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THE HUMAN FIGURE IN DRAWING AND SCULPTURE

by

CAROLYN J. TREAT

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Senior Scholars Program

COLBY COLLEGE
1982
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My project as a Senior Scholar has been the study of the human figure through drawing and sculpture. I have worked directly from the model in order to understand the form and structure of the human body. The result of this concentrated study has been a sharpened sense of vision and an increased confidence in the use of materials for both two and three-dimensional representation.

I began my study in sculpture planning to explore many different media, but I realized it would be more beneficial to limit the materials to wire, clay and plaster. Of the three, I chose clay as the principal medium because it allowed for both quick studies and for longer more sustained work that was continued over a period of days or weeks. I also used Mechanic's Wire to complete a series of linear sculptures which were based on gesture drawings done during the fall. These wire pieces were meant to evoke the energy, movement and rhythm of the drawings.

During the month of January, I made a conscious effort to slow down the working process. As I spent more time on the work, I also increased the scale of both the drawings and the sculpture. I began seeing the figure from the center of the form: instead of defining the edges, I worked volumetrically. In the
drawings the marks became more visible, and in the sculpture
the clay’s textural quality became more important in the
surface.

When working with a particular pose in sculpture, I
tried to realize what governed it, where the weight was con-
centrated and what mood was created by the figure in relation
to its surroundings. The partial figure sculptures came out of
preconceived ideas and from my decision to explore the idea of
the reclining figure. These partial figures were very challeng-
ing because I couldn’t depend on the natural completeness of the
body to make the composition work. Instead I played with the pro-
portions of the figure and the base, so that together they formed
a coherent statement.

Part of my decision to concentrate on reclining or self-
supporting figures was made from a technical standpoint. It meant
that I wasn’t slowed down by complicated armature, and I had the
option of kiln-firing the clay pieces. I soon discovered the
limitations of this method. The requirements for size and density
of the clay discouraged me from fully exploring the three-dimen-
sional possibilities of reliefs. I wasn’t satisfied with the
stiff, flat quality of the work. A decision to cast the finished
sculpture in one-piece plaster waste molds solved the problem.
I was then able to model the clay freely, without constraints of
size. With each finished work I became more proficient with the
casting method, and eventually learned how to construct a four-
piece waste mold.

In drawing I made the same conscious decisions about
composition and form as I had in sculpture. Though I studied the whole figure, I also concentrated on the partial aspect by exploring portraiture as well as reclining and seated poses. I tried to perceive the features of the face and areas of the body not as isolated parts, but as elements dependent on each other and growing out of the whole. For the drawings I limited myself to graphite as a medium, and experimented with several kinds of paper. I found that the quality of the paper made a noticeable difference in the richness of the drawing. The papers I felt most comfortable working with were the Arches, Strathmore and Chatham, all of 100% rag. Working on large paper helped me lose an attitude of preciousness toward a drawing. I could work and rework drawings over along period of time, using the kneaded eraser as a constant tool. The quality paper sustained this method and I was able to emphasize the value changes, pushing for rich darks with the graphite and picking up highlights with the eraser.

By the end of the study I was much less dependent on the model as the visual starting point. While working on a particular piece, I allowed myself to experiment with the material and with the proportion of the form, without constant reference to the specific subject. This approach gave me fresh perspective and a necessary distance from the figure I was studying. I began to see the figure as growing out of its environment, and through subtle or dramatic changes, I could emphasize the organic quality of its forms. I discovered that by concentrating on a portion of
the body, and having to visualize what wasn't there, forced me to confront the composition and unity of the piece more directly.

As a Senior Scholar I have learned a great deal about the possibilities contained in the human figure as a subject for representation in the visual arts. This project has been a rare opportunity to do an in-depth study of the figure, using specific media to explore a specific subject. During the course of the year I have used this gift of time not only to develop and realize my own solutions but also to look at how artists have visualized the figure in the past. In particular, I studied the works of the sculptors Rodin, Maillol, Lachaise and Rosso, along with drawings by the artists Degas, Matisse and Cezanne. This Senior Scholar Project has greatly enriched my education as an artist, the independent nature of the study leaving me free to follow the unpredictable path of my ideas.
The following descriptions correspond chronologically to the photographs included in the report.

**WIRE GESTURES**

1) These are a series of wire sculptures made from specific drawings. I tried to use the wire as a continuous, expressive line that would capture the movement of a particular pose, while also adding a three-dimensional quality to the gesture.

2), 3), & 4) Close-up views of some wire gestures

**DRAWINGS (GRAPHITE)**

5) DEANN - This drawing was a breakthrough for me because it was the first one that I had worked on for more than one session. Until then I had been doing more linear, gesture drawings. After this study, the background became more important and the figures began to have a sense of place.

6) VALERIE - I was interested in this pose because of the twist in the body and the foreshortening involved. I wanted the whole figure in the composition while still placing emphasis on the model's mood and expression. I used this same pose later on for one of the first reclining figure sculptures.

7) UNTITLED - I liked the space created by the curves of the body in this pose. I tried to convey the soft, relaxed mood of the sleeping figure by concentrating on the curve of the stomach and the weight of the head on the arms.

8) SELF-PORTRAIT I - This was the first in a series of portraits and my first attempt at a self-portrait. I was very conscious of being true to the image and of including every detail in this study. I found the practice of self-portraiture valuable because it forced me to use extreme concentration and to overcome the fear and stigma attached to reproducing one's own image.
9) SHEILA - In this portrait I tried to convey the strong presence of the model. Most interesting for me is the way that the strength in her expression comes through with strong, textural pencil marks. I'm not totally satisfied with the result, the features are off-balance and the pose is rather stiff, but the drawing is important because it shows a new understanding of the medium.

10) JILL - While working on a clay portrait-bust of Jill, I decided to do a drawing in order to gain a new perspective. Had I begun on larger paper, I think the portrait would have been stronger; it seems to outgrow its boundaries. I had fun doing the detail on the blouse and with the subtle value shifts. The portrait has a soft quality I find appealing.

11) SELF-PORTRAIT II - In this second self-portrait, I began with more of a preconceived composition. I wanted the surroundings to be as important as the portrait, and I chose objects that were symbolic to me. In this drawing I finally departed from the central, straightforward approach that I used in the previous portraits. The lighting was important in this study, I worked at night using artificial illumination in an attempt to convey the atmosphere through strong value contrasts.

12) OTT - This felt like another breakthrough for me, the marks are very visible and directional, creating an all-over surface quality I hadn't previously achieved. I wanted to show a male figure in a non-traditional pose, one that would bring forth a quiet, contemplative, subdued feeling. Because the figure is not centrally positioned, the relation between the figure and the draped table creates unexpected shapes that become abstract forms in themselves.

13) SHARON IN CHINESE ROBE - I feel that this drawing combines and resolves some of the problems investigated in earlier drawings. I find the composition most interesting and successful of all the drawings and the use of the graphite freer and more expressive. Working large(approx. twice the size of the others) made a dramatic difference in the surface treatment. I could really explore the drapery folds, the soft quality of the robe in contrast to the hard volume of the wooden chair. As a portrait I feel that this study does more to communicate the model's mood and character than any previous attempts.
14) **RECLINING FIGURE** - This was one of the first reclining poses that I worked on, where the base began to assume a more important role. The relationship between figure and base is still awkward but I'm beginning to understand its importance in the composition.

15) **RECLINING FIGURE** - This piece was a quick study in which I was most concerned with the fluidity of the pose. I feel there is a sense of motion, continuous from the head through the arms and legs and connecting to the base.

16) Another view of figure 15.

17) **RECLINING FIGURE** - Another quick study, this piece goes still further toward connecting figure and base. I am more conscious of the edges of the base, and an interesting tension is created where the figure pulls out to the edge, defining the composition with strong angles.

18) Another view of figure 17.

19) **DEANN WITH DRAPERY** - (CLAY) This study was significant because I worked on it over a long period and concentrated on proportion and detail in a more academic way. I wanted to put the same attention to detail in the base by exaggerating the drapery folds. I like the configuration created by the figure in relation to the drape, there is an interesting play between the curves of the folds and the angles of the body, creating pockets of space and shadow.

20), 21), & 22) More views of figure 19.

23) **SCOTT SLEEPING** - This piece required many sessions of work as I struggled to resolve proportion in the figure and still communicate the weight and relaxed quality of the sleeping figure. I concentrated on showing the massiveness of the body while also trying to convey the very rounded, soft forms and the twist in the upper torso. I tried to extend the mood of the figure throughout the piece by softening the edge of the figure where it met the base, fusing the two in some areas and separating them in others.
24) Another view of figure 23.

25) **Throne** - This piece was a departure from the previous sculpture in that it was completed almost independent of the model. I began it as a study for a full seated figure and put it away unfinished for later work. When I eventually uncovered it, I found an interesting partial figure. As I worked on it again, I tried to stress the organic aspect and to create a tension between the lower portion of the body which is a part of the base, and the upper half which seems to want to twist and come away from the base.

26) **Fetal Form I** - This figure came out of a conscious effort to explore the idea of the partial figure composition. I was interested in this particular pose for its fetal quality that suggested a feeling of growth. I like the ambiguity between figure and base; the possibility that the body is either dissolving into the base, or growing out of it. The surface is integral to the whole piece, I am finally using the clay's textural quality as a unifying element.

27) Another view of figure 26.

28) **Fetal Form II** - After completing the first fetal study, I decided to further explore the idea and push to the extreme the figure/base relationship. In this piece, the body seems to be emerging as from a cocoon, the ambiguity is even stronger in this study, between the figure as it dissolves into its base and as it breaks away from it. I tried to show the shapes of the body pushing through the surface of the base but never totally independent of it. I feel this piece has a compositional unity of shape and form lacking in some of the previous sculptures.

29) Another view of figure 28.