

A New Reality

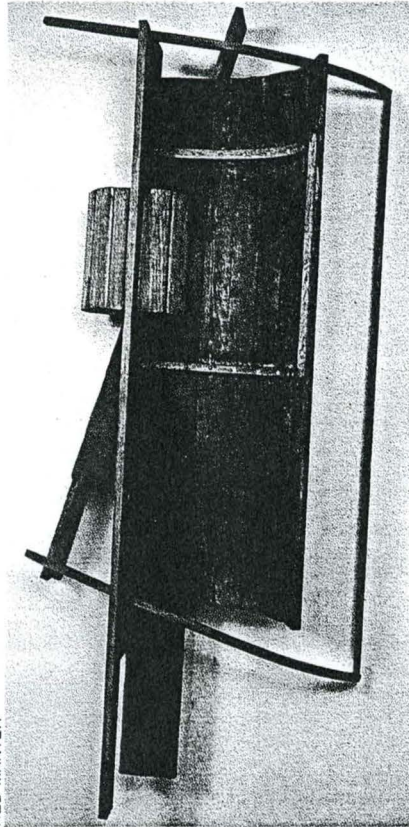
Process Sculpture by Paul Bowen

"Ideas are easy," says Provincetown sculptor Paul Bowen. "I've got millions of them, but they're like stillborn babies — they're whole and complete; they're cold and done with. If I can project an idea into a finished object, fine, but much of what my work is about is *process*." Bowen's process involves wrapping, soaking, grinding, nailing and laminating found objects into archaic looking sculptures that possess strength, proportion and, paradoxically, a sense of structural decay.

Bowen speaks in archaeological terms when describing his work, remembering the ruins, the landscape, and the culture of his native Wales. He "exhumes" debris (fish traps, nets, boat fragments) at different stages of their decay, but unlike an archaeologist, Bowen says, he doesn't try to put the debris back into context. Instead, he provides the rejected materials with new form and function. These forms run the gamut from a towering "pole piece" to a sphere covered with the soles of shoes.

"My work doesn't please," Bowen says, "it fulfills a function. There is an incredible strength in an object that has had another life hundreds or perhaps thousands of years before. The object gets damaged or lost or its function gets bypassed, then something else more efficient takes its place and the original is discarded. Bugs feed off it, and then at some point in history, it gets exhumed."

Bowen's work has gone through various stages, each one producing subtle differences in his sculptures. "The strength of my work happens through gradual change," Bowen maintains but, he adds, "Connections and parallels to life, culture and history have always been apparent and are fine. There's an element of wholeness in my work. I



NED MANTER

"Given a month I could fill this room," Bowen says of his small studio (right), located in the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown. High ceilings and vast wall space allow Bowen to display works as large as this untitled piece (above) which measures 79" x 36" x 16." In addition to displaying his work, Bowen uses his studio to store his drawings, files and raw materials.

love the way my work interacts piece to piece to piece, but for the existence of one, it shouldn't have to depend on the others. If it does, then it's weak and should probably be reconsidered."

"You either relate to Paul Bowen's work or else it's totally anti- anything you know, and you don't," says Sam Hardison, co-owner of Impulse Gallery in Provincetown. Hardison was the first person to show Bowen's work, giving him a one-person show at Hardison Fine Arts in New York City in 1983. "The

first piece of Paul's work that I saw was a ball bound by black electrical tape with a horse figure on top. I thought, 'This work is incredible! I felt I'd seen it before, yet I never had.'" Hardison bought the sculpture for his home, and says he especially enjoys living with Paul's work. "It holds very well, and I can't always say that about art that I live with."

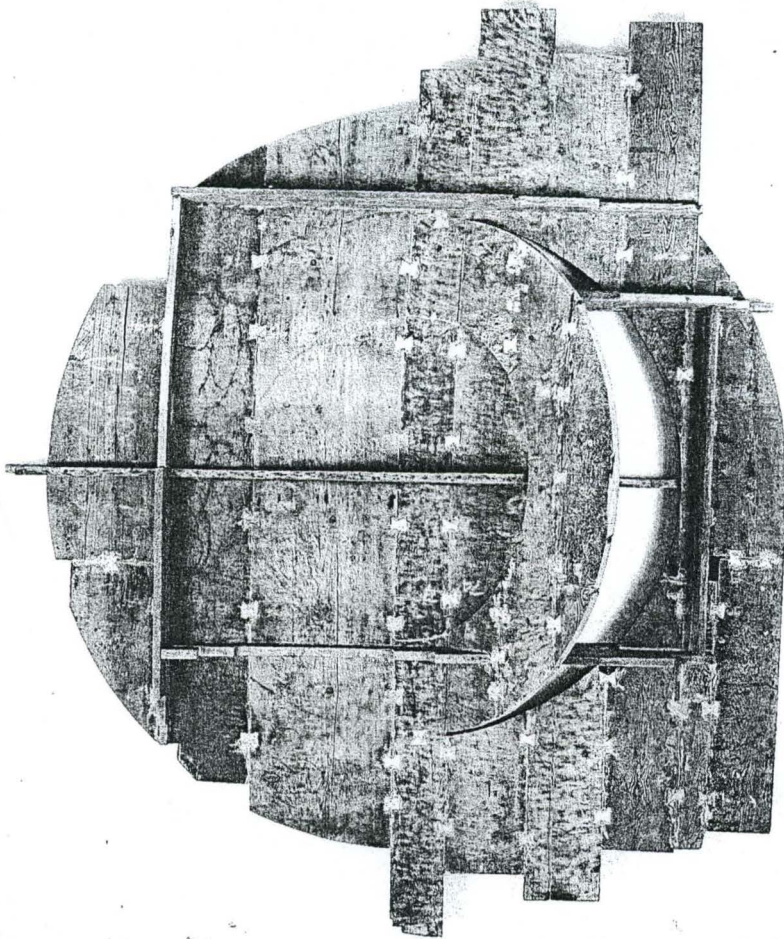
Response to a showing of Bowen's new work at the Jack Shainman Gallery in New York City this spring was overwhelming. "The show sold out three days before it opened. This new work evolved into something special, and in fact," says Shainman, "I've now got a waiting list for Paul's work."

"People who know my earlier work, probably wonder where my new work came from," Bowen says. "What they have been attracted to in my work up until very recently are the characteristics that are now getting lost . . . going away . . . shutting down. I recognize that it's happening, but I don't know why." Hardison calls Bowen's new work "slicker" than his previous work, and advises that to really appreciate it, the viewer must investigate the sculpture's surface. "Attention to surface visual textures has always been the finishing touch that fuses Paul's work," he says.

In his most recent pieces (which, Bowen says, are the result of his emergence from an 18-year-long "artistic adolescence") the dark, weather-worn wood, straw, tar and black electrical tape that characterized the early pieces Hardison remembers have been replaced with wax, colored wood and more cylindrical, simple designs.

"Whiteness has interesting characteristics and qualities," Bowen suggests. "I've been using wax in my new work," he explains, "Tar and wax are similar, yet they're opposite. They're both subject to heat and they're both very basic. One is





Hiraethum, mixed media, 101" x 81" x 14". Double dovetail closures adhere skewered and chalk-coated planks in this sculpture. Bowen's newfound use of color is exemplified in this piece. "I ran out of the blue painted wood," he explains, "so I improvised with blue carpenter's chalk."

white and one is black. Tar has been a consistent element in my work because it has so many interesting characteristics. When it's used undiluted it's very malleable. It can be warmed or thinned with turpentine to produce a brown, watery liquid. It's a very long-lasting material, and it's an impoverished and purely functional material. I like that."

Shape, former function and, a new characteristic in Bowen's work, color, are attributes Bowen looks for when selecting his materials — a process that can take several months. "Right now I've got fragments of boats I've been collecting for two months and there's not a lot there," Bowen says, "but to find wood that has approximately the same thickness, and is painted the same color white is fairly rare. I have to do a lot of walking on the beaches.

After collecting the raw materials, Bowen enters the first of several phases of his work. He builds a large (one of Bowen's wallhangings

constructed from wood and mixed media measures 79" x 36" x 16"), flat surface that is irregular in shape, screws it to the wall and continues building others. The second phase involves "physically moving" the work into the room.

In order to add armatures or bend the wood or make it curve, Bowen must give up what he has already achieved in the sculpture; he must literally slice into it. It is this giving up the known for the unknown that Bowen fears. "I've gotten to the point where I've accomplished some minor thing in the construction phase, but in order to achieve the next step, I have to destroy the work. This constant sense of giving up and abandoning oneself, of its very nature, is fearful. I think this sense of giving up carries through in my work."

"My father was a well-known architect," Bowen says, so "I was surrounded with design and art growing up but I had to undo, in a sense, give up, all these preconcep-

tions and start over." When he was 17 he began formal study of art and, consequently, re-evaluating his preconceptions of what art is. Bowen chose fine arts as his major in school so that he could both paint and sculpt; eventually deciding between the two. "The sculptors had a very aggressive way of teaching," he says. "It was very challenging because they scared me stiff."

Bowen's academic studies brought him to the United States where he earned an MFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art in 1974. He returned to England briefly, but settled in Provincetown 10 years ago when he received a fellowship at the Fine Arts Work Center. He attributes his recent work to his current environment. "I don't feel that I have to hang on to my cultural identity so tenaciously. Perhaps I'm beginning to feel more comfortable about being in this country and I don't have to cling to my heritage."

"Paul's work is reminiscent of past, present and future all bound together," says Hardison. "His new work is like a giant puzzle he has reconstructed, a piecing back of a new reality." When Hardison was considering showing Paul's work in New York, he was impressed with the artist's consistency. "Paul showed me slides of work done 12 years earlier," he says. "What I saw was sculpture that was continually good." Bowen's sculpture is currently on exhibit at the East End Gallery in Provincetown.

"Artists don't always carry on the surface their awareness of all the motivations for things they do," Bowen says of his creative process. "I think you learn about what you've done in the past more and more. I'm cautious about relying too much on the craft. What happens when I adapt what I've learned to the next sculpture is that if I'm not careful, what I've learned becomes a way of not being entirely true to that current experience. In a way, what I'm making is weakened or is not 100 percent itself. There's too much of a percentage of the spirit of something else. There is a delicate balance between learning and allowing yourself to make mistakes. You can never fully understand all the implications. Some things just remain a mystery." TR

— Lisa Sheehy

ARTIST TO ARTIST

PAUL BOWEN



Paul Bowen

PAUL BOWEN is a sculptor who lives in Provincetown yearround. He is represented by the Jack Shainman Gallery in New York. He also exhibits at the Cherry Stone Gallery, Wellfleet.

TIMOTHY WOODMAN lives and works in New York and Wellfleet. He is represented by the Zabriskie Gallery in New York. From July 26 to August 13 he will exhibit with Bernard Langlais at the Cherry Stone Gallery, Wellfleet.

PAUL BOWEN: I was in New York recently and saw the name Woodman on an announcement for a new show, which I went to see. It wasn't your work, it was your mother's.

TIMOTHY WOODMAN: Actually it was my aunt. The only other member of the family who is an artist is my uncle, George Woodman, a painter fairly involved with patterns, the way M.C. Escher uses the same principle of shapes

that interlock in different rotating orientations. My uncle spent a lot of time mostly in Colorado, but several years ago he was in the Guggenheim show sponsored by Exxon, I think the year before Jim Peters showed at the Guggenheim.

PB: Did your aunt and uncle have any connection with how you started as a sculptor?

TW: They lived in Colorado and I grew up in New Hampshire. I never visited them and they were just not around much as I grew up.

PB: And so you didn't even have a long distance fantasy about them?

TW: No, it's only been in the last few years that I've gotten to know them.

PB: Ah, that is curious. Is there perhaps someone a generation back in the family who was an artist?

TW: No. My family is an old New England family, thoroughly prosaic. My father was a businessman and my mother

took care of the family.

PB: Did your introduction to sculpture have any childhood origins, or did it simply start much later?

TW: I don't think children worry about whether what they are doing is art. That distinction is not important for kids. I think the concept of art is a grown-up's concept.

PB: I can't agree with that.

TW: When I was a child I lived near my grandparents. I'm not sure my grandmother intended me to become an artist, but she was the one who took me on trips to Boston, took me to the Museum of Fine Arts, took me to the Symphony, when I was quite small. I was five or six years old. She took me to the Peabody Museum and to the Science Museum and, you know, those trips were important, otherwise it wouldn't really have happened for me. When I was a youngster and I would go to museums, I'd see beautiful paintings or sculptures. I had

&TIMOTHY WOODMAN



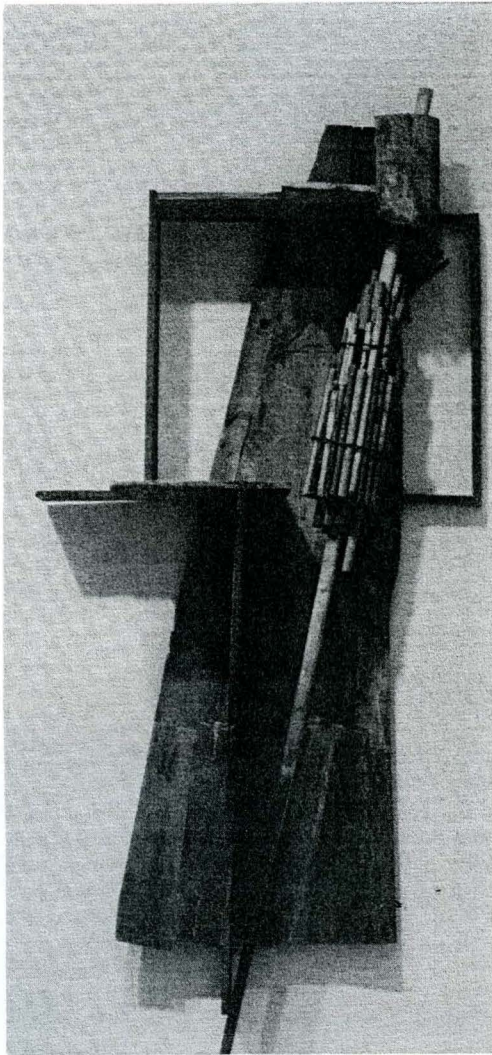
Timothy Woodman
Photo: Helen Wilson

no understanding that these things were the products of people's lives, that people spent their lives creating these things and preparing themselves to create these things. I had no connection with the person. Even having art teachers in school didn't make that connection for me. It wasn't until I went to high school that I understood that art itself could be a vocation, because I met a teacher who did his own work and had his own studio. I think that really is quite rare on the high school level. And when I saw his studio and got to know him a bit, it dawned on me that this is a way one could spend one's life. At that point the idea of becoming an artist grew. Before that I had only loved making kites, boats or airplanes.

PB: Have you kept any of those things?

TW: There was nothing original about that stuff.

PB: You might have kept them out of nostalgia.



Untitled, 1986-88, Paul Bowen

TW: When you look at other artist's background, there is nothing original about mine. I was a solitary little person. I spent a lot of time doing these things, maybe to entertain myself, not knowing I was enacting the cliché of the introverted artist.

PB: There are reasons that we do what we do. These things have roots. More often than not, the roots are back in childhood, someplace. The thing about your grandmother: presumably she had done for your uncle what she later did for you.

TW: I think so. She had a certain feeling for culture and aesthetics. She took it upon herself to make sure she passed that on.

PB: That's great. Did she have a feeling for music or literature?

TW: She read, I know, but I was too young to engage her. She could take my arm and say, "Look at these things," but we didn't discuss *War and Peace*. She was quite an authority on antique furniture. She had a collection and was very learned, so in a sense, for me, she represented a respect for the past.

PB: Is she still alive?

TW: She died some time ago, before I had a career as an artist. It's too bad, because I think she'd be interested.

PB: It sounds like she would be. What happened after that?

TW: It wasn't all that complicated for me to decide what my vocation would be. I wasn't outstanding in anything else and I wasn't cut out for most things academic. Not going to medical school never caused a big hue and cry from anyone. I wanted to pursue my art education. I spent a year at the Rhode Island School of Design, taking half studio credits and half academic credits. The studio credits were wonderful, but the other half did not seem that satisfying or

substantial to me. I began to realize that the important part of my college education may not be the studio courses. The opportunity of going to college is the opportunity to take history and literature and courses in things you are not going to get anywhere else. I transferred to Cornell. As far as I could see, it was the only large university within the area I wished to be in, and also offered a degree program in fine arts. I was very happy with the resources there. Then I went to graduate school at Yale.

PB: Where did you decide you would make sculpture, as opposed to another aspect of fine art?

TW: From the beginning, even in high school, I concentrated on sculpture. The high school teacher I mentioned as a model was also a sculptor, but I think that is more coincidence than influence. From the very beginning, the whole idea was to create things with your hands. Putting pigment on canvas with a brush never satisfied me.

PB: What sort of sculpture were you doing?

TW: It didn't look like the work I do now. I've always thought it would be a good idea for somebody to curate a show of contemporary artists which included samples of their school work. I forgot to interject in listing my education that I was very fortunate to be able to go to the Skowhegan School the summer after I graduated from high school. I was probably the youngest person there. I may have gotten more out of it than some of the people who had more right to be there. It gave me a look at all the possibilities in other people's work at quite an impressionable age. Later on, after spending years doing your own work, those impressions have less impact. At that point, I was learning about materials, I was learning about techniques, all



Bucket Brigade, 1986

Timothy Woodman

of which are very necessary. There was a student at Skowhegan who was doing relief sculptures. Something about it took root in my mind, and from then on it became the focus around which my work has grown ever since. So, in school, no, my work didn't look like my present work, because I wasn't using metal or planar materials. I was using clay and plaster and my work had an Italian Renaissance kind of look. I was interested in Donatello and Ghiberti, fascinated by the possibilities in relief sculpture of illusion. Dealing with a flat plane, you can create effects of illusion of perspective, and scale, and yet at the same time you are actually creating a three-dimensional object, with actual volume. It was a wonderful magic thing, just loaded with potential.

PB: So you were making figures.

TW: Not necessarily always figures, but the work was never abstract. I was making things you could recognize, interiors, some landscapes. It seemed that if you were going to use this format where you could create illusion you would shortchange yourself by doing an abstract thing. I wanted to utilize the illusion.

PB: What was your awareness of what else was possible, what else was going on?

TW: The heyday of minimalism, particularly in sculpture, may have passed, but it certainly wasn't dead. I think I was bucking the prevalent attitude in sculpture at the time. I was aware of what was contemporary in sculpture. Figurative relief sculptures certainly didn't flood the art scene. If you go way back and take as your inspiration someone like Donatello, who was deeply involved with the humanity of his subject matter, you would have to be a person more brilliant than me to be inspired by Donatello, yet create completely ab-

stractly.

PB: The humanity, rather than abstract qualities, appealed to you?

TW: The humanity is certainly the focus of my work now. Before, I think I was more excited about perspective and space. I was in school, learning about those things in a technical way. You could study perspective and discuss different theories, but what could you discuss about humanity?

PB: Oh, I don't know! At that time, the end of the 60s and the early 70s were a time when Vietnam⁴ was still going on. In France there was virtually an overthrow of the government.

TW: To me, there is a split between philosophy and politics, and the events you mention were political. I don't have the skill to incorporate philosophy into my work. I work realistically, the subject is really where the work all starts. When I conceive a piece, it begins, in my mind, as someone doing this or people involved in this or someone involved in such and such a situation. Then I do a little drawing.

PB: The one I saw in your sketchbook was little, only about two inches high.

TW: They are very small. They are really just to get the image on the page without making a blueprint for a sculpture. For my large pieces, I do maquettes.

PB: Made of paper.

TW: Heavy paper which I can manipulate similar to the way I manipulate metal on a larger scale. I spend five per cent of my time making the initial sketch and the maquette, if that much time. Most of the time is spent, you know, agonizing about the shape of a sleeve which has ceased to be a sleeve and has become a devilish form which I just can't get right. Or, the particular color of someone's pant leg may be the wrong color and I am trying to get the color right, not thinking about

the fact that it is a pant leg. I'm sensitive about this issue because it took reviewers quite a while to mention anything beyond the story element of my work.

PB: The illusionism in some of your work is almost shocking. The new one in your studio, the jockey going through the weighing room, is staggering. From where I am sitting, there is absolutely no visible structure. In virtually all your pieces, you only see the supports when you step to one side. Otherwise, the figures are articulated in space physically as extraordinary illusions. I also notice that even the rivets holding the aluminum really disappear, whereas I remember some, not long ago, with the rivets very prominent.

TW: That probably has to do with the scale of the piece, since the pieces now are larger than they've been in the past. My only conscious decisions about the rivets is structural. In terms of design, the rivets can go anywhere, except in the middle of somebody's nose. I should add that when I was in graduate school I actually built a room within my studio, which was pretty big. The structure had an apse and a vaulted ceiling. I made plaster reliefs for the walls. But I had vastly underestimated the effects of scale and light, so, in formal terms, it wasn't particularly successful. What was exciting was to do things incorporated on the wall. Before that I was doing the sculptural equivalent of easel paintings, using a rectangular format to make something to put on a wall. When I made that room, I became obsessed with wanting to keep that feeling of making things that would become part of the wall. There was no way to save that room. I mean, you couldn't get it out the door.

PB: Was that piece aluminum?

TW: I put a mesh over a stud framing and plastered it. I came away from that experience with the desire to make

things that could be part of the wall, and not set off in a rectangle that could be framed.

PB: Architectual, in a sense.

TW: Yes, somehow part of the wall. At the end of my graduate school years, I started experimenting with cardboard and thin wood, using planar materials instead of plastic materials. When I got out of school, without much money, I was in New York and not very settled. I wanted to go further than I could using cardboard as a material, so I started using found metal. I picked up old signs that usually were painted or weathered with a patina if they weren't painted. I made things ignoring whatever color was inherent in the material, until I became aware of how color affected the things I made. I started painting the pieces to counteract the problems I had with the color of the found materials. Once I had broken the ice about painting them, I guess in '76 and '77, I adopted painting as a matter of course.

PB: You were very recently out of school.

TW: Yes, the painting is catching up with the sculpture. Living with Helen Wilson, a painter, has had a lot to do with my understanding of painting. For better

or worse, I never had any real training in painting.

PB: You had to teach yourself painting.

TW: Yes.

PB: You painted your first pieces in a very flat way.

TW: It was kind of schematic. There would be flat areas of color, with very little modeling. I think there is some kind of balance between the form that the paint is on and the paint. If the sculpture is simple and spare, you can go only so far with paint. I think that as I became more painterly, the sculpture had to develop in complexity, in articulation and definition.

PB: Here's something I kept thinking about: you and I were in school when Phillip Guston came out with those quirky paintings of Klansmen, and enormous heads, that opened up the way to figuration. I remember the uproar that went on at the school I attended. Did that make an impression on you?

TW: I followed his work, particularly the drawings. I don't recall an intellectual uproar, but that can be ascribed to the fact that I've always been fairly solitary and seldom spend much time discussing those issues.

PB: Well, I wondered if Guston might have served as a confirmation of the figurative impulse in what you were doing. He became the grandfather of neo-expressionism.

TW: I've basically just toiled away in my studio for years, and do what I do. It's just temperament. With rare exceptions, though, I feel that one is on the wrong track if one is worried about whether one's work is current or politically correct. If you are worried about that, you are spending your energy in the wrong way. Maybe growing up in New Hampshire gave me rebelliousness and independence.

PB: You're a Yankee.

TW: I'm sure that the proverbial Yankee independence, with its suspicion of outsiders and provincialism and backwardness and resistance to change, influenced me less than other artists and their work. I just seem to be more interested in historical figures as models, but that's different from saying I am not interested in contemporary art. Because I am very interested in contemporary art and I follow very closely what's going on. That's why I enjoy living in New York. To keep going as an artist, you've got to take something to heart, and I have simply taken the historical to heart.

PB: Yet at the same time, the subject of your work is mostly current.

TW: Yes, but it is current in a kind of regionalist sense, not in a *Newsweek* sense or a *Vogue* sense. I think again of growing up in New Hampshire.

PB: I have thought much about that aspect since I've first known your work. In my mind, I have this image of whirligigs, of little men chopping wood while the wind blows, and a Halloween-pumpkin-corn-on-the-cob-New-England fall. It seems so obvious a connection that I almost hesitate to say anything about it. I imagine the home-made do-dads you made as a kid. The life of your work is very strong, terribly independent, yet somehow traditional. Of course it's not the art of some nutty or naive outsider, but a genuine "everyman" product. Am I treading on sensitive ground?

TW: I'm not going to spend a lot of time helping substantiate the connection between my work and whirligigs or *Saturday Evening Post* illustrations. My work is a manifestation of subconscious feelings. I don't sit in my studio thinking, "Now what's the best illustration of New England in autumn?" I do think it would be completely plausible to want to create a representation of some image that recalled the tradition of one's upbringing. I just don't approach it that way, though I may end up at the same point. I don't believe that certain things



Cutting Ice, 1987

Timothy Woodman

happen to the child that the artist is forever playing out for the rest of his life. I think you do develop new things, though there is always a core, just as you have spoken about memories and images that absorbed you as a child growing up in Wales, which are now a part of your work.

PB: From the reviews I have read of your work, I was surprised how little your background was related to your work.

TW: I think people did pick up on it, they mentioned a folk art quality or a toy quality, but they may not have had a true understanding of the Yankee tradition. If they had understood it more, maybe they would have written more about it. All the figures in my work are usually doing something, using tools, or interacting with some object. I guess I'm reflecting that feeling I have, or had, of making things or doing things. Many things once done by manual labor are now mechanized, and have disappeared as a human activity. It may be inevitable to be drawn to a slightly older time if one is looking for images of human activity.

PB: A lot of your figures wear clothes that are somewhat outdated.

TW: I think there is some sense of the past.

PB: Do you locate them in a particular time?

TW: When I decide to do a certain subject, perhaps I see it in a time where the action was an integral part of the person's life. I could depict someone cutting grass with a scythe, but it is eccentric and quirky today. Thirty or 40 years ago it wasn't.

PB: One of your pieces has a railroad worker shifting points by hand, which is completely outmoded.

TW: It still occurs, on some little spur that goes to a warehouse, where the man would throw a switch by hand. But I'm not trying to perpetuate the past or trying to put before the public some depiction of an agrarian ideal.

PB: In fact almost the opposite exists: it's far from being the ideal. Probably what prompted me to want to do this interview was the peculiar atmospheric quality I get from much of your work. I have tried a number of times, but I am not able to put it very well in words. I was re-reading John Russell's most recent review of your recent show at Zabriskie, where he calls you "a poet of near catastrophe." It is that quality, of catastrophe or apocalypse. Sometimes things go right over the edge and sometimes they don't. It's more primitive than folksy. I was amused by your piece which shows a bucket brigade and others saving things from a burning house. One of the few things which are saved is a painting.

TW: Some furniture was saved too. Of course you can say things about a particular show which you can't say about one's work in general. You could say things about a particular piece that you couldn't say about a single show. I think that the "near catastrophe" themes are on one edge of the spectrum of my work, with completely mundane subjects on the other. It's the same spectrum and I wouldn't hesitate to hang one piece next to the other. Many of the pieces involve people, if they're not averting catastrophe, they are in some small way establishing order. Like a surveyor imposing his transept on the wilderness, or the piano tuner, purely mundane, restoring to the instrument the order, the sense of the music, the tuning, without which it is useless. Just looking around the studio here, there's a fellow who's collecting papers with a pole, loose papers, there's someone working in a beehive, there's somebody panning gold. For better or worse, and in most cases I think for the better, the figures are making progress.

PB: One of your figures shows a man sweeping up with a broom, sweeping a broken umbrella, a skull, a glove, a newspaper.

TW: These things surface as the work

goes along, and when a piece is done, they are there on the surface.

PB: I was pleased recently to find this quality of restitution, an element of hope, which I guess I hadn't seen before. I had seen the humor, but I saw that as black humor.

TW: It is interesting to talk generally like this, but in a sense it is a lie, because you do one sculpture at a time. You are not out to add another soldier to the ranks of your troops, amassed as an idea. It just adds up. That's the frightening thing. All one's efforts add up, but it's really one sculpture at a time.

PB: What painters or sculptors or particular people do you feel spiritually akin to?

TW: I see a lot of work by different people which I like, but I don't ally myself with it. We've talked about the Italian Renaissance figures. Somehow that period, the 1400s and the 1500s, interests me as a period of marvelous technical expertise in many mediums. It was also a period of sincere and deep concerns about subject matter. But the late Renaissance, the Baroque and Mannerist periods, were periods in which subject matter became less criti-

(continued on page 171)



Sweeping Up, 1986

Timothy Woodman

BOWEN & WOODMAN

(continued from page 133)

cal, and detachment, irony, and cynicism developed.

PB: After that period, so much art seems self-serving, commissioned work for those wealthy enough to commission it.

TW: I'm thinking about the difference between a painting by Piero and a painting by Bronzino. They are both masterful, but there is a detachment about the later work, the Mannerist work, where the subject matter has become simply an armature on which to put the painting. I prefer the earlier work because I don't see irony and detachment, and that reflects my attitude, though it makes some people think of me as reactionary or naive or folk-like.

PB: It's a way of gaining access to your work, a way into it. What then strikes me is the sophistication of your painting, so adept at illustration that I wonder how much more the facility can improve.

TW: You attain a certain kind of cruising speed where you are working at peak efficiency. Who can tell where things will go? As you get experienced, more and more you become intuitive. No longer do you have to spend a whole afternoon figuring out how to make a foot or a hand. You've done that. Now you can spend a whole afternoon doing something else. That extra time may go into the work in a useful way or it may not, but it certainly does free you. One has a finite capacity for the intellectual energy you can bring to a subject or problem. As I continue to work, I would hope to spend more time thinking about questions of subject, perhaps about mood, about psychological concerns which I may not have considered because it was so difficult to actually make the thing physically. One creates wonderful things in one's early work in ignorance and innocence, fresh and un-self-conscious. You can't go back. You can't forget what you've learned. Ten years ago one writer called my work insouciant, but that was ten years ago.

PB: Just because you are adept at one thing doesn't mean you're not a primitive at something else. You are always naive about things you are on the brink of. That's sort of daily true.

TW: There is a bottomless well of ignorance to plumb. Absolutely. You have to give up some of the ignorance, I think, if you want to move into more sophisticated and complex issues.

PB: Do you ever feel that one might have to give up an acquired skill to move on?

TW: On some of my really bad days, where I put something together and take

it apart two or three times, I feel that way. But the only reason I'm putting it together and taking it apart is because I'm trying to articulate a form or I'm trying to do something with color that's more complex than I've tried before. I'm not sure how you unlearn. I could make a very simple piece now, but it wouldn't look innocent. It would look like something made by someone who knew a lot about holding himself back.

PB: Does that strike you as phony?

TW: What do you mean, phony?

PB: To not use the maximum you have.

TW: There may be situations where it's a question of articulating every finger on a certain hand. You say, no, that's too complicated, it's going to mess up the sculpture, it's going to make it all too much. So you don't do it. So you make a simple hand that looks made by somebody who could have made all the fingers if he wanted to. That's OK.

PB: In sculpture, you and I make some very different things. I have no training in sculpture at all. I studied painting, not at a very good school, and what I learned one could know in half a day. But I seem to pick up skills very quickly — certain ways of drawing, certain ways of making things. I get adept very quickly and very quickly it degenerates into cleverness and good technique, nothing more. At that point, I have to make a switch. Like you, I can't unlearn. That's one of the reasons my work might seem to jump around a lot.

The first time I came to your studio, I was amazed that all your tools were contained in one rubber dishpan. It's absolutely flabbergasting to me. Snipers and a couple of clamps, a drill, pliers, rivets and a riveter: that's it.

TW: Right, and they're all hand tools.

PB: Astounding. It simply ain't true that sheet metal is high tech phenomena.

TW: As far as orthodox sheet-metal technique goes, I'm probably way out in left field. I would never introduce myself as a sheet-metal artisan. I like keeping it simple in terms of tools and technique. In school, I never was interested in the power tools and all the technique that a lot of people got involved in. And also, I work at home, share a loft, and there are practical considerations that preclude heavy power equipment. What I have learned about power equipment versus hand tools is that power tools always impose themselves. They always leave their trace. I've never found a completely neutral power tool which is a perfect extension of the artist's hand. With hand tools, I don't have that problem.

PB: You work in a small to moderate scale. I did see a commission that was

big, about eight or nine feet. Did that tax your ability to cut it?

TW: No, because the material stays the same. I use the same gauge metal for the large pieces and the small pieces. I've found a certain gauge which is heavy enough to be sturdy and thin enough to be workable. I've stuck with that for years. I've tried different gauges, but that changes the speed you cut it, it changes movements you can make, completely altering it.

PB: You're evidently content with the material you've taught yourself to use.

TW: Exactly. This technique was not something I was doing in school. Only there is nothing complicated about it at all. It's very simple, but I like the material and I like limiting the problem. I have other problems about issues besides technical issues.

PB: Presumably at this point you are so adept there are few technical problems.

TW: I am familiar with the material, what it will do in a certain situation, how it will bend. I use sheets of aluminum that are completely flat, and when I cut a shape I have to intuit how it will look when it's bent or formed. It's quite a jump from that flat sheet to the sculpture.

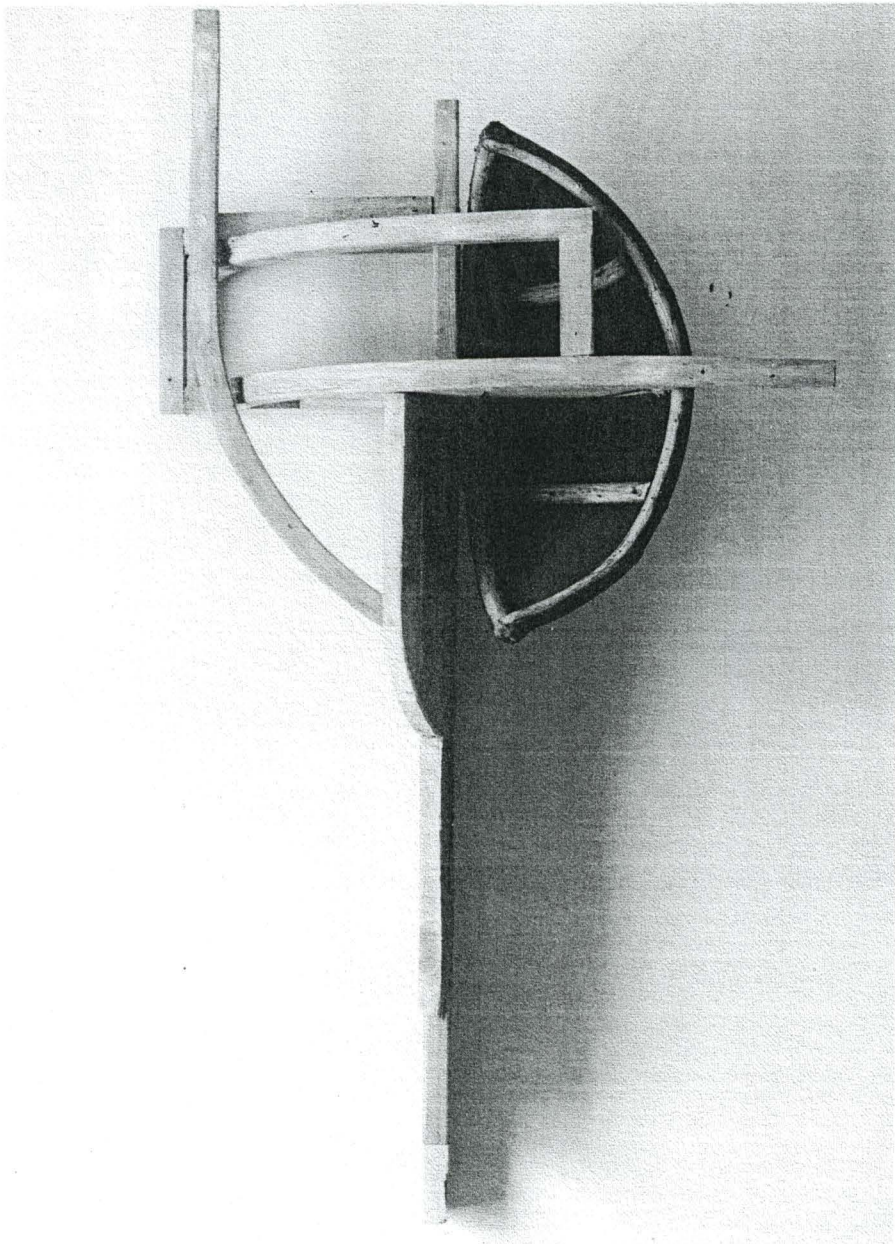
PB: And the maquettes help make the transition?

TW: I really don't get much help from the maquette in terms of form. The sculpture can be ten times bigger than the maquette. A one-in-ten scale is pretty small. I get scale from the maquette, the relation of one element in the piece to another. Also I get some help in ideas for the overall color scheme. Scale is what I mostly get. In working out the forms, I don't get much help, because I find that when you change the scale that much a form that looks great at two inches looks silly at two feet.

PB: The drawing you make for a sculpture is a composite of images you see?

TW: No, I never work from a model in the sense of studying something, making marks. When I'm developing ideas for sculptures, it all comes from my head. I may consult references about the detail in a tool. When I did the piano tuner, I went to the library. I had no idea what the inside of a piano looked like, so I looked it up in the encyclopedia. But basically it comes out of my head. I have a feeling, then I think, "What image will represent this feeling?" I just happen to have this vocabulary of images, people doing things. If I was somebody else, I might use geometric grids or other ways to express myself. I'm not creating these sculptures to represent something I see, but to represent how I feel at a certain time. That's the impulse behind them, the desire to express some feeling.

Paul Bowen



In 1988, as a result of a coincidence, I returned to Provincetown after several years absence and met Paul Bowen. I had received a letter announcing a memorial fellowship in honor of Myron Stout at the Fine Arts Work Center. I offered to donate a painting. When I delivered it in the spring of 1988, I saw one small piece of Bowen's; hardly enough to form a judgment.

Bowen was one of a number of Provincetown artists whose work I got to know in the months and years since that 1988 visit. I particularly came to admire the work of Richard Baker, Polly Burnell, Pat de Groot and Jim Forsberg. I had the feeling from these artists, and others, that Paul Bowen was the most important of the "younger" sculptors now working in Provincetown.

At first I was put off by the driftwood and found-object aspects of his work. In seaside resorts there are many second-rate artists making third-rate objects out of things picked up on the beach. But I found an appealingly poetic handmade, craft-anti-craft aspect to his work. His sculptures have a pictorial, chromatic complexity that reflects his knowledge of painting. His training as a painter is also reflected in his drawings, which can be both realistic and mystical.

In the summer of 1989 I bought two of Bowen's sculptures and a drawing. The larger of the two sculptures had no title, although Paul's letter of July 10, 1989, suggests the "name" "Open Heart":

Incidentally, the provisional title (I prefer *name over title*) was "Open Heart" but that sounds a bit sentimental. Sometimes I give work simple Welsh names. I may do that with this one. Actually, I think "Open Heart" would be "Calon Lan"—the name of a famous and very popular hymn. In the sculpture the black cowl or covering—which is stretched over the wooden ribs—is turned to the wall, "exposing itself." That form and technique (tarred cloth over wood) I used years ago, in about 1975, I think. I was making "boat" sculptures. The Welsh *coracle* and Irish *curragh* are traditionally made of tarred canvas and wood frames. Both boats are ancient. I've loved them since I was a boy.

I read everything I could find on these traditional boats. I found them most interesting. (My two loves—art and history!) A few months later, at the Jack Shainman Gallery in New York, I saw one of Paul's early (1978) boat sculptures, a shell-like form called "Curled Curragh." It was a wonderful object and I immediately made arrangements to buy it.

I enjoyed living with Bowen's sculptures so much that I thought of having him do a commission for a space in our house which I had tried for two decades to fill without much success. I have found com-

missions chancy. In my almost 50 years of collecting I have commissioned work only three times. The results varied. Two were satisfactory, but a bit unsatisfying. However, one commission, a wall sculpture Claes Oldenburg made for me in 1961, remains first rate—a brilliantly painted plaster *Sandwich*, an early pop art icon, possibly a masterpiece.

I approached Paul about a commission with some trepidation. I wanted him to make a piece for the fireplace wall of our family room. The space above the fireplace opening was about four by seven feet. Over the years I had hung a number of objects in the space, but had found nothing that was completely satisfactory. Early in the 1970s I had talked to Richard Stankiewicz about a piece for the space and, although he agreed and presented a couple of ideas, nothing was ever made. I had also talked to Ellsworth Kelly and he seemed interested, but nothing ever came of that either.

Paul had started the sculpture in mid-1990. I heard about it from others who had seen it, but since it was not finished, I put off going to Provincetown. After waiting several months, curiosity got the better of me. I visited Paul's studio to see the work in its unfinished state. He was not particularly anxious to show it to me. I tried to make no judgment. A couple of months later, I saw it again. Changes in the piece made it look better to both of us, but we agreed it was still unfinished. A few weeks later I talked to Paul on the phone and he told me of a major change in the piece, which he was very enthusiastic about.

The progress involved a series of changes and inspirations, some of which happened easily and quickly, and others with difficulty over a period of time. I admired Bowen's insistence on the absolute integrity of the work, his clear sense of "rightness," his fear of cuteness, and his reticent sense of beauty.

When I saw the finished sculpture early in May, 1991, I was astonished. It was so much more complex. Many will find it difficult, with its battered pieces of wood and odd, asymmetrical composition. To me, it is very beautiful, formally satisfying and filled with references to the sea and wind-battered seashore shacks. I look forward to living with it. ■

CHARLES CARPENTER, a former vice-president of a Fortune 500 company, is the author of three books on decorative arts, including *The Decorative Arts and Crafts of Nantucket* (Dodd, Mead). He has been collecting contemporary art for over 40 years.

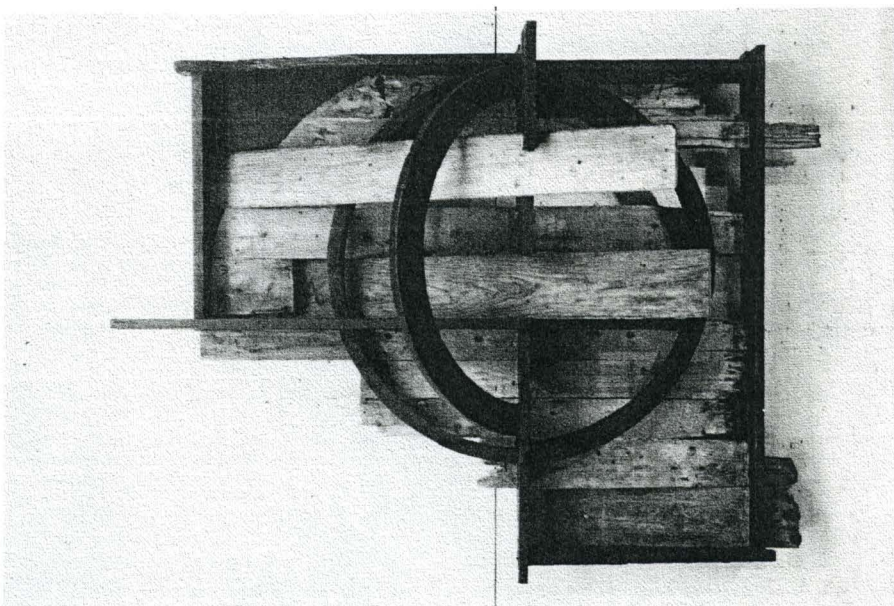
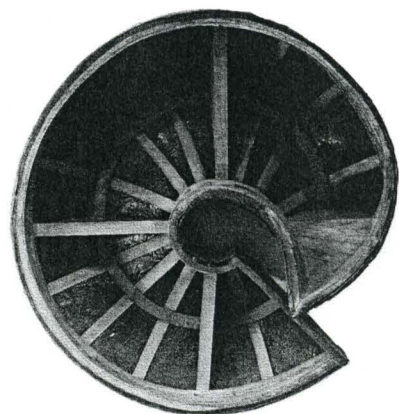
From a Collector's Journal

by Charles Carpenter

Left: "Open Heart," 1987
wood, cloth and tar
35 x 19 x 9

Right: "Curled Curragh," 1977
wood, cloth and tar
28 x 25 x 9

Below: Untitled, 1990-91
wood and tar
41 x 53 x 18½



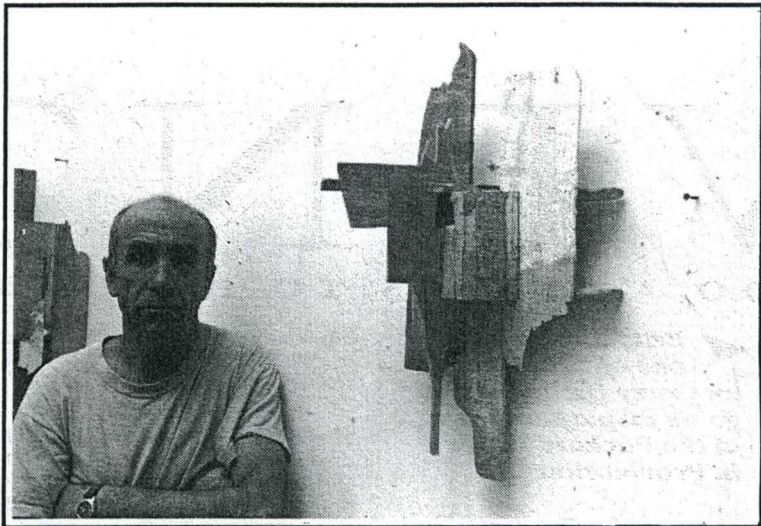
Gallery Exhibiting Works of Paul Bowen

Long Point Gallery is wrapping up its 1994 season with a solo exhibition of recent wall sculptures by Paul Bowen.

The annual end-of-season group show, "Summer's Work," is also being shown.

The show will run through Sept. 17, when the gallery closes for the season.

The gallery is located at 492 Commercial St. For information, call 487-1795.



Paul Bowen with his 1994 wood and paint sculpture, "Window of Opportunity." Mr. Bowen's work is on display at the Long Point Gallery in Provincetown.

Photo by Paul Bowen

Tidal Sculpture Plan Advances

By K.C. Myers

PROVINCETOWN — The idea of a floating sculpture garden has appeal, but safety concerns may keep a "Tidal Floating Sculpture Exhibit" from taking hold in town.

Robyn Watson, administrator of the Provincetown Art Association and Museum, and the sculptor Paul Bowen have proposed a sculpture exhibit to be displayed on the sand flats of Provincetown Harbor.

"To maintain the reputation of Provincetown as one of the largest art colonies in the country, we thought a mooring area for sculptures would be a neat idea," Ms. Watson told selectmen Monday. "We hope the publicity would get out that we are the only harbor in the world with such an installation."

She said the appeal to the media would not be limited to the art press. "We want Newsweek," she said.

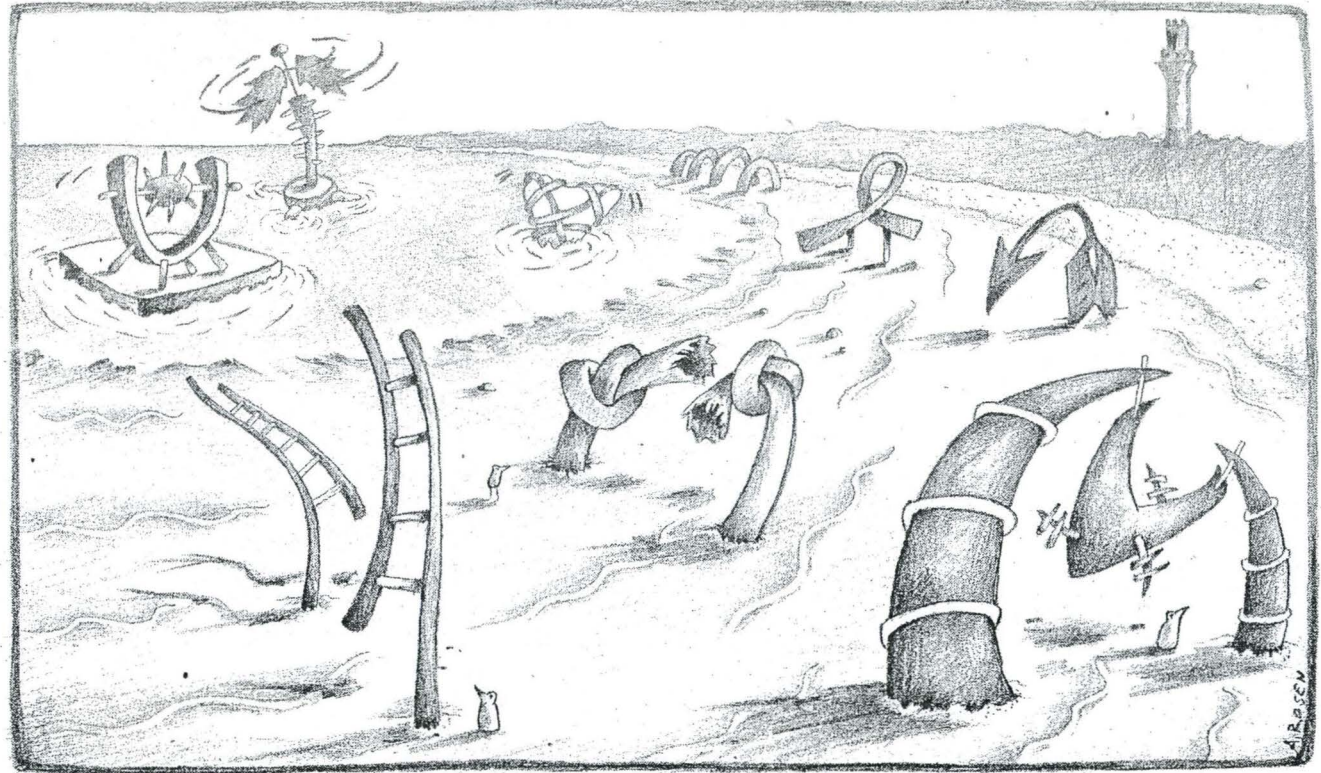
Selectmen approved the concept

Monday, but finding a location may be a problem.

Harbormaster Jim Vincent suggested the tidal sandy area between the West End breakwater and the Provincetown Inn as a good site for the exhibit. That drew a protest from Evan Evans, the inn's general manager. He said the art could rip loose from moorings in a storm and damage the inn, and warned that spectators'

"To maintain the reputation of Provincetown as one of the largest art colonies in the country, we thought a mooring area for sculptures would be a neat idea."

—Robyn Watson



would be an additional burden for the nearby congested traffic circle with no parking.

"As a businessman, I know people want to look at the existing work of art, which is Mother Nature," said Mr. Evans.

Ms. Watson agreed that the West End location would not be satisfactory. She said there are plenty of waterfront homeowners who would "love" to have a sculpture garden on their property. Logistics concerning navigation, even ways to account for children who may use the sculptures for diving boards, must be worked out.

"This exhibition would tie in with some of our goals to improve public access and to involve the art community in the use of our harbor," stated Mr. Vincent in a memo to the selectmen. "Therefore, I strongly support this proposal and would be willing to work with the Provincetown Art Association to fine-tune any rough edges."

Ms. Watson said the "Tidal Floating Sculpture Exhibit" would be displayed from June 24 until Sept. 4 this year. She said no more than 10 sculptures would be displayed at one time. The artist could create objects that float. Or, the sculptor could build a raft and mount the sculpture on top. Perhaps the artist could stick the sculpture into the sand, so it would appear to float at high tide.

The art association would be responsible for damages to the art and for removing the sculptures on time, Ms. Watson said. All dimensions, materials and efforts to secure the sculptures would need approval from the harbormaster before installation, she said.

"The place and size are negotiable," said Ms. Watson. "If this works, let's make it one of the things we have here in the summer. If not, let's get rid of it."

"If it's 60 feet of tampon applicators, that might be all right with some people, but it's not all right with me," said Selectman Custodio Silva.

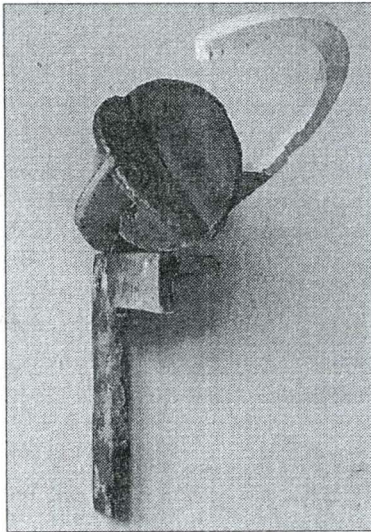
Bowen's sculpture speaks language of form

By Sue Harrison
BANNER STAFF

Sculptor Paul Bowen's work is hard to pin down. In the end, one can only say it is the sum of his life's experience in merging shapes, textures and materials to express a vision for which he says he has no words.

"It's not a narrative, it's not a story, not a novel," Bowen says as he sits in his Commercial Street studio, surrounded by work for his upcoming show on Saturday at the TJ Walton Gallery. "If it was words, that would be my chosen medium but it's not. I'm not a writer, not a novelist, not a poet."

Although he says he cannot wrap words around what his finished pieces represent, Bowen talks freely about his process of creating them. He uses primarily found wood that he combines with fabric, pigment and tar. It is not sculpture in the sense of taking a single block of some material and rendering it into a form, and neither is it assemblage, al-



Untitled wood-and-paint wall sculpture that shows Bowen's use of fabricated circles juxtaposed against natural lines.

final product. Rather, Bowen puts together a melange that combines some elements of the wood, keeping some original edges, some curves, with shapes he creates from bits of those same raw materials to create a carefully worked hybrid.

A Welshman by birth, Bowen has lived in the U.S. for over half his life but still retains a British passport. He is at home here now but carries his personal history in his accent and his sensibilities. He was the son of an architect and grandson of an ironmonger who made casket engravings as a sideline. The family went on walking tour holidays, and European history, especially Welsh history, was always central to Bowen's life through his father. Central, too, was the art of doing work with one's hands.

"There was a visual kind of sensibility in the family and a familiarity with making things," Bowen says. "On my mother's side there was somebody who made carriages, old-fashioned wagons. And all the women repaired the bed

and they knitted our sweaters and did the laundry by hand on Mondays."

He goes from that recollection to a slightly more ephemeral remembrance. "In the area I grew up, which was very much a kind of working class row house, all the women did the laundry on Monday and then they did this thing with the [stone] steps. We lived on a hill and they would take this block of material, I don't really know what it was, it was a yellow pigment, kind of like chalk, not exactly sandstone but something inbetween, and the women rubbed this dampened stone onto the steps to make this flat pigmented surface. It made a sort of fresh coating, like a new coat of paint, but it wasn't paint. As I remember, it happened once a week. It was yellowish and it wore off very quickly."

Listening to Bowen speak of the weekly ritual, one recognizes that the same changing of the old into the new continues in his work.

He began with paintings done exclusively with tar on old bed sheets. He would coat the sheets and then fold them accordion style like a map while they were still wet. Later, he would unfold them and the surface would be further changed as the tar ripped apart.

"Then I simply stopped opening them and that's literally how they became sculpture," he says. "It's very simple and kind of curious. The first sculpture I did was a group of these packages in an open suit-

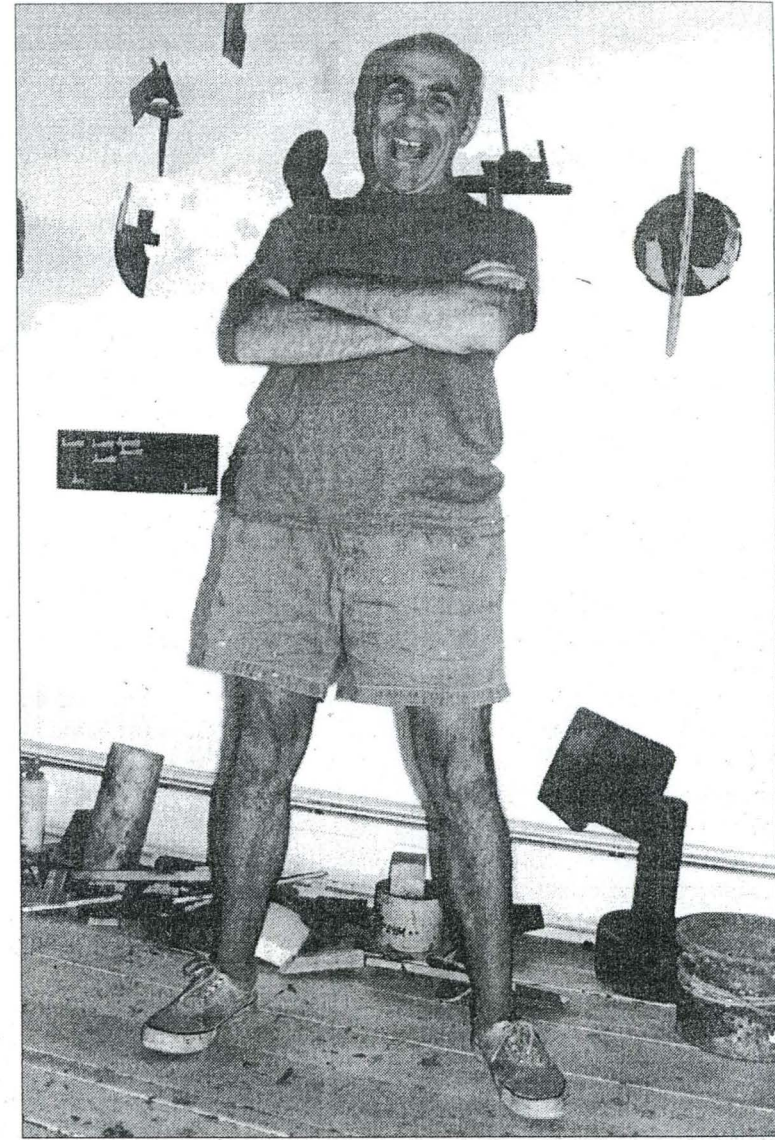


Photo Sue Harrison
Paul Bowen, in his studio, takes his work very seriously but has a sense of humor that's always just below the surface.

Bowen continued from previous page case, and it had a sense of arrival, just off-the-boat kind of thing, and I really was."

In the corner of his studio is a canoe-like structure from 1977. The frame is made from crutches and the body from fabric coated with tar. Even in that there is history.

"This is one of the first pieces I made in the U.S.," he says. "It's a very simple boat construction made from Celtic designs, the coracle, the curragh, made with fabric, tar and stretching. Then I went off into other things."

Those things included the use of more wood, often parts of fish crates he salvaged from the flats. He then paired the wood with wax or white pigment and his work increased in size.

"I made very, very large things that I still tried to make kind of buoyant visually," he says of the change. "Sort of light, not dense and heavy. I think it was definitely influenced by the quality of light here."

Those comments on the illusion of buoyancy introduce some of Bowen's biggest challenges with his work, the difference between what

the mind can conceive and what can be made real in the world, and how to bridge that gap.

"I work large," he says of some of the pieces. "It pushes you to beyond what you know you can do, and it takes you beyond the minuscule judgments of this and that because those great big things have to hold up. It has to literally hold up in the real world, physically. The big work, how a thing stands on the floor or hangs on the wall, the physical difficulties, start to tell you how to make a sculpture, and that's a very good discipline and keeps you sort of down to earth. You can have the most elaborate, thrilling, fanciful ideas but it doesn't work if the thing falls down 20 minutes later."

To keep the work together, he relies on tightly fitted dovetails or butterfly joints that he learned how to make from a Japanese furniture master. He leaves the joints, especially the butterflies, in plain view and they become part of the design like the staples that he uses when he attaches fabric before it is tarred or whitewashed.

He continues to talk about the difference between the visualized

image portrayed in two dimensions and sculpture.

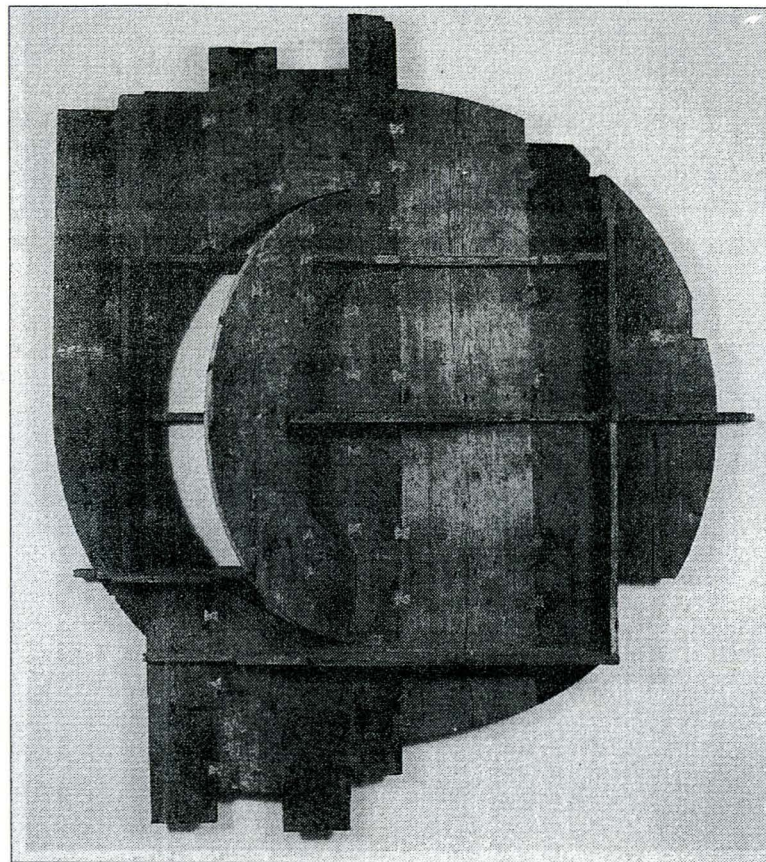
"The drawing parallels the work," he says "It's not for the work, although I have drawings that are idea things, but it's really a parallel activity. What's great about drawing is that you can come up with images that are quite impossible in the real world. There are rules one may or may not choose to follow but you can do things that you cannot do in the real world."

And like the women turning the stone steps yellow every week, Bowen tends to work with similar shapes or substances like the tar or white pigment for a while before moving on. Lately, he has found himself drawn to using tar again.

"I really surprised myself by going back to using material I'm familiar with from years ago," he says. "It was very surprising in a way that I started using black again because I was so happy with very light, buoyant work that in a way wasn't earthbound or didn't have a sense of terrestrial weight to it.

"But what I realize is that even though I'm using tar again, that by using this very shiny black, it's a somewhat different use of black from the past, which was a flat black that absorbed light. Using the shiny got more ambiguous things going on because it reflects. I'm using the black more like a skin than I did in the past."

The boat motif has also resurfaced, this time as a dragger. He has refined the shape down to its bare bones and sometimes uses a stencil to add the dragger icon onto the sculpture's surface or as a pattern which he then cuts through the tarred fabric to reveal the dragger in the wood underneath.



"Hiraethum," a large wall sculpture (approximately nine feet by eight feet) from 1986, features the butterfly joinery Bowen uses.

blocks, cutting up erasers to make shapes," he says of his various permutations of using the dragger. "It was at that point that it moved from a peripheral thing to right into the body of the work. And of course the fishing dragger is such a part of life here, especially for those of us who are here year-round. The drama of the type of life the fishermen live, the political situation with fishing, you can't live here and not be aware of all of that. And so certainly, there is a connection there.

"But even again, imagery or not, the work has to stand up in terms of abstract qualities. It has to formally work, regardless of drift-

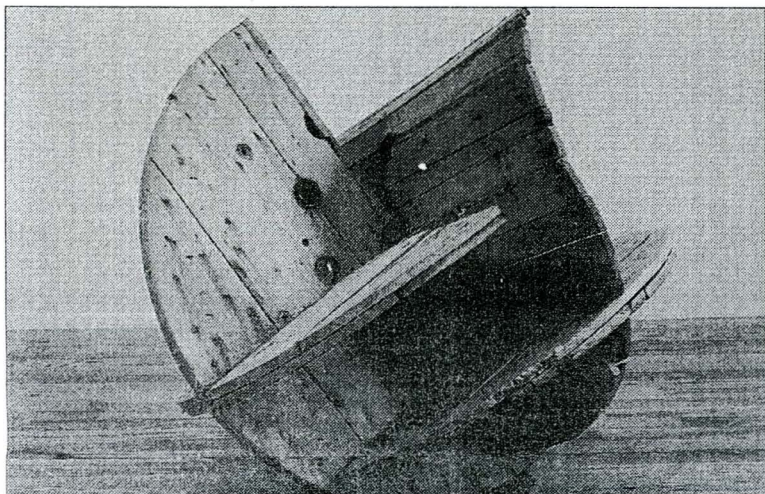
wood or whatever the hell the stuff is made from, it has to do its job visually."

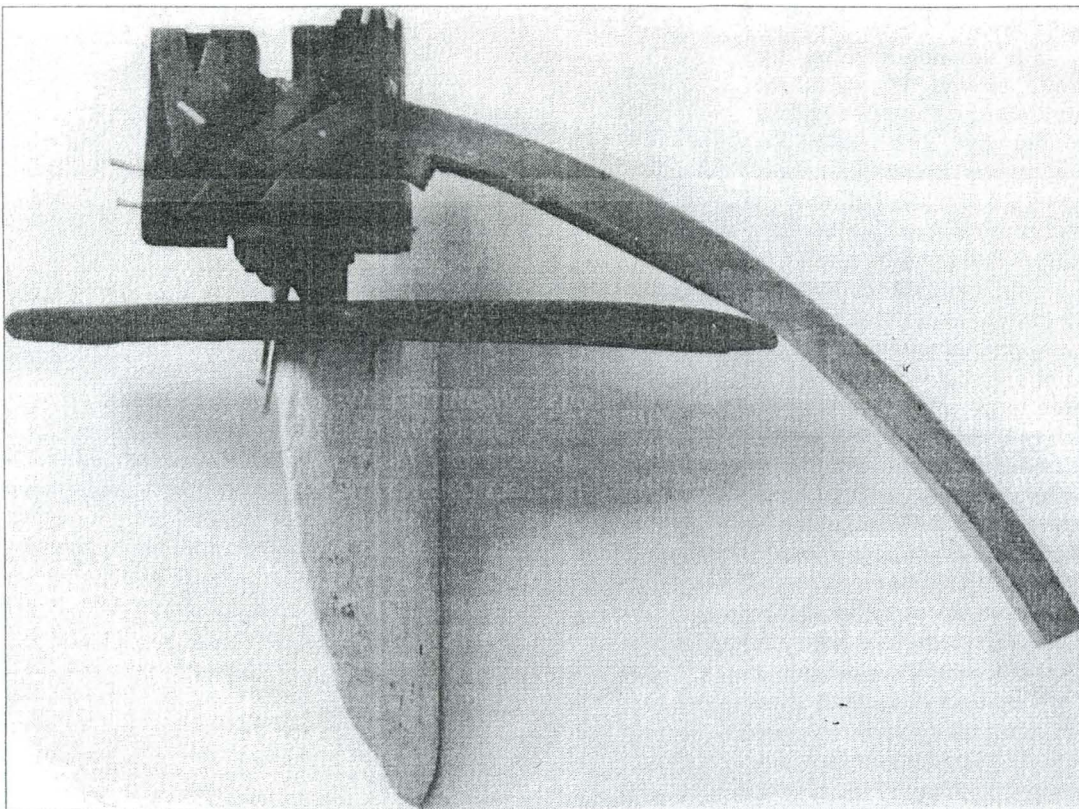
To do that job to his own satisfaction, Bowen works and reworks pieces.

"The way I work is that I work on lots of pieces at the same time, so it's a herding of all them together to get them through that little narrow gate at the same moment," he says. "That's why there's so much unfinished work here."

But just because he keeps all the balls in the air at the same time doesn't mean there is anything haphazard about his approach. He is

continued on next page





Untitled wood-and-paint piece mixes found wood with printer's block letters.

Bowen continued from previous page quick to point out that his process has nothing to do with gathering pleasing bits and arranging them until they suit him. His is a full-time job of considering the smallest of details, like whether two differently finished edges work or don't work in a piece, and he brings an intense level of scrutiny to each component and how it interrelates.

"This is what I do. I do it day in and day out," Bowen says. "This is my life and I take it very seriously. And it's not a hobby. And, hopefully, the thing we do, that we spend our life doing, we do with a degree of deliberation, passion and sheer hard work. Scar tissue underlies a lot of what is going on here, that

change that happens [when reworking a piece] five times, that leaves behind an accumulated residue or the absence of it. It's one thing to look good but doesn't the truth of the process get it to that point?"

Being that strict with himself causes Bowen to reject a lot of work, but during the process the sense of how things are meant to be becomes clearer.

"You also go back to the mechanics of how things fit together," he says. "They really have to work. The glue really has to work, the staples really have to work. All that practical stuff, it's like a house, if it's got to stand up. So does the sculpture."

The public seems to agree with him. He's widely collected privately and is represented in public and corporate collections in the U.S., Japan, Belgium and his native Wales. Bowen has had dozens of solo shows and many, many group shows. He's done book covers and has had international commissions from Italy, Japan and Wales.

So what does it all mean? Bowen will only say that his collective work has elicited a response from the public that shows a simple human connection between what he creates and the viewer.

"I just try to make the very best work I can with the tools that I have, with the materials available

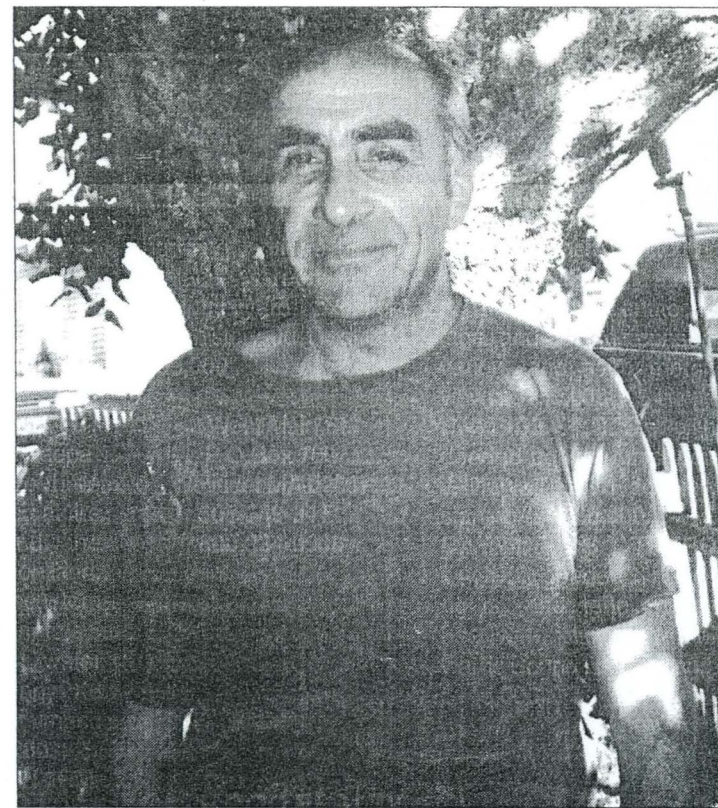
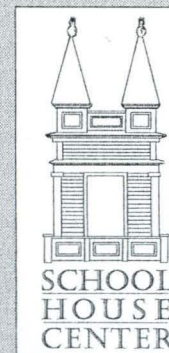


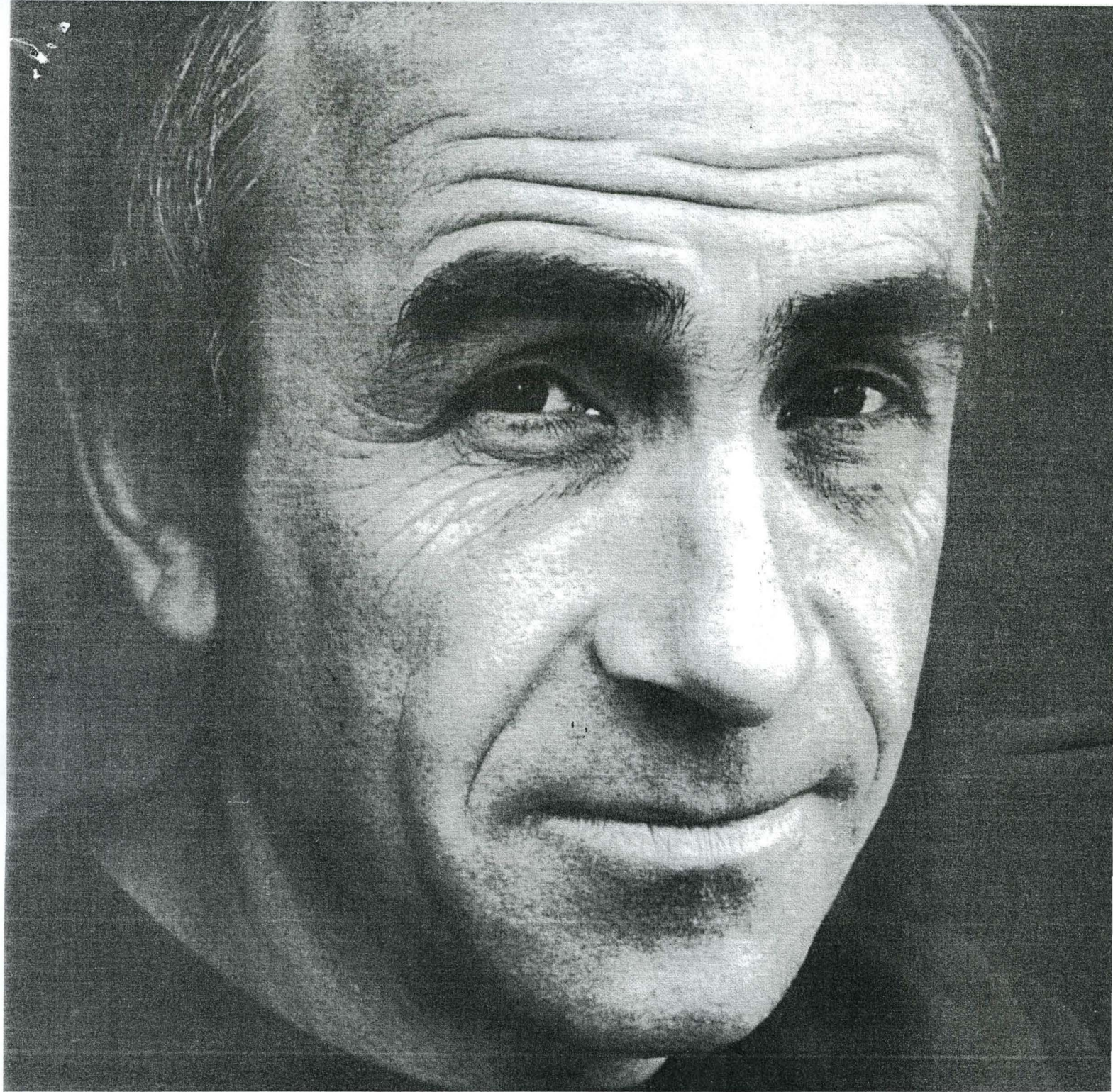
Photo Sue Harrison

Sculptor Paul Bowen takes a break from finishing work for his opening on Saturday.

to me," he says. "I'm not sure if what you [the viewers] get out of it, if that really matters. I don't know that it does. I just try to do

the best I can. As simply and as honestly and as directly as I possibly can. I think that's all one can expect to do."





A WHARF IS A
DISAPPOINTED
BRIDGE

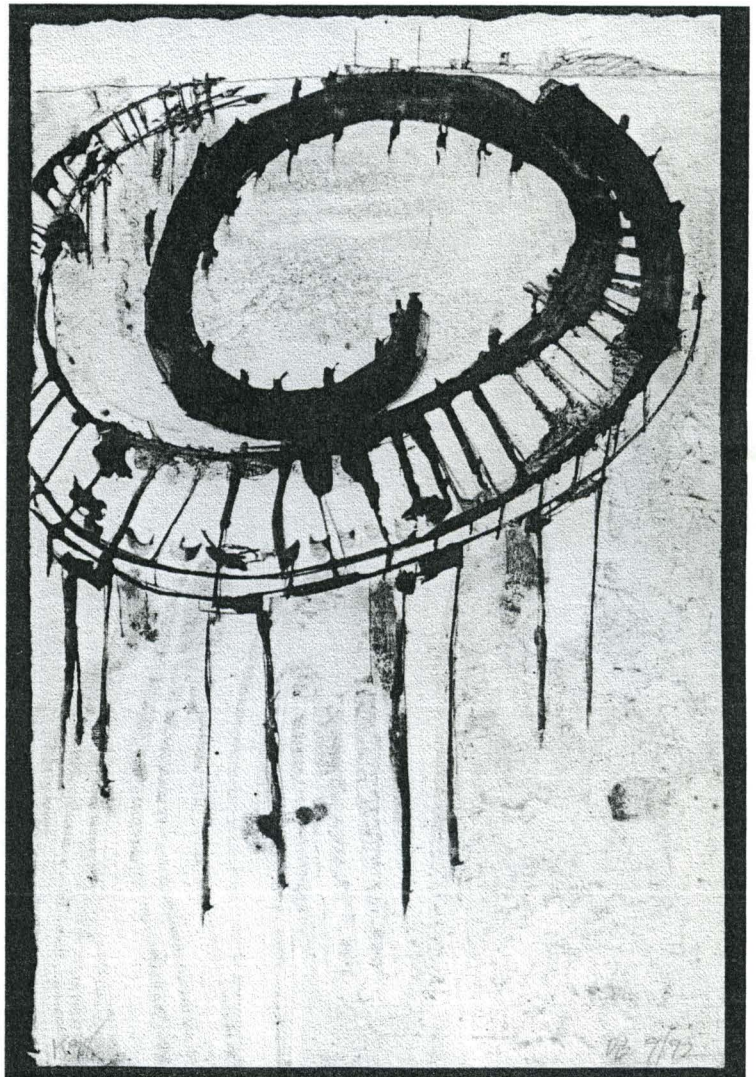
THE RECENT DRAWINGS OF PAUL BOWEN

Interview by Ellen Sidor

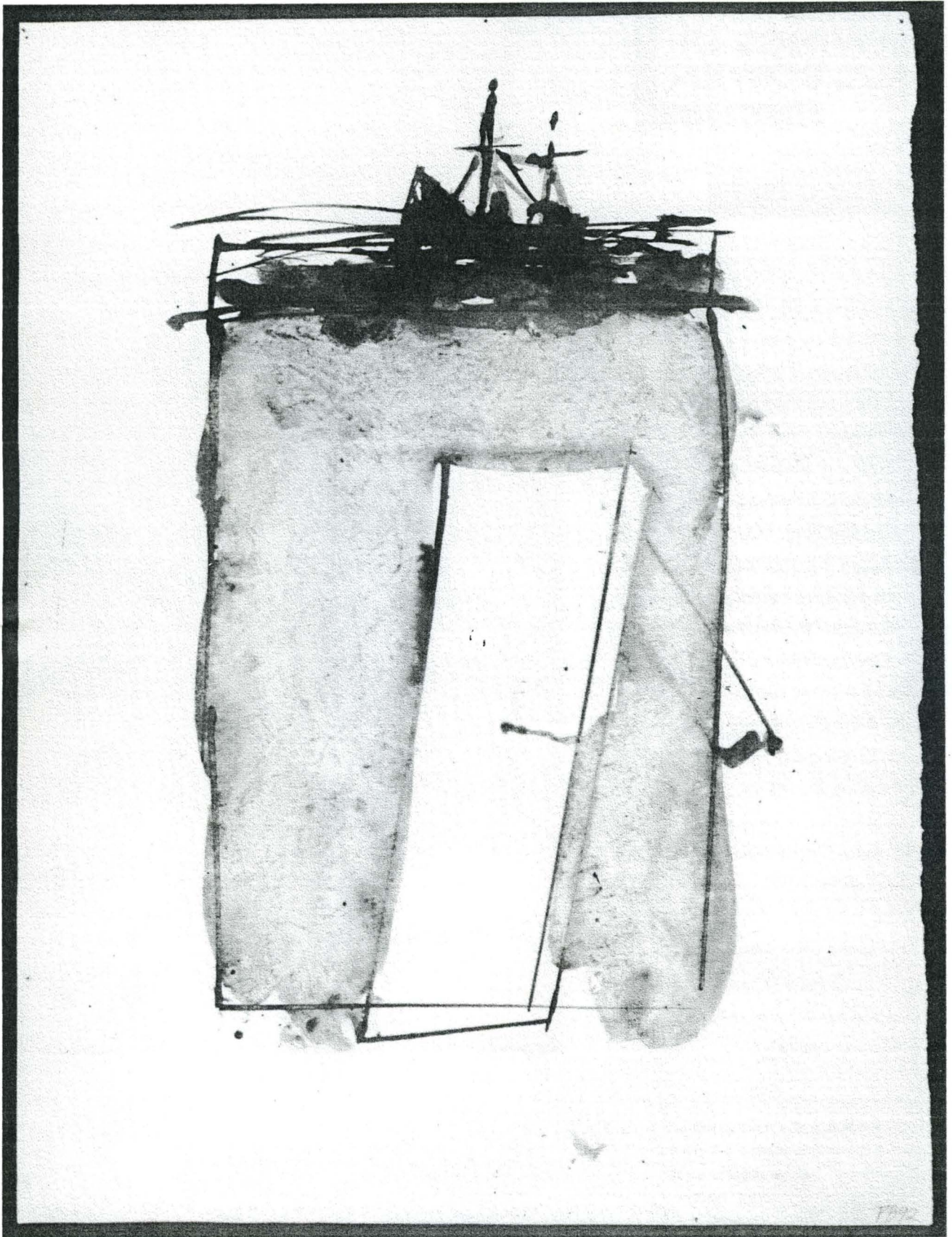
BORN AND RAISED IN WALES, Paul Bowen intended to go to Germany to study with Joseph Beuys, but the plans were cancelled when Beuys became ensnared in a controversy with the university where he taught. Instead Bowen came to the U.S. in 1972 to enter graduate school at the Maryland Institute. After receiving an MFA, he came to Provincetown in 1977 as a Fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center and has lived here ever since. Known primarily as a sculptor, he often utilizes wood and other materials found on the local beaches. He shows regularly in New York at the Jack Shainman Gallery and his work is in many private and public collections, including the Guggenheim Museum. Locally he is represented by the Cherry Stone Gallery in Wellfleet and last year he became the youngest member of Long Point Gallery in Provincetown. Recently he exhibited an enormous, free-standing work with a spiraling tail at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, along with some of his drawings, which are less well known. In this interview he discusses the place of his recent drawings in his work and life.

Ellen Sidor: How do you know one day that you are going to draw instead of work on sculpture?

Paul Bowen: It's rather mundane. I get given a lot of materials—old but serviceable paper, boxes of watercolors, notebooks. Somehow,



PAUL BOWEN, 1992
ACRYLIC TAR WASH 9" x 6"
PRIVATE COLLECTION



PAUL BOWEN, 1992
ACRYLIC TAR WASH 12" x 9"

perhaps since they are already "hand-me-downs," I'm less intimidated than I am by a virgin sheet of paper or an untouched tube of paint. If I'm stuck with the sculpture, drawing can be a useful break. I can often get quite quick results. And I can do things with sculptural imagery that are impossible in reality—like defying the laws of gravity! I usually do a batch, say, 20 to 50 drawings, linked by theme or material. What tends to happen, eventually, is that they become too clever or knowing and I'll have to look for another medium in which to work. Or I might stumble across a new way of drawing. For a while last year, I doodled whilst talking on the telephone, mostly sepi sketches of boats and the waterfront.

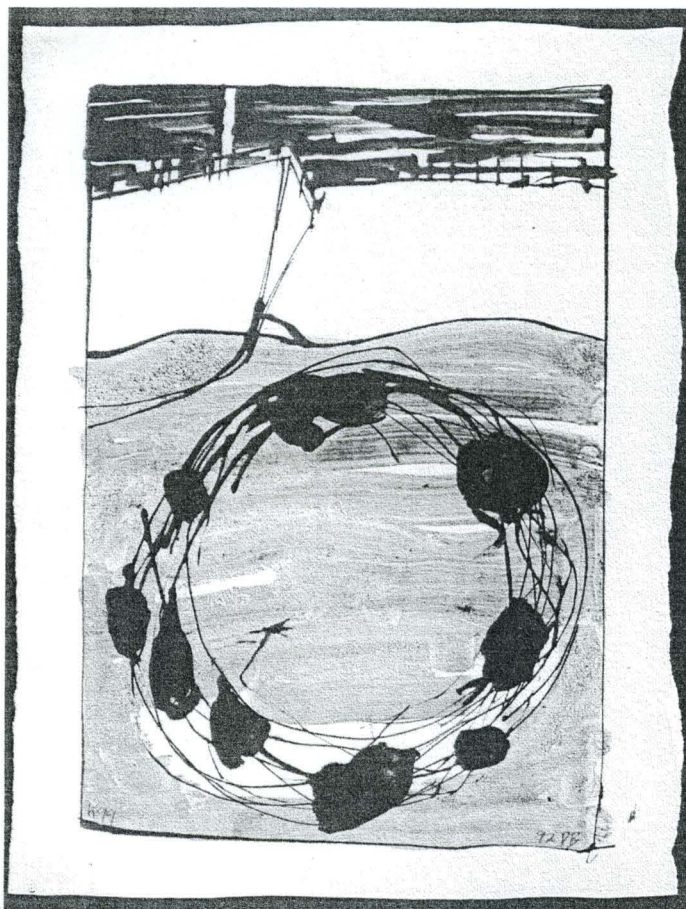
ES: So some of these new drawings started as doodles?

PB: That was the impetus, but my doodles tend to be less gestural and more intricate. Also I stumbled across a material I hadn't seen in years, an acrylic tar which can be thinned with

water and made into washes as delicate as watercolor, or it can be used straight from the can, very thick and pasty.

ES: So the starting point may not be specific imagery, but the material itself?

PB: Sometimes it's one, sometimes the other. It ends up being a combination of the two. Some of the forms are connected to the sculpture—images of wood and other debris I find on the beach after a storm. Other imagery is often parts of wharves or imaginary wharves. The imagined structure is put down on paper, "built," the way a real wharf is made. Very often it derives from a functional element. If an image tends only to have a singular use, it disappears rather quickly for me. But if there is a layering of motivation, then it will appear for years and years. For instance, the wharf and the raft are closely related. They are both platforms in the water. One floats, the other is embedded in the bottom of a lake or bay. They are both related to bridges, another element in the work. One important aspect comes from the Celtic world, the crannog, a lake-dwelling system which also appears in other parts of the world, essentially dwellings on pilings or artificial islands. I recently found out that they were not always isolated like islands from the mainland, but often would have underwater bridges in a form



PAUL BOWEN, 1992, ACRYLIC TAR WASH, 12" x 9"
PRIVATE COLLECTION

that only the lake-dwellers themselves would know, as a protection from attack. They were built just below the surface of the water, sometimes in different patterns, not just in a straight line, but meandering or curving or spiraling.

ES: When I saw those patterns in your drawings, I thought they were about the Cape.

PB: The spiral keeps appearing in my work. I think I started making circular work in 1979, disks and spheres, often made of many fragments of wood joined together to make a whole form by interlocking, stacking, or piling, an accumulation of little things to make a big thing. Then they started growing these counterbalances that were like tails—and like the Cape, of course. That's what I mean by layering.

ES: A number of different sources for the same thing.

PB: Simultaneously. About 10 years ago I was looking at early German woodcuts from the time Halley's Comet had appeared. The woodcut images are essentially a ball with lines shooting out from behind it. That image began to appear in a lot of my transfer drawings, which I made like carbon copies by drawing on the back so I couldn't really see what I was doing. Then, about six years ago, there was a change in my sculpture. Instead of being symmetrical, static, and flat on the wall, it started to have

areas that would be peeling open, exposing the armature behind it and transforming itself into a sort of window in the process. A sense of speed or acceleration began to appear in the drawings as well.

ES: Your drawings with schools of fish seem more obviously narrative.

PB: They come directly from things seen. I go down to the water at night when, if there's illumination, I can see more clearly through the water. In the daytime there is so much to sort out that it's almost impossible to see anything.

ES: After you mentioned this last summer, I went down to the wharf. It was quite late one night, very clear. There were schools of fish, fish chasing fish back and forth, gathering and changing.

PB: Then you've seen it.

ES: But you won't go down and draw at night?

PB: I know a lot of the guys who fish down there and I'm just too inhibited to work in front of

them. I draw loosely from memory. But I have to keep going down to the water to look at certain things—how the pilings connect with the deck, how physically they support it, just the carpentry of it. It doesn't matter how many times I look at it, I can never get it quite right.

ES: A lot of your drawings are quite simplified.

PB: They are. I'm not trying to render, using conventional perspective. When there is any perspective, I'm doing something else at the same time which counteracts it. The drawings are very physical and tied to the idea of their flatness.

ES: Often they seem to be about the ink or the tar.

PB: There's a balance between material and image. I don't want either taking over. If the image takes over, it becomes illustrative. If the material takes over, I lose the tension I like.

ES: You often define a rectangle, then violate it.

PB: Sometimes I draw right to the edge of the paper so that the form is physically tied to the edge. Sometimes that's too constricting, and I draw an internal frame so the edge of it starts to define a form. Landscape can act as a border. That embracing arm of the Long Point peninsula, that end of the curve of Cape Cod, which we who live here look at every single day, looks back at us across the water and permeates a lot

of people's work. Last year I curated a show at the Art Association around the theme of the harbor. One form that appeared in the work of many artists in the permanent collection was a scow, a big barge with a structure on top used for pile driving. You have this huge expanse of ocean and sky and this thin bit of Long Point, and some big form like the scow is tremendously powerful. Yesterday they were towing a crane on a barge. There was the drama of a massive form out there like a dense mark being towed through water that felt like a blank screen or a sheet of paper.

ES: I've looked at a lot of work by painters—Paul Resika, Arthur Cohen, Anne Packard—and they get the sky, the horizon line, and the point, but never your sense of the curve.

PB: Well, they're not sculptors, their priorities are different. Sometimes I think I take too many liberties with the look of the place, but what's underneath is also what it is. What's seen is only the starting point. There's much unseen that's there for me: what those places are like in winter, what a dead whale washed up on the beach looked like, how it stank to high heaven. I go out to Long Point quite a bit. I have found where some of the old house sites are. I've found garbage dumps from the last century. And I've found good areas for collecting wood. Archaeology is an important part of my work in the sense of looking through the layers of what's below our feet, both physically and in time. If you stand on the wharf at the deepest end at very low tide you can see these dead fish that have been dropped off the boats or been thrown back, these white ghosts deep down. When you're fishing with a pole on the wharf your gear can get too near the bottom and snag on the debris that's underneath: rotten lobster traps, coiled wire, ripped fishing net, tires, or old bicycles.

ES: In one of your drawings, there's a diagonal block in the water. The water flows around this form, as if there's a chasm beyond or through the surface, a slit. What do these chasms mean to you?

PB: That sense of an almost endless bottom is terrifying. And you know damn well at the bottom there're bones. I remember as a child—I grew up in a seaside town—there was a long pier and the planks were spaced with a gap of no more than half an inch, but I was absolutely terrified of falling through. Perhaps that's why I've done quite a lot of drawings in

peat bogs in Ireland and Wales where they've found corpses of men and women from the Iron Age, preserved by the tannic acid. The color of these drawings is not black, but a deep rich brown, almost like liquified peat, a brown tar that for me is a material equivalent. An interesting thing is that it's a carbon product, just as peat is.

ES: The connection you make with those early influences, some architectural, some archaeological, is similar to the sensibility you bring to the Cape.

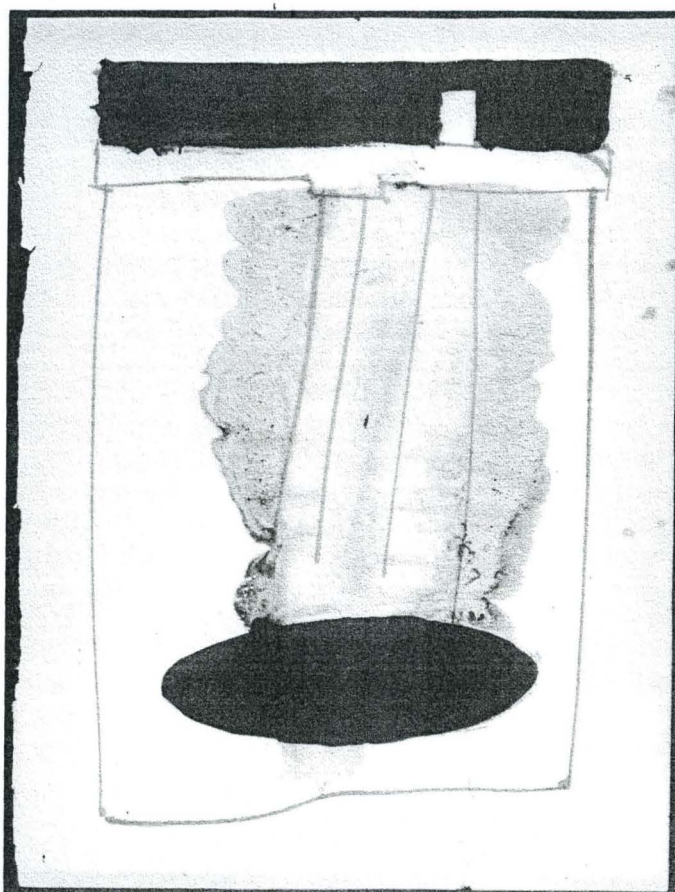
PB: Peat bogs, lakes, bay—in a way it ends up being the same thing. Just the location is different, a sense of history, the former use of objects, tools, decaying things. But the work now has just as much to do with light and a sense of unfolding, of self-determination. Maybe it's just that although my roots are in Wales, their importance has become integrated with living here. As one matures, one starts to make more deliberate, conscious choices. And of course, where you live has an impact on what you do.

ES: Last fall you moved into a house that by some insane luck incorporates a lot of the images that have already come into your work.

PB: Yes, the Hondius House. It's near the waterfront, it's very old and has floors that are probably made from local pine and are pieced to-

gether like some of my work. There are three circular cellars, two of them under the studio. There's quite a lot of saltwood used in the house, too—wood that was salvaged after the saltworks stopped being used. Across the street, in the churchyard of St. Mary's of the Harbor, is a memorial for the S-4, the submarine that sank off Wood End in the '20s. When it went down, the local fishermen had a plan to rescue the sailors by hitching their boats to it and towing it along the bottom to shore. The Navy officials wouldn't let them, and by the time they had sent their own crew, the men had all died. Last October the dragger *Liberty Belle* exploded and sank between the breakwater and Long Point. Fortunately the men on board were rescued. The next day eight or nine fishing boats tied up to the submerged dragger and towed it to shore. I can't help but think that if the Navy had been less rigid, the S-4 and its crew could have been saved the same way. You know, when you live here, with all that under your nose every day, it becomes part of you.

Ellen Sidor is a stone carver, an editor, and the author of *A Gathering of Spirit: Women Teaching in American Buddhism* (Primary Point Press, 1987).



PAUL BOWEN, 1983
ACRYLIC TAR WASH
12" x 9"