

ART

by Jean Charlot



I have just returned from a three-month trip to South America, Europe and the Mainland only to find myself thrust into the thick of the controversy astonishingly raised by the sculptress Marisol's gentle statue.

Men of many callings — columnists, politicians, clerics even — have had their say. How could an artist escape the issue, even though it be at this late date!

While in New York, friends sent me various clippings on the subject culled from our local papers. Some of the opponents of her work were brutally outspoken in expressing their distaste. I decided to interview the artist.

It seemed proper to remind her detractors that Marisol is neither a faker nor a joker. In fact, as she herself words it in necessary defense, she is undoubtedly "one of the most successful artists in America."

Or, as I stated in the published Star-Bulletin interview, she is a bonafide member of this most exclusive of all esthetic clubs, that of the tastemakers.

Her success is deserved. In its unassuming way, her Damien statuette contrasts with much that is disheveled dynamics in our contemporary mode of expression. Her model clings close to the sober beauty of basic geometric form.

For the art lover who seeks first and last the emotional impact of art, a discussion of techniques may



"The Fasting Buddha" in the Central Museum, Lahore, Pakistan.

seem superfluous. Not so for the art maker.

Under the single term "sculpture," two very different techniques coexist: modeling and carving. Each affects differently not only the

form of the art object, but its spirit as well.

Modeling starts with a shapeless soft mass, classically clay. It uses the oldest of tools, the human hand. The job of the modeller is to

give form to formlessness.

Carving is quite another matter. What the sculptor starts from, be it wood or stone, already has shape, density, grain and color. The hardness of the material forces the sculptor to use tools whose handling and logic are different from handwork.

Regardless of their respective values, all entries submitted in the Father Damien contest are executed along the lines of modeling. All but one. Marisol's model is based on sculptural logic. Hence its outstanding individuality.

The sculptor must remain aware of the innate quality of the material of his choice. He will approach it with awe, afraid to weaken or to destroy what beauty nature has already endowed it with.

Basic geometric shapes govern sculpture. The block of stone comes out of the quarry in cubic shape.

It is the task of the sculptor to describe, more often than not, the human form, and at the same time to retain, to underline even, the original shape of the stone block.

Illustrated on this page is an Egyptian rendering of a man in a squatting posture. Legs folded, knees to the chin, arms crossed over the knees. The ancient stone carver deemed anatomy, of which we make such a proud display, of secondary importance. Of prime importance instead was the cubic beauty



Statue of Senusret-Senebef-Ni of Egypt.

of the original block of stone that in the finished product remains unimpaired.

The cube is linked to the stone block. By contrast, the basic shape of wood as it is found in nature is the cylinder. Its trunk and branches, its mode of growth, all are by nature cylindrical.

Marisol loves and understands wood. Her statues are as respectful of the logic of wood as are those of the Egyptian sculptor of the logic of stone.

Marisol is a very busy artist. She does not lack work. Indeed right now she has left New York for England, to execute there still another

commission.

Why did she enter our local contest?

As I quoted her previously, what made Marisol decide to enter was the fact that Father Damien, like herself, was a person who understood wood, who loved to work with wood, who carpentered with wood many things, from coffins to churches.

Marisol's Damien statue, adapting itself to the basic logic of wood, is geared to the cylindrical shape. It partakes of the immutability of a tree trunk. As happens with the tree, there is a sturdiness and a feeling of inner growth. The holy man, planted by his own will on his chosen ground, is there obviously to stay.

One should not forget that the small model now on display is only a first draft, the sort of visual sketch and usually to be seen only in the workshop.

As the true artist that she is, the sculptress does not intend to merely enlarge the tentative model. She plans to carve full scale a new statue. There will be doubtless many changes to adapt the model to the new scale and to the new point of view.

Not only will the statue be larger than life. It will be raised on a pedestal. The viewer will look up at it. Like mural painting, monumental sculpture depends for its full effect on an "angle



Marisol's "Father Damien".

shot" that the small model

In a letter just received by the Star-Bulletin, Marisol, somewhat surprised at the colossal commotion raised by her tranquil statue, attempts to put her own feelings into words:

"I am aware that Father Damien had leprosy, but when I made the statue, leprosy was not the main feeling I was conveying . . .

"I didn't know that I was expected to give Father Damien the qualities of a hero in the sense that Napoleon was: a soldier with an enormous ego trying to conquer the world.

"It has never happened to me that I have had to defend my work in writing.

"I really hope that I will be able to do the statue of Father Damien. It has so much meaning for me."

Her reference to Napoleon opposes this extroverted mil-

itary hero to the religious ascetic, who seeks to hide his heroism from the world.

Letters from Star-Bulletin readers have already mentioned that a saint becomes a hero through suffering. All faiths understand this truth.

I choose to illustrate this thought on this page with a famous statue of Buddha towards the end of his heroic fasting. It is in the Central Museum, Lahore, Pakistan.

Certainly here the sculptor has not attempted to minimize the anatomical horror.

Thus for Marisol. If I have emphasized here the physical process of direct sculpture it is because, in living art as in a living body, one cannot pull apart the spiritual from the physical.

The award of the commission seems eminently justified. I hope that Marisol will be allowed to carry her work to its monumental conclusion.