Paul Suttman

the Master-pieces

1981 - 1991

March 14 - April 20, 1991

PHILIPPE STAIB GALLERY

CONTEMPORARY SCULPTURE

8 Greene Street New York City 10013 tel. 212-941-5977 fax. 212-941-5979
We are concerned . . . with the art of sculpture . . . it is precisely this art, because of its perdurability and transportability, that has been most effective as an agent of stylistic diffusion. . . . painting has not survived in significant quantities . . . whereas sculpture is plentiful and is now to be found in all the important museums of the world. After pottery, the most indestructible of all arts, sculpture has been the main agent of stylistic diffusion in modern times.

-- Sir Herbert Read
A Fragment

The relation between sculpture and reality has always been tricky. Sculpture inevitably involves an existential pun, an uncanny confusion between the natural and the artificial, between what is and what is supposed to be. Given this virtually real nature of sculpture it is no wonder that we commonly describe primitive religions as "totemic." It is no accident that the Bible describes graven, rather than painted images, and that when the Israelites relapse in their devotion to the true God they do so by worshipping the brazen serpent and the golden calf. In classical antiquity cult images of the gods always took sculptural form, and when the emperors were apotheosized their divinity was embodied in the form of portrait statues. For the early Christians idolatry was the very core of pagan religion and in the Middle Ages the very emblem of the overthrow of paganism was a naked statue toppling from its pedestal. The Middle Ages, in fact, so abhorred the superstition of the three-dimensional image that monumental; free-standing sculpture practically disappeared. When independent sculpture was revived in the Renaissance, however, it was revived with what can only be called a vengance. The artist sought not only to match the greatest achievements of the ancients, but to outdo them, and in the domain where the ancients were unquestionably preeminent -- that of imitation. Imitation meant not only recreating nature, but also emulating other works of art. The artist proved his worth by invoking the hallowed masterpieces of old and incorporating them into his own surpassing vision. This process of imitating imitations gave the existential pun inherent in sculpture another dimension. The key to this peculiarly modern (as with Cubism) image-magic was the fragment, whether artificial or natural. For fragments signify more than meets the eye and permit the assemblage of a new reality that openly declares its relation -- ironic, nostalgic, critical, affirmative -- to the past and to the world at large.

Irving Lavin,
Institute for Advanced Study
February, 1991
At the banquet of the gods Strife threw a golden apple and the goddesses vied with one another for its possession . . . The golden apple signifies the universe, which, as it is made of opposites, is rightly said to be thrown by Strife . . . Paris, the soul that lives in accordance with sense perception, seeing beauty alone and not the other powers of the universe, judges the apple to be Aphrodite's.

-- Sallustius,
*Concerning the Gods and the Universe.*

Sculpture is but a language among the various languages whereby the eloquence of the arts expresses nature . . . And as the terrible is the first element of the language of tragedy, so the nude is the first element of the language of statuary.

-- Antonio Canova,
*Letter to Count Cicognara, 1815.*

I couldn't portray a woman in all her natural loveliness . . . I haven't the skill. No one has . . .

-- Georges Braque,
*Architectural Record, May 1910.*
Quand, lasse de rêver, Olympia s'éveille,
Le printemps entre au bras du doux messager noir;
C'est l'esclave, à la nuit amoureuse pareille,
Qui vient fleurir le jour délicieux à voir:
L'august jeune fille en qui la flamme veille.

-- Beginning of a poem by Zacharie Astruc.

Placed by Manet on the label of the
painting of Olympia in the Salon of 1865.

In my search for brilliancy and intensity I made use of the
machine as other artists have happened to employ the nude body
or still lives.

-- Ferdinand Léger,

Propos d'artistes, 1925.

... puisque le nu est, paraît-il, le premier et le dernier mot de l'art.

-- Édouard Manet,

Quoted by Antonin Proust,
Souvenirs de Manet, 1913.
Since sculptors must always make their statues, whether nude or
clothed, in the round, and free on all sides, they must take great
care that the work looks well from all views, and if their figure has
grace from one view, they must make sure that it is not deficient
from the other views, which, when the eye goes around the statue,
are infinite in number because such is the nature of the circular
form.

-- Angelo Bronzino,
_Letter to Benedetto Varchi, 1546._

The men known as cubists are trying to imitate the masters,
endeavoring to fashion new types... They have allowed them-
selves to move round the object, in order to give, under the control
of intelligence, a concrete representation of it, made up of several
successive aspects.

-- Jean Metzinger,
_Paris-Journal, 16 August, 1911._
He that concealed things will find
Must look before him and behind.

-- George Winter,
*Emblems*, 1635.

From the human body derive all measures and their denominations and in it is to be found all and every ratio and proportion by which God reveals the innermost secrets of Nature.

-- Luca Pacioli,
*De divina proportione*.

For us the Greeks invented the human form; we must reinvent it for others.

-- Jean Metzinger,
*Pan*, October-November, 1910.
Therefore, since nature has designed the human body so that its members are duly proportioned to the frame as a whole, it appears that the ancients had good reason for their rule, that in perfect buildings the different members must be in exact symmetrical relations to the whole general scheme.

-- Vitruvius

_The Ten Books on Architecture._

Poliphilus ... in his dreame ... was in a Vallie, inuironed with mountaines, and hilles, the end whereof was shut up in a marvellous fort, with a mightie pyramides worthie of admiration; vpon the top whereof was a high obeliske ...

Vpon the point of which Obeliske, with great arte and diligence, was fastened a copper base, in the which also there was a turning deuise infixed; wherevpon did stand the shape of a beautifull nimph framed of the aforesayed matter ... shewing parte of the naked substance of the legges and thighs ...

-- Francesco Colonna,

_Hypnerotomachia Poliphili._

Filippo ... proposed to the masters assembled that whoever should make an egg stand upright on a flat marble surface should make the cupola [of S. Maria del Fiore in Florence] ... He produced an egg and all the masters endeavored to make it stand, but no one succeeded. Then they passed it to Filippo, who took it, broke the end with a blow on the marble and made it stand.

-- Vasari,

_The Life of Filippo Brunelleschi._
The beautiful style of art begins with Praxiteles.

-- Heinrich Winckelmann,
Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums, 1764.

-- Did artists like Pheidias and Praxiteles, after going up to heaven and making mechanical copies of the forms of the gods, then represent them by their art, or was there something else which stood in attendance upon them in making their sculpture?"

-- Imagination wrought these, an artificer much wiser than imitation. For imitation will represent that which can be seen with the eyes, but imagination will represent that which cannot . . . While terror will often drive back imitation, it will never do so to imagination, for that proceeds undismayed towards the goal which it has set."

-- Philostratos,
Life of Apollonios of Tyana.

Authentic cubism . . . would be the art of depicting new wholes with formal elements borrowed not from the reality of vision, but from that of conception.

-- Guillaume Apollinaire,
Der Sturm, February 1913.
They . . . elevate sculpture by saying it is magnificently effective and a great ornament for cities, because it serves to make colossi and statues, either in bronze, or marble, or other material, that honor illustrious men, and adorn the land, and give those that see them the will to emulate the virtuous actions in order to be honored in the same fashion, whence follows the greatest glory and advantage.

-- Angelo Bronzino,

Letter to Benedetto Varchi, 1546.

Da quest’esistenza io uscirò con un disprezzo per tutto ciò che non è arte. Nulla è più terribile dell’arte. Tutto ciò che vedo al presente è un gioco di fronte a una buona pennellata, a un verso armonioso, a un giusto accordo. Tutto, in confronto a ciò, è una questione di meccanica, di abitudine, di pazienza, di memoria. C’è solo l’arte.

-- Umberto Boccioni.

Last written words, shortly before he died on 17 August, 1916, of wounds suffered falling from a horse.
He who has a vehement desire for posthumous fame does not consider that every one of those who will remember him will himself also die very soon; then again also they who have succeeded them, until the whole remembrance shall have been extinguished as it is transmitted through men who foolishly admire and perish.

-- The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius.

"I mezzo di me, che dal ciel viene,
A quel con gran desir ritorna e vola . . .

That half of me which comes from heaven turns back towards it with a great longing and flies . . .

-- Michelangelo,
Rime.
Then must thou bear in mind . . . that all things from eternity are of like forms and come round in a circle.

— *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius.*

There stood a stately Mount, on whose round top
A gloomy grove of mirtle trees did rise . . .

But like a garland compassed the height
And from their fruitful sides sweet gum did drop,
That all the ground with pretious deaw bedight
Threw forth most dainty odours, and most sweet delight.

— Edmund Spenser,
*The Faerie Queene.*

I am an apple; one who loves thee throws me at thee,
But consent . . . both thou and I decay.

— Epigram ascribed to Plato,
*Anthologia greca.*

*The Garden of Venus*
I throw the apple at thee, and thou, if lovest me from thy heart, take it... but if thy thoughts be what I pray they are not, take it still and reflect on how shortlived is beauty.

-- Epigram ascribed to Plato,
*Anthologia greca.*

And if Mars were always subordinated to Venus, that is, the contrariety of the component elements to their due proportion, nothing would ever perish.

-- Pico della Mandorla,
*On the General Nature of Beauty.*
Dotti figli d'Apollo;  
Se'n mirar non t'ammiri  
Del brutto, ond'io son bello,  
Ben non sai qual brutezza  
Avanzi ogni bellezza.

Blessed children of Apollo;  
If in looking you are not admiring  
Of the ugly, whence I am beautiful,  
Then you know not what ugliness  
Precedes every beauty.

-- Gregorio Comanini,  
*Il Figino*, 1591.

Everything has two aspects: the current aspect . . . and the ghostly and metaphysical.

-- Giorgio de Chirico,  
*On Metaphysical Art*, 1919.
One must not imitate what one wants to create.

-- Georges Braque,
*Nord-Sud*, December 1917.

There is, in fact, no need to be a cultivated man to conceive, for instance, that a chair, however you place it, does not cease to have four legs, a seat and a back.

-- Guillaume Apollinaire,
*Le Temps*, 14 October, 1912.
The tendency toward utility does not . . . impede the access to a state of beauty.

-- Fernand Léger,
Of Darkness an egg, from the whirlwind conceived,
was laid by the sable-plumed Night,
And out of that egg, as the seasons revolved,
sprang Love, the entrancing, the bright.

-- Aristophanes,
The Birds.

And I recall that Love and War came from
the eggs of Leda.

-- William Butler Yeats,
A Vision.

The Hand of Leda

Galatea, playful maid, throws an apple at me, and runs to the willows, and desires that she first be seen.

-- Virgil,
Ecologues.

The Hand of Galatea
No doubt it is useful for an artist to know all the forms which have preceded or which accompany his.

-- Pablo Picasso,

_circa 1948._
At its origin the term *masterpiece* referred to a work presented by a craftsman or artist to demonstrate his worthiness to join the guild of masters. Over time the term came to be used for works of art of superlative quality, especially the single best production of an artist's career. Paul Suttman has called the works in this exhibition *the Master-pieces* — with that important hyphen — because they are tributes and responses to masters of the past. Suttman regards *the Master-pieces* as artifacts of history, artifacts that cannot lie, as can written — and thereby interpretive — history. Since the artifact exists, the history to which it bears testimony also exists. The interpretation of that history may vary with the observer, but the fact in the art cannot be denied: *the Master-pieces* thus establish realities about themselves and their subjects, whether or not they ever happened.

In combining or counterpointing familiar art historical forms Suttman has changed and enriched their meanings. Through more than a decade studying masterpieces of western art, and meditating upon aesthetic principles and practices, he focused on a number of paradigms: the alluring female, the triumphal hero, the human form examined anatomically or architectonically. By manipulation, abbreviation and objectification he assures that these allusions go beyond mere copying or appropriation. He not only uses the art of the past to draw attention to the similarities and disparities in that art but also to present critiques of its broader, contemporary, significances.

In these works Venus appears in many guises, not only as the mother of Eros and originator of endless love affairs. Where the apple appears, as in *Braque Visited by the Conquering Venus* . . . , the work includes the concept of the Judgement of Paris, the choice of love and beauty over worldly power and wealth or victory and wisdom. But Venus is also the power of harmony to suppress discord, and the embodiment of the universal cycle of growth, decay and ultimate rebirth. In the widest sense she represents all female qualities and identities, from generation to vanity, from the Madonna to Madonna. When she falls, whether through her flaws, or through the inevitable cycles of fate, strife intrudes and prevails.

Some of *the Master-pieces*, such as the equestrian works, form conceptual and philosophical sequences. Praxiteles is represented as a triumphant albeit benign conqueror. The glorified but precarious rider of *The Fall of Heroes* can be seen tragically as the insufficiency of courage in the face of inevitably superior forces, morally as the consequences of hubris, or cynically as the all-too-frequent discrediting of role models. In *Apotheosis* the grounding base refers to the point of connection between the generative force of nature and the worldly activities of Man. The articulated columnar structure bespeaks the purposeful quest of civilization, recalling the Pillars of Hercules, erected by the hero at the end of the known world. The écorché horse, symbolic of Man’s taming of the creatures of Nature, evokes the exalting ascent of the Nature-born spirit, strengthened and refined through achievement, striving for a transcendence beyond the material bounds, which fell away behind him.

In *the Master-pieces* Suttman shows a number of the ways in which art has investigated the forms of nature and man-made orders. *Académie de l’anatomie* contrasts different analyses of the human form — the Academic écorché and the Cubist reintegration of multiple aspects —, and then elaborates that contrast through the classical column, whose capital and shaft are so analogous to the figure of man, and the Caryatid, which combines the form of man with the function of architecture. The parallels between architecture and the human form are presented in *Arc-I-Tek-Tur*, along with a repertory of architectural elements: the pyramid with its magic powers and maximum stability, the balls with their geometric perfection and contrasting instability, and the descending and broadening blind arcade, fortified chamber, open peristyle and impenetrable cella, upon the final grounding mastaba. The monument is inscribed with a dedication to the essence of architecture and pencilled with notation that suggests the granular texture of the fortress and the involvement of the structure in the light and shadow of its context. Where *Académie de l’anatomie* contains bilateral contrasts and *Arc-I-Tek-Tur* is built upon a serial hierarchy, *La virtù fantastica* shows the elements of nature and man’s creation as complex agglomerations. Arcimboldo’s fantastic evocations of the seasons, with their alchemical mystery, and De Chirico’s metaphysical constructs, with their cosmic implications, suggest a fluid boundary between order and chaos, meaning and emptiness.

The group of works that make up this exhibition began with explorations of the *puragone*, the comparative examination of the qualities of the different arts that obsessed Renaissance theorists. For
the Renaissance the paragone was a formalized discussion weighing the relative merits of different arts, such as the difficulty, permanence and three-dimensional reality of sculpture versus the color, light and illusionistic nuance of painting. For Suttman the paragone is more a dialogue than a contest. The prototypes of many of his sculptural forms are found in paintings, his use of paint may disguise the sculptural materials, or his colored patinas and colored stones may give the bronzes and marbles the polychromy of painting. Cubist Hero addresses the cubist painter's insistence on fracturing the illusionistic representation of forms in order to attain a representation of more than one view, in light of the fact that sculpture already and always contains more than one view. The painter's artifice of converting three-dimensional reality into two-dimensional illusion is frequently a concern of traditional theorists. Suttman, by contrast, examines what happens to the multiplicity of views or the mutability of the relationship between object and observer, when a two-dimensional image, such as Braque's tables and chairs, are rendered in three dimensions, or even in hybrid transmutations such as Olympia étendue chez M. Léger, where two-dimensional images become three-dimensional objects that still preserve elements of the illusionism of painting.

In examining the relationship between art and its audience, Suttman gives an important role to pedestals. His sculptures are obviously not isolated like paintings in frames that signal the observer's suspension of disbelief in entering the pictorial world. Nor is the relationship between the fictive world of the object and everyday reality mediated by a definably separate zone occupied by a neutral pedestal or base. Rather, Suttman has chosen to make his pedestals elaborate this meeting with their own commentaries and dialogues. Braque's and Léger's furniture support the manifestations of Venus but at the same time interact with her as equals. In The Fall of Venus and the equestrian pieces the pedestals participate in the movements that are essential to the works, and in The Entry of Praxiteles... and Académie de l'anatomie the pedestals reinforce the counterpointing of styles.

Taken as a whole the Master-pieces display a quality all too rare in contemporary art: the generosity of spirit. Suttman approaches the art of the past with respect. He may abbreviate Olympia to mitigate her shock value, startle Paolina Borghese by introducing her to petit-bourgeois surroundings, or topple Venus in a way she never experienced in ancient mythology, but his wit is always humane and his interpretations avoid mockery or vulgarization. This generosity extends to his audience through the uncompromising craftsmanship and the sumptuous materials. The painstaking detailing of anatomical and architectural forms, the opulence of marbles, patined or silvered bronzes and the glazed purity of lacquered surfaces, all testify to a belief in the integrity of art-making and a high value placed on the relationship between the artist and his public.

Virginia L. Bush,
1991
Biography

1956    BFA, University of New Mexico.
1958    MFA, Cranbrook Academy of Art.
1958-62 Assistant Professor, University of Michigan.
1960-61 Study with Giacomo Manzù.
1965-68 Rome Prize Fellowship, American Academy, Rome.
1973    Artist-in-Residence, Dartmouth College.
1975-79 Visiting Associate Professor, University of New Mexico.
1980-82 Artist-in-Residence, Texas A & M University.
1983-85 Adjunct Associate Professor, Columbia University.

One-Man Exhibitions

Museum of Art, University of Michigan, 1962.
Roswell Museum of Art, Roswell, New Mexico, 1962.
Museum of Art, Redlands College, California, 1975.
Fine Arts Gallery, Texas A & M University, 1981.

Selected Group Exhibitions

1955    Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota.
        Museum of New Mexico, Santa Fe.
1956    Cuarto Gallery, San Francisco, California.
        Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe.
        San Francisco Museum of Art.
1959    National Sculpture Exhibition, Providence, Rhode Island.
1960    Salzburg International Art Exhibition, Austria.
1961    Museum of Art, Cincinnati, Ohio.
        Museum of Modern Art, New York City.
1963    John Herron Art Institute, Indianapolis, Indiana.
1965    Cleveland Museum of Art.
        American Academy, Rome, Italy.
        American Academy, Rome, Italy.
      American Academy, Rome, Italy.  
      American Embassy, Rome, Italy.  
1972  Centro d’Arte Internazionale, Orvieto, Italy.  
      Galleria Nuovo Carpine, Rome, Italy.  
      American Embassy, Rome, Italy.  
      Ringling Museum, Sarasota, Florida.  
      U.S. Information Service, Turkey.  
1977  Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, Colorado.  
      Museum of Art, Palm Springs, California.  
1979  Wildine Gallery, Albuquerque, New Mexico.  
1978  Museum of Albuquerque, New Mexico.  
1980  Roswell Museum, New Mexico.  
1983  St. Louis Museum of Art, Missouri.  
      Marilyn Butler Gallery, Scottsdale, Arizona.  

Selected Public and Private Collections

Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona.  
Fine Arts Collection, Texas A & M University.  
Red Grooms, New York City.  
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.  
Jack Lemmon, Beverly Hills, California.  
Morgan Library, New York City.  
Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College.  
Museum of Art and Martha Cook Garden, University of Michigan.  
Museum of Art, Princeton University.  
Museum of Modern Art, New York City.  
Stavros Niarchos, Porto Cervo, Sardinia.  
Nelson Rockefeller, New York City.  
Roswell Museum of Art, Roswell, New Mexico.  
J. Walter Thompson, New York City.  
Lawrence Tish, New York City.  
Billy Wilder, Beverly Hills, California.  
Michael York, Los Angeles, California.
Cher Paul,

Quelle inoubliable journée
Dans votre si belle maison de South Kent
Où Virginia semble tout protéger
De merveilleuses pâtes al dente et un délice chinois mélangé
A peine épicé un vrai régal par vous préparé
Votre regard profond qui révèle une culture
et sourire dans l’œil qui plaisante dans l’instant
L’ombre de Boccione
La table de Braque
Le bras de Pauline Borghese
un talent hors du temps
Mémoire d’un passé si riche
et sourire présent
Niulle part dans la littérature, le théâtre, le cinéma
je n’ai vu un telle richesse
Vous nous matérialisez une évocation du passé avec une telle perfection
Mélanger plusieurs passés pour bien comprendre que nous sommes aujourd’hui
où tout est possible
Faire un tel clin d’œil un sourire au futur
Marquer son temps de façon inoubliable
le sourire au coin de l’œil
la culture au fond du coeur
Merci Cher Paul de nous permettre de vous exposer

Philippe Staib,
February, 1991
Catalogue of the Exhibition

1. **Braque Visited by the Conquering Venus Armed with the Apples of Discord, 1981-1991.**
   bronze, 63 x 67 x 50 (approx.) inches.

2. **Olympia étendue chez M. Léger, 1985-1990.**
   marble and wood, 49 x 43 x 22 inches.

3. **Cubist Hero, 1988-1991.**
   carrara marble, 70 x 26 x 24 1/2 inches.

4. **Académie de l'anatomie, 1985-1988.**
   bronze, marble and wood, 68 x 20 x 18 inches.

5. **Arc-Tek-Tur, 1984-1988.**
   bronze, marble and wood, 86 x 27 x 27 inches.

6. **The Entry of Praxiteles into Paris -- 1913, 1984-1990.**
   bronze and wood, 77 1/2 x 26 x 5 1/2 inches.

7. **The Fall of Heroes, 1984-1989.**
   bronze, marble and wood, 73 x 30 x 19 inches.

8. **Apotheosis, 1988-1991.**
   bronze, marble, steel and wood, 96 x 47 x 22 1/2 inches.

   bronze and resin, 67 x 96 x 96 inches.

10. **The Fall of Venus, 1989-1991.**
    bronze, 56 x 15 x 17 inches.

11. **La virtù fantastica, 1986-1991.**
    bronze and wood, 72 x 20 1/2 x 20 1/2 inches.

    bronze and wood, 16 x 16 x 11 inches.

13. **Paolina Visits Georges, 1991.**
    bronze on marble base, 25 x 9 1/2 x 10 inches.

14. **Maquette for Léger's Couch, 1984.**
    wood, 8 1/2 x 24 x 8 inches.

15. **The Hand of Leda, 1989.**
    bronze, silver and gold plate, swan egg and pearl,
    15 1/2 x 4 1/2 x 4 1/2 inches.

    pewter on marble base, 9 x 6 x 7 inches.

17. **Study for Velasquez Contemplating the Bust of Picasso, 1987.**
    bronze and marble, 12 x 14 x 7 1/2 inches.
L'amor Virginia

Dritta, dritta
Dal'America
Fin' a San Pietro

Mentr'io
Un pass' avanti
E due in dietro

Per sempre

With special thanks to the steadfast assistants:
Mark Lineweaver, Jack Cresco, John Suttman,
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Argos, Inc., Brewster, New York;
Fonderia dell'Arte Tommasi/Del Chiario, Pietrasanta, Italy.

A list of edition sizes is available on request.

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Studio Antognazzi, Pietrasanta, Italy.
Laboratorio Giorgi, Pietrasanta, Italy.

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