

LUXEMBOURG & DAYAN

ARTNEWS

Twist and Turn: Stunning Abstract Sculptures By Seven Masters Tell Rich Tales of Modernism

BY *Alfred Mac Adam* POSTED 06/16/17 12:18 PM



Installation view of "Figures Towards Abstraction: Sculptures 1910 to 1940," 2017, at Luxembourg & Dayan, New York. / ANDREW ROMER/COURTESY LUXEMBOURG & DAYAN, NEW YORK

This fascinating compilation of domestic-scale sculpture by seven modernist masters, organized in collaboration with architect Daniel Libeskind, instantly stimulates the desire to forge a narrative. The works, all conceived within a 30-year

period, reflect the currents dominating the European artistic tradition of the moment. But the difficulty in producing such an account is caused by the frequent divergence between “date of conception” and “date of execution.” Unlike a painting, a bronze sculpture can be cast at any time so long as a mold or a maquette exists. Time here is both relevant and irrelevant.

Jacques Lipchitz’s *Seated Figure* is a case in point. Conceived in 1915, it was cast sometime later in the artist’s lifetime. There is a long stretch between Lipchitz in 1915, when he was 24, and 1973, the year of his death. But set all chronology aside: the piece is a synthesis of Cubist and Futurist concerns, where static Cubism and dynamic Futurism hold each other at bay. Understated, especially if we think of later Lipchitz, the object expresses a grand monumentality while standing only 34 inches high.

Henri Laurens’s saucily posed *Femme accoudée* instantly recalls Manet’s *Olympia*, so it seems to look back even as its stylization looks forward. Executed in 1927, Laurens’s sculpture effectively effaces its own historical moment while imposing its sensuality and will-to-geometry on our contemporary eye.



Alberto Giacometti, *Figure dite cubiste I*, 1926, bronze, 24 $\frac{7}{8}$ ” x 10 $\frac{5}{8}$ ” x 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ ”. / ANDREW ROMER/COURTESY LUXEMBOURG & DAYAN,

The same escape from time occurs with two Giacomettis: *Femme (Plate II)* and *Objet désagréable à jeter*. The *Femme*, conceived in 1928 and cast in 1970–71 reduces the female body to a vague rectangle with two circular indentations. Recalling Cycladic sculpture, the piece ponders essential female biological functions, giving birth especially. It could be a fertility cult object, and in this sense, it recalls Surrealism’s anthropological side. The *Objet* on the other hand sends us back to Surrealism’s whimsy. Conceived in 1936 and cast in 1979, the object is playful, suggestive in a phallic way, and is, at the same time, a parody of a convex table mirror. This is not the Giacometti of existentialist anguish, but rather the Giacometti who is having fun with the less solemn side of Surrealist aesthetics.

Matisse's *Le Tiaré* also contains a dash of wit. A parody of aristocratic portraiture, conceived in 1930 and cast in 1954, it transforms a grande dame's little nose into an ostentatious penis reminiscent of some Picasso noses of the 1930s. Unlike Giacometti's *Femme*, which seeks to express an archetypal womanhood, this superb piece compresses a satiric portrait into eight inches of bronze.

Unique in this show of wonders is Julio González's *Le Pied*, forged and welded in 1934–36. A fragment that exalts its fragmentary nature. Perhaps an allusion to a remnant of some lost classical piece, the foot is nevertheless a step toward a scattering of parts that would produce the kind of work, also included here, for which Gonzalez is best known whose only subject is itself.

In a similar vein, Jean Tinguely's 1948 *Stabile I*, hung high in a stairwell, floats in midair. It may suggest some biomorphic shapes, but that is only incidental to its total independence from representation, geometry, and gravity. Here is sculpture as idea, its final distillation. We are back where we started.