

ADRIAN ALAN

Fine Art & Antiques



Marius-Jean-Antonin Mercié

'David vainqueur de Goliath'

Circa: French, Circa 1880

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73 x 35 x 23 cm (28 ³/₄ x 13 ³/₄ x 9 inches)

Patinated bronze

'David vainqueur de Goliath' - A Fine Patinated Bronze Figure By Antonin Mercié, Cast by Ferdinand Barbedienne.

With rich brown patina, the base cast with a lozenge with the Hebrew for David and Signed 'A. Mercie', 'F. BARBEDIENNE FONDEUR', with 'REDUCTION MECHANIQUE A. COLLAS BREVETE' stamp.

The figure depicts the Biblical story of young David's final triumph over Goliath and is one of the most recognisable and celebrated sculptures of the nineteenth century.

Influenced by the works of Verrocchio and Donatello, the piece earned Mercié a first-class medal as well as the rank of Chevalier de légion d'honneur at the Paris Salon of 1872.

The life size version of Mercié's David is in the permanent collection of the Musée D'Orsay (RF 186, LUX 74).

French, Circa 1880.

Literature:

P. Kjellberg, *Les Bronzes Du XIXe Siecle*, Les Editions de L'Amateur, Paris.

Artist description:

Marius-Jean-Antonin Mercié (1845- 1916) was born in Toulouse and studied at the école des Beaux-Arts, Paris, under Alexandre Falguière and François Jouffroy, He made his debut at the Salon in 1868 when he won the celebrated Grand Prix de Rome with the group *Thésée vainqueur du Minotaure*. This entitled him to study in Rome, and whilst studying in Rome from 1869 to 1873, he already executed the models for his first two popular works, *David* and *Gloria Victis*.

In 1870 whilst Mercié was still in Italy, the Prussians invaded France and he began, somewhat prematurely, modelling *Gloria Victis* to commemorate his country's imminent victory. Unfortunately the victory never came and Mercié re-modelled his sculpture replacing the victorious soldier with one of defeat thereby transforming an allegory of Glory to the Victors into one of Glory to the Vanquished . The model for the wounded soldier was reputedly based on his friend and fellow sculptor Henri Regnault who was killed on the last day of the war. The full-size plaster model of *Gloria Victis* was exhibited at the Salon of 1874, winning the Médaille d'Honneur and critical acclaim. It was then purchased by the City of Paris for the sum of twelve thousand francs and cast in bronze by Victor Thiébaud for a further eight thousand francs. The original bronze is now placed in the central courtyard of the Paris Hôtel de Ville. The plaster version was re-exhibited at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1878, alongside bronze reductions of the group by Barbedienne.

After Mercié completed the plaster model of his *David* in Rome, it was also sent to Paris and exhibited at the Salon of 1872, where it was a great success, winning a first class medal. A life-size bronze version of the work was then exhibited at the Exposition Universelle of 1878 and acquired by the Musée du Luxembourg.

In 1873 Mercié was given the Cross of the Legion of Honour - an unprecedented award for a sculptor who was still a student at the French Academy in Rome.

In 1882 he enjoyed further great success with a group *Quand Même*, replicas of which have been set up at Belfort and in the garden of the Tuileries,

Merçié received many important commissions which included monuments to Jean-Louis-Ernest Meissonier (1895), erected in the Jardin de l'Infante in the Louvre, and Louis Faidherbe (1896) at Lille; a statue of Adolphe Thiers set up at St Germain-en-Laye; the monument to Paul Baudry at Père Lachaise; and that of Louis-Philippe and Queen Amélie for their tomb at Dreux (1885). His stone group of *Justice* is at the Hôtel de Ville, Paris.

Further to this he also received many international commissions including three monuments in America namely - *Robert E. Lee*' (1890) an equestrian bronze on Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia; a collaboration with his former teacher Alexandre Falguière on the *Marquis de Lafayette* (1891) in the District of Columbia and for the *Francis Scott Key Monument*, Baltimore, Maryland in (1911).

Merçié was appointed Professor of Drawing and Sculpture at the école des Beaux-Arts, and was elected a member of the Académie Française in 1891, after being awarded the biennial prize of the Institute of 800 in 1887.

He was also one of the few sculptors to be elected to grand officer of the Légion d'Honneur, and in 1913 became the president of the Société des Artistes Français.

As Harpers Magazine was to put it in an article of 1888, on modern French sculpture, Mercié's genius was characterised by an intensity of feeling and an unerring sentiment of beauty in form.

M. Mercié is a man who lives outside of contemporary life, reading neither books nor newspapers, taking no part in civic or patriotic business, frequenting but rarely the society of a few friends, and being, in fact, a sort of artistic hermit isolated in the studio. And yet M. Mercié at the opportune moment created that famous group *Gloria Victis*, which symbolized with thrilling intensity the moral state of patriotic France in 1874, vanquished, but conscious of heroic deeds and noble resolves, grateful to her fallen sons, and more glorious in her defeat than was the Teuton foe in his brutal victory. But how did M. Mercié conceive this group? Why did the clay assume this form? How came the sculptor to express so vividly the latent thought of a whole nation? The simple fact is that the clay which became ultimately the model of *Gloria Victis* assumed successively the forms of *Samson* and *Delilah* and *Judith* and *Holofernes*, but being satisfied with neither of these projects, M. Mercié transformed the clay into the group which is called *Gloria Victis*, and which was conceived and modeled in ten days.

Makers Bibliography:

Pierre Kjellberg, *Les Bronzes du XIX Siècle*, dictionnaire des sculpteurs, Edition de l'Amateur, (Paris)

1987, pps 488-491.

'Lami', Vol 3, p. 433; Romantics to Rodin, pp. 304-6.

'Contemporary French Sculptors' : The Century, Volume 33, Issue 3, Jan 1887

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January 1888.