



## Sketch for a Fireplace Overmantel, Francesco Antonio Franzoni

### Sketch for a Fireplace Overmantel

Francesco Antonio Franzoni  
Italian, about 1789

**Terracotta**

21 1/16 x 16 3/4 in.

95.SC.77



### Questions for Teaching

Take time to look closely at the work of art. What do you see?

What do you notice first?  
Where do your eyes move next?

What shapes do you see?

What lines do you see? How do the lines help create movement? (*The edges of various shapes are made up of lines. These lines lead one's eye around the frame and point to different objects depicted on the frame.*)

Look closely at all the objects on the frame. Do any of them have something in common? (*Military and religious symbols.*)

Judging by the kinds of objects that decorate the **overmantel**, what can we infer about the Braschi family?

If you designed an overmantel, what objects would you put on it to symbolize your family's history?

### Background Information

Elaborately decorated with emblems and symbols of the **patron's** family, this terracotta **relief** was made as a study for a large marble mirror frame. It would have been placed above the mantel in the second-floor drawing room of the Braschi [BRAS-kee] family's grand Italian palace in Rome. The artist, Francesco Antonio Franzoni, drew upon a **classical** vocabulary for the design, incorporating putti (figures of infant boys often depicted naked and with wings) and

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Roman military objects around the frame. Military trophies adorn the relief, including a suit of armor, helmet, flags, shields, spears, axes, and the prow of a ship, referring to the family's illustrious political triumphs. The many religious emblems, such as a chalice (a goblet used for wine in Christian mass), cross, crozier (a staff carried by a bishop as a symbol of pastoral office), stole (a priest's vestment worn over the shoulders), miter (a bishop's headdress), papal tiara (a three-tiered crown that is a symbol of the papacy), and keys of office, were appropriate to this fireplace design, because, as a member of the Braschi family, Pope Pius VI called this palace home.

The loose handling of details apparent in the plumed helmet, the lion's face, and the military shields indicate that this was a preliminary sculptural sketch known as a *bozzetto*. A nineteenth-century photograph shows the now-lost fireplace as it was eventually built, with green and white marble and gilt-bronze emblems of the Braschi family.

### **About the Artist**

Francesco Antonio Franzoni (Italian, 1734–1818)

Francesco Antonio Franzoni was one of the most important sculptors and restorers of antique sculpture in Rome in the late 1700s. Arriving in Rome from Carrara around 1765, he was soon involved in some of the most prestigious building projects in the city, including the funerary monument to Princess Maria Flaminia Odescalchi-Chigi in S. Maria del Popolo and marble works in the Palazzo Altieri. But Franzoni is best known for his work in the Museo Pio-Clementino, the Vatican museum of antiquities, for which he restored many important fragmentary antique sculptures and provided decoration and furnishings.

Intimate with Pope Pius VI for the majority of his career, Franzoni also worked for members of the pope's family, the Braschi. He produced a clock for the facade of Saint Peter's Basilica and decorated the family's palazzo on the piazza San Pantaleo.