

Harry Abend: Assembled Environments (1958-2017)

Opening Reception: Wednesday June 28, 6-9 pm

Exhibition runs through August 12, 2017

Gallery Hours: Monday to Friday 11-6 pm

Henrique Faria Fine Art is pleased to present *Assembled Environments (1958-2017)*, Harry Abend's second solo exhibition in the gallery. This exhibition brings together a selection of sculptures from 1958 through the present day that highlights the artist's sustained relationship with his immediate surroundings and the inspiration that comes from the formally disparate objects he continues to find around him. When Abend first began exploring the sculptural technique of assemblage, three years before William Steitz's historic exhibition *The Art of Assemblage* at MoMA, he saw it as a means for incorporating the organic, naturally occurring, timeless forms with the prefabricated, arbitrary structures of the urban and industrial landscapes of modern society. The works on display in the gallery demonstrate this tension between the mechanical compulsion for order and the entropic forces that rule the natural world.

In the exhibition text, Juan Ledezma discusses the term "Second Nature", originally adopted by Georg Lukács and Walter Benjamin to describe "our daily encounter with urban, built environments" and the ensuing relationship between this "modern life and the forms built around it" according to new technologies' rapid advancement. As the pace of technological progress has outstripped the lifespan of its own machinery, we have been left with a mine of obsolete, yet ornate materials that have been relegated to junkyards and the fate of decay, and this is precisely where Abend has found the formal inspiration for this series of assemblages. Ledezma writes, "the artist's reconstructive method [... privileges] eroded, scoured surfaces—surfaces on which the formative forces of [...] nature have left an indexical mark, providing them with sensuous immediacy. Abend has thereby tack-welded a redemptive system, a compound of forms that revert the mastery of technology over nature, for it is now nature that shapes and reclaims dregs of technology."

Through his poetic and metaphoric titles, Abend inserts new levels of meaning to the assembled pieces, pushing the idea of the Readymade a step further and thereby welcoming these now sculptural materials back from the brink of society. Works such as *Recuerdo de una ciencia que fue (Memory of a Science that Was)* (2017), *Otra vez en Marienbad (Again in Marienbad)* (2009) and *No te olvidé (I Didn't Forget You)* (1960), allude to the enigmatic relationship these sculptures have with the past, of times when their components had use and value, when their look was pristine. In referencing the film *Last Year in Marienbad* (1961, dir. Alain Resnais), Abend evokes the sensation felt in the film of the blurring of past and present, truth and artifice, in his transformation of disparate objects into a new entity. In *Ajedrez (Chess)* (1958-2017), Abend has reimagined the iconic pieces of the game of chess, creating a board in which each piece is a unique reconfiguration: a small round brush has become the head of a "pawn", a threaded metal nut graces the top of a "rook" and rusting iron joint connectors with uncanny visages of dogs serve as the heads of two other pieces. With the work *El mago soy yo (I Am the Magician)* (2013), Abend acknowledges his role as sculptor in the metamorphosing of the pieces of eroded, oxidized metal into a work of art, creating something out of "nothing". In other works, Abend provides a platform for solitary forms to speak for themselves, relinquishing any power to manipulate the objects beyond what nature has already done. Similar to work created in the vein of the Japanese aesthetic "wabi-sabi", Abend finds perfection in the imperfections in the pieces of metal and wood featured in *El Gancho (Hanger)* (1958), *El Encuentro (The Encounter)* (1966) and *La Ventana que no conduce a ninguna parte (The Window that Doesn't Lead Anywhere)* (2000).

As Ledezma continues, according to Benjamin in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility", art had a means of "[redeploying] the rigid structures of second nature as a sensorial compound of unexpected connections", and, as we see in the sculptural assemblages of Harry Abend, the capacity to re-instill the sense of wonder and surprise felt outside of society's constructions, within the boundless spontaneity of nature.

Harry Abend (Jaroslaw, Poland, 1937) immigrated to Venezuela in 1948 and embarked on his sculpture practice in 1958 under the guidance of Miguel Arroyo while also studying architecture at the Universidad Central de Venezuela. In 1963, at the age of 26, Abend received the National Sculpture Prize of Venezuela for his work *Forma 1961*. In 1964, he participated in a three-month workshop led by British sculptor Kenneth Armitage. In 1976 Abend moved to London where he continued developing his work and exhibited in galleries such as the Roundhouse Gallery and the Hayward Gallery. Around this time Abend began to receive commissions to stage interventions in urban and architectural environments, such as the cement mural on the façade of the Teatro Teresa Carreño, and the interior design of the Sala Plenaria in the east tower of Parque Central, both in Caracas. A selection of his solo shows include *Esculturas*, Museo de Arte Moderno, Río de Janeiro (1968); three exhibitions at Sala Mendoza, Caracas (1973, 1980 and 1995); Electrum Gallery, London (1977); Saint James Piccadilly Festival, London (1981); a retrospective at the Museo de Arte Moderno Jesús Soto, Ciudad Bolívar (2002); Museo de Arte Acarigua Araure, Acarigua (2003); Museo Kern Unión Israelita de Caracas (2012); Galería GBG ARTS, Caracas and Henrique Faria, New York (both 2014). He lives and works in Caracas.

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