GETTY MUSEUM ANNOUNCES TWO LANDMARK SCULPTURE ACQUISITIONS, INCLUDING A MASTERPIECE BY AUGUSTE RODIN

Rodin’s marble Christ and Mary Magdalene (1908) goes on view alongside newly acquired early 17th-century Italian bronze of Belvedere Antinous by Pietro Tacca that once belonged to King Louis XIV

On view June 10, 2014
At the J. Paul Getty Museum, Getty Center

LOS ANGELES – The J. Paul Getty Museum announced today two highly important sculpture acquisitions: Christ and Mary Magdalene (1908), a large marble group by one of history’s most renowned sculptors, Auguste Rodin (French, 1840-1917), and a bronze statue of the Belvedere Antinous of about 1630 by Italian master Pietro Tacca (1577-1640). Both acquisitions will go on view today at the Getty Museum at the Getty Center in Los Angeles.

“In the history of art, Rodin is a towering figure whose achievements revolutionized modern sculpture,” said Timothy Potts, director of the J. Paul Getty Museum, in making the announcement. “Christ and Mary Magdalene is a powerful and expressive work that

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exemplifies all the key aspects of his style at the height of his artistic achievement. One of only two versions of this subject, and the result of a prestigious commission by a major patron of the arts, it also carries a distinguished provenance history. I have no doubt that it will soon become one of the most popular highlights of the Getty Museum’s collection."

In discussing the second new acquisition, the Belvedere Antinous by Pietro Tacca, Potts adds: "Pietro Tacca was the leading Italian sculptor of his day and became famous for his own highly inventive compositions (including a number of monumental equestrian sculptures of European monarchs) and for his adaptations of the most famous sculptures from classical antiquity. That this striking piece once belonged to the ‘Sun King,’ King Louis XIV of France, underscores Tacca’s status and influence in Baroque art history."

**Christ and Mary Magdalene (1908)**

At about three-and-a-half feet tall, Rodin’s impressive *Christ and Mary Magdalene* depicts a dying male figure nailed to a rocky cross being mourned by a female figure, their bodies pressed closely together. Although *Christ and Mary Magdalene* is the title by which the work is commonly known, and the title it was given when it was first commissioned, Rodin gave the composition different names, saying that he could have called it “the poet, the thinker or the artist, in one word the man whom other men always crucify and women always comfort.” In later instances, he also referred to the composition as *The Genius and the Pity* and *Prometheus and an Oceanid*.

The sculpture was commissioned in 1907 by the wealthy industrialist Karl Wittgenstein (father of the famous philosopher Ludwig and pianist Paul) for his collection in Vienna and has been in private hands ever since. The block of stone was acquired in early 1908 and the carving was entrusted to Rodin’s primary marble carver Victor Peter (Paris, 1840-1918). The sculpture was completed and sent to Vienna in 1909. In order to keep up with the high demand for his work, Rodin routinely appointed talented marble carvers to realize his compositions in stone. More than just a technician, Peter played a critical role in the production of Rodin’s marbles and was himself a well-regarded artist.

Unlike most of Rodin’s sculptures, this group was never cast in bronze, making it a very rare and distinctive work. The first, and only other, version of the composition was commissioned by August Thyssen in 1905 and is in the Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza collection in Madrid.

The dramatic composition of *Christ and Mary Magdalene* is complemented by the stark contrast
between the highly polished surfaces of the naked flesh and the surrounding rough-hewn marble. The ingenious use of the non finito (“unfinished”) reflects the critical impact that the sculptures of the Renaissance master Michelangelo had on Rodin during his trip to Italy in 1876.

“This exquisite marble, which is in excellent condition, is an outstanding achievement in early 20th century art,” said Anne-Lise Desmas, head of the Department of Sculpture and Decorative Arts at the Getty Museum. “As well as being an exceptionally moving, indeed breathtaking, piece, it provides a critical reference point for our collection of late modern and contemporary sculpture.”

Christ and Mary Magdalene is the second work by Rodin to enter the Getty’s collection. Sphinx (about 1898–1900), a watercolor, was acquired by the Museum in 2008. In ancient mythology, the sphinx embodies an amalgam of human, lion, and hawk body parts. The subject of this drawing by Rodin does not literally represent such a beast; instead, the artist drew a young woman, who is standing frontally, with her arms folded. Sphinx will be displayed alongside the newly acquired sculpture.

**Belvedere Antinous (about 1630)**

The second work acquired by the Getty Museum is a striking sculpture in bronze from early 17th-century Italy.

Pietro Tacca’s two-foot tall image of the Belvedere Antinous depicts a nude young man standing with his weight on the right leg while the left is slightly bent. In the left hand he holds a piece of drapery that is thrown over his shoulder. The other hand is at his right hip, the fingers gripping a small piece of fabric. His face, framed by short curls of hair, with oval-shaped eyes, a long straight nose, small mouth and a round chin, is slightly inclined forward and towards his right.

This figure is based on an ancient Roman marble statue also known as the Belvedere Antinous, now in the Vatican Museum, itself based on a Greek original of the 4th-century B.C. The Roman marble was acquired by Pope Paul III (1468-1549) and quickly became famous, having been copied as early as 1545 by Francesco Primaticcio (Italian, 1504-1570). Indeed, the Belvedere Antinous was considered by artists, theorists, and collectors as the most beautiful surviving statue from antiquity, and as representing the perfect proportions of the male body. Reductions in bronze after famous ancient models, though rarely as large as Tacca’s, were proudly displayed in princely and aristocratic collections from the 16th century on.

The first documented reference of this Belvedere Antinous comes from a posthumous 1662 inventory of the belongings of French aristocrat and collector Louis Hesselin (1600-1662), who most likely purchased it during one of his trips to Italy in the 1630s. Hesselin was active in the service of two Kings of France, and the latter, King Louis XIV, was so taken with Hesselin’s
taste that in 1663, after Hesselin's death, he acquired 34 of the 40 bronzes in his collection. The “N. 4” engraved on the right ankle of the sculpture indicates its inventory number in the French royal collection. The work belonged to the French crown until the late 18th century, since when it has been in private collections. In 1999 it was included in an exhibition at the Louvre Museum devoted to the bronzes of the French Royal collection.

“Tacca was an extraordinary sculptor and this piece is a premiere example of his mastery of bronze,” said Desmas. “Even among the Getty Museum’s exceptional collection of sculpture by Florentine masters, it is sure to stand out.”

Both new acquisitions will be on view beginning Tuesday, June 10th at the Getty Center in the Museum’s North Pavilion.

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