

‘Body and Soul: Masterpieces of Italian Renaissance and Baroque Sculpture’

By **ROBERTA SMITH** NOV. 5, 2010

Moretti Fine Art and Adam Williams Fine Art

24 East 80th Street

Manhattan

Through Nov. 19

New York galleries frequently exhibit things rarely seen almost anywhere else in the country. A current example is the powerful terra-cotta “Head of a Gorgon,” newly attributed to Andrea del Verrocchio (around 1435-88), the Florentine sculptor, goldsmith and painter whose apprentices included Leonardo. This rare relief is one of several works — the majority in terra cotta — competing for center stage in “Body and Soul,” a remarkable exhibition of Italian Renaissance and Baroque sculpture assembled by Fabrizio Moretti and his frequent collaborator, the private dealer Andrew Butterfield.

With streaming, flamelike curls accented by bat wings and a face ringed by a pair of entwined snakes, the Verrocchio is a far cry from Greek mythology’s gorgons, three sisters that included Medusa. The strong, contorted face is more male than female, but what is most striking is its realism. Minus the hair treatment, this is a terrified modern visage, shouting warnings. Even with the coif, the effect is still relatively current, if more heavy metal.

The emphasis on terra cotta gives this show an amazing hands-on vitality that roams through several centuries. But after the Verrocchio gorgon, the main event is the face-off in the second room of two very different high Renaissance sensibilities.

On one side, Jacopo Sansovino's stunning figure group "Charity" (Rome, 1513) depicts an idealized woman with an infant and two prancing cherubs. Its undulating combination of bare limbs and appendages, draped torso and free-floating drapery reflects the recent discovery of the Laocoön, and also brings the grace and sophistication of Raphael into three dimensions.

On the other side, Andrea Riccio's fabulously grave and still "Madonna Dolorosa" (Padua, 1500-10) is a study in exquisitely restrained emotion and modeled form that suggests direct contact with Greek Classicism (not the Hellenism of the Laocoön) and probably the aristocratic Venetian Madonnas of Giovanni Bellini. It's the southern versus the northern Italian Renaissance in three dimensions — and a win-win revelation for the viewer. ROBERTA SMITH

A version of this review appears in print on November 5, 2010, on page C32 of the New York edition with the headline: Body and Soul.