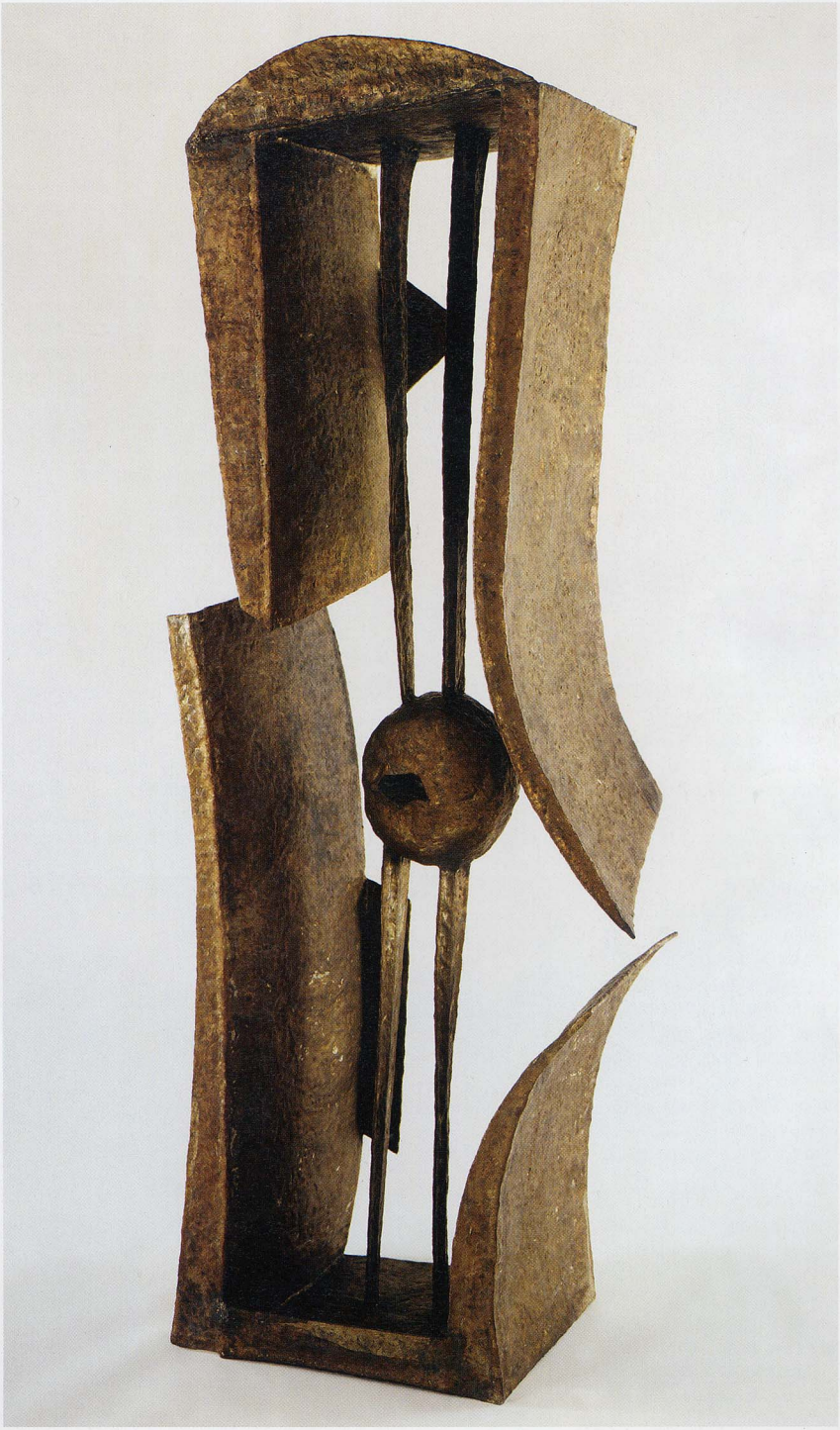
New York

Seymour Lipton

Michael Rosenfeld Gallery

My first encounter with the sculpture of Seymour Lipton happened in the late '60s, when I had occasion to see works by contemporary abstract painters and sculptors from the Phillips Collection at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. This was an important event, since I was acquiring knowledge about the European and American avant-garde—a subject I knew little about, but for which I had a burning interest. The artists who had the greatest impact on me were Sam Francis, Ray Parker, and Seymour Lipton. There is no way to account for this. I was coming to art not from the position of an art historian (at the time) but as an aspiring young artist—and somehow the formal tenacity and lyricism embedded in Lipton's bronze forms struck a chord that would continue to resound as I encountered his work in other large-scale exhibitions. I would search out his sculpture and always find satisfaction in the completeness of his forms.

There is something direct and philosophical about Lipton's sculpture, something that goes beyond the concept into the realm of material/ethereal matter. His work is less about equivocation than a stalwart glance at a meta-reality of the soul, a seclusion of meaning that communicates metaphorically outside itself. Lipton is not a literal sculptor. His position derives from Cubism. Works such as *Dissonance* (1946) and *Battle of the Gargoyles* (1946) hold a strong indebtedness to Lipchitz. By the late '40s, he had moved beyond Cubism into another type of abstraction, into imaginary abstract configurations, such as *Square Mask* (1948), *Temple of the Mother* (1949), and *Warrior #2* (1949). In these works, the forms appear less referential in



Seymour Lipton, *Dirge*, c. 1983. Nickel-silver on Monel metal, 81 x 30 x 21 in.

terms of the external visual world and more given to intuited and continuous structures, forms that occupy a space of their own. This sense of spatial occupancy eventually became the artist's signature style. Works such as *Sentinel #2* (c. 1959), *Wheel* (1965), and *Brain of a Poet* (1966) are exact in their formal positioning. They claim a language of their own, with their own private syntax, their own formal acuity, their own poetic consistency. The coiled shapes in later works such as *Shrine* (1979) wind in and out again, depending on the angle of vision discovered in the process of circumambulating the work.

The recent exhibition of Lipton's sculpture at the Michael Rosenfeld Gallery holds an important key to the aesthetic history of this underrated, yet pre-eminent Abstract Expressionist sculptor. Indeed, to confront a relatively large-scale work like *Dirge* (c. 1983)—perhaps the last major work of the artist's career—offers an insight into Lipton's ability to challenge himself by stretching the space of his formal container while managing to keep the shapes moving, never losing track of the space that identifies these coiled forms as they herald a recognition of the significance found in the interior world. Unlike the Surrealists, with whom he felt an early connection, Lipton's rigor stayed with the materiality of the form, while keeping a vision that would eventually reveal itself as a unique and practical metaphysics achieved through making.

—Robert C. Morgan

Above: Seymour Lipton, *Brain of a Poet*, 1966. Bronze on Monel metal, 23.3 x 22.2 x 8.25 in. Right: Erica Loustau, installation view of "Circus of the Sublime," 2005.