
Antique shop & Art gallery

Cara Uroša 12
Belgrade, Serbia
+381 11 2627994

office@antiqueart.com

Antique Art

Antique shop

Old Town 268
Kotor, Montenegro
+ 381 69 2456 307

www.antiqueart.rs

Polychrome painted and partially gilded carved wood figure of a cherub

Height: 40 cm

Material: carved wood - soft wood species, the most probably lime-wood, polychrome painted and partially gilded

Period: 18th century

Provenance: Bay of Kotor

Description

This full round sculpture of a cherub or putto (meaning a winged figure of a boy) is represented in an instance of a dynamic movement. Actually he is floating in air while his body is spirally twisted in a shape of a letter "S". His right leg is almost straight, with slightly bent knee, balancing on the tiptoes, while his left leg is fully bent and positioned behind the right leg. His body is partially wrapped in a crimson red drapery, leaving his belly uncovered. The cherub is holding the richly folded and fluttering part of the drapery with his right palm. The position of the wavy drapery accentuates the floating movement of the cherub himself. He holds his left arm up wright in a tender gesture with mildly bent fingers. His head is bent towards his right shoulder. Behind the shoulders the cherub has gilded wings, rendered in a dynamic movement too. He has oval face with typically chubby cheeks, tiny red lips and especially captivating wide opened blue eyes. His curly hair surrounding a face has each curl in a different position enhancing an impression of floating of a whole figure. The face and the body are painted with delicate complexion hues, while the hair is painted in a warm maroon shade of brown.



The naturalistically rendered figure of a cherub in such a dynamic movement is typical for the Baroque art. This figure originally was part of a larger sculptural composition, possibly with Madonna and Infant Jesus as a central motive. Although the figure of a cherub is reminiscent of the Italian Baroque sculpture of this type, it was actually made by an unknown artist from Boka Bay, and it originates from the church or more likely from some private chapel from the Boka Bay area. The further explanation is given in the following text.

Historical and artistic context

In a broader chronological sense, the Baroque époque spans from the period of a decline of the Roman Mannerism in 1580 to the rise of the Classicism in 1780. In a narrower sense, Baroque was the ruling artistic movement from circa 1600 to circa 1730 year. This was an exciting but also tragic era, marked by dramatic historical events, incredible contrasts and strong tensions, giving birth to a sumptuous and dramatic Baroque art. The emergence of the Baroque art was actually a consequence of a deep religious rift in Europe. The starting point of the conflict was the issuing in 1517 of "*The Ninety-five Theses*" by Martin Luther (1483 – 1546). In this disputation Luther was criticizing the corruption of the Catholic clergy and the Roman Catholic Church. This act is regarded as a beginning of the Protestant Reformation. In order to respond to the Protestant Reformation in methodical and uncompromising manner, the Catholic Church convened the Council of Trent (1545 - 1563), which proclaimed the triumph of the Catholic Church, recognizing the supreme spiritual authority of the Pope in Rome. Art played a crucial role in the Catholic Counter-Reformation, and the Baroque art became the main artistic expression of this powerful movement, which proclaimed that art primarily should move and deeply amaze the believers. Hence the Baroque art was aimed to incite imagination and to stir up emotions. Sculpture as a medium had an especially important role in the Baroque art. It tended to be extremely naturalistic, but with the accomplishment of the ultimate illusionistic effect at the same time. This paradox is just one of the many when it comes to the Baroque art. This is why the fine arts during the Baroque period were under the influence of theatre and a skill of creating scenography. It is interesting to notice that the greatest protagonist of the Baroque art, the genius sculptor and architect Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598 - 1680) was also engaged in creating theatre scenography.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, in the microcosm of the Boka Bay almost all the aspects of the dramatic and artistically rich Baroque era were present. The Bay of Kotor actually was an integral part of the European and the Mediterranean culture, with the particularly pronounced influences of the Italian art. One of the important factors in the creation of such a cultural climate was that the Boka Bay was in the domain of the Venetian Republic for a long period from 1420 to 1797. At the same time, due to the fact that it was positioned on the sea, maritime activities developed as the main occupation here. That led to the material prosperity, but also to the interaction with various foreign cultural and artistic influences. Wealthy captains, ship-owners and international traders from the Boka Bay were great patrons of arts. As the main benefactors in the building and renovation of churches, they advocated for the implementation of the Baroque style in the architecture and in the interiors of those sacred buildings, aiming to accomplish the same Baroque splendour, as they have encountered on their voyages. Also important factor in assimilating the Italian baroque style by local artists was the actual presence of Italian artists or works made by commission by Italian artist for churches in Boka Bay. One such example among the others is the sculptor Bernardo Tabacco (active 1680 – 1729), whose sculptures were made by order for the Church of Our Lady of Remedy in Kotor.

Hence, it is not surprising that this playful cherub, represented in a dynamic movement, with a body twisted in a shape of letter "S", so much in the spirit of Italian Baroque art, is actually work of an unknown local artist, for one of the churches or smaller private chapels within the homes of wealthy families alongside the coast of the Bay of Kotor.



Figures of angels by Bernardo Tabacco (or his workshop) on the main altar in the the Church of Our Lady of Remedy in Kotor

An additional comment

Since the 12th century one of the favourite cults in Western European Christianity was that of Virgin Mary or Madonna, with especially enhanced her role as a Mother of God. So from the period of the Gothic art and onward the tender relationship between mother and child was emphasised in the artistic representations of Madonna and Jesus as a child. In the Baroque time the opulent compositions with a sculpture of Madonna holding an Infant Jesus were often surrounded by figures of angles pointing to them and cherubs flouting around them amidst clouds and sun rays. Those figures were included in the main composition of Madonna and Infant Jesus contributing to the overall holiness of the scene, and creating an impressive illusionistic effect. The sculptural compositions of this type were placed in niches near the altars of the Baroque Catholic churches, which was also the case in the Boka Buy, too.

For „Antique Art“

Melisa Niketić

*(B.A.A. from the Academy for Art and Restoration
“Palazzo Spinelli”, Florence, Italy,
Departments: Antique furniture restoration and Antiques evaluation)*