

Head of French statesman: Country house discovery of bronze ‘Bordoni’ bust emerges after 400 years



A rare early 17th century bronze bust of a French statesman has been discovered in a French country house and will be offered for auction at Drouot in Paris in November with an estimate of €500,000-800,000.

The bust has been in the same family, direct descendants of the sitter, for 400 years, although the owners were unaware of its value. It has been attributed to Francesco Bordoni, a Florentine sculptor who moved to Paris and became *premier sculpteur du Roi* to the French king.

The bronze depicts Paul Phélypeaux de Pontchartrain (1569-1621), a French minister, and was found by Géraldine d’Ouinque of De Baecque & Associés auction house which will be selling it on November 20.

She recalls: “The first time that I saw the bust was during the course of an inventory in a private country home. It seemed too beautiful to be true because it appeared to date from the 17th century but, today, all the bronzes from that period are only to be found in museums or private institutions.”

Subject’s identity

The first clue to the sitter’s identity was a brass plaque on the reverse reading *Paul Phelypeaux Seigneur de Pontchartrain secretaire d’estat, 1610*.

Subsequent research by the firm of experts Sculpture & Collection has filled in more detail about the commission and provided the attribution to Bordoni.

Appointed *secrétaire des commandements* to Marie de Medici in 1600, Phélypeaux went on to become *secrétaire d’état* to Henry IV shortly before the king was assassinated. He subsequently spent time during Marie de Medici’s Regency

attempting to maintain peace between the Catholics and Huguenots in a particularly troubled period of religious conflict.

In 1621, the year of his death, he also accompanied the new king, Louis XIII, to the siege of Montauban.

Sculpture collection

The bust, which stands 2ft 10in (88cm) high on a blue marble socle, was originally placed in the family chapel in Saint Germain de l'Auxerrois in Paris, as shown in a drawing by Robert de Cotte. However, Paul Phélypeaux's grandson, Louis II Phélypeaux, removed the bust to install it at the Château de Pontchartrain as part of a larger sculpture collection.

Alongside scientific analysis of the bronze, the attribution to Bordonni has been made on the basis of its quality (it is executed with a high degree of naturalism and detail) and its comparison to Bordonni's bronze bust of Louis XIII in the Louvre. Moreover, Bordonni was in Paris at this period and also frequented the church of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois.