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Ex Uno Lapide: The Renaissance Sculptor's Tour de Force

IRVING LAVIN

To Matthias Winner on his sixty-fifth birthday, with admiration and friendship.

In a paper published some fifteen years ago, in the context of a symposium devoted to artists and old age, I tried to define what I thought was an interesting aspect of the new self-consciousness of the artist that arose in Italy in the Renaissance.¹ In the largest sense the phenomenon consisted in the visual artist providing for his own commemoration, in the form of a tomb monument or devotional image associated with his final resting place. Although many artists' tombs and commemorations are known from antiquity, and some from the middle ages, artists of the Renaissance made such self-commemorations on an unprecedented scale and with unprecedented consistency, producing grand and noble works at a time of life when one might have thought that their creative energies were exhausted, or that they might have rested on their laurels. In particular, some of the most powerful works of Italian Renaissance sculpture were created under these circumstances: the Florentine Pietà of Michelangelo, which he intended for his tomb in Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome (fig. 1); Baccio Bandinelli's Pietà, which he intended to vie with Michelangelo's and placed on the altar of his funerary chapel in Santissima Annunziata in Florence (fig. 2); and the marble crucifix by Benvenuto Cellini, made to spite Bandinelli and surpass Michelangelo, now at the Escorial but originally intended for the tomb he planned for himself in Santa Maria Novella in Florence (fig. 3). Each of these works was conceived as a supreme demonstration of its creator's prowess. The artists evidently regarded their senescence and even death not as a motive for retirement and withdrawal but as a challenge to continue – indeed, to surpass – their earlier achievements. Old age was no more, and no less, than an extension of the Renaissance definition of the artist as an ambitious and innovative creator.

In part, this way of defining the achievement of the artist in what might be called "agonistic" terms, as a sort of professional competition, was inherent in the Renaissance revival of antiquity – Pliny, in particular, is given to describing this or that work or artist as the "first" of a kind, with reference to technique, design or scale. The Renaissance attitude differed from the classical in several important respects, however, which were indebted to medieval tradition. Pliny appreciated "firsts" primarily



Fig. 1 Michelangelo, Pietà. Florence, Cathedral

in evolutionary terms, as witnesses to change and progress in a given context, or a cause of wonderment at an individual achievement; in the Renaissance these classical notes of distinction engendered a conscious and

¹ LAVIN 1977-78.



Fig. 2 Baccio Bandinelli, *Pietà*. Florence, SS. Annunziata

explicit spirit of competition, and not only with one's predecessors and contemporaries, but also with one's self. The second point of difference is that the very self-consciousness of the artist reflected not only the vast egoism, self-promotion and individualism of the Renaissance, but also an underlying spirit of humility and even of self-abnegation. All these works were made ultimately as acts of extreme devotion and the sheer effort of creation, intellectual and physical, acquired a moral corollary as a testimony to the artist's dedication and self-sacrifice.

Cellini said of his crucifix that he undertook it with the thought that even if his attempt failed, he would at least have shown his good intention.² It sounds like a mod-

² "Questa difficile opera io l'avevo destinata per un mio sepolcro e meco medesimo mi scusavo che, se l'opera non mi fussi riuscita in quel bel modo ch'era il mio desiderio, almanco arei mostro la mia buona volontà." Cited after LAVIN 1977-78, p. 26, n. 29.

ern, almost tragic version of the charming medieval story familiar from Anatole France and Massenet of the *Jongleur de Notre Dame* who, having no other gifts to offer the Virgin on her feast day, approached the altar secretly that night and performed his juggling act with such fervor and devotion that his prayer was heard. The admiration for antiquity may have inspired these grandiose endeavors, but they were conceived in the spirit of the medieval notion of the creative work of the artist as a divinely inspired, quasi-sacral act of humble devotion.

My purpose in the present essay is to extend the exploration of this phenomenon of competitive self-realization outside the domain of funereal art, by following two interrelated but distinct lines of development that emerged from the Renaissance sculptor's response to one of the major challenges posed by the achievements of classical antiquity. It is no accident that the auto-commemorative sculptures of Michelangelo, Bandinelli and Cellini have one thing in common, apart from their Christological subject matter and the fact that they were created in a spirit of competition with antiquity and with each other: they are all monumental sculptures carved from one piece of marble, and in each case this represented a conceptual and technical *tour de force* that was unprecedented – Michelangelo's multiple figures, Bandinelli's unsupported torso and legs, and Cellini's reduction of the block to a slender figure with outstretched arms. It is clear from the sources that this was the measure of the artist's labor, ingenuity and virtuosity.³ Vasari already saw the point of the Florentine Pietà in the first edition of his life of Michelangelo, published in 1550, written while the work was in progress: "One can suppose that this work, if he should leave it to the world finished, would outstrip all his other works for the difficulty of extracting from that block so many perfect things." Ascanio Condivi, whose biography of Michelangelo was published in 1554, calls it a *cosa rara*, a "rare thing and among the most laborious works he has done so far." Ultimately, indeed, it was this aspect of the sculpture that "sanctified" it as a work of art; so Vasari intimates in his second edition, published in 1568, after Michelangelo's death: "A laborious work," he says, "rare in one block, and truly divine." We know that Michelangelo also planned, but never carried out two monumental marble crucifixes (fig. 4), and his failure certainly underlies the terms of Cellini's conception of his own achievement.⁴ "I have begun for pleasure to



Fig. 3 Benvenuto Cellini, Crucifix. Escorial

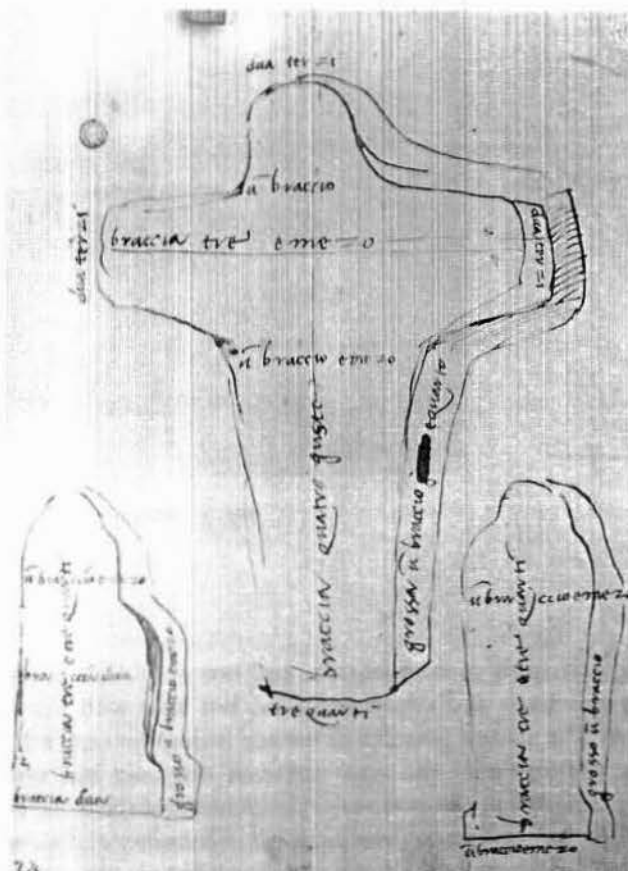


Fig. 4 Michelangelo, sketch of blocks for a crucifixion group. Florence, Casa Buonarroti

³ For these sources quoted below, see LAVIN 1977-78, pp. 23-6.

⁴ On the drawing reproduced here, and a sketch for a Y-shaped crucifix, see C. de Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, 5 vols., Princeton 1943-60, IV, p. 155, fig. 174, V, p. 60, p. 132; IV, p. 155, V, p. 223, no. 253.

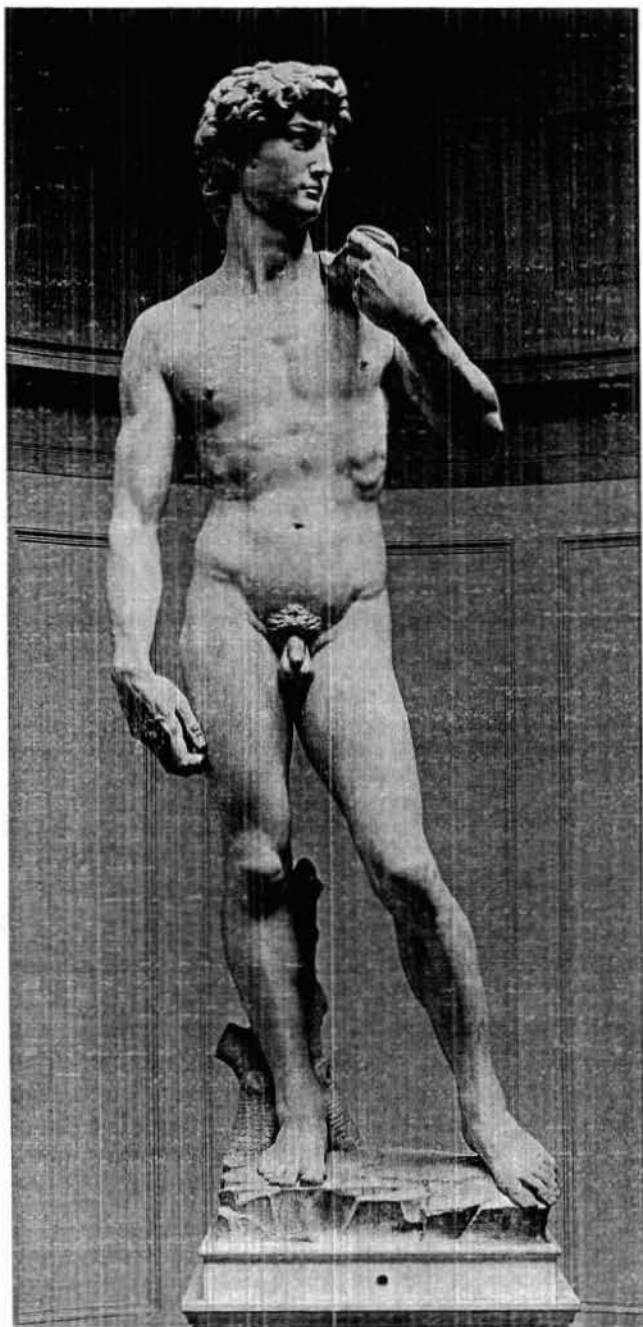


Fig. 5 Michelangelo, *David*, Florence, Accademia

make one of the most laborious works that has ever been made in this world: this is a crucifix of whitest marble, on a cross of blackest marble, large as a living man ... no one has ever undertaken a work of such extreme laboriousness; even I would never have agreed to do so far any patron, for fear of shaming myself." – "I made [the crucifix] of marble three and a quarter braccia high on a cross of black marble, at my own expense and for my own satisfaction, solely to see whether I could

with my art surpass all my predecessors, who never attempted such a work; if they did, and as I more than once heard, they failed; whereas I succeeded, with the Lord's help and my extreme labor, and also at my great expense, by the grace of God." The work was "among the most difficult one can do in the art, that is, dead bodies. This was the image of Jesus Christ our Savior hanging on the cross, to which I devoted the greatest study, laboring on this work with the affection proper to the subject, and the more eagerly for knowing that I was the first to execute a crucifix in marble And I placed the body of the Crucified on a cross of black Carrara marble, a stone most difficult to manage because it is very hard and very prone to shatter."

The feat of carving large monoliths, single statues as well as multfigured groups, was in fact one of the favorite topoi of classical literature on art. References to works outstanding for their scale and seamless perfection, carved *ex uno lapide*, occur frequently in Pliny, Diodorus Siculus, Pausanias, and Herodotus, as a source of admiration but without reference to any underlying matter of theory or principle. Sculptors of the early Renaissance responded to these allusions with a new passion for monumental scale and the integrity of the block. The motivation, however, was now radically different. The integrity of the block became more than a cause for admiration, more even than an aesthetic ideal; it became a veritable ethical imperative, a testimony not only to the bravura of the artist but also to his personal integrity. For Vasari, patching a work of stone sculpture by adding pieces was a "most vile and ugly thing and greatly to be blamed" ("cosa villissima e brutta e di grandissimo biasimo").⁵ The challenge of conceptual foresight and technical mastery with which the sculptor was confronted by this uncompromising principle of integrity, a forerunner of the modernist fetish of "truth to materials," was what gave the carver of marble his claim to superiority over artists in other, more forgiving materials.

The first evidence we have of the significance and value attached to the principle appears in Leon Battista Alberti's treatise on sculpture, composed probably around 1450. The text is mainly devoted to a system of measurement from a prototype, the value of which Alberti illustrated by boasting that it would permit unlimited reduction or enlargement from a model to any desired size, and even allow two sculptors working in separate locations to make complementary sections of a

⁵ See V. B. Mockler, *Colossal Sculpture of the Cinquecento from Michelangelo to Giovanni Bologna*, Ph. D. diss., Columbia Univ. 1967, pp. 25 f.

statue that would fit together perfectly.⁶ Alberti clearly developed his idea for a measuring device as well as his illustration about the two sculptors, from a passage in Diodorus Siculus's famous account of the proportion system used by Egyptian sculptors, which permitted them to execute statues in separate sections.⁷ In his treatise on architecture, completed in 1452, Alberti repeated the point, citing Diodorus Siculus explicitly, and added high praise for ancient works of colossal size and great complexity carved from a single block.⁸ I suspect that Alberti's discussion, and perhaps his method of measurement, may lie behind the first documentary evidence we have of an effort to give practical form to the new ideal, an effort that in fact ultimately resulted in the first colossal, monolithic, freestanding sculpture of the Renaissance, the David of Michelangelo. This epochal story begins with the famous giant to be placed on the buttress of Florence cathedral commissioned from Agostino di Duccio in 1464.⁹ The statue, which was to be nine braccia high, was to correspond to a model that Agostino had made in wax. It was to have been constructed of four pieces of white marble, one for the head and neck, one for each arm, and one for the rest of the body. Had it been carried out Agostino's would have been the first colossal free-standing marble statue since antiquity. When done deliberately to achieve spectacular results of scale or dissimulation, this premeditated composition of large and complex sculptures out of multiple blocks could itself be a praiseworthy accomplishment, and in this sense Agostino's bold project should probably be understood in the light of the ancient precedent recorded by Diodorus Siculus, and followed by Alberti. One wonders whether Alberti may also have inspired the new, even more ambitious undertaking of Agostino di Duccio who in 1466 contracted to execute his figure in a single block, rather than four. Most remarkable in this case is that the overseers of the cathedral agreed to pay Agostino a premium because a figure in one piece is of higher *valuti et pretii* than one of four pieces, requiring not only more *spendio et expensa* but also greater *magisterii*. The fact that the overseers were willing to pay more for the monolithic figure, and especially the reasons given for doing so bear witness to a qualitative and intellectual mind-set as novel as was the project itself. We hear nothing more of Agostino's monolithic *gughante*, but the echo of his clamorous failure must have redounded to the greater glory of Michelangelo when, nearly forty years later, in 1501, he was given the commission and succeeded in carving his heroic figure of David – the first colossal, monolithic, free-standing marble statue since antiquity – from the same block that Agostino had evidently left *male abbozzatum et sculptum* (fig. 5).

The developmental strains I wish to trace, one of which might be called figurative, or sculptural, the other

spatial, or contextual, had their origin in the subsequent rediscovery of two of the most famous of all ancient sculptures, both of which Pliny reports to have been made from a single block of stone. The first of these was the Laocoon, whose accidental discovery in 1506 brought to light the very work Pliny had extolled as the supreme achievement of antiquity, and carved *ex uno lapide* (fig. 6).¹⁰ Michelangelo was in Rome at the time and was among the first to be summoned to view the new wonder, which he promptly pronounced a "singular miracle of art," wherein we should admire rather than try to imitate the "divine ingenuity of the artists."¹¹

⁶ "You will have no doubt of your ability to make something like it [the model] of the same size or smaller or a hundred cubits large, or even, I would say, as big as Mount Caucasus, provided the material we use were sufficient for such an enormous undertaking. What is more amazing is that, if you liked, you could hew out and make half the statue on the island of Paros and the other half in the Lunigiana, in such a way that the joints and connecting points of all the parts will fit together to make the complete figure and correspond to the models used." – "Ut simillimam illius et minorem et tantam et centicubitem, atque adeo ut sic audeam dicere monti Caucasus parem tuis posse, uti aiunt, auspiciis fieri non dubites, modo ad opera tam immania quibus utamur media nobis suppedient. Et quod magis mirere, huius dimidiam ad Paron insulam, si libuerit, dimidiam vero partem alteram in Lunensibus excides atque facie perficies ita ut iunctiones et cohaesiones partium omnium cum totius simulacri facie conveniant exemplaribus et cor respondeant." C. Grayson (ed.), *Leon Battista Alberti. On Painting and on Sculpture*, London 1972, paragraph 5, pp. 124 f.; cf. also the dedicatory letter and paragraph 11, *ibid.* pp. 118 f., pp. 132 f.

⁷ I, 98, 5–9.

⁸ Bk. VII, ch. 16.

⁹ For what follows, see I. Lavin, "Bozzetti and Modelli. Notes on Sculptural Procedure from the Early Renaissance through Bernini," in: *Stil und Überlieferung in der Kunst des Abendlandes. Akten des 21. internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte in Bonn, 1964*, Berlin 1967, III, pp. 93–104, esp. pp. 97–9.

¹⁰ "Nec deinde multo plurium fama est, quorundam claritati in operibus eximiiis obstante numero artificum, quoniam nec unus occupat gloriam nec plures pariter nuncupari possunt, sicut in Laocoonte, qui est in Titi imperatoris domo, opus omnibus et picturae et statuariae artis praeferendum. ex uno lapide eum ac liberos draconumque mirabiles nexum de consili sententia fecere summi artifices Hagesander et Polydorus et Athenodorus Rhodi." – "Not many celebrated artists remain to be named; in the case of certain masterpieces the very number of the collaborators is an obstacle to their individual fame, since neither can one man take to himself the whole glory, nor have a number so great a claim to honour. This is the case with the Laocoon in the palace of the Emperor Titus, a work superior to all the pictures and bronzes in the world. Out of one block of marble did the illustrious artists Hagesander, Polydorus, and Athenodorus of Rhodes, after taking counsel together, carve Laocoon, his children, and the wondrous coils of snakes." Pliny, *Nat. hist.*, XXXVI, 37–38; JEX-BLAKE 1977, pp. 208–11.

¹¹ "Hanc Michael Angelus dicit esse miraculum artis singulare: in quo divinum artificum debeamus suspicere ingenium



Fig. 6 Laocöon. Rome, Musei Vaticani

One wonders whether Michelangelo's precisely defined appreciation for the work might have been formulated in relation to the fact that he and his companion on the visit, the sculptor Giancristoforo Romano, had observed that the sculpture was not in fact carved from a single block, but was composed of some four pieces (we know today that there are at least seven). The piecing in this case was a source for admiration because it was so adroitly done that only "experts in the art" would notice. "Hence either Pliny was himself deceived or he wished to deceive others to render the work more

admirable, because it would be impossible to make secure three large figures, joined in a single block with so many and such wonderful tangles (*mirabili gruppi*) of

potius quam ad imitationem nos accingere." J. J. Boissard, *Romanae urbis topographiae et antiquitatum*, 2 vols., Frankfurt 1597-1602, I, pp. 13 f., cited after P. Barocchi (ed.), *Giorgio Vasari. La vita di Michelangelo nelle redazioni del 1550 e del 1568*, 5 vols., Milan-Naples 1962-72, IV, p. 2101.



Fig. 7 Baccio Bandinelli, *Laocöon*. Florence, Uffizi

serpents, without any sort of devices."¹² The *Laocöon* thus became a touchstone, a veritable *pietra di paragone*, in the subsequent development of European culture, not only in the most commonly understood sense of an *exemplum* of the psychological expressiveness attained by classical artists, but also as a challenge to the limits of professional ingenuity and technique.¹³

¹² "Questa statua, che insieme co' figliuoli, Plinio dice esser tutta d'un pezzo, Giovannangelo romano, e Michel Cristo-

fano fiorentino, che sono i primi scultori di Roma, negano ch'ella sia d'un sol marmo, e mostrano circa a quattro commettiture; ma congiunte in luogo tanto nascoso, e tanto bene saldate e ristuccate, che non si possono conoscere facilmente se non da persone peritissime di quest'arte. Però dicono che Plinio s'ingannò o volle ingannare altri, per render l'opera più ammirabile. Poiché non si potevano tener salde tre statue di statura giusta, collegata in un sol marmo, con tanti, e tanto mirabili gruppi di serpenti, con nessuna sorta di stromenti." Letter of Cesare Trivulzio, June 1, 1506, G. Bottari and S. Ticozzi, *Raccolta di lettere sulla pittura, scultura ed architettura*, 8 vols., Milan 1822-5, III, p. 475.

¹³ It is noteworthy that, as L. Ettlinger, "Exemplum Doloris. Reflections on the *Laocöon* Group," in: M. Meiss (ed.), *De*

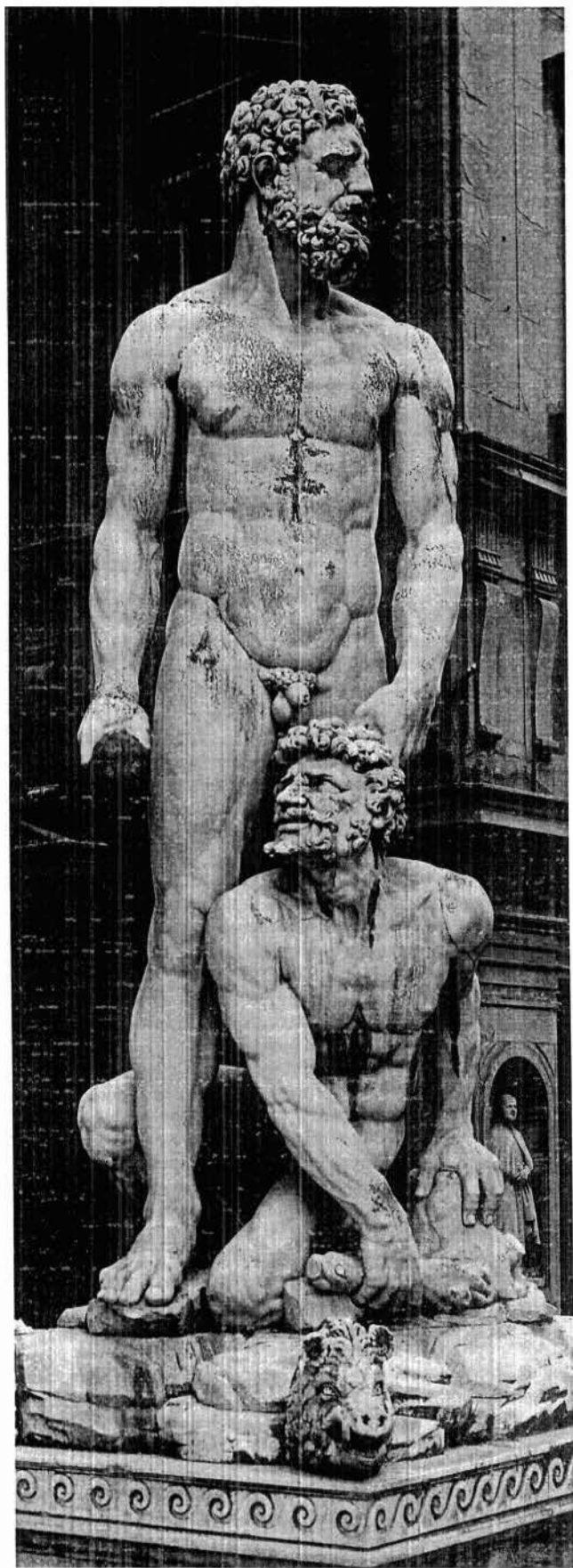


Fig. 8 Baccio Bandinelli, *Hercules and Cacus*.
Florence, Piazza Signoria

Following its discovery many artists made copies of the sculpture, one of whom, Baccio Bandinelli, had the temerity to claim that he would surpass the original. His full-size copy in the Uffizi, which dates from 1520–25, does surpass the original in the sense that it consists of only three pieces (fig. 7). Bandinelli seems to have been the first to make the Laocöon the focal point of a meditation on what might be called the exemplarity of ancient art, initiating a tradition that would culminate in Lessing's famous essay. I believe, in fact, that Bandinelli's attempt to vie with the sculpture had a profound effect on Michelangelo, perhaps inspiring him later to undertake the Florentine Pietà but certainly motivating one of his most famous pronouncements on the precisely the subject of the exemplarity of antiquity. In a thinly veiled reference to Bandinelli's boast, Vasari reports the anecdote as follows: "A friend asked him what he thought of one who had copied some of the most celebrated antique marble figures, boasting he had imitated them, and had far surpassed the ancients. He replied, 'One who follows others never surpasses them, and a man who cannot do good original work is unable to use that of others to advantage'."¹⁴

The discovery of the Laocöon also raised the challenge of creating original multfigured standing groups *ex uno lapide*. This ambition must have conditioned the project initiated in 1508 by the Republican governor of

Artibus Opuscula XL. Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky, New York 1961, pp. 121–6, p. 126) points out, Counterreformation writers later in the century recommended the Laocöon as a model for portraying the Passion of Christ and suffering saints and martyrs: "Ma da le statue chiaro argomento cavar potiamo da la perizia degli antichi pittori e scultori, il che ciascuno di voi può aver veduto in Roma in molte statue e seppialmente nel Loacoonte di Belvedere, il quale par che con suoi figliuoli dimostri, così annodato dai serpenti, l'angustia, il dolore et il tormento che sentiva in quell'atto. Certo sarebbe cosa nova e bella veder un Cristo in croce per le piaghe per i sputi, per i scherni e per il sangue trasformato ..." G. A. Giglio, *Due dialoghi*, Camerino 1564, in: P. Barocchi (ed.), *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento. Fra manierismo e controriforma*, 3 vols., Bari 1960–2, II, p. 42; "Sane vero quando in veterum gentilium statuvis acerbitas illa doloris exprimi potuit, quemadmodum in Vaticano Laocoonte cernitur, tantum non expirante, ac prae dolore se filiosque serpentibus vinctos dirissime torquente, quis neget id effici posse in eo [Cristo], in quem omnium dolorum ac diritatum genera omnia irruperunt?" A. Possevino, *Tractatio de poesi et pictura ethnica, humana et fabulosa collata cum vera, honesta et sacra*, Lyons 1595, cited after Barocchi, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 587.

¹⁴ G. Vasari, *The Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, ed. W. Gaunt, 4 vols., London and New York 1963, IV, p. 176: "Domandato da uno amico suo quel che gli paresse d'uno che aveva contrafatto di marmo figure antiche delle più celebrate, vantandosi lo immitatore che di gran lungo aveva superato gli antichi, rispose: 'Chi va dietro a altri, mai non li passa innanzi; e chi non sa far bene da sé, non può servirsi bene delle cose d'altri'." Barocchi (see note 11), pp. 127 f.

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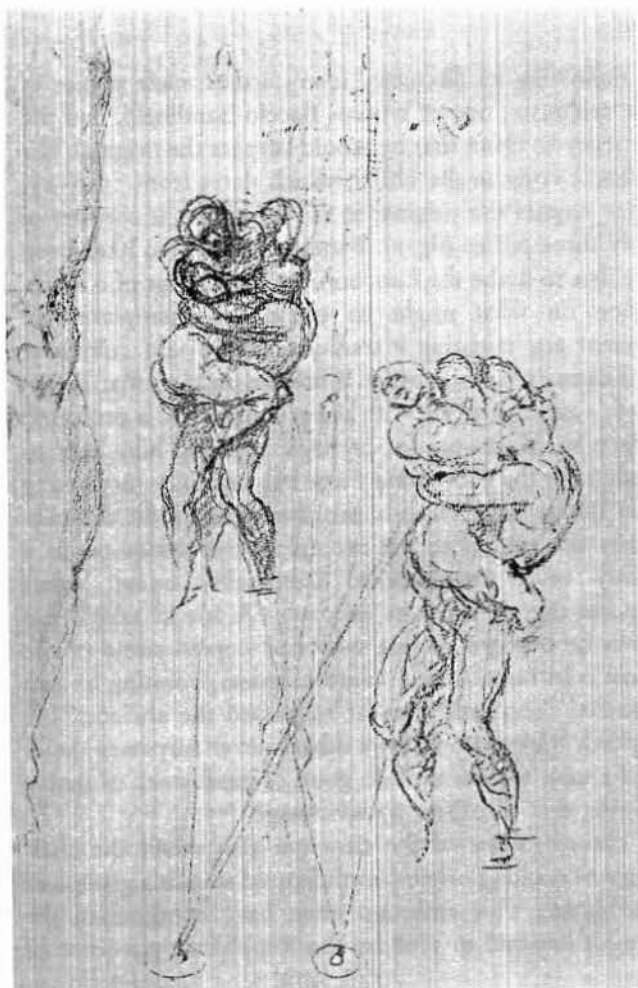


Fig. 9 Michelangelo, sketches for Hercules and Antaeus group, detail. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum

Florence, Piero Soderini, for Michelangelo to carve a colossal figure of Hercules as a counterpart and pendant to the David, for which Soderini had also been responsible. Together the statues would provide Florence with colossal signs, *insegna* is the word Vasari uses, of its ancient heroes, biblical and pagan.¹⁵ The project had a tumultuous history until 1534 when, under the very altered political circumstances of Medici rule in Florence, Baccio Bandinelli finally installed his Hercules and Cacus group, with which he sought to "outdo" Michelangelo's David (fig. 8). (In fact Bandinelli found it necessary to add pieces at a shoulder and leg of Cacus, for which he was roundly criticized by Vasari¹⁶). Bandinelli's group is not only a *risposta* to the David, however; its rigid poses and strictly planar composition seem positively archaic and contrast markedly, and surely deliberately, with Michelangelo's ideas for the commission, which are known from various drawings and models (figs. 9, 10).¹⁷ With the sinuous motion and intertwining actions of the figures Michelangelo created coherent – one is tempted to say, intimate – groups that

revolutionized the treatment of sculptural narrative. This approach to human relationships and sculptural form was inherent in Michelangelo's art from the beginning – witness the early relief of the Battle of the Centaurs; but here in a monumental freestanding two-figured group it seems clear that Michelangelo had in mind another classical sculptural topos which, as far as I know, has been completely overlooked by modern critics; I refer to the formula for groups of interwoven figures, the *symplegma*, or interlace, the term used on more than one occasion by Pliny presumably to describe sculptures depicting couples in erotic embrace, but which might also apply to struggling figures like the famous pair of Hellenistic wrestlers discovered later in the sixteenth century (figs. 11, 12).¹⁸ It is important to note that in each case Pliny qualifies the noun *symplegma* with the adjective *nobile*, a point that has been dismissed as senseless by modern editors but which I think must have seemed very significant indeed for Renaissance readers

¹⁵ "In questo marmo Michelagnolo Buonarroti aveva fatto pensiero di far un gigante in persona d'Ercole che ucidesse Cacco, per metterlo in Piazza a canto l'uno e l'altro, e Davitte ed Ercole, insegna del palazzo." VASARI-MILANESI, VI, p. 148. Vasari uses the same word in describing Michelangelo's colossal figure of David as the protector of the city: "Laonde Michelagnolo, fatto un modello di cera, finse in quello, per la insegna del Palazzo, un Davit giovane con una frombola in mano, acciò che, sì come egli aveva difeso il suo popolo e governatolo con giustizia, così chi governava quella città dovesse animosamente difenderla e giustamente governarla." Barocchi (see note 11), I, pp. 19–23.

¹⁶ "Nel gigante in piazza, come si vede, rimesse a Cacco ed appiccò due pezzi, cioè una spalla ed una gamba; ed in molti altri suoi lavori fece il medesimo, tenendo cotali modi, i quali sogliono grandemente dannare gli scultori." VASARI-MILANESI, VI, p. 175.

¹⁷ Tolnay (see note 4), III, pp. 98–103, pp. 183–7.

¹⁸ "Praxitelis filius Cephisodotus et artis heres fuit. cuius laudatum est Pergami symplegma nobile digitis corpori verius quam marmoris impressis." – "Kephisodotos, the son of Praxiteles, was also the heir to his genius. Greatly admired is his celebrated group at Pergamon of figures interlaced, in which the fingers seem to press on flesh rather than on marble." Pliny XXXVI, 24; "Idem Polykles et Dionysius Timarchidis filii Iovem qui est in proxima aede fecerunt, Pana et Olympum luctantes eodem loco Heliodorus, quod est alterum in terris symplegma nobile ..." – "The same Polykles and Dionysios, the sons of Timarchides, made the Zeus in the adjoining temple, where are also the Pan and Olympos interlaced by Heliodoros, second in renown among such groups in all the world." Pliny XXXVI, 35; JEX-BLAKE 1977, pp. 194 ff., pp. 206 ff. The passage about Cephisodotos was cited in relation to the impressed fingers of Bernini's Pluto and Proserpine by R. Preimesberger, "Zu Berninis Borghese-Skulpturen", in: H. Beck and S. Schulze (eds.), *Antikenrezeption im Hochbarock*, Berlin 1989, p. 121. On the symplegma see M. Bieber, *The Sculpture of the Hellenistic Age*, New York 1961, p. 147. The wrestlers had an important reception in the 1570's through the work of Pirro Ligorio, for which see D. Coffin, "Pirro Ligorio and Decorations of the Late Sixteenth Century at Ferrara," *Art Bulletin*, 37 (1955), pp. 177 f.



Fig. 10 Michelangelo, clay model for the Hercules and Cacus group. Florence, Casa Buonarroti



Fig. 11 Satyr and Nymph. Rome, Museo Nuovo Capitolino

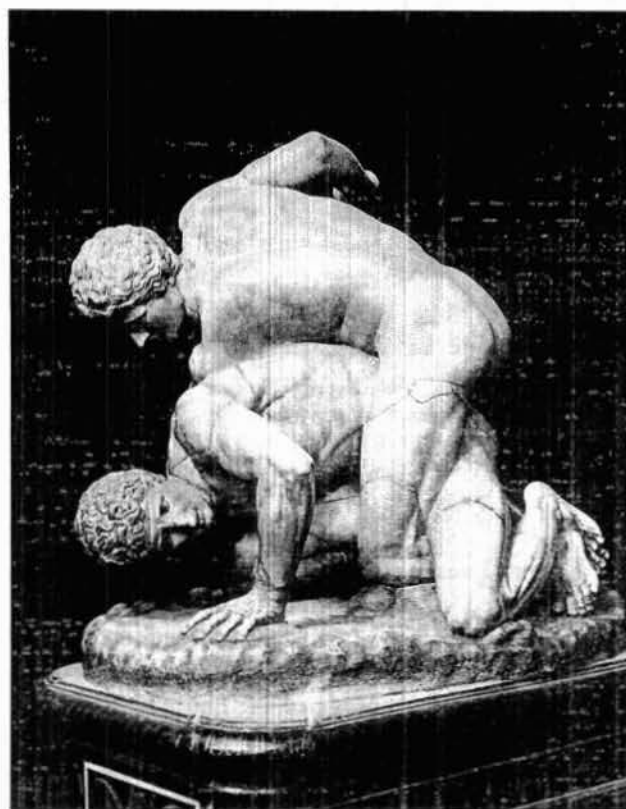


Fig. 12 The Wrestlers. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi

Fig. 13

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Fig. 13 Copy after Michelangelo, *Samson and two Philistines*, bronze. Florence, Museo Nazionale del Bargello

of the text. I suspect that the concept of the *symplegma nobile* played a critical role in the development of Michelangelo's early, two-figured projects for the monument, and that he subsequently combined this concept with the challenge of the Laocoon to produce, around 1530, his final solution representing Samson overcoming two Philistines (fig. 13). Here the complex

of three interlocking, struggling bodies alludes specifically to the very feature of the Laocoon that had earlier seemed, even to Michelangelo himself, impossible to achieve without artificial devices. Although the *symplegma* groups are not directly connected in Pliny's text, the reference to one of them occurs within a few sentences of the references to groups carved *ex uno lapide*, including the Laocoon. Michelangelo was never able to complete the work for the Piazza Signoria, but the problems he set for himself in the project became a very personal challenge for him – a challenge that he finally met in the Florentine Pietà, which is indeed the first monumental, monolithic multifigured group since antiquity.¹⁹

Michelangelo's studies for the Piazza Signoria commission might be described as poised between the horns of the sculptor's dilemma. The early idea for a Hercules and Antaeus suggested a double *symplegma* supported by one figure, while the Samson with two Philistines offered a modern solution to the challenge of a monolithic three-figured group represented by the Laocoon. In his entry into the great *ex uno lapide* competition Giovanni Bologna set himself the task of combining both these approaches. Giambologna's Rape of the Sabine, in many respects the culminating work in the Renaissance tradition of monumental monolithic *tour de force* sculpture, went through essentially the same evolution from a two-figure to a three-figure composition as had Michelangelo's (figs. 14, 15). The great difference is that Giambologna replaced Michelangelo's essentially closed and earthbound knots by vertically oriented, gravity-defying and open-ended flames – no doubt an extrapolation from the flame-like composition that Michelangelo himself was reported to have recommended.²⁰ The sources repeatedly emphasize that Giambologna's main ambition in life was to emulate and surpass the record of

¹⁹ It is interesting, and probably not coincidental, that the St. Peter's Pietà was also appreciated as a monolith at the time Michelangelo took up the Florentine, in the inscription on the engraving of the work by Beatrizet, which bears the date 1547: MICHELANGELOVS BONAROTVS FLORENT. DIVI PETRI IN VATICANO EX VNO LAPIDE MATRE/ AC FILIVM DIVINE FECIT/ ANTONIVS SALAMANCA QVOD POTVIT IMITATVS EXCVLPISIT 1547/ NB (*Il primato del disegno*, Milan-Florence 1980, p. 236). This point was noted by W. Wallace, "Michelangelo's Rome Pietà: Altarpiece or Grave Memorial," in: S. Bule, A. P. Darr, F. Superbi Gioffredi (eds.), *Verrocchio and Late Quattrocento Italian Sculpture*, Florence 1992, pp. 243–55, p. 254, n. 41.

²⁰ As noted in this connection by C. Avery, *Giambologna. The Complete Sculpture*, Oxford 1987, p. 109. The reference is to a passage in Lomazzo's treatise on painting, 1584, concerning which see D. Summers, "Maniera and Movement: The Figura Serpentinata," *Art Quarterly*, 35 (1972), pp. 269–301; D. Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, Princeton 1981, pp. 81–83.

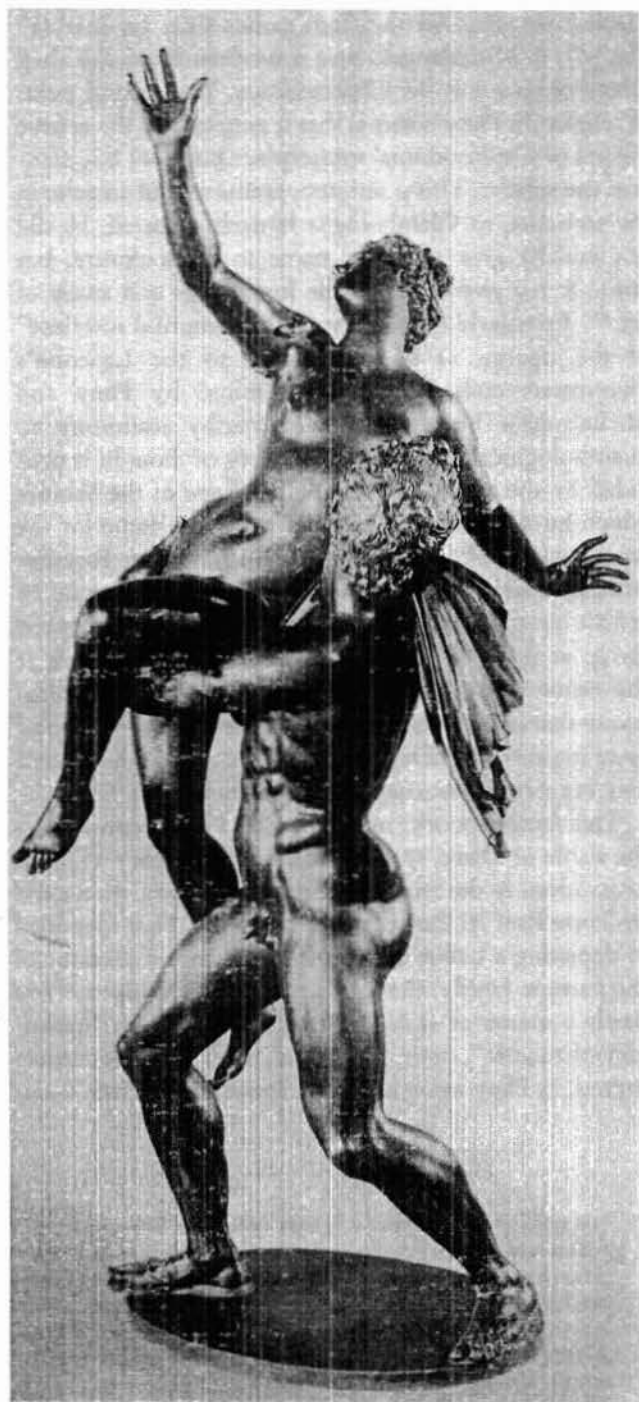


Fig. 14 Giambologna, *Rape of a Sabine*, bronze.
Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum

Michelangelo, and the Rape of the Sabine, unlike the Laocöon, was indeed carved from a single block, without precedent; it seemed to one observer, who echoed Michelangelo's description of the Laocöon, "miraculous."²¹ Contemporaries particularly admired the figures' "beautiful interlace" (*bellissimo intrecciamento*), which might well serve as a translation of *symplegma*

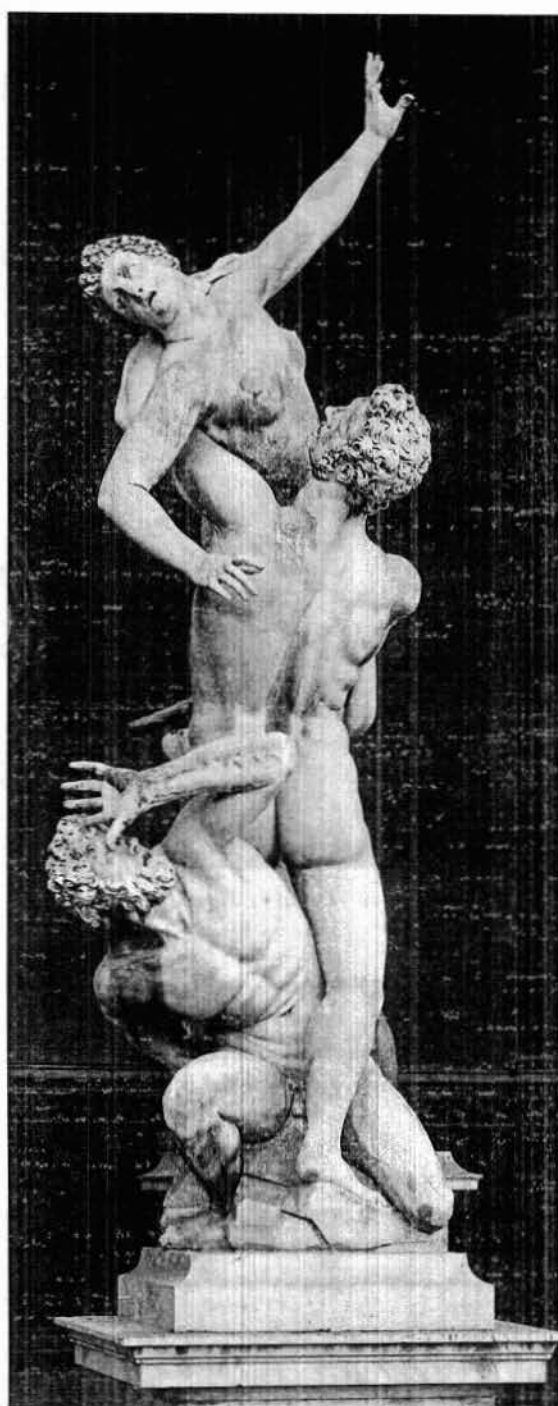


Fig. 15 Giambologna, *Rape of a Sabine*.
Florence, Loggia dei Lanzi

nobile, and recalls the *mirabiles nexus* as well as the *tanti e tanto mirabili gruppi* of serpents admired in the Laocöon

²¹ "Fu posto nel luogo dov'era la Giuditta [of Donatello] in Piazza il miracoloso gruppo di tre statue di marmo fatto ... da Gio Bologna." Diary entry of F. Settmani, August 18, 1582; E. Dhanens, *Jean Boulogne, Giovanni Bologna fiammingo*, Brussels 1956, p. 235, n. 1.



Fig. 16 Detail of Figure 15

by Pliny, Michelangelo and Cristofano Romano.²² On two specific points, however, Giambologna's work makes explicit reference to one of the other classical groups to which Pliny gives special praise. This was the

"noble symplegma" carved by Cephisodotus, the son and artistic heir of Praxiteles, in which "the fingers seemed to press on the flesh rather than on marble" (fig. 16). If Michelangelo was a modern Praxiteles then Giambologna was his Cephisodotus. The second point of interest in Pliny's text is that it emphasizes the artistic virtues of Cephisodotus' masterpiece but does not mention the subject. This point, too, seems to find an echo in the fact that, as Giambologna himself reported, he did not initially give a specific name to his sculpture, but chose it "to give scope to the knowledge and study of art."²³ Particularly admired was the "beautiful interlace" of the figures, as if in reference to the Laocöon's "wondrous coils of snakes" admired by Pliny and Michelangelo himself.²⁴ A noteworthy testimony to Giambologna's ambition and subtlety of thought is provided by the relief representing the Rape of the Sabines which he affixed to the pedestal when the name for the work was finally established (fig. 17). Taken together with the marble sculpture itself, it seems to illustrate an artistic progression embracing the original two-figured group at the left, the three-figured marble sculpture at the center, and at the right a multfigured, pyramidal group that clearly alludes to the Farnese Bull, the second great masterpiece of ancient sculpture to be rediscovered and intimately associated with Michelangelo.²⁵

This famous work, mentioned by Pliny, representing the Fable of Dirce, was found in early January 1546, in excavations in the Baths of Caracalla in Rome sponsored by Pope Paul III Farnese (figs. 18, 19).²⁶ First identified as depicting a Labor of Hercules, the heroic ancestor of the Farnese family, the significance of the sculpture was partly a matter of scale and technique – a huge "mountain of marble", as it was called, with multiple figures carved, as Pliny again reported, again falsely, from a sin-

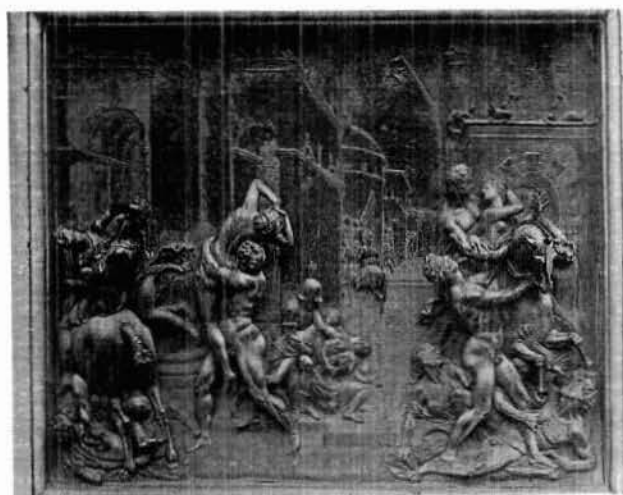


Fig. 17 Giambologna, Rape of the Sabines. Florence, Loggia dei Lanzi

²² "Le quali [Giambologna's figures called the Sabines] furono vedute con molto piacere e meraviglia di ciascuno pel bellissimo intrecciamento loro." *Settimani diary*, January 14, 1582, cited by Dhanens, *loc. cit.*

²³ "Le due predette Figure che possono inferire il rapto d'Elena et forse Proserpine o, d'una delle Sabine: eletto per dar campo alla sagesza et studio dell'arte ..."; letter to Ottavio Farnese, June 13, 1579, cited after J. Pope-Hennessy, *Italian High Renaissance and Baroque Sculpture*, London-New York 1970, p. 383. According to Borghini (1584), Giambologna undertook the work "solo per mostrar l'eccellenza dell'arte, e senza proporsi alcun' istoria" (solely to prove his excellence in his art, and without selecting any subject); *ibid.*, 384.

²⁴ See notes 10 and 11 above.

²⁵ Avery (see note 20), pp. 53 f., also notes the reference to the Farnese Bull in this relief.

²⁶ For the facts presented here see HASKELL / PENNY 1981, pp. 165–67, with references, and the important results of the recent restoration of the group in: *Il Toro Farnese. La "montagna di marmo" tra Roma e Napoli*, Naples 1991. The Farnese Bull measures cm 370h x 295l x 293w = 31.98m³.



Fig. 18 Farnese Bull. Naples, Museo Nazionale Archeologico

gle block (*ex eodem lapide*).²⁷ In this case we have no direct evidence that Michelangelo himself realized it was pieced together, but we do know that the overseer of papal fortifications, whom Michelangelo knew well, was perfectly aware of its true nature.²⁸ Thus, the heroic claim of antiquity to have created freestanding, multi-figured monolithic sculpture, received another serious blow. Michelangelo must also have noticed that the sculpture served in antiquity as a fountain, a fact that has been confirmed in the recent restoration when the interior hole for the water was found. This realization may

²⁷ "Zethus et Amphion ac Dirke et taurus vinculumque ex eodem lapide, a Rhodo advecta opera Apolloni et Taurisci." — "Zethos and Amphion, with Dirke, the bull and the cord, all carved out of one block," JEX-BLAKE 1977, pp. 204–6. "Quel marauiglioso monte di marmo," Federico Zuccaro 1584, cited after D. Heikamp (ed.), *Scritti d'arte di Federico Zuccaro*, Florence 1961, p. 259.

²⁸ "Circa il Toro Farnese ... dirò una cosa, che sicuramente le riescirà nuova, e molto strana, ed è che detto gruppo non è altrimenti d'un pezzo solo, come si crede, ma di più pezzi, in alcuni luoghi commessi a perfezione, tale che difficilissimamente si può riconoscere. Ciò io ho sicuramente letto, non sono due anni, in una lettera stampata di scrittore del secolo XVI, il quale avvisava come nuova tale scoperta da eccellenti

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have induced Michelangelo to restore the ancient sculpture to its ancient use, as the focal point of another great unfinished project which Vasari describes in connection with the artist's work on the Farnese palace (fig. 20): "At that time an ancient Hercules, of marble, seven braccia in each direction, was found in the Antonine baths, holding the bull by the horns, with another figure helping him, surrounded by numerous shepherds, nymphs and various animals, a work of extraordinary beauty, the figures being perfect, made from one block without pieces. It was thought it would do for a fountain, and Michelagnolo advised that it should be taken into the second court and restored for that purpose. This advice gave general satisfaction, and the Farnese have lately had it carefully restored with this idea. Michelagnolo then directed the construction of a bridge over the Tiber to another palace and garden of the Farnese, so that from the principal door of the Campo di Fiore one looked straight through the court, fountain, Strada Julia, the bridge and the other beautiful garden, right to the other door into the Strada di Trastevere, a rare thing worthy of the Pope, and of the genius, judgment and design of Michelagnolo."²⁹

scultori di quei tempi fatta ad un suo corrispondente, il quale, se non erro, si era sig. Gabrio Sorbellone; pur della persona, cui era diretta quella lettera, non m'accerto: bensì sono certissimo dell'asserzione che detto gruppo del Toro fosse commesso: onde falsa viene ad essere la commune credenza. Di ciò con diligente esame di uomo perito si può scoprire la verità, sempre che si voglia." Letter from Giacomo Carrara to Giovanni Bottari, June 19, 1768, Bottari/Ticozzi (see note 12), VI, pp. 238 f.; Gabrio Serbelloni (1508–80) was a cousin of Pius IV and overseer of the Papal fortifications; he is mentioned in Vasari's life of Michelangelo, Barocchi (see note 11), I, pp. 114 f.

²⁹ Vasari (see note 14), IV, p. 148. "E perché s'era trovato in quell'anno alle Terme Antoniniane un marmo di braccia sette per ogni verso, nel quale era stato dagli antichi intagliato Ercole che sopra un monte teneva il toro per le corna con un'altra figura in aiuto suo, et intorno a quel monte varie figure di pastori, ninfe et altri animali – opera certo di straordinaria bellezza per vedere sì perfette figure in un sasso sodo e senza pezzi, che fu giudicato servire per una fontana –, Michelangelo consigliò che si doversi condurre nel secondo cortile e quivi restaurarlo per fargli nel medesimo modo gettare acque; che tutto piacque. La quale opera è stato fino a oggi da que' signori Farnesi fatta restaurare con diligenza per tale effetto. Et allora Michelagnolo ordinò che si doversi a quella dirittura fare un ponte che attraversassi il fiume del Tevere, acciò si potessi andare da quel palazzo in Trastevere a un altro lor giardino e palazzo, perché, per la dirittura della porta principale che volta in Campo di Fiore, si vedessi a una occhiata il cortile, la fonte, strada Iulia et il ponte e la bellezza dell'altro giardino, fino all'altra porta che riusciva nella strada di Trastevere: cosa rara e degna di quel pontefice e della virtù, giudizio e disegno di Michelagnolo" (Barocchi [see note 11], I, p. 87). For a discussion of the project (doubts as to its feasibility do not affect the argument here) see *Le Palais Farnèse. École française de Rome*, Rome 1981, vol. I, pp. 119–21.

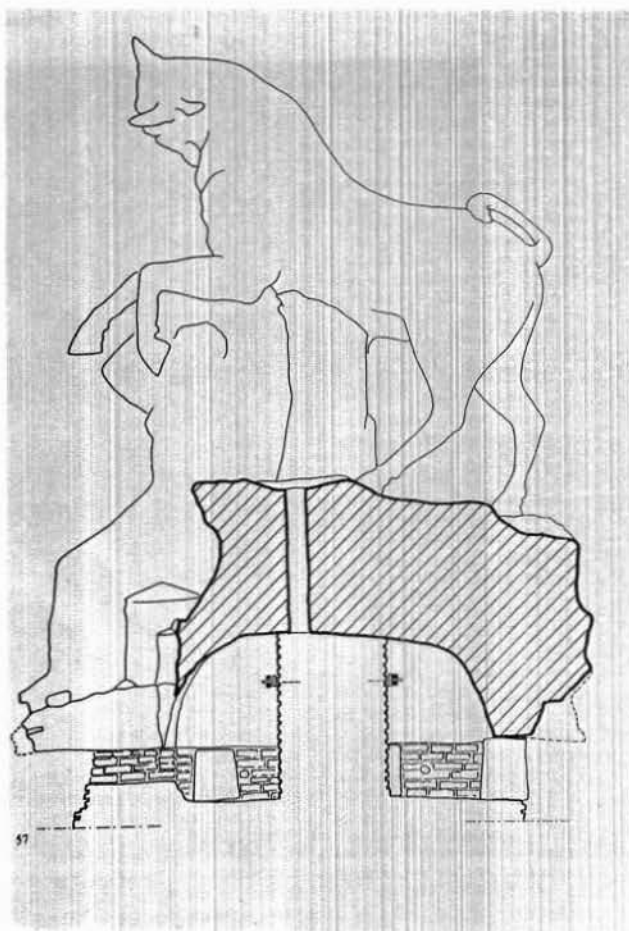


Fig. 19 Cross section of the Farnese Bull (after Il Toro 1991)

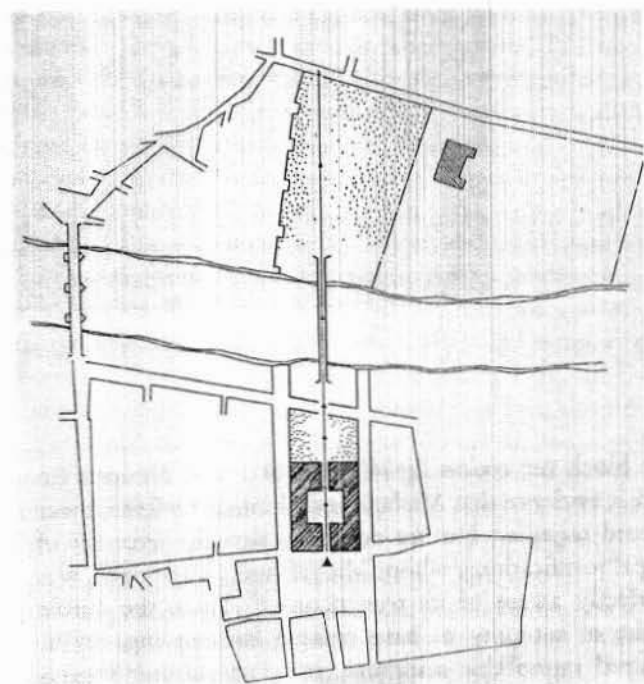


Fig. 20 Plan of Michelangelo's project for the garden side of Palazzo Farnese, Rome (after Le Palais Farnèse 1981)



Fig. 21 Giambologna, *Hercules overcoming a Centaur*. Florence, Loggia dei Lanzi

The significance of Michelangelo's project as a revolutionary exercise in axial planning and the spatial extension of a building from its innermost fabric far out into the urban environment, has often been noted. This is the second, spatial or contextual strain of development I defined at the outset. The nature of the project's influence has not been fully appreciated, however, and in order to do so, we must return to the theme of monumental, monolithic two-figured sculpture and pursue it into a domain with which it is not generally associated, namely the equestrian monument.³⁰ The equestrian monument was, to be sure, a major theme of monumental sculpture in the Renaissance, but always in the form of bronze. That is, until the year 1600 when Giambologna completed his second great work for the Loggia dei Lanzi in Florence. His *Hercules overcoming a Centaur* (fig. 21) has a specific subject, indeed it had a specific ideological mission from the outset, intended to glorify Ferdinando I and the Medici dynasty of Tuscany, which set the direction for the European monarchic style that would follow. The relevance of the work lay partly in its form and material and partly in the way the Herculean theme was interpreted – not simply as a victory but as a labor, an obstacle overcome on the road to glory. This



Fig. 22 Commemorative medal of Giambologna's *Hercules overcoming a Centaur*. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale

message was spelled out on a commemorative medal, inscribed *Sic itur ad astra*, "thus one reaches the stars" (fig. 22). With a little good will the sculpture might qualify as the first monumental, monolithic, free-standing equestrian monument since antiquity, and the inscription on the medal may be said to apply to the artist no less than to the patron. To be sure, it does require a certain imagination to see the *Hercules overcoming a Centaur* as an equestrian group, but this is precisely what I believe Bernini perceived in 1665 as he passed through Florence on his way to design the Louvre for Louis XIV. While in Paris, he conceived the famous equestrian portrait of the King, which was indeed, without qualification, the first monumental equestrian group carved from

³⁰ For what follows concerning Giambologna's sculpture, Bernini's Constantine and equestrian Louis XIV, and the Farnese Bull, see I. Lavin, *Past-Present. Essays on Historicism in Art from Donatello to Picasso*, Berkeley, etc. 1993, pp. 172–5. On Bernini's debt to Florentine sculpture of this period see Lavin (as in note 9), p. 102, and I. Lavin, "Fife Youthful Sculptures by Gian Lorenzo Bernini and a Revised Chronology of his Early Works", *Art Bulletin*, 50 (1968), p. 242, n. 126.

a single block (fig. 23). Indeed, the block itself was unprecedented: Bernini's biographers describe it as "larger than the Constantine", "the largest ever seen in Rome", "the largest ever struck by chisel". However, I doubt that Bernini would have achieved his triumph, conceptually or technically, without the suggestion of Giambologna's rocky base, which serves to support the animal's belly. What proves the relevance of Giambologna's work for Bernini's is a medal issued to commemorate in Rome to celebrate the Louis XIV monuments, which bears an analogous inscription carrying essentially the same meaning, *Hac iter ad superos*, "this way to the gods" (fig. 24). This was a preeminently Herculean sentiment, associated especially with the theme of Hercules at the Crossroads; the hero chooses the difficult path of righteousness over the easy road to pleasure, thereby expressing the supreme Stoic virtue, conquest of the self. Since Bernini's sculpture was specifically vaunted as surpassing even his own equestrian Constantine, the inscription on the medal may again apply to his own artistic achievement no less than to the political and military achievement of his hero.



Fig. 23 Bernini, equestrian portrait of Louis XIV. Versailles



Fig. 24 Commemorative medal of Bernini's equestrian portrait of Louis XIV. BAV

The conceptual circle I wish to draw comes to a close when one considers two other aspects of Bernini's project for an equestrian Louis XIV. One of these is the huge craggy peak on which he intended to place the group (fig. 25). The peak represented the Mountain of Virtue to whose summit only the most virtuous, following the arduous path chosen by Hercules, may accede. Completely unprecedented as an equestrian monument, the basic concept, including the mammoth scale and monolithic ideal, clearly evokes the Farnese Bull, the mountain of marble, which had been installed in the Palazzo Farnese and also been thought to refer to Hercules. Bernini's reference to the Farnese Bull was surely deliberate, and no doubt reflected Louis XIV's efforts on several occasions in the months preceding Bernini's visit to Paris to acquire the sculpture for himself.³¹ The second aspect of Bernini's project I think significant here concerns the location he imagined for his equestrian monument, for I am convinced it was based on Michelangelo's project for the Palazzo Farnese. Bernini intended to place his sculpture on the main axis of the palace of the

³¹ As noted by HASKELL/PENNY 1981, p. 165. In a discussion of important antiquities during Bernini's stay at the French court the Farnese Bull was said to be remarkable only for its size and the number of figures carved from a single block, P. Fréart de Chantelou, *Journal du voyage du Cavalier Bernin en France*, ed. L. Lalanne, Paris 1885, p. 26; idem, *Diary of the Cavaliere Bernini's Visit to France*, ed. A. Blunt, annotated by G. C. Bauer, transl. M. Corbet, Princeton, N. J., 1985, p. 26.



Fig. 25 Bernini, drawing for equestrian portrait of Louis XIV. Bassano, Museo Civico

Sun King in the area between the west, or rear facade, and the Palace of the Tuileries (fig. 26). There would thus have been created one continuous line of sight, following the path of the sun, from Place Saint-Germain before the main, east facade of the Louvre, through the entire building with its two courts, one closed the other open, and culminating with the vision of the mountainous sculpture at the west end of the axis. Michelangelo's plan to integrate the greatest sculpture from antiquity into the fabric of modern Rome on the banks of the Tiber had its most majestic and influential, but equally frustrated sequel in Paris, on the bank of the Seine.

The force of these traditions was such that the Laocöon came to be the very embodiment of classical art. In the matter of expression the development culminated in Lessing's essay of 1766, called *Laocöon*, the theme of which was a comparative analysis of the nature of the arts, visual and literary, in the tradition of the Renais-

sance paragone. But the status of the work as a sculpture was perhaps best illustrated by Hubert Robert. In 1773 during his stay in Rome at the French Academy Robert painted one of his most grandiose and evocative pictures, depicting the discovery of the Laocöon, when the work which Pliny described as "superior to all the pictures and bronzes in the world" was brought forth in all its glory (fig. 27).³² Robert shows this momentous event in the history of European culture taking place in a colonnaded gallery, the palace of Titus, which evokes the sacral and aulic character of such monuments of Roman ceremonial architecture as Raphael's *Disputa*, and Bernini's *Scala Regia*.³³ The vast structure suggests not only the physical grandeur but also the great distance of time past from which the ancient masterpiece is transported into the present. The brilliant light at the end of the tunnel seems to portend the birth of a new age in which the three arts defined in the Renaissance as the arts of design and in the eighteenth century as the Fine Arts – sculpture epitomized by the Laocöon, architecture epitomized by the great gallery, and painting epitomized by Robert's visionary incorporation of all three – would reign supreme.³⁴ The discovery of the Laocöon is a metaphor for Robert's own inventive meditation on art. Fate had it that Robert was given the opportunity to realize his vision: under the Revolution, he was in charge of transforming the Grande Galerie of the Louvre into a museum, his depictions of which strongly recall the *Discovery of the Laocöon*; under Napoleon, he installed the expropriated statue itself nearby in the *Salle du Laocöon*.³⁵

Not the least remarkable feature of the *Discovery* is the fact that the Laocöon is shown fully intact, although

³² See J. H. Fragonard e H. Robert a Roma, exhib. cat., Rome 1990, pp. 209 f., no. 146.

³³ The architecture is discussed, in a different sense, by A. Corboz, *Peinture militante et architecture militaire. A propos du thème du tunnel chez Hubert Robert*, Basel and Stuttgart 1978, p. 8.

³⁴ On the Renaissance paragone and the *arti del disegno* see I. Lavin, *Bernini and the Unity of the Visual Arts*, New York and London 1980, pp. 6–13; on the development of a comprehensive notion of the Fine Arts at this period in France, P. O. Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts," in his *Renaissance Thought II. Papers on Humanism and the Arts*, New York 1965, pp. 163–227. Robert's engagement with this theme is articulated expressis verbis in his famous view of the Grande Galerie as a museum displaying paintings and sculptures, with the vault opened through a series of light wells. The faces of the wells are decorated with pairs of winged victories carrying three wreaths and the inscription glorifying the three arts, *Trium par artium honos*. The pendant painting shows the Grande Galerie in ruins and despoiled of paintings. See M.-C. Sahut, *Le Louvre d'Hubert Robert*, Paris 1979, pp. 28 ff., no. 58, pp. 31 ff., no. 81.

³⁵ Sahut, *op. cit.*

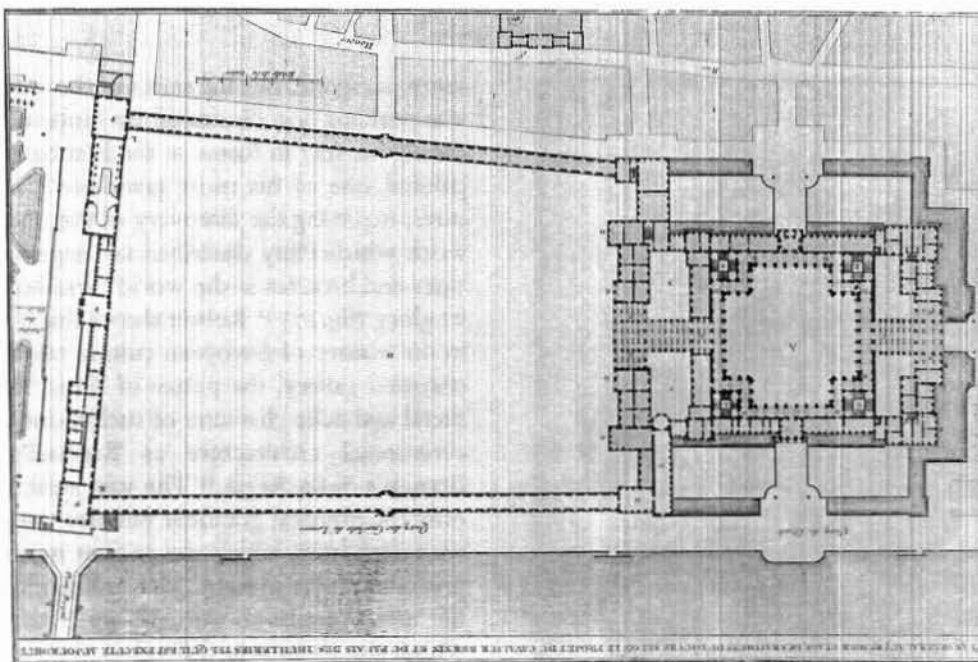


Fig. 26 Plan of Bernini's project for the Louvre (left) with Palais des Tuileries (right), engraving by Jean Marot. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale



Fig. 27 Hubert Robert, *Finding of the Laocoon*. Richmond, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

Robert must have known that it was made of several pieces and that the raised arms of Laocöon and his older son were restorations. I suspect that the integrity of the work served to suggest not only its formal perfection but also the technical virtuosity it incorporated by virtue of being carved *ex uno lapide*.

ADDENDUM

Tommaso della Porta's Deposition from the Cross

I want to call attention in this context to an important but little-known work that I had overlooked in my

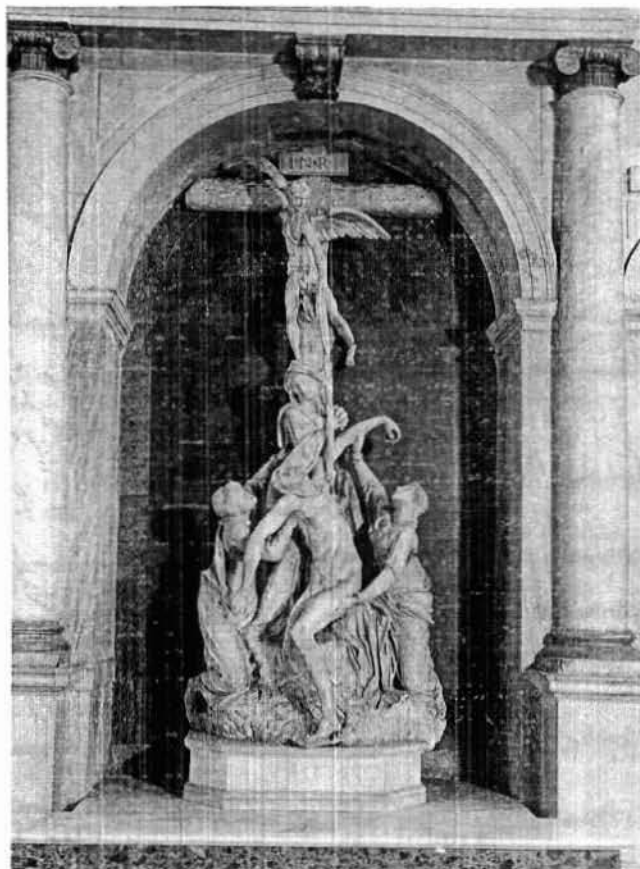


Fig. 28 Tommaso della Porta, *Deposition from the Cross*.
Rome, S. Ambrogio al Corso

surveys of Renaissance sculptors' tomb monuments and repercussions of the *ex uno lapide* topos. This is the extraordinary Deposition from the Cross by Tommaso della Porta that serves as the altarpiece of the chapel of S. Ambrogio adjoining S. Carlo al Corso in Rome (fig. 28).³⁶ Having begun the project sometime between 1586 and 1596, at his death in 1606 Tommaso bequeathed the Deposition, along with two accompanying figures representing the Old Law and the New, to S. Ambrogio. The sculptures were to be used to decorate the high altar of the church, where he was to be buried. (The present structure, where the work was installed only after 1923, is a late seventeenth-century replacement for the original building.) In his biography of Tommaso, Baglione notes that the work consists in "diverse figure tutte in un groppo di marmo, e sono di un pezzo." In fact, the carving is an astonishing technical and expressive *tour de force*: with its five, life-size figures forming a group it surpasses Michelangelo's feat in the Florentine Pietà;³⁷ the daring display of perforated, interlocking forms and delicate limbs and draperies suspended "in aria" rivals the Laocöon; the cross with the

figure suspended from it inevitably recalls Cellini's "Bel Cristo"; and the multi-figured, pyramidal composition emulates the Farnese Bull (Tommaso was a professional dealer in antiquities, and his namesake, Guglielmo della Porta, had participated in the restoration of the Bull³⁸). To be sure, Tommaso originally undertook the project not for his own tomb chapel, but for a great patron. Moreover, Tommaso stipulated that the work was to be displayed in a flat niche, rather than free-standing. (The marble, which has been badly damaged and repaired at various places, is fully finished at the front; at the back the cross and mound are flat and the figures are left rough.) But the sculptor's personal act of reverence and devotion was expressed by the inscription he prescribed bearing his name: "Ad honore e gloria di Nostro Signor Giesù Christo Crocifisso Thomasino della Porta scultore in memoria de messer Thomaso suo zio e de messer Giovanni Battista suo fratello fece questa opera."³⁹ And I have no doubt that this extravagantly idiosyncratic artist, whom Baglione, who knew him well, regarded as somewhat pathetic, obtuse and unbalanced – "tennessi il maggior' huomo del mondo e cominciò (come si suol dire) a far castelli in aria"; "credo, che patisse di cervello"; "di poco cervello"; "disgratiato" – sought deliberately to combine and supersede in a single masterpiece the professional exploits of all four of its great predecessors.

³⁶ S. Pressouyre, *Nicolas Cordier. Recherches sur la sculpture à Rome autour de 1600*, Rome 1984, p. 211, gives a fine appreciation of the work, which has also been the subject of an exemplary study by G. Panofsky, "Tommaso della Porta's 'Castles in the Air,'" *JWCI*, 56 (1993), pp. 119–67.

³⁷ As noted by Panofsky, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

³⁸ *Il Toro* (see note 26), p. 48.

³⁹ An extraordinary iconographical feature of the composition is the fifth figure, the angel lowering the body of Christ from the cross. I suspect that Tommaso sought to combine in this motif the traditional theme of the Angel-Pietà, in which an angel supports and displays the dead body of Christ, cf. Panofsky (see note 36), p. 139, and that of Joseph of Arimathea, in whose tomb Christ was buried, or Nicodemus, reputedly the sculptor of the famous Volto Santo crucifix at Lucca, who are often shown in the role here performed by the angel. (Tommaso's substitution of the third Mary for the male figure in Michelangelo's Pietà would encourage this bivalent understanding of the angel.) If so, the figure might allude to the intermediary role of the artist himself – a frequent allusion in sculptors' tombs, cf. LAVIN 1977–78.

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