

# Constantin Brancusi

## *Photographs*

20 October—23 December 2025  
Opening Monday 20 October 2025, 6pm—8pm

Thaddaeus Ropac  
Paris Marais  
7, rue Debelleye, 75003 Paris



Constantin Brancusi, *La Table de Silence à Tirgu Jiu*, 1938  
Vintage silver gelatin print, 24.1 × 29.5 cm (9.49 × 11.61 in)

*Why write about my sculptures?  
Why not simply show their photographs?*

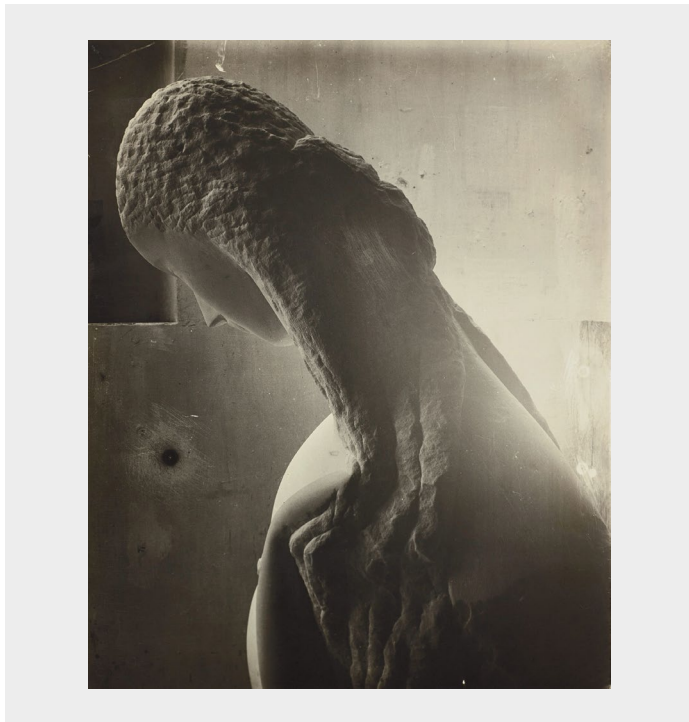
— Constantin Brancusi

Following the major retrospective dedicated to Constantin Brancusi (1876–1957) at the Centre Pompidou, Paris last year, Thaddaeus Ropac Paris Marais presents a selection of the Romanian artist's photographic work, spanning 1906 to 1938. Brancusi's photography was an integral part of his artistic practice and evolved alongside his sculpture from early in his career. In 1956, he bequeathed his entire studio

to the French State, including a number of his photographs, which were notably the subject of a focused exhibition running alongside the artist's first retrospective in France, also held at the Centre Pompidou in 1995.

Crystallising his artistic vision, photography was essential to Brancusi's practice. The artist began experimenting with the medium following his arrival in Paris in 1904, whereupon he immersed himself in the contemporaneous photographic and cinematographic avant-gardes. He befriended numerous photographers including Edward

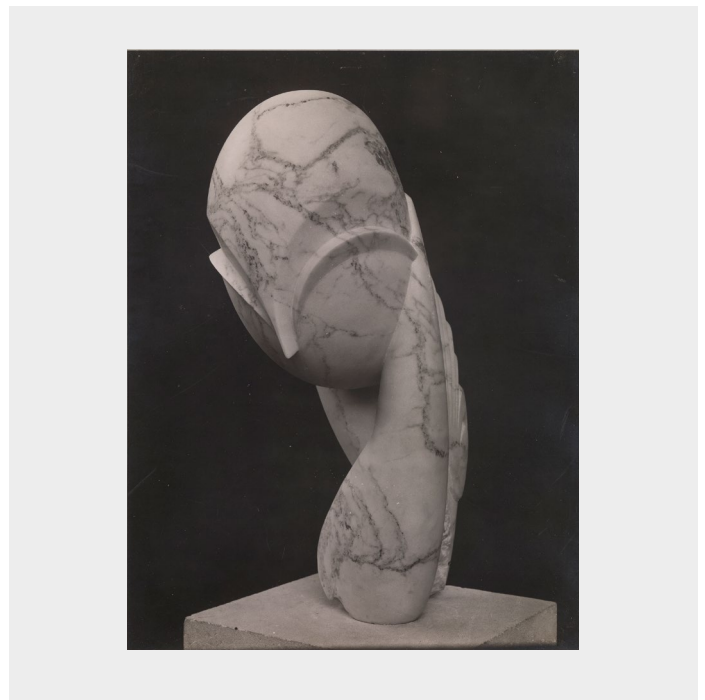
Steichen, Alfred Stieglitz and Man Ray, who helped him set up a dark room in his studio. Brancusi notably accompanied Steichen to take nocturnal shots of Rodin's *Balzac* sculpture – a formative event that fostered his experimental approach to photography.



Constantin Brancusi, *Woman Looking into a Mirror*, 1909/14  
Vintage silver gelatin print, 29.7 × 23.8 cm (11.69 × 9.37 in)

In 1917, Brancusi met John Quinn, who would become one of his most prominent collectors and, crucially, acquired most of his sculptures from photographs. This relationship initiated a shift in Brancusi's photographic practice from a spontaneous to a more systematic creative endeavour, and he only allowed the reproduction and diffusion of his own photographs of his sculptural work during his lifetime. As curator Elizabeth A. Brown writes, Brancusi believed that solely those shots 'could convey the artist's emotional exchange with his creation.'

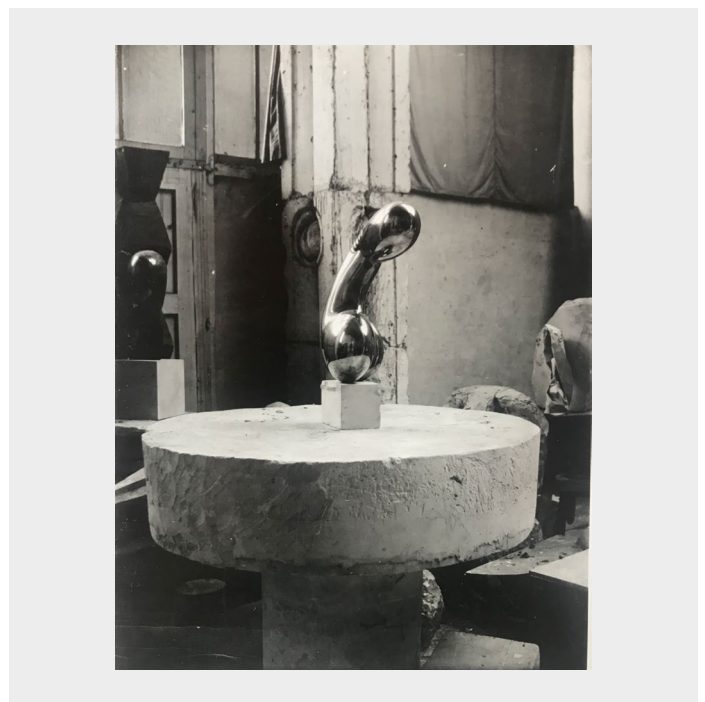
Brancusi used photography as a potent documentary tool that supported his sculpting practice. As such, the exhibition offers an invaluable insight into the remarkable development of his oeuvre, from a 1906 photograph of a naturalist bronze bust of a child – a central motif that would evince his radical purification of sculptural form – which he created whilst studying at the Beaux-Arts de Paris to outdoor shots of his monumental sculptural ensemble at Târgu Jiu in Romania (1937–38), which would become a UNESCO world heritage site. Some of his sculptures survive only as photographic likenesses, as epitomised by *Woman Looking into a Mirror* (1909/14), on view in the exhibition, which Brancusi would radically rework



Constantin Brancusi, *Mlle Pogany 11, vue de trois-quarts* \*, 1920  
Vintage silver gelatin print, 23 × 17 cm (9.06 × 6.69 in)

into the eminent sculpture *Princesse X* (1915–16; Centre Pompidou, Paris), his phallic portrait of psychoanalyst Marie Bonaparte.

Photography allowed Brancusi to sculpt light, capturing the arresting interplay of reflections on the surface of his sculptures, particularly on his signature polished bronze works exemplified by *Golden Bird* (1919). As Man Ray



Constantin Brancusi, *Princess X (Princess Marie Bonaparte)*, 1921  
Vintage silver gelatin print, 22.5 × 16.6 cm (8.86 × 6.77 in)



Constantin Brancusi, *Leda*, c. 1921  
Vintage silver gelatin print, 19.3 × 22.5 cm (7.6 × 8.86 in)

wrote in his autobiography, '[Brancusi's photographs] were out of focus, over- or underexposed, scratched and spotty. This, he said, was how his work should be reproduced. Perhaps he was right – one of his golden birds had been caught with the sunrays striking it so that a sort of aurora radiated from it, giving the work an explosive character.' Subverting photographic conventions, Brancusi generated bursts of light that lend his work a metamorphic quality and, as art critic Michel Gauthier sets forth, 'allow the sculpture to escape its strict contours, to live in space beyond itself.'

Photography also played a pivotal role in Brancusi's presentation of his sculptures, which was of utmost importance to the artist. Acutely aware of the spatiality of his sculptures as well as the synergies between them, he relentlessly staged his works in his atelier on impasse Ronsin in Paris, reconfiguring them into various 'mobile groups' that he immortalised in his photographs. In one work on view, Brancusi stages two versions of *Mlle Pogany II* in his studio – one in bronze and the other in marble – that bow

to each other atop their sculptural pedestals, as if engaging in a reverent dialogue. The photographs on display turn the viewer into a voyeur in the environment of Brancusi's workplace which becomes 'a living space for his sculptures,' as Brown writes. 'Revisiting the myth of Pygmalion, the sculptor transforms his studio into a sanctified space, a sculptural microcosm.'

Brancusi's photographs not only played a pivotal role in his sculptural oeuvre and its staging, but also constitute works of art per se. As Brown posits, 'These photographs are true portraits of works of art. Just like the most striking portraits, they reveal the different facets of the sculpture's personality and reveal its particular sensibility.' This is evidenced by a photograph of *Leda* (1920; The Art Institute of Chicago, IL), in which Brancusi masterfully captures the sensuousness of the marble's immaculate texture and seemingly transfiguring forms, breathing life into the stone through his camera. Each photograph distils the ineffable essence of its subject, down to Brancusi himself in the exhibited self-portraits.





Constantin Brancusi, *Self-Portrait*, c. 1922  
Vintage silver gelatin print, 22.9 × 17.1 cm (9.02 × 6.73 in)

### About the artist

Constantin Brancusi is considered as one of the greatest sculptors of the 20th century. He was born in Pestisani, Romania in 1876. After attending the School of Arts and Crafts in Craiova (1894–1898) and the National School of Fine Arts in Bucharest (1898–1902), Brancusi left Romania in 1904, travelling across Europe before settling in Paris, where he pursued his studies at the École des beaux-arts until 1907. Brancusi's work was noticed by Auguste Rodin at the Salon d'Automne of 1906, and the acclaimed sculptor offered him work in his studio. Their conception of sculpture would diverge; while Rodin modelled his sculptures in plaster or clay, seeking to impose form onto his material, Brancusi carved his works directly in wood or stone, striving to reveal 'the cosmic essence of matter.'

In 1913, five of Brancusi's sculptures were displayed in the Armory Show in New York and, the following year, Edward Steichen and Alfred Stieglitz organised his first solo show at the Photo-Secession Gallery in New York. In 1920, Brancusi's suggestive sculpture *Princesse X* was refused from the Salon des indépendants, where his work *L'Oiseau d'or* took pride of place nonetheless. In 1926, his *Colonne sans fin* was installed *in situ* in Steichen's garden in Voulangis. In 1928, Brancusi won a landmark case against American customs authorities, who had denied the

status of *L'Oiseau dans l'espace* as a work of art – a verdict that fundamentally redefined the categories of sculpture and art more broadly. In 1935, he was commissioned to create the monumental sculptural ensemble at Târgu Jiu in Romania (1937–38), which is inscribed as a UNESCO world heritage site. Brancusi died in Paris in 1957, bequeathing his studio and the entirety of its contents to the French state.

Brancusi has been the subject of numerous monographic exhibitions, notably at the Centre Pompidou, Paris (1995, 2011, 2024); Tate Modern, London (2004); and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2004). Exhibitions dedicated to his photographic work have been held at the Centre Pompidou in 1995 and 2011 and at the National Museum of Art of Romania in Bucharest in 2006. Brancusi's work belongs to prestigious institutional collections such as The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Art Institute of Chicago, IL; Philadelphia Museum of Art, PA; Tate, London; and Centre Pompidou, Paris, which reconstructed Brancusi's studio to house its impressive collection including more than 1600 negatives and original photographic prints by the artist.

Press release

For any enquiries:

Marcus Rothe  
Thaddaeus Ropac Paris  
[marcus.rothe@ropac.net](mailto:marcus.rothe@ropac.net)  
Telephone +33 1 42 72 99 00  
Mobile +33 6 76 77 54 15



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