

T O M A S S O



Antonio Susini (1558–1624)

Equestrian Portrait of Carlo Emanuele I, Duke of Savoy

c. 1620

Bronze, dark brown patina with traces of red lacquer

36.8 cm (14 1/2 in.) high, base 21.5 cm (8 1/2 in.) high, overall 58.3 cm (23 in.) high

The bronze, once owned by Maria Beatrice of Savoy, depicts Duke Carlo Emanuele I of Savoy wearing armour distinguished by the cross of the Order of Saint Maurice. In its size and characteristics, the bronze can be compared to two works which have long been known and debated in specialist studies – another version of the same equestrian portrait found at Lowenburg in Kassel and apparently originating from Paris (38 cm high; Avery, Radcliffe and Leithe-Jasper 1978, p. 242, no. 161a) and a bronze equestrian portrait of Henri IV of France in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon (38 cm high; Crepin-Leblond 2003, p. 135, no. 10). As Manfred Leithe-Jasper has observed (Avery, Radcliffe and Leithe-Jasper 1978), the horse in the latter sculpture is a mirror image of the former and, therefore, of the one exhibited here.

The figures of the horsemen are also a mirror image, and both wear identical suits of armour. One can therefore suppose that the portraits of these two sovereigns were conceived as pendants, and such a theory finds support in the dynastic relationships between the Savoy and the sovereigns of France: Vittorio Amedeo, the son and heir (from 1630) of Carlo Emanuele I, married, in 1619, Maria Cristina, daughter of Henri IV and Maria de Médicis and sister of Louis XIII of France. Two small equestrian bronze portraits with the same collective history, depicting the Bourbon Henri IV and Vittorio Amedeo I respectively, were also commissioned for this occasion (Wallace Collection, London; Mann 1981, pp. 158–59).

As has already been acknowledged, the horse in the bronzes of Dijon and Kassel and in the present exhibited example is very similar to the horse signed by Antonio Susini which is today in the Victoria and Albert Museum of London

(Motture 2006, no. 61, p. 276). The portraits of Henry IV and Carlo Emanuele I have also been attributed to this sculptor and in fact they exhibit the same detailed style which Antonio habitually shows and the same extreme precision with which he typically carried out the cold work.

According to Baldinucci, the wax model, which is now lost, for the small equestrian bronze monument of Carlo Emanuele I in Kassel dates to the year of the wedding between Carlo Emanuele I's son and Henri IV's daughter. The sculpture itself is dated around 1621–22; it is believed to have been made as an alternative after the large equestrian monument requested by the Duke after he was sent the wax model failed to be realised. In truth, one of the related documents, a letter which the Duke sent the sculptor on 5 October 1621, mentions a “cavallino” (little horse), a term which better suits a sculpture of the size of the bronze presented and of its pendant. According to every probability, therefore, the conception of our bronze dates back to this same occasion, when the Savoyard court turned to the artistic environment of Florence for inspiration. D.Z.

Provenance:

Maria Beatrice of Savoy

Exhibitions

The Centro Internazionale, Carrara

Pietro Tacca

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Antonio Susini (1558-1624)

SCULTURA - 15 OCTOBER - 1 NOVEMBER 2008, Catalogue no. 13, Williams Moretti & Irving Gallery, 24 East 80th Street, New York 10075.

Literature:

Ed. C. Avery, A. Radcliffe and M. Leithe-Jasper, *Giambologna 1529–1608. Ein Wendepunkt der Europäischen Plastik*, Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, 1978 -79

Thierry Crepin-Leblond, in *Marie de Médicis* 2003, p. 135, no. 10
Mann, 1981

P. Motture, in *Giambologna: gli dei, gli eroi – Genesi e fortuna di uno stile europeo nella scultura*, exhibition catalogue, ed. B. Paolozzi Strozzi and D. Zikos, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, 2006