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GOING FOR BAROQUE: OBSERVATIONS ON THE POST-MODERN FOLD*

Irving Lavin
Institute for Advanced Study
Princeton

“go for broke: To make a maximum effort; stake everything on a big try.”
Robert L. Chapman *New Dictionary of American Slang*, New York, etc., 1986, p.
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“The world of the Tannings, Jane's parents would have agreed, was a dungheap. And it did no good to know that in her eyes Francis had grown up out of it like a rose, until her world, by contrast, seemed as dull and artless as her way of talking. (She said ‘mere’ for mirror, ‘Yurp’ for Europe, ‘**broke**’ for **baroque**-or ‘barrack,’ as he himself sounded it.) It did no good to guess that she adored him.” James Ingram Merrill, *The Seraglio*, New York, 1957, p. 18

Hawaiian Eye. Go for Baroque, Warner Brothers, February 12, 1963

“Going for Baroque”: editorial caption to a review by Creighton Gilbert of Francis Haskell, *Patrons and Painters. A Study in the Relations between Italian Art and Society in the Age of the Baroque*, New York, 1963, in *The New York Review of Books*, Volume 1, Number 4, October 17, 1963, p. 11

“Go for Baroque”: editorial caption to a review by Francis Haskell of Paolo Portoghesi, *Roma barocca*, Cambridge, MA. 1971, in *The New York Review of Books*, Volume 16, Number 11, June 17, 1971, p. 28

Go for Baroque, painting by Roy Lichtenstein, 1979

When Christo and Jeanne-Claude wrapped the Berlin Reichstag with shimmering silver drapery in June 1995, they were, consciously or not, recreating the theme of terrific, awe-inspiring mystery that Henry Moore had invoked privately in a similar way first during the shattering blitz of London in 1942, and in more benign images after the war (**Figs. 1a, b**); (**Figs. 2a, b, c**).¹ The Berlin event was also, also consciously or not, a mighty baroque

* This essay is a revised and expanded version of an introduction, “Why Baroque,” to the catalogue of an exhibition, titled *Going for Baroque*, held at the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore in 1995-6 (Corrin and Spicer 1995). Some of the themes dealt with here appeared in Lipman and Marshall 1978, and have been taken up by Bal 1999.

¹ See Clark 1974, 120, 148, pls. XI, 134-5. The precedence of Henry Moore was noted by Laporte 1986, 42 (a reference for which I am indebted to the Christo-expertise of Jonathan Fineberg). I suspect that Moore's drawings, along with the *Disparate de Miedo* (Madness of Fear) by Goya to which Clark aptly refers, also inspired Kubrick's image in *2001* of the awesome monolithic slab observed by the astronauts on planet Jupiter.

extravaganza: the great public spectacle—the whole city became a theater, like Piazza San Pietro—the superabundance of lavish materials, the exuberant spirit of joy and celebration, are all features we associate with European culture in the period often defined spiritually as the age of the Counter Reformation, politically as the age of Absolute Monarchy. The very thought of draping the Reichstag recalls the unprecedented role played by curtains in works of the baroque period, often as "frames" behind which the scene proper appears, or is revealed (**Fig. 3**). Indeed, the stage curtain as we know it is itself an invention of the baroque theater, corresponding to the development of movable scenery, when the element of surprise became a fundamental ingredient of effective and affective expression. The device has a powerful metaphorical effect, as well, expressing the underlying notion of revelation, in the literal sense of removing a veil (Latin *velum*), that suggests the display to the privileged spectator of some mysterious, precious, and previously hidden value (a perfect definition of the German parliament building, I think, given its past history and future potential). In Christo's work, however, the building is dematerialized into some immense mystery not only gorgeously veiled, but also wrapped and bound by an unearthly and unseen hand, and poised for shipment—like a voluminous time capsule with portentous information inside—from one historical context and time to another.

Drapery, used as a kind of proscenium intermediating between the fictive and real worlds, was merely one of many baroque devices that served to create the almost hallucinatory relationship between past and present that is a hallmark of the period. A common practice in introductory surveys of the history of art is to begin the discussion of the Italian baroque with the mortuary chapel in Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome built by Pope Paul V in the early years of the seventeenth century, a grandiose structure, larger than many churches, housing the magnificent tombs of Paul and his predecessor with heroic portraits and depictions of their achievements (**Fig. 4**). The walls and pavement are encrusted with precious marbles, the niches contain huge statues of saints and Old Testament figures, the vaults and cupola are covered with frescoes glorifying the Virgin Mary and on the altar wall a refulgent glory of gilt bronze angels appears suspended, as if to corroborate the impression that this gorgeous display is indeed a vision of heaven on earth. The chapel is understood as a deliberate manifestation of the power and wealth of the papacy and the triumph of the Catholic Church and dogma over the temporal and spiritual challenge of the Protestant Reformation. What is often overlooked is that the focus and proximate cause of all this splendid fuss is a small, austere, and utterly ethereal image of the Virgin and Child that had been painted—by divine intervention, it was believed—many centuries before. The bronze angels act as frame-bearers. The juxtaposition could hardly be more abrupt, and through it the elaborate chapel is revealed "for what it truly is," a vast and complex artifice that embodies the historical as well as the contemporary significance of the physically insignificant but spiritually infinite image. Both aspects of the Pauline chapel—its almost overwhelming visual power and its almost obsessive historicism—served to illuminate the past and give meaning to the present. This mutually reinforcing contrapposto of form and content is an essential component of the style we call baroque, which, starting in Italy about 1600, swept Europe for the next 150 years.

The reign of the baroque came to an end when the style was condemned—with prejudice (*con pregiudizio*), as Italians say for punishments without mercy—by the neoclassical movement, the first in a series of systematic historicistic revivals that broke the previously uninterrupted chain of evolution that had followed upon the last systematic revival of antiquity, in the Renaissance. The fate of the baroque in our own time is epitomized in the fate of a remarkable lecture entitled "What is Baroque?," first presented by Erwin Panofsky in 1934, as an

introduction to what was then a quite risqué subject. In this talk, Panofsky sought to define the character and significance of the style, of which he gave a warm and closely argued defense.² He begins with a discussion of the term baroque, used by the neoclassicists, and in his time by the less-is-more modernists, as a pejorative reference to what were regarded as the style's uncontrolled excesses of form and expression—meretriciously corrupt narration, ornamentation, and sentimentality—the "lordly racket" of the baroque, to borrow Panofsky's wonderful phrase—for which the style was vilified. With the scientific historicism of the nineteenth-century, especially in Germany, baroque became a neutral term equivalent to other originally derogatory art historical period designations such as Gothic, Mannerism, or Rococo, all of which went through an analogous process of "decontamination." Although Panofsky subsequently delivered the paper on various occasions, he never published it, and eventually came to regard it as obsolete. He gives the reason in a letter of February 1960 to someone who proposed publishing it at last. The reason is curiously relevant in our present context: he recalls that the lecture was originally written "about thirty years ago, at a time when the word 'baroque' was still employed as a term of opprobrium in the Anglo-Saxon countries, and would [now] seem to be pretty much out-of-date after a whole generation of art historians, Americans and others, have devoted so much effort to the exploration of baroque art." While of course it is true that by 1960 baroque art was a fully qualified participant in any general account of the history of European art, it would be hard to imagine anything farther from the minds of contemporary abstract expressionist artists, then at the forefront of the world art scene. In their austere eschewal of illusion, any conventionally recognizable form or emotion was a mark of devilish deception and impurity, to be eliminated as moral imperative. Clearly, as the wrapping of the Reichstag testifies, the thirty and more years that have passed now since Panofsky's letter of demurral have witnessed a revolution in our cultural values, a major symptom of which has been the retrieval by the successors to Abstract Expressionism, of this distant and alien style with the exotic name baroque, from the dustbin of academic art history. The artists of Pop and Post-modernism generally, have reinserted the baroque into the center of the current artistic arena.

WHY BAROQUE

Two principal, interrelated aspects of baroque art offered escape routes from the impasse of what might be called the absolute, ahistorical, indeed anti-historical visual style that modernism reached in abstract expressionism. Paradoxically, the first path originated in the very nature of abstract art, its formal purity. Abstract expressionism itself might be said to have distilled into sheer gestures, universally valid forms and bold colors, not only the dynamic and intimately personal handiwork of Frans Hals or Rubens and Pietro da Cortona, but also their gorgeous splendor and high drama—the "furia del pennello," a quintessentially baroque expression for impassioned creativity, coined, as far as I know, by Giovanni Pietro Bellori in reference to the style of Rubens.³ Willem de Kooning, in particular, was born in Holland and

² Published in Lavin 1995, 17-88.

³ Bellori (1672) 1976, 267: "Nel comporre poi se ne serviva di motivo e ne arricchiva li suoi componimenti, ed in vero che alla copia dell'invenzioni e dell'ingegno, aggiunta la gran prontezza e la furia del penello, si stese la mano del Rubens a tanto gran numero d'opere che ne sono piene le chiese ed i luoghi di Fiandra e d'altre parti ancora."

trained at the Rotterdam Academy, and if one thinks of the hard-edged abstractions of his immediate Dutch predecessor, Piet Mondrian, the reference to the Netherlandish painters of the Golden Age, whose work he certainly knew intimately, is not so far-fetched as might at first appear (Figs. 5, 6). *Je t'aime* by Robert Motherwell incorporates a cubist-style inscription, not cut from a newspaper, however, but brushed spontaneously in the artist's own hand, expressing his intimate, personal feeling for his art, and for this work in particular (Fig. 7). Seen thus, it is no accident that, subsequently, many "pop" paintings by Roy Lichtenstein, for example, viewed abstractly, with their powerful movement and great splashes of primary color, retain those baroque-like features of abstract expressionism: in Lichtenstein's *Blam*, society at large blatantly displays its "achievements" and addresses the spectator in loud, hard-edged, catastrophically inverted and completely impersonal terms (Fig. 8). Conversely, it is no accident that Frank Stella should have gone for baroque when in his metal paintings he turned away from the rigid geometry and colorlessness of his early abstractions—and I do not refer merely to the new depth, fluidity, action, and polychromatic verve that have invaded his work—signaling a return to some of these values in abstract expressionism (Figs. 9, 10); in his vision of the artist's studio the disorderly array of the tools of his profession replace Vermeer's casually draped curtain as the foreground frame for the art-work in progress. Stella's development through his career conforms in an astonishing way to the principles of stylistic change defined by Heinrich Wölfflin, one of the founders of the modern discipline of art history. Wölfflin would have explained this shift as a manifestation of a tendency inherent in the human psyche to alternate between two polar opposite "modes of seeing" which he called classic and baroque, but which he considered to have general, indeed universal validity. It is often overlooked that Wölfflin did not think of himself in this context as a historian of art in the narrative sense, but as a psychologist of vision, describing the inevitable limits of human perception. Inevitable or not, Stella's definition of and approach to the problem of illusionism in abstract art led him to discover, or re-discover as he believed, one of the most profound innovations of the baroque, namely the interactions between medium and space, notably painting and sculpture (and architecture as the situation required), the fusion of which gave the work a kind of existence in the real world it had never had before.⁴ Bernini was said to have been the first to attempt "to unify architecture with painting and sculpture in such a way as to make of them all a beautiful whole." In fact, as with many of Stella's works, one cannot decide whether Bernini's St. Teresa altarpiece is free-standing or relief, the fluctuating shadows and highlights of the drapery are often called painterly, and the composition as a whole is often said to resemble a painting in conception (Fig. 11). In the vault, painted and molded stucco forms overlap the architecture, creating the illusion of a heavenly vision invading the spectator's space, just as do Stella's metal paintings. The key factor is that the "depicted" space does not recede into an imaginary distance, but proceeds into a real presence. In Bernini's case a contemporary described the uncanny effect of this device as follows: "having covered various angles with a filling of plaster to give the clouds a certain added effectiveness, he used a new device that deludes, and with certain projections in relief he made to appear effectively true that falsehood which is feigned." It might be said that Stella achieved the same kind of "working space" in which to express himself in purely visual, abstract terms, beyond the constricting confines of representation.

⁴ See Lavin 1980.

The second escape route, on the other hand, and with equal irony, was representation, precisely the arena in which seventeenth-century artists and art theorists engaged the problems of expression, in terms of what was then called imitation or emulation, and is now—in a very different frame of reference—called appropriation. This issue has come to the fore again in the wake of the return to figuration (or the representation or reproduction or incorporation of some aspect of "reality") that formed perhaps the main constituent of pop art's reaction to abstract expressionism. But whereas the imagery of pop art was distinctly contemporary and *déclassé* (from Coke bottles and comic strips to dirty rags and paintbrushes), the imagery of appropriation is distinctly historical and "artistic." In a measure, the whole process might be said to reflect one of the most elementary human strategies, which of defining one's self by reference to some superceded adversary or some admired prototype. In the domain of culture, the pride of place goes to the Romans, who made a fetish of incorporating imported originals or copies of Greek works in their homes and public buildings to show their admiration for and assimilation of their politically helpless but intellectually prestigious preceptors. The relation to the past also took a theoretical turn in the debate, especially among partisans of Greek or Latin, about the relative merits of imitation (following the good old masters) or emulation (using the old masters as a springboard for novelty and innovation). In the Middle Ages, particularly in Italy, it became common practice to incorporate classical monuments, in their entirety or as fragments (referred to by scholars nowadays with the Latin term "spolia" (a polite euphemism for the more military-sounding "spoils"), into Christian churches—not just rapaciously to economize on building materials, as is often assumed, but deliberately to signify the triumph of the new faith over the old superstitions. Christian writers did the same sort of thing with ancient texts, many of which we know only through such deprecatory citations.

The classical debates were revived along with antiquity itself in the Renaissance, and by the seventeenth century the artist's claim to legitimacy and fame often rested heavily on his ability to make the observer aware that he had learned the lessons of his venerable predecessors (imitation) and even surpassed them (emulation). At one extreme, Caravaggio mastered a statue of a contemplative antique heroine by transforming it into a humble Virgin Mary worshiped by peasants (one could equally say that he elevated the humble Virgin Mary by assimilating her to a contemplative antique heroine) (**Figs. 12, 13**). At the other extreme, Bernini recognized in a miserably mutilated and despised fragment with the ignominious sobriquet "Pasquino" (**Fig. 14**) the highest achievement of ancient sculptors—whom he surpassed only because, as we shall see, he had been given the "heart" (cuore) to transform the very nature of the art. It is remarkable that he does not use a traditional rhetorical term of technique, such as facility, but a psycho-moral concept of will, boldness, courage. The return to figuration in our own time has confronted the artist with an analogous challenge to find the heart to make something new and valid out of something old and valued.

But there is more than meets the eye in the examples we have seen of baroque appropriation of the past. In each instance—and they could be multiplied indefinitely—they involve an element of irony, or paradox, a somewhat jarring coincidence of opposites in which the high and the low, the exalted and the humble are knowingly and explicitly conjoined. There is here a distinct inversion of artistic and social conventions that is new to European culture and that has its counterpart in radical shifts at the opposite ends of the social and political scale, with the development of absolute monarchy and conspicuous luxury and academies to promote the advancement of art and sciences as political and cultural institutions, along with an unprecedented appreciation of the indigent and homeless as a social class and the establishment

of poorhouses and other forms of institutionalized public welfare. This new social conscience might be said to be the positive side of the phenomenon that Michel Foucault described in negative terms as "the great imprisonment."⁵ With respect to art, it is significant, for example, that Bernini, the favorite of popes and kings, invented the modern caricature (the name derived from the Italian word *caricare*, to load) in which the high and mighty were reduced to primitive and acerbic ciphers of themselves—often to their own delight.⁶ The great princely patrons of Rome were avid collectors of the often extremely "proletarian" genre works of northern painters resident in the city, such as the Bamboccianti.⁷ Strange as it may seem, many of the attitudes and expectations we take for granted today can be traced to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In particular, for example, when we turn to government for culture and social welfare we are—for the most part unwittingly—going for baroque.

The artists of our time who are going for baroque have learned this lesson well. The return to figuration after abstract expressionism was not straightforward. Once modernism had established the facticity of the work—the inviolability of the surface and the materiality of the object—representation could never again be an end in itself, except in the metaphorical realm of "virtual reality" and in the allegorical realm of quotation and allusion. It is no coincidence that the first major work of Walter Benjamin, the great social critic of *modern* culture, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, first published in 1928, was devoted precisely to the *estetica barocca*.⁸ Allegory, — in the sense that the work of art refers to concepts and values beyond, or beneath, what is actually represented,— was the defining nature of the style and ultimately the key to its relevance for the present, both of which, that is, the Baroque and the Modern, Benjamin saw essentially as periods of decadence. Panofsky's concrete, humane, and sympathetic evaluation of the modernity of the baroque, including allegory, contrasts markedly with Benjamin, and I suspect that "What is Baroque?" may have been intended as a corrective to Benjamin's pessimistic and deprecatory attitude. In 1927 Panofsky had read and disapproved of Benjamin's section on Melancholy in a lost letter to Hugo von Hofmansthal, whom Benjamin had importuned to intercede on his behalf in the hope of gaining entrée into the Warburg circle. Panofsky's negative response was a bitter disappointment to Benjamin, especially since he emphasized his profound debt to the recent study of the subject by Panofsky and Fritz Saxl. Apart from the peculiarities of Benjamin's prose, much commented on at the time, I suspect that the Marxist underpinnings of his negative assessment of the period may also have been evident to Panofsky and played a role in his reaction. In any case, a recently published exchange of letters between Saxl and Panofsky sheds a faint but interesting light on the subject. Having received the published version in 1928, Panofsky reported that he "also found it too clever," but that he had learned a great deal from it, viz., that the description of Melancholy by a baroque

⁵ "Le grand renfermement," in Foucault, 1961. I have discussed this phenomenon in relation to Bernini's art in Lavin 2000.

⁶ On Bernini and caricature, see Lavin 1990.

⁷ On the Bamboccianti, see Levine and Mai 1991.

⁸ Benjamin 1999. On the Panofsky episode see Kemp 1975, Brodersen 1990. For analysis of the text and its ideological underpinnings see the perspicacious introductory essays by Cases 1980, Solmi 1995, Schiavoni 1999, and especially Wolin 1994; for the letters, Wuttke 2001, 246f., 276, 282, 285f., 289f., 293.

writer of the seventeenth century came directly from the iconographical handbook of Cesare Ripa (“however you toss the cat, it always lands on the usual iconographic hind legs”). Significantly, he later (1936) referred to Benjamin’s study, citing a German seventeenth-century poet to illustrate that the allegory of Death might be interpreted in a *positive* way, as a hopeful prospect for the afterlife. Of Benjamin’s more abstruse methodological, philosophical, and ideological ruminations Panofsky says nothing.

With this “modern” understanding of the baroque as an allegorically “loaded” representation of reality, quotation from its visual and expressive vocabulary has become an up-to-date version of what the first of the moderns, Courbet, called an “*allégorie réelle*”—the ironic oxymoron he applied to his famous portrayal of the artist working in his studio, in reference to the ideal nude and the depiction of nature itself (**Fig. 15**). In Ann Fessler’s work called *Art History Lesson*, Rubens’s *Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus* and Poussin’s *Rape of the Sabines* do not evoke the mythic and portentous events sung by Theocritus and Ovid and recorded by Plutarch, but vulgar acts of sexual violence (**Fig. 16**); in Jean Lowe’s *Real Nature: Accomplishments of Man*, Empire furniture, Sevres porcelain, and Gobelin tapestries, are not fragile expressions of delicate and transitory feeling, but wasteful products of exploitation and conspicuous consumption (**Fig. 17**); in Derek Jarman’s *Black Notebook for Caravaggio*, Caravaggio’s youths, including Christ’s dead body, are not the embodiment of a subtle, ineffable homoeroticism but of common homosexuality (**Fig. 18**). (All these images are from an exhibition at the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore in 1995-6, titled *Going for Baroque*.) Beneath these witty, ironic, and often bitter appropriations there lies the presumption that we are able to expose the reality behind the facade, the truth beneath the rhetoric in the historical past. Transposed into the present such observations about what was “really” going on back then become trenchant comments about what is “really” going on today.

Obviously, this sort of “modern” persiflage of the baroque past involves a high, one might almost say fatal, degree of sophistication and self-awareness. An aspect of the phenomenon is already evident in the progenitors of the movement. In his 1979 painting titled *Go for Baroque* (**Fig. 19**) Lichtenstein invokes an awesome triple pun depending on the consonance of the word baroque, as in the florid ornamental form that dominates the field, with the English word “broke,” as in “go for broke,” that is, the bankrupt banality of contemporary values, a bankrupt banality that is itself reflected in the picture’s fragmented quasi-cubist vision of a “broken” reality. As far as I have been able to discover, “Going for Baroque” first appears in 1971 as the caption given by a clever editor at *The New York Review of Books*, to a very negative review by Francis Haskell of a book on baroque Rome by Paolo Portoghesi (cited as a motto above); evidently the punning phrase inspired Lichtenstein’s verbal analogue for his punning picture. In his 1984-85 Charles Elliot Norton lectures on seventeenth-century painting, called *Working Space*, Stella appeals with great passion to the baroque, especially Caravaggio, as authority for his own transgression of the traditional limits pictorial action (**Fig. 20**).⁹ And it can come as no surprise that these very qualities of sophistication, awareness, and ironic inversion, which have become the mark of Cain on our modernity, had their origin in the Baroque. Panofsky also regarded the Baroque as the first modern era, which he defined in terms of a new psychological awareness and self-consciousness. For him, however, it was not an era of decadence but just the opposite, a new synthesis based on a knowing grasp of the significance of consciousness itself (“I think, therefore I am,” said Descartes), and a concomitant capacity

⁹ Stella 1986.

deliberately to embrace, rather than suppress or despise, both the fables and the foibles of our human kind—often in good humor, especially as in caricature, the modern art of social criticism par excellence. Perhaps Bernini's most radical thrust of this kind is his treatment of no less a personage than Innocent XI (1676-89), the ascetic pope who finally ended the church's millennial plague of nepotism and instituted a comprehensive welfare program for the poor which, *mutatis mutandis*, is still with us (Fig. 21).

GERHY'S BILBAO NAO

I want to end by turning back to the beginning of these observations, to explore a bit further the role and significance of drapery as a medium-neutral metaphor for both form and meaning.¹⁰ When Bernini came to define his own achievement as a sculptor his formulation, which again entailed a profound transgression of traditional distinctions among the arts, was doubly significant in our context. A particularly obtuse visitor to his studio as he worked on the equestrian monument of Louis XIV voiced a criticism of his mode of portraying the king's drapery and the horse's mane as too wrinkled and perforated, beyond the rule passed on to us by the ancients. His response was to say that "What the critic considered a defect was precisely the greatest achievement of his chisel," that is, "to have overcome the difficulty of rendering stone malleable as wax, and to have in a certain sense fused painting and sculpture. This, even the ancients had not achieved, perhaps because they were not given the heart to render stones obedient to the hand as if they were pasta."¹¹ In this astonishing statement, the material in which the artist worked was no longer a determinant in the result, but became a neutral medium wholly subject to his skill and will—which was to transform the traditionally earth-bound equestrian figure into a heaven-bound vision bursting aloft in space (Fig. 22). And in this case it is no accident that he voiced his concept of the unity of the arts in relation to his treatment of drapery. It might be said that for Bernini drapery represented a new order of being, a sort of

¹⁰ In recent years, drapery has come to be virtually identified with the very notion of Baroque, notably in the work of Gilles Deleuze (1988); in a kind of interrelational paroxysm Deleuze considers manifold aspects of science and culture under the rubric of Leibniz's concept of the fold. My concern here is rather with drapery as a specific historical, and often pointedly ironic, metaphor.

¹¹ Baldinucci 1948, 141: "e sebbene alcuni biasimavano i panneggiamenti delle sue statue, come troppo ripiegati e troppo trafitti, egli però stimava esser questo un pregio particolare del suo scarpello, il quale in tal modo mostrava aver vinta la gran difficoltà di render, per così dire, il marmo pieghevole e di sapere ad un certo modo accoppiare insieme la pittura e la scultura, ed il non aver ciò fatto gli altri artefici, diceva dependere dal non essere dato loro il cuore di rendere i sassi così ubbidienti alla mano quanto se fossero stati di pasta o cera; questo, però diceva egli non già con affetto di iattanza o presunzione, ma per rendere conto di se stesso, e dell'opere sue, perché peraltro, in quanto alla cognizione del proprio talento apparteneva, egli conservò sempre basso concetto di sé, solito dire sovente, che quanto più operava, tanto meglio conosceva di non saper nulla." Bernini 1713, 149: "Ad un'altro, che passava con lui maggior confidenza, nel dir che gli fece, *Esser i panneggiamenti del Rè, & i crini del Cavallo* [the equestrian statue of Louis XIV], *come troppo ripiegati, e trafitti, fuor di quella regola, che hanno a Noi lasciatagli antichi Scultori*, liberamente rispose, *Questo, che da lui gli veniva imputato per difetto, esser il pregio maggiore del suo Scalpello, con cui vinto haveva la difficoltà di render' il Marmo pieghevole come la cera, & haver con ciò saputo accoppiare in un certo modo insieme la Pittura, e la Scultura. E' non haver ciò fatto gli antichi Artefici esser forse provenuto dal non haver loro dato il cuore di rendere i sassi così ubbidienti alla mano, come se stati fossero di pasta.*"

hypostatic psycho-metaphysical state of consciousness. This perception of a fluid and universal matrix under which all perceived reality may be subsumed amounted to a conceptual and expressive revolution fully equivalent to that of Galileo in establishing the con-substantiality of the earth and the moon.

A comparable conflation may be discerned in the relation between drapery and architecture. It has often been noted that the effulgent, swelling and perforated forms of Frank Gehry's Museum at Bilbao recall the billowing sails of a wind-born vessel (**Fig. 23**).¹² Gehry does own a modest sailboat, and he does enjoy sailing, but he is a very modest seaman and he is far from obsessed by the sport. What clearly affected him at Bilbao was the fact that the city was once a great port, of which the abandoned warehouses and other structures by the River Nervión became the site of the Guggenheim museum. Gehry thus paid homage to this shipbuilding tradition, which had been based since the late nineteenth century on the nearby iron and hematite deposits that had made Bilbao into a major industrial city, but had long since fallen into decrepitude. Gehry may be said to have revitalized in art Bilbao's maritime tradition—as his building has indeed revived the city's economy, and created its reputation as a city of culture, which it never had before! What is of interest here is that the modern shipbuilding industry was of course based on steel—Bilbao pioneered in the construction of steel-hulled sailing ships. Gehry's titanium skin recalls the sleek metal hulls into burnished newness, while the expansive and convoluted forms convey the motive power of the billowing sails. But it is clear that Gehry also invoked Bilbao's medieval history, when its sailing vessels were amongst the most prized in the world and gave rise to the city's historic maritime commercial institution, the Consulado y Casa de Contratación. In Gehry's museum the once famous emblem of the Consulado—its characteristic commercial vessel, the *nao*, in full sail—glows in the estuary like a visionary Flying Dutchman, majestically transported from the dead past into the living present (**Fig. 24**). The carved stone escutcheon of the Consulado hangs on the courtyard wall of Bilbao's Archeological Museum, where Gehry received the seal of the modern Casa de Contratación at the opening of the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum in 1997 (**Fig. 25**), and where he can scarcely have failed to see the original from the inception of the project. It might be added parenthetically that in the case of a museum, as in the *Going for Baroque* exhibition itself, such art-historical references have double exposure, as it were, explicitly both reflecting the present and revealing the past. With respect to drapery, Robert Venturi in his Seattle Art Museum made a similarly complex and evocative pun on the oxymoronic term “curtain wall” often employed in modernist architectural parlance, especially for glass-enclosed structures, now opaque, now transparent (**Fig. 26**). The design creates a paradoxical equivalence between a superficial decorative hanging—like the flat, rhythmically repeated and undulating folds with colorfully patterned borders of the peploi worn by archaic Greek korai—and a solid surface with rows of fluted columnar or pilaster “supports” (**Fig. 27a, b**). The verbal and art-historical conflation is literally epitomized by the diaphanous, interwoven, modern English text written in Latin letters carved in Egyptian sunk relief, proceeding uninterrupted across the wall as do the incised cuneiform inscriptions of the Assyrians (**Fig. 28**). The museum building incorporates and displays a kind of summa of its function.

¹² I am much indebted to Keith Mendenhall of Frank O. Gehry and Associates for his patient and generous help in all matters pertaining to Gehry's work; and to Dr. Amaia Basterretxea, Director of the Museo Vasco at Bilbao, for her kind responses to my questions and requests concerning the Bilbao *nao* and the museum's escutcheon.

THE HEAD OF GEHRY'S HORSE

Notes on a Conversation with Frank Gehry, Feb. 16, 2002:

The "Horse's Head" that can well be called the "soul" of Gehry's office building for Deutsche Genossenschafts-Bank at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, completed in 2001 (**Fig. 29**), started with a trip we made together in June of 1993.¹³ For no particular reason other than that Dijon was on our route elsewhere, and neither of us had been there before, we stopped to see the Chartreuse de Champmol and the sculptures of Claus Sluter, of which he was quite unaware. Gehry was deeply affected by the emotional depth of Claus Sluter's monumental sculptures, but only in retrospect have I understood that what motivated this response was primarily the massive drapery forms that give the figures of the Moses fountain a sense of mythic power, heroic scale, and inner life (**Fig. 30**). The Museum of Fine Arts at Dijon was closed that day, but when he returned to the office he obtained the monograph on Sluter by Kathleen Morand illustrated with photographs by David Finn, and there discovered the Mourners of the tomb of Philip the Bold, enveloped in their Carthusian hassocks, whose drapery was ultimately transmuted into the form that has come to be known as Gehry's "horse's head" (**Fig. 31**).¹⁴

1. He first began to work on the shape purely experimentally as part of his "research" for the Peter Lewis house. He made clay models at this stage that virtually duplicated the cowls of the Sluter mourners and served as independent structures for different rooms (**Fig. 32**; October 1993).

(I quote parenthetically from several remarkable responses to my inquiries by Gehry's Associate Keith Mendenhall. January 20, 2003: "Before he began to work specifically on the Horse's Head, he worked on four shapes for the Lewis Residence in mid to late 1993, all modeled in clay, and all very clearly influenced by Sluter, very nearly direct copies of the hoods on the mourners. We referred to the shapes as the Sentinels. If I recall correctly one contained the master bedroom, one the living room, one the study, and one the dining room." I.L.: "Sentinels"—a somewhat whimsical but perfect description of the functional transition from the watchful figures on the Sluter tomb, mourners but also spiritual guardians of the resting soul awaiting the resurrection.)

2. These experiments then converged in an "object," modeled in red velvet impregnated with wax, for the main entry and gallery of the house (**Fig. 33**; November 1994)

¹³ Dal Co et al., 1998, 540-7. A more ample and perspicacious discussion of the development and significance of the Horse's Head(s) will be found in Sylvia Lavin, "12 Heads Are Better than One," forthcoming in a volume of essays in honor of Robin Middleton, edited by Barry Bergdoll and Werner Oeschlin.

¹⁴ Morand 1991.

(Mendenhall, April 29, 2003: “The red velvet is perhaps the most significant model fragment ever produced by our office. It brought us to everything that we’re doing now, in terms of form making, model making techniques, and documentation techniques, it was the turning point.” I.L.: I was informed that the choice of red velvet was purely accidental, but I suspect that the rich color and soft sheen of the material made an elegant transition to the burnished metal of the final work. One is here insistently reminded of Leonardo’s silverpoint studies of gesso-impregnated drapery.)

3. Gehry then worked on the forms with the computer, a process he found unsatisfactory. He tried several versions for the Bank project, which did not satisfy him. Returning to the Lewis piece he included it in the design that won the competition (1995).
4. The final Bank version was a further development from the Lewis piece (1996).
5. An enlarged (35' long x 25' high x 20' wide), modified version of the model was shown independently at the Gagosian Gallery in Los Angeles (April 1999; now on display in the Icahn Molecular Biology Building at Princeton University).
6. A series of small multiples (62" x 46" x 30") in variously textured and colored fiberglass were made for Gemini G.E.L. LLC Art Gallery, Los Angeles (2000).

He emphasizes that the sculptured drapery meant to him not only form and movement in a rigid material, but also the expression of emotion. He said that drapery is one of the earliest experiences of the infant who associates it with the mother’s breast. To this I observed, “like, it is no accident that Linus sucks his thumb while holding his blanket to his cheek,” to which he responded, “yes.” (It may be relevant in this context that Gehry’s mother was head of the drapery department of a Los Angeles department store, helping clients design their home furnishings. Speaking of her he has said: “So the creative genes were there.” “She would push me.”¹⁵) He took care to note that another important stimulant to his thinking in conjunction with Sluter’s drapery were the extraordinary ceramics created from pinched and curling slabs of clay—the material of the original models of the “sentinels” of the Lewis house—by the eccentric but pioneering “mad potter” of Biloxi, Mississippi, George E. Ohr (1857-1918) (**Fig. 34**). Gehry has designed a new museum for Ohr’s work, scheduled to open in 2004.¹⁶ The convergence of drapery and clay is particularly telling in relation to the thin “emptiness” of the forms and to Bernini’s deliberate transmutation of the material of sculpture. It is ironic, and no doubt significant, that Ohr himself had evidently perpetrated a material transmutation equivalent to but precisely the reverse of Gehry’s, inspired by the “casually” folded forms of some metallic vessel such as the Early Bronze Age gold cup recently acquired by the British Museum (**Fig. 35**).

The drapery that formed the model for the horse’s head was actually the cowl of one of the Carthusian mourners, whose head is half hidden inside (**Figs. 36a, b, c, d**). The idea of the head inside and the idea of the covering cowl fused to become an equine cranium that might, in

¹⁵ Lacayo 2000, 1.

¹⁶ Schematic Design Documents dated July 11, 2001. On George E. Ohr, see Clark et al., 2000.

textured and colored fiber glass, suggest a hairy, one-eyed, horse's head; or, in gleaming metal, its armored protective headpiece, or chanfron (**Fig. 37**). At Berlin the skull became a veritable think-tank, a gigantic, preternatural brain-casing, and the effect is two-fold. The view from the exterior evokes the mysterious cerebral activity within; from the inside the visitor inhabits the supporting, natural wood neuro-structure and becomes the equivalent of the monk's cerebellum, cowl-enclosed as if in the mother's womb. All very appropriate for a meeting room intended to provoke thought, in psychological recollection, warmth, and armor-clad security! Considering its Sluterian origin it is also appropriate that Gehry has referred to the horse's head as "the most mystical work I have ever done."¹⁷

The metaphor of the horse's head was not part of the original concept, but there was a significant tradition of monumental portrayals of this disembodied expression of nobility, power and intelligence (**Fig. 38**). There was also a preexistent animal in Gehry's structural repertory, his gigantic fish, in which the skeletal framework became part of the fabric of the scaly, luminescent, thin-skin construction (**Fig. 39**). The metal-clad, exposed structural support had become a foremast of the Bilbao naos, commemorating a soaring brick smokestack that had occupied the site before (**Fig. 23**, far left). An originally unintended nickname, "Fred and Ginger," had also served as a handy (and ironic) moniker for the corner pavilion of Gehry's Nationale-Nederlanden Insurance building in Prague (1996), where the idea of referentially meaningful drapery was nascent (**Fig. 40**). Ginger's flaring translucent gown joined Fred's elegant tuxedo and a six-story chorus line on the bank of the Vltava in an ecstatic celebration of the capitalist regeneration of a glorious ancient city and its cosmopolitan culture from the desolation of totalitarian Marxist rule.

A further turn in Gehry's drapery-architecture metaphor for form and movement in a rigid medium took place with two related projects, unexecuted, for the One Times Square building in New York, and for a monumental "triumphal arch" in the Largo Aldo Moro at the northern entrance to the city of Modena from the ancient Via Emilia (**Figs. 41, 42, 43**).¹⁸ In these monumental yet whimsically light and airy fantasies, the metaphor became an explicitly ironic and specifically baroque embodiment of the factitious nature of architecture as theater or spectacle. At Times Square transparent metal mesh (which Gehry had used in other ways from early in his career) is crimped and folded so as to appear as ephemeral and fortuitous as the ever-changing advertisements the structure frames and supports—and as the entertainments created by the Time-Warner company whose offices it was intended to contain. In this case the reference to drapery might be described as generic: the folds of a hanging curtain, the ruffles of a ballerina's tutu (stiff crinoline, also to maintain rigidity in motion), the wrinkles of a crumpled cupola-puff. The luminosity of the horse-head's reflective metallic plates has become illumination through translucent metallic lace. The proposals for the Modena project included a centerpiece framing the Piazza S. Agostino, consisting of two pylons that held a retractable metal screen for the projection of films and other images for public events. The pylons went through a

¹⁷ Lacayo 2000, 1.

¹⁸ On the Times Square project, see Dal Co et al., 1998, 579-81. The Modena project, 1997-2000, is unpublished. Avidly promoted by the Mayor, Giuliano Barbolini, and the Assessore alla Cultura, Gianni Cottafavi, the project was the subject of much controversy and received considerable attention in the Italian, especially the local, newsmedia before it was finally rejected by the arch-conservative Soprintendente, Elio Garzillo.

long series of permutations to become great flourishes of windblown, metal mesh drapery that echoed the fluttering cloak-as-magic-carpet on which Bernini's portrait bust of Francesco I d'Este, the Duke of Modena—a work so famous as to have become a veritable emblem of the city—is wafted into the empyrean (**Fig. 44**). If Ginger and Fred danced, Francesco flies; if Sluter's smooth, undulating curves carried the weight of meditation, Bernini's coruscating fields of energy carry the charge of miracles. Francesco had in fact been a great patron of the theater, and the grandiose spectacles he sponsored, full of wondrous appearances and disappearances, had been the pride of Modena during the glory days of his rule. It is indeed ironic that Gehry's conflation of architecture with drapery should be essentially consubstantial with Bernini's conflation of drapery with sculpture. Deep down, they both went for baroque.

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Fig. 1a, b. Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Reichstag Wrapped, 1995. Berlin a. Day Time; b. Night Time

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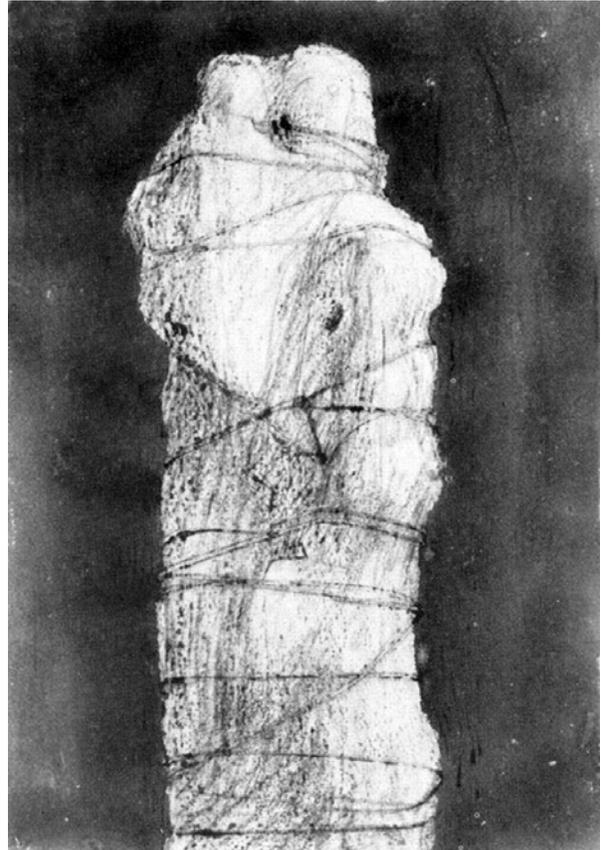
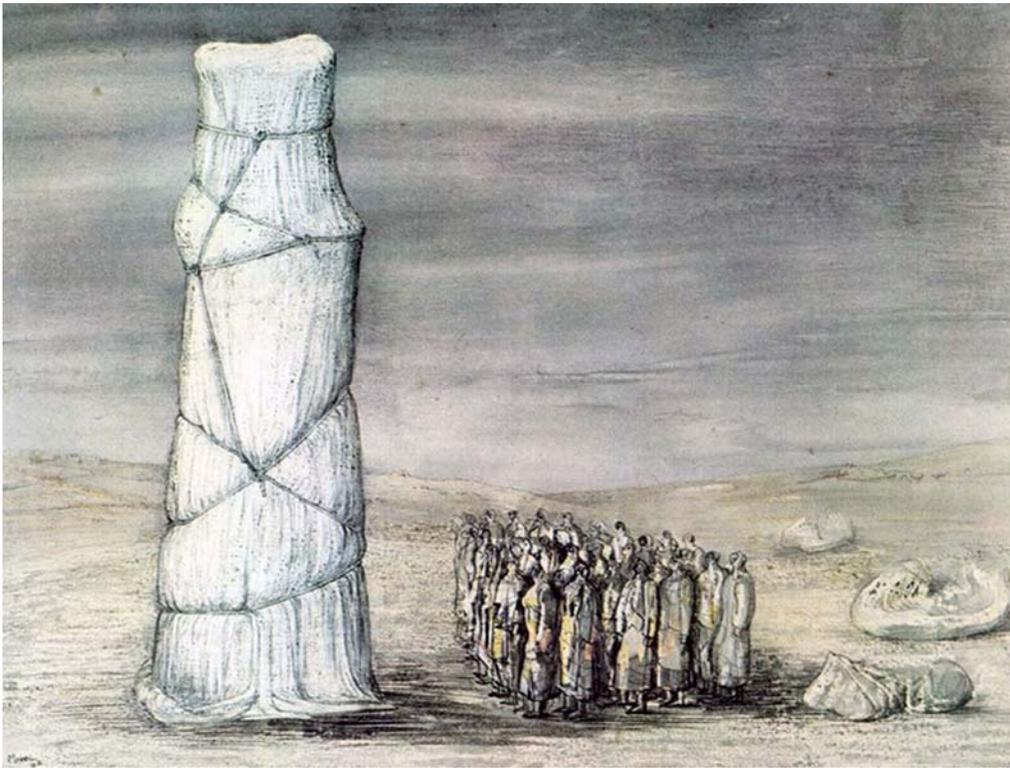


Fig. 2a, b, c. Henry Moore, a. Crowd Looking at a Tied-up Object, drawing. Collection Lord Clark, London; b. Wrapped Madonna and Child: Day Time, drawing. Mrs. Charlotte Bergman, Israel; c. Wrapped Madonna and Child: Night Time, drawing. Mrs. Charlotte Bergman, Israel

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Fig. 3 Jan Vermeer, *An Artist in His Studio. Allegory of Fame*. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

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Fig. 4 Flaminio Ponzio, interior of the Pauline Chapel. S. Maria Maggiore, Rome

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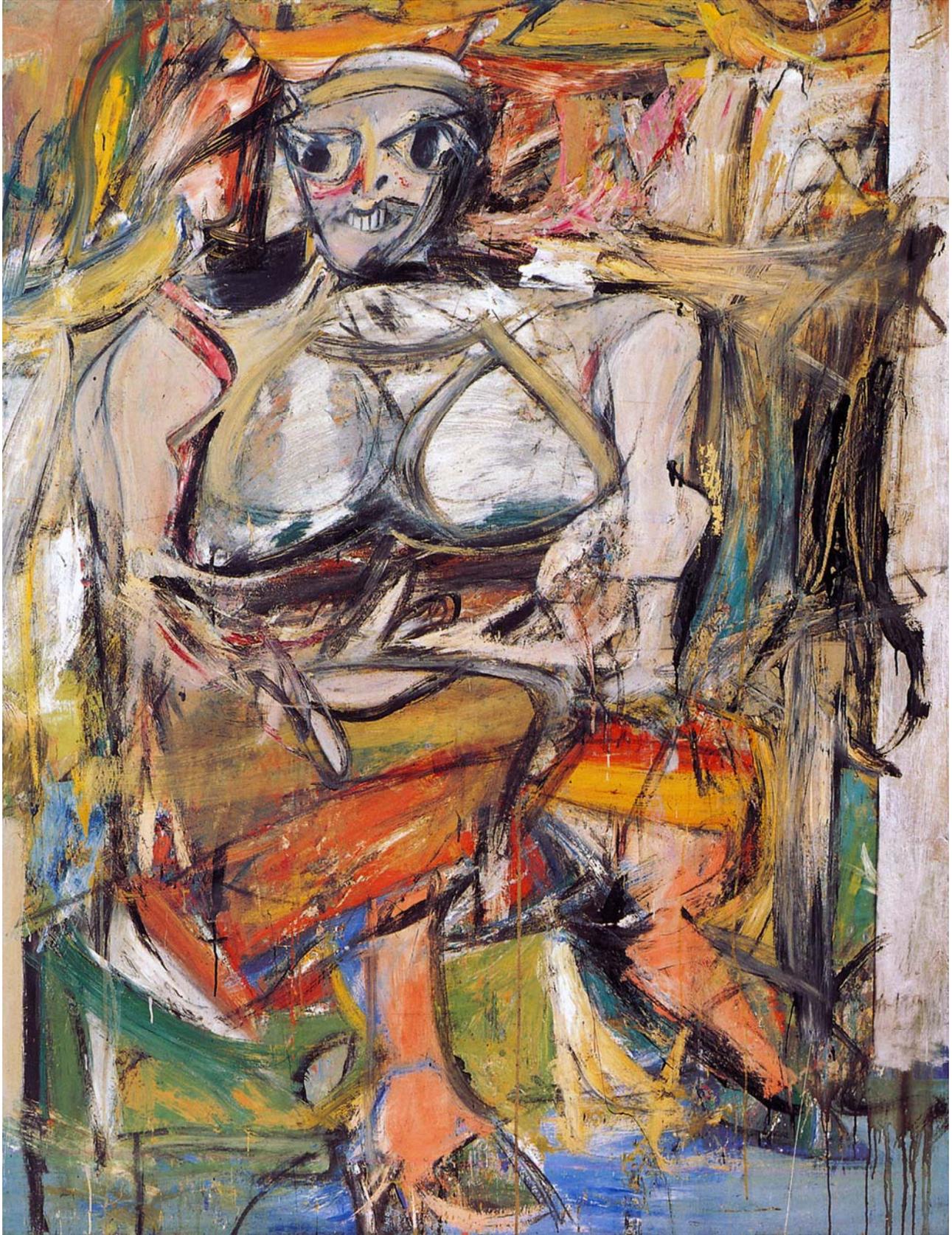


Fig. 5 Willem de Kooning, Woman, 1, 1950-2. The Museum of Modern Art, New York

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Fig. 6 Frans Hals, Malle Babbe. 1641, oil on canvas 29x25in, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin

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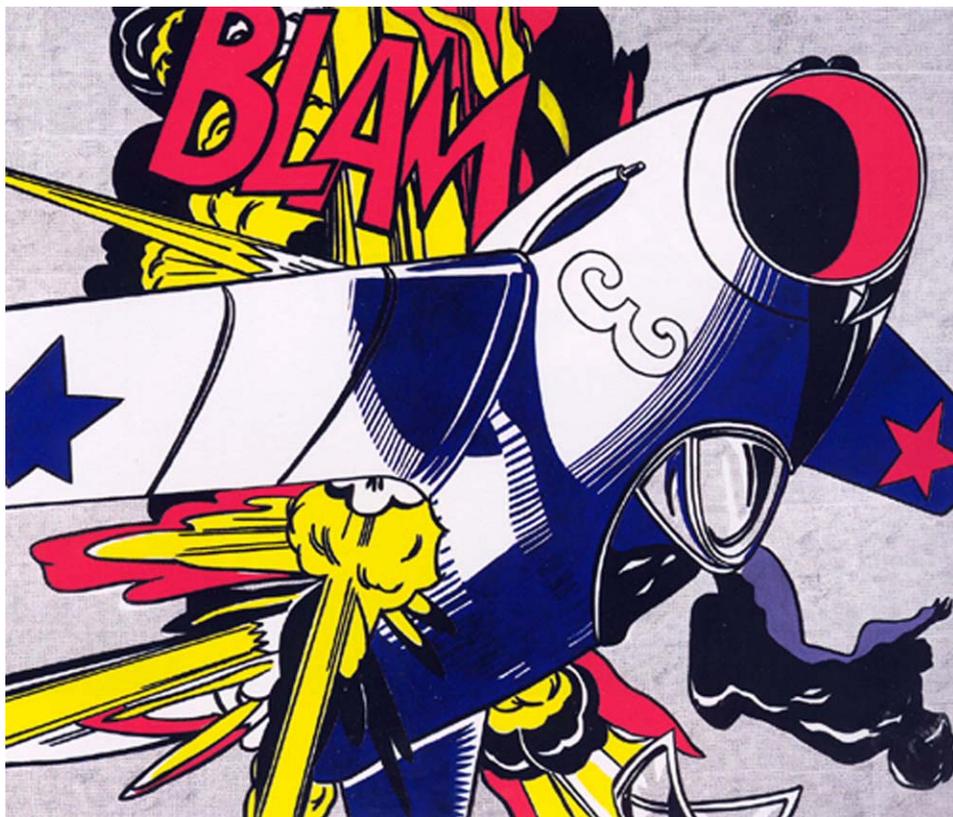


Fig. 7 Robert Motherwell, Je t'aime IV, 1955-7. Bayerische Staatsgalerie, Munich

Fig. 8 Roy Lichtenstein, Blam, 1962. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven

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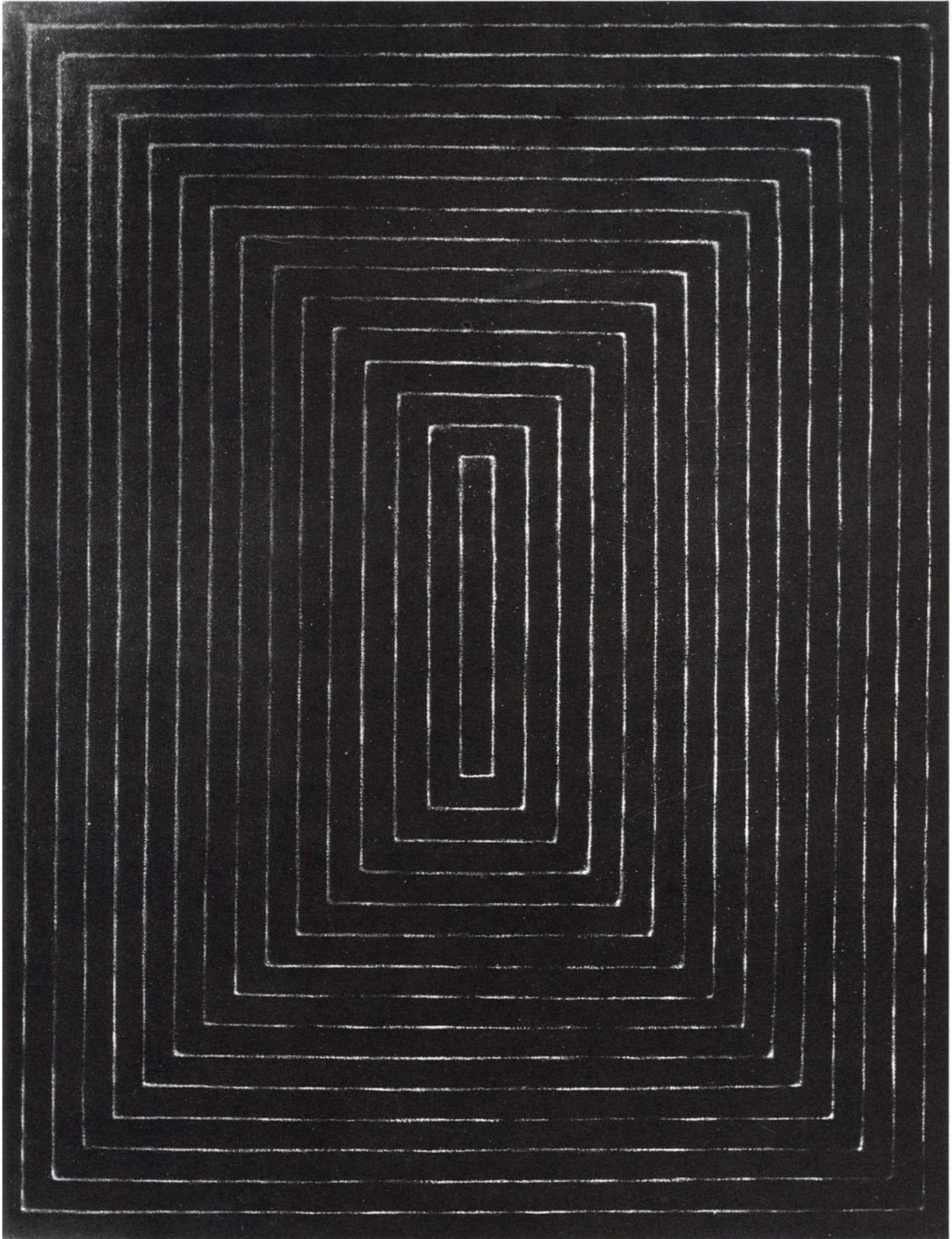


Fig. 9 Frank Stella, Tomlinson Court Park II, 1959. Collection Robert A. Rowan, Pasadena , CA

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Fig. 10 Frank Stella, *The Artist's Studio* (back cover of *Working Space*, 1986)

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Fig. 11 Gianlorenzo Bernini, Chapel of St. Teresa. S. Maria della Vittoria, Rome

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Fig. 12 Caravaggio, Madonna di Loreto (Madonna dei Pellegrini). S. Agostino, Rome

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Fig. 13 Vestal or priestess of Romulus, believed to be Tuscelda. Roman Statue. Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence

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Fig. 14 "Pasquino," fragment of a Greek sculpture. Piazza Pasquino, Rome

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Fig. 15 Gustave Courbet, The Painter's Studio (Une Allégorie Réelle), 1854-5. Musée du Louvre, Paris

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Art History Lesson
1993
Mixed media installation with artist books,
gilt-framed photographs printed on canvas,
reproduction of period chair
Collection of the artist
Photo by Tish Lefter, Houston Center for Photography

Rubens, Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus
courtesy SCALA/Art Resource, New York,
Poussin, Rape of the Sabine Women courtesy
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Fig. 16 Ann Fessler, Art History Lesson, 1993, details. (Mixed media installation with artist books, reproduction of period chair, gilt-framed photographs printed on canvas: Peter Paul Rubens, Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus, Alte Pinakothek, Munich; Nicolas Poussin, Rape of the Sabine Woman, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) Collection of the Artist (From Corin and Spicer 1995, 42)

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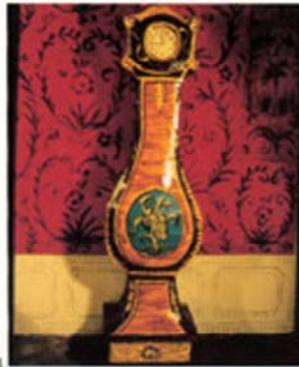
Details from *Real Nature: Accomplishments of Man*
1993
Mixed media installation
Photos courtesy Gracie Mansion Fine Art, New York

1. Crown Mirror
1993
Mixed media
53 x 40 x 1 1/2"
Courtesy Gracie Mansion Fine Art



2. *An Inland Sea*
1992
Oil on canvas
85 x 129"
Collection of Museum of Contemporary Art,
San Diego; Museum purchase
Elizabeth W. Russell Fund

3. Architectural Couch
1993
Mixed media
44 x 96 x 30"
Courtesy Gracie Mansion Fine Art



4. Fertility Clock
1993
Papier mâché, enamel, clock mechanism
91 x 26 x 2 1/2"
Courtesy Gracie Mansion Fine Art

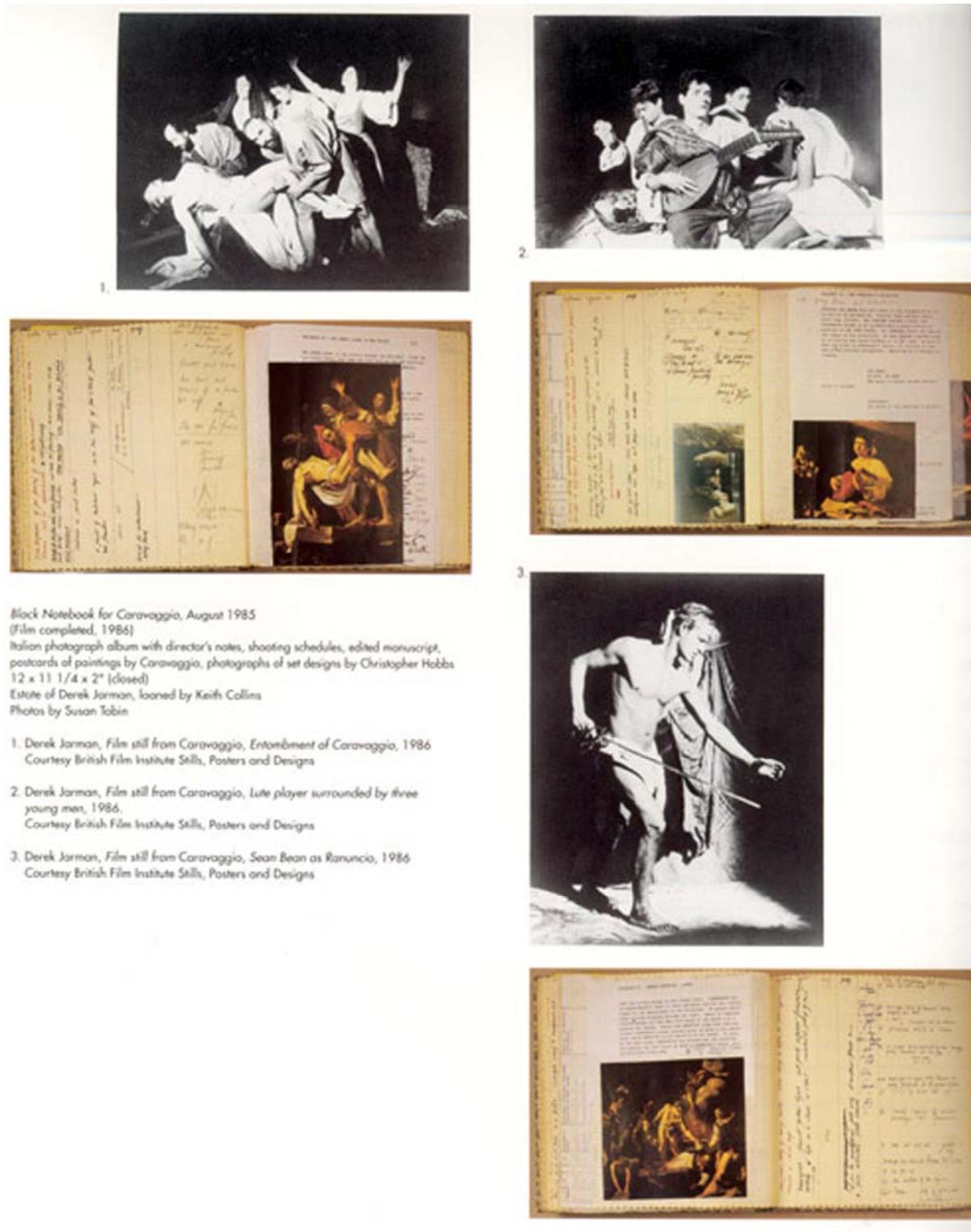


5. Chemistry Chair
1993
Mixed media
46 x 32 x 27"
Courtesy Gracie Mansion Fine Art



6. Dandelion Urn and Male Demilune
1993
Mixed media
Urn: 40 x 24"
Demilune 40 x 36 x 22"
Courtesy Gracie Mansion Fine Art

Fig. 17 Jean Lowe, *Real Nature: Accomplishments of Man*, 1993, details. (Mixed media installation: 1. Crown Mirror, 1993; 2. *An Inland Sea*, oil on canvas, 1992; 3. Architectural Couch, 1993; 4. Fertility Clock, 1993; 5. Chemistry Chair, 1993; 6. Dandelion Urn and Male Demilune, 1993) Gracie Mansion Fine Art, New York (From Corin and Spicer 1995, 52)



Black Notebook for Caravaggio, August 1985
 (Film completed, 1986)
 Italian photograph album with director's notes, shooting schedules, edited manuscript,
 postcards of paintings by Caravaggio, photographs of set designs by Christopher Hobbs
 12 x 11 1/4 x 2" (closed)
 Estate of Derek Jarman, loaned by Keith Collins
 Photos by Susan Tabin

1. Derek Jarman, *Film still from Caravaggio, Entombment of Caravaggio*, 1986
 Courtesy British Film Institute Stills, Posters and Designs
2. Derek Jarman, *Film still from Caravaggio, Lute player surrounded by three young men*, 1986.
 Courtesy British Film Institute Stills, Posters and Designs
3. Derek Jarman, *Film still from Caravaggio, Sean Bean as Ranuccio*, 1986
 Courtesy British Film Institute Stills, Posters and Designs

Fig. 18 Derek Jarman, *Black Notebook for Caravaggio*, 1986, film completed 1986. Estate of Derek Jarman. (Film stills from *Caravaggio*: 1. *Entombment of Caravaggio*; 2. *Lute player Surrounded by Three Young Men*; 3. Sean Bean as Ranuccio. British Film Institute Stills) (From Corin and Spicer 1995, 46)

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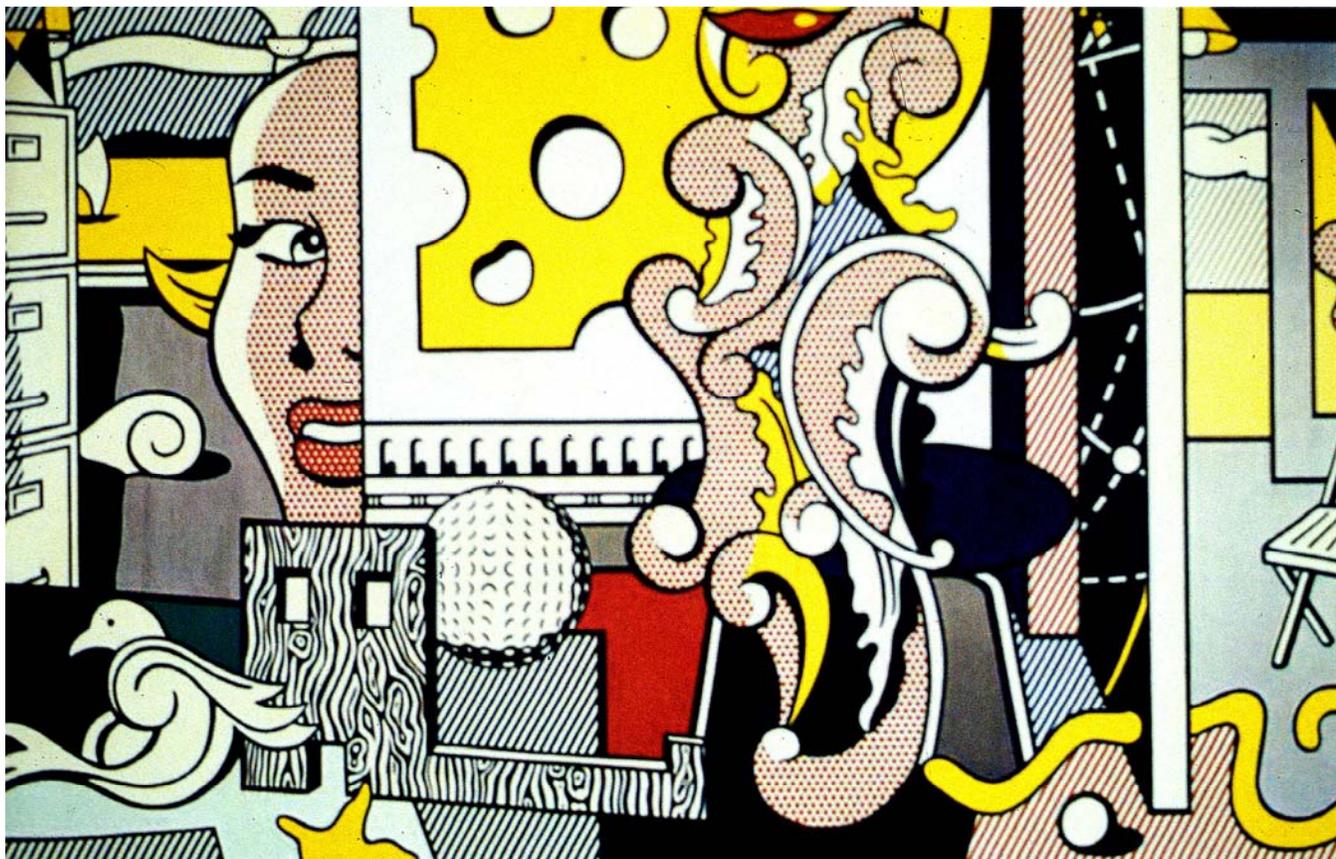


Fig. 19 Roy Lichtenstein, Go for Baroque, 1979. The Jeffrey H. Loria Collection, New York



Fig. 20 Front Cover of Frank Stella, Working Space, 1986

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Fig. 21 Gianlorenzo Bernini, Caricature of Pope Innocent XI. Museum der Bildenden Künste, Leipzig

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Fig. 22 Gianlorenzo Bernini, equestrian monument of Louis XIV. Versailles



Fig. 23 Frank O. Gehry, Guggenheim Museum. Bilbao (1991-7)

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Fig. 24 Bilbao Nao, Escutcheon of the Consulado y Casa de Contratación. Museo Arqueológico, Etnográfico e Histórico Vasco, Bilbao

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Fig. 25 Modern Seal of the Casa de Contratación of Bilbao. Possession of Frank O. Gehry

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Fig. 26 Robert Venturi, Seattle Museum of Art

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Fig. 27a,b. Korai. a. Archeological Museum, Athens; b. Museo dei Conservatori, Rome

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Fig. 28 Assyrian relief, from the northwest palace of Assurnasirapi II at Kalchu. British Museum, London

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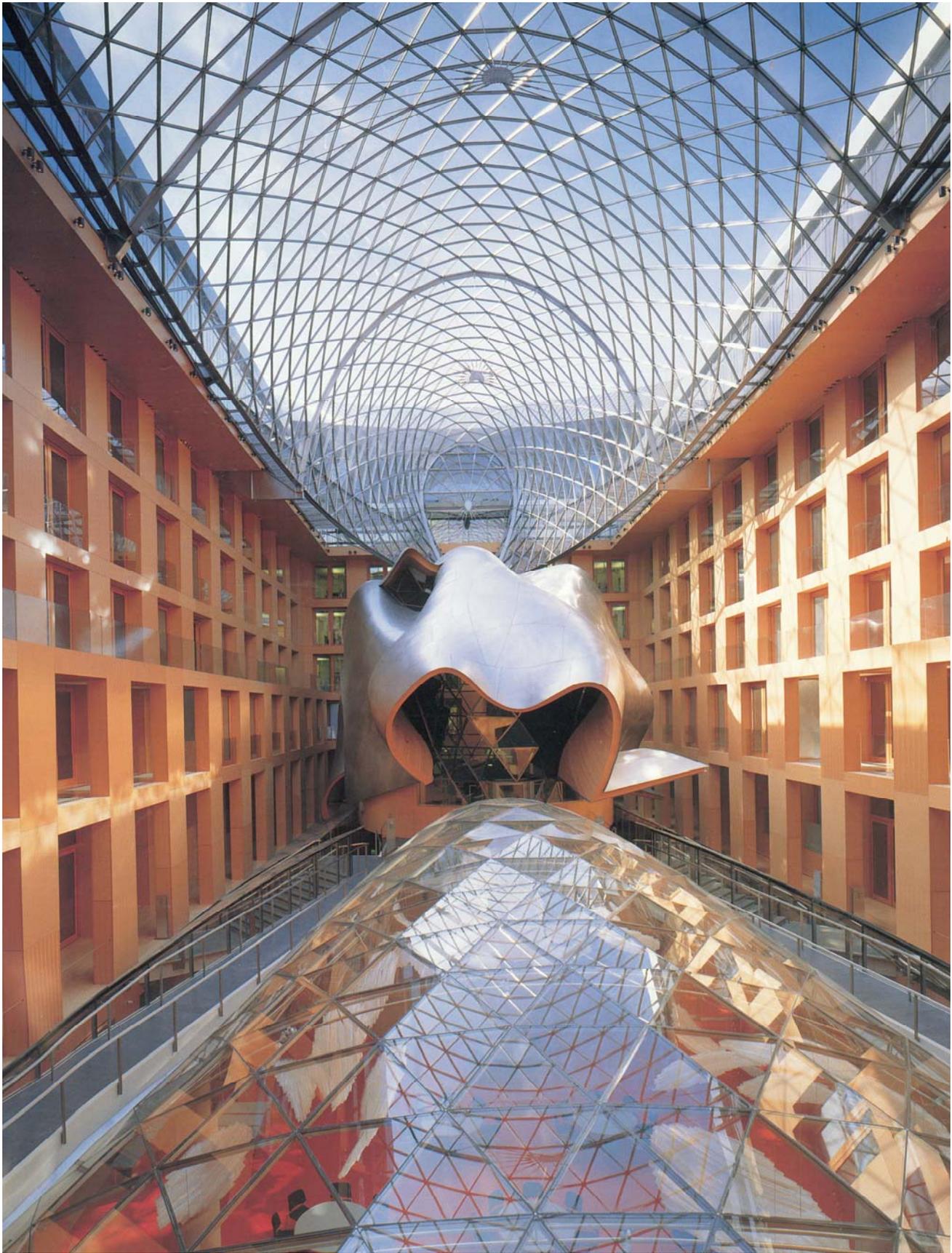


Fig. 29 Frank O. Gehry, Atrium with "Horse's Head" conference room. Deutsche Genossenschafts-Bank, Berlin (1995-2001)

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Fig. 30 Claus Sluter, The Moses Well. Chartreuse de Champmol, Dijon

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Fig. 31 Claus Sluter, Mourning Monks. Tomb of Philip the Bold, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon

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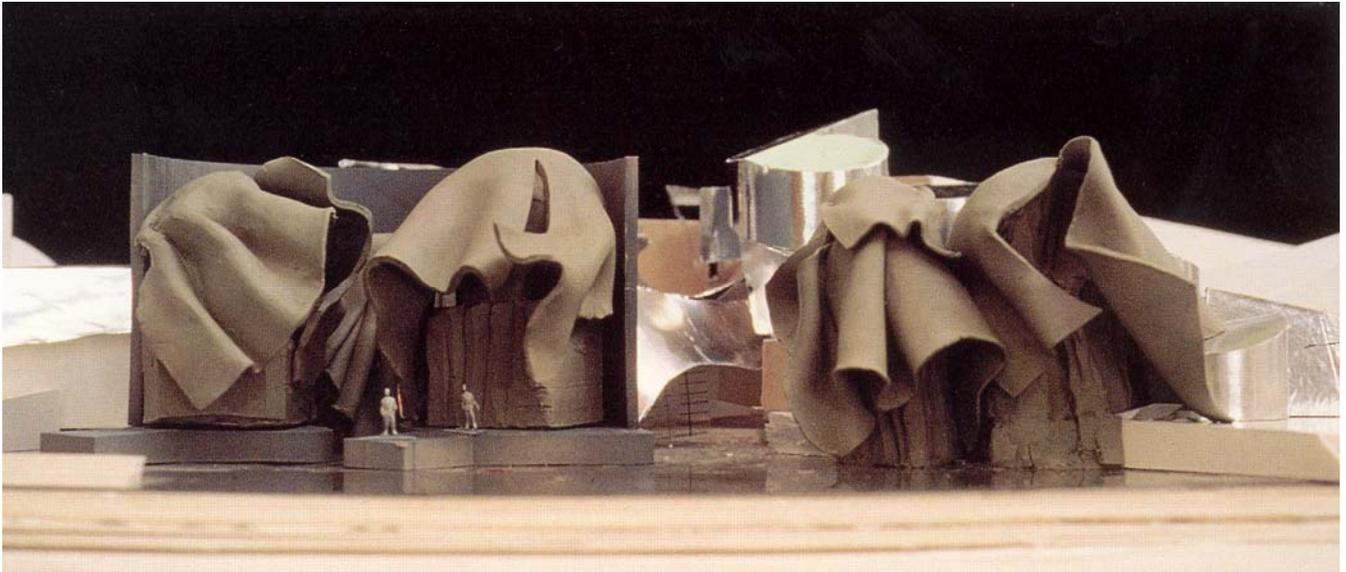


Fig. 32 Frank O. Gehry, model for the Peter Lewis residence, showing Sluter "Sentinels" (1989-95)

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Fig. 33 Frank O. Gehry, model for the Peter Lewis residence, showing red velvet entrance hall and gallery

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Fig. 34 George E. Ohr, Glazed Terracotta Vase. The Ohr-O'Keefe Museum of Art, Biloxi, Mississippi

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Fig. 35 Early Bronze Age gold cup from Ringlemere. British Museum, London

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Fig. 36a, b, c, d. Claus Sluter, Heads of Mourning Monks, Tomb of Philip the Bold. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon

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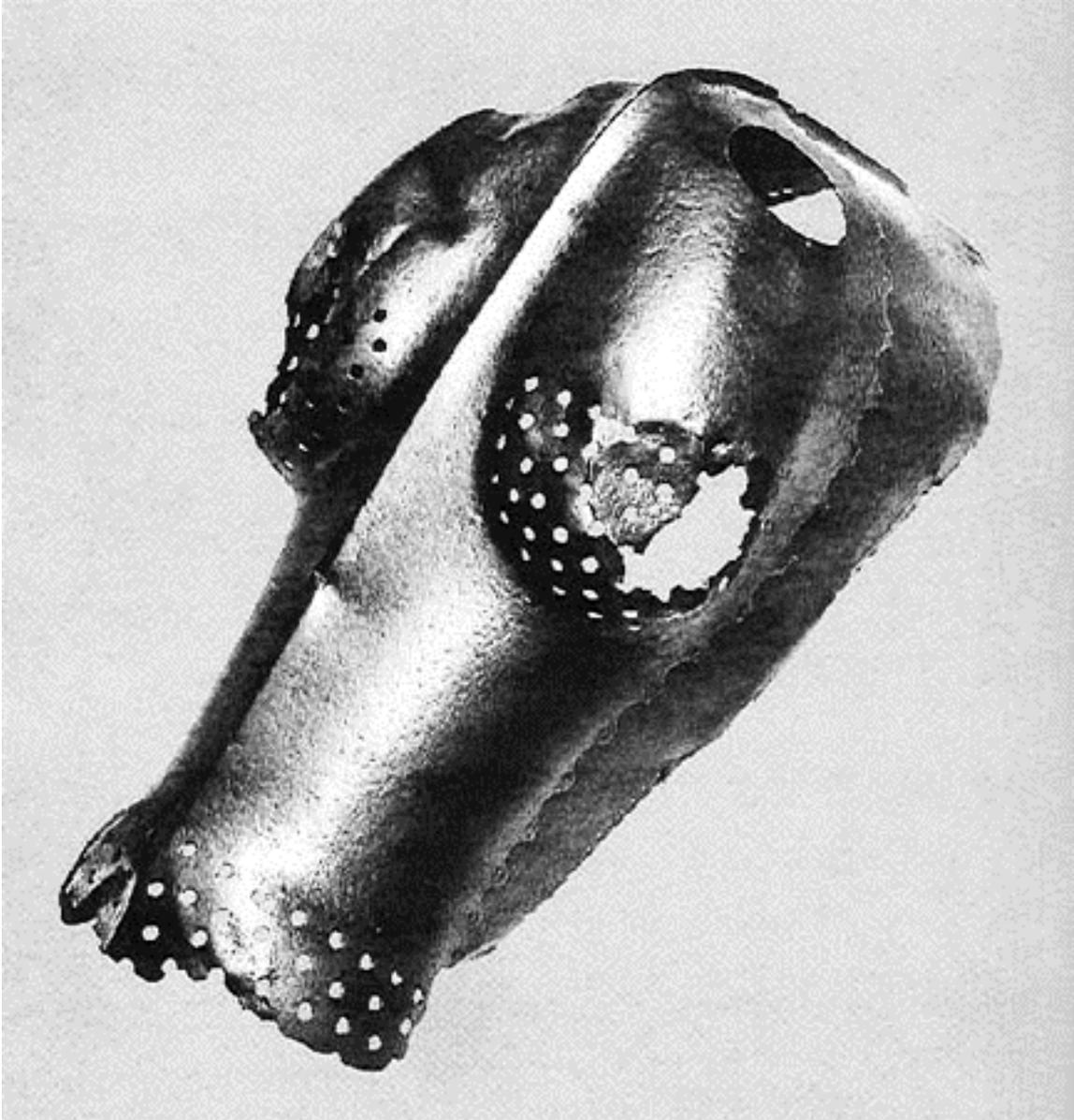


Fig. 37 The Warwick Shaffron. Royal Armouries, Leeds

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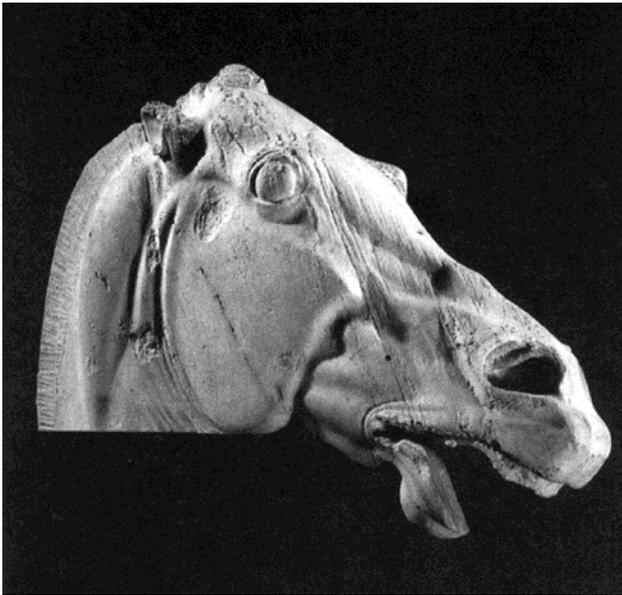


Fig. 38a. Horse's head, from the east pediment of the Parthenon. British Museum, London; b. Colossal bronze horse, formerly attributed to Donatello. Archeological Museum, Naples; c. Leonardo da Vinci, study for casting head Sforza monument horse. National Library, Madrid

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Fig. 39 Frank O. Gehry, Fish. Barcelona (1989-92)

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Fig. 40 Frank O. Gehry, Nationale-Nederlanden Insurance Building. Prague (1992-6)

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Fig. 41 Frank O. Gehry, Project for Time Warner Building at One Times Square, New York (1997)

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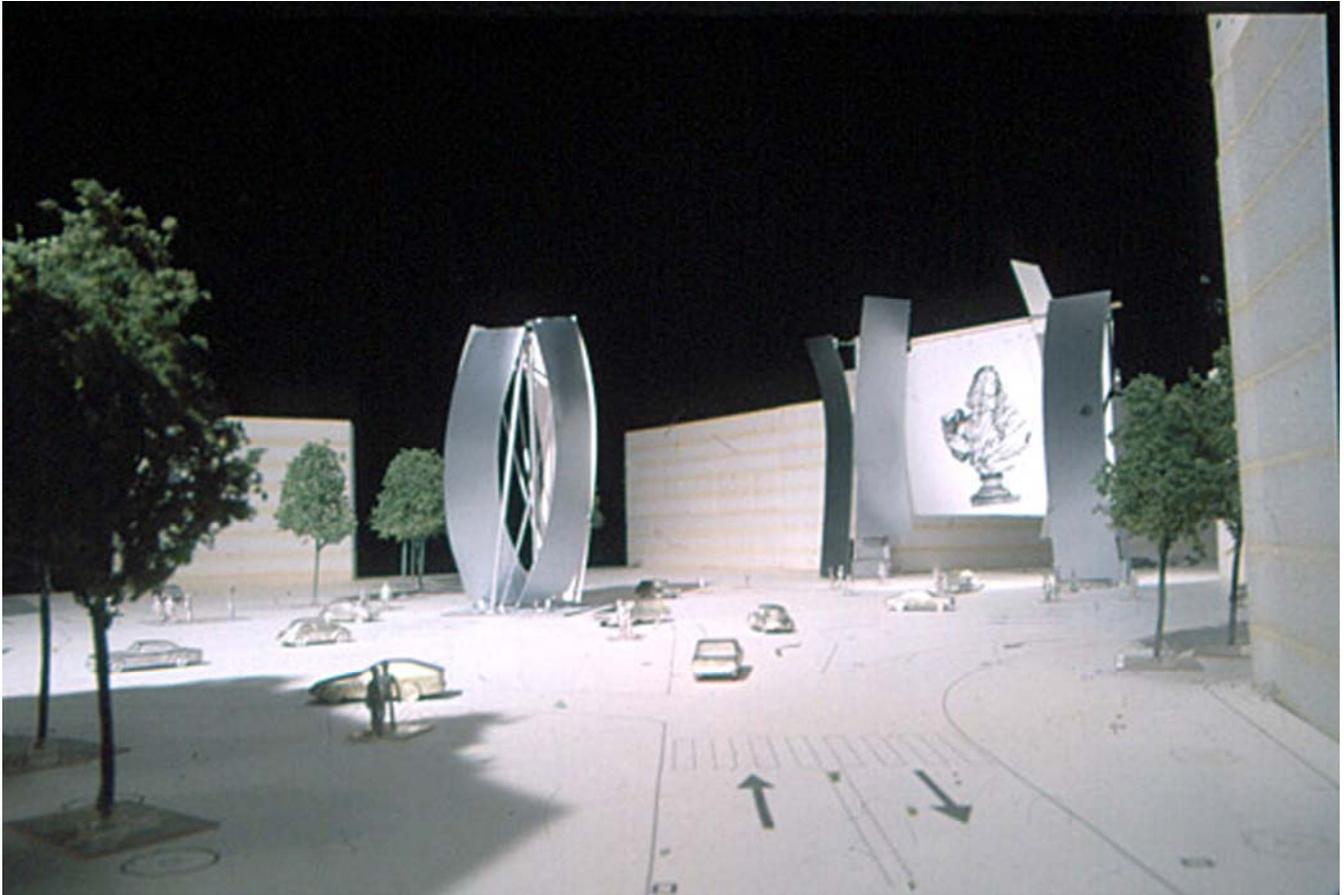


Fig. 42 Frank O. Gehry, Project for Entrance Monument, Largo Aldo Moro, Modena

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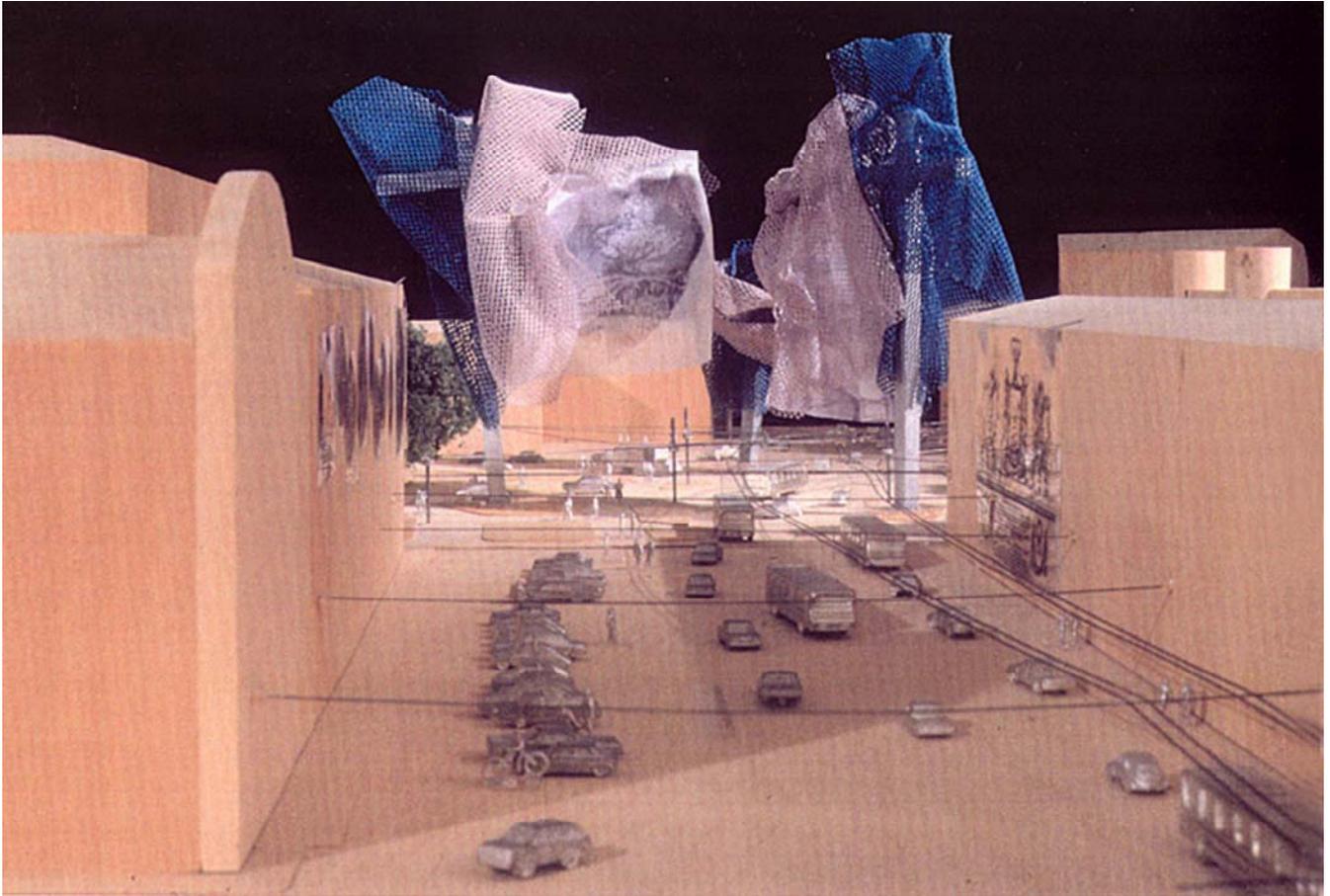


Fig. 43 Frank O. Gehry, Project for Entrance Monument, Largo Aldo Moro, Modena

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Fig. 44 Gianlorenzo Bernini, Bust of Francesco I of Modena. Galleria Estense, Modena

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