

IMPERIAL MATERIALS: SITE AND CITATION IN LEONE AND POMPEO LEONI'S *CHARLES V AND FUROR*

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This essay will investigate how *Charles V and Furor* and the larger commission to which it belongs by the Milanese sculptors Leone Leoni (ca. 1509–1590) and his son Pompeo Leoni (ca. 1533–1608) functioned as material instantiations of the Hapsburg's imperial presence. These sculptures embodied the empire's geographic scope through their citations of imperial metallurgical industries and material cultures, positioned the Hapsburgs at the intersection of military might and artistic savvy through the adaptation of contemporary classicizing visual languages in bronze, and alluded to the legitimacy of the family's past, present, and future by continuing the visual strategies for maintaining their power enacted by previous Hapsburg generations. DOI: [10.18277/makf.2015.11](https://doi.org/10.18277/makf.2015.11)

In an undated letter addressed to Ferrante Gonzaga, Leone Leoni wrote to the Milanese governor with a proposal for an equestrian monument to Charles V to be placed in a public square in Milan.¹ After describing the characteristics and limitations of painting, the artist expanded on the virtues of sculpture. “Conversely sculpture can be seen and touched from all sides, knowing the surfaces and planes and curves, and said sculpture does not lessen with age, and even more so with sculptures made in metal.”² In order to convince the governor to advocate for such a prestigious commission, Leone stressed the efficacy of sculpture, and bronze in particular, to function as a lasting and indelible reminder of the emperor's presence and military successes within Milan's visual landscape. His contention that the medium is so much more effective in its eternal, material, and three-dimensional qualities compared to painting strengthens his argument, while also demonstrating his participation in the burgeoning *paragone* debates.³ Leone positioned bronze sculpture as the ideal medium with which to communicate the qualities of permanence, legacy, and memory. These sculptural effects dovetailed with the visual strategies established by Charles V, which adapted the priorities of earlier Hapsburg generations to highlight the family's military acumen and dynastic lineage. Since the Hapsburgs had to carefully negotiate their own ambitions with the Imperial Diet, they emphasized through their artistic patronage the permanence and simultaneous presence of various generations of rulers and the family and the empire's military strength to assert continued imperial legitimacy and fortitude.⁴

While the equestrian commission so fervently pursued by Leone never came to fruition, it led to commissions for eleven sculpted portraits, currently in the Museo del Prado, through which the Leoni were able to negotiate complex imperial and artistic networks.⁵ It was in 1549, after an invitation to Charles's court in Brussels, that the father, with his son, received the commission to carve and cast portraits of the then-current generations of Hapsburg royalty.⁶ These portraits would go on to accrue an astounding itinerary. The Leoni returned to Milan to execute the sculptures, and after six years of labor they transported the still unfinished portraits from Milan to Brussels.⁷ Pompeo then accompanied the sculptures on the last leg of their journey to Madrid, where he established his own workshop and finished the eleven sculptures over the next several years, with the aid of Spanish craftsmen and sculptors.

Adhering to the Hapsburgs' wishes and displaying the sculptural qualities promised in his earlier letter, the portraits, none more so than *Charles V and Furor* (fig. 1), made by both Leone and Pompeo, communicate a sense of the diverse dominions and riches of their empire, the character of the familial dynasty that led to its breadth, and the military campaigns that maintained and expanded those borders. This paper will study ways in which the sculptural output of the Leoni workshops furthered Hapsburg identities and ambitions throughout sixteenth-century Europe. The multiple sites of production, wide circulation, and varied forms of *Charles V and Furor* functioned as material

instantiations of the family's imperial presence. The sculpture group embodied the empire's geographic scope through its citations of imperial metallurgical industries and material cultures, positioned the Hapsburgs at the intersection of military might and artistic savvy through the adaptation of contemporary classicizing visual languages in bronze, and alluded to the legitimacy of the family's past, present, and future by continuing visual strategies for maintaining their power enacted by previous Hapsburg generations.



Figure 1. Leone and Pompeo Leoni, *Charles V and Furor*, ca. 1550–64, bronze, 251 x 143 x 130 cm, 825 kg. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado, inv. no. E00273 (artwork in the public domain; photo: © Museo Nacional del Prado / Art Resource, NY)

As objects that carry traces of their collaborative production, the eleven Prado portraits reflect the changing political and artistic relationships between the various regions of the Hapsburg empire. The Hapsburgs consolidated their European domains throughout the sixteenth century, battling against France for Italian territories in the south and against Protestant forces for spiritual righteousness farther north. The sculptures traversed the better part of their western European holdings, circulating between Milan, Brussels, and Madrid. Since the eleven sculptures arrived in Madrid in 1556 still unfinished, the portraits' production relied on partnerships between Italian and Spanish workshops and artists. In the case of the bronze standing portrait of Empress Isabel (fig. 2), Charles V's wife and Philip's mother, Pompeo employed two Spanish silversmiths, Felipe Jusarte and Micael Méndez, to complete the details of the figure's dress in his workshop, including the brocade on the exposed underskirt and the hem that runs along the edge of the overskirt.⁸ Whether this was due to the Spanish-specific fashion featured in Isabel's dress (she is clothed in the style popular in the 1530s when she died), or to the overwhelming amount of work that remained to be done on the portraits, Pompeo's transplanted Italian workshop had to expand to employ craftspeople from both Italy and Spain. As such, the Prado portraits reflect the power of the Hapsburg court to attract artists from increasingly diverse regions of their imperial holdings.



Figure 2. Leone and Pompeo Leoni, *Empress Isabel*, ca. 1550–55, bronze, 177 x 84 x 93 cm, 388 kg. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado, inv. no. E00274 (artwork in the public domain; photo: © Museo Nacional del Prado / Art Resource, NY)

The commission also spoke to a specific type of cultural cross-pollination that was facilitated by the ever-widening avenues of exchange within the empire. In the case of the Leoni, their movements through Hapsburg lands reflected not just the family's ability to pluck the best and brightest from the farthest corners of their empire, but it also indicated certain ambitions behind their artistic patronage. The Hapsburgs had the money to patronize experts in the most contemporary visual languages (such as modernizing classical forms), the understanding to appropriate those languages for sculpted bodies of the imperial family, and the power to spread those visual modes to all aspects and regions of their artistic programming.

Among the eleven extant works at the Prado, the *Charles V and Furor* best exemplifies how these sculptures functioned as embodiments of Hapsburg imperial rule and the regional and cultural connections it allowed. Scholars have assessed the sculpture group in terms of the iconographic and formal resonances between the contemporary emperor and his classical Roman counterparts, Caesar Augustus in particular: Charles's stance and armor, the inscription around the base, which refers to the figure as "Emperor Caesar Charles V Augustus,"⁹ as well as the reference to Virgil's *Aeneid* in the choice of subject matter,¹⁰ collectively imbue the current Holy Roman Emperor and Catholic monarch with the political prestige and artistic currency of the peace-achieving Roman emperors of yore.¹¹

The work constructs a classicized yet still highly modern identity for Charles V. In addition to the textual and visual alignments with Augustus's and Virgil's enduring reputations that function to highlight peace's triumph over war, Leoni thematized the parallels between the sculpture's metallurgical mode of production and the metal weaponry that provided the military means by which Charles maintained a tenuous balance between peace and war. Charles stands on and over a figure of Furor, within Virgil's metaphor a personification of war and within the contemporary context a more pointed reference to battles against Protestant forces. Furor, in its contorted pose, holds a lit torch, whose fire threatens to set alight and melt the pile of weapons to which he is chained.¹² His bronze chains fall over the edge of the sculpture's base, and the space between the viewer and the forms is further punctured by Furor's constricted limbs and a mass of military wares, including arrows, an axe, a trumpet, a sword, a club, a shield, and a helmet, whose placement along the edge is made even more precarious by the force of Furor's foot. The sculpture communicates the emperor's victory over Furor and, by extension, the emperor's political and religious enemies. But as the weaponry is not yet melted or melting, Charles remains liminally poised between peace and battle. He stands ready to take up arms—some of which are decorated with the Hapsburg symbol of an eagle's head—should the need arise once again. The sculpture group foregrounds the paradoxical strategy of maintaining peace, or rather an uncontested rule, through the threat of easily mobilized violent suppression.

The sculpture signals Charles's actual, and not just represented, access to military industries. Leone conflated the bronze sculpture and the instruments of war through their shared production processes and sites: the bronze iterations of the various weapons were cast using metallurgical methods similar to those employed for the functional instruments they represent. The same is true of Charles's armor. In addition to its evocation of the emperor's classical aspirations, the armor encompasses the crucial interrelation between material, method, and site. Like the pile of weapons that remain at his disposal, the armor worn by the cast *Charles V* underscores the access to Milan's prolific military industries afforded him by his imperial control over Lombardy. Charles's literal access to Milan's foundries, armorers, and general metallurgical prowess is articulated in the sculpture's most distinctive trait—its removable armor (fig. 3).



Figure 3. Leone and Pompeo Leoni, *Charles V and Furor* (armor removed), ca. 1550–64, bronze, 251 x 143 x 130 cm. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado, inv. no. E00273 (artwork in the public domain; photo: © Museo Nacional del Prado / Art Resource, NY)

Milan's reputation for expert metalwork had been cultivated for decades, starting most famously in 1482 with Leonardo da Vinci's ambitious but uncompleted attempts to cast a colossal bronze equestrian monument to Duke Francesco Sforza. By the time Charles's military forces finally consolidated their hold over Lombardy in 1535, and Leone began his work at the imperial mint in 1542, the Milanese armor industry was on the rise.¹³ In his 1540 metallurgical treatise *De la Pirotechnia*, Vannoccio Biringuccio praised the larger territory of Milan for its high-quality steel and the "great quantity" of brass that was "worked and colored" in Milan.¹⁴ The positive perception of Milanese metals was aided greatly by the refined, intricate, and technically complex steel ceremonial armor produced by the famous Negrolì family, who worked for the political elite throughout Europe and produced a number of pieces for Charles V.¹⁵ In addition to the desirability of Milan's luxury armor industry, it was also a crucial provider of armor for Hapsburg forces in Spain.¹⁶ Sixteenth-century Italian armorers had turned away from using bronze,¹⁷ though the metallurgical prowess required to forge steel and to cast bronze were at the time considered closely related to one another under the general rubric of the "Fire Arts."¹⁸ The metalworking processes used in forges and foundries were perceived as related at theoretical and practical levels vis-à-vis the crucial role fire played in both methods and across a diverse range of materials and objects. It was against this backdrop that Leone designed and cast *Charles V and Furor* with its armor, embodying the sculptor's artistic ingenuity and reputation within Milan's metallurgical traditions and asserting the emperor's desired message of his political reach, military might, and cultural savvy.

While *Charles V and Furor* exhibits the emperor's personal achievements and goals, the larger commission for eleven or more other works continued a rich history of sculpted portraiture within the Hapsburg visual tradition. A greater understanding of the Prado portraits can be gained by considering the Hapsburgs' long-standing patronage of large-scale portrait statues. In their genre, format, and materials, the Leoni's sculptures served as visual indicators of the continuity between Hapsburg rulers, past, present, and future. Although the exact relationships between specific portraits within the larger Brussels commission remain unknown, the sculptures memorialize still-living family members in similar formats and materials (e.g., standing life-size bronzes) and in so doing draw connections between the generations and imperial sites and holdings. For example, Prince Philip's title as king of England, a status achieved through his marriage to Mary Tudor, is proclaimed on the base of the standing bronze statue of Philip (fig. 4), thereby linking the empire's expanding claims to the other legitimate rulers and landholders of the family.



Figure 4. Leone and Pompeo Leoni. *Philip II*, ca. 1551–55, bronze, 171 x 72 x 46 cm, 321 kg. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado, inv. no. E00272 (artwork in the public domain; photo: © Museo Nacional del Prado / Art Resource, NY)

Sculptural assertions as to the continuity between ruling generations and interfamilial support had an early precedent in the council chamber in the Palace of Liberty in Bruges, which features an ornate oak chimneypiece with a large central portrait of Charles V (fig. 5).¹⁹ To his left stand reliefs of his maternal grandparents, Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, whose marriage unified the lands that became Charles's Spanish kingdom. To his right are life-size representations of his paternal grandparents, Mary, Duchess of Burgundy, and her husband, Maximilian I, the rulers who passed down the Low Countries and the Holy Roman Empire to the young Charles. These disparate lands, presided over by the individuals depicted, were joined through the marriages of these couples and ultimately unified in the person of Charles. Unlike the Leoni sculptures, the Bruges chimneypiece reasserts the presence of generations since deceased, a tactic employed to fantastic effect in a monument erected to Maximilian I in Innsbruck, Austria (fig. 6).²⁰ Attended by twenty-four life-size bronze portraits of Hapsburg ancestors, his impressive cenotaph set the standard for future Hapsburg sculpted portraits. The statues effectively blur fact and fiction, the visual display underscoring the family's putative unbroken lineage and, by extension, their political legitimacy. Owing to complications behind the inheritances of titles and lands, the rightfulness of Maximilian's rule was frequently contested. The ensemble of sculptural representations was thus able to achieve a fictive impression of consolidated power that was impossible in Maximilian's political reality. The sculptures moreover fossilized this imperial message in the bronze bodies that stand perpetually in adoration and support of the emperor and his rule.



Figure 5. Guyot de Beaugrant (sculptor) and Lancelot Blondeel (design), *Chimneypiece with Statuettes of Hapsburg Rulers*, ca. 1528–31, oak. Bruges, Brugse Vrije (Palace of Liberty) (artwork in the public domain; photo: © Lukas - Art in Flanders VZW, photo Hugo Maertens)



Figure 6. Gilg Sesselschreiber, Stefan Godl, and Leonard Magt, *Monument to Maximilian I*, ca. 1502–84, various media and dimensions. Innsbruck, Austria, Hofkirche (artwork in the public domain; Photo: © Alexander Haiden)

Charles's decision to preserve this tradition of life-size portraiture in bronze within the 1549 Brussels commission goes far beyond the aping of an earlier patron's choices. The visual evocation of his political predecessor unquestionably affected the interpretation of the large-scale portraits; the Leoni, however, managed to enhance this association with imperial connections particular to Charles. It was under Charles that Lombardy and its formidable militaristic and metallurgical industries came under the Holy Roman Empire's dominion, and it was Charles who persistently waged wars in defense of the Catholic faith, as indicated in *Charles V and Furor*, and the inclusion of the Order of the Golden Fleece in the portraits of Charles and Philip. The sculptures were cast and carved in arguably the two most enduring and exclusive artistic materials. The works' travels exposed the ambitious project to diverse court audiences throughout major Western European imperial centers. By depicting the members of the family in similar sizes and materials, the Prado portraits conflate the individual personalities of the sitters into a series of figures that are both of the present and lasting, while also mobilizing precisely those attributes that distinguish the contemporary generations from their predecessors. The Leoni's work for the Hapsburgs made the most of the cultural contingency of materials, capitalizing on Milan's material cultural reputation, while also involving workshops and craftspeople from throughout the empire. For decades, large-scale sculpture, particularly in bronze, married the subjects of such portraits to geographically distant imperial sites and temporally removed imperial ancestors, thereby rendering the immaterially remote materially present.

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The impact on me of Alison Kettering's mentorship reaches far beyond the confines of this essay offered in commemoration of her pedagogy at Carleton College. It is no coincidence that the present study's geographic scope, and the direction of the larger dissertation project from which it has been plucked, mirrors Alison's teaching so closely, having been implicitly shaped by her courses on early modern Spain, Italy, and the Low Countries. My thanks are also owed to Dawn Odell and the anonymous reader for their incisive suggestions and to the University of Michigan's Jean Monnet Fellowship for supporting primary research undertaken in preparation for this essay. But most of all, thank you, Alison for helping me to balance my curiosity with the discipline and direction that has stood me in good stead for so many years.

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1. Leone and Pompeo Leoni, *Charles V and Furor*, ca. 1550–64, bronze, 251 x 143 x 130 cm, 825 kg. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado, inv. no. E00273 (artwork in the public domain; photo: © Museo Nacional del Prado / Art Resource, NY)

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¹ Although the letter is undated and located toward the end of the *cartela*, near a letter dated April 15, 1585, I agree with Amadio Ronchini's placement of the letter between late 1546 and early 1549, most likely during 1548.

² "Come per lo contrario la scoltura da tutte le bande si bede et si tocca le superficie e piane e tonde et detta scoltura non può venir meno per molte età, et tanto maggiormente, essendo le sculture fatte in metallo." Archivio di Stato di Parma, Epistolario Scelto 23, 18 (Leone Aretino) f. 32 (undated). The letter was first transcribed in Amadio Ronchini,

“Leone Leoni,” *Atti e Memorie delle R. R. deputazioni di Storia Patria, per le provincie Modenesi e Parmensi* 3 (1865): 24–25 (letter IV). This transcription was later translated into French by Eugène Plon, *Les Maitres italiens au service de la maison d’Autriche: Leone Leoni, sculpteur de Charles-Quint, et Pompeo Leoni, sculpteur de Philippe II* (Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit, 1887), 37–38.

³The *paragone* debates, which encouraged artists and theorists to discuss the relative virtues and vices of painting and sculpture, illuminate the contemporary rhetoric and terminology for the two art forms; they shared a common goal in elevating these crafts to the level of the other liberal arts. For a compendium of primary documents on the *paragone*, see Paola Barocchi, *Scritti d’arte del Cinquecento* (Milano: R. Ricciardi, 1971), 1:475–707.

⁴Although the Hapsburgs were an imperial dynasty, the family’s rulers nevertheless relied on the bureaucratic body of the Imperial Diet, composed of the various states within the empire.

⁵These sculptures are: the life-size bronze sculpture group *Charles V and Furor* (inv. no. E00273), three life-size bronze standing sculptures of Philip II (inv. no. E00272), Maria of Hungary (inv. no. E00263), and Empress Isabel (inv. no. E00274), two life-size marble standing sculptures of Charles V (inv. no. E00267) and Empress Isabel (inv. no. E00260), two marble reliefs of Charles V (inv. no. E00291) and Empress Isabel (inv. no. E00269), two marble busts of Charles V (inv. no. E00264) and Maria of Hungary (inv. no. E00262), and a bronze bust of Charles V (inv. no. E00271).

⁶While still at court on Sept. 8, 1549, Leone reported to Ferrante Gonzaga that Maria of Hungary wanted him to make ten standing figures in metal (“dieci statue pedestri in metallo,” Archivio di Stato di Parma-Epistolario Scelto 23, 18 f. 9), although it is not possible to reconstruct which of the extant works, if any, were considered part of such a series. The discrepancies between the documentation and extant sculptures render a total and coherent narrative of the commission extremely challenging; while it is not the purpose of this paper to parse out these historical tangles, it is worth noting that the specific backdrop of *Charles V and Furor*—who commissioned it, for what location, and for what purpose—is complex and difficult to bring into focus.

⁷Leone notified cultural minister Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle on August 14, 1555, of his travel plans and the reported the state of each sculpture. Real Biblioteca, Cartas italianas al Obispo de Arrás [1555] II/2271 f. 98-99. Also in Plon, *Les Maitres italiens*, 370 (letter 39).

⁸Archivo Histórico de Protocolos 384, CCXLIIr. The contract for the extra work on *Empress Isabel’s* dress has been quoted in Walter Cupperi, “Leo faciebat; ‘Leo et Pompeius facerunt’: Autorialità multipla e transculturalità nei ritratti leoniani del Prado,” in *Leone and Pompeo Leoni: Actas del Congreso Internacional*, ed. Stephan F. Schröder (Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2012), 84, n. 72.

⁹“CAESARIS VIR/TUTE DOMITUS FUROR.” The base is also signed: “1564 / LEO. P. POMP. F. ARET. F.”

¹⁰Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.293–96: “dirae ferro et compagibus artis / claudentur Belli portae; Furor impius intus/saeva sedens super arma et centum vinctus aënis / post tergum nodis fremet horridus ore cruento.” Translated as “Tight locks of iron / Will close War’s grim gates. Inside, godless Furor, / Drooling blood on a heap of brutal weapons, / Will roar against the chains that pinion him.” Translation from Sarah Ruden, trans., *The Aeneid of Virgil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 9.

¹¹See Michael Mezzatesta, “Imperial Themes in the Sculpture of Leone Leoni” (PhD diss., New York University, 1980), 1–69; the catalogue entry “Carlos V y el Furor” in *Los Leoni (1509–1608): Escultores del Renacimiento italiano al servicio de la corte de España* (Madrid: Museo del Prado, 1994), 102–9; and most recently Jennifer Liston, “The Performance of Empire: Leone Leoni’s Charles V Subduing Fury,” *Visual Resources* 28, no. 1 (March 2012): 24–42.

¹²Michael Cole, “Under the Sign of Vulcan,” in *Bronze: The Power of Life and Death* (Leeds: Henry Moore Institute, 2005), 44–47.

¹³Although the area remained contested, with skirmishes breaking out between Spanish and French forces after 1535, this year marked the beginning of otherwise uninterrupted control over the territory that lasted until the early

eighteenth century. See Antonio Álvarez-Ossorio Alvariño, “The State of Milan and Spanish Monarchy” in *Spain in Italy: Politics, Society, and Religion 1500–1700*, ed. Thomas Dandeleit and John Marino (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 106; and Cesare Mozzarelli, “Introduzione storica,” in *Grandezza e splendori della Lombardia spagnola, 1535- 1701*, ed. Claudio Nasso and Serena Parini (Milan: Skira, 2002), 25–27; and in the same volume Gianvittorio Signorotto, “Milano e la monarchia cattolica Spagnoli e lombardi al governo dello Stato,” 37–45.

¹⁴ Vanoccio Biringuccio, *De la Pirotechnia* (Venice, 1540), 1:19v–20r; also discussed in Cole, “Under the Sign of Vulcan,” 42.

¹⁵ Álvaro Soler del Campo, “Armors as Works of Art and the Image of Power,” in *The Art of Power: Royal Armor and Portraits from Imperial Spain* (Madrid: Sociedad Estatal para la Acción Cultural Exterior, 2009), 75–93; and Stuart W. Pyhrr and José-A. Godoy, eds., *Heroic Armor of the Italian Renaissance: Filippo Negroli and His Contemporaries* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998).

¹⁶ After a preliminary search, a number of documents at the Archivo General de Simancas confirm that Milan remained an attractive armor industry, as armor was shipped from Milan to Spain for decades. See Archivo General de Simancas, Consejo de Estado legajo 520 (f. 75), legajo 1330 (f. 117, 131, 132).

¹⁷ Alan Williams, *The Knight and the Blast Furnace: A History of the Metallurgy of Armour in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 203.

¹⁸ The ninth book of Biringuccio’s *De la Pirotechnia* signals a step away from the exceptional detail that characterizes the eight preceding books with its title “On the practice of further exercises in fire.” He proceeds to treat topics as varied as alchemy, blacksmithing, goldsmithing, and work in copper under the shared umbrella of the “operations and power of fire.” Biringuccio, *De la Pirotechnia*, 122v.

¹⁹ Gert von der Osten and Horst Vey, *Painting and Sculpture in Germany and the Netherlands: 1500 to 1600* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969), 240–41.

²⁰ For the long history of the commission as well as its genealogical importance, see Larry Silver, *Marketing Maximilian: The Visual Ideology of a Holy Roman Emperor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 63–76; and Osten and Vey, *Painting and Sculpture*, 43–46, 253–54.

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