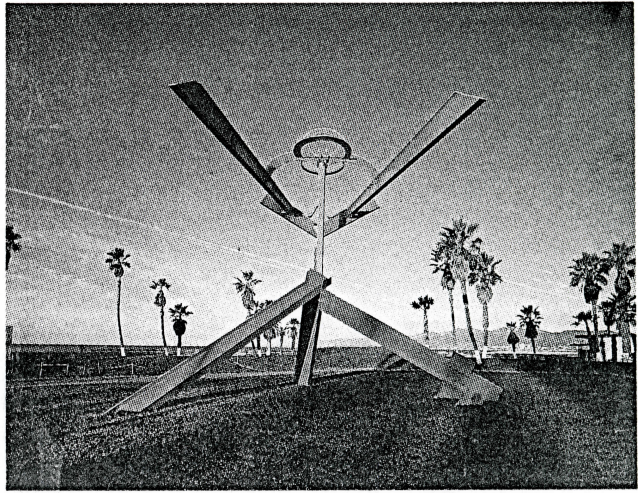


# NATURE'S



LA Louver Gallery

# SCULPTOR

mark di suvero

What are those two massive red and yellow steel sculptures doing on the beach in Venice? They are the work of Mark di Suvero, probably the best known living sculptor in America today. di Suvero, along with sculptor David Smith, changed the course of sculpture as we know it. Prior to David Smith, the heavy bronze casts of Rodin had been the mode, but along with Tony Smith, Donald Judd and Robert Morris, Smith began using materials previously considered improper for sculpture—remnants of stainless steel, bits of rusty chain and giant wooden beams—in a way that let the viewer participate in the art. These sculptors developed a figure/grounding or framing technique that lets you look through and around the sculpture as well as looking directly at it. In other words, the sculpture becomes a framing device for nature.

Fifties art concerned itself with the emotional level of the human being, hence the school of art called "Abstract Expressionism." However, there was never really a school of abstract expressionist sculpture. In the sixties, in the

style of David Smith, Mark di Suvero established his current massive technique that contained accidents of nature and odd materials, and culminated in a five-borough show of his works in New York several years ago in which each of Manhattan's five boroughs contained his work.

Mark di Suvero was born in Shanghai, China, in 1933. He studied at U.C. Berkeley. While living on the West Coast, he built the "Tower of Peace" in 1966 on the Sunset Strip in Los Angeles as a protest against the Vietnam War. Today, he lives and works in New York City. Severely injured in an elevator shaft accident several years ago, he supervises his work from diagrams and drawings for his assistants to execute. Although he no longer works from a wheelchair, he still remains conscious of the plight of the handicapped. In fact, while I was interviewing him at the LA Louver Gallery in Venice, Jean Kennedy Smith appeared to interview him for a book she is writing on the handicapped in art.

by molly barnes

*There is always an element of danger connected with your work. People always sense they could be hurt by it. Is that an element you purposely include?*

Not at all. I try not to make the pieces of sculpture dangerous. I deal with all the capacities of the moving parts which are very carefully made. The balance is very carefully done. Whenever we work with the sculptures, they are dealt with in terms of structure in a very knowing way. I think you run a much greater danger being out on the freeway.

*When you first started working as a sculptor, were you influenced by David Smith?*  
I knew David Smith and I liked him. He liked me and said something about my work which I treasure and keep very secret to myself. It was very electric and exciting. I think the man explored amaz-

ingly in the forms of steel. In his time, he reacted in a very socially conscious way to the horrors that were going on around the world. Unlike a lot of artists who are politically indifferent and are willing to see genocide and imperialist colonialism going on, he took positions against it. He was very unrecognized during his lifetime. All those people who praise him today, who did very little when he was alive, are not only hypocritical, but deficient. I think the man was direct. His idea that his work should not be created in a factory and by oneself, is absolutely true....I think it has been received by those artists who are design artists and pattern painters. *You were hurt badly in an accident. Did that affect your art?* I changed because of the injuries I got. I was working a job, trying to earn the rent. I changed from working wood

to working steel. When you change directions, you have to build a whole new technique and a whole new vocabulary of forms, and it took me awhile to do that.

*How many people work with you?*

I work with a lot of people. I don't know. When you say "work with me," let's see, I have two assistants in Petaluma. I work in my studio alone in New York, alone in France, and I have a team that can number three to four, who work for me when I go to do an installation.

*Following the current trend that exists in New York, you have a large extended family there which we hear about here on the West Coast.*

I like that a lot. The extended family includes people that I've known since they were born, to people who I built toys for when they were eight years old and who are now

thirty or more. I think there is more and more of this kind of relationship, the non-nuclear family, where it is essentially the people you love and have a kind of vibrant harmonic relationship with. That is the central part of what the emotional society is that we live in.

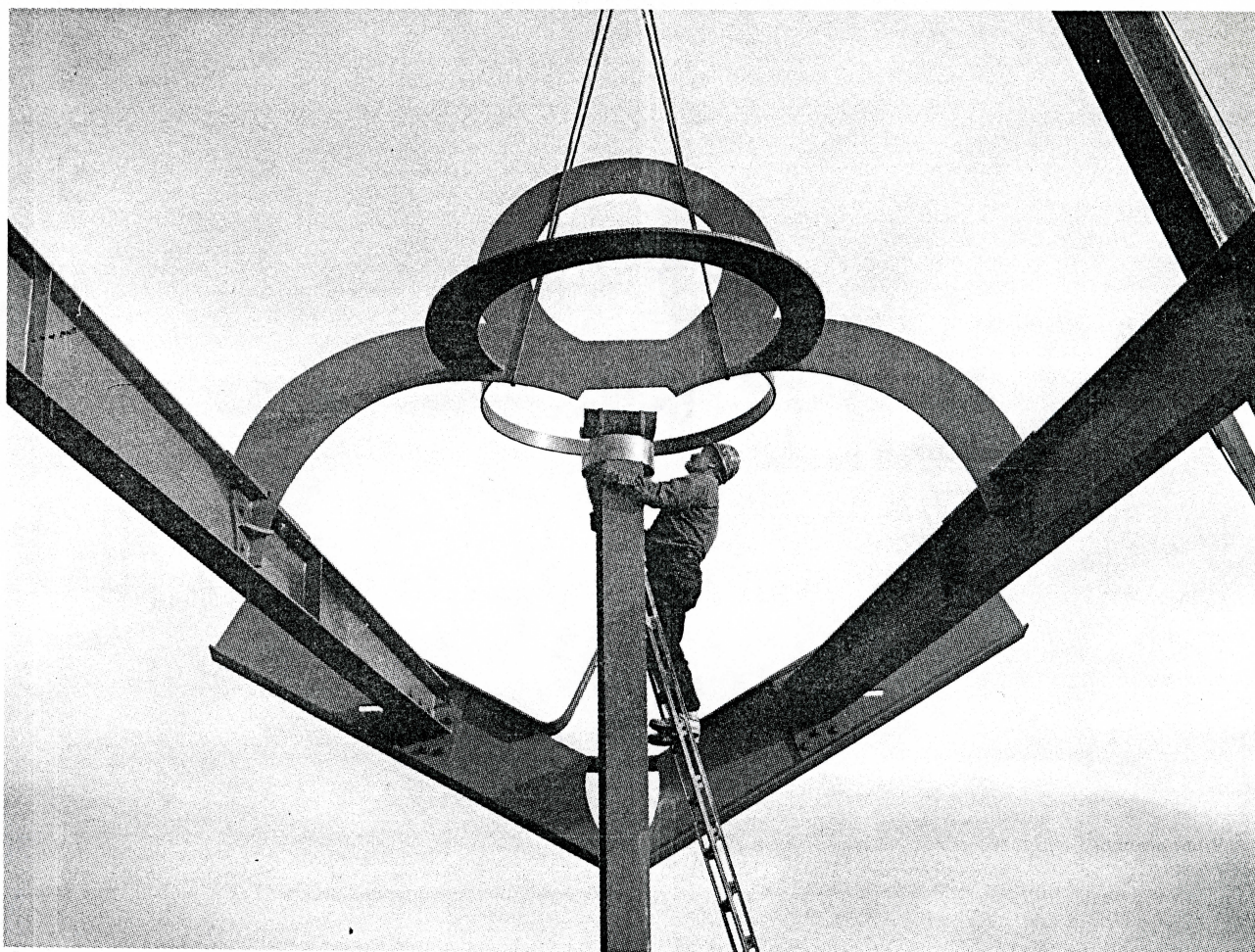
*What do you think art does for people?*

I think art explores the emotions that a materialistic society absolutely does not understand. It opens out a view of our spirit. It gives the capacity to vision that we need to have in order to see what is real and what is new behind that false finish that is so often presented to us as what reality is...like the flickering of the television tube. It is the reality of what our existence is, and it not only transforms that vision of it, but it also gives us the values of where we are and what we are living for.



Tom Vinez; courtesy of LA Louver Gallery

For Gerald Manley Hopkins, 1988-89



Tom Vinez; courtesy of LA Louver Gallery

*I asked di Suvero about how it is to return to Venice, California.*

Well, it's a pleasure to be in Venice. It's certainly not the "Venice" where I taught and where my ancestors came from, but it has a certain craziness about it that makes me feel that I fit.

*Was it difficult to get these two pieces put up in Venice?*

No, in actual fact, the LA Louvre Gallery arranged all the difficult things like the permits, the possibility with the park, etc. For me, it became just an actual setup...quite easy. I have an A-Team which is just beautiful and we were able to put up both pieces in just two days.

*Do you look at the project of having to deal with permits from the city as a Christo idea...where the art exists with the interaction of all the*

*people involved, as well as with the finished project?*

No, not at all. I don't get involved with the city or the problems of city planning. I really get involved with doing the work for the people...not for magazines and publicity. I really like the direct experience of the sculpture with

people in places they have previously known, but have ignored. They've walked right through some of those spaces. They've looked right through them as if they were clear windows. By putting in those pieces of sculpture, I hope to be able to charge that space with a certain image in

life, and when I take that image back, at that moment, they can probably perceive the image that was there.

*When did you first realize you were an artist?*

I realized I was an artist when I was living in a tree house in Santa Barbara, and I took a course in making sculpture from a man named Robert Thomas, who was a sculptor there. He showed me what he was doing, and when I started working, I realized all the rest of college faded. I did the final two years of college, but what had become important was how to make those feelings I had into sculptural images...images that could blaze.

*Did you start as a painter?*

Yes, I started as a painter, but sculpture immediately made me realize that that was what I wanted to do.

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