

# Women Sculptors and their Male Assistants: a Criticised but Common Practice in France in the long Nineteenth-Century

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**Abstract:** The creation process of sculpture always has relied on the use of assistants. However, women sculptors often have faced a double standard. Despite simply following standard sculpting practices, they have commonly been reproached for not being the true authors of their works, as sceptics could hardly believe a woman, due to her slighter physique, could be a sculptor. The multitude of references to such rumours and comments in historic and more recent publications on women sculptors shows that it has been an international and persistent phenomenon. This article takes France, and particularly Paris, as a case study, covering the (very) long nineteenth century, with the aim of examining developments across different periods.

The earliest French sculptresses – some worked as ‘amateurs’ because of their high social status while others struggled to make money – were attacked for their use of assistants. The Second Empire, with its many commissions for contemporary sculptors, saw a rise in ‘professional’ women sculptors from the middle classes. It then became more acceptable for women to employ assistants and openly communicate about it. The relatively easy access to praticiens in Paris actually seems to have helped sculptresses in nurturing professional careers alongside their male colleagues, while their training opportunities were still all but equal. In the late nineteenth century, when training and exhibition possibilities grew, a new wave of amateur women artists again elicited new accusations on authorship. Some sculptresses preferred to work entirely on their own, precisely to avoid rumours, or because they liked to master and practice all skills themselves. This ties into the twentieth-century vogue for direct carving, which attracted some female practitioners despite its association with masculinity. The fact that women sculptors’s (assisted) work often was viewed differently because of their gender and biology created yet another obstacle in their careers.

**Keywords:** art history, woman sculptor, assistance, *praticien*, gender, France, Paris, 19<sup>th</sup> century

**Titre :** Femmes sculpteurs et hommes assistants : une pratique courante mais critiquée en France (xviii<sup>e</sup>-xix<sup>e</sup> s.)

**Résumé :** Sculpter a toujours requis l'aide d'assistants. Pourtant, les femmes sculpteurs se sont souvent heurtées à une double injonction. Alors qu'elles suivaient les mêmes

pratiques d'atelier que les hommes, elles furent accusées de ne pas être les véritables auteurs de leurs œuvres. On ne pouvait croire qu'une faible femme puisse sculpter. Les multiples allusions à ces rumeurs relevées dans les monographies sur les femmes sculpteurs montrent leur caractère persistant et universel. Cet article choisit Paris comme cadre d'une étude de cas, tout au long du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle au sens le plus large, afin de noter une évolution sur différentes périodes. Déjà les pionnières parmi les françaises, qu'elles travaillent en amateurs en raison de leur statut social élevé, ou qu'elles luttent contre des difficultés financières, furent critiquées pour avoir employé des assistants. Le Second Empire, avec ses nombreuses commandes à des sculpteurs contemporains, vit l'essor des femmes sculpteurs professionnelles issues des classes moyennes. Le recours à des aides fut désormais mieux accepté, tout comme le fait d'en parler ouvertement. La relative facilité à trouver des praticiens à Paris semble avoir aidé ces artistes à mener des carrières professionnelles parallèles à celles de leurs collègues masculins, tandis que leurs occasions d'apprentissage étaient toujours loin d'être équivalentes à celles des hommes. À la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, quand les offres de formation et d'exposition s'accrurent, une nouvelle vague de femmes amateurs suscita des réactions de défense. Certaines préférèrent travailler seules, précisément pour éviter les rumeurs, d'autres parce qu'elles aimaient maîtriser elles-mêmes tous les savoir-faire. Cette attitude est liée à la vogue de la taille directe au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, qui bien qu'associée aux hommes, eut un succès aussi chez les femmes. Le fait que le travail des femmes soit souvent apprécié en fonction de leur sexe, autre obstacle à leurs carrières, fut préjudiciable à la réception de leur œuvre, tant à leur époque que dans le futur.

**Mots-clés :** sculpture, *gender studies*, assistant, praticien, collaboration, France, Paris, XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle

In primary and secondary sources on women sculptors internationally, one can regularly find short references to criticism concerning women sculptors's use of (male) assistants. This article, for the first time, assembles such mentions, focusing on France from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Even though this was an international and persistent phenomenon, remarkably many sculptresses were active in France during this period, when French sculpture was dominant. The time span of two centuries is divided into four shorter periods, to discern trends, while looking at women sculptors's actual use of collaborators and reactions to it.

The practice of artists hiring collaborators to help realise their artwork has a long tradition in the art world, particularly in the discipline of sculpture.<sup>2</sup> Whether it involves transposing the *bozzetto* into a *modello*, the *maquette* into

1. This text is based on a presentation given at the conference *L'invention partagée* at the University of Clermont-Ferrand in April 2016. For the AAH conference in Glasgow in April 2010, the author already prepared a lecture on this topic, though looking at the phenomenon internationally, titled "Female sculptors and their male collaborators: common practice?", in the session "Mapping the Practice and Profession of Sculpture: The Influence of Context and Collaboration in Sculptural Practice from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century to the Present", convened by Alison Yarrington and Rhona Warwick.
2. Another session at the AAH conference in Glasgow in 2010 was devoted to this topic: "Many Hands Make Light Work: The Division, Status and Valuation of Artistic Labour in 16th- and 17th-Century Northern European Art". See on this matter also: Danielle CHILD, "Dematerialization, Contracted

the final piece, roughing out or polishing marble, casting bronze, or applying the *patine*, every sculptor who could afford so financially has called on (a host of) assistants and craftspeople in the transformation of the idea into a finished object using durable materials. And this doesn't even include the cooperation of sculptors with architects and engineers for pedestals, integrated fountains, or surrounding metalwork that accompanied public statues, or with ceramists or glassmakers, in the case of decorative arts.

And yet, these common practices of collaborative creation, of artists using helping hands, have received rather little art historical attention until recently.<sup>3</sup> Art history since Giorgio Vasari favoured the single creator, and twentieth-century modernist art history, with its emphasis on individuality, originality, authenticity, and genius, was instrumental in overshadowing and downgrading workshop practices and collaborative artistic production.<sup>4</sup> Such denial or underestimation of past collaborative practices is a distortion of historical reality, not only to the disadvantage of the many mostly anonymous skilled artisans (male and female), but also to the many women artists, sculptors in particular, trying to establish a career between the mid-eighteenth and mid-twentieth century.

In the twenty-first century, there has been a “collaborative turn” in art and design (history), and collaborative creation processes and “co-design” are in vogue (again). Yet, the precise functioning and conditions of past collaborations between artists and colleagues or assistants remain rather vague. The differences in meaning between terms such as *collaborator* and *assistant* (in French, the term *praticien* was mostly used) point to hierarchical relationships

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Labour and Art Fabrication: the Deskilling of the Artist in the Age of late Capitalism”, *Sculpture Journal*, t. 24, n° 3, 2015, p. 375-390; Anthony HUGHES, “The Cave and the Stithy: Artists’ Studios and Intellectual Property in Early Modern Europe”, *Oxford Art Journal*, t. 13, n° 1, 1990, p. 34-48. The Rubens studio is well known for that period.

3. Some exceptions: John DE LA VALETTE, “Collaboration between manufacturers and artists”, *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, t. 82, n° 4244, 1934, p. 511-534; Hugh HONOUR, “Canova’s Studio Practice-I: The Early Years”, *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 114, n° 828, 1972, p. 146-159; Michael RICHMAN, “Daniel Chester French and Henry Bacon: Public Sculpture in Collaboration, 1897-1908”, *American Art Journal*, 12, 3, 1980, p. 47-64; Véronique WIESINGER, “Les collaborations. À propos du monument à Claude Gellée dit Le Lorrain d’Auguste Rodin”, in Anne PINGEOT (ed.), *La sculpture française au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, RMN, 1986, p. 110-114; Martina DROTH, “The Ethics of Making: Craft and English Sculptural Aesthetics c. 1851-1900”, *Journal of Design History*, 17, 3, 2004, p. 221-235; Sébastien CLERBOIS and Martina DROTH (eds), *Revival and Invention. Sculpture through its Material Histories*, Oxford-Bern-Berlin, Peter Lang, 2011, notably Catherine CHEVILLOT’s “Nineteenth-Century Sculptors and Moulders: Developments in Theory and Practice”; Deborah CHILD, *Dematerialization [...]*, *op. cit.* In the recent (2017) centenary Rodin exhibition in the Grand Palais, Paris, much attention was focused on Rodin’s use of different *praticiens*. They were named on the labels, albeit not as co-authors, and the practice was thematised in the exhibition and catalogue (Catherine CHEVILLOT et Antoinette LE NORMAND-ROMAIN (eds), *Rodin. Le livre du centenaire*, Paris, Éditions RMN-Grand Palais, 2017).
4. Whitney CHADWICK, *Women, Art, and Society*, London, Thames & Hudson, 2012, p. 17, 20-21, 32; D. CHILD, *Dematerialization [...]*, *op. cit.*, p. 375.

between artists and their helpers, with *collaborator* hinting at a somewhat more equal position, compared with the more subordinate *assistant*. Typically, the artist-helper relationship is regarded as a division of labour between a highly valued artist-inventor, on the one hand, and one or more lower-tier executing artisans, workers, or *praticiens*, on the other hand. This is probably too simple a model in many cases. Even if this is hard to prove, insights and skills were no doubt often shared in both (or more) directions, nuancing the terms *inventor* and *artisan*. As it always has been, good ideas and solutions for specific artistic or design problems often do not come solely from a single brain, but from discussing the problem with other practitioners, and from working with the hands, guided by past experience (so-called *tacit knowledge*), through the process of creating, using particular materials, tools, and techniques.

As such, within the process of translation from a clay model into a plaster model, then into a stone or bronze object, there is a not-to-be-underestimated margin of interpretation. This is why Auguste Rodin, for example, made use of different skilled *praticiens* and talented *sculpteurs statuaires* (sculptors in their own right who occasionally worked for more renowned masters), depending on their own specialisation and the character of the work to be done, though without mentioning their names.<sup>5</sup>

By applying the finishing touches and signing the finished object, the sculptor turned himself into the single ‘real’ author. Outsourcing to studio assistants or specialist craftspeople the physically most-demanding aspects of the translation of the *maquette* into a larger format, using durable materials (such as stone or bronze), was a necessity when one wanted to satisfy all demands and regularly present new work at the Salon. This practice generally was viewed as an indicator of success and prestige, and was understood as a simple call for mechanical labour, inferior to the piece’s invention, which was instead regarded as the locus of genius. This latter term was very rarely attributed to women, though, who generally were considered irrational and inferior beings.<sup>6</sup> However, if women were assisted, it was not so much during the early, ‘inventive’ stage of modelling, usually small-scale and in malleable materials, but during the later transposition into durable materials, just as their male colleagues did.

5. V. WIESINGER, *Les collaborations [...], op. cit.*, p. 110; C. CHEVILLOT and A. LE NORMAND-ROMAIN, *Rodin [...], op. cit.*

6. Exceptions do exist, however. In 1926, for example, the Belgian-French sculptress Louise Ochsé-Mayer (1884-1944) was praised for her “*faculté d’invention*”. Arsène ALEXANDRE, “*Galerie Georges Petit. Sculptures de Louise Ochsé*”, *La Renaissance de l’art Français et des industries de luxe*, June 1926, p. 362.

When women sculptors used collaborators, the same, centuries-old collaborative practices have repeatedly been called into question. Since at least the eighteenth century,<sup>7</sup> many a sculptress was accused – by colleagues, critics, or the public – of unjustly claiming authorship of her artwork, mainly because she employed (male) helpers. For them, shared work was often regarded as a sign of a lack of knowledge and skills, as proof of their weakness and “natural” unsuitability for this artistic discipline, and sometimes also as evidence of their allegedly insufficient inspiration and authenticity.

Thus, while the working practices of male and female sculptors were quite similar, the responses to them differed considerably. Women sculptors often faced a problematic double standard: although both contemporary and later critics knew and accepted the fact that male sculptors used studio assistants, without being explicit about it, they criticised women sculptors for relying on them, sometimes referring explicitly (even with names) to these helpers. Thus, women sculptors were confronted with a stalemate: either rely on assistants and run the risk of being criticised for it, or work alone, which garnered praise and astonishment, but would hinder their competitiveness with their male colleagues in terms of productivity.

### A sculptress? Hard to believe! (ca. 1765-1852)

In the 1760s, sculptor Étienne-Maurice Falconet (1716-1791) wrote to Catherine the Great of Russia about his pupil and future daughter-in-law Marie-Anne Collot (1748-1821), who accompanied him to St. Petersburg in 1766, about how the Russian population “had wanted to believe that [he] produced her works”. As soon as she was observed at work, however, they were convinced of the contrary, Falconet added: “They saw her modelling and they were convinced.”<sup>8</sup> Louis Réau mentions that she also had to fight against such assumptions in France:

*Entrée à 15 ans dans l'atelier de Falconet, elle avait déjà produit avant sa majorité une série de bustes remarquables, si remarquables que certains critiques malveillants soupçonnaient Falconet ou, à son défaut, Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne d'y avoir collaboré.*<sup>9</sup>

7. They probably were accused before this time as well, but more research on this matter is needed.
8. “Perepiska imperatritsi Ekateriny IIs Fal'konetom”, *Sbornik Imperatorskogo russkogo istoricheskogo obschestva*, XVII, 1876, p. 243; as quoted in English in Irina G. ЕТОВА, “Brilliant Proof of the Creative Abilities of Women: Marie-Anne Collot in Russia”, in Jordana POMEROY, Rosalind P. BLAKESLEY, Vladimir Yu. MATVEYEV, and Elizaveta P. RENNE (ed.), *An imperial collection. Women Artists from the State Hermitage Museum*, Londres-Washington, National Museum of Women in the arts, Merrell, 2003, p. 83. Clara Clement writes on Collot: “She has also been accused of employing an undue amount of aid in her art.”; Clara Erskine CLEMENT, *Women in the Fine Arts*, Massachusetts, Corner House Publishers, 1904, p. 99.
9. Louis RÉAU, “Une femme-sculpteur française au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle : Marie-Anne Collot (Madame Falconet)”, *L'Art et les Artistes*, February 1923, p. 165-171, p. 166. This concerns, among others, busts of the Russian Prince Dimitri Gallitzin (Golitsyn) (1738-1803) and writer Denis Diderot (1713-1784).

In his analysis of work by Parisian sculptor Julie Charpentier (1770-1845), critic Tønnes Christian Bruun-Neergaard, in 1802, made the distinction between the two main sculpting modes: carving (*per vi di levare*) and modelling (*per via di porre*). He implicitly linked these with gender, while writing:

*On m'a encore nommé plusieurs femmes françaises et étrangères, mais qui se sont seulement restreintes à modeler, n'osant jamais porter le ciseau sur le marbre dur, pour en créer une statue ou un bas-relief. [...] [J]e ne lus pas sans intérêt une annonce qui invite à voir un bas-relief exécuté en marbre, par une demoiselle.<sup>10</sup>*

So, Charpentier's distinctiveness as a sculptor was even more remarkable to Bruun-Neergaard because she cut the marble herself. Yet he compared her only to her female colleagues, whom he judged quite negatively, as they "restricted" themselves to modelling and "did not dare" carve, while he omitted mentioning that most male sculptors restricted themselves to modelling and made use of *praticiens* for the carving. Bruun-Neergaard and many others would describe the paucity of women sculptors as a problem of biology, of the "natural" inability of women to thrive in the sculpting profession due to their "*sexe faible et délicat*".

Although contracting out the heaviest cutting and carving to *praticiens* was a practice commonly known and accepted by critics and the public, it was not given any special attention for a long time, and the names of all those helpers were not recorded. The work often was done by *praticiens* in a separate (and often less-visible) room or area within the artist's studio. Large studios might also contain separate *ateliers de moulage*. Another method was the delivery of models and marble blocks to a living-out *praticien* or *praticiens* studio. Therefore, it is, among other reasons, difficult to find images of this outsourcing practice. In 1804, the London *Morning Post* drew attention to it when it described a marble bust (of famous Royal Navy Vice Admiral Horatio Nelson) made by a woman, Anne Seymour Damer (1748-1828), Marie-Anne Collot's contemporary in England. The writer was surprised that "it was entirely finished as well as conceived" by Damer – similar to Bruun-Neergaard's reaction, but the paper now compared her with male colleagues:

It was entirely finished as well as conceived, by the Honourable Mrs. Damer; for while most of the modern Statuaries, modellers strictly speaking rather than sculptors, confine their own labours to shaping the ductile clay, and suffer what little fire they may have instilled in this pliant material, again to evaporate under

10. Tønnes Christian BRUUN-NEERGAARD, "Lettre sur un ouvrage de Mlle Julie Charpentier, statuaire", *Revue Philosophique, Littéraire et Politique*, 1<sup>er</sup> trimestre 1806, p. 364 (included in PAUL LACROIX (ed.), *Revue Universelle des Arts*, 22, Paris-Brussels, 1865, p. 113–116. No information about Charpentier's possible use of *praticiens* is known, and perhaps for that reason, she signed her marbles using her name and surname, as she did for her bust of *Le Dominiquin* (1818, Musée du Louvre).

the mechanical process of the journeyman, who thence copies the fragile form in the more stubborn marble, simply by rule and compass [...].<sup>11</sup>

However, in 1830, Allan Cunningham claimed to notice a difference in artistic quality in the finish of Damer's *œuvre*. Some works, he claims, are "very rudely carved", while others are "wrought by a skilful hand".<sup>12</sup> In this inconsistency, he saw expression and proof of Damer's undisclosed use of assistants, and went on to identify these as Italian and English, even suggesting names.

While writing about Collot, Réau suggests that, in a way, one could view accusations concerning the use of assistants as fairly positive, implying that the work of a woman sculptor was indistinguishable from one made by a man and considered of such high quality that it was "not possibly made by a woman". Central to this discussion is the aforementioned belief that women, by reason of their mere "nature" and physical "weakness", were essentially unfit for sculpting. Paradoxically, this assumption implies that women sculptors – if they succeeded in becoming such – were forced to call upon "strong" men for the realisation of their works. However, when male assistants helped them with the most-demanding physical aspects of marble cutting, they were criticised for attempting to pass themselves off as the authors of works that actually had been made by men.

Such was the case with French Princess Marie d'Orléans (1813-1839), whose artistic skills and integrity were repeatedly ridiculed in *La Mode*.<sup>13</sup> In 1838, the journal published several short pieces and a longer satire entitled *L'atelier d'une princesse ou Une réputation de Cour. Scènes contemporaines*, all suggesting that the princess was completely indebted to a male painter and sculptor, not only for the execution of her artworks, but also for their invention.<sup>14</sup> These allegations were presumably based on gossip concerning collaboration between d'Orléans and her tutor – draughtsman and painter Ary Scheffer (1795-1858) – and with *praticien* Auguste Trouchaud.<sup>15</sup> After all,

11. *The Morning Post*, 5 May 1804; Percy NOBLE, *Anne Seymour Damer: a Woman of Art and Fashion, 1748-1828*, London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1908, p. 160. Damer presented a plaster version of this bust to Napoleon Bonaparte during her visit to Paris in 1802.
12. Allan CUNNINGHAM, "Anne Seymour Damer", *The Lives of the most Eminent British Painters and Sculptors*, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1830, p. 214-236; Alison YARRINGTON, "A Female Pygmalion: Anne Seymour Damer, Allan Cunningham and the Writing of a Woman Sculptor's Life", *The Sculpture Journal*, t. 5, n° 1, 1997, p. 32-44.
13. On this case study, the author prepares an article for *Sculpture Journal*.
14. *La Mode : Revue du monde élégant*, 1 July 1837, p. 346; *La Mode : Revue du monde élégant*, 7 October 1837, p. 26, 28, 70, 308, 317; *La Mode : Revue du monde élégant*, 6 April 1838, p. 135; *La Mode : revue des modes*, 18 August 1838, p. 173; ANON., "L'atelier d'une princesse ou une réputation de Cour. Scènes contemporaines", *La Mode : revue des modes*, 3 November 1838, p. 126-130.
15. Stanislas LAMI, *Dictionnaire des sculpteurs de l'école française au dix-neuvième siècle*, Paris, Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1914-1921, IV, p. 324; Peter FUSCO and Horst W. JANSON (ed.), *The Romantics to Rodin. French Nineteenth-Century Sculpture from North American Collections*, Los

Scheffer's student "*ne pouva[it] copier que des figures drapées (et très drapées)*".<sup>16</sup> Yet political and religious issues fueled the vehemence of the attacks on the princess's artistic reputation by this royalist and Catholic magazine.

The princess's royalist and Catholic colleague, French-Italian sculptor Félicie de Fauveau (1801-1886), who co-organised the failed legitimist resistance efforts in the Vendée in the early 1830s, was showered with praise in the same periodical.<sup>17</sup> De Fauveau did publicly defend d'Orléans, whom she respected as an artist, by pointing out, in a posthumous article, that the fact that she did not carve all her statues personally doesn't mean she should not be considered a real sculptor.<sup>18</sup> This attitude was in De Fauveau's own interest: she also used assistants for marble cutting and bronze casting, and she did not hide this fact. In a letter, she formulated it as such:

*Je dirai qu'il m'a toujours paru infiniment plus humble et selon la raison de signer ses œuvres par ses armes que par le "fecit" qui n'est qu'un mensonge. C'est substituer le hasard de la naissance à l'inconcevable orgueil qu'on a fait quelque chose. Qui sait mieux que moi qu'on ne fait rien soi-même et que la création n'appartient qu'à Dieu.*<sup>19</sup>

At the height of her career, around 1840, de Fauveau employed up to four *praticiens* for cutting marble, and her brother Hippolyte de Fauveau became her assistant, *praticien*, and studio manager until his marriage.<sup>20</sup> They even regularly co-signed their artworks. Such a dual signature – which was quite unusual – also was used by British-French painter and sculptor Elisa Marianne de Lamartine, née Mary Ann Elisa Birch (1790–1863), in 1844 on her group of three putti around a cross in the Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois church in Paris. She ensured that the name François Jouffroy (1806-1882), 16 years her junior, who assisted her with the marble carving, also was written on the base. Unusually, his name appears first, although she is credited with having conceived the piece. However, he allegedly was her teacher.<sup>21</sup>

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Angeles-New York, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, The Minneapolis Institute of Art, The Detroit Institute of Arts, Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1980, p. 310; Isabelle LEROY-JAY LEMAISTRE, "Marie d'Orléans sculpteur", in Anne DION-TENENBAUM (ed.), *Marie d'Orléans 1813-1839. Princesse et artiste romantique*, Paris, Somogy éditions d'art, Musée du Louvre éditions, 2008, p. 121-124.

16. Harriet GROTE, *Memoir of the Life of Ary Scheffer*, London, J. Murray, 1860, p. 40-41.

17. ANON., "Salon de 1837", *La Mode : Revue du monde élégant*, t. 9, 7 January 1837, p. 218; ANON., "Un bénitier, par Mademoiselle de Fauveau", *La Mode : Revue du monde élégant*, 22 September 1838, p. 318-319.

18. As quoted from by Philippe DE CHENNEVIÈRES, "Souvenir d'un directeur des Beaux-Arts", *L'Artiste*, I, 1884, p. 85-100; I. LEROY-JAY LEMAISTRE, *Marie d'Orléans sculpteur [...]*, *op. cit.*, p. 116-125. Both women were born in Italy and would die there.

19. Private archives Jacques de Caso, 05 07 229 R; as cited in Sylvain BELLENGER, "Légitimer sa vie : l'art de Félicie de Fauveau", *Félicie de Fauveau, l'amazone de la sculpture* [cat. exp.], Paris, Musée d'Orsay, 2013, p. 23-45, p. 27.

20. *Félicie de Fauveau [...]*, *op. cit.*, p. 27, 312, 313, e.a.

21. Elizabeth ELLET, *Women Artists in All Ages and Countries*, London, Richard Bentley, 1859, p. 239;



Before the mid-nineteenth century, when there were still relatively few women sculptors, the authorship of their works appears to have been disputed remarkably frequently. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, many women artists from the upper classes (for whom learning to draw and paint was encouraged at an early age) worked as “*amateur*” artists (i.e., they received no monetary reward for practising the arts). Yet for a lady “*amateur*”, drawing, pastels, and aquarelle were deemed more appropriate than the dirty discipline of sculpture. As dilettantism became associated with the feminine, and the dilettante became the negative counterpart of the professional – associated with mediocrity, domesticity, and lack of commitment (as voiced by Denis Diderot, Johann W. von Goethe, and Friedrich Schiller, among others)<sup>22</sup> – this negatively influenced the artistic reputations of women artists in general and particularly those not working for a living.

Whereas almost all sculptresses up until roughly 1850 seem to have been the victims of contentions concerning authorship, as is recorded in their (auto)biographies and contemporary articles, such accusations seem much harder to find against their male colleagues. Nevertheless, they do exist, and more research on this matter is needed to compare the treatment of both sexes sufficiently. Belgian sculptor Joseph Tuerlinckx (1809-1873), for instance, was criticised for his use of assistants in 1848, when he had the plaster model of his statue of Margaret of Austria for the City of Malines (Belgium) carved in stone by 10 stonemasons in the popular Antwerp studio Rousseaux – attesting to the common practice of outsourcing in Belgium as well. Tuerlinckx’s defence was to compare the work of those *praticiens* with that of a clerk with beautiful handwriting, who only copies his master’s concept. This master then would check the work and possibly add missing punctuation, but he would remain the only true author of the writing.<sup>23</sup>

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*Inventaire général des œuvres d’art appartenant à la ville de Paris dressé par le Service des Beaux-Arts – Édifices religieux*, Paris, Chaix, 1878, I, p. 46, 483; M. BAURIT and J. HILLAIRET, *Saint-Germain-Auxerrois : église collégiale royale et paroissiale. L’église, la paroisse, le quartier*, Paris, éditions de Minuit, 1955, p. 51; A. BOINET, *Les églises parisiennes–xvii<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, éditions de Minuit, 1958, p. 287; Chris PETTEYS (ed.), *Dictionary of Women Artists: An International Dictionary of Women Artists Born before 1900*, Boston, G. K. Hall, 1985, p. 416.

22. On amateur artists, see a.o. Kim SLOAN, *A Noble Art: Amateur Artists and Drawing Masters, C.1600–1800*, London, British Museum Press, 2000; Charlotte GUICHARD, *Les amateurs d’art à Paris au xviii<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, éditions Champ Vallon, 2013.
23. Bart STROOBANTS and Wim HÜSKEN, *Een romantische blik op de Margareta’s*, Mechelse Museumbladen, Mechelen, Stedelijke Musea Mechelen, 2005, p. 9.

## Professionalism and *praticiens* in Paris (ca. 1852-1880)

During the Second Empire, a period of high demand for sculptural work (for both public and private spaces), thanks to Haussmannisation, a handful of sculptresses received several prestigious public commissions.<sup>24</sup> Certainly when faced with multiple orders, the employment of *praticiens* was a must in terms of time management, and the sculptresses at work in Paris during this period – now more from the middle classes, similar to the majority of (male) sculptors – did not hide this practice in their letters. Indeed, why should they? They did not deviate from what was seen as a perfectly legitimate practice within the art world, and their employers and patrons apparently did not frown upon it (anymore). It seems these women sculptors were being taken more seriously as professional artists precisely because they followed current working procedures. In fact, it is possible they were able to further their professional careers precisely because of the large workforce of *praticiens* easily available there and then, allowing women sculptors to accept more commissions and show more new works at the annual Salons.

In 1859, Claude Vignon – the male pseudonym of the Parisian sculptor and writer Noémie Constant-Rouvier, née Cadiot (1828-1888) – wrote to the commissioning architect Hector Lefuel to tell him that both her plaster model and the block of stone intended for the ordered bust of Socrates for the library of the Nouveau Louvre were to be delivered to the studio of her *praticien*, Mr. Chevalier, and that he needed about one month to transfer the model into stone.<sup>25</sup> About twenty years later, the sculptress still worked that way as she asked the inspector of fine arts to come to her studio and have the long-promised block of marble delivered so as to be able to put her *praticiens* (now in plural) to work to complete another sculpture in time for the Salon.<sup>26</sup> Six months later, she asked to be paid for yet another bust, as she wanted to pay her *praticien* before going on a holiday.<sup>27</sup> The same practice was used by Marie-

24. See a.o. Marjan STERCKX, “Le titre, non, mais des commandes”: la participation des femmes sculpteurs à la sculpture publique à Paris au Second Empire”, in Anne RIVIÈRE (ed.), *Sculpture'elles : les sculpteurs femmes du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle à nos jours*, Paris, Somogy, 2011, p. 202-205.

25. Paris, Centre Historique des Archives Nationales (CHAN), 64 AJ 185: Noémie Constant to Hector Lefuel, 5 Dec. 1859; included in Deschamps, 2002, annexe 21 : “Vous pouvez me faire porter le plâtre du Socrate à l’atelier de mon praticien (Monsieur Chevalier 200 rue de la Roquette chez Monsieur Lebègue). Bien entendu que vous pouvez aussi y faire porter le bloc de pierre. Il faudra un mois pour terminer le travail. Ainsi le buste pourra être placé dans les premiers jours de janvier.” ‘Monsieur Lebègue’ is possibly the sculptor Jean-Louis Lebègue (1797-1887).

26. Paris, CHAN, F/21/2066-67: Claude Vignon to the *Inspecteur des Beaux-Arts*, 26 October 1881 “et je n’attends plus que le marbre pour mettre les praticiens à l’œuvre.”

27. Paris, CHAN, F/21/2066-67: Claude Vignon to the *Inspecteur des Beaux-Arts*, 5 March 1882. From 1890 onwards the bust decorated the Hôtel de la Préfecture in Lyon.

Louise Lefèvre-Deumier (1812-1877), whose semi-nude *Glycera* (1856-1861) on the *Cour carrée* was largely carved by Franzetti, one of the many Italian *praticiens* in Paris then put at work on the Cour Carrée, among others, but only she signed the statue.<sup>28</sup>

The Parisian sculptor Madame Léon Bertaux, née Hélène Hébert (1825-1909), who was instrumental in the development of training for women artists – sculptors in particular – complained to the French *Surintendant des Beaux-Arts* in 1865 for not providing her with adequate funding to hire a *praticien* for one of her large reliefs for a facade of the *Palais des Tuileries : La Navigation*. She was, therefore, forced to carve the work entirely herself, but pointed out that this “*ne peut que retarder beaucoup un artiste dans sa carrière*”.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, she fished for an order for a marble statue, again hinting that the work would take a while, as she could not afford a *praticien* due to lack of funding. Roughly six years later, she employed one, as she asked the director of fine arts to pay her for a stone statue for the facade at the Grenoble Museum because she had to pay her *praticien*.<sup>30</sup>

Following common practice, professional sculptresses during and right after the Second Empire mostly signed their works with their own names only. In turn, at the same time in Dordrecht, the statue of Ary Scheffer, inaugurated in May 1862, was signed by Joseph Mezzarra (1820-1901) only, although Scheffer’s daughter Cornelia (1830-1899), living in Paris, created the design that incorporates the face of her beloved grandmother. Mezzarra – not a famous sculptor, but a friend and pupil of Ary Scheffer’s in Paris – confessed in a letter to Cornelia’s uncle that he only executed the statue, and that the design was entirely Cornelia’s.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, Mezzarra often was regarded as the author of the work, which has been described as “outstandingly executed”<sup>32</sup>. Was it his

28. Paris, CHAN, F/21/0093, file 14 (via Arcade): Documents relating to the order and acquisition of Marie-Louise Lefèvre Deumier’s sculpture *La Couronne de fleurs/ Glycera*. On Italian *praticiens* in Paris, see Barbara MUSETTI, “Praticiens italiens en France au tournant du siècle. Phénomène artistique, phénomène social”, Actes du colloque *Histoire de l’art du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle (1848-1914): bilan et perspectives*, Forum pour les jeunes chercheurs (Paris, INHA/Musée d’Orsay/École du Louvre, 13-15 September 2007), Paris, éditions de l’École du Louvre, 2012, p. 83-91.

29. Paris, CHAN, F/21/118: M<sup>me</sup> Bertaux to the *Surintendant des Beaux-Arts*, [26 May 1865 (stamped on arrival at the Fine Arts department)]; Anastasia Louise EASTERDAY, “Charting a Course in an Intractable Profession : Women Sculptors in 19th-Century France”, Los Angeles, University of California (Art History Department), 1997, p. 120.

30. Paris, CHAN, F/21/118, file 46 : M<sup>me</sup> Bertaux to the Directeur des Beaux-Arts, 7 Dec. 1871. The address of the *praticien* was 51, Boulevard St. Jacques.

31. “*Cette statue est toute de son inspiration*”, in a letter to her uncle. Leo EWALS, *Ary Scheffer 1785-1858. Gevierd romanticus* [cat. exp.], Dordrecht-Zwolle, Dordrechts Museum/Waanders, 1995, p. 12, 17-21; Marjan STERCKX, “Cornelia Scheffer, beeldhouwster”, in Els KLOEK and Anna DE HAAS (ed.), *1001 Vrouwen uit de Nederlandse geschiedenis*, Nijmegen, Vantilt, 2013, p. 1031-1032.

32. Anon., “Onthulling van Ary Scheffer’s standbeeld te Dordrecht”, *Dagblad van Zuidholland en ’s Gravenhage*, n° 109, 9 May 1862, p. 2.

idea to sign the statue alone, or was it her modesty as an artist that made her conceal her contribution – as she *only* provided the design? Or was it fear of critics alleging bias in awarding the commission, namely that family ties had prevailed over artistic quality? Notably, Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi (1834-1904), another pupil of Ary Scheffer’s who at that time had already finished a monument to Gen. Jean Rapp in Colmar, provided the first design, but it was rejected for lack of likeness.

Whereas it was apparently possible for a professional woman sculptor in Paris during the Second Empire and at the beginning of the Third Republic to communicate openly about her male *praticiens*, this apparently was not the case everywhere. A known case in this respect – which might have played an emancipating role in France too as it was widely publicised – is that of successful American sculptor Harriet Hosmer (1830-1908). Making part of the *White Marmorean Flock* in Rome, Hosmer is known to have employed, at the height of her career, up to twenty-four assistants, whom she had herself photographed amidst in 1864. As such, she not only showed respect for her skilled Italian artisans, but also provided transparency in her working process. However, her reputation was severely questioned following the exposition of her large marble *Zenobia in Chains* sculpture at the London International Exhibition of 1862. Accusations in the press – and eventually a lawsuit – ignited a lively, international debate concerning collaborative practices in sculpting.<sup>33</sup> In a four-page report titled “The Process of Sculpture”, published in 1864, Hosmer “raise[d] the veil upon the mysteries of the studio”, and defended herself by demonstrating that her working methods in no way differed from those of her male colleagues.<sup>34</sup> Somewhat similar to Joseph Tuerlinckx’s aforementioned comparison, Hosmer used a language metaphor, stressing that the sculptor’s assistant was not necessarily someone with imagination or good taste, but that this person merely translated “the original thought of the sculptor, written in clay, into the language of marble”.<sup>35</sup> The sculptor, on the contrary, “infuses into the clay that refinement and individuality of beauty which constitute his ‘style’”.<sup>36</sup> Hosmer voiced the essence of the problem in concluding that “we women artists have no objection to it being known that we employ assistants; we merely object to it being supposed that it is a system peculiar to ourselves”.<sup>37</sup>

33. See Deborah CHERRY, “Harriet Hosmer’s *Zenobia*. A question of authority”, in Deborah CHERRY (ed.), *Beyond the frame. Feminism and Visual Culture, Britain 1850-1900*, London-New York, Routledge, 2000, p. 101-141; Melissa DABAKIS, *A Sisterhood of Sculptors. American Artists in nineteenth-Century Rome*, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania University Press, 2014, p. 81-87.

34. Harriet HOSMER, “The Process of Sculpture”, *The Atlantic Monthly*, 14, December 1864, p. 734-737; M. DABAKIS, *A sisterhood [...]*, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

35. H. HOSMER, *The Process [...]*, *op. cit.*, p. 735.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 735.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 736.

In France, one of the first overt descriptions of collaborative practices in sculpture appeared around the same time, by Charles Blanc in his *Grammaire des Arts du Dessin : Architecture, Sculpture, Peinture*, which was published in Paris as a book in 1867 (and again in 1880), but already had been serialised in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* since April 1860.<sup>38</sup> Blanc described sculpture in stone as “masculine” and “robust” but considered the statue in stone as merely a copy of the model in clay or wax, which is the actual “original” work.<sup>39</sup> Thus, he minimised the artistic importance of assistants, whom he saw as purely mechanical helpers. This testifies not only to the perceived primacy of mind over matter, or *inventio* over manual work, in the era’s workshop practices, but also demonstrates that modelling was not considered to be less creative than carving. On the contrary, it was considered the most direct, spontaneous material translation of the idea, and thus, the genius of the (male) artist.<sup>40</sup>

### To be skilled or not to be skilled? (ca. 1880-1900)

In his updated compendium of contemporary artists from 1882, *Peintres et sculpteurs contemporains*, Jules Clarétie declared that “*en art, le sculpteur [...] est le mâle du peintre*”<sup>41</sup>. Many other nineteenth-century publications refer to the “hard” discipline of sculpture being incompatible “by nature” with the “soft nature” and “weak” biology of women. According to Clarétie, “*le sculpteur doit être matériellement et moralement deux fois robuste : il faut non seulement, pour se colleter, pour ainsi dire, avec une statue, l’inspiration de l’artiste, mais le courage physique, la patience et les dépenses de force musculaire de l’ouvrier. Tailler, ciseler le marbre, palpiter d’angoisse lorsqu’on soumet son œuvre à la fonte, quelle tâche!*”<sup>42</sup> Thus, Clarétie distinguished between invention, which he ascribed to the artist, and execution, which required a workman’s muscles. He lauded Antoine-Louis Barye for his ability to master all technical skills, from marble to bronze handling, being “*ouvrier autant qu’artiste*”. Aware that

38. In the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, the first part (livre premier: architecture) of the *Grammaire des arts du dessin* was published in four to six issues each year between 1 April 1860 and 1863. Then came the part on sculpture. The “avis au lecteur” in the 1867 edition is dated April 1860. Charles BLANC, *Grammaire des arts du dessin : architecture, sculpture, peinture*, Paris, veuve Jules Renouard libraire-éditeur, 1867, from p. 372, under subtitle VII; Charles BLANC, *Grammaire des arts du dessin : architecture, sculpture, peinture*, Paris, Henri Laurens, 1880, p. 351-52.

39. Ch. BLANC, *Grammaire [...]*, op. cit. (1867), p. 373: “*L’exécution de toute statue doit être précédée d’un modèle en argile ou en cire, qui est proprement l’œuvre originale du sculpteur, et dont la statue sera la copie*”.

40. Ch. BLANC, *Grammaire [...]*, op. cit. (1867), p. 374: “*La terre cuite est en effet pour le sculpteur ce qu’est pour le peintre un de ces dessins qu’il crayonne ou qu’il écrit d’une plume légère sur le papier pour les graver à l’eau-forte, en s’attachant moins à la réalité qu’à l’esprit des formes, et qui sont, comme les autographes de son génie*”.

41. Jules CLARETIE, *Peintres et sculpteurs contemporains : artistes décédés de 1870 à 1880*, Paris, D. Jouaust, 1882, p. 125.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 126-27.

sculptors often relied on the help of assistants, Clarétie found that a true sculptor had to be able not only to come up with the idea, but also to execute it alone. Around that time, criticism on the many sculptors making use of the numerous available *praticiens* in Paris gradually arose. In 1894, critic Paul Leroi, in his Salon review in *L'Art*, complained how “several of our leading sculptors have become weak”.<sup>43</sup>

For women sculptors, this matter seems to be the crux of the problem: the perception that they contracted out the work because they lacked the skills. This corresponds with another wave of amateur women artists in the last decades of the nineteenth century (with the *arts d'agrément*s now also fashionable among the middle classes), which led to defensive reactions. It remains difficult to determine whether nineteenth-century women found the kind of work that was usually done by *praticiens* to be more difficult than their male colleagues found it,<sup>44</sup> or whether they could become just as capable as men and only had part of the execution done by others for time-management purposes, just as men, or precisely because the carving part of the job was considered incompatible with feminine identity. One should ideally differentiate between women of different social classes, and, more individually, between women of different body types and bodily conditions. However, such information is scarce and hard to interpret.

In some cases, criticism directed at women for using assistants, alleging a deficiency in skills, may not have been completely unjustified. After all, for a long time, there were barriers to women sculptors obtaining the necessary training to master the profession. Not only were they not accepted in official training institutions, such as the *École des Beaux-Arts*, until the late nineteenth century, but aspiring sculptors usually also started their careers as assistants in the studios of respected masters. Many would remain *praticiens* for the rest of their lives. Such a working context (in which the presence of nude models was possible) was the best place to acquire skills and train the hands, but it contrasted in many ways with the then-supposed ‘respectability’ of women within the middle and upper classes, to which most nineteenth-century women sculptors belonged.

43. Paul LEROI, “La sculpture”, in *L'Art*, 1894; as cited by Barbara MUNETTI in her chapter “Prejudice and Protectionism: Italian Sculptors in France in the Nineteenth-Century”, in Marjan STERCKX and Tom VERSCHAFFEL (eds.), *Sculpting Abroad. International Mobility of Nineteenth-Century Sculptors and their Work*, XIX. Studies in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Arts and Visual Culture, 3, Turnhout, Brepols, 2018 (forthcoming).

44. According to Charlotte Cushman, her partner, sculptor Emma Stebbins (1815-1882), who made little use of assistants, “assume[d] labours [in the studio] for which she ha[d] neither physical nor mental strength”, Letter from Charlotte Cushman to Emma Crow, Rome, 4 February 1864, as cited in M. DABAKIS, *A Sisterhood [...]*, op. cit., p. 83.

Thus, the problem was not merely one of biology and gender, but often also of a social gap, and sometimes even a racial or national “complication” as well, such as in the case of Italian *praticiens*.<sup>45</sup> Aspiring young women sculptors were not readily accepted as assistants in sculpting studios, so they could not readily learn by doing. Rodin’s studio is presumably one of the first exceptions, as it was where Camille Claudel (1864-1943) and Jessie Lipscomb (1861-1952) worked alongside men as his assistants starting around 1885.<sup>46</sup> However, the mere presence of a female minority in an all-male, homosocial context, which was typical of nineteenth-century artists’ studios, changed the atmosphere, making it more sexually charged. In a family studio, therefore, women artists traditionally had better chances to learn, as the presence of male relatives impeded the risk of sexual involvement.

Women sculptors in France found increasing opportunities to train themselves in sculpture, largely thanks to Mme Léon Bertaux, who not only pleaded to get them into the *École des Beaux-Arts*, but also opened her own *École de sculpture pour femmes* in Paris in 1879, in the Avenue de Villiers 147. This also was the address communicated by Mme Bertaux of *praticien* Rimbez, who would cut her lifesize statue of Jean-Baptiste Chardin in stone before its placement on the facade at the newly-built Parisian City Hall in 1882, after this was destroyed by fire during the Commune.<sup>47</sup> This was no exception: no less than 150 out of the 219 commissioned sculptors used *praticiens*, many of them Italians, largely from Carrara.<sup>48</sup> Presumably, Mme Bertaux’ building contained several studios for sculptors and *praticiens*. Nevertheless, moral, social, and educational conventions excluded all but the most determined women from stonework and from training in a sculptor’s studio. As such, contracting out the carving was actually a solution for several (distinguished) women to retain their respectability and still become sculptors. In his 1889 publication *A primer of sculpture*, British sculptor Edward Roscoe Mullins asserted, once again, that women’s “slighter physique” was simply inadequate for a discipline that “require[d] a firm grip of the tool and strength of arm and wrist, to ensure good execution”, and thus that they lacked the necessary skills

45. The presence of Italian *praticiens* increased in Paris and in southern France from around 1850, especially between 1885 and 1900, the period of statuemania. B. MUSETTI, *Praticiens italiens [...], op. cit.*, p. 84.

46. *Camille Claudel, 1864-1943* [cat. exp.] Paris, Gallimard, 2008, p. 105. Few other examples of female *praticiens* are known; further research is needed.

47. See M. STERCKX, *Sisyphus’ dochters, vrouwelijke beeldhouwers en hun werk in de publieke ruimte (Parijs, Londen, Brussel, ca. 1770-1953)*, Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België voor Wetenschappen en Kunsten, Nieuwe Reeks, Brussel, KVAB Press, 2012, 2 vol., cat. nr. 37.

48. See Barbara MUSETTI, “Gli emigranti del marmo. Scultori apuo-versiliesi a Parigi tra la fine XIX e l’inizio del XX secolo, tra arte e socialità”, in S. BERRESFORD (ed.), *Carrara e il mercato della scultura*, Milan, Motta, 2007, p. 212-216, p. 214.

due to their biology. As a solution, Mullins suggested that women sculptors should “get their marble work done for them”, a practice that is not unreasonable, he added, given that male sculptors frequently left this heavy-duty aspect of their work to assistants.<sup>49</sup>

In France, this practice endured. In late 1891, Laure Coutan-Montorgeuil (1855-1914) requested that the inspector visit her *praticien* Mr. Richard to verify the marble bust of Vivien that the state commissioned her to do.<sup>50</sup> One month later, she announced that the finished bust could be collected from the *praticien*.<sup>51</sup> Concerning her nude *Floréal*, also bought by the French government, Coutan wrote that “the practice” would be done by “*un Français*” (maybe to distinguish from the many Italians ?), Mr. Greber, and that she would deliver the marble statue after the 1912 salon.<sup>52</sup>

Nevertheless, several sculptresses did cut their stone themselves for fear of being accused of not producing their own works. In 1894, Camille Claudel asked Mathias Morhardt to convince Rodin to stop visiting her, as “*M. Rodin n’ignore pas que bien des gens méchants se sont imaginé de dire qu’il me faisait ma sculpture ; pourquoi donc alors faire tout ce qu’on peut pour accréditer cette calomnie ?*”<sup>53</sup> Some works or parts formerly ascribed to Auguste Rodin have since been attributed to Camille Claudel during the time she was one of his assistants.<sup>54</sup> Once she started working on her own, around 1892, she had some of her works partly carved by others (among them, François Pompon), but also carved many herself, even in the hardest stones, which was very time-consuming. According to Mathias Morhardt, “*elle peut signer de son nom les œuvres qui sortent de son atelier. Elles sont bien d’elle-même et d’elle seule*”.<sup>55</sup> On one hand, she did this precisely to avoid having her work attributed to her former teacher and lover who, at the same time, advised her not to remove

49. Roscoe E. MULLINS, *A Primer of Sculpture*, London, Cassell and Co., 1889, p. 70.

50. Paris, CHAN, F/21/2181: Laure Coutan to the Directeur des Beaux-Arts, 12 December 1891. The French State made a block of marble available for this statue. The *praticien’s* address was 25, rue Humboldt. The inspection was followed by a second payment (FF 900).

51. Paris, CHAN, F/21/2181: Laure Coutan to the Directeur des Beaux-Arts, 26 January 1892.

52. Paris, CHAN, F/21/4192: Laure Coutan to the Directeur des Beaux-Arts, 1911: “*La pratique sera faite par un Français, Mr. Greber, 6, rue Vernier*”. It was bought for FF 7500 and ended up in a square in Lyon.

53. C. CLAUDEL as cited in Jacques CASSAR, *Dossier Camille Claudel*, Paris, éditions J’ai Lu, 1987, p. 189; Antoinette LE NORMAND-ROMAIN, *Camille Claudel & Rodin*, Paris, Musée Rodin-Hermann éditeurs, 2014, p. 81. The American Edmonia Lewis (1845-1907) and the German Milly Steger (1881-1948) are other such examples.

54. For instance, the heads of *l’Esclave* (1887) and of *Rieur* (ca. 1891-92). The latter received the signature of Rodin during its cast in bronze, but is actually a work by Claudel. Several feet and hands also were made by her, but are more difficult to attribute. *Camille Claudel, 1864-1943 [...] op. cit.*, cat. 24-28.

55. Mathias MORHARDT, « Mademoiselle Camille Claudel », 750; as cited in J. CASSAR, *Dossier [...] op. cit.*, p. 183.



the joints left by two errant *praticiens* and not to conduct the chasing of the bronzes herself, as he considered this a waste of time.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, in her struggle to be original, Claudel pleaded for appreciation of the actual fabrication of an artistic object when its authenticity is evaluated. She said originality consists not only of the invention of the piece, as readable in the “*modèle original*”, but also in the technical realisation of the marble or bronze piece, from start to finish.<sup>57</sup>

### Direct carving and the muscular genius (ca. 1900-1914)

It is not surprising then that Camille Claudel also started working in *taille directe*, as an early practitioner during the revival of this so-called ‘primitive’ method, working directly on the marble block without preliminary sketches.<sup>58</sup> The vogue for direct carving, or *taille directe*, in the early twentieth century paralleled a better recognition of the sculpting practice itself, including its physicality. As the sculptor does not just fit material into a form invented in advance, the qualities of the material itself are a determining factor in the final form. Thus, the carving process is part of the essence of the sculpture, so it cannot be outsourced.<sup>59</sup> The typical accompanying image of the sculptor is that of a hard-working, somewhat aggressive, and impulsively carving genius, driven by immediate insights and instinct, striking a rather masculine figure. According to the French magazine *Minerva*, Belgian-French artist Yvonne Serruys (1873-1953), once a neighbour of Camille Claudel’s on the Quai de Bourbon, was also an early adopter of this method, which was distinguished from the ‘old practice’ with *praticiens*:

*Avant la guerre, c’était la méthode courante que de mettre au point la maquette de terre glaise, puis de la confier ensuite à des praticiens qui dégrossissaient le marbre presque complètement (sinon copiaient tout à fait) pour ne laisser à l’artiste que la place*

56. Claudine MITCHELL, “Sur la notion de « femme sculpteur » : les phénomènes de la connaissance et les ombres de l’Histoire », in Anne RIVIÈRE (ed.), *Sculpture’Elles. Les sculpteurs femmes du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle à nos jours*, Paris, Somogy, 2011, p. 257; A. LE NORMAND-ROMAIN, *Camille Claudel [...]*, op. cit., p. 93-96. Family ties in general could have the disadvantage that a woman’s work was simply added to the œuvre of her sculpting father, husband, brother, or son, and was thus denied authorship. These sculptresses (e.g., Mary Thornycroft) largely disappeared from art history, or appear in the footnotes in the stories of their family members.

57. C. MITCHELL, *Sur la notion [...]*, op. cit., p. 257-258.

58. J. CASSAR, *Dossier [...]*, op. cit., p. 183-84.

59. Alex POTTS, “Carving and the Engendering of Sculpture: Adrian Stokes on Barbara Hepworth”, in David THISTLEWOOD (ed.), *Barbara Hepworth Reconsidered*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1996, p. 43-52; Anja CHERDRON, *Prometheus war nicht ihr Abne. Berliner Bildhauerinnen der Weimarer Republik*, Marburg, Jonas Verlag, 2000; Reinhold HOHL, “The adventure of modern sculpture in the 19th and 20th centuries”, in Georges DUBY et Jean-Luc DAVAL (ed.), *Sculpture, from Antiquity to the Present Day*, Köln-London-Madrid, Taschen, 2002, p. 843-1152.

*de la signature à tracer au ciseau et au papier émeri. Frémiet, Mercié, toute leur école ont toujours procédé ainsi. Les efforts de la nouvelle génération ont prouvé récemment que la seule réalisation « vivante » est la taille directe, qui respecte de la matière l'esprit, le grain, le sentiment si péremptoire aux yeux de qui sait vraiment ce qu'est l'art sans maniérisme vain ou sans commercialisation excessive. Ceci, Yvonne Serruys fut l'un des premiers à le comprendre, et dès ses débuts [...] elle se plia au rude apprentissage de dégrossir la pierre, ne voulant laisser à quiconque la joie de sentir s'animer et vivre la matière qui, plus que toute autre porte en elle, par sa peine même, la récompense divine.<sup>60</sup>*

Using this method, Serruys sometimes worked for a year and a half on a single piece, according to the same author.<sup>61</sup> Nonetheless, she left behind an œuvre of nearly threehundred sculptures, which she signed with her name in full, even if she sometimes also called on the services of *praticiens* for her marble statues and busts. At the age of nearly sixty, after a long illness, she wrote from her studio at the Île Saint-Louis: “*On m’attend pour aller corriger un buste en marbre chez le praticien*”.<sup>62</sup> Note that she writes “correct” and not simply “collect”, so there was still an active role to play for the sculptor. American sculptor Malvina Hoffman (1887-1966) also did much of the specialised work herself out of curiosity about the materials and techniques, from the building of armatures and the pouring of plaster casts to experiments in bronze casting using the lost-wax technique, but she also used assistants for her monumental commissions<sup>63</sup>. During her time in Paris between 1910 and 1914, Rodin took her to Eugène Rudier’s bronze foundry and “asked the workmen to instruct [her] in the technical maze of sand-mold bronze casting, chasing, and patining”.<sup>64</sup> According to her, “few sculptors of modern times do

60. Roger DE NÉRCIP, “Les Femmes Artistes : Yvonne Serruys (Mme Pierre Mille), sculpteur”, *Minerva*, Paris, 1926, s.p. Constantin Brancusi is usually considered to be who introduced this new approach around 1906; Paul Gauguin and Aristide Maillol experimented with it early on as well. In Great Britain, Dora Gordine, Gertrude Hermes (1901-1983) and Barbara Hepworth (1903-1975) are known to have worked via direct carving. Photos of the latter two carving in Jon WOOD and Penelope CURTIS, *Close Encounters. The sculptor’s studio in the age of the camera*, Leeds, Henry Moore Institute, 2002.

61. R. DE NÉRCIP, *Les Femmes Artistes [...]*, *op. cit.*, sans page/without paging: “*toujours avec un métier sûr, probe et patient, qui lui fit certaines fois tenir un an et demi une œuvre sous l’ébauchoir*”. Serruys’ contemporary, Jane Poupelet (1874-1932), just like British sculptor Dora Gordine (1895-1991), released herself of the time-consuming patination and polishing of her bronzes. As a result, Poupelet managed to deliver only three to four sculptures a year. For this reason, Poupelet left the Salon d’Automne and went on to exhibit only at the Salon national des Beaux-Arts. Maurice GUILLEMOT, “Jane Poupelet”, *Art et Décoration*, 1913, p. 51-56, 54; Claudine MITCHELL, “Style/ Ecriture. On the Classical Ethos, Women’s Sculptural Practice and pre-First-World-War Feminism”, *Art History*, t. 25, n° 1, February 2002, p. 1-22; Anne RIVIÈRE (ed.), *Jane Poupelet 1874-1932*, Paris, Gallimard, 2005; C. MITCHELL, *Sur la notion [...]*, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

62. Paris, Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, 091 SER : Letter by Yvonne Serruys (sent from 15, Quai de Bourbon, Paris) to unknown “*chère amie*” (H. Lacour?), s.d. (after 1929), p. 2 of 4.

63. May Brawley HILL, *The Woman Sculptor Malvina Hoffman and Her Contemporaries. An Exhibition of Small Bronzes to Celebrate the Centennial of the Brearley School*, New York, Paul-Art Press Inc., Berry-Hill Galleries, 1984, p. 22; D. GAZE, *Dictionary*, p. 705.

64. Malvina HOFFMAN, *Yesterday is Tomorrow. A Personal History*, New York, Crown Publishers, Inc., 1965, p. 271. She also visited the Valsuani foundry; Malvina HOFFMAN, *Heads and Tales*, New York, Charles

much of their own marble carving. It is a slow and tedious profession, demanding expert skill and endless patience and accuracy”.<sup>65</sup>

The use of assistants for marble carving and bronze casting was indeed common practice for sculptors, both men and women, in the long nineteenth century in France. The reactions, however, often differed, depending on the artist’s gender. Women were frequently criticised for utilizing assistants – a system that was common practice among male sculptors and even seen as a measure of success. This was especially the case during periods when many women artists worked as “*amateurs*”. Around 1800, they were mainly women from the upper classes, and during the belle époque, mostly women from the upper and middle classes. The Duchesse d’Uzès, sculptor Anne de Mortemart (1847-1933), complained in her memoirs that someone once said of her works that she couldn’t have created them because the work required would have spoiled her nails:

*Bah ! ce n’est pas elle qui a fait cela ! On sait comment elles travaillent, les femmes du monde ! ça leur abîmerait les doigts, etc.*<sup>66</sup>

However, during the Second Empire, a group of determined women sculptors in Paris, mainly from the middle classes, received several state commissions and made no secret of their use of *praticiens*, enabling them to establish professional careers alongside their male colleagues.

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Scribner’s Sons, 1936, p.102-108. For her large undertaking *The Hall of Men* (ca. 1930-35), Hoffman had most of the 104 bronze sculptures of human races cast in the Paris foundry of Eugène Rudier, under her close supervision.

65. M. HOFFMAN, *Heads and Tales [...], op. cit.*, p. 96.

66. Pierre de COSSÉ-BRISSAC, Comte de (ed.), *Souvenirs de la Duchesse d’Uzès née Mortemart*, Paris, Plon, 1939, p. 108; Patrick DE GMELINE, *La Duchesse d’Uzès (1847-1933)*, Paris, Perrin, 2002, p. 225.