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Rembrandt BUGATTI (1884-1916)

Le Grand Fourmilier, model created in 1909

Bronze proof with brown patina tinged with green, n°5

Lost-wax cast by Adrien Aurélien Hébrard before 1934

Signed (on the top of the base): "R. Bugatti"

Founder's seal: A. A. Hébrard

Numbered (5) on the side of the base

Original oak base

H. 13,4 W. 18,5, D. 8,2 in

Certificate from Véronique Fromanger

600 000 / 800 000 euros

Related Literature

- Vauxcelles, Louis, "La Fonte à Cire perdue" ("Lost-wax Casting") *Art et Décoration*, vol.18, July-December 1910, pp.189-197.
- Chalom des Cordes, Jacques et Fromanger, Véronique, *Rembrandt Bugatti, catalogue raisonné*, Paris, Les Editions de l'Amateur, 1987, pp. 222-223, repr.
- Horswell, Edward, *Rembrandt Bugatti, life in sculpture*, Sladmore Gallery, 2004, pp. 122-125, repr.
- Horswell, Edward, *Rembrandt Bugatti, une vie pour la sculpture*, Sladmore, Les éditions de l'amateur, 2006.
- Fromanger, Véronique, *Rembrandt Bugatti sculpteur, répertoire monographique*, Les Editions de l'Amateur, Paris, 2009, pp. 168-169, repr. and p. 310, n°233, repr.
- *Rembrandt Bugatti The Sculptor 1884 – 1916*, exhibition catalogue, Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, March 28 – July 27, 2014, edited by Philipp Demandt and Anke Daemgen for the Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Hirmer Verlag, 2014, pp. 150-151, repr. (proof n°2/5).
- Fromanger, Véronique, *Rembrandt Bugatti sculpteur, une trajectoire foudroyante, répertoire monographique*, Les Editions de l'Amateur, Paris, 2016, pp. 174-175, repr. et p. 343, n°237, repr.
- Fromanger, Véronique, *Rembrandt Bugatti sculpteur, a meteoric rise, répertoire monographique*, Les Editions de l'Amateur, Paris, 2016, pp. 174-175, repr. and p. 343, n°237, repr.



Bugatti at the end of the first decade of the 1900's

Rembrandt Bugatti was 25 years old in 1909, when he sculpted the *Grand Fourmilier*. Encouraged by the support of those around him, he had already been sculpting for ten years. His favorite subjects were animals, which he modeled in plastiline.¹ Between 1903 and 1908, his parents lived in Paris, which allowed him to spend a lot of time at the zoo in the Jardin des Plantes and at the horse market, which were close to each other. Around this time, he was also regularly visiting the zoo at Antwerp,² in Belgium, and traveling to Germany.

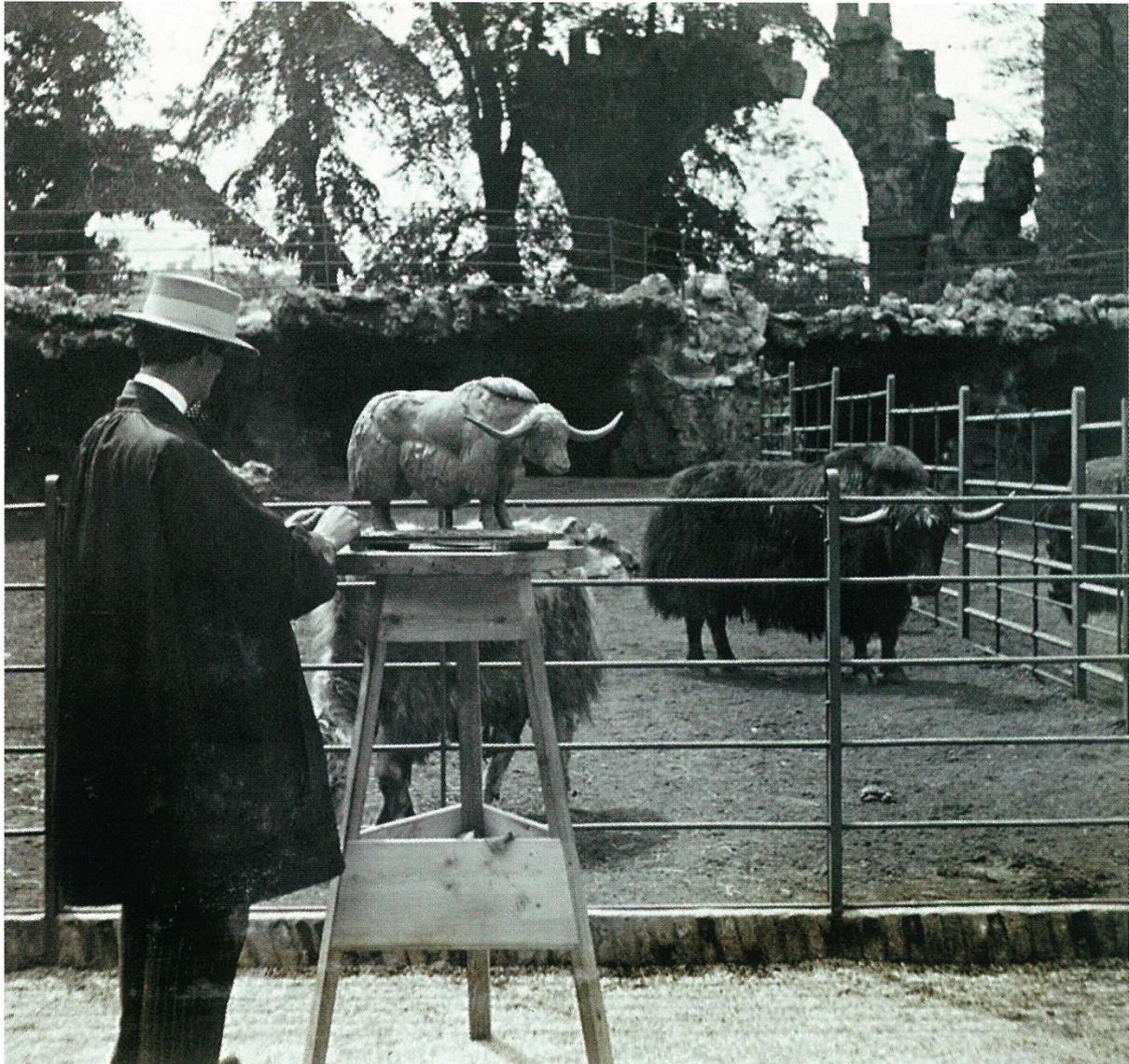
At first devoted to domestic and farm animals, Bugatti was, during this period, entranced by wild animals. "Bugatti persevered with his series of big cats and also cast his expert eye over the other large mammals, from the bear to the elephant, the rhinoceros to the hippopotamus, and the buffalo to the giraffe. He was also interested in other lesser-known species of wild animal, encountering various antelope, a zebra, a large anteater, a baboon, yacks, lamas, tapirs, an ostrich, and several cassowaries."³

¹ "Plastiline is the commercial name of a modeling material containing sulfur, invented in the 19th century by the Genoese Tschudi," in Marie-Thérèse Baudry, *Principes d'analyse scientifique Sculpture Méthode et Vocabulaire*, Editions du Patrimoine, Imprimerie Nationale Editions, 2000, p. 568.

² At the time, the Antwerp zoo was considered the most important zoo in the world. Rembrandt Bugatti began working there in 1906. A large exhibition of his works was held there in 1910.

³ 2016, Fromanger, p. 174.

He spent considerable time observing his models in the various zoos that he frequented, and his working method—freehand modeling, without tools or preparatory sketches—helped him to capture his models with accuracy and spontaneity. As Véronique Fromanger noted, "Bugatti's approach to the volumes was one of synthesis. He schematized each animal as a series of geometric forms, while simultaneously taking care to evoke the texture and sensation of their skin, feathers, or fur."⁴



Rembrandt Bugatti models one of the yacks from the group *Groupe de trois yacks*, in plasteline, c. 1909-1910. Photograph, author unknown. Société Royale de Zoologie d'Anvers (KMDA) archives. P. 59 du Répertoire monographique de 2016.

⁴ 2016, Fromanger, p. 174.

The anteater, a subject that offered wonderful stylistic possibilities

That's exactly what Bugatti brought out in his *Grand Fourmilier*, an animal that he discovered and then studied at the Antwerp zoo. "The anteater is a mammal from South America belonging to the Xenarthra order. There is no other animal quite like it. It is solitary and peaceful, with a long cylindrical muzzle serving as a sheath for its endless tongue. It has short, sturdy back legs armed with powerful inward-facing claws, which enable the animal to open up termite mounds and ant nests in its natural habitat. Its elegant, long-haired, bushy tail equates to more than half its total body length. When sleeping, the anteater covers itself with this large tail and can sleep for at least fifteen hours a day."⁵

Bugatti emphasized the extraordinary natural geometry of the animal as it turns to lick its back foot. Its body almost forms a complete circle, from the end of its tail to the tip of its nose. Even the small part of the body that isn't also curling contributes to the sense of the circle, completing it in our minds through the curve of the leg and the striations in the fur. The only counterpoint to this great circle are the feet, firmly anchored, and the undulating wave of the tail.

The overall effect is a little disconcerting: at first glance, it's a bit difficult to tell the head from the tail or the front from the back.⁶ Guillaume Apollinaire noted this "peculiar distinction"⁷ without really understanding it. However, it perfectly captures the genius of Bugatti's art and is why this anteater was such a great success. Bugatti not only negotiates the animal's difficult volumes, but he also conveys the life vibrating through it at that instant. As in his *Hamadryas Baboon*, he takes great pleasure here in experimenting with new forms, compositions, and surfaces.⁸

"Bugatti's artistic language, though it developed subtly throughout his career, was essentially formed from the sculptural impressionism of his compatriots Medardo Rosso and Giuseppe Grandi, and of Rodin and Troubetzkoy. He was one of those artists (Amedeo Modigliani with his nudes or Alberto Giacometti with his portrait heads come to mind as other examples) who find their own very personal artistic vocation, distinguished not by evident innovation but by utter uniqueness and individuality within a language."⁹

Around 1925, Albéric Collin, one of Bugatti's students, sculpted an interesting version of his master's *Grand Fourmilier*,¹⁰ adopting the same closely striated fur and the circular composition. But in his *Fourmilier*, Collin shows a relaxed animal; he is standing solidly on his four feet, and his nose touches his tail naturally, with neither tension nor intention.

⁵ 2016, Fromanger, p. 174.

⁶ 2014, *Bugatti*, p. 150.

⁷ 2016, Fromanger, p. 174.

⁸ 2014, *Bugatti*, p. 150.

⁹ 2004, Horswell, p. 126-127.

¹⁰ 2004, Horswell, p. 126.



Adrien-Aurélien Hébrard's Castings

Like most of Bugatti's bronzes, the casting and the patina of the *Grand Fourmilier* are of exceptionally high quality. Throughout his short life, Rembrandt Bugatti benefitted from the work of one of the best "artists" of bronze.

A.-A. Hébrard's lost wax casts are among the most beautiful ever made. "The lost wax casts of M. A.-A. Hébrard of works by Rodin, Dalou, Falguière, Debois, Bartholomé, Bourdelle, and others are unanimously appreciated by connoisseurs," the art critic Louis Vauxcelles affirmed in 1905.¹¹ Founder, art dealer, and experienced collector, Hébrard took Rembrandt Bugatti under his wing in 1904, when the sculptor was as yet unknown, offering him an exclusive contract and producing his work until his death. He also promoted Bugatti's work through regular exhibitions in his rue Royale gallery in Paris's 8th arrondissement, inviting an extensive network of collectors to come to view the pieces. As an experienced businessman, he knew to limit the edition's number to make them more desirable.¹² But their success is above all attributable to the quality of the casting and to their exceptional patinas. "One remembers the supple bronzes vibrating with life done by the young animal sculptor Rembrandt Bugatti," Vauxcelles added.¹³ This excellent work is the product of an ancestral knowledge handed down by Albino Palazzolo, the head of the foundry. Bugatti had met Palazzolo, a native of Milan, in Italy and introduced him to Hébrard in 1904.¹⁴ The bronzes that came out of the collaboration among Hébrard, Palazzolo, and Bugatti are so alive, so attentive to the artist's intentions, down to the smallest detail, that they are literally inimitable."

The *Grand Fourmilier* is a rare work; as of today, only five proofs from the edition are known, and only one of them bears a dedication.¹⁵ The dedicated one was given by Bugatti to Hébrard and is marked "To Monsieur A.A. Hébrard, Bugatti, grateful and devoted, 1909, Antwerp." Proof #2 was acquired by Monsieur Jansen in 1911, and proof #3 by Sir Robert Abdy of London; proofs #4 and #5 were kept by the Hébrard gallery. At the time of the publication of the catalogue raisonné of Bugatti's sculptures in 1987 and of the French edition of Edward Horswell's book in 2006, proof #5, the one presented here, was not yet accounted for, and it remained unaccounted for until 2009, when Véronique Fromanger came out with her work, *Rembrandt Bugatti Répertoire monographique*.

¹¹ Vauxcelles, *Art et Décoration*, 1905.

¹² He was the first to establish a numbering system for bronzes.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Albino Palazzolo made a death mask of Bugatti on 8 January, 1916, at the request of Ettore Bugatti.

¹⁵ 2009, Fromanger, p. 310. This information comes from *Cahiers Hébrard* (incomplete).

Bugatti created the *Grand Fourmilier* during a period of intense activity in which he was perfecting his art. Two years later, in 1911, he gained wide-spread public recognition. He was awarded the Legion of Honor, and a large exhibition that brought around a hundred of his sculptures together, organized by Hébrard's gallery, was a huge success.

This is the first time that proof #5 of the *Grand Fourmilier* has ever been on the market, and there is not yet a model of the work in a public collection.