



## Belial Figure

### Date

1945

### Primary Maker

David Smith

### Medium

Bronze

### Description

During his college years, when he was in and out of school, David Smith, who had been born in Decatur, Indiana, earned money by working as a welder and riveter at the Studebaker plant in South Bend. In 1926, he moved to New York City and began attending the Art Students League. Early in his career, he created small, figurative works such as the present bronze, many of which responded to political events of the time; he eventually left this style behind for the abstract, monumental welded-metal sculptures for which he became best known. Smith was deeply affected by his first trip to Europe, in 1935–36, when the Surrealist movement was at its height in France and the Nazi party was consolidating power in Germany. After returning home, between 1938 and 1940, the artist produced a series of fifteen bronze Medals for Dishonor as an indictment of Fascism, capitalism, and war. He continued this theme into the mid-1940s, when he made a number of

sculptures, including Belial Figure, that offered a general commentary on the destructive underpinnings of human behavior without specifically supporting the United States' role in fighting Fascism. In the Hebrew Bible, the name "Belial" refers to Satan, but the term can also indicate a worthless, lawless individual. Smith's winged creature, with skeletal legs delineated beneath a flowing robe, holds an ambiguous form resembling an arrow or a bolt of lightning over its head with one arm. The year after making the bronze, the artist debuted a large body of new, politically charged work at New York's Buchholz and Willard Galleries, which included such sculptures as War Spectre, Spectre of Profit, False Peace Spectre, and possibly Belial Figure, all confronting the violent and destructive nature of man. (SOURCE: Alcauskas, INNOVATIVE APPROACHES, HONORED TRADITIONS, 2017) David Smith was an American abstract expressionist sculptor and painter best known for his large geometric metal sculptures. Early in his career, he created smaller, more figurative works that directly responded to political events of his time. Deeply affected by World War II, Smith debuted a body of work in 1945 including sculptures such as this, War Spectre, and False Peace Spectre that confronted the violent nature of man. The belial, or war-like, figure depicted here resembles an angel with wings, skeletal legs emerging from beneath a flowing robe, and an arm raised above its head holding an arrow-like form. In style and subject, the sculpture resembles a series of fifteen bronze Medals for Dishonor that the artist made between 1938 and 1940 as an indictment of Fascism. Belial Figure, however, is more ambiguous, as the sculpture does not specifically support America's role in fighting Fascism, but rather offers a general commentary on the destructive underpinnings of human behavior (SOURCE: Wellin Museum permanent collection label, Summer 2016).

### Dimensions

Overall (without base): 15 3/4 x 7 3/4 x 2 1/2 in. (40 x 19.7 x 6.4 cm) Overall (with base): 17 1/2 x 7 3/4 x 6 15/16 in. (44.5 x 19.7 x 17.6 cm)