

The Museum of Modern Art

MoMA PRESENTS FOCUSED EXHIBITION OF CONSTANTIN BRANCUSI'S SCULPTURE

Presentation Also Includes a Selection of Drawings, Photographs, Films, and Archival Material

Constantin Brancusi Sculpture

July 22, 2018–February 18, 2019
Floor Two, Paul J. Sachs Galleries

NEW YORK, June 22, 2018—The Museum of Modern Art charts Constantin Brancusi's achievements and innovations in sculpture through the focused presentation *Constantin Brancusi Sculpture*, on view from July 22, 2018, through February 18, 2019. This concentrated survey largely comprises MoMA's holdings of Brancusi's work, which demonstrate the artist's singular approach to materials, among them bronze, stone, and wood. In this exhibition, 11 sculptures by the artist will be shown together for the first time, alongside drawings, photographs, and films—extensions of his sculptural endeavors. Also on view is a selection of archival materials that sheds light on the artist's working process and his relationships with friends, sitters, and patrons, including this Museum. *Constantin Brancusi Sculpture* is organized by Paulina Pobocha, Associate Curator, with Mia Matthias, Curatorial Fellow, Department of Painting and Sculpture.

Born in rural Hobița, Romania, Brancusi came to art through an immersion in craft; in his youth he learned direct carving techniques, eventually becoming a skilled woodworker. In 1904 he moved to Paris, where he studied at the École Nationale des Beaux-Arts and then briefly assisted Auguste Rodin. Brancusi established his own studio at the Impasse Ronsin soon after and quickly immersed himself in avant-garde art circles. While Rodin and his peers were making sculpture by modeling clay and casting it in bronze, Brancusi carved his work directly from sandstone, travertine, and marble, relying on the techniques learned in his youth. With this method, Brancusi created imaginative and formally reductive works that evoke rather than resemble the subjects named in their titles.

Although Brancusi made hundreds of sculptures in his lifetime, he limited his subject matter to people and animals, with just a handful of exceptions. He especially preferred portraits of women, as seen in *Mlle. Pogany* and *Blond Negress, II*; children's heads; and birds, exemplified by *Maiestra* and *Bird in Space*. In his work, he pushed sculpture to the threshold of abstraction. Equally revolutionary was Brancusi's approach to his sculptures' pedestals. Brancusi filled his studio space with functional objects he made himself, such as stools, fireplaces, benches, as well as pedestals for his sculptures. These pedestals, made from

wood, limestone, and marble, became part of the artwork; many were created for specific sculptures, and some were constructed from existing sculptures. For example, he incorporated the sculpture *Double Caryatid*, which depicts two figures, into the base of *Maiastira*. On other occasions, Brancusi made pedestals that could support a variety of sculptures rather than one work in particular. His bases thus performed a dual function, serving simultaneously as components of the artwork and as their support.

Brancusi's bases also position the sculpture at a height that references their subject matter. For example, his *Bird in Space* works soar high above one's head, often set on lofty tripartite bases. His portraits are typically positioned at eye level, and the heads of children and sleeping women tend to live low to the ground. The unprecedented importance Brancusi bestowed on his bases transformed sculpture's relationship to the space it inhabits and, by extension, to the world at large: If a base is part of the art, what differentiates art from its surroundings?

In addition to sculpture, Brancusi made drawings, photographs, and films. While he did not produce many drawings, those he did were executed casually, with whatever materials were on hand. Brancusi chose subject matter that echoed that of his sculptures, such as his study related to the no-longer-extant sculpture *The First Step*. In addition to drawings of women, he also depicted his sculptures and other objects assembled in his studio.

Brancusi's relationship to photography, however, was much more deliberate. Similar to his approach to drawing, he took many photographs of his sculptures, often capturing how they were installed in his studio. Although some of his photographs are straightforward representations of his work, many obscure rather than reveal their subjects, as in *Self Portrait in Studio*. They mimic the abstracted nature of his sculptural work: the occasionally out-of-focus images emphasize the play of light and shadow on the surfaces of Brancusi's sculptures.

Brancusi's least-known experiments, however, unfold in film. With his friend Man Ray, who introduced him to the medium, Brancusi made films that captured him working with his materials, activating his artworks through movement, and revealing his sources of inspiration, such as animals, light in nature, and dance. Although few of Brancusi's films survive, many of those that do demonstrate his interest in the movement of objects through space and affirm his desire for his work to be experienced in the round.

SPONSORSHIP:

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