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Giambologna's miniature bronze busts of Cosimo I and his self-portrait*

A little studied aspect of the activity of Giambologna and his workshop is portraiture. This was a field in which there had been no lack of contenders during the mid-16th century in Florence, owing to the rôle of courtly propaganda which Medicean domination had imposed on Tuscan sculpture. Indeed, some of the most striking portraits of the century were in the medium of sculpture, which might be preferred to painting both for its connotation of Antiquity and for its potential of display out-of-doors and in the public eye. Bandinelli, Cellini, Bandini and the Poggini had all contributed to a veritable flowering of portrait-sculpture in mid-century Florence. The central rôle which Giambologna rapidly assumed in the 1560's made it incumbent on him to perfect himself in this most courtly of pursuits. The results were the monumental bronze busts of Cosimo I and Ferdinando I which were included in the exhibition 'Giambologna, Sculptor to the Medici' of 1978 (nos. 140, 142). Even more spectacular is the incisively chiselled marble bust depicting Giambologna's greatest patron, Francesco I, which is set over the doorway of the former theatre in the Uffizi, an image that must ante-date 1585, owing to the conspicuous absence of the Order of the Golden Fleece which he received in that year (Fig. 1)¹.

A tribute to Giambologna's prowess in this field is the curious commission mentioned in a letter of Simone Fortuna on 27 October

1581 whereby the sculptor was required to purvey a marble portrait statue of the late Grand Duke Cosimo to replace an image by Giambologna's Perugian contemporary and former associate Vincenzo Danti, that was evidently regarded as unsatisfactory². Danti's statue had been intended as the centrepiece of his decoration of the northern façade of the Testata of the Uffizi—the cross-gallery between the office-blocks and near the Arno—a scheme that was overtly indebted to Michelangelo's Medicean wall-tombs in the New Sacristy of San Lorenzo. Danti's flanking, recumbent allegorical figures of *Aequitas* and *Rigor* are still *in situ*, but the disgraced central statue was erected in the Sala Grande of the Palazzo Vecchio in 1592 and since 1868 has reposed in the Bargello, looking a good deal more like Mars than the Grand-Duke, which was no doubt the essence of the original problem. Fortuna's account is confirmed by a passage in Raffaello Borghini's *Il Riposo* (p. 587) which must have been penned some months before the date of publication in 1584: 'Di marmo ha scolpito il Gran Duca Cosimo, che si dee porre agli Uffici nuovi donde fu levato quello di Vincentio Danti Perugino'. According to the Diaries of Settimani and Lapini Giambologna's replacement statue of Cosimo was erected on the Testata on 11 February and unveiled on 23 March 1585³. Giambologna had received payment on 3 June 1574 for taking moulds in plaster of

Fig. 1. Giambologna, Francesco I de' Medici, marble, before 1585, Uffizi Gallery, Florence.



Fig. 2. Giambologna, *Cosimo I de' Medici*, marble statue (detail of the head), before 1581. Uffizi Gallery, Florence.



the head and hands of Cosimo after his decease on 17 May⁴: 'A Giovanni bologna scultore per havere formato la testa et mani di sua altezza... lire 8.6'. The process of taking a death-mask from which accurate, 'life-like' images might be cast, often in wax, was a standard part of funeral exequies of royalty. Subsequently, however, the moulds must have been a valuable item in Giambologna's stock-in-trade, for they all but guaranteed him a monopoly in producing veristic portraits of the deceased and ultimately permitted complete fidelity to Cosimo's appearance a decade later, when he was called upon to carve the portrait-statue. The Grand-Duke is shown in contemporary armour in an unorthodox variation of

classical *contrapposto*, following Danti's martial image clad in ancient Roman uniform. The sculptor took advantage of every opportunity to introduce curvaceous, proto-Baroque forms into the armour, the helmet and the splendid plume of ostrich feathers (Fig. 2).

This commission provides the background for a bronze bust of unusually small scale—perhaps one quarter life-size—and therefore obviously intended for a domestic setting, which was first published in the exhibition catalogue of 1978 (no. 141) (Figs. 3, 4, 5)⁵. The features and accoutrements correspond closely with those on the marble statue, though the details are not identical. The heavy military cloak thrown round the shoulders has been re-arranged to disguise the truncation of the bust. The treatment of its patterns of folds as incisive, straight grooves and indentations—reminiscent of the technique of a wood or alabaster carver using a gouge-chisel—is an idiosyncrasy of Giambologna. In fact, the bust is inscribed at the edge of its right shoulder on the surface of the armour: 'IHOAN. BOLOG. F.'. The illiteracy of rendering the sculptor's name is consistent with other signatures collated by Dhanens⁶. The image, the style and the inscription combine to suggest that the little bust is an autograph variant of Giambologna's documented marble statue.

There remains one complication, however, which has to be confronted before the piece may be safely added to Giambologna's œuvre: this is a further inscription engraved inside the hollow casting, 'COSIMO PRIMO DA GIOVANNI DI BOLOGNA' (Fig. 4). As every diligent reader of Dhanens' monograph knows, the insertion of the preposition 'di' in the artist's name is illicit and anachronistic, however common it eventually became owing to a confusion between his Italianized surname and his early period of activity in the city of Bologna. Furthermore, the identification of the sitter would have been otiose in any Florentine context, quite apart from the fact that the form of wording without any of the customary titles or niceties would have been unacceptable. The engraved inscription is thus 'wrong', to use

Fig. 3. Giambologna, *Cosimo I de' Medici*, bronze, 24.5 cm. high. Private collection.



Fig. 4 (above). Interior of bust in fig. 3, inscription inside the casting.

Fig. 5 (below). Signature on shoulder of bust in fig. 3.

Fig. 6 (right). Giambologna, *Self-portrait*, bronze, 9 cm. high, after 1599. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.





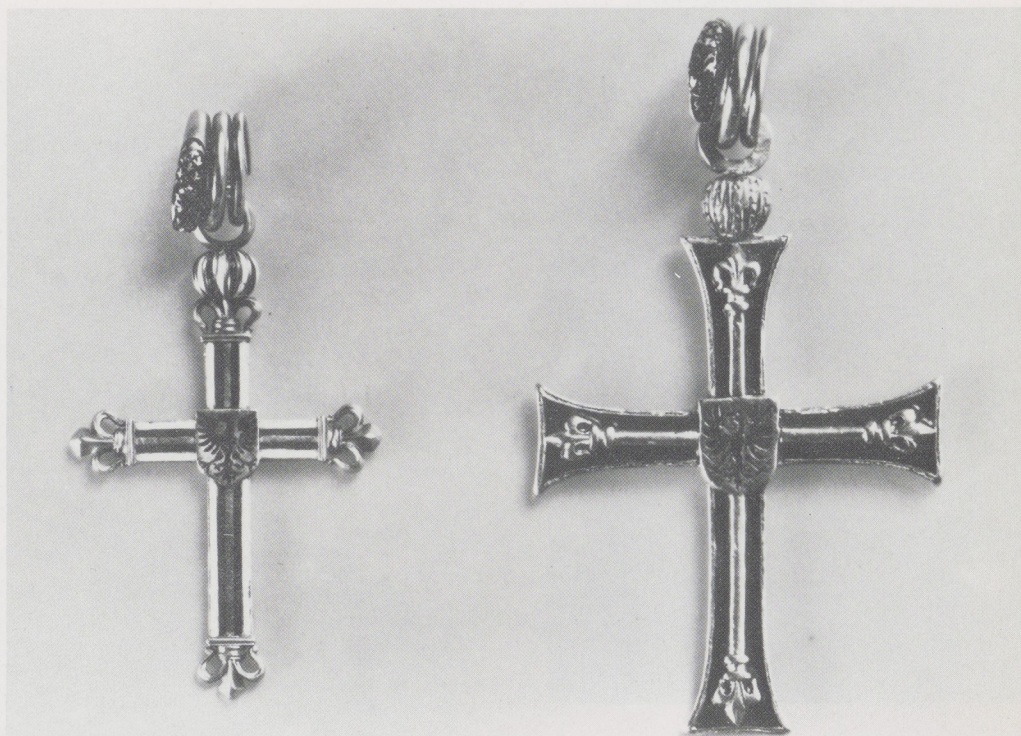
Fig. 7 (below left). Giambologna, *Self-portrait*, bronze, 9 cm. high, after 1599. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon (1361).

Fig. 8 (above right). Giambologna, *Self-portrait*, bronze, 9.2 cm. high, after 1599. Private collection.



connoisseurs' parlance. The question remains whether its presence vitiates the attribution of the bust to Giambologna. I think not, for it has the air of a statement added considerably later to elucidate for a person, who was not as familiar as a contemporary would have been with the world of the Florentine Cinquecento, the curious—though absolutely authentic—signature on the shoulder, as well as the identity of the sitter. The casting of the bust by lost-wax is consistent with, though not of course a proof of, a 16th century origin; furthermore, the image is not simply a slavish reduction of the head and shoulders of the monumental statue, but a carefully cogitated variant, as described above; and finally, its style and facture are redolent of

Fig. 9. German or Austrian, 16th/17th century. Crosses of the Grand Master of Teutonic Order, enamelled gold. *Schatzkammer des Deutschen Ordens, Vienna.*



Giambologna and his bronze founders. The second of the small bronze portrait busts included in the exhibition (nos. 143–145) is known in three virtually identical casts (Figs. 6, 7, 8). None has a provenance that is significant for determining the author or subject. Nevertheless, there are various internal clues, of which the most important, apart from style, is the 'Greek' cross prominently embroidered on the left breast of the tunic. The example in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (R.B.K. 15117), was ascribed on stylistic grounds to Hendrick de Keyser by Leeuwenberg⁷. He identified the sitter as a Knight of the Utrecht Chapter of the Teutonic Order because of the cross. This was accepted by Weihrauch⁸, by Smodis-Eszlary⁹, and perpetuated in the catalogue of sculpture in the Rijksmuseum¹⁰. While the cross is not dissimilar from that of the Teutonic Order, it should be noted that its stem is not elongated into a 'Latin' cross (Fig. 9).

An alternative identification of the sitter as Giambologna himself, wearing the cross of the Knights of Christ, which he was awarded by the Pope in 1599¹¹, and a proposal that the bust, if not a self-portrait, at least originated in his workshop was published by the present author in 1973¹². This was refuted in the Rijksmuseum catalogue¹³ but re-stated in a review of the catalogue¹⁴. A comparison with accepted portraits showing Giambologna towards the end of the century, for instance the drawing of 1591 by Goltzius (Fig. 10), leaves little doubt as to the identity of the miniature bronze bust¹⁵, while the cross of the Knights of Christ proudly carved on the coat-of-arms over the door of Giambologna's *palazzo* at no. 23 Borgo Pinti in Florence is clearly identical with that worn by the sitter (Fig. 11). Its correct identity is corroborated by its appearance in images of other artists who were awarded it later, for instance, Gianlorenzo Bernini (Fig. 12) or Giovanni Baglioni.

Fig. 10. Hendrick Goltzius, *Giambologna*, chalk drawing, inscribed and dated 1591. Teylers Stichting, Haarlem.

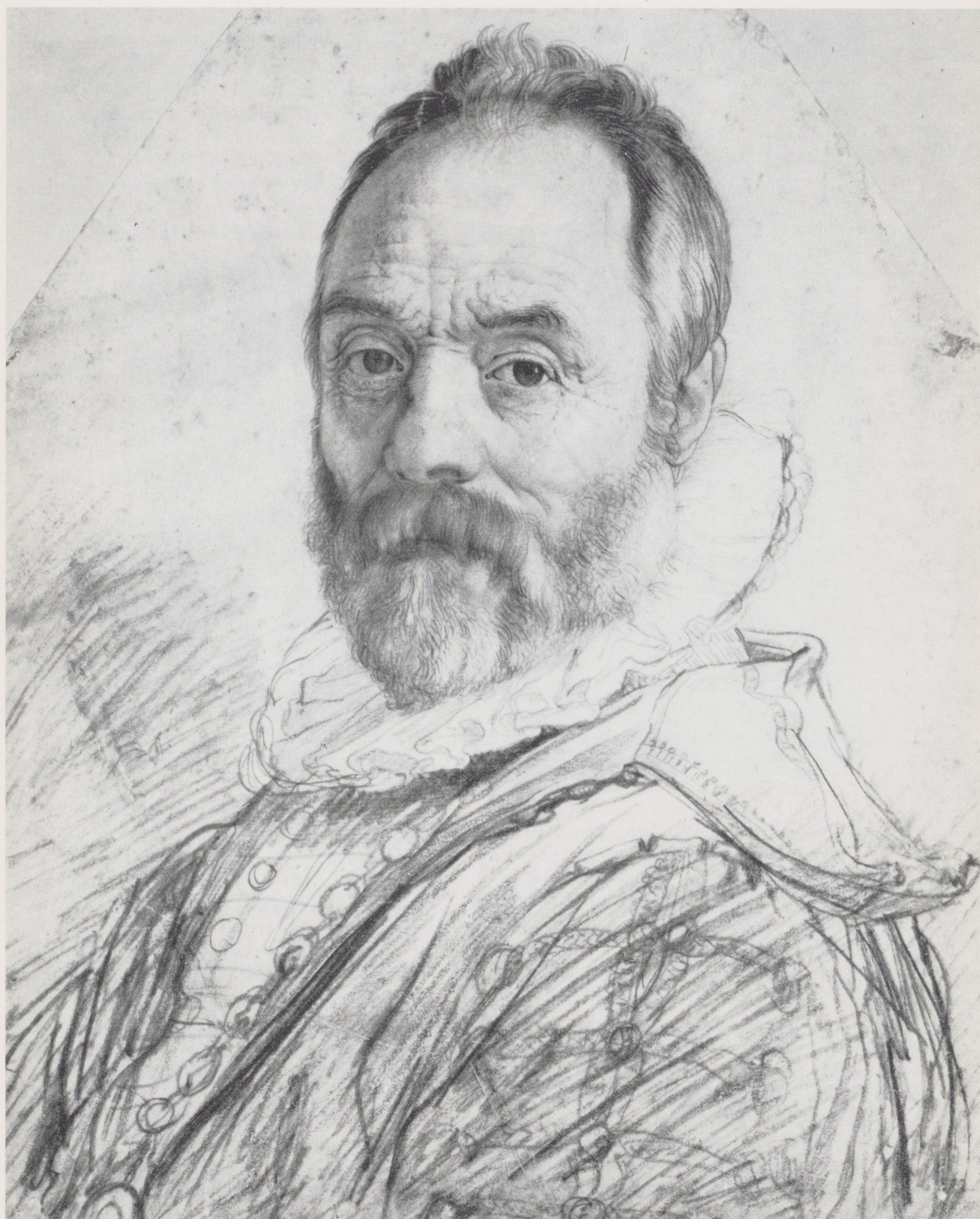


Fig. 11. Workshop of Giambologna, Coat-of-arms of Giambologna, marble, after 1599, Grand-Ducal Studio, Borgo Pinti, Florence.



Interestingly enough, a bronze portrait of Giambologna valued at a quarter the worth of one of his statuettes of horses—and therefore presumably about a quarter of the size—was inherited in 1663 from the estate of the widow of N. C. Cheeus of Antwerp by their son Nicolaes¹⁶: *Een peerdt, henst, van Joan de Bologne... 72 gl; Jan de Bolonge, van bronse... 18 gl*. This clearly itemized legal document proves the existence of a probably rather small bronze image of the sculptor and provides the clue for a re-interpretation of a related, but earlier document, which has frequently been mis-read and mis-quoted¹⁷. This is a posthumous inventory of the estate of Cheeus himself, who died on 31 March 1621, which, it can now be seen, included the

bronze portrait in a lot of seven items: *Twee figuren van peerden, een van stier, twee van leeuwen, een van moesler oft ruyspyper, een van Meester Jan de Bouloigne, al in bronsse oft koper, op ebbenhouten voeten oft pedestalalen, geestimeert tsamen op seven hondert end tachentich gulden* (two figures of horses, one of a bull, two of lions, one of a musician or bagpiper, one of Master Giambologna all in bronze or copper, estimated together at seven hundred and eighty guilders). The sculptor's name has usually been taken as a reference to the authorship of the bronzes, which are indeed all part of his standard repertoire. The new reading means logically that their authorship is not so specified. However, the particular combination of subjects and the fact that they were included in a lot with a portrait of Giambologna leaves little doubt that they were by him—including the bust itself!

Another bronze self-portrait bust of Giambologna was to be found shortly afterwards in the collection of Pieter Stevens of Antwerp, which was offered for sale posthumously in 1668¹⁸: *De Jean de Bologne No. 74 – Son Pourtraict en Bronze*. This was the only sculpture in the collection and the last lot in the catalogue. Unfortunately, no sizes were given, but there is a strong presumption that it was a miniature bust like the one recorded in the Cheeus collection in the same city as long before as 1621 and as recently as 1663. Might it even have been identical, having been sold or given to Stevens, shortly before he died, by the younger Nicolaes Cheeus soon after he had himself inherited it? In view of the fact that a small bronze portrait—depicting Giambologna—existed in Flanders early in the 17th century, it seems not unreasonable to associate the reference with the miniature bust under discussion, and perhaps even with the example now in the Rijksmuseum, which has a northern provenance, albeit a recent one¹⁹.

The portrait may well have been produced to celebrate the sculptor's elevation to the Knighthood in 1599, which as we know from his anxious correspondence of the period was a matter of great personal importance.

Fig. 12. Ottavio Leoni, Gianlorenzo Bernini as Knight of Christ, engraving, 14.3 × 11.5 cm., 1622. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

May it not have been a self-portrait, modelled by the delighted recipient to mark the apogee of his worldly success, an acknowledgment of his talents from the Pope himself? If this is the case, the uniquely small size may have been chosen to suggest a decorous modesty. The production in bronze and the chiselling may even so have been delegated—as was usual—to Antonio Susini²⁰.



Notes

* This is the text of a paper given at the Conference in Edinburgh University at the opening of the Arts Council/Edinburgh Festival exhibition, Giambologna, *Sculptor to the Medici*, 1978 (Cited below as 'Giambologna Cat. 00').

¹ L. Berti, *Il Principe dello Studiolo*, Florence, 1967, plate II.

² E. Dhanens, *Jean Boulogne*, Brussels (1956), p. 345: ... *la statua del Duca Cosimo nei Magistrati...*; cf. pp. 231–2, cat.no. L; cf. Council of Europe, *Firenze e la Toscana dei Medici, Palazzo Vecchio: committenza e collezionismo medicei*, Florence, 1980, nr. 668.

³ F. Settmani, *Diario Fiorentino* IV (1574–1587), folio 363 and 365 verso; A. Lapini, *Diario Fiorentino*, Florence, 1900, pp. 239–40; cited by Dhanens, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 231, n. 1.

⁴ E. Borsook, 'Art and Politics at the Medici Court, I, the Funeral of Cosimo I de' Medici'. In *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 12 (1962), p. 38, n. 38.

⁵ I am grateful to its owner, who wishes to remain anonymous, for permission to reproduce the bust and to Cyril Humphris who negotiated its loan to the exhibition.

⁶ Dhanens, *op. cit.* (Note 2), pp. 26–7.

⁷ J. Leeuwenberg, 'Drie werken met meer of minder zekerheid aan Hendrick de Keyser toegeschreven', *Maandblad voor Beeldende Kunsten* 24 (1948), p. 229.

⁸ H. Weihrauch, *Europäische Bronzestatuetten*, Braunschweig, 1967, p. 361.

⁹ E. Smodis-Eszlárý, 'Un petit bronze inconnu de Hendrick de Keyser', *Bulletin du Musée Hongrois des Beaux-Arts*, 34–35 (1970), pp. 99, 102.

¹⁰ J. Leeuwenberg and W. Halsema-Kubes, *Beeldhouwkunst in het Rijksmuseum*, 's-Gravenhage/Amsterdam, 1973, pp. 184–85.

¹¹ Dhanens, *op. cit.* (Note 2), pp. 365–66.

¹² C. Avery, 'Hendrick de Keyser as a sculptor of small bronzes', *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 21 (1973), pp. 5–7.

¹³ Leeuwenberg and Halsema-Kubes, *op. cit.* (Note 10), p. 516.

¹⁴ C. Avery, 'Sculpture in the Rijksmuseum', *The Burlington Magazine* 119 (1977), p. 44.

¹⁵ E.g. Giambologna, Cat. 213, 214.

¹⁶ J. Denucé, *Inventories of the art-collections in Antwerp in the 16th and 17th centuries*, Antwerp, 1932, p. 236.

¹⁷ Denucé, *op. cit.* (Note 16), p. 35; cf. Dhanens, *op. cit.* (Note 2), p. 215.

¹⁸ B. Jestaz, 'A propos de Jean Boulogne', *Revue de l'Art*, no. 46, 1979, p. 81, n. 17, citing S. Speth-Holterhoff, *Les Peintres Flamands de Cabinets d'Amateurs au XVIIe siècle*, Brussels, 1957, p. 199.

¹⁹ Amsterdam art dealer, 1937.

²⁰ The identification and attribution as a self-portrait are now accepted by most authorities, e.g. J. Montagu in her review of the exhibition in *The Burlington Magazine* 120 (1978), p. 693 and Jestaz, *op. cit.* (Note 18).