

## Aristide Maillol

Aristide Maillol was born on April 8, 1861, at Banyuls in the Pyrenees, where his family lived by fishing and growing vines. This Mediterranean environment may account for his later admiration for ancient sculpture. He went to school in Banyuls and to college in Perpignan, where he copied plaster casts at the city museum. At 21 he went to Paris. His teacher at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, the painter Jean Leon Gerome, sent him on to the Ecole des Arts Decoratifs, where he was a pupil of Alexandre Cabanel for four years.

The objects of Maillol's most careful study were the pictures in the Louvre and the medieval tapestries in the Cluny museum. The paintings of his contemporaries Pierre Puvis de Chavannes and Paul Gauguin gave direction to his own painting and pointed out to him the need for the decorative elements to predominate in a work of art. He decided to manufacture tapestries and to that end started a small studio in Banyuls, employing village girls on the weaving and using home-made dyes. Gauguin admired a tapestry of his shown in Brussels in 1894 with *Les XX* and later in Paris.

Maillol moved to Paris in 1895 and settled three years afterwards in Villeneuve-Saint-Georges. He had great difficulty in making a living, until friends recommended him to a wealthy patron, who commissioned several tapestries. During their fabrication Maillol's eyesight weakened and for several months he was completely blind. In order to save the strain on his eyes, he turned instead to sculpture, producing carvings and terracottas that at first reflected, then reacted against, the style of Auguste Rodin.

In about 1900 the painter Edouard Vuillard brought his friend Ambroise Vollard to Villeneuve-Saint-Georges. The young dealer bought some sculptures, which he then had cast in bronze, and in 1902 organized a Maillol exhibition in Paris, at which Rodin acquired a bronze figurine and the *Leda* was sold to the critic Octave Mirbeau. Maillol began to show regularly at the Paris Salon d'Automne and attracted attention which sometimes took the form of virulent criticism. His entry for a competition in 1903 for a monument to the writer Emile Zola was rejected in favor of Constantin Meunier's.

In 1908, with his German friend and patron Count Kessler, Maillol traveled to Greece by way of Naples and Pompeii. This journey reinforced his feelings for early Greek art, very evident in the version of *Pomona* that he submitted to the Salon d'Automne of 1910. He then received the commission for a monument to Cezanne.

His work was interrupted by World War I when, through his association with Count Kessler, he was accused, though not convicted, of spying. His large post war commemorative statues include a monument to the dead of Banyuls. He also spent some time in later life producing woodcut and lithograph illustrations to Latin authors. He died in October, 1944, after a road accident near Banyuls.

Maillol's sculpture was closely related to the female human form, which he represented in simple, solid, basic volumes, never allowing his instinct for decorative line to predominate. Renoir, who took to sculpture late in life, was influenced by him, just as he had been influenced by Renoir's paintings.

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