

**THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS
OF THE CITY OF DETROIT**

Bulletin

VOL. XXII... NO. 2

NOVEMBER.. 1942



THE DRUMMER BOY (DETAIL), SILK BROCADE, VENETIAN, MID-FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Kahn, 1942.

Eighteenth

THREE MASTERS OF THE ROMAN BAROQUE: CORTONA, DUQUESNOY, LEGROS

THE relativity of taste is one of the most striking and, to the layman most alarming things about the arts. How is it possible to have any standards at all when we see the meteoric appearance and disappearance of reputations; when the artists whom one generation has learned to call great are in the next generation described by critics as worthless, and when the price of a picture can within a life time sink to a tenth of its one-time value or rise from nothing to the skies.

We get pleasure from works of art according to what we bring to them. We see the arts from our own position in time and each generation chooses its favorites among the masterpieces of the past on the basis of its own inner life. As our life changes, so does the general point of view or taste and in a mentally undisciplined age these fluctuations are very violent. But the changes in value must also be attributed to the fact that we are a people who, in our intellectual life, must at all costs be in the fashion of the very latest moment. So long as we gallop, a hundred thousand strong, to read the latest book recommended by the latest literary authority, or have a decorator do over our houses in the newest style every ten years, we shall continue to rush to collect the half dozen painters in fashion at the moment, while hundreds of interesting and delightful artists are completely neglected. For this we can hardly blame the artist or the picture. They remain precisely what they are.

One hundred years ago when Americans like Hawthorne and Emerson went to Italy, one of the experiences which delighted and impressed them was the splendor which seventeenth century Italian artists had known how to create. Coming from the simple and austere setting of New England they had never known such experiences as were offered by the mingled grandeur and charm of Italian villas and formal gardens, or the glowing and cheerful splendor of the interior of the Roman churches or of palaces like the Pitti Palace in Florence. But in the second half of the nineteenth century taste changed: people's interest went into learning to comprehend the more restrained and sober arts of the early Renaissance or the austere nobility and inner exaltation of the Middle Ages. Under the leadership of Ruskin English speaking art lovers learned to lump together under the term "baroque" all the profuse creative activity that followed Michelangelo and to despise it as bad. The word "baroque" today still has power to check the natural outflow of pleasure which springs up in the average art lover before a fine work of the Italian seventeenth century; and American collections are still weak in examples of even the greatest artists of that age.

Pietro da Cortona (1596-1669) was, both as architect and as painter, one of the decisive figures of seventeenth century art. In architecture he takes his place with Borromini and Bernini as one of the great creative architects at Rome, where the ideas were developed that were to affect the architecture of all Europe. In painting he was no less important, for his invention of the aerial ceiling painting ranks, so far as influence goes, with the ceilings of Correggio and the Sistine Chapel. Yet the little picture of *St. Jerome in the Desert* (Fig. 1) just given us by Mr. and Mrs. E. Raymond Field, is apparently the first of his paintings to be acquired by an American museum.¹

Published monthly, October to May inclusive, at the Detroit Institute of Arts of the City of Detroit, 5200 Woodward Avenue, Detroit, Michigan. Entered as second class matter at the post office at Detroit, Michigan, under date of October 29, 1934. Subscription price \$1.00 per year.

The style which Pietro da Cortona played so important a part in creating, was designed to create an atmosphere of energy and confidence, splendor and triumphal joy—traits which have seldom been brought together in art. Its tone of what might be called noble cheerfulness, or dignity combined with delight, has something to do, perhaps, with the times in which he lived. The seventeenth century was a period of peace and expanding energy in Rome after the tragic and stormy times of the sixteenth century. The art of Rome, which had for a century been dominated by the heroic project of building St. Peter's, was ready to turn to other tasks. Pietro da Cortona took the lead in developing a new architecture on a more intimate scale, in which the designer, freed from problems of grandiose construction, worked for a free interplay of masses and voids, variety of light and shadow, and contrasts of concave and convex surfaces which were made possible by the great



ST. JEROME IN THE DESERT BY PIETRO DA CORTONA, ITALIAN, 1596-1699.
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. E. Raymond Field, 1942.

invention of the seventeenth century architect—the predominance of the curved line. The churches he created at Rome are among the most beautiful expressions of the baroque spirit.

In painting his chief work was the invention of a new type of decoration which surrounded domestic life with a setting equally sumptuous, imaginative and pleasing. His ceiling of the great salon of the Barberini Palace (painted 1633-37) created the aerial ceiling design. He followed this by the decoration of the rooms on the first floor of the Pitti Palace in Florence (1640-47), which now form the picture gallery. The ceiling decorations of these rooms combined painting with enframing sculpture in stucco, producing an effect of variety and splendor that inspired a decorative style throughout Europe.

St. Jerome in the Desert, though small in scale, is a good example of the rapid energetic movement, the bright clear color, the luminosity and cheerfulness which marked Pietro da Cortona as a painter. The saint is not without earnestness of spirit, but he is far from the image of studious solitude or painful self-mortification that the Renaissance made him. The Roman baroque preferred in Christianity the elements of confidence, gladness and hope to those of sadness. It is a vision of the triumphal joy of heaven, of a glory born by happy angels, that bursts upon the saint whose retreat is a pleasant landscape with a chorus of nymphs dancing in the background. The artists of the seventeenth century preferred to offer the believer a foretaste of paradise upon earth rather than to frighten him with martyrdoms and horrors; this was the spirit of architecture and sculpture as well. We may recall the words of the seventeenth century critic Felibien (1666) about the artist: "As we have said, there are two sovereign qualities in Painting; the one to work with science in order to instruct, and the other to paint agreeably in order to please; and that which pleases, makes a more general effect than that which instructs. One can also say that the quality necessary to please, was the portion of Pietro da Cortona. How many times in Rome have we looked at the Salon of the Barberini Palace, where we found so many graces and so much nobility in the arrangement of the figures, such harmony in the attitudes and in the expression of the heads, such a beautiful unity in the colors, and what the Italians call *Vaguezza* (gracefulness)? Although this work is in fresco, it has no less force and tenderness than if it were painted in oil. And although the drawing may not be of an exquisite taste, nor the draperies of the figures altogether well arranged and natural, there is nonetheless in the whole something so gracious and so sweet to the sight that there is no one who does not take much pleasure in looking at it."

The *St. Jerome* however belongs to the phase of more luminous coloring and more spacious ordering of the figures that came in with the Pitti Palace decorations. And since it came originally from the Medici Collection in the Riccardi Palace, it is possible that it was painted in Florence at the same time. Easel paintings were for this immensely productive artist a relaxation from his great architectural and decorative projects.

The Founders Society has also given the museum two pieces of Roman baroque sculpture which are of special interest for our collection. The characteristics of the art of this period as seen in Pietro da Cortona—perception in terms of color and light, a free movement of forms in space, an air of richness and splendor, a sweet and joyous spirit—would seem to be qualities difficult or impossible to achieve in sculpture. Yet seventeenth century sculpture not only reached the highest level of technical and expressive skill, but formed, like painting, an essential element in the effect of harmonious richness with which that age surrounded itself. In our collection sculpture is represented side by side with painting through every century down to



SACRED AND PROFANE LOVE BY FRANÇOIS DUQUESNOY, FLEMISH, 1594-1643.
Gift of The Founders Society, 1942.

the seventeenth, so that the absence of baroque sculpture was a serious gap and the acquisition of two characteristic pieces is helpful.

One of the most important sculptors at Rome in the first period of the baroque style was François Duquesnoy (1594-1643). Born at Brussels, he worked from the age of twenty-four in Rome. The Italians called him Fiammingo (the Fleming) and valued his work very highly. He took part in the decoration of St. Peter's carried out under Pope Urban VIII (Barberini) and his colossal *St. Andrew* (1629-40) which stands against one of the piers carrying the dome in this church, and his *St. Susannah* in St. Maria di Loreto, Rome, had a lasting influence on sculpture. But still more influential were his small sculptures in ivory, bronze or terracotta, and his charming compositions of playing children used as decorative architectural reliefs, both which created types of sculpture that were carried on until the end of the rococo.

The marble relief of *Sacred and Profane Love* (Fig. 2) is a characteristic treatment of the theme which he was the first to introduce into baroque sculpture. The grace and simple easy movement of these child figures made his work extremely popular. His reliefs and free-standing figures were multiplied by casts and spread all over Europe, so that the envious called him *il fattore d'amori* (the cupid-maker). But it is significant of the solid plastic strength of his work that it was also popular with artists. His casts appear frequently in the studios of the Dutch seventeenth century painters. The *Self Portrait* of Frans van Mieris in our collection shows a plaster cast among his still life properties in the studio he shared with Gerard Dou at Leiden; another cast of the same cupid was owned and painted by Cézanne. It was by comparison with a plaster relief used by Dou in two pictures (W. Martin, *Dou, Klassiker der Kunst*, Stuttgart and Berlin, 1913, p. 121) that Dr. Valentiner identified the present relief, which was standing nameless in a New York antique shop.²

The simplicity and plastic dignity of Duquesnoy's work are marks of his classical tendency. For if Bernini, the dominating genius, developed in seventeenth century Roman sculpture an unprecedented dynamic style, there was also a tendency toward

simplicity and quiet under the influence of antique sculpture. Duquesnoy and his intimate friend Poussin were leaders of this tendency. Immediately after arriving at Rome in 1618 Duquesnoy began studying the antique sculpture and first became known for his small replicas and free studies in bronze or ivory of famous classical pieces. A small bronze *Antinous* by him, of this period, at Alger House (described in *The Art Quarterly*, Vol. III, No. 3, Summer, 1940, p. 267) shows the mingled grace and plastic dignity which made these small figures popular among the discerning Italian collectors and brought to the young sculptor the opportunity to join the group of artists working in St. Peter's.

If the Duquesnoy shows the free, graceful movement and genial spirit of Roman baroque sculpture in a plastic style still related to the classical feeling, *The Glorification of St. Luigi Gonzaga* (Fig. 3)³ by Pierre Legros, II (1666-1719) shows what pictorial qualities of light and space were achieved by another wing of the movement. It is a *bozzetto*, a sculptor's model, for the monumental relief



GLORIFICATION OF ST. LUIGI
GONZAGA BY PIERRE LEGROS II,
FRENCH, 1666-1719.

Gift of The Founders Society, 1942.

executed in marble over the altar of St. Luigi Gonzaga in the church of St. Ignazio, Rome. This sketch is a complete work of art in itself with the added value of representing a fully developed monumental composition for one of the most considerable sculptural projects undertaken in Rome at the end of the century. Legros, although born in France, went in 1691 at the age of twenty-five to the French Academy at Rome and his artistic life belongs to the Roman movement. According to the original rule of the French Academy, its sculptors were allowed to work only on orders from their own government to be sent to France; but by the 1690's Louis XIV's government was so deeply involved in wars and pressed by so many expenses, that this rule was tacitly relaxed. There was also a dearth of native talent after the death of Bernini in 1680 so that the French sculptors were much employed in Rome. Legros may be said to represent the best ideal of Italian baroque sculpture of his times. He made his reputation first by the statute of *Religion Overcoming Heresy* on the right side of the famous altar of St. Ignatius in the Gesù. This brought him the commission for his masterpiece, the altar of *The Glorification of St. Luigi Gonzaga* in the church of St. Ignazio, executed between 1697 and 1703. The altar consists of an architecture frame of typical baroque splendor in color and material, surrounding a marble relief of the saint ascending into glory.

The terracotta sketch is very close to the completed composition; only a few details had to be changed to adjust the composition to a larger scale. Legros treated the scene in a graceful and decorative spirit. The gentle young saint with humbly bowed head, is lifted on clouds surrounded by crowds of angels toward the rays of glory streaming from above. The relief, both in the sketch and in the completed work, is a tour de force of the late baroque spirit, a composition of many figures in free, graceful movement through space and of pictorial subtleties of modeling.

The Roman baroque was also capable of more sober and dramatic expression in other hands. But no one should underestimate the seriousness or the extraordinary technical achievements of this art because of the sweet, gentle and decorative spirit which is clearly embodied in all three of these works. It was an art which wished to surround life with riches. But it did not confine itself to the small circle of a few refined spirits. It was chiefly concerned with public buildings such as parish churches, where we today are satisfied if decent dignity is achieved, but which the seventeenth century wished to clothe in an atmosphere of splendor, joy and hope. It was a phase in the life of western art which deserves to be represented in American museums, for it is an ideal of art which we never find in our ordinary environment.

E. P. RICHARDSON

¹Accession Number 42.56. Copper, an irregular polygon. Maximum height: 17 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches; Width: 15 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches (Framed, Height: 17 $\frac{1}{2}$; Width: 14 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches). Engraved in the eighteenth century as an oval, it was apparently later cut to the present shape.

Collections: Medici, Palazzo Riccardi, Florence; LeBrun, Paris (1764); Sir. Thomas Baring, Earl of Northbrook.

References: *Galerie LeBrun*, I, 23, Engraving No. ii; London, British Institution, Exhibit of 1816. No. 72; *Catalogue of the Northbrook Collection*, No. 170.

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. E. Raymond Field, 1942.

²Accession Number 42.107. Marble relief. Height: 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches; Width: 33 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches. Gift of the Founders Society, 1942.

The relief is mentioned by Bellori: "A boy representing 'Divine love' overthrows 'Profane love', holding him down with his foot and closing his mouth to silence him, while another boy raises the laurel crown toward 'Immortal victory' and thus he (Duquesnoy) changed the composition of Annibale Carracci in the Galleria Farnese." *Le vite de pittori, scultori e architetti moderni*, Rome, 1728, p. 160-1.

Georg Sobotka mentions in his article on Duquesnoy in *Thieme-Becker*, Vol. 10, p. 191, an unpublished terracotta relief of quarreling children in the Palazzo Spada, Rome, which may be connected with our marble.

³Accession Number 42.52. Terracotta relief. Height: 34 inches; Width: 16 inches. Collections: Curt Glaser, Berlin. Gift of the Founders Society, 1942.

THE DRUMMER BOY

THE Institute has recently acquired, as a gift of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Kahn, a panel of one of the most beautiful Italian brocades, woven in Venice about the middle of the eighteenth century.¹

It is one of the rare, utterly fantastic, exquisitely frivolous designs with figures of that last great period of textile art. Although vaguely reminiscent of the ubiquitous fashion of the day, *chinoiserie*, there is nothing of the nostalgic artificiality which so often pervades the contemporary French chinoiserie fabrics. The Venetian designer and weaver unite in presenting to us a fabric of solid gaiety in the spirit of the *feste e maschere* which made Venice so attractive to travelers from foreign lands.

A fountain surmounted by dolphins, steps leading up a rock, a windblown tree with knarled trunk, huge leaves and magnificent blossoms, an island tied to a garland of fruits and flowers, these are the ingredients of a landscape which make us forget the laws of gravity and symmetry, all the limitations of mere logic. In such a landscape figures are apt to become merely staffage, like the little girl looking over the rock at the fountain. But the Drummer Boy is more than that, he is a real personality. In his three-cornered hat and blue uniform, golden sticks in raised hands, he stands firmly behind his glittering kettledrums, absolutely master of his universe. The strong colors of the brocading silks contrast pleasingly with the background of white corded silk and the glimpses of gold.

The panel pictures to perfection the high spirit and geniality of Venice in the last heyday of her glory, the eighteenth century which "with its thousand corruptions, its elegances, its sprightly wit and its carelessness of tomorrow, in the most luxurious frame, on the most fantastic background, has ever baffled the poet's imagination and defied the painter's palette" (Theophile Gautier).

ADELE COULIN WEIBEL

¹Accession Number 42.7. Length: 32 inches; Width: 31¾ inches. Length of repeat of pattern 18½ inches. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Kahn, 1942.

HOURS OF ADMISSION

The Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward Avenue, is open free daily except Mondays and Christmas Day. Visiting hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday afternoon, 1 to 6; Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday evenings, 7 to 10; Saturday, 9 to 5; Sunday, 2 to 6. The grounds of the Russell A. Alger Branch Museum for Italian Renaissance Art are open daily. The Museum is open Saturday, 10 to 6; Sundays, 2 to 6.