

Case 4

Antoine-Louis Barye

French, 1796–1875

Theseus Slaying the Minotaur, second version,
modeled in 1857 after first version in 1843
Bronze, sand cast

Like many European artists of the modern period, Barye was inspired by the ancient Greek myth of Theseus and the Minotaur with its dramatization of the conflict between human morality and the bestial aspect of nature. The tale of the brave young hero who defeats the half-human, half-bull monster to prevent the needless sacrifice of the Athenian youth was an ideal subject for the sculptor to explore new codes of representation and expression.

Barye found inspiration for his composition in one of the oldest known examples of Greek art, the so-called archaic sculpture dating from around the 6th century BC. Unlike the naturalistic elegance of classical sculptures, this “other Greek art” is characterized by the stiff stances and expressionless features of its figures. Barye’s direct source of inspiration for the impassive face of his Theseus was likely the Piombino Apollo, an archaic sculpture that had been acquired by the Louvre in 1834. Theseus’s stolid visage was Barye’s means of expressing the ruthlessness of the hero and of adding a dimension of dramatic inscrutability appropriate to the violent scene. The entanglement of the figures is a reference to the Mannerist bronzes from the period of the Italian Renaissance.

Copper: 91.1%, Zinc: 4.2%, Lead: 2.3%, Tin: 2.1%, additional trace elements

Charles G. Thalhimer Family Fund, 80.34

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