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Theodor
Commer
Secrétaire

Caspar
Bernhard
Hardy

Wax Figures









Theodor Commer (1773 - 1853)

Secrétaire

Cherrywood, mahogany,
gilded brass, 225 x 145 x 52,5 cm

Caspar Bernhard Hardy (1726 -1819)

Wax figures

Abstract from: Alvar González-Palacios,
*A Secrétaire by Theodor Commer with panels
containing Wax Figures by Caspar Bernhard Hardy*,
Walter Padovani, Milan 2016

Caspar Bernhard Hardy was born in Cologne in 1726 and studied painting and modelling in the city. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1754, by which time his wax figures had already achieved a certain renown, and he was later appointed to the post of Vicar of the Cathedral. Although he received early recognition





I. Caspar Bernhard Hardy, *Portrait of Goethe*, Walter Padovani, Milano

for his wax figures he was also skilled in painting on enamel, engraving shells, working with glass and in casting bronze. Hardy also made globes, armillary spheres, concave mirrors and lenses, all of which were much admired by the travellers of his day. Goethe, who met him in 1815 and acquired from him eight of his wax figures, described his work with this very words: “[Hardy] devoted his energies to a very pleasing genre, modelling half-figures in wax almost in the round, depicting the Seasons and other subjects of the kind: the joyful gardener with her fruit and vegetables, the ageing peasant saying grace, the pious man on this deathbed and so on. These figures are set in glass cases about a foot high and they are made of coloured wax suitable to the figures’ nature. They deserve to be shown in some museum in Cologne for they clearly demonstrate that here we are in the city of Rubens, in the Lower Rhine, where colour has always dominated and exalted

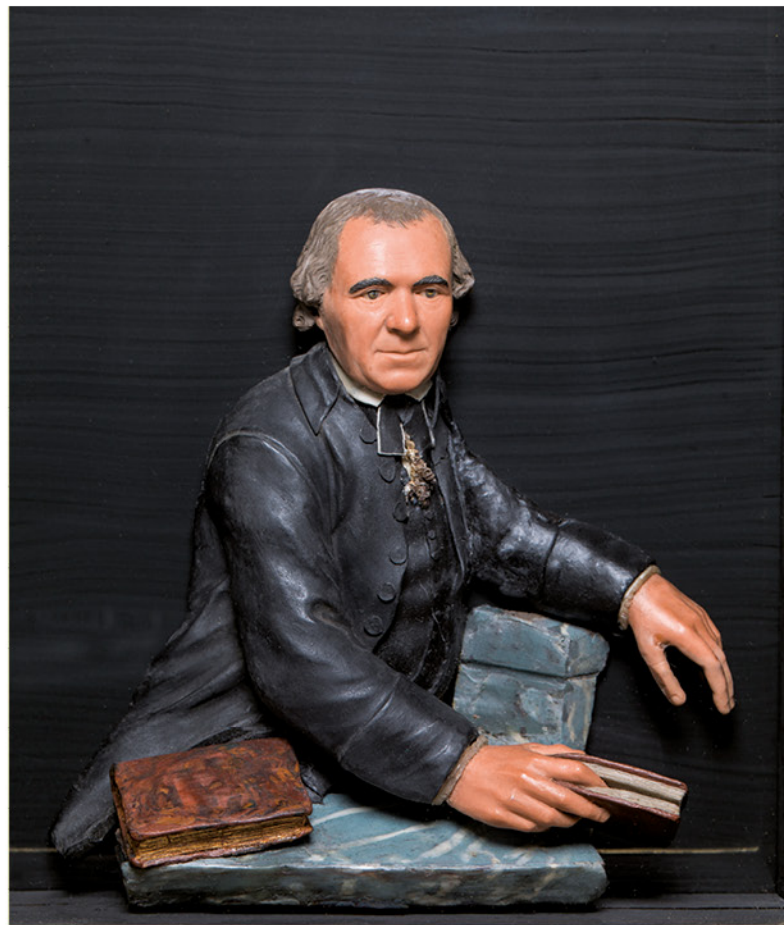
works of art”. A curious circumstance allows us to know exactly what Hardy thought the divine Goethe looked like. An interesting portrait in meticulously carved and beautifully polished white marble bearing the name Johann Wolfgang Goethe, seen in profile from the right, was sold at auction by Kunst- und Auktionshaus Wilhelm M. Döbritz in Frankfurt on 2nd July 2005. This fine effigy is signed Bernhard Kasper Hardy, spelled out in full, and dated 1814, and is, I believe, the sculptor’s only signed and dated work known to us (fig.1).

Letters from several of Hardy’s numerous contemporaries who visited his workshop inform us of the reputation that his work enjoyed and of his prestigious clientele, mentioning for instance the names of the Empress Joséphine and of the Duke of Orléans, Louis Philippe, future King of the French. Hardy died in his home town in 1819.





2. Caspar Bernhard Hardy, *Portrait of Benjamin Franklin*



3. Caspar Bernhard Hardy, *Self-Portrait*

THE WAXES

Hardy composed his waxworks in moderately-sized panels generally designed to form allegorical or emblematic cycles. His subject matter included the Four Seasons, the Four Ages of Woman, the Five Senses, the Vices, the Virtues, the Arts and the Sciences, as well as a group of works depicting genre subjects. More rarely, we find portraits of famous figures (Isaac Newton, Benjamin Franklin, **fig. 2**), self-portrait (**fig. 3**), or figures from ancient history and mythology (Cleopatra, Diana **fig. 4**, Seneca, Giuditta, Artemisia **fig. 5**) along with a number of religious works. Hardy's subjects tend on the whole to offer an allegorical panorama of moral states illustrating human types, in accordance with the celebrated principles of Hardy's contemporary Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741–1801) who used physiognomy to draft an

aesthetic classification of human temperaments.

Hardy seems to hark back to Dutch painting in a broad sense in the figure of the old lady reading (**fig. 7**), for whom it is possible to draw several parallels with a composition by Nicolaes Maes (**fig. 6**), and we encounter the echo of other painters influenced in one way or another by Caravaggio's realism, artists such as Terbrugghen. His inspiration also comes from the picturesque taste of his era expressed, for instance, by Boucher, whose works were reproduced in widely-disseminated engravings and Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725–1805). This latter shares with Hardy a unique sensitivity consisting in moralising pathos, pious intentions and sublimated eroticism, whose primary aim is to highlight the reward or punishment deserved by every Catholic soul (**figs. 8, 9**).



4. Caspar Bernhard Hardy, *Diana*



5. Caspar Bernhard Hardy, *Artemisia*



6. Nicolaes Maes, *Old Woman Dozing*.
Brussels, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts



7. Caspar Bernhard Hardy, *The Grandmother*





Another interesting parallel we may draw, somewhat closer to the cultural mood of 18th century Cologne, it's with the porcelain figures modelled in German workshops in accordance with the *Cris de Paris*. The porcelain figures' poses cannot help but recall those that Hardy modelled (figs. 10, 11).

8. Caspar Bernhard Hardy, *The Dying Man*

9. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *La piété filiale* (*Filial Piety*). Saint Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum

10. Höchst Porcelain Factory, modelled by J. P. Melchior, *The Slumber of the Shepherdess*. London, Victoria & Albert Museum

FOLLOWING PAGE 11. Caspar Bernhard Hardy, *Spring*





THE TECHNIQUE

Hardy's figures tend all to be roughly the same size and they are set in glass display cases. The technique that he used most frequently to make his figures involved pouring molten wax into moulds, making numerous variations from the same one. Hardy used to work on his faces while they were still hot, changing their physiognomy and expression, subsequently adding their hands and various attributes, before colouring them and occasionally resorting to plaster for his delicate finishing touches.

THE SECRÉTAIRE

Made by the cabinet-maker Theodor Commer (1773-1853), the secrétaire rests on legs in the form of reversed obelisks, it comprises a body with six drawers surmounted by an extractable writing surface and a cylinder dropleaf. Above, two doors conceal eight rectangular drawers and they are sufficiently thick to house the glass cases with the wax figures. The wax figures which adorned the Schrank (the German word is most frequently translated as cupboard, sideboard or cabinet, but we have chosen to use the French and now pan-European term *secrétaire*) numbered forty-eight in Luthmer's day. Thirty-three of these were lost and the remaining fifteen were matched by another nine tracked down on the German antique market. The *secrétaire*'s original provenance is revealed by the inlaid initials in the centre of the drop-leaf, which are those of Johann Wilhelm Neel



12. Cologne Cathedral

(1744-1819), a canon of the Cologne Cathedral (fig.12) and thus unquestionably known to Hardy. Ownership of the *secrétaire* then passed to the Jansen family of Cologne, from whom it was purchased by the sculptor Michael Lock (1848-98). On Lock's death it entered first the Hochmaier collection in Berlin and then that of Baron von Gwinner, a banker and collector, whose descendants owned it until 2015.



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