

Culture for Friends

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LA FLEUR QUI MARCHE, A SCULPTURE BY FERNAND LEGER Circus Theatre, Scheveningen, the Netherlands



The Hague Sculpture 98, Lange Voorhout, The Hague

La Fleur qui Marche ('The Walking Flower'), is a world-famous work of art by the French painter and sculptor Fernand Léger (1881-1955), a contemporary of Picasso. Fernand Léger made various versions of *La Fleur qui Marche*, in different sizes and materials, in the course of his life. Five copies were made after Léger's death from original sketches prepared by the artist. One of them was sold in 2004 by Christine van Stralen of the **BUREAU FOR ART PROJECTS**, Almere, the Netherlands, to the famous Dutch impresario Joop van den Ende. He had it installed in the open space in front of his Circus Theatre in Scheveningen, the seaside suburb of The Hague, where it can still be admired today. The sculpture in Scheveningen has been exhibited throughout the world, for example in New York, Geneva and Tokyo, before it

reached its final resting place and is very well known in the international art world. It was first shown in the Netherlands in 1998 in an open-air exhibition in The Hague. Of the four other copies, two went to museums – one to the Léger Museum in Biot, France, and one to the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, Texas; the third may be seen at the headquarters of Fuji Television in Tokyo and the fourth stands on the Kirchberg plateau in Luxembourg. *La Fleur qui Marche* in Scheveningen is a 6-metre high sculpture in bronze, painted in different colours. The sculpture has a black side and a polychrome side. It looks rather like a two-dimensional representation of a three-dimensional image, made by a painter. This is hardly surprising: for most of his life, Léger worked as a painter rather than as a sculptor. During the last few years of his life, however, he spent much

time in a ceramic workshop where he started to work in three dimensions. Very little of his work is available from this period; *La Fleur qui Marche* is one of the few we can enjoy.

The sculpture

La Fleur qui Marche, which dates from 1952, is made of bronze and steel with a coating of polyurethane lacquer. It measures 600 x 500 x 200 cm. It was cast in Florence, and is marked with the name of the artist and the stamp of the founders, 'Fondario D'Arte Tesconi'. It was formerly in the collection of Dominique Haim-Chanin Fine Arts, New York, and of the Bureau for Art Projects, Christine van Stralen, Almere, the Netherlands.



La Fleur qui Marche, Fuji Television Headquarters, Tokyo

LA FLEUR QUI MARCHE, A SCULPTURE BY FERNAND LEGER

Transport from Geneva to Scheveningen

The sculpture consists of four sections which were packed in separate crates for transport from Geneva to Scheveningen, after it has been displayed in various exhibitions round the world for many years. While on show in an open-air exhibition in The Hague in 1998, it was regularly washed to remove the sticky residue deposited from the overhanging lime trees. The entire visible surface of the sculpture is finished in polyurethane lacquer in six primary colours, produced by BELFA AG from Switzerland.

Installation and restoration in Scheveningen

The municipality of The Hague provided the concrete base for the statue and its lighting. The statue was installed on its base by Gerlach Art Packers & Shippers which has its head offices in Schiphol and the contractor for the project, under the overall supervision of the **BUREAU FOR ART PROJECTS**. The entire surface of the sculpture was washed with water and a non-ionogenic soap before and just after installation, and before retouching, which was necessary due to minor damages after

transport and installation. During the restoration work by Pier Terwen of Terwen Consultancy in Leiden, it was noticed that the white lacquer had darkened somewhat during the life of the sculpture. In order to avoid noticeable colour differences between the old and the new lacquer, a little Talens brown ochre was mixed with the white lacquer used for retouching. The black at the rear of the flower and on both sides of the rib on the top leaf was found to have been retouched with a less glossy lacquer at some time in the past; this difference was also removed during restoration by treating the spots in question with the right lacquer.

The construction of the statue

As mentioned above, *La Fleur qui Marche* is made of steel and bronze. Other examples of statues with a similar mixed construction – of which the Statue of

Liberty in New York is the most famous – show that such constructions can have a long life if they are regularly monitored and properly maintained. The polyurethane coating doubtless has a protective effect on the statue's bronze cladding.

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