

Lipchitz

Preview for Critics

Tuesday 2 to 5 p.m.

May 18

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

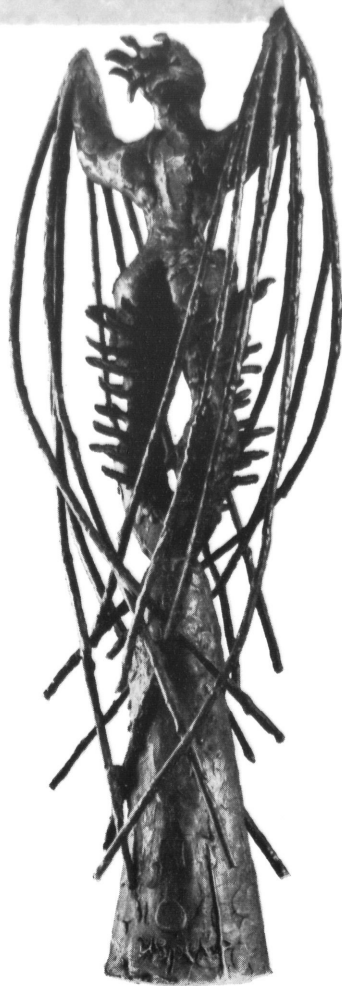
*the trustees of the museum
of modern art invite you
to the members' opening
of a retrospective exhibition
of the work of*

jacques lipchitz

*on tuesday evening, may 18,
1954, from five to eleven*

11 west 53 street

this invitation admits two



the museum of modern art

11 west 53 street, new york 19, n.y.

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

local general
PRESS PREVIEW: TUESDAY
MAY 18, 1954; 2 - 5 p.m.

FOR RELEASE: WEDNESDAY
MAY 19, 1954

No. 49

COMPREHENSIVE EXHIBITION OF SCULPTURE BY JACQUES LIPCHITZ AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Over forty years of the art of Jacques Lipchitz, one of the principal sculptors of the modern movement, will be on view at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, from May 19 through August 1, in the largest and most comprehensive exhibition of the artist's work ever assembled, and including one of his most celebrated bronzes, the monumental Song of the Vowels, never before exhibited in this country. A large group of works of all periods were brought from France for this showing and the selection includes a number of bronzes specially cast for the exhibition, notably Prometheus Strangling the Vulture, a work of heroic size with a spread of more than seven feet.

The exhibition which numbers over 120 works was organized by the Museum of Modern Art in collaboration with the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis and the Cleveland Museum of Art, where it will be shown during the fall and winter. Henry R. Hope, Head of the Art Department of Indiana University, served as director of the exhibition and has written the accompanying catalog. All of the first floor galleries and the larger half of the Museum's sculpture garden are given over to the exhibition, which was installed by Andrew Carnduff Ritchie, Director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture.

Lipchitz was born in 1891 in Russian dominated Lithuania and now lives in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York. He received all his training and made his first reputation in Paris where he lived until 1941. Since that time he has lived and worked in the United States. All aspects of the sculptor's career are surveyed in the exhibition. Lipchitz won his first renown as one of the principal sculptors of the cubist movement, and a fourth of the exhibition is drawn from work of this period. Bronzes, wood constructions, stone carvings, gouaches and polychrome reliefs, made between 1914 and 1928, demonstrate his contribution to the movement.

His emergence from the emotional detachment of cubism to a style of greater emotional power and impact is illustrated in the large bronzes of the thirties and forties, many of which are installed in the Museum's sculpture garden. And all the heroic themes of conflict and supplication, which appear in the works of the past 15 years, are represented in sketches, drawings or master bronzes.

Contrasting with the weight and mass of the sculpture-in-the-round are many small, airy, bronze "transparent" cast in the difficult lost-wax technique. They range in feeling from the gaiety of Pierrot with Clarinet, 1925, to the lyricism of Spring, 1943.

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Since Lipchitz is primarily a modeller, a dozen small bronze sketches are shown -- quickly modelled notations, ideas and images which frequently contain the germ of a major work.

Except for the garden, the exhibition is arranged chronologically. It opens in the hall with two early works which reflect Lipchitz' early schooling at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, where he began to study in 1909. Diego Rivera, whom he met in 1913, introduced him to cubism. At first unconvinced by the new style, Lipchitz experimented independently in such figures as The Meeting and Woman with Serpent. His cubist work begins with Sailor and Guitar, modelled in Madrid in 1914. His evolution through the next two years can be followed in the elongated bronze Bather, made in 1915 after his return to Paris; through the demountable wood constructions, Dancer and Figure, to the shaft-like stone carvings, Standing Personage and Standing Half-Figure and Man with Guitar, the most abstract and serene achievements of Lipchitz' career. The architectonic shafts are soon replaced by the more massive cubic forms of the Man with the Mandolin of 1917, lent by the Yale University Art Gallery. This stone image "with its single astonishing eye" fuses two views of the same figure. Other conventions of cubist painting appear in the stone and polychrome reliefs executed in 1918, when he spent the spring and summer with Juan Gris, a close friend of several years.

With the '20s comes a freer use of the curved line, as in the polished granite Seated Man, lent by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, and Lipchitz' first large-scale sculpture, the golden Bather of 1923 (installed in the reflecting pool in the Museum garden).

But it is the year 1925 which Mr. Hope finds most crucial in Lipchitz' career, for it marks the beginning of his break with cubism: "He felt an urgent need to break into the mass, to loosen the tight, well-disciplined planes ... and hoped to find some way of opening up its solid core to penetrations of light and space."

Many of the small "transparent" in which Lipchitz first achieved these aims, are exhibited in the east galleries. Pierrot, only 8" high, is the first. Mardi Gras, Pierrot with Clarinet, Acrobat on a Ball and two reliefs, Reclining Woman and Circus Scene, illustrate the many directions of his experiments. Mr. Hope quotes Lipchitz as saying about this time, "I soar with this heavier-than-air which is sculpture."

About 1917 Lipchitz began to translate the open patterning of the "transparent" into larger forms. The Reclining Nude with Guitar, a basalt carving of 1928, the Return of the Prodigal Son, Mother and Child, and Figure of 1926-30 are all in varying degrees designed in solids and voids.

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During this period Lipchitz gradually freed himself from the subject matter of cubism and turned toward a more personal, spontaneous imagery. The sweeping metaphor of the Song of the Vowels was first suggested by the harp section of a Paris orchestra. Lipchitz recalls "the music, the peculiar shape of the harps, the strings vibrating in the light, veritable columns binding the earth to heaven." The image developed in several stages from the small "transparent" The Harp Player of 1928 to the final monumental work installed in the Museum garden "a huge transparent which seems to magnetize the surrounding space." Symbolizing for the artist the will of man asserting itself over supernatural forces, the title is drawn from an ancient Egyptian prayer used to conjure up the forces of nature.

Discussing the changing style and spirit of the works of this period, Mr. Hope writes:

"To judge by surface appearances alone one would say that after 1929 or 1930 Lipchitz had begun to replace cubism by something else Yet Lipchitz was never to abandon cubism. When he says today 'I am still a cubist' he means that what he learned in cubism remains the grammar and syntax of his art."

Variations on themes of heroic conflict appear early in the '30s, such as Bull and Condor and Jacob Wrestling with the Angel, shown in the hall. The Prometheus legend is represented by three studies: the first idea, a bronze sketch of 1933, a gouache and an 18" bronze, Prometheus with Vulture, both preparations for the 40 foot sculpture executed in 1937 for the Paris World's Fair. A later development of the Prometheus theme, installed in the garden, is a cast of a facade sculpture for the Ministry of Education and Health in Rio de Janeiro, the artist's major architectural commission.

Lipchitz came to the United States from France in 1941 carrying a small sculpture called Flight, and, when he reached America, he executed another piece, in a similar baroque, passionate style called Arrival, both of which are shown in the hall. In an adjacent gallery is a group of "transparent" sculptures, executed during his first years in this country, such as Spring, Blossoming and The Promise. Displayed in the garden are two larger works of the same period. Benediction I, a 42" bronze, was created as a prayer for the preservation of France in 1942 when the sculptor's adopted country was being overrun by the Nazi armies. The huge, powerful torso, Mother and Child, from the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, is more specific in inspiration.

"Working in emotional tension," Mr. Hope writes, "it was only after the sculpture was completed that Lipchitz discovered the source of his image -- hidden until then in his subconscious mind: 'In 1935, while visiting a sister in Russia, we had come out of a theatre late at night in the rain, and hearing the voice of a woman singing in a loud, hoarse voice, traced it through the darkness until suddenly she appeared under a street lamp, a legless cripple in a little cart, with both arms raised and with her wet hair streaming down her back as she sang.'"

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Other somber subjects followed in the forties as Lipchitz was affected by the mass tragedy of mankind, wars and concentration camps. Commenting on two of these sculptures in the exhibition, Mr. Hope describes The Pilgrim:

"a tragic figure with exposed entrails whose body is clad in fluttering leaves, his pilgrim hat a coxcomb, his staff a budding branch." In Prayer, derived from the figure of The Pilgrim, "the ancient sacrificial ceremony, in which each man in the community kills the cock by whirling it above his head, is represented by a solitary old man in a dishevelled cloak quivering in terror as the cock wildly flaps its wings. The hollowed-out anatomy and the chaotically broken contours give a feeling of hysterical pathos. Yet the sculpture is not without beauty, beauty of a weird and unprecedented kind commemorating terror."

The final statement on this theme, Sacrifice, 1948, is lent by the Whitney Museum.

Among the later works shown in the last gallery, are five sketches and a small model for a figure of the Virgin, commissioned in 1946 by the late Father Couturier for the Church of Assy in the French Alps. In 1952, the final plaster model was destroyed in a studio fire. Imagining how the model must have looked as it was consumed in the fire, Lipchitz made one of his finest small bronzes, the Virgin in Flames.

Shown in the same case is another group of small works -- priest-like figures, centaurs, a dancer -- all incorporating the blade of a sculptor's tool and called by the artist, Variations on a Chisel. These "small delightful inventions," as Mr. Hope describes them, "reveal a lighter, more playful spirit when seen against the high seriousness of his monumental works."

Photographs of works in the exhibition are available upon request.