

The Frick Collection: Detail Report



St. John Baptizing

Francesco da Sangallo (Francesco Giamberti) (Italian, 1494–1576)

Date 1534–38

Medium Bronze

Dimensions H.: 20 7/8 in. (53 cm)

Credit Line Henry Clay Frick Bequest

Accession Number 1916.2.41

Currently On View

First Floor, Room 13, West Gallery

Commentary To the principal civic heroes of Florence—Hercules and David—a third must be added: John the Baptist, patron saint of the city. Sangallo's bronze figure of this saint in the act of baptizing, a masterpiece of sixteenth-century Florentine sculpture, is the most profoundly expressive Renaissance bronze in The Frick Collection. Sangallo is known to have produced a dozen medals during his long career, but St. John is his only authenticated bronze statue. Signed by the sculptor but not dated, the figure was made for the baptismal font of S. Maria delle Carceri at Prato, probably about 1535–38. It was sold by the church before the end of the nineteenth century, and a replica took its place. Other replicas also exist. The bronze is solid-cast and therefore very heavy. Problems during the casting produced flaws, the most obvious being one in the left arm. But any difficulties experienced in the production of this bronze were secondary to the success of its completed state. The surfaces of the figure are inventively finished, with a variety of textures described by means of diverse tools and techniques. The saint's hair falls in ropey locks, quite different from the coarse, curling hair of the animal hide forming his cloak, whose underside is striated to convey its roughness. Long, streaking tendons and muscles ripple through the saint's spare body. His large eyes, with their deeply hollowed pupils, set in a sorrowful face, portray the saint as one who sees beyond the present, as the prophet and precursor of Christ. In his youth Francesco accompanied his father to Rome, where in 1506 he witnessed with the young Michelangelo the excavation of the Laocoön. A letter written much later in his life describes how lasting an impression the tortured marble group made upon him. The heightened realism and sometimes intense expressive content of Sangallo's sculpture may reflect the spell of that ancient sculpture. Source: *Art in The Frick Collection: Paintings, Sculpture, Decorative Arts*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996.

Collection History Stefano Bardini, Florence. Oscar Hainauer, Berlin. 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.