

CONNER • ROSENKRANZ

19th & 20th Century American Sculpture

L.L.C.



Jo Davidson (1883-1952)

Jo Davidson was born to Russian Jews who immigrated to New York's Lower East Side in the 1880s. As a boy, he received some art instruction at the Educational Alliance, but his father, a rabbi, made it clear he would not approve of a art for his career. When Jo moved to New Haven to live with his sister and her physician husband, it was ostensibly to prepare to study at the Yale School of Medicine. His path was redirected when a Yale professor who arranged for him to take art classes at the university. Upon discovering the clay bin in the basement of the art department, he was immediately attracted to the medium and his course was set.

Upon returning to New York, Davidson studied at the Art Students League and worked as an assistant to sculptor Hermon Atkins MacNeil. In 1905 he received his first commission, for a small figure of David, and with a grant from the attorney for whom he had made the sculpture, he went to Paris the following year. There he fell under the spell of

Auguste Rodin, whose treatment of the figure Davidson found to be a revelation. Following Rodin's approach, Davidson sought to model the figure as if it were moving through space and to use the female nude, for example *Eve* (1908), and fragments of the figure as vehicles to evoke strong emotion.

Between 1909 and 1913 Davidson's had five shows, all but one exclusively his sculptures. He exhibited in London, Paris, New York, and Chicago, and in 1913 he participated in the groundbreaking Armory Show in New York, and had a small role in helping to organize it. Prior to the outbreak of World War I, Davidson completed more than thirty portraits and portrait figures, among them Gertrude Whitney's daughter, Flora, fellow artist John Marin, and gallery owner and photographer Alfred Stieglitz.

The portrait became Davidson's primary focus, and when the United States entered the war in 1917, he produced a group of fourteen portraits of European and American leaders who participated in the Paris Peace Conference. He divided his time between France and New York, a pattern he continued for much of his life. During the next twenty years, the powerful, the wealthy, and the talented were literally at Davidson's fingertips. During these decades he completed well over one hundred portraits. Government and financial leaders, including Franklin D. Roosevelt, Fiorello LaGuardia, and Andrew Mellon; radical labor leaders Andrew Furuseth and Mother Jones; Carl Sandburg, George Bernard Shaw, Ignace Paderewski, Will Rogers, Albert Einstein—all sat for Jo Davidson between 1920 and 1939.



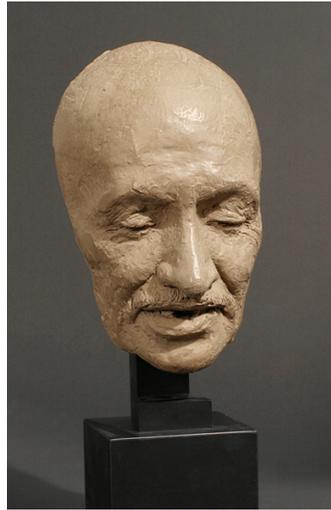
EVE, 1908, marble, 17 ¼ inches wide, Conner • Rosenkranz



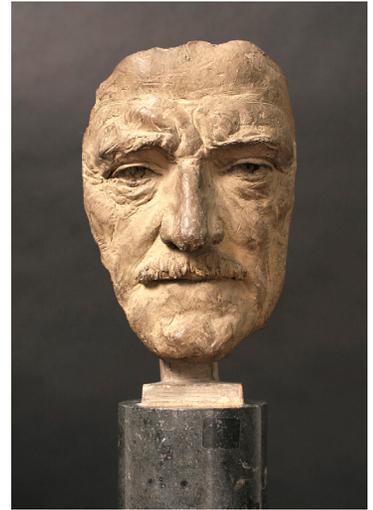
MASK OF V. K. WELLINGTON KOO, 1920, terra-cotta, 8 inches high, Conner • Rosenkranz



MASK OF ROBINSON JEFFERS, 1930, terra-cotta, 9 3/8 inches high, private collection.



MASK OF MAHATMA GANDHI, 1931, terra-cotta, 9 inches high, Conner • Rosenkranz



MASK OF GENERAL JOHN J. PERSHING, 1919, terra-cotta, 8 1/8 inches high, Conner • Rosenkranz

Forced to leave France during the Second World War, Davidson returned to the United States and bought a farm in Lahaska, Pennsylvania. Stone Court Farm was located in the beautiful countryside of Bucks County, a setting he described as “a Poussin landscape.” He adapted an old stone barn as a studio, and when he was not working, he entertained a steady stream of visitors. His first project at the farm studio was the *Third Inaugural Medal* for Franklin D. Roosevelt, whose head Davidson had modeled at the White House in 1933. Portraits of Helen Keller, Vice-President Henry Wallace, the writer Van Wyck Brooks were made over the nine years Davidson owned Stone Court.

After selling the Pennsylvania farm, Jo spent more time in New York and returned often to France. Over the few years left to him, Davidson made portraits of General Dwight D. Eisenhower and he traveled to Israel to model portraits of Israel’s first leaders. He died in France in 1952.

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