

Jean Carriès
Mon Portrait



BENJAMIN PROUST

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LONDON

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"Carriès' talent is as fine as amber."
Auguste Rodin



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Jean Carriès
Lyon, 1855–Paris, 1894
Mon Portrait
Circa 1888
Patinated plaster
Height: 132 cm

Provenance Collection Charles Auzoux (1859–1922), Paris and Fontaine, Normandy
By descent until 2013

Literature A. Le Normand-Romain, *Mémoire de marbre. La sculpture funéraire en France 1804–1914*, Paris, 1995, p. 408

Exhibition *Les trésors retrouvés des ateliers d'artistes au temps de Rodin. Collection Charles Auzoux*, Paris, Le Louvre des Antiquaires, May–September 1995, number IX-9 in the catalogue, reproduced p. 35

Related literature A. Alexandre, *Carriès imagier et potier. Etude d'une oeuvre et d'une vie*, Paris, 1895
Jean-Joseph Carriès 1855–1894, exh. cat., Galerie Patrice Bellanger, Paris, 1997
Jean Carriès imagier et potier. Etude d'une oeuvre et d'une vie, Musées de la Nièvre, Etude et documents. N°4, 2001 [republishing of the biography 1895 by A. Alexandre]
A fleur de peau. Le moulage sur nature au XIXème siècle, exh. cat., Musée d'Orsay, Paris, 2001
E. Papet, 'Une autre polychromie: plâtres patinés, bronzes et sculptures céramiques de Jean Joseph Carriès', in 48/14 *La Revue du Musée d'Orsay*, N°16, Spring 2004, pp. 72–83
Jean Carriès. La matière de l'étrange, exh. cat. by A. Simier (ed.), Petit-Palais, Paris, 2007

Related versions Wax, Petit-Palais, Paris
by Carriès Plaster, Musée du Grès, Saint Amand en Puisaye
Bronze, on the artist's tomb, Cimetière du Père Lachaise, Paris

Jean Carriès

His life and work

Carriès was brought up in an orphanage from the age of six. He entered the studio of a sculptor of religious images in Lyon, before leaving for Paris in 1874. There he studied for a time with Augustin-Alexandre Dumont at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts but soon left to set up on his own. He made his début at the Salon of 1875 and a private exhibition organized by the Cercle des Arts Libéraux in 1882 signalled his rising fame. The Salon of 1892 brought recognition in the form of the cross of the Legion d'Honneur, as well as a large order from the French state. Most of his sculptural work — comprising heads and busts — was carried out between 1881 and 1888; his favourite media being plaster and wax. He also worked with bronze and in 1883 he was introduced to the lost-wax method by the founder Pierre Bingen. Carriès undoubtedly ranks among the most outstanding sculptors of the late 19th century. He left a varied and remarkable body of work which includes numerous masks, portraits of his contemporaries, historical representations — for example of Frans Hals and Diego Velázquez — as well as ideal busts full of naturalistic pathos such as his series of *The Desolate*. His choice of subjects tended to be idiosyncratic and he also created intriguing heads of babies as well as grotesque figures and fantastic animals in pottery. His sculptures are instilled with realism and intensely felt emotion; an added degree of symbolism creating a unique and fascinating output.

Carriès was variously gifted. Having attained a degree of financial independence, he was able to fulfil a long-standing desire to experiment with ceramics. From 1888 he established a studio in Saint Amand en Puisaye, a locality southeast of Paris long famous for its pottery production. His interest in enamelled stoneware originated at the Universal Exhibition held in 1878 in Paris during which he admired Japanese ceramics. He went on to produce numerous masks, both as decorative objects and architectural elements, sculptures and vases in enamelled stoneware, passionately experimenting with pigments and patinas. His most ambitious work in this medium



Jean Carriès working at the Monumental Doorway for Princesse de Scey-Montbéliard, circa 1890, col. Archives Départementales de la Nièvre.

was a monumental Symbolist doorway commissioned in 1889 by Winaretta Singer, Princesse de Scey-Montbéliard (1865-1943). Intended to adorn the room in which she kept the manuscript of Wagner's opera *Parsifal*, this aesthetically ambitious project became an exhausting struggle for Carriès and he died at the age of 39 before it was completed.

A large collection of works by the artist, including a version of his self-portrait in wax, was bequeathed to the French state by his friend and fellow ceramicist George Hoentschel (1855-1915) in 1904 and is now in the Petit Palais, Paris. Hoentschel owned an extensive and varied collection; many works that belonged to him are now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York. An exhibition dedicated to this group of works, which had been given to the Metropolitan Museum by J. Pierpont Morgan in the early twentieth century, was recently held at the Bard Graduate Center, New York.¹



Mon portrait

Carriès self-portrait

The present life-size sculpture is a striking and emphatic self-portrait. Truncated above the knees, it shows the artist standing in his working clothes, holding a statuette in one hand, a mask of a woman with closed eyes placed to his side. The statuette held by the artist has been alternatively called the Louis XIII Gentleman or Callot while the mask represents Carriès' mother who died while he was still very young and whose memory haunted him for the rest of his life. A small angel-like figure and vase with a few flower stems are placed near the mask while an owl is partly hidden on the other side. In its combination of a realist likeness with a dream-like mask and other subjective elements, the work expresses psychological tension and mysterious associations suggesting symbolist tendencies. This ambitious and complicated composition might have been intended for a decorative scheme around a well, according to the testimony of the poet and aesthete Robert de Montesquiou.²

In creating an introspective image, the artist has presented himself with a tensed, concentrated expression, his eyes focused and his brow knitted. Carriès would repeatedly interrogate his own face throughout his career. He realized several masks of himself with various miens and furrowed brows, pouting or with a broken nose, the latter likely an homage to both Michelangelo and Auguste Rodin, whose *Man with a broken nose* had been rejected at the 1864 Salon.³ He also represented himself as a warrior (*Le guerrier*, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon, patinated plaster).

Self-portraits by contemporary sculptors, such as Rodin and Camille Claudel, offer fascinating comparisons but none represented themselves on such a scale and in such a striking manner. One of the most creative self-portraitists of the period is the painter Gustave Courbet (1819–1877), who presented images of himself in particular states of mind or roles. His most intriguing and debated self-representation is the 1854 painting *Bonjour Monsieur Courbet* (Musée Fabre, Montpellier) where the artist appears somewhat lofty before his patron.



Gustave Courbet (1819–1877) *La rencontre ou "Bonjour Monsieur Courbet"*
Montpellier, Musée Fabre, inv. 868.1.23 © RMN-Grand Palais/Droits réservés

As emphasized by his working apron on the present self-portrait, Carriès envisioned himself as an artisan. Conscious of having succeeded in representing the essence of his character, he reportedly told the sculptor Pierre Bingen in front of the plaster "that day I made my monument to be placed on my tomb".⁴





Related works by Carriès

Carriès realised a work of similar composition and size in wax. Small variations between the present plaster and the wax exist, such as differences in the coat on the Callot statuette or the folds on the artist's glove.

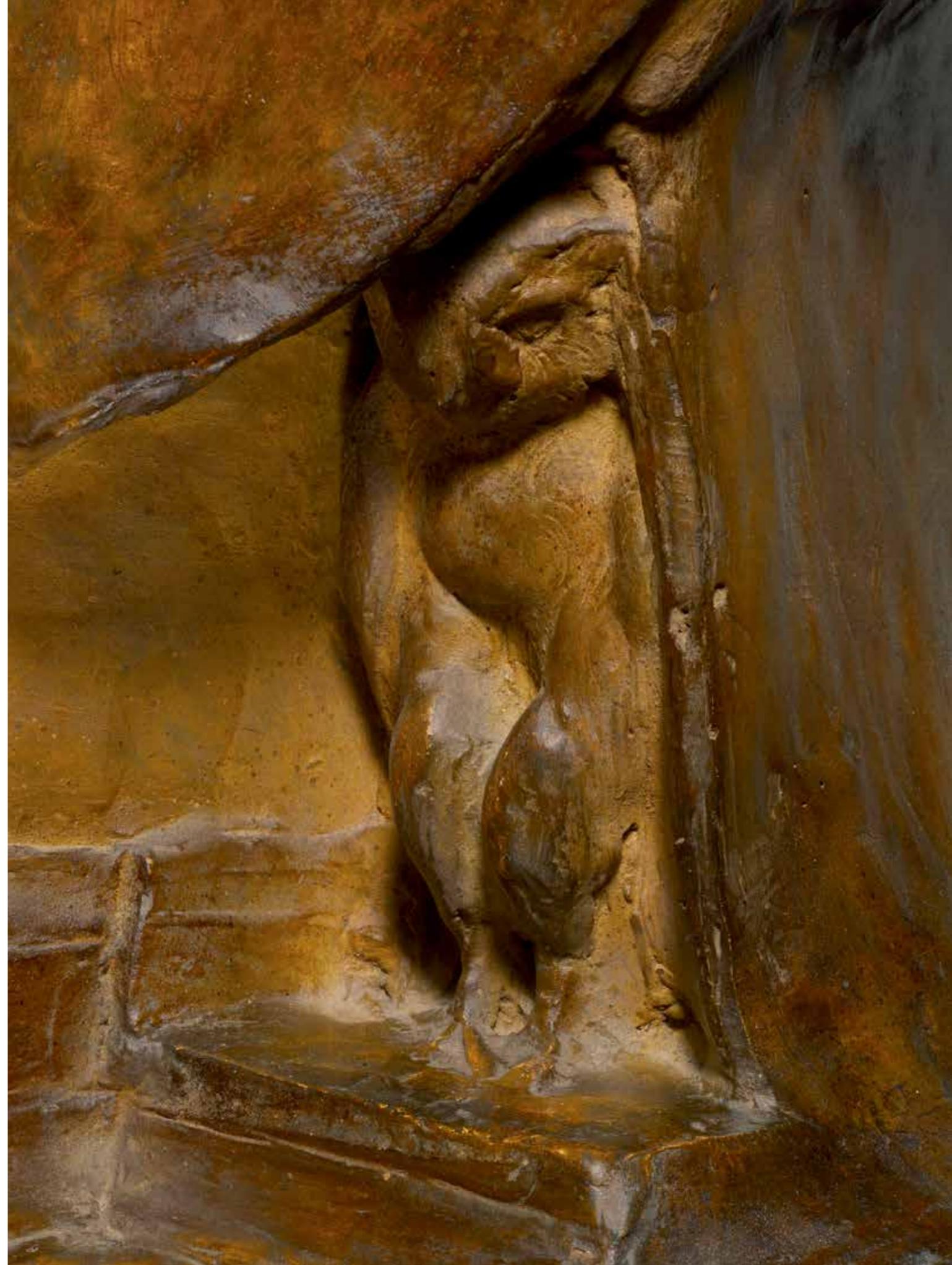
The wax version of his self-portrait is one of the highlights of the substantial group of works by the artist in the Petit-Palais, Paris. The wax was exhibited by Carriès in 1888 in an exhibition organized at the Ménard-Dorian residence rue de la Faisanderie (N°8) and again in 1892 at the Salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts (N°1457).

A second plaster version exists; it forms part of the collection of the Musée du Grès in Saint Amand en Puisaye. That plaster comes from the collection of Paul Jeanneney, a friend of Carriès and fellow ceramicist. Jeanneney owned many works by Carriès⁵ and bought the artist's studio in Saint Amand en Puisaye after his death. In a document describing Carriès' workshop after his death and prepared by the founder Pierre Bingen for the artist's posthumous inventory, a mould for the self-portrait is mentioned.⁶

A further version of the self-portrait, this time in bronze, is also known. It features on the artist's tomb in the Père-Lachaise cemetery in Paris. The bronze was cast with the lost wax method by Pierre Bingen, Carriès' long-time collaborator, at the request of Georges Hoentschel who was a faithful friend and supporter of Carriès. The bronze is inscribed *Cire perdue de Jean Carriès/P. Bingen fondeur* (photography in the documentation of the Petit Palais⁷) and was exhibited at the Universal Exhibition of 1900. Thanks to a subscription initiated a few years after Carriès' death, a funerary monument was realized in his memory and the bronze, given by Hoentschel, placed in the cemetery in 1914.⁸



Carriès tomb, Cimetière du Père Lachaise, Paris





Material as an obsession Carriès' technique

Carriès' remarkable taste for materials is embodied in the precise, detailed surface of the present work. Indeed in the course of his career the artist showed originality not only in his selection of themes but also in his choice of materials: plaster, wax, bronze and ceramic. For each of these, the natural finish was not enough for him and he would experiment with patinas he had himself created. His life-long obsession with subtle varieties and modulations of surface colouration and patina are recorded by his friend and biographer Arsène Alexandre in his seminal work on Carriès:

*"... les plâtres étaient soumis à des traitements fort divers. Ils étaient d'abord uniformément imprégnés d'huiles et séchés à un point déterminé. Puis les uns subissaient les applications d'oxyde, les autres des rebauts de peinture à l'huile, ou même d'aquarelle, et pour certains, encore plus complexes et triomphants, les oxydes et les peintures étaient appelés simultanément à l'aide pour d'indéfinissables amalgames... Plus d'un exemplaire de mêmes figures en plâtre a été ainsi enrichi par les mains de l'artiste, et, malgré cette pluralité, ils peuvent être considérés comme autant d'objets rares et de prix, car pas un ne se ressemble exactement, et tous gardent le contact et la fleur; aussi ont-ils atteint des chiffres, dans les ventes et chez les collectionneurs, auxquels le plâtre n'était jamais monté."*⁹

As Alexandre explained, the artist's experimentation with patinas and colours resulted in works that were related in their composition but different from one another due to the intricate and differentiated treatment that was applied to their surface. His haunting Head of a Faun for example exists in various versions, among which there is a plaster whose warm brown patina resembles metal (J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles¹⁰), a patinated plaster with ochre tones (Petit Palais, Paris) as well as a bronze (Musée d'Orsay, Paris).



Jean-Joseph Carriès, *Self-Portrait as Midas*, 188(5?), patinated plaster, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

Alexandre also quoted Rodin as saying "Carriès' talent is as fine as amber".

As noted by E. Papet in the exhibition catalogue *A fleur de peau*, like other of his contemporaries who favoured naturalistic depictions, Carriès employed life casts. The Parisian mouleur [caster] Ganet was employed by Carriès between 1883 and 1893. In his memoirs Ganet recorded that on 14 January 1888 he made a cast of Carriès' shirt and arms.¹¹ The artist's hands and the details of the folds on his glove and sleeves are particularly well rendered on the present plaster. Along with E. Papet, one can wonder whether Carriès decided to use life-size casts of certain details during the elaboration of his self-portrait, one of his major works. Although frowned upon by contemporary critics and some visitors of the Salon, this practice was adopted by several sculptors and Rodin for example had the cast of a dressing gown made for his sculpture of Balzac (life-size cast of a dressing gown, plaster, 1897, Musée Rodin, Paris).

Charles Auzoux: lawyer, friend and patron

The first owner of the present self-portrait was Charles Auzoux (1859–1922), a friend and patron of many renowned artists, such as Rodin, Dalou and Carpeaux. So close was he to some of those artists that Dalou, Carpeaux and Falguière designated him as their executor. Auzoux was a lawyer and in 1894 he represented Rodin during the litigation between the artist and the Société des gens de Lettres over his statue of Balzac. Auzoux opened the doors of his home on rue de Rivoli and of his house in Fontaine outside Paris to many artists; an ample correspondence between them remains. The significance of the Auzoux's collection was only reassessed in recent years, as his descendants rediscovered more than 300 works disseminated around his house.¹² Auzoux was listed by Alexandre among the main owners of works by Carriès. He had in his collection several ceramics, masks as well as plaster sculptures such as Madame Hals, Sleeping baby, Saint Louis as a child, Callot and the present Self-portrait.



Rodin, *Balzac*, photograph Eugène Druet, published in *L'Art, entretiens réunis par Paul Gsell*, Grasset, 1911. p. 235





Carriès in his studio, circa 1885, reproduced in Alexandre 1895, p. 192

Notes

- 1 Salvaging the Past: Georges Hoentschel and French Decorative Arts from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bard Graduate Center, New York, 4th April–11th August 2013.
- 2 R. de Montesquiou, 'Jean Carriès' in *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, 1894, 2nd semester, pp. 202–212: "mais surtout la propre statue du statuaire en cire vierge d'un jaune vieux miel. Cet ouvrage, très compliqué, devait faire partie de la décoration d'un puits, si je me souviens bien d'un dire de l'auteur".
- 3 Original terracotta in Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp; various bronzes
- 4 Quoted by A. Alexandre, 1895
- 5 Vente collection Jeanneney, Saint Amand en Puisaye, 15–23 mai 1921. (A further Jeanneney sale was held in Paris in June 1921; the plaster had been secured earlier by the city of Saint Amand)
- 6 See *Jean Carriès ou la terre viscérale, Auxerre - Saint Amand*, 2007, p. 99.
- 7 See *La matière de l'étrange*, 2007, p. 67, illus.
- 8 See Papet, 2004, p. 32 and also A. Le Normand-Romain, 1995, p. 128. (The statuette of Callot was stolen in the 1980s but the monument has been restored and the missing statuette, cast after the plaster in Saint Amand, restored)
- 9 Alexandre, 1895, p. 70
- 10 The work is also described as self-portrait, or a representation of the mythological King Midas.
- 11 Archives départementales de la Nièvre: ADN 73J9 quoted in *A fleur de peau*, exh. cat., p. 37; "moulé sur nature de Mr Carriès/Le torse avec une blouse et les bras"
- 12 See *Les trésors retrouvés des ateliers d'artistes au temps de Rodin*. Collection Charles Auzoux, exh. cat., Le Louvre des Antiquaires, Paris, May–September 1995.

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