

Confessions of a Modern Art Luddite

5. Modern Sculptures and Typewriter Erasers



Uyless Black

Confessions of a Modern Art Luddite

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Confessions of a Modern Art Luddite

5. Modern Sculptures and Typewriter Erasers

For the first part of “Confessions 5,” we take a tour of the National Gallery of Art Sculpture Garden, located on Constitution Avenue in Washington, D.C. Later, we return to the central subject of this book: Is modern abstract “art” really art?

The Art Sculpture Garden occupies six acres on the Mall. The grounds are lovely; a wide variety of surrounding trees, bushes, and flowers softly mute the sharp sculptures on display. The Garden has a large central fountain which doubles as an ice rink during the winter. A fine restaurant is available for light food and drink.

As I walked into the garden, the first sculpture I encountered was a model of an eraser, shown in Figure 5-1. The work caught my eye. My first impression of the art and the artist was, “That took balls to make.” And a lot of gum.



Figure 5-1. The Typewriter Eraser.

Here is my interpretation of the National Gallery of Art Sculpture Garden write-up on the piece.¹ My interpretations vary from those in the National Gallery of Art brochure. Please read footnote 1 before proceeding:

In the mid-1960s, lacking anything else to do during Sweden’s winters, Claes Oldenburg began to make drawings of clothespins and scissors. Later, as he became an adult, he took to the idea of challenging the notion that public monuments must commemorate something that was actually monumental. The artist’s selection of discredited, obsolete, and otherwise non-monumental objects extended to various worthless artifacts remembered from childhood. As a youngster, he enjoyed playing in his father’s office with a typewriter eraser. His

¹ For the unaltered write-ups on all these sculptures, please read the last section of this essay, “Smithsonian Brochure.”

father later banned him from the office after young Claes erased an original pencil drawing by Michelangelo. In the late 1960s and 1970s he used the eraser as a source for erasing yet more drawings. Motivated by his past success, he created a never-realized monument for New York City. “Never-realized” in the sense that no one had ever thought a monument to a typewriter eraser was worth realizing in the first place. But then, New Yorkers did not suffer Swedish winters and their after-effects. Anyway, as you can see, this sculpture presents a giant falling eraser that has just alighted, the bristles of the brush turned upward in a graceful, dynamic gesture. In reality, the bristles exhibit an ultimately futile view. After all, erasing deals with futility.

It’s difficult for this modern art Luddite to imagine why Odlenburg devoted a lot of his waking hours creating an oversized image of a soon-to-be obsolete eraser. But then, his creation resides in a prestigious gallery and I am writing about it. Nonetheless, we might imagine:

- Odlenburg’s neighbor, “Hey there Claes, couldn’t help but notice your giant typewriter eraser. It’s blocking the sun from my roses. What are you up to now?”
- Odlenburg, “I’m a tongue-in-cheek sort of guy. You know that anyway! Remember my giant clothes pin? (See Figure 5-3) For this creation, I’m making a tongue-in-cheek social comment about typewriter erasers.”
- “Are typewriter erasers controversial?”
- “Sure. Erasing writings is socially unjust. It’s censorship.”
- “How about erasing typos? Anyway, move your eraser away from my flowers, and don’t even think about a typewriter.”

We can only guess at Mr. Odlenburg’s motives for creating the Typewriter Eraser or his other work, some of which allow the art viewer to interact with the art piece. One such sculpture is a tube of lipstick which deflates unless someone pumps air into it. This piece was later embellished and titled, “Lipstick (Ascending) on Caterpillar Tracks.” It was a popular sculpture at Yale University in the 1960s (Figure 5-2).

I think interacting with a tube of lipstick would have been a vicarious second place to interacting with the lips of Warhol’s Marilyn but we are told the Yale students wanted the lipstick piece on campus as “a tongue-in-cheek tribute to American consumer culture.”² (It seems to me the terms “tongue-in-cheek” and “tribute” do not match-up.) The work was also unpopular and vandalism led to its removal. It was later re-done in vandalism-proof steel and installed at Morse College in 1974.³

Figure 5-3 is another example of an Odlenburg sculpture. His “Clothes Pin” is located in front of the Philadelphia City Hall. Both structures have bragging rights for bigness. The City Hall is the world’s tallest masonry building. Its construction has no steel support. The building’s weight is borne by huge granite and brick walls, some up to 22 feet thick.

As best I can determine, the Clothes Pin is the world’s biggest clothes pin. I surfed the Web and found no other clothes pins of comparable size. I’m curious if Mr. Odlenburg made this apparatus to be interactive, as he did with the lipstick. I’ve been in Philly several times, but I’ve

² Quote is from Wikepeida. Key-in Claes Odlenburg.

³ <http://www.yale.edu/publicart/lipstick.html>

never paid attention to this work. Next time I'm in the city, I'll check out the contraption and see if there are any interactive clothes lines or giant diapers in the vicinity.



Figure 5-2. Ambulatory lipstick.

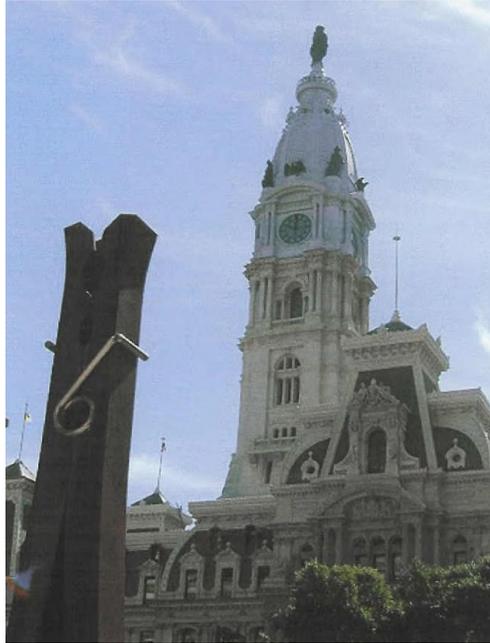


Figure 5-3. Big building and a big clothes pin.

Chinks in a Luddite's Armor

Many artists who create works such as the Typewriter Eraser probably do it for the sake of doing it. I'm not being circuitous. I come from a blue-collar background. The idea of doing something that does not put bread on the table---of doing something for its own sake---seems counter-productive. My position in Maslow's hierarchy of needs is on the lower rungs of the ladder.

As I write these essays---as I assess my initial impressions of the creations in galleries, hotel hallways, and gardens---I still do not buy the idea of modern art being "art for art's sake." But I am coming around to the idea that "art for the artist's sake" makes a lot of sense.

I should have been more aware of this idea. I write for my own sake. If a reader likes what I write, fine. If the reader does not, fine. Some people like what I have to say. Others do not. I cannot please everyone, nor can Mr. Odlenburg. In the end, the creator of the piece---be it a musician, a painter, or a writer---must please himself.

Continuing the Tour

Roy Lichtenstein's work is so embedded into our culture that we take it for granted. Here is a description of Lichtenstein's sculpture, titled *House I* (Figure 5-4); again altered with my interpretation of the National Gallery of Art Sculpture Garden write-up on the piece:

Roy Lichtenstein is best known for his contribution to the T-shirt industry. His knock-off paintings of popular advertisements and comic strips that he made in the 1960s also made him very rich. He produced a significant body of sculpture, including large-scale works designed for the outdoors. For example, *House I* was designed for the outdoors, because it is a house. *House I* incorporates the hallmarks

of the artist's style: elementary school drawing, heavy black outlines, and a palette based on primary colors. This simple approach was developed when he was a child: His Crayon box consisted of the minimum 8-crayon set. Thus, old habits died hard. Whereas most of the artist's sculpture approximates freestanding paintings in relief rather than volumetric structures in the round, some of his late sculpture, such as *House I*, exploits the illusionistic effects of a third dimension. (Author: if you understood this last statement, please send me your explanation.) The side of the house at once projects toward the viewer while appearing to recede into space...but only if the viewer is walking away from the house. Standing still, the viewer sees nothing happening because Mr. Lichtenstein had not yet learned to knock-off animated images.



Figure 5-4. *House I*.

I enjoyed viewing *House I*. True to the official write up (at the end of this chapter), as I walked back and forth in front of the sculpture, its dimensions appeared to change. Similar tricks can be seen at Las Vegas night club magician acts. Let's call Roy Lichtenstein a magician. Wait! Remember his take on Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck? (Figure 3-4 in "Confessions 3.") So, maybe he is an artist.

Shall we call him an architect? After all *House I* is a house. No, that won't do either. If you look more closely at Figure 5-4, the house doesn't have all of its sides; the shrubbery and fence behind the sculpture can be seen through the windows. Ah ha. That's part of his magic, showing images of outdoor plants and fences inside the house.

I've been trying to classify this work: Art? A joke? Both? You can be the judge as to what *House I* is. I'm moving on to another exhibit in the Sculpture Garden. We might as well stick with house-like things. Chairs will do, as seen in Figure 5-5.

Here is my interpretation of the official brochure write-up. To appreciate this critique, look carefully at these chairs. Notice the arm rests and the soft padding. Notice the reclining back and the foot stools.

Scott Burton's work has been described as "sculpture in love with furniture." ---but not "furniture in love with sculpture." Of course, he never actually sat in his chairs; otherwise, he would have realized they were not functional in the conventional living room comfortable sense---but perhaps functional in the conventional interrogation

room sense. He also preferred a public setting, where the objects would be used, but a Gallup poll revealed that no one in their right mind would ever use them. Burton openly acknowledged a debt to Constantin Brancusi, who was the first modern sculptor---and a closet sadist ---to challenge the conventional distinction between aesthetic (as in pleasing in appearance) and utilitarian (as in useful) form. Here Burton contrasts the massiveness of his forms with a material-red granite---that is visually sumptuous (as in grand and elegant) and warm. (as in, “cold as granite”) With a nifty fork lift, the individual seats---weighing a modest few hundred pounds apiece---can be arranged in a circle, suggesting a ceremonial gathering, or side-by-side to form a long bench.



Figure 5-5. Standing room only...who would want to sit?

The Sculpture Garden has another chair sculpture, shown in Figure 5-6. Here’s my take on the work:

After working in multi-use conference rooms for a number of years, where he did nothing but stack and unstack chairs, Lucas Samaras has devoted his art to the evocation of an intensely private (as in this *public* display), obsessional (due to his earlier work experience), sometimes hallucinatory (OK, you try stacking/unstacking chairs for a living) realm. Among the many motifs that occur in his work, the chair is especially prominent--- the busman’s holiday mentality. The "Chair Transformation" series (author: Series? He did more than one!) has included provocative sculpture executed in a variety of materials such as wood, wire mesh, and mirrored glass. The wood chairs proved popular with people who like to use chairs to sit in. The wire mesh and mirrored glass chairs were not very good sellers. But then, because of Samaras’ fixation on stacking chairs, only the top most chair could have been used anyway. Thus, Samaras came up with a brilliant idea: Ladder sculptures! The problem was, he also stacked his ladders. Anyway, throughout the series, Samaras transforms the ordinary object into a fantastical one, evoking a dreamlike metamorphosis (wherein the chairs mutate into sofas, thus making it easier to be “dreamlike”). Here the artist suggests an animated flight of stacked chairs. A deceptively simple form---and borrowing from Lichtenstein’s magical bag of tricks, the sculpture appears from different viewpoints to be upright, leaning back, or springing forward. Look out below!



Figure 5-6. Standing room only...who would want to sit?

I snapped two pictures and placed them side by side in Figure 5-6. What do you think? Are the chairs springing forward? I am certain of one thing: I would hate to be a copywriter for modern abstract art.

Let's leave the furniture world and look at a pyramid, depicted in Figure 5-7. Here's your writer's take on the official write-up:

From the early 1960s to the present, Sol LeWitt has been at the forefront of the children's building block toy industry. LeWitt's "structures" (a term he prefers to sculpture) are generally composed with modular, Tinkertoy forms. For many of his works, LeWitt creates a plan and a set of instructions to be executed by others. *Four-Sided Pyramid* was constructed on this site by a ream of children in collaboration with the artist. The retraced pyramid, first employed by LeWitt in the 1960s, relates to the setback design that had long been characteristic of New York City skyscrapers. Its geometric structure also alludes to the ziggurats (temple towers) of ancient Mesopotamia and fittingly enough, the Tower of Babel.



Figure 5-7. Tinker Toys on the Mall.

One of my least favorite media for abstract sculpture (near the bottom on the bottom ten list) is a piece of work constructed of steel beams, shown in Figure 5-8. The effort seems a waste of resources when so many unfinished buildings in the impoverished world go begging for building material. Half of the buildings in third world countries are 50 percent complete.

The sculpture Mark di Suvero began to make in the late 1950s consisted of massive, weathered timbers and objects he came across in his job as scrap iron dealer, such as barrels, or chains. Later he added tires to round out the ensemble. The dramatically cantilevered forms were seen as sculptural equivalents of the bold, gestural paintings of Franz Kline⁴ or Willem de Kooning. In the 1960s, after receiving a large grant from US Steel, di Suvero stopped relying on scavenged industrial materials and began to craft works from steel beams that he moved with cranes and bolted together to create large outdoor pieces---much to the chagrin of the vast majority of folks who preferred a more soothing landscape of say, trees. *Aurora* is a tour de force *of excess idle time on one's hands*. Its sophisticated structural system---principally the ground underneath the thing---distributes eight tons of steel over three diagonal supports to combine massive scale with elegance of proportion. Unlike Lucas Samaras' stacked chairs, it actually appears to be moving, perhaps flying---It's a bird? It's a plane? No, it's soaring scrap iron! Several of the linear elements converge within a central circular hub and then explode outward---will, not exactly explode, as an actual explosion would have found Mr. di Suvero under an I beam. The title, *Aurora*, comes from a poem about New York City by Federico Garcia Lorca---which is also a source of confusion, because Aurora is the name of cities in Colorado and Illinois

⁴ One of the original champions of abstract expressionism. Kline is known for black-and-white works, painted with huge, energetic brushstrokes. Kline sometimes treated both white and black areas of his paintings with equal force. These gestural paintings link him with the branch of abstract expressionism known as action painting. (After massive infusions of vodka,) action painting involves (the drunk artist) dripping and splashing paint in an impulsive, loosely controlled manner without any predetermined design. Sourced from Microsoft ® Encarta ®, with my additions in parentheses.

Should I ease off? Am I taking the parody too far? Perhaps, but just look at Figure 5-8. Judge for yourself.

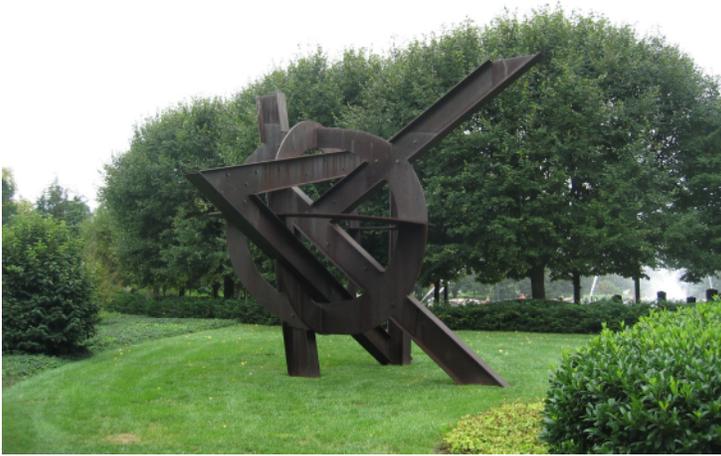


Figure 5-8. The miracles of ground strength.

Figure 5-9 is a sculpture of a spider. I intended the following critique to go unaltered from the official write-up from the National Gallery of Art. I was going to let it speak for its anthropomorphic self. But as I re-read the prose, I decided to amplify. My changes are included:

Since 1984 Louise Bourgeois has been developing a body of work with the spider as *protagonist*. (*Protagonist*, as in hero, main character, leading role; as in Spider Man.) For the artist, whose work has explored themes of childhood memory and loss, the spider carries associations of a maternal figure (Eh, sorry, as in Spider Woman). Indeed, Bourgeois' "Spider" series relates to her own mother who died when the artist was twenty-one. Of course, Louise's siblings have not been happy about the sister's adaptation of a spider as a role model for their mom, but they are not artists and could only protest in their family Christmas letters. From drawings to large-scale installations, Bourgeois' spiders appear as looming and powerful (Spider Man like) protectresses, yet are (Spider Woman like) nurturing, delicate, and vulnerable.



Figure 5-9. The maternal, nurturing, delicate, vulnerable, protagonist, protector spider.

Ellsworth Kelly was highlighted in Confessions 3. As you may recall, I am not a big fan of Mr. Kelly. My opinion must leave me in the minority of actual art critics, because his work is exhibited in several prestigious museums. Here is my take on the work shown in Figure 5-10.

Tired of one bedroom walkups and landlords' restrictions on off-the-wall art, after moving from Manhattan to the countryside in New York State in 1970, Ellsworth Kelly began to make large sculptures to defile the outdoors. The distinctive shape of *Stele II* --- a shape appearing on countless food packages and mailing labels---had already appeared in the artist's abstract paintings and is loosely based on a French kilometer marker! (my exclamation point), an object Kelly observed during his years in Paris after World War II. (Other artists, more colloquial in their approach, borrowed this idea, but used other traffic markers, such as American stop signs and yield warnings.) Alluding to the banal fatuousness of the work, especially in a landscape setting, the title refers to a type of ancient stone monument that traditionally served a commemorative function. Like most ancient stelae (old stone slabs), this sculpture is also essentially planar and upright. The steel weathers when exposed to the elements, developing an evenly corroded, non-reflective surface. It contends in originality with the blank wall in the Chicago Museum.

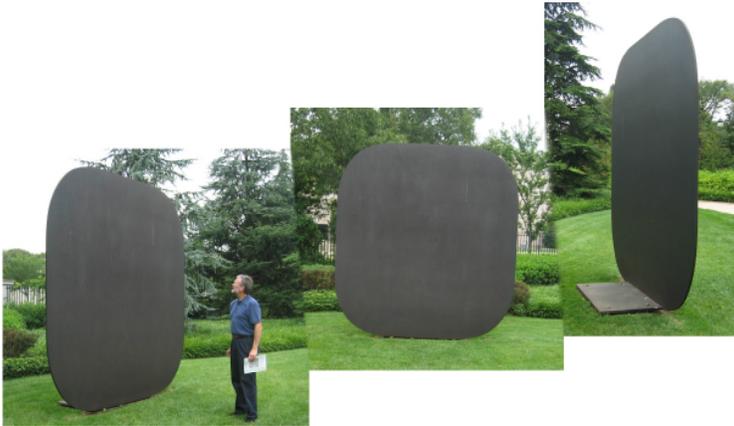


Figure 5-10. It's a French road sign, but is it art?

Back To the Original Questions

The National Gallery of Art Sculpture Garden displays several more exhibits. They are fun to view and fun to parody and ridicule. But in keeping with the theme of this book, we once again return to our attempt to first, define art; second, ask if a creation is art; and third, return to the controversy: Is abstract modern art really art?

After viewing hundreds of "works of art," and after thinking about my reactions to these images, I have come to believe that art is a function of our imagination. And our imagination is a function of our experiences.

I have attempted to demonstrate in these essays that my mind, while naïve, is open to new ideas about art in general, and modern art specifically. As I have come to acknowledge my ignorance on the subject, I have also come to realize that I enjoy many pieces of abstract modern art. But I will not yield on one point: A canvas of black paint is not art. In this regard, I remain a Luddite.

That said, I also recognize the definition of art differs, depending on who is composing the definition. What is art to a tribal society citizen may not be art to an urban dweller, and vice-

versa. I think a Navajo rug is art. But then, solitary triangles and trapezoids aside, I'm partial to geometric patterns.

I confess I am changing my views about abstract modern art---this booklet has been a work in progress---because I have come to the conclusion that even trying to define this kind of art---to place boundaries on it---is a futile exercise. In the first chapters of this work, *skill* is what I have hung my hat on:

Artist, draw an asparagus...Fine, your asparagus actually looks like an asparagus. You can now draw your interpretation of the desiderata of life.

Or:

Your asparagus looks like green dung. Find another line of work.

The result of this type of mentality is artistic fascism. It puts us on a dangerous slippery slope. I want to put joking aside for one moment and emphasize that *no one should ever* dictate what another draws, sculpts, composes, or writes---including the government. If you or I find a creation banal, or even contemptible, we need not patronize it. If we choose not to support a Rembrandt or a black canvas-painting charlatan, that's fine. But keep the government out of this process and out of our life's choices. Let us decide.

I take this view one step further with religious criticisms. Without question, the cartoons about the Islamic faith and Muhammad published in a Danish publication were offensive. I am not sure what purpose they served, but I do not agree that the cartoonists should be threatened with death or that protesters should die because of someone's bad taste. I would also hope that those who practice the Islamic religion would say, "Yes, they are offensive, in the deepest sense of the word. But our religion is strong enough that we need not bother with them. Our religion speaks for itself. It can weather these assaults. Let's move on. Before long the cartoons will be forgotten, but our religion will not." This approach did not happen. The Muslims guaranteed the cartoons a place in history because of their reaction.

While I am on the soap box, permit me one more observation: The Hayden, Idaho City Council passed a resolution in 2006 stating, "(It) strongly encourages all businesses, schools, and public institutions in the city of Hayden to adopt child-appropriate standards."⁵ The resolution also stated the Council supported a "community standard" that reflected "a wholesome environment for children and families."

Alas, the feel-good resolution was seized by a woman as a tool to intimidate local businesses into removing magazines from their racks that in her words had, "too much skin." Her displeasures would target not just *Playboy*, but fitness and bridal periodicals. Check the footnote below for the reference. The newspaper article articulated her views,

In public and in the community, I would hope we could be covered...no belly buttons, no cleavage. I've taught my children that their bodies are special....As a parent, my job is saying, "Look, I don't want my little girl to see tummies shown."

I say to this woman: *The belly button is a very important part of the mother/child assemblage during critical periods of the creation of the child. So, how about explaining to your*

⁵ Lynn Berk, *Coeur d' Alene Press*, March 1, 2006, p. A1.

children that the belly button is an example of the wonderful ways in which nature has created us humans? Instead of your children's guilt about having a naval, perhaps they will recognize the wonder of having a naval.

Skill?

Let's finish our exploration of modern abstract art by returning to a central theme of the book: In relation to art, what is skill? We use Figures 5-1 and 5-11 as focal points to attempt, once again, to answer this question. Figure 5-1, lambasted earlier, is a sculpture of a typewriter eraser by Cles Odlenburg. Figure 5-11 is a photo of part of the Sistine Chapel ceiling by Michelangelo.

A few years ago, I paid a visit to Rome, where I took pictures of the artwork at the Vatican, including the Sistine Chapel. Figure 5-11 shows part of this Chapel's ceiling, which is located on the grounds of the Vatican. Here is a quote about the Sistine Chapel ceiling from Microsoft's Encarta Encyclopedia:

Between 1508 and 1512 Michelangelo created some of the most memorable images of all time on the vaulted ceiling of the papal chapel in the Vatican. ...The frescoes are his interpretation of the biblical book of Genesis, the story of the creation of the world. In the central scene (in the middle of this picture), God appears in human form as he gives the breath of life to Adam, the first human being. The scene above it shows the first woman, Eve, as she emerges from Adam's rib.



Figure 5-11. The Sistine Chapel ceiling.

Mr. Oldenburg, the creator of the gem in Figure 5-1, might (could) have said, "Look, I've an aptitude for sculpting over-sized gum erasers. That's where my talents lie. I'm not into chapel ceiling frescos."

Who knows? Michelangelo might (could) have said, "I'm into frescos. I don't know a thing about sculpting typewriter erasers. What's a typewriter anyway?"

My conclusions about the subject have changed since I began writing these essays. I have grown to appreciate the concepts behind modern abstract art, but I have not changed my views about the idea of *skill*. I have tried but I cannot. I don't admire Mr. Odlenburg. If he was trying to be funny with his eraser, I take my hat off to him. If he was trying to be serious, I pity him. Funny or not, I admire Michelangelo

It's a Wrap

I hope to write more about modern abstract art. I may come across stacks of cans, piles of ordure, Tinkertoys, and gum erasers that beg to be parodied. I'll see what I see, and then I'll decide what to write. Confessions 6, dealing with still life art, is already under study. (I cannot get away from vases and (especially) soup cans.) The Hirshorn sculpture garden will be fun to critique. I am eager to tell you about the Prado, the Met, the Getty, and many others. For now it's a wrap. Thanks for reading; I hope you got a few laughs and (like I) learned more about modern art.

In conclusion:



Figure 5-12. Summing it up.

Whatever art is, enjoy it.

Smithsonian Brochure

I thank the National Gallery of Art for furnishing the material for my satire about their Sculpture Garden works. As I said earlier, I would not want to be a copywriter for modern abstract art brochures. I hope the folks at the Gallery get a laugh of two from the parody.

What follows is the text in the official write up about the sculptures in the National Gallery of Art brochure. This brochure is available at each entrance to the Garden:

Figure 5-1:⁶

In the mid-1960s Claes Oldenburg began to make drawings of monuments based on common objects, such as a clothespin or a pair of scissors, challenging the notion that public monuments must commemorate historical figures or events. The artist's selection of discredited or obsolete objects extends to those remembered from childhood. As a youngster he enjoyed playing in his father's office with a typewriter eraser. In the late 1960s and 1970s he used the eraser as a source for drawings, prints, sculpture, and even a never-realized monument for New York City. This sculpture presents a giant falling eraser that has just alighted, the bristles of the brush turned upward in a graceful, dynamic gesture

Figure 5-4:

Roy Lichtenstein is best known for the pop paintings based on advertisements and comic strips that he made in the 1960s. He also produced a significant body of sculpture, including large-scale works designed for the outdoors. *House I* incorporates the hallmarks of the artist's style: crisp, elemental drawing, heavy black outlines, and a palette based on primary colors. Whereas most of the artist's sculpture approximates freestanding paintings in relief rather than volumetric structures in the round, some of his late sculpture, such as *House I*, exploits the illusionistic effects of a third dimension. The side of the house at once projects toward the viewer while appearing to recede into space.

Figure 5-5:

Scott Burton's work has been described as "sculpture in love with furniture." Indeed, the artist intended much of his work to be both sculptural and functional. He also preferred a public setting, where the objects would be used. Burton openly acknowledged a debt to Constantin Brancusi, who was the first modern sculptor to challenge the conventional distinction between aesthetic and utilitarian form. Here Burton contrasts the massive ness of his forms with a material-red granite-that is visually sumptuous and warm. The individual seats can be arranged in a circle, suggesting a ceremonial gathering, or side-by-side to form a long bench.

⁶ All quotes in this essay, unless otherwise identified and/or "altered" by your writer, are sourced from the "National Gallery of Art Sculpture Garden," a brochure made available the garden visitors. The Thinker reposes in the National Gallery of Art; there, I took a snapshot of this sculpture, shown in Figure 11.

I also have used Microsoft's Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2006. © 1993-2005 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved and a delightful resource.

Figure 5-46

Since the 1960s, Lucas Samaras has devoted his art to the evocation of an intensely private, obsessional, sometimes hallucinatory realm. Among the many motifs that occur in his work, the chair is especially prominent. The “Chair Transformation” series has included provocative sculpture executed in a variety of materials such as wood, wire mesh, and mirrored glass. Throughout the series, Samaras transforms the ordinary object into a fantastical one, evoking a dreamlike metamorphosis. Here the artist suggests an animated flight of stacked chairs. A deceptively simple form, the sculpture appears from different viewpoints to be upright, leaning back, or springing forward.

Figure 5-7:

From the early 1960s to the present, Sol LeWitt has been at the forefront of minimal and conceptual art. LeWitt's “structures” (a term he prefers to sculpture) are generally composed with modular, quasi-architectural forms. For many of his works, LeWitt creates a plan and a set of instructions to be executed by others. *Four-Sided Pyramid* was constructed on this site by a team of engineers and stone masons in collaboration with the artist. The retraced pyramid, first employed by LeWitt in the 1960s, relates to the setback design that had long been characteristic of New York City skyscrapers. Its geometric structure also alludes to the ziggurats of ancient Mesopotamia.

Figure 5-8:

The sculpture that Mark di Suvero began to make in the late 1950s consisted of massive, weathered timbers and found objects such as barrels, chains, or tires. The dramatically cantilevered forms were seen as sculptural equivalents of the bold, gestural paintings of Franz Kline or Willem de Kooning. In the 1960s di Suvero stopped relying on scavenged industrial materials and began to craft works from steel beams that he moved with cranes and bolted together to create large outdoor pieces. *Aurora* is a tour de force of design and engineering. Its sophisticated structural system distributes eight tons of steel over three diagonal supports to combine massive scale with elegance of proportion. Several of the linear elements converge within a central circular hub and then explode outward, imparting tension and dynamism to the whole. The title, *Aurora*, comes from a poem about New York City by Federico Garcia Lorca.

Figure 5-9:

Since 1984 Louise Bourgeois has been developing a body of work with the spider as protagonist. For the artist, whose work has explored themes of childhood memory and loss, the spider carries associations of a maternal figure. Indeed, Bourgeois' “Spider” series relates to her own mother who died when the artist was twenty-one. From drawings to large-scale installations, Bourgeois' spiders appear as looming and powerful protectresses, yet are nurturing, delicate, and vulnerable.

Figure 5-10:

After moving from Manhattan to the countryside in New York State in 1970, Ellsworth Kelly began to make large sculptures for the outdoors. The distinctive shape of *Stele II* had already appeared in the artist's abstract paintings and is loosely based on a French kilometer marker, an object Kelly observed during his years in Paris after World War II. Alluding to the severe presence of the work, especially in a landscape setting, the title

refers to a type of ancient stone monument that traditionally served a commemorative function. Like most ancient stelae, this sculpture is also essentially planar and upright. The steel weathers when exposed to the elements, developing an evenly corroded, non-reflective surface.

Finally, Figure 5-13, shown on the next page. (The thinking human is on display at the National Gallery of Art, and the sculpture of the thinking rabbit is part of the Sculpture Garden):

Reacting against the formal, constructed metal sculpture that predominated when he was in art school, Barry Flanagan explored painting, dance, and installation pieces. He has produced an inventive and varied body of work filled with humor and poetic associations, often evoked by the particular organic materials he employed. While working with clay in the early 1980s, Flanagan perceived the image of a hare "unveiling" itself before him. The hare has appeared in an endless variety of guises in Flanagan's bronzes. In *Thinker on a Rock* the artist substitutes his signature hare for Rodin's *Thinker* (1880), making a witty and irreverent reference to one of the world's best-known sculptures.

I'm art!



Figure 5-13. The Thinkers.

No. I'm art!

