

A Raccoon Dog in Disguise

Chaplet, Ringel d'Illzach, and the Tanuki of Choisy-le-Roi

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1. The teddy bear

On 23 May 2025 the Paris auction house Ader offered at Drouot a small enameled porcelain figure, 9.3 centimeters high, cataloged as the joint work of the ceramist Ernest Chaplet (1835–1909) and the sculptor Jean-Désiré Ringel d'Illzach (1847–1916), dated circa 1891–1895, and titled *Petit ourson assis*, a little seated bear cub, which the sale's English-language listing rendered as *Seated teddy bear*.¹ Against an estimate of €1,200–1,500, it made €11,700 with fees, and the buyer was someone other than me.



Fig. 1. Ernest Chaplet and Ringel d'Illzach, *Seated tanuki* (cataloged as *Seated teddy bear*), enameled porcelain, c. 1891–95, h. 9.3 cm. Two views. Ader, Paris, 23 May 2025, lot 11. Courtesy Ader.

The word that caught my eye in the English listing was “teddy,” a name no one had heard when the figure was made: it was coined after Theodore Roosevelt’s November 1902 Mississippi bear hunt, and the first toys to carry it appeared the following year.² A listing

¹Ader, *Art décoratifs et sculptures du XXe siècle*, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 23 May 2025, lot 11, expert Emmanuel Eyraud: “Ernest Chaplet (1835–1909) céramiste & Jean Ringel d'Illzach (1847–1916) sculpteur. Petit ourson assis. Sculpture. Épreuve en porcelaine émaillée à l'épaisse couverte bleu pâle (type jiangdou – peau de pêche/peau d'orange) aux nuances violacées. Vers 1891–1895. Hauteur: 9,3 cm.” Estimate €1,200–1,500; sold €11,700 with fees (€9,000 hammer). Ringel’s birth year is given as 1847 by Ader and by the Bestiaire; several reference works print 1849.

²Clifford Berryman’s cartoon “Drawing the Line in Mississippi,” *Washington Post*, 16 November 1902, is the usual point of origin for the name; the Michtom and Steiff toy bears followed in 1903. The anachronism belongs to the translation rather than to the French cataloger, who wrote *ourson*; the species

reaching for a twentieth-century toy to describe an 1890s figure is a small sign of how far the figure had drifted from the world that made it. On 25 May 2025, I posted a hunch about what those terms might be: that the “bear” was a tanuki, the Japanese raccoon dog, and that it was modeled with a Japanese netsuke in mind.³ At the time I argued from posture. I can now argue from anatomy, from the object’s own provenance, and from a letter of Chaplet’s, as his biographer reports it.

2. Not a bear

The Ader figure is not unique. The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam has owned an example since 1993 (BK-1993-2, 9.2 cm), bought under the title *Figure of a bear*, and its record names Chaplet at Choisy-le-Roi as maker and Ringel d’Illzach, “possibly,” as designer.⁴ The museum has photographed it from the front, the back and below (figs. 2–4).



Fig. 2. Ernest Chaplet, model attributed to Ringel d’Illzach, *Figure of a tanuki* (cataloged as *Figure of a bear*), porcelain with matte turquoise glaze, Choisy-le-Roi, c. 1891–95, h. 9.2 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, BK-1993-2. Front view. Public domain.

error belongs to both, and it is a reminder that the figure’s pose was being read through a bear, and in English through a twentieth-century toy, rather than through anything available to a sculptor in 1891.

³Todd Arkebauer, post to the Art Nouveau ceramics group, Facebook, 25 May 2025, with comparative images of Edo- and Meiji-period tanuki.

⁴Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, BK-1993-2, *Figure of a bear*, Ernest Chaplet, Choisy-le-Roi, c. 1891–c. 1895; designer Jean Désiré Ringel d’Illzach (possibly); h. 9.2 × w. 8.1 × d. 5.9 cm; purchase 1993; persistent URL <https://id.rijksmuseum.nl/200216108>. The record’s physical-description field reads “steengoed met lichtturquoise glazuur” (stoneware with light turquoise glaze) while its description field reads “Beer van porselein met een mat, licht turquoise glazuur” (bear of porcelain with a matte, light turquoise glaze). The museum’s own 1993 acquisition entry, cited below, says porcelain.

The rear and underside views settle the question as far as a nine-centimeter object can.⁵ From the front the animal reads as a soft, rounded mass, head sunk between the shoulders, forepaws resting on a full belly. From behind, a long, thick tail is visible, wrapped along the right flank from the rump forward to the forepaw. A bear has no such thing: its tail is a stub, a few centimeters long and lost in the fur, and a sculptor working from a bear, or from any image of one, would have had no reason to invent a brush of that length.



Fig. 3. The same, rear view, showing the tail wrapped along the right flank. Rijksmuseum, BK-1993-2. Public domain.

From below, the hind feet show four toes each. Bears have five toes on every foot. The dog family has four behind and four on the ground in front, the fifth front digit being a raised dewclaw that never touches down, and the raccoon dog, *Nyctereutes*, is a canid. In the frontal photograph of the example in the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, a color variant of the same model to which I return below (fig. 5), the forepaws, which come down the flanks to rest beside the belly, show four toes as well.⁶ A small stylized figure need not be anatomically exact, but whoever modeled this one appears to have counted toes.

⁵Rijksmuseum, BK-1993-2, collection images (front, three-quarter, rear, underside), released as public domain and reproduced here as figures 2–4.

⁶Bears (Ursidae) are plantigrade with five digits on each foot; canids, including *Nyctereutes procyonoides* and the Japanese *N. viverrinus*, have four digits on the hind foot, the first digit being absent. See, for the



Fig. 4 (left). The same, underside, showing the four-toed hind feet and the painted rosary mark. Rijksmuseum, BK-1993-2. Public domain. Fig. 5 (right). Ernest Chaplet, model attributed to Ringel d'Illzach, *Ours* (tanuki), glazed terracotta, mottled flambé glaze, h. 9.2 cm. Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, B 1260-7, acquired 1921 from Achille Astre. Image © Lyon MBA – Photo DR.

Add the ears, short, pointed, upright and set wide on the skull, which are a raccoon dog's and not the small round ears of a bear, and the anatomy points one way. What remains is the pose, and the pose is where the Japanese source shows. The seated, frontal, pot-bellied animal with its forepaws laid on its stomach is the standard netsuke formula for the tanuki, the trickster of Japanese folklore who drums on his own belly, *hara-tsuzumi*, on moonlit nights.⁷ Three carved examples make the comparison without needing a word of commentary: a stag-antler netsuke of the 1870s in the British Museum, a raccoon dog dressed as a priest, head bowed, paws on the robe;⁸ its near twin in the Bushell collection in Los Angeles, crouched under the same robe with the belly swelling beneath it;⁹ and an eighteenth-century Kyoto wood netsuke in the form of a tanuki *mokugyo* bell, upright, belly forward, forepaws on the stomach. The Chaplet figure is the resting version of the type, head bowed and paws at the belly, closer to the priest netsuke than to any drummer;

general rule, Mark Elbroch, *Mammal Tracks and Sign: A Guide to North American Species* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole, 2003), on the bear and dog families.

⁷On the tanuki in folklore and popular iconography, including the belly-drum and the creature's comic shape-shifting, see Michael Dylan Foster, *The Book of Yōkai: Mysterious Creatures of Japanese Folklore* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), s.v. "Tanuki," and his *Pandemonium and Parade: Japanese Monsters and the Culture of Yōkai* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

⁸British Museum, F.809, netsuke, raccoon dog dressed as a priest, stag antler, signed Hoshunsai Masayuki, Meiji era, 1870s.

⁹Los Angeles County Museum of Art, AC1998.249.236, Raccoon Dog Disguised as Priest (Tanuki sō), stag antler, Japan, second half of the nineteenth century, 5.4 × 4.9 × 3.3 cm, Raymond and Frances Bushell Collection; published in Hollis Goodall et al., *The Raymond and Frances Bushell Collection of Netsuke: A Legacy at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art* (Los Angeles: LACMA, 2003). An ivory version of the subject is AC1998.249.274.

the belly-drum prints that follow show the tradition the pose belongs to, not the action of this particular figure.¹⁰



Fig. 6 (left). Netsuke, raccoon dog dressed as a priest, stag antler, signed Hoshunsai Masayuki, 1870s. British Museum, F.809. © The Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0). Fig. 7 (center). Netsuke, *Raccoon Dog Disguised as Priest (Tanuki sō)*, stag antler, second half of the nineteenth century, 5.4 cm. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Raymond and Frances Bushell Collection, AC1998.249.236. Public domain (LACMA). Fig. 8 (right). Netsuke, tanuki in the form of a *mokugyo* bell, wood, Kyoto, eighteenth century, 6 cm. Private collection.

Three prints make the same case in two dimensions. An aizuri-e sheet of the 1830s or later, by a printmaker whose signature ends in -kuni, shows the tanuki upright on its haunches, the pale belly presented square to the viewer, the forepaws raised and four-fingered, and the long, full tail laid flat along the ground and trailing behind the haunch, which is exactly where Ringel wrapped it; Shibata Zeshin, Chaplet's exact contemporary, drew the belly-drum itself, the animal upright, belly forward, both forepaws raised to beat it, the tail swept out beside it, on a sheet that reached Boston in the collection William Sturgis Bigelow formed in Japan between 1882 and 1889, the years Chaplet was running Haviland's Paris studio;¹¹ and a design attributed to Hokusai, known to me in a reprint of about 1900, gives the hunched, head-sunk silhouette of the Amsterdam figure almost line for line.¹²

¹⁰Wood netsuke of a tanuki *mokugyo* bell, Kyoto, eighteenth century, 6 × 4.4 × 4 cm, with a loose ball inside the belly; London trade, 2025. The other standard netsuke type, the standing sake-seller with a lotus leaf for a hat and a bottle and bills in its paws, is a different pose altogether; a signed Garaku ivory of the second half of the eighteenth century in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (10.211.1436, Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1910) shows it.

¹¹Aizuri-e woodblock print of a tanuki, Edo period, image 8 7/8 × 6 3/8 in., from a small group of aizuri-e nature subjects, trade, 2025. The dealer left the signature unread; it has four characters, the last two 國 (kuni) and 画 (ga), the first 東, the second not yet read, which places the artist in or near the Utagawa line. The Prussian blue, available to Japanese printmakers from about 1829, dates the sheet to the 1830s or later. Zeshin: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 11.20999, Shibata Zeshin (1807–1891), Raccoon-dog (Tanuki) Drumming on Its Belly (Tanuki no hara-tsuzumi), color woodblock print (nishiki-e) with a poem, Edo period, signed Zeshin with the artist's seal; William Sturgis Bigelow Collection, gift 1911. The museum notes that most of Bigelow's Asian collection was formed during his residence in Japan between 1882 and 1889.

¹²*Tanuki*, after Katsushika Hokusai, woodblock reprint, c. 1900, French trade. The sheet carries, on the block, a vertical cursive signature over two red seals at lower right and the manji 卍 alone at lower left, the name Hokusai used from 1834; a Meiji facsimile reproduces its model's signature along with everything



Fig. 9 (left). *Tanuki*, aizuri-e (Prussian-blue) woodblock print, signed with a four-character signature ending -kuni ga, Edo period, 1830s or later, image 22.5 × 16.2 cm (8 7/8 × 6 3/8 in.). Private collection. Fig. 10 (center). Shibata Zeshin, *Tanuki Drumming on Its Belly* (*Tanuki no hara-tsuzumi*), color woodblock print with poem, Edo period. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, William Sturgis Bigelow Collection, 11.20999. Public domain (MFA). Fig. 11 (right). *Tanuki*, after Hokusai, woodblock reprint, c. 1900. Private collection.

A generation after Chaplet, Ohara Koson drew the same creature under a crescent moon, upright on its haunches with both forepaws raised to beat the swollen belly and the tail laid in the grass: the belly-drum itself, and proof that the convention Ringel borrowed was stable enough to be drawn unchanged in the 1920s.¹³ Set the Chaplet figure beside them and the resemblance is not a resemblance of mood. It is the same animal in the same posture, and in the netsuke at nearly the same size.



Fig. 12. Ohara Koson (Shōson), *Tanuki, Grasses and Moon*, color woodblock, c. 1926–35. Public domain.

else, so this proves the attribution the publisher intended, not Hokusai's hand. Cited for the pose, not the authorship.

¹³Ohara Koson (Shōson, 1877–1945), *Tanuki, Grasses and Moon*, color woodblock, signed Shōson, the signature Koson used from about 1926, so the print postdates the Chaplet figure by some thirty-five years and is cited for the iconography, not as a source. Catalog number to be supplied from Amy Reigle Newland, Jan Perrée and Robert Schaap, *Crows, Cranes & Camellias: The Natural World of Ohara Koson 1877–1945* (Leiden: Hotei, 2001).

The Rijksmuseum's own wall text, I should say, never claimed more than it could see. It says only that "a sculptor friend made the model of the little bear" for Chaplet.¹⁴ The title is a cataloger's convenience, inherited since 1993 and now propagated, through the museum's Iconclass subject heading "beasts of prey, predatory animals: bear," into the databases that harvest its records. That is the kind of error that corrects itself only if someone writes it down.

3. One model, several examples

Ader cited two further examples, described as color variants, in the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon (inv. B 1260-7) and the Musée national de Céramique at Sèvres. The Lyon figure can now be confirmed: the museum catalogs it as a bear, in glazed terracotta, 9.2 centimeters high, and its photograph (fig. 5) shows the same model in a mottled flambé. It came by a different road from the Amsterdam figure, bought by the museum on 1 July 1921 from the collection of Achille Astre, with six Chaplet vases and a Chaplet elephant. The Sèvres example still rests on the auction house's word.¹⁵ Jean d'Albis, in the chapter of his Chaplet monograph on the Choisy-le-Roi years, illustrated the little figure's companions, several of them now in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs: a recumbent cockerel in dark red, a belled rabbit in matte gray flecked with green, chess pieces in red and turquoise, and a small white figurine of a fat man with a watch chain across his belly, smoking a cigar in an armchair, which d'Albis calls "a modern Buddha as seen by Ringel (?)," all of them porcelain and all of them, he says, the small trial pieces of a period of research.¹⁶ The Amsterdam figure is the one that matters, because its history runs straight back into Chaplet's own studio.

¹⁴Rijksmuseum, BK-1993-2, online label text.

¹⁵Ader lot essay, as in note 1. The Lyon record is confirmed: Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, B 1260-7, Ours, Ernest Chaplet, "terre cuite émaillée," H. 9.2, L. 8.4, D. 6 cm, dated by the museum "second half of the 19th century; 1st quarter of the 20th century," in storage; purchased 1 July 1921 from Achille Astre as part of a group of eight Chaplets, B 1260-1 to B 1260-8 (six vases, the bear, and an elephant figurine, B 1260-8, 9.8 × 19.8 cm). Online at collections.mba-lyon.fr, consulted 8 October 2026; the museum's photograph, frontal, shows the mottled glaze and the four-toed forefeet. Lyon's "glazed terracotta" is a third material description for a single model, after Amsterdam's porcelain and stoneware. The Sèvres example remains on the auction house's authority: the Musée national de Céramique has no online catalog, is closed for renovation until 2030, and has contributed no Chaplet records to the national Joconde database, where the fifty-five other Chaplet notices in French public collections can be read. The Rijksmuseum's 1993 entry independently notes that "several examples" of the model are known.

¹⁶Jean d'Albis, *Ernest Chaplet, un céramiste art nouveau* (Paris: Presses de la Connaissance, 1976), pp. 66–67, figs. 67–70 (cat. nos. 135–139): *Coq couché*, porcelain, dark red glaze (cat. 135, MAD); *Lapin au grelot*, porcelain, matte gray glaze flecked with green (cat. 136, MAD); *Figurine*, porcelain, h. 10 cm, unsigned, mark no. 18, bluish-white enamel, "Un homme au gros ventre barré par une chaîne de montre, assis dans un large fauteuil, fume un cigare. Bouddha moderne vu par Ringel (?)" (cat. 137, p. 119, Aboucaya-Toupenet collection); *Oiseau*, flambé porcelain red and blue, Chaplet bequest 1910 (cat. 138, Conservatoire national des arts et métiers, 14314); chess pieces, red and turquoise glazes (cat. 139, Barlach Heuer collection). The Musée des Arts Décoratifs now catalogs the belled rabbit (inv. 16961) as enameled stoneware, c. 1890; d'Albis called it porcelain.

The museum's acquisition entry, published in its *Bulletin* the year it was bought, records that when Chaplet died in 1909 and the whole stock of his atelier was transferred to the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, his grandson-in-law and former apprentice, the potter Émile Lenoble, chose this little figure and one vase to keep; they stayed in the Lenoble family until Lenoble's elderly daughter-in-law, Hélène Lenoble-Lebasque, sent them to auction at Drouot on 5 June 1992.¹⁷ The figure in Amsterdam, in other words, came out of the master's own shelves, and the dates attached to the model since, Ader's "circa 1891–1895" among them, trace back to that 1993 entry. There is one more trace of it in the family. When d'Albis cataloged the Lenoble holdings in 1976, he listed among sixteen miniatures from Émile Lenoble's collection "a pair of bears, porcelain, H. 8 cm."¹⁸ Two bears in the family in 1976, one in Amsterdam since 1993, one at Drouot in 2025: the arithmetic is suggestive, and it is the first thing I would ask the expert who cataloged the Ader lot.

The base of the Amsterdam example carries Chaplet's signature mark, a rosary (*chapelet*) painted in underglaze blue, with a dot and two loose strokes inside it that the museum transcribes as "I.T." What the strokes are is less clear than it looks. D'Albis's table of Chaplet's marks gives, for the Choisy years, a plain rosary with a pendant cross, painted in pink, blue or green or incised on the copper-red porcelains (his no. 19), and a variant in which the cross is placed inside the ring, reserved "for pieces of very small size" (his no. 20). That is the mark one expects on a 9-centimeter figure, and at first glance a brushed cross is what a cataloger would read as an I and a T. But the museum's own high-resolution photograph does not quite give a Latin cross: the upright meets the bar at the bar's end and does not rise above it, which is the shape of a T rather than a cross. Whether Chaplet's brush simply failed to carry the upright through the bar, or whether a T was intended, and if so what it stood for, I cannot say from a photograph.¹⁹ The rosary itself

¹⁷"Keuze uit de aanwinsten," *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 41, no. 2 (1993): 134–140, at 137–138, no. 3 ("Beertje van porselein met een mat, licht turquoise glazuur, h. 9,2 cm, Choisy-le-Roi, ca. 1891–95, door Ernest Chaplet, het model door Ringel d'Illzach?"). Provenance as given there: collection Émile Lenoble; collection Hélène Lenoble-Lebasque, sale Drouot, Paris, 5 June 1992, lot 81; private collection, Antwerp; purchased 1993. The same sale is the one Ader cites as *De Chaplet à Mayodon (dont Fonds Chaplet)*, Lenormand & Dayen, Drouot-Richelieu, 5 June 1992, catalog by the experts Jean-Marcel Camard and A. Deconinck (Lenoble material pp. 42–48), though Ader's lot and page references do not agree with the Rijksmuseum's; the catalog itself should settle it. Open access at <https://bulletin.rijksmuseum.nl/article/view/20549>.

¹⁸D'Albis, *Ernest Chaplet*, cat. 134 ("16 miniatures de l'ancienne collection Emile Lenoble"), item m: "Paire d'ours, porcelaine. H. 8 cm." The line that follows, "Porcelaine rouge de cuivre. Marques n° 19," may describe the pair or the group; the Amsterdam figure is turquoise and 9.2 cm, so either the pair was glazed differently from it or d'Albis's line is a group description. The 1992 sale dispersed the Lenoble pieces; whether the Ader figure is the second bear of this pair is a question the sale's expert can answer from his file.

¹⁹Rijksmuseum record and 1993 entry, as above: "Merken: geschilderd rozenkrans waarbinnen I. T. = Ernest Chaplet." D'Albis, *Ernest Chaplet*, p. 91, marks nos. 19 ("Après 1886. Peinte en rose, bleu, vert ou en creux, sur les porcelaines rouges de cuivre") and 20 ("Après 1886. Sur les pièces de très petite taille"), the latter drawn as the rosary enclosing a Latin cross whose upright passes through the bar. On BK-1993-2 the strokes read, from the photograph, as a horizontal bar with the upright descending from its right end and a separate dot to the left; the Rijksmuseum's "I.T." is a fair transcription of what is visible. The

settles who fired it, and places the figure in d'Albis's post-1886 group whichever reading of the cipher is right. What it does not settle is what the thing is.

4. Who modeled it

The sculptor friend has a name, and the evidence for it is better than a bare “possibly.” D'Albis, writing from the family papers, places the small sculptures in the same breath as the turquoise glaze: it was during this period, he says, that Chaplet called on Ringel to sculpt small objects for him, animals and chess pieces, “qui font très bien en flammés,” which come out very well in flambé.²⁰ His catalog entry for the belled rabbit gives the source. In the years 1890–91, he writes, Chaplet in his correspondence with Bracquemond alludes several times to animals, and in one letter says: “Ringel m'a fait des choses assez drôles et qui sont parfaites comme réussite de flambé” — Ringel has made me some rather funny things, which are perfect as flambé successes. The letters are dated: 24 September 1890, two undated of 1890 and 1891, and 11 April 1891.²¹ So Ringel's animals for Chaplet can be placed, on the strength of the ceramist's own letters as d'Albis reports them, in the months between the autumn of 1890 and the spring of 1891. The letters do not name the tanuki, and the attribution of this particular model to Ringel remains an attribution; but it is the best-documented one on offer, and the letters give the likeliest moment for the model inside the broader circa 1891–95 bracket the museums use. “Rather funny” is not the obvious way to describe a bear study. It fits a pot-bellied raccoon dog with its paws on its stomach, and it is how d'Albis, a generation later, still described the cigar-smoking figurine from the same group: a modern Buddha, with a question mark for Ringel.

Ringel is the right man for the subject in every other respect. He had worked under Chaplet at Haviland's rue Blomet studio in Vaugirard in the early 1880s, where he made

museum's entry for the companion vase (BK-1993-1), from the same source, transcribes its rosary cipher as “J V ?”, which suggests the same uncertainty. One wrinkle worth keeping: the line “Marques n° 19” that follows the pair of bears in d'Albis's cat. 134, if it refers to them, would give the Lenoble pair the empty rosary rather than the small-piece cross, a point against the Amsterdam figure being one of that pair. The base of the Ader figure, and the cipher on it, would settle both questions.

²⁰D'Albis, *Ernest Chaplet*, p. 67: “C'est pendant cette période que Chaplet fera appel à Ringel pour lui sculpter de petits objets : animaux, pièces du jeu d'échecs, ‘qui font très bien en flammés.’”

²¹D'Albis, *Ernest Chaplet*, cat. 136 (*Lapin*), p. 119: “Au cours des années 1890/91, Chaplet, dans sa correspondance avec Bracquemond, fait plusieurs fois allusion à des animaux. Il écrit : ‘Ringel m'a fait des choses assez drôles et qui sont parfaites comme réussite de flambé’. Réf. : Chaplet, *Lettres à Bracquemond* des 24-9-1890; s.d. 1890; s.d. 1891; 11-4-1891 (Archives Desprez, Paris).” The Rijksmuseum's 1993 entry (p. 138) quotes the same sentence in a lightly shortened form and cites d'Albis's p. 67; the sentence is in fact on p. 119. The letters were in a private collection, the Desprez archive in Paris, when d'Albis consulted them in 1976. Bracquemond's own autograph collection had been dispersed at the Hôtel Drouot on 16–17 November 1960 (*Lettres autographes de la collection Félix Bracquemond*), and the three bound volumes of letters addressed to him that reached the Bibliothèque nationale from that sale (NAF 14674–14676, correspondents Asselineau to Willette) contain nothing from Chaplet. One Chaplet letter to Bracquemond of 1890, written at Choisy-le-Roi and signed “E. Chaplet,” 17.9 × 23 cm, is now in a public collection: Musée de Pont-Aven, inv. 2014.o.259 (M172), from the collection of Dr. Jules Paressant, gift 1987, cataloged in the Joconde database in 2025. Whether it is one of the four letters d'Albis cites is a question only the sheet can answer.

models for the Limoges firm and met the ceramist Albert Dammouse;²² the friendship outlasted the firm, and the Musée d'Orsay, which owns his stoneware mask *La Hantise* of about 1899, calls Chaplet a close friend of the sculptor.²³ He was, moreover, a French sculptor of his generation who is known to have modeled Japanese folklore creatures in ceramic: his kappa figures, the amphibious water-sprites, have been recognized as such by Paul Arthur, who in the same breath credits the Chaplet “bear” to Ringel.²⁴ The Bestiaire’s own Ringel, a 65-centimeter stoneware chimera of 1905 edited by Elchinger of Soufflenheim, belongs to the same imagination at a very different scale.²⁵ A sculptor who had modeled kappa did not need to be told what a tanuki was.

5. The road from Edo to Choisy-le-Roi

How a Japanese trickster reached a kiln in the southern suburbs of Paris is not a mystery once one looks at the house Ringel and Chaplet had both come out of. Bracquemond, the recipient of Chaplet’s letter, was the man who in 1866 had built the Service Rousseau out of Hokusai’s *Manga*; on 1 July 1872 Charles Haviland appointed him artistic director of the firm’s Auteuil studio, and by that December Japanese albums borrowed from Bracquemond were circulating at the factory in Limoges.²⁶ Five years later Haviland married Madeleine Burty, daughter of Philippe Burty, the critic who had given *japonisme* its name, with Bracquemond and Edmond de Goncourt among the witnesses; Goncourt noted that the bride’s father left the wedding breakfast early to go and look at Japanese objects at Bing’s.²⁷ Chaplet directed Haviland’s Paris workshop through the first half of the 1880s, with Ringel modeling for him there. The *Manga* itself, the picture-book the whole circle had been raised on, contains both creatures in question: a kappa among the

²²Petit Palais, Paris, PPS3809, Ringel d’Illzach, *Portrait de Jeanne et Mme Albert Dammouse*, 1885: the museum’s notice records that Ringel met Dammouse in the rue Blomet studio directed by Chaplet, where he was making models for the Haviland factory.

²³Musée d’Orsay, Paris, Jean-Désiré Ringel d’Illzach, *La Hantise*, c. 1899, polychrome stoneware mask, with the museum’s notice on the friendship.

²⁴Paul Arthur, post to the Art Nouveau ceramics group, Facebook, 5 January 2025, suggesting that Ringel’s kappa were inspired by Hokusai and noting that the Chaplet bear was “apparently sculpted by Ringel d’Illzach.” Arthur is the author of the standard reference, *French Art Nouveau Ceramics: An Illustrated Dictionary* (Paris: Norma, 2015).

²⁵Jean-Désiré Ringel d’Illzach, *Chimère batracienne*, 1905, glazed stoneware, Elchinger, Soufflenheim, 65 cm, Arkebauer Collection; the model is also represented at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, M.2006.98.2.

²⁶Laurens d’Albis and Tristan d’Albis, “Haviland, Charles,” in *Répertoire des collectionneurs*, AGORHA, Institut national d’histoire de l’art, <https://agorha.inha.fr/detail/303>, citing the Haviland papers (Archives départementales de la Haute-Vienne, 23 J) for the appointment of 1 July 1872 and a letter of December 1872 on the Japanese albums. The fullest treatment of the subject is Laurens d’Albis and Gabriel P. Weisberg, “Reflexions on the Japanese Influence on Some French Ceramics 1866–1886,” *Journal of Japonisme* 4 (2019): 1–124.

²⁷AGORHA notice as above: marriage of 27 July 1877, witnesses Gambetta, Bracquemond and Goncourt; the anecdote is from Goncourt’s *Journal*.

apparitions of volume twelve, and a tanuki in volume nine.²⁸ By 1890 netsuke were in every serious Japanese cabinet in Paris, Burty's among them, and Chaplet's own patron would soon be buying them by the hundred.²⁹ Ringel did not have to go looking for Japanese folklore. It was the house library.

6. A Japanese trickster in a Chinese glaze

The Ader catalog got one more thing right while getting it wrong. Its glaze line reads "type jiangdou – peau de pêche/peau d'orange," which the English listing rendered literally as "peach skin/orange skin" and which names two real things. *Jiangdoughong*, "cowpea red," is the Chinese name for the Kangxi peach-bloom glaze, the copper-red that Chaplet spent the second half of his life pursuing; "peau d'orange" is the name of the matte, pitted surface Chaplet himself arrived at in his last years, which the Rijksmuseum's 1993 entry traces back to the matte turquoise on its own figure.³⁰ The copper reds themselves have a documented origin inside the same circle. In a letter of 2 May 1883 Charles Haviland wrote of his intention to reproduce the different types of Chinese porcelain in his own collection, and the result, in the workshop then directed by Chaplet, was the discovery of copper-red glazes on hard-paste porcelain.³¹ Chaplet himself supplied the date that frames the figure. Looking back at the end of his life he said that until 1889 he had stayed "in the Chinese note," and that "it was in 1891 that I found the whites and the bluish glazes you know."³² A tanuki in matte turquoise is, by the master's own chronology, a product of the moment he stepped out of the Chinese palette. So the Ader figure, in its copper red, is a Japanese subject in a Chinese glaze fired in a French kiln, which is as neat a summary of 1890s Japonisme as a 9-centimeter object can offer; the Amsterdam figure, in the

²⁸Katsushika Hokusai, *Hokusai Manga*, vol. 12 (1834), supernatural subjects including a kappa; vol. 9, a tanuki. The volume references are from library and dealer descriptions of the plates and should be verified against a copy before publication.

²⁹Haviland bought netsuke from Hayashi Tadamasa between 1892 and 1894; the dispersal of his collection at the Hôtel Drouot in eighteen sales between 27 November 1922 and 21 June 1927 included 544 netsuke (AGORHA notice, as above). That purchasing postdates the tanuki by a year or two, which is why the earlier channels, Bracquemond's albums and Burty's collection, matter more for Ringel's source.

³⁰D'Albis, *Ernest Chaplet*, p. 67: after the copper reds came the violet-reds, then turquoise, celadon, white and the bluish "œuf de vaneau," laid uniformly over the piece; the turquoise, needing a thicker coat to develop, led Chaplet to the semi-matte enamel he would later use for his *peau d'orange*. The Rijksmuseum's 1993 entry (p. 138) makes the same link for its own figure. On *jiangdoughong* (peach-bloom) see Nigel Wood, *Chinese Glazes: Their Origins, Chemistry and Recreation* (London: A. & C. Black, 1999), pp. 173–187, on the copper-red family.

³¹AGORHA notice, as above, citing Haviland's letter of 2 May 1883 (AD Haute-Vienne, 23 J). Chaplet dated his own move to flambé porcelain at Choisy-le-Roi to "the beginning of 1888" (d'Albis, *Ernest Chaplet*, p. 74, quoting Chaplet); at Choisy he worked only in hard porcelain and a porcelain-like stoneware fired at high temperature (*Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 41 [1993]: 137).

³²D'Albis, *Ernest Chaplet*, p. 74, quoting Chaplet: "Jusque là j'étais resté dans la note chinoise; c'est en 1891 que je trouvai les blancs et les bleutés que vous connaissez." The matte turquoise and the pale bluish glazes on the known examples of the tanuki therefore belong to 1891 or after, which, with the Bracquemond letters of September 1890 to April 1891 for the modeling, is where the Rijksmuseum's dating of c. 1891–95 comes from; d'Albis closes Chaplet's "period of research" at 1895, by his own admission somewhat arbitrarily (p. 63).

turquoise Chaplet found as he left the Chinese palette, is the same subject one step further along the same road. And the subject was not an antiquity. In the very years Chaplet was firing tanuki at Choisy, the Japanese press was blaming tanuki for phantom trains on the new railway lines; the creature was live folklore, and Ringel was modeling it while it was still being told.³³

7. What to call it

The figure in Amsterdam, and its siblings in Lyon, at Sèvres if Ader's report holds, and in whatever cabinet the Ader example now occupies, should be called what they are: a tanuki, the Japanese raccoon dog, modeled in all probability by Ringel d'Ilzsch for Ernest Chaplet at Choisy-le-Roi, most likely between the autumn of 1890 and the spring of 1891 and glazed by Chaplet in his copper and turquoise flambés. The attribution to Ringel rests on Chaplet's dated letters to Bracquemond as d'Albis reports them, and the identification of the animal rests on a tail, four toes, two ears and a posture that any carver in Kyoto would have recognized at a glance. None of it requires a museum to have been careless; it only requires someone to look at the back and the base.

There is a small joke in this that Ringel, if it was Ringel, would have enjoyed. The tanuki of folklore is a shape-shifter, the trickster who passes himself off as a priest, a teakettle, a traveler at the inn, and is found out only when someone notices the tail he forgot to hide. This one passed for a bear for the better part of a century, in two museums and a Paris saleroom, and was found out the same way. Regrettably, I did not buy the Ader figure. The name, at least, costs nothing, and it belongs to the Bestiaire's method rather than its shelves: a raccoon dog in disguise, waiting for someone to count its toes.



³³Michael Dylan Foster, "Haunting Modernity: Tanuki, Trains, and Transformation in Japan," *Asian Ethnology* 71, no. 1 (2012): 3–29, on the phantom-train legends of the 1890s. For the kappa, Foster, "The Metamorphosis of the Kappa: Transformation of Folklore to Folklorism in Japan," *Asian Folklore Studies* 57, no. 1 (1998): 1–24.