

Michael Jastram Europa and the Bull

In 2010 the Art Council of the German Bundestag acquired Michael Jastram's 2006 bronze sculpture *Europa and the Bull* for its European Union premises in Brussels. Together with other works by the artist, both drawings and sculptures, *Europa and the Bull* is being shown to the public in the German Bundestag's Liaison Office to the European Union in Brussels.

Michael Jastram, who was born in Berlin in 1953, comes from a family of sculptors. His recently deceased father, Jo Jastram (1928–2011), ranked among the most important sculptors of his generation.

Michael Jastram trained under his father at the art college in the Weissensee district of Berlin, before setting up in the city as a sculptor. Among his early exhibitions was one at the Galerie Eigen+Art in Leipzig in 1988. In 1984 he applied for an exit visa, a request 'complied' with by the GDR authorities much later, in 1989, in the form of enforced expatriation. His activities in the West included artistic directorship of the sculpture workshop at the Deutsche Oper, Berlin.

Michael Jastram's distinctively individual sculptures address themes and motifs on which his father also focused. They show people and animals (especially horses, which feature as the quintessential living creatures) in relation to

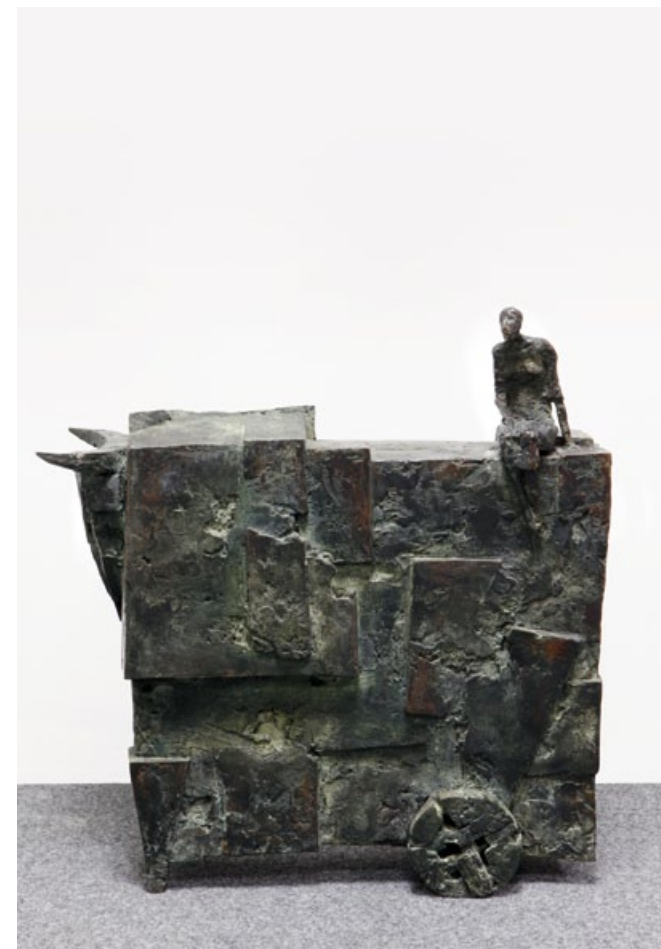
their surroundings. This is a subject as old as sculpture itself. An outstanding sculptor like Marino Marini engaged with it for his entire career. In fact, it was Marini's work that led Michael Jastram to become a sculptor when he discovered it for himself in 1971. Jo Jastram concentrated on a dialogue with this tradition, but his son has chosen more unconventional paths, embedding his filigree-like, often small-scale figures in architectural contexts.

An archaic aura runs like a leitmotiv through these sculptures. They appear to embody primeval forms of architecture, mythical images in the shape of pyramids, simple huts, pile dwellings, Jacob's ladders and, time and again, vehicles reminiscent of the well-known Bronze Age sun chariot of Trundholm. The figures seem unfinished, in a state of transition, existentially at risk: scarcely having materialised, they already appear to be returning slowly

to their original state, or they resemble archaeological finds from a dim and distant past. Their surfaces are rough and restless, revealing the traces of their making. Individual motifs frequently underscore the impression of frailty, as when a delicate figure sits precariously with a balancing pole at the uppermost tip of the battlements in the sculpture *Tower* (2001; Art Collection of the German Bundestag). On the other hand, the architectural features, though they sometimes open outwards and incorporate the surrounding space in the whole, also grant a measure of stability to Jastram's figures.

The torso titled *Icarus* excludes all additional elements. The sculpture is a powerful symbol, so weighed-down in its effect as to quash any hopes that Icarus might soar aloft. This work, too, recalls an archaeological find, as though it had been recovered from the rubble of centuries as testimony to failed utopias.

Jastram's drawings reveal a skilled artist able to bring sculptures to life on paper with just a few lines. His studies for *Europa and the Bull*, in particular, can stand on their own as independent works, while also evoking the basic conception of the sculpture. They focus on the bull. As though being forced into a suit of armour, it is constructed from a series of tectonic plates from which it emerges as a bulky, block-like form. The suggestion of a wheel transforms the bull into a vehicle – moveable, but only when pushed from outside. Seated to one side on top of the bull, the small, delicate figure of Europa gazes past the animal into an unfathomable distance. Clearly, Jastram is not concerned with a traditional narrative, dynamic and erotically charged, of the familiar mythological tale of the Phoenician princess who was abducted to Crete.



Europa and the Bull, 2009, bronze, 67 × 70 × 25 cm, sample 1/6 (above)

Europa and the Bull, 2006, plaster, 67 × 70 × 25 cm (left)

Europa and the Bull I, 2006, drawing, 70 × 100 cm (centre)

Europa and the Bull II, 2007, drawing, 70 × 100 cm (right)



Michael Jastram
Europa and the Bull
1 February to 30 March 2012

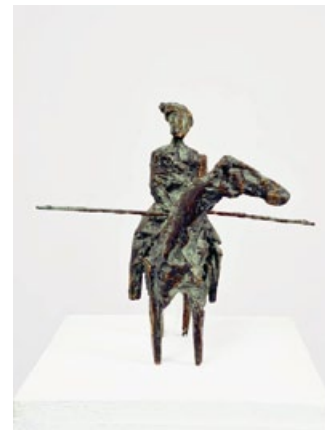
An exhibition in the German Bundestag's Liaison Office to the European Union, Square de Meeûs 40, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium

Further information:
Telephone +49(0)30-227-32027
kunst-raum@bundestag.de
www.kunst-im-bundestag.de
www.leo.coppi.de
www.jastramart.de

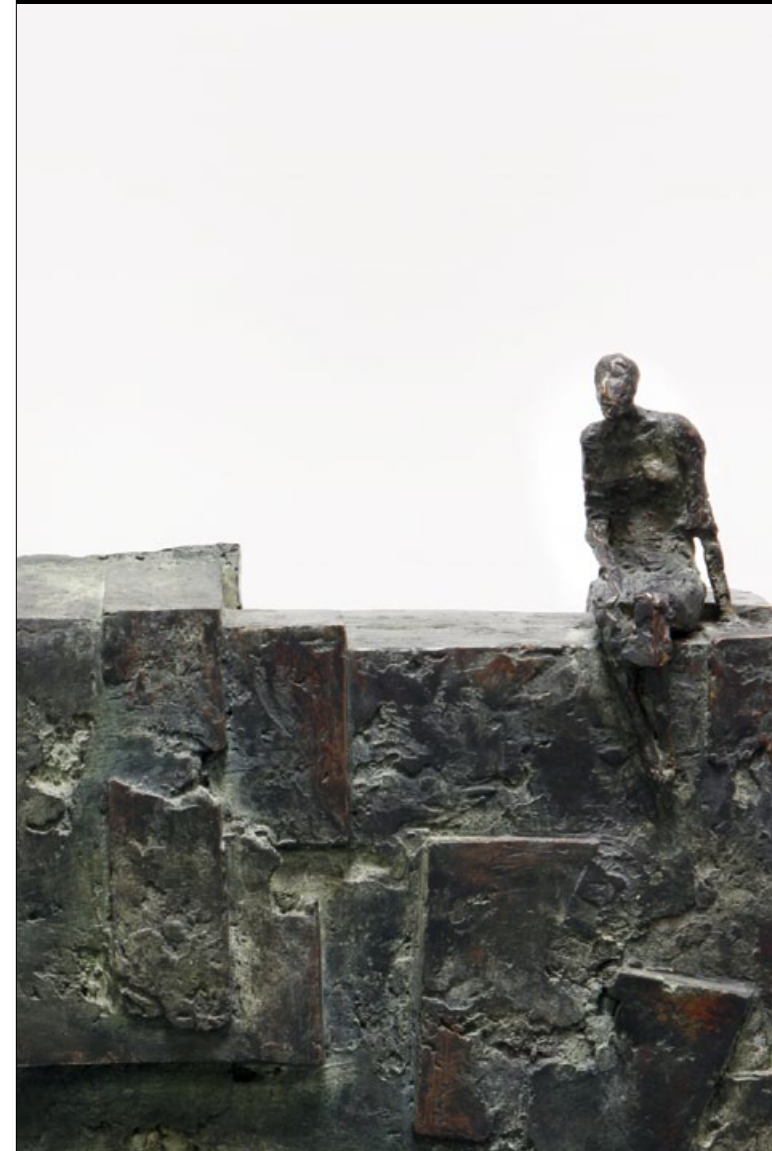
Published by the German Bundestag Secretariat of the Art Council, Platz der Republik 1, 11011 Berlin, Germany; **written and conceived by** Andreas Kaernbach, Curator of the Bundestag's Art Collection, **assisted by** Kristina Volke; **translated by** the Language Service of the German Bundestag in cooperation with Michael Foster; **designed by** Angela Klasar, büro uebele visuelle kommunikation, Stuttgart; **printed by** MEDIALIS Offsetdruck GmbH, Berlin; **photographs by** Martin Adam, Berlin; Julia Nowak-Katz, DBT; **poem by** Walter Helmut Fritz, © Hoffmann und Campe Verlag, Hamburg 1987; **courtesy of** GALERIE LEO.COPPI, Berlin.



Instead, the configuration of his sculpture transforms the story into a vivid evocation of a current, unresolved situation. Europa/Europe has arrived at a certain point, but at present there is no knowing whether it will move on: a promising plan of action threatens to come to a standstill unless it regains something of its original impetus. In this way the artist uses a compelling image to oppose false confidence in Europe's progress. The European idea demands more than complacent pride in Europe's past, as represented by its mythology: it demands determination and energy in the realisation and revitalisation of its utopia. Europe must believe in itself and must depart for new shores, far beyond the Crete to which the nymph who gave the continent its name was abducted.



Art at the German Bundestag Michael Jastram



Sculptures in the artist's atelier (above) Michael Jastram, born in Berlin in 1953, is based in Berlin.

Small Rider, 2008, bronze, 18 x 18 x 14 cm, sample 8/22 (left)

Tower I, 2001, bronze, 24 x 156 x 24 cm, sample 2/3 (centre)

Icarus, 1986, plaster, 58 x 120 x 47 cm (right)