

Tyne and Wear County Council Museums Service

The New Sculpture: Romantic Bronzes, c.1875-1920

Information Sheet



The sculpture of mid-Victorian England consisted almost exclusively of sentimental marble groups and bland, characterless classical portraiture. It was the last, dull flowering of the neo-classical movement which had become merely traditional. In contrast, the development

of French sculpture had been dynamic, closely involved with the turbulence of politics and used as a form of propaganda since the Revolution of 1789.

The influence of French sculpture arrived late in England, around 1875, but captivated the imagination of several young sculptors, who, although they never worked together as a coherent group, shared an ideal. The revolutionary title applied to their work, 'New Sculpture', was coined by Edmund Gosse in a series of articles in the Art Journal of 1894. The influence of the New Sculpture extended to the teaching, exhibiting and patronage of English sculpture engendering a public enthusiasm equal to that for contemporary painting. The classical or heroic subject matter of the previous generation was replaced by naturalism, symbolism and imaginative themes and the scale of the actual objects was reduced from the monumental to a more domestic and easily handleable size.

The painter, Frederic, later Lord, Leighton exhibited the piece usually considered to be the first example of the New Sculpture, *Athlete wrestling with a Python*, at the Royal Academy in 1877. It was originally made as a clay model to aid the composition of a painting and was cast in bronze only at the insistence of the French sculptor Alphonse Legros, Slade Professor of Drawing from 1876 to 1892. It was therefore not conceived as a commercial reduction merely to reproduce a large piece and was further innovative in that it was based on study from the life.

In the following year, 1878, a Professorship was created at the National Art Training School, South Kensington (now the Royal College of Art) for the exiled French naturalistic sculptor Jules Dalou whose teaching principles were a lasting influence throughout the century. From 1877, sculptors found a shop window for their work when the Grosvenor Gallery was opened as an alternative exhibiting space to the Royal Academy. Artists of the aesthetic movement like Burne-Jones exhibited at this avant-garde gallery and exhibitions of French sculpture and the New Sculpture were held there. After the failure of the Grosvenor Gallery the New Gallery carried on its policy **and in** 1881 the Royal Academy's summer exhibition gave the New Sculpture greater prominence.

The best known public work by a sculptor of the movement is the Eros figure on the Shaftesbury Memorial, Piccadilly Circus, by Sir Alfred Gilbert (1854-1934).

From the 1880s there was a close liaison between sculptors and the craftsmen of the Arts and Crafts movement which followed Ruskin and William Morris's principles of design and aesthetics. Modelling classes previously devoted to crafts were made open to sculptors at the Lambeth School and the Art Workers Guild. Sculptors and metal workers studying and working together increased the technical quality of sculpture in bronze and the variety of methods and materials used. Bronze appears to have been the preferred material partly due to its contrast to the bland coldness of marble but more positively due to its excellent physical properties: strength, permanence and the development of fine patina.

The nineteenth century revival brought bronze sculpture back to a prominence it had not occupied since the Renaissance.

The New Sculpture was short lived due to its late start in comparison with its European counterparts and it did not outlive the First World War with any confidence. The war interrupted continuity in the arts and saw the beginning of the modern movement. Sculptural themes which had been romantic, sensual and allegorical degenerated into weak symbolism or the ornamental kitsch of Art Deco and were largely replaced by the new strength of abstraction.

ALFRED DRURY, A.R.A. (1856-1944)

Studied under Jules Dalou at South Kensington and later followed him to Paris, at the end of Dalou's political exile, to work as his assistant from 1881-1885.

D3464 The Kiss

Bronze

12V4 x 6 x 6¹/₂ (31.5 x 15 x 16.5)

on marble base 1¹/_e x 5³A x 6 (3 x 14.5 x 15.5) signed and dated in the bronze, lower left: A. DRURY/1919

Given by George Renwick, M.P., 1919

D3463 Figure of a Girl

Bronze

7V* x 5V* x 4 (18 x 13.5 x 10) on marble base 2 x 4% x 3¹/_z (5 x 12 x 9)

signed and dated in the bronze, lower rear: A.DRURY.1916

D3465 Ceres

Bronze

17 x 6 x 5V* x 15V4 (43 x 16 x 13.5 x 38.5) signed in the bronze, lower right: A.DRURY.

Purchased, 1935

D3466 The Age of Innocence

Bronze

14 x 10³/₄ x 4Vi x 10¹/_z (35.5 x 27 x 11.5 x 26.5) on marble base 1V* x 8V2 x 6 (3.5 x 21.5 x 15) signed and dated in the bronze, reverse of

hflop'

A.DRURY 1911 Purchased, 1977

EDWARD ONSLOW FORD (1852-1901)

Started his career as a portrait painter and in spite of having no formal training as a sculptor abandoned painting for a successful sculpture career.

D3467 Bust of Matthew Ridley Corbet, R.A.

Bronze

14 x 8% x 9¹/₂ (35.5 x 21 x 24) on marble base 7x5x5 (17.5 x 13 x 13) Signed and dated in the bronze, left of bracket: E.Onslow Ford/1895 Given by Miss Corbet, 1921

SIR GEORGE FRAMPTON (1860-1928)

Leader of the craft sculptors, he won a Royal Academy scholarship to Paris in 1887 where he absorbed French symbolism. He maintained strong links with the craft movement becoming joint principal with the architect W.R. Lethaby of the L.C.C. Central School of Arts and Crafts in 1894 and often contributed to Arts and Crafts exhibitions. His best known work is the Peter Pan Statue by the Serpentine in Kensington Gardens.

D3468 Madonna

Bronze

10% x 3V6 x 3¹/₄ x 5 (27.5 x 9 x 8.5 x 13) Signed and inscribed in the bronze, front of base: G F (in monogram) /MADONNA Given by the Hon. Lady Parsons, D.B.E., 1923

FREDERICK WILLIAM POMEROY (1856-1924)

One of the earliest sculptors to join the Arts and Crafts movement. His *Perseus* of 1898 was more traditional and owed a great deal to Alfred Gilbert.

D3472 Perseus

Bronze

19% x 1/4 x 9 x 18V2 (50.5 x 19 x 23 x 47) on base 7x5¹/₄x5(18x15x 12.5)

Signed and dated in the bronze : F W POMEROY/Sc 1898 Purchased, 1922

ALBERT TOFT (1862-1949)

He served his apprenticeship at Wedgwood's and after some splendid successes he often generated into feeble symbolism after 1900. The dreamy adolescent figure in *The Spirit of Contemplation* shows close links with Art Nouveau design. Her chair is decorated with figures representing Courage, Philosophy, Life and Love.

D3476 The Spirit of Contemplation

Bronze, 1901

38¹/₂ x 39³/₄ x 22 (97 x 101 x 55.9)

on base 2 x 41¹/₄ x 18% (5.1 x 104.4 x 48.0) Signed, side of base : ALBERT TOFT Purchased, 1915

D3490 Bust of John Heaton

Bronze

20¹/₂ x 19 X 15 (52.1 x 48.2 x 38.1)

Lent by Miss Nell Heaton, 1933

GEORGE FREDERICK WATTS (1817-1904)

A painter, who, like Lord Leighton, was peripherally but significantly involved in sculpture. The major sculptural concern of his career was his equestrian monument to *Hugh Lupus*, the falconer, for Eaton Hall, Cheshire, on which he worked for about twenty years. Eventually

many elements of the design were simplified, strengthened and incorporated into the figure of *Physical Energy*, now in Kensington Gardens.

D3471 Maquette (model) for **Physical Energy**

Bronze

16V₂ x 18V_i x 8% (42 x 47 x 21)

on base 2¹/₂ x 17⁵/_e x 2% (6.4 x 44.8 x 18.1) Signed in the bronze, front left of base: Physical Energy/G.F. Watts and by the caster, lower right of base: T.H.Wren/1914 Purchased, 1915.

JAMES SHERWOOD WESTMACOTT (1823-1900)

An example of the mainstream of Victorian sculpture, Westmacott studied in Rome and his work was displayed in the House of Lords and the Great Exhibition. He also modelled the figure for the reredos of Newcastle Cathedral.

D3587 **Chryseis**

Bronze

35V₂ x 33 x 29V_i (92 x 83.8 x 75)

on base 2³/₄ x 32¹/₂ x 29⁷/_i (7 x 81.9 x 76) Signed and dated, side of base: J.S. WESTMACOTT SC. 1867 Given by Mrs. Dixon Davies, 1933.

All sculpture listed is in the Laing Art Gallery although not necessarily on display. Dimensions are given in inches and then in centimetres.