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A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF ART

Volume II

Michelangelo and
the Mannerists
The Baroque and
the Eighteenth Century

Selected and Edited by
ELIZABETH GILMORE HOLT

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FRANCE

PAUL DE FRÉART, SIEUR DE CHANTELOU

[Paul de Fréart, Sieur de Chantelou (1609-1694), was the youngest of the three Fréart brothers prominent in the intellectual and court life of France in the seventeenth century. He was a well-known connoisseur of art and possessed an excellent collection of paintings. Accompanying his cousin, Sublet des Noyers, Superintendent of Buildings (see p. 147, note 14), he spent three years in Rome (1640-1643) where he met Poussin and Bernini. The letters written him by Poussin (see below) are a testimony to their friendship. As *Maître d'Hôtel* for Louis XIV, Chantelou was chosen by the King to meet Bernini when he came to France and accompany him during his stay. Some years later, at the request of his brother, Jean de Fréart (1604-1674), he wrote from his notes, in the familiar, current style of the court, the diary of Bernini's journey in France.]

The Sieur de Chantelou is sometimes confused with his brother, Rolland de Fréart, Sieur de Chambray (1606-1676), a writer and connoisseur of art. He published notes from Leonardo's writings and was also a friend of Poussin.]

DIARY OF CAVALIER BERNINI'S JOURNEY
IN FRANCE¹

June 6th [1665]. On the sixth, while the tables were being made and other things necessary for drawing were

¹ The excerpts are translated from *Journal du voyage du Cavalier Bernin en France*, Paris, 1930. The text was first published by L. Lalanne, "Journal du voyage du Cavalier Bernin en France," *Gazette des beaux-arts*, xv-xxxi, 1877-1885.

See also: Henri Chardon, *Les Frères Fréart de Chantelou*, Le Mans, 1867; L. Mirot, "Le Bernin en France," *Mémoires de la société de l'histoire de Paris et de l'île-de-France*, xxxi, 1904, pp. 161 ff.

being prepared, the time was passed in conversation. As the Cavalier Bernini is a man with a famous name and a great reputation, I, in agreement with you, my very dear brother, have deemed it a useful thing for our common study and for our amusement to preserve some record of what I have heard said by him. You who have never seen him will perhaps be glad if I make a rough draft, or as the Italian painters say, a *schizzo*, of him and his character.

So I will tell you that the Cavalier is a man of short stature but well-proportioned, thin rather than fat, and of a fiery temperament. His face resembles an eagle's, especially the eyes. He has very long eyebrows and a large forehead that is a little caved in toward the middle and rises gently from the eyes. He is bald, and what hair he has is curly and white. By his own admission, he is sixty-five. Nevertheless, he is vigorous for that age, and walks firmly as though he were only thirty or forty. One might say that his mind is one of the most perfect nature has ever formed, for, without having studied, he has almost all the gifts which the sciences give a man. Besides, he has a fine memory, a lively and quick imagination, and his judgment seems clear and sound.

His enunciation is very beautiful and he has a special talent for explaining things with words, expressions, and gestures, and for making them vivid as well as the greatest painters have been able to do with their brushes. No doubt this is why he has succeeded so well with the comedies he has written. They have won, it is said, universal approval, and they caused a great stir in Rome because of the decorations and the astonishing contraptions he introduced, which deceived even those who had been forewarned. On every occasion Bernini likes to quote Pope Urban VIII, who loved and cherished him from his early youth. One of the first things I remember his telling me is that the Pope, at that time only a cardinal, was once at the house of Bernini's father, who was also a sculptor. After seeing a work that the Cavalier had finished at the age of eight, Cardinal Barberini (for so Urban VIII was then called) laughingly said to Bernini's father: "Signor Bernini, take care! That child will surpass you and doubtless will be more skillful

than his master." He said that his father replied brusquely, "Your Eminence knows that in this game, he who loses wins."

Speaking of sculpture and of the difficulty of achieving success, especially in obtaining a resemblance in marble portraits, he told me one remarkable thing, and this he has since repeated on all occasions: that if some one whitened his hair, beard, eyebrows, and, if it were possible, the pupils of his eyes and his lips, and in that state showed himself to those who are wont to see him every day, they would scarcely recognize him. In order to prove this he added: when a person faints, the pallor alone which spreads over his face makes him almost unrecognizable, and it is often said "He no longer seems himself." It is equally difficult to achieve a likeness in a marble portrait, which is all of one color. He said another thing even more extraordinary: sometimes in order to imitate the model well it is necessary to introduce in a marble portrait something that is not found in the model. This seems to be a paradox, but he explained it thus: in order to represent the darkness that some people have around the eye, it is necessary to deepen the marble in the place where it is dark in order to represent the effect of that color and thus make up by skill, so to speak, the imperfection of the art of sculpture, which is unable to give color to objects. However, he said, the model is not the same as the imitation. Afterwards, he added a rule which, according to him, should be followed in sculpture, but of which I am not as convinced as of the preceding ones. He said: a sculptor creates a figure with one hand held high and the other hand placed on the chest. Practice teaches that the hand in the air must be larger and fuller than the one resting on the chest. This is because the air surrounding the first alters and consumes something of the form or, to express it better, something of the quantity of the form. I myself believe that this diminution would take place in nature itself; therefore it is not necessary to represent in the figure what is not in nature. I did not tell him so and since then I have thought that the ancients followed a rule of making the columns which they placed at the corners of the temples one-

sixteenth larger than the others, because, as Vitruvius says, being surrounded by a large quantity of air, which consumes their quantity, they would have appeared less large than their neighbors, even though they were not so in reality.

Then, speaking of painting as compared to sculpture, each having its partisans who have disputed at length in recent centuries, as much as in the time of the Greeks, the question to which of the two arts must be given precedence and the place of honor, the Cavalier endeavored to show by well-contrived arguments that painting is much easier and that a great deal more effort is required to attain perfection in sculpture. In order better to prove his proposition, he offered an example: "The King wants a beautiful work of sculpture, and discusses it with a sculptor to whom he allows the liberty of choosing the subject after his taste. For the task, His Majesty gives the sculptor one, two or three years, in short as much time as he may desire to perfect his work. The King makes the same proposition to a painter for a work of painting and allows the painter the same freedom of time and of subject. If the painter is asked, when the time has expired and his work is finished, whether he has put all the perfection of art of which he was capable into his work, he can freely answer in the affirmative since he has been able to put into his painting what he knew when he began the work, but also to add what he acquired in studying his subject during the entire time he had for the execution, whether six months, a year, or longer. The same is not true of the sculptor, the Cavalier said, for when his work is completed and he, too, is asked if it represents the best he could do, he might answer negatively, and be right, that it only represents what he knew when he began the work and that what he has learned since he could not add to this work, for he could neither change the pose he had decided to choose at the beginning nor correct it in accord with the progress he was making through study in his profession.

Afterwards he went from his room, where we were, onto his gallery. There he told me that he has a gallery almost exactly like this one in his house at Rome and that it is

there that he creates most of his compositions as he walks around; that he notes on the wall with charcoal the ideas as they come to him; that it is usual for agile and imaginative minds to pile up thought upon thought on a subject. When a thought comes to them, they draw it; a second comes, and they note it also; then a third and a fourth; without discarding or perfecting any, they are always attached to the last idea by the special love one has for novelty. What must be done to correct this fault is to let these different ideas rest without looking at them for one or two months. After that time one is in a condition to choose the best one. If by chance the work is urgent and the person for whom one works does not allow so much time, it is necessary to have recourse to those glasses that change the color of objects or those that make objects seem larger or smaller, and to look at them [the sketches] upside down, and finally to seek through these changes in color, size, and position to correct the illusion caused by the love for novelty, which almost always prevents one from being able to choose the best idea.

August 19th. On the nineteenth, having come to the house of the Cavalier, I learned that M. Colbert had just left; that he had brought back the plans of the Louvre and had left a memorandum of the things necessary in the apartments for the convenience of the King, the two queens, the Dauphin, and the officers of their retinue; and others in charge of the kitchens, provisions, glasses, the five pantries, the offices and rooms for the tables of the Grand Maître, chamberlain, maîtres, etc.; also of the things necessary for the construction of a water reservoir from which water could be pumped in case of fire, and of room for storing the implements necessary in case of such an accident; a plan for the banquet and ball-rooms, and for the adaptation of the theater room; for a large armory in the Louvre. . . .

At noon M. Villeroy² came to see the bust (our *fig. 5*) in the southern apartment and served as an advance courier for the King, who came subsequently with a great

² Marshal of France: Nicolas de Villeroy (1598-1685).

crowd. The Cavalier had begun to give form to the nose, which was as yet only blocked in. M. de Crequi came forward to whisper in the King's ear. The Cavalier said laughingly, "These gentlemen have the King with them at their pleasure all day and they do not wish to leave him to me even a half-hour; I am tempted to do a caricature portrait of one of them." No one understood the remark. I said to the King that those were portraits in which the resemblance was in the ugly and the ridiculous. Monsignor Butti took up the conversation and remarked that the Cavalier was excellent at that sort of portraiture and that one should be shown to His Majesty. As a portrait of a woman was mentioned, the Cavalier said, "One must make a caricature of women only at night." M. de Prince, who was there, affirmed that under the hand of the Cavalier the resemblance of the bust to the King increased from one time to the next. The Marshal de Villeroy agreed. After three quarters of an hour, His Majesty left, saying to the Cavalier that he would not come back the next day but that on the following Thursday he would sit for him two or three hours. As he left the room, Madame de la Baume approached the King, who stationed himself near a window and gave her an audience of a good quarter of an hour. Then M. Colbert gave her a long audience too, after which he came to see the bust and remained in the room for some time. I told him that I had taken the Cavalier to Vincennes and that he was pleased by it, that he had said that the King was nowhere so well lodged and that he had thought the woodcarving, the gilding and the pictures very beautiful.

After Colbert had gone, the Cavalier said it would be enough for the King to come twice more; however, if His Majesty wished to come more often, the bust would not only resemble him but would be a speaking image of him. I forgot to say that Varin was there the entire time the Cavalier was working. Every one questioned Varin about the bust. He said to me that he believed the Cavalier had removed too much from the forehead and that it was impossible to replace marble. I assured him that this was not so and that the Cavalier's intention was to make the part