

# Decorative Panels by François Girardon from the Tomb of the Princesse de Conti

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IN 1939 The Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired a marble sculpture of an allegorical figure (Figure 1),<sup>1</sup> one of the few works by François Girardon (1628–1715) which is now to be found outside France. Girardon emerged as an important artist in the mid-1660s. Twenty years later, he had attained a preeminent position among the sculptors of Louis XIV, and until his retirement in 1700, he continued to superintend important royal projects.<sup>2</sup> As with all the sculptors of the *ancien régime*, his oeuvre suffered seriously as a consequence of the French Revolution. While his sculptures at Versailles were protected from damage, the same cannot be said for those works that were more accessible to the public. His large-scale equestrian statues were all destroyed. His tomb monuments, however, met various fates, and most survived in one form or another. The Museum's relief belongs to this group. It was once the principal sculptural decoration for the tomb of the princesse de Conti (1639–72) in the church of St.-André-des-Arts in Paris.<sup>3</sup> The appearance of the monument is known from an engraving (Figure 2), showing it in reverse. The two marble panels of cypress branches that originally flanked the relief had been thought lost for over a century, but have now been rediscovered in the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Paris (Figure 3).<sup>4</sup>

The history of the princesse de Conti's tomb is known primarily from the research of Louis Réau.<sup>5</sup> In 1793, during the Revolution, the reliefs were removed to the convent of the Petits-Augustins, which served as a depot for displaced sculptures. From a recently published drawing by Vauzelle, dated to the first decade of the nineteenth century, we now know that the central relief arrived there intact.<sup>6</sup> When the

holdings of the convent were reorganized into the Musée des Monuments Français, confusion arose over the attribution and provenance of the three reliefs, and for a short while it was forgotten that they

1. Preston Remington, "Recent Acquisitions of French Sculpture," *MMAB* 34 (1939) pp. 213–215, repr. cover.

2. The standard reference is Pierre Francastel, *Girardon* (Paris, 1928).

3. The former presence of memorials to the princesse de Conti in the church of Port-Royal-des-Champs has led some writers to suggest that this tomb was originally erected there: *Chefs-d'oeuvre de l'art français*, exh. cat. (Paris, 1937) pp. 468–469, no. 1040; and Gérard Hubert, "Josephine, A Discerning Collector of Sculpture," *Apollo* 106, n.s. no. 185 (July 1977) pp. 37–38. The monument is identified as in the church of St.-André-des-Arts at the top of the engraving by Charpentier (Figure 2), and is described there by G. Brice, *Description de Paris* (Paris, 1684) II, p. 127. The memorials related to the princesse de Conti at Port-Royal are transcribed by Edouard de Barthélemy, *Une Nièce de Mazarin: La Princesse de Conti* (Paris, 1875) pp. 254–259.

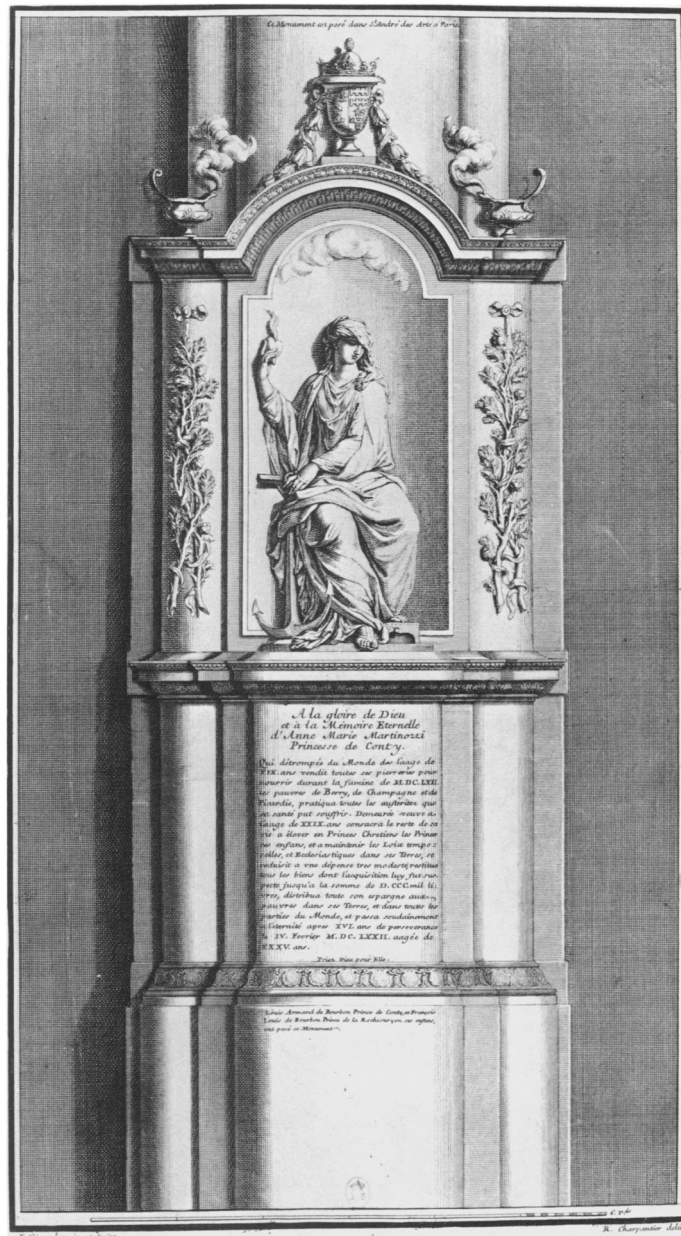
4. Inv. 240 (IV 47); the panels were identified in May 1978 with the aid of Mlle Annie Jacque, curator of the library of the Archives of the Museum and Collection of the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts.

5. Louis Réau, "Un Bas-relief de Girardon retrouvé: Le Monument de la princesse de Conti," *Revue de l'Art Ancien et Moderne* 41 (1922) pp. 34–38; idem, "Un Bas-relief de Girardon retrouvé: Le Tombeau de la princesse de Conti," *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de l'Art Français*, 1921 (1922) pp. 68–74. See also Francastel, *Girardon*, p. 72, no. 29, and François Souchal, *French Sculptors of the 17th and 18th Centuries: The Reign of Louis XIV* (London, 1981) II, pp. 33–34, no. 29.

6. The drawing is discussed and reproduced as anonymous by 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. 150 and repr. p. 149, fig. 2. It is signed on the lower center: *Vauzelle*. The date below the signature is uncertain because the lower margin of the sheet has been trimmed. Still, it is possible to read: 180(?).



1. François Girardon (1628–1715), *Allegorical Figure*, executed probably between 1672 and 1675 as part of the tomb of Anne-Marie Martinozzi, princesse de Conti (d. 1672). Marble,  $56\frac{3}{4} \times 25\frac{1}{4}$  in. (144.3 × 64.2 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 39.62
2. René Charpentier (1680–1723), Engraving of the tomb of Anne-Marie Martinozzi, princesse de Conti, in St.-André-des-Arts, Paris. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes, Va 263f. fol. (photo: Bibliothèque Nationale)



belonged together.<sup>7</sup> They can be found correctly identified, however, in the museum's catalogues from 1797 to 1810.<sup>8</sup> By then, at the orders of the museum's director Alexandre Lenoir, the central relief had been recut to its present form for use in the garden at Malmaison, to which it was probably transported in 1807.<sup>9</sup> Of the attributes representing the three theological virtues originally displayed by the figure, only the foundation block of Faith remains, supporting her right foot.<sup>10</sup> The anchor symbolizing Hope was completely removed, and the flaming heart of Charity was transformed into a poppy.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, the decorative panels remained in Paris. When the Musée des Monuments Français was suppressed in 1816, Lenoir listed the pilasters without an attribution and gave their location as the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, which had been constructed on the same spot and had taken over part of the museum's

7. According to Alexandre Lenoir's journal for 1793 (Louis Courajod, *Alexandre Lenoir, son journal et le Musée des Monuments français* [Paris, 1878] I, p. 261), the three reliefs arrived together on 12 Nivôse, 1793, with an attribution to Girardon and a provenance of St.-André-des-Arts. However, in Lenoir's own copy (Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes) of his *Notice succincte des objets de sculpture et d'architecture réunis au dépôt provisoire nationale rue des petits Augustins* (Paris, 1793) manuscript notes, p. 31, no. 276, the allegorical relief is attributed to Coysevox and there is no reference to the cypress panels. In the next catalogue, A. Lenoir, *Notice historique des monuments des arts, réunis au dépôt national* . . . (Paris, 1796), the central relief is correctly identified as by Girardon (p. 30, no. 155), and the cypress panels, though without attribution, are listed as from St.-André-des-Arts (p. 7, no. 32).

8. In 1797, the year in which permanent reference numbers were assigned, the three reliefs were designated as no. 193, from the princesse de Conti's tomb, St.-André-des-Arts: A. Lenoir, *Description historique et chronologique des monuments de sculpture réunis au Musée* . . . (Paris, 1797) p. 149; (1798) p. 186; (1800) p. 278; (1802) pp. 263–264; (1803) p. 94; (1806) V, pp. 92–94; (1810) p. 213.

9. This chapter of the history of the relief is discussed in the following article by Gérard Hubert, chief curator of the Musée National of the château of Malmaison. For another tomb by Girardon that was displaced by the French Revolution and modified in the 19th century, see Dean Walker, "A Fragment of Girardon's Tomb of Henri Bonneau de Trassy," *Burlington Magazine* 123, no. 934 (1981) pp. 30–33.

10. Cesare Ripa, trans. Jean Baudoin, *Iconologie* (Paris, 1644; Garland reprint, New York, 1976) I, pp. 75f., under "Foy chrétienne." There is no visible evidence that Charpentier's engraving is correct about this detail of the relief, which he represents as a footstool.

11. The anchor is associated with Hope in Hebrews 6:19. The flaming heart is given as an attribute of Charity in Ripa, *Iconologie*, II, p. 114.

3. Girardon, *Cypress Branches*, decorative panels from the tomb of the princesse de Conti. Marble, 56 × 11¾ in. (142 × 30 cm.) Paris, Ecole des Beaux-Arts (photo: Bulloz)

collection.<sup>12</sup> Corrad de Breban, author of an important book on Girardon in the nineteenth century, saw them there in 1832.<sup>13</sup> He gave their setting as a window bay in an arcade, and noted that the reliefs were damp from students taking plaster casts from them. His fear that the panels would suffer even more from the approaching reconstruction of the school was justified. Sometime after that the reliefs disappeared. Louis Courajod did not refer to them in his discussion of the sculptural remains of Lenoir's museum; Stanislas Lami did not include them in his list of Girardon's works; Pierre Francastel described them as lost in the Revolution along with the rest of the tomb's decorative details.<sup>14</sup>

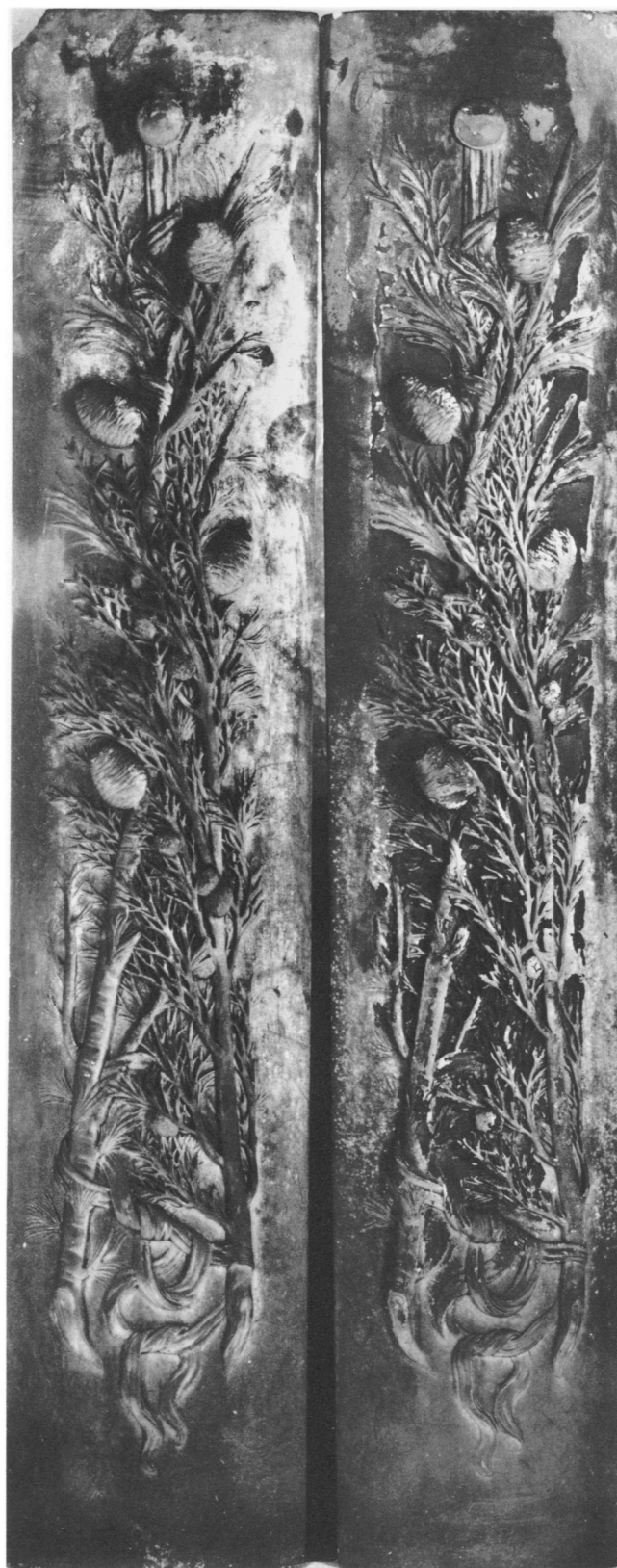
Although black with dirt, the reliefs still exist at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. They do not correspond exactly with the form or dimensions given in the print. Both pilasters are essentially of one composition, but differences in handling and in the placement of cones prevent an impression of exact repetition. The panels are in correct scale with the allegorical relief,<sup>15</sup> and are rounded to follow the shape of the pier in St.-André-des-Arts against which they were placed. The quality of the carving is also evidence of their authenticity. In particular, the loose ribbons tying the boughs at their stems are close in handling to the soft folds of the allegorical figure's inner robe and veil. The bows shown at the top of the panels in the print do not

12. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Cabinet des Estampes, Yb4/671, Alexandre Lenoir, *Manuscripts*, under: "No. 2 Ornaments sculptés," no. 148.

13. Corrad de Breban, *Notice de l'oeuvre de François Girardon de Troyes . . .* (Paris, 1833) p. 30, no. 12.

14. Louis Courajod, *Alexandre Lenoir* (Paris, 1886) II, pp. 19–204; Stanislas Lami, *Dictionnaire des sculpteurs de l'école française sous le règne de Louis XIV* (Paris, 1906) pp. 204–216; Francastel, *Girardon*, p. 72, no. 29.

15. The measurements derived from the scale given on the print are too small for the tomb. The height of the allegorical relief in its present condition would be 50 in. according to the printed scale, as opposed to its actual 56¾ in., and that of the cypress reliefs 52 in. as opposed to 56 in. Corrad de Breban (*Notice*, p. 30) gave the height of the cypress panels as around 4 ft. 10 in.



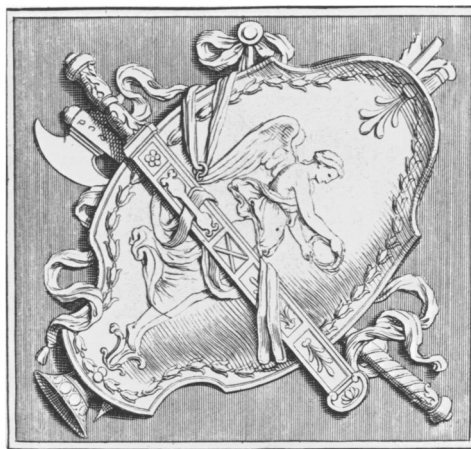


exist today, but it is likely that they were removed at some point after being damaged.<sup>16</sup>

In her unpublished inventory of 1973, Mme Bouleau-Rabaud, former curator of the library at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, considered the possibility that the reliefs were those of the princesse de Conti's tomb,<sup>17</sup> but she was put off by their apparent similarity to pine branches. In fact, the branches of cypress, traditionally associated with death, were represented by Girardon with botanical fidelity. Girardon had earlier, in the late 1660s, created more freely modeled but still identifiable growing plants in his lead relief of the *Bath of the Nymphs*.<sup>18</sup> Closer in date to the pilasters are the carefully finished plants in the marble *Bath of Apollo* group completed in the mid-seventies.

The significance of the cypress reliefs extends beyond their demonstration of Girardon's virtuosity in plant rendering to their quality as ornamental design. Throughout his career Girardon devoted great attention to the decorative passages in his works. Although the design itself has not come down to us, his entry of around 1670 in the competition for a third colossal order, a "new composite French order" for the attic of the Louvre, was singled out for praise in the late seventeenth century by the architectural theorist A.-C. d'Aviler.<sup>19</sup> The cypress panels at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, remarkably delicate in their execution, are our earliest surviving examples of Girardon's decorative relief carving in marble. His talent in this direction seems to have been readily appreciated. In an official guidebook to Versailles of 1681, Girardon was credited with designing a set of decorative reliefs of the arms of the nations of the world in what is now called the Bosquet des Dômes.<sup>20</sup> In the royal account books from the late 1670s, Girardon is mentioned in a way that suggests a predominant role in the project, but additional evidence has been lacking.<sup>21</sup> However, a series of prints, not known since the mid-eighteenth

4. Charpentier, Engraving of a trophy by Girardon in the Bosquet des Dômes at Versailles. Vienna, Graphische Sammlung Albertina, K. H.B.183, f. 41, no. 29 (photo: Lichtbildwerkstätte "Alpenland," Vienna)



5. Girardon, *Trophy*. Marble. Versailles, Bosquet des Dômes (photo: Myra Orth)

16. Additional support that the ribbons existed comes from an anonymous 18th-century drawing of G. Coustou's monument for the princesse de Conti's son, which was placed across from her tomb and was designed as a pendant. In it, two flanking panels have military trophies that hang from ribbons (Paris, Musée Carnavalet, 105H).

17. Mlle Annie Jacque confirmed this for me.

18. Francastel, *Girardon*, pl. xv, fig. 20.

19. Ibid., p. 71, no. 25.

20. Le sieur Combes, *Explication historique de ce qu'il y a de plus remarquable dans la maison royale de Versailles et en celle de Monsieur à Saint Cloud* (Paris, 1681) pp. 98–100.

21. Jules Guiffrey, *Comptes des bâtiments du roi sous le règne de Louis XIV* (Paris, 1881) I, cols. 963, 1160, where the payments are made to "Girardon et consors. . ." Francastel wisely took a conservative stand on this issue (*Girardon*, p. 76, no. 39).

century, corresponds to some of the reliefs and supports the attribution to Girardon.<sup>22</sup> Like the engraving of the princesse de Conti's tomb, the prints are by Girardon's student René Charpentier, and were most likely commissioned by the sculptor himself. Most of the arms hang from bows, and in several reliefs there is a notable repetition of the winding ribbon motif of the cypress panels. One such trophy represents a shield decorated with a figure of winged victory, shown here in Charpentier's print (reversed) and in the marble relief (Figures 4, 5).

Taken together, the three reliefs from the tomb of the princesse de Conti allow a reconsideration of its character. A much grander monument would have been justified by the princess's fortune and by her rank as the niece of Cardinal Mazarin and the widow

of the younger brother of the Grand Condé. As was well known in her own time, however, the princesse de Conti was a fervent adherent of Jansenism and lived austere.<sup>23</sup> In the seventeenth-century manner, her charitable acts were described in some detail in her epitaph.<sup>24</sup> The lost gilt-bronze festoons on the urn of the tomb and the prominent placement of the monument near the high altar reflect her importance.<sup>25</sup> But the tomb avoided the lavish use of colored marble and any form of effigy or portrait. Instead, the allegorical figure expressed the Christian virtues that motivated the princess's life.<sup>26</sup> No seventeenth-century sculptor was better suited than Girardon to create such a monument. Even today, despite later vicissitudes, its veiled figure and cypress reliefs retain an appropriate, eloquent modesty.

22. Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna, K. H.B.183. I am indebted to Dr. Fritz Koreny for helping me find these prints. They will be discussed thoroughly in my doctoral dissertation on Girardon for the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University.

23. For the most detailed account of her life, see de Barthélemy, *Une Nièce de Mazarin*.

24. The inscription as preserved in Charpentier's print reads: "A la gloire de Dieu / et à la Mémoire Eternelle / d'Anne Marie Martinozzi / Princesse de Conty. / Qui détrompée du Monde de l'âge de / XIX. ans vendit toutes ses pierreries pour / nourrir durant la famine de M.DC.LXII. / les pauvres de Berry, de Champagne et de / Picardie, pratiqua toutes les austérités que / sa santé put souffrir. Demeurée veuve a / l'âge de XXIX. ans consacra le reste de sa / vie à élever en Princes Chrétiens les Princes / ses enfants, et a maintenir les Loix temporelles, et Ecclesiastiques dans ses Terres, se / reduisit a une dépense tres modeste, restituez / Tous les biens dont l'acquisition

lui fut sus- / pecté jusqu'à la somme de D.CCC. mil li- / vres, distribua toute son espargne aux / pauvres dans ses Terres, et dans toutes les parties du Monde, et passa soudainement / a l'éternité apres XVI. ans de perseverance / le IV. Fevrier M.DC.LXXII. âgée de / XXXV. ans. / Priez Dieu pour Elle. / Louis Armand de Bourbon Prince de Conty, et François / Louis de Bourbon Prince de la Rochesurayon ses enfants, / ont posé ce Monument."

25. A. N. Dézallier d'Argenville, *Voyage pittoresque de Paris* (Paris, 1749) p. 218.

26. Girardon's allegorical figure for the tomb of the princesse de Conti served as the model for the funerary monument of François de Guénégaud by the sculptor's pupil Pierre Granier. In this work, commissioned in 1685, Granier represented only Charity. He retained the flaming heart in the figure's raised left hand and added three children, one of whom is feeding at Charity's breast. For more about this work, see Souchal, *French Sculptors*, II, pp. 92–93, no. 15.