Antonio Canova

Antonio Canova (Italian pronunciation: [an'tɔ:njo ka'nɔ:va]; 1 November 1757 - 13 October 1822) was an Italian Neoclassical sculptor, [3][4] famous for his marble sculptures. Often regarded as the greatest of the Neoclassical artists, [5] his artwork was inspired by the Baroque and the classical revival, but avoided the melodramatics of the former, and the cold artificiality of the latter. [6]

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Life

Possagno

In 1757, Antonio Canova was born in the <u>Venetian Republic</u> city of <u>Possagno</u> to Pietro Canova, a stonecutter.^[2] In 1761, his father died. A year later, his mother remarried. As such, in 1762, he was put into the care of his paternal grandfather Pasino Canova, who was a <u>stonemason</u>, owner of a <u>quarry</u>, ^[6] and was a "sculptor who specialized in altars with statues and low reliefs in late Baroque style". ^[2] He led Antonio into the art of sculpting.

Before the age of ten, Canova began making models in clay, and carving marble.^[7] Indeed, at the age of nine, he executed two small shrines of <u>Carrara marble</u>, which are still extant.^[8] After these works, he appears to have been constantly employed under his grandfather.^[8]

Antonio Canova

Self-portrait, 1792

Antonio Canova
1 November
1757
Possagno,
Republic of
Venice

Died 13 October 1822 (aged 64) Venice, Lombardy-

Venetia

Nationality Venetian

(before fall)
Austrian
(territory ceded

to Austria)^[1]

Known for Sculpture

Notable work Psyche Revived by Cupid's Kiss,

The Three Graces, Napoleon as Mars the

Peacemaker, Venus Victrix

Movement Neoclassicism

Venice

In 1770,^[2] he was an apprentice for two years^[7] to <u>Giuseppe Bernardi</u>, who was also known as 'Torretto'. Afterwards, he was under the tutelage of <u>Giovanni Ferrari</u> until he began his studies at the <u>Accademia di Belle Arti di Venezia</u>.^[2] At the Academy, he won several prizes.^[8] During this time, he was given his first workshop within a monastery by some local monks.^[7]

The Senator Giovanni Falier commissioned Canova to produce statues of Orpheus and Eurydice for his garden - the Villa Falier at Asolo. [9] The statues were begun in 1775, and both were completed by 1777. The pieces exemplify the late Rocco style. [9][10] On the year of its completion, both works were exhibited for the Feast of the Ascension in Piazza S. Marco. [6] Widely praised, the works won Canova his first renown among the Venetian elite. [2] Another Venetian who is said to have commissioned early works from Canova was the abate Filippo Farsetti, whose collection at Ca' Farsetti on the Grand Canal he frequented.

In 1779, Canova opened his own studio at Calle Del Traghetto at S. Maurizio,.^[6] At this time, Procurator Pietro Vettor Pisani commissioned Canova's first marble statue: a depiction of <u>Daedalus</u> and <u>Icarus</u>.^[6] The statue inspired great admiration for his work at the annual art fair;^[11] Canova was paid for 100 gold zecchini for the completed work.^[6] At the base of the statue, Daedalus' tools are scattered about;

these tools are also an allusion to Sculpture, of which the statue is a personification. [12] With such an intention, there is suggestion that Daedalus is a portrait of Canova's grandfather Pasino.[11]

Rome

Canova arrived in Rome, on 28 December 1780.^[8] Prior to his departure, his friends had applied to the Venetian senate for a pension.^[8] Successful in the application, the stipend allotted amounted to three hundred ducats, limited to three years. [8]

While in Rome, Canova spent time studying and sketching the works of Michelangelo.^[2]

In 1781, Girolamo Zulian - the Venetian ambassador to Rome - hired Canova to sculpt Theseus and the Minotaur. [13] The statue depicts the victorious Theseus seated on the lifeless body of a Minotaur. The initial spectators were certain that the work was a copy of a Greek original, and were shocked to learn it was a contemporary work. [14] The highly regarded work is now in the collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum, in London.[13]

Between 1783 - 1785, Canova arranged, composed, and designed a funerary monument dedicated to Clement XIV for the Church of Santi Apostoli. [7] After another two years, the work met completion in 1787.^[8] The monument secured Canova's reputation as the pre-eminent living artist.[8]

In 1792, he completed another cenotaph, this time commemorating Clement XIII for St. Peter's Basilica. Canova harmonized its design with the older Baroque funerary monuments in the basilica.[15]

In 1790, he began to work on a funerary monument for Titian, which was eventually abandoned by 1795.^[2] During the same year, he increased his activity as a painter.^[6]

The following decade was extremely productive, [8] beginning works such as Hercules and Lichas, Cupid and Psyche, Hebe, Tomb of Duchess Maria Christina of Saxony-Teschen, and The Penitent Magdalene.[16]

In 1797, he went to Vienna, [17] but only a year later, in 1798, he returned to Possagno for a vear.[8][notes 1]

France and England

By 1800, Canova was the most celebrated artist in Europe. [2] He systematically promoted his reputation by publishing engravings of his works and having marble versions of plaster casts made in his workshop. [18] He became so successful that he had acquired patrons from across Europe including France, England, Russia, Poland, Austria and Holland, as well as several members from different royal lineages, and prominent individuals.^[6] Among his patrons were Napoleon and his family, for whom Canova produced much work, including several depictions between 1803 and 1809.^[5] The most notable representations were that of Napoleon as Mars the Peacemaker, and Venus Victrix which was portrayal of Pauline Bonaparte.

Napoleon as Mars the Peacemaker had its inception after Canova was hired to make a bust of Napoleon in 1802. The statue was begun in 1803, with Napoleon requesting to be shown in a French General's uniform, Canova rejected this, insisting on an allusion to Mars, the Roman god of War.[19] It was completed in 1806.^[20] In 1811, the statue arrived in Paris, but not installed; neither was its bronze copy in the Foro Napoleonico in Milan.^[19] In 1815, the original went to the Duke of Wellington, after his victory at Waterloo against Napoleon. [20]

Venus Victrix' was originally conceived as a robed and recumbent sculpture of Pauline Borghese in the guise of Diana. Instead, Pauline ordered Canova to make the statue a nude Venus. [21] The work was not intended for public viewing.[21]

Other works for the Napoleon family include, a bust of Napoleon, a statue of Napoleon's mother, and Marie Louise as Concordia.[7]

In 1802, Canova was assigned the post of 'Inspector-General of Antiquities and Fine Art of the Papal State', a position formerly held by Raphael. [6] One of his activities in this capacity was to pioneer the restoration of the Appian Way by restoring the tomb of Servilius Quartus.^[22] In 1808 Canova became an associated member of the Royal Institute of the Netherlands.[23]

In 1814, he began his *The Three Graces*.^[7]

In 1815, he was named 'Minister Plenipotentiary of the Pope, [6] and was tasked with recovering various works of art that were taken to Paris by Napoleon. [8]



Orpheus, (1777)



Theseus and the Minotaur, V&A, London

If one could make statues by caressing marble, I would say that this statue was formed by wearing out the marble that surrounded it with caresses and kiss

- Joséphine de Beauharnais on the Venus

Victrix[2]

"

Antonio Canova^[6]

Returning to Italy

In 1816, Canova returned to Rome with some of the art Napoleon had taken. He was rewarded with several marks of distinction: he was appointed President of the <u>Accademia di San Luca</u>, inscribed into the "Golden Book of Roman Nobles" by the Pope's own hands,^[7] and given the title of Marquis of Ischia, alongside an annual pension of 3000 crowns.^[8]

In 1819, he commenced and completed his commissioned work *Venus Italica* as a replacement for the Venus de' Medici. [24]

After his 1814 proposal to build a personified statue of Religion for St. Peter's Basilica was rejected, Canova sought to build his own temple to house it.^[2] This project came to be the Tempio Canoviano. Canova designed, financed, and partly built the structure himself.^[6] The structure was to be a testament to Canova's piety.^[18] The building's design was inspired by combining the Parthenon and the Pantheon together.^{[6][7]} On 11 July 1819, Canova laid the foundation stone dressed in red Papal uniform and decorated with all his medals.^[18] It first opened in 1830, and was finally completed in 1836.^[18] After the foundation-stone of this edifice had been laid, Canova returned to Rome; but every succeeding autumn he continued to visit Possagno to direct the workmen and encourage them with rewards.^[8]

During the period that intervened between commencing operations at Possagno and his death, he executed or finished some of his most striking works. Among these were the group *Mars and Venus*, the colossal figure of <u>Pius VI</u>, the <u>Pietà</u>, the *St John*, and a colossal bust of his friend, the Count Cicognara.^[8]

In 1820, he made a statue of George Washington for the state of North Carolina. [17] As recommended by Thomas Jefferson, the sculptor used the marble bust of Washington by Giuseppe Ceracchi as a model. [25] It was delivered on December 24, 1821. The statue was later destroyed by fire in 1831. A plaster replica was sent by the king of Italy in 1910, now on view at the North Carolina Museum of History. A marble copy was sculpted by Romano Vio in 1970, now on view in the rotunda of the capitol building. [25][26]

In 1822, he journeyed to Naples, to superintend the construction of wax moulds for an equestrian statue of <u>Ferdinand VII</u>. The adventure was disastrous to his health, but soon became healthy enough to return to Rome. From there, he voyaged to Venice; however, on 13 October 1822, he died there at the age of 64.^[8] As he never married, the name became extinct, except through his stepbrothers' lineage of Satori-Canova.^[7]

On 12 October 1822, Canova instructed his brother to use his entire estate to complete the Tempio in Possagno.^[18]

On 25 October 1822, his body was placed in the Tempio Canoviano.^[8] His heart was interred at the <u>Basilica di Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari</u> in Venice, and his right hand preserved in a vase at the <u>Accademia di Belle Arti di Venezia.^{[2][8][18]}</u>



George Washington, plaster replica on display at the North Carolina Museum of History

His memorial service was so grand that it rivaled the ceremony that the city of Florence held for Michelangelo in 1564. [18]

In 1826, Giovanni Battista Sartori sold Canova's Roman studio and took every plaster model and sculpture to Possagno, where they were installed in the Tempio Canoviano.^[18]

Works

Among Canova's most notable works are:

Psyche Revived by Cupid's Kiss (1787)

<u>Psyche Revived by Cupid's Kiss</u> was commissioned in 1787 by <u>Colonel John Campbell</u>. [27] It is regarded as a masterpiece of Neoclassical sculpture, but shows the mythological lovers at a moment of great emotion, characteristic of the emerging movement of <u>Romanticism</u>. It represents the god <u>Cupid</u> in the height of love and tenderness, immediately after awakening the lifeless <u>Psyche</u> with a kiss.

Napoleon as Mars the Peacemaker (1802-1806)

Napoleon as Mars the Peacemaker had its inception after Canova was hired to make a bust of Napoleon in 1802. The statue was begun in 1803, with Napoleon requesting to be shown in a French General's uniform, Canova rejected this, insisting on an allusion to Mars, the Roman god of War. It was completed in 1806. In 1811, the statue arrived in Paris, but not installed; neither was its bronze copy in the Foro Napoleonico in Milan. In 1815, the original went to the Duke of Wellington, after his victory at Waterloo against Napoleon.



Detail of Psyche Revived by Cupid's

Perseus Triumphant (1804-1806)

Perseus Triumphant, sometimes called Perseus with the Head of Medusa, was a statue commissioned by tribune Onorato Duveyriez. [28] It depicts the Greek hero Perseus after his victory over the Gorgon Medusa.

The statue was based freely to the Apollo Belvedere and the Medusa Rondanini.^[29]

Napoleon, after his 1796 Italian Campaign, took the Apollo Belvedere to Paris. In the statue's absence, Pope Pius VII acquired Canova's Perseus Triumphant and placed the work upon the Apollo's pedestal. [30] The statue was so successful that when the Apollo was returned, Perseus remained as a companion piece. [31]

One replica of the statue was purchased from Canova by the Polish countess Valeria Tarnowska; it now resides in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.^{[29][32]}

<u>Karl Ludwig Fernow</u> said of the statue that "every eye must rest with pleasure on the beautiful surface, even when the mind finds its hopes of high and pure enjoyment disappointed." [33]

Venus Victrix (1805-1808)

<u>Venus Victrix</u> ranks among the most famous of Canova's works. Originally, Canova wished the depictation to be of a robed <u>Diana</u>, but <u>Pauline Borghese</u> insisted to appear as a nude Venus.^[21] The work was not intended for public viewing.^[21]

Detail of *Perseus with the Head of Medusa*

The Three Graces (1814-1817)

John Russell, the 6th <u>Duke</u> of Bedford, commissioned a version of the now famous work.^[34] He had previously visited Canova in his studio in <u>Rome</u> in 1814 and had been immensely impressed by a carving of the Graces the sculptor had made for the <u>Empress Josephine</u>. When the Empress died in May of the same year he immediately offered to purchase the completed piece, but was unsuccessful as Josephine's son <u>Eugène</u> claimed it (his son <u>Maximilian</u> brought it to <u>St. Petersburg</u>, where it can now be found in the <u>Hermitage Museum</u>). Undeterred, the Duke commissioned another version for himself.

The sculpting process began in 1814 and was completed in 1817. Finally in 1819 it was installed at the Duke's residence in <u>Woburn Abbey</u>. Canova even made the trip over to England to supervise its installation, choosing for it to be displayed on a <u>pedestal</u> adapted from a marble <u>plinth</u> with a rotating top. This version is now owned jointly by the <u>Victoria and Albert Museum</u> and the National Galleries of Scotland, and is alternately displayed at each.

Artistic process

Canova's sculptures fall into three categories: Heroic compositions, compositions of grace, and sepulchral monuments.^[8] In each of these, Canova's underlying artistic motivations were to challenge, if not compete, with classical statues.^[6]

Canova refused to take in pupils and students,^[2] but would hire workers to carve the initial figure from the marble. He had an elaborate system of comparative pointing so that the workers were able to reproduce the plaster form in the selected block of marble.^[33] These workers would leave a thin veil over the entire statue so Canova's could focus on the surface of the statue.^[33]

While he worked, he had people read to him select literary and historical texts. [2]



The Three Graces

Canova's system of work concentrated on the initial idea, and on the final carving of the marble^[2]

"

Last touch

During the last quarter of the eighteenth century, it became fashionable to view art galleries at night by torchlight. Canova was an artist that leapt on the fad and displayed his works of art in his studio by candlelight.^[18] As such, Canova would begin to finalize the statue with special tools by candlelight,^[2] to soften the transitions between the various parts of the nude.^[33] After a little recarving, he began to rub the statue down with pumice stone, sometimes for periods longer than weeks or months.^[33] If that was not enough, he would use tripoli (rottenstone) and lead.^[33]

He then applied a now unknown chemical-composition of <u>patina</u> onto the flesh of the figure to lighten the skin tone.^[2] Importantly, his friends also denied any usage of acids in his process.^[7]

The polish throws upon the parts which are lighted so great brilliancy as frequently to make invisible the most laborious diligence; it cannot be seen, because the strong reflected light dazzles the eyes

— Johann Joachim Winckelmann^[33]

Criticisms

Conversations revolving around the justification of art as superfluous usually invoked the name of Canova. [18]

Karl Ludwig Fernow believed that Canova was not Kantian enough in his aesthetic, because emphasis seemed to have been placed on agreeableness rather than Beauty.[33]

Canova was also faulted for creating works that were artificial in complexity.^[6]

Legacy

The importance and value of Canova's art is now recognized as holding in balance the last echo of the Ancients and the first symptom of the restless experimentation of the modern age^[2]

Canova spent large parts of his fortune helping young students and sending patrons to struggling sculptors,^[17] including Sir Richard Westmacott and John Gibson.^{[35][36]}

He was introduced into various orders of chivalry.^[7]

The Romantic period artists buried Canova's name soon after he died, but he is slowly being rediscovered.[2]



The Museo Canoviano located in Possagno near Asolo

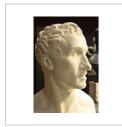
Literary Inspirations

Two of Canova's works appear as engravings in Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book, 1834, with poetical illustrations by Letitia Elizabeth Landon. These are of The Dancing Girl and Hebe.

Commemorations

- Canova, South Dakota
- Via Antonio Canova, in Treviso

Gallery



Antonio Canova from the studio of Canova c.1813



Tomb of Clement XIII



Tomb of Clement XIV



Monument to Pius VI



Psyche Revived by Cupid's Kiss, Louvre



Revived by Perseus Cupid's Kiss, Louvre Vatican (detail)





Triumphant, Theseus Fighting the Pair of portrait busts Kunsthistorisches

Centaur (1804-1819), by Canova, c. 1815 Museum, Vienna^[notes 2]



Napoleon as Mars the Peacemaker, **Apsley** House London











<u>Pauline Bonaparte</u> as Panorama <u>Venus Victrix</u>, now at Cenotaph the Galleria Borghese Christina of

Panorama of
Cenotaph to <u>Maria</u>
Christina of Austria

of Cenotaph to <u>Maria</u>
<u>ria Christina of Austria</u> in
the <u>Augustinerkirche</u>

The Penitent Magdalene (Hermitage Museum, ex-Leuchtenberg Gallery)

Penitent Antonio Canova Medal by Francesco Putinati







Monument to Canova in the <u>Basilica di Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari,</u> designed by Canova as a <u>mausoleum</u> for the painter Titian

Notes

- 1. The Glory of Venice: Art in the Eighteenth Century states (pg. 441) that Canova left Venice when it fell, tried to escape to America and then went to Possagno. The fall of Venice was in 1797. There appears to be some gap in knowledge that would correct or amend these accounts. The first reference to Vienna is an online source, the second is the Encyclopædia Britannica, 1911 which has already proven itself incorrect in some areas. The Glory of Venice has proven itself more accurate, but it is undated, leaving speculation of time frame.
- 2. Napoleon ordered it for the Corso in Milan; Emperor Franz I bought it for the Theseus Temple in the Volksgarten in Vienna; moved to Kunsthistorisches Museum in 1891.
- 1. The fall of Venice occurred in 1797 but was then ceded later to Austria. Encycopedia Britannica Venice (https://www.britannica.com/place/Venice/History#ref24409). Accessed 14 May 2018.
- 2. , and Maria Angela Zardo Fantolini. Turner 1996b.
- 3. Irwin, David, *Antonio Canova, marchese d'Ischia | Italian sculptor* (http://www.britannica.com/biography/Antonio-Canova-marchese-dIschia), Britannica.com, retrieved 1 April 2017
- 4. "Canòva, Antonio nell'Enciclopedia Treccani" (http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/antonio-canova/), Treccani.it, retrieved 1 April 2017
- 5. Turner 1996a.
- 6. Jean Martineau & Andrew Robinson, *The Glory of Venice: Art in the Eighteenth Century.* Yale University Press, 1994. Print.
- 7. Handley 1913.
- 8. Rossetti 1911, pp. 204-206.
- 9. "Eurydice by CANOVA, Antonio" (http://www.wga.hu/html_m/c/canova/1/02orpheu.html). wga.hu.
- 10. "Orpheus by CANOVA, Antonio" (http://www.wga.hu/html_m/c/canova/1/01orpheu.html). wga.hu.
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- 16. "Sculptures until 1799" (http://www.wga.hu/html_m/c/canova/1/index.html). wga.hu.
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- 22. Paris, Rita, "Appia, una questione non risolta" in "La via Appia, il bianco e il nero di un patrimonio italiano." Electa. 2011
- 23. <u>"A. Canova (1757 1822)" (http://www.dwc.knaw.nl/biografie/pmknaw/?pagetype=authorDetail&ald=PE00004542)</u>. Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. Retrieved 5 October 2016.

- 24. "Venus Italica by CANOVA, Antonio" (http://www.wga.hu/html_m/c/canova/2/8venus.html). wga.hu.
 - 25. "George Washington Sculpture, North Carolina State Capitol, Raleigh" (http://docsouth.unc.edu/commland/monument/407/). University of North Carolina.
- 26. "The Canova Statue" (https://www.ncsu.edu/ligon/rt/canova/canova.htm). North Carolina State University.
- 27. Johns, C.M.S. (1998) Antonio Canova and the Politics of Patronage in Revolutionary and Napoleonic Europe. Berkeley, CA: <u>University of California Press</u>, p. 149.
- 28. "Perseus Triumphant" (http://mv.vatican.va/3_EN/pages/x-Schede/MPCs/MPCs_Sala02_05.html). vatican.va.
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- 31. "Perseus with the Head of Medusa by CANOVA, Antonio" (http://www.wga.hu/html m/c/canova/2/2perseu.html). wga.hu.
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External links

- 🔳 🗑 Rossetti, William Michael (1878), "Antonio Canova", Encyclopædia Britannica, **5** (9th ed.), pp. 24-26
- Canova's Three Graces (second version) (https://www.flickr.com/photos/65986072@N00/458745957/) in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (2000). One of three Flickr photos by ketrin 1407.
- Canova's Perseus and Medusa (https://www.flickr.com/photos/65986072@N00/3963111586/) in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2009). Part of Flickr set by ketrin1407.
- Europe in the age of enlightenment and revolution (http://libmma.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p15324coll10/id/593 28/rec/1), a catalog from The Metropolitan Museum of Art Libraries (fully available online as PDF), which contains material on Canova (see index)
- Antonio Canova: Photo Gallery (https://web.archive.org/web/20050723014633/http://www.scultura-italiana.com/Galleria/Canova%20Antonio/index.html)
- Canova's death mask at Princeton (http://libweb.princeton.edu/libraries/firestone/rbsc/aids/C0770/ex49.jpg)
- Canova museum and plaster cast gallery (http://www.museocanova.it/menu.php?name=hom&lang=uk)
- Canova 2009 Exhibition in Forlì, Italy (http://www.alessandroronchi.net/2008/canova-exhibition-at-forli-san-domenico-museum/)

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