‘The History of a Motif’[1]

Julius Lange (trans. Karl Johns)

What follows is a biography, not of a human being, but of an artistic motif. We pursue it from the cradle to the grave, a life that lasted approximately four hundred years. It had its delicate childhood when it first appeared weak and anxious when it was not yet apparent whether it had a future. It comes out into the world, efficiently achieves something and in that way attracts attention. We sense that it possesses a force capable of great deeds lacking neither in abundance nor brilliance. Yet time passes for a motif just as it does for a human being. The spirit of the time that generated and bore it was succeeded by others and shunted aside. It reaches an age when its effectiveness continues to recede. At the end, nothing of it is heard any more. It must have died and been buried in silence without our being able to say where and when this occurred.

It is possible to object that this is speaking metaphorically. What is a motif? It after all does not exist like a living human being.

It is probably not possible to define in a universally valid way what a motif actually is. It is something that art affectionately extracts from the world of lines, forms, colours and sounds because it discovers a particular significance, effect or a unique expression in it. The example we are here referring to is a particular stance of the human body. But everything else that it might also be cannot I believe, be defined in advance since the genius of art lies precisely in recognizing, adopting, sometimes along the side of the road, and then refining in the way a diamond might be cut to maximize its light. There is something telling in this, something that can in certain circumstances almost assume the status of a typical characteristic but always remains fluid and never completely reveals its mystery. We could say that it is like a rune symbol, not in the linguistic sense of letters, but more of the sense heavy with meaning and anticipation the way our ancestors viewed the runic signs engraved on the claw of a bear, the point of a thundercloud, the talon of a wolf or beak of an eagle, on bloody wings or at the end of a bridge or the like. These signs were sent out into the world, and some left their mark on humanity.

History everywhere shows the effects of such runes. Those wishing further enlightenment must turn to the wise mime or if no response can be elicited, to the

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knowing Valkyrie Siegdrive who is to be found at Hindarfjeld on the way to Frankland.

Even if the general concept of motifs eludes strict scholarly definitions, we are nonetheless faced with individual motifs themselves as historical facts within our field of study. It is possible to learn about them in greater detail and discover very humble examples within human history.

Every aspect of the history of art, and not merely the visual arts, must be seen in a large part as a history of motifs. The primary purpose of historical study is verifying how each work came to be just how it is. We are of course still overly preoccupied with the history of persons, artists, and content ourselves with arranging their works in the proper order along the threads of the individual development of their author. In reality, those threads are crossed by others involving the development of commissions and motifs (*Opgavernes og Motivernes Udvikling*). To clearly understand the historical origins of an individual work, it is as important to recognize this impact as well as the chronological chain. The thread uniting the use of one and the same motif on the part of an artist is a strong one involving an effective and active achievement. The tradition and development of a motif delineates itself very strictly. The motif is not as rich and diverse as the artist, but is more telling and clear in its intention. In every aspect of his activity, the artist is not merely creative, but also receptive and imitative. To some degree, their individuality merely reflects a nuance among the patrimony of motifs intersecting during their lives.

In what follows, we trace an art-historical continuity where the activities of a very diverse group of artists cross and define a distinct group of art works. These works are even famous or notorious and have been discussed by others. We nonetheless feel that an understanding of them as well as of the individuality of their creators is precarious and open to error when they are not seen as elements within the sequence, the development of the common motif, and for this reason we trace its biography. We must admit at the outset that it is not possible to document every turn in the life of our motif, and that these art works must be partially taken as examples although we trust that we have found and seen the most important among them.

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The Renaissance inherited a curious motif from the medieval period for the pose and contours of a figure, namely the straddling stance. Both legs stand straight to the sides with the knees stiff so that the weight of the both is carried evenly on both feet. If a person faces us directly in this pose, it is an essentially symmetrical shape certainly originating in medieval draftsmanship when various geometric schemes were used to delineate the human figure. Indeed, we find such a figure composed according to such a convenient pattern among the models for drawing the human form given by the French architect Villard de Honnecourt in his well-known sketchbook from the mid-13th century, preserved in the Bibliothèque

Nationale in Paris.[2] It is completely symmetrical with the head looking straight forward and the hands braced on the hips. As naïve as this early drawing appears, it is striking for its unmistakable air of a rough and confident defiance, emanating even from the bare outlines of the pose placed by Villard beside some other figures. The others are constructed according to the same geometric scheme, but their poses express more modest or submissive attitudes appropriate to medieval art. This anticipated the antithesis between the tendencies of Signorelli and Perugino three and a half centuries earlier.

It was not only in preparatory drawings that later medieval art used this pose for knights. Although very subdued and tentative, it already appears among the statuettes on the shrine of the Magi in Cologne, dated 1138. Further more obvious examples are found in the fourteenth century Scaliger monument in Verona, or lying supine on tombstones of knights such as the monument of Filippo de Desideri, died 1315, in the Museo civico in Bologna from the local church of S. Domenico. As we know, recumbent medieval tomb figures were depicted as standing with open eyes and living actions – praying. The straddling pose of standing figures also corresponds to that of horseback riders sandwiched between two vertical saddle trees, with the knees extended stiffly and the feet inclined into the stirrups. It was common throughout the later medieval period and continued until after the year 1500.

What Donatello did in his famous 1416 marble figure of St. George standing with straddling legs in the niche on the outside of Or San Michele was in at least one sense nothing new. It was not only then one of the most popular and praised figures of all Italian art.[3] In this figure, the open space between the legs is covered by the high shield touching the ground with its lowest point while his left hand secures its upper edge. His right arm hangs straight down. The pose is as simple and direct as any could wish, but the pose of the legs and body are not completely symmetrical with the left foot protruding slightly further than the right, and the left side and shoulder also further forward. This lends the figure a quality of bold resurgence very apt to the furrowed brow and fiery eyes burning for action, directed in the same direction as the entire figure. In relation to the somewhat sunken chest, the long neck and head are extended somewhat forward in the medieval manner. We are shown a fiery and aggressive character, a 'hotspur', seeming to warn us to be careful and not touch him.

Donatello is otherwise usually counted among the founders of the Renaissance, and the Renaissance is all too often understood with exaggerated overgeneralizations as a revival of ancient traditions in art. There are in fact other works by Donatello that follow antiquity very closely, indeed copy it. A figure such

[2] I have been using the English ed., *Facsimile of the Sketch-Book of Wilars de Honecort, an Architect of the Thirteenth Century, with commentaries and descriptions* by Jean Baptiste Antoine Lassus and Jules Quicherat, translated and edited with many additional articles by Robert Willis, London: Henry & Parker, 1859, particularly plates XXXVI and XXXIV.

[3] Camillo Jacopo Cavalucci, *Vita ed opere del Donatello,* Naples: Hoepli, 1886, plate V with text.

as St. George ought to serve as an adequate warning against conceiving 15th century Italian sculpture or all of its arts as based on studies of antiquity. This example not only demonstrates a relationship to medieval art, but also an actual antithesis to antiquity.

I obviously do not overlook the fact that I am now contradicting very recent publications by the most respected art historians. Eugène Müntz and another French scholar, Prévost agree in praising the simplicity of the pose of Donatello's St. George as something that would even have enraptured the Greeks. Hans Semper has spoken of this statue in a similar way. This links the simplicity and clarity of the ancient Greek spirit with the vibrant life of Florence.[4]

It does occur once in a while that very erudite connoisseurs of an individual period such as the Renaissance fail to see things with enough clarity. The Greeks were enamoured of 'simplicity' in poses as with everything else, but this does not mean that they would have endorsed every pose with this commendable virtue.

The straddling stance is distinctly not antique. After visiting Europe's larger collections of ancient art, I was only able to find a single similar pose in a work of art from antiquity, in the beautiful but rather late mosaic floor that comes to the *sala rotunda* of the Vatican museums from the baths of Otriculi. In the inner sequence of images there, we see a pair of battling heroes with their legs spread in assuming a defensive posture against centaurs. I mention these small and cursively done figures only by way of being conscientious, and believe that the pose and the spirit they exude has more in common with medieval art. All of those familiar with antiquity will fairly certainly sense that this pose would have aroused disdain in the great period of Greek art, that particularly in a large and isolated statue it would have been felt to be ugly, overly stiff and symmetrical. It contradicts the Polycleitean principle '*uno crure imistre*' that a figure should essentially be standing on one leg, a principle that was actually fundamental to ancient statuary. It might at best have reminded the Greeks of the infancy of art in their 'archaic period'. Yet this pose is not even found among the remains of archaic art. It is true that knees are often shown stiff and legs spread far apart, but they are never spread sideways. On the other hand, the pose does occur, coarse and ugly, among some 'wild' cultures, such as in the Caribbean. It must be admitted that in spite of all its stiffness and rigidity, the straddling pose we see in medieval art or Donatello has great assets in comparison to the earliest Greek, or Egyptian statuary. It makes an impression of being loose, natural, uninhibited and psychologically truly expressive while the stiffness of the archaic poses results from apprehensiveness and an all too strict discipline within the arts.

In any case, the motif became quite telling for the early Renaissance, not in the sense of occurring frequently so much as because it sticks in the mind of the

[4] Eugène Müntz, *Donatello*, Les artistes célèbres, Paris: Rouam, 1885, p. 28. Gabriel Prévost, *Aperçus sur Donatello et la Sculpture dite Réaliste*, Paris: Didier, 1878, p. 11. Hans Semper, *Donatellos Leben und Werke, Eine Festschrift zum fünfhundertjährigen Jubiläum seiner Geburt in Florenz*, Innsbruck: Wagner, 1887, pp. 17-18.

viewer as a peculiar and contrasting feature in the figure style of the period. It was particularly adopted in the 15th century. Although Donatello did not invent it, he was certainly the first to recognize its potential and was able to forcefully and completely exploit its psychological qualities, or at least some of them. He by no means exhausted them. His figure of St. George was trendsetting in the history of this motif, and some of the later versions are probably due to its influence.[5]

One of the most significant of these figures from the beginning of the Renaissance is the colossal 1435 fresco *Portrait of Pipo Spano* by Andrea Castagno now in Sta. Apollonia in Florence [Florence, Uffizi Inv. P64]. This again shows the knight in full armour, an ample and powerfully built figure. He is posed with the legs spread just as the St. George, but neither of them protruding further forward than the other. As bold and brave as he seems, his expression is far less active. He stands 'lost in thought' with his head inclined slightly to the side, his eyebrows raised with a slightly staring quality of the gaze. He is holding his unsheathed sword laterally, bending its flexible blade in his strong hands. Such pointless physical exercises usually reveal inner feelings. In this instance, the straddling stance not merely expresses a knightly virility, but the artist has correctly observed that when our minds are independently active and not engaged with the body we naturally assume an attitude requiring a wider surface to stand on.

In Italy during the 15th century there was surely no rule either written or unwritten that the figure of a knight be shown in this pose. Most of them were shown differently. By way of an instructive contrast to that we have just mentioned, we draw attention to the marvellous figure of St. George by Alvise Vivarini in his large altarpiece of ca. 1501 in the Berlin museums [Inv. 38]. This presents a knight in a completely different spirit. He stands guard at the foot of the throne of the Virgin Mary, coarse and strong as the lance in his hand, holding his head proud and pertly. In spite of this he is more modest. He seems to have taken an oath to protect and assume responsibility for something, and this feeling seems to pervade him while the knights with the straddling pose seem to feel as if they carry the entire world, heaven and earth within themselves. I am surprised that aside from this type, the St. George by Donatello has been described as the image of the Christian knight. Such a thing might more likely seem to be expressed in the St. George by Vivarini than Donatello.

A number of examples by artists temperamentally remote from the aggressive masculine quality of Donatello or Castagno, unlikely to invent such an

[5] We must not believe that every later figure in this pose derives from Donatello. When Hans Semper discusses the motif in the figure of St. George, where it was invented and created as a type, his words demonstrate that he is unfamiliar with the earlier history of the motif, Semper, *Donatello - Seine Zeit und Schule: Eine Reihenfolge von Abhandlungen*, Quellenschriften zur Kunstgeschichte 9, Vienna: Braumüller, 1875, p. 99. There is by the way no enlightenment to be found in Francesco Bocchi, [*Eccellenza della statua del San Giorgio di Donatello scultore Fioretino*] 1571, cited by Semper. It is a mess of words without a clear thought or idea.

expression on their own, reveal that around the year 1500, the straddling stance was considered to reveal knightly qualities. In his famous painting of *The Calumny of Apelles*, Sandro Botticelli [Florence, Uffizi, no. 1496], the painter of refined poetic inspiration, used the pose for a knight installed as a statue in a niche, suggesting that the motif had assumed the status of a type. The subject matter for this painting comes from the history of ancient art, but the medieval type of the knight is included in the décor, telling us something essential about the Renaissance. As little as the motif would seem to harmonize with the basic tenor in Perugino, he nonetheless used it at least twice for the figure of St. Michael, the archangel in a knightly pose with wings in the large altarpiece from Vallomba, dated 1500 in the Accademia in Florence, and in the beautiful altarpiece from the Certosa in Pavia, ca. 1504, now in the National Gallery in London [no. 288]. The latter is extremely elegant and testifies in many ways to Perugino's refined sense of beauty. Such an earthy stance seems so inappropriate to the delicate type of this painter, the sweetness in the air surrounding the head and the overall femininity, that it leaves us with a fatal sense of inauthenticity or conceit. We feel as if we are seeing an actress in the costume of a knight, playing her roles with manners that have degenerated into fashions.

All historical periods and all nations of the world seem to agree that a stance such as this is unfeminine. It was used almost exclusively for men in medieval and Renaissance art. In this period of Italian art, we nonetheless do find at least one example of a woman, even naked, standing with legs spread straight in this way, the black and white figure of *Fortuna* in the 1506 floor decorations of the cathedral of Siena, following the designs of Pinturricchio. There is of course a particular reason for this pose in this place. As she is shown, the goddess of fortune is standing with one foot on an unstable, rocking boat and the other on a sphere rolling away on the land. The implications of this symbol seem to have justified applying the pose to a female figure. In other times it might not even have been accepted in this context.

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To understand the significance of this pose for the early Renaissance, it is necessary to study it in the work of a single artist who employed it as their own, Luca Signorelli. This pose is one of the most prominent physically expressive characteristics in the history of his art. It accords rather well with his earthy qualities, his serious, at times harsh personality, proudly indifferent to anything appealing to the beholder with sweet or soft feelings or subjects. None of them painted a male figure with such simple, sharp and grand strokes. In spite of the fact that he is a painter and a painter of the second highest level in the development, an older contemporary of Sodoma, Raphael, Correggio and Titian, the strict, straight and all-encompassing cut of his figures involves a sculptural sense that seems to be drawn from the deep, fresh well of an ancient period of humanity. Robert Vischer

has very aptly written that none painted such 'steadfast primal humanity' as he.[6] Of course the same author exaggerates his accolades when he generalizes, 'we can do nothing but praise the static poses of his figures', because in reality, Signorelli by no means rose above the weakness of the entire Renaissance in conceiving stasis, and his paintings abound with obvious examples of an inadequate sense for the balance of the figures. He works on this shortcoming, and we feel that this could be the reason that he so often shows them standing firmly on the ground with spread legs. We must not overlook the fact that as a means for maintaining balance, it is as crude and primitive as when the earliest architecture achieved balance by building pyramids.

We can account for all examples of this motif in his famous cycle of frescoes in the chapel of the Virgin Mary of S. Brizio in the cathedral of Orvieto, images of *The Last Judgment*, scenes from ancient poetry and Dante painted between 1499 and 1505. We find a figure with the armour of a knight, one of the large and very earnest angels standing in the clouds to guard that no soul damned to hell can escape. The straddling stance is applied with measure. The angel poises the mace with the right hand against the hip, head inclined to the side with a gaze upon the horrible jostling of the people and the devils in the abyss, a gesture of surprise with the left hand.

Otherwise, Signorelli's use of the pose distinguishes itself in not being bound to the knightly appearance. He brings out its more general human significance.

The motif occurs in numerous places in the fresco where the dead are rising from the graves to the sound of angels blowing trumpets. We see it with some of the angels with their instruments lacking the accoutrements of knighthood and among the naked people risen from their graves. The latter are poised almost symmetrically with the legs spread evenly, the feet facing outward, the upper torso and head bent slightly backward looking toward heaven. One of them props the backs of the hands on the hips with wrists curled, while another lowers both arms with extended hands viewing the scene. While the stance of the two corresponds to one another, their placement in relation to the beholder varies with one partially frontal, the other half from the rear and a third in yet another position. Since we do not see any of them straight from the front, the symmetry does not impose itself directly or geometrically as in the medieval examples or those from Donatello, Castagno or Perugino.

What they all exude in common is a certain candid air of self-confidence, a steady, dauntless breath and a sense of inviolability. Much in the same way as Castagno's *Pipo Spano*, they also share something like either pensiveness or absentmindedness, lost in that contemplation of heaven which the trumpets have summoned. This is all well and good, apt to the idea of the resurrection of humanity to eternal life and the sense that they are all at once consumed by beatitude both permanently and unalterably. Yet the doctrine of the Last Judgment includes a

[6] Robert Vischer, *Luca Signorelli und die italienische Renaissance: Eine kunsthistorische Monographie*, Leipzig: Seemann, 1879, p. 153.

rather important interim element, the testing and judgment usually shown with the souls weighed in the scales of St. Michael, usually arousing fear and trembling but absent here. This has also been noted by others. An Italian author, Luzi, whom Robert Vischer also cites, alludes to the first book of Thessalonians 4:16, 'for the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the vice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God and the dead in Christ will rise first.'[7] Signorelli has painted the first to arise, those to have died in Christ, therefore 'fearless' in their expressions. It only remains to explain why Signorelli should prefer this particular passage from St. Paul instead of the usual tradition for depicting *The Last Judgment*.

A sentiment similar to these risen human beings is expressed in a figure at the foremost edge of the painting showing the horrible omens of the judgment, the eclipse of the sun and moon. This is a slim young man with all of the elasticity of steel wearing a shirt in the style of Signorelli's contemporaries. We see him from the rear as he stands with legs spread, one hand poised at the side and the other over his eyes while contemplating the signs in the sun and moon. He is not one of the 'hundreds of the earth' who shall wail [Revelations 1:7], and his trust is not shaken in the idea that he owns the earth on which he stands.

This is what is expressed in this passage. In these paintings, it is not a result of the theme, the idea of the last judgment, and we would be on the wrong track to seek the reason in theological details supposedly being illustrated by the artist. These strong expressive devices were conveyed by the entire tenor of the artist, his period and his contemporaries, and that is far more historically interesting than notes to passages from the Bible or the church fathers. At another spot, Robert Vischer is entirely correct to urge that the primary reasons for these expressive devices are to be found in the artist himself.[8] This also emerges from the fact that, as we shall now see, he uses these devices evenly throughout all the subjects in his work. If it is admissible to use the term 'Renaissance' in its traditional sense as a rebirth of humanity from the dark medieval fear and trembling, it must be seen to have found an incomparably clear and eloquent expression in these figures standing so broadly and firmly on the ground. It is of course also in the character of the Renaissance to look toward heaven, and that the heavy pull of gravity is counteracted by an energetic intellectual upward surge, although judgments and rights were no longer expected from there.

In other places within Signorelli's frescoes, the straddling pose also appears in a more quotidian context without the contemplation of heaven in such a way that we even wonder if the people in this period might actually have affected such a stance. It occurs in numerous places within the large painting of the sermon and miracles of the Antichrist where the types and costumes are largely drawn on

[7] Vischer, *Signorelli*, p. 189 [Lodovico Luzi, *Il Duomo di Orvieto*, Florence: Le Monnier, 1866, pp. 59-200].
[8] Vischer, *Signorelli*, p. 153.

Signorelli's own time. One of the most important examples is the colossal figure at the centre of the foreground, a man with a massive body, back, neck, strong limbs and a small head. His legs are evenly spread to the sides with the knees straight and fixed. The view of such coarse thighs with the body pushed slightly forward and hands on the hips would have turned the stomach of the ancient Greeks. In his light shirt and trousers he strikes us today as something like the 'common man', perhaps a butcher or blacksmith. We can be sure that he was viewed differently when this was painted and that the pose would not have had the context of a lower social order or a '*landsknecht*'.

By its physical features alone, it is only natural that Signorelli would have used the pose for minions swinging weapons over their heads, yet he also employed it for the battling heroes in the myths and legends from antiquity. We have seen that this contradicts ancient art itself, more evidence for the renaissance treatment of ancient ideas. The stance with spread legs promotes an impression of great strain or forceful character, but also makes the hero appear as something of a lackey (*bøddelagtig*). Hercules spreads his legs when battling the Hydra or raising his club to slay Cacus. The same is true of Phineas raising the large, heavy battle axe over his head against Perseus and the others and is frozen in this pose when Perseus holds up the head of Gorgon. Another of the small paintings in the chapel at Orvieto shows Perseus riding Pegasus in the battle against the sea monster. The ancient hero wears the armour of a knight, standing with straight spread legs in the stirrups, swinging the large sword above his own head and that of the horse before striking the blow. Is this ancient or medieval?

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The figures Signorelli painted in Orvieto were almost immediately obsolete. A younger generation of artists arose in the same years, prescribing completely new rules for depicting the human form, pushing aside the straddling pose as something from a period of the arts now surpassed, or at best only to be tolerated in very isolated instances. Both as an artist and theorist, Leonardo da Vinci, barely ten years younger than Signorelli, loved fine wavy lines and variety in poses. He inculcates his readers not to create a figure comparable to a piece of wood. Joints may not be stiff so that two parts of the limb continue in the same direction, but must instead be light and gracious.[9] These words from Leonardo simply express the predominating

[9] Jean Paul Richter, *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, compiled and edited from the original manuscripts, London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1883, vol. 1, p. 295, no. 591, 592. Leonardo eliminates from consideration figures intended to express strength. That would permit a greater stiffness, but in any case he demands that the head be turned (no. 591). This seems to be illustrated by a drawing in Turin, photograph by Mareville no. 93, including a few sketches of powerful figures in the straddling stance, very similar to those by Signorelli. One of these, in Venice, Richter vol. 1, no. 343, is a figure illustrating proportions. Others at Windsor Castle seem also to have been made entirely for didactic reasons. I cannot consider it likely that Signorelli was familiar with and influenced

taste among the great sixteenth century idealists. It would be vain to search the enormous world of Michelangelo's figures for something recalling the old-fashioned straddling pose. He preferred dramatic turns. Raphael only used the pose in his very earliest period still lacking independence – to say nothing of Correggio![10]

Nonetheless, the pose did not die out. We would like to say just a few words about some examples of its later life.

It haunts the occasional image of knightly figures. When Andrea del Sarto was commissioned to paint his four saints for Vallombrosa, now in the Accademia Florence, he thought of the traditional image of the knight for St. Michael. He shows the archangel in armour standing with legs spread, right hand on the hip, the judicial scales in the right along with the shaft of the sword pointed to the ground between the feet. We see the figure partially from behind, the upper torso and head turned to face the viewer while the legs remain implanted as they are. This turn of the body involves a momentary effect and reference to the beholder somewhat at odds with the strong and coarse seriousness of the traditional motif. Andrea del Sarto is one of those artists able to make everything seem becoming, and his St. Michael is a very appealing figure, well built with curly hair, if not completely convincing as a knight.

Very soon though, the motif came to be reserved exclusively for the more forceful characters from ancient mythology. Baccio Bandinelli used it for his large 1553 marble group of Hercules standing above the vanquished body of Cacus before the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence. Jacopo Sansovino did the same with his marble giants of *Mars* and *Neptune*, particularly *Mars* at the head of the steps leading to the court of the Doge's palace in Venice. This crude pose is quite apt for such strong, defiant gate-keeping types. Sansovino's giants have in fact always inspired awe. On the other hand, Bandinelli's *Hercules* in its place of honour has been the subject of ridicule for three centuries. It was the subject of a lightning streak of heated criticism against Bandinelli on the part of his rival and archenemy in the presence of Grand Duke Cosimo I. We quote this now partly as an example of the 16th century style of criticism, and also because it includes some quite instructive remarks about the motif we have been discussing. Cellini does not wish to speak of the miserable *Hercules* in his own name, but only to let its author know what people say about it:

> they say that if the hair were cut there would be no rear of the head to house the brain, and as far as the face is concerned it is difficult to tell whether it depicts a human being or a lion. He is not even paying attention to what he is doing and the head is so badly related to the neck, so artlessly that it is difficult to imagine anything worse. It is being said that his pitiful shoulders recall the wooden pommels of a saddle used on a mule, that the chest and its

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by Leonardo's theories as Crowe and Cavalcaselle as well as Vischer surmise. In all essentials, the intentions and goals of these two artists seem very different from one another.

[10] Drawing at Oxford of soldiers related to a Pinturricchio 1504 fresco in the Libreria at Siena.

> muscles are modelled on a sack of melons leaning against a wall rather than a human being, and that the back is based on a bag of long cucumbers. None can understand how the legs join this ugly body, it is not clear which leg the figure is standing on or whether the weight is evenly distributed as many very competent artists have managed to evoke. Quite to the contrary, the body is obviously leaning forward more than a third of an ell, and that alone is the greatest mistake committed by bunglers. As for the arms, people feel that they extend completely devoid of grace or the slightest spark of artistic talent, as if he had never seen a naked model. The right leg of Hercules and that of Cacus merge into a single mass of flesh so that if they were separated, not one but both would lack a calf at the point where they meet. It is also said that Hercules seems to have one foot underground while the other is resting on hot coals.[11]

All of these crude remarks are apt. Yet we must admit that Bandinelli's figure could be instructive for 19th century sculptors in its forceful assertiveness.

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After the already dying motif created such a fiasco in the central spot for the development of Italian sculpture, its role in Italy had certainly run its course. In the other European countries it continued to be used without interruption for knightly figures. An example is the splendid design by Albrecht Dürer for the tomb slab of a knight and his lady, then used in the bronze casting studio of Peter Vischer the Elder in Nuremberg for two gravestones, for the church at Römhild and for Hechingen, the latter for Count Frederick II of Hohenzollern and Magdalena von Brandenburg.[12] Hans Holbein the Younger also used the pose for a portrait of King Henry VIII in Whitehall.[13] The king of England is here shown in courtly attire and not as a knight, proof that at least in the northern European countries, the pose was not associated with the behaviour of simple soldiers, but to the contrary was completely compatible with the best manners. As influence from the Italian Renaissance pervaded the rest of Europe in the course of the 16th century, this motif also came to be used in the new context it had received in Italy, for naked heroes from classical antiquity, particularly Hercules. At the end of the century, we can recognize an aftereffect of Signorelli's chiaroscuro paintings at Orvieto in a woodcut from 1588 by Hendrick Goltzius in Haarlem showing Hercules with his legs spread and raising the club with both hands over his head to slay Cacus, but then again in a

[11] [Benvenuto Cellini, Autobiography LXX]

[12] Charles Ephrussi, *Albert Dürer et ses dessins*, Paris: Quantin, 1882, p. 212 [Berlin, Uffizi, Christ Church, Winkler no. 489, Tietze W 75, James Byam Shaw, *Drawings by Old Masters at Christ Church, Oxford*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1976, p. 344, no. 1422, plate 839, and Berlin and Florence Uffizi Byam Shaw as copies, Marianne Bernhard and Wolfgang Hütt eds., *Albrecht Dürer 1471 bis 1528: Das gesamte graphische Werk*, München: Rogner & Bernhard, 1970, vol. 1, p. 555].

[13] Alfred Woltmann, *Holbein und seine Zeit*, vol. 2, Leipzig: Seemann, 1868, p. 276.

1589 engraving of Hercules continuing after vanquishing Achelous.[14] Similar phenomena occur in the works of other Netherlandish artists such as Cornelis Cornelisz van Haarlem. What had been elastic and fresh with Signorelli, emanating from a direct relation to nature and reality, appears ossified in quite bombastic exaggeration among the foreign imitators of the Italians. In this sense, Goltzius's engraving of Hercules is unparalleled in the history of art, and even if we are already familiar with such things, it is still surprising to see such an imaginary freak from a Dutch tavern combined with classical and academic literacy. The pose of this *Hercules* is the crudest form of swagger with each muscle vying to tell a fantastic story of superhuman strength. On the technical level though, the engraving is brilliant.

This mannered imitation of the Italian Renaissance persisted in every corner of Europe. To my knowledge, the last examples of this motif appear in Spain in a series of paintings of *The Labours of Hercules* made in the first half of the seventeenth century for the Buen-Retiro Palace, and are at least partially attributed to Francisco de Zurbarán.

In the course of the seventeenth century though, the motif died out completely, in any case for the serious presentation of figures such as knights, saints or princes. The cohesive tradition in its use comes to an end. The isolated examples of figures standing with their legs spread, such as an outfitted near easterner by Rubens in Kassel, a jester or court actor by Velázquez in Madrid or the beturbaned Pontius Pilate by Rembrandt in Munich all demonstrate that this pose was no longer being seen with the same eyes. If it was being used at all, it had degenerated into a type for evoking a lower order. French taste from the reign of King Louis XIV and Louis XV dominated most of Europe and could not have been more adverse to it. Every detail was to be turned and presented as noble, antique, light and decorative. In spite of the fact that severe linearity and straight extended legs were beloved, as in *The Oath of the Horatians* by Jacques-Louis David, the pose was also not resumed by the classicizing taste of the revolutionary or neo-absolutist period. Nothing could be further from the mind of an artist such as Thorvaldsen than to use this motif.

It was not until very recently that the straddling stance was again occasionally taken up on the basis of early examples when a feeling arose for its historical significance such as the statue of the Elector Frederick I before the new city hall in Berlin. Compared to the vivid early history of this motif however, it is no more than a ghost.

Karl Johns (Independent), Riverside CA and Klosterneuburg
karltjohns@gmail.com

[14] Hendrik Goltzius, Bartsch nos. 23 and 142 respectively [Otto Hischmann, *Verzeichnis des graphischen Werks von Hendrick Goltzius 1558-1617*, Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1921, no. 17 'Massacre of the Innocents', pp. 13-14, no, 143 'The Large Hercules', pp. 57-58].