

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Alfred Gilbert's Aestheticism: Gilbert Amongst Whistler, Wilde, Leighton, Pater and Burne-Jones by Jason Edwards

Review by: Mark Stocker

Source: *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 149, No. 1257, Sculpture (Dec., 2007), pp. 866-867

Published by: Burlington Magazine Publications Ltd.

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20075085>

Accessed: 27-01-2023 20:20 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Burlington Magazine Publications Ltd. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Burlington Magazine*

JSTOR

While in most instances Scherf's assessments are well argued and convincing, there are a few cases in which the present reviewer has a different opinion. For example, it is difficult to believe that the *Project for a funerary monument* (no.21) is by Houdon. Even though the small terracotta relief comes from the collection of Alexandre-Charles Sauvageot (1781–1860) who claimed to have purchased it at the sale of Houdon's studio in 1828, it is entirely different in style from the beautifully modelled and documented terracotta sketch for a *Funerary monument for Prince Alexandre Mikhaovitch Golitsyne* (no.22), also in the Louvre's collection. Furthermore, it cannot be convincingly associated with any known commission or project by Houdon. Because we know of the direct role that Diderot and Grimm played in establishing the iconography of the funerary monuments Houdon was commissioned to make for the court of Saxe-Gotha as well as for members of the Golitsyne family in Russia, it is impossible to believe that this terracotta sketch, with its confusing iconography, could be by Houdon.

Scherf writes in his entry on the portrait bust identified as *La comtesse de Jaucourt* (no.35) that the work must be from Houdon's studio and identical with the '*Portrait de Madame la comtesse de Jaucourt*' exhibited under no.240 at the Salon of 1777, along with the bust of her daughter, '*Madame la comtesse de Cayla*', under no.239. Scherf writes: '*Le caractère posthume du portrait de Mme de Jaucourt explique sans doute en partie l'aspect décevant du visage, Houdon et ses praticiens n'ayant pour se guider dans la taille du marbre que, probablement, le modèle*'. The poor quality of the carving, the blank, vapid expression of the sitter, the lifeless, repetitive treatment of the hair, the awkward execution of the drapery, the weak imitation of the striations often used by Houdon to finish the backs of his busts, all indicate a much later date and preclude an attribution to Houdon or any member of his studio. As Scherf points out, the Salon of 1777 was one of the most important of the sculptor's career, one in which he exhibited a series of masterpieces. It is inconceivable that he would allow such a sculpture to be shown under his name, whether the sitter was dead or alive. A comparison with the superb portrait bust of the *Comtesse de Cayla* (Frick Collection, New York; fig.94), shown at the same Salon, reinforces the conclusion that they cannot be by the same sculptor, nor done at the same time.

Because the first trace we have of this bust is when it entered the collection of David David-Weill in 1912, this reviewer would like to suggest that the bust may have been executed in the early twentieth century, at the same time the marble bust presumed to be a *Portrait of Mademoiselle Servat* (no.45) was carved. Both of these works purport to be identical with portraits shown by Houdon at the Salon of 1777. The Louvre bust allegedly of the comtesse de Jaucourt is particularly close in style to another marble portrait also presumed to be that of Mademoiselle Servat, now in the Liebieghaus in Frankfurt (fig.105). The handling of drapery, the empty facial expression and the generally fussy yet weak carving are quite similar.

In 1979 the Louvre purchased a round white marble relief of *Apollo facing into the wind* (no.24) which is signed and dated on the back: 'HOUDON.F.1782'. While Scherf acknowledges the sketchiness of the marble's provenance, he catalogues it as an autograph work by Houdon and designates it '*cette œuvre superbe*'. The relief is completely different in style from any known work by the sculptor. The very low, delicate character of the carving, the lack of definition in the hair, face and neck offer a marked contrast to the beautiful plaster medallion relief of *Minerva* (fig.68) sent by Houdon to Gotha in 1772 and today only known from a photograph. In the *Minerva* one senses the three-dimensionality of the figure, the mass of the head and body, the texture of the hair, laurel wreath and pleated tunic. These characteristics are even more in evidence in Houdon's double profile portrait of the *Frères Montgolfier* of 1783 (fig.67). Compared with the *Apollo*, the relief in the Montgolfier brothers medallion is higher and more robust, the musculature of the faces and necks skilfully articulated, the ear and hair beautifully modelled with clearly defined textures and a sense of movement. This robustness can also be found in the profile portrait medallion of the comte d'Ennery on his monument, dated 1781 (no.23).

In his entry on the Louvre's terracotta bust of *George Washington* (no.18) Scherf gives an excellent summary of the documents concerning Houdon's visit to Mount Vernon in October of 1785 and the mould taken of Washington's face at that time; however, he does not list the plaster mask of Washington in the collection of the Morgan Library and Museum, New York, among the works related to the bust (p.108), and he seems to doubt that it is of the eighteenth century and cast from the original mould taken by Houdon of Washington's face (pp.112–13, note 9). Having examined the Morgan Library's mask closely, this reviewer would like to suggest that it was cast from the original mould taken by Houdon. While it does not have the haunting crispness of the death mask Houdon took of Rousseau, now in the Bibliothèque universitaire of Geneva (repr. on p.84, fig.36), the details and imperfections of Washington's face, including a mole on his cheek, are sharply defined, and there are circles around the eyes indicating where the sculptor's application of plaster ended and where he later modelled the eyes from life. With the circles around the eyes, it is improbable that the Morgan mask was taken from a bust by Houdon rather than from the mould for the life mask.

In his entry on the Louvre's bronze bust of *Jean-Jacques Rousseau à l'antique* (no.14), Scherf writes that, after a technical examination, it was determined that the bust is a sand cast ('*fonte au sable*'). The bust was acquired by the Louvre in 1838 from the collection of Bertrand Barère de Vieuzac at the suggestion of David d'Angers. If the bust is a sand cast, it is an anomaly in Houdon's *œuvre*. We know from the documents that from 1772 until 1787 Houdon occupied the foundry that belonged to the city of Paris near the place du Roule and that he prided himself as being the only

sculptor of his generation in France who was able to do his own lost-wax casts.³ All of the documented bronzes known by Houdon were cast with the lost-wax method. Is it possible then, that the Louvre bronze of Rousseau is an early nineteenth-century work cast by another sculptor after Houdon's model?

Listed among the related works in Scherf's entry on the terracotta *Bust of Benjamin Franklin* (no.17) is a plaster bust in the Schlossmuseum, Gotha. He speculates that it was acquired by Duke Ernst II of Saxe-Gotha shortly after its execution. Owing to the recent discovery of documents in the Archives Nationales, Paris,⁴ it is now known that in January of 1791 there was a second shipment of five busts by Houdon to the court of Saxe-Gotha, arranged by Baron Grimm. In addition to the bust of Franklin, there were busts of Lafayette, Washington, d'Alembert and '*la petite Sabine Houdon*'. What is puzzling is that there is no trace in Gotha today of the other four portrait busts.

¹ See A. Schuttwolf: *Sammlung der Plastik Schlossmuseum Gotha*, Gotha 1995, pp.129–57 and 170–88, nos.44–65; and C. Schönfeld and K. Hegner et al.: exh. cat. *Jean-Baptiste Oudry/Jean-Antoine Houdon: Vermächtnis des Aufklärung*, Schwerin (Staatliches Museum) 2000, pp.170–200, nos.1–15.

² A.L. Poulet et al.: exh. cat. *Jean-Antoine Houdon: sculptor of the Enlightenment*, Washington (National Gallery of Art), Los Angeles (J. Paul Getty Museum) and Versailles (Musée du château) 2003–04; reviewed in this Magazine, 145 (2003), pp.685–87.

³ See G. Bresc: 'Fonderie et Ateliers du Roule', in B. de Andia et al.: *Rue du Faubourg-Saint-Honoré*, Paris 1994, pp.372–73.

⁴ Paris, Archives Nationales, Série T.319. I would like to thank Christoph Frank, who discovered these documents, for sharing them with me and giving me permission to publish their content here.

Alfred Gilbert's Aestheticism: Gilbert Amongst Whistler, Wilde, Leighton, Pater and Burne-Jones. By Jason Edwards. 275 pp. incl. 97 b. & w. ills. (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2006), £55. ISBN 0-7546-0861-1.

Reviewed by MARK STOCKER
University of Otago, New Zealand

IN HIS INTRODUCTION to this book, Jason Edwards challenges traditional tendencies to relate Aestheticism primarily to literature, painting and the decorative arts. He convincingly claims a major place for sculpture – and particularly the work of Alfred Gilbert – within the movement. Have critics really been blinded 'to the potential homoerotic, effeminate and queer resonances of Gilbert's work'? This is a tough verdict, but Edwards's wholehearted if not entirely convincing quest to reveal these resonances must be applauded. He does so by closely scrutinising (or as he prefers, 'reading') the works themselves and attempting to explain the artist's motives in making them look as they do, their wider cultural and historical milieu and their audience appeal.

Alfred Gilbert's Aestheticism comprises five case studies from the sculptor's most productive period: *Perseus arming*, *Icarus*, *Eros*, *Comedy*

and *Tragedy* and the tomb of the Duke of Clarence, respectively. Edwards aims to correct what he considers Gilbert's carefully engineered reinvention of himself in his interview with Joseph Hatton for the 1903 *Easter Art Annual*, a long authoritative source. By then, Gilbert was bankrupt and facing the accusations of disappointed clients, from Royalty downwards. This social disgrace eventually culminated in his resignation from the Royal Academy of Arts in 1908. A very different Gilbert had created the *Perseus* and *Icarus* some twenty years earlier. Discussing these works, Edwards sketches Gilbert's 'self-conscious flirtation with the varieties of fashionable, effeminate and homoerotic Aestheticism' of London around 1880, focusing on Walter Pater's writings on Renaissance art. Edwards relates their finer points to Gilbert's aesthetic, and his erudition is impressive. But even at this early point in the book, we must stop to ask whether Gilbert had actually read Pater as closely as is claimed. How convincing is the corollary between the art and the writing? Edwards splits hairs when endeavouring to explain how the differing theories of Pater and Arthur Symonds might have influenced Gilbert. He tortuously posits that 'if a viewer of Symonds's homoerotic Aesthetic persuasion might have considered Gilbert's figure distastefully effeminate, rather than positively homoerotic, *Perseus* has a stronger affinity with Wilde's and Pater's criteria for what might make neo-Florentine male figurative sculpture desirable'. Two 'mights' in a sentence reflect the essentially conjectural tone of *Alfred Gilbert's Aestheticism*. Edwards ignores Kenneth Clark's assertion that 'the artist takes what he needs'. The artist is not necessarily bothered by the world around him; he is more interested in what other artists do and reinterpreting them in turn. Thus Antonin Mercié's *David with the head of Goliath* is a more palpable influence on *Perseus* than screeds of Pater. A large bronze version of Mercié's work was shown at the Exposition universelle (1878) which Gilbert, then a student in Paris, surely attended. The timeframe, combined with Gilbert's well-known competitiveness with other sculptors, past and present, clinches the case.

Edwards sometimes makes inaccurate assertions to further his arguments. For example, he exaggerates the impact of Dante Gabriel Rossetti on the young Gilbert. Celebrated poet though he was, Rossetti had exhibited nothing in public since 1850 and his painting was probably unknown to Gilbert before the mid-1870s. Again, Whistler's impact in France, which amounted to little between the mid-1860s and late 1880s when he lived mostly in England, is likewise exaggerated. And it is surely absurd to speak of the stupid, lazy and ineffectual Prince Albert Victor, Duke of Clarence ('Eddy'), in the same breath as Oscar Wilde as an 'Aesthete'.

More seriously, I believe that Edwards is the unwitting victim of his school of scholarship. We are – perhaps fortunately – not all queer theorists today, nor were we so in the late nineteenth century. Supposedly epiphanic moments in homosexual art history such as

the disgrace of Simeon Solomon and the hushed-up relationship between Pater and William Hardinge, 'the Balliol Bugger', were probably far more marginal to Gilbert (and even to the wider context of Aestheticism) than Edwards assumes. A queer piety overcomes Edwards when he claims that Gilbert smoothed over Prince Albert Victor's facial features in his minor marble memorial relief in Sandringham church to avoid 'physiognomic readings of the body [...] to identify queer men in the eyes of the law'. Why did Gilbert modify the same prince's tomb in St George's Chapel, Windsor (begun 1892), to render his effigy less visible? We do not know, but Edwards offers a set of explanations: Eddy's possible involvement in the homosexual Cleveland Street Scandal, the Labouchère amendment which criminalised homosexuality and the recent arrest of Oscar Wilde. This reasoning, dutifully supported by extensive reading and references, is intriguing but remains, as I say, conjectural. I am reminded of Gilbert's famous contemporary namesake: 'corroborative detail, intended to give artistic verisimilitude to an otherwise [...] unconvincing narrative'. If, however, we swallow the central thesis, then it indicates an extraordinary degree of empathy on the firmly heterosexual Gilbert's part towards the nuances of Aestheticism on the one hand and queer culture on the other.

Edwards's book is certainly readable, while his patent admiration for a remarkable artist is affecting and infectious. *Alfred Gilbert's Aestheticism* provocatively complements the excellent if more orthodox biographical achievements of Richard Dorment. But unlike those of Eros, the shafts that Edwards fires are not always on target.

Eduardo Chillida. Catalogue Raisonné of the Original Prints. By Martin van der Koelen. *Opus P.I: 1959–1972*, 360 pp. incl. 174 col. + 9 b. & w. ills. (Chorus Verlag für Kunst und Wissenschaft, Mainz, 1999), €86. ISBN 3-931876-11-X; *Opus P.II: 1973–1985*, 400 pp. incl. 214 col. + 1 b. & w. ills. (Chorus Verlag für Kunst und Wissenschaft, Mainz, 1997), €92. ISBN 3-931876-12-8; *Opus P.III: 1986–1996*, 360 pp. incl. 156 col. + 10 b. & w. ills. (Chorus Verlag für Kunst und Wissenschaft, Mainz, 1996), €86. ISBN 3-931876-03-9; *Opus P.IV: 1996–2001*, 208 pp. incl. 92 col. + 9 b. & w. ills. (Chorus Verlag für Kunst und Wissenschaft, Mainz, 2005), €76. ISBN 3-931876-44-6.

Reviewed by DANIEL F. HERRMANN
Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh

COMPLETED AFTER MANY years of research, this beautifully produced four-volume publication will be the standard work on Eduardo Chillida's prints for years to come. Spanning a period of more than forty years, its excellent reproductions allow for a comprehensive appreciation of the artist's printmaking; Martin van der Koelen's introductory texts are astute scholarly essays. Above all, the publication demonstrates the intricate relation between

sculpture and printmaking in Chillida's work.

Born in 1924 in San Sebastián in the Spanish Basque Country, Chillida trained as an architect but soon ventured into different fields: those of fine art and football. While injuries prevented him from furthering his career as a goalkeeper in Spain's premier league, his work as an artist won him important prizes, commissions and much critical acclaim. Reflecting on his athletic past, he once likened the work of the footballer to that of the sculptor. More than anything, the artist stated in an interview with Andrew Dempsey, both professions dealt with space. For Chillida, the goalkeeper's art was to understand the borderline where the two-dimensional playing field was translated into three-dimensional space.

This borderline was seminal to Chillida's work. Often using skewed arrangements of rods, bars and compact masses, his sculptures explored the richness of volumes and voids to the utmost. In their relation of form to surrounding space, Chillida's sculptures have often been likened to the coastal landscapes in which they were placed; it is impossible to tell which one defines the shoreline more, the solid land or the surrounding sea. The beauty of such rich ambiguity lay at the heart of Chillida's art and, as this catalogue of his prints magnificently illustrates, was not confined to sculpture alone.

As a printmaker, Chillida expertly translated his explorations of mass, void and spatial borders onto paper. Intense, dark fields of black aquatint clash with the white surface of the sheet; rich textures of woodblock lines contrast with the pronounced emptiness around them. Making use of printmaking's many possibilities, Chillida proved a master of the medium. An example of this is his use of the platemark, the impression which the facette of an intaglio plate leaves in the sheet during the printing process. In traditional conceptions of printmaking, the platemark constitutes the border of the respective image. Not so for Chillida. In his works, the impression of the printmaker's plate, often deliberately cut to form, becomes a compositional element. The platemark thus defines the print just as much as the ink does. Its physically impressed shape marks Chillida's goal area between printmaking's level field and sculpture's third dimension. Another example of Chillida's accomplishment and sculptural sensibility in printmaking is his selection of different papers. Whereas the choice of paper is often secondary to many artists, this catalogue demonstrates how integral it was to Chillida's work. Here, papers were employed to add highlights, shades and textures, emphasising the quality of Chillida's prints as objects, rather than as mere reproduced images.

This important fact would not be easily discernible, were it not for the publication's high production standards. Bound in cloth and well printed, the catalogue's four volumes boast excellent photography. This is especially important with regard to the aforementioned qualities of Chillida's work: only careful lighting and delicate contrasts are able to convey the exciting subtleties of his prints as spatial objects instead of flattening them into mere