

Translation samples

The Lure of Antiquity and the Cult of the Machine: The Kunstkammer and the Evolution of Nature, Art and Technology, by Horst Bredekamp, trans. Allison Brown (Princeton: Wiener Publishers, 1995).

Reading sample, pp. 1-2:

One of the most trying moments in Benvenuto Cellini's life, which surely was not in want of problems, came in January 1545 in the gallery of the palace at Fontainebleau. Cellini had been commissioned to create a series of silver statues for François I of France. Of the required series, only a single sculpture of Jupiter had been completed. In order to conceal this omission and confront the resentment of the powerful Madame d'Estampes, he attempted to enhance the value of his silver figure by employing unusual means. He was able to attain an initial advantage since Madame d'Estampes had delayed the King's visit until dusk, so that his work "would appear less beautiful due to the darkness. But as God has promised those trusting in Him, what came to be was just the opposite of that which she had planned. As night approached, I lighted the candle in Jupiter's hand. Since he was holding it a bit above his head, the light shone down from above, making the figure look far more beautiful than it would have in daylight."

The effect was also enhanced by the fact that Cellini had placed the silver statue on a golden plinth connected to a barely visible wooden block: "I had placed four small hardwood balls inside the wooden block, so that more than half of each ball was concealed. The balls were the size of those hurled from a sling and everything was arranged so skillfully that even a small child could move the Jupiter back and forth or from side to side without expending any effort whatsoever." When the King finally entered the gallery with his entourage, "I had my assistant Ascanio slide the beautiful Jupiter forward ever so gently, and because I had constructed the device that enabled this motion quite ingeniously, that slight movement of the statue made it appear alive. All eyes abandoned the ancient art in the room, turning immediately and with great pleasure to my work." Madame d'Estampes tried to detract from the impact by commenting on the unparalleled quality of the sculpture of antiquity, but the King's judgment was unwavering. "Whoever wished to disadvantage this man has done him a great service; for these splendid figures provide visible proof that his work is much more beautiful and wonderful. High praise is thus accorded our Benvenuto; his works do not merely rival those of the ancients, but surpass them." The message was clear. The mechanical impetus brought the sculpture to life and helped its creator to triumph—modern art in the form of a "machina" had outshone the magnificence of antiquity.