

# WHITNEY

## Press Release

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### THE WHITNEY TO PRESENT *DAVID SMITH: CUBES AND ANARCHY*

October 6, 2011-January 8, 2012



David Smith (1906-1965), *Suspended Cube*, 1938, Steel and painted aluminum, 23 x 16 x 20 ¼ in. (58.4 x 40.6 x 51.4 cm)  
Private collection, courtesy The Estate of David Smith © Estate of David Smith/VAGA, New York.

**NEW YORK, September 8, 2011** -- *David Smith: Cubes and Anarchy* examines the abiding importance of geometric form in the work of American sculptor David Smith (1906-1965) from his earliest small works through the monumental late masterpieces that he created in the final years of his life. Organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, where it debuted earlier

this year, the exhibition brings together approximately 60 works, including the largest grouping of Smith's *Cubis* and *Zigs* assembled in more than two decades. *Cubes and Anarchy* places these acknowledged masterpieces in context with Smith's earlier works in an exhibition that includes sculptures, drawings, paintings, and photographs, many provided by the Estate of David Smith. The show will be presented at the Whitney Museum of American Art in the fourth-floor Emily Fisher Landau Galleries, from October 6, 2011, through January 8, 2012.

David Smith has been widely heralded as one of the greatest sculptors of the twentieth century. His work has often been presented as a sculptural counterpart to that of the Abstract Expressionist painters who were his friends. As an innovator of welded sculpture, he produced a richly diverse body of work exemplified by his poetic assemblages of found objects and industrial materials. Most scholarship has viewed Smith's career as developing in a linear fashion, from the European influences of Picasso and Cubism in the 1930s, to the surrealist, expressionist, and lyrical works of the 1940s and 1950s, and culminating with his large-scale, stainless-steel and boldly painted sculptures of the 1960s. The simplified geometry of Smith's monumental late sculptures, the final works he produced before his untimely death in a car accident in 1965, are often seen as representing a distinct break from his earlier sculptures, which often radically reinterpreted the traditional themes of painting, such as landscape, the figure, and still-life. *David Smith: Cubes and Anarchy*, by focusing on geometry, revises the narrative of Smith's aesthetic development and, for the first time, places his final works in context. Beginning with the artist's late stainless-steel and painted steel sculptures, and ending with his earliest work from the 1930s, the exhibition's installation traces the vital role that geometric abstraction played in his work in sculpture, painting, drawing, and photography, throughout his entire career.

The exhibition's subtitle, "*Cubes and Anarchy*," comes from a phrase Smith attributed to John Sloan, his teacher at the Art Students League in New York in the 1930s. For Smith, the phrase connoted the revolutionary power of geometric forms that had been heralded by the European abstract artists he most admired, in particular the Russian Constructivists, Kandinsky, and the Dutch De Stijl painter Piet Mondrian. Smith's fusion of simple geometries with the techniques and materials of industrial fabrication freed him to explore a broad range of formal and expressive directions, including heightening the breakdown between drawing, painting, and sculpture. With wildly gestural surfaces of burnished stainless steel and powerfully vibrant

painted steel, he united timeless form with the power and scale of modern life. In creating this synthesis, Smith redefined the aesthetics and ambitions of sculpture.

### **About the Artist**

David Smith was born in Indiana in 1906. In 1926 he moved to New York City, where he studied at the Art Students League. In the early 1930s, as part of a small group of abstract artists in New York that formed around the Polish émigré artist, John Graham, he became friends with Stuart Davis, Arshile Gorky, and Willem de Kooning. After establishing his studio in a foundry on the Brooklyn waterfront in the 1930s, Smith moved in 1940 to Bolton Landing, on Lake George, in the Adirondack Mountains of upstate New York. He showed regularly in New York City beginning in 1938 and by the 1940s was championed, along with Jackson Pollock, by critic Clement Greenberg. Smith's work was exhibited regularly at the Whitney Museum of American Art, and he was given a major retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in 1957. His sculptures were exhibited not only across the United States, but internationally as well, including in the Venice Biennale (1958), the São Paulo Bienal (1959), Spoleto (1962), and Documenta (1964). His work in the early 1960s brought Smith to the forefront of international recognition. In 1965, he was appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson to serve on the National Council on the Arts. Smith died in an automobile accident in 1965, at the age of 59. A major survey of his work planned by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and organized in consultation with Smith, was presented in 1965 as *David Smith: A Memorial Exhibition*. Retrospective exhibitions have since been held in Australia, France, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, and the United States.

### **Exhibition Support**

*David Smith: Cubes and Anarchy* was organized by Carol S. Eliel for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The exhibition's installation at Whitney Museum of American Art has been overseen by Barbara Haskell in association with Charles Ray. Following its presentation at the Whitney Museum, the exhibition will travel to the Wexner Center for the Arts.

Major support for the Whitney's presentation is provided by the National Committee of the Whitney Museum of American Art and The Lipman Family Foundation.

## About the Whitney

The Whitney Museum of American Art is the world's leading museum of twentieth-century and contemporary art of the United States. Focusing particularly on works by living artists, the Whitney is celebrated for presenting important exhibitions and for its renowned collection, which comprises over 19,000 works by more than 2,900 artists. With a history of exhibiting the most promising and influential artists and provoking intense debate, the Whitney Biennial, the Museum's signature exhibition, has become the most important survey of the state of contemporary art in the United States. In addition to its landmark exhibitions, the Museum is known internationally for events and educational programs of exceptional significance and as a center for research, scholarship, and conservation.

Founded by sculptor and arts patron Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney in 1930, the Whitney was first housed on West 8th Street in Greenwich Village. The Museum relocated in 1954 to West 54th Street and, in 1966, inaugurated its present home, designed by Marcel Breuer, at 945 Madison Avenue on the Upper East Side. While its vibrant program of exhibitions and events continues uptown, the Whitney is moving forward with a new building project, designed by Renzo Piano, in downtown Manhattan. Located at the corner of Gansevoort and Washington Streets in the Meatpacking District, at the southern entrance to the High Line, the new building, which has generated immense momentum and support, will enable the Whitney to vastly increase the size and scope of its exhibition and programming space. Ground was broken in May 2011, and the building is projected to open to the public in 2015.

## Current and Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art

<b>Cory Arcangel: Pro Tools</b>	Through September 11, 2011
<b>More Than That: Films by Kevin Jerome Everson</b>	Through September 18, 2011
<b>Breaking Ground: The Whitney's Founding Collection</b>	Through September 18, 2011
<b>Xavier Cha: Body Drama</b>	Through October 9, 2011
<b>Lyonel Feininger: At the Edge of the World</b>	Through October 16, 2011
<b>David Smith: Cubes and Anarchy</b>	October 6, 2011–January 8, 2012
<b>Real/Surreal</b>	October 6, 2011–February 12, 2012
<b>Three Landscapes: A Film Installation by Roy Lichtenstein</b>	October 6, 2011–February 12, 2012
<b>Aleksandra Mir: The Seduction of Galileo Galilei</b>	Opens October 20, 2011
<b>Sherrie Levine: Mayhem</b>	Opens November 10, 2011
<b>Singular Visions</b>	Through November 2011
<b>Whitney Biennial</b>	March 1–May 27, 2012
<b>Designing the Whitney of the Future</b>	On Continuous View

*The Whitney Museum is located at 945 Madison Avenue at 75th Street, New York City. Museum hours are: Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m., closed Monday and Tuesday. General admission: \$18. Full-time students and visitors ages 19–25 and 62 & over: \$12. Visitors 18 & under and Whitney members: FREE. Admission to the Kaufman Astoria Studios Film & Video Gallery only: \$6. Admission is pay-what-you-wish on Fridays, 6–9 p.m. For general information, please call (212) 570-3600 or visit [whitney.org](http://whitney.org).*

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