RCEWA – A bronze sculpture of Apollo by François Girardon

Statement of the Expert Adviser to the Secretary of State that the sculpture meets Waverley criteria two and three.

Further Information

The ‘Applicant’s statement’ and the ‘Note of Case History’ are available on the Arts Council Website:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Brief Description

A statuette of Apollo; model c.1675; cast before 1715, possibly c.1675
Bronze
H. 69.5 cm
Model by François Girardon (1628-1715); founder unknown.

Condition

Very good condition, with fine surface working and underlying golden patination. Areas of variation in the patina; repairs and patching to the raised left arm; cracking and holes on the base and back, with minor casting flaws.

Provenance

The early provenance of the bronze is unknown. Acquired by the dealer Cyril Humphris before 1967, who possibly acquired it from another dealer who bought it in France (unconfirmed); passed to the current owner in the early 1970s (although listed in Souchal 1981 as still 'in the trade').

Selected Literature


Exhibited


Waverley criteria

This bronze Apollo discussed in this report meets Waverley criteria 2 and 3. The sculpture is based on an elegant, original composition by the sculptor who defined the grand style of French baroque. Despite some areas of repair and uneven patination, it compares to some of the best French bronzes of the period in both its composition and quality, being of outstanding aesthetic importance. Its exceptional finish has been noted by leading scholars in the field, with Françoise de la Moureyre describing it as a ‘bronze of remarkable quality of finish and chasing’.¹

Based on a terracotta model of c.1675 by Girardon, illustrated in the so-called Galerie de Girardon (see below) and recorded in his 1713 and 1715 inventories, it is known in only two extant bronze casts (the other in the Philadelphia Museum of Art). An exceptional and rare statuette, it was potentially made under the sculptor’s personal supervision, perhaps for king Louis XIV (1643-1715). Technical investigation of this and the Philadelphia bronze is likely to answer a number of currently open questions and, as recent studies into French bronzes have highlighted, thereby afford a deeper
understanding of the development of European bronze technology. The bronze is therefore of outstanding significance for the study of French bronzes of this period within their broader context.

DETAILED CASE

The semi-clad sun god Apollo stands in contrapposto on an integral base with several identifying attributes. Crowned by the laurel that alludes to his pursuit of Daphne, he holds a lyre to represent music, supported on a pedestal with a tripod as a reference to Apollo’s oracle at Delphi. He raises a lighted torch - here intact, while that in Philadelphia lacks the full flame. The supple body of the god is enveloped in luxurious drapery, perhaps eluding to the robe woven of gold and purple mentioned by the seventeenth-century Venetian iconographer Vincenzo Cartari. This excellent manifestation of Girardon’s lyrical classicism epitomises the taste of the French ‘Sun-King’ Louis XIV in both style and subject matter.

The artist François Girardon was the most eminent sculptor in France during the latter part of the seventeenth century at a time when the art flourished under Louis’s patronage. The son of a founder, Girardon achieved an eminent academic career at the Académie and played a leading role in the sculptural embellishment at the Château de Versailles, creating several large-scale groups in marble and designs for fountains, as well as copying and restoring antique marbles. Significantly, he was involved in bronze making, being in charge of casting at the Arsenal. From 1687 to 1706 Girardon received an allowance to manage the sculptural works of the king, including the casting of bronze figures, working with different founders. In addition to the production of reductions after his large-scale works, he spent ten years collaborating with the Swiss founder Balthasar Keller (1638-1702) on the equestrian monument of Louis XIV for the Place Vendôme, famously cast in a single pour (dest. 1792, a fragment surviving in the Louvre).

The so-called Galerie de Girardon, which was engraved by Nicolas Chevallier before 1709, sets a selection of Girardon’s important sculpture collection into an imaginary architectural setting, showing works by or after Michelangelo, Giambologna, and numerous others, alongside his own models, including the Apollo.

Although the context for either the model or the bronze is not recorded, it was possibly amongst the unspecified works made for the king for which the artist was regularly paid. It has potentially been associated with the ‘Apollo holding a torch’ listed in the 1708 posthumous inventory of the king’s favourite architect, Jules-Hardouin Mansart (1646-1708). The only securely documented version of the bronze (now lost) was acquired by the avid collector Elector Maximilian II Emanuel of Bavaria (1662-1726) in Paris before 1715. Housed at the Residenz in Munich from at least 1730 until apparently destroyed in World War II, it once stood in a niche of a baroque earthenware stove. The other known version was acquired by the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1976.

The terracotta model on which the bronze was based is convincingly dated to c.1675, and prominently illustrated (in reverse) as no. 1 (pl.III) in the engraved Galerie de Girardon, demonstrating its importance to the sculptor. The bronze has been modified so that the pedestal overhangs the base. It represents Girardon’s emerging personal style following an earlier model of Apollo at no. 44, which relates more closely to a drawing of c.1660 by painter Charles Le Brun (1619-1690) with whom he had a long association. Influenced by the classical Apollo Belvedere, a copy of which was at Fontainebleau, the drapery bears a close resemblance to that of Girardon’s marble Winter at Versailles begun in 1675. The figure is reminiscent of the god depicted at the centre of the group showing Apollo Served by the Nymphs (or Bath of Apollo) made for the Grotto of Thetis at Château de Versailles, designed in 1667. This is most evident in the superbly-worked central figures by Girardon for what has recently been identified as a bronze model (now in the Grünes Gewölbe, Dresden) created by Girardon and Thomas Regnaudin (1622-1706) for that marble group.

The terminus ante quem of 1715, provided by Maximilian’s version, suggests that these bronzes were all life-time casts. Unlike the two terracotta Apollos, described as ‘bronzed’ in the 1715 post-death inventory, bronzes of this subject are not recorded in Girardon’s possession or that of his heirs. La Moureyre has proposed that they were all made under the sculptor’s direction around 1675, and possibly by the same founder. Apparently cast in one, both versions are closely related and presumably from the same model. However, technical analysis, which is central to bronzes study,
could provide the key to furthering our knowledge of both sculptor and founder, as seen in recent French bronzes studies.\textsuperscript{ix}

This is one of a handful of bronzes by or after designs by Girardon currently in UK collections. The Wallace Collection houses a Pluto Abducting Proserpine after the life-size marble group created for Versailles, and two vases showing The Triumph of Thetis, probably cast from Girardon’s preparatory wax models for two large-scale marble urns (1683) also made for Versailles.\textsuperscript{x} Another Pluto and Proserpine is in the Royal Collection, as is the documented and outstanding Louis XIV, cast after a model for the equestrian monument.\textsuperscript{xi} The V&A’s dramatic group of Aristaeus and Proteus (c.1695-1700) by Girardon’s pupil Sébastien Slodtz (1655-1726), based on a drawing by Girardon for a large-scale marble group at Versailles, is believed to have been owned by Girardon.\textsuperscript{xii} Other bronzes, generally after the more popular models, occasionally appear on the UK market.

The limited representation of Girardon’s works in the UK collections would be enhanced by the addition of this rare statuette, with potential to be studied within the context of important bronze holdings and active scholarship in the field.

\textsuperscript{i} La Moureyre 2015, p. 455.
\textsuperscript{ii} Walker 1981, p.16.
\textsuperscript{iv} La Moureyre 2008/2009, p. 279.
\textsuperscript{v} La Moureyre 2015, p. 454, fig. 361;

\textsuperscript{vi} Acquired from Cyril Humphris in the 1970s, earlier provenance unknown; Walker 1981.
\textsuperscript{vii} Maral 2015, fig. 317.
\textsuperscript{viii} Maral 2015, fig. 319.
\textsuperscript{ix} Maral 2015, p. 37, fig. 22.
\textsuperscript{x} Walker 1981, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{xi} La Moureyre 2008/2009, p. 279.
\textsuperscript{xii} François de la Moureyre and Uwe Peltz, ‘The Dresden bronze of the Bath of Apollo: a model, not a copy’ in David Bourgarit et al (eds), French Bronze Sculpture. Materials and Techniques 16\textsuperscript{th}-18\textsuperscript{th} Century, London, 2014, pp. 125-138, esp. fig. 4.

\textsuperscript{xiii} See also François Souchal, ‘La Collection du Sculpteur Girardon d’après son inventaire après décès’, Gazette des Beaux-Arts, LXXXII, July-August 1973, pp. 1-98, esp. p.75, no. 159 associated with this model; p.91, no. 261.

\textsuperscript{xiv} La Moureyre 2015, p. 455.
\textsuperscript{xv} See notably articles in Bourgarit et al 2014, op. cit. at n.12, including that by La Moureyre and Peltz cited at n.12.
\textsuperscript{xvi} Robert Wenley, French Bronzes in the Wallace Collection, London, 2002, pp. 54-59; La Moureyre 2015, pp. 448-452.

\textsuperscript{xvii} https://www.rct.uk/collection/31359/equestrian-statue-of-louis-xiv
\textsuperscript{xviii} Bresc-Bautier and Scherf 2008/2009, pp. 270-71, cat. 70 (Jonathan Marsden).