

TRINITY FINE ART

FÉLICIE DE FAUVEAU
(Leghorn, 1801 - Florence, 1886)

Portrait Bust of the Duchess of Berry

marble, height 60 cm

signed and dated: F. DE Fauveau/1840, inscribed along the top: *HENRICI GENITRIX*

Félicie de Fauveau, Feminism and the French Revolution

The century of Louis XV is well known also as the century of the royal mistresses, since in Paris and in the provinces, the pivotal meetings of the Enlightenment movement known as the « Salons des Lumières » were hosted by women. However both the French Revolution and the Empire dealt great blows to the status and roles of women, and therefore female influence and participation in French society. During these troubled times, two women in particular illustrate female resistance, firstly Olympe de Gouge, guillotined after Marie Antoinette, in November 1793, authoress of the “*Declaration of the Woman and the Citizen*”, who wrote copiously in favour of women's civil and political rights and the abolition of slavery. The other is Germaine de Staël, an emancipated woman and an intellectual close to the spirit of the Enlightenment who, during a reception organised by Talleyrand, the new Minister of External Affairs, met General Bonaparte for the first time in the Hotel Galliffet and immediately assailed him with questions, amongst which she asked: "*General, who is to you the first amongst women?*", to which Bonaparte replied "*The one who produces the most children, Madame*".

In the literature dealing with her relations with social institutions, Germaine de Staël proclaimed that the Revolution had brought about a regression in the status of women, and underlined the ways in which their legal, social and political status had been affected, and the misfortunes to which their subordinate position in the family and in society, condemned them.

Fauveau's feminist and political engagement

Furthermore, the history of art allows us to clearly evaluate the condition of the female artist and with the exception of a few outstanding personalities who carved a niche for themselves at the end of the reign of Louis XVI, such as Anne Vallayer-Coster, Élisabeth Vigée Lebrun,

Marguerite Gérard, and a little later Hortense Hautebourg Lescaux, how many others remained unknown due to being ignored by the institutions and thus confined to the practice of art as a mere pastime.

It is within this panorama that we can situate the personage and character of Félicie de Fauveau who occupies a space of courage and radicalism that is totally original.

As the catalogue of the monographic exhibition of 2013, at the Musée d'Orsay¹, points out, Fauveau, who was educated in a school for young girls run by a woman from the Jewish intelligentsia, adopted a radical, traditionalist Catholicism and rather than choosing the more “feminine” pastimes of poetry or watercolour, instead chose the most physical and, therefore, a priori the least feminine branch of art according to the gender-based organisation of society: sculpture.

In doing so Félicie was in defiance of the masculine social status quo, and moreover feminised the chivalric order which traditionally excluded women. In the aftermath of the abdication of Charles X, dressed as a man she took arms at a chateau in the Vendée together with her friend the Countess of La Rochejacquelein, and both serve a woman who defended the exercise of royal power by divine right, the Duchess of Berry, almost embodying the idea of bellicose Amazons led by women in defence of a child king.

Characters similar to Félicie emerged simultaneously in post-revolutionary and post-imperial French society, among them Marie d'Orléans who sculpted a Joan of Arc (fig.1), not as a victim or in prayer but in armour, in men's clothing, while at the same time the acts of her trial are being transcribed which speak of her gender transgression, Joan lived and fought dressed as a man, a fundamental argument in her conviction for heresy. Félicie's story, and particularly her devotion to the Duchess of Berry who had dared to brave Charles X and then Louis Philippe, tells a story that goes beyond the history of art, which recounts the story of women in their struggle for expression, against the male order, and of the repression of their demands, which finds its most tragic moment in the imprisonment of Camille Claudel, who is no longer locked up for witchcraft or political activism but for perceived mental instability, a modern “answer” to the troubling subject of female creativity and power.

¹ Bellenger 2013, see literature



Fig. 1: Marie d'Orléans, *Jeanne d'Arc à cheval*, 1834-1835, Musée de Grenoble

Feauveau and the genre of portrait bust

It is to be deduced that the portrait was not the preferred genre of Félicie. As soon as she first attended the Salon her choice was made, she would only exhibit historical subjects. During her entire career she only undertook about fifteen portraits, all of them executed during her exile in Florence, and in the end, Félicie treated the portrait as a work of History. Bearers of a political and spiritual message, her portraits are rarely limited to capturing individuality, a value she considered to be vain and accidental. In the human image, as in all her objects, it is the symbol that prevails above all else. As a result, in the portrait as in other genres, Fauveau innovated, invented and transformed. She conceived the portrait as an architectural ensemble, in the medieval manner, and loaded it with attributes and symbols which point to the identity of her models and often to their royalist and Christian commitments. "*Above all, we wanted architecture and portraiture to present a whole that could satisfy both the demands of the times in which we live and the taste of our 15th century ancestors*" wrote her brother to the

fervent royalist, the Marquis des Issarts. After the unusual iconography employed in the bust of 1851 depicting Virginia Boccella, with a long neck in the manner of Desiderio da Settignano, which shows the daughter of Prince Esterhazy of Galanta, whose reputation for beauty was so great that a rose was named after her. Fauveau's second female bust is that of the Duchess of Berry, a dynastic bust. Its method of depiction, which sacrifices verisimilitude for the sake of symbolism, is so codified that it is almost heraldic. The composition is in the shape of the interior of a lily, whose stem of stylised foliage enshrines open, golden pomegranates, thus transforming the whole bust into a sort of ciborium or reliquary. The polychrome decoration of gold, red and lapis blue, the inscription *HENRICUS MATRIX* and the small crenellated towers that seem like the defences of a fortress lead the viewer towards ideas of fecundity, resistance and dynastic sacredness (fig.2).



Fig. 2: Félicie de Fauveau, *Portrait Bust of the Duchess of Berry* (detail)

The almost incongruous strangeness of this extraordinary invention, which is as much Gothic as it is close to Art Nouveau, is without equivalent in the entire oeuvre of Romantic statuary.

Félicie de Fauveau

Félicie de Fauveau was a unique figure and one of the most representative exponents of the "troubadour style". Nostalgic for an age she had not lived in and a monarchist, a Catholic, a spinster and a feminist, she devoted her life and her art to the defence of a political utopia. A loyal ally of the Duchess of Berry, she and the Countess de la Rochejaquelein were the driving forces behind the rebellion in the Vendée. After the uprising collapsed she went into exile in Florence, a city to which Europe's aristocrats flocked en masse, attracted by the grand duke of Tuscany's hospitality and by the city's pleasant climate, and they never failed to visit the De Fauveau workshop. Loyal to her ideal of monarchy by divine right, De Fauveau worked primarily for the highest ranks of the nobility, with Russian aristocrats playing an important role in her career. After completing the work commissioned from her by Grand Duchess Maria Nikolaevna of Russia, De Fauveau received commissions also from the grand duchess's father, Czar Nicholas I, of whose autocratic style of government she strongly approved. The czar visited her workshop in 1846 and asked her to make a graceful fountain with a nymph and a dolphin for the terrace of his Peterhof Palace. This fountain is one of the very few instances of nude sculpture in De Fauveau's entire career.

For Prince Anatole Demidoff's Villa of San Donato, De Fauveau produced decorations and adornments designed to set off the items in his sumptuous collection, such as the base for François-Joseph Bosio's statue of *Henry IV as a Young Child*.

Félicie de Fauveau produced a militant and almost fanatical Catholic iconography fuelled by heraldic symbolism, and proceeded to clothe that iconography in an inspired neo-Gothic and neo-Renaissance style.

The Duchess of Berry

Maria Carolina of Naples and Sicily, Duchess of Berry, was the daughter of Francesco I, King of the Two Sicilies, and of Maria Clementina of Austria. After spending most of her childhood and adolescence in Palermo and Naples, Maria Carolina went to France to wed Charles Ferdinand of Artois, Duke of Berry, a younger son of the Count of Artois (King Louis XVIII's brother and himself later King Charles X). The Élysée Palace was redecorated for the couple.

The Duchess of Berry moved to the Tuileries after her husband was assassinated. Not

especially observant of court etiquette, Carolina loved to hold receptions and was very sensitive to fashion. A great patron of the arts, she devoted much time and energy to sponsoring the work of painters, musicians and literary scholars.

After the July Revolution she followed Charles X and the court into exile, returning to France in secret in 1832 when she became involved in a major scandal. Maria Carolina had been involved, in her capacity as the widow of Charles X's son and mother to the heir of the throne, their son the Comte de Chambord, in an unsuccessful uprising. While she was imprisoned in the Citadel of Blaye, however, she gave birth to a daughter, Anne-Marie. Being a widow, she was forced to confess to having secretly contracted marriage with a Sicilian duke named Ettore Lucchesi-Palli. The news caused a huge fuss and was exploited with successfully polemical intent by the government of usurper Louis-Philippe. Arrested again, she was allowed to leave France for Palermo on 8 June 1833. From Palermo she travelled to Prague, but Charles X agreed to receive her only on certain very stringent conditions. This, because the matter was extremely delicate in that the duchess was still the widow of Charles X's son and the mother of the Comte de Chambord, the heir to the throne, so Charles X demanded evidence of a regular wedding certificate attesting to her marriage to Duke Ettore Lucchesi-Palli and had Maria Carolina intercepted in September in Florence, forcing her to hand over the marriage contract. She was finally admitted to her father-in-law's presence in Ljubljana from 13 to 18 October, but she was spurned by the royal family who refused to entrust her with the upbringing and education of her son, the heir to the throne. The Duchesse de Berry was offered hospitality in Belgium, whence she moved to Austria where she was to remain until her death in her castle of Brunnsee in 1870.

PROVENANCE:

commissioned by Maria Carolina of Naples and Sicily, Duchesse de Berry, for her castle of Brunnsee in Austria;
Lucchesi Palli collection

EXHIBITED:

Paris, Musée d'Orsay, June – September 2013 (and Les Lucs-sur-Boulogne, Historial de Vendée, February – May 2013), *Félicie de Fauveau, l'amazone de la sculpture*, cat. n. 24

LITERATURE:

D. M. [ARMAND LOYER DE MAROMME], *Mademoiselle Félicie de Fauveau*, in «L'artiste», May 1842 p. 86;

S. LAMI, *Dictionnaire des sculpteurs de l'École Française au dix-neuvième siècle*, 1916, p. 347;

J. BARBOTTE, *Félicie de Fauveau, héroïne vendéenne et sculpteur romantique, 1801-1866*, 1971, unpublished, Paris, Mémoire de l'école du Louvre, pp. 118-119;

D. GAZE (ed.), *Dictionary of Women Artists*, vol. 1, Chicago 1997, p. 511;

S. BELLENGER, J. DE CASO (ed.), *Félicie de Fauveau, l'amazone de la sculpture*, catalogue of the exhibition held in Les Lucs-sur-Boulogne and Paris, 1913, Paris, 2013, p. 327, cat. n. 24.

