

Our critic guides you through a petrifying forest of sculpture

By GARY MICHAEL DAULT

When my daughter Jonatha was about 5, she devised for herself a useful rule of thumb for deciding what was sculpture. If an object was three-dimensional and was clearly and obviously NOT ANYTHING ELSE, then SCULPTURE it must be.

It worked most of the time.

Now, however, with the city coming all over sculpture in celebration of the 10th International Sculpture Conference, which opens at York University next week, it is going to require something more from each of us than Jonatha's way of getting us around and beyond the objects that are springing up like mushrooms for our delight.

Here is an alternative.

What follows is a highly personal guide to two of the big sculpture shows in town: The Art Gallery of Ontario's Structures For Behaviour, and the gaggle of large-scale sculptures nestled at the foot of the Toronto-Dominion Bank Tower on King St. W.

For easy evaluation, I have assigned each piece a certain number of Henry Moore Archers. Four Archers means terrific; your life will be empty if you miss it. Three Archers means nice, but you could live without it. Two Archers means that you should see this one if you're in the vicinity and you don't actually have to move to get to it. And One Archer means the work is beneath contempt.

Steel platforms

Each sculpture is identified first by the title then the sculptor's name, Archer-rating and, finally, its location.

Transfer Station, George Trakis (Four Archers). The Zacks Gallery of the Art Gallery of Ontario. The sculpture consists of three steel platforms about 7 feet off the ground. Leading up to these platforms are very narrow and precariously springy sets of wooden steps. The piece's major function appears to be to get you up into the rarefied air that nobody ever gets to inhabit in the top half of the gallery. The problem is how you feel about climbing the delicate little steps that seemed firm enough when you were on the ground but rapidly appear to grow inadequate to the task when you're about halfway up. When you finally get up there, the world once more seems secure. But then you have to come down again.

Extruded Routes, George Trakis (Two Archers). Sculpture garden of AGO, just off

The prestigious International Sculpture Conference, being held in Canada for the first time, starts next Wednesday at York University. It's billed as the biggest ever gathering of sculptors, with 1,500 delegates from around the world — and it has spawned a host of spin-off exhibitions in and around Metro. The Star's writer on art, Gary Michael Dault, rates some of the results on a scale of One to Four of the ultimate piece of sculpture, the Archer.



Beverley St. Extruded Routes involves the "correcting" of planes and angles of the grassy slopes of the AGO's sculpture garden. Trakis' extensions of the natural landscape for some reason involve a small house-shaped structure made of steel. Cute, but without morally redeeming value.

Untitled, Robert Morris (Four Archers). Zacks Gallery of the AGO. An entire gallery full of thick timbers and big polished mirrors. The piece is constructed so that viewers are inclined to funnel themselves through mirrored passageways. This means that you can hear other people thudding through the passageways but you often can't see them. Sound thus assumes an important part of the work's effect. The fresh wood from which most of the work is made smells good too. A curiously fresh and somehow rejuvenating experience.

Metrical (Romanesque) Constructions In Five Masses And Three Scales (No. 2), David Rabinowitch (Three Archers). Lobby of the AGO. Too big. This elegant but slightly pompous sculpture brings together five slabs of steel, arranged in such a way that the piece radically changes its appearance (and its implied weight and buoyancy), when you move around it. "Three scales" means that Rabinowitch has drilled holes of three different diameters into the steel. Rabinowitch's three small floor pieces next

door at the Art College of Ontario work better. So does his old Open Pine Piece of 1967-8 in the gallery's new Canadian wing.

Walking Woman (stainless steel variations), Michael Snow (Three Archers). First floor, Zacks wing, Art Gallery of Ontario. Walking Woman was Canadian art's best known silhouette in the late '50s and early '60s. A little too decorative to be really important (notice how much more visual authority is generated by Snow's beautiful old Walking Woman painting from 1962, Venus Simultaneous, hanging nearby).

Untitled No. 11, Royden Rabinowitch (Four Archers). First floor, Zacks Wing, AGO. Royden is David Rabinowitch's twin. His little wall piece of hot rolled welded steel, crimped at the edges like a pie crust, is still a tour de force of sculptural wit — acting as it does like a sculpture by being an obviously heavy, massy object, but also acting like a painting as it hangs its little implied volume of space on the wall like a steel envelope. Nifty.

Inner City Gate, Kosso Eloul (Three Archers). T-D Centre. One of Kosso's better positionings of one big hefty black block of steel up on two other blocks. The potential drama of three real blocks of steel in delicate balance is subverted by Kosso's way of merely welding together three big hollow volumes of steel sheet so that they look like masses.

Work gets lost

Three-Elevations, 1978, Richard Serra (One Archer). North-east corner of the parking lot, at Phoebe St. and Huron St. Three little steel blocks get lost among the dandelions of this vacant lot. They make up the sort of work of art that reminds you that, after all, half of the world is starving.

There is one other Three-Archer piece at the T-D Centre. It's one of Andre Fautaux's very best pieces — a deftly open and relaxed drawing in space made of welded steel painted gray and called Annunciation. Its extreme linearity is extraordinarily seductive and its envelopings of the space nearby are remarkable to behold.

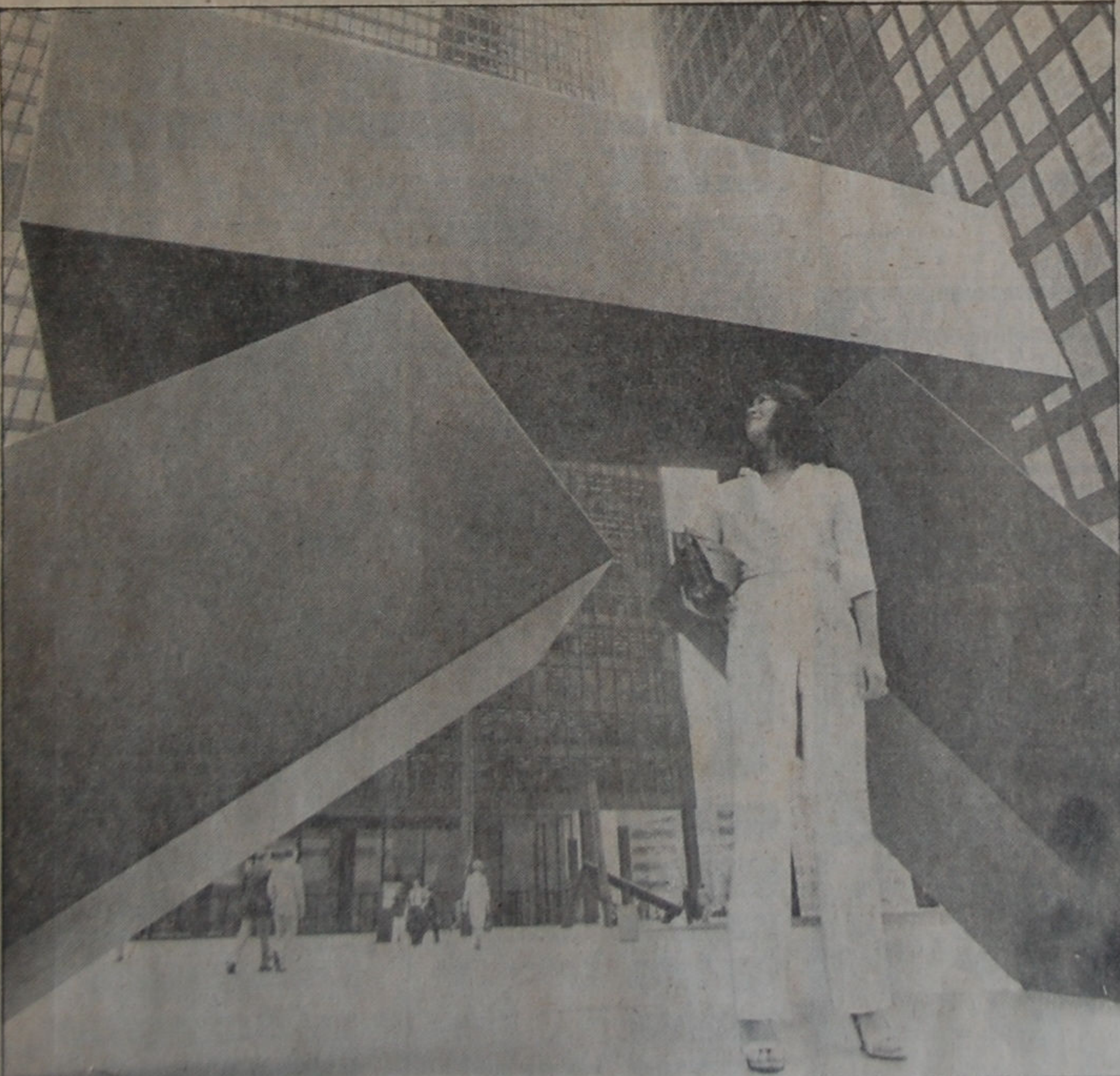
The rest of the T-D Centre stuff is all One-Archer material — including Michael Hayden's absurd overblown Christmas tree ornament called Transition (1975) and Haydn Davies' pretentious Trevan's Arch.

Next week, an Archer-rating of the Ontario College of Art's Aspects Of Sculpture and Harbourfront's 5-mile, 100-sculpture exhibition, Performance.

Star photos by Ron Bull



Trevan's Arch by Haydn Davies gets One Archer. It's pretentious, writes Gary Michael Dault, and isn't worth looking at. It is part of exhibition currently at the Toronto-Dominion Centre, King St. W.



Inner City Gate, by Kosso Eloul, rates Three Archers. It's one of the better pieces at the T-D Centre, spoiled only by using hollow sheet metal "boxes" to resemble huge blocks of solid steel.



Michael Snow's stainless steel variation of Walking Woman is at the Art Gallery of Ontario.