

**EMERGING  
SCULPTORS 1986**

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LILLIAN BALL, ERIK LEVINE, RONA PONDICK,  
RICHARD REZAC, MARY WALKER

ESSAY BY APRIL KINGSLEY  
EXHIBITION COORDINATED BY SKIPP COOPER  
GALLERY DIRECTOR: MARIAN GRIFFITHS

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**S C U L P T U R E C E N T E R**

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## A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

The Sculpture Center has exhibited the work of some two hundred and fifty emerging artists over the past five years. To all artists whose slides we have reviewed and whose studios we have visited, your cooperation and ongoing support are appreciated. We are grateful to the Jerome Foundation and New York State Council on the Arts for their generous funding of **EMERGING SCULPTORS 1986**. Special thanks to Cynthia Gehrig, President, Jerome Foundation, for her encouragement. Skipp Cooper's work on this exhibition has been invaluable: for his special insights, administrative skills and ability to make difficulties disappear, my personal thanks. We are indebted to April Kingsley for her thoughtful essay and Barbara Knight for her sensitive design of this catalog. To the Sculpture Center staff, Louise Dudis, Peter Hristoff, Allison Sheppard and volunteers Elaine Lavalley, Bea Aminoff and Nancy Zigelbaum, very many thanks for their dedication and assistance.

Marian Griffiths  
Gallery Director

## H I G H L Y S P E C I F I C O B J E C T S

Recent sculpture has become increasingly idiosyncratic and internalized, even downright quirky. The unsettling objects created by these five emerging artists—Lillian Ball, Erik Levine, Rona Pondick, Richard Rezac and Mary Walker—have next to nothing in common with the neutral "specific objects" of Minimalism as they were defined by Donald Judd. Those objects were anonymous. They had the look of the machined rather than the hand-crafted. Finger-tip sensibility was nowhere in evidence. In fact, anyone might have replicated one of those objects exactly and had a Judd or an Andre or a Flavin of one's own without purchasing it from the artist. The sixties "specific object" was particularized by being selected out from a continuous grid for enlargement and presentation, but one was ever-conscious of that matrix and of how the object fitted into the continuum of co-ordinates. No geometrical framework encompasses these new highly specific objects. They can't be fitted into any three-dimensional grid, no matter how warped. Each object is a dense, compact, cluster of consciously shaped matter which is loaded with references and seems almost to radiate energy. Feelings formed it and hands shaped every nuance of its surface. The new object resonates with the personality and life experience of the artist.

Certain precedents, distant and close, naturally exist for this new work. Mia Westerlund and John Duff would seem to have been important influences on some of these artists, but Surrealism can be sensed lurking behind all of them, despite their marked differences from one another. The disturbing clottedness of Pondick's **Solid** and the sinister vibrations emitted by Walker's **personnages** echo Surrealism's flirtation with fear. The mute, abstracted, yet humanoid **personnage** itself is Surrealist in origin. The biomorphic shape with its multiple identity—body part, stone, egg, pod, leaf, protozoan—was invented by Surrealists, as was the unconscious means of arriving at that shape—automatism. Both form and method are called into play by these emerging artists to a greater or lesser degree. Even Erik Levine's constructed works make reference to nature [**Blue Pegs**] and to the stances and action of the human body, to arms or legs thrust out into space. His sculptures have a human-like physicality with which one identifies viscerally. A tongue-like form swoops out of a wall unit in **Pointer Play** or a neck cranes at an angle from the top of solid stack of squared-off blocks in **Overtime**. Even the many remaining traces of the sculptures rough n' ready fabrication—pencil marks, glue drips, smears of paint and patching compound—don't detract from the physical thrust of the work. If anything they add to its power.

Levine's four co-exhibitors all create organic forms. Ball and Walker cause them to stand tall like a **personnage** by Ernst or Motherwell; Pondick and Rezac tend to contract them into dense simulacra of body parts—heads, breasts, joints—invented shapes like those of Gorky or Miro. The primitivizing tendency in Walker and the use of titles such as



**Virago** for a smoldering, flame-like column or **Evening Situation** for a group of interacting **personnages** also point to an attitude common to the French Surrealists and their American counterparts in the early days of Abstract Expressionism. Lillian Ball's use of titles like **Elegba's Crown** and **[Aplysia]** for tall frond-like forms that seem to derive from an undersea world, also echoes those mythologizing years. Some of her other titles, however, and the humorous names Rezac assigns his pieces — **Departure** for a stacked pair of ghostly white boot-or foot-shaped boomerangs and **Eye** for a "heavy-lidded" bronze point away from Abstract Expressionism. They seem more in the post-Pop vein of the Irreverent-Eighties instead.

The vaguely comical top-heaviness of some of Pondick's earlier work — **[Figure]**, for example — and the amusing facelessness of her **Self-Portrait** serve to undercut the threatening inevitability of her oozing formworld. Calling a piece **Bed** puts the viewer in a strangely ambiguous position vis-a-vis the slug-like creature lying on the pillow, and the lump of solid matter she titles **Mole** does likewise. Clearly this artist wants us to make a maximum number of readings of her work and not to limit our imagination in its presence. Lillian Ball uses her titles to multiply meaning as well. **Swipe** indicates the piece might be read as a giant-size cipher for a brushstroke, but it can look more like a cresting wave one minute, and its swaying stance makes it seem like a dancing figure the next. By titling another piece **Hood**, Ball transforms a fairly simple arc into an object that conjurs up both a cowl and a Jack-in-the-Pulpit. The purity of the form retains its air of the geometric, but its meanings are expanded.

Geometry and a certain kind of purity are also important to Rezac and to Levine, despite or within their organicism. The units comprising Levine's pieces are geometrical solids which are either defined by paint — the way the red bands in **Overtime** do, for instance — or by his emphasis on the seams or joinings of the separate units. Rezac's symmetry and the smooth simplicity of his shaping makes his sculptures seem eminently pure in the tradition of Brancusi, even though they have a psychological component. One is more conscious of the extraordinary way **Untitled** hovers next to the wall, or of the potential ceremonial purpose of **Maroon** than one is of their symmetry or their geometry per se. **Seal**, the closest to a Brancusi fish or bird, also seems, because of the bend in the middle, like a floating arm or some other natural thing. Only later do you become aware of the arc that is its upper curve and the negative triangle below. As was the case with Joel Shapiro's house/polyhedra, more is made of less by adding references, manipulating scale, and emphasizing the purely sculptural aspects of the mundane formworld of geometrical solids.

Truth to materials doesn't seem to be of crucial importance to these artists; anything will do — paper, plaster, resin, wood — because it may eventually be disguised or changed anyway. Mary Walker's sculpture is the most radical in this regard, and, being so completely and actively painted, it seems a perfect hybrid of the two mediums. In fact, a

provisional quality is present in much of the work that recalls the mock-up of the sixties, fabricated to look like it would look at some future point in another, usually more expensive material. Much recent sculpture by artists of every persuasion shares this material anonymity. You find yourself wondering what it's made of, but ultimately realizing that it doesn't matter much one way or the other. Only the object's resonance matters.

These artists demonstrate a current ambiguous attitude toward scale. Unlike Minimalism, which concerned itself with sheer size, recent art comes in all scales and even refers outside of itself to objects of contradictory size. Rezac's sculptures are usually quite small but read any size; Walker's are very large, but relate to hand-held primitive fetishes. Ball's are human-size tall, but resemble flora and fauna, Pondick's small ones seem capable of great, even menacing, expansion and Levine's can be imagined either toy-like or enormous. The specificity of these new objects has to do with density of content, which is an internal matter, rather than with exactness of presentation in a public context, so important to their Minimal predecessors. Today's artists have obviously decided that more is more often more than less is.

April Kingsley  
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