CANONA SKETCHING IN CLAY

n the years around 1800, Italian sculptor Antonio Canova (1757–1822) was the most celebrated artist in Europe. He dazzled audiences with his sensuous statues carved in hard marble, every surface chiseled and polished to perfection. One secret to his success was his devotion to a material completely unlike marble—soft, messy clay. Canova began each of his statues by taking lumps of raw clay and sketching out his ideas in the form of small models. These sketches (*bozzetti* in Italian) are full of energy—rough with the marks of his fingers and tools. They are the opposite of his smooth marbles.

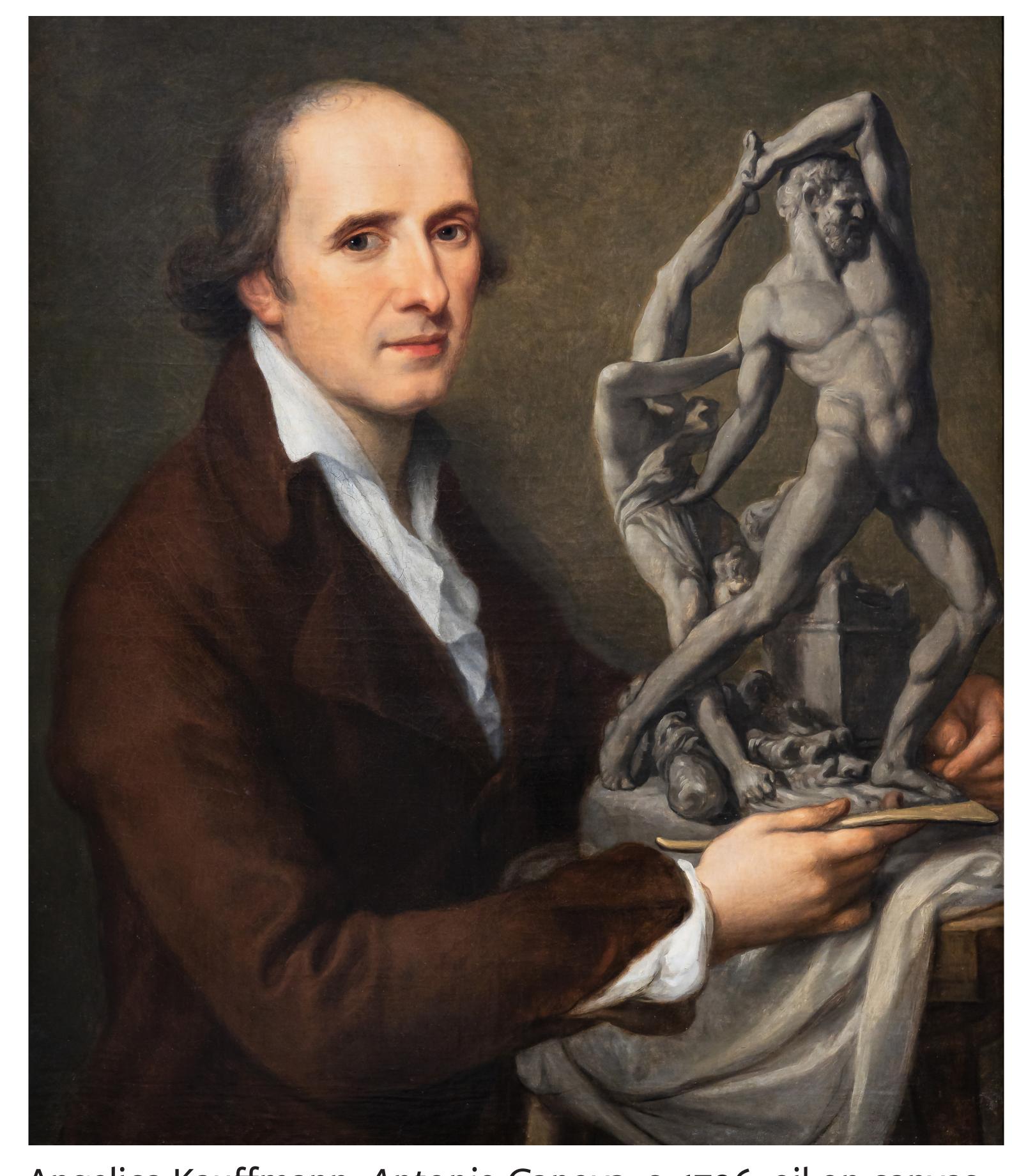
This exhibition explores how crucial clay was to Canova's artistic practice. While he surely made hundreds of clay models (both *bozzetti* and more finished *modelli*), only some sixty survive. Over thirty are displayed here, alongside related plasters and marbles. Grouped by subject—portrait, myth, and religion—these works reveal a completely different side of his creative identity. A final section is devoted to his process and features a sculptor re-creating one of Canova's signature statues in a new video.

The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and the Art Institute of Chicago.

Major support is provided by the Annenberg Fund for the International Exchange of Art.

Under the patronage of the National Committee for the Celebration of the Bicentenary of the Death of Antonio Canova, Ministry of Culture, Rome.

ANTONIO CANOVA



Angelica Kauffmann, *Antonio Canova*, c. 1796, oil on canvas, Private collection, Italy (© Ghigo G. Roli / Art Resource, NY)

Possagno, Canova trained primarily in Venice. He was quick to win praise for his inventive designs and his ability to carve in marble. By age twenty-one, he was in Rome. Dazzled by the many works of ancient sculpture he found there, he was inspired to forge a new path for art. He not only embraced neoclassicism—the return to the ideal beauty and simplicity of the Greek and Roman past—but also offered his own interpretation of it. His revolutionary style became all the rage

across Europe. Canova was flooded with orders for statues of lithe goddesses and muscular heroes. He worked tirelessly over three decades to meet the demand, producing one iconic sculpture after another. By his death in 1822, no artist in Europe had achieved greater celebrity or wealth.

PORTRAITURE

sure way to show status in Europe around 1800 was to have one's portrait carved by Canova. The rich and powerful—including Napoleon and members of his family—went to great lengths to secure his services. They prized his portraits for their beauty and the confidence they projected.

Each portrait required hours of working in clay: Canova began by creating sketch models to study the pose, whether seated or standing. He then produced full-scale head studies to understand facial features and expression. He finished with ever larger models in clay that he had cast in plaster and then copied in marble.

MYTHS AND LEGENDS

anova's fame was tied to his ability to reimagine famous stories from ancient Greece and Rome and bring these myths to life in glistening marble. The statue at the center of this room is a prime example. Finished in 1816, it represents one of the nine goddesses, or Muses, of creative inspiration.

Each time Canova took up a new mythological subject, he turned to clay, his preferred medium for exploring ideas. He could work quickly in clay, and it was cheap. Ever rigorous in his approach, he often produced many models, one after the other, until he was certain he had found the best design. But his use of clay did not end with sketches. He would proceed by elaborating ever finer and larger models in clay—as with *Hebe* nearby.

MONUMENTS AND FAITH

devoted Roman Catholic, Canova regularly sculpted religious subjects as well as ones that celebrate the papacy. Two of his most complex sculptures were funerary monuments dedicated to popes—Clement XIII and Clement XIV. These lavish memorials involved extensive planning. To meet the challenge, Canova worked through his design ideas in a series of clay models.

In his later years, as he faced his own mortality, his thoughts turned to a similar project: his own burial church, which he was building in his hometown in northern Italy. While planning the decorations for it, he created some of his most expressive clay models. They almost certainly include the series depicting Adam and Eve grieving over their dead son Abel. But Canova died in 1822 before any of these designs could be produced in marble or the church could be finished.

Doge Paolo Renier

1779

terracotta

Museo Bottacin—Musei Civici, Padua

This large bust is one of Canova's most finished works in clay. The subject is Paolo Renier, who in 1779 was elected doge (head) of the Venetian Republic. Working with several tools, Canova took advantage of the supple properties of clay to create a range of subtle details. Note the soft crinkles around the eyes and the thick, dense fur of the coat.

DEX 57

Maria Luisa Habsburg as Concordia

c. 1809-1811

terracotta

National Galleries of Scotland, Purchased by Private Treaty with the assistance of the Art Fund and the National Heritage Memorial Fund 1996

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(left)

Character Head

c. 1780

terracotta

Dino and Raffaello Tomasso

This small head is one of Canova's earliest surviving models. It's a character study—an exercise in exploring facial expression. The furrowed brow and parted mouth convey strong feelings: this man is troubled.

(right)

Study of a Boy

c. 1790-1800

terracotta

Museo Gypsotheca Antonio Canova, Possagno

Is this a portrait of someone Canova knew? The careful, lifelike rendering of the boy's face suggests so. The deep cracks that cover the bust's smooth surface occurred—unintentionally—during the firing process. And yet they add to the work's appeal, emphasizing the fragility of youth.

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Penitent Magdalen

c. 1794–1796 marble and gilded bronze Musei di Strada Nuova, Genoa

Mary Magdalene was a follower of Jesus who was often depicted in prayer repenting for past sins. In 1791 Canova began planning a statue of her for an Italian client—the marble shown here. He began, as he typically did, with quick sketches like the clay model nearby. It is roughly made—little more than a stack of clay lumps with face, hands, and feet barely indicated. And yet it portrays a woman all but crushed by the weight of her remorse.

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(right)

Penitent Magdalen

1791

terracotta

Musei Civici, Bassano del Grappa

(left)

Head of the Penitent Magdalen

c. 1794–1809

plaster with pointing marks

Museo Gypsotheca Antonio Canova, Possagno

This plaster, possibly made for the second version of the marble statue, is studded with metal pointing marks. They served as a guide for transferring the composition to marble, using a mechanical system called pointing. Watch the pointing process in action in the video in the nearby room.

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Monument to Titian

1790/1795

terracotta

Museo Gypsotheca Antonio Canova, Possagno

In 1790, Canova received a prestigious commission to erect a monument to the renowned Renaissance painter Titian in the church of the Frari in Venice. Although the project was later abandoned, Canova produced several studies in clay to explore the design. The model at left represents an early stage in the artist's thinking: a mourning woman leans over a raised sarcophagus with other weeping figures on the steps.

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Monument to Titian

1790/1795 terracotta

Museo Gypsotheca Antonio Canova, Possagno

In this larger, probably later, study a mourning procession ascends low steps leading into a dark, open doorway cut into a tall, pyramidal tomb. The model began as handfuls of clay, packed into a slab that lay flat on a table. Canova would have spent hours bending over it as he worked. Once the tomb's shape was complete, it was propped up so that he could add the figures and step back to assess the full composition.

[Detail 1, DEX 39 (pl. 44), caption]

Detail of **George Washington**, 1817, terracotta, Museo di Roma (Sovrintendenza Capitolina–Museo di Roma, Photographed by Luigi Spina)

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Monument to Pope Clement XIV, 1783–1787, marble, Santi Apostoli, Rome (Patrimonio del Fondo Edifici di Culto, amministrato dalla Direzione Centrale degli Affari dei Culti e per l'Amministrazione del Fondo Edifici di Culto del Ministero dell'Interno, Photographed by Zeno Colantoni)

For a view of Canova's studio showing his assistants at work on the figures he designed for this monument, see the mural in the process room.

[Detail 2, DEX 27 (pl. 30), caption under image]

Detail of **Princess Leopoldina von Esterházy**, c. 1805–1806, terracotta, Museo Gypsotheca Antonio Canova, Possagno (Photographed by Luigi Spina)

canova.labels.9.indd 7 5/25/23 5:04 PM

Revealing Canova's Process

Fred X. Brownstein is a Vermont-based stone carver who trained in Italy. He demonstrates Canova's process—from modeling in clay to carving in marble—and produces a copy of *Venus Italica*, one of the artist's most recognized works.

Artist

Fred X. Brownstein

Director, Producer, Videographer Chelsea Knight

Director of Photography
Terrence Hayes

canova.labels.9.indd 8 5/25/23 5:04 PM

(right)

Adam and Eve Mourning the Dead Abel

c. 1818-1822

terracotta

Museo Gypsotheca Antonio Canova, Possagno

(left and center)

Adam and Eve Mourning the Dead Abel

c. 1818-1822

terracotta

Musei Vaticani, Vatican City

These three sketches—among Canova's most moving works in clay—depict a story from the Bible: Adam and Eve mourning over the body of their dead son Abel. Look closely at the face of Adam, raised to the sky, at left. Canova transformed a lump of raw clay into an image of anguish—all in seconds with his fingers and a few flicks of a wooden modeling tool. According to one of his friends, Canova was seized by a range of emotions—"with tears, with happiness, and with general convulsions of his body"—when he modeled in clay.

Canova probably made these models for an altar he was designing in his own burial church, the Tempio Canoviano, in his hometown of Possagno. He began building it in 1819. It was completed after his death.

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Immaculate Virgin

c. 1818-1822

terracotta

Museo Gypsotheca Antonio Canova, Possagno

Crucifixion

c. 1780

terracotta

Civici Musei, Udine—Gallerie d'Arte Antica

Canova's diary records his artistic studies during his first year in Rome. "This morning," he wrote on April 24, 1780, "I went to the Accademia on the Capitoline Hill, and there was a scene of Christ on the cross that had been set up; I started to model it and later returned after lunch to draw it." This model may be the one he made that day.

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(right)

George Washington

1817 terracotta Museo di Roma

(left)

George Washington

c. 1817–1818 plaster Museo Gypsotheca Antonio Canova, Possagno

In 1816 the General Assembly of North Carolina commissioned Canova to carve a statue of George Washington for the statehouse in Raleigh. The finished marble was destroyed in a fire in 1831. These are some of the models that survive from the project and show the evolution of Canova's design.

The terracotta model is probably his first sketch for the composition. It depicts Washington in an ancient Roman toga. In the later plaster Washington wears the armor of an ancient Roman general. He also holds a tablet that reads "LEX / PATRIA / LIBERTAS" (Law / Homeland / Liberty) in honor of his role in founding the United States.

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(left and center)

Princess Leopoldina von Esterházy

c. 1805-1806

terracotta

Museo Gypsotheca Antonio Canova, Possagno

(right)

Princess Leopoldina von Esterházy

c. 1805-1806

terracotta

Museo di Roma

Princess Leopoldina von Esterházy was one of several aristocratic women who exercised considerable influence over Austrian politics during the 1780s and 1790s. She was also a practicing artist, which is reflected in the statue she commissioned from Canova. He depicts her holding a sketchbook in the marble and in one of the models shown here.

These sketches exemplify Canova's obsessive approach to planning his compositions in clay. Each model varies only slightly from the other. Canova worked quickly over a short period of time (perhaps a couple of hours) to explore subtle changes in the figure's pose and drapery.

anova.labels.oversize.5.indd 2 5/25/23 5:03 PM

(left)

Allegory of Peace

c. 1811

terracotta

National Galleries of Scotland, Purchased by Private Treaty with the assistance of the Art Fund and the National Heritage Memorial Fund 1996

(right)

Allegory of Peace

c. 1811–1814 plaster with pointing marks Museo Gypsotheca Antonio Canova, Possagno

In 1811 the Russian diplomat Count Paolo Romanzow commissioned Canova to sculpt a statue of Peace. He depicted it as a winged woman standing triumphantly over a serpent, a symbol of war.

The plaster reflects a more developed stage in the design. The round protrusions of metal on the surface—such as those on the right hand and both knees—are screws inserted into the plaster. Called pointing marks, they indicate that Canova used a measuring tool to reproduce the design, likely at a larger scale. For more about Canova's copying techniques (known as pointing), see the video in the nearby room.

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(left)

The Three Graces

1812

terracotta

Musei Civici, Bassano del Grappa

(right)

The Three Graces

1812

terracotta

Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, Bequest of Juliette Récamier, 1849

These two models were preparatory for one of Canova's most celebrated statues, *The Three Graces*. The sculpture portrays the three daughters of Zeus linking arms as they turn inward and embrace one another. They are known as the Graces because they bestow gifts on humanity.

The earliest of the surviving models, on the left, has a rough surface with many toolmarks left unsmoothed. The figures, caught midtwirl, seem to dance.

In the model on the right, Canova refined his concept. The central Grace is now bookended by her partners. Wrapped together by sinuous arms and a ribbonlike swath of drapery, the group is quieter, more dignified, and more finished.

The Three Graces, 1813–1816, marble, The State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg (© Ghigo G. Roli/Art Resource, NY)



canova.labels.oversize.5.indd 4

ROOM 1 M74 case and pedestal label ledges

DEX 44 [earlier model, with arms down by her sides] [wedge-ouside of case]

DEX 54 [later model, with arm raised] [wedge-ouside of case]

Madame Mère (Letizia Ramolino Bonaparte)

c. 1804–1805 terracotta Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice

Madame Mère (Letizia Ramolino Bonaparte)

c. 1804–1805 terracotta Collection Museum de Fundatie, Zwolle and Heino/Wijhe

These are two of the three surviving models for Canova's portrait of Napoleon's mother, known as Madame Mère.

Both focus on the pose rather than the face, which was left

relatively blank. When developing one of his seated portraits, Canova would also make more careful studies of the sitters' heads on a life-size scale.

The earlier sketch, on the left, shows the figure with her arms resting at her sides. The second sketch is much closer to the finished marble. It presents the sitter with her left arm raised up on the chairback and her legs uncrossed. Why did Canova make these changes? Perhaps he thought they helped the figure look more informal—and thus approachable.

DEX 35 [inside case on angled wedge]

Madame Mère (Letizia Ramolino Bonaparte)

c. 1805 plaster Museo Gypsotheca Antonio Canova, Possagno Canova made this plaster model of Napoleon's mother in preparation for the marble at right. It sits halfway in size between the sketch models at left and the finished marble. As Canova worked to refine his designs, he often produced these intermediary plasters. Each one would be cast from a model in clay. Discover more about plaster casting in the room exploring Canova's process.

ROOM 1 M74 floor wedge label pedestal 9
DEX 55

Madame Mère (Letizia Ramolino Bonaparte)

1805/1807marbleThe Devonshire Collections, Chatsworth

Napoleon's mother, known as Letizia as well as Madame Mère, commissioned her portrait from Canova during a visit to Rome in 1804. He immediately went to work on the models at left. The composition is based on an ancient sculpture now known as the *Empress Helena*, which he considered appropriate for a regal matron.

When Canova's marble sculpture was unveiled in Paris, it was widely admired for its exquisitely finished surfaces, including the subtle texturing



given to the skin, hair, and clothing. Napoleon, however, refused to let his mother display it opposite his throne in the Palais des Tuileries. He sent it to storage (though why is not entirely clear).

Roman, Seated Statue of Empress Helena, second half of the 2nd century, marble, Capitoline Museum, Rome (CNP Collection/Alamy Stock Photo)

5/25/23 5:03 PM

ROOM 2 M75 pedestal label ledge pedestal 8 DEX 85

Hebe

c. 1816
terracotta
Private collection, Courtesy of the
Daniel Katz Gallery, London

Hebe, the ancient Greek goddess of youth, was also cupbearer to the divinities on Mount Olympus. This highly finished terracotta (called a *modello*) is unusually large for Canova, who typically preserved models of this scale in plaster. The composition was one of Canova's most successful: five life-size versions were produced in marble.

Canova gave this model to his dear friend Mary Berry, one of the British intellectuals who helped promote the sculptor's career in Rome and abroad. Many of the models in this exhibition represent personal



gifts from Canova to his closest friends.

Hebe, 1800–1805, marble, The State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg (© Ghigo G. Roli/Art Resource, NY) ROOM 2 M75 case and pedestal label ledge - pedestal 12 DEX 86

DEX 89

ROOM 3 M76 PROCESS ROOM pedestal 24

Terpsichore Lyran (Muse of Lyric Poetry)

c. 1814–1816 marble The Cleveland Museum of Art, Leonard C. Hanna, Jr. Fund, 1968.212

Look closely at the shimmering drapery that flows over and around the figure's left leg. Carved in vibrating parallel rivulets that become thin shadowed stripes, it stands out from the smooth, polished texture of her outer dress. Canova built his reputation by carving sumptuous marbles like this one. While he entrusted assistants with copying his designs in marble, he insisted on adding the most delicate surface effects at the end himself.

Canova began this statue as an idealized portrait of Alexandrine Bonaparte (Napoleon's sister-in-law). He refashioned it as the Muse of lyric poetry and sold it to a British aristocrat.

After Antonio Canova

Venus

c. 1822/1823
marble
National Gallery of Art, Washington,
Corcoran Collection (William A. Clark Collection)

The *Venus* (Roman goddess of love) shown here is a copy of a statue Canova made in his later years (1817/1820). This version was commissioned during his lifetime, but completed by one of his assistants after he died. The composition of both the copy and the original is closely related to Canova's famed *Venus Italica*, the work being replicated in the nearby video.

5/25/23 5:03 PM

DEX 25 and 26

DEX 50

DEX 23

Pyrrhus Sacrificing Polyxena

c. 1798-1799
terracotta
Museo Gypsotheca Antonio Canova,
Possagno

These two sketches demonstrate Canova's use of clay to explore different approaches to the same story—in this case, an episode from the end of the Trojan War. After the city of Troy fell, the vengeful spirit of Achilles, a Greek warrior killed in battle, appeared and demanded the death of the Trojan princess Polyxena. His son Pyrrhus was tasked with the horrible deed.

In both sketches the princess kneels on Achilles's tomb and looks up at her killer. But Canova experimented with how to depict Pyrrhus. In one model, he raises his blade. In the other, Canova tried the opposite approach, focusing on psychology. Pyrrhus seems to pause with uncertainty as he comes to grips with the violent act he has been asked to commit. Neither sketch resulted in a marble sculpture.

Hector

c. 1808
plaster
Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, Museo Correr

This plaster was cast from a relatively large clay sketch depicting the Trojan prince and warrior Hector. Rather than firing the original clay model, Canova chose to preserve it by casting it in plaster. The lines that articulate the figure's chest helped Canova establish the symmetry of the torso. They are a type of anatomical shorthand frequently deployed by the sculptor. They can also be seen in his figures of Pyrrhus nearby.

Head of Medusa

c. 1797–1800 terracotta Museo Gypsotheca Antonio Canova, Possagno

Blank eyes, slack mouth, and cheeks caressed by snakes—this decapitated head is Medusa's. Canova created this relatively finished model for a monumental marble statue he was sculpting of Perseus, who would hold the head as a sort of trophy.

In Greek mythology, Medusa was a serpent-haired creature called a Gorgon. Her gaze turned anyone who locked eyes

with her into stone. Using a mirrored shield, Perseus was able to approach Medusa as she slept and sever her head.



He carried it as a weapon, using it to petrify his enemies.

Perseus with the Head of Medusa, 1804–1806, marble, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Fletcher Fund, 1967

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DEX 16

DEX 49

DEX 48

Oedipus (?) and Antigone Mourning the Dead Eteocles and Polynices

c. 1798–1799 terracotta Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, Museo Correr

Cupid and Psyche

1786/1787 terracotta Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, Museo Correr

The urgency of Canova's modeling enhances the energy of this writhing, entangled couple. Briskly executed and swept all over by a raked tool, this sketch model is one of Canova's most spirited. It contrasts sharply with the completed—and widely celebrated—marble. There, in a highly refined staging of gracefully interlinked forms, Cupid embraces the princess Psyche and saves her from death with a kiss.



Psyche Revived by Cupid's Kiss, 1787–1793, marble, Musée du Louvre, Paris (© Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN–Grand Palais/Raphaël Chipault/Art Resource, NY)

Satyr and a Nymph (Cupid and Psyche?)

c. 1786–1787 terracotta Museo Gypsotheca Antonio Canova, Possagno

Venus and Adonis

DEX 15

c. 1787 terracotta Museo Gypsotheca Antonio Canova, Possagno

These four models demonstrate the wide range of techniques that Canova used when sketching in clay.

All were likely produced in less than an hour. *Venus and Adonis* exemplifies the additive properties of clay.

Look closely at Venus's head, which is formed from small pellets of clay that Canova pressed together.

Some bear his fingerprints.

canova.caselabels.8.indd 4

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ROOM 3 M79 pedestal 22 DEX 9

Religion

c. 1786-1787 terracotta, wood, and wax Galleria dell'Accademia Tadini, Lovere

Among Canova's largest sketches in clay, this study was for a figure symbolizing religion in the marble monument to Pope Clement XIII in Saint Peter's Basilica, Rome. Canova probably used it to gauge not only how the figure would work within the monument's composition, but also how light and shadow would play across the finished marble. The back of this figure was left incomplete because the marble statue was not meant to be seen in the round. To appreciate the gigantic scale of the finished monument, note the plaster of Religion's head, nearby. It was cast at the final, full size.



Monument to Pope Clement XIII, 1783–1792, marble, Saint Peter's Basilica, Vatican City (Courtesy of Fabbrica di San Pietro in Vaticano)

ROOM 3 M79 pedestal 21

DEX 34

Head of Religion

c. 1787-1788 plaster Museo Gypsotheca Antonio Canova, Possagno

ROOM 3 M76 PROCESS ROOM ledge label Canova studio mural

Francesco Chiaruttini, View of Antonio Canova's Studio in Rome, 1786, pen and wash, Civici Musei, Udine (Fototeca dei Civici Musei di Udine)

Welcome to Canova's studio in Rome in 1786 just as he was in the middle of executing his monument to Pope Clement XIV. Assistants are busy carving and attending to tasks around the workshop. Two other visitors, in the left foreground, also watch the work in progress.

See models created for this project in the nearby gallery focused on monuments and faith.

This drawing illustrates Canova's system of pointing how he copied his designs in marble. Look at the right wall, where the plaster model of the seated pope is just to the left of the unfinished marble. Two assistants use a rope drill as they work on the marble. The frames suspended above the works hold plumb lines—long ropes with weights attached at the bottom. Assistants used plumb lines to establish a three-dimensional grid that helped ensure an accurate transfer of the design from plaster to marble.

ROOM 3 M79 pedestal 20, 18, 19

DEX 60, 12, 11

DEX 60

DEX 12

DEX 11

ROOM 3 M79 pedestal 15

DEX 84

Veiled Virtue with an Urn

c. 1798-1800 The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Museum purchase funded by the Agnes Cullen Arnold Endowment Fund, 2000.95

A shrouded woman, crowned with olive leaves, clasps an urn. The diagonal sweep of her body and drapery suggests forward movement. This plaster was cast from a clay model that Canova made for a monumental tomb in Vienna that memorialized Maria Christina of Austria (one of Marie Antoinette's older sisters). The figure was adapted from his earlier design for the Monument to Titian.

Piety Pope Clement XIV

terracotta

painted terracotta

Private collection Museo Gypsotheca Antonio Canova,

Possagno

across the surface were added later, as part of the copying

Humility

terracotta

Possagno

Museo Gypsotheca Antonio Canova,

1783

Canova's monument to Pope Clement XIV in the basilica of Santi Apostoli marked his public debut in Rome (see the mural behind the terracottas). He wasted no effort in planning every detail of this massive project and undoubtedly made many models. Only three survive, including the statue of the pope at center. Given its high finish and white paint (imitating marble), it was presumably shown to the patron for his approval before work continued. Small Xs marked

(pointing) process.

Piety is one of Canova's most meticulously executed models. It represents an early idea Canova tried, and later changed, for one of the allegorical figures in the monument. Like Humility, Piety is depicted as a woman in flowing drapery, her face partly hidden by a deep cowl.

Terpsichore Lyran (Muse of Lyric Poetry)

c. 1814–1816 marble The Cleveland Museum of Art, Leonard C. Hanna, Jr. Fund, 1968.212

Look closely at the shimmering drapery that flows over and around the figure's left leg. Carved in vibrating parallel rivulets that become thin shadowed stripes, it stands out from the smooth, polished texture of her outer dress. Canova built his reputation by carving sumptuous marbles like this one. While he entrusted assistants with copying his designs in marble he insisted on adding the most delicate surface effects at the end himself.

Canova began this statue as an idealized portrait of Alexandrine Bonaparte (Napoleon's sister-in-law). He refashioned it as the Muse of lyric poetry and sold it to a British aristocrat.

ROOM 3 M76 PROCESS ROOM pedestal 24 DEX 89

After Antonio Canova

Venus

c. 1822/1823
marble
National Gallery of Art, Washington,
Corcoran Collection (William A. Clark Collection)

The *Venus* (Roman goddess of love) shown here is a copy of a statue Canova made in his later years (1817/1820). This version was commissioned during his lifetime, but completed by one of his assistants after he died. The composition of both the copy and the original is closely related to Canova's famed *Venus Italica*, the work being replicated in the nearby video.

CANOVA'S PROCESS

final- to film

Canova used clay to make sketch models (bozzetti in Italian; fig. 1) and larger, more finished models (modelli in Italian; fig. 2).



Fig. 1. Venus and Adonis, c. 1787, terracotta, Museo Gypsotheca



Fig. 2. Pope Clement XIV, 1783, painted terracotta, Museo Gypsotheca Antonio Canova, Possagno (Photographed by Luigi Spina) Antonio Canova, Possagno (Photographed by Luigi Spina)

He worked the clay

with his fingers

and simple tools



Fig. 4. Princess Leopoldina von Esterházy (detail), c. 1805–1806, terracotta, Museo di Roma (Sovrintendenza Capitolina – Museo di Roma, Photograph © Anthony Sigel)

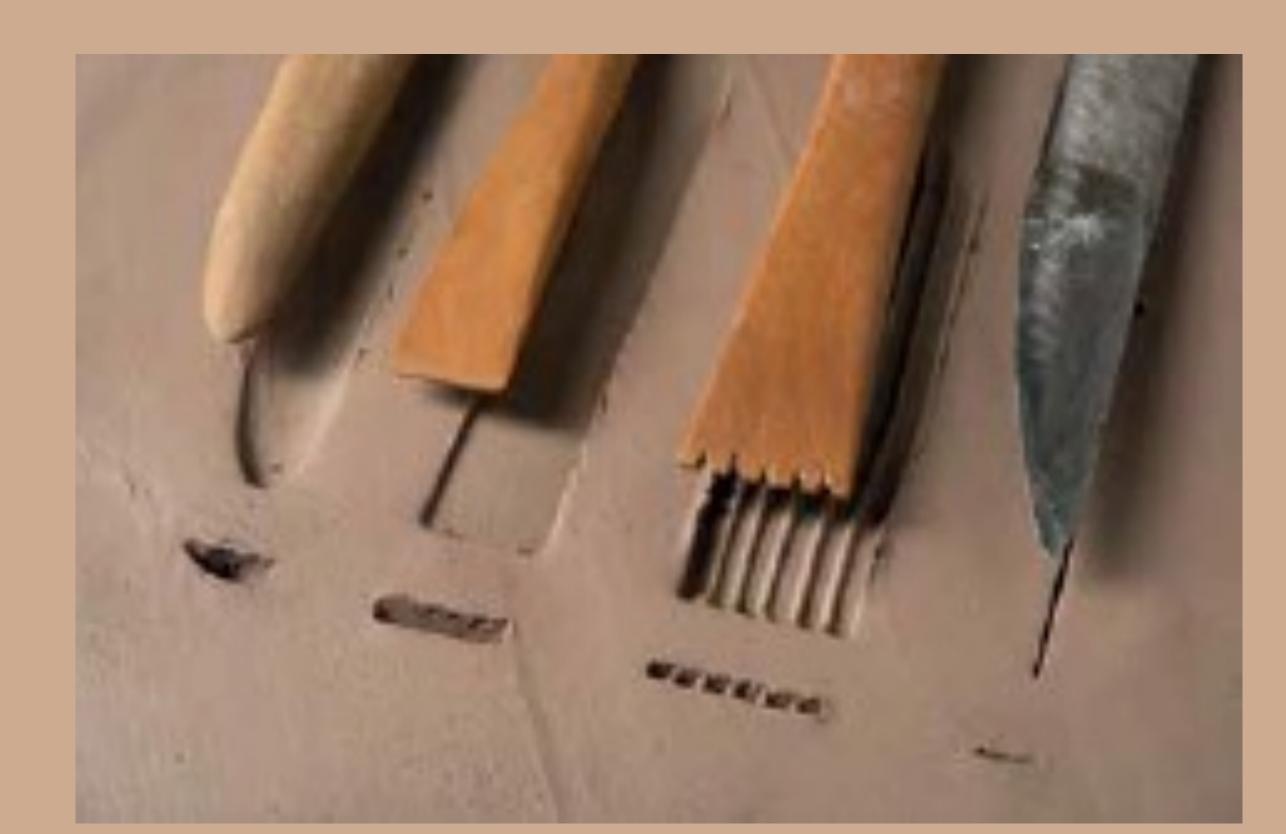


Fig. 3. Modeling tools and their marks, from left: oval-tip, chisel-tip, serrated, knife (Photograph © Anthony Sigel)

Marks left in the clay reveal Canova's distinctive techniques. He frequently rendered eyes, for example, by making a clockwise twist with his oval-tip tool (fig. 4).

Canova preserved many models by firing them in a kiln. When clay is heated to a high temperature, it becomes a hard, water-resistant solid called terracotta (Italian for "cooked earth").

Canova used plaster to create copies of his largest clay models.

He began by coating a clay model in wet plaster (fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Coating a clay model with plaster

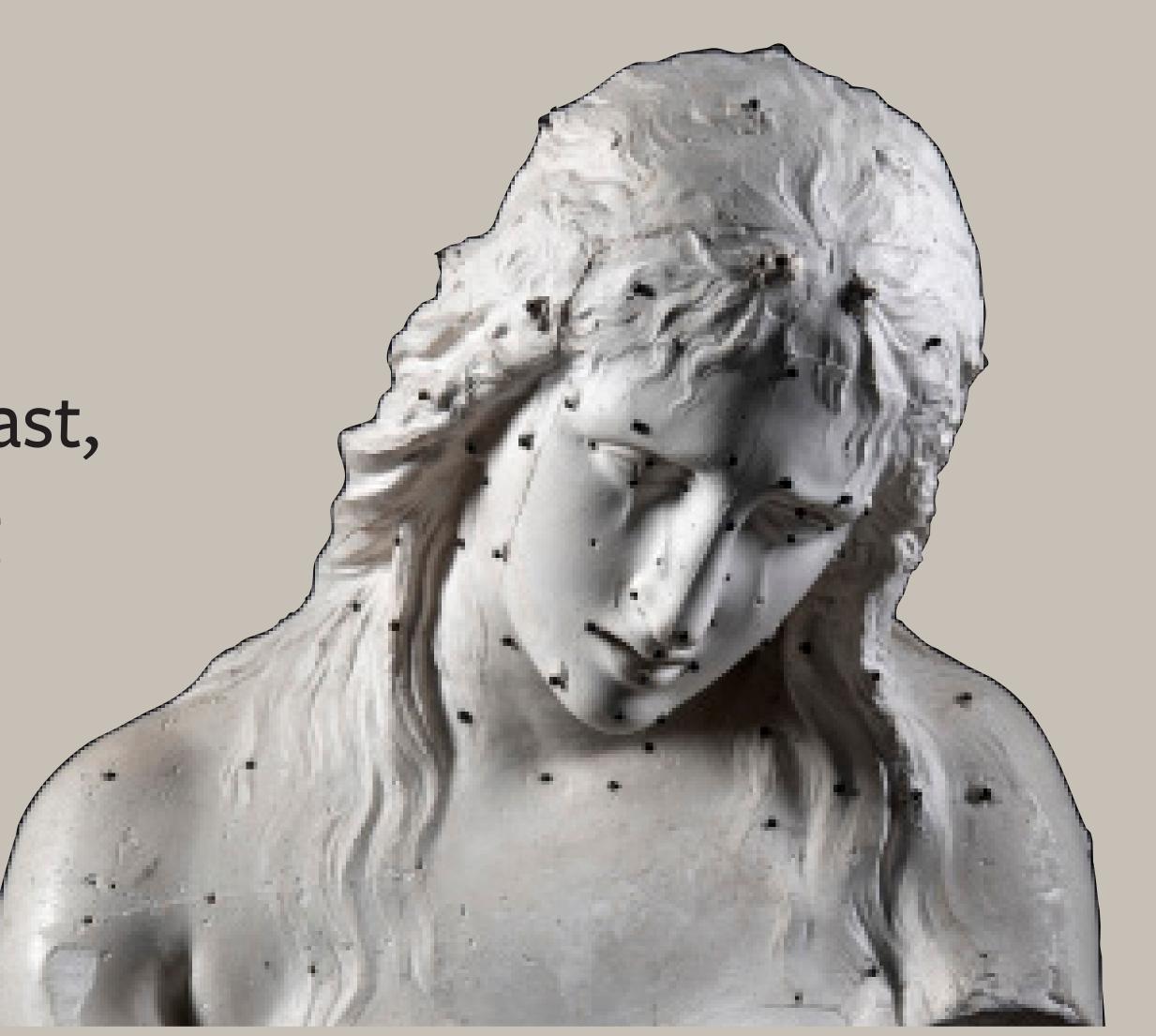
Once the plaster had dried to a hard, chalky solid, he removed it in sections. He then reassembled those sections to form a hollow mold, replicating the shape of the clay model (fig. 6).

Fresh plaster was poured into the mold and left to dry. The copy (known as a plaster cast) was then removed from the mold.



Fig. 6. Two sections of a plaster mold

After Canova had prepared a full-scale plaster cast, his assistants readied it for pointing by inserting metal screws (points) all over the surface. They served as fixed coordinates for taking measurements (fig. 7).



Canova relied on the pointing system to copy his designs into marble. Studio assistants used several tools, including calipers (fig. 8) and plumb lines suspended from wooden frames (fig. 9), to measure and transfer the design.



Fig. 8. Measuring distance with calipers

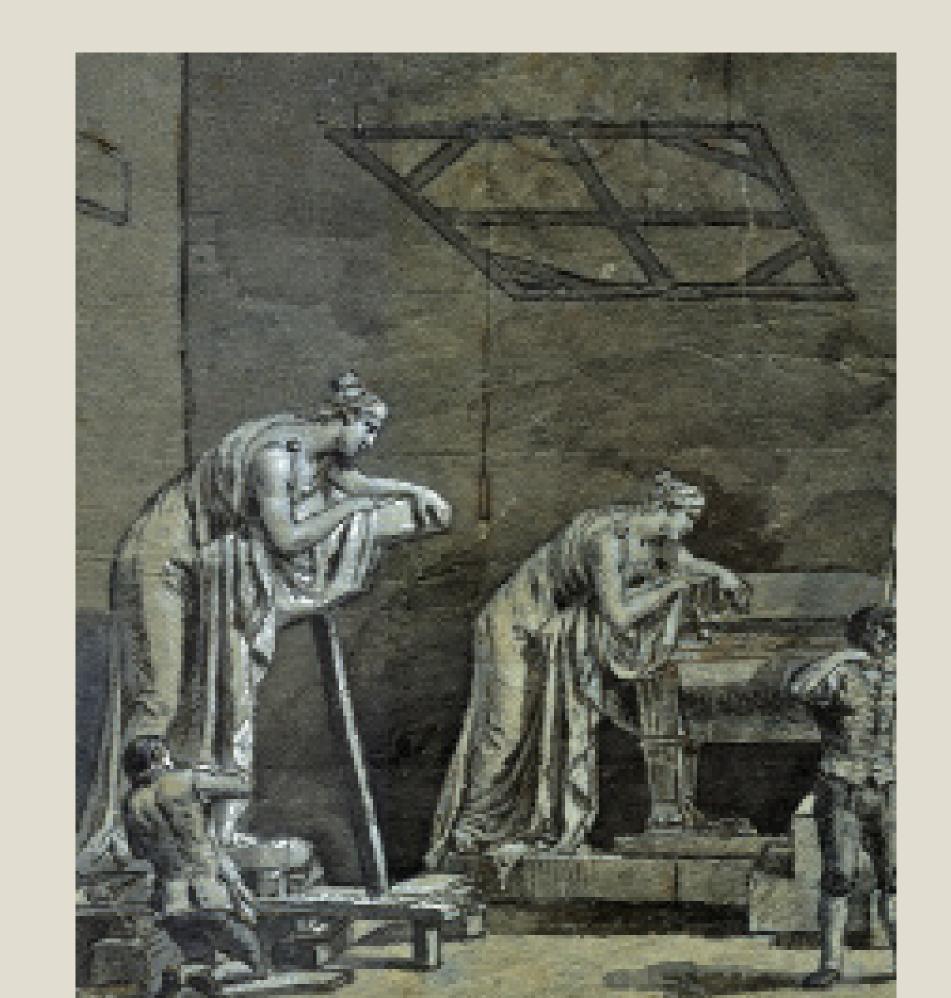


Fig. 9. A plumb line—a rope with a weighted end (see mural, center)



To carve the stone, they used rope drills (fig. 10), chisels, and other tools.



Pointing made Canova's prolific output possible. Instead of carving each marble by himself, he employed a team of people.

While Canova delegated the carving to others, he insisted upon applying the finishing touches himself, obsessively working the surface of the marble for hours. He was renowned for bringing sculptures to life through his subtle details (fig. 11).

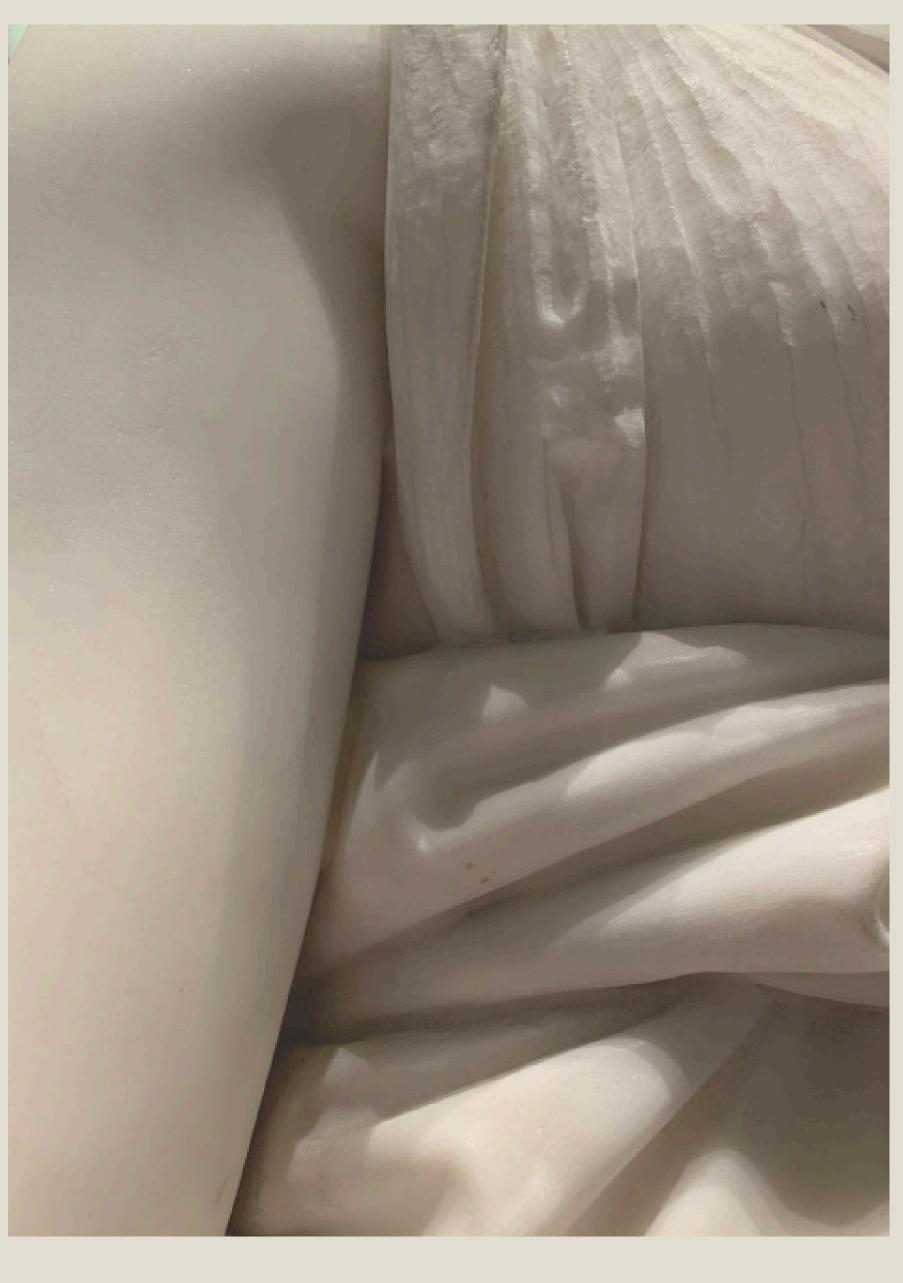


Fig. 11. *Terpsichore Lyran (Muse of Lyric Poetry)* (detail), c. 1814–1816, marble, The Cleveland