



LULLO | PAMPOULIDES

LULLO | PAMPOULIDES

VINCENZO GEMITO
1852 - 1929

PHILOSOPHER
1920

Bronze and pink granite herm bust on an ebonised wood column; signed to the reverse of the shoulder 'GemiTo 1920'
51 cm high, the bust

PROVENANCE

Acquired from the artist (or possibly commissioned?) by Bianca and Giuseppe Falchi in 1920/1; Bianca and Giuseppe Falchi collection, Naples;
And by descent until sold Pandolfini, Florence, 20 November 2024, lot 83.

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

O.Morisani, *Vita di Gemito*, Naples, 1936
A.Schettini, *Gemito*, Milan, 1944
Spoleto, Palazzo Racani Arroni, *Temi di Vincenzo Gemito*, 2Jul.-3 Spet. 1989, B.Mantura ed.
M.S.de Martinis, *Gemito*, Rome, 1993
K.McArthur & K.Ganz, *Vincenzo Gemito (1852-1929) Drawings & Sculpture in Naples and Rome*, New York, 2000
F.Licht, *A Chisel and a Brush, Vincenzo Gemito (1852-1929)/ Antonio Mancini (1852-1930) Italian Art from the Gilgore Collection*, Naples, 2000
E.Bianchi, 'Gemito, Vincenzo,' in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Vol.53, 2000
G.Nocentini, *Vincenzo Gemito: sculture e disegni*, Arezzo, 2001
Naples, Museo Nazionale e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, *Gemito, dalla scultura al disegno*, 10 Sept.-15 Nov.2020, J.L.Champion, M.T.Contarini & C.Romano eds.
Pescara, Museo dell'Ottocento, *Antonio Mancini/ Vincenzo Gemito*, 14Oct.2023-11 Mar.2024, M.Carrera, C.Sisi & I.Valente eds.

Seven years after Vincenzo Gemito's death in 1929, his biographer, Ottavio Morisani, became the first to recount that the sculptor's bronze *Philosopher* was conceived in late 1882/ early 1883 as a proof by the artist that there was someone alive capable of modelling with equal vigour a bust in the style of the ancient Roman bronze *Seneca* (fig.1).¹

Gemito came to know the *Seneca* from his frequent visits to the Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples, and it was one of many works that he and his artist friends tirelessly studied in their early careers. The result of the exercise that Morisani referred to - which is the bronze today in the Museo Nazionale e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples (fig.2) - was so successful that, with it, Gemito won a gold medal for sculpture at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1900. Yet, despite the high acclaim it received, Gemito abandoned the composition until 1919.

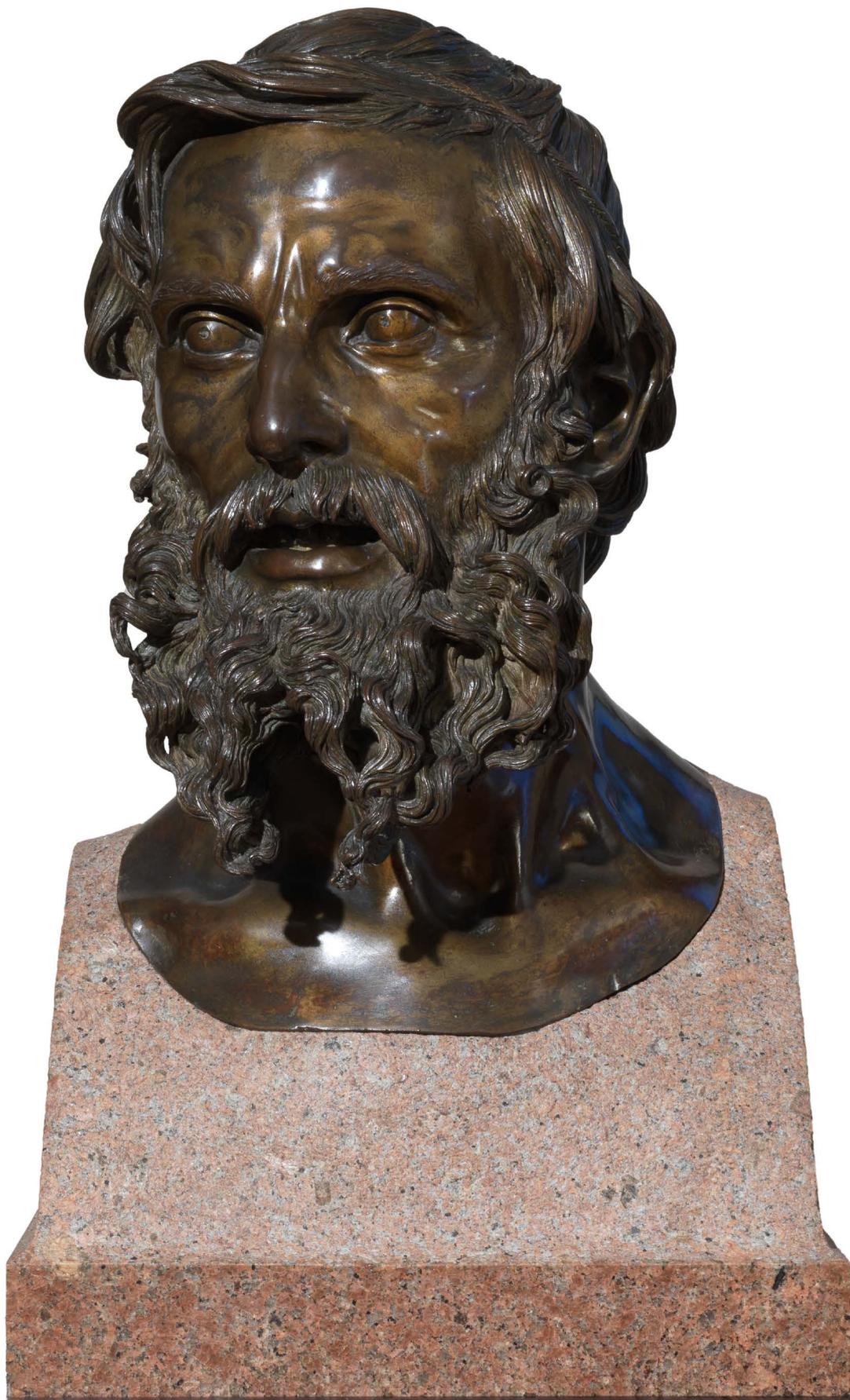
The version presented here - cast just one year later - and on the international market for the very first time, is arguably the finest known to have ever appeared on the market, as well as the most unique: unlike the innumerable other versions, this one is signed and dated '1920' and is presented on a pink granite herm as well as its original ebonised wood pedestal rather than an integral bronze socle.

BIOGRAPHY

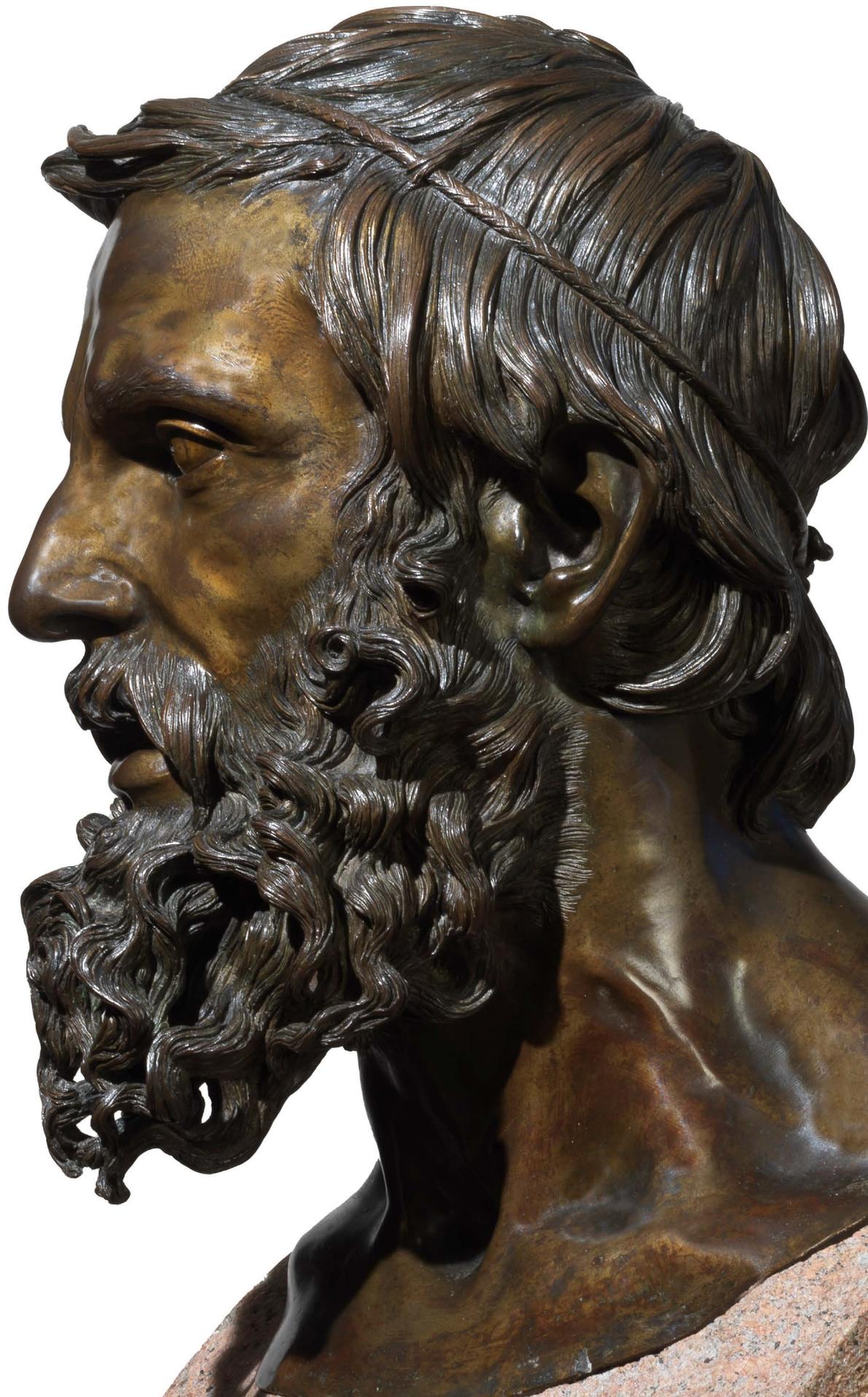
Gemito's biography perhaps best explains the artist's complex life, his influences and the near 40-year gap between the conception one of the most defining images of his career and its subsequent commercialisation.

On July 17th, 1852 a one day old child was abandoned at the Foundling Hospital of Naples. It was christened Vincenzo Genito but a clerical error led to him being called *Gemito* instead.

¹Morisani, *op.cit.*, p.139







LULLO | PAMPOULIDES

Days later, he was adopted by Giuseppa Baratta and Giuseppe Bes. By the age of six, Gemito was selling coffee on the streets of Naples to help his newly widowed foster mother make a living. He took on additional jobs as a tailor before becoming an apprentice to two Neapolitan artists.² At the age of 12 he enrolled into the Academy of Fine Arts in Naples where he met his lifelong friend Antonio Mancini and where a terracotta he later modelled received such praise that it was purchased by the King Vittorio Emanuele II and presented to the Royal Palace of Capodimonte, Naples.

In 1877, aged 25, Gemito travelled to Paris determined to make his mark. That same year he caused a scandal at the Salon by presenting his life-size figure of the *Fisherboy*, today in the Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence. The realism - or, 'ugliness' as many thought of it at the time - of the naked boy precariously balanced on a rock and removing a hook from the fish's mouth was shocking and unlike anything the Parisian masses had seen until this point, yet it drew in countless visitors, newspaper critics, as well as fame and commissions for the artist.³

Despite this, Gemito remained poor, and with his muse (and girlfriend), Mathilde Duffaud suffering from tuberculosis, he hurriedly returned to Naples in January 1880. Duffaud died the following April and thus began the first of Gemito's many psychological crises. A brief moment of respite came within a year after he met Anna Cutolo, who was modelling for Domenico Morelli, and quickly became his model, his muse and - in 1882 - his wife.

Anna was profoundly devoted to her husband and took great care of him during the terrible years in which he lived locked in a room, either sitting in a corner or lying on the floor. When moments of lucidity came, he drew and on occasions even modelled in wax and terracotta. On two very rare occasions he even picked up the sculptor's chisel to carve two marble portraits of his wife.

Between 1883 and 1886, with the help of his Belgian patron the Baron de Mesnil, he set up his own foundry on the via Mergellina, Naples with the aim of reviving the lost-wax process for casting bronzes. It was with this backdrop that Gemito set to work on the first version of the *Philosopher*, which was based on his step-father and assistant in the foundry, Francesco Jadiccico, known as 'Masto Ciccio' (fig.3).

In 1887 Gemito was commissioned to create a full-length marble statue of Charles V for the façade of the Palazzo Reale in Naples. The combination of carving in marble, which was his least preferred medium, and the fact he was committed to carving the portrait of a historical figure rather than a work of art based on a living person, caused him enormous heartache, and resulted in his second - and most profound - breakdown that would last nearly 22 years.

During that time, he lived in self-imposed isolation in his apartment, though he also spent periods of confinement in a psychiatric hospital suffering from delirium and hallucinations. Though he continued working, he abandoned his sculptor's tools and concentrated on drawing hundreds of unique and powerful works on paper that somehow kept him in contact with reality.

We have little evidence as to the effect on him of Anna's death in 1906, but we know that he emerged from his sequestration in 1909. As Alfredo Schettini - another of his biographers - observed:

In quel periodo, nel 1909, Gemito in tuba e in finanziaria, con la rosetta della Legion d'onore all'occhiello, la pipetta di radica in una mano e nell'altra il bastone che aveva per manico un piede di bronzo dell'« Acquaiuolo », usciva la prima volta dopo i diciott'anni di volontaria prigionia, per recarsi in visita ufficiale dai duchi d'Aosta nella Reggia di Capodimonte.
(*op.cit.*, 1944, p.16)⁴

² F.Walker, 'Vincenzo Gemito and His Bust of Verdi' in *Music and Letters*, Vol.30, No.1, Jan.1949, p.44.

³ The same accusation of 'ugliness' would be levelled again four years later against Edgar Degas, when in 1881 he exhibited his *Petite Danseuse* aged 14.

⁴ 'In that period, in 1909, Gemito, wearing a top hat and a frock coat, with the rosette of the Legion of Honour in his buttonhole, a briar pipe in one hand and in the other a stick with a bronze foot of the *Acquaiuolo* as a handle, went

LULLO | PAMPOULIDES

Thereafter, he returned to work and focused once more on the modelling of waxes and terracottas, as well as the casting of small-scale works in silver, gold and bronze, always in reverence to the great masters of Antiquity. This was a period of intense activity in which he exhibited works nationally - and internationally - and created some of his greatest pieces, including, his breathtaking masterpiece the *Medusa* (1911) today in the J.P.Getty Museum, Malibu (fig.4).

Gemito died in Naples on March 1st, 1929. He had been working assiduously in his foundry the days before and, when he eventually returned home, fell into a deep delirium from which he never awoke.

THE PHILOSOPHER

In creating the first version of the *Philosopher* in 1883, Gemito achieved two ambitions: firstly, he paid tribute to the artistic verisimilitude achieved by ancient sculptors and, secondly, created a timeless vision of his paternal figure. And while the original bronze bore an undeniable similarity to Masto Ciccio, one cannot exclude the possibility that the image might also have been self-referential. His nearly contemporary *Self-portrait* from 1886 (fig.5) shows Gemito with a similar hairstyle, long unkempt beard and a deeply penetrating gaze, and if one looks at the drawings he executed in later life (for example, the version today in the Art Institute of Chicago, fig.6), he presented himself as the archetypal artist with similarly long, dishevelled hair and beard, rather like Leonardo or, more pertinently, the writers and thinkers of the ancient world (think, Diogenes, Socrates or Homer)...

The image of the ancient thinker-type with the Masto Ciccio-like (or Gemitian) physical attributes described above is one that recurred throughout the sculptor's career as can be seen in his allegories of *Winter* and *Time* both dating from 1914 and both formerly in the collection of Giuseppina Gemito, Rome (figs.7-8); as well as his *Prophet* dating from 1917 in the collection of Intesa Sanpaolo Bank (fig.9). Beyond the obvious compositional similarities common to all of them was the depiction of the humanistic thinker simultaneously intense, freethinking, rational and the creator of truths.

The 1883 bronze in Naples (fig.2) and those that were produced from 1919 onwards when Gemito returned to working on the composition have been broadly categorised as type-1 and type-2 compositions,⁵ and they diverge from each other in very subtle ways: the former are more vigorously modelled in the wax and less finished in the bronze, especially around the eyes and beard, whereas the latter - of which the one under discussion here is almost certainly the finest cast - display a greater degree of after working in the cold metal. Only a silvered bronze *Philosopher* (fig.10) sold in Sotheby's, Paris⁶ comes close to the present cast in terms of refinement and, as a result, the two are the unquestionable outliers when compared to the general workshop productions of the time. However, where the present cast is truly unique in the artist's body of work is in its presentation: no other work displays the same combination of a bronze component set into another material⁷, in this case a pink granite herm. To date, no documentary evidence has been found explaining this unusual choice but, evidently, it was a clear intention by the artist to set this cast apart from everything else he produced.

As mentioned above, Gemito had a dual purpose in the conception of the *Philosopher* but, more precisely, it became his treatise on the art of sculpture that honoured the ancient sculptors of Greece and Rome (as well as Michelangelo and Benvenuto Cellini), while also allowing him to fashion a permanent snapshot of Neapolitan life. With this work, as with many others in his oeuvre, he gave dignity to the impoverished and deprived he saw living on the streets of Naples and like a photographer, captured moments in time, passing looks, vulnerabilities,

out for the first time after eighteen years of voluntary imprisonment, to pay an official visit to the Dukes of Aosta in the Royal Palace of Capodimonte.'

⁵and while other early casts must have been produced while Gemito's foundry was active between 1883-6, only one type-1 version is securely documented (though its original wax still survives in the collection of the Baroness De Mesnil in Spa; McArthur and Ganz, *op.cit.*, p.28).

⁶5 November 2014, lot 390, where it was erroneously dated to 1883, when it was clearly a post-1919 cast

⁷It is likely that the inspiration for this compositional idiosyncrasy came from the Pompeian bronze portrait of *Caecilius Iocundus* in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples that, likewise, is set into a rectangular marble herm and that Gemito would have known from his visits to the museum.

LULLO | PAMPOULIDES

frailties and love. With the exception of the infamous *Charles V*, which precipitated his mental collapse, all his allegorical compositions derived from portraits of real people. Thus, his *Neptune*, *Water vendor*, *Time*, *Winter* and *Philosopher*, along with every named sitter, are the product of the assiduous observation of the world within which he lived, though always seen through the lens of the Masters from antiquity.

GIUSEPPE FALCHI

Little is known about Giuseppe Falchi's life, however, the existence of a group of artworks by Gemito hailing from his collection demonstrate that there was more than a casual relationship between collector and sculptor. In total 12 works on paper by Gemito were sold by Falchi's heirs at Pandolfini, Florence 24 May 2023, with six bronzes by Gemito - including the present bust - sold by them at the same auction house on 20 November 2024. Among them, an ink and pencil portrait depicting Falchi (fig.11) dating from 1921 presents us with the earliest evidence of the two having known each other, with a further drawing of a young woman dating from 1925 (monogrammed 'GF') giving us the latest known date.

According to Pandolfini's introductory essay from the second sale (p.60), a further connection between artist and patron was Nera Ponsiglione Cicada, who they described as being a 'relative' of Falchi's and a model to Gemito. In fact, according to the 2023/4 *Mancini Gemito* exhibition catalogue (*op.cit.*, nos.114 &115, pp.278-281), new evidence shows that Nera was actually the sister of Bianca Falchi, Giuseppe Falchi's wife.

Nera had certainly posed for Gemito in 1920 when he executed a very fine portrait of her (sold at Pandolfini, Florence 24 May 2023, lot 82), and it was likely she that introduced her sister and brother-in-law to Gemito which led to them commissioning from him two spectacular watercolours in 1921 (figs.12 and 13). A photograph taken in Gemito's studio at the time shows Bianca posing for this same portrait (fig.14)

To date, no documentary evidence has been found that proves the Falchis commissioned the *Philosopher* from Gemito - though this possibility cannot be excluded - but it is plausible that they spotted the spectacular bust during one of their sittings in his studio and subsequently acquired it.

LULLO | PAMPOULIDES

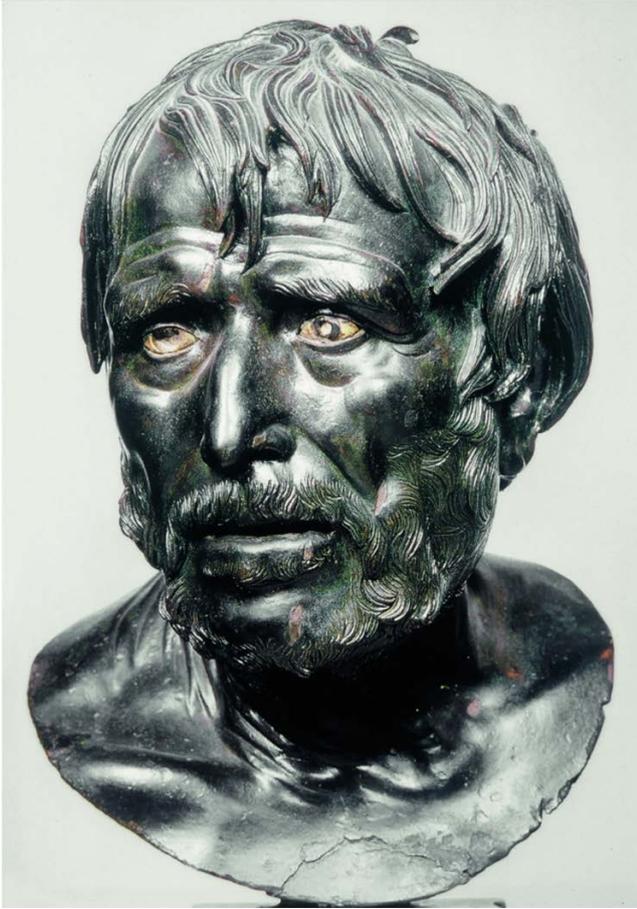


Fig.1 Rome, 1st century BCE/ AD, *Pseudo-Seneca*
Bronze, from the Villa of the Papyri,
Herculaneum, now Museo Archeologico
Nazionale, Naples

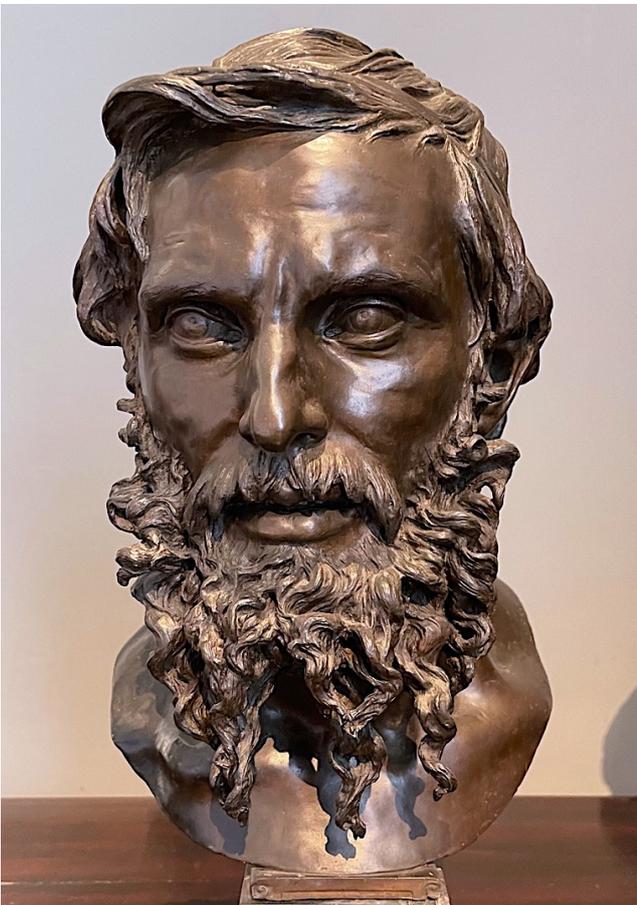


Fig.2 Vincenzo Gemito, *Philosopher*, 1883
Bronze, Museo Nazionale e Real Bosco di
Capodimonte, Naples

LULLO | PAMPOULIDES



Fig.3 Vincenzo Gemito, *Masto Ciccio*, c.1883 (detail)
Private collection

LULLO | PAMPOULIDES



(above)
Fig.4 Vincenzo Gemito, *Medusa*, 1911
Partially gilded silver, J.P.Getty Museum, Malibu



(left)
The reverse

LULLO | PAMPOULIDES



Fig.5 Vincenzo Gemito, *Self- portrait*, 1886
Pencil, charcoal, gouache on card, Intesa
Sanpaolo Collection, Naples

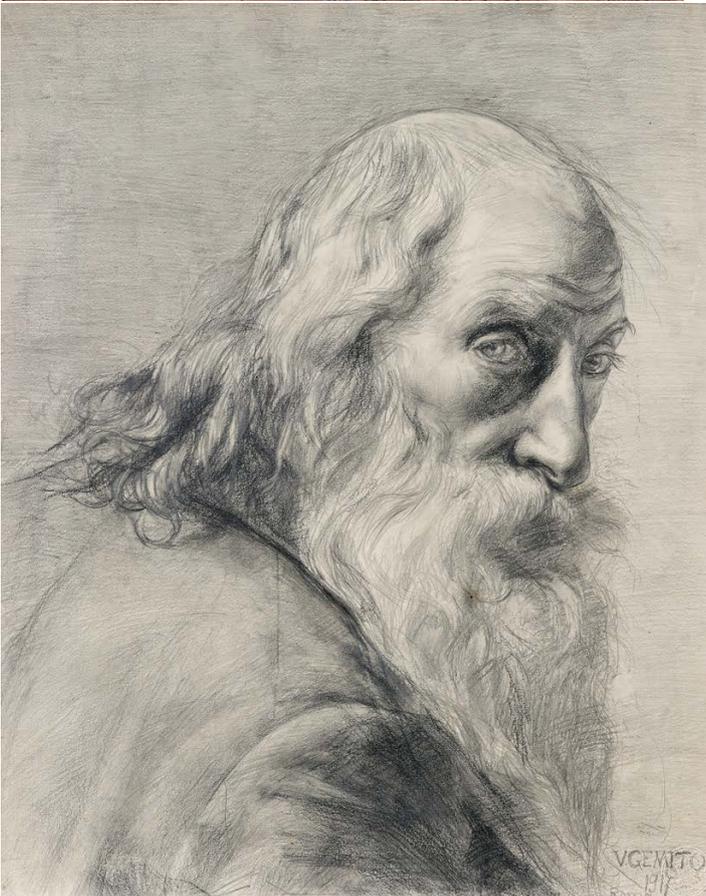
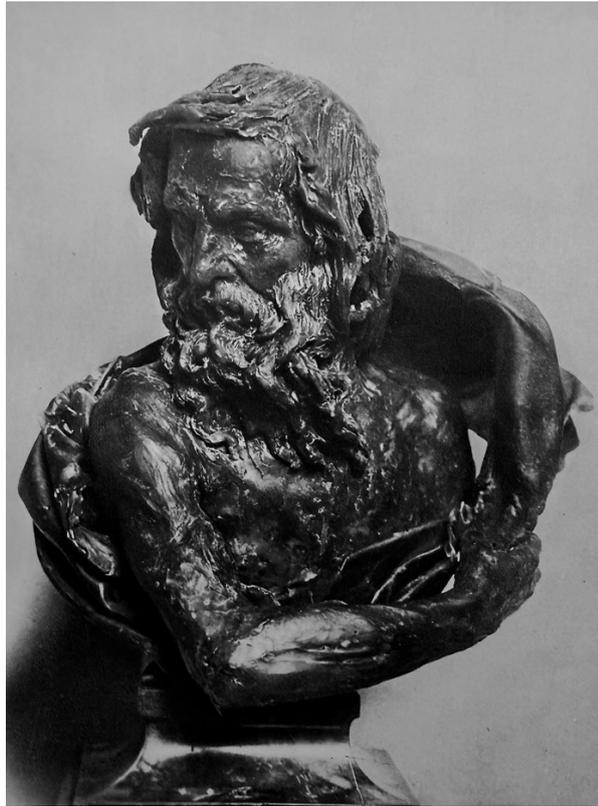


Fig.6 Vincenzo Gemito, *Self-portrait*, 1917
Pencil and charcoal on card,
Art Institute of Chicago

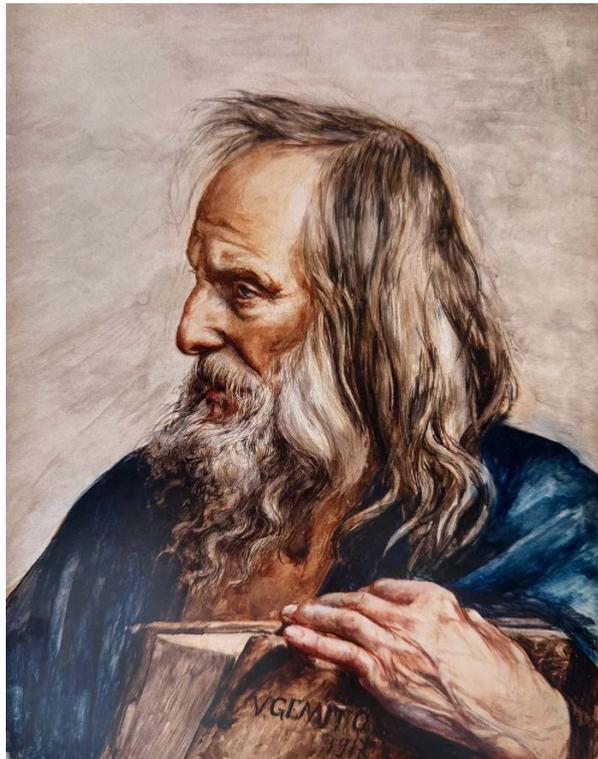
LULLO | PAMPOULIDES



(top left)
Fig.7 Vincenzo Gemito, *Winter*, 1914
Bronze, formerly collection of Giuseppina Gemito, Rome



(top right)
Fig.8 Vincenzo Gemito, *Time*, 1914
Wax, formerly collection of Giuseppina Gemito, Rome



(bottom right)
Fig.9 Vincenzo Gemito, *Prophet*, 1917
Pen, pencil, watercolour and tempera on parchment, Intesa Sanpaolo Bank, Italy



Fig.10 Vincenzo Gemito, *Philosopher*, after 1919
Silvered bronze, formerly Sotheby's Paris, 5 November 2014, lot 390

LULLO | PAMPOULIDES



Fig.11 Vincenzo Gemito, *Giuseppe Falchi*, 1921
Ink and pencil on paper, dedicated 'All'ottimo Falchi', signed and dated
Sold Pandolfini, Florence, 24 May 2023, lot 78



Fig.12 Vincenzo Gemito, *Giuseppe Falchi*, 1921
Pencil, chalk, watercolour and tempera on paper, private collection, Italy



Fig.13 Vincenzo Gemito, *Bianca Falchi*, 1921
Pencil, chalk, watercolour and tempera on paper, private collection, Italy



Fig.14 Bianca Falchi posing for Vincenzo Gemito, 1921