MARK DI SUVERO’S SCULPTURE: FROM THE FOUND-OBJECT SCULPTURE OF THE NINETEEN SIXTIES TO THE MONUMENTAL SCULPTURE OF THE NINETEEN EIGHTIES, A STUDY IN CONTINUITY

THESIS

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By

Valerie J. Pinkney, B.A.
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This thesis analyzes technical and stylistic aspects of Mark di Suvero's nineteen sixties found-object works, and his monumental I-beam sculptures of the nineteen seventies and eighties to demonstrate their consistency despite the apparent contrasts in form, materials, and process.

Primary data, sculpture of Mark di Suvero. Secondary data obtained from major art periodicals, newspapers, and exhibition catalogs. The artist was interviewed by author at the retrospective exhibition in Nice, France, September, 17, 1991.

Examination of primary and secondary data reveals a strong continuity by the artist in his approach to his work despite obvious external changes in materials and process.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When the work of Mark di Suvero first appeared in New York in 1959-1960, his sculpture attracted attention for its vitality and energy. Pieces such as *Hankchampion*, 1960, and *Stuyvesantseye*, 1965, were hailed as evocations of the fifties' Abstract Expressionists, and as exemplars of the sixties' style of junk art. Infused with the "funky" spirit of the time, di Suvero transformed and transposed junkyard materials into whimsical toys or fantastic shapes. Mark di Suvero's found-object works from the early sixties invite the viewer to interact with them. In using varied shapes, diverse textures, and kinetic elements, the sculpture engages the viewer. Critic Harris Rosenstein attributed this quality of inclusion of the viewer to Mark di Suvero's artistic and personal philosophy:

"Characteristic of di Suvero's sculpture is that it works across many levels of understanding, mainly I believe because of the effort behind it does not take the form of 'thinking to exclude.'"

If one examines the literature on modern sculpture, inevitably these early pieces of Mark di Suvero are displayed as his contribution to American sculpture. In such treatises
as Wayne Andersen's *American Sculpture in Process: 1930-1970*, Edward Lucie-Smith's *Movements in Art Since 1945* and Barbara Rose's *American Art Since 1900* and *Readings in American Art 1900-1975*, di Suvero's place, it seems, is cataloged in the time-line of art history based on works from his emerging years as an artist. As intriguing as these early pieces are, they hardly comprise a complete statement on the work of Mark di Suvero.

The found-object pieces of the sixties were only the beginning of the artist's work. His energies culminated in the eighties in monumental works of steel plates and I-beams. As his constructions grew in scale, they underwent crucial changes in materials and technique. The improvisations of his early years were replaced by pieces that revealed exceptional technical mastery. In the works *New Star*, 1986-1987, *Tendresse*, 1989-1990, and *Esope*, 1990, his use of steel, I-beams, and intricate joint systems display the power and aesthetic possibilities of complex engineering. His sculpture is the product of a life spent refining the use of the welder's torch and challenging conventional concepts of what sculpture should be. *Hankchampion*, 1960, and *Tendresse*, 1989-90, are signature pieces for their respective times. The former, an intimate statement composed of gritty materials; the latter, a public declaration of precise, balanced elements. Yet despite these contrasts, there is also continuity in his work. This thesis
analyzes both shifts and consistencies of Mark di Suvero's work over three decades to chart this continuity.

Discussions of Mark di Suvero's work in the literature have been concerned primarily with the work of his earlier years. The work of the seventies and eighties appears to contrast with the sixties, but the stylistic, technical, and philosophical aspects actually demonstrate continuity. Just as the earlier work received review and analysis for its place in American sculpture, so does the work of the last twenty years merit such examination and assessment. The place that more recent works hold in American sculpture, and in the artist's career has yet to be determined. To document the different, yet continuous, sensibilities of Mark di Suvero's career will be the purpose of this thesis in order to lay the ground for a more accurate statement on this artist's contribution to twentieth-century art.

Statement of Problem

This thesis analyzes technical, stylistic, and philosophical aspects of Mark di Suvero's nineteen sixties found-object works, and his monumental I-beam sculptures of the seventies and eighties in order to demonstrate its consistency despite its apparent contrasts in form, materials, and process.

Methodology

The works utilized for this study had to meet the following criteria: emblematic examples of work in the three
decades discussed in the secondary source materials, and/or works viewed on exhibit, particularly those at the retrospective exhibit, "Mark di Suvero 1959-1991", held at the Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain, Nice, France, September 11 - 17, 1991.

Primary data is Mark di Suvero's work from the nineteen sixties through the nineteen eighties. Examples of the sculpture were analyzed for their similarities and differences. In addition, the primary data was augmented by discussions with the artist, his colleagues and his assistants at Nice, September 11 - 17, 1991.

Secondary source materials consisted of exhibition catalogs, periodical and newspaper articles, and texts on sculpture and twentieth-century art. Information was also drawn from artist files of the Dallas Museum of Art and the Dallas Public Library. In addition, because the thesis examines works frequently only briefly documented, the thesis includes critical analysis by the author.

Review of the Literature

This study was based upon information from major art periodicals and newspapers--New York Times, Dallas Times Herald--from 1960 to 1991; catalogs from four of the six city-wide exhibitions the artist has held: Chalone-sur-Soane, 1973-1974, New York, 1975, Stuttgart, 1988, Nice, 1991; and interviews with the artist and his associates. The opinions of critics and historians on the artist's work are available
through articles, exhibition catalogs, and surveys on American modern sculpture. Since Mark di Suvero creates public art, a general review of periodical articles on the development of public art in the last twenty years was also conducted.

The first prominent review of di Suvero’s work was by Sidney Geist on the artist's first one-man show at the Green Gallery, 1960, in the December issue of *Arts Magazine* of that year. Not until May, 1966, did di Suvero’s work again receive individual scrutiny with a review, "Mark di Suvero: Sculpture of Whitmanesque Scale", by Hilton Kramer in the *New York Times*. Reviews after the Geist article, and prior to the Kramer review, evaluate the artist's work in the context of his involvement with Park Place Gallery. Pieces in *Studio International*, January, 1965, and April, 1966, and in *Artnews*, January, 1966, explored the shared philosophy of the Park Place Gallery group of young painters and sculptors. After Park Place Gallery closed in 1967, the artist remained independent of any formal groups and his work has been assessed as such by the art world. As the artist's work of the seventies became ever more challenging, it received extensive attention. Comprehensive articles were written on the artist in major American art periodicals: *Artforum*, November, 1972, February, 1976; *Art Journal*, Winter, 1975; *Artnews*, January, 1976; *Art in America*, March/April, 1978, December, 1983. Even mainstream press accorded him notice
with reviews by Robert Hughes in *Time*, April, 1971, and December, 1975. His life and work up to 1975 were the subject of a documentary film, *North Star*, written by Barbara Rose and directed by filmmaker Francois de Menil. The artist, who insists his work speaks for him, agreed to the film in appreciation for Rose's efforts on his behalf in Chalome-sur-Saône. There is no dearth of information on the artist's work in this period of his career.

Attention in the late eighties and early nineties has been focused on a few exhibitions. The 1985-1986 show at Storm King was reviewed by Mimi Weinberg in "Thunder in the Mountains", *Arts Magazine*, February, 1986 and by Douglas C. McGill in "Upstate Retrospective For Mark di Suvero" in the *New York Times*, April, 1985. Michael Brenson's review, "American Has a Whole French City as His Gallery", in the *New York Times*, August, 1990, of the city-wide exhibit in Valence, France, is the most recent treatment di Suvero's work has received in the American art press. Though major retrospective exhibits were held in Stuttgart, Germany, 1988, and Nice, France, 1991, as of March, 1992, mention of either show could not be located in American art periodicals or newspapers.

Journal articles, newspaper reviews, and exhibit catalogs were utilized for text and images to chart the development of the artist's work. To review post World War II developments in American sculpture and the artist's

A complete discussion on the work of Mark di Suvero must contain an acknowledgement of the work's role as public sculpture. As the artist's work developed and changed so too did the role and definition of public art. Journal articles such as Kate Linker's excellent survey, "Public Sculpture, the Pursuit of the Pleasurable and the Profitable Paradise", *Artforum*, March 1981, and "Public Sculpture's New Look", *Artnews*, September, 1991, by Avis Berman, were utilized as well as texts such as Margaret Robinette's *Outdoor Sculpture, Object and Environment*, 1976.
Endnotes


4 Rosenstein, 64.

CHAPTER II

MARK DI SUVERO, BIOGRAPHY

In honor of an earlier Italian traveler to China, the artist was christened Marco Polo upon his birth in 1933 in Shanghai. The artist's father, Vittorio, an officer in the Italian navy, had been assigned to Shanghai and Tiensin to look after Italian interests in the area. Childhood visits to exotic temples and palaces left an indelible impression upon the young child. An especially intense memory is that of the Forbidden City. The manipulation of space by the grandiose buildings set among immense open areas "...is so marvelous, I had never encountered it again, until I came upon the Grand Canyon."¹ Seven years later, the family had to flee China for the United States after Vittorio was denounced by fellow officers for his Jewish heritage and pro-British sentiments.² The artist's mother, Matilde, instilled in the artist and his three siblings a compelling image of their destination:

My mother presented America as a land of liberty, freedom, different from the ancient cultures where we had been growing up, China, Italy... My father did not...he was a follower of Dante. I was given these two visions, and I shared that of my mother's, it being more progressive.³
The family settled in San Francisco, at one time living near the zoo: "It was wonderful. At night we could hear the lions roar, and we could tell when they were being fed!" Expeditions with his amahs in China, and relocating while young, instilled a desire for adventure that manifested while in his teens. Two weeks before high school graduation he left school, preferring to work and to roam, à la Steinbeck. The allure for dynamic spaces continued. He was drawn to the sea, to the desert. Mark di Suvero, artist, might not have been if not for a sojourn through the vastness of the American southwest. "I was bicycling through the desert. I read Durant's *Story of Philosophy* and knew that was what I had to do. I came home to study philosophy." During his course of study at various colleges and universities he enrolled in an elective class, sculpture, taught by Robert Thomas at the University of California at Santa Barbara. Transferring to the University of California at Berkeley, he continued studying sculpture, for by then he had become disillusioned with philosophy; feeling he could not make an original contribution to the field. In sculpture he could combine his intellectual pursuits with his desire to make individual, original statements.

After graduating with a B.A. in philosophy, di Suvero moved to New York in 1957. For the east coast, New York art set of the late fifties-early sixties, the enthusiastic new artist was something of an anachronism. Babara Rose
described the young sculptor of this period:

Passionate in his opinions, at ease in his work clothes, flamboyant in his life style, an astonishing red-blond mane,... For some, he was considered an eccentric romantic when it was the bon ton to be cool, detached, and objective, for others he was a delirious maniac, mixing physics and philosophy, citing Hegel and Heisenberg...10

Three years later, in 1960, Mr. Richard Bellamy, of the Green Gallery, held the first solo exhibit of di Suvero's work. The exhibit consisted of three large pieces, Hankchampion, Barrell, (non-extant), Che Faro Senza Euridice, a carving, and drawings of hands, and four hands modeled in wax. The show met with a critical and enthusiastic review by Sidney Geist:

History is glad to record the arrival of any new artist... but the real stuff of history is made of those moments at which one can say: From now on nothing will be the same.[sic] One felt this way at di Suvero's show.11

During this year of success Mark di Suvero suffered an accident that nearly cost him his life. While employed to move some materials in a warehouse, di Suvero agreed to steady a load of lumber piled atop a freight elevator. The aging elevator did not stop and went to the top of the shaft. Crushed between the lumber and the ceiling, he was not expected to survive. He lived. The doctors said he would never walk. He did. Just as the medical community had been wrong about Mark di Suvero, so too were those in the art world who thought his burgeoning career was over.
Set aside for a time were the large lumber and wood found-object works that had first brought him notice. *Ladderpiece*, 1960-1961, was his last attempt to continue in this vein while working from his wheelchair. Smaller pieces, of wood and welded metal were his efforts during his convalescence. Works such as *Kiss*, 1961-1963, and *Bach Piece*, 1962, were created by the artist as he sat in his wheelchair welding them in his lap. While recuperating, di Suvero joined with fellow artists to form the first Soho artists' collective, Park Place Gallery. The Park Place artists shared a vision of art without pretention, intensely physical, energetic, and predominantly rational in its sources. Lasting until 1967, the founding members, (seven of whom were from California), were di Suvero, Dean Fleming, Peter Forakis, Robert Grosvenor, Anthony Magar, Tamara Melcher, Forest Meyers, Ed Ruda and Leo Valledor. In this atmosphere of mutual support and friendship, the artist continued to heal physically and develop creatively. By the end of the decade, the man who was not to have walked again, had constructed works such as *Nova Albion*, twenty five feet high, and *Praise for Elohim Adonai*, without the aid of a crane. This was a triumph of the spirit, not a medical miracle. The artist lives and works in body and leg braces. He is still paralyzed.

Determination and conviction are the traits that sustained Mark di Suvero during his recuperation in the
sixties. They also precipitated his decision to relocate to Europe in 1971. The move was in reaction to the escalating United States involvement in the Vietnam conflict. To the artist, to stay, showing and selling his work, while holding strong views against current political conventions would have been an act of hypocrisy. Until his return in 1975, Mark di Suvero led the life of the journeyman artist, traveling about the continent working in Holland, Germany, Italy, and France. In 1973 he was invited to Venice, the home of his paternal forebears, to teach and work.

Through the French government arts agency c.r.a.c.a.p., Centre National de Recherche d'Animation et de Creation Pour les Arts Plastiques, studio space and support services were established in Chalon-sur-Saône. In this small factory town in Burgundy the artist held his first city-wide exhibit in 1973-1974. It was also the first display of works in the monumental style that would become his distinctive metier. A year later he was invited to present five of his massive I-beam pieces created in his various European studios at Les Jardin des Tuileries, Paris. The installation of Ik Ock, Etoile Polaire, Mon Pere, Mon Pere, Ave, and Ange des Oranges, was the first exhibition in the Tuileries of work by a living American artist. After the Paris exhibit, di Suvero returned to New York, where, in the fall of 1975 the Whitney Museum of American Art presented an exhibit of his work. The boroughs of New York provided the setting for his
first, and only, American city-wide exhibit. These city-wide exhibits fulfilled an objective the artist maintains to this day: take art out of the museum and gallery and place it in the life of the average person.

Chalone-sur-Saône remains a studio-residence, one of three the artist utilizes. The other two were established during the eighties at Long Island City, New York, and Petaluma, California. Having far-flung locations aids in the execution of the larger pieces the artist has devised. Materials and finished pieces need not be shipped cross-country or overseas; he comes to them. Considering the ample, and necessary, studio space available to the artist during the eighties it is not surprising that the past decade has witnessed his greatest outpouring of work. Monumental I-beam sculptures and small, car-sized welded metal works were not the only works created by the artist during the eighties. After months of wrangling with New York City bureaucrats and clearing rubbish from four and half acres, Mark di Suvero opened Socrates Sculpture Park in 1986. The park is the host site for biannual shows of work by grant recipients from the Athena Foundation. Started in 1977 by di Suvero, the Athena Foundation supports and encourages new sculptors. The eighties ended, and the nineties began, with retrospective exhibits in Stuttgart, Germany, 1988, and Nice, France, 1991. Still traveling and exploring, the artist continues to live up to his namesake.
Erudite and articulate, Mark di Suvero carries on the Renaissance tradition of scholar-artist. Music, poetry, physics, architecture, life, are sources for his work. For di Suvero, "...inspiration, it is a bad word, because it implies some muse will give you a sudden illumination, whereas it is only the moment when the puzzle is resolved." After his first show in 1960, Barbara Rose was among the critics who labeled him as the last artist-as-hero for "his way of working as well as in his rebellious attitudes, romantic postures, and passionate idealism." If this is so, the lineage ends with one of its finest exemplars in Mark di Suvero.
Endnotes to Chapter II


3Perlein, p. 21.

4Mark di Suvero, interview by author, 17 September 1991.

5Monte, p. 9.

6Perlein, p. 21


9Monte, p. 9


12Monte, p. 13.


15Bourdin, p. 23.

16c.r.a.c.a.p., *Mark di Suvero* (Chalon-sur-Saone, France: Centre National de Recherche d'Animation et de Creation Pour les Arts Plastiques, 1975), 64.

17Perlein, p. 21.
Endnotes Chapter II

18Rose, p. 43.
20Monte, p. 11
23Lloyd, p. 132.
25Perlein, p. 22.
26Rose, p. 42.
Figure 1  Hankchampion & Barrell

Figure 2  Che Faro Senza Euridice
Figure 3  Homage to Brancusi
Figure 4 Stuyvesantseye

Figure 5 Praise for Elohim Adonai
CHAPTER III

WORK OF THE SIXTIES

Mark di Suvero's work of the early sixties is not comprised of a linear progression of pieces that culminates in an inevitable conclusion. Rather, his work forms three groups. These groups are delineated by their stylistic elements and, in part, by the critical injury he sustained in 1960. Di Suvero's early work reflects his artistic endeavors and his success in reclaiming his life.

The first period was from 1958 to 1960. This group consists of large, primarily wood, pieces with rope and metal elements that provide either support or aesthetic functions. The three pieces, seen in Figures 1 and 2, Hankchampion, Barrel, and Che Faro Senza Euridice, first displayed at the 1960 Green Gallery show are of this period. Approximately eight works of this kind were created; two were never titled, shown, or photographed, and several are now non-extant.¹ The qualities that delineate these works; rough hewn planks connected by bolts or pipe, are of a scale and rawness that was, in the late fifties and very early sixties, without precedent.² The impact of Hankchampion, sixteen feet across and nine feet high, in a gallery's intimate confines could
only have been startling. In 1960, massiveness had yet to become a mode in sculpture. That these works appeared fully realized, without tentative, antecedent works to indicate their arrival contributed to their impact. Mark di Suvero's works prior to this period were experiments, working out the influences the artist had acquired in college. Nothing in those earliest pieces foreshadowed the emergence of the 1958-1960 body of work.

Implied action is a critical element for this body of work from these years. Action as it was understood in the fifties, of the first-generation Abstract Expressionists, as stated by Carter Ratcliff in his 1978 article, "Taking Off: Four Sculptors and the Big New York Gesture":

The early works make strong gestures, but this gesturing doesn't emanate from images of the body. Their work is all gesture.[sic] Its skewed, intertwined, layered, reaching forms--like those of the first-generation abstract painting--are to be seen as the result of actions, not as images of the body acting.4

The most obvious connection lies in the sweeping lines of the materials echoing the sweeping strokes of Franz Kline. Yet these wood pieces are not just simple recreations of the artists of the New York School's brush strokes. Through the cantilevered planks a visual and physical tension is created that captures the essence, not merely the appearance, of action. Empowering these immobile forms with the vitality of movement was achieved through their assembly. The sculptures appear precarious, the joining of the various elements at
The energy of Abstract Expressionism was not the exclusive impetus at work in the 1958-1960 group. Concurrent with the gestural energy of the New York School runs the dynamic manipulation of space first expounded by the Constructivists in the first decades of this century. The Constructivist tenets: volume and mass are not the sole means of conceiving space; art is dynamic, not static, are acutely evident in the 1958-1960 works.” In Hankchampion, space is ensnared and engulfed by the canted beams and angled boards. The chains that tether them together also serve to
accentuate the lines of the piece. Volume here is the area between the mass of the boards and the floor beneath the piece; not the volume of bulk, but the volume of encompassed space. The whole of Hankchampion can only be fully grasped by walking around it. In forcing this action from the viewer, the piece becomes a dynamic entity, one part recedes as another appears. In creating works without a point of origin, no mass save linear elements and enclosed space, di Suvero's "...wooden pieces belong to a well-known history of Constructive sculpture; that for all his invention cannot avail against that history,..." this quote is again from the ever-pertinent 1960 Geist review. The true "inventiveness" of the artist lies in his fusion of these two antecedents, Constructivism and Abstract Expressionism. The two concepts are fused, resulting in constructive composition with expressionist handling of form. This synthesis, first displayed in the 1958-1960 group, would be repeated throughout the artist's career.

The second body of work, created from 1961 to 1963, is an extraordinary series of small works realized while the artist regained his strength and mobility. This group has not received the same attention as other phases in the artist's career. If they are discussed, it is only in the context of a reflection on the artist's personal imagery. The tortuous Prison Dream, 1962, is often cited as a metaphor for imprisonment of the body and the desire for freedom."
There is validity to this aspect of these works, but they represent more than states of mind during a recuperation period. After the accident Mark di Suvero had to reevaluate his approach and his methods in sculpture. The artist was searching for new aesthetic and technical expressions. These works are the benchmarks of that search. In these small pieces the artist honed his skill with the welder's torch and experimented with new materials. Steel, iron, and fiberglass, (Fatherly's Lamp), joined the artist's store of found wood. New materials engendered new forms. Kiss, Sunrise, and Bachpiece, compact in appearance, create a play of asymmetrical balance on metal slabs. Tensile possibilities of steel are tested in Attic, Queen's Rook, and Homage to Brancusi, with wooden forms attached to coiled or bent pieces of that metal. Seen in Figure 3, Homage to Brancusi, was, for di Suvero, "the first work where I totally abandoned the idea that a work of art could not be touched. This work is seen only when one participates with it." This participation required climbing up five feet to a seat set on a curved steel bar. The participant-viewer then pushed against a post to animate the piece. All these works were probes into uncharted technical and aesthetic areas. Yes, Prison Dream does convey the anguish of imprisonment, be it physical, mental, or spiritual. It is also the result of practice bending metal and using an acetylene torch, skills
Mark di Suvero would continue to use—eventually on pieces the size of four story buildings.

During this period of experimentation a parallel body of work was created, a magnificent series of hands. The six hands, (three were formed in 1959, the rest in 1962-1963), were first modeled in wax and then cast in bronze. These oversized hands are the only figurative works in di Suvero’s oeuvre. Raft, Hand Pierced, and Hand, 1962, are very powerful. They are not academic studies. The inflection of agony and determination are forceful and affecting. If Prison Dream conveys a message of imprisonment then these hands are the counterpoint—depiction of the spirit that clings to life and shall overcome that prison. Donald Goddard, writing in Artnews, in 1976, considered them to be critical in the foundation of the artist’s work:

The hand represents the junction of interaction between the individual and the world...; it is the part of the body that spatially and psychologically breaks through the shell of human isolation and immobility. In di Suvero’s sculpture it is the basic unit for structuring the world.\textsuperscript{12}

After 1963, the presence of hands in the artist’s work would only be through the skill of his own.

Works made from 1964 to 1966 comprise the last group, as 1964 marks the year di Suvero walked without assistance, and 1966, the last year he assembled works without a crane. Heterogeneous in appearance, materials, and scale, these pieces are the most diverse in the artist’s career. As if in
response to his renewed vitality, the ideas broached in the experiments of the second group are enlarged and expanded during these two years.

These two years, 1964-1966, saw an outpouring of work. All manner of found objects were brought into the artist's studio and turned into sculpture. Tires, chairs, steel drums, chunks of wood and metal were chained, roped, and forged into an array of works. Homage to Brancusi spawned a host of kinetic pieces, among them Laurie's Love Seat, BLT, and Love Makes the World Go Round. Kinetic pieces were not always to be ridden, they could be manipulated, as in Figure 4, Stuyvesantseye, 1965, where a chair, barrel, and bent pipe are transformed into a merry-go-round. Guards at Walker Art Institute, which currently owns Stuyvesantseye, encourage visitors to turn it. Viewed at rest the piece seems to be lacking in some way. It was designed to be rotated, and it needs to be in motion to be successful. Without motion it is too still, too lifeless. The participant-viewer is a crucial element in Mark di Suvero's kinetic pieces. This inclusion, like the size of his wooden constructions of the first group, was without precedent in modern kinetic sculpture.

Naum Gabo created the first kinetic sculpture in 1920 with Kinetic Construction, but this work and those that followed by Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Alexander Calder, and Jean Tinguely, did not include a human element in the kinetic formula. As Max Kozloff declared in 1967, "No one has yet
had the casual nerve and wit, not even Calder, to include people in a mobile sculpture of such magnitude. The inclusion of the participant-viewer would be intrinsic to di Suvero's work from this period onward.

The kinetic works of the third and last group of Mark di Suvero's earlier years range in size from modest, by di Suvero standards, to immense. After recovering from his accident he returned to his New York Front Street warehouse loft-studio and created a series of "ceiling grazing" works such as A-Train, and Zero. An extended visit home, to California, in 1963, is credited as the catalyst for the surge in scale of his work. While living at the Point Reyes beach, di Suvero found a spatial challenge in the vista of sea and shore. Considered against the majestic expanse of the ocean, his large, interior-built sculptures diminished in substance and potency.

In response to the wide and open environment he created Nova Albion, 1964-1965. Twenty feet high, it was his largest work to that time. Another work created at Point Reyes beach during 1965 was a smaller piece, PreColumbia. His first pieces created outside the studio, they both contained, by then, signature kinetic elements, a foam and tire bed for Nova Albion, and a tire seat on one arm of PreColumbia. From 1965 onward Mark di Suvero would work either out-of-doors or in immense, enclosed spaces. Freed from the limitations of walls and ceilings di Suvero's sculptures
continued to stretch skyward.

The increase in the scale of the works after Nova Albion continued at a steady, smooth, pace. With Figure 5, Praise for Elohim Adonai, in 1966, he achieved his largest work without the use of a crane. Constructed of I-beams, logs, cable, and metal, it features a thirty-foot-wide tetrahedron on a twenty-foot-high central axis. The intricate pivotal joint, and the two massive parts, are so finely balanced that the great tetra-hedron gracefully sways and rotates. This pivotal element is an appropriate metaphor for the pivotal position Praise for Elohim Adonai has in Mark di Suvero's work. The last piece in which he would combine wood and metal, it is the first of his monumental works of extremely subtle structural engineering. Praise for Elohim Adonai, stands on the cusp, between the work of Mark di Suvero's years of aesthetic searching and that of his mature style of progressively refined and expanded monumental works. After 1967, the year of his first crane-assisted piece, Are Years What? (For Marianne Moore), Mark di Suvero's work grew from fanciful found object "rides" and "toys" to monumental statements.

Inaugurated by influences from pioneers of modern art, these three groups constitute the first flowering of Mark di Suvero's work. Created partly, in reaction to, and partly in spite of, his severe injuries, the eight years between 1958-1966 reveal the development of the characteristics that
distinguish the artist's work: massiveness, architectural conception, physical/psychological inclusion of the viewer, and urban-technical materials. The attention that the work of these years has received reveals as much about the flux of American modern art as it does the artistic development of their creator.

Work of the Sixties in the Context of American Sculpture

Mark di Suvero's early work has most often been presented in two periods, 1958-1960 work, and the 1964-1966 pieces. The place these works hold in the development of American sculpture requires knowledge of the development of sculpture and criticism in the fifties and the sixties.

Sculpture in America of the fifties has not held an esteemed position in the history of modern art. Depending on the observer, it was either an exercise in failed potential, or mere copying of preceding European styles. American sculpture of the fifties was not accorded the evaluation and acclaim accorded American painting of the fifties. It is a decade historians seem reluctant to discuss. The Whitney Museum's commemorative catalog of 1976, Two Hundred Years of American Sculpture is indicative of the treatment these years have received. The efforts of artists in the thirties and forties, with especial attention to David Smith, are reviewed in an extensive discourse, "Magician's Game Decades of
Transformation, 1930-1950," by Roseland E. Krause. This segment was followed by Barbara Haskell's "Two Decades of American Sculpture: A Survey". In Haskell's discussion the efforts of fifties' sculptors are encapsuled in a few statements:

Although sculpture began to attract a greater number of young artists as early as the fifties, it was generally dominated by the Cubist tradition of open welded forms...During the fifties sculptors centered their attention on the attempt to translate the spirit and imagery of Abstract Expressionism into three-dimensions.¹⁶

Then Haskell passes on, with obvious relief, to the glories of the sixties and seventies. "By the early sixties, this situation had changed and American sculpture became as prominent and vital as painting."¹⁷ When this decade is not being consigned to American art's periphery (as in Lucie Smith's Movements in Art Since 1945, "It was difficult for any artist to produce a satisfactory three-dimensional equivalent for the work of Jackson Pollock,"¹⁸), it is evaluated strictly as a period of a few exceptional talents. In Wayne Craven's Sculpture in America of 1967, the author's compilation of artists is presented with meticulous adherence to his contention that "The two most significant movements of the post-1946 period have been Abstract Expressionism and Constructivism."¹⁹

The most acrimonious opinion, held by Clement Greenberg, was expressed in his 1956 fulmination on the only sculptor he would acknowledge, David Smith:
Modernist sculpture's present malady, here and abroad, is artiness—whether it is the archaic artiness of Moore, Marini and Giacometti, the Cubist or art brut[sic] artiness of the younger British sculptors, or the expressionists-surrealist artiness of the Americans. Artiness is usually the symptom of a fear lest the work of art not display its identity as art sufficiently and be confused with either a utilitarian or a purely arbitrary object.20

What had appeared to the critic, in the 1948 essay "The New Sculpture," to be a promising avenue of visual expression ten years later was a disheartening melange of "inflated reputations and false renaissances." 21 Invariably these two essays, and this attitude, by Clement Greenberg are evoked in most treatises on American sculpture. "...Greenberg's criticism has thus turned out to be a prediction. ", reiterates the accepted view in the catalog of the prestigious sculpture show of 1967, Maurice Tuchman's American Sculpture in the Sixties. 22 Sculpture, in the fifties, was evaluated, not in its own right, but in relation to painting. As the first and second generation artists of Abstract Expressionism were codified, and deified, sculpture was held, in the critical literature, to be painting's inferior reflection. This bleak attitude toward sculpture of the immediate past was the filter through which the earliest work of Mark di Suvero was viewed.

Critics, grounded in this negative view, saw in the first group of 1958-1960, the qualities that seemed to have eluded sculpture in the fifties. Hankchampion, Che Paro
Senza Euridice satisfied the decade-old demand that sculpture shun previous traditions in materials and monolithic form and embrace the openness of Abstract Expressionism. Reviews of these works from the early sixties invariably remark on the sculptural realization of Kline's or de Kooning's brush work. Mark di Suvero's work from 1958-1960, has been entrenched, through surveys and catalogs, in the years after its appearance as the delayed fulfillment of the critic's expectations. This role was ascribed to several of di Suvero's contemporaries--John Chamberlain, Tom Doyle, Peter Forakis, and Charles Ginnever. From Barbara Haskell's essay in Two Hundred Years of American Sculpture:

Mark di Suvero also succeeded in adapting the heroic vision and the bold dynamic forms of the New York School painters. His early work combined the thrusting imagery and powerful gesture typical of Franz Kline's paintings with a sense of monumental scale...Concurrent with but independent of Chamberlain and di Suvero, a group of sculptors in California adapted the spirit of Abstract Expressionism painting to the ceramics medium.

It is a viewpoint not without foundation. Mark di Suvero, in an interview with Barbara Rose in the seventies stated "My work is painting in three dimensions." With the considerable attention paid Abstract Expressionism after World War II, artists in the fifties and early sixties were, at the minimum, aware of, if not affected by its impact. Abstract Expressionism was held up to be the primary source on which American sculptors could base their work, "...the art criticism of the Fifties, by naming it, by explaining its
aims and technical process, and by ignoring those who didn't fit." The early work of Mark di Suvero was, by some critics, to be named and explained under the pervasiveness of the New York School.

The inclusion of strong Constructivist elements in the early work of Mark di Suvero could not be dismissed while it was being championed as the realization of Abstract Expression in sculpture. Critics who acknowledged the Constructivist aspects in Mark di Suvero's art considered it a successful union of disparate forces. This union had its critics, such as Jack Burnham:

Visually insecure and illogical connections have become the stock in trade of the sculptor—and an important part of the vernacular of the new formalism, termed by some critics 'Concrete Expressionism.' What typifies this vein is that it is scaleless, imposing in mass, industrially finished, room-oriented, and adapted from a structural idiom which could be termed "formalism of the absurd." Some of the best exponents of this are Robert Grovsner, Mark di Suvero,...  

Synthesis in art, in the fifties and sixties, was suspect. Synthesis resists the aegis of the historian, assigning of art into patterns or styles. Consider the premise of Wayne Craven's Sculpture in America, 1968, detailing an exacting segregation of artists into Constructivism, Abstract Expressionism, and Pop Art. This tight, controlled view, disavows even the possibility of synthesis occurring in art. Of the artists of the late fifties and early sixties identified in other sources as Abstract Expressionists, only
John Chamberlain, in a terse acknowledgement, is found in Cravens' rigidly ordered view. Mark di Suvero, Robert Grovsner, Charles Ginniver, et. al., are not listed. The same principle that governed critical appraisal in the fifties was re-enacted in the sixties; if an artist's work cannot be placed in a category, then it is not discussed.

Two attitudes were at work in the sixties in art and criticism; declaring Abstract Expressionism dead and promoting favorites from among the myriad of movements that sprang up to fill the void. After a decade of decrying American sculpture for not being vitalized by Abstract Expressionism, critics then declared the all-important movement passé. Even as Mark di Suvero's first group of works from 1958-1960 was lauded for realizing what sculpture was to have been throughout the fifties, it was also received with impatience by those eager to leave the past behind and turn to the new.

By the time Abstract Expressionism faded from the scene around 1960, the rhetoric of 'struggle' was worn thin. ...and most of di Suvero's contemporaries reacted against the existential esthetic of Abstract Expressionism...

Fractured into an array of choices, the art world of the sixties in New York was not unlike Paris of the twenties. Groups, movements, and manifestoes, shifted and supplanted one another in the artistic kaleidoscope. The appendices of exhibit catalogs of the sixties listed the ever-increasing
new terms and movements, including "ABC art, Correality, Gestalt sculpture, Junk sculpture, Kinetic sculpture, Object Sculpture, Planar sculpture, and Structurist Sculpture," along with the popularized terms of Minimal art, Op art, and Pop art. The mythos of the One True Movement disappeared forever under the deluge of new forms and ideas. The new modes of art each had its sycophants who maintained, with vehemence, their cause's validity and superiority over the moment. These ideological divisions are reflected in the literature on Mark di Suvero's early work, especially the diverse wood and metal pieces of 1964-1966.

These years are the period of Mark di Suvero's involvement with the Park Place Gallery. The Park Place Gallery years can be considered the closest the artist came to a formal ideology. The consortium of artists was predicated on friendship and shared interests rather than on an official manifesto or shared process in their art. Their mutual interests included free form jazz music, physics and an aversion to artiness. From David Bourdin's 1966 article, "E=mc² à Go-Go,":

The Park Place artists take the Space Age for granted and try to get it across in their work. They all read books and periodicals on mathematics and science. The sculptors have a special interest in topology, the branch of geometry concerned with the ways in which surfaces can be twisted from one shape into another, leaving certain basic properties unaltered and the surface as a whole unbroken.
Mark di Suvero's work developed in this mix of art, philosophy, and quantum mechanics, includes the second group of pieces created during his recovery, and the third group of large scale works with kinetic elements. Exploration was the raison d'être of this group. The experiments with new materials and forms di Suvero embarked upon during this time would have found ready encouragement with these artists. The work of the artists of the Park Place Gallery group unknowingly ascribed to Jack Burnham's tenet in *Beyond Modern Sculpture* of sculpture's grounding in science:

Sculpture's origins were founded in the philosophies of rationalism and materialism. Consequently the development of modern sculpture very closely parallels the intellectual framework produced by our scientific culture.\(^3\)

Mark di Suvero and the Park Place Gallery group, often by default, would be extolled as the counterpoint to Object Art or Minimalism. Imposed from outside the Park Place group, this polarization of style and process, affected the reception of di Suvero's work of 1961-1966.

Minimalism with its emphatically machine fabricated sculpture is the antithesis to his found-object compositions of 1961-1966. In the work of Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, and other Minimalists, "Theirs is an aesthetic based on a horror of ambiguity, accident, and wayward emotion." observed Dore Ashton in her "New York Commentary" of April, 1966.\(^3\) Ambiguous and emotionally engaging are qualities that typify the pieces created by the artist in 1963-1966. Minimalism,
with its elemental geometric anti-romantic stance, created new forms through rejection, whereas Mark di Suvero's emphasis was on complexity. There was a surfeit of isms during the sixties for di Suvero's work to counter, but Minimalsim was the style of the moment. The inclusion or omission in reviews and retrospective exhibits of Mark di Suvero's work, (or any artist), at this time was affected by the particular critic's personal response to the new directions in art.

An example of the pervasiveness of these two attitudes is Jack Burnham's *Beyond Modern Sculpture*. Published in 1968, this comprehensive examination of the European and American plastic arts of this century does redress the delinquencies of other surveys, while creating several of its own. The scholar's concepts are carefully and thoroughly presented, but the acknowledgement of a sculptor's work within his concepts is just as arbitrary as that of Clement Greenberg, or Wayne Craven. His allegiance to the controlling attitudes of sixties' criticism is put forth clearly and simply. The first position, that of Abstract Expressionism being a non-viable source for artistic inspiration, is unmistakable in Burnham's writings.

It is no secret that since 1960, the vitalist and formal-reductivist tendencies of sculpture have approached exhaustion...The urge to create 'objects,' that is, three-dimensional entities that did not resemble sculpture--that were even a-sculptural--had been building up for some time."
Though tolerant of most trends, Minimalism was Burnham's movement of choice:

Objective or Minimal sculpture, is a rejection of 'open' sculpture, pseudo-mechanistic sculpture, organically-derived sculpture, Neo-Plastic sculpture, 'dynamically' poised sculpture that have characterized three-dimensional conceptualism. Objective sculpture admits to being itself--nothing else. It seeks a separate identity unattached to all influences except the space in which it stands. 35

Having aligned himself with these two attitudes, Burnham could not consider Mark di Suvero's work congruent with his tenets.

On kinetic sculpture, Burnham meticulously details its history, development, and present state, (1968). Marcel Duchamp, Naum Gabo, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Alexander Calder, Jean Tinguely, Len Lye, are among the artists cited for their efforts in the sculpture of motion. The fanciful wood and metal kinetic pieces of Mark di Suvero are most definitely not mentioned. Burnham equates the development and expansion of modern sculpture to concurrent developments in scientific thought. Machine-oriented kinetic work is permissible, not di Suvero's human-oriented and human-activated, pieces. Burnham made the caustic observation on di Suvero's work as "formalism of the absurd," cited previously. 36 That Mark di Suvero, and the Park Place artists, used scientific theories as a basis in part, for their work, appears to have been irrelevant for their work to be mentioned in Beyond Modern Sculpture. "The constant shuffle of powers gives new importance to the art critic and art functionary,
particularly those who undertake to predict." wrote Harold Rosenberg on art criticism in 1964. This power extends as well to those who documented art in the sixties. Not all critics ignored or dismissed di Suvero's early work of the sixties. Sidney Geist, Hilton Kramer, Wayne Andersen, were among those who did not disdain di Suvero's obvious connections to antecedent styles and perceived the synthesis that the artist had achieved between the two. "...his work is the opposite of the cynicism and small ideas that clutter the world of art." Sidney Geist, 1960. By the seventies, after di Suvero had begun realizing this synthesis in monumental form, critics such as Carter Ratcliff would write of his early work:

During the 60's, a decade of rejections, reductions, and denials, di Suvero's art grew through its inclusiveness. While rival art movements challenged each other with mutual exclusive genealogies, di Suvero drew on a variety of sources with an exuberance that carried him beyond eclecticism...Works from this period show di Suvero's capacity to make the processes of invention, of improvisation, explicit.  

In order to determine the place of Mark di Suvero's early work in the development of American modern sculpture it would seem the work is a paradox; it is of the sixties' art milieu and yet outside it too. Mark di Suvero's work from 1958-1966 is not simply an increment in the linear march of style, but a bridge. A bridge between decades, between styles, and between personal tragedy and triumph. Mark di
Suvero's work of the early sixties is the period in which he successfully blended the aesthetics of Abstract Expressionism and Constructivism, the foundation for his mature style.

Work of the Sixties and the Artist's Philosophy

The inclusiveness noted by Harris Rosenstein in Mark di Suvero's early work is the product of his view that the nature of art is drawing from innumerable sources. In an interview with Gilbert Perlain, di Suvero stated, "The greatest artists based their work on other artists. Picasso's ceramics are of the works of Crete, Brancusi had sources from Africa. We are all tied to other artists..."40 His work is also an admixture of the arts--the humanities, science, mathematics, engineering. Mark di Suvero's inclusiveness extends beyond the sources of his work, to include the viewer as well. Art is not to be a barrier, his sculpture is to be for everyone. In Rosentstein's 1966 article di Suvero declared his egalitarian intentions for his work:

His final reality principle is perhaps the most illuminating: the work must be able to 'defend itself against an unarmed man,' which is to say it must endure the reality of people, and not just the sheltered ambience of art lovers.41

The most obvious example of this "final reality principle" is in the group of kinetic works from 1963-1966. These pieces were meant to be handled, shoved, and to carry human weight. At the 1991 retrospective exhibit in Nice,
posted signs in the galleries of his earliest pieces politely asked "Ne touchez pas." These works produced too strong an urge to disobey. Inevitably one would see a furtive viewer stroke the dappled surfaces of a cast bronze hand or tentatively tap a piece to articulate its movable parts. Even the largest of his early works, *Praise for Elohim Adonai* may be grand, but it is not remote. The great tetrahedron, so carefully balanced, is an invitation to the viewer to participate in the simple pleasure of watching the wind turn it upon its axis. (While preparing to close the Nice exhibit, the artist loaned out a crutch so that towering *Praise for Elohim Adonai* and *Mahatma*, placed on the museum's parve, could be set in motion to the delight of visitors and staff.)

The "unarmed man," when presented with di Suvero's art, senses immediately that his presence is an intrinsic element to its execution. Mark di Suvero's work, especially the work of the early sixties, is to form a connection between himself, other artists, and his audience.

The artist's interest in all the arts: music, literature, architecture, and in the individual and his place in society, are all first evidenced in Mark di Suvero's earliest works. This sculptor displayed the qualities of the "Renaissance man" in the contemporary understanding of the term. His belief that the individual has worth and value was, and remains, the basis for the inclusion of the participant-viewer in his work.
The artist's personal philosophy concerning war, and the Vietnam war in particular, led him to leave the United States in 1970 to live in Europe until the conflict's conclusion. This was not a pretentious display of protest for personal fame on his part, but a personal protest, affecting only the artist. He cut himself off from his friends, his beloved family, familiar surroundings and his adopted country.

The metaphor of a bridge for Mark di Suvero's early work is appropriate, not only as a link between styles and decades, but in the expression of his personal philosophy. A bridge connects opposites, transcends barriers, and permits communication; this too, is the goal of this artist in his work.
Endnotes to Chapter III


5 Ibid., p. 100.


8 Geist, p. 41.

9 Barbara Rose, "Mark di Suvero," Mark di Suvero, edited by c.r.a.c.a.p. (Chalon-sur-Saône, France: Centre National de Recherche d'Animation et de Creation Pour les Arts Plastiques, 1975), 44. (Translated from French.)


12 Kozloff, p. 46.

13 Lloyd, p. 134.

14 Ibid., p. 134.

Endnotes to Chapter III


2. Ibid., p. 188.


6. Ibid., p. 203.


8. Ratcliff, p. 100.


10. Rose, p. 45.

11. Andersen, p. 16.


14. Rose, p. 44.


Endnotes to Chapter III


34Burnham, p. 174.

35Ibid, p. 175


38Geist, p. 43.


40Perlein, p. 22.

Figure 6 Are Years What (For Marianne Moore)
CHAPTER IV

WORK OF THE SEVENTIES

The years of 1958-1966 were the years of searching and experimentation for Mark di Suvero. He examined and utilized materials and artists, honing his ability to integrate diverse elements. In 1967 the artist began to use a new tool, a construction crane. "Openness to experimentation means nothing if one's experiments are always cautious.", wrote critic Carter Ratcliff of di Suvero's willingness to utilize such a non-traditional tool. After 1967, the artist's work literally and figuratively grew up.

The crane released the artist to experiment with new materials and proportions. His work, which had been growing steadily in size, advanced to Herculean proportions. Praise for Elchin Adonai, 1966, at 22 by 30 feet was soon dwarfed by works such as Are Years What (For Marianne Moore), 1967, at 40 by 40 by 30 feet, and Yes! For Lady Day, 1968-69, 54 by 40 by 35 feet. Having the means to manipulate the appropriate materials, contributed to the new, colossal proportions in his work. Di Suvero's sources became the shipyard, foundry, and factory instead of the alley and building site. Prior to
1967 he had worked in relatively malleable materials—wood, rubber, tires, foam. Industrial metal does not willingly conform to an artist's vision. The knowledge and experience Mark di Suvero had acquired with the Park Place Gallery group in engineering and topology would be challenged and expanded with his new, monumental pieces.

Utilization of these new materials demanded particular attention to technique. A work has to be considered; regard paid to the balance and stability of the various elements and how they converge. The harmonious interdependence of all elements of a piece is critical, for safety as well as aesthetics. Yet, for all their overwhelming dimensions, the crane-assisted works display several familiar qualities. They are the found-object constructions and kinetic works of 1958-1966 rendered on a grandiose scale. The slanted legs and canted I-beams echo the thrusts and angles of *Hankchampion, Barrell, and Che Faro Senza Euridice*. While the dangling elements in *Are Years What? (For Marianne Moore)*, two joined I-beams, and *Yes! For Lady Day* with its severed boiler, recall the swings and rides. The artist exchanged only his materials in 1967, not his approach to how they should be used. The increase in size of his work was well received, Wade Saunders, on di Suvero's monumental forms, "Di Suvero is at his best at his biggest. His work was physically and psychologically outsize from the start."
Of the early crane-assisted works the most significant is seen in Figure 6, *Are Years What? (For Marianne Moore)*, 1968. This piece displays the characteristics of the earlier work of the sixties, while demonstrating the complex engineering that delineates Mark di Suvero's masterful work of the late eighties. Named for the poem by the St. Louis poet Marianne Moore, *Are Years What? (For Marianne Moore)* is a series of canted and angled I-beams that appear to simultaneously support and reject one another. The massive steel beams are counter-balanced, visually and literally, by a "v" of I-beams hanging from an out-thrust appendage. The tons of steel accentuated by the improbable balance of the dangling "v" creates a dramatic impression. The success of the piece, aesthetically and structurally, is in the skillful use of the cable to take the weight of one element, the "v", and shift it to another member, the canted beams. The pieces are tenuously connected, bolted or welded, only where absolutely necessary. This thrust and parry of weight and balance is tensegrity on a colossal scale. Tensegrity is R. Buckminster Fuller's concept of rigid and flexible elements working in tension and compression to form an entity greater than the sum of its parts. Without the "v" the piece would collapse, without the canted I-beams the dangling element would not be possible. The divergent parts of *Are Years What? (For Marianne Moore)* combine to form a whole that is
monumental without being massive. This dramatic play of tension and balance is repeated in works of ever-grander scale and subtly throughout the seventies and eighties. If Are Years What? (For Marianne Moore) is the first display of the artist's proficiency in manipulating crane, torch, and mathematics, it is also an expression of the qualities of the best of the artist's earlier work.

The visual similarities to Hankchampion, Barrell, Che Faro Senza Euridice and the later kinetic rides, has already been noted, but the connection between the early sixties and this period is not only in outward appearance. The elaborate play of tension in Are Years What? (For Marianne Moore) is an evocation of the tension of Hankchampion transformed by steel into a massive gesture of action. The artist's objectives of the seventies, to embody energy and to construct volume without mass, were the same as his goals in the sixties. Some critics such as Carter Ratcliff thought that he was most successful in achieving the qualities of energy and encompassed space, after he turned to using a crane and steel:

Sleeker, with their components more elegantly deployed, they bring di Suvero as close he has ever been to the ideal forms and balancings of Constructivism.4

The preceding quote was from a review of the 1975 Tuileries exhibit. Three years later in a review on Mark di Suvero, (and three other Park Place Gallery Group sculptors),
Ratcliff observe about the previous decade's work:

...as these sculptors employed formal components of greater and greater linear clarity, their work has become more severe. Yet its expansive openness has persisted, its concerns have been focused, and you begin to see that the point was never to bring the forms of abstract painting into three dimensions. From the beginning, all four have deployed form with a gestural thrust, with a spontaneity turned relentlessly outward...

Are Years What? (For Marianne Moore) and the other crane-assisted pieces of the seventies share not only the gestural and constructivist influences of the earliest works of Mark di Suvero's career, but also the inclusive nature of his kinetic pieces, the "rides" and "toys" of 1964-1967. Where before the kinetic element comprised the entire piece in For Brancusi, or Stuvesyantseve, in Are Years What? For Marianne Moore) and the other works from the seventies onward, the kinetic aspect became only one element. The dangling "v" of Are Years What? (For Marianne Moore), and seat dangling from a crosspiece are di Suvero's continuation of his desire to include the participant-viewer in his work.

This idea of the participant-viewer inclusion may not be as immediate as in his previous work, but it is definitely present. Are Years What? (For Marianne Moore) as installed in Nice, led pedestrians of the plaza to interact with the towering red sculpture. Set adjacent to the Avenue Malaussena, directly on the expansive sidewalk, dozens of people passed by and beneath the large, heavy, dangling "v."
They often barely glanced up at what one would have thought an imposing and menacing object. For the unhurried patron of the area, the sculpture was an object for reflection and photography. The work encouraged viewers to draw near. Repeatedly, interested viewers stood next to the piece, leaning against supporting legs peering up the canted I-beams at the bolted joints and examining the cable system supporting the dangling "v." Viewers stood beneath the welded I-beam "v" and watched entranced as it slowly turned and pivoted high above them. Children seemed never content simply to observe; they had to touch the sculpture. More precisely they struck it with fist or object, in attempts to elicit a tone from the heavy metal. A short I-beam "foot" for the forward thrusting canted leg, provided a seat for contemplation.

Mark di Suvero has said that his sculptures have been created to stand up to the attention of "an unarmed man." The average person should be able to interact with his work without fear of either damaging fragile artwork or of being imperiled by monumental sculpture. Elizabeth C. Baker's comments on the city-wide Chalon-sur-Saône exhibition of 1974 are as applicable to the Nice exhibit of 1991:

He has always built his work to entice people into climbing on it, lying on it, swinging from it...Di Suvero seems to assume that his work has, quite naturally, a social and public dimension. He wants it to be used in every sense—physically, socially, esthetically—the last encompassing all the rest.
The monumental steel works are constructions on a grand scale with the ability to be intimate. A paradox at which the artist has excelled for the past twenty-five years. The sixties was the time of experimentation by the artist for the means to realize his artistic goals. The seventies were the time Mark di Suvero concentrated on those methods and materials that developed his constructive ideas on a new public scale.

Work of the Seventies in the Context of American Sculpture

If early work has given cursory consideration by the "instant art history" of the sixties, the early years of the crane-assisted pieces were met, for the artist, with unprecedented attention. A review in 1971 by Robert Hughes of the artist's new monumental pieces and impending European exhibits, accurately limes what had been the artist's reception prior to this time:

Mark di Suvero is perhaps the least visible major talent in American sculpture: a tough, idealistic, exuberantly gifted man whose work may well contain more lessons about epic scale than any other living American's. But his achievement has until lately been strangely muffled. He has never written a public statement about art. His work is hard to find; museums until now have given it only the sketchiest support.

Mark di Suvero's work was to be seen throughout Europe from 1972 to 1975. Major exhibitions and city-wide installations in Eindhoven, Holland, 1972, and in Chalone-sur-Soane, France, 1972-1974, were followed by showings in the 37th
Venice Biennale and the distinguished honor of an exhibit in the Jardin des Tuileries, 1975. These events were reviewed and discussed in the *International Herald Tribune*, the *New York Times*, and the major art periodicals. The subject of a documentary film, the artist and his work were internationally known and examined. The Whitney Museum of American Art held a retrospective exhibit in November of 1975, with the only American city-wide installation of his work. The Whitney placed his works in the boroughs of New York City. His audience of participant-viewers expanded to include the citizens of cities and towns across two continents as his monumental pieces were purchased, or displayed by various museums and government agencies in America and Europe. The artist's work became more public than ever before, appropriately. Since the first city-wide exhibit in the Netherlands, Mark di Suvero's work became synonymous with the seventies' concern with public art. To many critics, historians, public officials, and average citizens during that decade, public art was the monumental crane-assisted pieces of Mark di Suvero. When considering di Suvero's work from this period, knowledge of the seventies' approach to public sculpture in America is essential. The evolution of the artist's work into monumental forms coincided with a major shift in the the role and definition of public art.
By the seventies the shift in public art, i.e., sculpture, from commemorative totemic object to urban environment panacea was entrenched in civil and corporate agencies throughout the United States. The earnest and laudable belief that public sculpture would animate dismal urban living spaces was widely, and generously, supported. The April, 1977 issue of Buildings stated:

...big business has finally realized it needs the arts...In the last few years, private enterprise has commissioned artists and sculptors to help make the city a viable place to live and work,...

Margaret A. Robinette's survey of successful public sculpture projects, Outdoor Sculpture, Object and Environment, is of interest not only as a survey of public art programs of the time, 1976, but also in its function as a guide for "the professionals and laypersons responsible for the enhancing of our visual environment with outdoor sculpture." This treatise reveals as much about the attitude toward public sculpture, as it does the state of public sculpture, during the decade.

Today, further change in the purpose of public sculpture is evident. It rarely commemorates heroes and events, nor symbolizes accomplishments and goals. Instead its task appears to be aesthetically enhancing its setting. It is expected to contribute visually and experientially to the quality of life of those who experience it as an element in their daily environment. There is, however, a sense that it is still symbolic and expressive, at least of the technological world in which we live.

Two agencies, the General Services Administration, and the National Endowment for the Arts embarked on achieving this
worthy goal. Through their respective programs, GSA's Art in Federal Architecture, and the NEA's Art in Public Places, the deliberate and systematic placement of art by contemporary sculptors in plazas and parks commenced. The large, often colorful, works by Alexander Calder, Anthony Caro, Kenneth Snelson, Alexander Lieberman and Mark di Suvero were the epitome of the work that the GSA official and the corporate executive sought to enact public art's new raison d'etre.

Prior to his return to the United States and the Whitney retrospective, the artist had built and shown his work, when and where he could. Inspired by the new impetus to public sculpture, various public and private organizations commissioned the artist for several site-specific pieces, among them: For Handel, Western Washington State University, 1974-1975, ISIS, Institute of Scrap Iron and Steel, Inc., 1977-1978, and Innersearch, Northwestern Bank, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1979-1980. By the end of the decade the artist's work could be seen in numerous museum or public sites. Cities across the country--Baltimore, Dallas, St. Louis, Grand Rapids--could claim a di Suvero among their public art collections. In 1968 the artist was known only in the art world, by 1978 he was known around the world. The new public sculpture movement found in Mark di Suvero's monumental forms the means to satisfy its demand for work to benefit the general public. The seventies' monumental work of Mark di Suvero found its place in American sculpture to serve as a
sterling example of the public art movement of the sixties and seventies.

Reviews of the artist's work from this decade invariably remark upon the ability of the work to "humanize" urban spaces that have been dehumanized through poor urban design or neglect. Typical is Wade Saunder's observations, from 1983, on di Suvero's monumental pieces:

A big sculpture in front of a bigger building doesn't necessarily help connect the building with its site. It can be alienating rather than integrating. Di Suvero always gives us a way in, into the sculpture and thus into the space. The success of the large pieces rests in part on the happy congruence of di Suvero's visual style and personal temperament—both are expansive, direct, democratic.13

These comments, made nearly a decade after the Whitney Museum retrospective exhibition and city-wide installation, typify the attitude critics held of this artist's work during the seventies. From the first, though, the crane-assisted pieces appealed to critics and communities seeking to "connect" buildings and citizens to the urban environment. The ability to integrate inclusiveness and grandeur, imbued in the monumental works, was unique to this artist. Other artists were creating massive works at this time, Alexander Calder, Anthony Caro, and Kenneth Snelson, but none of these artists displayed the unique, human, scale of Mark di Suvero's pieces. Donald Goddard's opinion on Mard di Suvero's monumental sculpture: "Their scale is always in relation to the human figure. There is nothing remote, nothing that
cannot be reached, either by climbing or by sight." In the 1975 *New York Times* art editorial, "Public Sculpture Should Be Art for the Public," Peter Schjeldahl while reviewing a recently installed Kenneth Snelson piece, elaborated on the failure and success of monumental art:

The main assumption is that what we want to do with urban spaces is 'enliven' them. This, then, is seen as a problem requiring a 'solution,' elegant, or otherwise, and big sculpture, in this case Snelson's, is seen to provide it. The artist is viewed gratefully as a kind of aesthetics engineer. This is not a new or by any means a disreputable philosophy. What is disturbing is how thoroughly it has come to possess the thinking of cultural agencies and urban planners. Its functionalism is of a piece with the functionalism of the architecture that entails it, an architecture whose mammoth size and clean lines celebrate celebrate efficiency at the cost of every other human virtue. Schjeldahl opined that not merely huge works of industrial material be placed in the urban environment were the "solution" but works that challenge it, aesthetically and philosophically:

And by human values I don't mean the tame playfulness of Calder or the sedate surrealism of Moore, I mean something less tractable, something like the individualistic dynamisms of Mark di Suvero and Ronald Bladen or the serious silliness of Claus Oldenburg. None of these three first-rate American sculptors has been exactly swamped with commissions.

By the end of the seventies corporate and government officials had also perceived the artist's capacity for "the deliberate kinship di Suvero promotes between the human presence and industrial metaphor." They responded with commissions for several works.
Complex engineering as evidenced by works such as *Are Years What? (For Marianne Moore)*, is the trait that has become the hallmark of Mark di Suvero's work. His ability to suspend a given element by cable or intricate joint-piece, without the element coming in direct contact with other solid parts of the work produces work instantly recognizable in appearance. Mark di Suvero's ability to endow these distinct pieces with the human presence, of the creator and the viewer, is the trait that renders his monumental crane-assisted pieces so unique as public art.

**Work of the Seventies and the Artist's Philosophy**

Mark di Suvero's philosophy from 1960 to 1967 did not change after he began his crane-assisted pieces. He still utilized his work to blend divergent styles and communicate his interest in the humanities and the world about him. Always a person of strongly held beliefs, by 1968, these beliefs had not altered, but intensified. If his early work, either through inference or evocation, expressed his convictions, the crane-assisted pieces were direct, strong statements for strongly held ideas. In Carter Radcliff's *Artforum* review of the artist's work, the critic detailed the issues that concerned the artist in 1972:

This persistent impact is partially due to di Suvero's broad social concern. He is an engaged artist without being especially political. It shows in his anti-war position, in his important role in the communal activities of the Park Place Gallery (1963-67), in his work with New York's
Institution for Rehabilitation and Research, and other social agencies, (especially in the construction of playgrounds), and in his efforts to produce toys...

These ideas had been present from the beginning; *Hankchampion*, 1960, is named in honor of younger brother Henry, active in civil rights efforts in New York in the sixties. *Eatherly's Lamp*, for Claude Eatherly, the pilot of the Enola Gay, who remained guilt-ridden over his role in dropping the first atomic bomb and became committed to pacifism and ending nuclear armament. Subtle allusions such as these were replaced by unmistakable statements such as *Mother Peace*, 1970. A three story tall plinth bearing suspended I-beam arms, upon which are cut-outs of the peace symbol, *Mother Peace*, was, and is, his most overt political statement. The major influence on Mark di Suvero's work after 1968 was his opposition to the United States' role in the Vietnam war. As Harris Rosenstein indicated in his 1967 interview:

The swinging tires, and the fact that it [a Happening] began at 4:00 p.m., rather than in the evening,...sure signs that Mark di Suvero was involved because both meant that the place would be packed with kids, and kids are what Mark di Suvero is crazy about. Another passion, which has about the same basis, is his opposition to the Viet Nam war and most particularly the bombings.

Mark di Suvero was not unique in his beliefs during this time of heightened political awareness. Irving Sandler, in *American Art of the 1960's*, chronicled how artists, and
critics, were affected by the escalating conflict:

Even after President Kennedy's assassination, in 1963, the mood was one of optimism and hope, until the war in Vietnam began to exert an irresistible and overwhelming pressure on artists in all the arts.²³

In 1966 di Suvero designed and assisted in the erection of the Artists' Tower of Peace in Los Angeles.²⁴ Funded by local arts organizations, built by a consortium of artists, the sixty-foot pylon structure was flanked by walls holding pictures executed specifically for this event by over four hundred artists, among them Roy Lichtenstein, Louise Nevelson, and Frank Stella.²⁵ In demonstrations like this, artists and critics joined with other citizens across the country who questioned the continued participation in a seemingly moribund and pointless war.

Mark di Suvero chose to make his protest personal and self-affecting in 1971 when he decided not to show his work or live in the United States until the war ended. Living and working in a series of shipyards and industrial sites throughout Europe, he continued to refine his skill in assembling I-beams and steel plate. His work of the early seventies was truly a direct reflection of his personal philosophy, as it might not have come into being without the decision to relocate. Provided support and materials as he had never received in the United States, he set about creating the body of monumental pieces that came to represent the artist's work to so many people in the seventies.
In the purchase or commission of Mark di Suvero's work, municipal and private organizations met their goal to bring renewal to the urban setting. In meeting their goal, the artist fulfilled his desire to bring art into the world outside the museum or gallery space. The monumental crane-assisted pieces reflect the artist's contention that art can be shared by all people, from all economic and social classes. The overt inclusion of the viewer in the monumental pieces is the most cited example as evidence of this intent. For Mark di Suvero, the monumental pieces were never intended to "beautify" an area. The pieces were intended for the participant-viewer, not the high-rise structures on whose plazas they were often set. In an essay in the 1970 Chalon-sur-Saône city-wide exhibit catalog Barbara Rose stated:

...the reason di Suvero uses the materials of industry itself to create his works is to force the viewer into a direct, intimate encounter with the contemporary environment. Because of di Suvero's insistence that his works are a series of confrontations with reality rather than a means of escape from the brutality and problems of industrial society, ...the individual viewer must arrive at the conclusion that these works are art, at the how and why they are art, out of his own process of self-education; if not, he is merely accepting, perhaps begrudgingly, the judgement of authorities. This is precisely the passive acceptance di Suvero abhors.26

Are Years What? (For Marianne Moore) or XV can render an ill-designed glass monolith palatable, respecting the participant-viewer's right to formulate a judgement or assessment of a work based upon direct exposure to the work
reflected the humanist elements of the artist's personal philosophy. People, from all walks of life, should have the opportunity to measure his works.

Though increased in size, the crane-assisted pieces were still a bridge, more so than before. As if by increasing their size, the artist could have the works rise above the polarization of society in the sixties and the seventies. If, by causing the viewer to pause, if only for a moment, to consider the size and complexity of a work, di Suvero intended the viewer might take the time to consider other opinions or solutions to society's problems.
Endnotes to Chapter IV


16. Ibid., Sec. D, p. 29.
Endnotes to Chapter IV


22 Rosenstein, p. 63.


24 Rosenstein, p. 63.


Figure 7  New Star

Figure 8  Esope
Figure 9  Tendresse
CHAPTER V

WORK OF THE EIGHTIES

The sixties were di Suvero's years of experimentation with form and materials. The seventies were his years of expanding into monumental forms while working abroad and nationwide. The eighties, especially from mid-decade to the early nineties, saw the development of variations in his monumental pieces. These variations were possible only through the artist's mastery of his tools and materials. In the nineties Mark di Suvero continues to work in his selected mode of expression. He continues to develop and refine the use of heavy industrial materials and equipment that he first took up in 1968 to create Are Years What? (For Marianne Moore).

The new variations were represented at the 1991 Nice retrospective, Mark di Suvero 1959-1991, by New Star, 1986-1987, Tendresse, 1989-90, and Esope, 1990. These three pieces display the two variations of an elaborate joint piece; in New Star, Figure 7, Tendresse, Figure 9, and in Esope, Figure 8, an emphatic, horizontal-linear form, rare in the body of work created from 1968 to 1985. These variations are deceptively subtle, requiring technical finesse and
welding mastery, skills Mark di Suvero worked diligently to perfect.

Of the two developments the more visually striking is found in New Star and Tendresse. The two pieces are explosions of converging and expanding I-beam appendages. The dynamic impact of the two works is created through gradual and subtle effects of the placement and the angles of the radiating I-beams. This "starburst" effect is achieved through the use of an elaborate joint piece created from steel plate that is torch-cut and welded by hand, see Figure 9. As elaborate as the joint piece is, it does not distract from the finished work's unity of form.

The joint piece in New Star is so unobtrusive, that it is not discernible until the piece is dismantled. When freed of its outthrust arms, the joint piece of intersected rings is plucked out by the crane from the supporting I-beams. The effect is like a gem stone being removed from a setting. Only when no longer encumbered by supporting I-beams do the intricate patterns of cut and welded steel plate emerge. The effect is just as dramatic in the more compact, Tendresse. As impressive as the mechanics of these pieces are, the artist has not permitted process to completely overwhelm the works. The joint piece, and the I-beam appendages it supports, combine in a harmony of static and dynamic elements to produce such spectacular pieces.
From a review of the 1990 city-wide Valence, France, exhibit, Michael Brenson's comments on Tendresse could be applied as well to New Star shown at Nice a year later:

So does the 1990 "Tendresse" alongside it, in which Mr. Di Suvero has made steel seem as flexible as rubber and as light as the plumes of a gigantic bird. The sculpture appears to turn away smitten to the point where its beams seem to buckle in shyness, and yet remains as firm and vigilant as a dog that has cornered its prey.¹

His comments are understandable when one is confronted with technical tour-de-force pieces such as New Star and Tendresse. In Nice, site was a crucial element to the visual impact of the pieces. Tendresse was set adjacent to the Mediterranean Sea on the wide promenade raised above the beach. The combined effect of swept-back, scarlet I-beams against an azure horizon recalled Matisse's vibrant paintings of this area. If Hankchampion was Abstract Expressionism in the third dimension, Tendresse, at that site, was Fauvism. Not as openly dramatic as the joint piece works, Esope, with its horizontal, bridge-like structure, demands an equal level of skill. This linear form with a triangular axis and geometric groupings is a departure from the artist's more well-known expression of soaring works set on I-beam tripods or legs. This complex, horizontal form replaces the linear, reductive qualities of the seventies' crane-assisted works such as Mon Pere, Mon Pere or Etoile Polaire, with a complex interplay of geometric forms. The interplay of the cut and
shaped geometric forms recalls the space-sculpting shapes of the sixties' found-object pieces. With *Esope* the enclosed volume of space is created, not through found objects, but through the creation of the desired forms.

*Esope*, and another work not at the Nice retrospective, *Mozart's Birthday*, exhibit Mark di Suvero's technical command of the cutting and bending of steel. Wade Saunders, a sculptor as well as a critic, expressed his appreciation of di Suvero's technical skills:

> The irregular edges of torch-cut steel (no one is better with a cutting torch than di Suvero) don't function meaningfully as marking, as modeling, brushwork or handwriting can. He is without peer among sculptors both in forming shapes by bending and in taking steel towards its physical limits.²

For the past two decades the artist has been testing the limits of his materials, determining the tensile limits of steel, transforming rigid materials into pliant forms. This testing of limitations is not taken lightly by the artist. As he related to Ann Wilson Lloyd, "You have to test the edge; the steel can only be bent so far and then it breaks. There is always that danger."³ With *Esope* there is complete confidence on the part of the artist in his knowledge and the abilities of his chosen metier. There is a rapport evident in the grouping of the geometric forms of *Esope*—rapport between artist and materials and the artist and his concepts. Years spent in calculating, experimenting, intuitively combining elements on a grand scale are evident in this recent
variation in the artist's oeuvre. There is no need for the artist to reinvent either his work or himself. He is in accord with Jack Burnham's comment in *Beyond Modern Sculpture*, that modern sculpture is "essentially a series of technological ramifications." Style, as defined by historians and critics, is meaningless in modern sculpture.

The pieces from 1986-1990, are derived from his technical process, and his life-love philosophy with his sculpture. *New Star*, *Tendresse*, and *Esope*, display the qualities of energy and inclusiveness that have been present in the artist's work since it was first displayed in the Green Gallery in 1960. Through the expanding I-beams in the starburst works and the curving and convoluted geometric elements of the horizontal structures, the artist continues to imbue his work with energy. In *Tendresse* and *New Star*, this expression is explicit, as in the earlier *Hankchampion*, whereas *Esope* is a more subtle, implied, expression of energy. There is an absence in the recent works of kinetic elements. By 1984, the kinetic elements in Mark di Suvero's work had gone from being attached swings and beds, to being essential elements of the pieces--*Gateway*, *Mahatma*. In the recent works there are no kinetic elements, either attached or intrinsic to the pieces.

This absence of the familiar kinetic element does not preclude involvement of the participant-viewer. The artist's "not thinking to exclude" is as critical in the 1986-1990
works as it was in the toys and rides of the early sixties. If the horizontal form of *Esope* is the less visually dramatic expression of energy, it is the more obviously inclusive of the two developments. At the Nice exhibit, the site for *Esope* was a grassy knoll set among trees. For any viewer under the age of eleven, active participation was irresistible. The carefully hand-cut and twisted elements were proportioned as crawling and climbing spaces. A direct descendant of *Homage to Brancusi*, *Esope* continues the artist's insistence on including the viewer in his sculpture. With *Esope* it was never more apparent or appreciated. The dramatic, visual impact of *Tendresse* and *New Star*, openly expresses energy and vitality; draws in the participant-viewer into this new variation. From the first of his crane-assisted pieces Mark di Suvero rendered the monumental approachable through the interplay of static and movable elements. With *Tendresse* and *New Star*, it is through the interplay of the joint piece and the supported elements. These large pieces are neither massive or threatening. Robert Hughes' comments on the artist's first crane-assisted works are valid for the later work of 1986-1990:

*With Di Suvero, everything hinges on the fine intuitive balance and adjustment of the heavy girders, the turnbuckles and cables. His style is as intimate as watercolor, despite its scale. What counts is the tuning of parts. It is 'relational' sculpture, and it pits itself against the tendency among American artists to do away with such European ideas as composition and*
balance. To watch the big V of red beam swinging on its cable from the apex of Are Years What? is to be reminded that truth lies in nuance...

These recent pieces from 1986-1990 are variations on Mark di Suvero's complex theme of synthesis and synergy. They share all the previous pieces' vitality, inclusiveness, and harmony of diverse artistic influences. The joint piece, starburst works had precursors in Elohim Adonai, Etoile Polaire and Ave, while the the horizontal works recall the linear spread forms of Hankchampion, Ladderpiece, and Che Faro Senza Euridice. Subtly may have replaced the directness of the kinetic pieces and the found-object works, but it has not been done at the expense of the participation of the viewer. The elements that distinguished the artist's work in the sixties and seventies have only seen increased refinement and elegance in the works of 1986-1990.

Work of the Eighties in the Context of American Sculpture

Save for one review in the New York Times and several in foreign publications, the most recent work of Mark di Suvero has not been reviewed or discussed by the American art press. This might be attributed to the fact that the works were presented in exhibits outside the United States, though it was not a factor in the early seventies when American critics reviewed the artist's work in Europe. The lack of attention might also be due to the shift of focus in public art. The attitude toward public art, as understood to be public
sculpture, has changed from the sixties-seventies' concept of placing a singular work in an area to accomplish a herculean urban-renewal miracle, to the nineties approach in site-specific projects. Public art projects are being designed by coalitions of professionals in architecture, landscape and urban design as well as art. According to Avis Berman in the 1991 *Artnews* article "Public Sculpture's New Look", public sculpture is "no longer abstract monoliths parked on plazas, public commissions these days can be many things in many places." Jackie Farrara elaborated on this new approach in her interview by Berman:

'It's the most radical thing that's happened to sculpture in years.' Jackie Farrara says, talking about the enormous changes that have amplified the scope of public sculpture. 'Artists have entered into so many different areas that they never could before—they are involved in the design of plaza, airports, tidal basins, courtyards, bridges, freeways, and bus stops. Sculpture is going to interact everywhere and affect the physical look of our country.'

Mark di Suvero's work, his most publicized work, is that of the seventies. It is possible that the work from recent years, from an artist closely identified with the former approach to art in public places, has suffered from critical myopia. It was interesting to note in Brenson's 1989 Valence exhibition review, attributes that had not been ascribed to the artist's work by critics prior to this time:

Mr. di Suvero's sculpture is restless and dominating. It dwarfs people. It is often menacing, and it frequently seems on the verge of collapse.
The reviewed works are in fact, neither the largest nor the most spindly the artist has created. Perhaps the argument for site-related pieces that "Public Sculpture's New Look," detailed is valid. Perhaps in Valence the pieces did seem "dominating" and "menacing." Situated in the various parks, plazas, and thoroughfares of Nice, they did not exude these negative qualities. *New Star*, set before the Palais de Justice in the old quarter of the city, might have alarmed the reviewer from New York, but it troubled no one in Nice. On the Sunday afternoon before its dismantling, *New Star* served as the goal for a spirited soccer match. The piece held up admirably, in tune with the artist's goals, to the repeated assaults by the children. The plaza before the Palais de Justice was only a block and a half wide and enclosed on all sides by five and six-story structures. The piece could have easily overwhelmed the space and the public who utilized it, but it did not. Its red steel girders were a contrast to the old limestone and marble buildings about it, but the nineteenth-century plaza was enhanced, not diminished, by its presence. The artist has continued to work in his personal idiom; it is the attitudes that have changed. It would appear, if the lack of attention is any criterion, that the recent work of the artist has no place in the new world of public sculpture as envisioned by Jackie Farrara, George Trakas, Robert Fleischner, Mary Miss, and Jonathan Borofsky. The works of 1986-1990, just as their
predecessors, still cannot be easily grouped into the latest
trend in art.

Work of the Eighties and the Artist's Philosophy

As the artist has not deviated from his technique, he
has not swerved from his commitment to those principles that
have ever been a part of his personal philosophy. More than
ever he is committed in his conviction of the value of the
individual person in society. It is not only through his
work of 1986-1990 that Mark di Suvero expresses his continued
belief in the empowerment of the individual, but also in his
creation of the Athena Foundation and Socrates Sculpture Park.
The Athena Foundation seeks to encourage the efforts of
sculptors without imposing a style, methodology, or theory.
A committee awards fellowships to sculptors to assist them in
the development of their own personal style. Mark di Suvero,
from a 1980 interview with Carter Ratcliff:

'I set up the foundation,' he explains, 'but the
selection committee has a completely free hand.
Each sculptor gets space to work in, a grant for
materials, tools and so on. There are four artists
here at a time, and they stay for a period of three
to six months. The only stipulation is that when
the time is up, they take their work with them!'"

Built on a former dump by the East River in New York
City Socrates Sculpture Park, is the site for exhibits by the
artists selected by the Athena Foundation. Built despite New
York City's renowned bureaucracy, Socrates Sculpture Park
carries on the artist's efforts to have art in the lives of
all people, not only museum and gallery goers. Socrates
Sculpture Park may not have the prestige of a site-specific,
team-designed space, but in its aims to contribute to the
neighborhood around it, it succeeds. It provides a flower-
filled open area in an industrial urban locale, and serves to
present the work of new sculptors to a public that might not
consider crossing over to the island of Manhattan to enter
the grander institutions of art. In the 1989 Valence,
France exhibition catalog, Mark di Suvero elaborated on the
purpose of the Athena Foundation:

The Athena Foundation is dedicated to the arts
for the people. In a culture which is vital,
the unity of joy between the people and the
works of art becomes one of the great bases
for cooperation: people's spirits when they
sing together make a celebration of the world
and human life.

Mark di Suvero's dedication to the "unity of joy" between the
participant-viewer and his art, has been the purpose of his
artistic career.

The elements of the new variations which make them
alluring and appealing are their technical mastery, striking
visual quality, accessible, non-threatening structure. By
retaining these qualities throughout the years of his
monumental pieces the artist has maintained his artistic and
philosophical ideas. Harris Rosenstein wrote of Mark di
Suvero and his personal philosophy in 1967 "...it takes far
more intelligence to live as a credible idealist than as a
credible cynic.\textsuperscript{12} Twenty five years later the artist is still optimistic and still trying to change the world for the better.
Endnotes to Chapter V


7Ibid., p. 103.

8Brenson, Sec C, p. 17.


11Ville de Valence, Mark di Suvero:Valence, (Valence, France: Ville de France), 156.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

At the start of this review of the artist's work the question was posed as to what was the catalyst for Mark di Suvero to change his work from the found-object assemblages of the early sixties to the elegant steel girder constructions of the late eighties. No single defining event or idea prompted the artist to change his work. The factors that contributed to the shift were many and often internal—life experiences, personal interests and knowledge. The shift, though initially seeming abrupt, was gradual and logical. The changes in the artist's work were external changes in material, process, and size. Readily apparent, but superficial.

Mark di Suvero's sculpture changed only outwardly, in appearance and process; the artist's philosophy did not. Mark di Suvero's strength is in his intense individuality. His work may incorporate qualities of other artists—Alexander Calder's mobiles, David Smith's found-object works, but his work is a fusion, not an echo of their work. His work has variation, but not duplication, of innumerable themes. The various influences that have converged in his work are
revealed in the titles he has given his pieces. Often, the works are tributes to persons the artist admires: artists, family, poets, musicians, mathematicians, and individuals of great integrity. These titles, just as their sources, are important to Mark di Suvero. For him when a work is finished, a name must be given. "You wouldn't send a child out into the world without a name." The term cynosure, the foci where all points come together, is utilized primarily for science and mathematics, but is appropriate to use for the artist and his work. Throughout his career the artist has displayed a capacity to create a harmony of numerous forces and elements, whether one is considering a found-wood piece such as Hankchampion or an intricate steel piece as New Star. Mark di Suvero has consistently incorporated those qualities that render his work unmistakably his: monumentality that is intimate, inclusion of the participant-viewer, and the expression of energy through obvious and subtle means. This body of work cannot be easily consigned to any one style or movement. His position in American sculpture might be to stand alone.

If the artist has imbued his works with fixed and distinct attributes, it is because he has remained constant in his personal philosophy. The individual nature of his work stems from the artist's focus upon the importance of the individual. For all the inconsistencies that American
society presents there remains the concept on which that society is built, that of individual rights. The individual has rights, value, and freedom, independent of any political or religious institution. These were concepts that Mark di Suvero’s mother instilled in him before he came to America, concepts he has never forsaken. Barbara Rose styled this artist as the last artist as hero.² This is a suitable title for this artist, but not entirely in the same sense as Rose utilizes the term. The hero, in myth and folktale, endures great personal travail during his quest to ultimately triumph. Mark di Suvero has prevailed over tragedy to succeed as both an individual and an artist.
Endnotes to Chapter VI


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