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EST. 1817

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Jean-Jacques Feuchère
(Paris 1807-1852)

Satan (or Mephistophelese)

Signed and dated: 'J. Feuchere 1833'

Bronze, with rich dark-brown patina

Height: 13 3/4 in. (35 cm.)

Conceived 1833, cast c.1833



Provenance

Private collection, France, until 2024.

Although a sculptor of secondary rank, Feuchère was a Romantic personality par excellence. Son of the *ciseleur* Jacques-François Feuchère, Jean-Jacques was primarily self-trained although he studied with Cortot and Ramey. (1) In his youth Feuchère made a living by working for goldsmiths and chasing, or finishing, bronzes. He studied and became an amateur in the history of many earlier periods of art, and he tried his hand at a wide range of media: metalwork, enamel-work, painting, drawing, lithography, etching, engraving, and sculpture. He made designs for various objects including clocks, candelabra, lamps, ashtrays, and calling cards. His designs for decorative objects were inspired by the works of Renaissance artists, and some of his jewellery supposedly passed as Renaissance originals. (2)

Feuchère made his Salon debut in 1831 with five small works which were well received; (3) although he was associated in the minds of critics with Barye, Préault, and Moine, unlike these artists he does not seem to have had works refused by the Salon juries. (4) For the Arc de Triomphe he executed a relief, *Crossing of the Pont d'Arcole* (1833-34), which depicts a group of theatrically gesticulating figures in a picturesque style close to, but less grand and successful than, that of Rude's *Departure of the Volunteers* on the same monument. Feuchère's other public works, which now appear somewhat stiff and academic, include bronze statues of

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Navigation, Agriculture, and Industry (1838) for the fountain on the Place de la Concorde; a stone statue of *Saint Theresa* (1837-40) for the church of the Madeleine; and a statue of *Bossuet* (commissioned 1840) on the fountain at Place Saint-Sulpice, Paris. His *Joan of Arc* (1845), now in the Hôtel de Ville at Rouen, possesses a simplicity and Romantic lyricism that was appreciated by Baudelaire. (5) In the church of Saint-Paul he painted frescoes of Philippe-Auguste, Saint Louis, Charlemagne, and Louis XII. For the most part, however, Feuchère executed small reliefs, groups and statuettes, and portrait busts.

Feuchère was supported by the Duke of Orleans, and he worked for Prince Demidoff, the Duke of Luynes, and for the Sèvres porcelain works, whose director Meyer was a friend. In fact, Feuchère seems to have had an unusually large circle of friends, including the artists Barye, Daumier (whom Feuchère portrayed), Klagmann, and Soitoux, the latter two Feuchère's pupils. (6) Feuchère also knew Baudelaire, perhaps through the Club des Haschischins to which they both belonged. The poet wrote critically of Feuchère's "exasperating universality" and categorized him as one of those artists who would be happy to "convert the Tombs of Saint-Denis into cigar boxes." (7) Nevertheless, Baudelaire seems to have been fascinated by Feuchère and considered using him as the model for a character in a short story or novel. (8) Feuchère possessed a *goût antiquaire* that manifested itself in the historicising subjects of some of his works, and sometimes in their style, but primarily in his activity as a collector. Much like Balzac's Cousin Pons, Feuchère died poor while possessing an enormous (and enormously varied) art collection. (9)

In the first part of the 19th century, sculptures were created according to demand, not in limited editions. *Satan* was made in three different sizes, with the edition size unknown. However, the quality of the present mid-sized casting, highlighted by its exquisite chasing and patina, distinguishes it as an outstanding early example. The particularly fine cast of the present bronze and the exceptional *ciseleur* work (engraving finishing to the surface), help to create the effect of Satan's fabulous reptilian-like skin. *Satan* was first modelled circa 1833, and Feuchère exhibited a plaster model at the Salon of 1834 and a bronze version the following year; this latter work is presumably the small bronze example, now in the Musée de Douai, which was in the 1900 centennial exhibition of French art. (10) The artist produced an enlarged and reworked version in 1850 measuring 80 cm. high, of which at least three examples are known including one at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and another at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. Reductions were cast, some with the foundry inscription 'E. de Labroue. Gautier et Cie', measuring 34 cm. and 21 cm. high. An illustration of *Satan*, after an etching by Feuchère, appeared along with Alexandre Decamps' review of

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the 1834 Salon in Le Musée; (11) in this review *Satan* was singled out for special praise among several sculptures representing winged creatures or demons.

Perhaps Feuchère's most interesting work, *Satan* in many ways epitomises the interests of Romantic sculptors. Inspired by such literary works as Milton's *Paradise Lost* (translated by Chateaubriand), Goethe's *Faust*, and Dante's *Inferno*, numerous artists of the period dealt with satanic themes. Perhaps the best-known image of this type is Delacroix's 1827 lithograph of *Mephistopheles in the Air*, executed as an illustration for Goethe's *Faust*. Among sculptors, Jean-Jacques Flatters exhibited a figure entitled *Milton's Rebellious Angel* at the Salon of 1827, Marochetti exhibited a *Rebellious Angel* at the Salon of 1831, and Duseigneur showed *Satan Overcome by the Archangel Michael* at the Salon of 1834. In a similar vein, Moine exhibited a *Sabbath Scene* in 1833 and an *Angel of the Last Judgment* in 1836. Bizarre, picturesque semi human figures such as Satan, as well as the themes of melancholy and evil, were central to Romantic imagery both in literature and in art. Artists at this time often saw themselves, like Satan, as outcasts. (12) Along with Satan, the image of another figure with wings, Icarus, also recurs in Romantic art and came to symbolize the artist's plight.

Feuchère's *Satan* was probably inspired by a number of sources. The general pose of the figure—seated and encircled by wings, with the chin resting upon the left hand, and the left elbow propped on a knee—is based upon Dürer's famous engraving of Melancholy of which Feuchère owned an example (fig. 1). (13) The physiognomy of *Satan*—with hooked nose, thick brows extending over the nose, and horns protruding from—may be influenced by medieval gargoyle figures such as the one on Nôtre-Dame that was later recorded by Charles Meryon in his famous etching *Le Stryge*. *Satan's* muscular body with taloned feet and large wings is similar to Delacroix's 1827 rendering of *Mephistopheles*.

Feuchère has depicted Satan after his fall, defeated and dejected, holding a broken sword in his right hand while he gnaws at the fingers of his left. The batlike, skeletal wings, with vestigial claws at the tips, add to the evil cast of this figure. Forming a scaly protective shell, the wings envelop the figure and emphasize its isolation. Feuchère's vivid depiction of melancholy evil is an important formal prototype for a number of later sculptures, most notably Duret's *Chactas Meditating on the Tomb of Atala* (1836), Carpeaux's *Ugolino*, Rodin's *Thinker*, and Joseph Geefs' *Angel of Evil*. At some point, Feuchère's *Satan* also apparently functioned as a symbol for the Freemason's Society in Paris. (14)

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Fig. 1: Albrecht Durer, *Melancholia I*, 1514, engraving

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Notes:

1. J. Janin, *Notice sur J. Feuchère*, Paris 1853, p. 8.
2. Ibid., pp. 8-9.
3. *L'Artiste*, 1831, I, p. 314.
4. *L'Artiste*, 1836, XI, p. 122.
5. C. Baudelaire, *Curiosités esthétiques: l'art romantique et autres oeuvres critiques de Baudelaire*, Paris 1962, p. 81.
6. Janin, *op. cit.*, 1853, p. 14, lists several of Feuchère's friends.
7. Baudelaire, *op. cit.* 1962, pp. 189-90.
8. C. Baudelaire, *Salon de 1846*, Oxford. 1975, p. 242.
9. *Catalogue d'objets d'art et de curiosité... de M. Feuchère, sale catalogue*, March 8-10, 1853.
10. *Catalogue officiel illustré de l'exposition centennale de l'art*, Paris. 1900, p. 229, cat. no. 1647.
11. Alexandre D[ecamps], 'Revue du Salon de 1834,' *Le Musée*, 1834, p. 74. Feuchère's etching of *Satan* is reproduced in Janin, 1853, unpaginated plate illustration. The *Satan* also appears along with several of Feuchère's sculptures in a second unpaginated illustration in the preceding work and in the frontispiece illustration to the journal *L'Art au dix-neuvième siècle*, 1860, v.
12. On the Romantic image of the artist, see R. Wittkower, *Born Under Saturn*, London, 1963, and G. Pelles, *Art, Artists, and Society*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1963.
Also see the following note.
13. *Catalogue d'objets...*, 1853, p. 39, cat. no. 255: "Dürer, la Mélancolie, no. 47, ancienne et belle épreuve." For the association of the artist's image with melancholy, see R. Klibansky, E. Panofsky, and F. Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy*, London, 1964; W. Hauptman, "Manet's Portrait of Baudelaire: An Emblem of Melancholy," *The Art Quarterly*, 1978, I, no. 3, pp. 214-43; W. Hauptman, "Couture's Damocles and the Subjective / Objective Icon," *The Art Quarterly*, 1978, 1, no. 4, pp. 318-37. All of the preceding contains extensive further bibliography.
14. See the extraordinary photograph, which includes a version of Feuchère's *Satan*, of Rosa Bonheur in Freemason's costume illustrated in A. Klumpke, *Rosa Bonheur: sa vie, son oeuvre*, Paris, 1908, p. 159.