

CHARLES DESPIAU (1874 - 1946)

Spring or Seated Nude

Bronze proof, # 2/3
Lost-wax cast by Claude Valsuani
Signed: C. Despiau
Label from the Barbazange Gallery with the number 68
H. 71; W. 30; D. 37 cm

Provenance

Switzerland, private collection

Bibliography

- *Charles Despiau, sculptures et dessins*, Paris, Rodin Museum, 1974, n°46, repr. plaster held in the collection of the National Museum of Modern Art, Paris.
- *Charles Despiau, 1874-1946*, Mont-de-Marsan, Donjon Lacataye, 1975, n°26, repr. plaster held in the collection of the National Museum of Modern Art, Paris.
- *Charles Albert Despiau, 1874-1946, collections du Musée municipal de Mont-de-Marsan*, Mont-de-Marsan, musée Despiau-Wlérick, 1982, p.31, n°30, repr. bronze proof from the Mont-de-Marsan Museum.
- Elisabeth Lebon, *Charles Despiau, 1874-1946*, catalogue raisonné of the Sculpted Works, doctoral dissertation in Art History, under the direction of Mme Mady Ménier, Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, 1995.

- *Charles Despiau 1874-1946*, The Miyagi Museum of Art, Mie Prefectural Art Museum, Kumanato Prefectural Museum of Art, Ohara Museum of Art, Yamanashi Prefectural Museum of Art, Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Modern Art, Kobe, The Museum of Modern Art, Ibaraki, 1997-1998, p.189, n°29, repr. bronze proof from the Mont-de-Marsan Museum.
- Michael Semff, *Charles Despiau*, *Zeichnungen*, Staatliche Graphische Sammlung München, 1998, p. 39, repr. sanguine préparatoire au *Printemps*, held in the collection of the National Museum of Modern Art, Paris.

“At the same time that he was turning to Asian art for the bust of Madame Derain (1923) and to a revival of “naïve” form for the large figure of *Eve* (1923), Despiau was also exploring Pharaonic statuary for this *Seated Nude*, whose model was a trapeze artist from the circus (…) It was a distinctly different avenue for Despiau to take, and it allowed him, as he expressed it, to arrive at a full, serene, and luminous grandeur through *l’avancée des fonds*[1] and the precise positioning of forms.”[2]

“This shows how much his art differed from that of Maillol, a sculptor who did many seated nudes in which the massiveness of the body is compensated by a lightness often expressed in a graceful gesture and a light that envelopes the smooth body—a purely sensual note. Nor did Despiau carry his rigorous demand for the simplification of form as far as the distortions practiced by Laurens, Csaky, and Chana Orloff, artists of the same era who also worked on seated nudes, but in styles generally considered radically different from Despiau’s. Despiau developed his forms in what seemed to him the most promising direction, but he always stopped at a point that still scrupulously respected nature as directly observed. A study drawing in the National Museum of Modern Art also shows how closely he observed his models and how he introduced distance into the composition through his fluid transpositions.”[3]

Despiau created the first version of *Spring* in 1923; it was 35 cm high and cast in an edition of eight. Then in 1925, he enlarged it and showed it in Paris; this was likely the version included in his solo exhibition in Brussels in 1930, as that catalogue also gives the date as 1925. Although he enlarged the work, he didn’t otherwise alter it, and he cast it in an edition of three.

One of the proofs of this very limited edition belonged to a Luxembourgish couple, the Mayrisches. Although its location at the moment is not certain, it is probably in the garden of their château in Colpach. Proof #3/3 belonged to Despiau’s greatest patron, Frank Crowninshield and to the Brummer Gallery in New York. The proof presented here (#2/3) was shown at the Barbazange

Gallery, though the date is not known. Despiau was under contract to the prestigious gallery in the early 1920s.[4] The plaster of Spring, large size, belongs to the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in Paris (Inv.AM1259S) [5]. Besides these three original pieces cast during the artist's lifetime, there is one other bronze, cast posthumously, before 1977, for the museum of Mont-de-Marsan and inscribed "proof of the museum of Mont-de-Marsan."

[1] "l'avancée des fonds" is a technical term in stonecutting than means cutting all the way to the back of the piece.

[2] Lebon, 1995, t. II, vol. 1, p. 234-235.

[3] Ibid.

[4] The Barbazanges Gallery, founded in 1912 by Henri Barbazanges, had a large exhibition space at 109 rue du Faubourg Saint Honoré in Paris. The gallery quickly became an important and active force working on behalf of the contemporary art of its age. They showed the Delaunays, Marie Laurencin, Matisse, and Modigliani, and were the first to show Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* to the French public. They also showed the Impressionists and sold important works to many European museums. At the beginning of the 1920s, in partnership with Bernheim, they obtained the contents of Renoir's studio. In 1923, the gallery became the Barbazanges Hodebert Gallery, and was the first to show the works of Chagall, in 1924.

[5] https://www.centrepompidou.fr/cpv/ressource.action?param.id=FR_R-181524ab8483ac8aaa7f3bc8977db6&param.idSource=FR_O-44e2ae376dc3b99afa9878713de522f4