliefs. But that's the nature of the object. The object goes out there and people will impose on it their own thoughts. I see nothing wrong with that. I can imagine that someone with a deep concern for ecological pollution might look at *Tropic (Mercury Pump)* and his first thoughts would be about the poisonous nature of mercury in water.

*BL* Were those your thoughts at the time you were making it?

*RP* One has to be extremely careful when working with mercury. But that's a practical consideration. I don't believe it plays a fundamental part in the sculpture. It's the notion of mercury as quicksilver, one of the materials discovered by the early alchemists, which in itself has visual and intellectual fascination, and historical connection to ideas of alchemy and to our own personal history. It's the fascination children feel when they first get to play with a little lump of mercury, which we've all done in school. The sculpture talks then not about science, but about wonderment. That's what I want the pieces to talk about. I want them to talk about wonderment and the ideas of excitement, of curiosity, of creativity, of commitment.

*CB* Do they follow the rules of science?

*RP* They follow the rules of technology but not science.

*CB* Are you learning from and experimenting with the tricks and illusions to —

*RP* To some extent I'm experimenting with illusions and I enjoy the process that implies for myself, but the objects themselves are sculptures, and sculptures are not scientific devices. They are aesthetic devices, philosophical devices. They are objects which imply an examination for intellectual and contemplative reasons and that's how I want these to function as well. So, although they may resemble objects of utility from another field, they are not. They are sculptures. That's why I show them in art galleries. They would never be shown in a science setting, because a scientist would look and say, "Well, what does it do?" And they don't do anything. But they do provoke thought. And I would hope also that the titles provoke thought, not only about the pieces themselves, but about the related areas that these pieces might refer to, which might be enhanced by their poetic resonance.

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Photography by Richard Prince.

Grant "Raindance" Gardner /  
TWO POEMS  
WITH MY FINGERS IN THE BUSY  
WINDOW LIGHT I LET THE BLIND  
DOWN A BIT

The horse leaps over the rainbow blind let down  
With my fingers to my thighs naked I dance I dance  
The world inside  
out.

After, thrilling skin and thoughts of myths  
My freedom begins to arrange the situation and things  
(like the light)  
And the powers in the glance fades.

It seems: One cannot sustain the crave for the always genuine.

Now  
I drink  
Calming  
Charming teas here

And at the same time

am listening to "Romantic Favourite Arrangements for Strings"  
I drink at a white table I think

the music!



I drink A

Bukowski sampler I C:

“Play the Piano Drunk/Like a Percussion Instrument/Until  
the Fingers Begin to Bleed a Bit.”

Brilliance of subtle craft there.

Brilliance of subtle wit there.

Or:

Brilliant subtle wit styled as blue jazz, as hair unkempt, precise,  
leaning arm

(The drunk end rhymes mere pathos in the end)

Here\*

...

I drink and *will* get to Turgenev if not this winter — next. 'Til then

Try not to hurry

This elegant worry has style

In the line

I drink of to my next one waiting next me shoulder muse

Like maybe

After

The next meal

Or

Like tomorrow

I may Dance “different,” yes

You may and you may leave the horse in the attic sky and the  
blind let down a bit from daylight.

## GHOST POEM

Away away

Out my window:

Eyeing below  
And

Away away,

A white house  
A woman ghost  
Crossing slow  
Her windows.

Lantern light  
Gentle as old  
glass.

The rain, falling.

## Brenda Riches / THE WALKING PLACE

Lately I thought: Love is dishwater.  
Then I saw the silver knife submerged  
and pulled on rubber gloves to lift the blade.  
Love-in-the-hole. Consumed. The dishes dealt with.  
A rinsed knife on a runnelled board.  
The sickle moon rotting outside.

I left the house to walk in saturated leaves,  
nothing to shuffle through.  
A cloud throttled the moon, spouting;  
not tears, more a descent of damp gladness for the night  
that would soon altogether be there.  
I kept walking because there was nothing to do  
but propel myself along the post-autumn street.

I wished the moon would come back. Didn't I need  
its slit to give direction to the dark sky?  
But rain insisted  
it would fall.

Such dark. My way through something  
I hadn't wished for, couldn't understand, yet knew  
for its actual leaves and rain and hard paving.  
Though the moon was apparently absent, it would appear  
when the clouds took off to a different sky.

My shoes, made of fabric not destined  
to weather such weather, quickly became soaked;  
my feet squelched.  
But my skull was an efficient umbrella.  
This was the hard part. My thoughts  
wanted moisture so they would cease to be  
the stunted growths that kept me back.  
Perhaps tears would do the trick.

Weeping refreshed my eyes. The shine  
on the bark of trees, their bruised and sticky  
leaves took on my grief.  
The rain thinned, finished, and the moon  
came back airy, filtering breath,  
barely attached to the sky.

I was leaving a sink, sinking in leaves, taking steps  
to put myself far from a meal weary to prepare  
away from careful hours invested in supper no one wanted  
and walking towards an emptiness I hoped  
the waxing moon would fill.

Trudging through the season before winter, I stumbled over a dead  
cat, grey, tattered, neck broken.  
A former life on the soggy ground.  
This corpse was once a movement against legs  
a plea to open the door, a thing that purred.  
Now it was something else to put behind me.

Death in the narrow street and the moon waiting to glare.  
In the meantime there was the street to be followed  
over pulpy leaves and between the high-walled gardens  
of houses with roofs so dark they blended with the sky.

To be blended with something so the knife  
and the malaise of a new moon would count for nothing  
was a desire that stretched like arms toward what  
should have stretched in return and held the gesture.  
But I was apart from the merging that night wrought.  
Outlined by a desire that had no counterpart  
in the mulchy night, I moved on.

The porch of a dark house. A place to huddle.  
A roof and three walls,  
the prospect of the street the fourth wall.  
I lay on my right side and entered  
a dream of barren ground and a bland sky.  
A pocket of cloud shrunk in upon itself,  
intensified to a black so deep it pained my head.  
I sensed a soundless cracking as of lightning,

but saw no light. The cloud vanished,  
to reappear elsewhere in the sky,  
shrunk in upon itself, intensified, cracked  
pain inside my head. The cloud vanished,  
reappeared, blackened, cracked upon its egg in my head.  
In the clear slime of the dream  
I witnessed a compounding of disasters  
and suffered the jolting of my brain.

I carried the dream's tightness  
into a porch sluiced with morning. The sun  
dripped onto the day, a garment hung, not wrung.  
I recognized the drenched leaves,  
the hesitancy of birdsong. I wanted an end  
to the space between me and the morning's answer  
whose question I had not yet posed.

The porch was rickety in the light  
the handrail coated with bird shit.  
Such marbleness. Chiselled excrement.  
Rubbed by sunlight to a mottled sheen.  
I passed it by and stepped down to resume my path.

Sleep had held me in a difficult position.  
There was pain between my shoulderblades as if  
a blunt knife had scored my back.  
I walked stiffly, slowly, the world enlivened.  
The body's weakness was a sign of life  
whose finitude made each item of the natural world  
the more dear to me.

This snail! Such a house to carry,  
so tender its glistening trail.  
Perhaps I should have felt nostalgia  
for the abandoned sink, the lost domesticity,  
but a dew-strung web caught between leaf and leaf  
took my mind from the astonishing snail.  
These were jewels. The frail geometry of my journey.  
Which led me to a riverbank.



Sunlight splintered the water.  
I wanted to carve words into this fluidity  
but my thoughts floated past.  
I couldn't trap them in the moment's crystal. An impulse  
welled up and broke,  
leaving nothing but uncontained air.

A swan. Its curving neck, purity,  
stark black on its face,  
sultry gold around its eyes,  
feathered glide of my yearning.  
Side by side with the swan  
he on his water, I on my ground.

There were buttercups on the bank,  
their yellow glimpses intermittent wisdom.  
Grassblades strident by glassy water, the swan  
both mirror and billow.

Silence was irrelevant to the violins in my mind.  
Their notes shuddered, strings touched by strung bows.  
I wanted soft fingers to play me.

At the curve in the river's course, the swan stopped.  
But I was nowhere near the end of anywhere.  
Noon was a way station  
to the moon's next phase.

Buzz went the violins, vibrant, disconsolate,  
the trees an orchestra with no conductor,  
random harmony played to the sky's empty audience.  
I applauded and a rook leaped from a branch,  
black flapping, smudging the vacant blue  
as if a stain was essential.  
This is absurd, I thought. This is revelation.

I seized the crow's way and followed a harsh path.  
Ants bit my ankles. I thought of the cat  
and resisted the impulse to wish it alive.  
Grass turned to gravel and the ants dropped off.  
Red freckles on white stone chips.  
Scurrying. Hidden.

Violent dusk, violet. The moon's claw emerging, ready to pinch,  
unable to scuttle. A crabby night.

Let's go, I said, and the moon tugged me.

The stars were barbs on an invisible wire. Gladdened  
by darkness, wide awake in its folds, I changed my suit.

Sorrow for motley. A fool under the larger moon.

Time for idiocy.

Such antics across the hours to a midnight

that hung a curtain to be drawn back

for dawn's gentle entrance.

But something shifted, and time was delayed.

An owl, winging? Bats' dark darting

to stymie the day's beginning?

Or did I want a malingering of hours to give me

a pinpoint, somewhere to pivot

as if it could all be turned around and around.

Where am I going? I asked the thickening moon.

Stars winked, pinpoints themselves.

Clusters to be stared at.

Again the shifting, this time of sound.

Gasp? Rasping of a saw.

A tree toppled, its limbs sinking.

The earth nudged from its axis.

The evidence of owls and bats blighting

the moon with shadow, the jarred collapsing

tree, harmony slipped sideways an inch,

conspired to infuse me with doubt.

I don't know, was the answer that settled my ground

to send flying creatures to the far side of the moon

where they could do no more damage.

No more damage, I decided and night

flapped open to let the day's grey horses come

galloping in, stream of nightmares slipping.

I must have frightened hours away  
with slow anger in sharp gravel, sludge  
at the bottom of stagnancy. I stood  
on the muddy edge of a pond and watched the prisoner  
weeds keep still as the sky descended, a lid to seal  
me into a dish.

But I had left one kitchen, and was damned  
if I'd be drawn into another.

I left my nightmare where it was and worked my way  
into a world I would have to understand  
with a new sense of echo.

Shimmer around the sun, vibrato of birds, flurrying  
wings, sense of quaking crosses casting  
shadows for stars to tumble into. Sense of wanting  
a star larger than the rest.  
Sense of careful stable.

Time to follow.

And eventually dance, slowly to be sure,  
nevertheless a jig, a lightness as if  
my soles were dry sponges, till my dancing  
became a waterlogged lifting of feet, an unwieldy bending  
of knees that would have been happier unyielding.  
Clumsy ecstasy.

A stone caught my eye, a pebble under  
the water causing a lilt of ripples,  
sunlight diving down, the stone a target  
for brightness, struck by crescendoes, nothing  
to hold, the stone and water  
elusive as light.

A weed slapping my hand reminded me it was time  
to move away from the forlorn  
drowned in their mistaken beds.

In substance of melancholy, the sky's grey eyes.

Hardened by hail, I trod the dead ground,  
tramped over tough fallow. Hobo on byegone  
wheat. Its seeds sucking at stubble.  
My spit rode the wind like a mind going. I walked  
in its grip, claspng a straw I caught  
when the maelstrom brought it my way.  
Cold swirl in the frozen storm.

A crossed stick stood over me,  
head lolling, rags gusting.  
A being I could speak to.  
My words swerved like crows on drafts of air,  
silent when they should have been loud.

The deaf scarecrow leaned over me, over his shadow  
that jumped at the whim of sun and cloud.  
I stretched out my hands to cup the hailstones  
which dwindled and stopped.

Under the scarecrow, I slept another night away.  
Under the constant sunlight, I craved constancy.  
Leaning against a stick and gazing at a field  
was no way to find it.  
The scarecrow swung around and pointed  
toward a wood.

Away from frozen straw and into suffering trees  
whose mystery blocked the sky.  
and dropped faint shadows over the undergrowth  
I fumbled through.

Sunlight on a patch of trunk, radiant birch bark.  
Time I leaned to consider my feet.

Wrinkled soles. Growing toenails.  
Hard heels. They kicked me  
into dreaming about a blank sun and a striped cat  
clawng a hammock strung between sunrays. Swaying me  
into the next day.

And snowflakes sliding. Not enough to settle. Enough  
to chill. To get me onto my feet.

I cupped my hands to beg mercy from  
the white bounty in my hands. It gave me strength  
to slam my fist against time that insisted  
on keeping its own pace.

Blood from my hands speckled the snow.  
The path was ill defined.

There they were, the broken branches, torn stumps,  
scraggy shrubs. Thorny thicket.  
After the wrestling came the ooze. Scarlet. Alive.  
Time grafting the skin of day and night.  
Was the snow a whiteness to splash the black sky,  
or grey flakes in daylight?

The downfall stopped and I reached  
the last tree, an oak, anomaly among birches.  
Beyond it was a wasteland of settled snow and unimpeded sky.  
A great expanse I had to cross.

No chance of sleep in that cold place. I plodded on.

In the boneyard of my brain, the soaked and shining  
dead collected, resurrected against my will, filled  
the space I wished would wall them out.  
Ghosts low moaning kept me alert under the prickly sky.  
I had no wish to resist sleep and yet the ghosts  
prodded me on along the wasted terrain.

My way became a dainty stepping  
between shadows and the strings that pulled them  
hither and thither, tangling  
my ankles with their frail grey.  
I walked toward a paling sky.

Shrouded by violins, I danced  
to the launching of another day.  
Their thin singing bound me homeward, for home  
was where I was going and not what I was leaving.



From the blond horizon, the sun rose,  
flooding the low sky with hissing,  
and the soaring of some bird,  
not lark nor angel, but a substance  
of sparrow that took on a phoenix blaze  
to light me across the desert.

My coarse habit softened to fresh cobwebs, silk  
of a slick and endless sea.

A rock, sudden on the beach, limpet strewn. I held on  
to its barnacled body while the white spray splashed me.  
I hung on for grim death, for blessed life, for  
the madness that beckoned.

I would have slept against the rock's wild wetness,  
but the jetsam of lives attracted my attention.  
Buttons, flashes in the curves of broken bottles,  
shoe laces, the skeletons of fish. Debris  
beached for some compassionate soul to heed.  
But I wanted to reach no one. The rock was mine,  
and so was the hardness.

Night brought a dusky moon, webbed with shyness,  
knowing spiders.

Flocks of crows blocked its light  
beseeching me to share their pandemonium,  
settling one by one on the sand around me.

A beak, pecking my knee.  
I snapped it in two.

Locked to my rock, I watched the moon's timid journey  
and felt a loosening  
as of boats unmoored.

## Kimberley French / TWO POEMS

### UNTITLED *(for V.M.)*

you are wearing  
the amber I put  
around your neck, before  
the break

you left it  
that one morning  
on the doorhandle

I put on your pajamas—  
the softness  
and the smell of you

the morning light —  
on your desk, the walls

the candle  
long out

the liquid in its glass frame  
shimmers, as the rays  
smile upon it  
the clock's hands still  
sweep across its face

## UNTITLED

a pumpkin face droops  
left there on the porch

I walk toward it  
treading on skeletons  
of leaves

inside you bathe  
in the moonlight

your face too white  
and patterned in the slim hands  
of branch shadows

snow flies through the window  
and clings to you

you are —  
still as  
correct as

ice

## Timothy Muskat / TWO POEMS

### WEATHERVANE

Do those metal tongues measure  
eternity's heartbeat, the corn's  
dying to feed us,

how the husks in decay are  
earth's sweek slaking?  
And what does it make of that

bloatbellied horse, bridled  
in its halo of flies, eyes  
dead as westfallen sun, limbs

brittle as rickshaws?  
Does a weathervane taste  
the fecund apple's scent, dewdrunk

blossoms dank in matted grass?  
Does it even know its own pale barnyard,  
its sad, proud caretaker, I,

who clawed the gable, gave  
the twist & quiver?  
*Forget* says the vagrant wind: *forget*

We spinnaker in the field like children  
dogs among us  
like bees

## THE STALLION CAGES

Are where they lead the ones  
in heat, great woven rectangles  
where hooves turn to  
jackhammers & bend the fencing  
out in crooked, galvanized  
spines. Inside  
at night you can hear  
them racing back & forth  
like vermin, you can just see  
the eyewide nostrils searing air,  
you can almost crawl through these  
fuzzy portals to those horses'  
lovesick hearts



## Brian Burke / HANDS

### 1

As a small boy he plays outside his house—in *his* yard—and he crouches down on his knees, digging in the dirt. He sees all this—himself—through a camera, a camera positioned so low that his childlike form, oversized head, frail undersized body, loom large in the foreground, while above and behind, huge white clouds begin to boil. They tower overhead, higher and higher, the danger accelerating furiously. The undersides darken, and the entire sky threatens to tumble over and crush him.

Oblivious, he continues to play. His bare arms are thin; he wears a striped T-shirt, wide shorts—much wider than his skinny legs—and running shoes, scuffed, the laces undone.

Clouds, black now, blot out the sky; but the boy still digs his fingers in the soil, smoothing down roadways, forming hillsides.

He knows what is coming next, what must come—and he kicks out in his sleep. He begins to sweat, and emits struggling, guttural sounds. Strange grunts—aware too of a voice, a sense that suggests it is too late to save himself.

Blasts of thunder shake the ground, stun the boy and spin him around, backward, pinning him to the earth. For the first time he sees them, enormous clouds, brutal and black to the ground. Panic speeds his heartbeat and his breathing, seals off the cry jammed in his throat. He races to the back porch—safety, he thinks—his scraped knees pumping. And the hand-held camera follows.

A bolt of lightning strikes the yard and another cannon-shot of thunder knocks the boy to the sidewalk below his porch. His knees bleed, and he wonders why no one comes to rescue him.

And it's all so agonizingly slow. Please—he's sure he won't survive another lightning strike, another crash of thunder. Please. Hold off for just a few seconds more. It's too dark, the blackness so strangely vivid.

He scales the porch steps on his hands and knees, his eyes squeezed tightly shut, his unformed chin trembling. Flailing wildly with his hands, he tears open the screen door, lets it slam shut behind him, and stands terrified, humiliated in the darkened kitchen.

He opens his eyes. No one looks up. His father, so large behind the kitchen table, plays solitaire. His mother stands at the counter, a long gleaming knife in her hand. With quick, efficient strokes she slices through stewing beef, cutting away the fat.

In a turn of his head the counter is clear and his mother and father disappear.

Early morning; the kitchen is warm and brightly lit. He goes to the cupboards above the sink and climbs upon a chair. Standing on his toes, he stretches and reaches out with his fingertips for the box of cereal on the second shelf, the one just beyond his grasp. It is not the cereal he is after, but the plastic baseball player concealed inside. The box glides silently forward onto his straining fingers, where it totters, then tumbles to the counter-top.

He rips open the box, clumsily tearing the boxtop; filled with dread, he checks to see if it still has trade-in value — it's worthless, and he tilts the oversized package over a deep blue bowl. But instead of cereal flakes, out pour hundreds of plastic coins, each embossed with the picture of a baseball player, followed by a flood of marbles, dozens of them, hundreds, thousands, that bounce off the counter and his chair onto the floor. And, finally, one flake of cereal.

He tries to catch the marbles in mid-bounce, to stop them from rolling noisily across the hard kitchen floor and waking his parents; but there are thousands of them, multiplying into millions of marbles ricocheting around him, impossible to silence, and his hands are too small.

## 2

He approaches his parents' house in a steady, droning rain, protected beneath a bobbing black umbrella, soon to be blown inside-out. Poisonous plant-life encroaches on both sides of the roadway. It's once again a dirt road before him, like it was when they had first moved there as a young family on his sixth birthday. As always, when the house finally appears through the rain and low cloud, it seems to cling to the hillside — the only house not

completely overgrown now with the rampant vegetation—like an air bubble.

Wordlessly, he enters the house through the back door, his cold hand sparking as it touches the copper knob, and he passes by his parents, who drink tea at the kitchen table. He heads directly on down the basement stairs, and hides in the dark as thunderstorms explode outside. He stays curled up in an abandoned, over-stuffed armchair, his eyes squeezed shut and his fingers in his ears, until he dares to think the storm might be over. He never—must never—open his eyes to find out; instead, he takes his fingers out of his ears, just barely, and listens.

Images of a cyclical conspiracy raging outside parade through his head, as he hides and listens to the sound of his own pulse beating inside his ears, the tides of his blood rising and falling. Something in the ocean—he has never known what—kills whales. Dead and water-bloated, they rise and float overhead, piling up against the mountains. Their swollen underbellies are slit from below by the mountain ridges. Poison rains down, drenches the hillsides, and seeps into the soil, into the rivers and streams, and finally back out into the ocean. Plant-life thrives, feeding on the contamination. It overgrows the slopes and foothills. On the other side of the mountain lies a whale's graveyard. This is what he tells himself, eyes squeezed shut, fingers pressed into his ears, ten years old again, not daring to move.

Occasionally, when he pulls his fingers out of his ears to listen, the storm still crashes over the house, and he crawls deeper into the armchair. Other times, the storms end and he climbs back upstairs, leaving through the kitchen, where his parents still sit quietly, drinking tea at the table.

3

He holds his breath and walks quietly among coffins. Clear bright moonlight shines through a man-sized hole in the window above him and onto a large double casket. The heavy wooden lid lies ajar, and he stares down at the peaceful faces of his mother and father—his mother so serene, his father more at rest than he has ever seen him before; finally a trace of relaxation in the usually tense, harsh features.

But he searches for a smaller, lighter coffin—and he sees it resting shoulder-high on a shelf, in a dark corner away from the light.

He straightens the lid on his parents' casket, satisfied with the firm solid fit. Someone has to make everything secure.

That sense, surrounding him, always present, repeats itself again: save her.

He raises his daughter's coffin from the shelf and carries her swiftly through the city streets. He can hear the sound of tires on wet pavement; he can see his breath pluming before him in the night; but it has not been raining and stars shine as pinpoints overhead. Moisture must seep up from below.

They are stealing the childhood from your child—hurry, before you are found. Before you are caught.

Over the swaying suspension bridge; he slips only once climbing the steep, wooded mountainside. Sky awaits, black and visible beyond the tree-tops towering high above him.

On his knees he digs with his hands in the dirt, scooping deeper, deeper, until he stops, perspiring, to listen for it. Listen: to the wind shifting through the branches of the conifers. And music: a tinkling of crystal or windchimes carried on a scent of pine and fir, rising above his frantic breathing.

His daughter's tiny mouth opens in a small oh. He leans close, making a wish for the faintly sweet baby's breath. With thumb and forefinger he gently presses her thin blue lips together, leaving small blue bruises the size of his thumbprints. With firm hands he lays his baby at the bottom of the freshly-dug grave and folds a white wool blanket over her.

They should be coming now. In desperation he loses his footing and crashes down the mountainside. Scratched and bleeding, he stands, turns sharply. Listens. Only wind rises from the darkness beyond him. Only wind. But he runs. Faster. Breath tears from his lungs. Shouts struggle to escape his strangled throat but are lost in the roar and rush of water and his blood. Over the skyline the first faint flush of lightning. He tumbles to his knees again on the rocking suspension bridge and crawls, hands gripping the rope he cannot see.

## Debbie Bennett / TWO POEMS

### ILLNESS

You recall being ill  
morning and cold air, later  
a sleepy sun banging  
in your eyes,  
light and dust, you remember the smell  
of warm velvet and oily  
chairs poking into  
odd corners: they are enormous  
swathed like your father  
in unfamiliar colours

in the kitchen, your grandmother is switching on  
the sudden static  
of the radio and a voice coughs out  
the progress of the war,  
weather comes later  
but in your half-sleeping dream, all the trees  
outside flare up, feverishly red  
then black  
and into them, one by one  
parachutes drop  
sizzling like snowflakes  
but it's only the squeal  
of the water-taps  
the crackle of the radio; impatiently  
your grandmother snaps it off.



Now your mother  
comes toward you with a tray  
of medicines and cool cloths

before she too  
vanishes into another  
dark corner

and only much later  
you will recall her standing there  
looking through the window  
her fingers pulling lightly at  
the buttons on her dress or her heart.

## LAST MORTGAGE PAYMENT

And there is this man  
gathering shadows each time he moves  
in the half-light  
his face collecting thoughts  
steadily near the window:  
pants, shirt, buttons,  
the belt-buckle snaps  
briefly, decisively,  
his mind made up and  
he goes out for his first slow smoke,  
the sun ticking down  
on empty aluminum  
boats, spacious green lawns,  
everywhere around him he's supposed  
to breathe it in  
that leathery inconspicuous smell  
of space and money because  
he's paid for it, it's his  
he can break it apart  
like puzzle pieces now or  
he can keep it together, he can even  
sell it, buy something else,  
a real-estate picture

of a white house, a lawn, the people behind somewhere  
hidden in curtains and upholstery  
bickering gently, quietly and never quite  
cutting up their wrist, or  
getting divorces;

he thinks this must be some version of  
expensive suburban despair,  
even his son strolling, casual in his  
sex, his jeans won't  
smash up the family car  
won't get his girl knocked-up  
as in the fifties,  
ending up with a  
three-piece suit  
and a dying carnation  
in his button-hole, ending up  
walking down those aisles forever.  
Not going to University.  
And being sorry.

Now there's the Pill his son tells him,  
and besides,  
nobody knows who all these kids belong to,  
anyway, so

this man thinks maybe  
he'll keep it  
won't even get another mortgage, buy something more  
keep it for himself, maybe

He looks at the immaculate roses  
along his borders:

thinks that  
in the morning  
they shine  
like good skin.

## Leo McKay, Jr. / MY LIFE: THE OUTSIDE

- i. my life  
the outside  
you  
my arms
- ii. palpitation  
the plinky-plink  
of your fingers  
on my piano heart
- iii. i echo a box  
what you hear  
not my voice  
air

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

MICHAEL REDHILL, a Toronto poet, has published in numerous literary journals and edits *York* magazine.

TONI SAMMONS is Writer in Residence this winter at the Villa Montalvo Center for the Arts in Saratoga, California. She has published poetry in *The Fiddlehead*, *The Literary Review*, *Prism International*, *The Antigonish Review*, *Room of One's Own*, *Spectrum* and the *International Poetry Review*.

KEN RIVARD was born in Montreal and has lived and worked in Calgary since 1976. He has published four books of poetry: *Frankie's Desires*, *Kiss Me Down to Size*, *Losing His Thirst* and *Rude Songster*, as well as many other poems and stories. He also writes for radio.

D. C. REID was born in Calgary and now lives in Victoria. He has published poems and stories in *Quarry*, *Dandelion*, *The Antigonish Review*, *Matrix*, *Prairie Fire* and *Queen's Quarterly*. His photographic work will soon appear in *Prism*. He is currently working on a book of stories and on a novel.

SANDI JOHNSON has published poetry, prose and drawings. Her book, *The Comfort of Angels*, a work of fiction, will be published in the spring of 1989. Ms. Johnson lives in Ganges, B.C.

RICHARD PRINCE is a British Columbia-born sculptor who was raised in Vancouver and attended the University of British Columbia (B.A. 1971) where he is at present Associate Professor in the Fine Arts Department. His sculpture was first exhibited at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1972. He has since had his work shown frequently in Canada and internationally.



CAMILLE BREITMAN has studied at Capilano College in the Studio Arts Programme. She is intending to continue her studies in her new home in Calgary.

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BRENDA RICHES lives in Regina. She publishes poetry and fiction. *TCR* published her work "The Breeding Ground" in #43 and "Time Pieces" in #44.

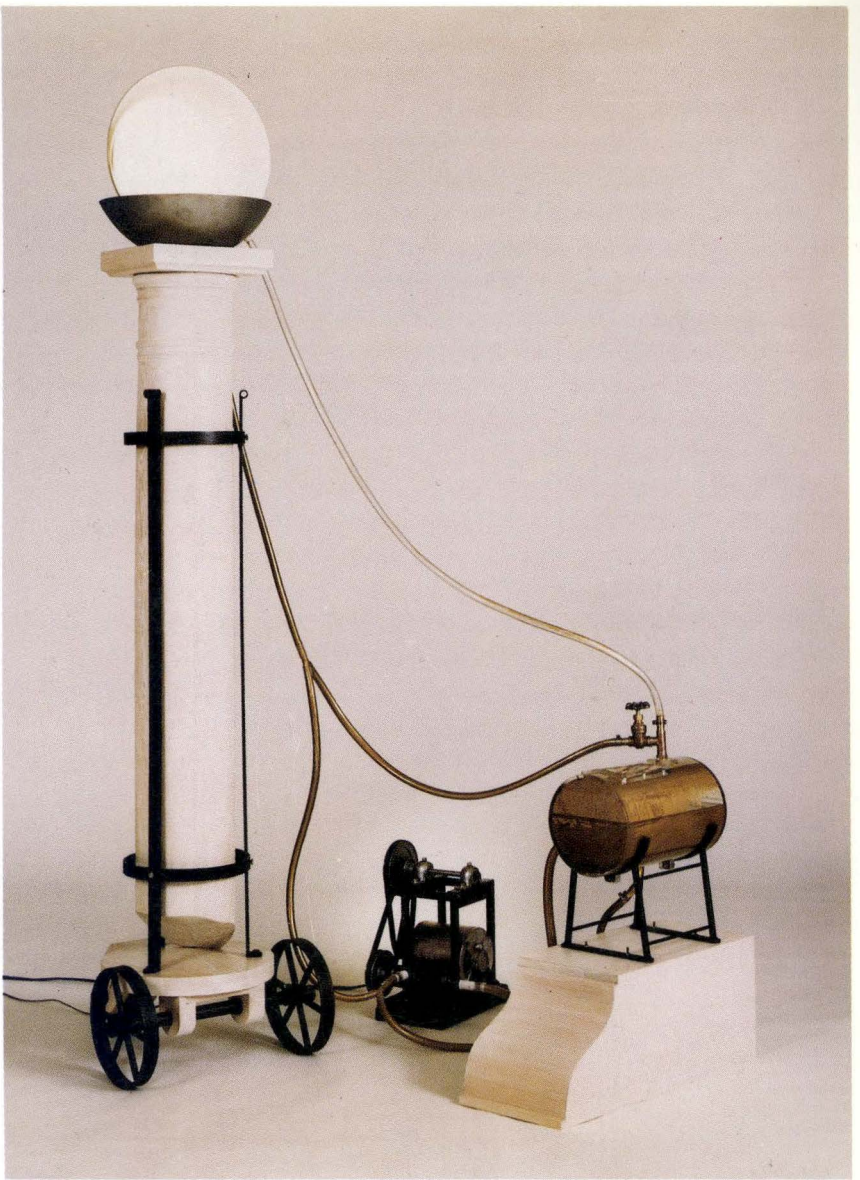
KIMBERLEY FRENCH is the Student Associate Poetry Editor for *TCR*. She also co-edits Capilano College's student magazine, *The Liar*.

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