

Willoughby Gerrish

Savile Row

Press Release

BRONZE: Vulcan's Forge

Willoughby Gerrish | Second Floor, 16 Savile Row, London, W1S 3PL

13 June – 26 July 2024

Following on from the seminal *Bronze* exhibition at the Royal Academy in 2012, Willoughby Gerrish Ltd are delighted to present *BRONZE: Vulcan's Forge* at our new gallery space on Savile Row, an exhibition based around the material that has been so central to sculpture throughout human history.

The title of this exhibition has been chosen as 'Vulcan's Forge', in reference to the blacksmith of the gods, the archetypal foundryman and protector of the 'arts of fire', who represents the mythological origin of all bronze objects in the western, classical tradition.

For thousands of years, bronze has been chosen as an artistic medium for the combination of its aesthetic beauty, its technical advantages and its range of powerful cultural and historical associations.

Bronze is the name given to the alloy of copper and tin, when these chemical elements are combined at a ratio of roughly 9:1, respectively. However, the bronze used for making sculptural casts has often contained other metals and impurities. For example, Italian Renaissance bronzes, such as the Florentine *Seated Lion* and the medal of *Francesco II Novello da Carrara* often contain zinc, lead, silver, nickel, antimony and arsenic. This alchemic combination of metals creates an alloy with a high tensile strength, that can be cast into sculptural forms that are highly complex and (until fairly recently) could not be realised in any other material, particularly on a large scale. This, combined with its durability, has made bronze an appropriate and popular material for public statuary, as well as for smaller works. Its relative hardness has also meant it was historically used for the production of tools, weapons and utilitarian objects, such as our Roman *Casserole Patera*, Bronze Age *Axe Head*, or the *Short Sword with blood channels* from Luristan.

Bronze also has the capacity to be melted down and repurposed. This has largely been to the detriment of art history, because since the invention of the bronze cannon in the late 14th century, many bronze statues were thrown back into the forge and re-cast as weapons of war, a role which its strength and heat resistance also made it well-suited to.

Bronze sculptures and objects are made by pouring a molten copper alloy into a pre-prepared mould. This allowed a precise reproduction of the intricacies of the mould, or the primary model (which was usually fashioned from wax or clay). Depending on the method used, this process could be repeated numerous times, which has been useful for the creation of editions and multiples, as is the case for the works in this show by Giacometti, Cragg, Moore and Dalou.

Another attractive prospect for the artist is that the surface of bronze can be altered greatly, making it a versatile form of expression. Its appearance can be enhanced by the application of patinas through various processes involving acid, pigment and heat. A fine example of this can be seen on the surface of the *Egyptian Cat* from the Late Dynastic period, which has a wonderful mottled red and green patina, or the 16th century *Capitoline Hercules*, whose green hue was likely added to mirror the ancient examples that were being unearthed at the time. This tradition of applying green 'all'antica' patinas is continued until the present day, as evidenced by Emily Young's *Sailor*, of 2022. In 16th century Florence, Grand Duke Cosimo I de'Medici (1519-1574) is credited with devising his own recipe for the reddening of metals. It is at least possible that after this time, Florentine bronzes began to have deep-red patinas applied to their surface, like that which appears on our 17th century Florentine bronze of *A Female Allegory of Virtue* (...), attributed to Damiano Cappelli.

A major part of the appeal of bronze as an artistic medium was its famed use by the ancients, who used it to cast statues of their gods and heroes. It is said that the ancient Greeks even valued it above all other materials. Despite this, the material was not interpreted as intrinsically 'pagan' and it did not deter later Christians from making religious sculptures from bronze, as proven by our *Corpus Christi* from circa 1200. The use of bronze was even justified by biblical passages that associated it with judgement and strength. It was during the Renaissance, that the material of bronze became widely and intractably associated with the authority and glory of the ancient world. Artists and patrons repeatedly sought to emulate the art of the antiquity to harness the rhetorical power of the classical past, by making and owning copies of the most famous ancient statues to have survived from antiquity, which were often reproduced in the form of small-scale statuettes. To demonstrate this phenomena, we have an exquisite 43cm high model of the *Famese Hercules* (the original of which stands at over 3m tall), and a finely executed, reduced scale version of the ancient *Il Porcellino*, cast by Gian Francesco Susini.

- Elliot Davies

Notes to Editor

Willoughby Gerrish:

Willoughby Gerrish is an independent art dealer and consultant, specialising in artworks from the Impressionist, Modern and Post-War periods, with a specific focus on sculpture. He is the director and owner of Willoughby Gerrish Ltd which opened a new premises on Savile Row in June 2024.

Elliot Davies:

Elliot Davies is an independent dealer and advisor working across the fields of European sculpture, paintings and works of art, from antiquity to the twentieth century, with a particular interest in Italian renaissance bronzes. He is currently writing the catalogue for the Ömer Koç collection of British Art.

Willoughby Gerrish:

Second Floor, 16 Savile Row, London, W1S 3PL

Tuesday – Friday, 11am – 4pm

Contact details:

T: +44 (0) 7301 024124

E: emily@willoughbygerrish.com

W: www.willoughbygerrish.com

Instagram: [@willoughbygerrish](https://www.instagram.com/willoughbygerrish)