

From 'The New Sculpture' to Garden Statuary: the suppression of Abstract Expressionist sculpture

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Introduction

A photograph in the January 15, 1951 issue of *Life* magazine depicts fourteen men and one woman gathered in an empty room, dressed in suits (and an overcoat for the woman), and staring defiantly at the camera. Their sparse surroundings give no indication of their identity; rather the accompanying caption addresses them as an 'Irascible Group of Advanced Artists'. The short paragraph that follows notes their opposition to the jury of a national exhibition to be held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This photograph, known as the 'Irascibles' photo, is today a defining symbol of American Abstract Expressionism, which emerged in New York City after the 1939-1945 war. However, it also contributed to the mythologizing of this movement in two ways: first, it depicted what appeared to be a cohesive group of artists, when nothing could be further from the truth, and second, it played a part in the belief that Abstract Expressionism was a movement of painters. Although ten sculptors signed the letter to the Met, they were not included in the photograph. In fact, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, both painters and sculptors were part of the New York avant-garde, and attempts to document this period, such as *Modern Artists in America* (1952) edited by Robert Motherwell and Ad Reinhardt and the 1951 exhibition *Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America* held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA), often included sculpture. But as Abstract Expressionism became canonized, sculpture was written out of the story. The factors that shaped this omission are the central concern here.

Of the ten sculptors who signed the Met letter, this article will focus on six who used welding and other direct-metal techniques to make abstract sculpture: David Hare, Herbert Ferber, Ibram Lassaw, Seymour Lipton, Theodore Roszak, and David Smith. They had the closest ties to the New York School painters, and their work, with the exception of Smith, has suffered the most from the later suppression of sculpture from this period. In the late 1940s and into the 1950s, Hare, Ferber, Lassaw, Lipton, Roszak, and Smith were part of a new generation of sculptors in New York, and their works were regarded as embodying a new sculptural vocabulary. Drawing from Constructivism and Surrealism, their pieces exhibited anti-war and anti-nuclear sentiment; an interest in nature, primordial creatures, the cosmos and scientific developments; and the expressive use of dripped metal. Of the six, several were prevented from travelling to Europe due to the war, so the influx of European artists in New York in the 1940s had a profound impact. Although their work is very disparate, and they did not see themselves as a cohesive group, the use

of Surrealist biomorphism to express a dystopian worldview in the post-war period is a common theme. Like the Abstract Expressionist painters their lives were shaped by the social and political events of the time: the Great Depression and the New Deal programs, the devastation of the 1939-1945 war, the dropping of the atomic bombs, and the Cold War. Despite common aesthetic concerns and shared experiences, very few histories of Abstract Expressionism look seriously at the intersections between painting and sculpture.

These sculptors developed alongside the painters of the New York School and were involved in many of the same avant-garde activities; therefore, their work has been labelled by Stephen Polcari and others as 'Abstract Expressionist sculpture', 'action sculpture', or 'sculpture of the New York School'.¹ Despite the problematic nature of these labels, as they suggest the sculptors were emulating developments in painting, they will be referred to in this article as Abstract Expressionist sculptors. This act of naming serves two purposes. The first is one of convenience and clarity, while the second is ideological. Naming was an integral step in the consolidation of avant-garde painting in mid-century New York; therefore, extending this label to sculpture challenges the canon and recognizes the power of naming in the myth-making process.

In the 1940s and early 1950s the work of Hare, Ferber, Lassaw, Lipton, Roszak, and Smith was regarded by many as being at the forefront of developments in sculpture. Yet by the late 1950s, and increasingly into the 1960s, their work lost favour, with the exception of Smith, who is the only sculptor out of the six who has had lasting national and international success. Meanwhile, the sculpture of Hare, Ferber, Lassaw, Lipton, and Roszak came to be seen as derivative of Abstract Expressionist painting. Since then, their sculpture has been largely erased from the narratives of post-war American art. However, it is not a complete erasure, instead it is a suppression. This study contends that Clement Greenberg's writings had the greatest impact on the reception of Abstract Expressionist sculpture, from his initial approval in 'The New Sculpture' (1949), to hesitation in 'Cross-Breeding of Modern Sculpture' (1952), and later rejection in his feature on David Smith (1956) and 'Sculpture in Our Time' (1958). The immediate impact of Greenberg's criticism can be seen in the work of Jane Harrison Cone and Rosalind Krauss who were

¹ As early as 1952, Andrew Carnduff Ritchie, head of painting and sculpture at MoMA, labeled Smith, Hare, Roszak, Lipton, and Ferber as 'abstract expressionists'. He also included the female sculptor Mary Callery; however, since she did not achieve the same level of success in the 1950s, she has not been included in this study. See Ritchie, *Sculpture of the Twentieth Century*, (exhib. cat.) New York: MoMA and Simon and Schuster, 1952, 36-37. Stephen Polcari mentions all six, as well as Isamu Noguchi, as sculptural counterparts to Abstract Expressionist painting in his study on Abstract Expressionism. See Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience*, Cambridge, MA and New York: Cambridge, UP, 1991, xxiii. And Lisa Phillips labels their work as sculpture of the New York school in the exhibition of the same title. See Phillips, *The Third Dimension: Sculpture of the New York School*, (exhib. cat.) New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1984.

influenced by his formalism in the 1960s. The long-term effects of Greenberg's criticism are evident in later analyses by historians such as Michael Leja, Kirk Varnedoe, and Edward Lucie-Smith, and in the erasure of sculpture from many books on Abstract Expressionism. Our understanding of Abstract Expressionism has profoundly changed as a result of revisionist histories published in the last thirty to forty years; nevertheless, sculpture has not benefited from these reassessments.

This suppression, particularly Greenberg's role, has been mentioned on numerous occasions; however, the impact of Greenberg's writings has not been explored in depth.² In contrast, this article revisits the reception of Abstract Expressionist sculpture to look closely at the conditions that led to the current treatment of post-war sculpture. It argues that this suppression is due largely to the writings of Greenberg and the critics and historians that were influenced, either directly or indirectly, by his position. Furthermore, by singling out Smith as the only sculptor of merit, the complexity of post-war art was erased. First, this article will examine the historiography of Abstract Expressionist sculpture, focusing on writings by Greenberg, Wayne Anderson, Leja, Varnedoe, and Lucie-Smith. Second, it will explore reasons for this suppression, which are ideological rather than aesthetic in nature. This study demonstrates that tastes for certain works are culturally constructed and a product of their time.

'The New Sculpture'

The shift in attitudes towards Abstract Expressionist sculpture can be primarily attributed to Greenberg, including his initial support for this work, and later rejection. Therefore, this section and the next will chronicle his writings on this body

² Douglas Dreishpoon has been one of the few scholars to look at Greenberg's writings on Abstract Expressionist sculpture in detail. In his catalogue essay for the 2008 exhibition *Action/Abstraction: Pollock, De Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976*, organized by the Jewish Museum, Dreishpoon outlined Greenberg's initial approval and later rejection of this body of work. However, he did not explore the issue thoroughly, nor did he posit reasons for Greenberg's dismissal of this sculpture, except to suggest that it no longer conformed to the qualities outlined in 'The New Sculpture'. See: Douglas Dreishpoon, 'Sculptors, Critics, Arenas and Complaints', in *Action/Abstraction: Pollock, De Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976*, ed. by Norman L. Kleeblatt, (exhib. cat.) New York: The Jewish Museum and New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2008, 215-229, 295-298. Dreishpoon analyzed 'The New Sculpture' in detail in his PhD dissertation on Roszak, but did not look at its larger impact, except to say that Roszak rejected Greenbergian purity. See Dreishpoon, 'Theodore J. Roszak (1907-1981): Painting and Sculpture', PhD diss., City University of New York, 1993. Greenberg's initial support for Abstract Expressionist sculpture and/or his later dismissal of this work is mentioned and discussed in several sources. See: David Anfam, *Abstract Expressionism*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1990; Debra Bricker Balken, *Abstract Expressionism*, London: Tate Publishing, 2005; Lisa Phillips, *The Third Dimension*; and Andrew Causey, *Sculpture Since 1945*, Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1998.

of sculpture, exposing the impact that his words would have on a later generation of historians and critics. In doing so, it is revealed that the story of the erasure of Abstract Expressionist sculpture is a story of Greenberg.

Prior to 1949, Greenberg had written about sculpture on numerous occasions. In several articles and reviews he mentioned Abstract Expressionist sculpture and often responded positively to this work. These writings show that throughout the decade, he saw a new trend emerging in sculpture and the Abstract Expressionists were at the forefront. For example, in a 1943 review of the Whitney Annual, he commended sculptures by Smith and Roszak.³ Later that year, Greenberg mentioned Smith in a review for the exhibition *American Sculpture of Our Time* held at the Buchholz and Willard Galleries.⁴ In this article, Greenberg made clear his support for Smith, and declared that his sculptures overshadowed the others in the exhibition.⁵ Furthermore, he had the potential for greatness: 'Smith is thirty-six. If he is able to maintain the level set in the work he has already done...he has a chance of becoming the greatest of all American artists.'⁶ In 1946, Greenberg expressed approval of Hare's work in a review of his one-man show at the Art of This Century Gallery. In his piece, Greenberg stated: 'Hare stands second to no sculptor of his generation, unless it be David Smith, in potential talent.'⁷ And while he criticized the diversity in Hare's output he proclaimed that Hare had a 'prodigious amount of talent' and praised his linear inventiveness and draftsmanship.⁸ Also that year, in a review of the Whitney Annual, he indicated that the work of Roszak, Smith, and Alexander Calder 'all point to the possible flowering of a new sculpture in America, a sculpture that exploits modern painting and draftsmanship, new industrial methods, and industrial materials.'⁹ The following year, that sentiment was repeated when Greenberg again reviewed Hare's work and stated that despite his young age,

Hare has already shown enough promise to place him in the forefront of what now begins to seem, not a renaissance, but a naissance of sculpture in America: sculpture that in its methods and very utensils no less than in its

³ Clement Greenberg, 'Review of the Whitney Annual and the Exhibition *Artists for Victory*', in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 1, Perceptions and Judgments, 1939-1944*, ed. by John O'Brian, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986, 134.

⁴ Clement Greenberg, 'Review of the Exhibition *American Sculpture of Our Time*', in O'Brian, *Clement Greenberg... Volume 1*, 138-140.

⁵ Greenberg, 'American Sculpture', 139.

⁶ Greenberg, 'American Sculpture', 140.

⁷ Clement Greenberg, 'Review of an Exhibition of David Hare', in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 2, Arrogant Purpose, 1945-1949*, ed. by John O'Brian, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986, 55.

⁸ Greenberg, 'Exhibition of David Hare', 56.

⁹ Clement Greenberg, 'Review of the Water-Color, Drawing, and Sculpture Sections of the Whitney Annual', in O'Brian, *Clement Greenberg... Volume 2*, 59.

conceptions...attaches itself more intimately to industrialism than any other form of art now being practiced.¹⁰

These writings demonstrate that by the late 1940s, Greenberg supported Abstract Expressionist sculpture, with favourable mentions of all the sculptors, with the exception of Ferber.¹¹ Moreover, he saw a sculptural renaissance on the horizon, which would be a major theme in 'The New Sculpture'.

Greenberg's greatest approbation for Abstract Expressionist sculpture came in 1949, in his article 'The New Sculpture', published in *Partisan Review*. In this landmark piece, he identified a sculptural renaissance with Smith, Roszak, Lipton, Hare, Lassaw, and Ferber at the heart of it. Greenberg had hinted at this in his 1946 review of Hare's work where he mentioned a 'naissance of sculpture in America'. Three years later, that renaissance had come. In 'The New Sculpture' he suggested that sculpture and not painting was the more advanced art. He described this 'pictorial draftsman's sculpture' as emerging from George Braque and Pablo Picasso's Cubist collage. Moreover, it adopted modern materials such as steel, iron, alloys and glass, while rejecting traditional media such as bronze and marble. Multiplicity of materials, especially in the same work, was favoured over unity or cohesion. The new sculpture was orientated towards the landscape, rather than the monolith – a solid object built up around a core. Also, this sculpture was not concerned with representation, and had no historical ties aside from Cubist painting.¹² The linearity, the openness, and the rejection of traditional sculpting methods and materials in these works appealed to Greenberg, and he felt that sculpture 'has lately undergone a transformation that seems to endow it with a greater range of expression for modern sensibility than painting now has.'¹³ The comparison to painting would be a recurring theme in his writings on sculpture, and suggests that painting and sculpture were in competition with one another. He commended the young sculptor-constructors 'who have a chance, as things look, to contribute something ambitious, serious and original' and named, in addition to the six mentioned above, Richard Lippold, Peter Grippe, Burgoyne Diller, Adaline Kent,

¹⁰ Clement Greenberg, 'Review of Exhibitions of David Smith, David Hare, and Mirko', in O'Brian, *Clement Greenberg...Volume 2*, 142.

¹¹ For other positive reviews of Abstract Expressionist sculpture prior to 1950 see Greenberg, 'Review of a Group Exhibition at the Art of This Century Gallery, and of Exhibitions of Maria Martins and Luis Quintanilla', in O'Brian *Clement Greenberg...Volume 1*, 209-210; Greenberg, 'Review of the Whitney Annual and Exhibitions of Picasso and Henri Cartier-Bresson', in O'Brian, *Clement Greenberg...Volume 2*, 137-140; and Greenberg, 'A Symposium: The State of American Art', in O'Brian, *Clement Greenberg...Volume 2*, 287-289.

¹² Clement Greenberg, 'The New Sculpture', in O'Brian, *Clement Greenberg...Volume 2*, 317-318.

¹³ Greenberg, 'The New Sculpture', 316.

and Isamu Noguchi.¹⁴ These sculptors showed freshness, inventiveness, and positive taste. Greenberg noted, however, that not enough attention has been paid to the new sculpture, but despite that he concluded: 'Yet this new "genre" is perhaps the most important manifestation of the visual arts since cubist painting, and is at this moment pregnant with more excitement than any other except music.'¹⁵ Given that Greenberg had a high regard for Cubism – he often used the term 'cubist classicism' to describe sculpture he favoured, and he regarded Abstract Expressionism as inheriting the legacy of Cubism – this statement is a testament to his interest in this work.¹⁶ This article, which was later reproduced (albeit substantially changed) in *Art and Culture*, Greenberg's edited volume of writing, represented a definitive stance regarding his position on sculpture. Furthermore, 'The New Sculpture' has been often cited in discussions of Greenberg's views on sculpture, as well as in studies of American sculpture of the 1940s and 1950s.

Greenberg's praise may have influenced many of the commonly held sentiments regarding this work, including the belief that something exciting was happening in sculpture alongside developments in painting. It also coincided with institutional support for this work at MoMA in New York. For example, three years later Andrew Carnduff Ritchie repeated many of Greenberg's sentiments in his catalogue essay for the *Sculpture of the Twentieth Century* exhibition, a survey of general stylistic concerns of the previous fifty years. Ritchie addressed the 'so-called' Abstract Expressionist sculptors in the final chapter whose works 'owe more to the metaphorical, symbolic and technical example of surrealists like Giacometti and Gonzalez than to any other one source'.¹⁷ He went on to explain that it was in America where the best sculpture was being made, and in this context he mentioned Lassaw, Smith, Hare, Roszak, Lipton, and Ferber.¹⁸ Ritchie's claim that 'another sector of the limitless frontier of sculpture is being explored right in our time,' recalls Greenberg's belief that sculpture 'is at this moment pregnant with more excitement than any other art except music'. Given Ritchie's position as head of painting and sculpture until 1957, this exhibition and accompanying catalogue provided a seal of approval from one of the foremost institutions for modern art.¹⁹

¹⁴ Greenberg, 'The New Sculpture', 319. Greenberg's article mentions a number of sculptors, namely Grippe, Diller and Kent, who are rarely discussed in the current literature on sculpture of the period, further exemplifying the erasure of the complexity of this period.

¹⁵ Greenberg, 'The New Sculpture', 319.

¹⁶ For Abstract Expressionism carrying on the legacy of Cubism, see Clement Greenberg, 'The Decline of Cubism', in O'Brian, *Clement Greenberg... Volume 2*, 211-215.

¹⁷ Ritchie, *Sculpture of the Twentieth Century*, 34.

¹⁸ Ritchie, *Sculpture of the Twentieth Century*, 36.

¹⁹ *Sculpture of the Twentieth Century* was not the only exhibition at MoMA during this period that demonstrated support for Abstract Expressionist sculpture. *14 Americans* (1946) and *15 Americans* (1952) both featured a select number of sculptors with the aim to present recent works in a wide variety of styles. Included in *14 Americans* were Hare, Noguchi and Roszak, while Ferber, Richard Lippold and Frederick Kiesler – a Surrealist-influenced stage designer, painter and sculptor – were represented in *15 Americans*. Both curated by Dorothy C. Miller,

This initial support for Abstract Expressionist sculpture is contrasted to the current situation, whereby MoMA owns major works by these sculptors, many of which were acquired in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, yet none of them are currently on view.²⁰

A re-evaluation

By 1952 Greenberg began to express doubts regarding this sculpture in his article 'Cross-Breeding of Modern Sculpture', which appeared in the summer issue of *Art News*. Concerning the Abstract Expressionist sculptors, who he had praised several years prior, he explained:

Some of our American constructor-sculptors, the more gifted as well as the less, flounder in their new medium, at a loss, for guiding examples, go off down blind alleys, or commit horrible errors of taste—particularly now that the tide has turned for the moment away from geometrical forms toward plant and animal ones.²¹

He further criticized the excesses of this work in the 'complications of line, texture and color'.²² However, he hadn't completely rejected this body of sculpture, rather he claimed these sculptor-constructors were too 'passive' and 'timid', but suggested that the new sculpture had the potential to surpass painting.²³ Undoubtedly, he was beginning to express his reservations due in part to the use of 'plant and animal' forms, and what he regarded as excesses in the work. This was a recurring theme in his criticism on Smith, where his sculpture was criticized when it veered towards 'baroque excesses', and praised when it moved towards a restrained 'classicism'. Its emergence here suggests that Greenberg had a certain standard for contemporary sculpture.

they were part of a larger series of exhibitions intended to introduce the public to notable contemporary artists. See Dorothy C. Miller, ed., *Fourteen Americans*, (exhib. cat.) New York: MoMA, 1946; and Dorothy C. Miller, ed., *Fifteen Americans* (exhib. cat.) New York: MoMA, 1952.

²⁰ According to MoMA's online catalogue, they own three works by David Hare, five works by Herbert Ferber, two works by Ibram Lassaw, five works by Seymour Lipton, five works by Theodore Roszak, and nineteen works by David Smith. David Smith is the only one with works on display. See 'The Collection', MoMA, accessed May 24, 2015 <http://www.moma.org/explore/collection/index>

²¹ Clement Greenberg, 'Cross-Breeding of Modern Sculpture', in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 3, Affirmations and Refusals, 1950-1956*, ed. by John O'Brian, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993, 112.

²² Greenberg, 'Cross-Breeding', 112.

²³ Greenberg, 'Cross-Breeding', 112.

The turning point came in 1956 when Greenberg dealt the final blow to the new sculpture. In a review and feature article on David Smith that appeared in *Art in America* in the winter of 1956-57, he stated that the hopes he had for sculpture ten years ago had faded.²⁴ He explained: 'Painting continues to hold the field, by virtue of its greater breadth of statement as well as by its greater energy. And sculpture has become a place where, as hopes have turned into illusions, inflated reputations and inflated renaissances flourish.'²⁵ He goes on to outline the failures of this sculpture:

[I]t is also significant that modernist American sculpture should have succumbed so epidemically to "biomorphism," and that then, after the fanciful and decorative improvisations of plant, bone, muscle, and other organic forms, there should have come a spinning of wires, twisting of cords, and general fashioning of cages and boxes—so that the most conspicuous result of the diffusion of the welding torch among American sculptors has been a superior kind of garden statuary and a new, oversized kind of objet d'art.²⁶

His bias against biomorphism, along with plant and animal forms is more clearly stated here. In his criticism, classicism based on cubist-constructivist forms became a standard against which to judge sculpture. He did not hold Surrealism or biomorphism in high regard due to the Surrealist tendency towards subject matter, which went against the principles of medium specificity.²⁷ Smith, however, was one of the few to withstand the overall decline in American sculpture, and Greenberg labelled him as 'the best sculptor of his generation'.²⁸ By the mid-1950s Smith's work had become increasingly pared down and abstract, although some remnants of subject matter remained, for example in the *Tanktotems*. Nonetheless, his work did not have the same aggressive or intricate imagery seen in the works of other Abstract Expressionist sculptors, such as Roszak's *Night Flight* (1958), or Lipton's

²⁴ Clement Greenberg, 'David Smith', in O'Brian, *Clement Greenberg...Volume 3*, 275-279.

²⁵ Greenberg, 'David Smith', 276.

²⁶ Greenberg, 'David Smith', 276.

²⁷ Arshile Gorky's paintings, despite the use of biomorphic forms, did not receive the same criticism as Abstract Expressionist sculpture. In a 1945 review of Gorky's paintings at the Julien Levy Gallery, Greenberg noted that Gorky had been 'corrupted' by the influence of 'abstract "biomorphic" surrealist painting'. See Clement Greenberg, 'Review of an Exhibition of Arshile Gorky', in O'Brian, *Clement Greenberg...Volume 2*, 13-14. However, a year later Greenberg stated that his earlier hesitations were gone; Gorky's work had not succumbed to the 'surrealist version of charm'. See Clement Greenberg, 'Review of Exhibitions of Paul Gauguin and Arshile Gorky', in O'Brian, *Clement Greenberg...Volume 2*, 78-79. After Gorky's death in 1948, Greenberg would refer to his paintings as late Cubist on several occasions, and mentions of biomorphism had disappeared. For a notable example, see Clement Greenberg, "'American-Type" Painting', in O'Brian, *Clement Greenberg...Volume 3*, 221.

²⁸ Greenberg, 'David Smith', 277.

Thunderbird (1951-52). This would have lasting consequences as Smith would come to be seen as the only sculptor of merit during this period, but it would also have an enduring impact for the other sculptors named – Hare, Ferber, Lassaw, Lipton, and Roszak – whose works would be relegated to the junk pile. The immediate effects of this article have only strengthened over the years, as this became an influential text. Firstly, it was a feature article on a preeminent American artist, and has been referred to again and again in the literature on Smith. And secondly, it was later reprinted in 1963 in *Art in America* and in 1961 in *Art and Culture* (the only volume of Greenberg's writings until the late 1980s).

Greenberg substantially revised 'The New Sculpture' when it was published in *Arts Magazine* in 1958 under the title 'Sculpture in Our Time'. Similar to the original version, he outlined the qualities of Abstract Expressionist sculpture, however, he deliberately omitted the names mentioned in 'The New Sculpture'. Instead he claimed:

Art delights in contradicting predictions made about it, and the hopes I placed in the new sculpture ten years ago, in the original version of this article, have not yet been borne out—indeed they seem to have been refuted. Painting continues as the leading and most adventurous as well as most expressive of the visual arts...²⁹

By republishing this article, but with a radically different evaluation of post-war sculpture, Greenberg provided a final act of judgment in his rejection of this body of work. He also attempted to rewrite history by erasing his initial approval of the new sculpture. Furthermore, 'Sculpture in Our Time' was reprinted as 'The New Sculpture' in the *Art and Culture* anthology, yet another instance of the suppression of the sculptors mentioned in 'The New Sculpture'. His assessment of art in the post-war period not only accounts for the suppression of Abstract Expressionist sculpture, but also the supremacy of painting during this period.

Given Greenberg's position as one of the most authoritative critics of the post-war period – in the 1950s and 1960s he could make or break an artist's career – his evaluation of Abstract Expressionist sculpture had profound consequences. His initial approval and later dismissal of this body of work had a trickle-down effect that led to the omission of this sculpture from books, museum exhibitions, and collections.

The effect of Greenberg's criticism is apparent in a multitude of ways, including the lack of information on Abstract Expressionist sculpture, the erasure of this work from monographs on American sculpture and Abstract Expressionism, and the explanations given for these omissions by other historians and critics. The minimal scholarship on Hare, Ferber, Lipton, Lassaw, and Roszak provides the most

²⁹ Clement Greenberg, 'Sculpture in Our Time', in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4, Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*, ed. by John O'Brian, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993, 59-60.

telling evidence of the suppression of Abstract Expressionist sculpture. It is a marked contrast to the treatment of Smith's career, which has been the subject of numerous publications, critical writings, and exhibitions. Recent exhibitions such as a large retrospective in 2006 at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, solo exhibitions in 2011 at the Phillips Collection and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and monographs by Sarah Hamill and Joan Pachner, indicate a continued interest in Smith's work.³⁰ In claiming that Abstract Expressionist sculpture has been suppressed, it does not imply that their work has ceased to be shown. Their sculptures are represented in many notable collections in the United States and they continue to be shown in solo and group exhibitions. Overall though, these works tend to be kept in storage and are rarely included in high profile exhibitions.³¹ Also Abstract Expressionist sculpture has been documented in small exhibition catalogues and several unpublished dissertations, but there have been very few book-length monographs on this work.³² Consequently, many narratives written since the 1960s on post-war abstract sculpture have upheld Smith's greatness.

The absence of discussions on sculpture in the discourses on Abstract Expressionism provides the false impression that it was a movement comprised solely of painters. One of the first dissertations on Abstract Expressionism, William

³⁰ Exhibitions include *David Smith: A Centennial*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 3 February – 14 May 2006; *David Smith: Cubes and Anarchy*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 3 April – 24 July 2011; and *David Smith Invents*, The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C., 12 February – 15 May 2011. For monographs see Sarah Hamill, *David Smith in Two Dimensions: Photography and the Matter of Sculpture*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015; and Joan Pachner, *David Smith*, London and New York: Phaidon, 2013.

³¹ A notable example is the blockbuster exhibition *Abstract Expressionist New York*, which was organized by the Museum of Modern Art in 2011, and shown at the Art Gallery of Ontario later that year. In the main exhibition, 'The Big Picture', only two sculptors were represented: David Smith and Louise Nevelson. One exception is the 2008 exhibition *Action/Abstraction* that included works by Ferber, Hare, Lassaw, Lipton, and Smith.

³² There is one monograph, an older study on Seymour Lipton. See Albert Elsen, *Seymour Lipton*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1970. Elsen's monograph is useful mainly for its extensive reproductions. Dissertations include Douglas Scott Dreishpoon, 'Theodore J. Roszak (1907-1981): Painting and Sculpture', PhD diss., City University of New York, 1993; Nancy Heller, 'The Sculpture of Ibram Lassaw', PhD diss., Rutgers University The State U. of New Jersey (New Brunswick), 1982; Sarah Johnson, 'Zen Artists of the Eighth Street Club: Ibram Lassaw and Hasegawa Saburō', PhD diss., City University of New York, 2005; Valerie A. Livingston, 'Herbert Ferber: Sculpture, Discourse, Context, 1930-1960', PhD diss., University of Delaware, 1989; Joan French Seeman, 'The Sculpture of Theodore Roszak: 1932-1952 (Volume I and II)', PhD diss., Stanford University, 1979; Lori Ann Verderame, 'The Sculpture of Seymour Lipton: Themes of Nature in the 1950s', PhD diss., Penn State University, 1996. They are valuable sources for scholars and researchers, but with the exception of Verderame's research, their findings have not been made accessible to a wider audience.

Seitz's 'Abstract Expressionist Painting in America' focused only on painters.³³ The trend continued with Irving Sandler's *The Triumph of American Painting* (1970), the first book on the movement.³⁴ Subsequent texts by Serge Guilbaut and Michael Leja have upheld this tendency, solidifying the belief that only the painters made works of historical relevance.³⁵ When studies do include sculpture, it often takes a minor role. For example, David Anfam's *Abstract Expressionism* (1990) includes discussions of Smith, and like many, he considered Smith to be the only noteworthy sculptor of that period. Stephen Polcari's study includes a few brief discussions of sculpture, and mentions all six of the sculptors in his analysis on the cultural climate of the era; nevertheless, only painters are the focus of the in-depth biographical sections.³⁶ Debra Bricker Balken's 2005 book *Abstract Expressionism* perhaps does more to address the bias against sculpture.³⁷ She includes the work of Smith, Hare and Ferber, and discusses Greenberg's criticism of the new sculpture. However, as a slim volume, it is not yet known what effect (if any) this work will have on future scholarly work. A recent monograph by Phaidon (2011) provides a broad overview of Abstract Expressionism and covers work by Smith, Lassaw, and Ferber; it reflects a shift towards a more inclusive treatment of sculpture.³⁸

Derivative, formulaic, and material: why Abstract Expressionist Sculpture failed to fit in

Greenberg's writings on Abstract Expressionist sculpture suggest that he had to choose between painting and sculpture – that only one, not both, could be the preeminent art form. In fact, as early as 1940, in his essay 'Towards a Newer Laocoon', he declared that there was a single dominant art form, and other art forms

³³ William C. Seitz, *Abstract Expressionist Painting in America*, Cambridge, MA and London: National Gallery of Art, Washington by Harvard UP, 1983. Seitz's dissertation was completed in 1955. Although it wasn't published until 1983, it was available for many years through circulated copies.

³⁴ Irving Sandler, *The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism*, New York: Praeger, 1970.

³⁵ Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983; and Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s*, New Haven: Yale UP, 1993.

³⁶ Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism*.

³⁷ Debra Bricker Balken, *Abstract Expressionism*, London: Tate Publishing, 2005.

³⁸ Katy Siegel, ed., *Abstract Expressionism*, London and New York: Phaidon, 2011. The sympathetic treatment of Lassaw and Ferber's sculpture sets this source apart from other histories of Abstract Expressionism. Siegel does not compare developments in sculpture to those of painting, instead she touches on the formal and technical developments of this work, with occasional references to sculpture history. Nonetheless, this book does not represent a complete acceptance of Abstract Expressionist sculpture. The work of Hare, Lipton, and Roszak is not included. Furthermore, there are only brief mentions of sculpture in the survey section.

'deny their own nature in an effort to attain the effects of the dominant art'.³⁹ When sculpture did not satisfy his standards, he declared painting to be superior. His comments regarding biomorphism reveal his bias against this type of sculptural vocabulary, preferring instead Cubist forms. As Caroline Jones explains, this stemmed from his distaste for Surrealism, which was due to its subject matter.⁴⁰ Concurrent to this was his disapproval of what he referred to as 'baroque excesses'. Although he was never clear on the meaning of this term, it suggests works that have a formal complexity or evoke strong emotion. Moreover, his early renunciation of biomorphism and 'baroque excesses', which was repeated throughout his writings, indicates that these standards developed early on in his criticism, eventually becoming dogmatic. He criticized the use of biomorphism and 'baroque excesses' in Smith's sculptures, but in the 1950s, in his *Tanktotem*, *Agricola* and *Sentinel* series, Smith's aesthetic was increasingly pared down and restrained. As the influence of Surrealism, which shaped the sculptures of the 1940s, began to dissipate, Smith gained Greenberg's full approval. By the mid-1950s Greenberg could claim that Smith's works were once baroque, but had become more classical.⁴¹

These criteria were determined by Greenberg's adherence to the theory of medium specificity, in which the aim of sculpture was to explore qualities unique to that medium – for example, three dimensionality, mass, space, and surface – rather than concerns of subject matter.⁴² Abstract Expressionist sculpture tended towards the literal in the incorporation of biomorphism and evocative titles. These suggestions of subject matter placed this work in opposition to aesthetic purity, the goal of medium specificity. Kant, and the idea of self-critique, whereby a discipline uses its own methods to critique the discipline, influenced Greenberg's theory of medium specificity. It was a rational approach to art making that for Greenberg reached a high point with analytic Cubism. Cubism, and its classicism, control and restraint, was the measure against which to place Smith's work, suggesting that Greenberg was looking for a new art that would continue this tradition.⁴³

³⁹ Clement Greenberg, 'Towards a Newer Laocoon,' in O'Brian, *Clement Greenberg...Volume 1*, 24.

⁴⁰ Caroline Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, 178-179.

⁴¹ Greenberg, 'David Smith', 278.

⁴² Greenberg's essay 'Modernist Painting' provides one of the clearest articulations of his theory of medium specificity. Although it was first published in 1960, Caroline Jones notes that the ideas espoused in 'Modernist Painting' had been repeated and reiterated in early publications dating back to 'Towards a Newer Laocoon', where he first outlined his theory on purity in the arts. See Jones, *Eyesight Alone*, 38, 136-137.

⁴³ Greenberg's role in the altering of Smith's work after his death is a notable example of his adherence to aesthetic purity in sculpture. As Rosalind Krauss illustrated in her article 'Changing the Work of David Smith', several of Smith's painted metal sculptures were stripped of their colour or left to deteriorate outdoors. Although she didn't point to Greenberg specifically, Raphael Rubenstein noted that she regarded Greenberg as the prime suspect. Furthermore, Greenberg was critical of Smith's use of colour because it went against

Roszak's *Spectre of Kitty Hawk* (1946-7), an iconic work from this period, provides an example of how much Abstract Expressionist sculpture deviated from a restrained classicism. Made of welded and hammered steel brazed with bronze and brass, it depicts a horrifying creature removed from anything known in the natural world. It stands on four 'legs' – one slightly raised off the base – and has a long, large tail-like form that comes to a point and serves as a main focus of the work. Along the creature's 'body' are numerous jagged spikes, tentacle-like forms, and biomorphic projections in different shapes. The entire surface is covered with a very rough, jagged finish that repels the viewer. Greenberg's formalism required a disinterested gaze, one characterized by a detachment. His criticism of 'baroque excesses' was echoed in his critique of Abstract Expressionist sculpture and its 'complications of line, texture and color'. Baroque art, which was visually complex and appealed to the emotions and senses, was everything that restrained high modernism wasn't. Not only did Abstract Expressionist sculpture appeal emotionally to the viewer, but works like *Spectre of Kitty Hawk* interrupt the viewer's space by inviting a tactile response while also repelling the viewer. These interruptions provide a sense of theatricality by incorporating and engaging the viewer. Both elements, emotional appeal and theatricality, belied the disinterested gaze and denied the work the ability to transcend what it depicted. In the late 1960s, critic Michael Fried, a student of Greenberg's, would criticize theatricality, which he saw as a characteristic of Minimalism.⁴⁴ The unique nature of sculpture – its formal complexity and the manner in which it could disrupt the viewing process – led to its suppression during this period.

Greenberg's immediate impact on the reception of Abstract Expressionist sculpture can be seen in the work of his students. In the 1960s Greenberg taught a graduate seminar at Harvard University. Even though he was there for only one semester, he influenced three students in particular: Michael Fried, Jane Harrison Cone, and Rosalind Krauss. As Barbara M. Reise explained, not only did these three continue to write about topics that Greenberg had previously taken on, but Greenberg's influence was also seen in 'the almost incestuous territorializing of David Smith': all three wrote about Smith, Cone organized an exhibition of his work at the Fogg Art Museum in 1966, and Krauss's PhD dissertation was on Smith's sculpture.⁴⁵

the tenets of medium specificity. See Krauss, 'Changing the Work of David Smith', *Art in America*, September/October 1974, 30-34, and Raphael Rubenstein, 'Critical Overhaul', *Art in America*, May 2013, 128.

⁴⁴ Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood (1967)', in *Art and Objecthood*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, 148-172.

⁴⁵ Barbara M. Reise, 'Greenberg and The Group: a retrospective view, Part 2', *Studio International* 175, no. 901, June 1968, note 38.

Cone and Krauss' writings on David Smith have been explored in detail elsewhere.⁴⁶ Relevant here is the manner in which they upheld Greenberg's assessment of Smith as the greatest sculptor of his generation while dismissing other Abstract Expressionist sculptors. Cone, in an article for *Artforum* published the year after the exhibition at the Fogg Art Museum, treated Smith's work as if it was created in isolation by severing any connections between him and then-current sculpture; she stated that after the 1940s Smith's works were 'self-referential'.⁴⁷ She affirmed that his sculptural innovations, particularly his use of found objects, were abused in much of the junk sculpture of the era – no doubt a dismissal of Abstract Expressionist sculpture.⁴⁸ Similarly, Krauss treated Smith as an isolated phenomenon in her early writings on his work.⁴⁹ Later, when she rejected Greenbergian formalism in her book *Passages of Modern Sculpture*, it was not accompanied by a re-evaluation of the sculpture that Greenberg had dismissed (such as Abstract Expressionist sculpture). In the chapter on David Smith, she drew on the work of Hare, Ferber, and Lassaw, in order to compare to Smith's work and uphold his greatness.⁵⁰ Both Cone and Krauss, in reinforcing Smith's greatness while dismissing the work of other Abstract Expressionist sculptors, reveal the immediate impact that Greenberg had on other scholars.

Greenberg's criticism was a significant factor in the reception of Abstract Expressionist sculpture; that it coincided with the rise and fall of this work is no coincidence. Nevertheless, Wayne Anderson addressed the larger context of this suppression. Writing for *Artforum* in 1967, he explained there was a 'stable character' in Abstract Expressionist painting, while in sculpture there were 'multiple and intermixed' styles that came across as a lack of consistency – something that Greenberg criticized. He attributed this to the variety of methods and materials available to the sculptor – more so than in painting – and also to the rich sculptural tradition they were drawing from.⁵¹ He suggested that sculpture and painting developed as they did in the 1940s because there was a clear grouping of painters, but not sculptors. Although there were strong sculptors in the years before the 1939-1945 war – he names Calder, Jose de Rivera, Smith, Roszak, Noguchi, Lassaw and

⁴⁶ Meghan Bissonnette, 'Chapter 3: "Drawings-in-Air": David Smith and the Formalist Impulse', in 'The Making of an American Sculptor: David Smith Criticism, 1938-1971', PhD diss., York University, 2014.

⁴⁷ Jane Harrison Cone, 'David Smith', *Artforum* 5, no. 10, June 1967, 73.

⁴⁸ Jane Harrison Cone, 'Introduction', in *David Smith 1906-1965: A Retrospective Exhibition*, (exhib. cat.) Cambridge, Mass.: Fogg Art Museum, 1966, 3.

⁴⁹ Rosalind Krauss, 'The Essential David Smith', *Artforum* 7, no. 6, Feb. 1969, 43-49; Rosalind Krauss, 'The Essential David Smith: Part II', *Artforum* 7, no. 8, April 1969, 34-41; Rosalind E. Krauss, *Terminal Iron Works: The Sculpture of David Smith*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1971.

⁵⁰ Rosalind Krauss, 'Chapter Five: Tanktotem: Welded Images', in *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, Cambridge and London: MIT, 1977, 147-200.

⁵¹ Wayne Anderson, 'American Sculpture: The Situation of the Fifties', *Artforum* 5, no. 10, June 1967, 61.

Peter Grippe – it was difficult to link their works stylistically.⁵² He further attributed the reception of sculpture to the tendency of critics to view sculpture in relation to painting: 'The radicalism of modern sculpture in this country is only disconcerting to those whose historical orientation demands stylistic grouping and continuity. The belief that sculpture since the late forties has followed painting is now a cliché, resulting from the fact that the history of modern art has been written about painting.'⁵³ This statement certainly applies to the work of Leja and Lucie-Smith discussed later in this section, as both viewed sculpture by painting's standards. Anderson addressed the ideological nature of this suppression, as well as the cultural context. While there is merit to his claims, one cannot overlook the impact of the foremost American critic of the era.

Leja only briefly mentioned sculpture in his book *Reframing Abstract Expressionism*. He claimed that, with the exception of Smith, the works were too literal. Furthermore, Abstract Expressionist sculpture was lacking in the spontaneity that characterized painting, implying that the inherent nature of the materials of sculpture led to its lack of success.⁵⁴ He failed to account for the so-called color field painters – Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman and Clifford Still – whose works also lacked in spontaneity yet became widely successful. Here, Leja judges sculpture by painting's standards. Moreover, he does not provide a convincing argument for why this work failed to achieve success, nor does he offer evidence to support his claim that it was this works' lack of spontaneity that determined its reception.

The explanations provided by scholars for the suppression of Abstract Expressionist sculpture are varied and, at times, contradictory. According to Kirk Varnedoe in his catalogue essay for the MoMA exhibition *Primitivism in 20th Century Art*, Abstract Expressionist sculpture had become too formulaic:

Bones and birds became spiky skeletal monsters and horrific airborne predators, while the simple process of metal welding became a vehicle for tortured, twisted shapes of anguish...to the point that a "regressive" disregard for finish and an "archaic" evocation of mythic horror became predictable, even formulaic aspects of much of American metal sculpture around 1950.⁵⁵

His criticism echoes that of Greenberg in his article on David Smith, especially in regards to the formulaic subject matter and treatment of this sculpture. Varnedoe's claim has merit; however, he doesn't consider the diversity of Abstract Expressionist sculpture where not all pieces are characterized by a 'disregard for finish' or

⁵² Anderson, 'American Sculpture: The Situation', 61.

⁵³ Anderson, 'American Sculpture: The Situation', 63.

⁵⁴ Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism*, 311.

⁵⁵ Kirk Varnedoe, 'Abstract Expressionism', in *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, vol. 2, ed. by William Rubin, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1984, 646.

'evocation of mythic horror'. Lassaw's *Kwannon* (1952), for example, is comprised of an irregular grid-like structure, and its name refers to the Japanese Buddhist Goddess of Mercy. And while many works had craggy surfaces, not all did. Roszak's *Night Flight*, with its smooth, sleek finish and contrasting jagged edges, is a case in point. Not only does Varnedoe demonstrate an allegiance to Greenberg's assessments, but it is apparent that he preferred the sublimated use of primitivism by Smith and the Abstract Expressionist painters.

Edward Lucie-Smith provides another example of the impact of this suppression. In his popular survey book *Sculpture Since 1945* he stated:

The upsurge in American painting during the 1940s was not matched by comparable developments in sculpture, and it took some time for the situation to resolve itself. Sculptors were confronted by the demand that they should find an equivalent for the Abstract Expressionist style in painting, and the quintessentially 'painterly' nature of this made the demand seemingly impossible to fulfil.⁵⁶

In this context he addressed Lassaw, Roszak, and Lipton – but not Smith – and declared these artists were attempting to emulate the Abstract Expressionist painters, but were always a step behind.⁵⁷ His study echoes the widespread belief, outlined by Anderson, that American post-war painting was supreme, while sculpture was derivative. However, he offered no evidence that the sculptors were attempting to emulate painting or even that they felt the need to do so. Lucie-Smith went on to argue that Abstract Expressionist sculpture was either too literal, attached itself to Abstract Expressionism after the movement had reached its peak, or tried to emulate Abstract Expressionist painting in its earlier phase. This is stated quite explicitly in his discussion of Lipton's work: 'As Lipton's career demonstrates, the American sculpture affiliated to Abstract Expressionism made its appearance only when the movement in painting was already at or even past its peak, and it never took things as far as the painters were ever able to do.'⁵⁸ In his discussion of

⁵⁶ Edward Lucie-Smith, *Sculpture Since 1945*, London: Phaidon, 1987, 40. This position was also expressed by Carter Ratcliff a few years earlier, however with greater derision. He claimed that the 'Action Sculpting' of Lassaw, Roszak and others made a mockery of Action Painting – because welded and dripped metal could not flow like paint, it was therefore 'stuck with the hulking themes of the early 1940s – all the myth that provincial Surrealism loves, and can never forsake. To the poignance of an inadequate technique, these artists joined the bathos of stalled iconography'. Carter Ratcliff, 'Domesticated Nightmares', *Art in America*, May 1985, 146. This was a review for the exhibition *The Third Dimension: Sculpture of the New York School* curated by Lisa Phillips, then Associate Curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art. One of the purposes of the exhibition was to bring attention to American sculptors of the 1940s and 1950s, who had been overshadowed by the painters of the era.

⁵⁷ Lucie-Smith, *Sculpture Since 1945*, chp. 5.

⁵⁸ Lucie-Smith, *Sculpture Since 1945*, 44.

Lassaw's work, Lucie-Smith commented on the supposed unoriginal nature of this work, and claimed that Lassaw's sculptures of the 1950s were a 'literal attempt' to reproduce paintings by Pollock or Tobey.⁵⁹ Yet Sarah Johnson, in her dissertation on Lassaw and the influence of Zen Buddhism, acknowledges that Lassaw was impacted by Pollock's drip paintings, but also examines other influences, such as his interest in cosmological space.⁶⁰

Both Leja and Lucie-Smith are guilty of judging sculpture by the standards of painting, rather than on its own terms, something Greenberg also does. How would their views differ if they regarded sculpture, not as an attempt to find an equivalent to painting, but as having its own aims? Neither Leja nor Lucie-Smith provides evidence to support their arguments for why Abstract Expressionist sculpture was not successful. Instead, in these texts by Leja, Varnedoe, and Lucie-Smith, the treatment of Abstract Expressionist sculpture is never questioned. Rather, it is accepted as natural and justified by various means.

However, a distinction should be made between Greenberg, who extended his criticism to 'the New Sculpture' as a whole, and Leja, Varnedoe, and Lucie-Smith who singled out specific sculptors: Leja referred generally to sculptors associated with Abstract Expressionism, yet he highlighted one work by Lipton; Varnedoe was critical of metal sculpture around 1950, but specifically mentioned Roszak, Ferber, and Lipton; and Lucie-Smith addressed the work of Lassaw, Roszak, and Lipton. Yet these scholars provide differing explanations for the suppression of sculpture (that it was derivative, formulaic, or literal), which suggests that their conclusions are in part conjecture or based on personal opinion. Furthermore, Lucie-Smith's claim that developments in painting were not met by comparable developments in sculpture eerily recalls Greenberg's comparison of painting and sculpture, for example, his statement in his 1956 article on Smith that the hopes he had for sculpture 'have faded. Painting continues to hold the field...' Moreover, it provides evidence of the critic's continued influence. Underlying these scholars' assumptions is the belief that sculpture wasn't able to be like painting, indicating that the 'triumph of American painting' is still a dominant narrative. In order for painting to be seen as the preeminent art form of this period, the complexity of sculpture had to be simplified, even suppressed.

Leja, Varnedoe, and Lucie-Smith are quite dismissive of post-war abstract metal sculpture; in contrast, Anderson is more sympathetic to the aims and concerns of these artists. Moreover, he contextualizes the critical reception of this sculpture in the cultural climate of the post-war era, extending a sense of legitimacy to his arguments. Anderson's article points to the complexity of this issue, where multiple factors contribute to the treatment of post-war American sculpture.

Reconsidering the work of this era would require a rethinking of how sculptors thought about space, outside the reductionist aesthetics of Greenbergian

⁵⁹ Lucie-Smith, *Sculpture Since 1945*, 44.

⁶⁰ Johnson, 'Zen Artists', 78-113.

formalism. Lassaw's interest in cosmological space, previously mentioned, is one example. Another is Ferber's room-sized sculptural environment, *Sculpture as Environment*, which was displayed at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1961. An early form of installation art, Ferber explored the relationship between sculpture, the viewer, and the gallery space.

It also requires a closer examination of how artists responded to the anxiety of the post-war and Cold War period brought about by the dropping of the atomic bomb, McCarthyism, policies of containment and fear of Communist contamination. According to Joan Pachner, Roszak's *Spectre of Kitty Hawk* (1946-7) is 'a condemnation of the use of air power in war'.⁶¹ Hare's *Figure Waiting in Cold* (1951), an elongated totemic figure composed of rows of iron rods and delicate metal netting, alludes to harsh elements and a solitary existence. As explained earlier, Abstract Expressionist sculpture rejects the tenets of medium specificity, and the dominant reading of this period as one shaped by a modernist impulse.

Conclusion

There have been attempts in the past by critics, curators, and historians to recoup Abstract Expressionist sculpture. In the early 1980s the sculptor and art critic Wade Saunders wrote a feature article on Abstract Expressionist sculpture for *Art in America*, while Lisa Phillips, then curator for the Whitney Museum of American Art, curated the exhibition *The Third Dimension*, featuring their works.⁶² These efforts, however, were short lived. The 2008 exhibition, *Action/Abstraction*, previously mentioned, documented the Greenberg/Rosenberg debates and included works by Ferber, Hare, Lassaw, Lipton, and Smith.⁶³ It is too early to tell the impact this exhibition will have, if any, on the reappraisal of this work. As this article demonstrates, the relegation of post-war abstract sculpture is ingrained for many scholars, historians, and critics.

Greenberg played a critical role in the suppression of post-war sculpture. He initially supported this work in 'The New Sculpture', but later dismissed it in his feature article on David Smith, and in 'Sculpture of Our Time'. This dismissal would have a profound effect. The immediate impact can be seen in the work of Cone and Krauss, two of Greenberg's students, who upheld Smith's greatness while writing off the work of his contemporaries. Even when Krauss broke with Greenberg's formalism she did not challenge his assessment of Abstract Expressionist sculpture.

⁶¹ Joan Pachner, 'Theodore Roszak and David Smith: A Question of Balance', *Arts Magazine* 58, no. 6, February 1984, 107.

⁶² Wade Saunders, 'Touch and Eye: '50s Sculpture', *Art in America*, Dec. 1982, 90-104, 121; and Phillips, *The Third Dimension*.

⁶³ *Action/Abstraction: Pollock, De Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976*, was organized the Jewish Museum, New York, in collaboration with the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, and the Saint Louis Art Museum. It was subsequently exhibited in Buffalo and Saint Louis in 2009.

Although a direct causality cannot be determined, echoes of Greenberg's statements can be found in the writings of Leja, Varnedoe, and Lucie-Smith, who also rejected Abstract Expressionist sculpture for various reasons. Today, the suppression of Abstract Expressionist sculpture is evident in the lack of published information and the fact that their works are rarely shown. Considering that Smith's work, which Greenberg upheld, has been featured in numerous publications and exhibitions in recent years, one questions the long-term impact of his judgments. Nonetheless, Greenberg is not the sole perpetrator in the reception of this body of work – an issue which Anderson raises. One must also ask, to what degree did practicalities play a role in this suppression? Siegel noted that the expense of materials was prohibitive to sculptors in the 1940s, and resulted in less artists working in that medium.⁶⁴ There was also the need for specialized equipment, the cost of shipping, and the labour-intensive production. More research is needed in this area. The difficulty in trying to recover what has been lost is that the dominant narratives on Abstract Expressionist sculpture – such as those by Leja, Varnedoe, and Lucie-Smith – have become so entrenched that they have become historical fact. The challenge, in trying to put together a comprehensive narrative of post-war sculpture, is that one must take into consideration works and artists that have been written out of the histories. If there is a desire to recoup this work, and gain a glimpse of what the cultural production of an era actually looked like – and not just what we want it to look like – than such efforts become increasingly difficult over time. Retrieving information is a challenge: key figures have passed away, and second-hand accounts become the authoritative source. However, there is much to be attained by looking at Abstract Expressionist sculpture, even if it no longer satisfies current tastes. A greater understanding of the aims and desires in this period of American art, and a stronger grasp of the struggles sculptors faced, are just two things to consider.

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⁶⁴ Katy Siegel, 'Survey,' in Siegel, *Abstract Expressionism*, London and New York: Phaidon, 2011, 21.