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ART

Art

ART & ARTIST

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I am convinced of it. We live in a time when we are all more or less intellectual before we are sensual, and intellectual influences determine our beliefs and our choices. For example, there is a Dubonnet poster in front of the café where I go for a drink and this makes me say instinctively to the waiter: "A Dubonnet." Our senses no longer have anything to do with it; it's a mechanism of the mind and not of the palate. It's that way with everything and it's extremely dangerous. I think one of the functions of the artist is to try to reestablish a direct contact between man and nature.


GEORGE RICKEY

Although born in South Bend, Indiana, Rickey lived in Scotland, England, and the Continent from his fifth year until he returned to the United States twenty years later. He took his degree in modern history from Oxford but studied art at the Ruskin School and the Académie Lhote in Paris. In retrospect Rickey comments: "I don't even know whether I was, in Scotland, an expatriate from America or whether I am now an expatriate from Europe." There is a happy quality in Rickey's works, a lithe infectiousness which at first belies the precision-tooling and delicate engineering which give momentum to his imaginative constructions.

KINETIC SCULPTURE

I intended to become an engineer as my father had been. Though brought up in Scotland, I expected to follow in his footsteps at M.I.T. But a surfeit of calculus, conic sections, and advanced algebra from an overeager mathematics teacher in my moorland boarding school revolted me just at the time I was beginning to discover poetry, drama, and music. Another teacher, who became the dominant influence of my adolescence, showed me the power of words, and sketched monumental destinies and human values in the study of history. I determined at seventeen to become a history teacher, dropped all the
sciences from my curriculum, which the British Public School system permitted, and for the next five years committed myself to the history of mediaeval Europe, the English constitution, economics, and the American Revolution.

This, too, was an overdose. A year and a half before finishing at Oxford, I heard about special courses for undergraduates in art—a subject the University scrupulously ignored—at the Ruskin School of Drawing in the Ashmolean Museum across the street from my college. In my family we had all drawn and painted, but only because we could, not because there was any future in it. Why not develop this, I thought, in an amateur way, so that I could, while a teacher, make really nice drawings, which I assumed they could teach me how to do, in a style combining Botticelli and Augustus John? By now I had worked out a set of values with art at the top, teaching—especially the humanities—very high, the sciences rather low, and commerce and material success at the very bottom. I had read Malthus and had determined to contribute something to society beyond replacing my parents.

I was a pushover for my teachers in the Ruskin School who, after a few months of my shaded casts, laborious nudes, and muddy impasto, very improperly urged me to study in Paris (a magical and romantic thought absolutely beyond my most extended range of less than a year before) and to think seriously of committing myself to painting as a life work. I had just enough prudence left to finish my degree and to put out feelers for a teaching job. The August after I had graduated and had survived a painful discussion with my family, I crossed the Channel and rented a little hotel room in Montparnasse. The first real artist I saw was Bill Hayter. He was stooping over an enormous canvas flat on the floor slopping some paint onto what seemed to be a meaningless abstraction. It was quite a shock after the Ruskin School. A year and many other shocks later, with my savings exhausted, I got a job teaching history at Groton School. They were very nice about my art and for three years I tried to do right by them in history.

I was able, for a while, to earn a living there, with time to paint, and could postpone deciding whether to be an "artist" or not. That was twenty-five years ago. Twenty years later, after diverse jobs, travel, war service, and occasional crises, I was in exactly the same situation. The decision was no longer necessary; partly because I had been on the road to becoming whatever I was all the time, and partly because in America there isn't really a status of "artist." Where so many painters have recently become teachers I was a teacher who had become painter.

II

I will skip from these early decisions to a time in 1945 at the Laredo, Texas, Airforce Base where, as a staff sergeant, I was working for a group of civilian psychologists on a research project. I had proved quick at the mechanical, electrical, and electronic intricacies of the computers used with the remote-controlled gun turrets on B-29 bombers. During the previous three years in the army I had found that the aptitudes scorned at seventeen were still present. I loved the mechanical problems and the shopwork. I made a series of freehand pen drawings shaded in a sort of late Renaissance style which showed the movement of the cams, motors, differentials, and prisms in various gunsights and hydraulic turrets. These
were later circulated around the Air Corps on filmstrips. One day I made a crude mobile in the shop. During my hours off from servos, selsyns, and axis-converters I was painting mostly portraits, but I kept the shop separate from the studio. I worked on a gunner “tracking-rate-error-indicator.” It might eventually have indicated something if peace hadn’t intervened and turned this machine into a beautiful, refined, precisely ordered, very expensive piece of junk.

Now, to the present. I have not given up drawing and painting and probably never shall. I am more a teacher than ever, of art now, not history, and have advanced in the profession. I spend all the time I can on constructions of steel, brass, copper, and aluminum which are made to move like machines, and to do absolutely nothing useful. However, like other images, they may mean something as well as fill the eye.

It is not that I have been “beating swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks.” That would be the most useful undertaking man ever embarked upon and I would be all for it. I am not converting one kind of machine into another or obsolete war machines from the junk pile into art, though I admire very much what artists like David Smith do with “found objects.” I like finding them myself and keeping them around. They are full of suggestion and poetry and nostalgia; our junk piles probably summarize our age as concisely as the kitchen midden did the cave man’s. I am making brand new models which I hope will not obsolete as quickly as the torque converters, high compression heads, and wrap-around panoramas that crowd one another off the assembly line and all of us off the highway. I find a crankshaft a witty and perverse obelisk for the common man; a marker both for his destiny and his way there, summoning, in one turn, strength and lightness, steel and aluminum, pressure and vacuum, fuel and vapor, clear air and lightning, with cunning eccentricity and balanced purpose as it spirals toward the junk heap. I am not in the crankshaft business but there are other machines which are as useless and meaningful; I have made a few of these.

III

Here is how I have gone about it; what follows is not apologia but explanation. First, I attempted to use subject matter without describing it. I tried to rescue shape, contour, space, and the illusion of movement from the mysterious shadows and tactile glamour of the painted surface on which images were projected flatly and fixed forever. I stuck shapes of different materials, sometimes painted, on wires and hung the wires into what were essentially chains with levers attached to the links, balanced the linkage by adjusting the length of each lever and the weight on the end of it against the accumulated systems dangling from the other end.

For the most successful of these, I cut shapes freely from window glass and hung them from balanced linkage in a system which tinkled like a Chinese wind bell.
The mystery of this kind of mobile soon evaporated. The apparent magic of balancing was easy if one began at the bottom of the system and worked up, piece by piece, weighing the latest component against the total assembly (now fixed and of known mass) up to that point.

Limits soon appeared. Each component was literally chained to the next. The links permitted movement of only 70°-80° between one wire and the next. This allowed a vertebrate sinuosity (similar to a reptile’s, which has similar structure), and a monotonous if fascinating motion.

The tracery of the wires was appealing. But it was essentially a drawing suggesting surface, even if a flexible one. The sum of the shapes and spaces was still close to painting, even if released somewhat from the picture plane. I still conceived it as a flat, slightly varying system of spots and angles in the vertical plane. Everything depended from some higher point so that the whole tended to have the depressive effect of an easily read system where gravity played too dominant a role. Next, I tried to combat this with systems which, while dependent, appeared to go uphill. Once read they were as gravity-bound as others.

My first break from these essentially profile and passive forms was a figure piece in the form of an articulated cross which I called “Prophet.” A series of “Leaning Towers” followed in which each dependent component rose vertically above the one supporting it so that the whole bluntly reversed the expected effect of gravity. The last of the dependent links appeared at the top. It did not hang but stood on the summit of a tripod. The main member appeared inverted and was so balanced as to be barely stable. This was achieved by distributing the stabilizing weights of the system remotely from and slightly below the point of support.

I drilled a small detent at the very end of a properly directed wire which, owing to the weights around it, sat securely on the point of a tripod, permitting complete rotation. It could sway in any direction up to 30° or so from the vertical with a very dynamic bounce-back. Owing to the small margin of stability, the “Leaning Towers” were sensitive to drafts.

The range of movement as well as the visual effect of these pieces were very different from the wire and sur-
walker, which is a truly unstable system and one which cannot pivot.

I had not begun to exhaust the possibilities of this simple device before I realized that the pivot itself was a limiting factor just because it did require careful placing of weights and this control of the center of gravity. So I trapped the top of an unstable component above its pivot point with a second pivot, as a tight-rope walker would if he could reach up and touch the ceiling: a slight, almost frictionless constraint there would preserve the posture.

face systems which have become commonplace as “mobiles.” I was attempting to establish an expressive kind of order, which all art has, and to challenge the eye and the mind with a mechanical device which employed, yet appeared to defy, gravity. Its moving parts were arranged for mechanical as well as visual reasons—in short a machine.

Other machines followed. The next step was to try to set pivot on top of balanced pivot while securing untrammelled rotation of the parts in a rising sequence. At first the problem appeared insoluble. However, it required merely that the center of gravity of the sum of the series, starting at the top, be below the pivot which supported it—a condition really quite easy to satisfy and one which allows a wide range of possible visual orders—much easier than it is for an acrobat to stand on the hands of an acrobat who stands on the shoulders of a tight-rope

Here was the kind of pivoting already used in a toy gyroscope or a watch. Components mounted thus would be restricted, like the balance wheel in a watch, to rotation in a plane (something most old-fashioned mobiles really did anyway, though not my “Leaning Towers”) but would not be limited to chains (catenaries) positioned by
gravity. Now I could mix orbits and churn space. It might not be worth doing, but that could be said of everything an artist does. Perhaps art is only of value as art if it is not worth doing and is done well.

Ease of movement was important to me. I planned to use as driving force the drafts in a room from the heating system, or from the breezes of summer with the windows open, or from the disturbance of the air as someone walked by. This required minimal friction in the pivots. I tried to achieve this by sharpening them to a gently rounded point checked under magnification with my jeweler's loop, allowing as little play as possible in their bearings.

The axes of rotation were kept precisely vertical in order to reduce drag at the upper bearing. Each component was pivoted at its point of balance. This last may seem superfluous in a two-pivot system. However, if one end of a component is heavier and the axis of rotation is not vertical (either from faulty construction or a floor not
level) the heavy end will swing down to the lowest point and it may take more than a light draft to move it up again. Even with the axis vertical a heavy end creates side pressure at the upper bearing and increases friction.

Such unbalance, carefully avoided in the first machines, became the essential quality in later ones, where eccentric rotors were used as motive power for a whole series. These would start in motion as soon as their axis of rotation tilted from the vertical; this was made possible by mounting the whole machine on a pendulum, as in the “Hommage à Mondrian.”

Out of these thoughts came a series of “little machines” with pivots within pivots within pivots. I made them move with interpenetrating orbits. I cut the shapes and placed the bearings so that rotations overlapped and parts missed one another by a hair or passed through gates which they just cleared. These narrow escapes provided a dynamic equivalent to the tensions suggested in painting and sculpture by such devices as the hand of Adam and God on the Sistine ceiling or the cropping of a face down the middle by Degas or the opposing points in a Lipchitz. Such tight spots enrich novels, drama, and the dance much more forcefully than they can be suggested in painting. As a child on the Clyde river steamers I had watched by the hour the gleaming connecting rods in the engine room leap boldly at the catwalk above and just miss it as they turned the great cranks and drove the paddles. I built into my little machines a hint of the recurrent dramatic crises which occur in all engines.

As I made these machines, all with carefully adjusted vertical axes, I wondered about the horizontal axis and about combinations of vertical and horizontal. It presented difficulties: to pivot like a weather vane is easy, but to suspend like a bicycle wheel is hard because the slightest overweight of one end of a part will drop it to the bottom of its travel whence no breeze is likely to lift it. Even the natural sag of the rods which hold the parts together will create a heavy side and consequent immobility. The pivot points will lie against the sloping sides of their seats creating more friction. I could drill the rods and use shafts without taper but this would produce very high friction and poor response to light breezes and a tendency to force the rods apart, letting the pivots drop still further and thereby shifting the center of gravity. All these difficulties can be dealt with, especially if the scale is large.

A combination of both axes, with the consequent infinite variety of mingling orbits, requires spherical concepts, and probably motive power other than the breeze. The drawing shows how rectangular forms pivoted for both horizontal and vertical movement require a spheri-
ample in my "Hierarchy" the inner members are heavy and offer little surface to the breeze. The next level is lighter and offers more surface. When it rotates in response to breeze the inner parts hold to their original direction but describe an orbit, since their pivots and those of the next larger part are not in line. This relationship of a series of alternating (and hierarchical) active and passive parts lends itself to interesting developments mechanically and symbolically.

cal space to move in. I did this first in the "Space Churn," which was cranked, and later in a whole series of machines employing concentric circles pivoted one within the next, as in the "Flag Waving Machine."

Next I started exploring the possibilities of a series of concentric pivoted rings in which the outer circle turns on a vertical axis and is slightly unbalanced. The inner ones are mounted at progressive angles and are brought very near to balance. The motion which tilting initiates in the outer one is transmitted to the inner rings. They respond at random and often at higher speed than the outer ring. These shapes do not have to be rings—this is merely the minimal form (e.g., "Flag Waving Machine").

A corollary to the setting of parts in motion and transmission of motion from one part to another is the use of inertia to secure relative displacement of parts. For ex-
Motive power, whether the air, a pendulum, the human hand, a motor, or the seismic effect of walking across a wooden floor, offers difficulties. Though the machines are mechanical devices, I feel they should move either from natural causes or from the intervention of the human will, not from motors. No mechanical doll has the appeal of a hand-operated marionette.

Many of my machines are windblown but there is the series I have mentioned whose performance depends on oscillation about a horizontal axis arranged on the pendulum principle, usually with a relatively heavy weight on a short rod below and a much longer and lighter superstructure above. The two together are so proportioned that they have a slow period of oscillation (in one as slow as ten seconds) and are barely stable in the vertical position. These, balanced either on knife edges, or on a pair of

points, are set in motion by a touch of the hand; sometimes in large ones through linkage designed to prevent too hard a shove. The shift from vertical inclines all the axes, the heavy ends of the rotors swing down and continue to rotate for some time, sometimes falling into step with the swing of the pendulum and speeding up, sometimes doing the opposite. The various parts rotate at different speeds and in random directions, permitting a rich visual effect.

In several sculptures recently I have tried to translate the horizontal rotary motion caused by a breeze into the vertical oscillation which will set in motion a series of slightly unbalanced rotors. This is the “Totem.” Among its ingredients are two light but sizable vertical surfaces attached to the ends of a pivoted rod. These surfaces are
themselves pivoted within the rotating frames so that they will offer unequal and changing surfaces to the varying breeze. The pivot is a little removed from the point of balance of the rod. When this is installed in a chassis, which hangs on a string so placed that the system is barely stable, it rocks the boat, so to speak, as the breeze turns it. The rocking motion shifts the axes and sets in motion various other components.

A somewhat simpler example is “Seesaw and Carousel,” designed for the Belle Boas Memorial Library in the Baltimore Museum. An extremely sensitive response to gentle drafts resulted with the low friction of the knife edge and the large vanes set horizontally. The horizontal vanes were balanced so that they had a slight slope. Air currents acting on the broad surface produced relatively powerful lift or drop and vertical movement of the arm through a large arc.

I used a variation of this as drive for a set of concentric pivoted rings in “Carousel.” Brightly colored segments of spheres, fastened to the rings, so that they were slightly out of balance, made random rotations in a vivid harlequin pattern when a draft moved the “Seesaw.”

This last development from previous forms seemed to me to get my work over a hump. Except for the rather involved “Totem” and my hand-powered machines, all my sculpture (and, I think, everyone else’s that involves movement) has been limited to rotations in the horizontal plane because of the difficulties explained on page 161. Now, I had a simple and delicate vertical response to horizontal impulses, and my work began to acquire a more fully four-dimensional quality. A series of “Harlequin Space Churns” driven in this manner followed.

Another series of vertically pivoted vanes was used in a fleet of ships—brigs, barques, and frigates—with abstract sails and rigging. A hull, fashioned from a solid steel bar, served as the pendulum weight for the wire spars and sheet steel or brass sails (pivoted slightly off balance, of course) and was supported at bow and stern on a pair of points which balanced on another pair set transversely amidships.
This is a variation of the gimbals used at sea for compasses, lanterns, and dining tables. Essentially a universal joint, it permitted the ship to pitch or roll. The points sit in little cups and are adjusted to make a barely stable system. A slight breeze rocks the boat in any direction; the displacement from vertical then sets the sails in motion.

I used thin stainless steel or brass (down to 0.010 inches) for the sails and scored this very thin sheet in rectilinear patterns for stiffness and to make a light-dark relief pattern on the surfaces. Scoring on alternate sides keeps the sail close to a plane.

Such pieces as these can be made in almost any scale. However, when the pendulum principle is present a change of scale causes a change of time: the larger the scale the slower the oscillations. I have made ships from eight inches to about eight feet high. There is another and subtler result of large scale that appears when the work is larger than the man who made it. This involves aesthetic matters and these I have, up to now, ignored.

The foregoing is an exposition of technical means. The technical means, here, as in any art, offer the possibility of relationships. The artist decides what shall be related and what meaning or association or symbolism shall be suggested. The mechanical arrangements offer a four-dimensional canvas on which to compose. Shapes, proportions, spaces, inclinations of axis, orbits, the tensions, speed of rotations, the gamut of metals and colors and surface treatments are areas of choice, limited I admit. But the artist must always accept limits, imposed by his craft, his own capacities, and by his time and place, from which he cannot escape. As a schoolboy I had to write an essay on "Our possessions are our limitations"; I now find the converse more interesting; out of the limitations comes the most important possession of an artist, his style.

IV

With these details, I have tried to explain the explicable, which is only a fraction of what anyone does, artist or not. The "how" is more elusive, the "why" pure guesswork. The part of the documentation is easily and, I hope, clearly set down. It is transmissible knowledge. I have omitted motive, emotion, human values, self-expression, taste, significance, symbolism—in short, plot, style, form or content; I have omitted "art." This is just as well. I can now proceed with a light heart to talk about the rest, which will be subjective, unprecise, elliptical, metaphorical, mystical, obscure, and more interesting and valuable than the foregoing.
As I found myself more committed to this métier (it still surprises me to find myself listed as a sculptor) I began to wonder where my machines fitted into the evolution of art. It was obvious that movement itself had been involved in the visual arts from the beginning, in the dances of every culture, in toys everywhere, in mobile masks in Alaska, in the “flying game” of the Aztecs, in the bullfight, in the leaps of acrobats and the swinging of censers, in the water pageants in the Grand Canal and the clock by San Marco, in sliding down bannisters, in skiing and skating, in cheering sections, baton-twirling, marching bands, and in the ball games themselves, in electric signs and formation flying, and now, after fifty years of so-called motion pictures, in a very sophisticated way in the UPA productions.

I knew of Ducamp’s bicycle wheel as the first “mobile” in 1913, and the exhibition, of the automobile as art at the Modern Museum in 1933, and the works of Calder, Max Bill, Gabo, Pevsner, Boccioni, Léger, and Mondrian in the generation between.

This was context enough for my work. These visual adventures occurred in a wider popular context of round-the-world-flight, instantaneous communication, X-ray vision, space travel, accelerator under every foot, shutter in every hand, mesons, neutrons, pro- and megatons on every atoll, psychiatrist’s pattern on every rooftop, and an economy where mass production makes cheaper and cheaper things that cost more and more and more to distribute. In such a mechanized environment a machine that is carefully designed to be useless echoes the whimper of many a cog: “What is the use?”

My work has approached the limit of abstraction. Yet I recognize that most of the world’s art has been “figurative” and is likely to continue to be. I like it that way. I doubt if there is a purely visual art, independent of association, despite the last generation’s pressing of analogies with pure form in music. I was frankly surprised at the resurgence of abstract art in New York at the end of the War. I could not tell whether this was a delayed reaction to that phase of the School of Paris I had long thought dead and respectfully commemorated by exercises in the academies and by presentations of the sequence of styles in the museums. Or was it a belated discovery of Klee and Kandinsky? Or was it an actual resurrection? It has been a vigorous movement with gifted, knowing, and productive participants who have stood unawed by Paris, even though they forget (or perhaps because they do) that the canvas they paint on was stretched for them there a generation ago.

These men find they cannot stay abstract forever and the “figurative” reappears on 57th Street just in time to move uptown to the new art district in the Seventies. I was ahead of them in not surrendering my interest in figurative art and now I will probably lag in my devotion to an apparently abstract form. I am still interested in making portrait drawings rather close to nature, showing character with a somewhat romantic interpretation. I find no inconsistency between this and drawing up a “Flag Waving Machine” in explicit mechanical detail and then building it into precise, kinetic existence. Though it represents nothing, a machine is not an abstraction. It lives and moves and has being in space. It is not the projection onto a surface that a painting must be. Part of the role of a painting is to struggle back, through illusion, toward the spatial world from which it was projected. One finds this straining out of the picture plane in every art of every
time; it almost succeeded in the Renaissance. It is like man's paradoxical struggle to get back to the heaven whence he came. Sculpture has not been bothered by this dilemma of dimensions. It is significant that, except for cubism, the sculptor has always reflected the ideas of a new epoch before the painter has. Gabo says that the image need not be an "image of . . ." He is a sculptor. The painter cannot avoid dealing in suggestions of space and implying, even in the most abstract terms, a world of which his painting is a commemoration or illustration or map.

A machine is not a projection of anything. The crankshaft exists in its own right; it is the image. It is many other things, too. The paradox of the machine is that the projection from it—the mechanical drawing or the blue print—exists before the machine does. The concretene.s of machines is heartening. They do not depend on a rush of feeling or embellishment of surface or nervousness of execution or tragic renunciation of all that interferes with "process." Yet they can, without being "images of . . .," evoke and suggest and comment. They can be figurative in the sense of suggesting living forms. They can suggest a range of poetic thoughts in addition to delight in the forms and movement themselves, just as the ballet does.

I find myself unembarrassed by this double layer of expression: abstractness and a continuing interest in portraying the world I live in, especially people. If I were to live in another time I might be a portrait painter. I sometimes think that while making my machines I am waiting for the world to digest and assimilate modern art and prepare itself for an art that portrays, reveals, dramatizes, records, inspires, and even preaches deep values in human

action without being decorative, "illustrative," photographic, didactic, sentimental, or academic.

I should like to live in a world that could be described by artists without their feeling they were betraying themselves. I am convinced that in the end art is not for the artists, but for their fellow men, as it was for the cave painters, the Mochica potters, the Japanese printmaker and the Haida woodcarvers. Does the privacy of our art mean that we are in artistic hiding waiting for a better day? I can imagine a time when we will use what we have learned from abstract art and devote ourselves to painting nature according to our perception of it.

I have just been listening to the striking of a bell. The measured sound is carried unevenly on a blustery November wind. In a moment of reverie I thought I was hearing again the distant call from a fourteenth-century church tower across an English countryside. Now I remember that it is just a locomotive in the freight yards downtown. But the sounds are uncannily alike.

I must live with the locomotive and the freight yards. The bell on the great iron machine is sweet because of memories from a past time. I am lucky to be able to bracket it with the other bell ringing across the meadow from Iffley. I must live with one but I need not reject the other. I can make my abstract machines and still think of my Constable and my Corot. I want to live in my own time and make things as contemporary as the weather report. But I also want to enjoy my inheritance and whatever other riches travel or the camera may bring me. I will drill and bend and file and solder but I will think of the African maskmaker or the faces of Van der Weyden. I do not worry that I cannot choose to live in a place
Or an age where the artist's role is clear, where his service to society recognized, his skills defined, his techniques and message harmonized, and where the values he works with are so implicit that no word such as art need be invented to argue about them. As I get older I concern myself less with any imaginary "artist" status. I no longer know what it means or what it would be to achieve it. I doubt if anybody else knows either. Perhaps what I make is art. If not it is something else equally interesting to me.

V

I have no aesthetic creed—though I love surface and texture and the quality of paint and certain shapes, color combinations, and ways of drawing a line; these are not relevant to my purpose. I am not making beauty nor am I trying to make a contact print of a state of mind.

My tools work either successfully or not at all. If a drill is the wrong size or a hole crooked or a soldered joint insecure I know it and I can fix it. If a saw blade is dull I can change it for a better one. If I lack the skill to do something I want to do I know it, and I learn how to, or give up the idea. It is clear. It involves recognizable mastery over the tool and material. Who is "master" over paint or the drawn line? We use this term for painters but it is a mystical label.

I know when I have finished a piece. I have a plan, drawn or not, and even if I keep altering the plan it always contains a concept of completion. For me the fragment is meaningless, the "emotive fragment" a joke. When the parts are shaped, the pivots sharpened and polished, the polychrome applied, the balance adjusted, I am through. There is nothing further to be done. But who knows when a painting is finished. One of the mysterious things to an art student is to be told halfway through a painting "It looks wonderful as it is. Don't give it another stroke or you'll ruin it." What's hard is that the student probably would ruin it (according to the current aesthetic) but wouldn't know it. His teacher knows it but can't say why.

This uncertainty about completion remains in every modern artist. Among the "avant-garde" artists for whom "arrangement" is anathema, completion must be equally so; "process" would be interrupted by completion. Paintings do leave their studios; what anxiety and frustration must accompany such a surrender! I can be anxious about whether a machine will work but I know whether it has worked. I can enjoy completion. Finis coronat opus.

My medium is so removed from nature and, really, from "art" that even the most unschooled public does not raise questions of verisimilitude. Imitation of nature would be so difficult in my métier and look so awful (the automaton with waving arms outside a gas station?) that I am spared the whole question. If there is a hint of nature, as in my "Prophet," the idea of resemblance is so remote that the viewer often insists on the subject rather than showing impatience at the lack of it.

Even when I suggest human involvement as in the "Flag Waving Machines," or imply figures as in "Cocktail Party," there is also a level of response (which I suppose is aesthetic whether I admit it or not) to delicacy of balance, complexity of movement, defiance of gravity, organization of shapes, periods of oscillation—to the so-called "design factors"—which is immediate and relatively effortless. If I did not aim beyond these factors it would be a meager expression and would deserve the comments I have made on abstract art. But I welcome this response
to the abstract just the same. So does my dealer, who says she is glad to have a couple of my things around to break the ice and provide an excuse for conversation.

VI

There is not much that anyone can tell about himself. Every autobiography is an invention, and probably the more interesting for it. The invention may reveal more than the history. Artists, who spend a lifetime on their visual statement, tell less perhaps than others. Though I like to read the classics of painters' prose, such as the letters of Van Gogh, the journal of Delacroix, the notebooks of Leonardo, the correspondence and tales of Gauguin, they create as much mystery as they dispel. Cézanne, unshaken after fifty years as the keystone of the structure of modern art, wrote letters which sketch in something of the man but almost nothing of his massive art. Sometimes the artist, no matter how skilled a writer, does not describe what he thinks he does. Leonardo's instructions on how to paint a deluge become, as he writes, his own poem on the end of the world.

But I would not join those who say that a painter should not write—that his work will say it all, that if he writes it he won't paint it, that if it can be said in words there is no need to say it in paint, that a good artist need not, or ought not to command language. I find this silly, confused, and defensive. I see no good reason why an artist should not be verbal or why a man with verbal gifts should not be a painter or sculptor. Many have been—indeed the list is so long that it is the exception for an artist not to be able to express himself well in words. For a time there was a comfortable legend that Van Gogh and

Cézanne were uncouth and unlettered children of nature who were articulate only with the brush; they were, in fact, well read, keenly verbal, educated men.

Today we are supposedly being battered by a wave of anti-intellectualism. This defensive attack started among artists long before it appeared in politics. It was expected to be axiomatic that art would flow from the innocent mind; that education and command of the mother tongue would somehow emasculate the artist; that a bohemianism of the mind was the artist's natural environment. If the artist were a teacher and talked about art it was likely he was not making it. It was a striking parallel to the 'know-nothing' chauvinism of the last century which has reappeared in such virulence today.

Ironically most of the anti-intellectual artists are intellectuals and very verbal. I have heard attacks on the 'artist-teacher' in skillfully turned phrases by men who proved themselves very effective teachers. The fear of verbal expression is a sign that we have not quite come of age in the visual arts. Fear of words admits the power of them. What robust artist will stop painting because he talks? One might even be tempted to measure the strength of the artist, not by his verbal skill, but by his unconcern about its dangers. I know the contest in almost every college art department between defensive studio teachers and art historians. I doubt the effectiveness of teachers who will not talk. Every one of us started with language as his first expressive instrument. The least articulate of us has spent almost all his life using language to convey ideas and, no matter what his command of another medium, still employs language as his major instrument. He would do better to use it well than badly. Many artists have used it well.
RICKEY

So, I don't think I have betrayed my art by talking about it. It has taken time. But I have not lost the ideas for more machines that I had when I sat down to write. Much of this account was thought out as I worked in the studio. The labor of writing often diverted my mind back to my machines; I will now go to work on them.

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

The tall, slender figures, which at first glance seem little more than armatures, have become a visual synonym for Alberto Giacometti. Painting and drawing were the first media of expression for him and, since 1914, when he completed his first sculpture, Giacometti has worked in these art forms. Drawing helped him to bring to his sculpture the quality of real movement and not merely the illusion of movement. Giacometti's friend, Jean-Paul Sartre, here writes about the Swiss painter and sculptor.

THE PAINTINGS OF GIACOMETTI

"A number of nude women, seen at the Sphinx, I being seated at the back of the room. The distance separating us (the floor gleaming and apparently impassable in spite of my desire to cross it) impressed me as much as did the women" [from a letter to Matisse, November, 1950]. Result: four inaccessible figurines poised on a ground swell which is nothing but a vertical floor. He did them as he saw them, distant. Yet we have four spindling girls of a looming presence, rising from the ground and about to plunge on the painter all together, like the lid of a box. "I saw them often, particularly one evening in a little room, rue de l'Echaudé, quite close and threatening." Distance, to his eyes, far from being an accident, is part of the inmost nature of the object. Those trollops at