

T O M A S S O



Florentine, 17th century

10. Flying Mercury

The present bronze is a finely cast statuette of the so-called 'Flying Mercury'. The ancient Roman messenger of the gods, and patron of travellers and commerce, balances almost weightlessly on the tips of his toes, his right foot raised and his left arched, as if about to lift entirely from the ground. The wings on his ankle and cap, iconographic attributes of the god established in antiquity, further suggest to the viewer the figure is about to take flight. The body, carefully modelled, stretches forward, while the figure's eyes glance up towards his right hand that points at the sky, an allusion to the higher power of the Olympian gods above.

The physiognomy of Mercury's face, with the wide open and clearly delineated eyes, oval shape, and delicately rendered curled locks of hair suggest a high Baroque date yet deriving inspiration from an earlier model.

Ferdinando Tacca is widely regarded as one of the greatest bronze sculptors working in Florence in the mid-seventeenth century. Ferdinando was the son of Pietro Tacca (1577-1640), the Grand-Ducal sculptor who had succeeded Giambologna upon his death in 1608. Though having begun his career in Madrid, working for the Spanish royal family, Ferdinando returned to Florence in 1640 where he succeeded his father Pietro as court sculptor to Ferdinando II de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany.

When Ferdinando himself became director of the Borgo Pinti workshops, he would have had full access to Giambologna's models. With his intimate knowledge of the great Flemish master's working methods, Ferdinando came to specialise in the execution of exquisite bronze statuettes in his tradition. The present work is a previously unknown variant of the Giambologna model of the subject, of which four main types, all larger, are recorded. While this cast appears most similar to the slender, adolescent type, it also includes the Zephyr head of the almost life-size version. Most prominent in the present model is the treatment of the hair in fuller, longer locks, curling over the sides of the petasos, and the left foot that stands upon the hair of a Zephyr bearing no resemblance to known types. Additionally, the present work bears similarity to other versions of the adolescent Mercury in the forward canting of the upper body, and the forward curling of the fingers on the right hand.

This bronze cast may be related to one described in the inventories of the French crown collections, described as, 'No. 271. Un Mercure en posture de s'envolver, don't le pied gauche est pos é sur un vent ou Z é phir, haut de treize pouces [35.1 cm.], tr è s belle copie de l'antique, estim é e de deux-cents livres '.

Literature:

C. Avery & A. Radcliffe, *Giambologna: Sculptor to the Medici*, exhibition catalogue, London, 1978, nos. 34 & 35, pp. 85-88

C. Avery, *Giambologna: The Complete Sculpture*, Oxford, 1987, pp.124-128

B. Strozzi & D. Zikos, *Giambologna, gli dei, gli eroi*, Milan, 2006, no.53- 57, p.259 -269