

RÓSA GÍSLADÓTTIR  
KJARVALSSTÖÐUM  
opið daglega frá kl. 11

22.3.

KERAMIKSKÚLPTÚR  
— 7.10. 1984  
— 22

# RÓSA GÍSLADÓTTIR

fædd 47. 1957

Menntaskólinn í Reykjavík 1973-77

Myndlista- og handíðaskóli Íslands

(keramikdeild) 1977-81

Akademie der Bildenden Künste, München

(keramik & skulptúr) frá 1981

Þátttaka í samsýningum hér á landi og í Þýskalandi,

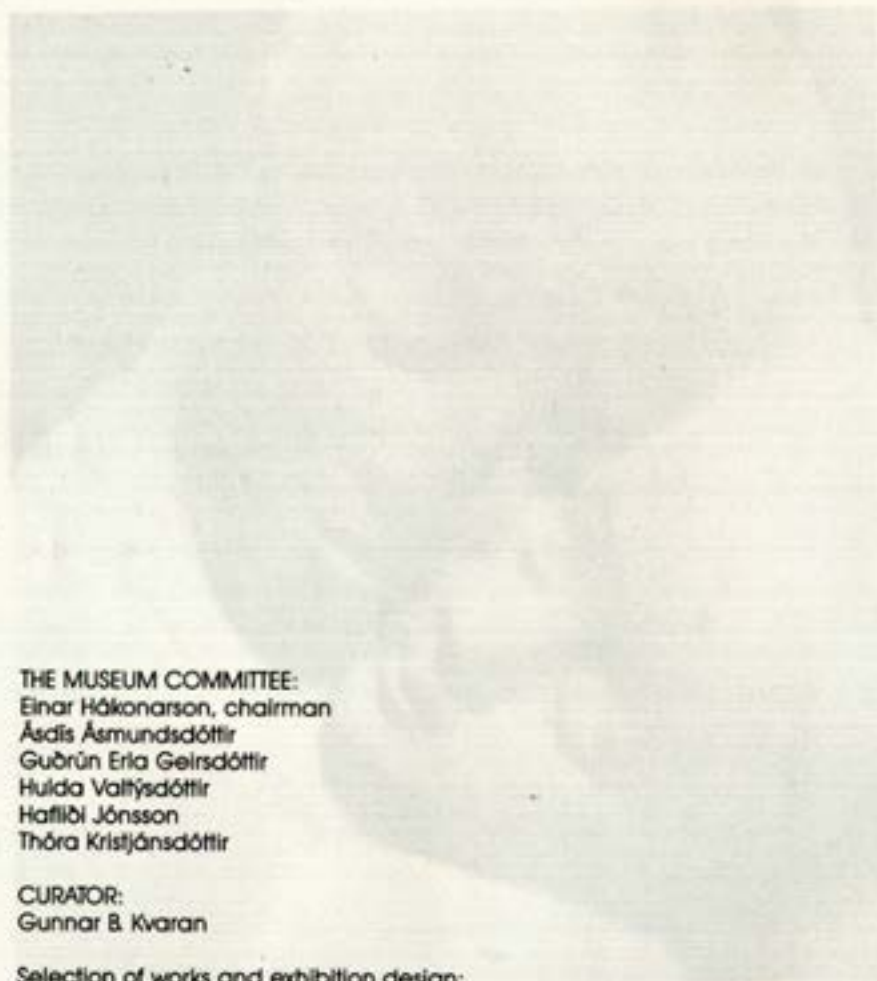
þar á meðal í Galerí Langbrók 1981

og Keramik heute in Bayern, Veste Coburg 1984

Hlaut verðlaun úr styrktarsjóði Svövu Finsen 1981

og styrk frá akademíunni í München 1984





THE MUSEUM COMMITTEE:  
Einar Hákonarson, chairman  
Ásdís Ásmundsdóttir  
Guðrún Erla Geirsdóttir  
Hulda Vallýsdóttir  
Haflíði Jónsson  
Þóra Kristjánsdóttir

CURATOR:  
Gunnar B. Kvaran

Selection of works and exhibition design:  
Gunnar B. Kvaran

© The Ásmundur Sveinsson Sculpture Museum,  
Reykjavík, 1985

The theme chosen by the Ásmundur Sveinsson Sculpture Museum committee for this year's exhibition is women in the work of Ásmundur Sveinsson. Sculptures devoted to this subject span virtually the whole of the artist's career and assume a wealth of styles. To mark the opening of this exhibition, the museum is issuing nine postcard-sized reproductions of works on the theme of women. This display will be staged throughout the summer and the coming winter, when special projects will once again be arranged for secondary school children, involving regular visits to the museum.

*Einar Hákonarson*



Autumn, 1940

A survey of the history of art clearly reveals the prime importance attached to women as subject matter since time immemorial. The earliest identifiable representations in sculpture, such as the *Venus of Willendorf* and the *Venus of Dolni Vestonice* from around 25000 - 18000 BC, portray women with enormous thighs and breasts, and have been linked to fertility rites. Ever since this time, widely varying cultures have transformed the female form into religious representations, ordinary motifs, or sexual portrayals to excite and pamper the male visual experience and imagination.

Women have played an important part in classical art; throughout the ages, the female nude has been the prime subject chosen by artists, its lines and volume the paramount aesthetic precept.

A great deal of Ásmundur Sveinsson's work relates to women, although he has almost without exception preferred straightforward compositions, with a dominant emphasis on subjective love, to sensual relish of the carnal aspect. In written sources where Sveinsson is quoted discussing the theme of womanhood in his work, he clearly equates women above all with the idea of fertility as well as protection, more often than not in connection with the maternal role.

The exhibition now being staged at this museum aims to illustrate the role of women in the artist's work, and is divided into four separate sections, with a gallery assigned to each. The subjects are classified into woman and child, housed on the upper floor of the dome; woman and man, on the lower floor of the dome; woman at work, in the Pyramid; and woman as symbol, in the studio.

Portayals of couples can be found from the first part of Ásmundur Sveinsson's artistic career, generally meditative, unassuming poses whose tenderness rhymes with the harmonic unity of the work. Above all it is the sense of touch which conveys the concept of love, or the merging of individuals as if love makes them part of each other. While





A night in Paris

some of the works show clothed men and women, the subjects are generally naked, yet their depiction is always guided by moral discretion. The male genitals are always concealed, and the female organs rarely visible. In contemplating these works, the beholder is detached from the subject matter and never invited to participate subjectively in the act of love, to identify with the sculptural figures, contrary to the common tendency in European art treating the topic of the female and her naked form.

The subject of the mother and child — maternal love — was also a particular preoccupation of the artist, a theme as primordial as art itself.

Works depicting the relationship between child and mother date from various stages in the artist's career, with a corresponding variety of formal approaches. In terms of content, however, the same fundamental tone invariably prevails: "the primal nature of maternal love", protection and the natural truth that the child grows from the mother. Sveinsson reveals an uncommonly profound and heartfelt expression in handling these themes, besides an unmistakable respect towards women and the quality of regenerating mankind with which they are endowed. The unique female process of kindling life through bringing forth children assumes an almost religious form in these figures, such as *Worship* with its emphasis on the dignity of the model. Interpreting the folktale *My mother in the sheepfold* in another work, the artist captures a sense of maternal power and responsibility, prompting Nobel-prizewinning author Halldór Laxness to observe, in his book on Ásmundur Sveinsson: "not only is this sculpture thought by many people to be one of the most brilliantly executed in this studio, but is also, I feel, the Ásmundur Sveinsson sculpture which for its depth and moving treatment of the theme almost issues an appeal to celestial forces."

During the 1930s, Sveinsson created a large number of sculptures devoted to the subject of people at work. Most of them depict heavily-built working women, devoid of all



"feminine" qualities and symbolism, and moulded by their toil and hardship.

In the simplification of form which Sveinsson's art underwent over these years, the female image assumed a somewhat ambivalent appearance. Women portrayed at work are simplified in delineation at the same time, as if the artist desired to bring out their essential nature. Sveinsson



Asmundur Sveinsson with the sculpture WORSHIP

does not sculpt a detailed, realistic representation, creating instead an expression in the third person to underline the virtues and heroism of these women who, he says, "fought for their existence without the aid of technology. . . guarded our culture and our history, giving us the land better than they received it."

The sculptures on the theme of women at work provide an excellent illustration of the artist's aesthetic precepts and his view that beauty was inherent not only in woman herself but also in her movements and actions: the working woman is thereby more beautiful than the static female. This concept is related to Sveinsson's conviction that work is a liberating force which brings happiness, while he regarded idleness as a vice.

Women also appear in Sveinsson's work with a metaphorical significance, assuming the status of allegories, depictions of superhuman phenomena or literary allusions. In such instances, they are classified at this exhibition as symbols in wider sense.

This theme spans virtually the whole of Sveinsson's career and therefore illustrates the transformations and reappraisals which his artistic execution underwent, apparently acting as a catalyst to this process. It is as if the symbolic nature of the subject stimulated and urged him to engage in new creative approaches, as shown by the works *The force of water*, *War and flight* and *Female troll*.

One of the most remarkable aspects of this theme is the artist's interpretation of the forces of nature, which he largely identifies with womanhood. *Mother Earth* is endowed with the form of a woman, as is *Vegetation*. In fact, this is an archetypal simile, which would seem to be based on the principle that both women and the world of nature kindle and bring forth life. Other natural phenomena are also represented through the female image, even though their Icelandic names do not belong to the female gender, such as *Black clouds*, *Winter* and *Tones of the sea*. Poetic licence inspires Sveinsson to abolish the traditional



Rest, 1935

associations between phenomena and the words used to define them.

Although the theme of women in Ásmundur Sveinsson's art is classified under the four above-mentioned headings, such categorizations are by no means absolute. They are clearly for the most part relative to the mood and attitude of the viewer who beholds the works. The arrangement made here is only a suggestion. Art does not admit of single truths.

GUNNAR B. KVARAN

### BIOGRAPHY

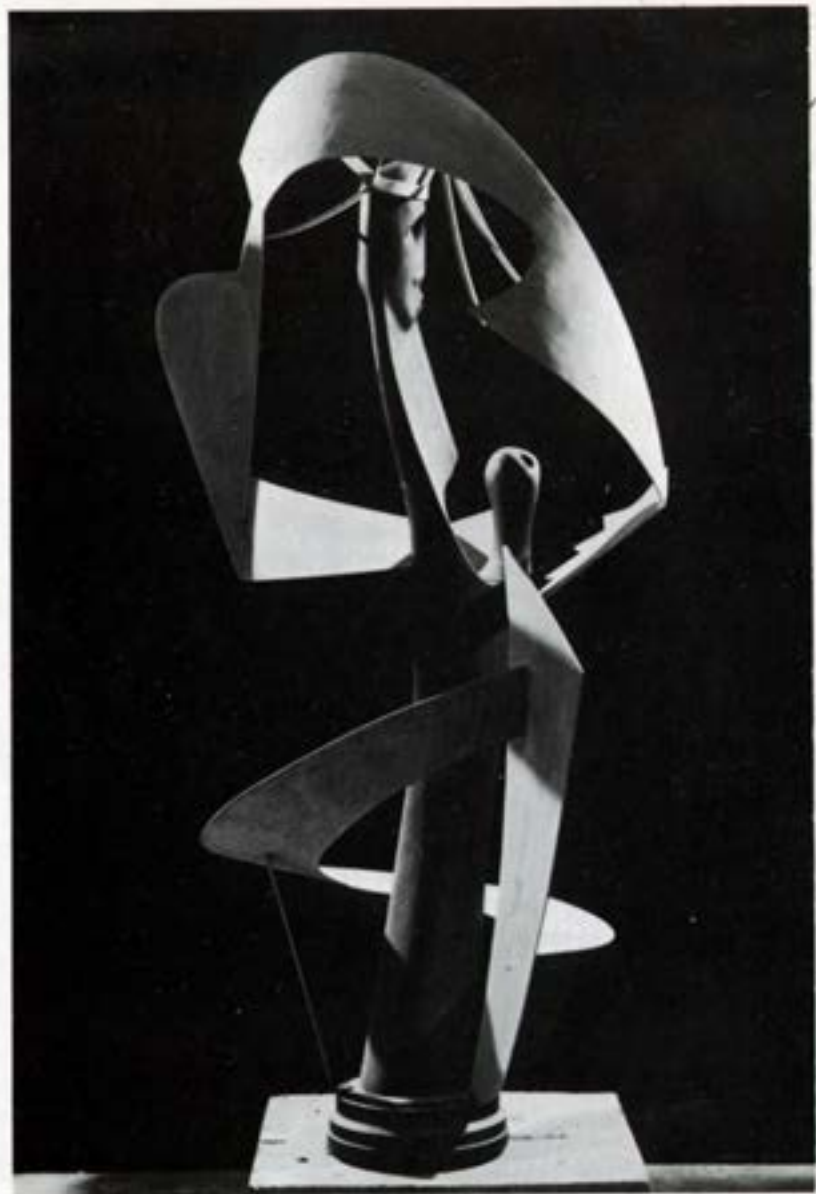
Ásmundur Sveinsson was born at Kolstaðir, in the Dalasýsla district of western Iceland, on May 20th, 1893. In 1915 he moved to Reykjavík, where he studied woodcarving under Ríkharður Jónsson, as well as attending the Technical College of Iceland.

On finishing his woodcarving apprenticeship in 1919 he went to Copenhagen, spending a year at the School of Drawing under the direction of Viggo Brandt. He moved on to Stockholm, took the entrance examination for the Academy of Fine Arts in the autumn of 1920, and studied there for six years, mainly under the direction of the sculptor Carl Milles.

In the spring of 1926, Sveinsson graduated from the Swedish Academy of Fine Arts and moved to Paris, where he spent the next three years under the direction of such teachers as the French sculptor Despiau.

Sveinsson returned to Iceland in 1929 after ten years abroad. In 1933 he built the house on Freyjugata which now houses the Ásmundur Sveinsson Gallery. He began work on the Dome at Sigtún in 1942, adding the two pyramids shortly afterwards, and the Oval Studio between 1954 and 1959. Ásmundur Sveinsson bequeathed his collection of works to the city of Reykjavík. He died on December 9th, 1982.





*Primal mother, 1954.*

#### DOME, UPPER FLOOR

- 1) Woman and Cupid, 1927, gypsum, 140 cm.
- 2) Moorland flight, 1933, bronze, 35 cm.
- 3) Maternal love, 1948, oak, 61 cm.
- 4) Worship, 1940, bronze, 38 cm.
- 5) Birth, 1949, oak, 34 cm.
- 6) The little sailor, 1935, fired clay, 38 cm.
- 7) Primal mother, 1954-1956, oak, iron, 190 cm.

#### DOME, GROUND FLOOR

- 8) Kiss, 1936, bronze, 58 cm.
- 9) A night in Paris, 1927, bronze, 28 cm.
- 10) Boy and girl, 1931, bronze, 35 cm.
- 11) Man and woman, 1943, fired clay, 27 cm.
- 12) Do you remember sitting side by side, 1932, bronze, 34 cm.
- 13) Regret (year uncertain), bronze, 32 cm.
- 14) Midsummer night, 1940, bronze, 28 cm.

#### PYRAMIDS

- 15) Rest, 1935, bronze, 22.5 cm.
- 16) Woman ironing, 1936, gypsum, 35 cm.
- 17) Washing the floor, 1950, gypsum, 52 cm.
- 18) Water carrier, 1937, concrete, 56.5 cm.
- 19) Woman churning butter, 1934, bronze, 46 cm.
- 20) Washerwoman, 1937, gypsum, 133 cm.
- 21) Washerwomen, 1937, fired clay, 37.5 cm.
- 22) Binding hay, 1935, fired clay, 35 cm.





*War and flight, 1943*

## STUDIO

- 23) Artistic leanings, 1936, fired clay, 31 cm.
- 24) Tones of the sea, 1950, oak, nylon, 61 cm.
- 25) Mother Earth, 1936, bronze, 30 cm.
- 26) Summer, 1940, bronze, 40.5 cm.
- 27) Spring, 1940, bronze, 34.5 cm.
- 28) Winter, 1940, bronze, 35 cm.
- 29) Autumn, 1940, bronze, 36 cm.
- 30) Female troll, 1948, concrete, obsidian, 58 cm.
- 31) Creation, 1949, bronze, 46 cm.
- 32) Black clouds, 1947-1948, concrete, obsidian, 90 cm.
- 33) War and flight, 1943, gypsum, 64 cm.
- 34) Vegetation, 1945, oak, 54 cm.
- 35) Eve spake, 1950, bronze, 87 cm.
- 36) Head-ransom, 1948, oak, 66 cm.
- 37) Freyja, 1949, bronze, 47.5 cm.
- 38) The oak, 1946, oak, 80 cm.
- 39) Eve leaves Paradise, 1949, oak, 88 cm.
- 40) Venus rising from the waves (year uncertain),  
gypsum, 113 cm.
- 41) Mermaid, 1922, gypsum, 93 cm.
- 42) Harp, 1934, fired clay, 13.5 cm.
- 43) The force of water, 1947, concrete, obsidian, 78 cm.
- 44) Heaven and Earth, 1935, fired clay, 40 cm.
- 45) Tristan and Isolde, 1965, iron, copper, 98 cm.