
georges desvignes 1913

GEORGES DORIGNAC (1879-1925)

Stevedore

Black pencil, black and yellow gold wash
Signed and dated: georges dorignac 1913
47.5 x 38 cm

Provenance

- Paris, the artist’s studio
- By inheritance

Bibliography

- 2016 PARIS : *Georges Dorignac, dessins rouges et noirs*, catalogue d’exposition, Galerie Malaquais, Paris, 31 mars – 21 mai 2016, repr. p.49 n°37.
- 2016 MANSENCAL : Mansencal, Marie-Claire, *Georges Dorignac, le maître des figures noires*, Le Passage, Paris, 2016, repr. p.53 cat. D84
- 2016 ROUBAIX-BORDEAUX : *Georges Dorignac (1879-1925), le trait sculpté*, catalogue d’exposition, Roubaix, La Piscine – musée d’art et d’industrie André Diligent, 19 novembre 2016 – 5 mars 2017, Bordeaux, musée des Beaux-Arts, 18 mai – 17 septembre 2017, repr. p.140 n°44.
- 2019 PARIS : *Dorignac, corps & âmes*, catalogue d’exposition, Paris, musée de Montmartre, jardins Renoir, 15 mars – 8 septembre 2019.

Exhibitions

- 2016 PARIS : *Georges Dorignac, dessins rouges et noirs*, Galerie Malaquais, Paris, 31 mars – 21 mai 2016, n°37.
- 2016-2017 ROUBAIX-BORDEAUX : *Georges Dorignac (1879-1925), le trait sculpté*, Roubaix, La Piscine – musée d'art et d'industrie André Diligent, 19 novembre 2016 – 5 mars 2017, Bordeaux, musée des Beaux-Arts, 18 mai – 17 septembre 2017, n°44.

The charged expression and powerful treatment of the *Stevedore* clearly demonstrates Georges Dorignac's distinctly innovative drawing style; it is in his drawings that he excels and expresses his creative freedom. His most remarkable pieces are the large red and black works on paper from the years 1911 to 1914.[1] The artist was then living with his family at La Ruche in Montparnasse. Using dense, thick, monochromatic pigments, he created powerful, compacted forms that filled the entire sheet of paper. The contrasts are violent; the forms, expressive. Creating a play of light between traces of raw paper and the thickness of the black pigment, Dorignac "modeled" the surface of the sheet. The resulting volume caused Paul Fierens to comment: "It's surprising that Dorignac didn't try his hand at sculpture."[2]

Critics and other artists had already noticed the "sculptural" aspect of his drawings. Rodin said, "Dorignac sculpts his drawings,"[3] and André Salmon[4] remarked, "I imagine that, though perhaps hesitant, he was tempted by sculpture." Jean-Gabriel Lemoine wrote of "(…) studies of heads, studies of nudes, with exceptionly intense expressions and almost sculpted in the black pigment."[5] And an anonymous visitor to the exhibition at the Marcel Bernheim Gallery in 1928 said of Dorignac's drawings that they "are constructed and modeled with such a science of volumes that you'd say that they were sculpted from a block of precious black material."[6]

In the *Stevedore*, this black material creates a play of light like that across the somber patina of a bronze.

Dorignac was drawn to realistic subjects taken from the daily tasks of working people. During this period, he produced dozens of drawings that captured the gestures of men and women at work—peasants, haulers, miners, etc. He often returned to the figure of the stevedore. This quai-side worker loads and unloads ships, dealing with all sorts of merchandise. Here, the head alone is enough to express all the stress and strain of the profession. Shown in extreme close-up and occupying the whole of this large sheet of paper, its presence is striking.

The face, under its hood, as if in a shroud, with its resigned expression and thick features rendered in strokes of charcoal, evokes Fayoum mummy

portraits. These effigies of ancient Roman Egypt (1st through 3rd centuries) are the oldest painted portraits ever discovered. They were painted on wooden panels based on a preliminary sketch in red or black—a fascinating parallel with Dorignac's large drawings from this period, which are monochrome red when done in sanguine, or black, like this one.

In addition, the strong contrasts, which are the result of a mixed technique using black pencil and perhaps an oilier lithographic pencil with a yellow-gold wash in the background, combined with the thick features, create an expressionist feeling that evokes stress and pain. There's a clear connection here with the art of Soutine, whom he met at La Ruche and whose portrait he painted in the same style.

Like Dorignac's other powerful black drawings, the *Stevedore*, with its strident physical presence cannot but fascinate the viewer.

Some of Dorignac's large red and black drawings are held in French public collections, notably those of the Centre Pompidou-musée national d'art moderne and the Beaux-Arts Museum in Bordeaux, but neither of those includes a portrait drawing. And yet it's a particularly well-represented theme in this body of extraordinary drawings. Futhermore, the artist's works are rare in foreign collections, though there is a beautiful charcoal portrait of a woman in the collections of the Morgan Library in New York (inv. 2018.32).

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[1] This refers to the works most characteristic of these years—the monochrome drawings, whether in sanguine (red) or in black pencil or charcoal (black).
[2] Paul Fierens in 1934, cited in the *Catalogue des dessins modernes du musée de Grenoble* (*Catalogue of the Modern Drawings in the Museum of Grenoble*), éditions des musées nationaux, Palais du Louvre, Paris, 1963.
[3] Remark noted by Gaston Meunier du Houssoy in his "Essay on Dorignac," letter to Jean-Gabriel Lemoine of November 16, 1955 (archives of the Beaux-Arts Museum of Bordeaux).
[4] André Salmon, "Le Salon d'automne," *Montjoie*, n°11 and 12, November-December 1913, pp. 1-9.
[5] 1920, Lemoine.
[6] Anonymous, "Le carnet d'un curieux, Galerie Marcel Bernheim," ("A Curious Person's Notebook, Marcel Bernheim Gallery"), *La Renaissance*, n°7, July 1928, pp. 317-318.