

PRESS RELEASE
from
THE FRICK COLLECTION

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**FRICK TO PRESENT FIRST MONOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION AND
COMPREHENSIVE PUBLICATION IN ENGLISH ON MAJOR DECORATIVE ARTS
FIGURE WORKING FOR POPES AND ARISTOCRATS**

***LUIGI VALADIER: SPLENDOR IN
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ROME***

EXHIBITION FOLLOWS ACCLAIMED SHOW ON PIERRE GOUTHIÈRE

October 31, 2018, through January 20, 2019



Luigi Valadier, *Herm of Bacchus* (detail), 1773, bronze, *alabastro a rosa, bianco e nero antico, and africano verde*; lacquered and golden patina, Galleria Borghese, Rome; photo: Mauro Magliani

This fall, the Frick presents the first monographic exhibition devoted to one of the important figures of eighteenth-century Italian decorative arts, Luigi Valadier (1726–1785). He was a talented draftsman, designer, goldsmith, silversmith, and bronze founder, using precious stones as well as enamel, wood and glass, to create whimsical and elegant works of art for noble clients. The exhibition is curated by Alvar González-Palacios, who has dedicated most of his life to scholarship on the artist and is considered its foremost expert.

Luigi Valadier: Splendor in Eighteenth-Century Rome will highlight Valadier's oeuvre, presenting more than fifty objects as well as drawings that represent the breadth of his career. Never before has an American museum audience been able to view together so many examples of his production, with significant loans coming from public institutions as well as private collections in Europe and the United States. Likewise, the accompanying book is the first substantial monograph published on Valadier, and with the show, it will

provide a vivid and unprecedented account of this man's work. As with the Frick's highly acclaimed 2016 exhibition on Pierre Gouthière, this project will allow the broader public to enjoy a much-needed study of a significant figure in

the decorative arts whose imagination and skills made him one of the soaring figures in his time. In this case, the subject is Roman rather than Parisian, and the exhibition and book add dimension to a strong year of Italian programming at the Frick, which began this summer with an exhibition related to a commission by sculptor Antonio Canova and continues this winter and spring with shows on painters Giovanni Battista Moroni and Giovanni Battista Tiepolo.

ABOUT THE VALADIER FAMILY AND WORKSHOP

Valadier's father, André (later Italianized to Andrea), moved from Avignon, in the south of France, to Rome, around 1720, where he established a silversmith workshop that became one of the best known in the city. While both of Luigi's parents were French, he was born in Rome and lived in the city for the entirety of his life. It is unclear if he ever visited France, and even though his background was French, he remained firmly established within the social circles of Rome. Luigi inherited his father's business in 1759, and his unsurpassed technical expertise combined with his aesthetic taste led to a career marked by the production of astonishing objects. He had a bustling shop and home, visited for more than twenty years by popes, aristocrats, and foreign sovereigns. A key document recently



The Triumph of Bacchus, 1780, agate, alabaster, ancient hardstones, ancient glass paste, gold, gilt metal and gilt bronze, Musée du Louvre, Paris, © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY. Photo: Les frères Chuzeville

purchased by the Frick Art Reference Library has proven a tremendous help in developing an understanding of his production and methods. Leafing through the almost four hundred pages of the *Registro Generale*, compiled in 1810 by his son Giuseppe, we can begin to visualize the large list of tools that Luigi and his eighty assistants and collaborators used to produce the staggering number of objects for the pope and major noble families of Rome, among them the Borghese, Colonna, Chigi, Odescalchi, Sforza Cesarini, and Giustiniani. They also worked for foreign clients who took their creations back to France, England, Spain, Portugal and Russia as tokens of their visits to the Eternal City. Despite such documentation, very little survives about Valadier the man, his character, his personal taste, or interests. Even though he was such an in-demand artist, he was financially burdened as a result of commissions for which he was never paid. The operation of his large workshop, which employed nearly one hundred people, must have been a significant cost. In 1785, Valadier committed suicide by drowning himself in the Tiber.

The exhibition, on view in the Oval Room and in the two lower-level exhibition galleries, is divided into three sections, focusing on the revival of antiquity, on Valadier's religious commissions, and secular objects. The artist was a discerning observer; he had an extraordinary eye for detail, focusing on the architecture surrounding him, especially the vestiges of Roman antiquity. He managed to translate these into refined masterworks, bringing miniature ruins into the courts of Europe. Interested in archeology, Luigi would take artefacts from the past as inspiration, playing with forms and materials to produce innovative and imaginative works. In 1780, Valadier

mounted for Pope Pius VI a series of precious cameos that had belonged to the late Cardinal Carpegna. These had been acquired by the papacy for the Vatican Museums, and Valadier was asked to set them in precious frames. The *Triumph of Bacchus* (shown on page 2) and its companion *Bacchus and Ariadne* are now at the Louvre and will both be shown in the exhibition. Valadier set the large rectangular cameo in a frame decorated with other precious objects—cameos and engraved gems—and set them on two gilt-bronze Egyptian-style lions. Below them he created a fictive pool of water, carved in stone, which includes small cameo representations of fish. This is one of the artist’s most whimsical objects and one that uses ancient objects in a particularly imaginative manner.

REUNITING A SIGNATURE COMMISSION

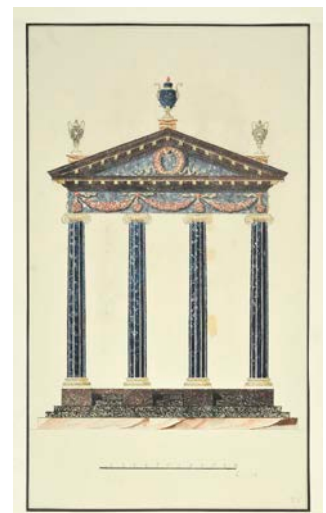


Reduction of the Temple of Mercury, ca. 1778, lapis lazuli, amethyst, garnet, red porphyry, portasanta, green porphyry, and gilt bronze, Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid

Valadier and his workshop were particularly well known for the creation of substantial centerpieces for dining tables, known in Rome as *desers*. These ensembles were decorated with miniature temples, obelisks, and triumphal arches. Valadier would scale down monuments from antiquity and reproduce them in precious materials: marbles, stones, and metal. Three *desers* by Valadier survive at the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, in two institutions in Madrid, and at the Louvre. The first two were for Jacques-Laure Le Tonnelier de Breteuil, the ambassador of the Knights of Malta to the Holy See from 1758, and to the royal court in Paris (after 1778).

They were subsequently acquired by Catherine the Great and the prince who would later become Charles IV of Spain. The third *deser* was created

for Duke Luigi Braschi Onesti, the nephew of Pope Pius VI. Each is composed of a flat base, on which the various architectural objects rest. In the case of the first *deser* for Breteuil, the various elements survive, but the base is lost. The Braschi *deser* which was looted by Napoleon survives in an incomplete state. The most complete of Valadier’s three *desers* was the second one he made for Breteuil, around 1778. It is now divided between the Royal Palace and the Archaeological Museum in Madrid but will be reunited at the center of the Oval Room, providing a unique opportunity to admire this masterpiece in its entirety. The small temples that complement it are executed in materials including lapis lazuli, amethyst, porphyry, and red garnets. Eight preparatory drawings for the Breteuil *deser* will be shown along with these objects.



Luigi Valadier Workshop, *Drawing of the Temple of Mercury*, ca. 1778, pen and brown ink, with colored wash, Museo Napoleonico, Rome; © Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali Napoleonico

ECCLESIASTICAL COMMISSIONS



Cardinal Orsini Mass Service, ca. 1768, gilt silver, Cathedral of San Nicola, Muro Lucano; photo: Mauro Magliani

A large number of commissions came from ecclesiastical institutions, and one of the galleries downstairs will be devoted a selection of these objects mostly in silver and gold. Highlights include two groups of objects from the south of Italy. One is a splendid gilt silver service, made in 1768 for Cardinal Domenico Orsini d'Aragona for his palace's private chapel in Rome, and now in the Cathedral of Muro Lucano, in Basilicata. Between the late 1760s and the early 1770s, Valadier designed the silver high altar for the Cathedral of Monreale in Sicily, which was commissioned by Archbishop Francesco Testa. The altar, still *in situ*, is decorated with a number of reliefs showing scenes from the life of the Virgin, to whom the church was dedicated. The altar is placed directly in front of the celebrated Norman mosaics from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which decorate the apse of the Cathedral. On top of the altar, Valadier placed six large statues of saints connected to the Cathedral: Louis, Castrense, Peter, Paul, Benedict, and Rosalia. All six sculptures will be lent for the first time, providing an extraordinary opportunity to study them closely. Each statue is executed in silver, highlighted with gold. At the Frick, they will be displayed on an altar-like pedestal, in the order in which they are shown in the Cathedral. Many objects like these statues were melted down during times of necessity, some quite soon after Valadier's death and most particularly during the Napoleonic invasion. Works such as the Orsini service and the Monreale altar survived because they were located in more provincial areas, away from the main cities. Both represent astonishing survivals in the field of precious metalwork in Italy. Many more objects like this were created by Valadier than survive today and are documented because of invoices, records of payments, and inventories. Only occasionally are we able to know what they would have looked like when drawings exist.



St. Rosalia, gilt bronze and silver, Cathedral of Santa Maria la Nuova, Monreale; photo: Mauro Magliani

RARE SURVIVING SECULAR WORKS



Drawing of a Trembleuse, signed (before 1763), pen and brown ink, with brown and ochre wash on paper, Private Collection; photo: Michael Bodycomb

In the field of secular silverwork, most of Valadier's production is lost. For the aristocratic families of Italy and for foreign patrons, he made large numbers of plates and soup tureens, coffee pots and cutlery, and lamps. Valadier created very detailed drawings of objects he designed, such as, an elegant *trembleuse* of the early 1760s. These small metal trays, often in silver or gilt silver, were created to hold two cups: one usually in porcelain for coffee or chocolate, and another in glass for water. The accompanying tray would have held biscuits and sweets. In this specific case, the entire object is designed in a highly decorative style with vegetal motifs. The tray is shaped as a large leaf; the water cup is surrounded by reeds, and the coffee or chocolate cup evokes small beans, which may have been meant to describe both drinks. The drawing witnesses the sophistication of domestic

objects designed and produced by Valadier for his Roman audience. Inventories and payments of aristocratic families list many objects like these, most of which, unfortunately, do not survive. The exhibition will present some of these rare survivals, including two soup tureens, one of which was made for the Chigi family, and a spoon that was originally part of a large service for the Borghese. A monumental coffee pot engraved with the Chigi family's coat of arms is another rare extant example of Valadier's secular silver. The central body is covered in leaves and geometrical patterns, while the beak of it is supported by a dazzling mask of a woman and develops into the neck and head of a fantastic bird.



Coffee Pot with the Chigi Coat of Arms, 1777, silver, Private Collection; photo: Michael Bodycomb

STYLISTIC SHIFT TO ANTIQUITY



Vase, ca. 1775-80, Rosso Appennino marble and gilt silver, The Frick Collection; photo: Michael Bodycomb

Valadier's career spans most of the second half of the eighteenth century, the period when Rome was one of the main cities visited by foreigners on the Grand Tour, many of whom were clients of the artist. Archeological finds were bringing antiquity back to the fore, inspiring a stylistic shift that we now describe as Neoclassicism. Although many of Valadier's early designs were created under the influence of his father's work and are close in style to contemporary French examples that are loosely described as rococo, Valadier became interested in antiquity. His work became more severe and classical over time. Among the objects featured in the exhibition that speak to his embrace of this aesthetic is a vase recently purchased by the Frick. Valadier's only known marble object with gilt-silver decorations, it was possibly made for the Chigi family of Rome in the second half of the 1770s.

Principal support for the exhibition is provided by Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder, The Peter Jay Sharp Foundation, an anonymous gift in memory of Melvin R. Seiden, Marina Kellen French and the Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Foundation, and Nicola Bulgari. Additional support has also been provided by Robilant + Voena; Alessandra di Castro; Monika McLennan; Margot and Jerry Bogert; Ayesha Bulchandani; Carlo Orsi, Trinity Fine Art; Walter Padovani; Rachel Fleishman and Paul Andrejkovics III; James C. Marlas and Marie Nugent-Head Marlas; and Jane Richards in honor of Elizabeth Eveillard.


UNPRECEDENTED PUBLICATION



Produced in conjunction with the exhibition is the only comprehensive monograph on Valadier, an essential resource for an understanding of the artist and his production. Published by The Frick Collection in association with D Giles Limited, *Luigi Valadier* is authored by Alvar González-Palacios, curator of the exhibition and the foremost expert on the artist. González-Palacios's vivid account, including a trove of archival documents he has unearthed, represents the culmination of a lifetime of research on the artist and his family. In churches, palaces, public museums, and private collections, the surviving works by Valadier, often still *in situ*, have inspired a number of important photographic campaigns; many of the objects by Valadier were newly photographed for this lavishly illustrated publication that includes more than 368 illustrations. The book is available in the Museum Shop or can

be ordered through the Frick's Web site (frick.org) or by phone at 212.547.6848. Hardcover (560 pages; \$99.95).

INTERACT

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BASIC INFORMATION

General Information Phone: 212.288.0700

Web site: www.frick.org

Building project: www.frickfuture.org

E-mail: info@frick.org

App: frick.org/app

Museum address: 1 East 70th Street, near Fifth Avenue

Hours: Open six days a week: 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Tuesdays through Saturdays; 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Sundays. Closed Mondays, New Year's Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day. Limited hours (11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) on Lincoln's Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day

Admission: \$22; senior citizens \$17; students \$12; Pay-what-you-wish hours on Wednesdays from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. **PLEASE NOTE TO YOUR READERS:** Children under ten are not admitted to the museum

First Fridays: Museum admission and gallery programs are free from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. on the first Friday evening of the month (except January and September)

Subway: #6 local to 68th Street station; #Q to 72nd Street station; Bus: M1, M2, M3, and M4 southbound on Fifth Avenue to 72nd Street and northbound on Madison Avenue to 70th Street

Tour Information: Included in the price of museum admission is an Acoustiguide Audio Tour of the permanent collection. The tour is offered in six languages: English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish.

Shop: The shop is open the same days as the museum, closing fifteen minutes before the institution.

Group Museum Visits: Please call 212.288.0700 for details and to make reservations.

Public Programs: A calendar of events is available online

Library address: 10 East 71st Street, near Fifth Avenue

Hours: www.frick.org/visit/library/hours

Admission: Open to the public free of charge

#334, September 13, 2018 - For further press information, please contact Heidi Rosenau, Associate Director of Media Relations & Marketing; Phone: 212.547.6866; E-mail: rosenau@frick.org