

# CARLE VAN LOO

(Nice 1705 - Paris 1765)

## *Bacchus and Ariadne*

oil on canvas  
110.5 x 142 cm (43½ x 55⅞ in)

**Provenance:** Victor Amadeus I, Prince of Carignano (1690-1741);  
Jean-Baptiste-Guillaume de Gevigney (1729-1802);  
his sale, A.J.Paillet, Paris, 1 1779, lot 570 (to Rabillon, 239 livres);  
Dr. Karl-Jürgen Schumacher, Cologne;  
Private Collection, Germany.

**Literature:** Michel-François Dandré-Bardon, *Vie de Carle Vanloo*, (Paris 1765), p.68;  
Alessandro Baudi di Vesme, 'I Van Loo in Piemonte', in *Storico dell'Arte*, VI, 1893, p. 350;  
Marie-Catherine Sahut, *Carle Vanloo: Premier peintre du roi (Nice, 1705 – Paris, 1765)*,  
exh. cat. (Nice, Clermont-Ferrand, Nancy, 1977), p. 100, no. 252b;  
Hans Ost, 'Carle Van Loo, Bacchus und Ariadne retrouvé' in: *Pantheon*, XL, 1 (1982), pp. 13-16.

**T**HIS FINE EXAMPLE OF CARLE VAN LOO'S EARLY work was painted in Turin c. 1732-1734. It depicts the famous mythological story of the god Bacchus falling in love with the Greek princess Ariadne. According to the myth, Ariadne had eloped from her native Crete with the Athenian hero Theseus. However, Theseus abandoned Ariadne whilst she slept, and so she woke alone on the island of Naxos to see his ship sailing away. She was discovered grief-stricken by Bacchus, god of wine, who immediately fell in love with her. In some tellings of the story, Bacchus removed Ariadne's crown and threw it into the heavens, where it became a constellation of stars. In other versions Ariadne herself became a star.

Van Loo has depicted the moment Bacchus and Ariadne meet on the shore of Naxos. They look adoringly into each other's eyes and the god gently takes the young princess by the hand. Above Ariadne's head a *putto* has taken her crown, ready to be thrown to the heavens. Bacchus is dressed in his traditional leopard skin cloak, and the wreath of vines around his head reminds the viewer of his role as god of wine, as does the bunch of grapes in the lower left corner. Ariadne is dressed in beautiful silks and rests on a large luxurious pillow, reflecting her royal status. In her hand she suggestively holds Bacchus' thyrsus, another of the god's traditional attributes. A complex narrative has been condensed into an extremely concise and effective pictorial composition.

We know from an eighteenth-century auction catalogue that *Bacchus and Ariadne* originally formed part of a pair of paintings, the other being a depiction of *Clytie and Apollo*.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, *Clytie and Apollo* is currently lost, but we have a good idea of the composition from one of van Loo's preparatory sketches (fig. 1). The works clearly shared similar features and techniques, such as the use of trees as framing



Carle van Loo, *Clytie and Apollo*, Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne (Figure 1)

devices, or the animation of *putti* to contrast with the dramatic poses of the main protagonists.

In 1982 Hans Ost wrote an article on the rediscovery of *Bacchus and Ariadne*.<sup>2</sup> As he shows, the work is unmistakably that of van Loo, comparable to many of his best works. For example the figure of Ariadne can be directly compared to the artist's depiction of Euterpe (fig. 2). Building upon the research of Marie-Catherine Sahut and Pierre Rosenberg<sup>3</sup>, Ost explores the likely circumstances of the painting's creation, c. 1732-1734. This was during van Loo's Turin period, when his paintings are notable for their cool colours, precision of execution,

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Baptiste-Guillaume de Gevigney's sale, A.J.Paillet, Paris, 1 1779. lots 569 (*Clytie and Apollo*) and lot 570 (*Bacchus and Ariadne*).

<sup>2</sup> Ost, H., 'Carle Van Loo, Bacchus und Ariadne retrouvé' in: *Pantheon*, XL, 1 (1982), pp. 13-16. In his article Ost states that Pierre Rosenberg agreed with the attribution of the present work to Carle van Loo.

<sup>3</sup> Sahut, M-C, *Carle Vanloo: Premier peintre du roi (Nice, 1705 – Paris, 1765)*, exh. cat. (Nice, Clermont-Ferrand, Nancy, 1977).









Carle van Loo, *Euterpe*, 1745, Bibliothèque National de France, Paris (Figure 2)

and grace of draughtsmanship, particularly in his depiction of female heads. These are all qualities evident in *Bacchus and Ariadne*, and the treatment of faces and drapery are consistent with other paintings by van Loo from the 1730s, such as *Castor and Pollox*,<sup>4</sup> *Mars and Venus*, see figure 3, or the Rouen *Madonna and Child*.<sup>5</sup> Similarly the depiction of the tree in *Bacchus and Ariadne*, is almost identical to that in another of van Loo's Turin pictures, *Armida Chaining Rinaldo*.<sup>6</sup>

Although van Loo painted *Bacchus and Ariadne* in Turin, it seems it was almost immediately sent to Paris, to enter the collection of Victor Amadeus I, Prince of Carignano (1690-1741).<sup>7</sup> Victor Amadeus was an Italian nobleman who had once been a great favourite of his father-

in-law, Victor Amadeus II, King of Sicily and Sardinia (1666-1732). However, his profligate lifestyle meant that the young prince eventually quarrelled with the King, and left Italy to settle instead in Paris, where he owned extensive property. Over the years, Victor Amadeus filled the Hôtel de Soissons with an extensive art collection, and became a major figure in Parisian cultural life. He was a great patron of the van Loo family, in particular Carle's elder brother Jean-Baptiste (1684-1745), who also served as his artistic advisor. He initially focused on collecting perennially sought-after sixteenth-century Italian paintings, but his tastes soon developed to encompass Dutch and Flemish work as well. Alongside this, Victor Amadeus was one of the leading patrons of contemporary French artists, including the van Loo family, Jean-Baptiste Pater (1695-1736) and Nicolas Lancret (1690-1743).

Although our painting is the primary version, it seems that van Loo may have painted a number of other variations of *Bacchus and Ariadne*. A 1766 Parisian auction sold a larger depiction of *Bacchus and Ariadne*, which, like our work, was also paired with a version of *Clytie and Apollo*.<sup>8</sup> There is also a version recorded in the collection of van Loo's brother-in-law, Lorenzo Somis, a resident of Turin.<sup>9</sup> More recently an inferior variation appeared on the art market, which given slight compositional differences, and the much quicker and looser manner of execution, was perhaps a *modello* for our painting.<sup>10</sup> Also worth noting is an engraving of Bacchus' head by Louis-Marin Bonnet, which appears to derive from our painting.<sup>11</sup> Finally, there is a drawing in the Louvre, which also appears to depict Bacchus and Ariadne, along with two *putti* holding the crown (fig. 4). It has many significant differences from our work, most notably of course the vertical format. However, given that it does not relate to any other known painting, there is a possibility that it represents van Loo's early thoughts for the composition of our work, before opting for a horizontal format.



Carle van Loo, *Mars and Venus*, 1730s, Archives Nationales, Paris (Figure 3)

<sup>4</sup> Archives Nationales, Paris.

<sup>5</sup> Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen (Inv. No. S.R.53).

<sup>6</sup> Palazzo Reale, Turin.

<sup>7</sup> For an extensive discussion of the Prince of Carignano's collection, see Ziskin, R., *Sheltering Art: Collecting and Social Identity in Early Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Penn State Press, 2012) pp.173-195.

<sup>8</sup> Sahut, p. 100, nos. 252a & 254a.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., no. 253.

<sup>10</sup> Sotheby's, Paris, 21 June 2012, lot 49.

<sup>11</sup> Sahut, p. 155, no. 498.

<sup>12</sup> Ost, pp.15-16.





Carle van Loo, *Bacchus and Ariadne*, The Louvre, Paris (Figure 4)

In his article on our picture, Ost discusses several artistic sources that van Loo may have turned to in his planning of *Bacchus and Ariadne*, some contemporary and some ancient.<sup>12</sup> Sebastiano Ricci (1658-1734) had set a template for the depiction of this narrative, in a picture which sets the protagonists in a frieze-like composition focused, in a similar manner to van Loo, on the moment Bacchus tenderly takes Ariadne's hand.<sup>13</sup> Van Loo would also have known the treatment of the subject by one of his former teachers, Nicolas Vleughels (1668-1737), in which the figure of Bacchus is used to inject energy into the composition (fig. 5). Van Loo has taken elements from both this artists, so that the central tender moment, where the lovers are entranced by each other, is enhanced by the dynamism of Bacchus. However, for the figure of the god, rather than look to contemporary examples, van Loo seemed to have looked to the antique for inspiration, specifically the famous *Discobolus*, an ancient Greek sculpture known through later Roman copies. This image of coiled energy, centred around a twisted torso, clearly influenced the present work.

Carle van Loo was part of a great dynasty of Franco-Flemish painters descended from the genre painter Jan van Loo (b. 1585). His father, the painter Louis-Abraham van Loo (1653-1712), died when he was still a child, and so Carle was sent to live with his brother, Jean-Baptiste, who at the time was working in Turin for patrons including the Prince

of Carignano. In 1714, Jean-Baptiste was sent by the Prince to Rome, and so there the young Carle began formal artistic studies with the painter Benedetto Luti (1666-1724), and the sculptor Pierre Le Gros the Younger (1666 -1719). After five years the brothers returned to France, where Carle continued and excelled within the rigorous French academic system for painters, culminating in him winning the prestigious *Prix de Rome*.

Van Loo returned to Rome in 1728, and quickly gained favour. He developed an artistic style that merged refined classicism with a sense of fluid dynamism, encapsulated by *Bacchus and Ariadne*. After a few years he moved to Turin, where he painted some of his best works, including our painting, alongside various commissions from Charles Emanuel III (1701-1773), the newly crowned King of Sardinia and Duke of Savoy.

Returning to Paris in 1734, perhaps as a result of the escalating war in Piedmont, van Loo's career flourished further. He was admitted to the French Academie Royale upon submitting his famous work *Apollo Flaying Marsyas*.<sup>14</sup> Demonstrating both his fondness for exploiting such stories, as well as a keen mastery of anatomy and classical antiquity, the painting resulted in numerous commissions. The most famous of these was instruction to decorate the apartments of Louis XV at Versailles and the further works for the chateau of Fontainebleau.

Van Loo spent the rest of his career in France, and was sought after by both royalty and high society. He never lacked for commissions and was greatly acclaimed by his contemporaries. Among his many achievements he was appointed *Premier Peintre du Roi* in 1762. The famous art critic Baron von Grimm (1723-1807) referred to him as 'premier peintre de l'Europe' and according to abbé Marc-Antoine Laugier (1713-1769), he was the 'premier peintre du siècle'.<sup>15</sup>



Edme Jeaurat, after Nicolas Vleughels, *Autumn: Bacchus and Ariadne*, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rennes (Figure 5)

<sup>13</sup> Schloss Weißenstein, Pommersfelden, Germany

<sup>14</sup> Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris.

<sup>15</sup> Cited in Ost, p. 13.