

Press release

March 2022

“Hans Steinbrenner – Sculpture and Painting”

Exhibition at Galerie Scheffel, Bad Homburg, Germany

25 March – 7 May 2022

Galerie Scheffel is pleased to present a solo exhibition honouring the life’s work of Hans Steinbrenner (1928-2008), one of the most highly respected sculptors of German post-war modernism. Some 50 works by the Frankfurt artist, spanning six decades, will be on display. Starting with his first sculptural works in 1948, they illustrate the consistent development of his distinctive artistic language, from the human figure to abstract formal structures.

Hans Steinbrenner’s early works are in the tradition of figurative sculpture. In their free approach to artistic models and their singularly concentrated overall composition, his first two figures of 1948 both already give evidence of the highly distinctive formal impetus behind the work of this, then barely twenty-year old, artist: thus his “Sitting Figure” (WV 1c) is an impressively independent sculptural translation of the painted female figure in Henri Matisse’s “Figure décorative sur fond fleuri” (1925/26), while his “Standing Figure” (WV 2) goes back to Wilhelm Lehmbruck’s “Pensive Woman” (1913/14), even though in the overall composition the individual body parts are largely condensed, as if already anticipating the non-representational construction of volumes and surfaces of his later works. In their self-evident nakedness, Steinbrenner’s subsequent human figures are also in repose, their body parts clearly delineated yet flowing into each other.

In the period between 1955-1960 Steinbrenner freed himself from figurative depiction and turned towards a biomorphic, seemingly organic abstraction – until there was a final break with representation. With their molten lines, his figures are now reminiscent of the formal world of Hans Arp or Henry Moore, yet here also Steinbrenner develops a sculptural language of his own, characterized by a progressive reduction in favour of an overall formal effect. Carefully balanced compositions emerge, with natural, rounded and curved forms washed around and permeated by space. With works from this creative phase, Steinbrenner first attracted international attention: at the end of the 1950’s he was already exhibiting not only in Paris but also, for the first time, in the legendary sculpture exhibitions at the Middelheimpark in Antwerp and in the Park Sonsbeek in Arnhem, in the Netherlands.

The beginning of the 1960’s marked a further decisive shift in Steinbrenner’s work: his initial turning towards geometrical forms can be seen in his “Figure” (WV 141b) of 1960, shown in the current exhibition, or his “Large Wooden Figure” of 1961, shown at documenta III, with its components apparently piled in tiers on top of each other. Yet, as with all of Hans Steinbrenner’s sculptures, these also are worked from a single block. Soon, Steinbrenner was to develop the language of geometrical constructions so characteristic of his later work, drawing exclusively on right angles and cubical elements. From now on, all his sculptures were simply entitled “Figure”, with no further precision. He created at first compact, then stelae-like, cuboid figurations, whose individual elements are not symmetrically arranged but slightly offset against each other. The rhythmic verticals give the works a seemingly live silhouette, and the deliberate traces of the working of the material, and the play of light and shade on their surfaces,

create an impression of movement and stand in sharp contrast to the strict geometry of the single forms. At the same time, the harmonious overall impression of these works is created by the perfect balance in the relationship of all the parts to the whole, by the correlation of symmetry and asymmetry, stasis and dynamics.

This interplay of static and dynamic moments has, since then, also distinguished the pictorial work of Hans Steinbrenner, based on the idea of space being defined by colour surfaces. His pictures, which he calls "Compositions", portray right-angled surfaces of different colours and sizes, creating through the use of light and dark tones the impression of three-dimensionality and relief-like interconnections: while the darkest elements lead the observer's eye into the depths, the lighter forms seem literally to leap out of them. Thus Steinbrenner's paintings, like his sculptures, invariably create an impression of inner balance. "Painting is the creation and staging in colour of surface; sculpture the spatial, corporeal shaping of the block", he summarizes in his "Thoughts and Reflections" in 1967.

Hans Steinbrenner studied graphic arts at the School of Applied Arts (today the University of Art and Design) in Offenbach (1946-49) before completing his studies in sculpture at the Städelschule academy of fine arts in Frankfurt (master pupil of Hans Mettel, 1949-52) and at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich (master pupil of Toni Stadler, 1952-54). He has taught, for example, at the Städelschule in Frankfurt and was from 1999 a member of the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts. His award-winning sculptural and pictorial works are regularly exhibited and are represented in numerous public and private collections in Europe, Japan and the USA. In addition, Hans Steinbrenner's sculptures are permanently installed in the public space in many locations in Germany, as well as for example in Tel Aviv – and especially, his home city of Frankfurt.

The exhibition in Galerie Scheffel, which runs until 7 May 2022, spans all of Hans Steinbrenner's creative periods. In addition to bronzes and sculptures in wood and stone, paintings on canvas and hardboard are also on display, enabling a deep insight into the complete work of this pioneering artist.

The "Hans Steinbrenner: Sculpture and Painting" exhibition at Galerie Scheffel is open Tuesdays to Fridays from 2-7pm, and on Saturdays from 11am-3pm.

We are happy to provide press photographs free of charge.

"Hans Steinbrenner: Sculpture and Painting" exhibition

Location: Galerie Scheffel, Ferdinandstraße 19, 61348 Bad Homburg v.d.Höhe, Germany

Duration of exhibition: 25 March – 7 May 2022

Opening times: Tuesdays to Fridays 2-7pm, Saturdays 11am-3pm

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Hans Steinbrenner – “Skulptur und Malerei / Sculpture and Painting”



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Figur
1991, oak
141,5 x 36,5 x 22,5 cm



Sitzende (WV 1c)
1948, cast bronze, ed 3/6
53 x 50,8 x 52 cm