

Information on

Philip Grausman
American, born 1935
Victoria, 1991–2000; cast 2007
Stainless steel; 14 X 6½ X 7½ feet, edition of 3
Museum Purchase with the Russell Hill Rogers
Fund for the Arts
2008.6



Subject Matter

Seen from behind, the smooth stainless steel trunk of Philip Grausman's *Victoria* rises to a height of about ten feet. A giant orb of shiny metal balloons outward. The polished metal surface shows a particular woman in a very smooth stylized form. This massive sculpture weighs about 4500 pounds and stands at an overall height of 14 feet.

From the front, the sculpture is clearly a head with a very long neck. The forehead is rounded and smooth, curving down and back, ending in a neat pageboy coiffure. The eyes are closed and somewhat sunken. A thin ridge rides over the bridge of the nose. This ridge and a broad brow encircle the eyes to form a mask-like structure. The mouth is closed, with lips neither very full nor very thin. Relatively small bumps represent the ears. High cheekbones, well-proportioned nose and lips, and a rounded chin complete this female figure.

Light and dark areas formed from shadows on the metal give the figure a striking, chiseled appearance. The figure displays bilateral symmetry from the front and back and appears balanced when viewed from the sides. The elongated neck, closed sunken eye surrounded by furrows, and tiny ear bumps give the sculpture a surreal appearance. Other features appear proportional and realistic.

Victoria, as well as other Grausman sculptures, "have been shaped with a silky emphasis on idealization—contours slope elegantly, symmetry quietly emphasized, with facial features stoic and streamlined." Grausman's sculptures tend toward abstraction. The artist has succeeded in depicting a universal quality that he believes cultures all over the world relate to. His sculptures, including *Victoria*, have a somewhat anonymous quality, yet their individuality is evident in his titling. Victoria Davila, a Santa Fe sculptor and friend of Grausman's, modeled for this work. The McNay Art Museum commissioned Grausman to make this stainless steel version based on an existing maquette of *Victoria*, as well as monumental heads in other materials.

About the Artist

Philip Grausman was born in New York City in 1935, to a family of surgeons. His family encouraged him to become an architect, a practical profession for his early interest in art. He changed his major to art history and began learning the technical fundamentals of drawing, carving stone, and forming metal sculpture. He spent ten years hammering large sheets of metal into sculptures. He studied at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine and Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan. He earned his bachelor's degree in art degree from Syracuse University in 1957, and his master's degree from Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1959.

Grausman studied with the sculptor Jose de Creeft at the Art Students League of New York, working with the form of the human head for over 30 years. While the dynamics of the human head have always inspired Grausman, his fascination with natural shapes has extended to germinating seeds, pods, and animals. The curving planes and angular crevices of his monumental heads evoke both portrait and landscape genre in viewing. Grausman's heads have been compared to depictions of the human form from Egyptian antiquity to those by 20th-century masters such as Constantin Brancusi, Gaston Lachaise, and Elie Nadelman. McNay director William Chiego has commented that the sculpture's monumentality makes him think of "older sculptures such as Egyptian sphinxes or heads on Easter Island."

Philip Grausman
Victoria, 1991–2000; cast 2007

About the Artist continued

Grausman has been featured in several solo and group exhibitions across the United States. He currently works for the graduate school of architecture at Yale University as an architectural drawing critic. In teaching at the Yale School of Architecture, he tries to instill in his students a traditional knowledge that he feels has been lost in the 20th-century revolution in art. He feels that architects of today need to become reacquainted with volume because of their tendency to conceive of volume in two dimensions.

Quotes from the Artist

As a sculptor, my ambition has been to create monumental forms inspired by the human figure.

[Making art is] the nearest a man can come to the experience of physically giving birth.

Strategies for Tours

Primary Grades (ages 6–8): What do you see? What do you think it is made of? How is it different from the paintings we have looked at? How would you describe the texture?

Upper Elementary (ages 9–11): [Use questions above.] Is this a sculpture of a real person? Why or why not? How did the artist get the metal to take this shape? [Discuss molten metal, molds, lost wax casting.]

Middle School/High School (ages 12-18): [Use questions above] How is this portrait alike or different from other busts in the McNay galleries, including portrait busts by Nicholas Africano, Jacob Epstein, and Alberto Giacometti? How is it alike or different from other outdoor sculptures such as the Tony Cragg's Hole Heads, or Tony Smith's Asteriskos?

Adults: [Ask visitors to view it from behind first, imagining what it depicts. Use questions above. Discuss the artist's life, career, what other types of sculptures he has done.]

Sources Worth Consulting

Grausman, Philip. *Monumental Elegance: Sculpture & Drawings of Philip Grausman*. Grand Rapids, MI: Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park, 2001.

Navas, Mario, "Head Cases," *The New York Observer*, September 1, 2008.

Petrich, Lynn Kari, "Philip Grausman," *American Artist*, September 1988, 50–55.