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Press Release

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***CONSTANTIN BRANCUSI: THE ESSENCE OF THINGS OPENS AT THE GUGGENHEIM JUNE 11 WITH RECENTLY DISCOVERED SLEEPING MUSE***

Press Preview June 10 from 10 AM – 1 PM

NEW YORK, N.Y. – April 30, 2004 – From June 11 through September 19, 2004, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum presents *Constantin Brancusi: The Essence of Things*. Co-organized by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Tate Modern, London, *Constantin Brancusi: The Essence of Things* is a highly selective view of Brancusi's work, primarily emphasizing his carving and tendency toward abstraction. Bringing together more than thirty of Brancusi's rare sculptures, this exhibition will capture the essential character of his art through an examination of his themes, use of series, and choice of materials. In addition, the New York presentation, which follows its extremely successful run in London, will be the first public showing of a recently discovered, major Brancusi sculpture *Sleeping Muse*. The exhibition fills three of the rotunda's ramps and the High Gallery.

This exhibition is sponsored by Deutsche Bank.

Additional support is provided by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

Thomas Krens, Director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, said, "The Guggenheim has championed the sculpture of Constantin Brancusi for 50 years, and is fortunate to possess 11 key examples of his work. In 1955, while the artist was still alive, the Guggenheim mounted his first retrospective, in the museum's temporary quarters in a townhouse at 1071 Fifth Avenue; this was followed in 1969 with another major Brancusi retrospective in the Frank Lloyd Wright rotunda. Then as now, the Guggenheim's spiral

structure forms the perfect complement to the organic surfaces of Brancusi's figures, evoking Brancusi's own statement that 'architecture is inhabited sculpture.'

"Deutsche Bank's sponsorship of *Constantin Brancusi: The Essence of Things* celebrates our long-standing commitment to the arts and our continued partnership with the Guggenheim," said Gary S. Hattem, President, Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation. "We are pleased to help bring such a special exhibition that will facilitate the first public viewing of a *Sleeping Muse* to New York City."

Brancusi was born in Romania in 1876 and studied in Bucharest. In 1904 he moved to Paris, where he was to spend more than fifty years and where, from the mid-1920s, he established his studio. He was encouraged by Auguste Rodin, but quickly broke away from the sculptural tradition that the elder artist represented. Rather than create a clay model and send the work out to a craftsman to enlarge, Brancusi was the first modern sculptor to carve works himself and to engage directly with the final material. In this regard, he was inspired by the examples of "primitive" art, including that of Africa and of ancient Europe, especially the Cycladic Islands, as well as the experiments of Paul Gauguin. He began a process of simplifying his figures to the point of abstraction in 1907; forms of great purity and balance resulted from this refinement. Brancusi died in Paris in 1957.

Brancusi's serene, simplified sculptures are widely acknowledged as icons of Modernism. His choices of materials, including marble, limestone, bronze, and wood, and his individual expression through carving soon established him as a leading avant-garde artist. He was a close friend of both Amedeo Modigliani and Marcel Duchamp, and his work has inspired sculptors from Barbara Hepworth to Carl Andre and Donald Judd.

The majority of this presentation focuses on Brancusi's carvings in stone and marble, offering an unusual glimpse into the artist's working practice. The thematic organization of the exhibition highlights specific recurring motifs in series such as the *Kiss*, the *Torso*, *Mademoiselle Pogany*, and the *Bird*. Each series helps demonstrate Brancusi's gradual process of reducing naturalistic subjects into forms teetering on the brink of abstraction.

The viewer is able to witness the cognitive process of reduction and refinement within a theme as the years, and as Brancusi's style, progress. This evolution in the direction of abstraction is most evident in the series of torsos and of heads that lead to the *Sleeping Muse* theme. From the clear and realistic carving of *Head of a Sleeping Child* (ca. 1908), a shift can be seen toward an elongated form with cleaner lines and less depth of carving in *Sleeping Muse I* (1909–10). In 1911, Brancusi created *Prometheus*, a spherical, smooth shape with only a nose, ear, and fragment of neck as visual markers. For the extremely abstract *Sculpture for the Blind* and *Beginning of the World* (both ca. 1920), Brancusi returns to the ovoid shape of the *Sleeping Muse*, emptying out all features to create perfectly smooth and pure forms.

The exhibition also presents key examples of Brancusi's independent wooden works—including his monumental *King of Kings* (ca. 1938) and *Adam and Eve* (1921), both from the Guggenheim's collection. The wooden works demonstrate a different trajectory in Brancusi's carving. Rather than focusing on the progression from realism to abstraction, the wooden pieces evoke the totemic and tribal and reference Brancusi's response to African and Romanian folk cultures. These works most effectively incorporate the base into the artwork, using both the wooden sculpture and the base to create unified works of multiple components.

### **Recently Discovered *Sleeping Muse***

The newly discovered *Sleeping Muse III/IV?*, ca. 1917–18, will be exhibited publicly for the first time, at the Guggenheim. Until 1985, the official cataloguing of Brancusi's oeuvre included two carved heads known as *Sleeping Muse*, one in marble, and one in alabaster. Then, a third muse in marble was discovered in an American private collection, identified as *Sleeping Muse III* and dated 1917–18.

In the year 2000, a fourth version was discovered in a European private collection. Both of the latter two pieces have been authenticated by Dr. Friedrich Teja Bach, author of the 1988 *catalogue raisonné* of Brancusi's sculptures. Since there are many stylistic details that the two sculptures share, it is thought that Brancusi may have worked on both simultaneously, making it difficult to establish their precise sequence. Brancusi kept this recently discovered *Sleeping Muse* until the last years of his life, at which time he gave it to a young woman who was a frequent visitor to his studio, telling her it was unfinished. She kept the

sculpture until 2003, at which time it passed into a private collection in the U.S. The Guggenheim exhibition will be the first time this piece will be shown publicly.

The exhibition was conceived by Carmen Giménez, Curator of Twentieth-Century Art at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Director of the Museum Picasso in Málaga, and developed with Matthew Gale, Curator at Tate Modern, London. The installation is designed by Juan Ariño.

The 144-page catalogue, published by Tate Modern, reflects the intimacy and iconicity of the works in the exhibition. It includes essays by the curators, who elaborate the decisions behind the selection, as well as by selected specialists, who explore Brancusi's life and work in more detail. Ms. Giménez situates the exhibition's formal choices within Brancusi's personal and artistic heritage, while Mr. Gale examines the artist's stunning rise to success during the interwar period through a close look at his relationships with his Paris contemporaries. Also included are essays by Sanda Miller, Alexandra Parigoris, and Jon Wood, as well as an illustrated chronology, a bibliography, and a selection of writings and vintage photographs by the artist. The catalogue is available in soft cover for \$25.00. Hardcover is also available to the trade through Harry N. Abrams Publishers for \$40.00.

## EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The following programs are offered in conjunction with the exhibition *Constantin Brancusi: The Essence of Things*.

### **Lectures**

#### **WILLIAM TUCKER ON BRANCUSI**, Tuesday, June 15 at 6:30 PM

Artist and writer William Tucker is the author of *The Language of Sculpture* and has written extensively on twentieth-century sculpture. He has exhibited at the Venice Biennale, the Tate Gallery, and Storm King Art Center, New York. He discusses the work of Constantin Brancusi, addressing his tendency toward abstraction and his role in twentieth-century sculpture. (\$10 adults, \$7 members, students, seniors)

#### **DORE ASHTON: SPEAKING OF BRANCUSI**, Tuesday, July 20 at 6:30 PM

Renowned art historian Dore Ashton provides a series of new reflections on the work of Constantin Brancusi. Ashton is an author and editor of 30 books on art and culture, including *Noguchi East and West*, *About Rothko*, *American Art Since 1945*, *A Joseph Cornell Album*, and *David Smith: Medals for Dishonor*. (\$10 adults, \$7 members, students, seniors)

### **Tours**

Free with museum admission. Times are subject to change. For daily schedules, see electronic signboard near the Admissions Desk.

**A Curatorial Eye**

*Constantin Brancusi: The Essence of Things*

Friday, July 30 at 2 PM: Tracey Bashkoff, Associate Curator for Collections and Exhibitions

Friday, August 6 at 2 PM: Nat Trotman, Curatorial Assistant

**For Families**

**Bytes and Brancusi**, Saturday, August 21 from 1–4 PM

Create a family portrait, Brancusi-style! Inspired by the sculpture of Constantin Brancusi, children and their adult companions create serene photographic portraits in this one-day workshop. Participants use digital cameras and the latest versions of Adobe Photoshop CS.

**To download press images, visit [www.guggenheim.org/press\\_office.html](http://www.guggenheim.org/press_office.html). Click on release, then on photo service icon. Enter username *photoservice* and password *presspass*.**

GENERAL INFORMATION: 212 423-3500

HOURS: Sat.–Wed., 10 AM–5:45 PM; Fri. 10 AM–8 PM; closed Thurs.

ADMISSION: \$15 adults, \$10 students/seniors.

#1003

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