

# Daniel Katz Gallery

ANTIQUITY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



**Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux (Valenciennes 1827 - Courbevoie 1875)**

**Jeune Fille à la Coquille et Pêcheur à la Coquille**

Circa: 1873

1873

Marble

96 x 0 cm (37 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 0 inches)

Signed and dated JB.TE CARPEAUX 1873

On richly carved wooden bases, signed and dated JB.TE CARPEAUX 1873

Carpeaux was born in Valenciennes in northern France. He enrolled at the École des Beaux-Art in Paris in 1844 and additionally studied with the Romantic sculptor François Rude. While he would admire Rude throughout his lifetime, in 1850 he abandoned his studio, which was thought controversial by the academicians, and entered that of Francisque Duret in order to better his chances at winning the Grand Prix de Rome and launching an official career. Carpeaux won the prestigious prize in 1854 but his resolve to complete and receive payment for a bas-relief, as well as an eye injury and illness, delayed his arrival at the French Academy in Rome by one year.

The present figures echo a sentimentalised vision of the Mediterranean prevalent at the time, in particular of Naples and its humble classes which were seen as living an ideal life, free and pure. In representing an adolescent boy holding a shell to his ear Carpeaux looks back to the work of his master François Rude and his Jeune pêcheur napolitain (marble, 1831-1833, Musée du Louvre, Paris). Figures listening to a shell are rare in the visual arts, especially when compared to the motif of tritons blowing into a shell, yet precedents exist. The earliest seems to be the Fisher boy by Hiram Powers, conceived in 1841-44 and carved in several marble figures in the following years, such as a version from 1857, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The subject relates to English romantic poetry and writers like William Wordsworth (1770-1850) describe children listening to a shell to find out when the tide will come. The pair has also been interpreted as allegories of Sight and Hearing.

Carpeaux claimed that he based the Neapolitan Fisherboy on a boy he had seen during a trip to Naples, giving French audiences an exotic glimpse of Italian modern life. The artist wrote in a letter dated 18 September 1858: "My subject is taken from nature; it is a young fisherman of eleven, smilingly listening to the echo in a conch-shell." [1] The sculpture would in turn inspire other artists and Henry Hudson Kitson's bronze of Music of the Sea from 1884 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) shows a grinning boy listening to a shell.

The Girl with a Shell relates to classical sculpture and various kneeling Venuses or nymphs associated with a shell, such as Venus kneeling on a tortoise (c. 250 BC, Museo del Prado, Madrid) who holds a perfume bottle above her head. The Girl with a Shell sits on an overturned wicker basket full of fish, holding the shell on her head like a hat or an ornament. Smiling, she looks coquettishly at the viewer from under her raised arm. Posing playfully with the conch, the young girl seems to defuse the erotic connotation traditionally attached to shells. Both statues, with their naturalistic vitality, are full of charm and grace.

### **Provenance**

Sale Carpeaux, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 20 December 1873, lots 1 and 2 (6,250 FF and 6,200 FF respectively)

Lord Mildmay of Flete collection, England

with Fabius Frères, Paris, from 1950 until 2011

Daniel Katz Ltd.

Private Collection, Canada, 2013 to 2026

### **Exhibitions**

Vienna, Austria, International Exhibition, 1873 ?

Paris, Petit-Palais, Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux 1827-1875, 1955-1956, n. 14 and n. 90

Paris, Musée Jacquemart-André, Le Second Empire de Winterhalter à Renoir, May-June 1957, n. 298 and n. 299

Paris, Grand Palais, Sur les traces de J. B. Carpeaux, March-May 1976, n. 44 and n. 45 (illus.)

Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, on loan, February 2013 - May 2023

Toronto, Art Gallery of Ontario, on loan, May 2023 – December 2025

### **Literature:**

Wagner, A. , Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux, London, 1985

C. Jeancolas, Carpeaux, la farouche volonté d'être. Paris, 1987, p. 52 et p. 93 (illus.)

R. Butler et al., European sculpture of the Nineteenth Century, The collections of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, 2000, p. 66-79

S. Glover Lindsay, European Sculpture of the Nineteenth Century. The collection of the National Gallery of Art Washington, New York and Oxford 2000, pp. 65-79 fig. 6 (reproduced);

M. Poletti and A. Richarme, Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux, Sculpteur. Catalogue raisonné de l'oeuvre édité, Paris 2003, pp. 60 and 63.

J.D. Draper and E. Papet in *The Passions of Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux*, exhibition catalogue, London and New Haven 2014, p. 337, no. 21.