

## Motion on Hold:

Lotta Blokker sculpts a dance in time. By John T. Spike



Lotta  
Blokker,  
"Levity," 2004,  
bronze, 39" x 75" x 47".

Stripped of sword, helmet or scroll, how were people to know who this young man was? All we see is a model, terribly lifelike, who places a hand on the top of his head and leans back slightly tensed. For Rodin, he represented "one of the first inhabitants of our world, physically perfect, but in the infancy of his understanding, only beginning to awake to the world's meaning." That's quite a mouthful, coming from a statue. On the other hand—and here's the power of art—we get the message.

Is it any wonder, as symbols dropped away, that sculptors began to represent dancers? Degas and Rodin would agree that "the body says what words cannot," although it was Martha Graham, a modern dancer, who said it. "The movement of the universe concentrated in an individual" is famous choreographer Isadora Duncan's definition of dance, and it works as well for the sculpted human body. Not by chance, the ancient poet Horace compared the arts of painting, sculpture, music and dance to poetry without words; poetry, he noted, is a picture that speaks.

All this was fine until the day, early in the 20th century, that the arts, poetry included, ceased telling stories. Suddenly "sentimental" Rodin was shown the door. His heir-apparent, Jacob Epstein, was world-famous until the 1940s. Who's heard of him now? Realism went down for the count, though the reports of its demise were greatly exaggerated. The realistic human form came back on stage under various disguises: the Pop Art of George Segal, the Hyperrealism of Duane Hanson and Carole Feuerman. In the '80s Robert Graham began to fashion perfect little nudes with the smooth limbs and blank expressions the times demanded.

Open the calendar to 2005 and the cycle is complete. Trying to express "interior feelings through the mobility of the muscles," as Rodin put it, is today's avant-garde—and it's quite appalling to those who expect their biceps cubed. "Levity" by Lotta Blokker is a life-sized bronze, modeled by eye and hand, without tricks. It represents a dancer or perhaps someone who yearns to dance. As the model leans forward, his lower body compresses and his torso ripples with tension. But his legs are crossed, his feet on edge. Though the whole frame is committed, in this instant, he cannot move. Bent over, "Levity" is a portrait of a human being on hold. When or if his call will be forwarded is anybody's guess. Blokker's aim is an emotion difficult to express in words. Perhaps she sought inspiration in Rodin—the expressive hands seem to recall the master—but youthful talent makes its own discoveries. Seek not the footsteps of the men of old, the poet said, seek what they sought. ♦

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When Gustave Courbet exhibited his painting "The Burial at Ornans" in 1850, the public was shocked, but also touched, by its unglamorized depiction of everyday grief. They were used to highbrow tragedy starring the Olympian gods. "From now on the critics must decide for or against realism" was the verdict of one impressed observer.

Sculptors raised on Greco-Roman marbles found it difficult to shed their togas. Twenty-five years passed before Auguste Rodin took the decisive step. In 1876, his figure "The Age of Bronze" created a sensation—not for its nudity, but for its lack of symbolic nonsense.