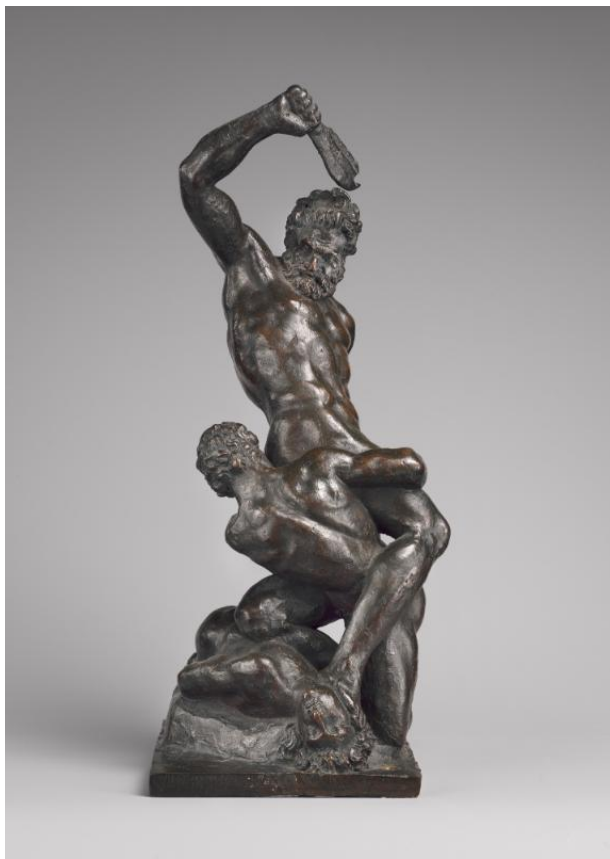


The Frick Collection: Detail Report



Samson and Two Philistines

Michelangelo Buonarroti (Italian, 1475–1564)

Date probably mid-16th century

Medium Bronze

Dimensions H.: 14 1/2 in. (36.8 cm)

Credit Line Henry Clay Frick Bequest

Accession Number 1916.2.40

Currently On View

First Floor, Room 10, Living Hall

Commentary Michelangelo's original project for a marble group to serve as pendant to his David in the Piazza Signoria, Florence, began in 1508 as a Hercules and Cacus. Political upheavals and professional rivalry sabotaged this commission, which was revived only in 1528, with the subject changed to represent Samson and Two Philistines. Although Michelangelo never executed the marble, he evidently made models for it, which were intensely admired and much reproduced. By the 1550s copies of the group began to multiply in drawings, paintings, and bronze statuettes. Some dozen sculptural versions, varying in quality and often in detail, are believed to date from the sixteenth century. Designed for a public space, to be viewed from all sides, this remarkable composition of three men engaged in deadly combat was to have a profound influence. The tautly entwined spiral of figures compels the spectator to circle the group, for although every angle is brilliantly composed, each is incomplete in itself. To see and understand the individual figures, one must move around the piece, skillfully led by the arrangement of limbs and torsos, to seek out the sequence of actions. This complexity of forms seeming to move in space and time is a far step from any sculpture by earlier Renaissance masters. The fierce energy of the combatants twists upward from the Philistine crushed underfoot, to his comrade who bites Samson's buttock, through Samson's upraised arm poised to smash his attacker's head with the ass's jawbone. The fresh, vigorous working of the material reinforces the immediacy and vitality of this drama, with many marks of the sculptor's action—the shaping, smearing, and scraping of the model, which may have been made in plaster or clay—left visible in the surface. This small bronze seems to preserve much of the legacy of Michelangelo's unfinished project. The Frick version of Samson and Two Philistines is generally agreed to be the best of the bronze replicas. Source: Art in The Frick Collection: Paintings, Sculpture, Decorative Arts, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996.

Collection History Stefano Bardini, Florence. His sale, June 5–7, 1899, Christie's, Lot 297, sold for £680 to Powell, apparently acting as agent for Bardini. Stefano Bardini sale, May 26–30, 1902, Christie's, Lot 64, sold for £1,200 to Durlacher. 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.