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Fine European Sculpture and Works of Art



Italian, 17th Century
Cast after a model conceived by Giambologna

Venus and Cupid

Silver statuette

Height: 14.8 cm - 5¾ in

Overall including wood socle: 22 x 7.5 x 5 cm (8⅝ x 3 x 2 in)

Silver mark: The top edge of the base-plate is stamped V, a Dutch import mark applied 1814-1953 and indicating a silver standard between 833 and 934.¹ Provenance: Mandri collection, Buenos Aires - thence by descent.²

Literature: M. Leithe-Jasper and P. Wengraf, *European Bronzes from the Quentin Collection*, exh. cat., New York, Frick Collection, 28 September 2004 – 2 January 2005, p. 157, n. 50. Some other known casts in bronze: Munich, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum (inv. no. 49/39), h. 14.8 cm;³ New York, Michael Hall, h. 14.9 cm.⁴ Condition: There is some restoration to casting flaws in the back of Venus and to the pedestal on which she rests her foot. Cupid must have become detached from the base as he is now incorrectly positioned on it. Rather than looking up at Venus, he is now placed slightly in front of her and facing forwards; he also now lacks his bow. The bronze cast of *Venus and Cupid* in the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich, was tentatively described as an early work by Gianfrancesco Susini (1585- after 1653) when it was published by Hans Weihrauch in 1956.⁵ The composition and scale of the Munich bronze are identical to that of the present silver, except that Cupid has subsequently been re-attached to the base, the error of a restorer (as noted above). Weihrauch also noted that a variant composition appears in an engraving by Maria de Wilde of the collection of her father, Jacobus de Wilde, in Amsterdam circa 1700.⁶ In 1998, an after-cast of the same model was attributed to Francesco Fanelli by Charles Avery.⁷ This model of Venus derives from Giambologna's model for the marble figure of *Venus Drying Herself*, also known as the *Cesarini Venus*. The only variations are the turning of her head to the right, the position of her lower right arm, which is brought across her body to rest on

her left thigh and the addition of some drapery. The marble was commissioned of Giambologna in early 1580 by Giangiorgio II Cesarini, Marquis of Civitanova, for the Villa Ludovisi, his palace in Rome. The statue remains in the building to this day, which is now known as the Palazzo Margherita and serves as the American Embassy. It has recently been established that only two of the many variant bronze casts known of this model can have originated after the completion of the marble statue (after 1583) and before 1616, when it was recorded to be broken.⁸ These examples - in Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum and New York, Hearn Family Trust - are distinguished by the modelling of their hair, in which respect all other known casts follow the illogical restoration carried out after 1616.⁹ The present writer has recently proposed that the Vienna *Cesarini Venus* (which bears an incised inscription "*Ioannes Bologna. Belga*"), was cast by Antonio Susini after 1583, while he was in the employ of Giambologna. Meanwhile, the Hearn cast is more typical of Susini's production of after 1600, when he had left Giambologna and established his own workshop.¹⁰ While Giambologna's own workshop continued to reproduce his models after his death in 1608 under the direction of Pietro Tacca, the sculptor's former assistant Antonio Susini also had his master's approval to cast Giambologna's works. This took place from circa 1600 until his death in 1624, when his studio was taken over by his nephew, Gianfrancesco Susini. Certain compositions of Giambologna that are now known through bronzes had originally been designed for casting in gold and silver, for instance the series of the *Seven Labours of Hercules* (1577-1591).⁽¹¹⁾ Guild rules stipulated that professional gold and silversmiths be employed for this purpose, and Giambologna is known to have called upon the services of Jacopo Bylivelt, Michele Mazzafirri, Giorgio d'Antonio Rancetti and Lorenzo della Nera on various occasions. A silver *Christ* in Loreto (pre-1583) and seven gold reliefs celebrating Francesco I (1585-87; cast by Cesare Targone) are amongst the few of these works to have survived. Giambologna's compositions also formed popular sources of inspiration for silversmiths working elsewhere. As early as 1624, Thomas Cruse, a silversmith in Delft, owned moulds of several works by Giambologna, which were listed in an inventory dated 23 October 1624 (along with pieces by Tetrode and Hendrick de Keyser).⁽¹²⁾ The present group is an excellent example of a freestanding bronze by Giambologna being adopted by a silversmith as an ornament for an ebony cabinet or as part of a centre-piece. Notes: 1. Tardy, *Poinçons d'argent*, Paris, 12th ed., 1977, p. 322. 2. It might possibly be identified with the *Vénus et l'Amour* described in *La Collection Spitzer, Antiquité – Moyen-Age – Renaissance*, Tome 2, 1891, no. 57, the height given as 14.5 cm. 3. H.R. Weihrauch, *Bayerisches Nationalmuseum München. XIII, 5. Die Bildwerke in Bronze und in anderen Metallen*, 1956, pp. 90-91, no. 114; *Giambologna 1529-1608 Sculptor to the Medici*, exh. cat. eds C. Avery & A. Radcliffe, Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh & Victoria and Albert Museum, London, August-November 1978, no. 9. 4. Giambologna. *An Exhibition of Sculpture by the Master and his Followers from the Collection of Michael Hall Esq.*, C. Avery, New York, Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, 6 March - 4 April 1998, pp. 9-11, no. 3. A poor after-cast of this model there attributed by Charles Avery to Francesco Fanelli. 5. See Weihrauch 1956. 6. Weihrauch 1956, p. 91 citing *Signa antiqua e museo Jacobi de Wilde ...*, Amsterdam, 1700. 7. See C. Avery in Salander-O'Reilly 1998. 8. M. Leithe-Jasper & P. Wengraf, *European Bronzes from the Quentin Collection*, exh. cat., New York, The Frick Collection, 28 September 2004 – 2 January 2005, pp. 146-157, no. 12, pp. 154 & 157, n. 41. 9. Leithe-Jasper & Wengraf 2004, pp. 151-153 & figs 5-8. 10. P. Wengraf, "Zur Bedeutung der 'Signaturen' an Giambolognas Marmor – und Bronzefiguren" in *Giambologna. Triumph des Körpers*, exh. cat., Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, 27 June – 17 September 2006, pp. 103-139: for the Vienna *Cesarini Venus* see pp. 118-120 & 132-133, fig. i; see also pp. 195-196, no. 3 & p. 198, no. 4, another cast of the small *Cesarini Venus*. 11. C. W. Fock, "The original silver casts of Giambologna's labours of Hercules", *Studien zum europäischen Kunsthandwerk. Festschrift Yvonne Hackenbrock*, ed. J. Rasmussen, 1983, pp. 141-145. 12. A. Bredius (ed.), *Künstler-Inventare. Urkunden zur Geschichte der holländischen Kunst des XVIten, XVIIten und XVIIIten Jahrhunderts*, vol. IV, 1917, pp. 1456-58. See also C. Avery, 'Hendrick de Keyser as a sculptor of small bronzes', *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum*, xxi.1, April 1973, pp. 3-24 (reprinted in C. Avery, *Studies in European sculpture*, 1981, pp. 175-188).