Further Reading


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Bronze

Favored for its durability and distinctive appearance, metalworkers have used bronze as early as the second millennium B.C.E. for functional and decorative objects. Bronze is an alloy of copper and tin with two distinct material properties: it is strong, and it can endure stretching while retaining this strength. These properties make bronze an ideal metal for sculptural forms, particularly figures in attenuated action poses.

Bronze casting techniques advanced around the 4th millennium B.C.E. as new technologies in metallurgy occurred in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. When casting bronze, sculptors create molds that allow them to develop ideas by using pliable materials that are often less costly. Molds frequently consist of the shape surrounding the sculpture—in other words, its negative space. Molten bronze can be poured into molds as part of the casting process. When cooling bronze first expands to fill in detail areas of the mold, then cools and retracts, allowing intricate detail to be rendered with refinement (Figure 1). A sculpture’s final appearance can be further articulated through a process of oxidation (such as the application of corrosive substances) which creates a distinctive patina that gives an object its final color and surface texture (Figure 2). More ornate sculptures may also feature gilding, a coating of gold, applied in specific areas of a sculpture or all over the object (Figure 3).

This exhibition highlights examples of figural bronze sculpture from The Trout Gallery permanent collection, including some works on display for the first time. It bears witness to the central position the metal holds in visual cultures that span the globe; on view are objects from four continents and eleven centuries. The variety of these works allows for cross-cultural exploration and interdisciplinary approaches to the medium.

Frances Taylor ’22