

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

FOURTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20565 • 737-4215/842-6353

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CONTACT: Ruth Kaplan  
Deborah Ziska  
(202) 842-6353

GIAMBOLOGNA'S MASTERFUL CESARINI VENUS IS RESTORED

FOR EXHIBITIONS IN ROME AND WASHINGTON,

OPENS AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART SEPTEMBER 26

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Heralded by Italian press as a "messenger of Italian culture," the recently restored Cesarini Venus (c. 1583), Giambologna's masterpiece in marble, has left Italy for the first time since its creation and will be presented in an exhibition at the National Gallery of Art. Just over five feet in height, it will be presented with seven smaller works in bronze that focus on the development of the female nude in Giambologna's career. Giambologna's Cesarini Venus takes place September 26, 1993, through January 17, 1994, on the main floor of the West Building, in galleries 11, 12, and 17. After its restoration last spring, the Cesarini Venus was exhibited at the Capitoline Museums, July 6 through September 9, 1993.

The exhibition is made possible by Republic National Bank of New York. An indemnity for this exhibition has been granted by the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

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"Seen in the context of bronze statuettes that represent his studies of the female nude, the captivating Cesarini Venus emerges as the great sculptor's final statement on a theme that occupied him for much of his long and successful career," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are very grateful to the governments of Italy and the United States, as well as other lenders from Austria, Italy, England, and Boston, and to Republic National Bank of New York for making this exhibition possible."

Giambologna (1529-1608), court sculptor to the Medici in Florence, created the Cesarini Venus for Grand Duke Francesco de' Medici as a gift from the Grand Duke to Giovanni Giorgio Cesarini, Marquis of Civitanova and the head of a Roman patrician family. The Cesarini family later presented the statue as a gift to Cardinal Ludovico Ludovisi, who in the 1620s installed it in a building on his estate in Rome. Late in the nineteenth century the Cesarini Venus was ensconced in a specially designed niche in a newly constructed Ludovisi family palace in Rome.

In 1900 the palace was acquired by Margherita of Savoy, first queen of Italy, and remained her home until her death in 1926. The Palazzo now bears her name. In 1946, the U.S. Department of State purchased the Palazzo Margherita, and its contents including the sculpture for its embassy in Rome, which lent the sculpture for exhibition.

The Cesarini Venus underwent extensive restoration in the



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seventeenth century after it fell and suffered several breaks. In preparation for this exhibition, the sculpture was removed from its niche high above the grand staircase leading to the offices of the U.S. ambassador for the first time in more than a century.

Close technical examination revealed that all of the rejoined parts of the Cesarini Venus are original. Conservation treatment in Rome last spring by Conservazione Beni Culturali, with oversight by the National Gallery, included the removal of dirt, paint splatters, stains, and discolored repairs. New filling material was applied and inpainted in the areas of the old breaks. Photographs and text in the exhibition illustrate the conservation process.

Born Jean Boulogne in 1529 in the Flemish town of Douai (now in northern France), Giambologna trained in the workshop of Jacques Dubroeuq before traveling to Italy in 1550 to study ancient and modern sculpture. On his way back from Rome he stopped in Florence, where he remained for the rest of his career with his name Italianized to Giovanni Bologna or Giambologna. The Medici grand dukes engaged him as their court sculptor and his works became treasures of the courts of Europe. Giambologna's workshop assistants carried his style across borders to foster an international influence that lived for centuries after his death in 1608.

Giambologna achieved unrivaled mastery of the *figura*



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*serpentinata*, the figure twisting like a serpent within a confined space. Inspired by ancient statues of the goddess Venus that he had seen in Rome, he explored the theme of the female nude, and, in particular, a woman drying herself after the bath, for a quarter-century prior to his creation of the Cesarini Venus in 1583. Originally carved in one piece from white Carrara marble, the Cesarini Venus is the last of Giambologna's long series of female nudes. The small bronzes in the exhibition represent his varied approaches to the subject. Although his early bronzes such as Kneeling Woman (Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence) are still oriented toward a principal, frontal vantage point, the artist conceived his mature works with multiple viewpoints in mind.

In addition to the U.S. Embassy in Rome and the U.S. Department of State, exhibition lenders include Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; The National Trust, Anglesey Abbey, Cambridgeshire, England; and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Once the Washington exhibition closes, the Cesarini Venus will return to the Embassy in Rome.

Director General Francesco Sisinni of the Italian Ministry of Culture and Maria Elisa Tittoni, director of the Capitoline Museums, were instrumental in arranging for the exhibition of the Cesarini Venus in Rome. The exhibition curator for the exhibition in Washington is Jay A. Levenson, who also organized the National Gallery exhibition Circa 1492: Art in the Age of



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Exploration in 1991. Anthony Radcliffe, keeper emeritus of sculpture at the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1993-1994 Samuel H. Kress Professor at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (CASVA), National Gallery of Art, and a prominent scholar on the art of Giambologna, selected the works that appear in the exhibition and wrote the accompanying brochure. Shelley Sturman, head of objects conservation for the National Gallery of Art, consulted on all phases of the conservation treatment of the Cesarini Venus.

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