

# Arthur Carter: Stainless Steel

By Hilton Kramer

Every work of sculpture, ancient or modern, figurative or abstract or some combination of both, may be said to give expression to the aesthetic relationship obtaining between a mass the space it occupies and transforms. It is to the specific attributes of the mass, however—its physical scale, its material character, and its formal structure—that a sculpture owes its principal identity as a work of art. Yet our response to that identity is inevitably contingent upon the ways in which the structure of the mass engages and redefines the circumambient space in which it is seen.

For it is in the nature of sculpture that its mass, whether slender or bulky or even weightless (in as light sculpture), to convert or co-opt the unbounded, featureless character of space into serving as the collaborative medium essential to the work's completion. Mass may thus be considered the yang, or masculine, principle in sculpture, while space functions as its complimentary yin, or feminine, principle. Neither is imaginable without the other, but it is in the conception of its mass and the specific ways in which the mass traces its course in space that a work of sculpture has its aesthetic distinction.

The most recent of Arthur Carter's sculptures—which, like his earlier work, consists entirely of open-form stainless steel constructions—divide themselves into two groups. The constructions in the first group—numbers 1 through 14 in the catalogue—I shall dub ideographic since their ultraslender, wire-like steel masses form trceries of elliptical loops and geometric arcs, chords, and circles that strike me as having the

character of sculptural ideographs—not so much-drawings-in-space as calligraphy-in-space. The second group—numbers 15 through 27—I would characterize as architectonic. For they are not only constructed of the kinds of geometric forms that are familiar to us in modernist architecture but they also lend themselves to being seen as maquettes, or prototypes, destined to be enlarged to a monumental scale in some modern architectural setting. Their constituent vertical and circular masses are weightier in girth than Carter's earlier work and more emphatically geometric in form, and they rise from their respective plinths with a more insistent perpendicularity. At the same time, their surfaces are burnished to achieve a softer, pewter-like skin that is more sympathetic to the eye and the hand. These architectonic constructions mark a distinct advance in Arthur Carter's sculptural development, and augur well for its future.