

MIT List Center

Jacques Lipchitz

Though he ceaselessly experimented with new styles, the Lithuanian-born artist Jacques Lipchitz never relinquished traditional methods or subject matter. *Bather* from the early 1920s was his first life-sized sculpture. It addresses a time-honored subject through the avant-garde lens of cubism.

Here, the bather's thick geometric body emerges from an unbroken solid block, much like an Egyptian statue. Deborah Rothschild, Curator Emerita of Williams College Museum of Art, notes how Lipchitz offers hints of the figure's humanity despite the bather's ambiguous and fractured forms.

The more one looks, the more alive and human the sculpture becomes. On the right, we see an eye, and as we move around the piece, the head with wavy hair, neck, shoulder, and arm come into view. Below, we see feet and knees in a classical contrapposto stance. The *derriere* is pulled around so that it sits where the hips should be.

Typical of Lipchitz is the way that we see a different figure from each angle. We cannot predict where the back will be from looking at the front.

Yet Lipchitz's sculpture somehow remains orderly.

The *Bather* has been a staple of Western art, affording a rationale for the commonly male viewer's delectation of the nude female body. It is amusing to think of this clumsy mass of blocky forms in terms of a new, luscious bather who arouses desire.