



MARCEL DAMBOISE (1903-1992)

Portrait of Danielle Damboise

Marble

Not signed

14 x 7.5 x 10.5 cm

Provenance

- The artist's studio
- By inheritance

Bibliography

- *Marcel Damboise, 1903-1992*, exhibition catalogue, Paris, Galerie Malaquais, November 14, 2008 – January 10, 2009.

"His art, which I consider to be among those that touch me the most, remains as strong, as affirmative as a bang of a fist on a table. I find in his art what I most love in sculpture: a *Noli me tangere* that's a bit proud, as well as enigmatic, [...] You can rest in it, be calmed by it, without getting lost in it. That's what we love in sculpture, which remains, perhaps, the art of affirmation." Albert Camus[\[1\]](#)

I / Portraits and stone carving in the art of Marcel Damboise

The portrait occupies a central position in Marcel Damboise's art. The earliest known portraits seem to date from his stay at the villa Abd-el-Tif, where he lived as a boarder between 1932 and 1935. During this stay, which he spent in the company of his friend, the painter Richard Maguet (1896-1940), Marcel Damboise began to make a name for himself, in France as well as in Algeria,

thanks in particular to articles that the very young Albert Camus wrote about his work. In 1934, Damboise created the *Bust of Hélène Faure*, the granddaughter of the art historian Elie Faure. This extremely delicate work joined the collections of the National Museum of Modern Art in Paris in 1939, the year in which Damboise was awarded the Prix des Vikings, an award given every two years by the Académie des Beaux-Arts for a portrait by a sculptor from France or abroad. Marcel Damboise went on to create busts of the actor *Jean Louis Barrault* (1940), then *Monsieur Furgier* (1951), and then one of the writer *Gabriel Audisio* (1964). He maintained a long and close friendship with Albert Camus, and did a head of his daughter Catherine in 1948, but didn't do a portrait of the writer himself until after his death; he created that work between 1961 and 1963.

Marcel Damboise used a wide range of materials for his portraits, including terra cotta, plaster, bronze, stone, and marble, but he was more a carver than a modeler, perhaps because, having been raised in a family of artisans, he had had extensive early contact with stone. Gabriel Audisio notes that from 1919 on, he worked for "various firms doing art bronzes and marbles to make his living, which is not common for sculptors."[\[2\]](#) He then moved to the studio of the sculptor Louis Botinelly (1883-1962), where he specialized in *pratique*.[\[3\]](#)

The *Small Bust of Danielle*, done in marble from the Greek island of Paros, attests to the artist's love for stone and for direct carving: "The Provençal Damboise has retained a deep connection with his artisanal beginnings and his training as a man of stone and marble. But beyond that, one might also wonder if the artist in him who transcended the artisan had not also retained the imprint of *The Venus of Arles*. Under the deeply Mediterranean influence of a static and harmonious world, his art instinctively arises from both a powerful Roman objectivity and a great Grecian moderation."[\[4\]](#)

II / The Portraits of Danielle, his daughter

In 1928, Marcel Damboise married Yvette Dorignac, the youngest daughter of the painter and draftsman Georges Dorignac (1879-1925). The following year, she gave birth to a son, Alain. Their daughter, Danielle, was born in 1941. Since the beginning of the 1930s, the theme of the family became a favorite subject for Damboise, and he did a number of sketches and busts.

Working directly from nature, Marcel Damboise featured the members of his family: his wife, Yvette, his son, Alain, his daughter, Danielle, his granddaughters, Claire and Anne, his son-in-law, Luc, and his daughter-in-law, Irène. Danielle Damboise recalls the sittings she did for her father: "Quite young, I posed in the studio at la Ruche. In order to keep me from getting restless, my father told me stories of his antics and mischief as a child in

Marseille. I loved these stories, they were privileged moments in which I felt like his accomplice. My mother would stop by from time to time to give him constructive criticism on the statue in progress. Some of his sculptures were hidden away in order to be forgotten and then rediscovered with a fresh eye that could see the subject more deeply."[\[5\]](#)

Marcel Damboise did this portrait of his daughter when she was in her early twenties. She posed regularly for her father from 1943 until 1985. The artist created a dozen or so portraits of Danielle that cover the range of her life, from her earliest years (*Bust of Danielle as a Child*, 1943-45), through her childhood (*Portrait of Danielle as a Little Girl*, 1947-48), and adolescence (*Head of the Adolescent Danielle, First Version*, c. 1955, and *Large Bust of Danielle*, c. 1957) to her maturity (*Medallion of Danielle*, 1985). The portraits in this collection, which have in common a great economy of means, always present the model "in repose," which is to say, without a particular expression, and thus capturing her natural air.

Between the beginning of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, Marcel Damboise also followed the evolution of his two granddaughters' facial features in a series of particularly moving portraits that have a universal character.

[\[1\]](#) Albert Camus, in *Alger étudiant*, May 14, 1934.

[\[2\]](#) Gabriel Audisio, "Marcel Damboise, Sculpteur de Marseille," *Marseille*, illustrated municipal magazine, 2e trimestre 1967, n°67.

[\[3\]](#) "Pratique in this case refers to the series of manual operations performed in order to reduce a block of stone or wood through the use of guide-points." Marie-Thérèse Baudry, *Sculpture méthode et vocabulaire*, éditions du patrimoine, imprimerie nationale, 2000, p. 544.

[\[4\]](#) André Barrère, "Marcel Damboise," in *René Iché et Grands sculpteurs contemporains*, exhibition catalogue, Palais des Archevêques, July-September, 1970.

[\[5\]](#) Danielle Damboise, "Regards vers mon père" ("A View of My Father"), in *Marcel Damboise, 1903-1992*, exhibition catalogue, Galerie Malaquais, November 14, 2008 – January 10, 2009, p. 10.