Severo Calzetta da Ravenna (Ferrara or Ravenna 1465/1475 - Ravenna before 1538)

Siren Candleholder

Circa: c.1510-30

c.1510-30

Bronze

23.7cm

Severo di Domenico Calzetta, known as Severo da Ravenna, was the son of a Ferrarese sculptor and most likely born in Ravenna where he is first documented in 1496. By 1500 he had moved to Padua, but he left in 1509, when Maximilian I attacked the city. Returning to Ravenna, Severo appears to have settled there, establishing a hugely successful workshop producing a large number of bronze objects for everyday use, the subjects of which were taken from antiquity. He was clearly influenced by the spirit of pagan humanism that had been given a new impetus at the University of Padua in the last quarter of the 15th century. Amongst numerous models, Severo sculpted fantastical sea beasts derived from classical antiquity which subsequently became a favoured motif of sculptors and painters active in Padua. Andrea Mantegna used the theme frequently in his drawings and engravings, such as in the Battle of the Sea Gods, an impression of which is in the Victoria & Albert Museum.

In the present work, a mermaid stands on a claw foot, with arms outstretched to hold candle sconces (now missing). Praised by Pomponius Gauricus, a writer who knew him, as a sculptor excellent in all media and as a painter, Severo was highly regarded in his lifetime. A notable difference in quality

distinguishes Severo's best works from the perfunctory later efforts of his shop, which continued to thrive after his death. The present bronze is evidently superior to many other known versions of the current model in the refinement of the details, including a version in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, the Art Institute of Chicago and the Louvre.

Provenance

Julius Goldschmidt (1882-1964)

Frank Partridge & Sons, from whom acquired on 21 March 1941 (£250) by;

Sir Henry Price

His Sale 'The Price Collection', Sotheby's, London, 22 November 2000, lot 53

Christie's, New York, 29 January 2014, lot 107

Private Collection, USA, to 2026

Literature:

A. Luchs, The Mermaids of Venice: Fantastic Sea Creatures in Venetian Renaissance Art, Belgium, 2010, pp. 163-164, figs. 211 and 221 (different casts).

Frankfurt, Liebieghaus Museum alter Plastik, Natur und Antike in der Renaissance, 5 December 1985 - 2 March 1986, p. 356, no. 226 (different casts).

L. Planiscig, Andrea Riccio, Vienna, 1927, pp. 480-481 (different casts).