

Daniel Katz Gallery

ANTIQUITY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



Severo Calzetta da Ravenna (Ferrara or Ravenna 1465/1475 - Ravenna before 1538)

Kneeling satyr

Circa: Circa 1500

Circa 1500

23 x 16 x 14 cm

Born either in Ferrara or Ravenna, Severo di Domenico Calzetta, popularly known as Severo da Ravenna, is thought to have trained with Pietro Lombardo in Ravenna where he was first recorded in 1496. In 1500 he was in Padua where he signed a contract with the syndics of the Santo in Padua for a marble statue of Saint John the Baptist. Still in Padua, Pomponius Gauricus wrote a treatise on sculpture published in 1504 in which he praised the artist's outstanding technical skills. Severo probably returned to Ravenna in 1509 and seems to have remained in the city for the rest of his career. Two bronzes signed by Severo are known; on the basis of these scholars were able to enlarge the catalogue of his work and the artist is now credited with producing several remarkable statuettes.

One of the two signed bronzes by Severo is a kneeling satyr that appeared on the art market in 1981. Thanks to the rediscovery of this firmly attributable sculpture a handful of bronze satyrs with idiosyncratic features and dating from circa 1500 have convincingly been ascribed to Severo.

The distinctive delicate chiseling of the present satyr, with his finely detailed hands, fingers and nails, sinuous strands of hair and thin articulations are all characteristic of Severo's highest quality bronzes. The rounded shoulders and the rendering of the musculature on the satyr's back are also typical. Further

features are also recognized as peculiar to Severo, such as the exposed and carefully filed teeth as well as the prominent and expressive eyes with raised pupils. These traits impart a vividness and animation that are characteristic to Severo's best works and indeed this particular cast is of exceptional quality.

The satyr created by Severo seems to have been popular and other versions of this bronze are known. Isabella d'Este (1474-1539), whose collection included works by the artist may have owned a version of the present composition. Indeed, her inventory drawn up in 1542 mentions a kneeling satyr with a shell in his hand. Among the extant bronzes now in museums and private collections, the satyr's attributes can vary, as well as the quality of the casting. The kneeling satyr was originally an inkwell and the figure would have been supporting a receptacle, probably a shell, in his raised right hand. A statuette, complete with the shell, is in the collection of the Museo Nazionale del Palazzo di Venezia, Rome and features a garland of leaves on the satyr's head. A further kneeling satyr, missing the shell and a base, is in the collection of the Galleria Estense in Modena. The satyr's lowered left hand probably rested on an object placed on the base. On a variant in the Cleveland Museum of Art that element is a bucket placed in one of the corners of the base by the satyr's knee. Like our statuette, the Cleveland bronze retains its original triangular base, a format that perfectly fits the satyr's position. A bolt on the base of our bronze indicates that an element has been affixed there, maybe a bucket or a vase. Severo's signed satyr has been removed from its base, his hand lost the receptacle it was holding and he was also emasculated. In contrast the present bronze remains ithyphallic.

Satyrs, mythological hybrid creatures with goat-like features, were a popular subject in Renaissance art. They were particularly in favour in Padua, a university town where scholars encouraged interest in antiquity. With their perennial cravings for wine and sexual gratification, they must have inspired both amusement and empathy.

As indicated by an old label under the bronze base, the sculpture was once in the collection of the Dukes of Arenberg. From the 16th century the House of Arenberg had its quarters in Brussels, Louvain and Enghien. The dynasty produced several patrons of the arts over the centuries.

Provenance

Collection of the Duc d'Arenberg (an old label under the base)

Literature:

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Donatello e il suo tempo. Il bronzetto a Padova nel Quattrocento e nel Cinquecento, exhibition catalogue, Padua, Musei Civici, 2001, pp. 131-167, entries by J. Warren