What History of Sculpture in the 20th Century?

Thierry Dufrêne

Translator: Simon Pleasance

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- 1 Titles delivered in 2002 confirm the sustained interest in studies on sculpture. From the viewpoint of the consolidation of knowledge, we now have a fine catalogue raisonné of the sculpted work of Fenosa (1899-1988), a protégé of Picasso and Cocteau, author of the *Tempête pourchassée par le beau temps* (1957), set in the Boulevard Saint-Jacques in Paris in 1978-1979, and of the *Monument à Pau Casals* (1976-1977) erected in Barcelona in 1982. His phantasmagorias, his style that conjures up the statuettes of Tanagra and his rocaïlle

taste are diametrically opposed to the work of Brancusi, on which Pierre Cabanne offers a viewpoint enlivened by memories from Peggy Guggenheim, François Stahly, and Duchamp, and concluding with a diatribe against the current re-creation of the artist's studio: "The magic place has vanished".

- 2 Thanks to the brainchild of the Cahors museum, which has just devoted an exhibition to him, the sculpted work of Jean Peyrissac (1895-1974) is finally being acknowledged. Sculpture is readily credited with the task of modelling the world—this is its cosmogonic calling. Peyrissac comes across like a "dreamer of the cosmos" in the enlightening study by Marianne Le Pommeré. In 1947, this self-taught artist, who attended the Bauhaus in 1927, exhibited his "animated constructions", made during the previous decade, with Maeght. He was connected with the *Espace* group in 1951, and drew from various sources, as is evident in his unusual painted work of the 1920s which led him naturally via *L'Œil d'Arlequin* (1924) to relief and then to the third dimension. Marianne Le Pommeré shows the influence of the metaphysical geometries of De Chirico, the biomorphism of an artist like Miró, and the constellations of Calder. His poetic sculpture creates spaces and gravitation, made of mobiles and "static balances". Also worth noting are the interesting spindles made of wrought iron which he created after he had set up home in France in 1957, and which may be likened to the iron works of Chillida. The photographs of Maywald (1907-1985) record his "spider-like work which is completely unfurled in space" and the machines which might be called "useless", echoing those of his Italian contemporary, Munari.
- 3 Skoda's spheres on view at the Regional Contemporary Art Centre in Montbéliard may be compared with Peyrissac's "historiated balls". Vladimir Skoda (born in Prague in 1942) came by the conviction "that the curved, the spherical and the elliptical are the nature of the universe, unlike the "human geometric"". Skoda's work, a sculptural counterpart to George Koskas' paintings, lumps of galaxy and universal game of bowls, is compared by Philippe Cyroulnik, Pierre Wat and Miroslava Hajek both with the Platonist idea and with contemporary scientific models. We may at best regret that an analysis of the photography of sculpture by the artist—admirably documented in the catalogue—was not possible, all the more so because the reflecting surfaces of the polished steel balls grasping the environment in accordance with Brancusi's lesson perfectly illustrate Arp's observation: "The small keeps the large on a leash" (*Le Siège de l'air*, 1946).
- 4 From the viewpoint of the problems broached, we can essentially home in on three: the relationship to the model, the issue of the sculptural design, and sculpture in film.
- 5 A new notebook from the Brancusi studio is devoted to the issue of the portrait, recurrent in sculpture, which the exhibition *César: l'œuvre de bronze* has once again tackled with dovetailed portraits. We are well aware of Brancusi's contempt for "the carcass that we see" and his refusal in 1909 to make Anatole France's portrait. But if we agree to regard his work as the lengthy development and cross-fertilization of serial processes, is it not legitimate to consider that, up until 1909, his rough clay works certainly did have models and that the portrait was thus just a stage in an evolution towards the "portrait-essence" or an idea that was asserted by the recourse to the direct size in the transitional years 1909-1911? This, in any event, is what is proposed to us by Ann Temkin, demonstrating as she does that realist portraits lie at the root of *La Muse endormie* and the *Nouveau-Né*, Doïmna Lemny, who comes to the conclusion, in talking about the "model-less portrait", that the face of the very real Margit Pogany has been slipped into the already existing series of Narcissus and the Danaids, and Alexandra Parigoris, who sets forth a complex

synthetic construction of the “portrait from memory” of the black woman transformed into *Négresse blanche* and *Négresse blonde* by propping it up on the sculptor’s interest in African art as well as in Taoist wisdom: a “portrait coming from somewhere else”. The fine text by Sydney Geist on the portrait of Mrs. Eugene Meyer Jr. shows that what is involved here is a twofold response: synthetic and mental to another portrait, the one made of the extremely wealthy American woman by Despiau, sculptural to a photographic portrait made by Edward Steichen in 1910. This response, not to reality but to art, seems to shore up the hypothesis of Brancusian “anti-mimetism” formulated by Cristian Robert Velescu, who also raises the issue of the relationship to the object, by noting that the lower part of the “portrait” of Mrs. LR II has turned into the “telephone stool”, that is, an “object”. Did Giacometti not say that all Brancusi made was objects?

- 6 On this often prickly question of the relationship of sculpture to the object, the catalogue *Isamu Noguchi : Sculptural Design* represents a real step forward. We are acquainted both with the Japanese-American artist’s plea in support of what he called “the permeable side of sculpture” and with his vision of art as an “overall concept”. Noguchi, a friend of R. Buckminster Fuller, an extremely interesting essay by whom features in the catalogue, made 21 sets for Martha Graham, proposed landscaped gardens (*Play Mountain*) in New York City, designed the *Radio Nurse* in 1937, the *Goodyear Table* (1939), the *Chess table* (1944-1945), furniture for Hermann Miller and Kroll, light environments (*Lunars*), Akari lights which brought back to life those Gifu paper lanterns in 1951, and the UNESCO Japanese garden and patio (1956-1958), would not have understood the scorn and reticence of certain historians of sculpture towards design, which prompted Reinhold Hohl to talk of “haute sculpture”, the way we talk of “haute couture”. In the meantime, however, couture has found its way into museums and many artists have used clothing as a conveyor of expression. Be it with regard to Brancusi or Peyrissac, whose sculpture has more of an affinity with the design of the Bauhaus, historians do dare to talk about the relationship to the object of an art with a powerful social scope. They have accordingly explored the wardrobes in sculptors’ studios looking for natural objects, and finds, in the broad sense. Further evidence of this is Margaret Reid’s text on the Bourne Maquette Studio, at the Perry Green Henry Moore Foundation, in the catalogue of the recent retrospective *Henry Moore* at the Maeght Foundation. What is more, they reassert the role of sculptors as outfitters and converters of urban spaces, a role too often obscured by architects. So it is with Mathias Goeritz (1915-1990), described in 1969 by Jack Burnham as an “underestimated painter-sculptor-architect” and designer of the Satélite Towers (1957), which were built in Mexico City by Luis Barragán, the experimental *El Eco* museum and the Jerusalem *Labyrinth*.
- 7 It was incidentally in a space literally punctuated by sculpture—the MoMA garden in Manhattan—that the film-maker John Cassavetes shot a scene of *Shadows* (1959), one of those analysed by Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues, pursuing Rosalind Krauss’s way of looking at Eisenstein’s *October*: what part does sculpture play in films? The period under consideration is 1954-1965, years when the seventh art, starting with Rossellini’s *Voyage en Italie* (1954), developed the “cinema of sculpture” and the “museum visit” sequence to subvert realism and introduce different time factors. We should remember that Resnais even had a sculpture specially made for a scene in *Last Year in Marienbad* (1961). Even if it is still difficult to obtain any synthesis on this point, the series of case studies proposed provides food for thought. Just as the skills of the sculptor Alain Kirili give pause—this latter having last summer exhibited his admirable *Ascension* in Montmajour abbey—when

it comes to creating a dialogue between his sculpture and jazz, and song and dance, as well as with Carpeaux, a couple of centuries hence.

- 8 Other issues lurk between the lines: international artistic relations, for example, broached through the works of Noguchi, Goeritz and Kirili, the relationship to painting subtly grasped in the case of Peyrissac, and the role of photography which is extremely well appraised in the Brancusi notebook, and outlined in the case of Skoda. If the “sculpted” (Criqui) and the “statuary” (Kirili) seem to be reasserted, let us hope for studies that are currently lacking on scientific art since the 1970s, on the relationship to architecture, and on exhibitions of still under-estimated sculptures. Lastly, if the history of sculpture is still a “criteria-based” history, and if the monographic approach is often the rule, it is nevertheless possible to think collectively of a general history of sculpture of the 20th century.