

The Frick Collection: Detail Report



Shield Bearer

Bertoldo di Giovanni (Italian, ca. 1440–1491)

Date ca. 1470–80

Medium Bronze, with extensive traces of gilding

Dimensions 8 13/16 × 3 3/4 × 2 3/4 in. (22.4 × 9.5 × 7 cm)

Credit Line Henry Clay Frick Bequest

Accession Number 1916.2.03

Currently On View

First Floor, Room 14, Enamels Room

Commentary Less celebrated than his contemporaries Pollaiuolo and Verrocchio, Bertoldo was nevertheless cherished by Lorenzo de' Medici. In his later years he lived in the Medici Palace, and he died in Lorenzo's villa at Poggio a Caiano. Bertoldo knew the humanist scholars and literati of Lorenzo's circle and was familiar with the ancient art and literature so amply available in Medici and other Florentine collections. His gilded bronze shield bearer owes its pose to some classical model, perhaps a sarcophagus relief of Apollo, and incorporates other references to the ancient past. Unlike the bronze perhaps representing either Marsyas or "Fear," Bertoldo's figure does sport the tail and horns (although not the pointed ears) of a satyr. He carries a club, is crowned with a wreath, and wears a garland of vine leaves from which hangs at his hip a set of panpipes. The shield he holds is a modern replacement derived from one held by a companion figure in the Liechtenstein collection, Vaduz. Both figures have been associated with a third bronze by Bertoldo in the Galleria Estense, Modena, of a man on horseback, thought to represent Hercules. If indeed the three Bertoldo bronzes were conceived as a group, with the shield bearers flanking the equestrian, it has been further hypothesized that this ensemble was designed for Ercole d'Este, Duke of Ferrara, who made reference to his name by tending to favor Herculean imagery. The conflation of so many classical motifs alluding to Hercules, wild men, and satyrs, and including garlands and the bacchic accouterments of vine leaves and pipes, suggests to some an iconography associated with wedding celebrations. An interesting but highly speculative theory proceeds to link the commission for the group with the marriage of Ercole d'Este and Eleanor Gonzaga in 1473. Without documentation, however, the chain of evidence is too slight to bear much weight. While no one doubts that the three fine bronzes are by Bertoldo, their date, significance, and relationship remain unsettled. Source: *Art in The Frick Collection: Paintings, Sculpture, Decorative Arts*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996.

Collection History Said to have been discovered in Pisa and "subsequently sold to Florence." Charles Loeser, Florence. 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.