

Daniel Katz Gallery

ANTIQUITY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



Italian

Grieving Youth

Circa: Second half 16th century

Second half 16th century

Bronze

32.2 x 9 x 12 cm (12 ⁵/₁₆ x 3 ¹/₁₆ x 4 ³/₁₆ inches)

The present bronze figure is crafted with an elegant contrapposto stance: the right leg strides forward while the head turns dramatically backward. This theatrical gesture is emphasised by the positioning of the upper limbs of the figure: while the left arm reaches upward, the right hand rests on the back of the head. The torso twists away from the direction of the gaze, enhancing the impression of movement. This elegant composition derives, without doubt, from antique marble, known as the Dying Niobid.

The Dying Niobid is first mentioned in an incunabulum in a famous poem written by the so-called 'Prospettivo Milanese', which was printed towards the end of the fifteenth century. The text documents the sculpture's provenance in the Maffei family's collection of antiquities in Rome, providing a crucial terminus ante quem for the discovery of the ancient marble. The intricate pose of the sculpture and its heightened expressive quality would have quickly garnered the attention of artists throughout Italy. The influence of the Dying Niobid is evident in various artworks from the Renaissance. A Florentine drawing from around 1500, now housed in the Prado Museum (inv. F.D.149), reflects its impact. It also appears in drawings by the Bolognese painter Amico Aspertini. Aspertini even incorporated it into the figure of a saint in his fresco, The Burial of Valerian and Tiburtius in the Oratorio di Santa Cecilia in Bologna.

Additionally, Raphael included a reference to the Dying Niobid in his Fire in the Borgo fresco in the Stanza dell'Incendio di Borgo in the Vatican — though upright and reversed, as can be seen in the figure hanging down from the wall to the left of the scene. The Venetian painter Vittorio Carpaccio also referenced it in his altarpiece of the Ten Thousand Martyrs, now in the Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.

Jeremy Warren, in his recent catalogue on Italian sculpture in the Wallace Collection notes that the latter painter frequently used small bronzes as models or props in his paintings. These statuettes take pride of place in the oil on canvas Saint Augustine in his Study in the Scuola degli Schiavoni, Venice, where such bronzes appear on a shelf to the left of the composition. It may be when Carpaccio painted the Ten Thousand Martyrs in 1515, he drew inspiration from the present composition, rather than the ancient Roman marble in Munich, implying that statuettes of the Grieving Youth were available to view in Venice by the early 16th century.

Apart from the present cast, there are only four known versions of this model: one in the Wallace Collection, London (inv. no. S73); a very crude aftercast in the Herzog Anton-Ulrich Museum, Brunswick (inv. no. Bro 30); another in the Musée du Louvre, Paris (inv. no. TH 82); and a final version formerly in the Adams Collection. A modern cast is preserved in the Staatliche Museen, Berlin (inv. no. K.F.M.V. 94).

Warren attributes the Wallace Youth to the Venetian School, primarily based on its stylistic similarities with the works of sculptor Tullio Lombardo and painter Andrea Mantegna. Lombardo's style showcases a refined, abstract classicism, emphasising choreographed, stylised gestures and movements. Similarly, Mantegna's compositions drew heavily from classical models, notable for their calligraphic facial features and keen interest in depicting emotional states — qualities echoed in both the Wallace and present casts. Warren also references another related work in boxwood, Francesco Pomarano's Hercules, housed in the Wallace Collection. This sculpture, the only known work in the round by the Paduan goldsmith, exhibits a nimble, exquisite anatomy and 'balletic grace', much like the present Youth. While such similarities led the esteemed scholar Wilhelm von Bode to attribute this model to Pomarano, they may be now considered as more generic markers of its geographical provenance from the north-east of Italy.

The bronze statuette of the Grieving Youth stands as a significant testament to the artistic sensibility of the early 16th-century Italian Renaissance. Rooted in the humanist interest in antiquity, it reinterprets its ancient model compositionally, melding gesture and expressive power to create a compelling portrayal of human emotion.

Provenance

Art Market, UK, as of 2018

Private Collection, New York, to 2026

Literature:

William von Bode, *The Italian Bronze Statuettes of the Renaissance*, Vol. I, pl. LXXIX (ill.)

Phyllis Bober and Ruth Rubinstein, *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture*, London, 1986 [2nd ed., 2010], p.152, n. 109 (ill.)

Jeremy Warren, *The Wallace Collection – Catalogue of Italian Sculpture*, London, 2016, no. 58, pp. 266-272