

*Ludovico Lombardo, c. 1509 – 1575: Bust of Lucius Junius Brutus
Photograph courtesy of The Los Angeles County Museum of Art*



MUSEUM ASSOCIATES
LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART
TWO ACQUISITIONS

THE COLLECTION OF VENETIAN ART at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art was significantly enhanced in 2005 by the acquisition, through The Ahmanson Foundation, with two major works from that school.

I

The earliest work is a bronze bust of Lucius Junius Brutus by Ludovico Lombardo (c. 1509 – 1575). The artist was descended from a renowned dynasty of Venetian sculptors. He and his brothers were key members of what is now called the School of Recanati, a group of Venetian sculptors whose foundry in Recanati, on the Adriatic coast, produced magnificent bronzes for the basilica of the Santa Casa in Loreto and the cathedral in Milan. Documents from 1550 record a commission to Ludovico to create bronze busts of Brutus, Hadrian and Scipio Africanus for Lorenzo di Piero Ridolfi, a patrician Florentine banker and a collector. The documents relate that Ludovico was making more than one cast of the bust of Brutus; indeed, there are two other known examples: one is in the Louvre, and the other is in the collection of the Prince of Liechtenstein.

The subject, Lucius Junius Brutus – not to be confused with Marcus Brutus, the assassin of Julius Caesar – became one of the first co-consuls of Rome in 509 B.C. after overthrowing the odious tyrant, Tarquin the Proud, who had murdered most of Brutus' family, and whose son had raped Lucretia, one of Brutus' kin. Brutus restores the rule of law to Rome. The severe, introspective expression on the face of the sculpture is in keeping with the defining episode of Brutus' life as consul. When his own sons were drawn into a traitorous conspiracy to restore the Tarquin monarchy, Brutus was obliged to order their execution, a subject that fired the imagination of countless writers and artists, including Jacques-Louis David and Voltaire.

This bust of Brutus may have been inspired by a classical bronze bust (c. 400 – 300 B.C.) in the Capitoline Museum in Rome that traditionally has been called a portrait of Lucius Junius Brutus. Once in the renowned collection of Count Wilhelm Pourtalès, this imposing sculpture achieved fame in 1898, when it was photographed in Berlin in a milestone exhibition of Renaissance art.

Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo, 1727 – 1804: Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery
Photograph courtesy of The Los Angeles County Museum of Art



II

Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo (1727 – 1804) was the son of Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696 – 1770), and his close associate. After his apprenticeship with his father, Domenico followed him in his peripatetic career, from Venice to Germany, back to Venice and on to Madrid. After his father's death there, Domenico returned to Venice and continued in that city the tradition of grandiose compositions and decorations in which his father had excelled. Throughout his life, Domenico was a prolific artist. An indefatigable draughtsman and a skilled engraver, he also produced numerous easel paintings and large fresco decorations.

Until Giambattista's death in 1770, Domenico worked as his father's associate as well as an independent artist. Both artists shared a same vocabulary, thus making the attribution of their respective works arduous at times. The collaboration between father and son reached its apex in 1750 – 1753 while painting the ceiling of the grand staircase of the Würzburg Residenz, in Southern Germany (1750 – 1753). It is also at that time that Domenico produced some of his most achieved easel paintings, among which is the *Woman Taken in Adultery* (1752).

The subject, taken from the Gospel according to St. John (John 8, 3 – 7), relates the episode of a woman taken in adultery and brought by the Pharisees to Jesus in order to test his interpretation of the Mosaic law that called for her death by stoning. Jesus, wrote with his finger on the ground, then professed: "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." The subject had been frequently represented in Baroque and Renaissance art, notably by Rembrandt. Typically Domenico Tiepolo imbues his representation with effective theatricality. A sketchily painted architectural background thrusts the figures forward, as if on a stage. Domenico Tiepolo, particularly apt at rendering clusters of figures contrasts here the anxious Pharisees and agitated attendants on the right with the figure of the woman, both poised and resigned, oblivious of the scandal she has created and resting her hope in Christ's judgment.

This fine work has been known for centuries and its provenance goes back to the years immediately after its execution. For many years, it was paired with another composition, *The Miracle of Christ Healing the Blind Man*, now in the collection of the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, CT.

Over the years, The Ahmanson Foundation, has helped the museum acquire important works of the Venetian school, by Veronese, G. B. Tiepolo, and Sebastiano Ricci among others. The acquisition of these two works gives further depth to the collection of Venetian art at the Los Angeles County Museum.

-J. Patrice Marandel

CHIEF CURATOR, EUROPEAN ART, LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART