



CAMILLE CLAUDEL (1864 - 1943)

The Implorer (L'Implorante)

Bronze proof, unnumbered, without patina

Sand cast by Eugène Blot without foundry stamp, executed between 1905 and 1937

Signed (on the terrace, in front of the knees): C. Claudel

H. 28,5; W. 35; D. 16,5 cm

Provenance

- Paris, collection of the lawyer Maître Justal (indefinite date - 1942)
- Paris, private collection by inheritance (1942-1978)
- Paris, private collection by inheritance (1978 - indefinite date)
- By inheritance

Related literature

- Anne Rivière, Bruno Gaudichon, Danielle Ghanassia, *Camille Claudel, Catalogue Raisonné*, 3rd edition, Paris 2001.
- Élisabeth Lebon, *Dictionnaire des fondeurs de bronze d'art France 1890-1950*, Marjon Éditions, 2003.
- *Camille Claudel. Au miroir d'un art nouveau (Camille Claudel, In the Mirror of a New Art)*, Roubaix, La Piscine-André Diligent Museum of Art and Industry, November 8, 2014 to February 8, 2015.

Camille Claudel's emblematic work *The Implorer* exists in several versions. From 1905 on, it was made available in three s by the art dealer and editioner of sculptures, Eugène Blot (1857-1938). The smallest , which is the one that we're presenting here, was editioned in around sixty proofs, and the current

locations of all of them are not known. Originally, *The Implorer* was part of the group *Maturity*,^[1] which Claudel had been working on since 1890.

***Maturity*, "Camille Claudel's most clearly autobiographical work"**^[2]

This group, which was commissioned from the artist by the administration of the Beaux-Arts and shown as a plaster in the 1899 Salon, was composed of three figures arranged from right to left: a young woman on her knees (*The Implorer*), a man walking, and an old woman. These figures were readily identified by contemporaries as representations of, first, Camille Claudel herself as the beautiful, imploring woman, then Rodin as the mature man, and then Rose Beuret,^[3] Rodin's faithful companion for more than thirty years, as the old woman. It was a work that drew its inspiration from the life of the sculptress, and, more precisely, from her decision to separate from Rodin. In a 1951 text,^[4] Paul Claudel confirmed the autobiographical interpretation of the group: "(...) that young woman, she's my sister! My sister Camille. Imploring, humiliated, on her knees, and naked! [...] It's all over! That's the vision of herself that she left for us, forever! And do you know what it is that, before your very eyes, she's tearing out of herself? It's her soul! It's everything all at once—the genius, the reason, the beauty, the life, the very name." The rhythm of his prose captures, in a particularly moving way, the intensity of the group that his sister created. The highly personal nature of *Maturity*'s subject matter was not well received by the State,^[5] which did not follow through on the commission for a bronze version. The organizers of the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1900 were apparently also put off by the work, as they refused to include it.

The different versions of *The Implorer* and its edition in bronze by Eugène Blot

As she developed the *Maturity* group, Camille Claudel came up with various versions in plaster of the figure of *The Implorer*. There is still much that remains unknown about these variants and their chronology, as Anne Rivière and Bruno Gaudichon have shown with insight and discretion in their catalogue raisonné of the artist's works.^[6] In reading their detailed study, it's interesting to note that the first casting of *The Implorer*, not connected to the *Maturity* group,^[7] was done as a commission for a collector, Captain Louis Tissier, in 1899. That work, cast by Gruet, is currently held in a private collection. After that first casting was done, around 1900, Camille Claudel met Eugène Blot, an art dealer with a gallery in the Madeleine district. They immediately shared a sense of camaraderie and collaboration: "Taken by Gustave Geffroy to Claudel's studio, Eugène Blot acquired, on his first visit, the rights to reproduce *Fortune* and the kneeling figure from the *Maturity* group."^[8] He chose to edition the latter in three s, giving each a number (No.1, No.1 bis, No.2):

--"For the original , labeled No. 1, I limited the edition to ten proofs," Eugène Blot explained in a letter from 1936.[\[9\]](#) This original was 62 cm high. Proof #5 is held in the Camille Claudel Museum in Nogent-sur-Seine ([inv.2010.1.15](#)).

--The intermediary , 33 cm high was done in an edition limited to twenty proofs. Eugène Blot gave it the number No. 1 bis. The only example known today of this is the bronze in the Ivan Morozov Collection, which is numbered 1 and is held today in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow.[\[10\]](#)

--Finally, for the small , 28.5 cm high, which was labeled No. 2, Eugène Blot hoped to create an "edition limited to 100 proofs."[\[11\]](#)

The exact number of the smaller version done by Eugène Blot from 1905 on is known thanks to the documents ceding the rights to Leblanc-Barbedienne in 1937. They indicate that, though the edition was planned for 100, in fact, only 59 were actually produced. Of that number, only a few are in public collections; in France, they can be found in the Albert André Museum in Bagnols-sur-Cèze, in the Rodin Museum in Paris (proof #14, [inv. S.01377](#)), and in the Camille Claudel Museum in Nogent-sur-Seine (proof #12, inv. 2010.1.14; proof #16, inv. 2007.3), and beyond France, there is one at the Metropolitan Museum in New York (proof #52, [inv. 1990.171](#)).

Material study of our proof

The proof presented here is a particularly interesting one because it features all of the signature characteristics of the small version of *The Implorer* editioned by Eugène Blot, even though it doesn't have his founder's stamp, numbering, or a patina.

It has, therefore, been submitted to an extremely detailed examination that compared it to other proofs known to have been cast by Eugène Blot, including one held in the Rodin Museum (#14) and two others in the Camille Claudel Museum at Nogent-sur-Seine (#s 12 and 16).

The exacting study of these works has shown that, without a doubt, the four sculptures were created with exactly the same foundry techniques.[\[12\]](#) In particular, the assembly of the works is the same, as is the thickness of the surrounding platform and the sculptures' contours. In addition, exactly the same bronze alloy was used.

The finishing chasing[\[13\]](#) on our proof is different from that on the other proofs in two places: while it is more detailed around the chignon, it is less so at the top of the head. The modeling of the inside of the right ankle is also slightly different from the other proofs; at this spot, a small patch of golden-colored bronze indicates that a casting sprue was connected there or that it was the site of a vent.

Different theories about the production of the work

There are a few theories that might explain the lack of a founder's mark, the numbering, and the patina.

—The first theory is that the work was part of the holdings of the Eugène Blot gallery, and was the prototype or an unmounted proof. It's possible that Eugène Blot had his Camille Claudel models mounted quickly when he ceded them to Leblanc-Barbedienne in 1936-37, or that Leblanc-Barbedienne did it later. Some other prototypes of Camille Claudel's works that were part of Blot editions are known, such as that of *L'Aurore (The Dawn)*, held in the Camille Claudel Museum in Nogent-sur-Seine (2010.2.2), and that of *Profonde Pensée (Deep Thought)*, held in the collections of the Saint-Croix museum in Poitiers (Inv. 2000-00-2). On our proof, there are no visible pins, and the "montages à la romaine" (seams joining the different pieces of the sculpture) located on both arms and on the left thigh, are less visible than on the other proofs of *The Implorer*, while the mounting of the work on the base is absolutely identical.

—The second theory is that the artist herself, or perhaps her dealer and ardent defender, Eugène Blot, had to send a proof quickly to an interested party, and didn't have the time to go through all the final stages of the casting process, such as striking the founder's stamp, numbering the proof, and applying the patina. This scenario seems highly unlikely, if not impossible, as the artist was extremely exacting regarding every detail of her sculptures. However, after 1905, when she was already extremely ill, such an anomaly could have occurred.

—And a third theory is that it's a proof that was produced in and disseminated by the foundry on a more or less illegal basis, but this theory doesn't really hold up, as the market value of Camille Claudel's bronzes was, at the time, negligible.

Documented provenance

The first known owner of this proof of *The Implorer* was Jean-Bernard Rigobert Justal (1866-1942), who was almost exactly Camille Claudel's contemporary. A lawyer, he practiced as a member of the Paris bar from 1889 on. On several occasions, he defended free-thinkers and anarchists, such as in the 1903 "Amiens trial," in which he represented Marius Jacob (1879-1954), the leader of a network of burglars. In 1921, then a lawyer at the Paris Court of Appeals, he was awarded the Legion of Honor for his work during the First World War. Based on current knowledge, we cannot say when Jean-Bernard Rigobert Justal acquired this proof of *The Implorer* (before Camille Claudel was institutionalized? or after?) And, given the currently available data, we can't say how he acquired it—the two most likely possibilities are that he bought it from Eugène Blot's gallery or that it was given to him by the artist. When Justal died in 1942, he bequeathed the work to a close family member, who, in turn, willed it to a third owner in 1978. Since then, the work has remained in the same family.

Stylistic analysis

Today, a stylistic analysis of this work would focus on the force of its modeling, though at the time of its creation, the critical response was centered on its stylistic ties to Rodin's work. Rodin's imploring figure^[14] and the figure created by Camille Claudel for *Maturity* are equally strongly expressive, but it is not the same emotion at play. Rodin's figure has a seductive, almost domineering, energy, while Claudel's is the epitome of grief, seemingly caught in a final, desperate plea. On the other hand, the similarity of the posture of Claudel's *The Implorer* and that of the small wax figure by Rupert Carabin, *Femme agenouillée sur un bûcher* or *Prière* (*Woman Kneeling on a Pyre* or *Prayer*), which was shown at the Salon des Indépendants in 1888, has received less attention.^[15]

The intense emotion that emanates from *The Implorer* is clearly rooted in the artist's extraordinary aptitude for modeling, which is particularly noticeable in the animation of the gaze, which she achieved through the relief lines that create the contours of the eyes. This upward gaze is related to that of the *Petite Châtelaine* (*The Little Lady*) and of *L'Aurore* (*The Dawn*). And the face of *The Implorer*, heavy with questions, strongly echoes the face of one of the *Causeuses* (*The Gossips*).^[16] Transfigured by the grief of the moment in which the beloved turns and walks away, the piece illustrates Camille Claudel's "hope betrayed," as her brother Paul Claudel put it.^[17]

Though Eugène Blot did not complete the full edition of 100 of the smaller *The Implorer*, he did, according to documents in the National Archives, do 59 proofs, making it "the largest edition of any work by Camille Claudel."^[18] The resulting broad diffusion, unusual for Claudel's work, is perhaps best explained by the exceptional nature of the piece, in which the artist attained one of the highest points of her art.

^[1] For more on *Maturity*, see Anne Rivière, "Une frémissante amertume" ("A Simmering Bitterness"), in *Camille Claudel. Au miroir d'un art nouveau* (*Camille Claudel, In the Mirror of a New Art*), Roubaix, La Piscine-André Diligent Museum of Art and Industry, November 8, 2014 to February 8, 2015, p.141-143.

^[2] Anne Rivière, "Une frémissante amertume" ("A Simmering Bitterness"), in *Camille Claudel. Au miroir d'un art nouveau* (*Camille Claudel, In the Mirror of a New Art*), Roubaix, La Piscine-André Diligent Museum of Art and Industry, November 8, 2014 to February 8, 2015, p.141.

^[3] Rose Beuret (1844-1917) was Rodin's companion from 1864 to February 1917, when, a few weeks before her death, they married. In 1866, she gave birth to their son Auguste Beuret (1866-1934), who was never recognized by his father.

^[4] Paul Claudel, "Ma sœur Camille" ("My Sister Camille"), in *Camille Claudel*, Paris, Rodin Museum, 1951.

[5] Though a final model, dated June 16, 1899, was done for this commission, the commission was withdrawn six days later, without explanation, by the director of the Beaux-Arts, Henry Roujon. See Anne Rivière, Bruno Gaudichon, "Catalogue Raisonné" in *Camille Claudel, Catalogue Raisonné*, 3rd edition, Paris 2001, p. 149.

[6] Entry for *The Implorer* in "Catalogue Raisonné" in *Camille Claudel, Catalogue Raisonné*, 3rd edition, Paris 2001, p. 138-144.

[7] This cast was made even though the sculpture *Maturity* had not, itself, been cast at that time. It was first cast in 1902.

[8] Anne Rivière, Bruno Gaudichon, "Catalogue Raisonné" in *Camille Claudel, Catalogue Raisonné*, 3rd edition, Paris 2001, p. 144. Note that this version of *The Implorer* differs from the one cast for Captain Tissier, particularly in the position of the arms.

[9] Letter from Eugène Blot to Barbedienne, December 17, 1936, Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, Fonds Barbedienne, 368 AP 3.

[10] See: curated by Anne Baldassari, *La collection Morozov., Icônes de l'art moderne*, exhibition [Paris, Louis Vuitton Foundation, September 22, 2021 - February 22, 2022], Paris, Gallimard-Fondation Louis Vuitton, 2021, p. 491.

[11] Louis Vauxcelles, *Exposition d'œuvres de Camille Claudel et de Bernard Hoetger*, exhibition catalogue [Paris, Galerie Eugène Blot, December 4 - 16, 1905], Paris, Imp. A. Lainé, 1905.

[12] It should be noted that in the case of the proofs bearing the founder's stamp "EUG. BLOT / PARIS" and the numbering, two stamps that were struck after the casting, they are found sometimes beneath the signature (as in the case of the proof in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Inv. 1990.171), sometimes on the back of the base (as on the two proofs in the Camille Claudel Museum at Nogent-sur-Seine, Inv. 2010.1.14 and Inv. 2007.3), and sometimes on the side of the base at the back (as on the proof in the Rodin Museum, Inv. S.01377).

[13] This operation is also known as *le réparation* or refining.

[14] Rodin, *Grande Main crispée avec figure implorante (Large Clenched Hand with Imploring Figure)*, 1906?, sand cast (1969), 44.5 x 33 x 27 cm, Paris, Rodin Museum reproduced in *Camille Claudel. Au miroir d'un art nouveau (Camille Claudel, In the Mirror of a New Art)*, Roubaix, La Piscine-André Diligent Museum of Art and Industry, November 8, 2014 to February 8, 2015, fig. 58, p.142.

[15] This comparison was suggested by Anne Rivière and Bruno Gaudichon, "Catalogue Raisonné" in *Camille Claudel, Catalogue Raisonné*, 3rd edition, Paris 2001, p. 144. The piece is reproduced on p. 40 of this publication.

[16] This face was reproduced on the cover of the exhibition catalogue *Camille Claudel. Au miroir d'un art nouveau (Camille Claudel, In the Mirror of a New Art)*, Roubaix, La Piscine-André Diligent Museum of Art and Industry, November 8, 2014 to February 8, 2015. It is from a plaster that belongs to La

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Piscine-André Diligent Museum of Art and Industry in Roubaix (Inv. 2005.61.1).

[\[17\]](#) Paul Claudel, "Ma sœur Camille" ("My Sister Camille"), in *Camille Claudel*, Paris, Rodin Museum, 1951.

[\[18\]](#) Anne Rivière, Bruno Gaudichon, "Catalogue Raisonné" in *Camille Claudel, Catalogue Raisonné*, 3rd edition, Paris 2001, p. 144.