

Case 4

This label is common to 63.42 and 2002.553

Anonymous Founder, after Antonio Canova

Italian, 1757–1822

Theseus and the Centaur, after 1819

Bronze, presumed lost wax cast

Copper: 84.8%, Tin: 6.7%, Zinc: 5%, Lead: 1.7%, additional trace elements

Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, 63.42

Antoine-Louis Barye

French, 1796–1875

Theseus Combating the Centaur Bianor, modeled ca. 1846

Bronze, presumed sand cast

A comparison of these two bronze groups illustrates some specific ways in which Barye attempted to differentiate his Romantic sculptures from the Neoclassical aesthetics of artists such as Antonio Canova. Both groups represent the same episode from the mythological epic the *Metamorphoses* by the ancient Roman poet Ovid. The half-man, half-horse being is the centaur Bianor who is slain by the hero Theseus at the wedding feast for King Pirithos of the Lapiths and his bride, Hippodamia.

Canova modeled his version of the tale on one of the metopes of the Parthenon that depicts a struggle between a Lapith and the centaur, and the essential elements of his frontally orientated scene can be viewed from a single perspective in a manner that recalls the ancient marble frieze. The hero's looming victory over the centaur is mirrored in the unnaturally triangular shape of the composition created by the exaggerated positions of the two figures. The form and content of Canova's work mutually reinforce the theme of civilizing tendencies reigning victorious over untamed nature.

The general compositional principles of Barye's *Theseus Combatting the Centaur Bianor* contrast distinctly with those of Canova's sculpture. At first glance, Barye's figures seem to unite in a single dynamic form. The sculptor's design reflects his thorough familiarity with his subjects' anatomical intricacies and compels the viewer to make a complete tour around the work to better comprehend the scene. Although the initial confusion of forms is eventually resolved into the moment that signals the inevitable defeat of the centaur at the hands of Theseus, the beast is rendered with equal dignity in Barye's composition. This is unsurprising given the artist's evident preoccupation with the animal kingdom.

Copper: 87.6%, Zinc: 8.0%, Tin: 3.5%, Lead: 0.6%, additional trace elements

Gift of Mrs. Nelson L. St. Clair Jr., in memory of her father, Walter T. Rilee, 2002.553

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