

The Museum of Modern Art

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A major retrospective exhibition of over 150 works by Reuben Nakian, the 69-year-old American sculptor, opens at The Museum of Modern Art on June 22 and will be on view through September 5.

Directed by Frank O'Hara, Associate Curator of Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions at the Museum, the show includes five recently completed major works -- Hiroshima, and a group of four figures, never before shown together, on the theme of The Judgment of Paris -- as well as a number of other large sculptures, small bronzes and terra-cottas, and drawings. The casting of Nakian's monumental Goddess of the Golden Thighs of 1964-65 was completed only in time for this exhibition which has been installed in the East Wing and adjacent section of the Sculpture Garden by Wilder Green, Program Coordinator for The Museum of Modern Art.

As Mr. O'Hara points out in the monograph* which the Museum is publishing in conjunction with the exhibition, "The career of Reuben Nakian has had dramatic ups and downs, advances, reversals, revaluations. His stylistic doubling-back and pushing-forward is not only exemplified by his development, but literally prefigured in his work: the slash-cut drawing into wet clay which ends as elegant, pastoral evocation of nymph and satyr; the harshly formed and rigidly armatured metal sheets which turn into erotic waves of Tarquinian lust and Lucretian submission, or autumnal leaves drifting toward a whimsical gravitational pull ... Nakian has created a remarkable oeuvre since the mid-forties through all these trials of temperament and of will"

The earliest work in the exhibition is the Head of Marcel Duchamp, completed in 1943. Unlike Nakian's many realistic portrait heads of fellow artists, collectors, political figures and other "democratic mythic figures" such as members of

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*NAKIAN by Frank O'Hara. 56 pages, 80 illustrations. \$4.95 hardbound, \$2.95 paperbound. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, N.Y.; hardbound edition distributed by Doubleday and Company, Inc.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's cabinet, the Head of Duchamp already shows the drastic revisions of his own artistic concepts which ~~began~~ about 1935. The change leads directly to the deeper content, the expanded open forms, and the dramatized surfaces of the important later work to which the present exhibition is devoted.

Nakian's evolving style, while personal, was closely related to that of the abstract-expressionist painters. His early terra-cottas, for example, show affinities with de Kooning's paintings of women, begun in the same period. This new interpretation led to the plastic innovations of his later work in plaster, bronze, and steel which in large part deal with mythological themes -- Leda and the Swan, The Rape of Lucrece, Mars and Venus, Hecuba, The Birth of Venus and the recent Judgment of Paris.

Such works, heroic both in subject and in scale, are accompanied in the exhibition by a range of smaller, intimate bronzes, terra-cottas and drawings in which the artist explores all the possibilities of his chosen themes.

Reuben Nakian was born of Armenian parentage in College Point, New York, in 1897 and later moved with his family to several New Jersey towns. Encouraged to study art by his parents, he attended the Art Students League briefly after graduating from grammar school and then worked as a professional illustrator. From 1916 to 1920 he served as an apprentice to the sculptor Paul Manship and was trained by Manship and his chief assistant, Gaston Lachaise, with whom Nakian shared a studio from 1920 to 1923.

Nakian's work was first exhibited at the Salons of America in New York in 1922 and his first one-man show was held four years later at the Whitney Studio Club. He was included in "46 Painters and Sculptors Under 35 Years of Age" held at The Museum of Modern Art in 1930, the year after the Museum opened. The Museum first acquired a Nakian work, the portrait head of the painter, "Pop" Hart, in 1932, and now owns almost a dozen sculptures and drawings by him. His monumental steel Rape of Lucrece has been exhibited periodically, on extended loan, at the Museum since April, 1959.

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In 1961 a one-man show of Nakian's work was presented at the VI Bienal in São Paulo, Brazil, as part of the U.S. representation, organized by The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art, and later shown at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. A retrospective exhibition of his work was given at the Gallery of Modern Art in Washington, D.C., in 1963; and that same year he was one of twenty American sculptors represented in the open-air exhibition in Battersea Park, London, also organized under the auspices of the Museum's International Council.

Several of his works were included in the exhibition of "Modern Sculpture: U.S.A.," shown at the Musée Rodin in Paris last summer and later in Berlin and Baden-Baden, which was organized under the auspices of The International Council.

Among the other honors accorded to Nakian in recent years have been his winning of an invited competition among five major American sculptors for the decorative sculpture installed in 1961 on the façade of the Loeb Student Center, New York University; the purchase by Lincoln Center of his bronze Voyage to Crete of 1960-62, now installed in the New York State Theater; and the inclusion of his La Chambre à Coucher de l'Empereur in the White House Festival of the Arts in June, 1965. The latter work will be shown in the Museum's exhibition, to which two other museums, 21 private collector, and two galleries are lending.

Photographs and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, and Lynn Traiger, Assistant Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. Circle 5-8900.