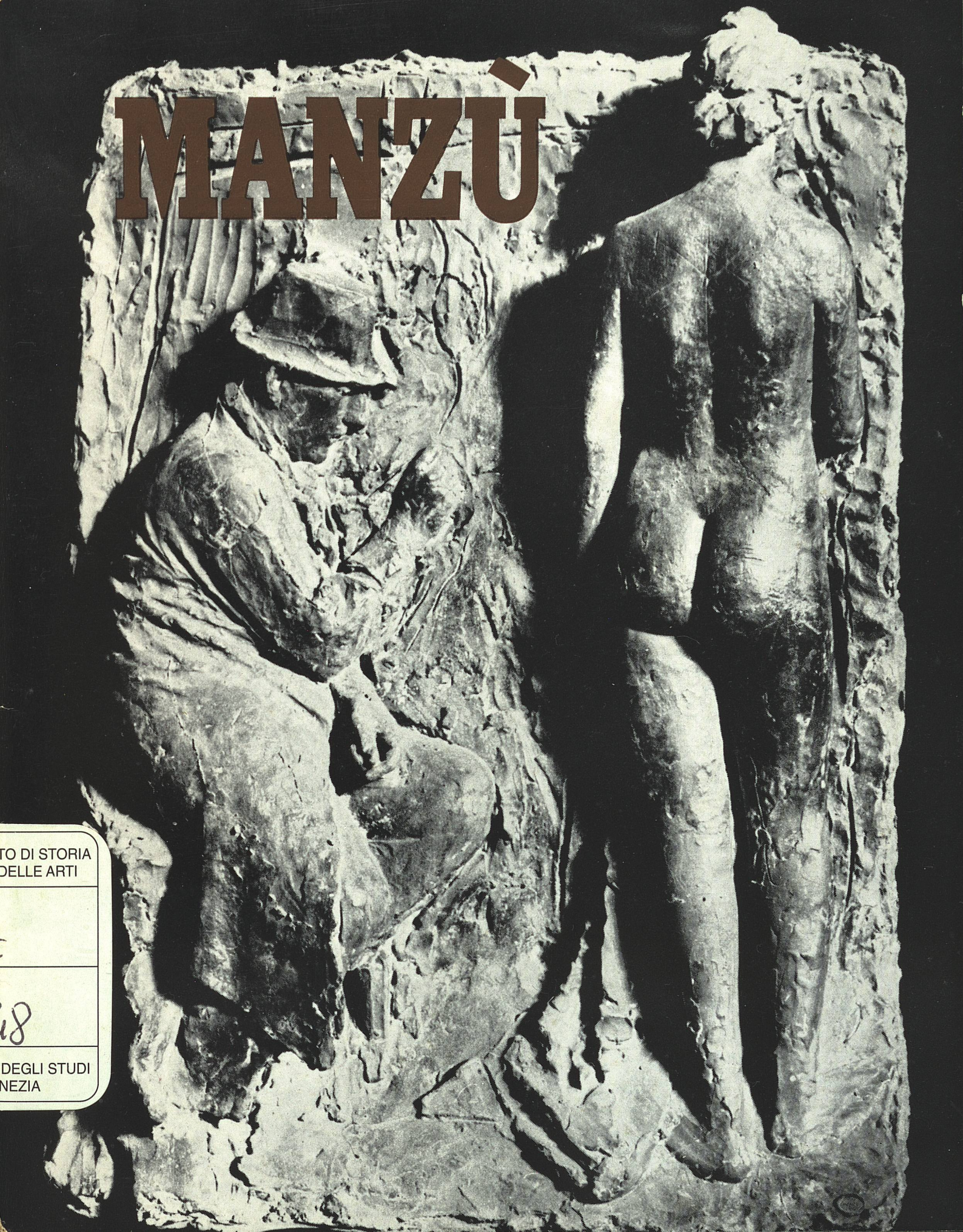


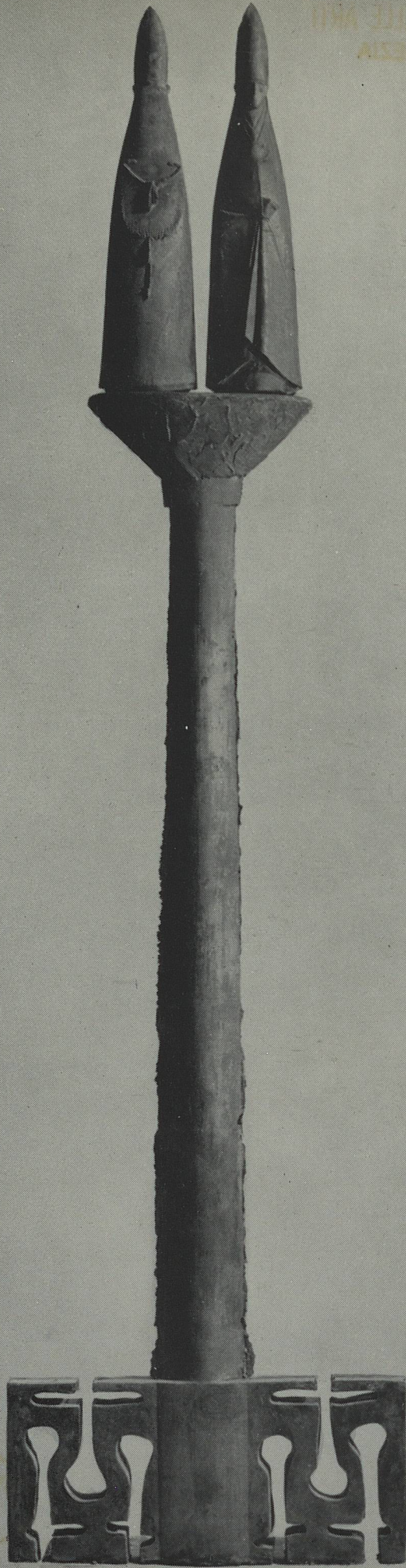
MANZÙ

TO DI STORIA
DELLE ARTI

18

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DIPARTIMENTO DI STORIA E CRITICA DELLE ARTI

INTRODUCTION

Manzù was born in Bergamo on December 22, 1908, the next to youngest of the eleven children of Angelo Manzoni, a shoemaker. His debut in the plastic arts was rewarded by a severe spanking. His two unmarried sisters recall with embarrassment to this day an ample-bosomed Siren which he made out of clay lifted from an amateur artist who lived next door.

At this time he was known as Giacomo Manzoni, not Manzù — the Bergamask dialect form of his name which he later adopted. He was going to elementary school, but the large number of his brothers and sisters and his father's limited means obviously stood in the way of further formal education. Besides, he hoped in his heart to become a sculptor.

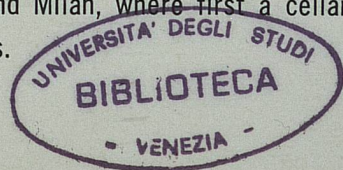
The house in which Manzù grew up was next door to a convent, and he made drawings on the courtyard walls while listening to the nuns sing in the chapel. He showed these drawings to the neighbor of whom we have spoken above and was encouraged to stick to his artistic ambitions in spite of his father's disapproval.

When he was eleven years old he learned how to use the chisel, as apprentice to a craftsman who made wooden angels and church decorations. A chance meeting with a gilder led to work in his shop and the welcome opportunity to master another technique. Soon Manzù was able to pay for evening courses at a school of decorative arts. One of the teachers offered him still another and better paid job and with him Manzù worked on stucco friezes and ceiling ornamentation.

At sixteen years of age Manzù spent all his spare time modeling on his own, putting particular effort into various versions of a clay goat. Every now and then his brothers and sisters posed for him, but in the family circle there was little applause for his work. For a lion which he sculptured at this time he had only the household cat as a model.

For the period of his military service Manzù was stationed at Verona and became acquainted with the copies of ancient statuary in the Accademia Cignaroli. At odd moments he made sketches of his officers and on free evenings he went to draw in the house of a friend who was a painter, but of all the work he did at this time only one self-portrait remains. Meanwhile Manzù conceived a passion for films and wished to become a director. He managed to buy a second-hand moving-picture camera and made some documentaries. But the passion did not last for long; he abandoned it when his military service was over.

It was only when he was twenty-one years old that Manzù began to think of himself as a sculptor rather than just a craftsman. In the pursuit of art for art's sake he launched into a Bohemian life, divided between Bergamo and Milan, where first a cellar and then a garage served as both studio and living quarters.



The urge to become a sculptor was still strong, and to satisfy it Manzù set off for Paris. He traveled with a waiter from his native Bergamo, who left him all on his own immediately after their arrival. Manzù's Parisian adventure lasted only three weeks and ended in forced repatriation. But the experience yielded rich returns, for he had made his first contact with Impressionism and the whole of modern art.

His cultural development was that of a self-educated man, reflecting personal taste rather than academic training. At this time he dipped into the Bible, particularly the **Song of Solomon**, attracted by its sheer poetry rather than by any scholarly interpretation. In sculpture he was chiefly influenced by the Etruscans and the stone-workers of the thirteenth century. He carved fluid and ingenuous figures, suspended in a sort of biblical Arcadia and brightened with surprisingly abstract colors. Together with Aligi Sassu, Renato Birolli and Luigi Grosso, he participated in a collective show in the **Galleria** of Milan, but without any startling critical success. He also did a number of pen drawings and oil paintings; among the latter **Adam and Eve** and **Woman with a Dove** are portraits of the woman who at this time inspired him.

The pursuit of art and the necessity of making a living were not easily reconciled. But by great good luck the architect Muzio commissioned him to decorate with saints and other ornamental figures the chapel of the Catholic University in Milan. Here he was called upon to work in cement, stucco, granite and metal, thereby having another chance to use new materials and acquire a variety of skills.

The marble statue of **The Sulamite Woman**, which he exhibited at a collective show in Milan in 1932, reflects a mystical languor inspired by his biblical readings and marked a turning-point in his artistic development, although it found no buyer. The first critical recognition of his work came a year later, in a small but highly prized publication by Scheiviller, who described his sculpture as "Etruscan."

In the house of Signor Ardiani of Bergamo Manzù painted a vividly colored encaustic frieze, in which the human figures seemed to be immersed in the stupor of the womb. His client was delighted with the small sum which it cost him. Manzù had no model for **The Sulamite Woman**, and for his next work, the life-size copper sculpture, **Young Girl on a Chair** (National Gallery of Modern Art, Rome), he made use of the pathetically homely chair which we see in so many of his drawings. The first **Head** of his wife was carved out of diaphanous wax, and other waxes and then bronzes followed. His artistic personality was further defined in a **Susanna** and in a series of busts and portraits, where poetry rather than objective likeness is the aim. Manzù's reputation was steadily increasing.

The period of the waxes was also one in which Manzù took a passionate interest in left-wing political ideas. He belonged to no party, but took part in discussions with anti-Fascist artist friends. He had personal and intimate Christian beliefs but was not a

practicing Catholic. A series of **Crucifixions**, which reflected his new concern with social problems, were branded as highly controversial. The **Young David** of 1938 was inspired by the same ideas. By now the artistic influences upon him came from such varied sources as Donatello, Medardo Rosso, Matisse and Picasso. Greatest of all was to be that of Phidias, who he came to know later on, in the Elgin Marbles of the British Museum.

Gualino and Lampugnani were Manzù's first collectors. In 1938 he did a successful series of bronze busts and the first **Cardinal** (National Gallery of Modern Art, Rome). He returned over and over again to this subject, treating it not from a religious point of view or as a psychological study, but simply as an exercise in pyramidal form. He has done forty-nine **Cardinals** in all, and in this symbolical Consistory, as in the later series of **Dancers**, there is never a sign of staleness of repetition; every one is a new adventure.

Political ideas once more occupied Manzù's mind in 1939, with the imminence of war. A few months before its actual outbreak (perhaps prophetically) he did a bas-relief portraying a weeping family and a German soldier with a swastika on his helmet before Christ on the Cross (Gualino Collection). In 1940, he returned to an autobiographical theme, **Artist and Model**, which he had begun to draw in 1937. Later, in the 1950's, he took it up yet again, with many variations. In 1941, in Rome, he did a bronze bust of Francesca Blanc, a notable achievement in his career.

During the period of war-time isolation, at Clusone, Manzù produced a large number of sketches, of **Cardinals, Artists and Models** and bas-reliefs. No trace is left of forty-five lost drawings, satires of the Axis alliance and depictions of Nazi atrocities.

Another milestone was the **Portrait of a Woman** (whose only variation is in The Museum of Modern Art, New York), a bronze executed in 1945, in Milan, along with seventy-two preliminary sketches, which his client managed to take over before he could destroy them. Manzù's perfectionism is such that he constantly does away not only with sketches of this kind, but with clay and plaster models and bronzes as well. At this same time Manzù was attracted by the subject of the modern girl and did the **Reclining Susanna**, a bronze now at the Tate Gallery. His second **Young Girl on a Chair** was done in lead, the only example of his work in this metal.

In 1947, when Manzù was only thirty-nine years old, he had a show in the Palazzo Reale of Milan, patched up after the damage inflicted upon it by bombardment during the war. This was the first important post-war exhibition to be held in Milan and the forerunner of a notable series put on in the same place. It was also a capital event in the life of Manzù, consisting as it did of fifty bronzes and a hundred drawings, and with the introduction to the catalogue written by Lionello Venturi.

Success did not cause the artist to forget his mission of instructing the young, and in 1945 he accepted the chair of sculpture at the Brera Academy. After eight years Manzù drew up a plan for a thorough reform of teaching methods. When this was not

accepted he had no choice but to resign, and he did not teach again until he went to Salzburg a few years ago.

In 1949 Manzù won the international competition for a sculptured bronze door of St. Peter's in Rome. His subject is present-day humanity before Christ. Here, again, the protagonists are involved in an ethical and religious drama and there is an underlying theme of social criticism, but it is strictly uncontroversial in character.

In the high reliefs of the **Passion**, set up in 1953 in the Middelheim Park in Antwerp, Manzù gives us a monumentally grandiose conception of the human drama of Christ. The weeping Magdalen is particularly admired by other artists. More **Cardinals**, **Crucifixions** and a series of bas-reliefs entitled **Variations on a Theme** stem from this same period.

The **Dancer** theme, which made a first vague appearance in his work in 1951, found renewed inspiration in Salzburg, where Manzù taught, along with Kokoschka and the architect Wassman, in the summers of 1954-58. Some forty **Dancers** have been bought by collectors the world over. Manzù did not abandon this theme until 1959, when it was succeeded by another: a life-size dancer with arms raised over her head to hold up her long hair. The girl who inspired this figure has a face so in harmony with Manzù's emotional and creative response that it is everywhere recognizable and he has portrayed it in any number of **Heads** and drawings.

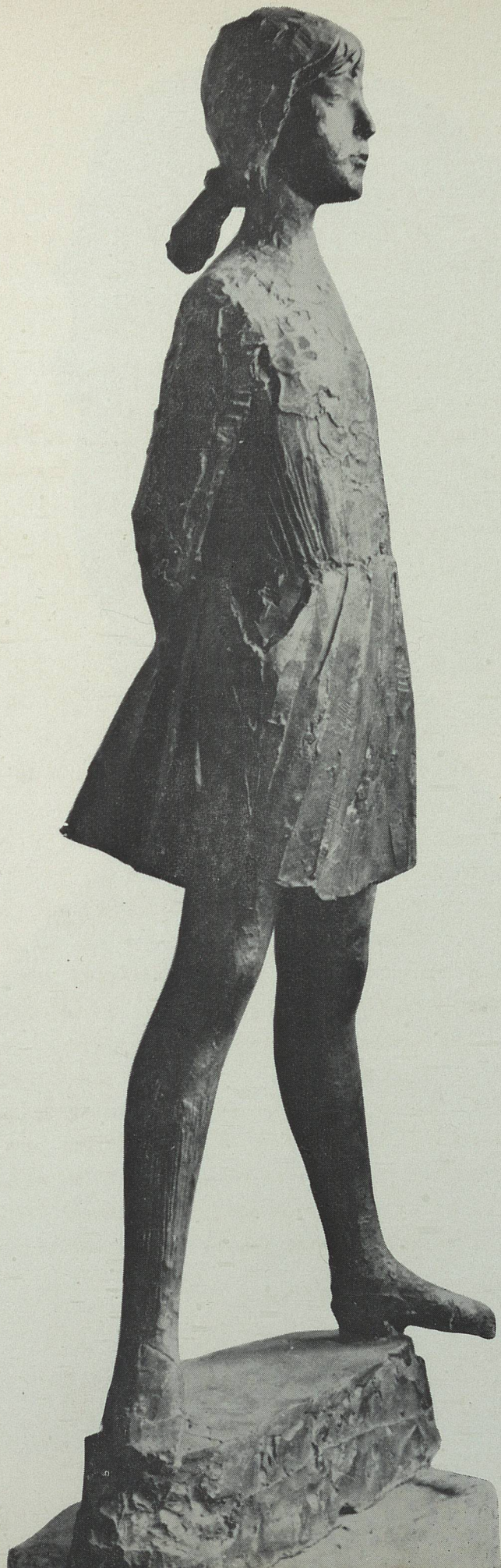
Among the **Cardinals**, of which we have spoken just above, only the greatly admired **Cardinal Lercaro**, a ten-foot bronze in the cathedral of San Petronio in Bologna, is an individual portrait.

Beginning in 1956 we must note the emergence of still another theme, the rounded **Maternity** and its variations.

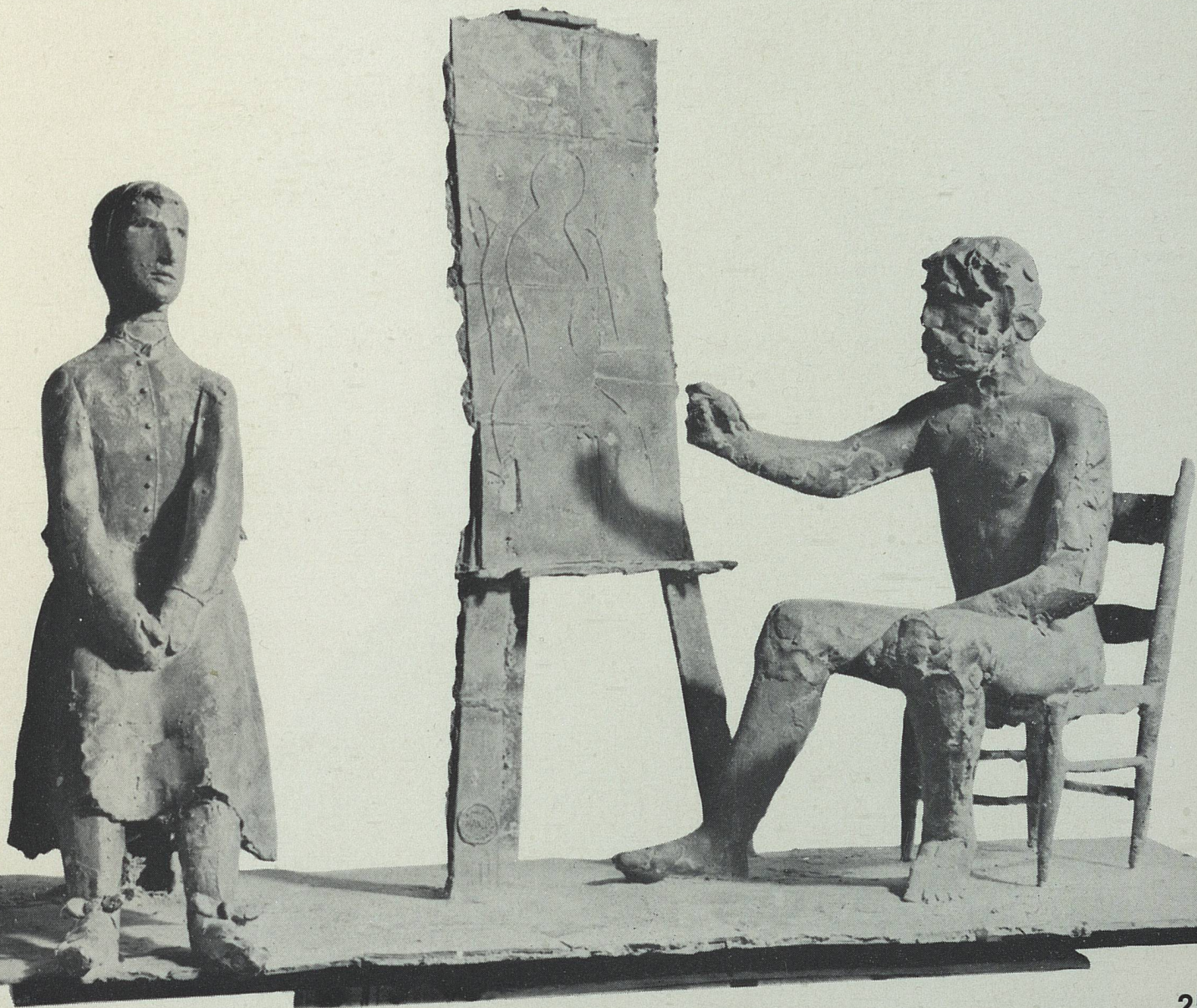
In 1958 came the solemn inauguration of Manzù's central door of the cathedral at Strasburg, attended by a large concourse of local people. Soon after this, personal disappointments caused Manzù to lose his religious inspiration. In the present period of intellectual stock-taking and re-evaluation he has abandoned religious subjects, with the obvious exception of the as-yet-unfinished St. Peter's door.

Two years ago the foundry cast his twenty-five foot high definitive model, which had been preceded by six others, each one containing radical changes of both subject and composition. The magnitude and dignity of this task have caused Manzù to pass through a long travail. Ever since the end of last year he has isolated himself in a house lent him by a friend in order to bring it to completion. At the same time there is in the back of his mind the theme, ever old and ever new, of **Artist and Model**.

by **Mario Miniaci**, Milan 1960











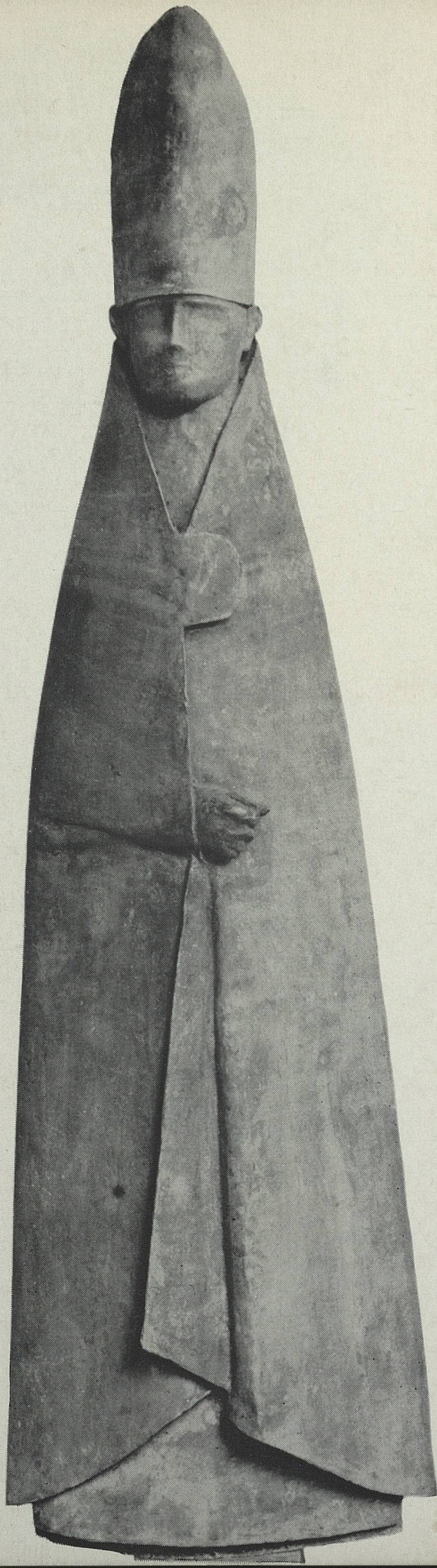




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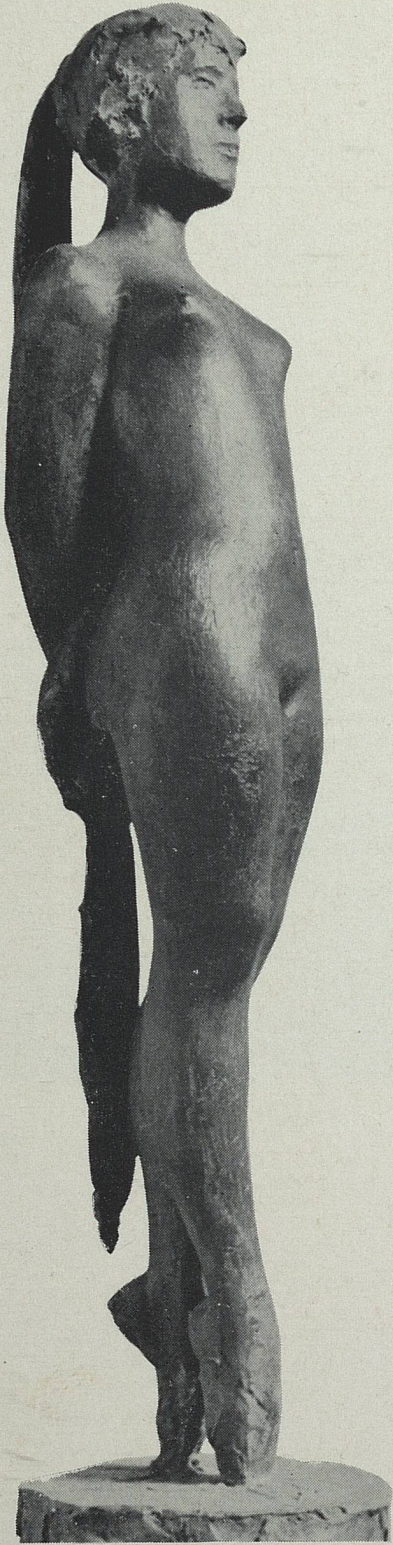


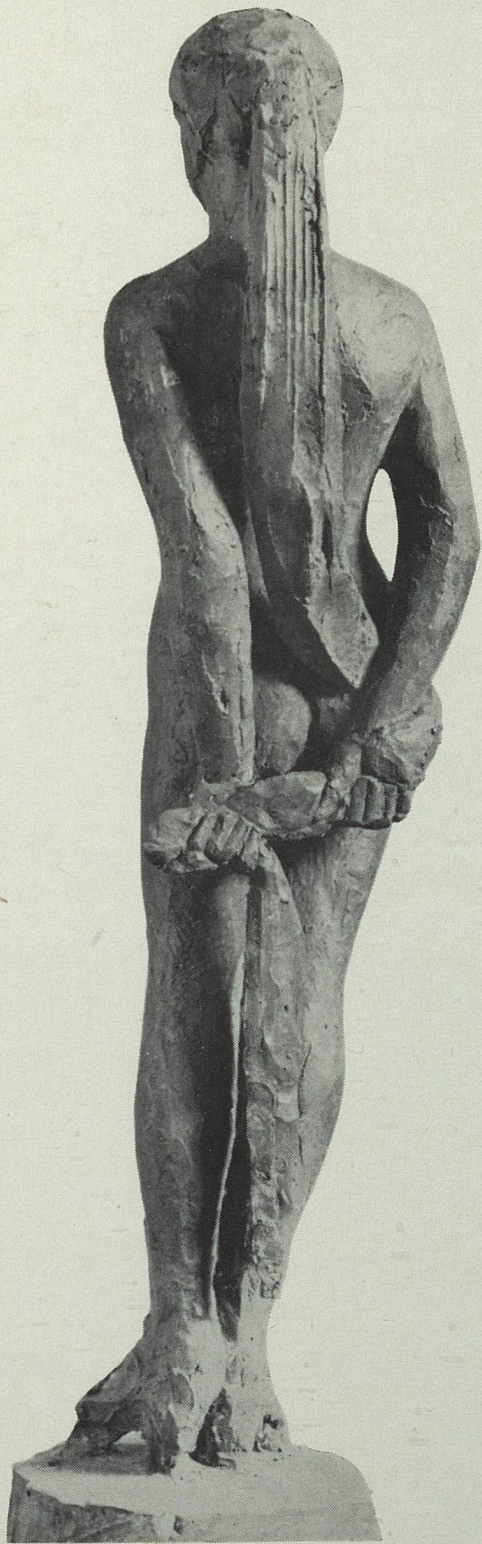












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CATALOGUE

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|--|--|
| <p>1 Seated Cardinal 1938
bronze H. 20½ inches</p> <p>2 Bust of a Woman 1939
bronze H. 16½ inches</p> <p>3 Self-Portrait with Model at Bergamo 1942
bronze high-relief W. 38½ H. 61½</p> <p>4 Child's Head 1942
wax H. 15½ inches</p> <p>5 Bust of Smiling Woman 1947
bronze H. 30¼ inches</p> <p>6 Chair and Fruit 1947
bronze H. 11¼ inches</p> <p>7 Head of Inge 1954
bronze H. 11½ inches
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Herbert A. Goldstone, New York, N. Y.</p> <p>8 Small Standing Cardinal 1954
bronze H. 15½ inches
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Herbert A. Goldstone, New York, N. Y.</p> <p>9 Small Seated Cardinal 1955
bronze H. 16½ inches</p> <p>10 Large Seated Cardinal 1955
bronze H. 84 inches</p> <p>11 Dance Step No. 4 1956
bronze H. 27¾ inches</p> <p>12 Small Seated Cardinal 1956
bronze H. 16¾ inches
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Manuel K. Berman, Brookline, Mass.</p> <p>13 Medium Seated Cardinal 1956
bronze H. 32 inches</p> <p>14 Dance Step No. 6 1956
bronze H. 78½ inches</p> <p>15 Bust of a Woman 1956
bronze H. 23½ inches</p> | <p>16 Smiling Skater 1956-57
ebony H. 78½ inches</p> <p>17 Large Skater 1957
bronze H. 76½ inches</p> <p>18 Large Standing Cardinal 1957
bronze 87½ inches</p> <p>19 Dance Step No. 1 1957
bronze H. 29¼ inches</p> <p>20 Dance Step No. 2 1957
bronze H. 24¼ inches
Collection Mr. and Mrs. E. E. Hokin, Highland Park, Ill.</p> <p>21 Dance Step No. 5 1957
bronze H. 33¾ inches</p> <p>22 Mother and Child 1957
bronze H. 20½ inches</p> <p>23 Head of Inge 1957
bronze H. 10¼ inches
Collection Dr. Hugo Tesoriere, Brooklyn, N. Y.</p> <p>24 Head of Inge 1957
bronze H. 10 inches</p> <p>25 Self-Portrait with Model 1957
bronze H. 10 inches</p> <p>26 Bust of Inge 1958
bronze H. 25¾ inches</p> <p>27 Mother and Child 1958
bronze bas-relief 15½ x 18½ inches</p> <p>28 Girl Skater No. 2 1959
bronze H. 65 inches</p> <p>29 Bust of Inge 1959
bronze H. 31¾ inches</p> <p>30 The Big Key 1959
bronze H. 96½ inches</p> |
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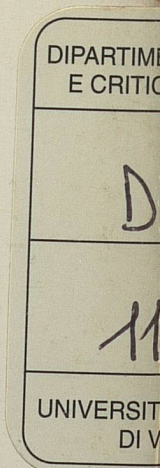
A selection of the bronzes in this exhibition will be shown later at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We gratefully acknowledge the generous loans made by Mr. and Mrs. Manuel K. Berman, Brookline, Mass., Mr. and Mrs. E. E. Hokin, Highland Park, Ill., Mr. and Mrs. Herbert A. Goldstone, New York, N. Y., and Dr. Hugo Tesoriere, Brooklyn, N. Y.



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