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BRANCUSI, CONSTANTIN - Continued

he reportedly said. The influence of Rodin, however, was apparent in his works of this period, such as in *Boy* (1907).

As early as 1908, before the emergence of the first cubist sculpture, Brancusi gave up working from living models and began to evolve an original plastic style based on simplification of form and elimination of detail. Turning away from the realistic, Renaissance-derived tradition of the West, he looked toward Oriental, African Negro, and prehistoric Greek Cycladic sculpture for inspiration. "What is real is not the external form," he explained, "but the essence of things. Starting from this truth it is impossible for anyone to express anything essentially real by imitating exterior surface." In 1908 he started carving directly in stone: *The Kiss*, a composition of two primitive block-like figures that was called "the most abstract sculpture of its period."

His life-long preference for the primordial, egg shape, first evident in the heads of the *Sleeping Muse* (1910) and *Prometheus* (1911), is indicated in the bronze portrait-bust of Mlle. Pogany (1913). Later he simplified and perfected this form in *The New Born* (1915), *Leda* (1922), *The Beginning of the World* (1924), and *Sculpture for the Blind* (1924).

In contrast to the highly polished marble and bronze surfaces of his ovoid forms, Brancusi's sculpture in wood is usually rough-hewn. The critics have related his work in this medium to African Negro sculpture, Gothic wood carvings, and Rumanian folk art. They point out that in such sculptures as *The Prodigal Son* (1914), *The Chimera* (1918), *Eve* (1920), *Adam* (1921), and *Socrates* (1923), he allowed his fantasy free reign and occasionally indulged in a satiric, grotesque humor.

Archetypal bird and animal forms occupy an important place in Brancusi's work. The first in a long series of bird forms was the *Maiestra* (the name of a mythical Rumanian bird) of 1912, and this was followed by the marble *Penguins* of 1914. His *Bird in Space*, a slender, highly polished bronze shaft that most critics consider his boldest and purest work, was completed in 1919. Further variations on the bird theme include *Bird at Rest* (1920), *Yellow Bird* (1921), *The Cock* (1924), and *Small Bird* (1929). Next to his bird forms Brancusi is best known for his *Fish*; a final version (1930) in blue-gray marble has been called his outstanding stone carving. In 1943 he executed his pearwood *Tortoise* and marble *Seal*.

In February 1927, Brancusi's *Bird in Space* created a newspaper sensation when a United States Customs appraiser ruled that it was not a work of art and was therefore dutiable. Several prominent artists and critics decided to contest this decision. The technical problem was whether the sculpture conformed to the standards of imitative representation in art prescribed by the Customs or whether it was a new form of tax evasion used to import bronze. The case was settled in Brancusi's favor in November 1928. The judge ruled that even though *Bird* bore no striking resemblance to a living object, it was a work of art "by reason of its symmetrical shape, artistic outlines, and beauty of finish" (New York Times, November 28, 1928).

BRANCUSI, CONSTANTIN—Continued
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reason of its symmetrical shape, artistic outlines, and beauty of finish" (New York Times, November 28, 1928).

The architectural quality of Brancusi's work has been widely praised. A large-scale version of his sculpture, *Endless Column*, rising to 118 feet, was erected as a park in the Rumanian town of Targu-Jiu. As yet included in his *Art in Space* project for a Temple of Indifference, commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art.

Since Brancusi is a slow, painstaking worker, his production has been relatively small. He has no preliminary models, and does all the labor himself. Believing that the art of sculpture is to call forth "the inner life" of "the material" by handling, never to denote by it, he often spends more over a single piece, patiently polishing and refining the surface.

He also divides the modern laws and those patterns on which he bases his work, selecting them for the qualities of color and texture that will enhance his sculptural form. One of his passions has been the construction of mechanical machines, which slowly and systematically rotate the sculpture so that the observer can experience its full plastic power in motion.

Brancusi has been correctly described by art critics as "the father of modern sculpture," "the most original and most important of nineteenth-century," and simply as "one of the great living sculptors." C. Gordon-Walker in *Reviews* (March 1949) wrote: "His sculpture attains the radiant formal beauty of the Motherhood with the formal wisdom and erudition of the East." According to Lewis Mumford, almost alone among contemporary artists, Brancusi has been able to blend the organic and the mathematical, "the feeling for nature" and "the belief in formal perfection."

During his first decade in Paris, Brancusi participated in the annual exhibitions at the Salon de la Nationale (1903-1907), Salon de l'Automne (1907-1909), and the Salon des Indépendants (1909-1912). His *Progeny X* (1912), an abstract portrait in polished bronze, created such a storm of indignation at the Salon des Indépendants of 1913 that it was temporarily removed from the exhibition. He later showed work at the Salon des Tuileries of 1927 and in the Rumanian Pavilion at the International Exposition of 1925. Other exhibitions have been held in Antwerp (1926), Moscow (1929), and other European cities.

The sculptor's work was first shown in New York at the famous Armory Show of 1913, where his *Seal*. Pogany shared with Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* the distinction of being the two major realizations of this first exhibition of modern art in the United States. The following year Alfred Stieglitz gave Brancusi a one-man show at the Photo-Secession Gallery. Solo exhibitions were later held at the Walden Galleria in February 1926 and at the Brummer Gallery in November 1928 and in November 1932. Works by Brancusi were included in the *Cubism and Abstract Art* (1936) and *Sculpture of the Twentieth Century* (1967) shown at the Museum of Modern Art.

The architectural quality of Brancusi's work has been widely praised. A large-scale version of his sculpture, Endless Column, rising to 118 feet, was executed in a park in the Rumanian town of Targu-Jiu. As yet unfinished is his Bird in Space project for a Temple of Deliverance, commissioned by the Maharaja of Indore.

Since Brancusi is a slow, painstaking worker, his production has been relatively small. He uses no preliminary models, and does all the labor himself. Believing that the art of sculpture is to call forth "the inner life" of the material he is handling, never to dictate to it, he often spends years over a single piece, patiently polishing and refining the surface.

He also devises the wooden bases and stone pedestals on which he places his work, selecting them for the qualities of color and texture that will enhance his sculptural forms. One of his innovations has been the construction of mechanical turntables, which slowly and automatically rotate the sculpture so that the observer can experience its full plastic power in motion.

Brancusi has been variously described by art critics as "the father of modern sculpture," "the most original and most important of near-abstract sculptors," and simply as "our greatest living sculptor." C. Giedon-Welcker in *Horizon* (March 1949) wrote: "His sculpture unites the radiant formal beauty of the Mediterranean with the formal wisdom and symbolism of the East." According to Lewis Mumford, almost alone among contemporary artists, Brancusi has been able to blend the organic and the mathematical, "the feeling for nature" and "the belief in formal perfection."

During his first decade in Paris, Brancusi participated in the annual exhibitions at the Salon de la Nationale (1905-1904), Salon de l'Automne (1907-1908), and the Salon des Indépendants (1910-1913). His *Princesse X* (1917), an abstract portrait in polished bronze, created such a storm of indignation at the Salon des Indépendants of 1920 that it was temporarily removed from the exhibition. He later showed work at the Salon des Tuileries of 1927 and in the Rumanian Pavilion at the International Exposition of 1937. One-man exhibitions have been held in Antwerp (1926), Moscow (1928), and other European cities.

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