Giuseppe Maria Mazza (Bologna, 1653-1741)

*Bacchus*

First quarter of the 18th Century
Terracotta
height 64 cm
height 25 1/4 in

**Literature**
A TASTE FOR SCULPTURE VI
Marble, bronze, terracotta, ivory and wood (15th to 20th centuries)

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Bacchus, the youthful god of wine, modelled in the round in clay, full-length and standing on a semi-circular base with a tree trunk rising from it – reminiscent of classical statuary –, has a head encircled by a luxuriant wreath of vines and grapes, his specific attribute. Posed in a sinuous contrapposto that accentuates his musculature, he rests on his right leg with his hip extended as if to follow the action of the bent arm, lifting a bunch of grapes full of juicy fruit. The god’s attention is concentrated on the latter: his head is inclined sideways and downwards, following the gaze focused on the fruit of the vine, which brings inebriation and joy. The expression on his round and chubby face is suggestive of these inebriating effects: the swollen upper and lower eyelids, the circles under the eyes and the wrinkles around them give him a simultaneously tired and amused look, an effect underlined by the lips open in a broad smile that contracts the cheeks and forms charming dimples at the sides of the mouth. The figure’s energetic vitality is suggested by his robust anatomy: the manifest nudity of his body is broken only by the little cloak draped over the left shoulder and falling along his back, behind the outstretched arm; at hip height it turns in a broad, deep curve to wrap around the front of the body and cover his genitals. The right hand now serves only to hold the cloak in place but it is not unlikely that it originally held another of the god’s attributes – a wine cup or thyrsus – lost together with the fingers which, with the exception of the little finger, were repaired during a recent restoration¹.

The terracotta appeared on the antique market ascribed to the Bolognese sculptor Giuseppe Maria Mazza, an attribution that can be confirmed based on its affinities of language and style with his documented works². Above all, the artist responsible for this work was evidently familiar with the great Bolognese figurative tradition: in addition to the models of classical antiquity and Michelangelo’s prototype, the Bacchus under examination here seems to descend directly from the best of Bolognese painting, from the Carracci to Reni. The supple sensuality

¹ The restoration was carried out in 2017 by the conservator Daniele Rossi (Florence).
of the pose is reminiscent of the same god painted with his beloved Ariadne by Guido Reni in the canvas in Los Angeles\(^3\), which also served as Mazza’s inspiration for another important sculpture, the marble depicting *David with the Head of Goliath* now in a private collection and dating to the last decade of the 17th or first of the following century\(^4\).

There are even closer parallels with the frescoes executed between 1583 and 1586 on commission from Count Filippo Fava by the three young Carracci, Annibale, Agostino and Ludovico, in the halls of his Bolognese palace opposite the church of the Madonna di Gallicia\(^5\). Specifically, our *Bacchus* repeats the anatomical definition and the turgid treatment of

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\(^4\) The work, which reappeared on the antique market in 2013, was attributed to the sculptor by Andrea Bacchi, see ‘Non è già ch’Egli non sia Eccellentissimo ne’ Lavori di marmo’: un Davide con la testa di Golia di Giuseppe Maria Mazza, in *Le memorie dell’arte*, ed. by Elisabetta Farioli, Angelo Mazza, Massimo Musini, Rimini 2015, pp. 193-201. Cfr. also Silvia Massari, entry in *Da Cimabue a Morandi. Felsina pittrice*, catalogue of the exhibition (Bologna, Palazzo Fava, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Pinacoteca Nazionale, 14 February-17 May 2015) ed. by Vittorio Sgarbi, Bologna 2015, pp. 268-269.

limbs and muscles, powerfully defined with prominent and sharply outlined profiles, of the muscular telamons separating the episodes from the *Aeneid*. Annibale’s monochrome *Bacchus* between the two scenes depicting *The Mock Funeral of Jason and Episodes from the Youth of Jason*, also painted by the youngest of the Carracci, may have inspired Mazza to create this work, during the years in which he trained at the house of the munificent Count Alessandro Fava (Bologna, 1622–1695). The latter, from the last decades of the 17th century, hosted in his Bolognese residence an academy frequented by the artists who shortly afterwards became protagonists of the local school⁶. This is not an isolated instance: the very first terracotta pieces modelled by Giuseppe Maria, for Fava himself, are in a style strongly influenced by these

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models by the Carracci. The same incisive representation of the anatomy can also be seen in three terracotta works representing St John the Baptist (one in the Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche in Faenza, where the inscriptions bear the patron’s initials, the date – May 1673 – and the artist’s signature; the other two signed and dated 1676 depicting the saint as a boy, in a private collection, and as a young man in the act of preaching in the Museo Nazionale di Palazzo Venezia in Rome); in the extraordinary St Jerome in the County Museum of Art in Los Angeles (1676), and, finally, in the St Sebastian in the Liebieghaus in Frankfurt (1677).

During the final phase of his *cursus studiorum* in the Fava residence, Mazza executed the two magnificent *Masks* (1679) made known by Andrea Bacchi and modelled on those painted in monochrome by the Carracci in around 1591 in the frieze with the *Stories of Romulus and Remus* in Palazzo Magnani.8

Though in Mazza’s documented catalogue this work cannot be identified with certainty, we know that during his long career he tackled the same subject on several occasions, interpreting it in different forms and compositions. For example, the Fava papers mention “three little satyrs and Bacchuses quarrelling over bunches of grapes” displayed in Palazzo Fava on the occasion of the celebrations for the Corpus Domini in 1677 alongside other works, all “considered very fine” and all “by Sig. Josepe Maria Mazza, a very promising young man”9. In subsequent years, this group must have been joined by another, on the same subject but of different size, as we learn from the inventory of 27 November 1699 of the collection inherited by Alessandro’s second son, Niccolò Maria Valeriano (Bologna, 1670-1736), where we read: “Three little Bacchuses, a companion to other larger ones inherited by my brother, in terracotta, by Sig. Giuseppe Mazza”10. Alessandro’s oldest son, Pietro Ercole (Bologna, 1669-1744) inherited “Two little putti with a satyr in terracotta with a wooden pedestal”11. It is not unlikely that the signed sculpture with *Bacchus and Satyr* in the Liebieghaus in Frankfurt12 was a further variation on the same theme, executed at around the same time as the Fava groups and thus dating to the years around the middle of the seventh decade of the 17th century. Like our *Bacchus*, the Frankfurt group finds compelling parallels among the artist’s early works, in particular for the greater incisiveness with which the chubby bodies of the two small boys are delineated, better defined than in his later works, which are modelled more softly and with a lighter touch. Consider for example the sculptures executed by Mazza between the last decade of the 17th and the first of the following century for Johann Adam Andreas I (1662-1712), Prince of Liechtenstein, and in particular the four marble sculptures representing two pairs of mythological lovers, *Venus* and *Adonis* (initialled and dated 1692) and *Bacchus and Ariadne* (the latter signed; both dating to

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8 Written communication from Andrea Bacchi to the antiquary Gallo.
9 Bologna, Archivio privato Hercolani Fava Simonetti, Famiglia Fava, busta n. 596, Li 19 ottobre 1742 Memoria del ad(j)ob(b)o p(er) il Corpus Domini di Pitt(t)ure fatto sotto il nostro Portico dalla B(eata) M(emoria) del mio caro Padre, che sta in Cielo, scrit(t)o di sua mano l’anno 1677. Matteo Ghisilieri alias Pietro Ercole Fava, fols not numbered cit. in Massari, *Giuseppe Maria Mazza e l’Accademia* di palazzo Fava... cit., p. 200.
10 The inventory is transcribed in Silvia Massari, «Il nostro moderno Algardi»: *Giuseppe Maria Mazza scultore bolognese tra Sei e Settecento*, PhD thesis, University of Trento, supervisor Prof. Andrea Bacchi, academic year 2012-2013, pp. 1042-1052: 1043 no. 4.
12 Maraickle Bückling (*Giuseppe Mazza Putto und Satyrkind*, in «Städel-Jahrbuch», 18, 2001, pp. 351-352) presenting the work, proposed a date between 1730 and 1739 given the similarities with the *Allegory of the Muse Clio* by Mazza (signed and dated 1736) also in the Liebieghaus.
Giuseppe Maria Mazza, Bacchus and Satyr, Frankfurt, Liebieghaus
between 1703 and around 1705), still in the Viennese palace owned by the Liechtenstein family today\(^{13}\). Compared to our work, the marble sculpture of Bacchus, whose terracotta model in Palazzo Caprara in Bologna was published by Stefano Tumidei\(^{14}\), shows the classicising evolution of the artist’s style, later a salient feature of his mature works. The Prince of Liechtenstein, in a letter to the painter Marcantonio Franceschini (27 January 1694), expressed his preference for the Bolognese sculptor in a famous sentence: “We who have acquired so many marble busts by very different sculptors throughout Italy, have found no-one better than Parodi and Mazza: none of the others deserve the title of virtuoso”\(^{15}\). We have mentioned the patronage of the Prince of Liechtenstein for a reason: among the other works that Giuseppe Maria executed for the aristocrat we also find a “Baby Hercules, squashing the heads of two snakes, a statue in Carrara marble 3 feet and 4 ½ inches high” and “a Young Bacchus, a statue in Carrara marble, 3 feet and 4 ½ inches high”\(^{16}\), brought to Vienna in 1694\(^{17}\), described in the catalogue of the Gallery drawn up by Vincenzo Fanti in 1767, but whose whereabouts are currently unknown\(^{18}\). Zanotti’s remark on the quality of these two marbles (”These boys are exceptionally beautiful, and in our opinion Mazza never made anything better”\(^{19}\)), is confirmed by their placement: together with the other busts sculpted by the Bolognese artist they were positioned in the “fifth room” reserved for the display of Rubens’ Decius Mus cycle and thus the space destined for the collection’s major masterpieces. Among the statues by Mazza present in the Prince’s collections, the two mythological boys were the largest, both about a metre tall. The terracotta under examination here, then, in part given its size, cannot be considered the model for the Liechtenstein

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\(^{16}\) Vincenzo Fanti, Descrizione completa di tutto cio che ritrouasi nella galleria di pittura e scultura di sua Altezza Giuseppe Wenceliano del S.R.I. principe regnante della casa di Liechtenstein, Vienna 1767, pp. 68-69 nos 45-46.

\(^{17}\) See the letter sent from Vienna on 1 September 1694 by Prince Johann Adam Andreas to Giuseppe Maria Mazza published by Adriana Arfelli, Lettere inedite dello scultore Giuseppe Maria Mazza ai suoi corrispondenti, in L’Archiginnasio, XXIX, 1934, pp. 416-434: 429.

\(^{18}\) As documented by the inventories of the collection, the two sculptures remained the property of the Liechtenstein family until 1882, when they were alienated and sold. In 1903 they reappeared for a last time in the Viennese collection of Baron Nathaniel Mayer Victor Rothschild (London, 1840-1915), the catalogue of which notes the presence of the inscription: “Joseph Mazza 1694” (Notizen über einige meiner Kunstgegenstände, Sammlungskatalog Nathaniel Mayer Rothschild, Wien 1903, p. 5, no. 2)

\(^{19}\) Giampietro Zanotti, Storia dell’Accademia Clementina di Bologna aggregata all’Instituto delle Scienze e dell’Arte, 2 vols., Bologna 1739, II, pp. 9-10.
Bacchus with a Cup in his Hand, but it is tempting to surmise that the sculptor, on this occasion, may have looked to his own youthful invention. Indeed, our work seems perfectly in keeping with the taste of the Prince, who alongside the marbles mentioned above also commissioned from Mazza “statuettes three or four handspans high, in terracotta” representing “rapes of the Sabine Women or the Labours of Hercules, and also some little Venuses”, but entrusting the choice of subject to the sculptor and leaving him freedom of choice “as long as he made sure to execute fine nudes and fine ideas”. Though the material used was not valuable, Johann Adam reassured the artist, stating that he would in any case display the clay works in the “Gallery”, since, he said “we do not base our opinion on the material of which they are made, but on the art”, thus showing that he considered language, style and the originality of the invention to be more important than the material. The prince thus aspired to obtain statues and groups of figures modelled by the sculptor and had full confidence in the inventions and “fine nudes and fine ideas” that Giuseppe Maria might conceive. The prince’s words anticipate those later written by the secretary of the Accademia Clementina, Giampietro Zanotti, concerning precisely the many works, statuettes and low reliefs modelled by Mazza in clay and destined to adorn “famous galleries” and, then as now, “appreciated” by those who “consider the value of the workmanship, more than that of any stone or metal”.

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20 The marble putti are first mentioned by Giampietro Zanotti, first in 1703, without specifying their subject (Nuovo fregio di gloria a Felsina sempre pittrice nella vita di Lorenzo Pasinelli pittror bolognese, Bologna 1703, p. 112) and later, in the biography of the sculptor, describing them as “two marble boys, larger than life size, one is Hercules Strangling the Snakes and the other Bacchus with a Cup in his Hand” (Zanotti, Storia dell’Accademia Clementina... cit., pp. 9-10).

21 See the letter from Vienna of 31 June 1693 from the Prince to Mazza published by Arfelli, Lettere inedite... cit., p. 427; Luigi A. Ronzoni, Giovanni Giuliani (1664-1744), 2 vols., München 2005, I, p. 189 doc. 12/2. Mazza also sent the Prince of Liechtenstein some groups in terracotta that were translated on a monumental scale and in a different material by the Venetian sculptor Giovanni Giuliani to decorate the garden of the palace in Vienna, see Ronzoni, Giovanni Giuliani..., cit.

22 Ibidem.

23 Zanotti, Storia dell’Accademia Clementina... cit., II, 1739, pp. 11-12.