



## ***Mercury and Argus and Perseus and Medusa, Ginori Porcelain Factory***

### *Mercury and Argus and Perseus and Medusa*

Ginori Porcelain Factory;  
after models by Giovanni  
Battista Foggini; Gaspero  
Bruschi, porcelain worker  
Italian, Florence, 1749  
Porcelain, polychrome,  
and parcel gilt  
H: 17 15/16 x W: 13 9/16  
x D: 11 in  
97.SE.76

Two brightly colored  
figural groups from the  
Ginori Porcelain Factory  
depict violent episodes  
from the Roman poet  
**Ovid's *Metamorphoses***.  
Modeled in porcelain,  
Jupiter's messenger



Mercury attacks Argus on one pedestal, while Perseus kills Medusa on another. The factory reused Giovanni Battista Foggini's bronze casting molds, replicating the Baroque sculptor's muscular figures, wind-blown dramatic draperies, and dynamic compositions. Yet the painting, using jewel-like yellow, purple, blue, and pink pigments and **gilding**, brings out a spirited delicacy more typical of the **Rococo** style of the mid-1700s. As a result, Medusa, whose horrifying look was reputed to turn men to stone, is merely a rather startlingly rosy-cheeked woman with snakes for hair, while Argus, the hundred-eyed giant who tormented Jupiter's lover Io, is a handsome, muscled warrior.

Each figural group is made from ten separate sections. These were **press-molded** and fired before being joined together. The figures are joined to Rococo bases with candle sockets, indicating that they were meant to function as part of a **candelabrum**. The two lively groups would have been used as a dramatic centerpiece for a dinner table setting.

### **About the Artist**

Ginori Porcelain Factory (Italian, 1735–present)

One of the most important porcelain factories to be established in Italy, the Ginori porcelain manufactory was founded in Doccia, near Florence, by the Marchese Carlo Ginori in 1735. Ginori hired two Viennese painters, as well as an Italian modeler, Gaspero Bruschi, to start production. For ten years, Ginori experimented with different porcelain recipes and collected models and molds for porcelain figures. Finally, in 1746, he began to sell the factory's products to the public. The early works were made from a grayish, hard-paste porcelain derived from local **clay**, which was extremely prone to cracking. After 1770 the paste was changed to a finer, whiter variety.

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Under the directorship of Ginori's son, Lorenzo, the Ginori factory produced a range of polychromed and white bas-reliefs of mythological subjects. The single figures and figure groups included peasant, **classical**, and **commedia dell'arte** subjects.

Ginori's was the only Italian porcelain factory to thrive during the 1800s; the factory continues production today under the name Richard-Ginori.

### **Questions for Teaching**

What is happening in each sculpture?

How are these two objects similar or different?

What textures do you see? Where are they on the sculpture?

Have you seen sculpture like this before? Where did you see them? How were they used?