



Cornelio Palmerini (Camaione, Lucca, 1892-1927)

La charmante

Boxwood, 51.5 cm

Provenance: Arnaldo Mondadori's collection

Expertise by Alessandra Imbellone

This sculpture of a young and slim woman slightly looking to the sky and elegantly interceding enveloped in a long-fringed shawl can be attributed to Cornelio Palmerini on a stylistic basis. Palmerini was one of the most gifted artists specialising in wood carving of the first quarter of the twentieth century in Italy. Our beautiful *Charmante* can be compared to other works by this artist created between 1914 (one year after he arrived in Rome) and his premature death. In the catalogue of the Fiorentina primavera (La Fiorentina primavera 1922, p. 165), Palmerini stated 'volsi tentare il legno, vedendo in quella materia qualcosa che non è nel marmo, il colore' [I wanted to try to work with wood, since this material has something that marble has not, colour]. This chromatic value is particularly evident in our sculpture, carved in precious boxwood, which is characterised by a warm, yellowish colour, darkened over the years.

Palmerini trained as marble sculptor at the Laboratorio Duccini in Pietrasanta. Subsequently, he studied first at the local Scuola di Belle Arti, then two years in the Special Course in Sculpture at the Istituto di Belle Arti in Lucca, and finally at the Istituto Regio di Belle Arti of Florence, where he was taught by Augusto Rivalta and got his diploma in 1912. In 1913 he won the prize of the Pensionato artistico nazionale and moved to Rome, where he worked for more than a year at the studio of the Carrarese Arturo Dazzi, who, as Rivalta, worked on the Vittoriano and was close to the Liberty movement (the Italian trend of Art Nouveau).

In this context, Palmerini started carving works in wood, e.g. *Sorrow*, displayed at the Third Exhibition of the Roman Secession (1915), and *Scream*, presented during the Fourth Exhibition and purchased by the City of Rome. *La Charmante* closely resembles these two works permeated by Liberty taste and by the precepts of the International Idealism and Symbolism that constituted the major reasons for the creation of the Roman Secession group. Ivan Meštrović, Gustav Klimt and Franz von Stuck, who successfully participated to the International Exhibition in Rome (1911), were the points of reference of this movement. In particular, Meštrović won the prize for the Serbian Pavillion in 1911 and remained in Rome for four more years to study classical sculpture. He was also a member of the jury for the First Exhibition of the Roman Secession in 1912 as a guarantor of both the petition to ideal values and the closure towards too experimental avant-gardes and movements. Palmerini seemed to have looked especially at Meštrović during his career.

In the following decade, Palmerini continued to carve wood in parallel to his career of cemeterial sculptor, to his War Memorials (Torcigliano, Capezzano Pianore, Santa Maria Albiano, Nocchi, Casarza Ligure e the *Apuan* in Seravezza) and his activity as xylographer. Palmerini's wood sculptures were appreciated by both critics and public during the most important Italian and International exhibitions: Roman Secessions, Biennali in Venice (1920, 1922, 1924 and 1926), First Roman Biennale (1921), Primavera in Florence and Livorno, Quadriennale in Turin, International Exhibition in Buenos Aires (1923), Amatori e Cultori di Belle Arti in Rome (1923, 1927), Florentine exhibitions (1924, 1925, 1927) and the International Exhibition in Fiume. The first catalogue of the Fiorentina primavera (La Fiorentina primavera 1922, p. 165) reads: 'Cornelio Palmerini non è oggi alle prime armi. Dal 1914 in poi egli ha preso parte con successo di critica e di pubblico alle maggiori esposizioni italiane, guadagnano parecchi premi e vendendo a enti e a privati' [Cornelio Palmerini is a mature artist nowadays. Since 1914, he successfully participated to the most important Italian exhibitions. He was appreciated by the public and critics, won numerous prizes and sold his works to both public and private purchasers].

Palmerini's virtuosity in wood carving is documented by works still close to the International Symbolism, such as *Alone* or *The Epileptic*. The fluctuating folds of the shawl of our *Charmante*, however, are closer to Liberty and can be compared to the dress worn by the *Woman*, a sculpture dated 1915. Therefore, this elegant work carved in wood was probably created at an early date, close to Palmerini's Roman sojourn and before he went to war, when he was closest to the Roman Secessions environment. Hypothetically, the *Charmante* might be identified with *Transport of the Soul*, an unlocated sculpture vaguely mentioned in the sources based on biographical notes on the artist.