





# CARO

Photographed by John Riddy · Text by Karen Wilkin · Edited by Ian Barker

Prestel

There are many different ways of looking at the sculpture of Anthony Caro. In this book we have chosen eight of the key themes that have occupied his work from the early 1960s to date. These themes should not be regarded as exclusive categories – rather they are intended to lead the reader into a principal concern that each sculpture addresses. We have attempted neither a comprehensive survey of Caro's work nor to illustrate solely masterpieces; instead we have provided an approach which the reader can utilise as a guide to appreciating different aspects of the sculptor's oeuvre.

**E**VEN TO the casual observer, it must be clear that Anthony Caro is a force to be reckoned with, perhaps *the* force to be reckoned with, in present-day sculpture. ‘Caro sets a standard for us,’ a younger sculptor said recently. ‘He’s the one we all have to get past.’ For thirty years, Caro has been the pre-eminent exponent of a kind of constructed sculpture, both wholly his own and firmly rooted in the history of modernism. It has its origins in Cubist collage, by way of the unprecedented works in welded iron and steel made by Pablo Picasso and Julio González, in the late 1920s, and the innovations of David Smith, in the 1950s and early 1960s. Caro’s work, like that of his modernist predecessors, denies that ‘sculpture’ is synonymous with ‘statue’; his is not an art of carving or modelling solid forms, but of assembling discrete, often disparate parts to make new kinds of expressive objects.

Since the early 1960s, when Caro’s strength first became apparent, he has been regarded as the principal heir to this ‘new tradition’, and praised, too, for enlarging his legacy by adapting it to a new, entirely personal abstract idiom. His sculptures look like nothing but themselves, but they are not arbitrary inventions. Profoundly based in experience, these wordless carriers of emotion speak to us as music does, as pure disembodied feeling. Since the mid-1970s, it has been increasingly clear that Caro’s dialogue is not only with his modernist ancestors, but with the whole history of sculpture, with painting, and lately, with architecture. It is increasingly evident, too, that he finds intense stimulation outside of his own culture and – occasionally – outside the realm of high art. He has remained faithful to a modernist conception of constructed, collaged sculpture, but, in recent years, he has begun to challenge some of the fundamental assumptions of this idiom, by examining new ways of using materials and new notions of density, scale,

and mass, and by rethinking new possibilities of the role of sculpture itself. Yet at the same time, there are strong family resemblances between even the most diverse sculptures, recurrent themes that cut across time, and persist through changes of scale, medium, and approach; no less important than the abundant evidence of growth and change, these constants are the hallmarks of Caro’s personality.

Caro announced his originality in the early 1960s when he began to exhibit eccentric and, as it turns out, unforgettable steel sculptures made by welding and bolting together industrial members: works, such as the glowing yellow *Midday* (32), at once brutal and elegant, dextrous and clumsy. *Midday* stands alertly, reaching across space, its poised, vertical I-beams signalling for attention and its rows of bolts simultaneously testifying to the history of its making and forming a delicate contrapuntal drawing. The sculpture, devoid of base or pedestal, occupies our own space, but it easily separates itself from the ordinary objects that surround us by its *otherness*,



by its insistent presence. While the industrial antecedents of its materials and method of construction are obvious, they seem less important than the force of its feeling: emotion shaped in purely sculptural terms.

Despite the many shifts and alterations along the way, the characteristics that made *Midday* and its fellows so remarkable when they were first seen have been true of virtually all of Caro's sculpture since. Typically, a Caro sculpture stamps itself out as a singular, unignorable object, but reads, at the same time, as an assembly of parts whose relationship is both logical and elusive, difficult to describe, but visually lucid. Much of the eloquence of Caro's work resides in the way elements are placed, in the intervals between them, in how things touch, back off, and angle away from one another, in how they respond to gravity and resist it. The American philosopher and critic, Michael Fried, London correspondent of *Arts* magazine when Caro made works such as *Midday* and, like Clement Greenberg, an early champion of these sculptures, was one of the first to point out how much they depended on this kind of 'syntax', as he called it.

Works like *Midday* were, in some respects, as new to Caro as they were to their first viewers. After gaining an engineering degree at Cambridge, he had been a prize-winning student at the conservative Royal Academy Schools, in London. There he met and married Sheila Girling, the painter whose exacting eye has contributed much to his sculpture over the years. Wanting to broaden his art education, the 27-year-old novice presented himself at Henry Moore's studio – 'He was the best modern sculptor in England,' Caro explains – and remained as Moore's assistant from 1951 to 1953. Caro speaks warmly of

Moore, of his generosity, of the importance of his example; Moore's library, with books on African sculpture, Surrealism, and much more that the Academy's traditional curriculum had ignored, affected him deeply, as well.

By the mid-1950s, Caro was modelling thickset nudes in clay or plaster, for casting in bronze. He has described these figures, which rest heavily on the ground or struggle to rise, as being about 'what it is like to be inside the body', a condition, for him, of being oppressed by gravity. They earned the young sculptor places in several prestigious exhibitions and a purchase by the Tate Gallery, but in spite of such evident approval, Caro was dissatisfied. He was already making efforts to alter his approach when the American critic, Clement Greenberg, visited his London studio for the first time, in the summer of 1959. However, real change did not occur until later that year, after his first trip to the United States, sponsored by the Ford Foundation.

In the United States, Caro visited museums, galleries and studios across the country, saw Greenberg in New York and met the artists Kenneth Noland, Helen Frankenthaler, Adolph Gottlieb and David Smith, among others. The Americans' energy and adventurousness fascinated Caro, as did their uninhibited attitude toward materials and methods. Caro recalls that it was Greenberg who summed up the lesson of the experience: 'He said if you want to change your art, change your methods'.

When he returned to London, Caro did just that, tackling for the first time scrap metal, girders, and found objects, unyielding but flexible new materials that were the antithesis of the malleable, responsive clay and plaster of his past. They both forced and allowed him to discover new ways of describing and



inventing form, as well as new ways of encapsulating feeling. They allowed him, as he put it, 'to make sculpture real'.

As the 1960s progressed, Caro tested the limits of his new language and his new materials. After working with bulky industrial members, he began to explore steel's ability to be both thin and strong, in vigorous, drawing-like structures. In works such as the masterly *Orangerie* (51) of 1969, or *Sunfeast* (75) of 1969-70, he used the animated twists of ploughshares and the swelling curves of tank ends to 'draw' simultaneously with edge and plane. Caro's sculptures, at this time, became increasingly 'open' – available to visual penetration – so much so that works such as *The Window* (100,101), 1966-67, depend on transparent grids, ephemeral planes whose density varies as the viewer moves. Distance, interval, the space between and within elements became more and more important.

Most of Caro's sculpture of the 1960s developed horizontally, resting on the floor of our own space, although the word 'resting' is misleading, since the law of gravity seems to have been abolished in these works. While Caro's first steel pieces appeared to rise with some effort, as his early bronze figures did – although they were not in any way *like* figures – his subsequent works seem weightless. It is as if abstraction carried with it the freedom to invent not only new kinds of objects, but new physical laws, totally unlike those that constrain our earthbound bodies.

The bright, uniform colours that Caro chose for these sculptures helped to cancel out some of the industrial associations of his beams and girders. Colour unified the variety of collaged elements and, at the same time, made the steel appear less

substantial. Nonetheless, a girder, no matter what its colour, is still a large, heavy length of metal. It is not colour, but *placement*, from the simple fact of Caro's having removed a structural beam from its usual context, to the subtle internal syntax of the sculpture, that makes us willing to believe that the delicately poised steel planes and bars could float. In many of Caro's best works of the 1960s, real structural logic is irrelevant. Just as the flying buttresses of a Gothic cathedral always appear to spring upwards, no matter how much we know about the transfer of loads, Caro's works of this period seem to hover above the ground, restating the ground plane in terms of a new kind of physics. Structural members often seem minimal, just enough to keep the sculpture together, and interchangeable with elements that have no visible supporting function, so that key portions of the sculpture seem to levitate. Surprisingly, other works of these years hug the ground, notably the pared-down pieces (1,7) made between 1963 and 1965, when Caro taught at Bennington College, in Vermont. As if providing an antidote for the sleight of eye of works like *Month of May* (18) of 1963, the Bennington pieces crawl along, measuring the distance travelled in a series of punctuating angles and staccato turns.

Traditional sculpture – statues – usually alluded to the upright human figure and described it in terms of solid forms. In the 1920s and 1930s, Picasso and González made it possible for open, thin-walled volumes constructed in iron and steel to be called 'sculpture' and for objects that looked like nothing pre-existing to convey emotion. But they continued to refer to the body, in their pioneering heads and figures. David Smith appropriated the vocabulary of the industrial vernacular for his sculptures of the



1950s and 1960s, but while his tripod and wheel-mounted structures were less explicitly about the body than Picasso's or González's, something decidedly animated, confrontational and, well, *figure-like* remained. Caro, once he began to work in steel, not only avoided solid forms and masses, but scrupulously avoided any allusion, however remote, to the figure. Since we tend to anthropomorphise anything vertical, perhaps because it carries with it a memory of our own upright posture, Caro avoided verticality in these early years. There is the occasional exception, but sculptures of this type are so attenuated, like the grounded Bennington sculptures, that figuration is not an issue; they are like lines drawn in the air, sculptural equivalents of the Indian rope trick (6).

The way Moore's boulder-like reclining figures, which Caro knew intimately, stretch along the ground makes comparison tempting, but Caro's conception of what sculpture could be is wholly opposed to Moore's. Caro's structures are, in his word, 'real'; as compelling as anything in the existing world, they look like nothing we already know. Their size and the space they occupy are literal. Moore's mature work is largely metaphorical, reminding us how landscape forms (among other things) echo the forms of the body; scale and space shift between actuality and illusion. For Caro, horizontality is not an equivalent for reclining, but an end in itself and a kind of guarantee of abstractness. Horizontality, like Jackson Pollock's placing his canvases on the floor to paint them, gave Caro a new freedom of construction. A sculpture could be expanded and extended at the artist's pleasure, its structure dictated neither by the logic of the human body nor the perennial bugbear of support. Smith often began his sculptures on the

ground, for similar reasons, but he hauled them into a vertical position to complete them, while Caro's 'ground-flung' sculptures, as they have eloquently been described, prolong process, making it an end as well as a means. We recapitulate this process because we perceive these horizontal sculptures from the same vantage point as their maker did, from all sides, even though there is almost always a strong sense of front and back in Caro's sculptures.

At the same time, these pieces demand to be viewed from specific points. Although they often spread accommodatingly at our feet (or, recently, seem to embrace us) the sculptures themselves determine the distance from which they must be viewed, because of their size or the placement of parts; elements can serve as barriers, keeping us at bay. Caro's works arrest the viewer at fixed points, so that we move around them in fits and starts. It comes as no surprise to learn that Caro dislikes sculptures that allow the eye to slide endlessly across surfaces and around forms. He prizes works that are clearly articulated spatially and has written perceptively about this aspect of Donatello. His own best work often seems conceived as a series of tableaux, as though we were seeing a sequence of self-contained 'pictures' in a disjunctive rhythm created, paradoxically, not by pictorial effects, but by the dominance of edges, planes and profiles that cut into space.

By the end of the 1960s, Caro's sculpture was admired and acclaimed. His work had been shown in major centres in Britain, Europe and the United States. In 1969, he represented Britain at the São Paulo Bienal, while the Arts Council mounted his first important retrospective exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, London. If Caro's work had remained unchanged, his place in the history of



contemporary sculpture would still have been assured, but what followed, in the 1970s and 1980s, was, if anything, more adventurous – and more passionate – than what preceded it. There was continuity, of course. Caro continued to think of sculpture as a way of making physical and emotional experience visible and the formal means he found for embodying these concerns remained consistent. Severe geometric works of the early 1970s, such as the *Silk Road* series (5, 12) or *Ordinance* (63), with their incremental progressions, their near-symmetry and unexpected deviations from regularity, were logical, crisper variations on the concerns of the Bennington pieces. Caro's small-scale sculptures of the period, too, continued to explore notions first stated by their predecessors in the 1960s of just what putting things on a table could mean. But there were also the thirty-seven large steel York Sculptures, made outside Toronto, Canada, during the spring and summer of 1974. They seemed startlingly new when they were made and now seem to prefigure many of Caro's recent concerns.

Until Caro began to work on the York Sculptures (8, 10, 11, 13), his improvisatory way of working eliminated the possibility of making very large sculptures or, at least, of using elements over a certain size. Since making a scale model and having it enlarged was anathema to him, his sculptures remained human in scale, made of elements that one man (or one with a little help) could manoeuvre. In Toronto, for the first time, Caro had men and equipment at his disposal that allowed him to work with a new lexicon of elements. 'The extraordinary weight of those slabs, those pieces which were unlike anything I'd handled up to then,' Caro marvelled. Some of the York Sculptures, he says, had

to do with his excitement at seeing huge sheets of steel slung up and lifted as easily as he himself could move an average-size plate of metal.

Many of the York Sculptures are about this kind of surprising encounter. Others are slabs leaning on each other in seemingly spontaneous, unstable configurations, while still others are horizontal spills of metal. The large sheets are presented apparently unmodified, unpainted, as if Caro had finally succumbed to the physical properties of his chosen material, after years of disassembling, of exploiting steel's practical virtues and tensile strengths, but not its surface, substance, or weight. In the York Sculptures, Caro appears to have fallen in love with the soft-edged expanses of metal, with their exquisitely inflected surfaces and unpredictably curved edges. The act of placing these objects in unexpected positions or in the subtlest, most haphazard of relationships with other pieces of steel was almost enough to make a sculpture.

It wasn't the first time Caro used large pieces of unpainted steel, nor was it his first venture out of the studio into the factory. Smaller versions of the York Sculptures' plates and crop – the ends of a rolling mill's run – figured in the *Veduggio* series, made in 1972 in a small Italian steel works. The elegantly-shaped sheets of the *Veduggio* sculptures are often presented vertically, as though displayed on an easel. Their uprightness alters our relationship to them from one of observation to one of confrontation, but there is no memory of the body inherent in their verticality. Rather, they recall inanimate objects: paintings, gateways, mirrors and the like. The sheer size of the York Sculptures suggests architecture, rather than domestic objects, but once again, placement and the articulation of part to part are



determining factors in how we perceive them. The seemingly casual arrangement of massive plates in *Double Flats* (11), for example, suggests known building conventions less than it does a miraculous suspension of natural laws. The improbability of seeing huge sheets of steel poised as they are makes us doubly aware of the piece as a unique, invented object, rather than a wall, for all its architectural scale. Its deadpan frontality is tempered by a new emphasis on volume, typical of the series; the space trapped between the sandwiched planes becomes of paramount importance. Yet there is a sense, too, of impenetrability. Some of the York pieces shelter 'secret' sculptures, tucked under overhanging planes, while others seem to conceal as much as to display themselves. In the light of Caro's recent work, this emphasis on both volume and on containment seems prophetic.

Caro's 1975 retrospective exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art began with *Midday* and culminated with the York Sculptures, whose generous scale and visual bulk seemed to sum up his newest direction of the time. Even his table pieces, small-scale works that began as relatively explicit, if abstract, still lifes that incorporated grips and handles, as if to reinforce their potential for being lifted, had become massive, made of large sheets of crumpled steel. In his work of the next few years, Caro pursued visual and literal density, drawing with broad brushstrokes instead of with the wiry lines of the 1960s, yet his next working trip to North America, to lead an artists' workshop in western Canada in 1977, produced a series of linear sculptures, as delicate as the York pieces were robust. Part of the slenderness of the Emma Lake series (14, 19, 20, 62) is due to the realities of transporting steel

to a remote lakeside site in northern Saskatchewan, but their emphasis on line was not just an expedient response to challenging working conditions; neither was it a return to earlier concerns. The Emma sculptures may superficially recall the drawing-like works of the 1960s, but despite their thin members and open construction, they are far more volumetric than their predecessors. Where Caro once seemed to regard transparency as a purely visual phenomenon, in the Emma sculptures he made it an abstraction of mass; in them, drawing outlined forms that substituted for literal bulk.

The linear Emma pieces have a tenuous relation to a group of Picasso drawings, typical of how Caro uses a great variety of stimuli as springboards for his art. He has been fascinated by marine propellers and piled-up picnic tables as by other sculpture, by Indian sculpture, and most recently, by architecture, but up to now, Caro, like David Smith, who insisted that he 'belonged with painters', has been most provoked by painting. Sometimes the connection is rather oblique, as in *Orangerie*, whose narrow, curving shapes evoke Matisse's cut-outs without looking specifically like any of them. At other times, it is more a question of common preoccupations. The clear, linear Bennington pieces, for example, have inevitable associations with the clean-edged bars of Kenneth Noland's *Chevron* and *Stripe* paintings, made in the mid-1960s, when the two artists saw each other frequently. The cursive edges, declarative spread, and emptied-out centres of the Veduggio and York series reflect Caro's like-mindedness with his friends Helen Frankenthaler and Jules Olitski, whose paintings deal with similarly inflected expanses and articulated edges. The heightened physicality of Caro's recent work, while in some respects simply



characteristic of art of the 1980s, also speaks of his sympathy for the built-up surfaces of Olitski's and Larry Poons's recent canvases. Lately, however, Caro has paid more attention to Old and Modern Master painting than to that of his contemporaries, basing a series of complex sculptures on works by Rubens (108), Rembrandt and Manet (42, 82), translating not their imagery but their tonal contrast and bravura paint handling into sensuously curved steel.

For all the constants in Caro's sculpture, it is nevertheless difficult to discuss his work in terms of thematic progressions or serial development. The way he proceeds is complicated. He begins sculptures rapidly, more than one at a time, but he can spend years bringing them to a point that satisfies him. Each group of works feeds the next, whatever the differences between them, and he often returns later to ideas he has not yet exhausted, or reconsiders earlier notions in the light of subsequent discoveries. To keep his sculpture fresh, he often works in ways that are not habitual to him, changing his stock, the size of his sculptures, or his medium, and in the last fifteen years or so, he has repeatedly changed his place of work. His London studio remains primary, but in addition to the Italian and Canadian ventures of the 1970s, Caro has worked for extended periods in Spain, Germany, Holland, and, every summer since 1982, in the United States, where he maintains a studio and has founded an annual international artists' workshop. He remains in close contact with many younger sculptors, former students, assistants, and workshop alumni, an echo of Moore's generosity at the beginning of his own career, and possibly, a way of keeping himself off balance.

Caro's later work is most striking for its unpredictability and riskiness, as if with maturity he

experienced a desire to see just how far he could go within the boundaries of his chosen territory, perhaps even a wish to go beyond that territory. Caro now permits himself many things that he deliberately banned from his earlier work, not through self-indulgence, but in a genuine effort to extend the limits of sculpture. In the past decade, he has worked in media not usually associated with modernist construction – clay, wood, paper, lead, silver and bronze – as well as 'traditional' steel, stainless steel and found objects. Each change of medium has occasioned a rethinking of formal and expressive possibilities. What has remained constant is the passionate enthusiasm for each material's physical properties that first manifested itself in the voluptuous sheets of steel of the Veduggio and York sculptures.

That Caro chose to work in bronze, a material he abandoned when he began to make abstract sculpture in 1960, is an indication of the broadening of his thinking. For him, using iron, steel and scrap metal was not the self-conscious declaration of modernism that it had been for Picasso and González, or even for Smith; steel and scrap were simply materials that allowed him to work directly and freely. He rejected bronze, despite its sensuousness and beauty, not for ideological reasons, but because it required preconception. Yet by the late 1970s, in part because of experiments with clay, Caro found himself interested in the shapes and forms that bronze permitted and attracted to its freight of art-historical associations. To reclaim this traditional material for himself, he had to devise a method of constructing directly with pre-cast shapes, brass sheets and rods; the beauty of surface and the richness of associations were transformed into his own immediate idiom.



Like traditional materials, solid forms (or dense, massive ones) often seem inextricably linked to an older, figurative tradition of sculpture, so much so that openness, in the early days of modernist construction, was a necessity – if sculptors were to avoid reminders of the organic forms of the body. Caro's massive, volumetric – and abstract – recent sculpture questions that assumption. His new appetite for mass has declared itself in tandem with an appetite for monumental scale. Many of his latest works are behemoths, not only dense, richly articulated, and intensely physical, but astonishingly large.

Some suggest that they could be entered, in contrast to his early, slightly aloof works, which were frequently praised for being accessible only to sight. Caro has been looking hard and thinking hard about architecture, from Romanesque and Renaissance churches, to Indian temples, to his own 1987 workshop collaboration with the architect, Frank Gehry, on a playful 'sculpture-village'. (After the project, the core forms of the 'village' became the genesis of monumentally scaled, building-like sculptures that, four years later, are still evolving.) A few towers and half-scale versions of loose-jointed, potentially 'habitable' works, such as *Lakeside Folly* (112) of 1988, which Caro has termed 'sculptecture', tread a tightrope between function and invention, balancing between carpentry and art. Other recent works, such as *Elephant Palace* (106) of 1989, are like sealed enclosures, all impenetrable exterior. Caro finds nothing contradictory in his newly expanded vision. He sees himself as simply investigating areas that have been opened up by what he calls 'the broadening of sculpture'. 'Abstraction makes other things important. You sacrifice the figure and you get things that you never had before – rather, you had them but

as part of the figure, not independently – like interval or issues of scale or architecture.'

Despite this broadening, many aspects of Caro's work remain unchanged. Placement is still crucial and drawing still plays a dominant role, rather like a solo instrument whose voice carries the burden of melody above and through complex orchestration. The edges of thick planes, the slots and spaces between massive elements, seams, even the profiles of twisting sheets of steel, all function as expressive linear elements. Usually the most delicate portions of the sculptures, they substitute for non-existent thin members that would be overwhelmed by the sheer size of other components. At the same time, this surrogate drawing reinforces our sense of weight and mass, by calling attention to how the sculptures were made and shaped. But Caro has not abandoned his more usual way of drawing with delicate line. Since 1987, a series of working trips to Barcelona, whose ubiquitous ironwork and art nouveau arabesques caused Caro to describe it as 'a place all about drawing', resulted in a group of smaller-scale works. The orchestration of elegant geometry and frozen calligraphy in the Barcelona and Catalan series (26, 29-31, 45, 69) suggests doors, balconies, windows, and even the flourishes of Catalan ironwork, without looking particularly like any of those things.

Yet another group of sculptures was provoked by Caro's first trip to Greece, in 1985. He was bowled over by the pediments of the Temple of Zeus, at Olympia: the still drama of the preparations for the chariot race on the east pediment, the stylised turmoil of the battle between the Centaurs and Lapiths on the west. The monumental, but human-scale *Xanadu* (116) of 1986-88 is part of Caro's response to Olympia. Like the sculptures of more or less the



same period, based on Rembrandt, Rubens and Manet's example, *Xanadu* and its fellows translate potent figure compositions into 'sentences' of curving, volumetric units. Caro speaks of Baroque sculpture in relation to these elements, yet geometry informs them, just as it does the best of Greek figure sculpture. The Greeks seem to have begun with abstract, ideal geometric forms and to have brought them to life – in contrast to nineteenth-century academicians who smoothed the irregularity of the actual into blandness. Each phrase of *Xanadu* is active, shadowy, with a lively play of flat, convex, concave and just plain indescribable shapes that, perhaps, stand for the complexities of human form without looking like anything human.

I do not suggest that Caro has started to make disguised figure sculpture, but we experience these works in relation to our own bodies, measuring each element against ourselves. In a sense, this is nothing new. Even the most stripped-down of Caro's early works elicited this kind of response; we mentally launched ourselves across the spaces these sculptures bridged, felt uplifted by the way they floated against the ground. Caro's architecturally-scaled sculptures make this quality 'real', as well, since full understanding of the pieces depends not on sight alone, but on literally moving into and through the work.

Sculptures like *Xanadu* or the boxy *Elephant Palace* are somewhere in between: accessible only to the eye, they also pose questions about the relation of interior and exterior, containment and openness.

Caro's work of the past few years is no less abstract than the work that established his reputation, but it is more ambiguous, sometimes even allusive. Caro explains the change as an inevitable part of the expansion of modernist sculpture's possibilities. 'In the 1960s, there were forbidden areas,' he says. 'Sculpture is made of the same stuff artifacts are made of. It can so easily become inexpressive, another artifact. In the 1960s, we did everything to avoid allowing our work to look like an insect or a piece of furniture. Now abstraction is so firmly established within the language of sculpture that it no longer requires that sort of defence.'

Caro shows no signs of slackening his pace. There has been no diminution of his remarkable ability to invent objects that demand and reward our attention, puzzle us, challenge us, and stir us deeply. At a time when fashionable taste questions the very notion of excellence, the intensity, conviction, and sheer unexpectedness of Caro's best work make it speak more eloquently than ever. As that young sculptor said recently, he continues to set standards for anyone who takes sculpture seriously.



# THE GROUND



FOR CENTURIES, statues were set on plinths or raised on pedestals. The dominant horizontal ground plane of ordinary experience was, for the most part, irrelevant, an unavoidable given that had nothing to do with traditional sculpture's concerns. Even after the advent of modernism, sculptors persisted in setting their works on bases, just as painters continued to surround their pictures with frames, to reinforce the difference between actuality and the work of art.

Some inventive modernist sculptors made the base part of their original conception. Constantin Brancusi's stacked geometric bases are as adventurous as (and sometimes more so than) his sleek, streamlined carvings, although he always distinguished between his suggestive sculptures and the abstract constructions on which he placed them. Alberto Giacometti, in his early Surrealist sculpture, sometimes alluded to landscape, making the ground plane part of the sculpture, but these were small works, meant to be displayed on traditional pedestals.

Anthony Caro's first abstract sculptures dispensed entirely with any vestige of the base, by spreading boldly into the viewer's own space. He has continued to situate his works in this way, forcing them to declare their difference from other objects by virtue of their unexpectedness and their emotional

charge. Caro has never regarded the ground plane merely as a necessary, unavoidable given, but sees it as an important element against which his sculptures react. The ground is never simply a support, the law of gravity notwithstanding. Caro's sculptures claim the space in which they are located, skim the ground, or defy physical laws by springing lightly away from it; they never rest heavily.

Caro dislikes the notion that horizontal spread is an equivalent for reclining, and denies that his ground-based works derive from the figure. He speaks of them in completely other terms, sometimes referring to his sculptures as 'fast' or 'slow'. Often this has to do with how works are perceived, the rhythm at which the eye moves from part to part, or the way they separate themselves from their surroundings. But it also refers to how the sculptures pace themselves across a given distance – the high-stepping, solemn progress of *Dark Motive* (5) or *End Game* (12), the low-lying syncopation of *Shaftsbury* (1), the stately hovering of *Lock* (3), the joyous upward thrust of *Wide* (9), and so on. The sculptures all acknowledge the ground plane, but they are not inhibited by it in any way. Even massive works, like *Low Line Flats* (4), or *Skimmer Flat* (8), which remain close to the ground, also strive away from it, as though subject to a weaker gravitational field than our own.



# CONTENTS

## ANTHONY CARO

by Karen Wilkin

### THE GROUND

1-13

### DRAWING IN SPACE

14-31

### POISE

32-50

### LEVELS

51-63

### VESSELS

64-74

### THE TABLE

75-89

### OPENINGS

90-100

### PLACE

101-116

### LIST OF PLATES

### CHRONOLOGY

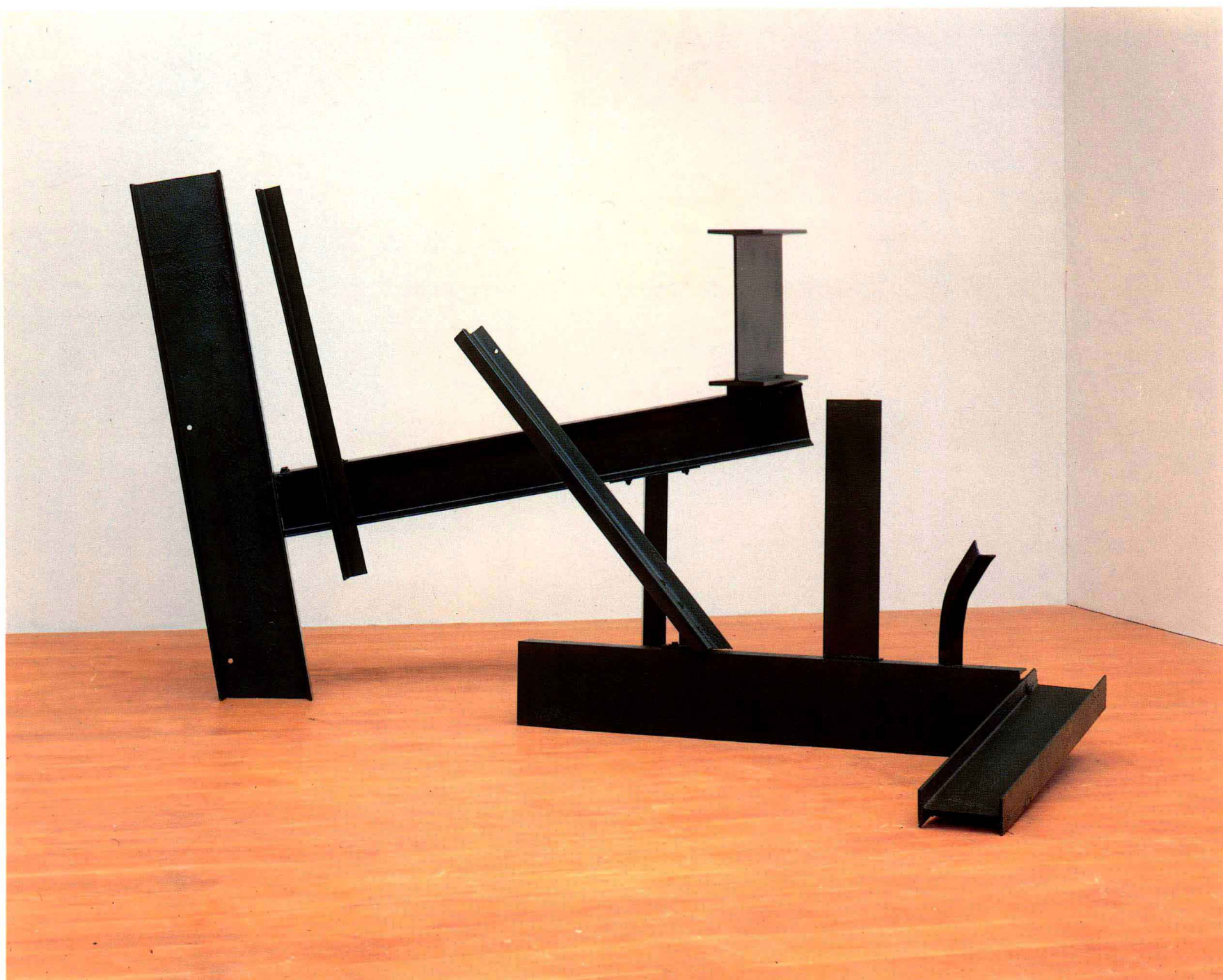
### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS





1. SHAFTSBURY 1965





2. SCULPTURE TWO 1962