c. 1889; 1878; 1880; ca. 1880; c. 1879; c. 1880

marble; bronze; bronze; bronze; bronze; bronze, dark-brown patina; bronze

head; relief; type: other; type: other; type: other; type: other; type: other

11 x 18$\frac{1}{4}$ in. x 12$\frac{1}{4}$ in.; weight: 97 lb; 8$\frac{7}{16}$ x 7$\frac{1}{8}$ x 1$\frac{1}{2}$ in.; 12$\frac{1}{2}$ x 7$\frac{1}{2}$ x 9 in.; 29$\frac{1}{2}$ x 24 x 23 in.; 13$\frac{3}{8}$ x 12$\frac{5}{8}$ in.; 12 x 14$\frac{1}{8}$ x 12$\frac{1}{8}$; 12$\frac{1}{2}$ x 13$\frac{3}{4}$ x 12$\frac{1}{2}$ in.

signed in script on plinth at right: Sarah Bernhardt; on front: A Mon Amie Louise Abbema, Sarah Bernhardt 1878

on back: S. Martin, Fondeur; top of base, proper left: SARAH-BERNHARDT

side of base, proper left: 1880

proper right edge of base: THIEBAUT FRERES / FONDEURS / PARIS; signed on top of base, proper left side: SARAH BERNHARDT / 1880

foundry mark stamped on back, side of base: Thiébaut Frères Fondeurs Paris


Credit Line: Purchase, Assunta Sommella Peluso, Ignazio Peluso, Ada Peluso and Romano I. Peluso Gift, 2009; Otis Norcross Fund and Gift of Robert A. Radloff and Ann Beha; Helen and Alice Colburn Fund; Gift of the Fabergé Society of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts; Acquired by the Clark, 2020; Purchased with funds provided by Constance T. and Donald W. Patterson and Pamela Kelley Hull

Photo credit: www.metmuseum.org, May 13, 2011; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Image courtesy of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts; ph. Clark Art Institute; ph. Art Institute of Chicago

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Provenance

- Paris, ex-collection Sarah Bernhardt
- [11-13 June 1923, Paris, Galerie Georges Petit, her sale]
- [David and Constance Yates]
- 2009, Purchase, Assunta Sommella Peluso, Ignazio Peluso, Ada Peluso and Romano I. Peluso Gift; 1878, given by the artist to Louise Abbema (1858-1927)
- possibly 1978, June 16, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, anonymous sale
- 1989, New York, Sandorval and Co., Inc.
- 1989, June 21, sold by Sandorval to the MFA; 1880, possibly with the artist and exhibited at the
Union League Club, New York (as suggested by Judith Applegate, MFA Bulletin 73, no. 369 (1975): 37, the MFA inkwell may be the third cast made, exhibited in New York in 1880. See "Sarah Bernhardt Souvenir, Including The Authorized Catalogue of Her Paintings and Sculpture" (New York, 1880), cat. no. 18)

- importer on Long Island (In a letter to the MFA (October 9, 1973), Shepherd Gallery indicated that the inkwell was purchased "from an importer on Long Island who gave us no significant provenance on the piece.")

- 1973, New York, Shepherd Gallery

- 1973, November 14, sold by the Shepherd Gallery to the MFA; Gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay; 1999, Gift of the Fabergé Society of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts; by 2012, France, private collection

- 2012, June 29, Paris, Piasa Auction, lot 242, sold to Robert Zehil Gallery, Monaco

- Monaco, Robert Zehil Gallery

- by 2015, New York, NY, private collection

- 2020, consigned to Colnaghi, Ltd, London

- 2020, offered to the Art Institute of Chicago

- Paris, ex-collection Sarah Bernhardt

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Bibliography

• Museum's website, 23 February 2012 and 20 March 2012

1986 Abdy

1975 Applegate

2008 Oklahoma
Paris 1900, Oklahoma City Museum of Art, 2008, p. 47, repr.; Museum's website, 29 February 2016; Museum's website, accessed August 6, 2018; Museum's website (accessed February 1, 2021);

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Exhibitions

- 2005-2006 New York
  Western European Bronzes of the 19th Century, New York, Shepherd Gallery, 1973

1980-1981 Los Angeles/Minneapolis/Detroit/Indianapolis

1987 Grinnell
A View of Her Own: Images of Women by Women Artists, Grinnell College, Grinnell, IA, October 2-31, 1987, no. 5, p. 17, repr.

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The Romantics to Rodin. French Nineteenth-Century Sculpture from North American Collections,

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Related works

- Other bronze examples:
  - London, Ferrers Gallery,
  - London, collection of the Queen Mother Mary,
  - Richmond, VA, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts; Plaster exhibited at the Salon of 1876 in Paris; Bronze, 1880, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 1973.551a-d.

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Comment
Oval bronze plaque with profile portrait in relief of Sarah Bernhardt wearing a plumed hat and a bow at her neck.

Although primarily known for her illustrious acting career, Sarah Bernhardt was an accomplished artist. "La Divine Sarah" was encouraged in her painting and sculpture by such eminent artists as Alfred Stevens and Gustave Doré. A departure from her other more academic sculpture, this unusual self portrait has affinities with Symbolist painting of the day. In 1879 Bernhardt was rehearsing for the role of Blanche de Chelles in Octave Feuillet's play Le Sphinx which may have influenced the theme of this work. The rendering of a part woman, part animal is reminiscent of art nouveau jewellery by René Lalique whom she patronized.