

MITOCHONDRIA, Rhoden, 1973. Onsite visit 11/4/85, report 11/25/85
bronze, approx. 12H x 16.3W x 5.8D, feet
steel column, approx. 7.1H x 1.5 diam.
Bellevue Hospital, 462 1st. Ave.

SHORT EXAMINATION REPORT, PRESCRIPTION AND COST ESTIMATE

DESCRIPTION: This very large bronze form located in front of New Bellevue Hospital exemplifies a very "organic" aesthetic common in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The sculptor draws his imagery and title from microbiology, and models the figure in heavy volumes with large negative spaces. Patina is for the most part a dark olive grey. Unusual topography, edge manipulation and textural contrast are the artist's primary concerns. The sculpture is presented well above head level on a simple cylindrical column of painted steel. Inscribed in the bronze near the support column are: "Rhoden MCML XXIII" and "MODERN ART FOUNDRY NEW YORK NY."

STRUCTURE: The sculpture is a hollow bronze form fabricated of many cast sections brazed or welded together. A foundry-applied patina covers the surface. Near the bottom of the bronze, a cylindrical metal flange with 3/8 inch thick walls is provided, which fits over the end of a painted steel support column. Since the column gives a "dead" sound when tapped, it is probably filled with concrete. It is anchored in the ground; an excavation six inches deep at the base of the column did not expose the footing.

CONDITION: The sculpture is in very good condition, and the patina appears original and in very good shape. The surface is almost unetched by environmental agents, but there are a few areas of bright green corrosion, and a few locations where patina is gone. A light, gold-colored material shows at the points of patina loss; this is either brazing metal or a very hard foundry grout.

The poor condition of the support column occasioned this inspection; the paint coating thereon has failed severely, with many scattered large and small areas of bare steel, each heavily rusted, pitted, and surrounded by blistered margins of underfilm corrosion.

RECOMMENDATIONS: If the steel support column is allowed to corrode unchecked, there will inevitably be structural failure and the bronze artwork would in that event most likely suffer damage. This must not be allowed to happen.

As soon as weather permits (i.e., spring or summer, 1986) the entire surface of the steel column must be cleaned to bare white metal, then recoated using an epoxy primer and a marine urethane paint. Properly applied and maintained, this coating can be expected to protect the column for a very long time.

Because several inches of the column are inserted into the bronze, the sculpture may need to be set aside during column treatment. Of

course, it will certainly be necessary to excavate earth down to the footing at the column's base. After painting, the flange-to-column connection must be well sealed using an exterior grade urethane or silicone caulk, and the paint coating overall should be protected by a hard paste wax.

At present the bronze sculpture requires only minor restoration, followed by cleaning and protective coating. The areas of patina loss must be restored to match surrounding surface colors, then the entire surface must be well cleaned of dirt and grime by the use of steam, an appropriate nonionic detergent in water, and thorough rinsing. The entire surface must be passivated against corrosion using benzotriazole, then saturated and protected with a coating of hard microcrystalline wax. This treatment will eliminate anomalous color areas, arrest existing corrosion, and control the bronze's tendency to corrode by excluding aggressive environmental agents such as acid rain from the metal surface.

After the prescribed treatment, the bronze and its support column should be preserved by regular maintenance, at least once yearly. Maintenance consists of cleaning followed by renewal of the wax coatings. Condition should be evaluated during maintenance and once more each year.

COST: The recommended initial conservation of the support column should cost about \$2700-3200, not including the cost if required of setting the bronze aside and replacing it again; and initial conservation of the bronze sculpture should cost about \$2500-3000.

Maintenance and condition monitoring of the sculpture and column should cost about \$1000 annually.

— Jim Scott

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