

Untitled 1982

Joel Shapiro (American, b. 1941)

cast bronze

Purchased by the Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park,
GSU Foundation

Collection of the Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park
1983.01

Joel Shapiro grew up in New York City, obtained a degree from NYU and spent 2 years in the Peace Corps before attending graduate school. He earned his MFA in 1969 from NYU.

Shapiro entered the art world at the height of the Minimalist movement. Artists such as Donald Judd, Richard Serra, and Carl Andre had stripped sculpture of its content, eliminating any trace of their hand in its creation and often choosing industrially-oriented materials for their works.

Shapiro absorbed and then reacted against this Puritanical formalism. Paula Cooper's gallery frequently exhibited his small, cast iron, iconic forms such as a house, a car, or a coffin – many times directly on the floor. Shapiro bucked the aesthetic moment by creating plain objects whose forms resonated with psychological meaning.

He developed the surfaces of these small works to demonstrate the presence of the artist's hand.

In 1980, he began to create works using 4x4 inch timbers of wood. These pieces explored a tenuous line between abstraction and figuration, alluding to the human form but never defining it. In a further response to Minimalism, he began to cast the timbers in bronze, an ancient material associated more with memorial sculpture than *avant garde* art.

This untitled piece from 1982 is an intimate example his work. The viewer may initially see a group of cubist-influenced, oblong abstract forms. Soon, a figure with arms outstretched (or is it an energetic break-dancer spinning on his head?) emerges. Shapiro reveals a deft hand, playing skillfully with our expectations of abstract sculpture.