



D A V I D B E G G S

B E G B I E

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A Scapa Group Company

THORN

Cover:
Blind Faith
50 × 30 × 15 cm



D O U B L E V I S I O N

D A V I D B E G B I E

D O U B L E V I S I O N

'DOUBLE VISION' (Diptych) is a Binary System of contemporary archetypes — male and female. Each reflects qualities of the other.

As with many of the works, the large sculpture is composed of two.

With 'shadowlighting' on a single element the 'precious object' is abandoned to the inseparable but constantly changing compositions between object and image, two dimensions and three are fused.

Twoness: they are line and form, graphic shells of 'human' classicism with the physical presence of mass and the ambiguity of drawing — they are hypocritical — an assault on our vision of what is modern and what is antique — they are neither and they are both.

DAVID BEGBIE

D A V I D B E G B I E

“As he is a splendid sculptural draughtsman, the shape is exquisitely outlined. It has the rightness and the adjustment to observation which in their absence we always miss in visual art. The steel mesh that makes these bodies also constitutes their imaginative clothing. It creates an iridescent fabric, with a fluttering sheen that is wantonly voluptuous, harsh yet silky, both at once. David Begbie weaves for imperial nakedness an optical garment, which is more illusory and stylish than ever.” 1984

SIR LAWRENCE GOWING

“If one envisages the human form in sculpture one perhaps first thinks of it being carved in marble, since we all still wear what Henry Moore once referred to as ‘Greek spectacles’. Alternatively one might reflect on Donatello’s DAVID which is arguably the most beautiful sculpture ever made. Or, perhaps nearer to our own time one thinks of Rodin’s powerfully modelled figures — and here we are getting closer to what David Begbie is seeking to create: an incomplete portion of the human body, a part which speaks eloquently for the whole. The foregoing examples are of the human body carved or modelled, solid either absorbing or reflecting light. Begbie has explored a further range of possibilities — his figures are transparent, made of wire mesh, modelled, painted and galvanised: the light both ripples on the surface and passes right through them. The effect is of a presence which is not quite of this world. It is real, but also surreal.” 1984

MARY ROSE BEAUMONT

“His work is quite unlike anything else being done at the present moment. His figures and figure-fragments are moulded from fine wire-mesh. This material turns out to be extraordinarily sensitive: Begbie is able to shape it with his hands to produce the illusion of rippling musculature. He makes it seem as sensitive and pliable as wax. But the mesh provides a whole range of other effects as well — the sculptures become translucent — they are simultaneously there and not there. In this new series of works, Begbie has become much bolder — the figures are deliberately fragmented, metal armatures are used to ‘draw’ with, so that the spatial interaction becomes more complex. Every time the viewer shifts position, a new set of relationships appear. The fascinating thing is that these relationships remain coherent.” 1986

EDWARD LUCIE-SMITH

“In some of his recent work Begbie has been exploring this theatrical element a little further, bringing figures together in conflict or coition, setting faces in ambiguous relation to one another, taking on different constellations of meaning as you move in relation to them. He could, one imagines, do a wonderful Gate of Hell for himself, but he would also be better equipped than Rodin to match an Inferno with a Paradise of aetherial light and grace. Certainly there seems to be no limits to his technique as long as there are no limits to his imagination. And of that there is no perceptible danger for a very long time to come. He is the master of his own floating world, where everything is as simple and as difficult, as once for all, as a classical Chinese brush-drawing. Like all true art, it is half stage magic, the confidence trick the magician finally believes in, and half real, inexplicable magic. Stage magic can make illusions seem actual for a moment, but only real magic can ensure that they obstinately stay with us, capable of being explained, but never explained away.” 1988

JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR

“David Begbie is a sculptor, draughtsman and printmaker whose materials and media are unusual but whose preoccupation - the human figure, and indeed by implication, the human condition - is ancient. The first known paintings, the cave paintings of southern France, are of living creatures, animals in the main; even older however, are the first known sculptures: a very plump female in limestone, and a man in ivory, both from Central Europe. The survivors - (and characteristically sculpture has a potential for survival denied to painting) - are associated with the art of the hunters, rather than with the more settled art of the farmers appearing substantially later. The famous dictum of Pope's turns out to have been shared throughout the millennia, even if man and woman were dressed up or rather down, in the sense of being naked and observed - as a deity.

In the face of all creeds and isms, the most persistent motif - man is the measure of all things - characterises the formulation of imagery for all of human history. (Abstraction is bold, because it emphasises human absence the more powerfully in some instances to recall the human presence.) Therefore, in one sense, what is there still to say or show?

David Begbie's human and humane art does demonstrate in contemporary terms that the human figure is inexhaustible as an inspiration in itself, and as itself, and as a way of saying all kinds of things about art - and life - now. First of all there is the refinement of the material. In the case of the three dimensional figures, Begbie confounds sculptural preconceptions - particularly when related to figurative work. We are accustomed to seeing the figure carved in stone or cast in bronze, however we are also used to an enormous variety of material in the revolutionary formulations for sculpture so characteristic of this century. In a curious way, the figure itself is the last bastion. David Begbie does not, it seems to me, use the novelty of steel mesh and now copper, simply for its own sake. Rather, it is an extension and amplification of an earlier avant-garde - Julio Gonzalez, say, and his drawing in space with his welded metal sculpture. Their technical insights and expansions of possibilities were and are quarried by artists who have tended to abandon overt representation for a more oblique view of the world around us, relying more on an inner vision, a sense of constructing from within.

I do not believe that David Begbie's seemingly accurate (although they are not; artistic licence is subtly, imaginatively and interestingly at work) visual mediations on the human figure and face could in fact have been created without the liberty afforded to artists by photography and its apparent faithfulness to the observed world (although we know that fidelity to be false as well). Nor could the evolution and development of his highly individual idiom have taken place without the freedom afforded figuration by abstraction.

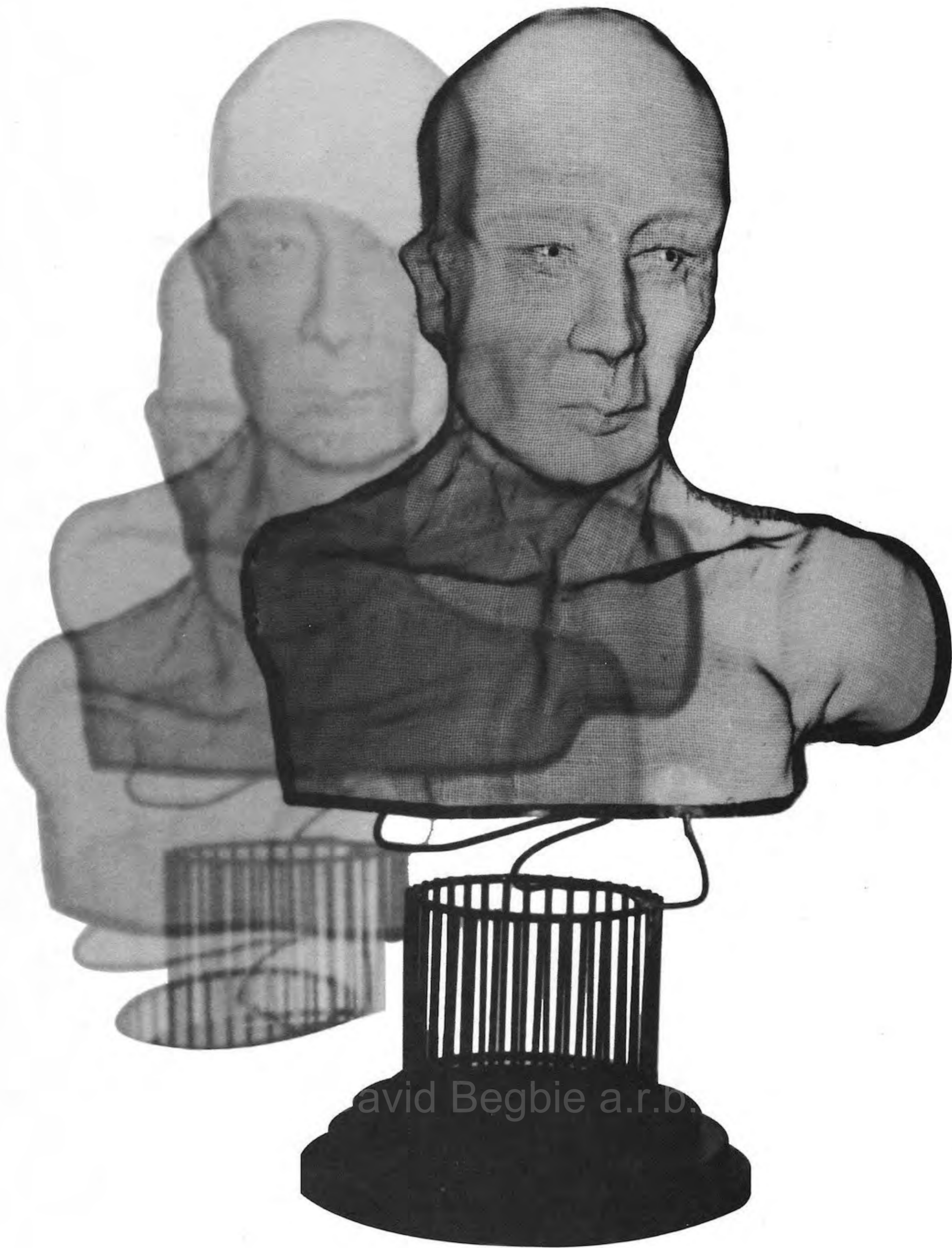
For the figures here - hieratic, startling and monumental on paper, airy, light and even playful in three dimensions - are curiously ambivalent and mysterious, even at times androgynous. There are strongly masculine bodies, and studies which are inescapably feminine, and sometimes tantalisingly close to pin-ups, to the pointed bosoms of war time girls, Vargas, and in the current London art spectrum, there is an oblique relationship to the art of Allen Jones. Indeed, Begbie's flirtation with kitsch adds another element of risk-taking to his art.

On one hand we have the monumental, the dignified, the awesome. We also see in his work the intimate, the affectionate. The use of shadowplay, the shadows cast by his figures, is an element that helps to convey liveliness, a sense of movement. There is also the nearly abstract, the refinement, especially in the works on paper, whether monoprints, Monoprint collages or drawings - into a paradigm of the figure, a pattern of outline shaded in with varying textures, and a rich sense of colour although all is black and white and the greys in between.

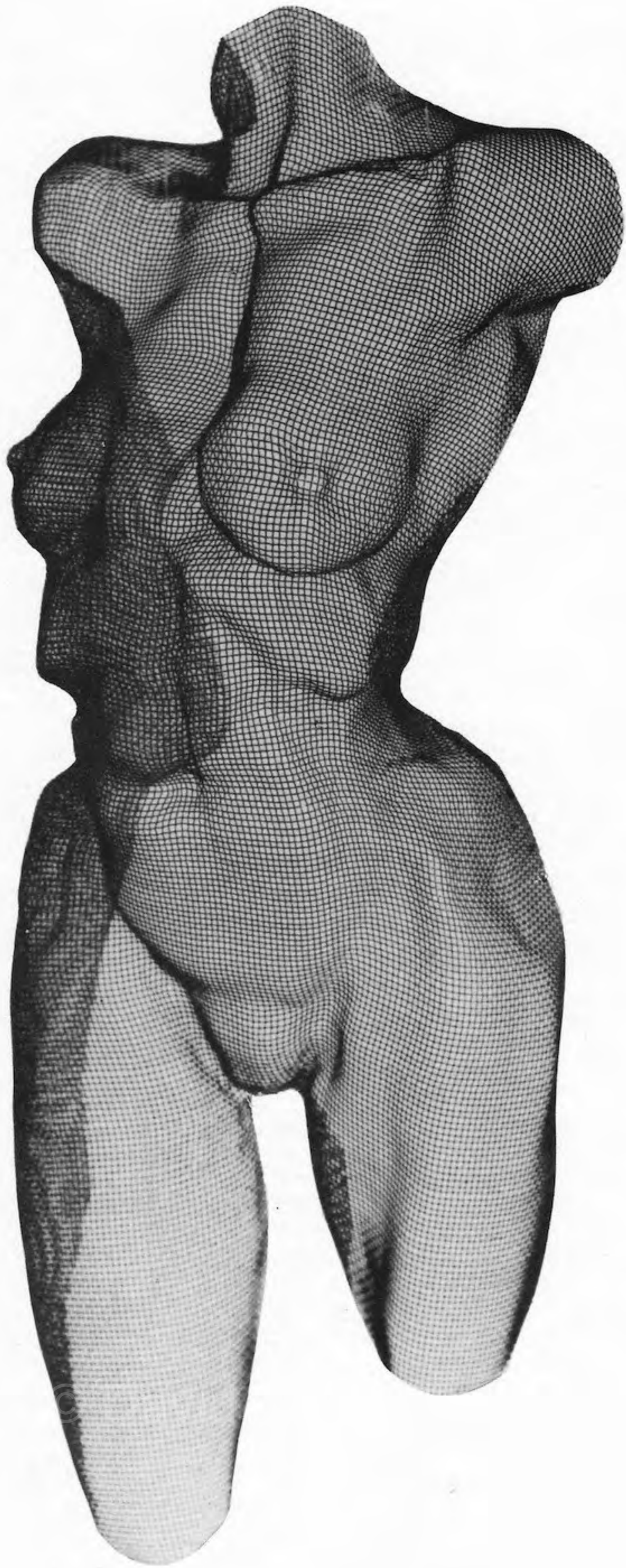
The artist captures too that sense of interest in the body that is characteristic of western culture. There is the awareness of health, of 'good' bodies; a feeling that we must rescue our bodies from the ill usage caused by the activities of the modern consumer world. People pay attention to their bodies, some even spend time and effort in building their bodies, a sport some claim as art.

Effective art must be of its time, as well as containing within it some understanding of tradition and the past. David Begbie's art is exhilarating and fascinating precisely because he deals directly with a subject that could not be more ancient and traditional, but does so in ways that are only possible now. He uses traditional and invented techniques. He uses the human form, but his art mediates it into a series of works, highly individual, that communicate a recognisable, emotionally authentic and affecting interpretation that is his own. 1993

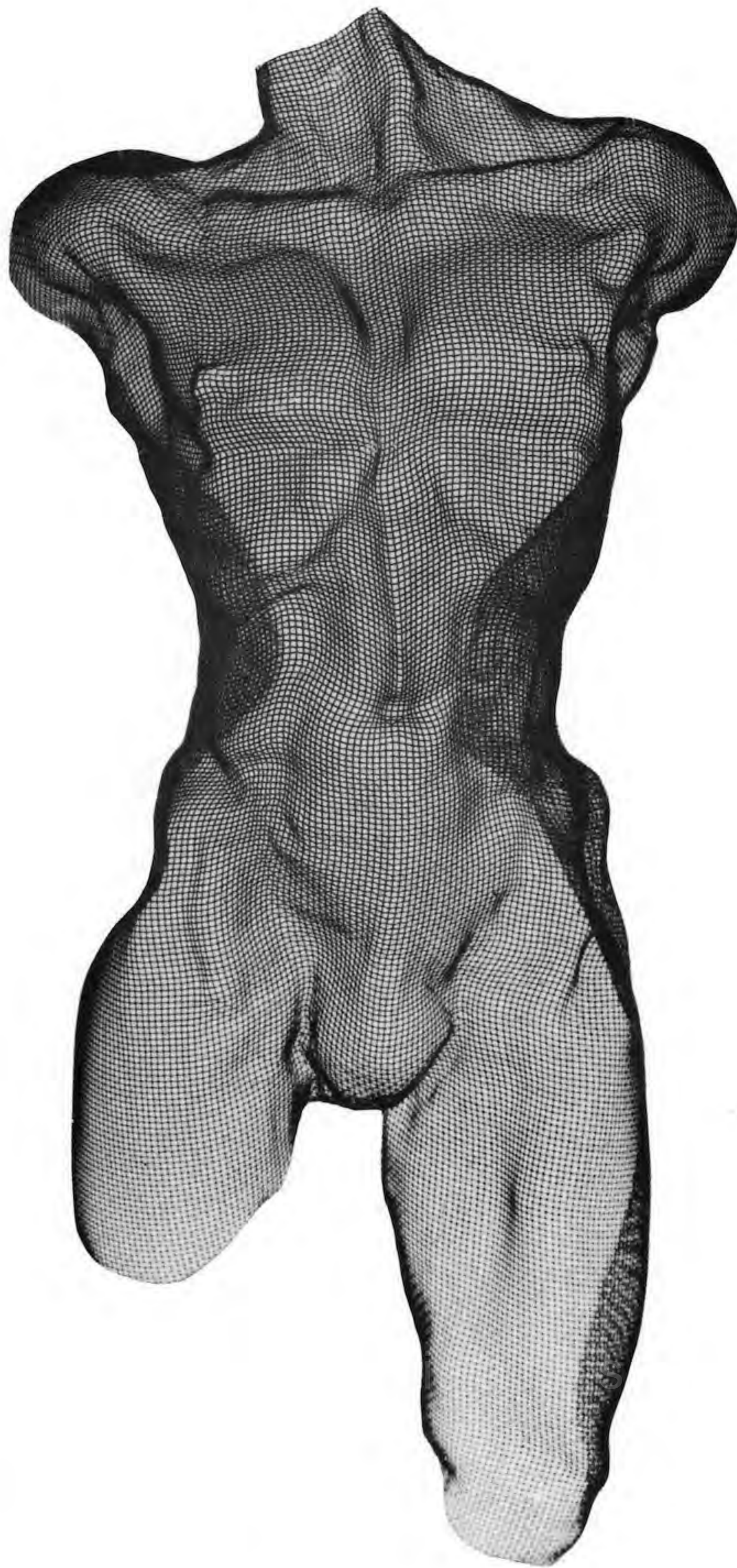
MARINA VAIZEY



Nullus
60 × 35 × 20 cm

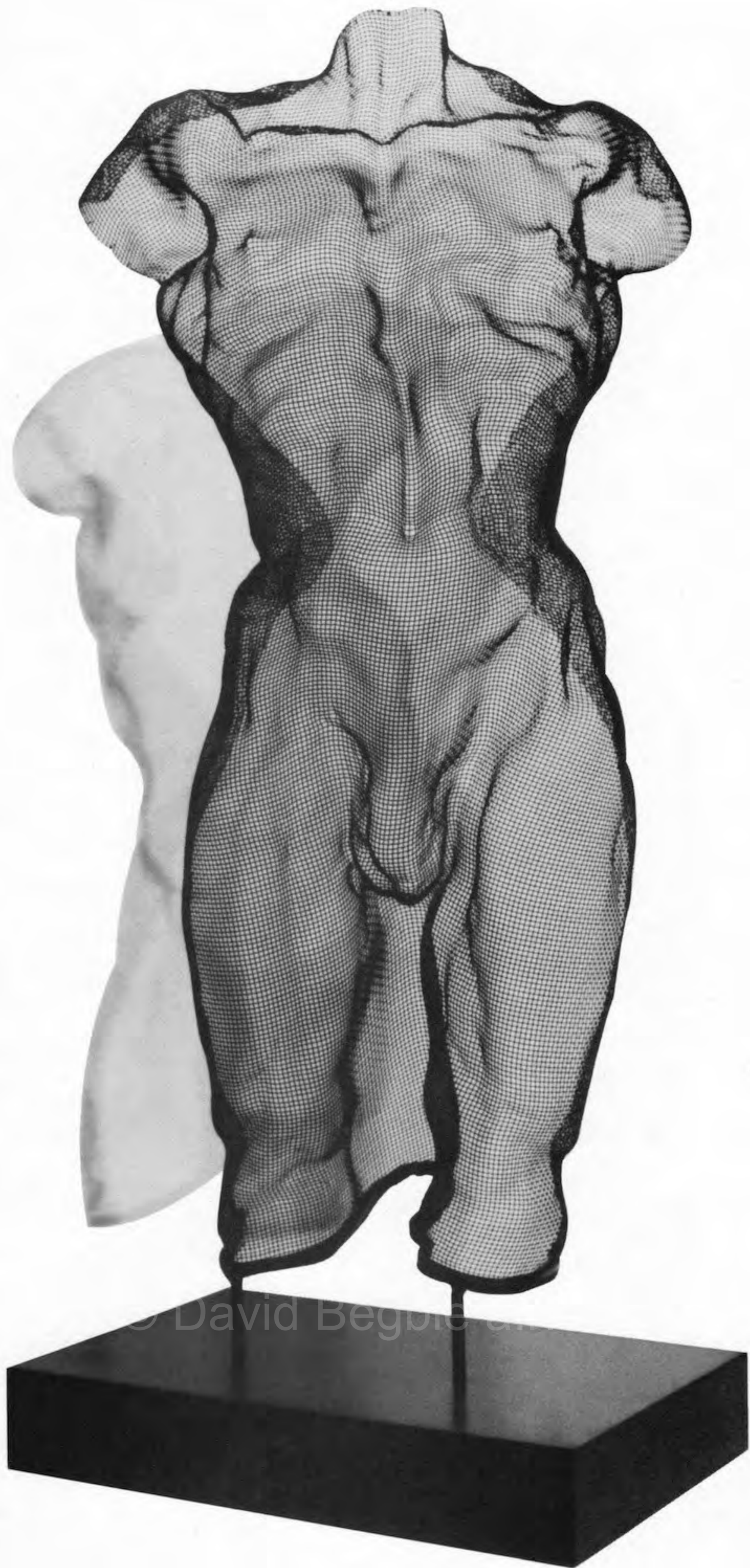


Double Vision — diptych
38 × 15 × 3.5 cm



Double Vision — diptych

38 × 14 × 3.0 cm



Raised Truncus
79 × 32.5 × 21.5 cm

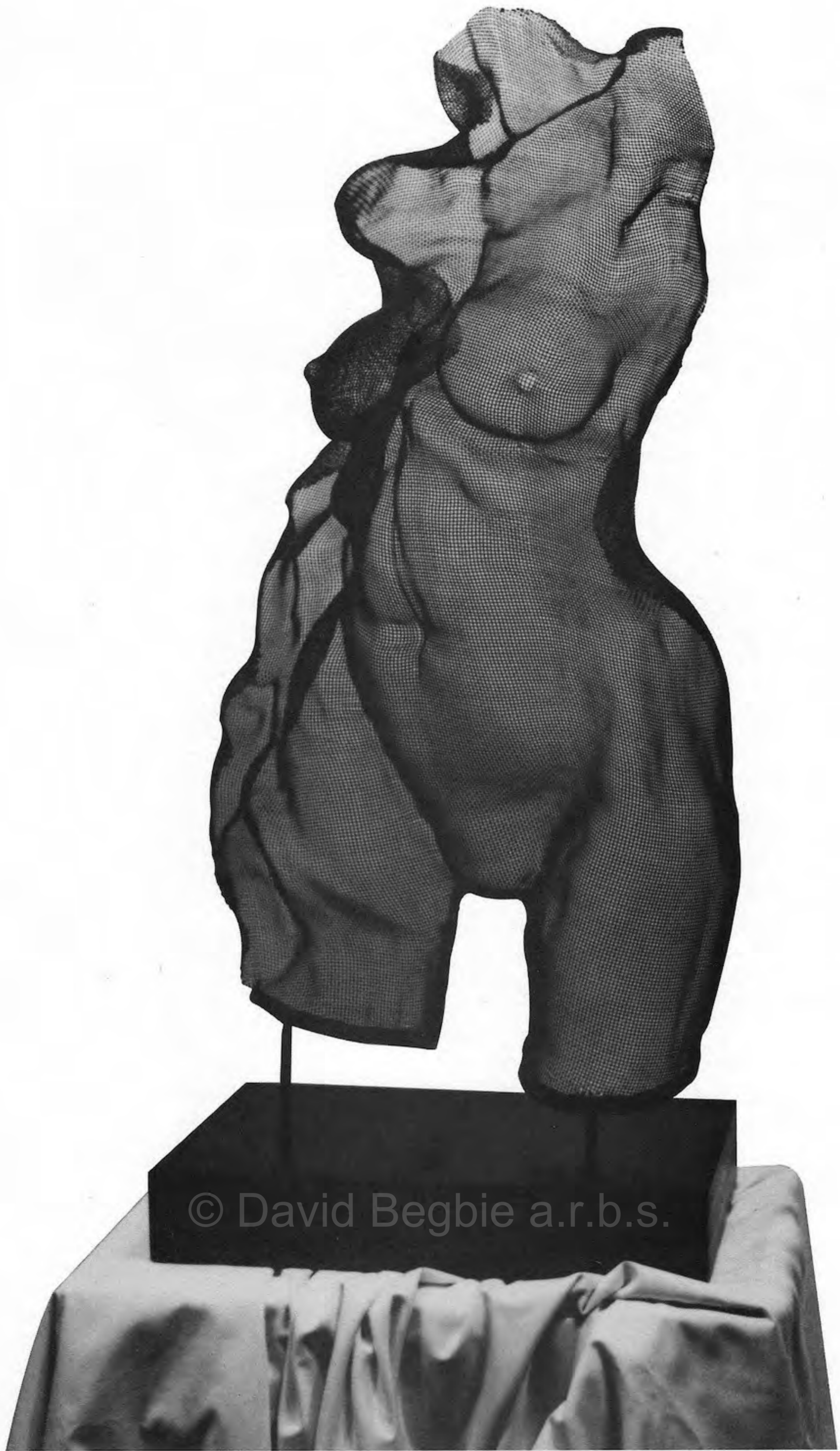
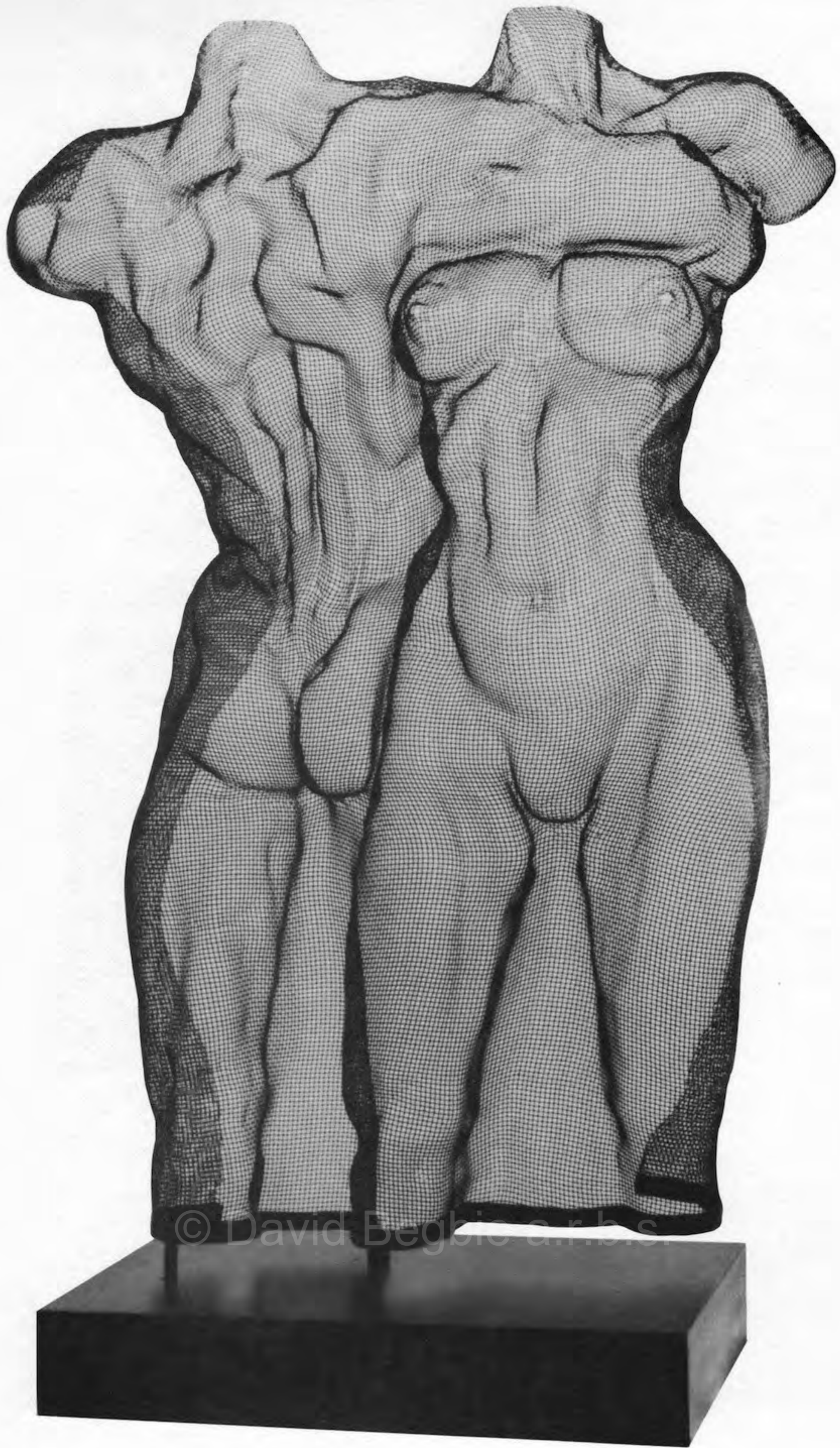
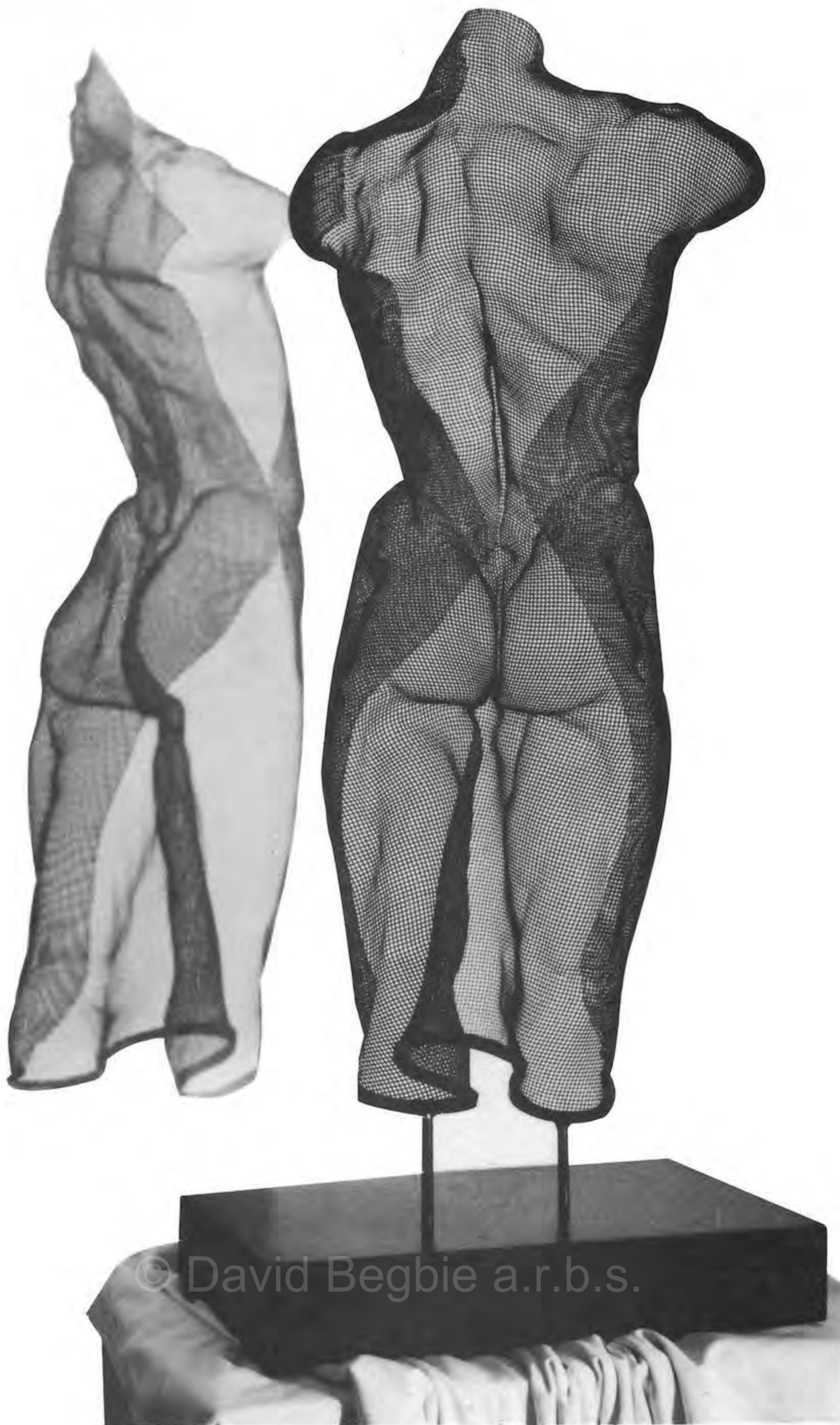


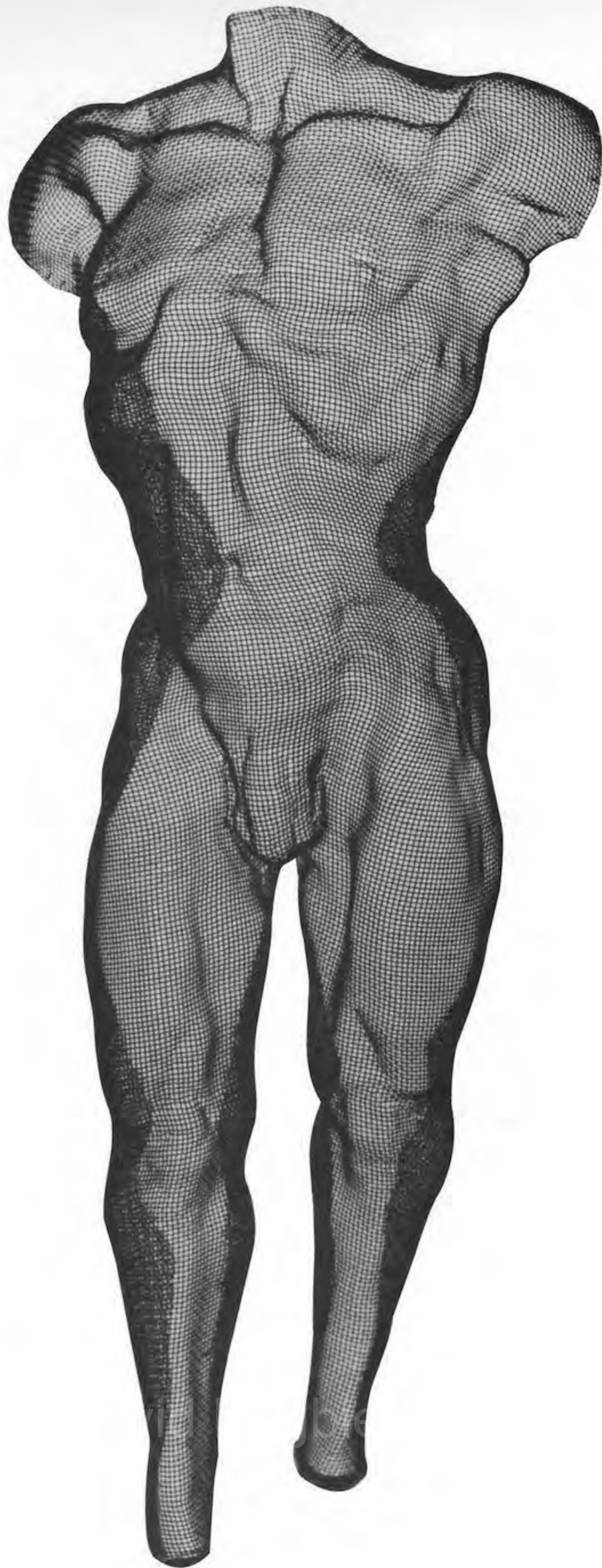
Figure and Drape
85 × 32.5 × 21.5 cm



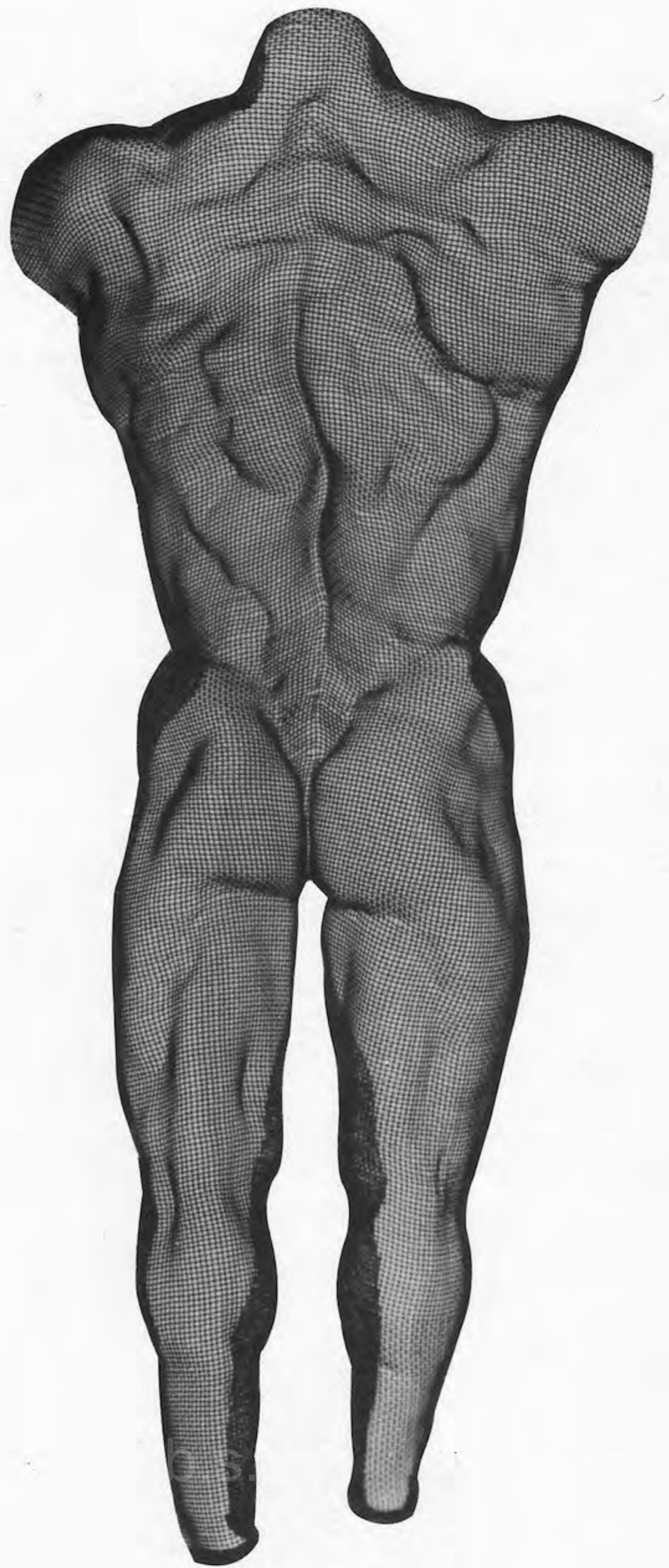
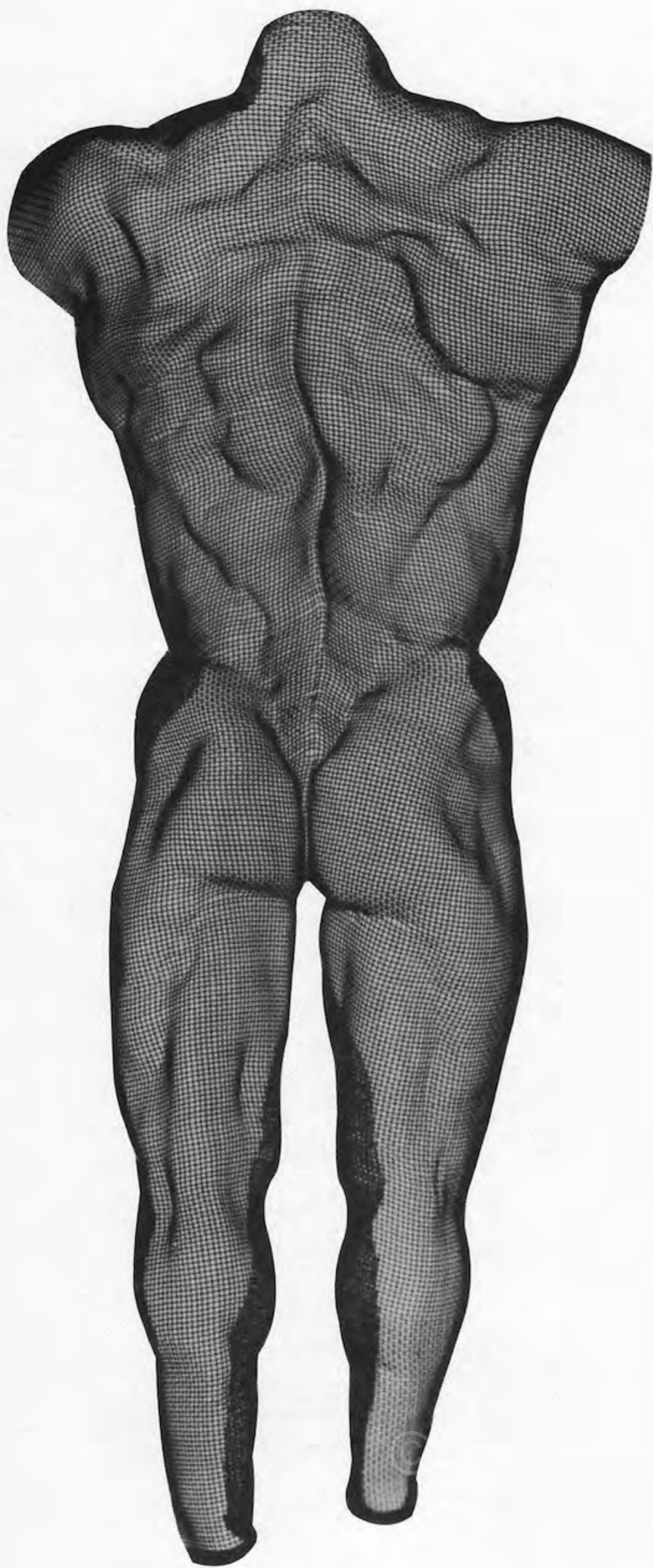
Back to Front
80 × 32.5 × 21.5 cm



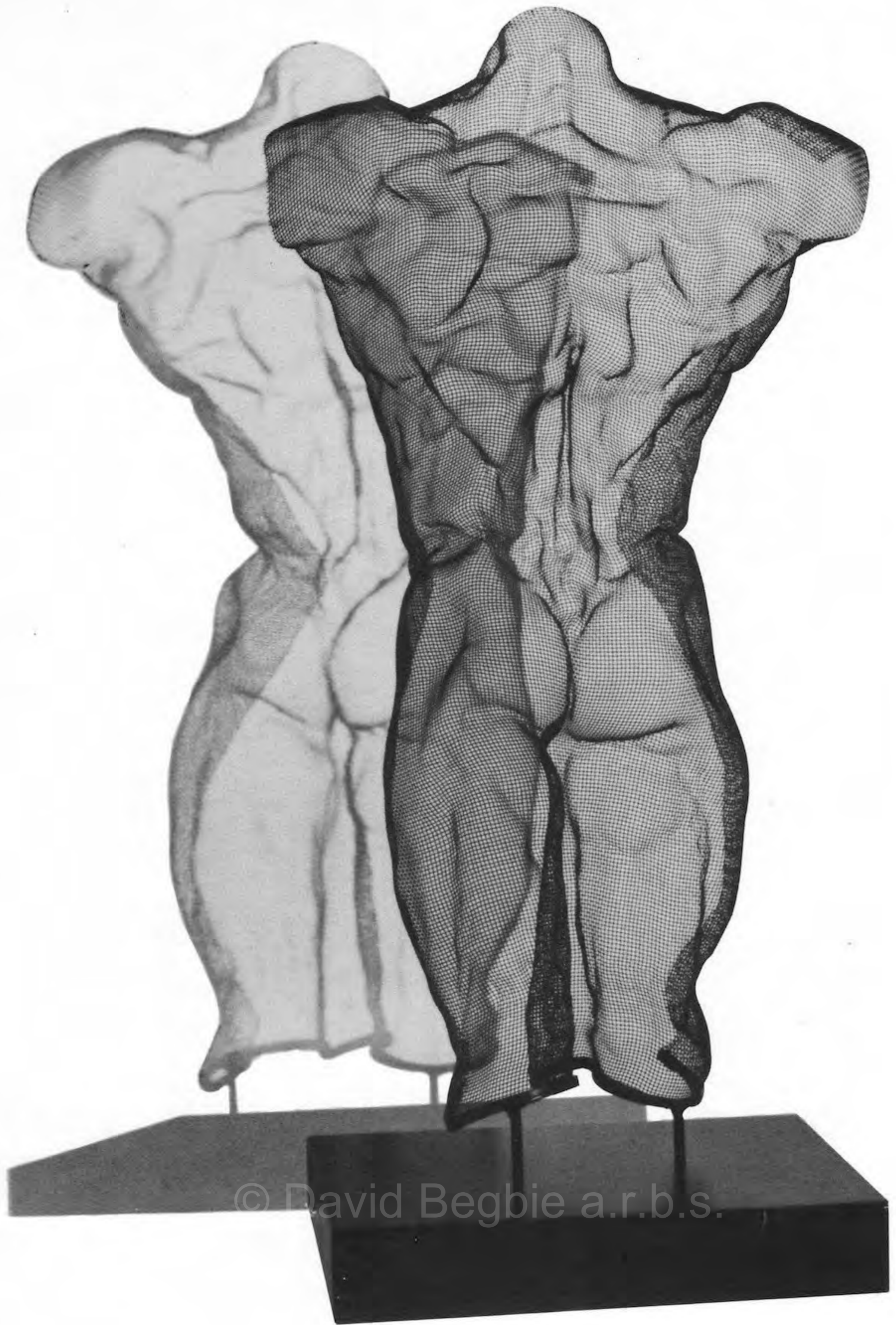
Taut Truncus
85 × 32.5 × 21.5 cm



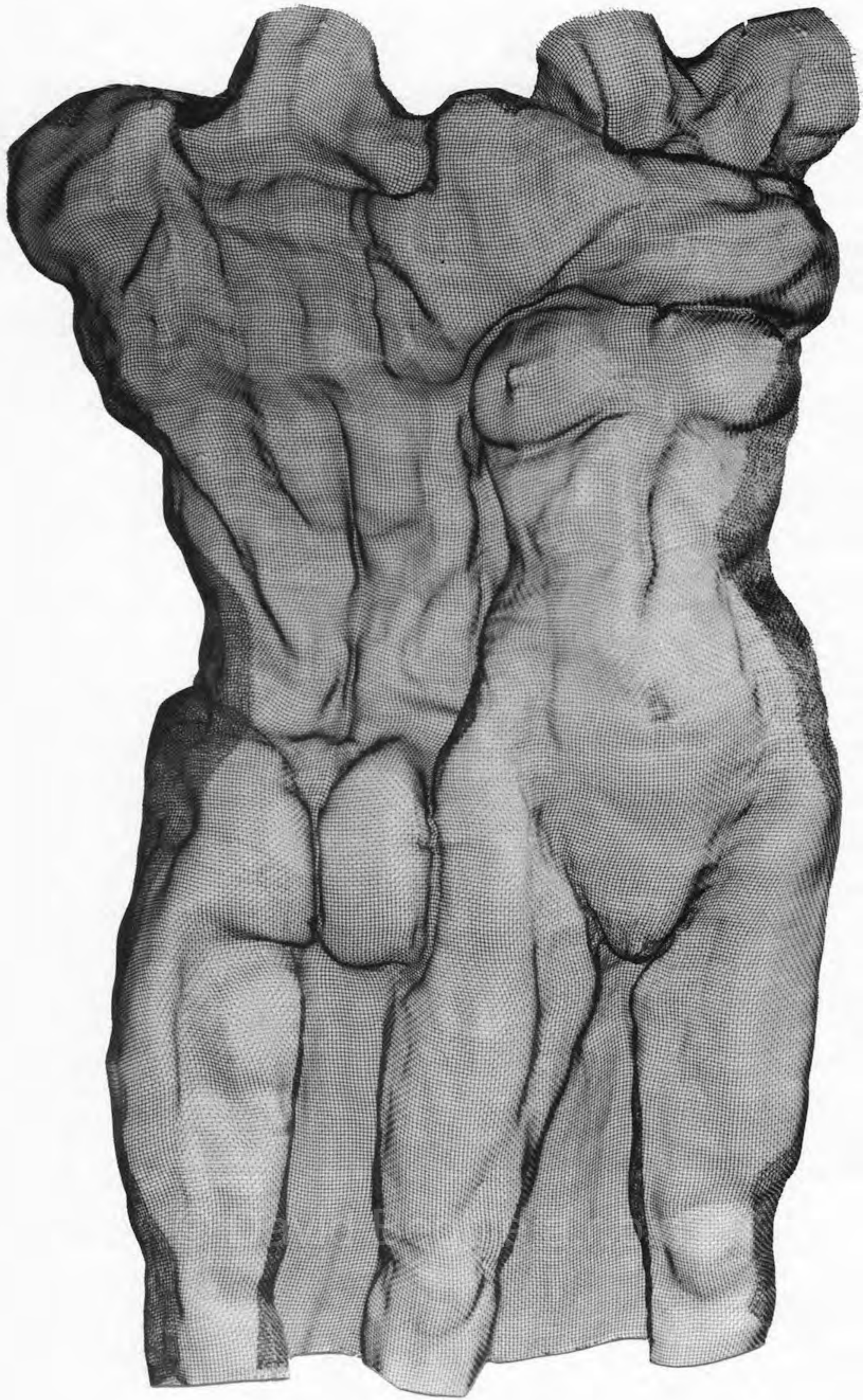
Raised Figure
72.5 × 15 × 15 cm



Raised Figure
75 × 15 × 15 cm



Tight Truncus II
80 × 32.5 × 21.5cm



Back to Front
165 × 105 × 25cm