Espace Sculpture

Jacques Lipchitz
A life in sculpture

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Volume 6, Number 3, Spring 1990

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/9788ac

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Publisher(s)
Le Centre de diffusion 3D

ISSN
0821-9222 (print)
1923-2551 (digital)

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public intégré à son environnement. Mais aussi ce concept est apparu de façon définitive pour des raisons d'unicité de structure, dont l'essentiel se compose de trois parties, soit deux verticales et une horizontale, elles-mêmes génératrices de multiples interprétations symboliques. Portes de villes murées, de territoires délimités dans le temps et l'espace, où des hommes se sont protégés contre l'inconnu. Pu...
construction, reveals Lipchitz' complete assimilation into Cubist non-objectivism. While it is a superb little work, the form still seems to be illustrative and descriptive, rather than part of a functional, expressive aesthetic.

Lipchitz continued to adapt and transform the Cubist vocabulary throughout the 20's. It was at this time, in his small-scale bronzes, called "Transparents", most of which were unique casts, that an inherent vitality, a stronger college exploration of positive and negative values, material mass and void begins to appear. He becomes less of a Cubist stylist, more completely the master of his own creative destiny and later wrote that he was 'escaping from the iron rule of syntactical cubist disciplines'. Lipchitz describes Chimène, one of the last of the "Transparents" executed in 1930 as a woman's head and hand, like a plant or a flower. For its free, fluid style this work has a graceful monumentality that surpasses the heavy-handed compression of form, and quasi-religious thematic that he sought in his large-scale public commissions.

Adjacent to the "Transparents" are Lipchitz' monumental "subject sculptures" of the 20's and 30's whose expressive enguished forms vary greatly in quality. Figures (1926-30), Joy of Life (1927) and The Cry (1928) are strong, expressive works, whose sculpted mass and spatial interplay achieve a contiguous harmony. On the other hand, Reclining Woman (1921) or Meditation (1923) have an exaggerated expression combined with an overblown workmanship that overwhelms, and confuses the viewer.

In looking at the diverse array of works from the post-war years when Lipchitz moved to America, we become aware of how lengthy his career was, and how prolific an artist he became. He outlined his generation, and his immense energies seemed caught in a dilemma, returning to previous themes, adopting earlier forms, dropping them, experimenting with maquettes, playing with the ideas which had preoccupied him in Europe. There is a strong vision in the astonishing variety of work here, but the styles vary, are inconsistent in quality, and ultimately reveal an indecisiveness, a lack of direction. It led Clement Greenberg to state that Lipchitz was "unable to develop a principle of inner consistency; none of the different paths he takes seem to lead to the next one". Curator Alan Wilkinson suggests that this inconsistency was merely the evidence of an explosive imagination, an uncontainable vitality that was the driving force behind Lipchitz' vision. The comprehensive, consistent forms of Alberto Giacometti, Jean Arp or Henry Moore are nowhere evident in Lipchitz' work. Whether this is a weakness or a strength may finally depend on how strongly our view of the history of art must rely on a basic consistency of individual aesthetic as a measure of relevance.

Of all the later works, it is the small bronzes, the spontaneous interpretive allegorical pieces that seem the most fascinating. They are imaginative, delicate forms, and have none of the Baroque gaudiness, the justification of material mass for its own sake, that we find in the later monuments such as Notre-Dame de Liesse (New Harmony, Indiana) and Our Tree of Life (Mount Scopus, Israel). The Beautiful One (1962) is an example of this open freedom of expression that can no longer be called Picasso-esque. For these later works of Lipchitz' do deserve attention, if only to counter the others. They are indeed evidence that Lipchitz continued, later in life, to seek a new language of expression.

And so, at the end of this exhibition, we are left grasping to understand, straining to lift the weight of this artist's idealism to find the pure expressions of beauty which lay beneath. These inner turmoil, seen in the strength and mercurial variation of Lipchitz' life's work did indeed cause him to defy any clear, historical categorization in his later life, and more often to his detriment of late. This, as much as his early work, undoubtedly cast him into the mould of that vague, ill-defined, catch-all phrase "true Cubist" expounded so cleverly in the Tate Gallery's 1983 show The Essential Cubism 1907-20: Braque, Picasso, and their Friends.

This show will be on at the Art Gallery of Ontario until March 11, 1990. It will travel to the Winnipeg Art Gallery (May 13-Aug. 12, 1990), the Nelson-Aikins Museum of Art, Kansas City (Oct. 6-Nov. 25, 1990), and The Jewish Museum, New York (Jan. 16-April 15, 1991).