The Annual Ferber Lecture
Thursday, April 16, 2009 at 5:30 p.m. in the
Anderson Center Reception Room

Adrian W. B. Randolph
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“Wild Hair: Donatello and Sculptural Askesis.”

The matted hair and and eremitical wildness of Donatello’s arresting wooden sculpture of the Magdalen not only represent her as an ascetic anchorite, but also instantiate a form of sculptural askesis. That is, the materials, form, and iconography of the sculpture produce a viewing experience that parallels the Magdalen’s asceticism, and, in so doing, tests cultural, geographic, and human limits. I wish to examine this work, considering especially its woodiness, hairiness, and wildness, in order to understand how it might be seen to challenge certain norms of femininity, cultural identity, and the complex definition of the human and the animal.

Donatello, details from Mary Magdalene. 1454-1455, Museo dell’Opera del Duomo, Florence, Italy.