

The Frick Collection: Detail Report



Diana the Huntress

Jean-Antoine Houdon (French, 1741–1828)

Date 1776–95

Medium Terracotta

Dimensions H.: 75 1/2 in. (191.8 cm)

Credit Line Purchased by The Frick Collection, 1939

Accession Number 1939.2.79

Currently On View

First Floor, Room 12, Portico Gallery

Commentary Swift virgin goddess of moon and hunt, Diana alights poised on one foot, a technical tour de force. The life-size terracotta, supported by interior metal armatures, is constructed of at least ten separately fired sections. Many versions of the Diana were made by Houdon and his workshop, in plaster, metal, and marble, life-size, reduced, and of the bust alone. Probably the earliest surviving example is a plaster dated 1776, in the Schlossmuseum, Gotha. The Frick piece, which is signed but not dated, is believed to have been produced several years later. The arrow once held in Diana's right hand is now missing, and her wooden bow is a replacement. Houdon thought about famous antecedents when designing his regal goddess, crowned with a crescent moon. He remembered the Apollo Belvedere, several well-known classical examples of Diana, and images of the sixteenth-century favorite of Henri II, Diane de Poitiers, who inspired so many similarly elegant, long-limbed Dianas. The pose of Giovanni Bologna's Mercury also became absorbed into the delicate equilibrium of his daringly balanced statue. Indeed, French and Florentine mannerism seem to dominate Houdon's ideal of an aloof beauty, with her blank-eyed mask and smoothly abstract, elongated body. Not even a wisp of cloth interrupts the sleek nudity, to Houdon's contemporaries a shocking indecency only intensified by the flesh tones of the surface. Large-scale terracottas were common in antiquity and in certain regions of Italy, such as Bologna (where Algardi learned his métier). In eighteenth-century France, the pastel hues and subtle malleability of baked clay made it a popular medium for small sculptures, but a terracotta statue so large and so precariously posed as this Diana was unprecedented. As in the virtuoso carving of his marble portrait busts, Houdon explored the frontiers of his chosen medium, again reaching beyond their traditional limitations. Source: *Art in The Frick Collection: Paintings, Sculpture, Decorative Arts*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996.

Collection History Cardinal Fesch (?). Henry de Montault, Paris. Susse. Victorien Sardou (1869–1908). Madame Sardou. Duveen (1911). Frick, 1939. Source: *Sculpture in The Frick Collection: German, Netherlandish, French and British*. Volume IV. New York: The Frick Collection, 1970.