

PRATO  
MUSEO  
DI PALAZZO  
PRETORIO  
23 MARCH  
26 MAY  
2013

# L'ARTE DI GESSO

THE  
DONATION  
JACQUES  
LIPCHITZ  
TO PRATO



Jacques Lipchitz  
in the studio at 54  
rue Montparnasse,  
around 1922

## 1 \_ MYTHOLOGICAL SCENE, 1911

Plaster

43.8 x 40.6 x 3.8 cm

This work was created in 1911 when Lipchitz returned to Lithuania after his first trip to Paris to complete the paperwork for his discharge from military service and to visit his parents.. He visited the Hermitage Museum where he became fascinated with Shiite art. "I particularly remember an extraordinary collection of Shiite art, which was a revelation for me. These almost abstract, intertwined figures seemed to have a connection to what I was trying to do and, even if it was before it became Cubist, I think that it helped me to clarify my ideas". In this work, we can see the art, the balance and the bucolic sense of Aristide Maillol (1861 – 1944) and at the same time, that rhythm of twists, which is present in all of Lipchitz's sculptures. The confronting nature of this work, as with the female nudes and the male nude, also has a link to Maillol's visual thought.

## 2 \_ HARLEQUIN WITH MANDOLIN, 1920

Plaster sculpture with shellac  
66.7 x 25.4 x 21.6 cm

The work introduces one of the most common subjects amongst Cubist avant-garde artists, from Pablo Picasso to Georges Braque, Juan Gris and Lipchitz himself, who had a long friendship with Gris in particular, assisting him with the technical part of the creation of his only sculpture, dedicated to the famous mask, in 1917. The simplified anatomy of the Commedia dell'Arte character, whose typical costume we recognise in the rectangular hatching hinted at on one shoulder and one hip, merges with the contour of the mandolin which stands out in the central position, recalling another theme which is particularly dear to the artist – music, featured by him in numerous works including the series of *bassorilievi* carried out between 1922 and 1925 for the American doctor and collector Albert C. Barnes (including *Harlequin with Mandolin in Oval*, 1923).

A stone version of this work is also housed by the Barnes Foundation (Merion, Pennsylvania).

## 3 \_ MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS, 1924

Plaster sculpture with shellac  
57.2 x 67.9 x 30.5 cm

Through the French merchant, critic and art collector Paul Guillaume, who was a friend of artists like Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse and Amedeo Modigliani, Albert C. Barnes visited Lipchitz's studio in Paris in 1922.

Struck by his work, the American collector purchased several of the sculptor's works, commissioning him five *bassorilievi* for the façade of the building in Merion, Pennsylvania, the location of his prestigious collection of masterpieces by the masters of French impressionism and post-impressionism.

Created at the same time as the creation of these works, the plaster model on display is also characterised by the specific geometric size set at the corners on a base which partially picks up on the rhomboidal contour. Lipchitz, who had already created a series of dead natures in *rilievo* in 1918, once again compares himself to the Cubist pictorial studies, in particular those of Picasso and Gris, rendering them in a plastic nature in a lively composition with musical instruments. The shape of a guitar can be identified in the centre of the instruments.

#### 4 \_ RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON, 1931

Plaster sculpture with shellac  
118.1 x 165.1 x 78.7 cm

A particularly meaningful work in Lipchitz's journey, *Retour de l'enfant prodigue* marks the beginning of a new phase of study for the artist, typified by sculptures with sizes that accentuates the alternation of filled and empty spaces, predominantly dedicated to subjects either of a mythological nature or inspired by stories of the Old and New Testament.

The artist picks up on and re-elaborates these themes in a personal way, filling them with autobiographical allusions and references to history and to his own past, as in the case of this sculpture in which the author substitutes the image of the father with that of the mother. In the embrace between the archetypal figure incarnated in the mother and the son, he represents his return to an original naturalness. The sculpture, in its final bronze version, is housed at The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri.

#### 5 \_ HANDS (HEAD; HAIR AND HANDS), 1933

Plaster sculpture with shellac  
50.8 x 53.3 x 40.6 cm

This work is part of a series developed at the beginning of the 1930s centred on the same subject. It represents a head, evoked by the shape of hair similar to the wings of a bird in flight, supported by two crossed hands resting on the forearms. The union of these anatomical parts, which reveal Lipchitz's interest respectively for the work of Henry Moore and that of Auguste Rodin, suggests a closeness to the surrealist unconscious in many sculptures, evoking profiles of frightening creatures.

According to the suggested interpretations, this work, which is at once mysterious and lyrical, could be a reference to H.G. Wells' book, *L'Homme invisible*, written in 1897 and translated into French in 1932.

## 6 \_ PEGASUS (BIRTH OF THE MUSES), 1944

Plaster sculpture with shellac  
45.7 x 53.3 x 15.2 cm

Attracted to the figure of Pegasus, Lipchitz chose the image as an emblem of the strength of nature, but also of the human ability to surpass one's own limits through the potential of intellect and imagination.

The artist draws on the myth, which states that the winged horse was the creator of the Hippocrene Source, the sacred source of the Muse, revisiting it freely in a sculpture characterised by a continuity of forms that represents and questions the origin of inspiration and the enigmatic essence of art.

Versions of this work are housed at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, New York, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Campus, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

## 7 \_ HAGAR II (HAGAR), 1949

Plaster sculpture with shellac  
34.3 x 36.8 x 17.8 cm

The sculpture draws on an idea from a Biblical episode from Genesis – the banishment of Hagar, the Egyptian slave with whom Abraham begot Ishmael, considered the ancestor of the Arabs. Returning to the mother-son theme, Lipchitz dealt with this story for the first time in 1948, the year of the birth of the State of Israel, conceiving the work as “a prayer for brotherhood between the Jewish and the Arabs”.

The artist pinpoints the wildest and most dramatic moment, which precedes the saving appearance of the angel of God, pausing in *Hagar II* on the volume of the woman's hair and the draping of her dress with which Hagar's body merges into that of the child lying in her lap, with similar effects to Picasso's surrealist experiments.

## 8 \_ MOTHER AND CHILD II, 1941

Plaster sculpture with shellac

127.6 x 185.4 x 63.5 cm

One of Lipchitz's most intense and pathos-filled sculptures, this was one of the first works created by the artist upon his arrival in New York. It depicts a nude woman lacking lower limbs and hands, with a baby clinging to her shoulders, in a painful expression that is intensified by the position of her arms spread towards the sky.

The mysterious reason behind this work, whose lengthy production is demonstrated by one of the drawings in the exhibition dating back to the end of the 1930s, makes reference, according to the artist, to the tragic experience of the Second World War and the re-emergence of a memory of a scene he saw in Moscow years earlier:

“In 1935 I was in Russia and one night, when it was dark and raining, I heard the sound of a pathetic song. I tried to trace it and came to a railroad station where there was a beggar woman, a cripple without legs, on a cart, who was singing, her hair all loose and her arms outstretched.

I was terribly touched by this image, but I only realized years later, when I made the *Mother and Child*, that it was this image that had emerged from my subconscious.”

Versions of this work are housed at the MoMA in New York, the Baltimore Museum of Art-Sculpture Garden, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, and The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

## 9\_ THE LAST EMBRACE, 1970

Plaster sculpture with shellac  
78,7 x 99,1 x 48,2

Lipchitz's entire oeuvre, his creative process, is an experiment in catharsis, which examines the meaning of life and of death, a sort of poem which tries to evoke the tragic events of his existence. The feeling of movement, created by the interpenetration of forms and volumes, of lightness and of weight, of schematic narration and monumental scale, is what invites us to move around this work entitled *L'ultimo abbraccio* (*The Last Embrace*), in search of its message, its meaning. If Lipchitz began his interpretation of biblical themes at the beginning of the 1930s with the figure of *The Struggle of Jacob and the Angel*, he finishes it here, with this last work he created, an *Embrace* designed as a tension of opposites, a compositive theme which is recurrent in all Lipchitz's sculpture.

## 10 \_ WORKING MODEL FOR LESSON OF A DISASTER, 1961-70

Plaster sculpture with shellac  
165.1 x 149.9 x 127 cm

In January 1952 Lipchitz's New York studio was devastated by a terrible fire.

The memory of this painful event, in which many of the artist's works were destroyed along with many pieces of his art collection, is recalled in the model of *Lesson of a Disaster*, centred on the image of a phoenix shrouded in flames.

In the figure of this legendary bird, capable of being reborn from its own ashes after death, the feeling of hope that Lipchitz knew how to harness in order to bounce back from what he himself described as one of the greatest tragedies of his life is condensed, as he passionately took up his activity once again.

A large bronze version of the sculpture is housed at the University of Arizona's Museum of Art, Tucson, Arizona.

## 11\_ BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH, 1958

Plaster sculpture with shellac  
127 x 134,6 x 109,2 cm

The sculpture represents a tangle of human beings which are opening up, supporting a sort of inverted heart-shaped structure, in which a faceless figure appears, supported or hanging from the beak of a dove. From the tangled human masses an ascending movement is created: some consider it an abstract composition which speaks of the passage from the material to the spiritual, others see it as a Christian theme with angels, the Virgin and the Holy Spirit. There are recurrent aspects in Lipchitz's thematic, which mix Jewish themes with Christian themes and Greek mythology, and reinterpret them in a *plastic symphony*. A version of the work is housed at The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri; another version (entitled *Peace on Earth*) is located outside the Los Angeles County Music Center, Los Angeles.

## 12\_ GATES LEADING TO PHILIP JOHNSON'S ROOFLESS CHURCH, 1958

Plaster sculpture, with metal  
and wooden structure  
129,5 x 114,3 x 38,1 cm

The small model for the monumental gates of the Roofless Church highlights the creative path of Lipchitz and his attention to the individual decorative elements.



### **13A -13E\_ GATES LEADING TO PHILIP JOHNSON'S ROOFLESS CHURCH, 1959**

Plaster sculpture with shellac

Crown 106.7 x 106.7 x 21

Angel 114.3 x 132.1 x 38.1

Crown 73.7 x 121.9 x 22.9

In 1958, the year in which he acquired American citizenship, Lipchitz collaborated with the architect Philip Johnson on the creation of the Roofless Church in the village of New Harmony, Indiana, which was intended to house a bronze version of the sculpture *Notre Dame de Liesse*, designing the monumental gate for the entrance to the site.

Lipchitz's models, concerning the structure and the decorative elements of the gate, observe the sacredness of the place with their symbology.

They represent a crown of leaves, supported at the sides by two angels, which encloses the lamb of God at its centre, and beneath which two crowns of roses stand out.

In the lower panel of the gate, which reveals a cross at the centre of the image with two closed doors, two bigger crowns depicting thorns enclose the Greek letters alpha and omega.

### **14\_ STUDY FOR BELLEROPHON TAMING PEGASUS, 1964**

Plaster sculpture with shellac

155.6 x 110.5 x 51.4 cm

Given the task of creating a sculpture for the entrance to Columbia University School of Law's new building in New York, designed by the architect Max Abramovitz, Lipchitz once again took inspiration from the myth of Pegasus, telling the story of the feat of the deadly hero Bellerophon, who tamed the proud winged horse by using a golden bridle. The work, of which this studio already reveals the original development, symbolises the command of human intelligence, personified by Bellerophon, over wild nature represented by Pegasus, celebrating the principle and the value of the law: "You observe nature, make conclusions, and from these you make rules, and these rules help you to behave, to live and law is born from that".

The bronze monument, one of the most important commissions Lipchitz received in America, was positioned in front of the Jerome Greene Hall in 1977, after the artist's death. Another is housed in the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, Missouri.

## 15 \_ SKETCH OF MRS. JOHN COWLES, 1956

Plaster sculpture with shellac

33 x 17.8 x 24.1 cm

The numerous portraits created by Lipchitz in the course of his long and prolific career represent some of the people dearest to him and many notable figures in culture and art of the previous century, whom the artist came to know and personally associated with, including Raymond Radiguet, Jean Cocteau and Gertrude Stein whom Lipchitz immortalised in two famous sculptures.

Predominantly created from live sittings (except, for example, the posthumous portraits of Théodore Géricault, completed by the artist by studying his mortuary mask, or the commemorative bust of the American president John Fitzgerald Kennedy, created from a photograph), these works reveal the artist's curiosity for the psychology of each of

the subjects of his portraits, and his ability to accommodate their personalities, interpreting the physiognomy of their faces in ever different ways. While the portraits using classic moulds sculpted in the 1920s in Paris are characterised by their realism, the later ones that cross the different phases of Lipchitz's study articulate and exemplify the continuous linguistic and expressive renewal.

The plaster represents the wife of the successful American magazine editor and philanthropist John Cowles, the dancer, artist and choreographer of French origin Sage Fuller Cowles, who made a lasting impression on Lipchitz's memory because of her vitality. A bronze version of this portrait is housed in the collection at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

## **16 \_ HEAD OF MAN**

n.d.

Plaster sculpture with shellac  
30.5 x 20.3 x 17.8 cm

## **17 \_ UNTITLED/HEAD OF A MAN, 1970**

Plaster sculpture with shellac  
34.9 x 22.9 x 28.6 cm

## **18 \_ HEAD OF MAN**

n.d.

Plaster sculpture with shellac  
47.6 x 24.8 x 33 cm

## **19 \_ HEAD OF A MAN**

n.d.

Plaster sculpture with shellac  
38.15 x 24.1 x 28.6 cm

## **20 \_ PORTRAIT OF ALBERT SKIRA, 1966**

Plaster sculpture with shellac  
39.4 x 24.8 x 29.2 cm

The plaster model depicts the Swiss editor Albert Skira, who founded the prestigious editing house SKIRA in Lausanne in 1928, which specialised in illustrated publications and art books. Active in the 1930s in Paris also, Skira conveyed the main artists and writers of the period, especially surrealists, through the magazine “Minotaure”, created in collaboration with the critic and editor Tériade. Remembering the sitting for this late portrait, the artist described him as “a marvellous sitter”.

## 21 \_ PORTRAIT OF CURT VALENTIN, 1952

Plaster sculpture with shellac  
39.4 x 21 x 27.9 cm

The work represents Curt Valentin, a German art dealer and gallerist who emigrated to the United States in 1937.

With his gallery, the Buchholz Gallery (called the Curt Valentin Gallery from 1951), Valentin became an overseas promoter of many avant-garde artists: including, in addition to Lipchitz himself, the sculptors Alexander Calder, Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore and Marino Marini, who in 1952 and then in 1954 also completed a bronze portrait of him.

## THE DRAWINGS

Jacques Lipchitz, like other great sculptors of twentieth century, including Henry Moore, Picasso or Eduardo Chillida, dedicated himself to work on paper, to drawing, as an instrument for his plastic vision. He drew both before and after the creation of a sculptural work. This was largely due to the potential that this technique has as a starting point for sculpture and to its usefulness in exploring different themes and forms, which can then be converted into three-dimensional constructions. After an initial phase which we can define as Doric, with very linear designs, in the style of Modigliani, he moved to drawings full of graphic violence, with many curved lines, in which it is from *organic chaos*, rather than organised chaos, that the form rises, the image appears or comes to life. Lipchitz moved from the sobriety of the Cubist avant-garde to being a new sculptor in the unconscious and the style of *Laocoön*. But it was not the idea of movement that interested Lipchitz, but the image that was born from the *interaction of forms*. Lipchitz looks for the negation of geometry in the search for the rhythm of the light and shade, which he learnt from Tintoretto and da Goya, and the spatial tension of Mannerism and Baroque. In Lipchitz's drawings we can understand his artistic evolution and accompany the artist in the experiment and the struggle to integrate the inspiration born *with and from* form.

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