

MIT List Center

Pablo Picasso

A dominant figure in 20th century European art, Pablo Picasso made more than 600 sculptures throughout his lifetime. Figure découpée, which literally means cut-out figure, began as a drawing from a series of pen and ink notebook sketches Picasso did of owls and birds in flight. Picasso turned these into a maquette in 1958 and with Picasso's enthusiastic approval, Norwegian artist Carl Nesjar here transformed Picasso's design into this concrete sculpture installed at MIT in 1975.

At the time, Nesjar was a visiting artist at MIT Center for Advanced Visual Studies. This is made by making a cast of concrete, and then it's engraved by sandblasting to the precise designs of Picasso from this earlier drawing. It is really a drawing made into monumental form. It's a planar sculpture. It doesn't really have a back.

Picasso and Nesjar first met in 1957. And by 1975, Nesjar had transformed 27 of Picasso's designs into concrete sculptures.

Nesjar studied prehistoric cave art of France and Spain, and that knowledge of prehistoric techniques contributed to the evolution of this concrete engineering, and of course, would have appealed to Picasso greatly, who loved the primordial and the primitive his entire career.