

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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MUSEUM ANNOUNCES ACQUISITION OF SCULPTURES BY MAILLOL AND RENOIR

Two major 20th century sculptures by famous French artists have been acquired by the Museum of Modern Art, it was announced today. The Washerwoman, designed by Auguste Renoir in 1917 in the last years of his life, was acquired through the A. Conger Goodyear Fund. Mediterranean, an early work by Aristide Maillol executed in the first years of the century, is the gift of Stephen C. Clark. Both large bronzes are now on view in the Museum's Sculpture Garden. The Maillol seated woman is by a grove of white birch trees, the Renoir woman by the side of one of the reflecting pools.

Mediterranean is generally considered Maillol's greatest work of his early period and probably of his entire career. The 41" high bronze cast acquired by the Museum is the final cast and the only one in America. The original plaster cast was first exhibited at the Salon d'Automne in 1905 and was developed from a small terra cotta of perhaps five years earlier. It was first known as "Statue for a Shady Garden," then as "Femme Accroupie" and as "La Pensée." Commenting on this figure, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Director of Museum Collections, says:

"From the first showing of Maillol's most famous figure in 1905, The Mediterranean has won high praise. In fact it is the first great work marking the classic reaction against the romantic informality and subtle modeling of Rodin. Maurice Denis, the champion of classicism, immediately recognized its significance as well as its greatness. He reviewed the Salon d'Automne of 1905 for L'Ermitage. At the end of a long and controversial article he chides the fauve Matisse for being too abstract and systematic and then to emphasize his point, concludes:

Here is a fine statue by Maillol -- the Femme accroupie Although some sculptors protested against its anatomical liberties or against the seductiveness of such lovely forms, the public was unanimous. Here at last, after so many attempts either incomplete or disconcerting, was a finished work, not created to astound anyone, not meant to satisfy a coterie of esthetes; here was a noble figure, at once expressive and harmonious, simple and grand as the works of the antique. Maillol has created it without a system, with his genius alone, aided perhaps by that sentiment for generalization of which Félibien speaks and which in Maillol is instinctive. In any case, it is this classic sculpture which is the most novel work of art in the entire Autumn Salon. Let us admire it; and let us learn from it the vacuity of subtleties. "

The Washerwoman was executed in 1917 when Renoir was 75 years old and so paralyzed by rheumatism that he had to be carried everywhere and could only use his hand by tying a brush between the stiffened fingers. Commenting on this bronze, which is 48" high, Mr. Barr says:

"With the exception of a few minor early pieces, Renoir did not turn to

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sculpture until the last years of his life, and then only at the insistent urging of his dealer, Ambroise Vollard. In 1913, at his own expense, Vollard hired a young Italian pupil of Maillol named Guino to serve as an assistant to Renoir. The great painter was reluctant at first but soon began to work at sculpture using Guino as his hands. He would select figures from his paintings which Guino would translate into rough clay models guided by the artist. Renoir would then supervise the completion of the pieces, indicating his wishes with a pointer in his hand. An extraordinary understanding grew up between the artist and his young collaborator so that these sculptures have always justly been considered Renoir's own work. The Washerwoman embodies a grandeur of line very similar to that of his late figure painting."

The Washerwoman was executed in 1917 at Cagnes on the Riviera. A small version was made the year previously. The Museum of Modern Art cast came from Vollard's estate.

PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE SCULPTURES IN THEIR SETTING ARE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST