

MARCEL GIMOND (1894-1961)

Peasant Woman from the Ardèche

Bronze proof, #3/8
Lost wax cast by Bisceglia
Signed (on the back, on the lower left): Gimond
H. 31, W. 19, D. 23.5 cm

Provenance

- Private American collection

Bibliography

- Thierry-Maulnier, *Gimond*, Les Éditions du Livre Monte-Carlo, 1948, repr. pl. IX (bronze proof).
- Waldemar George, *Gimond et l'esprit des formes* (*Gimond and the Spirit of Form*), Braun & Cie, 1962, repr. pl. 14 (bronze proof).
- Marcel Gimond, *Comment je comprends la sculpture* (*How I Understand Sculpture*), Arted, édition d'Art, 1969.
- *Marcel Gimond 1894-1961 Centenaire* (*Centenarian*) [exhibition catalogue, Aubenas, Château d'Aubenas, August 5 – September 30, 1994], Town Hall of Aubenas, 1994.
- Hélène Labbé-Bazentay, *Marcel-Antoine Gimond (1894-1961)*, thesis in art history under the direction of Thierry Dufrêne, Grenoble, Université Pierre Mendès-France, 2003, sculpture section, p.58, repr. (bronze proof).
- Toru Wakiya, Hélène Labbé-Bazantay, Soncho Fujita, Junichi Kurakake, *Marcel Gimond,* Yasakashobo, 2012.

"*A sculpture is a sign; it represents not a model, but the idea that the artist created from the model. It attempts to express the poetic and aesthetic feeling that emanates from the lines, planes, volumes, highlights, and shadows, which in themselves have a signifying power that gives rise to different impressions, depending upon their arrangement.*"[1]

I / Marcel Gimond's connections to the Ardèche

Born in Tournon, in the northern part of the Ardèche, Marcel Gimond was an "*Ardèchois de vieille souche*"—a native of the Ardèche from a family with very old roots in the region. He was "a descendent of a family that had, since the 16th century, included many government officials," according to Waldemar George in his work dedicated to the sculptor.[2] His mother came from the peasantry while his father was a blacksmith.

The Gimond family established itself in Lyon, where the father owned an ironmongery. Gimond attended the École des Beaux Arts in Lyon from 1912 to 1917, then continued his studies at Marly under Maillol (1861-1944), and then at Vence with Pierre-August Renoir (1841-1919). He continued to think of these two artists as the masters who had influenced his art in its early stages. When Renoir died in 1919, he took over his Parisian studio, and between 1920 and 1930, he traveled around Europe, seeking out the artistic masterpieces of England, Spain, Greece, and Italy. And yet his connection to the Ardèche remained strong, as his parents moved to a villa at Aubenas to which he regularly returned.

When the Second World War broke out, Gimond and his wife, Julie Chorel, fled the French capital and sought refuge in the small Ardèche village of Saint-Félicien-en-Vivarais, then later at Aubenas, joining the artist's father just before his death. The bust *Peasant from the Ardèche* came out of this paradoxical context of exile and a return to his roots. After the Liberation, he went back to Paris.

Gimond's attachment to his native region is apparent in his choice of certain subjects, such as the female figure in *Homage to Léon Barry*, honoring an Albenassian writer (1928), the bust *Gabriel Faure*, depicting the writer from Tournon (1931), and the bust *Charles Forot*, featuring a native of Saint-Félicien (1940). Today an entire room in the Aubenas Chateau presents the artist's sculptures, and exhibitions dedicated to his work were held in 1959, 1965, and 1994.

II / Marcel Gimond's Portrait Work

"*A bust is not an arbitrary creation: it's an attempt to explain the cosmos, to establish an order, a microcosm. Its construction, although the logic that directs it is much more subtle, is as rigorous as that of architecture. In short, a sculptor does not deform, but transforms, transmutes. Through transmutation, he creates a particular model of truth, itself entirely natural, by connecting the*

individuality of his model to the universe. A bust thus conceived gives the impression, not of a detached "piece," but of a monument that is complete in itself, that is an end in itself, with the same status as a statue."[3]

For Gimond, the fundamentals of a bust were grounded in its architectural construction, with its planes, its masses, and its volumes all activated by their relationships with each other. He stated, "*the pleasure that a bust gives us is close to that that architecture gives us; it's a harmonious equilibrium of geometric forms*."[4]

But the art of sculpture also includes an element of magic, even of religion, according to Gimond, because it is the association of forms that allows the sculptor to give life to his model through bronze. Aristide Maillol's influence on the theoretical framework of Gimond's art is clearly evident; Maillol once declared, "I don't do portraits; I do heads through which I try to give an impression of entirety. A head starts to tempt me once I can see its architecture."[5]

Beginning in his earliest years at the École des Beaux Arts, Gimond expressed boundless admiration for Medieval Gothic sculptors; like them, he stripped his busts of all attributes and stylized their features in order to render them universal. However, as he wanted to capture the interior life of the people he sculpted, as well as the movements of their souls, his portraits retain a strong sense of individuality.

Most of Marcel Gimond's models were anonymous. The little Ardèchoise girl who posed for the bust *Mademoiselle Madeleine Champanhet* was only twelve years old at the time and used to deliver bread to Gimond's parents. The name of the model for the *Peasant Woman* is known because the work was shown at the Salon des Indépendants under the title *Madame Aubry*, but her relationship to the sculptor is not. The bust was done at the Pigeonnier, an artists' refuge, cultural center, and later publishing house, opened by Charles Forot (1890-1973) in April, 1940.

III / The 1940 Busts

In 1940, Marcel Gimond created a series of busts, including *Charles Forot, Docteur Chabaneix, Madame Marcel Gimond* known as *With Bangs*, *Peasant Woman from the Ardèche*, and *Little Girl from the Ardèche*. At this time, the sculptor declared that he "would sculpt nothing but heads," vowing "to always go as far as possible, to try to capture the eternal within each face."[6] In 1959, he stated in a letter to the priest Jean Charay (1916-1997), in relation to an upcoming exhibition that the priest had organized at the Aubenas Chateau, "I'd rather show only the busts that I'm fairly satisfied with, and that means only ones that date from 1940 on—that was the year that I started doing nothing but busts."[7]

In 1962, the art critic Waldemar George (1893-1970) dwelled upon the innovative character of these busts in Gimond's career, "Here is *Charles Forot*

with his spherical head. That's the way that Van Eyck and Fouquet represented clerics in the 15th century. It's how the masters and their predecessors, the stone-carvers of the Middle Ages, depicted monks—as scribes and scholars. The lips of the model indicate the fineness of his spirit. The lobes of his ears are reminiscent of those of the Buddha. *The Bust of Doctor Chabaneix*, is, perhaps, one of the most remarkable works of the period. […] The beard and the smooth cheeks belong to the same aesthetic system. A Cézannian sculptor, Gimond walked in the footsteps of the master from Aix-en-Provence."[8]

Marcel Gimond followed the Cubist path that Paul Cézanne had opened up. In 1905, the painter Émile Bernard (1868-1941) recorded the latter's thoughts in the journal *L'Occident* in a phrasing that has become famous: "Treat nature by means of the sphere, the cone, and the cylinder. If you learn to paint according to these simple figures, you can go on later to do anything you like."[9] Based on a monumental ovoid volume, the *Peasant Woman from the Ardèche* demonstrates an understanding of this geometrical foundation, in which the spherical and circular forms are repeated in the model's facial features. The framing of her hair completes the oval of her face, the arcs of her eyebrows underscore the almond shape of her eyes, and the base of her neck echoes the form of her chin.

The *Peasant Woman from the Ardèche* has a male pendant, the bust *Ardèchois Peasant*, done at the same time. Hélène Labbé-Bazentay, a specialist on Marcel Gimond, claims that the model for that work was "the innkeeper in St. Félicien, named Sapet,"[10] saying that "Madame Gimond remarked that the innkeeper had been astonished by the interest that Gimond showed in him by doing his portrait."[11] The innkeeper in this anecdote is most likely the person whose portrait is immortalized in the bust *Ardèchois Peasant*. Be that as it may, it proves that the artist chose his models for the form of their faces and for what they conveyed to the sculptor, and not on the basis of their social status.

The bust *Peasant Woman from the Ardèche* is a key work in Marcel Gimond's œuvre. It testifies to a transitional period in his career as well as to his deep attachment to his native region, two impulses that came together in the creation of this bust.

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[1] Marcel Gimond, *How I Understand Sculpture*, Arted, édition d'Art, 1969, p. 12.

[2] Waldemar George, *Gimond and the Spirit of Form*, Braun & Cie, 1962, p. 5.

[3] Marcel Gimond, *Young French Sculptors* [extract], Paris, Paul Dupont Editions, July 15, 1946, in *Le Portrait Sculpté*, catalogue exhibition, Paris, Galerie Malaquais, November 15 – December 17, 2004, p. 7.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] Hélène Labbé-Bazantay, "Marcel Antoine Gimon: Sculptor of the Soul," in Toru Wakiya, Hélène Labbé-Bazantay, Soncho Fujita, Junichi Kurakake, *Marcel Gimond*, Yasakashobo, 2012, p. 184 .

[6] Hélène Labbé-Bazantay, *Marcel-Antoine Gimond (1894-1961), op. cit.*, p. 21.

[7] Hélène Labbé-Bazantay, "Marcel Antoine Gimon: Sculptor of the Soul," *op. cit.*, p. 192.

[8] Waldemar George, *Gimond and the Spirit of Form*, Braun & Cie, 1962, *op. cit.,* p. 16.

[9] Émile Bernard, "Paul Cézanne," *L'Occident*, #32, July, 1904.

[10] Hélène Labbé-Bazantay, *Marcel-Antoine Gimond (1894-1961), op. cit.*, p. 21. The plaster of the *Ardèchois Peasant* is held in the reserves of the Château-museum of Tournon.

[11] Hélène Labbé-Bazantay, *Marcel-Antoine Gimond (1894-1961), op. cit.*, p. 21.