John Acorn

'I'm not very fond of labels,' John Acorn said recently, 'but I'll accept the term 'organic' since it is true that I am interested in the origin of things, their development, their transformation and their death.'

People have described Acorn's work as 'organic' primarily because he has been able to capture the feeling of vitality that is the nature of living things. But regardless of labels or descriptions, the sculptural extensions which express his awareness of change and time have earned for him national recognition as one of the South's most promising contemporary sculptors.

If he's lucky, it's Saturday and he can do some welding in the basement workshop of the Clemson University Architectural Department classroom building, or some casting at a recently constructed foundry in the backyard of his home at Pendleton. If it's a weekday Acorn considers himself still lucky for he will be working with his Clemson students in the same basement workshop, moving about the debris of bronze, steel, aluminum, wood, styrofoam and fiberglas to guide, but not direct, the efforts of South Carolina's first real generation of sculptors.

In his own work, and through the work of his students, Acorn feels a deep sense of compatibility with the times. The steel, aluminum, styrofoam and fiberglas represent the materials of a new century that began before the numbers themselves have had time to change. 'If we are to become more aware of the nature of existence, this understanding must encompass the materials of the twentieth century,' he said. In this aspect, Acorn feels that the sculptor has the advantage over other artists in that his forms can better express the nature of existence. For Acorn, 'contemporary sculpture should be the distinct art form of the turn of the century.'

With a firm belief that technology has usurped the artist's literal theme, artists such as Acorn are

John Acorn

Born Patterson, New Jersey, 1937; lives in Pendleton, South Carolina, where he is Associate Professor Department of Architecture, Clemson University. Studied Montclair State College with Paul Harris; Cranbrook Academy of Art, M.F.A., 1961

Listed:

Who's Who in American Art

Selected Group Exhibitions:

Silvermine Guild of Artists
High Museum of Art
Winston-Salem Gallery
Gibbes Art Gallery
Mint Museum of Art
Weatherspoon Art Gallery
Pembroke State College
Cranbrook Art Gallery
Florida State University
Ball State University
Birmingham Festival of Arts
Guild of South Carolina Artists
Piedmont Painting and Sculpture Exhibition
Asheville Art Museum
Columbia Museum of Art
Clemson University
Norton Gallery of Art
Telfair Academy of Arts
Loch Haven Art Center
Tampa Art Institute
University of Florida Gallery
Jacksonville Art Museum

Public Collections Include:

Greenville County Museum of Art, Greenville, South Carolina
South Carolina Arts Commission (State Collection), Columbia, South Carolina
Mint Museum of Art, Charlotte, North Carolina
Wesley Foundation, Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina

moving into the expanded boundries of visual acuity and emotion to produce new dimensions and value references. It is interesting to note his observations concerning the material and psychological growth of South Carolina.

'There is a completely new outlook toward man,' he stated. 'Here in the South we are looking closely at ourselves. Today's emphasis is on the why, and there is no great difference between scientific inquiry and art. Both are involved with the same questioning. No one is looking for easy answers anymore. We have finally recognized that in solving one problem, two additional ones will arise.'

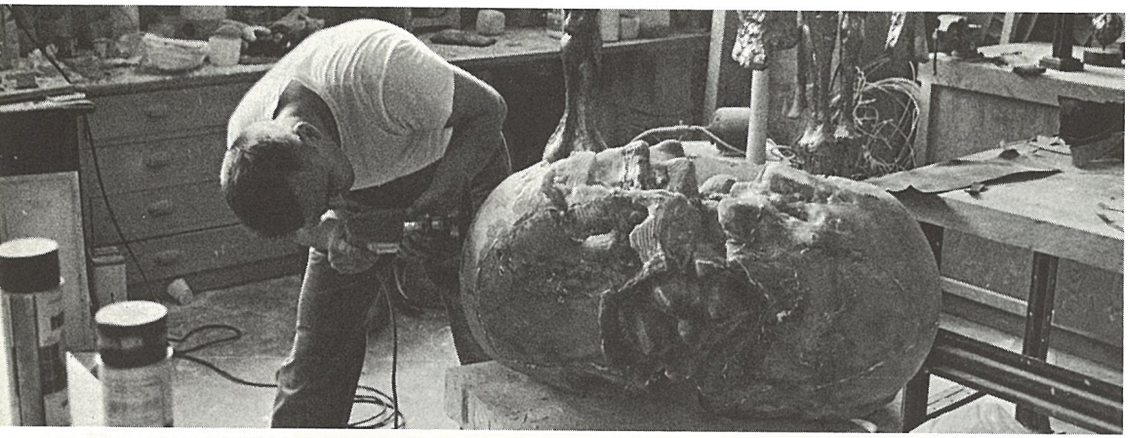
It is the old view of the artist as Everyman that Acorn asks to be reconsidered. Traditional answers are now no-answers. The questions have, in fact, become more important than the answers, and the name of things, of life, of existence, of energy, of underlying structures, of interiors as they are manifested in exteriors are the questions.

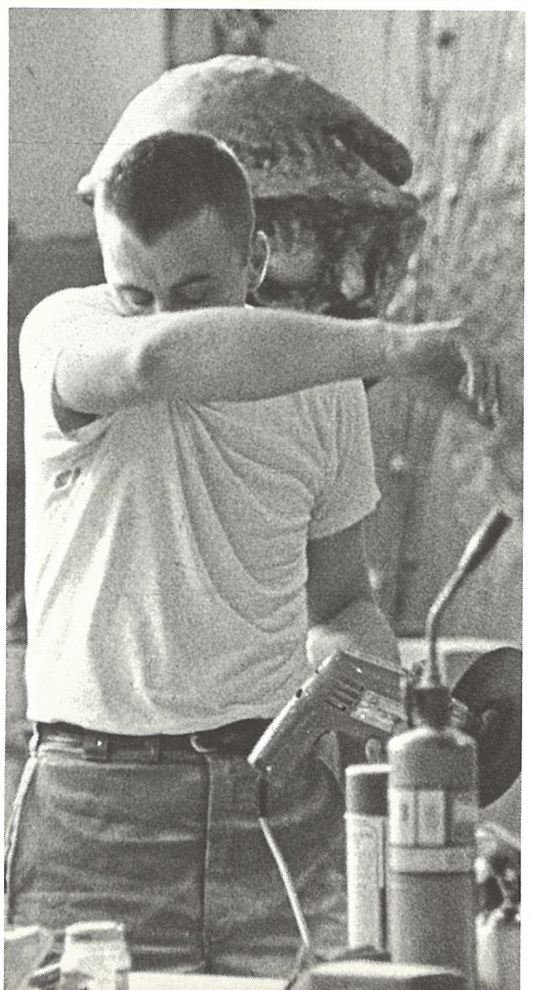
It is then, for Acorn, the role of today's sculpture to not presume to answer, but to question, to stimulate or suggest. And the role for man, the viewer, is not to merely look . . . but to participate. In this way John Acorn seeks an opportunity for Everyman to better understand himself and other men, an opportunity which can be fulfilled only in the creation of something from one's own experience, or from the participation with the artist in his own questioning. 'Our public schools should require . . . or rather allow . . . organized art experiences for every student. It is a means toward the discovery of self.'

So it is, that on a winter weekend in his backyard foundry at Pendleton, while aluminum blocks from exhausted Volkswagens change to liquid at 1400° John Acorn is busy translating the twentieth century.

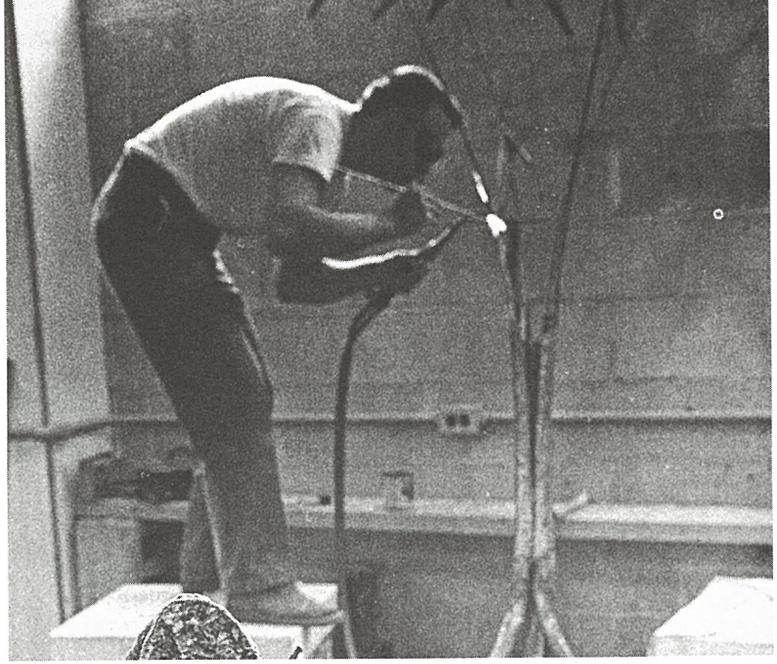
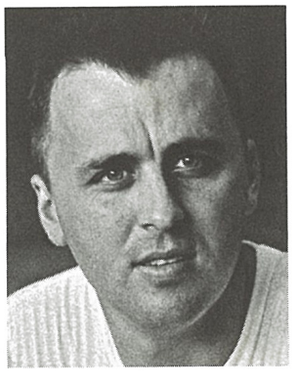
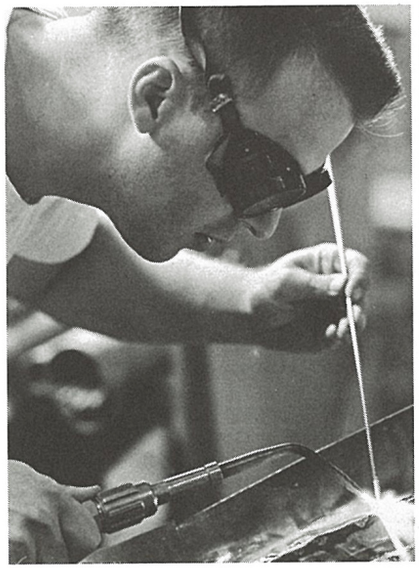
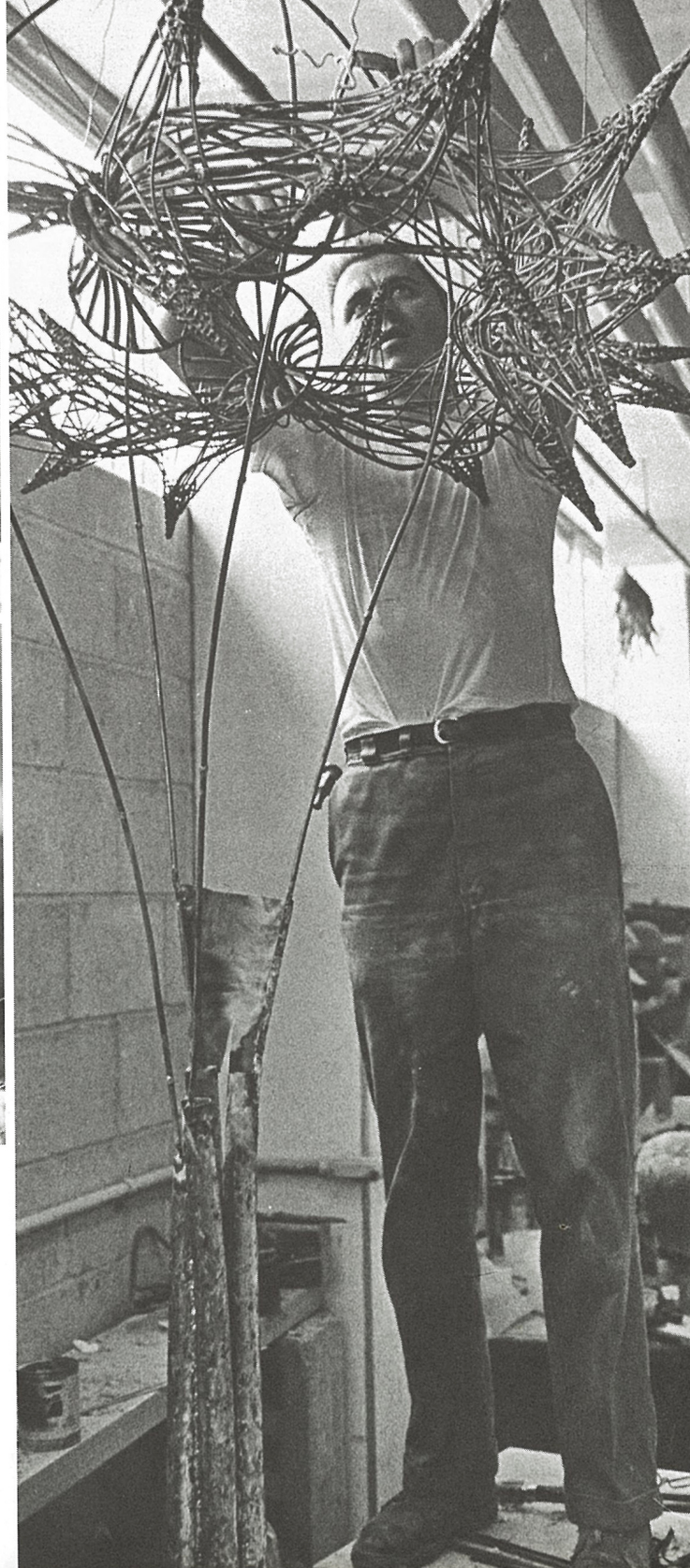
It's Saturday, and he's lucky.

John Acorn: Warrior V: *Bronze Casting* 11 x 18 in., 1968
Owned by the artist.





John Acorn works in his studio-classroom in the basement of Clemson University Department of Architecture.

Below: *Metamorphis*, aluminum casting
Private Collection

At right: *Crown of Thorns*, (study model)
welded brass and bronze 1968
Wesley Foundation of Clemson United Methodist Church, Clemson, S. C.