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*Fine European Sculpture and Works of Art*



**Gianfrancesco Susini (Florence 1585 - 1653)**

**Boy Seated on a Tree-Stump and Holding a Bird**

Bronze statuette

Height: 14 cm / 5½ in

Facture: The bronze<sup>1</sup> was cast in one piece by the lost wax method. One corner of the integral base has been broken off (see below), and there is a circular hole in the base behind the tree-stump and the remains of a similar screw hole on the broken edge. The pin protruding on the boy's left thigh originally located the front leg of an animal, most probably a fox, reaching up towards the bird. The statuette was extensively chased after casting, for example in the eyes, the mouth and surrounding area, the hair, finger and toenails, and the toes themselves. The surface of the figure was wire-brushed and the base matt-punched. The group retains some of its original golden dark brown lacquers and where rubbed the natural coppery colour of the bronze is revealed.

Other example: Sesto Fiorentino, Museo delle Porcellane di Doccia (inv. no. D153 (14)), wax;<sup>2</sup> no other bronze cast is known.

The *Boy Holding a Bird* is identified here with Gianfrancesco Susini on the grounds of direct comparison that may be drawn with the style and facture of his known works. The face of Cupid in *Venus Burning the Arrows of Cupid*<sup>3</sup> has a similarly flat profile and small, slightly up-turned nose. In both models Cupid's pose captures the sincerity and intensity of his child-like response, and they are also imbued with the same youthful awkwardness in their movements. Both boys direct their gaze towards the ground, shielding their heads with their arms. In both instances, Susini has responded with great sensitivity to the subject matter of a mischievous child. Comparison may also be drawn with Susini's signed life-size *Bacchus and Satyr*,<sup>4</sup> in which, despite the weathered surface of the marble,

similarities with the facial and body types of the impish satyr are still apparent.

The irregular landscaped base of the present statuette, whose outline is determined by the overall form of the model, resembles that of the signed *Abduction of Helen by Paris* in Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum.<sup>5</sup> Similar representations of boys also appear on Gianfrancesco's last major work, the so-called *Artichoke Fountain* in the Boboli Gardens in Florence.<sup>6</sup> The complex history of this ensemble remains obscure, but Pizzorusso has demonstrated how a document of 1621 shows that some of the *Amorini* had been sculpted by Susini and assistants before 1639 when, according to Baldinucci, the models for the fountain were completed. The facial expression of the present boy is found again in the two marble *Cupids Drawing a Bow* on this fountain.<sup>7</sup> The same facial type also appears in figure of *Cupid after the antique* depicted in René Charpentier's engravings of François Girardon's collection in an imaginary setting, where it is described as "*Petite figure de Marbre Grec d'un petit Amour de grandeur naturelle*".<sup>8</sup>

The composition was inspired by a genre of antique sculpture of boys holding birds, and related depictions of the infant *Bacchus and Hercules*.<sup>9</sup> A Roman group belonging to the same genre of a *Seated Boy with a Fox, Goose or Bird* after a Hellenistic prototype, now in the Uffizi, Florence, is included in Vasari's description of antiquities in the Palazzo Pitti.<sup>10</sup> Tribolo is celebrated as a sixteenth-century exponent of these classical prototypes seen through the eyes of a Renaissance sculptor, and Chiarissimo Fancelli perpetuated this tradition into the seventeenth century with his fountain figure of a putto with a dolphin and the Medici arms, for which he was paid in 1609.<sup>11</sup> The two piece-moulds of "*un putto sedente con un uccellino nella mano sinistra*" are described in an inventory of the Doccia porcelain manufactory which was drawn up circa 1779, and a wax of the model survives at Doccia (12). The manufactory itself was established in 1738 by Marchese Carlo Ginori at Doccia, to the north-west of Florence.<sup>13</sup>

The direction of the boy's glance in the present model, the fixing-pin in his left thigh and the screw holes in the base all strongly suggest that the composition originally included an animal from which the boy was rescuing the bird. This may have been a fox, as in the antique marble groups in the Uffizi.

Unfortunately neither the wax at Sesto Fiorentino, nor the description of the version in the Doccia inventory help to determine the identity of the subject. The wax must have been cast from a model which, like the present example, lacked the additional animal.

1. *European Bronzes from the Quentin Foundation*, exh. cat. by M. Leithe-Jasper & P. Wengraf, New York, The Frick Collection, 28 September 2004 – 2 January 2005, p. 343; A. Brook in J. Turner (ed.), *The Dictionary of Art*, London, 1996, vol. 30, p. 32; G. Pratesi & S. Blasio (eds), *Repertorio della scultura fiorentina del seicento e settecento*, 1993, vol. I, pp. 61 & 105; *Die Bronzen der fürstlichen Sammlung Liechtenstein*, exh. cat., Frankfurt, Schirn Kunsthalle, 26 November 1986 – 15 February 1987, nos 30-32; *Von allen Seiten schön. Bronzen der Renaissance und des Barock*, exh. cat., ed. V. Krahn, Berlin, Altes Museum, 31 October 1995 – 28 January 1996, nos 128-130.

2. K. Lankheit, *Die Modellsammlung der Porzellanmanufaktur Doccia*, Munich, 1982, p. 150, *Inventario de' Modelli* 67:1,13 & pl. 244 for the wax (Doccia, Museo delle Porcellane, inv. no. D153 (14)).

3. Signed casts exist in Vienna, Liechtenstein Museum (dated 1638, h. 55.5 cm, inv. no. 542b, see J. D. Draper in *Liechtenstein. The Princely Collections*, exh. cat., New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 26 October 1985 – 1 May 1986, p. 74, no. 44, citing earlier literature) and Paris, Musée du Louvre (dated 1639, h. 54.8 cm, inv. no. OA 8277, see *Les Bronzes de la Couronne*, exh. cat., Paris, Musée du Louvre, 12 April – 12 July 1999, p. 133, no. 190). A marble group of the same in Florence, Villa la Pietra, formerly collection of Sir Harold Acton, is signed and dated in 1637 (A. Brook, "Au département des Sculptures du Louvre, Bacchus et un satyre de Francesco Susini (1585-v.1653)", *Revue du Louvre*, February 2003, pp. 48-58, p. 51, p. 52, fig. 6).

4. Paris, Musée du Louvre (inv. no. MR 2096), h. overall 170 cm, signed "F SUSINI"; see Brook 2003.
5. Signed and dated 1627, h. 68 cm (inv. no. 90.SB.32); P. Fogelman in *Italian and Spanish Sculpture. Catalogue of the J. Paul Getty Museum*, Los Angeles, 2002, pp. 190-199, no. 24. While Fogelman proposes that such a feature is "another baroque element that presages a recurring characteristic of small bronzes by Giovanni Battista Foggini and Massimiliano Soldani Benzi", (p. 197) the rocky base had been used in Giambologna's own models such as the three-figured bronze reduction of the *Rape of the Sabine Woman*.
6. See Pizzorusso 1989, pp. 38-41, 46-47 & figs 30, 32, 34, 36, 36a, 38-40 & 42-43 and for a general view see *Palazzo Pitti. La Reggia Rivelata*, exh. cat., Florence, Palazzo Pitti, 7 December 2003 – 31 May 2004, p. 62. For the history of the gardens (although less reliable on statuary), see F. Gurrieri & J. Chatfield, *Boboli Gardens*, Florence 1972.
7. See Pizzorusso 1989, p. 39, p. 41, n. 26 and figs 34 & 36, attributing them to Francesco Generini and Cosimo Salvestrini respectively, whose involvement in Susini's fountain is known from documentary evidence.
8. F. Souchal, "La Collection du Sculpteur Girardon d'Après son Inventaire Après Décès", *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, vol. LXXXII, 1973, pp. 1-98, p. 40, fig. 22, no. 15 of Charpentier's pl. IV (not pl. III, as stated erroneously). Souchal's tentative identification of that figure with the entry in the 1715 inventory of his collection describing "*Deux enfants couchés de marbre blanc, dont l'un est un Hercule et l'autre un Cupidon*" is not wholly convincing because the figure is standing, rather than reclining as in the engraving.
9. S. Reinach, *Répertoire de la statuaire grecques et romaine. Tome premier*, Paris 1897, pp. 534-537, pls. 874c-877a. For a somewhat similar pose, in which a winged and hooded boy sits looking up, see Reinach, *Répertoire ... Tome V ... volume 1*, Paris 1924, p. 188, no. 6.
10. P. P. Bober & R. Rubinstein, *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture. A Handbook of Sources*, London & Oxford, p. 234, no. 201 & fig. 201. Vasari described two such replicas: "*due putti postei a sedere in terra, che tengono sotto una mano un'uccello assomigliante a un'anitra, e l'altro braccio alzano*".
11. Pizzorusso 1989, p. 94 & fig. 84. 12. Lankheit 1982, p. 150, *Inventario de' Modelli* 67: 1,13 & pl. 244 for the wax (Doccia, Museo delle Porcellane, inv. no. D153 (14)). For more recent discussion of the manufactory see *La Statue del Marchese Ginori. Sculture in Porcellana Bianca di Doccia*, exh. cat., ed. J. Winter, Florence, Palazzo Corsini, 26 September – 5 October 2003.
13. Austria annexed Tuscany in 1737 so it was Franz Stephan, duke of Lorraine, who bestowed his approval on the enterprise in 1741; having married Maria Theresa, archduchess of Austria, he became Holy Roman Emperor in 1745.