



ALBERT-ERNEST CARRIER-BELLEUSE (1824-1887)

Model for the Monument to Alexandre Dumas, senior

Terra-cotta

Signed (on the base): A. Carrier Belleuse.

H. 76, W. 28, D. 25 cm

Acquired by the musée d'Orsay, Paris

Provenance

- Private European collection

Bibliography

- HARGROVE June, *The Life and Work of Albert Carrier-Belleuse*, New-York, Carland, 1977, repr. n°42 (the terra-cotta from the musée Carnavalet, Paris).
- LAVALLE Denis, « Restituer une statue d'Alexandre Dumas en 2005 » ("Reproducing a Statue of Alexandre Dumas in 2005"), in *Alexandre Dumas, de Villers-Cotterêts au Panthéon, du Panthéon à Villers-Cotterêts*, Paris, Dominique Carré éditeur, 2005, p. 25, repr (the terra-cotta from the Getty Museum, Los Angeles).
- HARGROVE June, GRANDJEAN Gilles (dir.), *Carrier-Belleuse, le maître de Rodin (Carrier-Belleuse, Rodin's Master)*, exhibition catalogue, Compiègne, Palais de Compiègne, May 22 - October 27, 2014, Paris, éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 2014, p. 168-170, p. 169, cat. n°125, repr (the terra-cotta from the musée Carnavalet, Paris).

Related writings

- BELLANGER Patrice, DOLIN DOLCY Catherine, TURBAT Ève, *Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse (1824-1887)*, exhibition catalogue from the galerie Patrice Bellanger, Paris, Pavillon des Antiquaires et Galeries d'art Paris, March 27 – April 5, 1998.

I/ The history of the Monument to Alexandre Dumas, senior by Carrier-Belleuse

In 1877, seven years after the death of Alexandre Dumas, senior (1802-1870), the city of Villers-Cotterêts launched a fund-raising campaign to pay for a commemorative monument in his honor. The sculptor Albert Carrier-Belleuse, who had known the writer well, made an initial model for the project and presented it to the city of Villers-Cotterêts. Though Carrier-Belleuse's model was immediately accepted, the city's municipal counsel ran into difficulties raising the funds. The writer's family accordingly gave the city 7000 francs in order to finance the casting of the bronze, which was entrusted to the founder Antoine Durenne, with whom Carrier-Belleuse had already worked on a number of projects in the past. The bronze statue was inaugurated on May 24, 1885, in the presence of the sculptor and Alexandre Dumas' family, as well as a number of other prominent people, such as Jules Verne (1828-1905).

Since that inauguration, the monument has had a rather dramatic history; in 1942, the Vichy government ordered it melted down in order to reuse its metal as part of the war effort, an act that greatly shocked and saddened the inhabitants of Villers-Cotterêts. In 2001, the citizens were again alarmed and offended when, having already lost their monument, the remains of their great man were transferred to the Panthéon in Paris.

They declared: "Twice in its history, France has owed us Alexandre Dumas: first through an act of war and second [...] when his ashes were taken away without consulting us."[\[1\]](#)

On June 26, 2002, in an attempt to address the concerns of the citizens of Villers-Cotterêts, who had opposed the transfer of the ashes to the Panthéon, the Minister of Culture agreed to restore Alexandre Dumas' statue to the commune. Jean-Loup Bouvier, a sculptor working for the Monuments Historiques, was commissioned to recreate Albert Carrier-Belleuse's lost work. He used, on the one hand, elements of the original sculpture that have been conserved at the Alexandre Dumas Museum in Villers-Cotterêts (including *Moulage en plâtre de la tête et du col de la statue d'Alexandre Dumas* (Plaster mold of the head and neck of the statue of Alexandre Dumas), Inv. n°[91.2.54](#) ; *Maquette en terre cuite de la statue d'Alexandre Dumas* (Terra-Cotta model for the statue of Alexandre Dumas), Inv. n°[91.2.27](#), and *Plume originale de la statue d'Alexandre Dumas en bronze* (Original pen for the statue of Alexandre

Dumas in bronze), Inv. n°[91.2.56](#)), and, on the other, modern techniques, such as 3-D digitization and photometry. The [new monument](#) was inaugurated on December 11, 2005 in front of some 3000 people.

II/ Carrier-Belleuse and monuments to prominent men

In the course of his career, the sculptor had already executed various public monuments to great men; he had made a monumental bust dedicated to Alexandre Gabriel Decamps (1862, Fontainebleau), a standing figure of Marshall André Masséna (1869, Nice), and equestrian statues of General Bernardo O'Higgins (1873, Santiago du Chili) and Michel le Brave (1874, Bucharest).

While Carrier-Belleuse was working on the *Model for the Monument to Alexandre Dumas, senior*, which was the first statue dedicated to his memory, another work, a statue in bronze by Gustave Doré (1832-1883), was inaugurated on November 4, 1883 in the Place du Général Catroux in Paris' 17th arrondissement. Carrier-Belleuse's approach was quite different from Doré's; both sculptors depicted the writer with his classic attributes of pages and pen, but Carrier showed him standing in order to emphasize his spirited character while Doré showed him reclining in a sumptuous armchair with a relaxed, gentlemanly air.

For his sculpture's pose, Carrier-Belleuse found his inspiration in a [Derby porcelain](#) from the 1770s. The sculptor must have known this piece from the time he'd spent, from 1851 to 1855,[\[2\]](#) as the director of the Minton company in England, a porcelain factory not far from the one in Derby as well as from his later experience as the director of the porcelain factory at Sèvres between 1875 and 1887. The small Derby porcelain depicts the English poet John Milton (1608-1674) leaning up against a pulpit, his left foot a bit forward and his head turned toward the right, while his right hand holds back a drapery and his left hand holds out a parchment on which is written a passage of one of his poems.

If this is, indeed, the basis of Carrier-Belleuse's chosen pose, he infused it with a dynamism that is not present in the original by, among other things, changing the gestures of the hands; now the right hand holds a pen and the left hand, holding several sheets of paper, is resting on a stele engraved with a description that translates as: "The Three Musketeers / Twenty Years Later / Joseph Balsamo / Ange Pitou / Ascanio / Captain Paul / The Count of Monte-Cristo / Etc. Etc. Etc."

This new dynamism is also evident in the writer's tousled hair, his generously open lips, and his gaze, lost in the distance, all of which illustrate creative genius struck by inspiration. And it is further borne out in the intersecting, inter-communicating lines—the writer's left hand solidly planted on the stele runs parallel to his right leg, creating a linear tension. In contrast, his face, angled to the right, his right arm folded in toward his torso in the opposite direction, and his left leg, stepping forward all animate what might otherwise

prove to be too static a composition. The life that animates Carrier-Belleuse's sculpture is again present in the arrangement of the folds of the writer's dressing-gown, which, open at the neck, reveals the collar of the shirt underneath.

The work transmits both the character's physical force and intellectual energy; at the same time the "ample dressing gown that hides the contemporary suit aids in inscribing the writer into a form of timelessness."[\[3\]](#) Auguste Rodin, who studied in Carrier-Belleuse's studio, was most likely inspired by this same piece of clothing for his famous [Monument to Balzac](#), which he did in 1897.

Carrier-Belleuse also executed a strikingly accurate portrait of Alexandre Dumas, and it is interesting to note that the sculptor did not do a portrait of his friend while the latter was living, in a gesture of friendship, but that, instead, he undertook the work only some thirteen years after his death. To aid his memory, Carrier-Belleuse certainly had recourse to Henri Chapu's[\[4\]](#) [marble bust of Alexandre Dumas](#) (1876). The writer had very distinct and recognizable physical characteristics, which [were immortalized by the greatest photographers](#) of the 19th century, such as Nadar (1820-1910) and Gustave Le Gray (1820-1884), photos with which Carrier-Belleuse was also no doubt familiar.

III/ The terra-cotta models for the *Monument to Alexandre Dumas, senior* by Carrier-Belleuse

Albert Carrier-Belleuse usually began a work by creating a sketch before starting on the clay model of the piece. June Hargrove, the authority on Carrier-Belleuse, writes that "His terra-cotta sketches are superb testaments of his genuine talents, the evidence of which was not always preserved in the final works."[\[5\]](#) For the *Model for the Monument to Alexandre Dumas*, she theorizes that Carrier-Belleuse began working directly upon the clay with his hands and then continued with a spatula, without making preparatory drawings.

As far as is currently known, there are only four extant terra-cottas of the *Model for the Monument to Alexandre Dumas*:

- one in the Alexandre Dumas Museum in Villers-Cotterêts (Inv. #[91.2.54](#), which was bequeathed to the museum in 1943);
- one in the Carnavalet Museum in Paris (Inv. #[S1893](#), given to the museum in 1927);
- one in the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles (Inv. #[94. SC. 19](#), acquired from the Patrice Bellanger gallery in 1994);
- and the one presented here by the Galerie Malaquais.

Each of these terra-cottas carries a different list of the writer's works. Some titles, such as *The Three Musketeers*, *Twenty Years Later*, *Ange Pitou*, and *The Count of Monte-Cristo*, appear on all of them, but others, including *Joseph Balsamo*, *Ascanio*, *Captain Paul*, *Queen Margot*, *The Countess de Charny*, *The Corsican Brothers*, *The Forty-Five Guardsmen*, and *Acté of Cornith* appear more

rarely. Research is currently being done to detail the particularities of each of the four. Among other details, the model held by the Galerie Malaquais is distinguished from the other three in that it is the only one that still has the pen in the writer's right hand.

Denis Lavalley, who is a "conservateur en chef du Patrimoine", says of Carrier-Belleuse: he was a "very productive sculptor, in charge of a workshop able to manage important official commissions as well as the production of a large number of smaller-d versions geared toward commercial sales."^[6] That said, the *Models for the Monument to Alexandre Dumas* do not seem to have been designed for that sort of commercialization. They seem, instead, intended for a restricted circle of intimates, given their small number and the evident desire of the sculptor to make each one unique through their different inscriptions.

^[1] "The History of the Alexandre Dumas statue in Villers-Cotterêts," an article published January 17, 2014 on the commune of Villers-Cotterêts' blog: <http://villerscotterets.over-blog.com/article-224-histoire-de-la-statue-alexandre-dumas-de-villers-cotterets-122102580.html>

^[2]« Dumas' pose repeats a Derby porcelain figure of Milton, c.1770, [...]. Anyone with Carrier-Belleuse's background in English ceramics would have known this figure. », in HARGROVE JUNE, *The Life and Work of Albert Carrier-Belleuse*, New-York, Carland, 1977, p. 96.

^[3] Hargrove, June and Gilles Grandjean (dir.), *Carrier-Belleuse, le maître de Rodin*, exhibition catalogue, p. 169.

^[4] The bust is among the collection of the Société des Amis d'Alexandre Dumas, which has been held, since 1971, at the château of Monte-Cristo, the previous home of the writer, which is now classed as an historic monument and is located at Port-Marly in the Yvelines.

^[5] Hargrove, June, *The Life and Work of Albert Carrier-Belleuse*, New York, Carland, 1977, p. 96.

^[6] Lavalley, Denis, "Restituer une statue d'Alexandre Dumas en 2005," in *Alexandre Dumas, de Villers-Cotterêts au Panthéon, du Panthéon à Villers-Cotterêts*, Paris, Dominique Carré éditeur, Service national des travaux, 2005, p. 24-25.