



CHARLES MALFRAY (1887-1940)

The Silence, known as The Ball

Terra cotta (version with rock)

Signed: Ch. M

H. 9, W. 6.5, D. 5.5 cm

Provenance

- Switzerland, private collection

Bibliography

- Jacques Laprade, *Malfray*, Paris, éd. Fernand Mourlot, 1944, p.17-18.
- Jean Cassou, Bernard Dorival et Geneviève Homolle, *Catalogue guide du Musée National d'Art Moderne de Paris*, Paris, Editions des Musées Nationaux, 1954, p. 201-202, repr. (plaster)
- Charles Kunstler, *La sculpture contemporaine de 1900 à 1960*, Paris, Edition de l'Illustration, 1961, planche 26, repr. (plaster, H. 30 cm)
- Françoise Galle, *Catalogue raisonné des sculptures de Charles Malfray*, DESS thesis, université de Paris I, directed by Robert Julien, 1971, n°26, 27, 28, 29, 30.
- *Hommage à Humblot et Malfray*, Romorantin-Lanthenay, Bibliothèque municipale, May 17 to June1 1980.

Exhibitions of the model

- *Charles Malfray*, Paris, musée du Petit-Palais, juin 1947, n°7 (plaster, H. 31 cm), n°8 (bronze, H. 7 cm), n°9 (bronze, H. 55 cm), repr.
- *Charles Malfray 1887-1940*, Paris, Galerie Edmond Guérin, February 16 to March 31, 1948, n°9 (bronze, H. 55 cm, 1/8), n°25 (bronze, H. 31 cm, 1/8), n°47 (bronze, H. 7 cm, 1/8), n°53 (plaster, H. 85 cm).
- *Charles Malfray 1887-1940*, London, Marlborough Gallery, September-October 1951, n°1 (bronze, H. 31 cm).
- *Formes Humaines*, deuxième biennale de sculpture contemporaine, Paris, musée Rodin, April 29 to May 30, 1966, n°3 (bronze, H. 55 cm), repr.
- *Hommage à Charles Malfray*, Orléans, musée des Beaux-Arts, September 2 to October 9, 1967, n°2 (bronze, H. 60 cm).
- *Hommage aux amis des musées d'Orléans, Trente ans de dons (Homage to the Friends of the Museums of Orléans, Thirty Years of Gifts)*, 1972-2002, Orléans, musée des Beaux-Arts, 2002, n°29 (bronze, H. 40 cm, E.A.2).

- ***Charles Malfray, Parçay-les-Pins, musée Jules Desbois, June 10 to November 1, 2006, p. 8-9 (bronze, H. 9cm), repr.***

The Silence, a work born out of 1914-18

In 1914, Charles Malfray entered the army as a member of the artillery at Nancy and fought in the trenches. In several texts, including notebooks written at the front, the sculptor describes the horror that the soldiers suffered: "No more personalities, just two lines of trenches across hundreds of kilometers; silence and solitude when the bombs weren't falling, and hell when they were."
[\[1\]](#)

It was during this difficult time that Malfray sculpted the first version of his *Silence* in a small block of wood[\[2\]](#) that he used to keep medicines in. "The story goes that the artist always carried with him or had near him, like a talisman, the first draft, today lost, of this statuette."[\[3\]](#)

At the end of the war, in July 1918, terribly weak from the numerous gas attacks that he'd suffered, Malfray went to a sanatorium in Larressore (in the eastern Pyrenees) to recover. While convalescing, he created a version of *The Silence* in clay about 10 cm high. Based on this clay model, Malfray did an edition of a version with a rock and one without a rock. The version with the rock may be the result of an "accident" that occurred when the work was taken out of its multi-piece mold; Malfray may have realized that the material that had overflowed behind the figure created a kind of wall that reminded him of the

dirt walls of the trenches against which the soldiers sheltered during attacks.

The two small versions of *The Silence*, with and without the rock, were editioned in terra cotta and in bronze. The exact number of the version in terra cotta is not known; it's possible that Malfray directed the production himself and that it was not done after his death. For instance, his correspondence with his friend, the sculptor René Andréi (1906-1987) shows that he wanted to edition his figure *Printemps (Spring)* (1936) in terra cotta, and in a smaller.

After Malfray's death, the version of *The Silence* without the rock was enlarged to 40 cm for an edition in bronze. The version with the rock was also posthumously editioned in bronze, enlarged to both 30 and 50 cm. An example in plaster of *The Silence* (30 cm, with the rock) is held in the collections of the National Museum of Modern Art in Paris ([Inv. AM 938 S](#)), and a bronze (40 cm, without the rock) is in the collections of the Fine Arts Museum in Orléans (Inv. 998-18-1).

***The Silence*, a modern portrait of the wounds of the Great War**

The Silence is different from other works by Malfray that address the war. While works such as *La Gloire couronnant le Soldat (Glory Crowning the Soldier)* (Orléans, Monument to the Dead, 1922-1929) and *La traversée de la Marne (Crossing the Marne)* (1916) are based on allegories or scenes observed, in *The Silence*, it's the symbolism that is most important. In its austerity, this body crouching over into itself, trying to protect itself, is a powerful evocation of the unleashed violence, the deafening noise, and the isolation that each of the fighters felt in the face of the imminent danger of death. The sculptor created an accurate representation of what he had felt: great anxiety, expressed by that bodily position, and the incessant oppression of the horrors of war. Malfray expressed human drama with the same frankness as Daumier had in his relief titled *Emigrants*, which he had made around 1850.[\[4\]](#)

The figure folded in upon itself, constrained within a cube, is a recurrent theme of modernist sculpture. Notable examples include Derain's work from 1907, *Figure accroupie (Crouching Figure)* (stone, Vienna, Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, [Inv. P 45/0](#)) and Manolo's 1923 work *Femme nue accroupie (Nude Woman Crouching)* (stone, Grenoble, Modern Art Museum).

"Malfray respects the block; it's only by applying limits to his work that he can let the movement flower. Through this constraint, he strives to get more tension into the movement. The figure is presented as a unity, weighty in its suspended

volume. I first saw this mode of composition, which appears also in the figures at the base of the monument of Orléans, in a small sculpture that Malfray did in 1918, a work that he would hold caressingly in his hand as we looked over his earlier works together in his studio. He called this figure, with its arms and legs folded inward, the Ball, and with this work, he seemed to be trying to counter Bourdelle's excessive gestures."[\[5\]](#)

With a crisp economy of aesthetic means, *The Silence* offers a poignant symbolic portrait of soldiers in the trenches. The power contained in the block of this sculpture became one of Malfray's stylistic signatures. *The Silence* is, incontestably, one of Malfray's masterpieces.

[\[1\]](#) Malfray, manuscript letter on *L'Effroi*, Orléans, Documentation Center, Library of the Fine-Arts Museum.

[\[2\]](#) Dubois (1980, Romorantin-Lanthenay) speaks of a carved wooden piece. This first work has been lost.

[\[3\]](#) Eric Moinet, "Acquisitions," *Revue du Louvre. La Revue des musées de France*, #5, December, 1999, p. 87.

[\[4\]](#) Honoré Daumier (1808-1879), *Les Fugitifs* or *Les Emigrants*, 1855-1856, molded plaster after a terra-cotta original, 66 x 28, Paris, [musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration](#).

[\[5\]](#) Jacques de Laprade, *Malfray*, Fernand Mourlot Editions, Paris, 1944, p. 17-18.