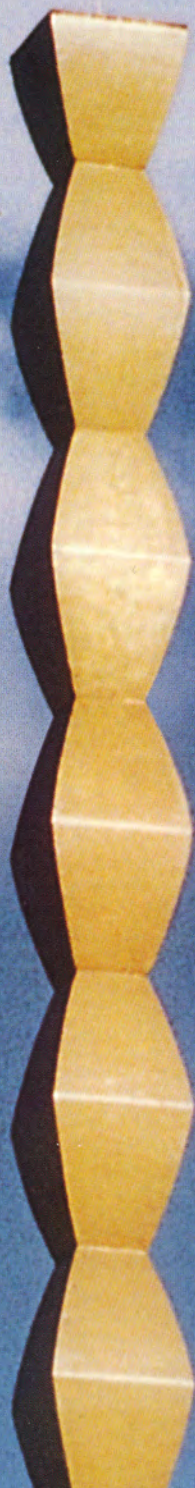
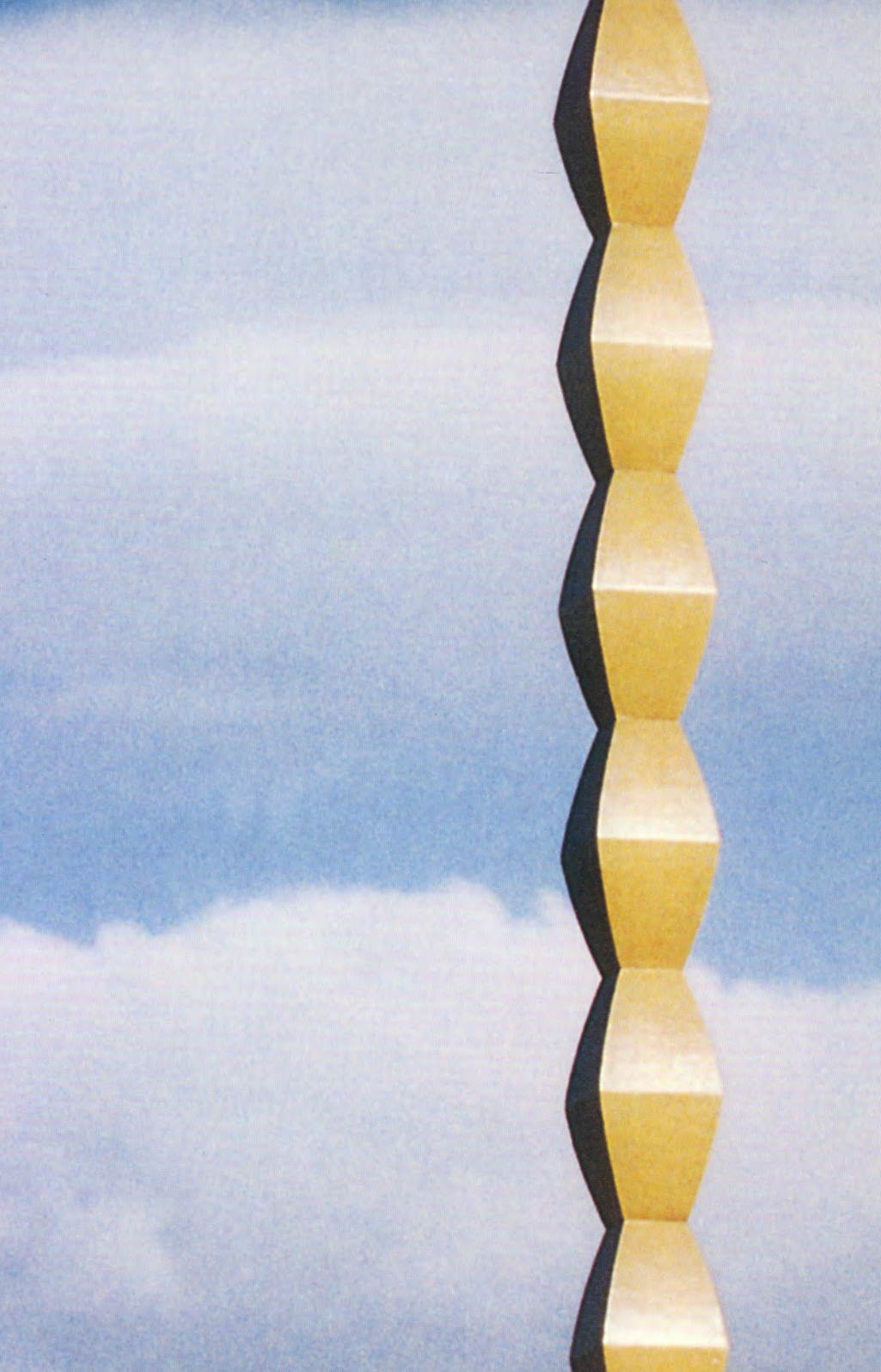


WORLD MONUMENTS FUND

THE RESTORATION OF
BRANCUSI'S
'ENDLESS
COLUMN'

TÂRGU-JIU, ROMANIA







INTRODUCTION

Constantin Brancusi's monumental *Endless Column*, located near his birthplace of Hobita, Romania, is a 98-foot column of cast-iron modules (clad with zinc, brass and a clear protective organic coating) threaded onto a steel spine. It is part of an ensemble (along with the travertine Gate of the Kiss and the Table of Silence) built as a memorial to those who died defending the town of Târgu-Jiu during World War I.

Although beloved by the Romanian people as a great cultural symbol, the column had suffered from years of exposure to the elements and the modules were deteriorating. In 1996, World Monuments Fund placed the *Endless Column* on its World Monuments Watch List of 100 Most Endangered Sites.

In 1998, the Romanian Government and World Monuments Fund established an international partnership, financed by both WMF and The World Bank for the restoration of the entire ensemble. The *Endless Column* restoration was a collaborative effort of the Romanian Government, World Monuments Fund, The World Bank, and other institutions, architects, art historians, engineers, conservators, and craftsmen. The restored sculpture was rededicated in December 2000.



BRANCUSI POSES IN
HIS PARIS STUDIO
WITH MODELS
FOR THE ENDLESS
COLUMN

HISTORY

In late 1934, Constantin Brancusi (1876–1957), the internationally acclaimed Romanian sculptor (then living in Paris), accepted an offer from the Women's League of Gorj to create a memorial dedicated to the soldiers, "fallen at the River Jiu in defense of the town against a German force in 1916. . . . his first idea for the memorial was a tall column, but it was enlarged during discussions with a committee" to include a stone portal for the public gardens of the town of Târgu-Jiu (Sidney Geist). Finally, in 1937, Brancusi reconceived the project as a tripartite ensemble spread along an east-west axis with the Table of Silence and Gate of the Kiss at one end, the *Endless Column* at the other.

The Gorj region of Romania is an area with a strong tradition of wood carving. Brancusi began working on the theme for of the *Endless Column* in 1917, the earliest dated example from 1918. Scholars have noted that the sculpture's forms echo decorative motifs found in vernacular Romanian architecture and folk art. The column has been seen as both a symbolic means of ascension to heaven for the dead soldiers' souls and, as Brancusi said, a way to "sustain the vault of heaven." The cast-iron modules of the *Endless Column* (fifteen full, two half) were based on a model made in wood (finished by Brancusi himself) and plated in 1938 with a "very pure golden-yellow" finish based on the artist's instructions. The technical solution for the design and erection of the column was engineered by Stefan Georgescu-Gorjan, son of a childhood friend of Brancusi's

DISMANTLING, REPLATING, AND REASSEMBLING



Since its completion in 1938, the *Endless Column* has been re-plated twice, once in 1965–66 and again in 1976.

A third restoration began in 1996 when the Brancusi International Foundation prepared the site for conservation and restoration. The modules were removed and stored individually in sealed and protected containers. The Romanian government assumed leadership of the project in 1997 and completed it as an international partnership.

In 1999, WMF convened 32 leading architects, engineers,

scholars, conservators, and project partners from around the world in Romania including Thomas Blinkhorn, Liviu Popescu and Daniela Chisuiu, The World Bank; Giorgio Croci, University of Rome; Sergiu Nistor, Department of Cultural Heritage; Cedric Proffit, DGT Fabrications; John Stubbs, World Monuments Fund; Mihai Radu, Lauster Radu Architects; Elena Prodan, Ministry of Culture; Marielle Tabart, the Brancusi Atelier, Paris; Dorin Danila, U.A.P.; Mircea Crisan, structural engineer; Mircea Constantinescu, Francisc Dosza and Florin Fagaraseanu, Romanian National Museum, and others. Final agreement was reached to conserve—as opposed to replace—the existing spine and replate the modules with a brass and zinc alloy that replicates the original polished finish.

A Romanian engineering firm, Turbomecanica, was selected through a competitive bidding process to clean and rust-proof the spine and to repair and replate the modules. The column was reassembled with added lightning protection and ventilation in December 2000.

THE ENSEMBLE

The ensemble, consisting of the Table of Silence, Gate of the Kiss, and the *Endless Column*, extends through the town perpendicular to the Jiu River. The column is connected to the Gate of the Kiss by a 1480-meter-long road running through the center of town called the Allée of the Heroes. A shorter extension of this axis called the Allée of the Seats, runs from the Gate of the Kiss to the Table of Silence. Thirteen travertine stools are arranged along each side of the allée.

The Table of Silence is a low round travertine table surrounded by 12 chairs. The Gate of the Kiss, also travertine, is an arch ornamented by a stylized version of Brancusi's *The Kiss*.

As part of the overall restoration project, the travertine pieces will be cleaned and the entire area will be landscaped.



LEFT: A SEGMENT OF THE ENDLESS COLUMN DURING THE RESTORATION PROCESS.
ABOVE: A RESTORED SEGMENT AFTER FINAL REPLATING.

SITE PLAN



ENDLESS COLUMN



TABLE OF SILENCE



GATE OF THE KISS

The ensemble as a whole marks the place where heroes died fighting a definitive battle for their country's independence and is linked in the minds of Romanians with the idea of infinite gratitude. When asked why there was such a great distance between the Table of Silence and the *Endless Column*, Brancusi answered, "The way of the heroes is always hard and long."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CREDITS

The restoration was a collaboration of World Monuments Fund, the Romanian Ministry of Culture, and The World Bank (through a special Project Implementation Unit in Romania). The project team included Mihai Radu, AIA, Lauster Radu Architects (architect); Turbomecanica (contractor); Plasma Jet (metal plating); and U.A.P. (technical documents). The conservation project was brought to WMF's attention and mobilized by the Constantin Brancusi International Foundation.

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