Jack Zajac

Artist Statement on his Falling Water Series 1962-1996

The idea of making a sculpture of falling water came, as some obsessions do, with disarming modesty, giving barely a hint of the depth of the challenge it was to present in the course of its development. Before this venture, my work had an intention and character completely unlike the falling water pieces.

So far as I know, falling water had never been used as a sculpture motif, and soon after beginning to work on it, I found that few, if any, of the skills or experience I had acquired on earlier labors would be useful in the new venture, nor would forms already existing in the historical index of sculpture practice serve the image. It was only when I had disarmed myself, surrendering all preconceptions as well as skills (and confidence), that the real promise of this new concept began to reveal itself. In this region of uncertainty and exhilaration, a way had to be found to convey the sensation of continuous movement: a paradox of implied flow in a stationary object. This had to be sensed within the strict confines of the probable behavior of the subject itself. Yet it had to overcome the rigidity the way a photograph abruptly freezes a moving image. In no way should it seem to be untruthful to the event it portrayed.

I found also that a surface of unequivocal purity, free of any sign of maker’s hand or of the prattle of texture, was essential in order to find the true registry of weight, mass and balance.

Between 1962, when the first piece was attempted, and 1964, when the first was committed to bronze, over forty visions at about an eight foot height made their way to the intermediate state of plaster from the original clay. Later, they were deservedly buried in a Southern California landfill without a sign of regret. Their sins ranged from the too sober and instructive to the too artfully vain. They had existed respectably enough during that time, until exposed as failures by the final emergence two years later of a work of a higher level, convincing as its namesake.

Work on the first versions of this theme continued in Rome until 1967. This group had seven final versions in bronze and three in marble. In 1967, the second phase was begun in Santa Cruz and presently number 24.

In their evolution, the works composed themselves into widely differing conformations. Some consist of a single strand; some begin at two sources and unite to become one as they fall. Others, ribbon-like, turn from the wide to the narrow edge in their descent. The latest versions drop from an asymmetrical lip. The successful ones, regardless of the conformation, share a common trait: that of perfect repose. Elemental and elusive, it must be found anew in every piece.