

A close-up photograph of a marble sculpture. The sculpture depicts a young child with curly hair, looking directly at the viewer with a somber expression. The child is holding a small lamb in their arms. The lamb's head is tilted back, and its body is wrapped in a cloth with a scalloped edge. The sculpture is made of white marble and is set against a dark, gradient background.

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Antonio Tantardini

**The Wounded Friend**











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**Antonio Tantardini**  
(Milan, 1829 - 1879)

*The Wounded Friend*, c. 1876

Marble,  
height 70 x 30 x 27 cm

Antonio Tantardini turned to sculpture thanks to his father Luigi, who worked with marble. He attended drawing classes at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Brera before entering Pompeo Marchesi's workshop.

Training at a time when Canova's academic approach was at its peak, he was soon lured by Lorenzo Bartolini's natural beauty and the naturalism of Giovanni Duprè. His work is also clearly related to the Romantic painting of Francesco Hayez – one has but to see the way in which one of his masterpieces, *Faust and Marguerite (The Kiss)* (fig. 1), is tantamount to a sculptural transposition of Francesco Hayez's celebrated painting *The*

*Kiss*, a manifesto of the principles of freedom and independence that guided Italy's Risorgimento movement against Habsburg rule (fig. 2). In fact in that connection it is also worth highlighting the fact that Tantardini was himself a fervent patriot: "he took up arms and fought for his country, first in '48 and then in '59 when he signed up with Garibaldi's scouts." ("Roma artistica. Periodico illustrato di belle arti ed arte industriale", anno V, nr. II, 23 March 1879, p. 84).

He showed an interest in Vincenzo Vela's realism, albeit without ever achieving the Swiss artist's dramatic and touching results, preferring a sweeter approach to the natural instead and choosing such



pleasing subjects as female figures and children. He very soon built a reputation for himself on the lively art scene in Milan, becoming popular with private patrons while also receiving prestigious public commissions (fig. 3).

He regularly showed his work at the Fine Arts Exhibitions in Brera and when, from the middle of the century, universal exhibitions became the catalyst and the vehicle for publicizing everything that the art world was putting out, he joined such sculptors as Vincenzo Vela, Odoardo Fantacchiotti, Pietro Magni, Francesco Barzaghi and many

Fig.1 Antonio Tantarini, *Faust and Marguerite (The Kiss)*, 1861, Milan, Galleria d'arte moderna

Fig. 2 Francesco Hayez, *The Kiss*, 1859, Milan, Pinacoteca di Brera











others to become one of the leading players in the field of sculpture on the international stage. His expansive temperament and kindly manner, together with his mastery of foreign languages, resulted in his being co-opted onto the jury in several world fairs, for instance the fair held in Philadelphia in 1876 to which, as we shall see, the sculpture under discussion here is closely linked. The marble sculpture depicts a little girl of three or four seated on a Neogothic stool holding a kitten with a bandaged paw in her lap, while a bowl containing food and a spoon lie on the ground. Her loose hair, the ringlets framing her face and touching her shoulders, and her light pinafore trimmed with lace are all astonishingly realistic. The marble has the consistency and weight of the

Fig. 3 Antonio Tantardini, *Monument to Camillo Benso conte di Cavour*, detail of the *History*, 1865, Milan, Piazza Cavour

Fig. 4 Antonio Tantardini, *The wounded friend*, Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of Arts, 1876, vintage photo











very light cotton, in fact we can even see the folds that formed when it was folded. The child's lovely, chubby little face gazes at the observer with a look that betrays sadness at the mishap her four-legged friend has suffered but also confidence that someone will be able to help her. In fact the sculpture's most entrancing features are precisely the deep empathy that the sculptor succeeds in conveying and the outstanding skill that he displays in handling his material.

The sculpture is not signed, but we know from a list of sculptures that he brought with him to the Centennial International Exhibition of Arts, Manufactures, and Products of the Soil and Mine in Philadelphia in 1876 listing *The Wounded Friend* alongside a photograph of the period, that it is in fact the same subject, the only difference being that in the Philadelphia statue the "wounded friend" is a puppy rather than a kitten (fig.4). Also on display in Philadelphia was his extremely famous *Seated Bather* (fig.5), a seductive work depicting a woman of explosive beauty seated on a rock as she prepares to go swimming. As he was wont to do with his more popular sub-

jects intended to adorn the drawing rooms of the nobility and the wealthy bourgeoisie, Tantardini made several versions of the same subject, thus we have fully fourteen replicas of the *Seated Bather*, while there are six known replicas of the sculpture under discussion here (Antonio Tantardini, in "L'illustrazione italiana", VI, 1879, nr. 12, p. 186).

Its excellent condition allows us to appreciate in full the heights of skill and perfection that Tantardini reached in his handling of marble: the fabric, the cat's fur and the girl's hair all have a different consistency and the girl's flesh, in particular, seems so soft that one is tempted to hug her in an attempt to console her, only to be brought abruptly back down to earth as we encounter hard marble rather than softly yielding flesh.

Fig. 5 Antonio Tantardini, *Seated Bather*, Buenos Aires, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes







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