

Constantin Brancusi

Photographs

13 January—21 March 2026
Opening Tuesday 13 January 2026, 6—8pm

Thaddaeus Ropac Ely House, London
37 Dover Street, London, W1S 4NJ



Left: *Woman Looking into a Mirror*, 1909–14. Vintage gelatin silver print. 29.7 × 23.8 cm (11.69 × 9.37 in).
Right: *Princess X (Princess Marie Bonaparte)*, 1921. Vintage gelatin silver print. 22.5 × 16.6 cm (8.86 × 6.77 in).

If we limit ourselves to exact reproduction, we halt the evolution of the spirit.

— Constantin Brancusi

Thaddaeus Ropac London presents the first UK exhibition dedicated to Constantin Brancusi's photographs in over two decades – and the artist's first solo exhibition in London since his landmark Tate Modern show in 2004. The exhibition brings together three decades of the Romanian artist's photographic work, the majority of which will be shown in London for the first time. In 2026, the 150th anniversary of the modernist sculptor's birth will be marked by a programme of institutional exhibitions worldwide, including *Brancusi, The Birth of Modern Sculpture* at the H'ART Museum in Amsterdam and *Constantin Brancusi*

at the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, both organised in collaboration with the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

Photography formed an integral part of Brancusi's practice, as both a documentary tool for his sculptural works, and an artistic medium in its own right. Some of Brancusi's sculptures survive only through photographs, including *Woman Looking into a Mirror* (1909–14), which was later adapted into *Princesse X* (1915–16; Centre Pompidou, Paris), his controversially phallic portrait of psychoanalyst Marie Bonaparte. In 1956, Brancusi bequeathed his entire studio to the

French State, including a significant body of photographs, which later became the focus of an exhibition presented alongside his first major retrospective in France at the Centre Pompidou in 1995.



La Table de Silence à Tîrgu Jiu, 1938.
Vintage gelatin silver print. 24.1 × 29.5 cm (9.49 × 11.61 in).

The artist began experimenting with photography following his arrival in Paris in 1904. Immersed in the city's vibrant avant-garde scene, he befriended numerous photographers including Edward Steichen, Alfred Stieglitz and Man Ray. In 1917, Brancusi met John Quinn, a prominent collector who, crucially, acquired many of his sculptures through photographs. The relationship was pivotal in transforming Brancusi's photographic practice from a spontaneous to a systematic creative endeavour; during his lifetime, he would only allow his sculptures to be reproduced with his own photographs, believing that only these images 'could convey the artist's emotional exchange with his creation,' as curator Elizabeth A. Brown has written. As such, the exhibition offers an invaluable insight into the evolution of Brancusi's sculptural language, tracing his radical purification of form – from his early *Study for Laokoon*, created while still a young student in Bucharest, to his monumental sculptural ensemble at Târgu Jiu in Romania (1937–38), which became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2024.

While Brancusi's photographs function as records of his oeuvre, they also enabled him to sculpt with light, capturing the reflections and patinas on the surfaces of his works. Through photography, he could enhance the visual impact of his sculptures. As Man Ray described in his autobiography, '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.' Brancusi generated bursts of light that lend his work a

metamorphic quality and, as art critic Michel Gauthier observes, 'allow the sculpture to escape its strict contours, to live in space beyond itself.'

The photographs on display invite the viewer into the sanctified environment of Brancusi's studio on Impasse Ronsin in Paris's 15th arrondissement, which he considered 'a living space for his sculptures,' as Brown writes. Acutely attuned to the relationships between his works and their surroundings, Brancusi continually reconfigured his sculptures into 'mobile groups' within his atelier, exploring the infinite possibilities of their arrangement and capturing their synergies through photography. In *Mlle Pogany II, marble and bronze** (1920) two versions of his sculpture *Mademoiselle Pogany* are staged so that they appear to bow towards each other, immortalised in eternal dialogue from their respective pedestals.



*Mlle Pogany II, vue de trois-quarts *, 1920.*
Vintage gelatin silver print. 23 × 17 cm (9.06 × 6.69 in).

Brancusi's photographs are 'true portraits', as Brown writes. 'Just like the most striking portraits, they reveal the different facets of the sculpture's personality and reveal its particular sensibility.' This is as evident in the photograph *Leda* (c. 1921), in which Brancusi masterfully captures the sensuousness of his marble sculpture and its corporeal forms, as it is in his *Autoportrait avec une cigarette dans le train Paris-Le Havre* (c. 1933), or even *Still Life with The Newborn, Leda and The Sorceress*

(1934), described by art historian Friedrich Teja Bach as a 'symbolic tableau' and the only version of this image known to exist today. With each photograph, Brancusi distills the ineffable essence of his subject.



Still Life with The Newborn, Leda and The Sorceress, 1934.
Unique vintage silver gelatin print. 23.9 x 18.8 cm (9.41 x 7.4 in).

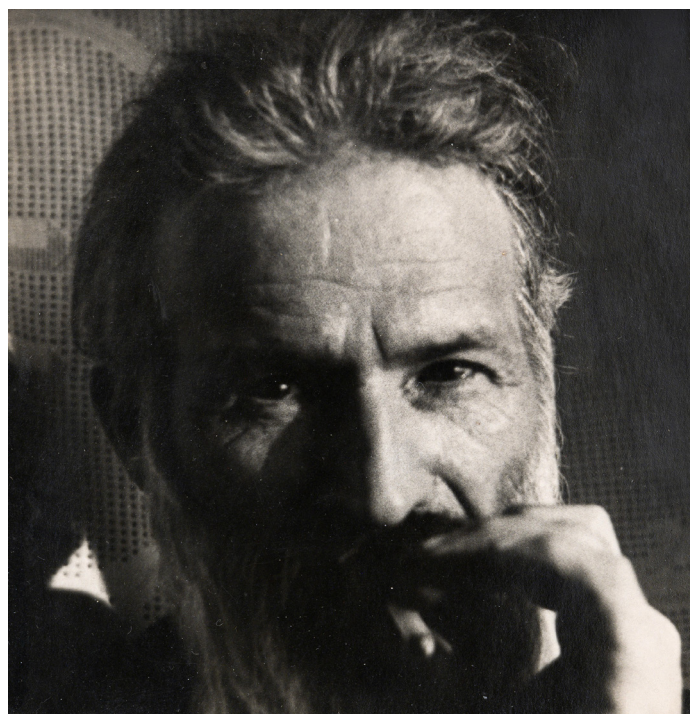
About the artist

Constantin Brancusi is considered 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 (1894–98) 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.



Autoportrait avec une cigarette dans le train Paris-Le Havre, c. 1933.
Vintage gelatin silver print. 18 x 15.5 cm (7 x 6 in).

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