



HIRSCHL & ADLER GALLERIES

GASTON LACHAISE (1882–1935)

*Mask: Portrait of Marie Pierce*

Nickel-plated bronze, 6 3/4 in. high (excluding original black Belgian marble base)

Signed, dated, and inscribed (with incised mark, on the back): G. Lachaise / © / 1925

RECORDED: cf. The Saint Louis Art Museum, Missouri, *The Ebsworth Collection: American Modernism, 1911–47*, exhib. cat. (St. Louis, Missouri: St. Louis Art Museum, 1987), pp. 120 no. 38, 121 illus. in color, 210, as “Mask”

EXHIBITED: Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, Ohio, 1984–85, *A Selection of Twentieth Century Three-Dimensional Portraits: An Exhibition*, p. 10 illus.. as “Mask” // National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C., 1985–86, *Gaston Lachaise: Portrait Sculpture*, pp. 64, 69 illus., as “Marie Pierce,” lent by Louis and Mary S. Myers Family Collection // Gerald Peters Gallery, New York and Santa Fe, New Mexico, 2012, *Gaston Lachaise: A Modern Epic Vision*, pl. 27 illus. in color

EX COLL.: [C. W. Kraushaar Galleries, New York, 1925]; to Charles Henry Coster, New York, 1925–77; to his estate, until 1978; to sale, Sotheby Parke Bernet, New York, May 19, 1978, no. 352;

to Mary Schiller Myers and Louis S. Myers, Akron, Ohio, until 2010

Although academically trained, the French-born Gaston Lachaise became an important figure in American modernist sculpture. A champion of American art and artists, Lachaise was born in Paris and studied sculpture at the *École des Beaux-Arts* under the French academician, Gabriel-Jules Thomas. While in Paris, Lachaise met the American, Isabel Dutaud Nagle, and it was because of her that he emigrated to the United States in 1906. Lachaise first worked in Boston for Henry Hudson Kitson, an academically-trained sculptor of monuments, before moving to New York in 1912, where he entered the studio of Paulanship.

Lachaise quickly rose to prominence. Called the “greatest American sculptor of his time” by *ARTNews*, Lachaise’s oeuvre is largely divided between portraits and robust and often erotic sculptures devoted to the female nude. His love of Isabel, whom he finally married in New York in 1917, proved his greatest inspiration, as many of his most powerful and compelling works are homages to her body. Lachaise’s portraits are noted for their incisive psychological character, and were often of people close to the him, both friends and family.

Inspired by the beauty of his niece, Marie Pierce (1886–1967), the daughter of Judge Edward P. Pierce and his wife, Adele (Mme Lachaise’s sister), Lachaise executed a tinted alabaster bust and three painted plaster busts of her between 1922 and 1925, one of which was the genesis for a life-size mask cast in bronze, highly polished, and nickel-plated (The Denver Art Museum, Colorado). In 1924 he modeled a smaller mask of her image, of which several nickel-plated bronzes were cast, including this work. Lachaise’s masks of Marie, with their sensitive likenesses, are considered to be

his finest examples of this form, with such portrait masks becoming Lachaise's legacy to American portrait sculpture.

During her youth Marie Pierce endured a short-lived marriage to Polish psychologist Edwin Katzenellenbogen, with whom she had one child who lived only until his eighth year. She was arrested for espionage in 1915 with her son and sister-in-law while sightseeing in Russia, and later served with the Red Cross at the Battle of Galicia. Marie Pierce was an accomplished pianist and linguist, fluent in French, German, and Polish. After her return to the United States, Marie summered with Lachaise and his wife in Georgetown, Maine.

Lachaise modeled his portrait mask of Marie Pierce seven years after her son had died, and her face still bore the traces of mourning. Lachaise's own interest in the expressive power of masks is recorded in a 1910 letter to his wife, in which he spoke of his admiration for "the Greek masks of tragedies that actors used to wear in order to surpass the possibilities of the human face" (Lachaise papers, The Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, New Haven, Connecticut). Lachaise clearly had the Greek mask in mind when he had Marie sit for him, and he brilliantly captured the ingrained sense of tragedy and pathos in Marie's hauntingly beautiful likeness.

Other examples of this sculpture include one in the collection of Barney A. Ebsworth, Seattle, Washington, and another sold by Hirschl & Adler Galleries to a private collection in 1988.

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