
Mythe de Léda
Bourdelle

EMILE-ANTOINE BOURDELLE (1861 - 1929)

Leda and the Swan

Watercolor
Inscribed : A monsieur Chautard avec tous remerciements Bourdelle (To Monsieur Chautard with all my thanks Bourdelle)
Inscribed : Mythe de Léda (Myth of Leda) and Bourdelle's monogram
H: 51.5, W: 32 cm

Provenance

- Private French Collection

Selective bibliography

- 1974 BOURDELLE-LOUŸS: Émile-Antoine Bourdelle, Pierre Louÿs, *Léda*, L'Astragale, 1974.
- 2012 CATALOGUE EXPOSITION MUSÉE PARIS: *Antoine Bourdelle… que du dessin*, [Paris, musée Bourdelle, 9 novembre 2011-29 janvier 2012], Paris, Éditions des Cendres - Paris musées, 2011.
- 2023 CATALOGUE EXPOSITION MUSÉE PARIS-ROUBAIX-MONTAUBAN: *Rodin / Bourdelle. Corps à corps*, [Paris, musée Bourdelle, 2 octobre 2024 – 2 février 2025, Roubaix, La Piscine-musée d'art et d'industrie André Diligent, 1er mars – 1erjuin 2025, Montauban, musée Ingres Bourdelle, 27 juin – 19 octobre 2025], Paris, Paris Musées, 2024.

Bourdelle's work on *Leda and the Swan*

Bourdelle often depicted this mythological subject in line drawings and watercolors. He represented it in every possible way: he was interested in Leda's modesty, as in our drawing, in the evocation of her pleasure, or in her struggle against the swan. We find Leda in every possible position: lying on her back, sitting, standing, walking, bent over, kneeling, hidden in the swan's wings... In each drawing, Bourdelle delivers a highly mastered composition, balancing graphic rigor and rendering of volume. For the watercolors, he adds a chromatic range that remains in shades of blue, yellow (sometimes up to brown) and white.

Among the artist's watercolors on this theme, two are kept in Strasbourg's Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (inv. 77.975.1.35 et inv. LXXIV 133) while more than forty are in the Bourdelle Museum in Paris. Three of them (inv. MBD3365, MBD3326 et MBD6658) were presented in the exhibition *Rodin / Bourdelle. Corps à corps* at the Bourdelle Museum (2024-2025) et are reproduced in the catalogue[1]. Another (inv. MBD1429[2]) was featured in the exhibition *Antoine Bourdelle... que du dessin* at the Bourdelle Museum in 2012. In 1974, a book entitled *Leda* gathers forty of Bourdelle's watercolors on this subject[3]. His daughter, Rhodia Dufet-Bourdelle, was the one behind this publication; she also wrote the foreword. The works are reproduced using the Jacomet process, accompanied by a text by Pierre Louÿs.

"Copies" by the artist himself

Our watercolor appears to have been created around 1919, when compared with a smaller watercolor of the same subject, which was sold at public auction (Rostand-Fillaire, May 11th, 1990, n°3, repr.). Its dedication indicates that it was given to "monsieur Chautard[4]" by Bourdelle. However, the sculptor did not like to give his drawings away as gifts. In order not to part with them completely, he often made copies of his works for himself. The watercolor of the Bourdelle Museum bearing the inventory number 5560 is certainly the one he executed at the time of the gift to Chautard, in order to preserve its memory : almost identical in , it shows slight differences in composition and tonality.

---

[1] 2023 CATALOGUE EXPOSITION MUSÉE PARIS-ROUBAIX-MONTAUBAN, n°197, p. 216 ; n°196, p. 218 et n°192, p. 219.
[2] It is reproduced in 2012 CATALOGUE EXPOSITION MUSÉE PARIS, n°80, p. 149.
[3] Our watercolor is not included in this book.
[4] This is the name that has been deciphered on the drawing, but no information on this person has yet been found.