

BRUNO GIRONCOLI
PROTOTYPES FOR A NEW SPECIES

FEBRUARY 14 – MAY 12, 2019

WALL PANELS OF THE EXHIBITION

INTRODUCTION

Bruno Gironcoli's aesthetic of excessiveness and opulence, which has always generated outgrowths and embellishments, has inspired innumerable young artists. Today, the Austrian is regarded as one of the most important sculptors of his generation. In the early 1960s, using his very personal imagery and inventively insatiable, he began creating an extremely unconventional oeuvre. Gironcoli succeeded in finding a novel, surprising language with each of his ever-new groups of works. One after the other, he produced wire sculptures, hollow-body forms, polyester objects, and unsettling environments. At the same time, his artistic work focused on human beings with their abysses.

Gironcoli was awarded the Austrian State Prize, his works were time and again presented in major Austrian exhibitions. Yet he is little known abroad, and hence to us as well. An important reason for this is surely not least the sheer size and massiveness of the group of works being presented in this exhibition. In the late 1970s he began working on the large-scale sculptures on display here, the so-called *Prototypes*. He was appointed director of the sculpture school at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna in 1977, which involved the use of a generous studio space. Gironcoli liberated himself once and for all with this new group of works. The sculptures are united by a fluid connection between recognizable and ornamental forms that proliferate in a way that is reminiscent of vegetal growth. Machine-like elements encounter eye-catching symbols and provocative flourishes. They are not lacking in humor, since he provided them, tongue in cheek, a supposedly noble skin in gold, silver, or bronze, thus making the works look as if they had been cast. Yet only a few of them actually exist as castings in aluminum, such as the work being shown in the Rotunda of the Schirn, *One Body, Two Souls* (2001). Most of the sculptures consist of rods, pipes, and sheet metal, objects made of wood and iron that the artist and his assistants brought into the desired form. Gironcoli frequently modified them or used them as set pieces. His works are therefore never static.

The clear, abstract construction of the *Prototypes* is constantly ruptured by means of representational details, such as horns, infants, wine barrels, or key-like objects. They break into this constructed works like the irrational, which grows over or through the rational. The *Prototypes* seize our attention with their excessiveness, which manifests not only in their monumental dimensions but in their complexity as well—they are objects that are aesthetically appealing and multilayered in meaning. They bring together mechanics and organism, the psychological and the technical.

Sexuality is always latently present in Gironcoli's monumental sculptures. A wine barrel has a vulva and is surrounded by archaic fertility symbols such as ears of wheat, grapes, and grape leaves. A symbolically charged physicality is inherent in all of the sculptures. The uncanny is also pervasive in these giant machines, which are apparently frozen only for the instant they are being viewed and might come to life the next moment. The *Prototypes* are generally crowned with one

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element—Murphy—which Gironcoli developed very early on and used over and over again. His numerous variations on it play a key role. *Murphy* is also the title of the protagonist in the first novel by Samuel Beckett, published in 1938. This figure stands for the absurdity of human aspiration and for an outsiderdom with which Gironcoli clearly felt connected. Murphy's refusal to subject himself to the dictates of day-to-day necessities is reflected not least in the refusal to conform present in Gironcoli's oeuvre.