

# Brancusi's Golden Bird<sup>1</sup>

The toy  
become the aesthetic archetype

As if

some patient peasant God  
had rubbed and rubbed 5  
the Alpha and Omega<sup>2</sup>  
of Form  
into a lump of metal

A naked orientation  
unwinged unplumed 10  
—the ultimate rhythm  
has lopped the extremities  
of crest and claw  
from  
the nucleus of flight 15

The absolute act  
of art  
conformed  
to continent sculpture  
—bare as the brow of Osiris<sup>3</sup>— 20  
this breast of revelation

an incandescent curve  
licked by chromatic flames  
in labyrinths of reflections

This gong 25  
of polished hyperaesthesia<sup>4</sup>  
shrills with brass  
as the aggressive light  
strikes  
its significance 30

The immaculate  
conception<sup>5</sup>  
of the inaudible bird  
occurs  
in gorgeous reticence . . . 35

1922

1. Constantin Brancusi (1876–1957), French (Romanian-born) pioneer of abstract sculpture, whose bird statues became icons of modernism in the arts. His nonrepresentational aesthetic was so revolutionary at the time that U.S. customs officials wanted to tax his sculptures as raw material rather than works of art.

2. The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet.

In the book of Revelation, Jesus repeatedly identifies himself as the alpha and the omega.

3. God of the Egyptian underworld; symbol of the indestructibility of life.

4. Excessive sensitivity.

5. Catholic doctrine that, from the moment of her conception, Mary was free of the burden of original sin.