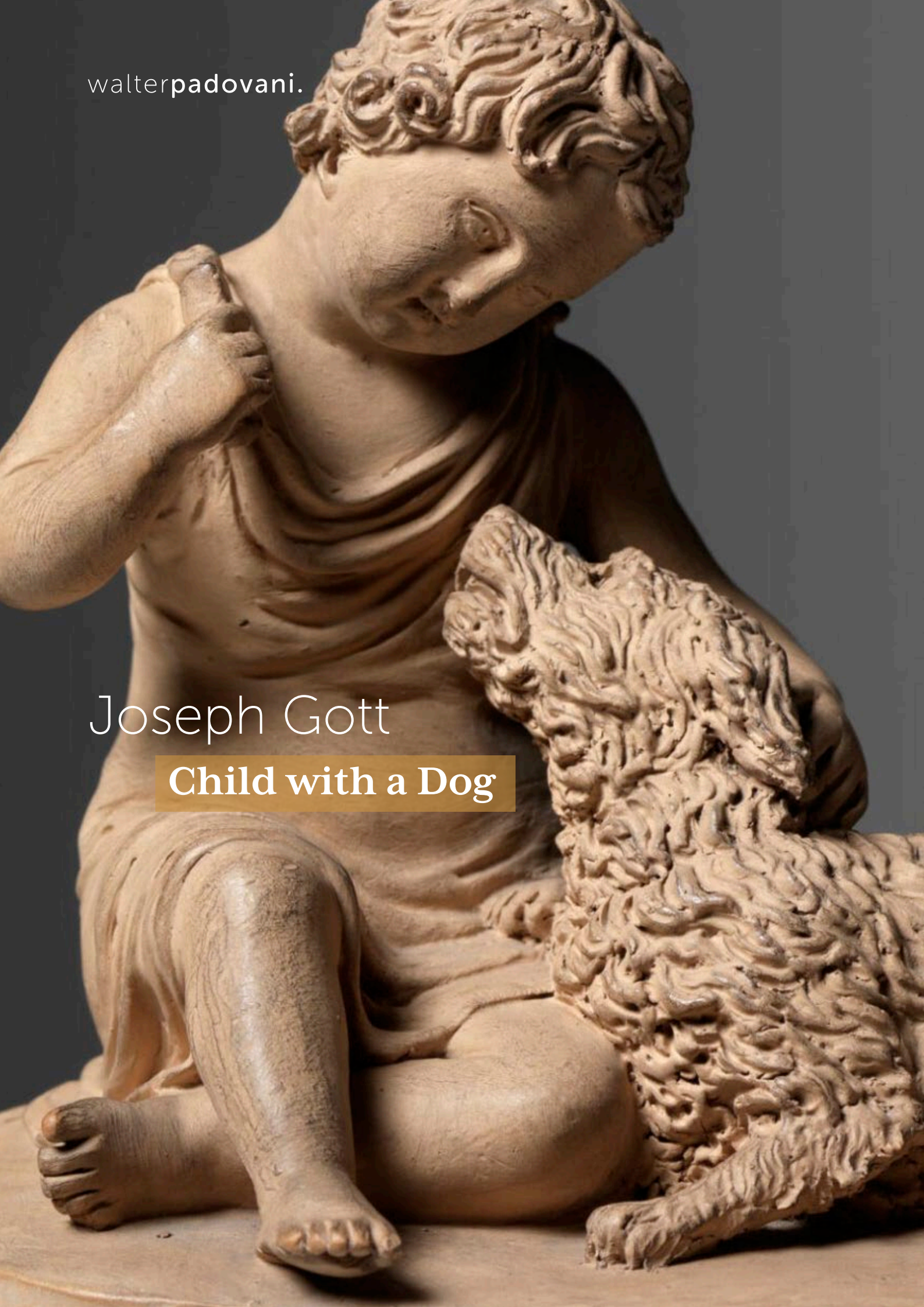


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Joseph Gott

Child with a Dog









Joseph Gott
(London, 1785 – Rome, 1860)

Child with a Dog, c. 1830

Terracotta; 16,5 x 13,5 x 9,5 cm

SIGNED: «[JOSEPH] GOTT. F[ECIT]»

PROVENIENZA: London, Christie's,
Important European Furniture, Sculpture and Tapestries,
6 December 2007, lot 1.

The terracotta, depicting a child seated on the ground and playing with a dog, belongs to the mature phase of Joseph Gott's production. As an artist, Gott is representative of that generation of English Neoclassical sculptors who lived in Rome for long periods and on repeated occasions (*fig. 1*)

Probably born in London—where he was baptised at Saint Martin-in-the-Fields on 11 December 1785—Gott grew up within one of the most

influential families of Leeds. Through his cousin Benjamin Gott (1762–1840), founder of one of the world's leading textile manufactories, the family played a prominent role in the English Industrial Revolution (*fig. 2*).¹ Between 1798 and 1802 the young Gott began his artistic training under John Flaxman, before continuing his studies from 1805 at the Royal Academy in London.²

1. Joseph Gott, *Boy with a Dog*, c. 1830.

1 The most recent biographical account of the sculptor is by Terry Friedman, *Gott, Joseph*, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004, online [<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/11128>].

2 For a short biographical overview of Gott's career, see *Joseph Gott, sculptor*, exhibition catalogue (Leeds, Stable Court Exhibition Galleries, Temple Newsam House, 23 August–14 October 1972; Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery, 3 November–3 December 1972), edited by Terry Friedman and Timothy Stevens, London 1972, pp. 8–11.



2. Joseph Gott, *Portrait of Benjamin Gott*, 1834–35. Leeds, Leeds City Art Galleries.

Like his master, and like many leading Neoclassical sculptors of the first generation, Gott completed his training in Rome, where he arrived in 1822 bearing letters of introduction to Antonio Canova from the painter Sir Thomas Lawrence,

his patron and protector. Introduced into Roman artistic circles as a sculptor of «Talent, if not indeed Genius», Gott's rise to international success was rapid.³

After initially sharing a workshop with the

³ Letter from Thomas Lawrence to Antonio Canova (Bassano del Grappa, Biblioteca civica di Bassano del Grappa, Epistolario Canova, V.550.360; for the transcription see *ibid.*, p. 57, cat. 2).



painter Joseph Severn (1793–1879) at 18 Via Sant’Isidoro, by early 1823 Gott had established his own studio in Via Gregoriana, later transferring to no. 155 Via Margutta.⁴ From 1828 onwards, his studio was visited by some of the most important collectors and artists of the period, most notably William Turner, who in a letter of that year to Francis Chantrey reported that Gott’s atelier was literally filled with works in progress.⁵ Between 1827 and 1828 the sculptor also returned briefly to England to design or execute several major marble commissions, including the *Monument to Lady Mary Williams* in St Mary’s Church, Walton-on-Thames, Surrey;

the *Monument to Benjamin Gott* in St Bartholomew’s Church, Armley, near Leeds; and the *Monument to William Ewart* (figs. 3–4), now in the Oratory of St James’s Cemetery, Liverpool.⁶

Alongside these monumental commissions—now largely concentrated in Merseyside and West Yorkshire—during his early Roman years Gott developed a specific interest in small-scale terracotta sculpture, particularly works of graceful or animal subject matter, sometimes also translated into marble on a larger or even

3 - 4. Joseph Gott, *Monument to William Ewart*, c. 1832. Liverpool, St James’s Cemetery.

⁴ See *ibid.*, p. 8; see also Salverio F. Bonfigli, *Guide to the studios in Rome with much supplementary information*, Rome 1860, pp. 32–33.

⁵ Alexander J. Finberg, *The Life of J. M. W. Turner, R.A.*, Oxford 1939; 2nd ed., Oxford 1961, p. 308.

⁶ See *Joseph Gott* 1972, cited in note 2, pp. 18–19, cat. 2; pp. 24–25, cat. 21; p. 35, cat. 37.

life-size scale. This interest can be dated to around 1825, when Gott executed for William Cavendish, 6th Duke of Devonshire, the *Bust of a Bacchante* and, above all, the *Greyhound Suckling Two Puppies*, still preserved in the Sculpture Gallery at Chatsworth House, Derbyshire (fig. 5).⁷ From this point onwards date several important marble works of this type, including the *Greyhound* of 1827 in the Leeds City Art Galleries (fig. 6).⁸ As noted by scholars, during this period Gott also produced small groups, mostly in terracotta, depicting children in antique dress, shown in playful attitudes and characterised by delicate sentimental accents.⁹

The present *Child Playing with a Dog* belongs to this successful vein, combining Gott's two principal iconographic interests. In stylistic

and compositional terms, it is closely comparable to the small terracotta group of a *Child Playing with an Italian Greyhound*, signed and dated «J. GOTT. 1830», formerly in the Roman collection of Giuseppina Sgambati, Gott's great-niece and maternal heir (fig. 7).¹⁰ The modelling of the child, as well as his posture and restrained emotional expression, also finds parallels in the *Embracing Infants* in the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool (figs. 8–9), another small terracotta group signed and dated «J. GOTT. 1829». To the same chronological phase may also be assigned the *Dog* in the Scottish museum of Hospitalfield House, Arbroath (figs. 10, 11, 12), closely comparable, in the lively and careful rendering of the fur, to the animal depicted here. Other works from around 1830 centred



5. Joseph Gott, *Greyhound Nursing Two Puppies*, 1825. Derbyshire, Chatsworth House.



6. Joseph Gott, *Greyhound*, 1827. Leeds, Leeds City Art Galleries.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 49, cat. 56.

⁸ *Ibid.*, cat. 57.

⁹ *Ibid.* (introduction to the catalogue section).

¹⁰ Antonio Rostagno, Sgambati, Giovanni, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. XCII, Rome 2018, online.

on the interaction between children and dogs should also be noted, including a small marble executed for George Oakley, 3rd Earl of Cadogan, and, above all, the life-size group made

for Hugh Percy, Lord Prudhoe and later 4th Earl of Northumberland (fig. 13). On the basis of these comparisons, the present *Child with a Dog* may therefore be dated to around 1830.



7. Joseph Gott, *Child Playing with an Italian Greyhound*, 1830. Formerly Rome, Sgambati Collection.



8. Joseph Gott, *Boy with a Dog*, c. 1830.



9. Joseph Gott, *Boy with a Dog*, detail, c. 1830. Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery.



10. Joseph Gott, *Dog*, c. 1830. Arbroath, Hospitalfield House.



11. Joseph Gott, *Boy with a Dog*, c. 1830.



12. Joseph Gott, *Dog*, c. 1830.
Arbroath, Hospitalfield House.

With his playful animals and children characterised by subtle grace, Gott renewed a theme long familiar to classical statuary, inflecting it with a distinctly sentimental tone. This emotional quality made such works particularly sought after by his patrons and se-



13. Joseph Gott, *Boy with a Dog*, c. 1832.
Northumberland, Alnwick Castle.

cured the sculptor a lasting reputation. At the same time, they allowed him to develop a highly personal artistic language, distinct from the dominant *ethos* of Neoclassicism, which at the time favoured heroic subjects and morally edifying themes.



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