

Sculptures by Geert Maas Humanity in Weil-Rounded Forms

Lee Gass

Volume 5, numéro 4, été 1989

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/9503ac>

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Éditeur(s)

Le Centre de diffusion 3D

ISSN

0821-9222 (imprimé)

1923-2551 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

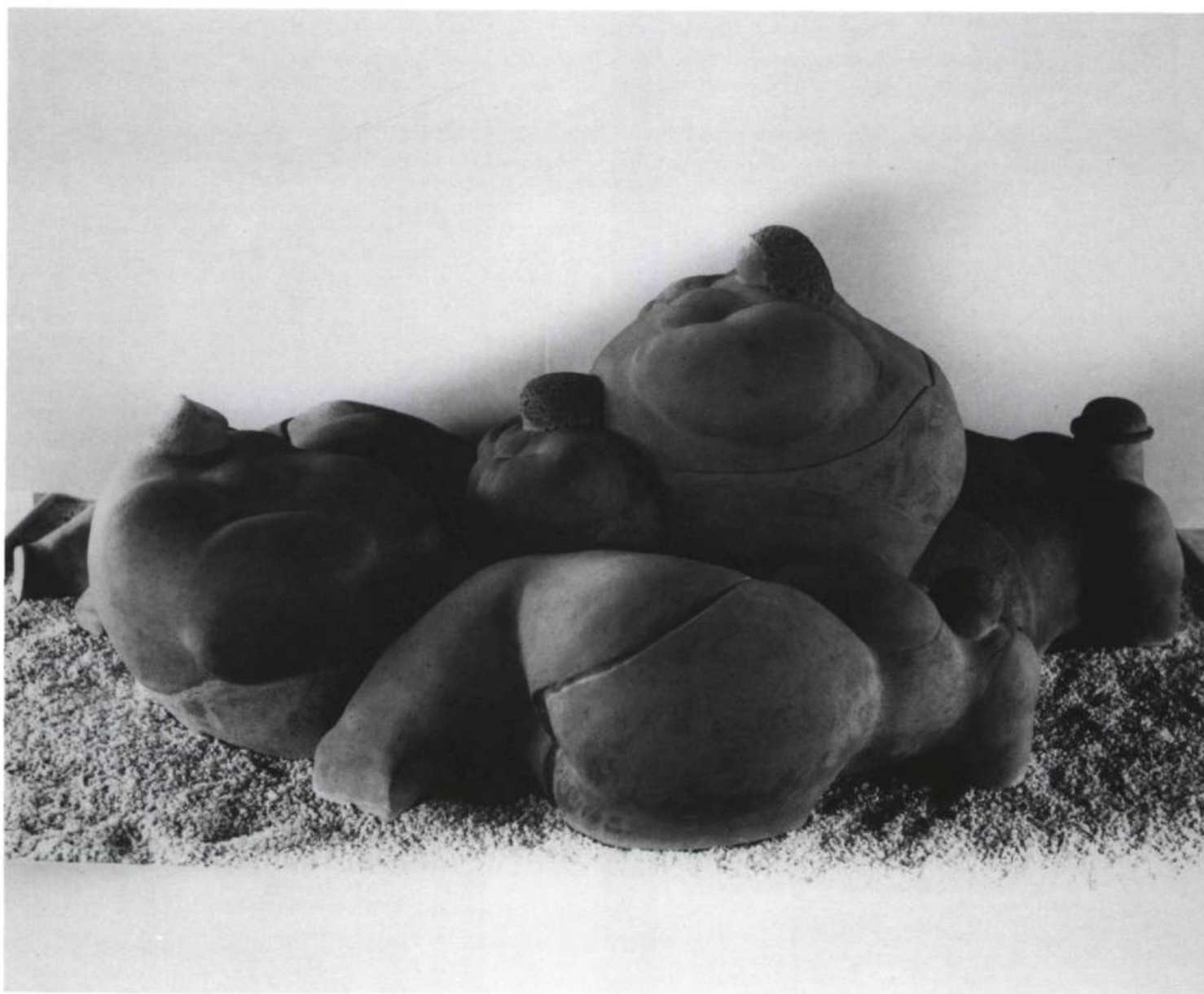
Gass, L. (1989). Sculptures by Geert Maas : humanity in Weil-Rounded Forms. *Espace Sculpture*, 5(4), 20–21.



LEE GASS

Sculptures
by
Geert Maas:

Humanity
in Well-Rounded
Forms



Geert Maas, *Summer*, Stoneware. 160 x 110 x 60cm.

The stoneware and bronze sculptures of human figures by Geert Maas are powerful, sensitive, humorous, and round. Some of the stoneware sculptures are unusually large and technically advanced, but all are very round.

Geert emphasizes volume in his work to accentuate human emotional qualities. He exaggerates volume, that is, roundness, while simplifying physical details of anatomy into shapes, curves, and planes that integrate to speak clearly about the individuals that they represent. But the sculptures are subtle and anything but abstract. In balancing the physical and the emotional aspects of life, they retain a uniqueness and individuality that invites personal response on an emotional level. This is especially clear in the group pieces.

Geert believes that the rolling topography of the Okanagan Valley and of his own property have "shaped" his work, because he views this landscape daily from his studio as he sculpts human figures in clay and plaster. This is probably true, and only he can say for certain, but to an outsider there is a striking, uncanny resemblance between Geert's round sculptures and his own round physique. It is almost as if he had consulted the mirror instead of the window as he worked. In any case, Geert Maas' well-rounded forms are beautiful to behold.

For me, the best example of the communicative power and humour of Maas' work is a very large stoneware group piece,

On the Beach which portrays fifteen women sunbathing. The figures are arrayed on a bed of real, white sand with their sunglasses, their tanning lotion, their magazines, and their beach chairs in the various postures that we might see when real friends gather in the sun to tan, to relax, and to talk. These rotund figures individually display the various stages of roundness, with their belly rolls, their dimpled thighs and cellulite, their extra chins, and their pendulous breasts. One fleshy, middle-aged woman lies face-down in the sand with the top of her bathing suit untied, and she is beautiful. Together, the figures in this piece speak powerfully of summertime and leisure, of middle age, and of friendship.

Clearly, this piece attracts through the strength of its invitation to



Geert Maas, *Spirits*, Stoneware relief, 135 x 110cm.

project ourselves into its caricature of the real world, where we can see ourselves with new eyes and smile. In general, Geert highlights our tendency to gain weight, yet there is no hint in his work of judgement of any kind. On the contrary, Geert loves people, and he portrays them in their individuality and in the reality of their worship of sun, their friendship, and their corpulence.

That Maas succeeds brilliantly in communicating on an emotional level is obvious to anyone who watches visitors to an exhibition of his work. I first saw *On the Beach* in a large group exhibition in Vancouver, where it captivated people in large numbers. They gathered around the beach environment, oblivious to the fact that as observers, they were as alien to the scene as clothed people walking on a nude beach, and they enjoyed themselves immensely. They whispered in their companions' ears, pointed at particular figures, and laughed. Many just smiled, and some blushed.

Geert Maas was born in the Netherlands in 1944, and received his art training at the Vrije Academy of Art in the Hague. He also worked as an assistant in a ceramic studio, and graduated as a teacher of drawing and special education. He emigrated to Canada with his family in 1979.

Geert Maas' home, studio, sculpture gardens, and gallery are perched on a small hill north of Kelowna (population 60,000), in the interior of British Columbia. It is a beautiful place with a commanding view of the farms and orchards of the Okanagan Valley and the hills and mountains beyond. There are over forty bronze and stoneware sculptures on the grounds, and many more inside the gallery. Besides free-standing sculptures, he also creates bronze and stoneware reliefs, medallions, etchings, prints, and paintings. His art has been shown in numerous solo and group exhibitions in Canada, the U.S.A., the Netherlands, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Italy. More and more art

collectors find their way to his gardens and gallery.

In winter, the outdoor sculptures stand out starkly against the snow; in spring and early summer, the green bronzes recede subtly into the background of lush vegetation, while in late summer and fall, these stand out while the gold bronzes and stonewares recede into the dry, golden hills of the B.C. interior. In 1983, over 1500 people visited this place. All are welcome.

Geert Maas Sculpture Gardens and Gallery

Rural Route 1, Reynolds Road
Kelowna, B.C. V1Y 7P9
(604) 860-7012

Lee Gass is a Vancouver sculptor and a research scientist in animal behaviour with the Department of Zoology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C.