

SCULPTURE SURVEY

Twentieth Century Trends Brought Out in Museum's Garden Exhibition

By HOWARD DEVREE

PRESENTING a major exhibition tracing the development of sculpture in the twentieth century, the Museum of Modern Art has given it a fittingly impressive installation. The visitor first encounters several masterpieces of that giant of the modern movement, Rodin, with galleries to left and right housing the smaller pieces, portraits, plastic constructions, mobiles and recent examples in metal media and passes through beyond the glass wall at the rear into the new sunken sculpture garden about which are spaciouly and advantageously disposed the larger pieces in bronze and stone, free standing or silhouetted against the high gray wall or against cedars or birches. Wall colors of the galleries within the museum have been toned with the garden wall, the unpolished gray marble block paving and the greenery so that the inner and outer parts of the exhibition are unified. Maillol's "River" figure has been dramatically placed beside the larger of two pools and Marini's horse seems just to have emerged from among the cedars.

And the exhibition which Andrew C. Ritchie, director of the museum's department of painting and sculpture, has assembled for the occasion thoroughly justifies the impressive installation. From Rodin, Maillol and Brancusi, who dominated the early part of the century, through cubist, abstract and surrealist work of the next decade or two, the exhibition reveals the ramifications of sculptural development down to the recent pieces in welded metal and the plastic constructions and mobiles of the last few years. The various influences and interrelationships are clearly brought out. More than 100 examples of European and American work of high quality have been assembled.

Figure and Space

The changing approach by sculptors toward the figure and space treatment, for example, are illustrated in the three pieces herewith reproduced. The Marcks piece reveals the essentially traditional treatment of the figure in the round as encased in an envelope of space. The Archipenko figure reveals influence of the cubist-abstract idiom with use of both convex and concave surfaces. The Roszak piece represents the employment of abstract form with enclosed or captive space which is taken into account as an element in the work quite as much as the material of the form.

Among the works not shown before in New York is an admirable Lehmbruck figure, "Seated Youth," a piece of somber dignity and beauty executed just before the sculptor's death, which has been used as a World War I memorial in his native town of Duisberg, Germany. It is a profoundly moving evocation somewhat expressionist in its angularity, with a depth of humanity which exceeds that of his other beautiful pieces such as the "Standing Woman" of more classic lineage. Also shown are three pieces by the Spanish sculptor Gonzalez, to whom assuredly some of our current workers in metal idioms can look back as a progenitor. One of them is the strangely affecting "La Montserrat," a life-size figure in sheet iron of a peasant girl. To the simplified treatment of stiff armor effect forms Gonzalez contrived to contribute so much dignity that at a first glance one thinks rather of Joan of Arc than of a field worker.

A Notable Exposition

In addition to the illustrated catalogue which accompanies the exhibition, the museum has published Mr. Ritchie's "Sculpture of the Twentieth Century," a careful and authoritative delineation of the various pioneers, influences and cross-currents of the period, with nearly 200 illustrations. In it, as in the exhibition itself, he stresses the work of painters who have also been sculptors and have made significant contributions—Degas, Braque, Modigliani, Picasso, Renoir, Matisse and others.

None the less painting holds a

danger for sculptors as well as emphasizing true pictorial values. In many of the big annual shows where sculpture is included one may note pieces representing figures with reflections in the water, an attempt to represent smoke or, as on the present occasion, David Smith's "Banquet" which seems to me to trespass far over toward the preserves of painting.

The treatment of space is a compelling problem in most of the work in the current show. In the Lehmbruck figure cited above, a work of 1919, there seems already a hint of Moore's figures with open areas and enclosed spaces. In the plastic constructions with captive space realized through transparency, such as in the very striking "Column" of glass, plastic, metal and wood by Gabo, one sees sculpture seeking a reunion with architecture.

Another thing which stands out in the present exhibition is the evident preoccupation of sculpture of the century in getting away from the deadening repetition of smooth Greek classic derivation. Rodin led the way with his doctrine that "sculpture is the art of the hole and the lump, not the straightness of smooth faces without modeling." From his somewhat expressionist manner, the more idealizing use of form by Maillol and the stripping of form to essence by Brancusi, the modern movement in sculpture accelerated. More and more sculptors came to look back on archaic work, the sinuous pieces of the Orient, the remarkably plastic effects attained by African sculpture and other non-European sources. The result has been manifold—a new conception of space, an extension of theme through abstraction, experiment with a variety of new materials and surfaces, away from the simple figure and the purely decorative piece and toward a new vitality. All this the current exhibition makes quite evident.

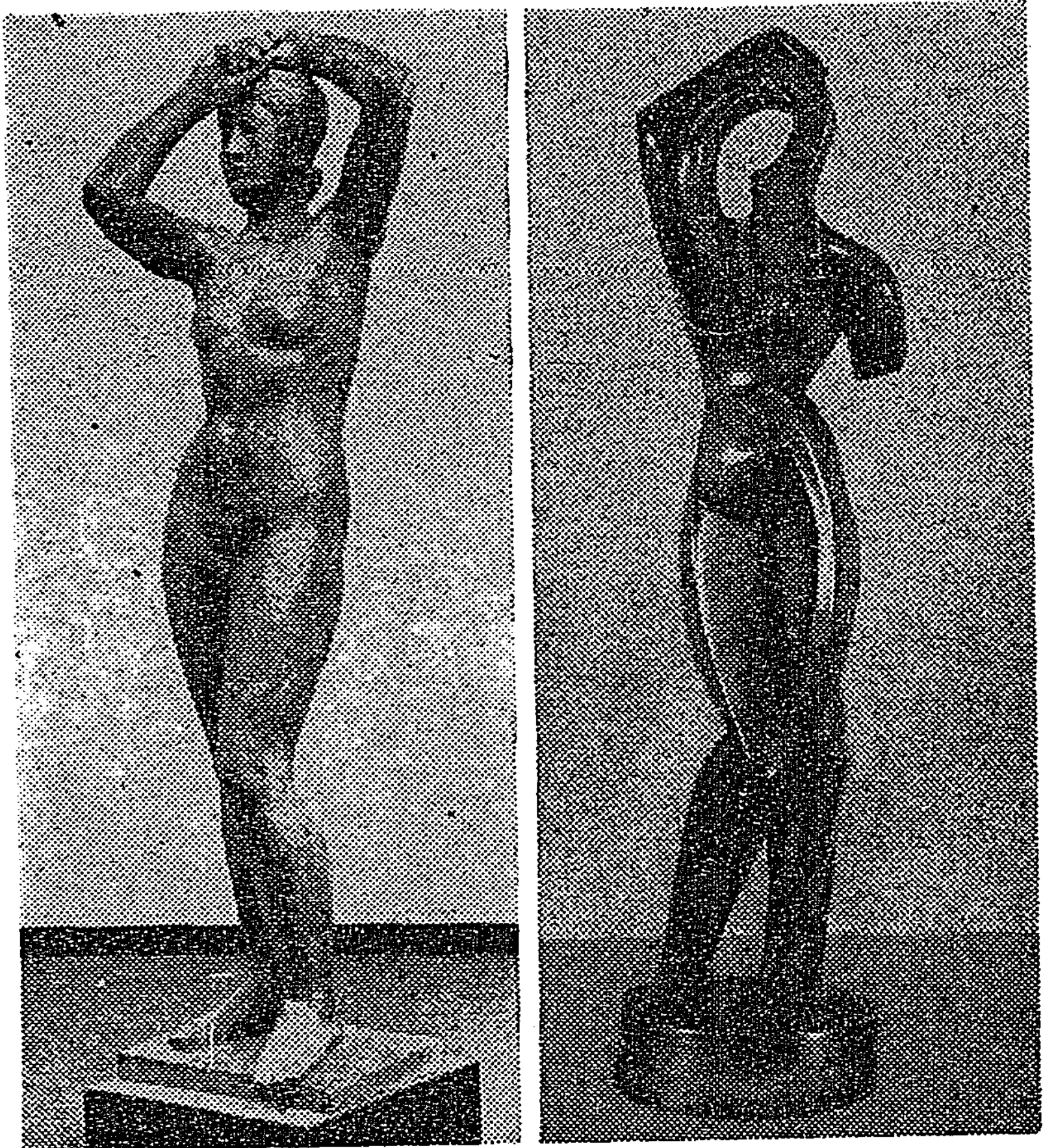
One-Man Show

The sculptor Leonard, holding his third show at the Peridot Gallery, continues to work individually, making use of a variety of stones such as gypsum, lava tuff and steatite with arresting surface effect and employing striking rhythms based in abstraction and simplification. His "Mother and Daughter" makes fine play of curve and angle. "Woman of the Earth" has something of that respect for the original shape and suggestiveness of the stone that characterized the work of Flanagan. The crouching figure "Despair" is impressive and the multiple convolutions of a triple figure are notably well carried out.

A Veteran Surprises

The many admirers of the recent explosive painting by Hans Hofmann have a surprise awaiting them at the Kootz Gallery. He has been persuaded to show paintings of the period 1936-39 not previously exhibited and even the most expressionist and abstract of them are seen to be clearly based on landscape, while two or three of them have clearly representational contours of hills or the harbor and boats of Provincetown. It is almost as if he were foretelling the break away from the non-figurative or expressionist-abstract work which seems to have set in.

"On the Pier" of 1936 is full of life and movement. "Truro River" and "Lake Evening" employ an over-scrawl of calligraphic pattern which is very effective against the solid colors. Deep space is employed, set off and enhanced by some of the richest color Hofmann has ever set upon canvas. Blazing reds and rich blues and greens are interspersed with dull browns and mauves in these full orchestrations which one finds hard to believe were not freshly done yesterday instead of fifteen years ago. For this reviewer they are the handsomest and most satisfying paintings Hofmann has ever shown and quite the most meaningful.



"Maja," bronze, by Gerhard Marcks, lent by Philadelphia Museum. Right—"Woman Combing Her Hair," bronze, by Alexander Archipenko, lent by Mr. and Mrs. George Heard Hamilton. Below—"Invocation," steel, by Theodore Roszak, lent by Pierre Matisse Gallery.

