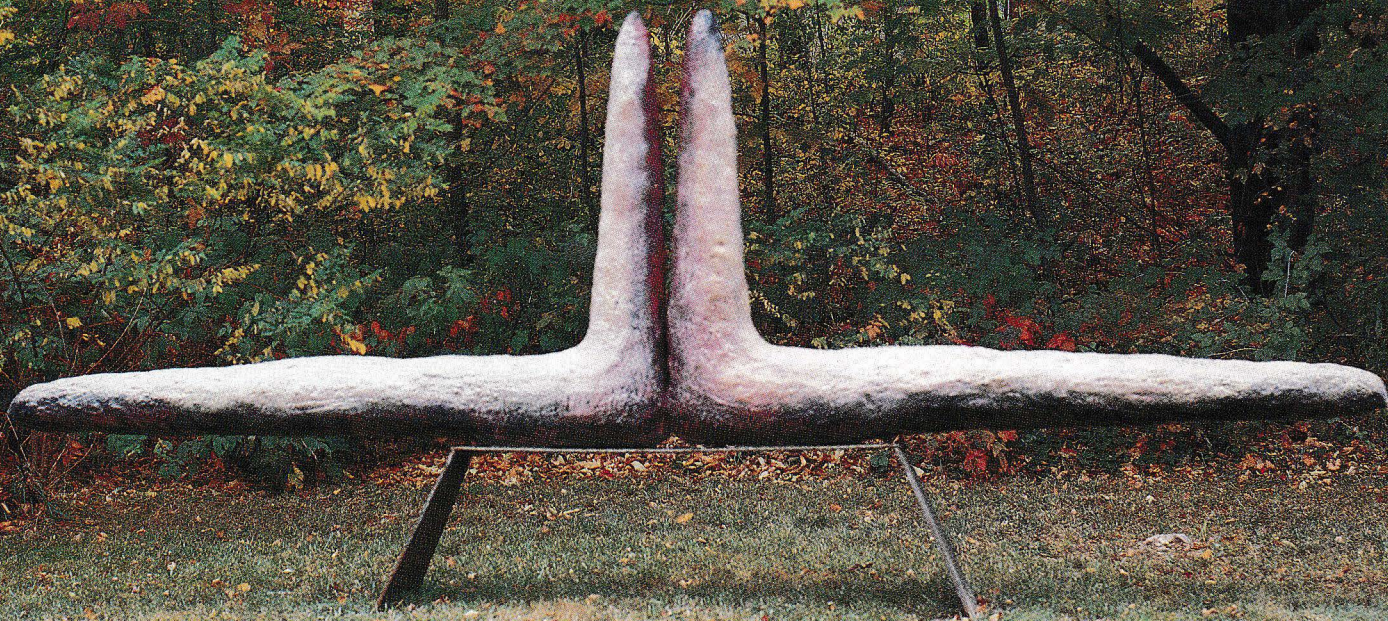


MIA WESTERLUND ROOSEN

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# MIA WESTERLUND ROOSEN

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The sculptures of Mia Westerlund Roosen garner strength in part through the power of the suggested as opposed to the obvious. Roosen, interested more in the oblique, evokes rather than describes. That she employs a physically imposing and often monumental format only contributes to their insistent presence. The sculptures convey an air of compelling mystery, and at the same time appear as if they have always existed. Indeed, Roosen's ability to unite a series of contrasting qualities within her sculptures ultimately augments their potency: they are at once awkward yet elegant, bulky yet graceful, organic yet geometric.

An untitled work from 1984, for example, is composed of two components in the form of right angles that rest on a table-like base (cover). Although they are abstract forms, they can also be read as two seated figures, resting back to back, with elongated "legs" stretching out before them. The sculpture, which measures over fifteen feet in length, is constructed from concrete, which is modeled over wire and reinforcing rod, and then covered with a layer of pinkish encaustic. The density and weight of the materials is countered by the sensation that the forms are floating, only minimally supported by the base. The angular composition is softened by the curved and rounded forms of the two components, and the symmetry offset by a slight torque between them. Similarly, the sensual, delicate texture and pink tint of the encaustic sheathing belies the inherently rougher and cruder concrete that it covers.

*Monument* (1984) goes a step further in skewing a symmetrical composition. Composed of only one element, it rises at an angle from a footlike support only to widen and bend down again to touch the floor, thus creating a triangular arch or passageway (fig. 1). Roosen was consciously attempting to unite columnar and planar elements in a way that also formed an arch in an unclassical manner.<sup>1</sup> The result is somewhat comical; although the sculpture has the "monumentality," i.e., large size usually attributed to a monumental arch, the foot support suggests an ungainly bird or figure, bent over in a slightly awkward position. Constructed similarly, although this time sheathed in pounded lead, the inherently static weightiness of concrete is denied.

Roosen's oeuvre to date reveals a logical progression of ideas and forms. She came of age artistically during the period of



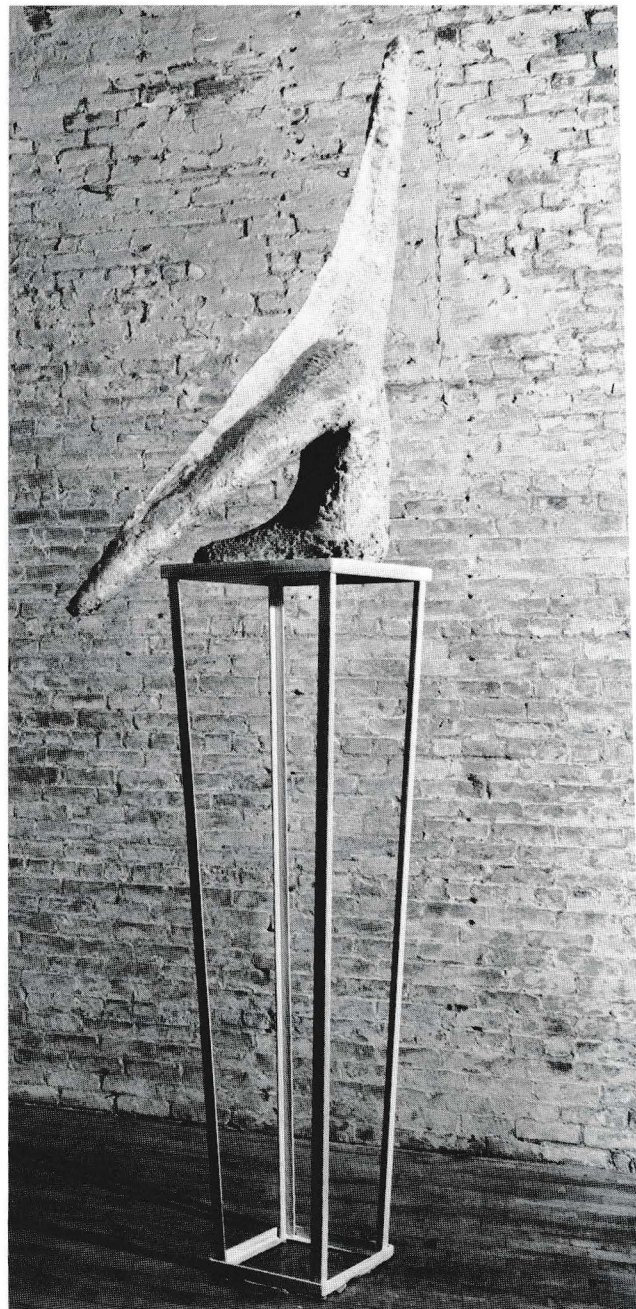
2. *Memories II*, 1984. Concrete and lead on steel base, 103 x 40 x 24". Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York

postminimalism, a time when artists were reacting against the strict doctrines and cool aesthetic of the art that immediately preceded it. She began in the early '70s by making large, bulky serial forms out of fiberglass and resins. This work combined an "emphasis on surface with a clearly defined volume," two features that have remained consistent.<sup>2</sup>

An equal emphasis on the process, in part, determined the next body of work. Roosen then switched to concrete, choosing this particular medium because, like resins, it was a soft material that hardened. Unable to make organic forms in the new medium, she began a series of geometric, poured concrete slabs that are reminiscent of truncated roads or highways. Eventually, the horizontal slabs became vertical wedges, where the pictorial qualities of the surfaces and textures were explored. The principal meaning of this body of work resided in the process itself and handling of the materials, an approach that ultimately became too limiting. Roosen found herself "wanting to make more aesthetic choices rather than relying on process accidents." After a period of experimentation, she found that she could work the concrete by hand by allowing it to partially harden. She then embarked on a series in which the concrete was enveloped with either copper, lead, encaustic, or more recently, hammered sheet bronze. Although Roosen's point of departure is still to explore geometric volumes, the results are decidedly organic in appearance.

Roosen's insistence both in modeling her sculpture and on their volume and mass have set her apart from many of her contemporaries. Indeed, a good deal of post-World War II sculpture has moved towards dematerialization, and is "essentially open in form. . . [seeking] to disguise its mass and ponderability."<sup>3</sup> Yet it is in the sculpture's density, Roosen maintains, that the power resides, emitting a sense of energy that is directed outward from within. Modeling also allows a slower rendering of pieces and enables Roosen to merge form and process, and to stress the making as much as the result. It is the process of animating an inert form that ultimately endows it with meaning, and Roosen has stated, "I am only interested in sculpture with some kind of life source within it. . . the expression of an inwardly-oriented consciousness manifesting itself in a three-dimensional object in space."<sup>4</sup> Roosen hence finds her interests more closely aligned with those pioneers of early twentieth-century sculpture such as Arp or Brancusi, rather than the more cerebral work of contemporary minimal, architectural or site-specific sculptors.

Never content to simply explore one issue, Roosen has consistently posed new ones for herself. Recently, she has grappled



3. *Phantom*, 1984. Concrete and encaustic on steel base, 135 x 48 x 28".  
Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York

with a problem that has traditionally concerned sculptors: that of the base or pedestal. After a body of work that was grounded, relating to and resting directly on the floor, Roosen began to experiment with forms that were suspended in a denial of both gravity and the more process-oriented strictures she had adhered to earlier. *Phantom* (1984) is one of a series that sits on a pedestal-six feet into the air, well above eye level. *Memories II* (1984) even more assertively denies gravity; an orb with a flattened, rectangular appendage is situated a little lower than *Phantom*, but exudes a much greater density (figs. 2, 3). *Ray III* (1984) posits the pedestal in a different role, making it an integral part of the sculpture. Here, the base—an elongated triangular outline constructed in steel—supports the denser, abstracted three-pronged form of concrete enveloped in hammered sheet bronze, neither of which could stand alone.

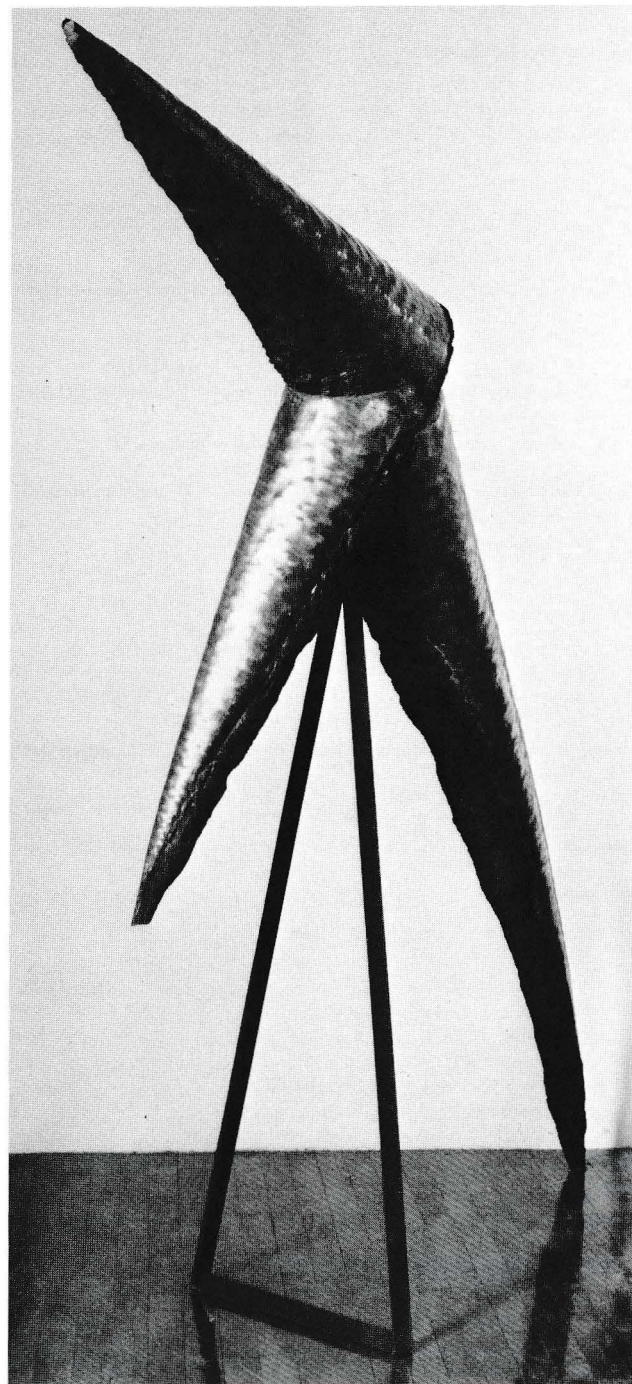
This recent body of work thus demonstrates an exploration of suspension and balance that was not in evidence earlier. And Roosen has once again achieved a remarkable unity of opposites: these works are on the one hand very aggressive, with their massive and spikey forms, yet they are also vulnerable, their balance somewhat precarious. Consistent is the equal emphasis on surface textures and density as qualities that both attract and repel. Roosen's powerful objects—which project a sense of being resolved, yet remain mysterious—testify to her success in finding within the tradition of sculpture a highly personal direction.

Lynn Gumpert

## Notes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are from a conversation with the artist, November 29, 1984.
2. Alan Barkley, *Mia Westerlund: Studies* (exh. cat.) (Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada: Southern Alberta Art Gallery, 1979), [2].
3. Herbert Read, *A Concise History of Modern Sculpture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1964), reprint 1971, p. 253.
4. Roosen quoted in Lilly Wei, "Mia Westerlund Roosen: Recent Sculptures," unpublished ms., 1982, p. 3.

4. *Ray III*, 1984. Pigmented concrete and bronze with steel base, 103 x 45 x 12". Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York



Born in 1942, New York, N.Y. Lives in New York, N.Y. and Hillsdale, N.Y.

#### Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 1982 Leo Castelli Gallery, New York, N.Y. (also 1977, 1979)  
Sable-Castelli Gallery, Toronto, Canada (also 1976, 1978, 1980)  
1978 *Recent Work: Sculptures & Drawings*, Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada  
1974 Willard Gallery, New York, N.Y.  
1973 Dunkelman Gallery, Toronto, Canada

#### Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1983 *Content in Abstraction: The Uses of Nature*, High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Ga.  
1982 *American Abstraction Now*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Richmond, Va.  
1981 *Mia Westerlund/George Peck*, Kingsborough Community College, Brooklyn, N.Y.  
*Sculpture Density*, Visual Arts Museum, New York, N.Y.  
1980 *Material Matters*, Norton Gallery, Palm Beach, Fla. (traveled)  
*Pluralities/1980/Pluralities*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Canada  
1975 Willard Gallery, New York, N.Y.  
1973 Zabriskie Gallery, New York, N.Y.

#### Selected Articles and Reviews

- Albee, Edward. "The New Work of Mia Westerlund Roosen," *Arts Magazine* 56, no. 7 (March 1982): 120-121.  
MacFadden, Sarah. "Review: Mia Westerlund Roosen at Castelli Greene St.," *Art in America* 70, no. 6 (Summer 1982): 143-144.  
Nasgaard, Roald. "The Recent Work of Mia Westerlund," *Arts Magazine* 49, no. 6 (February 1975): 70-71.  
Rubinfien, Leo. "Review: Mia Westerlund at Castelli," *Artforum* 16, no. 1 (September 1977): 79-80.  
Russell, John. "Review: Mia Westerlund at Willard Gallery," *New York Times*, December 12, 1975.  
White, Peter. "Mia Westerlund's Pictorial Sculpture," *Parachute* (Winter 1978): 36-39.

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Photos by Clemens Kalischer (cover, figs. 1, 2) and Ken Showell (fig. 3).

#### Works in the Exhibition

Height precedes width precedes depth

*Memories II*, 1984

Concrete and lead on steel base

103 x 40 x 24"

Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York

*Monument*, 1984

Concrete and lead

85 x 64 x 25"

Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York

*Phantom*, 1984

Concrete and encaustic on steel base

135 x 48 x 28"

Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York

*Ray III*, 1984

Pigmented concrete and bronze with steel base

103 x 45 x 12"

Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York

Untitled, 1984

Concrete and encaustic on steel base

80 x 82 x 18"

Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York

Pompadour, 1985

Concrete and encaustic

78 x 73 x 32"

Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York

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Cover: Untitled, 1984. Concrete and encaustic on steel base, 80 x 82 x 18".  
Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York

1. *Monument*, 1984. Concrete and lead, 85 x 64 x 25". Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York

