

CANOVA: THE FIRST EXPONENT OF NEO-CLASSIC ERA

A PEEP INTO THE IMITATIONS OF CANOVA'S WORKS IN SALAR JUNG MUSEUM

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The form or period of art etc. representing an exemplary standard that flourished about AD. 1750-1850 is known as Neo-Classic style. The great exponent of this Neo-Classic era in sculpture was Antonio Canova (AD. 1757- 1822). He was born at Possagno village near Treviso, Italy on 1st November 1757 AD. According to a tradition, the boy's genius was discovered through a lion he had modeled in butter. He some time served under the Venetian sculptors. His early works were influenced by the fashion of Johann Winckelmann in theory and Anton Raphael Mengs in painting as well as by the finds from excavations held at Pompeii and Herculaneum. He began by producing a work of realistic inspiration, classical only in general conception and poise, and of such vigorous originality that one is fain to believe that he might have proved a second Donatello and have founded a veritable Neo-Italian school of sculpture. Canova and Thorvaldsen are considered the two foremost representatives of Neoclassicism, yet they interpreted it in very different ways.

In Venice Canova executed several groups, among them one of Daedalus and Icarus. He went to Rome at the age of 23 with the financial help of Venetian senate where he found patrons like Pope Clement XIV. He opened a studio in the Via del Babuino and there spent two years on a monument to the Pope in the

Church of the Holy Apostles, which was completed in 1787. Later he took up another monument of Clement XIII in St. Peter's. Then he visited Vienna and Berlin in 1798. In 1802 he went to Paris to make studies for a statue of Napoleon. Protected by Napoleon, very much in favour with the Bonaparte family, Canova enjoyed a reputation that was almost unparalleled until his death. His influence on French sculpture was considerable. He also visited England in 1815.

After the fall of Bonaparte, Canova was named head of the commission appointed to restore to their various Italian owners the works of art, which had been sent to Paris. He received from the pope the titles of 1 '*Marquis of Ischia*' (noble man next in rank above an earl and below a duke), and '*perfect of the fine arts*'. Italy retained by means of the sculptor Canova (inspite of what Ruskin calls his *vile classicality*) that supremacy in European art circles which she had held for at least four centuries. His main creative activity was shaping clay models besides marble. Canova's works number about one

hundered and seventy. Among his monuments there are some notable creations. The last of the numerous portraits carved by Canova was that of Pius VI, which was made for the monument of that Pope (d. 1800) and erected in 1822, the years of the sculptor's death.

In the last years of his life Canova returned to his native village and died in Venice on 13th October 1822 at the age of sixty-five. Most of his remains were deposited in a temple at Possagno, which he had himself designed. The ancient or classical period sculptures of Greek and Roman mythological and other subjects and the style of their carving were said to have highly influenced in the works of Canova, who revived the classic style greatly, which is known as Neo-classic style. Therefore, he became the first exponent of the Neo-classic style. He used mainly the white marble as a medium for his works with variety of themes in different postures and size. Apart from marble, Canova also used other media like terracotta, clay and plaster for his works of art as seen from the miniature portraits of Latizia Romalino Bonaparte during AD. 1804-05).

Lorenzo Bartolini (1777-1850) started Cavovan school in Savignano, near Florence for continuing the neo-classic style of sculpture. Thorwaldsen (1770- 1844), Prof. Stefano Ricci, Fraccaroli of Verona (d. 1882) etc. followed the principles of Canova in later period.

Some of the celebrated works of Canova's are " Amore and Psyche", now in Louvre, Paris, "Perseus With the Head of Medusa" (Vatican), "The Three Graces" (Hermitage, Leningrad), "The Princes Pauline Borghese as Venus" (Villa Borghese, Rome) etc. His works about one hundred seventy, which spread in different places, have been mostly imitated all over Europe, especially by the French.

Some of the Italian sculptures in copied versions of the famous thematic works of Canova have been preserved in Salar Jung Museum, which have been acquired by the Salar Jung III, Nawab Mir Yousuf Ali Khan (AD. 1889-1949). There are about 10 important sculptures in Museum collection in different media and in different sizes. All these works are ascribed to 19th or early 20th Century AD. They represent in miniature to life size. Based on the literature and photographs of the original works, the Museum exhibits have been identified with the works of Canova. For three sculptures inscription is found on them, of which two garden figures have the name of sculptor, Canova. The names of sculptors of all the imitations of the original works are unknown. An attempt is made, to describe the Museum sculptures as they are seen different media and the themes they represent are also important. Some of them represent as group of figures.

I. Mythological Sculptures

Aphrodite in Greek is called Venus in Roman mythology. According to a tradition she is said to have born from the foam of the Sea. Another legend says that she is the daughter of Zeus (called Jupiter in Roman mythology) and Dione or Uranus and Sea. She is the goddess of erotic love and marriage. She is the most beautiful goddess in the Greek pantheon. In the marriage function of 'Thetis and Peleus', Aphrodite, Hera and Athena compete for the golden apple for being the fairest. It is Paris who declares

and gives the apple to Aphrodite for the most beautiful among the goddesses. Aphrodite is the wife of Vulcan, who presides over Fire and the working of Metals and patronized handicraftsmen of every kind. But, she also bestows her love on other gods like Mars, the god of War, and the god of Commerce and Gain, Mercury. Cupid or Amore is the son of Venus. Cupid's wife Psyche is the rival beauty of Venus. A festival called Aphrodisia was celebrated in her honour in various parts of Greece, but especially Cyprus. In art she was represented draped, in later times nude.

Amore and Psyche are the son and the daughter-in-law of Aphrodite. Amore is the God of Love. Psyche is as beautiful as Aphrodite. They are beauty rivals of each other. In art Amore is shown some times as nude and mostly with wings, where as Psyche represents with or without wings in nude or semi-nude.

Three Graces, the handmaidens of Hera are the divine personifications of grace, gentleness and beauty i.e., Aglaia (brilliance), Thalia (the blooming) and Euphrosyne (mirth). They represent as three graces. In fact they used to make the gods and goddesses happy and to assist Hera, the queen of Zeus who is the king of all gods in Greek pantheon. The three Graces are usually represented slightly draped or entirely nude, either locked in each other's embrace, or hand in hand.

Canova's works mostly deal with romantic subjects as most of them represent the Love goddess, Venus, Amore and Psyche, Three Graces etc. One of his works 'Venus and Mars' substantiates the theme that she was bestowing her love on Mars secretly without knowing to her husband, Vulcan. Canova became very close to the family of French Emperor, Napoleon I during his stay in France. He sculpted not only the images of contemporary persons like Napoleon and his sister, Pauline Bourgesse, but also some images of showpieces like garden figures, which represent the seasons like autumn and summer. Perhaps no Museum in India has as many imitations of Canova's works as Salar Jung Museum. The following are the impressive copies of famous works of Canova in Museum:

I. Romantic subject from Greek or Roman Mythology:

Amore and Psyche (M.No. 1602-CSI)

Marble Copy

Height: 23.0 cm. LAh

Late 19th Century A.D.

Europe/Italy

Cupid or Amore is the son of Venus who fell in love with Psyche and after a long time, he married her with the help of the principal god, Zeus. In this amorous sculpture both the seminude Amore appears with wings and Psyche without wings, with a classical outlook. The right wing of Amore is however, missing. She holds his head with both of her hands. She reclines on the rocky bed in semi-nude while Cupid is embracing her with his two hands, one on her back and the other at her bosom.. Her curly hair left hanging touches the ground. Cupid has also curly hair. The pedestal is in the shape of a gibbous. This sculpture is perhaps a copy of Canova's marble original.

Cupid and Psyche (M. No. 962/CSI)

Bronze

Ht. 25.9 cm.

Early 20th Century AD.

Europe/France

This represents the same sculpture of the above M.No. 1602-CSI) but in bronze. Here Cupid has two wings and other sculptural details are also same. The provenance may be France.

Standing Venus (M.No. 148/XLV):

Marble copy

Height:137.5 cm.

Late 19th or Early 20th Century AD.

Italy.

The original marble is now in Pitti Palace, Florence (Museo degli Argenti). Here Venus stands on a round pedestal standing seminude with right leg forward, She clutches the drape in her folded hands to cover her bosom. The bottom end of the drape carved with natural folds. A carved casket with lion paws is seen at the back of her right foot. Her head is turned towards left shoulder. Her hair is formed into a knot on top. The anatomy of the figure shows the beautiful features of Venus, the goddess of Love. Her face in profile with little tension shows that Venus was afraid at the arrival of her husband or somebody who is invisible, when she was with her lover or getting ready to take bath.

Standing Venus (M.No. 6-XLV):

Marble copy

Height: 74.2 cm.

Early 20th Century AD.

Italy.

The description of this sculpture is same as M.No. 148/XLV since it is a reduced copy of the same original life size Venus of Canova.

Venus and Mars (M.No.161-XLV):

Marble copy

Height:106.0 cm.

Late 19th or Early 20th Century A.D.

Italy

Mars is regarded as the father of Roman people, and in his name the third month March has been remembered as Romans' first month. The figure of Mars or Gradivus, the God of War and Husbandry has been represented here with his secret love, Venus, the goddess of Love. The sculpture depicts the story that they used to meet secretly without the notice of Vulcan. Mars appears in nude with traditional helmet and a spear

in the left arm. The 'S' curve design of the top of the helmet is said to be a common feature of the helmets of the Roman warriors. The semi nude Venus standing very close to Mars holds his neck with her left hand. At the back of the images a shield and a sword are depicted.

This sculpture is the copy of original marble (AD. 1816-1822), Ht. 209.5 cm., now in Buckingham Palace, London.

Three Graces (M.No. 1070-MS):

Plaster of Paris (Copy of Marble)

Height: 27.0, width- 13.0 cm.

Late 19th or Early 20th Century A.D.

Europe/France

The three goddesses representing beauty, blooming and bright form close together in this sculpture standing nude with their bodies touching each other. All of them stand mainly on single legs. The close standing posture of these goddesses' reveals that they may be discussing together to take a common decision on an issue or meeting very affectionately together. The goddesses are shown semi-nude embracing each other closely. They have knots on top with neat dressing of their hair. They stand on a oval shaped pedestal. The original marble sculpture now in Hermitage, Leningrad, is a fine example of the revival of the classic style of Greek sculpture by Canova.

Three Graces (M.No. 211/XL VI):

Ivory (Copy of Marble)

Height: 19.8 cm.

Late 19th or Early 20th Century A.D.

Europe/France

The particulars and description of the Three Graces are the same as M.No. 1070/MS. However, the sculpture looks bright and attractive. The carver of this impressive work may be coming from France.

II. Secular art figures:

A. Portrait sculpture

Pauline Borghese as Venus (M.No. 2-XLV)

Marble and Brass (Copy of Marble)

Inscribed: d' apre's

Length: 57.3, Height: 44.5 cm.

Late 19th or Early 20th Century AD.

Europe/France

This is a fine example of composite sculpture of both stone and metal. It is a miniature copy of the original marble in the Villa/Galleria Borghese, Rome. The sister of Napoleon (I), Pauline Borghese was portrayed in this sculpture as Venus Victorious

(Victrix). The sculpture has three parts in total, three marble pieces and brass cover. She reclines on a coach with marble bed. Her upper portion is devoid of any cloth. Her left arm with a bracelet and holding an apple is seen resting over left thigh. Her head is turned towards left. Her curly twisted hair forms into a knot at the back. Her legs are fixed in the metal drape at kneels, the right in forward position and the left is at its back.

The metal base below the marble bed is fixed on another rectangular base in black stone. The metal drape is a new creation, which is not seen in original sculpture. The metal coach has a floral design on it. An inscription is read on it as: d' apre's canova, which means copy of Canova. The original marble is dated back to AD. 1804-1808. The sculptor of his copy version is unknown.

B. Garden Figures

Garden Figure Representing the Summer (M.No. 23-AK)

Marble

Inscribed: CANOVA, L'ETE

Height: 157.5 cm.

Early 19th Century A.D.

Italy

The sculpture of this standing lady with her upper dress (skirt) partly uncovered at her bosom is seen stepping forward for bathing. Her right hand rests on the wall. Her left hand holds the garment at waist with a wreath of leaves. She wears a two-row beaded necklace. Her hair appears to have not dressed properly. The sculpture is said to be a garden figure in the campus of a royal palace.

In the front position of the pedestal of this sculpture it is inscribed as 'L'ETE' in Latin, which means 'Summer', a warmest season in a year (Mayor June to August). It is also inscribed on the right side of the pedestal as 'CANOVA', the name of the sculptor. This sculpture may be a original work of Canova.

Garden Figure Representing the Autumn (M.No. 24-AK)

Marble

Inscribed: CANOVA, L' AUTOMME

Height: 157.5 cm., width-40.0 cm.

Early 19th Century AD.

Italy

This sculpture represents a standing female. In this sculpture, a beautiful lady with an upper garment like skirt and a laurel wreath on head is seen portrayed in standing posture. She holds in her hands the fruits like grapes, thus depicting a season like autumn.

The pedestal of the sculpture is incised with Italian letters as L' AUTOMME (sic). L' AUTOMME (sic) stands for the third season AUTUMN, between summer and winter in a year (Sept., to Nov.). And at the right side "CANOVA". This sculpture is said to be

a garden figure depicting a season like Autumn, carved by the Italian master artist, Canova.

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