

THE FITZWILLIAM MUSEUM

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Fact Sheet

Albert Einstein by Sir Jacob Epstein



Title:	Albert Einstein
Maker:	Sir Jacob Epstein (1880-1959)
Medium:	Bronze
Date:	1933
Dimensions:	h. 44.5 cm
Museum No:	M.7-1933
Gallery:	I

The Sitter

Albert Einstein (1879-1955) is one of the most acclaimed figures of the 20th century. He transformed our understanding of the universe. He overturned the established concepts of time and space, energy and matter, and played a crucial role in establishing developments in 20th century physics, namely as the father of the theory of relativity and as a major contributor to quantum theory. He is also remembered as an ardent humanist, taking an active and outspoken stance on the significant political and social issues of his time. As a Jew, he advocated a distinctive moral role for the Jewish people, and was offered the presidency of Israel in 1952, an offer he declined.

At the time of this portrait he had renounced his citizenship of Germany because of the rise of Nazism. After brief spells in Belgium and England he emigrated to the United States to take up the position of Professor of Theoretical Physics at Princeton University. In 1933 Einstein also published *Why War?*, a correspondence between himself and Sigmund Freud. Within this Einstein suggests that the only possible solution to international conflict, particularly in a world where the technology exists to wipe out humankind, is to have a supreme court of all nations.

The Sculptor

Jacob Epstein was known as a sculptor of monuments and portraits, but was also an occasional painter and illustrator. He championed many of the concepts of modernist sculpture including direct carving and inspiration from so-called primitive art. Born in New York in 1880, his parents were of Polish-Jewish descent. Epstein began his art studies in New York, where he studied drawing while working in a bronze factory. He travelled to Paris to further his studies, and visits to the Louvre aroused his interest in ancient and primitive sculpture which was a continuing influence on his work. In 1905 he settled in London, and spent the next few years working with other artists living and working in Paris and London, including Eric Gill, Picasso, Brancusi and Modigliani.

Epstein exhibited regularly in London from 1913, mainly at the Leicester Galleries, and from 1916 he lived and worked in London for the rest of his life. He had a retrospective exhibition at the Tate Gallery in 1953, was knighted in 1954 and died in London in 1959. This portrait bust is one amongst many portraits of distinguished individuals who sat for Epstein, including Winston Churchill, Ernest Bevin and Somerset Maugham.

The Portrait

Einstein sat for Epstein for this head in September 1933, in rather extraordinary surroundings – a room almost filled by a grand piano in a beach hut in Roughton Heath, near Cromer. Einstein was the guest of the journalist and MP Commander Locker-Lampson who had persuaded him to come to England from Belgium, where he had been living since Hitler came to power in Germany. Epstein stayed at the Royal Cromer Hotel and for three days went to the hut for a two-hour sitting. Einstein smoked a pipe and after the sitting played the piano or the violin.

Epstein was immediately drawn to his sitter who 'appeared dressed very comfortably in a pullover, with his wild hair floating in the wind. His glance contained a mixture of the humane, the humorous and the profound'. The bronze successfully captures these qualities, and Epstein's rugged execution gives it an informality which was equally characteristic of the sitter. Jacob Epstein was criticised in his lifetime for the rough unfinished look of his portrait bronzes, but what he said in his defence is eminently true of this work: 'it is the rough surface which gives both character and likeness to the face ...'.

A total of six casts were made from this sculpture. The other five are in: Tate Gallery; Science Museum (signed); Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool; Public Art Gallery, Huddersfield and Hebrew University, Jerusalem. To see how a bronze sculpture is made please look at the *Making Art* section of our website Pharos – www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/pharos .