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Most of all, I wish to thank Associate Professor Emeritus Robert White for sharing his work and ideas with the Stony Brook community. We thank him for his 25 years of outstanding teaching at the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

Rhonda Cooper
Director

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Cherry wood, 56" H
Robert White: More is More

“Reality cannot be faked; unless it is total, it fails to convince.” So wrote Fairfield Porter, in a 1961 review of Robert White's sculpture.

More than any other critic, Porter was acutely aware of the difficulties facing a representational artist in America in the second half of this century. While representational artists risked outright rejection at a time when abstraction was the fashionable style, the greatest risk, as Porter saw it, came from the artists themselves. Representational artists often imagined that representation in and of itself could solve problems that abstraction had barely begun to raise, foremost among them the relationship of form and content. Even today, some realist artists insist that abstraction is a restatement of elements already present in the art of the past. By comparing closeups of Rembrandt's brushwork with that of Jackson Pollock, for example, they “prove” that Pollock performed exclusively what Rembrandt did in passing. The real issue raised by this comparison, however, is the relationship of gesture to context. That issue is especially pressing today, when the Modernist concept of historical progress lies in shambles. Pure form has not triumphed over narrative content, as proponents of abstraction thought it might; nor has the narrative content of a painting made it inherently superior to a painting without narrative content. The concepts shared by both camps are still unclaimed. The solution does not lie in representation or in abstraction per se but in the redefinition of our historical consciousness, and that is what the works of Robert White can teach us today.

White has the advantage of being primarily a sculptor. As Clement Greenberg observed of sculpture: “Whether abstract or representational, its language remains three-dimensional — literal.” For all their surface differences, both Porter and Hans Hofmann, the founding theoretician of Abstract Expressionism, were landscape painters. Both posed the question of form and content as painters for whom content always had to be “out there” no matter how much it might be concealed or abstracted. But the “something out there” of the sculptor is already a given in terms of pure mass. Ultimately, it represents nothing more than its own material in the act of organization. Because White works from memory, it is the charged memory — the very act of organizing experience — that substitutes for the sense-data that painters build on. According to Porter, White “sees the anatomy as if from the point of view of the man inside the body, as though he were the animate principle of his own landscape, and therefore beyond his own comprehension.” Valentin Tatransky calls White “the best American figurative sculptor” for “this balance between memory and similitude.” White works from a totally self-sustaining reality which is beholden neither to realistic imitation nor to meaningless gesture. An interesting parallel may be drawn between White, who achieves a self-sustaining work by developing all its possible aspects to a point beyond even his own grasp, and an artist like Frank Stella, for whom control is everything. Artists like Stella must eventually relinquish their own claims for a “pure” painting when the work moves into that uneasy zone between painting and sculpture. The reductionism which Stella once saw as a historical imperative of painting meets up with the universalism which Porter saw as a prerequisite of realism. As Hegel pointed out in his introduction to the Phenomenology of Mind, to particularize is to generalize.

Ultimately, there is no conflict between realism and abstraction, or even between painting and sculpture. They all come down to the artist's ability or willingness to confront the ghosts that rise up in his eye: the shadow that falls between his memory and the blank canvas or the lump of clay.

As a sculptor, Robert White could have ignored the problems of the painter. But he hasn't. In his work there is very little that has been taken for granted and very few problems left unacknowledged. His strength lies neither in his response to the challenge of abstraction nor in realism but in the wide range of options he must keep open at all times in order to answer the challenges of form and content. If he is a realist, it is first and foremost in his belief that “more is more.”

One aspect of his drawings illustrates the point. White has developed a manner in his studies of a reclining female nude seen from the back, a smear of the pencil that joins the receding area of the waist to the background of the drawing. It is a fine trick, no more than a flick of the thumb; the gesture is assured, aware of the history of the problem and of the history of its resolution. In its technical assurance, if not outright flippancy, the gesture is European. In its triumphant, almost naive, proclamation of its goals, it is brashly American. Only a sculptor could look at the craft of drawing with that particular, lucid detachment. Very few sculptors have.

This gesture is but one of many small options that White reserves for himself: other possibilities spring from the history of art, the history of meaning, the materials themselves, and the particular requirements of each of his numerous commissions for medals and public monuments. All options are valid a priori; in the beginning, at least, they are all given equal weight. But it is the emphasis given one aspect over another — the interaction, for example, of the historical meaning of a piece with its materials — that gives each of White's works its complexity and uniqueness. Each work defines itself as a particular set of choices — of ways of painting, drawing, sculpting, molding — a dialectic of being in the world.

His sculptured group Apollo and Marsyas, for instance, refers first of all to the legend of Apollo, the god of reason, who overcame the satyr Marsyas in a singing contest and flayed him as the prize of victory. White has sculpted Marsyas in black walnut and Apollo in a slightly repugnant raw bronze. Marsyas, who in Classical sculpture is shown upright and carved from stone, is thus revealed here as a "flayed peasant," in White's words, and Apollo as a crazed aristocrat. The texture of the wood both upholds and undermines the
sadistic pleasure implicit in the emphatic musculature of the Hellenistic originals — implicit, perhaps, in all Classical art. The contrast of Native American black walnut and the more "civilized" casting technique sets up another complementary tension. At any rate, the "meaning" is not settled. It courses over the surface of both objects, branching out in any number of directions the viewer might care to pursue. White meets Porter's demand for a "total reality" in the totalizing depth of his conception. Ann di Pietro, curator at The Heckscher Museum in Huntington, New York, has written that he "strives for an expressive impact that he feels is analogous to the power of literature," which is to say that he is above all an eminently cultured artist.

Tatransky has praised White for being "actively rhetorical" in that the tension between conception and execution is felt in every detail of his sculptures. All-overess, however, is not a virtue in itself; rather it is the natural sum of a series of small disruptions on the surface of White's sculptures. The unity of each piece lies no more in the quantity of tensions raised than the expression of power lies in the tending of all the muscles in the body.

Here again, the preference for quantity over quality that trips up so many representational artists has been neatly sidestepped. The surface of White's works is a series of laconic statements that open up into worlds of formal, historical, iconographic, or psychological significance. As White himself says, "I suppose that by the time I get through with a piece, it contains everything I know or feel anything about, and there are bound to be some ideas in the soup."

Consider, for instance, his two Dancers, from the series Dance of Death. The viewer's eye and mind are led from the slave's bracelet on the forearm of the male figure — which is actually an unfinished seam — to the seam-like border of his mask. Both effects are barely distinguishable from the vein in his forearm. Male strength and vulnerability are played against one another. This play brings to mind the vastly different yet complementary play of weakness and strength in Donatello's bronze David, which is evoked by the seams and textures of the Dancers. The contrast of the male dancer's outstretched arm, which faces the viewer, and the closed form of his other arm, sunk into the waist of his companion, are also a counterpoint to Donatello's use of open and closed form in the body of David and the head of Goliath. White's works develop in the mind slowly, much the way Vasari describes those of Michelangelo: It's as if a figure were emerging from a body of water. But their original disjointedness — their way of not seeming quite right at first — is White's own. The ways in which, over time, they slowly move into focus is their particular message.

Both Tatransky and Porter felt that White's work was organic rather than conceptual. Porter raised the issue with regard to White's Drinkers, a series depicting three patrons and bartender frozen into positions so expressive as to become icons of drunkenness. Porter felt that the virtuosity of the group was "lost in an artificial conception." I have seen the original plaster models piled up in White's woodshed. They remind me of that terrifying photograph of the frozen corpse of an Indian at Wounded Knee.

Tatransky argued that "White used the carriage of the
body to create the circumstances,” while George Segal, working in a similar vein at the same time, used the cultural context. In reality, both White and Segal use a cultural context, but each uses narrative in a totally different way. In Segal it is the awful emptiness of the narrative itself that conveys the context, especially in such recent sculpture as his monument to the Holocaust and his rejected projects for Kent State and Sheridan Square. For White, however, context, narrative, and formal design exist cheek-by-jowl, and it is the absence, as much as the presence, of any one element that gives these works their weight. It's always a good sign when an artist's work seems to have aged less than the writings of even his most perceptive critics. It is an even better sign when the yellowing labels of art fashion fall off of their own accord.

Paul Werner
Curatorial Assistant

APOLLO. 1986
Bronze, 60 x 18 x 16"
DANCERS, 1970
Bronze. 64 x 54 x 23" (unique)
EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

All dimensions are given in inches, height preceding width preceding depth. Unless otherwise indicated, works are lent courtesy of Graham Modern Gallery, NYC.

SCULPTURE

GARDEN FIGURE, 1947  
Cast Stone, 47 x 16 x 14"  
Collection of the artist

SEED BULL, 1950-85  
Bronze, 24 x 30 x 14"  
Anonymous Loan

HORSEMAN, 1951  
Bronze, 25 x 29 x 8½"  
Collection of the artist

MASK OF CLAIRE, 1951  
Cast Stone, 10 x 7 x 6"  
Collection of the artist

CLAIRE, 1953  
Bronze, 14½ x 8½ x 11"  
Collection of the artist

PORTRAIT OF STEPHEN GREENE, 1953  
Bronze, 15½ x 10 x 10"  
Collection of the artist

LADY KENNEDY, 1954  
Bronze, 18 x 10 x 9½"  
Collection of the artist

PORTRAIT OF CYNTHIA JAY, 1954  
Bronze, 13 x 8 x 10"  
Anonymous Loan

SALOME, 1955  
Bronze, 41½ x 9 x 13½"  
Collection of Mr. & Mrs. William Styron

BATHER, 1958  
Bronze, 48 x 66"  
Anonymous Loan

PLOUGHMAN, 1958  
Bronze, 53 x 28 x 30" (unique)

PORTRAIT OF ALIDA JAY, 1960  
Bronze, 18½ x 10 x 8"  
Anonymous Loan

THE WANDERER, 1963  
Terracotta, 14 x 7 x 5"  
Anonymous Loan

DRINKER ON A BAR STOOL, 1964  
Bronze, 22 x 18 x 20" (edition of two)

STUDY FOR CAN GRANDE, 1964  
Terracotta, 7 x 8 x 3"  
Anonymous Loan

STUDY FOR CAN GRANDE, 1964  
Terracotta, 6½ x 8½ x 3"  
Anonymous Loan

YOUNG GIRL, 1965  
Bronze, 37 x 9½ x 8" (edition of three, 1/3)

PRESIDENT'S JEWEL, STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT STONY BROOK, 1966  
Bronze, 3" diameter  
Collection of the artist

FIRST ABDUCTION OF HELEN, 1967  
Silver, 4 x 2½"  
Anonymous Loan

THE DANCE DIRECTOR, 1969  
(Pastel on paper, 16½ x 20"

JENNY SLEEPING, 1985  
Pastel on paper, 18 x 24"

RECLINING NUDE #1, 1985  
Pastel on paper, 16½ x 20"

RECLINING NUDE #2, 1985  
Pastel on paper, 20½ x 23"

RECLINING NUDE #3, 1985  
Pastel on paper, 19 x 25"

APOLLO, 1986  
Pastel on paper, 16 x 13½"

APOLLO #4, 1986  
Pastel on paper, 16 x 13½"

APOLLO AND MARSYAS, 1986  
Pastel on paper, 16 x 13½"

MARSYAS, 1986  
Pastel on paper, 14½ x 11½"

SEATED NUDE, 1986  
Pastel on paper, 21 x 18"
ROBERT WHITE

Born in New York City, 1921

EDUCATION
1933-34 Munich, studied woodcutting with Josef Weiss and painting with Hans Grund
1935-38 Portsmouth Priory, Rhode Island, studied sculpture with John Howard Benson
1938-42 Rhode Island School of Design, studied sculpture with Waldemar Raemisch and John Benson
1945-46 Rhode Island School of Design, studied painting with John Frazier and Gordon Peers, sculpture with Waldemar Raemisch and John Benson

ONE-MAN EXHIBITIONS
1948 Suffolk Museum, Stony Brook, NY
1950 Artist’s Gallery, NYC
1956 Suffolk Museum, Stony Brook, NY
1957 Davis Gallery, NYC
1958 Vera Lanzak Gallery, Cold Springs Harbor, NY
1959 Davis Gallery, NYC
1962 SUNY Stony Brook (retrospective), NY
1967 Davis Gallery, NYC
1970 Graham Gallery, NYC
1971 Benson Gallery, Bridgehampton, NY
1974 Gallery North, Setauket, NY
1975 Graham Gallery, NYC
1976 Gallery North, Setauket, NY
1977 Boston Atheneum, MA
1977 Hartwick College, Oneonta, NY
1979 Benson Gallery, Bridgehampton, NY
1980 Graham Gallery, NYC
1983 Art Department Gallery, Suffolk Community College, NY
1986-87 Graham Modern Gallery, NYC

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS (America)
1948 Laurel Gallery, NYC
1950 Artist’s Gallery, NYC
1960 National Arts Club, NYC
1960 Old Westbury Gardens, Westbury, NY
1961 Detroit Institute of Art Biennial, Detroit, MI
1966 Pennsylvania Academy, Philadelphia, PA
1968 Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL
1969 Banler Gallery, NYC
1970 Albright-Knox Art Museum, Buffalo, NY
1971 SUNY Stony Brook, NY
1979 University of Bridgeport, Bridgeport, CT
1970 SUNY Albany — The Representative Spirit
Suffolk Community College, NY — Artists of Suffolk County
University of Pennsylvania at Pittsburgh — The Figure
1976 Saint Gaudens Memorial, Cornish, NH
1977 Speak Farm Gallery, Peapack, NJ
1979 Artist’s Choice Museum, NY
1980 Pratt Manhattan Center, NYC — Sculpture in the Seventies
Nassau County Museum of Fine Arts, Roslyn, NY — Contemporary Naturalism
1982 Animals in American Art
Artist’s Choice Museum, NYC
1983 Heckscher Museum, Huntington, NY — Four Who Figure
1984 SUNY Stony Brook, NY
1985 Artist’s Choice Museum, NYC
1986 909 Third Avenue Gallery — Contemporary Images
The Heckscher Museum, Huntington, NY, Curator’s Choice

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS (Europe)
1953 American Academy in Rome
1954 American Academy in Rome
1955 American Academy in Rome
1968 Royal Academy of Art, Amsterdam, Breda and Nijmegen — Eight Americans
1969 American Academy in Rome
1976 Stazione Marittima, Trieste, Italy
1980 Civic Musei e Gallerie di Storia e Arte, Udine, Italy — Arte Americana Contemporanea

FREQUENT GROUP EXHIBITIONS
Century Association, NYC
Davis Gallery, NYC
Graham Modern, NYC
National Academy of Design, NYC
Portraits, Inc., NYC
Suffolk Museum, Stony Brook, NY

GRANTS AND AWARDS
1948 New Talent Exhibition, Laurel Gallery, NYC — Sculpture Award
1950 Tiffany Foundation Grant
1952 Rome Prize, American Academy in Rome
1953 Rome Prize, American Academy in Rome
1954 Rome Prize, American Academy in Rome
1962 Proctor Memorial Prize, National Academy of Design
1968 Fairfield Foundation Grant
1982 Proctor Memorial Prize, National Academy of Design

SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS
Boston Atheneum, MA
Brooklyn Museum, NY
Civici Musei e Gallerie di Storia e Arte, Udine, Italy
Heckscher Museum, Huntington, NY
Hofstra University, Long Island, NY
Museum of Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI
Springfield Museum, MA

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
Executive Committee of the St. Gaudens Memorial, Cornish, NY
Committee for the Reconstruction of Friuli, Italy (FRIAM)
Trusted of Village of Head of the Harbour, Senihtown, NY
Fellow of the American Academy in Rome
Member of the National Academy of Design
(Academician, First Vice President)

SELECTED MAJOR COMMISSIONS
1957 Bronze Fountain, Mr. and Mrs. Amyas Ames,
Martha’s Vineyard, MA
1958 Social Welfare Award Figurine given to Nelson Rockefeller
1959 Verrill Medal, Peabody Museum, New Haven, CT
1963 3 life-sized wooden carvings of St. Joseph, the Madonna and Child, St. Michael, Bedford, MA
1960 St. Anthony of Padua, 9’ bronze, East Northport, NY
1966 President’s Jewel, Stony Brook, NY
1972 Long Island Hall of Fame, Portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Ward Melville
1973 Bronze Portrait of Joseph Wilson, Xerox Corp. (Edition of 5)
1977 Monument to Bishop Cranmer, St. James Episcopal Church,
St. James, NY
1983 Sue Marquand Memorial
1983 General Pershing, 8’ bronze, Washington, DC
1986 Full figure bronze portrait of Sandra Alvarez de Toledo
1987 Portrait of John Swearingen, University of South Carolina
DRINKER ON A BAR STOOL, 1964
Bronze, 22 x 18 x 20" (edition of two)
**TEACHING**

1947-49  Suffolk Museum, Stony Brook, NY — Life Drawing and Painting
1950-52  Parson’s School of Design, NYC — Life Drawing:
1956-57  Architectural Ornamentation
1968-69  Sculptor in Residence, American Academy in Rome
1973    Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (Summer courses)
1983    Parson’s School of Design, NYC — Visiting Lecturer in the Humanities, MFA Program
1962-87  SUNY at Stony Brook, Stony Brook, NY

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

1950    *Art Digest* (May 15 issue), “Clear White” by Judith Kaye Reed
1958    *DRAWING* Magazine
1967    Harper’s Magazine (September issue), illustrations for Nat Turner
1970    *Sculpture Review* (Summer issue) p. 10
1981    *Cover* Magazine, p. 46, Valentin Tatransky
1982    *Sculpture Review* Magazine (Spring issue)
1984    *ARTS* Magazine (December issue), Valentin Tatransky
1981-87   Various newspaper reviews

**SELECTED REVIEWS**

1962    *Long Island Press*, William Raity “Art is His Major Interest But Honors Seek Him Out,” November 11
1968    *Bridgeport Sunday Post*, Martha B. Scott “White’s Look to Past Glories Still Has the Feel of Immediacy.” June 15
1969    *Rotterdam Nieuwsblad*, Dolf Welling “Rijksacademie Against the Trend with Eight Americans,” August 17
1975    *The Village Voice*, John Gruen “A Traditionalist in the Best Sense”
1976    *Art World*, Gene Thornton “Artist’s Choice - The Figure,” September issue
1979    *Smithtown News*, Nandy Wallis “Acclaimed Sculptor’s Roots in Art,” September
1983    *Newday*, Malcolm Preston “Four Students of the Human Figure,” August 31
1984    *The New York Times*, Helen Harrison “The Human Figure Makes A Comeback.” September 4
1985    *Arts Magazine*, Valentine Tatransky “Four Who Figure,” December issue
1985    *The Wall Street Journal*, Raymond Sokolov “Seeing NAM From Both Sides”
PREVIOUS EXHIBITIONS AT THE ART GALLERY

1975 FACULTY EXHIBITION
1976 MICHELLE STUART
   RECENT DRAWINGS (AN AMERICAN FEDERATION OF
   ARTS EXHIBITION)
   SALVATORE ROMANO
1977 MEL PETERSKY
   JUDITH BERNSTEIN
   HERBERT BAYER (AN AMERICAN FEDERATION
   OF ARTS EXHIBITION)
1978 LEON GOLUB
   WOMEN ARTISTS FROM NEW YORK
   JANET FISH
   ROSEMARY MAYER
   THE SISTER CHAPEL
1979 SHIRLEY GORELICK
   ALAN SONNIST
   HOMARDENA PINDELL
   ROY LICHTENSTEIN
1980 BENNY ANDREWS
   ALEX KATZ
   EIGHT FROM NEW YORK
   ARTISTS FROM QUEENS
   OTTO RENE
   STONY BROOK 11, THE STUDIO FACULTY
1981 ALICE NEEL
   55 MERCER: 10 SCULPTORS
   JOHN LITTLE
   IRA JOEL HABER
   LEON POLK SMITH
1982 FOUR SCULPTORS
   CECILE ABISH
   JACK YOUNGERMAN
   ALAN SHIELDS
   THE STONY BROOK ALUMNI INVITATIONAL
   ANN McCOY
1983 THE WAR SHOW
   CERAMIC DIRECTIONS: A CONTEMPORARY OVERVIEW
   CINDY SHERMAN
   THE FACULTY SHOW
1984 BERNARD APTEKAR: ART AND POLITICS
   ERIC STALLER: LIGHT YEARS
   NORMAN BLUM: SEVEN FROM THE SEVENTIES
   EDWARD COUNTRY 1921-1984
   CARL ANDRE: SCULPTURE
1985 LEWIS HINE IN EUROPE: 1918-1919
   FRANCESC TORRES: PATHS OF GLORY
   HOMAGE TO BULOTOWSKY: 1935-1981
   FREEDOM WITHIN: PAINTINGS BY JUAN SANCHEZ/
   INSTALLATION BY ALFREDO JAAR
   ABSTRACT PAINTING REDEFINED
1986 KLEEJE: METAL SCULPTURE
   TOBY BUONAGUARDI: SELECTED WORKS
   YANG YEN-PING AND ZENG SHAN-QING
   EIGHT URBAN PAINTERS: CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS
   OF THE EAST VILLAGE
   TV: THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS
   WOMEN ARTISTS OF THE SURREALIST MOVEMENT
1987 HANS BREDER: ARCHETYPAL DIAGRAMS
   MICHAEL SINGER: RITUAL SERIES RETELLINGS
   JUDITH DOLNICK/ROBERT NATKIN
   MARGARET BOURKE-WHITE: THE HUMANITARIAN VISION
   MEL ALEXENBERG: COMPUTER ANGELS
   STEINA AND WOODY VASULKA: THE WEST
1988 THE FACULTY SHOW: '88
PRESIDENT'S JEWEL
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
AT STONY BROOK, 1966
Bronze, 3" diameter