

ANDREW WEISS GALLERY



NAKIAN

Born: 1897

Died: 1986

Nationality: American

"Myths are good because they give you form and a grand story. I don't want only form; I want philosophy, love. You can't make a statue of a man and a woman copulating, but you can use a woman and a swan. Then it becomes poetry."

-Reuben Nakian

Reuben Nakian is one of the most important Modernist sculptors of the twentieth century. After studying with Paul Manship and working as a studio assistant to Gaston Lachaise, he began his career as a sculptor and became one of the major figures in the Abstract Expressionist, associating especially with Arshile Gorky and Willem DeKooning. During his long year career as an artist, he came to focus on erotic abstractions of the female figure, frequently based upon classical mythology reinterpreted for the 20th century. Nakian had his first major retrospective at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1962, soon followed by a major exhibition curated by Frank O'Hara (who also wrote the essay for the substantial catalogue illustrating more than 100 of Nakian's works) at the Museum of Modern Art in NY in 1966. Reuben Nakian's work has been shown in museums and galleries around the world, with a major travelling exhibition to celebrate the centennial of his birth in 1997 and 1998 that showed at the Reading Public Museum in Reading, Pennsylvania and the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. Nakian's sculptures demonstrate his preoccupation with drawing, and the MoMA catalogue shows a number of plaques based upon the theme of Leda and the Swan, a subject to which Nakian returned time and again, perhaps under the influence of Yeats' superb poem upon the subject, perhaps in an attempt to come to terms with previous art works on the subject, including a drawing by Michelangelo and a painting by Leonardo da Vinci.