

# COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Jan Baptist Xavery

(Antwerp 1697 – 1742 The Hague)

*Bacchus & Pan*

c. 1730

Boxwood

Height: 23.5 cm.; 9 2/8 in

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## Provenance

Probably Jan Snellen collection, Rotterdam;

His daughter, Margaretha Cornelia Snellen, wife of F. van Vollenhoven;

Their son, Jan Snellen van Vollenhoven;

Certainly his son, Samuel Constant Snellen van Vollenhoven comte Gabriel de La Rochefoucauld;

His daughter, Anne de La Rochefoucauld, marquise de Amodio and marquis John de Amodio;

Her husband by descent;

Sotheby's, Paris, 14 May 2014, lot 12.

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## Literature

Europäische Barockplastik am Niederrhein - Grupello und seine Zeit, exh. cat., Düsseldorf, Kunstmuseum, 1971.

F. Scholten, 'Het portret van Don Luis da Cunha door Jan Baptist Xavery (1737)', Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum, 42, n° 2, 1994, pp. 107-119.

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These exquisite small scale boxwood carvings of Pan and Bacchus were carved by Jan Baptist Xavery, who was court sculptor to Prince William IV of Orange Nassau. The present statuettes compare closely with a handful of other virtuoso statuettes made by Xavery. The Bacchus is near identical to another rendering of the figure in limewood by Xavery, monogrammed and dated J:B:X:1729, in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (inv. no. A. 18-1948). Both figures find a strong parallel in the ivory statuettes of a Nymph and Satyr signed and dated by the artist J:B:Xavery.1729.F in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (inv. no. BK-NM-1968). It would appear that Xavery focused on such small scale statuettes in boxwood, limewood and ivory circa 1728-1730, since another pair of boxwood figures of Meleager and Amphitrite in the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, are monogrammed and dated I:B:X:1728.

Such statuettes could be admired by collectors in the privacy of their own cabinets and share a certain stylistic and conceptual affinity with ivories produced by Balthasar Permoser (1651-1732): see the superb figures of Autumn and Winter from Harewood House, dating to circa 1722, which were sold by Daniel Katz in 2016 and are now in the Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig. There is also a certain similarity to the bronzes statuettes made by the great Florentine sculptor Massimiliano Soldani-Benzi (1656-1740) in the early 18th century (and subsequently turned into Doccia models). Compare with the Bacchus sold in these rooms on 4 December 2013, lot 125. Xavery's Bacchus and Pan likewise belong to a sophisticated late Baroque world in which collectors admired virtuoso small scale sculptures of gods and other mythological characters. However, whereas Soldani's Bacchus derives from Sansovino's model in the Bargello, Xavery's references an ancient model known in an example in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (inv. no. I156) and another in the Staatliche Museen, Berlin (inv. no. Sk 87). The figure of Pan may be partly inspired by the group of Pan with a youth and panpipes from the Farnese collection, now in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Naples (inv. no. 6329).

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Jan Baptist Xavery was the son of the Antwerp sculptor Albertus Xavery (1664–1728), who was probably his first teacher. Xavery entered the studio of Michiel van der Voort I, where he remained until moving in 1719 to Vienna, from where he travelled to Italy. He returned in 1721 and settled in The Hague, where, in 1725, he became a member of the Confrerie Pictura, the painters' guild. In the same year he married Maria Christina Robart, and the couple had two sons: the painter Frans Xavery, who became a master in 1768, and the painter Jacob Xavery IV (1736–after 1779).

In 1729 Jan Baptist Xavery became Court Sculptor to Prince William IV of Orange Nassau. He received many official commissions, such as the busts of William IV and his wife Anna of Hanover (The Hague, Mauritshuis), as well as the décor of the City Hall and Huis Ten Bosch palace. He was a remarkably versatile artist. His marble bust of Don Luis da Cunha, ambassador of Portugal to Paris (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. BK-1994-3) illustrates his talent as a portraitist, and he produced religious decorations for the St Bavo church in Haarlem. As discussed above, Xavery distinguished himself with his refined small-scale works in ivory or wood.

The old label still visible under the figure of Bacchus indicates that the pair formed part of the Snellen van Vollenhoven collection. They might have belonged to Jan Snellen (1711-1787), an art dealer and collector in Rotterdam. His great grandson Samuel Constant Snellen van Vollenhoven (1816-1880), director of the Leiden Natural History Museum, sold a large part of the collection in 1876.