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Alessandro Algardi

Christ Resurrected









Alessandro Algardi
(Bologna, 1598 - Rome, 1654)

Christ Resurrected

Terracotta, height 52 cm

PROVENANCE: Private collection, Italy;

Heim Gallery, London;

Arthur M. Sackler collection, New York

EXHIBITIONS: C. Avery, A. Laing, *Fingerprints of the Artist: European Terra-Cotta Sculpture from the Arthur M. Sackler collections*, exh. cat, Washington, New York, Cambridge (Mass.), 1980-1981, pp. 66-67, no. 17; J.D. Draper, *European Terracottas from the Arthur M. Sackler Collections*, exh. cat, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1981, no. 10; I. Wardropper, *European Terracotta Sculpture from the Arthur M. Sackler collections*, exh. cat, Art Institute of Chicago, 1987-1988, no. 5.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: C. Avery, A. Laing, ed. by, *Fingerprints of the Artist: European Terra-Cotta Sculpture from the Arthur M. Sackler collections*, 1980-1981, Cambridge, pp. 66-67, no. 17.; J. Montagu, *Alessandro Algardi*, 2 voll., 1985, Hew Haven and London, II, p. 343, no. 33, fig. 217.

This fine and moving terracotta was first recognized by Dr. Jennifer Montagu and was subsequently published for the first time by Dr. Charles Avery in the 1981 Sackler collection exhibition catalogue, making use of notes by Montagu for her (then) forthcoming publication on Algardi.

Dr. Montagu's attribution to Algardi was made on purely stylistic grounds, and, regarding the head, she commented on '...the flow of the hair, partly modelled freely in waving masses, partly incised with the modelling tool, and the sweet expression in a face constructed in

large and simple planes'. Dr. Montagu expressed some criticism to the handling of the torso, a point also taken up by Avery, which, in our opinion, has wrongly caused some concern about the autograph nature of the torso, a question which needs to be addressed. These problems seem to arise principally from the condition of the sculpture, lacking both arms: Christ's raised right arm is severed at the shoulder but a close inspection of this area suggests that at least some of the clay was cut before firing, implying that it was modelled separately; the left missing left arm is evidently the result of an accidental break.

The head and torso are divided just below the shoulders and this curving division is relatively even, suggesting that the join was not accidental. Probably Avery's proposal that the head and shoulders were the first part to be modelled, '... as a study of facial features and expression, and, as the sculptor's conception developed, the torso was afterwards modelled to fit on to it', is in fact correct. Recent tests have shown that the clay from which the torso is modelled is identical with that of the head, and, indeed, it is certain that these were modelled and fired together.¹

The perceived difference in quality between head and torso is no doubt caused by the difficulty of 'reading' the figure correctly in its fragmentary condition, which has, however, been greatly improved by the recent reintegration of the ungainly division between the shoulders and the body. Similarly, the apparently slightly awkward

I Alessandro Algardi, *Ludovisi Torchbearer*, after an antique torso. Rome, Palazzo Altemps

1. In the course of recent restoration of the figure, the gesso which had been placed inside the figure (presumably for strengthening) has been removed. The marks on the inner surfaces, as excess clay was removed prior to firing, run across the area of the division, leading one to suppose that the two sections were together when ready for firing. It is quite possible that the two sections did in fact come apart during the firing process. When placed back together they appear not to have fitted exactly since there are extensive traces of filing scratches.





positioning of the body has the same cause and would surely be visually coherent if Christ's right arm were still in place: it is the absence of this arm which causes the slight sense of imbalance. The figure represented is that of the Risen Christ, shown at the moment that He emerges from the tomb, his right arm raised in blessing. The suggestion that He might be part of a group, either a *Noli me tangere* or a depiction of the doubting of St. Thomas, seems superfluous since the figure makes perfect sense iconographically on its own. Indeed, the nakedness of Christ, correct for the moment shown, further confirms this.

Christ's body is that of a youth and Algardi's inspiration would appear to have been that of an antique marble figure; no precise figure can be suggested but Algardi's work on restoration of antique marbles, such as the Ludovisi Torchbearer, is well known and he would have had considerable knowledge of such figures (Figs. 1,2).²

The truncation of the body, just above the genitalia, is again not accidental; presumably this visually harsh cut would have been disguised by the way the sculpture was set on its base and the height at which it would have been viewed. The back, left partially unfinished and with an old repair to a firing (?) crack that runs right across the figure, was probably never intended to be seen; a hole at the centre of the back was either made for firing purposes or, more probably, for attachment.



2 Alessandro Algardi, *Ludovisi Torchbearer* (detail), after an antique torso. Rome, Palazzo Altemps

There is as yet no documentary evidence of a connection with Algardi although it is worth noting the suggestion made by Dr. Montagu that the sculpture could perhaps be related to a marble *Ecce Homo* recorded by the eighteenth century writer M. Oretti in a house in Florence: an "*Ecce Homo di marmo, al naturale dal mezzo in sù in casa Benicij*"³; Montagu points out that descriptions in eighteenth century inventories were often imprecise and it would have been perfectly possible for a Risen Christ to have been described as an *Ecce Homo*.

John Winter

2. Montagu, op. cit., vol. II, p. 401, no. 121.

3. Montagu, op. cit., 1985, vol. II, p. 322, no. L. 10, cites the Oretti manuscript, Bologna, Bibl. com., MSB 129, p. 23.



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