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ATTRIBUTED TO

ANTONIO SUSINI
FLORENTINE, 1558 - 1624

FROM A MODEL BY

GIAMBOLOGNA
DOUAI, 1529 - FLORENCE, 1608

CHRIST

CIRCA 1600

Bronze
28 x 6 x 31 cm

Provenance:
French Private Collection

Comparative Literature:

K. Watson, "The Crucifixes of Giambologna", in C. Avery and A. Radcliffe (eds), *Giambologna: Sculptor to the Medici*, Arts Council of Great Britain, London, 1978, pp. 45-47.

C. Avery and A. Radcliffe (eds), *Giambologna: Sculptor to the Medici*, Arts Council of Great Britain, London, 1978, pp. 140-146, ill. 104-11.

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C. Avery, *Giambologna: The Complete Sculpture*, Phaidon, London, 1993², pp. 193-202.

Herbert Keutner in *Von Allen Seiten Schön, Bronzen der Renaissance und des Barock*, exhibition catalogue, Berlin, 1995, n. 123, pp. 389-91.

W. Seipel (ed), *Giambologna: Triumph des Körpers*, exh. cat., Skira, Milan, 2006.

D. Allen in P. Wengraf (ed), *Renaissance & Baroque Bronzes from the Hill Collection*, Paul Holberton Publishing, London, 2014, pp. 158-63.

D. Zikos in *Bella Figura, Europäische Bronzekunst in Süddeutschland um 1600*, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich, 2015, n. 32, pp. 244-51.

As the foremost sculptor of the Counter Reformation, Giambologna's inclusion of religious themes in his otherwise markedly secular repertoire comes as hardly surprising, and was welcomed by important patrons such as Cardinal Ferdinando de' Medici. Among his various subjects, ranging from *St John the Baptist* to *Christ at the Column*, the *Crucifixion* is arguably his most enduring, in the two versions of *Cristo vivo*, or Christ alive,¹ and *Cristo morto*, dead Christ. As argued by Gasparotto,² Giambologna's *Cristo morto* represents the apex of a tradition that dates back to Brunelleschi's wooden Crucifix in Santa Maria Novella.

His *Christs* are idealised and far removed from the brutality of the Crucifixion that is by contrast so realistically rendered in northern European sculpture. Indeed, as Avery points out (1993, p. 193), even in his religious subject matter Giambologna did not relinquish his "sensuous treatment of surface and detail", achieving a high degree of spirituality through the harmonious proportions of his models.

As its scale indicates, the present *Cristo morto* was intended for private devotion. Its sunken head highlighting the tense tendrils of the neck, the torso slightly bent in the direction of the now shut eyes' gaze, the turned legs and raised right foot, all result in a gentle contrapposto, highlighted by the vigorously modelled *perizonium*. The impression is one of "fragile beauty and calm dignity [that] comes closest in spirit to [the] earlier large-scale depictions" of Renaissance Florence.³

Models and comparisons

Giambologna's production of crucifixes for private devotion in silver, bronze or gilt bronze has the papacy of Pope Pius V (1566-1572) – for whom one such Christ was executed - as a useful *terminus ante quem* (cf. Avery, 1993, pp. 199-200). However, bronzes of the crucified Christ continued to be cast after Giambologna's death, and display diverse readings of his prototypes, with a myriad of small variations, some already at the modelling stage, such as

¹ The *Cristo vivo* being an innovation perhaps influenced by the gradual assimilation of the precepts of the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and the stress placed on redemption as a consequence of Christ's sacrifice. See also E. M. Casalini, "Due opere del Giambologna all'Annunziata di Firenze", *Studi storici dell'Ordine dei Servi di Maria*, no. 14 (1964), pp. 261-76.

² In A. di Lorenzo (ed), *Il Crocifisso d'oro del Museo Poldi Pezzoli. Giambologna e Gasparo Mola*, Museo Poldi Pezzoli, Milan, 2011, pp. 9-10.

³ Allen in P. Wengraf, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

the position of the hands, the height of the arms, the inclination of the head, the treatment of the loincloth - others in the diverse quality and emphasis bestowed upon the chiselling.

A well-documented example after which the *Cristo morto* discussed here was arguably modelled is the larger (46.8 cm high) gilt bronze Christ in the Convent of Santa Maria degli Angiolini, Florence, from 1588. A second and nearly identical *Cristo morto* in gilt bronze, only slightly smaller (45.8 cm high), is in the Convent of San Marco, Florence (**fig. 1**). Fittingly, as argued by Watson (1978, p. 144) this could well be the work of Giambologna's close collaborator Antonio Susini, whose contribution to the Salviati Chapel reliefs is well documented, and who is known to have assisted his master in the creation of small-scale bronzes and reliefs.

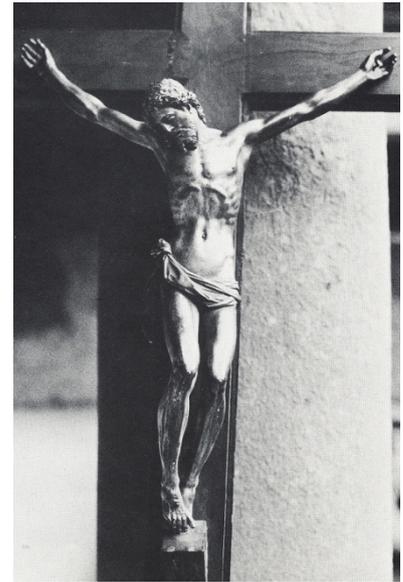


Fig. 1: Giambologna (and workshop), *Cristo morto*, bronze, Convent of San Marco, Florence.

The two above-mentioned crucifixes serve as firm terms of comparison for the typology of *Christs* under discussion, all of which were meant for private devotion and share a similar height of circa 30/31 cm.⁴ Although they differ in the treatment of specific elements, they are all distinguished by a more pronouncedly sunken head and a prominently knotted loincloth.

The small group to which the present example belongs includes at least four other examples: one from the Vecchiotti collection and now at the Musée Municipal de la Chartreuse, Douai (cf. Avery & Radcliffe, 1978, cat. 108), another in a private collection (*idem*, cat. 110); a third one in the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (*ibidem*, cat. 111) (**fig. 2**), attributed by Avery to Antonio Susini and a fourth one in gilt bronze in the Hill Collection,⁵ also attributed to Susini.

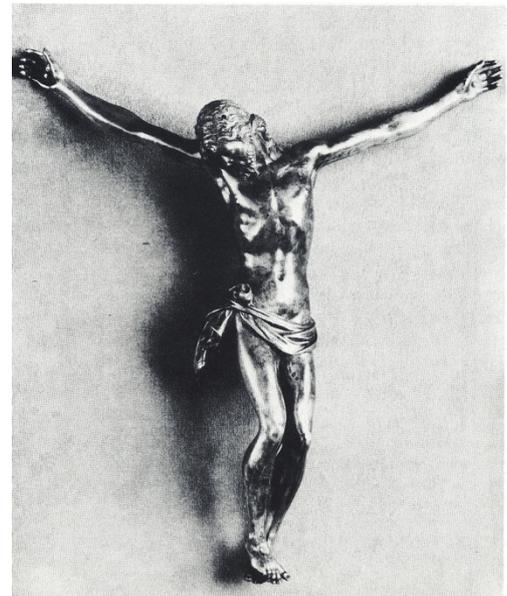


Fig. 2: Antonio Susini (attr.), *Cristo morto*, bronze, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

If the prototype for the present *Cristo morto* can be traced back to Giambologna's *Christ* in Santa Maria degli Angiolini – note the slender arms and the exact position of the legs - the treatment of the extremities and chasing of the hair is nearer to the Douai variant. The most effective overall comparisons, however, can be drawn with the above-mentioned Susini in gilt bronze from the Hill Collection and particularly with the Toronto bronze in which, moreover, the grooved folds of the loincloth drapery are nearly identical to ours.

⁴ A rediscovered example in gilt-bronze, likely cast from a master model in wax by the Florentine master, and now in the Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio (inv. no. 85.34; 33.5cm. high) may well be one of the earliest models for this type, and can be dated to the 1580s.

⁵ For a discussion on the Hill *Christ*, see Allen in P. Wengraf, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-63.

Antonio Susini

Born in 1558, Antonio Susini⁶ trained as a goldsmith, and was introduced to Giambologna by Jacopo Salviati in 1580. He soon became a key figure in the Florentine master's workshop, where he was largely responsible for the production of small-scale bronzes. Their collaboration continued even after Susini set up his own atelier in 1600, to which a foundry was added shortly after. His reputation for the treatment of the subject of the Crucifixion - with variations on the models that had been introduced by Giambologna - was such that as late as 1622, three years before his death, he presented a choice of ten *Christs* – five *Cristi morti* and five *Cristi vivi*, to Ferdinand I Gonzaga, the then Duke of Mantua.

By definition, a workshop involves the collaboration of more artists, and although the corpus of bronzes attributed to Susini is a distinguished and large one, supported, moreover, by a number of signed works, it is likely that other hands may often have contributed to the finishing – and perhaps even the modelling – of some works. It is therefore interesting to mention that, as noted by Dimitrios Zikos, the chasing of the hair of the present *Christ* compares well to that of Giambologna's *Christ before Pilate* cast for the artist's chapel in the Santissima Annunziata, Florence, a third series of which is now in the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich (**fig. 3**). One of the assistants who appears to have worked on this relief is Francesco Della Bella (d. 1612),⁷ father of the celebrated engraver Stefano (1610-1664), and one of Giambologna's foremost assistants for bronzes. According to an archival discovery made by Herbert Keutner (1996), between 1596-98 Della Bella took part in the making of Giambologna's *Passion* reliefs in the Annunziata, and a collaboration with Susini cannot therefore be excluded.



Fig. 3: Giambologna, *Pilate washing his hands*, bronze, detail with Christ led to judgement Bayerisches National Museum, Munich (inv. no. R. 3929)

⁶ For an extended biography of Susini see Wengraf, *op. cit.*, p. 343.

⁷ Although little is known about his life and *oeuvre*, Francesco Della Bella appears to have contributed to Giambologna's reliefs on the base of the equestrian monument to Cosimo I in the Piazza della Signoria, Florence, and to his bronze angels in the Pisa Cathedral (1602). His only independent work is a relief for the doors of the aforementioned cathedral, probably the Resurrection of Lazarus (1601). According to Baldinucci, it was his premature death that made of Pietro Tacca the heir to Giambologna's workshop.