



RENÉ BABIN (1919-1997)

The Pomegranate

Terra-cotta proof, n°1/8

Signed: R. Babin

H. 79, W. 35, D. 42 cm

Provenance

- France, private collection

Bibliography

- *3 Parisskulptörer*, Stockholm, Färg och Form, April 24 - May 22, 1970, repr. (probably in bronze; number unknown; probably 79 cm high)
- *Hommage à Auguste Renoir et à Marcel Gimond*, Maisons Alfort, Town Hall, May 12 - 30, 1971, repr.
- *Barbonval 89, exposition de quatre sculpteurs (exhibition of four sculptors)*, Barbonval, church, 1989, p.9, repr. (probably in bronze; number unknown; probably 79 cm high.)
- Patrice Dubois, *René Babin*, Paris, Assurances Axa, avenue Matignon, October - November 2001, p. 2, repr. (bronze with gold patina; number 1/8; H. 20 cm)

"We cannot feel other than a profound emotion when finding ourselves before the art of René Babin. / The power of the silence, the equilibrium, the light, and the tenderness that radiates from the work inundates us with its vibrations, appealing to our thirst for beauty. The rhythm of each of his sculptures, of each of his drawings, harmonizes with the rhythm of life and creates, in the words of Pierre Vintéjoux, "that shiver with which he infused his works." / (...) René

Babin drinks from the very well of his soul, which, in such moments, becomes the source of true inspiration, and is in no way separated from the universal soul. / And our emotion is complete—that's the great lesson, as we realize that René Babin's humility is as great as the beauty of his creation."[\[1\]](#)

I / Genesis and Diffusion

In his youth, René Babin visited the studio of the art founder Auguste Giannini. This decisive encounter influenced the career of the young boy; in 1935, he entered the studio of the sculptor Robert Wlérick (1882-1944) at the École supérieure des arts appliqués Duperré (The Duperré Advanced School of Applied Arts) in Paris. There he met Jean Carton (1912-1988), Simon Goldberg (1913-1885), and Raymond Martin (1910-1992). He stayed there for three years, then continued his studies in the studio of Charles Malfray (1887-1940), where he was assigned the evening drawing courses from 1934 on, which had a very strong influence on his art.

The Pomegranate presents the form of a naked woman, seated and angled slightly forward. With a straight back and her left leg folded up against her chest, she holds her right foot with her right hand in such a way as to present it directly to the viewer.

As far as is currently known, there is only one other terra-cotta proof of *The Pomegranate* (numbered 2/8). This terra-cotta version was based on the stone version (location unknown), as was the edition in bronze. One of the bronze proofs (with a gold patina) of *The Pomegranate* was bought by the State by decree on August 24, 1977, and, by degree on September 24, 1985, was placed in the holdings of the Minister of Defense in the apartment of General Saulnier (Inv. [FNAC 9997](#).)[\[2\]](#) That bronze proof was probably cast from the same mold as our terra-cotta proof, which was made off of the original stone sculpture. Molds of this sort, based on stone, were used for other sculptures by René Babin, most notably for the 1969 *La Dormeuse (The Sleeper)*.

There are also additional versions of *The Pomegranate*; for instance, there's a model that's slightly different and a little bit smaller (20 cm high). The proportions of the body are much less massive, the facial features are more delicate, and the figure overall is less detailed. The young woman's two legs, as well as the arm that holds the foot, are less differentiated and tend to blend into a single, almost spherical, form, reminiscent of the round, succulent fruit. A bronze proof with a gold patina from this edition was shown in the retrospective exhibition titled *René Babin*, which was organized in 2001 by the Axa Insurance Company in Paris in the avenue Matignon.[\[3\]](#)

II / The Meaning and the Form

René Babin's sculpture focused on the forms and the poses that the female body could adopt. In 1992, during a radio interview on the occasion of the retrospective of his works at the Taylor Foundation, Babin remarked, "My project is form: woman in all her diverse postures and many motifs."[\[4\]](#)

In *The Pomegranate*, subject matter is subservient to form. The artist began working with this approach in the early 1950s, with *Femme assise pensive* (*Pensive Seated Woman*) and *Femme nue assise à la Michel-Ange* (*Naked Woman Seated in the Style of Michelangelo*). In both cases, the sculptor was less interested in creating a portrait of his young model than he was in exploring the pose and its aesthetic rhythms.

He continued these explorations in the figure titled *La Chanson Douce* (*The Sweet Song*) in 1953, which falls perfectly into a parallelepiped. That was the first time that the motif of a woman holding her foot appeared in Babin's work, and he used it again in *The Pomegranate*.

Like *La Chanson Douce*, the figure here is entirely contained within a cube, evoking a solid block of stone. The young's woman's features are sketched in, stylized, and the highly feminine figure is voluptuous, which was the sculptor's way of making a reference to the exotic fruit that gives the work its title. "Like the masters that he most admired, both Romanesque and Gothic, René Babin was versed in the art of blocking out his figures in simple planes that are at once the most expressive and the most direct. Seated with her foot in her hand in a pose that heightens the power of its sculpted fluidity, *The Pomegranate*, as he chose to call this work, is like the splendid fruit itself on the point of bursting open. Her turbulent bust, in its wild ripeness, seems to emanate a spiciness from its amply full forms."[\[5\]](#)

In this compacted figure, folded in on itself, Babin appropriated a composition emblematic of the sculpture of the beginning of the 20th century. Another stone cutter also worked in this primitive style: André Derain, with his 1907 *Homme accroupi* (*Crouching Man*). But ample feminine forms such as those of *The Pomegranate* are reminiscent above all of Charles Malfray's[\[6\]](#) *Silence*, a sculpture that he did during the war, between 1916 and 1918. That work is an allegorical portrait of a soldier in the trenches. The back of the man is integrated into a rock, which amplifies the sensations of agony and suffocation inflicted upon the man by the horrors of the war. Though *The Pomegranate* belongs to the tradition of 20th century crouching figures, it occupies, nonetheless, a completely different emotional dimension from that of the anxiety and unease expressed by the others, for *The Pomegranate* is not closed in on herself. Her face is raised, and she offers herself to the world, smiling and mysterious, voluptuous and enigmatic.

GALERIE MALAQUAIS
sculptures & dessins

[1] Simone Veliot, *René Babin: Sculptures, Dessins, Aquarelles (Sculptures, Drawings, Watercolors)*, Salon de la Rose-Croix A. M. O. R. C., Paris, November 15 - December 29, 1984.

[2] René Babin, *La Grenade*, c. 1977, bronze proof, numbered 1/8, 83 x 44 x 35 cm, Inv. FNAC 9997.

[3] René Babin, *La Grenade*, bronze, lost wax cast, gold patina, signed and numbered 1/8 on the right side of the base, founder's stamp on the inside, Valsuani, H. 20 cm, in Patrice Dubois, *René Babin*, Paris, Assurances Axa, avenue Matignon, October - November 2001, p. 2.

[4] René Babin, Philippe Lejeune, broadcast on November 10, 1992 on Radio Courtoisie.

[5] Patrice Dubois, *René Babin*, Paris, Assurances Axa, avenue Matignon, October - November, 2001, p. 2.

[6] Charles Malfray, *Le Silence*, 1918, plaster, inscribed on the side: Ch. M., 29 x 19 x 18 cm, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne, Inv. AM 938 S.