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Giovanni Bonazza

**Reclining Female Figure  
or *Venus***

















**Giovanni Bonazza**

(Venice, 1654 - Padua, 1736)

## *Reclining Female Figure or Venus*, ca. 1700

Marble; h. 23.5 x 47 x 20 cm

Base in "Bleu Turquin" marble and gilded bronze, France, early 19th century; h. 9 x 23.5 x 49 cm

This small sculpture in the round portrays a beautiful woman reclining on the ground surrounded by rosebuds; her right arm rests on a tree trunk, her drape, which falls from the tree to protect her nude body from contact with the earth, partially covers the upper part of her legs. The woman, clad in no more than her own beauty, can be identified as a *Venus* for the presence of the roses, one of the goddess's iconographical attributes. Her long hair, adorned with a ribbon at the centre of her head, is gathered in an exuberant and elaborate hairstyle; her left foot wears a sandal whilst its companion rests on

the ground. The figure reclines in a very elegant pose, deep in solitary contemplation, emphasised by her lowered gaze.

Both for the typology of the sculpture and the peculiar treatment of the surfaces this *Venus* resembles the artistic production of Giovanni Bonazza, whose works include a series of small marbles on different subjects consisting of representations of reclining figures. These include a *Reclining Nymph* in the Dallas Museum of Art (Dallas; **Fig. 1**), a *Venus and Cupid* in the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe (Hamburg; **Fig. 2**), and





three sculptures depicting the *Penitent Magdalene* in the Musei Civici in Padua, one of which (Fig. 3)



1 Giovanni Bonazza, *Reclining Nymph*, Dallas, Dallas Museum of Arts



2 Giovanni Bonazza, *Venus and Cupid*, Hamburg, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe

in particular seems to be an ideal companion piece to a *Penitent St Jerome*, signed and now in the University Library of Padua. Also worth mentioning for its extraordinary quality is another *Penitent St Jerome* in the Monastery of San Francesco in Rovigno (Istria; Fig. 4).

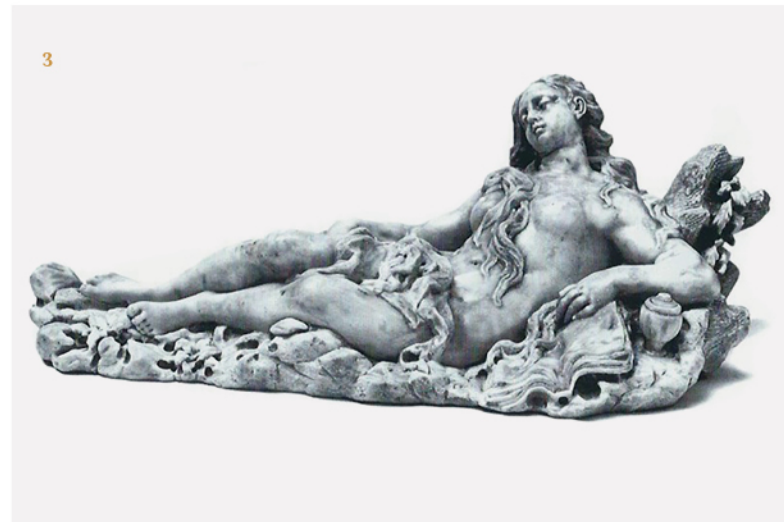
There are close resemblances between our *Venus* and the aforementioned sculptures: the eyes, the curve of the eyebrows, the form of the cheeks and mouth of the Dallas *Nymph* (Fig. 1) are al-

most identical to those of the *Venus* under consideration here, as is the treatment of the flesh. In the pose, but also in the modelling of the body and the joints, the *Penitent Magdalene* (Fig. 3) resembles a religious version of the *Venus*, and even the rendering of the ground with the extreme thinning of the marble where the feet rest are very similar in the two sculptures.

In chronological terms, the sculpture can be dated to between the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade of the following century. Like the other works mentioned above, our *Venus* presents the discursive freshness and the effervescent

3 Giovanni Bonazza, *Penitent Magdalene*, Padua, Musei civici

4 Giovanni Bonazza, *Penitent St Jerome*, Rovigno, Monastery of San Francesco









and melancholy elegance peculiar to Giovanni Bonazza's style.

Much inspired by the great Venetian painting of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and especially by Titian, the artist succeeds in working the marble with remarkable coloristic effects achieved through the varied treatment of the material: the polished flesh, which takes on a *sfumato* appearance, seems modelled in wax rather than sculpted; the other parts of the composition, such as the tree trunk, the drape and the ground, are worked with a chisel and drill. The differing refraction of light on the surface of the marble creates beautiful chiaroscuro effects.

During his career, the artist worked frequently on public religious commissions in Padua, as we shall see, but was also asked to execute works on a variety of subjects by enthusiasts and collectors in the city. These small and exquisite marbles, which we can divide into two groups, those on mythological subjects including the *Venuses* and a group of marbles with figures intended for meditation such as the *Saints*, seem to be aimed at educated private collectors.

Giovanni Bonazza began his studies in Venice, under the guidance of Giusto Le Court, and during his early training was much influenced by Filippo Parodi. He lived in Venice until 1696, when he settled in Padua, where he worked a great deal in the Basilica of Sant'Antonio and established himself as the most important sculptor active in the city. He received numerous commissions for the churches of Padua, among which we could mention the altar of the *Addolorata* in the church of the Servi, begun in 1703, with a reclining *Angel*. For the same church, he made a polychrome wooden *Crucifix* and the *Angels* at the sides of the high altar. Among the many, he worked in the churches of the Grazie, of the Carmine and Santa Maria del Torresino. Though he mainly executed religious sculptures, he also created numerous garden statues and was among the Venetian sculptors commissioned to supply pieces for the Russian imperial gardens.

In 1718 he sculpted *Adam* and *Eve* for a fountain at Peterhof and the following year, for the Summer Garden in St Petersburg, he executed *Dawn*, *Afternoon*, *Midday*, *Night*, and the *Delphic Sybil*. In 1720, for the gardens of Villa Pisani at Stra, he sculpted 12 colossal statues in Custozza stone representing various gods. He died in Padua where he was buried in the church of San Michele Arcangelo.

The oval base on which the sculpture rests, made of "Bleu Turquin" marble with a lavish decoration of gilded bronze, is French and dates to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

State of conservation: excellent.

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