

Daniel Katz Gallery

ANTIQUITY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



Aimé-Jules Dalou (1838 - Paris 1902)

French peasant woman nursing a baby

Circa: 1872

1872

41.5 cm

Signed and dated 'Dalou/1872' on the base

Signed and dated 1872 this lively and detailed terracotta is the earliest version of the celebrated composition of a young French peasant-woman nursing a baby, of which another version (also in terracotta) was exhibited in 1873 at the Royal Academy and which is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (A.8.-1993).

Depicted in typical French rustic costume, the Peasant woman wears a simple, long dress, tied at the waist with a single bow to the back, to the base of the sculpture her clogs poke out from beneath the folds of her petticoat. Her hair is covered by a simple headdress which frames her face and falls on her shoulders at the back. In her arms she holds her baby, who lies naked, and sprawled across her lap – his feet akimbo, rendered with great naturalism by Dalou.

Its role as the final stage of the creative process for the important Salon piece is indicated by its small scale and fine detailing, in addition to the date, inscribed next to the signature, which confirms its early chronology in the evolvement of this celebrated subject. The present work varies from the V&A version in size and some details of the composition. For example, the baby appears clothed in the V&A

terracotta and naked in the present sculpture – possibly as Dalou wanted to confirm the correct anatomical positioning in ours. Furthermore, in this terracotta the female figure sits on a structure hidden by a draped cloth, whereas in the V&A version this has been removed exposing a simple wicker basket.

The importance of the composition and its commercial popularity is testified to by the existence of several later versions. These include: two slightly reduced versions (thought to be taken from moulds of the 1873 V&A terracotta) - one of which is also in the V&A collection, London (A.27-1912), the other in the Hermitage, St Petersburg; another terracotta dated 1873, is in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; and two other known versions undated but likely to date to after 1873, are in private collections. The group's popularity is also attested to by a plaster (Petit Palais, Paris), and a studio marble (French Private Collection) and further editions in bronze by Susse Frères and porcelain by Sèvres. Achille-Isodore Gilbert published an engraving of the work in 1876 for an article in L'Art about the London art world, and Vincent Van Gogh also made a drawing after this engraving (1880/1, Van Gogh Museum).

Dalou's French peasant woman nursing a baby sits between two other depictions of maternal themes also exhibited at the Royal Academy Salons and which were met with equal critical and public success: Maternal Joy of 1872, and Hush-a-bye-baby of 1874. All three works captured the public imagination of his new audience in England and resultantly Dalou was able to find work teaching at the newly opened Slade school, as well as briefly at the South London Technical Art School in Lambeth. Indeed, Dalou's period in London had a profound impact on British Sculpture for several generations - most notably on the 'New Sculpture' movement who admired his humble subject matter and the immediacy and intimacy of his compositions.

Two drawings by Dalou relating to the theme of maternité, and thereby the present sculpture, are in the Becker foundation.

Provenance

Provenance:

P. M. Turner

Michael Travers

Private Collection, France

Literature:

Literature:

'Jules Dalou, le sculpteur de la République', exh. cat., Paris, Petit Palais, 2013, p. 354-355, model referenced under no. 285