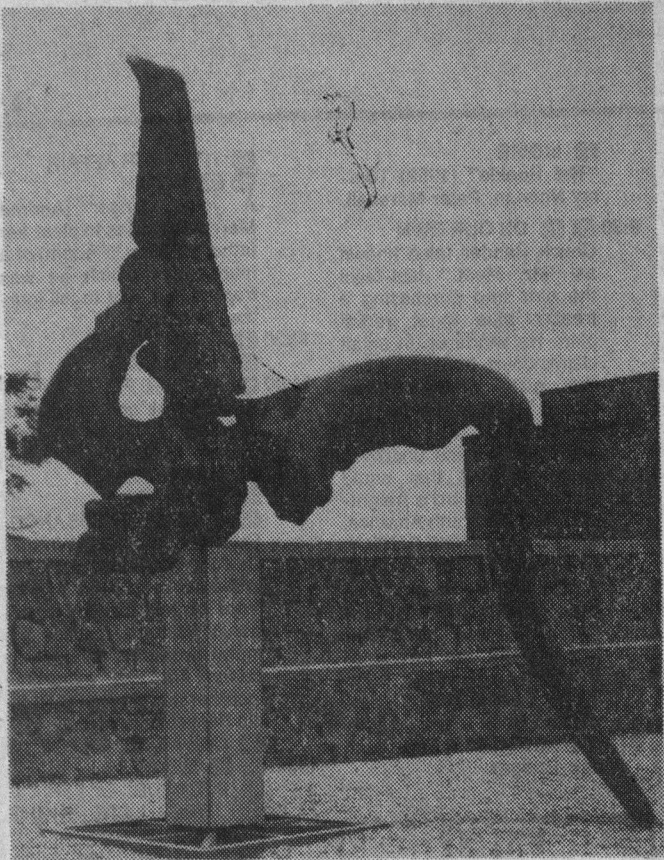


Artist
10-30-77



This is a ram's skull by sculptor Jack Zajaz.

Wally Trabing's Mostly about People



Visit With A Sculptor

Jack Zajac was suffering the "pudgies" when I walked into his drafty barn studio on the UCSC campus.

The tall handsome sculptor was having a hell of a time with his giant, gracefully swooping embryo of a statue he calls "Ram's Skull With Broken Horn." He had whacked off a couple of pieces because they didn't give the right feeling.

Exposed chicken wire of the broken horn jutted maybe 12 feet into the air; the other horn swirled in rough and smooth plastered elegance in a 22-foot arc that a man could walk under.

Talk about birth pangs. Zajac, professor of art—internationally honored sculptor—(who later bought my lunch because he said he had recently sold a piece for \$37,000 to the Museum of Fine Art in Honolulu), stood there spattered with plaster, shaking his head in disgust. But then me made a kind of helpless gesture.

"Just when you begin to get sensible and ready to throw the whole damn thing over, that bitch Muse comes along and pecks you on the cheek," he growled.

This work is destined for a prestigious exhibit at the Lincoln Center - Fordham University Mall in New York. It will probably be cast in fiberglass and later in bronze. Other Zajac creations are in the museum of modern art in New York and S.F. and in the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington D.C.

The artist of 48 years has a muscular build. Such work requires physical strength, dogged determination and infinite patience. When the plaster casting is finished it is cast in fiberglass. Pieces of it are numbered and ultimately sent to Rome to be reassembled and cast in bronze. Expensive? The man shuddered: "My foundry bill last year was \$45,000."

Another frustration: "You may start with a grand idea, but within 20 seconds, you realize how imperfect your concepts are and you can end up whimpering."

A fragment of casting he had temporarily wired to the statue to guide a new curve of wet plaster, slipped a bit.

He studied the new position and mumbled: "Well, I guess it is what God met it to be!"

* * *

Art Bloomfield of the S.F. Examiner wrote in May: "Jack Zajac is the Michelangelo of the 20th century, the sculptor who, better than anyone else I can think of, marries a high Renaissance monumentality with the less literal and narrative-oriented esthetic of our day."

Well, I don't understand that highfalutin stuff. I guess it means he's pretty good.

We left his soaring plaster skeleton for lunch. I had caught the man in the middle of a creative struggle. "I might come right back after lunch and kick that piece off," he said.

His growling has a sense of humor to it; he is an open man, easily letting you in on his mind; he seems to poo-poo the art world per se, yet he admittedly is a man driven by urgency to get on with his work, telling of one time he worked every day for almost a year, sculpting. He is excited about the work, but at times, "wanting to kick the living hell out of it."

Behind the frustration, the physical exhaustion, the cold, drafty isolation is his the solid the awareness, that, as he once said, "As long as each piece is difficult to do, I know I am all right. If pieces get easier to do— —it's dangerous. If a sculpture piece comes along easily, you know you've done it before and you're just repeating."

Zajac is also noted for his Easter goats, his running water and wave pieces, his swans and curving almond halves.

Sculpting, he said, is being alert to the creative possibilities as you go along. Decision making along the way is as crucial as the original idea.

He said the idea for the now famous ram's head series came from his squeezed fist. "I was squeezing a lump of wax at random. A fragment looked like a ram's horn and I started to develop the it."

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How does one enjoy art or sculpture one doesn't understand?

He answered, simply, "A child makes no claim on how or what a thing should be. We (adults) build up filters and dogmas that stand in our way."

He was anxious to return to work. Driving back, he said, "I've always had this fantasy about a studio with classical music playing, with warmth, and color. I've hated all my studios.

How would he like to see his work accepted?

"I'd like it to exist without the necessity of critical prattle— - to be accepted as a kind of totality of experience.

"I'd like, when parts of it are dug up 2,000 years from now, to have people say, 'That's not bad.'"