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THE FRICK COLLECTION

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MAJOR EXHIBITION OF SCULPTURE THIS FALL
AT THE FRICK COLLECTION
EUROPEAN BRONZES FROM THE QUENTIN COLLECTION

September 28, 2004, through January 2, 2005

European Bronzes from the Quentin Collection is the first public exhibition of a distinguished, little-known private collection devoted to the art of the statuette from the sixteenth through eighteenth century, and New York's Frick Collection is the sole venue. The exhibition features almost forty sculptures, including exemplary works by Italian



Giambologna (1529–1608), *Mars* (detail), Modeled by Giambologna between late 1560s and early 1570s, Bronze (Cast before 1577, probably by Fra Domenico Portigiani), The Quentin Collection

masters of the genre such as **Giambologna, Giovanni Francesco Susini and his uncle Antonio Susini, Francesco Fanelli, and Massimiliano Soldani-Benzi**, as well as examples by their equally gifted northern contemporaries such as **Hendrick de Keyser and Barthélemy Prieur**. Primarily consisting of bronzes, with some works in terracotta and precious metal, the collection has been discriminatingly assembled over the last twenty-five years. Many, like Giambologna's *Mars* and *Sleeping Nymph*, are outstanding examples of famous compositions. Other masterpieces, like the mysterious *Allegorical Deity Seated on Grotesques*, are new discoveries exhibited here for the first time. The compositional inventiveness, technical refinement, and sheer quality of these works endow the collection with its particular character, while an emphasis on the idealized human figure establishes its identity. Oil lamps, incense burners, and

bells – those imaginative accoutrements of the Renaissance scholar's study collected by Henry Clay Frick – are practically absent. Instead, the Quentin Collection presents some of the best examples by generations of European master sculptors who were inspired by the human form. The exhibition's gathering of powerful, elegantly idealized nudes provides a focused introduction to the pleasures offered by the bronze statuette. The exhibition, coordinated

by the Frick's Associate Curator Denise Allen, is made possible through the generosity of The Quentin Foundation with additional support from the Fellows of The Frick Collection.

Comments Chief Curator Colin B. Bailey, "The opportunity to exhibit such choice examples from the Quentin Collection is indeed gratifying: not only is each work of singular beauty and visual appeal, but the collection as a whole reflects the same commitment to quality that has inspired The Frick Collection since its inception. We are also delighted that the exhibition has served as a catalyst for the scholarly catalogue, which with its detailed entries and generous illustrations will surely make an important contribution to the field of Renaissance and Baroque bronzes."

HIGHLIGHTS OF A REMARKABLE GATHERING

At The Frick Collection the Quentin sculptures will be displayed so that visitors may appreciate the union of naturalistic illusion with technical artistry that is the hallmark of the greatest figurative statuettes. Most of the sculptures, like Giambologna's *Mars*, will be shown freestanding and without vitrines. This freedom of viewpoint allows the visitor to experience how the artist used the expressive logic of pose to identify the god of war with martial readiness. His muscles taut and eyes fixed on the enemy, *Mars* halts his stride, exploiting the force of arrested motion to swing his body and sword arm backward in preparation for attack. His free arm sweeps forward to balance his rotating movement, his hand poised at the instant it most resembles a gesture of command. By depicting Mars ready to strike, Giambologna celebrates the power and resolve leaders needed to wage war, or to prevent it. Late Renaissance rulers appreciated this ennobling lesson, and the *Mars* became a featured addition to their collections. No less coveted by princes and kings for its masterful artistry, Giambologna's *Mars* displays the sculptor's ability to depict the subtle movements of muscles bunching under skin, of eyes tightening in concentration, and of lips parting to draw in breath. This virtuoso combination of illusionism and technique is even more astonishing when one considers that the *Mars* is little more than fifteen inches tall.



Giambologna (1529–1608), *Mars*, Modeled by Giambologna between late 1560s and early 1570s, Bronze (Cast before 1577, probably by Fra Domenico Portigiani), The Quentin Collection

The focused compression of the *Mars* is typical of statuettes, for these small works were made first to delight and then to engage over numerous encounters. Statuettes compel the viewer to accept the human form as something that can be believably miniaturized to endlessly fascinating effect. By winning credence, statuettes inspire imagination. Such is the case of the *Allegorical Deity Seated on Grotesques*, sometimes attributed to the Dutch

sculptor Adrian de Vries. The robust muscular ease with which the idealized nude deity sits astride bat-winged monsters so effectively subjugates the creatures that the group has been interpreted as an allegory of good triumphant over evil – all in a work that can be comfortably held within one’s hands. It is a witty inversion of size in proportion to theme that, like a fictive looking glass, draws its audience into a world where fantastic nightmare creatures, though small and subdued, have the power to haunt through their sharply realized believability. Composition, scale, and meticulously crafted detail provide insight into this sculpture’s meaning even though its exact subject and function have yet to be discovered.

Each small bronze was made to evoke multiple associations that captivated the rulers and wealthy educated classes who collected them. The more we know about this history, the richer our understanding of this art form becomes. During the Renaissance collectors and sculptors often looked back to classical antiquity as a model. The anonymous northern Italian master of the *Hercules and Antaeus*, for example, based his composition on an over-life-size classical



Attributed to Adrian de Vries (c. 1556–1626), or to an Anonymous European Master, *Allegorical Deity Seated on Grotesques* (detail), c. 1600, Bronze, The Quentin Collection



Probably Northern Italy, c. 1500–1525, *Hercules & Antaeus*, Bronze, Late Renaissance base of painted wood, The Quentin Collection

marble fragment, then known even in its ruined state as “the most beautiful statue in Rome.” By imaginatively reconstructing the monumental, fragmentary marble in small-scale bronze, this sculptor rivaled the greatest achievements of the past and literally placed those achievements, miraculously restored, into the hands of his patrons. The sculptor of the *Hercules and Antaeus* also exploited his medium, allowing the metal’s inherent tensile strength to mimic Hercules’s strength as the hero hoists Antaeus into the air, the giant’s legs freely dangling without the strutted supports required by the original marble. The composition’s angular geometry and the figures’ blocky, flexed muscles echo the group’s marble origins and remind us that bronze is a molten medium that can take almost any form, its protean character limited chiefly by the artist’s ability to manipulate it.

WORKS MEANT FOR THE COLLECTOR’S ENJOYMENT

Renaissance statuettes were often displayed in the more private confines of the collector’s house or palace, where they were occasionally placed on tables so that they could be turned, touched and held. This intimate relationship between viewer and object frequently inspired sculptors. Giambologna, for example, crafted the smooth, silken, lacquered surfaces of the voluptuous *Sleeping Nymph* to invite the sense of touch. His sensual conception springs

from the sixteenth century's interest in the sleeping female figure. In Venice the subject was popularized by the woodcut image of a sleeping nymph from the book *The Dream of Poliphilus* and was echoed in the paintings of Giorgione. In Rome a monumental classical marble statue of the sleeping *Ariadne* represented this paradigm, and Giambologna's *Nymph* adopts the languid pose of that famous antiquity. In Florence, home of Giambologna and



Giambologna (1529–1608). Modeled by Giambologna before 1584, *Sleeping Nymph* (detail), Bronze, The Quentin Collection

his Medici patrons, the subject was identified with Michelangelo's celebrated monumental marble sculpture of *Night*. Florentine writers praised Michelangelo for so perfectly capturing *Night's* sleep that her viewers remained silent, lest their voices wake her from stony slumber. Giambologna's *Nymph* wittily plays, instead, on the relationship between sleep and the bronze statuette. Though sound might not rouse her, touch – the sense she most provocatively invites – could have the power to awaken this *Nymph* from her dreamlike repose.

Seventeenth-century bronze statuettes, like Francesco Fanelli's *Mercury and Cupid*, were often larger than their earlier Renaissance counterparts. At almost three feet tall, the *Mercury and Cupid's* size and dramatic, sweeping forms were meant to harmonize with grand public spaces, like the picture galleries typical of this period. The sculpture's subject is drawn from Apuleius's tale of the star-crossed lovers Cupid and Psyche and illustrates Mercury about to proclaim that Psyche must be returned to the bondage of Cupid's jealous mother, Venus. Fanelli depicts the winged god with his messenger's trumpet in hand, poised at the instant of flight on cloudy winds that loft him skywards. The little Cupid



Francesco Fanelli (1577–after 1657), *Mercury & Cupid*, early 17th century, Bronze, The Quentin Collection



Francesco Fanelli (1577–after 1657), *Mercury & Cupid* (detail), early 17th century, Bronze, The Quentin Collection

clutching Mercury's leg appears heavy by contrast, as he yields his weight like a ballast stone in a desperate attempt to halt the fateful flight. Cupid merely earns Mercury's backward glance, and the lover's cruel separation is sealed by the messenger god's elegant, inexorable ascent. Fanelli's complex story telling, which was rare in earlier statuettes, derives from the pictorial tradition and challenges it. Displayed at the center of a picture gallery, elevated and isolated on a pedestal, the *Mercury and Cupid* would have engaged viewers with a directness impossible for paintings to achieve. Fanelli crafts his narrative with the dramatic compression typical of sculpture. The composition's graceful torsion invites viewers to walk round the work and unfold the tale.

The sculptor's concise language of pose and gesture is movingly expressed by Massimiliano Soldani's *Pietà with Two Putti*. Made during the early eighteenth century when Soldani was a master medallist to the Florentine Grand Dukes, the *Pietà* is one of the latest works in the Quentin Collection, and one of the few masterpieces in terracotta (fired clay). Soldani's dead Christ with mourning angels is a *compianto*, a work intended for use during the Catholic devotions that



Massimiliano Soldani-Benzi (1656–1740), *Pietà with Two Putti*, probably 1715, Terracotta on original ebony base, The Quentin Collection



aroused compassionate empathy for the Savior's passion and death.

Christ's body is gently elevated

toward the viewer, exposing the bloody lance wound at his side. The crown of thorns and nails lie on the stony ground below. Beside them, closest to the viewer's gaze, Christ's hand opens upward in lifeless supplication. The sorrowful angels, who lovingly stare at the Savior's face and kiss his wounds, serve as exempla for the emotions experienced by the devotee as he knelt before this image in private contemplation. The loosely flowing, masterful freedom with which

Soldani modeled the wet c

Massimiliano Soldani-Benzi (1656–1740), *Pietà with Two Putti*, probably 1717, Terracotta, The group alone: 20.5 x 47 x 20.5 cm
On original ebony base: 29.5 x 55 x 27.5 cm
The Quentin Foundation Collection

flows the

rendered

sculpture with a hushed, graceful lyricism that inspires med

compellingly beautiful. Soldani produced many larger more complex versions (which include the Virgin accompanied by numerous angels) in terracotta and in bronze, while porcelain examples were created after his death. The Quentin *Pietà*, however, is the only surviving version of this composition by Soldani in any medium. The rarity, refinement, and distilled emotional intensity of the *Pietà* stand as hallmarks of the memorably beautiful sculptures in the Quentin Collection.

Massimiliano Soldani-Benzi (1656–1740), *Pietà with Two Putti* (detail), probably 1715, Terracotta on original ebony base, The Quentin Collection

SCHOLARLY CATALOGUE INTRODUCES UNKNOWN WORKS

The exhibition is accompanied by a scholarly catalogue, co-authored by Dr. Manfred Leithe-Jasper, Director Emeritus, Department of Sculpture and Decorative Arts at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, and Patricia Wengraf, esteemed sculpture dealer. Leithe-Jasper and Wengraf introduce many heretofore unknown sculptures, backing their arguments and attributions with thorough research, the most up-to-date technical evidence, and the kind of expertise that can only be acquired by years of focused study in the field. In preparation for the publication,

ten of the Quentin bronzes underwent full technical analysis at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Shelley Sturman, Conservator and Head of Objects Conservation, has written detailed technical reports on this group. The catalogue, published by M.T. Train/Scala Books, is lavishly illustrated and includes a large number of comparative images, which are essential to the understanding of the intricacies of attribution inherent in this field. This publication (360 pages) is available in hardcover for \$125.00 through the Museum Shop of The Frick Collection, the institution's website (www.frick.org), or by calling (212) 288-0700.

FREE PUBLIC LECTURE

Date: Wednesday, September 29, 2004, 6:00pm
Speaker: Manfred Leithe-Jasper, Director Emeritus, Department of Sculpture and Decorative Arts, Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna
Title: *Learning by Doing: Cataloguing European Old Master Bronzes in the Quentin Collection*

The experiences gained from cataloguing bronze statuettes often provide new insights into the works of even well-known sculptors such as Giambologna. Dr. Leithe-Jasper will focus on two of Giambologna's most famous compositions, the *Striding Mars* and *Sleeping Nymph*, in his discussion of the process, progress, and surprises afforded by cataloguing the Quentin Collection sculptures. *There is no charge for this lecture; seating is limited.*

Basic Information

General Information Phone: (212) 288-0700

Website: www.frick.org

E-mail: info@frick.org

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

Hours: open six days a week: 10am to 6pm on Tuesdays through Saturdays; 1pm to 6pm on Sundays. Closed Mondays, New Year's Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day. Limited hours (1 to 6pm) on Lincoln's Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day.

Admission: \$12; senior citizens \$8; students \$5

PLEASE NOTE TO YOUR READERS: Children under ten are not admitted to the Collection, and those under sixteen must be accompanied by an adult.

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 INFORM® 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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