

GIAMBOLOGNA

CHARLES AVERY

PHAIDON



# GIAMBOLOGNA

THE COMPLETE SCULPTURE

CHARLES AVERY

PRINCIPAL PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
DAVID FINN



Phaidon Press Limited  
Regent's Wharf  
All Saints Street  
London N1 9PA

First published 1987  
Reprinted in paperback 1993, 1994, 2000

© 1993 Phaidon Press Limited

ISBN 0 7148 2953 6

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available  
from the British Library.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication  
may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system  
or transmitted, in any form or by any means,  
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording  
or otherwise, without the prior permission of  
Phaidon Press Limited.

Printed in Singapore

FRONTISPIECE  
*Head of a Philistine*  
Detail from *Samson Slaying a Philistine*  
(see Plate 10)

# CONTENTS

|  |   |     |
|--|---|-----|
|  | Preface and Acknowledgements                      | 7   |
|  | Introduction                                      | 9   |
| <i>I Giambologna's Career</i>                              | 1 Youth   | 15  |
|  | 2 Maturity  | 21  |
|  | 3 Old age   | 33  |
| <i>II A Style in the Making</i>                            | 4 The Northern background                         | 43  |
|  | 5 The influence of the antique                    | 53  |
|  | 6 Sketch-models and sculptural technique          | 63  |
| <i>III Court Sculptor to the Medici – Marble Sculpture</i> | 7 The early marble statuary                       | 73  |
|  | 8 Female figures in marble                        | 97  |
|  | 9 The later marble groups                         | 109 |
| <i>IV Sculpture in Bronze</i>                              | 10 Monumental statues                             | 121 |
|  | 11 Statuettes                                     | 133 |
|  | 12 Animal sculpture                               | 147 |
|  | 13 Horses and riders                              | 157 |
| <i>V Special Themes</i>                                    | 14 Portraiture                                    | 167 |
|  | 15 Relief sculpture                               | 177 |
|  | 16 Religious sculpture                            | 193 |
|  | 17 Bronze fountain figures                        | 205 |
|  | 18 Marble fountains                               | 213 |
| <i>VI Giambologna's Influence</i>                          | 19 Giambologna's followers: a European phenomenon | 225 |
|  | 20 Patrons, collectors and connoisseurs           | 235 |
|  | Notes to the text                                 | 243 |
|  | Appendices  | 250 |
|  | Summary Catalogue                                 | 253 |
|  | Bibliography                                      | 278 |
|  | Chronology  | 280 |
|  | List of locations                                 | 282 |
|  | Acknowledgements                                  | 284 |
|  | Index   | 285 |

GIAMBOLOGNA





# GIAMBOLOGNA

THE COMPLETE SCULPTURE

CHARLES AVERY

PRINCIPAL PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
DAVID FINN



Phaidon Press Limited  
Regent's Wharf  
All Saints Street  
London N1 9PA

First published 1987  
Reprinted in paperback 1993, 1994, 2000

© 1993 Phaidon Press Limited

ISBN 0 7148 2953 6

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available  
from the British Library.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication  
may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system  
or transmitted, in any form or by any means,  
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording  
or otherwise, without the prior permission of  
Phaidon Press Limited.

Printed in Singapore

FRONTISPIECE  
*Head of a Philistine*  
Detail from *Samson Slaying a Philistine*  
(see Plate 10)



# CONTENTS

|  |   |     |
|--|---|-----|
|  | Preface and Acknowledgements                      | 7   |
|  | Introduction                                      | 9   |
| <i>I Giambologna's Career</i>                              | 1 Youth   | 15  |
|  | 2 Maturity  | 21  |
|  | 3 Old age   | 33  |
| <i>II A Style in the Making</i>                            | 4 The Northern background                         | 43  |
|  | 5 The influence of the antique                    | 53  |
|  | 6 Sketch-models and sculptural technique          | 63  |
| <i>III Court Sculptor to the Medici – Marble Sculpture</i> | 7 The early marble statuary                       | 73  |
|  | 8 Female figures in marble                        | 97  |
|  | 9 The later marble groups                         | 109 |
| <i>IV Sculpture in Bronze</i>                              | 10 Monumental statues                             | 121 |
|  | 11 Statuettes                                     | 133 |
|  | 12 Animal sculpture                               | 147 |
|  | 13 Horses and riders                              | 157 |
| <i>V Special Themes</i>                                    | 14 Portraiture                                    | 167 |
|  | 15 Relief sculpture                               | 177 |
|  | 16 Religious sculpture                            | 193 |
|  | 17 Bronze fountain figures                        | 205 |
|  | 18 Marble fountains                               | 213 |
| <i>VI Giambologna's Influence</i>                          | 19 Giambologna's followers: a European phenomenon | 225 |
|  | 20 Patrons, collectors and connoisseurs           | 235 |
|  | Notes to the text                                 | 243 |
|  | Appendices  | 250 |
|  | Summary Catalogue                                 | 253 |
|  | Bibliography                                      | 278 |
|  | Chronology  | 280 |
|  | List of locations                                 | 282 |
|  | Acknowledgements                                  | 284 |
|  | Index   | 285 |

*To Mary*

# PREFACE

## AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have contributed indirectly to this book – principally in the formation of my ideas over the years. First among my colleagues in this respect is Anthony Radcliffe, with whom I organized the exhibition on Giambologna that was held in 1978–9 in Edinburgh, London and – through the good offices of Manfred Leithe-Jasper – in Vienna. Our exchanges of ideas and enthusiasm over two decades have provided the touchstone for the evolution of my view of the artist. Elisabeth Dhanens, James Holderbaum and Herbert Keutner have all kindly added to their learned writings on Giambologna an incalculable amount of information in discussion and correspondence over the years.

Friends from all over the world, Bertrand Jestaz, Lars Olof Larsson, Manfred Leithe-Jasper and Katharine Watson are only the most prominent of a long list of enthusiastic students of Giambologna from whose specialized knowledge I have long benefited, while several others contributed notably in the two conferences on the sculptor held in Edinburgh University and Vienna at the opening and closure of the exhibition of 1978–9. To them all I owe a great debt of thanks for the generous sharing of ideas and information.

Others have contributed directly: indeed, to David Finn I owe the very possibility of producing the sort of book I had always dreamed of on Giambologna, where the visual aspect would match the written word. At a chance meeting in 1981 David evinced great enthusiasm to provide a wealth of new photographs, especially concentrating on the monumental statues in Florence and the models there and in London, to supplement the existing corpus of photographs that had been assembled from museum sources for the exhibition. This was the catalyst that enabled me to conceive the present book, with its deliberate emphasis on *his* visual presentation of Giambologna's photogenic *œuvre*, alongside my verbal interpretation. The designers Barbara Mercer and Gwyn Lewis have done justice to these excellent photographs and harmonized them subtly with the other available visual material. Many colleagues in museums all over the world have helped

gather the other photographs, notably Lars Olof Larsson, Manfred Leithe-Jasper, Michael Mezzatesta and Anthony Radcliffe, and I am most grateful.

Simon Haviland and Bernard Dod at Phaidon Press have enthusiastically supported the project on the practical side. Diana Davies has been an ideal and light-handed editor, helping me to select the photographs and to face the constraints of word length and book production, quite apart from the more normal tasks of editing the text.

The task of typing – and sometimes retyping – this complex and lengthy manuscript was undertaken without demur in addition to their daily work at Christie's by my three successive secretaries, Lady Mary Meade and Camilla Carr, who bore most of the burden, and, latterly, Katherine Leavett-Shenley: to all three ladies I am truly grateful for their kindness, forbearance and accuracy.

Since 1976 my wife Mary has had to share much of our life with Giambologna and so it is to her that I dedicate with love the result of a decade's effort.

### POSTSCRIPT, 1993

My friend Robert Didier of Brussels kindly informed me, after this book was first in the press, of a short series of documentary references to the presence of Giambologna at Mons in 1549. The sculptor was working as an assistant to Dubro-eucq on temporary decorations for the *Joyeuse Entrée* of Charles V and his young son Philip [II] into Mons in August. There are several entries in the relevant accounts of payments '*A Jehan de Boulogne, syx jours, apointier a mais Jacques*' (*sic*). These were published over 20 years ago, but are not generally known: R. Wellens, '*La Joyeuse Entrée de Phillipe, prince d'Espagne, à Mons en 1549*', *Annales du Cercle archéologique du Canton de Soignies*, XXIV, 1965, pp. 33–44 (esp. p. 38, notes 22 and 25). This slightly modifies the chronological account of the sculptor's youth on p. 15 below.





# INTRODUCTION

The name of Giambologna is unfamiliar to the world at large and even lovers of Italian art and European sculpture are less aware of him than of, for example, Benvenuto Cellini. But he forms a vital link between Michelangelo and Bernini in the development of sculpture. Just as their styles determined the direction of sculpture throughout Europe in their own day and long after, so Giambologna, representing the avant-garde of the world of sculpture, imposed his distinctive and seductive style on the half century between the death of Michelangelo (1564) and the emergence of Bernini.

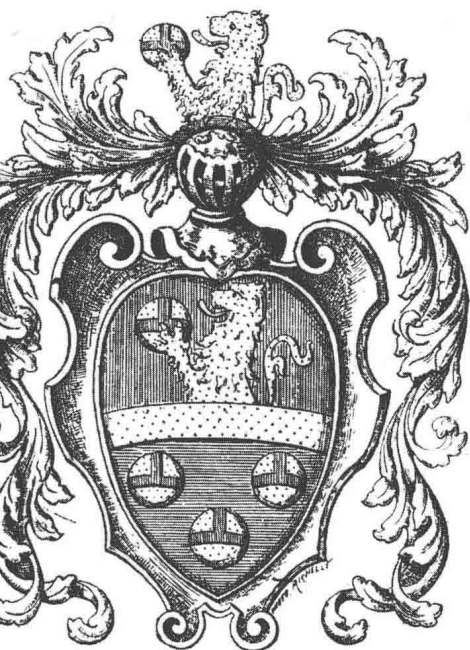
Of Franco-Flemish origin and training, the sculptor, whose real name was Jean Boulogne, became known in Italy as Giovanni Bologna, or Giambologna for short. After visiting Rome to complete his studies about 1550, he made his career in Florence and was employed by the Medici dukes to provide sculpture, both monumental and miniature, for court occasions, diplomatic gifts and political propaganda. By grafting an instinctive appreciation of the formal aspect of Michelangelo's sculpture on to a thorough reappraisal of Graeco-Roman statuary, Giambologna evolved a personal style, which soon became popular all over Europe owing to the export of his bronze statuettes. For compositional subtlety, sensuous tactile values and technical virtuosity his sculpture is unrivalled.

Unlike the intense and neurotic genius Michelangelo, Giambologna was not deeply involved with the spiritual content of his work, nor even (to the dismay of his more literal-minded contemporaries) with the narrative aspect of his subjects. He concentrated instead (and this was completely novel) on perfecting certain distinct types of composition, for instance the single figure, and the group with two or three figures, in a conceptual—almost 'abstract'—way. The ingenuity of his solution to a complex problem of design and the technical accomplishment of carving it in marble or casting and chasing it in bronze were paramount in Giambologna's aesthetic. Fortunately, this attitude coincided perfectly with the expectations of his patrons, the Medici dukes and other distinguished heads of state, including successive Roman Emperors and Popes.

Untouched by lofty philosophical concepts beyond his immediate vocation, Giambologna worked fast and methodically, soon organizing a first-rate studio, so that he was able to produce sculpture in quantity and to meet delivery dates, which endeared him to impatient, princely patrons—unlike Michelangelo whose incapacity to do so resulted in so many unfinished projects. Extremely quick on the uptake himself, Giambologna was evidently a good teacher who could pass on his enthusiasm and expertise to assistants (again unlike the solitary Michelangelo). These assistants, Northerners as well as native Italians, learned by helping him at every stage of work: after the master had produced preliminary sketch-models of his compositions in wax or clay (of which there is an unequalled collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum),

I Hendrik Goltzius, *Portrait of Giambologna*, 1591. Black and red chalk, 37 × 30cm. Haarlem, Teylers Museum





2 Giambologna's coat of arms  
(awarded 1588 by the Emperor  
Rudolph II)

he delegated to assistants the painstaking work of making enlargements of them to the requisite final size and blocking out the marble, or else of making piece-moulds from which statuettes might be cast in bronze. In short, Giambologna established a highly efficient sculptural production line. The bronzes were sometimes reductions of his monumental works, but more frequently they were fresh designs specially adapted for production in bronze (for example, the *Mercury* and the *Mars*). These statuettes, buffed to a high polish and lacquered or gilded, were popular with patrons for interior decoration, often being installed in the newly fashionable art cabinets (*Kunstammer*), and—being easily portable—made ideal souvenirs or diplomatic gifts. It was through this channel that Giambologna's capacity for brilliant design and execution became known all over Europe in an unprecedented way.

His assistants found a ready and profitable market north of the Alps for the skills that they had acquired and the style that they had learned by heart. Well before the end of the sixteenth century, Giambologna's style was thus diffused across Europe, from Prague to Madrid, from Dresden to Paris, and from Naples in the south eventually as far north as London, Copenhagen and Stockholm. For his contemporaries abroad it epitomized Italian elegance and sophistication. Never has the bronze statuette played a more influential role in the history of European art.

Giambologna was a business-like, prolific and successful artist. He lived for his art and was more concerned to equal the achievements and reputation of Michelangelo than with financial gain. He set great store by signs of official recognition such as the award in 1588 of a gentleman's coat of arms from the Emperor Rudolph II and his enrolment as a Knight of the Order of Christ by the Pope in 1599. The contrast with his predecessor Michelangelo could hardly be greater: the latter's career as a sculptor was, frankly, little short of a disaster as far as his principal patrons, the Medici and the Della Rovere, were concerned, for both had often to be satisfied with quite incomplete projects. It is clear that Giambologna was no intellectual and was not involved with the emotional or psychological self-analysis or the religious and philosophical speculation which motivated—and obsessed—Michelangelo. Giambologna's work does not manifest any of these characteristics which have always fascinated admirers of Michelangelo. By contrast, it is in the field of technique taken in its broadest sense that Giambologna excelled. Perhaps because he came from outside the claustrophobic art world of Florence he felt freer than native Italian sculptors to diversify into various fields of sculpture, particularly crossing and re-crossing the boundary between modelled (additive) and carved (subtractive) sculpture. In view of the fact that the majority of both his bronzes and his marble statues were largely produced by skilled assistants who specialized in one or other aspect, it is perhaps as a great *modeller* that we should remember Giambologna himself. His prolific and versatile imagination, his compositional brilliance and his technical facility are the characteristics which make him *par excellence* the sculptor of the age which may be called 'post-Mannerism' and which later comprised also the Counter-Reformation in terms of religious sculpture.

### *Nomenclature*

The real name of the sculptor is Jean Boulogne, 'Giambologna' being the colloquial, elided form of the literal Italian translation 'Giovanni Bologna'. The colloquial form was used as early as 1566 by D. Mellini who called him '*Giambologna Fiammingo, eccellentissimo nella scultura & nel gettar de bronzo maraviglioso & in ogni suo affare presto & di grande spirito*' (Giambologna the Fleming, outstanding in sculpture and marvellous at casting bronze, a man who is quick and enthusiastic in all he does). His own spelling, especially in signatures on bronzes, is erratic and phonetically based. Neither the French nor the Italianized surname has anything to do with the names of the cities of

Boulogne in northern France, or Bologna in Italy, though Giambologna was born not far from the former and worked for some years in the latter. There should be no preposition between the first and second names, such as 'de', 'di', 'da', or in English 'of', though it is frequently inserted in the literature owing to the topographical confusion explained above.

### Biographies

There are two contemporary accounts of Giambologna's career. The earlier is included in the second (up-dated) edition of Vasari's *Lives*, published in 1568 (see Appendix I). This enumerates Giambologna's major works to date: the *Fountain of Neptune* and its ornaments in Bologna; a beautiful marble *Venus* (not further specified); *Samson and a Philistine*; a bronze statue of *Bacchus* (now at the corner of Borgo San Jacopo and the Ponte Vecchio in Florence); a *Mercury*; and a 'Victory with a prisoner', i.e. *Florence triumphant over Pisa*. All these works date from between 1560 and 1565 and are indeed the masterpieces of Giambologna's early maturity with which he established his reputation and gained the status of a court sculptor to the Medici. Vasari does not refer to Giambologna's background or earlier activity in Italy, where he had been from about 1550, but mentions the fruit of this decade of study and practice, a multitude of works in clay, terracotta, wax and other mixtures of materials. He also specifies as owning works and models by the sculptor two collectors, Giambologna's personal patron Bernardo Vecchietti and the granducal master mason Bernardo di Mona Mattea; this constitutes our earliest evidence of the collecting of his sculptural models.

5 The second biography is included in a book called *Il Riposo* after a villa of that name belonging to Bernardo Vecchietti and published by Raffaello Borghini in 1584 (see Appendix II). This book takes the time-honoured classical (and Renaissance) form of a discussion *viva voce* between several real, historical persons, including Borghini himself, Vecchietti, and, most important, a sculptor called Ridolfo Sirigatti, who evidently had a professional knowledge of Giambologna's methods and technique of modelling and carving. A number of artists' biographies are appended and that of Giambologna serves to up-date his career from the time when Vasari wrote to include the two important central decades. It also provides details of Giambologna's early visit to Rome and lists many extra works, including bronzes. The following complete the picture of Giambologna's activity up to 1583 or so: *The Fountain of Ocean* (now in the Boboli Gardens); the colossal *Apennine* in the Villa of Pratolino; the sculpture for the Grimaldi Chapel in Genoa, including the six bronze reliefs of the *Passion of Christ*; the Salvati Chapel in San Marco, Florence; and the *Rape of a Sabine*.

The third (and only complete) biography is a posthumous one included by Filippo Baldinucci in his *Notizie dei Professori del Disegno*, the relevant volume of which was published in 1688. It is evidently based on reliable sources, including direct verbal tradition within the Florentine art world and the official archives of the Medici. More expansive than the earlier, contemporaneous accounts, it includes much more in the way of lively—although possibly apocryphal—anecdotes (for instance, the story of Giambologna's youthful encounter in Rome with the aged Michelangelo). It also incorporates much intelligent stylistic comment. Among the masterpieces from the last phase of Giambologna's career, Baldinucci records in detail the equestrian statue of *Cosimo I* in the Piazza della Signoria, and the marble group of *Hercules slaying a centaur*, now in the Loggia dei Lanzi. He also lists a number of titles of bronze statuettes that are authentic productions of Giambologna himself, as distinct from the aftercasts and variants produced by his followers.

There exists a good number of letters to and from (or about) Giambologna, as well as between his patrons and colleagues. These are quoted in the original Italian in



3 Federico Zuccaro, *Portrait of Giambologna, holding a model for Samson slaying a Philistine*, 1575. Black and red chalk, 26 × 19cm. Edinburgh, National Galleries of Scotland



## INTRODUCTION

Dhanens' monograph of 1956. However, Giambologna himself was barely literate and never mastered the Italian language properly, his letters being written phonetically in a Franco-Italian argot which must have corresponded with the way he and his compatriots in the Flemish colony spoke. He even joked about this in a letter of 3 March 1597, which he admitted was '*scritta a la escoultiorescho mal pratica nel scrivere*' (written in the style of a sculptor who lacks practice in the art of writing).

### Literature

After two centuries of neglect the first monograph on Giambologna was stimulated by the civic pride of two natives of Douai, appearing in folio format and in French—Abel Desjardins, *La Vie et l'oeuvre de Jean Bologne*, . . . Paris, 1883. Based on years of archival research in Florence by M. Foucques de Vagnonville, this was a serious monograph in the modern sense, giving an account of Giambologna's career, a catalogue of his work and a selection of documents. It was illustrated generously (by the standards of its day) with heliogravure plates and line engravings, and stands alongside Eugène Plon's pioneering study of Cellini as a monument to French art-historical scholarship of a century ago. A derivative work appeared in Italian twenty years later: P. Patrizi, *Il Giambologna*, Milan, 1905. Another twenty years passed before Giambologna was subjected again to serious scrutiny, by Werner Gramberg, in his doctoral dissertation (1928), published in Berlin in 1936: in it he gave a proper, scholarly account of the sculptor's 'Wanderjahre', i.e. his career as a 'journeyman', a period which ended in 1567 (by his reckoning). This gave a modern perspective to the early career of Giambologna, which is still problematic owing to a lack of documentation before about 1560. After the interruption caused by the war, Gramberg unfortunately did not build upon this good beginning, but turned more towards Guglielmo della Porta, the sculptor's predecessor and contemporary in Rome. Thereafter the major event in the study of the sculptor was the publication of Elisabeth Dhanens' doctoral thesis in Brussels in 1956, in the Flemish tongue. This excellent monograph subsumed all earlier published sources and contained a catalogue raisonné that is still valid after thirty years. Dhanens also provided an invaluable working tool for her successors by publishing *in extenso* all the available documents in chronological order. The present appreciation of Giambologna and the catalogue of the exhibition of 1978 (see below), could not have been written without the existence of Dr Dhanens' volume.

A doctoral dissertation of 1959 by Professor James Holderbaum was published by Garland Press in 1983, too late in the course of preparation of the present book to have been fully taken into account. It gives a perceptive appreciation of the style of Giambologna, which had been summarized in the same author's issue of *Maestri della Scultura* dedicated to the sculptor (Fabbri, Milan, 1966). A comprehensive exhibition of Giambologna's portable sculpture organized by Anthony Radcliffe and the present writer was mounted by the Arts Council of Great Britain, the Edinburgh Festival and the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, in autumn and winter 1978–9, with a catalogue of 249 entries in English and a slightly enlarged one in German, for the Austrian showing. A number of specialized articles were also published in *The Burlington Magazine*, *The Connoisseur* and *Apollo* before and after the exhibition. Through force of circumstance, it was the bronze statuettes, both large and small, that were the focus of attention at the exhibition. Where possible, several examples were borrowed in order to permit comparisons of style and technique and thus to refine ideas about the roles of Giambologna's followers. The catalogue was fully illustrated and constitutes a work of reference for the statuettes. Accordingly, in the present volume, the new photography that has been generously undertaken by David Finn



4 Gijsbrecht van Veen, *Portrait of Giambologna*, 1589. Engraving, 29 × 20.5 cm. Collection of the author



# DEL RIPOSO DI RAFFAELLO BORGHINI

*all' Illustrissimo ed Eccellentissimo Signore  
Padron suo singularissimo*

concentrates on the monumental works by Giambologna in Florence, Bologna and Rome, apart from a campaign in London covering the collection of models in the Victoria and Albert Museum and that in the British Museum.

5 G. Rossi, *Villa Il Riposo*, frontispiece to an 18th-century edition of R. Borghini, *Il Riposo*, 1584

A scholarly monograph on Giambologna, with a catalogue raisonné that may be expected to supersede that by Dhanens, and a comprehensive survey of the archival documentation and published sources, has long been in preparation by Professor Herbert Keutner in Florence, and is eagerly awaited.

The present book does not set out to supersede the work of Dr Dhanens or to compete with the research of Professor Keutner. It aims to give an account of Giambologna to the English-speaking world, relying on the most recent published work of many other authorities, in order to increase the enjoyment and appreciation internationally of the work of one of the most brilliant and prolific sculptors of the late Renaissance. The sheer volume of sculpture by Giambologna makes such an undertaking daunting; and it dictates an agonizing degree of selectivity, particularly when choosing from the many possible illustrations, with the alluring complementary views that exist for every work. An attempt has been made always to give one or more views of a sculpture in its entirety, though occasionally in alternative media, while permitting the inclusion of as many revealing details as possible, within the physical constraints of a single, readable book. To accommodate these aims and inherent conflicts, an analytical rather than a chronological approach has been taken, after the consecutive account of the sculptor's career that is provided in the first three chapters. A degree of overlapping and some minor repetitions are inevitable in this scheme, but its merits are that it serves to focus attention on the most singular aspects and achievements of Giambologna's heterogeneous *oeuvre*. Through pressure of time for research, personal inclinations and qualifications, and practical considerations of word length, two omissions weigh on the author's conscience: Giambologna's architecture; and the influence on him of contemporary painters.

The *Summary Catalogue* is designed to give a profile of what may currently be considered Giambologna's *oeuvre*, without having the definitive status which only a catalogue raisonné could achieve. Division of his work from that of his followers has been for practical purposes dealt with in an inclusive manner, crediting the master on the basis of his invention of the compositions, rather than on his execution of the finished sculpture.