Two French Sculptures

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In 2015, the collections of the Nationalmuseum were enriched by the addition of two French sculptures, Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse’s *Between Two Loves* and a *Head of a Sleeping Baby* by Jules Dalou. Dating from the second half of the 19th century, they show both differences and signs of a connection. Their subjects are closely related, although they differ in expression. The two works can serve to exemplify the change which sculptural art was undergoing in the late 19th century, in both genre and expression. It was a period when sculptures of anecdotal and sentimental subjects were often reproduced in bronze or other materials, appealing to a broader, middle-class circle of collectors and at the same time developing a more naturalistic expression.

Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse (1824–1887) began his career as a goldsmith’s apprentice. Instead of a formal, academic education at the École des Beaux-Arts, he received a more practical training as a sculptor at the Petite École. In time, Carrier-Belleuse built up a large, hierarchically organised studio of sculptors spe-

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**Fig. 1** Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse (1824–1887), *Between Two Loves*. Silvered and gilt bronze, 70 cm. Purchase: Hedda and N. D. Qvist Fund. Nationalmuseum, NMSk 2349.
specialising in different fields. The workshop turned out a wide range of ornamental and monumental work, together with more or less mass-produced sculptures in various materials, for which Carrier-Belleuse provided the models. Alongside his practice in France, he worked in Belgium and for several manufactories in England. Carrier-Belleuse’s sculptures combined elements of older styles with new technologies for mass production, and, entrepreneur that he was, he sold works directly from his workshop. At the same time, he regularly exhibited unique sculptures and portraits at the French Salon, attracting great acclaim from collectors and the public. Thanks to his successes at the Salon, pieces by him were also acquired by the French state – at the time, a necessary stepping stone to becoming a respected sculptor. Towards the end of his career (in 1875), Carrier-Belleuse became the director of the Sévres manufactory.

Carrier-Belleuse challenged the Neoclassical ideal. The human figure and a faithful study of nature – often expressed in a sensual female body – were always the starting point for his art, a characteristic we also find in the work of his pupil Auguste Rodin (1840–1917). At the same time, there was a decorative touch to his sculptures that would be quite alien to the sculptors of the next generation. When it came to reproducing his works, however, Carrier-Belleuse was a pioneer. The newly acquired sculpture Between Two Loves (Entre deux amours) was made in the third quarter of the 19th century (the marble is dated 1867). The work presents a moral dilemma. The young woman is caught between two kinds of love – the sensual, romantic variety and the tenderness of maternal affection (Fig. 1).1

Aimé Jules Dalou’s (1838–1902) artistic career had much in common with that of Carrier-Belleuse. Dalou also began his training at the Petite École, but at the age of 15 he was admitted to the École des Beaux-Arts. He made a living from ornamental work, like Carrier-Belleuse, and was involved in the decoration of the many new buildings constructed in Paris in the late 19th century. Like those of other artists, however, Dalou’s career was threatened by the unrest surrounding the Franco-Prussian War and the ensuing Paris Commune of 1870–71, which forced many working in the arts to leave the country temporarily. Dalou installed himself in London, where he found a new clientele among the English middle classes, who appreciated his portraits and charming genre groups of “sweet mothers and well-behaved children”.2 Twelve years later, he returned to Paris. A dedicated republican, he received commissions for a monument in honour of the new regime (Place de la Nation) and, soon afterwards, another dozen sculptures for public places in Paris.

The model for the newly acquired Head of a Sleeping Baby (Buste de bébé endormi) can be dated to between 1874 and 1878, that is, to Dalou’s English period (Fig. 2). It served as a preparatory work for several groups, including a monument to the deceased children of Queen Victoria (1878).3 From 1904 onwards, several posthumous copies were cast by the Hébrard foundry, of which this appears to be one of the earliest.4 The striking realism and the spontaneous expression of the child anticipate the more relaxed idiom of which late 19th-century sculptural art would provide examples, not least in the early works of Auguste Rodin. Dalou and Rodin were also close at a personal level – at least to begin with, before the rivalry between them grew too strong.5

Notes:
4. Archives Hébrard, Musée d’Orsay. This information has kindly been communicated by Amélie Simier.