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GASTON LACHAISE'S *LA MONTAGNE (THE MOUNTAIN)* IN TRAMWAY PLAZA

New York City's Department of Parks & Recreation, The Lachaise Foundation and the Frelinghuysen-Morris Foundation are pleased to announce the unveiling of *La Montagne (The Mountain)* modeled in 1934 by American Modernist sculptor Gaston Lachaise (1882-1935). The monumental bronze earth goddess lies at Tramway Plaza, located on Second Avenue between 59th and 60th Streets, where it is on loan to the New York City Parks Department from September 23rd until April 1st 2012.

La Montagne is the culmination of a series begun in 1913 by Lachaise in New York, where he lived and worked from 1912 until his death in 1935. The work represents at once a landscape and the figure of Isabel Dutaud Nagle, the artist's muse, model and eventual wife. Lachaise envisioned a piece that was "great and solemn." He later admitted, "You may say the model is my wife. It is a large, generous figure of great placidity, great tranquility." Some recognize in Lachaise a revival of the feminine ideal that had flourished for centuries in the voluptuous stone carvings on Hindu temples. Lachaise's wife inspired virtually all of Lachaise's sculptures of the female form. "You are the Goddess I seek to express in all my work," he wrote to her in 1915.

This bronze cast, the second in an edition of five, was made in 2002 by the Modern Art Foundry. Measuring eight and one half feet long, weighing two and a half tons, *La Montagne* embodies the artist's adoration of Woman in monumental form and heroic proportions. Its silver nitrate patina recalls the cement material of the original work, which George L. K. Morris commissioned in 1934 for his estate in Lenox, Massachusetts (now open to the public as the Frelinghuysen-Morris House and Studio).

Reclining below a canopy of honey locust trees at an angle between 59th street and Second Avenue, *La Montagne* infuses the small park under the Roosevelt Island tram and its passersby with a dose of tranquility. This veritable Mother Earth, mature and abstracted, looking East to the sun, might prove a rewarding contemplation for people in motion. In a place defined by movement--cars, trams, people — *La Montagne* is at once a destination and a voyage.

E. E. Cummings once likened Lachaise's work to a "slow arrow of beauty vigorously expressing something of a civilization of which speed seems to be the god." Lincoln Kirstein, a friend of the artist's and a founder of the School of American Ballet, described *La Montagne* as "the balance of breathing sumptuousness, a mountain raised into air, earth sharing the shape of clouds." (MoMA Retrospective, 1935).

The Lachaise Foundation serves to promote, protect and perpetuate the work of Gaston Lachaise for the public benefit.

Parks & Recreation's public art program has consistently fostered the creation and installation of temporary public art in parks throughout the five boroughs. Since 1967, collaborations with arts organizations and artists have produced hundreds of public art projects in New York City parks.

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