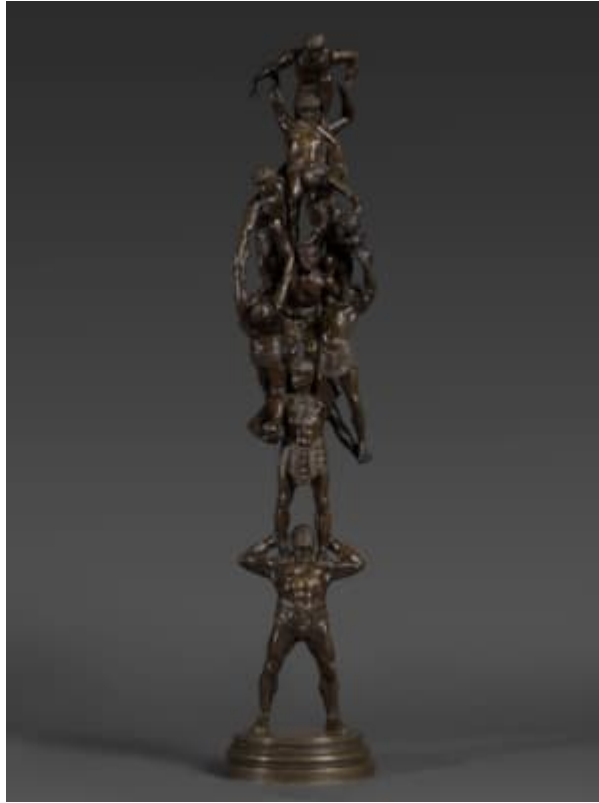


# Daniel Katz Gallery

ANTIQUITY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



**Gustave Doré (Strasbourg 1832 - Paris 1883)**

## **The Acrobats**

Bronze

58.8 cm high

Circa 1881

Signed G.ve Doré. on top of the base

A striking vertical display of equilibrium and physical strength, this bronze represents a group of ten acrobats wearing Egyptian style loincloths and forming a human pyramid. Unprecedented both in its subject matter and its conception, this intriguing sculpture was exhibited for the first time in 1881, at the Cercle de l'Union Artistique on the Place Vendôme. Contrasting with the prevailing themes of his previous sculptures and entirely unconventional, The Acrobats ignores the time-honoured principles of contrapposto and compositional balance to form a precarious balance of figures climbing on top of each other.

The present bronze is 58.8 cm high, like the Acrobats group originally exhibited in Paris in 1881. Yet the sculpture, also entitled *La Pyramide Humaine* in French, exists in three sizes. Indeed, when the contents of Doré's studio were auctioned in 1885 two years after his death, there were three bronze casts of the Acrobats, one measuring 129 cm, a second 90 cm and a third 58 cm. An example of the large version is now in the Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota.

The human pyramid was a popular gymnastic exercise at the time and in fact Doré himself was an enthusiastic gymnast. His studio on the rue Bayard was a former gymnasium and he retained a trapeze hanging from the ceiling for a time. The artist was also known for making his entrance to soirées held by Théophile Gautier walking on his hands rather than his feet.

It has been noted that for the general composition of *The Acrobats* Doré might have drawn some inspiration from a caricature by the well-known cartoonist Nadar published in 1849 in the satirical journal *La Revue Comique* and which showed politicians of the Second Empire balancing precariously atop one another. Doré's sculpture of *The Acrobats*, however, in its celebration of physical exploit, seems to stem directly from the artist's lifelong passion for acrobatics.

In addition to his remarkable and successful career as an illustrator, Doré was painting and sculpting. He exhibited sculpture at the Paris Salon for the first time in 1877.

### **Provenance**

#### Provenance:

- Private collection, France

### **Literature:**

#### Comparative literature:

- *The Romantics to Rodin*, exh. cat., Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980, p. 214, cat. 116 (entry by P. Fusco)
- S. Clapp and N. Lezni, "Une introduction à la sculpture de Gustave Doré", *Bulletin de la Société Historique de l'Art Français*, Paris, 1991, pp. 219-248, cat. 21
- *Fantasy and faith: the art of Gustave Doré*, exh. cat, The Dahesh Museum of Art, New York, 2007, p. 140