Benvenuto Cellini

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth name</th>
<th>Benvenuto Cellini</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Born</td>
<td>3 November 1500 Florence, Republic of Florence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Died</td>
<td>13 February 1571 (aged 70) Florence, Grand Duchy of Tuscany</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Italian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Field</td>
<td>Goldsmith, sculptor, painter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Accademia delle Arti del Disegno</td>
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<tr>
<td>Movement</td>
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<td>Works</td>
<td>Cellini Salt Cellar (Saliera), 1543</td>
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Benvenuto Cellini (3 November 1500 – 13 February 1571) was an Italian goldsmith, sculptor, painter, soldier and musician, who also wrote a famous autobiography. He was one of the most important artists of Mannerism.

Biography

Youth

Benvenuto Cellini was born in Florence, Italy. His parents were Giovanni Cellini, and Maria Lisabetta Granacci. They were married for eighteen years before the birth of their first child. Benvenuto was the second child of the family. The son of a musician and builder of musical instruments, Cellini's first major brush with the law came as an early teenager: He was banished from his native Florence for his alleged role in a brawl. As a result, he received his early artistic training not only from the Florentine goldsmith Marcone [Antonio di Sandro], but also from Francesco Castoro, a goldsmith of Siena. After further visits to Bologna and Pisa, Cellini was allowed to return to Florence and continue his work there.

Giovanni initially wished Benvenuto to join him in instrument making, and endeavoured to thwart his inclination for metalwork. When he was fifteen, his father reluctantly agreed to apprentice him to a goldsmith, Antonio di Sandro, nicknamed Marcone. At the age of sixteen, Benvenuto had already attracted attention in Florence by taking part in an affray with youthful companions. He escaped punishment by fleeing for six months to Siena, where he worked for a goldsmith named Fracastoro (unrelated to the Veronese polymath). From Siena he moved to Bologna, where he became a more accomplished flute-player and made progress as a goldsmith. After a visit to Pisa and two periods of living in Florence (where he was visited by the sculptor Torrigiano), he moved to Rome, age nineteen.\[1\]
Work in Rome

His first works in Rome were a silver casket, silver candlesticks, and a vase for the bishop of Salamanca, which won him the approval of Pope Clement VII. Another celebrated work from Rome is the gold medallion of "Leda and the Swan" executed for the Gonfaloniere Gabbriello Cesarino, and which is now in the Vienna museum. He also took up the flute again, and was appointed one of the pope's court musicians.

In the attack upon Rome by Charles III, Duke of Bourbon, Cellini's bravery proved of signal service to the pontiff. According to his own accounts, he himself shot and injured Philibert of Châlon, prince of Orange. (Allegedly Cellini also killed Charles III, Duke of Bourbon during the Siege of Rome.) His bravery led to a reconciliation with the Florentine magistrates, and he soon returned to his hometown. Here he devoted himself to crafting medals, the most famous of which are "Hercules and the Nemean Lion", in gold repoussé work, and "Atlas supporting the Sphere", in chased gold, the latter eventually falling into the possession of Francis I of France.

From Florence he went to the court of the duke of Mantua, and then again to Florence. On returning to Rome, he was employed in the working of jewellery and in the execution of dies for private medals and for the papal mint. In 1529 his brother Cecchino killed a Corporal of the Roman Watch and in turn was wounded by an arquebusier, later dying of his wound. Soon afterward Benvenuto killed his brother's killer – an act of blood revenge but not justice as Cellini admits that his brother's killer had acted in self-defense. Cellini fled to Naples to shelter from the consequences of an affray with a notary, Ser Benedetto, whom he had wounded. Through the influence of several cardinals, Cellini obtained a pardon. He found favor with the new pope, Paul III, notwithstanding a fresh homicide during the interregnum three days after the death of Pope Clement VII in September 1534. The fourth victim was a rival goldsmith who was working under Cellini's employment; Pompeo of Milan. Cellini reported in his autobiography that he had fallen in love with Pompeo and admired watching his magnificent physique as he worked near the furnace melting iron and bronze, and that he bore the hope of his affections to soon be acknowledged and returned by Pompeo. When Cellini learned that Pompeo was absent from work that day as his wife's lover, he admitted to visiting the Villa where his separated wife lived and meeting Pompeo at the door, stabbed him on the threshold. His wife he immediately stabbed afterward inside of the home for her 'betrayal'. The killings, the fourth and fifth that Cellini boasts of in his memoirs, was reported in his autobiography as nothing more than a 'justifiable accident during a heated argument' rather than by premeditated malice. He was saved from arrest only because of a safe-conduct by the Pope.
Ferrara and France

The plots of Pierluigi Farnese led to Cellini’s retreat from Rome to Florence and Venice, where he was restored with greater honour than before. At the age of 37, upon returning from a visit to the French court, he was imprisoned on a charge (apparently false) of having embezzled during the war the gems of the pope’s tiara. He was confined in the Castel Sant’Angelo, escaped, was recaptured, and treated with great severity, and was in daily expectation of death on the scaffold. The intercession of Pierluigi’s wife, and especially that of the Cardinal d’Este of Ferrara, eventually secured Cellini’s release, in gratitude for which he gave d’Este a splendid cup.[6]

Cellini then worked at the court of Francis I at Fontainebleau and Paris. However, he considered the duchesse d’Étampes to be set against him and refused to conciliate with the king's favorites. He could no longer silence his enemies by the sword, as he had silenced those in Rome. As a result, after about five years of invested work but continual jealousy and violence, Cellini returned to Florence, where he continued as a goldsmith and became the rival of sculptor Baccio Bandinelli[7] who died a few years later in 1560.

Death in Florence

During the war with Siena, Cellini was appointed to strengthen the defences of his native city, and, though rather shabbily treated by his ducal patrons, he continued to gain the admiration of his fellow-citizens by the magnificent works which he produced. He was also named a member (Accademico) of the prestigious Accademia delle Arti del Disegno of Florence, founded by the Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici, at 13 January 1563, under the influence of the architect Giorgio Vasari. He died in Florence in 1571 and was buried with great pomp in the church of the Santissima Annunziata. He had supported in Florence a widowed sister and her six daughters.

Personal relationships

Cellini is known to have taken some of his female models as mistresses, having an illegitimate daughter in 1544 with one of them while living in France, whom he named Costanza.[8] After briefly attempting a clerical career, in 1562, he married a servant, Piera Parigi, with whom he claimed he had five children, of which only a son and two daughters survived him.

Outside his marriage, Cellini was officially charged or accused three times with homosexual sodomy and once of adultery.

- 14 January 1523 he was sentenced to pay 12 staia of flour for relations with a boy named Domenico di ser Giuliano da Ripa.[9]
- While in Paris, a former model and lover brought charges against him of using her “after the Italian fashion.”[9]
- In Florence in 1548, Cellini was accused by a woman named Margherita, for having certain familiarities with her son, Vincenzo.[10]
- 26 February 1556, his apprentice Fernando di Giovanni di Montepulciano accused his mentor of having sodomised him many times.[11] This time the penalty was a hefty fifty golden scudi fine, and four years of prison, remitted to four years of house arrest thanks to the intercession of the Medicis.[9]
Towards the end of his life during a public altercation before Duke Cosimo, Bandinelli had called out to him *Sta cheto, soddomitaccio!* (Shut up, you filthy sodomite!) Cellini qualified it an "atrocious insult."[12]

Artwork

Statues

Besides his works in gold and silver, Cellini executed sculptures of grander scale. The most distinguished of these is the bronze group of *Perseus with the Head of Medusa*, a work (first suggested by Duke Cosimo I de Medici) now in the Loggia dei Lanzi at Florence, his attempt to surpass Michelangelo’s David and Donatello’s Judith and Holofernes. The casting of this work caused Cellini much trouble and anxiety, but it was hailed as a masterpiece as soon as it was completed. The original relief from the foot of the pedestal—Perseus and Andromeda—is in the Bargello, and replaced by a cast.

By 1996, centuries of environmental pollution exposure had streaked and banded the statue. In December of that year it was removed from the Loggia and transferred to the Uffizi for cleaning and restoration. It was a slow, years-long process, and the restored statue was not returned to its home until June 2000.

Decorative art and portraiture

Among his art works, many of which have perished, were a colossal Mars for a fountain at Fontainebleau and the bronzes of the doorway, coins for the Papal and Florentine states, a life-sized silver Jupiter, and a bronze bust of Bindo Altoviti. The works of decorative art are florid in style.

In addition to the bronze statue of Perseus and the medallions already referred to, the works of art in existence today are a medallion of Clement VII commemorating the peace between the Christian princes, 1530, with a bust of the pope on the reverse and a figure of Peace setting fire to a heap of arms in front of the temple of Janus, signed with the artist’s name; a signed portrait medal of Francis; a medal of Cardinal Pietro Bembo; and the celebrated gold, enamel and ivory salt-cellar (known as *Saliera*) made for Francis I of France at Vienna.

This intricate 26-cm-high sculpture, of a value conservatively estimated at 58,000,000 schilling, was commissioned by Francis I. Its principal figures are a naked sea god and a woman sitting opposite each other with legs entwined, symbolically representing the planet Earth. "Saliera" was stolen from the Kunsthistorisches Museum on 11 May 2003 by a thief who climbed scaffolding and smashed windows to
enter the museum. The thief set off the alarms, but these were ignored as false, and the theft remained undiscovered until 8:20 AM. On 21 January 2006 the Saliera was recovered by the Austrian police and is supposed to be returned to the Kunsthistorisches Museum in the coming days. One of the most important works by Cellini from late in his career was a life-size nude crucifix carved from marble. Although originally intended to be placed over his tomb, this crucifix was sold to the Medici family who gave it to Spain. Today the crucifix is in the Escorial Monastery near Madrid, where it has usually been displayed in an altered form—the monastery added a loincloth and a crown of thorns. For detailed information about this work, see the text by Juan López Gajate in the Further Reading section of this article. Cellini, while employed at the papal mint at Rome during the papacy of Clement VII and later of Paul III, created the dies of several coins and medals, some of which still survive at this now defunct mint. He was also in the service of Alessandro de Medici, first duke of Florence, for whom he made in 1535 a forty-soldi piece with a bust of the duke on one side and standing figures of the saints Cosima and Damian on the other. Some connoisseurs attribute to his hand several plaques, "Jupiter crushing the Giants", "Fight between Perseus and Phineus", a Dog, etc. Other works such as the portrait bust shown are not directly attributed but are instead attributed to his workshop.

Lost works

The important works which have perished include the uncompleted chalice intended for Clement VII; a gold cover for a prayer-book as a gift from Pope Paul III to Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor – both described at length in his autobiography; large silver statues of Jupiter, Vulcan and Mars, wrought for Francis I during his sojourn in Paris; a bust of Julius Caesar; and a silver cup for the cardinal of Ferrara. The magnificent gold "button", or morse (a clasp for a cape), made by Cellini for the cape of Clement VII, the competition for which is so graphically described in his autobiography, appears to have been sacrificed by Pope Pius VI, with many other priceless specimens of the goldsmith's art, in furnishing the 30,000,000 francs demanded by Napoleon I at the conclusion of the campaign against the Papal States in 1797. According to the terms of the treaty, the pope was permitted to pay a third of that sum in plate and jewels. Fortunately there are in the print room of the British Museum three watercolour drawings of this splendid morse by F. Bertoli, done at the instance of an Englishman named Talman in the first half of the 18th century. The obverse and reverse, as well as the rim, are drawn full size, and moreover the morse with the precious stones set therein, including a diamond then considered the second largest in the world, is fully described. Benvenuto's works are mentioned as "priceless" in Mark Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper*. 
Benvenuto Cellini

Cellini in literature and music

Cellini’s autobiography and other writings

Cellini’s autobiographical memoirs, which he began writing in Florence in 1558, give a detailed account of his singular career, as well as his loves, hatreds, passions, and delights, written in an energetic, direct, and racy style. They show a great self-regard and self-assertion, sometimes running into extravagances which are impossible to credit. He even writes in a complacent way of how he contemplated his murders before carrying them out. He writes of his time in Paris:

"When certain decisions of the court were sent me by those lawyers, and I perceived that my cause had been unjustly lost, I had recourse for my defense to a great dagger I carried; for I have always taken pleasure in keeping fine weapons. The first man I attacked was a plaintiff who had sued me; and one evening I wounded him in the legs and arms so severely, taking care, however, not to kill him, that I deprived him of the use of both his legs. Then I sought out the other fellow who had brought the suit, and used him also such wise that he dropped it."

Parts of his tale recount some extraordinary events and phenomena; such as his stories of conjuring up a legion of devils in the Colosseum, after one of his not innumerous mistresses had been spirited away from him by her mother; of the marvelous halo of light which he found surrounding his head at dawn and twilight after his Roman imprisonment, and his supernatural visions and angelic protection during that adversity; and of his being poisoned on two separate occasions.

The autobiography has been translated into English by Thomas Roscoe, by John Addington Symonds, and by A. Macdonald. It has been considered and published as a classic, and commonly regarded as one of the most colourful autobiographies (certainly the most important autobiography from the Renaissance). Cellini also wrote treatises on the goldsmith's art, on sculpture, and on design.

Cellini in the works of others

- The life of Cellini also inspired the French historical novelist Alexandre Dumas, père. His Ascanio is based on Cellini’s years in France, centered on Ascanio, an apprentice of Cellini. Dumas’ trademark plot twists and intrigues feature in the novel, in this case involving Cellini, the duchesse d'Étampes, and other members of the court. Cellini is portrayed as a passionate and troubled man, plagued by the inconsistencies of life under the "patronage" of a false and somewhat cynical court.
- Cellini was also the subject of an eponymous opera by Hector Berlioz and a Broadway musical, The Firebrand of Florence, by Ira Gershwin and Kurt Weill.
- Cellini’s life is an occasional point of reference in the writing of Mark Twain. Cellini’s autobiography is one of the books Tom Sawyer mentions as inspiration while freeing Jim in the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. His work is mentioned in The Prince and the Pauper in Chapter VII: "Its furniture was all of massy gold, and beautified with designs which well-nigh made it priceless, since they were the work of Benvenuto." In "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court", chapter XVII, Cellini is alluded to as the epitome of brutal, immoral, and yet deeply religious aristocracy.
- In "Rappaccini's Daughter" by Nathaniel Hawthorne, an antidote to poison is presented in a vase "wrought by the hands of Benvenuto Cellini."
- Herman Melville compares his character Ahab, at the captain’s first appearance, to a sculpture by Cellini. From Moby-Dick chap. 28; "His whole high, broad form, seemed made of solid bronze, and shaped in an unalterable mould, like Cellini's cast Perseus."
- Judy Abbott mentions Benvenuto Cellini’s autobiography in Jean Webster's schoolgirl romance novel Daddy-Long-Legs.
• In *Les Misérables*, Marius' chapter contains the line "There are Benvenuto Cellinis in the galleys, even as there are Villons in language."[15]

• In *The Labours of Hercules*, writer Agatha Christie uses a fictional goblet created by Benvenuto Cellini as the starting point for the short story entitled The Apples of the Hesperides.

• Surrealist artist, Salvador Dalí was also highly influenced by the life of Cellini, centering many etchings and sketches around his story and passions.

• The American poet Frank Bidart studies Cellini in "The Third Hour of the Night", a long poem from his book *Star Dust*.

• Lois McMaster Bujold loosely bases the character Prospero Beneforte in her fantasy novel *The Spirit Ring* on Cellini and his works.[16]

• In *The Girl from Missouri* (1934), Jean Harlow's character Eadie is offered a gift of an "authentic Cellini" sculpture by wealthy industrialist Frank Cousins (played by Lewis Stone).

• In *How to Steal a Million* (1966), Audrey Hepburn and Peter O'Toole conspire to steal a fake Cellini sculpture in order to prevent it from being authenticated.

**Popular culture references**

• Benvenuto Cellini was the subject of a $500,000 question on Australia's *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*. In 2000, celebrity contestant Red Symons was asked which of the following Cellini was famous for: painting, architecture, music or sculpture. Symons chose architecture, rather than sculpture (the correct answer), and thereby lost $218,000 in possible winnings.

**Notes**

[1] Cellini, *Vita*, Book 1, Ch XIII
[2] Cellini, *Vita*, Book 1, Ch XXXVIII
[3] Cellini, *Vita*, Book 1, Ch XXXIX
[4] Cellini, *Vita*, Book 1, Ch LI
[5] Cellini, *Vita*, Book 1, Ch LXXXIV
[7] Cellini, *Vita*, Book 2, Ch III
[8] Cellini, *Vita*, Book 2, Ch XXXVII
[10] L. Greci, 'Benventuto Cellini nei delitti e nei processi fiorentini' Archivio di anthroplogia criminale, 50 (1930)
[11] "Cinque anni ha tenuto per suo ragazzo Fernando di Giovanni di Montepulciano, giovanetto con el quale ha usato carnalmente moltissime volte col nefando vitio della soddomia, tenendolo in letto come sua moglie" (For five years he kept as his boy Fernando di Giovanni di Montepulciano, a youth whom he used carnally in the abject vice of sodomy numerous instances, keeping him in his bed as a wife.)
[12] *Vita*, Book II, Chapter LXXI
References

- This article incorporates text from a publication now in the public domain: Chisholm, Hugh, ed (1911). Encyclopædia Britannica (Eleventh ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Further reading


External links

- Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini, Symonds translation (http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/4028) at Project Gutenberg
- More images of the restored Perseus
- Reverse angle (400k) from Pbase (http://www.pbase.com/yolyn/image/33903662/original)
- Works by Benvenuto Cellini (http://www.gutenberg.org/author/ Benvenuto+Cellini) at Project Gutenberg
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