



## **Gaston Lachaise (Paris 1882 - New York 1935)**

### **The Knees**

Circa: 1932-33

In the view of art historian Winslow Ames, Gaston Lachaise's "marble Knees ... is the most fully simplified of all [his] works and is almost purely abstraction. The whole object has become a symbol" (W. Ames, "Gaston Lachaise 1882-1935," *Parnassus*, vol. VIII, no. 3, March 1936, p. 7). The white marble sculpture was commissioned in May 1932 by Edward M.M. Warburg at the insistence of his friend Lincoln Kirstein; both men were among Lachaise's most important patrons in the early 1930s. The present work is based on a plaster model [LF 174] made by Lachaise by 1932, now owned by the Lachaise Foundation in New York. That model, in turn, is an enlarged version of a three-inch-high plaster fragment [LF 281], also owned by the Lachaise Foundation, and which Lachaise had extracted from one of his statuettes. Lachaise often edited his earlier sculptures in unusual, arresting ways, creating new works intended to condense and intensify the composition's immediate impact on the viewer while inviting prolonged contemplation.

Lachaise carved *The Knees* without assistance, and, according to him, work was "progressing" by mid-December and completed on January 31, 1933. Before delivering the marble sculpture to Warburg, he displayed it on a black marble base in February in the window of the Kraushaar Galleries, New York, where, in his words, it looked "superb." (Letters from Lachaise to his wife on December 11, 1932, January 31, 1933, and February 13, 1933, Gaston Lachaise collection, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library). Towards the end of the year, *The Knees* was prominently displayed in Warburg's elegant new apartment, at Beekman Place, New York, which had been designed by architect Philip Johnson.

In 1946, Lachaise's widow ordered a bronze cast to be made from Lachaise's plaster model of The Knees for the important exhibition of Lachaise's art at New York's Knoedler Galleries the following year. That unique bronze cast was sold to a collector shortly after the show had closed, and is now owned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The limbs are more expansively arranged in the plaster model, and the bronze copy, than in the carving, in which the composition fits neatly within the confines of the stone block. This telling difference indicates that the plaster model was not made from the present sculpture, and instead, served only as a general guide for Lachaise when carving this work in stone.

#### CONDITION REPORT:

The work is affixed to its marble base which appears original to the artist's execution and exhibits a few scattered nicks and small losses. Minor surface dirt in the crevices and a few small, scattered accretions. The work appears overall structurally stable.

#### Exhibitions

New York, C.W. Kraushaar Galleries, February 1933.

Philadelphia, Philadelphia Art Alliance, Gaston Lachaise: Architectural and Smaller Sculptures, October 27-November 17, 1933.

New York, Museum of Modern Art, Gaston Lachaise: Retrospective Exhibition, January 30-March 7, 1935, p. 27, no. 54, illustrated.

New York, Museum of Modern Art, Recent American Acquisitions, March 14-April 30, 1957, p. 4.

New York, Museum of Modern Art, Paintings, Sculpture, and Graphic Arts from the Museum Collection, April 30, 1957-February 17, 1958.

New York, Museum of Modern Art, on loan, July 2, 1959-October 26, 1962.

New York, Museum of Modern Art, Paintings, Sculpture, and Graphic Art from the Museum Collection, October 26, 1962-November 8, 1963.

New York, Museum of Modern Art, Painting and Sculpture from the Museum Collection, July 2, 1964-April 7, 1969.

New York, Museum of Modern Art, Painting and Sculpture from the Museum Collection, December 21, 1971-January 2, 1973.

New York, Museum of Modern Art, Permanent Collection, October 17, 1979-March 17, 1980.

#### Literature:

C.H. Bonte, "In Gallery and Studio: ... Alliance has Gaston Lachaise Sculpture ...," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 29, 1933, p. 9.

L. Eglinton, "Lachaise Survives Current Retrospective with Honor,"

Art News, vol. XXXIII, no. 19, February 9, 1935, p. 4, illustrated.

P. Johnson, "Simplicity in the Home of an Art Lover," House & Garden, vol. LXVII, no. 1, January 1935, pp. 22-23, illustrated.

W. Ames, "Gaston Lachaise 1882-1935," Parnassus, vol. VIII, no. 3, March 1936, p. 7.

M. Knoedler & Co., Gaston Lachaise, 1882-1935, exhibition catalogue, New York, 1947, p. 18, no. 36.

A.H. Barr, Jr., "Painting and Sculpture: Recent Acquisitions, July 1, 1955 through December 31, 1956," Museum of Modern Art Bulletin, vol. XXIV, no. 4, Summer 1957, pp. 18, 37, no. 1289, illustrated.

H. Kramer, The Sculpture of Gaston Lachaise, New York, 1967, p. 49, no. 66, illustrated.

D.B. Goodall, "Gaston Lachaise, Sculptor," Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1969, vol. I, pp. 137, 661n23; vol. II, pp. 317-28 448, pl. CXXXIX, illustrated.

G. Nordland, Gaston Lachaise, The Man and His Work, New York, 1974, pp. 151-52, fig. 85, illustrated.

A.H. Barr, Jr., Painting and Sculpture in the Museum of Modern Art, 1929-1967, New York, 1977, pp. 253, 577, illustrated.

E.M.M. Warburg, As I Recall: Some Memoirs, 1978, p. 64, illustrated.

J. Hobhouse, The Bride Stripped Bare: The Artist and the Nude in the Twentieth Century, London, 1988, pp. 193, 195, pl. 165, illustrated.

S. Hunter, Lachaise, New York, 1993, pp. 181, 244, illustrated.

N.F. Weber, Patron Saints: Five Rebels Who Opened America to a New Art, 1928-1943, New York, 1992, pp. 208, 239, 240, 356.

American Sculpture in the Metropolitan Museum of Art: A Catalogue of Works by Artists Born between 1865 and 1885, vol. II, New York, 2001, p. 687, no. 324.

J. Day, J. Stenger, K. Fremin, N. Khandekar, V. Budny, Gaston Lachaise, Characteristics of His Bronze Sculpture, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2012, pp. 56n37, 66nM.

Sponsored by the Lachaise Foundation, Virginia Budny's forthcoming catalogue raisonné will include The Knees as LF 195.