

Daniel Katz Gallery

ANTIQUITY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



Joseph Chinard (1756 - Lyon 1813)

Bust of a female artist presumed to be Madame Constance-Marie Charpentier (1767-1849)

79 cm

This is an extremely rare and fine marble bust by the great sculptor of the French Republic, Joseph Chinard (1756-1813). Famed for his particularly refined and realistic portraiture (most notably of Napoleon's family and retinue) this is superb portrait epitomises his consummate ability to achieve an acute likeness without compromising on the purity and harmony of the neo-classical ideal.

Traditionally identified as the painter, Madame Constance-Marie Charpentier (1767-1819) the carving is thought to date to around 1800, executed at the height of the Lyonnais sculptor's fame and two years before his celebrated bust of Madame Récamier (the terracotta now J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles). It once belonged in the great collection of works by Chinard formed by the Count of Penha Longa.

The sitter looks out over her right shoulder, exposing the subtle musculature of her neck which runs down into her chest above the low neckline of her dress; her shoulders elegantly pushed back. She holds her arms folded beneath her bosom (which is visible beneath the folds of her dress) the left hand clasping the right forearm and supporting it. Beneath her arms the folds of the dress tighten and the weight of her dress falls - with the help of four beautifully carved acorn tassles - over the edge of an

integral classical socle. Upon the socle are adorned the painter's attributes of a palette and paint brushes which compliment the porte-crayon she holds in her hand.

The neo-classical Directoire Style of her hair and dress suggest a date for the work of around 1800. The refined way in which Chinard has rendered the fashion of the day, both in the hair, and in the notion of a loose fitting yet semi-transparent and fine materialled dress is superb, and shows the sculptor at the height of his ability.

After the Revolution there was a desire to disassociate oneself from noble connotations and traditions and so in fashion (and culture more broadly) there was a move toward naturalism and expression of the self. This is a notion brilliantly encapsulated in the present sculpture – particularly in the wonderfully sophisticated hair which appears loose, flowing and natural. The dynamic curls of her hair are a tour de force of carving accomplishment and reflect visually the psychological notion of a strong-willed character with the resolve and determination needed by an artist of the day.

The gown dress is simple, and classical, à la Greque. It is closely fitting to the upper body, with a very high waistline tied beneath the bosom, and loose below. Chinard has eloquently conveyed this impression in the carved 'wet-look' appearance of the dress, falling over the visible anatomy of the upper body and the breasts and shoulders. The fabric falls in tightly formed, crisp folds which, along with the visible nipples, suggest the thinness of a fine muslin - the favoured dress fabric of the period - clinging to her upper body. A wide-cut, short-sleeved jacket sits over her dress, its long folds falling eloquently into the folded forearms. There is also an elegant yet simple, classical S-shape embroidery design to the trimming of the sleeves and neckline and to the back. The high waist is hidden at the front by the sitter's hands but is brilliantly suggested by the change in direction of the folds of the dress which above her arms, are curved, and beneath, fold in uniform verticality. To the back, the suggestion at the front is confirmed by the visible waist line which shows the jacket pulled tight by two pins above the beginnings of the flowing dress, which juts out over the edge of the socle and the rest of which is left to us to imagine flowing down to the floor.

Like the hair, the classical style of the dress aimed to convey naturalism. The exposed skin and visible breasts reflect the emphasis on a more open and egalitarian society in which women were able to dress more freely (not having to conform to traditional modes) and where their place in society, and their maternal role in the family, were openly celebrated. One of the ways in which the new egalitarian society in France progressed was in its open approach to female artists. Thus, the present sculpture encapsulates the radical socio-political developments of the period not only in her modish dress, but also in her denotation as an artist. Art was seen as a suitable endeavour for a cultivated and learned Lady in society and could even be seen as a legitimate 'career'. Many women made a vocation in the painting profession and, whilst there were still limitations on the number allowed to join, and male life-classes were out of bounds, several Women artists were admitted to the Académie Royale. Furthermore, the newly formed Salons allowed women the opportunity to exhibit work even if they were not a member. Female artists abounded for the first time, the better known being Madame Constance-Marie Charpentier (1767-1819), Adélaïde Labille-Guiard (1749-1803), Elisabeth Vigée-le-Brun (1755-1847), Marguerite Gerard (1761-1837) and Anne Vallayer-Coster (1744-1818).[1]

Despite these developments it is worth remembering however that it was still extremely challenging for female artists of the day. Not only compared to their male counterparts, being greatly restricted in their endeavours by comparison, but also given the general difficulties for artists in light of the constraints and challenges that permeated society due to the political upheaval and instability brought about by the

Revolution. Therefore, the present sculpture can be interpreted not only as symbolic of a new found social standing for the female artist and a newly established autonomy, but also as emblematic of the triumph of the individual female painter in the face of adversity.

The new role of women in French society is reflected in Chinard's portraiture. As the official portraitist of the Bonaparte family he was arguably best placed to capture these developments. Chinard made many busts of female members of the imperial family including Josephine, Princess Augusta of Bavaria, Julia Clary, the Princesses Zenaïda and Charlotte, and Elisa Bonaparte all posed for the artist (Lami, p. 197). Indeed, his most publicly acclaimed and most widely known work is also of a female sitter, the beauty and socialite Mme Récamier (1777-1849).

Born in Lyon, Chinard had first served as apprentice in the studio of Barthélemy Blaise (1738-1819). In 1784 with the support of private patrons he was able to visit Rome for three years. It was there that he immersed himself in making terracotta copies after the Antique; spending much time at the Vatican and in the Pamphili collection, but most notably at the Villa Borghese.[2] These works would then be shown to his clients back in Lyon and sometimes would be commissioned in marble.[3] It was during this time that he won the prestigious sculpture prize for Perseus and Andromeda (1784) at the Academia di San Luca - a testament to his brilliance as a feat not previously achieved by a foreigner for at least sixty years.[4]

In 1791 he returned to Rome to study at the French Academy but his work drew negative attention from the Vatican as its revolutionary zeal was considered subversive and he was imprisoned in the Casel Sant'Angelo. After public outcry in his native Lyon and support amongst fellow artists such as Jacques-Louis David, he was freed and he returned to Lyon. In 1795 he moved to Paris where his talent won the attention and favour of General Bonaparte. He proceeded to serve the Republic, the Directoire, and the Empire as organizer of civic festivals and designer of patriotic monuments. A leading exponent of 'Le Style Empire' he became the preferred portraitist of the Emperors' family; his elegant yet realistic style lending itself to the portrayal of women of the neo-classical period.

A Note on the Provenance

The Seligmann family firm, established in the late 19th century, quickly became a central tastemaker on the French art scene, with international reputation and reach. Its clients came from the highest echelons of society. Dividing into two businesses in 1912, both thrived. In 1932, Jean A. Seligmann took over his father's place as head of the operation, which took his name too, as at Place Vendôme 23.

However, with the occupation of Paris by the German forces in May 1940, the Seligmann family and business came to the avaricious and predatory attention of the Nazi agencies empowered to strip Jewish firms of their assets. In the summer of that same year, Jean A. Seligmann et Cie was taken over, with an administrator appointed by the 'Commissariat aux affaires juives' to liquidate the gallery's assets.

On 29 March 1941, Jean Albert Seligmann was arrested by the German Wehrmacht on suspicion of espionage, due to his frequent travels abroad before the war, and imprisoned on Cherche-Midi jail. On

15 December 1941, he was shot as a hostage at Fort Mont-Valerien in reprisals against attacks carried out by the French Resistance.

After the war, the Seligmann family were active in trying to recover their assets and registered their losses with the French Commission de Récupération Artistique, many hundreds of the gallery's former possessions had been scattered and remained untraced - thankfully however, the present work was located and restituted to the family.

[1] Other names include Marie-Denise Villiers (1774-1821), Jeanne-Elisabeth Chaudet (d.1832), Marie-Victoire Lemoine (1754-1820), Marie-Gabrielle Capet (1761-1818) and Marie-Guillame Benoit (1768-1826).

[2] A. West, *Pigalle to Préault: Neoclassicism and the Sublime in French Sculpture, 1760-1840*, Cambridge and New York; Cambridge University Press, 1998.

[3] D. James, G. Scherf et al., *Playing with Fire*, 2003.

[4] Ibid

Provenance

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Count of Penha Longa, Paris, circa 1909.

His sale, Georges Petit Gallery, Paris, December 2, 1911, lot 30, illustrated (removed from sale).

His sale, Galerie Georges Petit, December 4, 1925, lot 18, illustrated (removed from sale).

Jean A. Seligmann & Co., Paris (No. 8500).

Spoiled at the expense of the Jean A. Seligmann & Cie gallery during the summer of 1940.

Edmond Courty, Paris, then by descent.

Restituted in 2019 to the heirs of Jean A. and Armand Seligmann.

Literature:

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Catalogue des sculptures par Joseph Chinard, de Lyon formant la collection de M. le Comte de Penha-

Longa (sale Paris, Galerie Georges Petit, 2 December 1911), N.30.

S. Lami, Dictionnaire des sculpteurs de l'école française, vol. I, 1910-1911, pp. 194-218 ; p. 216.

Les Arts, Revue mensuelle des musées collections expositions, Collection de M. Le Comte de Penha-Longa – 1909, n°95, pp. 30-33.

P. Vitry, Expositions d'œuvres du sculpteur Chinard de Lyon (1756-1813) au Pavillon de Marsan (Palais du Louvre) (exh. cat, Paris, Nov. 1909- Jan. 1910), Paris, 1909, pp. 8-19, p. 46, n. 75.

Répertoire des biens spoliés en France pendant la Guerre 1939-1945(1947), T.II, p. 384, nr. 361.

Dacre-Wright, Gildas, Constance Charpentier: Painter 1767-1849, available at: <http://www.constance-charpentier.fr/>