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THE BMA PRESENTS “LOST” DAVID SMITH WORK IN *ADVANCING ABSTRACTION IN MODERN SCULPTURE*

BALTIMORE, MD (July 21, 2010)—One of the earliest examples of David Smith’s welding is shown publicly for the first time in *Advancing Abstraction in Modern Sculpture*, an exhibition of more than 30 works by Smith and other artists on view at the BMA July 21, 2010–February 20, 2011. Considered “lost” by the Smith Estate for the past 37 years, *Head with Cogs for Eyes* (1933) came to the Museum last year as part of a generous bequest from the estate of longtime BMA Trustee Ryda Hecht Levi. It is one of only four heads made by Smith, and among the earliest examples of the artist’s use of welding. For this exhibition, the sculpture is reunited with *Chain Head* (1933) and seven other works by Smith created between 1933 and 1962.

Advancing Abstraction draws from the BMA’s collection, the Estate of David Smith, and private collections to feature works from the 1920s to the 1970s by Hans Arp, Naum Gabo, Julio Gonzalez, Henry Moore, Louise Nevelson, and other modern artists who moved beyond the figure to create sculptures based on a new language of abstract forms. Some artists like Smith explored welding—a uniquely 20th-century technique that revolutionized sculpture—while others included the use of new industrial materials, found objects, and assemblage.

Abstraction has played a significant role in figurative sculpture since Paleolithic times, but it wasn’t until the 20th century that artists felt free to abandon the figure and develop fully abstract or “non-objective” sculpture. From 1919-34 a group of artists called “Constructivists” sought to invent a new culture for a transformed society. These artists shared the belief that representational art was obsolete and that the new art should stand on its own rather than copying the world around it. The sculptor Naum Gabo and his brother Antoine Pevsner participated in this revolutionary moment and disseminated Constructivist ideas in the West.

David Smith began his artistic career by taking painting classes at the Art Students League of New York in 1927. He studied European modernist art and befriended artists including Arshile Gorky, Willem de Kooning, and other future leaders of Abstract Expressionism. In 1932, he began to make sculpture using painted wood, plaster, and found objects. These early works, which he called “constructions,” were attempts to translate the Cubist collage aesthetic into three dimensions. The following year, he discovered illustrations of welded iron sculptures by Pablo Picasso and Julio Gonzalez in the French art journal *Cahiers d’Art*. Inspired by this example and drawing on his experience as a welder at a car assembly plant, Smith began producing his own welded metal sculptures in 1933.

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Over the next decades, Smith produced an astonishing body of work as he explored the expressive potential of welded metal. Increasingly, the representational elements that link his early works to the human figure disappear or become sublimated within Smith's private vocabulary of form.

RYDA HECHT LEVI

Ryda Hecht Levi was a generous philanthropist and longtime BMA Trustee who volunteered on numerous committees and helped form the BMA's Friends of Modern Art. She and her husband Robert H. Levi were avid collectors of 20th-century sculpture and donated many of these works to the Museum to form the two-acre Levi Sculpture Garden that opened in 1988. Before her death in 2008, Levi and her family established a significant endowment for the future care of the sculpture garden. In addition to eight sculptures by Gabo, Moore, Nevelson, Smith, and others, the Levi Estate also gave the BMA an important collection of 22 modern illustrated artist's books, elevating this area of the Museum's collection to one of the best in the country.

THE BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART

The Baltimore Museum of Art is home to an internationally renowned collection of 19th-century, modern, and contemporary art. Founded in 1914, the BMA's outstanding collection encompasses 90,000 works of art, including the largest and most significant holding of works by Henri Matisse in the world, as well as masterpieces by Pablo Picasso, Paul Cézanne, and Vincent van Gogh. An expanding collection of contemporary art features iconic post-1960 works by Andy Warhol and Sol LeWitt, as well as exciting acquisitions by artists such as Kara Walker and Olafur Eliasson. The BMA is also recognized for an internationally acclaimed collection of prints, drawings, and photographs from the 15th-century to the present; grand European painting and sculpture from Old Masters to the 19th-century; distinguished American painting, sculpture, and decorative arts and Maryland period rooms; one of the most important African collections in the country, and notable examples of Asian, ancient American, and Pacific Islands art.

VISITOR INFORMATION

General admission to the BMA is free; some special events may be ticketed. The BMA is open Wednesday through Friday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 11 a.m.–6 p.m. (except major holidays). The Museum is closed Monday, Tuesday, New Year's Day, July 4, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. The BMA is located on Art Museum Drive at North Charles and 31st Streets, three miles north of Baltimore's Inner Harbor. For general Museum information, call 443-573-1700 or visit artbma.org.

VISIT BALTIMORE

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