

GALERIE LAMY
CHABOLLE



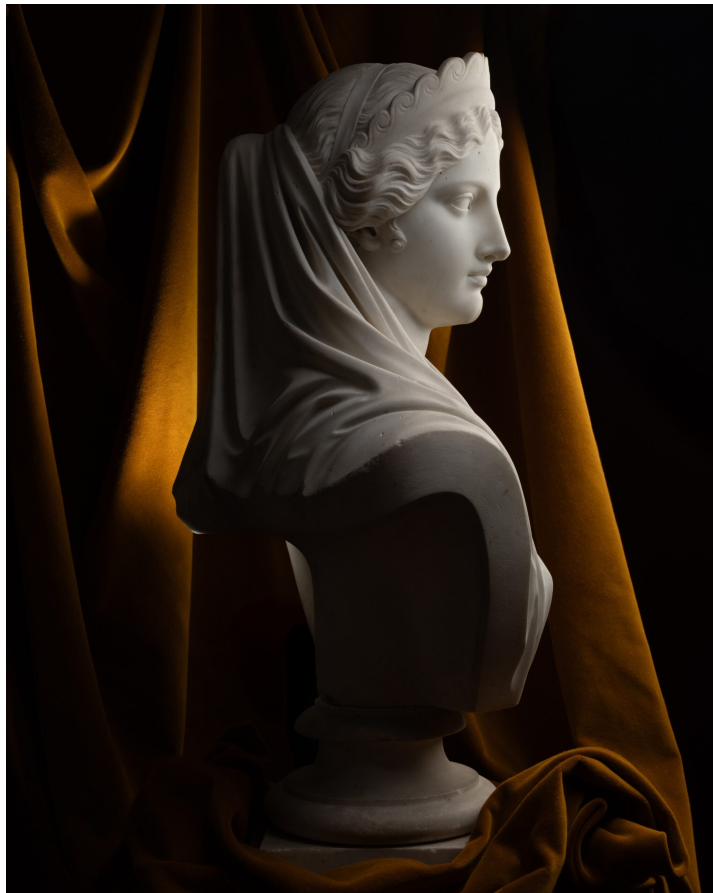
Helen of Troy, by Edward Arlington
Foley

Carrara marble

London

1874

26 x 16.55 x 9.85 in. (66 x 42 x 25 cm)



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This bust of *Helen of Troy* bears the signature of a tormented artist. Edward Arlington Foley, who signed : “E. A. Foley. Sc. 1874.”, was born in Dublin in 1814, trained at the Royal Dublin Society and under now-forgotten Irish sculptors, his kinsman Benjamin Schrowder and John Smyth. Unable to establish himself as a sculptor in Ireland, he soon settled in London, specialised in portrait busts, and began exhibiting at the Royal Academy in 1834, where “*his busts, with several graceful ideal works, appeared almost every year down to 1873.*” Among the busts displayed at the institution’s exhibitions are busts of *Samuel Lover* of 1839, now at the National Portrait Gallery, of the singer *Catherine Hayes* in 1855, which he sculpted and exhibited again in 1861, the nymph *Oenone* in 1869, *Penelope* in 1870, and a *Morning Star* in 1873, an allegory most mysterious and haunting inspired by Milton :

“*Hail bounteous May that dost inspire Mirth and youth, and warm desire...*”

Yet Edward Arlington Foley took his own life the following year, in the month in May. The *Annals* of journalist Joseph Irving report that on May, 10,

“*Drowned in the Regent’s Canal, Edward A. Foley, sculptor...*”

And a record from that year recounts that Edward Foley, who had recently taken to go on long walks late at night, left his home near Mornington Crescent shortly before midnight. A man saw him by the canal around two in the morning : he was seated on the railing of the Albert Road Bridge, his legs hanging over the waters. The man passed by, then heard a loud noise : Foley was gone, and he was dead by the time he was pulled from the water.

A brief biographical note from the National Gallery of Dublin’s archives, reveals that Foley, failing to pay child support, was imprisoned for debt at the end of

1873. Though Edward exhibited almost continuously at the Royal Academy, he seems to have always worked in the shadow of his younger brother, John Henry Foley, a full member of the Academy and arguably one of the most celebrated British sculptors of the Victorian era. The beauty of this bust is the work of an artist in dire and penniless.

It is the scenes, highly celebrated in the first half of the 19th century, engraved by Tommaso Piroli after the drawings of John Flaxman to illustrate a 1805 edition of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, that inform the iconography of this bust : when Aphrodite, disguised as a Phrygian servant and wearing the *pilos*, leads Helen into Pâris' chamber in the third book of the *Iliad*, Helen wears a veil over her hair and a diadem adorned with so-called 'Vitruvian' scrolls, akin to that of our bust. Flaxman's Penelope, by contrast, throughout the *Odyssey*, is crowned with a slightly taller diadem featuring a frieze of *anthemia*.

As Canova, who chose to depict *Helen* with the Phrygian *pilos*, Foley was fond of *ideal heads*. This is shown by his *Penelope*, *Cenone*, and *Hermione* — from Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*, not Euripides' *Andromache* — exhibited at the Royal Academy. These Greek queens and deities allowed him to sculpt some ideal beauty, which is rare in Victorian statuary, where female portraits were, moreover, uncommon. Edward Foley had previously exhibited a *Helen of Troy* at the Royal Academy in 1866, though it is impossible to determine how that work differed from the present work.

Thus, this bust of *Helen of Troy*, dated 1874, signed a few months at most before the sculptor took his own life, is most likely his final work. With this *Helen*, Foley puts to an end a series of ideal beauties begun eight years earlier with the same subject. It is arguably, as a matter of skill and technique, his most accom-

plished work : in a true feat of artistry, he managed to sculpt the sumptuous curls of Canova's *Venus Hope*, though half concealed beneath an ample veil. Helen's face, closely resembles another bust : his latest work preserved in public collections, that is a *Portrait of a Young Girl* dated 1873, held at the National Gallery of Ireland, which, like our *Helen*, reveals in the girl's face and the rendering of her clothing the *ultima maniera* of the sculptor.

LITERATURE

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