

PRESS RELEASE

JOSEPHSOHN

27 March – 29 May 2010

Opening: Friday, 26 March, 6 – 8pm

Hauser & Wirth Zürich is pleased to present a selection of sculptures by Josephsohn, many of which have been cast in brass for the first time. Curated by the renowned Swiss architect Peter Märkli in collaboration with Kesselhaus Josephsohn, the exhibition will include Josephsohn's half and standing figures as well as his reliefs, a sculptural form that has played a central role throughout Josephsohn's artistic practice.

Over the years, Josephsohn and Märkli have developed a close relationship, the artist becoming a mentor for Peter Märkli and his work greatly influencing Märkli's projects, such as La Congiunta, a small museum in the Southern Swiss Alps designed and built to house Josephsohn's sculptures. The young architect first came to Josephsohn's studio in 1975. Märkli's visits soon became regular, with Josephsohn and Märkli connecting over Italian culture, ancient Greek classicism, Romanesque art and, most importantly, their mutual interest in the relationship between art and architecture.

For these reasons Märkli has chosen to focus the exhibition at Hauser & Wirth Zürich on Josephsohn's reliefs, a type of sculpture that throughout art history has been predominantly used as an architectural ornamentation. Josephsohn's reliefs not only explore the fundamental struggles associated with sculpture, but also issues arising in architecture, including themes of volume, form and proportion.

The exhibition will include important examples of Josephsohn's reliefs from the 1950s and 1960s. In these earlier reliefs, Josephsohn removes figural representation from his work, depicting compositions consisting of abstracted figures and geometric shapes, as in *Untitled* (1952). However, unlike other abstract sculptors working during this time, Josephsohn did not reduce his forms in order to express only the essence of the subject or to renounce the figure. Instead, his reduction of the form to its most basic characteristics allowed the artist to explore the practical problems encountered within the spatial constraints of the relief.

At this time, Josephsohn was also continuing his earlier explorations of standing figures, such as *Untitled (Miriam)* (1953), a tall, slender, yet solid figure whose facial features and limbs are merely alluded to and whose feet seemingly morph into the plinth upon which she stands. These sculptures' straightforward simplicity and frontally oriented symmetry at once call to mind the gravitas of ancient sculpture and Egyptian stelae.



UNTITLED
1952
Brass
197 x 153 x 9 cm / 77 1/2 x 60 1/4 x 3 1/2 in



UNTITLED (MIRIAM)
1953
Brass
161 x 33 x 21 cm / 63 3/8 x 13 x 8 1/4 in

Alongside his earlier reliefs and sculptures, Josephsohn's later 'high' reliefs from the 1970s will be shown. With these works, the figures once strictly constrained within the reliefs attain a new plasticity, expanding into space and towards the viewer. Many of these reliefs are closed off by a horizontal beam at the top of the work that, much like an architectural feature, acts as a stabilising element, condensing the space and enabling the sculpture to be integrated into an architectural context.

Two examples of Josephsohn's more recent sculptures will also be included in the exhibition, sculptures which evidence the artist's return to abstraction. These half figures, such as *Untitled* (1994), possess an insistent corporeality, and, through their compact forms, emphasise the heaviness and materiality of the body. Although very different from his earlier, geometric reliefs, Josephsohn similarly uses these works to explore recurring questions of proportion and volume.

Throughout his career, Josephsohn has cultivated an independence and artistic freedom that has allowed him to explore traditional forms of sculpture. All of these aspects of Josephsohn's oeuvre – geometric reduction, the abstraction of form, figuration and a return to abstraction in recent years – do not speak to his association with any school of theory or artistic movement. Instead, these changes show an artist's continuing search for a way to express what is perceived or experienced. The unassignable characteristics of his figures and reliefs lend a timeless and enduring quality to his work.

The Swiss artist Josephsohn was born in 1920 to a Jewish family in Königsberg, then East Prussia. He travelled to Florence in 1938 to study sculpture then emigrated to Switzerland in the wake of fascist laws. He has lived and worked in Zurich ever since. There are two permanent installations of his work open to the public: Kesselhaus Josephsohn in St. Gallen, Switzerland, where sculptures by the artist are exhibited, stored and also cast in the nearby foundry; and the aforementioned La Congiunta. Major exhibitions of his work include retrospectives at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2002) and the Frankfurt Museum of Modern Art (2008). His work has also been included in numerous group shows including the recent 'Visible Invisible', currently on view at Parasol Unit, London and 'The Third Eye' at Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France (2007).

GALLERY HOURS: Tuesday to Friday noon – 6 pm,
Saturday 11 am – 5 pm

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UNTITLED
1976
Brass
127 x 65 x 36 cm / 50 x 25 5/8 x 14 1/8 in



UNTITLED
1994
Brass
143 x 70 x 55 cm / 56 1/4 x 27 1/2 x 21 5/8 in