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AS SOON AS I ENTERED the house on Chile Street in Mendoza, I felt myself enveloped in an atmosphere so charged with suggestion and beauty that it almost took my breath away. Shelves, tables, and walls were only a pretext to provide a stage for the world of artistic figures that Lorenzo Domínguez had collected in his house.

Invited by Clara, his wife, to spend an afternoon reminiscing over the long ago years as students we shared together in Buenos Aires, I arrived completely unprepared. I knew that she had married a Chilean sculptor—she, herself, had impressed me with her delicate sensitivity—but as I came as a tourist, I hardly guessed what awaited me. There, I found out about the man and the artist, his work, and his thirst for art and teaching—not for fame, which he never sought.

Domínguez "was a sculptor of works of art as well as a sculptor of sculptors and disciples," wrote Diego F. Pró, an Argentine philosopher and also himself an engraver, in his book, *Tiempo de Piedra. Lorenzo Domínguez* (Time of Stone: Lorenzo Domínguez. Mendoza 1965), which is at once a warm tribute to a friend, an aesthetic biography, and an examination and analysis, with the eyes of an artist and the reasoning of a philosopher, of almost thirty years in the life of the master, years they shared in Chile and Argentina.

His life began and ended in America but was molded in Europe, especially in Spain, together with the great figures that Azorín called "the Generation of '98."



LORENZO DOMÍNGUEZ

For that reason, the pure Americanist flavor that pervades his art is surprising, especially in his larger sculptures, although a Gothic accent can be discerned in some of his works.

When his father sent him to Madrid to study medicine in 1920, how unaware he was that his son was embarking on an adventure so alien to his own tastes and

ideas. From a rural family himself, he could aspire with pride for his son to be a doctor, like some of his wife's relatives; but an artist!

The first years as a student for the young Chilean were spent between the school of medicine and lectures on universalities imparted to him in the cafés of Madrid by men of the measure of

Valle Inclán, Gómez de la Serna, Diez Canedo, Pío and Ricardo Baroja, Juan de Echeverría and many other great figures in the arts, letters, and sciences. But finally, when he was already in his fourth year of medicine, he decided to exchange the living but ailing matter of hospitals for the inert but robust and virile matter of stone and metal.

The sculptor Juan Cristóbal initiated him into the mysteries of the new path he had chosen. He traveled to Valladolid, to Toledo, to Salamanca, to Segovia, to Seville in order to fill himself with the art of the Spanish image makers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Together with Emiliano Barral he worked feverishly on the *Monumento a Cajal* and on several busts and portraits of a vigorous expressionistic orientation, which already revealed the great artist that he had within him.

The land of his ancestors fascinated him. Nevertheless, after eleven years of involvement and study, he returned to Chile. He felt that his roots were in America. America had the attractive force of the new, the savage, the primitive; but Domínguez came not only with an eagerness for exploration but also

with that urgency that filled his life, to give, to share, to teach. And the New World needed teachers.

He entered the Academy of Fine Arts in Santiago, but was slow in assimilating the new airs. The contrast was strong. He felt disoriented by the somnolence characteristic of the atmosphere of that period, and by a certain hostility toward his revolutionary theories, his individualism, his subdued personality, and his originality. And how was he to replace all that he had left behind, the cultural atmosphere of Spain, the *tertulias* in the cafés and studios, the great masters, the climate so propitious for the cultivation of art in Madrid in those days?

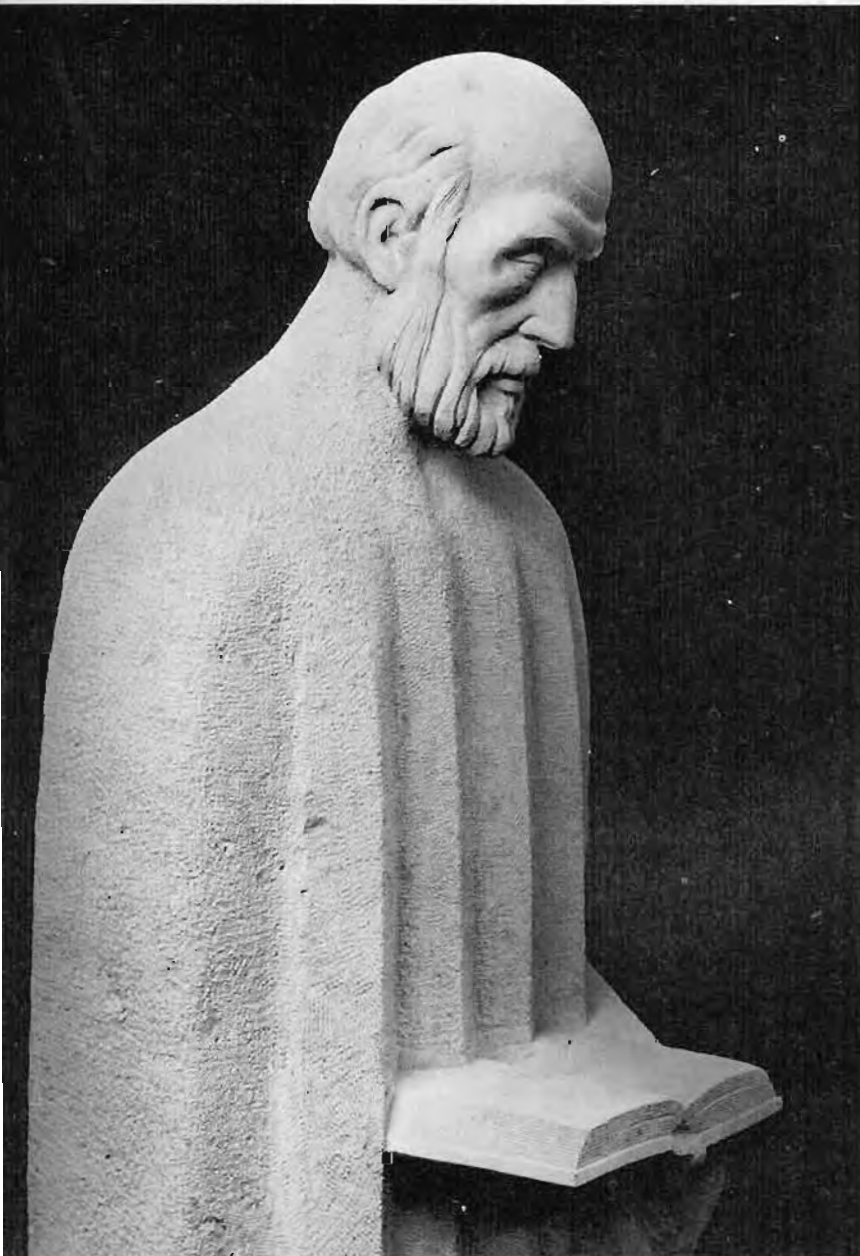
The new materials that he found in Chile, with their own expressive possibilities, constituted a challenge. And through battle and creation he found

his way again. He became enraptured by American stone, even in its imperfections that oblige the artist to modify his plan while he is working, to recreate his work, to obey, in short, the mandate of the live element that, in the course of the battle, becomes the spiritual material, "the genie of the work of art," as he called it.

In his work and in the intellectual gatherings in his studio with writers, men of science, engravers, sculptors, and painters, he found the escape valve for his creative passion. There he met Víctor Delhez, the Belgian engraver, and Pablo Neruda, the Chilean poet, who became his friends for life, and also Marta Brunet, Diego Pró, Carlos Lagarrige, Mariano Latorre.

The works of this period reflect the crisis and the process of maturation. They are of a more purified expressionism, without the strong contrasts of the first period. The heads of *Johann Sebastian Bach* and of *Lilion*, the *Portrait of Eugenio Matte*, and the figure of *Santa Olalla* are already hallowed works.

Serenity, however, did not seem to be destined him. The Civil War broke out in the Spain in which he had lived so intensely, and his heart took on a new burden. Frantic, he left again in 1938 in



Left: Monument to Cajal, detail, stone, 1931

Below: Lilion, green marble, 1937



what was at the same time escape and approach, eager to share the tragedy. But there is nothing more difficult than suffering a civil war, nor more painful than seeing a heroic country bloody itself in a sterile battle. This anguish and his own impotence in the face of the disaster sent him to France, where he devotedly studied in the museums, expositions, and studios of the great artists. His flight also took him to England and back to France again. But he found no peace. He needed to work, to create. And he returned to Chile, to teaching and to his studio.

Back in Chile, teaching, the gatherings with his friends, and the teamwork with his disciples brought him back to life. He read the *Bible* and *Don Quijote*. He found himself again and he worked intensely. His tremendous creative energy searched for new boundaries. He began the monumentalist period with the *Portrait of the Moon*, from the series "The Plane-

tarium," the plan for *Monument to Barcelona*, the *Monument to Calvo Mackena* and some portraits. Also from this period is the head of Víctor Delhez, of the purest expressionism and one of his finest works.

In 1941 he accepted a teaching position at the National University of Cuyo in the Argentine city of Mendoza. This was a decisive event in the life of the sculptor, since there he met the woman who would be his companion for the rest of his life, an inspiring force, the real genie of his work.

As the work and life of an artist correspond intimately to each other, it is not surprising that the equilibrium and repose that Dominguez finally achieved was translated into the extraordinary production of this period, which was not only monumentalist but also monumental for its quality, variety, and number of works realized. Some with a classic accent and the rest of monumentalist ex-

Victor Delhez, Carrara marble, 1940



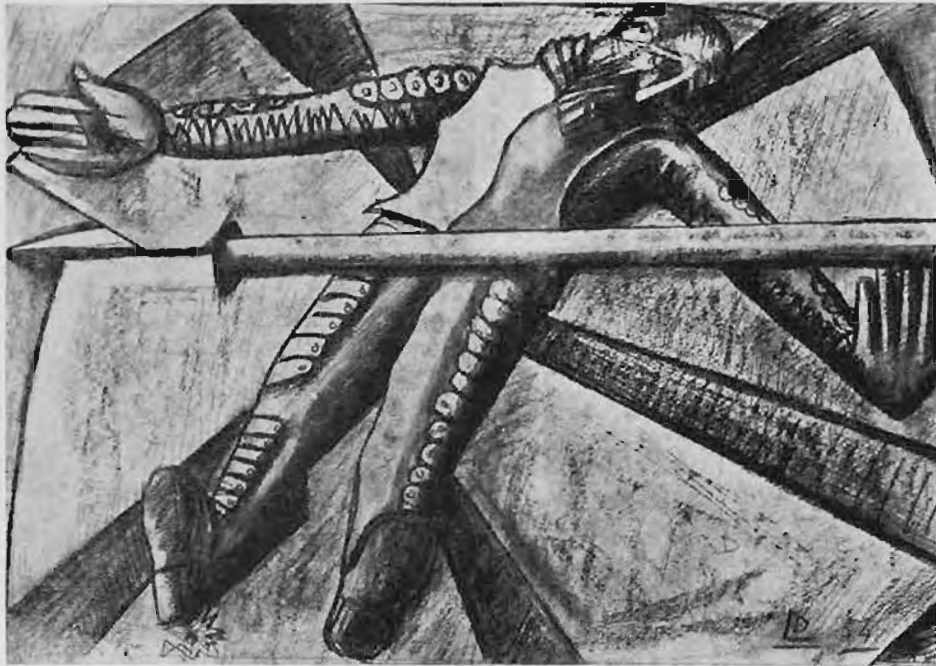
The sculptor's wife, Clara Federica. Stone, 1945

pression, in all of them the stone, challenging the sobriety of the lines and their own sharpness, radiates that spirituality that the sculptor had been able to imprint on all his work.

In those full years he also executed the bust of Ana Villar de Dominguez with the same religious devotion that he put in his Christs. The human energy, the stoicism, and the sobriety that emanate from that noble figure of a Spanish woman are captured in all their grandeur in the portrait that the sculptor—and devoted son—made of his mother in 1945. (In compliance with the artist's wishes, the bust was placed after his death—March 21, 1963, a little more than a year after the death of his mother—on the tomb that shelters them both in the earth of Mendoza.)

A figurative artist *par excellence*, the exaltation of individual character was more important for him than the traditional canons of beauty. The asymmetrical lines clearly reveal his anticlassicism in spite of his European formation, and his portraits are more than just portraits; they are the representation of a personal drama. "Art must be free of ties that bind," he said, and if he were asked in which trend he felt himself situated, he would answer, in none, "that he had freed himself of *isms* and that if he had to pick one he would call it *self-ism*."

His work continued to be exhibited with great success in the salons of Buenos Aires and Mendoza. The Argentine critics honored the Chilean sculptor with justice



Crucifixion in Madness, the windmill episode from the series, "Via Crucis of Don Quijote," pencil and charcoal, 1954

and enthusiasm. Jorge Romero Brest said: "Some of his heads, the *Torso* of 1942 and the sketch of the *Monument to Barcelona* are definitive works of universal validity that could stand comparison to the works of the great contemporary sculptors."

His move to Tucumán in 1949 marks another important stage in the continuous travel of the artist. "Art is not taught, it's caught," said Domínguez, and from the Spanish metal workers who shared his studio he became infected with the art of metal work. With them he learned the skill and began the series "Barbarous Irons," following the monumentalist style and the elemental language that characterized his work of those years. The biblical figures—*Judith and Helofernes*, *Adam and Eve*, the *Prophet Jonas*—alternate with themes of purely American origin—*Battle Between Pacha Mama and the War*—and the mythological—*The Rape of Europe*, *Portrait of the Sun*. And together with them, without interfering with them, a faithful portrait of *Unamuno*.

He also began to follow his inclination for drawing as an expression independent from sculpture. He initiated his series of drawings of the "Via Crucis of Don Quijote"—a free and symbolic interpretation of the Calvary of humanity—destined to be reproduced on plates

of iron. More than the plastic representation of the twenty-four moments—"falls"—chosen, Domínguez tends to exalt the values of man, to symbolize the clash of delightful madness with the grotesque, of the ideal with harsh reality. The most dramatic one is doubtless the one in which he represents the return to reason. The central theme of this series is essentially the artist's profound preoccupation with the drama of man.

Although he didn't abandon his monumental works with large planes and geometrical lines, he felt more and more captivated by drawing. He began to work on "The Mountains," "The Seeds," "The Beast-Men," "The Stones." The names of these series themselves reveal his constant search for the truth, for the origin of things, for the mystery of life. It is the art of ideas. The simplicity of the drawings is only apparent. Soon it is evident that it is a compact synthesis of a concept. It is like the skeleton of an organism deprived of its substance.

To this period also belong *Death and Hieroglyph of Time*, abstract expressions of an anxiety that had already begun to bother the artist and that was, perhaps, what impelled him to return to the tranquility of his residence in Mendoza, his "woods," as he called his garden. And there, together with his life's companion, his old friends, and his past disciples,

many of them now teachers, he recovered the desire to work.

Hardly a year had passed before his health began to decline. He had to stay away from his studio temporarily, but his will was as hard as the materials he worked with and he again mastered the stone, although it was not long before he would be unable to master the illness. From this period came a superb *Torso* in black granite and the *Head of Plato*.

Domínguez had reached the peak, his works assured him the permanence that every artist desires, but he was not yet able to be calm his search, his anxiety. He felt the shortening of his days and he still lacked a stage: Easter Island.

These lines from his diary explain his anxiety: "I was just a child of thirteen or fourteen when a small dictionary, Rapanui-Spanish, fell into my hands, written, I think, by a Chilean priest. It was my first contact with Easter Island. It had a hundred or two hundred words in it. I learned some of them and the island stayed within me, like a latent obsession, or a destiny perhaps."

Life was prodigal in gifts and misfortunes for Lorenzo Domínguez—perhaps for that reason it was brief—and the realization of his dream, to see the monuments from that mysterious island up close, was also permitted him. With a grant from the National Fund of the Arts of Argentina, he left in January 1960 with a mission to study the artistic treasures spread across the small island in the Pacific Ocean.

He lived on Easter Island for thirteen months, "perhaps the most passion-filled of my life, among stones, in the very heart of stone, where a brilliant and titanic people erected a gigantic and solitary hymn to strange gods, in that eagerness for projection, permanence, and the infinite that moves all the authentic and transcendental actions of man."

He didn't find himself completely alone in that solitude. Besides the islanders, in whom the habit of contemplating those strange figures since birth had taken from them all surprise or admiration, there was a German Capuchin monk who had worked quietly for twenty-five years studying the language and the island culture. He was Father Sebastian Englert, who, in November 1968, brought to the United States from far off Rapa Nui, as the natives call their island, the enormous head of volcanic rock that was

placed for a few weeks in front of the Pan American Union Building in Washington, D.C.

Domínguez studied, photographed, and touched the strange sculptures, heads, religious masks, woodcarvings, and petroglyphs engraved in stone, in his intent to capture the beauty and language of those stones, which other hands as vigorous as his had carved, no one knows when, with the pure, simple, and vital lines that bestow continuity on all art.

His later work reveals the decisive influence that that experience had on the artist. Drawings, iron and bronze work convey, even in their names—*Aku-Aku*, *The Komaris*, *Birds in Flight*, *The Make-Make*, *The Bird-Men*—the echo of mystery that surrounds that extraordinary

museum of art lost in the Pacific, which time has begun to corrode and lichens to cover in fine arabesques.

He also wrote. He did it feverishly, trying to describe his experience, the sculptures, the masks, the bird-men that dance in the stones: "For me to write this book is like erecting a monument." But he was unable to finish it. There remain his works done with charcoal, iron, copper, passion, and pain to fill the void. □

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Top right: Adam and Eve, from the series "Barbarous Irons," iron relief, 1951

Above: Crucifixion in Health, Don Quijote returns to reason from the series "Via Crucis of Don Quijote," pencil and charcoal, 1954

Left: Llaima-Llaima, stone, 1946