

A Sculptural Landscape in Iron and Steel

Paolo Bellini, James Licini and Josef Maria Odermatt are among the leading representatives of present-day Swiss iron sculpture. In continuation of the monographic exhibitions of Bernhard Luginbühl (2003) and Oscar Wiggli (2007), the Kunstmuseum Bern is now mounting *Iron and Steel* to present further innovative developments in Swiss iron sculpture by Paolo Bellini, James Licini and Josef Maria Odermatt. Paolo Bellini and James Licini as well as the family of Joseph Maria Odermatt, now deceased, cooperated closely with the Kunstmuseum Bern in mounting the exhibition.

Iron and steel first appeared very late on the scene in the history of sculpture. As relatively inexpensive metals they were used for manufacturing commodities, making machines and trains, and building railroads. Thus, while iron and steel were strongly representative for technological advancement and the Industrial Revolution, they were generally not associated with art. A symbol of the radical change in this attitude was the Eiffel Tower, which was built in 1889 for the centenary of the French Revolution.

Pionieers at work

As early as the 1920s and 1930s, Swiss artists such as Johannes Itten, Serge Brignoni, Walter Bodmer and Max Bill experimented with construction or non-representational sculpture, creating surrealistic and constructivist sculptures out of iron and steel. And in the 1940s and 1950s the generation of the "young rebels" began their artistic careers. These artists, including Bernhard Luginbühl, Robert Müller or Jean Tinguely, used iron in a novel way. Swiss iron sculpture had its breakthrough to abstraction and swiftly found international acclaim.

Innovative advances in iron sculpture

In the 1960s, iron and steel were used in the context of addressing specific questions and not primarily as signs of avant-gardism. Paolo Bellini, James Licini and Josef Maria Odermatt are among the leading figures of the group sculptors working with iron in Switzerland. They are real artisans in metalworking techniques. Their main source for iron is no longer the scrap-metal yard where their pioneers found the raw material for staging the metal's innate contrary qualities of decay and endurance. Bellini, Licini and Odermatt choose to work with new materials that they obtain from specialist retailers of iron and steel. Together they span in their sculptures the entire scope of possibilities in working with iron. Licini sees himself as a metalworker and targets utmost simplicity in his forms. He is in constant search of the ultimate primeval form that can not be further reduced. Bellini, on the other hand, creates playful artworks that appear to dance and cavort. They rise out of the ruins of technology in crude anthropomorphic motions and gestures. And Odermatt, before his decease, created an impressive series of forged floor pieces in which he conflated the axioms of minimal art with the archaism of the Swiss alpine world.

Bern as a center of Swiss iron sculptures

Bern is the center for Swiss iron sculpture. Several of the great pioneers using iron for sculpture in Switzerland were from Bern, such as Bernhard Luginbühl, Walter Linck, Hans Witschi or Willi Weber. The first overview exhibition of international iron sculptures took place in 1955 in Bern, organized by the legendary Kunsthalle Bern director Arnold Rüdlinger. The Kunstmuseum Bern began already at an early date to concentrate on accruing representative foci within its collection. Therefore, in addition to the exhibition *Iron and Steel*, we are also presenting iron sculptures from our collection.

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The Exhibition

Duration: 16.08. – 10.11.2013
Opening: Thursday, August 15, 18:30
Co-Curators: Matthias Frehner, Regula Berger
Entrance fee: CHF 14.00 / red. CHF 10.00

The Catalogue



Eisen und Stahl. Paolo Bellini, James Licini, Josef Maria Odermatt.

Hrsg. Kunstmuseum Bern, Matthias Frehner und Regula Berger. Mit Beiträgen von Mario Botta, Rudy Chiappini, Matthias Frehner, Ulrich Loock, Peter von Matt, Paul Nizon und Juri Steiner. Drei broschiierte Bände in Schuber. Total 192 Seiten, 160 Abbildungen. ISBN 978-3-85881-397-8, ca. CHF 55.00

The Poster



F4
89,5 x
128 cm
CHF 20.00

The Special Events (in German)

Öffentliche Führungen

Sonntag, 11h: 18. / 25. August, 15.
September, 13. Oktober, 10. November
Dienstag, 19h: 20. August, 10. September, 1.
Oktober, 29. Oktober
Anmeldung nicht erforderlich,
Ausstellungseintritt genügt

Öffentliche Führung für Blinde und Sehbehinderte

Sonntag, 15. September, 12h

Einführung für Lehrpersonen

Dienstag, 20. August, 18h
Anmeldung T 031 328 09 11
vermittlung@kunstmuseumbern.ch
Kosten: CHF 10.00

Wenn es dunkel wird im Museum

Freitag, 1. November, 18h – 22h
Sonderanlass für Kinder von 6 bis 10 Jahren:
Info/Anmeldung: T + 41 31 328 09 11 oder
vermittlung@kunstmuseumbern.ch
Kosten: CHF 20.00 inkl. kleinem Abendessen

Zeitfenster Gegenwart: Rundgang mit der Kuratorin

Dienstag, 27. August, 18h
Anmeldung nicht erforderlich,
Ausstellungseintritt genügt

Künstlergespräch: Matthias Frehner mit James Licini

Dienstag, 3. September, 19h
Anmeldung nicht erforderlich,
Ausstellungseintritt genügt

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