

DESMET

FINE ART



Francesco Fanelli (1577-before 1652)

A PACING AND A REARING STALLION EXERCISING
MOVEMENTS OF THE MANÈGE

Bronze

Probably London, c. 1630-1640

Provenance:

Private Collection (Italy)

Art Loss Register: S00251235 & S00251237

Pacing Horse

H 16 x W 15 x D 5 cm
H 6 1/3 x W 6 x D 2 inch

Rearing Horse

H 15 x W 15,5 x D 5 cm
H 6 x W 6 1/8 x D 2 inch

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This pair of stallions, one pacing and the other rearing, are excellent examples from a group of small bronze statuettes of horses that may be attributed on documentary, stylistic and technical grounds to the Anglo-Italian sculptor and goldsmith Francesco Fanelli (1577- before 1652).¹

Francesco Fanelli was born in Florence, where he received at least some of his training in the workshop of Giovanni Bandini (c. 1540-1599), who on his death bequeathed Fanelli the use of his models. By 1605 the young man was in Genoa, where he seems to have been largely based until at least 1630. Sometime between 1630 and 1632 Fanelli came to England, to work as court sculptor to King Charles I. Whilst in England, although he made sculptures in other materials, Fanelli also made the series of distinctive small bronze figures for which he is best known, notable for their fresh and vigorous modelling and treatment of surfaces. He is presumed to have left England on the outbreak of the Civil War, perhaps moving to France or returning to Italy.

Much of what we know about Fanelli as a maker of small bronzes comes from a handful of precious documentary references, the first in the inventory of King Charles I's collections at the palace of Whitehall, drawn up in 1638/39, just before the outbreak of the Civil War in Britain, which refer to statuettes of Cupid and Saint George, both on horseback. King Charles I is known to have owned at least five bronzes by Fanelli, all of which were sold in the Commonwealth sales of the royal art collections in the early 1650s. In the next century, the well-informed antiquarian and engraver George Vertue (1684-1756) wrote that 'Fannelli the florentine Sculptor ... made many small statues, models & cast them in brass, which he sold to persons that were Curious to set on Tables cupboards shelves by way of Ornament...'²

Vertue went on to explain that 'Many were bought by Wm. Duke of Newcastle, and left at Welbeck.' Vertue provided a list of ten bronzes by Fanelli that he had seen during a visit to Welbeck Abbey, then the home of Edward Harley, Earl of Oxford. All ten bronzes depicted horses, either on their own or as part of groups, for example Saint George. Although some were sold in the Earl of Oxford's sale in 1742, five of these bronzes remain in the Portland collection at Welbeck Abbey. One of them,³ described by Vertue as 'a horse ambling' is precisely the same model as the pacing horse in the present pair. The Portland version however retains its original shallow rectangular base, the surface naturalistically rendered. A number of similar small bronze figures of pacing horses are known. For example, one formerly in the Quentin collection represents a heavier animal with a long, carefully

¹ For Fanelli, see John Pope-Hennessy, 'Some Bronze Statuettes by Francesco Fanelli', *The Burlington Magazine*, 95 (May 1953), pp. 156-62; Simon Stock, 'Francesco Fanelli', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford 2004, revised 2008; Patricia Wengraf, 'Francesco Fanelli and Sons in Italy and London, on a grander scale' in M. Leithe-Jasper and P. Wengraf, *European Bronzes from the Quentin Collection*, New York 2004, pp. 30-53.

² 'Vertue Note Books IV', *Twenty-fourth Volume of the Walpole Society* (1936), p. 110.

³ Pope-Hennessy, 'Some Bronze Statuettes by Francesco Fanelli', fig. 6; Ben van Beneden and Nora de Poorter, eds., *Royalist Refugees. William and Margaret Cavendish in the Rubens House 1648-1660*, Antwerp 2006, no. 58.

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combed mane.⁴ This model is also known in larger versions, around 31 cms. high (example in the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham), and was also utilised for several small equestrian statuettes that are attributed to Fanelli, among them the statuette of King Charles I on horseback currently on the art market,⁵ or a figure of the Count-Duke of Olivares on horseback.⁶

The facture of the two bronzes of horses corresponds well with other small bronzes made by Fanelli, especially during his English period from the early 1630s. The sculptor's near contemporary, the German painter Joachim Sandrart, commented on Fanelli's technique in his *Teutsche Akademie*: 'he was especially remarkable in his casting of metal images and could bring out the model in all its detail so cleanly that it was not necessary to improve the sculpture with incising or filing; in this, he understood his art so perfectly that he had the knowledge to cast a quite large sculpture with walls just the thickness of a Reichsthaler [c. 2 mm.], so as a reminder of his skill I myself own a few works in metal by him.'⁷ The two horses are very well-modelled with, as Sandrart described it, minimal afterworking of the surfaces visible in those places where the thick black lye has been lost. This patination is another highly characteristic feature of Fanelli's technique and may be seen on many of the small bronzes attributed to him today.

George Vertue described the model of the pacing horse as 'ambling', a word that implies gentle strolling. But in fact, both these horses are depicted in highly-controlled movements, their tension evident from the rippling musculature in their necks. In fact, each horse seems to be depicted undertaking a specific movement in the refined art of the *haute école* of movement and form, *manège*. This is now known as 'dressage,' an Olympic sport, but it is perhaps still best-known through the displays of the Spanish Riding School in Vienna. The *haute école* developed in the sixteenth century, with the breeding and training of fine horses helping to codify and preserve movements that horses had been trained to make for cavalry combat. One of the most significant documents for *haute école* is Antoine de Pluvinet's treatise the *Manège royal*, first published in 1624, with its 64 plates illustrating the numerous movements in which horses were trained for the *haute école*. The bronze pacing horse appears to execute a movement known as the *piaffe*, in which the horse trots whilst remaining more or less in place. The rearing horse on the other hand is executing the movement known as the *pesade* or the *levade*, in which the horse rears up on its hind legs, with its forelegs drawn in.

As we have seen, George Vertue explained in his note on Francesco Fanelli that 'Wm. Duke of Newcastle' had bought many of Francesco Fanelli's bronze figures. William Cavendish (1593-1676), later the Duke of Newcastle, was an aristocrat and a prominent member of the court of King Charles I of England and Scotland. He fought bravely for the Royalist cause during the Civil War, before being forced to

⁴ Leithe-Jasper and Wengraf, *European Bronzes from the Quentin Collection*, no. 19.

⁵ Charles Avery, *Francesco Fanelli: King Charles I. A unique bronze statuette*, Altomani & Sons, Pesaro 2011.

⁶ Leithe-Jasper and Wengraf, *European Bronzes from the Quentin Collection*, p. 208, fig. 1.

⁷ Joachim Sandrart, *Teutsche Akademie der Edlen Bau- Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste*, Nuremberg 1675. p. 350. Translation by the present author.

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flee for exile on the Continent, following the catastrophic Royalist defeat at the Battle of Marston Moor in July 1644. William and his wife Margaret remained in exile until after the Restoration, living in Antwerp in Rubens's former house between 1648 and 1660.⁸

William Cavendish was in his own lifetime famous for his outstanding skills as a horseman and his passion for horses. He became one of the principal promoters of *haute école*, building no fewer than three riding houses, large buildings in which horses could be trained, at Welbeck, Bolsover Castle and the Rubenshuis in Antwerp. He also published highly regarded and beautifully illustrated treatises on the art of dressage, in French in 1658 and in English in 1667.⁹ In the 1630s, before the outbreak of the Civil War, Cavendish was asked by Charles I to teach riding to his young son the future Charles II, who wrote to his tutor 'I ride every day, and am ready to follow any other directions from you. Make hast[e] to returne to him that loves you.'¹⁰

It can well be imagined therefore how much these small bronze figures of horses executing the complex movements of the *manège* must have appealed to William Cavendish. It seems quite conceivable Cavendish, rather than simply buying finished works from Fanelli, as implied by Vertue, would also have been closely involved in their commissioning and the selection of subject matter.

As representations of movements in the *haute école*, an art form so closely associated with William Cavendish, these beautifully-modelled and -executed small bronze horses provide poignant and tangible links to the 1630s and the lost world of the Stuart court during its late flowering, before its destruction after 1641 and the outbreak of the Civil War.

⁸ See van Beneden and de Poorter, *Royalist Refugees*.

⁹ *Méthode et invention nouvelle de dresser les chevaux*, Antwerp 1658 ; *A New Method, and Extraordinary Invention, to Dress Horses*, London 1667.

¹⁰ van Beneden and de Poorter, *Royalist Refugees*, p. 38.