



Alfred Laliberté, *My Mother*, n.d., clay, 27 x 24 x 27 cm, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

Quebec artist Alfred Laliberté (1878–1953) sculpts a poignant homage to his mother in *My Mother* (n.d.). It remains unclear whether this is a self-portrait, a connection between the artist and his mother or, judging by one figure's soldier-like attire, an abstract declaration of heroism and love. Nevertheless, the powerful, longing gaze shared between the couple encourages the viewer to recall their own memories of peering into the eyes of a loved one. Employing an

additive method of sculpting, the artist would have warmed and worked his clay until it became malleable, only then piling on additional pieces until the bulk of the sculpture took shape. While keeping the clay wet, the artist would have used his hands and various tools to sculpt the figure before baking it in an oven or kiln or leaving it to dry. The fact that Laliberté's finished works are primarily in bronze or are plaster casts suggests that this sculpture is a *maquette*—a first draft, so to speak—which could be recast and reproduced at will. Despite its lacklustre finish, this version provides a rare, intimate glimpse into Laliberté's artistic process. The textured surface of *My Mother* retains his fingerprints and bodily gestures. The artist has even sentimentally carved the artwork's title into its base. This sculpture is redolent of works by French sculptors like Auguste Rodin (1840–1917) and Jules Dalou (1838–1902), especially in the evocation of sentiment through the clay medium. Laliberté was undoubtedly familiar with their work while studying at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris for five years.

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