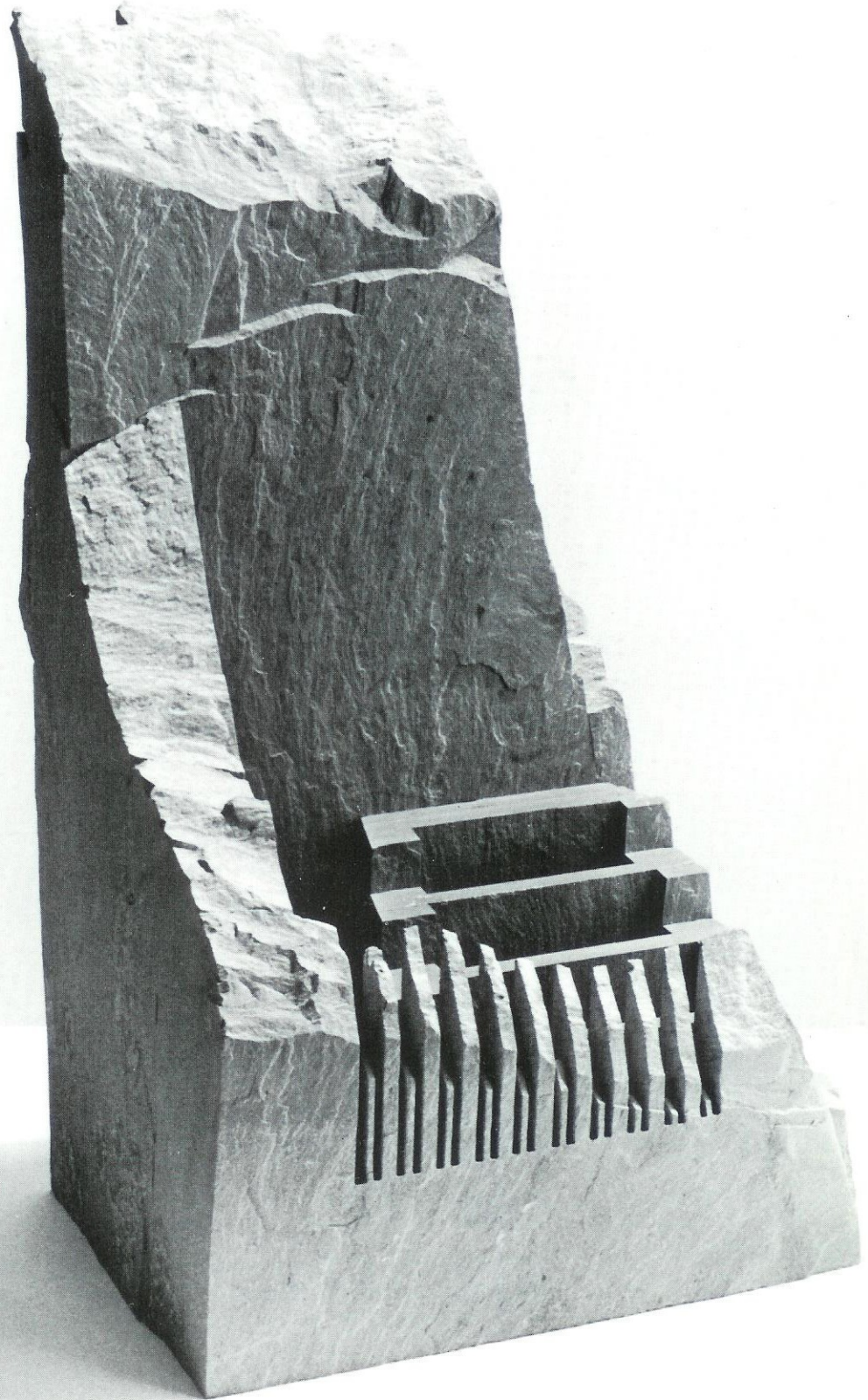


LIVIO SAGANIC



STOCKTON STATE COLLEGE ART GALLERY

L I V I O S A G A N I C

Sculpture

February 27 - March 16, 1990

STOCKTON STATE COLLEGE ART GALLERY

Livio Saganic's sculpture appears to have been formed by two or three waves of more or less emotional pressure over the past ten years. In "Hal Tarxien" (1981) and "Field of the Immemorial," the object is small-scale and sits on a pedestal in a way that pleases the narcissistic gaze of the ego, by allowing for complete grasp of the situation — both optically and by proxy, physically. "Hal Tarxien" is precise and architecturally-cut; nurture, not nature rules. It encapsulates an intellectual implosion, but also has the inescapable charm of a bonsai tree — not an architectural model, but a real miniature with real feeling. "Field of Immemorial" exploits imperfection in the rock to appear almost natural and the idea that it is an evacuated ruin lengthens the shadow of time on the work, obscuring the shorter life span of technique. "Lalibala" (1982) employs the motif of a staircase up a mountainside, multiplying into infinity the delicate emotion involved in inspecting its rock-cut intricacies. In all this work, actual size, snagged by attention to detail, is pumped up by an inner romanticism (the force that once found worlds in grains of sand), to envision the work as a residue and therefore container of information about a powerful and ancient force.

About five years ago, Saganic broke through the magic circle of eye appeal with a more energetic carving-transposed-to-cutting that elicits a direct tactile response in the viewer. This burst of energy consumed more material and forced pedestal and compositional space to become more introverted and resistant to pleasurable contemplation. The cutting in "The Incorruptible and the Celestial" is mostly natural, sharp and jagged, the architectural model is subsumed in its geological likeness. "Qorqor" (1985) is Saganic's tour de force, a radical implosion of an idealism suggested by the image of a cross cut into the slate mass. Its secret methodology and meaning ticks like a time bomb at the heart of an apparently inhibited structure. There is something empathetic in the human scale of the rock and when I first saw it, I felt that somehow it was a cavity formed by a descent to a level of archaic simplicity, as in Rodin's "Balzac," the flow of whose robes I imagined to be still imprinted, like fossils, in the curves of the sheer walls.

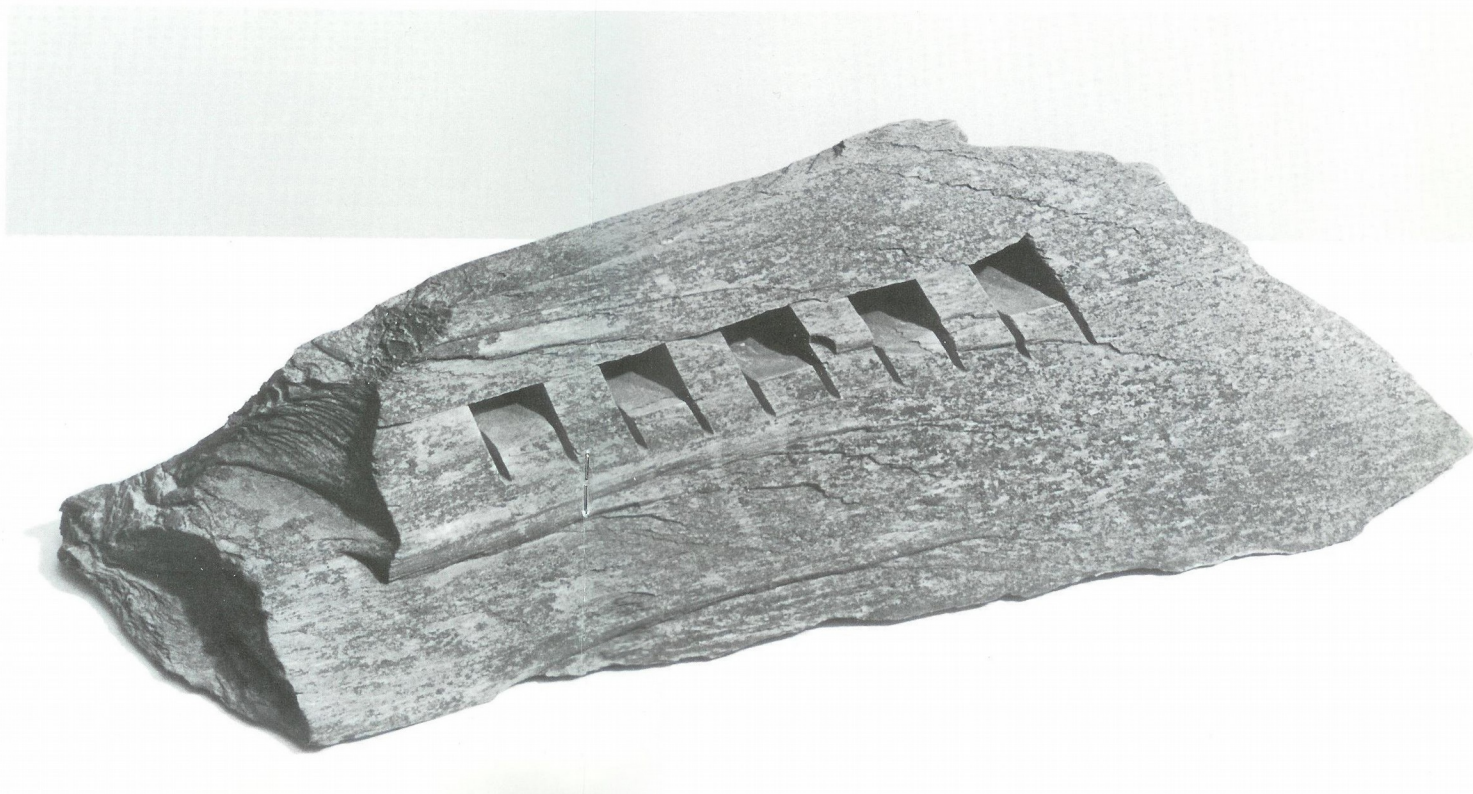
"Stone in the Wind" and "Refuge" press down closer to the floor, indicating a further buildup of pressure in Saganic's work. The new scale creates spaces that enable Saganic to bring back the more careful openings of the smaller work. A



synthesis of natural and civilizational likeness is achieved. The disposition of space in and around "Stone in the Wind" also has a hint of life-size human form in it. This and other forms suggest objects from elsewhere than architecture, furniture even, a sign that Saganic is thinking more about how this will withstand the relentless erosion of interior life than about escaping to the lands of final truth. There is a self-critical, defensive posture to these particular works that indicates a high degree of mature caution, a side effect of scale that makes the polarized romanticism of earlier phases inadmissible. Saganic's admittedly nonconsecutive evolution, from micro to macro and architectural to natural emphasis, can only be understood by a study of the physical dynamics of the work.

In the past, academic sculpture had a certain structure or convention: stone, carving, pedestal, composition and space were compactly balanced. Innovation consisted of turning

FIELD OF THE IMMEMORIAL, 1985
Slate, 4"x20"x8"

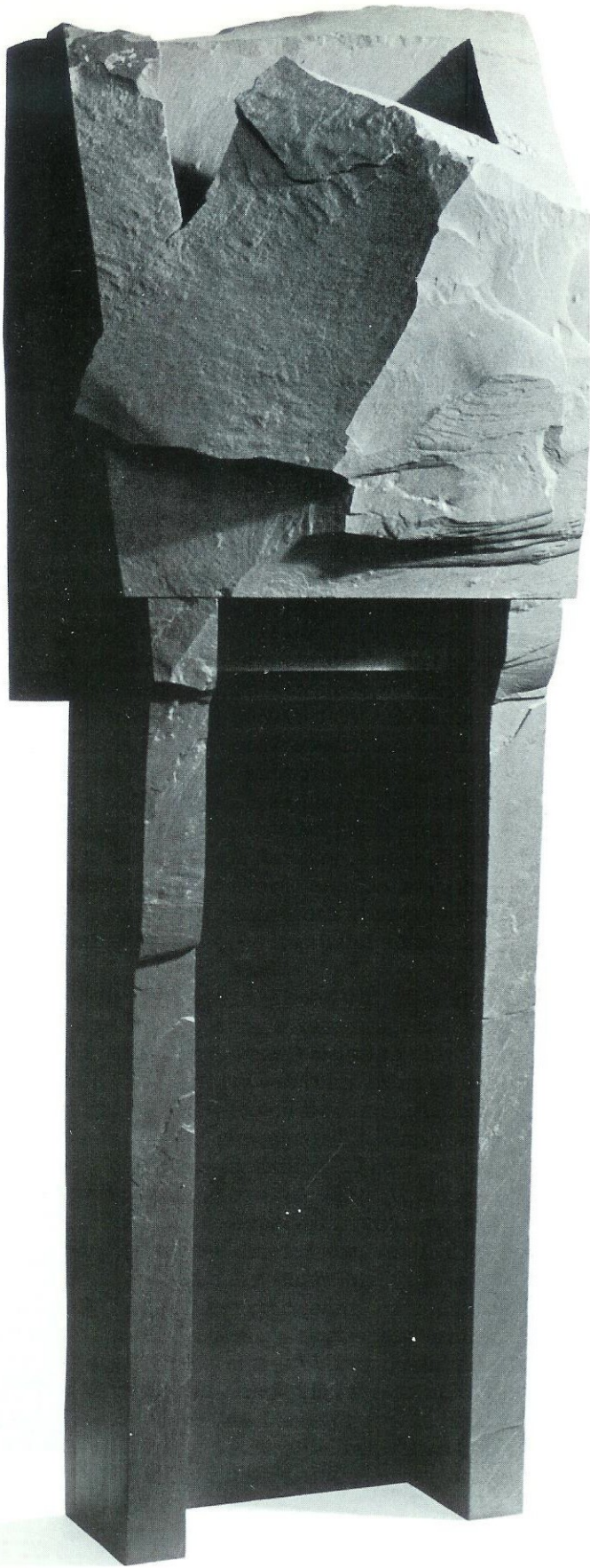


the bias within the object, but not breaking it. Modernism was witness to a series of radical ruptures of the old envelope. One strain of modernist sculpture (Brancusi) unraveled form into the outer spaces of abstraction, but kept the materials. Brancusi's practice of polishing marble covered up the tracks of carving until the stone was seen primarily as a souvenir of the formal breakthrough. Nowadays, carving has been replaced by literal techniques designed to express the absence of composition in the stone and the condition of the stone as a material that has rejected even an artist's abstract formal control over it. Carving has traveled out from the old craft into related fields (industry, for example) to find technical counterparts that are precise enough, when reimported, to shore up craft values in a way that acknowledges, then surmounts, the modernist depletion. Imported materials — concrete, slate, plaster — are now used to give metaphorical support to this extreme departure. Intuition's distrust of rationalism has led to a sculpture of the invisible hand — the less artist the better.

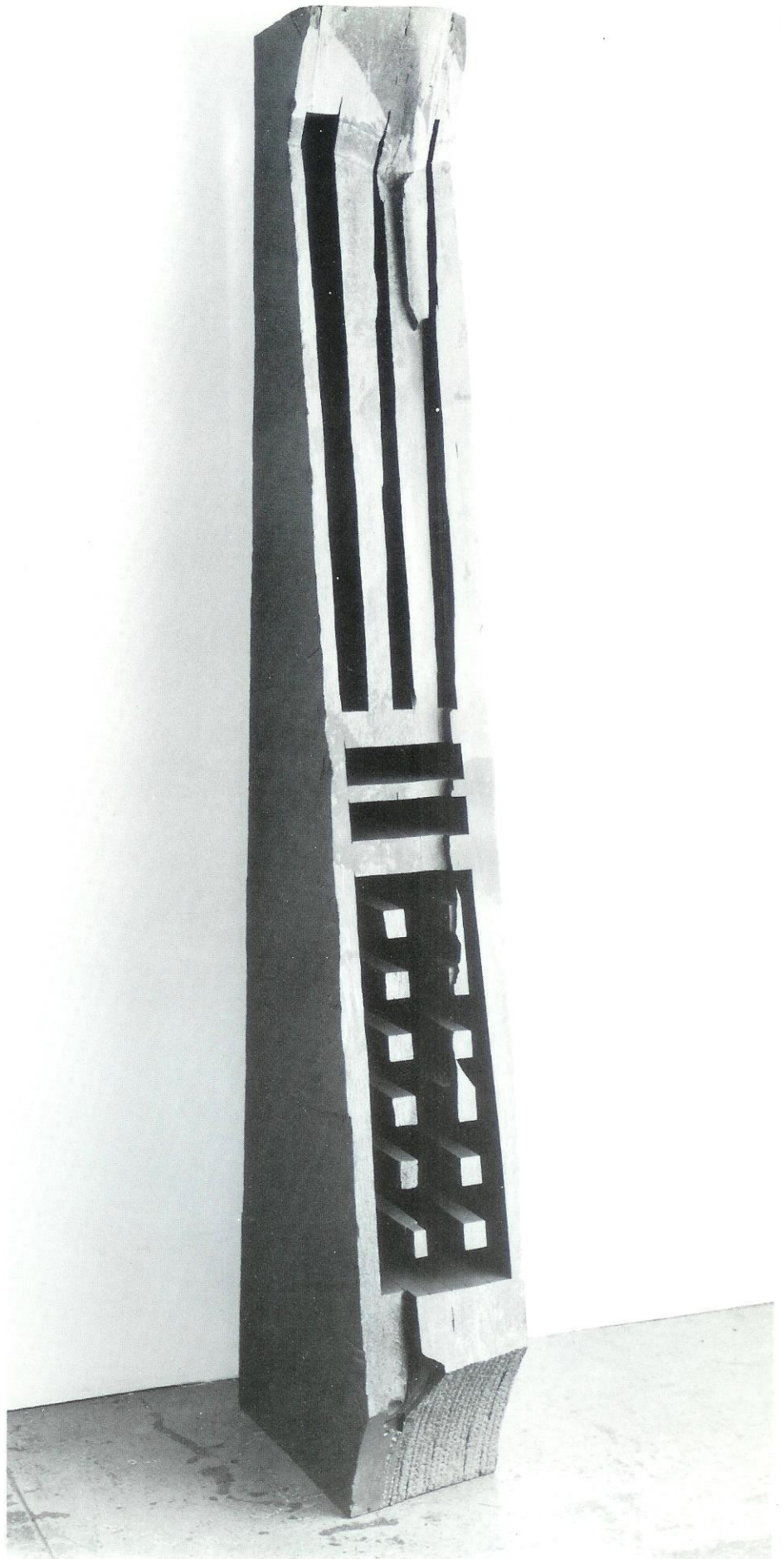
In order to provide a succinct and economical way of leaving a carefully selected piece of slate almost completely alone — so alone he likens his stone to a found object/landscape — Livio Saganic moves from carving to its machine-cutting counterpart. When you first see Saganic's sculpture, the mind tries to unlock it with old keys encoded with how this sort of sculpture is done; it cannot figure out how Saganic made the cuts, created the edge, or (because some are natural) if Saganic made the cuts at all. In truth, Saganic splits the raw slate into slices, cuts them to a plan, then reassembles them. But Saganic's quarry quest for a priori form involves an idealism that drives his regroup of carved and cut elements beyond mere technical transposition. Cutting symbolizes his relation to the stone and emulates elemental and archaic architecture. His evacuation turns back upon itself, implodes, then bears down upon the cutting so hard that only reference to the subtractive architecture of the rock-cut churches of Ethiopia establishes an equilibrium. It is through the explosion of mind, followed by an implosion of feeling in the work, that Livio Saganic's sculpture composes itself. It appears to have put back together the old material (stone), the pedestal and the spatial order of the academic.

— Robert Mahoney

Robert Mahoney is a regular reviewer for *ARTS Magazine*.



*TERROR OF
THE SEA, 1987
Slate, 82"x18"x10"*



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About the Artist

Livio Saganic was born in Yugoslavia and received his artistic education in the United States — a B.F.A. degree from Pratt Institute in 1974 and an M.F.A. from Yale University, in 1976. He has been teaching at Drew University, Madison, New Jersey, where he is now Associate Professor of Art. Livio Saganic lives in New York and there works in a spacious studio that is filled with reminders of his long-standing commitment to the sculptor's most challenging and enduring medium, stone. He has exhibited widely and since 1980 has also created several outdoor and indoor installations on a monumental scale, such as "Special Project, P.S. #1" for the Institute of Arts and Urban Resources, Long Island City (1980), "Art on the Beach" in Battery Park City, New York (1984) a New York City Public Commission, "Rio Grande" (1986-87) and most recently "Materia Prima" for BMW of North America in Oxnard, California (1989). The Albright Gallery, Buffalo, New York, the Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey and Montclair Museum, Montclair, New Jersey hold works by Saganic, as do many private and corporate collections.

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