



VALADIER

SPLENDOUR IN
18th-CENTURY ROME

10.30.2019 — 2.2.2020

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Press Release

VALADIER: Splendour in Eighteenth-Century Rome is this autumn's major monographic exhibition, which the Galleria Borghese is dedicating to Luigi Valadier, the most famous Italian goldsmith, silversmith, and bronze founder of his time.

Curated by Anna Coliva, the exhibition is inspired by the close relationship between the Borghese family and Valadier, who will be represented by about ninety works – religious sculptures and liturgical furnishings, profane silverware, bronzes, table accessories, drawings, gilt metals with marble and semi-precious stones – on display in the rooms of the Museum, creating a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to get to know and to study his vast production. In effect, Luigi Valadier was a *genius loci* of the Villa, one of the most brilliant and creative minds in the service of Prince Marcantonio and of the project of changing the layout of the building entrusted to the architect Antonio Asprucci.

Loaned by major international institutions and by private collections, the works displayed in the exhibition constitute an extraordinary assemblage, with features that are absolutely exceptional, such as the monumental silver lamps for the sanctuary of Santiago de Compostela, which left Rome in 1764, never returned nor were ever loaned before this occasion, and will be displayed at a much closer distance than they are ordinarily. The imposing bronze of *St. John the Baptist* from the Lateran Baptistery, which has been restored for the exhibition, will also be displayed for the first time outside its niche, and in such a way that the usually hidden parts are visible.

The exhibition will present all the artistic genres and techniques at which the great artist tried his hand, and the variety is exemplified by a large number of objects for each genre. Visitors will see religious works such as Cardinal Orsini's service for pontifical mass from Muro Lucano and the statues of saints from the altar of the cathedral of Monreale; bronzes like the large reproductions from the Louvre of ancient statues executed by Valadier for European kings and princes; the precious furnishings, from table settings, clocks, and bronze statuettes to the marvellous support in marble, bronze and rock crystal for the cameo of Augustus, executed for the Museo Sacro e Profano in the Vatican; the extraordinary inventions of the *desers*, triumphal table centrepieces, such as the one ordered by the Bailli de Breteuil, subsequently sold to Catherine the Great, and now in Saint Petersburg, as well as the reduction of the temple of Isis in Pompeii for Maria Carolina of Austria, from the Museo di Capodimonte.

A large section is dedicated to the drawings, essential instruments for understandings the evolution of Valadier's creative process from the conception of a work to its execution. The section includes the precious album from the Pinacoteca Comunale of Faenza, which has been entirely catalogued and published for the first time for the exhibition, which will present a selection of drawings through digital reproductions. The drawings also often provide evidence of works now lost, such as the gilt-silver service produced for the Borghese family, of which the few objects that have come down to us have been reassembled.



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Luigi Valadier was born in 1726 to Andrea, a French silversmith who had settled in Rome a few years earlier and had become well known. After inheriting his father's business in 1759, Luigi soon made a name for himself with his innovative art. He was the interpreter for the excellence of that crucial moment of the 18th century which gave rise to the essentially Roman values of modernity based on the study and knowledge of Antiquity. Valadier transmitted this knowledge as taste; as evocative dissemination of archaeological erudition, translating the ideals of morality and austerity characteristic of the ancient Roman world into the concreteness of the most precious materials and thus fulfilling the demand for luxury of his new customers.

He executed his first works for the Borghese family as early as 1759: the renovation of the family chapel in Santa Maria Maggiore and the one of the SS. Sacramento in the Lateran. From that time the artist was to lend his services to the family for more than twenty-five years, until his death in 1785.

In effect, Valadier's work characterised the great decorative and renovative projects of the city Palace and the Villa on the Pincio Hill commissioned by Prince Marcantonio IV Borghese. The Museum houses masterpieces by the artist such as the *Herm of Bacchus* and the pair of *Dodecagonal Tables*, as well as the precious ornamental details that characterise the fireplace in Room XVI of the Galleria and the four columns in granite and gilt bronze in Room XIV.

If the commissions from the Borghese family constitute the thread running through Valadier's career, the status and number of his customers reveal its extraordinary success, highlighting the vastness, originality, and international nature of his production, which the exhibition represents with superb examples.

In addition to the works, the exhibition will host two multimedia totems dedicated to the *Places of Luigi Valadier in Rome*, through which it will be possible to visit sites, churches, palazzi, and environments that were significant for the life, production, and history of the artist: an invitation to transfer this virtual itinerary to reality in order to better understand Valadier the Roman, an artist in the most magnificent and modern Villa of delights of the Eternal City and at the same time the protagonist of a new international taste that went forth from Rome to disseminate a sophisticated style imitated throughout Europe.

Edited by Geraldine Leardi, the catalogue of the exhibition is published by Officina Libraria.

The exhibition is supported by Fendi, institutional partner of the Galleria Borghese, and by Intesa Sanpaolo, title sponsor; it also received a contribution from Fondazione Giulio e Giovanna Sacchetti.



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