



PRESS RELEASE

from

THE FRICK COLLECTION

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ANTICO'S RARE RENAISSANCE SCULPTURE ON VIEW AT THE FRICK COLLECTION IN FIRST EXHIBITION OF HIS WORK IN UNITED STATES

May 1 through July 29, 2012



Pier Jacopo Alari Bonacolsi, called Antico (c. 1455–1528), *Apollo Belvedere* (detail), c. 1490, bronze with gilding and silvering, 16 ¼ inches, Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung, Frankfurt am Main; photo: Artothek

Pier Jacopo Alari Bonacolsi, known as Antico (c. 1455–1528) was a transformative sculptor who brought the classical world to life. His contributions are celebrated in *Antico: The Golden Age of Renaissance Bronzes*, the first monographic exhibition in the United States devoted to the Italian sculptor and goldsmith. The acclaimed exhibition opens at The Frick Collection May 1, 2012, after its successful run this past winter at the National Gallery of Art, Washington. It will present forty-six objects, thirty-seven by Antico, comprising almost three-quarters of the master's rare surviving oeuvre. They span Antico's activity and represent the genres in which he worked: medals, statuettes, life-size busts, and reliefs. *Antico: The Golden Age of Renaissance Bronzes* was organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, in association with The Frick Collection, New York. The exhibition is organized by Eleonora Luciano, associate curator of sculpture, National Gallery of Art, in collaboration with Denise Allen, curator, The Frick Collection, New York, and Claudia Kryza-Gersch, Curator of the

Kunstammer, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. The exhibition in New York is made possible, in part, by The Christian Humann Foundation, Mr. and Mrs. Jeremiah M. Bogert, Mr. and Mrs. J. Tomilson Hill III, The Peter Jay Sharp Foundation, the Robert H. Smith Family Foundation, the Thaw Charitable Trust, and the Samuel H. Kress Foundation. It will be accompanied by a range of public programs, and the only available monograph in English on the artist.

Comments co-curator Denise Allen, “Following the critical acclaim of the 2008 exhibition *Andrea Riccio: Renaissance Master of Bronze*, we were delighted to join the National Gallery of Art and the Kunsthistorisches Museum in studying another remarkable Northern Italian artist whose oeuvre deserved better recognition in America. As with Riccio, Antico is represented in the Frick’s holdings, and we have come to appreciate our work better by placing it in the context of these loans from major public and private collections worldwide.” Among them are the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Musée du Louvre, Paris; the Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

ANTICO, “THE ANTIQUE ONE” REIMAGINES AND CREATES A CANON

In 1489 workers digging in Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere’s Roman vineyard unearthed an ancient statue of Apollo. Little more than its right forearm and left hand were missing; the god seemed miraculously preserved. The cardinal had the Apollo placed in the sculpture garden of his Roman palace, where artists studied it during the 1490s. After his election to the papacy, Giuliano, now Pope Julius II, prominently displayed it with other examples of his magnificent antique sculptures in the Belvedere Courtyard of the Vatican. Today, the *Apollo Belvedere* is among a handful of classical works that have been esteemed as paradigms of artistic perfection from the Renaissance through the Neoclassical period. At the time of its discovery, however, the *Apollo* was not yet a cornerstone of a well-known classical canon, but rather a marvelous discovery that spoke to the achievements of antiquity.

The first Renaissance artist to interpret the *Apollo Belvedere* was the Mantuan goldsmith-sculptor Pier Jacopo Alari de’ Bonacolsi (c. 1460–1528). Within six years of the statue’s unearthing, he masterfully re-created it as an exquisite bronze statuette, capturing the likeness of the marble god with archeological precision. His bronze figure (see page 1) included an imaginative restoration of the missing limbs that returned the ancient composition to its perfect state. The monumental marble’s translation into a small-scale bronze, embellished with silvered eyes and partial gilding, transformed the *Apollo* into a precious object. On the quiver strap across the god’s chest, Pier Jacopo inscribed an abbreviation of his nickname Antico, meaning “the antique one.” The name announced Antico’s identity as a master who recaptured the grandeur of the ancient past in sculptures of great beauty.

GONZAGA PATRONAGE BEGINS: GIANFRANCESCO, LUDOVICO

Little is known about Antico’s training, but an early inventory lists silver vases “signed by the hand of Antico,” suggesting that he probably began his career as a goldsmith. He spent his life working as sculptor to the Gonzaga family, who ruled Mantua, a small independent principality in northern Italy. The Gonzaga promoted a culture of splendid display that brought the glories of classical Rome to their courts. Although they did not have access to singular, large-scale ancient marbles—such as the *Apollo*



Pier Jacopo Alari Bonacolsi, called Antico (c. 1455–1528), *Gianfrancesco Gonzaga di Ròdigo*, c. 1486–1490, bronze, 1 5/8 inches, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection; photo: Lee Ewing

Belvedere—they vigorously acquired small-scale antiquities, among them as cameos, engraved gems, and bronze statuettes. Antico’s first patron, Gianfrancesco Gonzaga di Ròdigo, was a renowned collector of Roman coins. His death inventory of 1496 records an astonishing group of 2,095 in gold, silver, and bronze. Ancient coins inspired the Renaissance art form of the portrait medal, and of all fifteenth-century examples, Antico’s most resemble Roman coins in format and symbolic language. His medal of Gianfrancesco (previous page) is exactly the same size as an imperial sestertius, and he shows the lord draped like an emperor. On the reverse, the gods Mars and Minerva flank a personification of Fortune, and all three stand on a flat platform, called an *exergue*, which is typically found on Roman coins. Yet other elements, like Gianfrancesco’s hairstyle, are contemporary, and the figures on the reverse are larger and more voluptuously rendered than their classical prototypes. Antico’s command of numismatic conventions endows the medal with ancient authenticity, convincingly transformed into a modern idiom. By including his signature (ANTI) beneath the *exergue*, Antico provokes the comparison between past and

present. He poses a question: If this medal was made by “the antique one,” does it not also equal the antique? The shared antiquarian interests of Antico and his Gonzaga patrons encouraged him to create novel works in a classical mode. He based the composition of the *Hercules and the Lernaean Hydra*, at left, on the reverse of an ancient coin. But he used the relief’s large scale—about a foot in diameter—to bring into vivid focus forms that could only be inferred on a tiny coin. Even from a distance, Hercules’s pitched battle against the multi-headed Hydra is instantly recognizable. The bold contrast between dark bronze and brilliant gilding as well as the goldsmith-like definition of each detail exaggerates the composition’s numismatic clarity. Hercules’s heroic feats of strength were ancient emblems of virtue. Antico’s splendid roundel associates the virtues of Gonzaga rulership with a classical



Pier Jacopo Alari Bonacolsi, called Antico (c. 1455–1528), *Hercules and the Lernaean Hydra*, c. 1496, bronze with gilding, 12 7/8 inches, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence; photo: Domingie & Rabatti Firenze

heritage writ large.

To Antico and his patrons, ancient sculpture represented the model of artistic perfection. Antico’s older contemporary, the painter Andrea Mantegna, set the example at the Gonzaga courts. In the *Lives of the Artists* of 1550, Giorgio Vasari wrote of Mantegna, “Andrea always believed that good classical statues were more perfect and possessed more beautiful parts than those that are shown by nature.” Because ancient marble sculptures known to the Renaissance were often fragmentary relics, imaginative reconstruction was required before their beauty might outshine nature’s own. Mantegna brought an entire classical world to life in his encyclopedic paintings. As a sculptor, Antico concentrated on reconstructing individual classical works, both in fact and in his own art. During the 1490s (and probably earlier), Antico spent time in Rome working as a restorer of ancient marbles. He recorded this activity by inscribing the monumental statues of the *Horse Tamers* on the



Pier Jacopo Alari Bonacolsi, called Antico (c. 1455–1528), *Meleager*, probably by 1496, bronze with gilding and silvering, 12 1/8 inches, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Purchased from the Horn and Buyan bequests with the assistance of a contribution from The Art Fund; photo: © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Quirinal Hill in clear Roman capitals: ANTICUS MANTVANUS R[E]F[ECIT] (Antico the Mantuan remade this), identifying himself with the renowned classical sculptors Praxiteles and Polycleitus, who were believed at the time to have carved the group. Without Antico's experience as a restorer, a masterpiece such as the *Meleager* on the previous page is unthinkable. The composition derives from a battered Roman marble that, by Antico's day, was probably headless, missing some of its limbs, and with its drapery eroded by the effects of time. From the fragment, Antico invented a complete figure and revived the mythical drama of Meleager killing the Calydonian boar. With gold tunic fluttering and silver eyes widened in attack, the hero delivers the death thrust with his spear (now lost) in a graceful movement that is as exquisite as the statuette's precisely finished details. Although the highly esteemed Roman marble was, itself, displayed in the Belvedere Courtyard, it could hardly compare to this glittering bronze. Antico's statuettes—including the *Marcus Aurelius*, *Spinario*, *Venus Felix*, *Hercules and Antaeus*, and *Mercury* (all featured in the exhibition)—presented the Gonzaga with a gallery of important Roman antiquities in a complete form that rivaled the perfection of the works that had inspired them.



Pier Jacopo Alari Bonacolsi, called Antico (c. 1455–1528), *Seated Nymph*, probably 1503, bronze with gilding and silvering, 7 5/8 inches, Robert H. and Clarice Smith; photo: Lee Ewing

After Gianfrancesco's death in 1496, Antico became court sculptor to Ludovico Gonzaga, bishop-elect of Mantua. Ludovico was a passionate collector of ancient gems and hard-stone vessels. Antico's meticulously executed, lavishly gilded sculptures (such as The Frick Collection's *Hercules*, discussed and illustrated on page 6) were probably made in large part for him. Ludovico promoted his ownership of such valuable works to enhance his public prestige. Even though he was the first Renaissance master to perfect the ancient art of indirect casting, which allows an artist to make many bronze versions of his sculptures using molds taken from a single wax model, Antico's bronzes always seem to have been as rare as exceptional antiquities. Few works that were cast during Antico's lifetime exist in multiple examples. Some, like the *Meleager*, are unique. The *Hercules* is known in four versions, the *Apollo* in

only three. Comparison of Antico's two *Seated Nymphs* reveals some of the small, but significant, differences that can exist between bronzes that derive from the same wax model. The hair of one is pulled into a knot above her brow (above), and each curl is gracefully articulated. The other (at right) wears a plain diadem. She is simpler overall and was probably less highly worked in the wax casting model than her more elaborate counterpart. Such differences may also reflect the fact that Antico often entrusted other masters to cast his bronzes. Although Antico's replicative casting technique might have generated a lucrative income, he apparently did not undertake the serial production of his works. His obligations as a court sculptor, which included consulting on the purchase of antiquities and restoring classical marbles, may have left him little time to spare. The Gonzaga, moreover, probably forbade him to sell his sculptures on the open market. Ludovico owned and zealously guarded the rights to Antico's creations,



Pier Jacopo Alari Bonacolsi, called Antico (c. 1455–1528), *Seated Nymph*, c.1503–1511, bronze with gilding and silvering, 7 5/8 inches, Private collection

ensuring their rarity. When molds were stolen from Antico's shop in 1498, Ludovico imprisoned the thief and threatened to "punish him so severely that he will regret it." In a culture dedicated to splendid public display, owning a sculpture by Antico was a privilege reserved only for Gonzaga rulers. They integrated his magnificent works into their collections of ancient art, and they bestowed them as gifts in noble gestures of friendship and diplomacy.

ISABELLA D'ESTE: GREATEST FEMALE COLLECTOR OF THE RENAISSANCE



Pier Jacopo Alari Bonacolsi, called Antico (c. 1455–1528), *Cleopatra*, c. 1525, bronze with traces of gilding, 25 3/8 inches, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, William Francis Warden Fund; photo: © 2012 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Antico's last Gonzaga patron, Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua, was the greatest female collector of the Renaissance. She indulged her admitted "insatiable appetite for antiquities" for more than thirty years and developed a famed collection that was identified with her taste, sophistication, and character as a ruler. Antico and Isabella formed a close, enduring relationship. Although she tended to manage every detail of a commission, often to artists' dismay, in 1503 she entrusted Antico to choose the subject of a female statuette intended for the cornice over the doorway of the room where she displayed her greatest works. This statuette was most likely the *Seated Nymph*. Presiding over a gathering of figurative works, the delicately pensive *Nymph* invited the elevated state of contemplation that is inspired by beauty. For the life-size bust of *Cleopatra*, at left, Antico imagined a resplendent queen whose outward beauty reflects her strength of spirit. Antico's early bronze busts emulated the Roman marble portraits and fragmentary heads that he studied and restored. Later ones, like the *Cleopatra*, are the product of his ability to invent in a classical mode.

Toward the end of his career, busts rather than statuettes captured his artistic imagination. In 1519 Antico agreed to cast for Isabella the statuettes that he had long ago made for Ludovico. But he enticed her by writing that he could also create "bronze heads" that were "more beautiful" than those he had created for Ludovico. The *Cleopatra* was probably one of these. During the Renaissance, Cleopatra was regarded as a heroine whose suicide was an example of ancient virtue. The defeated Egyptian queen chose death rather than the disgrace of being paraded in Augustus Caesar's triumph. Antico portrays *Cleopatra* confronting her terrible choice with introspective dignity. She is magnificently robed, crowned, and jeweled; her regal features are calm, her eyes downcast in thought. Below, on the bust's socle, Antico depicts an asp, the poisonous instrument of her death and the subject of her contemplation. In this remarkable work, which has no exact classical prototype, Antico suggests that heroic acts stem not from strength of body but from character of mind. In Isabella's collection, Antico's noble *Cleopatra* symbolized the inner source of female rulership.

Isabella once wrote to Antico that "we have not found anything that is equal to your merit." It was her way of expressing a personal appreciation of Antico's art and service. The Gonzaga rewarded his achievements by granting him property rights and courtly favors, and by allowing him to use the noble designation "de' Bonacolsi" at the end of this name. Born the son of a butcher, Antico died a wealthy man who had elevated his family's standing. But

his lifelong service to the Gonzaga came at the price of artistic fame. His authorship of the magnificent sculptures that graced their courts was forgotten soon after his death. Twentieth-century archivists and art historians secured Antico's reputation, rather than Renaissance writers like Vasari. Although Antico advanced the technique of bronze casting further than any sculptor of his time, this achievement went unnoted until modern scientific studies revealed the elegant technical intricacies of his methods. When Henry Clay Frick demanded from his dealer only "the finest" bronzes from J. Pierpont Morgan's estate, he did not consider Antico. The expert advice and magisterial catalogues of Wilhelm von Bode formed the taste of Morgan and Frick's generation of collectors. To them the bronzes of Antico's contemporary, Andrea Riccio, represented the Renaissance revival of antiquity at its most creative,



Pier Jacopo Alari Bonacolsi, called Antico (c. 1455–1528), *Hercules*, possibly by 1496, bronze with gilding and silvering, 13 5/8 inches, The Frick Collection, New York, Gift of Miss Helen Clay Frick; photo: Michael Bodycomb

expressive, and fascinating. Antico's sculptures, which hewed close to ancient sources, appeared, by contrast, cold and lacking in imagination. Henry Clay Frick was willing to spend thousands of dollars on a bronze, and he gave Riccio's *Oil Lamp* pride of place in his 70th Street mansion. He purchased Antico's *Hercules* for eighty-five dollars to decorate the family summer house, *Pride's Crossing*. The fate of this work presents an example of how specialists and collectors are influenced by the period taste they themselves help to establish. In 1970 Helen Clay Frick redressed her father's oversight by donating it to The Frick Collection, and since then it has remained a centerpiece among the sculptures shown in the grand West Gallery. For three months this summer, this *Hercules* will join other masterpieces by Antico in the exhibition, together recapturing a glimpse of the bygone splendors of the Gonzaga courts.

FIRST ENGLISH LANGUAGE PUBLICATION ON ANTICO

The exhibition catalogue, co-published by the National Gallery of Art and Paul Holberton publishing, is the only available English-language monograph on Antico. It features a series of essays providing an overview of the artist's career, placing Antico's life, work, and technique in a contextual framework critical to understanding his sculptures, and includes the results of technical studies undertaken by object conservators at the National Gallery of Art and The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The catalogue also addresses little-discussed topics, from the chronology of his works to aspects of his technique and his relationship with the court of Mantua. In addition to essays by Eleonora Luciano, Denise Allen, and Claudia Kryza-Gersch, the catalogue includes contributions by Stephen J. Campbell, professor and chair of the department of art history, Johns Hopkins University; Davide Gasparotto, curator, Galleria Nazionale di Parma; Dylan Smith, Robert H. Smith Research Conservator, National Gallery of Art; Richard Stone, senior museum conservator emeritus, Sherman Fairchild Center for Objects Conservation, The Metropolitan Museum of Art; and Shelley Sturman, senior conservator and head of the department of object conservation, National Gallery of Art. The 210-page hardcover catalogue includes 163 illustrations. It is available (\$50, member price \$45) in the Museum Shop, on the Frick's Web site (www.frick.org), and by phone at (212) 547-6848.

RELATED EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Special Exhibition Lectures

Wednesday evening lectures are free and do not require reservations. Doors open at 5:45 p.m. The Saturday afternoon lecture in this group is free with museum admission; doors for that program open at 1:45 p.m. Seating is on a first-come, first-served basis.

Date Wednesday, May 2, 6:00 p.m.
Speaker Claudia Kryza-Gersch, Curator, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna
Title *Antico: A Pioneer of Renaissance Sculpture*

Antico—whose oeuvre is the subject of the special exhibition—dedicated himself to reviving the forms and splendors of ancient sculpture. This lecture will explore the artist's pioneering role in establishing the bronze statuette as a new Renaissance genre; his innovative exploration of the classical bust and the female nude; and his invention of techniques for creating superbly finished versions of his bronzes that rival the technical achievements of the ancients.—*This lecture is made possible by the Robert H. Smith Family Foundation.*

Date Wednesday, June 13, 6:00 p.m.
Speaker Eleonora Luciano, Associate Curator of Sculpture and Decorative Arts, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Title *Antico in Mantua: Friends and Foes*

This lecture will explore Antico's artistic milieu, notably the overpowering presence of Andrea Mantegna, and will delve into the complexities of the sculptor's relationships with his Gonzaga patrons, including the renowned Isabella d'Este. The little-known sculptor and engraver Gian Marco Cavalli—a collaborator of both Antico's and Mantegna's—will also be discussed, as will his influential role as a key point of intersection between the two more famous artists.—*This lecture is made possible by the Robert H. Smith Family Foundation.*

Date Saturday, July 28, 2:00 p.m.
Speaker Denise Allen, Curator, The Frick Collection
Title *Antico and Exhibitions*

Early Renaissance masters of bronze, like Antico, whose works traditionally have been studied only by specialists, often require the attention of international exhibitions before they are propelled from the margins of art history into the scholarly mainstream. On the closing weekend of *Antico: The Golden Age of Renaissance Bronzes*, the show's New York curator will examine recent exhibitions devoted to the artist, including the Frick presentation. She will discuss the ideas that guided the selection of works and the format of the catalogues; how the exhibitions contribute to a better understanding of Antico and his oeuvre; and some of the questions about the artist that still remain.—*This lecture is made possible by the Robert H. Smith Family Foundation.*

Seminar

Seminars provide unparalleled access to works of art, often when galleries are closed to the public, and encourage thought-provoking discussion with Frick specialists. Sessions are limited to twenty participants, and advance registration is required. Register online or by calling 212.547.0704. \$100 (\$90 for Members).

Date Wednesday, May 23, 6:00 to 7:30 p.m.
Speaker Denise Allen, Curator, The Frick Collection
Title *Antico: Sculptor to the Gonzaga Courts*

Antico was sculptor to the Gonzaga, rulers of the principality of Mantua in northern Italy. His gilded bronzes in the ancient style express the aspirations of a court renowned for its splendid revival of antiquity. This seminar will examine the Gonzagas's collecting practices and their patronage of artists, including Andrea Mantegna, to provide a context for Antico's achievements. Through close study of the objects on view in *Antico: The Golden Age of Renaissance Bronzes*, participants will consider some of the master's contributions to the genres of the *all'antica* bronze bust and the Renaissance statuette.

Gallery Talks

Join curators and educators for an overview of the special exhibition. Talks are free with museum admission, but advance reservations are required (unless otherwise noted). To register, please visit our Web site.

Dates: Saturdays, May 19, June 30, and July 21, at 12:00 noon
Title: *Introduction to Antico: The Golden Age of Renaissance Bronzes*

Extended Hours Event: *Summer Night*

Date: Friday, June 8, 6:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Join us for a free after-hours viewing of the Frick's summer exhibitions *Antico: The Golden Age of Renaissance Bronzes* and *Johann Christian Neuber at the Saxon Court*. Meet curators, hear lectures and gallery talks, sketch in the Garden Court, and listen to live music. *No reservations are accepted; space is limited and visitors will be admitted on a first-come, first-served basis. For more information, please e-mail education@frick.org.*

BASIC INFORMATION

General Information Phone: 212.288.0700

Web site: www.frick.org

E-mail: info@frick.org

Where: 1 East 70th Street, near Fifth Avenue.

Hours: open six days a week: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Tuesdays through Saturdays; 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sundays. Closed Mondays, New Year's Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day. Limited hours (11am to 5pm) on Lincoln's Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day.

Admission: \$18; senior citizens \$15; students \$10; "pay as you wish" on Sundays from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

PLEASE NOTE TO YOUR READERS: Children under ten are not admitted to the Collection.

Subway: #6 local (on Lexington Avenue) to 68th Street station; **Bus:** M1, M2, M3, and M4 southbound on Fifth Avenue to 72nd Street and northbound on Madison Avenue to 70th Street

Tour Information: included in the price of admission is an Acoustiguide Audio Tour of the permanent collection. The tour is offered in six languages: English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish.

Museum Shop: the shop is open the same days as the Museum, closing fifteen minutes before the institution.

Group Visits: Please call 212. 288.0700 for details and to make reservations.

Public Programs: A calendar of events is published regularly and is available upon request.

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For further press information, please contact Heidi Rosenau, Head of Media Relations & Marketing, or Alexis Light, Manager of Media Relations & Marketing

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