

Press Release

## David Smith: Follow My Path

Hauser & Wirth New York, 69th Street  
27 April - 30 July 2021



**New York...** In a 1952 lecture at the Detroit Institute of Arts, David Smith (1906 – 1965) described the inspiration behind one of his recent sculptures, saying ‘My wish is that you travel by perception the path which I traveled in creating it. That same wish goes for the rest of my work.’ Taking its title from his remarks, ‘David Smith: Follow My Path’ will go on view at Hauser & Wirth New York beginning 27 April. The exhibition invites viewers to explore the daring artistic processes by which Smith revolutionized notions of sculpture’s form and function, embarking on new terrain in the field of abstraction. A member of the abstract expressionist generation, Smith eschewed the conventional sculptural methods of casting and carving in favor of modern industrial techniques and materials such as torch-cutting and welding iron and steel. Working first in Brooklyn and then largely in isolation in the remote hamlet of Bolton Landing in the Adirondack Mountains, he produced art inspired by transitory connections between human experience and nature, works that are at once self-contained yet expressively expansive.

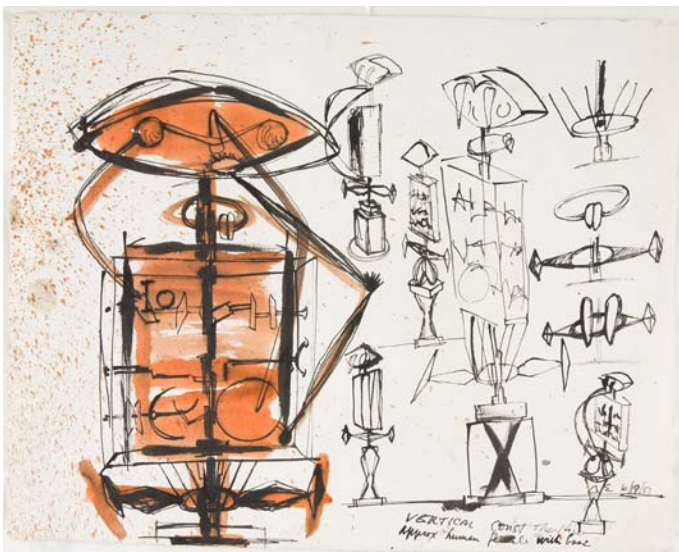
‘Follow My Path’ is organized around groups of specific sculptures representing each decade of Smith’s career and enriched by drawings, paintings, sketchbook studies, and photographs by Smith related to these works. Together, these act as landmarks of his journey and manifestations of his thoughts and visions. Each sculpture and its set of corollary materials represent a ‘chapter’ in the story of Smith’s artistic evolution, and also relate to the format of entries in the forthcoming three-volume catalogue raisonné, ‘David Smith Sculpture: A Catalogue Raisonné, 1932–1965,’ to be released by Yale University Press and the Estate of David Smith in September 2021. This publication, a monumental work featuring new scholarship on Smith, will include reproductions of photographs, paintings, drawings, and sketches by the artist, to offer fresh insights into Smith’s methods and creative thought.

Featuring works of art from major museums, international private collections, and the Estate of David Smith, ‘Follow My Path’ will present never-before-seen works that shed new light on Smith’s lasting artistic legacy. This exhibition has been organized to provide an immersion in the artistic process and development of one of the 20th century’s foremost innovators. The presentation reflects Hauser & Wirth’s commitment to postwar art and scholarship through historical exhibitions at its 69th Street space. Digital selections from the forthcoming David Smith catalogue raisonné will be integrated into ‘Follow My Path.’

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**‘Drawings are studies for sculpture,  
sometimes what sculpture is, sometimes  
what sculpture can never be.’**

**– David Smith**



### About the exhibition

‘David Smith. Follow My Path’ explores Smith’s world through nine distinct groups of works related by theme or form. The presentation offers a fresh perspective upon Smith’s 35-year career by allowing the visitor to travel through his cumulative aesthetic – the various styles, methods, mediums, and subjects that accrued across his practice – and formal conceits, which range from dancers, to billiards players, to letters of the alphabet, among others.

Smith’s special ability to fuse the influences of Surrealism and Cubism in abstract depictions of the human body is evident throughout the exhibition. ‘The Hero’ (1951-1952) is a life-sized female figure with a head, torso, and two triangularly shaped forms suggesting breasts. This bravura sculpture achieves surprising weightlessness through its radical open structure. Similarly, ‘Blue Construction’ (1938), one of Smith’s earliest forays into sculpture, masterfully deploys geometric form to recall the arabesque movement of a dancer in space. This steel work, coated in blue enamel, was achieved via Smith’s renegade, experimental approach to three dimensions. For this sculpture, and two others based on the subject of billiards players, Smith’s process from figuration to abstraction is revealed through the presentation of a rich selection of sculptures, drawings, and paintings from the 1930s and 1940s.

Painting, drawing, and photography were integral to Smith’s creative process; he would often work out aesthetic problems in one medium by turning to another. Smith depended upon the free-flowing nature of drawing as a complement to the slower and more physically laborious medium of sculpture. Photography played a similar role in Smith’s varied artistic practice. In 1945, he began routinely photographing his works in the studio and outdoors in the expansive fields around his home in Bolton Landing. Smith’s interest in scale is apparent in such images: the positive and negative spaces of his works take shape in relation to the landscape, illustrating his fascination with integrating art and nature.

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Smith's practice was deeply embedded in and further cultivated by the mountain setting of Bolton Landing. Here he expanded his approach to assembling found metal elements into three-dimensional works. While his techniques remained grounded in the machine age, Smith's preference for discarded quotidian objects and emphasis on manual skill flourished in the Adirondacks into an artistic vocabulary of profound humanism. In 'Untitled (Study for Agricola I)' (1951), the artist combines a cast iron plowshare with old piano parts, evoking the powerful but delicate relationship between human expression and the earth. In this precursor to his first major series of sculpture, the Agricolas, Smith's approach reflects his origins as an automotive riveter and welder. Also on view, the vertical steel sculpture 'Lunar Arcs on One Leg' (1956-62) represents a subsequent turning point in the artist's approach to monumentality. In this beautiful work, he clusters celestial forms in apparent defiance of gravity. From the beginning of Smith's career in the early 1930s to this late work, 'David Smith. Follow My Path' charts this great artist's practice across media and through time.

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#### Caption and courtesy information

John Stewart  
David Smith welding 'Agricola I' (1951-52)  
c. 1951  
© John Stewart

Untitled (Study for Agricola I)  
1951  
Cast iron, paint  
117.5 x 92.7 x 27.9 cm / 46 1/4 x 36 1/2 x 11 in  
Courtesy the Estate of David Smith and Hauser & Wirth  
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Photo: Ken Adlard

The Hero  
1951-52  
Steel, paint, metal  
190.5 x 64.8 x 29.8 cm / 75 x 25 1/2 x 11 3/4 in  
Brooklyn Museum, Dick S. Ramsay Fund, 57.185.  
Courtesy the Estate of David Smith and Hauser & Wirth  
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Study for 'The Hero'  
1951  
Watercolor and ink on paper  
46.4 x 57.8 cm / 18 1/4 x 22 3/4 in  
Chazen Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Terese and Alvin S. Lane Collection  
Courtesy the Estate of David Smith and Hauser & Wirth  
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David Smith. Sculpture group, Bolton Landing, NY. 1964  
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