

**WHITE MARBLE VASE WITH BACCHANALIA DECOR CALLED
BORGHESE VASE**



FRANCE

18TH-CENTURY COPY MADE AFTER AN ANCIENT VASE DATING BACK TO 40 BC.

DIMENSIONS: HEIGHT: 49^{9/16} IN - DIAMETER: 24^{13/16} IN

27, Quai Voltaire, 75007 Paris

This exceptional vase is remarkable for its large size, for the classic beauty of its shape, for the intense purity of its white Carrara marble, and also by the very high quality of its décor, a bas-relief on the Dionysian theme. The model, of which it is the copy made in the 18th century, dates from 40 BC and appears under the name of Borghese Vase, kept today in the collections of the Louvre. Three other famous copies made in the 17th century may be seen today in the gardens of Versailles Palace.

The shape of this vase is known in Ancient Greek art since the 4th century BC as the “chalice-shaped crater”. The structure associates on a foot carved with gadroons a basin with a slender concave profile, with flared collar.

Under the branches and the grapes slightly carved in the upper part, the main frieze is populated by Dionysian procession. In the center of the procession we recognize Dionysus, leaning on a long "thyrsus", he shares a look with Ariane, his wife. She plays the lyre, among satyrs and maenads who dance to the sound of the flute, the rhythm of tambourines and rattlesnakes, a kind of castanets. The composition underlines the trance suggested by Dionysus, the god of wine and ecstasy.

The two pairs of heads with a silene mask protruding from both sides of the vase, on top of the gadroons, complete this imagery of the "thiasos", a familiar escort of Dionysus.

The set rests on a base and a counter base, both square-shaped in white Carrara marble.



THE MODEL. THE BORGHESE VASE OF THE LOUVRE MUSEUM

Now visible in the Louvre, gallery Daru, this Penthelic marble vase 1.71 m. high dates from the years 30-40 before Christ. It was discovered in 1569 in the garden of the historian Sallust who had previously belonged to Caesar. The gardens of Salluste adjoining the Roman villas of the imperial era were adorned with Greek sculptures or marble copies of Hellenistic works, produced in Athens at the commission of wealthy Roman clients fond of Greek art.

In 1645 it entered the collection of The Borghese Princes and was part of the collection set purchased in 1808 by Napoleon from his brother-in-law Prince Camille Borghese.

That year, Prince Camille Borghese experienced serious financial difficulties. Napoleon offered to sell much of his works to France. Three hundred sculptures joined the Louvre between 1809 and 1810. This vase arrived in Paris on October 11, 1808 but was not installed in the Napoleon Museum until 1811.

The *Borghese Vase* has often been compared to the *Medici Vase* from the same period, 1st century BC. It appeared in 1598 in the inventory of the Villa Medici in Rome, of the same size, it is now kept in the Uffizi Museum in Florence. They differ only by the iconographic theme of the frieze, The *Medici Vase* depicts the story of Iphigenia.

These craters are called “neo-attics” because they combine characters from models in vogue in the 150s - 130 BC. These in turn are inspired by older motifs from two centuries: the bronze crater found in Dervéni, Macedonia, a masterpiece executed around 320 BC, gives an idea of these origins. From the wreck of Mahdia, discovered off the coast of Tunis at the beginning of the 20th century, we can deduce that these vases were produced in Athens, where the ship had loaded its cargo, for the order of wealthy Roman customers, lovers of Greek art. They were intended for the ornament of gardens adjoining opulent villas, located in Rome itself or in Campania.

This vase has sometimes been attributed to the great Phidias and often copied (three replicas are found in the Latone basin at Versailles).



Circa 40 BC. Athens region (Greece)
Marble of Mount Pentelic near Athens
(Greece)

172 H(TOTAL)-135 D

Discovered around 1566 at the site of the
Salluste Gardens in Rome (Italy)

Purchase, 1807, Borghese collection, former
Carlo Mutti collection

Louvre Museum, Department of Greek,
Etruscan and Roman Antiquities



1st century BC
Marble

Discovered in the 1900s-1910s in the
underwater excavations of the wreck of
Mahdia, Tunisia

Bardo Museum, Tunis

BORGHESE VASES AT THE PALACE OF VERSAILLES

In 1679, Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619-1683), Louis XIV's chief minister, asked the director of the Académie de France in Rome, Charles Errard, to order copies of vases from the antics made by the residents of the Academy and to ship them to France to adorn royal gardens.

Thus, between 1673 and 1678, three pairs of copies of the two most famous ancient vases, the *Borghese Vase* and the *Médicis Vase*, were arranged in the two flowerbeds of the Latone Basin: a pair by Simon Hurtelle, a pair by Pierre Laviron and Louis Le Conte.

The third, most spectacular pair, made by Jean Cornu, probably in Paris, was set up in 1683 on either side of the central aisle. The artist faithfully reproduces the shape of the *Medici Vase* adorned with the scene of the sacrifice of Iphigenia, however he adapts the *Borghese Vase* to make a real counterpart to the first one by equipping it with two missing handles on the original model and shows imagination by adding acanth leaves on the body of the cauldron. Thus the idea of adapting the ancient model was immediately manifested at Versailles.



Jean Cornu (1650 - 1710)

Borghese-shaped vase with *Bacchanalia* decoration

1683

White Marble

Height 1.80; Diameter 1.38 m

Latone Basin, Palace of Versailles Gardens

BORGHESE VASE - THE SYMBOL OF GREAT TASTE

Since the middle of the 17th century, the Borghese Vase has been one of the most admired ancient marble vases.

Giovanni Paolo Panini, Italian Baroque painter and one of the greatest masters of *Capriccio*, is customary to represent the Borghese Vase in his masterpieces of ancient architectural fantasies. For example, the painting *View of Campo Vaccino* (below) containing the most important remains of ancient architecture found in the excavations in Rome in the 17th century with the *Borghese Vase* in the foreground.



Giovanni Paolo Panini (1691 – 1765)

View of Campo Vaccino with the Temple of Jupiter, the Arch of Titus, the Colosseum, the Basilica of Maxentius, the Borghese Vase

Circa 1736

Oil on canvas

98 cm x 135 cm

Sotheby's New York sale, January 2, 2011, lot 181

Or the one depicting *The Gallery of Views of Ancient Rome*, of which there are three versions: one preserved at the Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart, one at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and one at the Louvre Museum in Paris. This monumental oil on canvas offers a rich glimpse of a set of views of the *Italian Caprices*. We easily recognize, in the right part of the painting the *Borghese Vase* with its the *Medici Vase* (center).



Giovanni Paolo Panini (1691 – 1765)

Gallery of views of ancient Rome

1754-1757

Oil on canvas

231 cm x 303 cm

Third and last version, kept at the Louvre Museum, Paris

Hubert Robert (1733-1808) a resident at the Académie de France in Rome, a pupil of Giovanni Paolo Panini and a friend of Jean-Honoré Fragonard, also dedicated his artistic career to the landscapes animated with ancient ruins. It is therefore not surprising that the *Borghese Vase* is the subject of a pastel of this fashionable painter. The *Borghese Vase* is presented in the foreground, in front of the Colosseum, in this poetic staging. At the foot of the vase, a painter sketches, leaving us to think that it is a self-portrait of the artist.



Hubert Robert (1733 - 1808)

Borghese Vase

Circa 1775

Sanguine

14.37 cm x 11.41 cm

Valencia Museum of Art and
Archaeology. Valencia

Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778), Italian engraver and architect, engraved the frieze of this vase and published it in 1778 in his famous book *Vasi, Candelabri, Cippi, Sarcofagi*.

