

SEATED PANTHER

ROMAN, MIDDLE OF THE 2ND CENTURY A.D. UNDER THE
REIGN OF EMPEROR HADRIAN (117 – 138)

BIGIO ANTICO MARBLE

FRONT LEGS, BASE AND EARS RESTORED IN THE 18TH CENTURY

HEIGHT: 42 CM.

WIDTH: 23 CM.

DEPTH: 35 CM.

PROVENANCE:

*FORMER PRIVATE COLLECTION OF
COUNT XAVIER BRANICKI, CHATEAU
DE MONTRESOR, FRANCE.
IN THE SAME FAMILY SINCE THE EARLY
19TH CENTURY.*



Sculpted in a grey Bigio Antico with almost blue shades, this resting feline is twisting his body in order to observe us, with its vively and smart look.

This rare animal sculpture is made of an also rare material: the Bigio Antico marble. With a very thin stone grain and shades from grey to intense black, it was extracted into Minor Asia quarries¹. Particularly appreciated under the reign of Hadrian, during the 2nd Century A.D., we can find this stone on several examples from the Capitoline museums such as a Centaur (ill. 1) or a male sculpture (ill. 2). It is also a stone frequently used for animal sculptures (ill. 3 and 4).



Ill. 1. Male sculpture, Bigio Antico, Capitoline museums, Roma.

Ill. 2. Centaur, Bigio Antico Capitoline museums, Roma.

¹ G. Borghini, *Marmi antichi*, coll. materiali della Cultura Artistica, De Luca Editori d'Arte, 1997, pp. 158 – 159.



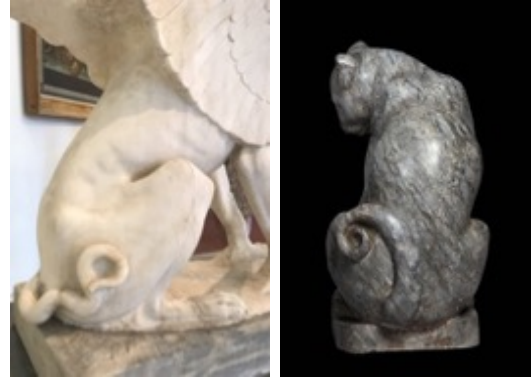


Ill. 3 et 4. A dog and a frog in Bigio Antico.

Multiple details show the accurate observation of the sculptor, who achieved to give a precise realism to his work: eyes with the carved pupils, muzzle with thin mustache, very close to a Roman pavonazzetto marbre trapezophoros in a private French collection (ill. 5), or also its queue winding on its lower back, in the same way than the one of a Sphinge from the archaeological museum of Naples (ill. 6).

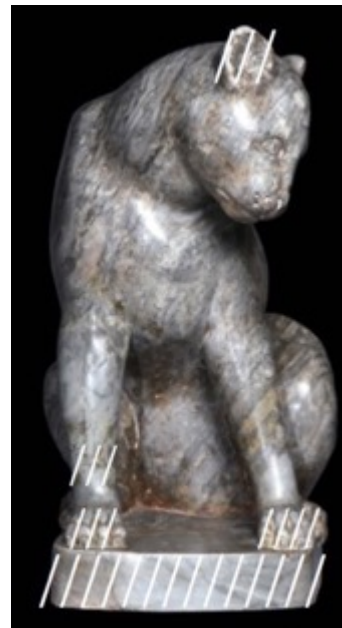


Ill. 5. Pavonazzetto trapezophoros, French private collection.



Ill. 6. Sphinge, Archaeological museum, Napoli.

Such as most of the Roman colored marble animals known, our Panther has been restored on its two frontlegs as well as on its ears. These restorations, dated from the 18th Century, evidences its rich history (ill. 7).



Ill. 7. Restorations of our panther.

The naturalism and vivacity of the sculpture, as well as the rarity of the marble used, confer to our Panther a status of masterpiece. It can be compared to the famous felines made of colored marbles of



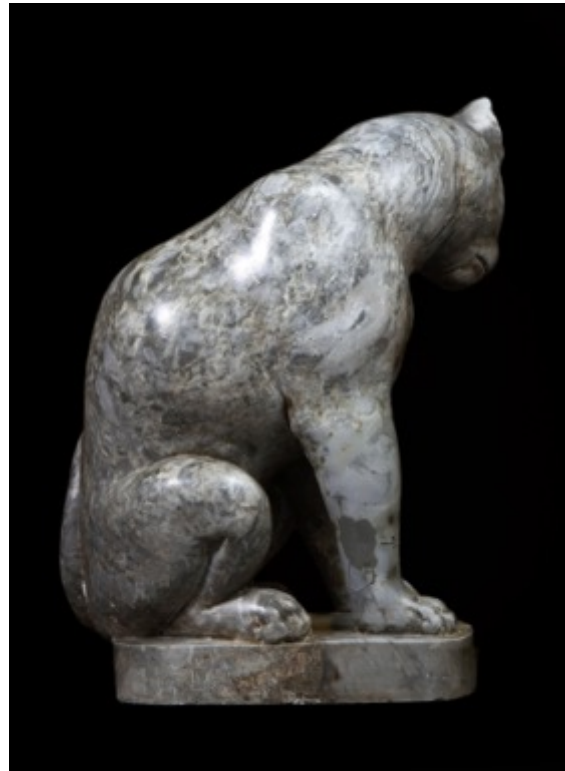
the Hall of Animal in the Vatican Museums, the finest and most well-known examples of Roman animal sculptures (ill. 8 et 9).



Ill. 8. Hall of animal, Pio Clementino museum, Vatican, Italy.



Ill. 9. Jaguar, Hall of animal, Pio Clementino museum, Vatican, Inv. 383.





Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun. Interestingly, a number of works of art assembled by Branicky originally came from the fabled collection of Cardinal Joseph Fesch (1763-1839) – Napoleon Bonaparte's powerful uncle - at Palazzo Falconieri, Rome, which had been dispersed after his death between 1843-45.



Ill. 10 : Château de Montrésor

A Polish-born aristocrat, political exile and patron of the arts, Count Xavier Branicki (1816-1879) was a friend and advisor of the young Prince Louis Bonaparte, the future Napoleon III. Interested in the arts, he spent the first years of his exile in Rome with her sister Sophie, Princess Odescalchi. In 1849, he acquired the Château de Montrésor in the Loire Valley (ill. 10), which became his main residence until his death. Built by the Count d'Anjou in the early 11th century, the ancient fortress took its present form during the Renaissance, at a time when it welcomed the grandfather of Diane de Poitiers, the celebrated favourite of King Henri II.

In the castle, Count Branicki found an ideal stage for the display of his art collection, which included paintings by the Italian Primitives, Filippino Lippi's *The Crossing of the Red Sea*, a Veronese reputedly won at a game of cards against Prince Jérôme Bonaparte, and family portraits by

