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Medardo Rosso
Mo.M.A. brochure +
16 Gazzettino
article originally
inserted in front
of L'Arte issue

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Lamberto Vitali material
except for a head of MR
no. back of legs in his studio
& a photo of down in la toilette
installed in Luxembourg

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ART

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NEWS

See p. 36

January 1960
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Fifty-eighth year
of continuous publication

Volume 58, Number 9 January 1960

ART NEWS

This month

Ad Reinhardt, a leading New York abstract painter, will be the subject of an essay in *Portfolio and ARTNEWS ANNUAL NO. 3* in the spring . . . Margaret Scolari Barr teaches art history; she hopes to continue her research and writing about the career of Medardo Rosso . . . J. P. Sedgwick, who lectures on the history of art at Columbia and Hunter, is a Tenth Street painter (probably the only one with a Ph.D. from Harvard) whose work was exhibited last month at the Rice Gallery; he is completing his writing of an *Evolutionary Theory of Art History*.

Coming

Collections in Canada, with a colorplate of a great G. B. Tiepolo . . . masterpieces of Italian art in England make the outstanding show of the London season; it will be covered for ARTNEWS by Sir Philip Hendy of the National Gallery . . . new American paintings in color, by Resnick, Marsicano and Kerkam . . . the art and philosophy of Torres-Garcia.

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Cover



Especially made for this first month of a new decade, his collage typically combines elements of Cubist space with vanguard concepts of action and chance. Goodnough has a one-man show current at the de Nagy Gallery, is included among the Modern Museum's new acquisitions and among "Younger" New Yorkers in the Stable Gallery's select show [p. 24].

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Medardo Rosso, 1858-1928.

By Margaret Scolari Barr

Reviving Medardo Rosso

Little known outside Italy, he emerges as an important pioneer of modern art in this American debut, at the Peridot Gallery

On a bright day in 1882 Medardo Rosso looked down from the Brera Academy in Milan into Richini's courtyard and saw two people walking in the sun. The shadows they cast were so heavy that he felt he could pick them up with his hands. In this moment of intense seeing, he realized that the figures and their shadows formed a check-mark under which the ground seemed to tilt forward. Later, reminiscing, he said: "It happened in Milan—I didn't have to go to Paris to see it." This was the vision which took form in the *Conversation in the Garden* (1893) [fig. 1], in *The Bookmaker* (1894) [fig. 2], and in the *Man Reading* (1894).

At the time, he was an awkward, tall, red-haired student of twenty-four. He was born in 1858 in Turin where his father, as

stationmaster, had expedited Piedmontese troops and Garibaldi during the turmoil of the Risorgimento. In later years Rosso would sometimes speak of his mother, but never of his father or his weakling elder brother whose place he was forced to take in the new army of the Kingdom of Italy. Under officers still blustering with past glories, military discipline was harsh and senseless. It is probably during these thirty-six months that the traits of rebellion and self-concern became dominant in his character.

In 1880, returning to civilian life, he went to Milan where he enrolled in the Academy. In art the city of Stendhal was dominated by a late Romantic, deliberately "tousled" school which, under the name of *Scapigliatura*, went in for sentimental or

1 *Conversation in the Garden*, 1893.
Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Rome



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2 *The Bookmaker*, 1894, wax, 17½ inches high.
Museum of Modern Art, New York



3 *Ecce Puer*, 1906, wax, 17 inches high.
Peridot Gallery

grandiose subjects. Fuzzy forms treated in broken, prevalently grey brushstrokes welled out of impenetrable gloom. In more advanced circles, the notion of the equivalence and interchangeability of the arts was much discussed; elaborate analogies were set up between music and poetry, colors and keys. The binding element of this theory was tone and its effect on the emotions. Soon Medardo Rosso attempted to achieve in sculpture the illusion of fitful light and shadow, the expansion of form into space which previously had been the exclusive domain of painting. His *Unemployed Singer*, 1882, and the *Bersagliere with His Girl*, 1882, though still genre statuettes for bourgeois drawing rooms, foretell Rosso's involvement with light and the circumambient air. Forms are agglutinated in the quick impression of the first glance, no gaps separate the shapes of arms or legs. "Nothing is material in space," Rosso announced. "Sculpture is not something to be walked around": sharp definitions, clear contour lines, the idea that a statue should compose from all angles were outworn conceptions upheld by the hated Academy. Expelled from the Brera and now, as Thieme-Becker says, "autodidact," Rosso was the first to take the step, revolutionary for sculpture, decisive for Italians, of cutting the umbilical cord with the past: he set himself up as a rival of the Renaissance artists, not as one of their epigoni. Thirty years later Rosso's admirer, the great Futurist sculptor Umberto Boccioni, was to reaffirm and extend Rosso's ideas when he proclaimed: "the Greeks and Michelangelo block the development of sculptural Impressionism which we [the Futurists] wish to continue by transforming it into the interpenetration of planes. Only tradi-

Rosso's revolutionary dissolving of forms through dramatic light and shadow contrasts [1] was an extension of sculpture into painting that influenced Rodin and the whole of 20th-century sculpture. Melting movement and slanting postures, rather than details, define both theatrical [1] and compassionate [2] conceptions. Portraits such as his *Ecce Puer* [3] caused Rosso to be compared to Renoir.

tion upholds the closed contour and the old notions of composition."

Having found his direction Rosso composed the *Sacristan*, 1882, a profile in high relief against a neutral background; the swollen nose of the alcoholic dominating the resigned, snuffed-out features. The artist's intention is made clear by a small holy-water font at the base of the relief (in the version at the Peridot Gallery); the bemused church beadle stares at the basin and mumbles: "If only, if only this water were grappa." Compassion also dictates the mood of *Portinaia*, 1883, a doorkeeper, stooped and brooding in her tired knowledge of the passing scene. Extraordinarily close to Daumier is the *Impression in an Omnibus* (1882-1884?), where four vividly differentiated figures are stated with directness and little overt sentiment. The plaster was destroyed on its way from Milan to Venice, but when Degas saw it in a photograph he exclaimed: "This can't be a sculpture, it must be a painting."

On November 10, 1884, Medardo Rosso's mother died and he fell into a long stupor. Black moods of inertia were to overcome

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4 *Jewish Boy*, 1893, wax over plaster, 9 inches high.
University of Nebraska, Lincoln

5 *Yvette Guilbert*, 1891.
Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Rome



Rosso continued

him at repeated intervals during the remaining years of his life.

The dates of Rosso's works, travels and exhibitions often present wide discrepancies because contemporary sources are critical, polemic or eulogistic rather than precise. Seemingly in this same year, 1884, Rosso felt the call of Paris, where friends already had shown some of his works. He arrived with twenty-seven lire in his pocket and stopped first at the Grand Hôtel. We find him next as an assistant in the studio of Dalou, where he met Rodin, by eighteen years his senior. A friendship arose and probably Rodin helped the young Italian make his first Paris contacts. He exhibited some pieces in the Galerie Thomas and at Georges Petit, together with Toulouse-Lautrec and Eugène Carrière, attracting the attention of painters and of the collector Henri Rouart.

Surprisingly, on April 16, 1885, he returned to Milan and married Giuditta Pozzi, who remained unsympathetic to his art. Late at night when she whimpered because there was no money, he drew up his stand beside the bed and, in the dark hours, roughed out a figurine that might sell. A son, Francesco, was born on November 7, 1885. Francesco Rosso was to become his father's aide and champion; in 1931 he gave an important group of works to the Galleria d'Arte Moderna in Rome and later he set up the Medardo Rosso Museum at Barzio in the Valsassina, some three hours' drive north of Milan. Meantime, friends in Paris had placed some of his works in the *Indépendants* of 1886. He was shown in Venice in '86, and in the same year some of his works were bought by the South Kensington Museum (renamed the Victoria & Albert in 1889).

By 1889 Rosso "forgot" his family and returned to Paris for the Exposition Universelle in which he exhibited at least six works, one of which, *Golden Age*, 1886, was an evocation of his wife and child. In sentiment and in softness of treatment it is remarkably close to Carrière, with whom Rosso has sufficient affinity to justify Benedict Nicholson's inclination to group him with the Symbolists. But Rosso lacks the absorption and the mystery of Redon or Mallarmé; he is not a Northern man and the Gothic mist is alien to him.

The years 1889 to 1895 were Rosso's most fruitful. He alternated between a soft and highly finished surface treatment and the excited, improvised asperity of Canova's "bozzetti" at Possagno. Both manners are dictated by his sensitiveness to air and light though it is obviously the [Continued on page 66]

Obsession with light and air found expression in soft and porous surfaces juxtaposed with seemingly improvised rough areas [4]. In later works, the head form becomes increasingly simplified [5] until finally a daringly abstract concept emerges in his *Madame X*, 1896(?) or 1913(?) [opposite], now owned by the Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Rome.

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motifs were meeting at once and the snowscape was inaugurated, Courbet's seascapes emerged transformed.

The sky is no longer clear and empty but acts upon itself. Clouds cast shadows on the water which responds; rocks begin to sit up; the sky draws water from the sea. Sometimes it storms; a fishing fleet departs, and boats appear on the beach, reflecting the sea's activity.

Meanwhile there is a series of low-horizon marines, with a noticeable field of shore and quiet water in flat planes; boats and figures are small and isolated; the cloud formations are multitudinous (but not yet ponderous), filling the sky and creating the light of the picture. The height of the painting is now nearly equal to its length, and the spatial scale is immense.

These pictures are closely related to Impressionism in both theme and tone, though more congealed in form and vaster in sweep. But their quietude represents only a pause in Courbet's turbulent quest.

The last great wave pictures (there are at least a dozen, in various countries) are the high point of Courbet's career and his unique contribution to the history of landscape painting.

The wave has now become the central theme—the rest of nature is not eliminated but is heightened in force through a limitation in focus. Rock, water, cloud and sky are finally united.

Static and dynamic, force and field, violence and resistance, action and substance, material and energy attain a final resolution; and the theme and its form (not infrequently discrepant in Courbet's work) are at one. The significance for modern art is the establishment of a field of primary nature-experience, as opposed to a preconceived art-order.

Winslow Homer's scenes of wave and shore appear flimsy and prosaic alongside these pictures, and even Turner's cosmic marines lack such weight. Turner's is an incessant excitement, a flash of unparalleled illumination; Courbet's art is French, and the residue of his violence is a pervasive fusion and superhuman repose.

At the same time Courbet remains a peasant and a near German one at that; his vehement masculinity may well have been a handicap to his public reputation over this past generation with its feminine paramountcy of taste. Possibly his appreciation will improve in a day beginning to respond to the rugged frontality of de Kooning and Kline.

Yet particular aspects of taste must not obscure the fact that Courbet stands—likewise apart from his social and political roles which possibly have been overrated—as one of the supreme colorists and formal inventors of his century. Surely it was in response to such achievement that Cézanne, as we are told, if the name of the master of Ornans was mentioned, would solemnly and silently raise his hat.

Reviving Medardo Rosso continued from page 38

rough one that accounts for his classification with the Impressionists. In *Little Girl Laughing*, 1890, the extreme morbidez of the wax produces a soft focus so porous that we feel the air invading the open mouth. *Rieuse* of the same year is more abstract, the bronze surface less smoothed, the features slightly distorted as if by atmospheric pressure. *Sick Boy* (1893 or 1895) is sentimentally caressed and recalls some of the children of the fifteenth-century Florentine sculptors, Desiderio and Mino. In contrast *Invalid in the Hospital*, 1889, and *Portrait of Henri Rouart*, 1890, are executed in a summary way with a dashing spatula; deep gouges and projections produce shifting values of tone so active that they give the illusion of broken color. In *Jewish Boy*, 1892 [fig. 4], a commissioned portrait of a small Baron de Rothschild, the soft blur seems to prevail in some reproductions while in others, perhaps of different casts, the surface appears rough and harsh. *Yvette Guilbert*, 1894 [fig. 5], abstract yet amazingly graceful, bends toward her audience; her Leonardesque smile is echoed in reverse by the spikes that bind her to the void of the stage.

But Rosso did not concentrate exclusively on the human countenance; the impression of the total figure continued to interest him. In *Conversation in the Garden*, 1893 [fig. 1], his own looming silhouette, seen from the back, slants away from the beholder and casts its shadow on two seated ladies; the giant form is enveloped in a sweep that defines the body's character yet evades all detail. *The Bookmaker*, 1894 [fig. 2], is in fact a portrait of Henri Rouart's son-in-law, Eugène Marin, at the races. Here the figure inclines sideways and slightly forward in a lively, alert way though it adheres to the tilting ground; the portly gentleman leans on his cane and holds his binoculars against his breast. *Man Reading*, 1894, seen in profile, is closer to us than the others because of the leg planted firmly in the foreground, but space extends behind him at a sharp slant and blends with his crumpled newspaper. These works echo the distant Brera vision and justify Rosso's insistence that his sculpture should be reproduced only in photographs that he himself had taken—his impressions had to be seen in one light just as he had beheld reality "in the fire of the eye."

In 1897 Rodin's *Balzac* created a tremendous controversy, even before it was exhibited at the Salon de la Nationale. Many felt that it owed much to Rosso, though *The Bookmaker* is mentioned in this connection more

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frequently than *Conversation*. Certainly the stance, the heavy-shouldered, long-robed figure, the angular features sprouting out of black shadows into the light, seem unaccountable innovations when compared to Rodin's preceding works.

They had been friends since the early days at Dalou's until at least 1889, when they exchanged works during the exhibition at the gallery of the Théâtre d'Application Bodinier. Rodin gave Rosso the torso of his *St. John the Baptist* and selected in its place Rosso's *Rieuse*. What their relation was between '89 and '97 is as yet unexplored, but the fact remains that Rodin never admitted a debt to Rosso, neither at the time of *Balzac* nor in later years. Our sensitive Italian had an exalted sense of friendship; he used to speak of "friends of the first order"; he even proclaimed "my friends are my decorations." He was hurt; he felt robbed, though there is no clear record of an overt rift. Mme. Aurel in her book, "*Rodin devant la femme*," 1919, admits that Rodin learned much from Rosso and retells the anecdote about Michelangelo who, when accused of taking from Verrocchio, remarked "Yes, but when I steal, I kill." A stout defender of Rodin, Mme. Aurel asserts that Rodin did not "kill" Rosso, but undeniably the *Balzac* scandal put Rodin in the public eye and did much to increase his fame.

In the same year, 1897, Rosso executed *Portrait of Mme. Noblet* and, after an interval of four years, *Ecce Puer* [fig. 3] in 1901. (This is the date given in the Biennale catalogue of 1914 which Rosso most plausibly controlled. Mino Borghi, in his book of 1950, marks it 1906, probably the date of a later cast.)

To say that Rosso ceased to produce at forty-three because of jealousy of Rodin or general discouragement would be jumping to conclusions; he had acquired international fame, he enjoyed the esteem of critics such as Camille de St. Croix and Louis Vauxcelles and of important personalities such as Zola and Clemenceau. He traveled all over Europe and had so many exhibitions in public institutions and at dealers that it would be tedious to list them.

In 1905 in Vienna, while he was supervising a show at the Artaria Gallery, he fell from a tram and knocked the back of his head on the pavement. In a letter to Harald Gutherz, undated, but probably written after the accident, he complains of recurrent nausea. Giorgio Nicodemi (who has written the introduction to the Rosso show in the Peridot Gallery) says that from this time he lost his creative faculty. He seems to have spent the rest of his life reworking, recasting, and admiring his past pieces, which he sold for a good price. At some point he developed diabetes and in 1928 in Milan a wound caused gangrene. Before consenting to an amputation he asked his surgeon, Aldo Cernezzi (who is still living) whether he could guarantee that the operation would be worthwhile, because he wanted so much to go back to Paris. Upon receiving an affirmative answer, he laughed and exclaimed: "These doctors! They are always so sure! I never felt sure when I started a work!" The operation was successful but his heart gave way.

The figure of a Dutch lady flits through the life of Rosso and one would like to think of her as his protectress. In his bibliographies there are many entries in Dutch, German and Italian by one Etha Fles, all unfindable in New York. They extend from 1901 to 1936 and include a book published in Freiburg i. B. in 1922, titled: *Medardo Rosso, der Mensch und der Künstler*. When and how did they meet? In the catalogue of the Venice "International" of 1895 we find nine prints by Etha Fles, a member of the Dutch Society of Etchers. In 1901 Rosso showed with Renoir, Sisley and Pissarro in Rotterdam, Utrecht, The Hague and Amsterdam, and in the same year Etha Fles wrote her first article on him. In *Bollettino d'Arte* of 1912 we find that the Ministero per la Pubblica Istruzione paid Rosso 6,000 lire for his *Veiled Lady* while accepting as a gift from Etha Fles four other waxes: *Jewish Boy (Bimbo Ebreo)* [fig. 4], *Portinaita, Little Girl Laughing* and *The Bookmaker* [fig. 2]. In a letter of 1928 to Ardengo Soffici, C. S. Chiofalo, a retired general, reminisces about Rosso and says: "I saw dear Medardo again when he came to install some of his sculptures [no date], generously donated to the city of Turin by a foreign lady." Who was Etha Fles? Some sources refer to her as "Miss"; others as "Mrs." Edmond Claris, in his *De l'Impressionisme en sculpture*, is the only one to reproduce a portrait of a *M. Fles*, so badly photographed that it is illegible. Was he the husband, the father, the brother of Etha? Now, one of Rosso's late heads, *Madame X*, is dated 1896 in the 1914 Biennale catalogue, and 1913 by Mino Borghi, Rosso's most careful historiographer, a discrepancy probably caused by Rosso's frequent recastings. Whatever its date the head, baffling and inscrutable at first, has a familiar air: the bony, high-bridged nose connects strongly with the forehead retracted to the temples while the small mouth and chin recede unobtrusively. It is a face we know through Vermeer's *Lady Playing a Lute* and the Vienna *Artist in His Studio* where the model raises her right eyebrow just like *Madame X* [fig. 6]. More advanced, more daring, more abstract than any other sculpture of its time, it may well be a concealed portrait of the beneficent Dutch lady who stood faithful guard over the artist's long decline and helped assure his immortality.

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IL GAZZETTINO

Luglio 1979

13

La figura e l'opera di Medardo Rosso alla Permanente di Milano

Con lui i sentimenti ebbero una forma

MILANO offre in questi giorni un'occasione che studiosi e appassionati d'arte non devono lasciarsi sfuggire. Nei saloni della Permanente (fino all'11 marzo) si tiene infatti un'interessante retrospettiva dedicata alla figura e all'opera di Medardo Rosso. E' la prima rassegna nel nostro paese dopo gli «omaggi» dedicati allo scultore dalla Quadriennale di Roma nel 1931, dalla Biennale di Venezia nel 1950 e dopo la personale allestita nel 1946 dalla galleria Santo Spirito di Milano; se ci trasferiamo all'estero dobbiamo ricordare le mostre newyorchesi alla «Peridot Gallery» (1959) e al «Museum of modern art» (1963). Ci troviamo dunque di fronte a una iniziativa di prim'ordine anche perché Luciano Caramel, che ha curato la mostra assieme a Paola Mola, ha svolto un'indagine storico-filologica quanto mai approfondita per analizzare le origini dell'opera dello scultore, per liberarla da non pochi luoghi comuni e imprecisioni. Certo è che il discorso rimane tuttora aperto, ma un notevole passo in avanti è stato fatto, si è usciti se non altro dalla consueta definizione luministico-impressionista al di là della quale pareva non vi fosse null'altro. Il bel catalogo costituisce poi un documento insostituibile, per le notizie, le informazioni e le precisazioni pittoriche — non poche sono le rettifiche — che contiene.

La mostra comprende

sedici bronzi, quattordici gessi, quindici cere, una terracotta, un dipinto a olio, quarantasei disegni (quasi tutti inediti), e sedici «pezzi di paragone», opere cioè che Medardo Rosso aveva fatto ricopiando sculture dell'antichità o rinascimentali e addirittura di Rodin per dimostrare quanto diverso fosse il suo discorso e, con una puntina di orgoglio, come fosse capace di fare «dell'altro». Sono esposte anche, a scopo di confronto e di verifica, per meglio valutare i rapporti intercorsi fra Medardo Rosso, artisti e intellettuali, numerosi documenti nonché le opere di Tranquillo Cremona, Daniele Ranzoni, Giuseppe Grandi, Auguste Rodin assieme a gigantografie di Picasso, Boccioni, e dello stesso Rodin.

E' insomma una panoramica che si dirama in più direzioni — non si dimentichi neppure il già citato catalogo che, oltre il saggio di Caramel e quello di Paola Mola, contiene una vibrante testimonianza dello scultore Mario Negri assieme a una messe di schede e riproduzioni, circa duecento — e dalla quale la figura di Medardo Rosso risulta veramente «a tutto tondo» (ha messo tra virgolette queste parole per un postumo ossequio al grande scultore, nemico dichiarato di ogni forma di monumentalità o di statuarità e quindi anche del «tutto tondo»). A partire infatti da un certo periodo, le opere di Medardo Rosso possono essere viste soltanto



MEDARDO ROSSO, LA PORTINAIA (CERA).

da un certo angolo visuale, pur senza essere dei bassorilievi; lo scultore riteneva questa una sua scoperta, «la scultura di non più "giraghi aturn"» come egli affermava, esprimendosi spesso con uno strano miscuglio di italiano, meneghino e francese. Ma perché non si trattava di bassorilievi? Perché Medardo Rosso non colloca nello spazio la sua scultura, non pone qualcosa nello spazio, bensì crea uno spazio nuovo con un oggetto che si fonde appunto nello spazio e che quasi viene a concretizzarlo esprimendo

ri luogo, di una componente espressionista ante litteram. Da qui una serie di opere ben lontane dall'accademismo del tempo, opere intrise di verità e di partecipazione umana, ritratti della realtà di tutti i giorni, scavi di caratteri, anche di deformazioni morali dovute ora alla prevaricazione, ora alla miseria ora al vizio. Medardo Rosso tuttavia non giudica mai, è sempre dalla parte di chi perde. Egli è nella vita, anche quando la trasferisce, la traduce in gesso, cera o bronzo, senza retorica, lontano da ogni accademismo, monumentalità o imposizione architettonica. La realtà è lo spazio, dunque, la luce e la forma che diventano spazio e che sono situazione esistenziale e stato d'animo, costituiscono la base della sua opera.

Nato a Torino il 21 giugno 1858, nel 1870 si trasferì con la famiglia a Milano e nell'82 entrò all'Accademia di Brera; neppure un anno dopo ne viene espulso per aver picchiato un compagno che non voleva firmare una petizione di protesta contro i metodi arretrati d'insegnamento. A questo periodo risalgono i suoi primi contatti con gli esponenti dell'ultima scapigliatura e così ebbe inizio un lungo periodo di bohème, di lavoro intenso e di numerosi viaggi; espone anche a Parigi dove nel 1889 si trasferì grazie all'aiuto di Felice Camerani, critico letterario e intellettuale militante nell'opposi-

zione repubblicana. Salvo qualche ritorno in Italia per soggiorni più o meno lunghi, Medardo Rosso resterà nella capitale francese, ove divenne amico fra l'altro di Zola e di Rodin. Morì il 31 marzo 1928 a Milano per le conseguenze di un banale incidente: si era ferito ad un piede con delle lastre fotografiche e la ferita si era infettata; da qui una serie di amputazioni e la morte.

Tra le opere esposte, appartenenti al periodo giovanile, si possono vedere «El locch», «Il bersagliere», «Il birichino», e «Gli innamorati sotto il lampione»; e poi «La ruffiana», e l'incisiva «Testa di vecchio». Scendendo nel tempo voglio ricordare l'«Amalato all'ospedale», la famosa «Rieuse», l'«Impression de boulevard», il «Bookmaker», «Madame X» ed «Ecce puer». Sono opere dalle quali appare chiaramente come la personalità di Medardo Rosso sia ben distinta da quella di Rodin; ripetendo ancora una volta il concetto, dirò che con Medardo Rosso ci troviamo di fronte ad un problema di spazio, di movimento e di scavo psicologico; alla ritualità della statua egli contrappone la vibrazione della forma che compenetra lo spazio, che solidifica l'impressione e che non è in alcun modo fatto pittorico o pittorista. Per Medardo Rosso l'impressione era la sensazione, il vedere, l'essere, l'esistere.

Luigi Lambertini

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L'ARTE

MARGARET SCOLARI BARR

MEDARDO ROSSO
AND HIS DUTCH PATRONESS ETHA FLES



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L'ARTE

RIVISTA DI STORIA DELL'ARTE

ADOLFO VENTURI, FONDATORE

MARGARET SCOLARI BARR

MEDARDO ROSSO
AND HIS DUTCH PATRONESS ETHA FLES

"L'ARTE"
MILANO

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MEDARDO ROSSO

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK



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MEDARDO ROSSO 1858-1928

MEDARDO ROSSO was born in Turin in 1858. After working briefly as a painter, he studied sculpture at the Brera Academy in Milan but revolted against its traditional training and was expelled in 1883. The following year he first visited Paris where, after 1889, he was to spend most of his creative life. Returning to Italy in 1908, he died in Milan in 1928. Long after Rosso's productive period had passed, Umberto Boccioni in the *Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture* (1912) recognized that his work was "revolutionary and most modern, most profound," that he was the "only modern sculptor who has attempted to widen the scope of sculpture as well as the ties that bind it to the surrounding atmosphere" and that he points toward the "liberation of space."

Rosso shared with the Impressionists a concern for a transient effect of light and movement, with Rodin a new and vital approach to sculpture, and with the Symbolists an evocative quality of form. Today, after a long period of relative obscurity, his art is being re-evaluated. We respond anew to his warm treatment of subject and admire the vigor and freedom with which he handled sculptural form, the delicacy and subtlety of the play of light on his almost transparent wax surfaces. His simplification of shapes to essentials anticipates Brancusi. The dematerialization and fluidity of his form which link it to the surrounding atmosphere make Rosso's sculpture most relevant to our sensibility today.

P.S.

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October 2 through November 23, 1963

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- 8 *The Golden Age*. (1886). Wax over plaster, 17 $\frac{5}{8}$ " high. The Joseph H. Hirshhorn Collection, New York
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- 20 *Conversation in the Garden*. (1893). Bronze, 12 $\frac{5}{8}$ " high x 20 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 16 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome
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- 24 *Madame X*. (1896). Wax over plaster, 12" high. Museo d'Arte Moderna-Ca'Pesaro, Venice
- 25 *Madame Noblet*. (1897). Bronze, 20 $\frac{1}{8}$ " high. Civica Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Milan
- 26 *Head of a Young Woman*. (1901?). Wax over plaster, 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ " high. Peridot Gallery, New York
- 27 *Ecce puer*. (1906-7). Wax over plaster, 16 $\frac{1}{4}$ " high. The Joseph H. Hirshhorn Collection, New York
- 28 *Ecce puer*. (1906-7). Bronze, 18 $\frac{5}{8}$ " high. Collection Piero Biffi, Milan

DRAWINGS

- 29 *At the Café La Roche*. (1893). Pen and ink and wash, 7 $\frac{7}{8}$ " x 5" (sight). Collection Gianni Mattioli, Milan
- 30 *The Woods*. (1893). Pencil, 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Collection Gianni Mattioli, Milan
- 31 *Two Figures*. (1893). Charcoal, 4 $\frac{7}{8}$ " x 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (sight). Collection Gianni Mattioli, Milan
- 32 *Bar in London*. (1906). Pencil, 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 3 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (sight). Peridot Gallery, New York
- 33 *Trafalgar Square*. (1906). Pencil, 4 $\frac{1}{8}$ " x 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (sight). Collection Mr. and Mrs. Louis Pollack, New York

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Ecce puer. (1906-7). Wax over plaster, 16¼" high. The Joseph H. Hirshhorn Collection, New York. Photograph by Lee Boltin

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Museum of Modern Art is honored by the sponsorship of this exhibition by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Italy and the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in New York. Our special thanks are extended to Dr. Lucia Pallavicini, Assistant Director of the Istituto. On behalf of the Trustees of The Museum of Modern Art, I also want to express gratitude to Messrs. Joseph H. Hirshhorn and Abram Lerner of the Joseph H. Hirshhorn Foundation, and to Louis Pollack of the Peridot Gallery, as well as to the collectors and museums in this country and abroad who have generously made their works available. This exhibition could never have been prepared without the help of scholars and museum directors in Italy, particularly that of Dr. Palma Buccarelli, Dr. Luciano Caramel, and Professor Guido Perocco.

My greatest debt is to Margaret Scolari Barr, author of the monograph on Medardo Rosso which the Museum is publishing concurrently, for her unflagging help in the preparation of this exhibition.

Peter Selz, *Director of the Exhibition*

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- 24 *Madame X*. (1896). Wax over plaster, 12" high. Museo d'Arte Moderna—Ca'Pesaro, Venice
- 25 *Madame Noblet*. (1897). Bronze, 20 $\frac{1}{8}$ " high. Civica Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Milan
- 26 *Head of a Young Woman*. (1901?). Wax over plaster, 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ " high. Peridot Gallery, New York
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- 29 *At the Café La Roche*. (1893). Pen and ink and wash, 7 $\frac{7}{8}$ " x 5" (sight). Collection Gianni Mattioli, Milan
- 30 *The Woods*. (1893). Pencil, 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Collection Gianni Mattioli, Milan
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- 32 *Bar in London*. (1906). Pencil, 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 3 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (sight). Peridot Gallery, New York
- 33 *Trafalgar Square*. (1906). Pencil, 4 $\frac{1}{8}$ " x 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (sight). Collection Mr. and Mrs. Louis Pollack, New York

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Ecce puer. (1906-7). Wax over plaster, 16¼" high. The Joseph H. Hirshhorn Collection, New York. Photograph by Lee Boltin

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

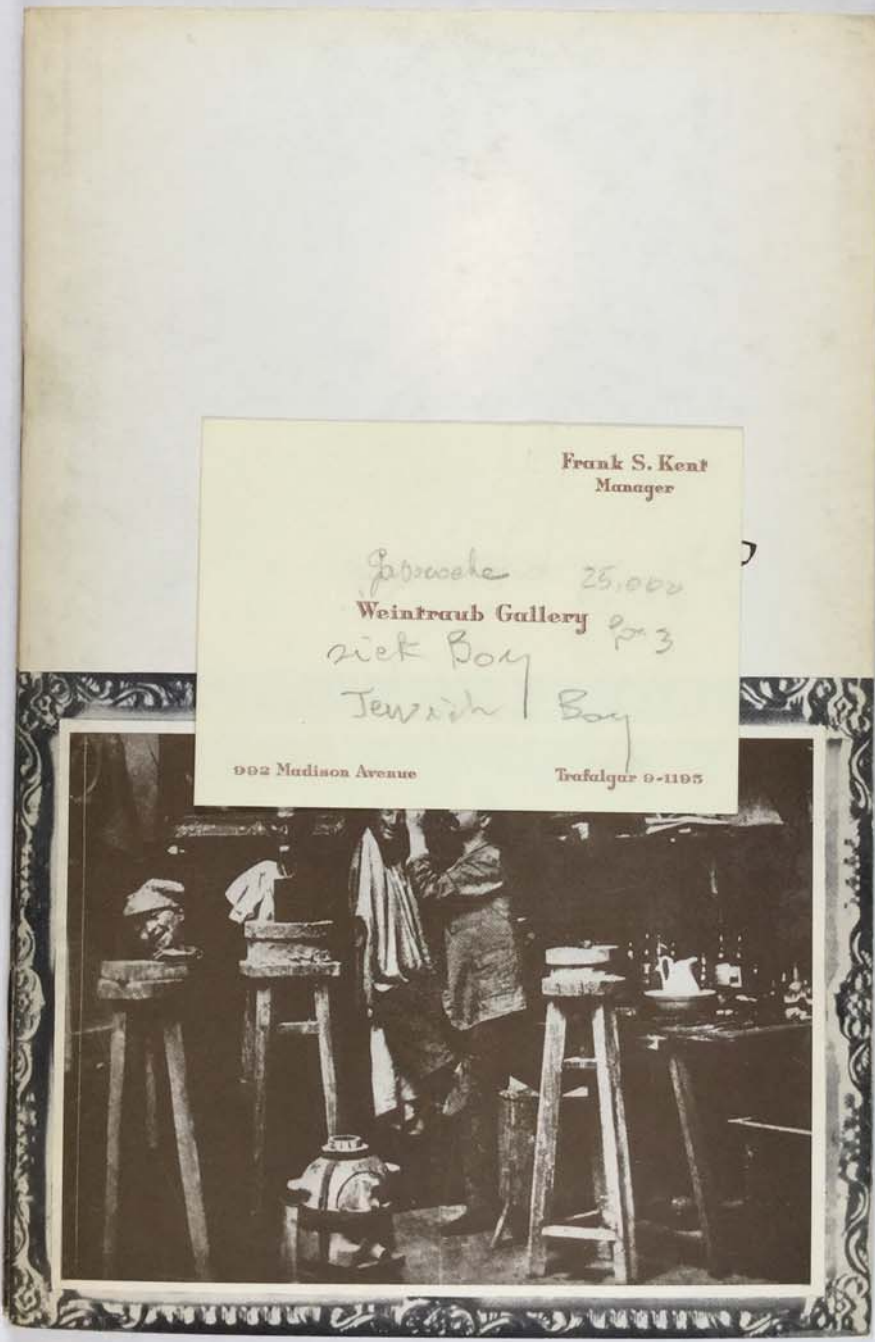
The Museum of Modern Art is honored by the sponsorship of this exhibition by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Italy and the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in New York. Our special thanks are extended to Dr. Lucia Pallavicini, Assistant Director of the Istituto. On behalf of the Trustees of The Museum of Modern Art, I also want to express gratitude to Messrs. Joseph H. Hirshhorn and Abram Lerner of the Joseph H. Hirshhorn Foundation, and to Louis Pollack of the Peridot Gallery, as well as to the collectors and museums in this country and abroad who have generously made their works available. This exhibition could never have been prepared without the help of scholars and museum directors in Italy, particularly that of Dr. Palma Buccarelli, Dr. Luciano Caramel, and Professor Guido Perocco.

My greatest debt is to Margaret Scolari Barr, author of the monograph on Medardo Rosso which the Museum is publishing concurrently, for her unflagging help in the preparation of this exhibition.

Peter Selz, *Director of the Exhibition*

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Manager

25.000
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ROSSO



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medardo Rosso

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the first exhibition in america of sculpture by

medardo

ROSSO

1858-1928

introduction by giorgio nicodemi

december 15, 1958 to january 16, 1959

peridot gallery

820 madison avenue new york

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INTRODUCTION

An Italian artist, Medardo Rosso, *born in turin on may 12, 1858; died in milan on march 31, 1928*, imparted to the plastic mass full equality with reality. With the emotions it can produce by means of light, he made it possible for sculpture to follow the precepts of impressionism.

The formative stages of Medardo Rosso occurred in milan at a time when a theory of unity among all arts was being evolved. This theory maintained that poetry could also be painting, sculpture, and music simultaneously; that painting was poetry, music, and sculpture; and that sculpture also possessed the qualities of painting. The fusion of the intellectual features ascribed to the figurative arts on the one hand, and the ideal emotions inherent in music on the other, undoubtedly carried Daniele Ranzoni, and particularly Tranquillo Cremona, to results of great evocative force in portraits and in compositions where the ecstasies of adolescent grace and of the female figure are expressed in

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visual sketches of exquisite tones. Giuseppe Grandi expressed with tormented features in marble and bronze a profound impressionist effect. Medardo Rosso immediately transported the achievements of painters and sculptors to a new level in portrayals of incidents in common life. This he presented without hesitation to the Paris Salon in 1886. Returning to Milan he elaborated on his impressionism and employed it in some portraits appearing on funeral monuments. The works exhibited by him at the 1889 international exposition in Paris revealed this artist to the connoisseurs and artists of France. Georges Clemenceau and Emile Zola were among the first purchasers of his works. The great collector Henri Rouart commissioned Rosso to do his portrait. Rodin offered him a man's torso in bronze in exchange for the RIEUSE. The successive shows of 1893, 1896 London, 1900 universal exposition, Paris, 1901 Amsterdam, 1904 Salon d'Automne, Paris, 1905 Vienna, 1906 and 1907 London, not only marked the recognition of his disquieting originality on the part of all European critics but also allowed the artist to assert his ever increasing detachment from every contemporary sculptor, as well as to affirm the value of the plastic effects attained by him.

When Rosso began to sculpt it was still believed in Italy that plastic forms might have a new function in seeking the relationship among spatial planes converging in plastic masses in order for light to give life to the figures and things represented. Renowned critics in France denied this possibility, which was also proudly discounted by artists ranging from Rodin to Bourdelle and Despiau. It was for Medardo Rosso to show that if a plastic mass were worked in such a manner as to collect the light from a given viewing position, it would be possible to render an equivalence to life capable of arousing the same emotions that are inspired by live figures. The means by which he succeeded in obtaining these effects in some of his works were immediately studied and interpreted. Rodin himself made use of this technique in the particular sculpture which shows Balzac in a sober and forceful mood, and which brought him glory. Medardo Rosso's accomplishment of revolutionary import was naturally compared with that of the impressionists. The first Italian show of French impressionists, which was held in Florence in 1910, combined a group of Rosso's sculptures, including LA PORTINAIA, CARNE ALTRUI, ETÀ D'ORO, RITRATTO DEL SIGNOR ROUART, GRANDE RIEUSE, BIMBO EBREO, BIMBA RIDENTE, YVETTE GUILBERT, BOOKMAKER, and UOMO CHE LEGGE IL GIORNALE, with works by Cezanne, Gauguin, Matisse, Monet, Pissarro, Renoir, Toulouse-Lautrec, Van Gogh, and Degas. Subsequent shows in Venice, Rome, and major European cities, therefore, always brought Rosso near the artists with whom he had the

most in common. When, in 1912, Umberto Boccioni issued the manifesto of futurist sculpture, he did not fail to pay homage to the old master who had taught him the bold perspectives to be imparted to forms if they were to convey the feeling of motion: "... to the genius of Medardo Rosso, the only great modern sculptor who attempted to enlarge the horizon of sculpture by rendering through the plastic element the influences of environment and the invisible spatial bonds that join it to the subject. . . ."

The limited series of works that Medardo Rosso executed in wax and bronze — the two materials which could best hold the immediate sense of direct touch with which the artist molded the forms — and a meager group of drawings were sufficient to enrich modern art with fundamental experiences *the number of known original sculptures is placed at 39, whereas the drawings probably number no more than a hundred*. After having perceived the wondrous breath of life which renders to each of his sculptures a sense of overwhelming truth — once the correct viewing position is discovered or the exact light — no one can forget the sense of revelation of a universal moment which has entered his existence. The drawings, reduced to essential notations of images seen by the sculptor, affirm their memorable quality with an interplay of lights and shadows which cause the forms of persons and things represented to vibrate in space.

The artist's winning personality deserves more than mere mention. A book which the great Italian painter Ardengo Soffici dedicated to him in 1929 describes Medardo Rosso as a man of rare intellect and great love for everything living around him. His feeling for light can indeed be traced to his admiration for everything he saw or felt to be endowed with energy or related to events of existence. This original artistic productivity did not last. A fall he suffered in Vienna about 1900 deprived him of the faculty of applying himself to new themes, and from then on he limited himself to restudying his finished work. Nevertheless, he felt the importance of what he had been able to attain, and as his thoughts grew clearer, he succeeded in becoming a teacher for the artists of the new generation who had recognized his valor and power.

Giorgio Nicodemi
October 1959

translated from the Italian

The distinguished Italian art historian Giorgio Nicodemi, former director of the Museums of the City of Milan, was an intimate friend of Medardo Rosso.

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CATALOG

sculpture

- 1 LO SCACCINO or SE LA FUSS GRAPA
the sacristan or if only it were grapa
1882 painted plaster h. 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
- 2 LA PORTINAIA *the concierge*
the museum of modern art, new york,
mrs. wendell t. bush fund
- 3 L'ETÀ D'ORO *the golden age*
1886 wax h. 17"
- 4 RIEUSE *smiling woman*
1890 bronze h. 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
- 5 MASK OF SMILING WOMAN
1890 bronze h. 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
- 6 BIMBA RIDENTE *smiling girl*
1890 wax h. 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
- 7 BIMBO AL SOLE *boy in the sun*
1892 bronze h. 13 $\frac{1}{4}$ "
- 8 BIMBO EBREO *jewish boy*
1892 wax h. 9"
f. m. hall collection,
university of nebraska
- 9 BOOKMAKER
1894 wax h. 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
the museum of modern art, new york
acquired through the lillie p. bliss bequest
- 10 BIMBO MALATO *sick boy*
1895 wax h. 10"
- 11 HEAD OF A YOUNG WOMAN
1897 wax h. 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
- 12 ECCE PUER
1906 wax h. 17"

drawings

- 13 BAR IN LONDON
1906 pencil 5 x 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ "
- 14 PARK WITH FOUNTAIN
1906 pencil 4 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 6 $\frac{7}{8}$ "

grateful acknowledgment is extended to the museum of modern art, new york, and the university of nebraska art galleries for their loans to the exhibition.

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1 LO SCACCINO or SE LA FUSS GRAPA



2 LA PORTINAIA

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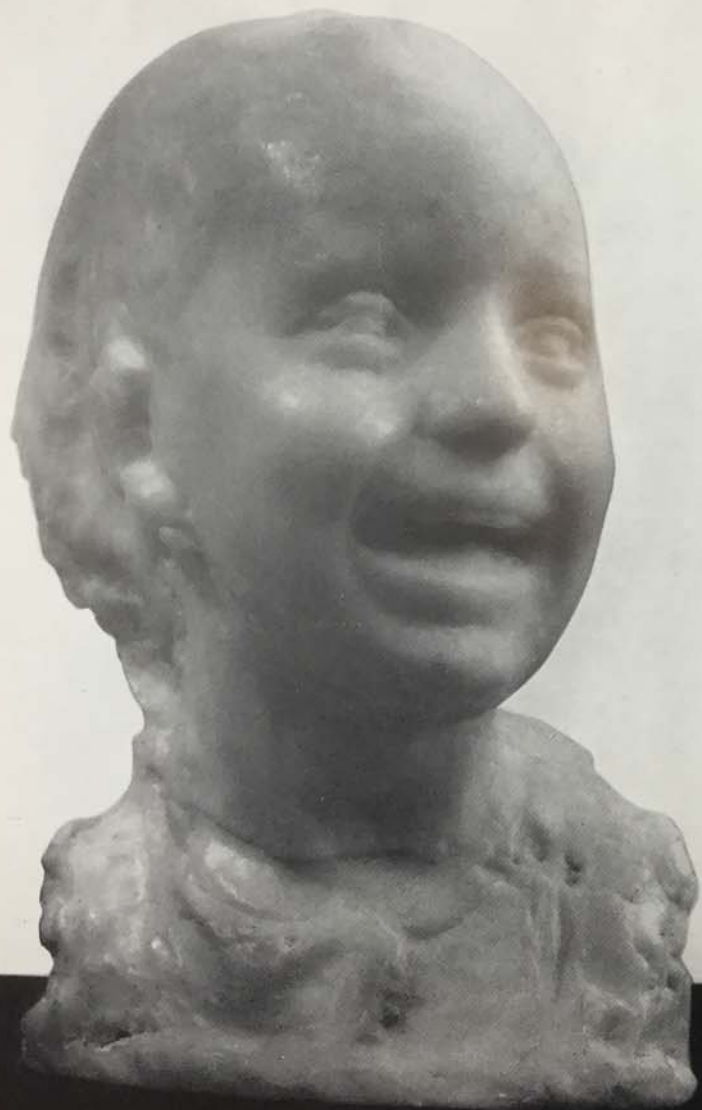
4 RIEUSE



5 MASK OF SMILING WOMAN

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6 BIMBA RIDENTE



7 BIMBO AL SOLE

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8 BIMBO EBREO



9 BOOKMAKER

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10 BIMBO MALATO



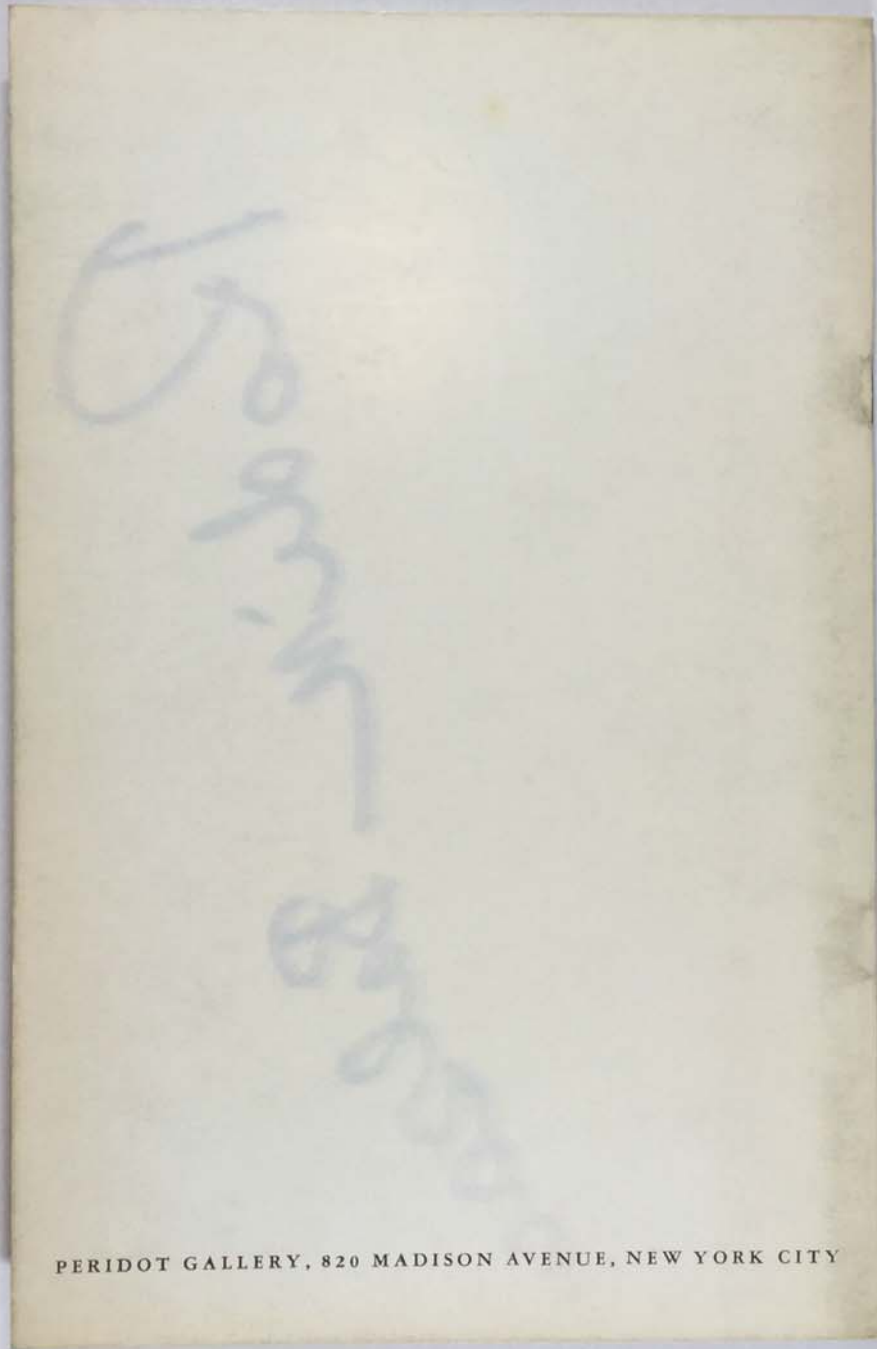
11 HEAD OF A YOUNG WOMAN

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PERIDOT GALLERY, 820 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY

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CHARLES FEGDAL

ATELIERS d'ARTISTES

TRENTE-CINQ PORTRAITS D'ARTISTES
QUATRE-VINGTS REPRODUCTIONS D'ŒUVRES

LIBRAIRIE STOCK
DELAMAIN, BOUTELLEAU ET C^{ie}
Libraires-Éditeurs

PARIS

241. from New York Library 1973

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XXXV

MÉDARDO ROSSO

L m'est arrivé très souvent, de prononcer le nom de Rosso devant des amateurs d'art, devant des peintres, voire devant des sculpteurs. A quelques rares exceptions près, chacun, d'un ton différent, étonné ou curieux, demandait :

— Rosso ?... Qui est-ce ?

— C'est un statuaire. Vous savez bien, ce grand artiste qui..., insinuais-je chaque fois.

Chaque fois presque, les uns et les autres ajoutaient :

— Ah ! oui... Mais... qu'a-t-il donc fait ?

Alors, devant leurs mines ébahies, il suffisait de lancer quelques mots pour exciter l'intérêt ou susciter les méfiances.

— Rosso... Rosso est un maître... C'est un chef d'école... C'est un inventeur de technique nouvelle... C'est un initiateur... Sans Rosso, peut-être l'œuvre de Rodin eût perdu en expression et en puissance... Sans Rosso, Rodin n'eût pas été Rodin.

Un jour, j'ai été rendre visite à Médardo Rosso, à son atelier du boulevard des Batignolles.

J'y éprouvai d'abord de l'enthousiasme, m'exaltant à écouter l'artiste qui parle de *ce qu'il a créé*, qui s'appesantit sur sa conception d'art sculptural *jamais réalisée avant lui*. J'y éprouvai ensuite,

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peu à peu, une sorte de malaise insinuant, de souffrance latente à écouter Rosso : il glissait, phrase par phrase, du lyrisme à l'amertume. Hélas ! sans doute Rosso doit avoir raison. Mais connaît-on jamais les exacts pourquoi d'une gloire subite, bientôt universelle ? Saura-t-on pourquoi Rodin est regardé à l'égal des plus purs génies, alors que Rosso — qui fût « l'éclaireur » de Rodin — est demeuré, en France, dans une obscurité d'où la critique elle-même n'a pu le tirer autant qu'elle l'eût voulu ?

Les grands écrivains, comme les grands artistes, ont le droit de chercher leur inspiration là où ils le jugent nécessaire ; ils ont un tel pouvoir d'assimilation à leur usage, de transposition et de transfiguration quasi merveilleuse, presque divine, que l'idée première s'affaiblit, s'éloigne et quelquefois s'oublie au bénéfice de la présentation nouvelle de cette idée.

En art, j'imagine, ainsi qu'en littérature, le mot cruel de Voltaire reste éternellement vrai dans son esprit : *en matière d'invention, il ne suffit pas de voler, — il faut assassiner !*

Pour apercevoir ce que Rosso apporta de nouveau à la statuaire il faut examiner quelles sont les influences — voulues ou inconscientes — subies par la sculpture contemporaine.

Écartons la conception du moulage. Sculpter une tête, un membre, un corps humain, avec tous ses détails, aussi précis et aussi vrais que ceux rendus par un moulage, ce n'est pas sculpter. — ou plutôt c'est sculpter comme ce serait peindre que présenter une sorte de photographie en couleurs.

En art, la vérité n'est pas extérieure, elle est interne. La vérité est dans l'émotion ressentie par l'artiste. Lorsque cette émotion est traduite, interprétée, elle doit se communiquer au spectateur presque dans la même mesure, le même ordre, le même poids. Aussi peut-on avancer que le but suprême de l'art est de tendre à une communion

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sensuelle et mentale entre les créateurs et ceux qui jouissent des créations.

La sculpture, comme tous les autres arts, ne peut et ne doit être qu'une transposition. Mais, si la peinture dispose de moyens variés pour exprimer la dominante d'un « sujet » — qu'il s'agisse de paysages ou de figures — la sculpture, plus pauvre, à son service, n'a que la création d'ombres et de lumières réparties selon les besoins de l'ambiance, selon la destination de l'œuvre. Cette pauvreté, en fait, est plus apparente que réelle : à travers les âges elle a été vaincue par de grands maîtres ; sa pauvreté est devenue de la puissance, de la richesse, de la pérennité.

Comment créer l'atmosphère, comment s'adapter à l'ambiance, comment indiquer un « milieu » ; voilà les préoccupations plus ou moins ressenties par les maîtres sculpteurs de tous les temps.

La sculpture égyptienne a donné aux masses une concision poussée à l'extrême, elle s'est contentée de suggérer les volumes. La sculpture grecque, s'affranchissant du conventionnel, alla vers la réalité vivante, elle donna aux lignes les légères déformations nécessitées par un idéal d'harmonie. La sculpture gothique s'adapte aux ensembles architecturaux, elle sait confondre ses « lumières » avec la vaste lumière des ensembles ; pour cela elle déforme, en deça ou au delà de la réalité, elle exagère les rapports des diverses proportions.

La sculpture de la Renaissance, négligeant la rude leçon de l'école bourguignonne avec Claus Sluter, veut rapprocher le langage de la pierre de celui des formes exactement humaines, de celui des chairs mêmes et des étoffes ; elle donne au modelé toute sa saveur un peu mièvre, — et c'est l'italianisme.

Outre ces diverses et magnifiques influences de compréhensions sculpturales, regardez les œuvres exposées dans nos Salons annuels. Vous reconnaîtrez les influences de la sculpture byzantine au hiéra-

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tisme compliqué, celles de la sculpture extrême orientale aux masses symétriquement décroissantes, vous y trouverez les influences personnelles, — et trop rares, hélas — d'un Rude, d'un Barye, d'un Carpeaux. Mais la sculpture contemporaine se serait attardée à l'italianisme si deux novateurs de génie n'étaient venus : Médardo Rosso et Auguste Rodin.

Un jour, à Milan, alors qu'il discutait d'art avec des amis, quel-qu'un rapporta à Rosso la phrase de Baudelaire : *la sculpture est un art inférieur condamné à ne jamais pouvoir égaler la peinture et à demeurer au rang des simples arts décoratifs, dans son impuissance à produire l'ambiance atmosphérique, le mouvement, la lumière et la vie des figures.* M. Camille de Sainte-Croix rapporta, dans le *Mercur de France*, la réponse que fit alors Rosso : « La sculpture est non seulement égale à la peinture, affirmait-il, mais elle a toute chance de la surpasser par les moyens d'exécution dont elle dispose. Privée de couleurs ? Allons donc ! Est-ce qu'elle ne possède pas en blanc et en noir tout ce qu'il faut pour réaliser le mouvement, les jeux d'ombre et de lumière ? Est-ce qu'elle ne s'attaque pas à la lumière déformable dans laquelle on peut à volonté produire des bosses et des enfoncements, et, par conséquent, obtenir non plus une illusion de perspective avec un jeu de nuances sur une surface plane, mais bien la perspective elle-même avec des reculs, avec des plans, avec des effets naturels de relief ou de creux ? Le secret de l'ambiance atmosphérique, de la palpitation vitale est là... »

Ces vérités relatives sont aujourd'hui des redites ; elles étaient neuves, cependant, aux environs de 1880. Et c'est à cette époque que Rosso commença de travailler dans le sens qu'il venait de trouver.

Il exposa à Milan, à Venise et à Vienne, le *Gavroche*, le *Pochard*, l'*Entremetteuse*. Sa facture fut une surprise pour les amateurs, la critique et les artistes. Mais, tout de suite, on se trouva sensible à l'envelop-

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MEDARDO Rosso
La femme à la voilette (1893-94)
(Collection Noblet)

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pement de ses figures, au reflet intense de vie qu'elles offraient, à la vérité d'expression, à l'impression de lumière exactement transcrite.

Tout, dit Rosso, n'a qu'un jour et ne peut-être vu que sous un jour ; on ne peut pas tourner autour.

Les bosses et les creux ont été créés, à l'atelier, sous un certain jour ; il faut voir l'œuvre sous un jour identique ; il faut la voir, comme un tableau, *dans son jour*. On ne tourne pas autour d'un tableau. Rosso est une sorte de peintre.

« Tant les figures de Rosso — a écrit Mme Aurel — sont dans l'ambiance de l'air, tant la couleur y est à la fois intime et mordue, violente et pénétrante, sans les encrassements qu'a le plus clair pin-ceau, tant elle est subtile et passe dans l'entour, que j'arrive à ce paradoxe, devant cette *Conciergé en omnibus* : on ne peut peindre qu'en sculpture avec tant d'idéalité terrienne. »

Relisez la critique du Salon d'Automne de 1906 ; vous y trouverez ces lignes, de Louis Vauxcelles : « l'œuvre de Rosso a été conçue sous un éclairage particulier *et voulu*, il faut, pour la comprendre, la voir du même point de vue et ne pas se placer au hasard. Baudelaire a écrit qu'un tableau n'est que *ce qu'il veut* ; il n'y a pas moyen de le regarder autrement que dans son jour... Un buste ou un masque de Rosso n'est que *ce qu'il veut*. »

Relisez la phrase divinatrice que Balzac, dans *Le Chef-d'Œuvre inconnu*, met aux lèvres du vieux peintre Frenhofer. Vous y trouverez l'intuition divinatrice des buts poursuivis plus tard par l'école impressionniste. « Le corps humain ne finit pas par des lignes. En cela les sculpteurs peuvent mieux approcher la vérité que nous autres peintres : la nature comporte une suite de rondeurs qui s'enveloppent les unes les autres. Il n'y a pas de lignes dans la nature où tout est plein ; c'est en modelant qu'on dessine, c'est-à-dire qu'on détache les choses du milieu où elles sont ; la distribution du jour donne seule l'apparence

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du corps. J'ai répandu sur les contours un nuage de demi-teintes blondes et chaudes qui fait qu'on ne saurait précisément poser le doigt sur la place où les contours se rencontrent avec les fonds. »

Enfin, Balzac écrit cette dernière phrase : « ... De près ce travail semble cotonneux et sans précision, mais à deux pas tout se raffermi, s'arrête et se détache ; le corps tourne, on sent l'air circuler tout autour. » C'est bien là l'aspect donné par une œuvre de Rosso ; et Rosso peut bien être nommé impressionniste, comme le sont ceux du même art, l'art de la lumière vibrante et de la vie sous le soleil, les Claude Monet, les Degas, les Manet, les Renoir.

Comme eux, Médardo Rosso a apporté du nouveau dans son art ; il a exprimé, comme eux et avec eux, les sensibilités, les lyrismes d'une époque ; il s'est sans doute trompé en voulant adapter les buts et les moyens de la peinture à ceux de la sculpture, — il n'en demeure pas moins que Rosso, avant le *Balzac* de Rodin (1898), avait donné — relevant de la même esthétique — l'*Enfant au soleil*, le *Malade à l'Hôpital* et le *Portrait de Rouart*.

* * *

Rosso nous dit lui-même que Rodin et lui travaillèrent chez Montaignac. Il est à penser que les théories et les œuvres déjà réalisées de Rosso furent, pour Rodin, l'étincelle qui allume et fait arder un feu qu'on n'arrête plus.

En 1896, Rodin et Rosso se trouvent à Londres. Rodin propose à Rosso un échange : Rodin donne le *Torse*, Rosso donne la *Rieuse*.

— J'aime les comparaisons, dit Rodin.

— Soit, réplique Rosso, je les aime aussi.

Le *Torse*, sculpté par Rodin dans sa première manière, est du temps où Rodin faisait encore du Michel-Ange. Mais Rodin ne demeura pas l'esclave de la « découverte » de Rosso, il fit son bien de la lumière

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nouvelle, comme il avait assoupli à ses besoins les enseignements des égyptiens et des gothiques, ceux, plus proches, de la Renaissance italienne, et peut-être ceux de l'école bourguignonne.

Rosso a toujours fait du Rosso. Rodin a fait du Rosso, mais il a fait du Rodin ; il a été plus loin que son initiateur ; il a été le Michel-Ange d'un autre Verrochio.

Rosso voulait qu'on ne pût tourner autour d'une œuvre sculptée, la lumière y étant immobile ; Rodin voulut garder la lumière tout en permettant qu'on tournât autour de ses figures, — la difficulté fut donner en plus à Rodin une volonté de vaincre, une raison nouvelle d'être victorieux de la matière.

* * *

Parcourons, à travers les années, l'œuvre de Rosso. En 1882, il expose à la galerie Vercesi, à Milan, des bronzes exécutés selon ses idées de lumière : *Un Gavroche, La Chair à autrui, Etude de femme, La Concierge, La Maquerelle, L'Age d'or, Le Chanteur.*

Cette même année il montre encore, à Rome et à Vienne, les œuvres suivantes : *Tirailleur italien, La Servante rieuse, Vieille Femme campée au soleil, Un Ivrogne, Mère et Enfant dormant, Intérieur d'omnibus, Une Juive, Impression de femme sous un parapluie.*

Et, enfin, cette même année, il expose à Paris en même temps que Toulouse-Lautrec et que Carrière. Cette exposition avec Carrière est d'importance, non seulement parce que, plus tard, la critique rapprochera les analogies du peintre Carrière avec le sculpteur Rodin, mais parce que les œuvres de Rosso, en 1882, et celles de Carrière, apparaurent alors avec toute leur évidente parenté.

Ce que Camille Mauclair devait écrire de Carrière et de Rodin est d'une justesse qui, déjà, en 1882, aurait pu s'appliquer à Rosso-Carrière. Camille Mauclair écrit, en effet, ceci : « ... Les figures de Car-

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rière baignées d'ombre sont analogues aux statues de Rodin, tandis que celles-ci, baignées d'une moite lumière, semblent des Carrière. Le peintre devient massif, puissant, le sculpteur devient vaporeux : Rodin recherche les suavités des pénombres du Corrège, et Carrière désire que ses figures aient la puissance de relief du bronze. Le peintre sacrifie les couleurs à l'étude unique des valeurs et, par le blanc et le noir, revient à la sculpture. Rien de plus curieux que cette union de deux grands artistes... »

Remplacez ici le nom de Rodin par celui de Rosso, et vous aurez exactement ce qu'il eût été essentiel d'écrire dès l'année 1882.

Rosso, ensuite, expose à Londres, de nouveau à Venise, puis le voici, en 1889, à l'Exposition Universelle de Paris, avec : *La Rieuse*, *L'Enfant juif*, *L'Enfant malade*, *Impression d'enfant au soleil*, *Le malade à l'hôpital*, *Portrait de M. Henri Rouart*. Cette même année, il voit ériger à Milan ses deux monuments : le *Monument à Filippo Lippi* et le *Monument à Brusco Omnis*.

En 1893, il expose à Paris : *La Femme sortant de l'église*, *Un Sportman*, *L'Enfant au sein*, *La Cantatrice*, *Femme à la voilette*, *Portrait de Mme Noblet*, *Impression de la Place Clichy*, *Conversation en plein air*. Et, en 1896, le voici à Londres exposant avec Burne-Jones et Rossetti.

1898 est l'année où Rodin expose, au Salon de la Nationale, la statue de Balzac. Issue des conceptions de Rosso, issue très vraisemblablement de l'influence de Rosso, la statue de Balzac fait naître les cris, les rires, les fureurs, elle fait naître aussi, pour Rodin, les admirateurs, les défenseurs, — c'est le commencement d'un triomphe.

A l'Exposition Universelle de 1900, Rosso expose cinq œuvres ; puis il va à Amsterdam, Utrecht, Rotterdam, et la Haye, où il expose, sculpteur impressionniste, avec les maîtres impressionnistes de la peinture : Monet, Renoir, Pissaro, Sisley.

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En 1904 et 1905, le voici à Paris, au Salon d'Automne. Puis, les galeries et les musées de l'étranger lui offrent leurs salles : Leipzig, Dresde, Berlin, Krefeld, Vienne, Londres, Madrid, etc...

A l'étranger, les musées et les galeries de collectionneurs comptent presque partout une ou plusieurs œuvres de Médardo Rosso : c'est la collection Fles en Hollande, la célèbre collection Egyedi à Budapest, les collections Aganor et du comte Turati en Italie ; ce sont les musées de Leipzig, Hagen et Dresde en Allemagne, le musée de Kensington en Angleterre.

A Paris, outre *La Rieuse* qui se trouve au Musée Rodin, Médardo Rosso est représenté au Musée du Luxembourg, par *l'Enfant*, et au Musée du Petit Palais (1) ; ses œuvres sont parmi les collections Tedesco, Henri Rouart, Chéramy, Faure-Noblet, Cahen, Groult, dans d'autres encore.

Et toutes ces œuvres éparses, discutées ou appréciées, critiquées ou admirées, suffisent à notre conclusion.

Rodin est un génie, mais Rosso est aussi un génie : il a la gloire d'avoir précédé Rodin dans ce qu'on pourrait appeler la sculpture de la lumière et de l'air.

Souvent il m'est apparu que Rosso et Rodin représentaient de grosses erreurs — magnifiques erreurs — de la statuaire moderne. Rodin a donné au « morceau » et à la « grande esquisse » une importance trop exclusive, mais il les a traités avec une fougue, une hardiesse et une puissance de conception uniques jusqu'à lui ; ce faisant, il a donné aux sculpteurs ses splendides et profondes leçons qui, en même temps, il faut le dire, qu'elles imprimaient à la statuaire un mouvement

(1) Ces œuvres, l'une au Musée du Luxembourg, et l'autre au Petit-Palais, y sont malheureusement peu accessibles à la vue, car la première a été retirée des galeries d'exposition, la seconde a été déplacée, d'une bonne à une mauvaise lumière, d'un endroit favorable à un endroit sacrifié.

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formidable et sans égal, ont été pour beaucoup d'artistes des raisons d'errer et de se perdre.

Rosso, lui, a voulu faire parler à la pierre un langage qui n'était pas celui de la pierre, il a voulu *peindre* avec le ciseau qui *n'est destiné qu'à sculpter*; mais il l'a fait avec une sensibilité si personnelle, si humaine et si aiguë que, dans son domaine, Rosso est, lui aussi, unique.

Rosso, comme Rodin — *et avant Rodin* — a cherché à situer la matière dans l'espace : seulement, chacun d'eux a proportionné cet espace à sa propre mesure.

Rodin est né de Rosso, mais Rosso a engendré un titan.

A côté du nom de Rodin, l'histoire de l'art devra mettre toujours le nom de son précurseur : le nom de Médardo Rosso.

Il faut laisser à Rodin sa couronne de gloire. Il convient de rendre justice à Rosso.

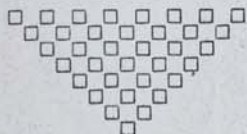
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