

# DOMINIQUE LÉVY

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **DOMINIQUE LÉVY TO PRESENT THE FIRST COMPREHENSIVE SURVEY OF JOEL SHAPIRO'S EARLY WOOD WALL RELIEF SCULPTURES ALONGSIDE A MAJOR NEW INSTALLATION**

*Joel Shapiro*

October 28, 2016 – January 7, 2017

Dominique Lévy

909 Madison Avenue, New York



*Untitled*, 1978. Wood and paint. 5 1/4 x 5 1/4 x 3 inches (13.3 x 13.3 x 7.6 cm). © 2016 Joel Shapiro / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

**New York ...** Dominique Lévy is pleased to present the first survey of early wood reliefs by the American sculptor Joel Shapiro, organized with Olivier Renaud-Clément. These works, created between 1978 and 1980, will be on view alongside a new site-specific installation. The exhibition will foreground work from the late 1970s, demonstrating the trajectory of Shapiro's career, over the course of which the artist has continually pursued ideas of color and mass, culminating in a recent body of room-size sculptural installations. Dominique Lévy will publish a monograph in conjunction with the exhibition featuring texts by David Raskin and Phyllida Barlow and poems by Peter Cole and Ange Mlinko, as well as full documentation of the wood reliefs. This marks the first time the series will be comprehensively surveyed.

Shapiro has worked with the idea of form collapsing since 2002; he views his work until this point as building up to this “moment of discovery that I can get the work off the floor and be more playful in the air.”<sup>1</sup> He describes these large-scale installations as being “the projection of thought into space without the constraint of architecture.” Shapiro will create a new site-specific installation for the exhibition, which will occupy the second floor of Dominique Lévy Gallery. This sculpture is part of this recent body of work concerned with the articulation of form in architectural space. To create these installations, Shapiro constructs wood elements in his studio and then paints them with hypersaturated casein. The artist then suspends these painted wood forms in air by means of cordage, connecting them to the gallery floors and ceiling. The composition formed in space appears pregnant with motion: the string is pulled taut, hence creating a sense of “torque and twist... So it feels like it's going to rip away.” Shapiro has spoken of these installations as being “expansive” and “joyful” in their refusal to be “limited by architecture and by the ground and the wall and

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<sup>1</sup> Joel Shapiro quoted in Richard Schiff, *Joel Shapiro: Untitled*, Houston, Rice University Art Gallery (2012).

right angles.”<sup>2</sup> Decisions regarding the configuration of the wooden elements will be made intuitively and spontaneously as Shapiro is installing the work; thus, this new installation presents an intense engagement with the gallery space, implicating both architecture and viewer’s bodies in the work. Of this, Shapiro notes, “In a piece like this, as you walk through it, it reconfigures, which is some essential aspect of sculpture.... It unfolds in time and space.”<sup>3</sup>

Shapiro’s early work, including the wood reliefs on view at Dominique Lévy, was created in part as a response to Minimalism’s “specific objects,” wherein color, texture, weight, shape, and the dynamic relationship between object and space are prioritized. However, Shapiro’s reliefs, like his iconic bronzes, as well as his plaster floor sculptures, which are also on view in the exhibition, question Minimalism’s insistence on non-referentiality, introducing again into the art object ambiguous states of psychological and affectual intensity. Against outright representation, in Shapiro’s work, the referential quality is never explicit: the sculptures appear simultaneously abstract and figurative. Of this, Shapiro has said, “My problem was to describe an emotional state, my own longing or desire... The work is about my experience, and if you care to participate, to look, then you bring your own history to the situation.”<sup>4</sup>

In the reliefs, traces of the artist’s hand interrupt the neutral geometric vocabulary of Minimalism. The sculptures are made of simple shapes and angular cutouts, built up in stratified layers of distinct wood elements. This mode of fabrication, coupled with unconcealed saw marks, makes Shapiro’s process visible and rewards close viewing. Shapiro often coats the reliefs in a light, uniform coat of color, allowing the underlying wood to remain partially visible. In painting the works a single color, the artist binds the forms together under a cohesive rubric, creating volumetrically dense structures. For Shapiro, painting his sculptures presents several opportunities: It can render a work more abstract, or the resulting smoothness can negate the surface texture of planes. Color affects our perception of structure; while monochromatic works are legible as compact, self-contained forms, multi-colored works appear as complex dimensional stratifications. Color also adds an affectual component: according to the artist, it has “an intrinsic metaphorical quality. It is not only perceptual but can have cultural connotations as well.”<sup>5</sup>

### **About the Artist**

Born in New York City in 1941, Joel Shapiro has explored the possibilities of sculptural form throughout his forty-five-year career. Since his first solo exhibition at Paula Cooper Gallery in 1970, his work has been the subject of numerous solo and retrospective exhibitions at institutions including the Whitechapel Gallery, London, 1980; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1982; the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1985; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (jointly with the Nelson-Atkins

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<sup>2</sup> Joel Shapiro interviewed by Michèle Gerber Klein, *BOMB Magazine*, Fall 2009 (109).

<sup>3</sup> Joel Shapiro quoted in Richard Shiff, *Joel Shapiro: Untitled*, Houston, Rice University Art Gallery (2012).

<sup>4</sup> Joel Shapiro interviewed by Michèle Gerber Klein, *BOMB Magazine*, Fall 2009 (109).

<sup>5</sup> Joel Shapiro quoted in Michael Brenson, *Joel Shapiro: Sculpture and Drawings*, New York: PaceWildenstein (1996), p. 84.

Museum, Kansas City), 1995-96; the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Roof Garden, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2001; and the Museum Ludwig, Cologne, 2011. Shapiro's work can be found in numerous public collections in the United States and abroad, including the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Art Institute of Chicago; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Tate Gallery, London; IVAM Centre Julio González, Valencia; the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; the Moderna Museet, Stockholm; and the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

In 1993 he installed a permanent work, *Loss and Regeneration*, at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. Other prominent commissions and works in public space include *Conjunction*, for the Foundation for Art and Preservation in Embassies for the United States Embassy in Ottawa, Canada; *For Jennifer*, commissioned by the Denver Art Museum; and *Now*, commissioned by the Foundation for Art and Preservation in Embassies and installed in 2013 at the new U.S. Consulate in Guangzhou, China.

Shapiro was elected to the Swedish Royal Academy of Art in 1994 and the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1998. The French Minister of Culture awarded Shapiro the *Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* in 2005, and in 2013 he was honored with the National Art Award for Outstanding Achievement by Americans for the Arts. In April 2015 he was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award in Contemporary Sculpture by the International Sculpture Center.

In 2014 Shapiro exhibited a new sculptural installation at Paula Cooper Gallery, recent work on paper at Pace Gallery, and sculpture from the 1970s at Craig F. Starr Gallery, New York. In the spring of 2014, Shapiro exhibited sculpture in wood, bronze, and plaster at Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris, which subsequently travelled to Galerie Karsten Greve, Cologne, in January 2015.

In May 2016 Shapiro exhibited a new sculptural installation at the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas, Texas.

Joel Shapiro lives and works in New York City.

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