

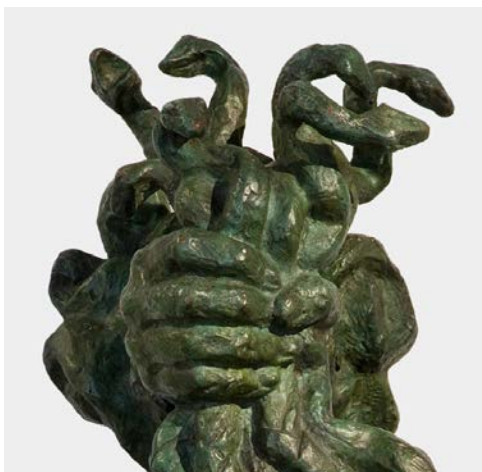


NOVEMBER 2015

Medusa at the Door

Head of Medusa (Door Knocker)

Emile-Antoine Bourdelle



VISIT THE BMA

and see *Head of Medusa (Door Knocker)* in the *Imagining Home* exhibition.

Emile-Antoine Bourdelle (French, 1861–1929). Detail, *Head of Medusa (Door Knocker)*. 1925. Bronze. 22 inches tall. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Nelson and Juanita Greif Gutman Fund, BMA 1966.40

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If you like snakes and grisly tales, you may already know about a monster named Medusa. Some say she was hideously ugly; others say she was beautiful. But all agree that her head was covered with hissing snakes instead of hair. Anyone who dared to gaze upon her face would suddenly turn to stone.

According to an ancient Greek myth, a young hero named Perseus was ordered by an evil king to slay Medusa—a most difficult task, since he dared not look in her direction. He could, however, focus attention on his polished shield, which reflected her image like a mirror. Taking careful aim, Perseus swung his sword and swiftly cut off the monster's head. Here, we see Perseus's hand grasping Medusa's head by her long braids. He will cover the head with a bag and present it to the evil king, who will open the bag, take one look, and turn to stone.

Long ago in Greece, people liked to decorate buildings with frightful pictures of Medusa in order to scare away enemies and evil spirits. Centuries later, a French sculptor named Emile-Antoine Bourdelle used the same Greek myth for a different purpose. Instead of creating an ornament for a wall, the artist created a bronze sculpture in the form of an extra-large door knocker. And instead of making Medusa look like an ugly monster, he gave her a beautiful face and sinuous braids that turn into wriggling snakes in Perseus's hand. Below Medusa's chin, two braids extend from ear to ear, forming the door knocker's handle. By lifting Medusa's head with the handle, visitors could rap sharply on the door, announcing their arrival.

CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS

Myth tells us that Medusa was a beautiful woman who was transformed into a monster called a Gorgon. Read more at <http://bit.ly/1LxBEnA>. Google "Medusa images" to see different ways that artists have depicted Medusa's hair. Then draw how Medusa looks in your imagination.

Some houses have "Welcome" signs on their front doors. Others have signs that say "Keep Out." What kind of message does Bourdelle's door knocker present to visitors?

Bourdelle's door knocker is 22 inches tall. Look for smaller door knockers around your neighborhood. Google "door knocker images" to see many types. Then design your own.

PRINT THE IMAGE ON PAGE 2 FOR YOUR STUDENTS.



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