JACQUES LIPCHITZ (1891-1973)

Study for the Portrait of Géricault or Géricault: Model #2

Bronze proof, #2/7
Lost wax cast by Mario Busato Paris, 1952
Monogrammed (on the back of the neck): JL
Seal with an impression of the artist's right index finger (on the back of the neck)
Remains of a rectangular label (on the left side of the neck)
Founder's stamp on the right side of the base of the neck: CIRE PERDUE BUSATO PARIS (LOST WAX CAST BUSATO PARIS)
H. 18, W. 11.5, D. 14 cm

Provenance

- Private American collection

Bibliography

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- Lipchitz, J., Arnason, H. H., *My Life in Sculpture,* Coll. The Documents of the 20th Century Art, Thames and Hudson, 1972, repr. P.130 (a bronze proof).

- Hammacher, A.M., *Jacques Lipchitz*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1975, repr. n°108 (*Portrait de Géricault*, bronze from the Fine Arts Museum in Rouen).
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"*During 1932 and 1933, I returned to portraiture, of which the most interesting to me was the portrait of Géricault. I have always been a great admirer of this painter, a genius who died young, and I have some paintings of his. There exists a death mask of Géricault of which I acquired a cast. I wanted t make the portrait as realistic as possible, so I checked documents and existing portraits of him. This was my homage to a great artist whom I love very much. I think it is a good portrait. Even the Museum at Rouen, which has a lot of his works because Géricault was born there, bought a copy. My American dealer, Curt Valentin, bequeathed me a small sculpture by Géricault of a fawn and a nymph*."
Jacques Lipchitz[1]

Portrait-making as recreation

Jacques Lipchitz has left us a valuable testimony in his autobiography *My Life in Sculpture*, published in 1972, one year before his death. A Lithuanian immigrant, Jacques Lipchitz moved to Paris in 1909 at the age of 18. He pursued an artistic education and met many other artists in the Montparnasse neighborhood where he lived. He became a French citizen in 1924 and the following year moved to a house and studio built by Le Corbusier at Boulogne-Billancourt. He mingled with ease in contemporary artistic and intellectual

worlds and came to know many collectors and donors who commissioned monumental sculptures from him for their houses and grounds. He did five bas-reliefs for Dr. Barnes' house in Pennsylvania (1922), *La joie de Vivre* (*The Joy of Life*) for the Noailles in Hyères (1927), and *Le Chant des Voyelles* (*The Song of the Vowels*) for Madame de Mandrot in Le Pradet (1931). In 1933, at the time that he was working on the *Portrait of Géricault*, Lipchitz was enjoying considerable success, receiving commissions and generally deeply engaged and flourishing. After a cubist period at the end of the nineteen-teens and beginning of the twenties, he began exploring the relationship of sculpture to space with the series *Transparents* in the second half of the twenties. By the beginning of the thirties, he was occupied with monumentality, and his forms became full and curved. He began to treat biblical and mythological themes, alluding to the political situation in Europe and the rise of fascism. In 1933, he began doing research on the theme of Prometheus, in whom he saw the image of Humanity fighting against evil.[2] He also explored the theme of David and Goliath, seeing David as representing a free Europe triumphing over Goliath, who represented the fascist oppressor.

Given this context, *Portrait of Géricault* seems to have offered a diversion and an anchoring. Lipchitz reconnected with the sources of his inspiration in creating this homage to an artist he admired. As the product of a classical French education, he considered the portrait to be a useful and necessary exercise in the evolution of the artistic work: "All my life, with a few interruptions, I've done portraits. I love doing them, and even when I'm also doing other work, I find it an excellent discipline and even relaxing."[3] Lipchitz is known as a great portraitist.[4] He usually created his portraits life-d, in front of his model, and he thought of them as independent from his stylistic concerns of the moment. For instance, he did the portraits of *Raymond Radiguet*, *Jean Cocteau*, and *Gertrude Stein* at the beginning of the twenties in a stylized classicism that contrasts strongly with the cubist style of his other sculptures from that time.

For *Portrait of Géricault*, Lipchitz recorded that he worked from a death-mask of which he'd acquired a proof[5] and from existing portraits of the painter. He had worked from a death-mask before, in 1920, to render homage to another artist, Amedeo Modigliani, who had been a friend of his. He did *Death-Mask of Modigliani* based both on memory and on a partial plaster mold that the painter Moïse Kisling and the Swiss astrologer Conrad Moricand had brought him.

A lively model, vigorously sculpted

For his homage to Géricault, Lipchitz tried to be realistic while also conveying his impressions. He used a very lively language based on vigorous modeling that is found on many of his other works as well as on other portraits, such as the *Portrait of Lorenzo Garaventa*, an Italian sculptor, which he did many years later, in 1968. The composition of that work is very similar—a head on a truncated neck—and features the same irregular surface. In the *Portrait of Géricault*, the surface, which Lipchitz composed by flattening small balls of clay with his fingers, is left rough. This superficial layer was applied over a highly architectural structure, cleanly cut, with prominent edges, creating an angular, even emaciated face, reminiscent of a landscape of hollows and mounds. Though the artist's approach to the construction of the physiognomy was frank and rough, the features of the face are treated with delicacy. The line of the nose, the eyes, the mouth, and the ears are all treated with precision. The tension created by a construction that is both exact and crude at the same time makes this portrait particularly alive and expressive.[6] The scale is half life-, which gives it an intimate feel perfectly suited to it.

This restless treatment reflects the romantic temperament of the artist depicted. Théodore Géricault (1791-1824) was a French painter, sculptor, draftsman, and lithographer. One of the greatest figures of the Romantic movement, he had an impetuous and turbulent personality and painted large, dynamic, turbulent compositions. The influence of Géricault's work on that of Lipchitz, who studied his work in the Louvre is most marked and obvious in the sculpted groups based on mythological themes that he worked on from 1933 on. These energetic and dramatic compositions feature ascending diagonals that create a dynamic tension, such as those in *l'Enlèvement d'Europe* (*The Rape of Europa*) (1938) and *La Fuite* (*The Flight*) (1940), which echoes the famous *Radeau de la Méduse* (*The Raft of the Medusa*) (1819 Salon) or l'*Officier de chasseurs à cheval de la garde impériale chargeant* (*An Officer of the Imperial Horse Guards Charging*) (1812 Salon). Lipchitz's models of various groups that he sculpted in the thirties also show a distinct relation to Géricault's sculptural work and particularly with the small sculpture *Satyre et Nymphe* (c. 1818); Lipchitz had acquired a proof of it through his American dealer Curt Valentin. They are similar in their compositions and in their treatment of volumes. Given that, the *Portrait of Géricault* can be seen as a testimony to the determining importance of this Romantic master to the development of Jacques Lipchitz's work.

Consistent with classical training, Lipchitz thought that "modeling is the most appropriate technique for a sculptor."[7] It allows him to rapidly capture the overflowing flux of his ideas. To arrive at a definitive model, he worked through successive steps, each one of which was an independent work or state, and he acknowledged their autonomy by editioning them.[8]

In the case of *Portrait of Géricault*, there are four developmental stages and then the final version. All are dated 1933[9] and were done in editions of seven.[10] The developmental models are all around 20 cm tall, whereas the finished portrait is 61 cm.

- Model #1 has a rather full face; the head is bare, and a collar covers the neck. A plaster of it is in the Frost Art Museum (Florida International University Metropolitan Collection) in Miami.
- Model #2, which is the one presented here, shows the artist with a beret perched on the back of his head.
- Model #3 still features the beret, but it is pulled further down on the head, and the face, without a neck, is mounted on a small cylindrical stand. The Tel Aviv Museum of Art has a plaster of this model.
- Model #4 is similar to #2 in that the beret is again worn toward the back of the head, though the tail of the beret is longer; this one also again shows the neck. There's another variation of this one that is dated 1936,[11] a plaster of which is held in the Krannert Art Museum (University of Illinois) in Urbana-Champaign.
- The definitive version is much larger (61 cm), and the eye-sockets are larger and deeper than in model #2. A plaster of this version is held in the University of Arizona Art Museum in Tucson. Among the edition's seven bronzes, one is in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam (1/7), and another is in the Fine Arts Museum in Rouen (3/7), and there is one in terra cotta that belongs to the Tate Gallery in London.

The Edition of Model #2

As for the model #2 discussed here, there is a plaster in the Fine Arts Museum in Nancy.[12] Like the other models, this one was cast in an edition of seven. The first three were cast by Busato in Paris in 1952.[13] As our example is 2/7, cast by Busato, it is one of the three that was cast during the artist's lifetime. The location of 1/7 is not currently known, while 3/7 is held in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

We know that Jacques Lipchitz scrupulously followed every step in the creation of a bronze,[14] retouching the wax and working on the patina. He signed the proofs not only with his monogram, JL, but also with an impression of his right index finger, guaranteeing the fidelity and the quality of the casting.

The year of the casting makes sense. In 1952, Lipchitz, who had immigrated to the United States in 1941, had a fire in his studio in New York. Confronted with the loss of a number of his works, he responded by making sure that what remained would be protected, such as the portrait of Géricault. The original

terra cotta must have still been in his studio in Boulogne. In addition, he was honored that year in the French pavilion of the Venice Biennale, where 22 of his works were shown.[15] At the time, Lipchitz was still living in the United States, where he also enjoyed considerable recognition. Many of his works were acquired by various American institutions (today more than 230 of his works are in American museums) and private collectors. The piece presented here comes from one such collection.

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[1] In. 1972, Lipchitz, J., Arnason, p. 128.
[2] For the 1937 International Exhibition, he presented *Prometheus Strangling the Vulture*, a monumental work for which he received the gold medal.
[3] In. 1972 Lipchitz, Arnason, p. 10.
[4] On the occasion of an exhibition at the Galerie Maeght in 1946, Camille Soula wrote in the catalogue, "His portraits are perhaps the only ones that can stand up to the busts of Rodin." in *Jacques Lipchitz, œuvres d'Amérique et rétrospective*, (*Jacques Lipchitz, American and Retrospective Works*), Paris, Galerie Maeght, June, 1946.
[5] For example, a *Death Mask of Théodore Géricault*.
[6] A passage from an article by Pierre Guéguen supports this idea well: "Upon looking closely at a group by Lipchitz, one has the distinct impression that it has two natures that don't quite manage to fuse. One nature reveals an agitated and combative aspect, while the other displays a well-ordered spirit and a keen perception. One always keeps the other from predominating. The first accounts for the fact that some of his works show a struggle and a desire for domination, suggesting that the artist has not taken sufficient precautions against passions tending toward the cruel or the aggressive, passions that emerge when a man's vitality carries him to extremes of action. The second of Lipchitz's natures is the anchor that has made his architectures over the past several years remarkably strong. It allowed him to resist giving in to his penchant for Rodin's works, which are often a mixture of excessive passion, calculation, and expressionism." *Cahiers d'art*, vol. 7, 1932 p. 252-258, reprinted in 2004, MNAM, p. 181-182.
[7] The statement appeared in 1971, *The Reuven Lipchitz Collection*, np.
[8] In 1963, he decided to cast most of the models that had survived in bronze. This editioning project gave rise to an exhibition at the Otto Gerson Gallery in New York and then, in 1969, to a book in which he stated: "Following the tradition of art and particularly that of the 19th century, I first created sketch models that reflect my first spontaneous idea, the living inspiration. In the course of my life, many of these models disappeared or were destroyed. However, many of them were also saved, and to make sure that they survived, I decided to cast them in bronze. And I agreed to allow them to be presented in this book." In. 1969, Arnason, p. 4.
[9] The four models are dated 1933 in Wilkinson's 1996 catalogue raisonné. However, in Barañano's 2009 catalogue raisonné of the plasters, model #4 is presented as a variation of the definitive version and is dated 1936.

[10] The four models and the definitive version are listed in Wilkinson's 1996 catalogue raisonné under the numbers 311, 312, 313, 314, and 315.
[11] See note 9.
[12] Jacques Lipchitz, *Head of Géricault*, 1933, plaster, H. 18.5, W. 11.5, D. 14 cm, (inv. 92.12.15).
[13] Information on the casting is in Barañano, 2009, #216.
[14] 1971, Israel Museum, in the chapter "The Bronze Sketches of Jacques Lipchitz. Methods of Production."
[15] The *Portrait of Géricault* was not among them.