



GEORGES HILBERT (1900 - 1982)

Horse and Rider, Antique Style

Stone relief

signed on the left side of the base: HILBERT

H: 10.4, W: 11.81, D: 3.94 in

Bibliography

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- Dubois, Patrice, Hilbert, « Le sculpteur du vivant » ("The Sculptor of the Living"), in *Revue des Artistes Français* (published earlier in *Elements*, January-February, 1983), n°15, July, 1983.
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- *Sculpteurs et dessins de sculpteurs, 1^{ère} moitié du XX^{ème} siècle* (*Sculptors' Sculptures and Drawings, 1st Half of the 20th Century*), musée national des Beaux-Arts d'Alger, Octobre 4-December 14, 2003.

Georges Hilbert was born in 1900 in Nemours (Djemaa el Ghazaouet), Algeria. The son of a veterinarian, he entered the fine arts school in Oran in 1918, though he did not stay there long, as he moved to Paris later that same year and took up studies at the school of decorative arts and the school of the fine arts there. However, it was largely in the Jardin des Plantes, in front of the animals, that he really learned his art. There, he made many drawings in precise, clear, and gently curving lines. He also sometimes made studies in soft stone.[\[1\]](#) Then

he created the final piece by carving directly into limestone, marble, or granite. He was taught this technique as a young artist by Joseph Bernard (1866-1921), who had brought it back into popularity around 1900.

The technique of direct carving requires a confrontation with the material and leaves no room for a rough, preliminary phase. Sculpting from life,^[2] Hilbert did not simply slavishly reproduce nature; rather, he interpreted it, guided by his particular sensibilities. "Through specific forms, carefully and extensively observed, he managed to convey the very essence of a stag or a panther."^[3] He was strongly influenced by two other animal sculptors; he learned much from the direct carving of the Spaniard Mateo Hernandez (1885-1949) as well as from the elegant proportions, the limpid volumes, and the serene expressions of the works of François Pompon (1865-1933). His understanding of the works of these two artists allowed him to expand his synthetic and purified style in order to reveal the essence of the animal.

Horse and Rider has a distinct balance and sobriety. The artist knew how to conquer the hardness of the material and imprint within it the supple softness of his models. The figures capture the light, making their muscles seem to move. The hard stone that he used for the piece led him in the direction of strong formal simplicity. The product of precise observation by a very sharp eye, it includes no unnecessary element. The very subject of the rider and his horse presents the dichotomy between the human body and the animal body. This confrontation underscores the raw, wild, and noble force of the animal, which the man has managed to tame. But even more than the domestication of the animal, Hilbert suggests a complicity between man and horse. The horse has become the man's alter-ego, a comrade in battle or at work in the fields. Since the early cave paintings, the horse has been an important subject for artists. The subject was equally popular with a number of Hilbert's contemporaries, such as Berthe Martinie and Joseph Bernard, and Hilbert himself treated it in several other works. He also featured other domestic animals as well as wild ones. The Musée national d'art moderne has his *Head of a Bulldog*,^[4] and the Fonds national d'art contemporain acquired *Panther*,^[5] *Parrot*,^[6] and *Head of an Antelope*^[7] directly from the artist. The Metropolitan Museum in New York City has his *Peccary*.^[8]

While he was working on small-scale sculptures, various private and state commissions allowed Hilbert to work on monumental pieces as well throughout his career, including the *Pergola of Sweet France* in Etampes (1924),^[9] with its horse in bas-relief, eight bas-reliefs for the recently-built large cat house in the Jardin des Plantes (1935),^[10] the baptismal fonts for the cathedral in Luxembourg (1937), the four life-sized lions at the Chateau de la Trousse (1951), and the twelve bas-reliefs for the director of the Bank of Algeria's villa in Algiers (1951). This relief, *Horse and Rider*, seems to have been planned as

an architectural element, though its intended destination is not known, as few archival documents on Hilbert's relief sculptures remain.

Georges Hilbert was at the peak of his art in 1943, when he created *Horse and Rider*. The 1930s had been a particularly propitious time for him. He was particularly active during the Art Deco period and in the Orientalist movement. In 1931, he became part of the Groupe des Douze (Group of Twelve), a consortium of sculptors founded under the aegis of François Pompon, and which included Jane Poupelet. Then in 1937, he was both a member of the jury and a participant in the International Exposition, later becoming a member of the Academie des Beaux-Arts, and he participated in the Compagnie des Arts Français,[\[11\]](#) an association that had been run by the decorator Jacques Adnet since 1928, and which tried to unite art and daily life through the concept of a total art.

In 1928, Hilbert was awarded the Blumenthal Prize,[\[12\]](#) which opened the doors to private collections and museums in the United States and allowed him to make a trip to Egypt in 1930. There, he was able to connect with the great tradition of animal art in the temples at Luxor and Karnak and in the quarries of Aswan. Hilbert's synthetic style is in part inspired by the austerity and purity of Egyptian animal statuary. In 1973, he received the Edouard-Marcel Sandoz Prize for his life's work.

[\[1\]](#) He did not do any modeling.

[\[2\]](#) André Damiens, *Catalogue Souvenir de Corot*, June, 1982

[\[3\]](#) Dubois, Patrice, "Hilbert le scupteur du vivant," *Revue des Artistes Français*, 1983

[\[4\]](#) Georges Hilbert, *Tête de bouledogue*, sandstone, H: 18, W: 14, D: 22.5 cm, 1930-1940, Paris, Musée national d'art modern, Centre Pompidou, N°INV : AM 5005 S.

[\[5\]](#) Georges Hilbert, *Panthère*, stone, H: 38, W: 85, D: 34 cm, placed in the Fonds national d'art contemporain at the town hall of Mulhouse in 1952, N°INV : 7002.

[\[6\]](#) Georges Hilbert, *Ara*, placed in the Fonds national d'art contemporain at the town hall of Barentin (Seine-Maritime) in 1955, location unknown since 1997 (FNAC-10040139).

[7] Georges Hilbert, *Tête d'antilope*, granite, H: 47, W: 19, D: 28 cm, placed in the Fonds national d'art contemporain at the town hall of Barentin (Seine-Maritime) in 1962, location unknown since 1997 (FNAC-10017808).

[8] Georges Hilbert, *Un pécari*, granite, H: 43.2, W: 58.2, D: 22.9 cm, 1927, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, N°INV : 28.214.

[9] <http://www.corpusetampois.com/cae-20-doucefrance1925d3.html>

[10] <http://www.zooudujardindesplantes.fr/fr/zoo/zoo-historique/patrimoine-architectural-unique>

http://alger-roi.fr/Alger/arts/textes/29_andre_sureda_algerianiste115.htm

<http://www.moinat.ch/fr/sculptures/811-sculpture-cubiste-rapace-par-georges-hilbert.html>

[11] <http://opac.lesartsdecoratifs.fr/fiche/compagnie-des-arts-francais-1>

[12] Georges Blumenthal, director of the Metropolitan Museum, and Florence Blumenthal, the founder of the prize, organized a Hilbert exhibition at the Arden Gallery.