

# CONNER·ROSENKRANZ

19th & 20th Century American Sculpture

L.L.C.



## Saul Baizerman (1889-1957)

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Born in Vitebsk, Russia, Saul Baizerman was motivated to become a sculptor from an early age. Discouraged by his teachers, however, the young and idealistic Baizerman turned instead to politics, becoming an active member of the Bolshevik movement. After spending a year and a half in an Odessa prison for having helped rob a bank in order to finance the cause, Baizerman managed to escape and emigrate to the United States in 1910. The following year he renewed his interest in art, taking classes at the National Academy of Design, the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design (under Solon Borglum) and at the Educational Alliance, where he became acquainted with Moses Soyer and Chaim Gross. Having gained technical proficiency, Baizerman taught sculpture, drawing and anatomy classes at the Baizerman Art School in New York City from 1934 to 1940. After 1940 he also occasionally taught

at the American Artists School in New York and the University of Southern California.

While Baizerman's reputation was founded on his human-scale works in hammered copper, the small-scale *The City and the People* series was to become his most ambitious and long-lived project. In fact, it would be one that he would continue to work on until his death in 1957. Begun in the early 1920s, this series of approximately 56 small works—generally four to eight inches in height—was originally carved in plaster and then cast in bronze. The final stage required the artist to rework the surface with hammers and awls, thus making each figure unique. *The Unemployed*, *Man with Shovel* and *Digger* are among the earliest works in the series, having been modeled in 1920 and cast in 1925. Like his copper sculptures, Baizerman's process of hammering each work—a laborious task—has been likened to the actions of the labor



*DIGGER*, 1921-1923, bronze, 4  $\frac{7}{8}$  inches high (excl. base), private collection



*MAN WITH SHOVEL*, 1921-1923, bronze, 5  $\frac{1}{4}$  inches high (excl. base), private collection



*THE UNEMPLOYED*, 1921-1923, bronze, 5  $\frac{3}{8}$  inches high (excl. base), private collection

classes that he ardently supported throughout his career. These figures, defined by their simple contours and smooth planes tend to fall into two categories. The first is the active laborer, identified by Baizerman's use of rigid rectilinear forms, as in *Man with Shovel* and *Digger*. The second, by contrast, consists of heavily rounded figures as in *The Unemployed*. Referencing his social activism in Russia, this series of manual laborers and the urban poor reflects his lifelong commitment to the labor movement.

Although conceived serially, these works were often exhibited individually or in small groups. In most cases each bronze was mounted on a high black marble base. It is unclear how many casts were made of each model, although the number of replicas is presumed to be small. Over 40 of the figures can be found in the collection of the Hirshhorn Museum of Art in Washington, D.C. including examples of *Man with Shovel* and *Digger*. *Man with Sack*, a plaster figure in the collection of the Weatherspoon Art Museum at the University of North Carolina, illustrates the first step in Baizerman's artistic process.

*The City and the People* was first exhibited in London in 1924, followed by a second solo show in Paris in 1925. A studio fire in 1931 destroyed many of the plasters for *The City and the People* along with a number of his large-scale copper works, causing Baizerman to cease work until 1933. That year, Baizerman received his first American solo exhibition showing figures from *The City and the People* at the Eighth Street Gallery in Manhattan. The final exhibition of the series during his lifetime was a solo show at the New Gallery in New York in 1954. Envisioned as characters populating an abstract Manhattan, these figures and their imagined habitat reflect the artist's perception of the anonymity and hardships faced daily by the urban working class.

Kaylee Alexander, June 2014

Selected References:

Dabakis, Melissa. *Vision of Harmony: The Sculpture of Saul Baizerman*. New York: Black Swan Books, Ltd., 1989.

Dreishpoon, Douglas. *Saul Baizerman's Lifetime Project: The City and the People*. Greensboro, NC: Weatherspoon Art Gallery, 1998.

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*Man With Sack*, n.d.  
Plaster  
34 x 57 in, 86.36 x 144.78 cm  
Gift of Irene Worth, 1991  
1991.4291  
Weatherspoon Art Museum  
University of North Carolina