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Press Release

David Smith Four Sculptures

Hauser & Wirth Zurich, Bahnhofstrasse 1
9 December 2022 – 6 April 2023

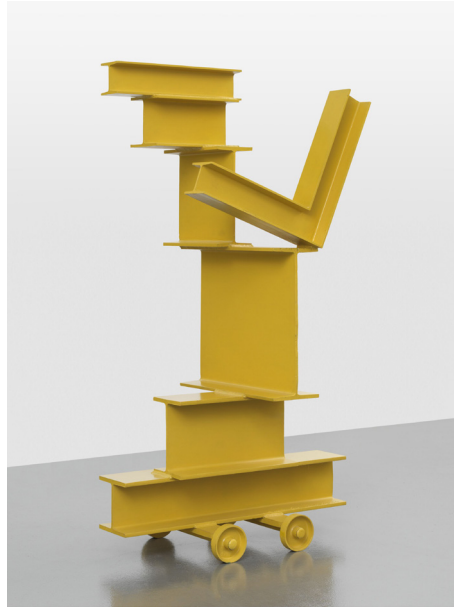


One of the foremost artists of the 20th Century and the sculptor most closely associated with the abstract expressionist movement, David Smith (1906–1965) is celebrated for his use of industrial materials and processes and the integration of open space into sculpture. 'David Smith. Four Sculptures' will be held in Hauser & Wirth's glass-fronted exhibition space on Bahnhofstrasse 1, Zurich. The exhibition will showcase four extraordinary, painted sculptures that represent major sculpture groups Smith made in the early 1960s.

Throughout his career, Smith referred to himself as both a painter and a sculptor, working in both mediums simultaneously. Citing the unification of painting and sculpture in ancient Egyptian and Greek art, Smith applied painting concepts to his sculpture and vice versa. 'I've always made painted sculpture,' Smith asserted in 1962, 'not one year that I've worked have I failed to do this.' By the early 1960s, he had arrived at a new phase of creativity: he made nearly one-third of his entire sculptural output in the last five years of his life while working on a monumental scale. The large, painted works in 'David Smith. Four Sculptures' are outstanding examples of the culmination of Smith's long exploration of colour and form.

'Zig I' (1961) is a part of Smith's Zig series that comprises seven large-scale, vertical works, each numbered by the artist. The series' name was an 'affectionate term,' according to Smith, that derived from 'ziggurat'—a stepped pyramid found in ancient Mesopotamia. Each of the Zigs features inventive arrangements of planes and rounded forms that yield surprising spatial relationships as a viewer walks around the sculpture. 'Zig I' is made from cut sections of steel tubes that ascend in a playful dance along a vertical axis. The surface of this work is activated by an application of feathery, black brushstrokes over a russet ground, harnessing the gestural vigour seen in the work of Smith's fellow abstract expressionists.

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By contrast, the yellow sculpture 'Untitled (Zig VI)' (1964) is characterised by angularity and a monochromatic surface. It has been suggested that this sculpture could possibly be 'Zig VI'—a number that is missing from the Zig series. While 'Untitled (Zig VI)' does bear certain formal similarities with the Zigs, it retains a distinct individuality in its nearly-minimalist, matter-of-fact construction and chromatic uniformity. In this sculpture, Smith stacked I-beams of various sizes and balanced them on four small, found wheels, a feature that connects it to three other wheeled sculptures from the Zig series, all of which are in museum collections. It is especially related to 'Zig VII' (1963), in the collection of The Museum of Modern Art, New York which is painted with a large swath of bright yellow and sits on four comparatively sized wheels.



In 1962, Smith was invited to make two sculptures for an exhibition associated with the Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto, Italy. Working with a crew of local metalworkers in an abandoned steel factory in the nearby town of Voltri, Smith produced a total of twenty-seven sculptures within a month. The experience would have a profound impact on Smith's work. After returning to Bolton Landing, he sustained the energy he demonstrated in Voltri and made, over a six-week period, three large sculptures that define his Primo Piano series. The title is Italian for 'first floor'—the floor above the ground floor—where, Smith explained, 'most of the action takes place.' In 'Primo Piano II' (1962), for example, two vertical elements elevate a central, horizontal beam, above which a dynamic interplay of different shapes and metals unfolds across a span over thirteen feet long. In a

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natural setting, this large-scale sculpture commands a strong visual presence, as a graphic contrast to the landscape. While the other two works in this series are entirely white, 'Primo Piano II' incorporates elements of unpainted bronze and stainless steel that introduce compelling variations within the work itself.



Smith described 'Gondola II' (1964) as his latest painted sculpture in a lecture delivered at Bennington College shortly before his untimely death in May 1965. The chromatic surface of 'Gondola II' is elegantly articulated, with a black, diamond-shaped plane topped by a cream-colored stanchion and flanked by two cloud-like forms, one in cream and the other a deep purple—tonal contrasts that counterbalance the general symmetry of the work. The title is a reference to the Italian name for the cart used in factories, such as Smith's workspace in Voltri, to transport large, heavy materials. Smith would incorporate the term 'gondola' into the titles of two other large, planar sculptures, now in museum collections. He made the first 'Gondola' in 1961 as a response, in sculpture, to Robert Motherwell's renowned series of paintings, the *Elegies to the Spanish Republic*. A dialogue, through art, with other artists was part of Smith's 'workflow' and inspiration.

'David Smith. Four Sculptures' offers a rare opportunity to consider these distinct sculptures in relation to one another, and to explore the many ways Smith mined history and his own prolific career to continue expanding the definition of sculpture.

About the artist

Regarded as one of the most innovative sculptors of his generation, David Smith (1906 – 1965) sought to redefine what sculpture could be in the modern world. Born in Decatur, Indiana, Smith worked as an automobile welder before moving to New York City, where he studied painting at the Art Students League. In 1929 he bought property in Bolton Landing, in the Adirondack Mountains of upstate New York. He would settle there permanently in 1940.

Smith's metalworking experience inspired his choice to make sculpture by welding steel, eschewing the conventional sculptural methods of casting and carving. He is widely acknowledged to have created the first welded metal sculpture in the United States and for his ability to use steel as an expressive, sculptural material. Over a 33-year career, he broadened the cultural and material conditions of sculpture, while questioning and advancing its relationship with nature. Smith often worked on multiple series at the same time and regarded his sculptures, paintings and drawings as part of a continuous flow of creativity. When Smith died suddenly in May 1965, he left behind an expansive, complex and powerful body of work that continues to exert influence upon younger generations of artists.

Exhibitions devoted to David Smith's work have been presented internationally since the 1950s. The Museum of Modern Art in New York NY presented Smith's first retrospective in 1957. Smith represented the United States at the São Paulo Biennale in 1951 and at La Biennale di Venezia in 1954 and 1958, followed by

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Documenta II in 1959 and Documenta III in 1964. In 1962, at the invitation of Giovanni Carandente and the Italian government, Smith went to Voltri, near Genoa, Italy, where he produced 27 sculptures for the Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto.

Subsequent retrospectives have been held at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (2006), which travelled to Tate Modern in London, UK and the Centre Pompidou in Paris, France; and at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2011) in Los Angeles CA, which travelled to the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York NY and the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus OH. Major surveys have been organised at the Sezon Museum of Art, Tokyo, Japan (1994); the Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Valencia, Spain (1996); the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain (1996); Storm King Art Center, Mountainville NY (1998 – 1999); and Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield, England (2019 – 2020). In June 2023, The Hyde Collection in Glens Falls NY, near Bolton Landing, will open the exhibition 'Songs of the Horizon: David Smith, Music, and Dance.'

Smith's sculptural output has been definitively recorded in 'David Smith Sculpture: A Catalogue Raisonné, 1932–1965,' published in three volumes in 2021 by the Estate of David Smith and distributed by Yale University Press. 'David Smith: The Art and Life of a Transformational Sculptor' by Michael Brenson, the first biography on the artist, was published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux in October 2022.

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Opening hours:

Tue – Fri 10 am – 6 pm
Sat 11 am – 5 pm

www.hauserwirth.com

Caption and courtesy information:

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David Smith
Primo Piano II
1962
Steel, bronze, stainless steel, paint
225.1 x 408.3 x 79.4 cm / 88 5/8 x 160 3/4 x 31 1/4 in
Photo: Ron Amstutz

David Smith
Zig I
1961
Steel, paint
245.1 x 144.8 x 81.9 cm / 96 1/2 x 57 x 32 1/4 in
Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography Zürich

David Smith
Untitled (Zig VI)
1964
Steel, paint
200.3 x 112.7 x 73.7 cm / 78 7/8 x 44 3/8 x 29 in
Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography Zürich

Sculpture group featuring 'Untitled' (1964) (far left), Bolton Landing, New York, c. 1964.
Photo: David Smith

Sculpture group featuring 'Primo Piano II' (1962) (second from left), Bolton Landing, New York, c. 1963.
Photo: David Smith

David Smith
Gondola II
1964
Steel, paint
278.8 x 274.3 x 45.7 cm / 109 3/4 x 108 x 18 in
Photo: Jon Etter

'Gondola II' (1964), Bolton Landing, New York, 1964
Photo: David Smith