

Elliott Fine Art

Old Masters to Early Modern

Madeleine Carpentier
(Paris 1865 – 1949)

Portrait of a young woman holding a lily, probably Marie-Paule Carpentier, the sister of the artist

Signed, dedicated and dated at the lower left: *à mon cher / et charmant modèle / Madeleine Carpentier / 1895*

Pastel on canvas

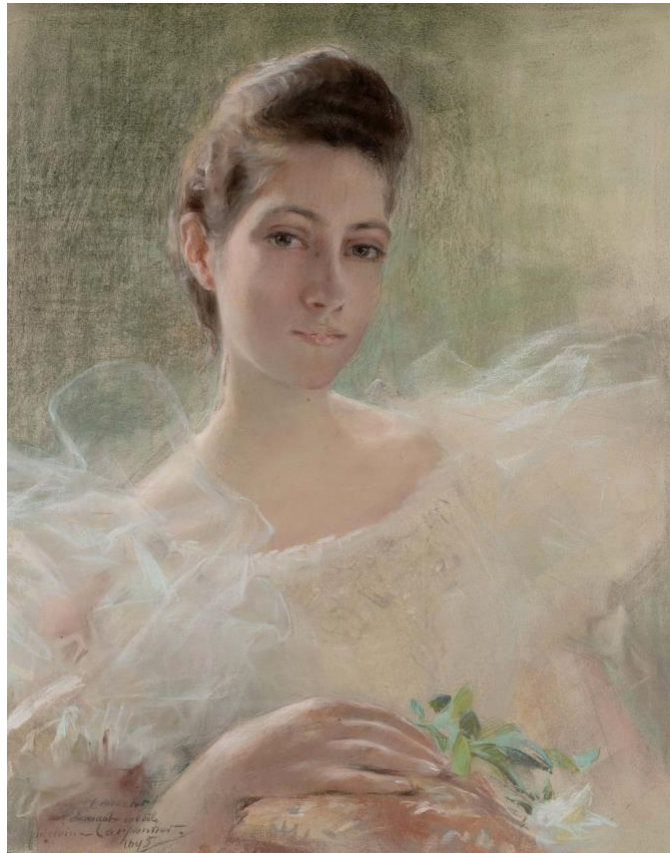
65.6 x 54.5 cm. (25 ½ x 21 in.)

Provenance:

Private Collection, Roubaix, until 2021.

Exhibited:

Probably Salon of 1895 (no. 378, Carpentier (M^{lle} M.), *Portrait de M.C.C...*)



Madeleine Carpentier's sensitive pastel was very likely the portrait exhibited at the Salon of 1895, with the catalogue for that year's exhibition including a work by the artist entitled 'Portrait de M.C.C.', under number 378. Though the sitter remains yet to be identified definitively, there is reason to believe that it is Carpentier's sister, and pupil, Marie-Paule, who was herself an artist. In this case, 'M.C.C.' would be a typographic error for 'M.P.C.', an understandable mistake in a salon catalogue of over three and a half thousand entries. An identification of the sitter with Marie-Paule rests on a few factors: the intimate dedication to the 'cher et charmant modèle'; the physiognomic similarities with Marie-Paule in a full-length painting of her by Carpentier (fig. 5), now in the Musée de Beaux-Arts de Nantes; and finally the youth of the sitter, which corresponds with Marie-Paule's age of nineteen in 1895. Given the above, Carpentier's portrait, which is in itself a fine work, can be considered an important reappearance, not only within the oeuvre of the artist but also in the growing field of study concerning female artists in Paris during the fin-de-siècle.

Madeleine Carpentier: biography

Madeleine Carpentier (fig. 1) was born in Paris in 1865 on the rue Faubourg Saint Denis, the daughter of Louise Marie Grivot and Louis Joseph Désiré Carpentier. She initially studied with Adrien Bonnefoy, and then under Joseph-Benjamin Constant and Jules Lefebvre at the Académie Julian. The Académie Julian, founded by Rodolphe Julian in 1868, was one of the few places in France, and indeed Europe, where a woman could be taught art to the same level and with the same opportunities as men. She also visited Rodin's studio, practicing sculpture.¹

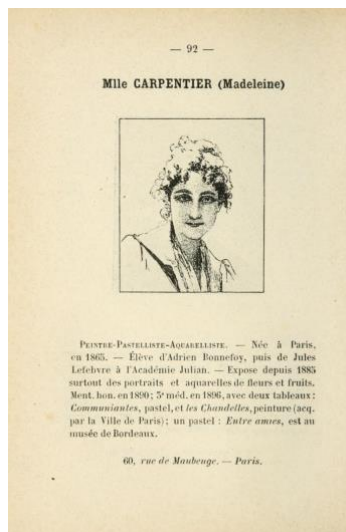


Fig. 1, Portrait of Madeleine Charpentier, from page 92 of Jules Martin's *Nos Peintres et Sculpteurs*, 1896



Fig. 2, Madeleine Charpentier, *Les Chandelles*, 1896, oil on canvas, dimensions unknown, Ville de Paris

Carpentier exhibited regularly at the Salon from 1885 onwards, gaining a 'mention honorable' in 1890 and a medal in 1896 for two pictures depicting infants: *Communiantes*, a

¹ C. Gonnard and E. Lebovici, *Femmes artistes / Artistes femmes*, Paris 2007, p. 47.

pastel, and *Les Chandelles* (fig. 2), a painting which was acquired by the city of Paris and was illustrated in the 1905 book *Women Painters of the World*.² In 1899, another Salon picture, *Le Marchand des Fleurs*, was purchased by the French state. Carpentier joined the *Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs* (U.F.P.S), an annual salon for female artists founded by the sculptor Hélène Bertaux in 1881, exhibiting regularly, and winning the gold medal at the exhibition of 1905.³ She continued to have success at the Salon over the next few decades, winning the gold medal in the Salon of 1930, and several more of her works were acquired by the French state, such as the monumental *Les Résignés* of 1909 (fig. 3). Overall, there are at least a couple dozen of works by her in French museums, giving some idea of the level of institutional interest in Carpentier during her lifetime. It seems Carpentier did not marry, and worked and exhibited up to her death in 1949. She was buried alongside her sister Marie-Paule in the cimetière du Père-Lachaise.



Fig. 3, Madeleine Charpentier, *Les Résignés*, 1909, oil on canvas, 217 x 320 cm, Musée de Beaux-Arts de Nantes

The portrait and sitter

The portrait depicts a fashionable young lady of around twenty, her hand resting on a cushion and holding a white lily, traditionally an allusion to purity, innocence and youth. Carpentier's skill with pastel, a favoured medium, is evident. The thin material over the shoulders is particularly well-rendered, with lightness and translucency, as is the sitter's face and hair, bathed in a soft light coming from the upper-left of the composition.

² W. Shaw Sparrow, *Women Painters of the World*, 1905, p. 244.

³ *Le Monde artiste illustré*, 5 March 1905, p. 158.

There are several reasons, as mentioned above, to believe that the sitter is Carpentier's sister Marie-Paule. Her age of nineteen in 1895 fits and the intimate dedication points to someone Carpentier knew very well. Marie-Paule was also Carpentier's pupil, and the two lived together at number 60 rue du Mauberge in the 9th arrondissement,⁴ so it seems natural that Marie-Paule would have sat for a portrait at some point. Finally, there are strong physiognomic similarities with a full-length portrait of Marie-Paule from around 1900, today in the Musée de Beaux-Arts de Nantes (fig. 4): the brown hair, worn up; the thin, arched eyebrows; the angular face, with high cheekbones; and finally the long nose, curving slightly at the tip.



Fig. 4, Madeleine Charpentier, *Portrait of Marie-Paule Carpentier*, c. 1900, oil on canvas, 200 x 97 cm, Musée de Beaux-Arts de Nantes

Fig. 5, Marie-Paule Charpentier, *La Source*, dimensions unknown, Musée municipal de Liborne

Marie-Paule's artistic output centred around small-format landscapes in watercolour and larger paintings of nymph-like female figures (fig. 5), which have a thematic debt to Jules Lefebvre, Madeleine's professor at the Académie, as well as a dreaminess reminiscent of the Symbolist painter Luc-Oliver Merson, under whom Marie-Paule herself studied. Like her sister, Marie-Paule exhibited regularly at the Salon. She died at the age of thirty-nine in 1915.

Context within Madeleine Carpentier's oeuvre

Though best known for her genre scenes of children at play, of which *Les Chandelles* was the most famous example at the time, Carpentier also excelled as a portraitist. The present

⁴ In the Salon catalogue of 1895 this is given as Carpentier's address, which is the address given for Marie-Paule in the Salon catalogue of 1904, the first time she seems to have exhibited (*Catalogue Illustré du Salon de 1904*, no. 245, *Dans les sapins*, p. IX). The address appears in Salon catalogues for both thereafter.

pastel accords well with Carpentier's best portraits from the fin-de-siècle, which include the aforementioned full-length depiction of Marie-Paule, as well as a currently unlocated oil of an elegant and fashionable lady holding a fan from 1901 (fig. 6). Though perhaps not strictly a portrait, *La Liseuse* (fig. 7), exhibited at the Salon of 1897, can be included with this group. Taken together, these four works depict her proficiency in both pastel and oil, as well as her compositional inventiveness.



Fig. 6, Madeleine Charpentier, *Portrait of a lady with a fan*, 1901, dimensions unknown, location unknown



Fig. 6, Madeleine Charpentier, *La Liseuse*, 1897, 91 x 70 cm, Private Collection

Protean in her subjects and technique, Carpentier was aware of artistic developments but incorporated them into her oeuvre in an individual way, the result being a distinct and diverse body of work. Carpentier deserves to be better known amongst the female painters active in Paris around the turn of the century, and hopefully further research may deepen our understanding of her life and career.