

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

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FIRST EXHIBITION IN U.S. OF SCULPTURE BY GONZALEZ, INFLUENTIAL SPANISH ARTIST

The first exhibition in the United States of sculpture by the influential Spanish artist, Julio Gonzalez, whose pioneering metal work influenced so many modern American and European artists, will be on view at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, from February 8 through April 8. The great majority of the 57 metal sculptures and 10 drawings in the exhibition, which is under the direction of Andrew Carnduff Ritchie, have been lent from European collections. After the New York showing, the exhibition will be shown at the Minneapolis Institute of Art.

The exhibition includes practically all the major examples of the metal sculptures described as "drawings in space," which Gonzalez developed in the 30's, following a period of collaboration with Picasso, as well as many of his outstanding naturalistic sculptures which culminated in the famous life-size Montserrat. With the exception of an early bronze (1910-14) and 4 oil sketches, all the works of art in the exhibition date from the last years of Gonzalez' life, when, at the age of 50, after a long period of private study and deep despair, he embarked on an extraordinarily productive period which lasted until his death in 1942 at the age of 65.

"One cannot begin to estimate the influence of his space-describing metal sculpture on younger sculptors of today, both in Europe and America," Mr. Ritchie says in the catalog accompanying the exhibition. "The debt of such English sculptors as Butler, Chadwick and Thornton is obvious. The Italian Lardera, the German Uhlmann, the Dane Jacobsen, to mention only a few, have all looked consciously or unconsciously to him for inspiration. And in America the preoccupation of such sculptors as Smith, Kozsik, Ferber, Hare, Lippold and Lipton with welded metal as a medium and the exploitation of space as a positive attribute of their sculpture is surely the result of Gonzalez' pioneering art."*

Julio Gonzalez was born in Barcelona in 1876 and died in Paris in 1942. His father was a master metal craftsman and Julio and his brother and two sisters all worked in the great Spanish tradition of decorative metal work, making grills, screens and candelabra. In Spain he did some work for the great Spanish architect Gaudi and studied painting at the Barcelona School of Fine Arts. In 1900 Julio and his brother, Joan, moved to Paris where they renewed their friendship with their fellow countryman Picasso, and came to know the poet Max Jacobs, the critic Maurice Reynal, and the sculptor Brancusi. At this time Gonzalez was more interested in painting

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* JULIO GONZALEZ, Introduction by Andrew Carnduff Ritchie, Director of the Museum's Department of Painting and Sculpture. Includes a complete catalog of the exhibition as well as statements by the artist, chronology and bibliography. 48 pp., 70 plates. \$.25 paper, approx \$.75 hard cover. Museum of Modern Art Bull. Vol. XXIII, Nos. 1-2.

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than in sculpture and three oils, painted during the first decade of the century, are included in the exhibition.

In 1908, Gonzalez' brother Joan died, and Julio began a period of deep melancholia which was to last for 18 years. "Now began for my father," his daughter Roberta later said, "those long years of study, in a solitude that always increased Practical difficulties, mental anguish, above all artistic anguish, the bitter fight with himself over the search for his true personality, are certainly the most depressing things he had to overcome. It was only towards his fiftieth year that Gonzalez, at last, foresaw dimly his true path."

Ten small scale pieces from the late twenties, when he began to see "his true path," are shown, including masks and heads, although the majority of works in the exhibition date from 1931. At this time a profound change took place and Gonzalez' work became increasingly linear and near-abstract, always, however, with reference to the human figure. This change Mr. Ritchie attributes to the fact that in 1930-32 he assisted Picasso in making a number of iron constructions. "From this collaboration," Mr. Ritchie says, "one can only conclude that the greatest inventor of imagery in the twentieth century transmitted a new vision to his old friend and technical advisor."

Gonzalez himself described his sculpture: "To project and design in space with the help of new methods, to utilize this space, and to construct with it, as though one were dealing with a newly acquired material -- that is all I attempt." Among the major steps in his development of "drawing in space" shown in the exhibition are four important figures: Woman Combing Her Hair (1931); Woman with a Basket (1931); and the large Standing Figure (1932) and Maternity (1933). In all of these "space itself becomes a positive medium of expression. The subtle play of angle and curve is the abstract definition of concrete space." An added note of gaiety is seen in other similar pieces such as The Prayer (1932), Dancer with Disheveled Hair (1932), The Angel (1933), and Dancer called "a la Palette" (1933).

At the same time Gonzalez worked in welded sheet iron in which "by an interplay of angular or circular shapes he cuts and circumscribes space in most complex ways (Head called The Swiss Woman [1932], and Head called The Big Trumpet [1932]). What intricate and often humorous variations he plays upon this head theme! And in still another set of variations he explores the relationships of cylinder, cone and triangle with witty results (Face called The Tunnel [1933], The Lovers [1933] and two simply entitled Head [1933])," Mr. Ritchie comments.

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In 1934 Gonzalez began to use three dimensional forms as a foil for the rod and thin sheet elements of earlier constructions. An example in the exhibition is Figure called The Giraffe (1934), where the body has been filled in with a mass of iron scraps loosely welded together, leaving openings for light to penetrate. In the next stage of this play of mass, line and space, Gonzalez combined hollow volumes of sheet iron with plate and rod shapes. "In these particular constructions," Mr. Ritchie says, "I think Gonzalez reached the peak of his formal and spatial invention." And he goes on to point out that the sinuous melodic Reclining Figure (1934), the small Elongated Figure (1935), the more severely abstract variants of Seated Woman (1935), the integration of angular and curved motifs in the Woman with a Mirror (1936), and the counterpoint of line and mass in the Woman Combing Her Hair (1936), all remind one of Gonzalez' passion for music.

"Beethoven and Mozart he loved, and above all Palestrina and Vittoria. He collected many music scores and sang and accompanied himself on the mandolin. Perhaps Gonzalez' constructions in iron are related in an intimate way to the curving shapes and hollow construction of the violin, the guitar and the mandolin (abstractions themselves of the human body. Even the patina of the metal reminds one of the polished texture of stringed instruments, long handled and rubbed," Mr. Ritchie says.

Although Gonzalez continued to produce near abstract sculpture until the end of the 30's, he never gave up working in a naturalistic manner and the exhibition includes four relatively small pieces which were all in a way preparations for one of his masterworks -- the life-size figure of The Montserrat (1936-7).

"Named after the holy mountain of Catalonia, this peasant woman with a sickle in her hand and a child on her arm, Egyptian in formal simplicity, Gothic in sentiment, is Gonzalez' answer, as was Picasso's Guernica to the desperate agonies of the Spanish Civil War....The Mask of the Crying Montserrat, also of 1936, is more obviously tragic in expression...(and) has none of the fantastic distortions of the crying heads in Picasso's Guernica, although they must be considered together as symbols of the pain and anguish of war. And it is actually to this same symbol that Gonzalez returns at the end of his life, during the opening years of World War II. By then, however, for want of oxygen and acetylene he could no longer weld his favorite iron and had to resort to drawings or to modeling in plaster. In this medium he left an unfinished figure of a kneeling woman, screaming in agony, only the head of which, so far as I know, has been cast (Head of The Montserrat II). The numerous drawings of these last years are either related to this final Montserrat or represent a prolific stream of ideas for metal constructions which Gonzalez was never to execute," Mr. Ritchie says.

Photographs and additional information may be obtained from Elizabeth Shaw, Publicity Director, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York City. Circle 5-8900.
