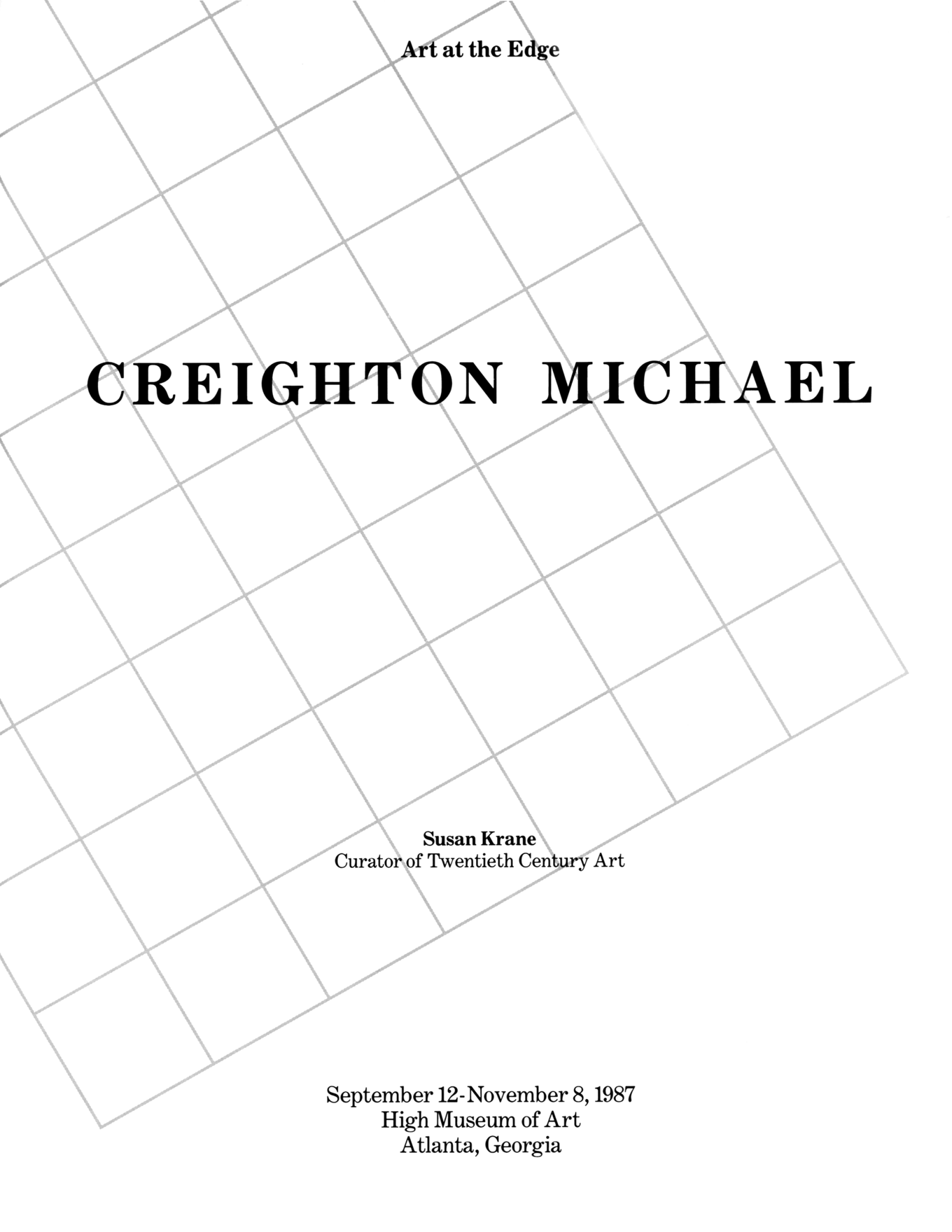


Art at the Edge



CREIGHTON MICHAEL



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CREIGHTON MICHAEL

Susan Krane
Curator of Twentieth Century Art

September 12-November 8, 1987
High Museum of Art
Atlanta, Georgia

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INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sculpture, as a medium, possesses dramatic and direct power: it intrudes physically into our realm, not merely as an object but as a presence that both occupies and defines our environment. Sculpture confronts us bodily, with a kinesthetic effect and psychological authority equalled by only the most aggressive of paintings. Regardless of the complexity of content or narrative components, sculptural objects refuse to be fixed in a purely fictive, illusory realm: they are dually empowered by their bearing—by their undeniable actuality.

This potent physicality became the very essence of much sculpture of the 1960s and early 1970s, which was frequently adamant in its formal monumentality and universality. Interests in concepts and perception often dominated, resulting in works of distanced surety and of architectonic boldness. Yet, after a recent period of art dominated by the resurgence of painting—and, concomitantly, expressionism, narrative, and cultural references—a younger generation of artists working with three-dimensional form has emerged; their art is newly invigorating the medium of sculpture, often by incorporating elements drawn from painting.¹ The powerful, familiar forms of modernism are often compounded in these works with symbolism, arcane personal references, and representation. The result is a vastly different mode of sculpture with a perplexing intimacy and ambiguity. It is challenging both intellectually and psychologically: importantly, it reflects as well fundamental disjuncture and idiosyncrasy, rather than unity or utopianism. The work tends to be intensely private, as opposed to public, in nature.

Creighton Michael, like many contemporary artists now making sculpture, was schooled as a painter, though at a time when the traditional boundaries of artistic media already had been shattered. He thus considers himself not a sculptor *per se* as much as a maker of highly synthetic and poetic objects. Creighton Michael's enigmatic, haunting works epitomize the use of multifarious references and the disorienting, facile embodiment of contradiction so typical of contemporary sculpture. His forthright objects are compounded by their strangely veiled connotations: they are rooted not in aesthetic theorizing but in the murky realm of the subconscious. Everything is revealed in Michael's work—interior, armature, structure, and skin—yet meaning is seductively held at bay. His work is about mystery and vulnerability. Its overt familiarity engages the viewer in a complex web, as one attempts to divine meaning and to extract identity from these hulking presences. As these objects provoke vague, unresolved recognitions through shape, scale, and

especially placement, they incite for the artist a sense of the "dual reality" of the world; they are a vehicle for questioning how we identify things and for probing the "relationship between human and object."²

This exhibition of Creighton Michael's work is the first in our new series of exhibitions featuring contemporary work, *Art at the Edge*. The exhibition and publication have been made possible by a generous grant from the Lenora and Alfred Glancy Foundation, with additional support from Edith G. and Philip A. Rhodes and the 20th Century Art Society of the High Museum of Art. I am grateful to Maxine Hull and Katherine Mitchell, volunteer chairpersons for *Art at the Edge*, and Betty Emrey, curatorial assistant for 20th Century Art Society activities, for their thorough assistance with the organization of this program. I thank Gudmund Vigtel, director, for his enthusiastic support of this project, and the staff of the High Museum for their help with the many aspects of the exhibition. My thanks in particular go to Margaret Gillham, curatorial assistant, who facilitated all aspects of the exhibition's organization with great competence and consideration and carefully prepared the exhibition's history and documentation for this catalogue; Marjorie Harvey, manager of exhibitions; and Kelly Morris, editor. I am grateful to Jim Waters for his sensitive and elegant design for this catalogue.

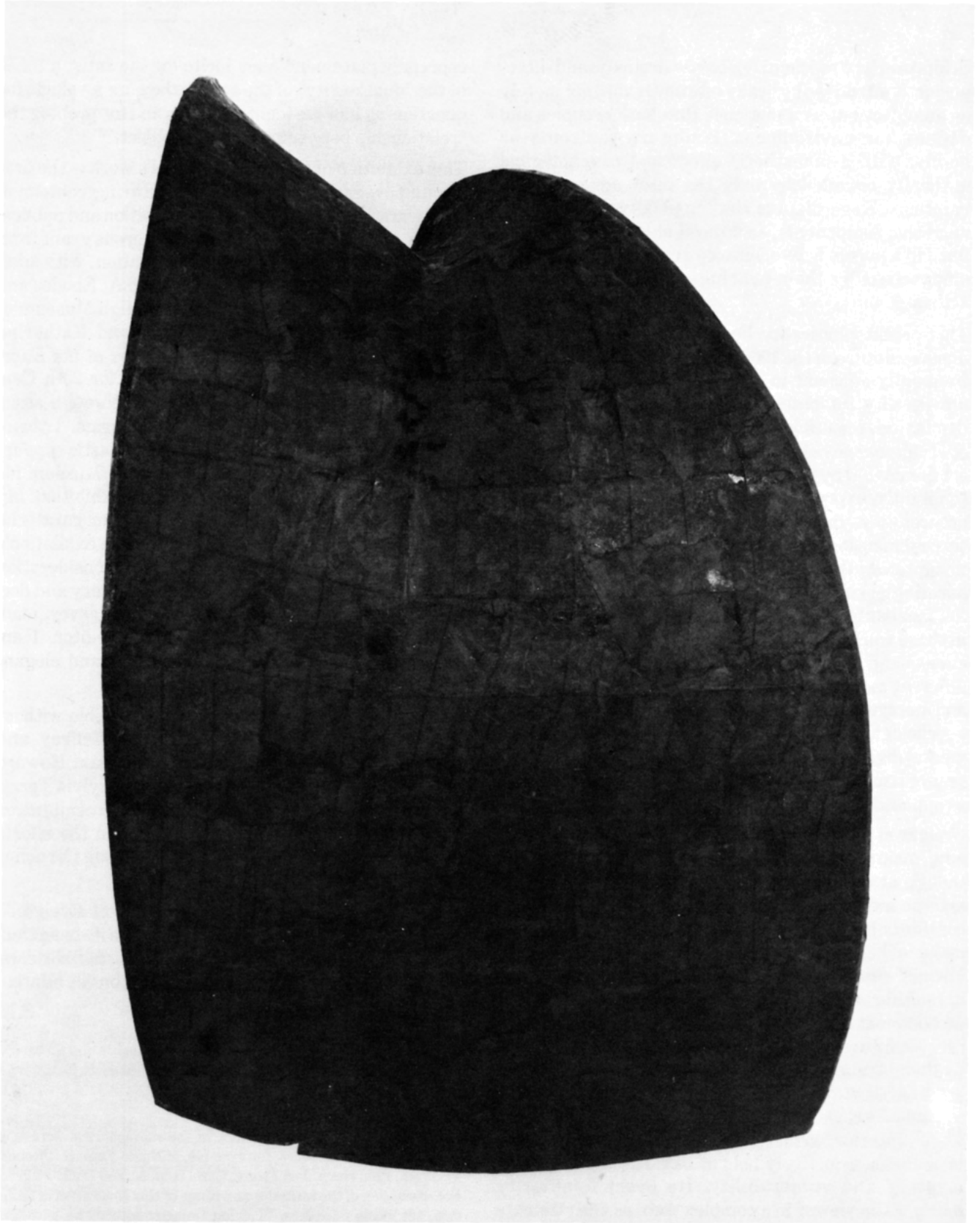
This exhibition would not have been possible without the generous cooperation of lenders Jeffrey and Rebecca Berkus, Neil and Janet Checkman, Howard M. and Frances A. Schoor, and Lee and Sylvia Terry, who also kindly assisted with the events in conjunction with the show. Invaluable also have been the efforts and participation of Craig Cornelius of Craig Cornelius Gallery, New York.

We are, of course, above all indebted to Creighton Michael for his help with this project from its inception. I thank him for his openness in discussing his work and for sharing his insights on art as well as on the South.

S.K.

¹Of particular interest in relation to the metaphorical nature of Michael's work is the work, for example, of Heide Fasnacht, Robert Therrien, Roni Horn, Joel Fisher, Carol Hepper, and Donald Lipski. For discussion of the attitudes and range of this generation of sculptors, see Wade Saunders, "Talking Objects: Interviews with Ten Younger Sculptors," *Art in America* (New York), vol. 73, no. 11, November 1985, pp. 111-136.

²Unpublished artist's statement, 1987, copy in HMA files.



7. *Malatesta*, 1985

BETWEEN OBJECT AND IMAGE: THE SCULPTURE OF CREIGHTON MICHAEL

Suspended slightly off the walls, floor and ceiling of his low, ground floor studio, Creighton Michael's forms look like abandoned cocoons, some strange naturalistic armor animated by ghosts of past inhabitants. The scene is other-worldly. Regardless of the compelling elegance and clarity of these structures, Michael's work reveals itself slowly. Our perceptions of it meander, for the artist relishes ambiguities and thwarts expectations. He thus subtly engages us in raveling meditations on the identity of these deceptively forthright objects. For example, his works—some hulking and talismanic, others luminous and crystalline—appear initially to be made of welded and chased metals. Yet the seemingly solid surface is, on close inspection, unmasked as a gossamer skin of paper or fabric, held taut on an intricate armature of thin wood. Implications of substance and weight dissolve. The work exposed strangely wed interior and exterior: it is sculpture turned literally inside out. Presumptions of its time-honored permanence and specificity thus fade into an enigmatic apparition.

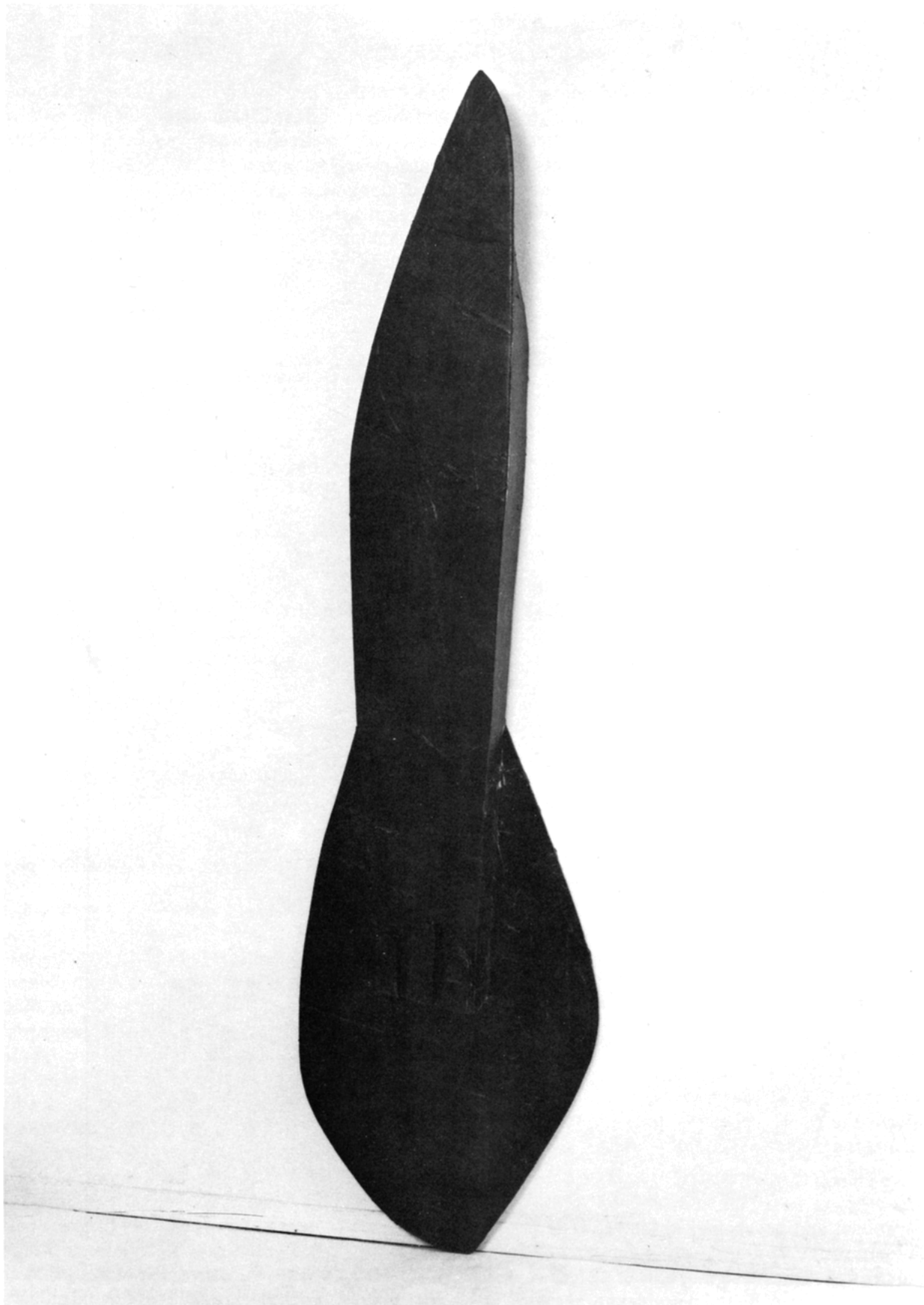
Like disembodied appendages, Michael's works hover above eye level, undulate off the walls, and project aggressively outward, stopping within inches of the floor. They defy our sense of gravity and create unusual points of focus, imbuing ordinarily unnoticed planes of the room with dramatic tension. This unexpected physical situation gives the objects a multiplicity of connotations, ranging from the archaic to the futuristic. Their vaguely animistic postures further endow them with a mysterious albeit familiar character, provoking us to decipher their identity. These abstract and metaphorical forms however refuse location: they operate in the realm between the known and the imagined. As such, they manifest Michael's interests in symbolism, in the realm of legend, and in the elements of "magic in our secular society."¹ His work is thus far removed from most mainstream sculpture of the past decades, and from its affirmative monumentality and comprehensibility. Rather, Michael's art is about the interstices in our knowledge—the unsure and provisional nature of our perceptions of the physical, objective world. His art rejects the realm of the rational for that of the surreal and the intuitive.

There is a strong theatrical quality to Michael's work, reinforced by its near-human scale, slight absurdist exaggerations, and psychological impact. The brooding, ominous *Malatesta*, 1985 (cat. 7), for example, connotes to the artist the sweeping flow of a black cape, a reading created in part by the placement of the work at a roughly figurative level. The piece is titled for Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, an Italian Renais-

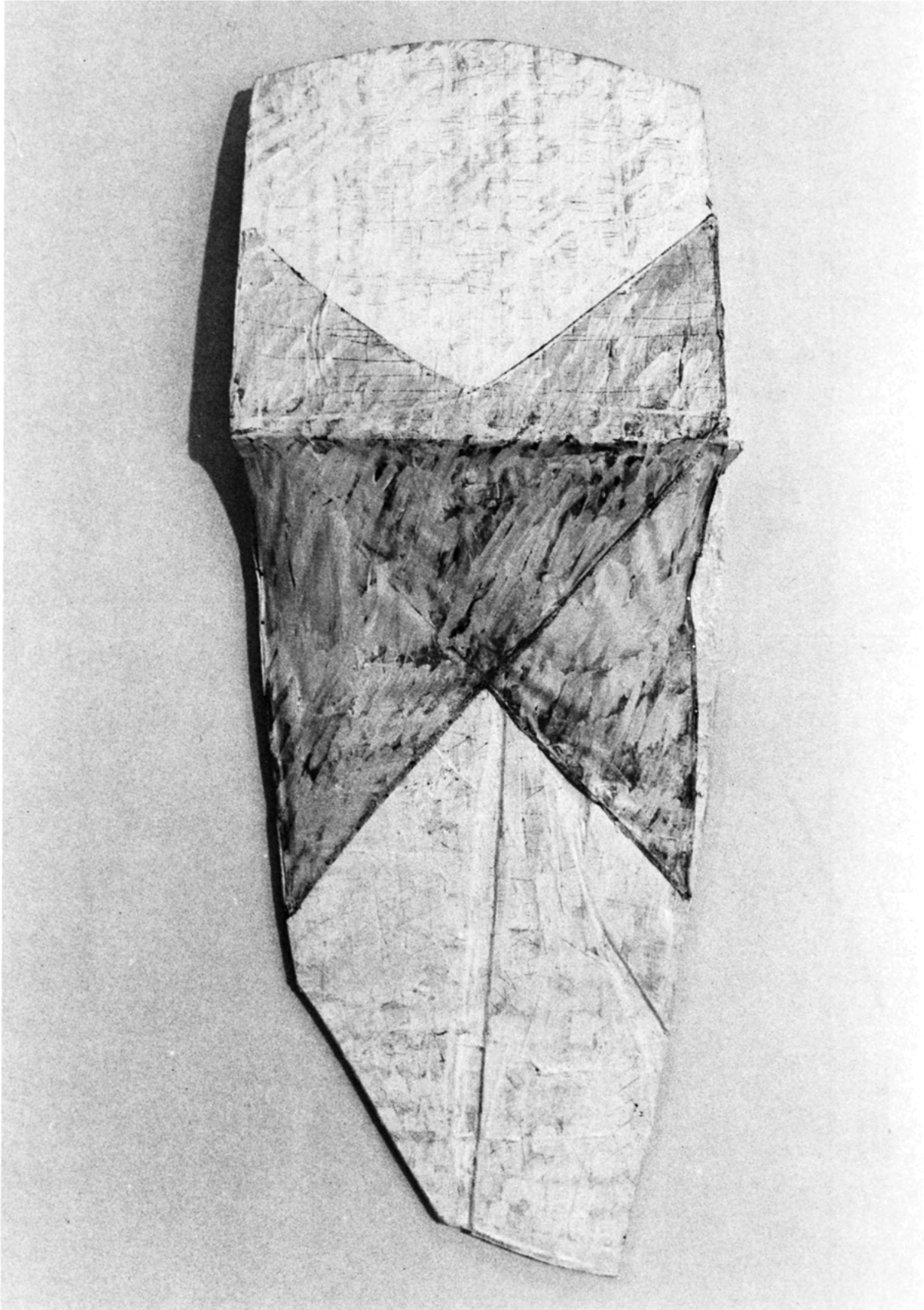
sance prince known for his artistic patronage and widely despised for his evil ways.² Typical of Michael's works, the piece refutes any singular interpretation: it is also clearly reminiscent of an archaic shield—a reference, along with other images of armor and weaponry, that recurs in Michael's oeuvre. By manipulating issues of resemblance, Michael dramatically implicates the viewer. He intends that these works exist not simply as discrete, beautiful objects but as prompts to incite abstruse intellectual and emotional responses. His interest ultimately lies beyond the aesthetic and in the exploration of human consciousness.³

This desire for more specific, physical involvement impelled Michael to abandon painting, his initial medium, nearly eleven years ago. His early canvases depicted surreal environs and strange atmospheres that are conveyed on a larger scale and with increasingly abstract means by these current works. Michael has similarly experimented with installation and performance pieces;⁴ most were meant to be encountered unexpectedly, and contorted quotidian situations with their presence. In the early eighties, Michael made an initial series of diminutive wall constructions using found objects. In these, collectively given titles such as "I'm Late" (1981) and "Punch/no Judy" (1981), bits of wood and paper took on connotations of lilliputian figures, isolated on small enchanted stages. The precursors of his current sculptures, these pieces had neither specific content nor narrative but rather were abstracted representations—unrooted psychological scenarios.

Michael subsequently enlarged and honed his sculptural forms, now using architectural space as his fictive proscenium. The first of these pieces, such as those of the "Bishop-Widow" series, were comparatively planar, actually deeply modulated paintings rather than reliefs. These were made (closely following the painter's process of stretching canvas) by forming over wood frames pieces of "umbrella skins," scrap material the artist collected from the cast-off, ruined umbrellas that littered the streets of New York after storms. These works, such as *V-Com*, 1983 (cat. 2), and *Bishop-Widow 9*, 1982 (cat. 1), have an intricate topography, rich and painterly in appearance. Many are shield-like and primitivistic, related in part to Michael's fascination with the aura of portent and the monumentality of the tribal artifacts he saw in the newly opened Michael C. Rockefeller Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.⁵ Michael is an avid scavenger with a great affinity for the aged, metaphoric qualities of found objects, "the way the material speaks": not inconsequentially, he likens his process of collecting and re-using detritus



1. *Bishop-Widow 9, 1982*



2. *V.Com*, 1983

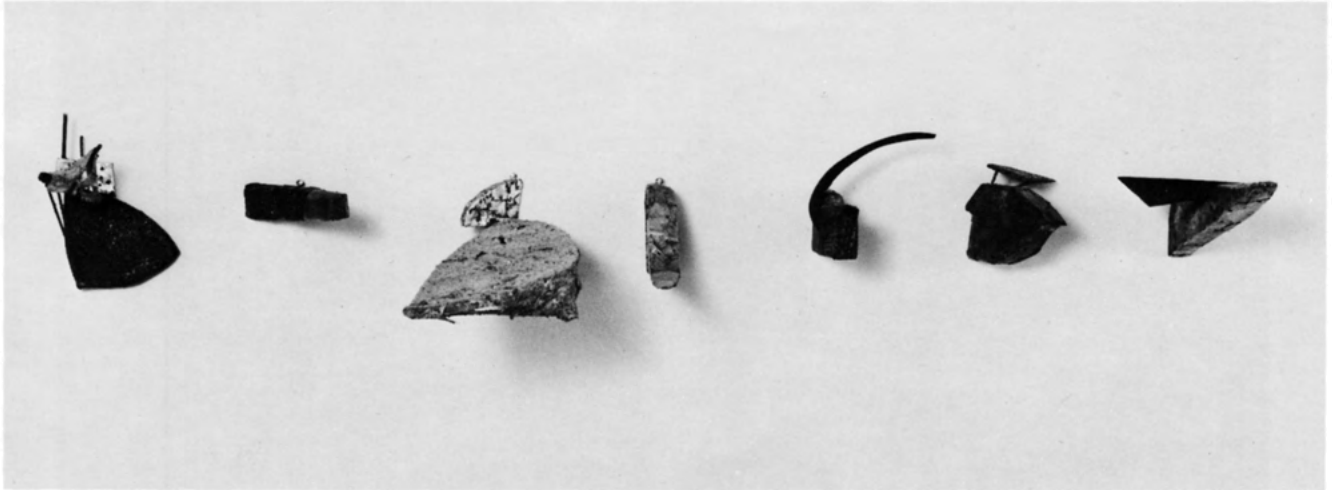


Fig. 1. *Study for Spirit of St. Louis II*, 1985: #2, metal, wood, tar, ash, $4\frac{3}{4} \times 1\frac{1}{2} \times 9\frac{1}{2}$; #3, metals, wood, tar, $3\frac{3}{4} \times 1\frac{3}{4} \times 9\frac{1}{4}$; #4, wood, metal, cloth, $3 \times 7 \times 17$; #5, wood, metal, cloth, $9\frac{1}{4} \times 6 \times 8$; #6, paper, wood, metal, $5 \times 12 \times 7$; #7, tin, wood, acrylic, $7\frac{1}{2} \times 1\frac{1}{2} \times 6\frac{1}{4}$; #8, copper, wood, charcoal, $5\frac{1}{4} \times 5 \times 6$. Courtesy of the artist.

from the vast urban landscape to the functional activities of hunting and gathering societies. The “Bishop-Widow” works were for him phallic, totemic images that he strove to anthropomorphize by adding head-like forms. His mythic references are freely amalgamated and bridge both locations and times. *Bishop-Widow 9*, for example, is indicative of the unlikely combination of the shape of a bishop’s mitre and that of an African shield, given impetus by his concurrent fascination with *African Sanctus*, a recording that combines the musical form of the Mass with traditional African songs.⁶ Such distant references are retained indistinctly, through the general ritualistic quality of these objects and their esoteric aura.

As Creighton Michael has further pushed and manipulated his works off the plane of the wall (a process reflected in the bulging, torso-like *Orlach*, 1984 (cat. 3), he has newly enlisted and staged the dynamics of the ambient space. For example, the many points at which these works closely approach but do not touch the surfaces of the room seem unexpectedly electrified. Similarly, *Kyoto*, 1985 (cat. 6), sweeps lyrically away from the wall, to which it is secured at one low point: our primary viewpoint of it is thus not frontal but strangely lateral, perpendicular to the wall on which it is hung. Like the full motion of a kimono sleeve, the uplifted curve of a symbolic *torii* gate, or the sweep of a samurai sword, *Kyoto* evokes the breathless and quietistic refinement of traditional Japanese arts.

Michael’s materials, technique, and imagery are often closely analogous. *Kyoto*, for example, is translucent like a Japanese screen, and *Luftschiff 9* [*Airship 9*], 1986 (cat. 8), is comparative in structure to wings and aero-

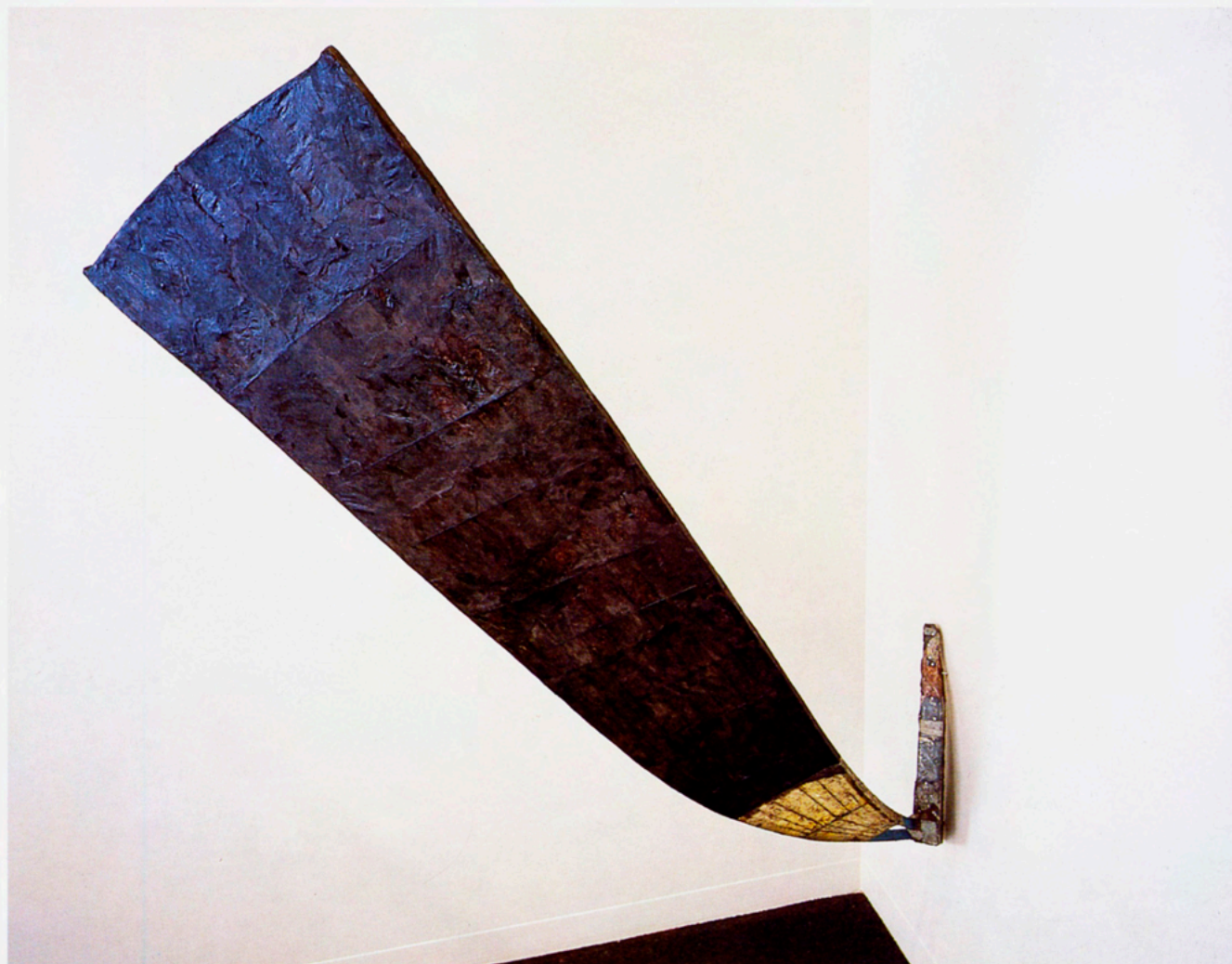
dynamic forms. It is surprising in light of the highly finished look and the structural complexity of these objects that Michael works quite spontaneously. Proceeding from a general mental image and without the use of preliminary drawings, he initially built armatures from thin plywood and dowels, which were drilled and pegged (as in *Orlach*). These he then covered with “bogus” paper (a cheap, commercial stuffing paper) impregnated with Rhoplex. This skin was then coated with many glazes tinted with charcoal and copper powder. Important to Michael was the incorporation of wood, paper, and charcoal—three physical states of the same natural matter. His use of an underlying skeleton with a covering of “skin” has a distinctive biological quality, which usually seems eerily mutant.⁷ As in *Blind Horn 3*, 1985 (cat. 5),⁸ we simultaneously see back and front, interior and exterior, surface and support, for Michael literally strips form to the bone. Although the works seem nakedly revealed, their ontology remains inexplicable, their identity held compellingly out of reach.

The artist relates the directness and facility afforded by his idiosyncratic processes to his inclinations as a painter. He is, in one sense, building an elaborate shaped stretcher for a fiber support on which he “paints.” However peculiarly they are situated, his works persistently read—as does painting—in relationship to the walls, which although void form an illusionistic backdrop for these objects.

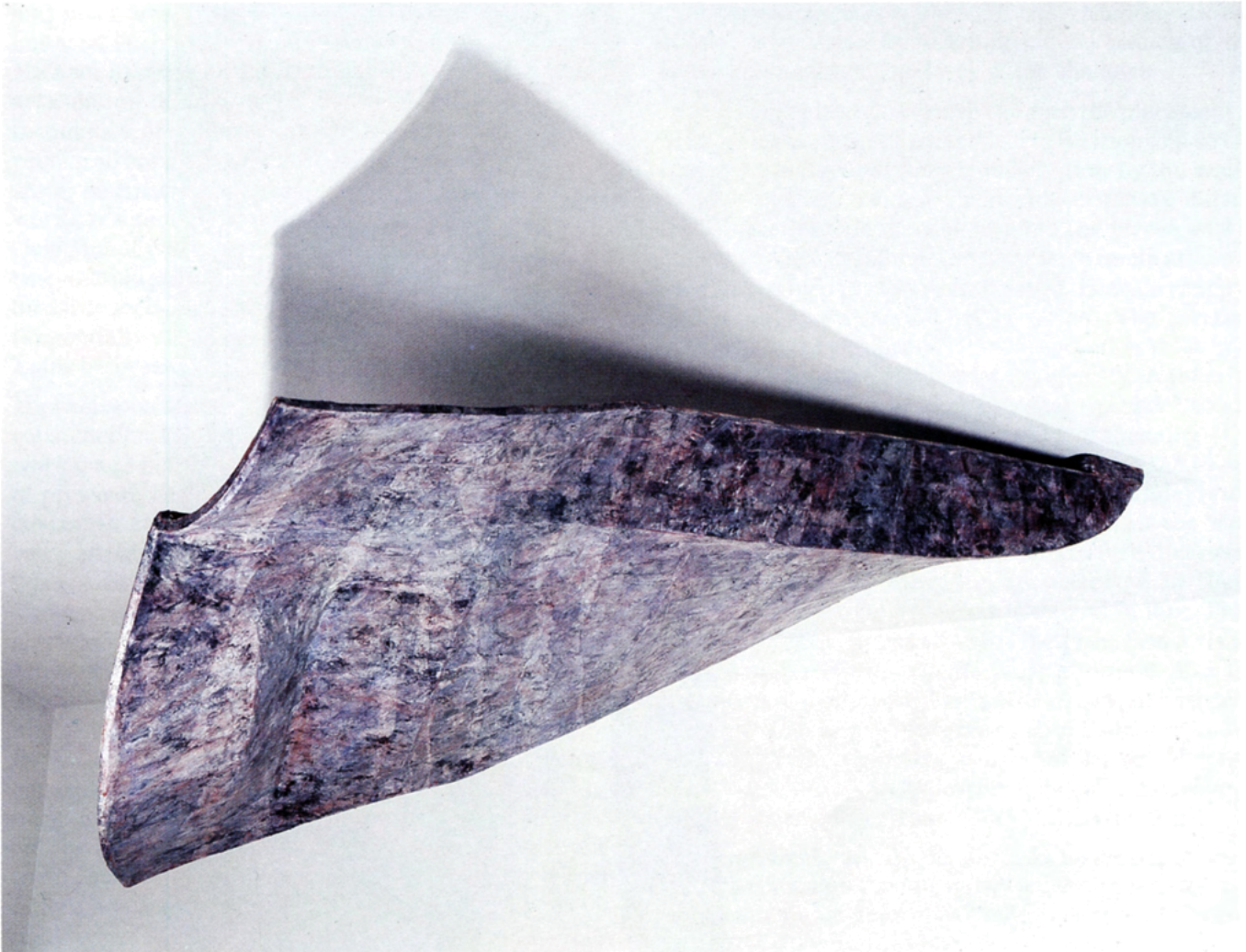
While beginning his first radically open three-dimensional pieces, Michael concurrently worked on a pivotal, intermediate group of sculptural sketches, called collectively *Study for Spirit of St. Louis II*, 1985 (fig. 1),



3. *Orlach*, 1984



6. *Kyoto*, 1985



8. *Luftschiff 9* [Airship 9], 1986



5. *Blind Horn 3*, 1985

and made over the course of the year. Using found material such as tar, scrap wood, and tin, Creighton Michael experimented with cantilevered forms, the articulation of surfaces, directional movements, and techniques of construction. Like most of his mature reliefs, all hang on the wall from a single point. Small in scale, fascinating in their unidentifiable mystery, the works resemble medieval artifacts. Their worn materials embody a history of use. As their title reflects, these casual sculptural explorations resemble wings of birds, insects, or airplanes. The piece is likely also tangentially autobiographical, for Michael lived in St. Louis before moving to New York.

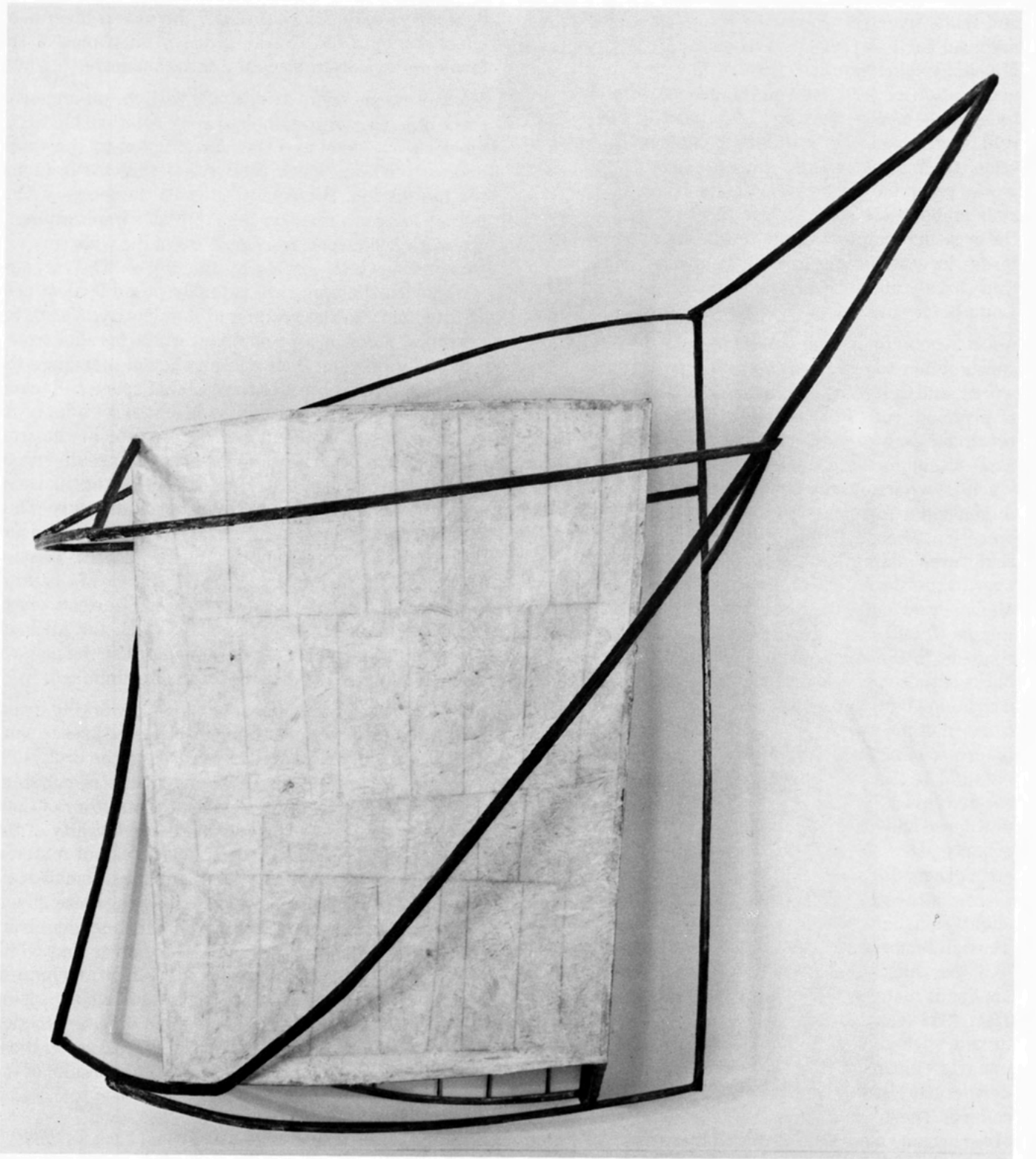
Michael soon found the dowels on which he relied for construction too great a limitation on the size of his works, and in 1985 he began making the armatures out of plywood, cut in flat patterns with a hand saw. He continues to work directly—as if drawing with the saw—although the configurations of these armatures when seen horizontally bear little resemblance to their dimensional forms when assembled. By process of accretion, Michael builds these into the skeleton of the sculpture, adding scraps of previous armatures left over in the studio. After sealing the wood with paint, Michael now cuts fine fiber papers (such as the black *unryu etchu* paper used in *Kyoto* and *Malatesta*) to conform to the component facets of the surface. The backs of these patches are, as in *Kyoto*, dipped in tinted acrylic medium and laid over the struts of the armature. In other works, Michael has shredded the paper before soaking it in acrylic medium, giving a variant detailed texture to the exterior. These skins then receive several glazes, each colored and textured with powdered and metallic pigments, charcoal, and diverse other matter. This surface is, in the latest works, strengthened by a layer of very thin fiberglass cloth pieces saturated with medium: these Michael cuts slightly smaller than the initial paper overlays to obtain an additional refractive detail, a rim which is in effect like the thick edge of a brushstroke. Over this he applies as many as ten additional glazes. Works such as *Usk*, 1986 (cat. 9), also have strata of wax medium, mixed with dry pigments. This elaborate process imparts a plush depth to these surfaces, creating also a hermetically sealed “time capsule” of the artist’s procedure. These subtle details, seen only with careful observation, also contribute to the sense of “time-released information” that Michael plants for the viewer. The surfaces of the objects, truly those of a painter, have a mysterious jewel-like translucence, as the embedded flecks of color glow from within and as

light plays exquisitely through the veiled layers—an effect compounded by the interwoven planes of the forms and resultant intricacy of the shadows.

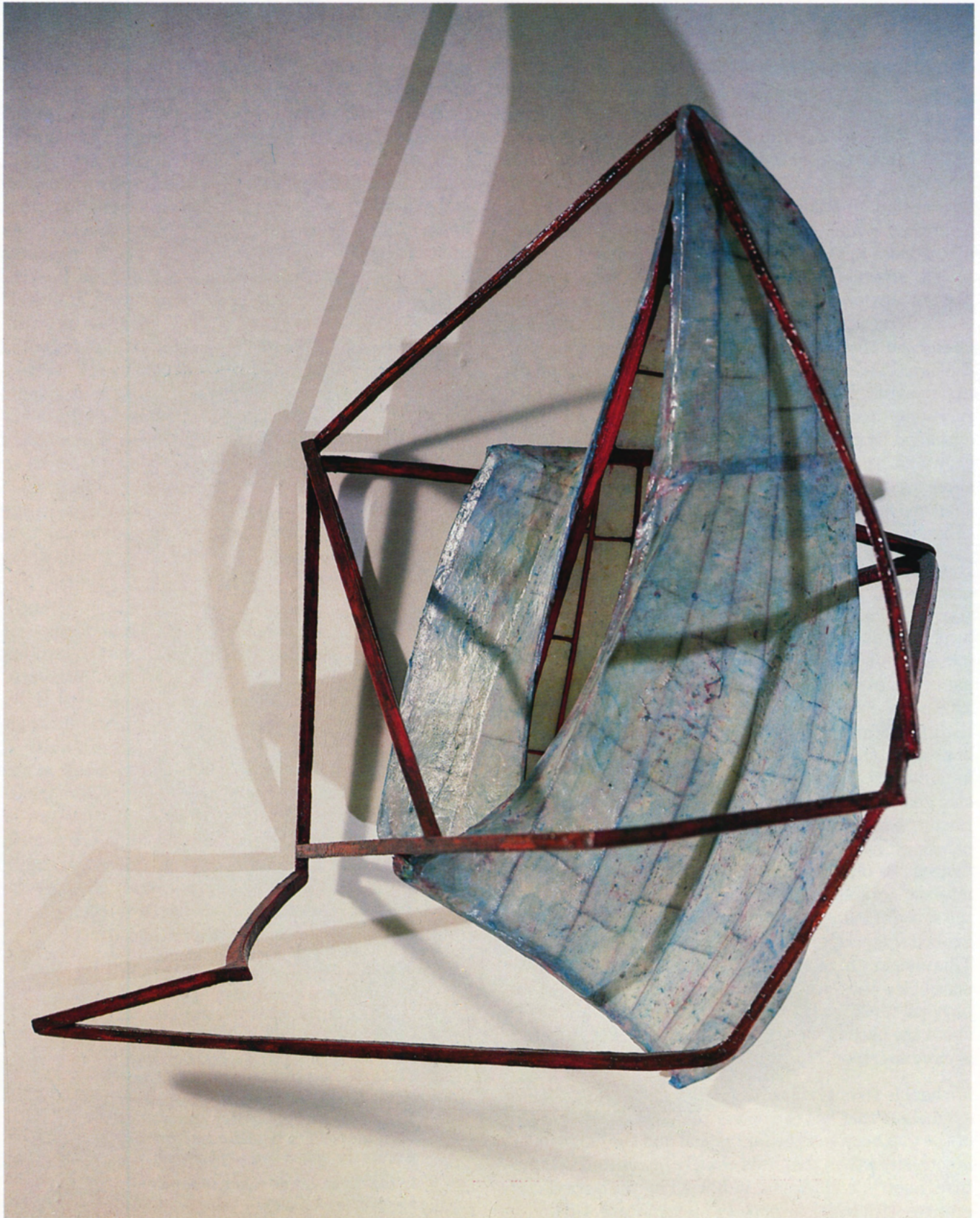
Michael experiments extensively with the placement of these objects, varying their specific relationship to the viewer’s eye level and their orientation to the walls, floor, or ceiling, which remain indeterminate during the fabrication. He usually situates the pieces within human range to reaffirm the figurative implications of the work, which persist regardless of the wide range of connotations also carried by the object. The carriage with which the sculpture is finally posed is most critical, for him, to the reading of its identity. *Kyoto*, for example, hung in a preliminary state parallel to the wall, like a rocker. This contingency of meaning—the relativity of the object to the ambient space and to our experience—corresponds to Michael’s underlying interest in the ambiguity of perception, in the irrational, and in occurrences that seem to fuse divergent times and places.⁹ Meaning, as dissected in these images, seems to be ever circuitous and in flux. Thus Michael titles his works after the fact, based on a vision or sensation conjured by the finished object. *Usk* for instance is Celtic for “water” and the name of a river in southern Wales, on which was located Caerleon, one of King Arthur’s legendary courts. It is, for Michael, loosely related to his Celtic first name, also the name of an area bounded by streams south of Edinburgh.

Although Creighton Michael makes no working drawings, he considers the fine emery paper he uses to sand the struts and armatures as records of the sculpture, drawings-after-the-fact. On them, tracks of rubbings and faint remnants of color become a territory of their own, like the quiet expressiveness and tactility of the work of Antoni Tàpies, whose poetic use of material Michael greatly admires. Akin to these small-scale “landscapes” are Michael’s exquisite, page-size silver-point drawings, works that are quite independent from the activity of the sculpture. These silver and white images contain barely perceptible tracings and hints of events—“as if an image of the shadow of a cloud passing over.” Whereas Michael’s large-scale objects function on an expansive stage of mythic, universal scale, these diminutive images operate in the intimate realm of the mind’s fantasy.

With his most recent cage-like forms, such as *Shell 3*, 1987 (cat. 10), Michael has transposed his structures, breaking them open and parodying the original function of his armatures, some of which are now purely descriptive devices and not functional. He is newly



9. *Usk*, 1986



10. *Shell 3*, 1987

experimenting with planes that pull in on themselves, shapes and lines that draw from exterior to interior, and passages of light and shadow. The cubistic appearance of these futuristic reliefs is deceptive: it was not historical artistic reference that bred these forms but rather the desire for a more “industrial, science-fiction” quality. These are props from myths of the future rather than those of the past. The “Shell” pieces were made (as is the artist’s tendency) in loose series, several of which proceed concurrently without preconception. Here the planes are curved and torqued, creating an object reminiscent of the title. For Creighton Michael, the series also makes strong psychological references, given by the womb-like, sheltering images. Thus it is fitting that the “Shells” too resemble cocoons anchored to latticework—an image extended by their sheer golden skins, with the look of chrysalis. These new works come full circle, returning again to Michael’s familiar metaphor of armor—“the shell of a figure”—and referring also to recurrent ideas of bodily costume, ritual, and natural concealment.

Heightened in these particular pieces is the sense of entrapment and the understated sinister quality of many of Michael’s works, paralleled earlier for example by the axe-like *Traveler 9*, 1984 (cat. 4). A critical influence on Michael’s works were Lee Bontecou’s haunting canvas and steel, mask-like reliefs of the 1960s: these were important to him not particularly for their structure (with which Michael’s constructions do bear similarities) but rather for their potent narrative implications. Similarly evocative and psychologically charged for Michael were the paintings of Francis Bacon, which have long intrigued him. In Bacon’s paintings, especially the earlier portraits, lone spectral figures are placed on stage-like platforms, often in an internal scaffold.¹⁰ Consistent with these influences is the sense of vulnerability, mortality, and imprisonment evoked abstractly in Creighton Michael’s recent pieces. This imagery of containment brings with it the obverse possibility of escape: such visions have a broader metaphysical sense for the artist and also provoke questions about the nature of the universe in which our existence is circumscribed.

Michael is strongly interested in formulating abstract symbolism that has the power to nudge our awareness of the gap between the fantastical and the “known.” It is consistent then that he is equally interested in literature, poetry, and legend, indicated by the various references with which he endows his sculpture. Off and on over the years Michael has written poetry, in which he uses small incidents of experience as the springboard for disincarnate, skewed descriptions, “a fusion of

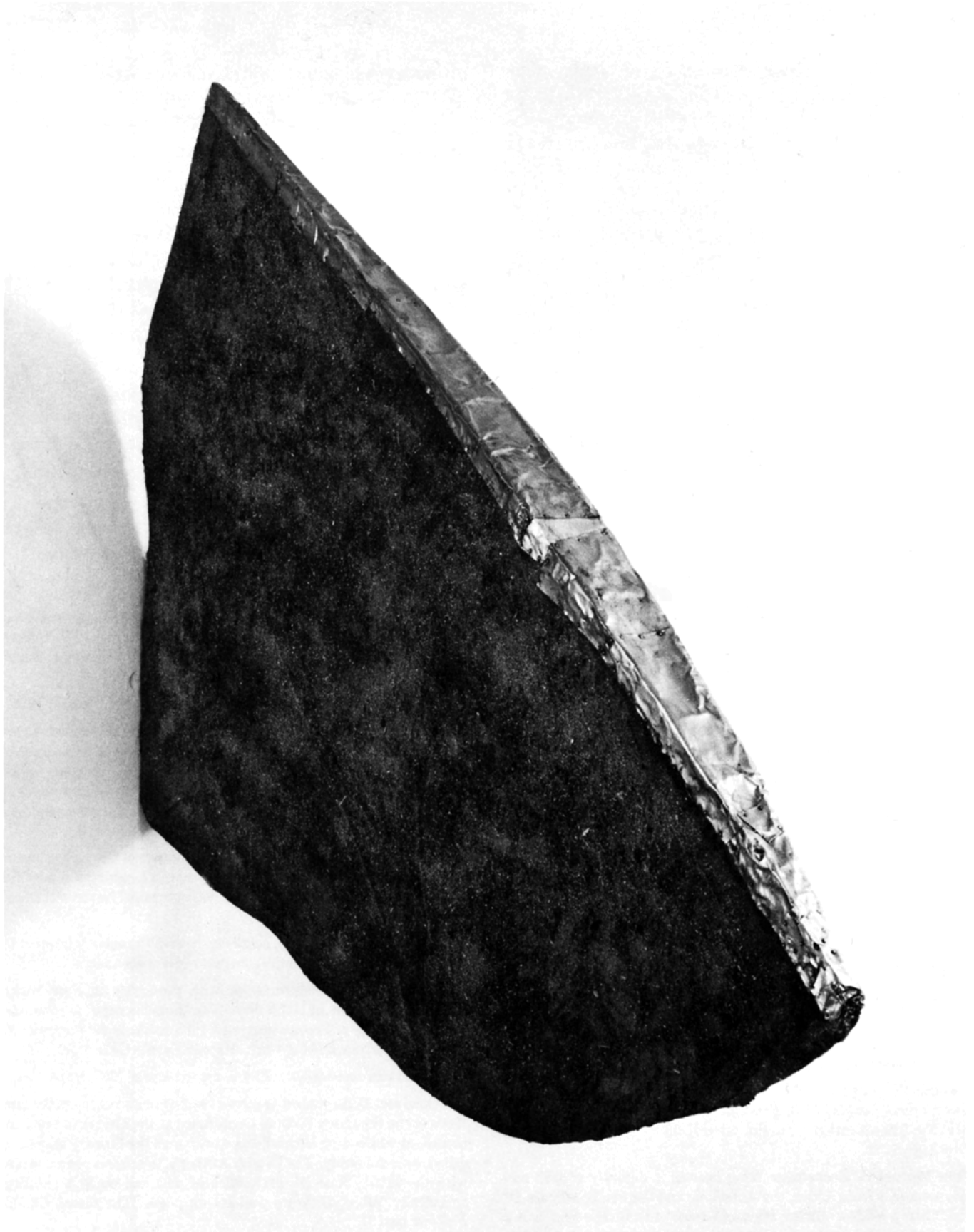
visions both real and imagined.”¹¹ His disjunctive verbal images of filmy skins, embryonic forms, malformations, and atmospheres of decay parallel many of the allusions carried by his objects. Recurrent in his writings are images of flight and of transformations both bodily and spiritual—indicative of a certain transience and of a thin facade of reality. This somewhat macabre imagery and sense of supernal powers have been colored in part by the artist’s upbringing. Michael was born and raised in the South, as a Southern Baptist, with clear visions of “fire and brimstone” and vivid memories of rural revival meetings. He grew up on the ghost stories and folklore of the supernatural and of the creatures of the backwoods, passed on to him by relatives and friends during frequent visits to the small rural town of Springfield, Tennessee (about thirty miles from Nashville), where his mother’s family had settled in the eighteenth century. Of Celtic extraction, he was dually compelled by the lore of druidism. Such diverse influences combined to give Michael a strong heritage of the imaginary and specific visual constructs for the sense of wonderment and mystery with which he imbues his work.

There are elements of the gothic in Creighton Michael’s art: the works often present a sustained undercurrent of ominous tension. Occurrences seem pending, lurking below the surface. This quality of prescience creates as well a sense of surreality and suspended time. Michael’s use of transmutation and mutability parallels characteristics of the works of Southern writers, specifically for him the poetry of James Dickey, which had earlier inspired his painting.¹² Dickey’s strong naturalistic imagery, his stance toward the powers of nature and visions of bodily transposition are echoed by Michael in discussions of his art. Indeed, Dickey’s richly representational poetry uncannily invokes the anthropomorphic imagery of Michael’s objects:

As your weight upon earth is redoubled
There is no way of standing alone
More, or no way of being
More with the bound, shining dead.
You have put on what you should wear,
Not into the rattling of battle,

But into a silence where nothing
Threatens but Place itself: the shade
Of the forest, the strange, crowned
Motionless sunlight of Heaven,
With the redbird blinking and shooting
Across the nailed beam of the eyepiece.

In that light, in the wood, in armor,
I look in myself for the being
I was in a life before life
In a glade more silent than breathing,
Where I took off my body of metal
Like a brother whose features I knew.¹³



4. *Traveler 9*, 1984

Rooted in Michael's Southern upbringing is this powerful sense of nature and animism, and the feeling that benign worldly events are perhaps not what they seem. His is an attitude filtered through a cultural framework of legends and spiritualism: the emotions of individual experience are seen through mechanisms which effectively both legitimize and distance such intimate expressions. These works then, for Michael, become a means of exploring and recapitulating, ". . . of materializing experience and visions." As much as Michael's art is derived from personal expression, it also clearly parallels the disjuncture common to postmodern art concerned with the "deconstruction" of meaning and with cultural symbolisms. Similarly, Michael's ultimate sense of displacement is coincident with the vast and uncodifiable ambiguities of the contemporary world. His work reflects the provocative and surreal dislocation that is at the root of much art of our time.

¹Author's telephone interview with the artist (in New York), July 1, 1987 (tapes in HMA files). All other references and quotes are from this interview unless otherwise noted.

²Malatesta (1417-1468), from the family that ruled Rimini, near Ravenna, in the Middle Ages, was considered a quintessential Renaissance prince. The Malatestas were embroiled in a power struggle with the papacy, and Sigismondo was excommunicated by Pope Pius II in 1460, a fact enjoyed by Michael, formerly a graduate student in art history. See *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* (Chicago: The University of Chicago), 1986, vol. 7, p. 725, and Clarence L. Barnhart, ed., *The New Century Cyclopedia of Names* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc.), 1954, vol. II, p. 2587.

³There is a fine critical distinction between Michael's more narrative, allusively representational inclinations and a purely abstract approach to similar issues. For example, the sculptor Roni Horn asserts that: "The object is not the end; what I'm interested in is the experience it provides for—how it incites and animates dialogue. . . . In the end I keep coming back to this desire to circumvent things which interface between actual experience and perceptions of it. Even so simple a thing as identity mediates experience. Naming: the detour of identity." Wade Saunders, "Talking Objects: Interviews with Ten Younger Sculptors," *Art in America* (New York), vol. 73, no. 11, November 1985, p. 120.

⁴Such as *Do Not Feed . . . The Animals*, 1983; *Are Your Pants (Skirts) The Correct Length*, 1983; *From the Caves*, 1983; *Alternate Take: Mic-Nic* [collaboration with Jim Nickel], 1983-84; and *Wings Over Brooklyn*, 1987.

⁵The Michael C. Rockefeller Wing opened in January of 1982 and houses works from Africa, the Americas, and the Pacific Islands. Of the "Bishop-Widow" series, Michael wrote: "The Bishop-Widow is a group of wall-floor pieces formed through a blending and abstracting of the shapes found in a Bishop's crown and in African shields. Historically, objects (unlike statues) obtained monument status by the use of scale and placement. The size was usually enough to dwarf

human scale, and the vertical placement perceptually increased the object's size." See artist's statement in *The Monument Redefined: Gowanus Annual II* (Brooklyn, New York: The Downtown Cultural Center), 1982, p. 34.

⁶David Fanshawe, *African Sanctus* (Baarn, Holland: Philips), 1973.

⁷This morphological quality and Michael's use of various skins (including also animal skins, rubber, and glass) and of techniques of piercing, stitching, and rebuilding correspond to his clear visual remembrances of a near-death experience after a severe car accident in 1973, at which time he was aware of the suturing and the mending of his wounds.

⁸The "Blind Horn" series was named in homage of German sculptor Rebecca Horn. The large phallic form used as a headdress in her 1972 performance piece *Kopfextension* (Head extension) inspired the first of these vertical objects.

⁹The "Traveler" series deals particularly with the artist's interest in the idea of time travel and the prospects of transcendence.

¹⁰Author's telephone conversation with the artist (in New York), June 26, 1987, notes in HMA files. This "internal cage" is seen particularly in many of Bacon's portraits, such as *Study for Portrait IX*, 1957, oil on canvas, 59½" x 49½", Abrams Family Collection.

¹¹Undated correspondence with the author, [June] 1987, HMA files.

¹²Michael met Dickey when he gave a reading of his poetry in the late 1960s at the Southern Writers Conference at the University of Tennessee, at which time Michael was working on the literary magazine called, coincidentally, *The Druid*. Author's telephone conversation with the artist, June 26, 1987. Michael also had made a painting specifically "after" Dickey's well-known poem "The Sheep Child," *Falling*, part II.

¹³Excerpted from "Armor," *Drowning With Others*, part II, in *James Dickey: Poems, 1957-1967* (New York: Collier Books), 1968, fifth printing, 1972, p. 81.

BIOGRAPHY

- 1949 Born in Knoxville, Tennessee; raised in Memphis, Tennessee, and, after 1963, Nashville, Tennessee.
- 1967-1971 Studies at University of Tennessee, Knoxville (B.F.A., 1971, painting).
- 1971-1972 Studies at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee (M.A., 1976, art history).
- 1976-1978 Studies at Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri (M.F.A., 1978, painting and multi-media).
- 1978 Moves to New York.
- 1985 Receives grant from Pollock-Krasner Foundation and fellowship from Edward Albee Foundation.
- 1987 Receives fellowship from New York Foundation for the Arts.

Lives and works in New York and Brooklyn, New York; adjunct lecturer at Rhode Island School of Design, Providence (since 1986).



Fig. 2. Creighton Michael with work in progress (*Auk*, 1987).

CATALOGUE OF THE EXHIBITION

All dimensions are given in inches: height precedes width precedes depth. Asterisk indicates work illustrated in color.

1. *Bishop-Widow 9*, 1982
Nylon, acrylic, wood
83 x 22 x 4
Collection of Neil and Janet Checkman,
New York
2. *V-Com*, 1983
Nylon, acrylic, wood
48 x 18 x 5
Collection of Howard M. and Frances A. Schoor,
Colts Neck, New Jersey
3. *Orlach*, 1984
Paper, acrylic, copper powder, charcoal, wood
39 x 27 x 13
Courtesy of the artist
4. *Traveler 9*, 1984
Nylon, acrylic, charcoal, sawdust, wood,
copper, brass
42 x 2½ x 42
Courtesy of the artist
5. *Blind Horn 3*, 1985
Paper, acrylic, charcoal, metallic pigments,
hair, wood
85½ x 5½ x 10
Courtesy of the artist
- *6. *Kyoto*, 1985
Paper, acrylic, charcoal, tin, wood
65 x 20 x 34
Courtesy of the artist
7. *Malatesta*, 1985
Paper, acrylic, metallic pigments, wood
57 x 36 x 20
Collection of Lee and Sylvia Terry, Atlanta
- *8. *Luftschiff 9* [*Airship 9*], 1986
Paper, acrylic, charcoal, fiberglass, wood
28 x 52 x 75
Courtesy of the artist
9. *Usk*, 1986
Paper, acrylic, wax, metallic pigments,
fiberglass, wood
62 x 63½ x 31
Courtesy of the artist
- *10. *Shell 3*, 1987
Paper, acrylic, dry pigments, fiberglass, wood
33½ x 30 x 22
Collection of Jeffrey and Rebecca Berkus,
Santa Barbara, California

EXHIBITIONS HISTORY

Selected One-Artist Exhibitions

- 1972 The Gallery Upstairs, Nashville, Tennessee. March 5-March 26.
Drawings. Memphis State University, Memphis, Tennessee. November 2-November 18.
- 1981 *Salute to Asparagus*. 10 on 8: Ten Windows on Eighth Avenue at Fifty Third Street, New York. July 13-July 18. Installation.
Punch (no Judy). Cemrel, Inc., St. Louis, Missouri. November 6-[November].
- 1982 *Wall Structures*. Just Above Midtown, Inc., New York. December 2-December 22.
- 1985 Craig Cornelius Gallery, New York. November 7-December 7.
- 1987 Craig Cornelius Gallery, New York. February 26-March 27.

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1976 *Forty-Sixth Annual Exhibition*. Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, Missouri. December 12, 1976-January 23, 1977. Catalogue, introduction by William C. Landwehr.
- 1977 *Twentieth North Dakota Print and Drawing Annual*. University Center Art Gallery, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, North Dakota. April 12-April 29. Brochure.
- 1978 *Six on Three*. Riverfront Design Center, St. Louis, Missouri. April 20-May 20.
Selected Works. Terry Moore Gallery, St. Louis, Missouri. [Summer].
- 1979 *Remains . . . The Artist in Environment*. Emily Lowe Gallery at Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York. [November]-December 21. Brochure, text by Linda Goode-Bryant.
- 1980 *Club Sandwich*. Proposal: Gallery, Baltimore, Maryland. [July].
Transgressions. Windows on White, 55 White Street, New York. December 1-December 31. Untitled installation.
- 1981 *Fifth Annual Small Works Competition*. 80 Washington Square East Galleries, New York University, New York. January 27-February 27.
Crossovers. Just Above Midtown, Inc., New York. [December].
- 1982 *Textured Planes*. Proctor Art Center, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. March 15-April 15.

The New Formalism. Roger Litz Gallery, New York. April 2-April 28.

The Monument Redefined: Gowanus Annual II. Downtown Cultural Center, Brooklyn, New York. September 10-October 2. Catalogue, essay by Robert Fisher.

- 1983 *Steel and Nylon: June Lathrop and Creighton Michael*. Small Walls, New York. March 13-March 27.

Alternate Take: Mic-Nic. Central Park, New York. November 20, 1983-January 6, 1984. Collaborative installation with Jim Nickel.

- 1984 *Constructed Image, Constructed Object*. The Alternative Museum, New York. February 4-March 10. Catalogue, text by Peter Frank.

Transformation of the Minimal Style. The Sculpture Center, New York. February 7-February 28.

On Relief. 80 Washington Square East Galleries, New York University, New York. June 13-June 29.

Selections. The Rotunda Gallery, The Brooklyn War Memorial, Brooklyn, New York. September 18-October 20.

Irregulars: Wall Work. Henry Street Settlement, Louis Abrons Art for Living Center, New York. November 30, 1984-January 6, 1985.

- 1985 *Exceptions 3: Paperworks*. Pratt Manhattan Center Gallery, Pratt Institute, New York. February 11-March 9.

Unaffiliated Artists III. Hillwood Art Gallery, Long Island University, C. W. Post Campus, Greenvale, New York. July 10-August 9. Catalogue, text by Judy Collischan Van Wagner.

Sculpture: The Language of Scale. The Bruce Museum, Greenwich, Connecticut. September 15-December 1. Catalogue, text by Dorothy M. Kosinski.

- 1986 *Materials*. Segal Gallery, New York. January 11-February 5.

Archaic Echoes. The Center for the Arts, Muhlenberg College, Allentown, Pennsylvania. January 14-March 2. Catalogue, introduction by Dorothy White, text by Cynthia Nadelman.

Drawings by Sculptors. Nohra Haime Gallery, New York. February 5-March 1.

Natural Sources, Abstract Sculpture. P.S. 122, New York. March 1-March 23.

Two Sculptors: Creighton Michael, Ed Rothfarb. East Hampton Center for Contemporary Art, East Hampton, New York. May 10-June 1.

Transformations. Richard Green Gallery, New York. June 7-July 5.

Craig Cornelius Gallery, New York. July 1-July 31.

Wall Sculpture. Saxon-Lee Gallery, Los Angeles. July 31-August 30.

Sculpture Dialogue: Anchorage & New York. ARCO Gallery, Visual Arts Center of Alaska, Anchorage, Alaska. September 9-October 25. Brochure, introduction by David Donihue.

In the Third Dimension. Zimmerman Saturn Gallery, Nashville, Tennessee. October 2-October 30.

The Sculptural Membrane. The Sculpture Center, New York. November 8-December 2. Catalogue, text by Douglas Dreishpoon.

1987 *Hybrids: Thirteen New York Sculptors.* Addison/Ripley Gallery, Washington, D.C. January 10-February 7.

Wings Over Brooklyn, Part II: The Birds. Memorial Arch, Prospect Park, Brooklyn, New York. April 25-June 21. Installation: *Spider Wing.*

Sculpture: Material Transformations. Rosa Esman Gallery, New York. April 30-May 26.

Petah Coyne, Joy Jacobs, Patrick Kelly, Creighton Michael. Grand Street Gallery, New York. May 19-June 27.

Ten Perspectives. Adams Memorial Gallery, Dunkirk, New York. June 6-July 3. Traveled to Michael C. Rockefeller Arts Center, State University of New York at Fredonia.

Painting into Sculpture. The Rotunda Gallery, The Brooklyn War Memorial, Brooklyn, New York. August 1-September 5.

Primitive Elegance: David Hall/Creighton Michael. Checkwood Fine Arts Center, Nashville, Tennessee. October 3-November 22. Brochure, text by David Ribar.

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- 1978 Stich, Sidra. "St. Louis: Gamesmanship in a Warehouse." *The New Art Examiner* (Chicago), vol. X, no. 9, June, p. 12.
- 1981 Rubin, Michael G. "Michael Exhibit at Cemrel." *St. Louis Globe Democrat* (St. Louis), November 27, p. 128.
- 1982 Callahan, Teresa. "Midwest: Missouri: Creighton Michael." *The New Art Examiner* (Chicago), vol. IX, no. 3, January, p. 21.
- 1985 Braff, Phyllis. "Unaffiliated, Intense and Stimulating." *The New York Times* (New York), July 28, Section XXI, p. 14.
Zimmer, William. "The Big and Little of Sculpture." *The New York Times* (New York), October 13, Section XXIII, p. 32.
- 1986 Brenson, Michael. "Sculpture Breaks the Mold of Minimalism." *The New York Times* (New York), November 23, Section II, p. 33.
Cameron, Dan. "Ten to Watch." *Arts Magazine* (New York), vol. 61, no. 1, September, pp. 40-45.
Harrison, Helen A. "Landscapes and Weapons Frame a Sculpture Show." *The New York Times* (New York), May 25, Section XXI, p. 18.
Westfall, Stephen. "Creighton Michael at Craig Cornelius." *Art in America* (New York), vol. 74, no. 5, May, p. 158.
- 1987 Lewis, Jo Ann. "Galleries: Modernists Coming of Age." *The Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), January 31, p. 62.

