

Francesco Laboureur

Italian sculptor

(1767-1831)

The son of Massimiliano, a sculptor originally from Brussels, and of Paola Salomoni, Laboureur was born in Rome on 11 November. 1767.

He was baptized in the parish of S. Lorenzo in Lucina with the names of Francesco, Filippo and Simone; the fact that Laboureur was better known as Francesco Massimiliano, or "Cavalier Massimiliano" after the conferral of the knighthood of the papal order of the Golden Spur, has generated confusion regarding the news concerning the biography and the works referable to him, to his father and son Alessandro Massimiliano.

Laboureur devoted himself early to sculpture, learning the rudiments in the family; he attended the courses of the Accademia di S. Luca, obtaining the second place at the Clementino Prize of 1783. His fortune in the Roman environment was linked to the figure of the French F. Cacault, minister plenipotentiary in Rome as well as great patron, who already in a letter of 1801 signaled to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ch.-M. de Talleyrand, the excellent workmanship of a *marble bust of Napoleon* who commissioned the sculptor, part of a larger group of works he collected, now at the Musée des beaux-arts in Nantes.

There is news about the working of a second bust of Bonaparte in another letter from Cacault, announcing how he had in mind to make Laboureur also a colossal statue of Napoleon, at the time the first consul. In fact the *Statue of Napoleon I* (Ajaccio, Fountain of the Four Lions) was carved in considerable dimensions (almost 4 m high, including the base) for the good offices of Cacault and Cardinal J. Fesch, his successor from 1803. they have information on the status of the statue's work until 1806 through the pages of the *Journal de Paris*, from which it also appears that, as soon as Napoleon became emperor, the iconography was changed: Laboureur opted for a togate figure, perhaps inspired by the *Titus* in the Vatican or consular statues, to underline the dignity and majesty of the represented, also through a certain naturalness obtained with the accurate rendering of the folds of the garment and a veiled elegance in the pose, of French taste. A eulogy by GA Guattani dissolves the meaning of the marble portrait: crowned with laurels, Napoleon holds in one hand a scroll on which is written "Concordato", while with the other he supports a rudder on a globe to indicate the government over the peoples. Innovative is the solution of the Aegis, which no longer bears the head of Medusa but a radiant Sun, alluding to truth and wisdom. The colossal portrait was later bought by Fesch and linked to his own city. The plaster model, with some variations, is preserved in the peristyle of Villa Paolina Bonaparte in Rome.

With the exception of this important commission, Laboureur was initially distinguished for small copies, in marble and terracotta, dating back to before 1803 and made mostly from ancient works. Some examples in the collection of Nantes include the *Terracotta Pudicizia*, originally from the Vatican.

Thanks to the important protection of Cacialti, the Oct. 3. 1802 Laboureur was elected academic of S. Luca. Ten years later he was appointed professor of sculpture, together with B. Thorvaldsen and then with A. Canova.

Among the academic activities of Laboureur figure, from the year of its establishment by the French government (1810), participation in the Commission des monuments et bâtiments civils and the direction of the Academy of Nude in the Capitol from August 1813 to March of 1828, in a non-continuous manner, according to the provisions of the by-laws. He was president of the Accademia di S. Luca for 1821 and 1822.

At the beginning of his activity the *funeral monument of Cardinal F.-J. de Pierre de Bernis* (1803-05) - illustrious ecclesiastical, academic of France and ambassador to Rome until 1791 - placed in S. Luigi dei Francesi.

Using marbles of different qualities (white and veined), Laboureur created a monument in which two smooth lateral bases are separated from the central stela by a frieze with elongated teeth; on it, which contains the precordi of the cardinal, there is a bas-relief of the *Genius of Harmony equipped with harp* and the *Religion (veiled) that carries the cross*. The work clearly reveals a strong neoclassical stylistic component of Roman type, of which Laboureur was considered one of the greatest exponents.

Also in 1805 the *funeral monument of Gastone Artaud* for the Florentine church of Ognissanti, dedicated to the dead boy after just eight days of life, should be dated.

The sculptor reused the architectural structure used previously, with slight variations: the side bases are decorated on the front with little roses and the rib shows a lemniscated crown, while on the stele is depicted the *Innocence that offers the little Gaston to the celestial Glory*. In this period of time it is reported the installation of two other funeral monuments: the one requested by an unknown Russian gentlewoman to commemorate her son who died prematurely, and the mediocre *funeral monument of Pius VI Braschi* (Valence, cathedral), dated 1808-11.

The stucco frieze depicting *Lorenzo the Magnificent* dates back to 1812, *which drives away the Vices and introduces the Virtues into Tuscany*, which adorns the first salon of the Napoleonic apartment, destined to become the study of Bonaparte, at the Quirinale. In 1816 he was commissioned to perform the *Bust of Cardinal Bartolomeo Pacca*, at the time one of the leading figures in the management of the Roman artistic heritage.

The construction was decided by the academic college of S. Luca in December of the previous year, but Laboureur ended it in 1822. Problems of an economic nature, linked to the reimbursement of expenses incurred by the sculptor for the materials used, made the he worked for a long time in the artist's studio, who only a short time before his death in 1831 was contacted to deliver it. The story did not have to be resolved, if the son, who died Laboureur and became heir and guardian of the work in question, required an assessment attesting to the actual value of what had been produced. The judgments expressed on the quality of the bust, however, were very negative and revealed both the absence of similarity and the modesty of the execution.

Between 1816 and 1819 Laboureur carved the series of seven marble herms preserved in the Sala della Protomoteca Capitolina.

Between 1817 and 1822 Laboureur was involved in the decoration of the new arm of the Chiaramonti Museum, for which he produced 32 bas-relief stucco compartments representing *Imperial Triumphs*, *Sacrificial Scenes* and *Bacchic Scenes*.

In 1820 the Hungarian prince Nicolaus Esterházy bought for his collection the work sculpted by Laboureur in that year entitled *Metabo re dei Volsci who teaches Camilla to shoot with the bow* (Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts), one piece documented among those collected by him in the Viennese palace of Mariahilferstrasse. Two years later Laboureur set up the *funeral monument of the marquess Settimia Marini Maffei and her son Pietro* in S. Maria d'Aracoeli, completed by her son Alessandro Massimiliano with the tomb of the client Luigi Marini.

The patron of the enterprise was the Marquis Luigi, husband of the late noblewoman of Veronese origins. The work reveals the collaboration between Laboureur and his son Alessandro Massimiliano, author of the statues in the round depicting on the right a man absorbed and on the left a woman who sadly moves towards the center. The whole is of unusual dimensions, and is structured in two bases with epigraphs, on the first of which insist the figures, and in a sarcophagus, whose front bears a medallion in the center with the left profile of twelve-year-old Pietro; at the top of the triangular tympanum, rather low and decorated internally with brushes and ribbons, stands the bust of the noblewoman. The articulated conception of the monument constituted a novelty with respect to the city tradition and can only be explained in the light of Canova's first Roman work, the *Ceremonial Monument of Clement XIV* (Rome, Ss. Apostles).

Of 1823 is the *funeral monument to Cardinal Jan van Goessen*, placed inside the church of S. Maria della Concezione of the Capuchin friars, at the bottom of the central nave.

The cult of memory of the cardinal, who died in 1696, was patronized by the great-grandchildren, as the plaque recites. At Laboureur stands the crowning stele, once again ending with a tympanum, filled with the coat of arms of the religious, and unmarked side acroteria. At the center of the slab, framed by a large frame, the *Faith* in broadly draped bas-relief is flanked by a putto that bears the symbols of the cardinal's office. The two-figure scheme already used for the monuments of cardinal de Bernis and Pius VI has been re-proposed here, but in a new formulation which suggests that the sculptor used a rather limited repertoire, varying from time to time, with some success.

Among the last commissions entrusted to him, mention must be made of the statue of S. *Francesco Caracciolo*, founder of the Order of minor clerics, on the occasion of the canonization that took place in 1807.

Laboureur began work only in 1829, as is clear from the four payment notes of that year (for a total of 1400 scudi). The sudden death of the artist forced the religious to have the sculpture finished by I. Fraccaroli under the direction of B. Thorvaldsen and the statue was placed in the Vatican basilica only in 1834.

Two sculptures in the Musée des beaux-arts of Angers (*St. Hyacinth* and *Colossal bust of Napoleon*), a funeral monument inside the cathedral of Warsaw and a relief for the cathedral of Lyon should also be mentioned.

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