

## JAMES PRADIER

### DANAÏDE (1850)

(Drapé impudique, variant of plâtre) (1850)

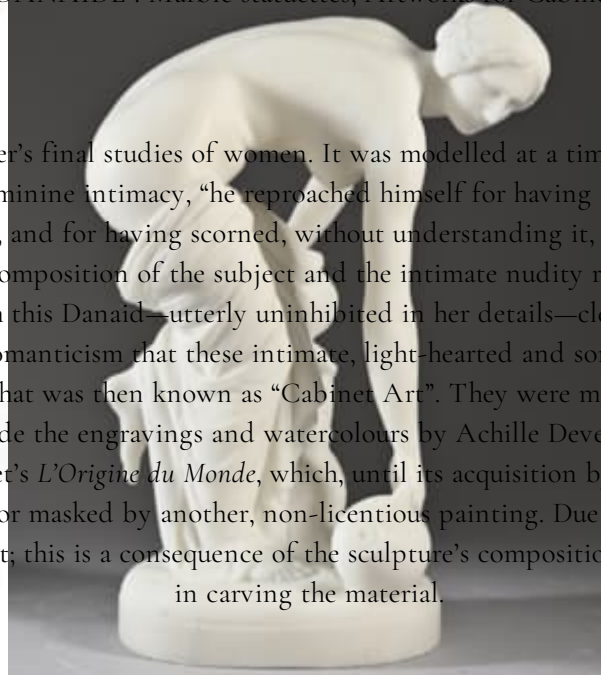
Probably for a private commission

White marble

H. 32,3 cm L. 20,4 cm D. 19,9 cm

Lifetime or posthumous example signed "J. Pradier", fine and detailed carve, by or finished by "E. Lequesne" (1815-1887), favourite pupil and assistant of the sculptor in the ultimate years : very rare in this quality of carving and material.

Circa (1850-1855) - before 1887.



La Danaïde (1850) is one of Pradier's final studies of women. It was modelled at a time when, comparing his earlier work with his new explorations into feminine intimacy, "he reproached himself for having sought only the banal reproduction of overripe fruit or plucked roses, and for having scorned, without understanding it, the poetry of the green fruit or the rosebud"[1]. Here, through the composition of the subject and the intimate nudity revealed in the marble by a subtle eroticism, we find ourselves, with this Danaïd—utterly uninhibited in her details—clearly within the new category. It is one of the characteristics of Romanticism that these intimate, light-hearted and sometimes mischievous works were circulated discreetly; this was what was then known as "Cabinet Art". They were meant to be viewed in very private company; notable examples include the engravings and watercolours by Achille Deveria and Paul Gavarni, but the most famous of these is Gustave Courbet's *L'Origine du Monde*, which, until its acquisition by the Musée d'Orsay, was concealed from view, hidden behind a cloth or masked by another, non-licentious painting. Due to its composition, Pradier's marble sculpture requires no concealment; this is a consequence of the sculpture's composition, the artist's delicacy and his skill in carving the material.

This virtuosity is clearly evident here in the delicate carving details, the satiny skin tones, the full curves of the chest and the supple contours of this Danaïd's abdomen, as she fills her pierced jar in an endless gesture[2]. To our knowledge, given its treatment, it is one of the most "daring" subjects produced by one of the great sculptors of the 19th century, and by Pradier, including the original plaster cast of *Satyre et Bacchante* (1830) held at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lille.

[1] Jules Salmson, *Entre deux coups de ciseau*, Paris, A. Lemerre éditeur, 1892, p. 192.

[2] The daughter of King Danaos, the Danaïd is condemned for having murdered her husband on their wedding night on her father's orders, and must endure the eternal torment in the Underworld of filling a leaky barrel. This absurd punishment symbolises infinite penance and the futility of the endeavour. But above all, this mythological subject allows Pradier to explore the female nude through a pose combining fatigue and resignation: she thus remains the universal allegory of an exhausting and endless task.

3 Examples of the Danaïde are sometimes stamped with Salvatore Marchi's mark, with the oldest bearing the date 1852.

4 *Satyre et Bacchante*, a few examples; *The Trois Graces*, including the example owned by Ludwig II of Bavaria, followed by *Femme mettant ses bas*, *Odalisque*, *Pandora* (1855) and *Toilette d'Atalante*.