

CONTEMPORARY SCULPTURE

**M**any people driving north along the West-side Highway or walking west along 42nd Street in New York must look up and wonder about the strange aquamarine construction projecting from the 33rd story of the McGraw-Hill Building. The object is Owen Morrel's *Boomerang* (1981). It has been variously described as a crashed kite, a praying mantis or a constructivist flying machine, but in order to fully appreciate the piece one has to muster one's courage and climb out onto it. A flight of steps ascends gently toward a diamond-shaped aperture in a huge V-shaped wingspan, through which one climbs by a short ladder to a triangular platform suspended in midair, inside an open frame.

Morrel's site-specific pieces—*Boomerang* was preceded by *Desk Axis* (1976), *Catapult* (1974) and *Omega* (1980) [see *A.i.A.*, Apr. '77, Nov. '80 and Oct. '84]—have consistently challenged the viewer to overcome feelings of disorientation and vertigo. The artist has earned the right to do this by first challenging himself: he freely admits

# Morrel's Delirious Structures

BY JOHN ASH

that he has been frightened of heights from an early age. While personal courage is rarely what is meant by the term "heroically ambitious art," Morrel's work has, both by its scale and originality, consistently addressed itself to the larger notion of heroic art as well. *Omega*, for example, consists of a tilted deck 110 feet long, approached by a staircase four stories high, and cantilevered out 200 feet above the Niagara River. It is appropriate that this startling "bridge to nowhere" should be poised on the stone piers of a vanished 1851 suspension bridge. If Morrel has precursors, they are not the builders of monumental sculpture so much as the constructors of bridges, observatories and towers; such visionaries as Eiffel and Tatlin come immediately to mind. Both *Omega* and *Boomerang* might be seen as machines for releasing new experience.

*Omega's* spiritual affinity to the monumental projects of seers like Boullée reminds us that the architect's fanciful designs were hardly ever

