

Galerie Max Hetzler Berlin | Paris | London

Hans Josephsohn

Untitled, 1990

ONLINE VIEWING ROOM

21 November – 5 December 2020



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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

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

Provenance

Hans Josephsohn Estate, Kesselhaus St. Gallen

Exhibited

Giornico, La Congiunta, *Haus für Reliefs und Halbfiguren von Hans Josephsohn*, permanent exhibition since 1992 (ed. 1/6 exhibited).

Zürich, Helmhaus, *Hans Josephsohn*, June–August 1997 (ed. 1/6 exhibited).

London, *Frieze Sculpture Park*, October 2012.

Venice, Arsenale, *Il Palazzo Enciclopedico (The Encyclopedic Palace)*, June–November 2013.

Munich, Kunstparterre, *Hans Josephsohn. Halbfigur, Legende, Relief in der Skulptur*, April–June 2015.

Basel, Münsterplatz, *Art Parcours*, June 2016.

Schönthal, Kloster, *Hans Josephsohn*, May–November 2017.

Essen, Museum Folkwang, *Hans Josephsohn. Existenzielle Plastik / Existential Sculpture*, March–June 2018.

Milan, ICA, *Hans Josephsohn*, March–June 2019.

Berlin, Galerie Max Hetzler, Window Gallery, *Hans Josephsohn*, October 2020 – January 2021.

Literature

W. Huber, *La Congiunta*, exh.cat., Giornico: Fondazione La Congiunta, 1996/2018, p. 51 (illustrated in b&w).

H-J. Lechtreck, et al., *Hans Josephsohn. Existenzielle Plastik / Existential Sculpture*, exh.cat., Museum Folkwang, Essen; Göttingen: Steidl, 2018, p. 136 (illustrated in colour).



Untitled (detail), 1990



Untitled (detail), 1990



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. “[He] 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.”¹

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.”*²— Gerhard Mack

Comparable “half-figures” can be found in the collections of the Aargauer Kunsthaut; 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.”*³

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."*⁴

Thomas Houseago



Josephsohn in his studio on Burstwiesenstrasse in Zurich



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

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Haus für Reliefs und Halbfiguren von Hans Josephsohn, La Congiunta, Giornico, 1992

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Kesselhaus Josephsohn, St. Gallen, 2003

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); Kunstparterre, 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 Archbishopric 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.

Hans Josephsohn: A Survey

Heads

*"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."*⁵

Isabel Hufschmidt



Untitled, 1954/1955
brass
49 x 32 x 31 cm.;
19 1/4 x 12 5/8 x 12 1/4 in.
edition 3 of 6, plus 2 AP

Seated Figures



Untitled, 1968/70
brass
70 x 36 x 29 cm.;
27 1/2 x 14 1/8 x 11 3/8 in.
edition 2 of 6, plus 2 AP

*"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."*⁶

Niall Hobhouse

Standing Figures



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

*"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."*⁷

Gerhard Mack

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.”⁸

Gerhard Mack



Untitled, 1950/1951
bronze
145 x 143 x 11 cm.; 57 1/8 x 56 1/4 x 4 3/8 in.
edition 1 of 6, plus 2 AP

Kunsthaus Zurich



Untitled, 1995
bronze
95 x 68 x 37 cm.; 37 3/8 x 26 3/4 x 14 5/8 in.

Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

Reclining Figures



Untitled, 2006
brass
79.5 x 220.5 x 70 cm.; 31 1/4 x 86 3/4 x 27 1/2 in.
edition 2 of 6, plus 2 AP

Museum Folkwang, Essen

“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.”⁹

Jon Wood

Half-Figures



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**

“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.”¹⁰

Walo Huber



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



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Hans Josephsohn, ICA, Milan, 2019

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Kesselhaus Josephsohn, St. Gallen, 2004

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Galerie Max Hetzler

← Eingang im Hof
Entrance through the courtyard

Hans Josephsohn
Untitled, 1991

Hans Josephsohn, Window Gallery, Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin, 2020

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Footnotes

- 1 G. Mack, *Josephsohn: an exercise in form & curation*, exh. cat., Lismore Castle Arts, Lismore; Zurich: Hauser & Wirth, 2012, n.p.
- 2 ---, *ibid.*
- 3 H. Josephsohn quoted by Udo Kittelmann, "Hans Josephsohn. Ein Urgstein am Rande, oder die Kunst zu überdauern" in: *Kesselhaus Josephsohn*, exh.cat., Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main; St. Gallen: Kesselhaus Josephsohn, 2008, pp. 7–10, p. 9.
- 4 T. Houseago, "Josephsohn", in *Blau International*, No. 3, November 2020, p. 99.
- 5 I. Hufschmidt, "'... a kind of existential sculpture'. On the sculptural act and its necessity", in *Hans Josephsohn. Existenzielle Plastik / Existential Sculpture*, exh.cat., Museum Folkwang, Essen; Göttingen: Steidl, 2018, p. 107.
- 7 N. Hobhouse, *Josephsohn / Märkli. A Conjunction*, exh.cat., Bruton: Hauser & Wirth, 2017, p. 14.
- 6 G. Mack, *Josephsohn: an exercise in form & curation*, exh. cat., Lismore Castle Arts, Lismore; Zurich: Hauser & Wirth, 2012, n.p.
- 8 ---, *ibid.*
- 9 J. Wood, "Plaster as material – plaster as art history", in *Hans Josephsohn. Existenzielle Plastik / Existential Sculpture*, exh.cat., Museum Folkwang, Essen; Göttingen: Steidl, 2018, p. 155.
- 10 W. Huber, *La Congiunta*, exh.cat., Giornico: Fondazione La Congiunta, 2008, p. 102.

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Installation view, Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin, 2020,

Photo: def image

Untitled, 1991, Photo: def image

Untitled, 1950, Kunsthaus 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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- 2 ---, *ibid.*
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