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THE ART NEWSPAPER

Rothschild Bronzes definitely by Michelangelo, new book claims

Pair of nude males, acquired by the family in 1877, last sold at auction in 2002

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The Rothschild bronzes © Arrigo Coppitz

A group of scholars, including Michael Hall, David Ekserdjian, Victoria and Charles Avery, Paul Joannides, William Wallace and Timothy Clifford, has today published their claims that the so-called Rothschild Bronzes (around 1506-08)—a pair of nude males, one young, one old, mounted on mythological panther-like beasts—are definitively by Michelangelo. The book, *Michelangelo: Sculptor in Bronze*, edited by Victoria Avery and Paul Joannides (I.B. Tauris, £75, \$95; to be reviewed in a subsequent issue of *The Art Newspaper*) summarises conclusions made since the initial thesis was aired in 2015, when the bronzes were put on show at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. In the same year, a conference of international experts examined the statues and the book is the result of their deliberations. Although there is no direct evidence for the attribution, a strong circumstantial argument for the attribution is made from art-historical, documentary, anatomical, metallurgical and other technological evidence. There are, of course, those who contest the attribution such as the prominent Michelangelo scholar Frank Zöllner.

The pair first surfaced in 1878 at the Paris Exposition Universelle to which they had been loaned by the owners, Adolphe and Julie de Rothschild. Julie had acquired the pair in Venice the previous year as by Michelangelo. The attribution was immediately cast into doubt in reviews of the time and when the couple's descendants sold the statues at Sotheby's London in 2002 to a private buyer (est. £1-1.5m; hammer £1.65m; with premiums, £1.8m), they were categorised as 16th-century Florentine, although the price reflects suspicions that there might be a named artist, rather than "unattributed".