

**MIROSŁAW
BACA**

The Dance in Sculpture

MIROSŁAW BACA

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Mirosław Baca – The Dance in Sculpture
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Lamar Dodd Art Center of LaGrange College
LaGrange, Georgia

About the work of Mr. Baca

Deep spirituality is present in the artwork of Mirosław Baca. In his forms there is a flow of thought and at the same time a dancing of the human mind seen and felt rhythmically in time. His work continues to remain mysterious to the eye and remembered in the mind once one's eyelids fall shut. Recently I visited the Isamu Noguchi Museum in New York and the impression I felt from Noguchi's work reminded me of Mr. Baca's sculpture. You feel something shared in the compendium of touches and marks to working in time that Noguchi created many years earlier. By experiencing Noguchi's work, I was able to understand better why Mr. Baca chose Japan as his destination to study abroad. As a young man Isamu Noguchi returned to Japan as a foreigner. In his sculpture Noguchi incorporates aspects of Japanese art and culture that only a foreign eye would notice. Mr. Baca also followed the threads of similar inherent traits present in the culture of Japan and in these threads found a deep spirituality that now dwells in his works.

As an international student of the Japanese government, Mr. Baca came to my university. There is offered a calligraphy course (Shodō), in which he showed a strong interest and through which he studied the art of Japanese calligraphy as well as Chinese characters. In these hieroglyphs, Mr. Baca created a system of characters that became the foundation of forms for his sculptures. In his cycle of sculptures "Kanji Class", he created works representing the Chinese characters that express the meaning for "Heart" [心], "Formula" [式] and "Bold" [太]. The meaning of "Heart" is intended to be the basis of the work. The meaning of "Formula" is a ceremony of manners in the Japanese culture that is especially prized. The meaning of "Bold" is strong, grand or sacred. Mr. Baca created expressions of the meaning of these kanji in beautiful wood and stone sculpture. His was a representation of the things that are divine and the Japanese mind identifies as representing beauty. In his short stay, Mr. Baca felt and expressed the foundation of Japan's beauty and I remember the surprise I felt realizing his discoveries. He possesses a keen insight and sensitivity.

His sculpture begins from a rough plan. Gradually the production process appears. The form is free to change along with the production. It is never created by whim as there is a long and deep dialogue with the material. There is a working fight to create this dialogue. This search is part of the experiment of creation carried out to *pull* the artwork from the material. Mr. Baca is not too conceptual in his thought, but instead is artful in his actions humbly approaching the material. As a result there is a feeling of deep contentment in the sculpture. I remember Mr. Baca's appearance; hammer in hand, in full swing at the university atelier in Japan every day,

Acknowledgments

Both artists wish to thank the colleagues and friends who helped make this exhibition and catalogue project possible. Special thanks to John D. Lawrence and the Lamar Dodd Art Center staff for preparation and organisation of the exhibition, Wes and Missy Cochran for the residency invitation which enabled the sculpture to be created, as well as Katherine and Tommy Mike for providing material and studio space, their help and care of the artists.

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Mirosław Baca, Tad Mike

from morning to evening. In Georgia the forest provided him an atelier in the same manner and his work ethic continued immutable. From his perennial life as an artist, his art was flowering.

His sculptures use stone and wood, classic sculpture materials. In his work he uses the material of the place where the project is made. In Mexico works were produced from volcanic rock. In Japan, he used the oak trees of Hokkaido and Japanese Granite. Works from his suite “Kanji Class” are created from the oak wood of Mikasa, Hokkaido. Currently, his work is being exhibited in the collection of the Mikasa Modern Art Museum together with Tadashi Kawamata’s work. The recent works included in the suite “The Dance in Sculpture” are produced from Georgia Marble, Water Oak and Hickory. He has a commitment to *place*. In materials, this commitment has been thorough. It is in his attitude to cherish *the place*.

His tour of the world, from encounters with various cultures and people, inspire him in his works. Living and realizing sculptures in Mexico, Japan, and the United States, Mr. Baca explored aspects of his inner life through the land as a creative source. He discovered the spirit of *place* inside the materials he used echoing the contents of these new landscapes. Projects inspired by these landscapes of people and culture lead to the discovery of relationships in sculpture relative to one another. He says that following a “Road” is the production process of the sculpture. Sculptures produced from his hands are seen as elemental. His sculpture is born from the act of walking the “Road”. He studied figurative art at The Fine Arts Academy in Cracow, and philosophy at the Jagiellonian University. In his oeuvre, he is always looking for “the way”. Such is his attitude as investigator and creator. Instead of being the investigator of an ascetic appearance, he chooses to give joy to people as a medieval minstrel; he is a seeker full of bright hope. It appears in his work.

His current project, “The Dance in Sculpture”, is based on the local folklore dance from his memory of Poland, a memory engraved in his mind from his hometown Zakopane. He grew up in the highlander tradition of the Tatra Mountains. Zakopane is located in the south of Poland in the alpine zone. Poets and musicians from the old days, and painters and architects were fascinated by the culture of the region. There was born a unique architectural style in wood, a unique style of costumes and folk dance. Small holes in his sculptures come from the traditional decor of Zakopane. His abstract sculptures connect sculptural forms with the decorations from folklore and dance. His works portray a sense of movement which begins to dance apparently dance in space. The joy in his work can be felt as the joy of dance in folk music in the Góral tradition.

The root of this artist’s representations are alive in is the memory of the land that nurtured him. There is authenticity in this indigenous artwork from the Tatra Mountains that when transcribe by Mr. Baca into his own work has retained this authenticity. Even in the work of Brancusi a respect for a traditional form of sculpture is found. It is also possible to confirm this in the sculpture of Isamu Noguchi as Noguchi absorbed and transcribed

the artwork he experienced on his tour of the world from Machu Picchu to Easter Island. Mr. Baca’s work has a universal appeal. From his many travels he has developed a language of sculpture that imparts an understanding of the world which makes a contribution to the world of art inspiring those who read his touch and language with the humanistic view of the world he has created.

二上正司

Professor Masashi Futakami

National Hokkaido University of Education, Japan



Artist's Statement

Why sculpture?

There is not any clear-cut answer. It is a means of expression, among others. This one, however, is difficult and specific. For me, it is the one that has appealed to me the most, not as a result of a deep thinking, but intuitively - language, form of communication, way of life. I am at the beginning of my way, struggling to learn about the chosen form. My sculptures are to express ideas, but very often, they are simply forms of expression, work over the material, the form, rather than the content. These are the equivalent elements for me, essential and complementing one another. I hardly ever work conceptually, starting with an idea and making a form out of it. Sometimes it is the opposite - it is the wood or the stone that suggests the final shape and the ideological 'casing' is thought of later, should the need arise.

The process of creation is open. It is an experiment. The result is impossible to be predicted. The only thing one can choose is the direction. This is exactly what I like about it - uncertainty and surprises. At the same time, I want to have the power over the process of creation to give it a sense, using the most adequate sources which hit the heart of the matter, to create the general character. It is the receiver that matters, who should make his/her own judgement or even spell it out.

My view of the world is subjective that is why I do not try to analyse it, but to express my feelings and impressions and to share them with my audience. This is the reason why it is necessary to look at my work as a whole, to treat it as a road and the particular sculptures as its elements. Despite the fact the sculptures do not make a series, for me, each one is the continuation of the previous one, its evaluation, the step ahead.

Inspirations? Mainly a man, or rather, people - what they are like, the relations between them, similarities and differences. Culture is something derivative for me. Culture moulds the man, but it is the man that creates it. For me, the best form of education is seeing and getting to know various, very often, quite different cultures and appealing to them. By the confrontation with another, exotic world, I can find a lot about myself. The co-operation with people grown up and shaped in totally different conditions, whose lives are based on different values (though the universal ones stay the same) gives the chance to look at oneself from a different perspective and to verify one's own views. It is the travelling, experiences, contacts with other people that are the inspiration. The aim is to learn about the man (and myself). Sculptures are the attempts to grow accustomed to the material, i.e. the wood or the stone. Furthermore, it is the way to learn about the soul of the material, its rules, moods, advantages and disadvantages, its possibilities. It is not just a means of transferring a message. Sculpture is a bit of an experience, a play and at last, but not the least, the preparation for further work.

Miroslaw Baca

Biography and Exhibitions

Education

1999 M. F. A. The Fine Arts Academy in Cracow, Poland

Solo Exhibitions

2015 *The Dance in Sculpture*, Lamar Dodd Art Center, LaGrange, GA

2011 *Kanji Class*, Sapporo Tokeidai Gallery, Sapporo, Japan

2007 Robert MacNamara Foundation, Westport Island, ME

2005 Marie-Louise Ferrari Gallery, Xalapa, Ver, Mexico

2003 *La Junta*, Jardin de las Esculturas, Xalapa, Ver, Mexico

1999 *Muslim World*, Jagiellonian University, Cracow, Poland

Group Exhibitions

2015 The 26th UBE Biennale, UBE Tokiwa Museum, Ube City, Japan

MECENAVIE, Galerie Thuillier, Paris, France

2014 1a Biennale Della Creativita, Palaexpo Verona, Italy

The Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Monreale, Palermo, Italy

2010 Sapporo Snow Festival, Sapporo, Japan

2005 The Royal British Society of Sculptors, London, UK

2004 Leeds City Art Gallery, Artist Open, Leeds, UK

Awards

2014 The 1st Award Trinacria 2014, Tribute to Sicily, Palermo, Italy

2005 The Royal British Society of Sculptors Bursary Award, London, UK

Collections

Robert MacNamara Foundation, Westport Island, ME

The Cochran Collection

Mikasa Modern Art Museum, Hokkaido, Japan

Jardin de las Esculturas, Xalapa, Ver, Mexico

Thomas Anthony Mike III Collection

Artist Residencies and Scholarships

2014 Butterfly House, The Cochran Collection, LaGrange, GA

2009 Japanese Government Scholarship (MEXT), Hokkaido University of Education, Sapporo, Japan

2007 Robert MacNamara Foundation, Westport Island, ME

2003 Mexican Government Scholarship, Universidad Veracruzana, Xalapa, Ver, Mexico



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Sculpture should create a zone of expression that includes the surrounding space.
Lee Ufan





The Dance in Sculpture
Figure # 1

Water Oak, Georgia Marble
45 x 22 x 17" / 115 x 56 x 43 cm
2014



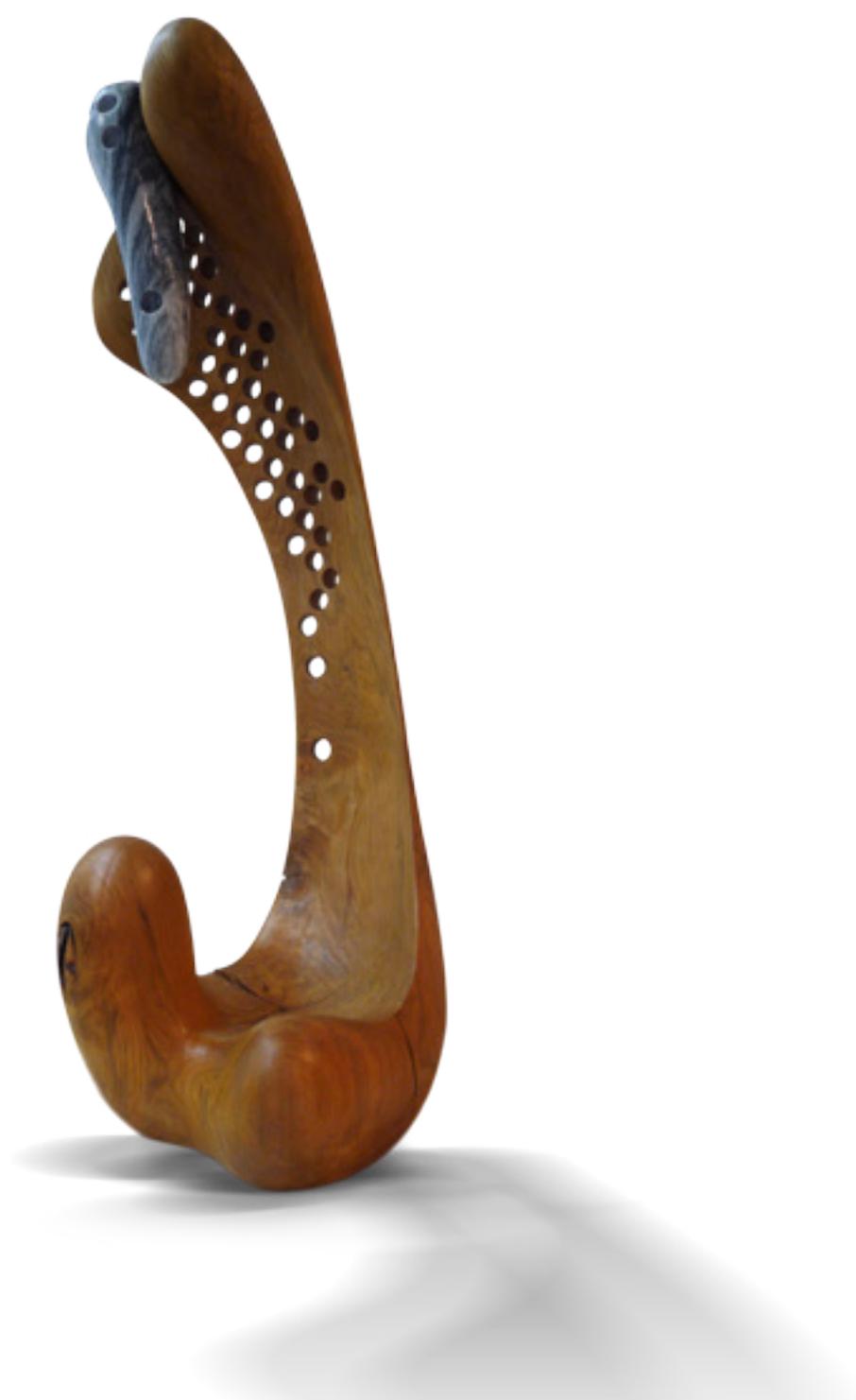
The Dance in Sculpture
Figure # 1

Water Oak, Georgia Marble
45 x 22 x 17" / 115 x 56 x 43 cm
2014



The Dance in Sculpture
Figure #2

Water Oak, Georgia Marble
66 x 24 x 20" / 168 x 61 x 50 cm
2014



The Dance in Sculpture
Figure #2



Water Oak, Georgia Marble
66 x 24 x 20" / 168 x 61 x 50 cm
2014



The Dance in Sculpture
Figure # 3

Water Oak, Georgia Marble
89 x 16 x 14" / 226 x 41 x 36 cm
2014



The Dance in Sculpture
Figure # 3

Water Oak, Georgia Marble
89 x 16 x 14" / 226 x 41 x 36 cm
2014



The Dance in Sculpture
Figure # 4

Water Oak, Georgia Marble
66 x 20 x 17" / 168 x 51 x 43 cm
2015



The Dance in Sculpture
Figure # 4



Water Oak, Georgia Marble
66 x 20 x 17" / 168 x 51 x 43 cm
2015



The Dance in Sculpture
Figure # 5

Water Oak, Georgia Marble
94 x 24 x 18" / 240 x 61 x 46 cm
2015



The Dance in Sculpture
Figure # 5

Water Oak, Georgia Marble
94 x 24 x 18" / 240 x 61 x 46 cm
2015



The Dance in Sculpture
Figure # 6

Water Oak, Georgia Marble
38 x 25 x 13" / 97 x 64 x 33 cm
2015



The Dance in Sculpture
Figure # 6

Water Oak, Georgia Marble
38 x 25 x 13" / 97 x 64 x 33 cm
2015





The Dance in Sculpture
Annexe

Water Oak, Graphite, Georgia Marble
18 x 18 x 11" / 46 x 46 x 28 cm
8 x 6 x 5" / 20 x 15 x 13 cm
2015







The Balance

Water Oak, Tennessee Field Stone
63 x 15 x 10" / 160 x 38 x 26 cm
The Cochran Collection, 2014





Fertility Orb



Bradford Pear, Tennessee Blue Limestone
36 x 22 x 11" / 92 x 56 x 28 cm
2015



Untitled

Sycamore, Graphite, Granite River Stone
24 x 11 x 7" / 61 x 28 x 18 cm
2015



Untitled

Sycamore, Graphite, Granite River Stone
24 x 11 x 7" / 61 x 28 x 18 cm
Artist's Collection, 2015





Kanji Class
Bold [木], Formula [式], Heart [心]



Oak Wood, Japanese Granite
71 - 98" (H) / 180 - 250 cm (H)
Mikasa Modern Art Museum, Japan, 2010

Implied Movement: The Dance of Sculpture

The engine of the senses fires outside the corporal body. Sensing the world we inhabit comes from a feeling of all the elemental senses in an envelope around the body projected outwards from the mechanical means of sight, sound smell, touch. Intuition and instinct both reside in this realm of space. Why it is important has as much to do with the spirit as well as survival. The artist Lee Ufan describes this space well:

My body has its own atmosphere that surrounds and spreads out beyond it to a certain distance. This atmosphere is made up of waves of my energy, scent, colors, and personal idiosyncrasies. There is a certain space in which I can extend my arms and legs, breathe, and feel things. Sometimes it expands and sometimes it shrinks. The outer perimeter of this atmosphere is a sensitive membrane, and I feel pressure on this interface with the outside world when I am alert. This membrane is permeable to the outside world and can be opened and closed. The elastic atmosphere around me possesses life and a sense of existence.¹

The shock of the encounter of sculpture is one of pure primal sensation. When the eyes meet an object, there begins not only involuntary calculations in the mind but also aesthetic ruminations that follow. Inasmuch as it takes time to see, the rate at which we comprehend varies the artist makes a gamble that his hand and our eye will meet on a level plane where artistry is seen, felt and heard at the moment that his eye and ours comprehend this transformation we know as art. The artist regardless of materials, pigments of Cobalt blue and Cadmium reds, Cor-ten steel, basalt stone or the body, must be a kind of alchemist.

During the construction of certain works of art, the movements of the hands create a visual history that sometimes can be read as a language not unlike a layered graphology in handwriting. Beyond the intention of an artist to portray some form of cadence or movement through mark-making, an equally compelling gesture can arise from the fundamental processes involved in the human touch. A compelling comparison is the act of improvisation in music. This action has historical roots in all musical forms East and West. Traditionally in Western music, the “Cadenza” was a portion of a concerto in which a soloist was allowed the freedom to improvise freely for a section of a work before returning to the written score.

In Gagku, Japanese Imperial Court Music, a soloist was considered to be both professional player and composer in that he was the master of his instrument technically as a performer and creator of inspired passages of music within the framework of a score. Two such instruments that are considered instruments of soloists are the Biwa, a four stringed lute, and the Shakuhachi, a wind instrument played like a clarinet. Accordingly, in Gagku, an open space of time in an ensemble existed for the soloist to create an improvised portion of the performance. Mildred Portney Chase captured the essence of such improvisation:

Highly skilled players are able to retrieve the smallest fragments of patterns and, again with split second timing, combine them and recombine the new combinations in part or whole with amazing continuity.²

1 Ufan, Lee. *The Art of Encounter*. Trans. Stanley N. Anderson. London: Lisson Gallery publications no. 42, 2004. 229 (85.)

2 Chase, Mildred Portney. *Improvisation: Music from The Inside Out*, Berkley, CA, Creative Arts Book Co. 1988. 30.

Just as in Western and Eastern musical forms, so in sculpture the hands perform an improvised movement with the same precision to construct forms that are variations on themes remembered and recreated to achieve the desired effect. It is an improvisation or dance of the hands that creates art in the purest sense, uncorrupted or contrived. For the viewer with a trained eye, the honest work of art is obvious.

Some sculptors work with a nervous energy, others with calm and sedateness, and still others without direct touch, although their touch is present in drawing which is a sculptor's method of *tuning* a sculpture or finding its *pulse*. The methodology on which this psychological forming transmutes itself into a material represents the clearest personification of the sculptor's fingerprint. Working with the body, shaping material with the hands that memorize certain movements and repetitions, the form is extracted, extruded and given a life. As with music, sculpture requires its listener to assemble the parts to create the whole. Even a sculptor as Giambologna requires one to circle round the base of marble or bronze and analyze the hand that removed the unnecessary material. Underneath are fugues, dance forms such as the Bourrée, Sarabande, Courante, Allemande. Dance forms from European folk music are fundamental for most all classical music and the basis for this grid of sound in folk music is generally at the core of classical sculpture replicated by hands with that memory intact. Indeed, the hands do in fact have memory, a memory that lies in the nerves and muscles not only the brain. As any trained pianist understands and can attest, the memory within the hands and how a certain touch and movement over the keys of a piano follows a linear path that the brain does not engage. The movement is fluid only because the hands remember. Minute details and nuances of a work of music are brought to life with a spirit and fundamental artistry that exists outside the realm of *controlled* thinking.

Also outside this realm, there exists a primal fingerprint which is the cultural hallmark and perhaps the salvation of our specie's voice. This primal fingerprint embodies the eternal question of our species: *if intelligence can exist beyond matter*. In art, there is always a desire to connect the human body and mind to a state of being beyond materiality. Humans need a thread beyond craftsmanship to connect a lineage or body of art that shares an ability to communicate a motif that is unwavering, essential, and timeless. For example, the perfection of the music of Johann Sebastian Bach must be achieved without imitation but with an authentic honing and originality. In the same manner that Bach consumed folk dances and made it *his* music, an artist must train his mind to take from the past or the natural world *what moves him* and use his talent to give some material a lasting voice. Inevitably, some artists will pass on their spirit and intelligence from one time period to another beyond the shared medium. The material becomes immaterial. This *fingerprint*, which like a strand of DNA, is invisible to the naked eye, but contains the complete essence of an idea, is passed down through time. The obligation of the artist, then, consists of the creation of something intangible by material means.

"Articulation", a word best suited for the description of musical precision, also has fundamental implications in the crafting of dance and sculpture. The articulation of the sound produced by the human voice or an instrument of wood and strings possesses the same significance in choreographing dance and the shaping sculpture. Space as *space* in sculpture or silence in music is also an articulation. "Think of the dancer who has moved through various steps and come to a stop, poised in a position. Isn't that pause as valid as the movement?"³ Comprehending these various methodologies informing the construction of a work of art allows one to move

freely among the arts as many artists have learned. Claude Debussy's measure of silence in the beginning of *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* is the first instance in the West that silence became written as music. The power of this space of silence changed music and the listener who, if asked, would not have intellectualized this silence but certainly felt it as part of the fabric of the music, a crucial embroidery in the partition or score.

The artist Isamu Noguchi has participated directly with all forms of art discussed – dance, music, sculpture and drawing. What he brought to each form was a touch that was distinctly his regardless of the form. He had an implicit understanding of space which allowed his work to flourish in the natural world of the garden, as well as on stage. As Noguchi recognized, both spaces share in common a central humanity which plays a vital role in both theaters. Noguchi says of the garden, "I like to think of gardens as sculpturing of space. A man may enter such a space. It is in scale with him. It is real".⁴ Noguchi's collaboration with the choreographer Martha Graham allowed him the opportunity to develop his ideas about sculpture in live time using the human body as an element of movement that relates to his sculptural inventions for the stage.

Dore Ashton, a writer and friend of Noguchi describes Noguchi's collaborations with dance and music in her book *Noguchi: East and West*:

Noguchi's long association with Graham drew him into many experiences that would later flow into his overarching metaphor of the garden. Among them were his works with Merce Cunningham and John Cage, both of whom were directly inspired by what they had learned of Eastern aesthetics (including, possibly, the custom in Noh and Kabuki for actors, writers and musicians to work separately toward a final unity), and his collaboration with the dancer Erick Hawkins, who also, later in his career, evolved a philosophy of art that came close to Noguchi's own.⁵

What all of these individuals shared was a pursuit of the essential qualities of sound, light, movement. The choreography of Erick Hawkins is very much about what the body *can* do in the same way Noguchi's late human-scaled stones reflect an acceptance of the materiality and natural forms of each particular stone. There is great theater in these late stones returning to the ideas discussed of Giambologna: movement, twisting, turning, compression, release. The human body may not be figuratively represented, but Noguchi's late stones all have a focus on humanity and the artful nature of what it is to be human and vertical on this earth: what it means *to escape one's-self* and make work free from a dominating, domineering ego.

In his text for training actors the rudimentary forces that are in play on stage, Michael Lugering speaks in his book, *The Expressive Actor*, of the paradox of self. In the same manner in which an artist must *lose himself* in his work to create clean, honest works, an actor must focus on the same kind of authentic actions to complete a character, a substantial character that contains a complete presence. Lugering says:

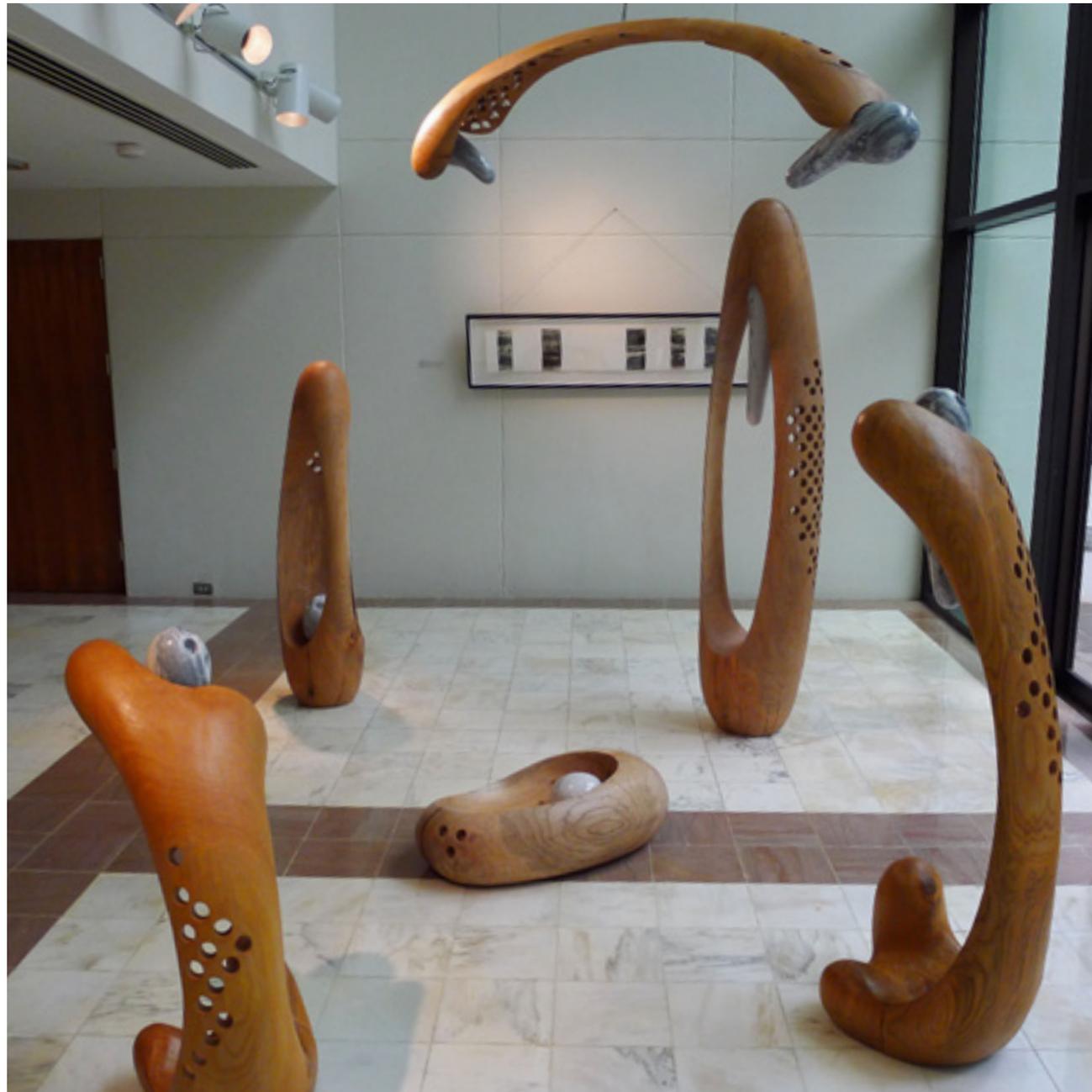
Expressive actions have a special transformative power that is often overlooked: they create character and personality. The personality of an individual can best be understood by examining their actions. *Who we are* is directly linked to *what we do*.⁶

3 Chase, Mildred Portney. *Improvisation: Music from The Inside Out*, Berkley, CA, Creative Arts Book Co. 1988. 25.

4 Noguchi, Isamu. *Isamu Noguchi: Stone and Paper*. Dir. Narita, Hiro. 1997, American Masters PBS Series, 56 Min.

5 Aston, Dore. *Noguchi: East and West*. Berkley, CA, 1992. University of California Press. 229.

6 Lugering, Michael. *The Expressive Actor*. Portsmouth, NH. 2007, Heineman 182



Making and unmaking is required in all the arts to arrive at what is essential, underneath the sequins or brushstrokes of paint. It is not always a comfortable precipice. When an artist understands the validity of his actions, movement or creations then he is forced to reflect on the quality of what is there before his eyes.

As graphology reveals the handwriting of an individual, chisel markings in stone distinguish artists one from another. Both actions project information with immediacy through sight, as well as vision through memory. In music it is the accumulation of “a drawing”, a notation on a score that accumulates in the memory before art is revealed. Dance is cumulative and sculpture requires the viewer to *intuit* the movement to complete the image. *Reading* a sculpture requires the viewer not to be passive in order to comprehend the visual language before him. The same is even said of painting – that we only fully appreciate the dynamics of a painting by moving through it, looking at it from the side, sitting.... Action in time is required to unfurl the past actions that create a work of art, whereas in dance action in time requires a mental transcribing in time and memory. These actions work in opposite directions: one moving forward in time and the other backwards. In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson explains with great cogency:

In learning physical exercise, we begin by imitating the movement as a whole, as our eyes see it from without, as we think we have seen it done. Our perception of it is confused; confused therefore, will be the movement whereby we try to repeat it. But whereas our visual perception was of a *continuous* whole, the movement by which we endeavor to reconstruct the image is *compounded* and made up of a multitude of muscular contradictions and tensions; our consciousness of these itself includes a number of sensations resulting from the varied play of the articulations. The confused movement which copies the image is, then, already its virtual decomposition; it bears within itself, so to speak, its own analysis.⁷

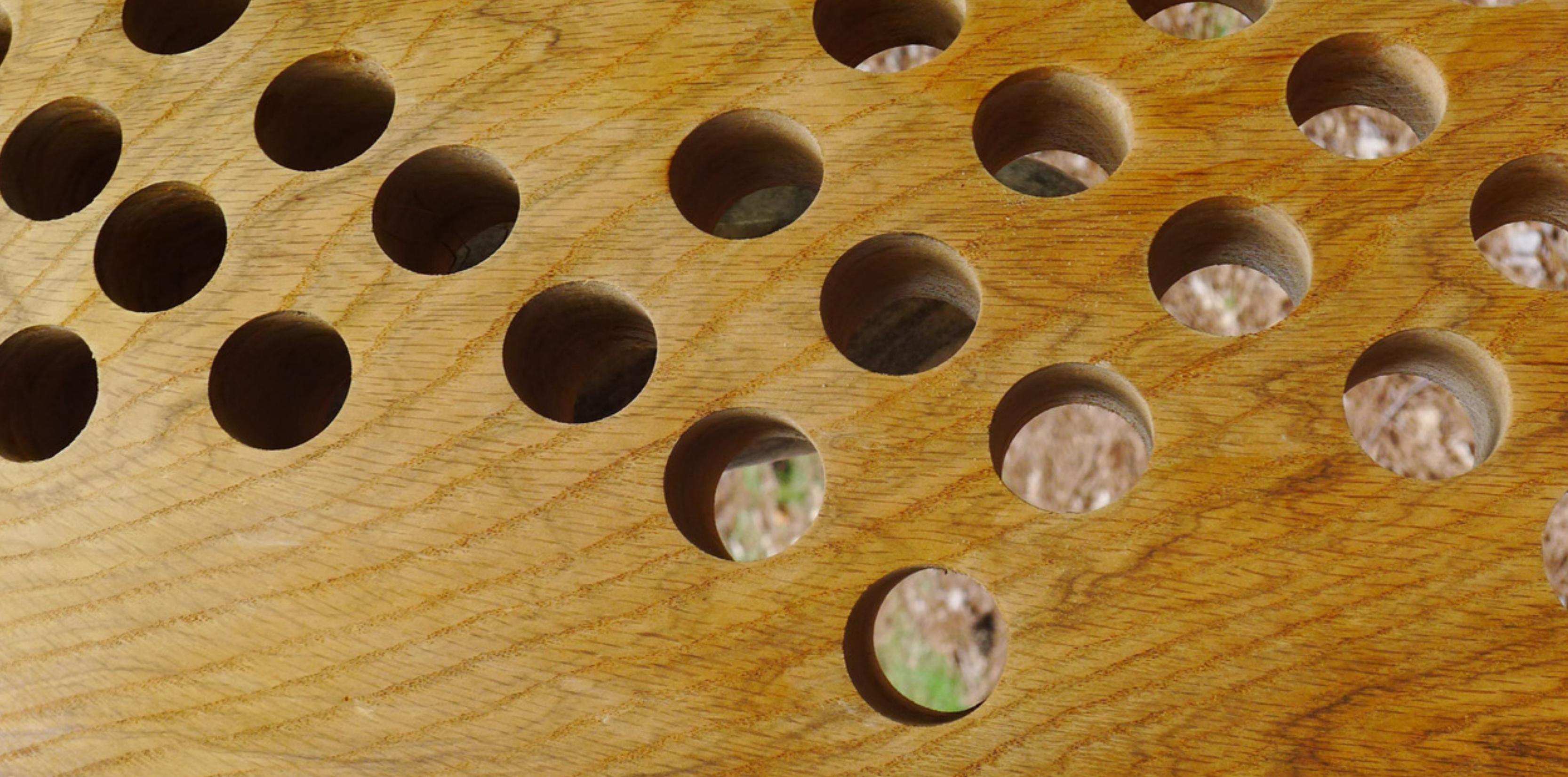
Why is this important? Why? Paul Valéry best answers this question, “So the whole question comes down to this: can the human mind master what the human mind has made?”⁸ For the curious individual a deeper awareness of art can only arise from active participation. In going to the cinema and watching a film for the first time, one only manages truly to comprehend twenty percent of the dialogue and imagery, music and sounds. The same analogy can be made in the other visual arts. With the work of Isamu Noguchi, it is only after multiple viewings of the same works that one begins to comprehend the gesture and articulation in space of particular sculptures. Dance as metaphor in art and armature in sculpture holds the promise of rich ruminations for any curious mind and sensitive soul. Here is the beginning of a worthy investigation where metaphor can play the role of guide, leading to a discovery of inexhaustible resonances.

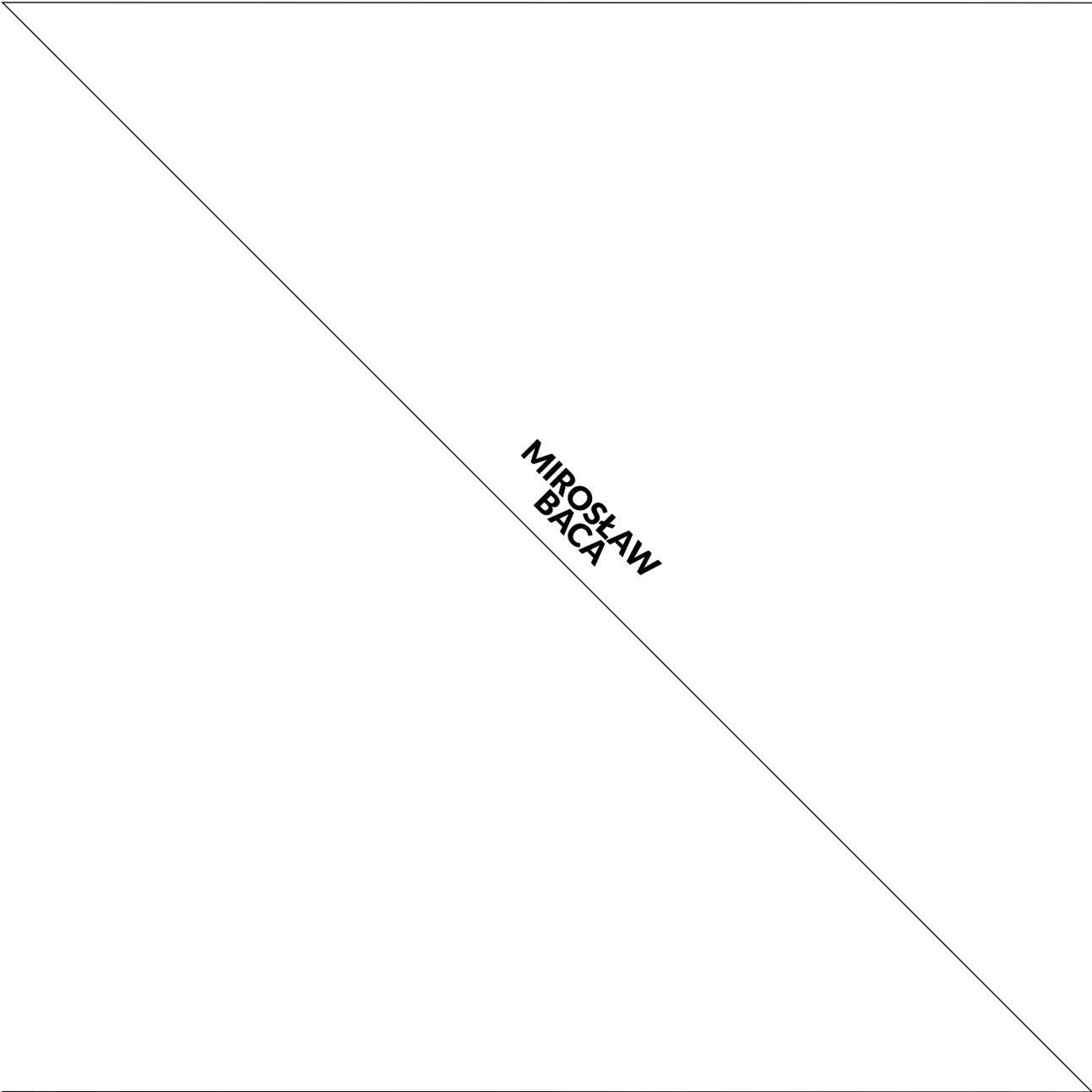
Miroslaw Baca, Tad Mike

*University of Nevada, Las Vegas
April 2015*

⁷ Bergson, Henri. *Matter and Memory*. New York, 2002. Zone Books, 111.

⁸ Valéry, Paul. *The Outlook for Intelligence*. Trans. Denise Folliot. New York, 1962. Harper & Row, 138.





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