

EXHIBITION OF GERMAN 20TH-CENTURY SCULPTURE ON VIEW AT HARVARD'S BUSCH-REISINGER MUSEUM

“Making Myth Modern” Examines How German Artists Adapted Myths to Express Contemporary Concerns



Franz von Stuck, *Amazon*, 1897 (cast after 1905). Bronze; 64.2 x 46.4 x 17.3 cm. Busch-Reisinger Museum, Anonymous gift in honor of the 100th anniversary of the Busch-Reisinger Museum, 2003.132. Photo: Photographic Services © President and Fellows of Harvard College.

CAMBRIDGE, MA (April 26, 2007)—The Harvard University Art Museums present *Making Myth Modern: Primordial Themes in German 20th-Century Sculpture*, a tightly focused exhibition of seven sculptures by Franz von Stuck, Renée Sintenis, Max Beckmann, Gerhard Marcks, Bernard Schultze, and Joseph Beuys at the Busch-Reisinger Museum from **July 14 through December 30, 2007**. This exhibition brings together for the first time important sculptures from the Busch-Reisinger Museum’s permanent collection and includes some of the foremost German artists from the turn of the century to the early 1980s. The works employ mythological themes to address broad subjects such as creation, nature, and gender relations. But after a closer look, it becomes clear that these interpretations also strongly reflect the artists’ personal lives and the turbulent history of 20th-century Germany.

The exhibition is organized by Solveig Köbernick, 2005-2007 Michalke Curatorial Intern at the Busch-Reisinger Museum and Ph.D. candidate in the department of History of Art at the University of Leipzig, Germany. “I was inspired by the exceptional sculptures by well-known 20th-century artists in the Busch-Reisinger collection, and the remarkable way they deal with mythological themes. I wanted to understand why these artists turned to myths to express

themselves,” said Köbernick. “I was also interested in the fact that artists who were renowned painters like Franz von Stuck or Max Beckmann were overlooked as sculptors. For example, one understands the work of artists such as Bernard Schultze much better by examining the relationship between sculptures and paintings in his work. My hope is that by focusing exclusively on sculpture, this exhibition will illuminate the importance of that medium in German 20th-century art.”

With the introduction of Romanticism in the late 18th century, the perception of myths changed dramatically as they began to be considered as symbols of deeper truths and the primal unity of the world. This important shift in perception freed myths from their traditional iconography and opened the door for more individualized interpretations and the creation of new myths. From this point forward mythological figures became mirrors of the artists’ states of mind and contemporary historical conditions. This makes the examination of the artists’ use of myths in 20th-century Germany so compelling, given Nazi persecution of modern artists, the Third Reich’s ideological misuse of myths, and the cultural and political transformation in the country after the Second World War.

The works in the exhibition encourage the exploration of sculpture in German 20th-century art through the study of different approaches by artists to material, form, and surface—from Franz von Stuck’s bronze sculpture of around 1900, already pointing towards an abstraction of form, to Bernhard Schultze’s colorful, biomorphic, and surrealist-influenced relief sculpture of the 1960s, and Joseph Beuys’ minimalist-influenced and readymade-looking, but highly designed sculptures of the 1980s.

“We are always looking for ways to use the collections to their fullest potential, especially to educate and illuminate,” said Thomas W. Lentz, Elizabeth and John Moors Cabot Director of the Harvard University Art Museums. “These works have not been chosen simply based upon their aesthetic appeal, but carefully selected by Solveig to encourage a dialogue about their role in the history of contemporary German art and their impact on society.”

Featured Works

Making Myth Modern contributes to the increasing scholarly and public interest in the role of myths in 20th-century art and in the medium of sculpture. It examines how German artists over the course of eight decades interpreted myths, and how their personalized myths reflected German history and artist's concerns. The interpretations of myths became as multifaceted as the artists' works. In his sculpture *Amazon* (1897), Franz von Stuck identified himself with a mythological figure in order to position himself as a successful artist within the turn-of-the-century German art world, whereas Renée Sintenis adapted the *Daphne* (1930) figure to reflect her status as a successful female artist in the late Weimar Republic. Max Beckmann's powerful sculpture *Adam and Eve* (1936) demonstrates the search for basic truths of life in a time of increasing political pressure by the National Socialists. The desire for a new beginning following the exploitation of myths in the Third Reich is reflected by Gerhard Marcks' *Prometheus Bound II* (1948), and Bernhard Schultze's sculpture *Migof Bloody and Blooming* (1965) is an example of his attempt to create a wholly new myth. In *Pala* (1983) and *ELEMENT* (1982), Joseph Beuys used myths to stimulate environmental engagement and express the idea of creative and spiritual energy in his work.

Brochure

The exhibition will be accompanied by a brochure featuring 12 color reproductions, an essay by curator Solveig Köbernick, and a checklist.

Exhibition Programming

Gallery Talks

Busch-Reisinger Museum

Free with the price of admission

Saturday, July 14, 11:30 a.m.

Solveig Köbernick, 2005–2007 Michalke Curatorial Intern, Busch-Reisinger Museum

Saturday, September 15, 11:30 a.m.

Lizzy Ramhorst, curatorial assistant, Busch-Reisinger Museum

Saturday, October 20, 11:30 a.m.

Sunday, November 18, 2:00 p.m.

Lea Kamecke, 2007–2009 Michalke Curatorial Fellow, Busch-Reisinger Museum

Sunday, December 16, 2:00 p.m.

Heather Hess, 2006–2008 Stefan Engelhorn Curatorial Fellow, Busch-Reisinger Museum

The Harvard University Art Museums

The Harvard University Art Museums are one of the world's leading arts institutions, comprising the Fogg Art Museum, Busch-Reisinger Museum, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Straus Center for Conservation, Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, HUAM Archives, and the U.S. headquarters for the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis.

The Harvard University Art Museums are distinguished by the range and depth of their collections, their groundbreaking exhibitions, and the original research of their staff. As an integral part of the Harvard community, the three art museums and four research centers serve as resources for all students, adding a special dimension to their areas of study. The public is welcome to experience the collections and exhibitions as well as to enjoy lectures, symposia, and other programs.

For more than a century, the Harvard University Art Museums have been the nation's premier training ground for museum professionals and scholars and are renowned for their role in the development of the discipline of art history in this country.

Location and Hours

The Fogg Art Museum and the Busch-Reisinger Museum are located at 32 Quincy Street, Cambridge. Adjacent to them is the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, located at 485 Broadway. Each museum is a short walk through Harvard Yard from the Harvard Square MBTA station.

Hours: **Monday through Saturday, 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.; Sunday 1:00–5:00 p.m.;** closed on national holidays.

General admission is \$9; \$7 for senior citizens; and \$6 for students. Paid admission includes entrance to all three Art Museums, including study rooms, public tours, and gallery talks.

Admission is free for Harvard University ID holders, Members of the Art Museums, Cambridge Public Library cardholders, and visitors under 18 years of age. Admission is free to all on Saturdays before noon. More detailed information is available at 617-495-9400 or on the Internet at www.artmuseums.harvard.edu.

The Harvard University Art Museums receive support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

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For more information about these exhibitions or the Harvard University Art Museums, please contact:

Daron Manoogian, Public Relations Manager
Harvard University Art Museums
tel 617-495-2397; fax 617-496-9762
daron_manoogian@harvard.edu

Mary Haus / Casey Barber
Resnicow Schroeder Associates
tel 860-523-8718 / 212-671-5179
mhaus / cbarber@resnicowschroeder.com