

# The Frick Collection: Detail Report

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## Robert de Cotte

Antoine Coysevox (French, 1640–1720)

**Date** early 18th century

**Medium** Bronze

**Dimensions** 21 3/8 × 12 5/8 × 10 1/4 in. (54.3 × 32 × 26 cm)

**Credit Line** Purchased by The Frick Collection, 1945

**Accession Number** 1945.2.83

Currently On View

Second Floor, Room 25, Small Hallway

**Collections** Works in Virtual Tour: East Vestibule, Subject: Portraits, Sculpture

**Commentary** In Robert de Cotte (1656–1735), Coysevox found a subject to inspire his finest efforts. A close friend and colleague, de Cotte was a highly successful architect, as eminent in his career as Coysevox was in the profession of sculptor. Brother-in-law and assistant to Jules Hardouin-Mansart, de Cotte succeeded the latter as "premier architecte" to Louis XIV. He designed numerous official

buildings in France and several major palaces elsewhere in Europe. He and Coysevox sometimes collaborated on commissions. With fluent skill and sensitive understanding, the sculptor translated his friend's appearance and character into bronze, creating a masterpiece of portraiture. The bust captures the energy and confidence of the architect who could so capably direct vast enterprises of diverse sorts at widely scattered locations. Every detail of the sculpture contributes to a description of this complex personality. The rich abundance of the peruke, with its fat, springy curls, the rounded ripeness of the flesh, the open gaze, the distinguished nose, all portray a commanding but sympathetic and intelligent man of the world. The vigorous turn of the head, emphasized by the twisting sweep of tumbling locks, is a far cry from the decorous frontal busts of the Italian Renaissance, when even the slightly tilted head of Verrocchio's young lady seemed a daring, novel engagement of the sitter with the external world. It was above all Bernini, briefly employed in France in 1665, who with his dynamic portrait busts such as that of Louis XIV led the way for Coysevox and other French baroque sculptors. Movement, Bernini claimed, could best express a sitter's unique qualities. In Coysevox' vibrant portrait, Robert de Cotte seems to move freely, with the assured yet receptive air of a man at ease in his world. Another version of Coysevox' bust of de Cotte, in the Bibliothèque Sainte-Genevieve, Paris, was executed in marble and dated 1707. Source: *Art in The Frick Collection: Paintings, Sculpture, Decorative Arts*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996.

**Collection History** Octavius E. Coope, Brentwood, Essex (?). (According to G. Keller-Dorian (Antoine Coysevox, Paris, 1920, II, pp. 53-54, Pl. 122), the bust was included in the Octavius Coope sale, May 3-5, 1910, Christie's. No bust of de Cotte is listed in the sale catalogue, but the Frick portrait may perhaps be identified with Lot 182: "Molière; a bronze bust, life size." According to an annotated copy of the sale catalogue in The Frick Art Reference Library, Lot 182 was sold to A. Wertheimer.) David-Weill, Paris. Wildenstein. Frick, 1945.