

## Press Release

### Hans Josephsohn

**8 June – 14 September 2024**

**Opening 7 June, 6 – 8 pm**

This exhibition of Hans Josephsohn's works at Karma International Gallery in Zurich focuses on reliefs. A group of six reliefs is installed in a row, taking up the whole wall on the left-hand side of the gallery space. As a contrast point, a single half-figure stands on a pedestal in the space, facing the entrance.

The hanging of a number of similarly sized reliefs in a row can be read as a friendly nod to the installation Swiss architect Peter Märkli curated at La Congiunta, a specifically designed museum for Josephsohn's works in Giornico, Switzerland. In both cases, we encounter a row of reliefs, similar in size and spaced out so that they can breathe, but still close enough to each other to create a rhythmical pattern.

Repetition makes sense when it comes to displaying Josephsohn's oeuvre. Throughout his lifespan, the German-born sculptor of Jewish descent, who emigrated to Switzerland via Italy in 1939, focused his attention onto a handful of key motifs: The standing figure, the reclining figure, the head. What all these shapes have in common is that they stand alone. Their impact springs from the dialogue with the viewer. But when Josephsohn had the urge to emphasize a relationship or a dialogue, he fell back onto the relief.

The relief may seem chaotic at first. However, once the eye gets accustomed to the idiosyncratic setup, the order and logic appear. We often see three figures: the sculpture, the model and the artist himself, from a distorted bird's eye view. The perspective is hijacked by the artist's emotions: what's important is big. It's usually the model, followed by the artwork. The smallest figure, the artist, can typically be recognized by his outstretched arm, a signifier of his action. A thick bar on the top shapes the space where the magic happens, the studio. One of the reliefs in the show also features a cat of considerable size.

Reliefs have been part of Josephsohn's oeuvre from the 1950s to the end of his practice in 2007. Tiny ones were done fast, almost like sketches, to capture a certain idea or try out a balance of volumes. But the larger versions were in no way mere copies; on the contrary, with the bigger scale, the balance of matter and the right proportions had to be reevaluated each time. The tension of the actual physical experience in the studio was not easily translated, but Josephsohn was stubborn. His fascination for the human form, and its fast and relentless translation into plaster, enabled him to work prolifically. He perceived the step of casting as separate from his artistic process; nevertheless, he wouldn't sell his plaster work. The finished piece was the metal cast.

The half-figure in the show depicts his second wife Verena. Created in 1993, it is exemplary of his late work, where material is accumulated extensively and more and more volume is created. The starting point for the half-figures is a real encounter - the classical work after a model - and yet it is not a portrait but an interpretation of matter, as Josephsohn saw it. In Verena, we recognise hair, nose, chin, mouth and her crossed arms. Despite its mass, this figure seems to exist with the bare minimum of features that is needed in order to make out a human. The half-figure is the sculpture that we encounter in the relief. While the relief depicts the process, the half-figure is the creation. Although there is an almost 20-year gap between the reliefs and the half-figure in the show, they can be linked by the characteristics of their surface. The distinctive roughness of Josephsohn's works stems from the velocity of his process. His work in plaster was fast and rugged. He would add big lumps of material, hack them away with a hatchet, then add more. In the balance of these two acts, he would find the finished sculpture. Between the actual creative phases, which were almost hectic, Josephsohn took a lot of time to simply contemplate the work. It could take up to a year or longer before he considered a sculpture to be finished. This time was crucial. It is the push and pull of these two extremes that defines Josephsohn's work in its unique intertwining of a fast pace and long-winding contemplation.

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