

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PLEASE LIST

WILHELM LEHMBRUCK
19 JANUARY THROUGH 3 MARCH 2012

Michael Werner Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of works by Wilhelm Lehmbruck (1881-1919). The first major Lehmbruck exhibition in the United States in more than two decades, *Wilhelm Lehmbruck* provides a unique opportunity to view significant works by a European artist rarely seen in America.

Wilhelm Lehmbruck is an important figure in the development of modernism and the first German sculptor of the twentieth century to significantly impact art on an international scale. A contemporary of Auguste Rodin and Aristide Maillol, Lehmbruck's contribution to sculpture was distinctly modern. His achievement was of particular importance to a later generation of sculptors, chief among them Joseph Beuys, who openly credited his predecessor as the inspiration to begin his own work in sculpture.

In 1895, at the age of 14, Lehmbruck entered the School of Arts and Crafts in Düsseldorf and later received specialized studies at the Düsseldorf Academy - training typical for aspiring sculptors of the time. He adhered to tradition during his Academy years, though he remained mindful of modern developments in painting and sculpture, vis a vis Rodin and other artists working in Paris at that time. A major Rodin exhibition, presented in Düsseldorf in 1904, made a deep impression on Lehmbruck and allowed him to conceive of a break with the traditions that had guided him during his student years. Beginning in 1907 Lehmbruck made several trips to Paris and eventually settled there in 1910. It was in Paris that his unique style began to emerge. Gradually moving away from the neoclassical foundations of his work, he began to fuse elements from his traditional formal vocabulary with a range of sources including Romanticism and the Gothic.

Lehmbruck's specifically modern contribution to sculpture lay in an innovative approach to materials, in particular his use of recently developed industrial materials including cast stone. This experimentation encouraged his interest in fragmentation, another important quality of the artist's modern sensibility. Lehmbruck often preferred to rework or recast elements from his existing sculptures, rather than to conceive of entirely new forms. Figures could be recast in stone or terracotta, for example, and given various different patinas; or, the head or torso from a larger figure could be isolated and recast in a variety of media. Lehmbruck exploited his experiments with materials and form to augment the emotional tenor of his works, all in an effort to achieve the deepest possible feeling.

Lehmbruck participated in the famous Armory Show of 1913 and had his first solo exhibition in 1914, at Galerie Levesque in Paris. With the outbreak of World War I, he returned to Germany, arriving first in Cologne and Düsseldorf and later Berlin. During the war he worked briefly in a field hospital. His already fragile sensibility, fraught with self-doubt and prone to melancholy, did not withstand the horrors of war. Tragically, he took his own life in 1919 at the age of 38, leaving no immediately apparent successor. While the Nazis would later denounce Lehmbruck as "degenerate", his work became for many a symbol of creative freedom. Joseph Beuys, in a moving acceptance speech given on the occasion of being awarded the Lehmbruck Prize in 1986, honored the artist as his inspiration and mentor. As his biographer Paul Westheim wrote in 1922, describing the artist's sadly truncated legacy, "Lehmbruck's art remains a torso...He has given us much that is significant, but, judging from his beginnings, we had the right to expect more..."

Wilhelm Lehmbruck features more than a dozen sculptures by the artist, including several rare lifetime bronze and stone casts as well as unique plaster and terracotta figures. Also included in the exhibition is a large selection of related etchings, many of them unique impressions. The graphic works are remarkable for their physicality and, like his sculptures, they exploit the emotive qualities of their material to reach beyond mere depiction toward something deeper.

Wilhelm Lehmbruck is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue featuring a text by art historian and curator Annabelle Ténèze. The exhibition is on view from 19 January through 3 March. Gallery hours are Monday through Saturday, 10AM to 6PM. Please call the gallery for more information or visit michaelwerner.com.