

IN-SIGHT:

Leopold Kiesling.

The Myth of Mars and Venus with Cupid

Upper Belvedere

14 February to 12 May 2018

IN-SIGHT has set its focus on the 1809 figural group sculpture entitled *Mars and Venus with Cupid*, by Upper Austrian sculptor Leopold Kiesling. The exhibition reveals the work's political topicality against the backdrop of the marriage of Napoleon I and the daughter of Emperor Francis II (I), Marie Louise.

Leopold Kiesling (Schöneben, Upper Austria 1770–1827 Vienna) created the work while in Rome on an imperial scholarship. He spent several years there within the circle of Antonio Canova and Bertel Thorvaldsen; highly regarded by these exemplary artists, Kiesling in his day was considered Austria's most important sculptor.

The arrival of the statue in Vienna was well-timed as the marriage between Napoleon I and Marie Louise had just been negotiated by France and Austria. The alliance was meant to ensure the equalization of powers in Europe and put an end to military actions. The Imperial House, therefore, saw the theme of the group sculpture as a gift: Venus, the goddess of love, tries to keep her lover, Mars, the god of war, from fighting any longer. Comparison with the mythological couple served to ennoble the dynastic decision at hand. Soon after arriving, the statue found its place in the Upper Belvedere. It was of particular importance during the Congress of Vienna – as congress participants and other noteworthy individuals walked the Imperial Picture Gallery, Kiesling's *Mars and Venus with Cupid* served as a reminder of the theme's significance to Europe.

In the exhibition catalogue, Ingeborg Schemper-Sparholz writes of the statue's artistic significance, while Sabine Grabner sheds light on its history and Werner Telesko explains the historical background of the marriage of Archduchess Marie Louise to Napoleon I.

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