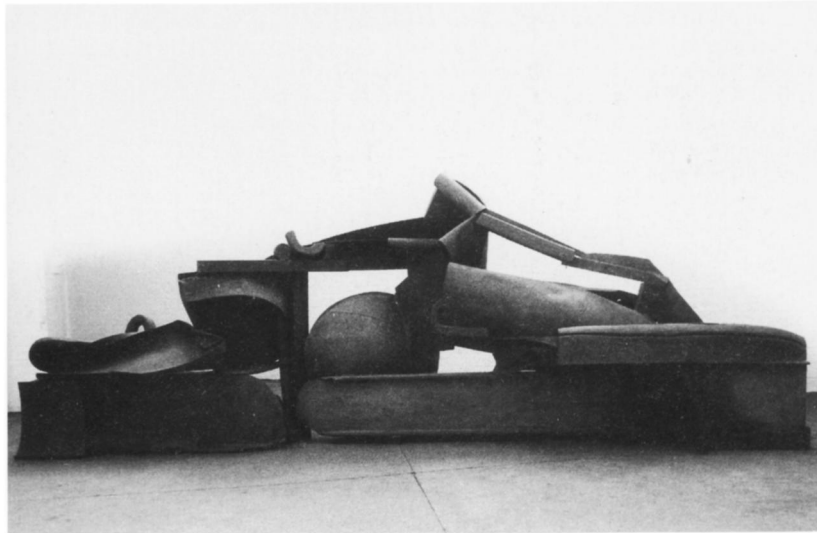




73. *Figures in the Tour Eiffel restaurant*, by Alvaro Guevara. c.1918. 43.2 by 49.5 cm. (Exh. Michael Parkin Ltd.).



74. *Rape of the Sabines*, by Anthony Caro. 1985-86. Steel, rusted and varnished. 222.2 by 603.6 by 144.7 cm. (Exh. Waddington Galleries).

ings, for which she has always been best-known, show an intelligent absorption of lessons learnt from Modigliani and Gaudier (as with Edward Wolfe); free-flowing, succinct, with an edge of wit and an ability to suggest volume through the simplest line. Her painting developed considerably under Fry's influence, an influence that seems to have gone both ways. London scenes, portraits and still lifes are sober, economical, low-toned and constructed with a water-tight emphasis on volume. They are often in marked contrast to the ebullient drawings of the same period. It is the works of these years that earn Nina Hamnett a footnote in modern English painting and they were rightly to the fore in **Michael Parkin's** exhibition *Nina Hamnett and her circle* (closed 12th November; at the **Hull University Collection** to 5th December).<sup>4</sup> The 'and her circle' proved to be almost limitless and works were included by the Omega artists, as well as Sickert, John, Cocteau, Minton, Colquhoun and Freud. A contemporary of Nina Hamnett was the Chilean Alvaro Guevara and there was a typical restaurant scene by him of c.1916 (Fig.73), very close in spirit to Hamnett's contemporaneous drawings (and depicting incidentally one of her favoured haunts). This exuberant exhibition and the generously-illustrated, well-researched biography might, one hopes, help to recover much lost work by Nina Hamnett and raise, perhaps, her footnote to the page itself.

RICHARD SHONE

### London, Waddington Gallery & Knoedler Gallery Anthony Caro

Earlier this year, Anthony Caro exhibited a group of small bronzes and drawings at Acquavella in New York; these were modelled and drawn directly from the figure – the first time Caro had worked in this way since his student days. Caro's London dealers, John Kasmin and Leslie Waddington, declined to show such conventionally figurative pieces here. But Kasmin has recently exhibited a group of *Variations on an Indian theme*, delicately patinated bronze sculptures, consisting of intimately modelled forms displayed in complex, constructed 'frames'. These were explicitly, if loosely, based upon an eleventh-century B.C. Chandella period carving of flying female warriors. Waddington exhibited a group of rather more familiar 'Table Pieces', and three large constructed works, in rusted and varnished steel, *Egyptian table*, *High table*, and *Scamander* (Fig.77); a fourth such work, *Rape of the Sabines* (Fig.74), was installed at the Economist Building (both exhibitions to 25th October).

All these pieces seem certain to intensify the controversy which Caro's recent directions have caused among those who follow his sculpture. For, in the 1960s, Caro was celebrated for what *The Times* called 'out-and-out originality'; and yet the traditional, even conventional, character of these recent Caro's can hardly be denied. The *Indian theme* sculptures, with their intricate passages and, in one case, even gilded surfaces, have more in common with Alfred Gilbert and the 'New Sculpture' of the 1880s, than with, say, the 'New Sculpture' of the 1980s.

But this is not the first time that Caro's way of working has appeared to undergo far-reaching changes. Caro was born in 1924; as a young man, he spent much of his school holidays in the studio of Charles Wheeler, a prominent academic sculptor, best known for his telamons, carved *in situ*, at the Bank of England. About the time Caro worked for him, Wheeler would have been carving his heroic figures of *Art* and

*Industry* for the Franco-British Exhibition in Paris. Caro's father remained implacably opposed to his desire to pursue sculpture as a profession; under family pressure, Caro read engineering at Christ's College, Cambridge. Finally, he was able to take up a place to study sculpture at the Royal Academy Schools, in 1947.

Through his catalogue [1981] of as many of Caro's student works as he could identify, Dieter Blume revealed how skilfully and how diligently Caro had absorbed what Wheeler and the Academicians had to offer him. But, from 1951 to 1953, Caro worked as an assistant to Henry Moore. At this time Moore was making pieces such as the highly abstracted *Reclining figure*, 1951, an example of which is now in the Arts Council collection; later in the year, he turned to more volumetric versions of the same theme. Moore was also assimilating the influence of a visit to Greece which he made in 1951; his serenely draped figures, with their vigorously rucked and modelled clothing, confirmed his revaluation of the classical tradition. Little has survived of Caro's own work from this time; but he was soon to react against Moore as he had against Wheeler. Caro emerged from his formative years as an enthusiastic, if sometimes lumpen, expressionistic modeller, whose squelchy figures were cast, often inelegantly, in bronze.

All this changed again in 1959 when Caro met Clement Greenberg; Caro went to New York and became friendly with the post-painterly abstractionists, including Kenneth Noland, Helen Frankenthaler, and Jules Olitski. Greenberg also introduced Caro to the welded metal sculptures of David Smith. Caro's wife, Sheila Girling, has written that the effect of this visit was 'to call in question dependence on the conventions of traditional culture, and open the way to a more direct and free sculpture'. On Caro's return to England, the following year, he made *Twenty-four hours*, a piece which consists of three shaped planes of roughly cut painted steel. This work announced Caro's adoption of new materials and working methods; throughout the

<sup>1</sup>*Sickert & Thanet*. Extracts from Sickert's lectures edited by Paul Pelowski. Unpaginated, 3 b. & w. ills. (Kent County Library, 1986), 50 pence.

<sup>2</sup>*Edward Wolfe*. By John Russell Taylor.

<sup>3</sup>*Nina Hamnett: queen of bohemia*. By Denise Hooker. 288 pp. including 8 col. pls. and numerous b. & w. ills. (Constable), £15. ISBN 0-09-466970-8.

<sup>4</sup>*Nina Hamnett and her circle*. Introduction by Denise Hooker. Unpaginated, 9 b. & w. figs. (Michael Parkin Fine Art Ltd., 1986).



75. *Variation on an Indian theme: 1*, by Anthony Caro. 1984-86. Gilded and patinated bronze. 74.9 by 74.9 by 33 cm. (Exh. Knoedler Gallery).



76. *Variation on an Indian theme: 5*, by Anthony Caro. 1985-86. Patinated bronze. 80 by 81.3 by 44 cm. (Exh. Knoedler Gallery).

1960s, he made use of preconstituted industrial elements, which he transformed and re-combined through cutting and welding. Caro's wife often painted the finished works in bright household colours.

Over the next few years, Caro began to make those sculptures for which he is still best known – works like *Midday* (1960), *Early one morning* (1962), and *Pompadour* (1963), all of which were included in his exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1963. In the catalogue introduction, Bryan Robertson wrote that Caro had produced sculptures 'without any outside correspondences or parallels'. He stated that Caro's work contained 'no references to nature'. Caro, Robertson claimed, 'is really on his own'. Nonetheless, Caro's work seemed to reflect the prevalent *Zeitgeist* of the 1960s. His sculpture was conspicuously 'new', urban, and American-inspired – the aesthetic equivalent of the white-heat of Harold Wilson's technological revolution.

Throughout the 1960s, Caro's influence as both a sculptor, and a teacher of sculpture at St Martin's School of Art, continued to grow. Caro attracted a voluminous literature, written by American formalist critics. The starting point for their arguments was what Michael Fried called Caro's 'radical abstraction'. Similarly, for Clement Greenberg, Caro's 'breakthrough' was related to the 'radical unlikeness to nature' of his work. Both Fried and Greenberg argued that a Caro sculpture did not rely on 'illusion', but rather depended upon the creation of a non-referential 'syntax', which Greenberg defined as 'the relations of its discrete parts'.

Some critics (though not Greenberg himself) seemed to imply that the aesthetic value of Caro's sculpture depended upon the resoluteness with which he had pressed these technical and stylistic innovations. Such commentators tended to reserve their most extravagant praise for works such as *Prairie* (1967), in which an extended expanse of yellow steel appears to hover parallel to the ground, and a couple of feet above it. For Fried, *Prairie* went 'further towards completely revoking the ordinary conditions of physicality than any other

sculpture in Caro's *œuvre*'; while Richard Whelan wrote that this work 'changes forever our idea of what we can expect and gives us a new vision of the possible'. Such readings of Caro's work persist to this day; in his new book *Anthony Caro*,<sup>1</sup> Terry Fenton distinguishes Caro from Smith on the grounds that Caro's sculpture 'did not symbolize or represent [...] the shapes that composed it were just shapes'. It was, 'a new sculpture that aspired to the "condition of music"'.

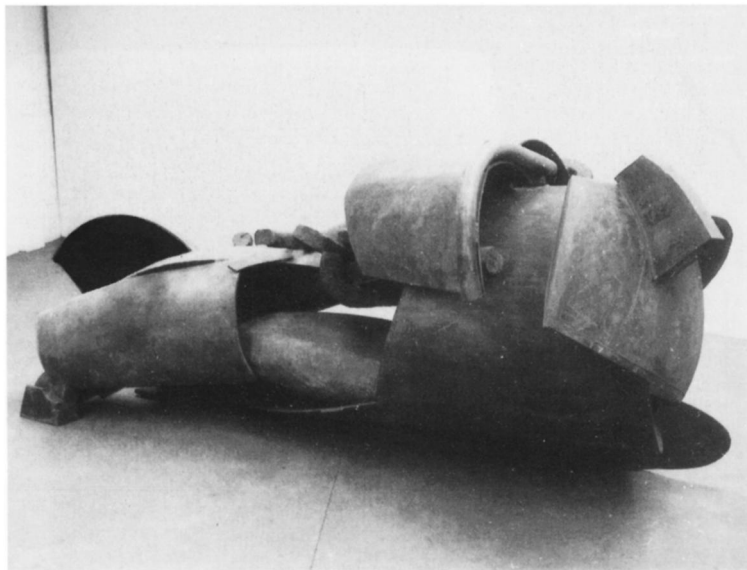
Caro has sometimes seemed to endorse such interpretations. As late as 1979, he said that 'in some new way', he foresaw his work becoming more rather than less abstract. But works like *Midnight gap*, 1976-78, already showed such a complex textured surface of bumps and hollows that, to the present reviewer at least, Caro's construction seemed to be seeking 'to convert itself into the modelling out of which it first sprang'. Similarly many of the *Floor pieces*, and most of the *Writing pieces*, of the early 1980s manifested 'a barely disguised, even if vigorously denied, pursuit of something which . . . is so redolent with affective and physical illusion and allusion that it can legitimately be described as "imagery"'. Not everyone, therefore, was surprised when Caro began to make figurative pieces alongside his abstract steel sculptures, and combined the two ways of working in his *Variations on an Indian theme* (Figs. 75 and 76).

And yet there can be no doubt that these developments pose a challenge to the existing American, critical literature on Caro, which explains the importance of his work almost exclusively in terms of a 'breakthrough' to a 'radical abstraction' which went beyond Smith's in its thoroughgoing anti-anthropomorphism. Caro's recent works are among the most attractive and accomplished of his career; and yet they do not seem to want to 'go beyond' anything. Rather, they reach back to recuperate elements of the sculptural pursuit – like modelling, casting, figuration, surface patinas, imagery and illusion – which Caro had jettisoned on the way to his break-through.

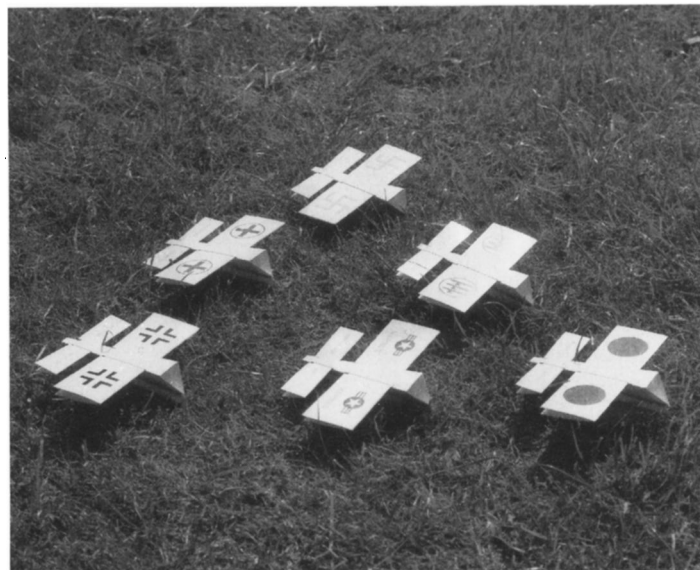
All this, of course, strongly suggests that the qualities of Caro's art require an explanation in terms other than those of the 'onward of art', and an 'advance' towards abstraction. Indeed, in the light of these recent developments in Caro's work, the voluminous American 'reading' of his sculpture seems more and more tendentious, the comparison with Smith, less and less rewarding.

American formalist criticism, following Greenberg's example, has consistently tended to disregard, if not to denigrate, the achievement of Henry Moore. For example, in his book on Caro [1975], William Rubin argued that any sculpture that rises vertically before the spectator, 'retains by that very fact an inference of anthropomorphism even if it is not monolithic in character'. And so, Rubin maintained, Caro's sculpture attained a more radical degree of abstraction than David Smith's, 'as much by virtue of its horizontality as its morphology'. And yet anyone who has attended to Henry Moore's work knows not only where the much vaunted 'horizontal' of works like *Midday* came from, but also that it no more excludes 'an inference of anthropomorphism' than does verticality. But the American critics could not admit this. It was axiomatic for them that, as Fried once put it, 'Caro's sculptures reject almost everything that Moore's stand for'. But most of Moore's figures did not 'stand' for anything; rather, as Caro seems to have noted, they *reclined*.

Formalist criticism will have enormous difficulties in attempting to come to terms with Caro's recent achievement. In his new book, Fenton struggles manfully to do so, but is clearly somewhat bewildered by the *Flats* of the 1970s which, he revealingly admits, 'looked like Henry Moore sculptures rolled flat'. Some of Caro's more recent works, like *Scamander*, involve curves, cavities and volumes. They look *very* like, say, the *Working model for reclining figure (internal and external forms)* (1951), or the large *Reclining figure (external forms)* (1953-54), upon which Moore was working about the time that Caro served as his assistant.



77. *Scamander*, by Anthony Caro. 1985-86. Steel rusted and varnished. 137 by 315 by 152 cm. (Exh. Knoedler Gallery, London).



78. *Arcadian gliders*, by Ian Hamilton Finlay and Steve Wheatley. Nine cardboard model aeroplanes made up from a kit. (Exh. Crafts Council).

This is not to impugn Caro's originality; it is rather to raise questions about the tradition to which his best work belongs. Caro's recent work confirms that the sources upon which he has drawn have been diverse and eclectic: it would be foolish to deny that they include American post-painterly aesthetics, Clement Greenberg, even certain aspects of David Smith; but equally they also include – and, it should be stressed, always have included – something of Wheeler's classicism, and, as Greenberg himself once acknowledged, even English engineering design. . . . But the most powerful influence of all has been none of these things: rather it has been Henry Moore. 'I suppose he was a kind of father figure to me', Caro wrote on Moore's recent death. 'Really I learned how to be a sculptor from him – I followed him yet reacted against him, as a son does'.<sup>2</sup> But these days, he seems to be, as it were, 'coming home' to Moore's humanist tradition on his own terms.

In the future, critics will come to regard the much vaunted 'break-through' in Caro's work as an interlude, or a diversion. Far from drawing out from him his greatest achievements, American art, and American criticism, may in fact have temporarily, and partially, diverted Caro from the tradition which had most to offer him, and to which he might have made his most significant contribution. The most conspicuous technical weakness in Caro's sculpture is its resolute planarity, its *pictorial* flatness; this is visible not only in *Twenty four hours*, but even in *Midnight gap*, and most recently in the *Indian theme* sculptures. Caro's sculptures tend to work from a single point of view; Moore's possess a complete cylindrical roundness, a richer and fuller expression of sculptural form. But Caro's American experience encouraged him to accept this limitation, rather than to struggle beyond it, and to overcome it. This formal limitation seems, however, to be but an emblem of a deeper *malaise*. Moore's art, in contrast to Caro's, never aspired to 'radical abstraction'. Rather it was rooted in natural and organic form, and ultimately in the expressive potential of the human body itself. Moore sought to affirm

a humanist and yet spiritual vision in fully sculptural terms. At his best, Caro wanted to do something similar; but the strait-jacket of fashionable American theory and practices deflected and inhibited him. Now, it seems, he is courageously endeavouring to rid himself of those constraints.

PETER FULLER

<sup>1</sup>Anthony Caro. By Terry Fenton. 128 pp. inc. 172 ill., 98 in col. (Thames & Hudson, 1986), £12.95. ISBN 0-500-09172-2.

<sup>2</sup>See 'In Memoriam Henry Moore', *Art Monthly* [October 1986], p.3.

### London, Crafts Council The Artist Publisher

The Crafts Council's show *The Artist Publisher* has the subtitle *A Survey by Coracle Press*. The initiated would know that Coracle Press means the gallery and press run by Simon Cutts from his premises in Camberwell, South London, but nowhere does his name appear in the credits or as compiler of the exhibition catalogue.

The catalogue is divided into twelve sections, only the first of which has any introductory text, mainly a collection of quotes from letters to or from Simon Cutts and from other exhibition catalogues on the same topic. This first section is called *Self-publishing as a Critical Alternative*, and Cutts explains how 'in some senses the heading for this section could have been taken for the title of the whole show, for in a large proportion of individual and collective instances represented, the artist (or in some cases gallery) has exercised his choice to present his ideas in . . . self-published form in order to subvert an "Establishment" . . . who would be either deaf or unsympathetic to his philosophical or practical ambitions'. Note that Cutts writes about the artist's *ideas* finding a wider audience, rather than the artist's works. Idea Art has now passed into art history, recognised as a lively and often anarchic episode involving artists in America and Europe from the late 1950s

for about two decades. Idea artworks usually did not exist as physical objects; their domain was in the philosophical or political stance of the artist, and as such could not be presented by the Establishment as commercial currency to be bought and sold way beyond the control of the artist-originator. Idea Art enabled artists to subvert the gallery-dealer-Establishment system and gave them more power to create a 'critical alternative'. This critical alternative usually took the form of printed documentation referring the reader back to the original concept. But the problem with this printed documentation was and is that it is quite difficult to present it cold, trapped under glass in desk cases, in a gallery context. And this is exactly what the Crafts Council exhibition does with the material.

Why, I wonder, did the Crafts Council offer its exhibition space for this show? It exists to promote the crafts, and a good many of the works included in *The Artist Publisher* are cheaply produced and crudely printed. Its exhibition programming is interesting, for it has set alongside *The Artist Publisher* a celebration of the working life of Roger Powell, a consummate craftsman, who has spent his life making precious and unique bookbindings. Certainly exhibition programming like this highlights the strong contrasts between the two shows and the two alternative paths to the production of art. Also, why did Simon Cutts take up the Crafts Council's exhibition offer? He has his own gallery and recently opened a shop at the Kettle's Yard Gallery, Cambridge. But perhaps he felt it was time he offered a survey of the past two and a half decades of the critical alternative in London, even though he would be aware of the risks of making the material seem sterile in such a context. Cutts and the Crafts Council have been fully alert to this problem and have set up a shop in the gallery as part of the installation. This offers an opportunity to examine and buy a good range of the works otherwise seen unopened or partly obscured in the glass cases by artists such as Richard Long or Ian Hamilton Finlay (see Figs.78 and 79).