

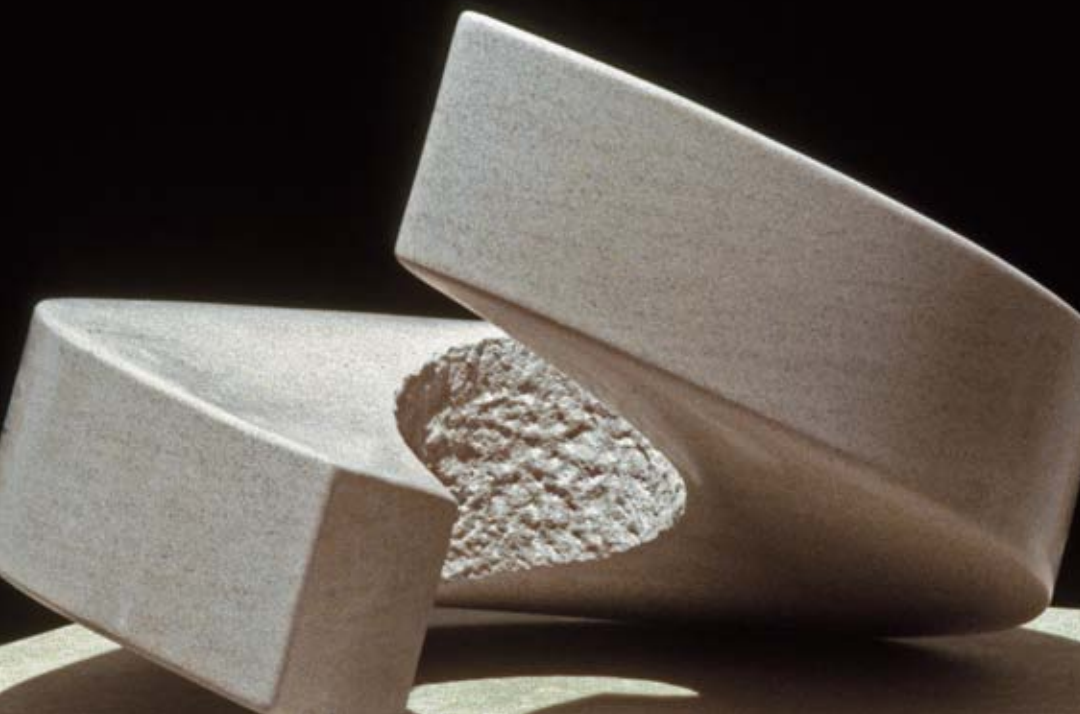
JOHN REEVES

LITHIC DREAMS

This eBook—an electronic version of a handsome hardbound monograph on John Reeves' sculpture—is designed to open in so-called “full screen mode” on a black background with no distracting menus.

To turn the pages use the Right and Left arrow keys on your keyboard.

On an iPad, simply tap the edge of the page or brush the page with your fingers.





LITHIC DREAMS

JOHN REEVES

SCULPTURES

&

ENIGMAS



L I T H I C D R E A M S

J O H N R E E V E S

S C U L P T U R E S

&

E N I G M A S



MALLET WIND

CHISEL WAVES

STONE BEACH

LITHIC DREAMS

AFTER ALL THESE YEARS OF SCULPTING, I still stand in awe of the creative process. It is difficult to describe because it is essentially a mystery. I witness my hands cutting the space occupied by a stone. Intention and awareness are present, but there is a looseness, an openness. Then at some point, often without warning a turn towards coherence occurs. It shifts, something clicks... there is a quickening. It is as if consciousness has arisen in the form; perhaps one could describe it as a quantum state change. From an unformed state, a defined being-ness emerges.

From that point on, it feels as if the piece begins to draw its own existence from a primordial realm of mind,. There is a certain clarity and veracity that arise from within – like a platonic form manifesting.

Spatial and temporal trajectories crystallize into presence. There is contemplation. Attention relaxes, and broadens to unbounded awareness. At least that's what happens to me. My wife sometimes finds me unmoving – standing timeless in my studio contemplating lithic dreams.

What happens when one experiences presence in this way? That is another mystery, cousin to the act of creating..

F O R M S I N S P A C E

A SUBURBAN ELM TREE served as my childhood perch between the north woods and Chicago. If you climbed to the right height you could look into the dense canopy, or out over it to the Chicago sky line. This dichotomy has continued throughout much of my life, though various cities became Chicago, and various wilds became the north woods.

The Chicago Art Institute and the Field Museum downtown were wonder filled caverns. At the Art Institute sculpture was either something I climbed on outside the entrance - the proverbial lions at the gate, or it was something that I had to get around in order to arrive at the Impressionist, Post impressionist, and Cubist paintings. However if we used the East entrance there was a post modern maze of sculpture to pass, and I always stopped at one of Jose Rivera's looping, spinning, bronze fabrications. It always drew me in. Eventually his sculpture left my memory only to tumble out again in works such as, Tetring, Uroborus, or Oh.

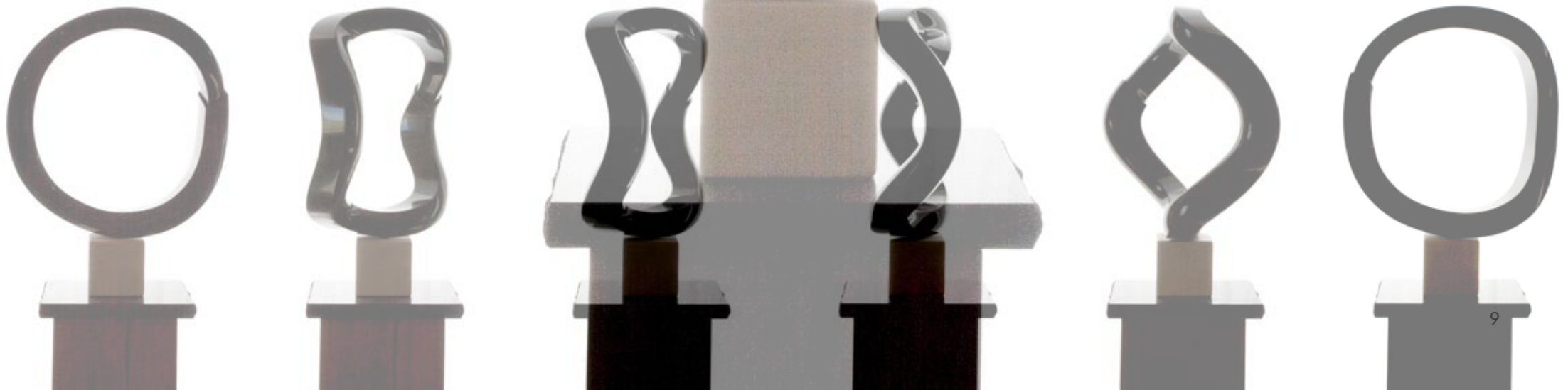


Ookpik
1991

Working directly, drawing on the hands' own knowledge and discovery has been central in my work. Really, how else are you going to find out what a material can do? Perhaps in time you include master artisans in your narrative. It is not really a judgement of which is better, it is just an acknowledgement that they are different approaches, that yield different experiences, both for the artist and likely the viewer.



Uroborous
1998



Brancusi

Surely I was around his works at the Art Institute as a kid. Again sculpture just wasn't in the foreground of my attention. I was most fixed on the great painters, Cezanne in particular. Brancusi and Noguchi were however a part of Chi Man's pantheon and this came to me osmotically, in a way. I noticed a number of curious coincidences with Brancusi. One of which occurred when I first started to carve. A white Spitz arrived at the studio and kept me company until I learned the craft. I later discovered that Brancusi too had a white Spitz.



Once Brancusi did move into my foreground I felt him to be a familiar spirit. For a time I kept a small journal in which I had copied his aphorisms. Much of Brancusi's work expands all at once out into the world. It holds little shadow. My sculpture owes a debt to the refinement and balance I found in Brancusi's work, however I had to integrate concavity, shadow, and the spatial indexing of time. A work such as *Rhythmic Symmetries* draws as much from Naum Gabo as it does from Brancusi.



Rhythmic Symmetries
a.k.a. Bird
1980



Mentors
1999

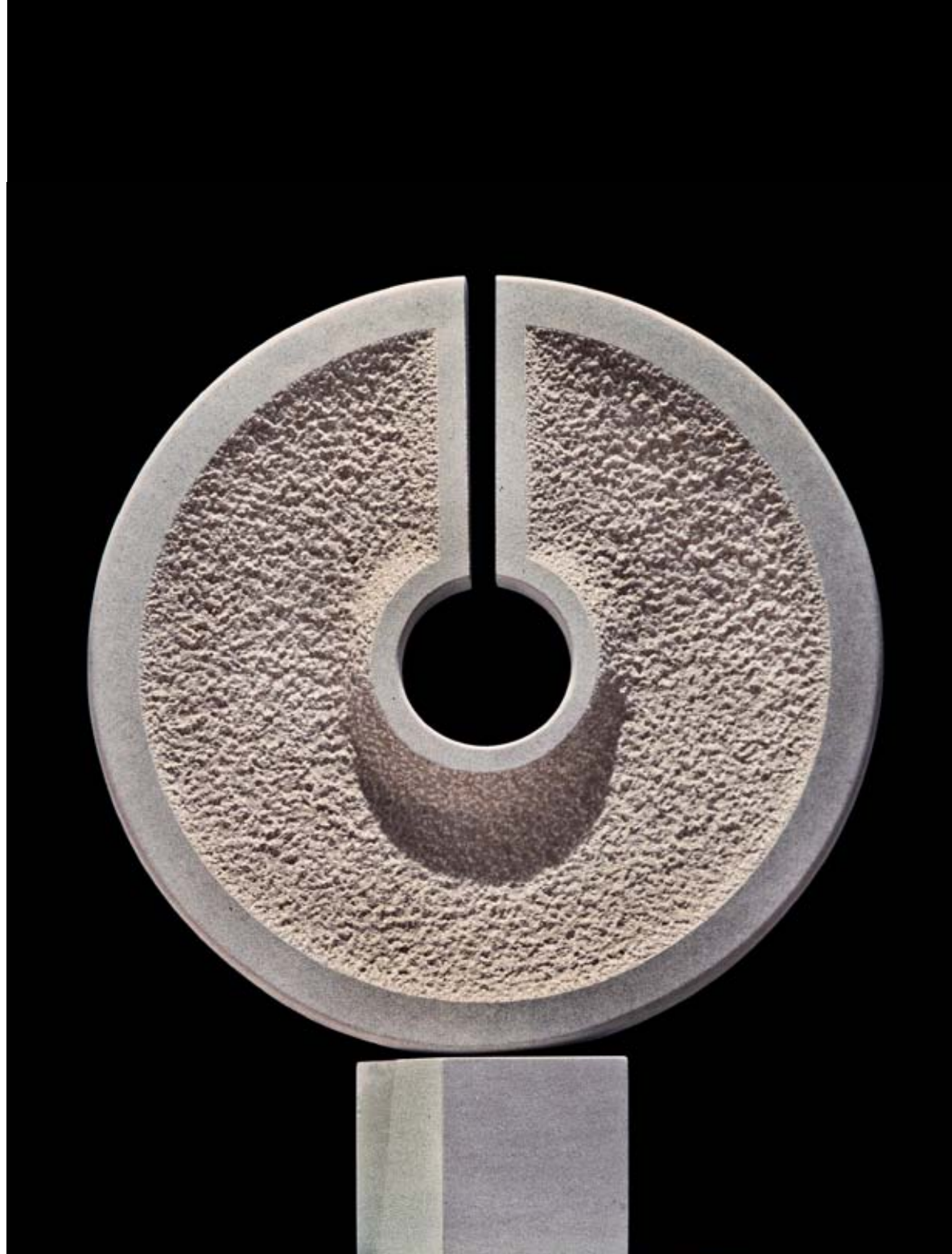


Mentors
1999

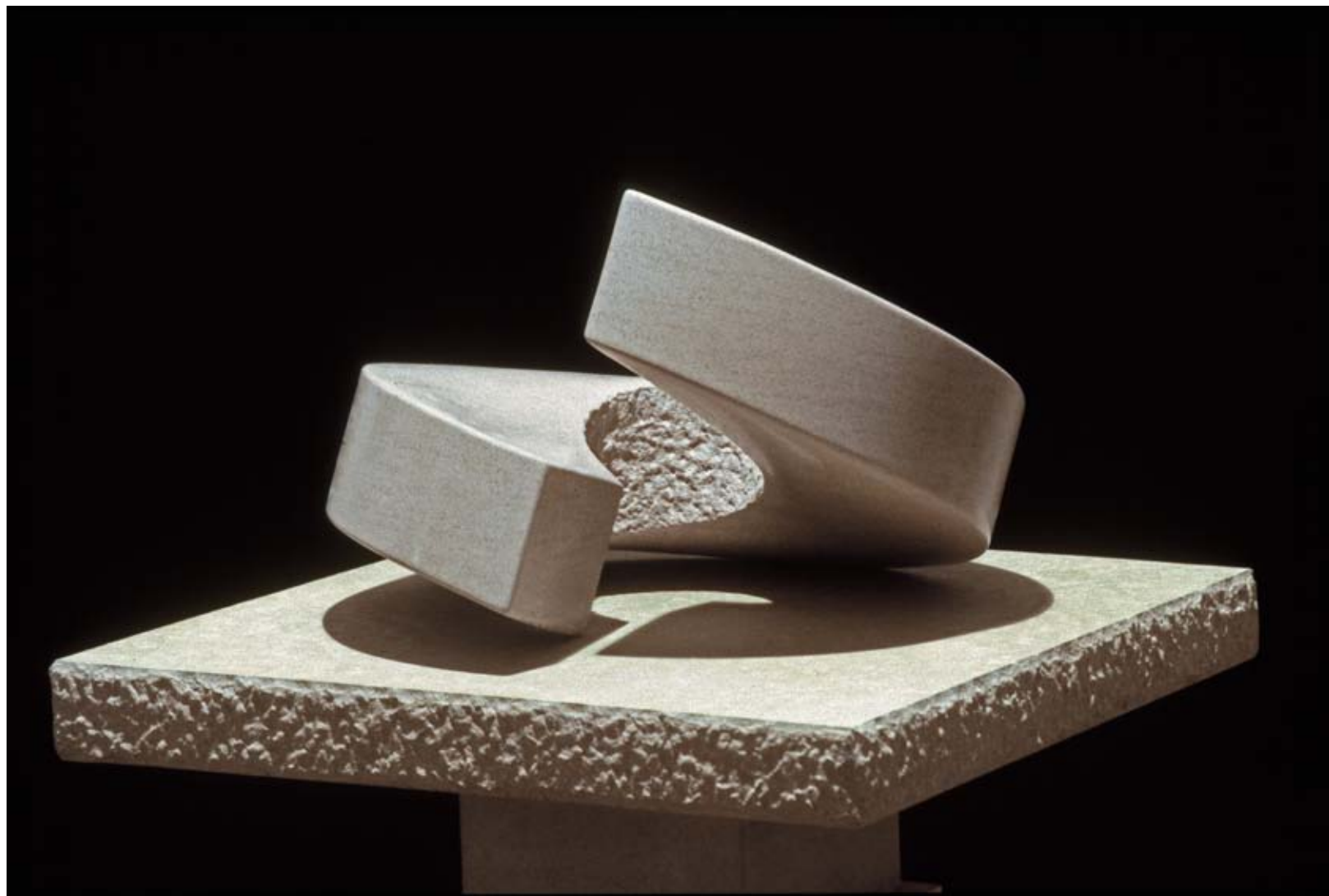
(more views...)



Clava
2000



Turning
2000





Little White Nut
2005

Torus
1990





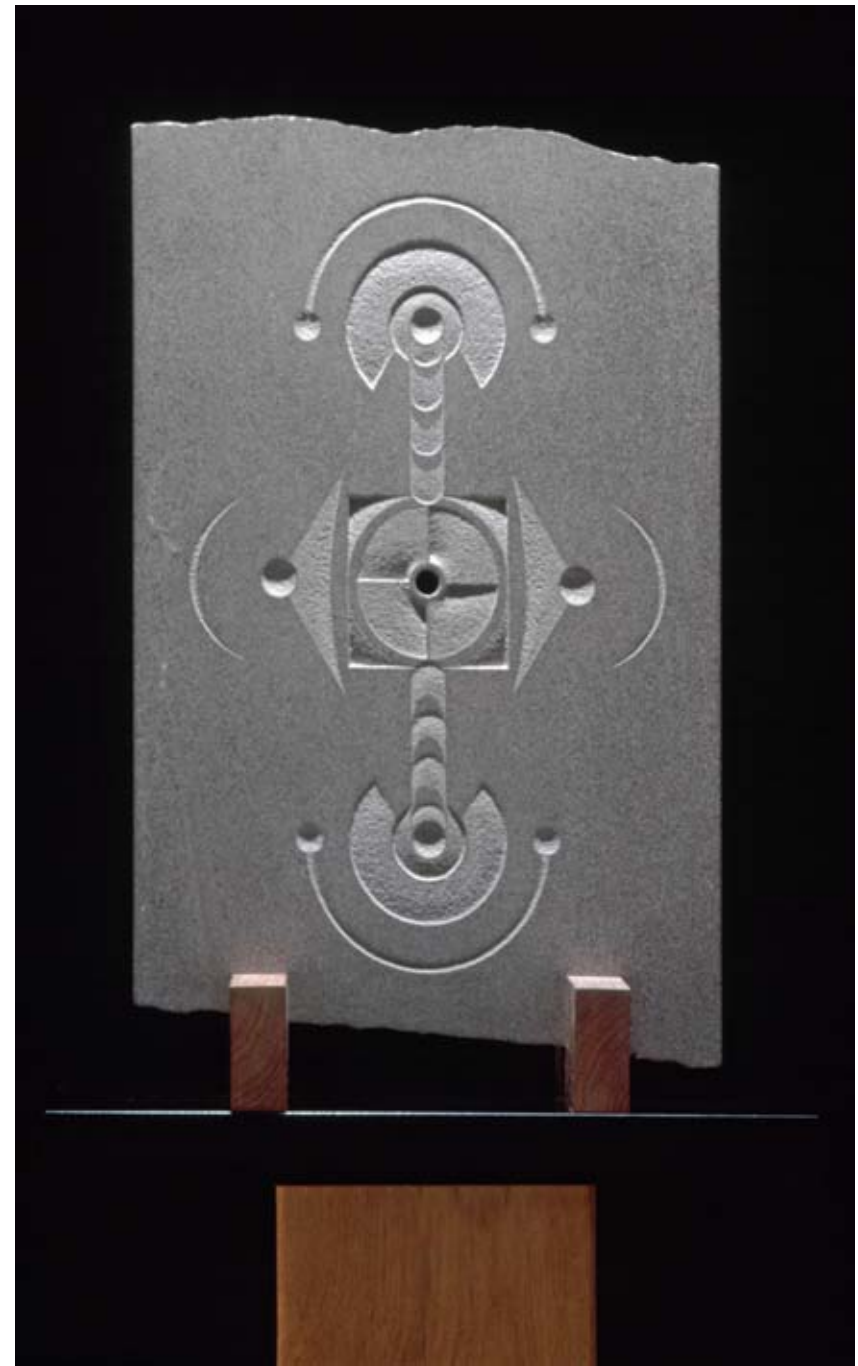
Torus
1992



Chrysalis
1990



At the Navel of God
1993





Goddess
1992



Flake
2005



Martin Puryear and Carl Andre were visiting artists at the University of Wyoming. It was odd to see these two giants in the cultural backwater of Laramie Wyoming. Within days of one another the two came through the carving studio while I was working on "Stone Spirals". Andre looked favorably on the work, while Puryear seemed to express relief that he had chosen wood as his primary medium and additive form as his primary method.

I think that until I watched Andre work it was easy to be dismissive. But to feel him see his work as it progressed made an impression on me. What struck me most about Puryear was his hands. They appeared to emanate a deep knowledge and confidence.

Stone Spirals
1982





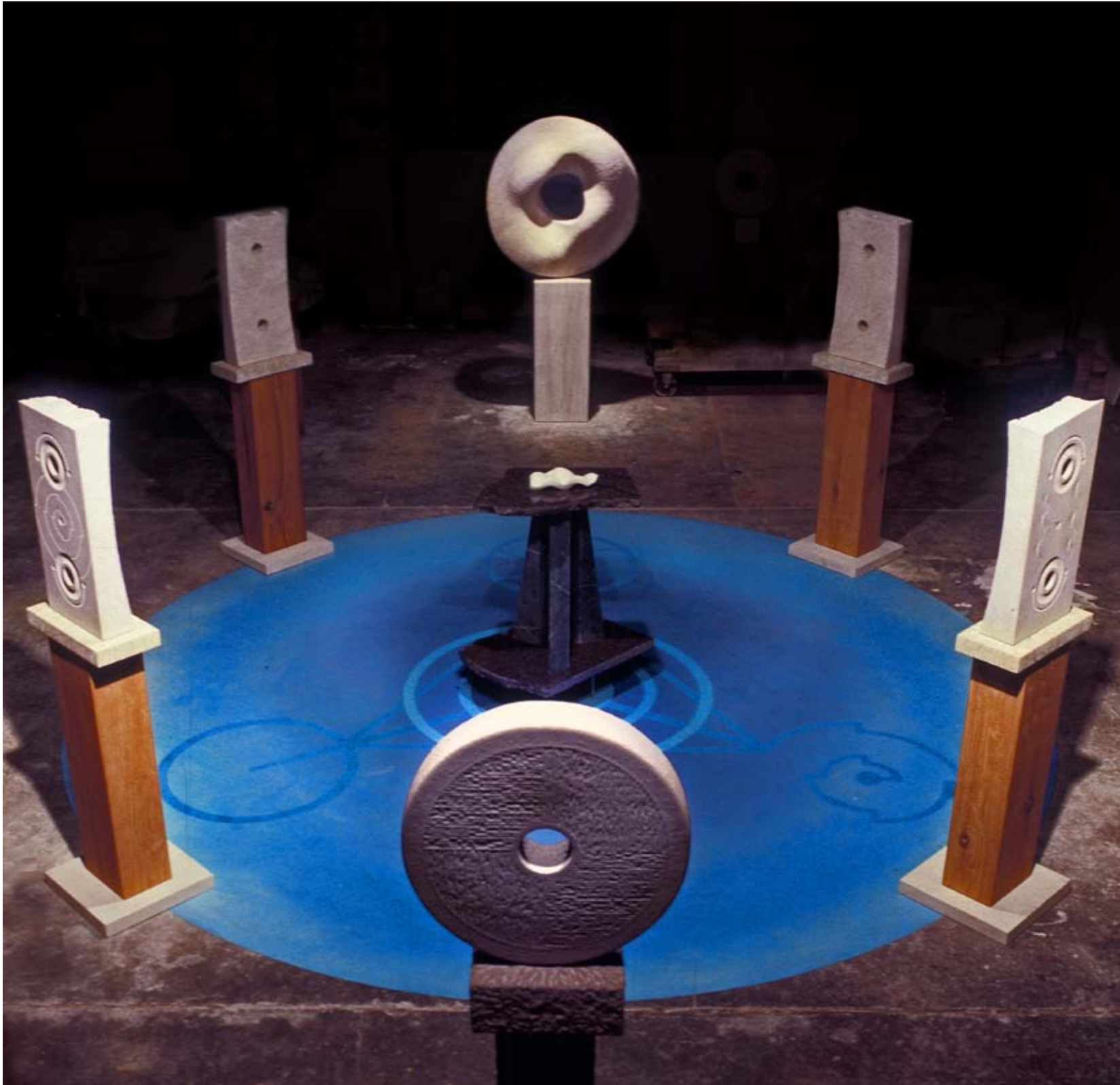
Sky Cradle
2005

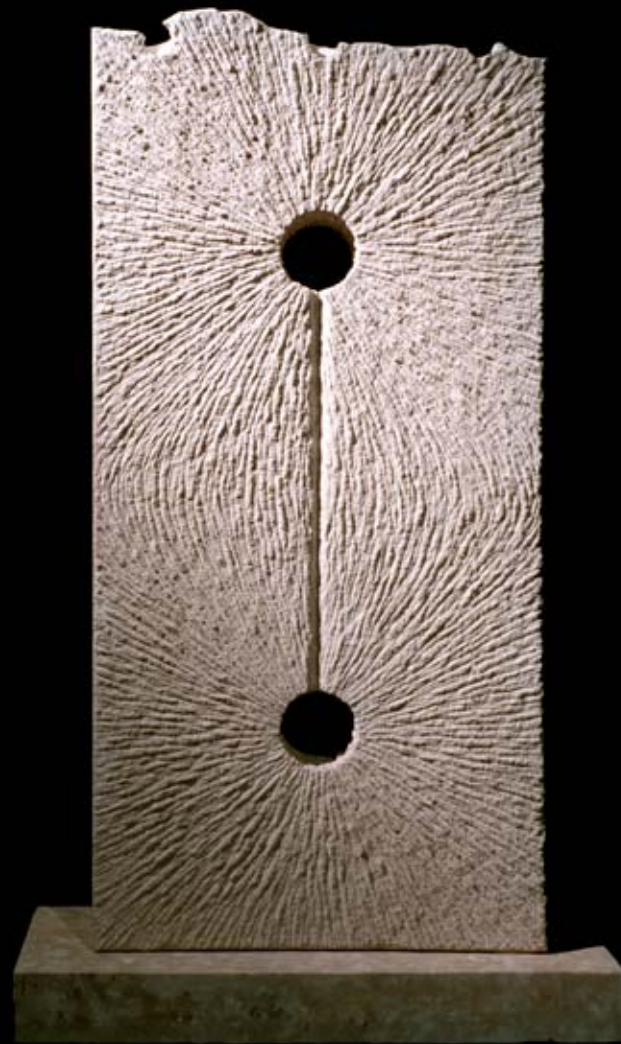
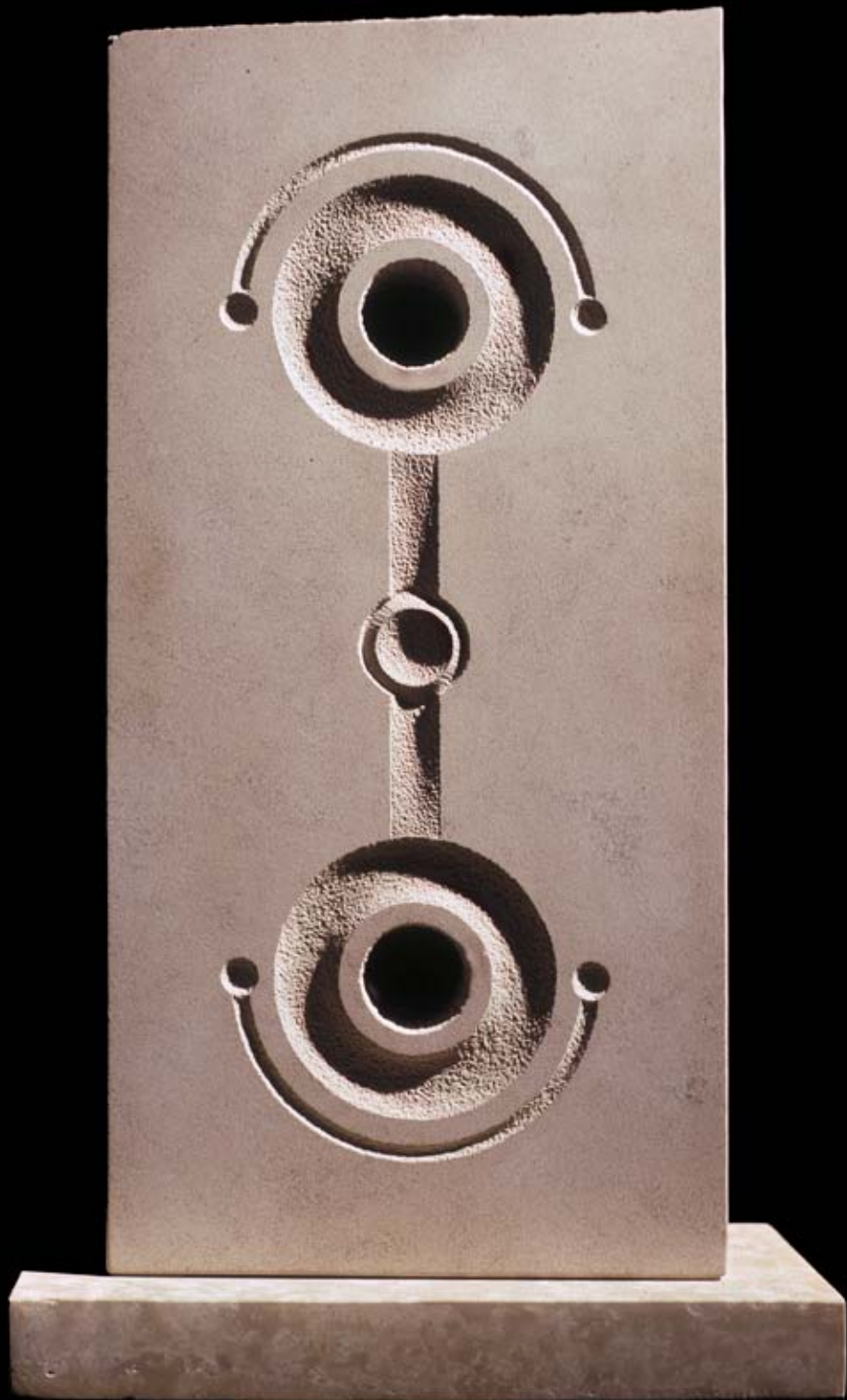


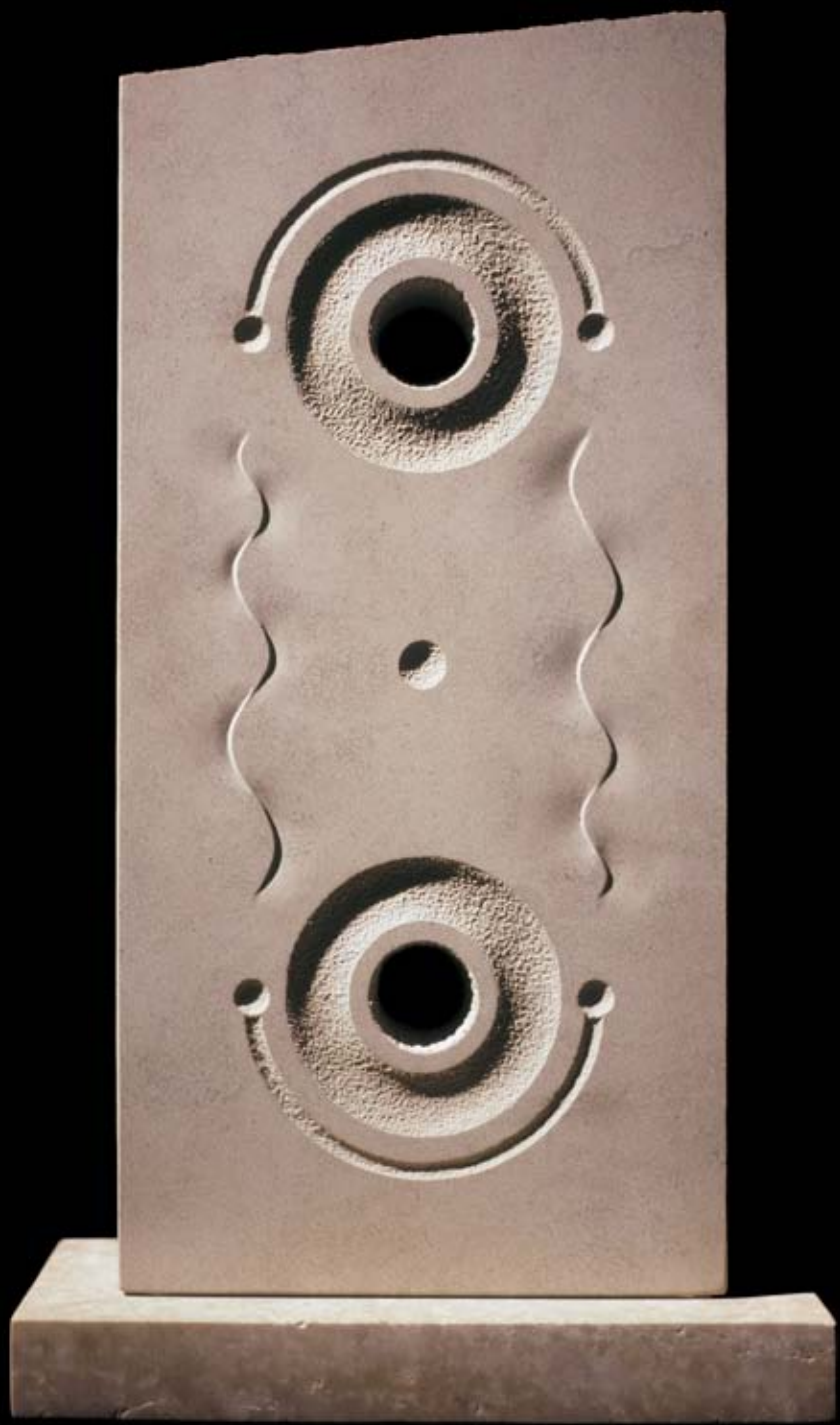
M I N I S S K I T I G A N
N O V E M B E R 1 9 8 6

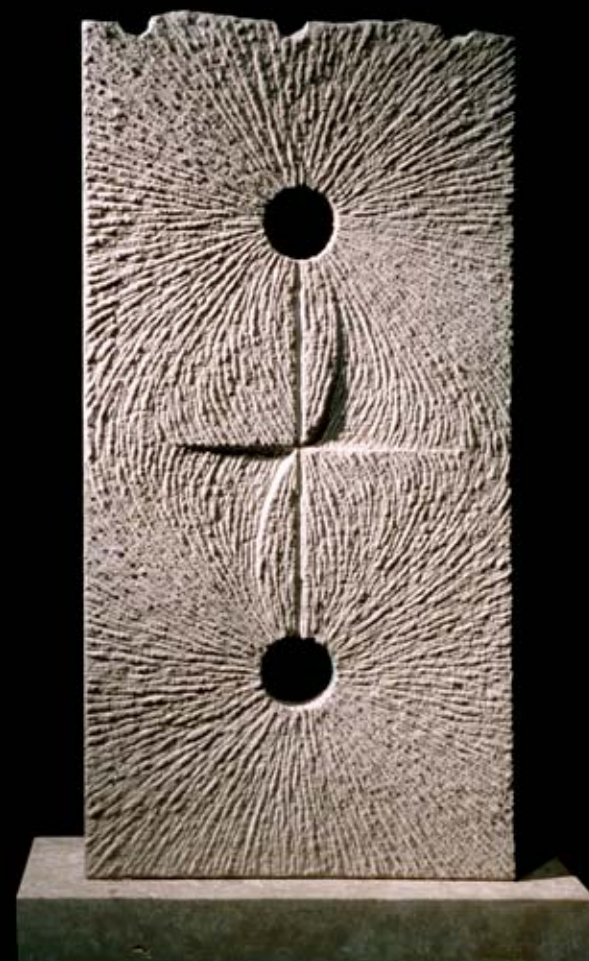
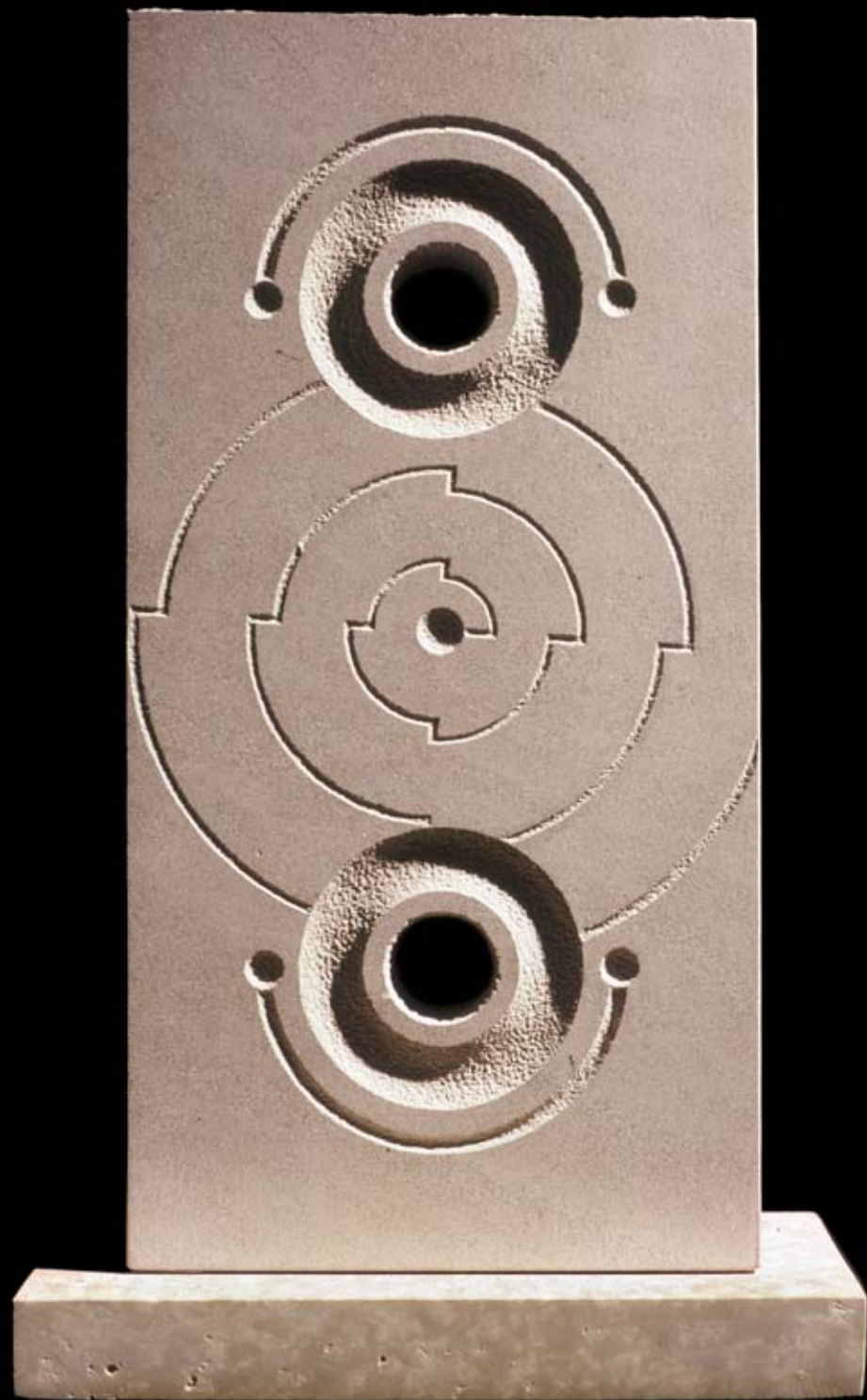
The Fall gales have arrived early. We are held here on this island until the Northwest winds subside. It has been weeks. I am with Keewaydinoquay, an Anishinabe elder. She is sometimes cantankerous and I am often scolded for various things. Evenings after prayers, around the cookstove, the conversations cover all manner of things. This evening it was linguistics - the structure of European languages, relative to Algonquian structures. "In our language that is not a tree, it is a space that is 'tree-ing'. The differing structures of languages engender differing perceptions of the natural world."













INSTALLATIONS
STONE IN SITU





Aligned Liths
1983





Aligned Liths
1983

L O N D O N M A R C H 1 9 8 7

I spent the afternoon with David Bohm. What really struck me was his interest in linguistic structures. He was proposing a language which more accurately enfolded the transient nature of nouns.. He felt that this would yield a timely shift in perception.





Elemental
1981





Bird
1980

JOHN REEVES' SCULPTURE CHALLENGES

both the modernist quest for rational purity and the postmodernist attitude of ironic disengagement. John's sculpture is instead an expression of a pre-modern or anti-modern world view. This approach refuses to reduce sculpture to either form or style, mathematics or aesthetics. Art is restored instead to its historical connection with metaphysical aims. John's stones are meant as links to forces that are beyond the understanding of the rational mind, and are more than just "pretty" art. In simple terms, the unknowable becomes a subject of contemplation as you move around John's sculptures, discovering order in chaos, fluidity in solid matter, and a sense of movement in a stationary object.

Paul Adams





Water Tree
1985

Nestled Stacked Form
1985



Osinagin
1987



ancient footpaths north

pennzance to zennor

coornish moors

heather bracken wet

autumn fog

stone walls enclose

green green

black atlantic



Preponderance
1985

O C T O B E R 2 2 1 9 8 3

A fork in the road. I have been for days walking among the stone works in West Pennwith. Slept on the grass beside Zennor Quoit last night, the Atlantic breaking against the headlands in the distance. I have been arranging stones in the fields north of Zennor Cove — nothing worth photographing, but it is nice to be working around such amazing walls. Do I remain in the UK and try to track down Richard Long and see what he is about, or do I carry on to Pietrasanta by way of the Musée de Brancusi?



Torus
1996



Torus
1996

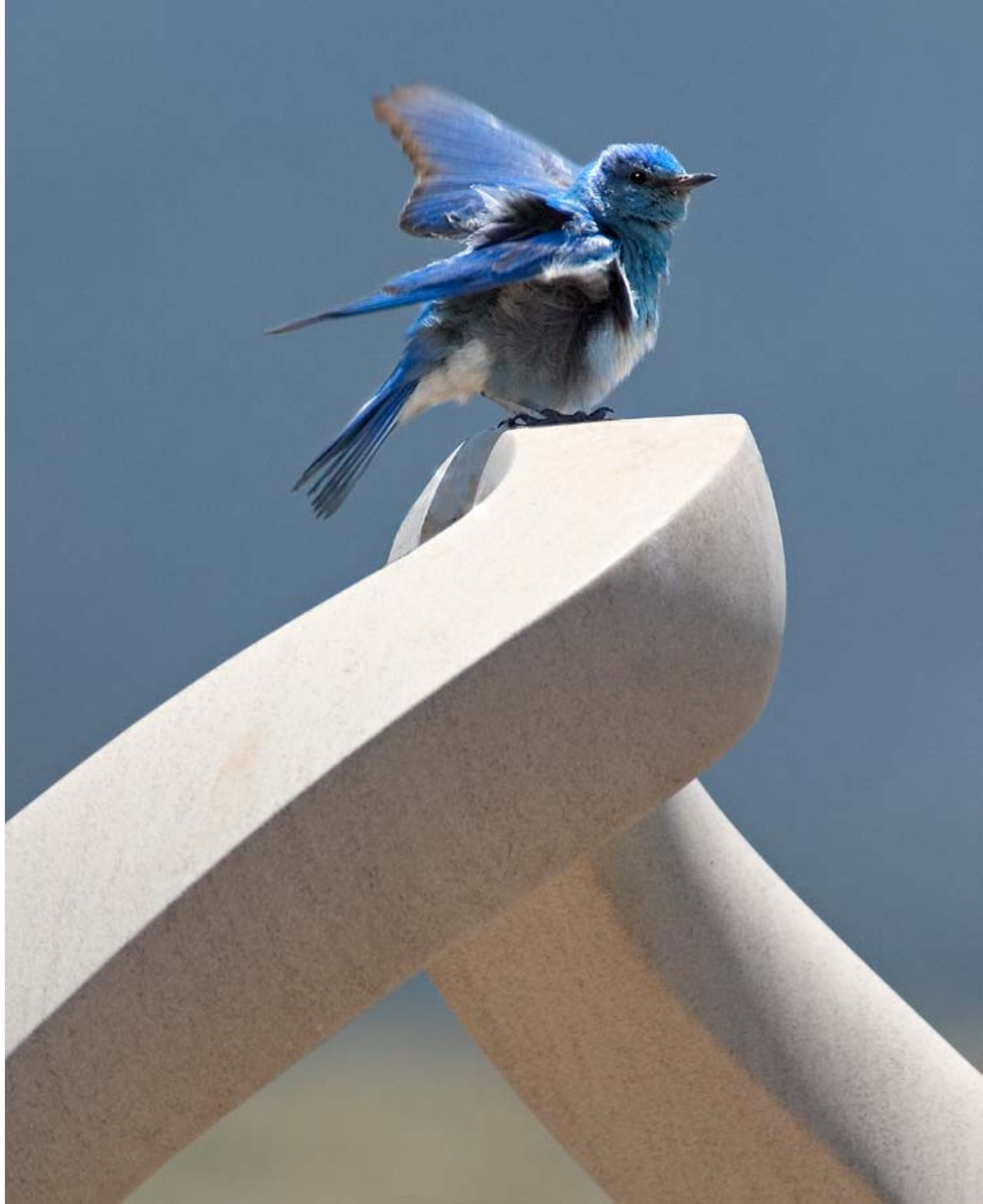
(more views...)

Upon return from Korea I found myself grateful for the hidden and anonymous works I was shown there.



LIVING IN THE
LANDSCAPE







T E T R I N G A T 8 0 0 0 F E E T

C R E S T O N E C O L O R A D O







ARRANGED MARRIAGES

FORMAL CONJUGATIONS

One long term project has been translating the hexagrams of the I Ching into sculpture. This endeavor has held my interest in varying degrees over the years. One of the more obvious of these was "Well". Within the Well there was a convex mirror partially obscured by leaves. Small children would reach into it, sometimes to their armpits to trying to touch what was down there. It was really quite amusing to watch.





Squarcle
2000



Squarcle
2000

(more views...)

Take Five
2007





Take Five
detail
2007



Take Five
2004

Water Tree
1991



sculptures resonate

tuning forks

listen,

intuit these

stone tones.

effort to understand

will dampen

the music.

Stories of I
2005





Conception
1990





The Dancing
2000



The Dancing
2000



(still dancing, more views...)



Torus
1996



Installation
1997

Wheel of Change
1997





this portal

that portal

crossings

what is this

that portal

this portal

what was that

still mystery

passing



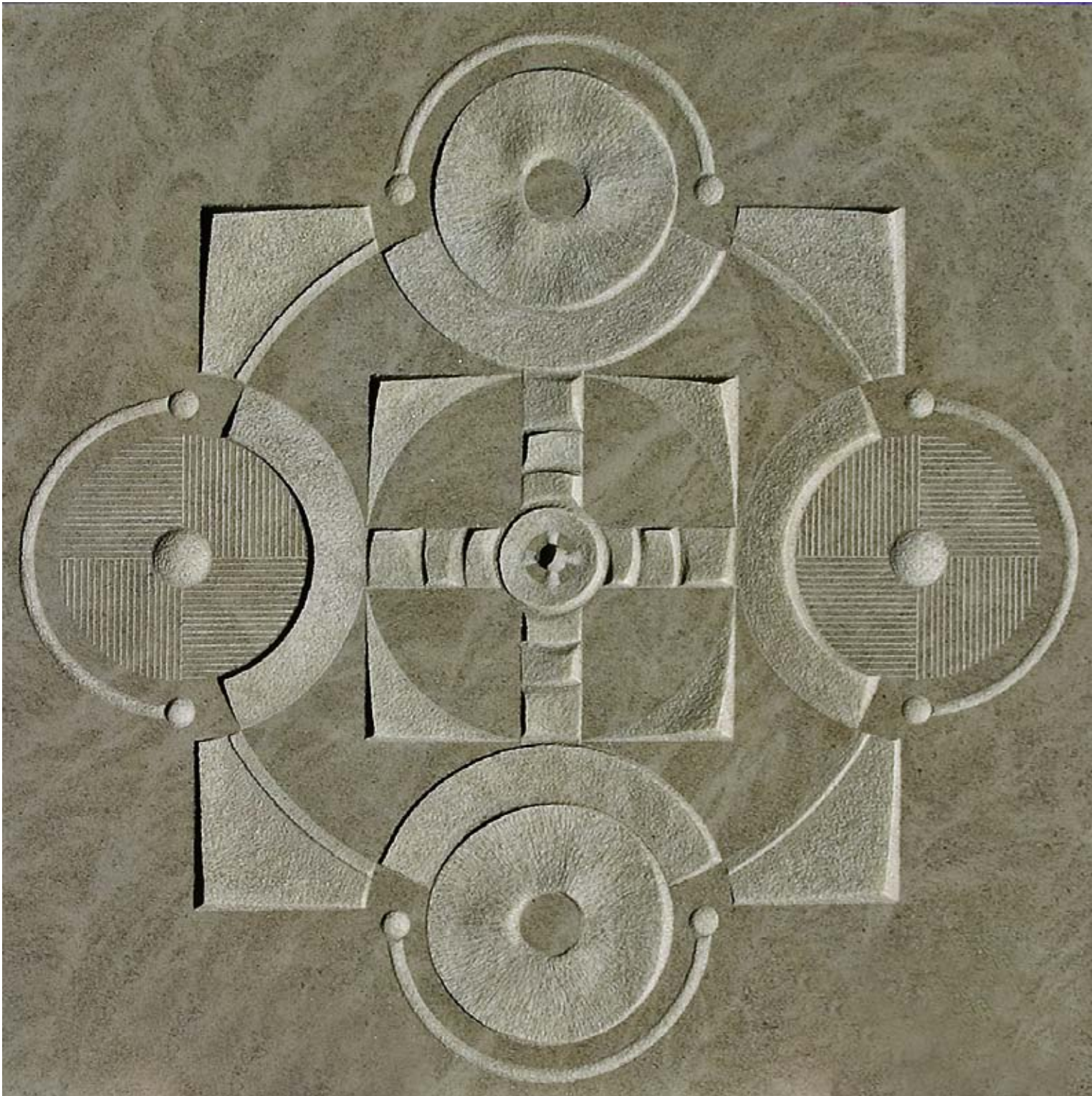
Grail
2000

Oh
2005



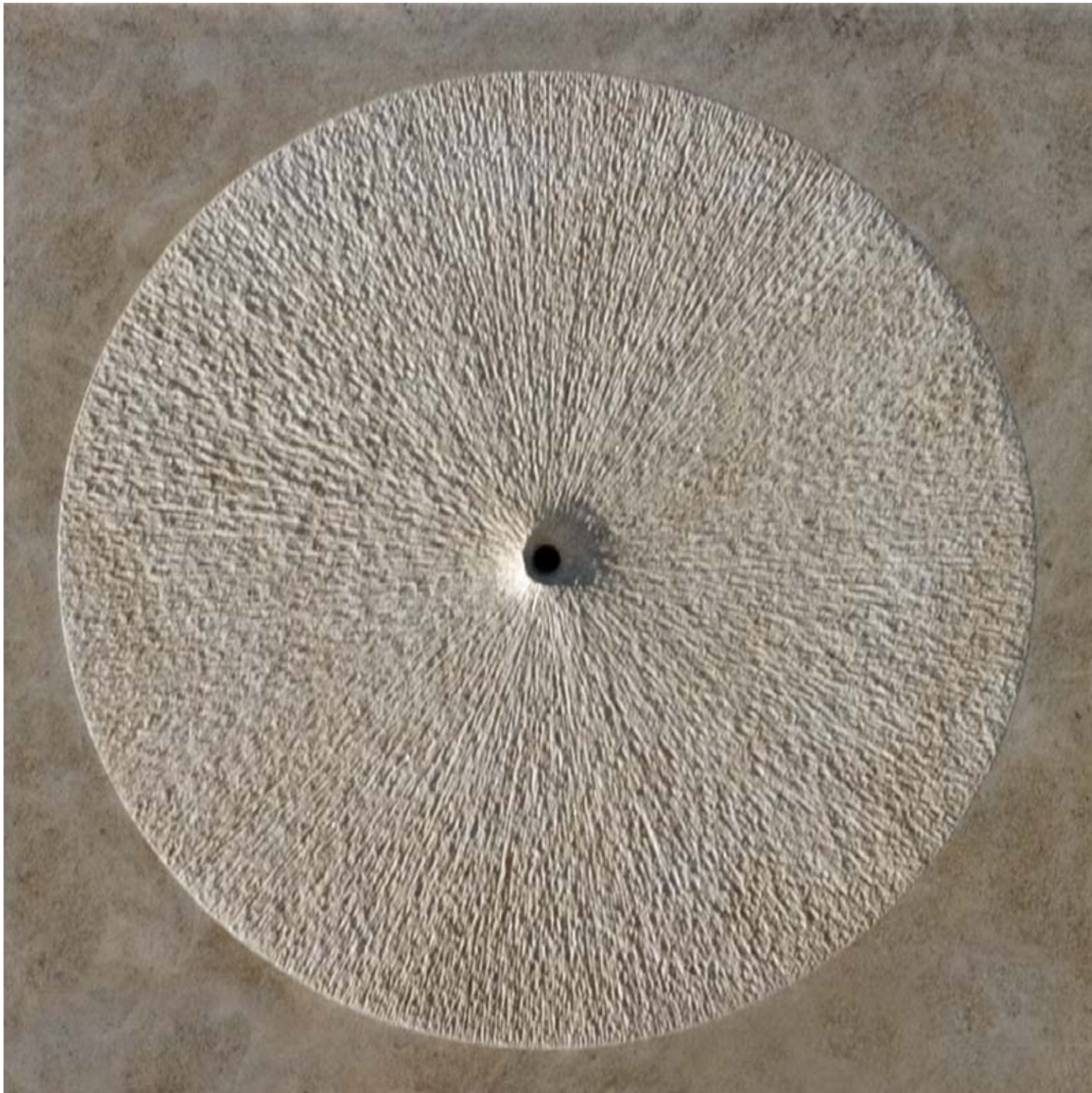






Mappings
2000-07

Mappings
verso
2000-07



FORMAL BREAKS





Cause and Effect
1983

A S E N S E O F E S S E N C E

JOHN REEVES' SCULPTURE brings to mind Keats' famous aphorism "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," an ideal which today seems a quaint, romantic relic, dismantled by our postmodern purge of all graven images from an outdated Age of Enlightenment. In art, as in our world, beauty seems rarely truthful, and truths are rarely beautiful. What motivates art today, is the desire for novelty, the "shock of the new." But the assault on our numbed and jaded senses waged by most postmodern art has, in turn, become its own numbing experience. Yes, Postmodernism was a necessary antidote to the archaic assumptions and myths of modernism, a cultural enzyme breaking down the absolute "truths" of a one-eyed age of reason. But after this deconstructive deluge, what next?

Artists are no longer the antennae of their race. Rarely do they, as James Joyce once claimed, forge the consciousness of their race in the smithy of their soul. With education in Art and Humanities being decimated by funding cuts across the country, how do artists recover their relevance within a system that devalues and marginalizes their voice and vision? Reeve's art is not yet another reactive regression to some familiar ground of old romantic certainties. He integrates those truths of earlier epochs, a totemic resonance with nature, an innate grasp of the mythic power of symbols, an intellectual knowledge of the Euclidian geometries of form, and an alchemist's skill in transmuting natural materials into something... sublime, all transcended by what might be termed a "transmodern" or integral perspective, where paradoxes play in the "groundless ground" of an ever-present Being.

John Reeves also has his own story in-the-world, his own dreams, desires, influences and abilities, refined over twenty years of work, study, and reflection. A notable influence on his art is Constantin Brancusi who said, "What is real is not the external form, but the essence of things . . . it is impossible for anyone to express anything essentially real by imitating its exterior surface." Reeve's "Little White Nut" may remind us of Brancusi's egg-shaped "Newborn" from 1915; and his limestone pillar, "Take 5," echoes the famous "Endless Column." Like Brancusi, Reeves uses limestone, marble, and wood, taking the same care to fully integrate the supporting bases with his work. He also understands the importance of space and the environment, like Isamu Noguchi (who briefly worked as Brancusi's assistant). And he watched Carl Andre respond to industrial "found objects," spontaneously arranging wood, metal or stone within a given environmental space to create his minimalist installations. (Andre also claims Brancusi as a major influence).

Concurrent with his art, Reeves has maintained an active interest in the field of consciousness studies. He once sought out the physicist, David Bohm, to debate the 'New Physics' and Bohm's theory of "wholeness and the implicate order." Unlike many modern artists (and most critics) Reeves has explored the territory which philosophies of nondual consciousness point to — a primordial, unconditioned awareness beyond all subject-object dualities, including our personal concepts and maps. Reeve's dual paths into nonduality allow his art to reveal the implicate order of Reality via the explicate form of his works. As Brancusi once put it, "Whoever does not detach himself from the ego, never

attains the Absolute and never deciphers life."

Reeves' art influences are translated into something beyond mere homage or imitation. He has absorbed the mystic primitivism of Brancusi, the austere minimalism of Andre, and the master craftsman's skills from Chinese sculptor Chi Man Lai, and created works that defy their own time and history. His art refuses any simple categorization or lazy-minded branding such as 'Taoist' or 'Zen' or 'Post-minimalist'. His works are neither machine-made products for the marketplace nor decorative objets d'art for casual consumption. They are silent portals to primordial truths that cannot be reduced to words or categories.

In works such as "Oh" the hard granite seems to morph before us as we shift our perspective. It becomes more fluid, more transparent to our attention, as if revealing some hidden sound or frequency that gives it life. His "Watertree" and "Flake" seem to carry us into a soundless sound that permeates the space around us. The eye, ear, and mind become fused and fall through the edges and spaces of these hard masses into a timeless present, a brimming emptiness that cannot be defined by the senses alone. As one's gaze oscillates between the seductive lines of these works, and the dancing stillness of Being that they generously present, a certain realization may arise... that Keat's words about Beauty and Truth are no longer mere myth, but an essential fact to be directly experienced in Reeves' sculpture.

Perhaps the words of a poet may best conclude this impossible task of translating Reeves' art into words:

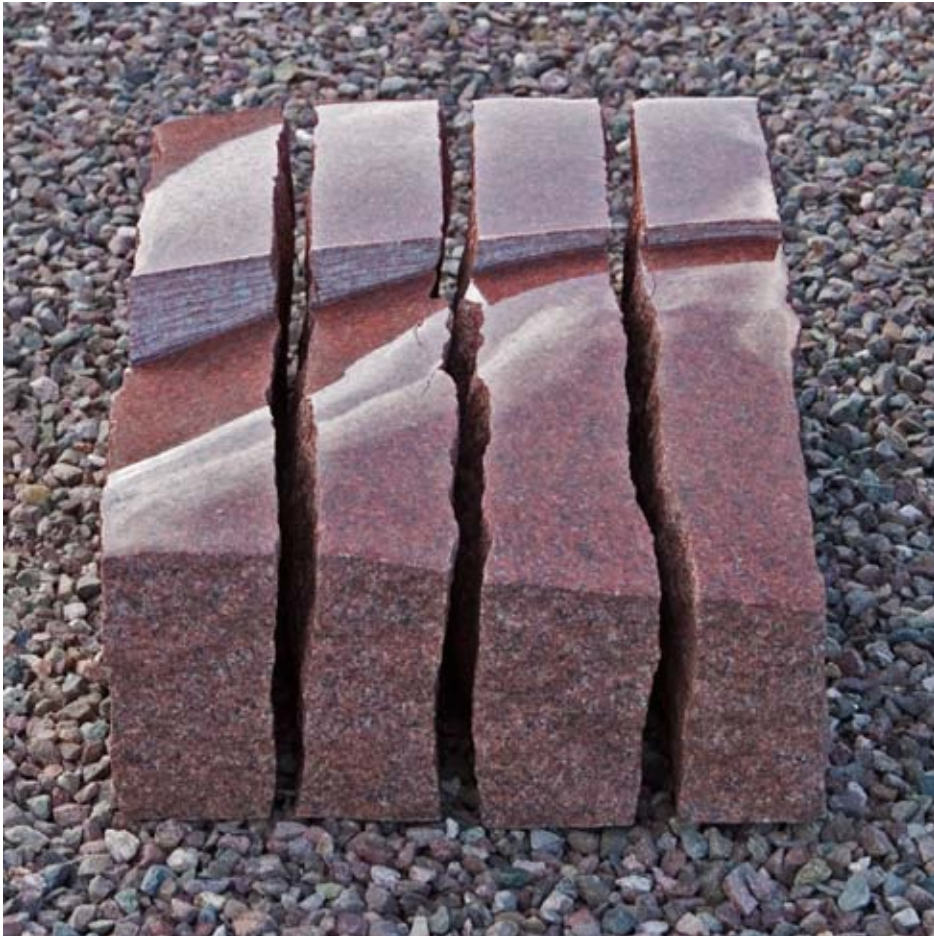
Antony Arcari

[Sculpture] had to distinguish itself somehow from other things, the ordinary things which everyone could touch. It had to become unimpeachable, sacrosanct, separated from chance and time through which it rose isolated and miraculous, like the face of a seer. It had to be given its own certain place, in which no arbitrariness had placed it, and must be intercalated in the silent continuance of space and its great laws. It had to be fitted into the space that surrounded it, as into a niche; its certainty, steadiness and loftiness did not spring from its significance but from its harmonious adjustment to the environment."

R.M. Rilke (1903)



Expansion
1985



Broken study
2007

Do we love works of art for what they are? Or for what they do to us? Or for the way they provoke, even force us to react to them?

The mystical, shifting geometry of John Reeves' sculptures pushes its way into our perceptions, our consciousness, our lives. This sculpture won't take yes for an answer. You simply can't say: yes, I get it. This is a stone sphere, a granite arc, a marble ring. In front of these sculptures you simply can't say: I see what I see, and I know what it is that I am seeing, because John has done something remarkable. He has separated these solid stone statements from their form... or, at the very least, from our everyday ability to perceive their form.

Sculpture is form occupying space. But what exactly is the form of these fluid rings of stone? – these shifting holes in granite, limestone, marble, even wood that allow light and air and thoughts to flow around and through these sculptures rather than bounce off them? Walking slowly around one of John Reeves' eccentric rings of stone challenges one's ability to see and understand form. Reeves refers one of his signature carvings as a "tetriring" because its curving ring-like shape bends in the vertical plane to touch a series of imaginary points that would be generated by a self-intersecting double tetrahedron. But that doesn't begin to tell us, or explain, what we are seeing:

Walking around this ambiguous statement in stone one observes in succession: a circle, a square with round corners, a soft rectangle with pinched in sides, a figure eight, which soon turns itself into a kind of double figure eight or, as

some astonished viewers blurt out, a double helix, which becomes a curvey diamond, then a straight diamond shape, then stepping closer, a triangle, which rounds slowly into that circle again. Damn! How is this possible? These are sculptures that ask questions that stubbornly resist one's best answers.

Ideas in stone, or maybe, better yet, koans in stone. The perceptual puzzle more important than the conceptual explanation. The questions these handsome hand-carved, hand-polished stone sculptures ask us are more important than any replies we can give. They are illustrations of lessons we haven't yet learned.

Buddhist teachers often talk about emptiness, the ultimate lack of a permanent, immutable essential nature – in phenomena, and in ourselves. Buddhist emptiness is all about the notion of contingent existence: The fact that I, we, they, it, anything, are not intrinsically I, we, they, anything, but rather a restless shifting complex of action and interaction. Yesterday's approximation of reality becoming tomorrow's new version, equally suspect, equally approximate, equally questionable.

John Reeves is not a Buddhist sculptor carving Buddhist sculptures, but these stone statements are as restless and ungraspable as the toughest questions that a Zen master ever threw out to challenge and wake up a student. John's sculptures grow out of formal geometry, and completely escape its formal limits. They keep moving, or should I say, keep our thoughts moving where words, diagrams and formulas falter and fail.

Finally I should note that these beautiful sculptures shouldn't be confused with the dry and passionless computer-carved school of mathematical sculpture, shapes generated from 3-D equations, untouched it often seems by human hands or heart. Reeves' mysterious and elusive formless forms are sensual and satisfying. They have been carved, and ground, and rubbed, and polished into existence with care, and skill; with a blend of craftsmanship and patience that is as rare in today's art world, as in today's world period.

Carving these baffling stone conundrums, John Reeves, has achieved. not the impossible, but the highly improbable. Translating ideas into stone without freezing them in stone.

Lito Tejada-Flores

Tie Break
1990



O N T H E W O R K O F J O H N R E E V E S



How can stone move?! How can stone speak? How can it sing, love, worship, and be plant and water, both and all?

I'm stunned and baffled. I exclaim inwardly as I view the whole body of John Reeves's sculptures, and wonder that my language doesn't have vocabulary sufficient to convey my amazement.

Reeve's sculptures morph like slow-motion yoga. They speak of history, of ancient Druid wonderment, of plowed fields, of perfect gardens, of Hellenic geometry and Hindu sensuality.

They are music with melodies and refrains—some as divas and Pavarottis, others as choral formations. They are loving families, embracing one another, sleeping beside each other, upholding and supporting, laughing together.

They soar to High Spirit, they offer commandments, they pray to the sky. They twine like vines, coil like tendrils, meander like rivers, cascade like waterfalls, ripple like ponds, and wave like the sea.

And they're only stone and wood abstractions. How is it they touch me so? Is it their humility? Their perfection? Their silence? Their softness? Their courageous encompassing of the known universe? Their soul-ness?

I don't know. I'm astonished. I revere them.

Thank you.

Esther A. Jantzen

Facets of Destructuring
1985





Broken Stone Series
(photograph)
2005



Broken Study
(photograph)
2007



Broken Stone Series
(photograph)
2005



The sculptures included in this volume were all completed between 1978 and 2007.

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POLISHING THE MOUNTAIN

A CONVERSATION WITH AN ANDEAN GLACIER

PATAGONIA 2007



E N V O I

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To see more of John's work, learn about his gallery representation and current projects, or order a hardbound copy of this monograph, please visit his web site www.reevesart.com