

Antonio MONTAUTI

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Son of Hannibal and Chiara Danesi, was born November 14, 1683 in the parish of St. Felix in Piazza in Florence (Visonà, 1996).

Educated in the study of plastic arts in his hometown under the guidance of Giuseppe Piamontini, the young Montauti, according to current practice among his contemporary artists, was first addressed, as Francesco Maria Niccolò Gabburri remembers, to the study of ancient statuary and of Michelangelo's works, to the knowledge of which he joined, as can be deduced from the examination of his first activity, distinctive interests for the new orientations of local late Baroque art, updated for some time, to the most fashionable stylistic trends of Roman sculpture.

At 1706, the time of enrollment at the Academy of Design (Zangheri, 2000), had to start an independent activity, marked at first, as well as works of which there is no more news - as a *Bacchanal* in bronze (Dati, 1734) and a garden statue for the Medici villa of Lappoggi (Palagi, 1876) - above all by the execution of medals (Vannel - Toderi, 2006).

Signed and dated 1707 is the medal of *Giovanni Maria Baldigiani*, which was followed shortly after those dedicated, between 1708 and 1713, to *Vincenzo da Filicaia*, to *Frederick IV of Denmark*, to *Francesco Maria de' Medici*, to *Orazio Ricasoli Rucellai*, to *Lorenzo Magalotti*, to *Violante Beatrice of Baviera* and to the Siense poet *Aretafila Savini Rossi*, for whom Montauti also sculpted a medallion in marble, which appeared in 2009 on the Florentine antique market. Conformed stylistically to the language of the most famous local masters of the time, such as Massimiliano Soldani Benzi and Giovacchino Fortini, these medals are appreciable, as well as for the expressive wit of the retracted, for the inventive originality of the allegorical scenes or the emblems described in the showers, for the high executive quality and the fineness of the modeling, enhanced by impeccable burin finishes, conducted with remarkable technical expertise.

The good public praise received by Montauti between the end of the first and the beginning of the second decade of the eighteenth century favored its gradual professional affirmation in the Florentine area, sanctioned by increasingly prestigious commissions, linked to the Tuscan grand-ducal house, to the local patrician families more in sight and to some of the most famous religious buildings of the Tuscan capital. After taking part in the execution of the ephemeral apparatuses set up, in 1711 and 1712, in the basilica of S. Lorenzo to commemorate, respectively, the funeral of Emperor Joseph I of Habsburg and the canonization of Pope Pius V (Riederer-Grohs, 1978) and after completing, in 1714, the realization of the marble bust of *Filippo Corsini* for the family palace in Parione (Visonà, 1990), he obtained the task of sculpting two marble medallions dedicated to the stories of s. Filippo Neri for the oratory church of S. Florence.

Under the aegis of Fortini, an artist who had been entrusted with the architectural work and the superintendency of the internal decorations of the church, Montauti created, between 1714 and 1719, the ovals with *S. Filippo Neri who sells his books and distributes the money to the poor* and *St. Philip Neri who receives the Holy Spirit* (Bellesi, 1992). Preceded by the plaster models, preserved in the convent adjacent to the church (Id., 1996), the two works, part of a cycle of four episodes dedicated to the life of the Florentine saint in which Fortini also participated, show a stylistic language rich in refined eclecticism, deferential, essentially, to Piamontini's lesson with original openings to the lively Fortinean narrativity and the fascinating Roman-inspired late Baroque compositions.

Dated to the second decade of the century and probably identifiable with a statue cited in 1718 in a letter by Anton Maria Salvini (Visonà, 1996) is the elegant marble bust of *Gian Gastone de' Medici* in the Uffizi Gallery

(Lankheit, 1962), catalogable among the highest achievements of the central activity of Montauti. The work, indebted to the portrait formulas successfully spread in Tuscany by Fortini in the early eighteenth century, shows an elegant style of courtly note that admirably emphasizes the regal character of the effigy, adorned by a flowing wig with ringed curls and draped armor. with care and characterized by a good-natured proud gaze full of haughty endeavor. Similar or related to this work are other interesting portraits, dating from the glimpse of the second and the beginning of the third decade of the eighteenth century.

Significant, in this sense, appear a relief dedicated to the same Medici character in the Bruschi collection in Grassano (Bellesi, Bellesi - Visonà, 2008), the marble bust with *Manoel de Vihlena*, already read as *Ramon Despuig*, in the Royal Castle of Warsaw (already at the Heim Gallery in London, *Baroque Paintings*, 1968), the terracotta model by *de Vihlena* already on the antiquarian market (signed, *ibid.*) and, again, the elegant bust with the effigy of *Francesco Redi* in a private collection American (Spike, 1984) and the most sober marble portrait with *Cosimo III di Toscana* in the Hall collection in New York (*Repertorio*, 1993), perhaps identifiable with a work exhibited in 1724 (Borroni Salvadori, 1974).

With the qualification of "festive chef" Montauti obtained in 1719 the task of supervising the artistic exhibition periodically set up by the Academy of drawing in the cloisters of the Ss. Annunziata, occasion, in which he also exhibited paintings from his collection. Documents of 1721 recall the relationship established with the English collectors and in particular with John Molesworth for whom he realized some unidentified works that contributed to making his name appreciated even in the countries beyond the Alps (Montagu, 1975).

In the wake of the interests shown at that time by the grand-ducal court and the patrician families for illustrious men, he realized, probably during the same decade, some medallions in different materials, replicated in more than one case several times, among which stand out a marble round with the effigy of *Marsilio Ficino*, already at the Heim Gallery in London (signed, *Faces and figures ...*, 1971), the series in polychrome stucco with *Michelangelo Buonarroti*, *Niccolò Machiavelli*, *Galileo Galilei* and, again, *Ficino*, appeared in 2007 in the Bacarelli Gallery in Florence (Bellesi, 2007).

In 1723, time of execution of the lost *St. Peter* placed at the top of the column in Piazza S. Felicità (Visonà, 1996), Montauti sculpted the statue with the *Innocence* for the Carmelite church of S. Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi in Florence; the work was later joined by the marble with the *Religion*, started by himself and then completed, in 1738, by the student Gaetano Masoni (Pacini, 1990), who had already collaborated in the realization of the Filipino stories in S. Florence (Bellesi, 1996).

After having participated in 1724 to the apparatuses set up in S. Lorenzo for the celebrations of the death of the Grand Duke Cosimo III, Montauti obtained, in the same year, from the palatine electrician Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici the payment of 300 ducats for the bronze group with the *Return of the prodigal son*, destined for Pitti palace and now kept in the Detroit Institute of Art (Casciù, 2006).

The work - from which it was later treated a second version with variants for the Salviati family, currently preserved in the National Museum of the Wales in Cardiff (formerly in the Heim Gallery in London; *Italian paintings ...*, 1976) - formed an integral part of a series of small bronzes linked to the most resonant names of Florentine sculpture of the time, among which the famous Giovanni Battista Foggini, Soldani Benzi, Piamontini and Fortini appeared together with the most promising artists of the new generation. The highly narrative and almost didascalical effect of the Medicean composition, that for the appreciations collected in the court area deserved to be exposed to the public in the same year (Borroni Salvadori, 1974), can be found in other works of Montauti's maturity, difficult to place chronologically, like the couple with *Ercole and Diomede* and *Ercole and Jolao who kill the Hydra* (already in the Heim Gallery, *Paintings-sculpture ...*, 1983) and, moreover, the very refined bronze relief with the *Rape of Europe and Neptune on the sea chariot* in the County Museum of Art in Los Angeles (commissioned by the Corsini family; Schaefer - Fusco), a work modulated on highly acclaimed schemes in Florence in the *rocaille* age, especially sensitive to the lesson of Soldani Benzi.

Careful observer of the artistic realities of his time, Montauti executed in 1725 two of the most intriguing portraits related to his catalog, which, for typological characters loaded and forcibly expressive, contrast with the effigies of the characters already treated by him in previous years. Representing *Antonio Magliabechi* and *Gian Gastone de' Medici* and preserved respectively in the National Library of Florence (Visonà, 1990) and in the loggia of the hospital of S. Maria Nuova (Bellesi, in press), the two busts qualify for the tone pungent looks and for the ruthless definition of faces, almost comparable to tragicomic masks.

Sources of primary inspiration for works of this type, decidedly devoid of the expressive intent with an idealizing background found in the official portraiture, are, according to a suitable critical response, the habituation and the study of Fortini's works, author of busts much appreciated in Florence of time, dedicated to the "cult of ugly". Physical ugliness, to be understood not only metaphorically as a means of achieving virtue, became, thanks to Fortini, a new term of comparison between the Tuscan masters of the time, who seemed to almost rival the creation of works dedicated to the most repellent and targeted local characters, belonging, above all, to the highest social classes.

The masterpiece of the sacred activity of Montauti in Florence dates back to 1726: the marble statue with *S. Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi* in one of the cloisters of S. Frediano in Cestello (Montagu, 1975).

The work, admired in advance by the Palatine electrics in the studio of Montauti "alla Nunziata", shows a refined eclectic language in which the most typical stylistic features of the sculptor converge, oscillating, mainly, among the hedonistic ideals derived from classical antiquity, the descriptive grace and elegance of Florentine masters of the Foggian context and the novelties of the Roman-French world, evident, in a marked way, in the virginal beauty of the figure, in the sinuous curvature of the body and in the vibrating rustle of the ample fabrics, almost moved from a light sea breeze.

In the dense agenda of allotments linked to the name of Montauti, it appears documented in 1727 the execution of a portrait, unidentified today, of *Pier Francesco Borgherini*, on which we have news in the papers of the Academy of drawing (Borroni Salvadori, 1985); in 1728 the first assignments for Cardinal Alamanno Salviati date back, and a few years later he opened the road to Rome. Another important Florentine family for the commissions carried out by Montauti in the Tuscan capital and in Rome was that of the Corsini for which he realized works especially in bronze.

In addition to the already mentioned relief with the *Rape of Europe and Neptune on the sea cart* deserve mention of works such as *Ganymede with the eagle*, *Meleager*, *Venus and Adonis* and *Diana*, now preserved in the National Museum of Ancient Art - Palazzo Corsini in Rome (Montagu, 1975). The success of these creations is attested, significantly, by the presence of other autograph editors, among which we can mention about the group with *Venus and Adonis* two beautiful mergers in the Bargello Museum in Florence and in the Museum Schloss Fasanerie in Eichenzell. As for the composition with *Ganimede*, it is likely that it had a bronze medal with *Leda with a swan* as a *pendant* (a version, attributed to Piamontini, is kept in the Minneapolis Institute of arts; Zikos, 2005). As well as compositions of his own invention, Montauti realized, also for Corsini, bronzes drawn from the old or from famous seventeenth-century works, documented in archival papers and at the moment largely unidentified (Visonà, 1996).

After having signed and dated in 1731 a medal with *Gian Gastone de' Medici*, in 1732 Montauti, in addition to the apparatus set up inside the Cathedral of S. Maria del Fiore for the official entry in Florence of Don Carlos of Spain (Bellesi, in Bellesi - Visonà, 2008), he completed two large statues of s. Peter and s. Paolo in marble for the basilica of S. Antonio in Mafra, in Portugal (Vale), an imposing building that involved the most important Florentine and Roman sculptors of the time.

Strong of the success enshrined in these statues, for which "he reported applause and immortal glory" (Gabburri), and thanks to the protection of Cardinal Salviati, Montauti had the opportunity to move to Rome in 1733, where, within a short time, he obtained coveted commissions. As the cardinal died a few

months after his arrival, he found new protection in the prelate's nephew, Giovan Vincenzo Salviati, who assigned him "a quarter, table and carriage" in the Lungara palace, where he was hosted together with his pupil Salvatore Sani. he too Florentine (ibid.). After being engaged in a portrait dedicated to the newly deceased cardinal, unidentified today (Visonà, 1996), Montauti waited, again in 1733, to the execution of the poignant marble statue with the *Pietà* destined to S. Giovanni in Laterano (Nava Cellini, 1982), commissioned by Pope Clement XII Corsini, who assigned to Montauti "the study of S. Pietro, which was already of the Valeri sculptor, and then of Agostino Cornacchini, together with the Palazzetto adjoining it for his dwelling" (Gabburri).

Preceded by small-format studies, of which only a plaster is currently known in the Florentine private collection (Bellesi, Bellesi - Visonà, 2008), the *Pietà*, which represents the absolute masterpiece of Montauti, highlights high quality data in the poetic definition of the figures, veined with subtle melancholy, and in the executive virtuosités that, in addition to exalting the whiteness of the polished marble surfaces, place particular attention to the contour elements, treated with technical acrobacy and with almost hyper-realistic descriptive intentions. The result of a very refined cultural interweaving, the Lateran statue, in which no iconographic citations are eradicated by seventeenth-century works, shows, to an analytical confirmation, particular conciliatory stylistic data, above all, the elegant Florentine compositional dictation with the late Roman Baroque art and the figurative language of contemporary French masters, in particular Nicolas Cousteau, author of a work with the same sacred theme, kept in Notre-Dame, closely related to that of Montauti in the arrangement of the two protagonists.

Following the public and private appreciations obtained with this sculpture, Montauti signed, in the same year, the contract for the execution of the imposing marble statue with *St. Benedict* for St. Peter in the Vatican (Bershad, 1984). The work, included in a series of statues dedicated to the founding saints of religious orders (carried out throughout the eighteenth century), kept Montauti busy until 1735, the time for placing the marble inside the basilica (Visonà, 1996). Preceded by a large format model, the statue stands out among the highest achievements of Roman sculpture of the time, comparable, within the same series, to the refined creations, more or less coeval, by Camillo Rusconi, Giovanni Battista Maini and Filippo Of the valley.

Now affirmed in the local artistic field, Montauti obtained, after the completion of *S. Benedetto*, the role of "assistant architect" of the Fabbrica di S. Pietro, thus joining Filippo Barigioni, who at the time was dressed in the same building, the office of «architect above» (ibid.).

Of the many works of Montauti cited in documents between the late thirties and 1746, probable year of death, very few are traced or survived. These include a statue with *Christ* for the convent of the Holy Trinity of the Pilgrims, a marble bas-relief with the *Madonna and Child Jesus* for the patriarchal basilica of Lisbon and the gate to the chapel of the Immaculate Conception for the same church Portuguese, left unfinished at the time of his death and sent *to the site* only in 1747 (ibid.).

Next to his death, in 1746 Montauti had the testament and the inventory of his property drawn up (Montagu, 1996), documents from which we learn the existence of two sisters and the close bond that united him to Cardinal Neri Corsini, his «singular master », for whose family he had worked, as has been repeatedly noted, at an almost constant rate. He died probably in the same 1746 in Rome.

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