



Jacques Lipchitz, *The Rape of Europa*, 1938, bronze,
38.6 x 52.8 x 33 cm, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

Lithuanian-born American sculptor Jacques Lipchitz (1891–1973) infuses an infamous myth with political significance in his bronze sculpture *The Rape of Europa* (1938). The myth behind this piece is supposedly linked to the birth of Europe. While its details may vary, the myth generally describes how Zeus fell in love with Europa, taking on the form of a bull in order to seduce her before carrying her across the ocean to the ancient island of Crete where they engaged in sexual intercourse. Europa then became queen of the first European civilization. This myth has inspired countless artworks throughout history. In this sculpture, Lipchitz relates the violent and territorial elements of the myth to the Holocaust, which forced the artist to flee Europe during the Second World War. In many of his past sculptural renditions of Europa stabbing the bull with a

dagger, Europa symbolizes Europe, while the bull represents Adolf Hitler (1889–1945). This 1938 rendition is quite abstract with little decipherable narrative, though it retains a sense of struggle and unrest that reflects the tense political atmosphere of the time. The daunting black bronze tint adds to the sculpture's dark, expressionist character. Yet true to the original myth, Lipchitz's work also evokes tender and erotic love, as the fluid, organic shapes blur the boundaries between beast and body. This abstract exploration of narrative and form is typical of the artist's interest in Cubism, which employs abstract geometric forms to represent external reality.

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