

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

No. 102

FOR RELEASE:

Wednesday, October 2, 1963

PRESS PREVIEW:

Tuesday, October 1, 1963

11 a.m. - 4 p.m.

The first Museum exhibition in this country of work by the revolutionary Italian sculptor Medardo Rosso (1858-1928) will be on view at the Museum of Modern Art from October 2 through November 23. The 28 wax and bronze figures and heads, selected by Peter Selz, Curator of Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions, trace Rosso's major accomplishments in Milan and Paris between 1882 and 1907 -- the short period of his creative life. The exhibition, which also includes 8 drawings, was installed by William C. Seitz, Associate Curator. It will be presented under the sponsorship of the Italian Government and the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in New York.

Rosso, frequently called an Impressionist, shared with these artists a concern for transient effects of light and movement. Like Rodin (whom he considered his rival), he had a new and vital approach to sculpture. Like the Symbolists he was concerned with an evocative quality of form.

In 1912 Rosso's experiments were credited by the Italian Futurist Boccioni for their important impact on the "aesthetic revolution" of the Futurists; in 1918, after Rodin's death, the French critic Apollinaire acclaimed him as the greatest living sculptor. Nevertheless after the turn of the century, when Rosso was in his early forties, he produced only one new work (1906-7) and before his death in 1928 his reputation was fading except in his native country.

The renewed interest in Rosso's work since World War II is perhaps partly related to the revival of enthusiasm in Impressionism, both in painting and sculpture. Margaret Scolari Barr in the introduction to her monograph* on Rosso which the Museum has published on the occasion of the exhibition suggests also that there may be a new appreciation of his informality and impetuous spontaneity and perhaps, of his realism, "at a time when the 'new realism' and the 'new humanism' are again catch-words if not passwords.

"Yet the relevance seems topical, even a little specious," she continues, "when we contemplate the mysterious heads and faces of women half merged in a visible, palpable ambiance and study the strange figures of men which seem to grow out of the earth-like tree trunks with spreading roots. Rosso's art is complex, ambiguous, his vision poetic as much as objective."

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*MEDARDO ROSSO by Margaret Scolari Barr. 96 pages; 68 plates (including color frontispiece). Cloth \$5.00, paper \$2.95. Published by The Museum of Modern Art and distributed by Doubleday & Co., Inc.

The earliest works in the show, Kiss Under the Lamppost (1882), a fleeting impression of a couple embracing in a dark street, and the perky head, Street Boy, were completed during Rosso's unhappy 11 months study at the Academy in Milan, where he found the teaching unimaginative and boring. In the recently re-discovered Mother and Child Sleeping, from the following year, some of the characteristics of his mature style emerge; the sculpture can be seen only from a certain angle, and the pictorial modeling depends on correct lighting.

But in Sacristan (1883), the sudden maturing of Rosso the sculptor is clear, Mrs. Barr points out/^{as}"...he invents devices to render in clay the vagueness of atmospheric envelopment that seems to dematerialize tangible forms."

In 1883 Rosso also completed the Concierge, a portrait of his doorkeeper rendered with warm sympathy. "The sense of irascible senility is conveyed by the hollow temple, the ridge of the frowning brow, the pendulous nostril, the long upper lip, the compressed mouth that begrudges a single gracious word. Intensely pictorial, its fractured surfaces reveal the most intuitive knowledge of the effects of chiaroscuro."

In the next year, 1884, at the age of 26, Rosso first went to Paris. Following his return to Italy a few months later his mother, to whom he was very close, died. He then embarked on a brief unhappy marriage, but in 1889 deserting his wife and son, he returned to Paris which remained his home during the rest of his creative years, so that essentially he is a Parisian artist.

From the beginning of this second Paris period when Rosso was sick and poor, dates his Man in a Hospital, a small but most sensitive work. The following year, 1890, a new friend and patron, the courageous and adventurous collector Henri Rouart commissioned his portrait. But even this powerful backing did not set Rosso afloat in Paris. He met Rodin, Degas, perhaps Toulouse-Lautrec, but essentially he belonged to no specific Paris milieu.

In Conversation in the Garden (1893), Rosso breaks most boldly with the tenets of traditional sculpture. Here "the sense of space is created not only by the relation of the faceless figures placed on an indefinite billowing platform, but by the manifest play of their glances," Mrs. Barr says.

In the Bookmaker (1894), Rosso explored further his idea that the figure adheres ineluctably to its cast shadow. By tilting the figure to the left, by extending and raising the billowing ground behind it, he obtained the check-mark effect that a figure forms with its own shadow.

In Man Reading (1894), Rosso captures the image from an even higher viewpoint. This work, Mrs. Barr says, "carried through to its ultimate conclusion the Impressionist principle of the assimilation of light and shadow between the figure and its environment. Modeled in squiggles, at first glance it confuses the eye; however, when viewed from above with an overhead light the figure stands bolt upright, magically detaching itself from the background to which it adheres."

Madame X, Rosso's most abstract work was modeled in 1896. This head has the purity of Brancusi's Muse. The unique wax, 12" high, has been lent to the exhibition by the Museo d'Arte Moderna, Venice.

Rosso's last work, Ecce puer (1906-7), is shown in the exhibition both in wax and in bronze. A commissioned portrait of a child six or seven years old, the head, Mrs. Barr says, is the "distillation of Rosso's compassion, tenderness and nostalgia for man's first innocent years.

"The dainty features, modeled with extreme delicacy, are foiled by the rasped vertical incisions at the right which veil part of the temple and neck as the half open curtain [through which Rosso had glimpsed the boy] had once done. The lips breathe, the vivid eyes glance, the blond hair surges above the tall shiny brow through an uncanny transmission of life."

On the wall label for the exhibition, Mr. Selz writes: "The dematerialization and fluidity of his form which link it to the surrounding atmosphere make Rosso's sculpture most relevant to our sensibility today."

Rosso spent the last part of his life pursuing fame and recasting his earlier works. Increasingly eccentric, frequently ill, he nevertheless had a circle of admirers and friends who were devoted to him. He died in Milan, a few months before the age of 70.

Photographs and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York 19, N. Y. CI 5-8900.

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 WEST 53rd STREET
NEW YORK 19, NEW YORK
Circle 5-8900

Tuesday, November 5, 1963 8:30 P.M.

In connection with the Medardo Rosso exhibiton

MEDARDO ROSSO

Illustrated lecture by Margaret Scolari Barr

Sponsored by the Museum of Modern Art and
The Italian Cultural Institute of New York

Tickets at the Museum or by mail

Non-members: \$2.00 Members: \$1.50 Students: 75 cents

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The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York 19