

	Object:	Johannes der Täufer
	Museum:	Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst Am Kupfergraben 10117 Berlin 030 / 266 42 54 01 sbm@smb.spk-berlin.de
	Inventory number:	1793

## Description

Circle of Desiderio da Settignano

St John the Baptist  
ca. 1450-55

Painted stucco  
Height: 46.5 cm

Formerly Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Skulpturensammlung, Inv. SKS 1793.  
Lost since May 1945.

### Provenance

Florence, Stefano Bardini (1891); Berlin, Skulpturensammlung/Altes Museum (1891-1904);  
Berlin, Skulpturensammlung/Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum (1904-1939); Berlin, storage  
(1939-1945); whereabouts unknown (1945-present).

### Acquisition

Bought in Florence in 1891 from Stefano Bardini.

### Comment

Indebted to the typologies of reliquaries, sculptural busts of saints became highly popular in Tuscany in the early 15th century. Even though it is difficult to identify this young man, as no attribute can relate it to a peculiar action, his age and red cloak are associated with St John the Baptist, who was particularly revered in Italy at the time (the camel-hair cloak that would have proven the identification is absent here; for other bust representations of the Baptist in this period, see Pisani 2007). The work is closely related to a bust once in the

Dreyfus Collection in Paris and now in the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC. Another version, less fine but also dating from the Renaissance, is preserved in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston (see Vermeule 1977). Balcarres 1903, p. 120 mentioned a similar version of the Berlin bust in the collection of Richard von Kauffmann in Berlin. After the work was bought by the Berlin Museums, in 1891, Wilhelm Bode immediately attributed it to Donatello (Bode 1894). The bust was judged very close to another bust, variously identified as St Leonard or St Lawrence, in the Old Sacristy of San Lorenzo in Florence and traditionally thought to be by Donatello (Schubring 1907). Kaufmann 1935 was the first to challenge this attribution and to propose the name of Desiderio da Settignano instead, an artist to whom the bust in the Old Sacristy is commonly ascribed today (Clarence Kennedy had already expressed some doubts orally, see Schottmüller 1933). Another bust of this period has recently switched from a Donatello to a Desiderio paternity: the Bust of Niccolò Da Uzzano in the Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence. In 1878, Bode had attempted to acquire the latter work, but the purchase was made impossible by the merchant Stefano Bardini. The disappearance of the bust of the Baptist in May 1945 makes it extremely hard to form a definitive judgement about its attribution. This is especially difficult as several problems of conservation had been stressed in the literature: the head of the sculpture was reported to have been severed and reattached (Schottmüller 1913), while the polychromy has often been judged later than the bust (a color photograph of the work has been published by Springer 1924; it was identified by Michael Knuth). The proximity to the Washington bust (especially in certain details, such as the tuft of hair standing up) is not enough to settle the attribution question conclusively; the work may well be by Desiderio da Settignano himself, after a lost prototype by Desiderio, or by a close follower.

## Literature

Bode 1894

Wilhelm Bode, *Denkmäler der Renaissance-Sculptur Toscanas*, Munich, F. Bruckmann, 1894, II, pl. 93: Donatello.

Bode 1902

Wilhelm Bode, *Florentiner Bildhauer der Renaissance*, Berlin, Bruno Cassirer, 1902, pp. 243, 244 fig. 104: Donatello.

Balcarres 1903

Lord Balcarres, *Donatello*, London and New York, Duckworth & Co. and Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903, p. 120: impossible to make a judgement about the attribution as long as the work remains polychrome; "but the whole conception is weakly and vapid". Late imitator of Donatello ca. 1470. Close to a painting of a St John in the Musée du Louvre, Paris, Inv. 1274.

Meyer 1903

Alfred Gotthold Meyer, *Donatello*, Bielefeld and Leipzig, Delhagen and Klafing, 1903, pp. 38-39: forgery.

Schottmüller 1904

Frida Schottmüller, *Donatello. Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis seiner künstlerischen T*

## Basic data

Material/Technique:

Stuck mit alter Fassung

Measurements:

Höhe: 46,5 cm; Breite: 42 cm

## Events

[Relationship  
to location]

When

Who

Where

Florence

## Keywords

- Bust