

Walking Men and Abstractions 1945–1948

...Towards the end of the war (World War II), his gigantesque style began to break up and the artist embarked on a painful self-evaluation and re-learning art from scratch—a typical New York phenomenon the impact of which he shared with such friends as Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline and Landis Lewitin. From 1945 to 1947 he made about 10,000 drawings ('...always three figures on a sheet of paper so I wouldn't turn into a painter...'). From these developed a long series of wax figures (1947–50), a crowded gymnasium of anatomies. In 1950–55, he took the figure into fields of abstract thinking—about ears or eye-sockets or head-bobs, allowing the concept to dominate any preliminaries of form.

—Thomas B. Hess, catalogue essay, Samuel Kootz Gallery, 1961.



Head, c. 1942
Beeswax, Life-size
Pavia Trust



Head, c. 1940-42
Beeswax, Life-size
Location unknown

Walking Man, c. 1948
Bronze
29 in. (74 cm) high
Private collection



Evening, 1949
Bronze
30 in. (76 cm) high
Private collection





Walking Man, c. 1949
Bronze
29 in. (74 cm) high
Private collection



Waiting Time, 1949
Bronze
29 in. (74 cm) high
Private collection



Walking Man, c. 1949
Bronze
30 in. (76 cm) high
Private collection



Abstraction, c. 1947-48
Bronze
27 in. (69 cm) high
Pavia Trust

Scatter Sculptures / Assemblage 1962–1969

While in Rome for the casting of *The Ides of March* and surrounded by classical sculpture, Pavia began working in marble.

The point of marble sculpture is the block—as Michelangelo teaches. Pavia has never strayed far from it. In his reference to nature, his point of contact with reality. Pavia assembles his stones in ways that connect to both their raw states (in the quarry) and their most sophisticated manifestation (the roughly triangular structure alludes to the pediment figures from the Parthenon.) He is also involved with color and selects his stones with the shrewdness of a Yankee horse-trader for their particular embodiment of hue. Then he carves them to channel the light over the surfaces in such a way that the chroma will be variously emphasized or veiled. Usually the crystalline surfaces of the marble are exposed (as in Greek sculpture) so that daylight bouncing across them will be broken by the skin of microscopic prisms into hushed violets and faint orange. But in Pavia’s work of the mid-1960s, these nuances are elbowed aside by the artist’s muscular, even perverse scattering and jumbling of blocks. There is a will to shambles. The acts of lifting and tilting, countered by the evident heavy pull of gravity, by the weighty mass of stone units, establishes the drama. It is a strong willful kick at the limits of art. For all its intellectual, Romantic, 1950s accent, it shares in the up-front, single impact imagery of the 1960s.

—Thomas B. Hess, School of Visual Arts exhibition catalogue, December 1973.

Collage, stacking of blocks, leaning and the horizontality of the ‘scatter sculptures’ were changes in the concept of sculpture. The English critic James R. Mellow grudgingly acknowledged the innovation. “One shouldn’t overlook the fact that Pavia has done something important: by adapting the collage technique to notably recalcitrant material, by imbuing his work with the appearance (if not always the fact) of assembled sculpture, he has brought the old fashioned technique of direct carving in stone—an abandoned technique in the modern repertory—successfully up to date.”

—*New York Times*, May 18, 1969.

Lily Pond, 1965-66
African and Italian marble, diam. 112 in. (2.84 m)
Pavia Trust



Fallen Matador, 1965-66
Italian marble, 79 x 50 in. (201 x 127 cm)
Pavia Trust

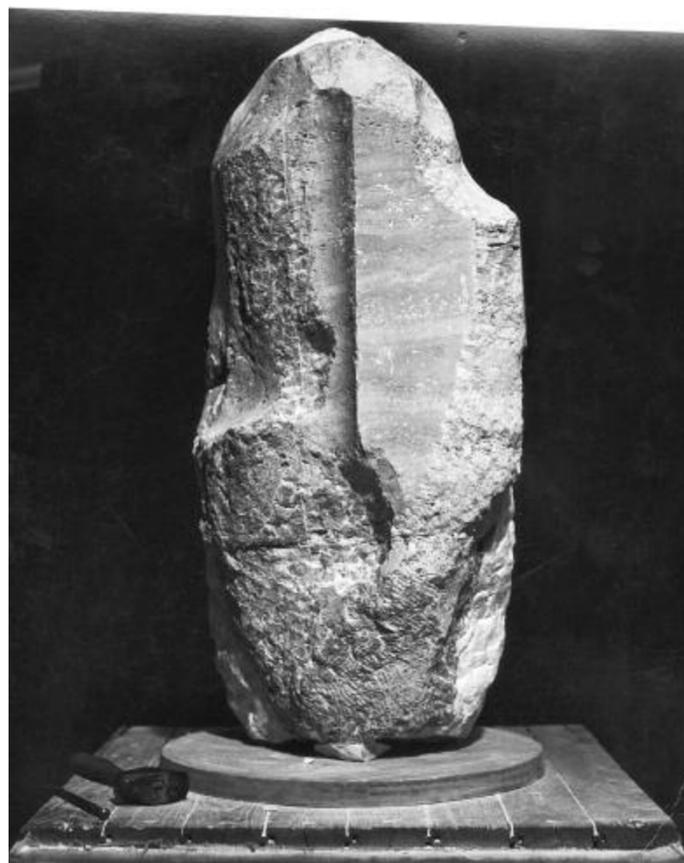




East Pediment, Sun-up, 1965–66
Seravezza and other marbles, 55 x 156 x 59 in. (140 x 396 x 150 cm)
Pavia Trust

Monolith, c.1964
Travertine, 38 in. (97 cm) high
Pavia Trust

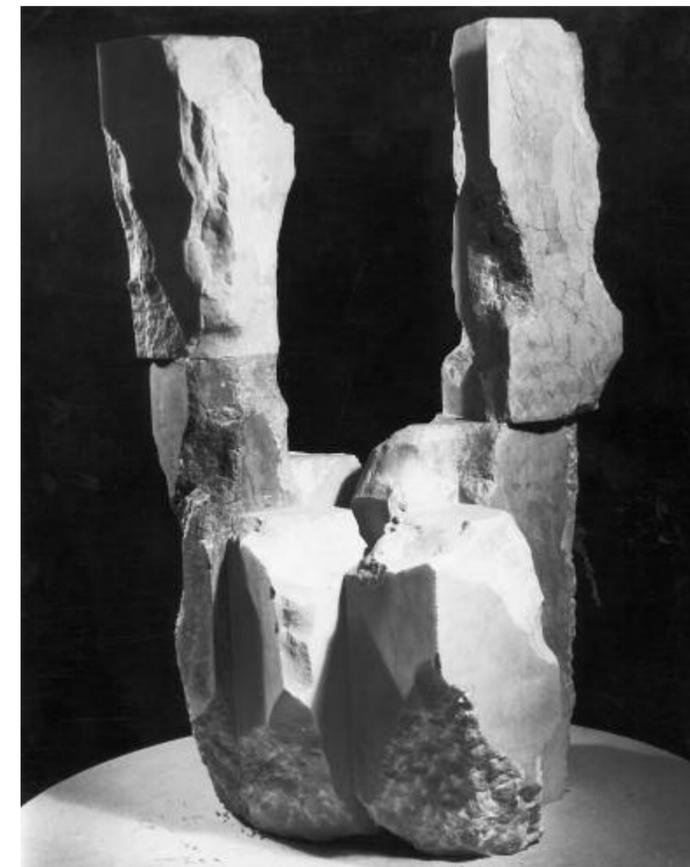
African Nightfall, 1965
Marble, 48 in. (122 cm) high
San Francisco Museum of Art





Cannonball, c. 1965
Seravezza and Portuguese marbles, 37 in. (94 cm) high
Oklahoma City Museum of Art

Yankee Clipper, 1965
Sienna and other marbles, 50 in. (127 cm) high
Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, N.Y.



Head, c. 1964
Carrara marble, 43 in. (109 cm) high
Pavia Trust



Yellow Sails, 1965
Sienna marble, 35 in. (89 cm) high
University of Illinois at Carbondale



No Object, 1967
Marble, 60 in. (153 cm) high
Newark Museum, N.J.

New England Novel, 1964
Carrara marble, 35 in. (89 cm) high
Pavia Trust



Terracotta Heads 2002–2005

Pavia focused again on authorship in its simplest and most direct form: “The volume in my terracotta heads is the parallel in sculpture to the plane space of Abstract Expressionist painting. It is the expressive volume that carries the message of self-expression in Abstract Expressionist sculpture. The features of a face serve as signs, the more abstract the better.... Throughout the nineties, I worked in an opposition of black and white marble, making abstractions. These painted terracotta heads are my return to color. Color is close to me because color has volume too. The surprisingly large cheeks and foreheads and temples that result from their double-life-size become abstract surfaces that I tint with patinas, and under-paint with color moods. From my earliest school days at the Art Students League, I made watercolors because of the color so pure.”

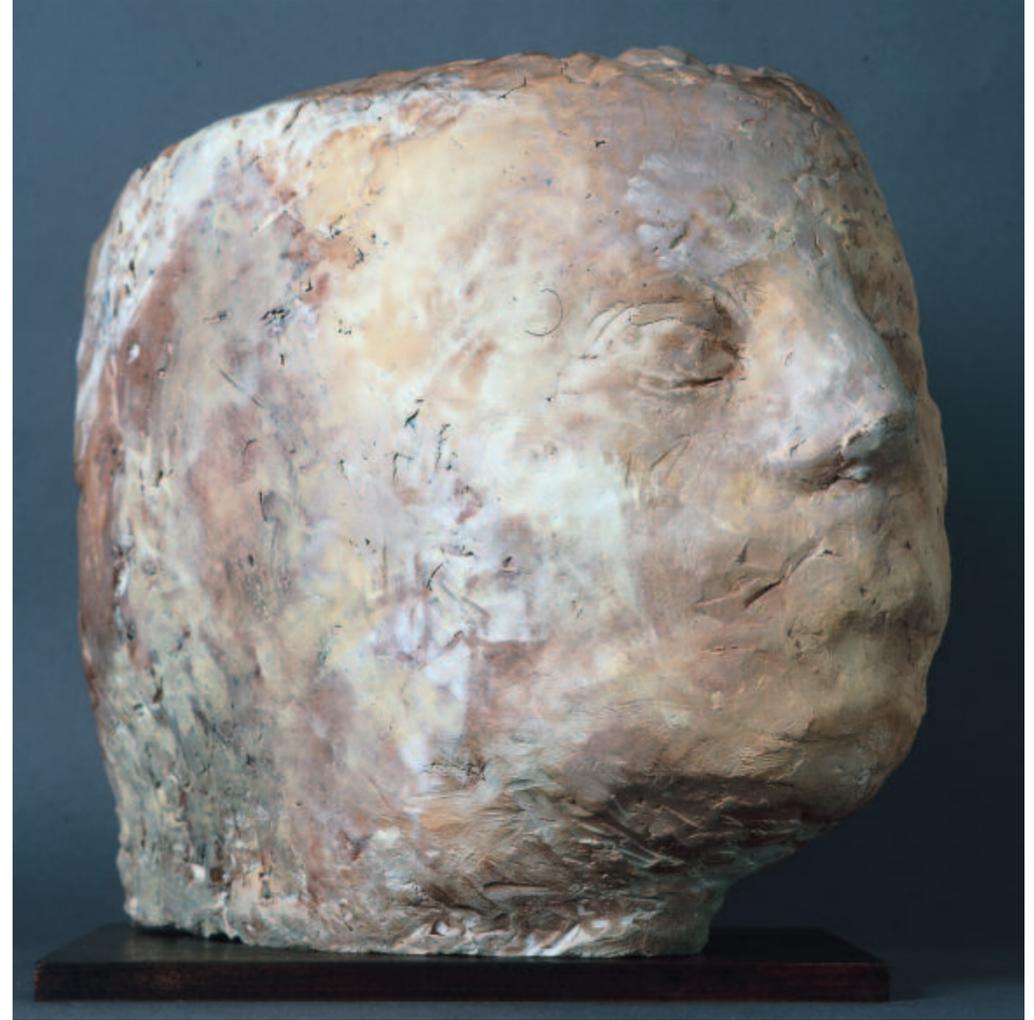
—Philip Pavia, catalogue essay, *Terracotta Heads*, O.K. Harris Gallery, 2005.

Pavia had one more surprise in his arsenal. He reversed the trajectory of space from a falling space to a rising space: the swathes of color he smacked across the surfaces of the great heads are light paths rising up from under the floor plane.

Of Pavia’s ‘final’ exhibition of terracotta heads in 2005, Mario Naves wrote in the *New York Observer*: “Mr. Pavia’s heads—lumpish and anonymous, coarse in features and larger than life—evinced an ambitious sculptor playing for big stakes. Each scrabbled, monolithic visage has the entirety of history rolled up within it. The gallery touts Mr. Pavia’s bond to the New York School, the generation of artists in which he came of age, but that is selling the work short. You can add to the short list the sculptures of Michelangelo, Medardo Rosso, and Alberto Giacometti, the painting of Piero della Francesca, Jean Dubuffet, and Giorgio Morandi, and artifacts excavated at Pompeii—none of which will lead you in the end to pegging Mr. Pavia’s achievement as one thing or another.... Time is likely to weigh heavily on anyone who’s past his 90th year, but for Mr. Pavia, time is less a burden than a liberating force. His recent efforts have the go-for-broke ease that only experience can bring to fruition.”



Head #6, 2001–04
Painted terracotta, 17 in. (43 cm) high
Pavia Trust



Head #3, 2001–04
Painted terracotta, 18 in. (46 cm) high
Pavia Trust

Head #2, 2001-04
Painted terracotta, 18 in. (46 cm) high
Pavia Trust

Head #12, 2001-04
Painted terracotta, 13 in. (33 cm) high
Pavia Trust

