

CHARLES AUFFRET (1929-2001)

Standing Maternity

Bronze proof, n° 1/8
Lost wax cast by Delval
Signed: CH. AUFFRET
H. 58.5, W. 13, D. 12.5 cm

Provenance

- Paris, The artist's studio

Bibliography

- *Charles Auffret, Sculptures-Dessins (1929-2001)*, exhibition catalogue, Voiron, Mainssieux Museum, March 30 – September 8, 2002 (repr. of the plaster at the end of the catalogue).
- *Charles Auffret*, exhibition catalogue, Rome, Villa Médicis, May 9 – July 15, 2007 (repr. p. 54; repr. of the plaster, p. 4).
- *Charles Auffret (1929-2001), Sculpteur et dessinateur*, exhibition catalogue, Mont-de-Marsan, Despiau-Wlérick Museum, August 10 – September 16, 2012 (repr. p. 34).

"Like Titian, Degas, and so many other great masters, material in Auffret's hands becomes transparent. We see the flux of life that animates the fold of a skirt or the veiling of a blouse. His work is inundated with light; this man with the transversal, the universal, gaze reinvents the rehearsal of the world at each moment. From the very interior of the modeling, we hear the beating of the heart and become immersed in the secret of beings (…) Behind each imprint of

his fingertips, there is emotion, relayed from his spirit and his fine eye. His eyes are scissors that sculpt the air, scrutinizing the shadows to expose the light within, to bring out of the void the huge patience, the solitude, and the hope of man."[1]

1 / Charles Auffret in the 1960s

On November 11, 1963 the Groupe des Neuf (Group of Nine) was founded; it was a decisive step in Charles Auffret's career. The nine sculptors who formed the group (Jean Carton, Paul Cornet, Raymond Corbin, Marcel Damboise, Léon Indenbaum, Léopold Kretz, Raymond Martin, Jean Osouf, and Gunnar Nilsson) gathered under Rodin's *Balzac* and under the protection of the poet Juliette Darle and proclaimed loudly and clearly "their technical and aesthetic independence. Far from the concepts of postmodernism and the official weight of abstract art in France, and in a climate of strong conceptual and aesthetic rivalries, the 'Nine' insisted upon the existence and the persistence of an independent figurative sculpture that was both strong and fully mastered."[2] This same group awarded Charles Auffret the prix Émile Godard on February 5, 1964 for his *Femme à la toilette* (*Woman at her Toilette*), the plaster of which was shown at the galerie Vendôme. This award allowed him to cast this work in bronze with the founder Émile Godard.

In 1965, two major events profoundly marked the life and work of the sculptor: first, he met Arlette Ginioux, a painter and sculptor, "a young redhead, beautiful, with a mischievous and commanding look in her eye. Auffret corrected her drawings and seemed to regard her with tenderness."[3] And second, as the winner of the international sculpture prize from the Paul Ricard Foundation, he was invited for a residency on the island of Bendor with his spouse. He installed a monumental sculpture there the following year, *Grande sculpture debout* (*Large Standing Sculpture*) also known as *L'Éveil* (*The Awakening*). That year also, the sculptor's only son, Jean-Baptiste, was born.

From the 1970s to the end of the 1990s, Charles Auffret's work became progressively more widely known in France and abroad, thanks to a number of exhibitions in which he participated, such as "3 Parisskulptörer" (*Three Parisian Sculptors*) at the Galerie Färg och Form in Stockholm, where he showed beside his friends René Babin (1919-1997) and Gudmar Olovson (1936-2017), and the itinerant solo exhibition "Charles Auffret: sculptures, dessins, aquarelles" ("Charles Auffret: sculptures, drawings, watercolors"), which went to Blois, Orléans, and Amboise between 1978 and 1981. The artist's work received various prizes, such as the Charles Malfray prize for drawing in 1984 and the Léon Georges Baudry prize for sculpture in 1986, both given by the Taylor Foundation. Also in 1984, Auffret received a commission from the Senate for an allegorical figure, *L'Esprit des Lois* (*The Spirit of the Laws*) also called *La Loi* (

The Law). The work stands in the rue Garancière, in front of the Senate in a niche in a corridor that comes into the street at the height of the second floor.

2 / The theme of maternity in the work of the sculptor

Maternity is a recurrent theme in the sculptor's work. He first treated it in his 1964 piece *Grande Femme enceinte* (*Large Pregnant Woman*). Henri Mercillon recounts the history of the work: "An expectant mother suggested that she pose for him. He accepted and worked, he said, 'with enthusiasm.' Through her, he presented the image of all expecting women: the heavier silhouette, the weight of the child, the hand that, in a single gesture, both supports and caresses. He was able to capture a strong impression of monumentality by the play of light across this gestating body."[4] A few years later, in 1967, Auffret returned to the theme in a somewhat looser way. In this work, the newborn is in his mother's arms; she is sitting with her legs crossed and gives the baby her nipple as her head bends over him, tenderly watching him.

The work presented here thus extends the exploration begun in the first two sculptures. Done in 1978, *Standing Maternity* presents a young mother holding her baby firmly in her arms and against her heart. The little body of the baby melts into that of the mother, emphasizing the ties that binds them. Thoughtful, the young woman looks down toward the ground in front of her.

Charles Auffret infused all of his works with humanism, tenderness, and sensitivity. They do not treat classical subjects (mythological, historical) but show instead moments of daily life and reveal the emotions experienced in the face of nature. "His pieces are both strong and serene at the same time; their generous volumes marvelously translate calm and tenderness. His bronzes express time caught in a given moment, but they also reveal that which is the most immutable within us: the hope and the patience of a future mother, the love that emanates from an embracing couple, the charm of childhood, the modest absorption of a woman at her toilette."[5] The family was a very important theme for Auffret and it continued to grow as he became a husband and then a father many years before he created *Standing Maternity*.

"The sculpted work of Charles Auffret evokes a sensitive world in which the singular beauty of daily gestures and attitudes is made apparent. (…) Taken as a whole, the work allows us to discover a world that is alive and perceptive; the Group of Nine was right. Auffret continued to work with what is known as humanist sculpture; he has left us today with the expression of a universe in which beauty emerges through the simplest gestures. He gives us the world to look at, to observe as it radiates a state of beauty—in a *Maternity* sitting or standing, in *La Figure drapée* (*The Draped Figure*), or in *Le grand Saint-Joseph* (*The Large Saint Joseph*). He renders living sculpture that reveals a world that

he loves and whose earth he caresses."[6]

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[1] Richard Peduzzi, "Charles Auffret, La patience de l'urgence" ("Charles Auffret, The Patience of the Urgent") in *Charles Auffret*, exhibition catalogue, Rome, Villa Médicis, May 9 – July 15, 2007, p. 10.

[2] Mathilde Desvages, "Charles Auffret, l'élu du Groupe des Neuf" ("Charles Auffret, the Chosen of the Groupe des Neuf") in *Charles Auffret (1929-2001), Sculpteur et dessinateur*, exhibition catalogue, Mont-de-Marsan, Despiau-Wlérick Museum, August 10 – September 16, 2012, p.15.

[3] Richard Peduzzi, "L'homme à l'affût" ("The Man on the Lookout"), in *Charles Auffret, Sculptures-Dessins (1929-2001)*, exhibition catalogue, Voiron, musée Mainssieux, March 30 – September 8, 2002.

[4] Henri Mercillon, "Sculpture figurative au XXe siècle," in *Commentaire*, 1994-95, vol. 17, n°68, p. 985-986.

[5] Xavier Narbaits, *L'Œil*, May, 1993, p. 84. From a short article on the occasion of the retrospective of Charles Auffret's work at the Galerie Annick Driguez from May 11 to June 30, 1993.

[6] Mathilde Desvages, "Charles Auffret, l'élu du Groupe des Neuf" ("Charles Auffret, the Chosen of the Groupe des Neuf") in *Charles Auffret (1929-2001), Sculpteur et dessinateur*, exhibition catalogue, Musée Despiau-Wlérick, Mont-de-Marsan, August 10 – September 16, 2012, p.15.