

# Sculpture of Eerie Power

Michael Edwards, The Times, Saturday December 5, 1964

Mr. Friederich Werthmann is a young German sculptor who has gained a considerable European reputation for his work in wood, stone, concrete and, later, metal. His first London exhibition (at the Hamilton Galleries, 8 St. George Street, W.1., until January 2) is of stainless steel welded and fused by heat treatment into openwork agglomerations suggesting at once natural forms and the most unnatural, transfiguring, destruction.

That a sculptor who has worked for some time in wood and reinforced concrete can make objects so completely devoid of structure is remarkable. The former materials impose severe restrictions on an artist, while providing him with an inescapable natural or structural basis of his work: the sculpture of Moore and Barbara Hepworth exemplifies the „discovery of structure“ in woodcarving and Mr. Werthmann's own work in reinforced concrete had equally clear regulating mechanics. Steel, on the other hand, is strong, uniform, and without grain. Thus with very skilful workmanship the sculptor can transcend completely the dictates of engineering. Like so many new freedoms, however, this tends towards chaos, and it is Mr. Werthmann's case the organization of chaotic matter, rather than the creation of formal structures, which give the sculpture its power.

His images are variously suggestive of tree roots, animals, and birds, and of elementary globes and mandalas: natural forms. The expression is angular, and fragmentary, as though nature were overcome by eruption and decay. The steel we know as a beautifier of dinner tables is metamorphosed into unfamiliar, almost physically distasteful, matter-matière in the European sense. „Maguelonne, 1963“ is a particularly powerful piece, at once a bird and a morsel of grim dereliction. „Dritte Wand-Lung, 1963“, however, has the same structureless tissue without either clear reference in nature or any abstract coherence: the exhibition is no way of uniform standard.

Mr. Werthmann's material seems hardly solid enough to constitute masses, and often hardly strong enough to articulate the space around it. This may come in part from a cramped display which suggests above all that the exhibits are maquettes for larger, and essentially open-air versions: photographs confirm that outdoor sites exploit the eerie power of the sculpture to better advantage.

Friederich Werthmann zu Besuch bei  
Henri Moore

