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Statue of Narcissus

Roman, Hadrianic, ca. 117-138 A.D.

Marble

Height: 60.2 cm; 23 5/8 in.

Provenance:

Private collection, 18th century (based on restoration techniques);
John Watkins Brett, Esq. (1805-1863) collection, UK;
Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 5-18 April 1864, lot 1110;
Sir Charles Robinson (1824 – 1913) collection, UK;
Alfred Moritz Mond (1868 – 1930), The Lord Melchett collection, UK;
Sotheby's London, *The Melchett Collection of Paintings, Drawings and Antiquities*,
23-24 May 1951, lot 43;
Christopher Norris collection, UK, 1951;
W.H. private collection, Connecticut, 1988;
US private collection, Connecticut, 2004;
US private collection, 2015.

Published:

Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 5-18 April 1864, lot 1110.
Arndt P., Amelung W., eds., *Photographische Einzelaufnahmen Antiker Sculpturen*,
München 1893- 1947, cat. no. 4926.
Strong E., *Catalogue of the Greek and Roman Antiquities in the Possession of the*

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Right Honourable Lord Melchett, P.C., D.Sc., F.R.S., Oxford, 1928, pp. 16-17, no. 10, pl. XVII.

Sotheby's, London, 23-24 May 1951, lot 43.

Vermeule C. C., Von Bothmer D., "Notes on a New Edition of Michaelis: Ancient Marbles in Great Britain, Part Two," in *American Journal of Archaeology* 60, 1956, pp. 337-338.

Zanker P., "'Iste ego sum". Der Naive und der bewusste Narziss," in *Bonner Jahrbücher* 166, 1966, p. 159, fig. 8.

SCHEFOLD K., *Die Göttersage in der klassischen und hellenistischen Kunst*, München, 1981, p. 210, fig. 288.

Rafn B, "Narkissos," in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* (LIMC), vol. VI, Zürich, München, 1992, p.707, no. 43.

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A male youth stands in contrapposto, with his weight on the left leg and the right at ease, and both arms raised and resting atop his head, right hand clasping the wrist of the left. His musculature is well defined, with accentuated pectorals, abdominal muscles, and iliac furrows.

This figure represents Narcissus, the mythical Boeotian hunter, son of the river god Kephisos and the nymph Leiriope. The seer Teiresias foretold a long life for Narcissus but only if he never saw his own face. Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* (III, 339-510) recounts how many young girls and youths fell in love with Narcissus but were rejected, including Echo. One disappointed suitor asked Nemesis the goddess of vengeance to punish Narcissus, which she did by having him fall irrevocably in love with his own reflection, leading to Narcissus' death and metamorphosis into the genus of flower bearing his name, known more commonly as the daffodil.

The sculptural type, thought to be based on an early Hellenistic original of post-Praxitelean and post-Lysippan workmanship, is known from Roman copies, including an example in the Musée du Louvre, Paris, (inv. no. MA435). The gesture of the type borrows from similar poses used for depictions of Apollo and Dionysus—referred to as 'divine repose'—though Narcissus' downward gaze sets him apart from these divine figures. There is also a strigillated sarcophagus in the Galleria Lapidaria, the Vatican Museums (inv. no. 169), with two very closely related images of Narcissus. The pair of Narcissuses on the Vatican sarcophagus to elucidate the original composition: in both cases, Narcissus' downward gaze is met by a reflection of his face, depicted in relief on the ground next to the youth (Figures 1-2). Narcissus is often depicted accompanied by a small figure of Eros, and it is likely that a similar figure may have originally been positioned on the shoulder of the Melchett Narcissus, based on the losses to the shoulder.

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The surviving copies of this type are Hadrianic or Antonine in date. This representation of Narcissus can be seen to have informed contemporary depictions of Antinous, the lover of the emperor Hadrian who drowned in the Nile and was thereafter divinized. In establishing the cult of Antinous, Hadrian used existing symbols and imagery, and Narcissus, with his young, beautiful face, flowing locks, and watery grave, is an apt, haunting echo of the death of Antinous.

The statue survives in excellent condition; it has been carefully repaired and restored with finely worked 18th-19th century marble insertions. The upper 2/3 of the statue, including the arms, head, and torso, down to the left buttock and thigh, are the high-quality work of an ancient Roman sculptor. There are some restored patches in these areas including the fingers of the right hand and the crown of his head. The face has had some careful replacements in marble at the nose, lips/chin and left eye. The torso is in very good condition with some marble restoration in patches on the right upper arm and shoulder, and the left elbow and shoulder. The genitalia are a restoration. The left buttock and thigh are ancient. The base and tree along with the lower part of the statue from the left knee down and the right hip down are matching marble restorations.

References:

Rafn B, "Narkissos," in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* (LIMC), vol. VI, Zürich, München, 1992, pp.703-711.

Schefold K., *Die Göttersage in der klassischen und hellenistischen Kunst*, München, 1981, pp. 209-211.

Zanker P., "'Iste ego sum". Der Naive und der bewusste Narziss," in *Bonner Jahrbücher* 166, 1966, pp. 152-170.

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Figure 1: Galleria Lapidaria, the Vatican Museums, inv. no. 169.



Figure 2: The Vatican Museums Sarcophagus (detail)