

# TRINITY FINE ART



## **GIOVANNI BATTISTA FOGGINI**

(1652-Florence-1725)

### *The Crucifixion*

Red wax model in low relief, on wood backing; mounted in an early eighteenth century Florentine carved giltwood and pastiglia frame, crested with scrolls and volutes.

Unframed: 11.1 x 25 cm Framed: 23.8 x 30.3 cm

### **Provenance**

Private Swiss Collection

### **Literature**

A. Peroni (ed), *Il Duomo di Pisa*, (no 3 of *Mirabilia Italiae*, a series edited by Salvatore Settis), Modena, 1995, Vol I pp. 452-453, Vol II pp. 366-371; this relief is illustrated as fig. 850.

This representation of The Crucifixion is most unusual on account of the long low format into which the sculptor was forced to compress the scene (normally shown in an upright rectangle) by the overall design of the altar, for which it was to form a part of a metallic predella zone. Traces of cracks running up diagonally to either side of Christ's cross may be traces of a change of design in this focal point on Foggini's part.

Christ on the cross is central, but its crossbeam is shown from a 45° angle facing leftward, as is that of the unrepentant thief to the right, while that of the repentant thief is canted in the opposite direction, so that his body is at 90° to that of Jesus, towards whom he looks. A disproportionately large St Mary Magdalene kneeling in the middle ground clings to the foot of the cross which — judging from the smaller size of Christ — should be in the background.

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Farther back and in scale with the crucified figures there stand under the central cross (left) St John the Evangelist and (right) the Virgin Mary.

From the right a Roman centurion (perhaps Longinus) leaps into the scene on a rearing horse, followed by an infantryman with the lance of the officer held over his right shoulder. Meanwhile, from the opposite side, a further pair of Roman cavalymen press forward into the scene, while in front of them, in the lower left corner, a standing, elderly man behind a woman seated on the ground, with a squirming child on her lap, are witnesses to the scene and presumably represent mankind in general.

The lively and confident modelling of this wax relief makes it instantly recognizable as a work by the hand of Giovanni Battista Foggini, court sculptor to the Medici Grand-Dukes and the most important sculptor of the Late Baroque in Tuscany. His distinctive style is evident in both the composition and in the handling of the figures and draperies; the groups of the three Maries and the three soldiers on horseback being particularly noteworthy.

Described by his contemporary, the biographer Francesco Saverio Baldinucci, as a precocious talent, Giovanni Battista Foggini began his apprenticeship at the age of ten, in his native Florence, in the workshop of the painter Iacopo Giorgi. By the age of fifteen, thanks to an introduction by the mathematician Vincenzo Viviani, Giovanni Battista was employed by Grand Duke Ferdinando II de' Medici, for whom he executed "*heads and bas-reliefs in marble*", with a salary of four scudi a month. In 1673 he was sent by the new young Grand Duke of Florence, Cosimo III, to study in the recently instituted Florentine Academy at Villa Madama in Rome. He remained there for three years, studying under Ercole Ferrata, a sculptor of the second Baroque generation and pupil of Alessandro Algardi, and Ciro Ferri, a painter who had been a pupil of Pietro da Cortona, the baroque painter "*par excellence*". His precocious ability at this period is demonstrated by a terracotta relief of the Slaying of the Niobids (Museo dell'Opificio delle Pietre Dure, Florence), a marble relief of the Adoration of the Shepherds, now in the Hermitage, Saint Petersburg and a bronze relief of the Crucifixion, until recently ascribed to the court sculptor of the day, Ferdinando Tacca (Museo degli Argenti, Florence). One of the young sculptor's chief tasks during this period, was to invent compositions for reliefs inspired by paintings, an exercise that was to leave traces in Foggini's later production and which is clearly demonstrated in the present work. Upon his return to Tuscany from Rome in 1676, Foggini immediately began to receive commissions for sculpture in the novel, late-Baroque style he had evolved. He was appointed grand-ducal sculptor in 1687, succeeding Ferdinando Tacca, and in 1694 became the official architect as well; from then until his death in 1725, he was chiefly employed on commissions for the Medici.

Thanks to a discovery by Prof. Cinzia Maria Sicca in the archives of the Opera del Duomo, this small wax relief can be precisely dated to the period immediately following Foggini's return from Rome, on his first real and important grand-ducal commission; because on the 30th of December 1678, he presented a bill "*for having made sixteen scenes for the section in which is shown the Passion of Christ and making the moulds and waxes to enable them to*

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*be made in silver*". One of these scenes is the present magnificent wax of the Crucifixion, made as a preparatory model for one of the sixteen silver reliefs located on the gradines of the altar of the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament in Pisa Cathedral (Figs. 1 & 2) and the only known extant wax model by Foggini for this project, which provides early evidence of the prowess with which he began his long and prolific career as a modeller and sculptor.



1. Sebastiano Tamburini from the wax design by Foggini, "The Crucifixion", Silver relief, Cappella Del SS. Sacramento, Pisa Cathedral

In 1595 a disastrous fire devastated the area of the north transept of the Cathedral of Pisa, and amongst the many losses was the wooden tabernacle (completed less than two years earlier by Andrea Guardi) from the Blessed Sacrament Chapel. However, it was not until nearly a century later that this loss was repaired, when in 1678 the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo III supplied the silver from his own pocket to make the altar and tabernacle, a piece of furniture of monumental proportions (more than three and a half metres high), in partially gilded bronze and silver. The contract between the Opera del Duomo represented by The Master of Works, Marco Antonio Venerosi and the goldsmith Sebastiano Tamburini for making the tabernacle and altar was drawn up in 1678, and in the same year Giovanni Battista Foggini provided the design. A first study exists (Fig. 3) on the reverse of a sketch, in the form of a polygonal temple supported by two angels which is based on the one produced for the high altar of the Florentine church of Santissima Annunziata. The entire work was finished by 1685 by Sebastiano Tamburini (as the Latin inscription on the structure records), and the sixteen reliefs are divided between the upper and lower sections of the altar. Foggini was finally paid for his work in 1686, receiving 2,566 lire for *"the making of several wax models, that is scenes (storiette), angels, putti, and thirty-one days in Pisa"*.

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The context and date of this commission have long been known to Foggini scholars, but the reliefs and other decorative details of the work were not identified until twenty-eight years ago, when they were illustrated for the first time in three monumental volumes dedicated to Pisa Cathedral; (A. Peroni [ed.], *Il Duomo di Pisa*, Modena, 1995 (Mirabilia Italiae, a series by Salvatore Settis, 3).



2. S. Tamburini from designs by G.B. Foggini - Tabernacle & Altar, Capella del SS Sacramento, Duomo di Pisa



3. G.B Foggini - design for the Ciborium & Altar, Capella del SS Sacramento, Pisa, Museo Nazionale di San Matteo