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Metal Menagerie

A new survey of sculpture examines the abstract expressionist movement in metal at Michael Rosenfeld Gallery

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Michael Rosenfeld Gallery

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In a parallel set of developments throughout the 1940s, '50s and '60s, abstract expressionism was sweeping through art on two fronts—in painted works and in sculpture. The sculpture aspect of the movement's explosive growth, and its sustained importance in a modern context, is explored in Michael Rosenfeld Gallery's new survey of metal sculptures.

The exhibition, which opens November 6 in New York, will feature an array of floor, pedestal and wall pieces from artists such as Ruth Asawa, Harry Bertoia, Lee Bontecou, Dorothy Dehner, Melvin Edwards, Richard Hunt, Ibram Lassaw, and David Smith. Additionally, Seymour Lipton, Theodore Roszak, Claire Falkenstein, Nancy Grossman, Alfonso



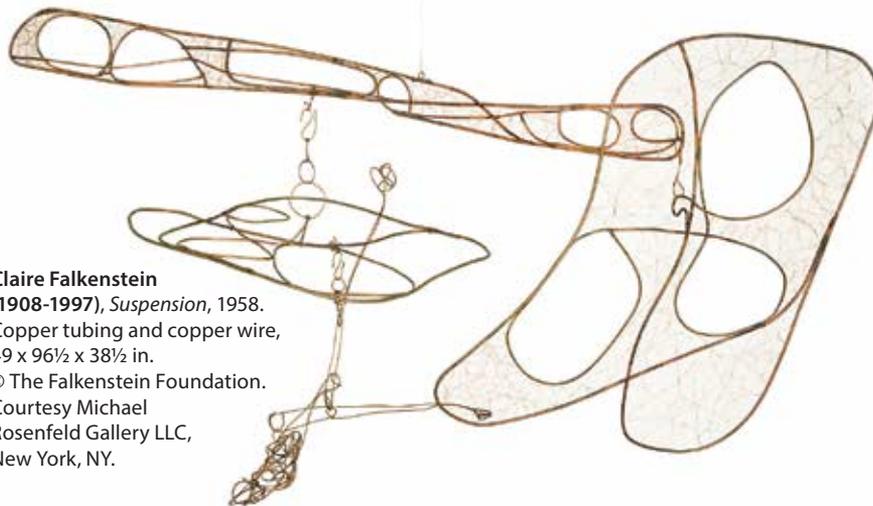
Seymour Lipton (1903-1986), *Casanova*, ca. 1969. Bronze and Monel metal, 33½ x 49 x 14 in.
© The Estate of Seymour Lipton. Courtesy Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY.

Ossorio, and Barbara Chase-Riboud—all artists whose works and estates are represented by the gallery—will have pieces in the two-month exhibition.

Gallery director Halley K. Harrisburg

says she has wanted to present an exhibition like this for many years because it will put modern sculpture into perspective with painted works that were being created around the same time. "Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, sculptors had a rich history with traditional figurative works in metal, but what we saw in the '40s, '50s and '60s is pure modernism, from Seymour Lipton to Theodore Roszak and others," Harrisburg says. "They were aware of their painting contemporaries working in an abstract manner. What we see is them using line and form in a very spontaneous and abstract language. They used the material as if it were a paintbrush, exploring all the movement they could."

One of the more striking aspects of the survey, and one that will likely



Claire Falkenstein (1908-1997), *Suspension*, 1958. Copper tubing and copper wire, 49 x 96½ x 38½ in.
© The Falkenstein Foundation.
Courtesy Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY.

thrill viewers, is the use of materials, from Falkenstein's copper tubing to Bertoia's welded bronze to Lipton's bronze on Monel. "This is the beginning of the breaking down of the definition of the materials and the associated '-isms' with them," Harrisburg adds. "Welded and brazed, shaped and molded, the work was in many forms, and it helped redefine an American aesthetic."

Works in the survey include Bertoia's untitled welded bronze piece based on sound. The flexible looped forms were designed to be pulled back and released, creating a miniature symphony of sound. Guests won't be able to touch the piece, but they will be able to see how the piece works and how it explores the music of shapes and spaces.

In an untitled 1963 piece by Bontecou, the artist has used metal gears to create a smiling mouth that looks grimacing and tough. "That aggressive and gritty aesthetic was associated with the male gender, and it certainly played a role with Lee Bontecou, who even had a name that was slightly ambiguous. She dealt with issues involving gender and identity much of her career," Harrisburg says.

Lipton's *Casanova*, with its waves of bronze folding over a horizontal axis that runs almost entirely through the piece, was inspired by mythological themes and subject matter. "Lipton was an extraordinary welder, and what he achieved with surface, color and manipulations of the form is remarkable," she says. "There's a reason he's in every major museum collection in the United States. We're fortunate to represent his work."

The metal survey will be on display through January 9, 2016. ■



Harry Bertoia (1915-1978), *Untitled*, ca. 1955. Welded bronze, 35½ x 23½ x 23 in. Courtesy Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY.



Lee Bontecou (b. 1931), *Untitled*, 1963. Welded steel and paint, 21½ x 31¼ x 6½ in., signed and dated. Courtesy Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY.