

# THE ARTS

FOUNDED BY HAMILTON EASTER FIELD

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## BOURDELLE ILLUSTRATIONS

The reproductions accompanying the two essays devoted to the art of Bourdelle are made by the courtesy of the following individuals and galleries: M. Emile Antoine Bourdelle; Mrs. Meredith Hare; Mr. Conger Goodyear; the C. W. Kraushaar Galleries and the Grand Central Galleries.

# BOURDELLE SPEAKS TO HIS PUPILS

*From a Paris Diary*

By ARNOLD RONNEBECK

*When Arnold Ronnebeck studied with Maillol and Bourdelle, he kept a diary. His account of the sayings of Maillol with an appreciation of Maillol's art was published in THE ARTS for July. We are now publishing a series of the sayings of Bourdelle which Mr. Ronnebeck took down word for word when he was studying under Bourdelle some years ago. Much has been published in Europe about Bourdelle, but in all the vast mass of printed eulogies, nothing has appeared as revealing as Mr. Ronnebeck's exact transcription of Bourdelle's words.*

OF Maillol I have written that "when he came to the criticism as a teacher, he was usually embarrassed. He could not say anything about a pupil's work. The process of his own creating was so natural to him that there was nothing to speak about. And that is why he could hardly give any practical advice to his pupils." The sculptor Lacombe was his absolute contrast. His way of working was a purely intellectual process. He constructed a plastic figure like a problem in geometry and arithmetic. Lacombe was lost in the abstract science of numbers. Maillol was too simple and, so to speak, too unsophisticated in the logic of training and teaching. Bourdelle, on the contrary, had the great faculty of expressing himself in a vivid and philosophical way about art and life in general, about religious, moral and psychological questions.

He always repeated that he was not teaching a dogma, but that he only wanted to stimulate the desire of personal research in his pupils, and that each had to find the way of expression which corresponded to his own personal gifts, his own personal vision. He never came as a teacher, but as an elder comrade, who had had more experience in sculpture and who had given much thought to it. He did not want blind followers. He wanted questions and contradictions. His desire was to recreate a community of spiritual collaboration as he believed it had existed in the Athens of Plato, in the Florence of

Lorenzo di Medici, and in the great period of the unknown masters of the cathedrals.

I can think of no better way to characterize his teaching than by quoting his own words, put down exactly as they were spoken after each criticism.

## *What Bourdelle Said*

"Pain is the effect of the universe in man. The more man suffers, the more he grows as a whole.

"A nation leaves sometimes only one single great poem, but he who has sung it has carried the whole burden of suffering of his whole nation; this is the destiny of each creator. He who can see, suffers. And the more he sees, the more he suffers. Because, in proportion as he sees beauty, it recoils.

"The physical look stops at the letter of things. Pain is only born when internal effort separates the plane from the letter of things and makes it retreat to the spirit, as illustrated by the sculptor working at a bas-relief.

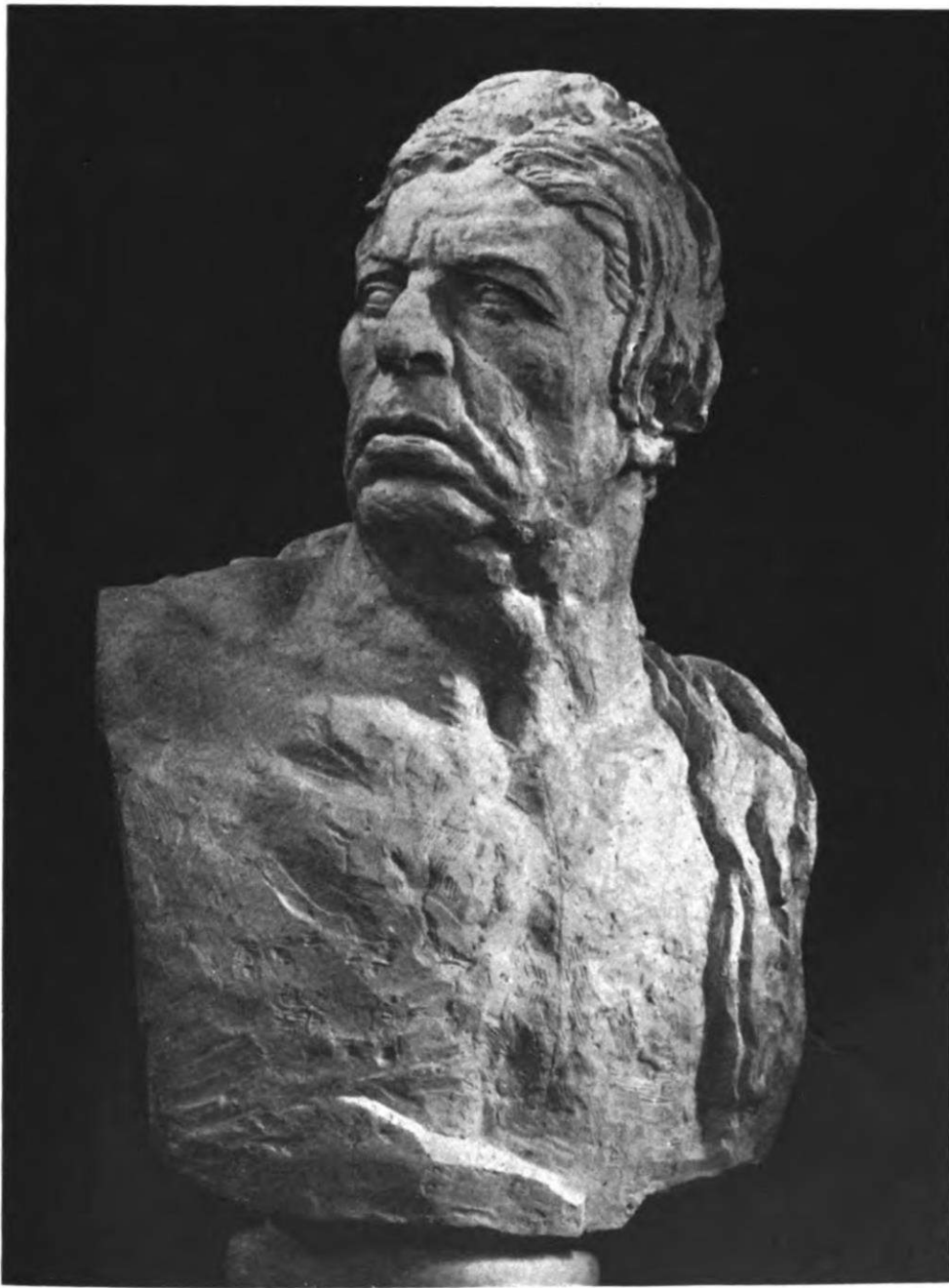
"Our work must be our confession before the inner revolt of the universe. It must tremble with our own being in order to be great with our own truth.

"If the end of man is veiled in darkness it is because we are not able to look into the world to come. But there is no 'end. Nothing is ever 'finished,' nothing is ever 'done.' The end would be the nothing, and the nothing we shall never see.

"What shall become of your clay? What shall it do, this grey clay, which was destined for the plow, to bear grain and wine and fruits? You have torn it from the lap of the earth. What shall become of it? What is your grain, your fruit, what beautiful seed of the spirit will you sow?

"Do you bring an experience, a flower which is a beautiful human unity? Is your soul moved by the blue wind of the ocean, by the rustling wind which carries away the leaves of the forest, by the star-sown wind of God? Ask yourself, examine your spirit.

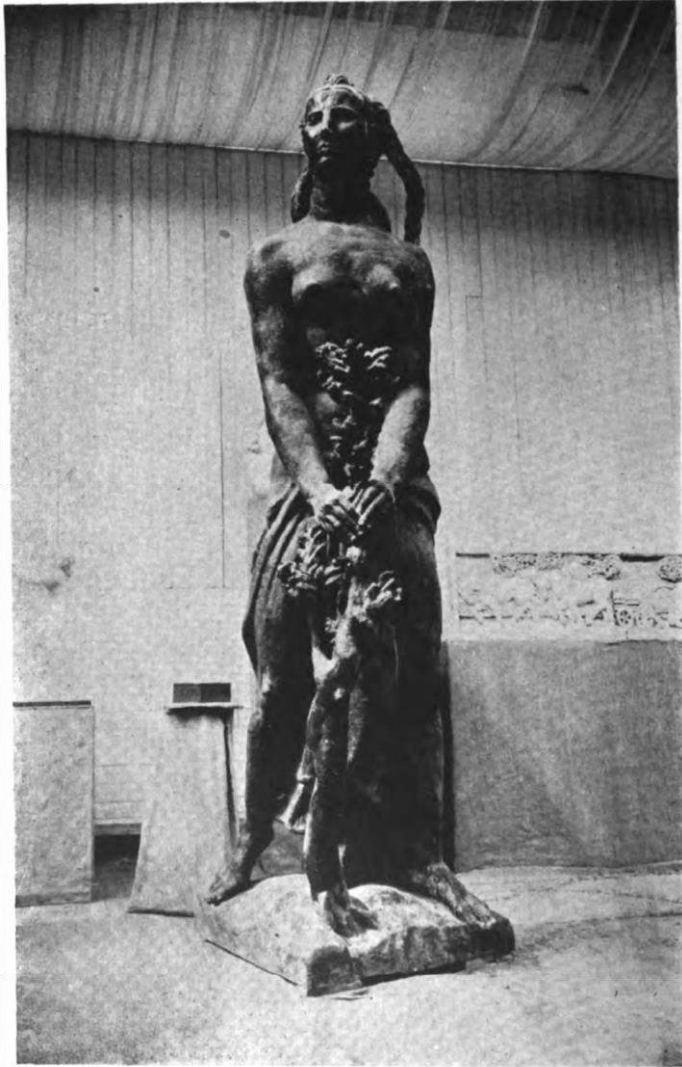
"Art is like the floods of the infinite ocean.



INGRES

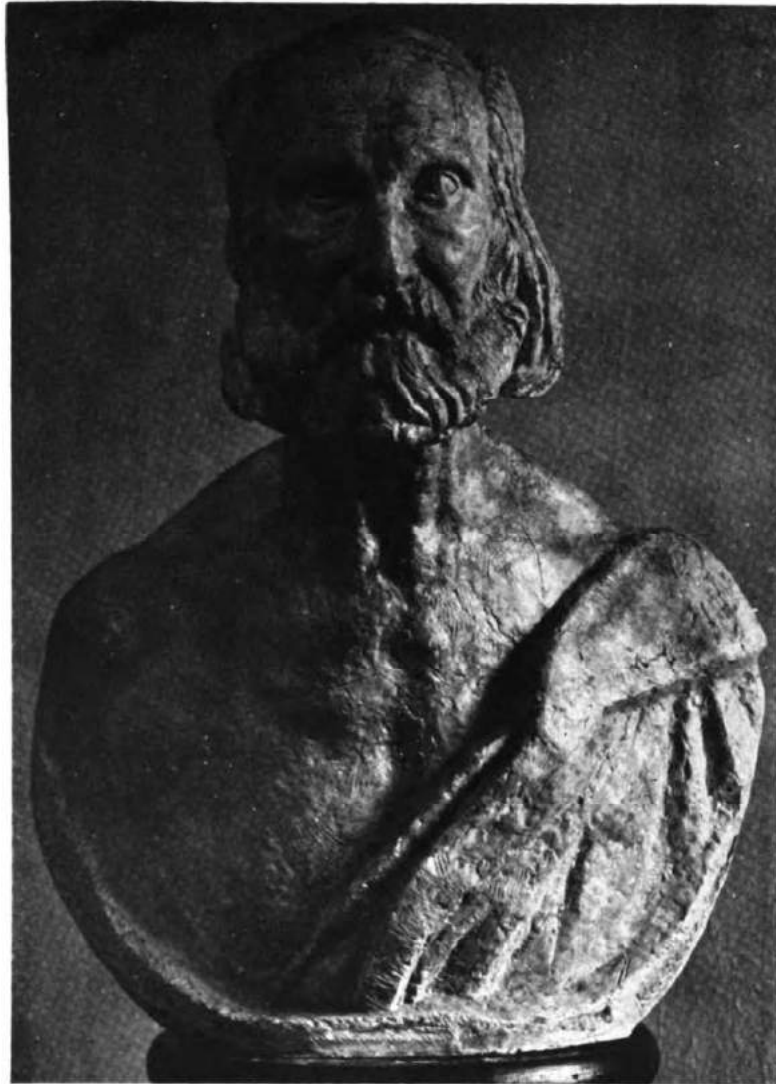
BOURDELLE





LIBERTY

BOURDELLE



THE SURGEON

BOUDELLE

If you dare to risk the struggle with the waves, take only a boat that is strong enough; the sail is your heart, the mast is your will, the rudder your daily labor, the compass the quality of your soul. Do not go out if you are not sailors—the ocean will devour your boat.

“Thus it is with art: if you are not willing to devote all your life to it, stay at the beach, do not go out, it is useless. Leave the clay to others who are called and are more worthy than you, worthy to bear the burden of the sufferings of humanity.

“But those who are really consumed by art are taken by it altogether. Either one

stays on the strand, playing like the child does with all sorts of colored stones and shells (like the big mass of the wrong artists) or one follows the path of truth—and escapes the world. One answers the questions of truth as one who speaks in a dream. Let us be ashamed of our superficial life which is full of lies.

“There are only two possibilities: the one is that we are not able to see the truth, the other that, when we have once seen glimmering before us the path that is leading to it, we are devoured by the eternal thirst to follow it to the end.

“He who is filled with this love for truth





MONUMENT ALVEAR

BOURDELLE

goes out into life like a hero without weapons, but under the spread-out wings of an archangel.

"Forge for yourself. If you want to live the life that has duration and carries blossoms even in the winter through the love of the beautiful, create for yourself that winged companion!

"The beauty of sculpture lies in the interior construction, in the architecture of masses and volumes and their composition. I myself have about thirty different ways of working. Each depends upon the character of the model, but the laws are always the same. They are the same in sculpture, in painting, in music and in poetry: always the architecture of the big masses, their construction and harmony, decorated and interwoven with subordinate details.

"Sculpture is logic. In order to be an artist, one must be wise, but sometimes one must be able to look at the world like a child,

knowing everything, and being able to be a child.

"No really great work of art has been done instinctively. Man has not been created to work under the influence of instinct alone. He must know what he is doing, in order to create something good. The beautiful Gothic statues of the cathedrals have been worked out after sculptural laws; the old masters were perfectly conscious of what they were doing. It is absolutely impossible to create such sculpture without the knowledge of the science of volumes, of the logic of architecture and the subordination of sculpture to it. But the Goths, like the Greeks, were in possession of this knowledge.

"All academic sculptors of today are working in just the opposite sense. How are they working? They make an ear, an eye, a nose, a foot, an arm, but nothing holds together, nothing is in its place. It is all falling to pieces, because it is an accumulation of details,



ELOQUENCE

BOURDELLE



**VICTORY**

**BOURDELLE**



no volumes, no grand planes, not even casts from nature, but false photographic reproductions of incoherent forms which have nothing whatsoever to do with art.

"Today one does not look at nature any more. One is only superficial. But the sculptors of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries knew. They were men who loved their fellow men, their animals, their flowers and their cabbage. And they carved the pictures of all these in stone and gave them flaming forms on the walls and in the interior of the cathedrals.

"On and in the cathedrals you have the whole knowledge and wisdom of sculpture. These simple artists were living in families, fifteen, twenty, together, and the one continued what the other had begun. By these means they kept alive the tradition of their art, of that immense wonderful art which through the great number of collaborators

has remained anonymous." On another occasion Bourdelle had harsh words for the critics.

"Technique and aesthetics are useless words, preached by certain critics and writers who don't understand anything about art."

A very wonderful work of Bourdelle's was exhibited in the Salon d'Automne. He had represented Hercules drawing the bow to shoot the stymphalic birds. A certain critic had written an article about it in which he said:

"Why does this Hercules not have a beard as in the old traditions, why is his nose so curved and his eyes so big?"

Bourdelle quoted this to us, and said:

"All these questions have nothing to do with the meaning of my work which simply deals with the problems of form in a human body in action. But the public reads this article and forms an opinion after it.

"Critics like this man are of the greatest



MONUMENT ALVEAR

BOURDELLE





MOTHER NURSING CHILD  
BOURDELLE

nuisance for art as well as for the artists. They are dangerous people. Sculpture is the science of form. Of course we have to give a title to our statues, just as every human being has to have a name in order to distinguish him from his fellow men. And besides, we have also to consider the fact that the public wants a title of some 'poetic' or 'literary' meaning, but if one is a sculptor one must not make literature in stone or in bronze. If you have to tell something—write it down. Sculpture is dealing with form only.

"Beauty is everywhere. Nature is always beautiful. You can make a masterpiece of each human face. When nature seems ugly to us we are not able to see its beauty because we do not understand it. And if our life is not beautiful, it is our fault. Each of us is building up his own life, and even things which seem exterior can entirely change our life.

"Only the most severe spiritual discipline creates a work of art. Its beauty and grandeur lies in analysis. Only he who knows his model thoroughly is allowed to represent the forms of nature by an interpretation of his own. Do not think that you know your model when you have been working from it five weeks. One must be able to work at one foot or one hand from two to three months.

"Only when you have really seen each profile, only when you have compared each volume to the general volume of the whole, are you capable of making a sketch or an interpretation of what you have seen. Not before. Because only after you have done that, you know that the big plane which you are cutting in your clay with one stroke, is composed of a hundred smaller ones and of a hundred thousand profiles.

"In order to be able to create a beautiful work, a personal interpretation of your inner



ANATOLE FRANCE BOURDELLE



FRUIT

BOURDELLE



vision, you must be able to render nature as exactly as a plaster cast does it. But who is able to do that? Today nobody has the requisite patience. With a little poetic feeling each takes himself for a sculptor. But if the sensitivity of observation and the inner structure are missing, the work is empty and worth nothing. This process of study takes years and years of infinite work."

Bourdelle always said that he owed very much indeed to Rodin, with whom he had been working a long time. Rodin was extremely conscientious in everything he did. When he did a draped figure like the "Bourgeois de Calais" or the "Balzac" he used to do not only one, but a great number of plastic studies of the nude before. For many of his works Bourdelle did these preparatory studies and he told us that only at the knee



STUDY FOR PORTRAIT  
BOURDELLE



BACCHANTE                      BOURDELLE

of the "Balzac" statue he worked five weeks. Yet in the finished monument the whole body of Balzac is covered with a sort of bathrobe, and only the head is bare.

At another time Bourdelle said:

"There is no such thing as 'National' art. There is only art. And the artist must not be a French, an Italian, German or an American artist. He must have a universal spirit. One must not belong to one country. The art of the Hindus is of the same wonderful beauty as the art of the French Gothic artists because the spirit is the same.

"There is no patriotism in art.

"The whole of our destiny forms the flower of our work. Its beauty and its vitality depend on how we are nourishing the ground on which it is supposed to grow. But what can we do and what influence can we

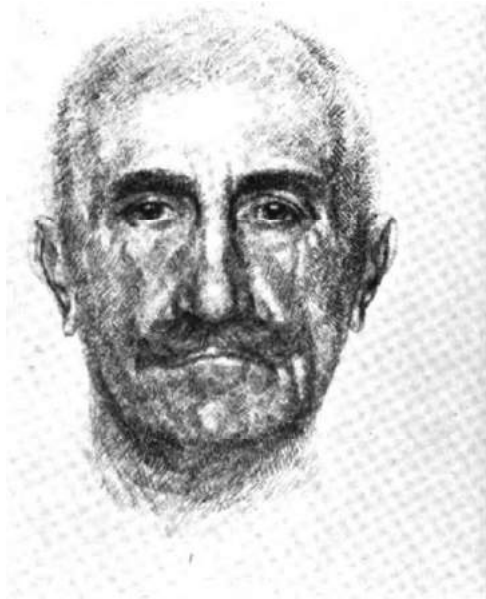


M<sup>r</sup> Auguste Perret.  
Architecte Théâtre  
des Champs Elysées.  
Antoine Bourdelle  
sculpteur  
Kraushaar

AUGUSTE PERRET  
*Architect of the Champs Elysées Theatre*

BOURDELLE





AUGUSTE ARNAULT  
BOURDELLE

have on that? Can we form our destiny after our will? Can we look into the future? Yes, we can! And for this purpose we need not even be a magician or an alchemist.

"I did not gather a thousand mysterious plants and boil them in retorts at midnight by the light of the full moon. I have only advocated all the work I have been doing, all I have been feeling, all I have been suffering, in a word, my whole past. And I saw that that which I am now and that which my work is now, is the result of my life up to this moment.

And I saw this: our future follows us, and our past guides us.

"Our future life does not lie before us under deep vales of darkness, impossible to penetrate. No, each tomorrow depends on a today. And we can very well see the consequences of what we are doing today. We can even prepare them consciously by our actions.

"Each single day is an immense gift. It is our task to receive it in the right and dignified way and make the best use of it. Let us look deeply into ourselves and ask ourselves

if everything that we do is really something good and valuable, something which is bearing a future in itself. And out of each new day let us make something better and greater than the day past.

"Life is a mathematical problem of which the last result is the sum of its actions.

"Be sincere and honest with yourself. Ask yourself if everything you do, if every hour of the day contributes to the happy formation of your destiny. If not, find out how to give the right direction to your efforts. Try to discover your faults and eliminate them. Keep always awake in you the thirst and the restless research for beauty.

"Be a mirror that reflects and holds in itself all eternity. Look into the world that surrounds you with the deep visionary eye of the spirit to which eternal laws and harmonies reveal themselves in everything that happens, and grows and blooms.

"If the ships and sails, passing over the infinities of the oceans are so beautiful, it is because they are built and guided by unchangeable truths and laws. The quality of





THE VIRGIN OF ALSACE

BOURDELLE



HEAD OF HERCULES

BOURDELLE

the waves eternally moved by the great winds, have created their beautiful forms—those forms which are the most suitable for their purpose. And exactly the same laws form the beauty of the human body, its interior construction, which results from the problems of the struggle for existence. The soul, the passions, the internal events and experiences of a human being are the forces which form the features of its face, its planes and lines.

“The internal, invisible planes must therefore correspond with those which are external and visible, and which can be reproduced in the creator’s material.

“In the beginning I have spoken of my past. I have said that it is the past that forms our future. What have I made therefore of my past and who is he who speaks to you about these great things? He is the son of a simple family of shepherds.

“I grew up in the woods of my home country, Montauban, in the south of France, among herds of goats with beautiful horns and capricious foreheads. I was the friend of the dark nightingale, and the trees and flowers and the sounds of the woods were my companions and brothers.

“I have always loved the poor, the modest and the humble. My playmates were poor little fellows in rags who in everything were the contrary of the city people in their Sunday suits and the beautiful ladies promenading in the public parks with the bands playing. I had a deep and instinctive antipathy toward these vanities. And, therefore, I was later without friends.

“I was always alone, maybe with a book, in the woods, in the mountains, in the open. There I heard other things than superficial talk. Yes, little nightingale, your burning hot song of longing is echoing through all my life.

“And the greatness and power of the trees has revealed to me the secret of their lives, which by and by, in the slow growth of long years, finally completed them in all their splendor and beauty. Each day, each hour, had added something, had made them grow, had endowed them with daily increasing fullness and power of resistance. All their past had formed their destiny. Life is a continuous succession of causes and effects. There is no tomorrow, no yesterday, no today. Life



STUDY FOR A FRESCO  
BOURDELLE

is one. We human beings alone have divided it into degrees.

“Let each hour be a step toward another more beautiful one, let each lost joy prepare another greater one, let each work under the failure of which you sink down, prepare the success of new coming works. Let the great joys and the great pains make you strong. Test the course of your days, create for yourself a sublime destiny. Live your life in closest contact with your art, and may each of you find his own truth. For each one of us is carrying it inside of himself.

“But why these differences? Why must so many of us be disappointed? And where is a perfect truth? Where does he hide—he who alone can answer?