

MARTIN  **NELSON**



(The Lovers, Camille Claudel 1886)

Jacob meets Camille- 'Live and Let Live'

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'I rest silent in my work',
preface to Jacob Epstein's 1917 Exhibition at the Leicester Galleries.

Prologue

La Belle Époque (The Beautiful Era also called the Golden Age) was a period of unique French and European Culture from the late 19th to the early 20thC.

It was the beginning of the Third Republic, an exciting time that saw the construction of the Eiffel Tower, the Paris Metro, the Paris Opera House and the beginning of Impressionism and Modern Art.

Young men and women flocked to the French capital to bask in its modernity and dynamism. Artists such as Auguste Rodin, Paul Gauguin, Henri Matisse, Henri de Toulouse Lautrec and many others were changing the face of art.

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Jacob is born

'It's a boy,' the doctor called out as I entered the world, the third child of my parents, Mary and Max Epstein. The date was 10th November 1880. They named me Jacob. They were to have eight children in all.

My parents, Mary and Max had enjoyed rich and fulfilling lives, growing up in a Jewish community in Augusow, Poland. They would never have considered leaving their beloved country, but progressively, their freedom to practice their religion came under attack and they began to be persecuted. Max dreaded coming home from work as he would be met by a howling crowd shouting *Aus Juden, Aus Juden* and throwing stones.

Their lives had become intolerable and reluctantly they decided to leave the home they had lived in all their lives. It was an agonising decision.

Across the sea, the New World was opening up. Oppressed peoples from many countries were flocking there. My parents joined thousands of others who were fleeing from subjugation, seeking a new life, free from fear and danger.

Some months later, after a long and difficult sea journey, they had their first sight of land: the Statue of Liberty.

They read at its base the stirring words penned by Emma Lazarus in 1883:
"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore"

Mary turned to look at Max, tears running down her face, then a broad smile appeared and they hugged. Then onto Ellis Island and freedom.

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The Lower East Side of New York between the Bowery and the East River had become a thriving centre for Jewish life and they decided to settle there. My father opened a Bakery and in time owned some tenement buildings.

We lived in one of these at 102 Hester Street. At first my parents were overjoyed by their freedom, no longer feeling afraid but slowly the reality of living in an unfamiliar country and not speaking the language began to affect them. Their answer was to seek the company of compatriots and soon a community of Yiddish-speaking people developed.

I was a sickly child, panting after the slightest exertion, struggling to breathe. It was called Asthma and at the time little was known about it. My parents spoke little English so I don't think they understood much of what the doctors were saying. They used to refer to me as the 'sick one'.

Confined to my bedroom, high up overlooking the bustling Hester Street below, I searched for something to do. From morning to night, I would sit peering down through the window, fascinated by the comings and goings in the street below.

It was full of life; people and vehicles; tradesmen pushing carts, a road sweeper resting on his broom, a maid loaded with parcels rushing home, young men with nothing to do, lounging against a wall eyeing the girls.

Every day the scene was different. Friday was the busiest as the largely Jewish community was preparing for the Sabbath. Gradually my drawings began to take shape.

From morning to night, there would be a frenzy of activity. Sometimes I would see the same person walking by, day after day. After a while, I began to look out for familiar faces as if I knew them and that they had become my friends.

Saturday the Sabbath, was the quietest when all the Jewish shops were closed. Then the most people on the street were families going to the Synagogue and non-Jews.

I felt very lonely, envying the people who had so much more freedom than me.

I looked forward to my father's visit every morning before he went off to work. Together we would peer down to the street below and he would talk to me about their lives.

Later after work, he would sit with me holding my hand, telling me about his day in the Bakery.

'Today we were cooking Challah for the sabbath. It's very popular and the queues begin early in the afternoon soon after we remove the cooked loaves from the ovens. Customers like to have their bread when it is still hot so they know it's fresh.'

One day, he came to see me as usual but I could tell that he had something hidden behind his back. I pretended that I hadn't noticed but I could see that he was holding a drawing book and some coloured pencils.

Then he showed them to me.

'Jacob, look what I have brought you? I saw them in a shop window on my way home. Why don't you see if you can draw some of the people that pass along the road below? It will help pass the time.'

When he had gone, I examined the pencils. They were all different colours and I began to sketch with them. I returned to the window, watched and carefully recorded on paper what I saw. At first it was very difficult as people were moving and I got frustrated, tearing out pages from the pad. Slowly I started to improve. In time my drawings began to take shape and I became totally absorbed.

From then on, I would wake up excited and couldn't wait to get to the window to draw. There was so much to see as the scene below changed continuously. I would sit for hours, looking, observing and recording.

Slowly my drawings took on a look of reality.

'How are you this morning?' My father would ask, coming in with a cup of tea. He would usually find me at the window, drawing. I could feel him looking over my shoulder.

'Mmm, zeyer gut, ikh trakhtn deyn dravings zenen zeyer gut, Yekb.'

'Mmm, very good; I think your drawings are very good, Jacob,' he would say, squeezing my arm. When he saw an especially good one, he would rush down stairs to show mother.

Art Competition at Cooper Union

Near where we lived was an Art College. Its full name was 'The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art'. It was founded in 1859 by Peter Cooper, an Inventor, Industrialist and Philanthropist. Politically a democrat, he was also an avid abolitionist.

While out shopping, my mother had seen a notice on the college Notice Board advertising an Art Competition.

She rushed home and told my father.

'Max, do you think Jacob's drawing would be good enough to submit to an Art competition?'

'I don't know, Mary but we can only try.'

Later, unknown to me, they submitted some of my drawings.

Jacob wins first Prize

Some days later, my father burst into my bedroom waving a letter.

'Jacob, Jacob,' he shouted.

'Kuk, ir've van,' Look, you've won.

'Van, Won?'

'Yo, ir hot van ershter freyz der kunst farmest. Yes, you've won first prize in the Art competition.'

I didn't believe what he was saying. First Prize? At first, I thought he was joking, teasing me.

'It's true Jacob, look,' he said, showing me the confirmation letter. I was overjoyed. I didn't know then that art would transform my life and that a door into another world had opened.

Soon after my Barmitzvah, I was enrolled as a student at the Art Students League. I couldn't wait for the course to start. On the first day, I woke early. My heart was thumping with excitement. I sorted out my best pencils and paper and put them into a satchel that Dad had bought me. Gulping down my breakfast, I rushed out with my satchel slung over my back.

With cries of '*Good Luck*' from my parents, I left the house

I had never been to an Art College and I found it very different from school. Pupils were expected to be self-motivated. There was no imposed discipline. You could come and go as you pleased.

A lot of the students just messed about but I didn't want to waste any time. I had a lot of catching up to do.

It was there I met George Grey Barnard, a highly regarded sculptor who had previously studied at the Art Institute of Chicago. I liked him. He was very patient and understood that drawing was difficult.

He became my teacher at the Art Students League. Looking around the life class I realised that I was one of the youngest students although I was quite tall so no-one knew. Initially I felt really intimidated by the older students. Their work was so much more mature than mine. But thanks to George Grey, I soon caught up.

It was through him that my tentative drawings became more definitive. I learned about perspective and shading; how to create an illusion of depth. Under his tuition, I was becoming an artist.

I think it was because of my work at the college that I was approached by Hutchins Hapgood, a journalist who had chosen to live in the Jewish Quarter of New York. He was fascinated by the teeming world of humanity that lived on the East Side and had been invited to produce a book to document their lives.

But it needed illustrations. Liking my work, he invited me to produce a series of drawings that would show the diversity of life in the East Side. Many of the drawings that I had made earlier from my bedroom window became the basis for the new ones.

The Spirit of the Ghetto was written by Hutchins Hapgood and illustrated by Jacob Epstein, It was published in 1902 by Funk and Wagnalls.

Jacob meets Bernard Gussow

It was at the Art Student's League that I met Bernard Gussow, an established artist. I liked him immediately and though he was older than me, we became close friends. I learned a lot from him. We would go on long walks together and talk about art. He had a prodigious knowledge of the history of Art and the major figures who played a part in influencing it.

During my stay with him on Greenwood Lake, he talked about the great sculptors of the past. I think it was through him that I decided to become a sculptor.

Having made the decision, I was excited and couldn't wait to begin. The prospect of carving stone and molding clay excited me although then, I didn't fully understand his counsel.

'Jacob, I want to warn you that it is a lonely path that you are taking. Be prepared for disappointments and criticisms.'

About the same time, I told him about the commission I'd received from Hutchins and asked if he would like to collaborate with me. Together we produced a collection of drawings which delighted Hapgood and were included in his book, 'The Spirit of the Ghetto'.

It was Bernard who later suggested that we go to Paris.

'Jacob, it's where the Art scene is. All the up and coming artists are there. Picasso, Modigliani, Rodin. We must go!'

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I knew it was going to be difficult to tell my parents. They had sacrificed so much when they were forced to leave their home and come to a strange country with an unfamiliar language. Now one of their sons wanted to leave home and go to Paris. It must have sounded to them that I was going to the moon.

But Bernard continued to nag me.

'We must go now! It's the right time.'

One day as my father and I were doing the dishes, I broached the subject.

'Vater, would it be alright if I went to Paris?'

'Paris, what for?'

'It's where all the up-and-coming artists go to learn.'

'Oh! OK if that's what you want. But you must tell your mother, she might not be so happy.'

But in fact, my mother was agreeable. She was more philosophical than my father.

'If you must, you must.' She said, but she insisted on coming with me to see me off.

At that time, going by ship was the only way to travel to France. By the time I had made all the arrangements, Bernard had already left, so he and I arranged to meet in Paris.

Paris

After a short road journey, my mother and I arrived at the port of New York. Stopping an official, I asked,

'Excuse me Sir, I'm looking for the SS Paul?'

Turning, he said, *'she's over there,'* pointing to a large liner tied up at the jetty.

'You'll need to hurry though, she will be departing very soon.'

Pushing through the crowds, we reached the ship. Suddenly I weakened. Fighting back my fear, I turned and kissed my mother; she hugged me. There were tears in her eyes.

Then the ship's horn sounded. Panicking, I clambered up the accommodation ladder. By the time I got to the top I was sweating profusely.

Reaching the main deck, I turned. My mother was now a diminutive figure standing alone on the wharf. She waved, blowing me a kiss and mouthing 'Good luck'.

I waved back, turned and made my way to my cabin.

I didn't know then that it would be the last time I would see her.

The sea journey was very uncomfortable. I was not a good sailor and soon began to feel seasick. Noticing my difficulty, someone sitting nearby in the lounge suggested that I went on deck and stood in the fresh air.

That made a big difference and allowed me to enjoy the rest of the journey. The sea mesmerized me with its constantly changing shapes and colours. I imagined how I would draw it, trying to capture its constant movement.

The voyage passed quickly and before I knew it, the ship was tying up in Cherbourg and we were disembarking.

Travelling through northern France by train was exhilarating. It was the first time I had seen the open countryside and gaped at its constantly changing shades of green. But it was very soporific and I think I slept most of the way.

The sound of a guard's whistle awoke me as we arrived at Gare St Lazare. Alighting, I looked up at the arching girders as they reached aloft enclosing the space. It was like entering a cathedral. They were breath-taking in their lightness and strength.

Suddenly I heard my name.

'Jacob, over here?' a familiar voice was calling. It was Bernard Gussow, my artist friend from New York. He had reached Paris before me.

Grabbing my bag, he shouted over the sound of hissing steam,

'Come! This way.'

I followed him along a busy street and up a narrow alley. We eventually arrived at his studio on Rue Belloni behind Gare Montparnasse, an airy spacious room overlooking the Seine.

'Jacob, put your things down, we're going out.'

Hardly able to catch my breath, I rushed after him along a narrow lane. Suddenly we reached the banks of the Seine and the smell of water and decaying fish.

'Look up there,' Bernard shouted above the traffic noise, pointing upwards.

I followed his finger and had my first view of Notre Dame.

Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Paris

Sited on the Isle de Paris with the waters of the Seine flowing on either side, the edifice reaches upwards into the sky seemingly to obliterate the sun.

'Wonderful isn't it? It was built on the ruins of two earlier churches; probably the most famous Gothic building in the world.'

On the way back we stopped to have breakfast at a local boulangerie near his home. It was my first taste of the delicious French cuisine. Having finished our croissants and coffee, we took a stroll as I had some time before I needed to enrol at the Ecole des Beaux Arts.

By chance we came upon a funeral procession. A large group of men and women had gathered on the pavement to watch as the funeral party went by. Bernard asked someone who it was.

'It's Emile Zola you know, of 'J'accuse' fame.'

The body of the famous novelist was being carried to be buried in Montmartre. I stood with Bernard watching the crowds. I overheard the name Dreyfus and saw people crying. Some were silently paying homage to him but others were shouting anti-Semitic insults. I didn't know then that my own career would be repeatedly challenged because of my religion.

L'Ecole de Beaux Arts

Needing to get on with my enrolment, I followed Bernard's directions and made my way to the Ecole des Beaux Arts. I stood for a moment in front of the huge building created by the French Architect Felix Duban in 1830, admiring its symmetrical appearance with classical features of columns and pediments.

At the admission's office, I struggled with my French, trying to explain that I wanted to enrol as a sculpture student. Eventually the clerk understood but he warned me that before they would accept me, I would have to take a test.

Returning later that day, I joined several other applicants in the studio. We were required to produce a clay maquette moulded from a nude model reclining on a couch. Thanks to my training with Bernard Gussow, I had no difficulty.

I quickly constructed a small armature and moulded clay to it, producing a passable resemblance of the human form. I looked around and saw that many students were struggling with the exercise, having never done it before. When the examiner came around, he nodded to me. I had passed.

I was overjoyed at being accepted as a sculpture student at that prestigious Art School but it was not a happy time. I was ragged and mocked, with taunts such as:-
Pourquoi ne vas-tu pas chez toi d'où tu viens? ('why don't you go home to where you came from?')

Although my French was improving, I was still unable to understand what they were saying, so I couldn't answer back. New students were placed at the back of the life class, some distance from the model.

I could hardly see the model from there, so I would dart back and forth to get a better view. My fellow students found this hilarious and would burst into roars of laughter. To add to my discomfort, an occasional foot was extended to try to trip me up.

I gradually got into a routine; clay modelling in the morning and direct carving from models in the afternoon. But the only ones available were plaster casts of works by Michelangelo and other Renaissance artists, not the choice that I would have made. I wanted to study today's art, the work of modern sculptors like Rodin and Brancusi.

Jacob attends an anatomy class

Realising that drawings from the cadaver were the most direct means of understanding the human body, I decided to attend an anatomy class. I arrived to find a human corpse on display. With no means of preserving the body, it was already putrefying. A mouldy arm was being passed from student to student to be examined. As it was handed to me, I retched at its appearance and smell and almost fainted.

Gagging, I rushed out of the class accompanied by howls of derision. That was the one and only time I attended. Somewhat ashamed at my response, I later learned that I was in good company; that even the great painter Ingres had had the same difficulty.

Six months had passed, and I was beginning to despair of the teaching. What's more, as a junior student, I was expected to slave for the senior men, many of whom had entered works for the Prix du Rome Concours, a prestigious award created in 1663 and competed annually.

While preparing for it, the senior students expected the newcomers to set up their tables and clear away their mess. Noticing that there were many paid assistants available to help them, I refused.

My studio is trashed

One evening, I returned to my studio to find the room had been trashed. My desk had been overturned and most of my half-finished models were broken and thrown onto the floor. Furious, I marched to the Office and reported the incident to the Manager.

'That is not right,' he agreed. 'Leave it to me, I will deal with this.'

I was angry. I returned to my room, cleaned up the mess and restored the unfinished pieces onto their armatures. But the following evening when I returned to my studio, the same thing had happened.

That was it. I collected my things and left.

That evening when I arrived back at the apartment, Bernard could see that I was furious.

'What's happened?'

'Those savages!' I shouted. 'They have destroyed my work. They have again broken into my studio and trashed everything. I've had enough. I'm not going back there.'

'Jacob, calm down. If you don't go back there? How will you learn?'

'I don't know,' I seethed. 'I can't give up now.'

Over supper that night, and after I had calmed down, Bernard brought up the subject of my studies.

'Jacob, I have an idea. Why don't you try at Julian's? You'll like it there and they have female students.'

Academie Julian

Academie Julian's was a private Academy for Art Students, established in 1868 by Rodolphe Julian, a painter. Unlike L'École des Beaux Art, it welcomed both female and male students. The classes were smaller and the routine was much freer.

Students worked at their own pace and this appealed to me.

I made some enquiries and found out that they were prepared to accept me and I was soon enrolled in the Sculpture class.

The Director was Jean Paul Laurens, a renowned artist. Apart from running the Academie, he also supervised the life classes.

I recall on one occasion, I was at my easel when he arrived. As usual, he was accompanied by a horde of new students who were hanging onto his every word.

His practice was to go from one easel to the next, standing behind the student, watching and commenting upon their drawing.

When he got to mine, he paused and reached for a stool. He sat down and stared at my work for a long time and then moved on, without saying a word.

He clearly disapproved of it. Some year's later, we would cross swords again at Le Compte d'Esthétique de la Préfecture de la Seine, where he would condemn my Oscar Wilde monument for the Pere Lachaise cemetery.

Looking back, I realised that my health had by then markedly improved since my early days in New York. I was no longer coughing and wheezing. I was now fully recovered and had unlimited energy.

My visits to the Louvre, Le Trocadero and many other museums exposed me to the past's great wealth of forms and images. I was particularly drawn to the primitive, to its clarity and simplicity.

Frederick Cayley Robinson.

While at Julian's, I became friendly with an English painter, Frederick Cayley Robinson. He was some year's older than me. We met by chance, finding ourselves sitting at the same table in the cafe. He must have overheard my accent because he commented,

'You're American?'

'Yes,' I said, *'and you're English?'*

We both laughed and fell into conversation.

'What are you doing here?'

'I'm learning to be a sculptor and you?'

'I'm a painter. Right now, Paris is the centre of the Art world. Really exciting work is going on here and I need to be here to experience it.'

Then he turned to me,

'Did you say you were a sculptor? Have you been to Rodin's studio? He's the most famous sculptor in the world.'

I had heard a great deal about him and wanted to meet him and see his work but didn't know how to.'

'Look Jacob, that's easy; Rodin has open days on Saturday when the public can visit his studios. Why don't we go together?'

The following Saturday the two of us met.

'Rodin's studios are at the Rue de l'Universite, its walking distance.'

We arrived just in time to enter with a group of other visitors. The studios comprised several large adjoining rooms with high ceilings and long windows opening onto a garden. It was already crammed with young people sauntering around, together with many models in various degrees of undress.

I then saw Rodin for the first time; a stocky figure with a short beard and wearing a small flat cap. He moved silently around the room watching. Suddenly, he would shout, '*attendez*'. Immediately a group of models near him would stop and freeze, holding their positions. He would then reach for a pencil and a large sheet of paper and make a quick drawing.

I watched spell-bound. I was in the studio of one of the most famous sculptors in the world and he was standing less than two metres away from me. I watched him closely, trying to capture the moment; following his hand as he swiftly recorded the scene before him.

Then Frederick and I walked on viewing the sculptures. I marvelled at the breadth of Rodin's work; the Kiss, The Gates of Hell, The Burghers of Calais, and so many more. I knew them all from photographs but to see them in real life was inspirational.

Jacob meets Camille

It was at Julian's that I first learned about Camille Claudel, a young female sculptor. Everyone was talking about her. They said that she was making amazing pieces and I should go and see her work. The studio that she shared with three British female sculptors was close by on Rue Notre-Dame des Champs and I was impatient to go.

I had never heard of a female sculptor. A female painter, yes, but a sculptor, that I had never thought a woman could do, so I was eager to meet her and see her work.

She was alone in her studio when I arrived. A cool breeze was blowing through an open window as I entered. I saw her standing in a corner, wearing a blue smock with her blonde hair tied in a plait; an intense young woman in front of a life-sized maquette of a female figure.

She was concentrating and didn't see me enter. I watched as she applied small pieces of soft clay to the armature, building up the form of a figure bending forwards.

The light was falling across her face. My eyes flickered over her strong jaw, her high cheekbones and her dark blue eyes, amazing blue eyes. I didn't realise that I was staring until she turned to look at me.

I think that was the moment I fell in love with her. Embarrassed and blushing, I looked away and pretended to study some of her other work. I could feel her eyes following me.

I turned to look at her and she smiled. It seemed to me at that moment, that it had been a long time since a man had looked at her in that way. Le Maitre Rodin no longer saw her as special; she had become just another one of his female assistants.

She had placed maquettes of some of her works; many of the originals of which had been exhibited in various galleries and exhibitions; on low tables around the walls of her studio.

Walking around, I recognized one of them, the bust of a young man dated 1892.

'Is this one of your brother Paul?' I asked.

'Yes, I modelled it in 1888 when he was 16 years old but didn't have it cast until four years later.'

Moving on, I looked into a mature face.

'I recognise this,' I said smiling. 'It's Rodin isn't it? It's a wonderful bust of him. You have really captured his strength and concentration.'

She grimaced.

'It wasn't easy. He just wouldn't keep still. He kept on getting up to do something.'

I then walked to the far end of the room and stopped in front of a cast of two people entwined.

'This is remarkable; what's it called?'

'Sakountala, L'Abandon, or Dite Vertumne Et Pomone. Take your choice? She was a mythical Indian character reunited with her husband after a long separation.'

Then Camille turned and stared at me.

'Yes, that was a very emotional piece to carve. It's two lovers; she is imploring him to be hers only, but he wouldn't promise it. The plaster was originally exhibited in 1888 at the Salon Des Artistes Francais. I hope one day to make a marble version.'

Then my eyes caught a work in a darkened corner of the studio. I walked over and pulled back the curtains to let the light in so that I could see it more clearly.

I examined it closely. It was a plaster maquette of three figures.

'This is interesting,' I called out over the traffic noise. Camille looked up, her face clouding over.

'That's a long story,' she muttered.

'Tell me about it?'

'I called it 'L'Age Mur'- the eternal triangle. As you see, it's a group of three naked figures; a young woman reaching for an older man who is being pulled from her grasp by an older woman. It was an emotional work. I did it in a frenzy of confusion. Many have seen it as a conflict between Rose and me over Rodin; others as youth trying to delay old age. I think each may have some virtue.'

Walking back to Bernard's studio, I couldn't get Camille out of my mind.

I told him about her.

'Bernard, I have just met an angel, the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. She has the most amazing eyes, deep blue like the bluest sky. I saw some of her work in her studio. She's a brilliant sculptor. I'm in love!'

'Jacob, c'mon you're crazy; you are going to fall in and out of love a hundred times if you are not careful.'

'Bernard, it's not like that. She's beautiful, she's gifted: she's unbelievable. Wait till you meet her, you'll see'

The following day, I returned to watch her; her dark blue eyes concentrating. She was still working on the same piece, continuing to refine it, adding and removing clay; flitting from surface to surface. I marvelled at the delicate and skilful way she applied the small pellets of clay, slowly building up the expression on the face of the work. I learned later that it would be called 'Maturity'.

Mechanically, I began following her every movement. To assist her, I picked up lumps of clay, shaped them into small balls and handed them to her as she needed them. We didn't speak; time seemed to stand still. I was completely infatuated.

I couldn't get her out of my mind and felt compelled to return to her, again and again. I began to neglect my studies. Days went by and we still hadn't spoken, just working silently; she modelling and me handing her small pellets of clay.

One day as I was standing, silently passing Camille the clay and watching her, she suddenly turned and looked at me with her large blue eyes.

I froze.

'Quel est votre nom?'

I stammered.

'Jacob, Jacob Epstein.'

'Vous êtes Américain?'

'Yes!'

'Je terminerai à six heures. On peut se retrouver au café d'en face.'

I couldn't wait for the day to pass. I had never met anyone like her, so natural and open. I was captivated.

The Cafe Nationale was in a nearby street. I arrived early and ordered a vin ordinaire. While I was waiting, the tables quickly filled with students from the local University. Soon the place was vibrant with shouting and pulsating with music from a live group.

I sat alone outside at a small table, uncertain whether she would arrive. Then I saw her, a slight figure in a long skirt, blouse and scarf, crossing the road, her hair flying in the wind.

She saw me and waved.

'Bon soir,' she called, stopping to catch her breath. Then she leant over and kissed me on the cheek.

'Merde! A la dernière minute, Le Maître m'a demandé de faire quelque chose.'

Still breathless,

'Comment c'a va?'

It was a magical evening. Sitting with this angelic young woman, in the warm summer air in Paris; I needed to pinch myself to grasp that it was real. I don't know what we

talked about but all I remember was her amazing animation, hands, mouth, eyes, all working together.

My French was still not very good so I missed much of what she was saying but it didn't matter. Just to watch her was a wonder.

Suddenly she stood up.

'Jacob, finis ton vin, Je veux que tu rencontres mes amis.'

Grabbing my hand, we set off. It all happened so quickly. One moment, I was sitting with her and the next, we were flying along the road.

'Where are we going?' I shouted, struggling to catch my breath.

'Ce n'est pas loin,' she yelled over the traffic noise.

I kept up with her as best I could as she weaved in and out of the other pedestrians almost oblivious of them.

'Wait, you're going too fast,' I shouted but she couldn't hear me. My pleadings were lost in the traffic noise.

Finally, breathless, we were back at the studio she shared with three other female artists.

'I want you to meet my fellow sculptors from England. They're also studying at Julian's. You haven't met each other?'

Suddenly I was surrounded by three young English women, Jessie Lipscomb, Amy Page and Emily Fawcett.

'Hello,' I hesitated, shaking each by hand in the French way.

'Hello' said Jessie, *I have seen you at Julian's but we are always in such a hurry rushing from the studio to lectures, it's difficult to meet anyone other than for a fleeting moment.'*

'So, you're the American who has been helping Camille?' Someone else asked. *'Camille told us about you; how you arrived, said nothing and just watched her.'* I could feel myself blushing.

'Laisse le pauvre garçon seul. He has been very helpful,' said Camille.

'Well not exactly, I only passed you pellets of clay,' I stuttered.

Suddenly Camille screamed,

'Je meurs de faim, let's go and eat somewhere.'

It was an hilarious evening; four young women and me, eating and drinking into the early hours below a clear star-filled Parisian sky. I was captivated. It was so exhilarating to be in the company of female sculptors; back home, they hardly existed.

Laughing, we talked about everything. Inevitably the question of sculpture came up, including a heated discussion, about the merits of modelling versus direct carving.

Modelling in clay is not enduring, not true sculpture. It is only when the work is cast in a foundry that it becomes permanent and comes to life.

Whereas carving in stone is real. When you handle a piece of carved work, you are actually in touch with the artist's hands. Camille's eyes twinkled.

Unwittingly, I asked their view about Rodin's work. Someone kicked my leg and whispered.

'Don't talk about him; it's a raw subject with Camille.'

Later I took Jessie aside.

'What's this with Camille and Rodin?'

She shook her head.

'I think you should ask her yourself.'

By the time we had left the restaurant, dawn was beginning to appear. Walking back to the apartment, I caught up with Camille and took her hand. She was very quiet.

'Are you OK?'

'Oui Jacob, I think I drank too much.'

'Camille, I'm tired, I must leave you,' I said, preparing to walk home.

'Non, c'est plus tard. You must stay in the atelier. You could sleep on the sofa?'

Exhausted, I readily agreed. Later I was awakened by a warm, naked body snuggling up to me.

'Chut,' Camille whispered her finger on my lips. *'I felt lonely.'*

That night we became lovers.

As time went on I realised that I needed to talk to Camille about Rodin. He seemed to figure very large in her life, but the time never seemed to be right and for a while I forgot all about him.

Now that we had met, I began to see the British sculptors more regularly at Colarossi and often shared lunch with them or we sat together at lectures.

I continued to see Camille, visiting her at her studio. Initially shy and not very outgoing, she was reluctant to talk about herself. When I asked her about Rodin, she carefully changed the subject. I was now seeing her daily. We would meet in the evening after college.

One day, we were sitting together watching the rippling waters of the Seine when she began to talk about herself, about her childhood and how she became a sculptor.

I was born in Fere-en-Tardenois, Aisne, a commune in the North of France. It's a small town where everyone knows each other. My father was a businessman and my mother came from wealthy Catholic farmers.

Camille becomes a sculptor

How did I become interested in sculpture? It's a question I have asked myself many times. I often wondered if it began when my brother Paul and I used to visit a place near our home called La Hotte du Diable, literally the hood of the devil.

It was a Karst, a geological formation consisting of large exposed limestone boulders, rising out of the sand. It was a magical place unlike any other I have known; huge, fantastically shaped rocks protruding from the ground like creatures escaping from the underworld.

We used to play 'tag', running around and hiding from each other. Crouching behind a big boulder eroded by the elements over millions of years, I imagined that it was a mythical creature with the face of an animal and the body and limbs of a monster.

So, I began to draw them and soon I was creating my own.

We had a heavy clay soil which was ideal for me to play with. I made shapes in clay like the rocks I had seen; figures with strange faces and bodies. My parents used to chide me for getting my hands and clothes dirty but eventually they began to watch me and even admired what I was making.

But my life changed when my father was promoted and we moved to Nogent-sur-Seine to a larger house. Happily, I was able to continue to make things. I wanted to get the attention of my mother who seemed to be much fonder of my brother and sister.

I often felt isolated and unloved. But because of my creations, my parents were soon boasting to their friends how clever their daughter was. By that time, I was making human figures using my family as models.

By chance, my parents became friendly with a well-known local sculptor, Alfred Boucher. He used to visit us regularly and began to watch me modelling. He noticed what I was doing and would stand near me and help me by guiding my hands.

Soon Monsieur Boucher became my mentor. He tutored me for over three years, teaching me the rudiments of sculpture. Gradually I began to understand what I was doing and my work became more realistic.

He must have spoken to my father about me because soon after my eighteenth birthday, he agreed that I should go to Art College in Paris to study sculpture. I was very excited at the prospect but my mother had always opposed what I was doing. She thought it was no life for a woman. She wanted me to get married and have babies. It was my father who persuaded her to let me study.

I overheard a conversation between them. My father was saying,
'Let her be, let her do what she wants to do. If she is not successful, there will be plenty of time for her to get married.'

We moved to Paris so that I would be near the college, That is when I attended the Academie Colarossi. It was admitting promising female artists and there we were even able to draw from the male nude.

I enrolled and soon met and became friendly with the three English students, Emily Fawcett, Jessie Lipscomb and Amy Singer Page. Together we agreed to rent a studio nearby in the Rue Notre-Dame des Champs.

Meanwhile Monsieur Boucher continued to supervise me. But sadly, it had to come to an end. We had just finished a teaching session when he gave me a bombshell.

Dear Camille, I have some good news and some bad news. The good news is that I have been awarded the Grand Prix du Salon. The bad news is that I have to leave Paris and go to Italy. It means I will have to stop teaching you.'

I congratulated him for his award but in my heart, I was sad that he would no longer be able to guide me.

What happened then? He very kindly introduced me to his colleague Auguste Rodin, a highly regarded sculptor. I had heard about him, everyone had. He was the up and coming artist of the time.

I remember so clearly when we met.

Camille meets Monsieur Rodin

Monsieur Boucher and I had gone to his studios at Depot des Marbres. On entering, I was overawed by the noise and the energy. I stood feeling utterly amazed by the hive of activity.

'That's Monsieur Rodin over there', Monsieur Boucher had said, pointing to a short stocky man carrying a pad and pencil. Monsieur Rodin waved and came over to us and said,

'Bonjour Monsieur Boucher.'

Monsieur Boucher then introduced me as the young sculptor he had told him about.

'Good afternoon Monsieur Rodin' I said curtsying.

'Please there is no need.'

Then followed a journey I shall never forget. Taking my hand, he walked with me from room to room, showing me completed works and works in progress. I saw clay pieces being cast into plaster and then others being carved in stone.

I was stunned by what I saw. It was the most exciting day that I could remember.

It was the first time I had seen Monsieur Rodin. At the time he was forty-four years old and had a beard. He was a little fat and wore a small round black hat on his rather large head. I didn't think anything of him. He was, after all, older than my father. But I knew that he could further my career so I was very keen to become his student if possible.

Within a few months, I had completed my studies at the Academie and began to work with Rodin full-time, as his assistant. Everything was new and exciting. I was caught up with the energy of the studio. So many young people milling around with Monsieur watching and drawing.

I remember one of my first tasks was to help him with 'The Gates of Hell', a plaster effigy embodying miniatures of all his earlier works.

Monsieur Rodin had won a competition to make a gate for the reconstructed Commune Museum in Paris that had been destroyed by fire in 1871. However the museum was never built so the 'Gates' were eventually destined for the Musee d'Orsay.

Later we worked together on 'The Kiss'. It was my first experience working on a full-sized work. It was exhilarating. Then followed other pieces; gradually I began to understand how to execute a full-sized figure and very soon I was allowed to model my own work.

Monsieur encouraged me and guided my hand. We got on very well and I was enjoying the work and learning a lot. He was very friendly and would often rest his hand lightly on my shoulder, helping my hand to mould a confusing shape in clay.

Occasionally, he would kiss me on the cheek. I thought nothing of it, after all we French are very affectionate. I wanted to show him my gratitude and in 1888, I sculpted his bust in clay which was later cast in bronze. He was delighted with it and heaped me with praise.

So, when did it change?

I don't think there was one moment. He was so different from my father, gentle, kind and caring, so it was natural that I would kiss him 'Au revoir' on the cheek, like father and daughter. I became used to being affectionate with him, it was my way to thank him for his kindness and guidance.

But I was naive; I should have realised that he might misunderstand my fondness for him.

It happened one evening. He had accompanied me home to my studio and as usual I invited him in for a good night Pastis. We were in my studio. I could feel him staring at me. I was familiar with that look. He loved to see me in the nude and often asked me to take off my clothes. I had done it many times in his studio as a model but this time it was different. I undressed slowly and stood by the window so that the light would be reflected off my body.

I could see desire light up in his eyes. He came towards me and gently touched my shoulder and then my breast.

I should have realised what was happening and diverted it, but I let him continue. One thing led to another and before I knew it, we had made love. When he had gone, I lay on my bed and cried.

How could I have been so stupid? I shouted. Then I promised myself, it would never happen again.

But he was persistent, continuing to visit me in my studio and giving me presents. I tried to resist him but gradually I relented. My mother would have been furious if she had known. I told myself that I needed him, that I could learn so much from him.

Very soon we became lovers. At the time, he was in a relationship with Rose Beuret, his studio assistant. She had borne him his son Auguste. She used to make me furious. Sitting there in the studio, so confident that he would continue to be with her despite my insistence that he end it.

After we had made love and I was laying in his arms, I would broach the subject. He never argued with me. He always promised.

'Yes, my darling, I will end it very soon. It's you I love and want to be with.'

He kept on saying that he would leave her but never did. I felt trapped in this dual situation. Eventually my parents heard about our relationship and while my father overlooked it, my mother became very angry with me. She detested it.

She always wanted me to marry and have children. In the end, I couldn't stand it any longer, I was being pulled in two directions and I stopped seeing them.

One day, standing alone in my darkened studio with the moonlight on my face, I thought about my position; it was impossible. I was being torn apart.

Suddenly a vision came into my mind. I saw an image of an eternal triangle; three figures in conflict. I could see it clearly. I couldn't wait. It was this that prompted me to sculpt a maquette of L'Age Mur. Reaching for some materials, I hastily fashioned a frame and began to apply layers of clay to it. I worked furiously, hardly stopping to rest. I was possessed. I wanted to show Rodin, the conflict I was facing. Gradually the maquette took shape.

By the time it was finished, I had composed a work consisting of three figures, a young woman reaching out desperately to an older man who was being pulled away from her by an older woman.

I put it aside and was working on another piece when Rodin visited. As usual he looked around the studio wanting to know what I was doing. Suddenly he saw it in the shadows and pulled it out into the light.

'What is this?' He shouted. He was furious. 'I don't understand it.' He insisted. 'What are you trying to say?'

'You know exactly what I am trying to say,' I yelled. 'The image is unmistakable.'

Then I had a shock. I found out I had become pregnant with Rodin's child. I couldn't tell him. It was impossible for me to have his child. I couldn't contemplate it so I had an abortion. I told no one but somehow my brother Paul heard. A devout catholic, he was horrified. I don't think he will ever forgive me. But by now Rodin and I had separated and I was working in my own studio on Rue Notre-Dame des Champs.

I listened as she poured out her heart. It was such a sad story. Then one day something extraordinary happened. I had come into Julian's to do some carving when the concierge handed me a letter, a plain white envelope with the single word 'Epstein'. It was from Rodin.

Puzzled and confused, I rushed to my studio, opened it and read;

Camille est à moi. Laisse-la tranquille si non je te ferai bannir de Julian.

(Camille is mine. Leave her alone or I'll get you banned from Julian's.)

I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. I read it again and again, trying to get it into my head. Was he serious? Had I inadvertently stumbled upon an intrigue? Maybe this is what they were saying that night when I wanted to discuss his work.

My initial thought was to confront Rodin. It would be like David and Goliath. But I wouldn't be prepared to go as far as that. Maybe I should show the letter to Camille, but then I had second thoughts? Why don't I just ignore it and hope it will go away?

Margaret Williams

While still in Paris, I was invited to a party by Victor Dave, a Belgium publisher. Standing in one corner on her own was a tall, elegant young woman with striking red

hair. Our eyes caught and she smiled at me. I went over to talk to her. We shook hands.

'I know who you are,' she whispered. 'You are the American everyone is talking about.'

'Am I?' I said, 'and who are you?'

'Margaret, Margaret Williams.'

'So, Margaret Williams, what are you doing here in Paris?'

'I came here to see you of course.' She laughed.

'Me? No seriously, what are you really doing in Paris?'

'Mmm, I needed a break; my husband and I are not getting on very well.'

'I am sorry to hear that.'

I hesitated and then said,

'In that case, maybe you need company? May I show you around?'

'I would love that.'

That's how our friendship began. I found we had a lot in common. Together we explored the delights of Paris, the museums and Art Galleries. One night after we had returned from a restaurant, she invited me into her room.

Later, she surprised me.

'Jacob, while you are here in Europe and before you go back to New York, why don't you come and visit me in England. It's not far and you would love it?'

What a kind invitation, I thought but then I remembered Camille, her pale face, her eyes so blue. When she looked at me, it felt like she could see into my soul. We had only just met; our love was still fragile.

How could I leave her? I was torn. But Rodin, he would never allow it; she was his and no one else's. He had made that very clear in his letter.

Go to London? What a wonderful opportunity to visit the great galleries and museums. I had read so much about them. I would only need to be there for say six weeks and then I could come back to Paris. Tell Camille, I love her and who knows -anything is possible?

I couldn't wait to see Camille and tell her about Margaret's Invitation. She was in her studio at work as usual. She nodded to me as I entered. I waited, watching her astonished at her gentleness, caressing the clay as if pleading with it to reveal her vision.

Later I joined her for lunch, sharing a baguette, with ham and brie washed down with vin ordinaire. She was very quiet as if she knew.

Plucking up courage, I blurted out,

'Margaret has invited me to visit her in London, I'll only be away for a few weeks and then...'

'You will enjoy London. It's a wonderful place to see sculpture from all ages. You must see the Parthenon sculptures in the British Museum.'

And then she turned away.

By then, I had completed my studies in Paris and having never been to London, I happily accepted the offer and some weeks later, I became a guest of Margaret and

her husband at their home in Bloomsbury, 49 Clovelly Mansions off Gray's Inn Road, London.

I soon realised that our friendship was becoming something more. Margaret was very attentive, touching my arm and kissing me lightly on the cheek. At first, I tried to brush off her attention. I could see that her husband was getting annoyed and often stomped off in the middle of a conversation. Margaret assured me that he was just inclined to moods.

Camille was constantly on my mind, but as time passed, Margaret and I became more attached. One day, I assured Margaret that our age difference was of no importance to me and we became lovers.

London was very exciting to a young sculptor; there was so much to see and so I decided to rent a studio off Fulham Road. Margaret agreed to join me, leaving a note for her husband.

I tried to contact Camille but she failed to answer my letter.

Our lives had taken different paths. I learned that Margaret was in touch with her and must have told her about our plan to marry. Soon after Margaret told me that Camille's relationship with Rodin had finally broken down. He had continued to promise her that he would leave Rose but he didn't. Furious she accused him of double-dealing and in the end severed all contact with him.

Rodin and Camille separate

Just before the outbreak of WW1, Camille withdrew to her atelier and began living alone. By that time, her three female sculptor colleagues had completed their studies and returned to England. She became increasingly isolated. She was then working as an independent artist. But the galleries were continually rejecting her work, claiming it was too derivative, too much like Rodin's.

The press was also unable to accept the originality of such a talented female sculptor. But Camille knew that the reverse was true, that Rodin had more and more deferred to her when faced with a project. Seeking her help and borrowing her ideas had become almost routine to him.

Determined to continue to sculpt and having little money to cast large pieces, Camille concentrated on smaller works such as *The Waltz*, a copy of which later adorned the piano of the musician Claude Debussy, an admirer. Another was *Deep Thought* showing a young woman kneeling in front of a fireplace.

Having been deserted by most of her family and in particular her mother, Camille had become increasingly desperate. In her despair and confusion, she began to destroy many of her works and openly accused Rodin of stealing her ideas.

Jacob and Margaret marry

By 1905, I had moved to England and was living with Margaret. A year later we were married in London.

By now, my work and my love were in London so it seemed natural for me to become a British Citizen. London was an artist's paradise. There were so many galleries and museums to visit. My favourite by far was the British Museum where I saw the Elgin Marbles for the first time. The sheer beauty of the carving took my breath away.

I stood for hours studying them, trying to imagine how they were carved. I visualised the original raw marble block and then the final pieces. The skill and imagination of the unknown sculptors was beyond words. If only, I thought, if only?

But by now I was penniless and was relying on Margaret. Then a surprise. I was approached by Frances Dodd, a Trustee of the Tate Gallery. He was a friend of Charles Holden, an architect.

Frances informed me that Charles was designing the new British Medical Association building at 429 The Strand. He had seen some of my work and liked it.

I arranged to meet him. He explained that he wanted some statuary to decorate the outside of the new building and suggested a total of eighteen life sized figures; fourteen to be placed, one on either side of the seven second-floor windows overlooking the side street and the other four; on either side of the two windows overlooking the Strand. He asked me if I was interested in the assignment.

Jacob gets commission to create sculptures to adorn the new BMA building

It was like a dream come true; my first real commission. Excited by the prospect of producing *noble and heroic forms*, I accepted and received an advance payment which pleased me greatly. I moved into a large studio in Cheyne Walk and hired models. Margaret was very enthusiastic and agreed to be a model for one of the statues.

I immediately set to work. It was a task of love. To be doing what I loved best was exhilarating. I awoke every morning excited by the day ahead.

Within a few weeks I had made a series of drawings of primordial figures of men and women, I showed them to the architects. One, that I thought was particularly appropriate was however rejected as being too primitive but the others were accepted.

From the drawings, I constructed armatures. By painstakingly applying wet plaster of Paris, I gradually built up the final figure. I decided early on that because they would be situated high up on the building they needed to be over life-size so as to be visible to the on-looker some distance below.

Fourteen months later, I had completed eighteen over-life size figures in plaster. These were then placed on the second floor of the building. From them, stonemasons would carve the definitive stone figures to be sited one on either side of the nine windows.

The first completed stone figure was Maternity, a young naked mother holding her baby close to her bare breast. When a total of four figures had been completed, the scaffolding around them was removed.

‘BMA sculptures’ provoke an uproar

By chance, the offices of the National Vigilance Association were situated in the building opposite. For months the staff had watched with interest as the work progressed but when the completed figures were unveiled, they were horrified and mounted a storm of protests. I had opened a can of worms and two opposing sides quickly assembled.

The defence team consisted of Sir Charles J Holmes, Slade Professor of Fine Arts who wrote a salutary epistle reminding the readers of the History of Art and the manner in which time softens the most hardened critics.

He summed up by saying,

‘I have ventured to say on his (Epstein’s) behalf, what will be a commonplace to those who know anything about the history of sculpture.’

The opposition were members of the church, Journalists and members of the public. Finally workmen were engaged and the figures were smashed and defaced.

‘Tomb of Oscar Wilde’ at Pere Lachaise in Paris



I imagined a hoax was being played on me when I heard that I had been given the commission to design the tomb for the late Oscar Wilde, a highly controversial figure. I was asked to keep it a secret for fear that more established sculptors would raise an objection.

The decision was made at an elaborate dinner at the Ritz Hotel given in honour of Robert Ross who had just published *‘The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde’* in 1908.

At the end of his speech, he revealed that an anonymous donor had sent him a cheque for £2000 -*to place a suitable Monument to Oscar Wilde at Pere LaChaise- the graveyard in Paris where he was buried . The work to be carried out by the brilliant young sculptor Mr Jacob Epstein.*

I was excited at the commission and struggled to find a suitable design, scrapping drawing after drawing.

I was familiar with his poem, 'The Sphinx' and the controversy surrounding Wilde's writings and wanted to encapsulate that in stone.

Having finally settled on a design, I went to the stone quarries in Derbyshire and arrived just in time to buy a twenty-ton block of Hopton Wood limestone before it was cut into thin slabs for wall coverings.

I was eager to get started; it was the largest stone I had ever worked upon.

Having set up the huge block on its side, I began transferring my drawings onto its surface. Initially its size overwhelmed me and I struggled to contain it in my mind. I would often end the day frustrated by the enormity of the task I had set myself.

But I persisted and steadily and meticulously, I released a winged Sphinx-like Angel from its depths.

After a nine-month's struggle, the work was finished. Now comes the test. Anxiously, I opened the studio to the public and waited for the response. Happily, unlike the reception I received to the BMA figures, this piece was received favourably.

Meanwhile I had kept in touch with Camille. She was producing some of her most innovative work. As I was going to be in Paris to install my Memorial to Oscar Wilde, I planned to visit her. That was my intention but it turned out very differently.

In time the work was duly transported to the cemetery at Pere LaChaise. Two days later when I arrived to complete the installation, I found it covered by a large tarpaulin with a gendarme standing guard over it. He informed me in no uncertain terms that the tomb was banned to the public. The authorities were appalled at the size of my sculpture's genitalia and called in the Gendarmerie to conceal it from the public.

Confused, I walked up to one and told him that I was the sculptor.

'I don't care if you are the president, my orders are to keep it covered.'

We almost had a stand-up fight. Apparently, the work was considered indecent. In the end, I had to concede, and the tomb was left covered. It seems my work was too explicit.

Picasso, Modigliani and Brancusi

While in Paris, I took the opportunity to meet the new breed of Artists, Picasso, Modigliani and Brancusi. They were exploring new ways of seeing the world and had discarded realism.

Picasso, a small dynamic figure, was all the rage. His new work called Synthetic Cubism was an extension of his earlier oeuvre depicting geometric and minimalist Cubist objects. Modigliani on the other hand was exploring the human face- mystical elongated stone figures and Brancusi also a minimalist was carving long slender figures.

In 1914, as WW1 began, the restrictions on my Oscar Wilde memorial were lifted and the canvas was removed.

I was saddened that my plan to visit Camille had to be delayed. I heard that she was inconsolable since the tragic death of her father to whom she was very close. Her whole life had collapsed. I had a message from her brother Paul to say that she had been admitted to a Psychiatric hospital in Ville-Evrard in Neuilly-sur-Marne. She had destroyed dozens of her sculptures and had accused Rodin of trying to have her killed.

Paul had written, after visiting her home - *she is living in filth, she has become enormous and dirty. The wallpaper has been pulled off in long shreds and the furniture is broken and filthy.* The year was 1913.

Later in the same year, he wrote,

'Just as a man sitting in the countryside employs, to accompany his meditation, a tree or a rock on which to anchor his eye, so a work by Camille Claudel in the middle of a room is, by its mere form, like those curious stones that the Chinese collect: a kind of monument of inner thought, the tuft of a theme accessible to any and every dream. While a book, for example, must be taken from the shelves of our library, or a piece of music must be performed, the worked metal or stone here releases its own incantation, and our chamber is imbued with it'.

'Rock Drill'

The drums of impending war were sounding all over Europe. Devastating machinery had been invented. Modern warfare would from now on, be conducted with cannons and tanks.

It was in the experimental pre-war days of 1913 that I was excited to do the Rock Drill. Was it my visit to a stone quarry and seeing the way in which machinery had now replaced brute force to release the stone from its bed, that prompted me to incorporate the drill in a sculpture from the primitive?

I had purchased a second-hand drill and mounted it on a plaster base. I invited the sculptor Gaudier Brzeska and Ezra Pound to view it. Listening to Ezra's critical comments, Gaudier had snapped at him telling him to shut up and that he knew nothing.

The work was initially shown in Brighton in 1913 and then put on show in the Goupil Gallery in 'London group's first exhibition in 1915.

Finally, in 1916 it was exhibited as part of the 'London group' second exhibition. In presenting it, I was asking the viewer to acknowledge that a machine could be accepted as an authentic part of a sculpture. It was only to be a one-off study. After it, I never made any other in that form. But it prompted the critics to comment that,

'I had thrown in the sponge and returned to a normal manner of working.'

I had thought less and less about Camille as my own career developed and it was only later that I heard the full story of what happened. Her relationship with Rodin had

become increasingly strained as he continued to see Rose. In desperation, she finally broke off all contact with him and withdrew to her studio where she tried to continue to work. In frustration she would often tear into a piece and smash it in her anger.

Finally, at the instigation of her mother and her brother, she was admitted to a mental institute at Ville Everard in Neuilly-sur-Marne.

By September 7th 1914, the Germans were advancing into France. Camille with the other inmates was urgently transferred to Montdevergues Asylum-near Avignon. She now had a diagnosis of 'Systematic persecution delirium'.

Jacob visits Camille XXXX

I still felt very close to Camille so as soon as I heard this, I made an excuse to Margaret and went to visit her at Ville Everard. Camille greeted me and we hugged. We sat in the garden overlooking a pond. She had lost weight but looked well. Occasionally the stillness would be broken by a fish jumping out of the water.

Finally, I asked, '*what happened?*'

Her voice was husky and almost inaudible. I leaned forwards to hear her.

'It was my mother and Paul. They brought a doctor who certified me. He said I was mentally ill and needed a rest. I argued with them that I was just tired, not ill. But they wouldn't listen to me and I was brought here.'

'What about Rodin, didn't he support you?'

'Rodin, what can I say? He just walked away. When I think of all the help I gave him. He was getting old, he was 74, He just wanted a quiet life so he had to lean more heavily on me. He used my ideas, He borrowed from my works. But when I needed him most, he deserted me.'

Later I learned that on at least two occasions, the doctors had considered her safe to be released but both her mother and her brother Paul wouldn't sanction it.

I was also deeply saddened to learn that at the time of her incarceration, she had just received a state commission.

Meanwhile, my Tomb to Oscar Wilde remained covered until 1914, the beginning of World War 1, when the coverings were removed. The Authorities had even forgotten why they were there.

Peggy Jean is born

I was in France at the end of WW1 doing some drawings of the War wounded when my daughter Peggy Jean was born to Meum (Dorothy Lindsell-Stewart) in Paris. I immediately went to be with her. It was a delight to have a child to draw from. I modelled Peggy Jean in all moods, from being at play to her being asleep.

Having some spare time, I made an excuse and went to see Camille in the Psychiatric Hospital at Montdevergues. Five years had passed since I had last seen her and I had lost touch with the family. I felt apprehensive as I approached, uncertain what I would find.

Surrounded by high railings and with only one guarded entrance, the hospital presented a forbidding picture. The front of the two-storey building was clad with grey irregular stones offset by white Portland edging the windows. The central tower was flanked on either side by two-storey extensions. It was raining when I arrived which added to its dismal appearance.

Explaining my purpose, I was allowed in and accompanied by an assistant, walked along a dark corridor, very conscious of our echoing footsteps. Finally, we entered a large room, the playroom, he called it; its long windows overlooking a garden and a pool.

A number of residents were sitting alone or in groups. Sombre music was playing in the background. The assistant pointed to a figure rocking gently in a chair by the window. Even from that distance, I recognised Camille by the firm line of her jaw and her high forehead.

'Hello Camille,' I said, bending over to kiss her.

I must have surprised her because she suddenly pulled away shouting,

'No! No!'

'It's me, Jacob,' I whispered but she didn't respond. I was puzzled. For a moment, I remembered our first meeting and the overpowering effect she had on me. That image of her has stayed with me since. So where had that vivacious animated person that I had known gone?

I waited a few moments and slowly she turned to look at me.

'It's Jacob,' I said.

For a moment her eyes shone and her face lit up. A smile began to appear. I thought that she was going to say something, to remember, so I waited but she said nothing and slowly turned away to face the window.

'I think she is tired,' the assistant whispered. *'You should leave now.'*

Shaken, I dragged myself away and made for the exit. I looked back. She was still staring out of the window, rocking in her chair, oblivious of her surroundings. I felt better for having visited her but don't know whether she was aware of who I was.

Kathleen Garman



I always had an eye for a pretty face so I couldn't resist saying hello to a young dark-haired woman sitting with another. I was eating alone at the Harlequin restaurant when I saw her. It was in 1921, I think, a few years after the end of WW1 and life was beginning to return to normal.

Attracted to her, I got the waiter to take a message asking if she and her friend would like to join me. I saw them laughing when the note arrived but they declined and left.

Some days later I saw her again but this time she accepted my invitation. Her name was Kathleen Garman; she was one of eight children. She told me that she had attended a Music and Art college and was an artist and a model. She and her sister had run away from home to live in London.

I explained that I was a sculptor always looking out for talented models and would like her to model for me. She had a marvellous face and I wanted to make a bust.

I arranged for her to come to my studio at home and introduced her to Margaret who initially was very friendly to her. I set too and made what I thought was a very acceptable bust. I was very attracted to her and persuaded Margaret to let her live with us and she became part of the family.

I should have seen that it was not a good idea because of our affection for each other. I thought Margaret and Kathleen were getting on well until one evening on coming home I found Kathleen bleeding from a shoulder wound. Somehow Margaret had got hold of a revolver and in a fit of jealousy shot her.

Kathleen was terrified but I managed to calm her. Fortunately it was not serious and after a few visits to the hospital she had recovered.

'Rima'

I was learning that my career was often influenced by unexpected events. In 1922, W H Hudson, a highly regarded writer on nature and wildlife, died. He had been a long-standing member of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the author of *Green Mansions*, *The Purple Land* and many other popular books on birds.

Wanting to commemorate his life, the R.S.P.B. commissioned me to carve a panel in his memory. It was to stand on a plot of land that they had acquired in Hyde Park in London. After many false starts, I decided to illustrate the panel with a portrait of Rima, Hudson's heroine in *Green Mansions*; one of his most successful books. She was a free native spirit who haunted the forest.

Having selected a slab of Portland stone, I had it delivered to my cottage in Epping forest and immediately began carving. I felt sympathy with Hudson's love of birds and by the spring of 1925, it was finished.

An unveiling ceremony was planned later that year with the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin in attendance.

On the 19th of May, a large crowd had assembled, waiting expectantly. Baldwin arrived and stepped out of his Rolls Royce, accompanied by his wife. They walked towards the Memorial and stood for a moment. He then stepped forward and pulled the cord. The sheet covering the work fell to the ground and exposed the plaque.

There was an almost immediate and enormous outcry from the crowd.

'Unequaled in venom and spite.'

Someone shouted, pointing at me,

'Would you want your sister depicted in that way?' Others followed, screaming out abuse at me. Eventually the police had to be called to calm the situation.

Complaint followed complaint until it even reached Parliament where a member apparently shouted,

-that terrible female with paralysis of the hands, and demanded -it be removed instantly from the Park.

Conversely George Bernard Shaw complimented me for being able to make such a small stone carving create such *'high explosives and rage.'*

In 1929 the sculpture was covered in swastikas and tar was thrown at it.

'Madonna and Child'

I had been away from America for twenty-five years and felt it was time to return and if possible to exhibit there. It would be my first visit since I left in 1902.

So, when in 1927, I was offered an exhibition at the Ferargil Galleries in New York, I was excited to accept. In preparation I began to assemble my work. There were so many that I wanted to take but after struggling with indecision, I selected forty-five works, all bronzes.

My excitement at returning to New York was quickly dampened when the gallery owner showed me the space in which my work was to be displayed. It was a poorly lit basement and the show was only for two weeks.

I had hardly known what I had let myself in for, when I planned to show here and give up my work to these damnable people.

After a confrontation, I was promised an extension to four weeks. We had just sold our London home so there was speculation that I might be returning to New York for good.

The press had a heyday with article after article about my career and the confrontational nature of my work.

'A prophet in sculpture not without honour in his own country,' was blazoned in the New York Times of October 30th

Most reporters did not understand what I was trying to say and simply dismissed my work as 'unconventional'. Especially because I rarely explained it. I wanted it to speak for itself.

I had selected 'Madonna and Child' to be the showpiece of the exhibition but it received very mixed reviews except that of the New York Times who wrote—*the form—conveys the idea of miracle within nature, of nature.*

A review in the New York Tribune by Royal Cortissoz, an American Art Historian, was more perceptive. He wrote about my work.

---It is the sincere expression of great talent- his vital grasp upon the principles of reality- his touch is vigorous, trenchant..

I returned to London disappointed at my New York experience but a surprise was waiting for me.

'Day and Night'

Following the success of the BMA building, Charles Holden was asked by Frank Pick, the managing director of the Underground Electric Companies of London to design their new Headquarters at 55 Broadway, Westminster.

They wanted a substantial building to house their administrative offices.

Six sculptors, including Henry Moore, Eric Gill and myself, had been invited to submit ideas, to provide the outside decorations for the building.

I was offered the two prime sites to create two figures called 'Day' and 'Night'. After making a number of drawings, I decided upon two primeval scenes involving a man, a woman and a boy. In 'Day', the boy would be standing in front of the man; in 'Night', he would be sleeping across the woman's lap.

The other sculptors were asked to carve images representing the four 'Winds'.

Working out of doors in a bitterly cold winter, I carved directly into the Portland stone, a requirement of Charles Holden who wished to *'preserve all the virility and adventure brought into play with every cut of the chisel even at the expense of accuracy.'*

It took me six months to complete the project carried out while the building itself was being built.

Often some of the builders came to watch me as I worked and to see my progress. But to my dismay, a number of them began to ridicule the work and threatened to damage it.

In desperation, I had a hut built around my figures to hide them from the public but that was soon broken into. Once again, as was becoming commonplace, my work was received with a storm of criticism.

‘Genesis’

I had managed to rescue a block of Seravezza Marble that was about to be sliced up. By now I had four children and often thought about the miracle of birth. Like Michelangelo, I saw within the stone, a figure struggling to escape.

It was inevitable that I would want to carve a maternal figure and to ‘let her out into the world’. The name *Genesis* came to mind.

I began to carve her when I was alone in my shed in Epping forest. Unconsciously I was being influenced by the art of Africa, an art that I so admired with its free forms unencumbered by religion and modesty.

After a short while, I was called back to London and had to finish the work in my Hyde Park Gate Studio. By then, the work, a pregnant woman had an ‘African mask-like head with a brooding face reminiscent of a Picasso.

I offered it to the Tate Gallery but they declined it. Could it be that they thought it might cause a sensation and was therefore unsuitable for the hallowed halls of the gallery?

The directors of the Leicester Gallery came to see *Genesis* to decide if they wanted to exhibit it. They appeared in two minds. I watched them unable to understand why they were so indecisive but in the end they accepted it and it was exhibited in London at the Leicester Galleries with some other work.

Its reception was unremarkable; as usual there were some hostile comments.

A Century of Paintings

I frequently escaped from the hurly burly of London to my retreat at Baldwin’s Hill in Epping forest, often accompanied by my daughter Peggy Jean. We would take long walks into the countryside which in that spring and summer was ablaze with colours.

Wild and cultivated flowers abounded and for a while, I abandoned sculpture and occupied myself with painting. I recalled my early days at Cooper where I first learned about colour and had made my early water and oil paintings under the watchful eye of my teacher.

I set to with vigour excited by those early memories. To my surprise and before I realised it, I had amassed almost 100 paintings. As usual with me what I started as a mere diversion became in the end a passion.

In December 1933, the paintings were exhibited in London at the Arthur Tooth & Son gallery

I was very pleased with the result, and the paintings looked well.

.....
I had completely forgotten about Camille who was struggling with her evils.

Writing to Eugene Blot in 1934, she penned:

Je suis tombée dans le gouffre. Je vis dans un monde si curieux, si étrange. Du rêve que fut ma vie, ceci est le cauchemar.

(I fell into the abyss. I live in a world so curious, so strange. From the dream that was my life, this is the nightmare.)

BMA Figures mutilated

In 1935, the BMA building changed hands and the Southern Rhodesian Government took ownership. Almost immediately, it was announced that my statues were to be removed as the new occupants thought them *undesirable*.

I was outraged and responded to the accusation that the figures were 'topical'. I replied that- *the figures were meant to have a universal appeal even perhaps understood in South Rhodesia.*

But it was of no avail. Although Mr Charles Holden insisted that the figures were an intrinsic part of the building, they were still mutilated.

'Ecco Homo'

I couldn't resist buying a huge block of Marble (a *noble stone*) destined to be cut up. I wanted to spare it for a more worthy fate.

I hated the thought that such a fine creation of nature should be destined for someone's kitchen table.

For a while I had been thinking about creating an Ecce Homo, a petrified manifestation of 'Man' bound and crowned with thorns looking on with a steely gaze upon a world riddled with pain and suffering. It would indirectly mirror the agony of Christ.

The stone, Subiaco Marble, turned out to be very hard and required me to find a very tough point (tool) to work with. This affected the form I could create. Unable to carve rounded shapes, I was limited to straight planes and edges.

I suppose I should have been prepared for its reception. But I remained baffled, unprepared for the insane hatred of the average man and woman

At first, no Gallery or collector wished to buy it. So I was delighted when the rector of Selby Abbey asked me to donate it to the city in my will. I readily agreed but I didn't reckon with a petition from the parishioners overruling his decision.

Flower Studies- Tate Gallery

Having seen my flower paintings at Tooth's, a Dutch dealer, Ascher & Velker commissioned me to paint a series of flower studies. These were exhibited at the Tate gallery in 1936. The Florist was so pleased with the results that they sent me crates of fresh flowers weekly until September 1939 when WW2 intervened.

‘Consummatum Est’

An enormous block of alabaster, seven feet high and weighing over three tons had been lying in my studio for several months. I would walk past it in the course of working on other pieces and ignore it, but it kept calling me back, as if saying, *‘what about me, don’t I matter?’*

Bach’s B minor mass, the section called ‘Crucifixus’, was playing in the background when I began carving, to release a supine figure. Unlike a workman who leaves his work when he goes home, an artist continually struggles with his ideas of creation whatever the time. So, it had been with this.

I begin by doing a series of tentative drawings. My ideas are constantly changing; new shapes emerge and get replaced as the drawings evolve. When I am satisfied, I turn to the stone and I begin the dialogue. I draw directly on the stone to show me where to make the first incision. As it is usually a block with straight sides, I need to find the form within it.

It is as if the stone speaks to me as I carve, slowly and meticulously uncovering the head, the arm and the feet, all the shapes that I have envisaged. Sometimes a false blow reveals an unexpected form as if it was lying hidden, waiting to be revealed

Slowly the form emerges. Carving is a balance between gentleness and firmness. Once I start a work, it fills my thoughts continually until it is finished. Even when I am not carving I am thinking about the work. A sculptor’s day never ends.

When is a work finished? That is a challenging question. It is easy to overdo it and remove too much. Then you need to find a solution by rethinking your idea.

The work, I named *Consummatum Est*, was finally finished and exhibited in the Leicester Galleries. Amidst a flurry of abuse, one positive opinion stood out, that of William McCance of the News Chronicle dated October 28th 1937.

This latest work by Epstein, ‘Consummatum Est’ satisfies the laws of a major work of Art. It is logically conceived and rendered in stone. It is no mere reporting or transcribing of naturalistic shapes. It is an act of creation. It is not an immediate and facile reaction to the subject. It has power, vitality, and organic unity. In my opinion it comes off.

Leave the artist alone and your children will bless you in days to come.

‘Adam’ 1961

I had been promised an exhibition at the Leicester Galleries which was to be entitled, *‘New sculpture and Drawings of Children’*. After having selected my pieces for the exhibition, I found myself with some free time.

Having a vague idea that I would like to carve a significant biblical theme, I settled on *Adam*. I thought that no one could be more important than him.



I envisaged a figure of gigantic proportions and had obtained an enormous piece of Derbyshire Alabaster, golden in colour, measuring seven-foot-high and weighing two tons. Standing it upright and with a ladder propped against it, I started working on it. I said very little to anyone until it was finished and then invited three Gallery owners to view it. They looked at it, walked around it and stood scratching their heads, then saying nothing they left.

The following day, I received a note to say that they could not exhibit it, it was too explicit as the phallus was too large. That was laughable as it was much less explicit than some of the coloured engravings from France that they regularly exhibited. Frustrated, I threatened to withdraw from the exhibition altogether.

'In no other work had I immersed so much of myself.'

A viewer commented after seeing Adam that in his view, the sculptor had 'spoken' for all mankind.

Finally, the exhibition opened and was dominated by Adam. The work was later bought by The Tussaud waxworks and went on tour before being bought by Lord Harewood and exhibited in his baronial home in Leeds.

Jacob visits Camille

I periodically thought about Camille, wondering how she was managing? Had she now recovered and was she back at work? When I did visit her at the hospital many years later, I was shocked by her appearance. By then, we were both much older and no doubt time had taken its toll on me also.

I was ushered into a large airy room. They called it the morning room. It had wide curtain-less windows overlooking a view of open fields. A strong disinfectant odour, mingled with the sour smell of sweat and faeces, confronted me.

'That's Camille over there,' the nurse said, pointing to a woman sitting in a chair by the window, rocking gently and humming to herself.

I didn't recognise her. She had shrunk and was now a wizened shell of her former self. I still had the image of when we first met, of a vital vivacious young woman in her prime.

I walked over to her.

'Hello Camille, it's Jacob.'

She turned and looked up at me. Her eyes once such a deep blue were now clouded. Fear crossed her face.

'It's OK Camille, you have a visitor,' said the nurse touching her shoulder.

'Camille, it's me Jacob,' I said, reaching for her hand. She withdrew it immediately and turned away.

'She doesn't like strangers,' the nurse whispered, still standing next to me as if guarding her.

'How are you, Camille?' I tried again and waited. There was no reply, no recognition.

'I'm sorry, I'm afraid she is always like this. She doesn't seem to register with people visiting although she does respond to some of the nurses.'

Although Camille had fallen out with her friend Jessie Lipscomb, she and her husband had visited her in the hospital.

Later I heard the sad news. On October 19th 1943, Camille died and her body was buried in a communal grave.

A communal grave? I was shocked. How could the family have let this happen? No matter how much they disapproved of her, she was their flesh and blood, their daughter, their sister. Surely, they could have given her a Christian burial?

For a while, sitting in my studio looking out across Hyde Park, time stood still as I remembered her beautiful soul. Memories of Paris, her studio; she standing poised over a work and turning to look at me with those deep blue eyes, flooded into my mind.

'Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.' John Milton.

The war had ended and the country was celebrating. I was invited to have an exhibition of my work in Leicester.

'Lucifer'-the fallen Angel

For a change, from creating portraits heads, I returned to one of my unfinished torsos, *Lucifer*. It had been a labour of love. I had spent almost a year carving the 'Fallen angel', giving it the face of Sunita, my Indian model and an elongated figure with striking wings.

When completed, it was so large that part of the front of the Gallery had to be removed to accommodate it.

After the exhibition ended, Lucifer had an unfortunate fate. Initially purchased by the Seven pillars of Wisdom Trust for £4000, it was then offered to the Fitzwilliam Museum

who rejected it. The Victoria and Albert Museum also didn't want it, but I wasn't going to let it rest.

Once again, the establishment had closed ranks and barred my work. I was furious. Will my work never be accepted? Will it always be denigrated and abused? It seemed that no matter what I produced, what I created, there would always be a backlash of criticism. I would have thought that after all these years, I would be recognized as a serious artist.

Sometimes the constant criticism is too much to bear and I want to give it up. But then the next morning as the sun rises above the horizon, I am revitalized and I can't wait to begin the next work

In an interview with the Manchester Guardian about Lucifer, I expressed my disapproval of their actions. Soon after, I heard from several Northern galleries that they would like Lucifer. In the end, it went to Birmingham.

Margaret dies after a fall

It was 1945, the nation was still recovering from WW2. I was alone in the house, mourning the loss of my dear Margaret. It had happened so suddenly. We had returned from a trip. Both of us were tired but happy.

I had gone ahead to open the house while Margaret stayed behind to pay the taxi. Suddenly I heard a thump and a scream. Rushing to get indoors, she had tripped and fallen, striking her head on the front stone step. We rushed her to hospital but they couldn't save her. She died later that day.

I was distraught. The suddenness of her death shocked me. I returned alone to the empty house which now resonated with her memory. It was so vacant. One moment she was a vital force in my life and the next she was gone. I struggled on alone within the now silent walls, scarcely eating or sleeping.

'Lazarus'

As I had so often done in the past, I turned to my work for solace. A huge block of pale cream Hopton Limestone lay untouched. I envisaged a massive theme, the biblical figure of *Lazarus*, wrapped in bandages emerging from a tomb; whom Jesus had brought back from the dead and began work.

I rose early after sunrise and began to carve, not stopping until the natural light began to fade.



When completed, *Lazarus* would be eight feet tall. I offered it for sale but without success and it remained alone and forlorn. Sometime later, I was completing a portrait of A.H. Smith, the historian and warden of New College, Oxford.

Standing up for a break from sitting, he was walking around my room examining the works, some of which were unfinished, when he noticed *Lazarus* towering above him in the corner of the room.

'That's interesting,' he said. 'Tell me about it?'

'It's Lazarus rising from the dead. I carved it soon after Margaret, my wife died.'

'Yes, I heard about it, what an unfortunate accident.'

'Yes, unfortunate.'

Then a pause, I could see him thinking.

'Is it available? I like it very much. It will go well in the college.'

'Yes, it is for sale but I would like it to be sited in a prominent place.'

Having settled on a figure, it was transported to the college and finally sited inside the college where it would be protected from the elements.

Camille Claudel Retrospective

In 1951, eight years after her death, Camille's first retrospective of her work was arranged by her brother Paul. Most of her sculptures had been collected together and were being shown at the Musee Rodin in a dedicated Camille Claudel room.

The following year, Paul Claudel donated five other pieces that he had collected; *Vertumnus and Pomona*; the two versions of *The Age of Mankind*, one in plaster and a second in bronze; the *Abandonment* in marble and *Clotho* in plaster.

Later the museum acquired the *Young girl with a sheaf*.

Epstein knighted

At the time, he wrote of his sister;

'this superb young woman, in the full brilliance of her beauty and genius ... a splendid forehead surmounting magnificent eyes of that rare deep blue so rarely seen except in novels, a nose that reflected her heritage in Champagne, a prominent mouth more

proud than sensual, a mighty tuft of chestnut hair, a true chestnut that the English call auburn, falling to her hips. An impressive air of courage, frankness, superiority, gaiety.'

'Madonna and Child' unveiled in 1953



Chance often played a part in my career. So, it was with *Madonna and Child*. In 1888-89, the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, a Roman Catholic Institution, had taken possession of No.11 Cavendish Square in Central London.

Three years later they had added No.12 and a year later No.13. The three linked buildings on the north side of the square were then occupied by the Convent of the Holy Child of Jesus.

During the Second World War, the buildings were severely damaged by bombing. Once the war was over, the Sisters commissioned the architect Louis Osman, to restore the buildings and to design a party wall between them. Realising that the new wall presented an elevated vertical surface facing onto the square, Osman thought that it would be an ideal site to place a sculpture and suggested it to the nuns. Initially they were enthusiastic.

They indicated that they wished to employ a Roman catholic sculptor but Louis had already approached me. After some toing and froing, they accepted his choice.

When I began my designs for the *Madonna and Child*, I thought that Sunita and her son would be ideal models and soon I had produced a drawing and then a maquette. Finally, I fashioned the full-sized sculpture in plaster and planned to cast it in lead salvaged from bombed-out sites.

It was inevitable that conflict would follow. I had almost come to expect it, but it came from an unexpected place, the nuns themselves. They couldn't afford the cost. Eventually the funding was arranged but then another issue arose.

They had decided that they didn't like the face of the Madonna that I had selected, so reluctantly I revised it, choosing instead the face of Marcella Bazetti, a gifted Italian pianist. When it was finished, I declined all but personal remuneration.

Finally, if that was not enough, it seemed that some members of the convent questioned whether a Jewish sculptor could comprehend and do justice to such a

sensitive Christian subject as the Madonna and child. I was dumbfounded by this assertion, refraining from reminding them that Jesus and his mother were Jewish!!

Jacob is knighted in 1953

There were numerous rumours circulating that my name had been put forward for an honour but I ignored them. After all, I had for too long been a thorn in the flesh of British Sculpture. Almost every work I had exhibited had been received with ridicule and rejection. Even my decision to become a British citizen had not quietened the noise.

So, it was with some surprise that *the* letter arrived. It landed one day on my front door and brought the shock of my life. Thinking it was a tax demand, I was about to put it aside when reflexly, I opened it. To my astonishment and delight, it was from Her Majesty's Government offering me a knighthood. Soon after Kathleen Garman and I were married

'Social Consciousness' unveiled in 1954

An invitation from the Philadelphia Museum to produce a sculpture to be entitled '*Social Consciousness*' came as both a surprise and a challenge. I was one of six sculptors invited to compete. For a while I struggled with the concept and then turned to Walt Whitman's verse in the poem 'America', for inspiration.

.....'A grand sane, towering seated Mother, chair'd in the Adamant of Time.'

Finally, I submitted a maquette of three figures, a woman seated in a chair with a figure on either side. She had the face of Sunita, the model I had used before. Her arms would be outstretched, welcoming.

It was accepted and later that year, I went to see the site and signed the contract.

I began to model the final work but as I proceeded, I realised that the figures were going to be too large for my studio. Happily, the Royal College of Art nearby kindly lent me a space in which I was able to finish it.

The completed work consisted of three elements - two towering figures, one standing to the left and the other to the right of a seated mother- the one to her right was a Christ-like figure lifting a fallen man and the one to her left, a woman, draped, holding a dying youth.

In 1953, I sent the completed trio to the foundry to be cast.

Although originally planned as a group of sculptures, spanning the history of America, to be placed on the banks of the Schuylkill River. It was later decided to site it in Fairmount Park, the park area surrounding the Museum. The work was installed along the memorial Garden walkway next to the Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center.

'St Michael and the Devil' unveiled in 1958



The City of Coventry will always remember the night of the 14th November 1940 when it was the target of thousands of German bombers that rained down untold numbers of bombs in an attempt to destroy one of Britain's Industrial centres.

One of its casualties was the Medieval Cathedral founded in 1043. In the 16th C, it had fallen into decay but by 1918 it had been restored and was designated a Cathedral.

For some years the site remained unchanged until 1956. In that year, the foundations for the new cathedral were laid by Her Majesty the Queen beside the ruins of the earlier one, which would remain as a reminder of its former glory and its fate.

As the restoration of Coventry Cathedral was being planned, the question of a statue of Christ in the nave had been raised. My name had been suggested by the Very Reverend Eryl Stephen Thomas, Dean of Llandaff Cathedral Wales who had said,

Only one man can do it, 'Jacob Epstein.'

I had always wanted to do a sculpture of *St Michael and the Devil* and so I was pleased when Bishop Neville Gorton asked me. It would adorn the outside wall of the magnificent new Coventry Cathedral but I was surprised when he insisted on a maquette.

I learned late that the Reconstruction committee again had a problem with my faith. *But he is a Jew* was said by one conveniently forgetting once again that Jesus was himself a Jew. After a number of drawings, I fashioned an 18" model depicting the winged St Michael looking down on a recumbent devil.

I faced the project with some uncertainty. The huge nave needed a sizeable monument. I planned a substantial figure, 16 ft tall. I wanted to make him 'divine but human' and rejected the conventional 'crown of thorns'.

It took me a whole year to mould the figure and a further year to have it cast in Aluminium. Then there was a delay as the structure upon which it would be placed had to be constructed. I began to worry whether I would ever live to see it unveiled. But happily, I did.

Addendum: In April 1957, my wife and I travelled to Coventry to attend its dedication. I was overwhelmed when I saw it shining high up in the sunlight that flooded the nave. I think it is my greatest act of faith and my greatest work.

'War Memorial' TUC Building 1958

I had just finished *Social Consciousness* when I received the commission from the Trades' Union Congress to carve a War memorial to adorn the vast entrance of the TUC building in Great Russell Street, just around the corner from the National Museum, only a short ride from my home.

I had envisaged a simple statement, a mother holding the body of her dead son emerging from the stone, suspended high up on the right-hand wall as you entered. My maquette was accepted and soon a huge block of off-white Roman stone was delivered. I began work but the stone was exceptionally hard and I had to get the help of some stonemasons to do the rough shaping. When completed, it would hang on and be surrounded by a huge wall of veined green Carrara marble.

I was beginning to feel my age. I could no longer work the hours I used to, and was now calling upon stonemasons to take over the rough carving. I think my high blood pressure was beginning to catch up with me, making me feel very tired at the end of the day.

Kathleen noticed my fatigue and suggested that we should take a holiday. It was a wonderful idea and I began to plan where we should go. There were so many places I wanted to visit but in the end, we settled for Padua and Venice.

In Padua, I wanted to see Donatello's Gattamelata, a bronze equestrian statue of a famous Venetian. Begun in 1443, it was completed and placed on its pedestal in 1453. We arrived in the town in the evening and rested overnight at our hotel. The next morning, following the directions of the concierge, we made our way to the Piazza del Santo, an open square in the centre of the town.

The statue was striking with the early morning sun glistening on it. The equestrian was seated high up on the horse's back as if about to ride away. Coming closer I admired the way the horse's flanks had been moulded.

'Look Kathleen, see the marks of the rasp are still present in the bronze.'
We continued onto Venice, less than 20 miles away. It had been a long time since I had been there. Fortunately, we were just in time to visit the 1958 Venice Biennale. I remembered that I had first exhibited there in 1924.

Returning to London, I felt revitalised. My trip to Europe had been a tonic, especially revisiting Venice

'Rush Of Green' 1959

Harold Samuel, the founder and Chairman of Land Securities, a property developer and an avid art collector, commissioned me to create a sculpture to compliment the Bowater House, a seventeen-floor office block at 68 Knightsbridge SW1, that was completed in 1958 on a site that was cleared following WW2 bomb damage.

By August 19th 1959, I had completed Rush of Green (also called the Bowater House Group)- -the work consisted of an assembly of four over-life sized figures with a dog, straining forwards into Hyde Park

Postscript Jacob Epstein died soon after, in 1959.

Henry Moore, then one of Britain's most famous sculptors wrote of him;
-he took the brickbats, he took the insults, he faced the howls of derision with which artists since Rembrandt have learned to become familiar. And as far as sculpture is concerned, he took them first. (Wilkinson 2002)

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Author's Note

Forgotten and buried in a pauper's grave, could have been Camille's end, and she and her work would have disappeared forever. But history should have taught us that a prodigious oeuvre of such a creator would not remain in the shadows.

In 2008, a retrospective of more than 80 of her works; in marble, terracotta plaster, onyx and bronze, were exhibited at the Musee Rodin. At last Rodin and his muse had made their peace.

But that was not going to be sufficient. Reine-Marie Paris, Camille's great-niece reached into the gloom, into the silence that the family had surrounded Camille's memory.

She recalled an interview with Janet Hulstrand.

No one ever mentioned her. Camille seemed cursed by the family condemned to total oblivion by a pitiless censorship.

But Reine-Marie remembered Camille's work from her childhood; in particular a marble, La Petite Chatelaine executed in 1895. She recalled how she couldn't take her eyes away from this little figure. Fascinated, she began to collect Camille's work, wanting to learn more about her.

Then a chance meeting with an Historian, Jacques Cassar, who was researching Camille's work, put her on the path of exploration. She began to collect documents, letters and even Camille's medical records.

I read what she had written, words so filled with suffering. I began to feel her pain. She was an 'artiste maudit', deserted, tortured. Her mother's least loved child; she was protected by her father. Her brother, a devout Catholic, both admired and detested her. Finding out that she was Rodin's mistress and that she had had an abortion, appalled him.'

Was Camille born too soon? Was society not ready for her explicit exposure of the human dilemma? So frail and mortal herself, she sought immortality in her work. Were Rodin and she on a fatal collision path as her work so often surpassed his?

Musee Camille Claudel opens

In 2017, the Musee Camille Claudel opened in Nogent-sur-Loire, Camille's birth place. The new building was built in and grew out of the shell of the Claudel family home where Camille had lived for three years from 1876-1879.

It would be the first museum in France dedicated solely to a female artist. Inaugurated one hundred years after Rodin's death, it was symbolic of the strong link between the two.

Its vision insisted that Camille, despite being sometimes overshadowed by Rodin, had a unique sculptural voice that needed to be heard; a voice that would now shine brightly long after her death.

Epilogue

Camille and Jacob are two spirits hovering in the air at the opening of the Musee Claudel in Nogent-sur-Seine, Camille's place of birth. It holds most of her work.

They watch as the public enter, whispering and pointing; smiling, with looks of surprise, sadness, even a tear or two, as a memory is recalled.

The artworks are silent, staring back with empty eyes and limbs, fixed in time and space for eternity.

The two float among them and stop at 'Maturity' also called 'L' Age Mur' or 'Destiny'. They had discussed it before.

Three naked figures are entwined: a young woman on her knees, her right arm outstretched, is tugging at an older man who is embraced by an older woman.

'Tell me Camille, was this you trying to tear Rodin from the arms of Rose Beuret or was it, youth's futile attempt to halt ageing?'

'Jacob, my dear friend, it is what you wish it to be.'

Then she pauses and stretches out her hands to encompass all her works.

'Not bad for a life's work,' she says, smiling. 'I did it, didn't I?'

'Yes', he says. 'We both did it.'

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Addendum:

Both Camille Claudel and Jacob Epstein produced remarkable life-like busts of children, family members and people from Politics, the Arts and Sciences. Some of these are in the Public domain while others are in private collections.

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-I have fallen into the abyss. I live in a world so curious, so strange. Of the dream that was my life, this is the nightmare.' (quoted by Morel, 2009).

Ecce Homo was finally installed in the bombed-out ruins of Coventry Cathedral on the 22 March 1969

