

**Press release
Zurich, 20 March 2014**

Kunsthhaus Zürich presents Antoine Bourdelle's bronze 'Sappho' and representatives of French sculpture.

'Sappho', the important bronze work by the French sculptor Antoine Bourdelle (1861–1929), has undergone an extensive restoration. From 21 March to 6 July 2014 it will be shown as part of a temporary collection presentation including sculptures by Auguste Rodin, Henri Matisse, Henri Laurens and others. Receiving its first showing at the Kunsthhaus is the newly acquired work 'We the People' by Danh Vo (b. 1975), which adds a further twist to the theme of the fragmented figure and the robe that is also present in the exhibition.

Along with Auguste Rodin and Aristide Maillol, Antoine Bourdelle formed the triumvirate of early modern French sculptors. Originally from south-western France, Bourdelle found worldwide recognition during his lifetime. His output ranged from intimate, small-scale works to large public commissions in a variety of formats. His principal subject is the human figure, often depicted in mythological contexts. Two of the three important bronzes held by the Kunsthhaus Zürich also fall into this category: 'Apollon (Masque)' from 1900, a representation of the face of Apollo, the Greek god of music and poetry; 'Beethoven' from 1902, a bust of the famous composer – and 'Sappho' from 1887/1925.

LARGER-THAN-LIFE DEPICTION OF A POET OF ANTIQUITY

Bourdelle's 'Sappho' is a monumental representation of the greatest female poet of antiquity. She is shown with a large lyre, crouching on a small rocky elevation. The whole figure is filled with tension, from the raised big toe of the right foot, to the right hand, which is held aloft; and that tension also manifests itself in the folds of her dress. Sappho has her head bowed. Her right hand mirrors the form of the musical instrument. Perhaps the poet is deep in thought, counting the metre of a poem. Or is she suffering the pangs of love? The depiction of a nude woman, apparently dancing, on the side of the lyre facing away from Sappho is particularly interesting in this respect.

Sappho's main subject is love – and her admiration for the goddess of love Aphrodite. Bourdelle worked on his Sappho composition several times. He completed his first version, which was just 28 cm in height, in 1887. In 1924 he finished a 70-cm bronze sculpture, followed a year later by the monumental bronze work, of which seven castings exist. The larger than life-size example in

the Kunsthaus dates from 1925. The possibility of exhibiting this work in the art garden once the Kunsthaus extension opens is currently under discussion.

COLLECTION COMPLETELY RESTORED

The restoration of Bourdelle's work followed projects to conserve sculptures by Maillol and Rodin. As a result, the Kunsthaus's important holdings of Classical Modern French sculpture (or, in the case of Constantin Brancusi and Alberto Giacometti, sculptures linked to France as the place of their creation) can now be seen once again in their entirety and in good condition.

MANUFACTURE, CONDITION AND RESTORATION

Bourdelle's bronze sculpture 'Sappho' was made using the sand-casting process by the Parisian foundry of Alexis Rudier in 1925. The hollow piece was cast in a number of large parts which were held together by badly rusted iron bolts.

The surface of the sculpture, which was probably chemically patinated in a brownish base colour when first produced, exhibits the green discoloration typical of atmospheric corrosion over time. As a result of being exhibited in the open air for decades, the original patina had suffered extensive damage, rendering it difficult for the viewer to read.

Conservation and restoration work involved the delicate and painstaking cleaning of the badly weathered surface as well as measures to ensure the lasting preservation of the original substance, with all its historical remnants of former states. Following careful cleaning of the surface and the removal of dirt deposits, the sculpture was coated with a microcrystalline wax. This provides optimum protection against environmental influences and also gives the sculpture a much more homogenous appearance which improves its legibility for the viewer. Also for reasons of conservation, a large number of the badly corroded iron bolts inside the sculpture were replaced with stainless steel bolts. The analyses and measures carried out as part of the project not only restored the sculpture's external appearance and inner structure, but also brought to light fascinating details about the manufacture and history of Bourdelle's 'Sappho'.

FROM RODIN'S 'IRIS' AND BOURDELLE'S 'SAPPHO' TO MATISSE'S NUS DE DOS

The first acquisition of a sculpture by a key French master of the (early) modern period came in 1910, in the form of Auguste Rodin's plaster version of 'La prière' from 1909 – a standing female figure crafted, in the artist's characteristic fashion, as a torso. The provocative 'Iris, messagère des dieux' from 1890/91, also a fragmented female figure, entered the collection in 1949. These were joined just two years later by Bourdelle's 'Sappho', promised by the foundry owner Alexis Rudier as a gift. A major acquisition came in 1960, with Henri

Matisse's central four 'Nus de dos' from the years 1909, 1913, 1916/17 and 1930. These are among by far the most important works of modernist sculpture and were acquired from the artist's daughter with the help of contributions by the canton and the VZK. Matisse was (like Alberto Giacometti temporarily) a pupil of Bourdelle. In 1961 Henri Laurens's monumental 'La grande musicienne' was donated to the Kunsthaus by the heirs of Franz Meyer. This was followed in 1968 by an entire group of generous donations from the collection of Werner and Nelly Bär, including Rodin's 'Femme accroupie' and 'Balzac', Bourdelle's 'Beethoven', an early head by Picasso and two smaller sculptures by Matisse. In all, the Kunsthaus assembled an important collection of such works during the first half of the 20th century, a further key example of which can now be presented once again, in the form of 'Sappho'.

PRESENTATION AND PUBLICATION

From 21 March to 6 July 2014 'Sappho' will be shown as part of a temporary collection presentation including, in particular, sculptures by Auguste Rodin, Henri Matisse and Henri Laurens. The newly acquired sections of the work 'We the People' (2010-2013) by Danh Vo (b. 1975) will also be on show, including the fragment of a foot and a drapery from the robe. They form part of the artist's ambitious project which involved creating a full-size replica of the Statue of Liberty and dividing it into individual pieces. The image of the dismembered symbol of freedom lying on the ground can also be read within a politically charged context, while the motif links it to the themes of the female figure, fragment and robe that are also present in the exhibition.

A free 16-page publication with 14 illustrations accompanies the presentation. It contains an insight into the restoration measures and comments on the works in the exhibition.

The restoration of 'Sappho' was supported by the BNP Paribas Switzerland Foundation.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Kunsthaus Zürich, Heimplatz 1, CH-8001 Zurich, tel. +41 (0)44 253 84 84, www.kunsthaus.ch.

Fri-Sun/Tues 10 a.m. – 6 p.m., Wed, Thurs 10 a.m. – 8 p.m. Public holidays: Easter 18-21 April, 1 May: 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

Advance sales: SBB RailAway combination ticket, with discount on travel and admission: at stations and by phoning Rail Service 0900 300 300 (CHF 1.19/min. by land line), www.sbb.ch.

Zurich Tourism: hotel room reservations and ticket sales. Tourist Service in Zurich main railway station, tel. +41 44 215 40 00, information@zuerich.com.

Magasins Fnac: sales points in Switzerland: Rive, Balexert, Lausanne, Fribourg,
Pathé Kino Basel, www.fnac.ch.

NOTE AND CONTACT FOR THE MEDIA

Visual material is available to download at www.kunsthhaus.ch under Information
> Press. Contact: Kunsthaus Zürich, Press and Public Relations, Kristin Steiner.
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