

THESIS

AXIS MUNDI

Submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Spring 1991

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

January 22, 1991

WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY ANNE VALENTI ENTITLED AXIS MUNDI BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS.

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

### AXIS MUNDI

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor

fleshless;

Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance

is,

But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,

Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement

from nor towards,

Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still

point,

There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.

I can only say, *there* we have been: But I cannot say where.

And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time.

The inner freedom from the practical desire,

The release from action and suffering, release from the

inner

And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded

By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving,

Erhebung without motion, concentration

Without elimination, both a new world

And the old made explicit. . . .<sup>1</sup>

In the buzz of a mechanistic world, I search the silence for the patterns and symbols that quietly touch the core of my being. In archetype and myth, patterns ancient yet familiar emerge. Archetypes, remnants of the archaic mind, serve to nourish myth, those clues to the mysteries that lie within.<sup>2</sup>

The axis mundi, or world axis, is an archetypal image that speaks of the central point from whence all creation arises, the umbilicus of the world, the pole about which spins all phenomenal existence.<sup>3</sup> Here lies the interface of the sacred and the profane, where time and timelessness intersect, and the One becomes the many. The cosmic center is evidenced in cultures throughout the world and across the boundaries of time. Mythic mountain, standing stone, sacred city and cultic house express this cosmogony.

Echoes of these primal archetypal forms reverberate in my images, imbuing them with past experiences of the numinous and the ancient relationships between human and divine, conscious and unconscious. The bronze medium is one of transformation, as creation is a transformatory process. The bark of the aspen tree references such mythological expressions of the axis mundi as the Tree of Knowledge, the Christian symbol of the cross, and the tree which was the divine symbol of the Paleolithic and Neolithic Goddess. Today, in western culture, a tree is still placed atop a newly constructed dwelling. The jute binds the whole together; it is the prima materia which joins the homologous elements.

My images are sometimes tightly bound, at other times, unfolding. Areas obscured are played against elements revealed. Such is my experience of the nature of existence, oftentimes concealed, filled with the tension of dualities, graced with brief moments of illumination and atonement. Although my artwork does not have the same force or presence of archetypal images that were woven into daily life, they perhaps contain some of the mystery and fascination inherent in similar artifacts of distant and unknown civilizations. Finally, I observe the viewers as they walk around each piece, like celebrants that encircle a maypole, recreating the "dance," consecrating the space, contemplating the nameless.

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Plate I: Axis I, cast bronze; height, 94"; average diameter, 4".



Plate II: Axis II, cast bronze; height, 93"; average diameter, 6".

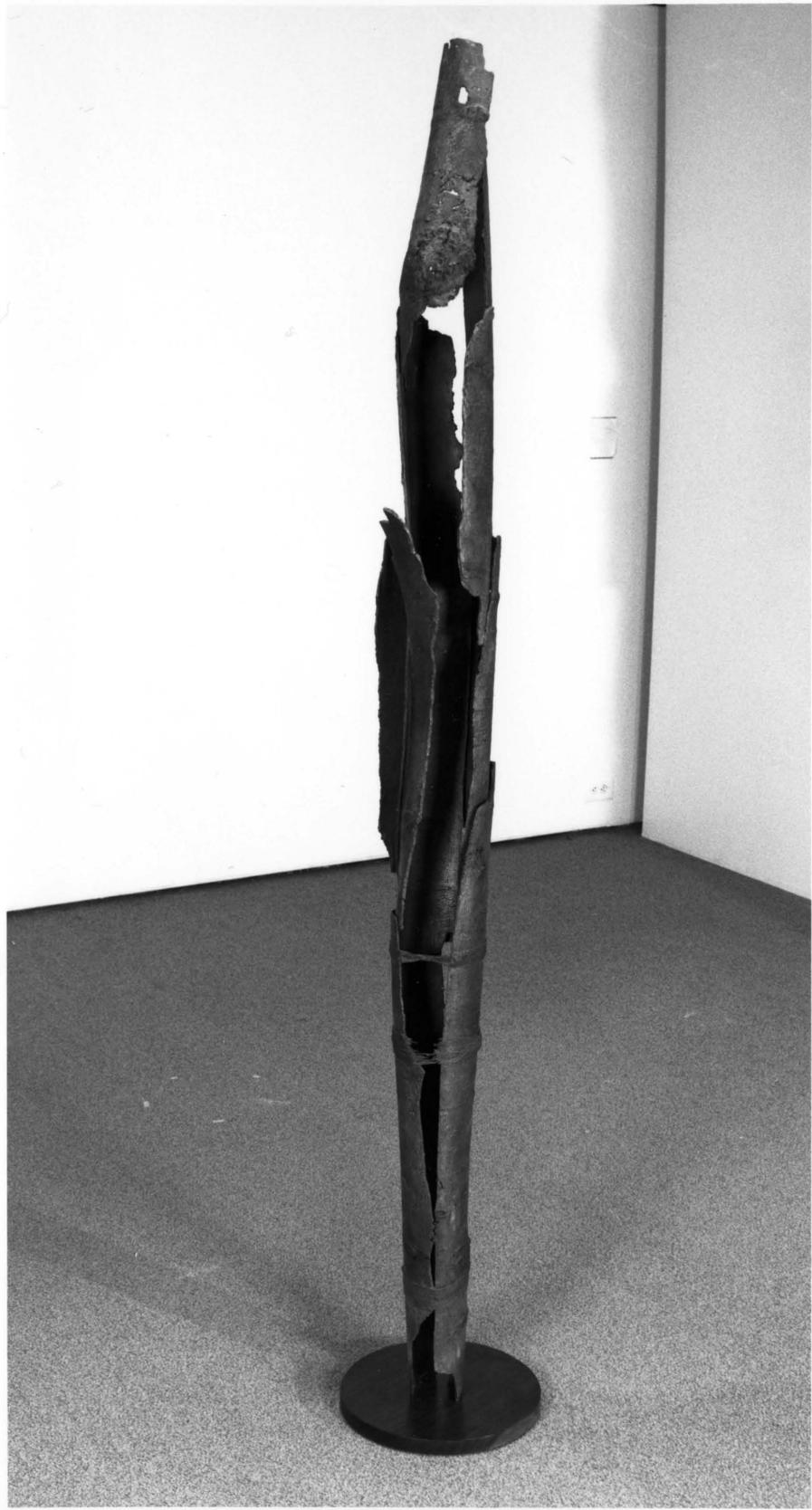


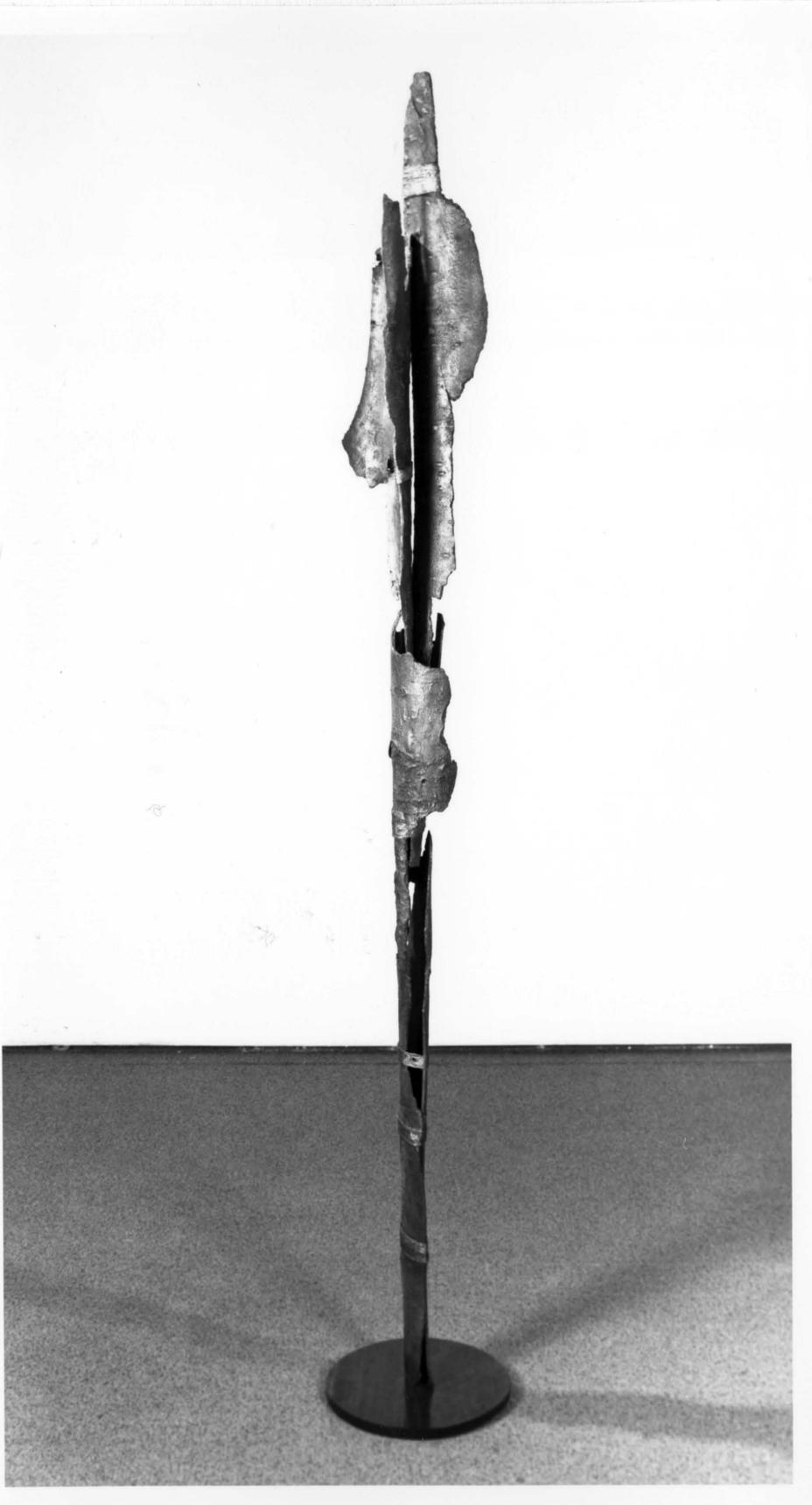
Plate III: The Guardian, cast bronze; height, 98"; average diameter, 5".



Plate IV: Ganesh, Lord of Obstacles, cast bronze; height, 94", average diameter, 6".



Plate V: Mahamaya, cast bronze; height, 96"; average diameter, 6".



## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>T. S. Eliot, Four Quartets (London: Faber and Faber, 1950), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Carl Jung, "Approaching the Unconscious," in Man and His Symbols, ed. Carl Jung and M.-L. von Franz (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1964), pp. 57, 68.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, The Power of Myth (New York: Doubleday, 1988), p. 89.

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