



## Adolfo Wildt (1868 -1931) The Last Symbolist

Musée de l'Orangerie  
15 April – 13 July 2015

This exhibition is held under the patronage of the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism (MIBACT)



The exhibition is organised by the Musée d'Orsay, the Musée de l'Orangerie in collaboration with the Fondazione Cassa dei Risparmi di Forlì and the city of Forlì

Sculptor Adolfo Wildt was famous in Italy during the inter-war period and captivated his contemporaries with his exceptional marble-working skills he acquired during the apprenticeship work he had done for other sculptors over several years. His originality stood on the fringes of tradition and avant-garde; however it always brought him mixed critical acclaim. His connections to Margherita Sarfatti, Benito Mussolini's mistress, and the official commissions and honours he received from the Fascist state undoubtedly played a key role in his falling into oblivion in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

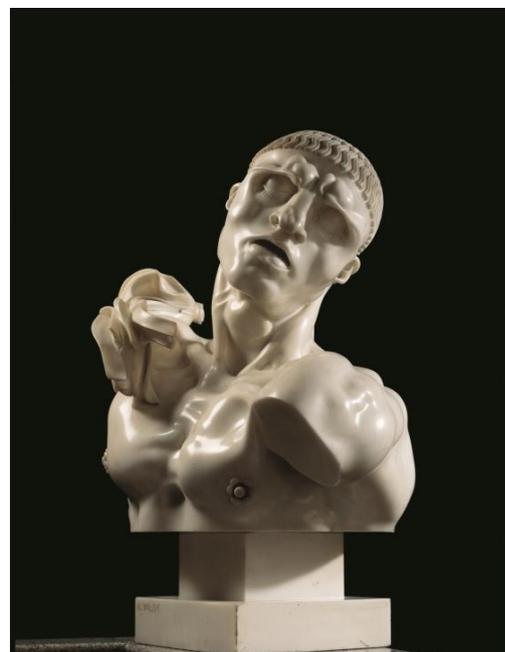
This is the first retrospective exhibition ever dedicated to Wildt in France and is organised in collaboration with the Cassa dei Risparmi di Forlì Foundation. It is an invitation to an unprecedented discovery of the Italian sculptor's fascinating and eccentric world. Only a few works have recently been unveiled to the public in Paris during the *Italies* exhibition in 2001 and *Masks* in 2008. Moreover, the public had to wait until 2013 for a French museum to acquire one of Wildt's works, the *Vir temporis acti* in bronze (1921), that is now part of the Musée d'Orsay collections.

The artist's atypical career unfolds in chronological order in the exhibition. As comprehensively as possible, it addresses the different facets of his art through 60 sculptures, sketches and medals, 34 drawings and graphic works, as well as old photographs of his works that have been lost or that cannot be put on display (sepulchral monuments in particular) and various documents. In conjunction with Wildt's work there are about 19 counterpoints on display throughout the course of the exhibition: mouldings of sculptures from Antiquity, Renaissance paintings (Cosmè Tura, Carlo Crivelli, etc.), as well as works by contemporary artists (Felice Casorati, Ivan Meštrović, Auguste Rodin, etc.) and by his students (Lucio Fontana, Fausto Melotti). The variety of sources and references as well as the contemporary artistic context are also addressed.

The large majority of the loans come from museums and private collections in Italy, where most of Wildt's works are still conserved. Two Italian institutions have generously loaned a significant part of their works by Wildt: the *Musei civici* museums in Forlì (6 sculptures) and in Venice (11 sculptures including several plasters from Wildt's studio).

The first room presents the artist's beginnings between Naturalism and Classicism. In 1894, Wildt entered into contract with the rich Prussian *Franz Rose*, represented in a bust, in which he agrees to provide Rose with the first copy of each of his sculptures in exchange for an annual pension: thus he was provided with the freedom to create and a certain material comfort until Rose's death in 1912.

The second room is dedicated to the period following the deep depression Wildt went through between 1906 and 1909. During this period he questioned the meaning of his art and the form he had to adopt: at the time he aimed to maintain a connection with early art and to "rebel completely against the art of today", all while being in harmony with modern thought. His extraordinary *Self portrait entitled Masque de douleur [Mask of Sorrow]* marks a return to



Adolfo Wildt (1868-1931)

*Vir temporis acti*, dit aussi *Homme du temps passé (Uomo antico)*, 1913, Marbre, 100 x 75 x 63 cm  
Collezione Franco Maria Ricci, Fontanellato (Parma) © Archivio Franco Maria Ricci

creation. The work fits into an Expressionist approach Wildt explored around 1910, a period when he also questioned the partial figure (*Vir temporis acti*) and introduced refined, golden decorative elements into his works that connected him to Germanic splinter groups.

With pure, refined works like *Un Rosaire [A Rosary]* or *L'Âme et son habit [The Soul and its Habit]*, the third room emphasises a now ubiquitous element of Wildt's art, a sense of spirituality stemming from a very personal sense of devotion that was an illustration of his maxim: "A work of art is not made for the eyes, it is made for the soul." Centred around the *Mère adoptive [Adoptive Mother]*, the fourth circular room accentuates the iconography of the family as reinvented by Wildt.

Wildt gained artistic recognition right after the First World War, and the fifth room showcases the variety of his artistic creation: of course his monumental portraits, but also his tributes to fallen heroes, his portraits of children, the series of drawings of the *Grands jours de Dieu et l'Humanité [Grand Days of God and Humanity]*, and lastly his final masterpiece, the *Parsifal*. The works in this room, adapted in a very personal way, highlight Wildt's connections with the classical demands of the "Novecento", the "Return to Order" movement launched by Margherita Sarfatti.

Tortured and eccentric, with extreme sensitivity, one cannot help but be moved before Wildt's work: Ugo Ojetti describes him as the ideal interpreter of his "tired, nervous, credulous and curious era".

**Curators:** **Beatrice Avanzi, paintings curator, Musée d'Orsay**

**Ophélie Ferlier, sculpture curator, Musée d'Orsay**

**Scientific adviser:** **Fernando Mazzocca, art historian**

**Scenography:** **Martin Michel**

**Media partners:** **Art absolutement, Les Inrockuptibles**

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## **Around the exhibition**

### **Publication**

Exhibition catalogue, joint publication Musée d'Orsay/Skira, 256 pages, 22 x 28,5 cm, 164 ill., €45

### **Inaugural Guided Tour**

Tuesday 15 April at 6.30pm

When the exhibition is not open to the public, this presentation of the exhibition, by curators Ophélie Ferlier and Beatrice Avanzi, will allow visitors to discover the sculptor's work.

### **Lectures in the Musée de l'Orangerie Auditorium**

- *Symbolism, A Challenge for Sculpture* by **Claire Barbillon**, contemporary art professor, University of Poitiers – Wednesday 6 May at 6.30pm

- *Elation of the surface: Adolfo Wildt, Lucio Fontana's master/anti-master* by **Choghakate Kazarian**, Heritage curator, Paris Museum of Modern Art – Wednesday 20 May at 6.30pm

### **Guided tours**

Every Wednesday and Saturday from 22 April to 11 July at 4pm

### **Reading**

Friday 5 June at 7pm

This reading evokes the Italy of the 1920s through the literature of the era's contemporary authors such as D'Annunzio, Malaparte, Buzzati, Pasolini, Bufalino, Morante and Pirandello.

**With Michel Vuillermoz from the Comédie Française**

### **Sculpture workshops**

While making their way through the exhibition, participants will be invited to sketch and draw the sculptures on display through the themes addressed by the artist. Once introduced to the techniques of Wildt's sculpture, they will create their own works of art.

For adults: Saturday 25 April, 9 and 23 May, 6 and 20 June and 4 July at 3pm.

For children: Every Wednesday from 22 April to 8 July at 3pm

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