



PRESS RELEASE

from

THE FRICK COLLECTION

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BERTOLDO DI GIOVANNI

THE RENAISSANCE OF SCULPTURE IN MEDICI FLORENCE

**FIRST MONOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION ON THE ARTIST PRESENTED THROUGH
GATHERING OF NEARLY ENTIRE EXTANT OEUVRE**

September 18, 2019, through January 12, 2020



Bertoldo di Giovanni, *Hercules on Horseback* (detail), ca. 1470–75, bronze, Galleria Estense, Modena, Su concessione del Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali - Archivio fotografico delle Gallerie Estense; photo: Valeria Beltrami

This fall, The Frick Collection presents the first exhibition devoted to the Renaissance sculptor Bertoldo di Giovanni (ca. 1440–1491). It shines a long-overdue light on the ingenuity and prominence of the Florentine artist, who was a student of Donatello, a teacher of Michelangelo, a favorite of Lorenzo de’ Medici, and an active collaborator with many other artists. By uniting nearly his entire extant oeuvre—more than twenty statuettes, reliefs, medals, a life-sized statue, and a monumental frieze never before shown outside of Italy—the show demonstrates the artist’s creative process and ingenious design across media, his engaging lyrical style, and especially, the essential role he played in the development of Italian Renaissance sculpture.

Indeed, Bertoldo was one of the earliest sculptors since antiquity to create statuettes in bronze, an art form that became ubiquitous in prestigious collections during the fifteenth century and



thereafter. The exhibition was organized by Aimee Ng, Curator; Alexander J. Noelle, Anne L. Poulet Curatorial Fellow; and Xavier F. Salomon, Peter Jay Sharp Chief Curator, with the assistance of Julia Day, Conservator. Comments Salomon, “The Frick is the only institution outside of Europe that owns a statuette by Bertoldo, and we have long desired the opportunity to study and present this artist’s work in great depth. We are thrilled that the resulting monographic display—on view only in New York—will finally bring into focus Bertoldo’s unique position at the heart of the artistic and political landscape of fifteenth-century Florence. Most

appropriately our team has enjoyed working on this project in partnership with that city's esteemed Museo del Bargello." The catalogue that accompanies *Bertoldo di Giovanni: The Renaissance of Sculpture in Medici Florence* is the most substantial publication ever produced on the artist (see cover illustration on previous page).

A PIVOTAL FIGURE RECONSIDERED IN HIS OWN LIGHT

Initially, Bertoldo developed his skills under the aegis of Donatello, inheriting his models and, upon the master's death, completing the pulpits that were commissioned to adorn the Basilica of San Lorenzo in Florence. Bertoldo went on to gain the life-long patronage and friendship of the state's de facto ruler, Lorenzo de' Medici, eventually moving into the Medici palace and creating numerous objects for his patron, some of which were designed as propagandistic tools. Bertoldo was even appointed the custodian and curator of Lorenzo's famed garden of antiquities near San Marco, where he instructed the gifted pupils studying the relics, one of whom was Michelangelo, whose creative genius flourished under the master's guidance.

His legacy, however, was largely written out of history by Michelangelo, who fashioned his own identity as a self-taught artist divinely blessed with ability. Michelangelo's biographers, including the art historian Giorgio Vasari, reduced Bertoldo's role significantly, mentioning him only in passing while focusing more extensively on the pioneering creativity of Donatello, the magnificent patronage of the Medici family, and the staggering genius of Michelangelo. Modern scholarship, as a result, has largely followed this precedent. The exhibition and catalogue offer a comprehensive exploration of Bertoldo's work, reconsidering the sculptor's associations with Donatello, Lorenzo, and Michelangelo, which are central to his narrative. These relationships, however, are reframed, thereby allowing Bertoldo to be appreciated in his own right, his artistic identity no longer overshadowed but, rather, enhanced by his connections to three of the most important figures of the Renaissance.

OBJECTS CHART A CAREER OF COMMISSIONS ACROSS ITALY AND BEYOND

While many of the sculptor's contemporaries, including Sandro Botticelli and Andrea del Verrocchio, were also frequently patronized by the Medici family, Bertoldo was Lorenzo's favorite. By the end of his life, Bertoldo was known as his patron's "familiar" and traveled with him as part of his retinue—serving as an entertainer, confidant, and designer—and valued for much more than his sculptural output. He was granted a place in Lorenzo's household, eventually dying in the Medici villa at Poggio a Caiano before completing the monumental frieze for its facade. Some of the bronzes on display in the exhibition were originally designed for the Medici palace, commissioned by Lorenzo himself, including the famous *Battle* relief (illustrated on page 4). While Lorenzo was Bertoldo's most illustrious patron, the sculptor received commissions from other leading figures. The *Hercules on Horseback* statuette featured on page 1, for example, was probably cast for Ercole I d'Este, Duke of Ferrara, perhaps in celebration of his marriage to the princess of Naples. The objects included in the exhibition chart Bertoldo's commissions from Rome to Padua, and even as far afield as Constantinople, revealing his significant network of patrons.

CREATIVE PROCESS REVEALED BY DESIGN ACROSS MANY MEDIA

Bertoldo's artistic production in wood, metal, and terracotta is reconsidered, exploring the innovation of the sculptor's work across media revealing both his versatility as well as his ability to create a unified style, mediated through diverse scale, media, and hands. The objects shed light on his creative process—the development of a sculpture from idea to design to production—which has puzzled scholars for the past century. While certain stylistic elements unify his artistic output, the various materials used necessitated different approaches for their fabrication. It is clear, through documents and inscriptions as well as technical analysis conducted for the exhibition, that Bertoldo—not known to have had a workshop of his own—enlisted other artists to help transform his models into artworks. By bringing these sculptures together, the exhibition elucidates his role as a designer, modeler, and collaborator.



Bertoldo di Giovanni, *Shield Bearer*, ca. 1470–80, gilt bronze, The Frick Collection, New York; photo: Michael Bodycomb

The majority of Bertoldo's sculptural production falls into three categories: statuettes, reliefs, and medals. In many media, Bertoldo demonstrated his witty, lyrical style that combined iconographic innovation with the use of motifs from ancient sources. The resulting visual language is both instantly recognizable as an invention by Bertoldo, yet layered with classical resonance. *The Shield Bearer*, purchased in 1916 by Henry Clay Frick along with fifty Renaissance bronzes from the holdings of the late J.P. Morgan, is displayed publicly for the first time with its pendant from Vienna's Liechtenstein: The Princely Collections. Reunited, the two *Shield Bearers* reveal Bertoldo's

combination of imagery associated with the fantastical fauns of the Arcadian forest, the ancient hero Hercules, and the medieval

fable of the monstrous "wild man." The two statuettes present multivalent identities, corresponding neither to each other nor to any established iconography, thereby facing the viewer with an intriguing game of identification designed to beguile the learned Renaissance mind. The *Bellerophon Taming Pegasus* displays Bertoldo's engagement with antique texts as he transformed the words of the ancient poet Pindar into his own

version of the myth. Heralded by modern scholars as one of the most beautiful small bronzes ever produced, the sculpture is signed in Latin "Bertoldo modeled me; Adriano [Fiorentino] cast me." The bronze is thus a prime example of Bertoldo's artistic collaboration in which he provided the design and model yet other hands physically cast his sculptures. The *Bellerophon*, when compared to the other five statuettes on view, serves as a cardinal point for examining Bertoldo's deft detailing of the surfaces of his bronzes, illustrating a consistency of intricate marks that unite the appearance of such works.



Designed by Bertoldo di Giovanni, executed by Adriano Fiorentino, *Bellerophon Taming Pegasus*, ca. 1480–82, bronze, Kunstkammer, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; photo: KHM-Museumsverband



Bertoldo di Giovanni, *Battle*, ca. 1480–85, bronze, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, Su concessione del Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali; photo Mauro Magliani

The five bronze reliefs displayed in the exhibition include scenes from the life of Christ to mythological festivities. They range in size from diminutive and intimate to the grand, arresting vision of a melee presented in the *Battle*, Bertoldo's largest bronze, which, according to modern scholars, is "the most important of [Bertoldo's] surviving works." The *Battle* is an imaginative reconstruction of a severely damaged ancient sarcophagus. He

intentionally departed from the traditional depiction of Romans fighting Barbarians, which is clearly delineated on the sarcophagus, and instead fashioned a scene of organized chaos in which the figures attack one another in seemingly endless combinations, with no underlying logic or allegiances. The central figure, adorned with the lion skin and club of Hercules as well as the helmet of Hermes, presents an identity that is as conflated and unclear as the battle itself. Bertoldo conceived of the relief with an unfixed narrative, thereby encouraging discussion amongst the viewers who attempted to discern its subject.



Bertoldo di Giovanni, *Battle* (detail)

Bertoldo is known to have designed six medals, the prime examples of which are included in the exhibition. All of the medals demonstrate the sculptor's adept ability to present the convincing likeness of the sitter on the obverse accompanied by an inventive allegorical scene or incredibly detailed historical event on the reverse, an impressive feat given the relative nascence of this medium. The Pazzi Conspiracy medal, however, reveals Bertoldo's ability to revolutionize the art form derived from ancient currency. Unlike any other medal, this work collapses obverse and reverse, fusing portraiture, allegorical figures, and



Bertoldo di Giovanni, obverse of *The Pazzi Conspiracy (Lorenzo de' Medici)*, 1478, bronze, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, Su concessione del Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali; photo Mauro Magliani

historical depictions together. The medal recounts the attempted coup led by the Pazzi family against the Medici brothers, Lorenzo and Giuliano, in 1478. Each side shows the bust of one brother hovering above his fate during the attack on holy ground in the Florentine cathedral, flanked by allegorical figures that underline the tragedy of Giuliano's murder and the celebration of Lorenzo's deliverance from harm. Commissioned by Lorenzo himself as part of a propagandistic campaign of interrelated artwork and literature, the innovative medal provided a visual component to the commentaries, poems, and elegies produced by the prominent writers in the Medici circle in response to the event. This double-portrait medal, intended to shock, was distributed across Europe to garner support for Florence, which was embroiled in war with the Pope, Rome, and Naples as a result of the assassination.



Bertoldo di Giovanni, reverse of *The Pazzi Conspiracy (Giulio de' Medici)*, 1478, bronze, Stephen K. and Janie Woo Scher Collection; Promised gift to The Frick Collection, New York; photo: Michael Bodycomb



Bertoldo di Giovanni and collaborators, *Frieze for the Portico of the Medici Villa at Poggio a Caiano*, ca. 1490, glazed terracotta, Villa Medicea di Poggio a Caiano, Polo Museale della Toscana; Gabinetto Fotografico delle Gallerie degli Uffizi

The largest sculpture Bertoldo designed was the terracotta frieze for the portico of the Villa Medici at Poggio a Caiano. Spanning over fifteen meters long and located directly above the main entrance, the frieze originally adorned the facade of Lorenzo's country villa. The monumental frieze is presented in its entirety in the exhibition, marking the first time that all five sections have traveled beyond Tuscany. The narrative divisions align with the architecture of the villa itself, designed by Giuliano da Sangallo, although the precise interpretation of the imagery continues to elude scholars. It is generally assumed that the composition is either an allegory of time or an allegory of the journey of the soul, based on ancient texts. It is almost certain that this complex iconography drawn from antique sources was devised by a humanist in the Medici circle as a celebration of Lorenzo and his personal motto "Time Returns." Bertoldo would have worked closely with both his patron and the poet who

provided the underlying structure of each scene. He also collaborated closely with numerous artisans to produce the frieze itself; while the design of the overall composition ascribes to Bertoldo's style, the varying execution of the figures indicates that multiple hands were employed to mold, fire, and glaze the terracotta.

Through the reunion and reconsideration of Bertoldo's oeuvre, this exhibition seeks to redefine the sculptor by celebrating his distinct style and notable achievements, allowing him to step out of the shadow of Donatello, Lorenzo, and Michelangelo. Bertoldo is presented as an active and influential participant at the nexus of art and politics in Florence. He was a pioneer in the new mediums of bronze statuettes and portrait medals, an innovative designer who found inspiration in classical models yet created his own unique iconography, and a collaborative partner who worked for, with, and instructed some of the most important sculptors of both the Early and High Renaissance. The statuettes, reliefs, medals, statue, and frieze on display reveal Bertoldo's striking ingenuity; it is clear why Lorenzo selected the sculptor as his favorite and why his designs were celebrated as "immortal."



Bertoldo and collaborators, *Frieze for the Portico of the Medici Villa at Poggio a Caiano* (detail)

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ABOUT THE PUBLICATION

A fully illustrated catalogue of the exhibition (illustrated on page 1), featuring contributions from a team of international scholars, will accompany the exhibition and is available in the museum shop. This book, published in association with D Giles Ltd, London, is by far the most substantial text on Bertoldo ever produced. The publication is available in the Museum Shop or can be ordered on the Frick's Web site (frick.org) or by phone at (212) 547-6848 (496 pages; 300 color illustrations; hardcover \$84.95, member price \$76.46).

INTERACT

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BASIC INFORMATION

General Information Phone: (212) 288-0700

Web site: www.frick.org

Building project: www.frickfuture.org

E-mail: info@frick.org

App: frick.org/app

Museum address: 1 East 70th Street, near Fifth Avenue

Hours: Open six days a week: 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Tuesdays through Saturdays; 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Sundays. Closed Mondays, New Year's Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day. Limited hours (11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) on Lincoln's Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day

Admission: \$22; senior citizens \$17; students \$12; Pay-what-you-wish hours on Wednesdays from 2:00 to 6:00 p.m.

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

First Fridays: Museum admission and gallery programs are free from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. on the first Friday evening of the month (except January and September)

Subway: #6 local to 68th Street station; #Q to 72nd 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 museum admission is an Acoustiguide Audio Tour of the permanent collection. The tour is offered in six languages: English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish.

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

Group Museum Visits: Please call (212) 288-0700 for details and to make reservations.

Public Programs: A calendar of events is available online

Library address: 10 East 71st Street, near Fifth Avenue

Library Hours: www.frick.org/visit/library/hours

Library Admission: Open to the public free of charge

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For further press information, please contact Heidi Rosenau, Associate Director of Communications & Marketing;
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