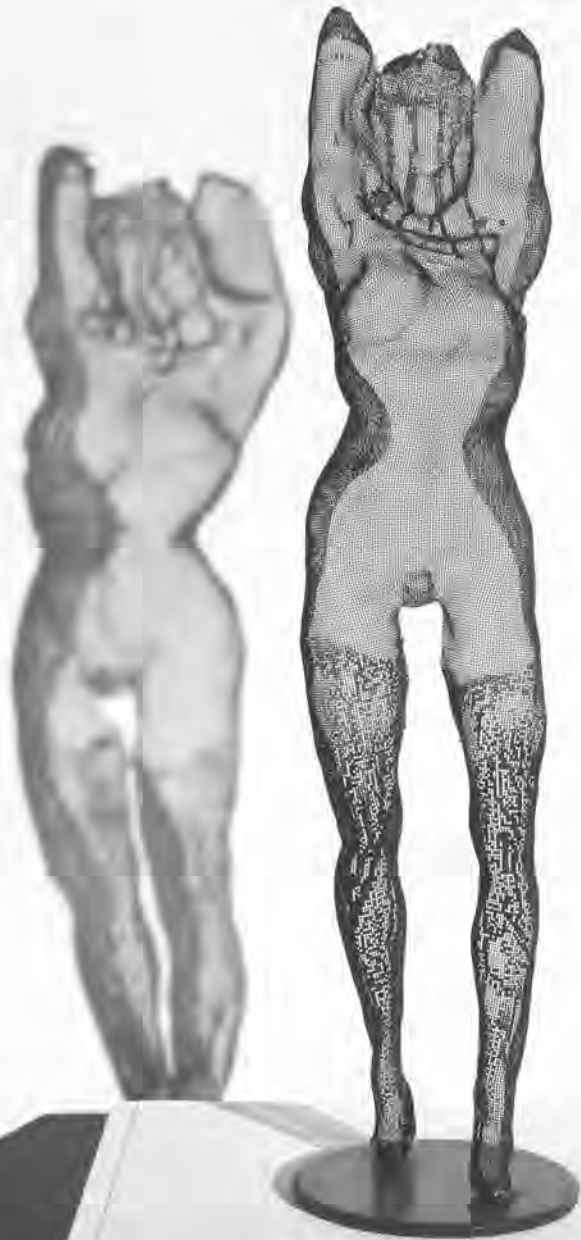


Exhibition dates Thursday May 5 until Saturday June 5 1994



FIRE STATION
gallery

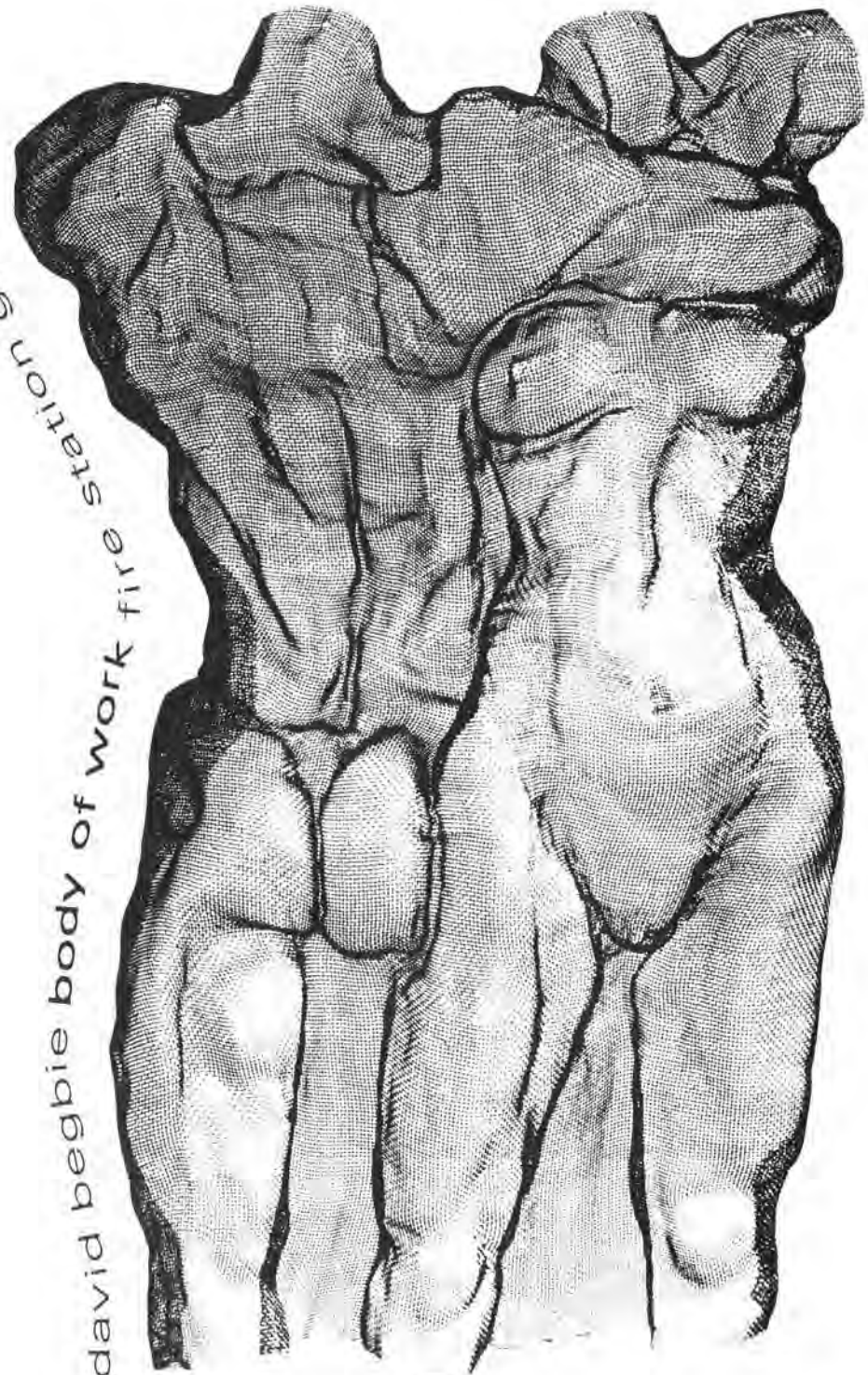


Gallery hours Tuesday to Saturday-12 noon to 6 pm
749 Darling Street Rozelle NSW 2039 Australia
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EXHIBITION COMMISSIONED BY THE FIRE STATION GALLERY IN ASSOCIATION WITH HOUSE GREENE. CATALOGUE DESIGNED BY COLIN TOWAN. PRINTED BY BLOOMHAM & GILMOR ON 100% PAPER

Front cover: Back to Front 1993 56 x 21.5 x 16 cm Steel Mesh Back Cover: The Stripper 1992 54 x 12.5 cm Steel Mesh

David Begbie body of work fire station gallery



David Begbie is a sculptor whose exquisite works explore the physical, emotional and spiritual possibilities inherent in the human form. It is significant that Begbie's chosen medium for expression is steel mesh - a highly innovative and unique medium for sculpture. It is essentially a cold, hard, flat, industrial material which he transforms into bodies that have a remarkable feeling of sensuality and emotion, are highly evocative of flesh and bone, and exuberantly three dimensional. In Begbie's hands, the steel mesh is like clay and with seemingly effort-

David Begbie

less ease he shapes it three dimensionally into challenging expressive form. His work reflects a superb understanding of the principles of sculpture and drawing, and it embodies a classical directness through anatomical precision, but there is more to Begbie than this.

It was in the 20th Century Gallery at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1989 that I first met Begbie. He was working on a commission of mannequins for the Powerhouse Museum's exhibition Australian Fashion, The Contemporary Art. Constructed from black steel rods, each mannequin was given a unique personality and life of its own. There were all manner of dramatic body positions. Each had been individually and imaginatively designed to meet the specific needs of every unique garment in the exhibition. Later, standing alone

in the gallery, it seemed as if I were in a world inhabited by a lively crowd of extraordinary beings. Begbie's energy had created an intoxicatingly surreal experience for London's avant-garde fashion world.

Like Rodin, with whom he shares close affinities, Begbie is a moulder, not a carver of forms, and like Rodin it is the impact of light, shadow, line and form that inspires him. He is interested in the way we see and the optical laws that govern our perceptions. A Begbie figure is a transparent optical garment, light reflects from

the surface and also passes right through. He introduces the use of shadows to enhance the visual experience and invites movement and exploration in and around the sculpture. Consequently, each time the viewer changes position a new set of relationships appears.

Intrigued by the expressive possibilities of the fragmented figure he says that "Rodin exploited the idea of truncation, but he discovered that you could evoke the rest of the figure or an incredible personality just through the partial figure." Confronted with the torso the viewer is encouraged to imagine or invent the rest. In another sense, with Begbie, the effect is intense. In the silence and transparency of his work there is a compellingly primordial power, which dominates the surrounding space in a monumental yet intimate way. In this respect a



parallel can be drawn with Giacometti. In the flattened reality of a Giacometti head there exists a similarity in effect. The flatness creates a greater presence than a normally observed sculptural rendition. It talks of the subconscious rather than the observed - this is the source of its power. A similar effect can be witnessed in Begbie's work.

In contemporary terms, Begbie's choice of material suggests that the skin of the body is also its cage. It tells us that a struggle between the male and female personality for expression is at issue, as well as the desire for their unity. The finished works have a contemporary sexual identity, the archetypal male and female yet each has both masculine and feminine qualities and even the hermaphrodite is explored. Here lies a contradiction in the truest sense. The final sculptures have gone through metamorphosis this way and that. As Begbie himself says there is an element of self

exploration in whatever he does. "Often the sex (of the figure) changes in the process of the making."

Begbie was born in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1955 and trained at Winchester School of Art, Gloucester College of Art and Design (Cheltenham) and the Slade School in London (UCL). He is an Associate of The Royal Society of British Sculptors and has exhibited widely in Britain, Europe, the USA and recently in Asia. Examples of his work can be found in the Galleria Nazionale de Arte Moderna, Rome, National Gallery Canberra and the Mezzanine Gallery of MOMA, New York. Origins, his triptych in steel mesh is on permanent view for at least the next 100 years in the Primate Gallery of the Natural History Museum, London and there are numerous major works in corporate and important private collections worldwide. Begbie presently lives and works in London.

David Begbie's first Australian exhibition introduces work that is certain to question those of us who enjoy the supremely evocative and sensual in image making. He steps up the debate about the nature of male and female, challenging as well as enjoying the stereotypic images of macho males and their female opposites. Essentially it is Begbie's European perspective that is refreshing. He offers us a more generous view of sexuality than the few over-defined norms of gender which we are so accustomed to experience in both Australian art and its psyche.

Marie Geissler 1994

biography

1955

Born Edinburgh, Scotland

1975-1976

Winchester School of Art, England

1977-1980

Gloucestershire College of Art and Design (BA Hons), Cheltenham, England

1980-1982

Slade School of Sculpture (H.D.F.A.), London

1993

Associate of The Royal Society of British Sculptors (A.R.B.S.)

exhibitions

one man shows

1979

G.C.A.D. Exhibition Hall, Cheltenham, England

The Centre for Visual Arts, Cheltenham, England

1984

Brompton Gallery, London

1985

Brompton Gallery, London

1986

Forum, Zurich, Switzerland

Navy Pier, Chicago, USA

Savacou Fine Art, Toronto, Canada

Brompton Gallery, Knightsbridge, London

Simpsons of Picadilly, London - Special Collaborative One Man Exhibition

1987

Salama-Caro Gallery, Cork Street, London

I.C.A.F, Olympia, London

1988

Crucifix, Installation at Winchester Cathedral, London

Henley '88 Festival, Henley on Thames, England

1989

Salama-Caro Gallery, Cork Street, London

1990

Salama-Caro Gallery, Cork Street, London

Wates City Tower, London

1991

City Place House, London - Permanent Installation

1992/3

Tower Bridge Piazza, London

1993

Catto Gallery, London

1994

Tower Bridge Piazza, London

Fire Station Gallery, Sydney, Australia

group exhibitions

1980

BA Exhibition, G.C.A.D, Cheltenham, England

1982

Open Studios, Wapping, London

Metro Show '82, London

Harrison McCann, London

MA Exhibition, Slade, London

Christies Inaugural Exhibition, London

1983

Metro Show '83, London

Brompton Gallery, London

1984

I.C.A.F, Barbican Centre, London

A.R.C.O, Madrid, Spain

Ward Jackson Gallery, London

Guildford Art Gallery, Guildford, England

1985

I.C.A.F, Barbican Centre, London

1986

I.C.A.F, Olympia, London

Tristan, M.O.M.A, Palma, Mallorca - Curated by Achille Bonito Olivé

Mandelzoom, Canino, Italy - Curated by Antonio d'Avossa

Il Ponté Galleria Edrice d'Art, Rome, Italy - Collaborative Printmaking Project

1987

Young Variety Club of Great Britain, London

The Male Nude Show, Salama-Caro Gallery, Cork Street, London

The Rachael Papers - special installation at Serpentine Gallery, London

Cinematography - filmed on location at Serpentine Gallery, London

1988

Young Variety Club of Great Britain, London

Juxtapositions. Salama-Caro Gallery, Cork Street, London

I.C.A.F, Olympia, London

1989

Australian Fashion, The Contemporary Art Show, 20th Century Gallery, Victoria & Albert Museum, London (Special commission of mannequins and displays for thirty designers - curated by the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, Australia)

Galleria 57, Madrid, Spain

1990

Galleria 57, Madrid, Spain

1991

Contemporary Art Fair, Los Angeles, USA

Salama-Caro Gallery, Cork Street, London

1992

Contemporary Art Fair, Los Angeles

Salama-Caro Gallery, Cork Street London

Sarah Guinan Associates, London

Collet Champion, London

Variety Club of Great Britain, Christies, London

Philip Samuels Fine Art, St Louis, Missouri, USA

The Inventive Spirit, Autodrome, Brussels, Belgium

1993

International Art Fair, Miami, USA

Whidchurch Gallery, California, USA

Arij Gasiunasen, Miami, USA

20th Century Art Fair, Royal College of Art, London

The Olympian Arts Exhibition, Centre Point, London

Masks exhibition, The West Soho Gallery, London

1994

International Art Fair, Miami, USA

Bruce Lewin Gallery, New York, USA

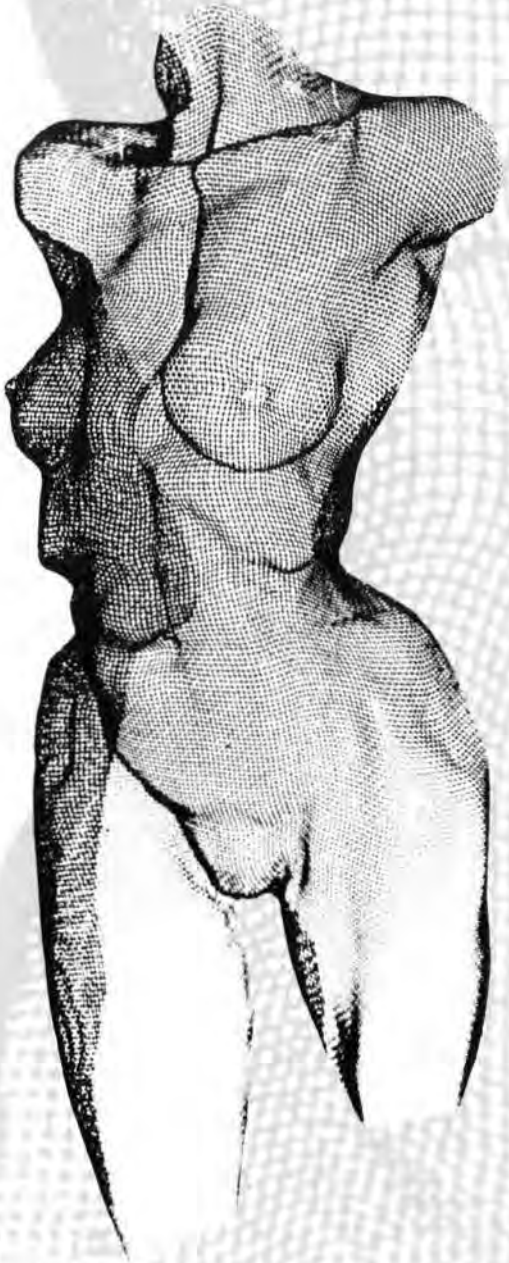
museum collections

Galleria Nazionale de Arte Moderna, Rome - Truncus Erodo Portfolio of Four, using Aqua Forte Etching

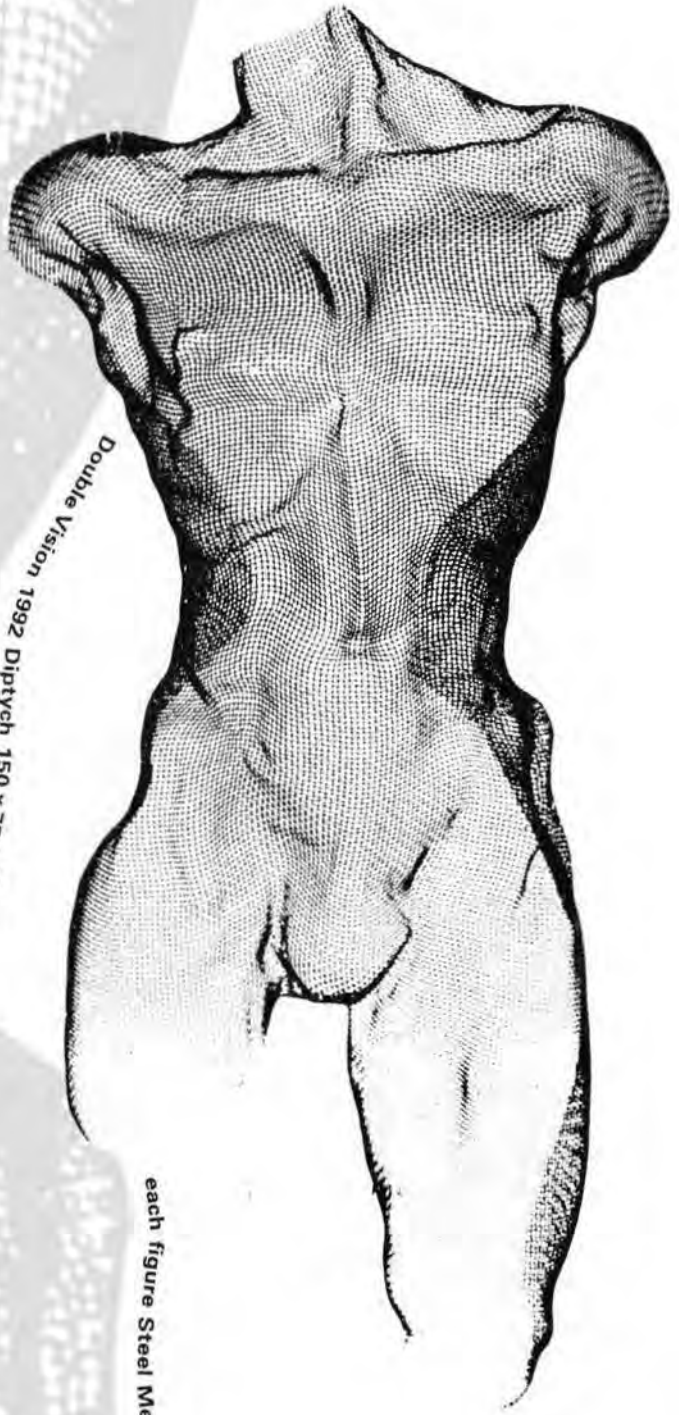
National Gallery Canberra, Australia - Truncus Erodo Portfolio of Four, using Aqua Forte Etching

Mezzanine Gallery of MOMA, New York - Truncus Erodo Portfolio of Four, using Aqua Forte Etching

Primate Gallery, Natural History Museum, London - permanent site for - Origins - Triptych in steel mesh



Double Vision 1992 Diptych 150 x 75 x 30 cm



each figure Steel Mesh

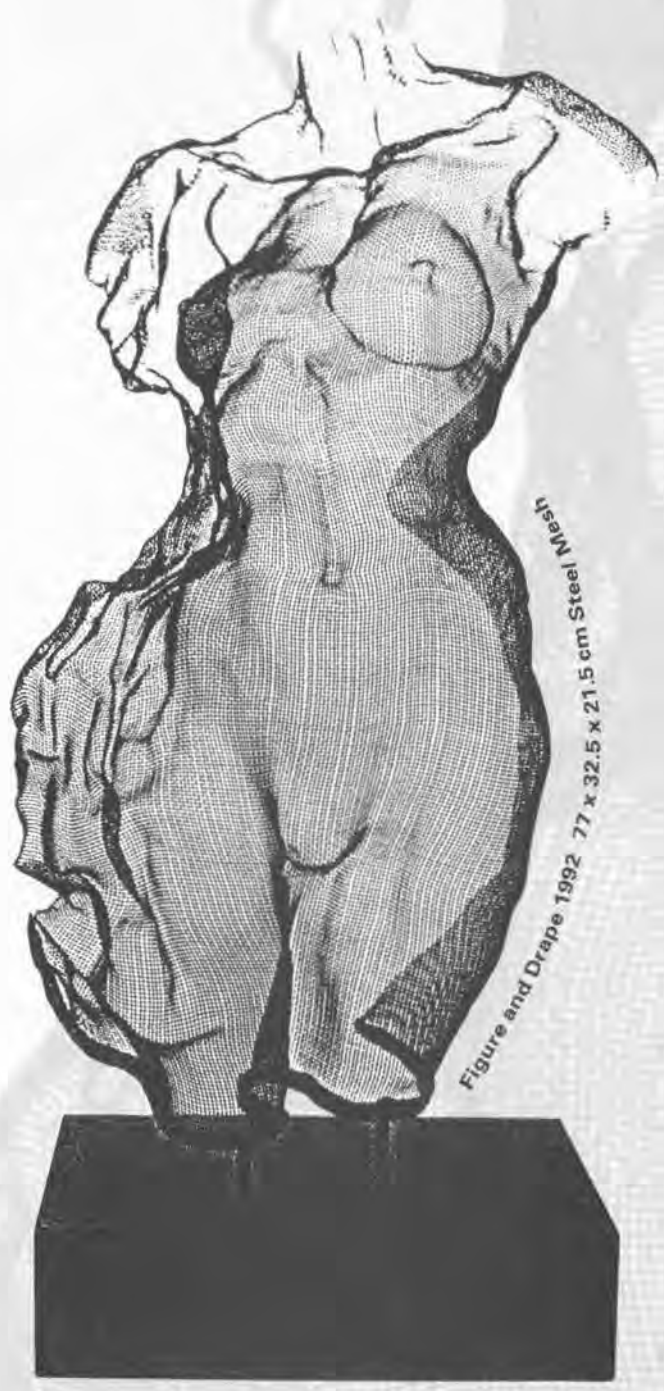
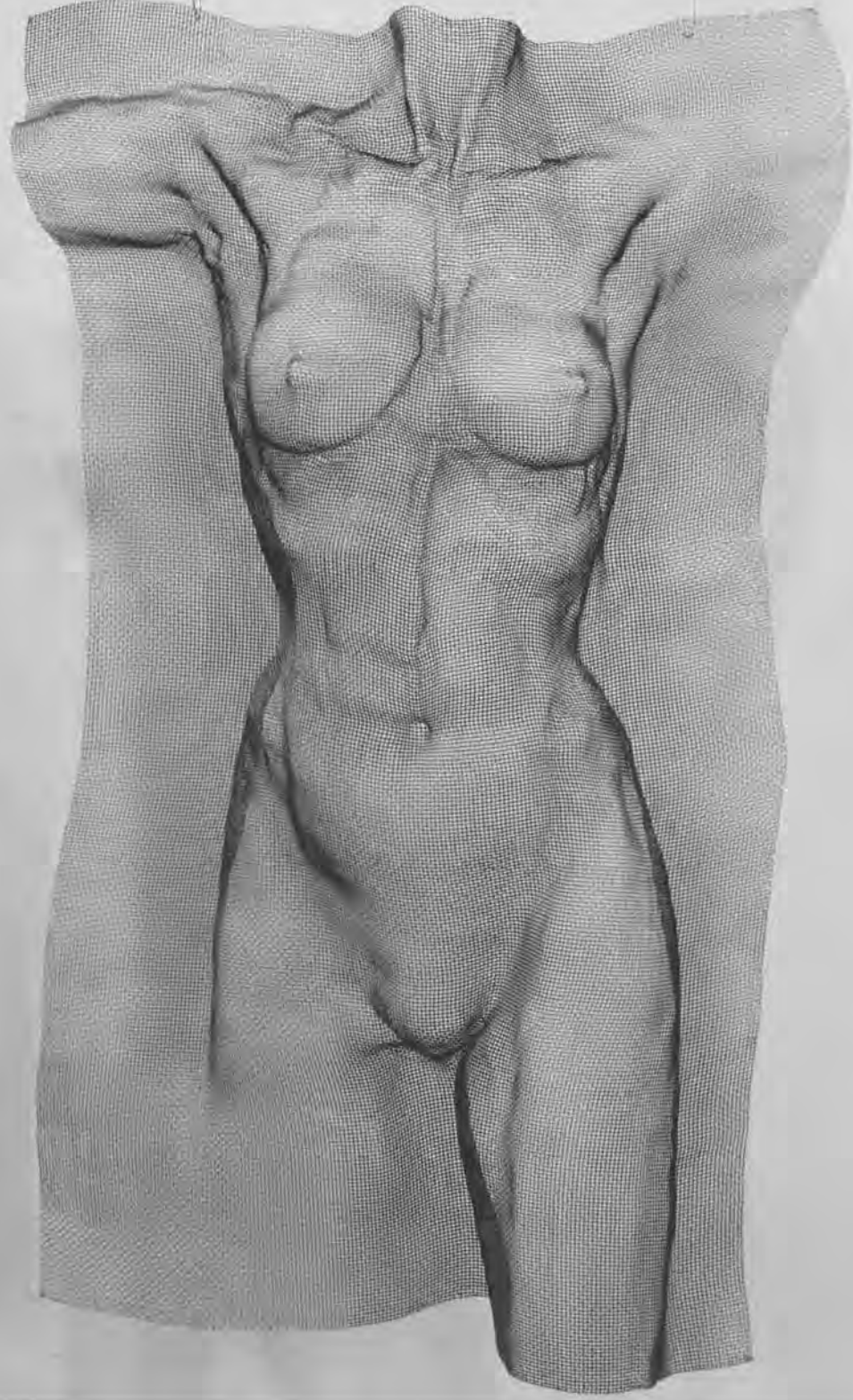


Figure and Drape 1992 77 x 32.5 x 21.5 cm Steel Mesh

"Effective art must be of its time, as well as containing within it some understanding of tradition and the past. David Begbie's art is exhilarating and fascinating precisely because he deals with a subject that could not be more ancient and traditional, but does so in ways that are only possible now. He uses traditional techniques, and techniques that he has invented. He uses the human form, but his art mediates into a series of works, highly individual, that communicate a recognisable, emotionally authentic and affecting interpretation that is his own."

Marina Vaizey

"David Begbie has invented a technique that presents his subject with classical directness undistorted. Yet it possesses the deceptive magic of visual art. The paradoxical feat is achieved by moulding the torso, which is his subject, out of steel mesh. As he is a splendid sculptural draughtsman, the shape is exquisitely outlined. It has the rightness and the adjustment to observation which in their absence we always miss in visual art.

"Where the net curves away towards the contour and beyond it and recedes obliquely from the gaze the superimposed intersections of the mesh generate dazzling moiré patterns. Suddenly we feel the modelling. We grasp the wholeness of the shape in light. The steel mesh that makes these bodies also constitutes their imaginative clothing. It creates an iridescent fabric, with a fluttering sheen that is wantonly voluptuous, harsh yet silky, both at once. David Begbie weaves for imperial nakedness an optical garment, which is more illusory and stylish than ever."

Sir Lawrence Gowing

"David Begbie's figures and figure fragments are moulded from fine wire mesh. This material turns out to be extraordinarily sensitive: Begbie is able to shape it with his hands to produce the illusion of rippling musculature. He makes it seem as sensitive and pliable as the wax used by Medardo Rosso. But the mesh provides a whole range of other effects as well - the sculptures become translucent - they are simultaneously there and not there. When one piece of mesh overlies another, the surface is further animated by rippling moiré patterns, which give an illusion of actual motion.

"I have mentioned Medardo Rosso in connection with Begbie - I think one should also mention Rodin. Rodin's reputation has undergone a tremendous revival in the last few years; he is once again recognised as a great sculptor. But he remains apart from the modernist tradition. Until now, it was impossible to think of an artist who had been able to make use of him, yet remain his own man. I think Begbie's ability to renew Rodin, to tackle the problems which interested Rodin most and find new and original solutions for them, is not the least significant part of his achievement."

Edward Lucie-Smith

Swungback 1993 60 x 35 x 20 cm Steel Mesh

