



## **Portrait of Nadine Dumas, Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux**

### **Portrait of Nadine Dumas**

Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux  
French, 1873–1875  
Marble  
H: 31 1/2 in.  
85.SA.47



### **Questions for Teaching**

Describe the person in this portrait. Look closely at her clothing, posture, and facial expression.

What does her pose communicate about her?

What does her facial expression communicate about her?

Describe the qualities of this woman's character, which the artist has captured in this work. What do you know about her from looking at this portrait?

Look closely at the woman's accessories. What do you notice in her hair? (She wears a tiara in this portrait.)

The lines, shadows, and highlights create visual movement in this work of art. Identify details where you notice movement that leads your eye around the sculpture. (Notice how the movement in the fabric and hair lead the viewer physically around the object and activate the motion of her head and clothing.)

Have students identify areas in deep shadow. (Notice how the artist has carved deep shadows in the woman's face, hair, and clothing to add drama. This is especially present in her facial features.)

This kind of sculpture portrait is known as a bust because it displays the head and shoulders of a person. This bust sits on a pedestal. How would you describe the area where the bust ends at the waist? (The termination of the bust is softened with the shawl that falls around the shoulders and waist. Knotting it at the side like a bow, Carpeaux wraps her up like a magnificent gift.)

Imagine what it would be like to be at someone's home and see marble portraits of them in the living room. What would you talk about?

Artist Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux was a close friend of the husband of the sitter, Alexander Dumas *filis*. Carpeaux conceived of the bust as a friendship portrait (as opposed to a work that was commissioned by a patron), and Carpeaux gave the bust to the couple as a gift. Discuss with students what kind of gifts they might give a close friend.

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### Background Information

Known as the "siren with green eyes," Madame Nadine Dumas retains her grace, charm, and power in this portrait bust of her at the age of forty-eight. Carved in white marble, she is a captivating woman with a forceful presence. As she turns with a steady gaze, her upright pose conveys self-assurance. Her unconventional expression suggests intelligence and strength as it shows her with a furrowed brow, caught in a moment of thought. The lace edging on her blouse and the waves in her upswept hair add animation to the smooth surface, while the termination of the bust is softened with a shawl loosely knotted around the shoulders and waist.

The daughter of a lawyer from the Baltic region, Nadine, born Nadeja Knorring, married Prince Alexandre Naryschkine. She fled to Paris in 1850 following a family scandal. After separating from her husband, she lived with the famous author Alexandre Dumas *filis* (*filis* is French for "Junior") for about twelve years, unable to marry him until 1864, when Prince Naryschkine died. Artist Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux, a close friend of Dumas and a witness at his wedding to Nadeja, conceived of the bust as a friendship portrait (as opposed to a work that was commissioned by a patron.) He carved it while staying with the Dumas couple in the north of France near Dieppe. A set of the portraits in plaster is on display together at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris. Nadine lived another twenty-one years after the portrait was completed.

This portrait was executed towards the end of Carpeaux's career, at the height of his powers. It represents a woman who was both a dynamic person and a close friend of his. In 1869 Dumas was in Carpeaux's wedding, and in 1870 the author and his wife were made the godparents of Carpeaux's first child. Alexander Dumas *filis* was one of the first to support the sculptor early in his career, and they continued their friendship until the sculptor's death when Dumas became the executor of Carpeaux's estate.

### About the Artist

#### Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux (French, 1827–1875)

The son of a bricklayer and a lace maker, Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux arrived in Paris in 1838 and worked as a messenger while studying at the free Petite École. Ten years later he entered the École des Beaux-Arts, where he studied with the Romantic sculptor François Rude. He tried and tried again and finally won the Prix de Rome (Roman Prize) in 1854 and traveled to Italy, where he copied antique statues and was greatly influenced by Michelangelo and other Renaissance sculptors. Carpeaux emphasized extreme emotional and physical states in contrast to the calm, classical composure encouraged by the French Academy. In his *Ugolino* of 1860, depicting a character from Dante's *Inferno*, Carpeaux broke with prevailing formulas and laid the foundation for his reputation as the leading sculptor of the day.

Carpeaux is considered one of the great portrait sculptors of all times and the finest sculptor of female portraits in the nineteenth century. He executed numerous portrait busts and became the favored portrait sculptor of Napoleon III and his court. His sensitive portraits combined anatomical and psychological realism with a lyricism reflecting the Rococo revival that permeated much of the period's sculpture. His use of deep shadow, and emphasis on chiaroscuro (bold contrast between light and dark) influenced later sculptors, including Auguste Rodin. Carpeaux also worked as a painter. He died in 1875, one year after this bust was completed.

