

## SCULPTORS

## The Uses of Ingenuity

Faceless, armless, toeless, sexless and potbellied, the figures could be store dummies, moon men, dolls, Oscars, or medical textbook diagrams. Ever since their creator, Sculptor Ernest Trova, 39, presented them as "falling men" on rotating wheels and bolted six together into a giant humanoid child's jack for a Famous-Barr department-store exhibition in St. Louis in 1964, the debate has raged over what the little men mean.

In London, when Trova showed them, they were called by one critic "the cumulative image of Man as victim, stereotype, faceless statistic." In Minneapolis, they typified, according to Curator Jan van der Marck, "the modern enigma." Trova himself has said, "The falling man is a personal hypothetical theory on the nature of man. I believe that man is, first of all, an imperfect creature."

**Lost in a Maze.** Now that his gleaming, chrome-plated figures stand on their own two feet in the U.S.'s top contemporary museums and private collections (the Museum of Modern Art put kaleidoscopes of Trova's falling men on sale for \$3.95 each, sold 8,000 in the past year), Trova is less concerned with the figures than with the sculptural environments in which he places them (see color). "You might say I am a student of Aristotle," explained the mustachioed Missourian in his suburban St. Louis studio last week. "Man has to deal with things around him. The environment is sometimes threatening, sometimes placid."

In *Maze*, Trova says he meant the boxlike environment to be a "complicated" one. One figure is enclosed in a Plexiglas chamber, another figure is trying to get into one, while the third and fourth are lost among the partitions. The *Wheel Man*, who looks out on Manhattan's turbulent Fifth Avenue from the garden of the Guggenheim Museum, could be a symbol of the in-



ERNEST TROVA  
*Landscapes with IBMs.*

stability of man's environment, as well as a study of motion itself.

**Alien Atmosphere.** The three-ton *Venice Landscape*,\* currently on display at Manhattan's Whitney Museum, locates three 7-ft.-tall bronze monsters on a mechanistic version of a Giacometti plain sown with half-spheres, cylinders, 16 round holes and 16 matching pegs—a symbolic landscape, to Trova, of "the world today with its IBM machines." Decorating his figures are gizmos from his large assortment of "found objects," which he picks up in the antique shops around St. Louis' Gaslight Square. A brace of oxygen tanks perches on the shoulders of the center figure, while a shower nozzle, stainless-steel tubing and a ski cable festoon the fronts of the other two. The apparatus eerily suggests scuba gear, gas

\* So called because it was originally selected for the 1966 Venice Biennale, then canceled when a squabble developed over the composition of the U.S. exhibit.

masks, or an astronaut's breathing equipment—items necessary, in Trova's view, to habilitate man for "an alien atmosphere."

Such gadgetry, from aging dental machinery to vacuum-cleaner engine castings, also embellishes many other Trova pieces. This is, in part, because Trova, a former department-store display designer, believes that "art today is ingenuity." In part, they seem the necessary equipment for his men's survival. "The logical deduction from the fact that man is imperfect," Trova says, "has to be world destruction. My man, if he's trying to tell a story at all, is saying that we ought not to go berserk. The choice is between dignity and hysteria. I choose dignity."

## CRAFTS

## Stirring Up the Past

To be born with a silver spoon in one's mouth, so goes the adage, is to be born assured of wealth. Rarer still are the spoons on which tots teethed in Olde Englande. So rare, in fact, that in 1531, when table manners were simply a toothy process of disconnecting meat from bones, one Humfrey Cooke willed that "every one of my childrene shal have one silver spone callid the Apostles." For when it came to skimming the *crème de la crème*, nothing could match a set of spoons decorated with figures of the Twelve Apostles.

Today, a set of such spoons is the rarest item in the market for antique silver. There are only seven complete sets known. Each is made up of 13 spoons, a dozen for the saints of the Last Supper and the last for Christ. Judas Iscariot is replaced by St. Matthias,\* for what father would give his child a Judas spoon to slurp up his porridge?

**Tools of Martyrdom.** Until 1881, only two such sets were known, one ensconced in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, and the other in London's Goldsmiths

\* The Apostles usually represented in spoons: Matthew, Peter, John, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, James, James the Less, Simon the Zealot, Thaddaeus, Matthias.

NELSON MORRIS



KALEIDOSCOPIC VIEWS OF THE "FALLING MAN"  
*Typifying the modern enigma.*