HIRAM POWERS (1805–1873)

Bust of the "Greek Slave"

Marble, 15 in. high x 9 5/8 in. wide x 6 in. deep

Signed dated, and inscribed (on the back of truncation): H. POWERS Sculp. 1852

RECORDED (partial list): cf. Lorado Taft, *The History of American Sculpture* (1930), pp. 61–64 // cf. Albert Ten Eyck Gardner, *Yankee Stonecutters: The First American School of Sculpture 1800–1850* (1945), pp. 14, 15, 16, 21, 29, 32, 52, 70 // cf. Samuel A Roberson and William H. Gerdts, "The Greek Slave," in *The Museum* (New Series) 17 (Winter–Spring, 1965) // cf. Wayne Craven, *Sculpture in America* (1968), pp. 115–16 // cf. Sylvia E. Crane, *White Silence: Greenough, Powers, and Crawford, American Sculptors in Nineteenth Century Italy* (1972), pp. 213 illus., 237, 331 // cf. Richard P. Wunder, "The Irascible Hiram Powers," in *The American Art Journal* 4 (November 1972), p. 10 fig. 1 // cf. William H. Gerdts, *American Neo-Classic Sculpture: The Marble Resurrection* (1973), pp. 32, 52 fig. 2, 53 fig. 3 // cf. Wayne Craven, "Images of a Nation in Wood, Marble and Bronze: American Sculpture from 1776–1900," in *200 Years of American Art* (1976), p. 298 // Donald Martin Reynolds, *Hiram Powers and His Ideal Sculpture* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, New York, 1975; reprint ed., New York: Garland Publishing, 1977), p. 1077 // Richard P. Wunder, *Hiram Powers:*

Vermont Sculptor, 1805–1873, vol. II: *Catalogue of Works* (1991), cf. pp. 168–77 no. 203 illus.; this version, 171 no. 16 // cf. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, *The Lure of Italy: American Artists and The Italian Experience, 1760–1914,* exhib. cat. (1992), pp. 73, 79–81, 83, 90, 339, 341, 447

EX COLL.: the artist; to William Duckworth (1795–1876), London and 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), Orchardleigh Park, Frome, Somerset, England; to sale, Christies, New York, October 1, 1987, no. 151 illus.; 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 small portrait busts in marble: *Fisher Boy* (formerly collection of Hirschl and Adler Galleries), *Proserpine* (with Hirschl and Adler Galleries), and the present *Greek Slave*. 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 in his letter 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 Dorfueille'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.

Powers's *Greek Slave* is the signature piece of American Neo-Classical sculpture, a true icon of American art as well as a significant piece of American social history. The artist was inspired in his creation by the Turkish capture and sale of Christian female prisoners during the Greek Revolution. The figure is that of a beautiful, ideal woman in a position of humiliation and sorrow. Her appalling circumstance notwithstanding, she is not degraded, but full of an enormous dignity born of true Christian faith. The whiteness of the marble underlined the slave's chaste and spiritual modesty. Powers

himself, somewhat defensive about how the work's nudity would be received at home, wrote a melodramatic "explanation" of the piece that accompanied the statue when it toured America:

> The Slave has been taken from one of the Greek Islands by the Turks, in the time of the Greek Revolution, the history of which is familiar to all. Her father and mother, and perhaps all her kindred, have been destroyed by her foes, and she alone preserved as a treasure too valuable to be thrown away. She is now among barbarian strangers, under the pressure of a full recollection of the calamitous events which have brought her to her present state; and she stands exposed to the people she abhors, and waits her fate with intense anxiety, tempered indeed by the support of her reliance upon the goodness of God. Gather all the afflictions together and add to them the fortitude and resignation of a Christian, and no room will be left for shame. Such are the circumstances under which the "Greek Slave" is supposed to stand (as quoted in Craven, p. 117).

Powers modeled the figure in clay in his Florence studio between 1842 and 1843 and completed the first marble *Slave* in late 1844. This was sent to London in 1845, where it was installed on its pedestal by the owner, Captain John Grant of Devonshire, in Messrs. Graves' rooms in Pall Mall. Two replicas toured the United States in 1847–49. Captain Grant's initial version of the *Greek Slave* was exhibited at the Crystal Palace Exhibition in London in 1851 to great critical and public acclaim. On the basis of these exhibitions, Powers gained instant fame and established an international reputation.

Powers eventually created six life-size (65-in. high), full-length sculptures: today these can be found at Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (formerly with the Corcoran Museum); the Newark Museum, New Jersey; the Brooklyn Museum, New York; private collection, Raby Castle, Durham, England; England; and one destroyed in England during World War II. The original plaster is in the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C.

In response to the extraordinary success of the *Greek Slave,* Powers began to produce reduced-size sculptures and busts of the *Slave* in 1845 or 1846. The busts were variously with and without arms, and with and without a bottom border of stylized acanthus leaves or beading. The *Greek Slave* bust was second in popularity only to *Proserpine* in Powers' *oeuvre*. Richard Wunder found documentation for over one hundred bust commissions in the sculptor's records. Wunder's two volume study of Powers is a tour-de-force, but since its publication in 1991 the availability of new information and subsequent shifts of ownership mean that some of its catalogue entries require updating and revision.

The marble bust of the *Greek Slave* that William Duckworth commissioned from Hiram Powers is the simplest iteration of the design, without arms or decorative border. In 1852, 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. By 1853, he was living in Eling, Hampshire, near Southampton. In July of that year he hosted novelist Elizabeth Gaskill 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's *Greek Slave* is arguably the best-known example of American nineteenth-century ideal Neo-Classical sculpture. It has been published and discussed in scores of texts in the years since Powers first modeled it in 1841–43. The present version enjoys the distinction having had only two owners since it left the artist's Florence studio in 1852.