



RENÉ BABIN (1919-1997)

Youth

Oak

Signed: Babin R 1959

H. 140, W. 24, D. 23 cm

Throughout his career, René Babin showed a particular affinity for direct carving, a technique that was not wide used in the mid-20th century, though it had seen a resurgence at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, with Georges Lacombe, Constantin Brancusi, Ossip Zadkine, and Joseph Bernard.

In the course of his studies, René Babin had worked restoring sculptures for the department of historic monuments, practicing direct carving in stone, and his works in stone remained a determining step in his development. Often, as with *The Seated Woman*, *The Pomegranate*, and *The Sleeper*, he later made a mold in order to edition the work, either in terra cotta or in bronze. His wood carvings, though, are rare, and it seems that no molds for editioning were made of them.

Youth was carved in a warm amber oak; the knots and grain of the wood, the marks left by the gouge^[1], and the various imperfections, such as the nails underscoring the breast and the inclusion near the pubis, contribute to the expressivity of the work. The presence of nails and cracks suggests that he might have reused an old beam. Babin adapted his work to the available material, like the Roman sculptors of the Middle Ages, whom he greatly admired. This narrow, slender figure has something totemic about it.

The Babin archives include two photographs glued next to each other; the first shows a front-view photograph of *Youth* standing before a wooden door; the

second shows a sculpture in the same medium and of relatively similar proportions, photographed in front of the same door. This second sculpture is probably an *Eve*^[2] in a modest pose, and is most likely the pendant for *Youth*; it is held in a private collection in Paris. Her hands are placed chastely over her pubis and breasts while *Youth* holds her arms over her head, openly offering her body up to the public gaze.

Though no one has yet written a monograph on René Babin, and his works, being few, are not widely present in museums and the art market, the sculpture *Youth* is fairly well documented, thanks to:

—a reproduction, taken from the back at a three-quarter angle, in the *Club Français de la Médaille* (1976, n°50, p. 206-207).

—the photograph mentioned above in the Babin archive.

—another photograph in the Babin archive annotated on the back with “R. Babin wood, direct carving youth 1.40 x .22 x .20.”

—a side-view reproduction, also in the Babin archive, with the caption “Youth (oak).” This reproduction clearly comes from the pamphlet for a group exhibition.

^[1] “A chisel, whether straight, s-curved, or back-curved, with a concave blade that cuts, usually, in a semi-circle. (...) Large, hollow or half-hollow gouges are used for reducing a block of wood, or occasionally soft stone, while flat gouges are used for refining forms”, in *Principes d’analyse scientifique : La sculpture, méthode et vocabulaire*, imprimerie nationale (*Principles of Scientific Analysis: Sculpture, Methods and Vocabulary*, National Printshop) 1978, p. 599.

^[2] According to the Babin archive, there is an *Eve* in wood that measures 115 x 15 x 15 cm.