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Gilt Bronze 'bust Of A Child Prince' After Germain Pilon



12 000 EUR

Period : 17th century

Condition : Bon état

Material : Bronze

Height : 33,5 cm

Description

Bust of a Child after Germain Pilon.Gilt bronze, alabaster.France.Late 17th century.h. 33.5 cm (13,2 in).A similar gilt bronze bust was exhibited in 1967 at the Château de Laarne during the exhibition "Bronzes de la Renaissance de Donatello à François Duquesnoy" (Renaissance Bronzes from Donatello to François Duquesnoy). This latter piece traditionally came from the Russian Imperial collections, and had, in all likelihood, been acquired by the art historian and collector Henry-René d'Allemagne during the numerous dispersals of private Russian collections after the October Revolution. Because it was a cast of a Bust of a Child in marble preserved at the Louvre and attributed since the end of the 19th century to Germain Pilon or his workshop, this gilt bronze version had at the time

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been dated to the late 16th century, Germain Pilon having died in 1590.Although the present bronze is certainly by the same hand as that of Henri-René d'Allemagne, it seems unlikely that this hand is that of Germain Pilon or a student from his workshop, as no gilt bronze bust from that time is known and attributed to either Germain Pilon or his workshop. It is true that the Wallace Collection in London possesses a bronze cast of the bust of Charles IX preserved at the Louvre. This bust, in marble and alabaster, dated 1568, appears in the post-mortem inventory of Catherine de' Medici, and no one other than Germain Pilon seems to have been capable of sculpting such a portrait. The Wallace Collection bronze, traditionally from the collections of the Duchess of Berry, seems to attest to the early existence of bronzes cast after the sculpted portraits by Germain Pilon -- royal portraits, or thought to be so, whose originals had been gathered by Cardinal de Richelieu only four decades after Germain Pilon's death, in the context of his "Galerie des illustres" at the Palais Cardinal, which became the Palais Royal in 1643.The very program of the Galerie des Illustres allows for addressing the delicate question of the subject's identity in this bust. Titled Bust of Henri IV as a child during the 1967 exhibition, it had initially been designated as a portrait of Henri III by Barbet de Jouy in 1873, for the reason that the subject presents some similarities with a toddler sketched in a late 16th-century red chalk drawing, preserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale and bearing a notation, probably later, designating this child as Henri III. The problem of the dating, attribution, and identification of the subject of this bust was summarized by the historian Louis Gonse in an aside of an eulogy for Germain Pilon and this bust:"He knew how to question the troubled soul of his models, just as he knew, on occasion, how to render with infinite skill the fleeting graces of childhood. If it is, as has been believed, a portrait of Henri III as a child, the little Louvre bust

would be from the master's youth. It seems to me to be of too accomplished an art not to belong, like the other busts, to his last period. Moreover, it is very difficult to identify the features of a model of that age. Doubts have even been raised about the attribution of this bust to Pilon. Some people wanted to attribute it to François Duquesnoy, but it is certainly from the 16th century and in the manner of Pilon, who here rivals the Florentines, those consecrated interpreters of putti."It is noteworthy that it did not occur to either Barbet de Jouy or the commissioners of the 1967 exhibition that the dates of Germain Pilon's activity, on the one hand, and the evident age of the child portrayed, on the other, are incompatible with the birth dates of these kings: no work by Germain Pilon is known before his participation in the work on the tomb of François I in 1558; as for Henri III and Henri IV, they were born in 1551 and 1553 respectively. The Bust of a Child at the Louvre, if this child is indeed the future Henri III, would then be one of the first known works by Germain Pilon, completed before he gained favor with Catherine de' Medici and became, so to speak, the sculptor of her Court. Furthermore, there already exists a bust of Henri III firmly attributed to Germain Pilon, by the same hand as that of Charles IX, also mentioned in the queen mother's post-mortem inventory, and further cited in Richelieu's collections at the Palais Cardinal. Henri III appears in it at maturity, and everything suggests that it dates from the same time as the aforementioned bust of Charles IX, namely the year 1568.If the child in Germain Pilon's bust is indeed one of Catherine de' Medici's sons, the least improbable hypothesis is that it is Hercule de France, Duke of Alençon, the last son of Henri II and Catherine de' Medici. This duke, who took the name François de France after the death of his brother King François II at age 16 in 1560, did not leave a significant mark on the history of France. Thus, it is probable that the importance of this bust was caused, in the 17th century as in the

19th and 20th, by a confusion or a presumption, through which this young prince was mistaken for Henri III or Henri IV, Kings of France. The Russian provenance of the bust exhibited in 1967, if proven, could also be explained by such a presumption: Henri III, King of France upon the death of his brother Charles IX in 1574, was also King of Poland in 1573 and Grand Duke of Lithuania.As for the dating of the present bronze and the one from the Russian Imperial collections, it is noteworthy that they share the same treatment of the iris, in the form of an incised spiral, which is typical of bronze portraits from the second half of the 17th century. A bust, also in gilt bronze, of Louis XIV by or after Coysevox, also preserved in the Wallace Collection in London, and undoubtedly related to a bronze bust of the same king presented by Coysevox at the Salon of 1699, is the closest work, in terms of technique and style, to these two bronzes. Since gilt bronze busts of this type are, on the one hand, remarkably rare in public collections, and the use of an incised spiral as an iris is, on the other hand, characteristic of sculpted portraits from the second half of the 17th century onwards, this parallel supports a later dating than that proposed at the 1967 exhibition, namely the late 17th century and not the late 16th.See Louis Gonse, La Sculpture française depuis le XIVe siècle, Paris, 1895; Émile Molinier, "Un buste d'enfant du XVIe siècle," in Monuments et mémoires de la Fondation Eugène Piot, vol. 6, no. 1, 1899; Jean Babelon, Germain Pilon, Paris, 1927; Charles Terrasse, Germain Pilon, Paris, 1930; Henry-René d'Allemagne, La maison d'un vieux collectionneur, vol. II, Paris, 1948; Bronzes de la Renaissance de Donatello à François Duquesnoy, Brussels, 1967; Pierre Chevallier, Henri III, roi shakespearien, Paris, 1985; Jean-René Gaborit, Geneviève Bresc-Bautier et al., Sculpture française II. Renaissance et Temps Modernes, Paris, 1998; Robert Wenley, French Bronzes in the Wallace Collection, London, 2002; Geneviève

Bresc-Bautier, Guilhem Scherf et al., Les Bronzes français de la Renaissance au Siècle des lumières, Paris, 2008.