

COMMENTARY ON THE SALE OF
ALAIN EDREI'S COLLECTION

by Michael Riddick

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The sale of the plaquette and pax collection of Alain Edrei by Morton & Eden, London, on 20 April 2023 evinced the continually strong market interest in Renaissance plaquettes. The sale marks one of the great events of its kind—dedicated exclusively to plaquettes and paxes—for the first part of the 21st century, in league with the great sale of Bernard Kelly's collection by Matthew Barton Ltd. of Olympia Auctions on 25 November 2021. The Edrei sale echoes other landmark sales of the late 20th century like that of a private German-Austrian collection in 1998, possibly the property of Alfred Walcher Ritter von Moltheim's descendants¹ and the Sylvia Adam's collection in 1999.² Some sales of the 21st century have included significant numbers of plaquettes like Spink & Son's sale of an extensive private collection in 2008,³ the Salber collection by Galerie Moenius in 2018⁴ and a private Italian collection by Pandolfini auction house in

2022,⁵ however, none have formed an entire sale such as the Edrei collection.

Edrei's collection formed a total of 203 lots and showcased a healthy and diverse collection of allegorical, mythological and religious subjects, inclusive of works by Italian greats like Galeazzo Mondella (called Moderno), Andrea Briosco (called Riccio), Ulocrino, the Master IO.F.F, Valerio Belli and Giovanni Bernardi as well as examples 'after the antique' and later 17th century productions. Edrei's collection also ventured into the realm of North European plaquettes, a refreshing departure for this field more typically centered on collecting Italian works.

Tom Eden notes Edrei's first plaquette purchases may have been the larger plaques of the *Martyrdom of St. Stephen* and the

Conversion of St. Paul (lot 199).⁶ Such purchases perhaps encouraged Edrei's long-term focus on acquiring Northern plaquettes, notwithstanding the Ashmolean's publication on plaquettes whose inventory of Northern plaquettes received fresh scholarship by Jeremy Warren in 2014.⁷

Provenance appears to have played a role in Edrei's collection, whether intentional or not. His collection featured plaquettes from former great collections like those of the 19th century nobleman, Thomas Charles Gaston (Baron Boissel de Monville),⁸ and pieces from early 20th century collections like those of Henry Oppenheimer,⁹ Baron Léon de Somzée,¹⁰ Dr. Augustin Nicolas Gilbert,¹¹ Seymour de Ricci,¹² and possibly Edouard Aynard.¹³ A quantity of plaquettes in Edrei's collection also came from more recent important collections like those of Sylvia Adams,¹⁴ Cyril Humphris,¹⁵ Dr. Charles Avery,¹⁶ Dr. Wilhelm Salber,¹⁷ Sir Timothy Clifford,¹⁸ Dr. Henry Hermann¹⁹ and the Stack collection.²⁰

As expected, quality plaquettes by the Italian masters sold well above their high estimates including a very fine contemporary cast of

Moderno's *Hercules and the Centaur* (lot 26) and an extraordinary cast of his *Mars and Victory* with a beautiful aged patina (lot 35, cover image). An unusually good example of *Hercules and the Lernaean Hydra*, attributed to the Master of the Labors of Hercules (lot 43), surprised with an achieved price of 8,500 GBP, more than double its high estimate.

Returning to the market was the best-known cast of *Apollo Conquering the Serpent* (lot 46), superficially attributed to Pseudo Fra Antonio da Brescia and suggested by the present author as the work of Francesco Francia,²¹ which had previously achieved a hammer price of 7,500 GBP in 2015²² and herewith achieved the magnificent sum of 16,000 GBP.

A reasonably good cast of Riccio's *Allegory of Spirit and Matter* (lot 54) achieved more than three times its high estimate, closing at 7,500 GBP while a rare *Entombment* (lot 52) attributed to his authorship,²³ achieved the highest price in the sale, landing at 22,000 GBP (Fig. 01, above). There are apparently two casts of this *Entombment* that were discussed in previous scholarship: one formerly in the Berlin State Museums and



Fig. 01: Lot 52 (Alain Edrei collection): bronze plaquette of the *Entombment* attributed to Andrea Briosco (called Riccio) (above); bronze plaquette of the *Entombment* in a later frame, attributed to Riccio (private collection)



Fig. 02: Lot 9 (Alain Edrei collection): gilt bronze applique of the *Virgin and Child* attributed to Francesco Marti (above); gilt bronze applique of the *Virgin and Child* attributed to Francesco Marti (Scaglia collection; below)

the other with the Bode Museum, also in Berlin (there whereabouts of the example cited by Leo Planiscig in 1927 requires further investigation). In addition to the Edrei example there is yet another uncited very fine example in a private collection, set in a later bronze frame and published here for the first time (Fig. 01, below).

Another top-seller was Ulocrino's *Death of Meleager* (lot 57) which achieved five times its high estimate while plaquettes by Valerio Belli stayed within reasonable range of their estimates with an especially beautiful and fine trapezoidal cast of *Christ brought before Pilate* achieving its high estimate (lot 87). The sale of Italian greats was rounded out by Giovanni Bernardi's *Apollo and Marsyas* (lot 98), hammering four times above its high estimate, being a very fine cast with a pleasing patina.

An applique of the *Virgin and Child* attributed to Francesco Marti (lot 9) had an unusually high valuation but sold for its low estimate of 3,000 GBP. The valuation seemed high for a plaquette known by numerous examples, although its attractive provenance to the early 20th century plaquette scholar Seymour de Ricci was appealing. The separate application



Fig. 03: Lot 8 (Alain Edrei collection): bronze plaque of the *Virgin and Child with a Garland*, school of Donatello

of an individually cast nimbus to its reverse is interesting and relates it to the example in the collection of Mario Scaglia.²⁴ Both could arguably originate from the same workshop, if not the Scaglia example being once removed from an example like that of Edrei's (fig. 02). To the present author's knowledge, the finest known cast of this applique is at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET)²⁵ and another extremely fine example was formerly in the art market.²⁶

A modestly inflated price was perhaps realized for the silver plaque of a *Battle Scene* by the Master of Coriolanus (lot 11), judged an early cast. The present author theorizes that the abnormally numerous examples of this relief in silver, such as this one, along with several other silver cast plaquettes are possibly the product of a yet-to-be-identified post-Renaissance workshop, to be discussed in a future article.²⁷

The Edrei collection held other surprises like several exceptional examples of some plaquettes. A less appreciated example was lot 63, being a Milanese depiction of the *Flagellation of Christ*, of which numerous examples are known in private and public collections, although Edrei's example, formerly in the Hermann collection, and before that, with the Humphris collection, is an exceptionally resolute example. Likewise, the Donatello school plaque of the *Virgin and Child with a Garland* (lot 8) was an especially beautiful example, commanding more than twice its high estimate (Fig. 03). Another star lot was the fantastic cast of a *Satyr* relief taken from the *Martelli Mirror*. This especially fine cast is perhaps the closest

one can get to owning the original mirror on display at the Victoria and Albert Museum.²⁸

In light of this sale, the present author desires to note lot 107, considered Venetian of the 16th century, has alternatively been proposed as a possible French, School of Fontainebleau invention of the early 17th century, inspired by Italian models.²⁹

Also not previously noted in literature is the observation that lot 77, a North Italian plaquette depicting an *Allegory of Music* (Fig. 04, left), known in various private and public collections, is possibly cast after a carved stone intended for setting into cabinets. Its manner favorably compares with an unidentified 16th or 17th century carver responsible for a relief of *Apollo and Calliope* in lapis lazuli that has appeared in the art market on several

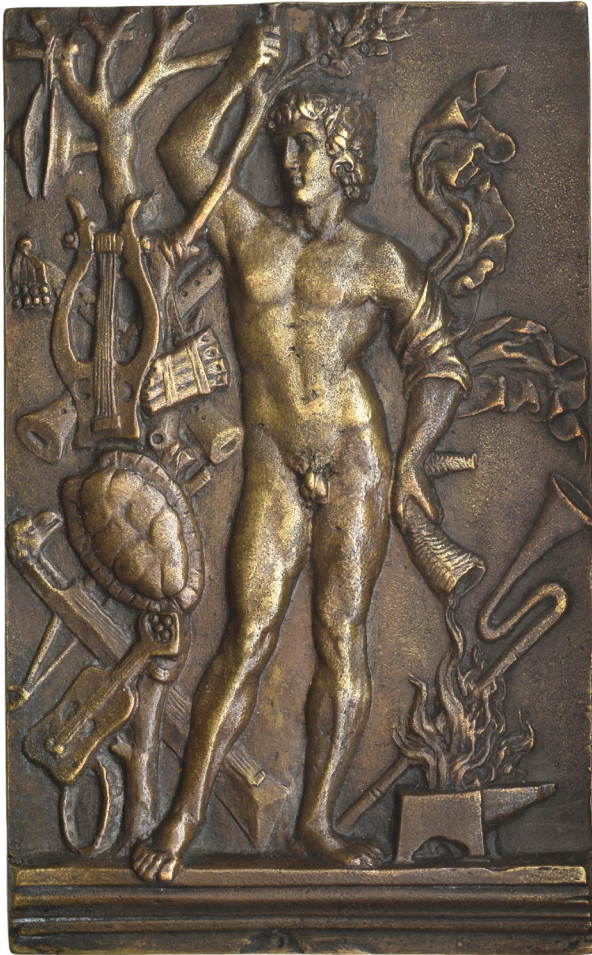


Fig. 04: Lot 77 (Alain Edrei collection): bronze plaquette depicting an *Allegory of Music* (left); a lapis lazuli relief carving of *Apollo and Calliope* (private collection)

occasions during the last few years (Fig. 04, right).³⁰ The relief is possibly Milanese or Florentine in origin and could point to new ideas concerning the well published *Allegory of Music* plaquette.

An unusual lull occurred in the sale during the offering of Edrei's collection of paxes. It can only be surmised that the buying audience took greater interest in pieces that lay flat in display cases versus independent

decorative works-of-art like paxes. Numerous of the paxes were either left unsold or selling for modest sums compared to what could reasonably be their true value under other circumstances. Two paxes, formerly in the present author's collection have additional data not noted in the sale catalog, such as lot 143 (a pax attributed to Bastiano Torrigiani) which has received further validation of that sculptor's authorship via its recent publication in a survey of Torrigiani and bronze founders



Fig. 05: Lot 160 (Alain Edrei collection): bronze plaquette of *Ecce Homo* after Christoph Lencker (left); a silver (electroplated?) cast of *Ecce Homo* after Christoph Lencker (previously in the present author's collection)



Fig. 06: Detail of a silver plaque of *Ecce Homo* by Christoph Lencker (Philippe d'Arschot)

in Rome³¹ and lot 133's former provenance with the Royal Museums of Fine Arts in Brussels, Belgium (deaccessioned on 26 October 1983).

The early 17th century pax depicting the *Vision of St. Ildephonsus* (lot 150), included in the sale, most likely originates in Spain and probably reproduces a finer silver original. Its character recalls the style of the Ballestros family workshop in Andalusia and its clean style particularly recalls the manner of Juan Bautista de Herrera from the first quarter of the 17th century, a follower of Hernando Ballestros the Elder's workshop.³²

The sale results of non-Italian plaquettes were generally mediocre, suggesting a need for perhaps more interest and appreciation for the talents and history behind the development

and use of small metal relief work in other parts of Renaissance Europe. There were, however, some positive results, namely with the second-most expensive plaquette in the sale: an exceptional quality relief of *Ecce Homo* by Christoph Lencker of Augsburg (lot 160, fig. 05, left), which hammered at 18,000 GBP and was featured on the cover of the sale catalog.

Not noted is that this cast is a talented free example after the original relief and truncates the full scene, lacking the upper portion of the original relief by Lencker. Given its integrally cast margin, this lot suggests it was modified for setting perhaps into a private devotional altar. The relief is not well studied in literature although an extremely fine cast, formerly in the present author's collection (fig. 05, right), reproduces what must have been a fine silver original from Lencker's workshop.³³ Featured in the relief is the Augsburg hallmark of a pinecone, ca. 1610-13, and the hallmark of Christoph Lencker (CL). Another contemporary silver cast, also bearing these marks (fig. 06), was formerly with the dealer Philippe d'Arschot in Brussels³⁴ and another truncated cast, in alike scale as the

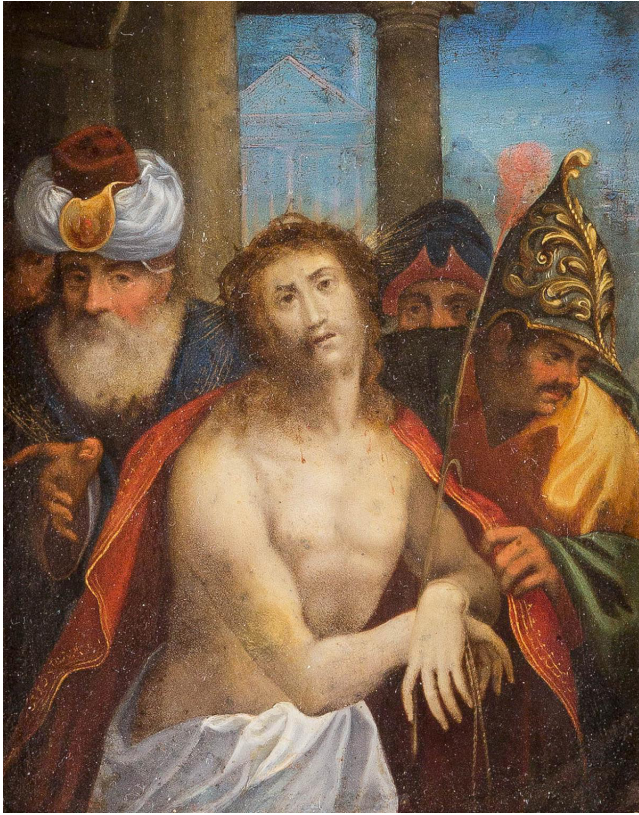


Fig. 07: *Ecce Homo* by Domenico Cresti or workshop, oil on copper (private collection)

Edrei example, although with a different background, is in the Museo Lazaro Galdiano Museum in Spain.³⁵

This *Ecce Homo* composition is believed to have its origin in the commission by the Cardinal Massimo Massimi for an *Ecce Homo* painting in which Domenico Cresti, Cigoli and Caravaggio competed.³⁶ The relief is presumably based on Cresti's variation, to which one of several surviving copies is attributed to that artist and his workshop (fig. 07).³⁷



Fig. 08: Lot 154 (Alain Edrei collection): bronze plaquette of *Adam and Eve*

Superb casts of other Northern plaquettes did reasonably well like a Nuremberg relief of *Vulcan Forging the Arrows of Cupid* (lot 155), an image of *Faith* by the Master of the Judgment of Solomon (lot 170), and a beautiful circular relief possibly depicting *Adam and Eve* for the Mecklenburg family of Hahn whose piercings indicate it was probably once used as a hat badge (lot 154, fig. 08).

Not noted in traditional plaquette literature is the arched relief composition attributed to Peter Flötner or his ambit (lot 152, fig. 09, left),



Fig. 09: Lot 152 (Alain Edrei collection): bronze plaquette of the *Drunken Bacchus* (left); gilt brass wine flask depicting the *Drunken Bacchus* (formerly present author's collection; right)

depicting various scenes of the humors, whose original designs were apparently intended for use on miniature flasks (fig. 09, right).³⁸

Also not noted in plaquette literature is the survival of the original wood models from which the cast series of saints, like that of the *Apostle St. Matthew* (lot 197), were derived. Ingrid Weber first made mention of the original reliefs in her survey of known casts³⁹ and they remain today available on the art

market via Blumka Gallery in New York City (fig. 10).

Edrei's collection was also distinguished by a quantity of rare and unpublished plaquettes, suggesting an interest in the uniqueness of certain reliefs and the boldness to acquire pieces worthy of investigation. In terms of rarity, of note was a round example of the Master IO.F.F.'s relief depicting the *Death of Marcus Curtius* (lot 17), formerly in the

present author's collection, and a rare example of IO.F.F's *Allegory of Constancy* (lot 20) of which the present author counts only a handful of known examples. This latter plaque is particularly unique in that it is one of very few Italian plaquettes that only depicts animals.

Also rare was lot 60, an enigmatic plaque known by a fine example in Berlin, inscribed by a certain Tomasso Calisto and dated 12 January 1482. It sold below its low estimate and perhaps should have garnered a higher price on account of its rarity and unique background. Especially rare, and commanding a reasonable sum, was the plaque of *Christ*



Fig.10: Lot 197 (Alain Edrei collection): bronze plaque of the Apostle St. Matthew (left); a wood relief model of the Apostle St. Matthew (Blumka Gallery, NYC; right)

brought before Pilate, attributed to Giovanni Bernardi (lot 101, fig. 11), and known by only one other lead cast in Berlin.

Several unpublished pieces included: lot 3, an *all'antica* piece thought cast after a damaged intaglio; lot 112, which Eden notes was likely inspired by gold states of Alexander the Great; lots 109 and 110 which were appliques intended for larger devotional works like crosses, house altars or cabinets; and most notably, lot 68, a silvered bronze late 16th century Italian *Entombment* of superb quality and deserving of further research. We could presume it may have been intended for the base of an altar cross perhaps once boasting a crucifix in silver or silvered bronze.

With thanks to Tom Eden for his valuable feedback.



Fig. 11: Lot 101 (Alain Edrei collection): bronze plaquette of the *Christ brought before Pilate* attributed to Giovanni Bernardi

Endnotes

- 1 Dorotheum auction, 30 March 1998. The notion that this sale may have been the property of descendants of Walcher von Moltheim is complex, to be discussed in a future article by the present author. See Michael Riddick (in edit): *Later Cast Plaquettes from a French or Viennese Foundry*. Renbronze.com
- 2 Bonhams auction, 23 May 1996.
- 3 Spink & Son auction, 24 January 2008. This sale had a significant quantity of plaquettes but also incorporated a quantity of Renaissance medals.
- 4 Galerie Moenius sale, 23 March 2018.
- 5 Pandolfini sale, 21 June 2022.
- 6 These two plaques feature 'no. 1' painted in red on their reverse, referencing Edrei's index system which correlates to the red painted numbers he applied to the backs of the plaquettes in his collection.
- 7 Jeremy Warren (2014): *Medieval and Renaissance Sculpture in the Ashmolean Museum, vol. 3, Plaquettes*, London.
- 8 The sale of Baron Boissel de Monville's collection, 24-25 January 1861. See Edrei's sale: lots 92 and 97.
- 9 Christie's, 27-29 July 1936. See Edrei's sale: lot 32.
- 10 J. Fievez, Brussels, 27-29 May 1907. See Edrei's sale: lot 159.
- 11 *Collection de M. le Professeur A. Gilbert: Catalogue des objets d'art et de haute curiosité principalement Du Moyen Age et de la Renaissance, orfèvrerie religieuse, émaux champlevés et peints de limoges, ivoires - sculptures - vitraux, baisers de paix et plaquettes en bronze, Bijoux, Argenterie, Objets varies, Manuscrit, Livres; Tableaux; Meubles et Sieges, Broderies et Tapisseries, composant la collection de M. le Professeur A. Gilbert, médecin de l'Hôtel-Dieu, 1927*. See Edrei's sale: lot 20 (the provenance to Gilbert is not noted in the catalog but observed here by the present author).
- 12 Beaussant Lefèvre sale, Paris, 24 March 2010. See Edrei's sale: lot 9.
- 13 Galerie Georges Petit sale, 9 Dec 1913. See Edrei's sale: lot 167.
- 14 Note 2. See Edrei's sale: lots 7, 32, part lot 42, 56, 74, and part lot 128.
- 15 Sotheby's auction, New York, 11 January 1995. See Edrei's sale: part lot 23, lots 34, 63, 102, 132, 143, part lot 165, and lot 198.
- 16 Morton & Eden sale, London, 11 June 2008. See Edrei's sale: lots 1, 10 and 42.
- 17 Galerie Moenius sale, 23 March 2018. See Edrei's sale: lot 2.
- 18 Morton & Eden sale, 13 June 2016. See Edrei's sale: part lot 45, lots 67, 95 and 96.
- 19 Morton & Eden sale, 20 May 2010. See Edrei's sale: lots 8, 14, 32, 57 and 63.
- 20 Morton & Eden sale, 9 December 2009. See Edrei's sale: lots 22, 61 and 62.
- 21 M. Riddick (2017): *Three Plaquettes by Francesco Francia or his Circle: Proposing an identity for Pseudo-Fra Antonio da Brescia*. Renbronze.com
- 22 Morton & Eden sale, 14 December 2015, lot 164.
- 23 Émile Molinier (1886): *Les plaquettes*, Paris, n. 223; Wilhelm Bode (1904): *Catalogo del Königsliche Museen di Berlino, vol. II, Die Italianischen Bronzen*, cat. n. 688 (inv. 1041), p. 57, tav. XLVII, Berlin; Leo Planiscig (1927): *Andrea Riccio*, pp. 286-87, fig. 330, KHM Vienna.
- 24 Francesco Rossi (2011): *La Collezione Mario Scaglia – Placchette, Vols. I-III*. Lubrina Editore, Bergamo, no. II.18 variant A.
- 25 Metropolitan Museum of Art, Inv. 66.198.
- 26 Oger-Camper-Blanchet auction, 17 October 2011, lot 125.
- 27 M. Riddick (in edit): *op. cit.* (note 1). It has been suggested that these could be late 19th century silverplated electrotypes with a copper core. Email communication, Amy Struble and Douglas Lewis (2021). We may consider also the electrotypes produced by N. Ritter von Klucaric of Strassburg, now in the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen in Dresden.
- 28 Victoria & Albert, Inv. 8717:1, 2-1863.
- 29 M. Riddick (2020): *Old World Wonders: Metal and Precious Objects catalog*. OldWorldWonders.com
- 30 This artwork has been unsold in several auctions during the last few years. For sake of reference, one sale was Marc-Arthur Kohn, Paris, 25 February 2020, lot 8.
- 31 Emmanuel Lamouche (2022): *Les Fondateurs de bronze dans la Rome des papes (1585-1630)*. Ecole Française de Rome. Fig. 30, p. 86.
- 32 For a survey of paxes by Hernando de Ballesteros el Viejo and his ambit see Manuel Varas Rivero (2007): *El lenguaje arquitectónico en los portapaces bajoandaluces del Manierismo: la influencia de los tratados in Estudios de platería* (ed. Jesús Rivas Carmona). Universidad de Murcia., pp. 561-77.
- 33 M. Riddick (2020): *op. cit.* (note 1). Acquired at Im Kinsky auction, 25 April 2017, lot 166 and before that offered at Dorotheum auction, 30 Mar 1998, lot 1253.
- 34 Darschot.com. Previously sold at Hampel auction, 30 June 2006, lot 845.
- 35 Museo Lazaro Galdiano, Inv. 2289.
- 36 John Gash (2003): *Caravaggio*. Chaucer Press.
- 37 Hargesheimer Kunstauktionen, Düsseldorf, 14 September 2019, lot 2028.
- 38 M. Riddick (2020): *op. cit.* (note 27).
- 39 Ingrid Weber (1975): *Deutsche, Niederländische und Französische Renaissanceplaketten, 1500-1650*. Bruckmann München, Germany, nos. 996.1-996.14, plates 284, 285, pp. 398-99.