

# Ludwig Haas: Innovation and Vision Carved in Steel

When we speak of steel sculpture, we are almost always referring to sculpture created with the welding process pioneered by Julio Gonzalez, popularized by Picasso, and practiced by innumerable sculptors ever since.

Ludwig Haas, however, a sculptor born in Austria, has evolved a unique method of creating a sculpture from a single block of steel, much as others carve in stone, and the results of his labors make for a powerful exhibition at Agora Gallery, at 415 West Broadway, in Soho, from November 12 through December 4.

Although steel is too hard to be carved in the traditional manner, Haas has developed what he calls a "melting and removing process" with which the surface of iron, steel, or stainless steel is "fluidized" at temperatures exceeding 4000 degrees and the hot melt is blown away by air pressure. Up to now, he is the only artist known to practice this method of sculpting directly in steel, and the works that he has produced with it do indeed have a unique quality.

Haas, however, is more than merely a technical innovator; he is an artist with a singular vision. Most of his pieces project a strong sense of humanistic symbolism by virtue of severely simplified figures fully as universal as Ernest Trova's "Everymen". But while Trova's figures are sleekly fabricated out of nickel-plated bronze, and deal with the single issue of the increasingly robotic merger of man and machine in the modern world, Ludwig Haas' sculptures have a more primal, timeless quality. They are not fabri-



*"Astonishment"*

cated in foundries or factories but created from conception to finished piece by Haas alone, and they address a much broader range of human experiences.

Indeed, Haas' sculptures have a raw primitive power, with their ridged surfaces, which give some of them a quality similar to Egyptian mummies or accident victims entirely swaddled in bandages. Following the latter interpretation to its logical conclusion one might be led to reflect on whether the accident might be the one that befalls us all: life itself...

Some of Haas' figures are featureless,

while others have only one feature, emphasizing a single certain quality or trait. In "Astonishment," for example, the figure has only negative space indicating a gaping mouth. In "Faithfulness" two indentations on an otherwise featureless face create a soulful effect that seems to express the virtue to which the title refers. Haas' figures are without limbs, leading to viewer to reflect on helplessness as a staple of the human condition—at least in regard to the ever-present awareness of our common mortality. However, one of the two companion figures in "Adam & Eve" has a rather prominent protrusion below the waist—per-

haps suggesting how we engage with each other and achieve forgetfulness. Yet, while bound together, the two figures in another piece called "Separation" seem to symbolize the solitary fate we all must eventually face.

Indeed, it is this ability to express any number of complex ideas through the primitive power of his figures that makes Ludwig Haas a sculptor whose vision finally exceeds even his considerable technical contribution.

—Lawrence Downes