



CHARLES MALFRAY (1887-1940)

Silence Seated on a Rock

Bronze proof, #1/8

Sand cast by Alexis Rudier

Founder stamp : Alexis Rudier.Fondeur.Paris

Signed and numbered : Ch. M 1/8

H. 29 cm

Provenance

- France, Private Collection

Bibliographie sélective du modèle

- 1944 LAPRADE : Jacques Laprade, *Malfray*, Paris, éd. Fernand Mourlot, 1944, p.17-18.
- 1947 CATALOGUE : *Charles Malfray*, catalogue d'exposition, Paris, musée du Petit-Palais, juin 1947, n°7 (plâtre, H. 31 cm), n°8 (bronze, H. 7 cm), n°9 (bronze, H. 55 cm), repr.
- 1948 CATALOGUE : *Charles Malfray 1887-1940*, catalogue d'exposition, Paris, Galerie Edmond Guérin, 16 février-31 mars 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 (plâtre, H. 85 cm).
- 1951 CATALOGUE : *Charles Malfray 1887-1940*, catalogue d'exposition, Londres, Marlborough Gallery, septembre-octobre 1951, n°1 (bronze, H. 31 cm).

- 1954 CATALOGUE : 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. (plâtre)
- 1961 KUNSTLER : Charles Kunstler, *La sculpture contemporaine de 1900 à 1960*, Paris, Edition de l'Illustration, 1961, planche 26, repr. (plâtre, H. 30 cm)
- 1966 CATALOGUE : *Formes Humaines*, deuxième biennale de sculpture contemporaine, catalogue d'exposition, Paris, musée Rodin, 29 avril-30 mai 1966, n°3 (bronze, H. 55 cm), repr.
- 1967 CATALOGUE : *Hommage à Charles Malfray*, catalogue d'exposition, Orléans, musée des Beaux-Arts, 2 septembre-9 octobre 1967, n°2 (bronze, H. 60 cm).
- 1971 GALLE : Françoise Galle, *Catalogue raisonné des sculptures de Charles Malfray*, mémoire de DESS, université de Paris I, direction de Robert Julien, 1971, n°26, 27, 28, 29, 30.
- 1980 DUBOIS : Patrice Dubois, « Charles Malfray (1887-1940) Sculpteur », *Hommage à Humblot et Malfray*, catalogue d'exposition, Romorantin-Lanthenay, Bibliothèque municipale, 17 mai-1^{er} juin 1980, sans pagination.
- 1999 MOINET : Eric Moinet, « Acquisitions », *Revue du Louvre. La Revue des musées de France*, n°5, décembre 1999, p. 86-87.
- 2002 CATALOGUE : *Hommage aux amis des musées d'Orléans, Trente ans de dons, 1972-2002*, catalogue d'exposition, Orléans, musée des Beaux-Arts, 2002, n°29 (bronze, H. 40 cm, E.A.2).
- 2006 CATALOGUE : *Charles Malfray*, catalogue d'exposition, Parçay-les-Pins, musée Jules Desbois, 10 juin-1^{er} novembre 2006, p. 8-9 (bronze, H. 9cm), repr.

I/ *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).

II/ *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.

[\[2\]](#) 1980 DUBOIS: The author speaks of a carved wooden piece. This first work has been lost.

[\[3\]](#) 1999 MOINET, 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](#).

[\[5\]](#) 1944 LAPARADE, p. 17-18.