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Alonso Berruguete (attrib)

(Paredes de Nava, ca. 1488 - Valladolid, 1561)

Pair of Pendentives
Second quarter of the XVI century

Polychrome wood 60 x 60 cm

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This *Pair of Pendentives* was undoubtedly created as decoration of an architectonic structure to enrich an altarpiece ornamentation. In the first pendentive, within a scenery formed by volutes, there are musical instruments, two violins and two trumpets, over a banyan and a book. In its upper part, there is an unidentified object, and in its lower angle, a male face with a moustache and plentiful dark hair blown by the wind. The second pendentive, framed by the same plant decor, shows several weapons. A breastplate, covered by a helmet, practically covers the whole surface, and underneath, there are the tip of a cannon and two bullets on the left, and two tips of spears, two arrow tips, and an axe on the right. A cloak under the breastplate covers most of the scene. Both representations are sculpted in polychrome relief over a golden background, with a predominance of vermillion red.

A pendentive is defined as a spherical triangle that covers the space between the ring formed by a dome's edge and the arcs on which it rests. It is similar to a squinch, but, in this case, it is decoration with no architectural functionality.

The iconography represented in both reliefs is connected with victory scenes. As a symbol of power, weapons are gentlemen attributes. In contrast, musical instruments are shown in *Venus and Mars* scenes, in a very popular allegory which refers to a young warrior who exchanges his sword for a musical instrument.

It is attributed to Alonso Berruguete, according to a comparative study of his recorded works of art.

Shortly after returning to Spain, around 1517, and after spending a long time training in Italy, Berruguete became the most innovative sculptor of the Spanish Renaissance. With his deep knowledge of painting techniques – since he had first followed in his father's footsteps, the painter Pedro Berruguete, – and his fast, skillful way of handling the gouge, sculpting in polychrome wood became his most perfect means of expression.

The design of objects inspired in the classical era was a constant feature during Alonso Berruguete's artistic career, since it can be found in all his creations. This *Pair of Pendentives* shows one of the favorite repertoires ever in his work, in which the choice of iconography and the perfect technique applied in its development are outstanding. Besides, the creation of faces with vacant expressions, oblique looks and frowning is very characteristic of his work, as it can be appreciated, for example, at the *Conversión del Godo Zalla* (The Conversion of Zalla, the Goth) relief, at San Benito de Valladolid altarpiece (The National Museum of Sculpture, Valladolid). The way of sculpting hair, with abundant curly locks, is similar.

From an iconographic perspective, both scenes suggest it might have belonged to an altarpiece, maybe to a funeral chapel of some nobleman of the time. The way it was made, with a flat relief where the rich polychrome is key to distinguishing its parts, evokes Mejorada del Campo reliefs (1525-1526), one of Alonso Berruguete's first works after his return to Spain, and which is kept at The National Museum of Sculpture at Valladolid.

Rosario Coppel

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Alonso Berruguete. Ecce Homo, Church of San Juan de Olmedo, XVI century. Valladolid. National Museum of Sculpture.

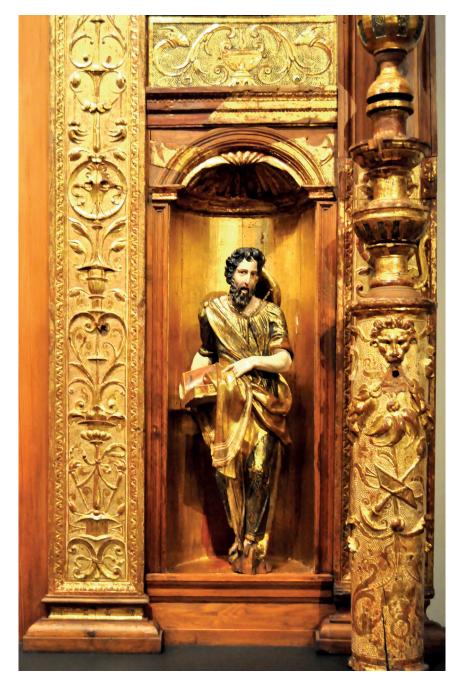


Alonso Berruguete. San Benito el Real, Main Altarpiece. *Warrior*. XVI century. Valladolid. National Museum of Sculpture.



Alonso Berruguete. San Benito el Real, Main Altarpiece. Predella. XVI century. Valladolid. National Museum of Sculpture.

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Alonso Berruguete. San Benito el Real, Main Altarpiece. First body. XVI century. Valladolid. National Museum of Sculpture.

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