



JANE POUPELET (1874-1932)

Donkey Foal Three Weeks Old

Bronze Proof, unnumbered

Sand cast, unknown founder

Signed: POUPELET

Underneath: fragment of a label from the Galerie Simon?

20.7 x 16 x 6 cm

Provenance

- France, Galerie Simon ?
- United States, Private collection

Bibliographie sélective

- 1924 MARTINIE : Henri Martinie, « Jane Poupelet », *Art et décoration*, éditions Albert Lévy, Paris, septembre 1924, repr. p. 91.
- 1928 CATALOGUE EXPOSITION : *Jane Poupelet Dessins et Sculptures*, Paris, Galerie Bernier (24 janvier-11 février), Girard Binino, Paris, 1928.
- 1930 KUNSTLER : Charles Kunstler, *Jane Poupelet*, Paris, Éditions G. Crès & Cie, 1930.
- 1938 CATALOGUE EXPOSITION : *Jane Poupelet sculpteur (1878-1932)*, Paris, Galerie Bernier (6 mai-24 mai), 1938.
- 1973 WAPLER : Vincent-Fabian Wapler, *Jane Poupelet sculpteur 1878-1932*, mémoire de maîtrise présenté sous la direction de Monsieur Souchal Professeur d'histoire de l'art en mai 1973, faculté des lettres et sciences humaines de Lille III, n°32, p. 136-145.

- 1982 BOURDANTON : Pierrette Bourdanton, « Pour un hommage au grand sculpteur Jane Poupelet », *Revue des Artistes Français*, janvier 1982, repr, p. 9.
- 1999 KAUFMANN-GARCHER : Fabienne Kaufmann-Garcher, « Les sculpteurs et l'animal dans l'art du XXe siècle », in *Les cahiers de la sculpture*, avril-mai, juin 1999, repr., p. 60.
- 2003 ANTRI : Azzedinne Antri, « Ânon » (notice), in *Sculptures et dessins de sculpteurs de la première moitié du XXe siècle Collection du musée national des Beaux-Arts d'Alger*, catalogue d'exposition, Mont-de-Marsan, musée Despiau-Wlérick (4 octobre - 14 décembre 2003), 2003, repr, p.75.
- 2005 RIVIÈRE : Anne Rivière, « Jane Poupelet 1874-1932 « La beauté dans la simplicité » », in *Jane Poupelet (1874-1932)*, catalogue d'exposition, Roubaix, La Piscine - musée d'art et industrie André Diligent (15 octobre 2005- 15 janvier 2006) ; Bordeaux, musée des Beaux-Arts (24 février - 4 juin 2006) ; Mont-de-Marsan, musée Despiau-Wlérick (24 juin - 2 octobre 2006), Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 2005.
- 2006 BIÉTRY-RIVIERRE : Éric Biétry-Rivierre, « Les courbes vraies de mademoiselle Poupelet », in *Le Figaro*, jeudi 5 janvier 2006, repr., p. 31
- 2017 RIVIÈRE : Anne Rivière, *Dictionnaire des sculptrices*, Paris, mare & martin, 2017.

Having studied at the École des Beaux-Arts in Bordeaux, Jane Poupelet was extremely well-versed in the works of masters from previous centuries, be they European, Japanese, or Egyptian. Among her contemporaries, she spent a lot of time with Lucien Schnegg and his friends and became one of the “Bande à Schnegg.” With Charles Despiau, she was one of the principal ambassadors of the purified style of smooth forms inherited from the Greco-Roman tradition, which broke from Rodin’s more agitated art.

Early on in her career, Jane Poupelet developed a bestiary of domestic and farm animals. She sketched cats, chickens, cows, donkeys, and rabbits from life. She observed animals as they moved and sought out the postures that interested her. In the course of the year 1906, she moved away from naturalism and anecdote, creating distilled, timeless forms from the immediacy of movement. [\[1\]](#) Working from nature allowed her to make sculpted forms that were precise and exact. “I make a sketch in clay in front of the animal or model. Then I work on the plaster; I add, I subtract, I simplify...” she said.[\[2\]](#)

The figure of the small *Donkey Foal* is typical of this kind of work. Completely free of embellishment or anecdotal detail, the animal is depicted in its purest form, with clean, taut lines and highly architectural planes. It is a universal representation of the animal in the manner of the Egyptians. It is no longer “the portrait of a specific animal, but rather the synthesis of a species. The generic features are direct and well-defined, and the being’s movement is shown

through a scientific study of its bone structure. With its attitude of absolute verisimilitude, the statuette is raised to the status of a definitive effigy.”[3] Poupelet confers a nobility on her humble subject, though she doesn’t think in terms of subjects, and even less in terms of a “hierarchy of genres.” “For her, the subject is life.”[4]

At the beginning, the figure of the young donkey was part of a group that she sculpted in plaster around 1907, titled *Ânesse et son petit* (*The Donkey and Her Foal*). That work has disappeared; only a photograph of it remains.[5] Later, as she had done with another sculpted group, *Paysan conduisant sa vache* (*Peasant Driving His Cow*), the artist separated the figure from the group to give it its full force. “The foal on its own would become one of her most popular works.”[6] In 1907, she showed it at the Salon de la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts with other animal pieces and at the Salon d’Automne.[7] Collectors of bronze animal works quickly became interested in Poupelet’s sculptures, and *The Donkey Foal* was often shown. It was presented again at the Salon de la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts in 1914,[8] and in 1916, it appeared in an article in *Current Opinion* on the occasion of the artist’s exhibition at the Goupil Gallery in New York.

Even though she occupies a very singular place, Jane Poupelet is part of the current that marks the revival of animal art at the beginning of the 20th century. Breaking from the romantic spirit of the *animaliers* of the 19th century, such as Mène and Barye, the artists of the early 20th century were, above all, interested in the animal’s pure form, its anatomy. Throughout the first decades of the century, exhibitions devoted solely to animal art attest to the revival of the genre. They included works by Rembrandt Bugatti, Paul Troubetzkoi, and the group known as “The Sandoz Group of Animal Sculptors,” Armand Petersen, Georges Lucien Guyot, and Georges Hilbert among them. Jane Poupelet remained on the margins of these activities and only once participated in an exhibition by the group, in 1920-21 at the Galerie Barbazanges at 109 Boulevard Saint-Honoré.[9] On the other hand, *The Donkey Foal* was again shown in Paris, first in 1925 at the Galerie Durand-Ruel[10] and then in June 1926 at the Galerie Briant-Robert,[11] followed by a presentation in New York in 1928; it was featured on the invitation to the artist’s solo show at the Montross Gallery in April and May.

At the beginning of the 1930s, Poupelet and François Pompon formed a new association of *animaliers*. *Le groupe des XII* (The Group of XII) included, among others, the drawer Paul Jouve, the sculptors Charles Artus, Georges Lucien Guyot, Georges Hilbert, and Berthe Martinie, and the painter Gaston Chopard. Their first exhibition was held in May of 1932 at Ruhlmann’s (27 rue de Lisbonne). Jane Poupelet, who was already ill at the time, presented a copy of

The Donkey Foal at that show.^[12] The association came to an end after the second exhibition because of the deaths of its two founders.

Today, eight copies of *The Donkey Foal Three Weeks Old* are known, in addition to the one discussed here. Three are in private collections and are included in the summary catalogue of the artist's work established by Anne Rivière in 2005.

^[13] The five others are in public collections:

—The first is in the fine arts museum of Algiers (inv. IG 776, acquired in 1928).

—The second is in the Museum of Art and Industry André Diligent-La Piscine in Roubaix (inv. D994-4-4, a gift of Poupelet-La Gauterie, 1934, lent by the National Museum of Modern Art in Paris, 1994).^[14]

—The third is in the Périgord Museum in Périgueux (inv. 2198-48.1.16, a gift of the departmental committee of the Liberation of the Dordogne, 1948).

—The fourth is in the Musée d'Orsay in Paris (inv. RF 3401, legacy of Charles Kunstler, 1978).^[15]

—The fifth is in the Despiau-Wlérick Museum in Mont-de-Marsan (inv. MM 2012.3.2, acquired in 2012).

^[1] 2005 RIVIÈRE, p. 37.

^[2] 2005 RIVIÈRE, p. 40.

^[3] Maurice Guillemot, "Jane Poupelet," *Art et Décoration*, December 1913, n°12, p.56.

^[4] 1930 KUNSTLER, p.7.

^[5] 2005 RIVIÈRE, p.39.

^[6] 2005 RIVIÈRE, p.38.

^[7] 2005 RIVIÈRE, p.143.

^[8] 2005 RIVIÈRE, p.144.

^[9] Anonymous, "Exposition de sculpture française," *Chronique des Arts*, January 1921.

^[10] This "tri-national exhibition" then went to London and New York. See Rivière, 2005, p. 145.

^[11] 2005 RIVIÈRE, p. 145.

^[12] T.S., "Art et Curiosité Le groupe des Douze," in *Le Temps*, April 21, 1932.

^[13] 2005 RIVIÈRE, cat. 120, 121, and 123 p. 104-105.

^[14] 2005 RIVIÈRE, cat. 119, p. 104.

^[15] 2005 RIVIÈRE, cat. 122, p. 105.