



EMILE-ANTOINE BOURDELLE (1861 - 1929)

Mask of a Sleeping Child, known as With Architecture

Émile-Antoine Bourdelle (1861-1929)

with the ceramicist Alexandre Bigot (1862-1927)

Mask of a Sleeping Child, known as With Architecture, 1905

Proof in green flambé glazed stoneware

On the back:

—signed in ink: Émile-Antoine Bourdelle / Stoneware by Bigot

—the vestiges of a torn-off sticker

—587 (carved into the stoneware)

—a sticker from the Czech customs with missing letters: “ptzollamt Prag,” a fragment of Hauptzollamt Prag, which was the main customs office in Prague. In addition, a “K” can be detected, but the second “K” is missing (see the sticker on a Rodin: for K(aiserlich) K(önigliches))

H. 20.5, W. 19, D. 9 cm

H. 8.07, W. 7.48, D. 3.54 in

Provenance

- Private collection, USA

Bibliography

- 1903 ARTICLE, Vitry, Paul, “Masques” (“Masks”) *Art et Décoration*, November 1903, p.345-354.

- 1905 ARTICLE, Leblond, Marius-Ary, "Émile Bourdelle. La sculpture pathétique (Poignant Sculpture)," *Revue Illustrée*, August 15, 1905, p.18-23, repr. p.23 (*Masque d'enfant endormi sans architecture*, ici intitulé *Sommeil d'enfant*) (*Mask of a Sleeping Child without architecture* here titled *Sleep of a Child*).
- 1909 CATALOGUE, *Exposition Bourdelle*, Prague, Manès Gallery, February-March, n°38, not repr. (*Masque d'enfant endormi avec architecture* (*Mask of a Sleeping Child, with Architecture*), our proof).
- 1931 CATALOGUE, *Exposition Bourdelle*, Paris, musée de l'Orangerie, February 14 - April 6, 1931, n°162, not repr. (*Masque d'enfant endormi avec architecture*).
- 1975 DUFET-JIANOU, Dufet, Michel et Jianou, Ionel, *Bourdelle*, Arted éditions d'art, Paris, 1975, n°315, p.95.
- 1994 ARTICLE, Lenormand-Romain, Antoinette, "Devenir Bourdelle" ("Becoming Bourdelle"), *Revue de l'Art*, n°104, 1994, p.30-39.
- 1998 CATALOGUE, Staub, Helena, *Bourdelle et ses élèves (Bourdelle and his Students): Giacometti, Richier, Gutfreund*, Paris, Bourdelle Museum, October 28, 1998- February 7, 1999, Paris Musées, Paris, 1998.
- 2016 BÉDAGUE, Bédague, Hélène, *Alexandre Bigot, chimiste et céramiste (Alexandre Bigot, Chemist and Ceramicist)*, Louvre Victoire, 2016, repr. p.97 (*Masque d'enfant endormi avec architecture*).
- 2018 CATALOGUE, *Transmission / Transgression. Maîtres et élèves dans l'atelier (Transmission/Transgression, Masters and Students in the Studio) : Rodin, Bourdelle, Giacometti, Richier...*, Paris, Bourdelle Museum, October 3, 2018 - February 3, 2019, Paris Musées, Paris, 2018.

"There's something essentially Bourdelle, and that's the way that he arranges a face in relation to its hair."[\[1\]](#)

"*The Sleep of a Child* is the deepest of oceans, the largest, the most filled with the glimmers and shadows of impenetrable mysteries."[\[2\]](#)

In Bourdelle's catalogue raisonné, the model of the *Sleeping Child* is dated 1905.[\[3\]](#) By this time, the sculptor had shaken off the influence of Rodin's work. He had been one of his assistants since 1893; the work that marked his rupture with the master is the *Head of Apollo*, which he worked on from 1900 to 1909, the date that marks his definitive split with Rodin. In 1905, he had established himself as an artist, and his personal life had dramatically changed: he was the father of a two-year-old son, Pierre, and he had just married his mother, Stéphanie Van Parys. That same year, the art editioner A.-A. Hébrard gave him a solo show in his gallery in the rue Royale. The catalogue has a preface by Élie Faure, and a *Mask of a Sleeping Child* in stoneware was shown.[\[4\]](#)

The *Mask of a Sleeping Child* is a proof in stoneware made with the ceramicist Alexandre Bigot (1862-1927). Bourdelle's work had been appearing in

stoneware editions since the *Bust of Pallas* (Bourdelle Museum) in 1889, and he continued to use this technique from time to time. Like Rodin, he was interested in the aesthetic qualities of different materials and techniques, which allowed him to explore expressive possibilities with carefully chosen models. The collaboration with Alexandre Bigot seems to have started in 1896. "In a letter to his friend Jean de Marigny, he wrote: 'I leave tomorrow for Mer to work on some stoneware sculptures with high-fire glazes that I'm doing with Mr. Bigot.' They created stoneware masks of children, heads of women, and pitchers, which were sold by Adrien A. Hébrard's Galerie d'Art."^[5] Their collaboration resulted in editions of some dozen models and ended around 1912 with an edition of *Petit Baiser aux nattes* (*Kiss with Braids, Small Version*), another relaxed face with closed eyes.

Works in glazed stoneware are emblematic of the Art Nouveau movement. Alexandre Bigot, along with Émile Muller, became one of the principal producers of architectural decorations in this style, working from his ceramics factory in Mer (Loir-et-Cher). He collaborated with Hector Guimard on the Castel Béranger and with Henri Sauvage on the Villa Maurelle in Nancy. In the last years of the 19th century, the world of avant-garde sculpture was excited by this technique, and Bigot collaborated with Pierre Roche, Alfred-Jean Halou, Jean Antoine Injalbert, and Antoine Bourdelle. Rodin made stoneware works with Edmond Lachenal in 1895 and with Paul Jeanneney (a student of Carriès) in 1904.^[6] Bigot maintained a correspondence with the sculptor and ceramicist Jean Carriès through which he shared his research, particularly on the chemistry of glazes. Matte glazes fired at very high temperatures became his signature.^[7] They seem to have been based on the Japanese pottery that was in vogue at the time in France.^[8] Bigot was, above all, a great technician of glazes and their reaction to fire. Our *Mask of a Sleeping Child* has a very interesting matte glaze in a verdant green that was popular in the Art Nouveau era. We can compare our *Mask* to two other examples in the Bourdelle Museum and appreciate the rich shades of green, evoking at times the mineral and at others the vegetal.

Like Carriès, an important creator of masks in glazed stoneware, most of Bourdelle's works executed in this material were also masks. The stoneware mask is not only an expressive object, but also a decorative one, largely thanks to the effects of the glaze: "Some of M. Bourdelle's studies have been translated by M. Bigot (...) into decorative masks in stoneware. The coloration of these already old works, less rich and less striking in tone than those of Carriès, are discrete and restrained, delicate and intimate. We give two examples here, two masks of children with soft and charming expressions."^[9]

These masks are generally based on portraits in the round. For example, there's an edition of a mask from the figure of Apollo, and Bourdelle returned several times to the famous figure of Beethoven to create a series of masks, including [Grand masque tragique](#) (*Large Tragic Mask*) [Beethoven aux grands cheveux sur socle architectural](#) (*Beethoven with Great Hair on an Architectural Base*), and [Beethoven métropolitain](#) (*Metropolitan Beethoven*).

As with these last two models, the head of our *Sleeping Child* emerges from vaporous and tumultuous hair that frames its curves and gives the work a symbolist air. Bourdelle used hair to structure his compositions and bring an expressivity to the decorative accents. "With Bourdelle, hair doesn't only have a decorative role; it also conveys a sense of the soul and of nature. It's what gives the face its musicality. [...] — the face of a child sleeping in a silken serenity that caresses the skin with smooth and spreading hair."; "Bourdelle, to make all of the child's beauty felt, shows him in the first stages of sleep, enveloped in his ample and disheveled hair ... ([...] like Rodin, he encloses his heads in blocks, though they are not of granite, but of hair [...]) It's while he's asleep that we can best perceive all the universal and global life that is in him, a life of intelligence and human spirit [...] And what blooms most through this sleep is the smile, (...) the generosity of the internal breath filling the cheeks like a fruit, the soft mischief of the features, the tenderness and the confidence."^[10]

Our *Mask of a Sleeping Child* is called "architectural" to distinguish it from a version without this right-angled base, though that version seems not to have been editioned in stoneware.^[11] The architectural base serves to "finish the composition" by contrasting with the vaporous forms of the head. Bourdelle often used an architectural base for his important works, such as [Tête d'Apollon sur base carrée](#) (*Head of Apollo on a Square Base*) and [Beethoven aux grands cheveux sur socle architectural](#) (*Beethoven with Great Hair on an Architectural Base*), which reveals his sense that sculpture is intimately linked to architecture.

This mask is based on a marble model titled *Sommeil de toute petite* (*Sleep of the Very Young*), which was shown at the Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in 1898. It is only known because of a [bronze](#) made from a mold of the marble.

Given the current knowledge, it is difficult to determine how many proofs of the *Mask of a Sleeping Child with Architecture* were made for the edition in stoneware, but they seem to be very rare, as no other one has been found except for the two held in the Bourdelle Museum, [MB Gr.4342](#) and [MB Gr.4358](#), donated by Cléopâtre Bourdelle and Rhodia Dufet-Bourdelle in 1949.

The edition in stoneware was sold by the Hébrard gallery. Our proof, like those in the Bourdelle Museum, definitely came from there. A price list of “Bourdelle sculptures in Bigot stoneware” found in the archives of the Hébrard gallery mentions a “mask of a child (boy) sleeping,” a “mask of a little girl, leaning, asleep,” and several models marked “with ink on the back.”[\[12\]](#) This is the kind of signature that our model has; written in ink are the words Émile Antoine Bourdelle / Grès de Bigot (Stoneware by Bigot).

There is also a posthumous edition in bronze of the mask, cast by Émile Godard between 1965 and 1971, five of which are held in the Bourdelle Museum.[\[13\]](#) The museum also holds two plasters.[\[14\]](#)

On the back of our *Mask of a Sleeping Child*, there’s a sticker from the Czech customs with the letters “ptzollamt Prag,” the remainder of the words Hauptzollamt Prag, which refers to the main customs office in Prague. There is also a “K,” and though the second “K” is missing, based on a similar sticker that we have seen on one of Rodin’s works[\[15\]](#) that passed through Czech customs on its way to an exhibition in Prague in 1902, this refers to “K(aiserlich) K(önigliches).

On the basis of this sticker, we can assume that this is the proof that Bourdelle sent to an important exhibition of his works organized by the Manès Society of Prague in 1909.

In the 1880s, there was an artistic revival in Bohemia and Moravia, and young avant-garde artists came together and founded the Manès Society in 1887. Stanislav Sucharda was the president, and the sculptor Otto Gutfreund (1889-1927), the painter Emil Fila (1882-1953), and the architect Jan Kotěra (1871-1923) were some of its best-known members. A Czech wing of the Viennese Secession, the Manès Society published the journal *Volné Směry* (*Free Directions*) and organized large-scale exhibitions in a vast pavilion in Prague.

In 1902, an ambitious exhibition of Rodin’s sculptures was held and met with great success. In 1908, Rodin was again invited by the Manès Society to do a show of his drawings. One of Rodin’s studio assistants who was of Czech origin, Josef Maratka (1874-1937) was the go-between who facilitated the logistics. He later did the same for Bourdelle, who was, in his turn, honored in 1909. “We wait with impatience for the inauguration of your wonderful exhibition,” he wrote to the artist.[\[16\]](#) The exhibition included 58 sculptures and 20 drawings. The mask was sent with the second lot on January 12, 1909, as #38, priced at 500 francs.[\[17\]](#)

“Bourdelle sent all the works he thought important to Prague; they are the biographical documents of his internal evolution.”[\[18\]](#) “E.A. Bourdelle, an artist at the height of his creativity and in full possession of his talent comes to Prague with the conviction—suggested by Rodin—that the judgement of the public of Prague on matters of modern art has a real importance (...).”[\[19\]](#)

Bourdelle chose the *Mask of a Sleeping Child* in stoneware to represent his work in this important exhibition, which shows how proud he was of this model. It is listed as #38 in the catalogue.

[\[1\]](#) Marius-Ary Leblond in 1905 ARTICLE, p. 19.

[\[2\]](#) Bourdelle in an undated letter in 1994 ARTICLE, p. 36.

[\[3\]](#) 1975 DUFFET-JIANOU, #315.

[\[4\]](#) *Exposition des sculptures, peintures, pastels, etc. par Émile Bourdelle*, Galerie A.A. Hébrard, 8, rue Royale, Paris, 1905, #18. It is dated from 1890. It is not known whether this was the *Masque de fillette rieuse* (*Mask of a Laughing Girl*), which was done in 1890 and then editioned in stoneware, or a proof of the *Sleeping Child* that interests us here, but with an incorrect date. In 1905, Bourdelle also showed a *Buste de bébé endormi* (*Bust of a Sleeping Baby*) at the Salon d'Automne (#191).

[\[5\]](#) 2016 BÉDAGUE, p. 94.

[\[6\]](#) Anne Lajoix, “August Rodin et les arts du feu” (“August Rodin and the Arts of the Fire”) *Revue de l'Art*, v. 116, #1, 1997, p. 76 ([DOI 10.3406/rvart.1997.348330](#), [lire en ligne](#) [[archive](#)], consulted on March 3, 2020).

[\[7\]](#) Forest, Marie-Cécile, “Alexandre Bigot (1862-1927),” *Revue de la Céramique & du Verre*, #99, March-April 1998, p. 46-49.

[\[8\]](#) A connoisseur of Asian ceramics, Alexandre Bigot studied the Japanese ceramic collections of Louis Gonse. See the article cited in Note 7.

[\[9\]](#) 1903 ARTICLE, p. 352 (two reproductions of masks of children, one laughing, the other sleeping, with smooth hair, sometimes also called *Enfant qui pleure* (*The Crying Child*)).

[\[10\]](#) Marius-Ary Leblond in 1905 ARTICLE, p. 19.

[\[11\]](#) The Bourdelle Museum has one in clay (MB Te.3017), three plasters (MB Pl.3020, MB Pl.3026, and MB Pl.4255), and two bronzes cast by Valsuani (MB Br.999 and MB Br.1000).

[\[12\]](#) Other documents from the Hébrard archives—price lists and lists of works consigned or deposited by Bourdelle—mention different titles: *Enfant qui dort* (*Child Asleep*), *Enfant endormi* (*Sleeping Child*), *Tête de bébé* (*Baby's Head*) and attest to the business that Hébrard handled with Bourdelle's works in Bigot's stoneware (Documentation from the Bourdelle Museum).

[\[13\]](#) MB Br.1001, MB Br.1002, MB Br.1003, MB Br.1004, and MB Br.1005.

[\[14\]](#) MB Pl.3018 and MB Pl.301.

[15] *L'un des Bourgeois de Calais: Pierre de Wissant vêtu, reduction (One of the Burghers of Calais: Pierre de Wissant, clothed, reduction)*, model conceived between 1887 and 1895, bronze proof with green patina, 1902, sand cast by Alexis Rudier, signed, H. 45.5 cm.

[16] Letter from Josef Maratka to Bourdelle dated February 13, 1909, archives of the Bourdelle Museum.

[17] List of the works of Monsieur Bourdelle to be sent to the Manès Artistic Association, archives of the Bourdelle Museum.

[18] Handwritten article by K.B. Mädl, professor at the la Umelecks prumyslova skola (School of Industrial Arts).

[19] Handwritten article by M.S. (without a doubt Max Svabinsky) for the journal *Volné Sméry*, #3, 1909.