



Duquesnoy, Jérôme (1602-1654)

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Flemish artist Jérôme (Hieronymus) Duquesnoy was one of the most renowned sculptors of the seventeenth century, but for decades after his death he was better known for his conviction and execution on charges of sodomy than for his impish yet polished style of sculpture.

Born into a Brussels family of artists at the beginning of the seventeenth century, Jérôme Duquesnoy lived his first twenty years in the shadow of his famous father, Jérôme Duquesnoy the Elder (who re-cast the famous *Mannekin Pis* [1619], the urinating boy that still stands as Brussels' signature fountain) and his brother François, who showed artistic promise at an early age.

Jérôme the Younger began his career as an apprentice in his father's workshop, but buoyed by both burgeoning talent and youthful enthusiasm, at the age of nineteen he joined his brother in Rome to study with some of the greatest artistic masters the Eternal City had to offer. Jérôme and François spent some time together studying and honing their craft, but the two brothers separated for reasons unknown soon after Antwerp painter Anton van Dyck, Rubens' most celebrated pupil, visited them in Rome.

Duquesnoy re-emerged in Spain, under the auspices of King Philip IV, who granted the young sculptor several important commissions. In 1642 news reached Jérôme that his brother was dying, and Jérôme hurried to his side. The two returned north, but François died en route, and for the rest of his life, ill-founded rumors plagued Duquesnoy that, in a jealous fit, he had poisoned his brother.

Returning to Brussels, Jérôme settled into life as an impulsive and incomparable talent, working not only as a sculptor but also as an engraver, goldsmith, and architect. This period marked the greatest activity of Jérôme's career, where he produced such famous works as *Ganymede and the Eagle of Jupiter* (ca 1540-1545) and *Children and the Young Faun* (ca 1542-1547). Many of Duquesnoy's works depict strong, muscled male figures in the Hellenic tradition, the polished bronze often seeming to mirror the sculptor's innate fondness for the form he was creating.

In 1654 Duquesnoy went to Ghent to fulfill several commissions, including what he hoped might be his masterpiece, the mausoleum of Antoine Triest, bishop of Ghent. According to Edmond de Busscher, a contemporary of Duquesnoy's: "He [Duquesnoy] set himself up with his assistants in one of the cathedral's chapels, to lay out and prepare the sections of this tomb, which could have been for the master the finest jewel in a new sculptural crown, had he not come to a sad end."

That end came on the heels of a persistent rumor circulating through conservative Ghent that Duquesnoy was "misusing" two young boys in the chapel where he was working. Incarcerated on accusations of sodomy, Duquesnoy vigorously denied the charges brought against him, but the two boys confirmed the rumors. Duquesnoy's family petitioned Archduke Leopold William for his release, and Duquesnoy himself wrote to his friend the king of Spain.

It was all for naught; the lords of the Privy Council of Ghent, on September 28, 1654, convicted Duquesnoy

of sodomy and sentenced him to death. Bound to a stake in the Grain Market in the center of the city, Duquesnoy was strangled, his body reduced to ashes.

For centuries after his death, Duquesnoy's reputation was both tarnished and repressed, and it is only recently that his works have enjoyed critical attention. A sculptor of remarkable talent, Duquesnoy's vigorous body of work finally serves to celebrate that talent rather than stand as a reminder of the sad end to a very promising career.

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