



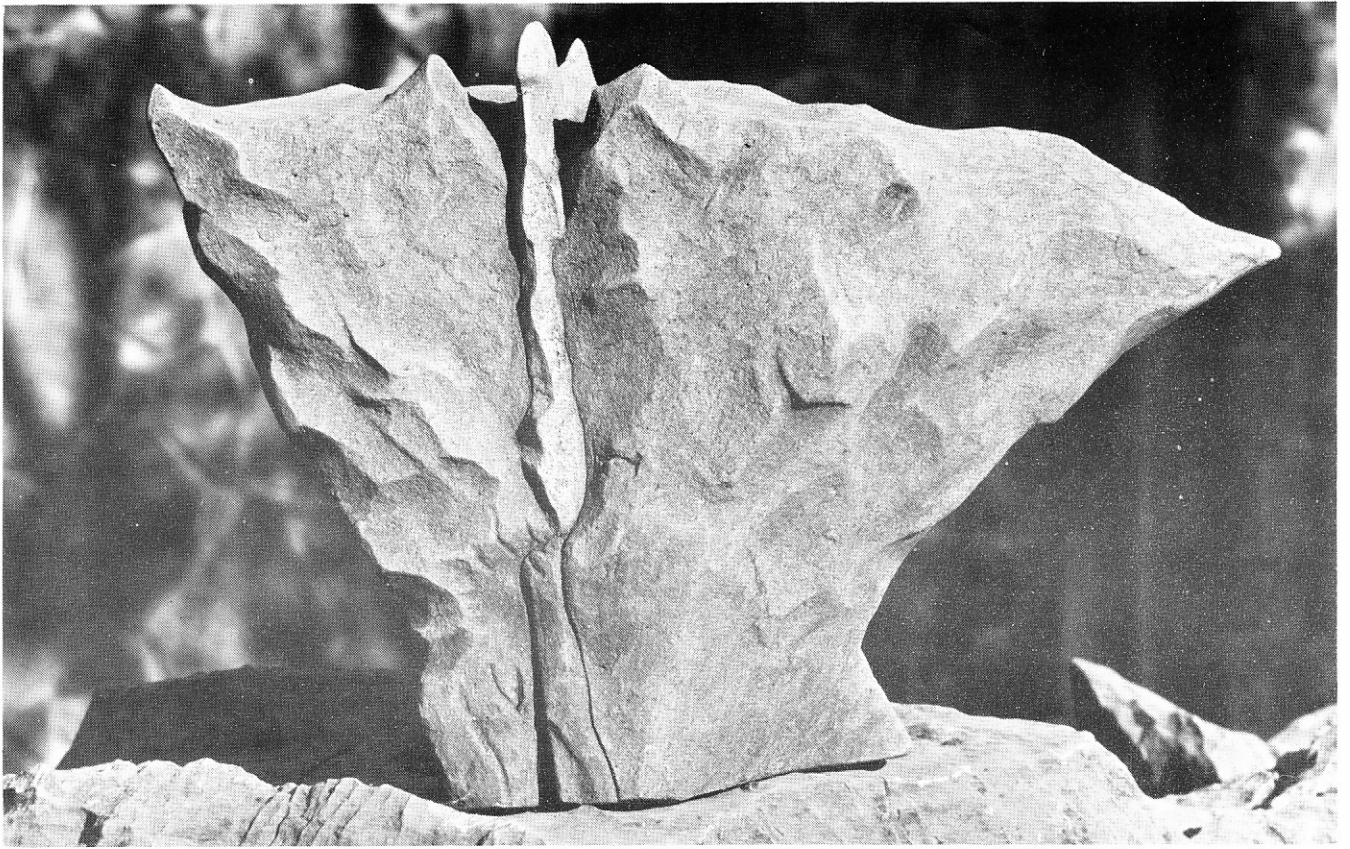
Challenge

Johan van Heerden, the Transvaal-born artist who lives in a house he built himself out in the magnificent rolling countryside along the Crocodile River among the foothills of the Skurweberge, midway between Johannesburg and Pretoria, is holding a one-man show of his sculpture at the Association of Arts Gallery in Pretoria.

The pieces range in size from 2ft in height to 8ft, are modelled and then cast in ciment fondu, and have a massivity and powerful presence rarely seen in contemporary South African sculpture.

The photographs on these pages illustrate some of the work he is showing. They are accompanied by selections from the transcript of a tape-recorded interview with van Heerden, made shortly before his exhibition opened.

'... Working in ciment fondu is terrific because it poses a different challenge. There's the time factor, for instance. You've got to work, you can't stick around, you can't just sit back and smoke a cigarette, you've got to make fast decisions. All this is new for me and I found in it a tremendous challenge. Which also fits in perfectly with our attitude as it is today, with the type of life we lead...'



'... If there's one thing to do it's pay homage to the technology of today for advancing materials like cement fondu, through which we can extend our visual investigations. And also I must tell you what I'm glad about personally is that I feel I'm using cement fondu in terms of what it is. I'm not using it as a substitute for stone...'

(Van Heerden is talking about his aims in art): '... For instance, let me try and relate it to the work I've done now, with which I've been confronting myself, at which I've looked and looked and asked myself: What have I done and why have I done it? What does it signify? What significance could it have for anybody else confronting it? I like to believe there is a certain let-go, a let-go in the sense of taking a chance, of seeing how far we can push things, of how far we can get the human being to go in the eternal path of his endeavour to get to final grips with our existence. And what sort of order there is – if any. And hoping only that by doing these things and being bold and employing every single sense you possess and really squeezing them to the last degree, to see what will emerge. All I can say, really, is that I hope these sculptures will go one-tenth of the way I want them to go in terms of communication. I want them to be able to give something to other people confronted by them...'

'... I'm not interested in trying to reach a physical imitation of life. I think art in all its forms – that's the last place it fits in, it's got nothing to do with that. In the first place I would like to use the word Communication. When we talk about art, that is the first thing that comes to my mind. It's the concept of utter importance, and that is to reach someone with the works one makes...'

