



# THE AGE OF BRONZE

An Unprecedented Gathering of  
Rare Hellenistic Sculpture  
at the Getty Center

*Terme Boxer* (detail), 3rd–2nd century BC, Greek. Bronze. Museo Nazionale Romano—Palazzo Massimo alle Terme. Su concessione del Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo—Soprintendenza Speciale per il Colosseo, il Museo Nazionale Romano e l'area archeologica di Roma. Photo © Vanni Archive/Art Resource, NY

During the Hellenistic era, artists around the Mediterranean created sculptures of unprecedented realism, physical power, and emotional intensity. Bronze—with its reflective surface, tensile strength, and ability to hold the finest details—was employed for dynamic compositions, graphic expressions of age and character, and dazzling displays of the human form. In this period, from about the time of the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC until the establishment of the Roman Empire in 31 BC, bronze, an alloy of copper and tin, fueled an explosion of artistic expression, as sculptors broke free from the idealized forms of the Classical canon. Fine detail and expressive forms created more realistic renderings of physical and emotional states: a revolutionary combination of power and pathos that changed the course of art history.

On view at the J. Paul Getty Museum at the Getty Center from July 28 through November 1, 2015, *Power and Pathos: Bronze Sculpture of the Hellenistic World*, will be the first major international exhibition to bring together approximately fifty of the most important ancient bronzes from the Mediterranean region and beyond.

Large-scale bronze sculptures are among the rarest survivors of antiquity. Typically, their valuable metal was melted down and reused. The rows of empty stone pedestals still seen at many ancient sites are a stark testimony to both the ubiquity of bronze statuary in the Hellenistic era and its scarcity in modern times. Ironically, many bronzes known today still exist because they were once lost at sea, only to be recovered many years later by fishermen and divers.

“The representation of the human figure is central to the art of almost all ancient cultures, but nowhere did it have greater importance, or more influence on later art history, than in Greece,” said Timothy Potts, director of the J. Paul Getty Museum. “It was in the Hellenistic period that sculptors pushed to the limit the dramatic effects of billowing drapery, tousled hair, and the astonishingly detailed renderings of veins, wrinkles, tendons, and musculature, making the sculpture of their time the most life-like and emotionally charged ever made, and still one of the high points of European art history. The fifty or so works in the exhibition represent the finest of these spectacular and extremely rare works that survive, and makes this one of the most important exhibitions of ancient classical sculpture ever mounted.”

Because of their rarity, Hellenistic bronze sculptures are most often displayed in museums as isolated masterpieces. This exhibition, the largest of its kind ever staged, is the first to present these works in their larger contexts. When viewed in proximity to one another, the variety of styles and techniques employed by ancient sculptors is emphasized to greater effect, as are the varying functions and histories of the sculptures. Bronze was a material well suited to reproduction, and the exhibition provides an unprecedented opportunity to see objects of the same type, and even from the same workshop, together for the first time since their ancient creation.

Hellenistic art was a widespread phenomenon, propelled by the expansion of the Greek world under Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC. The impact of Greek culture





recent discoveries that have never before been exhibited in the United States, the exhibition is the most comprehensive survey of Hellenistic bronzes ever organized. Recent finds—many salvaged from the sea—will be exhibited for the first time alongside famous works from the world’s leading museums, ranging from statuettes, busts, and heads to life-size figures and herms. The exhibition is organized into six sections: Images of Rulers, Bodies Ideal and Extreme, Images of the Gods, The Art of Replication, Likeness and Expression, and Retrospective Styles.

Among the many famous works on view is the so-called *Head of a Man from Delos* from the National Archaeological Museum in Athens, a compellingly expressive portrait with well-preserved inlaid eyes. The dramatic image of an unknown sitter—probably a ruler—is believed to date from the end of the second or beginning of the first century BC.

The iconic *Terme Boxer* from the Museo Nazionale Romano, with its scars and bruises, stands out as the epitome of the modern understanding of Hellenistic art, employing minute detail and an emphatic, arresting subject. The weary fighter, slumped and exhausted after his brutal competition, combines the muscular power and emotional pathos that is unique to Hellenistic sculpture.

Although rarely surviving today, multiple bronze versions of the same work were the norm in antiquity. A good example is the figure of an athlete shown holding a strigil, a curved blade used to scrape oil and dirt off the skin, known in Greek as the *apoxyomenos* or “scraper.” This exhibition brings together three bronze casts—two full statues and a head—that are late Hellenistic or early Roman Imperial versions of a statue created by a leading sculptor in the 300s BC. The original was evidently one of the most famous works of its time and copies were made well into Roman times.

can be traced not only throughout the Mediterranean from Italy to Egypt but also in regions beyond, such as Thrace (Bulgaria), ancient Colchis (the Republic of Georgia), and South Arabia. Itinerant Greek bronze workers satisfied commissions far from their homeland, while local craftsmen employed indigenous techniques to create sculptures in fashionable Greek styles. Through trade, migration, plunder, and emulation, bronze sculpture served as a vehicle for transfers of culture and technology.

From sculptures known since the Renaissance, such as the *Arringatore* (Orator) from Sanguinetto (in the collection of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Florence), to spectacular

*Head of a Man from Delos*, about 100 BC, Greek. Bronze, glass paste, and dark stone. Hellenic Ministry of Culture, Education and Religious Affairs. National Archaeological Museum, Athens. Photo: Maurie Mauzy / Art Resource, NY



This exhibition was organized and curated by the Getty Museum in collaboration with the Palazzo Strozzi, Florence; the Museo Archeologico Nazionale; and the Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici della Toscana, along with the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC, where the exhibition will be on view from December 13, 2015 to March 20, 2016.

Bank of America is the National Sponsor of this touring exhibition. The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities. The Los Angeles presentation is also supported by the Getty Museum’s Villa Council, Vera R. Campbell Foundation, and the A.G. Leventis Foundation.

## BRONZE SPOTLIGHT

Among the most spectacular underwater archaeological discoveries of the last twenty years, the “Croatian Apoxyomenos” was recovered from the sea off the islet of Vele Orjule, near Lošinj, Croatia in 1999. Standing 192 cm high, with copper-inlaid lips and nipples, the statue represents an athlete removing the oil and sand from his body with a small metal scraper called a strigil. The statue was most likely made in the first century BC in a Greek foundry, modeled after an original from the fourth century BC.

The apoxyomenos (“scraper”) type illustrates an important characteristic of bronze sculpture: its reproducibility. *Power and Pathos: Bronze Sculpture of the Hellenistic World* presents all three known versions of the apoxyomenos, first discovered at Ephesus in Turkey in 1898: two full-scale sculptures and one head. Bringing these three bronzes together for the first time provides an opportunity for comparative study, looking not only at casting and finishing techniques, but also at proportion and style in order to understand the bronzes’ relation to each other and to their ancient prototype. The Croatian Apoxyomenos is the best preserved, only missing a small area in the back of the right thigh, the inlaid eyes, the small finger of the left hand, and the strigil itself. Its inclusion in *Power and Pathos* at the Getty marks the Croatian Apoxyomenos’s first visit to the United States. Following its time in the exhibition, the sculpture—a national treasure in Croatia—will return to a new museum being specially constructed for it on the island of Lošinj.

*Athlete (The Croatian Apoxyomenos)*, Greek, 1st century BC. Bronze and copper. Republic of Croatia, Ministry of Culture. Photo: Ljubo Gamulin (Croatian Conservation Institute)