HERBERT FERBER

FIRST RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION

OPENING DEC. 1 - 8 P.M.
DEC. 1 - DEC. 20, 1958

IN
THE NEW GALLERY

BENNINGTON COLLEGE
Twenty works to represent the achievement of at least as many years: here obviously is a selection and a sampling from a much larger and more varied production. The gathering of pieces for this exhibition has been compelled to an omission of beginnings, of a first plateau of personal style (created largely in wood, and so by carving), and of the facets and details of investigations pursued in the course of a rising and increasing accomplishment. Thus this show is an abbreviated view of Herbert Ferber’s sculptural vision.

Or it would perhaps be more correct to say that it is a concentration of his creation, to whose contemplation we must bring an intensity that matches his own. If perforce it curtails our enjoyment (which would indeed have been enhanced by the impossible inclusion of the early work, the architectural commissions, and more of the larger pieces), it need hardly blur our understanding of his oeuvre as a whole. For one of the decisive characters of Ferber’s career is its consistency. (It is important to say at once that this is the opposite of that monotony which is the result of sudden and only too explicable conversions of manner, since it draws us in and gives subtleties a chance to grow.)

Ferber has on the one hand been affected by (and in turn helped to create the image of) the changing style of his time. In the course of quarter of a century he has moved from carving to modelling, from closed block to open construct, from stone and wood to lead and bronze, from a stylized representation to a symbolic and suggestive abstraction. He has thus shared the technical, the esthetic, and the personally expressive preoccupations of an important group of artists on the growing edge of American art, and of a stylistic development which after a long struggle suddenly and decisively exploded into dominance.

At the same time, Ferber’s work has evolved gradually and cohesively—which means personally. He has employed new techniques as they fitted his expressive purpose and has not been seduced by any falsely romantic equation of technique with result. The technical devices he has invented when he needed them have not been elaborated into obtrusive skills of recurrent signatures, so that they are more properly discoveries come upon in the course of esthetic exploration. When he first gave up the block for open forms in metal, his work remained fundamentally organic in reference. Even while the stylized figure — sometimes reclining, sometimes upright — grew more abstract, the parts — stretched or bunched, muscled or boned, ribbed or cranial — still functioned through direct kinesthetic empathy. They pulled or contracted in rhythmic interplay from a base that served as a foil. Gradually, however, the lunge and the recoil were replaced by smoother, more evenly distributed growths, through whose pointed elements — sharper in silhouette and flatter in section than in the earlier sculpture — flowed an even, continuous energy.

Thus the pulsating, struggling rhythms of the late forties give way to slender, drawn-out forms in the early fifties, and the single base often changes to a multiple support. If these works are less spasmodic, they are no less filled with life and tension, only now they suggest the world of field and harvest and the attendant blade and scythe whose blades of plant and metal create and contain overlapping layers of light and space that separate and yet blind the independent, interrelated directions of the climbing and bending forms.

Out of this interest in overall, interlocking tensions came Ferber’s development of sculptures with roofs and walls. Here was a method which enabled him to oppose descending energies to the more usual rising ones, and to confine a free and playful shape with a sharply ascetic edge. It is not surprising that out of the pointed uprights and the rounded forms thus created should come on the one hand a series of works in which suggestions of
stems and bulbs and buds are found among more abstract shapes, and on the other a series that Ferber simply calls calligraphs. And though in the most recent work this lightness is replaced by a more somber mood the earlier organic empathies are absent, and there still remains the same strong sense of intertwining energies.

If this too brief summary suggests a gradually increasing abstraction, that conclusion is in one way correct. And yet none of Ferber's sculptures is conceived as uncontaminated spatial geometry. He may, as he says, have difficulty with titles. This simply means that there is neither representation nor direct abstraction from it, but rather ambiguous reference and fleeting mention, partial yet provocative, that establishes the mood and prods the meaning. Above all there is the constant presence of energy, sometimes aggressive, sometimes solemn (as in the architectural and religious reliefs), sometimes lighthearted yet with a pantheistic suggestion of the natural world, that establishes the pervasive emotional quality of Ferber's sculpture. It is a quality less of abstraction than of expression—of emotion—and so is altogether concrete. And herein, developed with nuance and power, lies the coherent individuality of Herbert Ferber's vision.

—ROBERT GOLDWATER

Bennington College is pleased to introduce another important artist to its public. Thanks are due to Dr. Robert Goldwater, Director of the Museum of Primitive Art, New York, for his introduction to this first retrospective of Herbert Ferber's work, and to Samuel Kootz, of the Kootz Gallery, Ferber's dealer, for his cooperation in making a number of the exhibited sculptures available. Thanks are also due to the artist and the several persons who have kindly loaned Ferber sculptures from their private collections.

—E. C. GOOSSEN
HERBERT FERBER

**SCULPTURES**

1. THREE LEGGED WOMAN  
2. METAMORPHOSIS  
3. PIETA  
4. APOCALYPTIC RIDER  
5. HAZARDOUS ENCOUNTER  
6. SURREATIONAL ZEUS  
7. EXTREMIST

*Collection Mrs. Betty Motherwell*

8. HERCULES NO. 1  
9. ACTION IS THE PATTERN

*Collection Mr. and Mrs. Mark Rothko*

10. THE BOW  
11. HE IS NOT A MAN  
12. SPHEROID  
13. CALLIGRAPGH  
14. PROJECTING WALL SCULPTURE  
15. GREEN AND BLACK  
16. THE CAGE  
17. ROOFED SCULPTURE WITH S CURVE

*Collection Whitney Museum*

18. SUNWHEEL

*Collection Gerta Kennedy*

19. SUN, MOON & STARS, Sketch

*Collection Mr. and Mrs. Wm. Phillips*

20. FOUR PIECE CALLIGRAPGH  
21. CALLIGRAPGH, SLOPING ROOF, TWO WALLS  
22. PERSONAGE NO. 1  
23. PERSONAGE NO. 2

*Collection Gerta Kennedy*