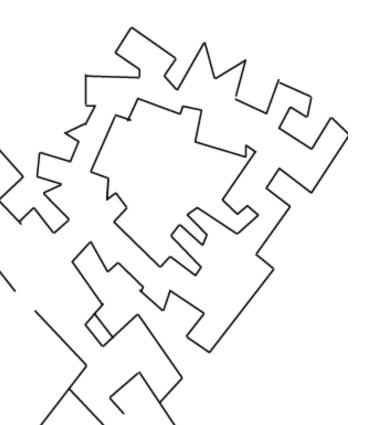


Catalogue of works

1970 - 2020



"Some of my sculptures appear to be opening up or collapsing; moving toward you or away from you; moving up or down; moving left or right."



DOUGLAS ABDELL

INTRODUCTION

I. 1960's Neo-surrealist genesis

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

- II. 1970's: KRYADS
- III. 1980's: BERLIN NEW YORK CITY UNDERGROUND

BERLIN PHONEAS

TOTEMS AND PAINTINGS

INTERVALISM

THE FOURTH PUNIC WAR

IV. 1990's: PHOENICIAN WORKS

STONE STELAE

M=Agua

LEBANESE ETCHINGS

V. 1978 - 2020's:

AEKYADS



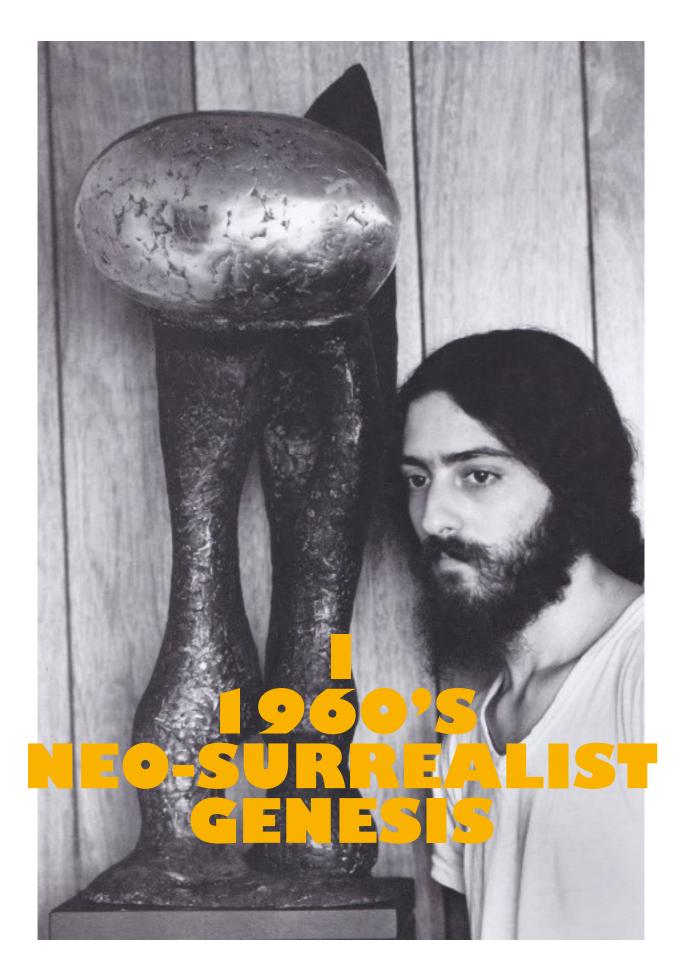
Douglas Abdell (Boston, MA, USA, 1947) Lives and works in Málaga, Spain

Born in Boston to an Italian mother and Lebanese father, Douglas Abdell is a sculptor who also produces paintings, drawings, engravings, and tapestries dominated by writing and graphic signs. His work explores the deep bond between words, images, sound, and form in intimate and political subjectivity. The artist believes that this link has been particularly close and significant in the ancient languages, now extinct, once spoken in his family's countries of origin: Phoenician and Etruscan.

Abdell's metal and bronze sculptures from the 1970s are not far removed from contemporary research into minimalism, always maintaining a link with the graphic sign. With the "Kryads" and "Aekyads", his sculptures are the materialization in space of a sound or phoneme that propagates into the third dimension.

In 1984 he published the Intervalist Manifesto, in which letters, numbers, and asemic writing are interwoven, forming geometric and esoteric compositions. In these, Abdell conveys his unified conception of things, his tendency to link elements—a number like a letter, one language with another—because nothing exists except in relation to otherness. His sculptures, engravings, tapestry, manifest a singular combination of signs, codes and imaginary alphabet inspired not only by Phoenician but also Etruscan and more esoteric systems.

Abdell moved to Spain in 1992, seeking to strengthen his roots in Mediterranean traditions and references, which he continues to translate and reinvent to this day in his work—notably by crossing the ancient imaginary of the Punic Wars with that of current political conflicts and ongoing migratory crises.

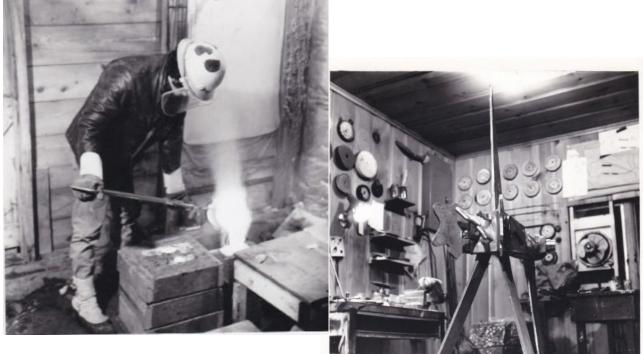


Portrait of Douglas Abdell, Syracuse University, 1960's

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY: the genesis 1960's



Untitled Syracuse u. 2



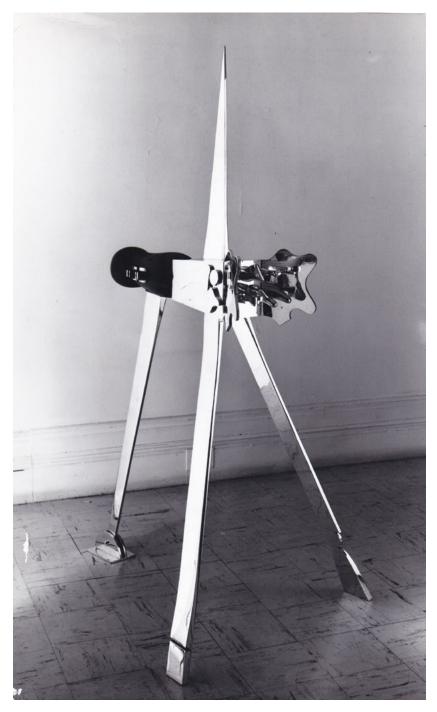
Arkville Studio New York State 1970's



Sancto-Yad, 1972

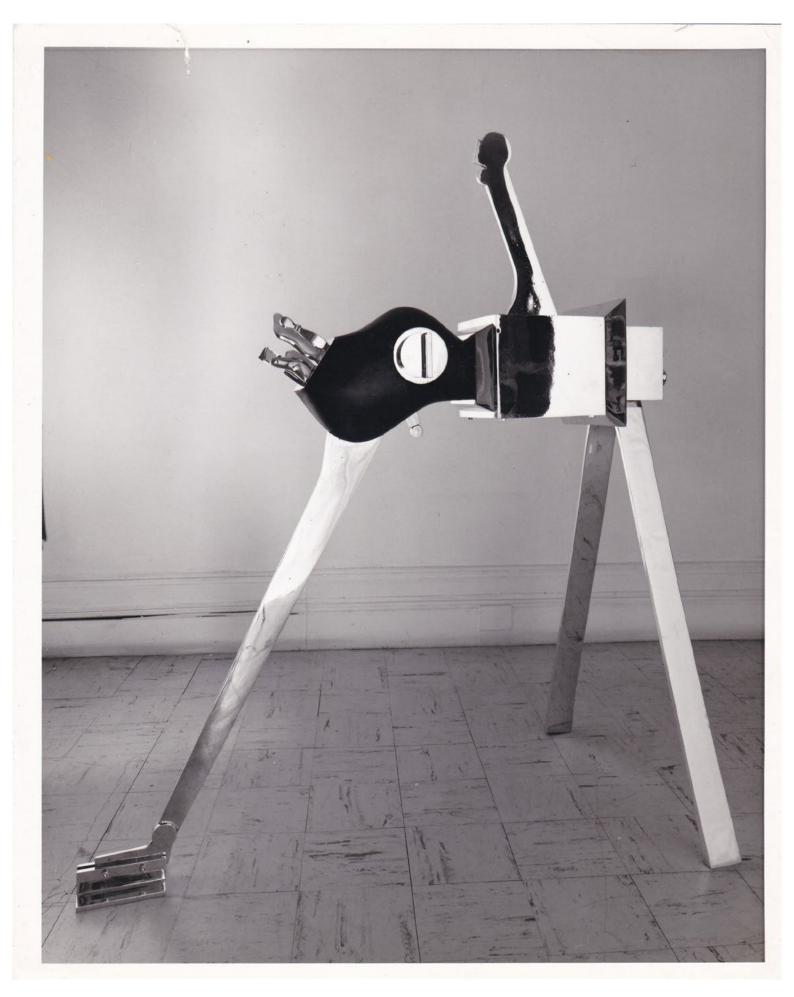


Cenq-Yad, 1972



Graham Gallery New York City

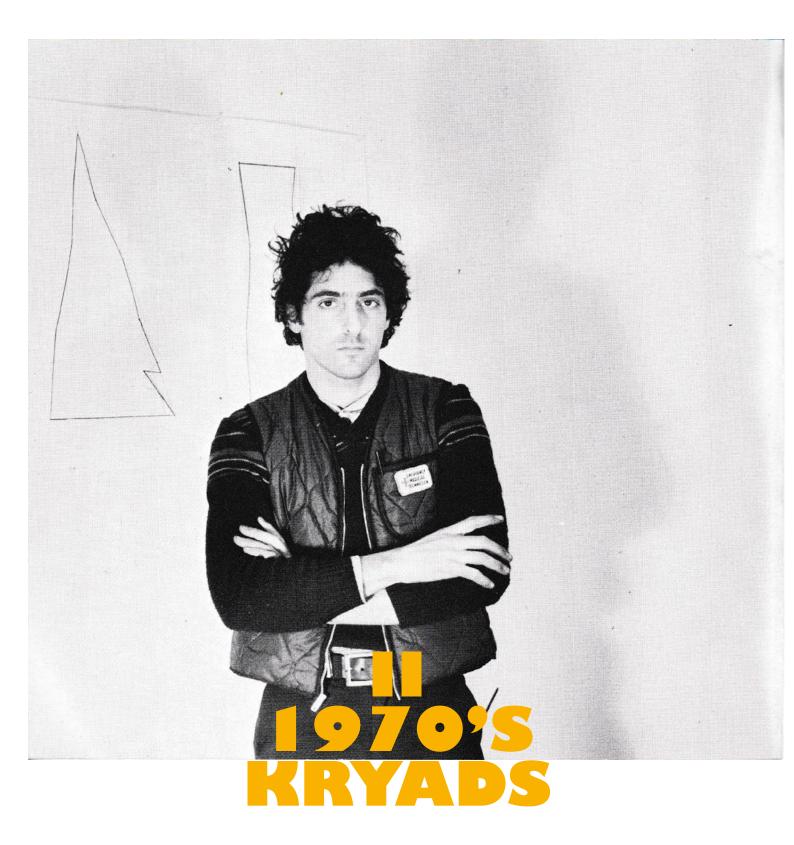
Phrae - Yad, # 1 1971



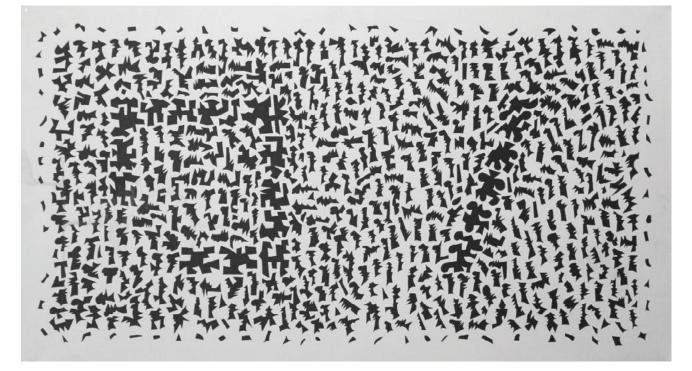
Sancto - Yad, 1972



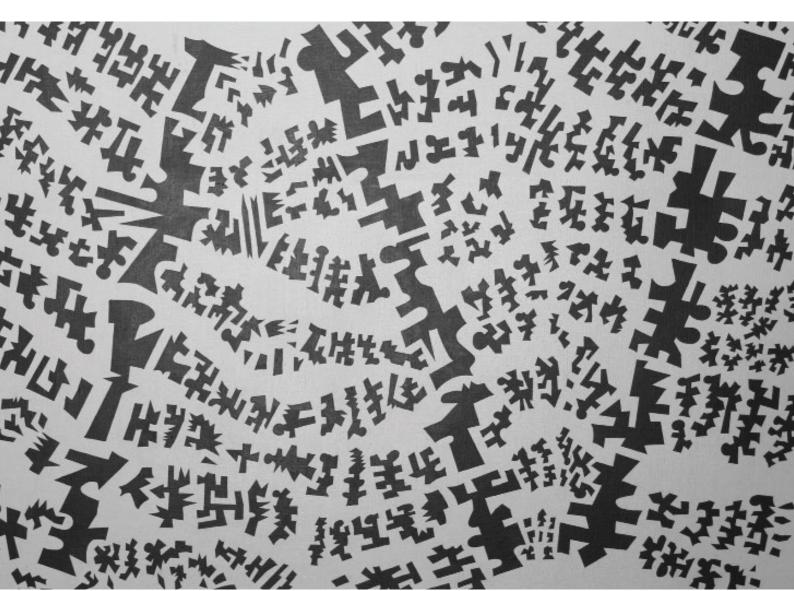
Yads, 1972 Graham Gallery

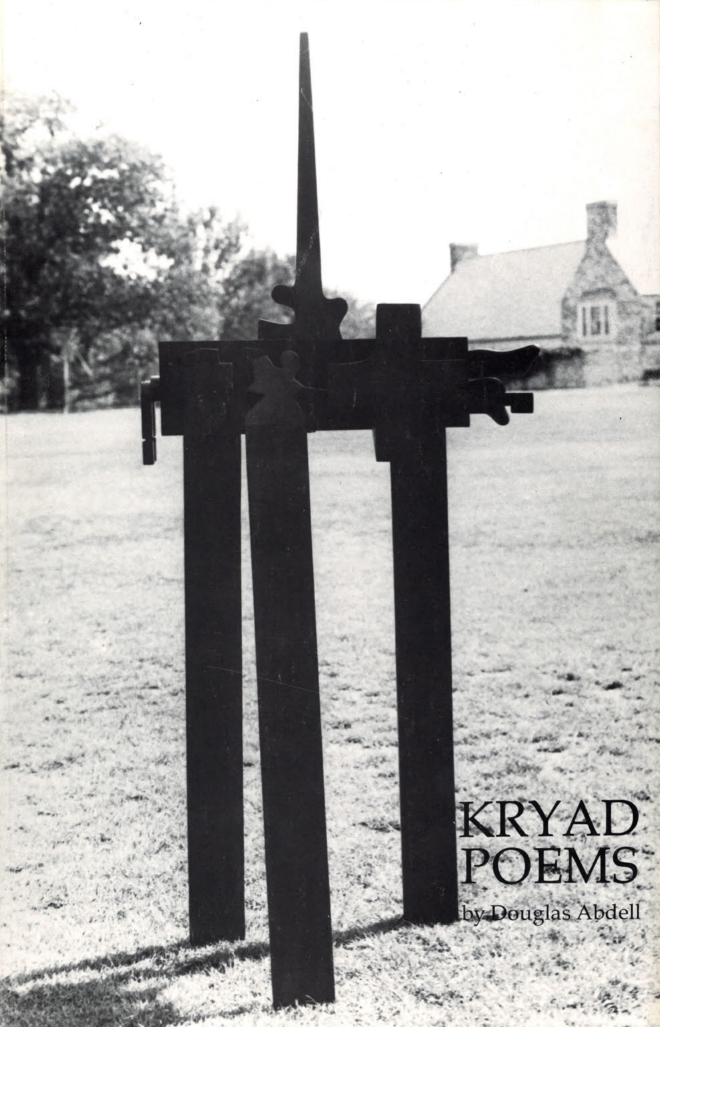


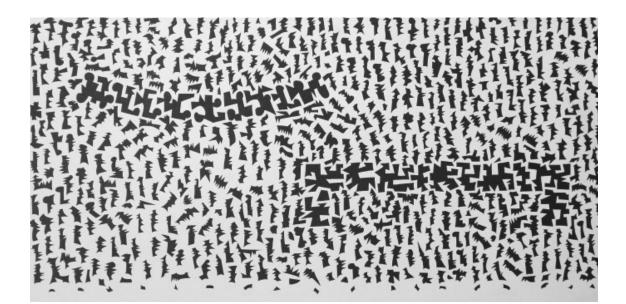
KRYAD SERIES



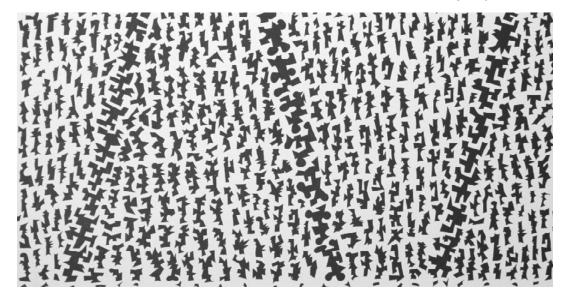
Proportional knowledge, 1975



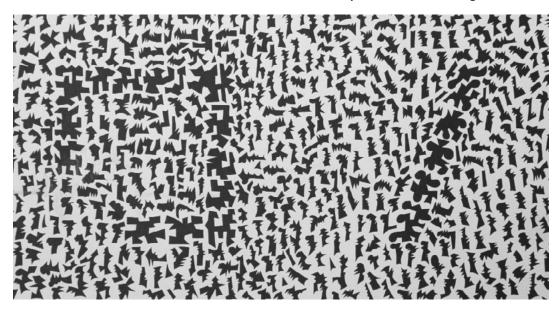




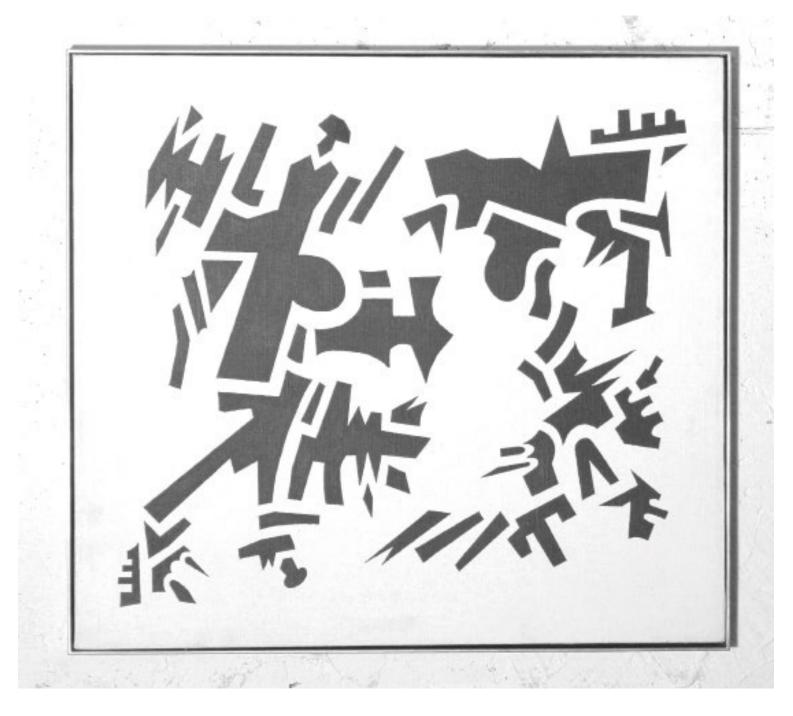
The Democracy of Jazz, 1975



Proportional knowledge # 2, 1975



Relational motional transitional, 1975



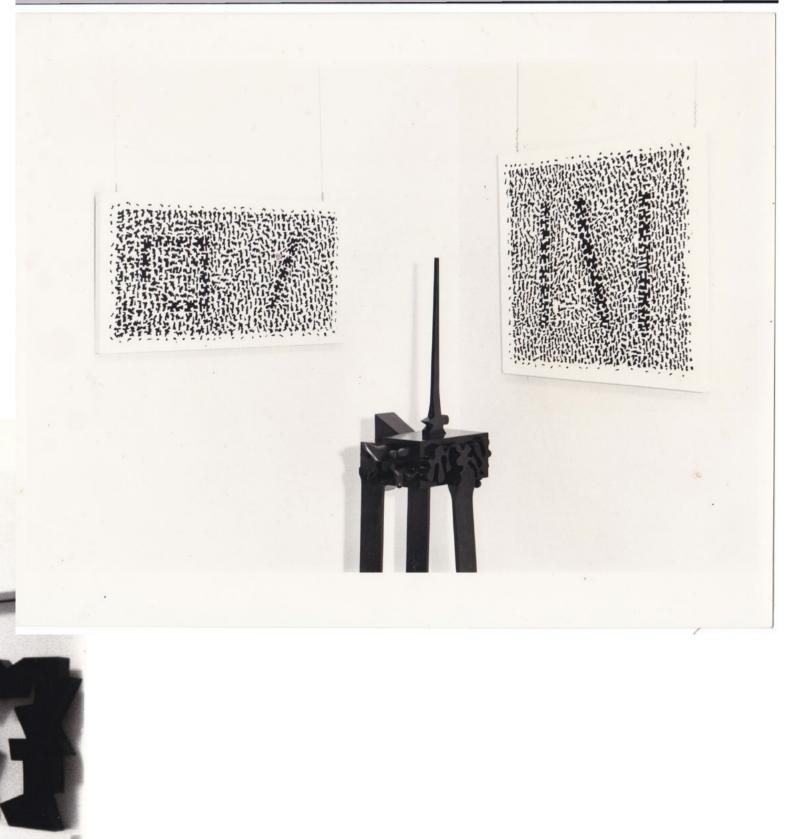


Naeo-Kryad

Somerville appartment, 1975



Boston, 1975"



V



• 0 D 0 R D ſ

BERLIN PHOENAES

« I approach this language as I do my sculpture with the same sense of loose suspension and self-imposed restriction.

In Berlin in May, 1981, I got the idea for a series of phonetic paintings in which the formation of words on the canvas would relate to their sounds. I would draw a few lines on paper in full scale, and would then interpret their gesture and relationship to one another with my sound-words. Sometimes I would work in the reverse, I would first think of the sounds, and then let them direct their composition. When the drawings were completed I would trace and transfer directly to a stretched white canvas and paint the letters in black. »

Douglas Abdell, Berlin, May 1981



AGESSPIEGEL / FEUILLETON



Skulptur und Lautmalerei

Der Amerikaner Douglas Abdell in zwei Ausstellungen

gen Das Amerika-Haus setzt seine Präsentation , heit, skulpturales Maß. Die 5 Kleinplastiken ten junger und jüngster amerikanischer Kunst mit äh-Douglas Abdell fort, von dem zum erstenmal lauin Europa Arbeiten gezeigt werden. Abdell ehr stammt, italiepisch-libanesischer Herkunft, telaus Boston, Jahrgang 1947; als Bildhauer hat ine er, nicht zuletzt durch den Einsatz der Anieudrew Crispo Gallery (die auch im Berliner die Amerika-Haus als Mit-Sponsor auftritt) einige am-Erfolge zu verzeichnen gehabt. sise

nal

ter-

ehr nd

eg-

je-

das

ibe-

ehr.

ha-

Er muß ein sehr fleißiger Mann sein, denn 1025 die sechs großen Plastiken, die eine davon vor dem Eingang aufgestellt, sind alle wähternz" otiv rend seines jetzt dreimonatigen Aufenthalts in fied Berlin entstanden -- die Luft- oder Schiffsuch fracht wäre wohl auch zu teuer gekommen. Aus Stahl geschweißt, in einfachen Volumen, **治田**dann pechrabenschwarz angemalt, wirken die oen. Skulpturen auf den ersten Blick wie ein Mitbertelding aus Wolkenkratzersilhouette und Baßner

geigenkasten, Auf den gleichfalls ausgestellten Zeichnungen sieht man, wie oft der die Künstler die silhouettenhafte Form revidiert von hat, bis sie seinen Anforderungen entsprach. ion Sie liegt ebenfalls auf einer Mitte, diesmal 107zwischen Minimal-art und herkömmlicher ker. Eisenstahlplastik etwa im Sinne Hans Uhlchmanns, Aus den architektonischen Formen uns werden wieder kompliziertere Gebilde, bei denen Balance eine Rolle spielt, Ausgewogen-

Der :hte

BLICK AUF DIE LEINWAND:

im Obergeschoß - die einzigen, die über den Atlantik transportiert wurden - zeigen eine Vorliebe für die Treppe, die Zickzack-Form, die sich in bildhauerischen Bereichen nur so schwer einordnen läßt.

Sie ist es jedoch, die Abdells Kunst ausmacht. Er hat in Berlin auch zu malen begonnen, was mit der Forderung seines amerikanischen Galeristen zusammenhängt, doch Titel für die Plastik zu finden. Sie führte den Bildhauer in lautmalerische Bereiche, denn er zog es vor, eigene Worte zu erfinden in einer eigenen Sprache, ganz wie einst die Dadaisten.

"Berlin Phonaes" nennt er die "Phonetischen Bilder", die daraus entstanden und nun bei Mike Steiner zu sehen sind: Kunstwörter, in schwarzen Lettern auf weißer Leinwand, die sich - je nach Lautklang - zickzackförmig ordnen, anziehen, abstoßen, im Kreis herumlegen: konkrete Poesie in visuellem Gewand, Treppen zwischen den Künsten und der Sprache, neue Artikulationen in eigentlich sogar einem neuen Medium zwischen Phonetik und Bildhauerei. Heinz Ohif bis

(Amerika-Haus, Hardenbergstraße 22-24, 11. Juli; Montag, Mittwoch, Freitag 11—18, Diens-tag, Donnersiag 11—20, Sonnabend 11—16 Uhr. Eintritt frei. — Studio Galerie Mike Steiner, Al-brecht-Achilles-Straße 58, bis 4, Juli; Monteg bis Freitag 17—19, Sonnabend 11—14 Uhr. Eintritt frei)

durch die Vergangenheit, von der sie berichten und bestimmt sind für die Zukunft, für die .sbt "Von der Wolke zum Widerstand" sie berichten; und es gibt einen gesamten gende E Film, der die zeitlichen und mythologischen widemu Zwei Texte von Cesare Pavese bilden die TAGES Räume miteinander verbindet, indem er Wege

AUF DE WEST

Ohne nen Fäh und Erfi 205 21 8 zuspinne lich hör vom NE fried Sc Vietnam standslo ge auf 1 mußten, schaftsfl gertum teln per Schön fi die run solange ist, und mehr, k gern odund Stri einmal lernen. Autorin bösa M etwas g Besitzer sen, die gern zu aber im Keller e

OST

Aruni Filmreg sogenai etwas 5 brot" a chen V bis zut erinner kurz ne chen L will, be gen Rù kindlic Verzicł: wenn i daß dis eine C man k Traum sympat Milchk doch w gefaller auch : Breitw ist, Un zen Pa harten Handso den, Fr

HAELAZ LHTHN JIMP HLKOND T LERE A OENAESZ

I. PHAELA HAELLAHH 2. PHLIMP / FLOMPH / PHLIMP April 1981 March 1981

PHLHMO

3.THLAEOENAESZ IEPE April 4.THLIEONPHFFUKTH April 1981 1981

In 1967, I was concerned with the notion of pure language of form, color, and sound. But I felt that the three should not be mixed arbitrarily. For the next four years I didn't name my sculptures. Then in 1971, I began to create names using letters and sounds that approached in a visual and audiol manner the nature of my sculpture. Within a series of sculpture each piece shored the second part of a hyphenated name, the first part of the name was unique to tae individual piece. Over a period of years, through the making and naming of many sculptures, I developed o large vocabulary of sounds and words. In 1977, I wrote some poems about sculptures from the Kryad series: Each poem was named ofter a particular piece.

Naeo - Kryad Naeroqae - naeo, neoa Pree yad Parmonsey naeos Stey endd dio dios Parmonsey naes naaeqoe Nreacc nreaq aene Aene kryas - traux kryos Na faxa danaes Na faxa kryaes Naes - Kryas, Naes - Kryos Naea - Krykrae.

{From Kryad Poems by Douglos Abdell (Chelsea Press, Chelsea. Mass. 1978) p. 15)





Marzo 1982 Mostra Mercato del Sale, Milano,





War is Near, 1983

All my life, before and after I have dedicated my work to sculpture. When I finally came to live in downtown New York City, the between the before and after occured. I was slowly drawn into the aesthetics of what was going on in my neighborhood and created a body of work which I also could use as a vehicle for literary and philosophical ideas that I was interested in. One may refer to this period as a window which opened up and closed after four years as I found myself painting images of sculptures Hence I started making sculptures again.

Douglas Abdell





P. Santo power R, 1983



Cold Worked, 1983



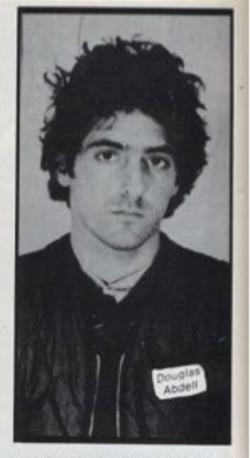
Contract Arment Work, 1983



P. Santo Power K, 1983







cendo fonemi in risposta all'ambiente, il mio lavoro è registrare, montare, ristrutturare l'informazione, ed emetteria di nuovo".

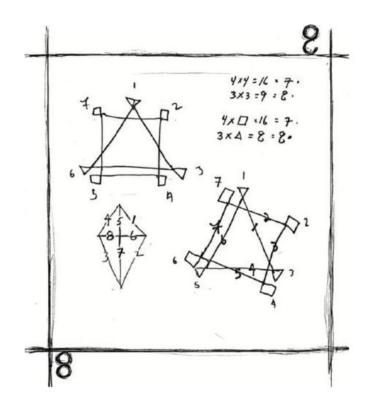
Ultimamente II VIIlage Voice ha dedicato un lungo articolo alle pitture e alle instaliazioni fatte spontaneamente nel capannone abbandonato sul flume a Canal street (il Pier), sulla sponda ovesi di manhattan. È possibile che, davanti ad una attenzione internazionale eccessiva rispetto a tutte le espressioni artistiche che appaiono nelle strade di New York, si stila ritornando ad una specie di graffitti de caverne, realizzati nei palazzi abbandonati del Bronx o nel capannoni deserti del porto Down Town?

"Le sculture del Pier sono molto primitive e territoriali, non bisogna dimenticare di quanto sia vicino a Soho, il molo ha acqua, materia in decadenza, oggetti abbandonati, è la perfetta tavola su cui dipingere, è il luogo fantastico per "Primitivo Santo" (un personaggio fantastico che talvolta appare simbolizzato nei quadri di Douglas, ndr). La prima volta che sono andato al Pier mi è sembrato di entrare nel nomanzo di Albert Cossery "Il perioolo della fantasia" quando il rigagnolo di piscia di un bimbo conduce alla scuola degli accattoni, il luogo oltre il quale non è possibile andare, la tomba della miseria umana".

Qual è la risposta della critica di New York al vostro lavoro, e come rispondono le gallerie?

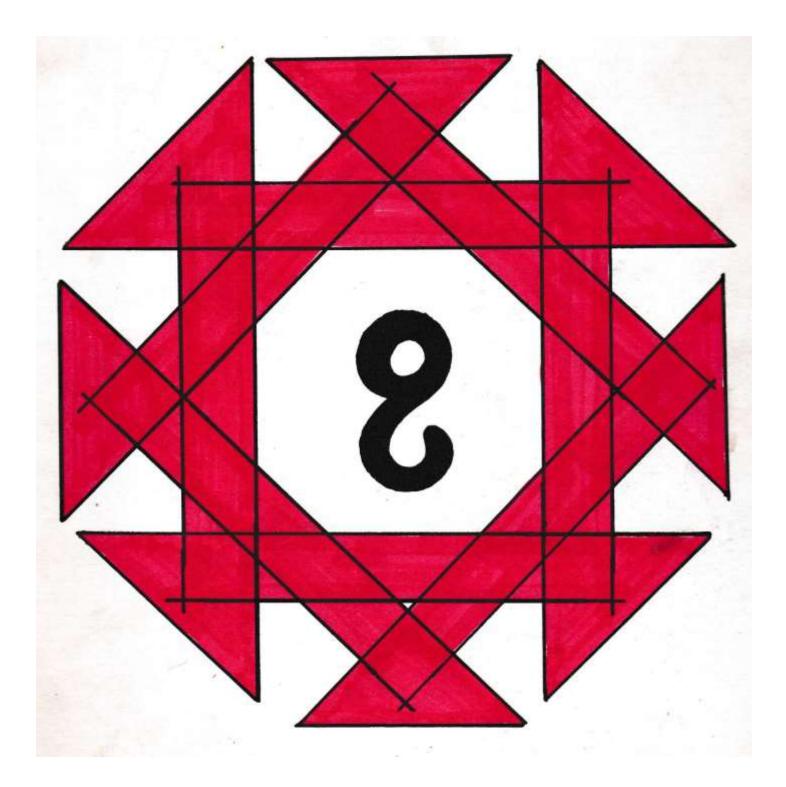
"Le gallerie sono una rete intrecciata di specchi, dove uno osserva l'altro e non si muove se non ha visto prima nuoversi l'altro, le gallerie di Soho più attente al nuovi artisti sono Boniow, Tony Shafrazi, Metro Pictures. Ma il fenomeno più interessante sono le gallerie che sono nate nella East side, un po' sul filone di successo che ha avuto la Fun Gallenie e Fashion Moda nel Bronx; sono gallerie povere ma molto attente, cito quelle che nicordo a memoria, ma ce ne sono senz'altro di più Gracie Manson, Six Gallery, Civilian Warfare, New Math, Executive, Lost Arc, 51 St Mark.

INTERVALISM



Interval of Ether, 1986



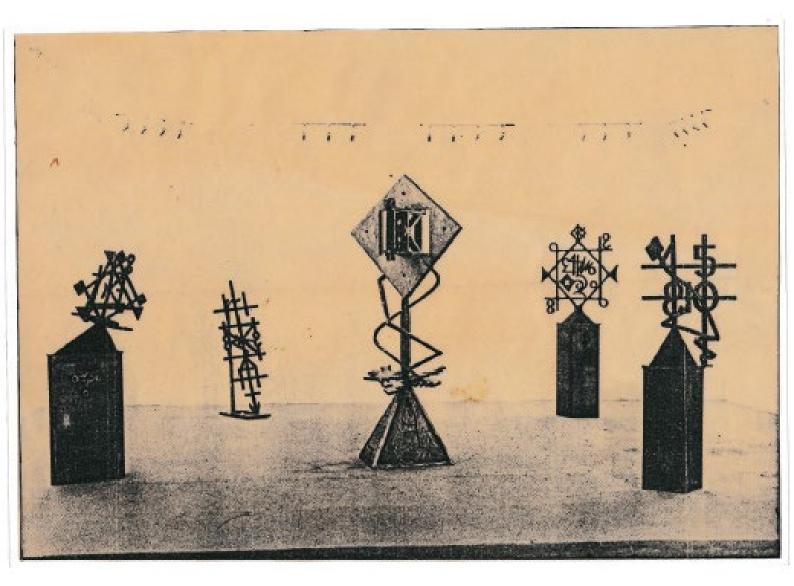


. INFINETELY DEVOLOOPING the 8: · 8.+8=+6(7)+8=+5(6)+8=14(5) +8=13(4)+8=12(3)+3=11(2) +8=10(1)+8=9+8= 17 (8) +8=16(7). DAMENSION GONE RIRALING IN WITHIN THE B. Systeme . NEVER the.g. ZOUE DEVOLUTIN of two Dist ADDITION. NETEN BECONING DEVOLOOPING WHEN ACKNOWLEDGE MENT IS MADEOFTICENETIK STRUCTURE ON THE COURSE OF THE ZOOU ROUU ZOOU ROUUSCOU ROUU SOOU ROUUZOOU ROUD MOVEMENT LOOPING ALONG THE ENFINETX STRUCTURE OF THE .8.

-8. INTERVALISTS SWORD . 2.

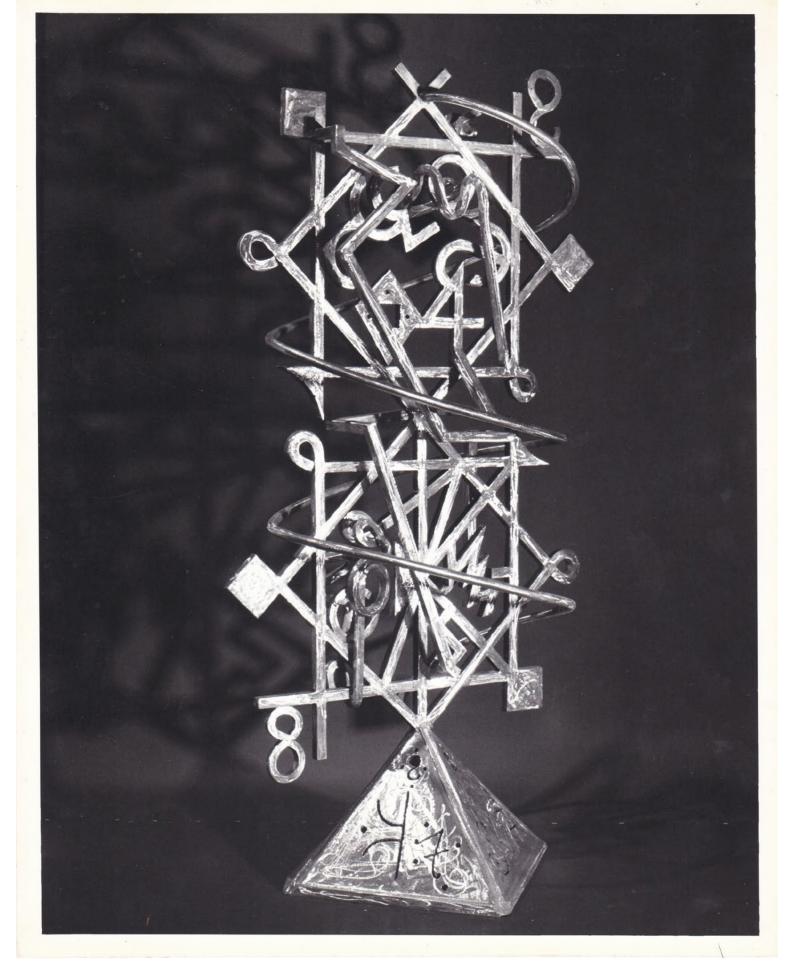
THEINTERVALIST DWORD . · FUNCTIONENG ZN THE 8'S . KONE IN GOLD BLAG WEIGHT STATE IS ATOOL FOR THE KUTTENG IN OF INTERVALD IN MOMENT TIME OF PRE-DEVEDOPED STATE. .4. STRUCTURE KFOREKAE MERANIKS AND KEAR KEAR, 2000 AND HOREHE SPIRAL EQUILIBRIATE THE INTERVALISTS SWORD FOR PREDEVOLCOPED KUTTING.





Arco, 1985



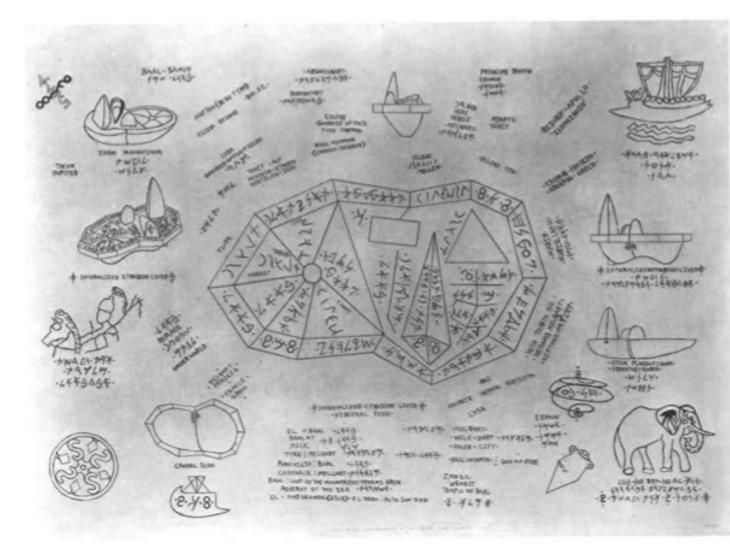


Collection Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita Kansas

THE FOURTH PUNIC WAR



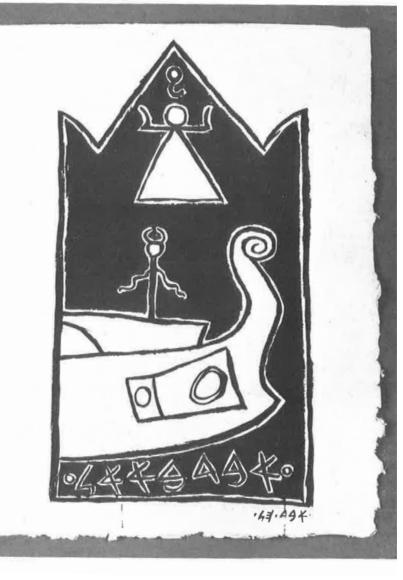
Abdbaal nella Quarta Guerra Punica, 1987



Studio per Intervallizzazione del Fegato Etrusco, 1988



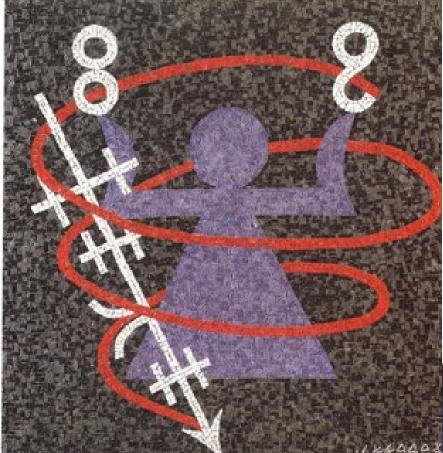
Intervallizzazione del Fegato Etrusco,



Stele Studio #19, 1987

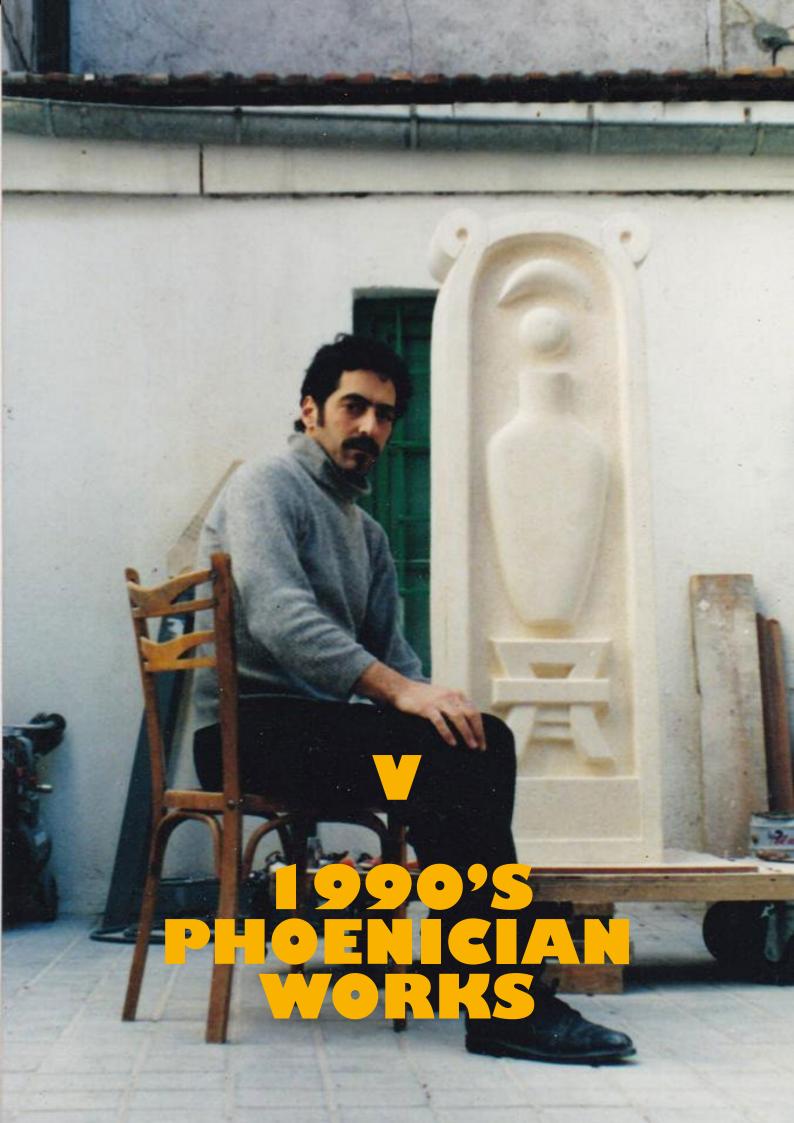
Djebel Mlezza, 1988-89



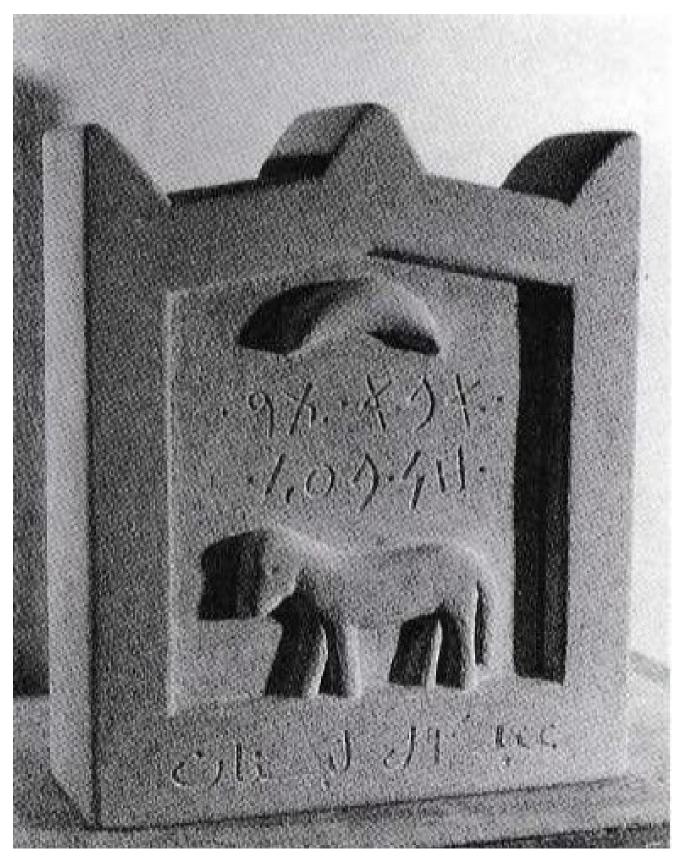


Posizione Punica, 1988

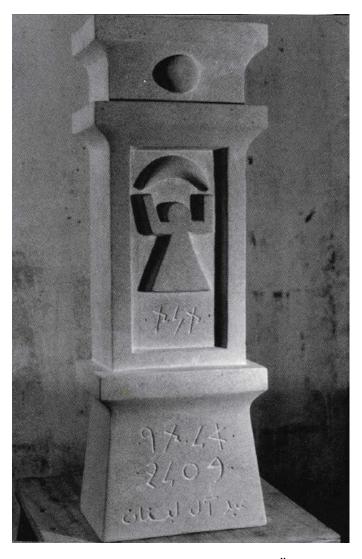


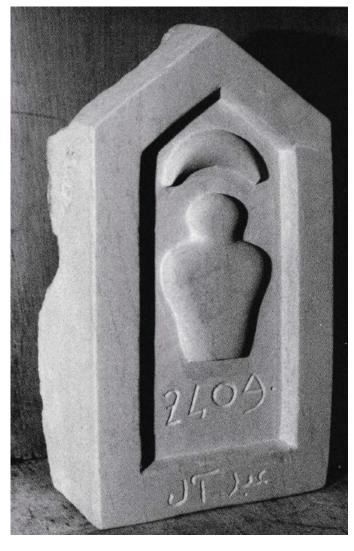


UNION OF PHOENICIAN STATES (STONE STELAES)



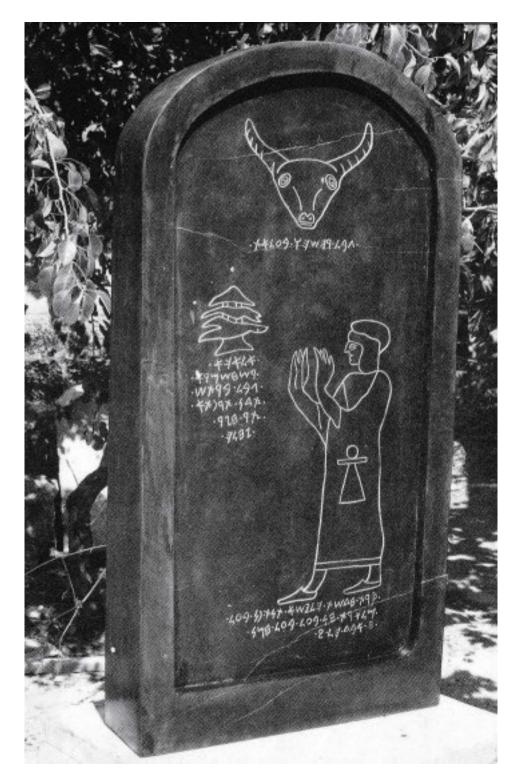
ABA SUR, 1992



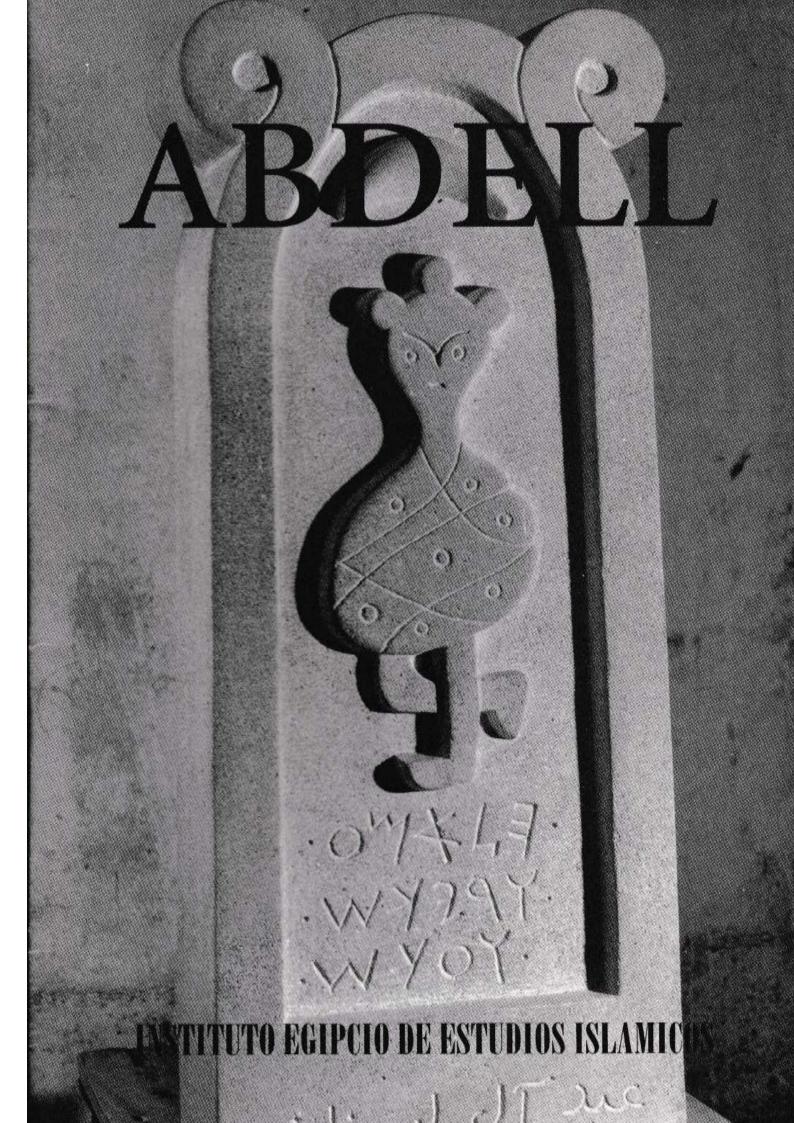




AL SÜR, 1993



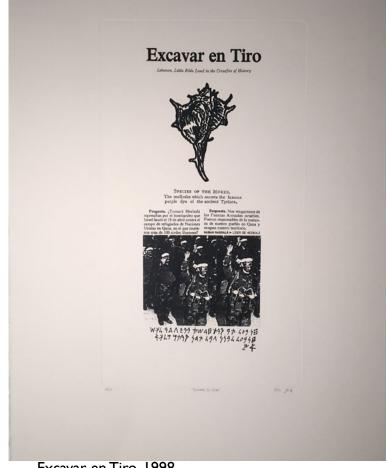
GBL-RESHEF, 1991



LEBANESE ETCHINGS

Los kurdos sin velo La abominable repartición de los restos del Imperio Otomano "Mi juicio debe ser un juicio a la causa kurda" "Son los pueblos quienes se liberan a sí mismos." la participación del Mosad y la CIA Cómo el FBI descubrió a Ocalan, líder de los kurdos, por utilizar el teléfono móvil y montó para los turcos una operación impecable PKK junto a las guerrillas libanesas Refugiados kurdos ocupan embajadas en 20 ciudades europeas en protesta por la detención de Ocalan Caen los ministros griegos de Exteriores, policía y servicios secretos la por Ankas El Kurdistán que pudo ser 491 40WZ497

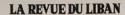
Los Kurdos sin velo, 1998 La revue du Liban, 1998



Excavar en Tiro, 1998

Templo de Astarte, 1998





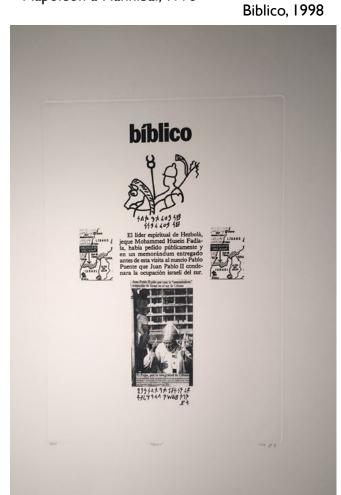


Le Liban, un oasis LE LIBAN, PAYS DES CÈDRES la Svizzera del Medio Oriente "cruce de civilizaciones" La Suisse du Proche-Orient «ventana de Occidente» Revive la Suiza de Oriente Medio

LIBANO, La vida vuelve sobre las ruinas Le Liban, De la Phénicie à l'Europe "Libano es un modelo para el mundo" 94N9 WYL 2427 941 299 54 \$ 451 94 409 18 #2409 78W9 978409 7716 1174



Napoléon à Hannibal, 1998



España, en un principio, fue un descubrimiento fenicio. España, como nación, fue una creación cartaginesa.



España Fenicio, 1998

Circulo Vicioso, 1998



$\mathbf{M} = \mathbf{A}\mathbf{G}\mathbf{U}\mathbf{A}$



M = AGUA # 8, 2003 Centre National des Arts Plastiques (French National Collection)



REALITA PUNICA 1998



TIME LINK 2001



M = AGUA # 18, 2003



SUR # 9, 2000



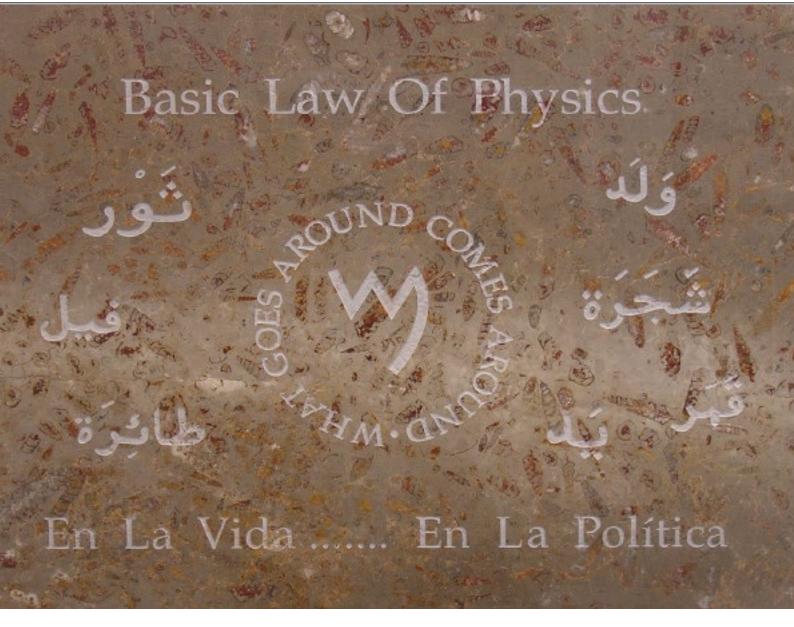
Raices de Occidente, 1999



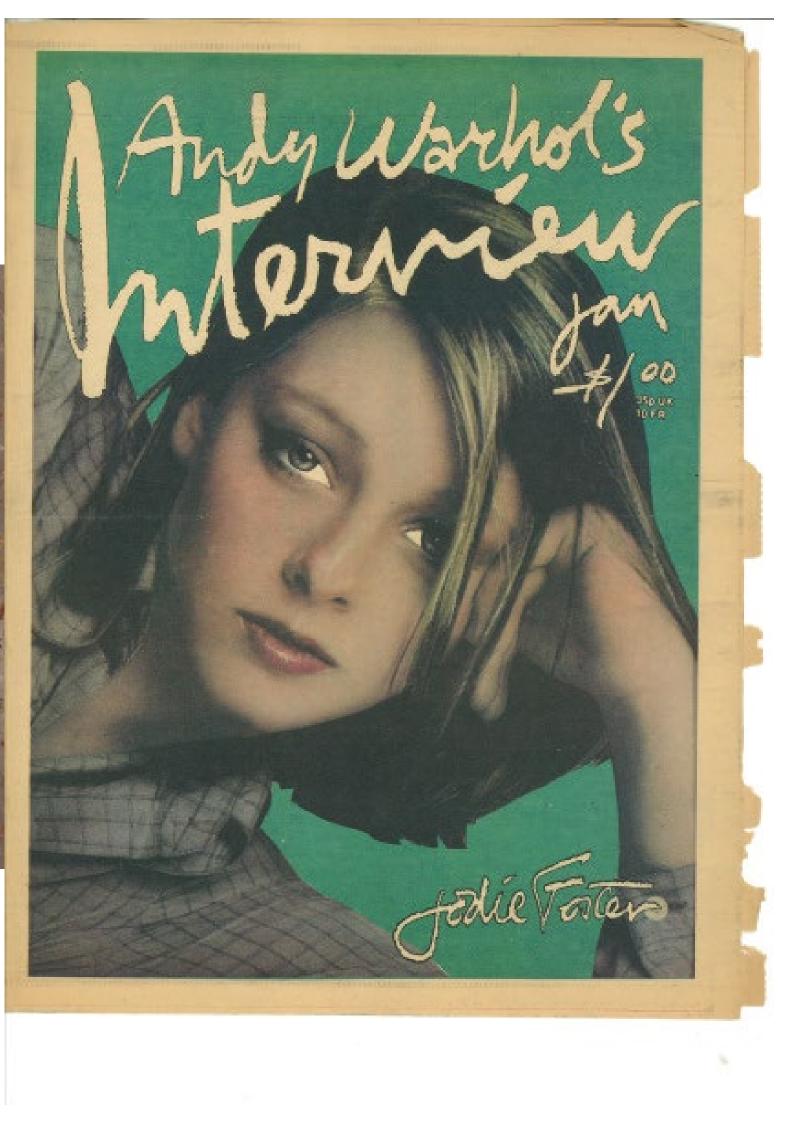


M=AGUA #23, 1999

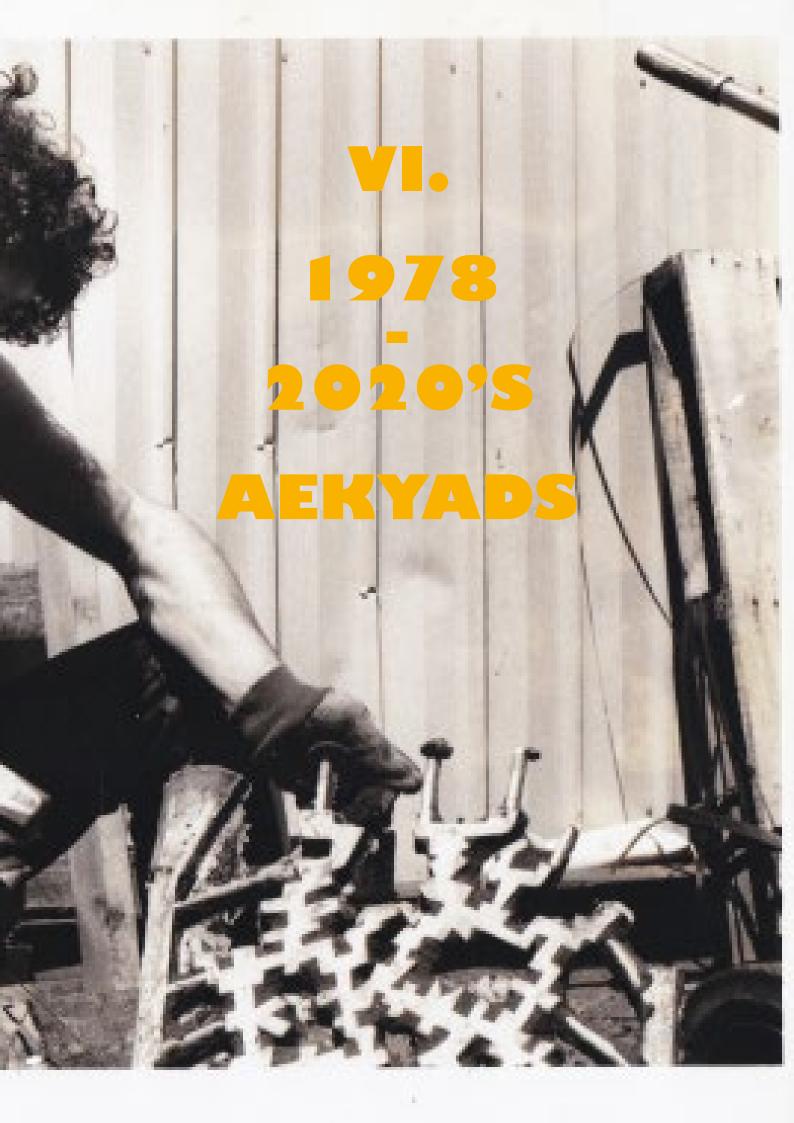
SUR #8, 1999



What goes around comes around, 2003



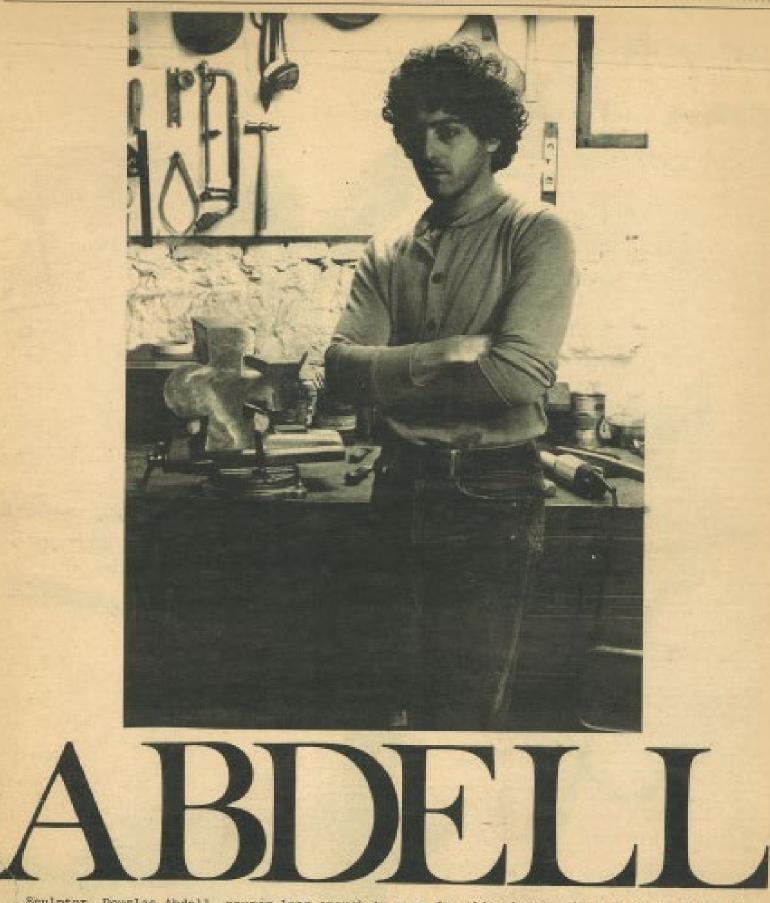








KLAET-AEYAD, Bronze (reflief), 1973



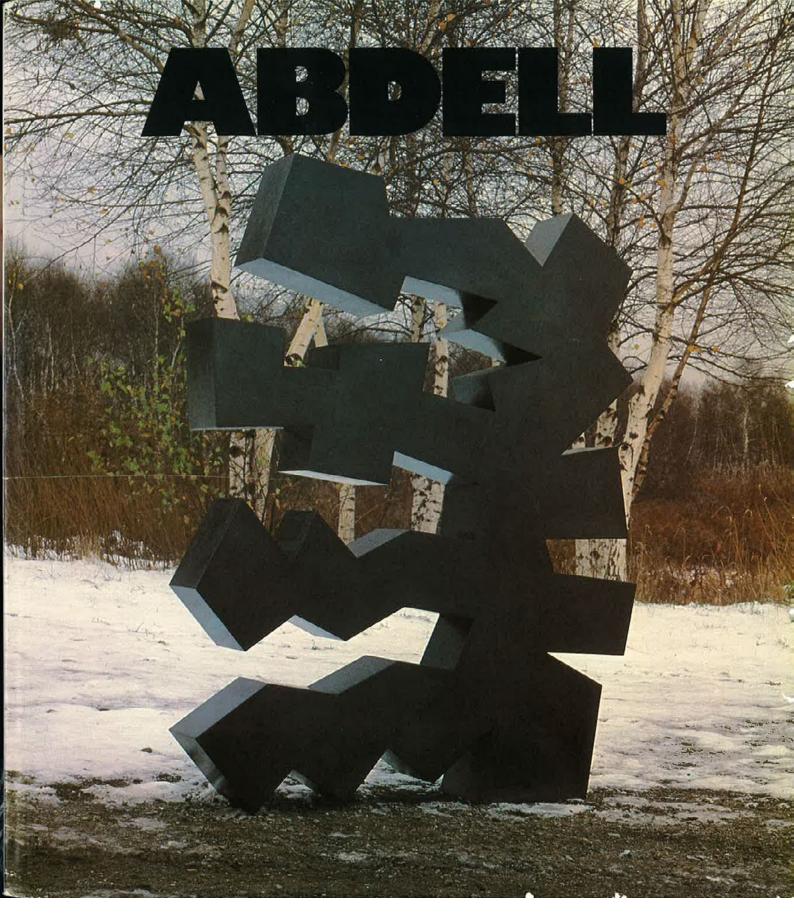
Sculptor, Douglas Abdell, pauses long enough to pose for this photograph in front of his work bench. Abdell's work is to be shown in a one-man exhibition at the ANDREW CRISPO GALLERY, 41 East 57th Street from January 1dth to February 5th, 1977. Many of the pieces are on loan from museum collections. This exhibition is currently on a very successful tour. The sculptured pieces have been shown at Manwaring Gallery. Connecticut College, and St. Mary's College of Maryland. It will travel to Wichita State University after this showing at Andrew Crispo Gallery.

Douglas Abdell is one of the few sculptors working in this country who still casts his own work in bronze. He has either cast the individual pieces or had them cast under his direct supervision. The finished works are tangible manifestations of the artist's thinking. In the photograph above, the artist has just stopped filing a piece of one of his Kryad bronzes, preparatory to applying the pating which is his singular trademark.

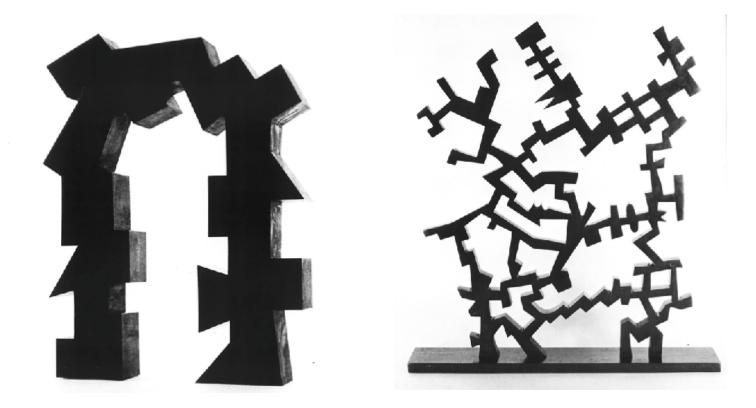
A profusely illustrated catalogue is available for purchase at the gallery or by mail.



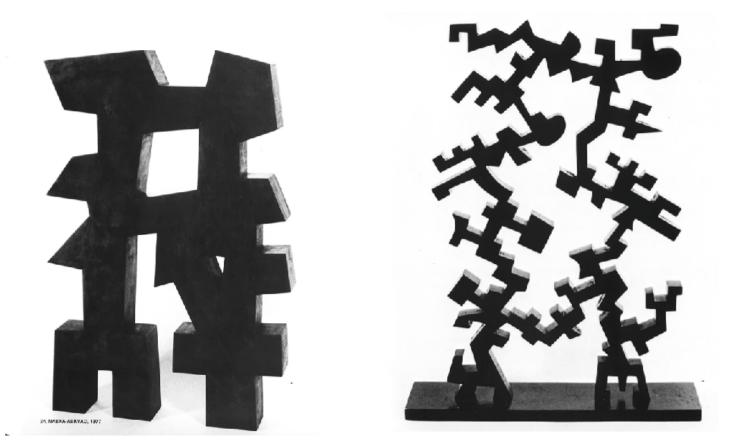


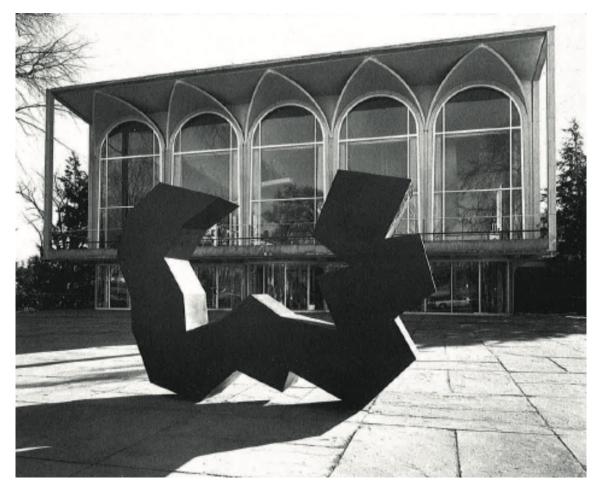


Douglas Abdell, The Sculpture of Douglas Abdell, 1979 Published by Andrew Crispo Gallery, New York

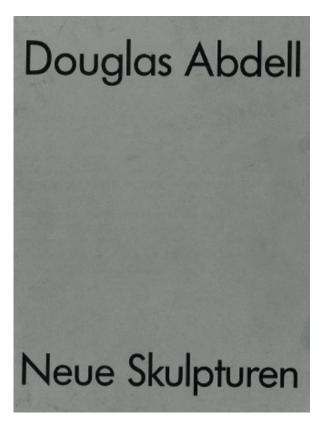


"Sculpture is an independent language in its own right."

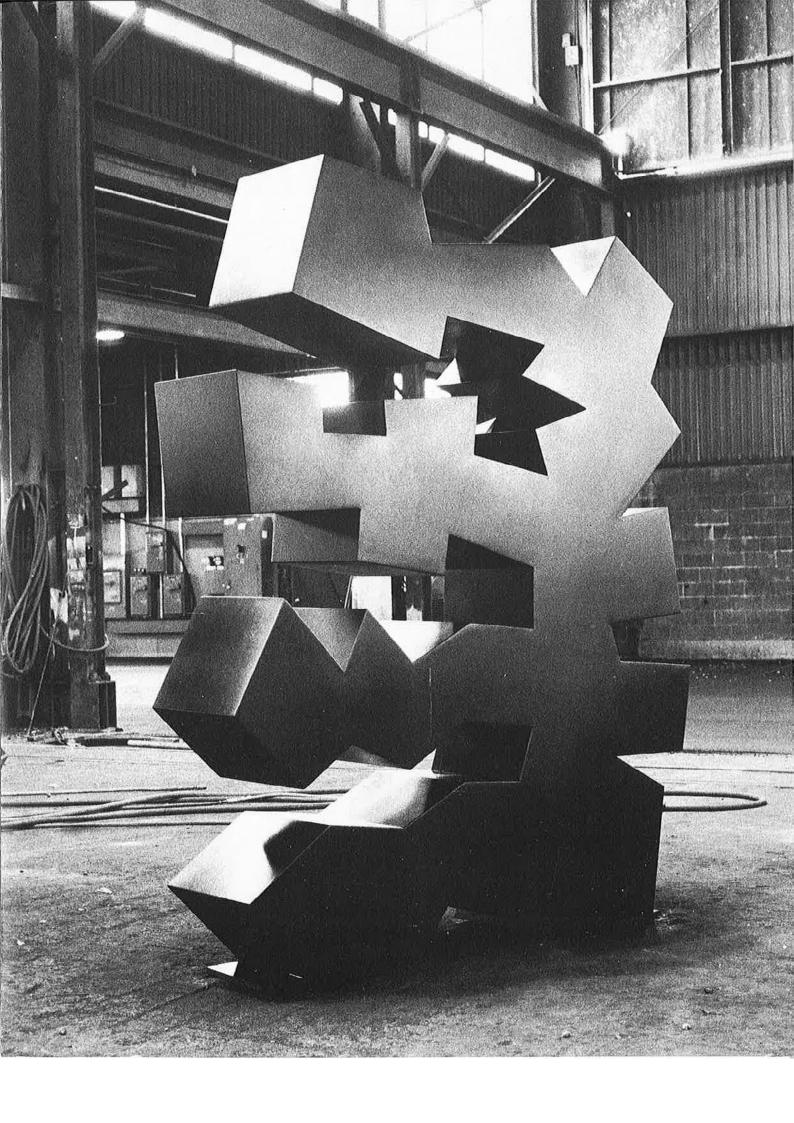


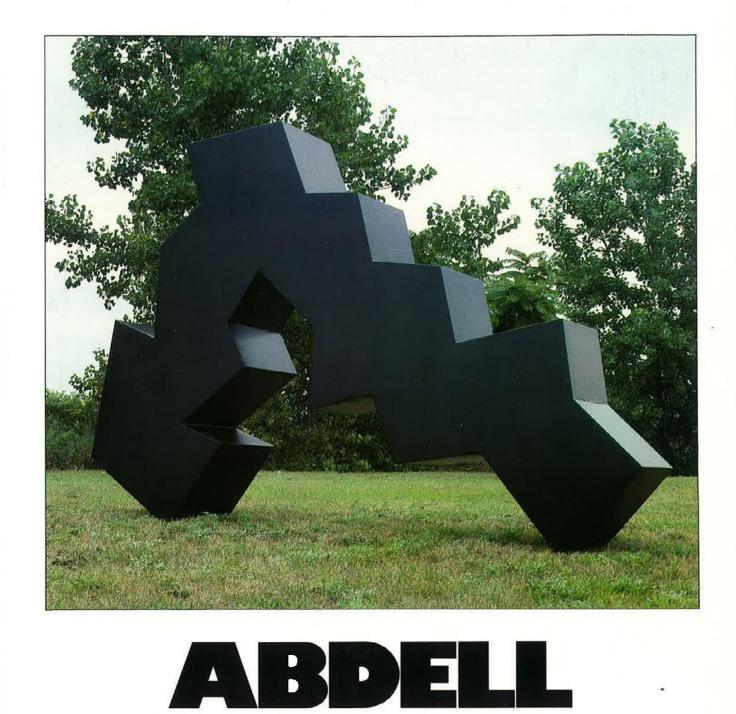


KAEFAE-AYKYAD, 1980



KRAEFF-AYKYAD, in progress

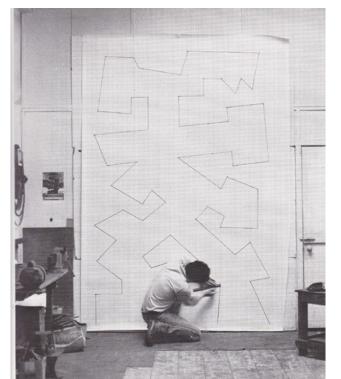




Douglas Abdell, Recent Sculpture, 1979 Published by Andrew Crispo Gallery, New York

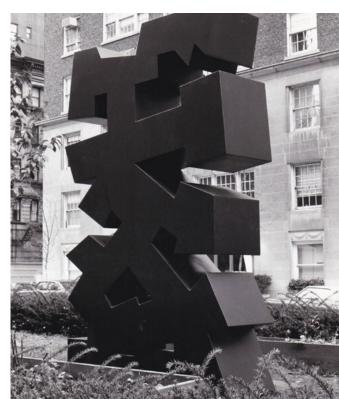
Eaphae-Aekyad #2 - From Studio to Street











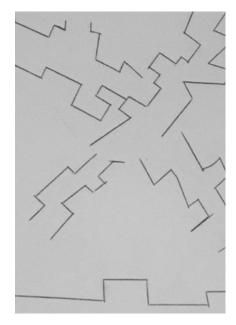


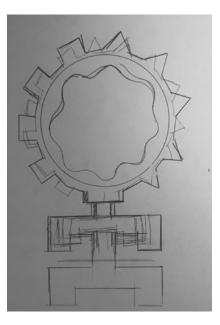
Caephae - Aekyad Collection Storm King Art Center, New York

AEKYAD STUDIES 2019-2020

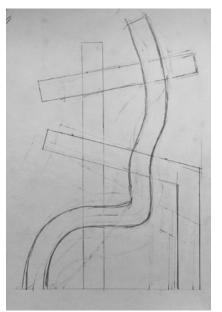


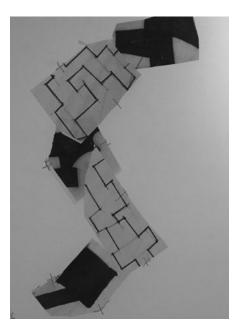


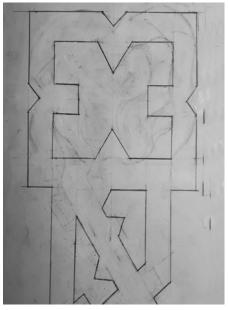


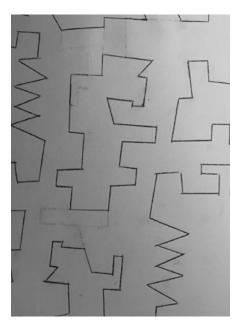


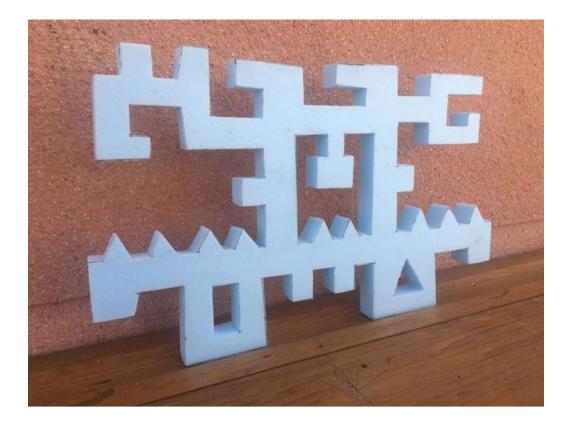


















Aekyad # 141 Cast bronze with black patina 23 x 42,5 x 8 cm. 2020

Aekyad # 151 Cast bronze with black patina 37 x 26,5 x 8 cm. 2020 Aekyad # 150 Cast bronze with black patina 39 x 31 x 8 cm. 2020



Aekyad # 224 Cast bronze with black patina 25 x 43 x 8 cm. 2020







From Apollinaire's *calligrammes* and F.T. Marinetti's "words in freedom" to Lawrence Weiner's statements and Joseph Kosuth's "analytical propositions," European modernist aesthetics and American conceptual art have definitely been illustrated in the deconstruction of language, but also in that of the myths associated with the origins of writing—and thus of civilization. A deconstruction which, paradoxically, does not always escape from the cult of logocentrism or from an almost sacred transcendence of the word in art.

This is exactly what Maurice Lemaître tried to sidestep, to take only the example of the Lettrist movement, boasting as he did about the total and definitive abandonment of the word in favor of works composed entirely of letters—and laying claim to dominion over "all signs of notation, acquired (Latin, Cyrillic, Arabic letters, musical notes, mathematical and stenographic symbols, and the like), possible (alphabets invented by Lemaître), past and future, individual and collective".¹ An ac-

- 1 Maurice Lemaître, "La Peinture lettriste et hypergraphique," published in the exhibition catalogue, Galerie Abel Rosenberg, Paris, 1966. Republished in Frédéric Acquaviva, Lemaître. Une vie lettriste (Paris: La Différence, 2014), pp. 56-57.
- 2 For Jacques Derrida, "the break-up marks the impossibility for a sign, for the unity of a signifier and a signified, to produce itself in the fullness of a present and an absolute presence." De la grammatologie (Paris: Minuit, 1967), p. 102.
- 3 Let us also mention the case of the Italian abstract painter, Carla Accardi, whose lengthy stay in Morocco in the 1970s, and contact with artists such as Mohamed Melehi and Farid Belkahia, totally reconfigured her aesthetics; leading her towards an abstraction that was evidently calligraphic in its gesturality and dynamics, but totally refusing to say anything whatsoever: neither signification, nor symbolization, nor metaphorization.

cumulated bulimia of signs designated by Lemaître as *hyperg-raphy* (a term that takes on particular resonance in the current context of the all-digital and big data), probably culminating in his *Panneaux hypergraphiques* (1954–55) now held in the Centre Pompidou. *The Panneaux* clearly display the paradox between an accumulation of empty signifiers, which only refer to themselves, and a certain cult—reasonably fetishist—of the sign, and thus of language; or between a desire to exhaust meaning and a desire for the letter, which is itself inexhaust-ible. From here to considering the asemic or wordless impulse of the Lettrist artists as the celebration of a writing of *break-up* (*brisure*)² or a writing without origin (apart from the liberating act of the infinite hybridization of all signs), there is just one step; some will wonder if this break-up is to be taken in a Babelian dimension, or rather an anarchistic one.

Where the various forms of modernism of western Asia, Arab territories, and more generally the Mediterranean are concerned, we would be wrong to think that things are totally different, under the pretext of an Islamic determinism linking any articulation of word-image relations to an ex nihilo transcendence, whose calligraphy, architectural ornament and carpet patterns are unique paragons. The issue of emancipated or "drawn" writing is thus raised in terms which differ from those of Western art, but not altogether. In passing, neither Lemaître, who is careful to quote Arabic among the spontaneous sources of *hypergraphy*, nor Dubuffet, who learnt Arabic so that he could indulge in the pleasure of a certain drawn writing, were

⁴ Charbel Dagher, Arabic Hurufiyya (Milan: Skira, 2016), p. 89.

mistaken. Even more striking is the case of Brion Gysin: is it not remarkable that the artisan of the "cut-up" was also the author of calligraphic paintings (using water-colors and India ink, as we can see in this show) in the wake of his stay in Morocco in the 1950s, more especially in Tangier.³ The immediate and eloquent contradiction between the "cut-up" as fragmented writing and calligraphy as (joined) drawn writing demonstrates that it is not a contradiction, as soon as one fondly overcomes the boundary between the sign and the asemic.

If calligraphy has managed to represent among Iranian, Pakistani, Moroccan, Lebanese, Egyptian, Turkish and Armenian artists both an ancestral technique and a regularly revisited field of application, this, it just so happens, does not stem from any fixed, popularizing and academic orthodoxy. Quite to the contrary, most authentic movements of the Mediterranean avant-garde have had to deal with the question of differences between "beautiful" writing (calligraphy), drawn writing, and emancipated writing (which we can temporarily call *hypergraphy*); and still other forms of break-ups and tremors. It is usually under the sign of the plasticity of the letter that this issue is played out. We can grasp as much in the writing of the Iraqi

corroborates Derrida's pages about the break-up of the logos and the return to the trace in De la grammatologie and his autopsy of a crisis in structuralist linguistics. Al Said is regarded as a master-thinker with regard to the use (and ultimately the disappearance) of the letter in the visual arts: it is to him that we refer to retrace a genealogy that goes against the grain of the liking for the arabesque, among European artists like Klee, Matisse, and Kupka. Al Said's most famous manifesto was written under the title of "one-dimensional art" or "the dimension of One," which were later translated into English as The One Dimension. It was in that 1971 manifesto that Al Said gave form to and put into words the intuitions of artists hailing as often from Lebanon (Saloua Raouda Choucair) and Iran (Hossein Zenderoudi) as from Egypt (Hamed Abdalla) and Morocco (Mohammed Melehi). In it he tangibly describes the deconstruction of calligraphy, and its autonomization with regard to purely aesthetic virtues, in order, rather, to re-visit the metaphysical field-and, we might say, as an explicit reference to the Surrealists, the magnetic fields of calligraphy.

Al Said thus glorifies the mobility of the letter itself, over and above simple technique and medium. For him, the



painter and art theoretician Shakir Hassan Al Said, who studied in the context of Paris between 1955-1959—before returning to Baghdad where he continued his artistic career. He analyzed this plasticity as a means aimed at a principle of uniqueness with regard to the letter, which he finally agreed to relieve of any referential or strictly linguistic meaning.

His plastic experiments, in particular to do with the degradation of the letter and its reduction to a palimpsest-trace, play a fundamental part in the understanding of an almost predominant aesthetic in certain active circles in the 1970s (from Baghdad to Tangier by way of Algiers, with a special mention of the Aouchem group), and even as far as the 1990s (we should analyze elsewhere this influence wielded by Al Said on the aesthetics of the trace in many works produced by contemporary artists). While initiating a line of thinking that is sometimes called a *sufi* realism,⁴ Al Said's approach broadly art of the letter surpasses the pure operation of the mind and is understood as a relation to space; to the spaces which the latter criss-crosses and transcends, from architecture to pottery by way of paper, needless to say, and in a unitary way, from floor to ceiling by way of walls—in a sort of spatial *hypergraphy* (see Shakir picture). In fact, if we can easily imagine calligraphic layouts decorating the walls of a mosque making our heads spin, or the impression they give of *spinning around us*, what is also involved for Al Said is our capacity to spin around them, and envisage the body-letter relation as *one*. It is almost in a thoroughly logical manner that the developments of his painting in the 1980s—precisely when the letter was becoming increasingly ineffable—prompted him

⁶ Douglas Abdell and Begonia Korta-Zaharra, *MIRROR MAGNE-TIK INTERVAL*, New York, self-published edition, 1984. At the time, the manifesto was available by order through the United States for the sum of \$5.

to lay claim to a posture that calls to mind that of Maurice Lemaître. Al Said thus declared in 1984, at an exhibition in the National Museum in Baghdad (let us specify that Al Said disseminated his thinking among certain circles of the Baghdad Modern Art Group and Jewad Selim from the 1960s on): "I like to include my pictures of letters rather in the manner of a child or a layman than that of a calligrapher or a typographer. The letter belongs to the street, to the schoolyard, not to the administration. It must remain the contemplative emanation of the human spirit and thus in the unconscious and prenatal state".⁵ A primal impulse satiated by dint of an anthropological regression of the letter springs from his ideas, which call to mind certain challenges of Art Brut; just when Al Said's art was developing within a social and philosophical context diametrically opposed to that artistic current.

The same year that Al Said uttered those words, another letter-obsessed artist, trained in the very different context of the United States and answering to the name of Douglas Abdell, created an asemic turning-point of another kind—no longer *one-dimensional* but *intervalist*. A sculptor first and foremost, but also the author of drawings, paintings, engravings and tapestries, it was precisely within a certain contamination

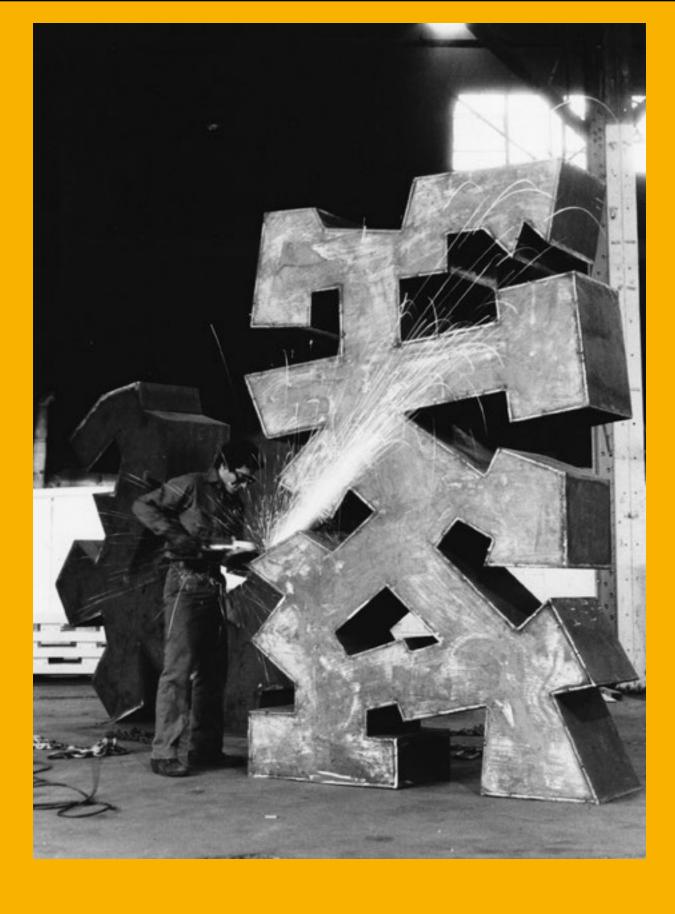


of the sculptural medium by the graphic media—through the emancipation of the latter in space—that this enigmatic artist's scriptural mini-revolution was played out. Abdell, whose deep-seated Lebanese origins and fascination with the Phoenician alphabet would gradually reconfigure his foothold in a certain American minimalist sculptural tradition, thus published, in 1984, his "Intervalist manifesto."⁶ Titled by a formula acting as a three-word catalyst of the outlines of this talismanic document—"MIRROR MAGNETIK INTERVAL"—, the manifesto plunges us into a lettrist and numerological sequence, on

the borderline of visual saturation and conceptual opaqueness. The wild accumulation of asemic signs (at the crossroads of geometry, mathematics and alchemy), and their infinite graphic entanglement might call to mind Tibetan mandalas, or magic sufi squares, in which an anarchic storm of signs is organized like Russian dolls, concentric shapes and abstract calligraphic tattoos. Meditating on the emancipation of numbers and letters in the manifesto's introduction, he points out, in a deliberately esoteric outburst: "The sickness of our time is that we are educated to separate rather than connect. Be it, for example, with numbers (mathematics, chemistry, physics) or letters (philosophy, literature, art). It is essential to understand this art as the assimilation of a new progressive concept necessary for the leap into the higher structure", and then adds: "I will never be able to study a number without thinking of it as an expanding function, or forgetting where it comes from and where it's going. The principle of motion is connected to everything. Nothing exists without a relation to something else."7 The deeper we delve into the asemic depths of the Intervalist manifesto, the more the influence of Phoenician graphics (now totally corrupted) can be felt on the paradoxical process which is at work. In particular through sequences of words arranged in graphic and sonic clashes: "PHOENIX PHOENICIA PHOE-NETIK PHONEAE PHOENEIGHT" (see Douglas picture). In retrospect, this broken link with Phoenician (where the artist seems to play with a fiction to do with returning to sources involving Lebanon, from where he hails, but a country he had never visited) can be sensed throughout his sculptural output of the 1970s and 1980s. Here again, Douglas Abdell proceeds by way of hyperactivity and ongoing transmutation of the graphics to which he confines himself-but at the time by masking the origins of this esoteric writing-through countless bronze sculptures, all borrowing this sinewy and rhizome-like "drawing" of intervalist writing. Each sculpture is the imprint or incarnation of a sound—a magnetic formula—signified by their invariably wordless but interconnected title: NAEX-AEKYAD, AEPH-AEKYAD, AEPHAE-AEKYAD, KAEPHAE-AEK-YAD, ZAE-AEKYAD (series shown in 1977 at the Andrew Crispo Gallery, New York) (see Douglas picture).

When all is said and done, is it really easy to make the distinction that, precisely where Henri Michaux and Pierre Alechinsky would have written by drawing, Shakir Hassan Al Said and Douglas Abdell, for their part, would draw by writing? It thus seems to be more essential than ever, in order to see a shared history of lettrist arts and drawn or emancipated writing through the 20th century avant-gardes, to be able to include therein both one-dimensional lettrism, hypergraphic lettrism and magnetic or intervalist lettrism, engraved on a nook in a wall somewhere between Paris, Baghdad and the ruins of Byblos.

7 Ibid., p. 6.



DOUGLAS ABDELL

1947

Born in Boston, USA Lives and works in Malaga, Spain

Abdell is predominately a sculptor and has worked with cast and welded bronze, welded steel, and carved stone. In the early eighties he had a period of painting with oil, acrylics and mixed media collage works. In the last 30 years his work has been devoted to political and social themes related to the Mediterranean Countries and their history more specifically Phoenician and Arabic with their specific symbols and languages.[3] The materials of these works are cast bronze, carved stone and etchings. He is currently living in Málaga, Spain.

Selected exhibitions

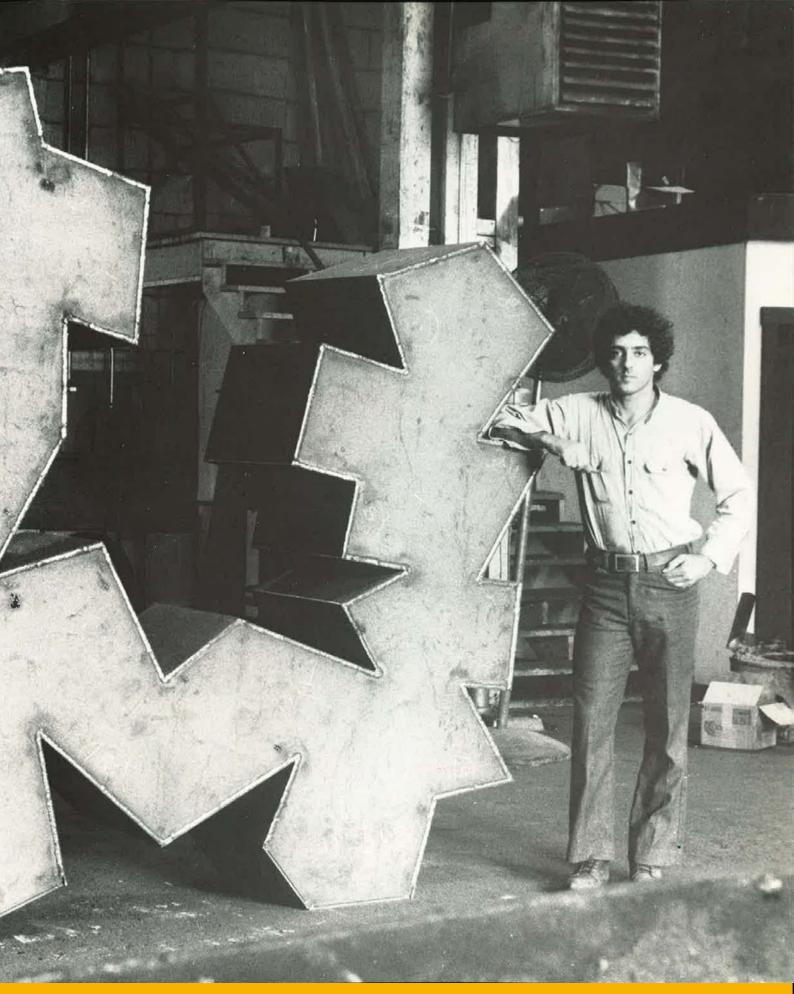
Individual Exhibitions

1971 – Graham Gallery, New York City. 1972 – Graham Gallery, New York City. 1977 – Andrew Crispo Gallery, New York City 1979 – Andrew Crispo Gallery, New York City. 1979 – Park Avenue, New York City, New York. 1981 – Amerika Haus Berlin, West Germany. 1981 – "Berlín Phoenaes", Mike Steiner Studio Galerie, Berlin, Germany. 1981 – Dartmouth College Museum & Galleries Beaumont-May Gallery, Hopkins Center for the Arts, Hanover, New Hampshire. 1981 – Marisa del Re Gallery, New York City, New York. 1982 – Andrew Crispo Gallery, New York City. 1983 – Gallozzi-La Placa Gallery, New York City. 1985 – Spoleto Festival USA, Charleston, South Carolina. 1991 – "La Quarta Guerra Punica", Galleria Massimo Riposati, Roma, Italy. 1991 – "La Quarta Guerra Punica", Galleria Agorá, Palermo, Sicilia, Italy. 1995 – "La unió dels Estats Fenicis", Pati Llimona, Barcelona, Spain. 1996 – "La unió dels Estats Fenicis" Casal de Vespella de Gaiá Catalunya, Pati Llimona, Barcelona, Spain. 1996 – "Abdell, Unión de Los Estados Fenicios" Museo Pablo Gargallo, Zaragoza, Spain. 2005 – "Abdell, El retorno del Fenicio" Museo de Adra, Centro de Arte, Adra, Almería, Spain.

2017 – "Abdell, El retorno del Fenicio" Museo de Chiclana, Chiclana de la Frontera, Cádiz, Spain.

2018 – "Abdell, El retorno del Fenicio" Museum of Cádiz, Cádiz, Spain.

2019 – "Abdell, El retorno del Fenicio" Antonio Gala Foundation, Córdoba, Spain.



Douglas Abdell with KAE-PHAE-AEKYAD#2 in Everett, Massachusetts, August 1979. Photograph by Gianni Parma

Works in museums and public collections

Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. H. H. Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, Lugano, Switzerland. Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas. Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, New York. Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas. Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Brooklyn Museum, New York City, New York. Hood Museum of Art. Dartmouth. Mc Nay Art Institute, San Antonio, Texas. Wichita Art Museum, Wichita, Kansas. University of Notre Dame, Snite Museum of Art, Notre Dame, Indiana. Figge Art Museum, Davenport, Iowa. John Jay Park, East 76th Street & York Avenue, New York City, New York. Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archives, Miami, Florida. Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kansas. Brandeis University, Rose Art Museum, Waltham, Massachusetts. Gibbes Museum of Art. Charleston, South Carolina. Quadrat Museum, Bottrop, West Germany. Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson, Mississippi. Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas. Stanford University, Stanford California. Centre national des arts plastiques, Paris, France.

Bibliography

John Canaday (1972). Art: The Sculpture of Upper Volta. New York: The New York Times.

Swartz, Carolyn (1981). Heavy Metal on Park Avenue. (Film of the installation of three sculptures on Park Avenue). New York City.

Achille Bonito Oliva (1983). La Scuola di Atene: il sistema dell'arte. Firenze.

Achille Bonito Oliva (1987). Erratici Percorsi. Roma.

Lidia Reghini Di Pontremoli (1987). Transavanguardia in mostra ad Acireale - Il cielo scolpito da fasci di luce. Acireale.

Achille Bonito Oliva (1989). Artoon, L'influenza del fumetto nelle arti visive del XX secolo. (Mostra, Palazzo Civiltà del lavoro, Roma, 1989-1990). Roma.

Achille Bonito Oliva (1991). Arie. Rassegna internazionale di giovani scultori. Roma.

Achille Bonito Oliva (1991). Abdell: la quarta guerra punica. Roma.

Lidia Reghini Di Pontremoli (1998). I segni del fenicio. Roma.



« The Fourth Punic War led by Douglas Abdell against Rome is not a violent and military but cultural and linguistic in which Rome becomes the metaphor of centralisation. In reality Rome could as well become the metaphor of current American imperialist politics, in a very specific way of struggles and fights, located inside the rules of language, without moralism or pathetic look, knowing the artist will have to go through modern communication and the globalisation of language. »

Achille Bonito Oliva, 1989



Crossing through Arab, African or Asian modernities, Zamân Books & Curating primary goal is the circulation of new cosmopolitan knowledge about art and images – driven by the efforts to shape the field of Southern modernities. Such new mappings of art histories develop through monograph and collective exhibitions, the research journal Zamân, textes, images & documents, and different kinds of publication (monographs, artists books, thematic and collective books), as well as reediting – or translanting – to-be-rediscovered and rare material.

Our role is generally to assist artists (and artists estates) with their exhibition and/or publication projects, including coproduction with public and private institutions, art centres, cultural institutes...

Zamân Books & Curating engages actively with different communities of cultural producers, researchers, curators, translators, archivists, writers and other narrators worldwide, sharing the same desire : to revive and celebrate their transcultural artistic heritages.

CONTACT

Morad Montazami

Editor-in-chief and editor of the review, Curator morad@zamanbooks.com +33 6 10 41 09 96

Madeleine de Colnet

Curatorial Projects Director Development madeleine@zamanbooks.com

www.zamanbc.com