

## **WILD THING: EPSTEIN, GAUDIER-BRZESKA, GILL**

### **The Sackler Wing of Galleries**

24 October 2009– 24 January 2010

Supported by



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**The Royal Academy of Arts presents an exhibition of works celebrating the radical change that transformed British sculpture at the beginning of the twentieth century. Over a period of 10 years (1905-1915), three outstanding young sculptors emerged; Jacob Epstein, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska and Eric Gill. This is the first time that the three artists have been shown together in this revolutionary context and many of the works have not been exhibited in London before.**

The exhibition contains more than 90 works featuring mainly sculptures, drawings and pastels. With rooms dedicated to the work of each sculptor the exhibition focuses on the key achievements of each artist and reveals their impact on British sculpture. The show brings together spectacular works, including Epstein's robotic masterpiece *Rock Drill*, Gaudier-Brzeska's innovative carving of *Birds Erect*, and Gill's controversial carving of the sexual act called *Ecstasy*.

The title of this exhibition is taken from the American poet Ezra Pound, who vividly remembered meeting Henri Gaudier-Brzeska for the first time in 1913. Pound was impressed by the young Frenchman, and likened him to "a well-made young wolf or some soft-moving, bright-eyed wild thing." But those last two words also sum up the feisty and daring spirit of rebellion driving the young Jacob Epstein and Eric Gill.

The origins of these three artists could hardly have been more diverse. Epstein was a Jew from New York, Gaudier-Brzeska the son of an Orleans joiner, and Gill's father a Brighton clergyman. But between them, in a sustained burst of bold inventiveness before the First World War, they brought about the birth of modern British sculpture. The idea of wildness lay at the centre of their revolution, looking far beyond classical art to gain inspiration from what Gaudier-Brzeska excitedly called "the barbaric peoples of the earth (for whom we have sympathy and admiration)."

When Epstein came to London in 1905, sculpture in Britain was ripe for a radical overhaul. He soon befriended Gill, who declared that Epstein was determined “to rescue sculpture from the grave.” Committed to carving in stone, they both aimed at returning to the prehistoric origins of sculptural expression. They were obsessed with virility, fertility and procreation. Gill described Epstein as a man “quite mad about sex”, and they shocked contemporary viewers by placing it at the heart of their work.

Then, in 1911, Gaudier-Brzeska moved from France to London and visited Epstein’s studio a year later. The powerful Tomb of Oscar Wilde was on display there, and Gaudier-Brzeska was impressed. He quickly became an outstanding young sculptor and draughtsman. Only 23 when he met his death on a French battlefield in 1915, Gaudier-Brzeska was one of the greatest losses sustained by the arts during the First World War.

This unprecedented exhibition explores the body of work executed by the three sculptors and draws on the major themes that impressed upon the men, namely sex, fertility, the human condition, the machine age and the impact of war. The works convey the momentous sense of change taking place in London and the world at the start of the twentieth century.

## **ORGANISATION**

**Wild Thing: Epstein, Gaudier-Brzeska, Gill** has been organised by the Royal Academy of Arts, London. The exhibition has been curated by historian Richard Cork, a leading expert on this period and Adrian Locke, Royal Academy of Arts, London.

## **SUPPORTERS**

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## CATALOGUE

To accompany this outstanding exhibition, the Royal Academy has published a catalogue written by Richard Cork highlighting the work of the three artists; Epstein, Gaudier-Brzeska and Gill. The book examines the remarkable contribution that the three artists made to British sculpture at the beginning of the twentieth century.

## DATES

### Press View

**Tuesday 20 October 2009, 10am – 2pm**

### Open to public

Saturday 24 October 2009 – Friday 24 January 2010

10am – 6pm daily (last admission 5.30pm)

### Late night opening:

Fridays until 10pm (last admission 9.30pm)

## ADMISSION

£9 full price; £8 registered disabled and 60 + years; £7 NUS / ISIC cardholders; £4 12–18 years and Income Support; £3 8–11 years; 7 and under free.

## TICKETS

Tickets for **Wild Thing: Epstein, Gaudier-Brzeska, Gill** are available daily at the RA. To book tickets in advance please tel: 0844 209 1919 or visit [www.royalacademy.org.uk](http://www.royalacademy.org.uk). Groups of 10 or more are asked to book in advance; please tel: 020 7300 8027, fax: 020 7300 8084 or email: [groupbookings@royalacademy.org.uk](mailto:groupbookings@royalacademy.org.uk)

## IMAGES

Publicity images for **Wild Thing: Epstein, Gaudier-Brzeska, Gill** can be obtained from Picselect, the Press Association's image service for press use. Please register at [www.picselect.com](http://www.picselect.com) and once registered go to the Royal Academy folder in the Arts section.

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Royal Academy of Arts, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1J 0BD

For further press information, please contact Simone Sagi at the Royal Academy Press Office on tel: 020 7300 5610, fax: 020 7300 8032 or email [press.office@royalacademy.org.uk](mailto:press.office@royalacademy.org.uk) 20/10/09