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**FIRST EXHIBITION OF VENETIAN RENAISSANCE
SCULPTOR TULLIO LOMBARDO AT NATIONAL
GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON
— ONLY VENUE WORLDWIDE —
JULY 4 THROUGH NOVEMBER 1, 2009**

**Tullio Lombardo (Italian, c. 1455 - 1532)*****Bacchus and Ariadne*, c. 1505**

marble

overall: H. 56 cm, W 71.5 cm, D 22 cm (22 1/16 x 28 1/8 x 7 7/8 in.)

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Kunstammer

In the first exhibition dedicated to Venetian Renaissance sculptor Tullio Lombardo (c. 1455–1532), his romantic approach to portraiture is revealed in four of his greatest marble carvings, which are joined by eight related works from his closest circle. On view at the National Gallery of Art's Italian galleries in the West Building from July 4 through November 1, 2009, **An Antiquity of Imagination: Tullio Lombardo and Venetian High Renaissance Sculpture** celebrates the artist's pioneering talent.

"Tullio Lombardo's talent is considerably greater than his modern reputation, essentially because so many key works are part of monuments still in their original locations in Italy and cannot travel," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "The Gallery is delighted to offer visitors unprecedented access to this special Venetian Renaissance experience. We are indebted to the lenders, which include museums, churches and private collections in Europe and the United States, who have generously agreed to share their sculptures."

Exhibition Support

The exhibition is sponsored by The Exhibition Circle of the National Gallery of Art.

Additional support is provided by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation.

The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

Tullio Lombardo (c. 1455–1532)

Tullio and his younger brother Antonio, both gifted sculptors, worked with their father Pietro Lombardo in the family firm, a leading force in architecture and sculpture in Venice well into the 16th century. While traditional demand for sculpture in Renaissance Venice centered on projects for churches, public monuments, and architectural decoration, Tullio created new forms of private art.

Like his far more famous contemporaries—Giovanni Bellini (1432–1516), Giorgione (1476/1477–1510), and Titian (c.1490–1576), whom he may have both emulated and influenced—Tullio crafted close-up treatments of secular subjects designed for an audience that could respond to their elusive, haunting character in an intimate setting. A type of sculpture never seen before, these portrait-like busts in exceptionally high relief represented figural types descended from ancient Greek and Roman art, given immediacy by their Renaissance hairstyles and costume details. They seem to belong simultaneously to two worlds: classical antiquity, as imagined in the 15th century, and contemporary Renaissance Venice.

Exhibition Highlights

An Antiquity of Imagination showcases Tullio's unprecedented masterpieces of Renaissance marble carving, never before seen in the United States. At the center of this focus exhibition are two double portraits carved in high relief from single blocks of marble: *A Couple* (c.1490/1495) and the so-called "*Bacchus and Ariadne*" (c.1505). The sensuously smooth flesh of these ideally beautiful young men and women, portrayed partially nude, contrasts with intricate detail carving in costume elements and in hair that surges with movement. Their restless expressions, with parted lips and wide-open eyes that seem to gaze into the distance, suggest states of reverie, anxiety, or yearning. They depart dramatically from conventions of late 15th-century Venetian portraiture, typically formal, reserved, and confined almost exclusively to painting. Whether Tullio's busts were really meant as portraits remains a mystery.

Although groundbreaking, Tullio's double-portrait busts drew on various ancient sources, including Roman funerary reliefs and cameo portraits, and expressive figures from the Hellenistic Greek world, with supple flesh and parted lips. In addition, Tullio seems to have been aware of northern European double portraits in painting and prints.

The exhibition presents other close-up bust-length images, in relief and in the round, that display Tullio's sensuous and expressive qualities. They include his own soulful, curly haired *Relief Bust of a Youth* (c.1505) as well as Simone Bianco's *Bust of a Woman* (c.1515/1520), in a pleated gown that falls suggestively open, and Antonio Minello's *Grieving Heroine* (1520s), a delicate miniature bust with elaborately bound and loosened hair winding over her bare shoulders.

Also featured are sculptures from Venetian churches that develop the spiritual character of the mysterious emotions suggested by Tullio's work: *Saint Sebastian* (1520s), a bust-length relief with teeth bared in anguish, by a follower of Tullio and Antonio; *Relief Bust of a Young Male Saint* (c.1510–1516), by Tullio, carved nearly in the round; and *Standing Angel* (c.1495/1500), by a Venetian artist, possibly Giambattista Bregno.

Reliefs of antique subjects became a specialty of Antonio Lombardo

(c.1458–c.1516), a court sculptor to Duke Alfonso I d'Este of Ferrara, the patron who commissioned the celebrated *Feast of the Gods*, by Bellini and Titian, now in the National Gallery of Art. On view are examples of similar small reliefs, depicting full-length figures in action, perhaps designed for installation in private studies: *Peace Establishing Her Reign* (c.1512/1520), a bronze allegory from a model attributed to Antonio or to his follower Giammaria Mosca (c.1493/1495–c.1574), which was possibly designed as a pendant to the marble high relief of the god of war *Mars* (c.1515/1520), from the circle of Antonio. A marble with colored stone inlay depicts the tragic Roman heroine *Lucretia* (1520s), shown as an ideal nude figure, from the circle of Antonio and Giammaria Mosca.

The Tullio Lombardo exhibition occupies galleries adjoining the National Gallery of Art's extensive collection of Venetian Renaissance paintings, many of which invite comparison with Tullio's works. Two related paintings will be part of the exhibition. In *Judith with the Head of Holofernes* (c.1495/1500) by Andrea Mantegna (c.1431–1506) or follower, possibly Giulio Campagnola (1482–after 1514), Judith's tilted head and faraway gaze seems to share the expressive aims of Tullio and Antonio. Conversely, small marble reliefs from the Lombardo circle, such as *Lucretia*, reflect an appreciation of Mantegna's small paintings of ancient heroes.

In *Saint Helena* (c. 1495) by the Venetian altarpiece painter Cima da Conegliano (c.1459–1517 or 1518), the mother of the Roman emperor Constantine appears in a classicizing breastplate, with a pensive gaze, a shifted-weight stance, and a cloak and skirt falling in rigid folds that indicate Cima's admiration for both ancient sculpture and Tullio's statuettes.

Curator and Catalogue

The exhibition was organized at the National Gallery of Art, Washington. It culminates a series of events, including conferences and publications, begun in Italy by the Comitato nazionale per le celebrazioni del 550° anniversario della nascita di Tullio Lombardo, to commemorate the 550th anniversary of Tullio's birth about 1455.

Alison Luchs, curator of early European sculpture at the National Gallery of Art, is the exhibition curator.

A fully illustrated exhibition catalogue includes scholarly essays by Luchs; Adriana Augusti, director of the Galleria Giorgio Franchetti alla Ca' d'Oro, Venice; Matteo Ceriana, deputy director of the Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan; Sarah Blake McHam, professor of art history at Rutgers University; Debra Pincus, independent scholar; and Alessandra Sarchi, research project manager at the Fondazione Federico Zeri, Università di Bologna. Published with Yale University Press, the catalogue is 160 pages with 62 color and 23 black-and-white illustrations and will be available in July 2009 from the Gallery Shops for \$60 (hardcover). To order, visit <http://shop.nga.gov/>; call (800) 697-9350/(202) 842-6002; fax (202) 789-3047; or e-mail mailorder@nga.gov.

General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Avenue NW, and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering the East and West Buildings. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 x 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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[An Antiquity of
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Lombardo and Venetian
High Renaissance
Sculpture](#)

July 4 through November
1, 2009

[Desiderio da Settignano:
Sculptor of Renaissance
Florence](#)

July 1 through October 8,
2007

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Biography

ALISON LUCHS
CURATOR OF EARLY EUROPEAN SCULPTURE
NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON



Photo by Simonida Uth ([click here to order this image](#))

Alison Luchs, curator of early European sculpture at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, is the curator of ***An Antiquity of Imagination: Tullio Lombardo and Venetian High Renaissance Sculpture***.

Working in the Gallery's department of sculpture and decorative arts since 1983, she has collaborated on various projects, including two systematic catalogue volumes (1993, 2000), the installation of the new sculpture galleries (2002), and the exhibition *Desiderio da Settignano: Sculptor of Renaissance Florence* (2007).

Luchs' extensive knowledge of early European art has resulted in numerous publications, including "A Marble Hunting Parting: The Companions of Diana for Marly" (2008); "Two Hercules Sculptures by Cristoforo Solari" (2007); "The Siren of Ca' da Mula" (2005); "The Stones of Prague" (1999); *Tullio Lombardo and Ideal Portrait Sculpture in Renaissance Venice, 1490-1530* (1995); "Stained Glass above Renaissance Altars" (1985); an English translation of Martin

Wackernagel's *World of the Florentine Renaissance Artist: Projects and Patrons, Workshop and Art Market* (1981); and "Michelangelo's Bologna Angel" (1978).

Luchs has contributed to *The Dictionary of Art* and *The Encyclopedia of Sculpture*. Her recent lectures have focused on Desiderio da Settignano, the courtyard of the Palazzo Ducale, Venice, and hybrid sea creatures in Renaissance bronze. Her book *The Mermaids of Venice: Fantastic Sea Creatures in Venetian Renaissance Art* is scheduled for publication in late 2009.

Luchs' honors and fellowships include Millard Meiss and Samuel H. Kress Foundation grants (1994) for the publication of *Tullio Lombardo and Ideal Portrait Sculpture* and the Chester Dale fellowship for dissertation research in Italy (1974–1975). Luchs has twice received the Robert H. Smith Curatorial Fellowship (1988, 1998) and the Ailsa Mellon Bruce Curatorial Sabbatical from the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (1992–1993, 2003–2004).

Prior to her arrival at the Gallery, Luchs taught art history at Swarthmore College and Syracuse University. She received a B.A. at Vassar College (1970) and her Ph.D. at Johns Hopkins University (1976).

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