

The Frick Collection: Detail Report



David

Severo da Ravenna (Severo Calzetta) (Italian, ca. 1465/75–ca. 1538)

Date late 15th century to early 16th century

Medium Bronze

Dimensions H.: 29 1/2 in. (74.9 cm)

Credit Line Henry Clay Frick Bequest

Accession Number 1916.2.08

Currently On View

First Floor, Room 17, Garden Court

Commentary The Frick's figure of Hercules in Repose and this David appear to have little in common: the one being squat, vigorous, and modeled with lively, rippling surfaces; the other, large for an early Renaissance bronze, of elongated stature, smoothly polished, faintly languid, and far more relaxed than Hercules in Repose. Yet this piece too has been attributed to Pollaiuolo and to Verrocchio as well as to Florentine sculptors of the next generation such as Baccio da Montelupo. The artist obviously was influenced by the two most celebrated David statues of the fifteenth century: the large bronze figures in the Bargello, Florence, by Donatello and Verrocchio. In his pose and the adolescent immaturity of his soft, unmuscular body, this David combines elements of both famous antecedents. Like Hercules, David was a civic icon for Florence, representing victory over tyranny and oppression; the two heroes were portrayed repeatedly in Florentine art. Florentine bronzes until quite late in the sixteenth century were less advanced technically than sculpture made in the north of Italy, a region also noted for its production of arms and armor. Almost without exception, Florentine bronzes were cast directly from a wax model, a relatively simple method for accurately reproducing an artist's original work. When the model was encased in a clay mold and baked, the wax melted out through an exit channel, or sprue, and molten metal could then be poured into the clay mold to replace it. This procedure is known as the lost-wax method, since the original wax model dissolves and can never be reused. Once the metal cooled, the clay mold was cut away to reveal the enclosed bronze form, which was then chased, polished, and, if necessary, repaired. Solid casts of this sort were more susceptible to defects than hollow casts, as well as being more wasteful of costly metals. Variations in temperature or in thickness of parts could result in bubbles, cracks, and breakage. To produce a hollow cast, the wax model was built around a core of dried clay to which it was attached by pins, and the wax was then, as in making the solid cast, encased in a clay mold. When the molten metal was poured into the case to replace the wax model, the core remained within the metal shell; sometimes the core was chipped away and removed through an opening at the bottom of the bronze. The figure of David is a direct cast, but it is hollow, with unusually irregular thickness of the bronze shell and several patches and repairs, suggesting perhaps a certain lack of experience in casting so large a piece. David's right hand may once have held his weapon, possibly a sling which had been cast separately. Source: Art in The Frick Collection: Paintings, Sculpture, Decorative Arts, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996.

Collection History Édouard Aynard, Lyon. Sold through Durlacher Bros., June 1903, for £8,000 to J. Pierpont Morgan, London and New York. Duveen. Frick, 1916. Source: Sculpture in The Frick Collection: Italian. Volume III. New York: The Frick Collection, 1970.