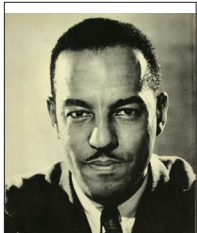


CONNER·ROSENKRANZ

19th & 20th Century American Sculpture

L.L.C.



Richmond Barthé (1901-1989)

Barthé left his birthplace of Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, in 1924 to attend the Art Institute of Chicago, where he began his studies in painting. Three years later, he produced his first sculpture and exhibited two pieces in the Chicago Women's Club's Negro in Art Week. In 1929 and 1930 he received the Julius Rosenwald Fellowship to continue his studies in New York City. During the 1930s and 1940s, Richmond Barthé was the most widely exhibited and honored artist associated with the Harmon Foundation, a philanthropic enterprise founded in 1922 to recognizing African-American achievements in visual arts and other creative endeavors. Barthé also exhibited in the cooperative show at Delphic Studios in 1935. He showed in private galleries and group exhibitions including the Whitney Museum annuals of 1933, 1940, 1944 and 1945, the Metropolitan Museum of Art's "Artists for Victory" in 1942, and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts' annual exhibitions of 1938, 1940, 1943, 1944 and 1948.

His first solo exhibitions took place in New York at Caz-Delbos Gallery in 1931 and 1933, and were followed by solo exhibitions at Arden Gallery in 1939, DePorres Inter-Racial Center in 1941 and the International Print Society in 1945. In a review of his first solo, Edward Alden Jewell, art critic for the *New York Times* commented, "Richmond Barthé penetrates far beneath the surface, honestly seeking essentials, and never, after finding these essentials, stooping to polish off an interpretation with superficial allure. There is no cleverness, no damaging slickness in this sculpture. Some of the readings deserve,



HEAD OF A DANCER: HARALD KREUTZBERG, c. 1933, bronze, signed © 8 BARTHE (rear), 12 ½ inches high, Blanton Museum of Art, University of Texas.

indeed, to be called profound." Barthé was a prolific artist whose subjects ranged from portrait heads of theatrical celebrities and public figures to studies of black folk life and dancers from different cultural backgrounds.

In later years, Barthé summed up his objectives as an attempt to "capture the beauty that I've seen in people, and abstraction



The Blackberry Woman, 1932, bronze, 33 ¾ inches high, Whitney Museum of American Art, NY



Black Madonna, 1961, painted terra-cotta, 6 inches high, private collection.



Boxer, 1942, bronze, 18 ¼ inches high, Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY

wouldn't satisfy me . . . My work is all wrapped up with my search for God. I am looking for God inside of people. I wouldn't find it in squares, triangles and circles." Many of his sculptures deal specifically with religious subject matter, but a spiritual quality can be found in other works such as *Feral Benga*, Barthé's 1937 evocative depiction of the Senegalese dancer who lived and worked in Paris in the the 1930s. In 1937-38, under the U.S. Treasury Art Project, Barthé completed large scale bas-reliefs on themes from the popular play *Green Pastures* for the Harlem River Houses. In 1940, he received the first of two Guggenheim Fellowships and, in 1945, under the sponsorship of the sculptor Malvina Hoffman, was elected to the National Sculpture Society. Barthé was active in several artists' organizations—the Liturgical Arts Society, the International Print Society and the New York Clay Club. A great deal of his energies went into organizing the Sculptors Guild and participating in its exhibitions, including their group showing at the 1939 New York World's Fair, in which he exhibited the life-size *Mother*

and Son. In 1949, he was elected to the National Academy of Arts and Letters. Although this latest honor should have cemented his career, the number of his exhibitions declined in the late 1940s.

The rise of a school of radically abstract sculptors at the end of World War II effectively assigned Barthé to a sculptural tradition of the past. In 1951, Barthé moved to Jamaica where he remained through the early 1960s, then settled in California until the end of his life.

Transcribed and edited from Reynolds, Gary A. and Beryl J. Wright. *Against the Odds: African-American Artists and the Harmon Foundation*. Newark Museum, New Jersey, 1989, p.154.