Daniel Katz Gallery

ANTIQUITY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



Gaspard Marsy (1624 - 1681)

Leda and the Swan; Danaë and the Eagle
Circa 1700

28.5 x 16 cm (11 ¹/▌ x 6 ¹/▌ inches)

26.5 cm by 14cm and 28.5 cm by 16 cm respectively

The first bronze depicts the moment when the charms of Zeus, disguised as a swan, win over Leda's modesty, while Eros, the spirit of physical love, looks on as a mischievous putto. Various accounts exist of this mythological subject, the more typical relating that Zeus saw Leda, the wife of Tyndareus, king of Sparta, bathing in the river Eurotas, and immediately fell desperately in love with her. He approached her in the guise of a swan and managed to seduce her, the result of this union being the birth of two sets of twins; Helen and Clytemnestra, and Castor and Pollux.

The second bronze shows Danaë receiving Zeus in the form of a shower of golden coins, while the putto at her feet plays the same role of instigator as that in the other group. The eagle, a common representation of Zeus, is shown to indicate his presence. According to Ovid's 'Metamorphoses' [4:611], Danaë's father, the king of Argos, was told by an oracle that Danaë's first-born son would kill him. To ward off suitors and his own demise, the king had his daughter locked away in a tower. Zeus, however, penetrated this fortress in the shape of golden coins, driven by his passionate love for Danaë, and the eventual effect of their union was a son, Perseus, who, as prophesised, killed his grandfather accidentally with a discus.

Both Leda and Danaë were wooed by Zeus, and for this reason it is not surprising that they have been paired. Terracotta bozzetti of both compositions, as well as of Bacchus and Ariadne, belonged to Ange-Laurent de la Live de Jully (1725-1779), the great French collector and patron1. They were described in the 1764 catalogue of the latter's collection as 'three sketches in terracotta by Le Gros representing

Bacchus and Ariadne, Danaë receiving the golden rain and Leda. These sketches are done with all possible fire and spirit, and have never been executed in marble'2. They reappeared in the 1770 sale catalogue of de la Live's collection with cursory descriptions as 'three figures little finished, each 23 cm. high'3.

Provenance

Private collection, UK, 2002

Daniel Katz Gallery, London, acquired above

Private collection, USA, 2009 to 2024

Daniel Katz Gallery, London, acquired above 2024

Exhibitions

On loan to the Philadelphia Art Museum, 2002-2008

Literature:

Bissell, G., Pierre Le Gros, 1666-1719, Reading, England, 1997

Engass, R., Early eighteenth-century sculpture in Rome, an illustrated catalogue raisonné, 2 vols., University Park and London, 1976, pp. 124-131

Souchal, F. et al, French sculptors of the 17th and 18th centuries. The reign of Louis

XIV. G.L, Oxford 1981, p. 273; ibid., Supplementary volume, A-Z, London 1993, p. 145