



"Fear/Victory" : Bronze 5½"

PETER HADEN

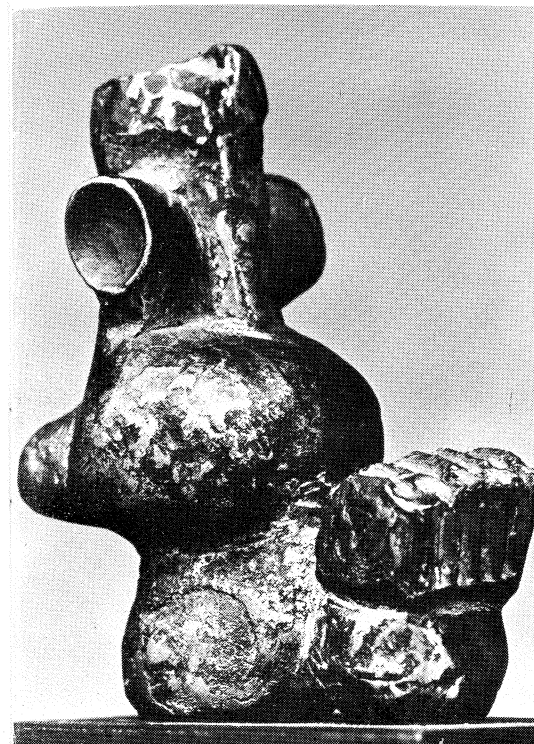
by SHIRLEY ESKAPA

You are struck at once by his obdurate honesty: you know he rejects compromise. Peter Haden's casual demeanour is offset by intelligent blue eyes which flit rapidly behind deep lenses; one soon realises how remorseless is his quest for validity. His frame is slender and fragile-looking yet he seems always to be bursting out of his clothes. His tone is matter-of-fact and serious but his smile somehow divides his face as if in evidence — as if *sculpting* his good-humoured cynicism.

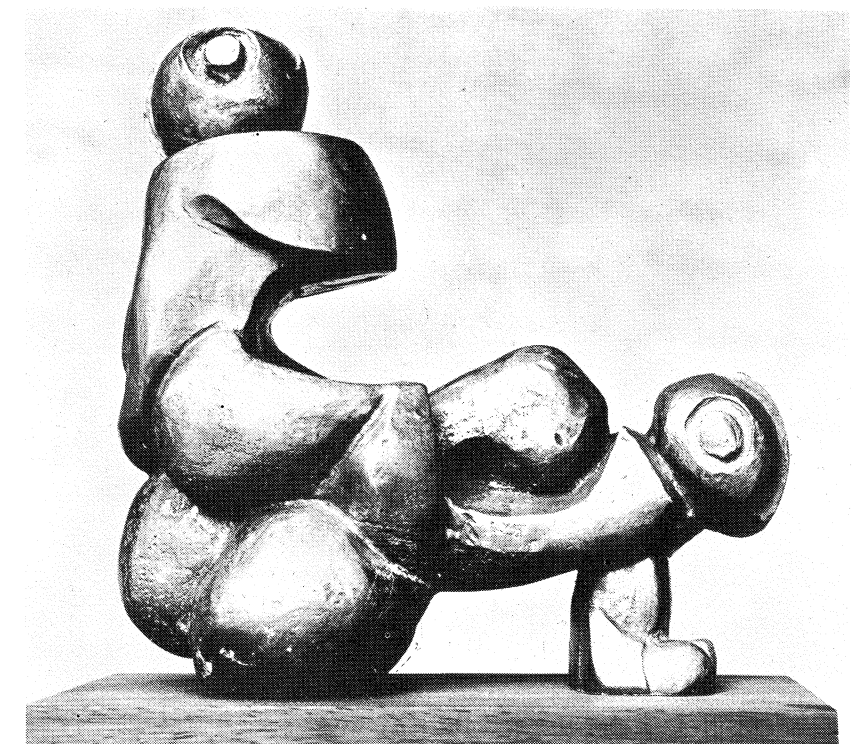
Peter Haden studied at the University of the Witwatersrand and later at Oxford where he also spent a lot of time writing short-stories. The step which took him to art was induced by a priest who gave him oils. . . . He was soon immersed in the world of art, and, irresistibly, sculpture dominated. Peter Haden thus became a sculptor without the benefits or defects of any formal training. His sculpture reflects his multi-dimensional vision of life.

He tells you adamantly that 'he does not believe in gimmicks' or in 'trying to add to the confusion already in existence'. He believes that art should 'be true to its environment in the same sense that a writer should only write about what he or she really knows or feels', he says too that art should never lose the presence of humanity and should strongly reflect the artist's personality.

We spoke about art in Europe and Peter Haden said, 'Art in Europe got a new lease of life in the period 1906/7 when African Art inspired Cubism. I ask myself questions like, can this be replaced by a computer? So many artists claim that they have to symbolise the computer age, the space age, in the form of repetitive intellectualised gimmicks. But long ago people like Mondrian, Schwitters, Kandinsky and Albers dealt with these things comprehensively. It is, to me, like re-writing the work of Huxley and the space-fiction pioneers and adding more buttons to the balloon. These things, art-wise, lack human warmth which still lives and always will live, at least in some people. If the meaning is to portray the cold sterility, the brutality or the militancy of life to-day,



"Sitting-foot" : Bronze 2½"



"Rider" : Bronze 6" x 6"

have these artists forgotten how close to the surface man's emotions really are? . . . and yet, paradoxically, I really enjoy some of the good, well-executed compositions of someone like Vasarely'.

And later we spoke about Haden's work and his method of working. He believes that art is 'an inborn instinct' and said, 'when I make a piece of sculpture I love it without sentiment. Suddenly a sculptural solution presents itself — in a haptic fashion which I call instinct — that line has to be changed to go to another point and suddenly the whole thing works — often I am really surprised at the result. Some people call it inspiration but that reeks of some sort of psychic sentiment — it is in fact instinct'.

Peter Haden teaches at a school he opened in Craighall called The Academy. On the subject of teaching he says, 'I do not believe that academic hammering will produce artists. Guidance, to bring out the talent however small in anybody who has a love for art and the desire to express himself in the media of art, is for me the correct approach. Art actually cannot be taught; techniques can of course, but if a person really has talent being taught can often do as much harm as good. If you plant a seed in the ground you don't go and dig it up all the time to see if it's growing — in terms of art tuition a talent correctly handled may grow into a giant tree and a talent incorrectly guided may develop into a modest little wild-flower. Both appreciable by people'.

At present Peter Haden's sculpture is on exhibition at the Egon Guenther Gallery. The small bronzes were originally made in terracotta and plaster of paris before being cast. "There seemed no really good reason to make enormous things if one could say the same thing in a smaller size". Some of his pieces are small enough to fit into a match-box (a paradox in the space age) and yet looking at them this seems somehow beyond the imagination because in his smallest pieces he achieves monumentality.

South Africa, fraught though it is, throws up its own innovations. You might say that Peter Haden is an innovation. □



"Ball-foot" : Bronze 4½"

Photographs by Egon Guenther