

# ABOUT THE ART

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Art from  
the Ancient  
Mediterranean  
and Europe  
before 1850

Gallery 13

ACKLAND

## **QUESTIONS?**

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## **ACKLAND ART MUSEUM**

The University of North Carolina  
at Chapel Hill  
101 S. Columbia Street  
Chapel Hill, NC 27514  
Phone: 919-966-5736

## **MUSEUM HOURS**

Wed - Sat 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.  
Sun 1 - 5 p.m.  
Closed Mondays & Tuesdays.  
Closed July 4th, Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve,  
Christmas Day, & New Year's Day.



Unidentified artist  
Cypriot, Archaic period  
**Male Votary with Conical Helmet and "Cypriot Shorts,"**  
c. 550-520 BCE  
limestone with traces of red paint  
Gift of W. A. Whitaker, 60.14.5

## About the Art

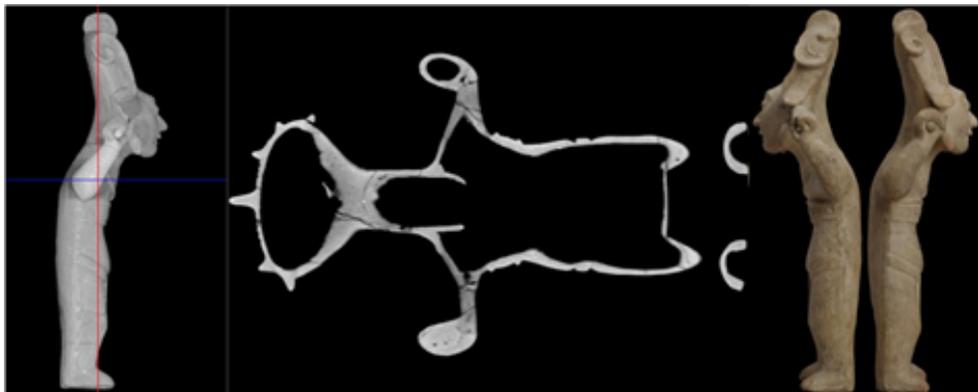
- Tool marks visible on this sculpture indicate the variety of techniques used to carve soft limestone. There are marks of a flat chisel, for example, in long strokes on its extended surfaces and in shorter marks on the item of clothing that resembles shorts or a loincloth. On the back, there are also marks of a wider chisel.
- The so-called shorts and the peaked cap or helmet probably represent ceremonial attire. Traces of red paint indicate that there may originally have been a painted vest-like garment as well.
- This figure was probably placed with others in the sanctuary of a deity, each one representing a worshiper devoted to that god.



Unidentified artist  
Mexican, Veracruz, Pre-Columbian  
**Smiling Figure ("Sonriente")**, 600-800 CE  
terracotta with traces of polychrome  
Gift of Gordon and Copey Hanes in honor of Dr.  
Joseph C. Sloane, 90.95

### About the Art

- The facial expression on this figure, which appears to be smiling, resembles that of many others excavated at the site of Las Remojados on the Gulf Coast of Mexico. They may represent priests engaged in ceremonies associated with the cult of the fertility goddess, Tlazolteótl.
- It is unusual to find complete figures like this; they are thought to have been ritually destroyed in antiquity. Scientific images called CT scans (Computed Tomography), seen below, indicate that the sculpture was in fact broken and has since been repaired. While the majority of the sculpture is hollow, which is consistent with similar figures of this kind, the CT scan indicates that its right arm is solid, so perhaps it is a later addition.





Unidentified artist  
Nigerian, Nok culture (c. 1000 BCE – 300 CE)  
**Female Figure**, 100 BCE-200 CE  
terracotta  
Ackland Fund, 97.15

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## About the Art

- This figure is hollow, like others from the Nok culture, and was constructed with coils of clay that were partially smoothed on the exterior and then covered with a slip (clay diluted with water), some of which has eroded from the surface.
- Since 1943, many terracotta figures like this one have been discovered in central Nigeria near the village of Nok, a name also given to an ancient African culture. Archeological evidence indicates that the Nok people grew crops and were skilled in working iron.
- Because Nok figures became so popular with collectors, many fakes have appeared on the market. Some are modern forgeries, while others are pastiches assembled from fragments of ancient figures. In 2008, scientific testing authenticated this figure as an ancient Nok terracotta.



Unidentified artist

Roman, Imperial period

**Torso of Dionysos or Apollo**, second century CE, in a fourth-century BCE Greek style  
marble

Ackland Fund, 62.14.1

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## About the Art

- Any attributes that would have helped establish the identity of this figure are missing, along with its head, arms, and legs. The most likely candidates are the gods Apollo and Dionysos. During the fourth century, both gods were depicted as youthful, slender, and sensual figures with long hair. On the shoulders of this sculpture, strands of curly hair are visible.
- In the complete figure, its right leg would have extended slightly forward and its left arm would have reached away from the body. At the lower edge of what remains of the left leg is the remnant of a support. Marble sculptures needed additional support to prevent extended limbs from breaking off due to the weight of the stone. Artists sometimes disguised those supports as tree trunks that the figure appeared to lean against.
- Roman artists often made marble copies of Greek bronze sculptures. This one imitates the style of fourth-century Greek bronzes.



Unidentified artist  
Egyptian, Third Intermediate period, Twenty-  
second dynasty, reign of Sheshonq I  
**Scarab of Sheshonq I**, 945-924 BCE  
blue-green faience  
Ackland Fund, 62.19.12

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### About the Art

- The scarab, or dung beetle, was a popular symbol of renewal and regeneration and the most frequently represented subject in ancient Egyptian amulets. With thin pieces of faience, a ceramic material, the artist suggested the scarab's legs — three visible on each side.
- On the underside of the scarab there are hieroglyphs that identify the king, Sheshonq I, and establish the object's date.
- Scarab amulets were thought to protect and bring longevity and abundance. As with other amulets, they were placed in tombs or worn by the living — a suspension hole in this one suggests the latter. When inscribed with hieroglyphs, they could also be used as seals; if inscribed with the name of a king they could be given as especially powerful amulets and signs of royal favor.



Unidentified artist  
Egyptian, Late period, Twenty-  
sixth to Thirtieth dynasty  
**Wedjat Eye**, c. 664–343 BCE  
green and black faience  
Ackland Fund, 62.19.18

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### About the Art

- In this *wedjat* eye (a name for a representation of the eye of the god Horus), we see the brow, the eye, the cosmetic line (extending from the outside corner of the eye), and several additional features, including chevrons, feathers, and two rows of tiny monkeys.
- In tombs, wedjat eyes were placed beside the head. They were also worn by the living for their healing properties; the loop at the top of this example allowed it to be worn as a necklace.
- In one ancient Egyptian account, Horus' eye was plucked out in a battle with the god Seth. The god Thoth then healed it. In other stories, the god Horus offered the healed eye to his dead father Osiris. The power of the eye was so great that it brought him back to life.



Unidentified artist  
Mesopotamian, probably c. early  
2nd millennium BCE

**Frog**  
hematite  
Gift of Miss Emily L. Pollard,  
69.3.1

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### About the Art

- This object was an amulet that could have been worn or carried on a chain (through the hole visible in the frog's side) to protect its owner. Frog amulets have been found in Sumerian tombs, worn around the neck of the dead.
- The frog is a symbol of fertility in Mesopotamia and is associated with the god of a subterranean ocean.
- Between 1889 and 1900, archeologist Hermann V. Hilprecht worked at a site at Ur, an important ancient Sumerian city now known as El Muqaiyar in southern Iraq; this frog is recorded as coming from that site.



Unidentified artist  
Mesopotamian, Old Babylonian  
period  
**Cylinder Seal: Goddess Ishtar,**  
c. 1800 BCE  
hematite  
Ackland Fund, 72.53.3

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### About the Art

- In the modern impression of the seal's carving, from left to right, we see a female worshipper, a male worshipper carrying a sacrificial animal, and the war goddess Ishtar. Ishtar's attributes are the animal she stands on and her weapons — a scimitar (a curved sword), a mace, and two quivers of arrows above her shoulders.
- An inscription next to the image of Ishtar, visible in the part of the seal itself that faces us, names two female deities. Nisaba is the goddess of writing, accounting, and grain rationing and measuring. Ashnan is a goddess whose name means grain.
- By pressing their cylinder seals into damp clay, owners certified that they were present at a commercial, legal, or diplomatic transaction. Cylinder seals could be worn around the neck or wrist by threading a cord through the hole in their center.



Unidentified artist

Byzantine

**Sgraffito Bowl with Raptor**, 12th century CE  
earthenware and glaze

Gift of Charles Millard, 2018.46.3

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### About the Art

- *Sgraffito* is created by applying a contrasting color of slip (clay thinned with water) to the surface of a vessel, and then etching a design into the surface, revealing the color of the clay beneath. Here, the bird, leaves, and linear designs appear in the color of the clay.
- This bowl is thought to have been discovered in a shipwreck in the 1960s. Its physical makeup, the image of a raptor, and traces of marine incrustations link it to another bowl in the collection of Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C. that may have come from the same shipwreck.
- Aristocrats trained raptors and other birds of prey (identifiable by the hooked beak) for hunting. Depicting one on a bowl could be a reference to the owner's power and social status.



 10

Unidentified artist  
Egyptian, New Kingdom, Eighteenth dynasty, early  
Amarna period  
**Princess with a Musical Instrument,**  
c. 1360–1350 BCE  
white sandstone  
Ackland Fund, 67.29.4

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## About the Art

- This sculpture was made during the reign of King Amenhotep IV, who changed his name to Akhenaten. Under his rule, he established new, monotheistic religious practices, moved the capital, and prompted substantial changes in Egyptian artistic style. The facial features of the woman in this sculpture are typical of that style, including the elongated head, slanted eyes, and irregular body proportions.
- A daughter of King Akhenaten, recognizable as a princess by her distinctive hairstyle, plays a musical instrument. Women played these instruments in temple rituals. This kind of figure is typical of scenes in which the royal family worships the god Aten.
- Sculptures carved in low relief were often used to adorn exterior walls, and tool marks on the back of the Ackland's sculpture suggest this function. Those features, together with the relief's style and subject, suggest it may have been from a building in the capital, el-Amarna.



Unidentified artist  
Iranian, Caspian region, early  
Parthian period  
**Animal-Shaped Pouring Vessel,**  
3rd-1st century BCE  
earthenware  
Gift of Osborne and Gratia B. Hauge  
in honor of Dr. and Mrs. Sherman E.  
Lee, 91.21

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### About the Art

- The body of this unglazed vessel was made on a potter's wheel, while the neck was modeled by hand. The pouring spout was probably molded around a cylindrical object. In the recessed areas that represent the eyes, the artist inserted pupils made of clay discs.
- This pot would have been used to store and pour water or other precious liquids. Because it is unglazed, water could condense through the clay, keeping it cool.
- Animal-shaped vessels have been excavated in cemeteries in northwestern Iran in areas near the Caspian Sea. This vase is similar to ones found at a site in that area from the earlier part of the Parthian Empire (247 BCE-224 CE).



Unidentified artist  
Greek, East Greek, Rhodes, Archaic period  
**Head of a Goddess**, c. 500 BCE  
terracotta  
Gift of the Tyche Foundation, 2010.8

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### About the Art

- This head was made with a mold and was originally painted. There are very faint traces of red and blue paint in the eyeballs, earring, and headband or veil.
- Determining which deity this sculpture represents is difficult without more information about its original setting or other attributes. One possibility is Demeter; there was an important cult of Demeter at Cnidos, where the sculpture was found.
- Cnidos was a Greek city on the west coast of Asia Minor. This sculpture's red clay and style resemble objects from the nearby island of Rhodes. Similar objects have been found in graves at both locations.



## 13

Attributed to the Bucci Painter

Greek, Attic, active c. 525 – c. 500 BCE

**Vessel (Neck Amphora): Scene with Apollo, Leto, and Artemis and a Departure Scene, c. 540–530 BCE**

terracotta, black-figure ware

Ackland Fund, 88.15

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### About the Art

- There are twenty small holes visible on the surface of this vessel. They come from repairs made to the vase in antiquity, suggesting that it was valuable enough to reassemble rather than discard when it broke. Clamps affixed to the vase through the holes would have held the pieces together.
- One side depicts a four-horse chariot, a charioteer, a woman, and three warriors departing for battle. The woman hands a helmet with a laurel wreath to the warrior on the left. On the other side Apollo, wearing a laurel wreath, plays a stringed instrument. The small deer beside him is a symbol of his sister Artemis; she and their mother Leto stand to either side of him.
- The Bucci Painter was a Greek vase painter, active late in the sixth century. Vase painters are often named after the subject of a famous vase or, in this case, the name of its current or former owner. This painting has been attributed on the basis of stylistic characteristics typical of the Bucci Painter, such as the anatomy of the horses and the ornament on the neck of the vase.



14

Unidentified artist

Greek, Attic

**Oil Vase (Squat Lekythos): Women at their Toilette, c. 430-420 BCE**

terracotta, red-figure ware

The William A. Whitaker Foundation Art Fund, 71.8.1

## About the Art

- This vessel depicts women in an interior scene, as suggested by the objects hanging behind them. Several women grip mirrors while others carry boxes or hold vases. The women who sit in the chairs are most likely of higher status than the standing women, who may be companions or slaves.
- The *lekythos* is typically used to hold oils and perfumes. Depictions of women are quite common on such vessels, reflecting their use mainly by women.
- It is certain that this vase is from the area around Athens, but who made it remains unknown. The painting might be by an artist familiar with the Eretria Painter (active c. 430-420 BCE), an Athenian painter who often depicted domestic scenes. Another possibility is the Washing Painter, also active at that time in Athens.



## 15

Unidentified artist

Greek, Attic

**Fragment of a Funerary Vessel (Lekythos): Scene of Leave-Taking**, c. 420–410 BCE

marble

Ackland Fund, 76.24.1

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### About the Art

- The marble surface depicts a man, a woman, a child, and a man on horseback. The man and the woman are shown shaking hands, which may be a gesture of parting (because one of them has died) or of reuniting. The man on horseback may be the god Hermes, who escorted souls of the deceased to the underworld.
- *Lekythos* is the name given to slender Greek vessels with narrow necks that held oil and perfume, which were used in preparing a dead body for burial. Although this sculpture is in the shape of a lekythos, it is solid inside. It functioned as funerary monument.
- The portrayal of a family group on the lekythos suggests that the object belonged on a family plot and may have been used to mark its boundary. Elaborate funerary markers placed on family ground not only commemorated the deceased, but also indicated the family's social standing.



Unidentified artist

Roman, Syrian (Palmyra)

**Funerary Relief of No'om (?), Wife of Haira,  
Son of Maliku, c. 170 CE**

limestone

The William A. Whitaker Foundation Art Fund,  
79.29.1

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## About the Art

- An inscription in Aramaic at the upper right of this relief identifies the woman represented. It has been translated as: "No'om, wife of Haira, son of Maliku, alas." The key attached to her mantle and the spindle in her hand are symbols of her wifely status and household responsibilities.
- Palmyra was a major commercial city on vital trade routes connecting the Mediterranean and Near East. Prosperity under Roman rule during the first and second centuries led to the rise of a middle class and a major result of their patronage was funerary monuments.
- Second-century sculptures like this one came from underground rock-cut tombs. The deceased were buried in niches, called *loculi*, one on top of another. The short ends of the loculi were adorned with bust-length relief images. Family members visited the tombs both for burials and to venerate the dead.

Chat with this work of art using ARTBOT. Instructions available in the Museum Lobby.



Unidentified artist

Roman

**Lion-Footed Cauldron Leg**, first century CE

bronze

The William A. Whitaker Foundation Art Fund, 80.33.1

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### About the Art

- Lion-footed designs for furniture can be traced back to ancient Egypt, but they were also popular in Greece during the sixth and fifth centuries, although usually simpler in form than this example.
- This is one of three legs that originally supported a vessel such as a large cauldron or a water heater. Another leg, identical to this one, is in the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, Maryland. They may have come from the same object.
- Although there are no obvious joins, the leg may have been cast in separate pieces and then assembled. The leg is hollow with an opening at its top behind the palmette form but the long, curved structure of the leg makes it difficult to examine the interior for signs of joins.



Unidentified artist  
Etruscan, Late Archaic period  
**Female Dancer**, c. 500–480 BCE  
bronze  
Ackland Fund, 77.51.1

## About the Art

- The clothing of this small figure is decorated extensively, though it may require tilting your head to look at it from different angles to see all the decorations. There are rows of small holes punched into the surface around her waist and neck. Incised lines in the skirt indicate the texture and close fit of the fabric.
- Because earlier Etruscan figures have more elongated limbs and exaggerated poses, this sculpture has been assigned a later date in the Archaic period (c. 700–480 BCE).
- Although it is difficult to know the function of this object since parts of the limbs are missing, it is likely that it adorned a candelabrum, a candle holder with multiple arms. Dancing female figures were considered fitting ornaments for candelabra, echoing the real dancing that took place at candlelit banquets.



## 19

Unidentified artist  
Roman, Imperial period  
**Juno**, 150-200 CE  
bronze

The William A. Whitaker Foundation Art Fund, 87.4

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### About the Art

- The decorated diadem, the veil, and the figure's clothing indicate she is a married aristocratic woman or a goddess. It is likely that the figure is Juno, the goddess associated with motherhood and marriage, based on Roman imperial coins that feature similar characteristics.
- This sculpture was hollow-cast and the arms may have been cast separately from the body. It is almost entirely intact, missing only the earrings, inlay for the pupils, and what she held in her hands. Originally, Juno may have held an offering vessel in her right hand and a scepter in her left hand.
- A sculpture such as this one may have belonged in a private shrine of a wealthy Roman household.



Unidentified artist  
Greek, Hellenistic period  
**Head of a Woman**, 2nd century BCE  
bronze  
Ackland Fund, 67.24.1

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### About the Art

- This unidentified woman could be a Greek goddess, queen, or mourning woman. The veil and tilted head suggest mourning, that of either a mortal or a deity like Demeter, who lost her daughter Persephone. If the headband visible above the part in her hair is a diadem, it could be a clue that she is a queen.
- Part of a full-length figure which was cast in bronze in several sections, the head is comprised of two pieces: the mantle and the head. Remnants of solder drippings where the bronze components were soldered together are visible from the back. The eyes originally were inlaid with a material like stone or glass.



## 21

Unidentified artist

Roman, Imperial period

**Fragment of a Horse and Rider (from a Lion Hunt Sarcophagus), c. 270–280 CE**

marble

The William A. Whitaker Foundation Art Fund, 77.66.1

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### About the Art

- The carving includes elements in low relief, like the horse's harness and blanket made of lion skins, as well as areas that are deeply carved, like its mane. Even parts not readily visible on the original sarcophagus, such as the horse's left side and the underside of its hoof, are carefully finished.
- The lion hunt is a subject often depicted on sarcophagi for Roman men. The deceased could be shown in a heroic way, facing the ferocious lion with valor, just as he faced death. The horse's frightened expression and turning posture accentuate the drama of the hunt.
- There are several fragments from this sarcophagus in other museum collections. The image below shows the horse together with a photograph of its rider, a fragment now in the Glyptothek in Munich, Germany. Two other pieces in Munich come from the sarcophagus' front side. A head in the Princeton University Art Museum in Princeton, New Jersey is also associated with the sarcophagus.





## 22

workshop of Cristoforo di Bindoccio, Italian,  
active 1361 – 1409  
workshop of Meo di Pero, Italian, active 1370  
– 1393  
**Enthroned Madonna and Child with Saints**  
tempera and gold on wood panels  
Ackland Fund, 68.11.1

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### About the Art

- Mary sits with the infant Jesus on her lap in the central panel. Saints Bartholomew and Peter and two angels flank them. A scene of the Crucifixion is above. In the side panels appear two more saints, John the Baptist and an unidentified female saint. The Annunciation is depicted in the upper registers of the side panels – the angel Gabriel at the left faces Mary at the right. The small format of this painting made it suitable for personal devotional use.
- When this painting underwent conservation treatment in 1988, x-rays of the painting suggested that the triptych originally had finials attached to the tops of the three panels and that there was a base attached at the bottom.
- There is little documentation about the lives and careers of either Cristoforo di Bindoccio or Meo di Pero. Miklos Boskovits, a twentieth-century scholar and connoisseur of Italian painting, attributed the painting to these artists and thought it was made in the first decade of the fifteenth century.



## 23

Francesco Traini

Italian, Pisa, active 1321 – 1345

**Christ Blessing**, c. 1335

tempera and gold on wood panel

The William A. Whitaker Foundation Art Fund,  
61.12.1

Conservation treatment for this painting,  
completed in 1991, was made possible by a  
grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

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### About the Art

- The inscription on the book that Jesus holds combines verses 6 and 12 from the Book of John, Chapter 14. It reads: EGO/SUM/VIA/[ET] VERI/TAS/ET VI/TI QV/I CRE/DIT/IN/ME, or “I am the way, and the truth, and the life, to those who believe in me.”
- The shape of the panel suggests that it was placed above the central panel of a polyptych – a multi-panel altarpiece – probably similar in structure to an altarpiece Francesco Traini painted for the Dominican Church of Santa Caterina in Pisa.
- Traini was an influential painter and book illuminator who was active in Pisa, but knowledgeable about painting styles in nearby Siena and Florence. It is likely that he had a workshop and numerous apprentices.

### About the Artist

1322: Was paid for painting a palace in Pisa, Italy

c. 1335: Painted the Ackland's *Christ Blessing*

1337: Took on an apprentice named Giovanni

1344–45: Painted an altarpiece for the Church of Santa Caterina in Pisa



## 24

Unidentified artist

Byzantine

**Polycandelon**, c. 600 CE

bronze

Gift of Charles Millard in honor of Litsa Tsitsera,  
2001.6

### About the Art

- The Greek word *polycandelon* refers to a device designed to hold multiple candles or oil lamps. Lamps, usually made from glass or bronze, rested in the round openings in the metal disk (there are nine in this one), and the entire chandelier was suspended from the ceiling by chains.
- Polycandela were used in synagogues, churches, and mosques, as well as in secular settings. This one may have come from a Byzantine church: elements of its design suggest the shapes of the Greek letters alpha and omega, which are used to refer to God in the Christian New Testament.
- Sixth-century Greek poet, Paul the Silentiary, described the polycandela in the great Byzantine church, the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey):

Thus, descending from their lofty course, they float in a circle above the heads of men. The cunning craftsman has pierced the discs all over with his iron tool so that they may receive shafts of fire-wrought glass and provide pendent sources of light for men at night.... Thus the evening light revolves round the temple, brightly shining.



## 25

Unidentified artist  
British, Nottingham

**The Head of Saint John the Baptist on Charger  
Flanked by Saint Peter and Probably Saint Thomas of  
Canterbury,**  
1420-50

alabaster with traces of paint

Ackland Fund, purchased in honor of John M.

Schnorrenberg, Professor of Art (1959-1976), 76.44.1

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### About the Art

- John the Baptist's severed head floats at the center of this object. To the left, Saint Peter holds the keys of heaven and a book and to the right, a bishop, probably Saint Thomas Becket, carries a book and staff. Below, Jesus emerges from the tomb, a representation traditionally known as the Man of Sorrows.
- Traces of paint are visible in several places on this plaque – in the figures' hair, beards, and garments, in the book Peter holds, and beneath and behind the figures.
- Fifteenth-century alabaster reliefs were made principally in Burton-on-Trent, York, and Nottingham, England, with stone quarried from a location nearby. Reliefs depicting Saint John's head were a specialty of Nottingham.
- Plaques like this one were made in large numbers in the late middle ages in England for use in private devotions at home.



## 26

Master of the Altötting Doors

German, early 16th century

**Altar**, 1520-30

linden wood with inscriptions in ink

Gift of the Tyche Foundation in honor of the 50th Anniversary of the Ackland Art Museum, 2008.19

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### About the Art

- Nearly every inch of the wood surface is decorated with religious scenes and ornate borders. The subject of the altar is Jesus' Passion. In total, there are eleven scenes: four on each wing, with the Crucifixion as the main scene in the central panel, and two additional scenes, one above and one below the Crucifixion.
- Traces of red paint on the lips of some figures indicate that the altar was once painted. Inscriptions in sixteenth-century German script on the exterior of the two wings, visible when seen under black light, are likely instructions that specify the subjects of biblical scenes or the names of saints that were originally intended to appear there.
- The compositions of the carvings correspond closely to a series of prints by the artist Hans Schäufelein that appeared in a 1507 publication by the Nuremberg physician and humanist, Ulrich Pinder, entitled *Speculum Passionis Domini Nostri Ihesu Christi* (*The Mirror of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ*).



## 27

Master of the Legend of Saint Catherine  
Netherlandish, active 1470 – 1500

**Hugo De Groot**, 1480s?

oil on panel

Ackland Fund, 73.36.1

Conservation treatment for this painting, completed in 1995, was made possible by a grant from the Getty Foundation.

### About the Art

- This portrait was designed to be joined along its left side to a painting of Mary so that Hugo de Groot's image gazed reverentially at hers while holding his rosary beads and praying. Without that image, he seems to look distractedly to one side.
- This painting was formerly attributed to an artist from Delft called the Master of the Virgo inter Virgines. That artist made no known portraits, and it is difficult to compare the style of Hugo's face with that of the faces in his religious paintings. An attribution to the Master of the Legend of St. Catherine — who is known for painting small hands — is more convincing.
- The inscription on the back of the painting (seen in the image below) was added after Hugo's death and implies that the painting was placed at his tomb. It reads:

In this tomb is buried Hugo, known as the great [de Groot]. He was chosen a priest in the new church of Delft, which worthy post he undertook as a duty of the Councilor of the court. [In him] the church at The Hague had a loyal canon, whom Geervliet had as Dean of its holy order. Say, reader, may he go to Heaven blessed in fortune. 1509, 8th of May.





## 28

Giovanni Battista Naldini

Italian, Florence, c. 1537 – 1591

**The Presentation in the Temple, 1577**

oil on wood panel

The William A. Whitaker Foundation Art Fund, 77.41.1

Conservation treatment for this painting, completed in 1988, was made possible by a grant from the Institute of Museum Services, an agency of the Federal Government.

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### About the Art

- There are so many figures in this painting that it may be difficult to find the main subject: Mary, the infant Jesus, and the priest at the center of the panel.
- The scene represented here is known both as the Presentation in the Temple and the Purification of the Virgin. It depicts the occasion, forty days after Jesus was born, when Mary and Joseph took the child to the temple and when Mary completed the traditional Jewish ritual of purification after childbirth.
- This painting is a model that Giovanni Battista Naldini prepared before beginning work on the full-scale altarpiece of the same subject. It closely resembles the finished painting, which is still in the church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence.
- Duke Cosimo de' Medici of Florence funded the church's restoration from 1565 to 1577. Cosimo demanded that the patrons of its individual chapels pay for new decorations in keeping with a new overall design. If they refused, he replaced them with new patrons.

### About the Artist

1537: Born in Fiesole, Italy

1549–56: Trained with Jacopo Pontormo

1563: Founding member of the Accademia del Disegno, the artists' academy in Florence, Italy

1564–65: Worked on decorations for Michelangelo's funeral and for the marriage of Duke Francesco de' Medici

1577: Made the Ackland's *Presentation in the Temple*

1592: Died February 18 in Florence

Listen to music related to this artwork with the [Look & Listen Gallery Soundtrack](#). Visit [www.ackland.org/listen](http://www.ackland.org/listen) to access the playlist.



## 29

Battista Dossi

Italian, c. 1490 – 1548

**The Holy Family with the Infant Saint John the Baptist, c. 1530**

oil on wood panel

Ackland Fund, 85.22.1

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### About the Art

- In this painting, the artist set a biblical scene in a sixteenth-century Italian landscape, bringing an event from the remote past into the patron's present.
- This painting is a good example of north Italian Renaissance painting. Features like the lush landscape, careful attention to the texture of fabric and hair, and effects of light and atmosphere were typical of north Italian painting.
- Battista Dossi and his more famous brother Dosso were painters at the court of the d'Este family in Ferrara. They worked for Dukes Alfonso and Ercole II d'Este.

### About the Artist

c. 1490: Born

1517: Name first appeared in account books in Ferrara, Italy

1520: Mentioned in Ferrarese documents as being in Rome, Italy working with Raphael; later that year after Raphael's death mentioned as being back in Ferrara

c. 1530: Painted the Ackland's *Holy Family*

1542: His brother Dosso Dossi died

1548: Died in Ferrara



Agnolo Bronzino  
Italian, Florence, 1503 – 1572  
The Virgin and Child with the Infant  
**St. John the Baptist**, 1560s  
oil on wood panel  
Ackland Fund, 64.28.1

## About the Art

Set before a landscape background, the intertwining figures of the of the Virgin Mary, Christ Child, and infant Saint John form a pyramidal composition. The placement of their hands, as well as Christ's proper left foot, creates an intricate circular pattern that guides the viewer around the panel.

The unfinished state of the painting and some awkward passages, such as the proportions of the donkey in the background, have prompted questions about whether this is a late work by Bronzino, the product of a studio assistant, or a mixture of both. The survival of two additional paintings with similar compositions suggests Bronzino likely created a drawing from which all the panels were based.

While Bronzino typically depicted the Virgin Mary with more generalized characteristics, the Ackland's painting appears more portrait-like, especially in the treatment of the figure's hair and the wide, almond-shaped eyes that gaze directly at the viewer.

Bronzino's art demonstrates many of the qualities associated with mannerism, a term that later art critics invented. Mannerist painters, often supported by aristocratic and art-savvy patrons, highlighted technically and intellectually complex subjects and compositions. In this painting, the figures' intricate poses and elongated limbs, and the abrupt shift between foreground and background are examples of this approach to art making.

## About the Artist

1503: Born November 17 in Monticelli, near Florence, Italy

c. 1518: Studied with Florentine painter Jacopo Pontormo

1538: Published a volume of poetry called *Del Pennello*

1539–60: Served as court artist to Cosimo I de' Medici, grand duke of Tuscany

1540: Became a founding member of the Accademia degli Umidi, a literary academy in Florence

1546–48: Lived in Rome

1572: Held office in the Accademia del Disegno, an artist's academy in Florence

1572: Died November 23 in Florence



 31

Giovanni Antonio Dosio

Italian, 1533 – 1609

**Head of a Bearded Man**, 1567–70

marble

The William A. Whitaker Foundation Art Fund, 72.32.1

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## About the Art

- A sculpture like this may have functioned as a portrait for a tomb monument. The bust, now a fragment, would have originally included the figure's shoulders and tapered torso.
- Based on stylistic similarities with other portrait busts by Giovanni Antonio Dosio, it may have been made between 1567 and 1570.
- Dosio was trained as a goldsmith and over the course of his career worked as a painter and restorer of antiquities as well as a sculptor. He is best known for his work as an architect.

## About the Artist

1533: Born in San Gimignano, Italy

1549–52: Studied sculpture in Rome, Italy with Raffaello di Montelupo

1567–70: Sculpted the Ackland's *Head of a Bearded Man*

1575: Appears in records as an architect in Florence who worked at the churches of Santa Maria Novella and Santa Croce

1576–90: In Rome

1591–1609: Recorded working as an architect in Naples, Italy

1609: Died in Naples



32

Unidentified artist  
Italian, Urbino

**Molded Dish with Europa and the Bull,**  
c. 1550

tin-glazed earthenware (maiolica)  
Gift of the William E. Shipp Estate, by  
exchange, 2007.5

### About the Art

- The surface of the dish displays two episodes from the story of Jupiter and Europa, as described in Ovid's poem, the *Metamorphoses*. Disguised as a bull, the Roman god Jupiter convinced the mortal princess Europa to sit on his back, then abducted her and carried her off to Crete.
- Jupiter appears three times on the dish: twice disguised as a bull, enticing and kidnapping Europa and once as a god, portrayed with his traditional symbol, the eagle, at the top of the composition.
- The term *maiolica* is used to describe tin-glazed Italian pottery, known for its vivid colors and complex painted designs, which are often adapted from paintings and prints.
- Maiolica dishes were often given as gifts. In the sixteenth century, a bowl with a scene representing an abduction of a young woman could have been presented as a wedding gift, a reminder of the patriarchal expectation that a woman would submit to her husband's will.



## 33

Unidentified artist  
Flemish

**Hercules and Omphale**, c. 1650–70  
ivory or bone

Gift of the Ackland Associates, 84.14.1

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### About the Art

- Ivory is soft enough to allow fine detail in carving, so that intricate scenes like this one can be depicted in a small format.
- According to classical sources, the hero Hercules was sold as a slave to Queen Omphale of Lydia as punishment for a crime he had committed. In most accounts, Omphale and Hercules became lovers. This relief depicts the story in which he wore women's clothes and spun yarn, while she wore his lion skin and carried his club.
- In the seventeenth century (as well as in antiquity), this story in which the strongest man in the world gave the symbols of his masculinity and power to a woman was widely used as an example of the sexual power women held over their lovers.