

Marino Marini

Pistoia and Venice

by SHARON HECKER

THE EXHIBITION *Marino Marini. Passioni visive* at the **Palazzo Fabroni, Pistoia** (to 7th January), seeks to retrieve Marini from the myth of the artist 'who stands outside history and art history'.¹ As stated in the lavishly illustrated catalogue, Marini remains trapped in a few stylish clichés and is known mainly for the archaic equestrian sculptures that made him famous. The show's curators, Barbara Cinelli and Flavio Fergonzi, wish to revisit this narrow, formulaic understanding by disputing labels such as the 'artist-potter', the 'reborn Etruscan' and the 'Tuscan primitive' who is 'rediscovered as modern against his will'.² These appellations, which reduced Marini to a symbol of his Italian origins, were consolidated after the Second World War during the artist's years of international success. They are indeed hard to shake, for Marini himself adopted this appealing persona to promote his reputation worldwide.

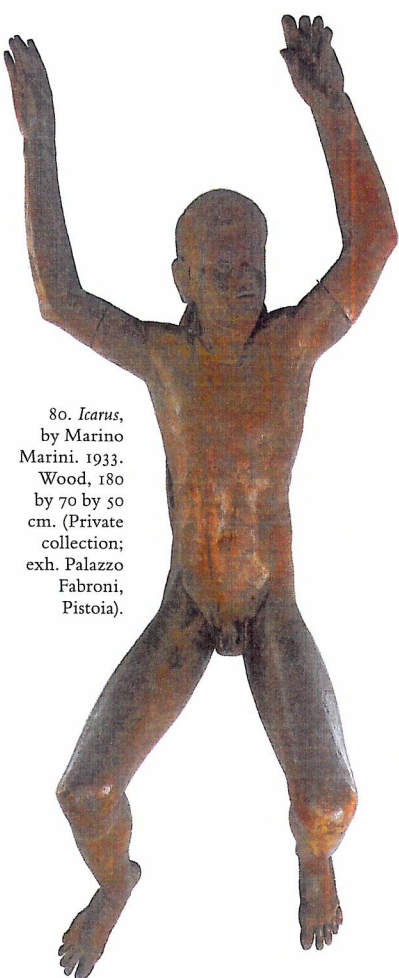
For newcomers to Marini's work and

scholars alike, the current exhibition in his home town, a retrospective of the artist's sculptural work from the 1920s to the 1960s, widens the lens on a major figure of twentieth-century art. It promises to contribute significantly to a renewed understanding of Marini while also partaking in broader and more recent debates about the national and international origins of modern sculpture.

The curators exclude Marini's paintings and gestural drawings in order to demonstrate formal and iconographic links between Marini's three-dimensional work and those of both modern sculptors – from fellow Italians Arturo Martini and Giacomo Manzù to such European masters as Auguste Rodin, Aristide Maillol, and Henry Moore – and older artists including Donatello and an anonymous Sienese master of the early Trecento. Examples of works by these sculptors are carefully positioned alongside Marini's: the curators suggest that he may have been inspired by or have known these works, based on their extensive research of books in his library, photographic archive and available publications of the time. By exhibiting Marini's sculptures alongside works from other periods, this show reiterates, reinforces, and gives visual emphasis to longstanding discussions in the Marini literature about possible sources and contexts for his inspiration. Such discussions have been part of the literature and exhibitions devoted to Marini for years, although like many artists, Marini rarely mentioned specific works as sources.³

The exhibition opens on the ground floor in a theatre-like area, where a video on Marini's life is projected. As it is four hours long, it is probably too demanding for a visitor to sit through, but even viewing an excerpt provides a lively introduction to Marini's practice, process and reputation. Upstairs, the exhibition has been divided into ten sections over eleven galleries, and includes works such as Marini's well-known *Cavaliere* (horsemen and riders), female nudes or *Pomona*, portraits and *Giocolieri* (circus figures). There are also lesser-known sculptures, such as the terracotta *Popolo* (1929; cat. no.1.1), first shown at the second Novecento Italiano exhibition (1929) organised by the art critic Margherita Sarfatti, Benito Mussolini's lover. This portrayal of a couple of robust Tuscan peasants is juxtaposed in the current display with an Etruscan funerary cover.

The inclusion of inter-war work such as *Popolo* invites discussions about art-making in Italy during various stages of Fascism and the rewriting of that history in the post-war years. For example, the catalogue mentions Marini's claim that his first large *Cavaliere* from the late 1930s were inspired by the *Bamberg Rider*, which he saw on his visit to Germany in (1934). The Nazi party admired the rider's fierce expression and adopted this sculpture as an icon of German identity.



80. *Icarus*, by Marino Marini. 1933. Wood, 180 by 70 by 50 cm. (Private collection; exh. Palazzo Fabroni, Pistoia).



81. *Crucified Christ*, twelfth or thirteenth century. Wood, 205 by 35 by 28 cm. (Fondazione Marino Marini; exh. Palazzo Fabroni, Pistoia).

After the Second World War, this source would be conveniently forgotten, replaced by references to, *inter alia*, the statue of Marcus



82. *Warrior*, by Marino Marini. 1958–59. Bronze, 71 by 124 by 74 cm. (Courtesy Fondazione Arnaldo Pomodoro, Milan; exh. Palazzo Fabroni, Pistoia).

Aurelius in Rome's Piazza del Campidoglio, medieval sculpture by Giovanni Pisano and Tino da Camaino, Donatello's *Gattamelata*, Paolo Uccello's paintings and rearing horses seen in Milan after the war.

Another captivating early work by Marini in this exhibition is the wood-carved *Icarus* (no.3.I; Fig.80), installed near two of his bronze jugglers from the 1930s and 1940s (nos.3.II and 3.III). *Icarus* is exhibited opposite a wooden crucified Christ made between the late twelfth century and the early thirteenth (no.3.IV; Fig.81). Although this work could not have been a direct inspiration for *Icarus* – a critic described seeing the crucifix in Marini's studio in 1960, and it was probably purchased by the artist in the late 1950s – the curators believe that Marini could have seen similar crucifixes in churches while working on the sculpture several decades earlier. Hung on the wall like a painting, as it was when first exhibited at the Rome Quadriennale of 1935, *Icarus* is a tour de force of modern sculpture. Suspended in mid-flight after *Icarus's* waxen wings have melted, it conveys a sense of utter precariousness, a gradual vertical fall that could resemble the plight of the crucified Christ. *Icarus*, however, is not nailed to a cross – he struggles in a void without support. This intriguing work presents a breathtaking image of sculptural weight and weightlessness, lending a simultaneous sense of magnificence and despair.

Marini's national and international outlook at every stage of his career is further reinforced in other galleries. A small *Giocoliere* (1940; no.6.IV) is compared to a cast of Rodin's *Le jongleur* (c.1892–95; no.6.II); Marini's (ungainly) female nudes are juxtaposed with those by Maillol and Ernesto de Fiori; and Moore's *Three standing figures*

(1953; no.8.X) is presented alongside Marini's Milanese *Giocolieri* of the 1950s (nos.8.II–VII). These comparisons lead one to ponder further links between Marini and artists such as Alexander Calder and especially Alberto Giacometti who are not included in the show and who, while probing the limits of abstraction, also remained attached to the figurative.

The exhibition closes with expressionistic works including several marvellously abstract *Cavaliere* from the mid-to-late 1950s (nos.8.XI and XIV; Fig.82), whose riders sometimes appear to have been toppled by the lively horse. These works delight for their diverse surface textures: pocked, scored, chiselled, gouged, painted and patinated. If in the constricted space of the gallery these massive works' force and lyricism appear somewhat compromised, this is a small price to pay in comparison to the task of bringing about a different kind of appreciation of Marini's *œuvre* and his contribution to art history. Ultimately, the exhibition provides a springboard for reincorporating Marini into the Italian tradition as well as a starting point for new discussions about his place in an international canon of art history.

¹ The exhibition travels to the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, 27th January to 1st May 2018. Catalogue: *Marino Marini. Passioni visive*. By Barbara Cinelli and Flavio Fergonzi. 256 pp. incl. 82 col. ill. (Silvana Editore, Cinisello Balsamo, 2017), €30. ISBN 978-88-366-3773-7.

² *Ibid.*, n.p.

³ See, for example, L. Vitali: *Arte Moderna Italiana*, N.29: *Marino Marini*, Milan 1937, transl. B. Wall: 'Contemporary sculptors: VII – Marino Marini', *Horizon* 18, no.105 (September 1948), pp.203–07. For an excellent recent critical study, see A.K. Gamble: 'National and international Modernism in Italian sculpture from 1935–1959', unpublished Ph.D. diss. (University of Michigan, 2015).

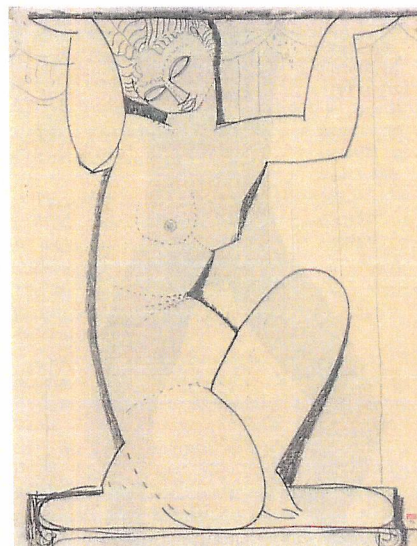
Modigliani

New York

by KENNETH WAYNE

THE EXHIBITION *Modigliani Unmasked* is a major coup for the Jewish Museum, New York (to 4th February).¹ Around 130 drawings have been selected from the renowned collection of Paul Alexandre (1881–1968), who between 1907 and 1914 bought approximately 450 sheets from Modigliani, most of which are still owned by Alexandre's family. The collection was first shown to the public in 1993–96 in an exhibition that toured widely but did not reach the United States.² The present exhibition is thus a triumphant event, thanks to the curators, Mason Klein from the Jewish Museum and Richard Nathanson, a London-based dealer and friend of the Alexandre family.

The exhibition is beautifully presented in richly-coloured rooms of midnight blue, maroon and steel grey; the drawings and watercolours – often on cream paper – look transcendent. The display is arranged thematically with groupings devoted to a variety of subjects. It begins with early cartoonish watercolours and a few drawings reflecting Modigliani's occult and spiritualist interests before moving on to theatrical scenes and portraits of Maud Abrantes, an American Jew and close friend of the artist, the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova, who was possibly his lover, and Paul Alexandre (cat. p.142; Fig.84). Other groups encompass sculptural heads and nudes. The largest group depicts caryatids, which in Modigliani's hands become emotional beings. He brilliantly uses the top of the paper as a compositional device, against which the figures often push (p.83; Fig.83),



83. *Caryatid kneeling on a plinth*, by Amedeo Modigliani. 1911–12. Black crayon on paper, 33.7 by 26.5 cm. (Paul Alexandre Family, courtesy Richard Nathanson, London; exh. Jewish Museum, New York).