# PAUL JEANNENEY

## PÉLICAN

Toad and fantastic bestiary or «The Pelican»

Green, red, brown and black grey enamelled stoneware.

H: 130 cm, L : 70 cm, D : 80 cm

Lifetime piece signed «Jeanneney» dated «1900», inscribed in the clay underneath « Lion Emile » (practioneer of Jeanneney), restoration report available.

Kilned in 1900

Provenance :

After death sale of P. Jeanneney from May 15th to 23rd in 1921, titled "Le Pélican" on its original wooden base (1921)



This stoneware by Paul Jeanneney (1861-1920), Phénix, toad and fantastic bestiary (1900) in a spirit of Gothic revival, is one of the largest group known by us in ceramics and stoneware1. It far exceeds Rhinocéros Noir by Armand Petersen (large model) (circa 1938) and Autruches by Gaston Le Bourgeois (1928), both in stoneware from the Sèvres Manufacture. And, apart from Emmanuel Frémiet and Georges Gardet (Animaux fantastiques at Pierrefonds and Chat et Canard...), in smaller animals or groups, the ceramic corpus of the industrial editor Emile Muller mainly includes architectural decorations and figures.

Stoneware is a plastic, resistant and colorfast material, the best for modelling large sculptural pieces that we only hope won't collapse on themselves before or during firing, and that won't break either during the magical but dreaded firing process: Vita per ignem3 ! That's what defines the passion of the ceramists of the time, of whom Jean Carriès, Ernest Chaplet, Pierre-Adrien Dalpeyrat, Paul Jeanneney and Edmond Lachenal were the main representatives... A "Vouloir-Faire" that kept European ceramics in competition from the last third of the 19th century until the Second World War, against a backdrop of artistic rivalries at Universal Exhibitions.

For example, the Musée de la Manufacture de Sèvres holds Jules Dalou's large vase decorated with low-reliefs, l'Âge d'Or de l'Humanité (1888), while the Petit Palais holds Jean Cros' Vase (les métaux) from 1897. Paul Jeanneney's sculpture appears here as a successful tour de force, which he repeated with Gargouille tenant un lézard et crapaud in the same year, the representation of a true ceramic ronde-bosse in dimensions well in excess of a metre - and not a simple turning-vase job.

The name of this original artist, who could be seen as a worthy successor to Bernard Palissy, is linked to sculpture through two other artists, Jean Carriès (1855-1894), whose close friend he was until his death, and Auguste Rodin (1840-1917), for whom he produced two medium-sized models in stoneware4 , the Buste de Jean d'Aire and a monumental Tête Balzac.

Born in Strasbourg on August 6th, 1881 in a wealthy family, Paul Jeanneney passed the École Centrale de Paris entrance exam5 in his twenties, returning to Strasbourg for four years to train as a ceramist. In 1889, he moved to Paris in a studio in the Cité Fleurie at 65 boulevard Arago6, where he met Jean Carriès, becoming his pupil, friend and collector. It was after the death of his mentor that his career exploded when, in 1898, he bought the château at Saint-Amand en Puisaye, a town in the middle of the ceramics region famous for its earthenware practice from the 14th century. Jeanneney set up his kilns there and declared himself as a Master Potter: he would spend the rest of his life there. Two years later, he produced his two masterpieces, ours, Phénix crapaud et bestiaire fantastique in his usual shades and glazes, and the second, which owes more to Carriès in theme, style and the wet-like modelling of the material, Gargouille tenant un lézard et crapaud – perhaps a tribute to his Master who died in 1894.

Already exceptional for its dimensions in this material, and for its rarity which is its corollary, this sculpture is also exceptional for its presence: at just three feet tall, which is far from gigantic, it impresses with its primitive power, almost reminiscent of direct modelling, and with its monumentality, which makes it occupy space with astonishing energy... It almost rises from the towers of Notre-Dame in Paris ! Whether it's the right inner dimensions or the hidden grandeur of things, this monumentality, the fourth architectural dimension of sculpture, is not given to every artist. It is innate in Antiquity, found in the great Italians Masters of the past, more notable in Michelangelo than in Gian Lorenzo Bernini,

and in the last two centuries, it has become rare, but it is particularly strong in Antoine-Louis Barye, Emile Antoine Bourdelle, Aristide Maillol, and in this piece by Paul Jeanneney.

Signed and dated "Jeanneney 1900", the group was produced in the chateau's kilns and a second example adorned the Gate to the Lion's pottery studio, with its counterpart, as seen on an old postcard. Then, after the artist's death in 1921, it was reproduced in the small booklet of his after death sales of May 1921 on its present oak base and described as "Le Pélican, grès flammé par Jeanneney, reproduction d'après les gargouilles de Notre-Dame de Paris".

Auctioned in situ in the château during a series of sales over eight days, they were acquired by the ancestors of the last owners of a large property in Puisaye, which in turn became a ceramics center, where they were kept until their acquisition by the Gallery. The very long sale in a remote location, the description in the catalog and the reserved nature of the sculptor who, unlike Carriès, rarely showed his works in Paris, explain why these two masterpieces of ceramic sculpture have remained unknown, virtually disappearing from their village of creation since they were made.

For over 120 years, to our knowledge, they have never been photographed, exhibited or catalogued. The first reproduction and description are that of the small 13-page booklet whose advertisement is reproduced above.

**PAUL JEANNENEY, AUGUSTE RODIN AND STONEWARE**

Paul Jeanneney became, for Rodin only, the artist's craftsman: the Meudon Master, who was approaching sixty in full glory, was always attentive to new trends and innovations in art, and stoneware was one of them.

The ceramist may have been acquainted with Rodin through multiple ways and at different times, but what seems certain is that by 1900, the same year as our Phénix, the ceramic connection had already been made for another major stoneware piece, the monumental Jean d'Aire, vêtu.

This shows for this lonely practitioneer a level of excellence and efficiency, of which his training at Centrale must not be absent, because it is not far from being one of the largest stoneware figure ever made that we know. It is then interesting to read a passage from a letter of Jeanneney to Rodin in 1904:

"I have just kilned an example of the great Bourgeois of Calais, it is a beautiful black enamel with green spots, there is a small accident: a slight slit in a fold of shirt"

then, further which shows the complexion of the work :

"I stamped two examples of the Bourgeois : I would have liked to kiln them last Fall, so that you could choose one, before

sending the other to Saint-Louis [for an American exhibition where Jeanneney hoped for a gold medal for this piece]; but the drying lasted five months. The second example is not even dry yet, and I will only be able to kiln it in a month."

And finally his feeling about the piece in July 1905:

"if it is not sold in Liège [expected sale to an American museum] I will have it shipped to Paris, and if you like it, you will keep it. It's the only one that exists. Before I break the mold, I'll make one for myself. There will never be others, and for good reason: we can not imagine the difficulties involved in stamping, demoulding, drying and kilning of this fragile piece; just stuff! And that of anxiety..."

And all this work, these researches and these tests, to more than 150 km of the French Capital and in 1900, year of Universal Exhibition where the three mentioned pieces could have been presented.

(1) An other example, as we can see on an old postcard, still existing.

**Literature:**

BOURNET, Maître. *Catalogue des Objets d'Art et d'ameublement. Tableaux Moderns (...) provenant de la collection de M. Jeanneney (...) au Château de Saint Amand en Puisaye*, 1921.

SIMIER Amélie (dir.) *Jean Carriès. La matière de l'étrange*, catalogue de l'exposition (Paris, Petit Palais, Octobre 2007-janvier 2008). Paris: Paris musées, 2007.