

*Pomme Bouche*

Hill Art Foundation

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Claude Lalanne, *Pomme bouche*, 1994. Bronze, 4 1/2 × 4 1/2 × 4 1/2 inches (11.4 × 11.4 × 11.4 cm). The Hill Collection. © 2023 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

*Pomme Bouche* by Claude Lalanne was sculpted in 1994 as part of a series, the earliest noted being from 1975.<sup>1</sup> The mouth appears to melt into the electroplated skin of the apple, exemplifying key elements of the Surrealist movement: “strange images or bizarre juxtapositions, unconsciousness as a valid reality, dream-like artwork or symbolic images.”<sup>2</sup> *Pomme Bouche*’s balance of human and fruit-like features and its larger context as part of a series convey a satirical representation of humanity’s interactions with its surroundings, locked into a cyclical pattern.

Claude Lalanne was born in Paris, France in 1925, to a musician mother and a gold broker father. She studied architecture and eventually became friends with artists Jimmy Metcalf

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<sup>1</sup>“Claude Lalanne, *Pomme Bouche*, 1975.” Kasmin Gallery. Accessed December 5, 2023. <https://www.kasmingallery.com/exhibitions/191/works/artworks-32100-claude-lalanne-pomme-bouche-1975/>.

<sup>2</sup>“What Is Surreal Art Definition?” Angelo Accardi, May 9, 2022. <https://www.angeloaccardi.com/surreal-art/>.

and Larry Rivers, who taught her the method of electroplating: a technique which later became synonymous with her art style. In 1952, she met her husband, Francois-Xavier Lalanne, at one of his art shows. Upon meeting Claude, he abandoned his previous medium of painting and adopted sculpture with his wife, earning the two the name “The Lalannes.” Their goal was to exemplify the “art of living,”<sup>3</sup> mixing the mundane with the extraordinary in dream-like pieces. As time passed, the two diverged into their own signatures; Francois-Xavier Lalanne modeled most of his artwork after animals, and Claude Lalanne after vegetation. Such became the inspiration for *Pomme Bouche*, a celebration of human nature in conjunction with fruit.

The captivating bronze sheen of the apple is derived from electroplating, a technique that transfers the properties of one metal onto the surface of another.<sup>4</sup> Though the color of the apple is unusual, its size is facsimile of a real apple. After extended viewing, one question begins to formulate: where does the mouth end and the apple begin? Other sections of the sculpture, such as the leaf upon the stem, do not leave much up to the imagination in the creative process, since a gap is visible between the two components. However, there is no such gap between the skin of the apple or lips to suggest separate creation.

This surrealist melding of apple and man occurs frequently throughout art history. Rene Magritte’s *The Son of Man* (1964) reverses the dynamic present in *Pomme Bouche*. Whereas Lalanne uses the apple as a canvas for the face, Magritte uses the face as a canvas for the apple. In both artworks, the elements of mystery are clear; and yet, in Lalanne’s, the mystery can be solved when simply looking at human nature’s tendency to interact and depend upon the environment around us just as the face depends upon the apple.

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<sup>3</sup>Viladas, Pilar. Living Treasures, April 2, 2006.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/02/style/tmagazine/living-treasures.html>.

<sup>4</sup>“Electroplating 101: How Plating Metals Works.” Formlabs. Accessed December 5, 2023.  
<https://formlabs.com/blog/electroplating-metal-plating/>.

When surrounded by nature, the human body diffuses into its environment. In consuming the apple, lips mix with the juices of the fruit, teeth dig into the ripe flesh, and for a moment, body and apple become one entity. Charlotte Jansen of *Wallpaper* magazine, in her obituary for Lalanne, shares that the artist was “inspired by both plants and human body elements that she transposes into her furniture, sculptures or jewels made out of precious metals. Other works have a more humorous and surreal dimension to them.”<sup>5</sup> Jansen’s assertion further proves that the sculpture can be read as a satire of the nature of human consumption. Lalanne combines plant and human elements to convey a satirical outlook on how humanity consistently erases the line between the environment and personhood.

Though the exact origin of *Pomme Bouche* as a series is not discernible, the earliest of the series goes back to 1975, and the latest is from 2018, a year before Lalanne’s passing.<sup>6</sup> Not only does this show that the meaning of this work must have resonated with Lalanne, but it also can represent the cyclical pattern of human interactions. Humanity’s patterns over the centuries have changed with time with evolution. However, over the years, *Pomme Bouche* has not lost its signature look -- always an electroplated apple and pair of lips.

The sculpture is an uncanny, disturbing rendition of humanity, and yet, intrigues the viewer to ponder its absurdity. The choice of electroplating the apple rather than painting it a traditional red or green further obscures it. Rather than choosing a color that would suggest skin of a fruit or person, Lalanne chose to electroplate her work, avoiding suggestion of either one.

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<sup>5</sup> Jansen, Charlotte. “In Memoriam: Claude Lalanne (1924-2019).” *wallpaper.com*, April 14, 2019. <https://www.wallpaper.com/art/claude-lalanne-obituary>.

<sup>6</sup>“Pomme Bouche: Collection Dorothee Lalanne: Claude & François-Xavier Lalanne: 2021.” Sotheby’s. Accessed December 5, 2023. <https://www.sothebys.com/en/buy/auction/2021/claude-francois-xavier-lalanne/pomme-bouche>.

Claude Lalanne's piece depicts humanity in opposition to its common narrative. The viewer becomes the subject of art onto the inanimate. Over and over the viewer becomes one with the apple, and at the same time, one with nature.

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