

March 2012 OOM by Gail Gresser-Pitsch

Veiled Lady (70.60); c. 1860; Raffaello Monti, sculptor (1818-1881) g357

Marble Sculpture; 21.5", created in Milan, Italy (spellings: Raffaello, Raffello, Raeffaelle; ACE uses first two)



Tour Ideas:

Cherchez la Femme: Women in Art: Inspiration

Come to Your Senses: trompe l'oeil (tromp-LOY) (Reminiscences of 1865 (44.25); The Promenades of Euclid (68.3))

Decorative Arts: Beauty in the Useful: Victorian private galleries, libraries, parlors

The Language of Flowers: Morning Glories

How Was It Made?

Mysteries in the Museum

Any Highlights tour

Activity idea lifted from the ReMix: Create fascinating six word bios about our lady by visitors:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/minneapolisinstituteofarts/sets/72157626400964264/>

Key Points:

One piece of marble

Subtractive process

Implied texture: the illusion of actual textures. Implied texture is used to allow the viewer to enter into the scenario that the artist has created.

The illusion of form beneath transparent drapery was derived from 18th c. Baroque sculpture, but our veiled lady is straight out of Victorian times: Popular, collected and copied, with various “identities”.

The language of flowers

Gallery Label: In Italy during the 1700s, sculptures of veiled figures peaked in popularity, affording artists the chance to demonstrate their ability to delicately carve marble. Nearly two hundred years later, artists revived this technically demanding tradition in reaction to the academic neoclassicism of the early-19th century.

Raffaello Monti is known for marble busts draped in filmy veils such as this one, subtly modeled to suggest feminine allure. The heightened realism and sensuous appeal of 19th-century figures made sculpture once again a fashionable decorative element in upper-middle-class houses.

We don't know her name, but we do know that Monti made a clay model first and then sculpted the marble after his own clay, which was common workshop practice at the time. The clay model hasn't survived, but his Veiled Ladies became so much sought-after that he was busy sculpting variations of her for the rest of his life.

One of many veiled ladies; the public loved this illusion. Many wanted their own copies and Monti reproduced many of these.

MIA Interpretations:

The transparent covering over my face juxtaposes life and death; the veil is a representation of new life and beauty, while the shroud is a symbol of fading beauty and death. (Gallery Label for the Face to Face Exhibition April, 2011(ReMix))

The Veiled Lady is one of numerous versions executed during the '50s. Clearly alluding to a classical portrait bust, especially in the clean sweep of the lower edge, the bust transforms its prototype by the sensual treatment of stone and subject. *The Veiled Lady* (vestal virgin?) captures the perfection of innocence and youth, which, as the dew-fresh morning glories on her crown, will all too soon fade. (Merribell Maddux Parsons, "Raffaello Monti: The Veiled Lady," *The Minneapolis Institute of Arts Bulletin* 59 (1970).

Monti made a series of veiled woman busts, each with different floral headpieces. It is the difference in meaning between morning glories and orange blossoms that brings me to the conclusion that our veiled woman is not a bride, but a young lady.

Sculpture Techniques: Stone Carving

1. **Clay Model**: We do know that Monti made a clay model first and then sculpted the marble after his own clay, which was common workshop practice at the time.
2. **Artistic Technique/Texture**: When you look at this sculpture from a distance, you believe you are seeing a woman's face through a thin fabric veil. It is in fact solid marble. With this piece of trompe l'oeil (tromp-LOY)-French for "fool the eye"-Raffaello Monti makes you think you can see through stone.

How has he done this? Monti was a keen and careful observer and a master with his chisel and mallet, the tools of a stone carver. The top of the head and the shoulders are polished smooth, to reflect light. But where the veil falls across the face, the marble is less polished. It reflects less light, suggesting the texture of fabric.

3. **Tools**: The tools used for stone-carving have remained more or less unchanged since antiquity. A mason's axe is used to cut out the basic shape of the sculpture, which is then roughed out using picks, points and punches struck by a hammer or mallet. Different sizes of tool are used throughout the carving process, each leaving their mark.

Roughing out tools leave deep, uneven grooves whereas flat chisels achieve finer results and are used as a surface finishing tool for sandstone, limestone and marble. A flat chisel struck at an angle of 45 degrees (the 'mason's stroke') leaves a ridged channel, and its edge can be used to define lines. Claw chisels have serrated edges that mean they are capable of rapid but controlled removal of material. Drills are used to excavate the stone, and can also be used to create decorative effects.

4. **Finishing with Pumice**: Further smoothing is achieved using rasps or rifflers (metal tools with rough surfaces) or minerals such as sand or emery (stone grit). Polishes can then be applied to sculpture of fine-grained stone after it has been abraded. Marble and alabaster were polished with pumice, producing a smooth, translucent and reflective surface, though the surface could also be left partially unpolished in order to create a variety of textures.

Biography:

Raffaello Monti studied sculpture at the Imperial Academy with his father, Gaetano Monti of Ravenna (who was also a pupil of Bertel Thorvaldsen: *Ganymede and the Eagle*). They studied under Pompeo Marchesi (*Bust of a Vestal Virgin 1831*).

Monti made his debut early and won the Imperial Academy's Gold Medal for his group entitled *Alexander Taming Bucephalus*. He and other young sculptors soon became

identified as belonging to the *Scuola Lombarda*, a group associated with a reaction against the severity of the neo-classicism that dominated Italian sculpture in the first half of the 19th century. After periods spent working successfully in Vienna (1838-1842) where he enjoyed patronage of the Imperial court, and once again in Milan (1842-1846), he made his first visit to England in 1846, but returned to Italy in 1847 to join the Popular Party and became one of the chief officers of the National Guard. After the disastrous failure of the Risorgimento campaigns of 1848 where the Italian insurgents were defeated by the Austrian army at Custozza, he fled from Italy to England where he was to remain for the rest of his life. Yet, he continued to portray, in his inevitably sentimental style, themes dear to the Italian Risorgimento.

His career in England was extremely successful and prolific. The Great Exhibition of 1851 occurred only a few years after his arrival, and his reputation was largely built on the nine works he exhibited- the largest contribution of any sculptor. His *Eve After the Fall*, awarded a prize medal, was particularly well received, but two other sculptures in the exhibition, the *Circassian Slave* and a *Vestal Virgin* established features that were to become his trade mark: the delicate rendering in solid marble of figures swathed in transparent veils. A *Vestal Virgin*, commissioned in 1847 by the Duke of Devonshire (for his sculpture gallery at Chatsworth) before the exhibition, and the dramatic *The Sleep of Sorrow and the Dream of Joy*, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, are examples of such pieces, some of which became popular through reproduction in Parian ceramic. Parian ware (a type of bisque porcelain prepared in a liquid form and cast in a mould) statuettes and busts based on Monti's designs were produced by Copeland and Wedgwood.

At **the Great Exhibition of 1851**, he showed nine works in marble- the largest contribution of any sculptor-that demonstrate in their variety of theme and treatments the eclectic nature of his production and his understanding of the different idioms of English taste in art. His subjects encompassed the Miltonic nude (*Eve after the Fall*), poetic romance (*Angelica and Medoro*), genre (*The Sister Anglers*), and Orientalism (*A Circassian Slave in the Market Place*; his second veiled statue after the *Veiled Vestal* also exhibited.)

The culmination of Monti's production of statuary on a grand scale was his involvement in the early 1850s with Joseph Paxton's **Crystal Palace Company at Sydenham** in London. In 1852 Paxton, the original designer, began the re-erection of his Crystal Palace on the new site at Sydenham. Presumably as a result of their common connection with the Duke of Devonshire, Paxton gave Monti the commission for a large part of his vast sculptural program for the new Place and park. Monti produced six colossal statues for the upper garden terrace (representing South America, Italy, Spain, Holland and the Zollverein/Prussia), two figurative fountains with figures of the four races of men in the north nave, and a full-scaled polychrome reconstruction of the Parthenon frieze for the Greek court, as well as fountain and cascade figures and a variety of ornamental garden features. Few of these works survived the destruction of the Crystal Palace by fire in 1936.

Monti seemed to have over-stretched himself and before the work was completed was declared bankrupt in 1854. Fortunately, the bankruptcy court allowed him to complete much of the contract instead of ordering the immediate sale of his stock-in-trade.

He exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1853, 1854 and 1860.

Meanwhile, Monti developed a sideline as a dealer in commercially produced Italian sculpture, acquiring 37 crudely finished pieces so that he could improve and resell them. About 20 of these 'statues and busts by modern Italian sculptors, to which the last finish has been given under Monti's eye' were sold at Christie's on 22 June 1855, together with 24 of the sculptor's original works.

After the Sydenham project there was marked a change in the direction of Monti's work toward more collaborative projects and increasingly to commissions for ornamental sculpture on a small scale. In his later career, he worked principally as a designer for silver ware and the decorative arts. In spite of this commercial activity the sculptor was unable to resolve his financial problems; he passed the last years of his life in poverty and eventually was compelled to even sell his tools.

For context of collectors of the time:

1. Victorian homes

A Victorian house from this period was idealistically neatly divided in rooms, with public and private space carefully separated. The Parlor was the most important room in a home and was the showcase for the homeowners- a marker of social status; where guests were entertained. A bare room was considered to be in poor taste, so every surface was filled with objects that reflected the owner's interests and aspirations.

2. The MIA's Kiss of Victory (1878-1881); Sir Alfred Gilbert (British, 1854-1934) (73.32); currently in the same gallery

As a private commission, this sculpture was also intended to be seen close up in an intimate space such as a drawing room or entrance hall.

3. The Role of Statuary in 1870

In 1870 many of the most famous and successful of modern artists were sculptors. These "new men" were poets as much as sculptors, "who will hold us . . . by the cunning of some hidden meaning, some suggestive grace, by I know not what of allurements by which we are beckoned into other and ideal worlds". (5)

Then every connoisseur adorned his private gallery, library, or parlor with some elegant production of the chisel. In the gloom of the fashionably dark interiors of the day these white figures and portrait busts loomed up stark and cold with a whiteness of polar purity in dramatic contrast to the surrounding red plush portieres and ebonized woodwork. The white marble itself was one of the most important and desirable qualities of sculpture, linking modern works with the ancient glory of Greece and the grandeur of Rome.

The sentiment for the stone was perhaps only slightly outweighed by the heavy indulgence in sentimentalism and melodrama in the subjects chosen to be represented. Victims of all kinds prisoned in Carrara marble fed the insatiable Victorian appetite for pathos. The Infant Corpse, the Shipwrecked Mother, the Wounded Indian, and the White Captive were all rewarded with ready tears. The "breathing marble" preserved in countless portrait busts memories of departed friends. The sculptors were perhaps the favorite artists of the time because their works were so suitable for those twin Victorian sanctums the Parlor and the Cemetery.

4. The Business Side of Being a "successful" sculptor

The trick was to produce a figure with popular appeal and have it repeated over and over again in marble for as many customers as could be found. These copies, selling for substantial sums, provided fat profits. The production of statuary became a lucrative business when placed on this mass-production basis. With low overhead, cheap labor, and many customers eager for sentiment and Carrara marble, the sculptors were in an enviable economic position. Very few had the strength to resist the pitfalls of easy success and place the serious pursuit of their art before all other considerations. In this they were victims, one likes to believe, of the current notions of their time rather than of personal predilection. It was imperative to succeed, and success appeared to be a matter of sales volume.

5. MIA Victorian "parlor" objects:

(2000.167a,b) étagère c. 1850

(51.41a,b) Bust of George Washington (draped in toga) c. 1853

6. The General Language of Flowers as Communication

Beginning in the 18th century, rumors spread across Europe of a secret flower language being practiced in Turkey. This is largely a result of the letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who, while writing home to England from the Turkish Embassy, discussed "a mysterious language of love and gallantry". In a letter to a friend, she described the use of objects to communicate, calling it a "Turkish love letter". She wrote of this language: "There is no color, no flower, no weed, no fruit, herb, pebble, or feather that has not a verse belonging to it: and you may quarrel, reproach, or send letters of passion, friendship, or civility, or even of news, without ever inking your fingers". (7)

Over the course of the century, the rumors became interest, and then practice. Until, by the early 19th century, the development of a formalized Language of Flowers had occurred. This took the form of a dictionary of symbolic meanings assigned to individual flowers, which thus became generally known to society as a method of silent communication.

Although the legendary associations and religious meanings of flower symbolism have existed for centuries, the use of the symbolic meaning of flowers to represent emotions was developed to a high degree during Victorian times.

7. The Victorian Language of Flowers

The Veiled Lady was made in the time where the language of flowers was used as communication to send coded messages, allowing individuals to express feelings which otherwise could not be spoken. Due to the strict protocol of the times, emotions, wishes and thoughts were not openly expressed between men and women. Instead, an elaborate language based on flower symbolism was developed.

Gifts of either single flowers or bouquets conveyed clear messages to the recipient. This language most commonly communicated through tussie-mussies, arose during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901) when the small bouquets became a fashion accessory.

Some of this symbolism still lives on today: Red roses still imply passionate, romantic love; pink roses a lesser affection; white roses suggest virtue and yellow roses still stand for friendship or devotion.

During the Victorian era, flowers adorned nearly everything--hair, clothing, jewelry, home decor, china plates, stationary, wallpaper, furniture and more. This language of flowers was further "spoken" in women's embroidery of the times as a method through which women could silently express themselves.

Even the scents of flowers had their own meanings in the language of flowers. For example, a scented handkerchief might be given in place of actual flowers.

8. Victorian Floriography Handbooks

With the increasing complexity of flower symbolism, floriography handbooks were written to guide the understanding of the symbolic meaning of flowers.

The first book written on flower symbolism in modern times was *Le Language des Fleurs* by Madame Charlotte de la Tour in 1819. The most popular book on flower symbolism, which remains a prominent resource today, is Kate Greenaway's *Language of Flowers* (1884). During the reign of Queen Victoria many more were published, including the truly comprehensive meaning of 100 flowers in John Ingram's *Flora Symbolica* signifying the utter importance of floral etiquette - after all,

how embarrassing would it be if you gave the object of your desires a yellow carnation, signifying rejection, and expected some loving in return.

Monti made a series of veiled woman busts, each with different floral headpieces. After consulting some of the floriography handbooks, I've concluded the "code" in the veiled lady is in the flowers. It is the difference in meaning between morning glories and orange blossoms that brings me to the conclusion that our veiled woman is not a bride, but a young lady.

9. Morning glories: symbolized affection. (8)

The flower symbolism most associated with the morning glory is affection: fleeting and renewable.

As the name implies morning glory flowers, which are funnel-shaped, open in the morning allowing them to be pollinated by hummingbirds, butterflies, bees, other daytime insects and birds. The flower typically lasts for a single morning and dies in the afternoon making it a representation of the sometimes fleeting nature of affection.

However, the vine produces new blossoms every day during its growth season, so they also represent the renewable nature of love.

Because the morning glory flower blooms and dies within a single day, it may also mortality. On grave marker statuary they may also signify mortality, mourning, the shortness of life, or resurrection.

Orange blossoms sculpted on The Bride (1873, by Monti- photo below) symbolized chastity, innocence, eternal love, marriage, and fruitfulness. (It is one of the rare plants that blooms and bears fruit at the same time, thus becoming symbolic of fruitfulness).

The influence became so indoctrinated into the culture that the phrase "to gather orange blossoms" took the meaning "to seek a wife."

Orange blossoms may also suggest that "your purity equals your loveliness".

Veiled Vestal ca 1848, Raffaello Monti's first recorded veiled statue; originally purchased by the sixth duke of Devonshire; shown at the Great Exhibition of 1851, lead to a number of imitations.



Our Veiled Lady is modeled after this sculpture.

The illusion of form beneath transparent drapery was derived from 18th c. Baroque sculpture, particularly Antonio Corradini's Veiled Truth:



Corradini's Veiled Truth, 1750

A Circassian Slave in the Marketplace, 1850; Raeffaele Monti; exhibited at the Great Exhibition of 1851. This is his second recorded veiled woman.



The Bride, 1873; Raffaello Monti; Parian (porcelain); height 38 cm, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK

She has a wreath of **orange-blossom flowers** tied at center back with a bow.

The Bride was derived from the head of a full-length marble of a kneeling Veiled Vestal of 1847, which was exhibited at the Great Exhibition in 1851, and was acquired by the Duke of Devonshire.

The parian version was first issued as a 2 guinea prize to Ceramic and Crystal Palace Art-Union subscribers in 1861.



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Siimilar Style from a classmate of Monti:

Veiled Virgin, c. 1856, Rome; Giovanni Strazza (1818-1875), Carrera marble.
Now located: Presentation Convent, Cathedral Square, St. John's, Newfoundland.

(their notes): This statue was executed in flawless Carrera marble by the renowned Italian sculptor Giovanni Strazza (1818-1875) in Rome. Other examples of Strazza's work may be seen in the Vatican Museums and at the Archbishop's Palace in Milan. The St. John's Veiled Virgin was described by *The Newfoundlander* (4 December 1856) as the second such work by Strazza on the subject of a veiled woman. There are similar marble busts depicting veiled women in Canada, the United States, Ireland and England. None, however, are as meticulously crafted as the Newfoundland Veiled Virgin by Strazza: the facial features and the braids in the hair are clearly visible through the stone veil.

During the mid-19th century, Italian nationalism was on the rise, and there was a resurgence in nationalism in the Italian arts and music. Strazza's Veiled Virgin is of a piece with this Risorgimento school of Italian nationalist art. The image of a veiled woman was a favorite subject of whole school of Strazza's fellow sculptors, with Pietro Rossi and Rafaello Monti the most important among them. Often, the image of the veiled woman was intended to embody Italia, in the same manner in which Britannia symbolized England, Hibernia symbolized Ireland, and Lady Liberty symbolized the United States.

On 4 December 1856 Bishop John Thomas Mullock recorded in his diary: "Received safely from Rome, a beautiful statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary in marble, by Strazza. The face is veiled, and the figure and features are all seen. It is a perfect gem of art."



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