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**The Focus and Evolution of Bernini’s “St. Longinus”**

The “Bernini: Sculpting with Clay” exhibition assembles the clay models and drawings made by the sculptor Bernini in advance of his final statues. The exhibition is located in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. By juxtaposing related models and drawings, the exhibition provides glimpses into Bernini’s creative processes. With its focus on his preparatory steps, it also provides an understanding of his thorough work process and also how Bernini’s vision evolved. In particular, an examination of the clay model, preparatory drawings, and the final statue of Saint Longinus shows that the statue’s incredible sense of movement is seated in an exceptional focus with the drapery in Bernini’s preparatory steps.

The purpose of the “Bernini: Sculpting with Clay” exhibit was to show how Bernini visualized his marble statues with small clay models called bozzetti. It presents his creative process and shows how each work evolved as Bernini shifted between mediums, from drawings to clay to marble. This comparative perspective is encouraged by the layout of the exhibition, which cordons different works in vaguely distinct sections. In the Saint Longinus section, the two clay models are placed next to each other, and five drawings are arrayed on the walls facing the models next to a large picture of the final statue.

The catalog entry provides the history of the statue. Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome commissioned a statue of Saint Longinus to play in one of its altars that commemorated its relics, one of which was the lance of St. Longinus. Saint Longinus was the Roman centurion who participated in the crucifixion of Jesus. After Longinus stabbed Jesus with his lance, he converted to Christianity. It is the climax of this emotional moment of conversion that is depicted in the statue. St. Longinus holds his lance in his right hand and both arms are outstretched in an open and heroic stance. His robe flows dramatically around him, suggesting the effect of some external, and possibly supernatural, force.

The most elementary variations can be spotted in his drawings, of which five are on display. Sketching offers a quicker method of conveying impressions than modeling clay, so many of Bernini’s drawings show him working out his original ideas and the first poses and variations he imagined.

The drawings on display each focus on something specific and something unique. Some, such as “D4: Eight Studies for the Torso of a Partially Draped Figure”, “D6: Study of the Torso of Saint Longinus”, and “D11” focus on a specific detail of the sculpture. D4 shows experimentation with the knot of drapery. The level of detail here is astonishing. Some of the differences between the knots are barely noticeable, differing by just a couple strokes out of many dozens—a testament to Bernini’s incredible level of detail when it came to the movement of the robe. D6 shows the outline and musculature of the chest and arms, and shows in the retracing of the right arm, Bernini’s decision-making in process. Elements like the downward pointing left arm in D6 and the detail in the robe in D11 were later eliminated from the final version, showing that this was a long and experimental process.

Others, such as D12 and D9 practice a particular effect. “D12: Two Studies of a Draped Figure” examines the relationship between arm and fabric: the movement in the sketches comes from the pulling of the arm. “D9: Three Studies of Drapery Details” is nearly abstract and does not capture texture or the detail in the cloth. One sketch consists of only fifteen fast and uncertain strokes. These drawings indicate how deeply absorbed Bernini was in the patterns of cloth. They suggest that Bernini was thinking about the cloth on a level deeper than the simply visual and this eventually manifests in the incredible sense of movement that inhabits the final statue.

After imagining poses and details on paper, Bernini translated his visions into three-dimensional products, his bozzetti. Two of these terracotta models out of 22 were on display: Cat 3 and Cat 4. “Saint Longinus (Cat 3)” is a complete clay study that has the effect of being covered all over in a shimmering gold texture. This was created by the stippling texture of the armor and was used by Bernini to study the effects of light. From this we can gather that these clay models were not only used to decide form, but also style and questions of aesthetic consideration.

Compared to “Saint Longinus (Cat 3)”, the second clay model “Saint Longinus (Cat 4)” (1630-31) shows changes to stance and the knotted drapery. Unfortunately, the model has suffered extensive breakage and missing pieces and what remain—the right foot, bottom-right piece of robe, knotting of the robe at the left waist, the upper torso, shoulders and neck—are supported by a metal frame. Despite its unfortunately fragmented condition, the model can still be recognized as being one of the last stages of design. Measuring marks, which are marks used to make a proportionately enlarged sculpture, can be spotted from the indentations made near the ankle bone. This is significant because it suggests that this was the final model and indeed, the only difference between the model (what we can see of it) and the final version is the lack of sandal straps on the right foot.

While the composition of the figure seems perfect, there is a lack of fine detail—for instance, the foot has a delicate ankle bone, but a lumpy stump where the toes should be. This may point to the corrosion of the terracotta due to time, or to Bernini’s lack of concern with this particular detail in a model that was made for measurement, not design, purposes. Even still, there is more detail in this robe than in the one in Cat 3. Here, the robe seems to take on a life of its own and there is a sense that is the robe that moves, not the body beneath it. This further suggests that Bernini’s focus when he was making this model, was to practice the convection of movement, not the anatomy of Longinus’s body. This emphasizes that the force of conversion is a power larger than Longinus.

Lastly, we can garner knowledge about the technical aspects of Bernini’s work from this model. Areas smooth wear in the folds of the robe suggest that Bernini used his fingers, in addition to the toothed tools that were used to create the fine striated textures that cover the model. According to the catalog, this toothed texture was applied after shaping and had a decorative function related to light effects—Bernini showed concern for multiple facets of his sculpture all at once. The sculpture also supports our understanding of Bernini’s work process. After shaping the model, he textured the surface, and then used wire cuts to break the model into smaller pieces for firing. These wire cuts can explain why some of the fragments have broken along such clean lines. Furthermore, the color difference in the torso (the middle drapery is a dusty rose beige while the other sections are plain beige), suggest that the middle section was fired in an environment that had more oxygen in the iron-oxide content. In the last step, the pieces were joined together which a tree resin adhesive that has been confirmed by chemical analysis.