

***luka*, 1965**

Masonite, wood, steel

60 (h) x 54 (w) x 72 (l) inches

Exhibition History:

1965 WORLD HOUSE GALLERY NYC "Sculpture from All Directions"

" The battle of luka, which took place in the northeast corner of Mississippi on September 19, 1862, was an awkward battle, that arose through a mix of accident and intent. By then, General Ulysses S. Grant was in command of Union forces in western Tennessee. Realizing that the railroad depot at luka would be vital to either side in reinforcing their armies to the east, Grant aimed to capture it, and to drive out the forces under Confederate General Sterling Price. To do so, he sent two separate armies to assault it: one led by General William Rosecrans from the south, and another led by General Eward O.C. Ord from the west.

The initial plan was for Ord to attack first, and for Rosecrans to hit them from behind once he heard the sounds of battle. But because Rosecrans was delayed, Grant changed the plan so that Rosecrans would attack whenever he arrived, while Ord would join in once he heard the battle had begun. Yet despite Grant's sending messengers, somehow Rosecrans didn't realize that the plan had changed, and withheld his attack until he ran into the Confederate forces by accident. And then – another accident – neither Grant nor Ord ever heard the sounds of battle due to an "acoustical shadow," so Rosecrans had to fight it out alone. Because the Confederates withdrew overnight, it was deemed a Union victory, but Price's army had survived to fight another day.

Though cheerfully colored and highly abstract, Doyle's 1965 work *luka* can be said to echo the battle in several ways. The large curving purple plane suggests an unfurling flag, but also perhaps the acoustic shadow which muffled the sounds of the conflict to the Union command; the shape itself was formed from painted Masonite, which Doyle wetted then clamped into shape until it set. The two thin supporting posts joined at a right angle can be seen alternately as a soldier's dynamic legs or the two routes of the Union army. Viewed more broadly, as a small bendy work that seems to fold in on itself, it gives form to the narrative arc of the battle itself – an awkward, unexpected, twisty affair in which the flag still flew at the end."

George Melrod

La Vergne, 1965

Masonite, wood, steel

108 (h) x 102 (w) x 102 (l) inches

Exhibition History:

March 1966 DWAN GALLERY NYC / Solo Exhibition

1966 WHITNEY ANNUAL, New York City

1984 MODERNA MUSEET "VANISHING POINTS" (FLYKPUNKTER) Stockholm, Sweden.

"Situated in central Tennessee roughly halfway between Nashville and Murfreesboro – both of them the site of major Civil War battles – La Vergne was one of those towns that changed hands frequently during the war. Although never the site of a full battle, it also was the site of a vital railroad depot, and at least five smaller clashes. The first "Battle of La Vergne" occurred in October 1862, when Union forces defeated a contingent of cavalry under noted Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest. A second clash occurred on December 26, 1862, when soldiers under Union General Thomas Crittenden encountered a large Confederate force there, and drove them back after hours of brutal house-to-house fighting.

On December 30, on the eve of the Battle of Murfreesboro (also known as Stone's River), Confederate cavalry under General Joseph Wheeler swept through town to capture a Union wagon train. A fourth fight occurred toward the tail end of the battle, on January 1, 1863, when the 1st Michigan Engineers Regiment valiantly held off a superior force of Confederate cavalry. The fifth clash at La Vergne occurred in December 1864, when Confederates under Generals John Bell Hood and (again) Nathan Bedford Forrest attacked Union troops there, capturing a blockhouse. Though whatever gains the rebels made were wiped out in the ensuing Battle of Nashville, when Hood's Army of Tennessee was all but destroyed.

While none of these specifics are manifested in the sculpture, the piece is notable for its dynamic composition and swirling central plane around a sharp vertical marker, which loosely suggests a rifle or a flagpole, and is certainly fitting for a town that was a repeated target for both sides in the war. For all its material elegance, the work offers an almost violent juxtaposition of forms, already boasting the angular intersection of curving elements and vigorous formal counterpoint that would become a signature of Doyle's later works."

George Melrod

Over Owl's Creek, 1966

Wood, steel, fiberglass

24 (h) x 108 (w) x 216 (l) inches

Exhibition History:

March 1966 DWAN GALLERY NYC / Solo Exhibition

1966 JEWISH MUSEUM NYC " Primary Structures"

April 1967 LOS ANGELES MUSEUM OF ART, LA. CA. "American Sculpture of the Sixties"

September 1967 PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART, Philadelphia, PA

"American Sculpture of the Sixties"

1984 MODERNA MUSEET "VANISHING POINTS" (FLYKPUNKTER) Stockholm, Sweden.

Over Owl's Creek (1966), one of Doyle's most important works, marked a moment in his career when he began shifting from smaller sculptures to the large, free-standing works that would define his later career, which used the floor itself as an element to lie across, balance atop and pivot over. The title refers to the famous 1890 short story by American author (and Civil War veteran) Ambrose Bierce, "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" about the hanging of a Confederate saboteur named Peyton Farquar. Captured while trying to wreck a vital railroad bridge, the unlucky slave-holder is contemplating his fate as the noose is placed around his neck. Through a twist of fate, the rope breaks and he falls into the river, and eluding his captors, he embarks on a desperate journey back home. Exhausted and hallucinating, he at last arrives at his Alabama plantation; but as he rushes to embrace his beloved wife he feels his neck snap back, and the reader realizes that he's still on the bridge, and the escape was just a fleeting fantasy. In the story's final image, Farquar's body hangs lifeless from the timbers of Owl Creek Bridge.

Over Owl's Creek carries with it its own history, as arguably the first modern sculpture that was made to be walked on by viewers, a template Doyle would examine further in the coming decade with his wood deck pieces. In 1966, it was featured in the seminal sculpture survey at the Jewish Museum in NYC titled "Primary Structures," alongside works by artists such as Tony DeLap, Carl Andre and Donald Judd. Composed of several low plywood elements, the work was initially surfaced with linoleum which was later replaced by fiberglass and sand to make it less slippery.

Although low to the floor, the composition offers high drama, presenting a sort of step up to a tenuous passage. Laid out horizontally atop the floor, its central flowing form offers an anxious lifeline: suggesting both the bridge itself and the water flowing under it, as well as perhaps the starting point on a voyage to an undefined destination. Ultimately, at least for Doyle (if not the unlucky Farquar), that voyage was not just metaphorical, as the work helped launch the sculptor on his own, very tangible journey, creating formally powerful, richly evocative, human-scaled abstractions that would span over half a century. Steeped in their love of history and place, the works he left behind serve as welcome guideposts to that journey now that he is gone.