

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR RELEASE:  
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## NATIONAL GALLERY EXHIBITS

### REUNITED BRONZE GROUP

WASHINGTON, D.C. February 16, 1971. Two small Renaissance bronze sculptures, one in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and one in the Louvre, Paris, have been reunited after atomic analysis confirmed a curator's hypothesis that they once formed a single group.

The group, Saint Christopher Carrying the Christ Child with the Globe of the World, is now on view at the National Gallery, where it will remain through March 21. The Louvre granted the National Gallery a brief loan of its Saint Christopher (10-3/4 in.), attributed to Bartolomeo Bellano (1434-1496/97), a Paduan follower of Donatello.

The saint fits together perfectly with a bronze from the National Gallery's Samuel H. Kress Collection, one of the world's greatest collections of Renaissance bronzes, in many respects second only to the National Museum in Florence. The Kress bronze had been known as "A Boy with a Ball" (3-1/2 in.). A tenon (or bored projection) on the seated child's bottom fits exactly into a hole in the saint's hand, so that the child sits on the saint's upraised palm. This motif constitutes a handling of the subject new to art history, since every known Saint Christopher carries the Christ Child either on one shoulder or on his back.

Saint Christopher, the traditional patron of travelers, was removed from the liturgical calendar of the Roman Catholic Church in 1969, because scholars could not find definitive proof of his historical existence. His feast day had been celebrated on July 25.

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According to the apocryphal legend, Christopher was a ferryman who agreed to carry a small boy across a river on his back. As he went further his burden grew heavier, until when he reached the other side his passenger revealed himself as the Christ Child, with his burden of the whole world.

The idea that the two bronzes, in museums 4,000 miles apart, might belong together, first occurred to Bertrand Jestaz, Curator of the Department of Objects of Art at the Louvre.

While in Washington last spring to study the National Gallery's Kress bronze collection, M. Jestaz examined the "boy with a ball." He noticed the posture which suggested the boy had been seated on something, and saw how its characteristic style corresponded to a statuette in the Louvre which had a flat, upraised hand. The Louvre figure represented a bearded man with arms raised above his head, dressed in a tunic. It had been known as an "Atlas" or "Hercules."

In April, 1970, M. Jestaz asked whether it might be possible for the boy to be removed from the socle (or miniature pedestal) on which it had been sitting since it was acquisitioned by the National Gallery in 1957, to be photographed and measured. This was done, and its bored and threaded tenon was discovered, with measurements which indicated that it might well have been attached at one time to the statuette in the Louvre.

In September, 1970, the boy was taken to Paris by Dr. Douglas Lewis, Curator of Sculpture at the National Gallery. Its tenon fitted perfectly into the hole in the Louvre Christopher's hand, so that the child sat looking down, his left hand holding the globe of the world on his knee, his right hand raised to bless Saint Christopher after his heroic labor.

The Louvre kept the child for three months, making a clay cast of it which was tinted to resemble bronze in order to be displayed with the saint. In December of 1970, the Saint Christopher, together with the Christ Child, was brought to the United States where the National Gallery arranged for technical testing. The tests were intended to determine 1) whether the two figures were composed of the

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same metal, and 2) whether the tenon on the child, which fit the saint so well, was part of the original cast or had been soldered on at some later date.

The two bronzes were tested at the Louise Dupont Crowninshield Memorial Laboratory of the Winterthur Museum at Wilmington, Delaware, by Dr. <sup>Victor F.</sup> ~~Vincent~~ Hanson, <sup>Coordinating Scientist,</sup> ~~director of the analytical research department,~~ and Dr. Robert Feller, senior fellow of the National Gallery Research Project at the Carnegie Mellon University.

The test marked one of the first dramatic uses of a non-dispersive X-ray fluorescence analyzer, a sort of mini-reactor, one of the first of its kind ever installed in an American museum. "This device can measure the composition of an object with a precision which could help to revolutionize the classification of works of art," Dr. Lewis said. "And better yet, it leaves no trace of any testing on the originals."

The tests showed that the saint and child were made of an unusual and highly specialized combination of copper and zinc, with small percentages of tin, lead and a few other elements. Thus they were actually made of "brass." ("Bronze," which usually refers to the metal alloy made from copper and tin, is however the accepted generic term for these small Renaissance figures.) The exact similarity of composition in the two pieces confirmed that they had been poured from the same batch of metal, undoubtedly in the same workshop. The child's tenon, tested separately, proved to be an original and integral element of the same material.

The bronze group is unusual for other reasons besides its composition. It appears to be the sole existing cast of this motif, and the fact that the relationship of its figures constitutes a new treatment in art history makes it particularly rare.

Dr. Lewis has described the reunited Saint Christopher and Christ Child as "an undoubted masterpiece: one of the finest and most interesting of the larger Renaissance bronze statuettes. Its pose, an upward spiraling movement in space, shows it to be the work of an extraordinarily inventive and creative artistic intellect. This elaborate

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three-dimensional development is one of the most complex things a sculptor can do, and is a very precocious solution for the early Renaissance."

The group is also rare in its attribution to one of the few well-documented artists of his time, Bartolomeo Bellano of Padua, a pupil of Donatello. Bellano was called a "clumsy craftsman" ("ineptus artifex") by Pomponius Gauricus in his De Sculptura, but the epithet chiefly reflects the later date at which the book was written, in 1504. At that time the more accomplished, sleeker bronzes of Andrea Briosco, called "Il Riccio," had come into general currency in Padua, and even those of the gifted Bellano suffered from this change in taste.

However, the "rough facture" of the small boy, noted earlier by John Pope-Hennessy, director of London's Victoria and Albert Museum, in the catalog he wrote for the National Gallery's Kress bronze collection, was one of the characteristics which first led Jestaz to consider that the boy might be a complement to the Bellano figure with raised arms in the Louvre.

"The recomposition of this group will certainly lead to new research," Dr. Lewis said, "and possibly even to a new attribution." The identical drapery style on the two figures differs from that of other known Bellano works. M. Jestaz is now considering alternative attributions, such as to Severo da Ravenna, a slightly younger Paduan artist contemporary with Riccio, who executed the National Gallery's bronze Neptune on a Sea Monster in the Widener Collection.

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Scan of photocopy of photograph. Photograph is located in the Press Release files.

Saint Christopher Carrying the Christ Child with the Globe of  
the World

Attributed to Bartolomeo Bellano (1434-1496/97)  
Bronze, second half of 15th century  
St. Christopher H. 10 3/4"; Christ Child H. 3 1/2"

CREDIT: St. Christopher, Musée du Louvre, Paris

Christ Child with the Globe of the World,  
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.  
Samuel H. Kress Collection

Scan of photocopy of photograph. Photograph is located in the Press Release files.