

LIPCHITZ

and the School of Paris

November 10, 2022 – January 21, 2023

Private View: 10 November, 6:00 – 8:00pm

Marlborough is pleased to present Jacques Lipchitz and The School of Paris, an exhibition of early works by the Lithuanian-born sculptor and his contemporaries, including Alexander Archipenko, Brassaï, Georges Braque, Fernand Léger, Henri Matisse, and Pablo Picasso. With a focus on Lipchitz's Cubist phase, the exhibition explores the influence of the group of artists around him before he moved to New York in 1941.

Jacques Lipchitz (born Chaim Lipchitz in Druskininkai, Lithuania) was eighteen when he arrived in Paris in October 1909. Unlike other foreign artists who had settled in the French capital such as Picasso, Archipenko, Constantin Brâncusi and Amedeo Modigliani, Lipchitz had no previous academic training, and studied only briefly at the esteemed *École des Beaux-Arts* and at the *Académie Julian*. In 1912, he moved into a studio next to Brâncusi, and in 1913 was introduced to Picasso through Diego Rivera. Soon afterwards he embarked on what he referred to as his 'proto-Cubist' phase, the translation of pictorial experiments in Cubist painting into three-dimensional sculpture, representing figures as if seen from multiple angles and perspectives.

It is generally assumed that Jacques Lipchitz's first radically cubist work was stimulated by the revolutionary trends in current sculpture and especially those of Alexander Archipenko. In *Femme Assise*, 1912, Archipenko creates a composite of frontal and profile views. While we understand this to be a basic tenant of early Cubism, Archipenko was the first sculptor to ratify these principles on a three-dimensional scale. By presenting simultaneous views in a fragmented way, Archipenko was pioneering in his sculptural interpretation of Cubism. In the sculpture which followed, Lipchitz began to show his grasp of the Cubists' analysis. His figures were represented as if seen from multiple angles and perspectives, often with deep and shallow facets that were informed by the play of light. This effect created an agitated movement which animated an otherwise static mass. Lipchitz absorbed the visual grammar and syntax from this particular milieu in which he lived and worked, just as he gradually became a Frenchman, assimilating the speech, customs, habits of thought and expression of his adopted country.



Lipchitz, *Harlequin with Mandolin in Oval*, 1923

Lipchitz's early works in stone and bronze realized the potential of Cubism as a sculptural form. In 1918, he began creating bas-reliefs that depicted still lifes of objects such as wine bottles, fruit baskets, and, most commonly, musical instruments. Often placed in a deeply cut oval, curvilinear shapes and planes in high relief emphasize the contrasts of light and shadow and thus the three-dimensional sculptural effect. Like many in his circle, both during and after the Great War, Lipchitz celebrated the liberating effects of imaginative play by embracing the world of Italian street theatre, the *Commedia dell'arte*, drawing from its bevy of traditional masked characters. Just as Picasso's *Harlequin* painting of 1915 had combined highly stylized front and side views of the character's head to suggest constant shifts in role and costume, using bold color to confuse the layering effect of the forms, so in Lipchitz's *Harlequin with Accordion* of 1926 the face is dissected to evince a partially veiled personality. Lipchitz's figure takes on the animated concertina patterning of the instrument he plays, with sharply cut, tumbling sections that create a dramatic play of light and shadow. Lipchitz could also suggest shifting meanings and identities with great subtlety in the bas-relief format. Through a series of musically-themed reliefs, such as the *Harlequin with Mandolin in Oval*, 1923, Lipchitz explored increasingly free-form rhyme and dissonance within a geometrically balanced and controlled space.

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Paysage Animé, 1937, a thematically similar still life by Léger, with whom Lipchitz became acquainted at La Ruche, an artist residence in Montparnasse, demonstrates this ongoing interest in the interweaving of geometric planes. The painting is inspired by the imagined landscapes of Henri Rousseau, in which man and beast are joined in familial complicity, while two still lifes by Braque are less a function of psycho-perceptual distortion than a perceptual merging of form and atmosphere. Braque rejected the inherited concept that art should copy nature, or that artists should adopt the traditional techniques of perspective, modeling, and foreshortening. He wanted instead to emphasize the two-dimensionality of the canvas. So he reduced and fractured objects into geometric forms, and then realigned these within a shallow, relief-like space. He also used multiple or contrasting vantage points. These elements can be seen in his *Pomme, Verre et Serviette*, 1927, a still life in which the artist incorporates a tablescape of objects that seemingly blur together inside a shallow plane.

The next cycle of sculptures Lipchitz produced are collectively known as *transparents*. In these curvilinear bronzes, he incorporates open space into the design, depicting mass by integrating solid with void. Many of these early *transparents* were cast from small fragile cardboard and wax constructions. While Europe was threatened by the political and economic upheavals of the thirties, Lipchitz's work grew more and more personal. The rise of Hitler, the political tensions within France, and the looming inevitability of war all colored Lipchitz's subsequent work. At this time he began work on a series around the theme of family, including *The Couple*, 1929, an intimate expression of physical love, and *Mother and Child, Maquette No. 1*, 1929, a reference to his own mother, towards whom he had always felt a deep attachment.

Around this same time, Lipchitz began to make work concerned with Biblical themes, like his *Return of the Child* of 1941, the year he emigrated to the United States. Lipchitz was able to make the journey with assistance from The Museum of Modern Art in New York, while his dealer Jeanne Bucher took care of his home in Paris and hid his bronze sculptures from the threat of Nazi looters.

Marlborough's long engagement with the work of Jacques Lipchitz was first realized within the merger between the former Otto Gerson Gallery and Marlborough Fine Art in 1963. Otto Gerson had become the successor to the Curt Valentin Gallery who had long been Lipchitz's representative in the US. That year, the new Marlborough-Gerson Gallery hosted a memorial exhibition entitled *Artist and Maecenas: A Tribute to Curt Valentin*, marking Marlborough's entry into the New York market. Since that time, the gallery has provided extensive support for the continuing legacy of this twentieth-century master.

Jacques Lipchitz has been included in group and solo exhibitions at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York; Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Germany; Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris, France; and Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Valencia, Spain, among many others. In 2018-19 the Moscow Museum of Modern Art in Russia presented a major retrospective. Lipchitz's work is featured in innumerable public collections worldwide, including Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Israel Museum, Jerusalem; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Tate Gallery, London; Sprengel Museum, Hannover; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.



Lipchitz, *Baigneuse (Bather)*, 1917

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Gallery Hours
Mon - Fri 10:00 - 5:30pm
Saturday 10:00 - 4:00pm
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