

# JACK RUTBERG FINE ARTS

Reuben Nakian was born in 1897 in College Point, New York, the fifth child of Armenian immigrants. From 1916 to 1919, he apprenticed to the noted sculptor Paulanship in New York, along with Gaston Lachaise. Nakian and Lachaise established their own studio from 1920 to 1922. In 1922, with a stipend from Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, Nakian established his own studio. Nakian's early works of the 1920s and 30s were mainly of exotic animals sculpted in a sensually smooth manner typical of the era.

In the 1920s and 30s, Nakian received considerable recognition with numerous exhibitions in New York, including the Whitney Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, the Downtown Gallery and Wildenstein Gallery, as well as the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Corcoran in Washington D.C. In 1926 he met Brancusi and assisted him in installing his first one-man exhibition in the U.S.

In the mid 1930s, Nakian met the painter Arshile Gorky (and through him Willem De Kooning), who encouraged him to seek greater expression through abstraction. Nakian - already inspired by Picasso, and some of the European avant gardes, as was Gorky - sought to further his own expressive possibilities and pursued a course of modeling the figure with unprecedented freedom, atypical in American sculpture. Indeed, Nakian's unique style in sculpture anticipated artists such as Willem De Kooning's work by more than two decades. Nakian's immersion in Greek mythology captured his interest and served as the primary inspiration of his subject matter for the duration of his career, through the mid 1980s.

In mythology, Nakian found a universe of reflection and metaphor. Epic themes of struggle and sensuality are depicted in monumental form. Nakian's modeling, whether in large or intimate scale, expresses power and yet retains a tenderness and even good-natured joy; a balance nearly unfathomable for sculpture so raw and abstract in style. Works such as "Salome" and "Europa and the Bull," dating from the mid 1940s, belie their small scale of less than 9 inches in height, and evoke a monumental presence with remarkable nuance.

Exhibitions of Reuben Nakian have been presented by major museums internationally. Among them are the exhibitions at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., and the Fundacao Calouste Gulbenkian in Lisbon. In 1966, he was afforded a solo exhibition organized by Frank O'Hara at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Nakian represented America in the 1968 Venice Biennale.