

ARCHIPENKO: THE PARIS YEARS



ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO, JANUARY 16 — FEBRUARY 21, 1971



ARCHIPENKO: THE PARIS YEARS, 1908-1921

In 1908, when he was twenty-one, Alexander Archipenko left his native Ukraine for France, where he remained until 1921. After these years in France, he moved to Berlin and two years later settled in the United States. He died in New York in 1964.

This exhibition explores Archipenko's development as an artist during his stay in France. The exact dating of some of his works between 1909 and 1916 has not been definitely established. The checklist below, however, suggests a probable sequence for these works.

By 1913, Archipenko had found the direction of his personal style, and in the same year he exhibited in the famous Armory Show in New York. The significance of his work during his heroic years in France can be clearly revealed only by comparison with the contemporaneous and Cubist sculpture of Raymond Duchamp-Villon, Henri Laurens, Jacques Lipchitz, and Pablo Picasso. As a sculptor, Archipenko explored spatial relationships and the movement of forms. He was also particularly interested in the uses of color in sculpture. No matter how abstract his analysis, his inspiration derived from nature. Throughout his life, he remained a solitary figure. Although an innovator, he always remained close to the Cubist tradition as it was established in France during the years of his sojourn there.

On behalf of the Trustees of The Museum of Modern Art, I wish to express thanks to the lenders, and particular gratitude to Mrs. Alexander Archipenko and Mr. Donald H. Karshan for assistance in organizing this exhibition. I am also grateful to Katharine Kuh for kindly permitting us to reprint her essay on Archipenko, originally published in the catalogue of the memorial exhibition of the artist's work organized in 1967 in the UCLA Art Galleries, University of California at Los Angeles.

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New York

ALEXANDER ARCHIPENKO: 1887-1964

Alexander Archipenko, the first sculptor of our century to recognize form as an illusion, investigated this mystery throughout his entire life. Almost from the beginning he became involved with the void, with perforated and concave planes, with what today we call negative form. Now, well over a half-century since his earliest experiments were initiated, we accept the fact that less can make more, that space can miraculously turn into form. What we occasionally forget is how much Archipenko was responsible for these intangible discoveries.

Long applauded as a pioneer Cubist sculptor, he was far more than that. He never merely transferred Cubist theories from painting to sculpture; he virtually invented his own kind of three-dimensional Cubism. Relying on the human body, preferably the female nude, as his point of departure, Archipenko constructed his figures with architectural precision, yet rarely sacrificed the rhythms of nature. His idealized women have the elongated elegance we sometimes associate with undulating plants, sometimes with those Gothic saints which echo the soaring churches they decorate. Archipenko confessed, "From the Gothic I learned to see the transformation of proportions as an . . . expression of the spiritual."

Unlike the medieval sculpture, his figures are seldom frontal. They turn, twist, bend; they are inverted, foreshortened, and tautly poised. They move, yet more important—light moves over them with rippling speed. As early as 1912 Archipenko combined wood, glass, mirror, metal, canvas, and wire in dynamic constructions (or should we say assemblages) where light was manipulated with meticulous control, and where reflections and transparencies were deliberately exploited. A year or two later, again predicting present-day trends, he was already considering environmental groups.

But his greatest contribution was metaphysical. He made what is, seem what it is not. It was the duality of vision that interested him, less the image itself than our reaction to the image. Turning total voids into solid form, he also discovered that surrounding space could become as potent as dense mass.

Though Archipenko was widely acclaimed in Europe, he was never fully appreciated in America where he lived for thirty-four years. Coming here

at the age of thirty-six and at the height of his European fame, he remained something of a displaced loner, a man who always seemed to be looking in from the outside. Moving from place to place, he restlessly pursued his roots, but they were not to be found in America. And, of course, during the early twenties, this country was scarcely ready for his sophisticated metaphors. Later, his ebullient color, admittedly more decorative than structural, disturbed American eyes which at that time were happier with more restrained Gallic taste.

For, from beginning to end, Archipenko remained a Ukrainian, a man who often seemed closer to the near East than the West. The golden ornament and linear eloquence of Byzantium are so manifest in his work as sometimes to obscure its vigor. But, make no mistake, Archipenko belongs securely to the history of modern art, less because he reflected its influence than because he himself helped create it.

Katharine Kuh



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Dimensions are given in inches, height preceding width preceding depth. Parentheses indicate that a date has been supplied or varies from the one that appears on the work itself. Alternate titles encountered in the literature are included.

SCULPTURE

1. Woman (Head on Knee). (*Femme; Tristesse; La Tête sur les genoux*). 1909 (probably 1909-1910). Bronze, 17 x 10 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Private collection, New York
2. Black Seated Torso (*Torso noir assis*). 1909 (probably 1911?). Bronze, 15 x 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 4 $\frac{1}{8}$ ". Estate of the artist
3. Madonna of the Rocks (*La Mère dans les roches; Mère et enfant; La Mère avec l'enfant*). 1912 (cast 1969). Bronze, 21 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 13 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 13". Estate of the artist
4. Bending (*Penché*). 1910 (probably 1912?). Bronze, chromium plated, 11 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 2 $\frac{5}{8}$ ". Estate of the artist
5. Dance (*La Danse*). 1912 (probably 1912-1913?). Bronze, 25 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 18 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 5 $\frac{1}{8}$ ". Estate of the artist
6. Seated Figure (*Forme géométrique assise*). 1913. Polychromed bronze, 18 x 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 5". Private collection, New York
7. Head (Construction with Crossing Planes). (*Tête; Construction aux plans entrecoupés*). 1913. Bronze, 15 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Estate of the artist
8. Statue on Triangular Base (*Statue sur socle triangulaire*). 1914. Bronze, 30 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 6 x 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Donald H. Karshan, 1970
9. Gondolier (*Le Gondolier*). 1914. Bronze, 35 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 8 $\frac{3}{8}$ ". The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Frances Archipenko in honor of Alfred H. Barr, Jr., 1969
10. Boxing (Boxers; Struggle). (*La Boxe*). 1914 (cast 1966). Bronze, 23 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 18 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 15 $\frac{3}{8}$ ". The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Donald H. Karshan, 1966
11. Woman Combing Her Hair (*Femme se coiffant*). (1915). Bronze, 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ " high. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest, 1943
12. Portuguese (*La Portugaise*). 1916. Polychromed bronze, 24 x 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 6 $\frac{1}{8}$ ". Estate of the artist
13. Walking (*Femme qui marche*). 1912 (probably 1916?). Bronze, 26 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 8 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 5 $\frac{5}{8}$ ". Private collection, New York
14. Espagnola. 1916. Polychromed bronze relief, 21 x 23". Estate of the artist
15. Standing Figure (*Forme debout*). 1916. Bronze, 12 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Estate of the artist
16. Seated Black Concave (*Femme assise — concave noir*). 1916. Bronze, 31 x 11 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Estate of the artist

17. Egyptian Motif (*Motif égyptien*). 1917. Bronze, 13 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 4 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Estate of the artist

18. Figure. 1917. Sculpto-painting (painted wood), 27 x 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Estate of the artist

19. Seated Figure (*Femme assise; Figure géométrique avec espace et concave*). 1920. Bronze, 25 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 9 x 8 $\frac{3}{8}$ ". Estate of the artist

20. White Torso (*Torse blanc*). (c. 1920, after marble of 1916). Silvered bronze, 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 3 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 1 $\frac{5}{8}$ ". The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Murray Thompson, 1961

21. Ray (*Rayon*). 1919 (1956, variant of Figure — Vase Woman, 1919). Bronze, 62 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 7 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 5 $\frac{3}{8}$ ". Private collection, New York

WORKS ON PAPER

22. Composition. 1913. Brush and ink, gouache, colored pencil, and pasted paper on paper, 18 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 12 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (sheet). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, extended loan from Donald H. Karshan

23. Bending (*Penché*). (1920). Drypoint, 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 15-13/16". The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Mrs. Frances Archipenko, 1969

24. Kneeling (*A Genoux*). (1920). Drypoint, 7 x 5". The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Mrs. Frances Archipenko, 1969

Four plates from the portfolio *Dreizehn Steinzeichnungen*, published in Berlin, Ernst Wasmuth (1920-1921), after drawings made in France.

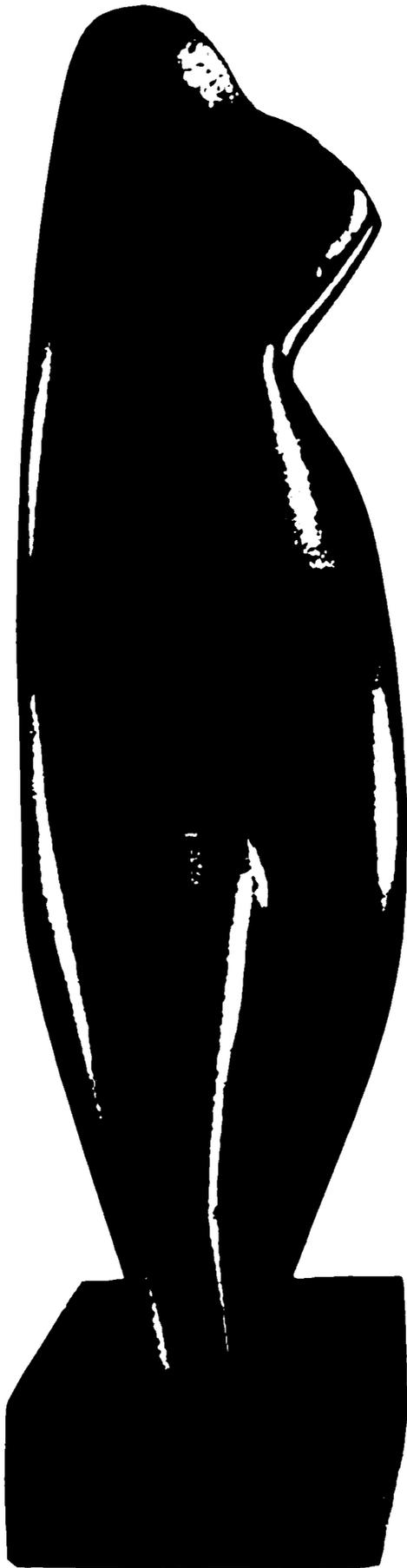
No. 16 of 60 copies. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Purchase, 1950

25. Plate 2 (two standing nudes). Lithograph, 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 11-11/16"

26. Plate 3 (still life on table). Lithograph, 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

27. Plate 7 (standing figure). Lithograph, printed in color, 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 16 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

28. Plate 8 (standing figure). Lithograph, printed in color, 18-9/16 x 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ "



ARCHIPENKO: THE AMERICAN YEARS, 1923-1964

Archipenko left Europe at the age of thirty-six, eager to grasp the New World with both hands, but alas, America wasn't ready for him. True, in 1936, Alfred H. Barr praised him highly in his *Cubism and Abstract Art*, writing, 'Archipenko, who had studied Egyptian and archaic Greek figures in the Louvre after his arrival in Paris in 1908, was the first to work seriously and consistently at the problem of Cubist sculpture.'

The United States, in the early twenties and thirties, was apparently not willing or prepared to accept what Katharine Kuh calls his 'sophisticated metaphors', and it was not until the fifties that he began to earn the widespread recognition in America that he had in Europe.

In America Archipenko's work at once became more 'stylish' in the fullest sense of the term. The earlier cubist forms were employed in a more decorative fashion and he sought out a new gracefulness and flowing contour. There is an innate elegance and refinement, like Brancusi and Modigliani, in the American pieces which he himself traced back to his Eastern background. He always insisted that it was not Picasso or Negro prototypes that influenced him, but in fact 'such styles as Assyrian, Egyptian, Hindu, early Byzantine, Gothic and archaic Greek.' Certainly Byzantine art comes to mind, with its rich play of folded contours, its subtle use of open and closed space, its voids and flatly modulated planes as well as that innate elegance of conception and execution. To pinpoint his forms we need only refer to the images in the cathedral of Santa Sophia in Kiev, where he was born, or to those elongated, simplified, slightly serpentine madonnas topped by the perfect oval head and clothed in stylized linear folds. *Arabian* of 1936 and *Dignity* of 1961 are perfect examples of this.

Archipenko first came to America in 1923, although his work had been seen (and caricatured by a newspaper) in New York at the famous Armory show of 1913. The stream-lining element that seems to have entered his work and which could be characterized as a subtle type of dynamism ('dynamic' was one of the sculptor's favorite words) was perhaps an endeavour to capture the machine-tooled American culture that was rising around him with bewildering speed. His *Graceful Movement*, 1923, *Standing Concave*, 1925, and *Silver Torso*, 1931, are high points of

this new sense of styling—not so different from the sort of styling that American manufacturers were later to adapt for commercial products. The splendid silver-coated figures which move on revolving plinths, seem to predict the kind of 'modernism' that America was striving for in the late thirties and which, through Hollywood movies, influenced Western taste for over a generation (Archipenko lived and taught in Los Angeles from 1935-37).

Cubist forms remained with Archipenko throughout his life, particularly in the low reliefs in wood, bakelite and aluminum, polychromed in rich and sonorous colors. Other early ideas persisted as well, and the tightly concentrated form of *Family Life*, 1935, goes back to *Woman, Head on Knee*, 1909, and *Woman with Cat*, 1910, where the concentrated figuration is shaped by the block of material rather than released from it. But by far his greatest contribution to contemporary sculpture were the pieces in which he opened up voids within the mass (an idea which Henry Moore was to become famous for much later) to the point where he reversed the entire traditional concept that a sculpture is a solid surrounded by space. Hereafter space could be surrounded by solids which would in fact define the form that is read in the void.

Sadly, one of Archipenko's last and most ambitious conceptions, *King Solomon*, 1963, was never executed in the monumental scale that he had wished. It was to be a true colossus, some sixty feet high, and was to be viewed from below as well as from a great distance, and it takes a dramatic leap of the imagination to picture it as the artist conceived it.

Frederick S. Wight, in the catalogue of the Archipenko retrospective organized by UCLA in 1967, has written, '. . . he was free of that conventional taste that has clung to the most revolutionary figures in Western art until just now, so that he could seem either too tasteful, or tasteless, and apparently not care. Perhaps he was so far outside our pervasive materialist faith (in his Eastern way) that his subtleties and dedications embarrass us without our knowing why.'

That embarrassment has diminished with a greater knowledge of the richness and variety of this sculptor's ideas, and with a fuller understanding of his sense of style, which a new generation no longer finds intrusive or affected but in fact embraces as part of the heritage of our century.

Mario Amaya
Chief Curator
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

ARCHIPENKO: THE AMERICAN YEARS



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29. Silver Torso. 1931. Chrome-plated bronze, edition of 12, 39½" high
30. Family Life. 1935. Bronze, edition of 10, 29" long
31. Torso in Space. 1935. Bronze, edition of 12, 27½" long
32. Josephine Bonaparte. 1935. Bronze, edition of 10, 51" high
33. Arabian. 1936. Bronze, edition of 6, 26" high
34. Seated, Black. 1936. Bronze, edition of 6, 21⅛" high
35. Old Dutch Fisherman. 1942. Bronze, edition of 12, 16" high
36. Hindu Princess. 1954. Bronze, edition of 10, 53" high
37. Scheherazade. 1954. Polychromed aluminum, edition of 8, 12¾" high
38. Ray. 1919-56. Bronze, edition of 6, 63¼" high
39. Lying Horizontal Figure. 1957. Bronze, edition of 6, 14" long
40. Abstraction. 1959. Bronze relief on marble, edition of 6, 17 x 17"
41. Dignity. 1961. Polychromed bronze, edition of 8, 34" high
42. Walking Torso. 1963. Bronze, edition of 8, 14" high
43. Woman in the Chair. 1963. Polychromed bronze, edition of 12, 11⅝" high
44. King Solomon. 1963. Bronze, edition of 12, 26¼" high

The above works are on loan from the Bernard Danenberg Galleries, New York



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The Art Gallery of Ontario wishes to express its sincere thanks to the Museum of Modern Art for allowing The Paris Years to be exhibited in Toronto; and to the Bernard Danenberg Galleries, New York, for the loan of works from The American Years and their co-operation in enabling us to bring this exhibition together.



CHRONOLOGY

- 1887 Born in Kiev, Ukraine, son of an engineer and inventor, and grandson of an icon painter.
- 1902 Entered art school in Kiev to study painting and then sculpture. Influenced by Byzantine art, as well as the writings of Andreyev, and later, the revolution of 1905.
- 1905 Expelled from art school.
- 1906 First one-man show in the Ukraine. Went to Moscow; participated in group shows.
- 1908 Went to Paris; entered Ecole des Beaux Arts, but left after two weeks. Independently continued studies in museums, where he drew inspiration from Egyptian, Assyrian, archaic Greek and early Gothic works. Established Montparnasse studio where Modigliani, Gaudier-Brzeska and others studied sculpture with him.
- 1910-11 Exhibited in the Salon des Artistes Indépendants and with the 'Section d'Or', and the Salon d'Automne.
- 1912-13 Opened his own art school in Paris and introduced controversial new esthetic elements into his sculpture: modeling of space by means of abstracted concaves and voids to create implied volume. Made the first three-dimensional construction in modern sculpture in various painted materials (wood, glass, metal wire). Began creating reliefs usually plaster, carved and painted, which he called 'sculpto-paintings'.
One-man shows in Germany, at Folkwang Museum, Hagen and Der Sturm Gallery, Berlin. Represented in famous Armory Show in New York, in Budapest in Exposition d'Art Moderne organized by Alexandre Mercereau, and in Cubist exhibition held by Mánes Society, Prague, 1914.
- 1915-18 Spent World War I near Nice and left collection of plasters of early work with M. and Mme. Jean Verdier in Cannes for safe-keeping before starting travels.
- 1919 Began extensive tour, exhibiting his work in various European cities, including Geneva, Zürich, Paris, London, Brussels, Athens, Berlin, Munich, continuing through 1921. In 1920, large one-man show at Venice Biennale. Continued exhibiting with the 'Section d'Or', which resumed its activities after the war.
- 1921 Married sculptress Angelica Bruno-Schmitz, and moved to Berlin to open an art school. First one-man exhibition in United States at Société Anonyme, Museum of Modern Art, New York. Monograph by Ivan Goll published in connection with exhibition. Exhibitions also in Potsdam and Berlin.
- 1923 Moved to United States; opened art school in New York City. Subject of various monographs and articles by Professor Hans Hildebrandt, Roland Schacht and Professor Erich Wiese.
- 1924 Opened summer art school in Woodstock, New York. Invented (and patented) a variable image system or 'movable painting', also called 'Archipentura'.
- 1928 Became American citizen.
One-man exhibitions in New York and Tokyo.
- 1932-33 Lectured on theories of creativity in colleges and universities on the Pacific Coast, the Middle West and the East. Taught at Mills College, Oakland, California and at Chouinard School, Los Angeles.
- 1935 Opened an art school in Los Angeles; exhibited in several western cities.
- 1935-36 Taught summer sessions at the University of Washington, Seattle.
- 1937 Moved to Chicago; opened school of creative fine arts, and also taught at New Bauhaus School of Industrial Arts in Chicago.
- 1939 Confiscation of works owned by German museums during Nazi purge of 'decadent art'. Returned to New York and re-opened art school; also ran summer school in Woodstock.
- 1944-52 Taught at Dalton School, New York; Institute of Design, Chicago; Kansas City Art Institute, Missouri; Carmel Institute of Art, California; University of Oregon, Portland; University of Washington, Seattle; University of Delaware, Ohio.
Delegate to U.N.E.S.C.O.
- 1947 Created first carved plastic sculpture illuminated from within. Exhibited in New York the following year.
- 1952 Exhibition in São Paulo, Brazil.
- 1953 Inaugurated Associate Member of International Institute of Arts and Letters. Exhibitions in Guatemala and Germany.
- 1955 Began work on book, *Archipenko: Fifty Creative Years 1908-58*, by Alexander Archipenko and Fifty Art Historians, a 346-page book which includes a 52-page manifesto on creativity by Archipenko, an extensive bibliography, quotations, and 292 plates of his works.
- 1956 Taught at University of British Columbia, Vancouver.
- 1957 Angelica died aged 65.
- 1959 Awarded Medaglia d'Oro at XIII Biennale d'Arte Triveneta, III Concorso Internazionale del Bronzetto, Sala della Ragione, Padova, Italy, in October.
- 1960 Publication of book *Archipenko: Fifty Creative Years 1908-58* by Tekhne Publications, established by the artist for the purpose of publishing this book.
Married Frances Gray, a sculptress and former student. Recovered early plasters stored in 1918 with friends in Cannes.
- 1962 Elected to Department of Art of National Institute of Arts and Letters.
- 1963-64 Large retrospective exhibition shown in Rome, Milan and Munich.
- 1964 Died in New York.