



## 220 Aristide Maillol

1861 – 1944 French

### La Nymphe sans bras

bronze and patina, initialed, editioned 3/6 and stamped with the Alexis Rudier fondeur Paris foundry mark, 1930  
61 ½ x 15 x 12 ½ in, 156.2 x 38.1 x 31.8 cm

#### PROVENANCE

Lucien Maillol, son of the Artist  
Galerie Dina Vierny, Paris  
*Impressionist and Modern Paintings and Sculptures*, Sotheby's  
London, December 6, 1979, lot 30, titled as *Nymphe*  
W. Lawrence Heisey, Toronto  
By descent to the present Private Collection, Toronto

#### LITERATURE

John Rewald, *Maillol*, 1939, the original plaster and lead cast illustrated plate 130, the grouping *Les Trois Graces* reproduced plate 131, each listed page 167  
Pierre Camo, *Maillol: Mon ami*, 1950, page 69  
John Rewald, *Original Pieces of Sculpture by Aristide Maillol*, Paul Rosenberg & Co., 1958, page 6, listed and reproduced page 38  
Bertrand Lorquin, *Maillol*, 1995, another casting reproduced page 114 and listed page 199 as *The Nymph (Armless)*

#### EXHIBITED

Paul Rosenberg & Co., New York, *Original Pieces of Sculpture by Aristide Maillol*, March 3 – 29, 1958, traveling 1958 – February 1960 to the Philadelphia Museum of Art; Cleveland Museum of Art; Toledo Museum of Art; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Albright Art Gallery, Buffalo; Minneapolis Art Institute; St. Louis City Art Museum; California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco; Los Angeles County Museum; and Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, titled as *Nymph*, catalogue #37

AFTER THE DEATH of Auguste Rodin in 1917, Aristide Maillol emerged as the pre-eminent sculptor on the European art scene. Like Rodin, Maillol rejected the heightened romance, narrative and symbolism that characterized the sculpture of the nineteenth century, preferring to engage directly with the force and volume offered by the body. But whereas Rodin chose to repudiate that older tradition with dynamic, vigorous contortions, Maillol's style represented more of a clean break with the past.

His aim was that art should not be overly descriptive or symbolic, but rather emphasize the purity of form and volume of the body's natural contours, achieving harmony between allegory and naturalism. The simplified lines of his almost exclusively female nudes, eradicated of extraneous detail, stand with a calm monumentality that essentialized the power within the figure. With their overwhelming sense of elegance, balance and near-abstracted freedom, Maillol's works were among the best of their time, and their organic forms would directly inspire (if not foreshadow) works by the important later generation of sculptors such as Henry Moore and Jean Arp.

By the 1930s, Maillol, then in his late 60s, was at the height of his career. Arising from his late popularity, he was commissioned by the French state to create a monumental sculpture, *La Montagne*, to coincide with the Exposition internationale des arts et techniques dans la vie moderne, to be held in Paris in 1937. As part of the expo, the city of Paris hosted the exhibition *Les Maîtres*



Aristide Maillol, 1925  
Photo: Alfred Kuhn

*de l'art indépendant*, 1895 – 1937 at the Petit Palais, with the aim of promoting contemporary French art. Maillol was given the use of three dedicated rooms as part of the exhibition, a rare privilege for a living artist, and enough space to hold over 60 of his works—making him the most prominently featured artist of the show.

To match this unprecedented honour, Maillol decided to create an ambitious sculpture composed of three figures. Up to that point, Maillol had almost exclusively sculpted single figures, wary of the complexities involved in the manufacture and casting of larger groupings. The subject he chose was the Three Graces: drawn from antique myth, the intertwined female nudes representing youthful beauty have been frequent subjects across art history, from ancient Greece and Rome to Raphael to Pablo Picasso. For Maillol's interpretation, he looked to interject the celebration of youth and the beauty of nature with a sense of grandeur and nobility. After seven years between conceiving the group and finally casting it in bronze in 1937, the resulting group is a triumph of Maillol's later career and received immediate praise at its exhibition.

The familiar representation of the Three Graces—dynamically dancing, bodies and arms intertwined—is here replaced by Maillol's sense of clarity and purity. A hymn to natural beauty, he chose to emphasize the figures' plastic qualities, bringing a warmth and stability to their closed-in poses and replacing the flurry of movement with the specificity of gesture. In his



monograph on the artist, John Rewald wrote, “The absence of movement, however, is compensated by a tenderness and charm distinctively his own; and while all agitation is foreign to his art, there is in his work... such quiet grace and such warm feeling that they never appear inanimate.” Indeed, despite its classical inspiration, Maillol felt that the title *Les Trois Graces* was insufficient to capture the latent power and physicality of his nudes, finally settling on the title *Les Trois Nymphes de la prairie*—injecting a sense of elemental energy. In their elegant poise, the trio present an emphatically tactile presence, radiating a youthful and striking beauty.

Our sculpture, *La Nymphe sans bras*, is the central figure of the group, with which Maillol began his conception. The inspiration here was his then-muse and student Lucile Passavant, herself a sculptor, printmaker and poet. Typical of his practice, Maillol would work up his sculptures in parts, starting with the torso and only moving on to the next element once he was satisfied. Adding limbs was the artist’s greatest worry (especially given the limits presented by upright standing figures compared to the more folded forms of reclining ones), and he would often create multiple variations before settling on the final form. In the grouping, the nymph’s arms are outstretched, palms upwards towards the two other figures in greeting. Here, in their absence, and now without arms, our nymph most directly recalls the *Venus de Milo*, a work that Maillol admired all the more for being armless: he declared that arms “would add nothing to its beauty; on the contrary they would probably detract from it.”

Maillol’s *Nymphes* was one of the last major compositions produced before his accidental death in 1944, and was perhaps his most celebrated. The vigorous figures that comprise it represent the apotheosis of his aesthetic goals of essential, monumental physicality. Standing on her own, *La Nymphe sans bras* sensitively captures the balanced grace and enduring power of the female body. In this, one of his finest works, Maillol represents a bold declaration of modernist form, while recalling some of the greatest sculptures of the classical age.

This work is from an edition of six casts after the 1930 study of the central figure and comes with exceptional provenance. It was once owned by the artist’s son, Lucien Maillol, and was then held by Galerie Dina Vierny, the gallery founded by the artist’s muse and model under the guidance of Henri Matisse and Jeanne Bucher; Vierny would also go on to found the Musée Maillol in Paris. This lot toured extensively in a major American exhibition of Maillol’s sculpture in the late 1950s and in 1979 was purchased by W. Lawrence Heisey, a Toronto businessman and publisher. It has been held in the family collection ever since. Castings of *Les Trois Nymphes* are held in major global collections, including the Jardin des Tuileries in Paris, the Tate Britain in London, and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, while studies of the central nymph are held in the Centre Pompidou and the Smithsonian’s Hirshhorn Museum.

This work was conceived in 1930 and cast in the late 1940s. Olivier Lorquin has confirmed the authenticity of this work.

**ESTIMATE: \$300,000 – 500,000**



*Les Trois Nymphes* at the Jardin des Tuileries in Paris