**A Brief History of Modern Sculpture**

During the course of the twentieth century, sculpture emerged as a major art form for the first time since the seventeenth century in the Western art world. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were dominated by academic Classicism and traditional monuments. Sculpture had held a dominant position in the history of art from ancient Egypt through the Baroque period (seventeenth century), when the Italian sculptor Bernini made new strides in dynamism and emotionalism. Yet in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, sculpture seemed to become stagnant. Commissions were made and parks and public squares were filled with public monuments in the classical tradition, but the basic style of these traditional artworks did not encourage sculptors to experiment with new forms or subject matter. When Auguste Rodin appeared on the scene in Paris in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, sculpture once again became elevated to a prominent position. Rodin is often credited with recharting the course of sculpture almost single-handedly, and with giving the art form a new impetus. Twentieth century developments in painting influenced the development of sculpture as well. Formal experiments, expressionism, and Surrealist tendencies encouraged new explorations for sculptors. This workshop will focus on works of art from the New Orleans Museum of Art’s (NOMA) collection which demonstrate twentieth century developments in the history of sculpture.

Auguste Rodin reacted against the established academic traditions. Working in Paris in the late nineteenth century, Rodin looked foremost to nature as his inspiration as well as to the great artists of the Renaissance. He particularly admired Donatello and Michelangelo, claiming “My liberation from academicism was via Michelangelo.” Rodin worked from nature and was as revolutionary to the art of sculpture as the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists were to painting. He built his forms out of clay and later cast them in bronze and plaster. The sculptor also instituted such unconventional methods as using non-professional models and posing them in nontraditional poses. His work centered on interpretations of the human form, a seemingly traditional act, yet his attention to surface detail and musculature challenged the traditions of polished Academy.

Rodin also issued a challenge to the stale traditions of sculpture by his notions of “completeness” in a work of art. He believed that incompleteness in a work of art may serve as reminder of the process of creation, celebrating the ability of the artist to make a work come alive. This mode of thinking was inspired by Michelangelo’s infinitocaptives, the incomplete works of the Renaissance master. *The Gates of Hell*, which began in 1880 as a commission for a portal of the Museum of Decorative Arts in Paris, is an example of Rodin’s struggle to achieve a final and complete version of a work. *The Gates of Hell* include many different interpretations of scenes from Dante’s *Inferno.* Twisting, contorted bodies, often grouped together, adorn the large portal. Yet the artist could never decide on a final version of the *Gates*. During his lifetime, Rodin constantly changed the positions of the different groups, and it was not until after his death that they were finally cast in bronze. *The Age of Bronze,* in NOMA’s collection, also has this unfinished quality. Although the musculature of the figure is refined, the rough texture of the casting leaves the viewer with a reminder of the hands that modeled the piece. Rodin’s insistence on revisiting the properties of subject matter, space, movement, light and material of the sculptural form influenced generations of modern artists.

Antoine Bourdelle, a student and assistant of Rodin, continued these explorations in the early twentieth century. He also sought to revitalize the Classical tradition by returning to the Greek model as inspiration. His *Hercules the Archer* with its heavily modeled muscles, is reminiscent of Rodin’s work, and his choice of subject matter reveals his Greek inspiration. Hercules is depicted braced against the rocks in a pose of heroic effort. The legendary hero is pulling the arrow which he will release upon the Stymphalian birds, the third of his twelve labors. Like Greek artists of the Classical period, Bourdelle has chosen to depict the most strenuous moment of action.

Twentieth century artists began to experiment with form, color and subject matter in new and intriguing ways. The Impressionists’ break from the established rules of the French Academy in the 1870s encouraged artists to continue experimentations with expressionism, form, and the imagination. These experiments would lead to the developments of German Expressionism, Cubism, Constructivism, Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism, and kinetic worksamong others. Modern artists in all media fell under the influence of one or more of these developments.

Expressionist tendencies developed in France and in Germany and were inspired by the works of the Post-Impressionists, Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin, who had explored the emotive qualities of color in their works of the 1880s and (for Gauguin) 1890s. In France, Henri Matisse and the artists associated with the Fauves, continued to experiment with bright dissonant colors in a distorted, flat space. Matisse’s masterpiece painting of 1905, *Joie de Vivre*, demonstrates the artist’s interest in expressing mood and feeling through color and line. In the acadian-themed painting, nudes lounge and dance in an idyllic landscape. The curvilinear forms and arbitrary colors lend a mood of freedom to the scene. Expressionists in Germany also experimented with emotions in their artwork. Vasily Kandinsky, the Russian founder ofDer Blaue Reiter [The Blue Rider] group who were established in Munich in 1911, was among the first artists to achieve pure abstraction. For Kandinsky, art was a matter of using rhythmic lines, colors and shapes, rather than narrative. His spiritual take on art and non-representational approach would affect the later twentieth century Abstract Expressionists and Color-Field Painters.

The Post-Impressionist Paul Cézanne had a very powerful affect on developments in Western art. Working during the late nineteenth century, Cézanne probed the use of form in painting, reducing each painted element to its basic structural quality. Cézanne insisted that the natural world can be “reduced to a cone, a sphere, and a cylinder.” Expanding upon these ideas in the years between 1908 - 1914, Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque worked closely to develop Cubism. The collaboration between the two artists resulted in a new analysis of form in painting. Objects became shattered across the picture plane, allowing the viewer to see multiple perspectives of the object at one time. These experiments soon affected sculpture as well. Pablo Picasso was the first to apply the Cubist principles to sculpture with his 1909 bronze, *Head of a Woman*, in which the head is discernible, yet multi-faceted and geometric.

Experiments in Cubism made up a large part of the career of sculptor Jacques Lipchitz. After moving to Paris, he became friends with a group of avant-garde artists which included Pablo Picasso. He began to introduce some geometric stylization into a series of figure sculptures, and by 1916 he was producing a wide variety of Cubist works in stone, wood and bronze. As was typical of Cubist constructions, Lipchitz worked with subject matter common to artistic life. *The Bather* is a variation on a theme often explored by artists. Lipchitz sculpted the body of a bather with one arm raised over her head and one knee bent in a contrapposto stance, but the body of the bather is fragmented in the Cubist manner.

The formal explorations of the Cubists working in Paris also concerned artists working in other parts of Europe. Futurismin Italy was born as a literary concept and societal movement which called for a vigorous artistic style which expressed the power and aesthetic of the machine age. Works such as Umberto Boccioni’s 1913 bronze, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* were influenced by the faceting of the Cubists, yet also demonstrated an interest in motion and progress. Boccioni depicted a geometric form of a man striding purposefully forward, ready to face the challenges that the future might hold. While the works of the Futurists embraced movement in art, they did not go so far as to add a kinetic component. This would be left to later generations. Kinetic artists such as Alexander Calder, George Ricky, Lin Emery and John Scott are indebted to these early twentieth century ideas.

In post-revolutionary Russia, new sculptural ideas were developed by the avant-garde which were influenced by the Cubist aesthetic as well as by the introduction of new materials and the integration of motion into works of art. Constructivism, whose earliest proponents were Naum Gabo and his brother Anton Pevsner, and Suprematism, created by Kasimir Malevich, contributed to the modernist outlook. Malevich, a painter, took Cubism to its logical conclusion when he created works that were completely non-representational and dedicated to pure form. His *Suprematist Compostition: White on White* of 1918 is a painting of a white rectangle on a white background. Like his compatriot, Kandinsky, Malevich achieved pure abstraction. But while Kandinsky’s approach was via expressionism, Malevich took a formal approach. Piet Mondrian, working in the Netherlands around the same time as Malevich, came to similar conclusions as he developed paintings based on primary colors, black and white in a grid. Both Suprematism and Mondrian stretched the formal limits of art-making, concentrating on the lines, color, and form of their work and eschewing subject matter all together. These experiments were very influential to American Minimalists of the 1970s, such as Tony Smith.

Another strand of twentieth century art that helped encourage sculptors to achieve new forms was the imaginative exploration of the human mind as seen in the works of the Dada artists and Surrealists. Dada and Surrealism relied upon the non-rational intricacies of the human mind, turning to dream imagery and chance happenings as artistic fodder. Marcel Duchamp helped create and spread the ideas of the Dada artists, who originally met in Zurich, Switzerland to lament the chaos of World War I. These artists, poets and writers decried the madness of war and sought to eliminate intellectualism in art. Instead they proposed the irrational and the unconscious as a basis for art-making. Duchamp’s contributions to Dada art include his famous *Fountain*, an appropriated urinal which he set on a pedestal and signed “R. Mutt.” Duchamp called his appropriations “ready-mades,” found objects which he adopted, titled and installed as art. Challenging the public conception of art, Duchamp set the tone for many experiments of conceptual artists of the late twentieth century.

The Surrealist artists, centered in Paris in the 1930s and 40s, continued in the vein initiated by the Dada artists as they sought to explore irrationalism in their artwork. Two distinct styles emerged within Surrealism, although both attempted to gain access to unconscious phenomena. Artists such as Joan Miró, Jean Arp and Max Ernst practiced a type of Surrealism described as biomorphic. Arp, a Swiss artist who was one of the founders of Dada, created works which relied heavily upon chance and spontaneity. As a Dada artist, Arp created works of art with cut-out pieces of paper that he let fall to the ground randomly to arrange themselves. His later works were of playful, organic forms which he created without relying on conscious control. *Bowl of Fruit*, from 1960, is a late example of Arp’s biomorphic style. Both bowl and fruit are carved as large, bulbous forms of marble. Because Arp’s forms are abstract, the viewer might not realize that he is looking at a bowl of fruit without knowing the title. Titles gain new importance in the works of the Surrealists.

The second type of Surrealism is represented by the artists Salvador Dalí and René Magritte. These Surrealists attempted to represent the irrational by depicted dream imagery and combining incongruent forms in a realistic style. In Dalí’s *The Persistence of Memory* the artist painted a barren landscape and filled it with melting watches. Heavily influenced by the writings of Sigmund Freud, Dalí painted his dreams in fine detail. The melting watches, which represent the passing of time and fading of memory, are often remembered as a symbol of Surrealism. The works of René Magritte are also grounded in realism. Magritte juxtaposed objects in surprising, often humorous ways. In Magritte’s painting *The Art of Conversation*, from NOMA’s collection, the artist created an illusionistic, paradoxical work. The word “Rêve,” French for dream, is shown monumentally in stone towering over a landscape. Magritte’s juxtaposition involves the fleeting immateriality of the idea of a dream and the permanent quality of the stone. This work is also indicative of the Surrealists’ interest in dreams. Late in his life, Magritte had eight of his paintings commissioned in bronze. *The Labors of Alexander* is based on a painting completed in 1950. The bronze depicts the stump of a felled tree and the ax which apparently cut it down. However, the viewer is surprised to notice that the ax handle is securely lodged under one of the roots of the tree.

Early twentieth century developments in form, expressionism and Surrealism influenced the personal artistic styles of artists throughout the century. Alberto Giacometti, a Swiss sculptor, fell under the influence of Surrealism early in his career and went on to develop his own style which was influenced by expressionism and Surrealism. His elongated, textured figures, such as *Standing Woman*, evoke feelings of loneliness and isolation. The works of Louise Bourgeois combine elements of Surrealism and formal concerns. Her *Female Portrait* is an exploration of a theme which appeared in Bourgeois’ work from the 1960s through the 80s. A refined face emerges from a coiled mass which sits upon a rough-hewn base. The combination of rough base and smooth coils represents the dualities of human existence, a theme popular among Surrealists. Bourgeois addresses universal themes of human existence, yet she is particularly concerned with the reality of female identity, and consistently expresses this theme in her work.

The American sculptor David Smith studied in New York at the Arts Students League in the 1930s and became a Works Progress Administrationartist under President Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal. Smith is often associated with the AmericanAbstract Expressionists, including artists such as Willem de Kooning and Jackson Pollock. These artists combined elements of expressionism, fauvism and Surrealism to arrive at personal styles which were impulsive, abstract and modern. Pollock is remembered for his drip paintings, created as the artist dripped latex house paint from brushes and sticks as he danced around a canvas laid out on his floor. David Smith made explorations into new materials and processes as he developed his abstract style. Smith felt that art should express its age, and that artists should develop new materials indicative of their time in history. Working in steel, Smith explored new forms. *The Swan* is sculpted and welded in discarded steel. Smith believed in the importance of drawing for any artist and referred to this linear piece as a drawing in steel. The negative space is just as important as the rods of steel, indicating Smith’s careful construction of space.

Contemporary American artists John Scott and Deborah Butterfield continue to express new ideas in sculpture. Scott’s kinetic works rely upon the explorations of space, initiated by the Futurists. Scott’s works are also inspired by African traditions and the City of New Orleans. *Spiritgates*, was commissioned by NOMA to grace the exterior courtyard. They are utilitarian, kinetic, and symbolic. There are three possible positions of the gates: open, closed, or partially open. Each of these phases represents a different historical reference. When they are fully open they resemble two identical twins and are inspired by African Ibeji twin figures. At the partially open position the gates reference the pyramids of Egypt and indicate the heritage of architecture. When the gates are closed, they resemble the closed shutters seen on so many New Orleans houses. Surrealist tendencies can be seen in the work of Deborah Butterfield, whose *Horse* looks as if it is made of driftwood but is actually cast in bronze. Butterfield works consistently on the theme of the horse, adopting different materials for her explorations of the horse form.

These examples show how sculpture has risen to a position of prominence in the art world during the 20th century. Contemporary sculptors continue to test new media and create new forms. Advances in modern art and the rise of the modern concept of “art for art’s sake” contributed to new techniques and explorations in form, space, and concepts. Rodin’s early contributions instigated a mood of reform that continues to flourish in today’s artistic climate.

**Auguste Rodin (French, 1840-1917), *The Age of Bronze*, 1876, bronze**

Auguste Rodin is most often considered to be the father of modern sculpture. Until he emerged on the scene in Paris in the 1870s, nineteenth century sculpture had been primarily dedicated to monumental and public art commissions. Rodin would lend a new impetus to the art of sculpture. Rodin was born in 1840 in the Mouffetard quarter of Paris. He showed artistic skill by the age of fourteen and attended the Imperial School of Drawing and Mathematics, yet he was denied entrance to the Ecole des Beaux-Art, the major artistic training institution of Paris. Rodin then entered the workshop of the famed artist Albert Carrier de Belleuse where he mastered the decorative sculptural style for which Carrier-Belleuse was renowned. In the wake of defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, Rodin immigrated to Brussels to escape the Commune. It was during this time in Brussels, and after an extensive trip to Italy, that Rodin began to work on a sculpture that he hoped would gain acceptance into the Paris Salon. *The Age of Bronze* not only secured Rodin entry into the Salon, but assured his immortality as an artist, marking the transition from the historic tradition of statuary to the modern exploration of sculpture as an expressive medium.

The artist originally conceived of the idea of sculpting a single, nude male figure that would serve as an allegory for the French in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War. The subject was to be caught in a moment of physical and mental exhaustion, contemplating the enormity of defeat. Rodin reasoned that the salon jury would be attracted to such a universal topic and that it would allow the artist to express what he had gleaned from his study of nature, Michelangelo, and Greek sculpture. A young Belgian soldier posed for him for eighteen months, leaning on a spear in his left hand with his right arm lifted to his forehead in exasperation. Rodin worked on the sculpture in a peculiar fashion. Rather than taking direct measurements of his human model and translating them into clay, the artist set his mound of clay right next to the model and worked around the clay, sculpting an outline in detail from every angle. When the work was finished he submitted it in an exhibition in Brussels under the title *The Vanquished.* He retitled the piece *The Age of Bronze* and it was accepted for display in the 1877 Salon. However, the work caused quite a scandal when Rodin’s sculpted image was accused of being a life cast of the model, and not an original work of art. The controversy was only quelled after numerous friends and artists vouched for Rodin’s carving skills.

*The Age of Bronze* was one of Rodin’s most significant early works. The New Orleans sculpture is one of twenty-seven known full-sized bronzes, cast by Alexis Rudier, Founder.

**Jacques Lipchitz (Russian, 1891-1973), *The Bather*, 1916-17, bronze with gold patina,**

Jacques Lipchitz has been considered to be the modern successor to Rodin because of his handling of symbolic themes in an expressive manner and in his preference for modeling over carving. Lipchitz was born in Lithuania in 1891 and studied architecture at Vilno. In 1909 he moved to Paris where he studied sculpture at the Academie des Beaux-Art and Academies Julian and Colarossi. While in Paris he became friends with Diego Rivera, Pablo Picasso, and Juan Gris. In 1914, encouraged by his acquaintances as well as his natural adoration for African tribal sculpture, Lipchitz fell under the influence of cubism and began to abandon his prior stylized naturalistic forms. Following Picasso’s lead and inspired by his compatriot, Archipenko, Lipchitz successfully adapted the theories of the Cubism to sculpture. In works from 1914 - 1927, Lipchitz successfully sculpted interwoven planes in three-dimensional work. By 1930, the artist began softening the contours of his forms and returned to realism in figurative sculpture. With the Nazi invasion of France in 1941, Lipchitz fled to New York, where he lived and worked until his death in 1973.

*Bather* shows Lipchitz’ mastery of the cubist style. Lipchitz considered cubist sculpture to be a construction of an idea. He would first imagine a form or a movement and then make a figure from these ideas. His integrated network of flat planes and bulging forms, curves, and angles are based in abstraction, yet the form is recognizable. Beginning in 1916 Lipchitz began to focus on archetypes, like the bather and the musician, which allowed the sculptor to experiment with cubist theories while retaining the universal associations of the figurative tradition. Lipchitz’ cubist rearrangement of the *Bather’s* body invites the viewer to walk all the way around the sculpture and to view the piece from multiple perspectives. The viewer may discern certain features, such as the belly-button, and can imagine the *Bather’s* pose--one arm lifted over the head, legs slightly crossed. NOMA’s bather is cast in bronze and lightly painted over in bronze paint to avoid changing patina.

**Jean (Hans) Arp (Swiss, 1887-1966), *Bowl of Fruit*, 1960**

Jean (Hans) Arp once said, “Art is a fruit that grows in man, like fruit on a plant, or a child in its mother’s womb.” This quote seems fitting when discussing *Bowl of Fruit* which was made late in Arp’s life. For a man who lived and breathed art, this sculpture is an excellent example of Arp’s ideas to strip an object of all of its outer layers to find the pure essence of its being. The bowl and fruit are rounded masses with the “fruit” seeming to gently balance on the “bowl.”

Arp was born in Strasbourg, France (which was under German control in 1887) and was a pioneer in abstract, modern art. During World War I, Arp sought refuge in Zurich, Switzerland where he and other artists started the Dada art movement. With his colleagues, Arp created art that was innovative and completely different than that of his predecessors. He avoided oil painting and instead constructed art with collages, sculptures, prints and found objects. Arp avidly rejected academic traditions, avoiding naturalism, perspective and all forms of literal representations. The art was created out of Arp’s interest in chance happenings, letting art develop out of the accident. His interest in the laws of chance converted smoothly to his interest in Surrealism when he would abandon himself to his unconscious and let the art happen without his apparent control. Arp was interested in automatic drawing and developing a symbolic language of nature. Late in life he dedicated his art to sculpture, creating rounded, smoothed, feminine forms.

**Alberto Giacometti (Swiss 1901-66), *Standing Woman,* painted steel, 1953-55**

Alberto Giacometti was born in Switzerland near the Italian border. He grew up surrounded by artists. He studied art in Switzerland and at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. In 1922 he began his five year studies under Antoine Bourdelle. Giacometti then associated himself with the Surrealists including Joan Miró and André Masson. His sculptures from this period evoke an underlying sense of violence and anxiety. In the midst of World War II, Giacometti turned away from Surrealism to pursue figurative sculptures for which he is most well-known. He turned away from sculpture involving the subconscious and imagination and began working out his feelings of post war alienation and loneliness.

Giacometti’s figures are elongated bodies usually in a form of action. The figures are shown walking, gazing or pointing toward something that the viewer cannot see. The figures look like “drip castles” made out of sand or roughly molded forms. The sculptures were cast from clay. The figures were startling not only because they looked emaciated but also because sometimes they were five to six feet tall. They were unnerving because they looked as if they would break from being too thin. Giacometti intended for the figures to look like survivors of a great atrocity, although an unspecified one. By 1953, the sculptor’s style changed in a subtle way. NOMA’s sculpture is an example from this period. The figures were no longer moving, but motionless. The figures were smaller and rounder, and less emaciated. The pitted texture of the figures surface became extreme and the artist made a sharply scratched surface. However, Giacometti’s figures remained isolated in their surroundings. The deep emotional scars that the figure seems to reveal remain with little explanation.

**David Smith (American, 1906-65), *The Swan*, 1938, welded and painted steel,**

David Smith was born in Decatur, Indiana, an agricultural town that his ancestors founded. Smith said he came from a family of blacksmiths, befitting of his surname as well as his choice of materials for his art. Although he was virtually untrained as a sculptor, he is considered one of the most innovative and ground-breaking American artists of his time. Smith studied in New York City in the Arts Students League from 1927-1937 under Ash Can School artist, John Sloan. And like most artists in the 1930s, he worked as a WPA artist under Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal program. It was under the tutelage of John Sloan and amid the camaraderie of other WPA artists that Smith was introduced to modernism and European avant garde styles. Smith moved away from city life in 1940 to Bolton Landing in upstate New York. It was here that he established a studio called Terminal Iron Works, which consequently was the name of the factory where he worked in New York City. His land became his “gallery” where he displayed his work in the landscape.

Smith’s art was strictly modern, using industrial materials and with little reference or inspiration from past art styles. Smith felt that abstraction was the language of his time and an artist should use modern materials like steel to express modern convictions. Art should break from the past and form a new language, develop new symbols and use new metaphors to express art. Smith said that drawing is the life force of an artist. And although he turned to sculpture for expression, he always considered himself a painter, a painter in sculpture. In *The Swan,* Smith uses discarded steel to construct a drawing in space. The lines that form the swan are as important as the negative space that surrounds the object.

**Louise Bourgeois (French, b. 1911), *Female Portrait*, 1962-82, marble.**

Louise Bourgeois was born in Paris in 1911. Her parents were tapestry makers and introduced Bourgeois to art at a young age. Bourgeois was incredibly affected by her upbringing in an apparently dysfunctional family. She often cited the family’s English tutor who was also her father’s mistress as a source of her deep-seated emotions. In Paris during the 1930s, Bourgeois studied mathematics, art and philosophy in various well-known schools. It was also in Paris at that time that she surrounded herself with the vibrant avant-garde artists and philosophers. In 1938 at the dawn of World War II, Bourgeois moved to New York City preceding the wave of European artists who would soon take refuge in the city a few years later. Although Bourgeois was exposed to Surrealist art in Paris, it wasn’t until she associated herself with the European artists in New York that she embraced the art style. Bourgeois’ art cannot be characterized into any particular style, but her artwork tends to have Surrealistic overtones. It is mostly autobiographical, expressing her inner psyche, anxieties and pleasures. Bourgeois always questioned what sculpture should be as well as the role of the female artist in a male dominated arena.

*Female Portrait* is part of a series that began in the 1960s. The series varied the idea of a head extruding from a writhing or coiled mass of tentacles. The female head is emerging out of the worm-like forms like a mind escaping the torments of the inner psyche. The smoothed texture of the head and tentacles is contrasted with the rough base. This piece is similar to most of Bourgeois’ art in that the art suggests a wide range of paradoxes: smooth/rough, debased/elevated, confined/freed, and unorganized/orderly.