

Two Bronze Peacocks

Artist: unknown
Date: 130-150 A.D.
Dimensions: 103-101 cm high
x 164-155 cm long x 43 cm deep
Material: gilded bronze
Inv. 5117, 5120

STATE OF PRESERVATION

Unfortunately the condition of these peacocks is precarious because they are over two centuries old. The bronze surface requires special conservation techniques and the inside of the peacocks must be reinforced to avoid future fractures. One of the peacocks (inv. 5117) is affected by a dangerous unsolder of the neck. This intervention allows a chance for a concrete study of this work of art and its pendent and will enable our specialists to better understand the stylistic differences which characterize these twins. One year of work will be required for the complete restoration of the two.

RESTORATION PROJECT

- XR XRF rays
- Endoscopy
- Cleaning and consolidation of the surface
- Didactic panels
- Analysis of the bronze composition and gilded composition
- Internal sustaining structure in carbon steel
- Photographic documentation

Total Cost € 62.500,00



► These famous peacocks come from a small group of bronze objects which survived the days when many ancient bronze pieces were melted down and used for military and construction purposes. The origin of these unique pieces dates back to a codex from the XI century, now in Eton, where they are depicted as an elegant decoration ornamenting the façade of the old St. Peter's Basilica. This prestigious location is possibly an invention of the medieval illustrator, nonetheless it testifies to the importance of these peacocks in the Middle Ages. However, trustworthy historical sources indicate that since the middle of the XII century, these peacocks adorned the "Cantaro del Paradiso," which was a fountain located at the entrance of the ancient Basilica of Saint Peter for the ablutions of the pilgrims. In the "Mirabilia Urbis Romae," a chronicle from the middle of the XII century, the author states that twelve bronze peacocks were displayed in front of the gates of Hadrian's Mausoleum. Their excellent craftsmanship, shown by the minute rendering of every detail, namely the feathers, suggests

that they were most likely showcased in the plush garden holding the tomb of the Emperor. After being stolen during the siege of Federico Barbarossa, these peacocks were redisplayed before Hadrian's Mausoleum in 1200 under the Pontificate of Innocent III and remained there until the XVI century, serving as wonderful subjects of many drawings of that time.

When the construction of the new façade of St. Peter's began, the Cantaro was dismantled and the peacocks (along with the large pinecone now adorning the Niche in the Cortile della Pigna, Vatican Museums) moved to the Vatican. After undergoing repair during the pontificate of Pope Clemens the XI Albani in 1704, the two peacocks were placed on the sides of the pinecone at the center of the large niche constructed by Pirro Ligorio. They remained in this location until 1986 when they were moved in the Braccio Nuovo for conservation purposes. Today there are two copies that are in place of the originals on either side of the pinecone.