

Anton JENSEN

1931-1969

Sculptor, art critic



Introduction

FROM HAROLD JEPPE

"I am concerned with human frailty, with mortality in fact. My philosophy is based on an optimistic belief in the thrust and development of life, tempered by a degree of melancholy over its transience and the vulnerability of the individual."

Tony Jensen wrote those words in a brief explanation of his work when he held his first one-man show with us last September. No one can see into the mind of another, especially when the other is as diffident and ungarrulous as Tony was. In his sculpture his hands gave meticulous expression to the neo-classical forms conjured up in his mind. I think he would have made a fine name for himself as a sculptor.

He was a gentle man, with the instincts and manners of a gentleman; modest, reticent, generous, with an innate but unobtrusive honesty.

I had a letter from him a few days before his death saying he had arranged an exhibition at The Drian Gallery in London in 1970 and asking me for another show with me towards the end of this year.

I shall miss him very much, both as a person and as an artist.

ARTLOOK, January, 1969 21

ANTON JENSEN held his first exhibition on September 18, 1968. In a review of this exhibition Richard Cheales wrote:—

● Anton Jensen's outstanding exhibition of very modern sculpture owes much of its instant impact to the virile imagination—apart from technical skill and ingenuity—of the artist.

It is the astonishing ease of moulding pliability with which Jensen evolves these unusual pieces—that often look like shapes exposed to the searing heat and icy cold of some ancient holocaust—that intrigues the eye and mind.

In essence, the artist concentrates almost exclusively on unfolding or evolving forms: there is a weird feeling of growth, life and development that takes millions of years to achieve.

The impression that these shapes have sprung into being "through natural processes" is dramatically stressed in compositions where satin smooth orbs are shattered to show corroded, rough stony ridges and gashes within.

One of the most stimulating exhibitions of small sculpture seen for a long time, Jensen's abstract interpretation is so naturally easy and rhythmic that even those who dislike very modern work should find his compositions compelling, if only for the outstanding virility and strength which characterize the compositions.

THE STAR, September 20, 1968.

One of his bronzes



Anton Jensen

"Abstract Spherical Form" bronze on ciment fondu, plaque with initialled monogram, 28 x 28cm

Auctioned by Russell Kaplan & Co., Johannesburg, 26th March, 2016, Lot P164

His signet



Obituary

FROM DESMOND GREIG

The real tragedy for me is that life as he wanted to live it was just beginning to open before Anton Jensen. He was a man who had spent his adult life thinking deeply, and privately, about the problems of art.

And at 38, when death cut it all short there on a road in Crete, it seemed to those who knew him, perhaps even to himself, that he had reached a successful resolution of the problems in his own difficult branch of artistic creation.

He had, just before he left on his first visit to Europe in November, last year, held his own very successful first one-man exhibition of three-dimensional ciment fondu sculpture in which he was pursuing some far-reaching avenues of his own.

Then, in April, 1970, he was to have shown in London, at the Drian Gallery, where some of South Africa's best-known artists have exhibited. It seemed as though it was on the cards that Anton Jensen would go on to make his mark there as well.

A meticulously painstaking craftsman, an intensely thoughtful artist with a powerful intelligence brought single-mindedly to bear on the problems of his own volumes in space—yes, it seemed to all of us that he would go on to make an international name for himself.

Well, a road in Crete cut all that short. We shall never know what Anton Jensen could do. Only what he has done.

I knew Tony Jensen for many years. "Knew"—that's an oversimplification. I don't think many people "knew" him at all. Difficult, self-absorbed, intensely reserved—that was the side of Anton Jensen that most of us knew, the face he turned to the world.

And it was the face most ARTLOOK readers knew him by. It was in the eleventh issue of this magazine, in October, 1967, that his first piece of published art criticism appeared, under the name of "Anton Hansen." It was with that issue that, at his own suggestion, he began his regular page of art reviewing. (He had a sort of missionary fervour about critical standards.)

His critical pieces were closely reasoned, uncompromising, impatient of shoddiness in thought or execution, and were among the best things in art reviewing that have appeared in South Africa.

But all this concerns Anton Jensen's public face. The face of the demanding critic, the unsparing craftsman, the dedicated artist.

There was another side he sometimes showed. And this was something quite different. The Tony Jensen as a delighted listener who would laugh at your jokes until his eyes were bright with tears, the Tony Jensen who would solo on the dance floor in intricate arabesques of hypnotized rhythm, the Tony Jensen who would be unstinting in advice and encouragement and who would listen to your troubles with a sympathy that was genuine all the way through.

It is the obvious thing to say—but I'm sorry Tony has gone. It is a sad day for me, this, having to write these few words to say I am going to miss him and that the world seems a poorer place now.