

Paatal Benayy.

SWISS INSTITUTE - NEW YORK

*Raffaella Benazzi*

WOOD SCULPTURES

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MAY 10-JUNE 17, 1990



## Acknowledgements

The Swiss Institute of New York takes pride in presenting the work of one of Switzerland's foremost contemporary sculptors: Raffaël Benazzi.

That Benazzi currently chooses to work in wood is particularly significant to us, since wood—one of our country's principal resources—occupies a singular place in Swiss economy and culture. Raffaël Benazzi transcends the familiar mystery of the wood, to create an object loaded with unpredictable emotions.

It has been a refreshing pleasure preparing this exhibition with Raffaël Benazzi and his delightful wife, Serpoohi, in their bucolic studio, surrounded by the woods of Montague, New Jersey. Despite hard constraints, their patience and gentleness made everything possible.

Our deepest gratitude goes to the Swiss Society of New York, our faithful and longtime supporter, without whose generosity this catalogue could never have been issued.

We also wish to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of Linda Geiser, for her irresistible good humor and dynamic commitment to this project; of Margrit Kaeser, who put her time and talent unconditionally at our disposal; and of Michael Karp, whose highly esteemed advice and collaboration was greatly appreciated.

A.B.



It can be said of Raffaël Benazzi that he is an artist whose true metier is mystery yet one whose work holds no secrets. From the “open abstraction” wood sculptures that first brought him serious attention to his voluptuous, rounded forms in alabaster; from the pagan iconography of his pendulous jewelry and (especially) to the stoic cubes of the past decade, Benazzi’s work speaks most eloquently in its contemplative silence.

In this they reflect, perhaps, the naturally taciturn qualities of the farmer, the peasant, the man of the soil—Benazzi’s nurturing roots—whose rhythms are those of nature and whose primary organ of interaction with his environment is a watchful eye.

It is this quality of waiting, of taking things in, that informs these cubes, lends them their power, and resonates beyond their simplicity to more profound, spiritual issues.

The correspondences between these sculptures and the art of Benazzi’s time—Brancusi’s *Gate of the Kiss*, to select one particularly relevant example—lies in the tension between reticence and revelation. “I am not,” Benazzi once said, “a showman.” Yet the internal intricacy of his work is

telling and it shows, like a tabernacle that stands open, revealing the spirit within.

The artist’s links with contemporary art exist on a far more personal level, as well. It is less coincidence than fate that he was taken under the wing of Jules Bissier (1893–1965) in 1949 at the very time that artist, having passed through many stages, was beginning his wood sculptures. Fortuitous, too, was his subsequent association with Hans Jean Arp (1886–1966). Benazzi’s heritage from both Bissier, a founder of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, or “New Objectivity” movement (opposed to both abstraction and expressionism), and Arp, the independent thinker, Dada/Surrealist and poet, lies less in the direct transmission of “art” than in communicating the aesthetic of the maverick, the loner, the solitary creator. “Their influence,” says Richard Pichler, author of *Swiss Artists in New York*, “was primarily to open the young Benazzi to art.” They also bequeathed to him the courage to be, in his own words, “a self-taught anarchist.”

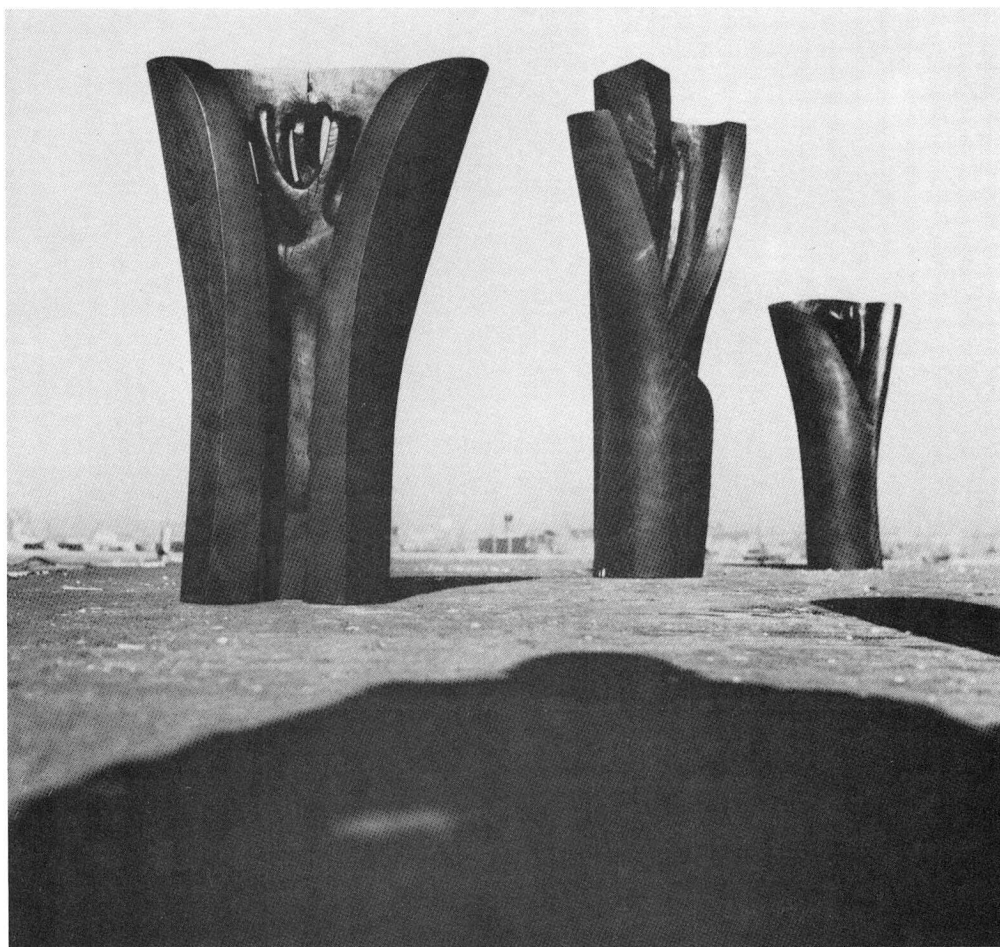
One can examine at greater length the similarities among these artists: Bissier’s early “neo-medieval romanticism” in which Benazzi, through the sober tone of his work since 1979, still participates; Arp’s

restless, tactile surfaces and relentless probing of forms and shapes. But equal to these early influences—and more relevant to the current exhibition—is the impact of New York itself on the sculptor’s work.

Of the black charred patina which envelops his cubes, Benazzi says, “What Ad Reinhardt did with color, I do with space;”—an acknowledgement of debt to the quintessential New Yorker of the New York School. It has been said that Benazzi’s forms have turned hard-edged and angular as a result of his emigration to New York, and there is probably truth in this perception. Yet he has never forsaken the sensual and tactile that has informed his work since his genesis as an artist.

Benazzi’s words regarding “open abstraction” pieces with which he began his career may apply equally to his latest work. “When Rodin sculpted Balzac, he had the figure stand with his arms folded across his chest, the writer’s cloak wrapped tightly around him, very defensively. My ‘cloaks’ are wrapped, too, but they are open. Like myself, they are vulnerable.”

Michael Karp

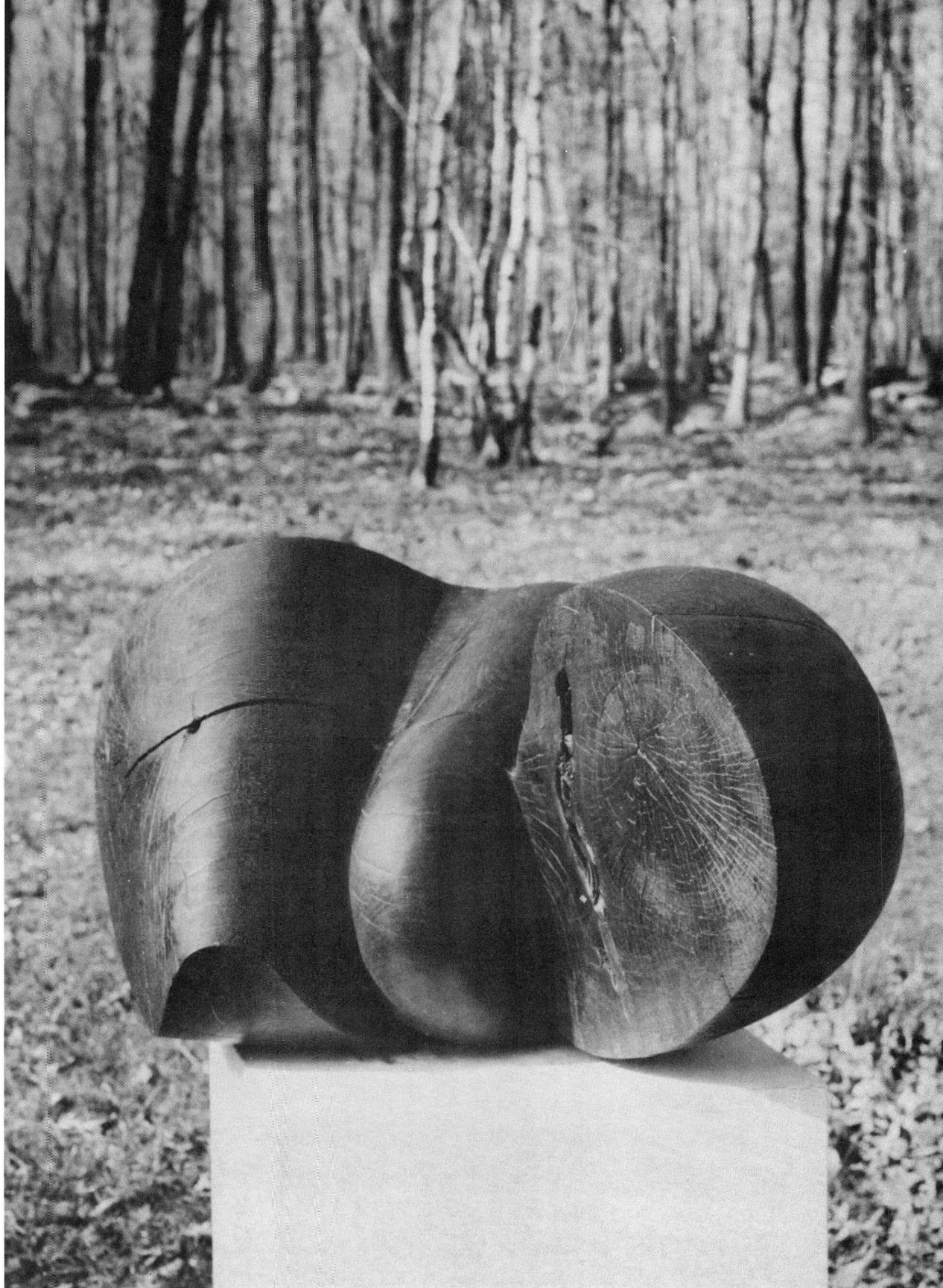


Untitled, 1982/86, white ash, foreground, 46 × 29 × 13 inches

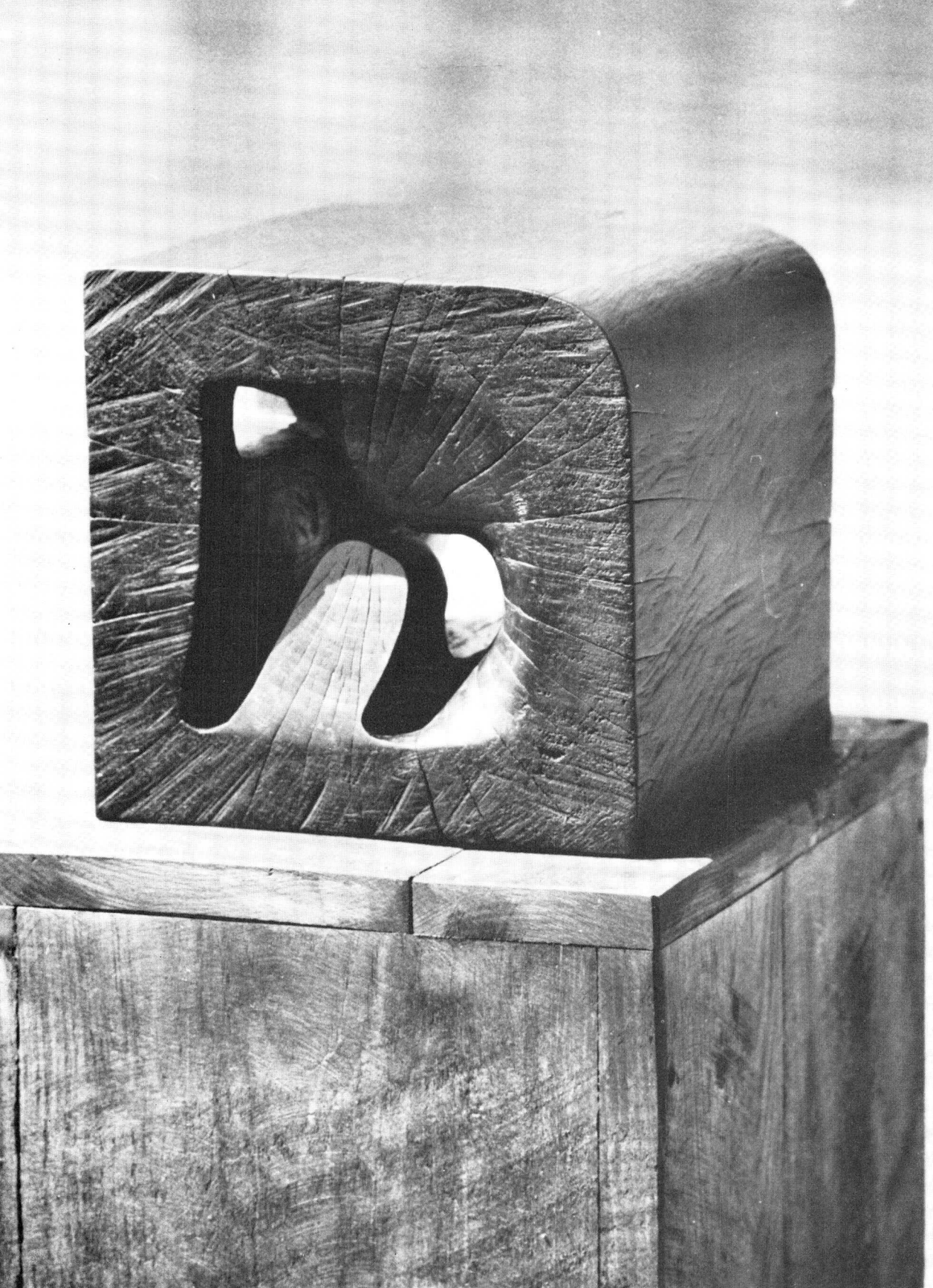


Untitled, 1986, black walnut,  $9\frac{1}{2} \times 28\frac{1}{4} \times 19\frac{1}{2}$  inches



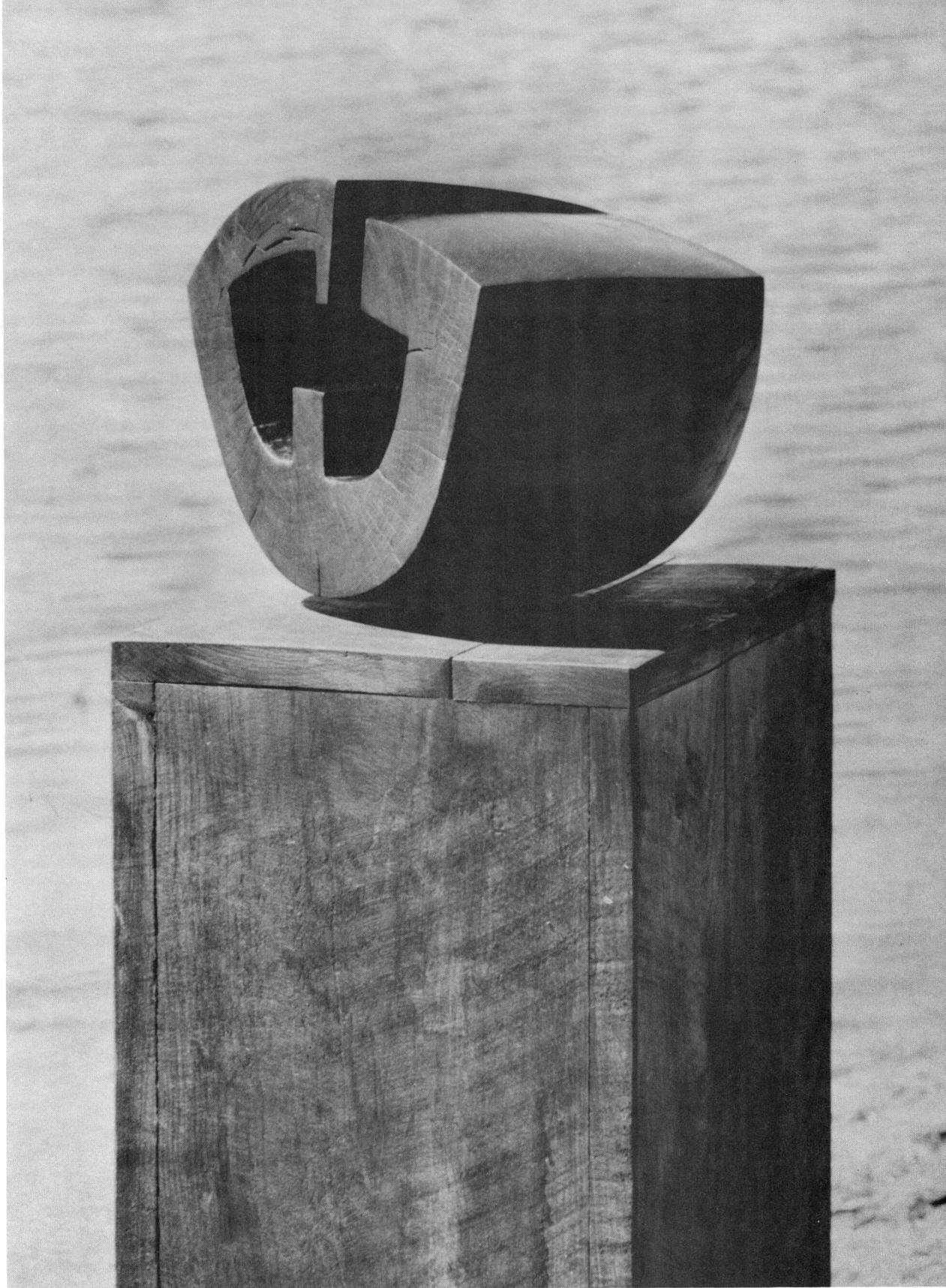


► Untitled, 1988, black walnut, 18 × 34 × 25 inches

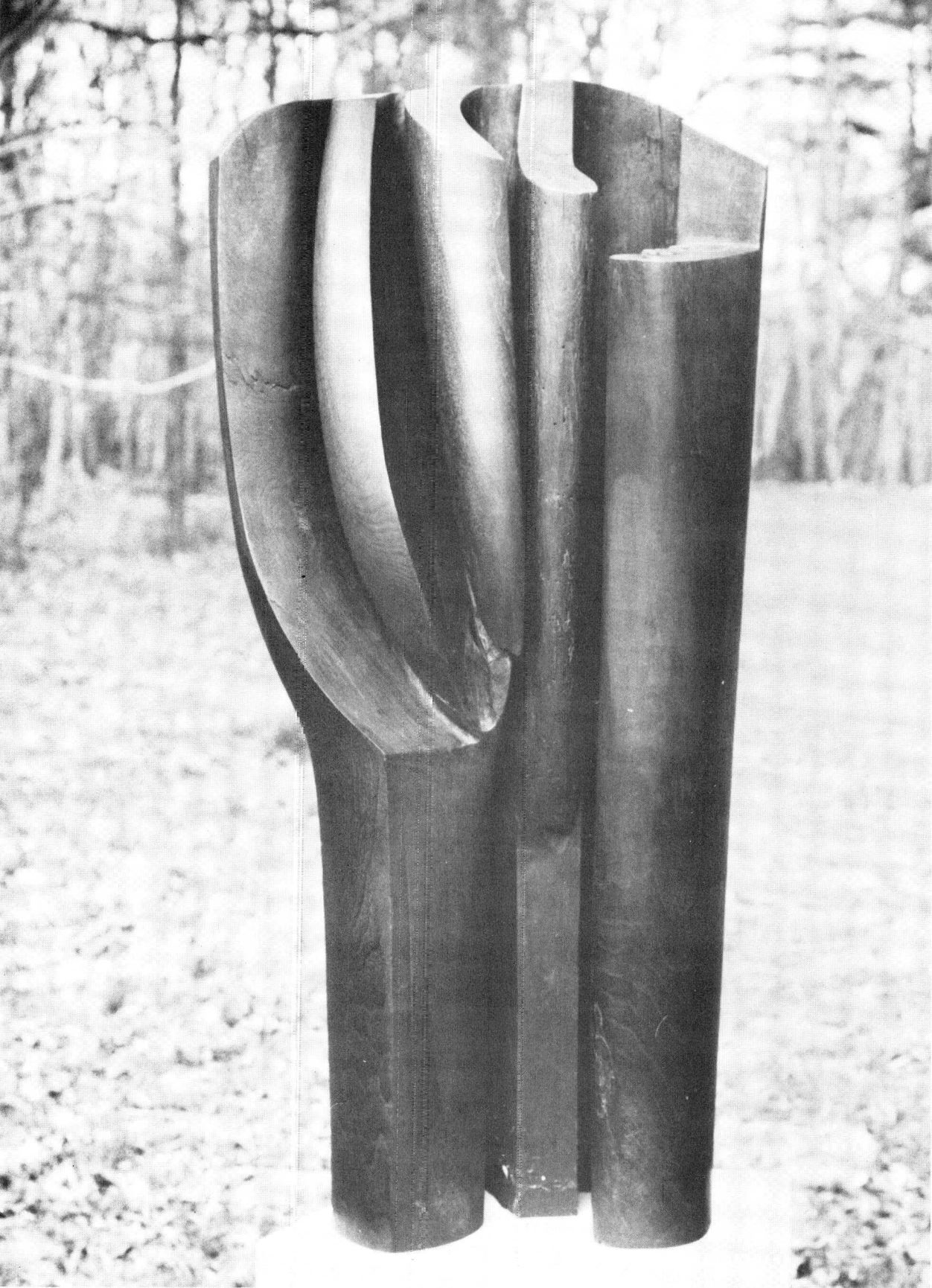


► Untitled, 1988, black walnut, 10 × 10½ × 12½ inches



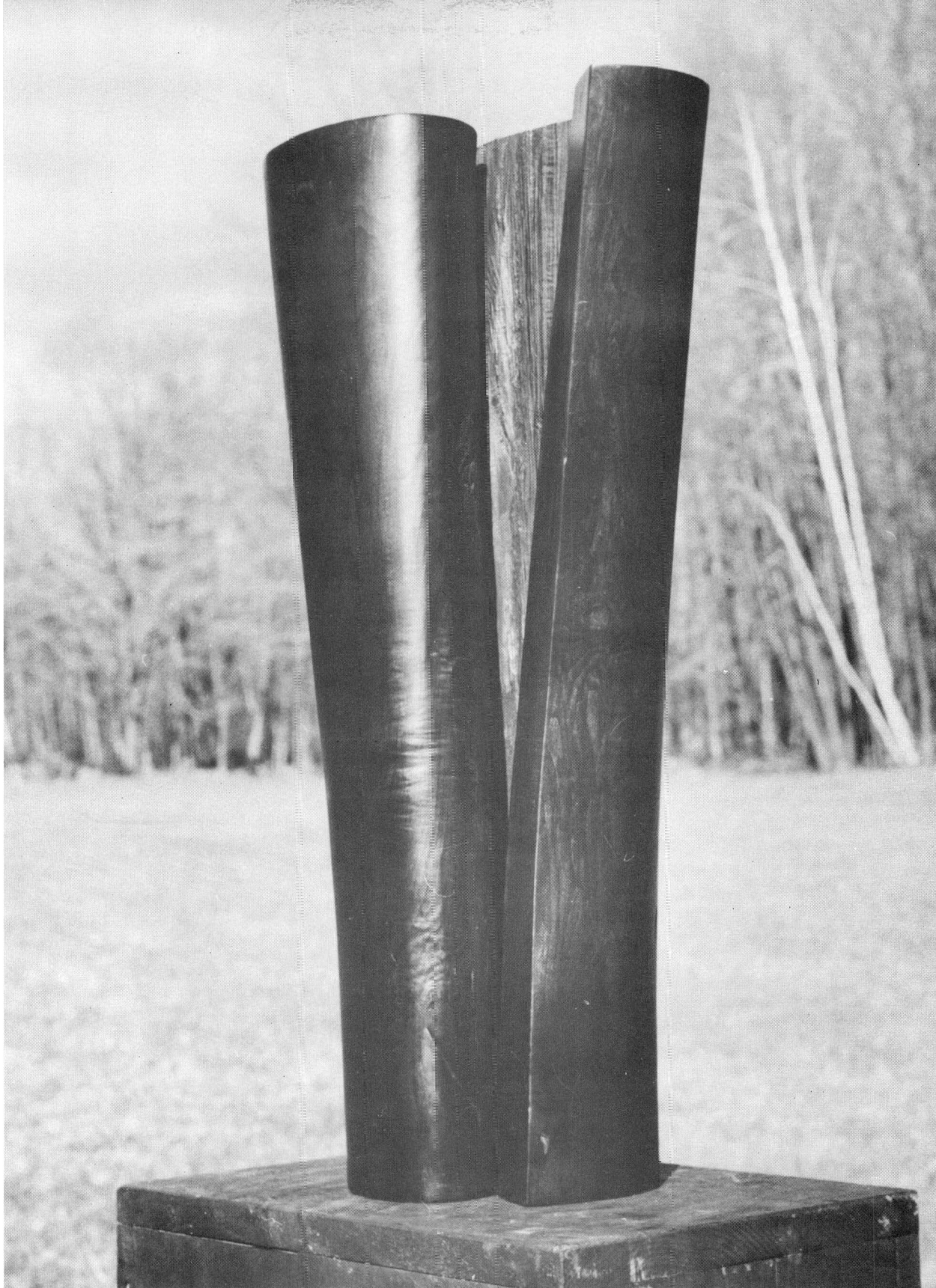


► Untitled, 1988, black cherry,  $10\frac{3}{4} \times 14 \times 13\frac{1}{2}$  inches



► Untitled, 1988, black walnut, 45 × 24 × 16 inches



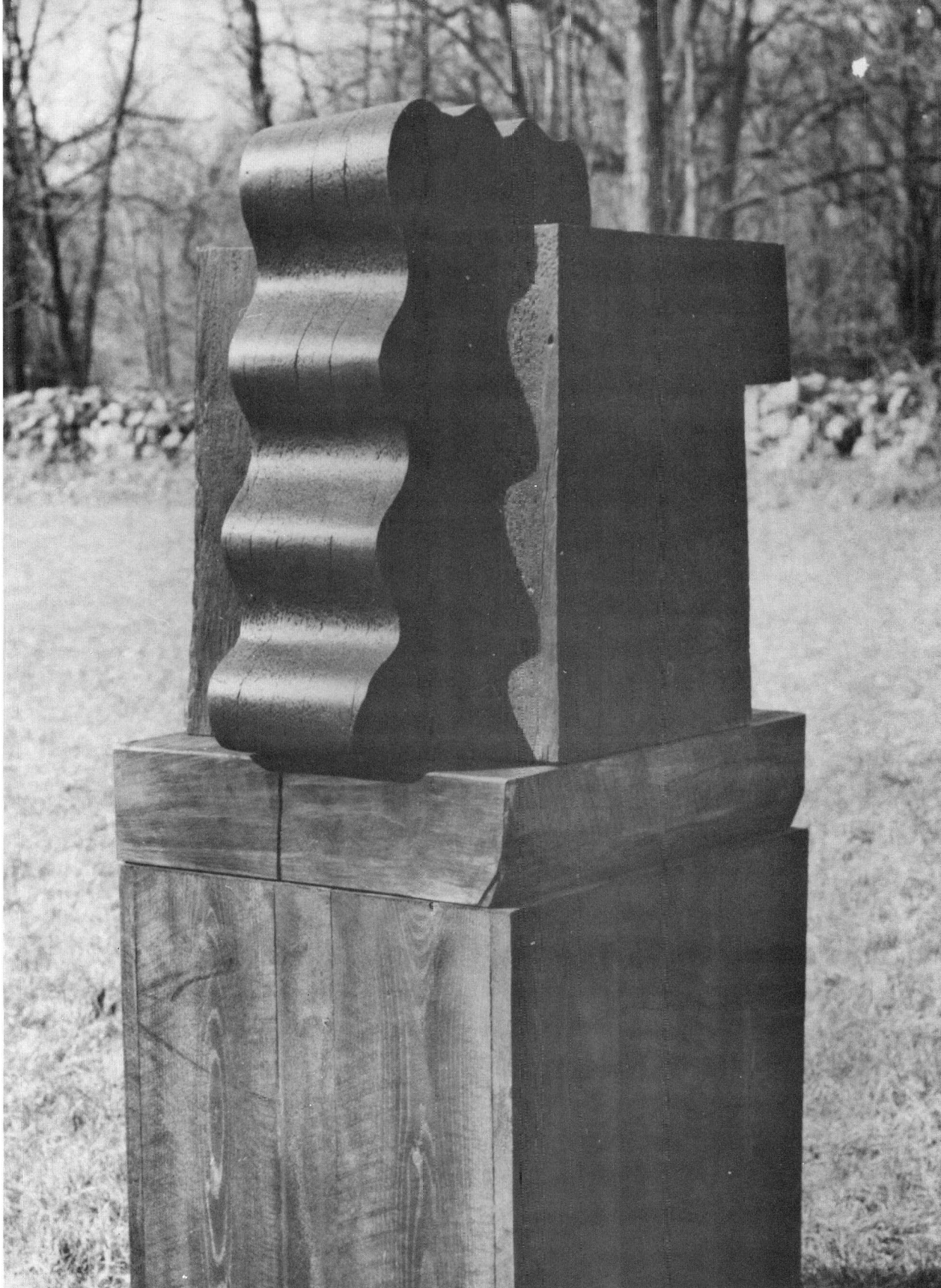


Untitled, 1987, linden, 31 x 16 x 8 inches





Untitled, 1989, oriental elm, 26½ × 23 × 17 inches

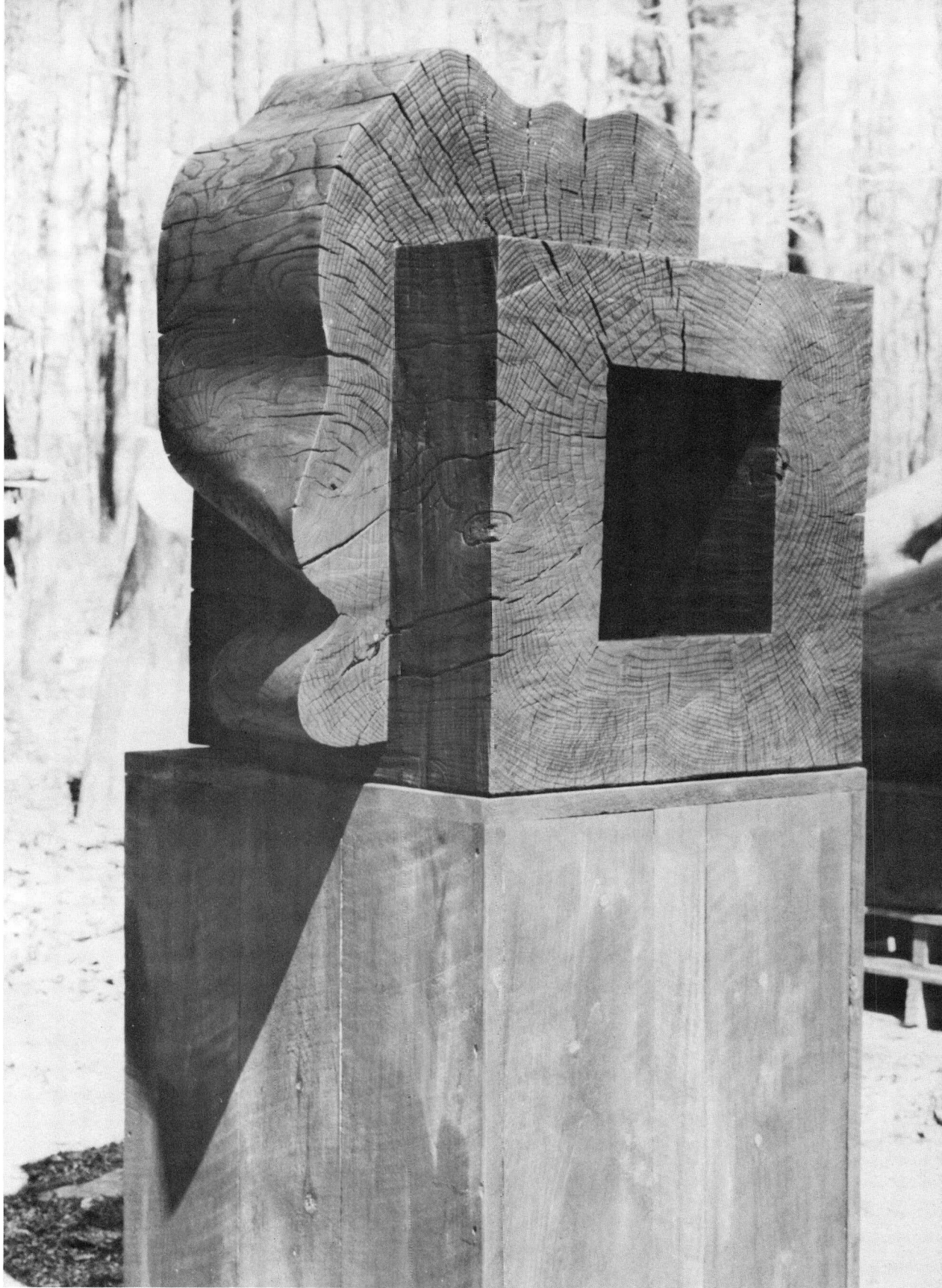


Untitled, 1989, oak, 29 × 30 × 23½ inches



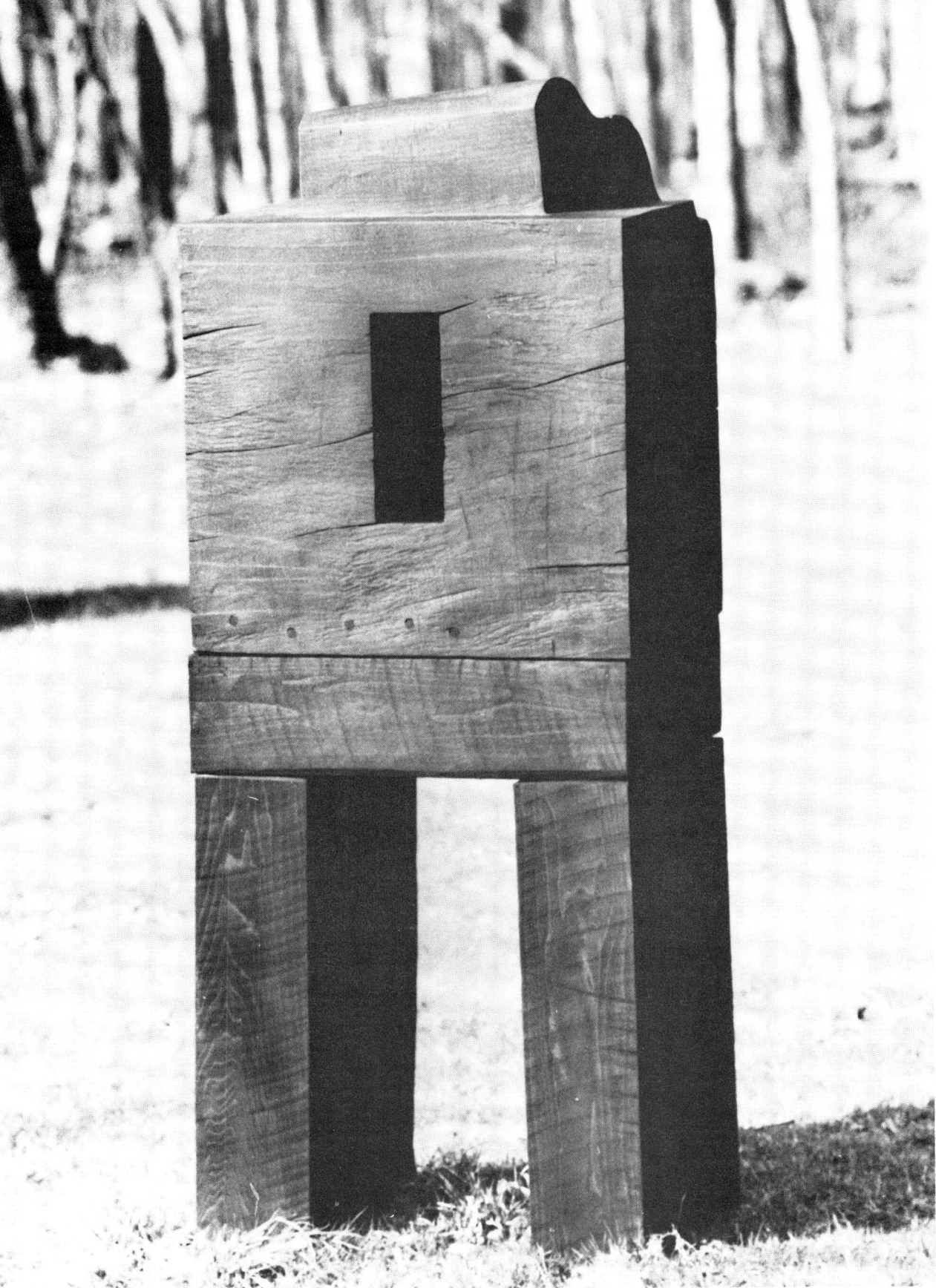


► Untitled, 1989, black gum, 18 × 20 × 13 inches



Untitled, 1989, oriental elm, 35 × 32 × 30 inches





► Untitled, 1989, oriental elm, 30 × 20 × 25 inches

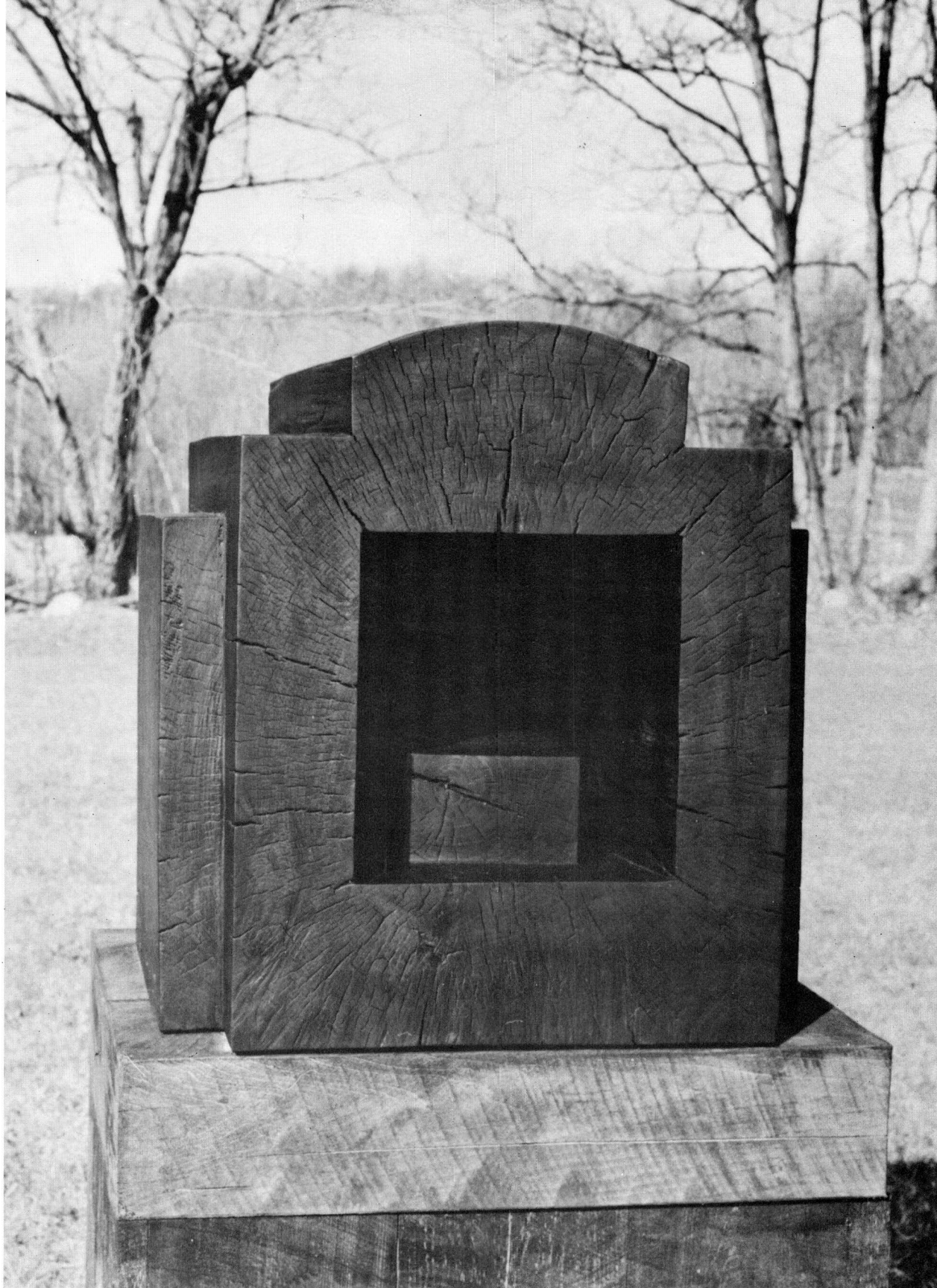


Three untitled sculptures, 1989



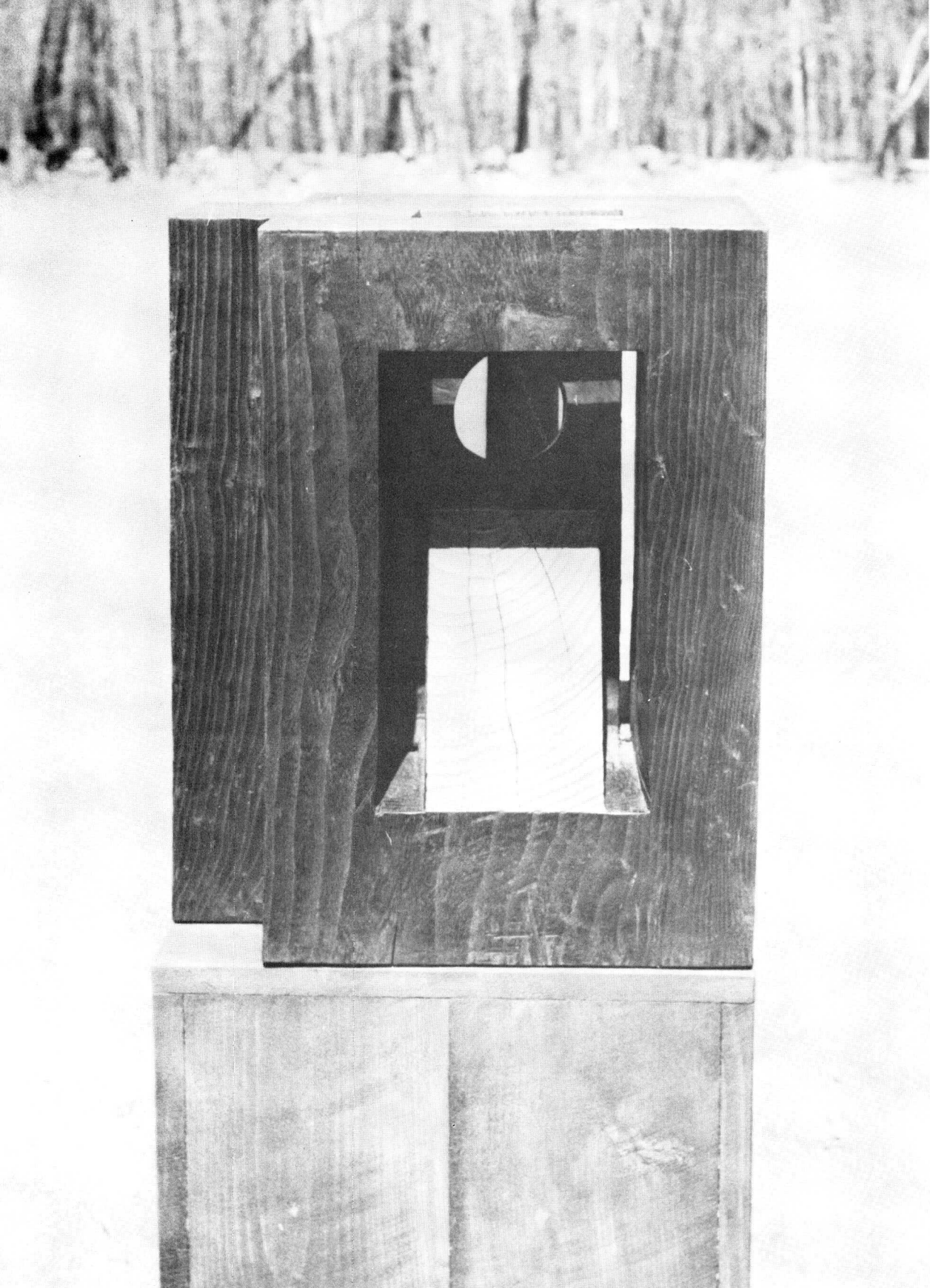


► Untitled, 1989, oriental elm, 23 × 22½ × 24 inches



► Untitled, 1989, elm, 26¼ × 25 × 23½ inches





► Untitled, 1989, oriental elm, 25 × 21½ × 18¾ inches



► Untitled, 1989, oriental elm, 25 × 21½ × 18¾ inches

## **RAFFAËL BENZAÏ**

- 1933 Born, Rapperswil, Switzerland
- 1952 Meets artist and mentor Julius Bissier (1893–1965)  
Currently resides in New York, New York; Montague, New Jersey;  
San Vincenzo (Livorno, Tuscany), Italy; Zürich, Switzerland

## **SOLO EXHIBITIONS**

- 1957 Galleria Citadella, Ascona
- 1957 Galerie Numaga, La Chaux-de-Fonds
- 1963 Galerie Charles Lienhard, Zürich
- 1967 Gimpel and Hanover Galerie, Zürich
- 1968 Schlosshof, Rapperswil
- 1969 Galerie Charles Lienhard, Basel  
Gimpel and Hanover Galerie, Zürich (Jewelry)
- 1971 Galerie Defet/Schmidt-Bank, Nürnberg, Germany
- 1973 Galerie 57, Bienne  
Gimpel and Hanover Galerie, Zürich
- 1974 P&P Galerie, Zug
- 1975 Galerie Koller, Château de Lucens  
Galerie Dr. Luise Kron, Konstanz  
Elaine Ganz European Gallery, San Francisco, U.S.A.
- 1976 Allerheiligen Museum, Schaffhausen (Retrospective)  
Altersheim Sunnepark, Zürich (Gold and Silver Jewelry)
- 1977 Chiostro di San Francisco, Sorrento, Italy
- 1979 Gimpel and Hanover Galerie with André Emmerich Gallery,  
Zürich
- 1980 André Emmerich Gallery, New York  
Les Ambassadeurs, Geneva and Zürich
- 1981 Gimpel and Hanover Galerie with André Emmerich Gallery,  
Zürich
- 1983 Gimpel and Hanover Galerie with André Emmerich Gallery,  
Zürich
- 1984 "Bronze Sculptures, Pieces Uniques," City Park, Uster
- 1986 Galerie 68, Klosters  
Museum of Art, Glarus

### **GROUP EXHIBITIONS**

- 1966 Bienne Sculpture Exhibition: Subterranean Grottos; Concrete Sculptures/Environments
- 1972 "Public Works of Sculpture," Museum of Modern Art, Nürnberg, Germany  
"Art of the City," Rottweil, Germany  
"Traveling Exhibition," (England, France, Germany, Holland, United States and Eastern Europe) (Through 1974)
- 1973 "The Twelfth Biennial of Sculpture," Anvers, Belgium  
"Group Exhibition," Jerusalem and Haifa, Israël
- 1974 Museum of Modern Art, Toronto, Canada
- 1975 "Public Sculpture Event," Civic Center, San Francisco, U.S.A.
- 1977 "Group Exhibition," Gallerie Ge, Winterthur
- 1978 Venice Biennial, Venice, Italy: Swiss Pavilion  
Swiss Center Gallery, New York, NY
- 1980 Bienne Public Works Project, Bienne
- 1984 "Group Exhibition," Gimpel and Hanover with André Emmerich Gallery, Zürich

### **COMMISSIONS**

- 1969– Bronze sculptures, "Pieces Uniques": Gymnasium Ramibühl,  
1970 Zürich; Sportszentrum Magglingen
- 1971 Five large wood reliefs: Seminar Kreuzlingen

### **FILMS**

- 1968 "Raffaël Benazzi" Director: Peter Schweiger; Condor Films
- 1980 DRS (Swiss Television) documentary, "Raffaël Benazzi"
- 1984 "Von Stamm zur Figur." Director: Roland Huber

### **AWARD**

- 1966 Jean Arp Award

#### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- 1963 Catalogue, Galerie Charles Lienhard, Zürich, Switzerland, Hans Neuburg.
- 1963 "The Sculptor Raphaël Benazzi," Hans Neuburg: *Werk*, No 9; Winterthur, Switzerland.
- 1964 *Contemporary Sculpture*, Ulrich Gertz: Second Edition, Berlin, West Germany.
- 1964 Catalogue, Galerie Gimpel & Hanover, Zürich, Switzerland, Willy Rotzler.
- 1966 *The History of Modern Sculpture*, Herbert Read: London, Great Britain.
- 1967 *Contemporary Swiss Sculpture*, Marcel Joray: Editions du Griffon, Neuchâtel, Switzerland.
- 1967 "Raphaël Benazzi," Willy Rotzler: *Du*, No 319, Zürich, Switzerland.
- 1968 Catalogue, Schlosshof Exhibition, Rapperswil, Switzerland, Fritz Billeter.
- 1969 Catalogue, Galerie Charles Lienhard, Basel, Switzerland, Paul Nizon.
- 1971 "Raphaël Benazzi," Leonardo Bezzola; *Werk*, No 1; Winterthur, Switzerland.
- 1971 "Raphaël Benazzi," Hans Baumann: *Tages-Anzeiger Magazine* No 15, April, Zürich, Switzerland.
- 1972 "Raphaël Benazzi," Willy Rotzler: *Kunstbulletin*, No 3, March, Zürich, Switzerland.
- 1973 Catalogue, Galerie Gimpel & Hanover, Zürich, Switzerland, Felix Baumann.
- 1974 Catalogue, Galerie P&P, Zug, Switzerland, Hans Baumann.
- 1975 "Raphaël Benazzi," John Marlowe: *Current Art Magazine*, No 3; August–September, San Francisco, U.S.A.
- 1975 Catalogue, Galerie Koller, Château de Lucens, Switzerland, Willy Rotzler
- 1976 Catalogue, Allerheiligen Museum, Schaffhausen; Switzerland, Willy Rotzler.
- 1978 Catalogue, Venice Biennial, Swiss Pavilion, Italy, Sibyll Heusser.
- 1980 *Les Ambassadeurs*, Willy Rotzler: Zürich, Switzerland.
- 1980 "Raphaël Benazzi," Peter Bichsel; *Plus*, No 34, Zürich, Switzerland.
- 1981 *Raffaël Benazzi*, Hans Baumann, Peter Bichsel, Willy Rotzler; Photography: Eliette McCouch-Benazzi & Leonardo Bezzola, Ex Libris/Kunstkreis Publ., Zürich, Switzerland.
- 1983 *Raffaël Benazzi—Schmuck und Kleinplastiken*, (Jewelry and Small Sculptures), Peter Zeindler—Photography: Leonardo Bezzola, Waser Verlag Buchs, Zürich, Switzerland.
- 1983 *Raffaël Benazzi, Schmuck und Kleinplastiken*, same as above. Franziska Müller-Widmer: special edition for Bank Julius Bär, Zürich, Switzerland.
- 1985 *Swiss Artists in New York*, Richard H. Pichler, Ringier-Print, Adligenswil, Switzerland.

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