



HIRSCHL & ADLER GALLERIES

HIRAM POWERS (1805–1873)

Proserpine

Marble, 15 in. high x 9 1/2 in. wide x 6 in. deep

Signed and dated (on the back): H. POWERS. / 1849

RECORDED (partial list): cf. Lorado Taft, *The History of American Sculpture* (1930), pp. 60, 61 fig. 6, 67–68 // cf. Albert Ten Eyck Gardner, *Yankee Stonecutters: The First American School of Sculpture 1800–1850* (1945), pp. 12, 15 // cf. Samuel A Roberson and William H. Gerdts, “The Greek Slave,” in *The Museum* (New Series) 17 (Winter–Spring, 1965), p. 3 // cf. Wayne Craven, *Sculpture in America* (1968), p. 115 // cf. Sylvia E. Crane, *White Silence: Greenough, Powers, and Crawford, American Sculptors in Nineteenth Century Italy* (1972), pp. 188 illus., 192, 199, 222–24, 237 // cf. William H. Gerdts, *American Neo-Classic Sculpture: The Marble Resurrection* (1973), pp. 31, 52, 93 fig. 81 // cf. Richard P. Wunder, *Hiram Powers: Vermont Sculptor* (1974), pp. 1 fig. 1; 18 figs. 8, 9; 19 figs. 10, 11; 20; 33 // cf. Wayne Craven, “Images of a Nation in Wood, Marble and Bronze: American Sculpture from 1776–1900,” in *200 Years of American Art* (1976), pp. 38 pl. 7, 41, 298 // cf. Richard P. Wunder, *Hiram Powers: Vermont Sculptor, 1805–1873*, vol. II: *Catalogue of Works* (1991), cf. pp. 188–204 no. 222 illus., 189; this version, 239 // cf. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, *The Lure of Italy:*

American Artists and The Italian Experience, 1760–1914, exhib. cat. (1992), pp. 339, 439

EX COLL.: the artist; to William Duckworth (1795–1876), London and Eling, Hampshire, England, then Orchardleigh Place, Frome, Somerset, England; to his son, The Rev. William Arthur Duckworth (1829–1917); to his son, Major Arthur Campbell Duckworth (1870–1948); to his son, Arthur Victor Duckworth (1901–1986), to sale, Christies, New York, October 1, 1987, no 152; to private collection, until the present

On July 22, 1852, Hiram Powers wrote to his patron, William Duckworth (1795–1876), explaining the delay in filling Duckworth’s commission for three marble portrait busts: *Fisher Boy* (formerly collection of Hirschl and Adler Galleries), the *Greek Slave* (with Hirschl and Adler Galleries), and the present *Proserpine*. Powers told Duckworth that the sculptures, “have been ready for more than a month past so far as my own work goes, but the little pedestal for one of them, which was promised me from Carrara ... has not yet arrived.” The sculptor apologized profusely, “I fear you will be out of patience waiting for these works which ought to have been off long ago.” He grumbled that “I should never find much difficulty in keeping my promises if I could depend upon others in this place or country” and he vowed “to make one here” [Florence, Italy] if the much-delayed pedestal was not immediately forthcoming. The story had a happy ending documented in Powers’ letter to Duckworth of August 5. The pedestal had arrived and the busts would be “off for Leghorn [present-day Livorno] day after tomorrow.” He went on to give Duckworth careful instructions for the care of the busts—“don’t let the hand ever touch the busts”—as well as lighting advice—“elevated so as to cast the shadow from the nose as low as the verge of the upper lip” (copies of correspondence on file with Hirschl and Adler Galleries).

Powers was the living embodiment of an American success story: a Vermont farmboy who went on to become an internationally acclaimed artist. Born in Woodstock, Vermont, to Stephen and Sarah Perry Powers, he was among the younger children in a large farming family. In 1817, when he was twelve years old, crop failure and the ensuing inability to meet a promissory note precipitated the loss of the family farm. Stephen and Sarah Powers determined to set out west to Ohio with their four youngest children to join an older son, Ben, who had moved to Cincinnati. After an arduous and interrupted journey, in 1819, Stephen Powers died of malarial fever. The widow and remaining children tried farming again near Cincinnati, but in 1820, Hiram, also suffering from the ill effects of malaria, decided he would never regain his health on the farm. He joined his older brother, Benjamin, in Cincinnati, where he was able to continue his education. Powers worked at a series of odd jobs until arriving in 1823 at Luman Watson's clock and organ factory.

Though he had been hired as a bill collector, his startling and innate mechanical genius was soon recognized and he graduated to a variety of tasks in the factory. Powers was attracted to sculpture and began to study locally with Frederick Eckstein, a German-born sculptor and art teacher, who taught him how to model in clay and cast into plaster. By 1828, Powers was the mechanical supervisor at Dorfeuille's Western Museum, where he was the creative engineer of a moving tableau model of *The Inferno*, in collaboration with Mrs. Frances Trollope, who was touring the United States. The spectacle was an immense success and attracted national notice. In 1829, the young Cincinnati mechanic-turned-artist, fortified with money from local supporters, traveled east, hoping to go to Italy to study and work. His funds, however, stretched no farther than New York, where he was able to see the work of other artists and sculptors before returning to Cincinnati. Back at home, Powers enjoyed the patronage of

Nicholas Longworth, one of the wealthiest men in America, who lived in Cincinnati and loyally supported local artists. Powers married in 1831 and became a father in 1833. In 1834, Nicholas Longworth financed a trip to Washington, D.C., where the artist aimed to build a reputation. He was entirely successful in this goal, modeling a marble bust of President Andrew Jackson that was at the same time naturalistic and ennobling. The Jackson commission established him professionally. During his two-year stay in the nation's capital he produced busts of such noteworthies as John Marshall, John Calhoun, Daniel Webster, Martin Van Buren, and John Quincy Adams.

In 1837, Powers and his family left for Italy. The young American established himself in Florence, welcomed and aided by Horatio Greenough, the first American Neo-Classical sculptor to settle in Italy. Powers remained in Italy for the rest of his life, presiding over a growing American colony of Neo-Classical sculptors who chose to live and work in Florence. He continued to produce portrait busts as well as ideal works, achieving his greatest fame with the *Greek Slave*, first modeled in 1843. Powers's work was a mix of Neo-Classicism and naturalism, appealing to both American and English taste.

Proserpine was Powers's most popular ideal bust. It was initially carved in 1843 in response to a request from a Philadelphia patron, Edward Carey, for a full figure or a bust not to exceed \$500 in cost. Powers did not create a full figure for Carey but chose the option of a bust. He modeled a beautiful and serene young woman, and then, deciding to name her *Proserpine*, added the accessories appropriate to the mythological story. The first *Proserpine* thus emerged from a basket of spring flowers (see Wunder, pp. 187–88 nos. 219–21 illus.). After one replica had been made, Powers realized that it was impractical to attempt to reproduce the time-consuming intricacies of the flower basket arrangement. He designed a second version, bordered at the base with a garland of acanthus

leaves. Powers himself described the circumstances of Proserpine's tale:

She [Proserpine] was the daughter of Jupiter and Ceres and gathering flowers when very young and exceedingly beautiful, was discovered by Pluto who seized her in his arms and bore her down through a neighboring lake to his own infernal dominions. Her mother sought her a long time in vain, but at last found out her fate and besought Jupiter to release her, which request was granted on condition that 'Proserpine' had eaten nothing while with Pluto. But unhappily she had eaten a pomegranate in his garden and so a compromise was made, viz. she should come back to earth half the year and remain with her husband the other half. And so she appears in the bust with a wreath of wheat in bloom on her head and rising out of an acanthus (emblem of immortality) around her waist (as quoted in Wunder, p. 189).

Powers' studio ultimately produced between one and two hundred replicas. In 1849, unable to keep up with the demand, Powers again simplified the design yet again, replacing the acanthus-left garland with a beaded base. The bust was made in full-size, two-thirds size, and half-size variations. The current version, the simplest iteration with no border, is the least common of the three.

In 1852, William Duckworth was a very wealthy Englishman whose family traced its lineage to Richard Duckworth, granted an estate in central Lancashire by Henry VIII in 1538. In 1572, during the reign of Elizabeth I, Thomas Duckworth of Musbury was appointed Greave of the Rossendale Forest, a responsibility customarily granted to a local landowner. The Greave was the chief governing officer of the area. Subsequent Duckworths held this position under Queen Anne in 1707; George II in 1735; and George III in 1775. In 1810, William's father, George Duckworth, purchased an estate of over one thousand acres in Over Darwen, Lancashire, giving him the distinction of being "Lord of the Manor," of Over Darwen in the Parish of Blackburn. Not a title of nobility, but a form of landholding, the phrase indicates wealth and privilege with some rights and responsibilities. William Duckworth was born in Manchester, Lancashire, where his family had been established for centuries, His only brother died childless in 1847, leaving him with a full family inheritance. By 1853, he had moved to Eling,

Hampshire, near Southampton. In July of that year he hosted novelist Elizabeth Gaskell at his home, Beechwood House, on the edge of the New Forest. In 1855, Duckworth purchased the Orchardleigh Estate in eastern Somerset County, near Frome, and commissioned a new house designed by the noted architect Thomas Henry Wyatt (1807–1880). That impressive home, Orchardleigh Place, survives today. Duckworth's direct descendants lived in the house until the death without issue of William's great grandson, Arthur Duckworth in 1986. The house and its contents were sold at auction by Christie's in 1987.

Another line of the Duckworth family descended from William's youngest son, Herbert (1833–1870) provides a link with the artists and writers of the Bloomsbury Circle. In 1867, Herbert Duckworth married Julia Prinsep Jackson. Julia Jackson was the daughter of Maria Pattle Jackson, one of seven Anglo-Indian sisters whose beauty and intellect dazzled Victorian London society in the nineteenth century. Julia's aunt was the pioneering photographer Julia Margaret Pattle Cameron (1815–1879). In 1870, Julia Duckworth was the mother of three young children when Herbert Duckworth died suddenly of a burst appendix. In 1878, the widow married a widower and close college friend of her late husband, Leslie Stephen. The Stephens went on to add four more children to their blended family, Adrian, Thoby, Vanessa and Virginia.

Hiram Powers' *Proserpine* is among the best-known of American nineteenth-century ideal Neo-Classical sculptures. It has been published and discussed in scores of texts in the years since Powers first modeled it in 1843. The present version enjoys the distinction having had only two owners since it left the artist's Florence studio in 1852.

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