



HENRI LAURENS (1885-1954)

Reclining Woman, Frontal View

Bronze proof, #II

Sand cast by Florentin Godard (quite likely), before April, 1929

Unsigned

H: 5,51; W: 15,55 in

Label on the back

Kunsthalle Basel N°3574; Galerie Simon, 6741; Umelecka Beseda de Prague, 1931; Berlin, K.-L. Skutsch

Provenance

- Paris, Galerie Simon (n°6741)
- Bern, Hermann Rupf Collection
- Berlin, Karl Ludwig Skutsch (acquired in 1956)
- Berlin, Private collection

Bibliography

- *Henri Laurens, sculpteur (1885-1954), années (years) 1915 à 1924*, Marthe Laurens, 1955, repr. p. 95 (bronze proof).
- Cécile Goldscheider, *Laurens*, Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1956, repr. n°11b (bronze proof).
- Werner Hofmann, *Henri Laurens, Sculptures*, Teufen, Editions Arthur Niggli, 1970, repr. p.103 (bronze proof).
- *Henri Laurens (1885-1954), Skulpturen, Collagen, Zeichnungen, Aquarelle, Druckgraphik*, Bestandskatalog und Ausstellungskatalogue

Oeuvreverzeichnis der Druckgraphik, März-April 1985, repr.n°3, p.20
(bronze proof).

- *Henri Laurens*, Musée d'art moderne Villeneuve d'Ascq, RMN, 1992.
- Bérès, Anisabelle et Arveiller, Michel ; *Henri Laurens (1885-1954)*, galerie Bérès, Paris, 20 octobre 2004-8 janvier 2005, repr. n°30, p. 105 (bronze proof, galerie Louise Leiris).
- *Henri Laurens, Wellentöchter / Daughters of the Waves*, catalogue d'exposition, Brême, Gerhard-Marcks-Haus, 30 sept. 2018 - 13 janvier 2019, Mannheim, Kunsthalle, 1^{er} mars - 16 juin 2018, Editions Arie Hartog, Ulrike Lorenz.

Exhibitions

- *L'Ecole de Paris : francouzské moderní umění*, Prague, Umelecká Beseda, 1931.
- *Sammlung Hermann Rupf*, Basel, Kunsthalle Basel, 1940 ?, n°3574.
- *Sculptors' drawings and Livres d'Artiste*, Moscou, Pushkin Museum, April 26 to September 3, 2018, p.289, repr. (the proof presented here).

"The first Cubist works seemed hallucinatory to me. I didn't understand them right away, but they filled me with an inexplicable agitation. They emanated a miracle that confounded me."[\[1\]](#)

When he met Braque in 1911 and saw his pasted papers, Henri Laurens experienced a real aesthetic shock. They were both living in Montmartre at the time and had struck up a friendship based on their mutual admiration of Cézanne and their attempts to put into practice his recommendation to "address nature through the cylinder, the sphere, the cone..."[\[2\]](#) According to Martha Laurens, their research brought them to Henri's studio, where they drew figures on the walls.[\[3\]](#)

During his early years of Cubist experimentation, Laurens worked mostly in pasted papers, such as *Nature Morte à la guitare (Still Life with Guitar)* (1918), and polychrome reliefs, such as *Tête (Head)* from 1917 **[fig.1]**,[\[4\]](#) in which he pushed geometrical stylization to extremes. With Braque and Picasso, he studied the decomposition of forms and volumes to the point of abstraction.

The dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler considered Laurens' pasted papers as truly "the finest flower of Cubism."[\[5\]](#) Quickly charmed by Lauren's personality and by his passion for music, which Kahnweiler shared, the latter offered him a contract from April 1920 on. Between 1916 and 1919, Henri Laurens had an exclusive contract with the dealer Léonce Rosenberg, and he was in the process of extricating himself from his contract, which had become too limiting, when in

1920, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler came back to France, after having spent the years of the First World War in Switzerland with his friend Hermann Rupf,[\[6\]](#) who was the first owner of this proof. Kahnweiler took advantage of Laurens' situation, as he was just reopening his gallery in the rue d'Astorg,[\[7\]](#) which had been closed during the war. Laurens was the second and last sculptor that Kahnweiler took on.[\[8\]](#) The first, the Catalan sculptor Manolo, had been working with him since 1912.

At this point—around 1920—Laurens was principally interested in the female form examined from various angles and attitudes. His stylistic choices are readily recognizable: large hips and buttocks, generous thighs, and a small bust. The hair falls over itself in thick tresses depicted through undulating parallel lines. The round forms of the thighs, breasts, and belly are harmoniously juxtaposed to the extremely angular lines of the legs and nose. These features taken together testify to his investigation of the construction of volumes in a single plane; his aesthetic treatment of this question constituted his principal axis of interest.[\[9\]](#) Sculptures such as *Nu couché à l'éventail* (*Reclining Nude with a Fan*) from 1919[\[10\]](#) **[fig.2]** and *Femme couchée au collier* (*Reclining Woman with a Necklace*) from 1921 **[fig.3]** are built up of a complex network of planes and angles, similar to Picasso's 1909 *Tête de femme* (*Head of a Woman*)[\[11\]](#) **[fig.4]**, which was sculpted in facets.

The 1921 *Reclining Woman, Front View*, on the other hand, displays Laurens' talents as a renderer; it plays with low reliefs rather than with deeply carved volumes, as does his *Femme couchée de dos*[\[12\]](#) (*Reclining Woman, Back View*) **[fig.5]** from the same year. This second is not the counter to the first, but works as its pendant, or even as its negative.[\[13\]](#) Laurens repeated this positive/negative treatment of a figure in his two drawings *Nu de face* (*Nude from the Front*) and *Nu de dos* (*Nude from the Back*) **[fig.6]**, suppressing the perspective available to two-dimensional work. In 1922, he did a second relief of *Femme couchée*[\[14\]](#) (*Reclining Woman*), which is very close to *Reclining Woman, Front View*, but is distinguished by certain details of the necklace, the wavy pattern in the hair, and the drapery between the legs.

At the same time, the sculptor did a *Reclining Woman* that was also very close to *Reclining Woman, Front View*, but this time freed from its background. The work, a proof of which is held in the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden de Washington,[\[15\]](#) is a sculpture in the round. And then, once completely freed from Cubism, he did a sculpture in the round titled *Reclining Woman* in 1921 [\[16\]](#) **[fig.7]**; it has curved, voluminous forms, and prefigures Laurens' future direction, evolving toward a calm and timeless style, which achieved its apogee in *La Femme accoudée* (*The Woman Leaning on her Elbow*) of 1927[\[17\]](#) **[fig.8]**, which is remarkable for its simple curves and forms.

Thanks to recent work by the art historian Elisabeth Lebon, we know that the proofs numbered with Roman numerals are the result of a collaboration between the dealer Kahnweiler and the founder Florentin Godard: "[These inscriptions] indicate, without a doubt, an old casting that dates from the lifetime of the artist because the last commission that Kahnweiler sent to Florentin Godard dates from April, 1929." (Extract from Elisabeth Lebon's article "Laurens and the Bronze," published in the exhibition catalogue *Henri Laurens* from the exhibition at the Gerhard-Marcks-Haus in Bremen from September 30, 2018 to January 13, 2019).

According to the catalogue established by the Bérès gallery in 2004, the edition of *Reclining Woman, Front View* included eight proofs and one artist's proof. Of these eight proofs, six were made after the artist's death, by the Laurens family working with the founder Valsuani, and two were made by Kahnweiler^[18] while the artist was still alive, including #II, which is the one presented here. According to Elisabeth Lebon, the two older proofs, which pre-existed those done by Valsuani, were integrated into the edition done between 1954 and 1974 by the artist's beneficiaries.^[19] It seems, therefore, that this proof is one of the two that were cast during the artist's lifetime and the only one whose location is known.

[1] *Henri Laurens*, Musée d'art moderne Villeneuve d'Ascq, RMN, 1992, p. 274-275.

[2] Sylvie Ramond, "L'amitié à l'œuvre, Braque et Laurens," ("Friendship at Work: Braque and Laurens") *Braque/Laurens, un dialogue autour des collections du Centre Pompidou, musée national d'art moderne et du musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon*, musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, October 25, 2005 - January 30, 2006.

[3] "1911 : Braque came to Laurens' studio one day and explained something with a few lines drawn on the wall [. . .] It was a sudden window thrown open onto liberty and the start of all the sculpture known as cubist, as well as of the pasted papers." Marthe Laurens, *Henri Laurens sculpteur*, Paris 1955.

[4] Henri Laurens, *Tête*, 1918-1919, polychromed stone, 55 x 41 x 27 cm, Musée national d'art moderne, [Inv.AM1997-236](#)

[5] Patrick Waldberg, *Henri Laurens ou la femme placée en abîme*, Le Sphinx/Veyrier, 1980, p. 66.

[6] Herman Rupf (1880-1962) was a businessman from Bern who, with the help of his friend DH Kahnweiler, built up an important collection of modern art. Today, the Hermann and Margrit Rupf Foundation is held in the fine arts museum in Bern.

[7] On September 1, 1920, Kahnweiler went into partnership with André Simon and open the Galerie Simon at 29 bis, rue d'Astorg, in Paris's 8th arrondissement.

[8] The contract between Kahnweiler and Laurens ended at the end of 1921.

"Free from any contract, Laurens managed the editioning of his own work from May 1, 1921, with the occasional exception of the models that he sold to Rosenberg and to Kahnweiler, and those that he later sold them in quantities that are not known." (Lebon, in Laurens, Bremen, 2018)

[9] "When I begin a sculpture, I have only the vaguest idea of what I'd like to make. For instance, I may have the notion of a woman, or of something that is somehow related to the sea. Before being a representation of some other thing, my sculpture is an aesthetic fact, or, more precisely, a series of aesthetic events, the product of my imagination in response to the demands of construction. That is, in short, what my work entails. I give it its title at the very end." Henri Laurens, cited in Paule Chavasse, *Cubism and its Time*, a series of six emissions on France III, 1961-1962, archives INA.

[10] Henri Laurens, *Nu couché à l'éventail*, 1919/1967, bronze proof, 28 x 61 x 27 cm, Musée national d'art moderne à Paris, [inv. AM 1539 S](#).

[11] Pablo Picasso, *Tête de femme*, 1909, bronze proof, H. 40.6 cm, Metropolitan Museum, New York, [inv. 1996.403.6](#).

[12] Henri Laurens, *Femme couchée de dos*, 1921, bronze proof, n°6/8, H. 14 cm, Galerie Bérès, Paris.

[13] The two female figures face the same direction, which supports the claim that they can't be the two sides of the same relief.

[14] Henri Laurens, *Femme couchée*, 1922, relief, bronze proof n°3/3, H. 56 cm, Sprengel Museum, Hanovre.

[15] Henri Laurens, *Femme couchée*, 1921, bronze proof, H. 11,3 cm, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, [inv. 66.2908](#).

[16] Henri Laurens, *Femme couchée*, 1921, bronze proof n°7/8, private collection.

[17] Henri Laurens, *Femme accoudée*, 1927, stone, private collection.

[18] As this proof is number II, we presume that there is or was also a number I.

[19] Lebon, in Laurens, Bremen, 2018