

# CLASSICAL MYTHS

## HERCULES

Hercules is considered a 'hero' rather than a god, as he was the son of Jupiter and Alcmene, a mortal woman. Notable for his physical strength, he angered the gods by killing his wife and children in a fit of madness that had been brought on by Juno, the jealous wife of Jupiter. The gods set a punishment for him by sending him to do years of labour for a mortal king, Eurystheus. The king set him twelve tasks such as defeating a savage lion, capturing a wild boar, overcoming a mad bull and vanquishing a seven-headed water snake. He performed many other great deeds and eventually won his freedom. He became one of the gods when he died. Hercules is usually depicted as having a very powerful body, short hair and a beard, and is cloaked with a lion skin.

Hercules has long been a favourite subject for artists and especially sculptors. A small collection of bronzes showing some of the adventures and the Twelve Labours of Hercules is displayed in the Great Gallery at the Wallace Collection.

### KEY WORKS



Model by Pietro Tacca (1577-1640), after a design by Giambologna (1529-1608); cast Ferdinando Tacca (1619-1686)  
*Hercules Overcoming the Centaur Eurytion*  
c. 1640-50



*Hercules carrying off the Erymanthian Boar*  
Late 17th or 18th century



*Hercules and the Cerynithian Stag*  
Late 17th or 18th century

# HERCULES OVERCOMING THE CENTAUR

CLASSICAL MYTHS  
HERCULES



**TITLE** Hercules Overcoming the Centaur Eurytion  
**DATE** c. 1640-50  
**SIZE** Height: 67 cm, Width: 44 cm  
**MATERIALS** Bronze copper alloy, gilded

**MAKERS** Model Pietro Tacca (1577-1640), after a design by Giambologna (1529-1608); cast Ferdinando Tacca (1619-1686)

**PLACE** Italy

# HERCULES AND THE CERYNITIAN STAG



**TITLE** Hercules and the Cerynitian Stag  
**DATE** Original model 1570s;  
cast 17th or 18th century  
**SIZE** Height: 36.5 cm  
**MATERIALS** Bronze copper alloy

**ARTIST** Unknown, After Giambologna  
**PLACE** Italy

# HERCULES CARRYING OFF THE ERYMANTHIAN BOAR



**TITLE** Hercules carrying off the Erymanthian Boar  
**DATE** Original model 1570s; cast 17th or 18th century  
**SIZE** Height: 45.2 cm  
**MATERIALS** Bronze copper alloy

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**ARTIST** Unknown, After Giambologna  
**PLACE** Italy

## HERCULES OVERCOMING THE CENTAUR

During the course of his travels and labours, Hercules fought several centaurs (mythical half human, half horse creatures). Here he fights a centaur named Eurytion and defeats him using his club, his favourite weapon.

Eurytion was about to force king Dexamenos' daughter, sometimes identified as Deianira, to marry him against her will. Hercules intervened and battled Eurytion – the sculpture captures the moment before he kills the centaur.

## HERCULES AND THE CERYNITIAN STAG

Hercules' third labour was to capture the famous Cerynithian stag, a creature famed for its incredible speed – apparently so fast it could outrun an arrow. Hercules chased the stag for a full year across Greece before finally capturing it, as the sculpture represents. As the stag was sacred to the goddess of hunting, he released it back into the wild afterwards.

## HERCULES CARRYING OFF THE ERYMANTHIAN BOAR

Hercules' fourth labour was to capture the dangerous Erymanthian boar. He finally caught the boar by driving it into deep snow, where it got stuck. He then used his great strength to carry it back to Eurystheus on his shoulders, as shown in the sculpture.

## THE ARTISTS

Giambologna was one of the most influential artists in the late 16th century. Although Flemish by birth, he lived and worked in Italy, creating large and small scale works in both marble and bronze, often depicting classical subjects.

The process of bronze casting from clay or wax models allowed artists to make many versions from the same original design, sometimes altering the scale and finish. Giambologna's creative designs were used long after his own lifetime.

Giambologna's follower Pietro Tacca inherited his workshop in Florence. Tacca was commissioned by the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo II de' Medici, to create a new series of sculptures depicting the Labours of Hercules. However, the models were never cast in Pietro's lifetime. His son Ferdinando carried on his father's work, reworking and casting his models.

## DISCUSS



- How is Hercules different in appearance from Apollo?
- What sort of creature is a centaur? Have you read any other stories about centaurs?
- Why do you think Hercules was often shown in statues rather than paintings?
- The Ancient Greeks and Romans loved to hear stories of heroes. Who might be considered heroes for us nowadays?

## ACTIVITIES



- Design a mythical creature by combining two animals. What is it called? Where does it live? What does it eat?
- Research the Twelve Labours of Hercules and create a storyboard showing each task.
- Experiment using air-drying clay to create sculptures. Think about creating figures in dramatic poses - but consider using supporting structures such as a wire armature, or prop outstretched limbs up.

# HERCULES OVERCOMING THE CENTAUR



## IN DETAIL



# HERCULES OVERCOMING THE CENTAUR



## IN DETAIL

