

THE GIUSEPPE MARIA BONZANIGO SELF- PORTRAIT

An Italian carved limewood, walnut, tulipwood, ebony and fruitwood "microscultura" relief self-portrait by Giuseppe Maria Bonzanigo, dated 1786.

the oval central medallion with a profile portrait of the artist, framed by a banded and beaded oval moulding surrounded by a thin laurel wreath issuing from acanthus scrolls flanking a lion mask; below the medallion an inscribed tablet "JOSEPH MARIE BONZANIGO . SCVLPTVR . DU ROI DE SARDAIGNE"; from the rinceaux by the acanthus two garlands with silhouetted coins link to two upright vases issuing foliate wreaths and supported by a platform of fruits and wheat sheaves; carved 1786 to one coin to left hand side; the border of darker ground has in the upper side two scrolls issuing from the central acanthus with an inscription partially lost "J.A ROS(...)IGN(...) LEUR(...)M(...)SE(...)F / LES ARTS RECO(...)N(...)S(...)N", (les arts reconnaissant?); the corners with profile portraits with further smaller silhouette portraits, each side with three further medallion portraits about other artists and Bonzanigo's royal colleagues, interspersed by lozenge panels with trophies related to Sculpture, engraving, silversmith, plastering, design and Architecture, all on a dark ground with an entwined vine frieze centred by cord topped by tied ribbon; the lower side of border with rinceaux frieze with heads of hounds, tiger, lion and cockerel, the whole in a glazed frame.



Height: 24,68 in. (62,7 cm)
Width: 19,68in. (59cm)

Provenance:

1786-1787 Bonzanigo Atelier, Turin
Art trade, Milan, in the late 19th century;
Moisé Michelangelo Guggenheim (1837-1914), Venice;
Acquired from the above by Sir George Donaldson, London, 1897;
Probably acquired from the above by Sir Lionel Faudel-Phillips Bt., (1877-1941), Balls Park, Hertfordshire;
His daughter Miss Jean Faudel-Phillips (1909-1992);
Thence by family descent to the present owner.

Literature:

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- Gabiani, N., *Giuseppe Maria Bonzanigo da Asti intagliatore in legno ed in avorio*, Torino, 1920, p.46 (ill.);
- Maggiora-Vergano, T., *Nuove opere dell'Insigne Scultore Astigiano Giuseppe Maria Bonzanigo*, Torino, 1935, frontespiece (ill.);
- Baudi di Vesme, A., *Schede Vesme, L'Art in Piemonte dal XVI al XVIII*, Torino, 4 vol, 1963-4, p. 166;
- Bertolotto, C., et. al., *Giuseppe Maria Bonzanigo: intaglio minuto e grande decorazione*, (exh. cat.) Pinacoteca civica, Asti, 1989, p.32 (ill.);
- Ferraris, G., *Giuseppe Bonzanigo e la scultura decorativa in legno a Torino nel periodo neoclassico(1770-1830)*, Turin, 1991;
- Dragone, P., et. al., *Un Bonzanigo in terra Benese*, Savigliano, 2004, p. 57-61 (ill.);
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- Martignon, A., *Michelangelo Guggenheim (1837-1914) e il mercato di opere, di oggetti d'arte e d'antichità a Venezia fra medio Ottocento e primo Novecento*. Doctoral Thesis, Università degli Studi di Udine, 2015.
- Forthcoming unpublished Bonzanigo archival study by Dr.Arabella Cifani and Dr.Franco Monetti.

A self-portrait by the most celebrated cabinet-maker and woodcarver working in Piedmont in the late 18th and early 19th century - Giuseppe Maria Bonzanigo (1745-1820) - this exquisite panel is a bold statement of the artist's supreme talent as a sculptor. Of unparalleled scale within his microscultura portraiture, this important piece is a recent rediscovery, its location hitherto unknown since the beginning of the 20th century.

Bonzanigo's micro-sculpture has perhaps been slightly overshadowed in recent years by the importance ascribed to the cabinet-making commissions received from the royal family for the Royal Palace in Turin and the royal residences at Moncalieri, Rivoli, Stupinigi and Venaria. Nevertheless, the fame he achieved during his lifetime derived precisely from the extraordinary skill demonstrated in the minute carving of wood and ivory, resulting in further commissions from the royal family, the Piedmontese aristocracy and from the Napoleonic establishment.

Born into a family of sculptors in Asti in 1745, Bonzanigo is first recorded as working for the House of Savoy in Turin by 1773. From the following year onwards, his name appears more and more frequently in the Real Casa documents and having a particularly prolific period from 1784 to 1786.

In 1787 he joined Francesco Bogliè and Giuseppe Antonio Gianotti as scultore in legno for Vittorio Amadeo III, a title he was particularly proud of, having it inscribed for the imminent nomination some months before in the present work – “Sculpteur du Roi de Sardaigne”. The royal edict is complimentary: *“La particolare abilità, e perizia dimonstrata dallo scultore in legno Giuseppe Maria Bonzanigo, nell’essequimento de’ diversi travagli da parecchi anni a questa parte ordinati per nostro servizio, e di quelli singolarmente, che ha in ultimo luogo con singolare maestria perfezionati, invitandoci a dargliene contrassegno della nostra beneficenza, ci hanno disposti a stabilirlo nostro scultore in legno, all’oggetto anche di maggiormente animarlo a distinguersi nell’arte suddetta”* (Ferraris, op. cit. p.49).

It was not until 1817, after the restoration of the Savoy rule, that he would become Vittorio Emanuele I’s first sculptor, due no less to the prestige and commercial success that his minute sculpture reached during the Napoleonic rule, when furniture commissions were scarce.

Of the multiple microscultura portrait panels and frames executed by Giuseppe Maria Bonzanigo, his workshop and pupils working independently, the present example can be considered the genre’s chef-d’oeuvre, appropriately depicting its creator and leading master at the peak of his career for the Savoy sovereigns. He is presented dignified, with an assured expression and dressed as a successful gentiluomo.

The two vases, flanking the oval medallion, bear the king’s initials V[ictorius] R[ex] and on the coin garlands above, another two discreet VR cyphers can be seen, underlining his closeness to his principal patron. Related vases are present in the architectural decoration of the apartments of the Dukes of Aosta in the Palazzo Reale, which reveals an ornamental approach that he carries throughout his different projects.

Another example where Bonzanigo employed similar features both in micro-sculpture and interior decoration is the Anticamera now called “della Regina” at the Palazzo Stupinigi, where the walls are framed with bands with entwined vines, such as those seen in the side borders of the present lot, albeit without medallions. This use of the entwined vine band motif was also employed in an exceptional relief panel depicting the Three Graces at Palazzo Madama, Turin (Museo Civico d’Arte Antica, inv.787).

Claudio Bertolotto suggests an interesting theory, that the profile portraits to the corners and side bands represent Bonzanigo’s direct collaborators, but we think more painters, engravers, silversmiths, sculptors and architects whom he admired or worked as him for the crown. The trophies interspersing the highly naturalistic personal medallions probably refer to branches of all arts and are suggestive in this direction. The fact that some of his collaborators go on to become leaders in their fields, such as Morizio Bianco and Francesco Tanadé, show that they were not mere journeymen working for the master. Interestingly, in the 1792 census, his workshop listed thirteen workers and apprentices, including the two mentioned above but also Claudio Stefano Bliú and Giuseppe Arigoni (Ferraris, op. cit. p.55). Important

additions about his successors after Bonzanigo's death are included in the mentioned study of the literature by Dr.Cifani and Dr.Franco Monetti.

The silhouetted coin garlands to upper section, with incredibly minute chains, are less personal in their profiles and, following the above theory, one could suggest they symbolise the larger workforce supporting his achievements. This motif of a garland of coins, although without silhouettes, can be seen in a Portrait of Vittorio Emanuele I in wood and ivory (Private Collection, ill. Bertolotto, op.cit. p. 48). Much more similarities in this direction can be found in the other Bonzanigo masterpiece, the 1785's Triumph of Savoy family now in Venaria Reale Castle.

Bonzanigo profile portraits should be considered in the context of coeval practices of the painted silhouette, marble, cameo and wax portraits. An interesting Portrait of Vittorio Amedeo III (fig.2), of circa 1790-1795 (Palazzo Madama, Torino inv. 1071/L) has a relatable composition to the present lot, showing a profile medallion of the king, framed by an olive laurel wreath and by a border with twelve silhouette portrait medallions of members of the royal family.

The panel in the last century:

The present panel is not listed in Bonzanigo's stock sale after his death in 1820 and the panel's whereabouts are unknown for about a century. It re-surfaced in Milan in the final years of the 19th century where it is acquired by Moisé Guggenheim, who took it to Venice. Here it was seen and handled by Conte Alessandro Vesme (1854-1923) who was not only the head of the Pinacoteca di Torino and Soprintendente degli Oggetti d'Arte of Piemonte and Liguria, but also an indefatigable historian of Piemontese art, having written the seminal *L'Arte in Piemonte dal XVI al XVIII secolo*, posthumously published. In this book, this panel is mentioned as one of the main works of Bonzanigo (Vesme, op.cit. vol. I, p.126). It is nevertheless, Niccola Gabbiani who, in 1920, publishes an image and mentions that Vesme, after having encountered the panel, requested the renowned photographer Secondo Pia to register this self-portrait - "*Verso il principio del corrente secolo l'illustre signor comm. Baudi di Vesme conte Alessandro, (...) ebbe occasione di avere nelle mani, per qualche ora, l'originale dell'anzidetto autoritratto, e giovandosi della rara abilità fotografica del nostro egregio concittadino comm. avv. Secondo Pia ne poté far eseguire la fedele riproduzione in fotografia, la cui negativa si conserva nella preziosissima e ricca collezione di quest'ultimo*" (Gabbiani, op.cit, 1920, p.46) (fig.3). Gabbiani also mentions that it is not known where it is, and that sadly it had emigrated far away - "*Ignorasi dove la scultura original di questo autoritratto sia andato a finire e si ritiene che esso, disgraziatamente abbia emigrato lontano.*"

In fact, the panel had been sold by Guggenheim to a British dealer, Sir George Donaldson in 1897. According to its export license issued by the Accademia di Belle Arti di Venezia, he sent a sculpted portrait with the inscription «JOSEPH MARIE BONZANIGO SCULPTEUR DU ROI DE SARDEGNE» [SIC], together with another one with a watercolour portrait and the inscription «PIETRO GIACOMO PALMIERI

BOLOGNESE ACCADEMICO CLEMENTINO», for a total declared price of 2000 lire. (We kindly thank Dott.sa Alice Martignon for this information).

Moisé Michelangelo Guggenheim (1837 – 1914).

Of German origin, Guggenheim was one of the most prominent and respected figures in 19th century Venice, renowned as an antiquarian, collector, furniture maker and public figure. He was also the city's largest antique dealer. When he opened the shop in 1857, Guggenheim not only took on the mantle of proprietor, but also designer and creative director of the works created there. Whilst he strove to promote and ingratiate a new, and altogether expressive, visual language, he also was taken with the traditional and preeminent styles. So celebrated were his designs that his works were presented at the World Exhibition in Vienna, 1873 - likewise in Milan, 1881, Venice, 1887 and Paris, 1889. In 1879 Guggenheim's factory was established on the Grand Canal in the Palazzo Balbi. He had an impressive book of clientele which consisted of King Ludwig II of Bavaria, King Umberto I of Italy, Queen Alexandra of the United Kingdom and Victoria, Empress of Germany to name but a few.



Guggenheim's collection was varied and included an assortment of objects of interest to him such as terracotta models, majolica, jewels, a hugely important collection of textiles, fragments of timber, frames and furniture. He likely gathered these objects through his vast network of contacts within the art world which included critics and art historians such as Giovanni Morelli (1816 - 1891), Wilhelm von Bode and Adolfo Venturi, imminent collectors of the day such as Nélie Jacquemart-André, Baron de Rothschild and Isabella Stewart Gardner. He also had strong affiliations with museums which include, but are not restricted to, the Royal Museums Berlin, South Kensington Museum, Prague Museum of Decorative Arts.

Sir George Donaldson (1845 - 1925).

Sir George Hunter Donaldson had a similar career to Guggenheim, having been a prominent art dealer and collector with a predominant interest in English and European furniture from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, but also an eye for contemporary furniture production. He had a great interest in early musical instruments, donating his unparalleled collection to the Royal College of Music in 1894, and also Old Master paintings. He formerly owned Titian's *Ranuccio Farnese*, 1541 – 1542, now in the National Gallery of Art, Washington and Francisco de Goya's *Don Andrés del Peral*, before 1798; which he donated to the National Gallery, London, in 1904.

He opened his business as an art dealer in New Bond Street, in the early 1870's, having built some exceptional collections - amongst his clients were the collectors George Salting and John Jones and he also sought works for the South Kensington museum and made his own substantial donations.

In his lifetime Donaldson was made knight, first class, by the grand duke of Saxe-Coburg and Goth in 1885, a chevalier of the Legion d'honneur in 1892 for artistic services to France and in 1904 he was awarded his knighthood.

Sir Lionel Faudel-Phillips (1887–1941).

It is likely that Donaldson sold Bonzanigo's self-portrait to Sir Lionel Faudel-Phillips, who had the piece at Balls Park, Hertfordshire. This grand Queen Anne house had been bought by his father Sir George Faudel-Phillips, 1st Baronet (1840–1922) in 1901, having rented it from the 1880s. He had a distinguished political career, and was made Baronet following his post to Lord Mayor of London in 1896. Sir Lionel also had a public service life as president of the Bethlem Hospital, High Sheriff of Hertfordshire, first Chairman of the British Council's Fine Arts Committee and a trustee of the Wallace Collection in London.



Fig. Balls Park, Hertfordshire, 1912