



# LACCHIAISE

FINDLAY GALLERIES

gaston  
**LACHAISE**

1882-1935

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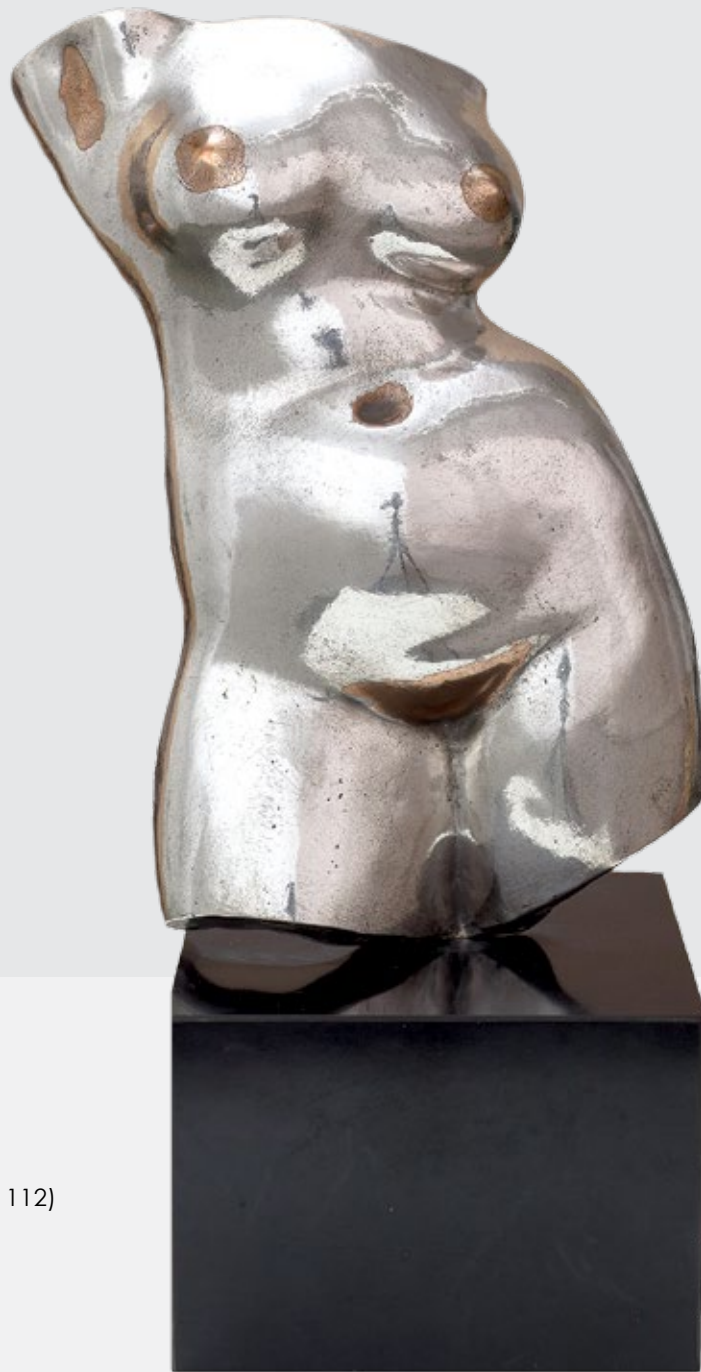
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NOW, I AM QUIET, CONTEMPLATING THE HOURS SPENT NEAR  
YOU, AND THE HOURS THAT ARE TO COME, MON AIMÉE, AND THE  
DESIRE TO THINK OF WORKING TO SEIZE IN MYSELF THAT WHICH I  
GET FROM THINKING OF YOU OF THE BEAUTY OF YOUR THOUGHTS,  
WHICH STAYS WITH ME AND WHICH RISES IN ME LIKE THE SUN.

— GASTON LACHAISE, 1910



***Ogunquit Torso*, 1925 (LF 112)**

bronze

10 x 6 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 2 inches

Edition 2/4

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# GASTON LACHAISE

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## Woman

By: Paula Hornbostel

Gaston Lachaise (1882-1935) was a modern sculptor arising out of the tradition of Matisse, Maillol and Rodin. He left Europe on the heels of a woman, whom he put on a pedestal, as Louise Bourgeois observed, both literally and figuratively. His influences include ancient Hindu, Greek and Egyptian sculpture, as well as that of Brancusi. Pursuing his own singular vision of Woman, Lachaise produced some of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most iconic modern sculptures.

Lachaise met Isabel Dutaud Nagle (photo on next page) when he was about 21. Exiting the École des Beaux-Arts, tired of “soulless reminiscences of classics,” he saw a “majestic” woman strolling beside the bank of the Seine. She was American, ten years older than Lachaise, married and with a young son. Lachaise proceeded to meet her—at the Louvre, or perhaps the Musée Cluny. The two fell in love, sharing a passion for poetry and dance, his art and her poetry. The artist had found his muse. “You are the goddess I seek to express in all my work...I am profoundly happy working—it is like caressing your body.”<sup>1</sup>

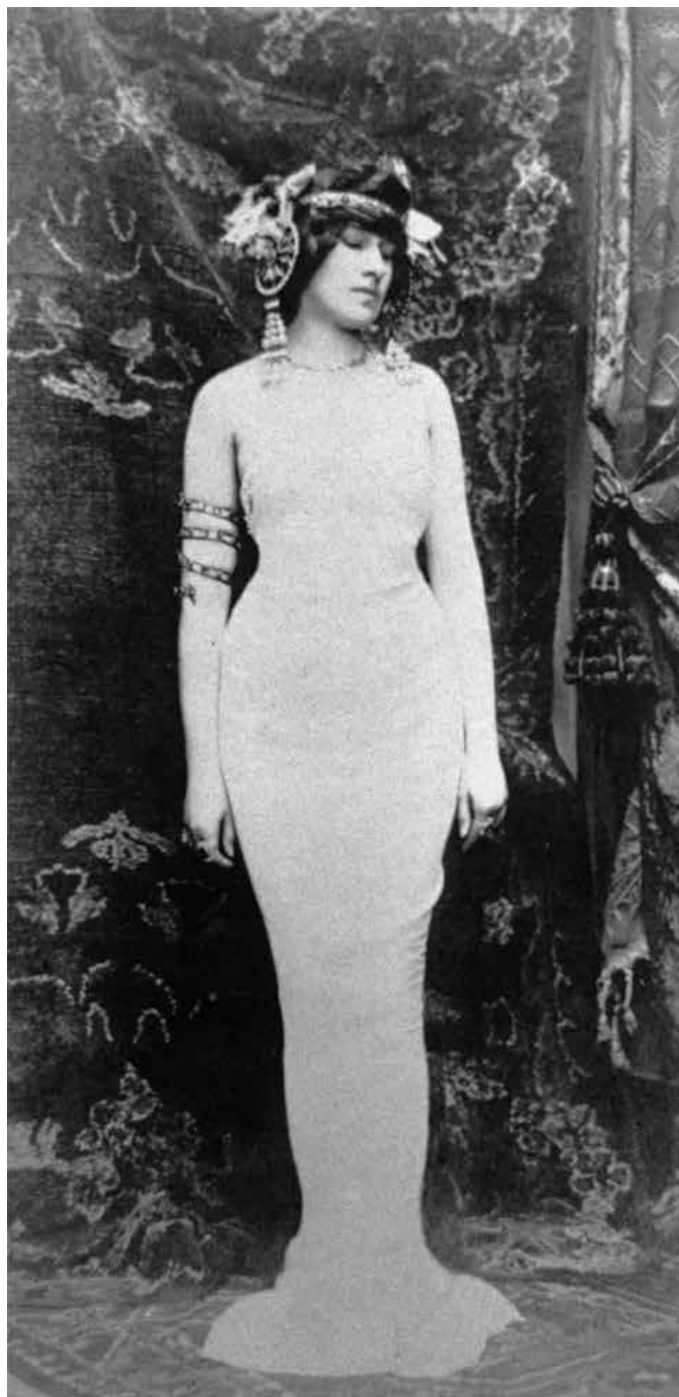
Lachaise wished to follow Isabel to America. He left the Beaux-Arts to work for René Lalique in Paris, gaining metal-working skills, exposure to Art Nouveau and money for the passage. In America, far from the Louvre's *Venus de Milo*, and Rodin's *Balzac*, Lachaise would create “a new Venus,”<sup>2</sup> a celebration of American women, specifically Isabel, whose body and being inform the majority of his oeuvre.

After six years in Boston, Lachaise moved to New York in 1912. Before long, he began working for Paulanship. At the end of his working day, he would retire to his own studio, staying up late, “his sleeves rolled up, his dungarees heavy with dust, the place suffused with the chill odor of marble and granite dust.”<sup>3</sup> He recorded 19-20 hour days, producing statuette after statuette, relief after relief and countless drawings. Looking back, Lachaise wrote, “‘Woman,’ as a vision sculptured, began to move, vigorously, robustly, walking, alert, lightly, radiating sex and soul.”<sup>4</sup>

*Dancing Woman* c. 1915 is an important life-time cast from his first years in New York, and reveals the influence of Art Nouveau on his work. This may be a portrait of Isabel doing a Hindu dance, synthesizing the styles of Isadora Duncan or Ruth St. Denis, both of whom Lachaise had seen perform. The statuette exudes joy. From all angles her pose is defined by rhythm and grace. A diaphanous cloth clings to the woman's body, while beads drape to perfectly frame her young breasts. The gold leaf patina made this an exquisite wedding present from the artist to his niece.

Works from this period are defined by elegance and workmanship. These qualities become increasingly streamlined to reflect Brancusian simplicity and purity of form. *Standing Woman*, c. 1918 is a modern statuette described as “at once emotional and poetic” in *Vanity Fair*, 1920. A similar work, nickel-plated *Standing Nude*, c. 1915-17 belonged to Alfred Stieglitz and is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. E.E. Cummings described these small but potent nudes: “in the sumptuousness of certain of his perfectly sensuous exquisitely modulated vase-like [sic] nudes we have felt something pleasantly akin to what are known as the least imperfect specimens of Chinese art.”<sup>5</sup> Many of his sculptures depict motion, and dynamic energy, such as *Woman Walking With Outstretched Arms (Forward)* c. 1917 and *Standing Figure*, n.d.

The sleek and voluptuous *Torso of Elevation* (Front Cover, Back Inside Cover), 1912-1927 was made in 1934, a fragment of the larger sculpture *Elevation*. The culmination of Lachaise's early work in New York, this life-size sculpture of a nude woman was first exhibited behind a velvet curtain in 1918. The reviewer, Henry McBride, was struck by her: “air of exuberance, of exaltation, of expansiveness...the Lachaise “Woman”...seemed a priestess from another planet...at least early-Egyptian, early-Arabian, or at least pre-Greek! ...I left the gallery firmly convinced I had seen a masterpiece.”<sup>6</sup> Lachaise presented *Torso of Elevation* in his 1935 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art. The work is exquisite, a fragment and yet wholly its own. Six casts of the edition of seven are in museums around the world. The twenties brought Coolidge Prosperity, commissions and



ISABEL DUTAUD NAGLE | STUDIO OF JEAN AGÉLOU | PARIS, C. 1902

some of Lachaise's best personal work. He was a director of the Independent Society of Artists and exhibited at the finest galleries: Bourgeois, Kraushaar, Weyhe, Stieglitz, and Brummer. He made a frieze for the AT&T building, a seagull for the Coastguard, radiator caps for cars, and portraits—a veritable Who's Who of the avant garde, including Edward Warburg, Lincoln Kirstein and, E.E. Cummings, John Marin, Alfred Stieglitz, and Georgia O'Keeffe.

*Egyptian Head*, 1922, is an idealized portrait of Isabel with an Egyptian theme and shows Lachaise's command of his materials. Absolute serenity radiates from her every polished pore, with a darker patina denoting her elegant hairstyle. Her contemplative mood recalls Odilon Redon's *Yeux Clos*, 1890 (Musée d'Orsay). Her effect is dream-like. One can watch her grow more beautiful until finally her image resides within the viewer. One reviewer from 1928 wrote, "[W]hat subtle beauty Lachaise has discovered in the muscles of the neck, how much he has done with the eyes. The piece has those qualities which led one very recent writer to speak of Lachaise's 'slow arrow of beauty.'"<sup>7</sup>

In line with his graceful representations of women, Lachaise made striking animal sculptures. The remarkable, "structurally lithe"<sup>8</sup> *Dolphin Fountain*, 1924, shows Lachaise at his finest, using animals "to translate spiritual forces,"<sup>9</sup> and producing a staggeringly beautiful composition. There are two casts of this work, both made during the artist's lifetime. One was purchased by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney; the other is the present cast. William Zorach explains how in the "rhythmic arabesque of 15 swimming and vaulting dolphins... the dolphins tend to carry the eye out of the group...the tails and fins carry the eye back again. The movement is perpetual and the total rhythm is built up from an infinite variety of lesser rhythms."<sup>10</sup>

Despite all the commissions, Lachaise struggled to meet Isabel's needs. After the crash of 1929, he wailed, "Money, money! This always the wall!"<sup>11</sup> "In response to your last letter, a person who spends what you spend with a man like me giving you money, ought to have a little patience with his difficulties."<sup>12</sup>

His works from the thirties are new and arresting. In *Torso*, 1928, he exaggerates the female anatomy, her obscenely large breasts almost grotesque, and yet lovely, a petite yet powerful sculpture. Revisiting earlier works, such as *Kneeling Figure*, 1924, yielded new forms: *Torso*, 1930 and *Torso*, 1932. Upon visiting his studio in 1931, Cummings said to Lachaise, "It is good to see someone still alive, in France they repeat themselves helplessly, Picasso now is an old priest."<sup>13</sup> The arrangement of breasts, buttocks and hips in *Acrobat Woman*, 1934, shows the emergence of a sexually charged abstraction. Created in his last year is a magnificent work one critic has said reveals a "dark, psychosexual underside." Sue Taylor warns us, "the headless, over-life-size bronze, *Torso with Arms Raised*, 1935, may make you cower: mammoth breasts hang down; arms sprout from the shoulders like menacing antlers."<sup>14</sup>

Like his sculptures, Lachaise's drawings evolve over time from easy, controlled geometric pastels to raging Earth Mothers in blue black or brown ink. Lachaise usually drew to explore a theme. His drawings are heroic and erotic, his fluid line summoning a quiet nude, or the bump and grind of the Burlesque. Lewis Mumford thought the drawings "splendid": "grotesqueness becomes suave and elegant--drawings such as only a very good sculptor can produce."<sup>15</sup> *Woman and Dancing Nude with Comb*, are dynamic drawings which filter Isabel through the lens of the burlesque, and vice versa. His sure contour line recalls Matisse, with a result that is more than beautiful. Lachaise's drawings depict a 'Woman' who can vote, and who can overcome neuroses and divorce. "I love you for you," wrote Lachaise during their first years together, "for what you have been and are. 'Woman'— confident, proud and strong."<sup>16</sup>

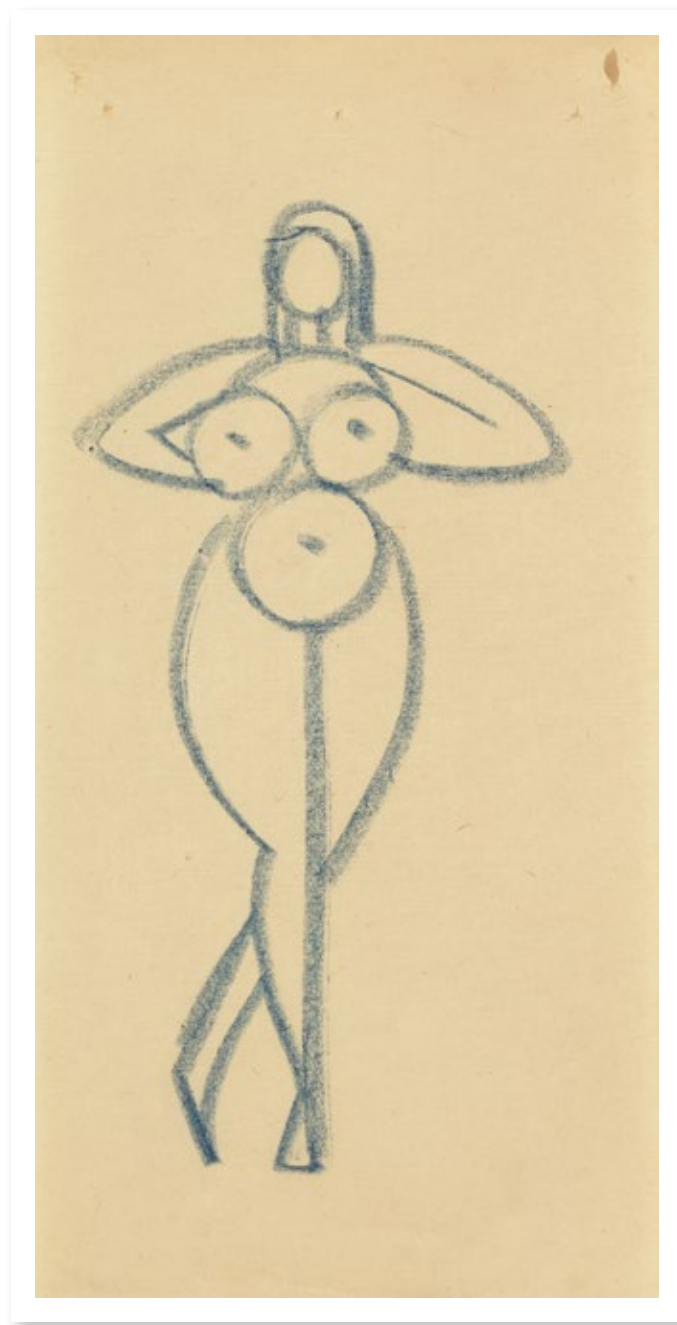
Lachaise took his art seriously. He participated in exhibitions to encourage the appreciation of art among the working people, and for the relief of the unemployed. Hopeful his art would outlive our praise, the composer Edgard Varèse once said to Lachaise, "Art is the highest expression and not a luxury—"Where are the Egyptian bankers today? And Egyptian art survives."<sup>17</sup>

The Lachaise Foundation is grateful to Findlay Galleries for the excellent care they have taken in presenting the work of Gaston Lachaise.

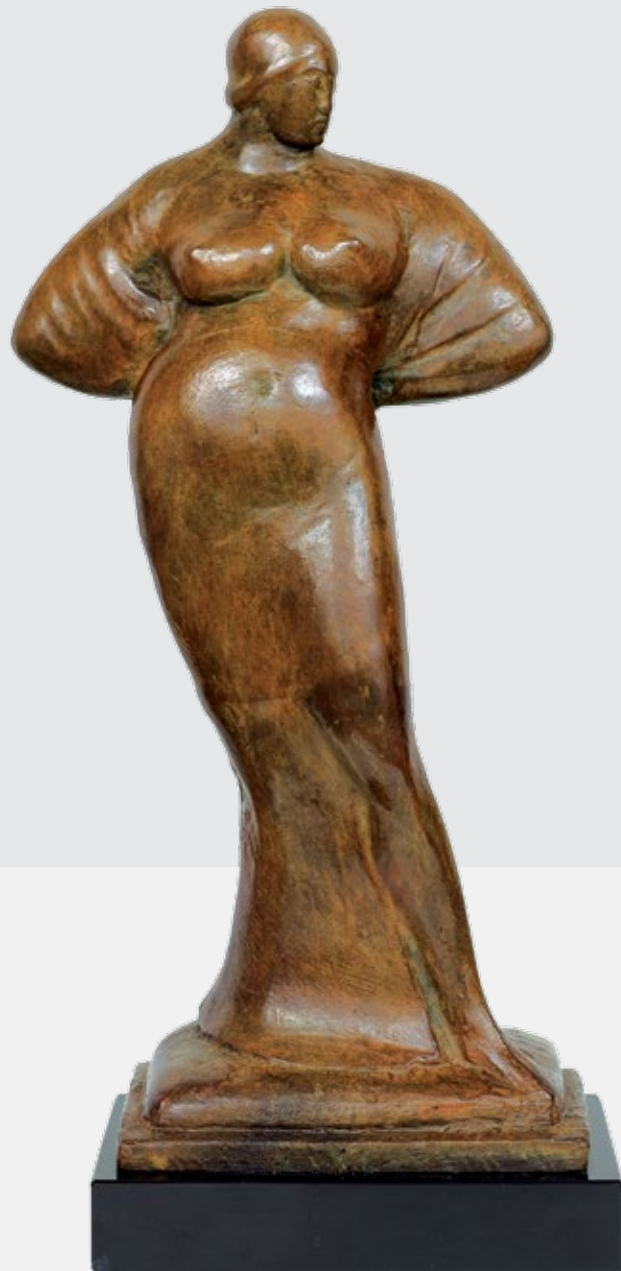
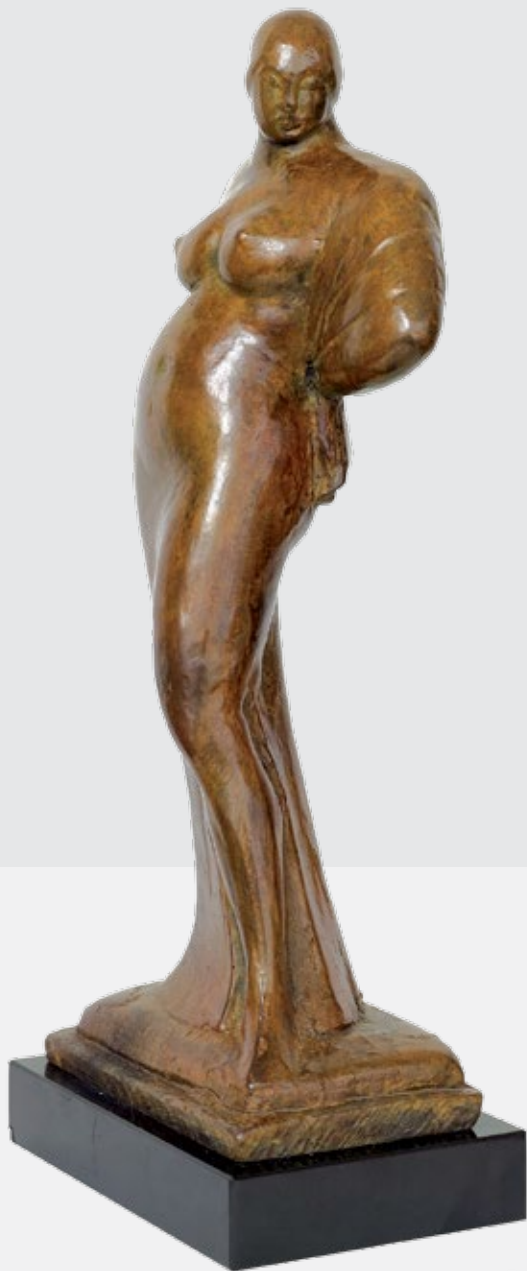
1. Handwritten letter from Gaston Lachaise to Isabel, Lachaise Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, (henceforth: "Lachaise to Isabel.") c. 1915-16.
2. Gaston Lachaise, "Modern Sculptures," preface to Exhibition of American Sculptures at Bourgeois Galleries, 668 Fifth Avenue, New York, January 11 to February 1, 1919.
3. Evelyn Gerstein, essay on Lachaise, typescript, 1928, Lachaise Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
4. Gaston Lachaise, "A Comment on My Sculpture," *Creative Art*, 1928.
5. Cummings, "Gaston Lachaise" *Dial*, 1920. In fact, Cummings visited Lachaise's studio in 1918 and saw "a superb...statue...its 'Big-nis in li-tel-nis' massive, pose supreme, divine." Selected Letters of E. E. Cummings, ed. F. W. Dupee and G. Strade, New York, 1969, p. 48. This work, sometimes called Biggest Little Woman in the World is in the collection of the Norton Museum of Art in West Palm Beach, Florida.
6. Henry McBride, "Here's to Lachaise," in Lachaise, brochure for exhibition at the Brummer Gallery, 27 East 57th St, February 27-March 24, 1928. McBride describes his reaction to *Elevation* in 1918.
7. Baltimore Museum of Art, exhibition of sculpture, April 1928 Review, A. D. Emmart, *Baltimore Sun*, April 8, 1928. That writer was Gilbert Seldes, in "Gaston Lachaise Sculptor of Repose," *The New Republic*, April 4, 1928.
8. Dorothy Gaffly, "The Whitney Museum of Art," *American Magazine of Art*, vol. XXIV, no 2, February 1932.
9. Gaston Lachaise, "A Comment on my Sculpture," *Creative Art*, 1928.
10. Zorach Explains Sculpture, American Artists Group, New York, 1947, p. 47.
11. Lachaise to Isabel, October 2, 1933.
12. Lachaise to Isabel, June 9, 1933. Lachaise did not stay mad long: "After this reproach, I kiss you everywhere." (Lachaise to Isabel, 1913-16).
13. Lachaise to Isabel, on Hotel Brevoort stationary, July 13, 1931. My quotation marks.
14. Sue Taylor, *Art in America*, Nov 26, 2013, Review of Man/Woman Gaston Lachaise, Portland Art Museum, 2013.
15. Lewis Mumford, "Lachaise and O'Keeffe," *The New Yorker*, February 9, 1935, p. 46.
16. Lachaise to Isabel, 1910-11.
17. Lachaise to Isabel, July 11, 1934.



**Acrobat Woman, 1934** (LF 210) | bronze | 16 x 6 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 4 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches | Edition 1/11 | FG© 207518



**Geometric Nude, c. 1918-24** | blue crayon on thin, laid cream paper | 11 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 5 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches | FG© 207518



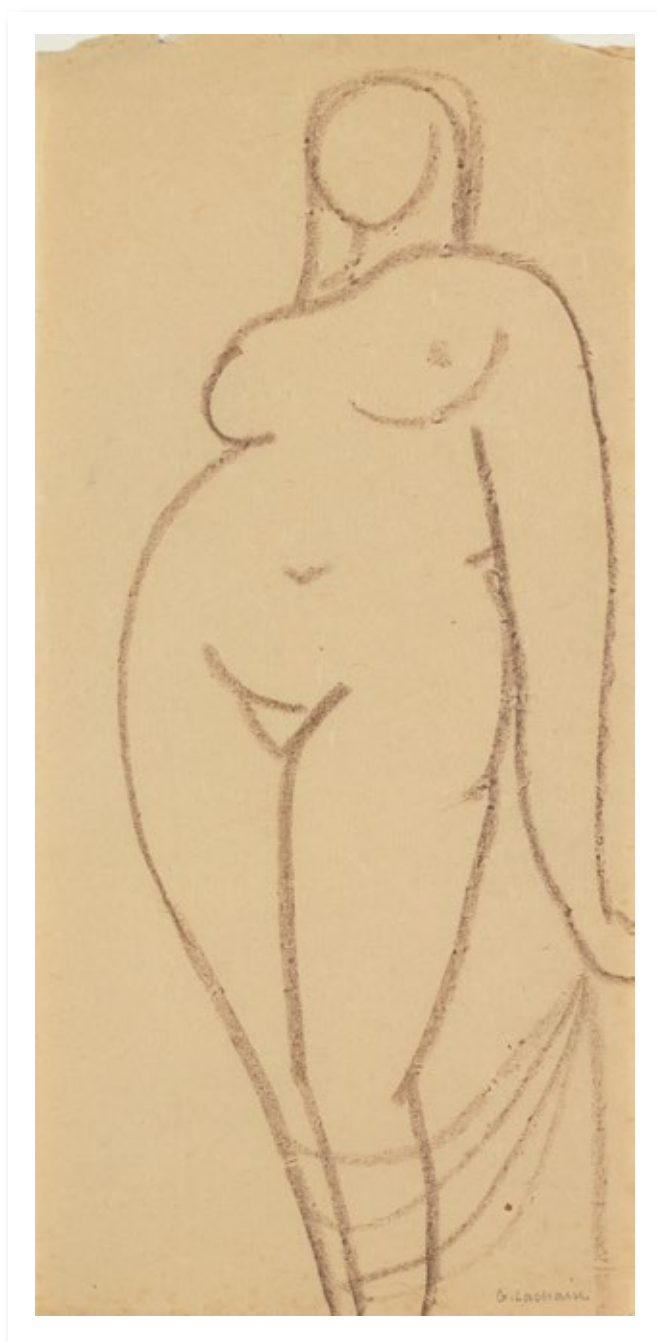
***Standing Woman with Arms Behind Her Back, c. 1918 (LF 25) | bronze | 13 x 6 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 3 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches | Edition 9/9 | FG© 207518***



**Geometric Nude with Veil, c. 1918-24** | green crayon on thin, laid cream paper | 11 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 5 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches | FG© 137439



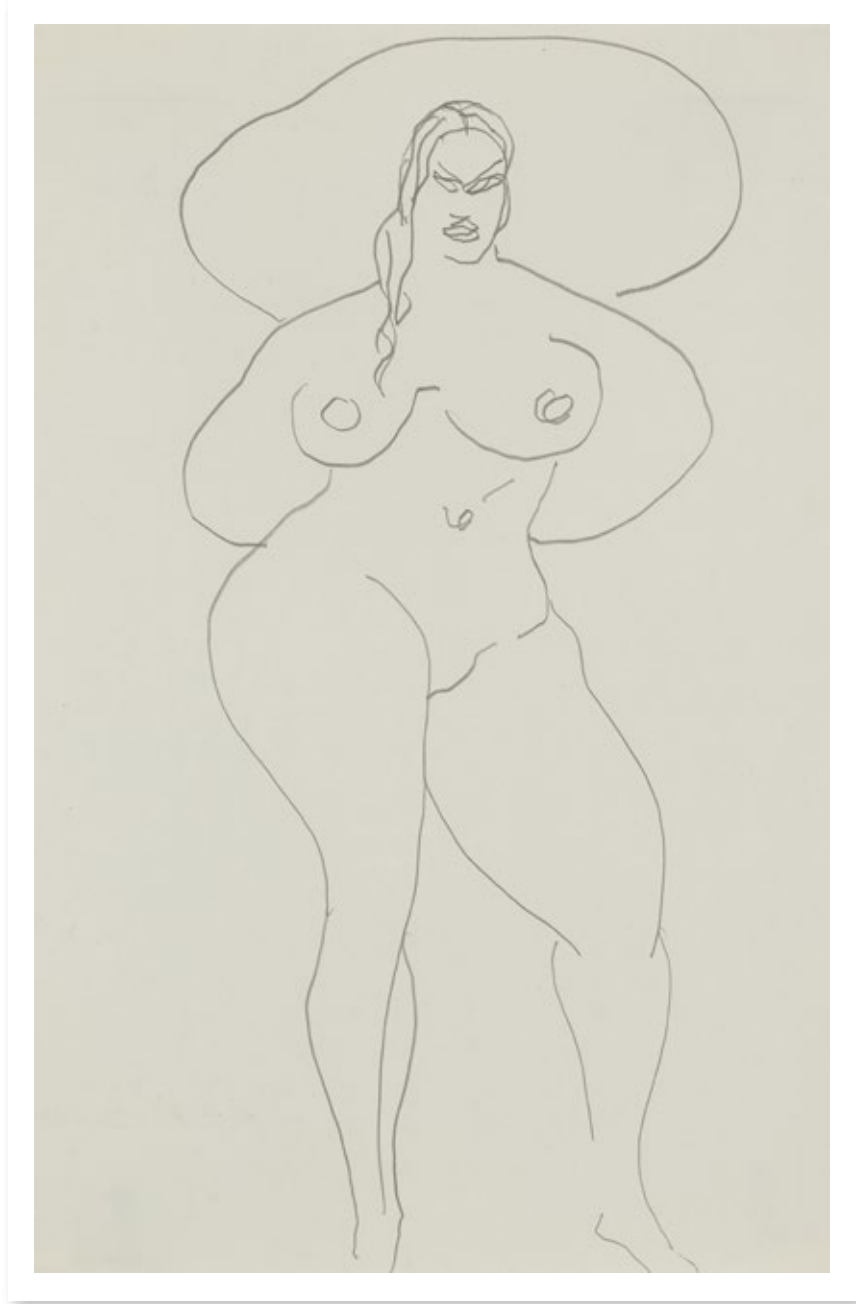
***Woman Walking with Outstretched Arms, c. 1917*** (LF 258) | bronze | 14<sup>1/4</sup> x 9<sup>1/2</sup> x 6 inches | Edition 1/12 | FG© 137601



***Nude Leaning (Standing Draped Figure)*, c. 1918-24** | brown crayon on thin, laid cream paper | 12 x 5 1/2 inches | FG© 137450



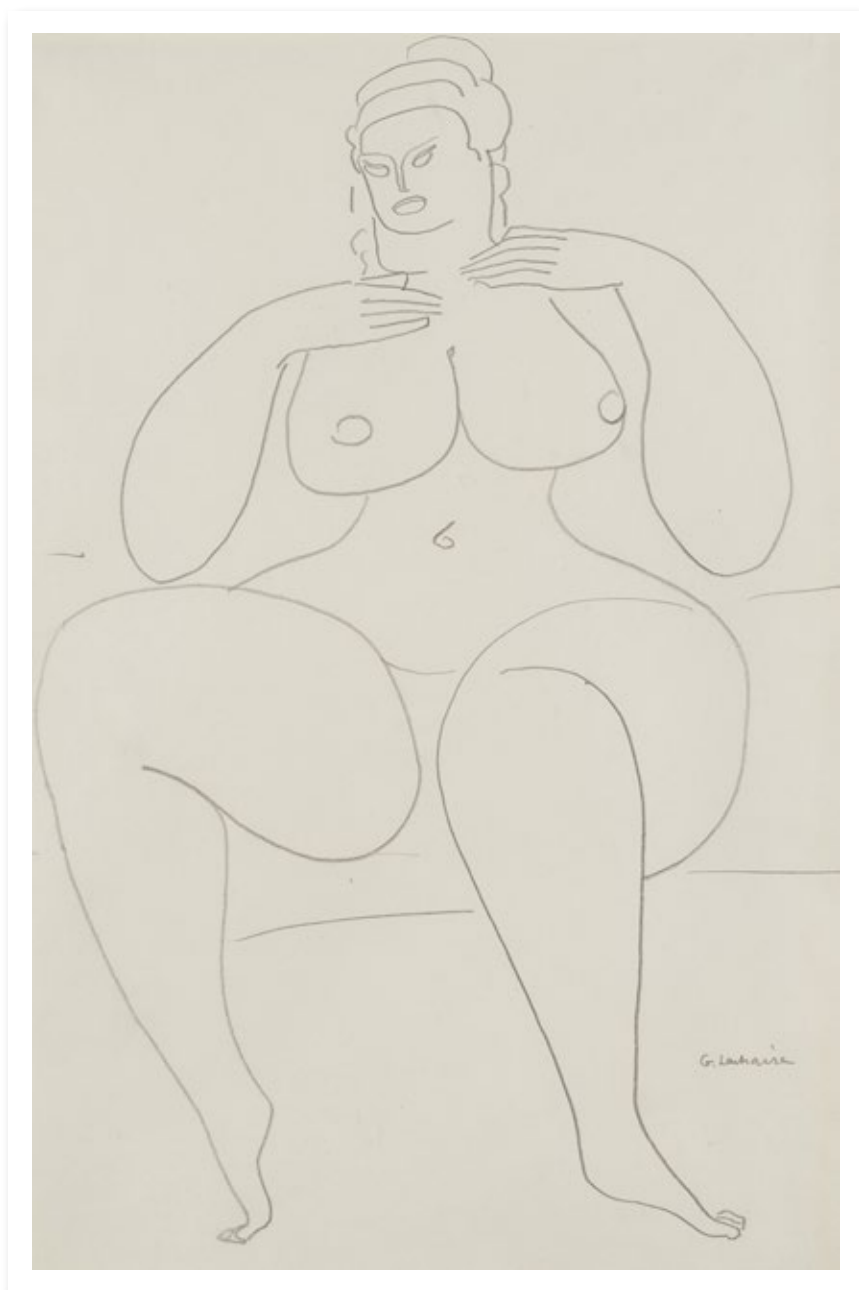
**Woman Walking, 1919** (LF 31) | bronze | 19 x 10 x 7 1/2 inches | Edition 6/6 | FG© 137925



***Nude in a Hat, c. 1935*** | graphite on paper | 16 x 10 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches | FG© 137453



***Torso of Elevation, 1912-1927*** (LF 113) | bronze | 46 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 23 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 12 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches | Edition 5/7 | FG© 207296



***Seated Nude, Hands on Shoulders c. 1929*** | pencil on paper | 18 x 12 inches | FG© 137464



***Woman Seated*, c. 1918-25 (LF 24) | bronze | 12 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 10 x 9 inches | Edition 6/9 | FG© 137604**



***Dolphin Fountain, 1924*** (LF 44) | bronze | 41 x 23 x 17 inches | FG© 137619



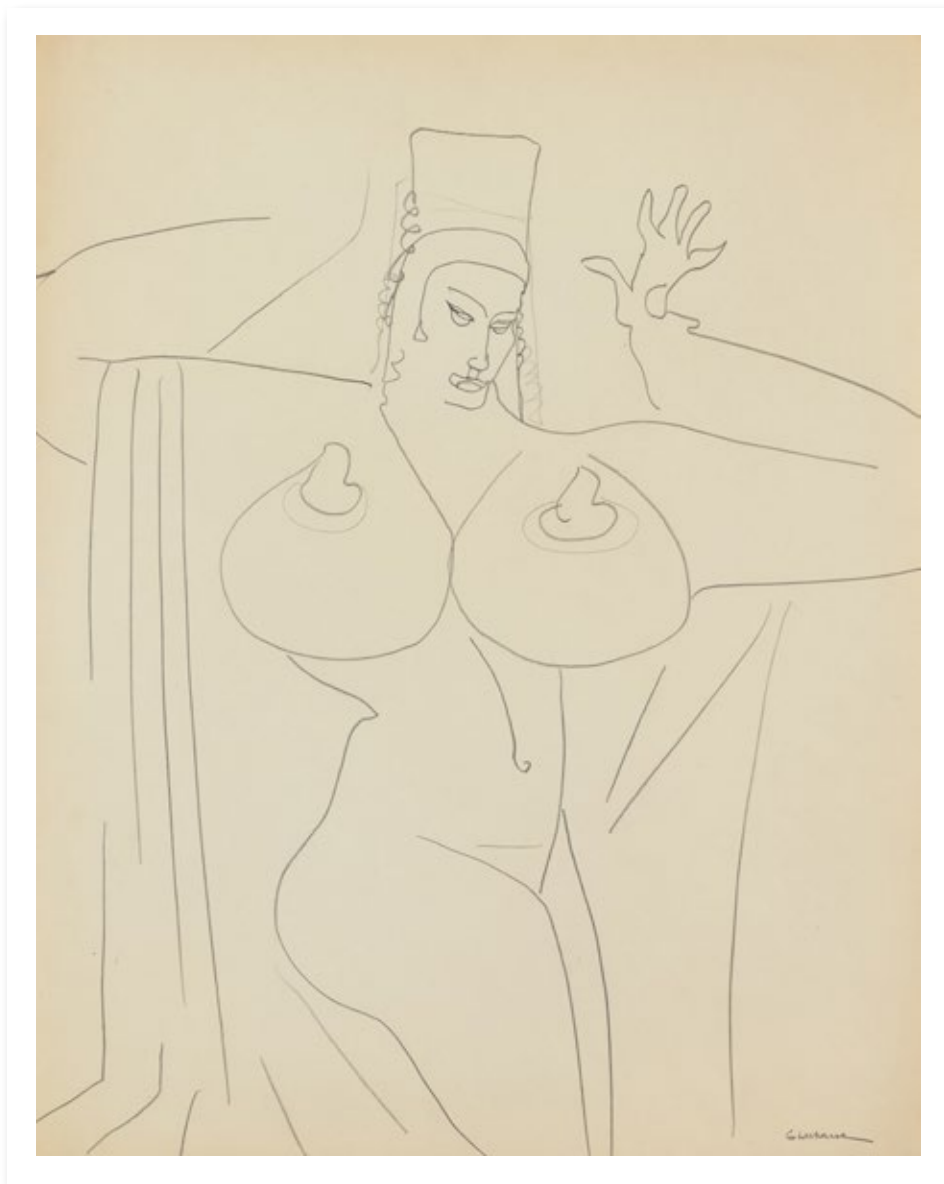
1. **Woman's Head, c. 1920's** | ink and graphite on paper | 14 x 10 inches | FG© 137437
2. **Head, Facing Left** | green crayon on thin, laid cream paper | 9 1/2 x 7 1/4 inches | FG© 137444
3. **Head, Facing Right** | blue crayon on thin, laid cream paper | 9 1/2 x 6 1/2 inches | FG© 137446
4. **Head (Double Sided)** | black crayon over graphite | 18 1/2 x 13 inches | FG© 137466



***Egyptian Head, 1922*** (LF 35) | bronze | 13 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 9 x 8 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inches | Edition 5/6 | FG© 137606



***Nude in Chair, 1925-27*** (LF 49)  
bronze · 13 x 9 1/2 x 15 inches  
Edition 3/11 · FG© 207507



***Nude with Turban, Draped, c.1932-33*** | graphite on paper | 24 x 19 inches | FG© 137470



**Torso, 1932** (LF 96) | bronze | 8 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 7 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 6 inches | Edition 10/10 | FG© 207199



**Figure with Upturned Face (Double Sided), c.1930-33** | graphite and ink on paper | 24 x 19 inches | FG© 137471



***Torso with Arms Raised, 1935*** (LF 106) | bronze | 36 x 32 x 14 inches | Edition 3/8 | FG© 207519



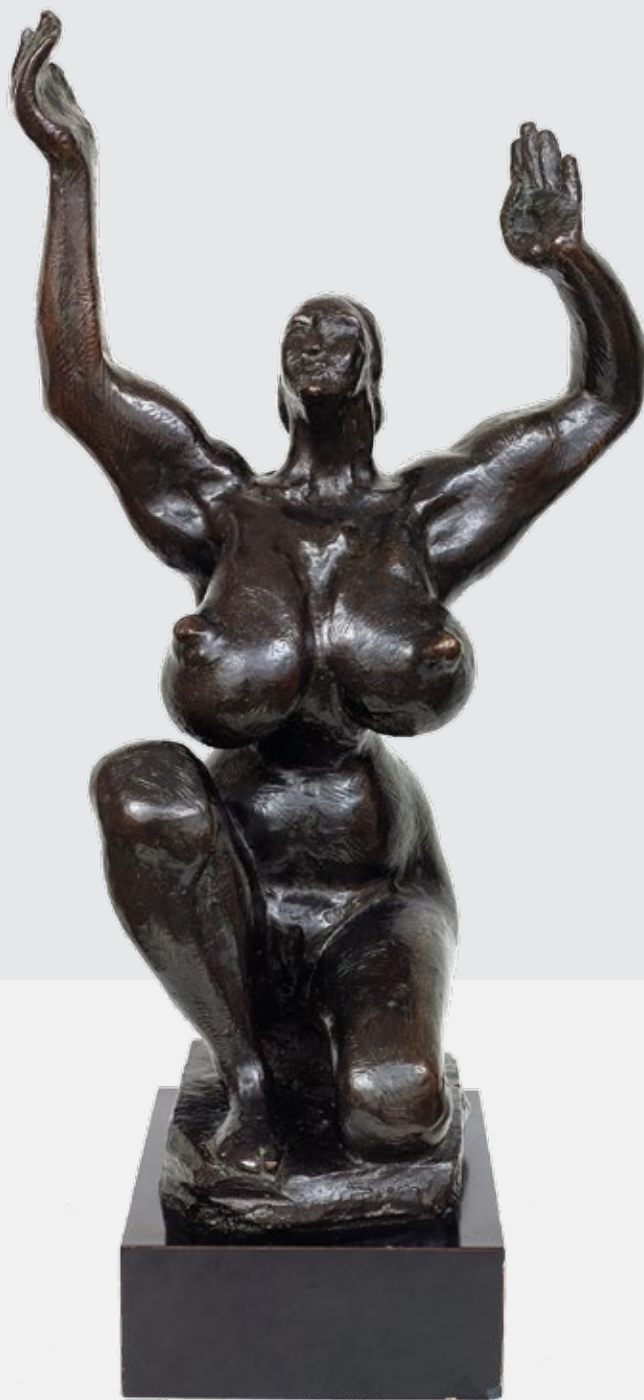
**Geometric Nude, c. 1918-24** | green crayon on thin, laid cream paper | 11 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 5 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches | FG© 137440



***Untitled (Standing Female Figure)***, n.d. (LF 257) | bronze | 17 1/2 x 9 1/2 x 5 1/8 inches | Edition 1/12 | FG© 137603



**Male Figure (Male Nude, Left Arm Raised), c.1931** | pencil on paper | 24 x 19 inches | FG© 137461



***Kneeling Figure*, 1924** (LF 111) | bronze | 19 1/2 x 11 x 7 1/2 inches | Edition 6/12 | FG© 207513



**Reclining Woman (Belle), n.d.** | graphite on paper | 8 x 9 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches | FG© 137436



***The Mountain, 1924*** (LF 45) | bronze | 7 x 19 x 9 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inches | Edition 7/11 | FG© 207456



***Bust of a Woman, c. 1920's*** | ink on paper | 18 x 12 inches | FG© 137452



**Paul Strand, *Gaston Lachaise*, 1928** | gelatin silver print



BACK OF:

**Torso of Elevation**

**1912-1927 (LF 113)**

bronze · 46 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 23 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 12 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches

Edition 5/7 · FG© 207296



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# LACHAISE

Gaston Lachaise was born in Paris in 1882. He entered the École Bernard Palissy at the age of 13 to study sculpture, completed the four-year program in three years, and enrolled at L'Academie Nationale des Beaux-Arts at the age of 16. For someone quite young, Lachaise enjoyed unusual successes, among them four acceptances to the Salon des Artistes Français and ranking among the top twenty candidates in the competition for the Prix de Rome—all before the age of 21. But in 1905, Lachaise gave up his pursuit of academic honors to follow his great love, a Canadian-American woman, Isabel Dutaud Nagle, to America.

First settling in Boston in 1906, Lachaise moved permanently to New York, where he was an assistant to the sculptor Paul Manship. Lachaise abandoned his previous academic style and found his way to modernism. Although he made many portrait busts, he was best known for his standing nude female figures, robust despite their small size, seldom more than ten inches tall. One figure was included in the Armory Show of 1913. Lachaise modeled his figures in clay or plasticene, preserved them in plaster, and set them aside for later casting in bronze. These early female figures are romantic and introspective, but full-bodied, prideful, and voluptuous. His sculpture is extremely refined, composed of generously proportioned, smoothly shaped forms that flow into each other, emphasizing their graceful contours.

Lachaise belonged to the generation of Picasso, Braque and Brancusi, who had revolutionized European art. In the United States, he counted among his friends the leaders of American modernism, artists such as Joseph Stella, John Sloan, John Marin, Marsden Hartley, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Alfred Stieglitz, as well as the poets Hart Crane and E.E. Cummings. Yet, Lachaise always stood apart, committed to his own deeply personal vision.

At the height of his career, Lachaise tragically died of Leukemia at the age of 53, leaving a vast collection of work, and plasters, safeguarded for so many years by his widow, and later the Lachaise Foundation.

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