

your own pieces. And the best way to experience the sculpture is to stand in the middle.”

*Chonk On* is appealing because, unlike di Suvero’s classic open monumental sculptures that reach out into the sky in an almost transcendental way, it contrasts soft and hard, tough and playful in a

articulation where rigid beams join at the peak and the lusciously curved base with its violin-style S holes and simple notched construction. Everything works together with breathtaking harmony.

Also on show were 10 drawings (2000–01) and a smaller but pow-

their own vigorous, dancing, Zen-like statement.

di Suvero never makes exact rendered plans or working drawings: “I don’t do blueprints.” He likes to improvise and says, “The best drawing I will do is on the plate that I will cut out and bend. By turning the piece over with a

## New York

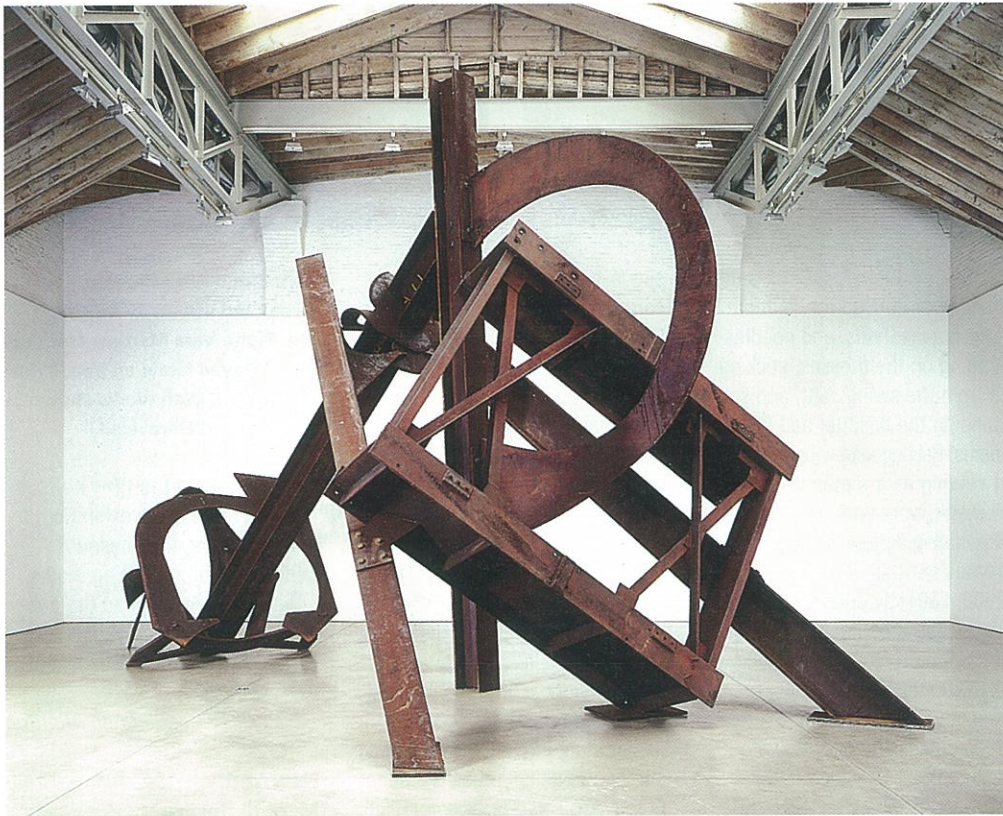
### Irene Gennaro

55 Mercer Gallery

Irene Gennaro offers a stunning synthesis of roughened haptic gesture and clear resonant color in painted wood sculptures of rare clarity and intelligence. Contemplating her own Sicilian heritage, as well the religious traditions of Byzantine Greece, India, and Tibet, Gennaro employs the motif of the votive, a symbolic object or body part used in many world religions. The artist has sculpted various body members—eyes, hands, uteri, brains, lungs, and ears—into disembodied and isolated cross-sections capable of mediating illness or communicating with the deity. Their essence as symbol asserts so-called “primitivist” concepts of homeopathic magic as it slyly undermines enlightenment and psychoanalytic concepts of psychic unity and integration. Like Gogol’s short story, “The Nose,” or Guston’s painting of glaring eyeballs, *Cabal* (1977), the isolated part in effect thinks for itself.

A giant eyeball as plump as a planet greeted viewers as they entered the gallery. Eighteen boxes lined the wall forming a relief, each containing a votive related to the body. There were several freestanding sculptures as well. A heart grows like a tree. A brain lounges on a tongue like an Egyptian boat of the dead. The effect was heightened by Gennaro’s use of aluminum leaf, which reads as silver, and a cobalt blue as celestially cold as a Ravenna mosaic. The exhibition climaxed with a grand altarpiece, *Sanctuary* (2002), an elaborate integration of structure and narrative in which all the votive symbols are deployed against the pointed shapes of densely carved tropical foliage. These shapes form a universal narrative of death and dismemberment redeemed through suffering and reintegration.

In many ways, Gennaro evokes a pre-modern psychology as she sculpts wood. Her work points to



**Mark di Suvero, *Chonk On*, 2000.**  
Steel, 19.5 x 32 x 15 ft.

wonderfully inventive way. This counterpoint of huge, edgy, rigorous steel (one rectangular found piece was lifted intact from a New Jersey highway construction site) and what looks like pliable rubber sheeting (but is actually 1.25-inch-thick steel, requiring an incredible amount of forging and bending) gives a memorable thrill. The use of space is also amazing. Parallels transmutate into diagonal and triangular spaces as you move around the sculpture, its every aspect nuanced to perfection. I especially admired the soft decorative nodal

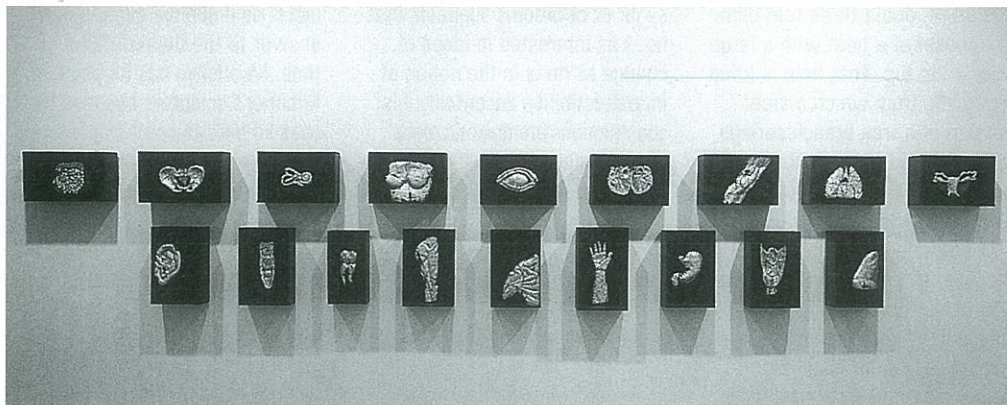
erful, painted rotating piece, *Prime Number 1984*, one of the first sculptures di Suvero made after moving to his Spacetime studio complex in Long Island City. These helped put *Chonk On* in context and provided a nice contrast.

The drawings are especially interesting as they come from a series of 80 works inspired by a collaboration with architect Renzo Piano. The initial plan was for di Suvero to create a special sculpture for the new Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas, designed by Piano and scheduled to open in May 2003. But Raymond Nasher decided instead to buy di Suvero’s *Eviva Amore*. The drawings form

crane, suddenly I see a better way to go.” However, these drawings “are like windows. Those who look at them see only the window, but I see through it. The drawing gives me the memory of an idea and how to transform this idea into a sculpture.” They also represent “the map of my thinking-feeling in ink. I see through the drawings as the hands of the blind feel the faces of their beloved.”

di Suvero’s characteristic pieces speak of harmony and balance. His sculptures emit a peaceful, composed, transcendental air. Even when incorporating unmodified industrial elements, they take on his elegant formal language.

—Clare Henry



**Left: Irene Gennaro, 18 Boxed Body Parts, 2001. Wood, oil, and aluminum leaf, 43 x 276 x 7 in. Below: Greg Johns, To the Center, 2000. Mild steel, 18 x 18 x 9 in.**

a time when the mimetic quality of sculpture and painting was based on socio-historical and religious worth, not aesthetics in the modern sense. Furthermore, the pre-modern individual was defined by a different relationship to the social group, one not based on intrinsic ideas of uniqueness, individuality, or personality per se, but on a theocratic group authority vested in the Church, which mediated social and historical definitions of self. If I am ill, it is a manifestation of a spiritual disease creating a physical symptom. This is to be arbitrated and cured by my direct appeal to the Godhead, a reflection of a relational identity as opposed to modern individuated (or isolated) one. In direct contrast, the modern world offers the personal narrative of the artist, the projection of a fragmented contemporary psyche commenting on a body of literature and artistic practice with a long history.

The contrast of Modernist and medieval readings etches a sharp almost satirical edge to these sculptures and renders them electric rather than merely reassuring. Rather than the easy New Age formulations of a Joseph Campbell, Gennaro offers us the possibility of transcendence against the intransigent. Whether these votives stand as sentinels to a universal iconographic claim or as fragmentary isomorphs in a disconnected matrix is the question. Gennaro's artistic inquiry, which successfully pits an artistic sensibility against the great traditions of religion,

psychology, and iconography is a prescription for vivid emotional experience not easily forgotten.

—Joel Silverstein

#### New York

##### Greg Johns

Robert Steele Gallery

Australian sculptor Greg Johns's steel sculptures suggest many influences, among them the organic works of Isamu Noguchi, the monumental, simplified steel structures of Eduardo Chillida, and the massive art of Clement Meadmore. Johns himself cites the visionary engineer Buckminster Fuller and the pure abstract Modernist Kandinsky. These references give Johns's Minimalist works an awareness of cultural history. Yet the citing of influences does not do full justice to the actual achievement of the work itself. Johns likes "the balance between object-making and ideas," and he also believes that form must "co-exist with mythology and symbolism." He creates archetypal forms whose compositions may well reference modernity, but they also hark back to a time when sculpture had ritual importance. This combination of intentions makes for an unusually meaningful body of work.

Formally, Johns's works twist and turn in ways that make their simplified shapes eloquent and revealing as viewers make their way around them. The element of time gives Johns's art its self-possession and dignity; the monumentality proves affecting because of

its ability to metamorphose from one condition to the next. There is a forceful joining of opposites in Johns's sculpture: as the simple curves form complex arabesques, the stillness of the composition suggests a slow but sure motion from one element to the next. Despite their monumentality, there is a lyrical grace in many works that can suggest the opposite of monolithic gestalt. For example, the very large steel sculpture *The Dance Continues* (1987–88), at a sculpture park north of Sydney, for all its monumental glory, portrays a personal theme: two figures fluidly dancing with each other. Seen against a backdrop of trees, the sculpture shows a surprising grace and ease of manner, of a

kind not necessarily associated with grand size.

None of the works in Johns's New York show were of such large dimensions, but it is interesting to see how the smaller work, often maquettes, can easily feel monolithic. The slightly larger-than-life-size *Grounded Figure* (1991) consists of an abstracted figure, whose body ends in a point supported by a flat base and from whose head flow three strands of hair, curving sideways and down nearly to the floor. It reminds an American audience of the Native American trickster figure Kokopelli; there is a graphic simplicity to the sculpture that strikes one as coming from an ancient aboriginal culture. The use of rusted reddish-brown steel makes *Grounded Figure* a materially strong piece, in keeping with its seemingly mythical origins.

*Fractal Mandala* (2001) appears to encompass the world in its open, spherical construction. This tabletop sculpture, made of mild steel, consists of a ring of curlicue

