
MEDARDO ROSSO

SIGHT UNSEEN

LONDON ELY HOUSE

23 Nov 2017 - 10 Feb 2018



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

23 NOVEMBER 2017 – 10 FEBRUARY 2018

Opening: Wednesday 22 November 2017, 6 - 8pm

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

Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac is pleased to present an exhibition of the works of Medardo Rosso (1858–1928), one of the founders of modern sculpture. *Medardo Rosso: Sight Unseen and his Encounters with London* is the first exhibition to focus on Rosso's relationship with London. The show features a selection of Rosso's most representative sculptures in plaster, wax and bronze, as well as rarely shown drawings and, for the first time in the UK, his own photographs of his sculptures and drawings. Presented together, these help demonstrate how Rosso created his subtle yet powerful images, where forms seem to materialize and dematerialize in relationship 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* (late 1889–90), on view at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, border on abstraction. He adopted a performative approach to sculpture by casting his bronzes in public in a theatrical *mise-en-scène*, and he invented unique exhibition strategies by installing his work alongside those of other artists.

In 1906 Rosso had a retrospective at the Eugene Cremetti Gallery, just a few doors down from Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, which the British press called "the artistic event of London today." Over 100 years later, we are pleased to present 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, *Rieuse* (early 1890s), will be on display, as will Rosso's drawings made in London, shown here together for the first time. These depict 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.

In his own time, Rosso was revered by his artistic peers as a genius, with avant-garde contemporaries such as Guillaume 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 showing his work in a contemporary context, *Sight Unseen* sheds new light on his contribution to modern sculpture and asks what today's artists can draw from his work.

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. Tony Cragg, for example, in an 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."

A new work by Cragg has been created for the exhibition, reflecting his admiration for the sculptor, and will be shown alongside Rosso's work, evoking the artist's early exhibitions juxtaposing his own sculpture alongside those of his peers.

An essay that presents new research on the sculptor's encounters with London, written by leading Rosso scholar Sharon Hecker, will be included in the exhibition catalogue, along with the conversation between Cragg and Peyton-Jones focusing on the unique qualities of this pioneering artist.

[WATCH THE EXHIBITION VIDEO](#)