

# The Frick Collection: Detail Report

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## Neptune on a Sea-Monster

Severo da Ravenna (Severo Calzetta) (Italian, ca. 1465/75–ca. 1538)

**Date** early 16th century (probably before 1511)

**Medium** Bronze

**Dimensions** 13 3/8 x 11 1/2 in. (34 x 29.2 cm)

**Credit Line** Henry Clay Frick Bequest

**Accession Number** 1916.2.12

Currently On View

First Floor, Room 13, West Gallery

**Commentary** Praised by Gauricus, a writer who knew him, as a sculptor excellent in all media and as a painter, Severo was highly regarded in his lifetime but has long been neglected. Only recently have scholars begun to sort out the innumerable bronzes hitherto attributed to Bellano or Riccio or simply to the Paduan School. In the process they have come to suspect that a great many of these pieces actually were produced by Severo and his assistants. It has also grown obvious that a notable difference in quality distinguishes Severo's best works from the perfunctory later efforts of his shop, which continued to thrive after his death. Although the lost-wax method of casting was prevalent in Paduan workshops, Severo seems to have learned more complex casting techniques that enabled him to turn out series of closely related bronzes; these were basically reproductions, but they could be varied in detail so that each purchaser might consider his bronze in a way unique. It was—to judge from the evidence of quantity—a very successful factory. In general, Severo's repertoire resembles Riccio's. He too made many useful, decorative objects, such as lamps and inkstands, often attended by satyrs. But perhaps his finest and most ambitious surviving bronze is The Frick Collection's Neptune on a Sea-Monster, comprising two separate figures that are bolted together. It belongs to a group of related pieces, most of them reduced to a single figure: either Neptune or, more often, some variant of a sea-monster or dragon. One of these dragons, in a New York collection, is signed, thus providing the attribution for the Frick bronze. The sea-monster that supports Neptune—a splendid beast, worthy of his popularity—may have been inspired by Mantegna's engraving of the Battle of the Sea-Gods. His body and thrashing tail are covered with rough scales. His splayed, finger-like claws, sharp fangs, and snapping tongue are fearsome. Yet the dragon's eyes are almost human, and he twists upward toward his master with the frisky playfulness of a dog on a leash. (The reins once held by Neptune are missing.) Neptune, stern and powerful, moves ahead purposefully, hair flowing behind, trident thrusting. Neptune portrayed as master of the seas, bringing peace in his wake, was a subject that held particular and obvious attraction for rulers and admirals. Source: *Art in The Frick Collection: Paintings, Sculpture, Decorative Arts*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996.

**Collection History** Frédéric Spitzer, Paris. His sale, April 17–June 16, 1893, 33 rue de Villejust, Paris, Lot 1449. 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.

