

ALFRED BOUCHER

L'HISTOIRE NUE

Against a wall

White marble

H : 104,5 cm, L : 46,4 cm, D : 27 cm

Provenance : former artist collection in his property at Aix-les-Bains, purchased in 1943 by the grandfather of the previous owners of the Villa; UDB collection - only two examples currently identified including this one.

Avant 1934



Alfred Boucher was born in 1850 in a village near Nogent-sur-Seine. He was introduced to sculpture by Marius Ramus, for whom his father worked as a gardener. Ramus soon introduced his young protégé to another sculptor from Nogent, Paul Dubois. Thanks to Dubois, Boucher was awarded a scholarship in 1871, enabling him to enrol at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris and subsequently travel to Rome in 1877–1878. During his studies, he also met Camille Claudel in Nogent-sur-Seine and became her first sculpture master.

From 1874 onwards, Alfred Boucher exhibited at the Salon des Artistes Français, where his works caused a sensation: *Eve après la faute* (Second Class Medal, 1878), *Venus Astarte* (1880) ... With *La Piété filiale*, he won the Prize of the Salon in 1881, and the French government commissioned him to create a monumental version, which was unveiled in Nogent-sur-Seine in 1886.

It was after a further stay in Rome that he conceived his most iconic and modern works, both acquired by the French State for the Jardin du Luxembourg: *Au But* in 1886 and *À la Terre* in 1890. Among the official commissions for the City of Paris were the Monument to Eugène Flachat (1897) and *L'Inspiration* for the façade of the Grand Palais (1900).

He also played a key role in promoting young foreign talent, both painters and sculptors, by establishing La Ruche in the Vaugirard plain, offering them a roof over their heads and a creative space for a modest rent. Painters such as Chagall, Modigliani and Soutine, as well as sculptors such as Archipenko, Zadkine and Lipchitz, created their first Parisian works there.

Today, beyond his numerous commissions and official purchases, Boucher's reputation rests on his masterful carving of marble. He is known for creating direct carvings in marble and worked with craftsmen only occasionally. The French State acquired three major marble works: *Le Repos* in 1892, *La Volubilis* in 1897 for the Musée du Luxembourg, and *La Pensée* in 1907, now housed at the Musée du Petit Palais. He thus created a new world centred on the female nude, where the body is crystalline, sensual and fluid, and where the pose captures a natural movement. He was drawn to the complexity of the body's twists and turns. Against this backdrop, his subjects take on a universal dimension, exploring themes such as pain, memory and posterity...

*L'Histoire nue* forms part of this quest for an absolute of eternity. It stems from the development of *La Philosophie de l'Histoire*, a high-relief sculpture which he exhibited for the first time at the Salon in 1898. Philosophy takes the form of a naked woman, seen in profile, her youthful head gazing towards the sky, her hair loose, lying flat against the stele. In *L'Histoire nue*, the female figure becomes an author, taking a step back from the history of a man, or indeed of humanity as a whole.

Moreover, Boucher adapted the subject on two occasions to pay tribute to figures of his time whose graves are in the Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris : that of the doctor of medicine, Théodore Keller (1900), and the monument dedicated to the politician, Auguste Burdeau (1901). For these monuments, the allegorical figure writes a story for posterity on the funerary stele. Her head, positioned more horizontally, follows the movement of the stylus on the wall.

As with many of his works, the sculptor produced variations (different sizes and forms) on the same theme. In a comparable large format, the primary documentation lists only one plaster cast and one marble version of *L'Histoire nue*. The marble version, which differs from ours in having a less naturalistic stele topped by a decorative hemisphere, is

known only from a photograph dating from 1902. Our marble appears to be an almost exact reproduction of the plaster cast, which was also photographed in the artist's studio during his lifetime. This marble, which bears no dedication and is striking for its monumentality and the sensuality of the young woman's body, remains the guardian of a stele with no visible inscriptions, leaving room for our imagination and our personal history. Boucher Studio, Paris, c. 1902.

Appreciating this piece in particular, which is rendered with a sense of fluidity in high-quality marble, the sculptor decided to keep the sculpture in his villa, built in Aix-les-Bains in 1917. Following the artist's death, the buyers of the villa purchased it along with certain works that remained on the premises, including this exceptional marble piece, which has been passed down within the same family for several decades.

