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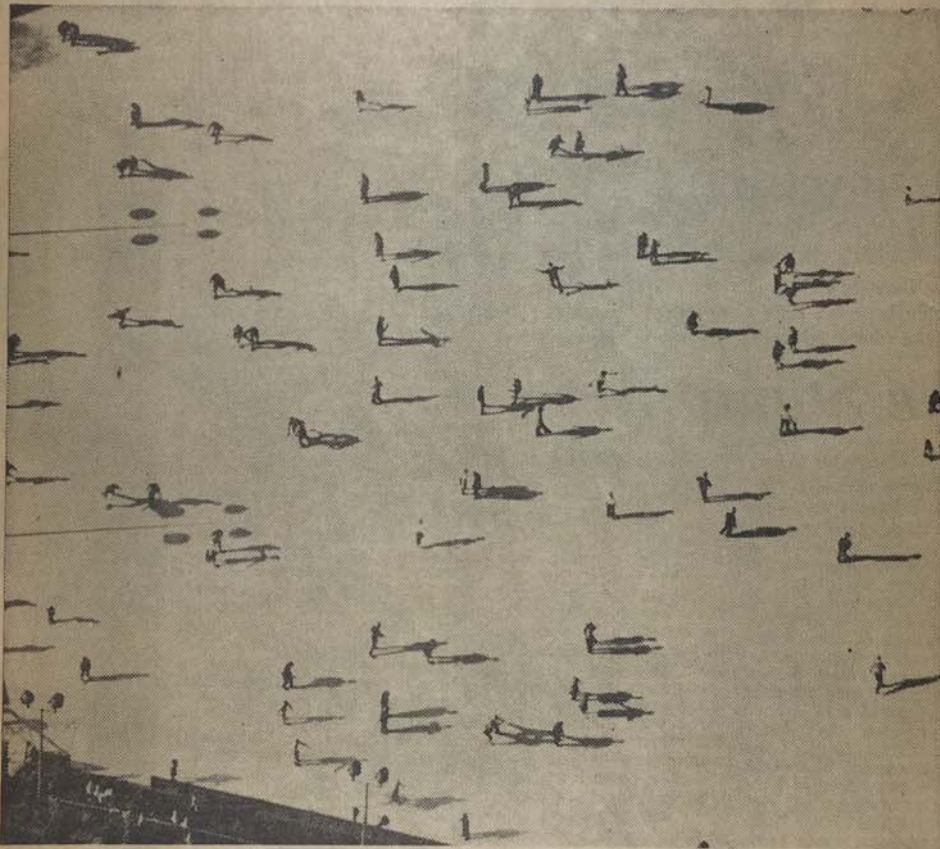
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MEDARDO ROSSO AND HIS DUTCH  
PATRONESS ETHA FLES

*'I Have a Little Shadow...'*



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**R**OBERT LOUIS STEVENSON, undoubtedly, had the last word on the subject in his poem, "My Shadow" ("I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me, And what can be the use of him is more than I can see ..."). We consider it likely that the New York Herald Tribune's Ira Rosenberg has the last picture on the subject with this rich and fascinating study of skaters in the Wollman Memorial Rink in Central Park. He photographed them yesterday from a helicopter, their shadows sharp against the white ice. For an interesting effect, turn this page on its side, going counter-clockwise, and look at the skaters—sporting new shadow personalities.

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MEDARDO ROSSO AND HIS DUTCH  
PATRONESS ETHA FLES

MARGARET SCOLARI BARR

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space limitations  
only a few li  
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retained in the  
book

THE NEW YORK TIMES,



The New York Times (by William C. Eckenberg)

**PROTEST AT PIER 84:** Striking clerical workers of American Export Lines picketing on Twelfth Avenue shortly after sunrise. Longshoremen refused to cross the line.

Museum of Modern Art Library three of Etha Fles's books and many articles, long since out of print. By personally interviewing surviving relatives and old

<sup>1</sup> Above Lecco on Lake Como, installed in 1934 in a small deconsecrated and altered church. <sup>2</sup> The essential, though at times puzzling, bibliography of this monograph consists in part of a chronological classification of clippings, books, pamphlets preserved by the artist.

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MEDARDO ROSSO AND HIS DUTCH  
PATRONESS ETHA FLES

MARGARET SCOLARI BARR

This article, <sup>was written as</sup> ~~greatly abbreviated~~, will form part of the closing chapter of a monograph on Medardo Rosso to be published by the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Since the sculptor was approaching the sunset of his creative period when he met Etha Fles, only his last two works are considered here in any detail.

The chronology of Rosso's career is often highly uncertain. It is difficult to date his works precisely and his many preserved letters never give a definite day, month, or year. The element of time did not interest him; when prodded by friends, he would exclaim: "When? Always!" Most of his letters to Miss Fles were either lost in Holland during the second World War or were buried with her in 1948. It is said that during his last illness in Milan, when he was a broken and lonely old man, he kept letters of hers by his bedside. But were these *all* her letters? all the accumulation since they met at the beginning of the century? or rather just some recent consoling letters she may have written him from Rome? If anything has been preserved of her correspondence it should be in the private Medardo Rosso museum at Barzio<sup>1</sup> among the papers which were last examined when the Italian scholar Mino Borghi, with the help of the sculptor's son Francesco (now deceased), wrote his monograph on Rosso<sup>2</sup>.

The primary source of information for this article has been Etha Fles's adopted daughter Miss Agatha Verkroost, who still lives in Bergen near Alkmaar and whose address I received from Miss Ellen Joosten of the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo. Mr. Jacob van der Waals obtained for me invaluable documentation from Dutch libraries and archives and succeeded in acquiring for the Museum of Modern Art Library three of Etha Fles's books and many articles, long since out of print. By personally interviewing surviving relatives and old

<sup>1</sup> Above Lecco on Lake Como, installed in 1934 in a small deconsecrated and altered church. <sup>2</sup> The essential, though at times puzzling, bibliography of this monograph consists in part of a chronological classification of clippings, books, pamphlets preserved by the artist.

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MARGARET SCOLARI BARR



Fig. 1 MEDARDO ROSSO, ca. 1900

friends of Miss Fles, he provided me with much conclusive evidence of facts and dates, as well as with fascinating sidelights which, though they serve to illumine the magnanimous nature of Miss Fles, cannot all be used in this account of her beneficent activity on behalf of the artist whom she helped to immortalize. The exceptional nature of this spiritual yet familiar friendship will appear in excerpts from a letter to me from Miss Alexandrine Osterkamp, who was staying in Rome with Miss Fles at the time of Rosso's death in 1928.

As this great lady is still affectionately remembered in Holland, I hope that the memory of her friends or the appearance of new documents may fill out the most evident gaps of this sketch.

*First Meeting*

Etha Fles made the acquaintance of Medardo Rosso (fig. 1) in Paris in 1900 during the Exposition Universelle where several of his waxes and bronzes were installed in the same galleries as the Alpine paintings of Giovanni Segantini. Herself a painter (fig. 2) and etcher, Miss Fles was the daughter of a distinguished oculist who was deeply interested in music; her mother had been an amateur painter; her elder sister Anna, a singer. Their house on the Maliebaan in Utrecht was a favorite gathering place for artists and writers.

In Utrecht in 1891 Etha Fles had organized with her friend Johanna Besier (later the wife of Antoon Derkinderen) an exhibition of advanced, somewhat Symbolist, Dutch artists such as Derkinderen, Matthijs Maris, and Toorop, all

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## MEDARDO ROSSO AND HIS DUTCH PATRONESS ETHA FLES

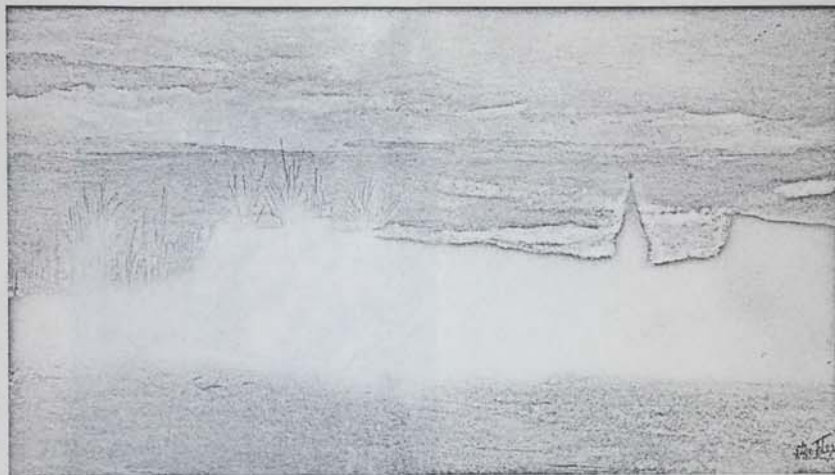


Fig. 2 ETHA FLES, WINTER EVENING. Watercolor (whereabouts unknown)

of whom had been ignored by the conservative *Kunstliefde*-society. In 1895 she had founded the *Voor de Kunst*-association and in the same year she sent some of her etchings to the First International Exhibition in Venice (not yet called *Biennale*)<sup>3</sup>.

It was five years later, at forty-three, that she encountered the artist who was to hold her attention for the rest of her life. One year younger than herself, he was tall, heavy-set, with "golden" eyes, auburn hair and beard. At this time he still walked with a rolling gait on diminutive feet carefully shod. Picturesque and often jovial, warmhearted and original, he liked to attract attention – as Christian Zervos, who still remembers him, remarked: "Il était un m'a-tu-vu". In a bewildering mixture of French, Milanese dialect, and literary Italian, Rosso proclaimed his ideas of rebellion against the established academic order, against all that was official and accepted, against the art of Greece, Rome, and the Renaissance, in recurrent phrases of virulent disdain. His credo, as the originator of Impressionist sculpture, was "nothing is material in space". A confirmed internationalist, he advocated a limitless fatherland (*patria illimitata*) and rejected the barriers that separate one nation from another, just as his eyes ignored sharp

<sup>3</sup> Probably because of the long residence in Holland of the Milanese etcher and watercolorist Vittore Grubicy de Dragon, many members of the Dutch Society of Etchers (*Nederlandsche Etsclub*) were represented in the First Venice International, among them Matthijs Maris and Anton Mauve.

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MARGARET SCOLARI BARR



Fig. 3 JAN VETH, ETHA FLES, 1886. Etching

edges in his field of vision<sup>4</sup>. He never opened a book<sup>5</sup> and wrote the way he spoke.

These two became kindred spirits right away. Etha Fles, a dauntless idealist, saw in this "giant with the soul of a boy" the incarnation of the natural man unspoiled by society, who could pour into his art all that was purest and most transcendental in the human spirit.

*Rosso in Holland, 1900-1901*

Before leaving Paris, Etha Fles encouraged Rosso to come to Holland, so that late in 1900 we find him modeling a portrait of Dr. Fles. Why ever did he under-

<sup>4</sup> Professor Giuseppe Prezzolini's characterization of Medardo Rosso is so perfect, that I translate it here (from *Il Tempo della Voce*, 267): "Not even in our circle of friends, all highly informal, have I ever seen a person so lyrically natural as Medardo Rosso, both in his art and in his way of living, and thereby so apt to devise such an excess of practical tortures and material predicaments. In his most serious ideas he was profound, extremely acute in his discrimination between the great and the mean, and quite instinctive in his distaste for the latter. His visits to Italy and ours to Paris would provide material for a book of legendary folklore. Rosso was indeed a world to himself, a world neither antique nor modern; as a creature he differed completely from one's wildest fantasy: he was all genius and bizarre caprice with, nevertheless, firm principles and beliefs that he brought into harmony in a hundred ways. Impossible to forget his accent, his generosity sometimes abrupt and inopportune and other times most sensitive. As for his sayings, they may have sounded funny, but they were, in fact, deep".

<sup>5</sup> Fles, 1922, 43.

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## MEDARDO ROSSO AND HIS DUTCH PATRONESS ETHA FLES

Fig. 4 JAN TOOROP, ETHA FLES, 1927. Drawing



take this commission? Although he had done a splendid half-length of Henri Rouart in 1890, women and children were the preferred subjects of his maturity. How much more logical for him to do a head of his new friend, perhaps on the lines of his most recent work, the *Madame Noblet* of 1897. The question may have been debated but set aside because Dr. Fles had reached his declining years and the documentation of his image seemed more urgent. Later, as friendship slipped into familiarity, the first vision was lost and Rosso never immortalized the features of his most steadfast protectress by the merest sketch<sup>6</sup>. We know her <sup>face</sup> features through an etched profile by Jan Veth of 1886 (fig. 3), a drawing by Toorop of 1927 (fig. 4), and a drawing by Harry op d'Veld of 1946 (fig. 5), two years before her death.

Rosso began to model the life-size seated figure of the old doctor in the garden of the house on the Maliebaan because the clay would soil the house. The family looked down from the windows as he worked feverishly with his thumbs or hurled lumps of clay at the figure, in a theatrical game of chance. Creation for him was always agonizing. In later years when a friend asked him why he did not do something new, he broke forth: "If you love me, don't wish that on me.

<sup>6</sup> I am now certain that I was in error when I suggested (*Art News*, January 1, 1961, 67) that *Madame X* might be a portrait of Etha Fles.

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MARGARET SCOLARI BARR



Fig. 7 HARRY OP D'VELD,  
ETHA FLES, ca. 1946. Drawing

I suffer so much physically when I create that in those hours it is as if my flesh were being torn from my bones"<sup>7</sup>.

The task he had set for himself was to an extent unprecedented. True enough, his *Impression de boulevard la nuit* of 1895 was very large<sup>8</sup>, but it was just a fleeting night vision of figures seen from the rear walking headlong against the wind. In the portrait of the doctor, however, he had to cope not only with the problem of resemblance, but with that plastic nightmare – a man in modern clothes. No original photograph of the portrait can be found. The best of the poor reproductions<sup>9</sup> shows the grave face of an old man with curly tufts of hair and a flowing mustache. He is seated on the edge of a bench, paunch forward, legs apart (fig. 6). A head by Jan Veth (fig. 7), executed when the doctor was seventy-five, proves that Rosso caught the resemblance and instilled it with the pathos and resignation of advanced age. However, as Miss Verkroost remarks, "the family did not like it" and it was not moved to Bergen when Etha Fles sold the

<sup>7</sup> Fles, 1922, 35.

<sup>8</sup> This work is sometimes called *Impression Place de Clichy*, but is labeled in Rosso's hand *Paris la nuit, impression de boulevard extérieur*, in Barbantini, 1950. The plaster cast was photographed in the artist's studio close to two ladders which serve to gauge the imposing size of the group. Never exhibited, it was owned by Madame Noblet in her country house at Jessains (Aube) in the Champagne and was shattered by German gunfire in the first World War. <sup>9</sup> Seidel, 86.

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MEDARDO ROSSO AND HIS DUTCH PATRONESS ETHA FLES

Fig. 6 MEDARDO ROSSO,  
DR. FLES ON A GARDEN  
BENCH, 1900/01 (destroyed)



mansion on the Maliebaan after the death of her father and sister. Miss Verkroost says that it was allowed to disintegrate.

At the Exposition Universelle Etha Fles had been in the thick of things, for she had worked with the commissioners in charge of the Dutch loans. Under the aegis of the society *Arti et Amicitiae* of Amsterdam, of which she was a charter member, an Impressionist show for Holland was selected from the paintings on view at the Exposition. The catalogue presents a curious mixture of famous and half-forgotten names: d'Espagnat, 3 loans; Loiseau, 3; Pissarro, 3; Maufra, 3; Monet, 3; Moret, 3; Renoir, 3; Sisley, 2; and Medardo Rosso, 5<sup>10</sup>.

The early notices of the show scarcely mention Rosso because only one bronze, probably already owned by Etha Fles, was in Amsterdam for the opening in

<sup>10</sup> The prices of Rosso's entries, in guilder, are as follows: No. 24 *Portrait* (bronze) 6,000; No. 25 *Impression d'enfant* 3,000; No. 26 *Tête* (wax) 4,000; No. 27 *Dame à la voilette* 5,000; No. 28 *Impression à l'hôpital* (wax) 500. The copy of this catalogue on deposit in the Library of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, shows the handwritten addition: No. 29 *Rieuse*. From the titles, which Rosso often varied, only Nos. 27 and 28 can be identified.

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MARGARET SCOLARI BARR

ÆT 75

V '95

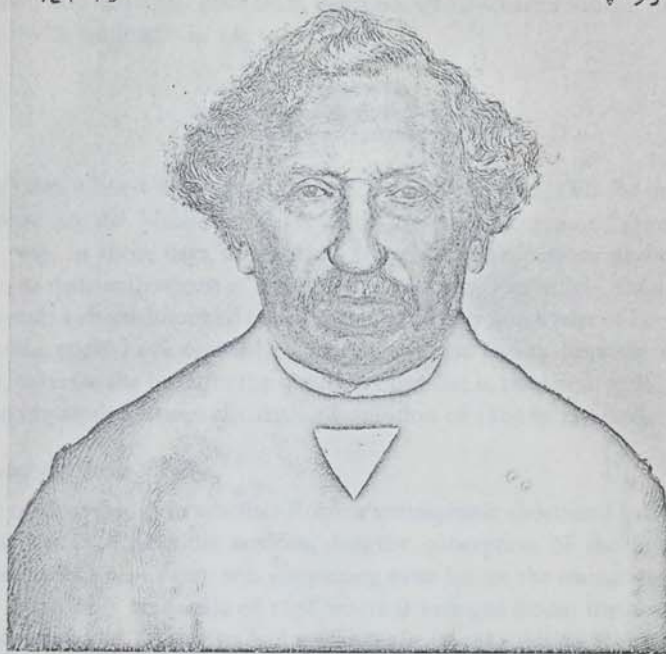


Fig. 7 JAN VETH, DR. FLES

January. Eventually his other entries arrived from Paris, so that on the first of March, 1901, she was able to publish a long article, on him alone, in the *Groninger Courant*<sup>11</sup>. It was the opening shot in her tireless campaign in his favor and reveals her technique of tactful introductory paragraphs reinforced by remarks of authoritative critics whose word might carry more weight than her own. She begins: "When Rosso heard the remark, 'Holland is not the land of sculpture, it is the land of color', he responded, 'In the country of Hals and Rembrandt where people hate the academic, I shall be understood' ". She continues: "In Paris and Vienna the casts of Rosso's work command prices that surpass our imagination, therefore he is not interested in selling here". Then she quotes extensively from the critic Camille de Ste.-Croix, who maintained that Rodin in

<sup>11</sup> Dr. A. M. Hammacher, Director of the Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller in Otterlo, feels that the work of Rosso in this circulating exhibition had an influence on the non-architectural sculpture of Lambertus Zijl as well as on Saar de Swart and S. A. Galis.

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## MEDARDO ROSSO AND HIS DUTCH PATRONESS ETHA FLES

his *Balzac* had been strongly influenced by Rosso, and brings her column to a close with two and a half lines from Verlaine, which Charles Morice had selected for an article on Rosso in 1897:

“. . . . . la chose envolée  
Qu'on sent qui fuit, d'une âme en allée  
Vers d'autres cieux à d'autres amours"<sup>12</sup>.

One cannot but wonder how this review was received. Did the intimates of the house on the Maliebaan shake their heads and murmur "Douce folie!" which was, in those days, the worldly comment when persons of a certain age gave in to their enthusiasm in a youthful, overt way. Her article, though ardent, also reveals a shrewdness and courage that were very much part of her character. She could easily have omitted all mention of the rivalry between Rosso and Rodin, whereas she brought the question right out in the open, well remembering the impressive Rodin circulating exhibition of 1899 in Holland.

*Rosso and the Rodin "Balzac"*

The controversy as to whether Rosso's atmospheric shorthand had or had not affected Rodin during his anxious, lengthy conception of the figure of the novelist he had never seen was simmering even before the statue went on view in the Salon de la Nationale of 1898 where it brought Rodin the notoriety of a *succès de scandale*<sup>13</sup>. The artists had met casually in 1884 during Rosso's first stay in Paris when, quite penniless, he may have accepted work as a marble cutter or studio assistant of Dalou, whose portrait Rodin had just finished. Certain it is that in 1893 they sealed their friendship by exchanging works when some pieces by Rosso were on view at the Bodinière<sup>14</sup>. Rodin gave Rosso the torso, half life-size, of his *Homme qui marche* and took in exchange the *Petite riense*, which now is preserved in Madame Goldscheider's office in the Musée Rodin. Shortly afterward Rodin must have called on Rosso in his studio, because on January 17, 1894, he sent him this short note:

<sup>12</sup> Misquoted in Cremetti, 19. The verses are from Verlaine's *Art poétique*, dedicated to Charles Morice.

<sup>13</sup> The *Balzac* was refused by the Société des Gens de Lettres who had commissioned it. Rodin did not sue. The collector Auguste Pellerin offered to buy it for 100,000 francs. Rodin refused. It was requested for exhibition in London and Brussels, but Rodin, feeling that the figure should stay in Paris, was in no way tempted, although we know that as late as 1900 he was complaining of neglect and economic difficulties (Rothenstein, 370-2).

<sup>14</sup> This was a hall on the rue St. Lazare that was converted into an experimental theater in 1892 by Charles Bodinier and officially called Théâtre d'application Bodinier; its vestibule was used as an art gallery. Soon it became a favorite gathering place for artists and intellectuals. Charles Bodinier, realizing that many of the habitués did not care to go to the popular café concerts, invited Yvette Guilbert to sing there at matinées. Introduced by a voluble lecturer, she was accepted as an artist, not as a ribald entertainer. It is she who nicknamed the hall La Bodinière.

foyer

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 Per mantenere il numero della nota 15  
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 Papini P. 11  
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 il numero romano - la pagina è indici)

MARGARET SCOLARI BARR

SSO,  
 given me immense pleasure. Upon arriving in your studio I was  
 wild admiration for you. I did not write you because I no longer  
 address. I am happy and if you want to lunch with me Saturday I  
 ighted.  
 on, your friend

Rodin<sup>15</sup>.

Rodin's proud and reserved temperament the words "folle  
 e elliptical "je suis heureux" are homage indeed. No corres-  
 of the time have yet revealed the circumstances of the coldness  
 that later ensued. Temperamentally and in their habits they were opposites:  
 Rodin was serious-minded, disciplined, intensely dedicated to his work, so that he  
 could not spare time for camaraderie when he came in to Paris from Meudon;  
 Rosso, on the other hand, worked intermittently and depended a great deal for  
 his fleeting impressions on walking through the streets, sitting in cafés, and  
 frequenting the gaslit music halls that played such an inspiring role in the visual  
 life of many artists of the late nineteenth century. *non dire*

However, the cordial connection had continued over a period of years and  
 though there is no written record of further meetings, the two sculptors had  
 many acquaintances in common and probably saw each other off and on until  
 the presentation of the *Balzac* in the Salon of 1898. At this time something must  
 have occurred: either a verbal exchange between the two artists or simply the  
 gradual setting in of an unwonted silence. It is easy to imagine what a man of  
 Rodin's prestige<sup>16</sup> would have felt if, berated by an indignant public, harassed  
 by the Gens de Lettres, yet confident of having achieved a masterpiece, he picked  
 up the rumor that some critics, anxious to display their perceptiveness, had  
 descried in the *Balzac* a dependence on Rosso, an eccentric foreigner and eight-  
 teen years his junior. Rosso, on the other hand, knowing what Rodin had seen  
 in his studio and sensing that his work had provided some solutions for the  
*Balzac*, was indignant at being ignored. Gradually his partisans, André Ibels,  
 Yveling Rambaud, and Charles Morice, infiltrated their opinions into the columns  
 of the press between 1898 and 1902 when the whole question came out in the  
 open with the publication of Edmond Claris' *Investigation on Impressionism*

<sup>15</sup> "Mon cher Rosso, vous m'avez fait un immense plaisir; en arrivant à l'atelier, j'étais frappé d'une folle  
 admiration pour vous. Je ne vous ai pas écrit parce que je ne savais plus votre adresse. Je suis heureux  
 et si samedi vous voulez déjeuner avec moi je serais content. A bientôt, votre ami, Rodin". Address:  
 Monsieur Rosso, statuaire, 15 ou 28 rue Cauchois, Montmartre, Paris (posted in Belleville, Seine-et-  
 Oise). Reproduced in Papini, 11. <sup>16</sup> A caricature of Rodin by Toulouse-Lautrec emphasizes his  
 professorial beard, his hunched and ponderous stoop; a lithograph by William Rothenstein (1897)  
 his grand, magisterial air. Both reproduced in Rothenstein, 66 and 321.

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MARGARET SCOLARI BARR

"My dear Rosso,

You have given me immense pleasure. Upon arriving in your studio I was struck by a wild admiration for you. I did not write you because I no longer knew your address. I am happy and if you want to lunch with me Saturday I would be delighted.

See you soon, your friend

Rodin<sup>15</sup>.

From a man of Rodin's proud and reserved temperament the words "folle admiration" and the elliptical "je suis heureux" are homage indeed. No correspondence or diaries of the time have yet revealed the circumstances of the coldness that later ensued. Temperamentally and in their habits they were opposites: Rodin was serious-minded, disciplined, intensely dedicated to his work, so that he could not spare time for camaraderie when he came in to Paris from Meudon; Rosso, on the other hand, worked intermittently and depended a great deal for his fleeting impressions on walking through the streets, sitting in cafés, and frequenting the gaslit music halls that played such an inspiring role in the visual life of many artists of the late nineteenth century.

However, the cordial connection had continued over a period of years and though there is no written record of further meetings, the two sculptors had many acquaintances in common and probably saw each other off and on until the presentation of the *Balzac* in the Salon of 1898. At this time something must have occurred: either a verbal exchange between the two artists or simply the gradual setting in of an unwonted silence. It is easy to imagine what a man of Rodin's prestige<sup>16</sup> would have felt if, berated by an indignant public, harassed by the Gens de Lettres, yet confident of having achieved a masterpiece, he picked up the rumor that some critics, anxious to display their perceptiveness, had descried in the *Balzac* a dependence on Rosso, an eccentric foreigner and eighteen years his junior. Rosso, on the other hand, knowing what Rodin had seen in his studio and sensing that his work had provided some solutions for the *Balzac*, was indignant at being ignored. Gradually his partisans, André Ibels, Yveling Rambaud, and Charles Morice, infiltrated their opinions into the columns of the press between 1898 and 1902 when the whole question came out in the open with the publication of Edmond Claris' *Investigation* on Impressionism

<sup>15</sup> "Mon cher Rosso, vous m'avez fait un immense plaisir; en arrivant à l'atelier, j'étais frappé d'une folle admiration pour vous. Je ne vous ai pas écrit parce que je ne savais plus votre adresse. Je suis heureux et si samedi vous voulez déjeuner avec moi je serais content. A bientôt, votre ami, Rodin". Address: Monsieur Rosso, statuaire, 15 ou 28 rue Cauchois, Montmartre, Paris (posted in Belleville, Seine-et-Oise). Reproduced in Papini, 11. <sup>16</sup> A caricature of Rodin by Toulouse-Lautrec emphasizes his professorial beard, his hunched and ponderous stoop; a lithograph by William Rothenstein (1897) his grand, magisterial air. Both reproduced in Rothenstein, 66 and 321.

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## MEDARDO ROSSO AND HIS DUTCH PATRONESS ETHA FLES



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Fig. 8 MEDARDO ROSSO, MALADE À L'HÔPITAL

Rome, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna

in sculpture<sup>17</sup>. This very publicity diminished the chances of a "rapprochement" for, while Rodin would never have admitted the influence of the Italian sculptor, the breach might have been mended with time. But alas, *scripta manent*, and the question in Rosso's mind assumed the proportions of an obsession. In 1905 it was uppermost in his conversations in Vienna with Frau Ida Maria Brünhof (now Mrs. I. M. Sachs of New York). In the early twenties in Venice he was still speaking of it with a new friend, Mario Vianello Chiodo, and he brought up the matter incessantly with his great champion, the painter and critic Ardengo Soffici whom he saw off and on until his death.

What is curious in the contemporary literature on the subject of this artistic fracas is that Etha Fles and Julius Meier-Graefe agree that it is the *Malade à l'hôpital* (fig. 8) that influenced the *Balzac* (fig. 9). Why? because of the conceal-

<sup>17</sup> *De l'Impressionisme en sculpture*. This *enquête* was first commissioned by the Madrid paper *La Epoca*. It is a curious booklet with statements by the two artists and an assortment of opinions by critics and personalities of the Parisian world to whom Claris had addressed a questionnaire. Of Rodin, Rosso says: "Il est vrai cependant que Rodin, Président du Jury du Salon, fier de mon amitié, a voulu donner une preuve de reconnaissance et de sympathie pour mon œuvre en démissionnant du jury des récompenses qui voulait m'exclure".

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MARGARET SCOLARI BARR



Fig. 9 AUGUSTE RODIN,  
MONUMENT TO BALZAC,  
1897/98  
New York,  
The Museum of Modern Art  
Presented in memory of Curt Valentin  
by his friends

ing hospital robe? because of the summary treatment of the features? because the figure grows out of the ground? Jacques Lipchitz, enthusiastic admirer of Rodin, considers it unwise, to suggest an influence of Rosso on Rodin. He says: "Rodin descends from the long tradition that came to an end in Carpeaux.

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dove dice a p. 229: From a letter  
to the author etc.

On the other hand, was typical of late nineteenth-century scul-  
pture modeling with the thumb was predominant. As for the  
evolution of the time and its main protagonist was Carrière, a  
The most common belief is that Rosso's *Bookmaker* (fig.

er que peu de renseignements concernant Rosso. Je ne l'ai pas connu per-  
se que nous connaissions de lui est la tête d'enfant qui était au Musée du  
as que Rodin pouvait être influencé par sa sculpture. Cela me semble même  
n à ce genre d'ascertions qui ne se justifient d'aucune façon. Rodin descend  
lpteurs dont le dernier était Carpeaux. Rosso, lui, est typiquement italien de  
coup de pouce dominait tout. D'autres sculpteurs d'origine italienne avaient  
s: le prince Troubetzkoi, moitié italien, élevé en Italie, Bugatti, sculpteur  
ent et bien d'autres. Quand à ce "sfumatto" (je ne suis pas sûr de mon ortho-

graphe) c'était aussi une mode du temps, dont le peintre Eugène Carrière était le protagoniste, ami de

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MARGARET SCOLARI BARR



Fig. 9 AUGUSTE RODIN,  
MONUMENT TO BALZAC,  
1897/98  
New York,  
*The Museum of Modern Art*  
Presented in memory of Curt Valentin  
by his friends

ing hospital robe? because of the summary treatment of the features? because the figure grows out of the ground? Jacques Lipchitz, enthusiastic admirer of Rodin, considers it unwise, to suggest an influence of Rosso on Rodin. He says: "Rodin descends from the long tradition that came to an end in Carpeaux. Rosso's work, on the other hand, was typical of late nineteenth-century sculpture in Italy where modeling with the thumb was predominant. As for the *sfumato*, it was a fashion of the time and its main protagonist was Carrière, a friend of Rodin's"<sup>18</sup>. The most common belief is that Rosso's *Bookmaker* (fig.

<sup>18</sup> "Je ne peux vous donner que peu de renseignements concernant Rosso. Je ne l'ai pas connu personnellement. La seule chose que nous connaissions de lui est la tête d'enfant qui était au Musée du Luxembourg. Je ne crois pas que Rodin pouvait être influencé par sa sculpture. Cela me semble même risible. Il faut faire attention à ce genre d'ascertions qui ne se justifient d'aucune façon. Rodin descend d'une longue lignée de sculpteurs dont le dernier était Carpeaux. Rosso, lui, est typiquement italien de la fin du 19ème siècle où le coup de pouce dominait tout. D'autres sculpteurs d'origine italienne avaient les mêmes caractéristiques: le prince Troubetzkoi, moitié italien, élevé en Italie, Bugatti, sculpteur animalier de très grand talent et bien d'autres. Quand à ce "sfumato" (je ne suis pas sûr de mon orthographe) c'était aussi une mode du temps, dont le peintre Eugène Carrière était le protagoniste, ami de

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MEDARDO ROSSO AND HIS DUTCH PATRONESS ETHA FLES

Fig. 10 MEDARDO ROSSO,  
BOOKMAKER  
New York,  
*The Museum of Modern Art*  
Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest



houppe lande

in 1825/30

Balzac, though the male figure in the *Conversation in the* looming, wrapped in an undefinable garment, may that Balzac's famous ~~robe de chambre~~ offered the best bulky figure which he had, in the Michelangelesque nude studies. Furthermore, Rosso's astonishing *Im-* might have suggested to Rodin the general effect of reated, to be seen from a single point of view. How-Rosso's repudiation of the statue "that can be walked around"; his *Balzac* from the beginning was meant to stand majestically free. True enough, the leonine head was predicated on the incidence of light from

houppe lande

Rodin d'ailleurs. La seule influence de Rosso que je discerne nettement parmi les sculpteurs de la génération qui le suit, c'est sur Brancusi. Regardez certaines têtes en forme d'œufs et vous comprendrez de quoi je parle. Elles sont des parents directs de cette tête d'enfant que nous connaissons au Musée du Luxembourg" (From a letter to the author, May 29, 1960.) Dr. A. M. Hammacher remarked in conversation (September 1961) that no critic had ever suggested the influence of Rosso on any of the later works of Rodin.

en l'honneur pour la statue

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MEDARDO ROSSO AND HIS DUTCH PATRONESS ETHA FLES

Fig. 10 MEDARDO ROSSO,  
BOOKMAKER  
New York,  
*The Museum of Modern Art*  
Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest



10) comes closest to the *Balzac*, though the male figure in the *Conversation in the Garden* (fig. 11) hunched, looming, wrapped in an undefinable garment, may have suggested to Rodin that Balzac's famous *robe de chambre* offered the best solution for swathing the bulky figure which he had, in the Michelangelesque tradition, first modeled in nude studies. Furthermore, Rosso's astonishing *Impression de boulevard* (1895) might have suggested to Rodin the general effect of large figures, summarily treated, to be seen from a single point of view. However, Rodin did not share Rosso's repudiation of the statue "that can be walked around"; his *Balzac* from the beginning was meant to stand majestically free. True enough, the leonine head was predicated on the incidence of light from

*houppelande*

Rodin d'ailleurs. La seule influence de Rosso que je discerne nettement parmi les sculpteurs de la génération qui le suit, c'est sur Brancusi. Regardez certaines têtes en forme d'œufs et vous comprendrez de quoi je parle. Elles sont des parents directs de cette tête d'enfant que nous connaissons au Musée du Luxembourg" (From a letter to the author, May 29, 1960.) Dr. A. M. Hammacher remarked in conversation (September 1961) that no critic had ever suggested the influence of Rosso on any of the later works of Rodin.

*intéressante pour la note*

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MARGARET SCOLARI BARR

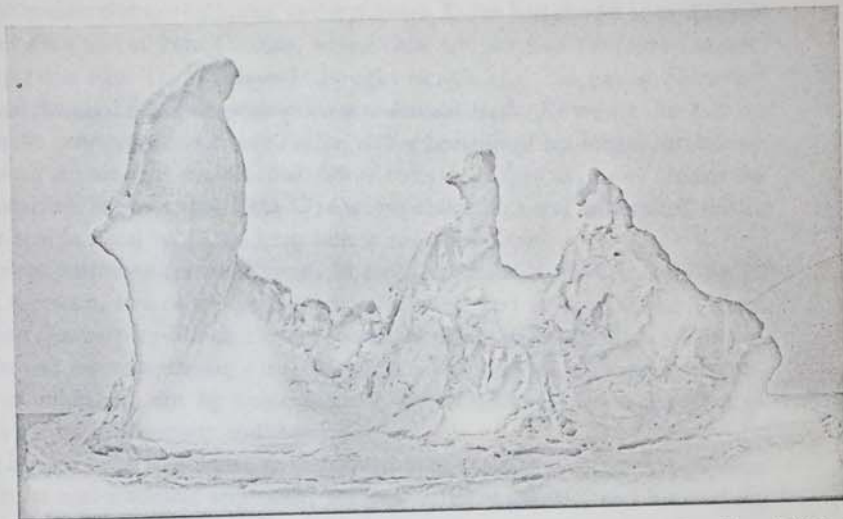


Fig. 11 MEDARDO ROSSO, CONVERSATION IN THE GARDEN Milan, Collection Dr. Giovanni Mattioli

above, a blind man touching its vital sproutings and gouged-out ruts could not identify its human features any more than he could "read" Rosso's *Dame à la voilette* or, for that matter, Donatello's head of Goliath at the foot of the Bargello *David*. Rosso had always inveighed against haptic sculpture, sculpture intelligible to the hand rather than the eye, but the *Balzac* head, the fruit of years of reading and searching experiment, is both technically and psychologically far removed from the intuitive transmission from eye to clay that was Rosso's secret.

#### *Propaganda*

Within 1901 Etha Fles's role had taken shape. She did not settle down alongside the artist as his daily "inspiratrice", but she turned herself into his paladin, and with imagination and enterprise did all she could to help him in private and to keep him before the eyes of the public. Some of her friends, who remember her well, maintain that she always tried to exert a strong influence on the many people she benefited during her life, but on Rosso she did not make a dent. Not only did he remain as Bohemian, as "impossible" socially as the first day she met him, but the warmth of her admiration did not raise his artistic temperature. After his portrait of Dr. Fles, he gave birth to one last superb head, the *Ecce puer* (1906/07), and then came to a creative standstill.

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## MEDARDO ROSSO AND HIS DUTCH PATRONESS ETHA FLES

✓ when  
 In the middle eighties and later, in the nineties, Rosso had shown at the Galerie Georges Petit and at Père Thomas, whose chief advisor was Toulouse-Lautrec. He surely met Père Tanguy, ~~later~~ he bought van Gogh's *Diligence de Tarascon*<sup>19</sup> at one of the sales following the paint merchant's death. However, he had no permanent connection with any dealer, either because of his innate turbulence or because at that time dealers took fewer risks than they do now. Under the circumstances, the fact that Etha Fles wrote about him and influenced critics to bear him in mind helped to keep him in the public eye.

c After the Impressionist exhibitions in Holland, Rosso's work was shown in Berlin, Dresden, and other German cities in 1902, and in 1903 at the Vienna Sezession (January 17-March 1). As soon as his ardent partisan, Edmond Claris, brought out his compilation *De l'Impressionisme en sculpture*, a German translation was published, not by coincidence in Utrecht, to serve as a passport to Rosso's shows in Germany and Austria.

Late in 1903 Etha Fles wrote an introduction to the history of art<sup>20</sup>, a pioneer book in its anti-academic approach; subjective, unsystematic, and homespun, it was favorably received in Holland. Underlying its 472 pages is the anthroposophical insistence that man is deeply affected by his social environment. As if pointing her finger at the philoprogenitive inclinations of Italy, she includes five reproductions of the Virgin and Christ Child among the mere ten illustrations with which she manages to document the entire period. The name of Bernard Berenson does not appear in her bibliography although in the Anglo-Saxon world he was then at the height of his first fame. Like her countrymen Berlage, Derkinderen, and Roland Holst, she was enthusiastic about Ruskin, Walter Crane, William Morris; in fact, her lively interest in arts and crafts gives her history of art an original slant<sup>21</sup>. On page 436 she comes to grips with the problem of Medardo Rosso: she reproduces the *Malade à l'hôpital* and the *Dame à la voilette*, but discreetly relies for her text on Meier-Graefe<sup>22</sup> whose eye, responsive to Greco, was sympathetic to the protoplasmic indefiniteness of the "sculptor of light".

By now Rosso had won recognition in England, Holland, Germany, and Austria, but though in previous years he had shown some few pieces in the Salon, in the Indépendants, and at the Exposition Universelle of 1900, he still

<sup>19</sup> Now Collection Henry Pearlman, New York. <sup>20</sup> Fles, 1903. <sup>21</sup> Deeply believing that man should use his hands as well as his intellect, throughout her life she did embroideries after her own designs as well as the then fashionable knotted lace called *macramé*. <sup>22</sup> Meier-Graefe, "Medardo Rosso"; in his *Entwicklungsgeschichte...* he described at length a visit to Rosso's Paris studio and weighed his merits against those of Rodin with great circumspection.

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considered himself unappreciated in France. The Salon d'Automne, founded in 1903 under the auspices of Carrière, Redon, and numerous disciples of Gustave Moreau, provided a sympathetic atmosphere for him and in 1904 he was able to exhibit some twenty pieces. Although he was refused a separate gallery, he must have had some say in the installation. He selected rooms adjacent to the exhibits of his old friend Troubetzkoy<sup>23</sup> whom he now considered a rival, so that the public could compare their relative merits. Two installation photographs survive: one shows his *Enfant à la bouchée de pain* close to a Cézanne *Bathers* then owned by Auguste Pellerin; the other reveals the elaborate enthronement that only Rosso himself could have devised for his *Malade à l'hôpital*. On the wall he hung three large photographs: an enlargement of the old woman from his *Impression d'omnibus* (1883; destroyed), a half-length of Rodin's *Balzac*<sup>24</sup>, and a photograph of his own copy of the Vatican *Vitellius*; in front of these, on a table, the *Malade*, and beside it, his copy of a reduced version of Michelangelo's *Medici Madonna*. Rosso felt that he could best assert himself by compelling the beholder to see his work in relation to that of other artists, present and past. Among the living his greatest rival was Rodin and, while in this case he invited comparison between his *Malade* and the *Balzac*, in 1905 in Vienna and in 1910 in Florence he exhibited close to his sculptures the Rodin torso that he had owned since 1893. He also used as "comparison pieces" certain copies of Renaissance or classical pieces he had made in his youth, labeling them "Donatello" or "Michelangelo" with no further elucidation<sup>25</sup>. Critics of the time made

an archaizing  
exercise  
male head.

✓ important  
monuments  
in Italy.

✓ (now in the sculpture  
collections of the State  
Museum in Dresden)

<sup>23</sup> Prince Paul Troubetzkoy, eight years younger than Rosso, had received his artistic education in Milan and for a while (three years after Rosso had been expelled because he demanded live models) had followed the courses at the Brera Academy. He had worked under the painter Ranzoni and the sculptor Grandi, who were, environmentally, Rosso's ancestors, being anti-academic and "impressionist" in tendency. Appointed to the State Art School in Moscow, he had scrapped the old plaster casts and had insisted on holding life classes. When he exhibited in the First International Exhibition in Venice in 1895, though six years younger than Rosso, he had already executed a commission for a monument to Dante Alighieri, the monument to Prince Amedeo of Savoy in Turin, as well as the Garibaldi monuments in Milan and Naples. In the Salon d'Automne of 1904 he had a Tolstoi (sic, cat. no. 1830) and sixty-four sculptures in various materials (cat. no. 1831). Already in 1900 he had received a Grand Prix in Paris and the Luxembourg had bought his *Tolstoy on Horseback*. Though Troubetzkoy freely admitted having learned a great deal from Rosso in Milan, there is no reason to believe that in

Italy. <sup>24</sup> Rodin had no entries in this exhibition. <sup>25</sup> Besides this *Vitellius* (now in the State Collections in Dresden) both of which are now in the private museum at Barzio), Rosso had made a Donatello *St. Francis* from S. Antonio in Padua and a small version of the *David* of which he much admired Rosso's copies from the classics and, indeed, in Vienna in 1905 he exhibited bronzes, a *Julius Caesar* and a *Roman Senator*, to the distinguished collectors Eissler (von Kleehoven). We know that in the Artaria show in 1905 he exhibited in bronze of classical, Gothic, and Renaissance works" (von Kleehoven). Rosso also exhibited a Gothic Madonna, a Greek torso, an Egyptian statuette, a Madonna by Michelangelo, an antique head of a satyr.

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MARGARET SCOLARI BARR

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now in  
the State  
collection  
in Dresden

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## MEDARDO ROSSO AND HIS DUTCH PATRONESS ETHA FLES

Fig. 12  
THE ZONNEBLOEM AT BERGEN



no remarks about this unconventional procedure<sup>26</sup>, in fact, Rosso's Italian friends admired his copies from the classics, probably because they proved that he was quite able to model conventionally<sup>27</sup>.

Following the *Indépendants* show, Rosso, in 1905, was invited to hold an important exhibition in Vienna at the Artaria Gallery. To escape the solitude of his hotel room he clung to Viennese friends or fell back on a headwaiter whom he took on long afternoon drives in hired cabs<sup>28</sup>. Etha Fles had not accompanied him but had returned to Holland where, after the death of her father and sister, she had sold the house on the Maliebaan in Utrecht and had designed – much in the manner of Berlage – a small house for herself in Bergen near Alkmaar which she called the *Zonnebloem* (sunflower), her emblem, because she always turned her eyes to the light (fig. 12).

Probably because she had contacts in London through Matthijs Maris (listed as a London resident in the Venice International catalogue of 1905), she joined Rosso in London for several months during 1906/07. The catalogue of that winter's exhibition of the International Society<sup>29</sup> listed nine works of his, although the *Dame à la voilette* and the *Concierge* did not arrive or were mysteriously withdrawn<sup>30</sup>, making it possible, as in Amsterdam in 1901, to keep up his publicity. Etha Fles's major effort went into the preparation of a great album for a Rosso one-man show at the Eugene Cremetti Gallery<sup>31</sup>. She com-

<sup>26</sup> Neither "Juv." (pseudonym of Dr. H. de Jong) nor the anonymous correspondents of the Dutch newspapers remarked on the "comparisons" in their glowing reviews which had probably been inspired by Miss Fles. <sup>27</sup> Cremetti, 26. <sup>28</sup> From conversations with Mrs. Ida Maria Sachs. <sup>29</sup> Rodin had been appointed President of the Society after the death of Whistler in 1903. <sup>30</sup> Cf. the *Observer* of February 17, 1907: "Rodin and Rosso: why were the two statues removed?" <sup>31</sup> Photocopy in the Library of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

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MARGARET SCOLARI BARR

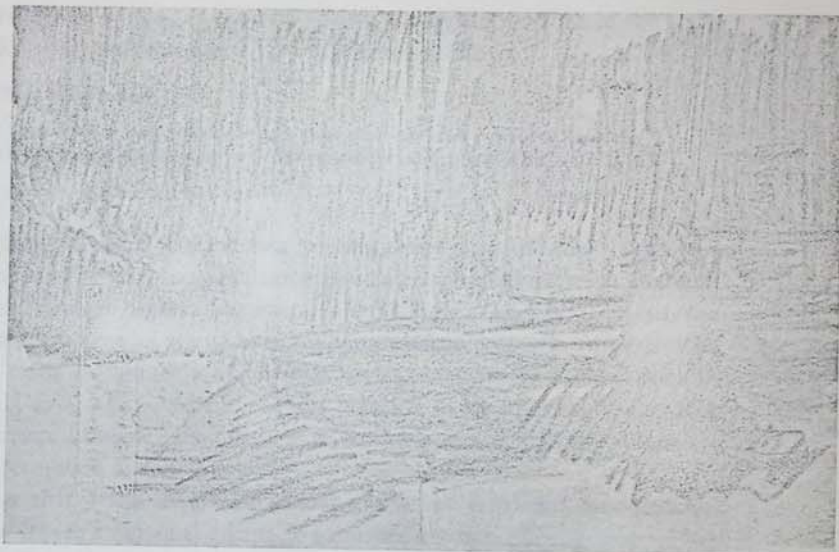


Fig. 13 MEDARDO ROSSO, TRAFALGAR SQUARE

New York, Collection Peridot Gallery

piled it with the help of her young nephew Walter van Alphen de Veer<sup>32</sup>, and had it printed in Paris by Herbert Clarke (338, rue Saint-Honoré). Besides reproductions of sculptures and drawings and a plate of "comparisons", it reprints criticisms in French, English, German, Dutch, and Italian, as had been previously done by the Artaria Gallery in Vienna. Of the dated notices, only one goes back to 1886, one to 1896, and one to 1897, proving that from the moment she met Rosso in 1900 she set herself the task of collecting his reviews, though she was not always careful to note the titles of the papers and precise dates of her clippings. The album makes fascinating reading and is the source of the early bibliographical entries in Italian monographs on Rosso. In London in 1906 it worked like a gigantic publicity release and furnished the critics with a variety of new material<sup>33</sup>.

A revelatory personal record of the London period is furnished by a postcard with the photograph of a hazy drawing (fig. 13) in which a statue on a pedestal,

<sup>32</sup> Now Dr. van Alphen de Veer. According to him and to Miss Verkroost, Miss Fles paid for all the expenses of the album. <sup>33</sup>In 1896 Rosso had been represented in London in a pre-Raphaelite exhibition at Boussod and Valadon, but his two entries, the *Age d'or* and the head of a boy (probably the *Enfant juif*), had attracted meager attention.

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## MEDARDO ROSSO AND HIS DUTCH PATRONESS ETHA FLES

marked above with a cross, is profiled against the lighter portion of the background<sup>34</sup>. I reprint the message with its authentic spelling:

"Chere Marguerite<sup>35</sup>,

Trouve toi a. 1 heure devant le petit monument que il est en fond de la place de la National Gallerie - Que je t'ai fait remarquer l'autre jour - a toi

(il est signe sur la photo par une +)

Medardo".

It is touching to think of these two meeting every now and then by written appointment in a city so foreign, at least to Rosso, that he had not even mastered the name of Trafalgar Square. But even if she lived in a hotel far from his, she must have tried to keep an eye on him, realizing what an eccentric impression he must have made in conventional British circles. Maurice Denis met him in London on July 4, 1906, and entered this notation in his journal: "Rencontré Medardo Rosso, bohème, assez italien de la Renaissance, naïvement prétentieux, sans scrupules, aimant son art"<sup>36</sup>.

Both knew that it was important to make sales and to obtain commissions. Evidence of Rosso's personal efforts is furnished by two photographs of his sculptures still in the files of the Victoria and Albert Museum with French dedications dated July 20, 1906, to the director, A. B. Skinner. Rosso was obviously proposing their purchase, but, while Italian monographs repeat with pride that his works were acquired by the "Museo Kensington", no works of his are preserved there, nor is there a record of their acquisition<sup>37</sup>.

*The "Ecce puer"*

Thanks to the two exhibitions Rosso received the commission to do the portrait of Alfred William Mond, then five or six years old<sup>38</sup>. He was the son of Emile Mond who was the nephew of Dr. Ludwig Mond whose collection passed to the National Gallery in 1910. Rosso had attempted nothing new during the five years since the unappreciated portrait of Dr. Fles. He must have embarked on this assignment with apprehension; in fact, the drama of what was to be his

<sup>34</sup> Preserved by Miss Agatha Verkroost. Rosso used as a postcard one of the photographs of his drawings which he always had on hand because he liked to give them to his admirers. The statue on the pedestal would be the monument to either Sir C. J. Napier or Sir H. Havelock. <sup>35</sup> In letters he always addressed Miss Fles as Marguerite. <sup>36</sup> Denis, 42. <sup>37</sup> According to information kindly furnished by Mr. John Pope-Hennessy. <sup>38</sup> I am indebted to Mrs. May Cippico for the correct identification of this portrait. I herewith quote the pertinent passages of her letter dated September 13, 1961: "I recognized the photograph at once as being the portrait of my brother Alfred William Mond as a very young boy, about five or six years of age, I think circa 1906 or 1907... The wax model [sic] was in our home in Hyde Park Square certainly until after 1918. The bust was certainly not in the house at the time of my mother's death (1941) and I have no idea what became of it".

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ultimate creation is not only recounted many times in print, but remained alive in the minds of those who, like Signora Tilde Rosso, his daughter-in-law, knew and loved him. She retold the story as if it had happened yesterday. There he was, a house guest in a wealthy home because he was supposed to do the portrait of the little boy. He saw him daily in the natural course of living with the family. Try as he might, he couldn't produce a thing. He was overstaying his welcome, he was beside himself. One evening there was a reception, the drawing room was full of elegant guests. Suddenly a curtain was drawn a few inches aside and the little boy peered in, his lips parted in amazement, and he withdrew. Triggered by this snapshot vision, Medardo rushed to his room, worked through the night and into the next day until he had brought the head to completion. He was found asleep on his couch still fully dressed in his evening clothes. It is said that the family did not consider the portrait a good likeness, but Rosso kept the model and in later years cast it many times in wax or bronze (fig. 14). He called it *Ecce puer* – Behold the child – and said of it: “Voilà la vision de pureté dans un monde banal”.

If for 1907 (the year of Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon*) we consider increased abstraction the only measure of progress, the *Ecce puer* represents a retrogression over several Rosso works of the nineties, such as *Conversation in the Garden*, *Madame X*<sup>39</sup>, and *Madame Noblet*, all of which were more detached from reality. But as a statement, this work is the distillation of Rosso's compassion, tenderness, and nostalgia for man's first innocent years. Through it he looked back on his own childhood. The lips breathe, the vivid eyes glance, the blond hair surges above the shiny brow through an uncanny transmission of life.

The effort of creation had been more terrifying than ever, but surely Rosso had no premonition that he would never attack a new work again. Laden with British laurels he and Etha Fles crossed the channel back to the more familiar territory of the continent. The return to Paris was felicitous, for in October 1907, Clemenceau, Monet's great admirer, caused the *Ecce puer* and the *Dame à la voilette* to be acquired by the State for the Musée du Luxembourg. The *Ecce puer* wax was damaged when the collections of the Luxembourg were relocated in other museums. In 1928, when Francesco Rosso came to Paris to close his father's studio, he gave a bronze *Ecce puer* to the Luxembourg, which is now preserved by the Musée National d'Art Moderne. A wax of the *Dame à la voilette* is in the Lyons museum as a “dépôt de l'Etat”.

<sup>39</sup> This head exists in a unique example in the Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna in Venice. Its dating is highly problematic. Most critics ascribe it to the year 1896, but Mino Borghi lists it as 1913.

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MEDARDO ROSSO AND HIS DUTCH PATRONESS ETHA FLES

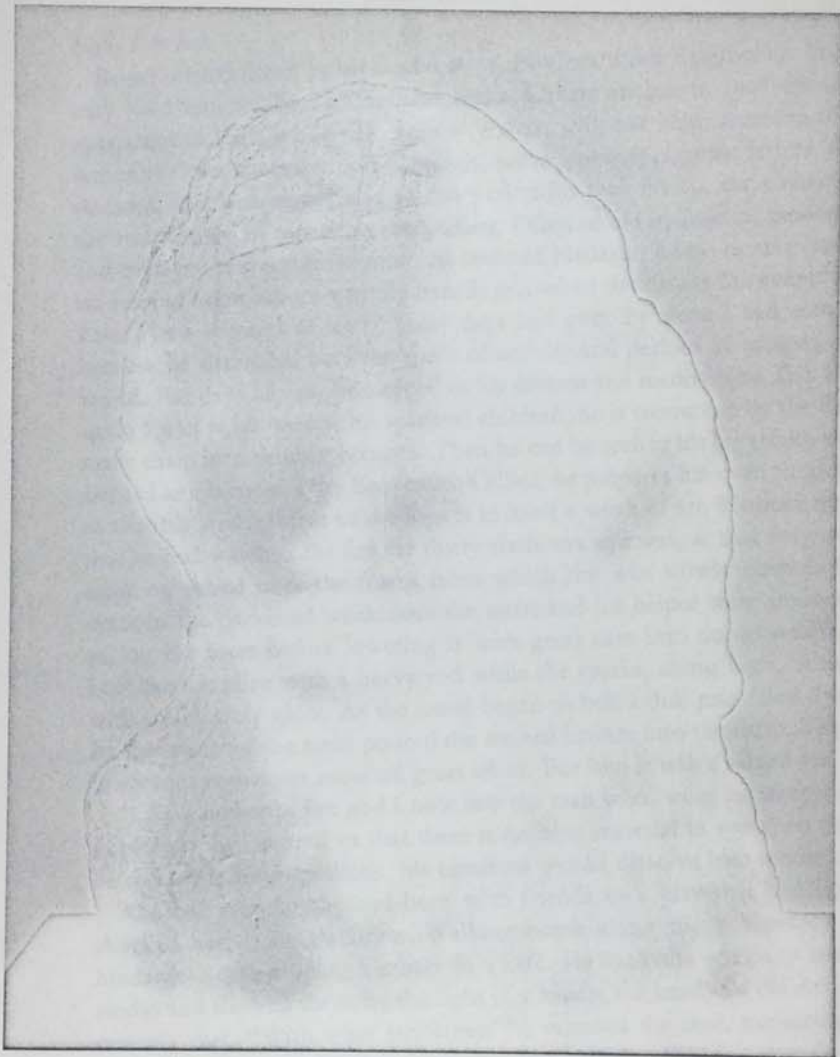


Fig. 14 MEDARDO ROSSO, ECCE PUER (PORTRAIT OF ALFRED WILLIAM MOND), 1906/07-  
Birmingham(Mich.), Collection Mr. and Mrs. Harry Lewis Winston

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*Paris Interlude*

Rosso settled down in his studio at 98, Boulevard des Batignolles. Miss Fles may have touched base in Holland, but at Christmas time in 1908 she took an apartment in Paris while her nephew Walter, with her help, attended the Sorbonne for one semester. Some legends, some typescripts, some letters, though undated, had best be referred to this period for they fill out the character and the relationship of our two protagonists. Often retold in articles, monographs, and even in a novel<sup>40</sup> is the dramatic scene of Medardo Rosso casting one of his bronzes at night before worldly friends convoked to witness the event. Here is Etha Fles's account of it<sup>41</sup>: "Many days had gone by since I had seen Rosso because he alternated between spells of activity and periods of escape from the world. For days he may be steeped in his dreams and meditations. But when he again looks at his waxes, his spiritual children, he is overcome by the desire to make them into shining bronzes. Then he can be seen in his big studio working as hard as a laborer. Like Benvenuto Cellini, he prepares his oven singlehanded so that his arrangement of the logs is in itself a work of art. He once wrote me that he had watched the fire for thirty-six hours and was, at that very moment, standing guard over the forms from which the wax slowly flowed. When I came to the darkened workroom the artist and his helper were anxiously preparing the form before lowering it with great care into the ground<sup>42</sup>. Rosso kept the fire alive with a heavy rod while the sparks, rising high, lit the room with an uncanny glow. As the metal began to boil a dull roar filled the studio. At this moment the artist poured the molten bronze into the form. This highly dangerous maneuver required great effort. For him it was a sacred act.

"Like a powerful fire god I now saw the man who, when he steeped himself in philosophy, assured us that there is nothing material in space, so that, were he to pursue his hypothesis, his creations would dissolve into steam".

Another evening she had been with friends to a play that had bored and shocked her by its gaudiness. Walking home along the boulevards she saw Medardo Rosso sipping his beer in a café. He took the company back to his studio and showed them, by the light of a match, the head of a child that he had recently cast. "With what tenderness he caressed the face, exclaiming: 'Mon petiot!' Such protectiveness, sincerity, and pride!... What a contrast between this man in his leather work jacket and the tawdry velvets and satins of the theater... This was the most beautiful evening I had ever spent in Paris. The meet-

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Soffici (1942), 211; Ibels and de Lys. <sup>41</sup> This and the following fragment from typescripts preserved by Dr. v. Alphen de Veer. <sup>42</sup> The oven, by all accounts, was set low or even beneath the floor level of the studio.

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ing lasted only half an hour but how full and lovely it was! How happy I felt when I went home! Why? Man is such a puzzle! Yet not really a puzzle. The truth of it is that I have always attained my most exalted moments of happiness upon first beholding beauty of the highest degree".

These short pieces ultimately were incorporated into her article "Medardo Rosso" (1919), for, as time went by, she came to consider herself a critic and reporter rather than an artist. In contrast to the literary tone and unconcealed enthusiasm of Miss Fles's writings, two notes from Rosso<sup>43</sup> have the spontaneity of telephone calls:

① "My dear Marguerite,

I wanted to surprise you. I came to fetch you so that we could go to dinner together. I sent someone to look for you. Finally I ate all alone. I'll see you soon. I'm going to take my work by the scruff of the neck to finish it quickly. I count on getting through with it fast. Anyway Sunday or Monday evening or for lunch...

Your

Medardo".

② [no salutation]

"All is music - someone in motion is but an instant - an instant is the infinite. A human being is not a kodak - no emotion in the photograph, no color, value of tones.

The museums are not made to make comparisons<sup>44</sup>. What a bunch of idiots!<sup>45</sup> They must be catalogued as inferior<sup>46</sup>. There's nothing to say - it's always been this way".

[no signature]

The third letter, whatever its date or city of origin, sheds light on Rosso's recurrent financial difficulties; it is quite moving because of the delicacy and circumlocutions that he feels called upon to use when Etha Fles, quite obviously, had forced him to admit his straits.

③ "My dear Marguerite,

Good for you! You've made me happy. To understand just a bit my situation and also what I - and also you - have gone through. For if I - I repeat - had had some slight amount of justice in that rot down there.

Certainly it would have been good for you too. However, to this a full stop.

But I'm sorry that you should have forced me to tell you a certain Truth which you knew and which, out of delicacy, actually, I did not want to get to. It's little, it's nothing, as you say.

But it's my due. It's a great thing at this moment - I repeat - it's a great thing at this moment.

I'm off to my business

Ever yours, your

Medardo

<sup>43</sup> The following three letters preserved by Dr. v. Alphen de Veer. All punctuation has been added.

<sup>44</sup> He probably means that museums are not installed so that one artist can be readily compared with another. <sup>45</sup> I think he means that museum officials are idiots. <sup>46</sup> He plausibly means that recent artists are automatically considered inferior to the artists of the past.

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As I tell you - I've answered as you have obliged me to - I have neither income, nor house, nor official position, nor money nor people who will give me credit [some words unintelligible]. It's exasperating but it's like this. My health is all right and that's a lot and with this I'm on my way.

Medardo Rosso as you rightly say".

The compunction of this letter refutes, to an extent, the opinion of Miss Fles's Dutch relatives who feel that Rosso imposed upon her. Certainly she bought many of his sculptures, equally certainly he considered her a friend "of the first category", as he used to say. Being extravagantly generous himself<sup>47</sup>, he thought it natural to ask for help, for he would gladly have granted it were the positions reversed. It appears that Miss Fles made it a point not to give him bank notes but gold pieces and he, with a single throw, would toss them high in the air so that they scattered all over his studio. As the days went by he picked up what he needed; then, when all visible coins had disappeared, he'd search frantically under the bed and under the furniture hoping to find some stray twenty-franc pieces. Wanton though this procedure may seem to the thrifty, it is typical of Rosso's character: born poor, he adored to be lordly and grand and, at the same time, he had a casual contempt for money, so that he lived improvidently all his life in a boyish rags-to-riches oscillation.

Etha Fles never wavered in her conviction that Rosso was a great artist, and her support and faith remained unflagging. She had known him and studied him with focused attention for some eight years. She had sublime notions about the call of art and she realized full well that since the *Ecce puer* her protégé had produced nothing new. In one of those impulsive twists that were part of her moralistic and northern nature, she decided that in his interest she had best move to Rome<sup>48</sup>.

*The Great Photograph*

In 1957 J. W. C. van Campen published a post-mortem on Etha Fles, reproducing a photograph (fig. 15) captioned "Etha Fles in her studio in Rome, c. 1908"<sup>49</sup>. Better than any words, it describes the situation at this time: Etha

<sup>47</sup> In 1906 he gave his van Gogh *Diligence de Tarascon* to his ~~Argentinian~~ disciple Milo Beretta; he gave his Rodin torso to Gustavo Sforzi around 1910/11; and he made gifts of his own works to friends who could not afford to pay for them. <sup>48</sup> During the second World War and the German occupation of Holland Etha Fles wrote her nephew Walter a letter that is a recapitulation of her life and her motivations. In it she says: "This gave me the strength to move to Rome, because life might have become too easy for my friend owing to my comfortable financial circumstances". <sup>49</sup> Dr. v. Alphen de Veer thinks that the date of this photograph should be circa 1911 and that it was taken in Paris. But the floor tiles are the red hexagonal *mattonelle* so common in unpretentious Roman apartments of the period. Beyond a doubt Miss Fles was settled in Rome by 1909, since Dr. G. J. Hoogewerff

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Fig. 15  
ETHA FLES IN ROME,  
1908/09



Fles sits at the piano in a loose, embroidered robe that is merciful to her stoutness. She smiles toward the camera with an expression of great softness and humanity. Her brow is smooth and serene, she touches the keys lightly, as if to play a short prelude for her absent friend who loved Bach. With the furniture compressed and moved, she is surrounded by her thirteen masterpieces, while – in the foreground – the tea set and cozy stand as reminders of the gentle social gatherings of the foreign colony in those last years of utter peace.

The photograph is a summation of what her friendship for Rosso had produced: tangibly a collection of his most touching and emotional works, and spiritually a focus for her idealism and her affectionate and selfless nature. Though she was out of his daily reach, the picture was her message of reassurance and steady faith. A friend of hers, Miss Alexandrine Osterkamp, remarks: "I always admired in Etha that gift to love without binding, to say farewell and to leave without regretting, even if her heart must have been suffering and breaking. Gratitude always got the better of grief"<sup>50</sup>.

*Recognition in Italy*

During his second trip to Paris, Ardengo Soffici, the brilliant Italian painter and critic, had taken notice of Rosso's entries in the Salon d'Automne. When he returned in 1909 he made a point of meeting him and, fired by the enthusiasm of a confirmed "discovery", embarked on a contentious, anti-academic cam-

went to call on her in that year and met Rosso there (letter to the author dated Florence, September 26, 1961). <sup>50</sup> From a letter to the author dated Amsterdam, April 23, 1961.

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paign in favor of his self-exiled countryman in *La Voce*. Founded in 1908 by Giuseppe Prezzolini, this periodical did much to arouse Italy from a long period of political, sociological, and artistic stagnation. Many of the youthful contributors looked to Paris as their Mecca and when, at last, they could afford the pilgrimage, they beheld, in a concentrated orgy of seeing, the work of the Impressionists, the Post-Impressionists, and, in the same glow, the controversial sculpture of Medardo Rosso.

With considerable effort they raised the money for an exhibition and succeeded in borrowing pictures from Durand-Ruel, Paul Rosenberg, as well as from private collectors. On April 20, 1910, failing better quarters, they opened their First Exhibition of Impressionism in the somber halls of the Florence Lyceum, a club for intellectual ladies at 28 Via Ricasoli. They had selected six works by Degas, four Monets, six Renoirs, five Cézannes, three Pissarros, three Lautrecs, and fifteen sculptures by Rosso supplemented by photographs of his unavailable works.

For Rosso this was the first accolade on his own soil and a very glorious one indeed. Let us not quibble at the elastic use of the term "impressionist", since classifications only crystallize in the perspective of time; for his young discoverers who were to become the leaven of Italian art and thought, the word was gloriously anti-academic. By exhibiting Rosso with some of the greatest artists Paris had produced, artists whose names were legendary only to the most cultivated Italians, and whose works had never been seen south of the Alps, they established an analogy that was meant to elevate him to the same level.

Rosso was lionized by the Florentine and foreign élite<sup>51</sup> and was taken to call on ~~the great actress~~ Eleonora Duse, whose friendship he and especially Etha Fles were to treasure in years to come.

Fame travels fast; in 1911 Rosso was invited to show at the Esposizione Internazionale di Belle Arti which opened on April 13th in the Museo d'Arte Moderna in Rome. Unaccountable delays arose, violent disagreements about installation, all caused, according to Etha Fles, by the opposition of masonic artists and organizers<sup>52</sup>. The gallery with Rosso's works opened only in June, more than a month late, when all critics had reviewed the show and when only the most fearless visitors would face the challenge of the sundrenched Valle

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 Vossler to Benedetto Croce, in *Briefwechsel Benedetto Croce-Karl Vossler*, Berlin 1955,  
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nota 51

Questo libro esiste in  
 Italiano e si chiama  
 Carteggio etc. pubblicato  
 da Laterza 1951.

È importante provare, completare  
 il titolo e cambiare la pagina

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<sup>51</sup> Letter of Karl Vossler to Benedetto Croce, in *Briefwechsel Benedetto Croce-Karl Vossler*, Berlin 1935, 148, courtesy Dr. Erwin Panofsky. <sup>52</sup> Fles, 1922, 43. It is actually true that freemasons such as the sculptor Leonardo Bistolfi and the painter Ettore Ferrari had a firm hold on exhibitions and official commissions before the Fascist period.

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year the territories of Tripolitania and Cirenaica as well as Rhodes and the Dodecanese came under the rule of Victor Emmanuel III. The brief colonial conflict seemed a minor episode at the time, but the ring of patriotic songs, the novel word "mobilization", the heavy tread of passing troops, the publicized atrocities of the enemy, the sudden increase in the price of commodities acquainted Italians with the sense of emergency which was to become only too familiar to most of Europe some three years later.

Medardo Rosso had returned to his Batignolles studio in considerable disgust after the exasperating experience of the Roman International. On February 2, 1912 the four Futurist painters Boccioni, Carrà, Russolo, and Severini opened their exhibition at Bernheim-Jeune's. It was a sensation. What Rosso felt about it remains shrouded in the same mystery<sup>53</sup> that leaves us in ignorance of his opinions about the crucially important artistic developments that, in the early twentieth century, were taking place in Paris under his very eyes. He did not live the life of a provincial or a recluse<sup>54</sup> but somehow he did not participate as he had in the nineties. So far as we can gather, his bitterness over Rodin's increasing fame caused him to concentrate on obtaining the recognition he, too, deserved, although the French expression "se battre pour son œuvre" is more heroic and more apt. It seems inconceivable that he and Etha Fles should not have conversed about the great Cézanne retrospective, about the Fauves, the Cubists, and about the many artists who were making a name for themselves before the first World War. Maybe they did, but their words have flown and in Etha's writings the most frequent allusions are to the Blue Riders and especially to Kandinsky. The scarce documentation of these years leaves many lacunae, not the least of which is an exact record of when Rosso's health began to fail<sup>55</sup>, for

<sup>53</sup> Rosso's devoted friend Mario Vianello Chiodo thinks that he was unsympathetic to the Futurists because they were too "inhuman". When Boccioni sent him the Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture (published April 11, 1912), he did not react. He eventually became a friend of Carlo Carrà whom he met, not in Paris but in Venice, in 1914. <sup>54</sup> He surely knew Apollinaire, that great connecting link of the Paris world, who was to write (437-8): "The death of Rodin did not cause art critics to speak again about Mr. Medardo Rosso who is now, beyond a doubt, the greatest living sculptor. The injustice of which this prodigious sculptor has always been a victim is not about to be repaired. Meanwhile Mr.

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Sophienspital

tu ho una parala  
non dire

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physical malaise as well as psychological factors can account for a man's passivity.

Doubtless the thought of Rosso was a source of ever-renewed anxiety for his devoted and restless friend in Rome, so that in 1912, when her dividends from the Kosmos Company began to shrink because of unwise investments in Russia, she felt justified in boarding a train for the north. First she went to Holland to attend to her affairs, and Rosso, also an inveterate traveler, came to visit her at the Zonnebloem where, as always, she plied him with kindness. Naturally she renewed contact with her old acquaintances and especially with the Julius sisters, who had been friends of her sister Anna. She invited one of them to stay with her for a month in Paris while the other, Louise, a violinist, was to arouse her particular solicitude when she developed tuberculosis in the bones of her wrists.

Later during her Paris visit Etha received her favorite nephew, Walter van Alphen de Veer, and his wife, who were departing for the Dutch East Indies for an indefinite stay. An unwonted disquiet was in the air as the Balkan crisis began to overcloud the European horizon, in fact, by 1913 all the chancelleries of Europe considered war to be inevitable. Did Miss Fles realize this? Had she become apprehensive? Or was the plan that was slowly forming in her mind motivated by her very nature? On the one hand, she was idealistic, prone to cults<sup>56</sup>, patient and long-suffering toward those she loved, often generous to excess; but on the other hand, she was thrifty, practical, and endowed with a sense of logic: she accepted reality and adapted to it with extraordinary equanimity. For a dozen years now she had bent her energies to aid and foster the cause of her Italian sculptor. Perhaps in small ways she had attempted to discipline him for his own good<sup>57</sup>, but in the grand design of her behavior she had shown intuition and self-discipline. She had never advanced the notion of marriage which, from a worldly point of view, would have been mutually advantageous<sup>58</sup>. She was willing from the first to grant sympathy, companionship, and help in the hour of need while respecting his unwillingness to be tied

the woods and remained unconscious for at least half an hour (from a conversation with A. Soffici, July 1960). Throughout his life he liked to eat and drink freely in the manner of the Italians of that time; eventually diabetes set in, insulin was not yet in use, and an injury to his foot ~~eventually~~ led to his death. <sup>56</sup> As previously noted, in the early nineteen hundreds she had a strong anthroposophical slant; in Rome she frequented the circles of Ernesto Buonaiuti who, though a Catholic, inspirationally made his appearances in Christian Science and Unity circles. Finally in 1925 she and her adopted daughter Agatha Verkroost were converted to Catholicism. <sup>57</sup> Dr. G. J. Hoogewerff in a letter to the author (September 26, 1961) in reminiscing about his youthful visit to Miss Fles in Rome remarks: "We had the impression that she was doing everything possible to 'coach' him..." <sup>58</sup> Miss Alexandrine Osterkamp, in a letter to the author (April 23, 1961), remarks: "I don't think that even if divorcees had been easy [in Italy] she would ever have married him, because she understood and loved him too much to bend his life to hers". According to Mrs. Carrà, Medardo's wife lived till 1933/34.

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down. She sensed that he could not and would not be responsible for others. In 1889 he had gone to Paris leaving his wife and young son in Milan; his insistence on personal freedom was part of the egocentric character of many committed artists. He knew that with great travail he had to draw out of his inner resources every new work, even every new version of a past work, so that there was no accommodation in his daily life for another presence. For his art he had to preserve the flow of casual impulse, the unhindered possibility of floating, of laying himself open to visual shocks, of meditating, of brooding alone with no set obligations. His immense solitude in later years accounts for the stream of affectionate notes and anxious telegrams he addressed to the few chosen friends that counted for him as family substitutes.

Whether international or personal considerations caused Miss Fles to alter her life in a most radical way by taking on new responsibilities without severing her allegiance to Rosso is a question that, for lack of evidence, cannot be resolved. Rosso by now had made contact with his long lost son Francesco and perhaps she felt that it would be suitable for her to diminish her involvement and to make herself less accessible.

The first intimation of her plan of withdrawal appears in a letter that she addressed to the Mayor of Turin on March 29, 1913. She had stopped off there with Rosso on her way to Rome<sup>59</sup>. ~~Written in rather shaky French, it is here reproduced in free translation:~~ *Here spelling is preserved!*

"Monsieur le Maire,

I wish to inform you that having visited the Museum of Modern Art in your city, it occurred to me that I might deposit in this Museum some lovely works of an artist born in Turin, Medardo Rosso, an eminent sculptor, not yet represented there. He is one of the most interesting artists for the evolution of art. Many foreign museums have actively sought out his works. The deposit that I am disposed to make in order to honor the artist in the city of his birth would consist of the following works: 1. *Femme à la voilette* (wax acquired by the French State for the Luxembourg); 2. *Sick Child*, Dresden Museum; 3. *Laughing Child*, Leipzig Museum [she means *Gavroche*]; 4. *Enfant au Soleil*, bronze, Hagen Museum; 5. *Jewish Child*, wax, Troyes Museum; 6. *Concierge*.

While offering you these works as loans I wish to inform you that I would be ready to donate them if the city of Turin, as proof of its appreciation of the work of this Piedmontese artist, were to buy one of his other creations.

Please answer my proposal within ten days because I have come expressly to Italy to give up my residence in Rome where I keep my Rosso collection and settle the matter of its disposal with one of the Italian museums. I trust that you will appreciate that I thought first of the birthplace of the artist.

Greetings...

Etha Fles

Address your answer to Via dei Villini 15, Rome"<sup>60</sup>.

<sup>59</sup> Borghi, 15. <sup>60</sup> From the archives of the Museo Civico, Turin, courtesy of the Director, Dr. Vittorio Viale.

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How had she hit upon this astonishingly modern invention of a conditional gift? In 1913, in Italy, it was unprecedented. Dr. Vittorio Viale, the present director of the Museo Civico, remarks that in Turin Miss Fles and Rosso saw a great deal of the critic Emilio Zanzi, who may in long conversations have helped, suggested, and elaborated the initial idea of placing works in the Museum while saving Rosso's face and pride by not making an outright gift. There was good reason to believe that Turin would be receptive because the Impressionist painter and critic Curt Seidel had begun to write about Rosso in 1910 and, in 1911, had obtained space to publicize him in a glowing and lengthy essay<sup>61</sup>. The ground was well prepared but, alas, Miss Fles's proposals were not handled with grace. On April 15, 1913, the Directing Committee of the Museum voted four in favor and two against the Rosso accessions, despite the support of the enlightened director, Enrico Thovez. As a result, only the *Enfant au Soleil* was accessioned in 1913, and the *Gavroche (Birichino)*, the *Age d'or (Donna con bimbo)*, and the *Child at the Breast (Bimbo che poppa)* in 1914, all as gifts of Miss Fles<sup>62</sup>. The Museum bought nothing from Rosso, it accepted just two of the sculptures originally offered, and, repudiating the more advanced works, selected the mother-and-child pieces which, in subject matter if not in treatment, were more apt to appeal to the public.

Undaunted, Etha Fles made the same conditional offer to the Museum of Modern Art in Rome. On July 31, 1914, the files record<sup>63</sup> the acquisition from Rosso of the *Dame à la voilette* for 6,000 lire and the accession of *Enfant juif*, *Concierge*, *Little Girl Laughing*, and *Bookmaker* as gifts of Etha Fles. During these transactions, in the height of the summer, she was closing her apartment for good.

By this time Rosso was coming into his own. In 1914, when invited at long last to have a one-man show at the Biennale (the XI), he omitted to answer the invitation and appeared in Venice with his eighteen entries when the gallery allotted to him had been filled with the canvases of Vittorio Mancini. This suited Rosso who liked to have his sculptures juxtaposed to paintings. With the help of his son Francesco and of the noted Spanish painter Anglada Cammarasa he got his things in place. Nino Barbantini, Director of the Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna in the Ca' Pesaro was enthusiastic<sup>64</sup>.

While the Biennale was running its course, Franz Ferdinand was murdered at Sarajevo (June 28), Austria declared war on Serbia (July 28), and the Germans

<sup>61</sup> Seidel. <sup>62</sup> *Catalogo... del Museo Civico di Torino*, 170. <sup>63</sup> From the archives of the Museo d'Arte Moderna, Valle Giulia, Rome, courtesy of the Directress, Dottorressa Palma Bucarelli. <sup>64</sup> Barbantini, August 1914.

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## MEDARDO ROSSO AND HIS DUTCH PATRONESS ETHA FLES

marched across the border into France. By August 4th the first World War was on.

Etha Fles had a certain sense of familiarity about the Venice shows. She had sent etchings to the very first International of 1895 and had exhibited again in 1905<sup>65</sup>; therefore, without inhibitions, she wrote Nino Barbantini, as an inhabitant of the Amsterdam of Italy, thanking him for his fervid article on "the soul of Medardo Rosso, my friend". She remarks bitterly that although Italy had never made a gesture of sympathy for the great Piedmontese, she had always been certain that it would be an Italian who would some day have the sensitiveness to perceive "the perfect harmony and the true religion with which Rosso, in a wide yet tender gesture, embraces all that exists around us... You have written lines that tremble with true emotion, whereas Soffici, in that book of his, preaches only about himself"<sup>66</sup>. She then alludes to the "materialistic monstrosities" of Mancini and, in a slightly skittish tone, adumbrates in closing that she hopes to make him a nice surprise some day but that, for the moment, he must not breathe a word of this.

By October 26th she has already revealed what the surprise would be: the usual formula of gifts from her conditional to an acquisition from Rosso; in fact, she awaits the decisions of the "Commissione" with anxiety for "it would be psychologically such a good thing for Medardo Rosso if Italy actually bestirred herself for him. If Italy were not his own country he would not mind quite so much this animosity, this hostility toward him... You may have heard that I forced the Committee in Rome to purchase the *Femme à la voilette*... I would like nothing better than to make a gift to your museum but I cannot do it *unless it buys*. Such a step cannot be taken twice<sup>67</sup>. From the sublime to the ridiculous is but one step. I do understand that they refuse to buy any one of the works you like best, but there are others, that everyone can understand... Do not let Rosso know of our correspondence..."

By November Etha Fles had moved to Padua within easy reach of Venice and the elaborate, though not unpleasant, transactions were brought to a close within the year, for the Ca' Pesaro bought a bronze of the *Ecce puer* and accessioned, as gifts of Etha Fles, *Petite rieuse*, *Enfant à la bouchée de pain*, *Yvette Guilbert*, *Madame X*, *Madame Noblet*, *Dame à la voilette*, and, as a gift from Medardo Rosso,

<sup>65</sup> In 1921 she gave the Venice Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna some etchings of Dordrecht and Utrecht which are still preserved in its print collections. <sup>66</sup> She is referring to Soffici, 1909. Her remark seems unfair, since without Soffici's campaign in *La Voce* in 1909/10 and the exhibition in the Florence Lyceum, Rosso might have remained in the suspended limbo of chance fame in countries not his own. Soffici continued to write off and on about Rosso until 1950. <sup>67</sup> She alludes to the Turin Museum which had accepted her gifts but had bought nothing.

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*Concierge*. She must have bought several of these pieces from him after 1908, for they do not appear in the great Roman photograph.

On February 21, 1915, Etha Fles wired Barbantini<sup>68</sup> from Alassio on the Italian Riviera to inquire at what time the Rosso Gallery in the Ca' Pesaro would be inaugurated, so that she could "participate in her thoughts."

#### *Wartime*

One would like to think that as she wended her way to Holland by dreary and slow trains through war-torn Europe she had the feeling of satisfaction of a good work well done. Thanks to her gifts representative groups of Rosso's sculptures, not just one or two works, were firmly entrenched in key Italian museums where they could be seen not only by his contemporaries but by later, more receptive, generations. There was now no chance of his sinking into oblivion.

At fifty-eight Etha Fles embarked on a new phase: once in Holland she adopted Agatha Verkroost, the eighteen-year-old daughter of one of her father's tenants and with her, and the now seriously ailing Louise Julius, she settled high in the Alps at Leysin, the Davos of French-speaking Switzerland, south of Geneva and in full view of Mont Blanc. Italy entered the war on May 23, 1915. After a while the cure came to an end, Miss Julius departed, Miss Fles and Agatha, left alone in the peaceful isolation of Switzerland, traveled from hotel to pension and spent some time in Ruvigliana near Lugano. Etha Fles rarely heard from Rosso and to comfort her solitude she documented in a copybook some remembered conversations, some letters of Rosso's, and probably began her long article on him which appeared right after the end of the first World War<sup>69</sup>.

Rosso's movements after the 1914 Biennale are difficult to trace. Etha Fles mentions that he returned to Paris in 1917 after an absence of three years<sup>70</sup>. Carlo Carrà remembers that he settled in Milan in 1917<sup>71</sup>, while Apollinaire writes on July 13, 1918, that Rosso is working in the silence of his studio in Paris.

How he divided his time between Milan and Paris cannot at the moment be decided; an inveterate internationalist, averse to patriotism and to the blind acceptance of "hereditary enemies", he had always preached that children should not be taught history so that they could grow up free and without chauvinistic resentments. Gradually he became indignant about the senseless slaughter and

<sup>68</sup> This telegram and the preceding letters to Barbantini are preserved in the archives of the Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna in Venice, courtesy of the Director, Dr. Guido Perocco. <sup>69</sup> Fles, 1919, 289-300. <sup>70</sup> Fles, 1922, 39. <sup>71</sup> Carrà, 277.

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## MEDARDO ROSSO AND HIS DUTCH PATRONESS ETHA FLES

cannot have been deaf, after the tragedy of Caporetto, to the French taunt *macaroni!* Probably after this fatal October of 1917 he left France. Agatha Verkroost remembers that she saw him for the first time when he came at an uncertain date for a visit to Leysin. Glad to escape from the stringencies of wartime rationing he made an omelet of twelve eggs which he triumphantly launched into the air and caught again in the pan, a feat for which he was celebrated. At this time Miss Fles was able to afford some further financial help for her friend because she had sold a house in Laren, but essentially she was no longer the wealthy lady of the prewar years; Medardo, persistently and touchingly child-like<sup>72</sup>, found the change hard to believe, so that Miss Fles, as a last resort, explained that she had to care for her adopted daughter<sup>73</sup>.

*Epilogue*

The Armistice of November 3, 1918 was for Etha Fles the signal for instant departure, and within the same month she and Agatha settled down in Rome. First the young girl worked in the Dutch Embassy, but funds were low and after a time Miss Fles had to fall back on the last resort of ladies in straitened circumstances: she rented a large apartment, took in paying guests, and had poor Agatha stay at home to help with the housekeeping.

Miss Fles continued to contribute to papers and periodicals in Holland. In 1919 her article "Medardo Rosso", though diffuse and imprecise, contained two notable facts: the identification of *Madame X* as the *Mask of Dolores* and the memory that when Rodin's *Penseur* was installed in front of the Pantheon in 1906 an indignant voice broke into the ceremonies with the repeated cry: "Et Medardo Rosso? Et Medardo Rosso?" Only in 1922 did she produce a mature though rambling little paper book on Medardo Rosso in German<sup>74</sup>. Full of useful information, written with firsthand perceptiveness though with a certain vagueness about dates, it provides a lively documentation of Rosso's character, attitudes, and *obiter dicta*.

The great friendship never flagged, though in the middle twenties Rosso was more and more confined to his room in the Grand Hotel in Milan where by hook or crook every now and then he managed to recast a wax in the small space that was divided in two by a curtain. One time at least, Etha Fles, overcome by anxiety, took the trip to Milan, didn't find him in the hotel and sought him out at his son's address. Rosso, taken aback, bustled out with her in short

<sup>72</sup> To quote Constantin Brancusi: "Quand nous ne sommes plus enfants nous sommes déjà morts".

<sup>73</sup> From interviews of Jacob van der Waals with Miss Agatha Verkroost in Bergen 1961. <sup>74</sup> Fles, 1922 (out of print); photocopy in the Museum of Modern Art Library, New York.

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order<sup>75</sup>. Perhaps he wanted to keep this side of his life in the shadow, and then again, he may have been ashamed of the old and perhaps shabby lady who was by now approaching seventy. But in his last years of ill-health he came to feel that she was the only woman who had ever understood him and he kept her letters by his bedside. He died on March 31, 1928. The news reached Rome on a Sunday and Agatha remembers that Etha remained long silent<sup>76</sup>.

Even before this bereavement she was writing a record of her ten years in Rome<sup>77</sup>. Illustrated mostly with Piranesi views, it preserves in amber the attitudes and occupations of the many foreigners who had chosen the Eternal City as the abode of their late years. Wandering, dreaming, probing the validity of their exotic faiths, they visited monuments, conversed in mixed languages, and basked in the sun. In their limbo they remained not aloof but totally unconscious of the real life of the city. Etha's first feelings about Fascism, her later considerations after the murder of Matteotti, her impressions of the *Conciliazione* between the Vatican and Mussolini are out of focus and bathed in a fine northern idealism. The names of Duse and of Rosso recur in happy reminiscence.

In 1934 Miss Fles and Agatha decided to return to the Zonnestoep; in 1936 while Agatha was sick in a hospital at nearby Alkmaar, Etha wrote one more essay on Rosso to comfort herself in her solitude<sup>78</sup>. The memory of this man came and went like a tide through the thoughts of her old age. Her prophetic remark that Rosso went far beyond Impressionism contains the kernel of our still lively interest in him in 1962 for, like Stendhal, he projected his message beyond his generation to the "happy few".

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<sup>75</sup> From a conversation with Mrs. Tilde Rosso, Francesco's widow (now deceased), August 1960.

<sup>76</sup> To quote Miss Alexandrine Osterkamp who was then staying with Miss Fles in Rome: "The shock which the tidings of his death gave her was significant; at this moment I did not know anything about their strong connection, but later I understood what his death meant to her". <sup>77</sup> Fles, 1929.

<sup>78</sup> Fles, 1936.

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*some the story  
aspect of this*

ETHA FLES  
1857-1948

by

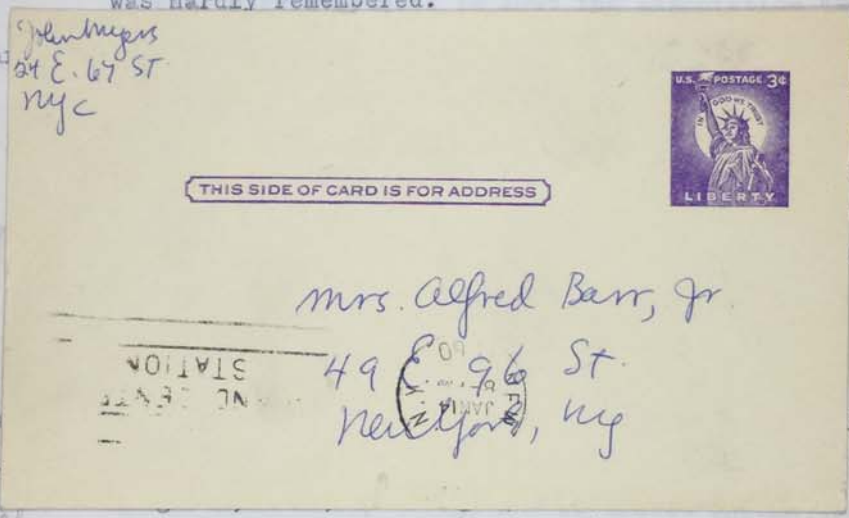
Mr. J.W.C. van Campen

page 110

par. 1 At the time of Etha Fles' death in 1948 in Bergen, the warmth of her personality had made her avoid the loneliness of old age: she had a circle of young friends, though the contribution she had made to the cultural life of Holland was hardly remembered.

*page 91*

*at E. 67 St  
NYC*



page 111

*in 1891 they moved  
to the Malenkamp  
37*

formed the centre of this group.

par. 2 Etha maintained her contacts with many of these friends in later life.

par. 3 amplifies par. 2, speculating on Etha Fles's further relations with Adele Opzoomer, the writer Frederik van Eeden and Jan Veth the artist, who lived not in Utrecht.

page 112

par. 1 Like most of her literary friends she was interested in socialism, in the eighties. But her interest was mainly theoretical

par. 2 The local association of painters in Utrecht, "Kunstliefde", which consisted mainly of local celebrities, such as Lokhorst, etc. had towards the end of the 19th century strong reactionary ix views, showed but little tolerance for new trends in painting. The more broad-minded painters organized exhibitions outside

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*now the sunny aspect of this*

ETHA FLES  
1857-1948

by

Mr. J.W.C. van Campen

page 110

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with Adele Opzoomer, the writer Frederik van Eeden and Jan Veth

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page 112

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had towards the end of the 19th century strong reactionary vi

views, showed but little tolerance for new trends in painting.

The more broad-minded painters organized exhibitions outside

*in 1891 they moved to the Maliebaan 57*

*Dearest Margu:  
what an excellent piece  
you have written on  
Medardo Rosso! Oh &  
wish you'd write more  
and more essays. I  
like the way you write;  
so clear, so simple  
and so well turned —  
a truly elegant prose.  
I mean it!!!  
Love,  
John*

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1

*now the sunny  
aspect of things*

ETHA FLES  
1857-1948

by

Mr. J.W.C. van Campen

page 110

par. 1 At the time of Etha Fles' death in 1948 in Bergen, the warmth of her personality had made her avoid the loneliness of old age: she had a circle of young friends, though the contribution she had made to the cultural life of Holland was hardly remembered.

*page 91*

par. 2 Etha Fles was born 1 May, 1857 at Utrecht. Her father was a medical officer in the armed forces and an oculist, emotional and passionately fond of music. Her mother engaged in philanthropic activities and was an amateur painter. Apart from the artistic element it is difficult to say what Etha inherited from her parents, though the strict and sober education she received at home had left its mark, according to relatives.

page 111

*in 1891 they moved  
to the Maliebaan  
37*

par. 1 This paragraph lists some of the people who frequented the Fles family: artists, authors and musicians. The elder daughter, Anna, the singer, and her sister, Etha, the painter, formed the centre of this group.

par. 2 Etha maintained her contacts with many of these friends in later life.

par. 3 amplifies par. 2, speculating on Etha Fles's further relations with Adele Opzoomer, the writer Frederik van Eeden and Jan Veth the artist, who lived not in Utrecht,

page 112

par. 1 Like most of her literary friends she was interested in socialism, in the eighties. But her interest was mainly theoretical

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her articles compared to those Moou's wife

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Poland to est.

the "Kunstliefde" group. Already in 1891 an exhibition with works by Derkinderen, Matthijs Maris, Toorop etc., had been organized in Utrecht by Etha Fles and J.H. Besier, later wife of Derkinderen/

Page 113

par. 1 With the enthusiasm which characterized her, Etha Fles and several others founded in 1895 the association "Voor de Kunst" to promote new trends in the plastic arts and to encourage handicraft. There followed many successful exhibitions of the works of Toorop, van Gogh and others, so that new movements in European cultural life reached Utrecht before other parts of Holland. In 1906 membership of "Voor de Kunst" reached 814. It was not until 1938 that "Kunstliefde" and "Voor de Kunst" merged into one group. By then Etha Fles had long left Utrecht. In 1900 she spent a short time in Paris where she made the acquaintance of the Italian sculptor Medardo Rosso, with whom she remained on friendly terms for a long time.

right after Paris she went

In her "Inleiding" (Introduction) she lays particular stress on his importance, though she is honest enough to quote fully Meier-Grafe, who considered that Rosso's impressionistic and pictorial sculpture took him along extremely narrow paths that led nowhere. From Paris she went to Rome for the first time. She set up a studio in Amsterdam in 1906, from there went to Haarlem and then Bergen <sup>in the Breda</sup> (North Holland). After Christmas 1908 she went again to Paris. <sup>significantly called the</sup>

went to Haarlem  
Maubert de Favaug  
was a friend, who  
was a writer who  
"In de Strijdt"

influencer, her father died, Anna died 1906, Maliebaan

Page 115

par. 1 Describes her generous character. <sup>Effort to many because of good</sup>  
par. 2 Paris marked the beginning of a long period of residence abroad. Though she had wanted to be a painter, she realized that her true vocation was that of art critic and wrote many a articles for various periodicals. What interested her in a work of art was the human and the spiritual, and her understanding of beauty was essentially religious. In 1918, after a five year stay in Switzerland, she finally settled in Rome.

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Euler, diep 1903  
idols name of  
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interior occupation

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par. 1 Though writing took up most of her time, she painted and etched and remained faithful to her piano during her stay in Rome. Her large studio was decorated with sculptures by Rosso, which Eleanore Duse came to admire. The actress's words "Ah, vous êtes artiste que vous aimez ces oeuvres tellement!" were probably more than a theatrical gesture.

par. 2 Some one with her talents could not live in Italy without writing about Giotto, Vannucci, Veronese, Bernini and other Renaissance and Baroque artists. But her heart went out even more to the painters and sculptors, striving for rejuvenation and freedom in a country where the traditions of a rich past live on, but a past that gives no new inspiration. Among them were: Medardo Rosso, "le sculpteur de la lumière", as he was called, at one ~~time~~ moment, a revolutionary dreamer and the next a frenziedly active artist; the painter Gerardo Dottori and the blind sculptor Ernesto Masuelli. Etha Fles, full of warm admiration, wrote essays about these three, which were later collected into her book "Three visionary artists of our time" (Drie visionnaire kunstenaars van onze tijd), published in Haarlem in 1936.

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par. 1 She was also interested in the Italy of today and her travel articles for the "Utrechtse Dagblad" formed part of the material of her book "Ten Years in Rome (Tien jaren in Rome)", which appeared in 1929. The rest of this long paragraph discusses her qualified admiration of Mussolini's work.

Page 118

par. 1 Discusses her admiration for Goethe, whom she resembles in Toorop's portrait, and for great spiritual figures of the past like St. Theresa and St. Francis Xavier. Her interest in these figures led to her conversion to Catholicism in December 1925.

Page 119

par. 1 She remained in Rome until 1936 and returned to Bergen, Holland when she was 79.

Page 120

par. 1 Lists the artists who frequented her in Bergen in her old age.  
par. 2 She died on 31 Jan., 1948, at the age of 91.

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J. T. SOBY  
Brushy Ridge Road  
New Canaan, Conn.

Nov. 2, 1962

Dearest Marga:

The only way I seem able to make editorial suggestions is to write them out on this machine, so I've simply underlined in pencil words or phrases I think might be improved. The suggestions are all extremely minor, and I find the book scholarly, lively and extremely informative. I don't think Monroe should think of cutting its length, and I'll tell him so when I see him at the Trustees on Thursday.

page 1: I don't really know why I don't like the word "expedited" as applied to a station master. Could you say something simpler like "moved" or "hurried forward"?

page 3: could you say "realized that his true masters were not at the Brera" instead of "at his school" just to remind people ~~once~~ more that it was the Brera?

*not yet fixed*  
page 6: would it add interest here to make some reference to the Renaissance dispute as to which was more difficult both to create and to understand - painting or sculpture? Also ~~the~~ the fact that right now so many of the most talented younger artists prefer to work as sculptors. This continuing alternation of preference is such a fascinating subject.

page 10: I ~~th~~ thought I didn't like the phrase "gray pennilessness." Now I like it very much.

page 17: as an old Puritan I am always embarrassed by mention of men kissing each other, though I realize this is a straight New England reaction. Would "embrace" do. I guess not, since you're referring to a work known specifically as The Kiss. But there is an awful lot of kissing going on in this page, and maybe ~~once~~ once or twice you could say "embrace" if it isn't too inaccurate.

page 19: I know that "conjecture" ~~is~~ both noun and verb but it always seems to me awkward when used as the latter. Could you say "surmise" or "speculate"?

page 23: I find the word "maturation" rather clumsy. Wouldn't "maturity" do the trick?

page 24: a nose can be pendulous, of course, but can a nostril?

page 26: The tribute to Paris as a "liberal, cosmopolitan city" seems a bit extreme, ~~considering~~ considering the struggle so many top-flight French artists had at the time. Perhaps you could qualify it by ending the sentence with "where an enlightened public was certainly more sympathetic to their efforts than in Italy." Of course the Parisian audience was more alert and progressive than Milan, but I rather doubt that it was that much of a paradise for all the best French artists then working. You seem to imply this in the next sentence when you talk about the forming of the Indépendants, but your two sentences rather contradict each other.

page 31: I don't know why the words "busts" has always bothered me. Could you say "sculptured busts" to get away from "busts" in its overwhelmingly popular sense of failures? *Or busts*

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page 33: Instead of "forced in" could you perhaps say "had accepted"/? "Forced in" seems to imply more power than Rosso actually had in Paris art circles.

page 40: I don't think you need both uses of the word "did" in this sentence.

page 41: I like "this" better than "his" in the last sentence of the first paragraph

page 44: I agree with Irene that the last sentence in the first paragraph should be rewritten

page 53: I keep wondering whether Brancusi's profound dislike of photographs of his work by anyone except himself may not have been inherited from Rosso. Brancusi, who apparently arrived in Paris in 1904, spoke with bitterness of Rodin every time I saw him, and he may at one point have turned to Rosso's theories for consolation. I just don't know

page 55: Is Yvette Gilbert's red ribbon really "famous" ? In my addled middle age I'd forgotten she wore one in her many portraits.

page 56: You use the word "close" twice in the same sentence. Use "Near" in one of the two instances?

page 57: would transpose this sentence to make clear that the cast was destroyed in Mme Noblet's country house and not owned there. She owned it wherever it was

page 59: I think this is the first time you mention Rosso's friendship with Modigliani and I wish you could say a bit more about it, i.e., when it began, etc. Modigliani's name is so famous that it comes as rather a surprise to learn that abruptly that the two men knew each other. There may be a clue here to the fact that both Rosso and Brancusi disliked photographs of their works by others, since Rosso may have talked to Modigliani and, years later, Modigliani to Brancusi. As someone who was his friend (and I can't remember who it was) once told me, Modigliani was passionately Italian, a fact confirmed by his dying with the words "dear, dear Italy" on his lips.

~~page 60: I think this is the first time you mention Rosso's friendship with Modigliani and I wish you could say a bit more about it, i.e., when it began, etc. Modigliani's name is so famous that it comes as rather a surprise to learn that abruptly that the two men knew each other. There may be a clue here to the fact that both Rosso and Brancusi disliked photographs of their works by others, since Rosso may have talked to Modigliani and, years later, Modigliani to Brancusi. As someone who was his friend (and I can't remember who it was) once told me, Modigliani was passionately Italian, a fact confirmed by his dying with the words "dear, dear Italy" on his lips.~~

fine  
 It's a #####/job, Marga, and I read it with the greatest interest  
 It even made me nostalgic for the day when I got violently car sick riding up to the Rosso studio with Wittgens and the two Mattiolis and the wife, being pregnant, got actively sick in that tiny, swaying car and had to be let out in the outskirts of Milan. Love and congratulations,

(over) *Juni*

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Marga:

I've had much too little time to go through the footnotes carefully, but on page 17 of these notes you say that a friend of Degas "died precisely in 1884." Couldn't you say "died in precisely this year - 1884." It's pretty hard, alas, to die precisely except in one's sleep; it's usually so messy.

This is quibbling and I apologize. I'm afraid I've done so throughout and you must just throw away the suggestions you don't agree with or find useful.