**Rosso, Medardo (1858-1928)**

**"An image can be this one:**

*Ecce puer*, 1906, Venice, Galleria Internazionale d’Arte Moderna di Ca’ Pesaro.

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Medardo Rosso was a pivotal yet enigmatic figure for the origin and development of modern European sculpture. In his fewer than fifty original subjects cast in plaster, wax and bronze, he represented emotionally charged glimpses of introverted, sick, laughing, anxious or smiling heads and figurines, especially of women, children and the elderly. By modulating sculpture’s surfaces, he made his diaphanously modeled images receptive to subtle changes of light, expressing a radical idea of “dematerialising” the three-dimensional object, as if it were subject to the influence of time and its surrounding atmosphere. Rosso began his career in Milan but spent three decades in Paris and was naturalised as a French citizen before returning to Milan in his final years. He was considered the founder of “Impressionist sculpture,” although his works also reflect the influence of Realism and Symbolism. In France, critics believed he was Auguste Rodin’s unacknowledged rival in the birth of modern sculpture and an influence on the 1898 *Monument to Balzac*. In Italy, he was hailed as the forefather of Futurism, prefiguring their experiments with movement and speed. Today, contemporary artists admire his precocious interest in materials and creative casting that left evidence of artistic process on his works.

Medardo Rosso was born in Turin in 1858, the son of a train stationmaster. He began his career in Milan in 1881 without official artistic training. His subsequent enrollment at the Brera Art Academy in Milan ended in expulsion, while his experimental art was criticised or ignored. A brief marriage to Giuditta Pozzi led to the birth of his son, Francesco. Rosso’s early works demonstrate interest in French Realism - Honorè Daumier, Gustave Courbet and Édouard Manet - foreign to late-nineteenth century Italian art (*Procuress*, 1883). A major stylistic shift in 1884 suggested sacrifice of detail in favor of sketchy modeling, flattened planes, and gently modulated surfaces to soften the play of light and shadow, rendering three-dimensional objects receptive to atmospheric conditions (*Concierge*, 1884). After moving to Paris in 1889, Rosso intensified his interest in Impressionist *vie moderne* subjects of Degas and Toulouse Lautrec (*Bookmaker*, *Yvette Guilbert*, 1894-5) while attentive to Symbolism. He exhibited around Europe and cast in his studio-foundry - also as a form of performance - using wax as a final medium. His radical ideas about “dematerialized” sculpture attracted second-generation symbolists like Charles Morice. Julius Meier-Graefe gave him a chapter in his 1904 history of modern art. Rosso’s friendship with Auguste Rodin soured after critics accused Rodin of having appropriated Rosso’s ideas for his *Monument to Balzac* (1898); the embittered Rosso became convinced of the unacknowledged debt. He continued to exhibit and sell works to European collectors and museums, making only one new work after 1900, the haunting *Ecce puer* (1906). He returned to Italy to curate his legacy in his last decade. Rosso’s innovative photographic production and drawings further highlight his experiments with the play between painting and sculpture, light and shadow, material objects and intangible surroundings.

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