

Between  
Mannerism  
*and* Baroque:  
TWO CAESARS  
BY DOMENICO  
PIERATTI















ANDREA BACCHI  
CLAUDIO PIZZORUSSO

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Between Mannerism and Baroque:  
Two Caesars by Domenico Pieratti



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## Preface

The unexpected encounter is one of the most appealing aspects of the profession I have chosen. I can recall the very moment when my eyes lighted on two busts depicting a young Marcus Aurelius sporting an impressive paludamentum and an Augustus in his sophisticated cuirass, whose stern gaze was forever trained beyond the horizon that we common mortals can perceive.

I was instantly seized with a desire to explore and to understand, because it is part of my job to select works whose quality can lead to the discovery of what may even be an as yet little-known artist.

Who? Where? When?

The busts may have appeared to remain silent but they were in fact extremely loquacious. The answers to my questions lay in the folds of the drapery, in the construction of the cuirass, in the treatment of the sitters' flesh and in the handling of their hair.

In these pages, Andrea Bacchi reconstructs and names the sculptor who carved the two Caesars, while Claudio Pizzorusso maps out the career of Domenico Pieratti, a brilliant and highly original sculptor who, we feel, deserves further exploration in order to shed light on the remarkable yet hitherto poorly studied area that was sculpture in Florence between the ages of Mannerism and Baroque.

*Walter Padovani*

FOLLOWING PAGES  
Domenico Pieratti  
(Florence 1600 – Rome 1656)

*Bust of Augustus*  
Marble, overall height 90 cm  
Private Collection

*Bust of Marcus Aurelius*  
Marble, overall height 90 cm







CLAUDIO PIZZORUSSO

# Transcending Giambologna: DOMENICO PIERATTI AND HIS EXPERIMENTS

There are a number of clues that tell us just how difficult it must have been for an emerging young sculptor in early 17th century Florence to find an independent and innovative path of his own. Even if we leave aside the long shadow cast by Michelangelo which, for some time now, had carried even greater weight than the stones the sculptors were carving – the dogged determination with which Pierino da Vinci sought to revisit *Samson and the Philistine* after the master's model is proverbial<sup>1</sup> –, we cannot fail to see what was in effect an equally burdensome obstacle in Giambologna's dazzling career. The brilliant inventor of an 'international style' resting on a skilled synthesis of the classical and the modern Florentine traditions, this Flemish entrepreneur, a veritable master at promoting both himself and his workshop, had given the Medici court a more effective weapon for its cultural and diplomatic promotion than any other artist before him ever had. Giambologna's brand, a kind of primordial "made in Florence" tag, lent his style and format an unquestioned supremacy that was carefully fostered and developed by his heirs, from Pietro and Ferdinando Tacca to Antonio and Giovan Francesco Susini. But as Filippo Baldinucci shrewdly spotted, this monopoly over a repertoire of bronzes large and small which could be both reproduced and exported, held within it the seeds of

a saturation of taste and of the demise of invention<sup>2</sup>, inhibiting or sidelining other experiments with expression and greatly reducing the range of potential patrons – a range which, in any case, was rapidly shrinking of its own accord: «There were few in Florence who had the opportunity or the will to commission statues, and so neither were the art or the labours of the artists of much value»<sup>3</sup>.

Thus it comes as no surprise that from the 1560s we see the list of young Tuscan sculptors, especially those skilled in carving in marble who left the city bound primarily for Rome or Naples, getting rapidly longer: Michelangelo Naccherino, Tommaso Montani, Pietro Bernini, Pompeo Ferrucci, Francesco Mochi and, much later, Giuliano Finelli, Giulio Mencaglia and Andrea Bolgi. Even Pietro Francavilla, Giambologna's faithful marble carver, seemed overjoyed to be able to return to Paris in 1605. The only sculptors left in the vaguely stifling atmosphere of Florence were: Giovanni Caccini, a sublime connoisseur of the classical style and creator of a fragile naturalism of his own; a handful of his pupils, including the better known Gherardo Silvani who, however, turned to architecture at his earliest opportunity after being hounded out of Giambologna's circle by a jealous Pietro Tacca<sup>4</sup>; and the craftsmen who specialised in semi-precious stonework such as porphyry and other *pietre dure* for the adornment of parks and gardens.



If we add to this the fact that in 1673 Grand Duke Cosimo III, «considering that the fine art of sculpture and statuary was gradually failing in Florence, providently determined to establish said art anew by training several young men of great promise who might restore that art to the excellence of its ancient state through study and application»<sup>5</sup>, and established the Medici Academy in Rome for the purpose<sup>6</sup>, we might well deduce that Florentine sculpture had been unable to produce a sculptor worthy of its brilliant, if weighty, past for fully half a century.

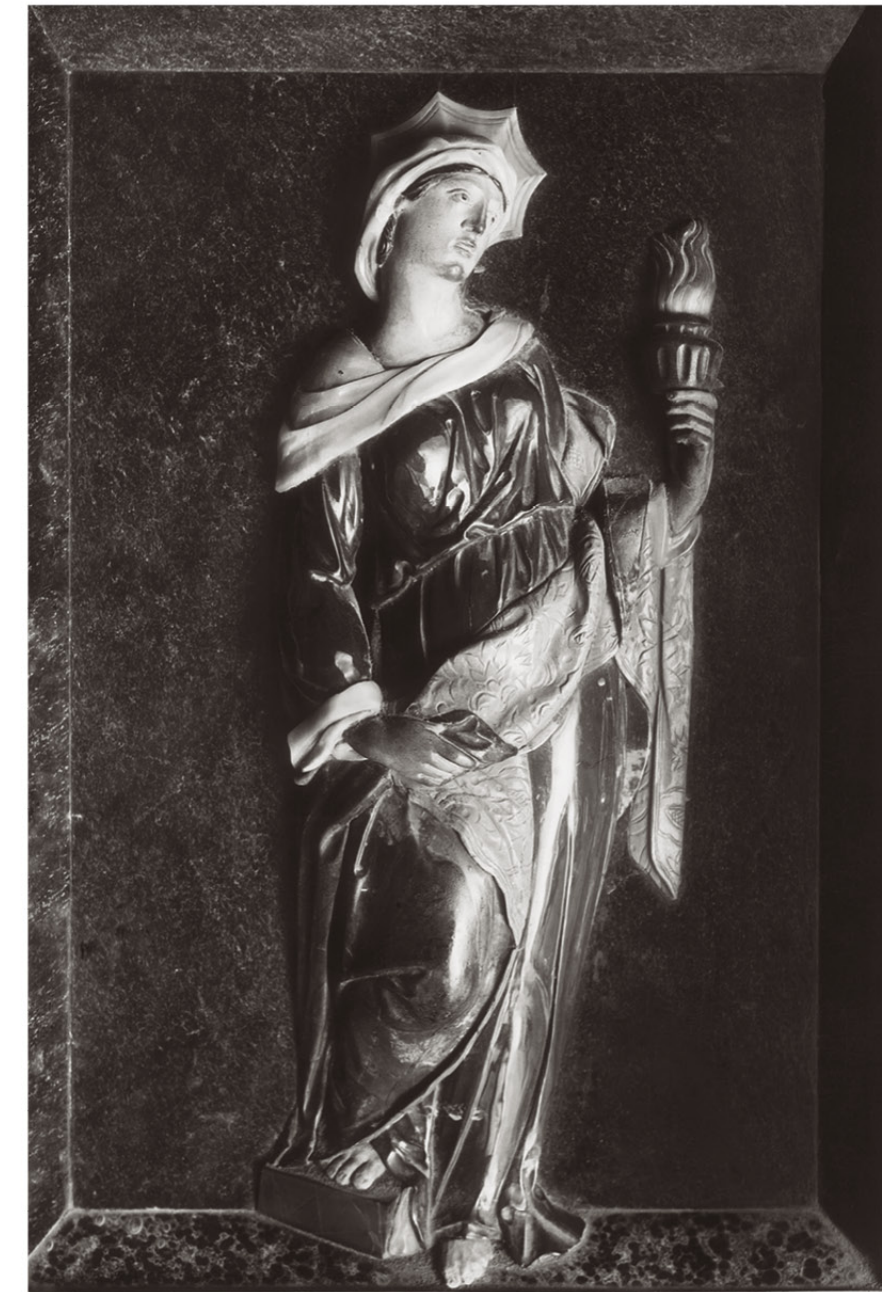
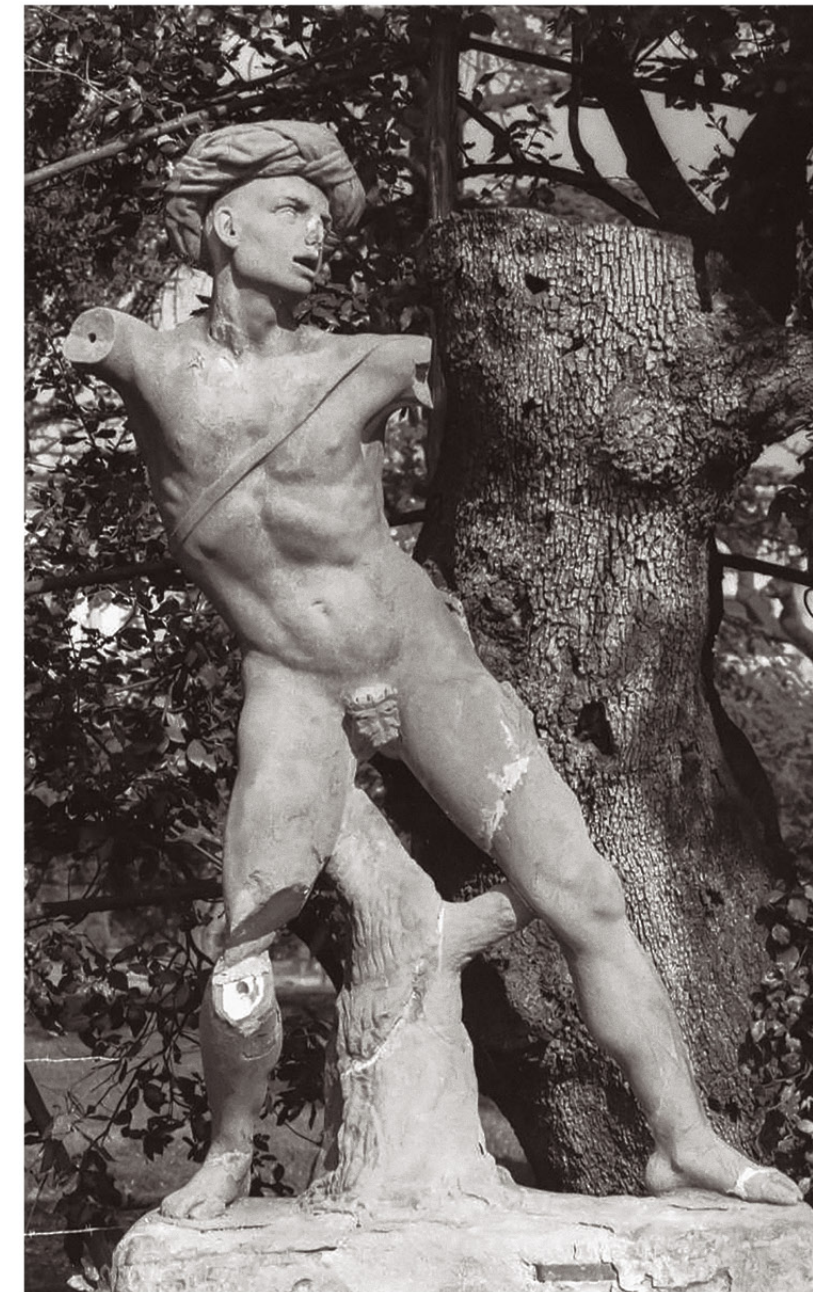
But we would be wrong. Between the death of Giambologna in 1608 and the maturity of the generation that included Marcellini, Foggini, Soldani Benzi and Piamontini, at least two sculptors, Antonio Novelli (1599–1662) and Domenico Pieratti (1600–56), had mapped out new paths and had even enjoyed a degree of success outside the Grand Duchy's borders. Novelli devoted his energy to circumventing the 'hereditary' constraints staked out by Michelangelo and Giambologna by adopting a classicism based in part on the art of the ancient world but primarily on a purist revisitation of Florentine art at the very beginning of the 16th century in the furrow of the Della Robbias and of Andrea Sansovino<sup>7</sup>. Here, however, we are more interested in tracking the career of Pieratti, who was often assisted in a virtually indistinguishable

style by his brother Giovan Battista (1599–1662)<sup>8</sup>.

Domenico's early career, stretching from his time spent under the guiding hands of Chiarissimo Fancelli (c. 1588–1632) and of Andrea di Michelangelo Ferrucci (1559–1626) at least until he enrolled at the Accademia del Disegno in 1624, coincided with a fertile moment in Medici patronage under Grand Duke Cosimo II and the Regents Christina of Lorraine and Maria Magdalena of Austria. The extension of the decorative scheme in the southern part of the Boboli Garden, the sculptural decoration of the cornice atop the façade of the Pitti Palace and the monumental arrangement of the approaches and the façade of the Villa of Poggio Imperiale offered Domenico, still a very young man, the opportunity to build up a reputation for himself with numerous predominantly stone commissions, of which, however, hardly a trace has survived<sup>9</sup> (fig. 1). What does survive of his many interventions in the Medici family's residences, however, is the translation into semi-precious stone of a *Charity* which he modelled in wax (fig. 2) at a later date (1626) for the monumental canopy in the Chapel of the Princes in San Lorenzo (and which now graces the Palatine Chapel in the Pitti Palace)<sup>10</sup>. This moderately sinuous figure reflects the process of normalisation of Mannerist features which had begun with Giovanni Caccini towards the end of the 16th century and with

1. Domenico Pieratti,  
*Turkish Huntsman*,  
Florence, Boboli Garden

2. Domenico Pieratti,  
*Charity*, Florence, Palatine  
Chapel in the Pitti Palace





"Even at this early date we can clearly detect the brothers' inclination to hark back to the more celebrated examples of sophisticated naturalism and neo-Hellenistic freedom proper to a particular trend in Florentine 16th century"



3. Domenico e Giovanni Battista Pieratti, *Cupid Astride a Tortoise*, Florence, Artichoke Fountain, Pitti Palace



4. Domenico e Giovanni Battista Pieratti, *Cupid on a Shell*, Florence, Artichoke Fountain, Pitti Palace



5. Domenico Pieratti, *Cupid Breaking a Heart with a Hammer*, Florence, Island Lake, Boboli Garden

which Pieratti must have been very familiar from his time with Fancelli, who had himself been a pupil of Caccini.

Particularly deserving of attention among the Pieratti brothers' earliest marble works are a pair of *Cupids*, one on a shell and the other on a tortoise (figs. 4-3), paid for together in 1621 as part of the decoration for the Island Lake in the Boboli Garden and subsequently reassembled around the Artichoke Fountain in the courtyard of the Pitti Palace. Even at this early date we can clearly detect

the brothers' inclination to hark back to the more celebrated examples of sophisticated naturalism and neo-Hellenistic freedom proper to a particular trend in Florentine 16th century art such as the putti for Niccolò Tribolo's fountain of *Hercules and Antaeus* in the garden of the Villa of Castello, especially those in bronze modelled by Pierino da Vinci. This inclination is confirmed by their later *Cupid Breaking a Heart with a Hammer* and *Cupid Opening a Heart with a Key* (1623, also for the Island Lake in Boboli) (figs. 5-6) which, with their sinu-





PREVIOUS PAGE  
6. Domenico Pieratti,  
*Cupid Opening a Heart with  
a Key*, Florence,  
Island Lake, Boboli Garden



7. Domenico Pieratti,  
*St. John the Baptist  
in the Desert*,  
formerly Berlin,  
Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum

8. Domenico Pieratti,  
*St. John the Baptist  
in the Desert*, Florence,  
Museo Nazionale  
del Bargello, (detail)

ous movements and delicate, smiling faces, clearly echo the charming elegance that Pierino da Vinci inherited from Leonardo. For some time now (and again only recently) this pair has quite rightly been associated with a so-called *Young St. John the Baptist* formerly in the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum in Berlin (fig. 7), the object of a long and stormy debate over both its attribution and its iconography<sup>11</sup>. The loss of this precious work has robbed us of a further example of Pieratti's attempt at this stage in his career to achieve the sculptural equivalent of those lissom, emotionally sensitive dancing figures that characterise the painting of Giovanni Bilivert and his pupils Bartolomeo Salvestrini and Giovan Battista Vanni, both of whom enjoyed a strong bond with the Pieratti brothers. This loss is made good in part by the monumental *St. John the Baptist in the Desert* (Museo Nazionale del Bargello, from the Villa of Poggio Imperiale) (fig. 8) that winds up the group of Pieratti's works datable to the first half of the 1620s. The way the figure effortlessly twists in the act of kneeling or his gaze full of intense pathos reveal Pieratti's interest in the search for grace and beauty through the study of a sentimental approach stretching from the late 15th century to Pierino da Vinci and to the introspective painting of Vignali and Furini.

This constant and far from secondary activity for the Medici court thrust Pieratti into the lime-





ANDREA BACCHI

# Florence *all'antica*:

## TWO BUSTS OF AUGUSTUS AND MARCUS AURELIUS

The Getty Villa in Malibu hosted a small exhibition in 2008–9 built around a *Bust of Commodus* (fig. 1) which had entered the museum's collection in 1992 from Castle Howard in England. The piece is likely to have been purchased by Henry Howard, 4th Earl of Carlisle, before 1758, although we have no evidence to determine when or where the piece came into his hands. Though initially thought to be a classical bust, doubts soon began to be raised: given its exceptionally good condition, which did not appear to be the result of restoration, could it not be an 18th century work or, perhaps even more likely, a bust carved in the classical style in Italy—in Rome, or in Florence—in the 16th century? At the symposium held to tie in with the exhibition, the traditional opinion held by those who considered it to be a classical work carried the day, and the *Commodus* has been on display ever since in the Villa in Malibu rather than at the Getty Center in Santa Monica which hosts the art collections of the modern era<sup>1</sup>. In 2002, thus only a few years before the symposium, however, the bust was listed in the Getty's catalogue of Italian (and Spanish) sculpture and the origin given as Florence in the second half of the 16th century, reflecting an earlier attribution to Giovanni Caccini (Montopoli in Val d'Arno 1556–Florence 1613) put forward by Claudio Pizzorusso in the early 1990s<sup>2</sup>. The debate

1. Giovanni Caccini (?)  
*Bust of Commodus*,  
Los Angeles,  
© J. Paul Getty Museum

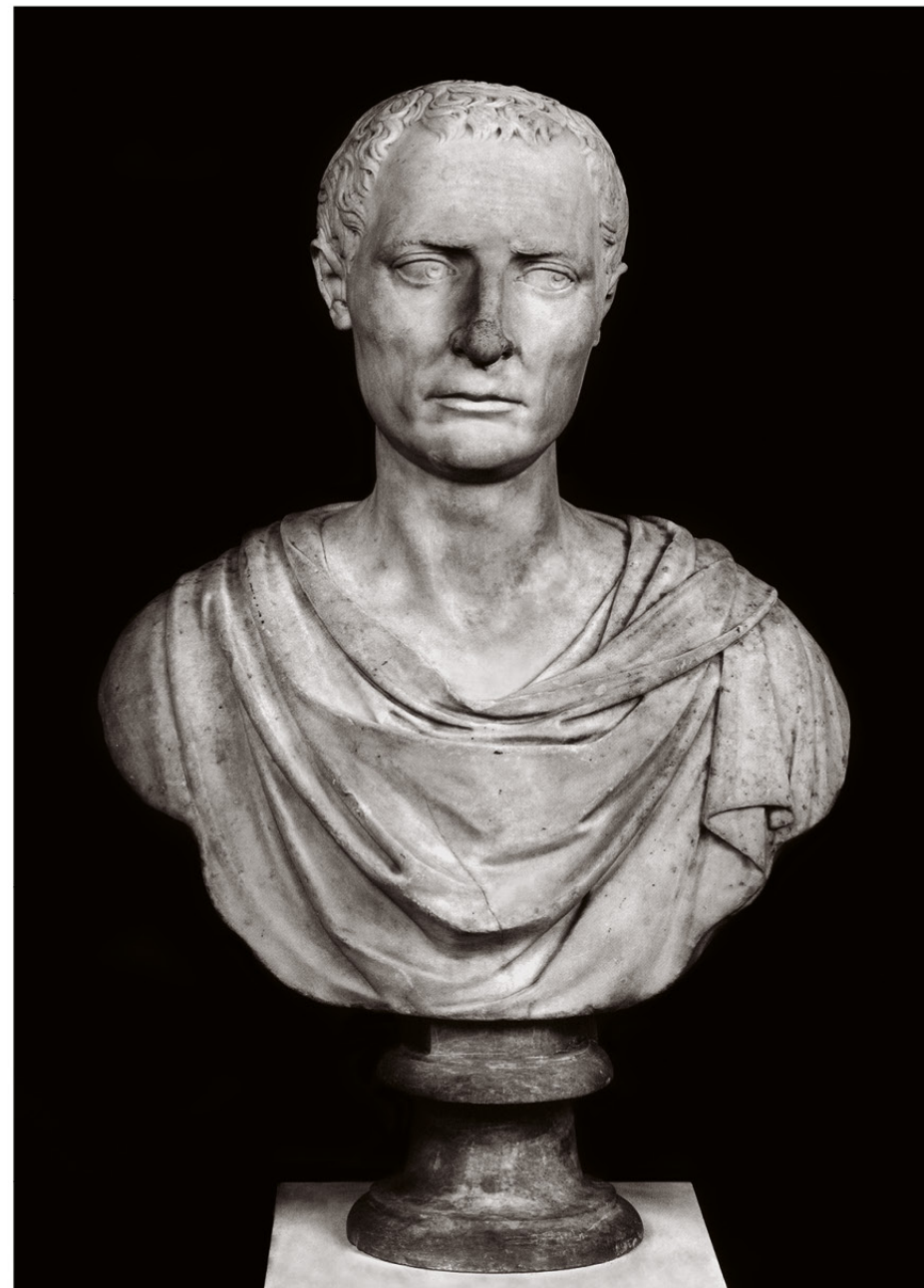




“Indeed it is primarily in that light that we should view the exceptional importance of the Augustus and Marcus Aurelius under discussion here, two masterpieces which we propose to attribute to Domenico Pieratti”



2. Simone Bianco,  
*Bust of a Woman*,  
Berlin, Bodemuseum



3. Simone Bianco,  
*Bust of a Man*,  
Paris, Musée du Louvre

over the Getty *Commodus* still cannot be said to be completely closed, and Pizzorusso’s intuition drew attention once again to the central role played by Florence as a centre for the production of classicising busts. Indeed it is primarily in that light that we should view the exceptional importance of the *Augustus* and *Marcus Aurelius* under discussion here, two masterpieces which we propose to attribute to Domenico Pieratti (Florence 1600 – Rome 1656), a sculptor born barely a generation after Caccini.

It is a widely held belief that it was primarily in the Veneto first, and later in Rome, that the popularity of this kind of bust originated and developed in the early modern era. Classicising portraits were certainly very popular in Venetian Renaissance sculpture, resulting in the production of unashamed imitation of ancient busts or variations on the theme such as Tullio Lombardo’s famous *Bacchus and Ariadne* now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna<sup>3</sup>. But the key figure, for our purposes, was unquestionably the Tuscan sculptor Simone Bianco who worked in Venice from 1512 to 1553, and concerning whom Giorgio Vasari wrote as early as in the first edition of his *Lives of the Artists* (1550) that:

*Their number [...] included Simon Bianco, a sculptor of Florence, who elected to dwell in Venice, and was constantly working on something, such as a number of marble heads despatched to France by Venetian merchants<sup>4</sup>.*

The “marble heads” that Vasari mentions have been hypothetically – yet convincingly – identified as a series of sculptures now in the Musée du Louvre<sup>5</sup>. Based on those pieces, which are almost slavish copies of original classical works, scholars have recently put together a substantial *corpus* of busts around Bianco’s name<sup>6</sup>. It is thus possible to track the birth and development of this specific genre from a *Bust of a Woman* in the Bode Museum in Berlin (**fig. 2**) right up to the pieces sent to France: in the Bode head (which echoes the style of Tullio Lombardo also in other respects) Bianco was still working with the reliquary-bust type with a rectilinear base, before moving on the fully-fledged classicising bust with the same kind of rounded base that we see in the two more mature pieces attributed here to Pieratti<sup>7</sup>. We should also distinguish between those correctly described as pseudo-classical, such as the busts sent to France, and totally new designs<sup>8</sup>. It was only in the former case that Bianco completely abandoned Venetian Early Renaissance models to adopt a larger, full-bust format rather than cutting the effigy below the half-bust line (a cut typical of the earliest reliquary-busts) (**fig. 3**). Classicising heads akin to those produced by Simone Bianco are also found in the output of another sculptor from the same period, Agostino Zoppo (1512? – 1572), although they are often devoid of any bust at all (and in Zo-





4. Girolamo della Robbia,  
Bust of a Man, Los Angeles,  
© J. Paul Getty Museum

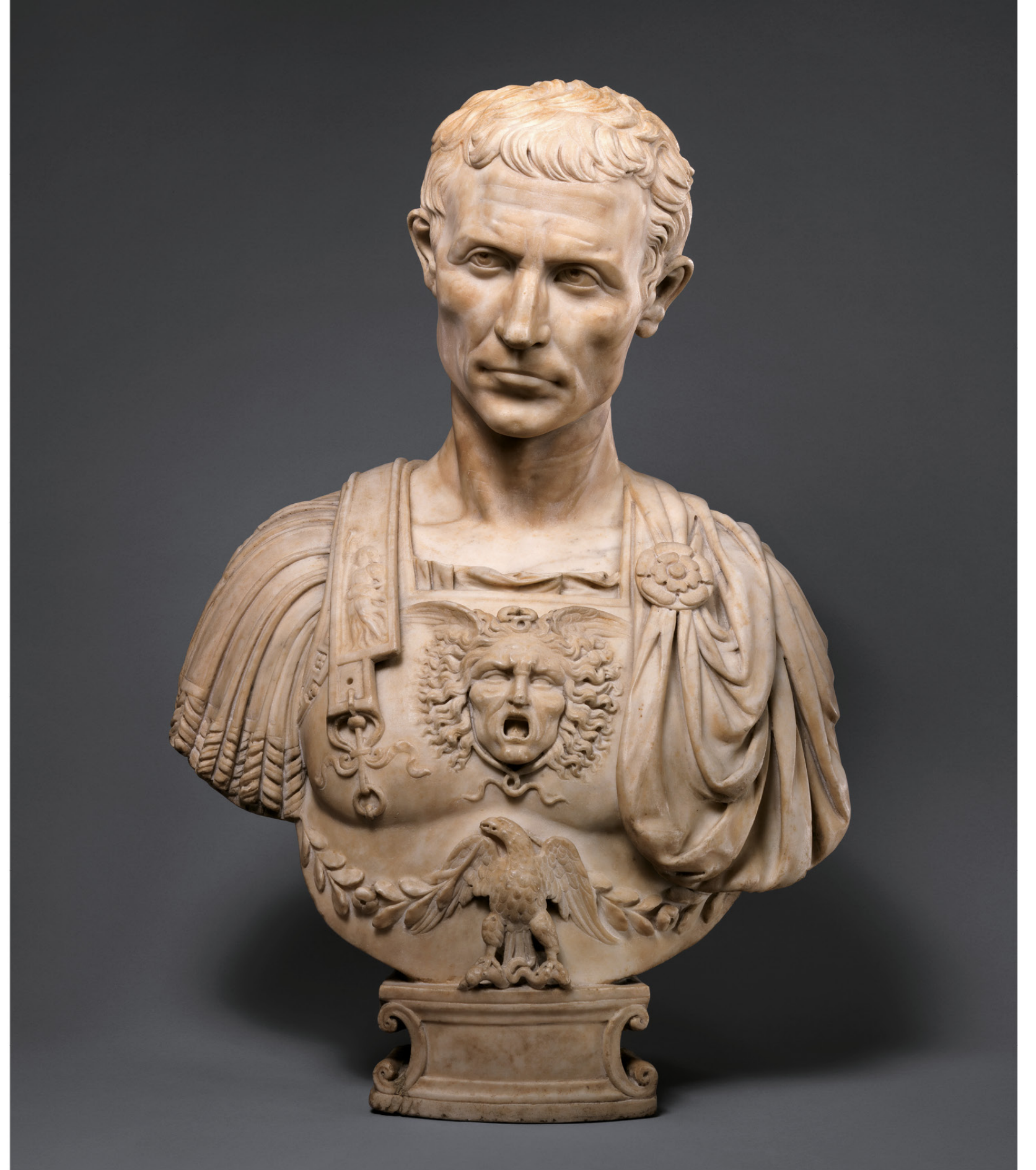
5. Andrea Ferrucci,  
Bust of Julius Caesar, New  
York, © The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art

ppo's case, too, they are pseudo-classical works)<sup>9</sup>. While an absolutely outstanding set of bronze busts depicting the emperors may be attributed to Ludovico Lombardo (1507/8 – 1575), nephew of the better-known Tullio<sup>10</sup>.

Now it may be of some significance that it was a Tuscan who introduced to the Veneto a type of

bust that was to enjoy such widespread popularity in the region, because the roots of the genre we are discussing here are, naturally, to be found in Florence. First of all, we should mention the extremely early bas-reliefs of the *Twelve Caesars* commissioned from Desidero da Settignano (Settignano 1430 – Florence 1464) in 1455 which, while not busts in the round, may be said in many ways to mark the beginning of the theme's later popularity<sup>11</sup>. The small glazed terracotta busts intended to adorn the Château d'Assier in France (of which a handful have survived, the best-known being the one now in the J. Paul Getty Museum) were made between 1526 and 1535, unquestionably by Girolamo della Robbia (Florence 1488 – Paris 1566)<sup>12</sup> (fig. 4), while heads also in glazed terracotta that can be identified as *Agrippa* and *Octavian* have been hypothetically attributed to the workshop of Giovanni della Robbia (Florence 1469 – 1529/30), thus with an even earlier date<sup>13</sup>.

But then, the earliest Florentine classicising bust of an emperor to have survived, a *Bust of Julius Caesar* now in the Metropolitan Museum, was carved some time before Simone Bianco sculpted his heads in Venice. Riccardo Naldi has convincingly attributed the New York *Julius Caesar* to Andrea Ferrucci (Fiesole 1465 – Florence 1526), dating it c. 1512–14<sup>14</sup> (fig. 5). Referring to Giovanni Bandini (Castello 1540 – Florence 1598), a pupil of Baccio Bandinelli





6. Vincenzo de' Rossi,  
Bust of Pertinax,  
Florence, Uffizi Gallery



whose name has also been mentioned in connection with the Getty Museum *Commodus*<sup>15</sup>, Raffaello Borghini wrote in his *Riposo* (Florence, 1584):  
*Over the years he carved twenty marble heads portraying Emperors and other ancient illustrious men, some of which have gone to France, five are in the home of Jacopo Salviati, one of Christ is in the choir of San Vincenzo in Prato, and the others are in the homes of Florentine gentlemen*<sup>16</sup>.

None of these busts has been identified<sup>17</sup> but we know that Jacopo Salviati (1537–86) was a keen collector of antiques, and in an inventory of his heir Lorenzo Salviati's property drafted in 1609 the first pieces mentioned as being in the Gallery were: *Thirteen settles several spans tall. Two carved with walnut masks and the Salviati arms, above which are 13 heads with their busts of various types of marble such as African, yellow Breccia, cotognino and white Marble, which heads are far larger than life size, each twice that size and some three times*<sup>18</sup>.

It must have been a breathtaking sight, and those heads, too, are likely to have been modern – of the others in the same room, some were explicitly described as modern, such as the “two small marble heads of 2 women, modern”, while others were acknowledged as being classical, for example “the two Marble heads with chests smaller than life size, ancient”<sup>19</sup> – because had they been classical, it is unlikely that the inventory's drafter would have failed to highlight the fact in view of their prestigious po-

7. Vincenzo de' Rossi,  
Bust of Caesar,  
Florence, Uffizi Gallery



sition on settles bearing the family coat-of-arms. In short, the production of busts of this kind in Florence in the second half of the 16th century is confirmed both by the sources and in documents, and Giovanni Bandini cannot have been the only sculptor producing them. Anyone involved in the restoration of classical marble pieces could also produce imitation of classical busts. One has but to think of Valerio Ciolli (Settignano 1529 – Florence 1599), whose work as restorer to Grand Duke Cosimo de' Medici Vasari discusses in the 1568 edition of his *Lives*:  
*Valerio, a young man of 26, has restored many ancient marble statues in the garden of the Cardinal of Ferrara at Monte Cavallo, making new arms for some, feet for others, and other parts they lacked. And he did the same in the Palazzo de' Pitti for many statues that the Duke had brought there to adorn a large chamber*<sup>20</sup>.

Vasari was referring in this instance to the *antiquarium* that Cosimo had commissioned Ammannati to install in the Pitti Palace in 1561–2. In 1585 Vincenzo de' Rossi (Fiesole 1525 – Florence 1587) was paid for a *Caesar* and a *Pertinax* which have been identified as two busts now in the Uffizi (figs. 6, 7), one of which Giulio Mansuelli considers to be wholly modern<sup>21</sup>. This, because in some instances the restoration was so casual that it ended up being tantamount to a total remake. Giovanni Caccini appears to have embarked on his career in Florence in the workshop of Giambologna with