

# Girardon's "Melancholy": A Note on Its Placement in the Park at Malmaison During the Nineteenth Century

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PAINTINGS ARE NOT the only works of art to travel widely before finding refuge in museums. In spite of their weight, dimensions, and fragility, many sculptures have had a comparable fate. Before it came to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the beautiful allegorical relief by François Girardon—principal element of the funerary monument to Anne-Marie Martinozzi, princesse de Conti, who died in 1672—was adapted for use in a way that its author could never have foreseen. Offered as a complement to the article by Dean Walker, the following details concern the removal of Girardon's work to Malmaison and its placement in the park surrounding the empress Josephine's château.

The appearance of the tomb as it stood in St.-André-des-Arts in Paris is known from a drawing in the Gaignières collection.<sup>1</sup> During the Revolution, the main figure was saved and deposited in the Petits Augustins, where Alexandre Lenoir exhibited it under the number 193:

*De Saint-André-des-Arts.*

Un grand bas-relief, consacré à la mémoire d'Anne-Marie Martinozzi, princesse de Conti, morte en 1672, âgée de 35 ans; consistant en une belle figure de marbre blanc, à demi-bosse, accompagnée des attributs qui désignent la Foi, l'Espérance et la Charité, vertus caractéristiques de cette princesse.

Ce monument érigé par ses deux fils, a été exécuté par Girardon. On remarque de chaque côté une branche de cyprès, précieuse pour la délicatesse du travail.<sup>2</sup>

A watercolor in the Musée Carnavalet shows the work in the introductory gallery of the Musée des Monu-

ments Français, still practically intact, including the semicircular part at the top adorned with vaporous clouds in relief, the burning heart symbolizing Charity held in the figure's left hand, and the anchor, symbol of Hope, steadied by her right.<sup>3</sup> In entry 1062 of his Journal, Lenoir mentions this sculpture among the "objects" whose removal to the château of Malmaison was authorized by the Minister of the Interior on the sixth of Germinal in the year IX of the Republic (1801):

18° Un bas-relief en marbre blanc, représentant la Mélancolie, par Girardon, venant de Saint-André-des-Arts.<sup>4</sup>

The work's title has changed, and there is no longer any question of Christian virtues. We do not know

1. Jean Adhémar, "Les Tombeaux de la collection Gaignières: Dessins d'archéologie du XVIIe siècle," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* ser. 6, 90 (1977) p. 18, no. 1932, ill.

2. Alexandre Lenoir, *Description historique . . . des monumens de sculpture, réunis au Musée des Monumens français* (Paris, 1798) pp. 186–187. The entry is repeated through the 1806 edition of this catalogue.

3. The Musée Carnavalet watercolor is reproduced in J. Vanuxem, "Aperçus sur quelques tableaux représentant le Musée des Monuments français de Lenoir," *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de l'Art Français*, 1971 (1972) p. 149, fig. 2, where Girardon's authorship is not mentioned; see also D. Walker, "Decorative Panels by François Girardon from the Tomb of the Princesse de Conti," *MMJ* 15 /1980 (1981) pp. 143–148, n. 6.

4. Louis Courajod, report on the sculptures at Malmaison in 1800–15 and on those restored to the Louvre in 1877, *Bulletin de la Société Nationale des Antiquaires de France* (1877), minutes of meeting Apr. 11, pp. 117–126, esp. pp. 119, 120, 121 n. 1.

whether it was at this time, in anticipation of the work's new destination, that the anchor was eliminated and the burning heart transformed into a poppy evoking sleep and oblivion, or whether the changes were made a few years later, in 1807, when—as the following message indicates—the relief was actually moved:

Le chambellan de service près S.M. l'impératrice a l'honneur de prévenir Monsieur Lenoir que S.M. désire qu'il apporte lundy, à la Malmaison, le petit monument de la Mélancolie.

A Malmaison, ce 2 avril 1807<sup>5</sup>

Later, Alexandre Lenoir, “honorary curator” of Josephine's collections, published an article in the *Dictionnaire de la conversation* on his role as supplier and arranger of the sculptures at Malmaison. Although his memory misled him in certain details, he wrote:

Je procurai aussi un Saint François . . . ainsi qu'un bas-relief funéraire, sculpté en marbre par Girardon, afin qu'il y eût dans le parc un tombeau suivant l'ordonnance d'un jardin anglais.<sup>6</sup>

The inventory of the empress's effects after her death confirms Lenoir's recollection in this case. Included “dans le parc” in 1814 was:

n° 1566. Item. Un bas relief en marbre blanc par Girardon représentant la mélancolie et formant un monument tumulaire prisé 400 francs.<sup>7</sup>

It fell to Lenoir to draw up the “état du partage des objets d'art et Antiquités de la Malmaison” between Josephine's heirs, Prince Eugène and Queen Hortense, the two children born of her union with Alexandre de Beauharnais. In Prince Eugène's share, assigned September 16, 1814, is found:

Dans le parc . . . n° 261 un bas relief en marbre blanc, par Girardon, représentant la Mélancolie et formant monument tumulaire 800 francs.<sup>8</sup>

The words are identical, although the value has doubled. The “parc” is clearly distinguished from the “parc extérieur,” which implies a monument erected not far from the château. Like most of the statuary in

the gardens, it was sold with the building. Bought back in 1861 by Napoleon III, the château was confiscated in 1870. The officials of the Domaines de l'Etat took possession of it and drew up various inventories, notably that of August 23, 1876, which recorded the “objets susceptibles d'être conservés” in the event of a new sale. The park was then reduced to a few acres around the château. The inventory lists “au dessous de la Garenne, la fontaine de la Dormeuse, avec un bas relief en marbre blanc, représentant une jeune fille”—undoubtedly Girardon's “Melancholy,” whose veiled head and poppy would allow her to be taken for a woman asleep. By this date, then, the relief was part of a fountain. Had the “tumular monument” already served as a fountain in Josephine's day? There is no drawing or document to indicate one way or the other. On December 13, 1876, the “Sleeping Woman” does not figure in the list of vases, sculptures, and columns reserved for the French museums. Their conveyance took place on February 1, 1877, and the same day an inspector called Schoell wrote to the director of the Domaines mentioning those objects that could still be sold or kept, among them the “bas-relief de la fontaine de la Dormeuse en marbre blanc.”<sup>9</sup>

After a stay of seventy years in the park at Malmaison, Girardon's work was to pass from hand to hand. Sold privately with part of the park, it was left on deposit at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs and exhibited in the Palais de l'Industrie from 1884 to 1890, then taken by the Parent family to Varengeville-sur-Mer in Normandy, put up for sale in 1909, again deposited at Malmaison in 1927–28, lent by Georges Bernard to the “Exposition des chefs-d'oeuvre de l'art français”

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 122–123 n. 3. Courajod was unaware of the fate of the relief after its transfer to Malmaison.

6. Alexandre Lenoir, “Malmaison,” in William Duckett, ed., *Dictionnaire de la conversation et de la lecture* XXXVI (Paris, 1837) p. 465; quoted by Courajod, *Bulletin*, pp. 122–123.

7. Serge Grandjean, *Inventaire après décès de l'impératrice Joséphine à Malmaison* (Paris, 1964) p. 201, fol. 261, with note; the location of the relief at the time is not indicated. Gérard Hubert, “Josephine, A Discerning Collector of Sculpture,” *Apollo* 106, n.s. no. 185 (July 1977) p. 38, fig. 7.

8. Twelve-page notebook in Lenoir's hand, Archives Malmaison, inv. MM 67-9-1, gift of Comte Roger Walewski, 1967.

9. Versailles, Archives Départementales (Seine et Oise, D 822, Malmaison).



1. Stele in the park at Malmaison, showing holes above for the attachment of a relief and below for the installation of a fountain (photo: Studio Laverton, Rueil-Malmaison)



2. Photomontage showing the placement of Girardon's "Melancholy" at Malmaison, 1807–77 (photo: Studio Laverton, Rueil-Malmaison)

at the Palais National des Arts in Paris, 1937, and finally acquired in 1939 by the Metropolitan Museum.<sup>10</sup>

It remains to be seen whether the exact site of the monument at Malmaison can be determined, as I think it can. In the park, which is now rather modest

10. Paris, Palais National des Arts, *Chefs-d'oeuvre de l'art français* (Paris, 1937) pp. 468–469, no. 1040, with history. Paul Vitry, responsible for the sculpture section, completed this entry in his personal copy of the catalogue with a mention of the sale of 1909 and the loan to Malmaison in 1927–28, of which

by comparison with its former size, and not far from a small artificial waterfall crowned by a statue of Neptune, there is a tall stone stele, curved at the top and approximating the form of a Greek funerary stele (Figure 1). This "monument" is pierced by a hole at

there is no trace in the museum's archives. The sculpture was reproduced in an album of plates by Paul Vitry, *Les Chefs-d'oeuvre de l'art français à l'Exposition internationale de 1937: II. La Sculpture française du XVIIe au XIXe siècle* (Paris, n.d. [1937]) pl. ix.

its base, which evidently once held pipes designed to convey water into a fountain whose basin has disappeared. In addition, there is a roughly worked, sunken area in the middle with three holes to allow for the attachment of a relief. It happens that the width of this recessed area corresponds with that of the Girardon relief—namely, 64 centimeters. The stele is thus certainly to be identified with the “tumular monument” conceived by Lenoir as a setting for Girardon’s “Melancholy.” A photomontage shows how well the relief resumes its former place (Figure 2). The only thing missing is the semicircular upper portion which Lenoir must have had carried out by an unknown sculptor with some symbolical or decorative attribute to complete the ensemble.

The stele bears a graffito dated 1906, proving that it was in place when the Musée National du Château de Malmaison was created. It is unlikely to have been brought from a neighboring property at that date, since it no longer had any sculptural decoration. On the other hand, the nearby statue of Neptune is not in its original place in the “Naumachia,” whose remains lie a few hundred yards away on private property. I am persuaded that the stele-fountain close by the “rivière anglaise” served as a support for Girardon’s work in the years following 1807. Even though unhappily deprived of its graceful decoration, it remains an almost unique witness to Josephine’s taste for parks enlivened with statues and *fabriques sentimentales*.