

Daniel Katz Gallery

ANTIQUITY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



Sir William Reid Dick (1879 - 1961)

Plaster for The Child, 1927

Plaster

Inscribed and dated '1926 Reid Dick' on the integral base

57.1 cm.

From humble origins Reid Dick rose to become one of the leading sculptors in Britain during the early twentieth century - only to be removed from art history by Modernist art critics for whom he did not fit with the prevailing trend toward abstraction.

Growing up in Glasgow, Reid Dick first trained as an apprentice stonemason. It was during this traineeship that he worked as a carver on the Glasgow Art Gallery in Kelvingrove under leading sculptors of the day: George Frampton, Francis Derwent, and Johan Keller. It was on the proposal of Frampton and Derwent that Reid Dick took an Associateship at the Glasgow School of Art and began to combine his practical carving skills with lessons in modelling and drawing. In 1908 after obtaining a bursary for his work he was able to move to London, enrolling at the Lambeth School of Art. At that time Lambeth's sculpture school was still heavily influenced by leading French sculptor Jules Dalou, who had taught there in the 1870's; and Reid Dick studied alongside Glyn Philpot and Eric Kennington. Concurrently he began to exhibit in galleries and at the Royal Academy and started to receive several major private commissions. A key early work being *Femina Victrix* (1913) a homage to Leighton's *Athlete Wrestling a Python*, which was bought by the National Gallery of New South Wales.

Like many artists of his generation Reid Dick's career was interrupted by the outbreak of war. Nevertheless, he somehow managed to remain productive whilst on active service in Flanders: notably in 1915 he was elected to the recently formed Royal Society of British Sculptors, and in 1916 an exhibition of his pre-war work was held in London (at which Her Majesty the Queen bought a copy of *The Catapult Boy*, 1911). Most incredibly he even found time to sculpt, producing pieces with the soft chalk of the trenches, carved with a pen knife, an example of which survives in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

After the war, he was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy and received two prestigious war memorial commissions – *The Royal Air Force Memorial on Westminster Embankment*, and *The Kitchener War Memorial in St Paul's Cathedral* – both of which transformed his reputation and career. The latter commission was critically acclaimed and included a *Pietà* group - a copy of which was shown at the British Pavilion at the 1925 Paris Exhibition and for which Reid Dick was awarded a Gold medal.

The present work is the preparatory plaster maquette for a sculpture known as *Madonna and Child* first exhibited in 1927, in stone, as *The Child*. Another version (of unknown medium) was later exhibited at the Royal Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts and a white marble version was shown at the Royal Academy in 1929 as his diploma work on being voted in as a Royal Academician. The painter Sir Walter Sickert on seeing the latter version, wrote to Reid Dick to commend him saying, "If a two dimensional may venture to address a three dimensional I think your diploma work one of the loveliest things I have seen. You are my exact idea of a sculptor..." (Wardleworth, *op.cit.*, p. 98).

Produced at the zenith of his skills *Madonna and Child* is one of a series of *Mother and Child* groups from the 1920's which also include *The Man Child*, 1920, *Madonna*, 1922, and *Love*, 1930. *Madonna and Child* is a wonderfully intimate sculpture with a great simplicity and clarity of form that moves away from the swirling, elaborate forms of the preceding art nouveau style. The female figure kneels, almost in supplication of the baby she holds aloft, the drapery of her shawl and headdress wonderfully falling in stylized folds. She gazes fondly at the baby, who wipes the sleep from his eyes. Sympathetic and graceful yet highly original this work can, along with *Madonna and Love*, be regarded as one of his most successful sculptures.

Given the loss of life of the First World War and perceived lack of empathy for mankind that such destruction wrought, maternal subjects were indeed popular amongst artists in the interwar years. There is no doubt the war must have had some influence on Reid Dick's desire to portray such maternal scenes. However, the female figure and child had long been central to his practice ever since *The Catapult* and *Femina Victrix*, and indeed would remain a cornerstone of his practice, culminating in late works such as *Lady Godiva* in 1943, and a *Madonna and Child*, 1958.

It is also interesting to note that Reid Dick's *Madonna and Child* groups - unlike many of his contemporaries' interpretations of the subject - are not religious, nor do they alternatively represent the idea of nourishment. Inventively he instead chooses to portray the intense emotional bond between mother and child, for each other - capturing a moment of mutual pleasure which verges on play. For an artist who has since been overlooked in favour of his contemporaries Epstein, and Moore, (who are deemed by the canon to be more radical) *The Child* more than holds its own - both in inventiveness and beauty - in comparison to comparable works by either of the aforementioned.

Literature:
Comparative Literature:

Royal Society of British Sculptors, 'Modern British Sculpture', Country Life, London, 1939, p. 22.

D. Wardleworth, William Reid Dick: Sculptor, Routledge, 2013, p. 100.

Artist description:

Born in Glasgow, Sir William Reid Dick became an Associate of the Royal Academy in 1921 and a Royal Academician in 1928. Dick served as president of the Royal Society of British Sculptors from 1933 to 1938. He was knighted by King George V in 1935. He was Sculptor in Ordinary for Scotland to King George VI from 1938 until his death.

Dick was renowned as a sculptor of portrait statuary and monuments and received many important commissions in his career: the sculptures by Blackfriars Bridge (near Unilever House) are his, as well as the eagle on the Royal Air Force Monument on the Victoria Embankment and the Boy with a Frog fountain in Regent's park dating from 1936. He was also the sculptor of the imposing bronze statue of Franklin Roosevelt in London's Grosvenor Square (facing the United States Embassy), of the John Soane statue at the Bank of England, and of the equestrian statue of Lady Godiva in Coventry, England. His archives are held by the Tate Gallery and he was buried in St. Paul's Cathedral, London.