

A SECRÉTAIRE BY THEODOR COMMER
WITH PANELS CONTAINING WAX FIGURES
BY CASPAR BERNHARD HARDY









Alvar González-Palacios

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con cere di Caspar Bernhard Hardy*

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FRONT COVER

Theodor Commer (1773 - 1853), *Secrétaire*.
Caspar Bernhard Hardy (1726 -1819), *wax figures*.

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WITH PANELS CONTAINING WAX FIGURES
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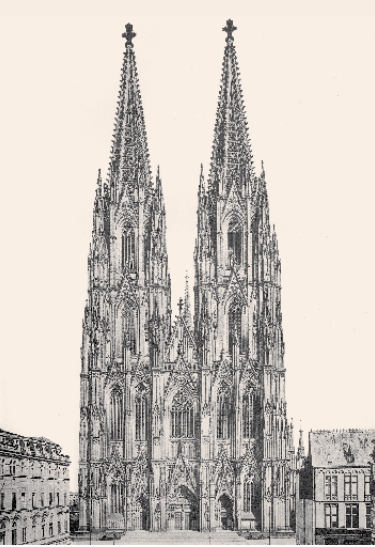
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Alvar González-Palacios

A SECRÉTAIRE
BY THEODOR COMMER
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CONTAINING WAX
FIGURES BY CASPAR
BERNHARD HARDY



Caspar Bernhard Hardy was born in Cologne in 1726 and studied painting and modelling in the city. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1754, by which time his wax figures had already achieved a certain renown, and he was later appointed to the post of Vicar of the Cathedral (fig. 1). But his interests were by no means confined to the field of wax figure modelling. He was also skilled in painting on enamel, in engraving shells, in working with glass and in casting bronze. Cologne Cathedral has a gilded metal crucifix attributed to Hardy and based on a model by Gabriel Grupello (1644-1730)¹. Two allegorical bronze groups by Hardy, inscribed *Ars Artis Imago* and *Ars Imago Vitae*, attracted the attention of Prince Archbishop Max Friedrich who invited him to Bonn in 1770², but the groups' present whereabouts are unknown. Hardy achieved equally varied results in the field of optics and mechanics, devoting his time chiefly to producing microscopes, some of which were ordered by the courts of Paris and Saint Petersburg. He made globes, armillary spheres, concave mirrors and lenses, all of which were much admired by the travellers of his day. He even made a major scientific discovery, using one of his microscopes to identify a new species of rotifer, a micro-organism found in plankton.

Caspar Bernhard Hardy lived with his brother Wilhelm, who appears to have assisted him in his artistic and scientific ventures. Goethe, who met Hardy in 1815, acquired

eight of his wax figures. These once graced Goethe's home but they are now on display in the Goethe Nationalmuseum in Schloss Tierfurt in Weimar. This is how Goethe describes Hardy's work: "[Hardy] devoted his energies to a very pleasing genre, modelling half-figures in wax almost in the round, depicting the Seasons and other subjects of the kind: the joyful gardener with her fruit and vegetables, the ageing peasant saying grace, the pious man on this deathbed and so on. These figures are set in glass cases about a foot high and they are made of coloured wax suitable to the figures' nature. They deserve to be shown in some museum in Cologne for they clearly demonstrate that here we are in the city of Rubens, in the Lower Rhine, where colour has always dominated and exalted works of art". A curious circumstance allows us to know exactly what Hardy thought the divine Goethe looked like. An interesting portrait in meticulously carved and beautifully polished white marble bearing the name Johann Wolfgang Goethe, seen in profile from the right, was sold at auction by Kunst- und Auktionshaus Wilhelm M. Döbritz in Frankfurt on 2nd July 2005. This fine effigy is signed Bernhard Kasper Hardy, spelled out in full, and dated 1814, and is, I believe, the sculptor's only signed and dated work known to us³ (figs. 2, 3, 4).

The leading light in Cologne's cultural circles at the time was a collector and patron

1. Cologne Cathedral.

2, 3, 4. Caspar Bernhard Hardy, *Portrait of Goethe*, marble. Private collection.

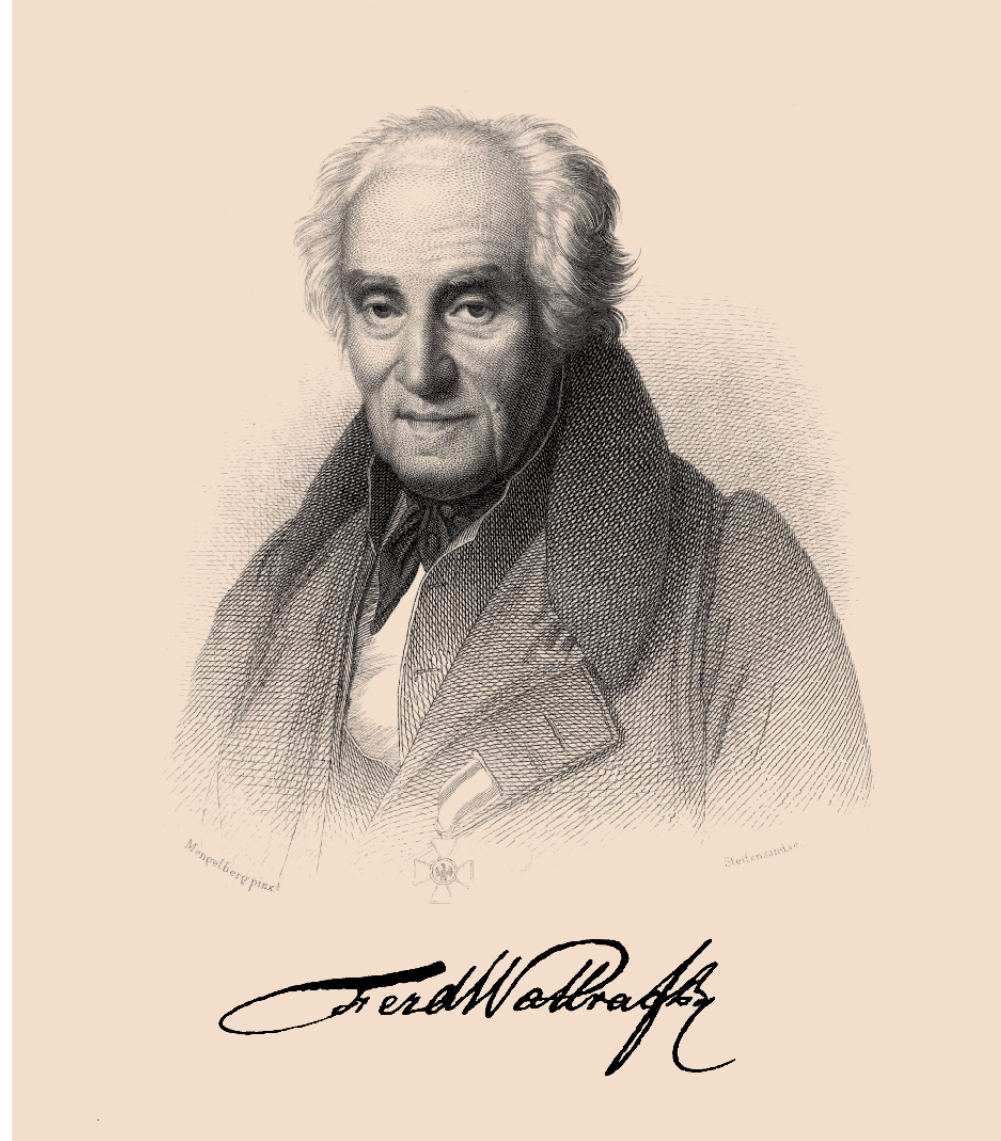


5. Theodor Commer
(1773 - 1853),
Secrétaire,
cherrywood, mahogany,
gilded brass,
cm 225 x 145 x 52,5;
Caspar Bernhard Hardy
(1726 - 1819),
wax figures.



“... They deserve to be shown in some museum in Cologne for they clearly demonstrate that here we are in the city of Rubens, in the Lower Rhine, where colour has always dominated and exalted works of art”

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe



6. Xaver Steifensand after E. Mengelberg, Portrait of Ferdinand Franz Wallraf.

of the arts named Franz Ferdinand Wallraf (1748–1824)⁴, who was one of Hardy's closest acquaintances and a fervent admirer of his work (fig. 6). Wallraf even went as far as to pen a lengthy *Ode* in honour of his friend, and that *Ode* is still the chief source of information for this polyhedric artist's output today. Letters from several of Hardy's numerous contemporaries who visited his workshop inform us of the reputation that his work enjoyed and of his prestigious clientele. In 1805, for example, they mention the names of the Empress Joséphine and of the Duke of Orléans, Louis Philippe, future King of the French.

Swedish philologist and orientalist Jacob Jonas Björnståhl (1731–79) writes in 1774 of a wax portrait of the King of Prussia that was an excellent likeness and a portrait of Frederick the Great (1712–86) sold at auction by Lempertz in Cologne on 11 May 2012 reflects Hardy's work⁵, while Cologne collector Joseph Gregor Lang (1755–1834) was even more lyrical in his praise.

Hardy died in his home town in 1819. He was only buried after several days had elapsed since his death in accordance with the instructions he left in his extremely detailed will, because he was terrified at the thought of being buried alive.

THE WAXES

Hardy composed his waxworks in moderately-sized panels generally designed to form allegorical or emblematic cycles. His subject matter included the Four Seasons, the Four Ages of Woman, the Five Senses, the Vices, the Virtues, the Arts and the Sciences, as well as a group of works depicting genre subjects which were of significance in their own right but which, when combined with others, could be interpreted as belonging to an allegorical cycle. These groups, in their turn, were completely arbitrary in the sense that a figure could be interpreted in various ways, thus allowing it to belong to more than one allegorical cycle. This occasionally makes it difficult to assign a single, comprehensive title to some of his work.

More rarely, we find portraits of famous figures (Isaac Newton, Benjamin Franklin (fig. 8)) and even a self-portrait (see B.10, p. 104), or figures from ancient history and mythology (Cleopatra, Diana (fig. 10), Seneca, Judith, Artemisia) along with a number of religious works. Hardy, a devout Catholic, must have been as obsessed as the majority of his contemporaries with the figure of Voltaire, whom he depicted not



7. Berlin Porcelain Manufactory, modelled by F. E. Meyer, Bust of Voltaire, biscuit.

8. Caspar Bernhard Hardy, Portrait of Benjamin Franklin.

FOLLOWING PAGES

9. Caspar Bernhard Hardy, Boar Assailed by Greyhounds.

10. Caspar Bernhard Hardy, Diana.







only as he was but also - possibly without being aware of what he was doing - as the archetype of the old, emaciated thinker illuminated by an inner light.

Hardy's subjects, whether isolated or part of a cycle, tend on the whole to offer an allegorical panorama of moral states illustrating human types, in accordance with the celebrated principles of Hardy's contemporary Johann Kaspar Lávater (1741–1801) who used physiognomy to draft an aesthetic classification of human temperaments. In his *Physiognomische Fragmente*, published between 1775 and 1778, Lávater puts forward theories which we would have difficulty in sustaining today and which are not devoid of a certain prejudice: "Of those who concern themselves with physiognomy, physically well-formed men are the best". Maxims of this kind appear in many ways to anticipate the theories of Lombroso and the perverse racial prejudice of the 20th century.

The Four Seasons seem to have been one of Hardy's most successful cycles. The *Ode* written by Wallraf in 1799 suggests that Hardy may have found his inspiration for the composition of Spring in the *Idylls* of the poet Salomon Gessner (1730–88) published in 1756 and praised by Lávater. For Summer, on the other hand, as Goethe himself underscored, Hardy made a very original iconographical choice, abandoning the traditional attribute of ears of corn and depicting in their stead a woman selling vegetables, a category more in keeping with the taste of Flemish and Dutch painting. In that connection, it may be worth mentioning the illustrations of Daniel Chodowiecki (1726–1801), a painter of Polish origin who worked in Berlin and whose illustrations display a certain affinity with Hardy's wax figures⁶ (fig. 12).



11. Caspar Bernhard Hardy, *The Young Fishmonger*.

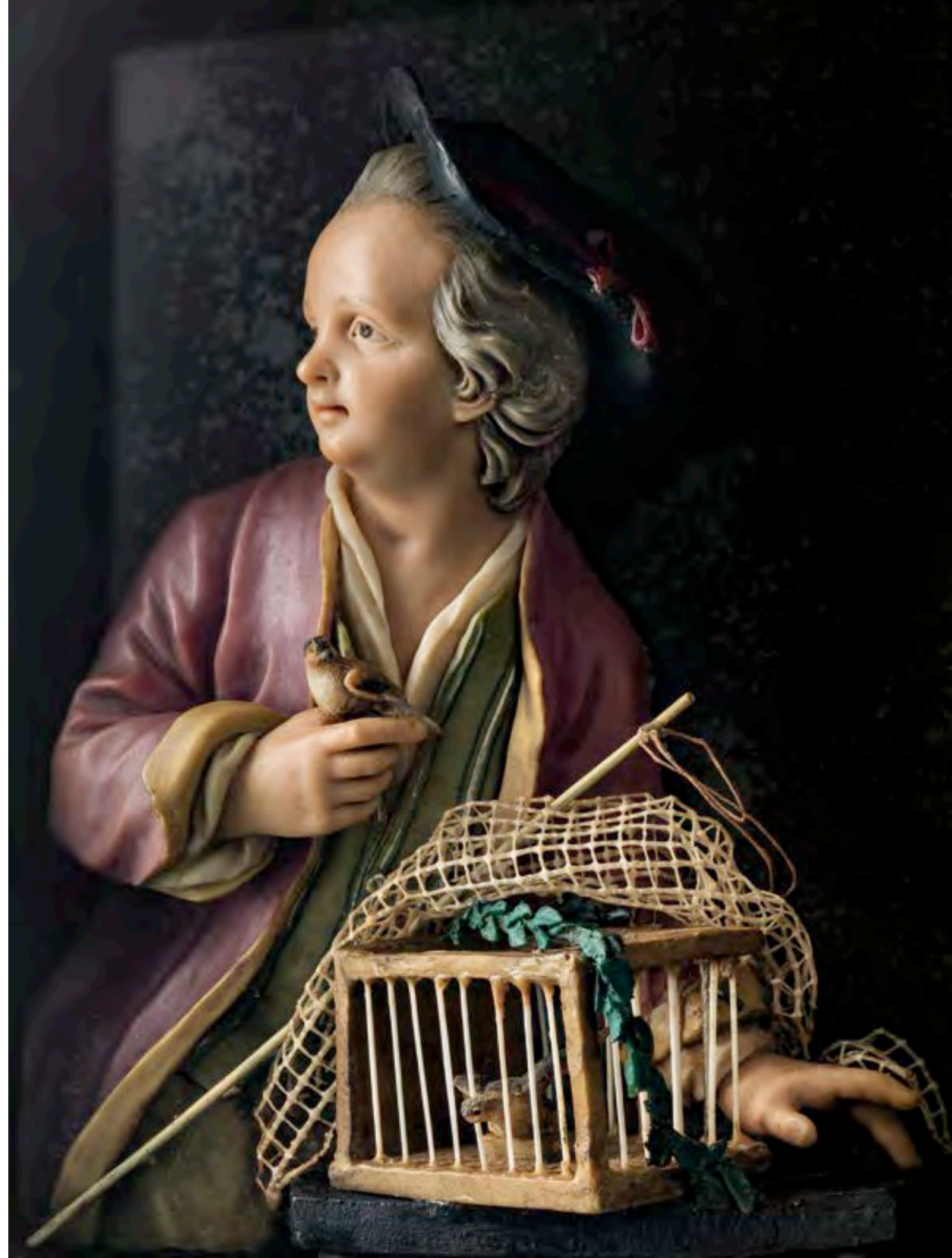
12. Daniel Chodowiecki, *A Painter's Cabinet*.



13. Géraud Vidal
after P. Davesne,
Les cerises.

14. Caspar Bernhard
Hardy, *Child with a Cage
and a Small Bird.*

Hardy depicted The Ages of Woman in four wax figures which Wallraf tells us were once again inspired by a literary work, the *Briefe an Lina* published in several stages by Sophie von La Roche in the last quarter of the 18th century. The figure of the girl appears to echo the subject of a print by Géraud Vidal, a French engraver (1742–1801) who specialised in the reproduction of contemporary paintings (fig. 13), while Hardy seems to hark back to Dutch painting in a broad sense in the figure of the old lady reading, for whom it is possible to draw several parallels with a composition by Nicolaes Maes (fig. 15). And we encounter the echo of other painters influenced in







- | | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|---|---|
| 1. Boar Assailed by Greyhounds (B.26) | 13. The Magician (A.6) | 25. Spring (A.19) | 37. The Mathematician (A.14) |
| 2. Portrait of a Prince Archbishop (B.7) | 14. The Gypsy Woman (A.7) | 26. The Drummer (A.21) | 38. The Baby Jesus as Redeemer (A.9) |
| 3. Diana (B.20) | 15. Winter (A.20) | 27. Artemisia (A.8) | 39. The Shepherdess (A.10) |
| 4. The Jew (A.22) | 16. Savoyard with a Marmot (B.15) | 28. The Innkeeper (A.15) | 40. Child with a Cage and a Small Bird (B.12) |
| 5. The Frugal Peasant (A.1) | 17. The Mother (A.17) | 29. Old Woman with a Basket of Bread (B.25) | 41. Old Woman Reading (B.24) |
| 6. The Old Miser Woman (B.21) | 18. The Drummer (B.16) | 30. The Frugal Peasant (B.3) | 42. Portrait of Benjamin Franklin (B.4) |
| 7. Mary Magdalen (A.2) | 19. The Girl Lute Player (B.17) | 31. Young Woman with a Dog (B.18) | 43. The Sculptor (A.11) |
| 8. St. Bruno (A.4) | 20. The Grandmother (A.18) | 32. The Old Miser Woman (B.22) | 44. The Mulatto Drummer (B.14) |
| 9. The Patient Sick Man (A.5) | 21. Girl with a Basket (A.16) | 33. Old Woman Reading (B.23) | 45. The Girl Lute Player (A.12) |
| 10. The Jew (B.1) | 22. Figure of an Old Man (B.2) | 34. The Mother (B.19) | 46. Sick Man Praying (B.11) |
| 11. Portrait of a Gentleman in Priest's Attire,
Hardy's self-portrait (?) (B.10) | 23. The Young Fishmonger (B.13) | 35. Boar Assailed by Greyhounds (A.3) | 47. The Dying Man (B.6) |
| 12. The Old Peasant with His Hands Together (B.9) | 24. The Dying Man (Rousseau) (B.8) | 36. The Patient Sick Man (B.5) | 48. St. John of Nepomuk (A.23) |

the numbers in parentheses are related to the lists A and B.

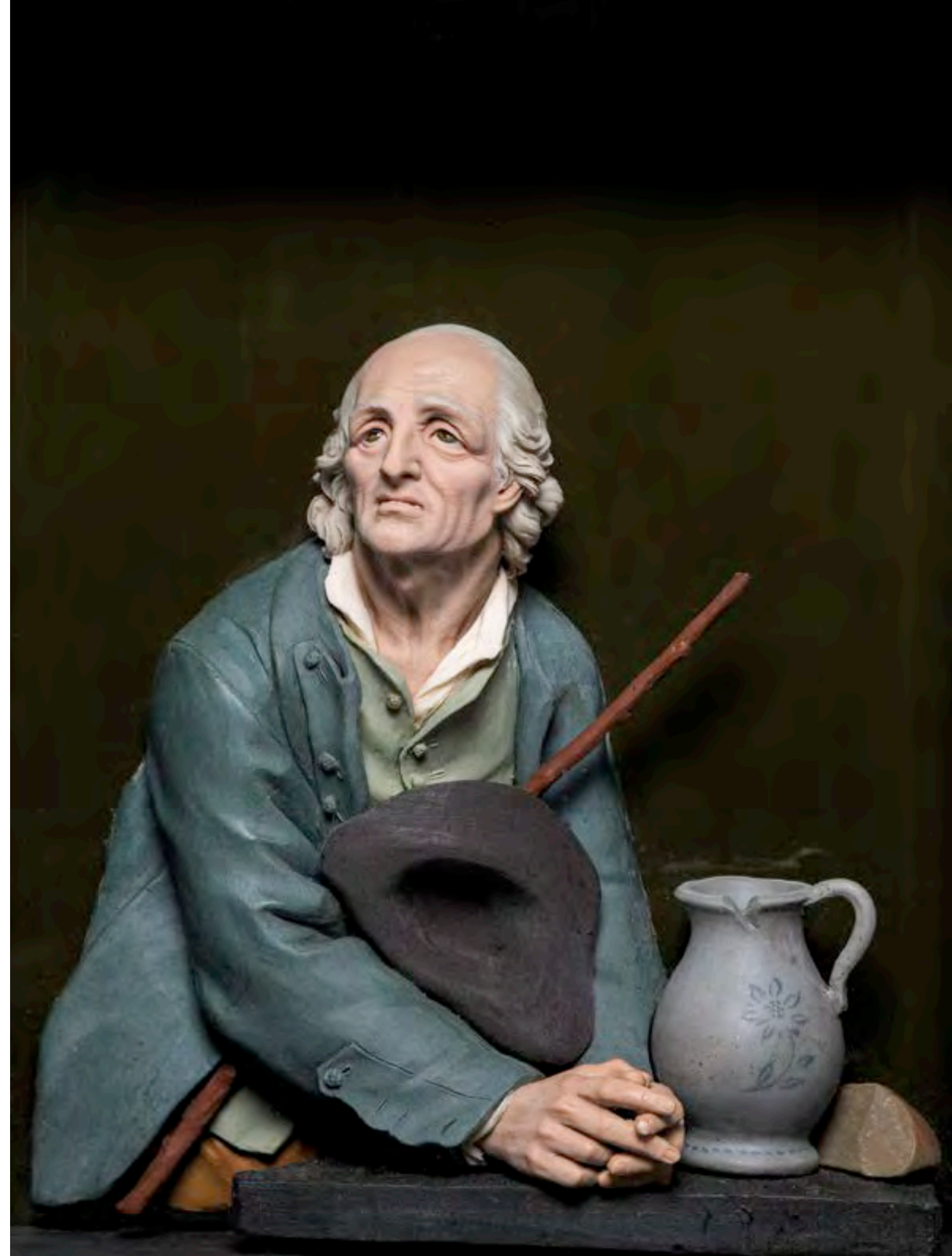
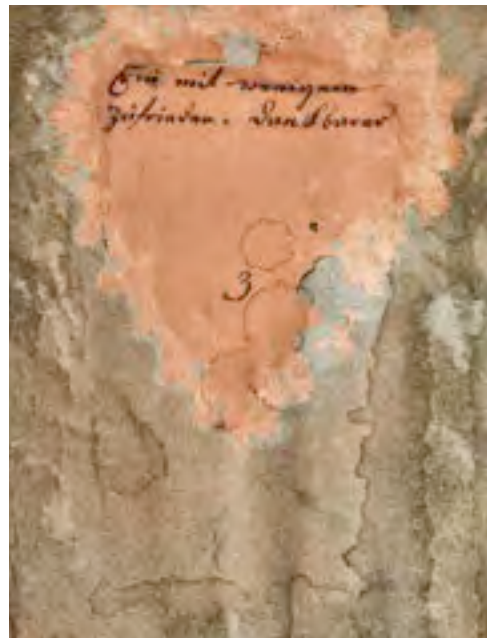
THE FRUGAL PEASANT

DIMENSIONS cm 22.3 X 18.4

ON THE LABEL *Ein mit Weinigem zufrieden Dankbarer 3*
(the words *Nr. 6* also appear on the back)

An old man with his hands together, gazing at the sky, dressed in humble attire has the appearance of an allegory of patience or faith.

We can clearly detect the influence of Greuze's painting here.





BOAR ASSAILED BY GREYHOUNDS

DIMENSIONS cm 23.4 X 18.5

ON THE LABEL Ein wildes Schwein mit zwei Hetz Hunden 8

The glass plate supporting the wax figure has trees painted on it.

No. B.26 is another version of the same composition.



ST. BRUNO

DIMENSIONS cm 23.5 X 19

ON THE LABEL Der wahre Fromme in dem Bildniß des H. Bruno Stifter der Carthaeuser 11 (the figure 8 also appears on the back)

St. Bruno, founder of the Carthusian Order, was born in Cologne in around 1030, lived in France and died in Italy. He was summoned to Rome by Pope Urban II, his erstwhile pupil in France, and established a Charterhouse in the Baths of Diocletian, the *Certosa di Roma*. He died in 1101 but was not canonised until 1623. Several elements in Hardy's work are typical of the saint's iconography (the skull, an arborescent crucifix, an olive branch). St. Bruno is generally portrayed wearing the white Carthusian habit rather than the grey habit that he sports here¹. His bald head and strong features are reminiscent of an ancient prototype, the Slave of Ripa.

¹L. Réau, *Iconographie de l'Art Chrétien*, Paris, 1958, III/1, pp. 249-250.

THE PATIENT SICK MAN

DIMENSIONS cm 22.8 X 19

ON THE LABEL *Ein mit heftigen Schmerzen gequält und geduldig ausharrender Kranker 12*
(the figure 9 also appears on the back)

The figure's face is reminiscent of the model used for St. Bruno in no. A.4 and for the portrait of the Prince Archbishop at no. B.7.

