



American Federation of Arts

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FIRST MAJOR SURVEY OF ELIE NADELMAN IN TWENTY YEARS ON U.S. TOUR

Elie Nadelman: Classical Folk
The Marion Koogler McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, Texas
June 12–August 19, 2001
The Frick Art Museum, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
September 21–December 20, 2001

To interpret the charm of life, often at its most fragile and shifting— by inflexible and solid physical laws— here is the definition of art. — Elie Nadelman

(February 2001) *Elie Nadelman: Classical Folk*, the first major survey of the artist in over two decades, opens to the public on June 12, 2001, at The Marion Koogler McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, where it remains on view through August 19, 2001. The exhibition will be presented at The Frick Art Museum, Pittsburgh, from September 21 to December 20, 2001. Including 46 figural sculptures and 22 drawings, the exhibition highlights the work of Elie Nadelman (1882–1946) during his years in the United States (1914–1946), a mature phase during which he arrived at his distinct synthesis of traditional and popular sources.

The exhibition is organized by the American Federation of Arts.

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Guest curator Suzanne Ramljak, editor of *Metalsmith* magazine and formerly an AFA curator, has selected sculptures in various mediums, including bronze, marble, wood, ceramic, *galvano-plastique*, papier-mâché, and plaster, with several sculptures represented in more than one medium and scale to demonstrate Nadelman's artistic process and facility in transforming subjects through varied formal treatments. In addition, a selection of drawings underscores his schematic handling of the human body. The works will be arranged in subject groupings, such as dancers or figure busts, allowing comparisons of similar works.

Born in Poland in 1882, Nadelman lived in various cities throughout Europe, including ten years in Paris, until settling in the United States in 1914, where he remained until his death in 1946. It was during his years in America that Nadelman developed his unique style, in which he applied the aesthetic formulae he developed in Europe to subjects drawn from American society and popular culture. This balancing act that Nadelman performed between the classical and the contemporary lies at the root of his art. Avis Berman, writer and art historian, describes the hybrid nature of Nadelman's work in the accompanying exhibition catalogue, writing: "He dignified and monumentalized everyday life by drawing on models from the classical past and then energized it by incorporating motion and the primal, uninflated forms of folklore, such as utilitarian crafts and popular theatre, for a new visual forthrightness in sculpture."

Although friends with many avant-garde artists of the day, including Marcel Duchamp, Nadelman worked against the modernist narrative, remaining dedicated to classicism, as seen in the marble bust *Woman's Head (Goddess)* (1916). However, Nadelman was able to complement the structural principles of antiquity with his interpretation of modern life, as evident in *Man in the Open Air* (1915), a work retaining the contour and silhouette typically found in Greek sculpture but updated by the addition of a contemporary bowler hat and bowtie.

During his years in the United States, Nadelman developed a deep appreciation for American folk art. In 1917, he began carving regularly in wood and applying gesso to suggest flesh and clothing, giving the work a directness and immediacy reminiscent of American folk sculpture, as in *Orchestra Leader* (c. 1919). Nadelman also paid a subtle tribute to the skills of European craftsmen with his use of a "joined wood" technique, whereby the figures were not carved from a solid piece of wood but, rather, assembled from segments of wood glued together, and then carved. Nadelman often chose subjects that allowed him to capture an expressive moment in time and demonstrate his belief in the power of form. His appreciation of popular art and entertainment led him to concentrate on dancers and performers as preferred subjects for his art. *Dancer (High Kicker)* (c. 1918–19) and *Female Dancer* (c. 1920) are both enlivened figures caught in motion, yet they maintain a grace and composure achieved through curves and convex forms, indicative of Nadelman's commitment to an art of formal harmony.

During the last decade of his life Nadelman produced hundreds of plaster figurines, presumably for broad distribution. These figurines, little known and rarely seen, draw comparison to terra-cotta Tanagra figurines from the Hellenistic period in Greece, with their combination of classical motifs and everyday poses and fashions. Their doll-like, cherubic quality and demonstrative gestures illustrate Nadelman's refusal to rigidly separate high from low art.

Ramljak states, "The exhibition will reveal Nadelman's synthesis of diverse sources—past and present, traditional and modern, high and low, classical and folk—and his ability to endow his sculptures with an expressive life, at once accessible and refined."

PUBLICATION

A fully illustrated catalogue accompanies the exhibition. It features a major essay by Suzanne Ramljak on Nadelman's sculptural achievement in the context of the classical figure tradition. Also included is an essay by Avis Berman examining Nadelman's involvement with folk art and popular culture and his establishment of the first museum of folk art in America in 1926; an essay by Valerie Fletcher, Curator of Sculpture, Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, detailing Nadelman's sculptural materials and processes; an essay by writer and curator Klaus Kertess discussing Nadelman's late plasters as precursors to the aesthetic transformations in figurative sculpture that followed World War II; and a detailed illustrated chronology of the artist's biography and artistic milieu by the artist's granddaughter, Cynthia Nadelman. *Elie Nadelman: Classical Folk* is published by the American Federation of Arts. Approximately 136 pages, 10 x 11 ½ inches, approximately 70 colorplates, 106 halftones; hardcover \$29.95.

AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS

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