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A HAUNTING GRACE: THE SCULPTURES OF GERMAINE RICHIER ON VIEW IN NYC FOR THE 1ST TIME IN 57 YEARS



Le Couple peint, Germaine Richier, 1959, Painted Bronze.

For the first time in 57 years, Germaine Richier's distinct sculptures are being exhibited in New York City. Not only providing a chance to explore an understudied woman artist during Women's History Month, the show also highlights an artist with a truly unique sensibility. Richier constantly pushed the limits to find new ways of representing recognized forms. Working in the tradition of bronze sculpture, she invented her own course by utilizing unusual color schemes, organic materials, hybrid human-animal figures and geometric, often elongated shapes. Informed by both formalist questions and expressionistic concerns, her work shares a vitality that is both carnal and spiritual at once and the show's layout presents a unique chance to see Richier's oeuvre as the work was placed in the artist's studio in her lifetime.

Jointly presented by Dominique Lévy and Galerie Perrotin, the exhibition is spread over three floors. On each one, Richier's sculptures are densely placed in close arrangement to each other. The layout not only gives visitors a rare opportunity to experience the work as the artist herself had, but also shares a less common way to engage with sculpture generally in the contemporary art world. Rather than looking at each piece purely as a singular object, a walk around each floor reveals different ways that the sculptures play off each other thematically and formally. This not only gives an impression of what the artist herself may have noticed while at work on her next piece in her studio, sending us back temporarily in time, but it also reveals continually new relationships that emerge from different viewer's experiences, making us more aware of the sculptures occupation of different positions in space as well —both relative to each other and to the gallery itself.

Richier was first trained as a classical sculptor at the École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Montpellier and then became a student of Antoine Bourdelle (a student of Rodin and teacher to Alberto Giacometti) in Paris. During this period, she created cast bronze sculptures of human forms that are reminiscent of ancient Egyptian sculptures. Her later pieces, which have come to define her style and make up for much of the show, usually represent human forms in motion or hybrid creatures that blend the human form with animal features.

"To me, she really was the mother of post-war sculpture in Europe," said gallerist Dominique Lévy at last week's press preview. Lévy discussed the ways in which Richier generated controversy from the start of her career as both a woman sculptor who embraced her femininity in her work and as a mid-century artist who defied the dichotomy between figuration and abstraction.

Essentialism may be a controversial topic in both art and politics but Richier's sculptures display a heightened sensitivity to nature and emotions through formal experimentation that refuses to ignore sensuality. The most linear, geometric forms in her pieces are juxtaposed with curved bodies. Animal heads often top the figures but the movement and emotion they convey is undeniably human. In addition, her predilection to use organic materials in her work in different ways shows a desire to connect with nature and perhaps redefine our relationship with it. There is an exploding sense of curiosity and optimism about the primitive world and our relationship to it in modernity.



Germaine Richier Installation Shot at Dominique Lévy and Galerie Perrotin.

Richier's work explores color, geometry, abstraction, expressionism and more all at once. Her dynamic sculptures are haunting; the exhibition's installation is a successful testament to the artist's boundary-pushing, a wonderful recreation of her inner world and a chance to reconsider the place of sculpture in contemporary culture.

January 2013
December 2012
November 2012
October 2012
September 2012
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"As long as sculpture is not brought back into the 'domain of man and woman,' into the places common to humanity, its face will be as if it were disfigured...And we decidedly cannot conceal human expression in the drama of our time."

~Germaine Richier (Paris, 1959)

Germaine Richier is on view until April 12, 2014.

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'La Fourmi,' Germaine Richier, 1953, dark patinated bronze.



'Le cheval à six têtes, grand,' Germaine Richier, 1954-1956, dark patinated bronze.



'Le Berger des Landes,' Germaine Richier, 1951, dark patinated bronze.

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