

PRESS RELEASE

ANNIVERSARY ACQUISITION: IMPORTANT BRONZE SCULPTURE BY REMBRANDT BUGATTI AT THE STÄDEL

ACQUISITION OF THE “DEVOURING LION” FROM THE COLLECTION OF ALAIN
DELON ON THE OCCASION OF THE 125TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
STÄDELSCHER MUSEUMS-VEREIN

Frankfurt am Main, 26 June 2024. The Städelischer Museums-Verein is celebrating its 125th anniversary with a major acquisition: the bronze sculpture *Devouring Lion* by Rembrandt Bugatti (1884–1916). With this 1908 figure, the Städel Museum in Frankfurt am Main has acquired a major work by the Italian artist and is now one of only two museums in Germany to be able to present its public with a bronze by this outstanding sculptor. The sculpture was purchased by the Städelischer Museums-Verein with funds from Volker Westerborg and private donations. The *Devouring Lion* previously belonged to the art collection of the actor Alain Delon, who owns one of the world's most important collections of works by Rembrandt Bugatti. Sculptures by the artist were last shown at the Städel Museum in 2020 in the special exhibition “En Passant. Impressionism in Sculpture”. On permanent loan from the patrons' association, the anniversary acquisition is currently on view in the Städel Museum's collection presentation of “Modern Art” and can be seen in the Impressionist Hall in dialogue with sculptures by Edgar Degas and Auguste Rodin. The Städelischer Museums-Verein was founded on 27 June 1899, making it one of the oldest and largest patrons' associations of a German museum today.

“Rembrandt Bugatti is one of the greatest sculptural talents in the history of art. By the time of his untimely death at the age of thirty-one, he had created an unparalleled oeuvre of some 300 sculptures, of which the *Devouring Lion* from the private collection of Alain Delon is one of the most important. As always, in a single working process of just a few hours, Bugatti translated the essence, appearance and tension of his model into a sculptural work that seems to break down and dissolve the boundaries between object and abstraction. The *Devouring Lion* is a milestone in early twentieth-century sculpture and an extraordinary addition to the Städel Museum. I congratulate the Städelischer Museums-Verein on this special anniversary

Städelsches Kunstinstitut
und Städtische Galerie

Dürerstraße 2
60596 Frankfurt am Main
Phone +49 (0)69-605098-195
presse@staedelmuseum.de
www.staedelmuseum.de

PRESS DOWNLOADS
newsroom.staedelmuseum.de

PRESS AND
ONLINE COMMUNICATION
Pamela Rohde
Phone +49 (0)69-605098-170
rohde@staedelmuseum.de

Franziska von Plocki
Phone +49 (0)69-605098-268
plocki@staedelmuseum.de

Elisabeth Pallentin
Phone +49 (0)69-605098-195
pallentin@staedelmuseum.de

acquisition. I would also like to thank Véronique Fromanger, Paris, and Edward Horswell, Sladmore Gallery, London, for their selfless support of this extraordinary acquisition”, says Philipp Demandt, Director of the Städel Museum.

“For 125 years, the Städelischer Museums-Verein has been supporting the Städel Museum with acquisitions to complement its collection, with the realisation of special exhibitions that attract the public, and with the financing of research and restoration projects. With the purchase of this outstanding sculpture by Rembrandt Bugatti on the occasion of our anniversary, we can once again confirm our mission of support. As chairwoman, I would like to thank our more than 10,000 members and art lovers from the bottom of my heart for their commitment. They are a prime example of what civic commitment to the Städel Museum can look like”, says Sylvia von Metzler, Chairwoman of the Städelischer Museums-Verein.

The acquisition was made possible in large part by a generous donation from Volker Westerborg (1940–2022) to both the Städel Museum and the Städelischer Museums-Verein. Westerborg’s support focussed on works by artists who lost their lives in the First World War and whose memory should serve as a reminder of the consequences of the war. Westerborg’s support had previously enabled the purchase of Wilhelm Morgner’s *Astral Composition VI*, 1912. With a major work by Rembrandt Bugatti, who committed suicide in 1916 under the impact of the First World War, the Städel Museum is once again honouring Westerborg’s patronage.

About the Artist

Born in Milan in 1884, Rembrandt Bugatti is one of the most important sculptors of the twentieth century. The son of the famous designer Carlo Bugatti and brother of the legendary car designer Ettore Bugatti, he showed an extraordinary talent for sculpture at an early age, particularly in the depiction of animals. Without studying art, he learned the techniques of sculpture and was encouraged by artists such as the sculptor Paolo Troubetzkoy and his uncle, the painter Giovanni Segantini. Both artists are represented in the Städel Museum’s collection; their works, together with Bugatti’s, were included in the exhibition “En Passant. Impressionism in Sculpture”, presented by the Städel in 2020.

In 1903, Bugatti’s family moved to Paris, where he discovered the zoological garden in the Jardin des Plantes – the same year and place where Rainer Maria Rilke would write his poem “The Panther”, which became a parable of the torment of a captive creature. Rembrandt Bugatti began to study animals in their natural movements and their behaviour in captivity. He quickly translated his precise observations into clay

models on site. In 1907, he moved to Antwerp and modelled in the city's zoological garden. His sculptures were cast by his gallerist, Adrien-Aurélien Hébrard, who owned the leading French foundry of the time. The bronze caster Albino Palazzolo, who had accompanied the Bugatti family from Milan to Paris, is still considered one of the most talented bronze casters of the twentieth century.

During the First World War, Bugatti experienced firsthand the collapse of the art market and worked as a hospital assistant at the Antwerp Zoo. He witnessed the emergency slaughter of zoo animals due to a lack of food. These traumatic experiences led him to take his own life in 1916 at the age of just thirty-one. His tragic death ended a promising career as an artist before his time but left behind an impressive oeuvre of some 300 works, including the outstanding piece *Devouring Lion*.

About the Work

The *Devouring Lion* is a dynamic depiction of a feline predator, focussing on the process of biting, tearing and chewing a piece of meat. The sculpture is based on an observation made by Rembrandt Bugatti at the Antwerp Zoo in 1908. In an unusually large representation, the artist shows the lion with its prey in its claws. The narrow base ends just short of the big cat's hock. The hindquarters and tail extend well beyond the base, emphasising the Impressionist sculpture's expansive characteristics. By focussing on the long tail rather than the powerful paws, the artist breaks with the traditional depiction of the lion as a symbol of power and dominance.

While the lion's body, which Bugatti always worked on in front of the live model and usually in just a few hours, is realistically rendered, its head, paws and massive body parts dissolve into dynamic forms. The power of the feeding process is reflected in a seemingly uncontrolled formation of heights and depths, surfaces and edges, light and shadow. Here, Bugatti's *Devouring Lion* breaks with another tradition: the motif is not immediately obvious. At first glance, it appears to be a vigorously kneaded mass. Bugatti left visible traces of his work, from scratches to fingerprints – further characteristics of Impressionist sculpture.

The term "Impressionist sculpture" was commonly used between 1880 and 1920 and referred to characteristics associated with Impressionist painting: capturing a moment, often from an unusual perspective, sketchy representation, visualization of the creative process, the play of light and the active participation of the viewer. Important Impressionist sculptors of this period were Auguste Rodin, Medardo Rosso and Edgar Degas, all of whom are represented in the Städel Museum's collection.

Rembrandt Bugatti was one of the first sculptors whose works were numbered and reproduced in limited editions. Some of his models were cast only once; the *Devouring Lion*, for example, is limited to just three casts. The Städel cast bears the number 1. The original plaster is preserved in the Musée d'Orsay in Paris as a gift from the Bugatti family.

Work details

Rembrandt Bugatti

Devouring Lion (Lion couché dévorant), 1908

Cast 1908, A. A. Hébard, Paris; edition 1/3

Bronze, 28 x 93 x 38 cm

Acquired 2024 on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of the Städelverein with funds from Volker Westerborg and private donations; property of the Städel'scher Museums-Verein e.V.

ANNIVERSARY ACQUISITION: IMPORTANT BRONZE SCULPTURE BY REMBRANDT BUGATTI AT THE STÄDEL

Location: Städel Museum, Schaumainkai 63, 60596 Frankfurt am Main

Information: [staedelmuseum.de](https://www.staedelmuseum.de)

Visitor Services: +49 (0)69-605098-200, info@staedelmuseum.de

Opening Hours: Tue, Wed, Fri, Sat, Sun + holidays, 10.00 am – 6.00 pm; Thu 10.00 am – 9.00 pm

Tickets: All information on admission prices and tickets available at [staedelmuseum.de](https://www.staedelmuseum.de)

@[staedelmuseum](https://www.staedelmuseum.de) on social media: #staedel on Instagram / YouTube / TikTok / Facebook / LinkedIn / STÄDEL STORIES: For more stories and background information on the collection and the special exhibitions, read, watch and listen to stories.staedelmuseum.de (in German)