



Reduced from Ø 72.5 mm

Chéron, Charles Jean-François

Lunéville 1635 – 1698 Paris

Portrait medal of Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680), aged 76

Rome 1674

BRONZE, very fine early cast. 72.5 mm diameter. Small piercing above head.

Obverse Bust to right, a portrait of Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680), with cloak draped over shoulder. Around, EQVES IOA LAVRENT BERNINVS ETATIS SVE; in exergue, ANNO 76 1674. Signed on the truncation, F. CHERON.



Reverse Allegorical figures of painting, sculpture, architecture and mathematics. Around, SINGVLARIS IN SINGVLIS IN OMNIBVS VNICVS. Signed in exergue, F. CHERON

PROVENANCE Michael Hall (1926–) — sale Baldwin's, 'Auction 64: The Michael Hall Collection: Medalllic Portraits from the Renaissance to the Nineteenth Century (Part One)', London, 4 May 2010, lot 575

THIS MEDALLIC PORTRAIT of the sculptor Gian Lorenzo Bernini was commissioned from Charles Jean-François Chéron by Louis XIV, to commemorate Bernini's short tenure at the French court (June–November 1665), during which he had designed projects

for the new Louvre and carved a marble bust of the King.¹ At the time it was issued, Bernini was working almost full-time on his ill-fated equestrian statue of Louis XIV (completed 1677).²

The source for the portrait on the obverse depicting Bernini ‘at the age of 76’ is unknown and its origin attracts speculation; it may be that Bernini collaborated in its creation. ‘Chéron’s portrait appears to depend on no known prototype, so it may be assumed that Bernini sat to the medallist, or commissioned draughtsman, specifically for this purpose. Indeed the agitated configuration of the drapery, with its deep troughs and narrow, parallel ridges, is reminiscent of Bernini’s own late drapery style, suggesting that the design for the medal may have been produced by an artist in his immediate circle.’³

The reverse shows, in allegorical form, the arts in which Bernini excelled: sculpture, architecture, and painting, with the motto ‘Singular in each, unparalleled in all’. At the centre of the medal a female personification of Sculpture carves a marble bust. Before Sculpture stands Architecture, holding the instruments of her profession, and in dialogue with Mathematics; at the left is Painting, holding a palette and brushes, with her covered mouth defining painting as ‘a silent art’. The mask hanging from Painting’s neck may be an allusion to Bernini’s scenographic activities.⁴

Chéron was born in Lunéville and trained by his father, who was engraver to Charles IV,

Duke of Lorraine. He went to Rome in the early 1650s,⁵ where he worked independently as a medallist for about twenty years (there seems to be no record of his employment at the papal mint). Chéron’s Roman medals include a struck portrait piece of Queen Christina of Sweden, and a medal of Louis XIV to commemorate the crossing of the Rhine (1672). ‘Chéron’s style in his Roman medals is of remarkable boldness, and his medals of Pope Clement IX and Bernini are grandiloquent and among the finest Italian medals of the period.’⁶

The date of Chéron’s return to Paris is uncertain. On 1 October 1674, Bernini wrote to Colbert, warmly recommending Chéron to the French court. This letter is often taken as evidence that Chéron was already in Paris, and that this medal was cast there (and not in Rome), before Bernini’s 76th birthday (7 December 1674).⁷ It is however equally probable that Chéron was still in Rome in 1674, as he did not receive funds for his voyage until August 1675.⁸

The medal is known by numerous examples, nearly all in bronze. Published examples include

- Brescia, Musei Civici d’Arte e Storia, Gabinetto Numismatico⁹
- Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum (bronze, 71 mm)¹⁰
- Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland, NG 2439 (bronze, 73.5 mm)¹¹
- Florence, Museo nazionale del Bargello, Inv. 7558 (silver, 72.8 mm)¹²
- Florence, Museo

¹ The medal was first illustrated in the Parisian journal *Le Mercure galant*, January 1681, at p.82 (in the Lyon reprint at p.56). Filippo Baldinucci mentions it in his *Vita del cavaliere Gio. Lorenzo Bernino: scultore, architetto, e pittore* (Florence 1682), p.53; cf. F. Baldinucci, *The life of Bernini*, translated from the Italian by Catherine Enggass (University Park, PA 1966), p.61: ‘... the King, in order to give new signs of satisfaction and of esteem to our artist, had a beautiful medal cast with his portrait on one side. On the reverse there were allegories of painting, sculpture, architecture, and mathematics in charming attitudes with their proper attributes and emblems and the motto: Singularis in singulis, in omnibus unicus’. An engraving of the medal by Marcus Tuschler illustrates Baldinucci’s life of Bernini in Ottavio Lioni, *Ritratti di alcuni celebri pittori del secolo XVII... con le vite de’ medesimi tratte da varj autori* (Rome 1731), p.123. The medal is also mentioned by Domenico Bernini, *Vita del Cavaliere Gio. Lorenzo Bernino* (Rome 1713), p.147.

² Rudolf Wittkower, ‘The vicissitudes of a dynastic monument: Bernini’s equestrian statue of Louis XIV’ in *De artibus opuscula XL: essays in honor of Erwin Panofsky*, edited by Millard Meiss (New York 1961), 1, pp.497–531 (especially pp.517–518, 528).

³ Timothy Clifford, in *Effigies & ecstasies: Roman baroque sculpture and design in the age of Bernini*, catalogue of the exhibition held at the National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh, 25 June–20 September 1998 (Edinburgh 1998), p.55.

⁴ Avigdor W. G. Posèq, *Bernini revisited: new insights into his work* (Jerusalem 2008), pp.163–164 (medal illustrated p.245 fig. 98).

⁵ E. Mellier, ‘Étude sur François Chéron, graveur en médailles’ in *Mémoires de la Société d’archéologie lorraine* 43 (1893), p.377, suggesting 1651 as the date of Chéron’s departure for Rome.

⁶ Andrea S. Norris and Ingrid Weber, *Medals and plaquettes from the Molinari collection at Bowdoin College* (Brunswick, ME 1976), p.68.

⁷ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Mél. Colbert, Ms 169, c. 426v; see transcription by Tomaso Montanari, in *Gian Lorenzo Bernini: regista del barocco*, catalogue of an exhibition held at the Palazzo Venezia, Rome, 21 May–16 September 1999, edited by Maria Grazia Bernardini and Maurizio Fagiolo dell’Arco (Milan 1999), p.302, who concludes: ‘la medaglia fu evidentemente realizzata non a Roma ma a Parigi’.

⁸ Jules Guiffrey, *Comptes des bâtiments du roi sous le règne de Louis XIV, 1 : Colbert, 1664–1680* (Paris 1881), col. 876: ‘28 aoust [1675]: à Chéron, pour le voyage qu’il a fait de Rome à Paris pour travailler aux médailles de l’Histoire de S.M. 600 [livres]’. Mellier (*op. cit.*), p.380: ‘Après avoir obtenu l’agrément du Pape... Chéron se mit en route et arriva à Paris au milieu de l’année 1675’.

⁹ Prospero Rizzini, *Illustrazione dei civici musei di Brescia* [volume 2, part 1:] *Medaglie, serie italiana. Secoli XV a XVIII* (Brescia 1892), p.126 no. 886.

¹⁰ Graham Pollard, ‘Some Roman seventeenth century portrait medals’ in *Studi secenteschi* 7 (1966), pp.97–99 pl.v.

¹¹ *Effigies & ecstasies* (*op. cit.*), pp.54–55 no. 6.

¹² Giuseppe Toderi and Fiorenza Vannel, *Medaglie italiane: Barocche e Neoclassiche* (Florence 1990), p.54 no. 32 (reproduced p.57); Fiorenza Vannel and Giuseppe Toderi, *Medaglie italiane del Museo*

Bardini (bronze, 73 mm)¹³ • London, British Museum (silver)¹⁴ • London, Victoria & Albert Museum, A.2–1966 (silvered bronze, 76 mm)¹⁵ • Madrid, Patrimonio Nacional, Inv. 3 V 3–34¹⁶ • Milan, Johnson Collection (bronze, 72 mm)¹⁷ • Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Médailles, Séries médailles italiennes, no. 516 (bronze, 88 [sic] mm)¹⁸ • Vatican City, Biblioteca Vaticana, Medagliere, XXVII–7 (bronze, 73 mm)¹⁹ • Weimar, Goethe-Nationalmuseum (bronze, 72 mm, 77.40 g)²⁰ • Private collection (bronze, 75 mm)²¹

Examples seen in the market include

- bronze, 74 mm, a fine cast (Sotheby Parke Bernet & Co., ‘European historical medals of The Holy Roman Empire, Germany, France, Italy and the Vatican, Spain, Switzerland, and Great Britain, from the Collection of His Grace the Duke of Northumberland’, London, 17 June 1981, lot 320)
- bronze, 71.5 mm, a late cast (Spink & Son in association with Christie’s, ‘An important collection of Renaissance and baroque medals and plaquettes [the collection of Timothy Clifford]’, London, 21 May 1996, lot 272, £1200; resold by Morton & Eden Ltd in association with Sotheby’s, ‘Coins and Medals including Renaissance and Later Medals from the Collection of Dr Charles Avery’, London, 11 June 2008, lot 467 £600)

nazionale del Bargello, 2: Secolo XVII (Florence 2005), p.69 no. 563 (and other examples in bronze). For Inv. 7558, see also Tomaso Montanari, ‘Bernini e Cristina di Svezia: alle origini della storiografia berniniana’ in *Gian Lorenzo Bernini e i Chigi tra Roma e Siena*, edited by Alessandro Angelini (Cinisello Balsamo 1998), p.420; *Gian Lorenzo Bernini: regista del barocco (op. cit.)*, pp.302–303 no. 13.

¹³ Fiorenza Vannel and Giuseppe Toderi, *Medaglie e placchette del Museo Bardini di Firenze* (Florence 1998), pp.63–64 no. 65.

¹⁴ Ingrid Severin, *Baumeister und Architekten: Studien zur Darstellung eines Berufsstandes in Porträt und Bildnis* (Berlin 1992), p.183 no. 88 (reproduced p.33, as 71 mm).

¹⁵ Charles Avery, *Bernini: Genius of the Baroque* (London 1997), p.275 fig. 397.

¹⁶ *Cortes del Barroco: de Bernini y Velázquez a Luca Giordano*, catalogue of an exhibition, Palacio Real de Madrid, Palacio Real de Aranjuez, 15 October 2003–11 January 2004 (Madrid 2003), p.224 no. 5.14.

¹⁷ Cesare Johnson, *Collezione Johnson di medaglie – Secoli XV–XVIII* (Milan 1990), I, p.205 no. 125.

¹⁸ Josèphe Jacquot, *La Médaille au temps de Louis XIV*, catalogue of an exhibition, Hôtel de la Monnaie, Paris, January–March 1970 (Paris 1970), pp.123, 125 no. 181; *Colbert, 1619–1683*, catalogue of the exhibition held at Hôtel de la Monnaie, Paris, 4 October–30 November 1983 ([Paris] 1983), p.445 no. 636 (in both catalogues described as 88 mm diameter).

¹⁹ Luigi Michelini Tocci, ‘Bernini nelle medaglie e nelle monete’ in *Bernini in Vaticano / Comitato Vaticano per l’Anno Berniniano*, catalogue of an exhibition in the Braccio di Carlo Magno, Città del Vaticano, May–July 1981, edited by Anna Gramiccia (Rome 1981), pp.306–307 no. 324; cf. *Bernini in Vaticano: guida breve* (Rome [1981]), p.68 no. 234 (with location).

²⁰ Jochen Klauß, *Goethe als Medaillensammler* (Weimar 1994), pp.110, 218 no. 52; J. Klauß, *Die Medaillensammlung Goethes* (Berlin 2000), p.222 no. 1064.

²¹ Fiorenza Vannel and Giuseppe Toderi, *La medaglia barocca in Toscana* (Florence 1987), p.19 fig. 6.

REFERENCES Piero Antonio Gaetani, *Museum Mazzuchellianum* (Venice 1761–1763), II, p.121 and pl. CXXVII, 7; Robert J. Eidlitz, *Medals and Medallions relating to Architects* (New York 1927), p.15 no. 78 (bronze, 72 mm) and pl. 13