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Gilt bronze *Putto*, circle of Jacopo
Sansovino

Gilt bronze

Veneto

ca. 1580

h. 13,5 cm (5.3 in.)



The Victoria and Albert Museum holds a set of seven gilt-bronze statuettes attributed to Roccatagliata: seven *putti* playing an assortment of musical instruments, most likely salvaged from the bronze ornamentation of an important cabinet. The present statuette — comparable to the London bronzes in scale, gilding, and the form of its base — almost certainly served the same decorative function on a piece of furniture, and, like them, would originally have held a musical instrument.

It lacks, however, the liveliness and movement characteristic of Roccatagliata's work. Furthermore, an affinity with a gilt-bronze *putto* in the Palazzo Venezia, Rome, of about 1580, points instead to an earlier conception, one nearer the bronze sculpture of Jacopo Sansovino's workshops, with their graver postures and weighty drapery. Several gilt-bronze statuettes of this type, older in manner than Roccatagliata's, have been assigned to sculptors in Sansovino's orbit, among them Girolamo Campagna and Camillo Mariani. Firm attribution, however, of Venetian bronzes from the later sixteenth century is, in most cases, an unrealistic ambition, given how sculptors' workshops in Venice were then organized. Sansovino himself, writing to Ercole II d'Este, Duke of Ferrara, in 1550, concedes that he customarily left his assistants to design his bronzes in full, works he more often than not never touched; the chasing, the finishing, even the modeling of the clay or wax prototype might pass through several hands. Even so, the type of the present *putto*, its gilding, its stance, and its relationship to the statuettes cited above together warrant an attribution to the circle of Jacopo Sansovino and a date in the third quarter of the sixteenth century.

LITERATURE

Antonio Santangelo, *Museo di Palazzo Venezia. Catalogo delle sculture*, Rome, 1954; Wolfgang Wolters and Norbert Huse, *The Art of Renaissance Venice. Architecture, Sculpture and Painting. 1460–1590*, Chicago, 1990; Pietro Cannata, *Museo nazionale del Palazzo di Venezia. Sculture in bronzo*, Rome, 2011.

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