

Julie Charpentier (Paris 1770 - 1845)

Clémence Isaure

Circa: 1822

Patinated plaster

1822

57cm

Clémence Isaure is a legendary Occitan medieval figure credited with founding the Acadèmia dels Jòcs Florals or Academy of the Floral Games. She is supposed to have left a legacy to fund awards in the form of gold and silver flowers that the city of Toulouse would award annually to the best poets. As the mythic founder of the games, she is celebrated principally in Toulouse, where poems, sculptures, and paintings have been dedicated to her with a variety of places and institutions bearing her name to this day.

Like many women artists of her generation, Julie Charpentier was born into an artistic family. Her father, François-Philippe Charpentier, was an engraver who enjoyed government sponsorship. Charpentier's sister, Adélaïde, also practiced as an artist. A sculptor, Charpentier began exhibiting her work in 1787. She made her Salon debut in 1793, exhibiting busts and statuettes. Over the course of her career, Charpentier received numerous commissions from government agencies. By 1801, she was working for the Muséum d'histoire naturelle in Paris, where she worked directly from taxidermy specimens. Despite her success and eventual salaried post with the museum, Charpentier and her family struggled financially. She died in poverty in Paris in 1843.

In 1820, Julie Charpentier received a block of Pyrenees marble from the King's House and was commissioned to execute a bust of Clémence Isaure, which is now in the Musée des Augustins in Toulouse. It was heavily inspired by a statue called Clémence Isaure formerly visible at the Capitole and today preserved in the Hôtel d'Assézat in Toulouse.

The present example faithfully adheres to the format of the 16th century marble, whilst imbuing it with a contemporary sensibility and spirit. The original model has a complex history, made up of fragments of recumbent figures from the 14th century from the Priory of La Daurade where Clémence Isaure would have been buried. Charpentier quite faithfully copies the upper part of the Hôtel d'Assézat statue. The face is enclosed in a wimple and covered with a veil which reveals two braids rolled up against her temples. The veil is worn in the same way although a little longer. However, in increasing the pleat, she voluntarily shows her qualities as a marble sculptor in the rendering of the fabric. It breaks the symmetry of the hieratic statue by rejecting the fabric behind the shoulder and thus gives this portrait more of a naturalistic quality. The medallion on the chest of Clémence Isaure, replacing the simple clasp, is delicately engraved with an arcature and the Virgin to whom the games were dedicated.

By taking the very simply drawn eyes and without pupils of the model, Julie Charpentier preserves the funerary aspect of the sculpture. It is undoubtedly for this reason that in 1823, Du Mège wished to see the bust, which had been presented at the Salon of 1822, on a cenotaph in the church of La Daurade. By reinterpreting a Toulouse statue, Julie Charpentier magnifies a local past and validates this legend taken up by Félicie de Fauveau (1845) and Auguste Préault (1844-1848).

Provenance

Private Collection, France

Art Market, Paris, to 2024

Acquired from the above.

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