

CHARLES DESPIAU (1874 - 1946)

Mademoiselle Andrée Basler, also known as Dédé

Bronze, numbered 3/6
Lost wax cast by Claude Valuani, probably before 1929
Signed and numbered : C. Despiau 3/6
Founder's stamp : CIRE/C. VALSUANI/PERDUE
H. 28.5, W. 18.5, D. 21 cm

- This work is listed as number 81-B in the *Catalogue raisonné des sculptures de Charles Despiau* established by E. Lebon.
- This work is listed as number 2021-9B in the *Catalogue critique de l'œuvre sculpté de Charles Despiau* (*The Critical Catalogue of Works in Sculpture by Charles Despiau*), a work in progress by Elisabeth Lebon.

Provenance

- Frank Crowninshield Collection, acquired from the artist
- Sold as part of the Frank Crowninshield Collection, Parke-Bernet Galleries, New York, May 19 and 20, 1948, #93; (...);
- Alain Kotlar Collection, Paris

This bust is one of a long series of busts of children and adolescents, a subject that Despiau always treated with extreme delicacy, though he had no children himself. Andrée was the daughter of a Polish art critic, Adolphe Basler (1876-1951), who ran the Galerie de Sèvres in Paris in the 1920s. Though Despiau had no contract with him, the two men held each other in such esteem that Basler devoted a monograph to him, which was published in 1927, and then translated into English for his first solo exhibition in the United States at the Brummer Gallery in New York, where the bronze of this bust of the young girl was shown.

[1] In *Le cafard après le fête ou l'esthétisme d'aujourd'hui* (*The Cockroach After the Feast or the Aestheticism of Today*), which came out in 1929, Basler again drew a eulogistic, orneric portrait of Despiau, in which he imagines him seated in the Académie. Despiau's career had been brutally interrupted by the war and further struck by the death of Rodin, who had been one of his warmest supporters; in the early 1920s, he was just beginning to get it back on track, thanks to a very positive reception that began with his peers and carried on to the critics.

From 1923 to 1924, Despiau chose his models exclusively from among his close friends and ardent supporters. This was most likely by necessity, as, given a lack of commissions, it was a financially difficult period for him. His models included the young Andrée Basler, the wife of the painter Léopold-Lévy; the daughter of Georges Werner, who happened to also be named Andrée; the daughter of the critic Elie Faure (*Zizou*); the wife of the painter Othon Friesz, and finally Léon Deshairs. It was only after 1925 and his marked success at the *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs* that he began to receive commissions from those beyond his close circle of friends. The period preceding 1925 in fact offered him a kind of parenthesis that allowed him to focus exclusively on his own predilections, enriched by an intimate and affectionate knowledge of his models. He returned again at the end of the 1920s to this focus, and this time in response to a personal challenge: the figure.

In 1923, the young Dédé was 17 years old. She may have begun posing the year before, as it's known that Despiau asked her to pose many times, perhaps extending back a year or more. The bust suggests the rounded facial features of a child, but Despiau also gives her a distinct somber air. By angling the head slightly forward, he keeps the light from falling directly on the broad, slightly prominent forehead of the young girl, while her face is cast in a chiaroscuro that lets it vibrate through numerous touches, constellations of facets and depressions arranged with a skill and insight that left nothing to chance. Overall, the volume is wonderfully clear and the profiles quite pure; they empha the cap of hair, cut in a boyish style, that enhances the shape of the skull. Despiau managed to translate the sensitive nature of this serious young girl, so absorbed by her inner life and seeming to suffer from a psychological disturbance.

Frank Crowninshield (1872-1947), the first owner of the proof, was the head editor of the high- profile New York magazine *Vanity Fair*. He published the photographs of Edward Steichen, Cecil Beaton, and Man Ray, and commissioned articles from Aldous Huxley, Thomas Wolfe, and Gertrude Stein … Following the solo show of Despiau's work at the Brummer Gallery in 1927, Crowninshield became a passionate admirer of the artist and quickly became a

loyal supporter. He immediately acquired a proof of each model available and commissioned the editioning of older works in order to create the most complete collection possible of the sculptor's work. This then joined an already considerable collection, including African, Impressionist, and, above all, contemporary works—Picasso, Rouault, Dufy, Modigliani, Derain, Matisse, Chagall ...

Through both the identity of the model and that of its first owner, this proof of the bust of Andrée Basler shows how completely, at the beginning of the 1920s, Despiau was immersed in the modern art of his time.

The edition is limited to six and numbered. The first proof was cast in 1923 and reproduced in an article by Léon Deshairs, published in *Art et décoration*[2]. The proof shown in New York in 1927 may have been this one here, which joined Frank Crowninshield's collection before 1929; the provenance was recorded during the exhibition *Twenty-nine Sculptures by Charles Despiau* at the Fifty-Sixth Gallery in New York in 1930. Another proof is held in the Baltimore Museum of Art as part of the Cone Collection, and third is in the Göteborg Konstmuseum (number 2/6). The location of the three other proofs is not known at this time.[3]

Elisabeth Lebon, January 2021

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[1] Adolphe Basler, *Despiau*, Les Albums d'Art Druet, Librairie de France, Paris, 1927, and E. Weyhe Editions, New York, 1927. Basler published articles on Henri Matisse, the Douanier Rousseau, and Auguste Renoir and was close to Picasso, Modigliani, Kisling, and Derain…
[2] Léon Deshairs, "Despiau," *Art et décoration*, April, 1923.
[3] There are also irregularly marked proofs (over 8) that occasionally appear on the market; they seem quite suspect to us, regardless of the certificates that accompany them.