

REVIEWS

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Antiques ~ Curiosities ~ Works of Art
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RILIEVI

Welcome to our curated catalog of fine 'rilievi' or 'reliefs,' as they were known and described during the Italian Renaissance. Our selection includes an array of North European and Italian designs ranging from the late 15th to mid-17th centuries. While most reliefs-in-small-scale (nowadays called 'plaquettes') were cast in bronze, our tailored collection embodies the rich glow of gold gilded bronzes and exquisite silver, suitable for 'cabinets-of-curiosities' and vitrines filled with treasured 'objects of virtue.'

All prices available upon request.

Our 'by appointment' gallery is located 50 minutes outside Washington DC, USA.

Old World Wonders celebrates the beauty of the past, specializing in fine European Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque antiques for an international clientele. We believe old art is alive, tells a story, and can enhance lifestyle with the knowledge of owning something truly distinct and appreciable. We serve discriminating collectors and enhance living spaces with fascinating and exceptional objects-of-art.

OLD WORLD WONDERS

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THE PRESENTATION OF CHRIST

Christoph Lencker

Augsburg, Germany; ca. 1610-13

Silver; 119.5 x 149.3 mm

Condition: a later, probably late 18th century cast of exceptional quality (directly reproducing the original by the artists' hand)

Provenance:

a private Viennese collection

a private collection (Dorotheum auction, 30 Mar 1998, No. 1253)

Though a later cast, the reproductive quality of this thick, silver plaque is breathtaking. Every detail of the original silver model is captured in fine detail. The result is a stunning, dramatic and exquisitely fine artwork that highlights the craftsmanship and skill of its original maker: the Renaissance Augsburg silversmith Christoph Lencker, whose hallmark is likewise reproduced, stamped into the relief along with the Augsburg mark for the years 1610-13.

This relief has not been discussed in the literature, likely due to its rarity. The original is probably lost, though was preserved by the foundry producing this cast, ca. 1800. Another cast (from the same foundry) was available in the German art market during the 2000s. A complete bronze cast belongs to the Museo Lazaro Galdiano in Spain and two additional late bronze casts have appeared in the art market over the past decade.

A stellar work by an exceptional hand. Christoph Lencker belonged to the Lencker dynasty of gold and silversmiths active in Nuremberg and Augsburg throughout the 17th century. Many of their works form important additions to museum collections around the world.



THE ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS (two versions)

Matthaus Wallbaum

Augsburg, Germany; ca. 1610-13

Silver; 86 x 118.9 mm (large plaquette), 108.4 x 74.4 mm (small plaquette)

Condition: a later, probably late 18th century cast of exceptional quality (directly reproducing the originals by the artists' hand)

The small relief depicting the *Adoration* is a rare cast of exceptional quality which defies all previous scholarship on this remarkable and influential relief (see image on following page). Weaker cast variants of this model are known in museum and private collections. Scholarship has traditionally attributed the relief as an Italian work by Giovanni Bernardi, but this attribution is incorrect.

The author of this relief was Matthias Walbaum of Augsburg, the celebrated maker of small silver reliefs whose work adorns numerous ebonized wood tabernacles, altar crosses, furniture and cabinets in various important museum collections throughout Europe and America. The attribution is made certain by the use of his hallmark (a tree or flower within a shield), reproduced on this extraordinarily fine cast. Also reproduced is the Augsburg stamp for the years 1610-13.

The retention of a flange featured on this cast suggests the original was likely intended for setting into a table altar like one other example at the Germanisches Nationalmuseum. Though the altar is unsigned, it is already attributed to Walbaum's workmanship.

The larger *Adoration* (left) also features commensurate hallmarks and was perhaps a small study for the larger panels found on the Frederiksborger altar made by Wallbaum for Christian IV of Denmark around 1610-15.

SALOME AND THE BEHEADING OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Anonymous

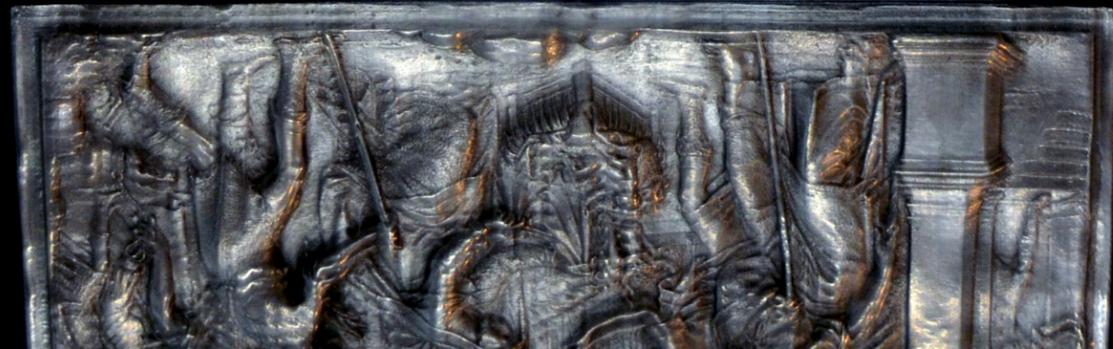
Probably French; 17th century

Silver; 101.5 mm

Condition: a later, probably late 18th century cast of exceptional quality (directly reproducing the original by the artists' hand)

A rare and exceptionally realized relief sculpture depicting the *Beheading of John the Baptist*. While discussing a bronze cast of this plaquette in the Walcher von Molthein collection Braun (1919) notes that a drawing by the Swiss painter, Hans Bock, reproduces a scene of similar import to the present plaquette, suggesting a print may have served as a model for both the sketch and the realization of this relief.

This plaquette has generally been given a late 16th century South German (Augsburg) association though we retain also the possibility it could align with the early-to-mid 17th century artistic milieu of France.





THE ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS

Attributed to Pellegrino Tibaldi

Probably Bologna, Italy; 1561 (the present example, ca. 1800)

Silver (repousse technique) applied to a wood backing

Condition: commensurate with age, set into a sophisticated modern frame

Provenance: an old German collection (see wax seal on reverse backing)

Examples of this relief are widely circulated throughout Europe. Many reproduce an inscription along the architrave: PARM INVENT, along with the date, 1561, on an exposed fragmentary column along the lower margin. The majority of examples are cast in bronze, with most being later in facture. Copies are also known in wood, marble, stone, ivory, cartapesta and even painted versions, attesting to its widespread popularity over several centuries.

The relief's author has long been debated and to this day is often mistakenly given to the 16th century goldsmith Gian Federico Bonzagna. The history of its attribution is too lengthy a discussion to review here though the most recent scholarship is due to Doug Lewis (National Gallery of Art) who convincingly places the relief as the workmanship of Pellegrino Tibaldi, operating after a model by Parmigianino. Lewis suggests this relief (along with a pendant *Lamentation* scene, also well diffused throughout Europe) were probably made for Cardinal Carlo Borromeo, under whose long-term patronage he began in 1561. Renaissance bronze expert, Charles Avery has also most recently agreed with this assessment.

Concerning the silver repoussé versions of the relief, like that offered here, Avery once suggested the hypothesis that these may have been the elaborate work of the known forger, Luigi Francesco Parmeggiani (1860-1932), who may have sought to replicate what appeared to be a fine work of 16th century origin and appearance. However, Attilio Toncavini later countered this suggestion by citing the silhouetted silver repousse example appearing on the fantastic tabernacle at the Church of Santa Maria del Carmine in Milan which bears an inscription of 1808. The inscribed date thus negated the Parmeggiani notion. Certainly, however, these silver repoussé versions were the product of a workshop active in Italy during the late 18th century. An example in the Civic Museum of Brescia bears the date 1804 and another at the Castello Sforzesco in Milan is set into a wooden support featuring the date, 1792.



A PAX OF THE IMAGO PIETATIS & GOD THE FATHER

Anonymous

Lombardy, Italy (probably Milan); 1547

Bronze, Silver; 101.1 x 182.1; 48.8 x 58.8 (central relief) mm

Condition: A dated, 1547, gilt copper and silver Lombard pax depicting the *Imago Pietatis*. Early repoussé silver relief and contemporary gilt copper frame with cast silver additions. Reverse and handle tarnished. Handle broken along its lower extremities. Loss to upper right rosette at top of pax and losses along the margins and corners of the central relief. Silver applique along the upper frieze of the obverse added or repaired and applique along base (previously fragmentary) repaired between 2012-15 by a former Italian owner. Original inscription and date, 1547, engraved on reverse.

The subject of this pax is too exhaustive for our entry, though its effigy of Christ dates back to Gothic influences. This depiction of Christ, suffering and surrendered, was popular all throughout late Medieval and early Renaissance Europe.

Suggestive of a Lombard or specific Milanese origin, are the footed orbs on the base of the present pax, formed by two molded halves, and common to other paxes of Lombard facture.

Reverse inscribed: Mo . FRANCo . ARMELLS. 1547 (probably the name of a donor to a church or possibly a former owner)

In some cases, paxes have been restored over time by replacing their central relief. This could be true of the present pax whose relief of the *Imago Pietatis* might not be original considering the location of its rivet holes.



A PAX OF THE IMAGO PIETATIS

Anonymous

Spain; early-to-mid 16th century

Bronze/Copper, Silver (on wood backing); 88.5 x 112.8 (frame);

58.1 x 66.9 (plaquette) mm

Condition: Contemporary repoussé silver relief applied to a wood backing, cast silver appliques and entirely gilt copper pax frame and handle. Minor losses to gilding and some tarnish present within the recesses of the silver parts. Damage to the nose of Christ and losses along the lower central portion of the tomb, exposing the wood beneath. The word “Cobre,” probably later chased into the lower underside of the pax base, indicating its presence in Spain and the material in which it was cast (“copper”). Finials atop the left and right of the pax have been excised at an early date.

The present pax depicts Christ as the *Imago Pietatis*, a subject widely popular throughout Renaissance Europe. The subject espouses Christ’s humility and empathizes with the suffering pilgrims and peoples of old Europe.

A Spanish attribution for the present pax is designated by the inscription along its base, *cobre*, which Michele Scapinello pointed out via private communication (Oct, 2016) indicates the word “copper” in Spanish. Also indicative of a Spanish origin is the use of naïvely designed putto appliques as found on other paxes originating in Spain. Further, the incorporation of a cross, in this case, the cross pattée, along its base is also a traditional feature common to paxes made in Spain.

One other example of this pax is known (Alcala auction, 25-26 May 2016, Lot 605), derived probably from a finer example like the present pax. The appliques are cast integral with the relief, and the drapery, facial characteristics, nimbus and crown of thorns have been remodeled by a new hand (on the Alcala example). One can observe the original finials atop this example which have been excised from our present pax. The flanking putto between both objects are identical but the putto featured in the pediment of the auctioned cast is different, either indicating the original used a different applique or perhaps was missing and was thus left to the inventiveness of the modeler. The auctioned pax features a hole where the cross along its base would have been fixed separately but is missing.



A PAX OF THE MARRIAGE OF THE VIRGIN

Anonymous

Probably Venice, Italy; 1624

Gilt Bronze (frame) and Silver (relief, backing and handle); 123.8 x 215.1 mm

Condition: Contemporary repoussé silver plaquette and early cast gilt frame. Separately attached silver reverse plate and handle tarnished to a dark bronze tone. Modest rubbing to the surface area of the gilding and minor flattening of the cherubim heads along the upper and lower part of the frame. Upper bar of separately attached crucifix atop the pax is broken. An old paper reinforcement has been used to help secure the upper left bolt which mounts the backplate to the pax. The silver backplate has been engraved with a dedication dated 1624.

Provenance: an important 19th century American collection

While the central relief of this plaquette is unique in the literature, it follows after the 1504 prototype by Raphael (at the Church of San Francesco, Città di Castell) featuring the painted depiction of Mary and Joseph being wed.

Contrarily, the frame is well known by several minor variant editions that all emanate from Venice during the late 16th and early 17th century. For example, other dated versions are known from 1597, 1604, and 1609. The frame itself has generically been assigned to the influence of Jacopo Sansovino.

Overall, this object is unique both for its handcrafted (rather than cast) silver central relief as well as its use and incorporation of this frame, exemplifying the success of this frame well into the first quarter of the 17th century. While the relief assuredly dates to 1624, the frame itself may have been cast earlier, an artifact perhaps from the workshop which serially produced them only slightly earlier.

Judging by the inscription and subject, it's possible this pax may have been a gift from a husband to a wife as a wedding gift. While paxes are more suited to religious use, they were, at times, used as gifts for spouses, serving as a devotional object for the bedroom or an early prototype for what would become framed pictures set about homes.



THE VISITATION

Anonymous

Probably Rome, Italy; 16th century

Bronze; 93.8 x 112.4 mm

Provenance: ex-collection of Pablo Bosch, important donor to the Prado Museum in Madrid. His Renaissance medal collection, the largest of its kind in Spain, is still retained at the Prado while his plaquette collection, formed during the late 19th century, was retired to the private market.

An exquisite and rare, relief plaquette depicting the *Visitation*. Other examples are known in only a minority of collections, mostly private. The example offered here is the best known cast. Though rubbed at the high points (with some loss to the gilding), the detail maintained by this example is lovely. In particular, the chiseled texture, executed by the steady hand of a Renaissance goldsmith, is apparent and glistens marvelously under proper light. To our knowledge, it is the finest known example of the relief.



PENITENT MAGDALENE

Anonymous

Flemish or Netherlandish; First half of the 17th cent.

Bronze; 122.7 x 150.3 mm

Provenance:

Private collection (Accademia Fine Art auction, 20 Sep 2012, Lot 99)

This Northern, probably Netherlandish relief plaque, is loosely based upon a painting by Abraham Bloemaert, later engraved and popularized by Willem Swanenburgh I in 1609. Only one other example is known in the private art market. Two other casts are in museum collections at the Bowdoin College Museum and the Museo Frederic Mares in Spain. A Baroque example in pressed tortoise shell is also known in the art market.





A PAX OF THE MADONNA & CHILD WITH SAINTS

Attributed to Moderno (Galeazzo Mondella)

Verona, Italy; 1490

Bronze; 61.7 x 108 mm

Condition: An early cast, former patina stripped, rubbed along high points, remnants of former handle on reverse (excised at an earlier date). Inscription cast integrally on reverse: SG . SA . / HOC.OPVS.MO (SG and SA indicating the saints to the left and right of the central scene, and the later referring to the probable authorship of the pax by Moderno).

Provenance:

Various NYC collections

Emmanuel Moatti (dealer, NYC)

Comte de R. (Tajan auction, 6 Nov 1997, Lot 62)

The subject of this pax is remarkable in its synthesis of various devotional subjects. The centerpiece displays Mary and the infant Christ who interestingly has his back turned toward the audience, flanked by the pensive saints Anthony and Jerome, and surrounded by relaxed and playful cherubs with a lunette depicting the Resurrection above. Douglas Lewis observes that the “precedents for such creative informality are rare in late quattrocento Italy.”

As was typical of Moderno’s earlier compositions, he models a portion of the present design after the work of Andrea Mantegna. The musical cherubs at the base of the scene appear to have been inspired by Mantegna’s central panel on the San Zeno altarpiece in Verona. The fluted columns, festoons, and acanthi patterns in Mantegna’s work also seem related.

This pax was pivotal in identifying its author, whom, upon stylistic grounds, an entire oeuvre was revealed during 20th century scholarship.

While examples of this pax are numerous in many private and museum collections, examples with an inscribed reverse are much less common, making this example a particular rarity.

A SCULPTURAL APPLIQUE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Anonymous

Probably Venice or Sienna, Italy; 16th century

Bronze

An exquisite applique of moderate-to-fine quality, probably intended for a tabernacle niche or altar cross.

The manner and style of this sculpture follows closely with a full-length figural Baptist at the Cleveland Museum of Art.

Similar examples are located in other private and public collections, such as another figurine at La Spezia (Museo civico Amedeo Lia).

In literature, the work of this unidentified sculptor has been variably compared against the workmanship of other known sculptors like Alessandro Algardi, Jacopo Sansovino and Ercole Ferrara.





A PAX OF THE PIETA, AFTER MICHELANGELO

Attributed to Jacopo and/or Ludovico del Duca

Rome, Italy; ca. 1580

Bronze; 115.1 x 170.2 mm

Condition: Contemporary cast. Gilt obverse and reverse. Contemporaneous gilt and separately attached handle. Modestly rubbed gilding along the high points of the relief. Cherub head along the base and scalloped shell at the top flattened due to wear or repeated falls. Warping along the upper right pediment, probably due to a casting flaw. Finely finished with elaborate punch work.

The small bronze *Pieta* relief cast integrally with its frame for use as a pax follows after a prototype by Michelangelo (1475-1564) made during the early 1540s. Michelangelo created the *Pieta* for Vittoria Colonna (1492-1547), an esteemed noblewoman with whom he shared corresponding spiritual beliefs inspired by progressive Christian reformists. Michelangelo's *Pieta* relates to Colonna's *Lamentation on the Passion of Christ*, written in the early 1540s and later published in 1556. In her *Lamentation* Colonna vividly adopts the role of Mary in grieving the death of her son. Michelangelo's *Pieta* was likely inspired by Colonna's writing, evidenced through the synchronicity of his design in relationship with Colonna's prose.

The most recent scholarship concerning this pax suggests it was made in the workshop of Jacopo or Ludovico del Duca, both successful sculptors and bronze casters. In particular, Jacopo was serving as Michelangelo's assistant at the time of his death and subsequently inherited several of his projects.

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