

**The  
SCULPTURE  
of  
Princeton University**

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*The John B. Putnam Jr.  
Memorial Collection*

# The John B. Putnam Jr. Memorial Collection

Princeton is extraordinarily proud of the Putnam Collection. It is one of the country's most dramatic permanent displays of major twentieth-century sculpture, containing superb examples of sculpture by the finest contemporary sculptors in the world. It is a tribute to the vision of the anonymous donor that he enabled Princeton to be one of the first university campuses in this country where one could see, study, and enjoy a group of distinctiveworks in a medium in which some of the most exciting developments in modern art are now occurring.

In a residential university such as Princeton, the campus, the physical characteristics of the place, have a pervasive effect. Lewis Thomas, Class of 1933, in a speech given on Alumni Day 1981, described at Princeton as "the look, and the feel of an institution deliberately designed for thinking and kept that way through the years."

The Putnam Collection is a major addition to Princeton's cultural resources, offering an exceptional opportunity for learning that exposes the untutored to the best in modern art at the same time as it delights the most sophisticated art scholar. But, even more, the collection is a source of vitality, a reminder of the possibilities of form, for each of us as we walk on the campus. It is, I think, the ideal complement to the natural beauty of his University, an added pleasure in the daily lives of each of us.

William G. Bowen  
President  
Princeton University.

# The Bride

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Courtyard of Hamilton Hall  
Reg Butler  
British, 1913-1982

The site of Reg Butler's *The Bride* -an intimate Gothic courtyard with fine trees- echoes the setting in which the sculpture was created. At his Elizabethan home in Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, Butler had three workshops, which he referred to as his "three fields of cultivation." One is a garden where *The Bride* evolved over a five-year period from an initial plaster that was repeatedly refined before final casting in 1961. "it was made entirely outdoors in a tree-surrounded garden," writes the sculptor. "Although I wouldn't claim a direct metaphor, *The Bride* probably owes a great deal to the adjacent tree trunks and the leaves around me all time."

Of *The Bride* and his method of working, Butler has written, "I work to get things as 'right' as I can, but what 'right' means in any given instance I can only find out by making. I work on some figures over a very long period of time -for instance, *The Bride* I started in 1956.

The studios are always full of sculptures, some beginning, some ending, some soon to be abandoned, others in the early stages of things to be with me for years to come. I have to work obliquely, otherwise everything breaks up. One builds with the edges of one's vision.

Bronze  
Height: 7 feet 4 inches  
Executed in 1961; installed in 1970  
Number 3 of an edition of 8  
Signed and numbered on right foot: *RB 3*



# Oval with Points

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Between Stanhope Hall and West College  
Sir Henry Moore  
British, born 1898

Two years after *Oval with Points* was commissioned, the completed two-and-one-half-ton sculpture was delivered and installed. Within a few short months -to the declaration of the sculptor- the interior curves of the oval had been burnished through contact with bodies sitting on or sliding through it.

The sculpture bears a relationship to one of Moore's favorite found objects -an elephant skull acquired in east Africa by the distinguished scientist Sir Julian Huxley and his wife Juliette. They had placed it in their garden.

Sensing the fascination that its "strange brooding presence" had for their friend Moore, the Huxleys gave him the skull, "Henry not only took it to his heart but proceeded to explore his massive outline, its tunnels cavities, its recesses and blind eye-sockets...[He] also created several pieces of sculpture bearing the unmistakable stamp of his genius fused with an evocation of the skull's construction."

Patrick J. Kelleher was shown the elephant skull in 1969 when he visited the artist's home and studio at Perry Green in Hertfordshire. Though Moore himself did not refer to a connection between the skull and *Oval with Points*, definite affinities could be discovered between the general form of the sculpture and the subtle undulant surfaces of the skull bones as well as the suggestive shape of the optical cage long since devoid of eyes.

Bronze  
Height: 11 feet  
Executed in 1969-70; installed 1971  
Number 1 of an edition of 6  
Unsigned



# Atmosphere and Environment X

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Between Nassau Street and Firestone Library  
Louise Nevelson  
American, born in Russia, 1900

In describing her art, Louise Nevelson has written: "I do not belong to any movement. As my work is related to the present time, it is bound to be related to that of others, consciously or not..." Her art may be more closely related to her collections of African art, American farm tools, architectural elements, and diverse other fragments of the past and her attraction to the art and architecture of pre-Columbian Mexico and Central America.

Nevelson has a penchant for rectilinear format in which shapes and patterns, rhythms and accents, tend toward repetition and read in narrative fashion. Together with her use of such "abstract" non-hues as black, white, and gold (equivalent to the space-erasing gold backgrounds of mosaics and icons) one finds the influence of the orientalized art of Byzantium and its Russian derivatives.

She was well past fifty when she began to create the extraordinary shadow box reliefs and walls of wood that constitute her master-works; she was nearly seventy when she undertook the Princeton commission for her first monumental outdoor sculpture in

Cor-Ten steel.

*Atmosphere and Environment X* is basically a two dimensional architectonic screen, increased in depth by projections and setbacks; it achieves character and magic from the play of natural light over surface geometry.

Cor-Ten steel  
Height: 21 feet; length: 16 feet  
Executed in 1969-70; installed in 1971  
Unsigned



# White Sun

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Lobby of Firestone Library  
Isamu Noguchi  
American, born 1904

**D**rawing on both Eastern and Western cultural traditions, Isamu Noguchi's sculptures appear to possess "effortlessness," a virtue Chinese artists once valued above perfection.

Together with the numerous individual sculptures that have emerged from Noguchi's various studios throughout his long and distinguished career, the artist has been involved in major environmental projects, especially since the early 1950s. Among the most notable is the Sunken Courtyard of 1960-1964, fashioned in dazzling white Vermont marble, that accompanies Gordon Bundshaft's Beinecke rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. The Putnam Collection's *White Sun* is related to this work, as Noguchi explains: "Within this composition...[was] a disque representing the sun...The sun gave me the most bother... There must have been at least a dozen of them that I made-more or less complex....The *White Sun* at Princeton is one of the other studies that I made. This was carved by me in Italy at the same time that I made on somewhat different version of the study which is at the National Collection of Fine Arts in Washington [National Museum of American Art]...in gray marble...One [other study]...is in front of the Seattle Art Museum and was carved in black Brazilian granite in Japan. It has been my conceit to think that I have spanned the continent with a giant *White Sun* in the East and *Black Sun* on the western shores of America. May I say that Princeton's *White Sun* is among my favorites."

White Marble  
Diameter: 2 feet 4 1/2 inches  
Executed in 1966; installed in 1970  
Unsigned



# Song of the Vowels

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Between Firestone Library and the University Chapel  
Jacques Lipchitz  
American, born in Lithuania, 1891-1973

*Song of the Vowels* is one of a succession of sculptures produced over almost two decades -the others are *The Harp Player* (1928), *Harp Players* [or *Harpists*] (1930), and *Benediction* (1945) -in which Lipchitz explored his "obsession" with the motif of the harp, inspired originally by the harpist at symphony concerts in Paris: "Invariably -the music contributing- the peculiar shapes of the harps, their strings vibrating in the light, veritable columns binding earth, transported me into a world which I, in turn, had to make my way back under pain of losing my self there.

From these repeated journeys was born, in the beginning of 1928 ... *The Harp Player* ... a sculpture made entirely of cords -a 'transparent' sculpture which can be seen and affects us from all sides at once."

In *Song of the Vowels*, Cubist principles of structure and form are fully realized. The vision of "transparency," produces spatial tensions through open penetrations that puncture the blocklike mass of bronze to create a sense of lightness and a soaring elegance.

Lipchitz commented in 1946 on the poetic title of the sculpture: "The title has no connection with the famous poem of Rimbaud, but rather with a legend of ancient Egypt, according to which it appears there existed a prayer, the *Song of the Vowels*, which the priests and priestesses made use of to conjure up the forces of nature."

Bronze  
Height: 10 feet  
Executed and installed in 1969  
Number 7 of an edition of 7  
Inscribed on top of the base: 7/7 J. Lipchitz 1931-32



# Head of a Woman

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Entrance to McCormick Hall and The Art Museum

Pablo Picasso

Spanish, 1881-1973

**P**ablo Picasso's first piece titled *Head of a Woman* was slightly larger than one foot high and later served as the inspiration for the monumental sculpture at Princeton. This earlier work was constructed of cutout and folded sheet metal that was painted.

Carl Nesjar, a Norwegian artist, agreed to serve as intermediary with Picasso in the negotiations that would lead to the acquisition of a major sculpture for the Putnam Memorial Collection. Armed with site plans, *in situ* photographs of a composition-board mockup, and a letter of request from President Goheen, Nesjar visited Picasso at this home in the South of France in November 1969 and received his approval. A photograph of the mockup, signed and inscribed "Bon à tirer pour Nesjar. Picasso. le 18.11.69," formed the contact between the artist and the University.

While Nesjar created the sculpture on the green in front of The Art Museum, he conducted a unique, outdoor seminar. The process involved building wooden forms to establish the basic shapes of the columnar pedestal and then a similar structure for the head itself. After completion of the wooden form, a mixture of crushed stone (imported from Norway) and iron tie-rods was packed within, and liquid concrete was injected under pressure from the base up. Nesjar later sandblasted the outer skin to expose the colorful aggregate.

The opportunity to participate in the re-creation of a master's imaginative work is but one instance of the contribution the Putnam Memorial Collection has made to the continuing process of education at Princeton.

Cast concrete

Height: 16 feet; length: 12 feet

Executed by Carl Nesjar in 1971 from Picasso's maquette of 1962

Unsigned



# Moses

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Lawn in front of Prospect  
Tony Smith  
American, 1912-1980

**T**ony Smith worked first as a toolmaker and draftsman while studying painting and drawing. After serving as clerk for Frank Lloyd Wright, he managed his own successful independent practice for almost two decades.

By 1960, however, he turned to sculpture. Smith preferred mild steel to Cor-Ten steel. Mild steel accommodates itself more readily to welding, resulting in greater unity of the joining planes. Its less wavy texture makes it easier to manipulate into exactly level planes. In reply to an inquiry about relevance of subject matter in his work and the significance of the title of *Moses*, Smith wrote: “My sculptures are always conceived and developed as abstract geometric structures....They were given titles only after a maquette (at least) had been made. In some cases the work had already been put together as a full-scale mockup or fabricated in steel before its image became clear and it was named. Occasionally titles ...came to me all at once. *Moses* is an instance of the latter. The parallel uprights suggested the horns in Michelangelo’s *Moses*. We know that these strange attributes were the result of a misunderstanding by the Latin Vulgate of the Hebrew ‘shone,’ derived from the word meaning ‘horn,’ and used figuratively to denote rays or flashes of light proceeding from a luminous object, e.g., the head of *Moses*....Mistranslation resulted in Michelangelo’s peculiar representation of a horned *Moses*. My sculpture, without previous intent, perpetuates this curiosity.”

Painted mild steel  
Height: 15 feet, length: 11 feet 6 inches  
Model executed 1967-1968; fabricated and installed in 1969  
Number 1 of an edition of 2  
Unsigned



# Upstart 2

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Entrance to the Engineering Quadrangle  
Clement Meadmore  
American, born in Australia, 1929

*Upstart 2* is characteristic of the minimalist movement through which strict economy of means produces purity of image.

Minimalist reduces the language of art to “its sparest and barest element...to secure a maximum of expression at the very boundary separating art from non-art.” (Hilton Kramer)

*Upstart 2* creates a precise optical experience. Despite its actual mass and weight, the sculpture creates a miraculous impression of material lightness. It aggressively elbows out surrounding atmosphere as it makes its ascent. It is said the “Meadmore sees his sculpture as being like a person who inhabits a place.”

The artist’s means of achieving much with little in his sculpture first involves the execution of a small-scale maquette usually made of polyurethane. When completed, this model appears to have been formed simply from an attenuated bar that has been twisted, bent, stretched, curved, coiled, or knotted according to the sculptor’s whim. From the miniature working model of *Upstart 2*, Meadmore executed a reduced version, measuring twenty-five and a half inches high, in an edition of four strikes.

The monumental version at Princeton is made of Cor-Ten steel. Meadmore was among the first sculptors to recognize the potential of Cor-Ten steel, which is particularly thick, hard, and durable. Its nonreflecting surface can be painted or allowed to develop a rich, dark brown patina through weathering.

Cor-Ten steel  
Height: 21 feet  
Executed in 1970; installed in 1973  
Number 1 of an edition of 2  
Unsigned



# Spheric Theme

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Courtyard of the Engineering Quadrangle  
Naum Gabo  
American, born in Russia, 1890-1977

Naum Gabo was captivated by spatial relationships. Before Gabo, traditional sculpture had dealt with material bodies in terms of solid mass; the artist's image, trapped in the stone, could be realized only by cutting away extraneous parts. Even working with fashioned or molded material, the sculptor needed to fill space with the solid form of his object.

Gabo, however, used a new system in which he employed a 'stereometric cube.' This schematic design involved removal of four of the six sides of the cube, while retaining the top and the bottom, and replacing the rejected planes with two internal, interlocking diagonals. Thus the illusion of solid mass within the cube could be destroyed, allowing the interior space to appear open and free.

After leaving Russia (about 1915), Gabo joined his brother and fellow sculptor Antoine Pevsner in Norway. Of this productive sojourn he said, "I was living in the fjords of Norway where the atmosphere was as if one were not of this world. Very often the sky was above and the sky was below and you felt as if you were between two skies. The sense of space was so intense that it helped me in my imagination to go on with that work, with my images, with the method of space."

After working out several variants of *Spheric Theme*, Gabo explained in 1957, "I felt that the visual character of space is not angular... I enclose the space in one curved continuous surface."

Stainless steel  
Height: 8 feet  
Executed in 1973-1974; installed in 1974  
Limited of a series of five  
Unsigned



# Five Disks: One Empty

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Plaza between Fine and Jadwin Halls  
Alexander Calder  
American, 1898-1976

Alfred H. Barr Jr., a member of the Putnam Selections Committee and longtime friend of Alexander Calder, first approached the artist directly to discuss a monumental work designed especially for Princeton. Early in 1969, Calder replied that he was preoccupied, but that he would find it “fun to make something especially for you, and quite big...So [I hope you will] bear with me, and I will evolve you something.”

By early summer he was free enough to write. “I feel that now I can try to conjure something up for Princeton.” *Disks and No Disks* was the title of what evolved.

Barr suggested one or more of the disks be painted orange to honor the colors of Old Nassau. A wary Calder replied, “After my initial reluctance to paint anything orange, I think *all 3* disks might be good.” A few weeks later he amended this, “I suggest that you paint the smallest ‘Orange.’”

In anticipation of the artist’s visit to Princeton in November 1971, all four solid disks had been painted orange. Surveying his sculpture with a shrewd eye, Calder walked through and around the stabile to scan the work from various angles of the place and from the top of the thirteen-story Fine Hall tower. Then, he gave quiet instructions to the painters, and the four orange disks were gradually blacked out, one by one. To an inquiry about a new title for the stabile, he replied without hesitation, “Five Disks: One Empty.” Clearly he had anticipated the denouement from the beginning.

Mild steel, painted black  
Height: 26 feet 3 inches  
Executed in 1969-1970; installed in 1971  
Signed and dated on foot: AC [artist’s monogram] 70



# Construction in the Third and Fourth Dimension

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Courtyard of Jadwin Hall  
Antoine Pevsner  
French, born in Russia, 1886-1962

*Construction in the Third and Fourth Dimension* is one of the last major works of Antoine Pevsner, elder brother of Naum Gabo and collaborator with him in the creation of the Constructivist movement upon their return to Russia during the early 1920s. While studying painting at the academies of Kiev and St. Petersburg, Pevsner first became absorbed with concepts of space employed in the icons of churches and monasteries in Novgorod, and subsequently he was attracted by the Impressionist and early School of Paris paintings. Arriving in the French capital in 1911 during the heyday of Cubist invention, he was impressed by the engineering magic of the Eiffel Tower.

One major direction in Pevsner's sculpture exploited the contortion of flat metal planes, theoretically capable of indefinite projection.

Linear striations on the surface of the planes allow for the enjoyment of both spatial and temporal experiences simultaneously, while suggesting the possibility of infinite continuity.

The Putnam Collection Pevsner, with its handsome black granite pedestal designed by the sculptor, serves additionally as a memorial to the Danish scientist and humanist Niels Bohr (1885-1962), who had longstanding personal and professional ties with colleagues in the Department of Physics at Princeton. A quotation from Bohr's 1950 letter to the United Nations, enunciating the policy of Open World, flanks the paving stones at the base of the sculpture.

Bronze  
Height: 10 feet 3 inches  
Executed in 1962; installed in 1972  
Number 3 of an edition of 4 cast in 1971  
Inscribed on one wing: *Pevsner 3/3*



# Sphere VI

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Butler College Courtyard

Arnaldo Pomodoro

Italian, born 1926

**B**etween the mid-1950s and mid-1960s, Arnaldo Pomodoro perfected his technique of casting in the negative/positive process, in which the artist works initially in clay or plaster, carving or gouging out his motifs as negative images; when cast, these elements are reversed and transposed into the positive forms of the final sculpture. Pomodoro first developed the technique in his elegant cast jewelry.

The *Spheres* of the 1960s were all characterized by an imagery of pure form sundered, violated, and partially eaten away by internal erosion. Beneath the flawlessly polished or natural skins of the exterior surfaces, multiple motifs of recessed and repeated dentils, ribs, and hatching became for the artist “an expression of an interior movement.”

While an artist in residence at Stanford University, Pomodoro evolved the first of his new spheres, the *Rotani* or *Rotors*, of which the Putnam Memorial Collection has one of the earliest examples. The distinction between the *Spheres* and the *Rotors* lies simply in the stability of one and the potential mobility of the other. Thus, Princeton’s elegant *Sphere VI* (*Rotante Primo Sezionale*) though pinned to the earth for reasons of security, is vested with inherent mobility.

In 1974 interview Pomodoro said, “I can enjoy my sculptures in a park, in an ancient public square, like Pesaro, or on a great university campus.... I like to see people lean their bicycles on the sculptures, and pigeons come to rest, to see them humanized.”

Polished bronze

Diameter: 4 feet

Executed in 1966; installed in 1969

Unsigned



# Cubi XIII

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Lawn of Spelman Halls  
David Smith  
American, 1906-1965

Although David Smith resented a modern architecture that denies serious roles to sculpture and painting in contemporary building, his competitive instinct would have been excited by the location of his *Cubi XIII*. It looks back on a group of dormitories that, Smith's sculpture, owes a considerable debt to Cubist precepts.

David Smith began to exploit the potentialities of stainless steel as a medium in the 1950s. He employed this material for the creation of his *Cubi*, a brilliant series of twenty-eight sculptures that were destined to become the capstone of his career.

It was David Smith himself who said, "I like outdoor sculpture, and the most practical thing for outdoor sculpture is stainless steel, and I make them and I polish them in such a way that on a dull day, they take on a dull blue, of the color of the sky in the late afternoon sun, the glow, golden like the rays, the colors of nature. and in a particular sense, I have used atmosphere in a reflective way on the surfaces. They are colored by the sky and the surroundings....They are designed for outdoors."

Smith began his career as a painter. He said, "I do not recognize the limits where painting ends and sculpture begins." Coming to sculpture as a painter, Smith had little propensity for modeling or carving maquettes. Instead he used a welding torch to execute his sculptures directly in iron or steel. His large corpus of works was achieved practically single-handedly.

Stainless steel  
Height: 9 feet 6 inches  
Executed in 1963; installed in 1969  
Inscribed on base: *Cubi XIII David Smith Mar-25 1963*



# Floating Figure

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Compton Court, Graduate College  
Gaston Lachaise  
American, born in France, 1882-1935

Acceptance of modern sculpture as major art form came slowly in America between 1915 and 1935. Gaston Lachaise, with the support of a small but influential group of artists, critics, dealers, and intellectuals, was the chief protagonist in the struggle for its recognition, and he emerged from the fray a figure of significant rank in American art.

His life and art would be unimaginable different without the presence of Isabel Dutaud Nagle and the visual image he created of her. She became for him a Galatea, model, wife, and eternal mistress.

*Floating Figure* has been described as “rising in the air, balanced with an exuberance, lightness, and originality.... The proliferation of rounded breast and buttock shapes create a fantasy of sexually laden forms which communicate in the most forceful manner, while transfigured in the myth-making process into a extrawordly spirit....As one sees the figure, one has no sense of weight or mass, but only the qualities of serenity, strength, and exalted womanhood.” (Gerald Nordland)

The first authorized strike of *Floating Figure* was presented to the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and has long been a glory of the museum’s sculpture garden.

Bronze  
Height: 4 feet 3 3/4 inches; length: 8 feet  
Executed in 1927; installed in 1969  
Number 4 of an edition of 7  
Stamped on left calf: *Lachaise Estate*, inscribed 4/7



# Lieutenant John B. Putnam Jr., 1921-1944

**J**ohn B. Putnam Jr. was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on January 20, 1921. After early education in schools in Cleveland and Switzerland, he entered Princeton University in the fall of 1940.

Leaving the University at the end of his sophomore year to enlist in the U.S. Army Air Force, he received his wings in late 1943 and was sent to European theater of operations in April 1944 as a pursuit pilot.

Named flight leader of a Thunderbolt fighter squadron, Lieutenant Putnam flew nine combat hours over Normandy beaches on D-Day, June 6, 1944, and had completed fifty-three combat missions before crashing to his death in England on July 19, 1944, at age twenty-three. He wrote in his diary, "Courage is not the lack of fear but the ability to face it."

During the last two and a half months of combat flying before his death, John B. Putnam Jr. was awarded the Air Medal, six silver leaf clusters, and posthumously, the Distinguished Flying Cross "for extraordinary achievement and heroism in aerial combat."

Text based on  
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