

Daniel Katz Gallery

ANTIQUITY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



Master of the Barbarigo Reliefs (Venice 1485 - 1515)

Salvator Mundi

Circa: c.1515

c.1515

Bronze and Parcel Gilt

16.5 x 13 cm (6 1/4 x 5 1/4 inches)

This exquisite relief depicting Christ in benediction is known in only two other closely related examples: in the Bode Museum in Berlin, and the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (for illustrations see Planiscig, 1921, op. cit., fig. 220 and Planiscig, 1924, op. cit., fig. 146). It is undoubtedly the finest cast of the three. A fourth plaquette which appeared on the art market in 1984 (Christie's London, 15 May, lot 98) appears to be a roughly contemporary example executed by a different hand.

On stylistic grounds, the relief was first connected by Leo Planiscig to three other bronze reliefs depicting the Coronation of the Virgin, the Assumption of the Virgin and the Twelve Apostles, all of which originally formed part of the funeral monument to the doges Marco and Agostino Barbarigo in the church of Santa Maria della Carita in Venice (dismantled in 1807, the reliefs are now in the Ca' d'Oro; Planiscig, 1921, loc. cit.). It is from these reliefs that the unidentified author takes his name. All four reliefs share the same classicising drapery, slightly ovoid faces and the distinctive background which is given texture through the repeated use of a circular punch. As Laura Camins has pointed out, the head and drapery of the apostle just to the right of the central pair in the Twelve Apostles, is particularly close to

the present bust of Christ (loc. cit.). Several other bronzes have also been connected to this group including a relief of St Jerome, also in Berlin (Krahn, op. cit., no. 51, pp. 187-189). Numerous proposals for the authorship of these bronzes have been put forward, but none has

been universally accepted to date (for a summary, see Camins, loc. cit.). However it would seem that the most likely candidates are Antonio Lombardo or his brother Tullio, whose father Pietro was probably responsible for the design of the Barbarigo monument (for the

attribution of the monument to Pietro Lombardo see Markham Schulz, loc. cit.).

In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the Lombardo family dominated the world of Venetian sculpture, with eight out of nine doges being commemorated by a tomb executed by either Pietro or Tullio Lombardo (Markham Schulz, op. cit., p. 187). Among the most

relevant commissions in the present context is the baldachino relief of God the Father surrounded by cherubs in the Zen Chapel of San Marco in Venice (illustrated in Planiscig, 1921, op. cit. fig. 229). The chapel, which was commissioned following the death of the wealthy Cardinal Giovanni Battista Zen in 1501, was designed by Antonio Lombardo. The main altar houses free-standing bronzes of the Virgin and Child Enthroned flanked by standing figures of SS Peter and John the Baptist. The relief of God the Father adorns the underside of the architectural canopy which protects them.

Although executed on a much larger scale, the figure of God the Father has the same delicate folds of drapery, a similar treatment of the hair and beard, and the distinctive mouth with parted lips as can be seen on the present relief of Christ. In addition, the cherub heads surrounding the central figure of God are closely related to a number of casts of small busts of female figures which are therefore also attributed to Antonio Lombardo. These female busts, two examples of which are in the Galleria Estense, Modena (illustrated in Krahn, op. cit., p. 41), are even more closely related to the present figure of Christ. The wavy modelling of the hair which is then further defined with fine individual strands, the simplified planes of the face and the parted lips are all highly reminiscent of the Christ offered here. It therefore seems likely that the Master of the Barbarigo reliefs is, in fact, Antonio Lombardo, and that he was commissioned to execute the bronze reliefs for the Barbarigo monument designed by his father. However, regardless of its authorship, the present relief has a monumentality and power – even on this small scale - that is a testament to the extraordinary talent of its creator.

Provenance

With Alessandro Castellani (as Bust of the Savior)

The Boston Athenaeum, 1876, and immediately placed on loan to the new Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Sotheby Parke-Bernet, New York, 18 February 1977, lot 58.

Christie's, New York, 28 January 2015, lot 5.

The Alana Collection, to 2024.

Acquired from the above.

Exhibitions

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1876-1974.

The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Renaissance and Baroque Bronzes from the Abbott

Guggenheim Collection, 3 Mar. – 11 Sep. 1988.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Sept. 2003-2005.

Literature:

L. Planiscig, *Venezianische Bildhauer der Renaissance*, Vienna, 1921, pp. 209-255.

L. Planiscig, *Die Bronzeplastiken – Statuetten, Reliefs, Geraete und Plaketten*, Vienna, 1924, fig. 146, pp. 80-81.

A. Markham Schulz, 'Pietro Lombardo's Barbarigo Tomb in the Venetian Church of S. Maria della Carita', in *Art the Ape of Nature – Studies in Honor of J. H. Larson*, New York, 1981, pp. 171-192.

A. Luchs, *Tullio Lombardo and Ideal Portrait Sculpture in Renaissance Venice 1490-1530*, Cambridge, 1995.

V. Krahn, *Bronzetti Veneziani – Die venezianschen Kleinbronzen der Renaissance aus dem Bode-Museum Berlin*, 2003, nos. 3, 49-52, pp. 38-41, 182-191.

M. Schwarz ed., *European Sculpture from the Abbott Guggenheim Collection*, New York, 2008, no. 40, pp. 92-93.