

Peggy Guggenheim COLLECTION

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Press Release

GERMAINE RICHIER: SCULPTURES AND DRAWINGS AT THE PEGGY GUGGENHEIM COLLECTION THIS AUTUMN FOR THE FIRST RETROSPECTIVE DEDICATED TO THE FRENCH SCULPTOR IN ITALY

GERMAINE RICHIER, on view from October 28, 2006 to February 5, 2007, is the first retrospective dedicated to the French sculptor in Italy. The exhibition marks the return of the artist to the limelight as one of the most important sculptors of the twentieth century. Germaine Richier (1902-1959) was, along with Alberto Giacometti and Marino Marini, one of the protagonists of the post-war avant-garde and she was considered a 'maestro' by critics and international collectors alike.

The Peggy Guggenheim Collection is honored to present to the Italian and international public the most complete retrospective since the 1996 exhibit at the Fondation Maeght in Saint Paul, France. Luca Massimo Barbero curated the selection of almost 60 works, including bronze sculptures, small casts, lithographs and drawings, and created a chronological and analytical view of the tortured artistic path of the sculptor. The presence of an important work by Richier, *Tauromachy* (1953), in the collection of Peggy Guggenheim originated the exhibition: the sculpture is emblematic of Peggy Guggenheim's love of Richier's work, which she had already begun to collect in 1960. The show, which will extend from the temporary exhibition galleries to the garden is made possible by the collaboration with the Archives Françaises de l'Art Moderne in Paris.

Germaine Richier was born in 1902 in Grans (Bouche-du-Rhône, France). She attended the Academy of Art in Montpellier and in 1926 moved to Paris, where she worked in the studio of Louis Guigues, one of Auguste Rodin's assistants. In Paris, she began to visit Emile-Antoine Bourdelle's studio, where she learned the difficult technique of sculpting busts. It is from this particular aspect of her work that the present exhibition commences: *Bust of the Christ* (1931), *Bust no. 12* (1933-34), and *Régodias* (1938)—statuesque works which still bear realistic features—will all be on view. In 1934, the Galerie Max Kaganovich held her first solo exhibition. In 1936 she received the prestigious Blumenthal Prize for sculpture. In 1937, she was invited to the Exposition Universelle de Paris, and in 1939 some of her pieces were shown in the New York World's Fair.

Though she never embraced any artistic or political movement, Richier participated in the cultural atmosphere of her time, frequenting Henri Favier, Celebonovic Marko, Massimo Campigli, Alberto Giacometti, Raymond-Jacques Sabouraud, and her dear friend Marino Marini. World War II brought her to Zurich, where she was followed by some of her students and where she recreated her studio. There, she continued to interact with all the friends who had also emigrated, such as Jean Arp, Le Corbusier, Fritz Wotruba, and others. In 1945, she returned to Paris. World War II had provided her with a new source of experimentation based on form and space, which created the strongest expressive force in her sculpture.

From 1945 to 1959, the year of her death, Germaine Richier completed an intense artistic journey, moving from an expressionistic analysis of the figure, such as in *The Forest Man (Large Version)* (1945-46), *The Ogre* (1949), *The Hurricane Woman* (1948-49), which attests to a future osmosis of man and nature, to a more aesthetic composition that is nonetheless fascinated by the representation of deformity (*Diabolo*, 1950, *The Couple*, *The Ant*, 1953). It served as a metaphor for the brutal relationship between living creatures and their environment, in which a surrealist composition completes the hybridisation of human and animal—*Tauromachy* and *The Hydra* both of 1954—in which the metamorphoses is an integral part of the sculptural language. "The fantastical is only a dialectic state of consciousness: the hybrid is only a constation of reality and of its contradictions"—

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wrote Pierre Restany describing these very sculptures, which, along with the ones Richier made in the 1940s, will be exhibited in the present show. GERMAINE RICHIER is intended to promote the rediscovery in Italy of the French sculptor, whose works are to be found in the most important public collections worldwide, such as the Tate Modern in London, the Centre Georges-Pompidou in Paris, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome.

Germaine Richier often admitted: "I love tension, dryness, anxiety." The small 1946 bronzes, *The Fight* and *The Struggle*, together with *Le Griffu* (1952), indeed show her preference for "beings" deprived of the "flesh" metabolized by an all devouring environment, from which "beings" should be shielded and protected, as with the webs enveloping her sculptures and creating an intermediary space between figures and environment. The works of Richier express, in addition to suffering and torture, the anguish of deformity, the imperative sense of position in space, the elegant rigor of posture, or in other words, the sense of humanity: "all of my sculptures," the artist wrote, "even those that seem to be inspired by imagination, are based on something real, on an organic truth ... imagination needs a start-line." The human being represents both the start-line and the inspiration of Germaine Richier's *oeuvre*, which depicts both the dramas and the dreams of her time, by combining in a revolutionary way the violence of the expressionist language with the mysterious fantasy of "surrealistic" sculptures from the 1950s. Richier achieved this result with only few tools: "It is necessary to feel one's own hands and passions ... because sculpture is an intimate and private thing. It is alive and it has its own rules."

Thanks to the generosity of the Archives Françoise Guiter, Richier's works on paper, including etchings and aquatints, will be exhibited for the first time. The exhibition will also offer the opportunity to experience the environmental dimension of Richier's sculptures through the dialogue between the works exhibited in the galleries and in the garden of Palazzo Venier dei Leoni. The Archives Françoise Guiter also agreed to loan the important sculptural group *Chess Board (Large Version, 1959)*, measuring over two meters in height.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalogue published by the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, with essays by the Archives Françoise Guiter, Luca Massimo Barbero, and Giorgio Mastinu, which will devote particular attention to the iconographic repertoire of Germaine Richier, including photographic prints of the works that Germaine Richier commissioned from Brassai.

Institutional Patrons: Banca del Gottardo, Regione del Veneto

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