

Daniel Katz Gallery

ANTIQUITY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



Auguste Rodin (Paris 1840 - Meudon 1917)

Caryatid with Urn

Plaster

40 x 32 x 30 cm.

Signed 'A.RODIN' and dedicated 'A MON AMI FEYEN-PERRIN' on the integral base

1885-6, this plaster executed 1886

This work will be included in the archives of the Rodin Committee for the publication of the Critical Catalogue of the Sculpted Work of Auguste Rodin currently in preparation at the Brame & Lorenceau Gallery under the direction of Jérôme Le Blay under number 2019-5925B.

“Here is one of the most striking creations... Rodin, as the great plastic poet of despondency, of the sorrow that weighs upon the human being of our times, has, in a sudden stroke of inspiration, seen the dejected caryatid, unable to continue, renouncing her task of carrying the stone, but still carrying it all the same. Nothing more poignant than this figure so robust and yet so crushed; nothing is more moving than this sculptural depiction of defeated force, all the more defeated since any resistance within her is dead.”

Caryatid with Urn, portrays a woman, her body collapsed and folded by the burden of the urn whose weight she bears despairingly. Her head buried on her arm, she is disconsolate and dejected. Symbolic of the suffering of physical strength not measuring up to determination or ambition, she is a poignant representation of the feeling of humankind weighed down by his or her destiny. The ancient Greek notion of the Caryatid is one of unfaltering commitment, often smiling or blissfully ignorant of the enormity of their task. Here Rodin turns the concept on its head, in which the world weary figure is all too aware of their fragility and unworthiness of the task at hand.

As Rodin described it: “It carries, as one carries the impossible in a dream, and cannot find a way out. And despite its weakness, the act of carrying continues...and even when reclining, it will still carry, will go on carrying forever.”

Much admired by Rodin's contemporaries and associates, the artist himself regarded The Caryatid as one of his best works and thus made several variants of it – most often shown carrying a stone. It emanates from one of his most daring and expressive figures, Crouching Woman, itself conceived around 1881-2, when Rodin was modelling the first figures for the Gates of Hell (eventually including a Caryatid with Stone atop the left pilaster).

Caryatid with Urn sits within a period of Rodin's oeuvre in which the influence of Michelangelo is most pronounced, and as is clear in our sculpture, where the aim is to emulate the Master's interest in a wholistic yet compact union between medium and subject. Unlike Michelangelo's work however, Rodin has intended for Caryatid with Urn to be viewed from all sides. And, moving around the sculpture, the viewer can empathise with the figures compact form which struggles with the inexhaustable weight of the urn.

A cast terracotta Fallen Caryatid Carrying an Urn dated 1883, was acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art directly from Rodin in 1910, for the high price of 3,500 francs. However, no bronze life-time versions of the work are known and the large versions of the work in plaster were not conceived until 1900, meaning that this early plaster from the 1880's stands apart.

It is interesting to note the importance of plaster with Rodin's oeuvre and the central role that plaster casts made within his working practice. Rodin would initially sculpt in clay. A hard mold was then taken of the modelled terracuda, during which process the clay model was often destroyed. From the mold a plaster model would be cast, which became the Master Model. From this a further set of plaster models were taken and were disseminated accordingly to the relevant foundries to either be pointed for conversion into marble, or as the basis for any bronze casting. These plasters were known as Foundry Models.

This plaster, has a beautifully patinated surface which is a result of an application of shellac intended to both protect the surface and to add to its appealing appearance. The piece mold seams from the setting of the original cast are clearly visible and have been left by Rodin to great effect. For Rodin seam lines were evidence of the making process as the idea of 'youth to materials' was all important to him. The process of casting the plaster would have required great skill and expertise. The plaster mix needs to be the right viscosity so as to be strong yet also thin enough to enter into the deepest areas of the mould and also so as to avoid air pockets.

Auguste Feytaud (1826-1888) was a French painter, engraver and illustrator who trained under Michel Martin Drolling and at the Ecole des Beaux-arts. He was a close friend of Gustave Courbet, and like him, took a keen interest in portraying social narrative and the plight of peasants. Feytaud was

a progressive force in the development of the arts and its politics in nineteenth century France. In 1871 the Commune secretly elected him, with Courbet, to a provisional committee of artists, and in 1873 he joined the group that organized the first Impressionist exhibition the following year, though he did not participate. Cariatid with Urn is therefore a symbolic work to have been gifted him by Rodin, given its connotations about resolved and dogged determination.

Provenance

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Augustin Feyen-Perrin, Paris (Gift of the artist, 1886)

Private Collection, France

Literature:

Literature:

Tancock, J.L., Sculpture of August Rodin, David R Godine, 1989.

Correspondence of Rodin, ed. Musée Rodin, Paris, 1985, t.1860-1889, letters n ° 48 p.62 and 59 p.67;

Antoinette Le Normand-Romain, Rodin in 1900, The exhibition of the Alma, exh. cat., Luxembourg Museum, March 12-July 15, 2001, RMN, Paris, 2001

Anntoinette Le Normand-Romain, The Bronzes of Rodin. Catalogue of works at the Musée Rodin, 2 vols, Paris, Musée Rodin, RMN, 2007, vol. 1; p.248.

Catherine Chevillot, Rodin Centennial Exhibition, exh. cat., Grand Palais, Paris March 22 - July 31, 2017, RMN, Paris, 2017, p. 272.