

TRINITY FINE ART

GIOVANNI BATTISTA PIAMONTINI

(Florence, 1690 – 1762)

Faun with a Kid (after the Antique)

Marble

Height 150 cm

PROVENANCE:

Marquesses Gerini.

LITERATURE:

M. INGENDAAY, *I migliori pennelli. I marchesi Gerini mecenati e collezionisti nella Firenze Barocca. Il palazzo e la galleria 1600-1825*, Milano 2013, p. 142

1. History and Provenance of the Statue.

On 1 January 1761 an agreement was signed in Florence between the sculptor Giovan Battista Piamontini (1695-1762) and the marquises Andrea (1691-1766) and his nephew Carlo Francesco Gerini (1738-1796). According to this paper, which was discovered and published by Martina Ingendaay in her book on Gerini art patronage,¹ the sculptor consented to sell to the Gerinis a marble statue by his late father, Giuseppe (1663-1744), and to carve himself another marble as a pendant to it. Giuseppe's statue was described, in the legal document, simply as 'representing a *Milo*' ('rappresentante un Milone'), that of his son was to be a Faun 'with a kid on his shoulders' ('con un capriolo sulle spalle'), and it was to be made after a model approved by Andrea and Carlo Francesco Gerini. The marbles were destined to a prominent place, two niches in the 'primo ricetto' – the first reception hall – of the Gerini palace. This palace was one of the most lavishly decorated patrician residences of *Settecento* Florence and housed a unique paintings gallery that grew from the seventeenth century on to become one of the most important in Florence. The most recent paintings acquisitions were due to the older of the two Gerinis who commissioned the Piamontini marbles, Andrea, known for his patronage of such eminent

¹ The agreement was published by Martina INGENDAAY, *I migliori pennelli. I marchesi Gerini mecenati e collezionisti nella Firenze barocca. Il palazzo e la galleria 1600-1825*. 2 vols. Florence 2013, vol. 2, doc. 136, pp. 98ff.

TRINITY FINE ART

artists as Pompeo Batoni (1708-1787) and Giuseppe Zocchi (1711-1767) and for his sponsorship of a series of folio books illustrated with magnificent engravings, including Zocchi's famous *Vedute delle ville e d'altri luoghi della Toscana* (1744-1745). Andrea Gerini had also been the driving force in the palace's recent decoration and the two statues of the 'primo ricetto' marked the end of his campaign to refurbish the family residence. Unfortunately, this space has sacrificed to the nineteenth-century restorations of the palace and it is therefore impossible to understand their intended display.

Thanks to the description in the 1761 document, the two works of the two Piamontinis could be located by Don Natale Maffioli in the Fondazione ecclesiastica Istituto Marchesi Teresa, Gerino e Lippo Gerini, Rome. Maffioli noticed that the Milo was signed with the initials of the sculptor and dated 1740 ('G.P. / F. / 1740'), and he passed this information to Ingendaay who refers to it.² It was therefore possible to identify the pair when it appeared on the art market with absolute certainty, also because of the sculptures' ascertained Gerini provenance.

As one might have guessed from the description of the statue Giovan Battista was to make, it is a copy after the famous Antique acquired by Christina, Queen of Sweden, restored by the sculptor Ercole Ferrata (1610-1686), and today in the Prado, Madrid.³ The model approved by Andrea and Carlo Francesco Gerini to which the 1761 contract refers must have been a statuette by Giuseppe Piamontini who had studied with Ferrata in Rome while he was restoring the 'Queen of Sweden's Faun', knew therefore the original well, and later made bronze reductions after it.

Giuseppe's statue represents the death of Milo - who was, according to Strabo (Geographica, 6.1.12), 'the most renowned of wrestlers' in Antiquity. However, whereas

the *Milo* is a finished work, Giovan Battista's *Faun* is obviously not completed, especially in the back which of course was not necessary for its intended display. A year and a month after the contract was signed, Giovan Battista died on 26 February 1762.⁴ A provision had been included in the agreement that should he become unable to work or die before delivery of the sculpture his heirs would have to take charge of having it completed, which implies that Giovan Battista was obviously aware of his impending end. Nevertheless he was fully paid for his work although the inaccurately published documents relating to the commission of the Faun would suggest the contrary.⁵ He

² INGENDAAY 2013 (as note 1), vol. 1, p. 148.

³ Francis HASKELL/Nicholas PENNY, *Taste and the Antique*, pp. 211-212, cat. 37.

⁴ Florence, Archivio di Stato, Ufficiali poi Magistrato della Grascia, 203 ('Libro XIV de' Morti dall'Anno 1760 a tutto L'Anno 1768'), fol. 232v.

⁵ INGENDAAY 2013 (as note 1), vol. 2, doc. 137, p. 99.

TRINITY FINE ART

received the last rate on 22 December. Two months later he was dead. At that moment Andrea and Carlo Francesco Gerini became therefore the owners of the last works of Piamontini the father and of Piamontini the son. Indeed, the Milo is the last known marble statue of Giuseppe and one of his last works.

2. *After the Antique: the prototype of Giovan Battista's Faun.*

Giuseppe Piamontini's art is often retrospective and this retrospection is not confined to antique Greek or Roman prototypes but extends to the great masters of the Italian Renaissance both in painting and in sculpture.⁶ Already before going to Rome he had been employed as a restorer of antique sculptures in that great assembly of opera nobilia that is the Galleria degli Uffizi.⁷

There he first came into contact with antique sculpture and the great antiquarian Anton Francesco Gori (1691-1757) tells us that Piamontini owned the best plaster cast after the famous antique bronze Idolino, today in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Florence, but in Piamontini's lifetime in the Uffizi.⁸ He (or his son) also owned a plaster cast after the Hermaphrodite in the same collection.⁹

Yet only once did the artist make a copy: this is the reduction after the 'Queen of Sweden's Faun', which served his son as a model for the Gerini cast. A splendid bronze after this statue was cast by Giuseppe before 22 November 1697 for Ferdinando di Cosimo III, one of the most discriminating art patrons in Late Baroque Italy, Ferdinando son of Grand Duke Cosimo III de' Medici.¹⁰ It is today in the Museo Nazionale del Bargello and was long hailed as a masterpiece of the most eminent Florentine Late Baroque bronze sculptor, Massimiliano Soldani Benzi (1656-1740), before the discovery of the payment record for it made it possible to identify it as an early Piamontini.¹¹

⁶ He possibly owned a cast after a Giambologna Venus sold by his son Giovan Battista to Carlo Ginori; Dimitrios ZIKOS, *Prince Johann Adam Andreas I of Liechtenstein and Massimiliano Soldani Benzi. The Late Baroque Florentine Bronze Sculpture*, in: *Baroque Luxury Porcelain. The Manufactories of Du Paquier in Vienna and of Carlo Ginori in Florence*, catalogue of the exhibition (Vienna, Liechtensteinmuseum, 10 November 2005 – 29 January 2006, ed. by Johann KRÄFTNER, Munich and elsewhere 2005, pp. 157-177: 158.

⁷ Mara VISONÀ, *Carlo Marcellini Accademico "Spiantato" nella cultura fiorentina tardo-barocca*, Ospedaletto, Pisa 1990, p. 115, note 3.

⁸ Dimitrios ZIKOS, *Antikenkopien in Bronze aus der Werkstatt des Massimiliano Soldani Benzi*, in: *Von allen Seiten schön. Rückblicke auf Ausstellung und Kolloquium*, vol. 1, Cologne 1996, p. 133.

⁹ ZIKOS 2005 (as note 12), p. 38.

¹⁰ Francis HASKELL, *Patrons and painters*, revised edition, New Haven/London 1980, pp. 229-41.

¹¹ Sandro BELLESI, *L'antico e i virtuosismi tardobarocchi nell'opera di Giuseppe Piamontini*, in Paragone, 497, 1991, p. 27, note 27.

TRINITY FINE ART

Another cast of lesser quality - possibly by Giovan Battista - is in the Musée Carnavalet, Paris.

It is interesting and symptomatic for a change in taste that it was only Giovan Battista who turned into making full-scale copies after the Antique, by resorting – in the case of the Gerini Faun – to the only copy his late father had made after the Antique.¹²

3. The Acquisition of the two Piamontini Marbles in the Context of Gerini Art Patronage.

The acquisition of the two marbles by Andrea and Carlo Francesco Gerini marks the zenith of this family's art patronage. Andrea Gerini had inherited the palace in the entrance of which they were to be displayed together with a great fortune and a considerable paintings' gallery founded in the seventeenth century. Located in the present day via Ricasoli that palace was bought by the Gerinis from one of the oldest and wealthiest aristocratic Florentine families, the Salviati.¹³ In 1758, Andrea Gerini acquired the building next-door and commissioned a new and impressive staircase for the new complex. This staircase seems to have been concluded by the early 1760s.¹⁴ It was the last architectural project promoted by Andrea and the acquisition of the two marbles is best understood in this context. The marbles were bought to adorn the entrance to the newly enlarged palace and to the new, grand, staircase.

Andrea Gerini was one of the foremost patrons of the arts in Settecento Florence and an eminent figure in the city's cultural life. A typical representative of the Enlightenment, he corresponded with many scholars and writers on artistic matters in Italy and abroad, the most famous of which is perhaps Pierre-Jean Mariette.¹⁵

The Gerini paintings gallery was greatly enlarged through Andrea Gerini's acquisitions. Instead of buying pictures only in Florence, he made use of his relations and connections throughout Italy to acquire works by the most modern and most renowned painters of his times. For this he first turned to Rome where he bought extensively by using his cousin Domenico Martelli as an intermediary. He chose paintings by Giovan Battista Panini and Pompeo Batoni with whom he also entertained a long and fascinating correspondence.¹⁶ He also bought in Venice and in Bologna thus following the lead of the Granprincipe Ferdinando who was the first serious collector in Florence to turn his attention to Emilian and Venetian pictures. Finally, he even turned his attention to the Neapolitan painter

¹² Roberta ROANI VILLANI, *Copie dell'Antico*: F. HARWOOD e G. B. Piamontini, in: *Antologia di Belle Arti*, N.S. 43/47, 1993, pp. 108-115.

¹³ INGENDAAY 2013 (as note 1), pp. 38-39.

¹⁴ INGENDAAY 2013 (as note 1), pp. 41-42.

¹⁵ INGENDAAY 2013 (as note 1), *ad indicem*.

¹⁶ INGENDAAY 2013 (as note 1), pp. 193-195.

TRINITY FINE ART

Francesco Solimena.¹⁷ In Rome and Venice he entertained close personal relations with eminent literary figures as Giovanni Bottari (1689- 1785) and Anton Maria Zanetti (1706-1778).¹⁸ With Zanetti in particular Andrea Gerini shared the common passion for engraving. Among the many artists Andrea Gerini protected, the most important was Giuseppe Zocchi, famous for his crisp magnificent engravings.¹⁹ Zocchi, who was offered hospitality in the Gerini palace where he stayed for many years, painted also part of the frescoes adorning the palace. Among the other frescoes he painted there one represents the Allegories of the Arts - a symbolic image of the art patronage of Andrea Gerini.

Besides buying extensively paintings and promoting the decoration and refurbishment of his family palace Andrea promoted the publication of exquisitely illustrated folio books.²⁰

These included his family's paintings collection catalogue first volume, the *Raccolta di Stampe rappresentanti i quadri più scelti de' signori Marchesi Gerini*.²¹ It is one of the

highest examples of publishing in Settecento Florence comparable to Gori's lavish Museo Fiorentino and Museo Etrusco.²²

However, the most successful and most famous editorial project promoted by Andrea are the abovementioned 1745 *Vedute delle ville e d'altri luoghi della Toscana*, which were preceded a year earlier by the *Vedute delle principali contrade, piazze, chiese e palazzi della città di Firenze*. After Andrea's death the tradition of sponsoring similar books was continued by his nephew Carlo Francesco with the publication of the *Ornithologia* - described as 'one of the most remarkable editorial ventures ever undertaken in Florence'.²³

Such were the patrons who commissioned the Faun from Giovan Battista Piamontini. In 1761 Florence, the Milo was the last available marble of the Florentine Late Baroque and

¹⁷ INGENDAAY 2013 (as note 1), pp. 189-190.

¹⁸ INGENDAAY 2013 (as note 1), *ad indicem*.

¹⁹ INGENDAAY 2013 (as note 1), pp. 103-123.

²⁰ INGENDAAY 2013 (as note 1), pp. 351-381.

²¹ INGENDAAY 2013 (as note 1), pp. 285-349.

²² INGENDAAY 2013 (as note 1), p. 311.

²³ INGENDAAY 2013 (as note 1), p. 365.

TRINITY FINE ART

the Faun one of the first Neoclassical sculptures made there. That such works were combined into a novel pair by one of the most sophisticated art patrons of that city in order to adorn one of its most prominent and most recently and lavishly decorated aristocratic residences makes the acquisition of the Gerini Piamontinis one of the milestones in the history of Florentine artistic patronage.

TFA 8931



15 OLD BOND STREET . LONDON W1S 4AX . +44 (0)20 7493 4916
info@trinityfineart.com