

'TimeOut London', 3 July 2008, London/UK

Exhibition of the week

Hans Josephsohn



Installation view, above, and untitled brass of 2002, below

Art

★★★★★

Hauser & Wirth

Mayfair to Sloane Square

Forget fresh-faced wannabes, old is the hot new thing in art right now. Cynics might argue that this is just the flipside of the same desire for novelty – and a potentially lucrative move by galleries sensing limited stock and higher prices. But there really does appear to be a move towards rediscovering people who might have been overlooked during the youth-obsessed past decade or so. Hauser & Wirth, who have a stable full of over-60s including Mary Heilmann, Roman Signer and Louise Bourgeois, are showing work from the past half-century by the octogenarian sculptor Hans Josephsohn.

Little known outside Switzerland, where he's lived since 1939, Josephsohn makes heads, figures and reliefs that share an earthy kind of realism while expressing a condition of

– not shyness exactly – but a certain reluctance to give themselves away in spite of their scale. Often they seem to turn their backs to us; some, you realise, don't really have backs or fronts at all. A video shows the artist at work, a cigar clamped between his teeth, mixing bowls of gloopy plaster that's used to stick extra bits on to a recumbent figure. Here downs the

singularity of Josephsohn's art, which in many ways is a continuation of the existential sort of sculpture championed by Giacometti: there's no whittling away, no carving, just addition. He's the anti-Giacometti. Cast in brass rather than bronze, to retain every aspect of the artist's touch, these patinated figures are relics of a very personal relationship with sculpture, capable of stopping us short with their physicality while subliminally transporting us back through history to the Easter Island statues. To the older than old.

Martin Coomer

