



COLEEN STERRITT

Coleen Sterritt

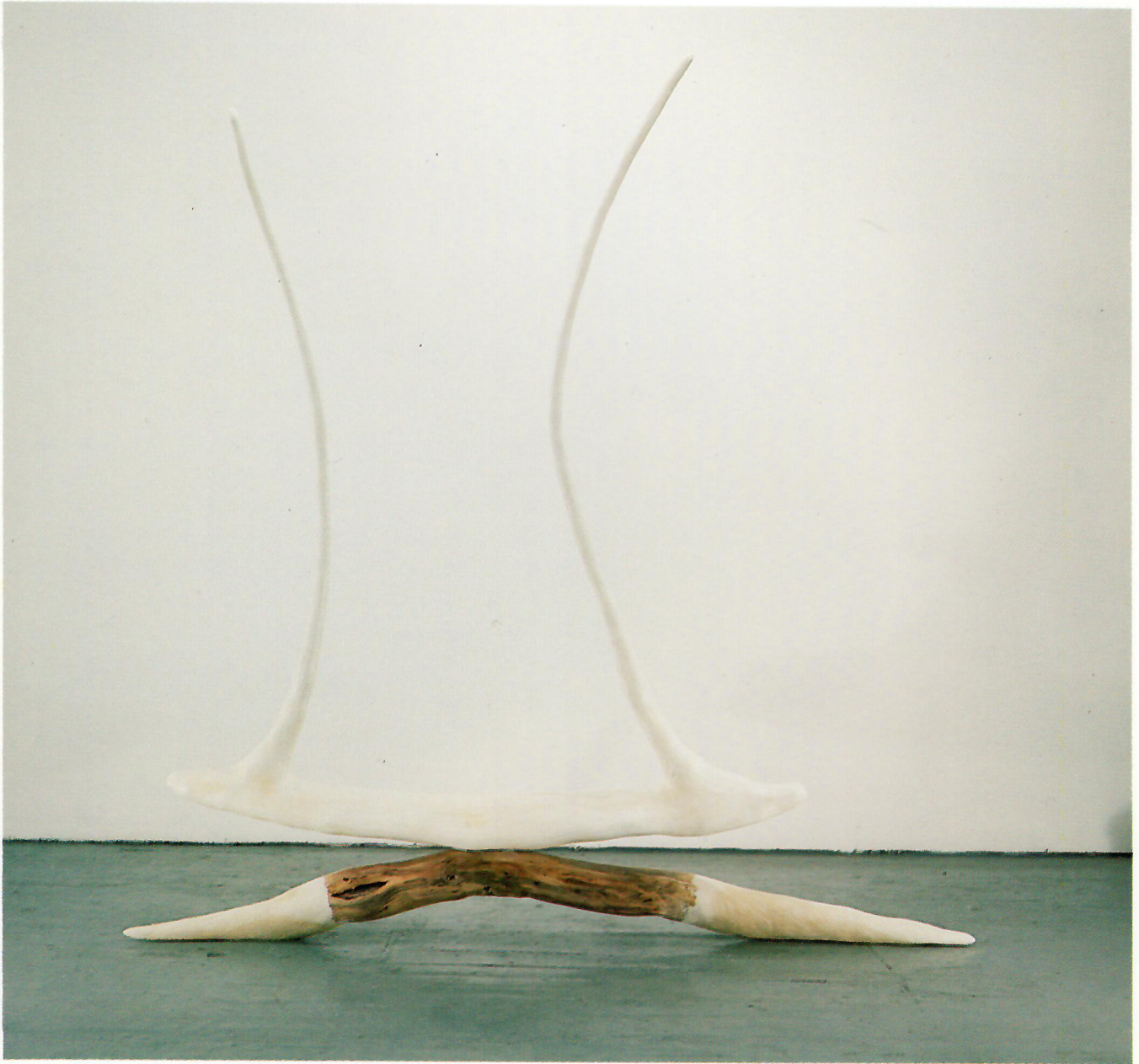
Coleen Sterritt pays close attention to some very specific sculptural concerns, constantly clarifying formal aspects of weight and balance, surface and texture. At the same time, her work evokes psychological and emotional qualities relating to certain dualities, like separation and union, part and whole, embrace and entrapment. And in the most recent work there is a new focus that continues her interest in organic forms but now charges them with more explicit figural references.

Balance is the key element that has always been present in Sterritt's work, from the early, skitterish tripod pieces which gradually evolved from small, spiky vessel shapes on leggy supports to more massive containers on stubbier appendages to giant, open cocoon shapes on single supports, to the present body of work, with elliptical closed and open forms caught or connected to single or double stanchions, from which flat, triangular shapes occasionally project like stiffened flags.

In the progression from tripedal to monopedal, the issue of balance becomes more critical and the problem of juncture more overt as formal concerns. As the work gradually moves toward a dialogue between equal elements, the point at which the elements meet becomes increasingly crucial. Sterritt's concern with the "rightness" of this juncture, the sense that these forms could not join in any other configuration, derives from her ongoing appreciation for indigenous architecture, for what Bernard Rudofsky called "architecture without architects," with its sense of formal economy and candid use of materials.

This concern for spontaneous architectural forms has progressed from the idea of "hut/architecture to vessel/body to pod/interior organisms to the current eye-shape, which is psychological and self-reflective," says Sterritt. "Also," she says, "it's interesting that this has been a metaphoric evolution as well — of a certain kind of domesticity which has become more microscopic in its progression — not scale, but focus." In this regard, then, the gradual transition from interlocking forms, characteristic of an initial, intense relationship, to a more interdependent and tangential union may signify the independence and autonomy of a more secure and evolved personal dialogue. The insistent desire for total embrace evident in the earlier work is relaxed into a more affectionate, kind of arm-in-arm, juxtaposition of co-equal parts which form a whole.

These transitions are witnessed by the works of the past few years. "Endear:153," from 1987, still catches (traps?) the tar and straw pod shape in the embrace of two long arms atop a sturdy foot, whereas "Cradle Up," from 1989 releases the arms and cups them on a crutchlike stem which is intersected by an elliptical echo of the pod. "Places in Between," from that same year, opens up the pod to reveal its inner structure and positions it, tilted as if in transit, on a pair of supports which can be read as legs.



Reciprocal Breathing, 1990, 110" x 104" x 18", wood, fixall, steel



Places in Between, 1989-90
68" x 49" x 16"
steel, mortar, fixall, fiberglass

Photographs: Chris Warner

In the most recent works, like "Reciprocal Breathing" and "I Am, I Am," the shift from pod to eye is complete and the references to arms and legs are fully developed. There is a parallel shift in materials, with the more visceral straw and tar replaced by more evocative materials and surface. The smoothed wood, the found forms of natural tree crotches, the painted tips that look like hooves or pointed feet call up references to skin and bone and render the works more insistently figurative.

Sterritt has also shifted her spatial references. While in the past all her works were freestanding, several now lean against the wall, borrowing its plane, inscribing shadows on it. More significantly, they now confront the viewer in a subtly different relationship. One can no longer circle the work, as if in control of its space, but must now meet it as an equal, as if in a quiet conversation.

Joan Hugo



I Am, I Am, 1990, 63" x 74" x 16", wood, fixall, steel

COLEEN STERRITT: SCULPTURE
OCTOBER 1-26, 1990
FINE ARTS GALLERY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, LOS ANGELES