

THREE OF BRANCUSI'S LESS KNOWN EXHIBITIONS ABROAD

Tracing back Brancusi's hard way and career has always been a ticklish task for critics, especially because of the artist's well known dislike for figures, dates and biographical details — which went so far as to make him forbid the measurement of his works; but their harmony — both inward and outward — was the object of his ceaseless meditation, and a thing he had always been deeply concerned with; the best example is the Endless Column which we believe the sculptor had been thinking of for about forty-six years, that is from 1911 to 1957¹.

The Columns of different size and material carved by Brancusi in the years 1918, 1920 and 1930 (mostly in oak) speak for themselves. In 1930 the Mayor of Bucharest invited the artist to erect a huge Column in the capital of Romania², but it was only eight years later that such a work was actually brought into being at Târgu-Jiu, to the memory of the nation's heroes³. Then, towards the end of his life — in the very year of his death — the sculptor was thinking of another Column, 400 metres high, made up of polished oxidized steel, which he intended to see mirrored in a lake of Chicago, where he had been asked to carry out this last, unfulfilled idea⁴.

Professor Siegfried Giédion and architect Adrian Gheorghiu have accurately pointed out not only the astonishing arithmetical succession, but also the infallible proportions as well as the magic of the inward rhythm included by the sculptor in his work, which far from being a mere transposing of a funerary pillar, or of a Romanian verandah post, is a genuine outcome of a deep artistic conception⁵.

Brancusi's work was continually in the making, the subject of an endless work of purification and polishing which the artist could never bring himself to consider perfect enough. Measuring, filing or carding such a work, would have meant its pigeon-holing for good, which would have meant a synonym for finished, fixed and, to a certain extent, dead work.

Saint-Exupéry's words seem to suit Brancusi quite well:

*"Tu ne peux rien connaître des étapes qui ne sont qu'invention du langage. Seule la direction a un sens. Ce qui importe c'est d'aller vers et non d'être arrivé, car jamais l'on n'arrive nulle part sauf dans la mort"*⁶.

Prompted by the same principles, the artist could not chime in with the museographers' and art critics' bias for petty bookkeeping and outward pigeon-holing; this is why the only landmarks he left are the quite inspired titles, some rare datings and above all, the exhibition catalogues in which one can find not only certain details about the technique of his carvings or about their dimensions — but also, here and there, some photographs.

This is why we deemed it proper to inquire about such ephemeral lists as were to be found from Zürich to New York, from Craiova to London, from Paris to Amsterdam, from Venice to Chicago, from München to New York again, from Boston to The Hague, from Brussels to Bucharest or to Philadelphia, — all of them bearing witness of Brancusi's artistic curriculum vitae as well as of the widespread geographical expanse of his works.

Let us take for instance the year 1914: In March and April the artist was present successively in New York and in Bucharest on the occasion of the exhibitions organized by the "Gallery of the Photo Secession", and by the "Tinerimea Artistică" ("Young Artists") Group.

Barbu Brezianu



Fig. 1. — The photograph of "The Naiad" — alongside works of the Cubist artists Félix Elie Tobeen and Jean Metzinger. (A reproduction from the "Zlatá Praha" magazine*).

What we should like to point out is the sculptor's participation in three more shows which have remained practically unknown to bibliographers and specialists.

The first exhibition took place in Prague in 1914, about a month before the above mentioned ones — that is in February-March. In the "Národní Galerie" library of Prague, we had the pleasure of making the discovery of a catalogue, a blue booklet⁷ devoted to the "45th Show of Modern Art"⁸, organized under the sponsorship of the founder of the Czech modern school of painting, Josef Mánes and of Otokar Novotný, with the assistance of Herbert Masaryk, Jaroslav Benda, Jan Štursa, a.o. The active organizer of this vanguard show — a true link between Paris and Prague — was the writer Alexandre Mercereau, whose memory has almost fallen into oblivion nowadays, and who wrote the preface for the Catalogue of the Exhibition⁹.

Alongside the most gifted representatives of the Czech vanguard — such as Bhumil Kubišta, Špála, Josef Čapek — alongside Swedish, Polish and Dutch artists, we also came across some imposing names of contemporary painters such as Piet Mon-

drian, Robert Delauney, Diego Rivera, Patrick Henry Bruce, André Lhote, Dufy, Kisling, Othon Friesz, Roger de la Fresnaye, Jacques Villon, Jean Metzinger and Louis Marcousis; and among the sculptors, Raymond Duchamp-Villon (with a portrait of Baudelaire), Archipenko, Julio Gonzales (who had once been encouraged by Brancusi), and last but not least, Brancusi himself, with five of his works registered from number 120 to number 124; the prices ranging from 1000 to 1700 crowns, were written in ink by the titles.

The sculptures were the following:

- "120. *Najada* (Naiad) — plaster, K. 1100.
- 121. *Hlava* (Head) — plaster, K. 1700.
- 122. *Usnuvši Musa* (Sleeping Muse) — plaster, K. 1100.
- 123. *Hlava* (Head) — bronze, K. 1300.
- 124. *Polibek* (The Kiss) — plaster, K. 1000."

It is not without importance to notice that the Czechoslovakian newspapers welcomed the Romanian sculptor's presence: for instance the *Zlatá Praha* magazine (nr. 22/1914, page 264) even published a plate of the "Najada". This is how we found out that the Prague *Naiad* was nothing else but a variant of *Miss Pogany*: the marble one was being exhibited at the same time in the New York "Gallery of the Photo Secession"¹⁰.

* We wish to express our gratitude to Dr. Anna Masaryková who had the kindness to put this important document at our disposal.



Fig. 2. — Brancusi during the Prague Exhibition period.

Twenty-three years later, Brancusi was to be present again in Czechoslovakia. In December 1947 he took part in the exhibition "From Rodin to Our Days" organized in Brno (and we believe also in Prague and Bratislava). He then exhibited a bronze of *Mlle Pogany* ($66 \times 20 \times 25$), and another

huge carving in wood ($115 \times 50 \times 60$) entitled *Victory*¹¹, about which, unfortunately, we could find no further information.

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Another so far unknown¹² show has been brought accidentally into our notice during a talk we had with one of Brancusi's

nephews, Mr. Ioan Blendea, a teacher of Latin, whom we met in the town of Arad in June 1967. Mr. Blendea told us of a friendly talk his uncle had had with the painter Camil Ressu in the year 1930, on the occasion of a short stay of the sculptor in Bucharest; the talk had taken place at the "Bulevard" hotel, in room nr. 8, where Brancusi was dwelling¹³.

"You didn't know I was in Russia too, did you?"

"Fancy, I didn't, but let me know how?"

"Well, I wasn't there myself, but my works did go to Russia. The Russians came to my studio, chose some of them, and then took them!"

This piece of information had to be carefully checked up, especially by examining the documents of the period when A. V. Lunatcharski had directed the People's Commissariat for Public Education, and when the vanguard movements had been given full support by the minister. A. V. Lunatcharski's opinion was that

"we must leave the way open for the development of all artists and artistic groups. We should not allow the development of one single trend and direction to the detriment of the others, be they traditional or highly up-to-date"¹⁴. Some forty years ago it was he who actually organized the great show of modern art in Moscow.

Owing to the kindly assistance of deputy manager Volodavski and of Mrs Emeljanova and Galya Sumietzkaja, we were able to examine the archives of the Tretiakov Museum, file 8, II, 220 for the year 1928, where we found all data concerning the "French Exhibition of Contemporary Art"; alongside Russian artists (such as Gontcharova, Anenkov, Michel Larionov, Lipschitz, Hanna Orlova, Alexander Iacovlev, Chagall, Henri Epstein, Leo Zak, Zadkine) — there were also foreigners such as Campigli, De Chirico, Modigliani (as a matter of fact, the cover of the catalogue was illustrated by a girl's portrait made by the latter), Gino Severini, Foujita, Max Ernst, Van Dongen, Vlaminck, Valloton, Henri de Waroquier, Fauconnier, Gromaire, Derain, Seurat, Sauvage, Utrillo, Marquêt, Amédé Ozenfant, Despiou and Brancusi.

We also discovered subsequently a copy of the catalogue (nr. 7, 1500 copies printed)¹⁵. On page 37 we found the first characterization of Brancusi ever made in the U.S.S.R. The artist is there considered to be "one of the most faithful followers of the principle of pure plastic skill. His tendency towards plenitude and roundness in form brings him to certain elemental volumes."

The Romanian sculptor has sent to Moscow six works recorded on page 38 as follows:

"3. *Bird in Space* — polished bronze; height 137. Signed C. Brancuși at the foot¹⁶.

"4. *Leda*, 1925, polished bronze.

"5. *The Witch*, wood; height 98, signed C. Brancusi, at the foot, right.

"6. *The Kiss*, stone; height 57. No signature¹⁷.

"7. *Drawing* — black-and-white picture, 64 × 48; signed C. Brancusi at the foot, right.



Fig. 3. — The sculptor's passport on the occasion of his visit to Romania (1914).



Fig. 4. — Brancuși in 1922.

“8. *Drawing* — lead pencil, 73 × 32; signed C. Brancuși at the foot, right.”

The varnishing of this exceptional exhibition took place in the month of September

1928 at the Museum of Western European Modern Arts (at present the Academy of Fine Arts), on Krapotkin Street in Moscow; as to the catalogue, it had no less than

four prefaces: the first, entitled "About the French Art Show", was signed by Luna-tchearski himself, who had given directions for organizing this courageous vanguard manifestation. The second, entitled "Two Cultures", was due to the President of the Science of Arts Academy, Petr S. Kogan, who held the idea that in point of aesthetic judgement Western art should be appreciated not as involving ideas but mostly from the viewpoint of what is to be perceived as beautiful in its structure. Then

followed professor Boris Ternovetz's preface about the "French Paintings at the Show" and finally Hram Efros' foreword about the "Russian Group".

Our research trips to Prague and Moscow thus gave us the opportunity of making the discovery of two more capitals (this time from Eastern Europe) completing the knowledge of Brancusi's progress as the most genuine representative of Romanian as well as of world sculpture of our days.

Notes:

¹ At the time when Modigliani was frequently visiting Brancusi, the former made the portrait of Doctor Paul Alexandre (1911); the wood motif of the *Column* is to be found in the background (BARBU BREZIANU, *A Few Notes Concerning Michel Ragon's Article on Brancusi*, "Arta Plastică", 1966, 4).

² APRILIANA MEDIANU, *Maestrul Brancusi*, "Curentul", 1930, Oct. 6.

³ In the cemetery of Hobitza a table of honour mentions four soldiers bearing the name of Brancusi, near relatives of the sculptor.

⁴ SIDNEY GEIST, *O Coloană la Sfirșit*, "Tribuna", 1966, Febr. 24.

⁵ In order to prepare the *Column's* erection, Brancusi had covered several copybooks with notes and sketches (CLAUDE EMMANUEL [ION STĂVĂRUȘ], *Brancusi's Studio*, "Lucaefărul", 1965, March 13). As Mircea Eliade put it, "this 'Axis Mundi' or this 'heavenly tree' contained all the known symmetries"; "these symmetries (translation symmetries, bilateral and rotary as well) are all spatial" said Prof. S. Giédion in 1952, before the students of the Federal Polytechnical Institute of Zürich. (CAROLA GIÉDION-WELCKER, *C. Brancusi*, 1959, Neuchâtel, p. 25, 253. Architect ADRIAN GHEORGHIU, *Geometrical Proportions and Lines in Brancusi's Sculpture*, in "Tribuna", 1966, Febr. 24.)

⁶ ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY, *La Citadelle*, Paris, 1948, p. 185.

⁷ Figure XXII, C. 4363/3.

⁸ 45 Výstava J.V.U., Manés V. Praze Moderni Umění.

⁹ He was the author of the volume: *Gens de là et d'ailleurs*; *André Lhote*; *Contes des ténèbres*; *La Littérature et les idées nouvelles*; *Paroles devant la vie*, a.o. With Paul Fort he directed the literary magazine "Vers et Prose" and was a member of the literary club "Closerie des Lilas", a supporter

of the Committee for erecting a monument to Gérard de Nerval, etc. It was at Mercereau's "Caméléon" — in Montparnasse — that Michel Seuphor read his *Manifeste-conférence sur l'impossible*, in 1925.

¹⁰ SIDNEY GEIST, "Numai ochi" — *Domnișoara Pogany de Brâncuși în lumina unor documente inedite*, "Contemporanul", 7, 1966, Sept. 9.

¹¹ J. B. SVRČEK, *Socharstvi Franciá*, in "Rovnost" (1947, December 7). The pieces of information have been given by the author of a study on Rodin, Dr. Lúba Belohraska, to whom we express our gratitude.

¹² NORA ELIASBERG, *La Présence de l'art de Brancusi à Moscou*, a paper delivered on the occasion of the International Symposium on Brancusi, Bucharest, October 14, 1967, a fragment of which — *Brancusi à Moscou en 1928* — appeared in "Lettres Françaises" (1968, January 3). The manager of the Pushkin Museum also mentioned a commendatory article by prof. Ternovetz in the "Iskusstvo" magazine.

¹³ According to passport nr. 223127 of January 12, 1926, Brancusi entered Romania on September 26, 1930 and left the country through Episcopia Bihorulului on October 12, 1930. The talk must have taken place between this interval (Archives of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, Bucharest).

¹⁴ ILYA EHRENBURG, *Oameni, ani, viață*, București, 1967, p. 115—116.

¹⁵ Archives of the Tretyakov Museum, Figure K, 32696.

¹⁶ *Bird in Space* is now in the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

¹⁷ The work, which was previously in the Arensberg Collection, is now in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. (We are very much obliged to Mr. Sidney Geist who had the kindness of sending us these two pieces of information).