

JEAN-FRANÇOIS HEIM

FINE ARTS

LUCIEN LEVY-DHURMER

Alger 1865 - Le Vésinet 1953
French School

THE BRONZE FOUNDER

Pastel on paper

H. 960 mm; W. 610 mm

Signed lower right: *Levy Dhurmer*

Bears a label on the mount: *Le fondeur de bronze / par Levy Dhurmer/ offert par ses amis à Monsieur J. MALESSET / Président de Section au Tribunal de Commerce de la Seine / à l'occasion de / Sa Nomination d'OFFICIER de la LEGION d'HONNEUR/10 février 1907*

DATE: 1906-1907

PROVENANCE:

Joseph Malesset Collection and thence by descent.

At the age of 14, Lévy-Dhurmer entered the École Communale Supérieure de Dessin et de Sculpture of the 11th arrondissement of Paris, where he attended the classes of two pupils of Alexandre Cabanel: Albert-Charles Wallet and Raphaël Collin, as well as those of Alexandre Vion, Director of the École Communale. From 1887 to 1895, Lévy-Dhurmer worked at Clément Massier's ceramic factory at Golfe-Juan. Practicing painting, drawing and pastel simultaneously, he went to Italy for the first time, probably in 1895. His exhibition at the Galerie Georges Petit in Paris in 1896 revealed first a Pre-Raphaelite symbolism related to Baudelaire portraying elegant allegorical female figures with a highly intellectual sensuality, greatly inspired by Puvis de Chavannes as well as Florentine and German art of the 15th and 16th centuries (*The Woman with a Medal*, 1896, Paris, musée d'Orsay; *Autumn*, 1898, Museum of Saint-Étienne).

From 1897, he undertook a number of trips abroad, mainly in Europe and the Near-East (Italy, Spain, Holland, North Africa, Turkey, etc.) from which he brought back scenes and idealized landscapes that were the subject of several individual exhibitions. Lévy-Dhurmer then went through a realist period, when his works expressed simply the warm colours of nature or the strange personality of his models (the *Blind People of Tanger*, 1901, Paris, musée d'Orsay; *Breton Mother*, 1906, Museum of Brest). He strove then to reach a synthesis between the truth of things and the intuitive view of the artist, but he remained above all a master of esoteric Symbolism: he preferred to evoke fleeting apparitions, distant faces with a mysterious pallor (*Silence*, 1895) and, after 1920, nudes materialized in a cloud of colour (*Blue Nude*, Paris, Petit Palais). He made exquisite portraits, the most famous of which are *Miss Nathalie Clifford-Barney* and *Pierre Loti* (1896, Bayonne, Musée Basque), with the twilight visible in the distance. In the portrait of *Georges Rodenbach* (1896, Paris, musée d'Orsay), he expressed the quintessence of the sickly soul of the poet in a refined symphony of shades of sweet melancholy.

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Lévy-Dhurmer was later to illustrate *Bruges la Morte* (1928), the principal work of this nostalgic dandy, in which breathe the silent, old fashioned languor of the closed beguignages and mists on northern waters. He also designed the covers of Renée Vivien's *Fjords* (1902). The major donation by Zagorowsky, exhibited in March-April 1973 at the Grand Palais (Paris) was divided among the museums of Paris (Musée d'Orsay and Petit Palais), of Beauvais, Brest, Gray, Pontoise, Saint-Étienne and Sète.

Joseph Malesset made a fortune with a prosperous factory for machines with gaseous water units. He was promoted to the grade of Officer of the Legion of Honour in 1906. He was also an officer of public instruction and Agricultural Merit. A judge at the Commercial Court of the Seine, he was also Councillor for Foreign Commerce and a member of the Higher Council for the Colonies. A Director of the automobile factory Darracq, he acquired in 1906 the art foundry Gasne, the successor to the prestigious foundry Thiébault Frères and also of the Molz establishments, an industrial foundry for bronze and copper. Shortly afterwards he merged the two companies and diversified production into two sectors. An exclusive activity of industrial monumental smelting and of sub-contracting with the Molz foundry while the Thiébault-Malesset foundry practiced art casting using in particular the lost wax and sand techniques. The theme of this pastel by Lévy-Dhurmer obviously refers to the activity of Joseph Malesset to whom it was given. Malesset also owned another work by the artist on the same theme, *The Founders* exhibited at the Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in 1908 (see Exposition de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, Paris, Champ de Mars, 1908, n°735, reproduced). The choice of pastel, a technique favoured by Lévy-Dhurmer, gives intensity to the colours used, while the hatching gives the composition a vibrant appearance.