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art & man

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GEORGE SEGAL

Working
with
Form



THE GHOSTS OF GEORGE SEGAL

"In plaster, I can project my own vision of a human being."

—George Segal

Perhaps you remember seeing this issue of *Time* magazine on computers, which came out a few months ago. Did you notice the cover (shown at right)? Without even opening the magazine, what does this cover, titled "Machine of the Year," suggest *Time* might be saying about the effects of the new computer technology?

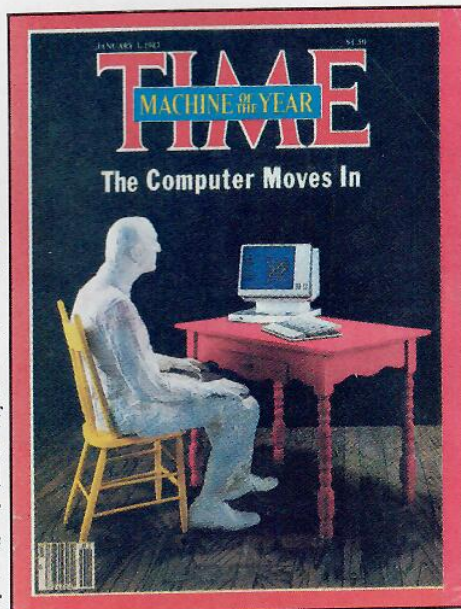
Contemporary American artist George Segal doesn't usually create magazine covers. But the prospect of showing the effects of yet another machine on the lives of ordinary people persuaded him to build this sculpture for *Time*. Compare the figure to the other Segal people in this issue. What do these life-sized plaster ghosts, wandering like sleepwalkers through lonely nighttime places, say to you about the artist's view of contemporary life?

George Segal was born in 1924 in New York City. His father was a butcher who, at the beginning of World War II, bought a chick-

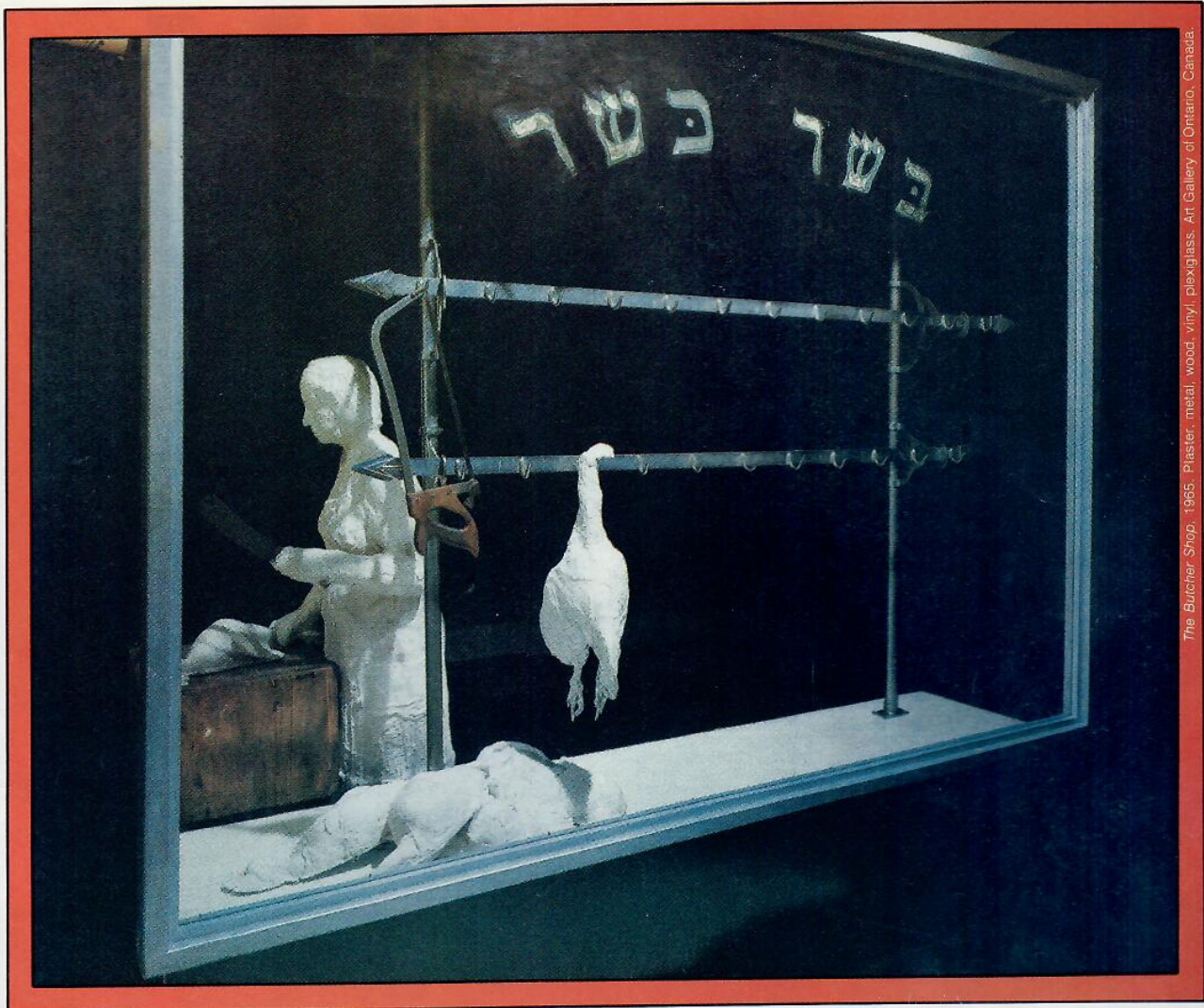
en farm and moved his family to New Jersey. Eighteen-year-old George took care of the chickens and went to art school (his parents agreed to pay only if he agreed to learn to teach art). Segal taught for a while, then bought his own chicken farm in order to be independent. He worked on the farm during the day, taught adult school in the evening, and painted when he could. Soon he began going into New York City to show his work and talk to other painters.

In the late 1950s, most artists were creating abstract art. But Segal wasn't comfortable with that. "I had to express my own 'real' experience." He found a few painters who were also working realistically. He let them use his farm as a setting for films and art projects. Segal even built some background figures for these movies out of materials he had around to mend his chicken coops—wood, chicken wire, burlap, and plaster.

Then, one July evening in 1961, he assigned his class to bring in discarded material to make a "junk" sculpture. One of his students, a scientist at Johnson & Johnson laboratories nearby, brought in boxes of bandages. Segal took some home and, "all of a sudden I knew just what to do. I dipped them in



When he showed his first sculptures, George Segal's work was considered "outrageous." Now, he is doing covers for Time magazine.



The Butcher Shop, 1965. Plaster, metal, wood, vinyl, plexiglass. ART Gallery of Ontario, Canada.

Why did George Segal dedicate this frightening-looking work to his mother?

plaster and my wife Helen wrapped me in them from head to toe. As it dried, everything shrank, so it was like being trapped in a giant Band-Aid. I pulled the plaster shell off with great pain. It broke into pieces which I put together again. . . . I had found my medium." He sat the sculpture on a chair, and put a table in front of it. The result, *Man Sitting at a Table*, looked like the *Time* cover (left), done some 20 years later.

In a few months, this work and some new Segal sculptures were featured in a show called "The New Realism." Many people were outraged at these works created by a group of new, young

artists—George Segal, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg. They thought the artists were making fun of them by presenting soup cans, billboards, comic strips, and gas stations as art. Later, these same "Pop" artists became famous for developing a new art form based on images taken from "popular" culture. Segal's work began to sell, and he was able to give up farming and sculpt full time.

While George Segal's sculptures are now world-famous, he still lives and works on his chicken farm and has not forgotten his past. *Butcher Shop* (above) is a monument to the artist's family who ran a small kosher butcher

shop in a Jewish section of New York City. Right after his father died, Segal went back to the old neighborhood and found a butcher block, racks, hooks, and an old Hebrew sign. His mother posed with the same hacksaw she used while working in the shop. The white form against the black tiles transforms her figure into that of a priestess performing an ancient ritual.

In this issue, you'll see more of George Segal's haunting work, as well as that of three other artists working with form in different ways. You'll meet a young award-winning sculptor and, finally, you'll create an exciting Segal-like portrait of your own.

Frozen Moments

"I admire Chartres Cathedral, but also the New Jersey Turnpike."—George Segal

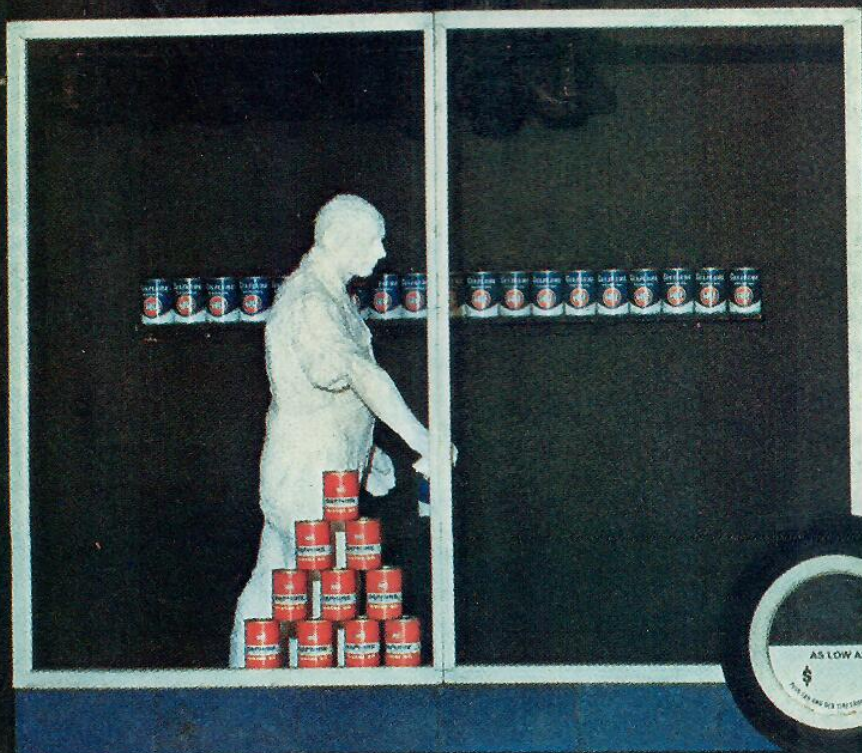
One of George Segal's favorite subjects is traveling alone through the night. Can you find other examples of this theme in the rest of the issue?

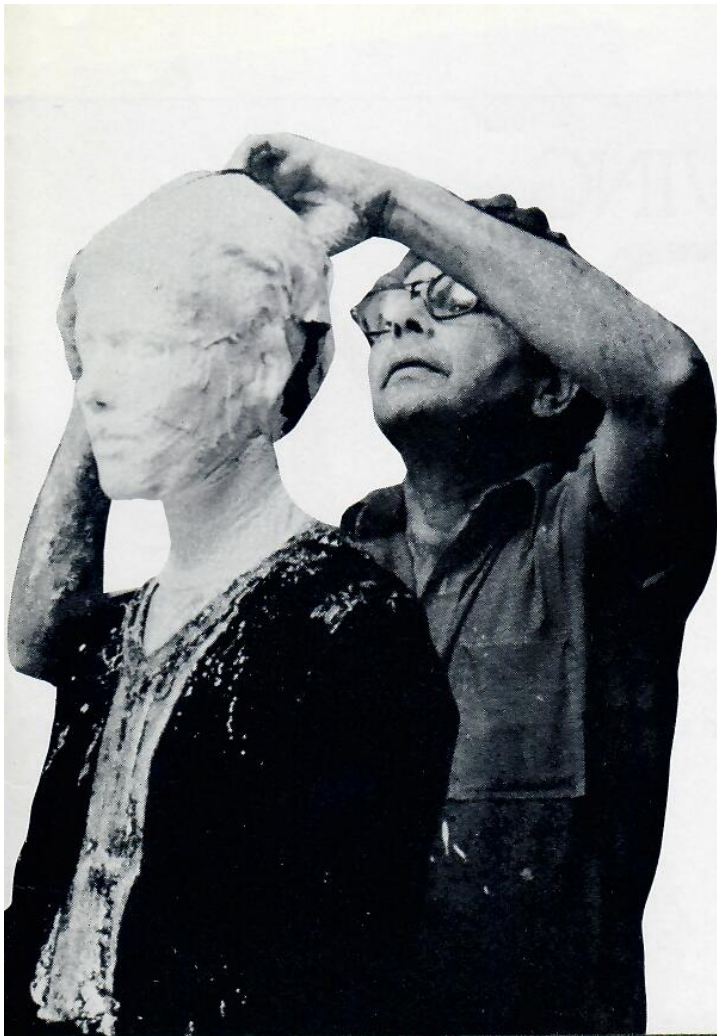
“W

hen I was farming, I was very restless—running into New York all the time, then driving home late at night. You see factories lined endlessly, horizontally, like feeder cables into the New York skyline. The road is a long, black corridor and a gas station looks like an oasis of light. But when you get close, it's impersonal and alien.”

Can you tell what the sculpture below is, without looking at the title? There are some tires and if you look closely, some motor oil, but there's nothing specific that tells you it's a gas station. It could be a city street, a bus station, or a parking lot—Segal has created sculptures set in all these places. The actual location really doesn't matter, as long as the feelings of loneliness and isolation are conveyed. “I stumble into spaces that move and terrify me. . . . I want to rebuild them and capture their expressive power, but not their function.”

Gas Station, built in 1964, takes up an entire room. At first Segal filled that room with all kinds of car parts, tire ads, charts, gas cans, decals, and a



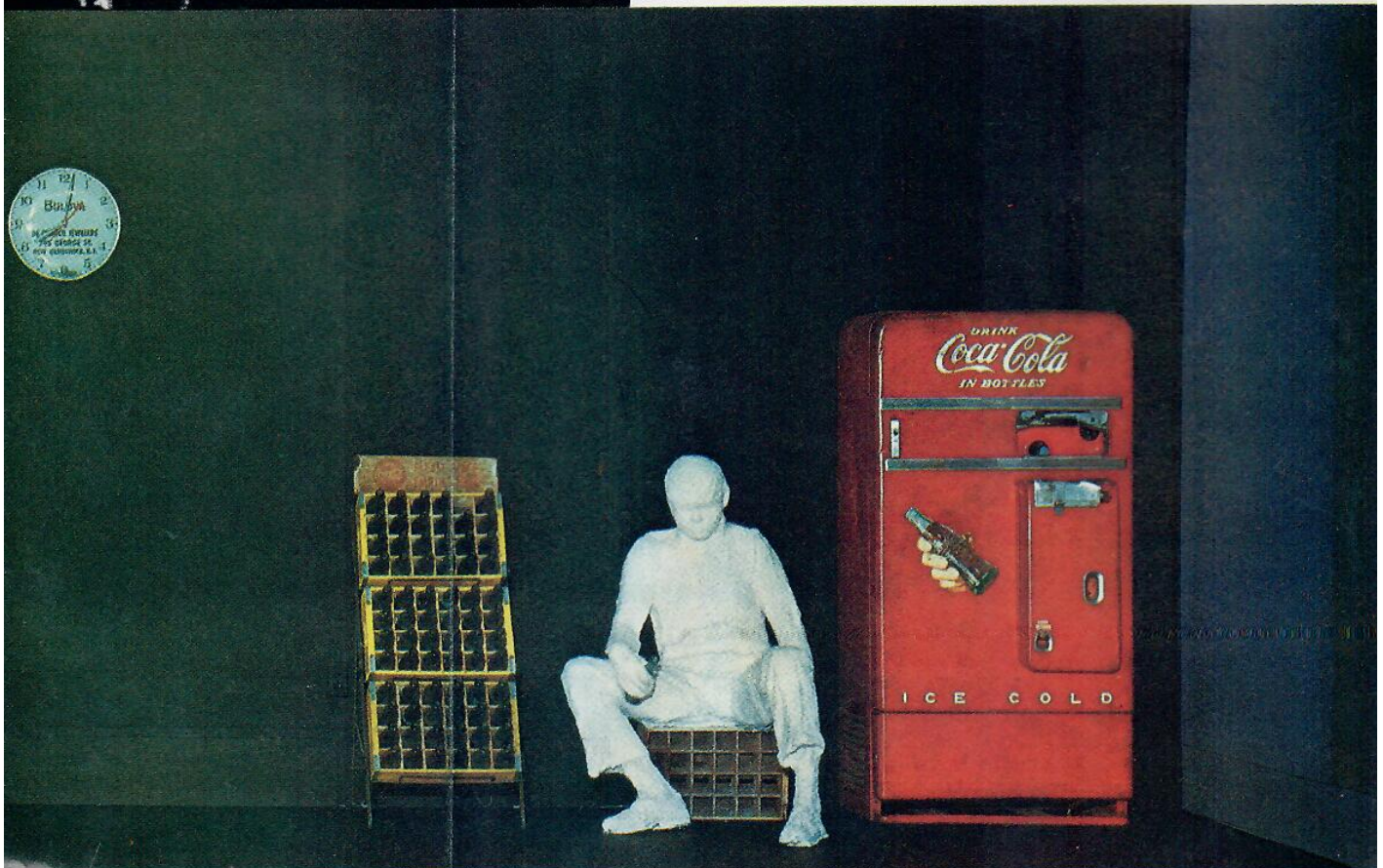


big *Gulf* sign. Then, slowly, he removed all but a few items, letting the black space unite the figures. George Segal's environments may look as though they are taken right out of the scrap heap, but these discarded materials are very carefully chosen and composed.

In *Gas Station*, the focal points are the two figures—one moving, one seated. Their soft, white contours contrast with the flat, geometric setting. The open rectangle of the large window balances the closed rectangular form of the soda machine. The active progression of cans and tires on the left is stopped on the right by the empty containers, the seated figure and the heavy, solid, red Coke machine. The black “empty” space between the figures is linked by a small, round clock in the middle. Segal has created a gas station, but we would be more likely to see it in a nightmare than on a highway.

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Gas Station, 1963-64. Plaster, metal, stone, glass, rubber. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.



LIVING FORMS

You've seen how George Segal sculpts people. Now discover three other ways to work with the human form.

PORTRAIT FROM THE PAST

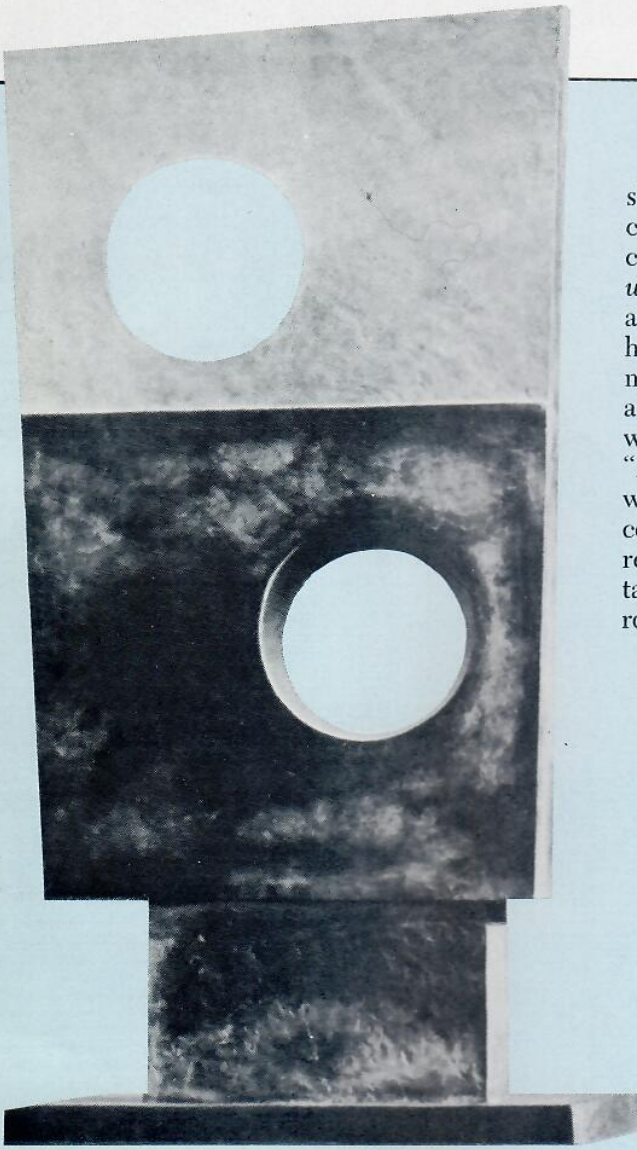
Where have you seen anyone who looks like the woman on the right? She might be in a fashion ad, on TV, or wearing the latest outfit in a department store window. Actually, she was an Egyptian queen and this sculpture of her was done over 3,000 years ago. In this issue, you've seen the way George Segal works with form, by building it up in layers. Most early sculptors, like the ancient Greeks, Michelangelo, and the Egyptian artist who made this portrait, created their three-dimensional forms by carving into blocks of marble, wood, or rock. This queen's very realistic features were carefully chiseled out of a solid piece of limestone.



Head of Queen Nefertiti, c. 1350 B.C. Painted limestone. Berlin Museum.

"SELF-PORTRAIT"

One way of working with form is to reduce the shapes to flat *planes*. In this work, left, twentieth-century English sculptor Barbara Hepworth has created an abstract, geometric work called *Squares with Two Circles*. Although Hepworth's work is abstract, her art is always related to nature and the human form. Ten feet high, set outdoors, and made of roughly textured natural stone, the size and material of this piece relates in a very human way to the people who walk through and around it. "I the sculptor am the landscape," Hepworth wrote. "I am the form, the hollow, the hill, and the contour." What natural forms might this sculpture remind you of with its two kinds of rough stone, tapered squares set on each other, and its two round circular spaces?

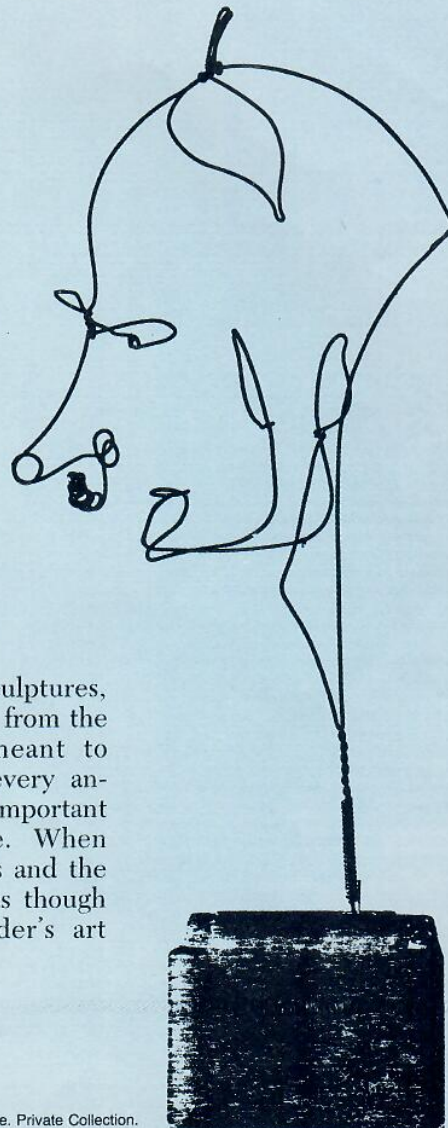


Barbara Hepworth (1903-1975). *Squares with Two Circles*, 1967. Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo.

DRAWING IN SPACE

Another kind of three-dimensional portrait is the one on the right by modern American artist Alexander Calder. In this wire sculpture, Calder uses line to create form, as if he were drawing three-dimensionally. Like George Segal's environments, the spaces between are as important as the lines themselves.

But, unlike Segal's sculptures, which can only be seen from the front, Calder's are meant to "work" visually from every angle. Movement is an important part of this sculpture. When touched, the head bobs and the mouth moves, almost as though the sculpture (of Calder's art dealer) was talking.



Alexander Calder (1898-1976). *Erhard Neyhe*, 1928. Wire. Private Collection.

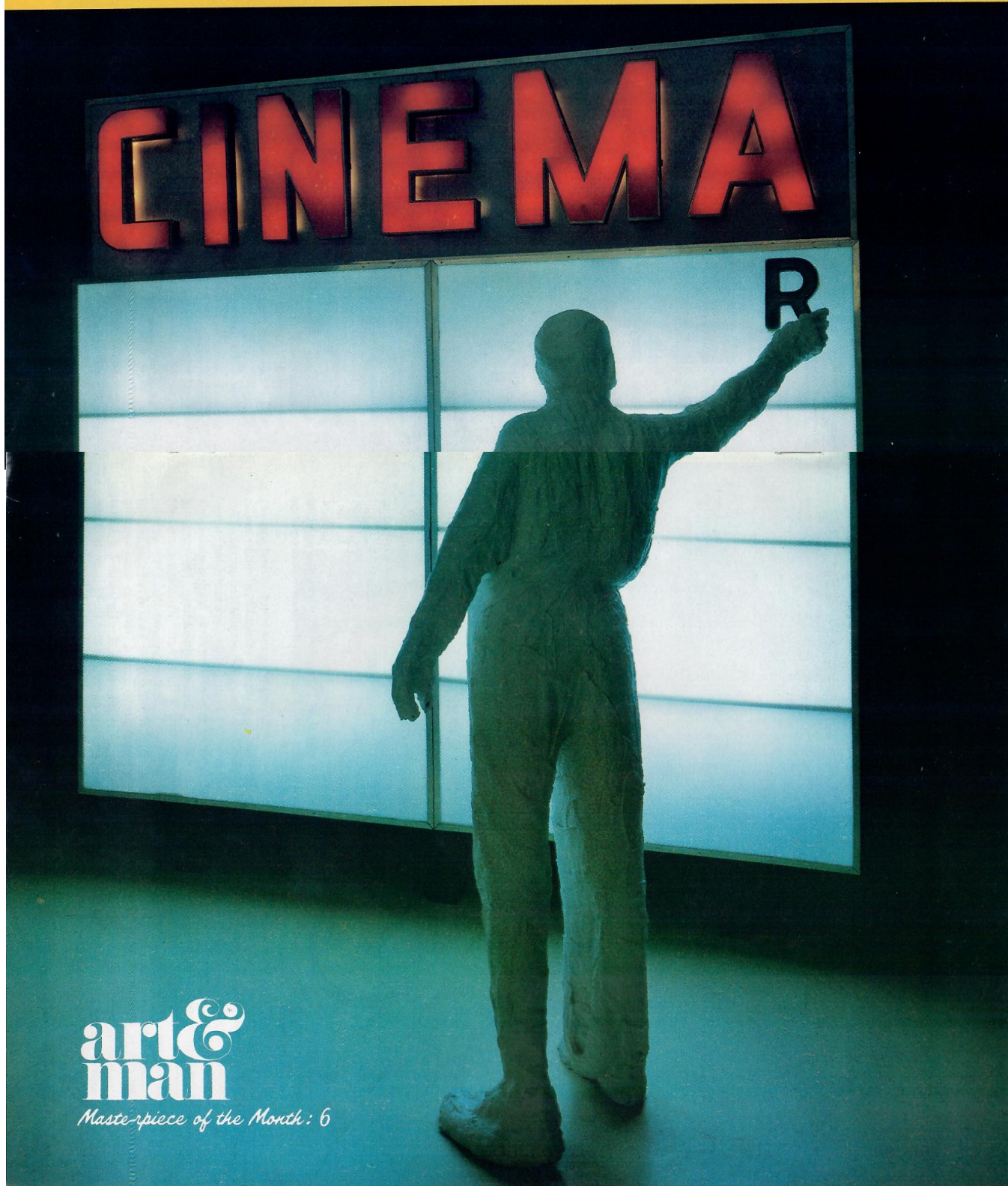
CINEMA

GEORGE SEGAL

“Driving home at two o’clock in the morning, I saw a fellow reaching up to pluck off the last letter from a sign. It was like seeing an exalted moment—the man’s body was silhouetted against a wall of light that seemed to dissolve his edges.”

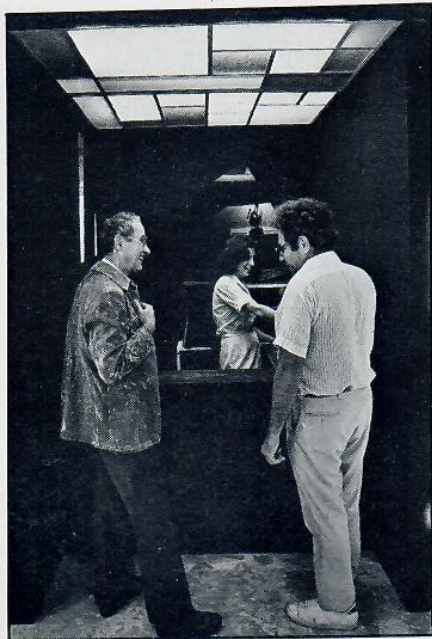
—George Segal

George Segal (b. 1924). *Cinema*, 1963. Plaster, metal, plexiglass, fluorescent light. Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY, as installed by the Walker Art Center (Minneapolis) in exhibition *George Segal: Sculptures 1978-79*.

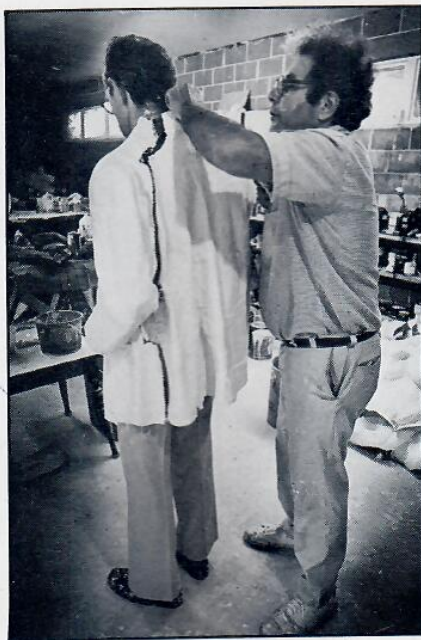


art &
man

Masterpiece of the Month: 6



The author (left), "waitress," and George Segal in the hot dog stand.



Segal removes the "coat."



Plaster pants with real ones inside.

How I Became a Work of Art

Find out how it feels to
"become" a George Segal sculpture.

George Segal

likes to use people he knows as "models" for his sculptures. His brother-in-law is the large, rumpled man in the middle of *Walk, Don't Walk* on the cover. His mother posed for *Butcher Shop* on page 3, and the man in *Cinema* is a mathematics professor. "Posing" for a Segal sculpture is quite an experience, as Martin Friedman, Director of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, found out.

I knew George's studio from previous visits. The plaster-casting area is a converted chicken house filled with piles of white plaster molds—shells of people waiting to be transformed into sculptures. At one end of the studio is the beginning of a new sculpture—a Segalized hot dog stand. It's not the ordinary hot dog stand, but a shiny, black plastic

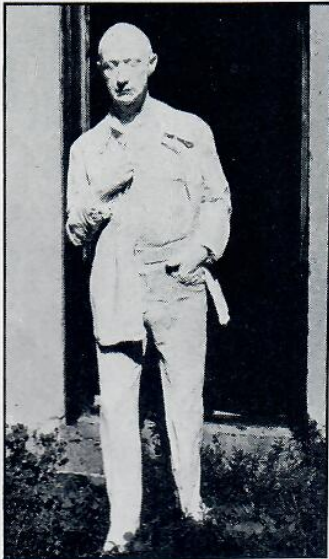
cube—"shopping center moderne." Its most spectacular feature is a grid-like illuminated ceiling.

To get into the spirit of the piece, I was asked to look like I was talking to the waitress. I moved around slowly until Segal selected the relaxed pose he wanted me in. Then Helen [Segal's wife] brought two pails of warm water and a stack of white cloth squares. These had been dipped in plaster and would harden slowly after being put in water.

George began applying the water-soaked squares to my shoulders, paying particular attention to the folds of my clothing. He emphasized certain lines in the pose and I felt as if he were sketching on me. The built-up plaster began to harden and I felt some warmth, but no discomfort. My covering rapidly became a thin, wafer-like casing, and 40 minutes later I shed my cocoon. Next, we did the pants. The then-familiar, warm wet sensation spread over the back of my legs as the wrapping and shaping began. After the shell dried, I found out why George had suggested that I bring trousers I didn't care too much about. I heard scissors snipping, and suddenly I leaped out of my plaster



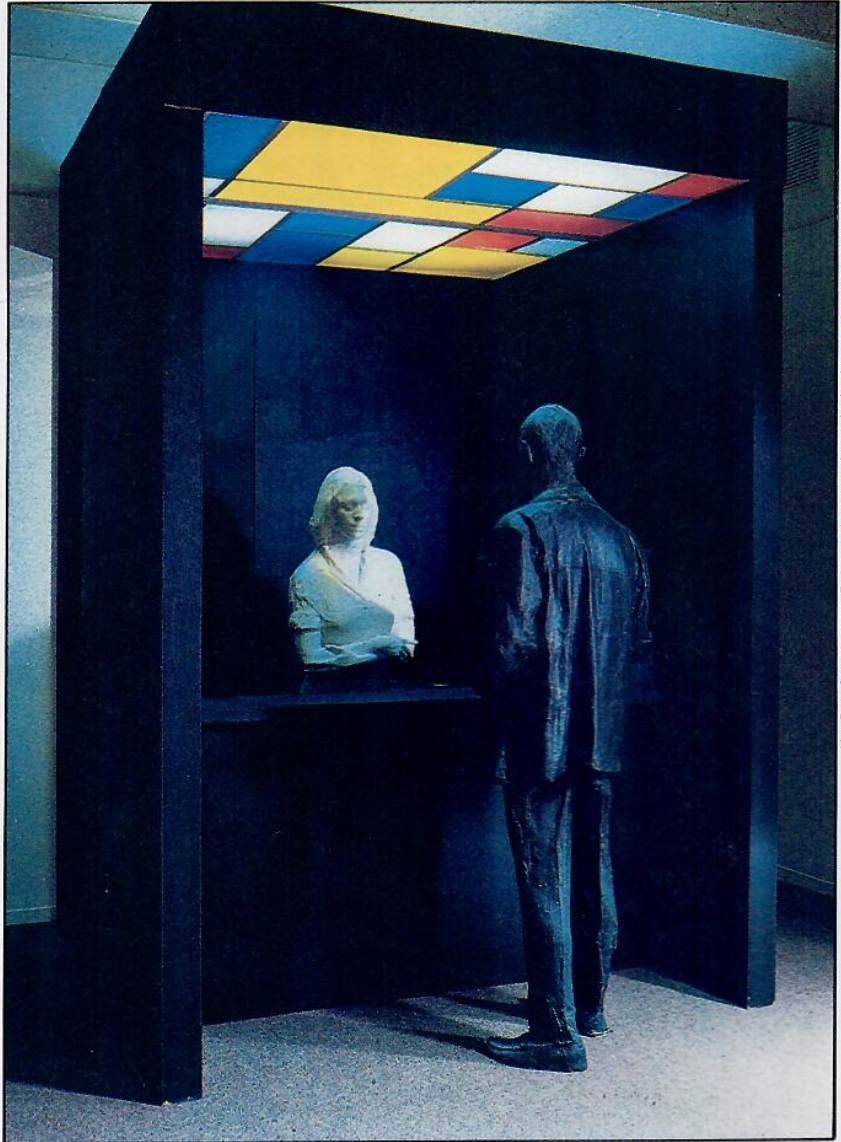
Segal begins the plaster mask.



Finished plaster figure, with all the parts put together.

pants which had captured my cloth ones. The image of the free-standing trousers with my split khakis lining them is unforgettable.

Now it was time to cast the head. In preparation for this ritual, my face and hair were coated with Nivea cream. Segal then applied a water-soaked bandage to the lower part of my face, another over my nose and eyes, and a third over my forehead. My ears were covered and I was isolated from the world. I thought about "The Invisible Man" in his bandage wrappings, "The Mummy," and "The Man in the Iron Mask." Led to a chair, I sat waiting to hatch.



The completed sculpture: Hot Dog Stand

Someone was tapping on my head—time to come out. The back seam was widened and slowly the cast was pulled away. George was delighted with the head, holding it up and saying, "This is what you're going to look like when you're really old." The prospect was not exactly alluring. Besides, my nose looked like a light bulb. But I was reassured by George who said the outside cast had to be built up in some areas to serve as a mold. I eagerly anticipated meeting "myself" someday at the hot dog stand.

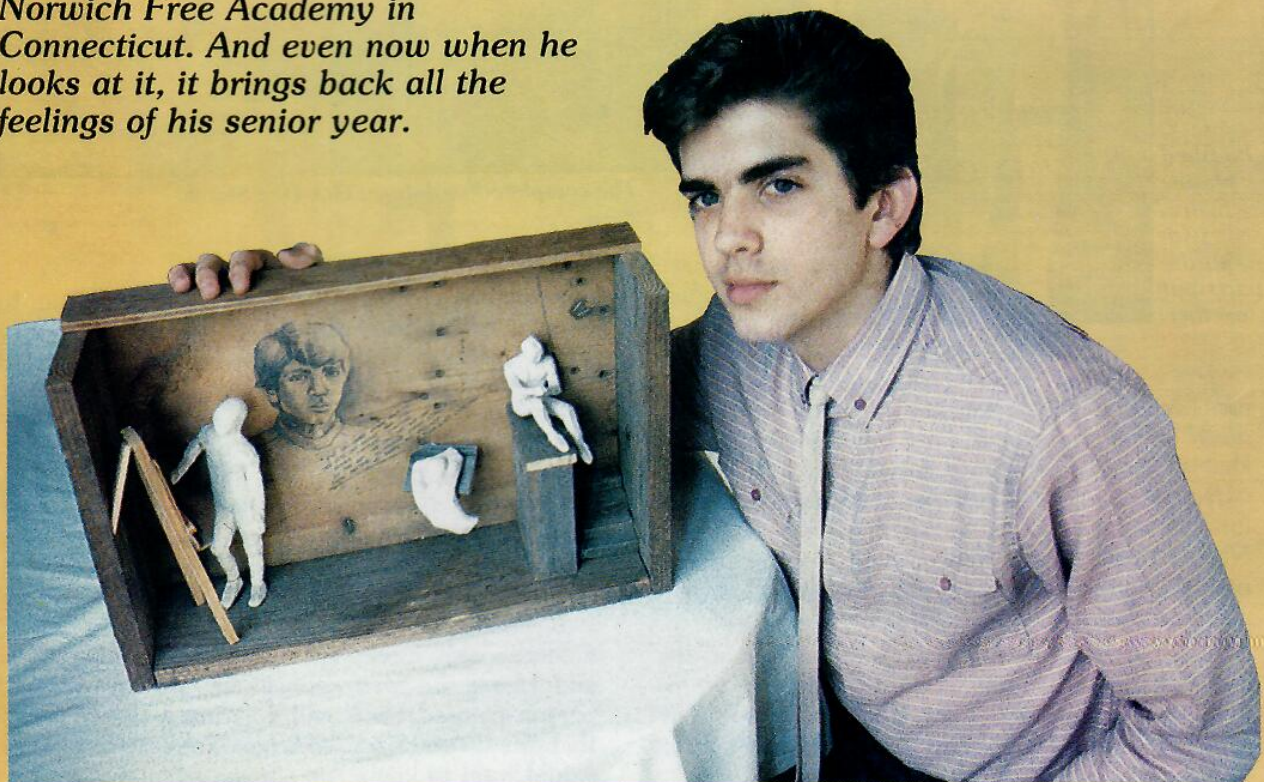
It finally happened: I met him at a show of George's new work. There was the hot dog stand and facing the waitress was an ominous-looking person painted black and wearing a sleazy jacket that was several sizes too large. Not exactly a type I would want to know!

Hot Dog Stand, 1978. Painted plaster and wood, plastic, metal, electric lights. Sidney Janis Gallery, NY, NY.

Tom Wozniak: Artist

Look into the shadowbox below and you will see three tiny white figures. Who are they and what do they mean? Perhaps the title is a clue—Autobiography. Nineteen-year-old Tom Wozniak created this work while he was in high school at Norwich Free Academy in Connecticut. And even now when he looks at it, it brings back all the feelings of his senior year.

Tom later sent the work to the Scholastic Art Awards—never expecting to win, since it was his first real sculpture. Not only did *Autobiography* win a medal, the artist also won a scholarship for his portfolio, and he was interviewed on the *Today* show. Tom is currently a sophomore at the Philadelphia College of Art, where he's majoring in illustration. Earlier this year, we talked to him about himself and his *Autobiography*.



Was this project a class assignment?

Yes. We were supposed to do a shadowbox about ourselves, and it had to involve both two-dimensional and three-dimensional work. The first thought is usually to do cutouts from magazines, your hobbies, etc., but I wanted to go a step further and make it more abstract. When you look at it, you can't tell exactly what's going on. But I knew. A lot went into it. Girlfriends, the pressures of senior year. It's almost like a documentary of my life at that time.

What came first?

Basically I had the whole thing in my mind and the problem was making it real. I must have started with the box. I thought about getting a nice fresh piece of maple, but then I found some scraps of old wood that seemed richer. I didn't want it to be slick and cold.

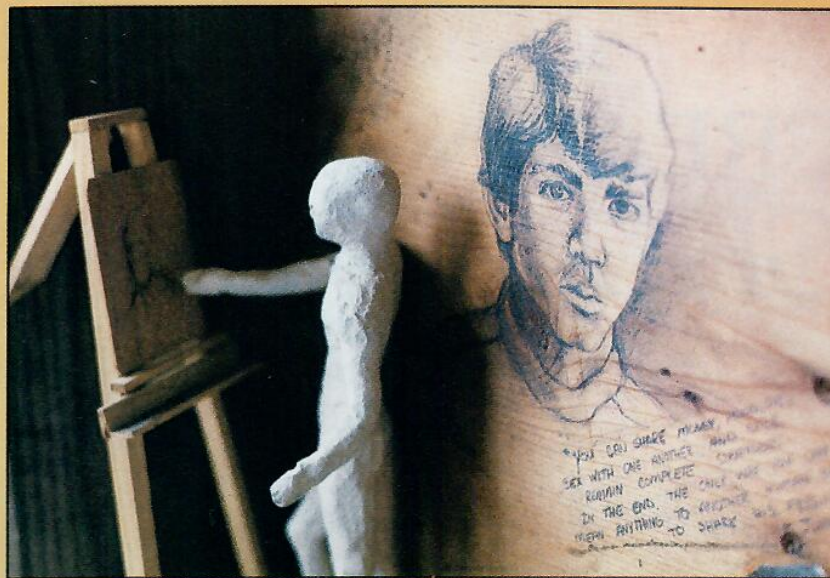
How were the figures made?

I wanted three different figures showing three parts of my life. It was my first shot at sculpting in clay, and I had a lot of trouble. The arms kept breaking off for one thing, and I didn't know anything about anatomy. I would look at books or try sitting in the position I wanted—to try to memorize how my arms and legs were.

The figures were reddish-colored after they were fired, but I wanted them to be white. I must have painted them four or five times to get just the right shade.

What do the figures represent?

The one on the far left is the artist in me. The figure in the middle is basically depression—I think that comes across. The other one is isolation, being by myself. I'm sitting on a wall by the door of the school. I spent a lot of time there.



This detail of *Autobiography* shows how the artist created a small sculptural "environment."

I don't want you to think I was always depressed. I could have shown happiness, but it didn't fit in with the piece.

Why is the middle one only a partial figure?

Why show more if it's not going to help my point? If I can get the emotion across with just the upper body, that's all I need.

How did you come up with this arrangement?

I tried them all different ways. And, as I arranged the figures, I was thinking where the portrait would be best. And the same with the poem. The words basically form a rectangular shape which had to connect with everything else. Now that I'm in art school, I understand the reasons for doing these things. When I was in high school, I did it more on feeling.

How did you decide to use the quote?

(You can share money, food, or sex with one another and still remain strangers. In the end the only way you can mean anything to another human being is to share his feelings.)

I wanted to get as personal as

I could without spilling my guts. "Money, food, or sex"—that wasn't the way I was living. I'd become really close to a girlfriend, and I knew how much more important sharing your feeling was. The poem said how I felt.

How did you feel about the piece when you were finished?

I liked it, which is very rare for me to admit. Usually I bring a piece in, find the faults in it, and go on to something else.

People call me a perfectionist—I think that's good, because you really push yourself to the limit and create the best work you can. I don't want to allow myself to be satisfied. Even after the awards and the scholarship from Scholastic, I made a pact with myself not to ease up. What good does a big head do you? Your work just suffers.

But what is it that makes you want to work so hard?

I don't know. I want to be good. It's not the fame. Maybe I'm crazy. I have goals that I've set. When I get out of school, I want to be the best free-lance artist I can be.

CREATING A GHOST IMAGE

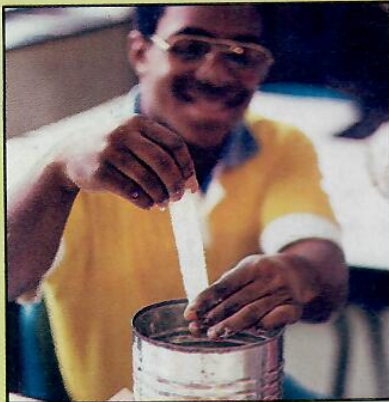
*"I want to present the mystery
and infinity of a human being"*
—George Segal

Earlier in this issue you saw how George Segal goes about creating his strange, ghostly figures. In this workshop, we will use Segal's casting method to express "the mystery of a human being." We will work with two very expressive body parts—the face and hands. What do you want to "say" about the subject of your "portrait"? The pose and expression you choose will determine the result.

MATERIALS

Plastercraft, cloth or Ace bandages,
Vaseline, and various props.
(Optional: 150-watt bulb or hair dryer)

STARTING OUT



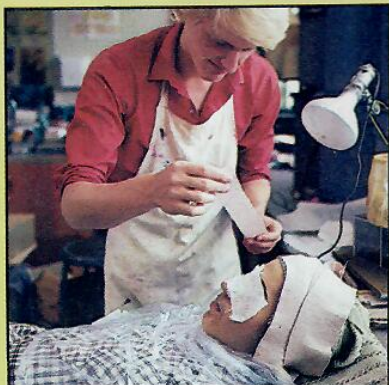
Step 1. Apply plaster cloth after squeezing through fingers to remove excess water.



Step 3. Use two layers, and carefully sculpt features you wish to emphasize. (Note: Leave area around nose for breathing.)



Step 5. Let cast harden for 10-15 minutes. (Careful use of 150-watt bulb or hair dryer will speed process.)



Step 2. Rub Vaseline over area to be covered. Begin mask by placing tape over bridge of nose.



Step 4. If you sculpt a hand, what position will you pose it in? Will you use props?



Step 6. Cut a seam if necessary, and slowly unmold. Then cover seam with plaster cloth.



SOME SOLUTIONS

What does your sculpture say about your subject? What would two hands together in a praying position indicate about his or her personality? What about a grasping hand, an outstretched palm,

two hands clapping, or a pointing finger? How big will your mask be? Will it have "open" eyes or mouth? Will you add anything else? Will you use color or leave your sculpture white?

Arts Alive



Andrea della Robbia (1435-1525). *The Adoration of the Child*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Samuel Kress Collection.

Sculpture in Washington, DC

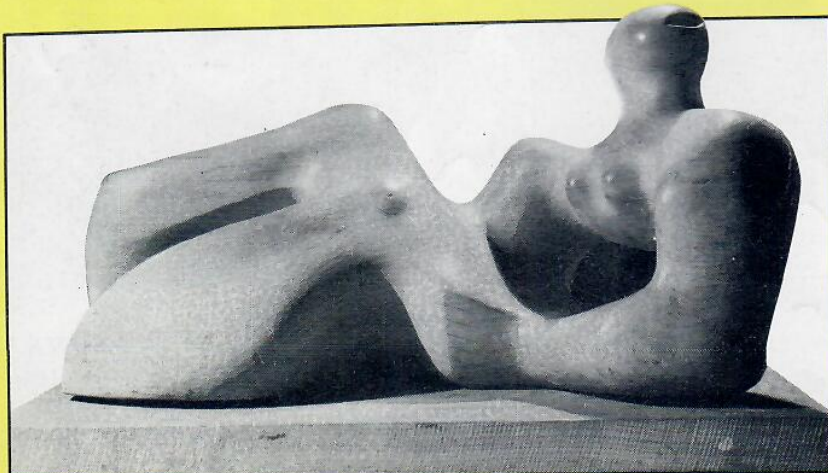
In this issue, you've seen contemporary sculptures by George Segal, a modern American master. This spring and summer, you may be able to see some famous, older sculptural masterpieces. At the beginning of this year, the National Gallery in Washington, DC, celebrated the opening of its Ground Floor Galleries. Much of this new space features the Gallery's permanent sculpture collection, which ranges from Italian Renaissance masterpieces (like the piece above) to works from the present time. A visit to the new sculpture galleries in the West Building of the National Gallery will be like a minicourse in the art of sculpture.



Wilhelm Lehmbruck (1881-1919). *Standing Youth*, 1913. Museum of Modern Art, NY, NY.

Sculpture in California

Like modern painters, modern sculptors have worked in many styles. At the beginning of this century, a group of artists wanted to express their emotions in three-dimensions. What does the elongated form and pose of this "Expressionist" figure say to you? You can see this and 100 more sculptures like it in a new show *Expressionist Sculpture* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, July 12-Sept. 18. It will travel to the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, DC, and will close in Germany.



Henry Moore (b. 1898). *Reclining Figure*, 1935. Elmwood. Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY.

Sculpture in New York

English artist Henry Moore is one of the greatest sculptors of the 20th century. His work ranges from realistic to stylized (see *Reclining Figure*, left), to completely abstract. You can see the first major American retrospective of this 85-year-old master this spring and summer (May 14-Sept 25) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.