Medardo Rosso

Inventing Modern Sculpture

“There is no painting, there is no sculpture, there is only a thing that is alive.”
– Medardo Rosso

Artist and craftsman, proto-installation artist, grandmaster of striking stagings, and one of Auguste Rodin’s competitors – Medardo Rosso numbered among the great trailblazers of modernity. To this day, many artists are still deeply fascinated by Rosso, who, for all his affinities to Impressionism, worked at the margins and intersections of methods, media, and materials. At the same time, he is difficult to grasp and, unlike Rodin, is still not widely known among the general public. The comprehensive retrospective aims to present Rosso’s artistic practice in all its facets – ranging from sculptures to photographs and drawings, not to mention texts, exhibition displays, and copies of antiquities. In this respect, it also ties in with the earliest holdings in mumok’s collection.

The exhibition follows in the footsteps of the relation-oriented thinking emblematic of Rosso, who generally showed his art alongside other pieces to set up comparisons. The second part of the show contextualizes his oeuvre for the first time with selected works by other artists from the last 150 years. This sheds light on the ways in which Rosso foreshadowed the major paradigm shifts of twentieth-century art: from the monumental to the anti-monumental; from form to material; from originality and uniqueness to serial (self-)repetition and reiterations; from the final and completed work to the mutable, to process and event; from autonomy to spatial and contextual referencing, and thus finally also to resonance with the surroundings, a reciprocal relationship between subject and object, the seer and seen, touching and touched.

Responding to the profound crisis in which sculpture was entangled in the late nineteenth century in the face of the fleeting and unsettled modern age, Rosso made a radical attempt to draw sculpture closer to reality and “bring it to life.” The intimate scale, fragility, and openness of his movement-filled, out-of-focus sculptures ultimately also prevailed over the male-connoted heroic tradition of permanence and monumentality historically attributed to sculpture. Rosso saw himself as a citizen of the world – “born in a train” – a stance at odds with the emerging nationalism that surrounded him; he also defied all kinds of boundaries in the motifs he explored, depicting people in everyday life, visibly subject to the passage of time, rather than grand glorious heroic narratives. Through this stance, he turned a spotlight on the radical social upheavals around the turn of the millennium.

In pursuing his creative goals, Rosso worked with bronze, which he cast by hand himself using the old lost-wax method, as well as wax and plaster, “poor” materials that were traditionally only chosen for preliminary studies and were more permeable, malleable, and organic than the stone that was conventionally used. He ultimately developed strategies that set the material and the working process at the center of attention, staging his meticulously lit works in specially designed display cases known as “gabbie” (cages). Rosso created only around forty motifs; rather than finished works, there is a recurrent, potentially endlessly looping return to the moment that has been captured, breathing life into it afresh over and over again. To that end, he worked with casting and photography as technologies of reproduction, calling into question however the commercialized art market’s logic of exploitation by undermining the familiar hierarchies of original and copy, of production and reproduction. At the same time, Rosso aimed through this approach to enter into a relationship of resonance with the world, which he perceived as in a constant state of flux, and to encounter it in ever new and different ways. To cite sculptor Phyllida Barlow, Rosso’s work appears “alarmingly alive,” in particular in an era when it is becoming ever more pressing to rethink the relationship between material bodies and an increasingly technologically networked environment.

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und ist eine Kooperation mit dem Kunstmuseum Basel, wo sie im Anschluss präsentiert wird.

The exhibition, which is being organized in close collaboration with the Medardo Rosso Estate,
is a cooperation with the Kunstmuseum Basel, where it will subsequently be on view.

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In 1926, two years before his death, Rosso sketched out an exhibition format in which "the most esteemed works of the past are exhibited side by side with contemporary pieces and the art that is most discussed today." In the spirit of an expanded retrospective, the exhibition picks up on this comparative principle, which Rosso also implemented, and shows his work for the first time in the broader context of artistic developments in the twentieth and twenty-first century. Juxtaposing Rosso's work with selected pieces by fifty artists from the past 150 years that directly or indirectly resonate with it, the exhibition offers a new way of looking at the history of modern art through the oeuvre of an artist that Juan Muñoz once described as one of the "missing links of modernity." Conversely, this offers scope for visitors to approach Rosso's pioneering, yet simultaneously idiosyncratic and complex oeuvre, through a web of reciprocal relationships. In the subsequent section of the exhibition, these relationships are unfolded in the light of various thematic perspectives.

Medardo Rosso (1858–1928)

Medardo Rosso was born in Turin on June 21st **1858**, the younger son of railroad official Domenico Rosso and Luigia Bono. In **1882**, Rosso began studying at the Accademia di Brera in Milan, but was expelled in **1883** due to a physical altercation over a petition in which he called for live models to be used in drawing classes. Rosso turned to one of Italy's first avant-garde movements, the Milanese Scapigliatura ("The Disheveled"), which advocated a renewal of art cutting across all genres. The social commitment the group promoted is reflected in Rosso's early veristic work. While Rosso exhibited in Italy from an early stage in his career, and soon after in Paris and London too, his radical proposals for public monuments were rejected and his funerary work was criticized and even removed.

In **1885**, Rosso married Giuditta Pozzi. Their son was born in the same year and was christened Francesco Evviva Ribelle (Francesco Hurrah Rebel). In **1889** however, Rosso left his family to move to Paris, the major art metropolis of the era. He did not return to Milan until **1920**. In Paris, he met figures such as Émile Zola, Edmond de Goncourt, industrialist and patron of the arts Henri Rouart, Edgar Degas, Guillaume Apollinaire, and Amedeo Modigliani. His initial friendship with Auguste Rodin, who was celebrated as a French national treasure, soured when Rosso publicly accused Rodin of plagiarism after *Balzac* was unveiled in **1898**. In **1895**, Rosso began experimenting with casting processes, and in **1900** introduced organized casting performances in the foundry in his Boulevard de Batignolles studio. He started a long relationship with Dutch writer Etha Fles, who also became an important patron. During this period, he was also more active internationally and toured Europe with exhibitions. In **1903**, Rosso showed his work at the Impressionist exhibition at the Vienna Secession and was involved in a serious tram accident. In **1904**, an important presentation of work was displayed at the renowned Salon d'Automne in Paris, alongside Paul Cézanne and the French Impressionists; he was granted French citizenship. In **1905**, Rosso returned to Vienna for a solo exhibition at the Artaria art salon at Kohlmarkt 9. After **1906**, he did not create any new motifs. At this stage, Rosso concentrated on repeating, modifying and re-evaluating his existing work through the prism of casts, photographic experiments, theoretical texts, and exhibition stagings.

Medardo Rosso died in Milan on March 31st **1928** from diabetes-related issues and blood poisoning, just a few months before his seventieth birthday. After his death, his son Francesco took charge of his estate and set up a museum in Barzio, not far from Lake Como. Before his death, Rosso had given his son and his friend Mario Vianello-Chiodo permission to make a certain number of posthumous copies of his artworks. In **1963**, Rosso's art was showcased in a major retrospective at MoMA in New York. The exhibition launched posthumous international reception of his oeuvre. One year later, in **1964**, Werner Hofmann, founding director of the Museum of the 20th Century, now mumok, bought two plaster casts by Vianello-Chiodo of Rosso's *Bookmaker* (1894) and *Ecce puer* (1906).

Drawing

With his focus on the visual event rather than on the subject-matter per se, Medardo Rosso, did not draw preliminary studies in the classical sense, deploying drawing instead as a medium of direct expression. With rapid, urgent lines, he captured schematic, fragmentary impressions of urban life that, as he put it, he had “managed to snatch from life.” Mostly created in Paris and London, his drawings of figures on the boulevards, in stations, bars, restaurants and parks convey a sense of what Charles Baudelaire called “the transient, the fleeting, the contingent.”

There is a dearth of information about the dating and production context of many of the drawings. The almost abstract landscapes from around 1912 are particularly noteworthy; Rosso worked on them at Armand Abreu’s villa in Hendaye-Plage on the French-Spanish border while convalescing from a serious traffic accident, as well as in Leysin, Switzerland, where he spent time with his partner Etha Fles during the First World War. The subject-matter is often tilted or rotated, highlighting the subjective gaze within which something appears for a moment. Rosso largely worked with makeshift paper sources – used envelopes, advertisements or the backs of menus – that he incorporated into the design process as a material in its own right.

Viewed in terms of his oeuvre as a whole, the relationship between Rosso’s drawings and his photographs remains ambivalent. After initially deploying drawing as a means to dignify photography, “the pencil of nature” as Henry Fox Talbot put it, Rosso subsequently inverted the relationship. He transformed drawing into a veritable photographic act that made it possible to record the light at a particular instant, an “effet,” even more rapidly. Furthermore, echoing his approach to his sculptures, Rosso also repeatedly photographed his drawings and integrated them into exhibitions, for example his major presentation at the 1904 Salon d’Automne. Even drawing, purportedly the most direct form of depicting reality, is thus fed into the reproduction loop, increasingly blurring the boundaries between various media, original and copy, as well as between before and after.

Photography

After 1900, Medardo Rosso systematically incorporated photography into his creative process as a means of exploring vital reflections on the aesthetics of sculpture as a medium and its materials, as well as on the relationship between the figure and its surroundings. At the same time, over and above transposition into another medium, the experience associated with photography seems to have been central for Rosso. There are good reasons why critic Ludwig Hevesi referred to “photo sculptures” when addressing the fleeting, blurred appearance of Rosso’s sculptures and their particular responsiveness to light.

Unlike Auguste Rodin, for example, who cooperated with established photographers, scholars now generally concur that Rosso photographed his sculptures himself and concentrated his experiments primarily on “post-production.” His sculptures appear on almost all of the approximately 500 photographs that he disseminated via newspapers and catalogs, using photo-mechanical means of reproduction. The photos, mostly depicting partial views of the works, convey a sense of unity of figure and space, sometimes more effectively than the sculptures, while also occasionally opening up to include the studio context. In 1902, Rosso began exhibiting his photographs with his sculptures as ensembles that cut across media boundaries.

Rosso was actually distrustful of the objectifying nature of the emerging reproduction technologies and the ways in which they furthered the industrialization and commercialization of art. Like philosopher Henri Bergson, he was convinced that automated perception of ready-made images could not do justice to life’s complexity, even referring to photographers as “criminals.” In that spirit, in his photographic work Rosso did not attempt to stop one unique moment in its tracks in order to “document” it. On the contrary, through his choice of angle, color scheme or sharpness of focus, as well as by re-photographing the prints at different scales, “alchemical” post-processing, collages, serial arrangements or other interventions, he aimed to set the moment depicted in perpetual motion; breathing life into it, rather than ripping it out of the flow of time.

The exhibition opens with a focus on Rosso’s experimental approach to photography. Over and above his role as one of the first Impressionist sculptors, his engagement with technologies of reproduction offers scope to expand art historical reception to encompass questions of repetition, appropriation, and process-related aesthetics – considerations that fundamentally restructured sculpture, a genre defined by duration and heft.

Prozess and Performance

“What strength! He is surrounded by exhalations capable of suffocating ten men; but he seems to breathe in his element”
– George de Lys und André Ibels

From the early 1890s, Rosso’s focus increasingly shifted from the finished artwork to design and production processes, continuous work with the material, and the event-oriented character of artistic creation. In all of this, Rosso emphasized intensity in particular – the emotional instant of perception – as well as potentiality and mutability. In addition, in 1900, he began repeatedly creating performative self-stagings as an “artist-laborer” by means of spectacular casting performances in his studio, underscoring that, unlike most of his contemporaries, he did not entrust the labor of producing his art to specialized workers – often from Italy – instead taking on the work himself. His self-stagings were even included in the 1908 novel *L’Arantelle* by George de Lys and André Ibels. Rosso’s engagement with questions related to process and performance reveal an early hint of what was dubbed the “performative turn” in the nineteen-sixties, in which processes, actions or events expand or even replace the classic, object-based concept of the artwork.

Like many artists of that era, Rosso was fascinated by the performative arts and the thriving nightlife of Paris. Unlike most of his colleagues, however, he did not primarily turn a voyeuristic and sexualized gaze on the predominantly female performers. Instead, in sculptures such as *Rieuse* (Laughing Woman) (1890) or *Grande Rieuse* (Laughing Woman [Large Version]) (1892), which in all probability depict the vaudeville singer Bianca da Toledo, viewers encounter faces that are performing, depicted in instants of heightened presence. Rosso also set his *Rieuse* “in motion” again in a photographic sequence, bringing her to life once more – a move reminiscent of the Futurist Photodynamism of the Bragaglia brothers, who, like Futurist Umberto Boccioni, recognized in Rosso a direct precursor of their own understanding of movement and the interpenetration of space and time. This dynamic fusion of the figure and its surroundings with the help of lighting effects was something Rosso shared with Loïe Fuller, who made stage appearances herself with the serpentine dance she had devised.

Edgar Degas, an acquaintance of Rosso with whom he shared an artistic affinity that to date has scarcely been researched, also engaged almost obsessively with the world of ballet. As in Rosso’s oeuvre, for Degas the motif served as a pretext for a constantly reinitiated process of shaping and varying that cut across the boundaries between different media. The only sculpture Degas ever exhibited in public, originally modelled in wax, *Little Dancer, Aged Fourteen* (1881), highlights his experimental and hybrid approach to materials, which is also evident in his overpainted monotypes. That recalls Rosso’s experiments with chemicals in the darkroom or the way in which he “contaminated” his casts by adding various substances or pigments.

Anti-Monumentality

“[…] a moment’s monument.”
– Dante Gabriel Rossetti

With his ideal of animate, mobile, and boundless sculpture, Medardo Rosso broke radically with the then prevalent European monumental tradition. His constant reworking of motifs he had developed previously, as well as the intimate scale and tentative, provisional nature of his sculptures are in fundamental opposition to the idea of a heroic monument tied forever to a specific location. Rosso, who viewed himself as a “European anarchist” according to Symbolist author Jehan Rictus, resolutely linked his artistic approach to a rejection of the nation state and a commitment to overcome all borders.

Wax and plaster as materials play a key part in Rosso’s anti-monumental approach. Quite apart from being much softer, more mutable, as well as more affordable than stone or bronze, they were in addition seen as “poor” materials, deemed acceptable only in the preliminary stages of the artistic process.
Just as he enhanced the purportedly lowly – a move that should certainly be read as a political gesture – Rosso also turned to “non-heroic” subject-matter; rather than the usual (male) national heroes or collective events, he increasingly anonymous individuals who reflected the social upheavals of modern urban society in the late nineteenth century. For example, the sculpture group *Impression de boulevard, le soir* (Paris la nuit) (Impression of a Boulevard [Paris at Night]) (1896–1897), which has only survived in photographs, shows three larger-than-life figures on the street at night, presented radically without a pedestal. At this point, if not before, sculpture becomes “placeless,” “homeless,” and “essentially nomadic,” to use art historian Rosalind Krauss’ terms.

In two small sculptures from 1894, Rosso adopted a different approach to destabilizing sculpture. While in *The Bookmaker* the disequilibrium is still grounded in the motif – the bookmaker is leaning on his walking stick – in *L’uomo che legge* (Man Reading), in contrast, the ground itself has begun to move. The inclined silhouette, on the verge of tipping over, would soon spark the publicized controversy between Rosso and Auguste Rodin that was tracked in the media. Despite the initially amicable relationship between the two sculptors, Rosso now accused Rodin of purloining his artistic ideas for his Balzac, completed in 1898 and documented ten years later by photographer Edward Steichen in dramatic nocturnal shots.

This dimension, which can be read in Rosso’s work as the advent of an “imbalanced” relationship between humans and the environment in the modern age, evolves in the nineteen-sixties into an investigation of physical balances of power on the brink of potential collapse, as evidenced in Richard Serra’s *Pipe Prop* (1969).

Touching, Embracing, Shaping

“Tenderness is a way of looking that shows the world as being alive, living, interconnected, cooperating with, and codependent on itself.”
– Olga Tokarczuk

In 1886, Medardo Rosso depicted his wife Giuditta Pozzi with their son Francesco, who had been born the previous year, in the sculpture *Aetas Aurea*. In an intimate embrace, mother and child, seemingly fused together, emerge only partially from the otherwise undefined mass of material. The mother strokes the child’s cheek with her thumb as an expression of affection (or possessiveness) – a gesture also suggesting the sculptor’s touch, modeling the material.

Two of Rosso’s core themes overlap in Aetas Aurea: an unmediated mode of dealing with the material from which everything is created and to which everything returns, along with the relationships between figures and the surrounding space. For nothing exists in isolation from its surroundings, as Rosso held, drawing on Henri Bergson’s theory of the continuity of movement. In this respect, the sculpture could also be understood as an embodiment of the “holding environment,” described by psychoanalyst and pediatrician Donald Winnicott as the physical and emotional quasi-fusion of mother and infant that is essential to the child’s very survival. In her *Touchpieces* (1982/83), Phyllida Barlow, for example, who greatly respected Rosso’s work, later picked up on this conflation of the way the mother touches the child and a sculptural, form-imbuing mode of touching the material. Long-established hierarchical distinctions between female-connoted reproductivity and male-connoted productivity are fundamentally relativized in Rosso’s self-replicating practice, which is grounded in self-repetition and undermines the boundaries between art and craft.

In Louise Bourgeois’ *Child devoured by kisses* (1999), on the other hand, parental care seems to tip over into the oppressive. The tangle of sewn-together fabric scraps recalls intestines, sometimes even suggesting a stuffed animal that has been swallowed and spat out again. In her series *Herbarium* (1972), Alina Szapocznikow explored her adopted son Piotr by making casts of his face and various parts of his body. The Pygmalion myth – whereby the male creator brings the female model in his studio to life with his tender touch, – and its reinterpretation, already hinted at in Rosso’s sculptures, undergoes a definitive performative inversion here.

Repetition and Variation

“Difference is simultaneously both the origin and the destination of repetition.”
– Gilles Deleuze

From the late eighteen-nineties, Medardo Rosso increasingly shifted his focus to repeating and varying an existing repertoire of around forty motifs. Between 1906 and his death in 1928, he did not tackle any new subject-matter at all. In looping creative processes, Rosso returned repeatedly to his groups of works, making and reworking casts, taking photographs and modifying the prints. The idea of a “finished” artwork receded into the background, making way instead for a potentially endless process that, like Claude Monet’s series of paintings, is a manifestation of modernity’s comprehensive crisis of representation. Rosso aimed to keep on revisiting a moment of reality, captured at a specific point and experienced as contingent, in order to repeatedly render it present. Linear progression is replaced by deepening resonance, a looping of before and after, of purportedly preliminary studies in plaster and wax, along with subsequent reworkings through photographic documentation.

Looking at his “trademark” *Enfant juif* (Jewish Child) (1893), developed over decades, the way in which Rosso conceived his serial sculptures as individual artworks becomes apparent. Although produced using a mechanical casting process, the differences between the various exemplars undermines the promise of uniformity associated with reproduction. Rosso’s collaged installation view of the Paris Salon d’Automne in 1904 testifies to his engagement with issues related to appropriation and reproduction, also with reference to works by other artists. In that spirit, this view shows, alongside his own sculptures and photographs, Eugène Druet’s photographs of Auguste Rodin’s sculptures and a small copy of *Michelangelo* by Rosso.

More than half a century after Rosso, Pop Art, Minimalism and Appropriation Art turned to similar questions of production and reproduction, examining seriality, the original and the copy, albeit it in altered socio-economic and technological circumstances. Sherrie Levine’s engagement with one of the most frequently reproduced works in art history, Claude Monet’s *Rouen Cathedral* (1892–1894) should be mentioned here by way of example, alongside the serial repetitions of media images in Andy Warhol’s screen-prints. In her photographic reiteration, Levine’s point of departure is not the painting themselves – in which varied thirty-three times – but rather black-and-white re-photographs of reproductions of the series. This tactic focuses the gaze on the independent media-defined afterlife of fetishistically over-amplified original artworks.

Mise-en-scène

“Nothing in this world can detach itself from its surroundings [...]”
– Medardo Rosso

As the artwork grew increasingly autonomous in modernity, the way in which it related to its surroundings increasingly became the focus of artistic explorations. The frame, like its sculptural counterpart, the pedestal, became important tools as new positions were determined. In this context, Medardo Rosso came up with his own distinctive solution: from 1904 – and even earlier in the studio – he presented his sculptures in specially produced glass showcases on wooden pedestals, known as “gabbie” (the Italian term for cages). These were precisely tailored to his works and formed an essential element of his proto-installation-style mise-en-scène.

Over and above their practical protective function, Rosso used the “gabbie” to give the sculptures, which had grown increasingly “homeless” as modernity progressed, a tangible anchoring in space, thus also positioning them in a figurative sense. In addition, the meticulously arranged “cages”, lit with artificial light, ensured a rigid direction of the gaze. By restricting three-dimensional works to one viewing side, Rosso also moved his sculptures closer to painting, a tradition with which he could identify more than with that of sculpture.

Paradoxically, Rosso’s cages, rather than separating his sculptures from their surroundings, appear to enclose part of the environment – light and air – as an integral component of the works. In his photographs Rosso also experimented with arranging and “reframing” his works; particular angles, a range of framing choices or collaging interventions set the sculptures depicted in a different relationship to their (exhibition) surroundings in each case, thus also reflecting the framing artistic framework conditions. In later practices, in particular those rooted in institutional criticism, as well as feminist or queer-based approaches – such as those of Robert Gober or Francesca Woodman – the principle of framing is ultimately also understood in terms of the social conditions that construct meaning.

Rosso’s “gabbie” also find an echo in the oeuvre of Alberto Giacometti’s oeuvre. His bronze sculpture *La Cage (première version) (The Cage [first version])* (1949/50) has an integrated cage-like presentation form that makes tangible the negative space between objects that Rosso had already addressed. Francis Bacon also repeatedly relied on framing in his paintings of dissolving bodies and, not unlike Rosso, attempted in the process to grasp amorphous and uncontrollable material. *Man in Blue IV* (1954) shows the ambivalence of enclosure and oppression arising from the cell-like positioning of the figure.

Appearance and Disappearance

*“We do not exist! We are only plays of light in space.
More air, more light, more space!”*
– Medardo Rosso

Medardo Rosso’s sculptural concept is fundamentally grounded in depicting and capturing the moment of appearance – the momentous instant in which a figure emerges from the atmospheric continuum of light, air, and space, only to sink back into it again soon afterwards. In sculptures such as *Madame X* (1896 ?), groups of works such as *Enfant malade (Sick Child)* (1893–1895) or *Enfant au soleil (Child in the Sun)* (1891 or 1892), this gives rise to fleeting faces that appear to loom up, ghost-like, from the unformed, seemingly undefined material.

In his sculptures, Rosso attempted to reinforce his aspiration to represent that vanishing moment of appearance and dematerialization by using flowing and translucent materials such as wax, along with a meticulously staged presentation. However, it was only when he turned to photography as a light-based medium that scope opened up for Rosso, by depicting the ephemeral as a trace of light, to largely “suspend” the dialectic of materialization and dematerialization that pervades his oeuvre.

Rosso’s last sculpture, *Ecce Puer* (Behold the Child), created in London in 1906, shows the young Alfred William Mond, who – so the story goes – hid behind a curtain at this father‘s house. Instead of deploying the veil as a means to conjure up transparency, however, the cloth penetrates into the boy’s face in the form of vertical grooves and furrows, in the process emphasizing the sculpture’s material opacity. The photographic versions are also markedly blurred, heightening this effect in an almost phantom-like manner – the very light lies like a veil over the object, erasing the last contours and details.

The conceptual expansion of serial sculpture into photography and its use to dissolve form through light effects denote a propinquity between Rosso and Constantin Brâncuși. Brâncuși who was eighteen years younger than Rosso probably first became acquainted with his work at the Salon d‘Automne exhibition of 1904. The impression created by the work of these two pioneering sculptors of modernism could not, however, have been more different; on the one hand, moving and rough and apparently unfinished surfaces, on the other hand, elementary forms expressed with compact solidity. Like Rosso, Brâncuși was interested in the ways in which an object and the surrounding space intermesh, although he drew on other means to explore this, such as mirroring and shadow projection.

Forms Undone

„I am busy with materials.“
– Medardo Rosso

For all Medardo Rosso’s interest in dematerialization, his eccentric handling of material and process also heralds a central paradigm shift of modernity: moving from the idealistic primacy of the “beautiful” form that vanquishes the material, to an examination of “base” material that is reflected in a transgressive aesthetics of the formless. By halting the production process at the wax or plaster model stage, Rosso moved the transitional and preliminary into the spotlight. The form that takes shape can at any time be actively dissolved, giving way to a form undone can neither be evaded nor visually grasped. In some works, the unformed material gains the upper hand and seems to produce an unfettered, “lawless” excess that breaks free from figurative representation and imbues the work with an uncanny liveliness. In *Enfant à la Bouchée de pain* (Child in the Soup Kitchen) (1897), for example, the child’s delicate face rises up as a schematic outline from a coarse, deforming mound of material.

With its morbidly fleshy appearance and traditional role in molding death masks, the wax often used by Rosso exudes a sense of proximity to death and transience. Rosso elevated the openness embodied by the malleable wax, its latent vulnerability and tendency to lose its shape – as Paul Thek, for example, would pick up on in his *Meat Cable* (1969) – to a principle that he also transposed to other materials. This is evident in sculptures such as *La Portinaia* (The Concierge) (1883), *Enfant au sein* (Child at the Breast) (1890) or *Madame Noblet* (1897), and in particular in *Malato all’ospedale* (Sick Man in Hospital) (1889). The latter couches death as a slipping away, as the dissolution of the tension that gives form to the figure. Here Rosso’s dark, “nocturnal” side, also expressed in the peculiarly rough surfaces of the backs of his sculptures, becomes apparent.

In 1968, Robert Morris invoked Rosso’s process-based, material-derived approach in his seminal essay *Anti-Form*, alongside references to Auguste Rodin. Morris’ *Feltworks* (1968), constantly re-forming cascades of felt, grow out of the dynamic self-productivity of felt as a material. In contrast, in Lynda Benglis’ “Fallen Paintings,” huge piles of paint made of pigmented rubber latex, the focus shifts to the act of pouring and solidification. Furthermore, from the nineteen-sixties, “fluidity” and “liquefaction” became important starting points for female artists like Eva Hesse, Carol Rama, Alina Szapocznikow, and Yayoi Kusama to challenge fears connoted as “masculine” about “formless works”. As they sought out new, as yet “unoccupied” forms of expression, they often utilized synthetic materials not conventionally deployed in the art world to negotiate physicality, affect, processuality, and materiality, as well as gender-specific connotations of these phenomena.