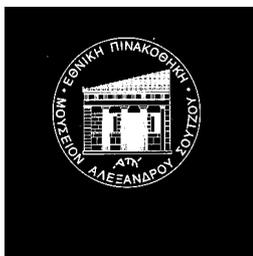


NATIONAL GALLERY  
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## CULTURAL OLYMPIAD

### *SIX LEADING SCULPTORS AND THE HUMAN FIGURE*

*Rodin – Bourdelle – Maillol – Brancusi – Giacometti – Moore*

**9 June – 30 September 2004**

The return of the Olympic Games to their country of origin, Greece, has inspired us to give once again to this major event its initial, moral and artistic dimension. The founding of the Cultural Olympiad by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture was based on these grounds.

The President of the Cultural Olympiad, Mr Evgenios Giannakopoulos, and the Trustees included in their programme the exhibition proposed by the National Gallery – Alexandros Soutzos Museum: *Six Leading Sculptors and the Human Figure. Rodin, Bourdelle, Maillol, Brancusi, Giacometti, Moore*. The exhibition will be one of the most important cultural events presented on the occasion of the Olympic Games.

In the history of the Olympic Games sculpture played a decisive role. The most beautiful sculptures inherited from antiquity are of athletes which perpetuate victories in Panhellenic games. It was thus legitimate to reserve a privileged place for sculpture within the framework of this universal celebration of the Olympic Games.

These European sculptors were selected by virtue of their dedication to the tradition initiated by ancient Greek sculpture and the role they played in the fundamental changes to this tradition through their approach to the human figure. In fact, these leading figures of modern art allow us to follow the steps from the traditional but radically rejuvenated and vitalized sculptural form of Rodin, Bourdelle and Maillol, to the innovations represented by Brancusi, Giacometti and Moore. The fact that these artists are connected to each other as teacher, pupil, follower or friend reinforces the pertinence of this choice.

The sculptors signalize another course: a new approach reaching back to the origins of antiquity, a new reading and re-estimation of the teachings of ancient art. Rodin admired Pheidias and was one of the first to understand the truth and vitality of the formal message of the art of Parthenon. He collected antiquities with passion and did not hesitate to integrate them in his own works. A number of significant pieces from his collection will be presented in Athens. Bourdelle, Rodin's assistant and friend, transfers his preferences to the severe style of Olympia and to the art of the archaic era. This lesson led him to restore to sculpture its monumental character. His imaginary museum, composed of originals, casts and photographs, will be represented in the exhibition. For his part Maillol remains true to classicism by adopting the serene, full-bodied figure of the Venuses from the time of Praxiteles; however, the archetypal beauty of his Mediterranean goddesses announces modern art, notably through the elimination of narrative subject matter.

Impregnated with his visual knowledge of classical sculpture, Brancusi extracted from marble and stone full, dense and refined forms, which, through a return to the origins of art, joins the spirit of Cycladic idols. Giacometti's elongated figures evoke the slim figures of Geometric sculpture and Etruscan statuettes. They are distinct, however, through their emotional charge that reflects the existential anxiety of modern man. Finally, Moore, while exploring non European traditions gives back to the human figure its intrinsic "classical" completeness and optimism by utilizing the plastic principle of vital form. His reclining figures, warriors and maternal deities testify to the vitality and persistence of the teachings of antiquity.

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