

The Frick Collection: Detail Report



Hand Bell

Vincenzo Grandi (Italian, 1493–1577)

Date probably before 1539

Medium Bronze

Dimensions H.: 6 5/8 in. (16.8 cm)

Credit Line Henry Clay Frick Bequest

Accession Number 1916.2.19

Currently On View

First Floor, Room 14, Enamels Room

Commentary Like Riccio, who made lamps, candlesticks, and inkstands for his educated clients, the Grandi family workshop too supplied their connoisseur patrons with decorative bronze objects, such as buckets, bells, and doorknockers. The bells were especially in demand, and a number of them are related in design to the Frick example, which is considered the most refined and imaginative of this group. Not surprisingly, it was once attributed to Riccio. The body of the hand bell is decorated with lively motifs, including pairs of putti flanking unidentified coats of arms in cartouches, leaves, masks, bunches of fruit, scrolls, and ribbons, all disposed in a crisp, lacy pattern over the surface. The handle of the bell is in the form of a seated infant who holds in his left hand the stem of a grapevine which curls down over his leg. At his feet are two small bunches of grapes, and he may once have held aloft another in his now-empty right hand. Seen from the front, this putto appears to be a hedonistic bacchanalian figure, reminiscent of many a tipsy Dionysus seated on a wine keg. But if one turns the bell around, the image is transformed into a memento mori, for the putto is seated not on a keg but on a human skull. The iconographic motif of a child with a skull was familiar and popular in the Renaissance. It was intended to remind the viewer that the span of life from infancy to death is nothing compared to eternity. Such a subject would be particularly appropriate to a bell because hand bells were associated with the office of the priest and were rung during the Mass at the Sanctus to announce the advent of Christ in the Eucharist. The grapes on the bell refer then to the Eucharistic wine and the blood of Christ, who offers salvation and eternity following the death represented by the skull. The unknown prelate for whom Grandi made this intricately designed hand bell must have been a cultivated man of subtle tastes. Source: *Art in The Frick Collection: Paintings, Sculpture, Decorative Arts*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996.

Collection History Durlacher. J. Pierpont Morgan, London and New York, 1909. Duveen. Frick, 1916. Source: *Sculpture in The Frick Collection: Italian*. Volume III. New York: The Frick Collection, 1970.