

GALERIE THADDAEUS ROPAC

LONDON PARIS SALZBURG



Medardo Rosso in the studio, Paris, early 1890s
Private Collection

MEDARDO ROSSO: *SIGHT UNSEEN* *AND HIS ENCOUNTERS WITH LONDON*

23 NOVEMBER 2017 – 10 FEBRUARY 2018

Opening

Wednesday 22 November 2017, 6 - 8pm

37 Dover Street, W1S 4NJ, London

Curated by Sharon Hecker, leading international expert on Rosso,
and Julia Peyton-Jones, Senior Global Director, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac

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PRESS RELEASE

Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac is pleased to present an exhibition of the works of Medardo Rosso (1858–1928), one of the founders of modern sculpture. *Sight Unseen* is the first exhibition to focus on his encounters with London.

The show features 12 of Rosso's most important sculptures, all cast by him personally in plaster, wax and bronze. Also on display are rarely shown drawings and, for the first time in the UK, his own photographs of his sculptures and sketches. Presented together, these help demonstrate how Rosso created his powerful images, where forms seem to materialize and dematerialize in relation to the effects of light and atmosphere.

Rosso was a revolutionary sculptor who subverted traditional modeling and casting methods to animate the surfaces of his sculptures. He went against prevailing monumental and heroic tendencies by depicting vulnerable subjects such as the poor, children and the elderly. Some of his works, like *Enfant au sein* (1889–90), on view at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, even border on abstraction. He adopted a performative approach to sculpture by casting his bronzes in front of a public in a theatrical mise-en-scène, and he invented unique exhibition strategies by infiltrating his works into galleries reserved for other artists...

In his own time, Rosso was revered by his artistic peers as a genius, with avant-garde contemporaries such as Apollinaire calling him the “greatest living sculptor,” and Rodin writing of his “wild admiration” for the artist. Yet in traditional narratives of modern sculpture he has not received the visibility he deserves. This is perhaps because he had no known artistic training, belonged to no school or group and is not easily categorized. By launching this historical work into a contemporary context, *Sight Unseen* sheds new light on his contribution to modern sculpture and makes the contemporary historically relevant.

Indeed, the inspiration for this exhibition comes from the many testimonies of contemporary artists regarding Rosso's importance to the development of sculpture and to their own work. The show will allow us to better understand why Rosso resonates with these artists. Tony Cragg, for example, in his insightful interview with Julia Peyton-Jones for the catalogue of this show said:

It's about materiality, especially in his most abstract works where he's mainly dealing with the surface. In doing that, he rejects and avoids representing the figure in the conventional manner of the time, and he opens up the door to a new way of looking at and reading the surface of materials and things. I find it extremely modern. I really believe he was the first modern sculptor in a sense. To have managed to quite heroically do away with the necessity to depict the human figure, anatomy in an exact sense—that's a pioneering achievement.

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A new work by Cragg, *In Frequencies*, reflecting his admiration for the sculptor, will be shown concurrently with the Rosso exhibition.

Rosso's largest London exhibition was a retrospective at the Eugene Cremetti Gallery, just a few doors down from Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac. Over 100 years later, we are pleased to present his first exhibition back on Dover Street, and the only show in London to include Rosso's experimental photographs of his sculptures. This is also the first exhibition to focus on his encounters with London, which played a crucial role in the development of his work and reputation. A cast of a sculpture shown in the 1906 exhibition, *La Rieuse*, will be on display, as will Rosso's drawings made in London, shown here together for the first time. These drawings are like Rosso's London "notebook," hastily sketched glimpses of sites such as Trafalgar Square, Royal Dock, Greenwich, the London underground, cabs and omnibuses. Some are sketched on the backs of London restaurant business cards. A rare presumed self-portrait made on the stationery of the Mathis and Previtali Hotel in Piccadilly will also be exhibited. Unprecedentedly, these London drawings will be shown alongside the photographic elaborations Rosso made of them. Yet another first is the debut appearance of *Impression de boulevard. Femme à la voilette* (sold by Rosso to the first collector of impressionism in Italy). And finally, the show provides the first full historical context for Rosso's masterpiece, *Ecce puer*, a portrait that Rosso made in London of the child of London collectors.

The exhibition is designed by renowned architect Annabelle Selldorf, responsible for renovating Thaddaeus Ropac's gallery space, Ely House. Plinths from Museo Medardo Rosso in Barzio, designed in the spirit of his father by the sculptor's son, who created the museum in the family home, are used for the installation. They not only give a sense of how Rosso's work is seen in this museum, but echo the installation of his works in exhibitions and in the studio during his lifetime.

The catalogue includes an essay written by leading Rosso scholar Sharon Hecker, who presents new research on the extended periods Rosso spent in London, the drawings he made there, his exhibitions, and the critics who wrote about them. Also featured is a conversation between Tony Cragg and Julia Peyton-Jones focusing on the unique qualities of this pioneering artist.

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NOTES TO THE EDITORS

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Medardo Rosso (1858–1928) was born in Turin, the son of a railway station inspector. He began exhibiting sculpture in 1881 in Milan without having had any known artistic training. Rebellious by nature, he was expelled after only one year of enrolment at the Brera Art Academy in 1882. He exhibited his small works in Milan, Rome, and Venice, while his radical monument proposals were rejected by local authorities and his audacious funerary monuments were removed from the cemetery or criticized by the press. Early on, Rosso sent works to exhibitions in Paris, where the French press took note of him, as well as to London, where he was not noticed. Rosso's modern subjects and style drew on Realism, but innovatively reconfigured through a new impressionistic modelling style that put sculpture in relationship to temporal and atmospheric effects, revealing a loss of detail in favour of sketchy modelling, flattened planes, and modulated surfaces.

Rosso married in 1885 and his only son, whom he christened *Francesco. Evviva Ribelle* (Francesco. Hurrah Rebel) was born late that year. Soon after, he separated from his wife and son. In 1889, he relocated to Paris, where he lived until after World War I and became a French citizen. Throughout his life, Rosso rejected any sense of national belonging and considered himself an internationalist. He met influential personalities such as Emile Zola (who allowed Rosso to list his name as the owner of a cast for publicity purposes), Edmond de Goncourt, and engineer and art patron Henri Rouart, whose portrait Rosso sculpted. In 1895, Rosso began casting works in unorthodox ways in his own foundry. He also experimented with photographing his works under different lighting conditions, manipulating the printing process and cropping, folding, scratching, or painting the photographic prints. He also experimented with drawing and with photographing his drawings. Rosso befriended Rodin but their relationship soured when Rosso felt that Rodin had failed to acknowledge his artistic debt to Rosso. After 1900, Rosso increased his international visibility, travelling throughout Europe and exhibiting in Vienna, Berlin, Dresden, Leipzig, Brussels, the Hague, Rotterdam, Amsterdam, and London. He made his final original work, *Ecce puer* (Behold the Child), in London in 1906. During Rosso's last twenty years back in Italy he reunited with his son and continued to experiment by recasting earlier works in new ways. He died of complications from diabetes in Milan in 1928.

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Despite Rosso's self-professed internationalism, he was forgotten after his death. He was resuscitated in 1963 in a retrospective at MoMA. Recent exhibitions include: *Medardo Rosso: Second Impressions* (Harvard University Art Museums, 2003-04), *Medardo Rosso* (Centre for Italian Modern Art, 2015), and *Medardo Rosso: Experiments in Light and Form* (Pulitzer Arts Foundation, 2016-2017).

ABOUT THE GALLERY

Since opening in 1983, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac has specialised in international, contemporary art representing around 60 artists and a number of renowned estates. With a team of 90 employees and approximately 40 extensive solo and group exhibitions held per year in the Salzburg, Paris Marais, Pantin and London spaces, the gallery supports and showcases the careers of some of the most influential artists today. Active in both the primary and secondary markets, the gallery's role extends to curatorial work, where it acts as consultant to major museums and public institutions as well as advisor to private and corporate collections.

From its origins in Salzburg, the gallery now holds five distinctive venues: in Salzburg at Villa Kast and Salzburg Halle, in the Paris Marais and Paris Pantin and in London, Mayfair. In Spring 2017, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac was opened at Ely House, 37 Dover Street. The listed mansion, built in 1772 by Sir Robert Taylor, was renovated by architect Annabelle Selldorf. The gallery spreads across five floors and over 1,500 m² (16,000 ft²), benefiting from four distinct gallery spaces.

SHARON HECKER

Sharon Hecker is a leading international authority on Medardo Rosso. She has authored over 30 publications, including essays, monographs, exhibition catalogues, and technical studies on Rosso. Her latest book, titled *A Moment's Monument: Medardo Rosso and the International Origins of Modern Sculpture* and published by University of California Press, 2017, has been awarded the Millard Meiss Publication Fund. She curated *Medardo Rosso: Second Impressions* at the Harvard University Art Museums (catalogue Yale University Press, 2004) and the retrospective *Medardo Rosso: Experiments in Light and Form* at the Pulitzer Arts Foundation (2016-17). For her work on Rosso she has received numerous awards from the Getty, Fulbright and Mellon Foundations. Sharon has also published extensively on other key twentieth century Italian artists such as Lucio Fontana and Luciano Fabro. She is co-author of *Postwar Italian Art History: Untying the Knot* (Bloomsbury, 2018). She lives between Milan and Los Angeles.

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SELLDORF ARCHITECTS

'We are so pleased to be working closely with Julia Peyton-Jones and Sharon Hecker on an exhibition which brings to focus the work of Medardo Rosso, an artist whose work has not yet been fully appreciated. The installation aims to connect the objects with related drawings and photographs and afford the visitor a dynamic, enveloping understanding of the artist's approach.' Annabelle Selldorf, Selldorf Architects

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OPENING HOURS
TUESDAY – SATURDAY 10 AM – 6 PM

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