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Jean-Guillaume Moitte
The Inebriation

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Attributed to JEAN-GUILLAUME MOITTE
(Paris 1746 – 1810 Paris)

THE INEBRIATION, c. 1790

Terracotta
H. 31 cm (12 ¼ in.), L. 19 cm (7 ½ in.), Pr. 20 cm (7 7/8 in.)

Provenance

Private collection, France.

Reference literature

G. Grammacini, *Jean-Guillaume Moitte (1746-1810). Leben und Werk*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin, 1993, 2 vol.
J. D. Draper, *Playing with Fire: European Terracotta's Models, 1740-1840*, fig. 105.

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The present, highly tactile terracotta group is characteristic of Jean-Guillaume Moitte's engagement with the antique, approached with both fluency and independence. The composition draws upon the celebrated *Suicide of Galatea* (fig. 1), formerly in the Ludovisi collection in Rome, whose arrangement - standing male figure with raised arm and a collapsing female character at his feet - provided a model widely studied by artists in the later eighteenth century. Moitte translated this prototype into a terracotta variant (fig. 2), closely aligned with the ancient source, before reworking the theme with greater freedom in the present composition.

Here, the sculptor concentrates on the physical and emotional state of the female figure, her body yielding under its own weight, while the male counterpart is conceived with a clarity of musculature that reflects careful study from life as well as from antique statuary. The handling of the clay remains alert and responsive: the modelling is firm in the torsos, more fluid in the transitions of flesh, while the drapery is cut with precision, its folds arranged to articulate the underlying structure. These qualities - economy of means, clarity of proportion, and a controlled animation of the surface - are consistent with Moitte's mature practice.

The subject held a particular interest for the artist, who returned to it in a marble version (fig. 3), there shifting the emphasis from pathos towards a more overtly Bacchic register. In doing so, Moitte aligns himself with a current within Neo-classicism that departs from the severity associated with the theories of Johann Joachim Winckelmann or the example of Antonio Canova, favouring instead subjects drawn from a more sensuous and pastoral sphere - fauns, bacchantes and nymphs, treated with a degree of animation and immediacy.

In the present group, Moitte further reconsiders the compositional balance. The inversion of roles seen in the marble - where the female figure assumes an upright stance - has here been resolved through a return to a more stable arrangement, with the woman seated and the centre of gravity lowered. This lends the group a greater coherence, allowing the interaction of the figures to unfold with clarity.

The sculptor's familiarity with canonical antiquities is evident throughout. The back of the bacchante recalls the celebrated *Belvedere Torso* (fig. 4), whose powerful yet elastic musculature Moitte adapts with a more attenuated contour. Such quotations are neither literal nor inert; they are absorbed into a language that remains responsive to observation and to the demands of the composition. A comparable approach may be observed in Moitte's reliefs for the *Arc of Titus* (fig. 5), where the treatment of anatomy, the brisk articulation of extremities, and the characterisation of the heads find close parallels with the present work.

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Moitte's art rests on this capacity to reconcile study of the antique with an instinct for natural form. The present terracotta exemplifies that balance, combining a learned, classical vocabulary with a sensitivity to movement and surface that gives the group its particular vitality.

Born into a family of artists in Paris, Moitte trained at the Académie Royale under Jean-Baptiste Pigalle. He won the Prix de Rome in 1768 and pursued his studies in Italy, where prolonged contact with antique sculpture shaped his artistic formation. On his return to Paris, he secured important royal and public commissions, contributing to major decorative schemes at Versailles, the Panthéon and the Louvre. His career continued without interruption after the Revolution: elected to the Institut, appointed professor at the École des Beaux-Arts, and awarded the Légion d'honneur, he remained a central figure in French sculpture until his death in 1810.

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Fig. 1. Roman copy after a Greek original, *The Suicide of Galatea*, marble, Rome, Palazzo Altemps.



Fig. 2. Jean-Guillaume Moitte, *Paetus and Arria*, terracotta, private collection.



Fig. 2. Back View.

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Fig. 3. Jean-Guillaume Moitte, *Nymph and Satyr*, terracotta, Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland.



Fig. 4. Roman copy after a Greek original,

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Fauna and Bacchante, detail.

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Belvedere Torso, marble, Vatican Museums.



Fig. 5. Jean-Guillaume Moitte, Scene of Roman History after the Titus Arch in Rome, circa 1791, terracotta, Los Angeles, LACMA.

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