

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Baldassare de Blasio

(documented in Naples from 1750 - 1764)

Model by Giuseppe Picano

(Sant'Elia Fiumerapido 1716 - 1810)

*Saint Joseph with the Child;
Saint Vincent Ferrer*

silver and gilded bronze

each 36 x 24.5 x 18 cm.;

each 14 1/8 x 9 5/8 x 7 1/8 in.

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These two notable silver busts, based on classic reliquary models, are reminiscent of the exceptional ones of the protective saints in the San Gennaro chapel of the Duomo in Naples, and seem to be precisely datable to the year 1750 or 1756. Underneath both busts, in fact, we find the *punzoni* of the goldsmiths who licensed the pieces. The consular one is recognizable also by comparison with the one on the back of one of our busts, in a position that granted it perfect conservation: the monogram is *BDBC*, representing Baldassare de Blasio (the 'C' stood for consul). The stamps of the goldsmith who physically produced the busts are no longer readable.

The De Blasios were the most famous goldsmiths of the eighteenth century in Naples: in addition to Baldassare, Andrea, Domenico, Gennaro and Nicola were also elected consuls of the corporation on multiple occasions: in 1714, 1720, 1723; in 1725, 1728, 1733, 1735; in 1740, 1741, 1747; in 1750, 1752, 1756, 1776, respectively. We are not aware of a stamp used by Baldassare as a goldsmith as opposed to as a consul, but we can be sure that, like his relatives, he must have had one.

The design for the *Saint Joseph with the Child* is taken from a wooden sculpture signed by Giuseppe Picano (*JOSEPH PICANO S.*), now located in the Church of Saint Agostino della Zecca in Naples. His invention must have been popular, as demonstrated not only by the version in Sant'Agostino, but also by the existence of a terracotta replica which recently appeared on the market. Giuseppe, the son of Francesco Picano who must have introduced him to the technique of carving wood (Francesco is documented as sculptor in 1737 and 1740), is often referred to across documents and signed artworks as a "*Scultore di legno*". He was active in Naples, but served the whole kingdom; in December of 1782, for instance, he received a commission for the *Immacolata Concezione* for the Chiesa Madre in San Giovanni Battista Decollato in Bivogno, Calabria, where it still stands. Additionally, in 1781, Picano received payments for "all the marble and plaster sculptures and their models" for the major altar in the Annunziata Church in Naples.

The identification of the Saint represented in the second bust is not problematic owing to the writing in the open book, associated with Saint Vincent Ferrer, whose cult in Naples started

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strengthening from the cholera epidemic of 1837 onwards; after that he was proclaimed protector of the city, as evidenced by one of his busts being located in the San Gennaro chapel. The quality of modeling and the beautiful drapery, as can be seen primarily in the Saint Joseph, remind us of the most famous examples of Neapolitan silverware of the eighteenth century, such as the San Rocco by Nicola de Blasio dated 1751 (Guardia Sanframondi, Museo). It is possible that both models were made by Picano and that he realized them right before modelling the signed and dated *Saint Agostino alla Zecca*, which reflects the artworks presented here.