

## Wall texts

### “White Wedding: The Reiner Winkler Ivory Collection Now at the Liebieghaus – Forever.”

From 27 March 2019

Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung

#### The Reiner Winkler Collection

It was in 1962 that the art collector Reiner Winkler began amassing a private collection of ivory sculpture. He concentrated on ivory art of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but also acquired the occasional work of terracotta, coral or mother-of-pearl. In 1995, he decided to give these treasures – meanwhile numbering more than two hundred – to the Liebieghaus within the framework of a ‘mixed donation’. The summer of 2018 saw the signing of the contract with the Städel Museum for the transfer of ownership. The world’s most important private collection of Baroque ivory sculpture has thus made its way into the Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung for good.

German, Austrian, Danish, Dutch, Flemish, French, English, Italian and Spanish works as well as two pieces from India and China convey the collection’s impressive breadth. Thanks to this acquisition, the Liebieghaus has been able to expand its holdings with works by the most famous ivory sculptors in history. Among the masterpieces of Baroque ivory carving are also objects by anonymous artists hitherto not represented in the museum’s collection. One of them – the pièce de résistance – is the *Fury on a Charging Horse*. The sculptor, whose identity has remained a mystery to this day, is referred to as the “Master of the Furies”.

#### WE THANK THE SPONSORS

The Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung is indebted to several dedicated sponsors for their generous support in the acquisition of the Reiner Winkler Collection. Funds from the Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung made the purchase of seven of the collection’s most outstanding works possible. The Städtischer Museumsverein e.V. likewise contributed significantly to enabling the procurement of these holdings. Further assistance came from the Cultural Foundation of Hesse and the Cultural Foundation of the German Federal States, which contributed to the acquisition of one of the collection’s principal works. Purchased by the Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung: Joachim Henne, *The Three Parcae*, Inv. St.P 822 / Francis van Bossuit, *Mercury, Argus and Io*, Inv. St.P 777 / Matthias Steinl, *Chronos*, Inv. St.P 823 / Ignaz Elhafen, *Scene with Bacchus*, Inv. St.P 850 / Master of the Furies, *Elijah Awakened by the Angel*, Inv. St.P 811 / H. W. Schröder, *The Glorification of Saint John of Nepomuk*, Inv. St.P 737 / Christoph Daniel Schenck, *Return of the Holy Family from Egypt*, Inv. St.P 858

Purchased by the Städtischer Museums-Verein e. V. and the Städel Museum with support from the Cultural Foundation of the German States (*Master of the Furies, Fury on a Charging Horse*, Inv. St.P 808)

and the Cultural Foundation of Hesse (Inv. St.P 725 – St.P 736, St.P 738 – St.P 776, St.P 778– St.P 821, St.P 824 – St.P 849, St.P 851 – St.P 857, St.P 859 – St.P 911)

## **Ivory: The Material**

Several factors contributed to the popularity of ivory in the Baroque age. It was relatively rare and, despite its hardness, so elastic that it lent itself to the crafting of even the finest details. What is more, its silky smoothness, warm, bright hue, fine veining and flawlessness satisfied the most sophisticated tastes of princely art collectors.

The tusk of a mature elephant can reach a length of three metres and weigh up to seventy kilograms. The point is the oldest part, and solid ivory except for the nerve. The rear section, on the other hand, is hollow. This so-called pulp cavity is supplied with blood vessels and nerves and open to the animal's jaw.

The presentation of ivory art objects bears witness to the fascination of the material and the high quality of its artistic processing. Yet it also calls attention to the importance of taking a clear stance against illegal ivory trade and in favour of international species protection.

## **Ivory in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries**

Human beings have been fashioning small statues and reliefs out of ivory and comparable materials – for example walrus tooth – since the Stone Age. Ivory art reached its zenith in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Ivory can not only be carved, but also turned like wood. The craft of turning vessels from ivory was among the skills on the curriculum of princes and contributed to the high appreciation accorded the precious material.

The Liebieghaus collections have hitherto had only few historical works of ivory to call their own. Thanks to the Reiner Winkler Collection, the museum's Baroque and Rococo departments have received exceedingly significant additions that suggest new focal points and open up entirely new perspectives. For example, until now the museum has possessed not a single specimen of the ivory-and-wood combination figures so famous in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – superior vessels often featuring gilded silver mountings, as well as outstanding portrait statuettes and portrait medallions.

## **Trade in Ivory**

Trade in African and Indian ivory as a material for artworks already existed from antiquity until well into the Middle Ages. Then expansion of the Ottoman Empire from the fifteenth century onward blocked direct access to the previous trade routes. The Europeans accordingly set out in search of new trade channels whose discovery brought the founding of colonies in Africa, India and Eastern Asia in its wake. The early colonial powers – primarily Portugal, Spain, Holland, Britain and France – were joined in the nineteenth century by Belgium, Germany and Italy. These countries used considerable violence to seize the natural resources in their colonies. In addition to colonial exploitation there was also sale and trade; in any case, the goods made their way to Europe. Ivory was in especially high demand.

Until the nineteenth century, elephant hunting was also dangerous for the hunters. As a result, it hardly had an impact on elephant populations as compared to the numbers killed by shooting in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries – it was the invention of modern weapons that enabled hunters to bring the animals down on a mass scale from a safe distance.

The ivory carvings of the Baroque did not contribute to the decimation of the global elephant population. What was responsible, rather, was the use of ivory for trivial mass goods from the late nineteenth century onward. To date, 183 nations have agreed to the global trade ban on works of ivory made after 1947. The Liebieghaus endorses the trade ban and international species protection.

## **Court Sculptors**

Cabinets of curiosity developed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries from secular and clerical treasure chambers. They featured such objects as scientific instruments, goldsmith works, paintings, products of nature such as coconuts or shells, statues – often including copies of antiquities – and works of ivory. The owners of these cabinets sought to collect the unusual and unique. To this end, they often hired sculptors to work exclusively or primarily for them. The privileges of a court sculptor included a fixed annual salary, and sometimes also living quarters at court. The employer frequently also provided the material to be processed. Court artists were moreover exempt from restrictive guild regulations. For instance, they were permitted to run large workshops uniting various trades under a single roof. The artists who enjoyed access to their employers' private chambers were at the top of the career ladder: they were called *Kammerkünstler*, literally “cabinet artists”. Many of the sculptors whose works made their way into the Winkler Collection worked for an emperor or a secular or clerical prince as a court or cabinet sculptor.

## **Deities and Myths of Greek and Roman History**

Greek and Roman antiquity has always provided artists with inspiration. Particularly the Greek myths that have come down to us in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* have served as a source for motifs. Authors of Roman times such as Ovid and Lucian told tales of the love affairs of the gods, and of humans and fabulous creatures who rebelled against the deities or even mocked them, earning harsh punishment in return. Depictions of gods – especially Venus, Cupid and Diana – and scenes of their amorous escapades were also extremely popular subject matter for small statues and reliefs. The early Roman age, for its part, is represented in the Winkler Collection with the story of the Settlement of the Dispute Between the Romans and the Sabines, a popular artistic motif.

Baroque artists adopted not only the myths of antiquity, but in their works also often made reference to famous statues of that period and showed them in new contexts. They will undoubtedly have been intrigued by the artistic challenge of depicting the often multifigural historical and mythological scenes on such a small scale.

## **Figures of Wood and Ivory**

Combinations of ivory and other materials, usually wood, came into fashion towards the end of the seventeenth century. Ivory craftsmen moreover frequently used pewter or silver for fittings and bases. They skilfully assembled the figures from several pieces to give the impression that the body inside the wooden clothes was made from a single block of ivory. In actuality, the *Man with a Phrygian Cap* consists of eleven pieces of ivory and five of wood. Simon Troger and Matthias Kolb were among the most famous artists to employ this technique.

Conspicuously, most of these combination figures have eyes of coloured glass. The latter were inserted in the eye sockets through a small hole in the back of the head. Many of the figures wear hats to hide the hole.

The majority of the works in combination style depict beggars or Greek and Roman deities. Its use for Christian themes or portraits – for example the *Maria Immaculata* or the Portrait of Isaac Watts – is more the exception than the rule.

## Portraits

In the Baroque period, a portrait was not expected to resemble the sitter. Importance was attached instead to idealization and the representation of the person's social status. Particularly the eighteenth century developed a penchant for portraying figures whose life and work were considered exemplary. These were often philosophers or writers such as Voltaire or Jean-Jacques Rousseau, typically shown wearing unconventional clothing.

Depictions of rulers, on the other hand, are recognizable by such attributes as medals and precious garments. Here the subjects moreover look sideways, their heads held high. By thus gazing into the distance, they demonstrate their sublime command over the political fortunes of their domains.

We encounter this type of bust in portrait medallions as well – an important form of representation from the early Baroque onward. In medallions, artists often depicted the sitter in profile. Prominent sculptors working in this genre were Jean Cavalier and David Le Marchand, both natives of Dieppe.

## Vessels and Utensils

Splendid ivory vessels were among most coveted objects of princely collecting passions. They were often fitted with bases and covers made of precious metal. Rather than serving any practical use, these decorative vessels were intended for presentation on buffets at festive banquets. There are two such covered tankards in the Winkler Collection. Other vessels include a goblet, a cup, small boxes and a smelling bottle.

The ivory carver Balthasar Griesßmann, official sculptor at the archiepiscopal court in Salzburg, had a special predilection for splendid pitchers and pictorial panels. His mastery enabled him to create these pitchers without the least metal reinforcement – as seen here in a display case. Four relief panels depicting hunting scenes are likewise his work; they originally embellished the sides of a ceremonial bowl.

Among the popular themes for vessels were marine deities, but also drinking orgies in clever allusion to the actual function of the goblets, cups and tankards. We moreover encounter biblical themes. Vessels of the latter kind might have belonged to a clerical prince's cabinet of curiosities.

## Leonhard Kern and Georg Pfründt

Leonhard Kern was one of the most well-known sculptors in the first half of the seventeenth century. After the Thirty Years War, he was appointed to serve as sculptor to the court of Brandenburg for a year. He did not spend the entire year at court, however, and continued to offer his work for sale at his shop in the imperial city of Schwäbisch Hall. The Liebieghaus has in its holdings Kern originals made of wood, alabaster, bronze and stone, as well as an ivory statuette by a sculptor in his circle. What is more, several ivory works in the Winkler Collection were made by his successors.

One of Kern's pupils was Georg Pfründt. In the Thirty Years War, Pfründt fought on the Protestant side and was taken prisoner; then he spent a number of years in France. When he returned to Germany, he

settled in Nuremberg. Like Kern, he came to be highly regarded as an artist and was particularly successful with the aristocracy. The museum possesses two works attributed to him, one in wood and one in clay. Pfründt himself did not work in ivory, but undoubtedly bore an influence on ivory carvers, as the Adam and Eve group in the Winkler Collection shows.

## The Schencks – A Family of Artists

Members of the Schenck family were among the most influential sculptors of the area around Lake Constance. Johann Caspar and his younger relative Christoph Daniel were two of its most prominent representatives. The former worked as a carver at the archiepiscopal court in Salzburg and ultimately rose to become court sculptor to Emperor Leopold I in Vienna. Christoph Daniel probably accompanied him to that city, not to return to Lake Constance until 1674, after the death of his kinsman.

The *Allegory of Summer* is one of Johann Caspar's masterpieces. It displays the distinctive features of his style: the gaunt male bodes, the hard ridges of the garment folds, the overly narrow horse muzzles and the diagonal grooves of the tree trunks.

The religious themes that dominated Christoph Daniel's oeuvre of large-scale sculpture would ultimately also come to distinguish his small works – the ones today considered his foremost achievement. An ivory relief in the Liebieghaus collection, complete with a wooden frame made especially for it, is an instance of great art on a small scale.

An unknown master who signed his works "ICL" belonged to the Schenck circle. He executed the gripping depiction of *Christ at the Column*.

## Jacob Dobbermann

After a period of activity in London, Jacob Dobbermann was in the employ of Charles, Landgrave of Hesse-Kassel, as an "amber and ivory worker" for fourteen years. Ivory, amber and ostrich egg were his favoured materials. Unlike artists at the court of Vienna – who needed their employer's approval to work for other clients – Dobbermann sold his objects to other buyers throughout his years as court artist.

His heterogeneous oeuvre exhibits a range of different stylistic features. Stocky figures with overly large heads and heavy eyelids are typical of his works of the 1720s and '30s. The artist's London phase, on the other hand, is distinguished by sophisticated figural compositions and plump figures with rather small heads. He is moreover known for a diverse spectrum of different work types, including mythological and religious reliefs, portrait statues, portrait medallions and vessels.

His figurative depictions of historical personages of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are of especially high quality. Two such small portrait statues are among the holdings of the Winkler Collection. A relief of a divine love affair and a portrait also testify to Dobbermann's exceptional skill.

## Flemish Artists

Like their German-Austrian colleagues, Flemish artists played a prominent role in the ivory-carving medium. Important Flemish sculptors such as François Duquesnoy, Gérard van Opstal and Francis van Bossuit exerted considerable influence on artists of their own and later times.

Both Duquesnoy and Opstal are known for their depictions of children. The Winkler Collection boasts a putto and a small Cupid after the example of Duquesnoy, and children also populate the reliefs by Opstal. The largest of these reliefs may have belonged to the French King Louis XIV in the seventeenth century.

Francis van Bossuit was also among the most well-known artists of this circle, and there are a number of important works in the Winkler Collection attributed to him. They include the depiction of the *Rape of Sabine Women* and, in a different display case, the relief *Mercury, Argus and Io*.

## Southern Italy and Sicily

In Italy, ivory art flourished not only in Florence and Rome, but also and especially in the country's south and in Sicily. The latter region is also famous for the frequent use of coral. Miners set out from the port city of Trapani and travelled as far as the coast of Africa to obtain this material. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, numerous artists in Trapani also crafted objects from ivory as well as alabaster and wood. There are two coral works in the Winkler Collection. One is a standing Virgin Mary consisting of a large number of individual coral branches. A look at the back of the other, smaller figure reveals the original natural form of the material.

Among the characteristics of works from Trapani are the stage-like character of the scenes, the small – in part even minuscule – figures and the rendering of the garment folds in soft skeins. These are attributes the reliefs share with one of the masterpieces in the Winkler Collection, the *Fall of the Rebel Angels*.

## Dieppe

In addition to Paris, St. Claude and the port town of Dieppe were especially important centres of French ivory art. They were already importing ivory as far back as the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when the first ivory workshops were founded. However, the earliest more detailed information about ivory carving and individual artists in Dieppe dates from the seventeenth century. In addition to portraits, small statues and reliefs, eighteenth-century advertising leaflets for ivory objects mention such items as jars, fans, compass roses and combs.

Famous artists came from the ivory carver families of Dieppe: David Le Marchand left his hometown and settled first in Edinburgh and later in London. Jean Cavalier, likewise thought to have been a native of the Northern French port, sojourned at many different European courts – for example London, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Kassel, Berlin and Brunswick. Portraits by both artists are on view in the exhibition. Jean Antoine Belleteste remained in Dieppe and executed splendid works such as the Calvary.

## Medieval Works

There are only very few objects dating from medieval times in the Winkler Collection. As some of the collector's earliest acquisitions, they form the core of his holdings. It was the small French panel that originally sparked Reiner Winkler's passion for ivory objects. The Nativity scene was originally part of a diptych, a two-part folding relief panel. Ivory reliefs of this kind were popular in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Europe.

Three of the medieval objects have their origins in the circle or following of the Embriachi workshop active in Florence and Venice in the fifteenth century. The name Embriachi is known above all for works combining wood and ivory. Among the workshop's famous products are cases like the hexagonal, tower-shaped casket in the Winkler Collection. The panel showing *Christ Between the Mourning Mary and John* can also be attributed to that circle. In the Late Middle Ages, priests offered panels of this kind to the faithful to kiss before Communion. The triptych of the Crucifixion likewise exhibits characteristic features of the Embriachi workshop. Made to serve as an altarpiece, it depicts the crucified Christ with Mary and

John standing at his feet, flanked by soldiers. The apostles Peter (with key and book) and Paul (with sword and book) are portrayed on the wings. John standing at his feet, flanked by soldiers. The apostles Paul (with key and book) and Peter (with sword and book) are portrayed on the wings.

## The Lücke Family

Over the course of the eighteenth century, several generations of the Lücke family worked as ivory carvers, sculptors and porcelain modellers. The prolific activities of this well-known family of artists began with Carl August Lücke the Elder (1688–1730/33?), presumably the father of Carl August the Younger and Johann Christoph Ludwig. In addition to statuettes, he devoted himself primarily to ivory portraits of – for the most part – male members of the bourgeoisie and the gentry. Many of his ivory busts of unknown male figures have come down to us. Carl August the Younger (ca. 1710–1779) likewise produced a number of portraits, among them the bust of Elizabeth I, Tsarina of Russia and the Portrait of an Unknown Man. Both the elder and the younger Carl August combined serial portrait types with realistic facial expressions and decorative elements.

The most famous artist of the Lücke family is Johann Christoph Ludwig (ca. 1703–1780). In addition to his masterful depiction of the *Allegory of Damnation*, the exhibition also features his ivory Reclining Boy and the relief of an Old Beggar Couple. Adhering to the tradition established by such artists as François Duquesnoy and Balthasar Permoser, his works are among the most superb examples of small-scale sculpture of the eighteenth century.

## Biblical Motifs

Works of biblical content make up a major proportion of the Winkler Collection. In addition to a small number of Old Testament motifs, they depict scenes from the life of Christ or – in the form of devotional images – Jesus, Mary and various saints. Among the objects of religious subject matter are also allegories of the transience of all earthly goods.

Frequently reduced to fundamental statements of faith, depictions of the Christ Child and Christ at the Column served the purpose of private devotion and aided believers in visualizing God's incarnation.

One of the most widespread motifs of the Virgin in the Baroque period was the Maria Immaculata, or Mary of the Immaculate Conception. These works often show her as a figure freed of the stigma of the original sin, standing on a globe and stepping on a serpent as a representation of original sin and evil.

The allegories, featuring the skull as their chief pictorial element, allude to the site of Christ's crucifixion. Yet they also refer quite generally to vanitas – that is, the transitory nature of earthly life.

The saints are venerated on account of their exemplary Christian conduct. In art they appear with attributes symbolizing their life and work or in scenes of their martyrdom by often very cruel means.

These images likewise served to promote Christian spirituality and devotion.