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| Meadmore, Clement (1929-1995) |
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| Clement Meadmore was a major twentieth century sculptor with many works *in situ* across North America, Australia, and Japan. They were often commissioned as design features within substantial architectural installations and urban design projects in the International Style. Their heroic and rhetorical positioning on the forecourts of large corporate towers, on university campuses, and other public institutions could almost be classified as a cliché of mid- to late- twentieth century visual experience, except that his works captured attention on their own merits. |
| Clement Meadmore was a major twentieth century sculptor with many works *in situ* across North America, Australia, and Japan. They were often commissioned as design features within substantial architectural installations and urban design projects in the International Style. Their heroic and rhetorical positioning on the forecourts of large corporate towers, on university campuses, and other public institutions could almost be classified as a cliché of mid- to late- twentieth century visual experience, except that his works captured attention on their own merits.  Meadmore’s works contain an impeccable fluid grace and balance, hovering between a celebration of the structural robustness of steel and a denial of their very materiality. Outlasting the trends in civic landscaping that begot the commissions, his sculptures have frequently been exempt from the popular abhorrence of abstract sculpture. Classifying the sculptures as minimalist overlooks Meadmore’s key working processes. His work developed through improvisation: intuitively by trial and error and through slow and painstaking visual readjustment of elements in small-scale models. It was, therefore, never the physical realisation of a preconceived idea, but the organic product of a lengthy artistic process.  Meadmore studied aeronautical engineering before transferring to the first Australian industrial design course established at RMIT. His commercial works included furniture, lighting, and interiors. Although he later emphasised 1950s Australia’s uncongenial provincialism and his overriding need to escape, his metal furniture was highly acclaimed. This early success indicates both the international outlook of design customers in Australia and his grasp of the interplay between structure, lightness, and balance, which defined his mature work.  When Meadmore arrived in the United States in 1963, he worked on maquettes, befriended artists, and viewed exhibitions, taking two years to find a dealer. He removed the heavy textural encrustation of his early work, which he now regarded as an affectation, and started working with smooth surfaces. Many of his works feature a squared off pipe-like form imbued with a reptilian flexibility. The careful positioning of the cubed end pieces along with the painstaking balancing and shaping of the main curved lines augmented compositional variety. Black was his preferred colour for its tonal consistency, whereas white absorbed various hues and interfered with the clear reading of the form.  Fig. 1: Hob Nob  Clement Meadmore, *Hob Nob,* 2007 (1992), aluminium, University of Michigan.  Internationally Meadmore ranks as the most frequently commissioned white Australian artist, with only another earlier sculptor, Sir Bertram Mackennal, sharing a similar international profile. Meadmore’s sculptures bear no signs of his Australian origins, unlike painters Arthur Boyd or Sidney Nolan who traded substantially on the romantic and exotic ‘otherness’ of Australia. Meadmore regarded such regionalism as worthless, and the substantiating influences on his practice were international. An outdoor sculpture exhibition he saw at Antwerp in 1953 confirmed his feeling of himself as a significant sculptor. Viewing contemporary American painting in Japan in 1959 confirmed his belief that he needed to work in the United States, and in 1976 he became an American citizen. This choice did not simply enable easy contact with dealers, clients and expert fabricators; for him North America embodied much of what he found congenial, including his life in urban New York and his legendary love of jazz and even the relentless, rigorous, self-guided meritocracy that shaped his artworks. |
| Further reading:  (Fox)  (Gibson)  (de Groen)  (Meadmore)  (Clement Meadmore) |