ROMAN BAROQUE BRONZES

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Rome of the seventeenth century was a key point in the development of European sculpture. A new generation of artists looked upon the works of earlier ages—from classical antiquity to the Renaissance—which formed part of the Roman landscape, and with this vision of the past before them created the dynamic sculptural style that our age now calls baroque. The catalyst for this development, the resurgent spirit of the Counter Reformation, was compounded by a succession of strong-willed popes who were making Rome once more the first city of the world. And the Jesuits, preferred counselors and militant supporters of these popes, helped shape the baroque style by encouraging its use as a means of deepening and spreading the faith.

But baroque sculpture was more than a summation of what had gone before; it was prophetic of what was still to come, furnishing European sculptors with a pattern for nearly two centuries of activity. Coysevox and, to a lesser extent, Houdon, leading French masters of the late seventeenth and the eighteenth century, both followed the baroque party line. They were profoundly, if unconsciously, Italianate. And it was much the same story throughout all of western Europe.

It has been difficult for American museums to give their public a first-hand knowledge of Roman baroque sculpture. There have never been many examples of it available, because, except for portrait busts, much of it is religious and is still in the churches for which it was made. Moreover, in the days when there were few restrictions on the export of art from Europe there was little interest in baroque sculpture; now that interest has quickened there is hardly a piece on the market.

It is not surprising, then, that only two or three undoubted major works by the presiding genius of the age, Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini, are to be found beyond the borders of Italy and that not a single one is in America. A marble bust of Cardinal Capizucchi, once tentatively attributed to Bernini, but now believed to have come from his workshop, is in the Metropolitan Museum. The Museum also owns a fine bronze bust of Pope Innocent X by Alessandro Algardi and a marble bust of a Roman matron by an unknown mid-seventeenth-century master. Handsome though they are, the three busts hardly give a true impression of the monumental sculpture so characteristic of baroque Rome.

If we in America are to understand this sculpture on a basis of actual examples, we must turn from the full-sized statuary to the terracotta sketches that were used by sculptors in developing their themes, and to the reduced versions in bronze. None of the small terracotta models, or bozzetti as they are sometimes called, are owned by the Museum—an unfortunate lack, since they are generally fine and spirited. In this country only the Fogg Art Museum, in Cambridge, has a good collection of baroque bozzetti, a large group of models by or after Bernini, once in the Piancastelli collection. In the bronze statuettes, however, the Museum’s representation, small though it is, is seemingly unmatched in this country. From these bronzes we can come to know the work of some of the great sculptors of the age, including Bernini, Algardi, Duquesnoy, and Caffà. All the characteristics of the baroque style appear in them. There are the well-advertised baroque naturalism, emotionalism, and theatricals; and there also are less obvious but equally persistent qualities—a faultless sense of balance and composition and a basically antique sense of form. The accompanying illustrations of four of the pieces acquired during the past decade—the Bernini has just been purchased—bring out all the divergent aspects of Roman sculpture of the baroque age.
Christ at the Column, by François Duquesnoy, a contemporary and friend of Poussin, who worked in Rome from about 1620 to 1643. Pulitzer Fund, 1940. H. 117/8 inches
Neptune, a reduced variant of a fountain figure made about 1622 by Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini. Rogers Fund, 1946. H. 20\(\frac{1}{2}\) inches. The marble original belongs to the Earl of Yarborough.