

After Donatello ca. 1386–1466

Lion (“Marzocco”) 19th century – original: Florence 1419–20

Sandstone. Inv. Nr. AE 38

This sculpture is a copy of a work by Donatello that the Florentine sculptor made in 1419–20 for the residence of Pope Martin V in the monastery complex of S. Maria Novella in Florence (Fig. 1). In 1812, as a replacement for a thematically related figure from the 14th century that was in a ruinous state, Donatello’s work was given a new exhibition site in front of the façade of the Palazzo Vecchio. However, in 1847 Donatello’s sculpture was also moved due to reasons of conservation, namely into the Uffizi. Today it is located in the Museo Nazionale del Bargello in Florence.

The Marzocco, which holds the coat of arms of Florence in its paws, is a heraldic symbol of Florentine sovereignty. The name is derived from the Latin Martius or Mars, a symbol of strength and magnanimity.

In the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum (today the Bode Museum), which opened in 1904 and was conceived as a Renaissance museum for the Paintings Gallery and the Sculpture Collection, the Marzocco also symbolised Florence, particularly as the main centre of Renaissance art. The sculpture was displayed on a high column in the gallery known as the Basilica, which is the architectural and spiritual centre of the building (Fig. 2). Corresponding to the Marzocco, the Lupa (she-wolf) was also shown on a high column as the symbol of Siena.

The Basilica, a space extending two stories high, was designed to make reference to the Florentine High Renaissance church, San Salvatore al Monte (Fig. 3). The goal was to convey to the visitors how religious works of art were originally presented. In the “side chapels”, large-format paintings as well as sculptures were installed above altar tables. Without interfering with the overall impression of the architecture, the works of art blended harmoniously into the room. Here, for example, were displayed the Varramista Altar by Andrea

della Robbia and the Crucifixion group by Antonio Begarelli, both of which can still be seen there. Overall, the gallery conveyed the impression of a church interior, and grave monuments, coats of arms, and wall fountains all played a role. In the middle of the basilica was a magnificent lectern with inlays and opulent carvings as well as the choir stall from the Certosa di Pavia, made by Pantaleone de’ Marchi (now in Room 129).

Most of the other exhibition rooms are characterised by a design concept similar to that of the Basilica. The great innovation of Wilhelm Bode was the addition of decorative sculptures and furniture to the existing collection, thereby providing the paintings and sculptures of the Italian Renaissance with a frame that was both effective and from the same era. As a result, in the years before the opening, historical architectural elements and interior design objects, such as portals, fireplaces, plafonds (historical room ceilings), coats of arms, and furniture were deliberately acquired, mostly in Italy. Bode’s exhibition concept is still perceptible today, albeit in a reduced form.



Fig. 1 After Donatello, “Marzocco” © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst / Antje Voigt



Fig. 2 The Basilica of the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum, ca. 1910, SMB-ZA, V/Fotoslg. 1.1.15./151 © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Zentralarchiv



Fig. 3 Interior of the Church of San Francesco al Monte in Florence © Photo: Art Historical Institute Florence, image from: Bernd Wolfgang Lindemann (Ed.), Bode-Museum. Architektur – Sammlung – Geschichte (Munich 2010) p. 79