

Linear Movements of Brushed Steel

By Lance Esplund

Arthur Carter's most recent sculptures, linear movements of brushed steel, activate space like lightning across a night sky. In this new work, Carter has more spring and increased speed in his step, as he twists and toques planes with a freedom and ease suggestive of handwriting. But, aware as I am of his love of music, I am inclined to see the sculptures' rhythmic calligraphy as the crossings of a maestro's baton or the pulls of a bow across strings. In *Triax*, *Parallax*, and *Tektonics* (all from 2001), there is something of the virtuoso in their grand, curving and zigzagging lines, and yet they are as direct as Carter's earlier works that were based on mathematical equations, musical harmonies, or the Golden ratio.

Carter is an artist obsessed with order but not at the expense of playfulness, surprise, romance, or flight. Many of his sculptures appear to be wedded to the ground, standing at attention, and yet they also seem to be in tension with the earth: wound up, ready for take-off. The sculptures, grounded through their relationship to the human figure, are released from the anchors of figuration through the lyric movement of dance. Though human in their deportment and attitude, the sculptures, take us skyward. Carter has titled some of the new work after astronomical phenomenon (*Quasar*, *Pulsar*), and yet they could be equally related to the half-mortal, half-god characters of Greek myth; as in Carter's earlier series of sculptures named after Psyche (soul), a being whose very existence is expressed in the tension between body and flight.

A constructivist, Carter sculpts air into planes, and at times planes into mass. Forms flit between volume and void. Looking at his sculptures, I am often made aware of the contradictory nature of an open, geometric shape that takes on the qualities, the weight, of sculpted form. In *Elliptyk* and the *Psyche* series, linking rings and rectangles rise like bubbles, and are set into motion like a juggler's balls. The planes seem to pull together, inward, to form new volume, as they also seem to blossom forth. In *Mathematika*, the world is in delicate balance—poised—and then there is a surprise of the triangular opening, not of the window itself, but of the fact that the window begins to breathe and to equal its presence, to support, the squares that surround it. Pressure inward meets pressure outward. The sculpture, it becomes increasingly clear, is comprised of interacting, changing forces rather than finished and assembled forms.

The Couple, a public sculpture thirty-feet-tall, is a construction of two bronze and steel interlocking ellipses. The forms are as independent as they are united. But they cannot stand alone. Walking around this sculpture, I noticed that through the overlapping and intertwining, new internal forms and rhythms were created. From one view one form bisected the other as line; from another view the reverse was true. The ovals lean toward and penetrate one another in perfect symbiosis: precariousness and support are felt in equal measure. In *Signifier I*, egg-shaped gaps between pinched rectangles become buoyant and full. The gaps exert stress both upward and downward, and then, slowly, the sculpture reveals, pressure is exerted on the outer sides of the rectangles, as well. The sculpture's central spine begins to give way to the increasingly volumetric intervals of air.

In *Signifier II*, stacked parallelograms and triangles appear to shift up and down from side-to-side like the forms in a sliding puzzle. At one moment the forms seem to be driving downward like a wedge, and the next moment lifting off the ground, or moving sideways, as the sculpture achieves a dynamic of give and take. The openings between forms suggest absence as much as presence. Each solid form is both burden and brace to its neighbor, as the shapes appear to move in multiple directions at once. In this sculpture, as in others, there the pleasure of showmanship, of the magician's sleight of hand—now you see it, now you don't.

Polished drama is part of the allure of Carter's sculptures. Flirtation and seduction are key elements of the work, from the shimmering surfaces of their metal facades to their swooning arcs to their hip-to-breast-shaped curves. *Musika* and *Morph* are as sexy and sly as they are melodic, and like a seductive glance across a room, they strive toward both reductive purity and erotic charge. It is in this sense that the sculptures are most like organic beings.

Seen collectively in a gallery or on Carter's Connecticut farm, the sculptures, especially the newest ones which are intended to be grouped together, communicate as if through dance or through coupling and multiplication. The sculptures form alliances with one another as individuals, as well as through their linear, lateral movements which begin in one sculpture, continue through another, and join in a third, completing and creating entirely new forms. In *Quasar*, its linear spokes suggest the beginnings of the spider's web, rays of sunlight, and an arrow taught within a bow. When related to other

sculptures, the web is magnified and extended, the arrow is released, and the curves expand into orbits.

From the beginning Arthur Carter's sculptures demonstrate his love of clarity and of the one-two-one rhythms of inversion, investigated and pushed further in later works like *Signifier I and II*, *Mathematika IV*, *Inversion*, and *The Couple*. Their creations have opened up to the artist the language of transformation, a language he continues to develop and explore. For Carter, who was trained as a classical musician, art-making has become first and foremost about the joy of song. They are infused from early-on with a playfulness and a sense of humor and of irony that continues to be present in the work today. Wherever Carter goes artistically, it will be these strengths that will carry him, and the viewer, onward.