

As one of Bertoldo's most ambitious works, *Battle* is placed right in front of the viewers at the most important location on the main corridor's wall. It is a bronze relief with opaque brown-black lacquer patina, 99 cm in width and 45 cm in height. The scale of the piece is fairly small compared to other sculptural masterpieces, however, the depiction of the characters and the content within the relief are delicate and complex. Bertoldo creatively used his own understandings of scale, composition, and material to construct a totally messy but appealing scene. The adaptation of an ancient Roman sarcophagus in this war scene between Romans and barbarians reveals his unique lyric style.

In the whole composition, there are twenty-six warriors and eighteen horses engaging in combat on a small scale. From an overall observation, James David Draper describes in *Bertoldo Di Giovanni, Sculptor of the Medici Household: Critical Reappraisal and Catalogue Raisonné*, "the figures are regimented fairly firmly along horizontal lines and are presented in almost equally high relief, with the heads looming outward".<sup>1</sup> When looking at the details closely, all the figures presented on the panel show a nearly three-dimensional quality with strong effect. Within such a small size, even a slight irregularity will create volumetric effect. The shadows surrounding the figures deepen the sense of space and concentrate artists' emotions in a restrained frame. This method of sculpturing and the use of shadows demonstrate high contrasts with different layers which gives the relief a sense of depth and intrigues the viewers. An all-over design was applied to the scene which left nearly no empty space in a constrained structure. Although the material is solid metal, the setting is dynamic and not stiff. With the utilize of various diagonal arrangements, many figures are appeared as in motion. The facial

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<sup>1</sup> James David Draper, *Bertoldo Di Giovanni, Sculptor of the Medici Household* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 133.

expressions, postures and the depiction of muscles also create an intense scenario within the piece. These characteristics are clearly shown on the top portion where some soldiers riding the horses are looking backward and their draperies are flowing with the winds. In the middle left part, there is one warrior on a furious horse seizing his helmet, he is lowering his head and clenching his jaw. On the bottom part, the figures are not on horses. Instead, these figures are nude with bare feet. They keep the weight on one foot, moving forward or have intense gestures and holding weapons to defeat the enemies. The reflections and shadows on their muscles make the action more vivid as if they are in a move and coming out of the frame. Some figures on the bottom also show the failure of one force, they are captured and restrained by ropes, stepping by the horses and other soldiers. Moreover, many overlapping and intersections are happening within the scene with tangled bodies and different depths. The way of using overlapping and multi-layer miniature narrative encourages viewers to join the discussion with the artwork. This attractive and thoughtful display formed Bertoldo's own artistic style.<sup>2</sup>

The content of the relief is based on mythological features. Scholars pointed out that this relief was an adaptation and reconstruction “from the front of a *Roman Battle* sarcophagus in the Campo Santo in Pisa” with Bertoldo's self-interpretation and style.<sup>3</sup> Since the original piece was severely damaged and missing the center parts, Bertoldo used it as the visual source of inspiration and concept instead of entirely reproducing the piece. He recreated some of the missing parts, duplicated figures and designed a new figure in the center to totally changed the narrative and constructed an innovative, complex and chaotic battlefield.<sup>4</sup> The artist put his own

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<sup>2</sup> The Frick Collection, “Alexander J. Noelle, Anne L. Poulet Curatorial Fellow, discusses Bertoldo's ‘Battle,’ ca. 1480–85, from Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.” Facebook, October 21, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Draper, 133.

<sup>4</sup> The Frick Collection, “Alexander J. Noelle, Anne L. Poulet Curatorial Fellow, discusses Bertoldo's ‘Battle.’”