

# DESMET GALLERY

Fine Art



## **Camillo Pacetti (attr.)**

(Rome 1758 – Milan 1826)

### ***Vestal Virgin***

White marble  
Height 61 x 44 cm  
Ca. 1810

### **Provenance**

Private collection Italy

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This magnificent marble bust represents a Vestal Virgin, a priestess to Vesta, one of Rome's three major virgin goddesses and protectress of the hearth. Unlike most Roman religious cults, worship of Vesta was run by women. The chief Vestal, *Virgo Vestalis Maxima* or *Vestaliū Maxima* (fig. 1.) oversaw the efforts of the Vestals, and was present in the College of Pontiffs. Six virgin priestesses were dedicated to Vesta as full-time officiates who lived in their own residence, the *Atrium Vestae* in the Roman Forum. This place of worship was where the priestesses tended the goddess's sacred fire. Once a year, in March, they relit the fire and then ensured it remained burning for the next year. Their task was serious as the fire was tied to the fortunes of their city, and neglect would bring disaster to Rome. The rites surrounding the Vestals remained relatively fixed from the time of the Roman Republic through the fourth century A.D.



Fig. 1. *Virgo Vestalis Maxima*, marble, 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, Museo Nazionale Romano, Roma.



Fig. 2. A. Canova, *Vestal virgin*, marble, 50 x 20 x 24 cm., 1818, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (inv. nr 85.SA.353)

The present bust is a masterpiece of North-Italian neo-classical art, reminiscent of the sensual oeuvre of Antonio Canova (1757-1822). The great Italian master himself created several Vestals, such as the marble herm bust now in the Getty Museum (fig. 2). Almost every European sculptor of stature living in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was indebted to Canova, at least to a certain extent. However, this particular bust also bears other stylistic features, such as the wax like quality of the marble and a specific rendering of the folds in the draperies, which resemble the art of another famous Italian sculptor, Camillo Pacetti.

Pacetti was originally from Rome, where he received his training at the famous *Accademia di San Luca*. Soon, his talents were noticed and from the 1780's onwards, he started receiving commissions from and working for influential figures such as the sculptor and bronze-founder Francesco Righetti (1749-1819), the founder of the famous Wedgwood porcelain company Josiah Wedgwood (1730-1795) and the papal Prefect of Antiquities, Ennio Visconti (1751-1818), who was supervising art projects for the Borghese family. Pacetti's activity as an antiques restorer for the Borghese and his proximity to Europe's leading sculptor Canova undoubtedly contributed to his adaptation of the emerging classicism.

Pacetti was a talented modeler in clay and mastered exceptional marble carving techniques. Some of his marbles display the same wax like qualities as present bust. Moreover, the folds in the draperies of his female figures such as his *Minerva infonde l'anima all'automa di Prometeo* (1806, fig. 3) and his *Santa Marcellina* of 1813 (fig. 4), made for the Cappella Santa Marcellina in the Sant'Ambrogio of Milan, show the same approach in volumes and forms.

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Left: fig. 3. C. Pacetti, *Minerva infonde l'anima all'automa di Prometeo*, marble, 91 x 62 x 32 cm, 1806, Galleria dell'arte moderna, Milan and right: fig. 4. C. Pacetti, *Santa Marcellina*, marble, 1813, Cappella Santa Marcellina, Sant'Ambrogio, Milan

There is a certain masculinity in the Vestal's face that resemble the art of the internationally acclaimed Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770-1844) and can be rediscovered in the faces of Pacetti's terracotta figures. Her small chin and slender face though, are close to figures such as the Virgin in a *Pietà* from circa 1810, now in the Galleria dell'arte moderna in Milan (**figs. 5 and 6**).



Left: fig. 5. C. Pacetti, detail of *Pietà*, terracotta, circa 1810, Galleria dell'arte moderna, Milan and right: fig. 6. C. Pacetti, detail of present bust, *Vestal Virgin*, circa 1810.

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## Camillo Pacetti (1758-1826)

The Rome-born sculptor Camillo Pacetti (**fig. 7**) came from an artistic family; his father Andrea Pacetti was a gem carver while his older brother Vincenzo was particularly active in collecting and freely restoring, or completing, classical sculptures such as the Barberini Faun (Glyptothek, Munich), the Hope Dionysus (Metropolitan Museum of Art) and the Athena of Velletri (Musée du Louvre, Paris) which he then sold to rich patrons as finished artefacts. Just like his brother, Camillo Pacetti attended the Roman *Accademia di San Luca*, where he received a solid training in sculpture techniques and drawing after the antiques. His talent was noticed; he got his first award during the *concorso elementino* in 1775 with his bas-relief *Judith shows the people the head of Holofernes*. In 1786-1787, based on the designs of his brother Vincenzo, he made four statues for the facade of Holy Trinity Church in Viterbo. In the same years he produced models for the *bronzisti* (sculptors of bronze statues and statuettes) of the Righetti family and started working for Josiah Wedgwood in Rome. Under the supervision of the sculptor and draughtsman John Flaxman (1755-1826), he created six tablets illustrating the life of Achilles for the Wedgewood porcelain factory. Attributed to Camillo is a sculpture in the church of San Andrea delle Fratte, *The death of St. Anna*, and some stucco decorations in the San Lorenzo Church in Lucina and the San Niccolò da Tolentino.<sup>1</sup> He was admitted to the *Accademia dei Virtuosi al Pantheon*<sup>2</sup>, one of the Pontifical Academies under the direction of the Holy See, and in 1794 among the honorary members of the *Accademia di San Luca*. Between 1792 and 1794, Pacetti worked with numerous other sculptors under the direction of Ennio Quirino Visconti (1751-1818) as a restorer for the Borghese family. As such, he restored a statue of Mars and a Head of Nero, destined for the Museo Gabino.<sup>3</sup>



Fig. 7. G. Mazzola, *Portrait of Camillo Pacetti*, oil on canvas, 1800-1810, Accademia di Brera, Milan

In 1804, Pacetti was offered the role of Chair of Sculpture at the *Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera* in Milan by its secretary Giuseppe Bossi, following Canova's recommendation. Succeeding the sculptor Giuseppe Franchi (1731-1806), he brought the pedagogical traditions of the Roman *Accademia di San Luca* to Milan, teaching his students how to draw after the antiques and involving them in the great Milanese sculpture projects of the time. Hence, he participated in updating the taste of the antique in Lombardia. Pacetti also contributed significantly to the promotion of the academy, thanks to the establishment of recurrent competitions and annual exhibitions, inspired by Roman traditions. Some of his notable students were Abbondio Sangiorgio, Luigi Scorzini, Gaetano Manfredini, Stefano Girola and Benedetto Cacciatori.

Pacetti had taken to Milan a terracotta sketch (Galleria d'arte moderna, Milan) and the colossal plaster model of his *Minerva and Prometheus*, based on the Palladedi Velletri (Musée du Louvre, Paris) which had been restored by his brother Vincenzo. The marble version of this group (**fig. 3**) was exhibited at the *Mostra dei Maestri* in 1806, shown on a rotating base at the center of the Modern Sculpture Room in the academy. In 1807, the

<sup>1</sup> H. Honor, "The Rome of Vincenzo Pacetti: leaves from a sculptor's diary", *Apollo* 78 (1963), p. 371.

<sup>2</sup> *Statuto della insigne artistica congregazione de' Virtuosi al Pantheon*, Roma 1839, p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> A. Campitelli, *Villa Borghese : da giardino del principe a parco dei romani*, Roma 2003, p. 240 and note 43.

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sculptor created an allegorical composition *Napoleon awakens Italy*, dedicated to the new King of Italy (Musée national du Château de Fontainebleau) and commissioned by the Minister of Interior Ludovico Arborio of Breme. It was exhibited in the hall of the great audiences at the *Palazzo Reale* during Napoleon's short stay in Milan. Its heroic nudity and the facial features are an evident homage to Canova's *Napoleon as Mars*. Equally honoring Napoleon, he created a terracotta composition with the Emperor crowned by the Virtues (Galleria d'arte moderna, Milan) and the allegorical group of Hymen, dedicated to the Emperor's wedding with Maria of Austria.<sup>4</sup>

Pacetti's position at the Academy earned him involvement in the most important decorative enterprises of the Napoleonic era: the completion of the facade of the cathedral and the decoration of the *Arco della Pace*, designed by Luigi Cagnola and placed at the beginning of the new road towards the pass, opened by Napoleon in 1807. For the cathedral he made some colossal sculptures of the facade (Saint James the Elder, Moses, The New Law) and assumed the responsibility of supervising the work of the other sculptors involved, providing some sketches for works created by his students such as the St. John the Evangelist and James the Great by Giuseppe Buzzi (1812-1843). For the *Arco della Pace* he created two bas-reliefs destined to decorate the base of the columns, representing Mars and Minerva and the Battle of Dresden, both with clear classic accents inspired by the reliefs of the Trajan column. He also provided the models for two *Victories* placed in the corners of the arch. Around 1808-1810, Pacetti made *The Spinner* (Galleria d'arte moderna, Milan). Involved in the arrangement of the Villa Carlotta in Tremezzo (Como), commissioned by Gian Battista Sommariva between the first and second decade of the nineteenth century, he made six stucco doorways with *putti* and *faunetti*, plaster models of Mars and of Minerva, a bust of a Faun and one of a Fauness, evidence of his attachment to the antique. In the antechamber of the sacristy of the Sommariva oratory, the family's funeral chapel near the villa, there are also plaster models of the statues The New Law and St. John the Evangelist carved for the Milan cathedral.

In the final years of his life, Pacetti was still commissioned two sandstone *Victories* for the arch of *Porta Nuova* in Milan and a sculpture of *Ganymede* for the palace of the Bolzesi family of Cremona. The great variety of Pacetti's oeuvre is testified by the forty sketches kept at the Modern Art Gallery in Milan, where religious subjects alternate, with some funerary monuments – clearly inspired by Canova – and bas-reliefs reminiscent of ancient roman sarcophagus, legacy of his never forgotten Roman education. Pacetti died in Milan in July 1826 and was buried in the cemetery of Porta Comasina near Franchi. He left an unfinished statue of the *Redeemer* for the main altar of the *Santa Maria at San Celso* in Milan and an *Apollo, the sleeping shepherd* commissioned by Maria Cristina of Savoy (1812-1836), the first Queen consort of Ferdinand II of the Two Sicilies. Both works were completed by Pacetti's pupil Benedetto Cacciatori (1794-1871), who had married Pacetti's daughter and become one of Savoy's favorite sculptors and restorers. The *Apollo*, exhibited in the Brera in 1828, was purchased for the Castle of Agliè, where it is still located today.

In 1833 the engraver Scipione Lodigiani published a series of engravings with the simple outline bound and distributed with the title *Works of sculpture of the famous late Mr. Camillo Pacetti*, sold at the Lodigiani and Panighi studio in Milan.

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<sup>4</sup> G. Hubert, *La sculpture dans l'Italie napoléonienne*, Paris 1964, p. 256, n. 1.

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