

A Letter From California

After sculpting polyester in technical isolation at the southern tip of Africa for the past few years, I welcomed the opportunity of a visiting professorship to Stanford University, as California is the home of the mass casting resin movement. It was here that people like De Wain Valentine explored the sculpting potential of this new medium and solved the formidable technical problems associated with its use.

Arriving in San Francisco filled with enthusiasm to set up my studio, I was confronted with the oil crisis. Not only was gasoline in short supply but polyester resin, being an oil based compound of rather low national priority, had overnight acquired the properties of liquid gold. Resin was virtually unobtainable and my frustrations further compounded when I visited the Stanford museum and saw examples of De Wain Valentine and Richard Randall's work.

It was in fact Richard Randall, professor of sculpture at Stanford and a pioneer in resin casting who came to my rescue and suggested I contact a friendly resin supplier. The response from the dealer was hardly encouraging. A one to two month delay, the price anyone's guess in an ever upward direction and no guarantee as to quantity as "rationing" had been imposed by the manufacturers.

I doubled my order and finally the day came when half a ton of resin in

gleaming blue-and-white barrels rolled into the studio. Elated, I commemorated the arrival by immediately casting a larger work than prudence dictated and held a party to celebrate.

The festivities in full swing were rudely interrupted by a loud "twang" from the studio as the carefully prepared mould failed, followed by gurgling noises. A mini tidal wave of sticky resin slowly covered the pristine concrete floor. As I did my best to clean up the disaster, a cash register kept ringing up dollars at the back of my mind and converted them to rands!

Sobered by this initial catastrophe and the landlord's intention to sell the house from under us, I proceeded more cautiously. I experimented with smaller works, initially developing hollowed disc shapes like "ECLIPTOS" and "EARTHVIEW". In these sculptures the lens-like quality of the hollowed sections convey a surrealistic view to the observer. This attains maximum freedom in the suspended mobile form. For example, in "EARTHVIEW", the Borberek painting is seen behind, as well as in perfect miniature within, the "eye" of the piece.

The other direction on which I have concentrated is the development of complex flying shapes where the transparency and colour of the material add an extra dimension to the sculpted form. These works vary in thickness, creating optical as well as colour density change. However, the

technical problems associated with these forms are even greater than those encountered with the circular forms which have more uniform thickness. The thick sections polymerise first and contract before adequate hardening of the thin areas has occurred resulting in stress fractures and complete failure of the casting.

Some of these difficulties have been overcome in the past year and a few of the many castings attempted have been successful with very encouraging results. "David Caldwell's Girl", a piece of seven kilos is an example of this development and marks the commencement of a new generation in my resin work.

Having seen the massive castings achieved by Valentine and other Californian sculptors in this medium I feel the challenge lies in the enlargement of these complex forms with which I have been working and this is the direction I intend to follow on my return to Cape Town in 1975.

Exhibitions – past and future

- 1972 Gallery 101 Johannesburg
- 1973 S.A. Association of Arts Cape Town
- 1973 Galerie Entremonde Paris
- 1974 Los Robles Gallery Palo Alto, California
- 1975 Galerie Entremonde Paris
- 1975 Alwin Gallery London

Alan Raphael



"Earthview" and Borberekí Nudes



David Caldwell's Girl 1974