
Two Bronze Busts after François Girardon

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To Geneviève Bresc-Bautier

The sculptor François Girardon (1628–1715) will be familiar to *Metropolitan Museum Journal* readers with long memories, thanks to Dean Walker's admirable article of 1980 reconstituting the tomb of the Princesse de Conti.¹ The tomb's principal decoration, a marble relief (Figure 1), is one of the treasures of the Metropolitan Museum. It is at least two decades earlier than the pair of bronze busts that are the subject of the present study (Figures 2, 3). The busts' provenance is unknown before their bequest to the Museum by the discerning collector Colonel Michael Friedsam. They seem not to have been published apart from the catalogue of an exhibition formed by the Museum for Athens in 1979. I then called their style "that of the Louis XIV school of sculptors, which included François Girardon and Martin Desjardins."² Room was found for them in the Museum's venue of the great exhibition devoted to French bronze sculpture in 2009, "Cast in Bronze: French Sculpture from Renaissance to Revolution," but they were not addressed in the catalogue.³ Through a series of observations, it can now be established that the author of their compositions was in fact Girardon.

Girardon, born in Troyes in 1628, was the youngest member of the triumvirate that dominated artistic creation in the France of Louis XIV, joining the landscape architect of Versailles, André Le Nôtre (1613–1700), and the *premier peintre* Charles Lebrun (1619–1690). Girardon's grandest projects include the marble group *Apollo and the Nymphs* in the Grotto of Thetis at Versailles (1666), the marble tomb of Cardinal Richelieu in the chapel of the Sorbonne in Paris (1675–77, toward the end of his work on the tomb of the Princesse de Conti), the mostly destroyed bronze equestrian Louis XIV that once surveyed the Place Vendôme in Paris



1. François Girardon (French, 1628–1715). *Allegorical Figure*, executed probably between 1672 and 1675 as part of the tomb of Anne-Marie Martinozzi, princesse de Conti (died 1672). Marble, 56¾ x 25¼ in. (144.3 x 64.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1939 (39.62). Photograph: Joseph Coscia Jr., Photograph Studio, MMA. The attributes, originally uniting those of Faith, Hope, and Charity, as known through an engraving, were recarved when the relief belonged to Empress Joséphine at the Château de Malmaison to commingle those of Sleep and Oblivion, understood generically to represent Melancholy.

2. After François Girardon.
Bacchus, ca. 1680–1700.
Bronze, H. 17¾ in. (45.1 cm),
later mounted on a black marble
socle. The Metropolitan Museum
of Art, The Friedsam Collection,
Bequest of Michael Friedsam,
1931 (32.100.195). Photograph:
Joseph Coscia Jr., Photograph
Studio, MMA



(1685–94), and the marble group *The Rape of Proserpina* now in the Orangerie at Versailles (1699). All the while, he ascended in the ranks of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture as professor (1659), rector (1674), and finally chancellor (1695). Having earned every right to slow down, he gradually gave up marble carving, and his dwindling strength in his later years was devoted to supervising bronze reductions of his own compositions and to amassing a collection of sculptures from antiquity and reductions

after the compositions of Michelangelo and Duquesnoy as well as works by his contemporaries. These were housed in his quarters in the Palais du Louvre. He had René Charpentier draw the best pieces of his collection, arranged with Baroque pomp in imaginary settings designed by the architect Oppenord.⁴ Charpentier's designs were engraved before 1709 by Nicolas Chevallier as a set of thirteen plates.⁵

Girardon owned two ancient marble figures of Bacchus,⁶ but for our bronze bust he seems to have consulted one that



3. After François Girardon. "Erato," ca. 1680–1700. Bronze, H. 16 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (41.1 cm), later mounted on a black marble socle. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Friedsam Collection, Bequest of Michael Friedsam, 1931 (32.100.194). Photograph: Joseph Coscia Jr., Photograph Studio, MMA

had been in the Louvre since 1604 and is now shown in the Galerie des Glaces at Versailles (Figure 4).⁷ The bronze head has been adjusted so that it no longer dips woozily to the wine god's left, and the neck is now drawn back in a manner, more assertive fashion. The contrapposto of a whole figure is implied by the god's raised left shoulder, and the muscular undulations are more rhythmic and forceful. The bronze bust retains the band across the brow, but the contours of the vine leaves stand forth better without the over-

hanging arm of the marble. The lion skin is switched to the god's right, covering that side of his chest. The fine almond eyes and exceptionally long locks of hair of the marble at Versailles are the traits our modeler has valued most, all the rest being adjusted in keeping with the refined gusto characteristic of Girardon's resolutely classical Baroque style.

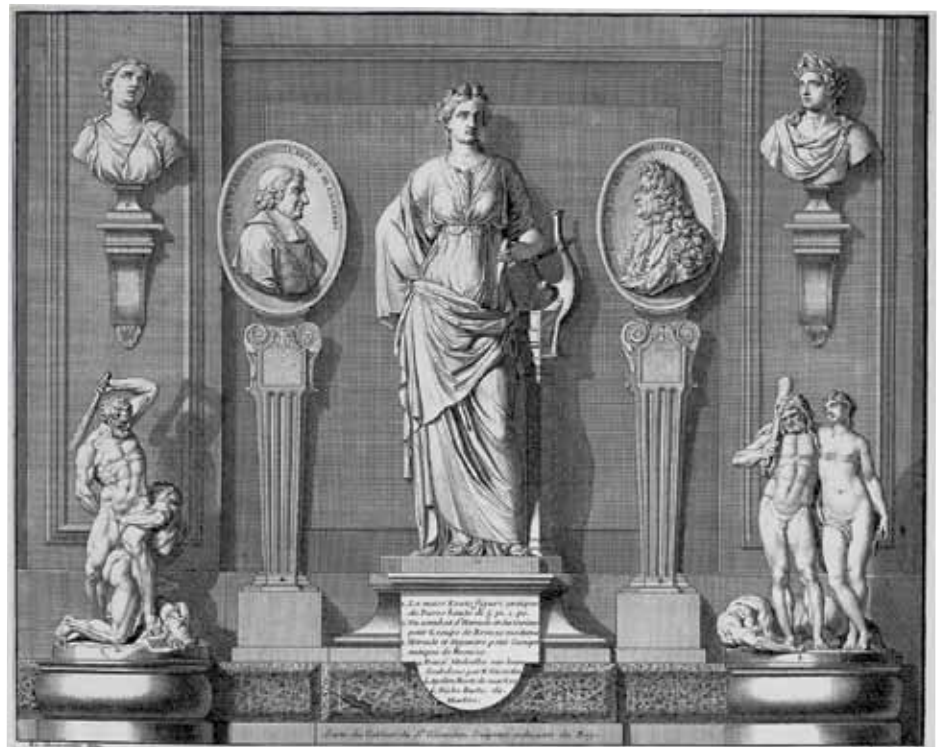
For the pair of busts I had first proposed as subjects Bacchus and Ariadne, then Bacchus and "Flora or Pomona," imagining them as perhaps members of a group of busts



4. *Bacchus* (detail). After a Hellenistic composition of the 4th century B.C. Pentelic marble, H. 83 1/8 in. (219 cm). Château de Versailles et de Trianon. Photograph: Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, New York

suggestive of the Seasons.⁸ The answer is partially provided by a plate of the *Galerie de Girardon* in which an ancient statue with precisely the facial features of our female is called “Erato” (Figure 5).⁹ The orientation of the statue, of Parian marble, with head, hands, lyre, and the stand that supports it all additions in Carrara marble, was reversed by the engraver. The engraved figure wears a grimmer expression than that of the actual figure, which survives. It recently reemerged on the Paris market, having belonged earlier to the Dukes of Buccleuch and Queensberry at Dalkeith Castle in Scotland (Figure 6).¹⁰ When inventoried in Girardon’s collection in 1715, the sculpture was identified only as “an antique figure of white marble, whose head is modern.”¹¹ Except for the head, its accretions have vanished, and the composition laid bare looks closest to an ancient type of Venus with motifs of drapery proper to the muse Urania.¹² The bronze repeats exactly the model, no doubt of clay, that was followed for the replacement head and bosom of Girardon’s ancient “Erato.” The showy crown of roses, which would have horrified a Greek, and the delicately gathered peplos are the same, except that the blossoms are more carefully delineated in the bronze.

Erato was the muse of lyric poetry, especially erotic poetry. Apart from the lost lyre recorded in the engraving and the caption under the image, there would have been no particular reason to identify the subject of the bust as Erato. The young woman before us is comely but hardly lascivious. The pairing with Bacchus has no immediate explanation apart from the fact that the two make a handsome



5. Nicolas Chevallier after René Charpentier. *La Galerie de Girardon*, pl. 7. Paris, before 1709. Engraving, 12 3/4 x 15 7/8 in. (32.5 x 40.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1953 (53.600.1593)



6. *Muse*, restored by François Girardon as *Erato* (with detail of head). Roman, 1st–2nd century A.D. Parian marble; H. 58 in. (143 cm), H. including restorations of Carrara marble 69½ in. (176.5 cm). Galerie J. Kugel, Paris



7. After François Girardon. *Apollo*, ca. 1680–1700. Bronze, H. 27½ in. (69.9 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art, Purchased with the Fiske Kimball Fund and the Marie Kimball Fund, 1976 (1976.39.1). Photograph: Gradon Wood

couple with their fine, regular brows, straight noses, and gently waving hair.

In style, the two are more concentrated and streamlined than the heads of Girardon's marble grotto figures at Versailles. In terms of both style and approach to metal, they are quite like sizable bronze statuettes after Girardon's *Apollo* (see Figure 7), which embody a further condensation of the classicism found in the grotto figures.¹³ The satiny chasing and lustrous dark brown varnish also find close matches. Like the Philadelphia bronze, the Museum's busts are surprisingly weighty (at fifty and forty pounds) and top-heavy, having great concentrations of metal in the heads.¹⁴ Despite their excellence, Girardon probably had little to do with the casting or, probably, even the chasing, of these lesser bronzes. He probably turned rather to jobbers who respected his high standards, but we are insufficiently

informed about their interactions. The major works provide clues here and there. In a feat that astonished everyone, the Swiss-born founder Balthasar Keller cast Girardon's Place Vendôme equestrian *Louis XIV* in a single pour. Visitors to "Cast in Bronze" will remember the extraordinarily thick mass of the royal foot, the monument's only surviving element.¹⁵ Just as the equestrian used up tons of metal, liberality with the material clearly extended to the smaller bronzes to which Girardon gave his attention.

NOTES

1. Walker 1980; Hubert 1980; Wardropper 2011, pp. 131–33, ill.
2. Draper in Athens 1979, pp. 160–63, nos. 51, 52, ill.
3. See Bresc-Bautier et al. 2009.
4. Presumably Alexandre-Jean Oppenord (1639–1715) rather than his son Gilles-Marie Oppenord (1685–1742). See Souchal 1973.
5. *La Galerie de Girardon* n.d. (before 1709).
6. Souchal 1973, pp. 26 pl. 10, 28 pl. 12, 87–88. Both had apparently belonged to Cardinal Richelieu.
7. Martinez 2004, p. 44, no. 0042.
8. Draper in Athens 1979, pp. 160–63, nos. 51, 52, ill.; wall label text for the exhibition "Cast in Bronze" (not in catalogue).
9. Souchal 1973, p. 23 pl. 7: "La muse Erato figure antique de Paros de 5 pi 2 po."
10. Sold Christie's, London, October 18, 2005, lot 105, and Christie's, New York, June 10, 2010, lot 144.
11. Souchal 1973, p. 23, ill. 90, inventory of 1715, p. 90, no. 245: "Une figure antique de marbre blanc, dont la teste est moderne, de cinq pieds ou environ de haut, sur son pied de bois peint," valued at 600 *livres*.
12. I am grateful to Valeria Cafà for the observation. See Delivorrias, Berger-Doer, and Kossatz-Deissmann 1984, vol. 2, part 2, pls. 309, 554.
13. Walker 1981; Françoise de la Moureyre in Bresc-Bautier et al. 2009, pp. 73–74, no. 73. The example in the Galerie de Girardon was of "terre bronzée." Another cast was formerly with Cyril Humphris in London. A third, in the Residenz, Munich, was destroyed.
14. Both backs retain two strong, square iron attachments through which they would have been slotted onto their supports.
15. La Moureyre in Bresc-Bautier et al. 2009, pp. 326–27, no. 90, ill.

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