



# Le Petit Canard (The Little Duck)

Henri Étienne-Martin

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**Not on display**

**Title/Description:** Le Petit Canard (The Little Duck)

**Artist/Maker:** Henri Étienne-Martin

**Born:** 1951 - 1953

**Object Type:** Sculpture

**Materials:** Wood: Acacia root

**Technique:** Carving

**Measurements:** h. 370 x w. 213 x d. 435 mm

**Accession Number:** 72

**Historic Period:** 20th century

**Production Place:** Europe, France

**Credit Line:** Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

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Regarding the tree root as something of an *objet trouvé*, Henri Etienne-Martin transformed a gnarled and complicated mass of wood into this polished wooden sculpture of a duck. From its rounded base, smooth carved sections of wood sweep upwards in twists and turns, enveloping an interior space to create the shape of the bird.

The angles capture a variety of different expressions and movements, and a contrasting sense of heaviness and lightness, all at once. The weight of the duck's rounded lower body, sitting on short, pronged legs close to the ground, is contrasted by the animation in the upper half of the duck's body. Movement is conveyed by the suggestion of the raised, outstretched wings with the head and long narrow beak tilted to the side, lending grace and lightness.

Although he preferred to carve, Etienne-Martin also modelled extensively, and produced a wide range of massive bronze sculptures. *The Little Duck* was itself cast in an edition of eleven bronzes before the sculpture entered the Sainsbury Centre Collection. Etienne-Martin made his name in France as a sculptor of 'dwelling-sculptures': sculptures with exteriors and interiors, which open and close, that the viewer can enter inside. All these dwellings derive from the sculptor's memory of his childhood home.

On winning the Prix de Paris from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Lyon, where he was studying sculpture, Etienne-Martin was able to move to Paris in 1934, where he established his first studio in Rue du Pot de Fer. There he studied with Charles Mafray at the Académie Ranson and became part of the artists' group Témoinage, whose members included Alfred Manessier and Marcel Michaud.

After being taken prisoner during the war, he returned to the Drôme area of central France and lived in artistic communities in Oppède, Dieulefit and Mortagne. In 1947 he returned to Paris and met Brancusi and Henri Michaux. He set up his studio in the same street as before, and from 1954 embarked on his Dwelling sculptures. [1]

In 1966 Etienne-Martin received the grand prize for sculpture in the 33rd Venice Biennale. He was a professor and head of the sculpture department from 1968 to 1983 at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris. In 1971 he was elected to the Académie Des Beaux-Arts.

In 1984 an exhibition bringing together all of Etienne-Martin's *Demeures* (Dwellings) was held at the Pompidou Centre in Paris. In 2010 a new exhibition at the Pompidou Centre paid respect to the artist by showing fifteen sculptures, drawing, personal notebooks, and photographs of his studio. [2]

Katharine Malcolm, February 2022

[1]

<https://www.henry-moore.org/shop/books-and-publications/essays-on-sculpture/product/etienne-martin-no-27->

[2] <https://alchetron.com/Etienne-Martin>

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## Further Reading

<https://www.henry-moore.org/shop/books-and-publications/essays-on-sculpture/product/etienne-martin-no-27->

Etienne Martin, Michel Ragon, La Connaissance, Bruxelles, 1970. Plate 58.

Catalogue "Otterlo, 1966"

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## Provenance

Acquired by the Sainsbury Family in 1965 from Galerie Europe, Paris.

Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.

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