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"Desiderio da Settignano: Sculptor of Renaissance Florence" Premieres in United States in First International Exhibition at National Gallery of Art, Washington, July 1–October 8, 2007



Desiderio da Settignano (c. 1429 - 1464)

Julius Caesar, c. 1460

marble

Musée du Louvre, Paris

Photo by Pierre Philibert

Washington, DC – The first international exhibition devoted to Italian Renaissance sculptor Desiderio da Settignano (c. 1429–1464) comes to the National Gallery of Art—its only U.S. venue—from July 1 through October 8, 2007. **Desiderio da**

Settignano: Sculptor of Renaissance Florence brings together approximately 28 works—many coming to the U.S. for the first time—by the artist and his immediate circle, ranging from highly original portrait busts of children to subtle low-relief carvings of religious subjects.

The exhibition was organized by the Musée du Louvre, Paris (where it opened October 27, 2006, through January 22, 2007), the Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence (on view through June 3, 2007), and the National Gallery of Art, Washington. The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

"Visitors to the National Gallery of Art will be able to deepen their appreciation of Desiderio's exceptional virtuosity as a sculptor and of the poetry of his innovations thanks to this collaboration with the Musée du Louvre and the Museo Nazionale del Bargello," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "Owing to the generosity of the lending institutions worldwide and the first publication of an English-language book on this artist, we are confident that Desiderio will receive the widespread esteem that he deserves."

The Artist

Regarded as one of the greatest sculptors of the Renaissance, Desiderio inspired contemporaries to declare that he brought cold marble to life. He was born in the quarry town of Settignano, where his father and brother were stone cutters. Trained in Florence in the mid-15th century, Desiderio was strongly influenced and possibly taught by Donatello. Desiderio mastered expression and low-relief carving so completely that throughout the years, his portrait busts and marble reliefs were often misattributed to Donatello.

Donatello's departure from Florence to work in Padua from 1443 to 1453 permitted a new generation of Florentine sculptors to develop their own ideas. In the short period before his death in 1464, Desiderio was one of the leading artists in the city, creating a delicate and sensitive style that conveyed the vitality of his subjects, whether they were small children, graceful young girls, or careworn old men.

Desiderio was rediscovered by scholars and collectors in the second half of the 19th

century, during the great revival of interest in Florentine sculpture of the early Renaissance. The great sculpture collections formed during this time and in the early 20th century competed for the very few genuine works by Desiderio that entered the art market. The National Gallery of Art acquired three of his greatest works, one from each of three founding donors: *A Little Boy* (c. 1455–1460) from Andrew Mellon in 1937; *Saint Jerome in the Desert* (c. 1460–1464) from the Widener Collection in 1942; and *The Christ Child* (?) (c. 1460–1464) from the Samuel H. Kress Collection in 1943.

The Exhibition

Situated in the West Building's intimate Italian Renaissance galleries, the exhibition will display the different genres for which Desiderio is best known: tender busts of children, extraordinary low reliefs including groups of the Virgin and Child, and delicate portraits of women.

The exceptional skill with which Desiderio rendered expression is evident in his busts of children, as seen in the gentle eyes and jovial smile of *Laughing Boy* (c. 1460–1464) and the tender companionship in *Christ and Saint John the Baptist as Children* (*The Arconati Visconti Tondo*) (c. 1455–1457). The wisdom and confidence depicted in the marble bas-relief *Julius Caesar* (c. 1460) and the brightly colored yet dignified bust *Saint Constance* ("*La Belle Florentine*") (third quarter of the 15th century), carved in wood by a close follower of Desiderio, further exemplify the range of emotion explored by the sculptor and his circle.

Two masterpieces by Desiderio are not included in the exhibition—the tomb of the Florentine chancellor Carlo Marsuppini in Santa Croce (completed 1459) and the Sacrament tabernacle in the Medici church of San Lorenzo (completed 1461)—because they cannot leave the Florentine churches for which they were made. They are, however, illustrated and discussed extensively in the exhibition catalogue.

Curators, Catalogue, and Related Activities

The curators for **Desiderio da Settignano**, an exhibition initiated several years ago by Jean-René Gaborit, Musée du Louvre, include Marc Bormand, senior curator, department of sculpture, Musée du Louvre; Beatrice Paolozzi Strozzi, director, Museo

Nazionale del Bargello; and Nicholas Penny, senior curator, sculpture and decorative arts, and Alison Luchs, curator of early European sculpture, both from the National Gallery of Art.

The exhibition catalogue *Desiderio da Settignano: Sculptor of Renaissance Florence*, the first book on Desiderio since 1962 and the first ever published in English, has also been published in French and Italian. The English edition of the catalogue is produced by 5 Continents Press and is edited by Bormand, Strozzi, and Penny. It includes illustrated essays by the editors, as well as Gaborit; Giancarlo Gentilini, University of Perugia; Francesco Caglioti, University of Naples; and Andrea Baldinotti and Tommaso Mozzati, both of the Museo Nazionale del Bargello. The 288-page publication with 200 color illustrations is available from the National Gallery of Art by phone at (202) 842-6002 or (800) 697-9350 (\$65.00 hardcover).

The National Gallery of Art will offer Gallery Talks throughout the duration of the exhibition, dates and times to be announced.

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit www.nga.gov/renovation (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on [Facebook](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on [Twitter](http://twitter.com/ngadc) at twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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