

JOSEPH SLOAN

ONE MAN EXHIBITION
Kilcock Art Gallery, June 1990

Extracts from the introduction to the exhibition:

My first encounter with Joe Sloan's work took place many years ago when he was making highly polished bronze figures with voluminous capes or cloud shaped wings that seemed to be catching great gusts of imaginary wind.

Much of the visual drama in "Predator and Prey" is derived from the tension between the implied upward movement of the hawk and downward diagonal thrust of the pigeon. The piece is also based on an interplay of crisply defined curvilinear shapes that break into the surrounding space. In fact, this work is remarkably airy, light flowing through the gaps and spaces. Sloan has reinforced the buoyancy and tension in this sculpture by supporting the two weighty bird elements on the narrow legs of the hawk and, ultimately, on the small tip of the wing touching the base. That Sloan has also managed to maintain stability in this piece (it is in no danger of toppling over) is no small technical achievement.

All works in this current exhibition clearly demonstrate the artist's mastery of the medium. While his earlier works showed a preference for shiny, highly polished surfaces, these bird sculptures demonstrate a range of textural effects and a variety of patinas. Some of the dark mahogany-like patinas have a mellow richness that are both exceptionally beautiful and particularly suitable to the motif.

The most recent works are the Heron Studies which are remarkable in their scale and presence. These birds, which are life size, reflect the keen observation of the creator and also his ability to eliminate detail in order to make a more concise and elegant visual statement.

Heron Study 1 wonderfully graceful, a long undulating curve moving downward from the head and neck through the body. There is great substance in the fleshy round torso, reinforced by the curve of the wings, that contrasts dramatically with the neck and spindly legs.

Heron Study 2 is very lean, very elegant, a rather aristocratic bird. It is made up of taut, compact shapes that give the piece a most appealing pared down restraint. The artist has invested this bird, like others, with a glimmer of personality.

Heron Study 3 From a technical standpoint it is amazing that this piece, like nearly all of the works in this exhibition, is so perfectly balanced that it can stand on its own without being anchored in anyway to the base.

Heron Study 4, another precariously balanced horizontal work, should be viewed from different angles to appreciate the undulating shape of bird. You can enjoy details like the ribbon-like comb as well as the delicate pattern of incised lines which enriches the surface. This rougher texture gradually disappears as the surface becomes silky

smooth around the neck and back. Sloan explores a variety of textural effects, varying the treatment from piece to piece rather than adopting a stock approach.

Joe Sloan has given us lyrical interpretations of the heron that express his love of these beautiful birds and his affinity with nature. Without relying on photographic realism the artist has shown his remarkable powers of observation that allow him to convincingly convey the essence of the heron. He communicates their grace and romanticism in forms that always work successfully on an abstract visual level.

Dr. Frances Ruane

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