

# The Frick Collection: Detail Report

---



## Reliquary Bust of a Female Saint

Hans Multscher (German, ca. 1400–1467)

**Date** ca. 1460

**Medium** Bronze

**Dimensions** 12 5/8 x 11 7/8 x 7 1/8 in. (32.1 x 30.2 x 18.1 cm)

**Credit Line** Henry Clay Frick Bequest

**Accession Number** 1916.2.59

Currently On View

Second Floor, Room 33, Sitting Room

**Commentary** In the fifteenth century, Ulm, Augsburg, and several of the smaller towns of Swabia attracted many skilled painters and sculptors, but for the most part their identities are lost. Hans Multscher is an outstanding exception in this crowd of nameless artists, a master celebrated even beyond his home territory. The Frick reliquary, said to have come from a church in Galicia (now southeastern Poland), is attributed to him through comparison with his documented works in stone and wood—as are, although with less unanimity, a few bronze statuettes and plaquettes. Sculpture made of bronze was rare in South Germany, metal casting being confined chiefly to utilitarian objects such as scales, weights, or bells. Lacking the rich heritage of antique bronzes that offered Italian artists inspiration and high standards of competence, German contemporaries were slow to adopt bronze as a medium for sculpture. The actual maker of this reliquary bust may have been a bell founder. The artist would have provided the bronze caster with a model, possibly carved in wood or stone, and may have played some role in the finely finished results. The gentle tilt of the head, the luxuriant flow of cascading curls, the delicate lines drawn from the corners of the eyes, the fringe of tiny dots suggesting lashes on the lower lids, all denote an artist of exceptional grace and imagination. Similarities between the reliquary bust and the female saints from Multscher's large altarpiece at Sterzing (1456–58) have prompted a late dating for the bronze, perhaps about 1460. The initial K fastened to the gilded collar suggests that the bust once contained purported relics of St. Katherine of Alexandria, a widely loved and admired saint, said to have been a fourth-century noblewoman and martyr who dreamed that she became the bride of Christ. The saint's relics would have been placed inside the bronze through the rectangular opening at the top of the head. Source: *Art in The Frick Collection: Paintings, Sculpture, Decorative Arts*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996.

**Collection History** Said to have come from a wooden church at Zamosc (Western Galicia) destroyed in the first half of the nineteenth century. Sold through Durlacher Bros., February 22, 1910, to J. Pierpont Morgan, London and New York. Duveen. Frick, 1916. Source: *Sculpture in The Frick Collection: German, Netherlandish, French and British. Volume IV*. New York: The Frick Collection, 1970.