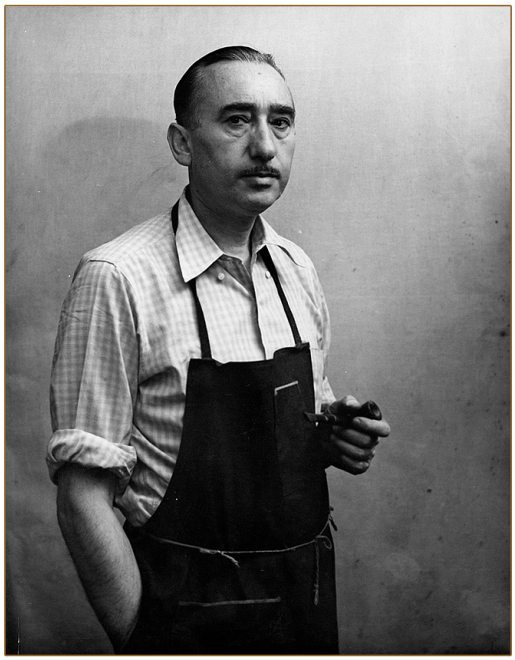
Seymour Lipton

"Sculpture is used by me to express the life of man as a struggling interaction between himself and his environment. Sculpture itself is a part of this interplay." [1]



Seymour Lipton, c.1950

Born in New York City **Seymour Lipton** (1903-1986) grew up in a Bronx tenement at a time when much of the borough was still farmland. These rural surroundings enabled Lipton to explore the botanical and animal forms that would later become sources for his work. Lipton's interest in the dialogue between artistic creation and natural phenomena was nurtured by a supportive family and cultivated through numerous visits to New York's Museum of Natural History as well as its many botanical gardens and its zoos. In the early 1920s, with the encouragement of his family, Lipton studied electrical engineering at Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute and pursued a liberal arts education at City College. Ultimately, like fellow sculptor Herbert Ferber, Lipton became a dentist, receiving his degree from Columbia University in 1927. In the late 1920s, he began to explore sculpture, creating clay portraits of family members and friends.

In addition to providing him with financial security, dentistry gave Lipton a foundation in working with metal, a material he would later use in his artwork. In the early 1930s, though, Lipton's primary sculptural medium was wood. Lipton led a comfortable life, but he was also aware of the economic and psychological devastation the Depression had caused New York. In response, he generally worked using direct carving techniques-a form of sculpting where the artist "finds" the sculpture within the wood in the process of carving it and without the use of models and maquettes. The immediacy of this practice enabled Lipton to create a rich, emotional and visual language with which to articulate the desperation of the downtrodden and the unwavering strength of the disenfranchised. In 1935, he exhibited one such early sculpture at the John Reed Club Gallery in New York, and three years later, ACA Gallery mounted Lipton's first solo show, which featured these social-realist-inspired wooden works. In 1940, this largely self-taught artist began teaching sculpture at the New School for Social Research, a position he held until 1965.

In the 1940s, Lipton began to devote an increasing amount of time to his art, deviating from wood and working with brass, lead, and bronze. Choosing these metals for their visual simplicity, which he believed exemplified the universal heroism of the "everyman," Lipton could also now explore various forms of abstraction. Lipton's turn towards increasing abstraction in the 1940s allowed him to fully develop his metaphorical style, which in turn gave him a stronger lexicon for representing the horrors of World War II and questioning the ambiguities of human experience. He began his metal work with cast bronze sculptures, but in 1946, he started welding sheet metal and lead. Lipton preferred welding because, as direct carving did with wood, this approach allowed "a more direct contact with the metal."[2] From this, Lipton developed the technique he would use for the remainder of his career: "He cut sheet metal, manipulated it to the desired shapes, then joined, soldered, or welded the pieces together. Next, he brazed a metal coating to the outside to produce a uniform texture."[3]

In 1950, Lipton arrived at his mature style of brazing on Monel metal. He also began to draw extensively, exploring the automatism that abstract expressionist painters were boasting at the time. Like contemporaries such as Jackson Pollock, Lipton was strongly influenced by Carl Jung's work on the unconscious mind and the regenerative forces of nature. He translated these two-dimensional drawings into three-dimensional maquettes that enabled him to revise his ideas before creating the final sculpture. The forms that Lipton produced during this period were often zoomorphic, exemplifying the tension between the souls of nature and the automatism of the machine.

In the years following the 1950s, Lipton's optimism began to rise, and the size of his work grew in proportion. The oxyacetylene torch-invented during the Second World War-allowed him to rework the surfaces of metal sculptures, thus eliminating some of the risks involved with producing large-scale finished works. In 1958, Lipton was awarded a solo exhibition at the Venice Biennale and was thus internationally recognized as part of a small group of highly regarded avant-garde constructivist sculptors. In 1960, he received a prestigious Guggenheim Award, which was followed by several prominent public commissions, including his heroic *Archangel*, currently residing in Lincoln Center's Avery Fischer Hall. Since 2004, Michael Rosenfeld Gallery has been the exclusive representative of the Estate of Seymour Lipton and has presented two solo exhibitions of his work-*Seymour Lipton: Abstract Expressionist Sculptor* (2005) and *Seymour Lipton: Metal* (2008).

[1] Seymour Lipton," *Landmarks*, University of Texas Austin, http://landmarks.utexas.edu/artist-detail/Lipton_Seymour (accessed July 2009).

[2] Seymour Lipton, quoted in Lori Verderame, *An American Sculptor: Seymour Lipton*, exh. cat. (Palmer Museum of Art and Hudson Hills, 2000), 19.

[3] Verderame, 19.

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