

**ÉMILE-ANTOINE BOURDELLE**

French, 1861–1929

*La Grande Penelope*, 1912 (cast 1956)

Bronze; h. 96 in. (243.8 cm.)

Gift in memory of Mrs. Richard A. Cooke  
by her children. 1965 (3334.1)

Referred to as “the beacon of the future” by Auguste Rodin, Émile-Antoine Bourdelle brought sculptural realism into the twentieth century. Unlike many of his contemporaries, such as Jean Arp and Constantin Brancusi, who perceived the natural world in terms of smooth biomorphic forms, Bourdelle exaggerated surfaces and built up multiple volumes, reveling in the physical presence of the human figure. Themes of allegory, history, and classical mythology provided Bourdelle with the larger-than-life subjects for which he is so well known. He created a constellation of works that depict Adam, Heracles the Archer (a fine cast of which is in the Academy’s collection), dying centaurs, and portraits of artists, composers, and sculptors; represented here is Penelope, the virtuous wife of Odysseus. Left in Ithaca, Penelope patiently waited for her husband to return from Troy; finally, after twenty years, her steadfast faithfulness was rewarded. Preoccupied with the theme of Penelope from as early as 1906, Bourdelle created an extensive series of drawings and clay and wax models based on Cleopatre Sevastos, a Greek sculptress who later became his wife. *La Grande Penelope* dates from 1912 and represents the culmination of one of the major efforts of his career.

As is true for much of his other sculpture, Bourdelle found inspiration for the depiction of this figure in the art of antiquity. He drew upon the traditions of classical sculpture and painting for the “S” curve of her posture, muselike stance, and regular features. Ignoring the idealized proportions of these precedents, however, Bourdelle



monumentalized Penelope through massively enlarged dimensions. With the gentle rhythms of her swaying figure and serene expression as she leans her head on an upraised hand, Penelope embodies the heroic quality of timeless endurance. JS

LaGrande Penelope ("5554.1")  
Gift of children of Mrs. Richard A. Cook  
in her memory 1963  
Bronze

FRANCE  
1861-1929  
1912 (This cast #4) (1956)

**ARTIST:** Emile Antoine Bourdelle. Bourdelle was a master craftsman and heir of stonecutters who built Romanesque churches. Born in Montauban, Bourdelle began as a simple craftsman sawing logs for his father who was a cabinetmaker. His uncle was a stonecutter and his grandfather a weaver.

At the age of 15 a bust of Ingres, who was born in Montauban, won him a scholarship to Ecole de Beaux Arts in Toulouse. In 1885, he went to Ecole de Beaux Arts in Paris.

In 1896 he worked as chief assistant to Rodin. For many years he was his friend and companion. Bourdelle, after learning much from Rodin struggled against his influence and eventually went his own way. With Penelope Bourdelle gained his first public recognition.

For a short time Henri Matisse studied with Bourdelle.

"Bourdelle's greatness and particular genius lie in one achievement," wrote Jean Charbonneaux of the Louvre, "his rededication of sculpture to its task of rendering the monumental."

At his death in 1929, he had completed 900 sculptures.

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**SUBJECT:** Penelope was the daughter of Icaeus and the nymph Peribola and the faithful wife of Odysseus, also known as Ulysses. The Adventures of Odysseus are told in the Odyssey. Homer's Iliad and Odyssey are the oldest known Greek writings, possibly 1000 B.C.

**MEDIUM AND TECHNIQUE:** Bronze. Small works may be cast as a single piece, but large sculpture often is cut apart to be cast in sections, (later welded together). The plaster model is first half-imbedded in sand, to the mark at which the mold is intended to divide. Then French sand (clay, silica, and alumina) is pressed against the exposed upper half of the model and is pounded firm to form the mold sections. When half the mold has been made, mold and model are turned over to make the other half. When the entire mold is done, the plaster model is removed and replaced by a sand core if the cast is to be hollow. The sand core is scraped down 1/4" or 1/8" to leave space for the bronze and suspended within the mold by means of iron rods. Channels and gates are scraped in the mold to permit the influx of metal and escape of air. The mold and core are then oven dried, reassembled and the molten bronze is poured. After a brief cooling the mold is broken away and the surface of the piece is chased (worked over with chisels and files to remove mold marks and other imperfections of the surface). The final finish, the patina, may be obtained with various acids as color and texturing agents or may be left to exposure and time. On Penelope, the green-brown patina was the result of treating the surface with acids. The work was then varnished and waxed.

Bourdelle made several preliminary studies for Penelope in the years 1905-1912, all of them smaller in size. The smaller version of Penelope was first cast in 1912. The HAA Penelope is #4 of 5 casts and was executed in 1956, in a Swiss foundry. Three of the other four are in The Kroller-Muller Museum in Otterlo, Netherlands; Billy Rose Collection, N.Y.; and a private collection.

LaGrande Penelope (#3334.1) -- continued

STYLE: Bourdelle deeply admired the ancient Greeks and often took his themes from their mythology. The large massive figure with exaggerated proportions is covered with drapery that is fluted in a manner similar to the Doric column. It was created to be displayed out-of-doors as were the figures of the Greek temple.

Penelope stands as the image of the faithful incorruptible wife of Ulysses, waiting with patient resignation for his return. There are no obvious clues that this is Penelope except for the name on the base. She is identified as Greek from her clothing. She appears to be waiting patiently for something, but it could be anything.

A fresco at Pompeii with Penelope in a similar pose may have been Bourdelle's inspiration for this sculpture. (see HAA slide 332 P788.44)

INSTRUCTIONAL AIDS:

1. Younger students enjoy speculating on the size and material. Leave it open, to be answered after they are closer to the sculpture.
2. Briefly discuss bronze casting, explaining the making of the mold and the pouring of molten bronze into the mold and that more than one cast is made when the mold is saved.
3. Discuss the sculptor's plans for the location of Penelope . . . . indoors or outdoors and why.
4. The question "Is that the way she really looked?" is often asked. This can be answered by discussing "what is a myth?"

## Emile Antoine Bourdelle

### *La Grande Penelope*

Bronze. Original dated 1912, Cast #4-1956

Honolulu Academy of Arts, 900 South Beretania Street, Honolulu

A gift in memory of Mrs. Richard A. Cooke by her children, 1965 (3334.1)

Approaching the entrance of the handsome Honolulu Academy of Arts, designed by the architect Bertram Goodhue, *La Grande Penelope* can be seen at some distance before entering the main gates. Framed in a white masonry niche three times its height, the eight-foot bronze sculpture is the focus of the main central court of the academy. The French sculptor Bourdelle was for many years a chief assistant to the great Rodin. Though influenced by his master, considered the father of modern sculpture, Bourdelle in his treatment of *Penelope* shows his strong ties to the nineteenth century, with its interest in classic styles and themes. Here he deals with the story of the wife of King Odysseus and her long wait for his return from the Trojan Wars. Her faithfulness and patience were eventually rewarded by his safe return to Ithaca. Pensive in attitude and quiet in mood, the figure is lent a sense of constrained movement by the thrust of the hip and the graceful counterpoised "S" curves. To appreciate the monumentality of the sculpture and its weathered patina, one must approach it at the platform level. Bourdelle made studies of *Penelope* for a number of years, and this cast number four of the 1912 version was executed posthumously in a Swiss foundry in 1956, under the supervision of Madam Cleopatra Bourdelle.

Thomas Square



You may have noticed on the base of Paul Emile Bourdelle's (1861-1929) the 'Grande Penelope', some inscriptions. On the rear there are several. One is "(c) By Bourdelle" and the other, in Greek,

ΠΗΝΕΛΟΠΗ ΟΔΥΣΣΗΑ ΤΡΟΣΜΕΝΟΥΣ  
*Penelope Odyssea Prosmethes*

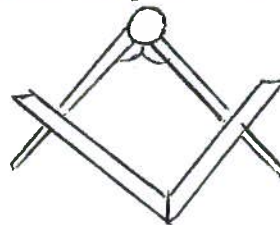
It is also inscribed on the right side of the base: 'EMILE ANTOINE BOURDELLE, 1912'. On the left side: the name of the foundry: 'SUSSE FONDEUR, PARIS, E.A.1 cire perdue', (lost wax)

On the back there is also a seal: What is the meaning of this seal?

*Bourdelle's seal:*



*Freemasonry's seal:*



Bourdelle was a "Martinist" and a "Freemason".

Martinism is a mystic sect founded by Martinez Pasqualis (Grenoble 1727/Port-au-Prince, Haiti 1779). One of his disciples was Franz Anton Mesmer, (1734-1815) a German Physicist who pretended that magnetic fields were a remedy to all diseases. His doctrine "Mesmerism" is to-day known as hypnotism.

Another of his disciples was Guiseppe Balsamo also known as the Count Alessandro de Cagliostro (1743-1795). Cagliostro was an Italian adventurer as well as a physician. He was involved in occult science and alchemy. Cagliostro was also a Freemason.

Freemasonry is a secret association founded by masons in the Middle Ages. Their emblem consists of an interlocked compass and a square. Bourdelle's seal consists of two inverted triangles.

As for Prometheus, he represents the FIRE he stole from the Gods and gave to man.

Penelope weaves the shroud of Laertes, her father-in-law which might represent labour. Penelope is also said to represent Air and Mercury. Mercury was known to the Ancient Greeks. For the alchemist it was the fundamental element of all metals.

Bronze casting contains all the elements of the alchemist: Air, Mercury, Fire and Sulphur.

According to Rhodia Dufet Bourdelle, his daughter, the features of Penelope are those of his first wife Stephanie Von Parys.

The body form of Penelope is recorded in Rhodia's archives as Bourdelle's pupil Cléopatre Savastos, who became his second wife and the mother of Rhodia. Penelope is a synthesis of both Bourdelle's wives. In addition this monumental sculpture is in the tradition of the female Caryatides in the Acropolis in Athens. The drapery over the extended knee is similarly drawn to emphasize the upward, columnesque tension of the figure.

ART OF THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN

The cradles of western civilization were the settlements along the great rivers, the Tigris-Euphrates and the Nile. The civilizations of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt influenced those of Greece and Rome, whose centers sprang up along the shores of the Mediterranean: the heritage of the western world is based on the traditions of those ancient Mediterranean civilizations. We are indebted to the Greeks for their achievements in the fields of philosophy, poetry, science, politics, mathematics, sports and art. It is Greek art, however, which speaks most clearly, telling of the Greeks' search for order and harmony between man, nature and reason. The Romans, heirs to Greek culture, are responsible for bringing civilization to most of Western Europe and for creating an art that reflects the glory and grandeur of a powerful state.

The Academy's collection of art from the ancient world spans several thousand years. Centered in a sunlit courtyard with stuccoed walls and classical arches, the guided tour focuses on three-dimensional objects such as an Egyptian relief, Greek sculpture and Roman glassware.

The enclosed packet of slides shows some of the works to be seen on this tour. The slides and accompanying handout are designed to promote a pre-visit discussion within your group. Please return the packet of slides to the front desk on the day of your tour. If you would like more visual material to prepare your group, our Lending Center has additional slides, mounted pictures and objects for you to borrow.

Slide 1 - Figure of a Pharaoh, detail, limestone, Egypt, ca. 2500 BC: This limestone relief is one of twenty that once lined the wall of a tomb in Saqqara, which is a few miles away from the Great Pyramids. The depiction of the human figure in Egyptian art was guided by traditional rules that were used throughout the entire history of Egyptian art. This relief is a fine example of how the Egyptian artist emphasized the most important aspects; the head is in profile though the eyes are seen from the front, the shoulders are seen from the front but the legs and feet are in profile. The portrayal is more symbolic than an actual representation of what a man looks like.

Slide 2 - Head of a Man, marble, Assyria, 7th century BC: This fragment of a relief is from the Palace of Sargon II at Khorsabad and may show a king. Stone was very scarce in Mesopotamia and most buildings were made of mud-brick. Very often the reliefs were carved on great slabs of stone used only to line the gateways and lower walls of the brick buildings. The relief is very low and, while marble is difficult to work without modern tools, the carving is exquisite. The facial features are strong, the raised eye contrasts with the flatter surface of the face. The tight curls of the hair and beard form a cursive design. The curls on the forehead form a scallop pattern. The overall feeling is one of controlled energy.

Slide 3 - Female Figure, marble, Cyclades, 3rd millennium BC: The Cyclades are a group of islands off the coast of Greece. The civilization of these Aegean islands dates from about the same time as the river-valley civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia. Perhaps the most beautiful objects that the Cycladic people produced were their marble statuettes. They vary greatly in size, from a few inches to almost life-size. The figures are very flat and stylized, with the parts of the human body carved in almost geometric shapes. These figures were usually discovered in graves and are most often female.