

Daniel Katz Gallery

ANTIQUITY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



Gabriel Grupello (Geraardsbergen 1644 - Kerkrade 1730)

Adonis

Circa: c. 1675-1695

c. 1675-1695

182 cm

Grupello was an apprentice in Antwerp with the Quellin dynasty (Artus I and Artus II) from 1658/59. By 1671 he had spent time in France and must have seen the statuary created for Louis XIV at Versailles.

In 1673 Grupello became master in the guild of the Vier Gekroonde ('the four crowned heads') in Brussels. In February 1688 he was appointed court sculptor to Charles II of Spain. He worked for William of Orange at Het Loo in 1689-90 (that was visited by Kurfürst Johann Wilhelm von der Pfalz, the Palatine Elector, in 1692). On 3 May 1695 Grupello was appointed Churfürstlicher Statuarius to Johann Wilhelm¹ at his court in Düsseldorf. Grupello was married there in 1698 to Maria Anna, daughter of the court lawyer Caspar Dautzenberg. Five days after the death of Johann Wilhelm in 1716 an inventory was drawn up of 121 works in Düsseldorf by Grupello. These included unfired clay models, many of which were compositions created for the Neue Residenz in Düsseldorf.² In 1719 Grupello, having returned to Brussels, became court sculptor to the Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI. Upon the marriage of his daughter Aldegunde in 1725, Grupello moved to live at Erenstein where his son-in-law had inherited the castle.

The present statue can be identified as Adonis by the pomegranates in his left hand. Adonis, while out hunting, was killed by a wild boar. 'Nor was there a pause / more than an hour, when from Adonis, blood, / exactly of its colour, a loved flower / sprang up, such as pomegranates give to us, / small trees

which later hide their seeds beneath / a tough rind' (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, X, lines 734-739).

Grupello's authorship is confirmed by the striking similarities between our Adonis and a Venetian-marble statue of Paris (Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg) which was seen in Grupello's workshop in Brussels on 22 September 1693 by Constantijn Huygens³ and taken to Düsseldorf in 1695.⁴ The tree-trunk with large flat leaves that seem to stick to the bark is almost identical to those used by Grupello for his statue of Paris and for Arcadian Atalanta, which was cast in lead by Heinrich Charasky between 1696 and 1710.⁵ The cache-sexe frond on the latter and on Adonis are also similar. The choice of this marble, rather than Carrara marble, may have been prompted by conditions of war in the late seventeenth century in the Southern Netherlands, which frequently blocked transport via the waterways. It was also a somewhat less costly substitute, often used at this time and in this area.

For all these reasons, Adonis is likely to be close in date to Paris (before 1693) and to have been carved in Brussels prior to Grupello's departure for Düsseldorf in 1695. This is further confirmed by its absence from the inventory of 1716 and by the sheer number of sculptures that Grupello executed for Johann Wilhelm von der Pfalz in the twenty or so years he worked for him and that were all included in this inventory as property of Johann Wilhelm (unless they had already been delivered). In the more than two decades before his move to Düsseldorf, Grupello must have produced substantially more than the few sculptures that survive today. One of the rare records of a sculpture, most probably from Grupello's first Brussels period, is the reference from Philippe Baert which mentions a marble statue of Mars in the possession of "M. le Comte de Cuypers" in the 1780s⁶ and that was subsequently sold at auction in 1802 (now lost).⁷ The other such reference is the marble statue of Mercury by Grupello which the Austrian governor of the Southern Netherlands, Charles de Lorraine, bought in 1768 for the substantial sum of 2000 guilders⁸ and that was sold for the same price at the auction of his estate in 1781.⁹

The remarkably fine condition of the Adonis indicates that it cannot have functioned as a garden statue during any time of its history. One must thus think about a potential use inside. A plausible placing would have been in the main hall or on a state staircase of a palace or country house. The latter can be illustrated with the sumptuous example of the Swedish royal country house of Drottningholm. There, life-size marble statues of the nine muses, Apollo and Minerva by the Antwerp-trained Nicolaas Millich are prominently displayed on the balustrades and in niches.

The exceptional condition of the Adonis should be stressed. All of Grupello's other life-size marble statues have been outside or are still outside: for instance Diana and Narcissus (originally in the garden of the Brussels Tour et Tassis palace, now *Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique*, Brussels), the large group of garden statuary in the park at Schwetzingen, etc. Even the figure of Paris now at Nürnberg has spent some time outside in a garden, destroying its original surface.

The only exception is the spectacular allegorical fountain of the former fishmongers' guild house in Brussels (now in the *Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique*) that was displayed in a grotto-like setting. Could the Adonis likewise have been intended for a grotto?

A more likely use is that of Jérôme Duquesnoy's life-size marble statue of Minerva, originally executed for the Brussels palace of comte Lamoral-Claude de la Tour et Tassis, and now in the state staircase of the nineteenth-century palace of Fürst von Thurn und Taxis at Regensburg. This statue was deemed so important by Lamoral-Claude, that he instituted it as a *fidei-commis* (unsellable family heirloom to be kept in trust) in his will, not only specifying the nature and subject of the statue, but also naming Jérôme Duquesnoy.¹⁰ This is why this exceptional statue is still in the hands of the same family.

Grupello's Adonis is no less rare and its patron must be sought in the immediate circle of the Tour et Tassis and William III of Orange. After all, Grupello worked for the former, supplying sculpture for their palace, palace garden and funerary chapel in Notre-Dame du Sablon, Brussels, and shortly after for the latter, supplying sculpture for the spectacular garden at the royal country house of Het Loo.¹¹ Johann Wilhelm von der Pfalz then visited Het Loo in 1692¹² and three years later appointed Grupello his court sculptor. This handing over of a good sculptor from one high aristocrat to another is not infrequent, but it is particularly gratifying to be able to show the direct line of contacts.

It should also be said that as a beautiful young hunter, Adonis would have been particularly well suited to the private sphere of a country house interior, rather than a city palace with overtones of dynastic display. His counterpart could have been formed by a statue of Venus, and together they would have signified the triumph of love over war (as could have been personified by Mars), but also of the valour needed for hunting, the common aristocratic pass-time at country houses. This is strengthened by the other common association of Venus and Adonis with fertility. The usual subject of Adonis in sculpture¹³ also points to a private agenda. Paired with a statue of Venus, it could have functioned as a record of the marriage of the statue's patron and his love for his new wife.

The two antique statues of Adonis that could have functioned as prototypes, the life-size marble Adonis in the Vatican museums¹⁴ and especially the Adonis in the Museo Nazionale, Napoli, also confirm the private agenda of Grupello's patron. The display of classical mythology still signals the education of the patron.

Finally a word about the provocative nudity of Adonis, which is quite unusual in Flemish sculpture of the seventeenth century, particularly considering the rules of decorum established by the Council of Trent, and those not just for religious sculpture. Jérôme Duquesnoy and Gabriel Grupello were much more daring (cf. their Minerva statues, respectively at Regensburg and at Schwetzingen) than their contemporary Artus I Quellin, as exemplified by his statue of Minerva given by the city of Amsterdam to Johann Maurits von Nassau-Siegen for his garden at Kleve in 1660. Grupello's Minerva-Pictura at Schwetzingen takes the point the furthest, just as with his statues of Paris and Adonis.

In conclusion, Gabriel Grupello's Adonis is an extremely rare and fine survival of a country house decoration for the highest nobility in the Low Countries.

Léon E. Lock

Provenance

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Kasteel Erenstein, Kerkrade, the Netherlands

Private collection, Antwerp, Belgium

Private collection, Arlon, Belgium

Literature:

Literature

Frank Matthias Kammel, Die marmorfigur des Paris von Gabriel Grupello. Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nürnberg, Berlin, 2006, p.28

Léon E. Lock, Flemish sculpture: art and manufacture c. 1600-1750, PhD thesis, University of London, 2008, p. 168