

Stephan Von Huene

STEPHAN VON HUENE

Born 1932 in Los Angeles, California. Graduated from Chouinard Art Institute in 1959, and received M.A. from the University of California, Los Angeles in 1965. Currently Associate Dean of the School of Art, California Institute of the Arts.

Animation . by Allan Kaprow

Current art is often made of absences: absence of purpose, absence of meaningful connection between things, absence of material and conceptual definition, absence of elaboration, absence of professionalism, absence of uplifting values, absence of personal identity, absence, even, of pathos. Artists seem intrigued by these gaps, these meta-states that leave things blankly self-evident or connected in perfunctory series like the numbers in a traffic count.

Stephan von Huene's art is one of presences. Not simply the physical presences of well-crafted objects, inventive and focused for eyes and ears; but, rather, 'magical' presences. Here are beings, surrogates for ourselves, who perform for a time and then are mute until requested to act and speak again. Oracles. They communicate in crypto-syllables from a language just beyond translation. They emit hoots, moans, clicks, beeps and breathy sounds, punched out on hidden paper tapes and run by vacuum sweeper motors. I've seen them in their mahogany dusk. Lights shine from their insides. Ceremonies.

For instance: A one-man band without the man who is the band, mechanically having become the band, plays for itself in an empty room. A white rose. Presence of the absence (cf. p. 27).

And: A vaudeville team in some bar in 1920 where for a nickel in a slot they'll rag, rattle, tonkle, scrape and blow. Washboard face with cowbell feather. Guardian Nickelodeon. Very serious. Mutt and Jeff at attention (cf. p. 28).

And: Enormous shoes of the clubfoot dandy, tapping away nifty twist of the hard-tipped toes under heavy folded cuffs. Insidious dance to the music we refuse to hear so we listen to the tappety tap of the man we won't see. Tappety (cf. p. 29)

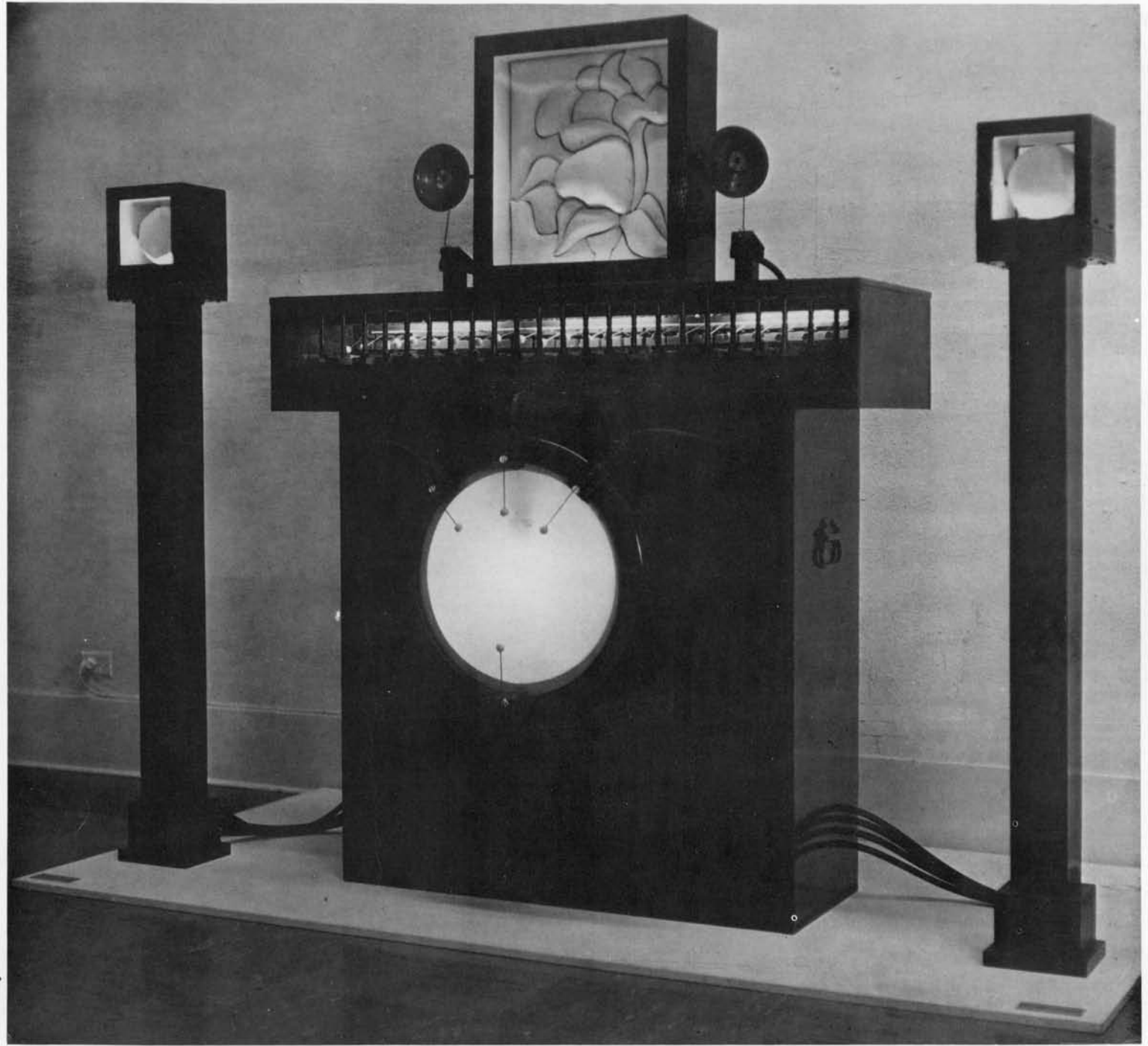
And: Erect wooden columns, alone, in pairs, threes and more (NYC office buildings), floating on contained light, totems intoning cadences of windy stories spoken to the shivering back. Jokes. Jokes you don't laugh at since you don't know when. (Meditative punch-lines.) Squared lips mouthing them, saying something known but forgotten. Dead-pan. Elegant. Ancestor (cf. p. 30).

Von Huene's art is located at a point just between those turn-of-the-century fantasies of machines that come alive, and archetypal evocations that reach beyond time. It thus escapes both the topicality of modernism and the datedness of the recent past. There is no nostalgia in his beings who articulate their own existence almost didactically and "in tongues." They seem on their own, stylistically removed from now just enough to perform without either necessity or apology. They are perhaps even a little smug in their mystery. What they are not, that is, what is absent, is of no importance to them. It is what makes their magic so potent.

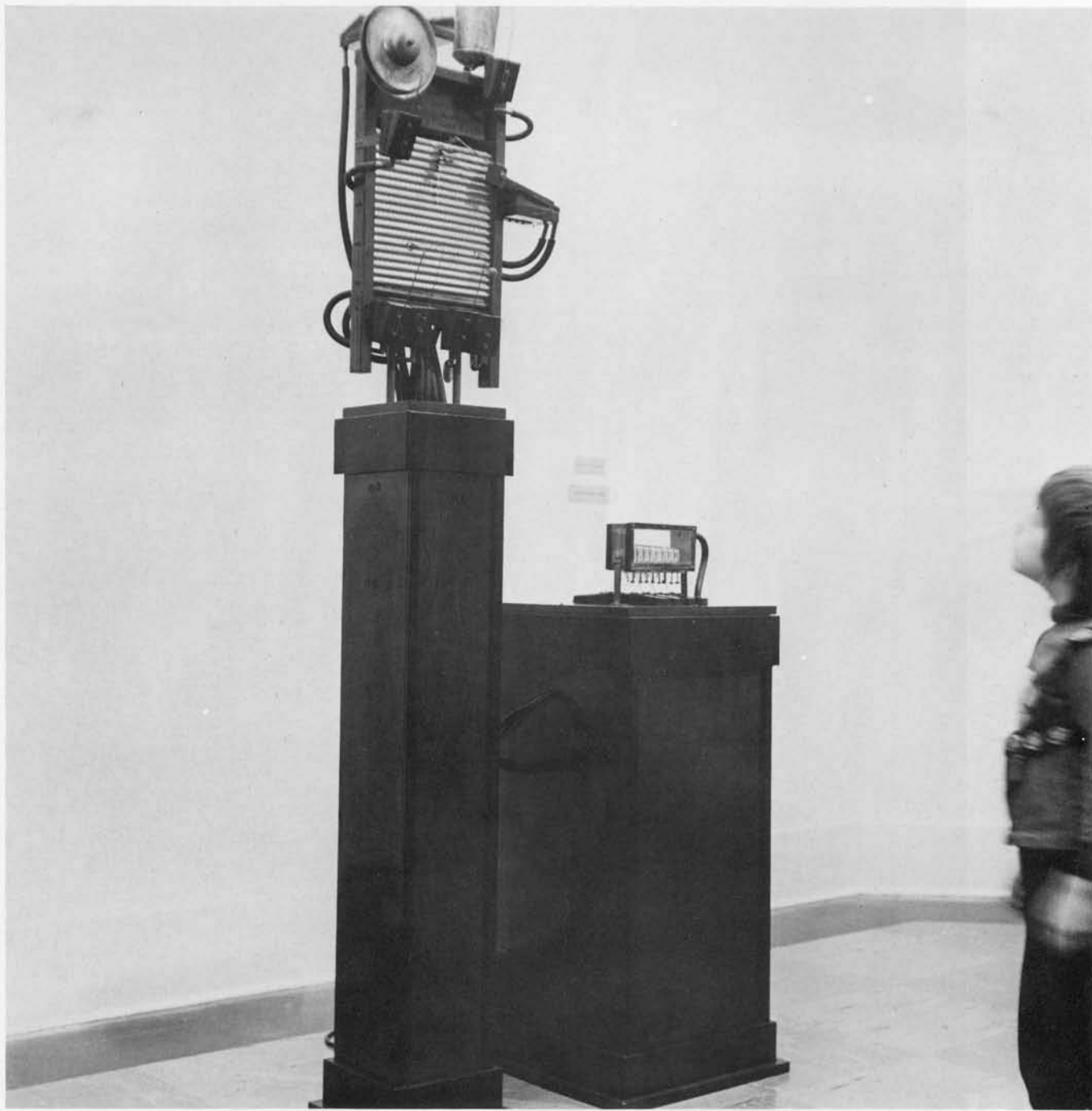


Von Huene's Totem Tones at the Vancouver Art Gallery

Rosebud Annunciator
*wood, formed leather, pneumatic
parts, pneumatic system*
7x8x4 feet



Washboard Band
*wood, leather trim, reeds,
pneumatic system*
7.5x4.5x2 feet



Tap Dancer
*wood, foam covered with leather,
4x4x3 feet*



Totem Tone III
wood, leather, pneumatic system
8x4x2 feet

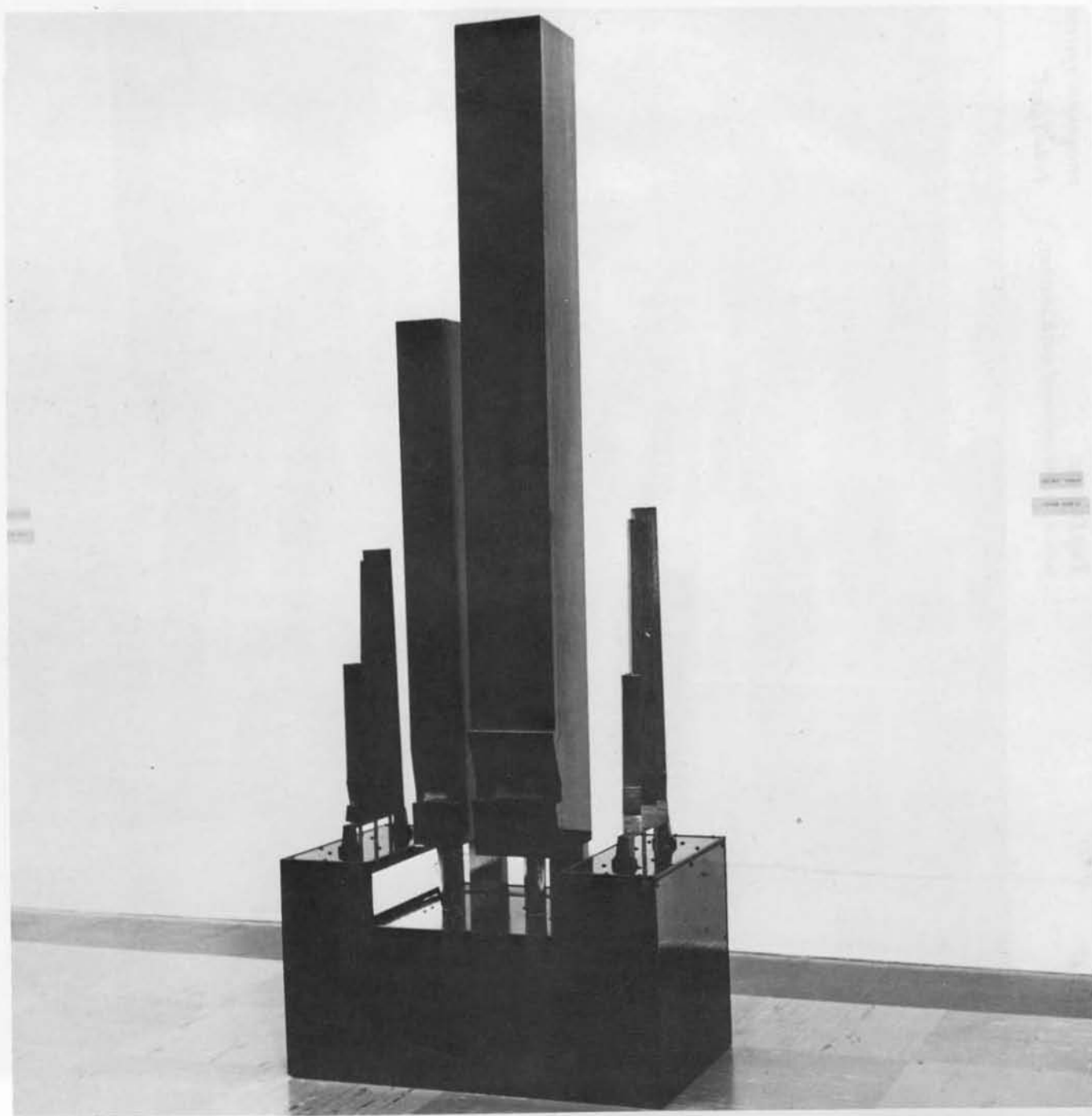


Photo Album

Von Huene compiled a series of informative photos "taken of my machines, inside and outside, of my tools, etc." The photo essay (excerpted) he felt to be the most useful way to depict his way of working in sound sculpture.



