ANTHONY SORCE

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Cover *Ever Free,* 1997 (Detail)

ANTHONY SORCE: FOUR DECADES

Exhibition curated by
Stanley I Grand

Essays by
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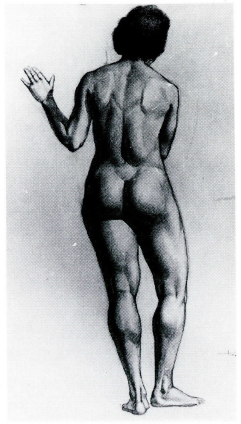
PROGRESS AND INNOVATION: THE ART OF ANTHONY SORCE

Stanley I Grand

1 *Figure Study*, 1955

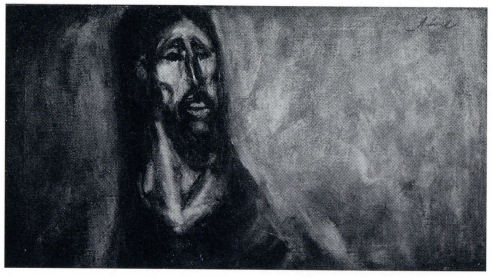


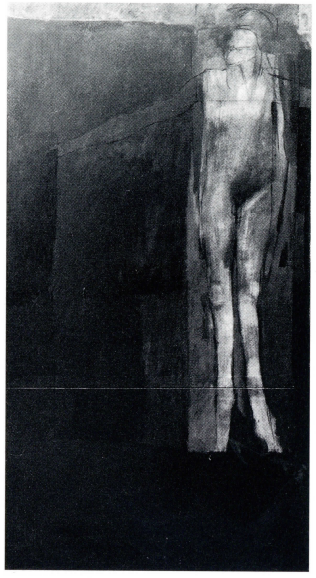
This exhibition and accompanying catalogue represent the first in-depth survey of Anthony Sorce's protean artistic career. At times an innovator, at times a developer, Sorce has consistently experimented with new processes, materials, and aesthetic possibilities. These investigations have manifested themselves in a multiplicity of stylistic expressions linked together by his commitment to such Modernist concerns as formal invention and artistic progress.

Born in 1937, Sorce was raised in a family that valued the arts. As a youngster he frequently visited the galleries of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he developed his lifelong love of the Old Masters and admiration for the avant-garde. In 1955, Sorce won a citywide competition and enrolled at the American Academy of Art, Chicago, where he followed a strict academic curriculum concentrating on drawing from the nude and employing line and value to express three-dimensional forms. His early figure drawings in which units are strung together to form the whole, where the underlying structure, or skeleton, is gradually obscured, but never obliterated, by succeeding layers of muscle, and where the entire sum is governed by a rational, logical, additive approach remain key factors in his subsequent works [Fig. 1]. At the Academy he also received extensive instruction in color theory and the techniques of oil, watercolor, tempera, and casein painting. This very traditional training has formed the basis for his lifelong devotion to craft and to expanding and investigating the physical aspects of process.

After receiving his diploma from the American Academy of Art, Sorce was awarded a scholarship to study with the sculptor Ivan Mestrovic at Notre Dame, where he earned his B.F.A. degree in 1961 and his M.F.A. degree a year later. Typical of Sorce's early work, *Ecce Homo*, 1961, shows his preoccupation with religious themes [Fig. 2]. A subject whose pathos has inspired countless artists, but few as movingly as Rembrandt, *Ecce Homo* ["Behold the Man," John 19: 4–6] shows Christ at the moment of his

2 *Ecce Homo*, 1961
3 *Genesis*, 1964
4 *Death and Resurrection*, 1964





condemnation to be crucified. The work exemplifies Sorce's interest in depicting form in space and his understanding of the expressive use of light, both lessons learned from the Baroque Masters.

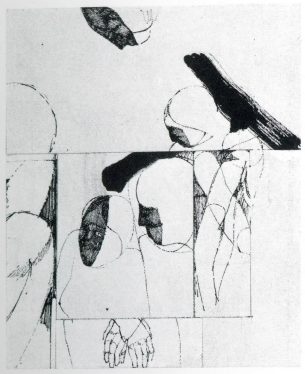
Other large figurative works from this period include *Genesis* and *Death and Resurrection*, both 1964 [Figs. 3 & 4]. Like his earliest figure studies [Fig. 1], the paintings have an additive quality in which units are combined to create a whole. Sorce viewed his compositional components like visual building blocks—like the chapters in a book or the movements in a symphony—that combine to create an integral artistic entity while simultaneously retaining their own artistic individuality. In sum, each section is an independent unit that contributes to, but is not subsumed within, a greater whole. The elongated figures, symbolizing the transmutation of the material into spirit, show the influence of El Greco, whose *Assumption of the Virgin* at the Art Institute of Chicago is well known to Sorce.

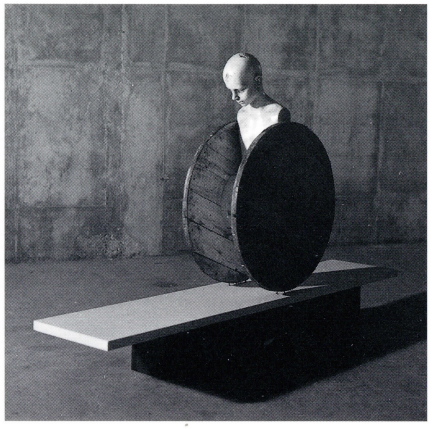
In 1962 Sorce left Notre Dame to accept a teaching appointment at Nazareth College, a small liberal arts school in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Outside the classroom, he met regularly with a select group of faculty, led by Dr. George McMorrow, to discuss philosophical and artistic matters in general and Existentialism in particular.[1] From his study of Existentialism, Sorce came to the dialectic of existence–essence, which increasingly became the content of his art. Yet Sorce never accepted the nihilistic aspect of Existentialism, nor did he embrace fully its preoccupation with the absurd. In this regard, he remained closer to Gabriel Marcel, who maintained his faith, than to Jean-Paul Sartre. Replacing his earlier narrative subject matter and religious content with Existentialism signified a key development in Sorce's art and marks his progression from a youthful, religious iconography to a secular, philosophical art to, finally, one in which formal aesthetic concerns predominate. Indeed, one significant aspect of his art is this development, this ability to grow.

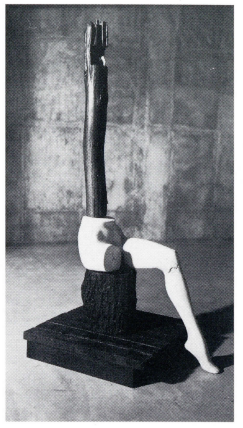
A further consequence of these discussions was that Sorce began to collaborate with a number of other creative individuals. In 1964 he provided the

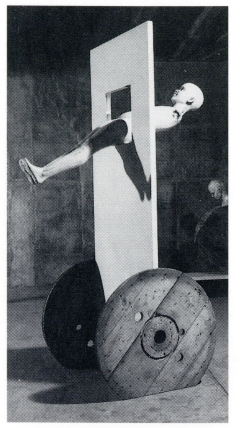
1. Existentialism, of course, was much discussed at the time. Not only did its tenets influence professional philosophers, but it also appealed to a broad range of the intelligentsia. Much contemporary art criticism reflected an Existentialist viewpoint; Peter Selz, for example, had written in the catalogue accompanying the highly influential "New Images of Man" exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art that in response to "solitude and anxiety . . . anguish and dread . . . these new imagists take the human situation, indeed the human predicament rather than formal structure, as their starting point" [*New Images of Man* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959), 11.]. Other disciplines as well had incorporated key Existentialist concepts; alienation, for example, was a subtext in William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956). Finally, the questions of essence, authenticity, and hypocrisy were explored in countless novels, with J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) among the most prominent.

5 *Drawing for The City,* 1964
6 *364-6-10,* 1965
7 *Untitled,* 1965
8 *3-70-6-0,* 1965









illustrations for *La Ciudad/The City,* a book of plays, short stories, and poems (Madrid: Ediciones Magical, c. 1965) by Jorge Diaz de la Jara, a Spanish poet and fellow professor at Nazareth [Fig. 5]. Both of Sorce's *Drawing[s] for The City,* 1964, with their masklike faces and fragile linear contours, poignantly evoke the plight of the anonymous, alienated, and dispersonalized individual in the modern city [Color Plates I & 2]. Sorce also collaborated with the poet Stephen Dobyns on *A Self-Portrait,* 1965.

Toward the end of 1964, Sorce began to experiment with assemblage [Figs. 6, 7, & 8]. In his poem "The Velocity of Cows," Stephen Dobyns described: "Standing there with Tony Sorce / in the dark garage, he looking / for junk, a found object. . . . He is tired of canvas, / the movement of space . . . "[2] Another poet, Ben Tibbs, specifically referred to *364-6-10,* 1965, an assemblage included in this exhibition [Fig. 6]:

> fixed on axis
> and squeezed between
> sides of a large spool
> . . .
> this bald mannequin
> pale and ashen
> quadruple amputee
> stares as if suddenly
> confronted
> by the hub of all
> existing dynamics[3]

Constructed of a mannequin's torso, a wooden wire spool, and other found objects (364-6-10 was stamped into the back of the mannequin's head by the manufacturer),[4] *364-6-10* seems a fitting metaphor of alienation. As in the line drawings for *The City,* the figure's gender is ambiguous, unisex, and hence universal. Armless, bald, and stripped, the mannequin symbolizes the wounded state, and lack of wholeness, of the contemporary individual. Created only two decades after the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps had become widely known, *364-6-10* reflects an awareness of the dehumanizing techniques employed by political entities. As Hannah Arendt noted in her seminal *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), dehumanization by stereotyping, substituting numbers for names, shaving heads, and starving bodies, was an essential prelude to the actual, physical destruction of the victims.

In a sense, *364-6-10* echoes other experiments in figurative sculpture during these years, particularly

2. "The Velocity of Cows," in Stephen Dobyns, *Velocities: New and Selected Poems 1966–1992* (New York: Viking, Penguin Books, 1994), 44.

3. Ben Tibbs, "364-6-10," *Pyramid* 3 (1969): 12.

4. In fact, 364-G-10 rather than 364-6-10 appears to be stamped on the back of the mannequin's head.

those of Trova (in terms of the sleek, streamlined forms) and George Segal (in terms of the palette). Most significant, however, was the influence of Robert Rauschenberg's employment of altered found objects (a ram in *Monogram*, 1959) to create a new unity. The use of wheels, to create a chariot-like platform, recalls a long tradition of mobile characters that flows backward from Alberto Giacometti to the Etruscans and Greeks. *364-6-10* also reflects a widespread interest in assemblage during the early 1960s: in 1961 the Museum of Modern Art had mounted "The Art of Assemblage," with a catalogue by William C. Seitz (*The Art of Assemblage*, 1961). In many ways this exhibition was a success by scandal: John Canaday, the chief art critic at *The New York Times*, denounced the exhibition as "highly perfumed" and "afflicted by fashionable bloat."[5] Despite Canaday, interest in assemblage continued; and five years later, Allan Kaprow chronicled more recent developments in *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings* (1966).

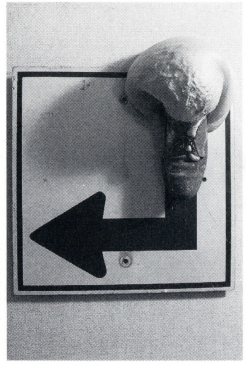
One of Sorce's most ambitious paintings to date, *Once Upon a Life*, 1965, is a large, flat, frieze-like work, in which an ambiguous, enigmatic drama takes place on a shallow stage [Color Plate 3]. To the left, a streamlined man moves toward a large space, empty but for a small circular object that hovers midpoint. In his haste, he distorts the restraining line, whose spiky forms bespeak tension. To the right, a pale, female character reclines, resting her weight on an elbow. Beneath, a heavy figure turns inward, his movement caught as if in a multiple exposure photograph or a Futurist painting. The small picture within the picture, which echoes the larger painting, suggests that the action is occurring in an interior, domestic space. To the far right, facing away from the male, are the legs, buttock, swollen belly, and breasts of a headless figure. An interlocutor, a silent onlooker, peers down upon the scene.

The title of the painting recalls the opening lines of countless children's stories. Like the protagonists in so many such tales and allegories, the man must embark upon a quest or journey in order to fulfill his destiny. The pregnant figure that turns away from the man as he moves outward into his future seems to epitomize that eternal conflict between the wandering male (Odysseus) and the domestic female (Penelope). In Sorce's painting, there is also a quest, but the Existential message is that only by acting—by employing free will, by seeking the unknown—can the essence be transmuted into existence. One cannot, in other words, describe; one must act and experience.

The painting is a summary and transitional work that continues Sorce's preoccupation with narrative content; however, its outlook is philosophical rather than religious. It is sincere rather than ironic, earnest rather than knowing. Overall, it appears somewhat unresolved: the large void, for example. In many ways the work seems more like a colored drawing than a painting. Nonetheless it is a harbinger of future fig-

5. Quoted by William C. Seitz [the exhibition's curator] in *Art in the Age of Aquarius: 1955–1970* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1991), 41.

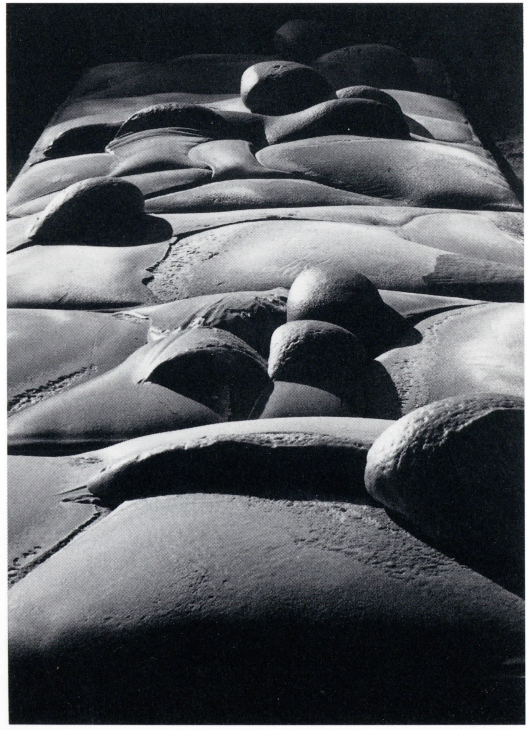
9 *Turn*, 1966
10 *Untitled Landscape*, 1967



ure–ground investigations and a more visual, abstract language.

Although Sorce continued to explore the themes of growth, change, emergence, being and nothingness, and other Existentialist concerns throughout the mid-sixties, he increasingly came to believe that: "The significance of art today is not in the images produced (i.e. Pop, Op, Surrealism, etc.) but rather in the expansion of media."[6] Fortuitous at this time, the Upjohn Company in Kalamazoo decided to make rigid polyurethane foam available to a limited number of local artists. One of the early beneficiaries of this decision, Sorce, who had long been interested in artistic innovation, began investigating the aesthetic possibilities of polyurethane foam.

Working in polyurethane involved combining a binder and a catalyst. Much like yeast causing dough to rise, the resultant mixture expanded quickly in a ratio

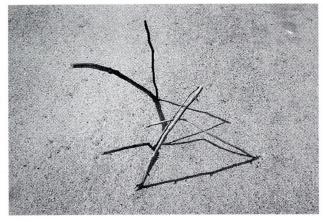


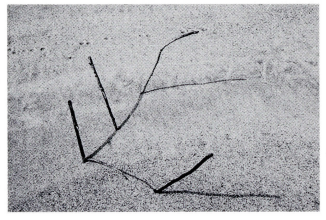
of 30 to 1. Sorce's earliest experiments with the new material incorporated found objects such as traffic signs and shoes, which gave the works both Dada and Pop references [Fig. 9]. Subsequently, Sorce would stretch ordinary bedsheets on a frame and then pour the polyurethane onto one section at a time. As he worked he cut slits in the sheets in order to allow the medium to rise and swell. Thus the material and chance became participants in the creative process. After his move to Rochester, New York, in the fall of 1967, Sorce continued to work almost exclusively with polyurethane. *Untitled Landscape*, 1967, is typical of the extruded form floor reliefs so suggestive of gardens or contained landscapes he created during the late 1960s [Fig. 10].

With polyurethane Sorce found a material through which he could express his underlying content in an abstract and visual way. In a 1972 letter he observed: "Aesthetically and philosophically I am concerned with the Existentialists' notion of emergence, the continual process of coming into being, the dynamic

6. Anthony Sorce, undated statement c. 1969.

11 *Signed City Block,* 1969
12 *Alphabets,* 1969





flux of life—the painful and rewarding course of growth and creation."[7] The material—with its intertwined swellings and depressions, its anatomical, sexual, and fecund forms—perfectly expressed his themes of growth, emergence, and becoming. Like the large Seurat in the Art Institute, these works express a moment frozen in time. Moreover, polyurethane represented a new material for a new time. Like many others—the Abstract Expressionists had used Duco paint, the Dadaists found objects—Sorce was intent upon employing the industrial products of his time. Sorce's commitment to truth in materials, along with a desire to escape the constriction of the frame, were to become characteristic of his later work.

The polyurethane foam experimental reliefs led to a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1968, which enabled him to move to New York City. Responding to the vitality of the New York art scene, Sorce's work developed in several directions simultaneously. In a gesture incorporating elements of conceptual and performance art, irony, found objects, and an homage to Marcel Duchamp's signed urinal, Sorce signed a city block [Fig. 11]. His *Signed City Block,* bounded by Wooster, Prince, Grand, and Greene streets in Soho was created on May 25, 1969, as part of a group project called "Streetworks III." In other works, such as *Alphabets,* 1969, he used twigs and their cast shadows to create an alphabet by the seashore [Fig. 12]. The sparse linear quality of these pieces, which were promptly destroyed by the elements, recalls Harry Callahan's minimal photographs of wild flowers, weeds, and sticks against a white ground. (Sorce has described his *Alphabet* work as "drawing with the elements and capturing the result with a camera.") Other seaside works included *Signed Atlantic Ocean,* which involved the ocean's participation in both their creation and their destruction [Fig. 13]. These works reflected Sorce's awareness of, and admiration for, Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning Drawing,* 1953.

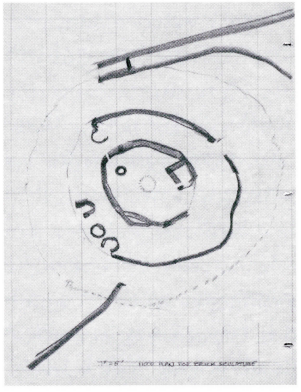
These private, conceptual, and ephemeral works were created during a period of great social change. Although intended as nonpolitical, aesthetic investigations, in retrospect they appear, to this writer, to ask pointed questions such as "Who owns the earth?" at a time when the United States was actively at war in Southeast Asia. They also reflect a general rebelliousness and antiestablishmentarianism characteristic of the 1960s. Considering how commercial the art world has become, it is hard to recall that many artists in the 1960s actively rejected the fetishistic, commodity aspect of art. Some artists refused to show in galleries and museums, while others created happenings and other transitory, nonsalable works of art. Still others employed nontraditional and impermanent materials (Sorce's use of sand and sun for example) or displayed their works in anonymous exhibitions (stressing the art rather than the cult of personality) or guerrilla theater manifestations (from the Revolutionary War to the Viet Cong, guerrilla tactics have been an effective means of fighting imperialism).

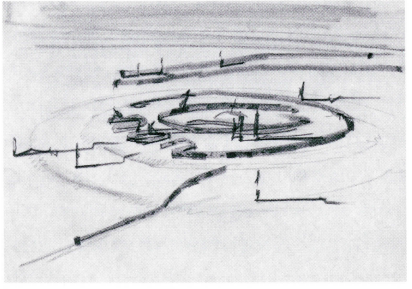
7. Anthony Sorce, letter dated May 19, 1972.

13 *Signed Atlantic Ocean*, 1969
14 *Brick and Earth Sculpture*, 1970
15 *Brick and Earth Sculpture*, 1970

Sorce also designed a number of earthworks that were never executed [Figs. 14 & 15]. These projects represented his own interests in the employment of nontraditional materials to create nontraditional works for nontraditional sites, as well as an awareness of other artists, such as Michael Heizer, Dennis Oppenheim, or Robert Smithson. These works should also be understood in the context of an increasing awareness of ecological issues that began with the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), continued with the back-to-the-land movement, and culminated in the first Earth Day in April 1970.

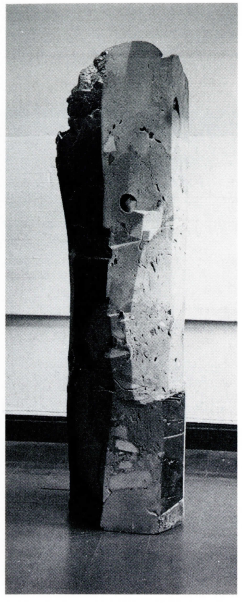
In 1969 Sorce began a series of rigid polyurethane foam *Totems* [Fig. 16]. After forming the shapes, he would cut into the polyurethane to reveal the very jewel-like inner cellular structure and colors. (Other sculptors then working in nontraditional materials included Louise Bourgeois, Eva Hesse, Louise Nevelson, and Richard Stankiewicz.) The monolithic Totems evoked both ancient monuments such as Stonehenge as well as the verticality of the New York skyline. Unlike the former, however, the Totems represent the opposite of permanence. Over time, sunlight has broken down their chemical structure. This self-destructive quality, however, now seems to be a part of their meaning; they have become metaphors of the cycle of birth and decay, an industrial memento mori. Ephemeral, like the conceptual ocean pieces, they reflect the values of a civilization that no longer believes in permanence.





Shown in 1970 at the Jewish Museum and subsequently at the Wichita Art Museum, the Totems received mixed critical response.[8] Gordon Brown found reason to both praise and condemn the work. "Sorce works with both intense and muted colors which he shapes and hacks at . . . producing a perfect realization of Abstract Expressionism in sculpture. There is no denying that this is an original idea and that one senses strongly the actions he performed to cre-

8. In conjunction with the exhibition, the Wichita Art Museum commissioned Sorce to create a pair of Totems.



ate the work, which gives it a living quality."[9] But Brown had problems with the material itself: "I honestly believe that his sculpture has an ugly shine to it."[10] So did Hilton Kramer, who wrote that "Mr. Sorce's sculpture is something of a puzzlement. He shapes polyurethane foam into fat columnar forms that have all the appearance of giant ceramics. I find it odd that so much technical finesse should be invested in making one material resemble another when there is so little discernible esthetic advantage in the process."[11] Sorce, on the other hand, felt that the critics had misunderstood his Totems by failing to differentiate the surface qualities of polyurethane cellular structures from those of other, more traditional materials.

In 1972, Sorce created a number of polyurethane sculptures in the courtyard of the Hudson River Museum. Here the installation stressed the interactive nature of the work. Viewers were encouraged to move the lightweight pieces around, to construct their own nonstatic environment, to embrace chance and randomness, and thereby to break down the barrier between the object and themselves (a concept explored earlier in *Once Upon a Life*). This participatory approach, this desire to extend boundaries, and this emphasis on open forms are also found in his assemblages (recall Dobyns's observation) and later in his polyurethane poured pieces. Finally, in encouraging the viewer to assume an active role in the art, this installation implicitly, if not explicitly, promoted the concept of questioning authority, which was a widely held belief at the time.

After the Totems, Sorce continued to investigate the aesthetic properties of polyurethane, but now as a painting, rather than a sculptural, medium. These experiments led to shaped works and Open Form "antiground" paintings such as *Untitled (Scherzo)*, 1972 [Color Plate 6]. In these works, Sorce employed a wide variety of techniques, including gestural brushstrokes and scumbled layers of paint, to apply polychrome acrylic pigments onto transparent polyethylene sheets. When dry, he peeled off the thin, flexible layers of paint film, which he then cut into different shapes. Overlapping, folding, and cutting the fine layers of pure color, he created painted collages. Typically he would expose prior layers of paint film and thereby produce an actual, rather than illusionistic, depth. Since the layers were primarily opaque, rather than transparent, they served to reinforce the sculptural, low relief quality of the work. When complete, the work was laminated onto the wooden support using rhoplex. The construction of these Open Form paintings, therefore, involved two distinct processes: (1) the painting stage and (2) the composing stage. The separation was more than sim-

9. G. B. [Gordon Brown], "Beautiful Painting and Sculpture," *Arts Magazine* (April 1970): 55.

10. Ibid.

11. Hilton Kramer, "Variety Marks 3 Exhibitions at the Jewish Museum," *The New York Times* (March 18, 1970): 40.

17 *Lumina Series VIII*, 1980

ply one of process; it represented Sorce's assault on the traditional way of making a painting in which the two steps are closely interrelated.

Having no predetermined ground, the image formed its own ground organically creating a unity of image and form. According to Sorce his intent was to unify figure and ground and thereby continue the advancement of modern art: "The Impressionists broke up color, the Cubists broke up form, the early abstract painters (Wassily Kandinsky, Kasimir Malevich, and Piet Mondrian) eliminated subject matter. I eliminated ground considerations." Sorce's desire to further artistic progress continues a tradition that E. H. Gombrich has explored well in his classic, 1952 essay, "The Renaissance Conception of Artistic Progress and its Consequences," (republished in *Norm and Form: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance*, 1966). Thus, in some ways, Sorce is an exemplar of Modernism's obsession with the new, even at a time when the concept of the vanguard itself was increasingly coming into question by critics and authors such as George Kubler, Hilton Kramer, and Roger Shattuck.[12]

Throughout the 1970s and '80s Sorce explored the possibilities of film painting. As he did so the work changed from organic to geometric to painterly. His palette went from bright colors, organic forms and irregular shapes, as in *Untitled (Scherzo)*, to the monochromatic palette and geometric structure of polygonal shaped works like The Speed Art Museum's *Untitled*, 1977 [Color Plate 7]. Although other artists, including Elizabeth Murray, Dorothea Rockburne or Frank Stella, were also exploring shaped canvases, Sorce's method of painting was quite different. Rather than creating objects, he was more interested in deconstructing or breaking down the idea of making a painting. In breaking down closed barriers, Sorce's open, "antiform" paintings dematerialized the object and shared affinities with others involved in process art.[13] This line of development culminated when Sorce reintroduced color and a painterly, expressionistic approach in works such as *Lumina Series VIII*, 1980, and *Matins*, 1981, which represents the end of the polygonal paintings [Fig. 17 and Color Plate 8]. Thereafter, in works like *Ninth Hour*, 1983, he returned to a rectangular canvas which served as the support for his "collaged" acrylic films [Color

12. See for example George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962); Hilton Kramer, "The Age of the Avant-Garde," *The Age of the Avant-Garde: An Art Chronicle of 1956–1972* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), 3–19; Roger Shattuck, "The Demon of Originality," *The Innocent Eye: On Modern Literature and the Arts* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1984), 62–81.

13. Robert Morris, one of the founders of Minimalism, wrote an influential article "Anti-Form," *Artforum* (April 1968): 30–33, that questioned many of the assumptions of that aesthetic.

Plate 9]. Curiously, his work now developed in the opposite direction from the earlier polygonal paintings; that is to say, the paintings increasingly become less expressionistic and more reductive as seen in *Untitled (AVS/Glowing Presence)*, 1989–92 [Color Plate 10].

In many areas the end of the 1980s saw a general mood of downsizing, a retreat from the exuberances and excesses of the decade. Responding to the retrenchment on Wall Street, the art market collapsed, especially in the contemporary area. In the 1990s, Sorce's works have undergone a dramatic shift in scale and technique. Seeking a more intimate engagement with the viewer, he began working exclusively on paper, at first mounting paint film on paper and then working directly on the paper itself. He also began to experiment with a proprietary product called Acryla Weave as his support.

In the Schema Series, he reverted to a more geometric, even constructivist aesthetic [Color Plates 11, 12, & 13]. In the following year, 1995, he eliminated color altogether and substituted dramatic light–dark tenebrism, and mystery in the works from the Caravaggio Suite. The mystery is heightened by uncertainty: are these photographs or paintings? And what do they portray? Some like *Double Circles* seem to document a documentation of an ancient eclipse [Color Plate 15]. Others like *Impost and Spring* suggest architectural ruins [Color Plate 17]. Still others like *Diagonal* suggest everything from lunar vehicle tracks to the incised marks associated with Neolithic cave paintings [Color Plate 16]. Overall, however, they appear like nineteenth-century records of the artifacts from some remote and long gone culture, whose meaning or function is now indecipherable.

After the restraint of the Caravaggio Series, Sorce's work has undergone an explosion of color [Color Plate 19]. Using glazing techniques, hatching, and scumbling, while manipulating the surface with incisions and scratches, he has produced small atmospheric, even Tonalist, paintings which glow like fine polished leather. In fact the surfaces appear to have the waxy quality and depth of color associated with encaustics. What might appear, in a reproduction, as a flat area of color is actually a rich, luminous amalgamation of hues. More recently, in works such as *Siamo in Due I*, 1996–97, Sorce has taken to "drawing" in wet paint [Color Plate 21].

As Anthony Sorce's art has evolved, it continues to be characterized by progress and innovation. In a recent statement, Sorce observed that his "approach to making art is formalistic; i.e., a concentration on the formal elements of art."[14] His is an art of inventiveness, of exploration. In his mature work he is concerned primarily with materials, aesthetic questions, color and light. Nonetheless, his art never becomes sterile or academic because process and discovery are for him an Existential metaphor of eternal becoming, a study in possibilities. Just as the human condition is not static, but always evolving and changing, so has his focus on process become synonymous with his content.

14. Anthony Sorce, letter dated January 18, 1996.

ANTHONY SORCE'S RECENT WORK

John Yau

In the early 1990s, Anthony Sorce, who had become dissatisfied with the large scale of his geometric works [Color Plates 7–10], shifted his focus to a more intimate scale. One suspects that the change was precipitated not only by Sorce's dissatisfaction with the scale of his own works, which since the mid 1960s had often been both physically large and materially insistent, but by his intention to separate his work from the material excesses of much of the art made in the 1980s. As in his earlier work, Sorce's change in scale necessitated the use of different materials and procedures. It wasn't simply that he was going to make his work smaller but that he was determined to reinvent his whole approach to making art. During this period of reconsideration, while working largely on paper, Sorce discovered a durable paper, Acryla Weave, which enabled him to redefine his process, particularly as it involved the way he applied the paint.

Acryla Weave is a hybrid material that combines characteristics associated with the more traditional materials of paper and canvas; it is relatively smooth and yet extremely durable. Its surface can both support acrylic paint and be continually reworked and even scratched and incised. As an artist interested in both painting and sculpture since he was a student at Notre Dame, Sorce found that Acryla Weave enabled him to use various methods to apply and subtract paint, thus developing a physically engaging process. One of the recurring aspects of Sorce's career is his commitment to developing a physically engaged way of making art which is open to chance. As when he poured polyurethane in the '60s [Color Plate 5] and painted, peeled, and assembled films of acrylic paint in the '70s and '80s [Color Plates 6–10], Sorce wants to be simultaneously involved and removed. In this regard, one can say that Sorce's processes have something to do with Abstract Expressionism, particularly as it extends out of Pollock's pouring of paint, as well as utilizing aspects associated with conceptual art.

One of Sorce's reasons for changing his methods around this time may have been the feeling that he was no longer discovering something by using a methodology that had preoccupied him for nearly two decades and that he had exhausted its possibilities. Drawing, he may have believed, would inevitably lead into an area that would enable him to make discoveries, as well as consider what avenues he might wish to explore. In this regard, he was clearing the decks and starting over.

The works of the past five years are intimate in scale and, like his earlier works, hybrid in form. Although they are done on Acryla Weave, which is technically a kind of paper, they should be considered as paintings rather than as drawings. Whereas in the geometric paintings Sorce layered different films of paint together, in the recent works he layers, abuts, scratches, and scrapes away areas of color, which is a combination of acrylic gel and dry pigment. The process is one of addition, juxtaposition, and subtraction, and thus significantly different from the processes he had previously developed, all of which were largely additive.

The other significant difference between the work of the past half-decade and what preceded it is Sorce's evident interest in light and its relationship to color. In both the Caravaggio Suite grisaille paintings [Color Plates 14–17] and those using color [Color Plates 18–20] the viewer senses that a dense rich light is suffusing throughout the composition. Here, the analogy the viewer is tempted to make is to light as an immanent presence, as a moment of spiritual realization. And yet, while the temptation is inevitable, such readings must also take into account the process of layering Sorce uses, as well as the linear scratches, divisions, and forms that have been made in the surface.

The paintings of the last five years can largely be said to belong to one of three groups. In the grisaille paintings, Sorce uses a palette knife and other flat edges to apply the paint medium to the Acryla Weave after he has deliberately placed various silhouettes beneath it. This method of interaction between paint and altered surface can be seen as extending Max Ernst's use of frottage to arrive at an image. In Sorce's work, the paint registers the flat object below, thus causing a destabilized, silhouetted image to appear. The image is destabilized because it is difficult to calculate exactly where it ends and the ground begins. While the image is usually geometric, it neither separates from nor is subsumed by the ground. From a distance, it is as if one were looking at the scratched negative of an aerial photograph of a distant planet. Consequently, one can't tell if it is a man-made image or a natural terrain or both. It is only when one moves closer to the painting that one realizes that it is not a photograph but a painting. The result is disorienting and causes one to question how one identifies whether something is a painting or not.

In paintings like *Evening Light* or *Encounter*, in which Sorce focuses on the interrelationship of light and color, he uses a palette knife and applies the paint in much the same manner as he does in the grisaille works [Color Plates 18 & 20]. The difference is that he applies transparent films of color and then scrapes part of them away. This causes the remaining traces of color to become even more atmospheric. The result is a destabilized relationship between figure and ground, solidity and atmosphere. Images appear to hover within and beneath other images. One is reminded of blurred photographs, as well as dramatic landscapes.

In *Siamo in Due I* or *Offspring*, the third group, Sorce both applies thicker layers of color and uses color to divide the composition into distinct geometric areas [Color Plates 21 & 22]. He then scratches lines into the surface, causing the color beneath to show through. Typically, the lines are rough and awkward because of the resistance of the paint to the instrument's edge. Of the three groups, it is this group in which the surface is most physically insistent.

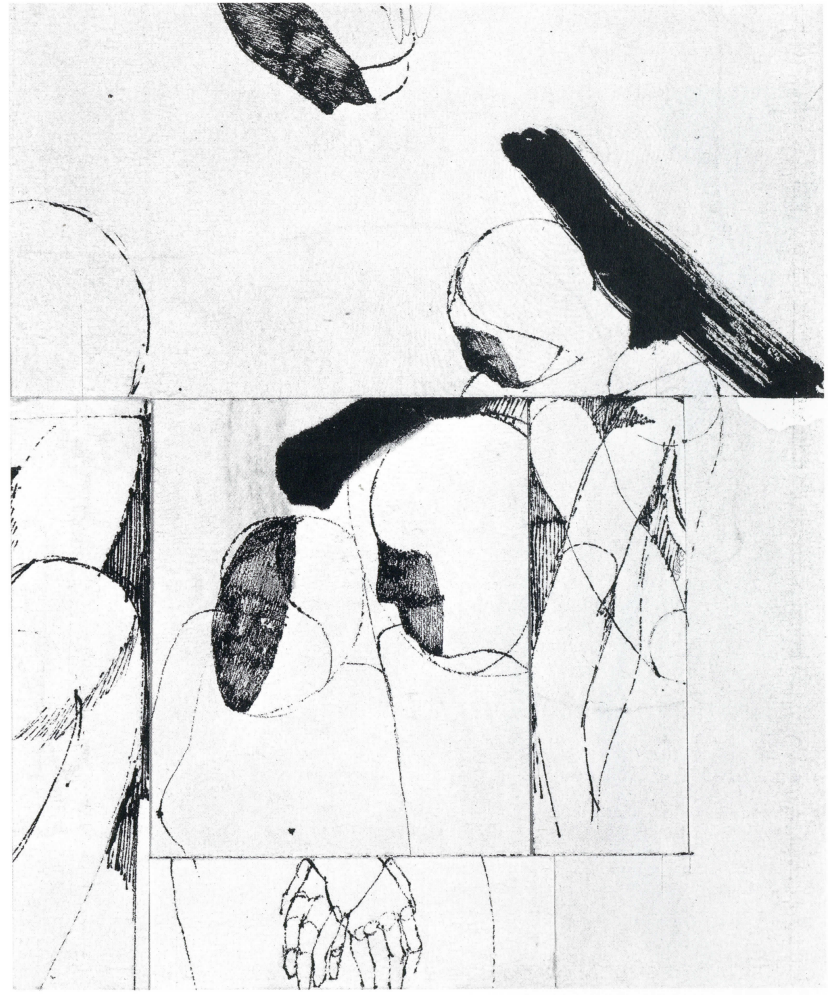
It seems evident that Sorce is after the most difficult unity to achieve, the synthesis of the material (layers of paint) and the spiritual (the presence of everlasting light). The degree to which we feel he is successful depends on our orientation toward spiritual matters and questions such thinking inevitably raises. Is light everlasting or is it another material in a world of things? Sorce's work seems not to settle into either perceptual category, but rather to address both at the same time. To Sorce's credit, he doesn't try to make us see the work in a narrow, didactic way. Consequently, we sense the artist's own faith in us as viewers.

Since Sorce began working with polyurethane in the late 1960s, he has followed an unpredictable and fruitful course. His commitment to process, however, is not something we should take for granted, because, in fact, few artists ever live up to the standards of such a demanding ideal. His incorporation of new techniques and materials has always been directed toward what might be discovered rather than what could be made of them.

Sorce's recent processes have led him to make paintings that seem to be photographs, though not in the usual sense in which we use that word. His "photographs" not only evoke the various worlds that exist beyond what we can see under natural conditions but also underscore the various devices we use to enhance both looking and our memory of looking. His paintings convey the limitedness of our sight by evoking what might exist beyond, within, and beneath what we look at every day. Finally, Sorce is an artist whose concern with materials has never led him to celebrate materiality. In this regard, he has remained faithful to the possibility that art can have a spiritual presence in the viewer's life, can evoke something we might not otherwise see. And in doing so, Sorce's art is able to bring us to a moment of wonderment that all too often we have ignored or rejected.

1
Drawing for The City, 1964
ink on paper
7 x 5½

2
Drawing for The City, 1964
ink on paper
7 x 5½



3
Once Upon a Life, 1965
acrylic on canvas
72 x 144

4
364-6-10, 1965
assemblage
53 x 80 x 16

5
Emergence, 1969
painted rigid polyurethane
70 x 70

6
Untitled (Scherzo), 1972
rhoplex, acrylic and nacreous pigments on paper
32 x 40

7
Untitled, 1977
acrylic on board
49 x 82
Collection of The Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky

8
Matins, 1981
rhoplex on wood
61 x 74

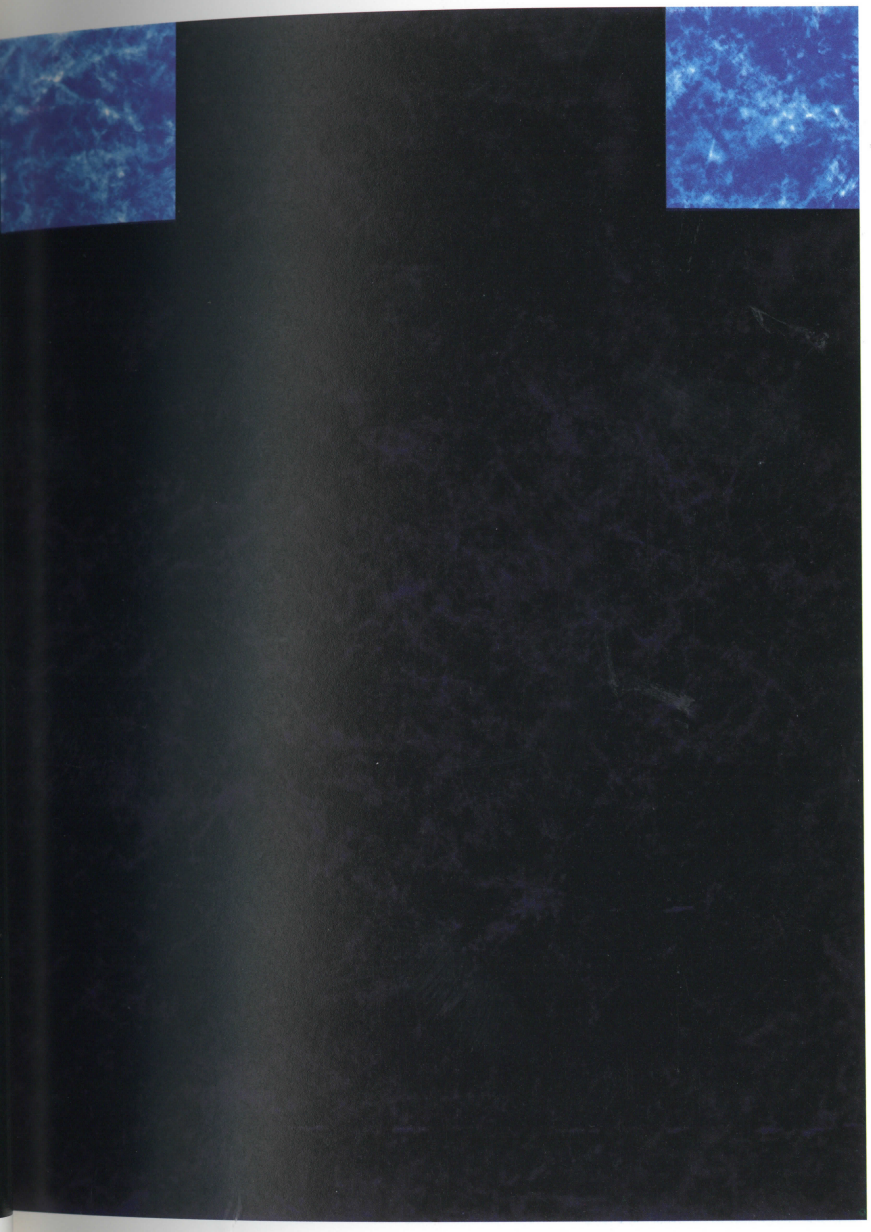
9
Ninth Hour, 1983
rhoplex on canvas
80 x 69

10
Untitled (AVS/Glowing Presence), 1989–92
rhoplex on canvas
90 x 65

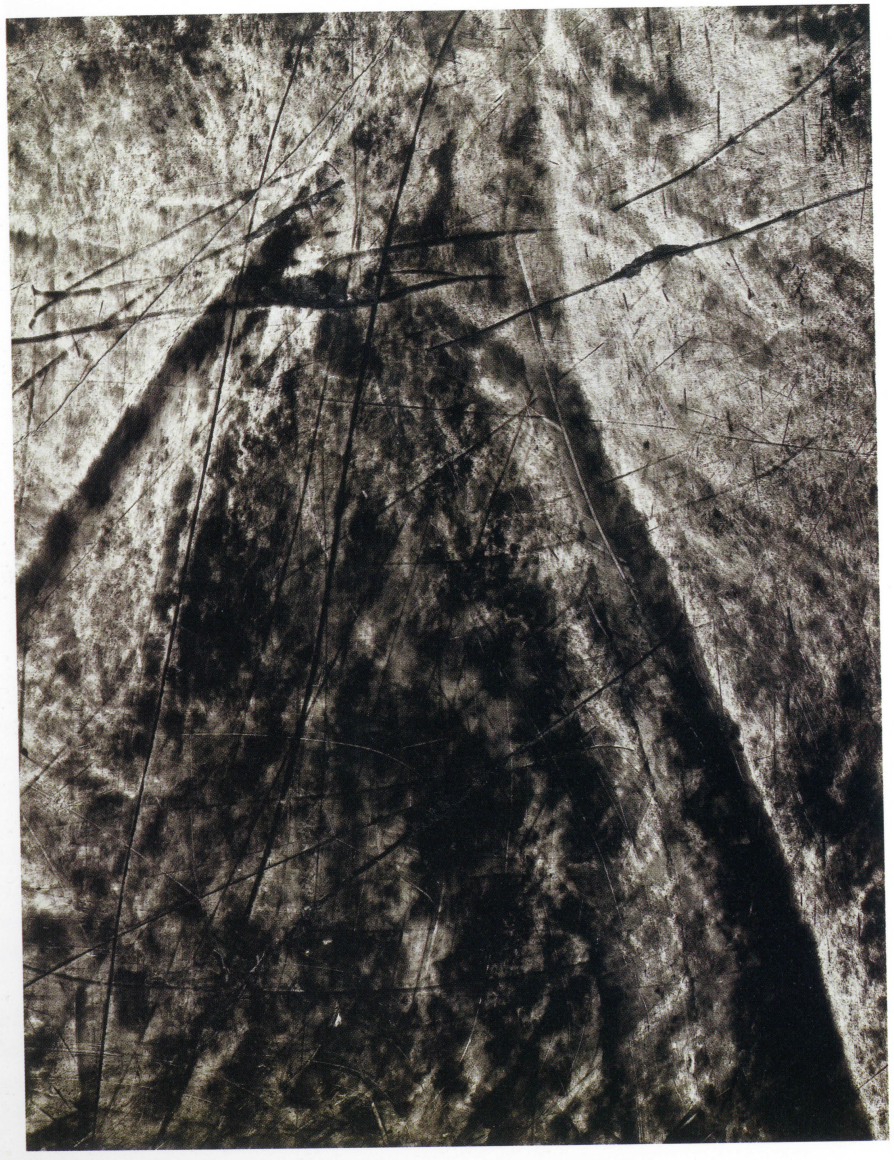
11
Schema, Orange 1994, 1994
acrylic gel, dry pigment on Acryla Weave
24 x 18

12
Schema, Blue 1994, 1994
acrylic gel, dry pigment on Acryla Weave
24 x 18

13
Schema, Red 1994, 1994
acrylic gel, dry pigment on Acryla Weave
24 x 18



14
Metaphor, Caravaggio Suite 1995, 1995
acrylic gel, dry pigment on Acryla Weave
9½ x 7¼



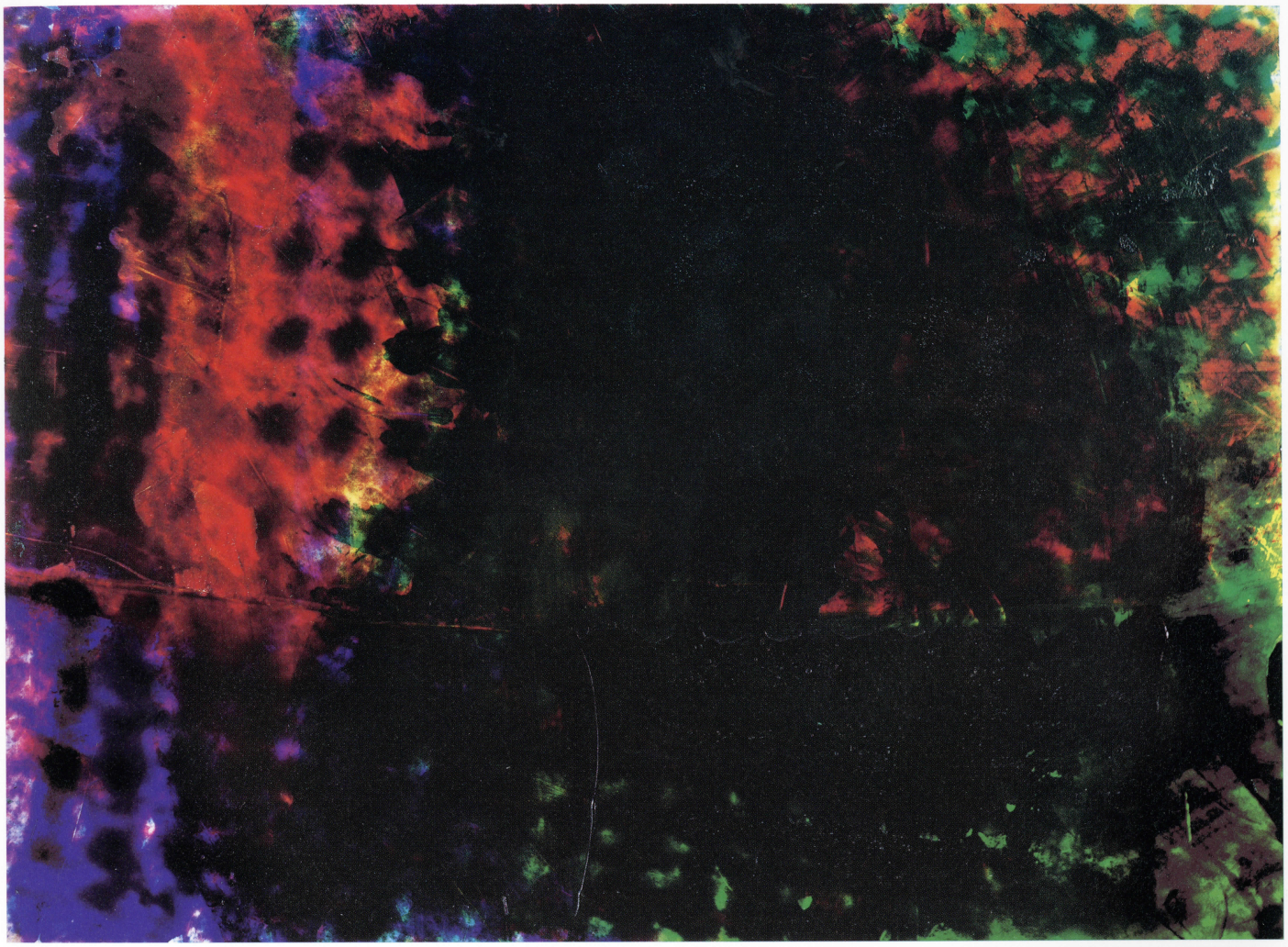
15
Double Circles, Caravaggio Suite 1995, 1995
acrylic gel, dry pigment on Acryla Weave
9¾ x 7½

16
Diagonal, Caravaggio Suite 1995, 1995
acrylic gel, dry pigment on Acryla Weave
9¾ x 7½

17
Impost and Spring, Caravaggio Suite 1995, 1995
acrylic gel, dry pigment on Acryla Weave
9¾ x 7½

18
Evening Light, 1995
acrylic gel, dry pigment on Acryla Weave
11¾ x 8¾

19
Landscape, Summer 1995, 1995
acrylic gel, dry pigment on Acryla Weave
8¾ x 11¾



20
Encounter, 1995
acrylic, acrylic gel, dry pigment on Acryla Weave
7¼ x 7¼

21
Siamo in Due I, 1996–97
acrylic, acrylic gel, dry pigment on Acryla Weave
10 x 8

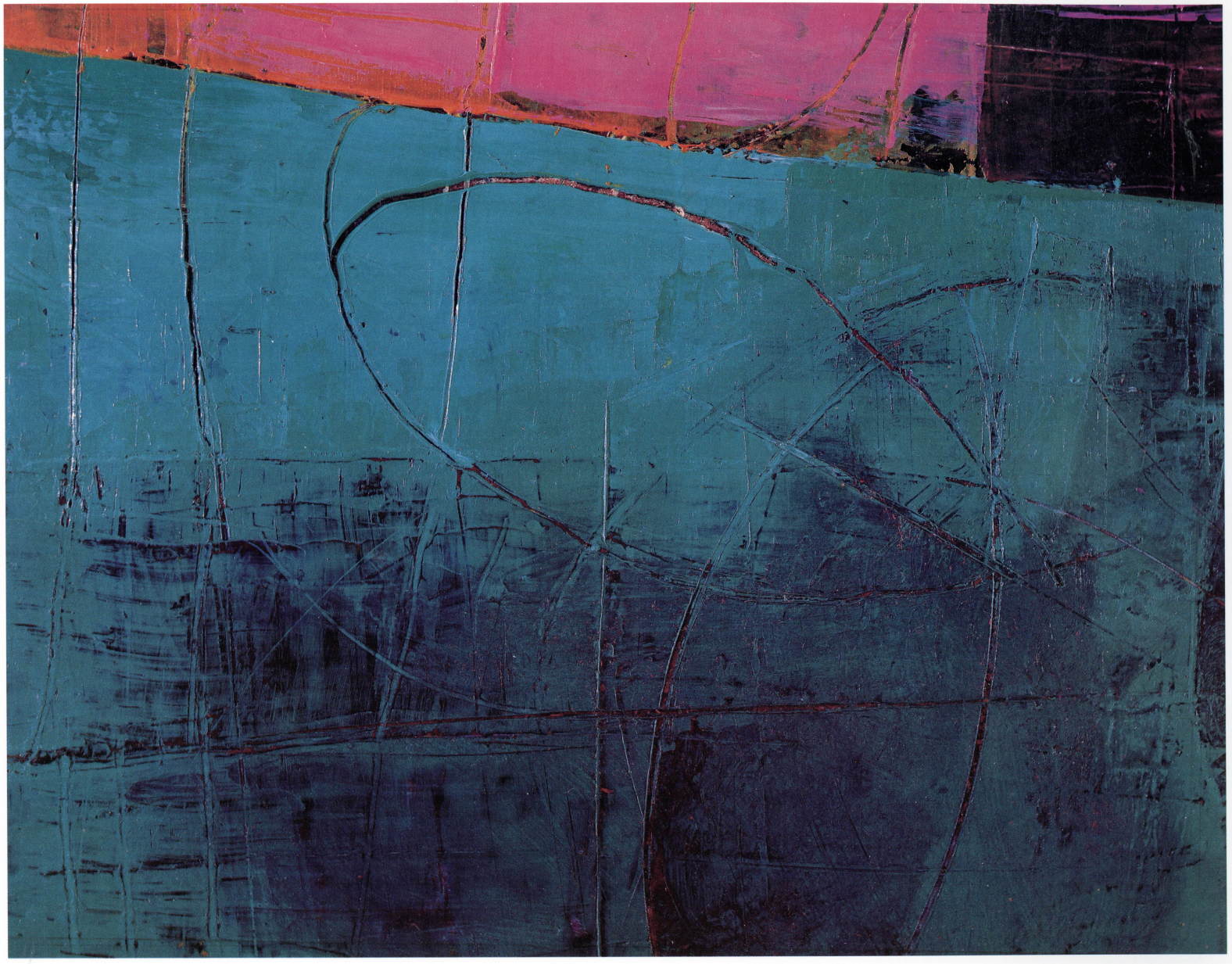
22
Offspring, 1996–97
acrylic, acrylic gel, dry pigment on paper board
11 x 8

23
Transposition, 1996–97
acrylic, acrylic gel, dry pigment on paper
15 x 10¾

24
Prelude, Bach, 1997
acrylic, acrylic gel, dry pigment on paper
10¾ x 8¼

25
Prelude II, 1997
acrylic, acrylic gel, dry pigment on paper
10¾ x 8½

26
Vergil's Melody, 1997
acrylic, acrylic gel, dry pigment on paper
8¾ x 11¼



27
Ever Free, 1997
acrylic, acrylic gel, dry pigment on paper
9 x 12

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Note: Height precedes width precedes depth.
All dimensions given in inches.

Drawing for The City
1964
ink on paper
7 x 5½
Courtesy of Lance Fung Gallery, New York City

Drawing for The City
1964
ink on paper
7 x 5½
Courtesy of Lance Fung Gallery, New York City

Once Upon a Life
1965
acrylic on canvas
72 x 144
Collection of the Artist

364-6-10
1965
assemblage
53 x 80 x 16
Courtesy of Lance Fung Gallery, New York City

Emergence
1969
painted rigid polyurethane
70 x 70

Untitled (Scherzo)
1972
rhoplex, acrylic and nacreous pigments on paper
32 x 40

Untitled
1977
acrylic on board
49 x 82
Collection of The Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky
Gift of Henry V. Heuser, Jr.

Matins
1981
rhoplex on wood
61 x 74
The Maslow Collection

Hearts of Space
1983
rhoplex on canvas
48¼ x 67½
Private Collection

Untitled (AVS/Glowing Presence)
1989–92
rhoplex on canvas
90 x 65
Private Collection

Schema, Orange 1994
1994
acrylic gel, dry pigment on Acryla Weave
24 x 18

Schema, Blue 1994
1994
acrylic gel, dry pigment on Acryla Weave
24 x 18

Schema, Red 1994
1994
acrylic gel, dry pigment on Acryla Weave
24 x 18

Metaphor, Caravaggio Suite 1995
1995
acrylic gel, dry pigment on Acryla Weave
9½ x 7¼
Private Collection

Double Circles, Caravaggio Suite 1995
1995
acrylic gel, dry pigment on Acryla Weave
9¾ x 7½
The Maslow Collection

Diagonal, Caravaggio Suite 1995
1995
acrylic gel, dry pigment on Acryla Weave
9¾ x 7½
The Maslow Collection

Impost and Spring, Caravaggio Suite 1995
1995
acrylic gel, dry pigment on Acryla Weave
9¾ x 7½
The Maslow Collection

Evening Light
1995
acrylic gel, dry pigment on Acryla Weave
11¾ x 8¾
Courtesy of Joan Prats Gallery, New York City

Landscape, Summer 1995
1995
acrylic gel, dry pigment on Acryla Weave
8¾ x 11¾
Private Collection

Encounter
1995
acrylic, acrylic gel, dry pigment on Acryla Weave
7¼ x 7¼
Private Collection

Siamo in Due I
1996–97
acrylic, acrylic gel, dry pigment on Acryla Weave
10 x 8
Collection of Jennifer and Steven Holtzman,
New York City

Offspring
1996–97
acrylic, acrylic gel, dry pigment on paper board
11 x 8
Collection of Gerald Himmel, Chicago

Transposition
1996–97
acrylic, acrylic gel, dry pigment on paper
15 x 10¾
Courtesy of Joan Prats Gallery, New York City

Prelude II
1997
acrylic, acrylic gel, dry pigment on paper
10¾ x 8½
Courtesy of Joan Prats Gallery, New York City

Vergil's Melody
1997
acrylic, acrylic gel, dry pigment on paper
8¾ x 11¼
Private Collection

Pour Soi
1997–98
acrylic, acrylic gel, dry pigment on paper
9 x 12

A Note on the Illustrations

Three important paintings shown in this catalogue could not be included in the exhibiton:

Color Plate 9, Collection of David and Linda Moscow, Chicago
Color Plate 24, Courtesy of Joan Prats Gallery, New York City
Color Plate 27, Courtesy of Joan Prats Gallery, New York City

ANTHONY SORCE

Born: 1937

Resides: New York City

EDUCATION

1965

Study tour Italy and France

1962

University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana; M.F.A.

1961

University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana; B.F.A.

1957

American Academy of Art, Chicago; Diploma

AWARDS/FELLOWSHIPS

1997

Faculty Research Award for Painting, The Research Foundation of The City University of New York

1996

Faculty Research Award for Painting, The Research Foundation of The City University of New York

1975

Faculty Research Award for Painting, The Research Foundation of The State University of New York

1974

Faculty Research Award for Painting, The Research Foundation of The City University of New York

1968

John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship

1964

Frances Award, South Bend Art Center, South Bend, Indiana

1961

Purchase Prize, Chicago Union League Art Exhibit, Chicago

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

1998

Lance Fung Gallery, New York City
Joan Prats Gallery, New York City
Sordoni Art Gallery, Wilkes University, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

1996

Howard Scott/M-13 Gallery (Project Room), New York City

1986

O. K. Harris Works of Art, New York City

1984

O. K. Harris Works of Art, New York City

1982

O. K. Harris Works of Art, New York City

1981

O. K. Harris West, Scottsdale, Arizona

1980

O. K. Harris Works of Art, New York City

1979

O. K. Harris Works of Art, New York City

1977

O. K. Harris Works of Art, New York City

1970

Jewish Museum, New York City
Wichita Art Museum, Wichita, Kansas

1968

Nazareth College of Rochester, Rochester, New York

1966

Kalamazoo Institute of Art, Kalamazoo, Michigan

1965

Kalamazoo College, Kalamazoo, Michigan

1964

Battle Creek Art Center, Battle Creek, Michigan
Institute de Cultura Hispanica, Madrid, Spain
Nazareth College, Nazareth, Michigan
South Bend Art Center, South Bend, Indiana
The Gallery, Kalamazoo, Michigan

1963

Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan

1960

Artist Guild of Chicago, Chicago
Libertyville Art Center, Libertyville, Illinois

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1997

Intimate Universe (Revisited), James Howe Fine Arts Gallery, Kean University, Union, New Jersey
Intimate Universe (Revisited), Robert Steele Gallery, New York City

1995

Fifty Works, AHI Gallery, New York City
Small Paintings, O'Hara Gallery, New York City

1994

To Enchant (Blue), Cynthia McCallister and Bixler Gallery, New York City

1989

Artists of the 80's: Selected Works from the Maslow Collection, Sordoni Art Gallery, Wilkes College, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

1986

The Artists of O. K. Harris, Helander Gallery, Palm Beach, Florida

1985

First Contemporary Art Expo Tokyo, Isetan Gallery, Shinjuku, Tokyo, Japan

1983

Art Today, Ward Gallery, Rochester, New York
O. K. Harris Artists, Zone Art Gallery, Springfield, Massachusetts

1982

Art in the Market Place, Sawhill Gallery, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia
Contemporary American Paintings, Myers Fine Arts Gallery, State University College, Plattsburgh, New York

1981

New York Galleries Showcase, Oklahoma Museum of Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma

1980

Illusionism, O. K. Harris West, Scottsdale, Arizona
Inauguration Exhibition, The Snite Museum of Art, University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana
New York Artist, Members Gallery, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York

1979–80

Critic's Choice, Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson, Mississippi

1977

Art on Paper, Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, North Carolina
O. K. Harris Gallery Artists, Root Art Gallery, Hamilton College, Clinton, New York
O. K. Harris Gallery Artists, Slippery Rock College Art Museum, Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania

1976

Contemporary Reflections 1975–76, Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut

1972

Sculptures for N. Howe Participation Piece/20th Century Sculpture Exhibition, Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, New York
Summer Graphic Show, Katona Art Museum, Katona, New York
Young Printmakers, Pace Graphics, New York City

1971

Ten Artists, Westbeth Galleries, New York City
Westbeth Artists, Westby Gallery, Glassboro State College, Glassboro, New Jersey

1970

O. K. Harris Show, Newark College of Engineering, Newark, New Jersey
Second Flint Invitational, Flint Institute of Art, Flint, Michigan

1969

Ivan Karp Presents, Visual Arts Gallery, New York City

1967

New Acquisitions, Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, Kalamazoo, Michigan

1965

Alumni Exhibition, University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana
Area Exhibition, Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, Kalamazoo, Michigan
Michiana Biennial Exhibition, South Bend Art Center, South Bend, Indiana
Michigan Painters and Printmakers, Grand Rapids Art Museum, Grand Rapids, Michigan

1964–65

Critic's Choice, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan
New York's World Fair: Michigan Room, Pavilion of American Interiors, Flushing, New York

1964

Area Exhibition, Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, Kalamazoo, Michigan
First National Print Exhibit, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan
Midyear Exhibition, Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio
North Mississippi Valley Invitational Exhibition, Illinois State Museum, Springfield, Illinois

1963

Area Exhibition, Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, Kalamazoo, Michigan
Michiana Biennial Exhibition, South Bend Art Center, South Bend, Indiana
Three-Man Show, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan
Union League Exhibition, Chicago Union League, Chicago
Watercolor USA, Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, Missouri

1962

Midyear Exhibition, Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio
Professional Artist Exhibition, Fine Arts Gallery, Exposition Building, State Fair, Springfield, Illinois
Watercolor Exhibition, Artist Guild of Chicago Gallery, Chicago

1961

American Watercolor Society Exhibit, National Academy of Design, New York City
Liturgical Art Show, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois
Michiana Biennial Exhibition, South Bend Art Center, South Bend, Indiana
Professional Artist Exhibition, Fine Arts Gallery, Exposition Building, State Fair, Springfield, Illinois
Union League Exhibition, Chicago Union League, Chicago

1960

Professional Artist Exhibition, Fine Arts Gallery, Exposition Building, State Fair, Springfield, Illinois

1959

Member Exhibition, Artist Guild of Chicago Gallery, Chicago
Professional Artist Exhibition, Fine Arts Gallery, Exposition Building, State Fair, Springfield, Illinois

1958

Chicago Artists Exhibition, Navy Pier, Chicago
Member Exhibition, Artist Guild of Chicago Gallery, Chicago

1957

Chicago Artists Exhibition, Navy Pier, Chicago
Member Exhibition, Artist Guild of Chicago Gallery, Chicago
Union League Exhibition, Chicago Union League, Chicago

SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

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Capital Management International, New York City
Chase Manhattan Bank, New York City
Episcopal Church Pension Fund, New York City
General Reinsurance Corporation
IBM/The Continental Group, Stamford, Connecticut
Jurist Company Inc., New York City
Kalamazoo Institute of Art, Kalamazoo, Michigan
Kelly, Warren & Dyre, New York City
The Maslow Collection, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania
Owens-Corning Fiberglass Corporation, Toledo, Ohio
Penn Central, New York City
Pepsico, Purchase, New York
Security Pacific National Bank, Los Angeles, California
Sherman and Sterling, New York City
The Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky
TRW Inc., Cleveland, Ohio
Upjohn Company, Kalamazoo, Michigan
Vesti Trust, Boston, Massachusetts
Wichita Art Museum, Wichita, Kansas

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———. "Boiling Plastic Formula for Art." *The Wichita Eagle* (January 24, 1970).

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O'Toole, Judith H. *Artists of the 80's: Selected Works from the Maslow Collection.* Wilkes-Barre, Pa.: Sordoni Art Gallery, Wilkes College, 1989.

"A Resourceful Artist." *Notre Dame Alumnus* (December 1969): 22.

Schjeldahl, Peter. "Designed for Use Rather Than Delectation." *The New York Times* (April 5, 1970).

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The artist dedicates this catalogue and exhibition to his wife Gloria, his children Damian, Becket, and Juliet, and his parents Ann and Joseph.
This exhibition and catalogue would not have been possible without the enthusiastic support of Anthony Sorce.

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Nancy L. Krueger
Earl W. Lehman
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The Maslow Collection, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania
Marilyn O'Boyle
Joseph and Mildred Patera
Pennsylvania Council on the Arts
Charles Pittenger
Lisa Parrott Rolfe
Brendan Rooney/ Joan Prats Gallery, NYC
Rosida (Rose) Russotto
Robert Schweitzer
Howard Scott/M-13/Howard Scott Gallery, NYC
Ann and Joseph Sorce
Gloria, Damian, Becket, and Juliet Sorce
Joseph M. Sorce
Paula Sorce
The Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky
Ev Stone
Ben Tibbs
Michael Walls
John Yau
Private Collectors

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Wilkes University

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