

Late-Mannerist European sculptor

Second half 16th century

The Three Graces

High relief in terracotta, 57.5 x 45.5 x 13.5 cm (22 ⁵/₈ x 17 ⁷/₈ x 5 ³/₈ in.)

The artistic popularity of the *Graces* can be traced back to the *Charities*, minor Ancient Greek goddesses who centuries later in Ancient Rome became known as the *Three Graces*.

Tasked with spreading goodwill, pleasure and mirth, Aglaea, “beauty, splendour or glory”, Euphrosyne, “good cheer or mirth”, and Thalia, “rich banquet or festivity”, were the immortal daughters of Zeus and the sea-nymph Eurynome; they attended banquets and, together with the Muses, danced for the gods. Their principal attributes, an apple, a rose and a sprig of myrtle.

Although only Roman copies are to be found today, the earliest portrayals of the three Graces belong to the Hellenistic period.

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Fig. 1: The Three Graces: portrayal and sculpture, Roman age

The enormous success enjoyed by the *Three Graces* throughout the years of the Roman Empire (fig. 1) presented itself anew with the advent of the Renaissance thanks to the production of numerous 16th century engravings by Marco Dente (?-1527), Enea Vico (1523-1567), Étienne Delaune (1518/19-1583) (fig. 2) and other anonymous artists.



Both pictorial representations as well as reliefs depicting the Graces were extremely popular during this period: prime examples, Sandro Botticelli's (1445-1510) *Primavera* (fig. 3), in which the three women unconventionally join hands as they dance in circle, and Raphael's (1483-1520) celebrated panel (fig. 4) - after the famous Roman Age sculpture today held in the Piccolomini Library, Duomo di Siena (fig. 5) - portraying the three women in a more classic stance.

It is important to underline that the *Graces* as a subject in Renaissance Art was, for years, the topic of lively discussions within international humanistic studies, finding various interpretations and inspiring artists throughout the decades to portrayals presenting different

modellings of the sculptural group.

16th century Mannerism freed the three figures in space; they became slightly elongated and, as can be observed in Pontormo's (1494-1557) drawing (fig. 6), abandoning a Classical sense of balance, they came to assume more precariously balanced poses.

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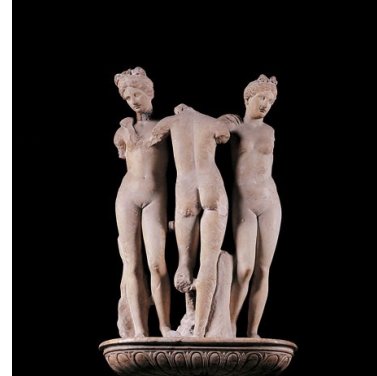


Fig. 3: S. Botticelli (1445 - 1510), *La primavera*, tempera on panel, Florence, Uffizi Gallery

Fig. 4: Raphael (1483 - 1520): *Three Graces*, oil on panel, Chantilly, Musée Condé

Fig. 5: *The Three Graces*, marble, Roman copy after Greek original (Hellenistic period), Siena, Piccolomini Library, Duomo

Our work is to be placed in the second half of the 16th century; its figures more elongated, as it presents characteristic foreshortening and skewed perspective of that period.

The subject of the three Graces would in years to come be taken up again and re-elaborated by countless artists, from the Baroque Age to Neoclassicism and continuing on into the Contemporary Age; one of the most famous, Antonio Canova's (1757-1822) sculpture today held at the State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, Russia (fig. 7) .



Fig. 6: Pontormo (1494 - 1557), *The Three Graces*, 1535, sanguine, Florence, Uffizi Gallery

Fig. 7: A. Canova (1757 - 1822), *The Three Graces*, 1813-1817, marble, Saint Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum

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