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Jacques Lipchitz Hager in the Desert

In *Hagar in the Desert* from 1957, Jacques Lipchitz addresses the theme of finding hope in the face of great despair. It was a recurring theme for the artist, who was himself Jewish and fled Europe for New York during World War II. Here, he depicts the Old Testament story of Hagar, the maid servant who bore Abraham a son when his wife couldn't. Later, after his wife conceived, he banished Hagar and her son, Ishmael, to the desert.

Hagar communicates her anguish with her outstretched hand, thrust back head, and open mouth. Promise and hope hover in the form of an angel, whose contours are suggested by a sweep of drapery. As Deborah Rothschild, Curator Emerita of Williams College Museum of Art explains, another life affirming theme emerges here as well.

Lipchitz's humanistic values found a fitting motif in the universal theme of a mother protecting her child. He acknowledged that, in part, it stemmed from his strong connection to his own mother. Further, it allowed him to express tender and lyrical, as well as fierce and violent emotions.

Lipchitz unites mother and child by literally merging their forms.

Ishtar's head does double duty as his mother's right breast. The two hands and arms that lie to the left on the base are also difficult to decipher. One appears to belong to Ishtar, the other remains problematic. But despite these ambiguities, Lipchitz is quite successful in communicating a mother's desperation to protect her child.

You can access commentaries on Lipchitz's other work at MIT on the List's website.