

ACE GALLERY BEVERLY HILLS

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HERB ALPERT *BLACK TOTEMS*

2ND PHASE OF *BLACK TOTEMS* INSTALLATION
EXHIBITION EXTENDED THROUGH OCTOBER 9, 2010

EXCERPT FROM "HERB ALPERT'S VARIATIONS ON A THEME: BLACK TOTEMS" BY
HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP PUBLISHED BY CURATORIAL ASSISTANCE

Herb Alpert's *Black Totems* represent the culmination of recent years in his studio defining a personal language of abstract form within the larger canon of sculptural traditions. *The Black Totems* embody the essence of movement within the framework of composure. When gathered together as a group, as they were in Ace Gallery in Beverly Hills, the sculptures with their dark luminous surfaces bring to mind a small copse of trees after a rain, their proximity to each other invoking contemplative silence.

There are no specific arboreal allusions, such as branches or leaves, but this impression is not entirely misguided since Alpert's sculptures reference the tall wooden totems of the Indian tribes of the Pacific Northwest. The Haida, to cite just one example, carved detailed totem poles, often placed at the entrance to their residences, as heraldic representations of identity in the shapes of animals or mythological beings. Around 1995 Alpert saw a selection of such poles in British Columbia — the outlines of animals, fish, women, men, faces and symbols started to make appearances in his own sculptures. As his work on the sculptures evolved, however, he accentuated the verticality. Visual allusions to animistic aspects of tribal totems soon morphed into sleekly voluptuous forms. In each sculpture, pneumatic curves, convex and concave, support smaller anthropomorphic elements that reach to an apex surmounted by wings or spires that reinforce their inspirational aspect. They are reminiscent of caryatids, though supporting an unseen firmament, and the columns of antiquity, which, after all, originated in the simple trunks of trees.

Bolted directly into the ground, without pedestals, the sculptures have a sense of propulsion as though thrusting upwards from the earth. This energetic sensibility can be said to have come from their original inspiration. *Totems*, while not specifically religious monuments, are associated with a belief system honoring the natural world integrated firmly with the spiritual one.

For further information and visuals please contact Jennifer Kellen, Director
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Gallery Hours: Tuesday through Saturday 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM