

*Preview and  
reception  
to meet  
the artist*

Sept. 30  
4-6 p.m.

## **Stephen Porter: Sculpture**

*Quartet #2*

October 1-30, 1983

Sordoni Art Gallery, Wilkes College



## Stephen Porter: Sculpture

Bound by the steep flanks of encircling hills, an open meadow slopes down to a stream behind Stephen Porter's studio in central Pennsylvania. In the raking light of winter afternoons, the sculptures placed here are clearly defined against the pure space of snow. Based on a formal vocabulary of spherical, cylindrical, and cubic solids, the sculptures seem simultaneously linked to the first principles of an elemental nature and to the materials and power of modern industry. Their refinement depends on a sophisticated use and combination of steel, wood, and aluminum, a perfect adjustment of proportion, and the unexpected sensuousness of weathered surfaces and geometric shapes. Because of the high horizon here, the sculptures, whether upright or horizontal, are seen against the earth. Therefore Porter's recent horizontal field groups, several of which are being shown in this exhibition including **Quartet #2, #7, #8, and Four Times #2**, seem a natural parallel to the somewhat earlier vertical sculptures such as **Construction for Outdoors #4, Construction 22, and Arch 2**. In that home space the russet, weathering steel of **Construction for Outdoors #4** hovers above its base, separated from it by the plane of mirroring stainless steel that dissolves in its own reflections. The shadows cast by the curves above are a surprise. They appear more as arcs of light than solid metal. The two angled tops of **Quartet #8** echo the sharp inclines of the landscape, then, with a turn, are revealed as beautiful ellipses released from the confinement of their cylinders. These sculptures and other works of the past decade rest in harmony in this environment, but they seem distinct from it.

In Maine, where he has spent most summers since childhood, one comes closer to the organic foundations of Porter's art. At his summer studio on Great Spruce Head Island, the forest and granite outcroppings are forcefully palpable. Trees downed in storms slowly rot back into the soil, their rusty hulks the color of weathering steel. A repertory of texture and color is provided by the sudden white of an island farmhouse, the yellow glimpse of sunlight in a clearing ahead, the darkening blue summer sea and sky, the metallic sheen of light on water, a glistening black of wet boulders, and everywhere the grayness of weathering wood. On the island, unseen, the impulse of beating waves pervades the senses, each beat distinct but part of the constant rhythm. The even pulse finds a visual expression in sculptures formed of three, four, six, or nine parts. Each element, constant in scale and weight but individuated in shape, sets up a field of beats. Sharing more in common than they vary, the separate elements coalesce as the overlapping theme in a figure that one can follow distinctly and blended at once. The sculpture **Three Times #2** consists of separate parts that vary only in proportion. No tension arises from contrast but the harmony of a chord. The elements in these groups form a web of familiar interrelationships adjusted to one another and in a state of equilibrium. In a recent series of monumental, commissioned sculptures the power of the island environment is more directly sensed: however, these sculptures are absolutely immune to any simplistic representational imagery. The stringently controlled catalogue of shape and color forces one to respond to these works very purely as sculptural forms.

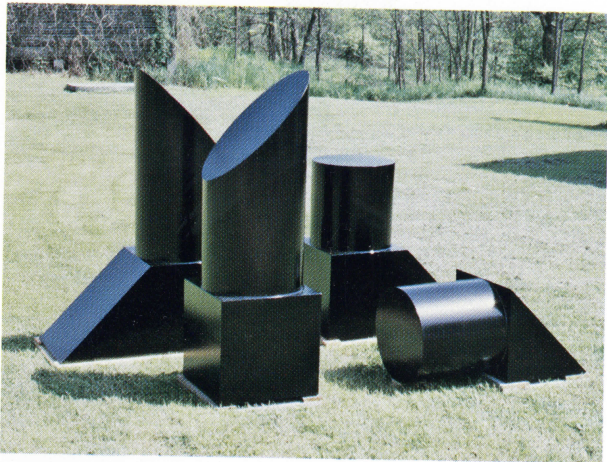
Stephen Porter has achieved a personal idiom within the tradition of modern sculpture. In this context the sculptor is an inventor of three-dimensional forms that he feels have a right sense of balance, weight, proportion, and shape. There is an analytical character to this approach suitable to a technological age, but in the end intuition is the basis for artistic judgement. The personal experience of the sculptor is sublimated into pure form, and individuality is of less importance than an ideal of harmony and perfection. The high level of craftsmanship of Porter's work derives from a deeply felt artistic vocation that he developed quite early. The son and nephew of artists — his father is the photographer, Eliot Porter, his mother, Aline Porter, paints and creates assemblages, and his uncle was the painter, Fairfield Porter — he had from childhood the example of serious artists close at hand. Porter has been influenced by the work of Constantin Brancusi, especially in that sculptor's genius for inventing shapes of great plastic power. Brancusi's hewn, wood sculptures, some of elemental, cylindrical shapes and others of repeated, geometrical solids, such as the **Endless Column**, are part of the modern heritage upon which Porter has drawn; but he has been less interested in the more directly representational character of other sculptures by Brancusi. Porter's method of welding steel masses, his exploration of sculptural ideas in series of related pieces, and his forthright use of industrial materials are also related to the sculpture of the American artist, David Smith. Porter has been less concerned with the shaping of space than Smith was, and his work is therefore less pictorial. Porter's individuality resides, above all, in his ability to elevate the most straightforward shapes into combinations of real elegance and power. The serious, quiet harmony of these clear shapes in space suggest an idealism that rises to a sort of moral imperative.

### Stephen Porter: Sculpture Checklist of the Exhibition

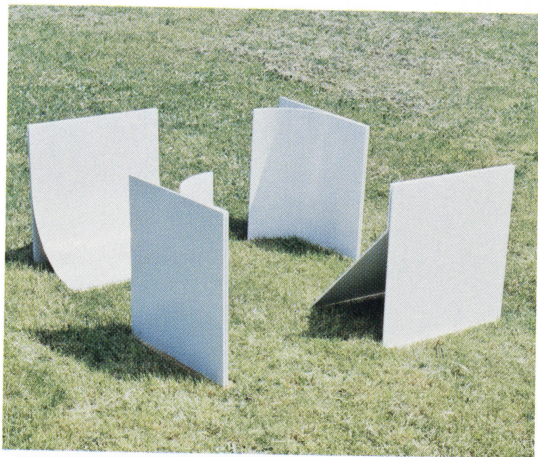
1. **Construction 22**, 1978  
Oak and Aluminum  
52 x 15 x 22
2. **Construction for Outdoors #4**, 1979  
Weathering and Stainless Steel  
88 x 32 x 21
3. **Construction 28**, 1979  
Beech and Aluminum  
76 x 18 x 7
4. **Arch 2**, 1980  
Spruce  
76 x 55 x 12½
5. **Quartet #2**, 1982  
Weathering Steel  
54 x 84 x 84
6. **Construction 29**, 1982  
Beech and Aluminum  
76 x 18 x 7
7. **Quartet #4**, 1982  
Painted Aluminum  
73 x 36 x 12
8. **Quartet #5**, 1982  
Painted Aluminum  
73 x 36 x 12
9. **Quartet #7**, 1982  
Painted Aluminum  
12 x 14 x 14
10. **Quartet #7**, 1982  
Painted Aluminum  
12 x 14 x 14
11. **Three Times #2**, 1982  
Painted Steel  
69 x 78 x 18
12. **Four Times #2**, 1982  
Painted Steel  
27 x 27 x 27
13. **Quartet #8**, 1983  
Painted Steel  
54 x 72 x 54
14. **Quartet #9**, 1983  
Painted Steel  
24 x 48 x 48
15. **Quartet #10**, 1983  
Aluminum  
12 x 10 x 4

Dr. Wilma Stern  
State College, PA  
1983

All measurements in inches. Height precedes width and depth. All works are for sale. Please inquire at the Gallery Office.



*Quartet #8*



*Quartet #9*





**SORDONI ART GALLERY**

STARK LEARNING CENTER · 150 SOUTH RIVER STREET  
WILKES COLLEGE · WILKES-BARRE, PENNSYLVANIA 18703