Hans Josephsohn

*Untitled*, 1990

ONLINE VIEWING ROOM
21 November – 5 December 2020
Untitled, 1990, brass, 139 x 91 x 80 cm.; 54 3/4 x 35 7/8 x 31 1/2 in., edition 2 of 6, plus 2 AP
Hans Josephsohn
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brass
139 x 91 x 80 cm.; 54 3/4 x 35 7/8 x 31 1/2 in.
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**Provenance**
Hans Josephsohn Estate, Kesselhaus St. Gallen

**Exhibited**

**Literature**
Untitled, 1990 (additional views)
HANS JOSEPHSOHN
1920–2012
lived and worked in Zurich, Switzerland

Galerie Max Hetzler is pleased to announce representation of the estate of acclaimed Swiss artist Hans Josephsohn (1920–2012). A solo exhibition is scheduled for Summer 2021 at the gallery’s location in Berlin.

Active for over six decades, Josephsohn is regarded today as one of the foremost sculptors of the second half of the 20th century—celebrated for his unique commitment to representing the human figure in space. Working in plaster, and later casting his works in bronze and brass, the artist’s sculptures are characterised by an urgent bodily materiality, combining immediacy of technique with an aesthetic of timelessness, in pursuit of capturing “réalité vivante” (living reality). Self-categorised by the artist into standing figures, seated figures, reclining figures, half-figures, heads and reliefs, the works exemplify the central role played by the human figure in Josephsohn’s art. “[H]e never even considered the possibility of renouncing the figure”, Gerhard Mack explains. “To him sculpture has always been a dialogue with the human form and the human condition.”

The present brass sculpture, *Untitled*, 1990, belongs to his series of “half-figures”. For these, Josephsohn worked from live models, seeking to render the earlier reliefs and figures in space by expanding the volume and mass of the objects. Oscillating between figuration and abstraction and balance and heft, these works ask to be viewed in the round, shifting dramatically in shape from one view to another. Marked by a rich materiality and varied patina—revealing traces of the artist’s hands—the works evoke geological formations in colour, texture and scale. Yet, they are rooted in corporeality, expressing the presence and vital simplicity of the human form.

“He shows the body’s haptic dimension, what the eye can virtually feel, what is palpable, and what can only be perceived by touching.”—Gerhard Mack

Comparable “half-figures” can be found in the collections of the Aargauer Kunsthaus; Kunstmuseum St. Gallen; Museum MMK für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt; Museum zu Allerheiligen, Schaffhausen; Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin; and Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, among other public spaces.

*Untitled*, 1990 is currently on view in the Window Gallery at Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin.

“My figures must be permanent. Standing. Sitting. Reclining. Figure. Head. Half-figure. The figures must be permanent in their expression, in their posture.”

Hans Josephsohn
“If I look at Josephsohn’s work, I have to think of the Venus of Willendorf, of Neolithic art, or of comets or asteroids being sent to us from outer space. Increasingly, scientists believe that life on Earth came from an asteroid impact, so actually our origin might be cosmic. When I think about sculpture at its best, when I think about Josephsohn, it feels like that. His work subconsciously reminds me of our cosmic origin. Of moon rocks, Martian landscapes, asteroids. His sculpture goes far back in time, not hundreds but hundreds of thousands of years, before there was life. Stanley Brouwn, with whom I studied in Amsterdam, taught that sculpture comes from outer space. Josephsohn, for me, is proof he was right.”

Thomas Houseago
Il Palazzo Enciclopedico (The Encyclopedic Palace) Venice Biennale, Arsenale, Venice, 2013

Click here to discover more exhibition views
Haus für Reliefs und Halbfiguren von Hans Josephsohn, La Congiunta, Giornico, 1992
Hans Josephsohn was born in 1920 in Königsberg, which belonged to Germany at the time. Having grown up in a Jewish family, he fled to Zurich via Italy in 1939. There he studied sculpture with Otto Müller and started working in his own atelier in 1943. His works have been shown in several solo exhibitions in Switzerland since 1956, gaining increasing international recognition, with Josephsohn receiving the city of Zurich prize in 2003, at the age of 83. He lived and worked in Zurich until his death in 2012.

Solo exhibitions of his work have been held in international institutions, such as Museo d’arte della Svizzera italiana (MASI), Lugano (2020–2021); Museum zu Allerheiligen, Schaffhausen (2020); Museum Folkwang, Essen (2018); Kunsthalle, Munich (2015); Modern Art Oxford (2013); Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield (2013); Lismore Castle Arts, Lismore (2012); Museum MMK für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt (2008); Kolumba – Art Museum of the Archdiocese of Cologne, Cologne (2005); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2002); among other major museums. Works by Josephsohn were also prominently featured as part of the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013.

Two permanent installations of Josephsohn’s work are open to the public, including: Kesselhaus Josephsohn, an exhibition and gallery space in St. Gallen, Switzerland and home of the estate of the artist; and La Congiunta, a small museum in Giornico, Switzerland, designed by the artist’s long-time friend and architect, Peter Märkli.

Works by Josephsohn are in the collections of the Aargauer Kunsthaus, Aarau; Kolumba – Art Museum of the Archdiocese of Cologne; Kunsthaus Zurich; Kunstmuseum St. Gallen; Museum Folkwang, Essen; Kunstmuseum Appenzell; Museum zu Allerheiligen, Schaffhausen; MMK Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt/Main; Neue Nationalgalerie Berlin; and Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, among others.

Hans Josephsohn’s brass sculptures are currently the subject of an exhibition at the Museo d’arte Svizzera italiana (MASI), Lugano, until 21 February 2021, marking the centenary of his birth.
“It is always important to mention that his focus was not on some mimesis of life. Rather, the viewer experiences in these pieces parameters or variables drawn from the lifeworld that have been given form. Here we see forms and volumes that take on a life of their own.”

Isabel Hufschmidt

“Josephsohn’s sculptures can be recognized for their simplicity; mostly they are limited to the simple postures of the human body. In appearance, his sculptures evoke prehistory, ancient stone slabs and Romanesque figures.”

Niall Hobhouse
Standing Figures

“No one has captured the body’s resilience as vividly as Josephsohn – its brutalization, its exhaustion, its repose, its ponderousness, its breathlessness and its gasping for air.”

Gerhard Mack

Untitled, 1950
brass
156 x 19 x 13 cm.;
61 3/8 x 7 1/2 x 5 1/8 in.
edition 6 of 6, plus 2 AP

Untitled, 1958
brass
71 x 21 x 15 cm.;
28 x 8 1/4 x 5 7/8 in.
edition 2 of 6, plus 2 AP
Reliefs

“For narrative, Josephsohn has revived the genre of the relief and given it a new importance as a space in which two or three figures are related to each other either lovingly or in sorrow. Their emotions are revealed in the spatial relationships between their, at times, very expansive forms. Turning towards or away from each other, occupying shared or separate spaces, appearing above or below, they reveal their present relationship and hint at a resolution. Within such references, movement and storytelling are possible.”

Gerhard Mack

Reclining Figures

“Josephsohn’s sculpture is first and foremost a sculpture of material and presence, of gravity and grace. It is perhaps in his reclining (or declining) figures made both in the 1960s and 1970s and after, with their collapsed and horizontal closeness to the ground, that the urgency of this and of his plaster sculpture emerges most powerfully.”

Jon Wood

[Images and descriptions of sculptures]
“The structure of the surface...still bears the marks of its modelling in plaster. Relative to the volume of the figure, surface areas are generally fragmented, broken down into small parts, with an infinite variety of transitions and intermediate values—flowing, smooth, rutted, crusty, fissured. Rather than evoking a statically closed form, these varied lines and surfaces develop the contour in a way that is choppy, discontinuous, often broken. The figure becomes open and ambiguous simply through the way in which the relations of the forces of body and space are experienced within the structure of the surface.”

Walo Huber

Untitled (Madeleine), 2000
brass
155 x 76 x 62 cm.;
61 x 29 7/8 x 24 3/8 in.
edition 1 of 6, plus 2 AP
Museum MMK für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt

Untitled, 1990
brass
154 x 104 x 77 cm.; 60 5/8 x 41 x 30 1/4 in.
edition 4 of 6, plus 2 AP
Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin
Hans Josephsohn. Existenzielle Plastik / Existential Sculpture, Museum Folkwang, Essen, 2018
Hans Josephsohn, ICA, Milan, 2019
Hans Josephsohn, Window Gallery, Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin, 2020
Footnotes

2 ---., ibid.
8 ---., ibid.

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Untitled, 1950, Kunsthau Zurich
Untitled, 1995, Photo: Courtesy Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam
Untitled (Madeleine), 2000, Museum MMK für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt
Filmstill from Marcus Spichtig’s House of Sculpture, 2007

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