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Analysis on Bird in Space

From 1923 to 1940, Constantin Brancusi created the series *L’Oiseau dans l’espace*, or *Bird in Space.* These abstract forms of a bird in flight were created in a variety of materials, including bronze, marble, and brass through a mold and then carefully sanded and polished by the artist. Each piece in the series also included a pedestal, usually made of marble, that was also made by the artist as a complete piece. The ‘bird’ is slightly over 4 feet in height and has ranging widths that taper and bulge in varying places on the sculpted artwork. The individual sculptures making up this series are housed in various museums such as the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Guggenheim, and the Museum of Modern Art.

Brancusi’s bird in space is a sculpture of a bird’s motion in flight. Due to the abstract form of the piece, the bird’s form is not immediately visible. Brancusi stated the interpretation of *Bird in Space* was of the motion of the bird, rather than the body and form of the animal itself. Both this statement as well as the reflection of his abstraction and focus on motion throughout his other work shows the bird through the tapering ends and mid section that curves outwards more on one side than compared to the other. Emphasizing this is the fact that what translates to being the mid-section is elongated far more than the sections that correspond to the beak and feet, which further show the focus on the upward flight movement.

The three-dimensional sculpture of bird in space is a combination of elegant lines, but also the image of swift movement. Brancusi took very visible care in making the very smooth lines of the curved piece incredibly smooth, which mirrors the streamlined motion of flight. Because Brancusi focuses on the motion of the bird rather than the bird itself, the form of the piece is made into one overall shape, in which air seems to pass over it effortlessly. This aerodynamic design gives the viewer the illusion of movement that cannot be literally given to the fixed sculpture. When viewing *Bird in Space,* we are aware of the fact that this sculpture is fixed to its pedestal, that it is a stationary object. However, Brancusi provides us with a different view of movement; one that is conveyed through form rather than physics.

In addition, the piece is bowed more on one side than on the other. This suggests the breast of the bird, proudly curved and flowing just as effortlessly as other aspects of the sculpture. The base of the bird, directly attached to the artist’s constructed pedestal, reminds one of the feet of a bird, or the tail, not only in the tapering that then expands into a cone, but also through our own expectation of the ending of the bird’s body. Similarly, the top of the sculpture is indicative of the head and beak, which is emphasized with the single flat point and straight edge that can be seen in the entire sculpture. This too gives the indication that the bird is soaring upward into the sky, which is supported through the words of the artist and critics alike.

Another important aspect of this piece is the highly polished material making up the sculpture. This meticulous polishing is characteristic of Brancusi’s work as a whole, and adds to the importance of movement he wishes to portray. This gives a reflective and expansive aspect to the piece, which translates to a large amount of space surrounding the object. This, in turn, can be interpreted in a variety of ways, but most immediately of an open sky surrounding the sculpted form of Brancusi’s bird. This also adds a sense of depth to the form, so that the curves and dimensions of the sculpture are emphasized with the use of the reflections seen in the material.

With the use of non-angular flowing lines and reflective polished material that provides an interpretation of expansive space, Brancusi shows us an image of motion. Through the knowledge given through the title that this piece is the image of a bird, viewers fill the details missing through the abstraction of the piece, and as a result, can interpret the physical bird. The point of this piece was not to sculpt a bird, it was to provide a visualization and ultimately, an emphasis of the upward movement of flight. As the spectator trace the swift upward movement of the proudly standing figure, the hidden and powerful motion is immediately felt.

Works Cited

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