

VNY *La Voce di New York*

— *america Oggi* 1988 —

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The First Italian English Digital Daily in the US

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Arts

February 27, 2026 | 0

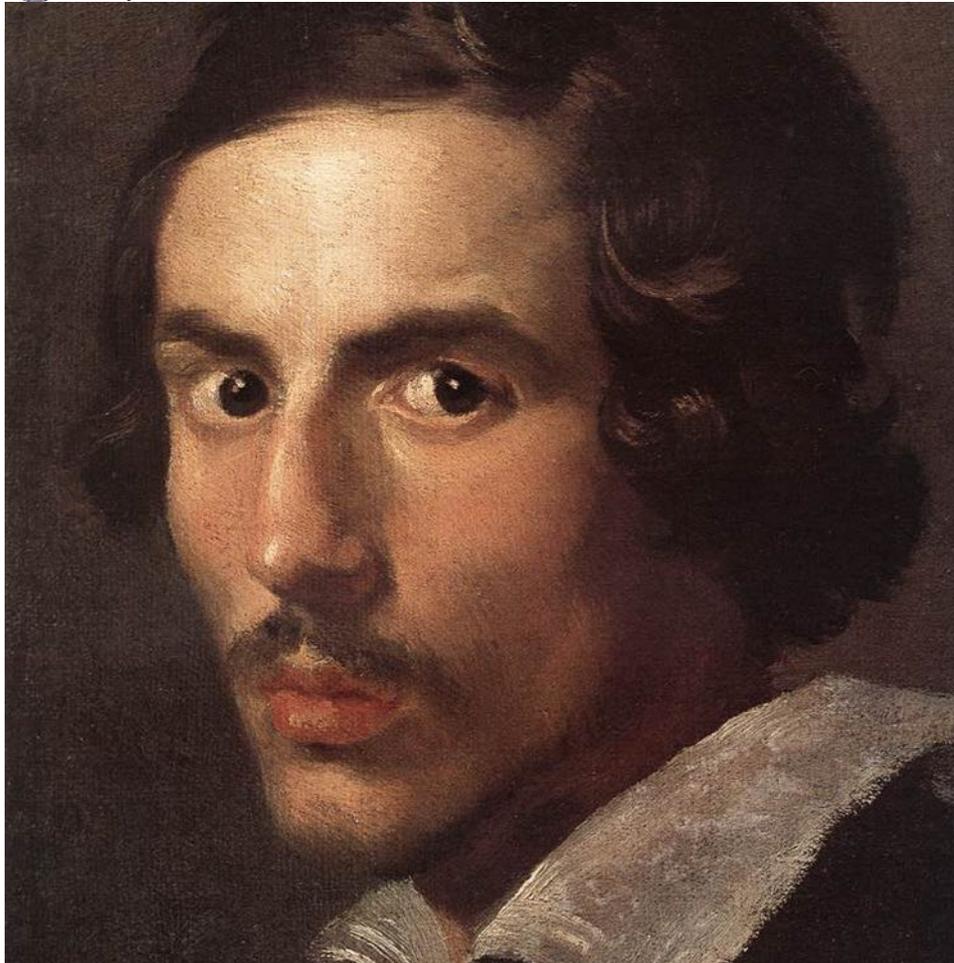
Bernini and Barberinis: 400th Anniversary of St. Peter's Consecration

Palazzo Barberini exhibit explores pope Urban VIII's patronage of sculptor Bernini and Rome's Baroque transformation



Italian Hours

Lucy Gordan



Self portrait of Gian Lorenzo Bernini. All the images are Courtesy of the Galleria Nazionale: Palazzo Barberini

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On view until June 14 at the Gallerie Nazionali di Arte Antica is the exhibition “Bernini and the Barberinis.” It follows the Jubilee year’s success there, “Caravaggio 2025,” but this time the location is particularly appropriate because the Gallerie, better known as Palazzo Barberini, was built by Maffeo Barberini as the family headquarters in 1627, four years after he was elected Pope Urban VIII.

“Bernini and the Barberinis” celebrates the 400th anniversary of the new Saint Peter’s Basilica’s consecration in 1626, one of the high points of the Roman Baroque and of Bernini’s work as an artist: sculptor, architect, urban planner, painter, and stage director. The exhibition’s some seventy artworks are almost all loans: from European churches and museums, Vatican City, American museums, and private collections; many never displayed before in Italy. Its six sections explore the symbiotic relationship between Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680) and Maffeo Barberini (1568-1644), his most important patron.



“The Four Seasons” Bernini sculpted with his father Pietro. In the background is his first independent sculpture: “St. Lawrence”

Barberini Discovers a Prodigy

The first, “Claiming Him as His Own,” covers Barberini’s discovery, a decade before he was elected pope, of Gian Lorenzo, and how his support emancipated this child prodigy from his father Pietro’s workshop and enabled him to develop his own artistic style. On display here, alongside sculptures by Pietro, such as “Adam, Eve and the Serpent,” are works that Gian Lorenzo sculpted in collaboration with his father: “Four Seasons” and “Cherub with Dragon.” There are also masterpieces by young Gian Lorenzo alone: “St. Lawrence” and “St. Sebastian Barberini.”

St. Peter’s and Papal Portraits

The second, “Ne Plus Ultra: The New St. Peter’s,” concerns Bernini’s work in St.

Peter's Basilica, a site where the alliance between now Urban VIII and Bernini is complementary. After the new Basilica's consecration, the Pope and his favorite artist, now architect as well as sculptor, started reinventing its interior. This section's highlights are drawings, models, engravings, and carvings for the Baldacchino as well as Bernini's studies for the statue of St. Longinus, not to omit his preparatory drawings for Urban VIII's elaborate tomb also in the Basilica.



Bust of Urban VIII by Bernini

The third, "Bernini as Papal Portraitist," begins with marble busts of Urban VIII's immediate predecessors: Paul V Borghese and Gregory XV Ludovisi, flanked by bronze portraits of these same pontiffs, showing how Bernini assimilated models from ancient

sculptures. These are followed by several marble busts of Barberini family members: Maffeo's uncle Francesco Barberini, his older brother Carlo Barberini, and his younger brother Cardinal Antonio Barberini the Elder, and then by eight bronze and marble busts of Urban VIII, on loan from several museums and never exhibited together before.



Bust of Costanza Bonarelli, Bernini's mistress

Barberini Palace to Scandalous Bust

The fourth, "The Barberini Palace: A Choral Masterpiece," documents the genesis of one of the earliest examples of Baroque architecture. Here Bernini, his traditional rival Borromini, and Pietro da Cortona collaborated and competed to transform a suburban villa into an urban palace. On display are some architectural plans by Pietro da Cortona, decorations by Bernini, and paintings by Guido Reni, the Barberinis' beloved painter, that have always remained in situ.

The fifth, "Apes Urbanae: Faces of Barberini's Rome," offers an anthology of busts, a cross-section of 17th-century Roman society: cardinals, intellectuals, courtiers, and eccentric figures at Urban VIII's court.

Alongside works by Bernini are sculptures by Algardi, Finelli's Bust of Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger, the writer, and Duquesnoy's Bust of Michel Magnan, the Duke of Créquy's Dwarf.

The last section, “Bernini’s Freedom, Urban VIII’s Power,” explores Bernini’s self-liberation from Urban VIII’s all-encompassing patronage. Here are rarely displayed busts, none commissioned by the Pope, and paintings including a self-portrait that Bernini painted for his own pleasure.

The section’s highlight is the marble bust of Costanza Bonarelli, Bernini’s only sculptural portrait without a commissioner. Costanza Bonarelli, the young bride of a Bernini assistant, was Bernini’s mistress. A few months after Bernini sculpted this bust, he discovered that his younger brother Luigi was also Costanza’s lover. As revenge, Bernini seriously injured Luigi with an iron bar. He also paid his servant to slash Costanza’s face with a razor, its scar ruining her beauty and reputation forever. Consequently, the servant was jailed; Luigi exiled; Costanza arrested for adultery; Bernini fined, but pardoned by Urban VIII, who encouraged him to marry immediately.

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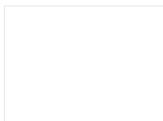


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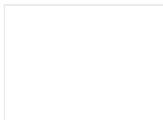
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