



CAMILLE CLAUDEL (1864 - 1943)

The Implorer (L'Implorante)

Bronze proof with black-brown patina, n°49

Sand cast by Eugène Blot between 1905 and 1937

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

Foundry mark and numbering (on the terrace, under the signature):

« EUG. BLOT / PARIS / 49 »

H. 28,4; W. 36; D. 16,5 cm

Provenance

- Japan, private collection (acquired around 1990)
- 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 two s by the art dealer and editioner of sculptures, Eugène Blot (1857-1938). The smaller , 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 her that she left for us, forever! And do you know what it is that she's tearing out of herself, before your very eyes—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*. These variants and their chronology have not yet revealed all their secrets, 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 1904, Camille Claudel met Eugène Blot, a reproducer and dealer of sculptures. 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 two s. The larger version, 62 cm, was done in an edition of ten, all numbered; the smaller was planned for an "edition limited to 100 proofs."^[9] 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, and in the Camille Claudel Museum in Nogent-sur-Seine. There is another at the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

Stylistic analysis

This work seems characterized aesthetically by the force of its modeling, though at the time of its creation, the critical response focused on its stylistic ties to Rodin's work. Rodin's imploring figure^[10] and the figure created by Camille Claudel for *Maturity* are equally strongly expressive, but it is not the same emotion at play in both cases. 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.^[11]

The intense emotion that emanates from *The Implorer* is clearly rooted in the artist's extraordinary aptitude for modeling, particularly, 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 that of one of the *Causeuses* (*The Gossips*).^[12] 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.^[13]

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."^[14] 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] Exhibition catalogue, Eugène Blot Gallery, 1905.

[10] 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.

[11] 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.

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

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

[14] Anne Rivière, Bruno Gaudichon, "Catalogue Raisonné" in *Camille Claudel, Catalogue Raisonné*, 3rd edition, Paris 2001, p. 144.