

POWER AND PATHOS

BRONZE SCULPTURE OF THE HELLENISTIC WORLD

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14 MARCH
21 JUNE
2015



PRESS RELEASE

From 14 March to 21 June 2015 Palazzo Strozzi in Florence will host a spectacular retrospective of ancient bronze sculpture from the 4th century BC to the 1st century AD. This major exhibition has been organised in conjunction with the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles and the National Gallery of Art in Washington

Power and Pathos. Bronze Sculpture of the Hellenistic World

Palazzo Strozzi, Florence – 14 March–21 June 2015

From 14 March to 21 June 2015, Palazzo Strozzi in Florence will be the first venue to host the major exhibition entitled **Power and Pathos. Bronze Sculpture of the Hellenistic World** organised and produced in conjunction with the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, the National Gallery of Art in Washington and the Soprintendenza Archeologica della Toscana, Tuscany's directorate general for archaeology. After Florence, the exhibition will travel to the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles from 28 July to 1 November 2015 and then to the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, from 6 December 2015 to 20 March 2016.

This important joint venture reinforces Palazzo Strozzi's international reputation for excellence. The exhibition will showcase – for the first time in Florence – some of the greatest masterpieces of the ancient world from such leading Italian and international museums as the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Florence, the Museo Nacional del Prado in Madrid, the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Naples, the British Museum in London, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence, the National Archaeological Museum of Athens, the Archaeological Museum of Heraklion (Crete), the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, the Musée du Louvre in Paris, the Vatican Museums and the Musei Capitolini in Rome.

Power and Pathos features about 50 extraordinary sculptures in bronze and tells the story of the artistic achievements of the Hellenistic era (4th to 1st centuries BC), when new bronze-working techniques were developed, new forms of expression were explored, and a first globalized language of art emerged in the Mediterranean and beyond. In this cosmopolitan climate, Greek art, in effect, became an international phenomenon.

The vast Hellenistic empire founded by Alexander the Great stretched from Greece and the borders of Ethiopia to the Indus Valley, embracing Egypt, Persia, and Mesopotamia. Thus its astonishing output in the fields of art, history and philosophy enjoyed extensive dissemination. While the Classical Greek world was based essentially on the polis, or city-state, now art served more than the cities and their citizens and focused instead on the courts of Alexander's successors. Artists devoted their skills to celebrating the rulers and their achievements, adopting and adapting Classical modes of expression to suit new needs.

The exhibition owes its unique character to bronze, an alloy of copper, tin, and often lead, so significant in ancient technology and art that Pliny the Elder dedicated an entire book to this medium. Bronze works are extremely rare today, and the vast majority of large bronzes from the ancient world are lost because they have been melted down over the centuries so that the metal could be used to mint coins and to manufacture arms. Immediately after casting, bronze was so dazzling that it resembled gold.

One of the reasons this show is an unprecedented, once-in-a-lifetime event is that it will allow visitors to admire works never before seen together: the bronze *Apoxyomenos* from Vienna alongside the Uffizi's marble version used in its restoration; the two archaizing *Apollo-Kouroi* from the Louvre and from Pompeii. Although all of these "pairs" have frequently been shown together in photographs, this is the very first time that any of them have been displayed side by side. A large number of the bronzes surviving to this day were found in the sea rather than on dry land. Spectacular underwater finds include the figure of a *General* (Lucius Aemilius Paullus?) found in the sea off Brindisi in 1992, and the *Head of a Man with Kausia* (discovered in the Aegean off the island of Kalymnos in 1997).

The discovery of the head of Apollo in the sea off Salerno in December 1930 was poetically described by Nobel Prize laureate Giuseppe Ungaretti: *"Night had almost fallen and the anchovy fishermen were returning to port in single file. Gathering up their nets, one of the fishermen found [...] a head of Apollo in his net. Holding it up in the palm of his lined hand and seeing it now imbued with new life in the light and appearing to bleed – where it had been severed at the neck – in the fire of the setting sun, the fisherman thought he was looking at St. John the Baptist. I myself have seen it at the Museum in Salerno; it may be by Praxiteles or possibly Hellenistic [...] its indulgent and quivering smile hinting at an ineffable song of youth restored to life!"*

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Unlike Classical artists, who sought to convey a sense of balance and serenity, Hellenistic sculptors aimed to capture the full range of human feelings, from anger and passion to joy and anguish. They typically emphasised pathos, or lived experience, in the figures they depicted, and we find this also in the portraits of the men who rose to power in Alexander's wake. Such portraits were designed to bolster the sitters' legitimacy and dynastic connections through a combination of individual features both dramatic and idealised. Statues of athletes such as the so-called Apoxyomenos—a figure shown after the competition, holding a small curved instrument called a strigil used to scrape off sweat and dirt from the body—focus on the nude male body in its various forms. Artists no longer represent wholly idealised forms, as in the Classical era, but depict momentary details that vividly express physical and emotional states.

Curated by Jens Daehner and Kenneth Lapatin of the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, the exhibition offers a comprehensive overview of the Hellenistic bronze sculpture in its larger archaeological, cultural and geographical environments.

Monumental statues of gods, athletes, and heroes will be displayed alongside portraits of historical figures—including select sculptures in marble and stone—in a journey allowing visitors to explore the fascinating stories of these masterpieces' discovery, often at sea (Mediterranean, Black Sea) but also in the course of archaeological digs, thus setting the finds in their ancient contexts. Those contexts could be a sanctuary where they were used for votive purposes, a public space where they celebrated personalities or events, a home where they fulfilled a decorative function, or a cemetery where they commemorated the deceased.

A unique feature of the Palazzo Strozzi exhibition is that it sets the works in context by also probing and exploring the production and casting processes and the finishing techniques adopted.

The Exhibition

Divided into seven thematic sections, the exhibition opens with the large Portrait Statue of *Aule Meteli* (known as the *Arringatore*), formerly part of the collections of Cosimo I de' Medici, to highlight the fact that there was already an interest in collecting ancient bronzes as far back as the Renaissance, and with a statue Base signed by Lysippos, favourite sculptor of Alexander the Great, discovered in ancient Corinth in 1901.

The exhibition continues with an evocative overview of **Portraits of Power**, presenting portraits of influential figures of the period, a new artistic genre which first saw the light of day under Alexander. *The Statuette of Alexander the Great on Horseback*, the *Portrait Head of Arsinoë III Philopator*, a *Diadochos* (a term initially used only for Alexander and his direct descendants) and the figure of a *General* (Lucius Aemilius Paullus?) are all outstanding examples of the genre.

The third section, entitled **Bodies Ideal and Extreme**, deserving of special attention, explores the stylistic innovations in the language of art through the development of new themes and genres taken from daily life, together with the ability to capture the dynamism of the human body in the extraordinary variety of its movements and positions. *The Statuette of an Artisan* and the *Sleeping Eros*, both from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, are outstanding examples of this trend.

The fourth section, entitled **Likeness and Expression**, focuses on individual portraits, on the use of inlay and colour to achieve a naturalistic look, and on the underscoring of pathos and of other forms of characterisation, which emanate from the figure of an *Aristocratic Boy* and from numerous other *Male Portrait Heads*.

The fifth section sets out – as its title, the **Art of Replication**, makes quite clear – to demonstrate bronze's inherent ability to create multiple "originals", by displaying reproductions of famous Hellenistic works from later eras, while also illustrating the differences between casting and "cold work," the imitation of bronze in dark stone, and the differences in the state of preservation of bronze statuary discovered in the sea and on land.

The sixth section, entitled **Divine Beings**, addresses a theme of some significance with a number of breathtakingly beautiful sculptures, including the *Athena (Minerva of Arezzo)*, the *Medallion with the Bust of Athena* and the *Head of Aphrodite*.

The exhibition closes with a section entitled **Editions of the Past**, which sets out to examine the renewed interest in archaic and classical styles as well as the mix of late Hellenistic styles. The most significant exhibits in this section include the so-called *Idolino* and the *Apollos* from the Louvre in Paris.

The exhibition is promoted and organised by the Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi, the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, the National Gallery of Art in Washington and the Soprintendenza per I Beni Archeologici della Toscana, with the participation of the Comune di Firenze, the Camera di Commercio di Firenze, the Associazione Partners Palazzo Strozzi and the Regione Toscana, with a contribution from the Ente Cassa di Risparmio di Firenze.

From March 20th to June 21st 2015, the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze will host the exhibition *Great Small Bronzes. Greek, Etruscan and Roman Masterpieces*. The exhibition will showcase 160 works in a fascinating exploration of the theme that makes it an essential complement to Palazzo Strozzi's *Power and Pathos. Bronze Sculpture of the Hellenistic World*.

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