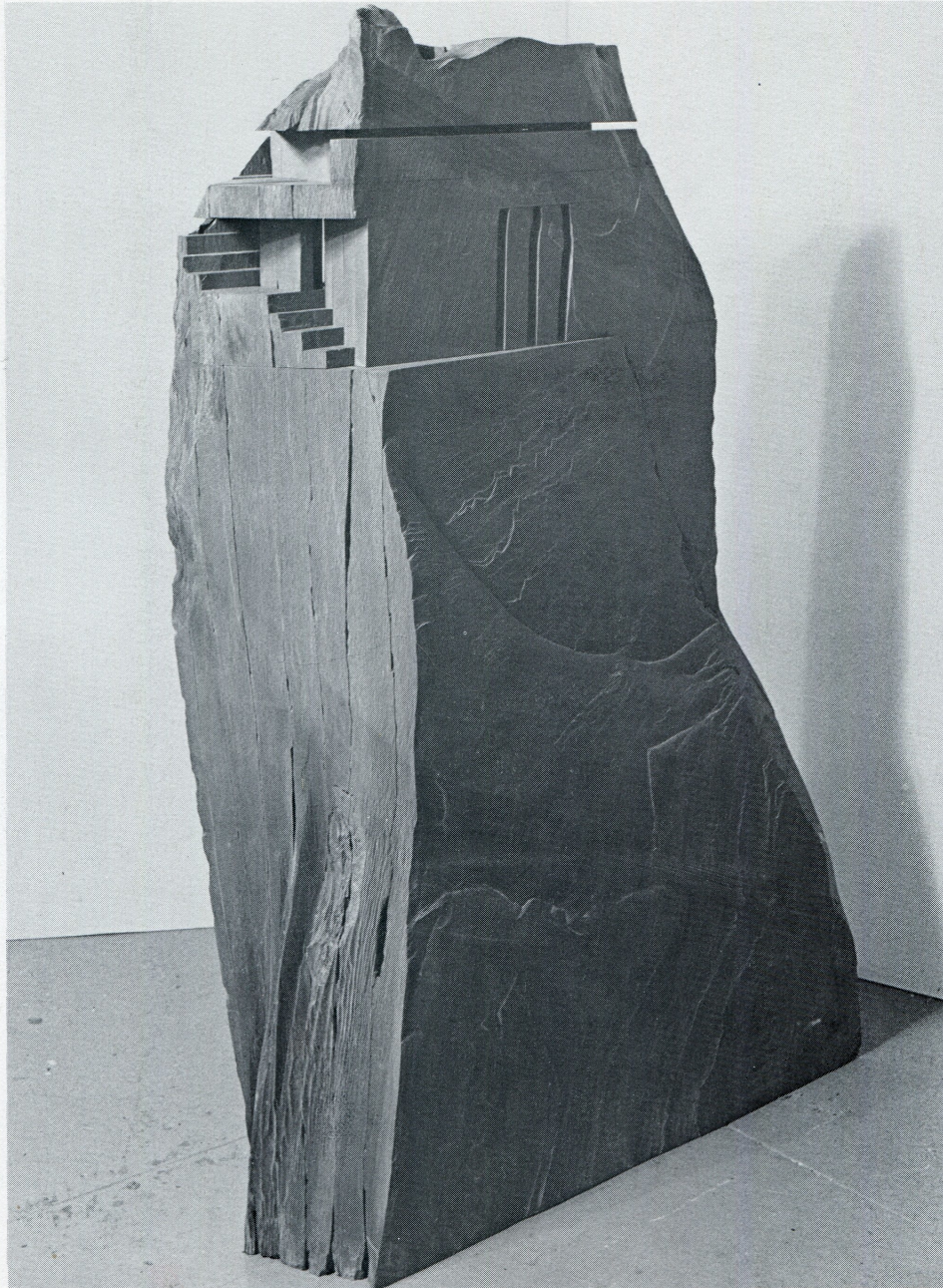


THE SCULPTURE  
OF LIVIO SAGANIC



*Trogles 1 (1981)*



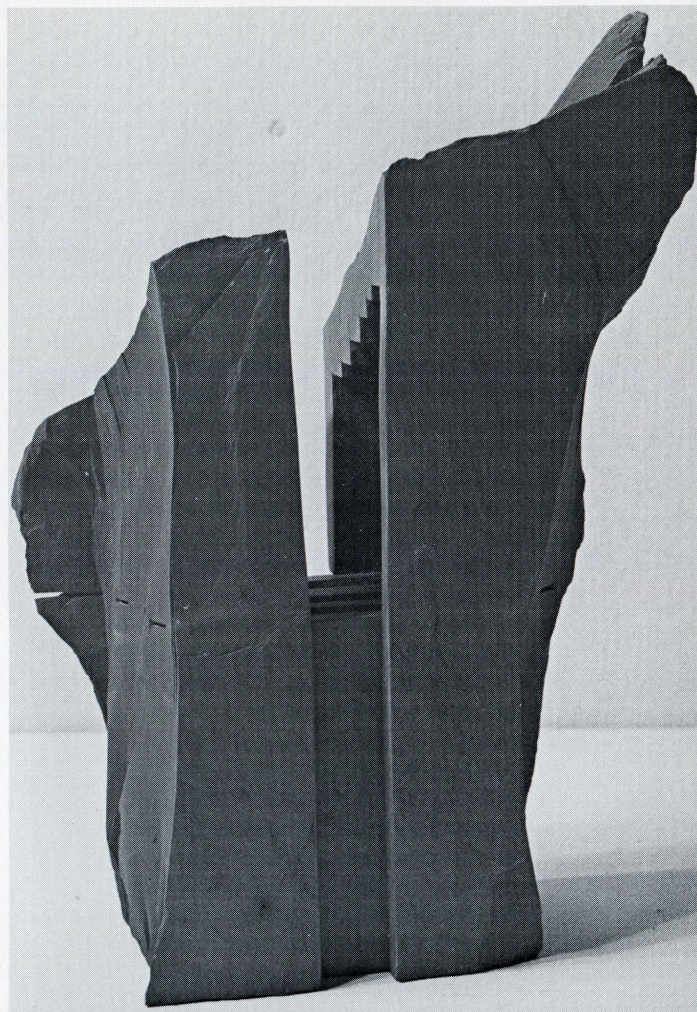
## FROM TEMPLATES TO TEMPLES

Livio Saganic's career since his emergence on the art scene in 1976 encapsulates the enormous shift that has occurred recently in art-world thinking. The 1960s (edging far into the 1970s as art decades are wont to do) had, as their hallmark, templates, grids and machine-produced or machine-like images. In fact, despite superficial differences, Minimal and Pop art had a number of aspects in common. Logic, rationality, serial order, systematic process and the predictable product ruled the day.

Nurtured on such Spartan fare, art students like Saganic began to create art with the premise that its conceptual rationale was primary, its emotional content secondary. More recently, however, he, like many of his contemporaries, has discovered the rich lodes one can mine in the dual depths of autobiography and art history. Previously, both had been thought to supply only the baser metals.

Livio Saganic's discovery was made early in 1979 in *Extraction* #8, a piece he was keeping (and still keeps) for his own personal viewing. He made it by a process he had been exploring since 1978—repeated extraction and extrusion of material from the inside of the stone. This time he discarded the central matter instead of displaying it in its extruded position. This left a dark, cave-like opening in the center; and the more he studied it (he kept it in his apartment instead of the studio) the more obsessed he became with its sense of mystery and its ability to hold the imagination. Perhaps it reminded him of his youthful days on a rocky Adriatic island off the coast of Yugoslavia; or perhaps Freudian or Jungian implications held sway. But whatever the attraction, he kept returning to the piece during 1979 and 1980 while he made the other "Extraction" pieces in this exhibition. The last year he began to explore its architectural and its human content in a new series of temple sculptures.

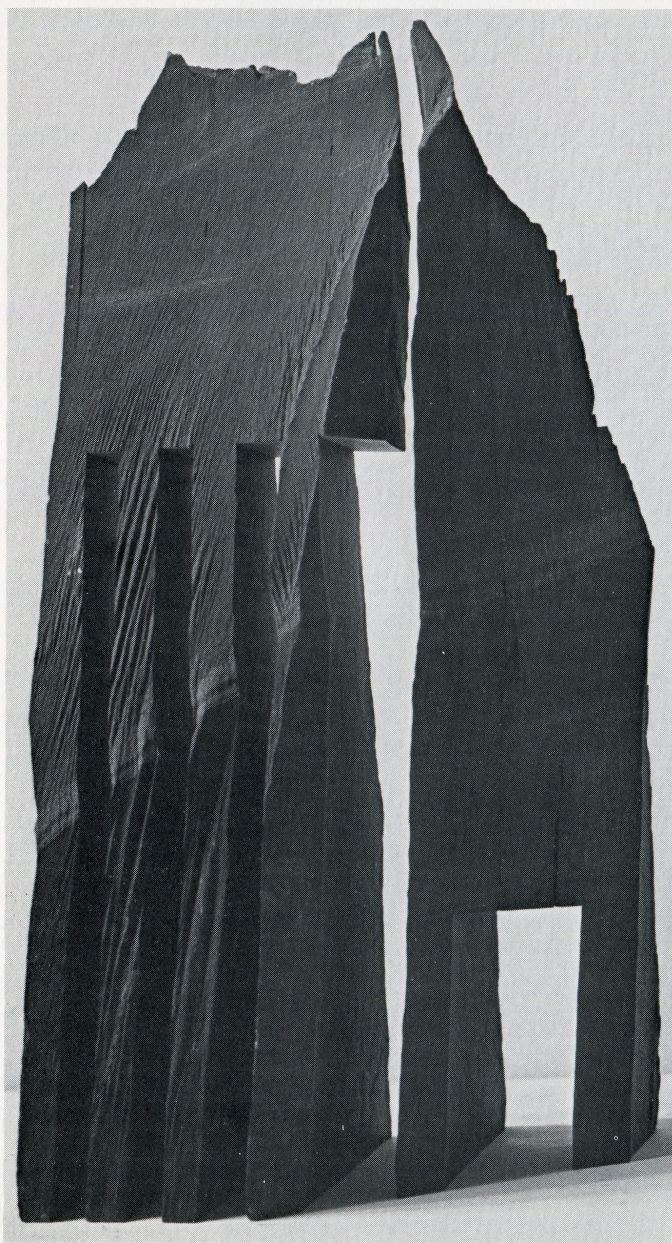
*Trogle I* is the masterwork in this group. Slightly more than five feet high, it stands gracefully, but assertively, with human-like presence. Yet its scale is so finely tuned that it stands-in (as rocks represent mountains to Chinese esthetes) convincingly for a rock-cut, temple-topped mountain. In



*Mnaijdra I* (1981)

fact, it is named for troglodytic (cave) architecture—that anonymous, universal, highly-practical style of carving dwellings and places of worship out of the living rock. The artist also recalls seeing or hearing of a castle (located on a mountain peak) with an opening in its floor through which ill-starred mortals were dropped to their death in the sea.





*Hal Saflieni I* (1982)

*Trogle I* is rife with the unexpected. The front doesn't prepare you for the back, though steps entice you around to explore it. No view tells more than the one from above which peers into the depths of the stone through rock-cut rooms. From the sides, the stone seems closed, almost as if capped or helmeted at its top. It is this head/helmet aspect that lends the piece its human presence.

The knife-sharp edges of the slits, stairs and other cuts in the stone are totally in tune with the sharp, splintery, sliced nature of slate. They seem like another species of the sharp-focused fractures and striations that already define its surface. Saganic's intense sensitivity to his material comes shining through in the softly-gradated pearly gray slate edges that the ambient light picks out on the surface. These natural lines have the exquisite delicacy of Donatello's *sciacciato* carving.

*Trogle II*, 1982, which stands erect against the wall, has a similarly human-like presence and an even more pronounced helmet at its summit. Its closed, guarded, reserved stance reminds one of blind entrances to Egyptian tombs and their austere, inscrutable guardians. Though a small portion of its facade is open to the viewer, the relief depth is too shallow to permit much psychological access.

Certainly one feels less romance and mystery here than in *Trogle I*. There is a coldness reminiscent of modern machinery or ancient machinations. The sharp-edged bars and bands which impede visual access to the piece's interior seem to clang shut with the finality of a massive gate in a Christians-and-lions Biblical epic.

Bernard Rudofsky, whose *Architecture Without Architects* is many young artists' bible, can be credited with almost single-handedly revolutionizing art thinking in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Saganic, who also found primitive sources in books, is longing to visit sites in the East and Near East that have been the inspiration for a number of his works. *Lalibala I* and *Mnaijdra I*, both from 1981, have a reddish coloration reminiscent of the splendid rock-cut temples of India; *Hal Saflieni I* and *II*, 1982, resemble helmets more than buildings; and *Hal Tarxien I* has a wonderful sense of closure and mass despite its tiny dimensions.

Since scale is crucial in Saganic's work, one needs to be in direct contact with a piece for this finely-tuned sensitivity to



function optimally. Also, unlike some sculpture, his pieces are truly three-dimensional. Consequently, the two dimensions of photographic representation are doubly insufficient to convey a true indication, even when multiple views are shown. Some pieces—*Hal Saflieni II*, for example—are so radically different from one side to another that one simply cannot construct the piece in one's mind from photographs.

This is not true of Saganic's "Extraction/Displacement" pieces where the systematic process of their making is so graphically evident the configurations are relatively easy to read. *Total Extraction/Displacement (TE/D) #6*, for instance, clearly has the extracted material of the bottom level displaced to the next higher level. The extraction from that level can be seen on the third level, and so on until one arrives at the irreducible solid point on the top.

*TE/Ds #3, #4 and #5* are also fairly simple to follow conceptually, even in photographs. It is interesting to note that the extraction process set up initially seems to lead inexorably to a spiralling or curving form (nature's most natural line). This is true for all of Saganic's basic geometric forms (the triangle in *TE/D #4* and the rectangle in *TE/D #5*, for example), and it applies no matter how perfectly straight the cuts are made for each slab unit.

It may appear that Robert Smithson has been an obvious influence on Saganic (most young sculptors have been affected by Smithson to some degree). However, the conceptual similarities are probably an accidental product of the predictability of natural formations—all organic matter tending as it does to curve back into the waterdrop which is its modular unit.

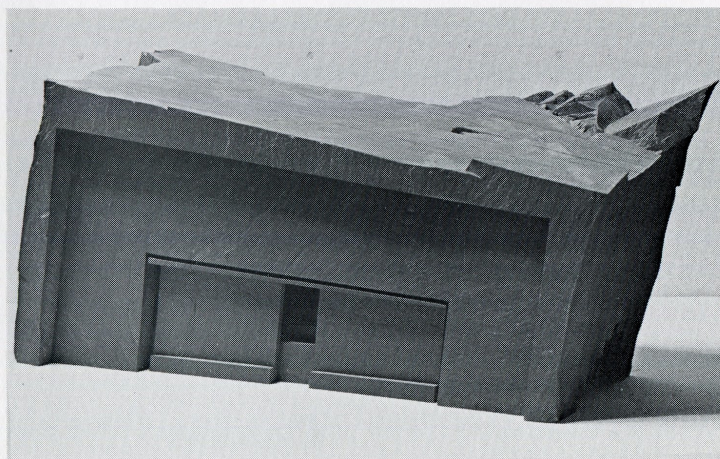
Smithson, Andre and other Minimalists used natural materials in artificially regularized configurations that often seem forced and confining to today's sensibilities. But the snaking movement of *TE/D #5*, the wing-like curve of *TE/D #3* and *TE/D #4's* resemblance to a discarded carapace seem much more natural, their organic shapes being intrinsic to their material. For example, compare Saganic's slate floor pieces of 1977 and 1978 with Andre's metal ones. Saganic's appear to be related to islands and other topographical phenomena while Andre's seem divorced from the ores from which they were fashioned. The "centeredness" of island life and the sense of being

surrounded by the relentless flatness of the sea—both of which are deeply embedded in the artist's memory—surface clearly in these floor pieces. It is a characteristic of nearly all of his work. Another important factor is his art-school training in graphics—*intaglio* being his special field of expertise. Digging into material—initially paper, then Masonite, and finally slate after he discovered real blackboards were better than his Masonite simulations—seems to be his essential method. His basic approach is cartographical-topographical.

Saganic's recent work raises the product of all these elements to a higher power by the factor of enriched content. He refers now to ancient sources as well as to biographical ones. This doesn't merely add to the work's meaning; it multiplies it, causing reverberations that echo back and forth through the ages.

Painters have always had the whole of art history lurking in the shadows of their canvases to help them in their efforts. It is only recently, however, that sculptors have been free to discard figural tradition by making raids on other kinds of past art or enlisting their aid. Systems, process, facts are no longer adequate; it is dreams, visions, romance, mystery, even danger that propel today's painters and sculptors.

April Kingsley



*Hal Tarxien I (1981)*



## LIVIO SAGANIC

Born in Yugoslavia, 1950. Earned a BFA at the Pratt Institute, 1974. He received an MFA at Yale University in 1976, after which he was given a position as assistant professor of art at Drew University.

Mr. Saganic has been the recipient of many awards and grants including the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Award for Sculpture, 1979; the National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, 1980; and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, Individual Artists Grant, 1980. He is represented in many public and private collections including the Prudential Insurance Company of America, The Exxon Corporation and Drew University. One man exhibits of his work include a thesis exhibition at the Yale University Art Gallery in 1976, the Hal Bromm Gallery in 1980, and an exhibition at the New Jersey State Museum in 1982. He has exhibited at the Pratt Institute several times between 1974 and 1977. Other group exhibits include "Sixteen New Jersey Sculptors," Morris Museum, Morristown, NJ; "The 1979 New Jersey Artists Biennial," New Jersey State Museum; and "North of New Brunswick and South of New York," Robeson Center Gallery, Rutgers U., Newark.

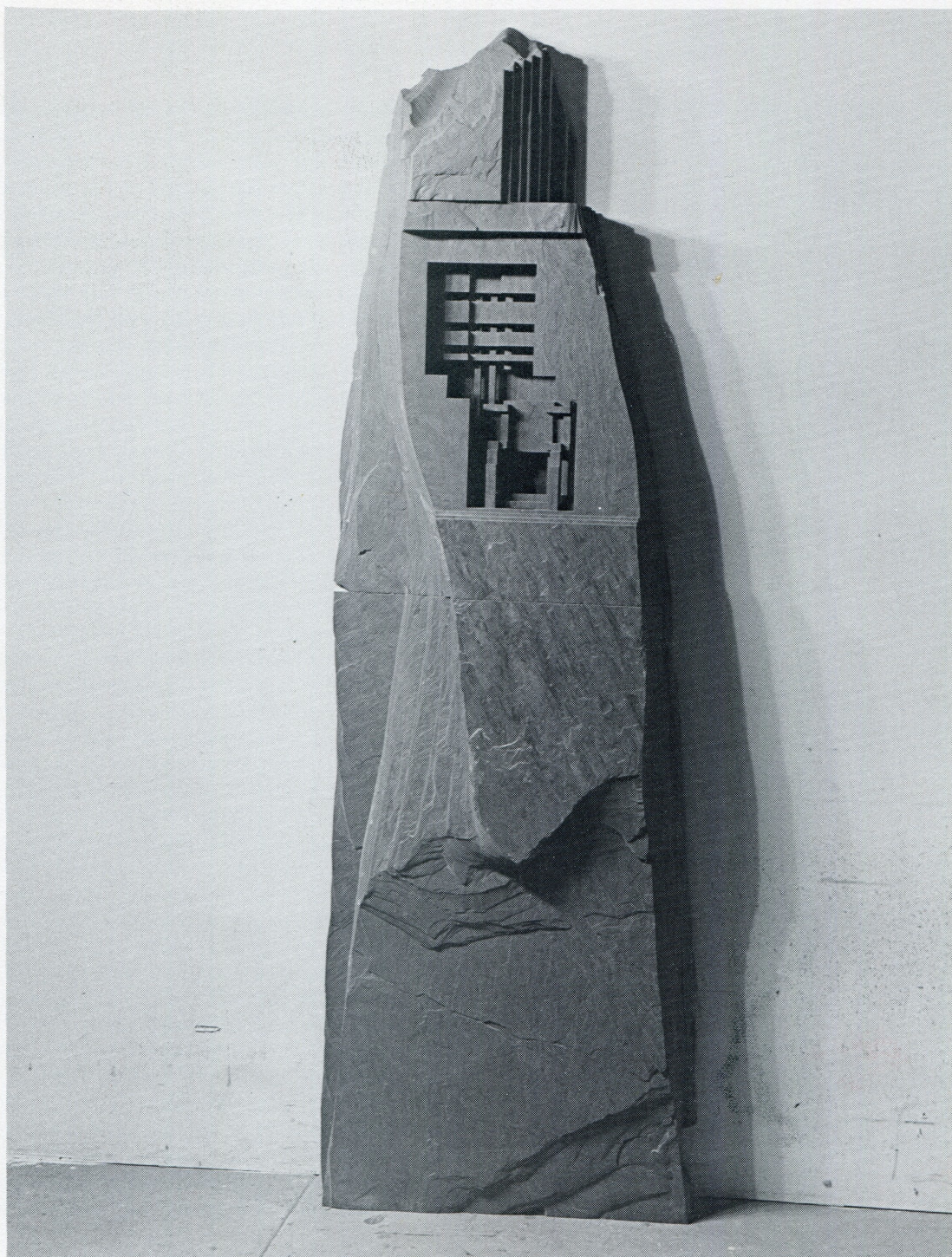
## The Exhibition

All objects are slate and were lent by the artist. Dimensions are in inches (h. height, l. length, w. width, d. depth).

1. Total Extraction/Displacement #3 (1979)  
h. 8 x l. 150 x w. 24
2. Total Extraction/Displacement #4 (1979)  
h. 41 x l. 115 x w. 50
3. Total Extraction/Displacement #5 (1979)  
h. 8 x l. 198 x w. 42
4. Total Extraction/Displacement #6 (1979)  
h. 82 x w. 52 x d. 22
5. Extraction #11 (1980)  
h. 8½ x w. 40 x d. 24
6. Hal Tarxien I (1981)  
h. 12 x w. 28 d. 9
7. Lalibala I (1981)  
h. 10 x w. 12 x d. 5
8. Mnaijdra I (1981)  
h. 13 x w. 10 x d. 4
9. Trogle I (1981)  
h. 61 x w. 40 x d. 11
10. Hal Saflieni I (1982)  
h. 17 x w. 9 x d. 8
11. Hal Saflieni III (1982)  
h. 20 x w. 5 x d. 7
12. Trogle II (1982)  
h. 82 x w. 26 x d. 7

October 15–November 14, 1982  
NEW JERSEY STATE MUSEUM, TRENTON





*Trogles II* (1982)