

MUSIC AND THE ARTS

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Ernest Trova's Glistening Homunculus

St. Louis Sculptor's Falling Man in New York Show

By JOHN CANADAY

NEW YORK

FROM SHOW TO SHOW, over the past several years, the St. Louis sculptor Ernest Trova has been presenting his ideas as to the developing fate of Homo Sapiens in the world we have made for ourselves.

Trova's latest conclusions, currently exhibited at the Pace gallery on Fifty-seventh street, would be a discouraging analysis of our status if they were not expressed with a glitter so seductive that our dilemma becomes acceptable simply by the fact of having been stated in such beautiful terms.

This is one of the functions of art in troubled times—to recognize how beset we are, but to re-affirm our capacities for perception and invention.

Trova's leitmotif—his entire cast of characters, in fact—is a glistening metal homunculus, dehumanized, depersonalized, armless and unsexed, who may be anything from six inches to six feet tall. At any size he is as sleek as a machine part, and as impervious to independent impulse.

And like a machine part, he is mass-produced—literally, since in sculpture after sculpture Trova employs the same figure grouped and regrouped in castings from a single mold, with very little difference from one mold to the next.

AS THE SUCCESSOR to Homo Sapiens, Homo Trovacus is man absorbed by and identified with the machine as a form of science come to life. At his simplest and happiest he is not much more elaborately involved than a scuba diver bearing his oxygen tank (and wearing it as a natural part of himself), but even here the Trova man is armless, not as a mutilation but simply as if these members with which we do so much of our maneuvering with the physical problems of existence had disappeared as a natural result of being no longer needed.

In a more elaborate identification (and

in the most spectacular single sculpture in this new show), a six-foot Trova man becomes the chassis of a racing car, the front axle growing from his vestigial armpits, his head and shoulders within a jet cowl, his ribs extended in the form of manifold exhausts, while a funnel, surely for the reception of fuel, occupies the spot on his belly where Homo Sapiens used to have an umbilicus.

He turns up once in a two-storied construction equipped with apparatus that suggests, without specific references, a combination iron lung, artificial heart and generator, which he probably invented himself, about the year 2500 A.D., to synthesize life. He is sometimes equipped with resonators and loud speakers in substitution, no doubt, for his lost speech (his head is featureless and without apertures). He may be em-

braced by two curving flanges descended from radar tracking devices, and from them he must learn (for he is blind) what is going on in the world.

OR HE MAY BE INVOLVED in a state of existence too complicated and too strange to identify from our present position at the dawn of the space age.

Because his figures are rigidly frontal, with all forms reduced to geometrical equivalents, and variant attitudes limited to the extension of one leg as if in the act of walking, a comparison with Egyptian sculpture is inevitable. But it is justified by more than physical resemblance. These anonymous men are given an almost ceremonial dignity.

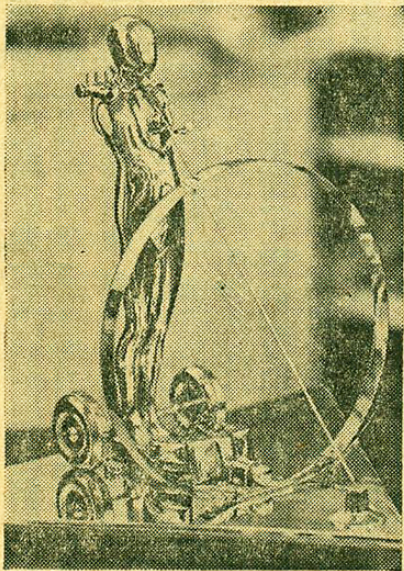
The sculptures are also inherently beautiful. Their materials are immaculate—the most exquisitely polished brass, or icy silver metal, the clearest plastics, all as impersonally employed as laboratory equipment.

If I have established my opinion that these are among the best of contemporary American sculptures, let me risk saying also that they are super-dolls. They keep reminding me of another mass-produced homunculus, a doll named G.I. Joe.

G.I. JOE'S ACCESSORIES, especially the more fanciful ones such as diving helmets, space suits and space capsules, put him into situation after situation comparable on a reduced scale to those invented for Homo Trovacus.

There must be somewhere a psychologist's theory by which the identification of the small boy with his G.I. Joe in the space capsule might be expanded as an explanation of the great satisfaction, even the happy response, one feels when faced by the adventures of Trova's men.

I am not certain that this is much of an idea, but it might be, and I am letting it do, right now, as an explanation of why I find Trova an invigorating, refreshing and even downright cheerful sculptor. Which is probably not at all what he has in mind.



Study: Falling Man (Triangle Landscape), 14 inches high in chrome-plated bronze from Ernest Trova exhibit at The Pace Gallery, New York