



# Ivan Mestrovic

*"The greatest phenomenon among  
the sculptors."* —RODIN

SELDOM does an artist run the gauntlet of the critics and emerge untouched, Ivan Mestrovic, "the sculptors' sculptor," is one of the rare exceptions, a master whose bouquets have been more blooms than thorns.

Mestrovic's rise from the obscurity of the Dalmatian Alps to his present position as one of the world's finest sculptors has not been meteoric, although his name became known among artists while he was quite young. He began carving in wood and stone in his youth, and, after an apprenticeship with a marble cutter, entered the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts to study four years under Edmund Hellmar.

Between the ages of 19 and 31, Mestrovic was repre-

sented in 29 exhibitions in Europe. His first American showing was more than 30 years ago. His work is in the permanent collections of more than 20 museums and he made art history in 1947 when he gave his one-man exhibition in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Such privileges have been extended to few artists in the museum's 77 years of existence.

Mestrovic was imprisoned for several months in World War II because he was pro-Allied in his sympathies. His release came only after Vatican intercession in 1942. In 1946, Chancellor William P. Tolley of Syracuse University appointed him a professor in the College of Fine Arts and obtained his visa to come to this country. Under Mestrovic's direction, a department of sculpture has been established at Syracuse. In his studios there he shares his vast artistic experience with graduate students and seniors.

**THE SHORT**, black-bearded sculptor from Yugoslavia is not only one of the best artists but one of the most prolific. In the past four years, he has produced 17 pieces of sculpture in marble and bronze, nine oil paintings on wood, six large wooden reliefs, and many drawings.

Mestrovic's sculptures are produced with his heart as well as his hands. His finished work is an expression of many forces and ideas. Mournful Slavic folk songs, Biblical tales he heard from his mother, his childhood in the Croatian hills, the internal turmoil of his country during its wars

—all are reflected in the stone, bronze, clay, and wood that have felt the hand of this master.

His famous works are many. They include his recent "Pieta," a heroic group in marble, "Head of Moses," his American Indian equestrian figures which dominate the entrance to Grant Park, Chicago, his memorial chapel for the Racic family in Dalmatia, the tranquil portrait of "Mother," the figure of Bishop Gregory of Nin, and his portrait of Rodin.

**OF MESTROVIC'S SHOW** at the Metropolitan, Edward Alden Jewell of the *New York Times* wrote: "On the basis of the present work, it may be said that Mestrovic exemplifies with exceptional power a broad sculptural tradition, stemming, as he would seem to do, from Michelangelo, by way of Rodin. But unqualified, that statement would be flagrantly inadequate, for it fails to specify distinguishing qualities that set Mestrovic apart.

"The relationship to Michelangelo and Rodin is purely general, or, if you like, largely anatomical. Much more personal is the use made of motifs that go back to archaic Greek sculpture. And the application of Byzantine principles of acute simplification and stylization, combined with typical traits that characterize his native Balkan environment, appear notably in such pieces as the formalized 'Teaching the Child to Pray' and the flatly-treated reliefs."

*Newsweek* wrote: "Its popularity can be foretold with

relative certainty, for the work is forceful, emotional, and modern. Yet it is easy to understand and relates to familiar classics of the past. The extra-long arms of 'Suppliant Persephone' make explicit the depths she is calling from. 'Inspired Woman' has a Lehmbruck-like suavity of form and expression. Other figures exhibit the quivering flanks and wrenched muscles of the most dramatic mannerist sculpture.

"Mestrovic . . . is at home in every form of expression including architecture, with four memorial chapels of a modified Romanesque style to his credit. . . . Whether or not these modes suit America, the art that begins to come out of Syracuse will be clearly worth watching."

Margaret Cresson, daughter of the famous American sculptor, the late Daniel Chester French, said in the *New York Times*: "In an era like our own, when the accent seems to be on power, money, science, and materialism, it seems only too seldom that an artist appears who has all the attributes of genius. For genius is a fundamental of the human spirit. It differs widely from talent. Talent is mild. A certain amount of it can be acquired through application and ambition. But genius springs full-grown. She is born mature and whole. Her followers have no choice. They work because they have to work. They are artists because they can be no other. Of such is Mestrovic."

