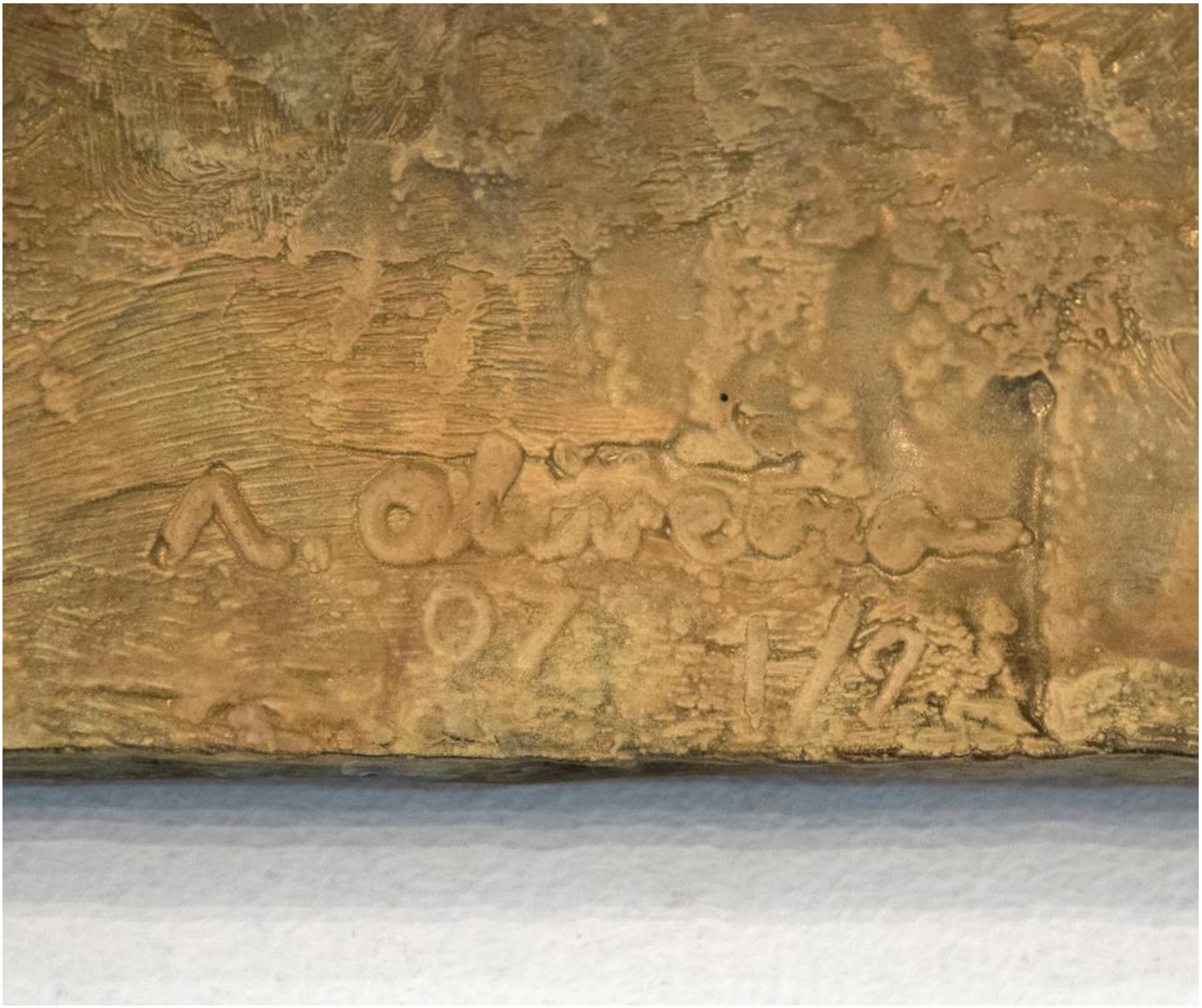
NATHAN OLIVEIRA (1928-2010)
Runner (Ochre)
bronze
17 x 16 x 23 1/2 in.
1/9
2007

33575

PROVENANCE:
Estate of the Artist

Heather James Fine Art is pleased to announce the commencement of our association with the Oliveira Family Estate and our initial offering of more than forty paintings, sculptures and graphics by Nathan Oliveira. A Californian whose work is of preeminent importance during the post war period, Oliveira is most often associated with Park, Diebenkorn and the other artists with whom he sketched early in his career. Yet it was not an oversight when Oakland Museum director Paul Mills chose not to include Oliveira in the 1957 exhibition "Contemporary Bay Area Figurative Painting." All came to figuration by initiating a sophisticated dialogue with abstraction, yet it is Oliveira, the often characterized ambivalent loner among Bay Area artists whose work is most often compared to Alberto Giacometti, Francis Bacon, or Willem de Kooning with whom he shared walls and space at The Images of Man exhibition held in New York at the Museum of Modern Art in 1959.

During the early years, Oliveira's lone figures often suggested an existential angst similar to that of Giacometti, but there was also a weightlessness and a transcendent aura that envelopes these figures; they appear as elemental, universal and eternal projections of selfless consciousness better understood within the bodiless realm of metaphysics. These qualities would remain in his work throughout his long career, yet he would find other themes to explore — the natural world where the essential nature of birds and animals exist in equal profundity with their human counterparts, the transient world of evanescent perception when memory must reconstruct momentary experience, and later, the 'site' paintings and monoprints that suggest the abandoned remnants of a long-lost civilization or tribe uncovered at an archeological dig.

Through and through, flesh to bones, and bones to dust Nathan Oliveira has left us with a legacy of art that will surely remain untarnished by time or changing trends. His work exists within a realm rarely achieved by artists striving in a similar mode of expression. Unclouded by ego or wayward sentiment, it is also in the warmth and humble nature of Nathan Oliveira's character that we celebrate a life well lived. His work is as he summarized, "about figuration…about nature…and (the) universal, not specific…These are issues that allow me to paint something that I find quite central and beautiful…I'm not trying to create issues of art. I don't want to be the center of the art world. I really prefer to simply to part of it; not only the part of it that's working today, but yesterday and the time before that. And if I can somehow connect all the way back to the caves I'd be most happy. Maybe that's where I belong anyway."

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