Rejecting nineteenth-century sculptors’ emphases on theatricality, detail, and narrative, Brancusi favored radical simplification and abbreviation. He sought to capture the essence of his subjects with minimal formal means while retaining the integrity of his materials. In *King of Kings* (*Le roi des rois*, ca. 1938), though the monumentality of the sculpture gestures toward the transcendent, uncarved passages highlight the lumber’s first use as an architectural beam. Similarly, the abstracted form of *The Sorceress* (*La sorcière*, 1916–24) follows the intersection of trunk and branches in the original wood. Brancusi also frequently paired sculptures so that the upper “figure” and the lower “base” complement each other through their contrasting textures, materials, and masses.

Brancusi’s work was significantly inspired by Central and West African sculpture and Romanian folk carving, though the scope and particularities of such influences have been widely debated. Serrated patterns present in many traditional Dogon and Senufo objects appear on *Adam and Eve* (*Adam et Eve*, 1921) and *Watchdog* (*Chien de garde*, ca. 1924). Meanwhile, prototypes for the sequential designs of *King of Kings* have been found in the vernacular architecture of Brancusi’s native Romania, and *The Sorceress* has been interpreted as the flying witch described in that country’s folk tales. Modern industrial design also served as an important touchstone. In *Flying Turtle* (*Tortue volante*, 1940–45), the smooth surface, nearly geometric forms, and depiction of movement all speak to the influence of machines and industrial production. However, Brancusi’s focus on craftsmanship and ahistorical subject matter casts doubt on any direct engagement with such contemporary concerns. Moreover, Brancusi never clarified the sources for his designs, preferring instead to promote an air of mystery surrounding their origins.
Constantin Brancusi
b. 1876, Hobitza, Romania
d. 1957, Paris

Adam and Eve
(Adam et Eve)
1921 (Adam and Eve executed separately ca. 1916)
Chestnut (Adam) and oak (Eve) on limestone base
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum,
New York 53.1329
Constantin Brancusi
b. 1876, Hobitza, Romania
d. 1957, Paris

Little French Girl (The First Step [III])
(La jeune fille française)
ca. 1914–18 (mounted by museum, 1953)
Oak on pine base
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Gift, Estate of Katherine S. Dreier 53.1332
Constantin Brancusi  
b. 1876, Hobitza, Romania  
d. 1957, Paris  

The Sorceress  
(La sorcière)  
1916–24  
Walnut on limestone base  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York 56.1448  

Shown on Watchdog  
(Chien de garde)  
1916  
Oak  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York 58.1503
Constantin Brancusi  
b. 1876, Hobitza, Romania  
d. 1957, Paris  

King of Kings  
(Le roi des rois)  
ca. 1938  
Oak  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York 56.1449
Constantin Brancusi
b. 1876, Hobitza, Romania
d. 1957, Paris

The Miracle (Seal [I])
(Le miracle)
ca. 1930–32
Marble on limestone base
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York 56.1450
Constantin Brancusi
b. 1876, Hobitza, Romania
d. 1957, Paris

Flying Turtle
(Tortue volante)
1940–45
Marble on limestone base
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York 56.1451
Constantin Brancusi  
b. 1876, Hobitza, Romania  
d. 1957, Paris  

Eve  
ca. 1919  
Gelatin silver print  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,  
James Johnson Sweeney Records
Constantin Brancusi
b. 1876, Hobitza, Romania
d. 1957, Paris

Adam
c. 1916–21
Gelatin silver print
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
James Johnson Sweeney Records
Constantin Brancusi
b. 1876, Hobitza, Romania
d. 1957, Paris

View of the studio: Mlle. Pogany II, The Kiss, Endless Column (later destroyed), Endless Column I, Bird in Space, and Newborn [II]
1925
Gelatin silver print
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
James Johnson Sweeney Records
Wayne F. Miller
b. 1918, Chicago
d. 2013, Orinda, California

Constantin Brancusi’s studio
1946
Gelatin silver print
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, James Johnson Sweeney Records
Wayne F. Miller  
b. 1918, Chicago  
d. 2013, Orinda, California  

Constantin Brancusi’s studio  
1946  
Gelatin silver print  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,  
James Johnson Sweeney Records
Wayne F. Miller
b. 1918, Chicago
d. 2013, Orinda, California

Constantin Brancusi’s studio: Boundary Marker, Flying Turtle, Blond Negress, Eileen Lane, Cock, and Sleeping Muse
1946
Gelatin silver print
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
James Johnson Sweeney Records
Wayne F. Miller  
b. 1918, Chicago  
d. 2013, Orinda, California  

Constantin Brancusi in front of *Doorway*  
1946  
Gelatin silver print  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,  
James Johnson Sweeney Records
Wayne F. Miller
b. 1918, Chicago
d. 2013, Orinda, California

Constantin Brancusi in his studio
1946
Gelatin silver print
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
James Johnson Sweeney Records