

JANE POUPELET (1874-1932)

The Bather or At the Water's Edge

Bronze
Sand cast before 1932
Assembly and patina by the Susse brothers, 1970
Signature mark stamped by the Susse foundry (on the right side of the base): J. POUPELET
51 x 20 x 40 cm

Provenance

- The artist's studio
- France, private collection

Bibliography

- 1928 EXPOSITION : *Jane Poupelet Dessins et Sculptures*, Paris, Galerie Bernier (24 janvier-11 février), Girard Bonino, Paris, 1928, n°2, non repr. (Baigneuse 1912).
- 1930 KUNSTLER : Charles Kunstler, *Jane Poupelet*, Paris, Éditions G. Crès & Cie, 1930, repr., n°7 (épreuve en bronze).
- 1973 WAPLER : Vincent-Fabian Wapler, *Jane Poupelet sculpteur 1878-1932*, mémoire de maîtrise présenté sous la direction de Monsieur Souchal Professeur d'histoire de l'art en mai 1973, faculté des lettres et sciences humaines de Lille III, n°48, p.180-186.
- 1974 EXPOSITION : *La Bande à Schnegg*, musée Bourdelle, Paris, 1974, bronze, cat. 113.

- 2003 DUMAINE : Sylvie Dumaine, *Les dessins de la statuaire Jane Poupelet (1874-1932), collection de dessins déposée à Roubaix, La Piscine, musée d'art et d'Industrie-André Diligent*, mémoire de maîtrise sous la direction de Frédéric Chappey, Université de Lille III, 2003.
- 2005 RIVIÈRE : Anne Rivière, « Jane Poupelet 1874-1932 « La beauté dans la simplicité » », in *Jane Poupelet (1874-1932)*, catalogue d'exposition, Roubaix, La Piscine – musée d'art et industrie André Diligent (15 octobre 2005– 15 janvier 2006) ; Bordeaux, musée des Beaux-Arts (24 février – 4 juin 2006) ; Mont-de-Marsan, musée Despiau-Wlérick (24 juin – 2 octobre 2006), Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 2005, n°63, p.96, repr. (L'exemplaire de la *Baigneuse* ici décrit) et reproduite en couverture.

Selected exhibitions of la *Baigneuse*[1] (Other bronzes)

- 1918, Paris, Petit-Palais, exposition au profit des œuvres de guerre de la SAF (Société des Artistes Français) et de la SNBA (Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts)
- 1919, Paris, Galerie Arbanère
- 1924, Cincinatti
- 1928, Paris, Galerie Bernier
- 1931, Paris, Galerie du Théâtre Pigalle, F.A.M. (Femmes Artistes Modernes)
- 1931, Paris, Grand-Palais (XXIe Salon des Artistes Décorateurs)
- 1932, Paris, Grand-Palais (XXIIe Salon des Artistes Décorateurs)
- 1933, Chicago, The Art Institute (exemplaire Porter)
- 1937, Paris, Petit Palais, juin-octobre, *Les maîtres de l'art indépendant 1895-1937*, salle 21, n°2 (intitulée *Jeune fille se hissant*, appartenant à la galerie Bernier)
- 1938, Paris, Galerie Bernier
- 1949, Périgueux, exposition *Jane Poupelet*
- 1974, Paris, musée Bourdelle, exposition *La Bande à Schnegg*, cat.113.
- 2005, Roubaix, Bordeaux, Mont-de-Marsan, exposition *Jane Poupelet 1874-1932 « La beauté dans la simplicité »*.

"Mlle Poupelet's Bather *would be (…) such an exquisite figure for a fountain! She stretches her leg cautiously toward the cool water like Falconet's* Bather*, but in this case, the precious refinement of the 18th century is replaced by a full and robust grace (…)"*[2]

By 1911, the year in which she created her *Seated Woman*, Jane Poupelet was a recognized and appreciated artist. She was a member of the Salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts and an active participant in various French

and American feminist networks.[3] She showed with Rodin and *Les Quelques* [4] and at the Galerie Georges Petit, and was invited by the Manès group to participate in the *Exposition de la Jeune Sculpture française* in Prague and Vienna. Already well-known in France and in Europe, she had her first breakthrough in the United States in 1911, when she won the Whitney Hoff Prize for her *Woman at her Toilette* and participated in a traveling exhibition of the Society of Painters and Sculptors that went to Buffalo, Chicago, Saint-Louis, and Boston. Her overseas success continued in the following years; the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York acquired her *Woman at her Toilette* (inv 13.192) in 1913, and additional works entered other public and private American collections.

The Bather is one of a series of feminine models that Jane Poupelet began sculpting in 1907, including such well-known ones as *Woman at her Toilette* (1907), *Woman Mirrored in Water* (1909), and *Before the Wave* (1909). Because these female figures are often associated with water, these works can be read as modern-day naiads.

And as these are entire bodies, Poupelet often used a process of marcottage[5] to create them. In this case, the head of *The Bather* comes from the *Self-Portrait* of 1907, which had already served for the head of the *Woman at her Toilette*. On the other hand, the *Heads* in plaster and terra cotta taken from the *Woman Mirrored in Water* were presented independently on small bases. The face is highly stylized, with regular and harmonious features. Reminiscent of small Greek or Etruscan votive heads, this self-portrait has a decorative aspect, which is emphad by the long, symmetrical lines of its rounded eyebrows and the small, undulating waves of hair at the forehead and temples.

The smooth modeling, the simple, soft, and flowing planes, the harmonious rhythms, and the full and balanced architecture that we see in *The Bather* are all characteristics that Jane Poupelet's work shares with ancient art. Like other members of the "Bande à Schnegg,"[6] in reaction to Rodin's exalted art, Poupelet sought an ancient calm, and yet the robust and well-proportioned body of *The Bather* is also an image of the modern woman. This modern woman appeared in the work of Charles Despiau (*Le Printemps* (*Spring*) and *Eve* from 1923 and *Assia* from 1936) and Robert Wlérick (*Jeune fille se coiffant*(*Young Girl Doing her Hair*) and *L'Offrande* (*The Offering*) from 1937) as well.

Of all of Poupelet's feminine figures, this one is the most emblematic of her art. It is often shown in exhibitions and has been featured on covers of the artist's catalogues.

Sitting on the very edge of the base, which represents the edge of the water (rock, embankment, or shore), the figure is caught in precarious and dynamic equilibrium. Through intimations of time and motion, the tension of the moment becomes part of the reading of the work. The characteristic pose of the bather who "tastes" the water with the tip of her toe has also been treated by Jean-François Millet in his *Bain de la gardeuse d'oies* (*The Goose Girl Bathing*) (1863, Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore) and *La Gardeuse d'oies* (*The Goose Girl*) (1863, Musée des Beaux Arts, Dijon). At least two drawings by Jane Poupelet are studies of this pose: *Étude pour Baigneuse s'avançant dans l'eau* (*Study for The Bather Entering the Water*), lead pencil,[7] and *Baigneuse* (*The Bather*),[8] and there is a *Torse de Baigneuse* (*Torso of a Bather*) in plaster as well.[9] A similar pose and attitude also appear in an ink and walnut wash study on paper for *Nu féminin au bord d'une table* (*Feminine Nude on the Edge of a Table*).[10]

According to Anne Rivière, a specialist on Jane Poupelet's work, "an initial study in plaster for *The Bather* was shown at the 1911 Salon, followed by an unfinished model in 1912. 'Large in spite of its small proportions,' was Apollinaire's appraisal in *L'Intransigeant* of April 14, 1912. The finished plaster statuette, titled *Au bord de l'eau*, (*At the Water's Edge*) was shown in 1913, though it wasn't cast in bronze until 1918, when it was shown at the Petit-Palais in the benefit exhibition sponsored by the Salon des Artistes Français (the SAF) and the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts (the SNBA) in support of the war effort."

As far as is currently known, there are five proofs of the bronze edition of *The Bather* or *At the Water's Edge* held in museums:

- Roubaix, the museum La Piscine, on loan from the CNAP, bought from the artist in 1918 at the exhibition in the Petit-Palais
- Chicago, IL, USA The Art Institute, the gift of George F. Porter in 1927
- Phalsbourg, Moselle, France, musée militaire et Erckmann-Chatrian (Military Museum and Erckmann-Chatrian),[11] given in 1938, formerly in the David Weill collection
- Périgueux, the Périgord Museum of Art and Archeology, bought by the city in 1947
- Norman, OK, USA, Fred Jones JR Museum of Art, given in 1969

Our proof comes directly from the artist's estate. According to the family archives, it was cast during the artist's lifetime, thus, before 1932. The assembly and the patina were done in the 1970s at the Susse Foundry, and the signature "Jane Poupelet" was stamped on the base at that time.
It is one of the very few proofs of this emblematic work by Jane Poupelet in circulation.

[1] According to the “archives Jane Poupelet” as established by Anne Rivière.
[2] Paul Vitry, “The Salons of 1923,” *Art et Décoration*, T. XLIV, July, 1923, p. 20.
[3] Jane Poupelet joined the *American Women’s Club* and the *Club des Unes internationales* in 1908; in 1909, she joined the *Women’s International Art Club*, and in 1912 she joined the *Association of Women Painters and Sculptors*.
[4] *Les Quelques* were a group of female feminist artists who showed several times in various galleries.
[5] In this practice, widely used by Auguste Rodin, “a new sculptural work is composed either wholly or partially of elements reused from earlier sculptures. The sculptor takes parts from his or her own earlier works and reincorporates them into a new work.” In *Sculpture, méthode et vocabulaire*, éditions du patrimoine, 2000, p.549.
[6] The sculptors of the *Bande à Schnegg* (*Schnegg’s Gang*), Charles Despiau (1874-1946), François Pompon (1855-1933), Jane Poupelet (1878-1951), Lucien (1864-1909) et Gaston (1866-1953) Schnegg, and Robert Wlérick (1882-1944), had all worked in or around Auguste Rodin’s studio and had assimilated his fundamental principles: contact with nature and the rigorous organization of planes. And yet they distanced themselves from Rodin’s exalted art by their interest in the ideals of tranquility, serenity, and austerity. Critics labeled them “*La Bande à Schnegg*” after their “leader,”Lucien Schnegg.
[7] 2005 RIVIERE, n°270.
[8] Anne Rivière Archives.
[9] Anne Rivière Archives.
[10] 2005 RIVIERE, n°200.
[11] Inv. PHAL.1938.331.1