

Antonio d'Este

Italian neo-Classical sculptor
(1754-1837)

He was born in Venice from Liberale in 1754. In 1769 his presence in the Venetian studio of the sculptor Giuseppe Bernardi, known as Il Torretti, is already documented d'Este In November of the same year he met Antonio Canova, then twelve years old, who entered the same workshop to learn the art of sculpture. Between the two disciples was born a mutual friendship that constituted the most important and most significant relationship in the life of D'Este. In Venice he attended courses at the painting and sculpture academy. In October 1773 (or the following year), as he himself wrote in the Memoirs of Antonio Canova (published in Florence 1864), he accompanied Canova to Possagno, where he assisted in the creation of the artist's first plastic work, the statue of *Eurydice*.

In Rome, where he remained for the rest of his life, d'Este arrived in 1777 in the wake of Giovanni Ferrari, who took over the management of Bernardi in 1774; between the two, contrasts soon arose that led to abandon the Ferrari to enter the workshop of the sculptor Massimiliano Trombetta. In 1779 he moved to the study of M. Labourer (where he remained until 1787). In that same year he married Teresa Arrigoni, as can be deduced from a letter from 18 Ag. 1829 addressed to S. Betti, in which he claims to be married for half a century. From the marriage the sons were born Giuseppe (born in Rome on March 19, 1779, Rome, Archbishop of the Vicariate, double positions 71/1804, VI, who will dedicate himself to the practice of engraving under the guidance of G. Volpato, and Alessandro.

In 1787 d'Este opened his own atelier near the church of S. Ignazio, next to the Gabrielli Borromeo palace. In Rome he also attended the studies of the most famous artists and began to collaborate with Canova, through which in 1790 he obtained the task of sculpting a copy of the Apollo of the Belvedere for the king of Poland Stanislaus Augustus, who was placed in the castle of Łazienki, where it is still located. In the same period he began to work as a restorer in the Vatican Museums, which continued until the end of the century. In these years, in addition to the restoration, he dedicated himself to the copy and sale of ancient sculptures also in collaboration with the sculptor P. Pierantoni called the Sposino. Of particular interest are the restoration of a statue of Faun, identifiable with that of the Vatican filed by F. De Clarac, and of four ancient sculptures purchased in 1796 by the Hope brothers. The Canova, during his stay in London in 1815, will note in the collection of Thomas Hope an Apollo and Giacinto, "restored by D'Este". Other ancient sculptures he restored were purchased by H. Blundell for his home in Ince; some of them are now kept in Liverpool in the Walker Art Gallery.

In May 1792 d'Este undertook together with Canova a trip to the Veneto, which kept him away from Rome until the month of July. In the same year he met the Paduan count Daniele degli Oddi, who commissioned his portrait, the first among those known of D'Este.

D'Este devoted himself particularly to this genre, as evidenced by a letter written on

April 18. 1807 to Pier Antonio Meneghelli, in which he claimed to have followed the "way of portraiture" considering it "the least difficult part of art, which is demonstrated by all ages, being the first to be born and the last to die". In 1795 he executed two busts of Canova, one of which, in the form of a herma (a plaster cast is preserved in Rome, Palazzo della Cancelleria), was translated into an engraving by Pietro Fontana as an antiporta of the book by Faustino Tadini, *Sculptures and Paintings by Antonio Canova* published 1795. D'Este donated the other portrait (engraved by T. Piroli), in which Canova appears in modern clothes, in Possagno, where, in 1798, it was placed in the sacristy of the parish church.

In the first months of 1795 d'Este was in Naples in the double role of director of the study of Canova and sculptor: he directed the works of arrangement of the Canovian group of Venus and Adonis in the house of the Marquis FM Berio and performed numerous portraits still unidentified. At the same time he attended exponents of the aristocratic world such as Count CG Della Torre di Rezzonico and Prince Honored Gaetani of Aragon, who then commissioned Canova through the group of Hercules and Lica. On his return to Rome, he sculpted the bust of Sir John Francis Edward Acton, who had been commissioned from him in Naples, where he sent it in September. In the city of Naples was also invited "to make the portrait of SM the Queen, but the general turbulence made to change of thought to SM".

Having the Canova in 1795 finished sculpting the Emo Monument (Venice, Naval Historical Museum), d'Este, commissioned by the Venetian Senate to have the coin engraved, entrusted its execution to G. Amerani. In 1796-97 he sculpted the stela in honor of Leonardo Pesaro, son of Pietro Pesaro, ambassador of the Serenissima in the papal city, who died in 1796. In 1798 he executed a profile portrait of Canova, which was translated into an engraving by P. Bettelini.

In the early days of May 1798, following the departure of his friend from Rome, d'Este had to assume "entirely on himself the study of Canova, since it was no longer a question of simple direction and advice, but it must have lent itself to a man., and neglect their own interests ". The following year he gave evidence of total dedication to the famous sculptor, refusing the task that was offered on July 19 by the French Republic of "exercise the office of sculptor, and director of the restoration of ancient monuments", not to abandon the study and the friend's interests. When Canova returned to Rome (November 1799), he closed his own studio in S. Ignazio, reserving "a small room in the alley of the Ursulines". From this moment he entered firmly to work in his friend's office as director and administrator. Among other tasks, he had to choose directly in the quarries of Carrara the marble used for the Canova chisel. During the repeated stays in Carrara "he raised the topographic map of those mines: he described the use of the Lunense marble made by the ancient peoples of Italy, he took over the classical monuments in that worked marble, and developed all that his artistic knowledge could to suggest, directing his memoirs to Canova, to Ennio Quirino Visconti, and to other distinct subjects ".

Of this period, but of uncertain date, are a plaster cast by Giovanni Volpato; another plaster, by Senator Antonio Renier and, on commission of the Widmann family Venice, a marble bas-relief with the Deposition (now at the Art Institute of Chicago), copied from a plaster of Canova. When in 1802 Pius VII appointed the Canova inspector general of the Fine Arts throughout the Papal State with superintendency to the Vatican Museums,

Capitoline and the Academy of St. Luke, the sculptor entrusted to d'Este and his sons Alexander and Joseph the arrangement of the Museum Chiaramonti. In 1803 d'Este sculpted the sarcophagus of Cardinal Carlo Rezzonico, former archpriest of the Lateran (1780-1799), who was placed in the chapel of the Crucifix in the transept of the Basilica of S. Giovanni in Laterano. With a classical form, the simple monument is enriched by a medallion supported by geniuses with the portrait in profile of the cardinal.

In the same year he executed, "according to the invention and direction of Canova", a bas-relief depicting the Blessed Gregorio Barbarigo in the act of distributing the 'alms for the altar of the second chapel on the left in the church of S. Marco in Rome. In 1805, aided by his sons Alessandro and Giuseppe, he completed the reorganization of the Chiaramonti Museum, with which he took over the management together with Alessandro. In 1807 he collaborated with Canova on archaeological excavations along the Via Appia, on which he will make a report. In the autumn of the same year he accompanied his friend to Naples. Also in 1807 he was appointed conservator of the Vatican Museums under Canova, a position that d'Este also covered during the years of the French administration (1809-1814) and during the short Neapolitan period (January-May 1814). Elected on June 4, 1808 honorary member of the R. Academy of Fine Arts in Venice, in 1810 he was accepted in the Academy of St. Luke in Rome, of which he later became advisor and censor for the class of sculpture. In 1811 he was entrusted with the task of conservative Vatican paintings. On April 6th 1814 he was appointed by the prefect of the department of Rome as a member of the commission charged with verifying the Farnese objects belonging to the king of Naples. With the papal restoration d'Este became director of the Vatican Museums, while his son Alexander was appointed sub-director.

In the meantime he continued his activity as a sculptor. For the Venetian house of Count L. Cicognara he executed two ornamental vases copied from the old: the first in 1807 and the second in 1809. In 1808 he sculpted a bust of Canova for Count Pezzoli of Bergamo and, two years later, another bust of the artist for Gioacchino Murat. In 1810 he painted the portrait of Pietro Lupi; in 1812 the busts of the Baron and Baroness Daru and, most probably in the same year, the Self portrait which, in 1839, was donated by his son Giuseppe to the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice (now 'Academy). Beginning in 1815 he began to sculpt, by commission of Canova, a series of portraits of famous people destined for the Pantheon in Rome: Andrea del Sarto's herms and Giambattista Piranesi (1816), by Girolamo Tiraboschi and by Alessandro Verri (1817), by Annibal Caro (1818). To this series will be added in 1825 the portrait "ad vivum" of Leo XII, sculpted by D'Este on commission of the arcades.

On August 7, 1816, Canova, president of the advisory commission then created to control and stem the exportation of works of art from the Papal State, appointed d'Este consultant.

Starting from these years the honorary positions of which he was awarded gradually multiplied. On 22 March 1817 he was nominated honorary member of the Roman Academy of Archeology; on November 7 honorary member of the R. Academy of Fine Arts in Carrara; the 14th nov. 1829 member of Arcadia with the name of Euphorbo; on 12 August 1830 honorary member of the Academy of Letters, Sciences and Economic Arts of the Tiberina Valley of Tuscany.

After the death of Canova (October 13, 1822), which sealed the friendship for his faithful collaborator between 1820 and 1822, Fr. to write the biography. One of the reasons that led him to this enterprise was the publication in 1824 of the volume of M. Missirini *Della vita* by Antonio Canova, from which emerged a figure of the artist from the Faragnese very different from the one he knew. D'Este, with his memorial, thus proposed to draw in writing, after having done so many times in marble, the true portrait of his friend. The important work (*Memorie di Antonio Canova*) was published posthumously in Florence in 1864, by his nephew Alessandro D'Este.

His latest works include two plaster casts: a statue of Tito Livio, modeled in 1825 (donated in 1837 to the city of Padua by his son Giuseppe and currently housed in the "Tito Livio" classical school in Padua), and another, most likely of the same period, by Archimedes (Syracuse, National Museum). In 1832 he sculpted a bust of Canova (Rome, Vatican Museums): the portrait, signed and dated, represents the last sign of homage to the extinct friend.

He died in Rome, of cholera, on 13 September. 1837 and was buried in the Roman church of S. Maria dei Miracoli.

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