

## Sculpture in Florence, Italy, in the Later 1400s

*Verrocchio was the leading sculptor in late fifteenth-century Florence—the time of Lorenzo the Magnificent, when the Medici family dominated the republic. The artists, by continuing earlier Florentine sculptural explorations of individual psychology and movement in space, gave their figures and actions an aristocratic elegance. The works of Verrocchio and his Renaissance contemporaries also reveal a fascination with ornamental detail, often based on classical antiquities surviving from ancient Rome. Among their finest achievements are portrait busts and religious reliefs, both carved in marble and modeled in clay, which, when fired, becomes terra-cotta (Italian for “baked earth”).*

### Benedetto da Maiano

Florentine, 1442–1497

*Madonna and Child*, about 1475

Marble, 0.583 x 0.390 m (22 7/8 x 15 1/4 in.)  
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1960.5.16



Benedetto da Maiano, the foremost marble carver of his generation in Florence, may have had some training under Antonio Rossellino. For comparison, a marble Madonna relief by Rossellino is also in this room. Benedetto's Madonna reliefs in marble and other materials were extremely popular in the last quarter of the fifteenth century. In this example, the child's joyous affection and energetic pose contrast with the mother's gently sorrowful smile, seeming to express her resignation to his fate.

### Benedetto da Rovezzano

Florentine, 1474–c. 1554

*Relief from an Altar*, about 1507/1512

Marble, 0.530 x 1.295 m (20 7/8 x 51 in.)  
Widener Collection 1942.9.131

Two energetic nude infants (*putti*) with wings carry a plaque with a Latin inscription: “King of Kings and Lord of Lords.” The classical motifs of nude babies and a fruit garland derive from ancient Roman decorative sculpture. As demonstrated by the varied surface textures and the deep, confident undercutting of the fruits and leaves, Benedetto da Rovezzano was a master of richly detailed marble carving. He made a near twin to this relief—with eagles instead of angels—now in the sacristy of San Michele a San Salvi near Florence. Thus the Washington relief was probably made for the same church.

Below the marble relief, the wooden *cassone* (a type of storage chest) shows the popularity of *putti* in Renaissance domestic interiors as well as church furnishings.

### Desiderio da Settignano

Florentine, c. 1428–1464

*“Marietta Strozzi”*, about 1455

Marble, 0.530 x 0.488 x 0.199 m (20 7/8 x 19 1/8 x 7 3/4 in.)  
Widener Collection 1942.9.112

Early documents state that Desiderio made a beautiful marble portrait head of Marietta degli Strozzi, daughter of a powerful banking family. The present bust was reportedly in a Strozzi palace in Florence until 1913, but its unfinished condition makes it less likely than some other candidates to be the Marietta portrait. The nose and one projecting portion of the

coiffure are restorations that cloud the design's otherwise graceful character.

*Saint Jerome in the Desert*, about 1461



Marble, 0.427 x 0.548 m  
(16 3/4 x 21 1/2 in.)  
Widener Collection 1942.9.113

Desiderio's skill with the chisel produced very low reliefs that suggest a rich and complex space, movement, and expression through subtle modulation of the marble surface. In the present example, the fourth-century Saint Jerome kneels in prayer before a crucifix. Behind this more strongly projecting foreground is a finely carved setting with a vast desert landscape and a sky streaked with clouds. A terrified boy in fluttering garments flees from a lion and lioness emerging from the rocks behind the cross. According to legend, Jerome tamed the lion by removing a thorn from its paw.

### Style of Desiderio da Settignano

*Christ and Saint John the Baptist as Children*, second half 15th century

Marble, 0.402 x 0.402 m (15 3/4 x 15 3/4 in.)  
Andrew W. Mellon Collection 1937.1.115

Carved in exceptionally low relief, this square marble sculpture reflects the composition of a famous round relief by Desiderio, now in Paris (Louvre Museum), representing the same subject—the young Jesus with his slightly older cousin, John the Baptist. The Florentine Dominican theologian, Cardinal Giovanni Dominici, had recommended around 1410 that images of the Christ Child together with John be displayed in the home for the moral instruction of children.

### Francesco di Simone Ferrucci

Florentine, 1437–1493

*The Adoration of the Shepherds*, about 1475/1485

Terra-cotta, 0.810 x 0.650 m (31 3/4 x 25 3/4 in.)  
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1939.1.333

The medium of terra-cotta and the complex composition on a small scale suggest that this relief may have been a model, to be executed in another medium for an altarpiece or pulpit. The strongly individualized faces of the shepherds may indicate the influence of similar rustic figures in Netherlandish paintings that could be seen in Florence, such as *The Portinari Altarpiece* (Uffizi Gallery) by Hugo van der Goes, which arrived in Italy from the Low Countries in 1483.

## Antonio Rossellino

Florentine, 1427–1479

### *Madonna and Child*, about 1477



Marble, 0.840 x 0.560 m (33 x 22 in.)  
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1939.1.327

The softly carved face, wavy hair, and downcast gaze of this Madonna establish her kinship with busts by Antonio Rossellino in Gallery 11. Mary presents her child as if on a balcony, from which he looks out on his worshippers. On the base, hovering angels carry a wreath enclosing the monogram of Christ (*YHS*, Greek for “Jesus”). The coats of arms in the lower corners—of the Ridolfi and Morelli of Florence—suggest that the relief was made for a married couple from those two families.

## After Antonio Rossellino

### *Madonna and Child with Angels*, after about 1470

Stucco, 0.698 x 0.553 m (27 1/2 x 21 3/4 in.)  
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1943.4.78

This tender relief is a stucco cast, possibly molded in the Rossellino workshop, from a marble relief now in Vienna (Kunsthistorisches Museum). In the Renaissance, it was a familiar practice to reproduce especially admired stone devotional reliefs in less costly materials.

## Andrea del Verrocchio

Florentine, 1435–1488

### *Giuliano de' Medici*, about 1475/1478

Terra-cotta, 0.610 x 0.660 x 0.283 m (24 x 26 x 11 1/8 in.)  
Andrew W. Mellon Collection 1937.1.127



This bust of Giuliano, the younger brother of Lorenzo de' Medici, conveys the impression of springing energy for which Verrocchio's figures are known. The tightly curling hair, twisting pose, and subtle smile at the corners of the eyes and mouth appear also in the works of Leonardo da Vinci, who was Verrocchio's apprentice in both sculpture and painting. Giuliano's richly ornamented armor may reflect his elaborate attire at the celebrated tournament he gave in 1475 in honor of the beautiful Simonetta Vespucci. Decorations Verrocchio designed for that event may have included Giuliano's festive armor.

In Gallery 7 is a painted portrait by Botticelli, *Giuliano de' Medici*, which depicts a more pensive aspect of the subject's character.

### *A Lady of the Vespucci Family (?)*, about 1475/1480

Marble, 0.530 x 0.488 x 0.199 m (20 7/8 x 19 1/8 x 7 3/4 in.)  
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1939.1.326



Harmonious clarity of form and structure, along with subtle expression and delicate carving of details such as the brocaded gown, makes this bust one of the masterworks of fifteenth-century portrait sculpture. With her proud bearing, the lady has been identified as belonging to the promi-

nent Vespucci family, based on her resemblance to a member of that family portrayed in a fresco by the painter Ghirlandaio in the Florentine church of Ognissanti. The woman in the fresco, and perhaps the subject of this bust, may even be Simonetta Vespucci, the beloved of Giuliano de' Medici; another Verrocchio bust in this room portrays Giuliano.

### *Putto Poised on a Globe*, about 1480

Clay on metal armature, 0.750 x 0.383 x 0.230 m (29 1/2 x 15 x 11 3/4 in.)  
Andrew W. Mellon Collection 1937.1.128



This plump, nude boy (*putto*) is a great rarity: a surviving Renaissance model—made of unbaked or raw clay—for a sculpture to be produced in more durable material such as bronze or marble. The child's puffed-out cheeks and gaze toward his outstretched right arm imply that he was meant to hold a pinwheel. Related motifs in painting and sculpture—the most famous being Verrocchio's bronze *Putto with a Dolphin* in Florence (Palazzo Vecchio)—suggest that this figure was the model for the central ornament on a fountain. In this as well as his active, carefully balanced pose, the little boy is a forerunner of the bronze *Mercury* atop the fountain in the National Gallery's Rotunda.

### *Lorenzo de' Medici*, about 1485

Painted terra-cotta, 0.658 x 0.591 x 0.327 m (25 7/8 x 23 1/4 x 12 7/8 in.)  
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1943.4.92



In this painted bust, Lorenzo the Magnificent wears the plain tunic and turban of a Florentine citizen. The overhanging brow, projecting chin, and grimly set mouth convey the forceful personality of the man who ruled Florence from 1469 until his death in 1492. Solid and compact in silhouette, this bust may be related to the life-size wax images, dressed in Lorenzo's clothes, that he ordered made under Verrocchio's supervision. Lorenzo placed those effigies in churches in thanksgiving for his escape from the assassination plot that took the life of his brother Giuliano in 1478.

## After Andrea del Verrocchio

### *Alexander the Great*, about 1480

Marble, 0.559 x 0.367 m (21 x 14 1/2 in.)  
Gift of Therese K. Straus 1956.2.1



This marble relief, a virtual pattern book of late fifteenth-century ornamental motifs, is believed to reflect a lost metal relief by Verrocchio depicting Alexander the Great, the Greek conqueror of the fourth century B.C. Sent by Lorenzo de' Medici as a gift to King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary, the Verrocchio relief is now known only through old descriptions and probable copies that include this one.

Other works by some of these sculptors are in Lobby B and Galleries 10 and 11. A painting from Verrocchio's workshop is in Gallery 7.

The sculpture discussed above is normally displayed in this room, but installations may change. PLEASE RETURN THIS SHEET TO GALLERY 9.

© 1991 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington  
5 August 1991 (1 ed.)