Francesco Freddolini

Marketing Nineteenth-Century Italian Sculpture across the Atlantic: Artists, Dealers, and Auctioneers, ca. 1800–1840

_Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide_ 14, no. 1 (Spring 2015)


Published by: Association of Historians of Nineteenth-Century Art

Notes:
This PDF is provided for reference purposes only and may not contain all the functionality or features of the original, online publication.

License:
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License Creative Commons License.

Abstract:
By studying two newspaper advertisements for auctions organized in the first two decades of the nineteenth-century, and two auction catalogues printed in the 1830s, this article explores the role of auctions as a means of fostering a market for Italian sculpture in North America in the first decades of the nineteenth century. These sources cast light on the way such auctions were promoted and organized, on the roles of auction organizers, and on the works that were sent to America. Furthermore, this essay investigates the instrumental role of advertisement and catalogue writers in creating the value of the lots to be sold by developing sophisticated rhetorical strategies of description.
Marketing Nineteenth-Century Italian Sculpture across the Atlantic: Artists, Dealers, and Auctioneers, ca. 1800–1840
by Francesco Freddolini

In the late spring of 1802, the auctioneer Samuel Bradford announced a major sale of Italian sculptures in Boston:

ON THURSDAY, 8th July next, will be SOLD at XI o’clock, at the subscriber’s office, Liberty Square, Boston,
A Number of very valuable MARBLE STATUES, and alabaster ornamental FIGURES,
executed by the first artists in Italy, among which are Antiques from St. Peters and the Vatican Library in Rome, viz. –
Venus de medici, large size; bust of Apollo of Belvedere; Cleopatra bitten by the asp,
bust of Franklin; - By Francis Lazzerini.
Diana; Apollo and Daphne, group figure; Venus de Medici, small size; Venus del Bagno; -
By scholars of Michel Angelo
Bacchus and Ariadne, a group figure, with its proper pedestal, from the Vatican Library—a real antique; - By Michel Angelo.
Bust of Pope Clement XVI, commonly called Ganganelli, an antique, from St. Peter’s church at Rome; - by Michel Angelino.
2 setts elegant Alibaster Chimney Ornaments, consisting of five pieces each.
3 elegant figures, representing Contemplation and Silence: a pair elegant do. Vases: 1 pair
do Agate do: 1 Alibaster Clock case: 100 Marble Mortars—Also, 4 Italian Paintings, Views,
&c.
Boston, June 19 S. BRADFORD, Auct.[1]

The Bradford sale is an early example of an auction on American soil including a group of sculptures imported from Italy. Although auctions specifically devoted to art represented only a minor portion of all auctions that took place in cities such as New York and Boston in the first half of the nineteenth century, they contributed to the consumption of Italian art across the Atlantic.[2] Thus far, the development of a market for Italian sculpture in the United States during the first half of the century has been associated almost exclusively with the involvement of Italian sculptors in early nineteenth-century American public commissions,[3] on the one hand, and with the participation of wealthy Americans on the grand tour on the other.[4] This focus on the patronage of Italian artists on American soil and on the import of works by elite travelers, has drawn attention away from the significance of auctions and their role in developing a market for Italian sculpture.

Two newspaper advertisements for auctions organized in the first two decades of the nineteenth century and two auction catalogues printed in the 1830s, offer significant case studies to explore the role of auctions as a means of fostering a market for Italian sculpture in North America in the first decades of the nineteenth century. The newspaper advertisements cast light on the way such auctions were promoted and organized. The advertisements, often describing the objects in hyperbolic language, shed light on how the dealers crafted their messages to attract potential buyers. Furthermore, both advertisements and catalogues often reveal who were the persons involved in this trade, how dealers gathered the works, and what
their network of contacts was in Italy, information that this article expands through archival
documents.

The catalogues were produced for an auction organized in Boston in 1834 by the painter
Chester Harding, and another promoted by the dealer John Clark in New York in 1839. They
cast further light on the roles of auction organizers; on the works that were sent to America;
and on the instrumental role of catalogue writers in creating the value of the lots to be sold by
developing sophisticated rhetorical strategies of description, as well as by forging falsities that
the American audience could hardly verify.

During the period explored in this essay, a discourse on artistic value on American soil was the
domain of very limited societal segments engaging with informed debates on connoisseurship,
while the desire to possess luxury objects was much more widespread. By looking at the
import of Italian sculptures into post-Federalist America through the lens of public auction
advertisements and catalogues, I hope to increase our understanding of the taste for, and
consumption of, Italian art in America during the first four decades of the nineteenth century.
Both advertisements and auction catalogues suggest that there was a considerable market for
copies in marble or alabaster, often reduced in scale. As we will see, Italian sculptors copied
classical statuary and busts of well-known historical figures (such as Roman emperors) as well
as contemporaries, including, for example, Benjamin Franklin and George Washington.
Authentic works by contemporary Italian sculptors—or by sculptors active in Italy—also made
their way to America. However, none were by the truly great of the day, Antonio Canova (1757–
1822) or Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770–1844), though copies of their works (especially Canova’s)
were common. Auctioneers did not hesitate to bend the truth in advertising their lots. Aware
that most of their clients were familiar only with the names of a few prominent artists of the
Italian tradition and contemporary scene, the auctioneers inserted these artists’ names
wherever possible in both auction advertisements and catalogues. Similarly, in listing the
provenance of the works, they would hint at world-famous public and private collections
known to the general public through articles in newspapers and popular magazines. In so
doing, they exploited the desire in middle-class America to possess art, and the absence in
middle-class America of a discourse on artistic value, connoisseurship, and authenticity.

Auctions were a fast and effective method for distributing works of art, and newspaper
advertisements show that such sales were promoted on a quite large scale. Although not as
detailed and textually complex as catalogues, these advertisements reveal some of the methods
employed by dealers and artists. The long list of works in the newspaper advertisement
quoted above reads like a very succinct catalogue and, as no printed catalogue has been found,
probably no real auction catalogue was ever printed by Samuel Bradford. In terms of
marketing strategy, it is significant that the first name on the list is that of an artist able to
capture the attention of a relatively large audience. Francesco Lazzerini (1748–1808), active in
Carrara, Italy, had been known to the American public since 1791, when he had carved the
statue of Benjamin Franklin commissioned by William Bingham for the facade of the Library
Company Building in Philadelphia. As contemporary newspaper articles reveal, this
commission garnered considerable attention in Philadelphia and beyond, and Bradford, in
his ad, clearly attempted to leverage the sculptor’s reputation to fuel the curiosity and
attention of his audience. Similarly, Bradford attributed several works to “scholars of Michel
Angelo,” a vague attribution that was surely aimed solely at catching readers’ eyes with the
presence of an iconic name on the page.[8] Michelangelo was also mentioned—implausibly—as the author of a *Bacchus and Ariadne*—a sculptural group that came with its pedestal, ready to be installed in the house of a wealthy Bostonian. The classification of the marble as “a real antique” from the Vatican collections—the most important repository of classical statuary—was misleading in employing a term that alluded to classical antiquity, rather than to the Renaissance. Clearly, Bradford not only hoped that his public could be lured by famous names, but also he believed that his potential bidders would not accurately verify the information provided in the text. The provenance of the objects—Saint Peter’s and the Vatican Library—could be read in the same way: the auctioneer mentioned two unlikely places of origin of the works to be auctioned, but a place and a collection which Americans could readily identify as renowned repositories of art and, especially, antiquities.

The advertisement for the Bradford auction raises further questions related to the origins of the works sold: under what circumstances did the artworks leave Italy to cross the Atlantic? How were they chosen, and by whom? By establishing connections with artists based in Italy, and by embarking on trips to Europe to gather artworks to be auctioned on the American art market, dealers retraced the steps of the grand tourists,[9] positioning themselves as intermediaries between the European supply of art and the demand that developed among those who could not spend years traveling about Europe.

American travelers always relied on the help of diplomats to be introduced to artists and nobles in Italy, in order to visit their ateliers and collections and possibly purchase works of art.[10] The network of diplomatic relations between Tuscany and the United States was structured along the lines of the well-established official connections between Great Britain and the Grand Duchy. Since the late seventeenth century, British diplomats were settled in both Leghorn, the port, and Florence, the capital, and had always been involved in the cultural and artistic relations between England and Tuscany.[11] British consular and commercial arrangements set a useful example for America: in 1798 the United States assigned a consul to Leghorn, Thomas Appleton,[12] and in 1819 a vice-consul, Giacomo Ombrosi,[13] was appointed in Florence.[14] Consul Appleton’s key role as an artistic agent between American travelers and sculptors in Tuscany has been explored by Philipp Fehl, while Ombrosi’s activity in Florence has been neglected thus far. Nonetheless, it is certain that he also acted as an artistic agent. Significant evidence is provided by a passage in a heretofore-unpublished letter he received in 1828 from the engraver William Main (1796–1876), who recommended Rembrandt Peale upon his visit to Italy:

> M.r Peale visits Italy for the purpose of making copies of some of the finest paintings in Italy and by them giving the people in this country a correct idea of those works of art that for so many years have been the admiration of the world.... Please present my respectful compliments to Mess.r Benvenuti and Morghen and also have the goodness to make M.r Peale acquainted with them, as M.r Peale’s project is so intimately connected with the advancement of the fine arts in their country as well as spreading the fame of your much loved Italia.[15]

The nineteenth-century export permits preserved at the Uffizi Gallery Archives reveal the names of many American travelers who applied to export works from Florence. In 1833, a Samuel Kettel of Boston exported 22 “ancient paintings”; the American vice-consul to Florence, Giacomo Ombrosi, exported a painting representing Judith with the Head of
Holofernes; an “Andre Ritchie of Boston” exported 24 paintings; and “Mr Burns from America” exported 12 copies of paintings in the Uffizi collections. In the same year, William Main exported 20 paintings, and Henry and Horatio Greenough obtained permission to send an impressive number of paintings, drawings, and prints to their country. If some of these artworks had been acquired by American collectors, probably those exported by the vice consul or by the Greenough brothers—both based in Florence—were not motivated by collecting agendas, but rather by the ambition of resale in the American market.

The advertisement for another early auction, organized in 1818 in New York, sheds further light on the praxis of dealers to travel to Italy for the specific purpose of gathering works to sell. The announcement, published in the Mercantile Adviser (New York) and entitled “Italian Gallery of Fine Arts,” promoted the auction of Mr. Nicholas Fiengo:

After several years of fatigue and industry, activity, and at great expense, having been obliged to travel through the principal cities of Italy, and search in the cabinets of the sovereigns and princes of Italy, to procure a curious collection of the Fine Arts, worthy the attention of amateurs, he has finally succeeded in collecting one of the most elegant, most curious and richest collections . . . that has ever been exhibited in any country.

The auction included a remarkable number of busts of emperors copied after the antique; thirteen medallions with portraits of members of the Medici family; other medallions with portraits of emperors; a mosaic model of the Borghese Palace in Rome, supposedly acquired from the collection of Prince Borghese; together with other busts and the astounding number of 600 paintings.

Notwithstanding such a large quantity of paintings, it is remarkable that the text of the advertisement was carefully crafted to draw the attention primarily to the sculpture. Fiengo, who probably authored, and certainly approved the text, did not mention any painting individually, focusing instead on the description of the sculptures, thus promoting these lots as the highlights of the collections:

This collection surpasses all that has ever been produced in the United States, and will perhaps never be equalled in this country. It consists of 8 Busts of Marble, 6 of which represent different Emperors and 2 Empresses of Rome, formerly the capital of the world, and at present the seat of the fine arts. . . . Beside these, there are six hundred Pictures, chiefly designed by the most eminent artists of Italy.

As with the 1802 auction, no catalogue for this sale survives. Perhaps the lengthy and informative advertisement, certainly aimed at capturing the attention of potential bidders, doubled as catalogue. The textual strategy of the advertisement includes magniloquent—and again quite ambiguous—references to the classical tradition, aimed at arousing the curiosity of the public. Take the case of the claimed provenience of an unspecified number of works, “taken from the ruins of Pompeia and from ancient Greece, which recalls to our recollection so many illustrious men, the friends of man and of human civilization, whose sight alone ought to electrify the human heart.”
The advertisement also reflects the hierarchy of objects, as well as on a potential hierarchy of buyers, by mentioning that different categories of lots were exhibited in different spaces, with specific entrance requirements. The alabaster objects, sold at lower prices, were displayed in a space freely accessible, whereas the other lots were exhibited in the “Gallery,” access to which required an entrance fee of 25 cents.\[21\]

By defining as a “gallery” the space in which, presumably, the best objects on sale were displayed, Nicholas Fiengo established a connection with the long-standing tradition of European collecting and displaying art.\[22\] Furthermore, he strategically defined the status of the works inside as a collection, as he more fully articulated in the first paragraph of the advertisement. The objects on display were not amassed randomly, but had been carefully selected and gathered together to form an ensemble that embodied quality and taste according to the highest standards of the European nobility (alluded to in the text with the Borghese family, a name that evoked the recent Napoleonic empire) and of the classical tradition.

Nicholas (or Nicola) Fiengo was a dealer of Italian origin based in Baltimore, who employed fellow immigrants as collaborators in his endeavors. One of his collaborators was Vito Viti, a native of Volterra, in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, who immigrated to Virginia in 1817 and later started his own business as dealer of luxury goods imported from Italy.\[23\] These dealers were undoubtedly relying on their connections with Italy to import sculptures, paintings, and other luxury goods to the United States. Vito Viti established a fruitful trade and in 1853 and 1854 organized two sales in New York comprising a significant amount of sculpture. On November 11, 1853, together with the auctioneer William Irving, he advertised for sale a collection “of superb marble statuary . . . part of Signor Vito Viti’s assortment, selected during his recent visit to Italy, Germany, France, and England.”\[24\] One year later, on December 27, 1854, another auctioneer, Henry H. Leeds, advertised “a sale of superb fancy goods, including a large assortment of real statuary, marble, alabaster and other goods, the importation of Sig. Vito Viti Sons; also several valuable invoices from the Crystal Palace.”\[25\] Later in his career, Vito Viti was celebrated in Italy as the major exporter of alabaster sculptures and \textit{objets d’art} across the Atlantic, confirming that even though he had settled in the United States where he established a reputation, he always maintained strong connections with his birthplace.\[26\] On the occasion of the \textit{Esposizione Italiana} that took place in Florence in 1861, Viti’s role in the international market for alabaster was publicly acknowledged:

The first laboratory [of alabaster] was opened at the beginning of this century by Cavalier Marcello Inghirami, who—we could assert—inaugurated the new era of this very illustrious industry, which later Vito Viti introduced abroad thanks to his long travels. After settling in Philadelphia, he based there his business, which provided him with wealth, and opened a thriving commerce with the inhabitants of the new world.\[27\]

As the examples of Fiengo and Viti show, auctions of Italian art, for the most part, did not exclusively feature sculptures, but also included paintings and luxury goods. Though sculptures often were highlighted in auction advertisements, the majority of the works to be auctioned were generally paintings, less expensive, easier to transport, and therefore more readily marketable than statuary.
A sale organized in 1834 by the painter Chester Harding (1792–1866) is a notable exception, as it was devoted entirely to sculpture imported from Tuscany. By the early 1820s, Chester Harding had already established a reputation for himself as a prominent painter. In 1832, he purchased a building in Boston at 22 School Street, where he set up his studio and rented out some rooms to other artists. The following year, in the same building, he opened a gallery, which soon became an exhibition space for its owner as well as for other painters. Harding exploited his reputation as an artist to promote his activity as a dealer, and “Harding’s Gallery” became one of the most prestigious auction rooms in Boston, selling paintings by local artists, as well as works imported from overseas. The catalogues, published regularly from its inauguration until 1841, are a significant source for the gallery’s activity. Harding’s catalogues often carried an introduction providing information on the collections and the lots auctioned. The individual entries comprised extensive descriptions of most works, explaining their subjects or providing information on their makers and provenance.

Chester Harding’s initial strategy for promoting his gallery was to exhibit paintings that could attract a large public and to auction only major collections. In 1833, the year the gallery opened, he exhibited a copy of Gericault’s *The Raft of the Medusa* together with other copies after Old Masters, and organized a sale of Thomas Jefferson’s collection of paintings. Harding also promoted his gallery by alternating between art auctions and exhibitions of American painting without an explicit commercial purpose. In 1839, for example, a major show in honor of the painter and poet Washington Allston took place at Harding’s Gallery.

In 1834, Chester Harding organized two major events: an exhibition and sale of paintings by Boston artists, including Francis Alexander, Alvan Fisher, and himself; and an auction devoted entirely to Italian sculpture (fig. 1). The eight pages of the catalogue listed works on display but lacked illustrations. No author is credited for the catalogue, but we can assume that Harding played a role in writing the text for a sale that took place in his gallery, or at least vetted it. As we will see, there is some variation in the density and accuracy of the information provided in the catalogue, and I argue that in some of the descriptions deliberate inaccuracies were intended to fabricate authorships as well as connections among artists.

![Fig. 1, Cover, Catalogue of Marble Statuary, now Exhibited at Harding's Rooms, School Street (Boston: W.A. Clapp, 1834).](larger image)
The 1834 sculpture sale comprised 148 items, and the most prominent and widely recurring artist’s name in the catalogue was Antonio Canova’s, though no original works by him were exhibited. Canova, who gained international stardom, was well known to the American public; one of his last works, now lost, was *Monument to George Washington* for the Virginia Capitol, and his Roman studio was a grand tour destination. Harding exploited Canova’s fame in an unscrupulous promotional strategy. Not only were numerous copies of his works among the lots for sale, but works by other artists were frequently linked to Canova by referring to their authors as students of Canova or sculptors in the artist’s circle, even if they had never collaborated with him.

The most important work offered for sale at Harding’s sculpture auction was the first lot in the catalogue, a copy of the *Medici Venus* in the Tribuna of the Uffizi (fig. 2), commissioned in 1803 to replace the original, which had been moved to Paris on Napoleon’s orders. The lot’s catalogue entry described it as a work “nearly finished” by Canova. According to the catalogue, the work was begun by Canova, who abandoned it due to a “defect in the marble,” and finished by Canova’s pupil Vanelli. The entry’s text matches in several crucial details the history of Canova’s copy of the *Medici Venus*. It is known that after some negotiations with Giovanni degli Alessandri, president of the *Accademia di Belle Arti* in Florence, Canova accepted the commission to carve an exact copy of the *Medici Venus*. However, he was extremely reluctant to sculpt a mere copy after the Antique, considering it a degrading practice for an artist of his reputation. For this reason, he concurrently worked on a different statue, the *Venus Italica* (fig. 3), in overt competition with the ancient marble. Furthermore—and this fact coincides with the narrative of the auction catalogue—we know that the marble provided to Canova for the copy of the *Medici Venus* turned out to be imperfect. This provided Canova with an excuse to abandon the carving of the copy and to work only on his own invention. Since the whereabouts of the work sold at Harding’s 1834 auction are unknown, we cannot verify whether it was the copy begun by Canova and finished by Vanelli, or a copy carved entirely by Vanelli and sold as Canova’s statue. Vanelli may be Pietro Vanelli, a student and assistant in Canova’s studio, so close to the master that the latter even mentioned him in his will. Vanelli was a member of a dynasty of sculptors and marble merchants from Carrara, and the family as a whole was involved in the market for sculptural copies from the late eighteenth century onwards. Chester Harding obtained other copies after Canova by Vanelli: a *Psyche* (original carved in 1793; Bremen, Kunsthalle), and a group of *Fighting Gladiators*, a copy of his master’s *Creugans and Damoxenos* (original carved in 1795–1806; Vatican Museums).
The catalogue’s textual strategy for enhancing the value of the *Medici Vĕnus* was not limited to its deliberately ambiguous attribution (“nearly finished”). The text also included information on the provenance, mentioning that the work had been sold to a “Russian prince.”[^44] This provenance could not be easily verified in Boston at the time of the auction and was almost certainly fictional. It may have been intended as a vague reference to the famous Demidoff family, based in Florence at the time,[^45] or to a group of marbles by Canova that indeed found its way to Russia. A series of works commissioned by Empress Josephine from Canova was acquired by Czar Alexander I in 1815. A list of those sculptures is extant, but Canova’s copy after the *Medici Vĕnus* was not among them.[^46] The catalogue even included a price supposedly paid by the unidentified Russian prince. This price, 20,000 crowns, was exorbitant if compared to the other lots, and the significance of the sum was stressed by listing the US dollar equivalent of $15,000.[^47] If we consider that in the same year, 1834, the Boston dealer William J. Davies sold four large views of Rome by Giovanni Paolo Panini to the Boston Athenæum for a total of $6,000,[^48] we can get a sense of how this statue was valued.
The strategy adopted in the catalogue to define the value of the marble attributed to Vanelli and Canova was extremely clever: the sum of $15,000 was mentioned within the body of the entry as the price paid by the Russian prince, suggesting that a higher price would have to be paid by subsequent purchasers. However, such higher price was only implied; indeed, unlike the other entries in the catalogue, the one for the first lot did not list a minimum bid. A masterpiece’s price could not be quantified, at least publicly and officially on the printed page of a catalogue. Furthermore, the minimum bid of $15,000 mentioned in the body of the entry was much higher than that of any other item listed in the auction catalogue. The first three lots were the most expensive ones. The work following the statue ascribed to Canova and Vanelli was another *Venus*, by Pietro Tenerani, a sculptor from Carrara and one of the prominent sculptors on the Roman art scene of the 1830s, had a minimum bid of $1,500. The third lot was a pair of anonymous statues representing *St. Joseph* and *Virgin Mary*, priced respectively $2,000 and $1,500, or $3,000 if bought together.

The (at least partial) attribution to Canova of the first lot of the 1834 sale conferred a special status on the *Medici Venus*, but the sculptor’s name was used in other contexts in this catalogue, especially in relation to lesser-known artists. The work by Tenerani is a case in point. The sculptor was probably not well known to those Americans who had not traveled to Rome and, who, therefore, would not know that the catalogue of the Harding sale erroneously introduces him as a student of Canova. In fact, Tenerani was the most accomplished pupil of Canova’s rival Bertel Thorvaldsen. Was this a simple and thoughtless mistake by Harding? Or, was the use of Canova’s name a strategy to enhance the value of the lots on sale? If we consider that even Bertel Thorvaldsen himself, the second most important artist on the early nineteenth-century European sculptural scene, was mentioned in the catalogue as a copyist after Canova, the catalogue author’s bona fides may be questioned. Harding may have assumed that the majority of the visitors to his gallery were familiar with Thorvaldsen’s name, as the artist claimed descent from the first European born on American soil, but that few of them were aware of the Thorvaldsen’s fame in Rome and of his rivalry with Canova. Therefore, connecting the two artists in one way or another was important. Harding realized that few readers of the catalogue had enough knowledge about either artist’s career and oeuvre to approach it critically.

The way Thorvaldsen’s and his pupil Tenerani’s marbles are introduced and discussed in the catalogues highlights Harding’s strategy. If few Americans knew much about Thorvaldsen, probably an even smaller number knew anything about the other sculptors mentioned in the catalogue. For this reason the catalogue linked the works and the artists to Antonio Canova: on the one hand, training in Canova’s studio represented an assurance of quality for the little-known Tenerani, while on the other hand Thorvaldsen’s reputation signified a guarantee of excellence for the copies after Canova’s popular masterpieces.

Further information in the catalogue entries was used to create narratives that inflated the value of the works and enticed the potential buyers to acquire groups of lots. Lot no. 2, Tenerani’s *Venus*, was catalogued as a commission “for the Gallery of Florence, for which he was to receive 3500 crowns.” Since much is known about Tenerani’s career as well as the Grand Dukes’ patronage, we can assume that the information in this entry was incorrect. Although the Carrarese sculptor did receive a commission for a statue to be installed in the Grand Ducal collections, it was not a *Venus* but an *Abandoned Psyche*, a work that is still displayed...
in the Galleria d’Arte Moderna, Palazzo Pitti, Florence. Therefore, although the catalogue description of the Venus by Tenerani mentions Florence, the statue auctioned in Boston was instead probably linked to Rome. The description (“receiving the Apple from Paride”) suggests that this was a copy after Thorvaldsen’s Venus with the Apple (fig. 4), modelled in Rome between 1813 and 1816, when Tenerani was studying under the Danish sculptor. Harding forced—and forged—the facts in an attempt to create a pendant for the Canova and Vanelli Venus, exploiting the fame of the Florentine public collections. The narrative created by the sequence in the list of lots is also remarkable, as this Venus directly followed the masterpiece of the auction, thus establishing a close connection with it on the first page of the catalogue. In this case, the textual proximity created a potential connection between two statues that, according to the catalogue, had been commissioned for the same collection in Florence: what better opportunity for distinction than acquiring two statues allegedly commissioned by the Grand Dukes of Tuscany and on sale at the same auction?

Fig. 4, Berthel Thorvaldsen, Venus with the Apple, 1813–16. Marble. Thorvaldsens Museum, Copenhagen. Photo Gunnar Bach Pederse [larger image]

As we have seen, as in the case of Vito Viti, dealers and auctioneers often collaborated and shared the responsibility for sales, on both financial and organizational levels, and Harding was no exception. On the occasion of this major Italian sculpture sale, he relied on the agency of a merchant, whose identity is uncovered by another auction catalogue, as well as by archival documents. In 1839, the New York Academy of Fine Arts auctioned the collection of Mr. John Clark, who, as stated in the introduction to the catalogue, had built his collection in Italy itself: “having spent a very long period of time in travelling through Italy, and visiting all the public and private Pinacothecas, [he] has spared no trouble or sacrifice in order to exhibit . . . a collection really worthy of the public patronage.” This was a vast auction, comprising both sculptures and paintings, and if we compare the catalogue entries of the major sculptural works with those auctioned by Chester Harding in 1834, we notice that they are identical. The masterpiece of Harding’s sale, the alleged Canova-Vanelli Venus, was auctioned again in New York; though the narrative of the commission and execution is more detailed in the 1839 catalogue, both the dimensions and the catalogue entries coincide in every crucial detail:

The Venus of Medicis, 4 feet 11 inches in height, marble of Carrara. The original statue of this Venus has a proverbial reputation in all the civilized world; it is the best specimen
of sculpture ever performed by the human hand, and can hardly be equalled by the celebrated Apollo of Belvedere. Both these invaluable statues exist in the Imperial Gallery at Florence, where they have been restored in 1815, after an absence of about 18 years spent in the Gallery of the Louvre at Paris, among the treasures of fine arts, with which the French conquest had enriched the capital of France. The original is by Praxiteles, who has performed his work uniting together all the beauties of forms and features, which he had discovered in seven of the handsomest women of Athens. This is a copy made by the immortal Canova, before he undertook to make the celebrated Chaste Venus of his own invention. Canova had almost finished this invaluable copy, when he discovered a defect in the marble in the right hip of the figure, which had to be taken off and replaced with another piece of marble. For this unexpected accident he yielded to his pupil Vanelli, who has finished it in a manner to give great credit to the instructions received of his immortal master. It is impossible to describe all the beauties of this statue, which must be examined with a peculiar attention to be well appreciated.

[58]

The “Chaste Venus” in this entry is the already-mentioned Venus Italica. Although the title was inaccurate, the text did not fail to provide a careful account of the facts, situating this work within the context of Canova’s production and competition with the Antique: this was the commission that inspired Canova to carve a new Venus. The sculptor aimed to replace in the Uffizi the iconic work brought to Paris by Napoleon, and—more importantly—to replace it in the history of art.[59] However a new and more flagrant error—obvious for the art historian but probably much more difficult to spot by potential bidders—was introduced in this entry, once again probably intentionally, to inflate the value of the work. The Apollo Belvedere, here referred to as a work in the “Imperial Gallery” in Florence, had never been in Florence, since it was reinstalled in the Vatican after Waterloo.[60] Nonetheless, the fame of this statue, together with the fame of the Florentine artistic collections, reflected on the prestige of the Venus in the Clark auction catalogue. This fabricated coexistence of the two works in the same collection magnified the value in spite of the truth.

In addition to the Medici Venus, the Venus by Tenerani, along with other works auctioned by Chester Harding in 1834, were part of the Clark sale again in 1839.[61] At first glance, we could hypothesize that Clark acquired several pieces at the 1834 auction, and then attempted to sell them in 1839. But a passage in the Clark catalogue’s introduction informs us that the same collection had been previously exhibited, and partially sold, in Boston, thus connecting Clark’s sale with the auction organized at Harding’s Gallery: “The warmest patronage which the noble citizens of Boston have bestowed on those very articles, when exhibited there some years ago, affords us a sufficient guarantee that the same favour will not fail to them in the city of New York.”[62]

The Italian provenance of the works is unquestionable, but the Clark collection catalogue, together with archival evidence, demonstrates also that Florence had been the center where the collection had been amassed, examined, and prepared for export. In 1833, the year before the Harding sale in Boston, an export permit was granted in Florence to “Mr. Clark from America.”[63] This document suggests that Clark was the agent who helped Harding organize the sale in Boston, and then offered the unsold items again in New York five years later. Furthermore, the introduction to the catalogue provides us with another precious clue. In order to certify the quality, the provenance, and the originality of his works, Clark had his
collection examined by a group of artists active in Florence before shipping it across the Atlantic.\[^{64}\] Such a close relationship to the local artists suggests that many errors in the 1834 and 1839 catalogues did not stem from ignorance, but had been intentionally introduced to increase the collection’s prestige and value. After spending time in the Tuscan capital to gather works of art, how could Clark not know, for example, that the *Apollo Belvedere* was never in Florence? How could both Harding and Clark ignore the fact that Tenerani’s statue in Florence was the *Abandoned Psyche*, and not the copy of Thorvaldsen’s *Venus with the Apple* that they sold?

The appraisers hired by Clark included two Florentine painters, Giovan Francesco Corsi (d. 1845) and Giuseppe Collignon (1776–1863), and two sculptors, Lorenzo Bartolini (1777–1850) and Luigi Pampaloni (1791–1847), who were not only known to those who traveled to Italy, but were also included in both the 1834 and 1839 catalogues as authors of several works on sale.\[^{65}\] In the 1830s, Lorenzo Bartolini was the leading sculptor of Florence, relatively well known to the American public for his original creations, and popular among grand tourists.\[^{66}\] Travelers visited his studio and acquired replicas of his most famous works, such as *The Trust in God*, commissioned in 1834 by the Milanese Marchioness Rosa Trivulzio Poldi.\[^{67}\] For example, a reduced-scale version, now preserved at the Gibbes Museum of Art, was purchased in Florence by John Izard Middleton (1785–1849), a Charlestonian collector who studied at Trinity College, Cambridge and in 1823 settled in Paris, to spend in Europe the last two decades of his life.\[^{68}\] However, for the 1834 auction organized at Harding’s Gallery, Bartolini’s works were mostly reproductions of other artists’ work or of his own sculptures. Some of his works are catalogued as copies after Canova: “A Madonna of Canova” and a “[Bust] of Eve of Canova” were attributed to the Florentine artist, who was also the author of a “A Bust of Lord Byron,” a replica of the portrait he had carved in 1822.\[^{69}\]

Luigi Pampaloni, who had studied under Bartolini, sent instead works of his own invention: a “Samuel Praying,” two busts representing *Paris* and *Ariadne*, a “Cupid, holding a bird, Laughing,” “One d.o [Cupid] holding the Nest, Crying” and “A figure of Moses Praying.”\[^{70}\] The *Samuel Praying* may be identified with a replica of Pampaloni’s most famous work, a *Boy Kneeling*, which he carved between 1826 and 1827 as part of a funerary monument, formerly in a church in Zbaraz, Poland.\[^{71}\] This work became so famous that the sculptor executed several replicas, with different titles, such as *The Orphan*. In addition, countless plaster casts were made by Tuscan merchants to be sold on the market, and a marble version of it is preserved at the Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, VA.\[^{72}\]

It is clear that Florence was a major center for the export of sculpture to America, as it had long been for Great Britain.\[^{73}\] Both merchants and artists took advantage of the proximity of Florence to Carrara, where the sculpture workshops produced high-quality copies after famous masterpieces as well as busts of George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, often copied from the prototypes by Giuseppe Ceracchi and Jean-Antoine Houdon.\[^{74}\] By the first decade of the nineteenth century, Lorenzo Bartolini had established a collaboration with the Lazzerini workshop in Carrara, devoted to the carving and commercialization of copies to be sold to travelers and shipped to foreign countries.\[^{75}\] Other sculpture workshops in Carrara specialized in the production and commercialization of copies, both after Antique and contemporary sculptures. The 1834 catalogue shows that a good number of copies after both antique and contemporary works were produced by a sculptor from Carrara called Baratta. He may be identified with Lorenzo Baratta (born 1782), son of Giuseppe Antonio Baratta (active
until 1818), a nephew of the late Baroque sculptor Giovanni Baratta (1670–1747). Little is known about Lorenzo, but by the late eighteenth century, his father had commercial relations with Giacinto Micali, the merchant who pioneered the export of sculptures to America, as Cinzia Sicca has demonstrated. Giuseppe Antonio Baratta’s agreement with Micali, signed in 1797, concerned copies after the Antique to be sold by the merchant, and it is plausible that his son Lorenzo, a few decades later, developed the family workshop’s activity by producing, in addition, copies after Canova’s masterpieces and busts of famous historical figures. Baratta sent to Boston “A group of Three graces, copied from the Ancients, called the Grecian Group,” a bust of Washington, “A Bust of Diana,” “A Bust of Napoleon,” and other copies, the most important of which was “A group of Three Graces of Canova.” It is not surprising that the catalogue entry written for the latter marble not only emphasized the quality of Baratta’s work, but also aimed at catching the visitors’ attention with details about the commission of the original group from Canova.

Sculpture workshops were located not only in Florence or Carrara, but also in Leghorn, the Tuscan port. A sculptor who exhibited several works at Harding’s Gallery, “Benassae,” was Giuseppe Benassi. Even though he has been almost completely neglected by art historians, Benassi was popular among nineteenth-century American travelers to Tuscany. Elizabeth Thompson, a Bostonian traveler whose diary is preserved at the Massachusetts Historical Society, during her 1848 grand tour, commissioned a portrait bust from Benassi. Thompson’s journal provides us with details concerning the commission and the shipment from Leghorn: “On Friday visited the Studio of Bennesai found my bust finished. Whether it is a good likeness my friends must judge it but so considered by many who saw it. The D.o has been sent to home by the Reliance which sails from Leghorn. directed to Father, care of Mr. Fessenden.” It is not surprising that Benassi was renowned as a portraitist, the most popular genre among nineteenth-century travelers. In a document drawn up in preparation for the 1851 Great Exhibition in London, he was listed as an alabaster sculptor, as well as “talented portraitist, also in marble” (valente ritrattista anche in marmo).

While portraits were the works most frequently commissioned by travelers, public sales required different types of sculpture and Benassi adapted his production to the demand, sending to Boston several copies, again after Canova’s masterpieces, as well as many alabasters. His prominent pieces in 1834 were two copies after Antonio Canova’s Dancers, described in a long entry that not only praised their formal qualities, but also insisted on their status as pendants, inviting the buyers to acquire both of them as companions. The text is quite sophisticated and reads like an ekphrasis, explaining the narrative of the action (“Ballerina stands in the attitude of one who has need of repose after the fatigue of dancing”) and rendering on the printed page the posture of the body and the flow of the drapery. Furthermore, the entry articulated the work’s position in Canova’s œuvre with a reference to Giovanni Battista Sartori (1775–1858), Antonio Canova’s half brother and secretary: “It is said by the brother and confidant of Canova, that no work ever employed more of his thoughts or resulted more to his perfect content than the Dancer now before us.”

The auctioneers’ use of famous names—like Canova and Thorvaldsen—and iconic artworks—like the Medici Venus and the Belvedere Apollo—as well as their manipulation of attributions and provenances in catalogues and newspaper advertisements, reveals both their intent to create inflated values for the lots, and their lack of scruples when it came to dealing with the
American public. Though these strategies seem particularly evident in the case of the advertisements and auction catalogues discussed here, they were not new. Indeed, a tradition of voluntary inaccuracy in the information provided by the auctioneers to the buying public dated back to eighteenth-century England and the very beginning of art auctions. Like Samuel Bradford, Nicholas Fuego, Chester Harding, and John Clark, British auctioneers took advantage of a lack of sophisticated art knowledge among the buyers, who had some knowledge of prominent artists' names but could not really locate them in time and space, and could therefore be easily deceived. A satirical engraving published in London in 1804 and entitled *A Lilliputian Auction* (fig. 5) shows an auctioneer calling the public’s attention to “that charming specimen of the fine arts, Queen Cleopatra painted by that great Egyptian master Correggio.” Two potential buyers scrutinize the work, and one of them concludes that it is unquestionably an original painting, stating that he had previously seen it in Egypt. Here the auctioneer is using two famous names—Cleopatra and Correggio—to capture the public’s attention, and providing overtly false information to an audience that is not familiar enough with the Italian artistic tradition to know that Correggio was not an Egyptian master, and that this painting could not have an Egyptian provenance.


The difference in their approaches to the art market, between Great Britain and America, was primarily one of timing. America lagged behind in all areas related to art collecting and consumption: art auctions and middle-class consumption of art, as well as a more sophisticated attitude towards art, came decades later than in Britain. As late as 1855, an anonymous article in the *Crayon*, an American periodical catering to a readership of artists and connoisseurs and aiming at creating an arena for intelligent artistic discourse, acerbically criticized the artistic naiveté of parts of American society that did not belong to the elite that traveled to Europe. The article focused on the American market for European paintings—defining it as “an important branch of European industry”—but its arguments could be extended to sculpture as well:

There is probably no country in the world where the want of critical taste in pictures is accompanied to such an extent by credulity as to their worth and disposition to buy them. . . . Probably there are in the country . . . ten thousand works of the old masters, Raphael, Murillo, Claude, Salvator, whose possessors procured that wonderful picture, by a lucky chance, from somebody who had brought it without its origin being
known, and had been compelled to smuggle it out of Italy or Spain in order to get off with his prize. In this way it is safe to affirm that there is not another land under the sun which contains so many worthless, smoky, and dirty old daubs as this, nor another that offers so good a market to the busy manufacturers of such impostures. The supplying of the United States with pictures by the old masters is, accordingly, an important branch of European industry.[87]

As the case studies explored in this article show, this “industry” was not solely European. It was rather a joint initiative involving artists, intermediaries, dealers, and auctioneers on both sides of the Atlantic. Auctions organized by dealers based in the United States offered opportunities for re-distributing artworks imported from Europe—and from Italy in particular—and contributed significantly to the development of European art consumption on American soil. If the networks of relations with artists and agents based in Italy was crucial to supply the demand for art, the newspaper advertisements and the auction catalogues that described the works proved to be key factors. Through these texts, the dealers fostered and enticed such consumption with rhetorical and narrative strategies that catered to an audience that was still developing a true engagement with artistic discourses on authenticity, connoisseurship, and value.

Appendix:

I. Advertisement for an auction organized by Nicholas Fiengo in the New York Mercantile Adviser, June 27, 1818, 3.

Italian Gallery of Fine Arts.

Mr. Nicolas Fiengo, lately arrived from Rome, takes the liberty of informing the amateurs of the Fine Arts, and the citizens on N. York and its vicinity generally, that after several years of fatigue and industry, activity, and at great expense, having been obliged to travel through the principal cities of Italy, to procure a curious collection of the Fine Arts, worthy the attention of amateurs, he has finally succeeded in collecting one of the most elegant, most curious and richest collections – (taken from the ruins of Pompeia and from ancient Greece, which recalls to our recollection so many illustrious men, the friends of man and of human civilization, whose sight alone ought to electrify the human heart) – that has never been exhibited in any country. This collection surpasses all that has ever been produced in the United States, and will perhaps never be equalled in this country. It consists of 8 Busts of Marble, 6 of which represent different Emperors and 2 Empresses of Rome, formerly the capital of the world, and at present the seat of the fine arts; 13 very ancient Marble Medallions, representing the family of Medicis in full size; other Marble Medallions, representing 5 ancient Roman Emperors, and 3 others representing different Popes, &c. A piece of Furniture (Mosaic) representing the model of the Palace of Borghese at Rome. In this piece, composed of many very rare and precious stones, the artist has distinguished himself as well by the variety of its stones, as for the perfection of their arrangement, which nothing can equal – it belonged to Prince Borghese. The amateurs are invited to examine this piece with attention; it is a masterpiece of modern taste. The Gallery contains also the Busts of the most celebrated Authors, Artists, Philosophers
and most distinguished men of that country. Besides these, there are six hundred Pictures, chiefly designed by the most eminent artists of Italy; six pieces of Tapestry, with figures of needlework, representing the different scenes of the Trojan war; also, three very ancient Porphyry Heads, found under the Trajan Ark at Ancona on the Adriatic Sea; with an extensive collection of Alabaster Images, Chimney Ornaments, Crowns, Urns, Vases, Busts, and a great number of other curiosities, too numerous to detail in the limits of an advertisement.

The public are informed that the lower front room contains the Alabaster, which is to be sold at a low price, and in lots to suit purchasers. – It will be open gratis at all times, from 9 A.M. to 6 P.M. The other apartments are reserved for the exhibition of the Curiosities of the Gallery, and will be open during the same hours. – Admittance 25 cents – at No. 292 Broadway, 2 doors above the corner of Reed St. and Washington Hall.

[Return to endnotes: 18, 21, 35]

II. Catalogue of the Harding’s Gallery Auction, 1834

[Frontispiece]
Catalogue of Marble Statuary now Exhibited at Harding’s Rooms, School Street, Boston. From the Press of W.W. Clapp. No. 14 Congress-Street. 1834

[p. 1]
Visitors are respectfully requested not to handle the Statuary. Catalogue, &C.

No. 1. represents the VENUS of MEDICIS. The height of this figure is 4 feet 11 inches. It was nearly finished by Canova, when he discovered a defect in the marble on the right hip of the figure, which had to be taken off and replaced with another piece of marble. On account of this unexpected accident he sold it to his pupil Vanelli, who finished it, and afterwards sold it to a Russian prince for the sum of 20,000 crowns. ~$15,000. It is the most charming invention in the Mythology of the Ancients, says Mirabeau the elder, to have personified and rendered divine the soul of nature and to have made beauty the Goddess of love and the graces. This is the Anadyomene or Marine Venus, supposed to have been formed from a mass of white foam, which was first seen floating on the sea near the island of Cytherea, but was afterwards driven by the billows to the island of Cyprus, where the mass suddenly opened and this beautiful Goddess issued from it. Venus is supposed to have just landed on the enchanting island of Cytherea, her hair dressed with care and elegance by the hours. The attitude of this figure is the same Praxiteles gave to his Venus of Gnidus, the fame of whose beauty was so great that travellers often went to Asia for the purpose of seeing it.

[p. 2]
No. 2. is a full length figure of Venus, 3 feet in height, receiving the Apple from Paride. It was executed by Tenerani, another pupil of Canova. It was made for the Gallery of Florence, for which he was to receive 3500 crowns. This figure, which is beautiful, speaks for itself, and no description can do justice to the perfection of its form or to the exquisite grace of its attitude. $1500.
No. 3 & 4. Represents a figure of JOSEPH and MARY returning from Egypt. These are full figures, 3 feet in height. Joseph carrying in his arms the infant JESUS. The expression of Joseph and the infant JESUS is beyond description. It is only in its presence we can appreciate the excellence of the artists. It is stated that 2000 guineas has been refused for the same. The attitude of Mary, the resigned expression of her face, and the humble beseeching posture of her person is beautiful. She shows her deep contrition and perfect abandonment to the will of her Lord and Master. They possess great merit and are very ancient. The more they are viewed the more they are admired. For Joseph $2000, for Mary $1500--or for both $3000.

No. 5. MARCUS AURELIUS, a beautiful Equestrian, very ancient $ 500.

No. 6. A SLEEPING CUPID with a Bow and Arrow, executed by Cardelli of Rome. The figure is well executed, the face and body is very fine, and breathes an air of content and happiness which enchants the beholder. $ 350.

No. 7&8. Two ETRUSCAN VASES.- Also, 2 do. the form of Medicis. These vases were made of Alabaster, for Charles the Tenth, and the artists were to have for both pair, when finished, 20,000 francs. There were two artists working on them for nearly three years, and they were not finished when Charles the Tenth was obliged to leave France. The beauty of these Vases cannot here be described; especially the Etruscan. It will require at least a day to view one of them, before an idea can be formed of their value. They are taken from the originals in the Vatican at Rome, and are superbly executed. The price for the Medicis $ 800 per pair; for the Etruscan, $ 1000 per pair.

No. 9. is a Venus from the Bath, a full figure, 2 feet, executed by Cardelli; it is a beautiful figure and well executed. $150.

[p. 8]

10. A Bust of CICERO, by Tenerani. $ 350.
12. One of FRANKLIN by do. $ 350.
11. One of ARIANA, very ancient. $ 350
13. One of NERONE, do. $ 150.
15&16. 2 Figures, Study of Canova from Canova, by Benassae. Per pair $ 75.
17. Greek Amazon, by Benassae 65.
19. A Flying Mercury, by do. of Alabaster, 55.
20. Samuel Praying, by Pampalon, 100.
22. A group of Three Graces, copied from the Ancients, called the Grecian Group, by Barratta, 100
23. A group of Three Graces of Canova, by Barata, the original was first executed by Canova for the Empress Josephine, who it is said, proposed to him to unite his three Dancers in one group, but in attitudes differing from those of the Graces of the ancients, and no one can deny that he has succeeded in designing positions, the Grace of which is not to be surpassed, even in imagination. This copy is very good. The figures speak for themselves, and no description can do justice to the perfection of their forms or to the exquisite grace of their attitudes. $ 75.
92. One ditto by Bombardi, 90
46. One do Dancing, of Marble, by Bellucci, 125
24. Bust of Christopher Columbus, by do. 85
25. Do. Chlopitzki do. 95
26. Do. Skrzynetzky, do. 85
27. Do. Washington, by Barata. 125

[p. 4]
28. Do. Franklin, do 125
29. A group of Laocoon & Sons, by Tenerani; a true copy, from the original in the Vatican in Rome $ 150
30. A Tower of Piza, of a solid Block of Alabaster. 60
32. A Bust of Lord Byron, do 100
33. A group of Fighting Gladiators, by Vanelli. 150
34. A Bust of Diana, by Barata, 95
35. Do. of Madame Letitia, mother of Napoleon, by Barata. 80
36. Do. of Eve of Canova, by Bartolini, 100
37. Do. Paride, by Pampaloni, 85
38. Do. Ariana, do. 100
39. A figure of Venus coming out of the Shell, of Alabaster. The shell holding Venus, supported by two Dolphins; by Fidia. 65
40. A Bust of Napoleon, by Barata. 150
No. 41. A figure of the Magdalen of Canova, by Fidia; it is a beautiful figure and a good copy of an excellent work. In the resigned expression of her face and the humble beseeching posture of her person, she shows her deep contrition and perfect abandonment to the will of her Lord and Master. 150
42. A Time Piece, runs 15 days, strikes the hours and half hours, and is warranted a good article. 50
43. A group of Three Graces, carrying baskets of Flowers. They are beautiful figures and well executed, by Orzalezi of Florence. 125
44. A Bust of Lafayette, by Baelandi, of do. 75
45. One do. of Paride of Canova, by Fidia. 150
47. A Bust of Indimione, by Bombardi. 100
48. Do. Lord Byron, by Benassae. 90

[p. 5]
49. Do. a Madonna of Canova, by Thorwaldsen. This figure is excellent, and does the artist great credit. $ 150
50. A Bust of the Venere of Venus of Canova, by Fidia. 150
51. Do. Tersicore, by do. These figures are rich and beautiful, and speak for themselves. 150
52. A Bust of Bacchus, by Benassae. 100
53. Do. Venere del Bagnio of Canova, by Barratta. 100
54. Do. Diana, by do. do. 100
55. Do. of Achimede, do. do. 100
56. Do. of Amazone, by Fidia. 125
57. A Temple of Apollo, of Bardilia, Agate and Alabaster. 60
58. A Bust of Louis Philippe the 1st. by Barratta. 150
59. Do. Psiche of Canova, by Vanelli. 125
60. Elena, do do 125
61. Do. Maria Louisa, by Bombardi. 125
62. A Bust of Apollo of Canova, by Thorwaldsen. 175
63. A group of Pandora, by a French Artist. 60
64. A Cupid, holding a Bird, laughing, by Pampaloni. 125
65. One do. holding the Nest, crying. No description can do justice to the perfection of the two preceding figures; their form, or to the exquisite grace of their attitudes, which enchants the beholder. 125
66. A figure of Venus receiving the Apple from Paride, by Benassae. 100
67. A group of Bacchus and Ariana, by Bombardi. 75
68. A figure of Venus holding a Butterfly, by do. 65

[p. 6]
No. 69 & 70. Two figures of Canova's Ballerina, one who is commencing the dance and the other reposing; executed by Benassae. It is said by the brother and confident of Canova, that no work ever employed more of his thoughts or resulted more to his perfect content than the Dancer now before us. Benassae has in this, attempted to copy, in its most minute parts, the clay formed by the hand of his great master, and few things are more alike than Canova's model, the statue executed by him and the one under consideration.

Ballerina stands in the attitude of one who has need of repose after the fatigue of dancing. For this purpose she leans against the trunk of a tree, which, with the left foot, supports her whole person. Her right foot is placed over the left, and her left hand rests upon her side; a garland of flowers encircles her arm and falls toward the wrist--the upper half of the other arm adheres closely to the body, while the lower half turns toward the breast, and the fingers are stretched with an exquisite grace in the direction of the cheek, which, as if it would move to meet them, bends a little toward them, but in a manner so endearing, so lovely, that words seek in vain to describe it. The arms are uncovered as also the neck, feet, and a small part of the legs, her dress falls in natural folds about her, and seems yet to move as if she had hardly ceased her dance.

Any description must be cold and unavailable, and it is only in her presence we can appreciate her excellence. Each 60
99 & 100. Two do. by Barratta, each 75
71. A figure of Canova's Venus, from the Bath, by Cardelli. 65
72. A figure of Moses praying, by Pampaloni. 75
73. A figure of Venus coming out the Shell, of Alabaster. The shell which Venus comes out of, is supported by two Dolphins; by the same artist. 35
74. A Bust of Napoleon, by Bombardi. 35
75. One do. of Washington, do. 35
76. One do. of Franklin, do. 35
77. One do. of Rossini, do. 100
78. One do of madame Letitia, mother of Napoleon. 35
79. One do. of Vespucci, by Barratta. 100
80 & 81. Two Vases of Jaune Antique, forms, Medicis. each 100

[p. 7]
82 & 83. 2 do. do. each 75
84. A Bust of Lord Byron, by Bombardi. $100
85. One do. of Plautilla, do. 90
87. A group of Europe, by Bellucci. 75
88. Figure of Apollo Belvedere of Canova, by Fidia. 100
89. One do. of Paride do. do. 85
90. Group of Venus and Cupid, by Orzalezi. 50
91. Group of Bacchus and Ariana, by Tenerani. 100
93. Venus coming out of the Shell, of Alabaster, 50
94. Bust of Napoleon, by Barratta. 100
96. One do. of Canova, by Thorwaldsen, in his crowned robe. 150
97&98. Are Two Pitchers of Jaune Antique, each 25
101. Is a Group of the Rape of the Sabines, made of Verde Antique, copied from the original, by Tenerani. This group is very fine, and universally admired; and the stone of which these are made, is rare, and very difficult to trace with the chisel, being exceedingly brittle. 175
119. Is one do. larger Group. 125
102. A true copy of the Warwick Bowl, of the same kind of stone, by Cardelli. 100
103. a Genius, with his torch, reposing on a Time Piece. 100
104&105. Two Bowls taken from the Antique in the Vatican at Rome, do. each 35
106. A Wild Boar, copied from the original in Florence, and is a superior piece of sculpture. 35
107. One do. do. 30
108. One do. do. 25

[p. 8]
109&110. are two Agate Vases, of a single piece, each $ 15
111&112. 2 do. of Alabaster, do. 10
113&114. 2 do. of Agate do. each 10
115&116. 2 do. of Alabaster, do. each 8

The above are copied from the originals in the Vatican at Rome, with the inscriptions in Greek on them. They are very ancient.
117&118. Two beautiful Vases of Alabaster, also copied from the original in the Vatican at Roma, executed by Bienaime, each 75
120. A Mosaic Table Top, with a description of the different stones of which it is composed, amounting to upwards of 300 specimens. An explanation will be given to the purchases, when delivered. 100
121. One Bowl of Ariana do. of Verde Antiquie, 50
122. One do. do. 65
123. One do. Antique 75
124. One do. do. 70
125. Two Vases of Jaune Antique, each 55
126. Two Bowles of Ariana, of do. do. 35
127. One do. do. do. do. 35
128. One do. solid agate, snake handles, 45
129. Two Lions, copied from Canova, ea 15
130. Two do. ditto, each 8
131. A Sleeping Cupid, by Baratta, 15
132. A Group of Graces, by Benassae, 45
133. One Antique Pitcher of Alabaster, 35
134. One do. do. do. 35
135 to 143. Eight Dogs, jaune antique, ea. 5
144 to 148 Four ditto of Alabaster, $ 3,50
Francesco Freddolini received his PhD from the University of Pisa, Italy, and is Assistant Professor of Art History at Luther College, University of Regina. His recent publications include his monograph *Giovanni Baratta, 1670–1747. Scultura e Industria del Marmo tra la Toscana e le Corti d’Europa* (Sculpture and Industry from Marmo to Tuscany and the Courts of Europe) (Rome: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 2013), contributions to *Display of Art in the Roman Palace, 1550–1750*, edited by Gail Feigenbaum with Francesco Freddolini (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2014), and the special section of the *Journal of Art Historiography* (2014) entitled “Inventories and Catalogues: Materials and Narrative Histories,” guest edited with Anne Helmreich. He has received fellowships and grants from the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Huntington Library, the Getty Research Institute, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Email the author francesco.freddolini[at]uregina.ca

**Notes**

[Return to endnotes: 34, 37, 43, 44, 49, 51, 53, 55, 69, 70, 78, 79, 82]

In my transcriptions I have maintained all the spelling errors and typos in the original sources. I have also maintained the original abbreviations, in particular of the term “ditto,” often abbreviated as “do.”

I wish to express my gratitude to Cinzia Maria Sicca, who first encouraged me to pursue this research under her direction at the University of Pisa, and over the past years has extensively discussed the contents of this article with me. The research for this article was supported by a short-term visiting scholarship at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in 2006, and an earlier version of this essay was presented at the Association of Art Historians Conference in Manchester, UK, in 2009. I would also like to thank Petra ten-Doesschate Chu for her insightful reading of an earlier version of this text, the anonymous reader for many extremely valuable comments, and Robert Alvin Adler for his editing. All translations are mine, except as otherwise indicated.

[1] *New York Gazette and General Advertiser*, June 28, 1802, 2. The same advertisement was published in the *Independent Chronicle*, June 7, 1802, 3. No further information on this auction is available, but we know that Bradford was quite active as an auctioneer in early nineteenth-century Boston. He was listed as “auctioneer 5 Kilby street; house Atkinson street” in *The Boston Directory; Containing the Names of the Inhabitants, Their Occupation, Places of Business, and Dwelling Houses* (Boston: Edward Cotton, 1807), 40. In April 1802, he organized the sale of the effects of a Mr. John M’Lean, who had declared bankruptcy. Louis E. Grivetti and Howard-Yana Shapiro, eds., *Chocolate: History, Culture and Heritage* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2011), 1817.


[7] See, for instance, Gazette of the United States 3, no. 100, April 11, 1792: 399: “Philadelphia, April 11 [1792]. The Statue of Dr. Franklin was left Saturday fixed in its niche, over the front door of the new library in Fifth-street. Francois Lazzarini is the sculptor, and Carrara the name of the place where it was executed. If the intrinsic merit of this master-piece of art did not speak its value, the name of the artist, where he is known, would evince it. Here perhaps its price may give the best idea of its worth. We have heard, but not from such a quarter, however, as positively to warrant the assertion, that it cost above 500 guineas. The statue of Dr. Franklin is a full length figure, erect, clad with a Roman toga—the position easy and graceful—in the right hand is a sceptre reversed, the elbow resting on books placed on a pedestal—the left hand, a little extended, holds a scroll.”


[10] On the American consul see H. R. Marraro, Relazioni fra l'Italia e gli Stati Uniti (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1954); and C. S. Kennedy, The American Consul: A History of the United States Consular Service, 1776–1914 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990). Furthermore, Tuscany, with its artistic tradition and its cultural relations between its aristocracy and the American élite, set up a privileged cultural connection with the United States. For example, the Baltimore merchant Robert Gilmor, Jr. shared literary interests with Carlo Torrigiani. See Carlo Torrigiani to Robert Gilmor, Jr., Florence, October 10, 1835, Ms. Ch.1.5.1, Boston Public Library: “It is not without a very long delay that I answer to your polite letter dated 10th October last which reached me four months after. I hope you will be kind enough to forgive my apparent carelessness, especially if you will consider the great want of good opportunities of keeping alive a regular intercourse between our country ad yours. I have lost so many letters and things since my return from the Un. St. that I have now become very venture and expedition whatever – I have been lucky enough to get you better together with some precious autographs which you have forwarded to me. They have been very well come to take a place in my collection, which is now perhaps superior to any other private one in Italy; and this privilege I owe almost entirely to you. I wish I could give you a proof of my sincere gratitude; and as I am aware that the best means would consist in sending you some autographs of our most celebrated men in Italy, I have done all [what has been in my power to acquire for you as many as possible, according to your request. The difficulty of my pursuits has also been a reason of long delay in accomplishing my duty.
towards you. I hope you may find my offer acceptable, and beg you to remember me most respectfully to M.rs Gilmore, and to present my best compliments, and those of my brother, to you nephew.”


[14] The whole area—together with the port of Genoa—was considered of vital importance, as we can infer from the number of officers appointed in this region: in 1832 a consul was settled in Carrara; in 1856 a second one in La Spezia; and since 1799 an American official was appointed in Genoa. All the official correspondence of the consuls is preserved in Record Group 059 at the National Archives, Washington, DC.

[15] William Main to Giacomo Ombrosi, New York, October 29, 1828, Nuove Accessioni 1205, no. 12, BNCF. On Rembrandt Peale’s sojourn in Italy, see Rembrandt Peale, Notes on Italy Written During a Tour in the Year 1829 and 1830 (Philadelphia: Carey & Lea, 1831); and Lilian B. Miller, In Pursuit of Fame: Rembrandt Peale 1778–1960 (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1992), 191–206. At least two other letters of recommendation were sent to Ombrosi: Peter Crary to Giacomo Ombrosi, New York, October 25, 1828, Nuove Accessioni, 1205, no. 11, BNCF: “I have much pleasure in introducing to your acquaintance M.r Rembrant Peale. This Gentleman is a Painter by profession: and is among the few in our Country, who, notwithstanding the few advantages and small encouragement enjoyed here, remains constant to his profession.”; William Little to Giacomo Ombrosi, Boston, August 5, 1828, Nuove Accessioni, 1205, no. 19, BNCF: “This will be handed you by Rembrant Peale Esq.r, an eminent Painter in this country a particular friend of mine – His ardour in his profession induces him to visit your fine city. Your goodness I know will indulge me, in requesting your polite attention in showing him the fine paintings in la bella Firenze also your fine Cathedral Church, called santa Maria del Fiore, and other of your curiosities, not taking too much of your time. All Americans are full of the praise of my friend Jimmy Ombrosi Esq.r. I take pride in the acquaintance Mr Peale is accompanied by his amiable & accomplished lad and family. Mr Peale has the best likeness of Washington as he appeared in the revolution, of any that I have ever seen.”


On the partnership between Vito Viti and Fiengo, see Richard N. Juliani, Building Little Italy: Philadelphia’s Italians Before Mass Migration (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 266.

The catalogue for the sculpture auction was printed by W. W. Clapp, a publisher in Boston that also printed the catalogues of the Boston Athenaeum. See, for instance, Descriptive Catalogue of the Four Magnificent Paintings of the Most Interesting Monuments of Ancient and Modern Rome, Being the Original Pictures Painted for the


[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid. On the difference between provenience (the original findspot of an object) and provenance (the chain of ownership of an object) see Rosemary A. Joyce, “From Place to Place: Provenience, Provenance, and Archaeology,” in Provenance: An Alternate History of Art, ed. Gail Feigenbaum and Inge Reist (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2012), 48–60.


[22] Ibid.


[27] “La prima officina fu sul principio del secolo presente aperta dal cavalier Marcello Inghirami, il quale può dirsi che inaugurò la nuova era di tale preclarissima industria, che dipoi Vito Viti fece conoscere all’estero, merce i lunghi viaggi che intraprese. Avendo questi stabilito il suo soggiorno in Filadelfia, pose ivi il centro delle sue industriali operazioni, che produssero ad esso ricchezze, ed apersero un commercio attivissimo al proprio paese cogli abitanti del nuovo mondo, i quali furono talmente avidi dei pregevoli lavori volterrani, da fare sì che la domanda spesso soverchiava la possibilità di poterla soverchiare.” Esposizione Italiana tenuta in Firenze nel 1861: Volume Terzo; Relazioni dei Giurati, Classi XIII a XXIV (Florence: Barbera, 1865), 200.


[29] Ibid., 33–33.


[31] Lipton, Truthful Likeness, 34.

[32] The aim of this exhibition was explained in the introduction: “The friends of Mr. Allston, have desired to express in some public manner their high sense of his pre-eminence as an Artist and their esteem and affection for him as a man. No mode of doing this seemed so appropriate as to collect all his pictures which are accessible in an exhibition, the proceeds of which might be presented to him as a token of those feelings.” Exhibition of Pictures painted by Washington Allston, at Harding’s Gallery, School Street (Boston: John H. Eastburn, 1839), 1.


[34] Appendix, II. Catalogue of Marble Statuary, Now Exhibited at Harding’s Rooms, School Street (Boston: W.A. Clapp, 1834).

[35] Appendix, I. The catalogue for the sculpture auction was printed by W. W. Clapp, a publisher in Boston that also printed the catalogues of the Boston Athenaeum. See, for instance, the catalogue of the exhibition at the Boston Athenaeum, in the summer of 1834, of four paintings by Giovanni Paolo Panini: Descriptive Catalogue of the Four Magnificent Paintings of the Most Interesting Monuments of Ancient and Modern Rome, Being the Original Pictures Painted for the
Duke of Choiseul, a Minister of Louis XV by the Cavalier Giovanni Paolo Panini (Boston: W. W. Clapp, 1834).

[36] The monument was destroyed by fire in 1830. See Robert D. W. Connor, Canova’s Statue of Washington (Raleigh, NC: The North Carolina Historical Commission, 1910); Fehl, “Thomas Appleton of Livorno,” 323–32. On Canova’s popularity among grand tourists, see, for example, “Sketch of Italy. Concluded,” New Bedford Mercury, November 22, 1822, 1: “My time in Rome was made more agreeable by the attentions of R. Trentanove, an eminent young sculptor, a pupil of Canova, and considered even now as the rival of Throwaldron, the next to Canova. He introduced me to his great master. His Studio is really one of the greatest attractions in Rome. I visited it almost every day.”

[37] Appendix. II. Catalogue of Marble Statuary, lot 1.


[42] As we can infer from some unpublished documents, Vanelli descended from a dynasty of marble merchants active in Carrara since the seventeenth century. For example, a copy of a letter written to Andrea Vaccà of Carrara, and another one to Angelo Vanellj of Carrara, with the same text, reads: “March 3, 1696. We need to know, for the Royal Chapel of His Most Serene Highness, if we can have two loads of black marble from that place [Carrara]. The blocks should be at least 3 palmi [long] and 2 to 3 palmi large, and 1 1/2 palmi thick.” (Adi 3 Marzo 1696 Copia di Lettera Scrutta, una a S.r Andrea Vaccà di Carara e una S. Angelo Vanellj di Carara dell’ istesso tenore ambedue le lettere. Ci occorre per seruizio della Real Cappella di S.A.S. Sapere Se Si possa auere due Caratte di Marmo Nero di codesti Luoghi, che almeno i pezzi sieno di 3 palmj, e di larghezza 2 in 3- grossezza un palmo, e mezo). The copies are preserved at 1089, fol. 9r, Guardaroba Medicea, Archivio di Stato, Florence. On other members of the Vanelli family in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Notaio Antonio Leonardi, III, fol. 103r, Notarile di Carrara 158, Archivio di Stato, Massa, “[January 10, 1719] Carlo Antonio Vanelli of Carrara agreed with Iacopo Vanelli to work together as a company in the quarry of veined and white marble that they jointly own, located in Torano, in the place called La Sponda, adjoining the property of the Vicinanza, the property of Giovanni Baratta, and the street.” (Carlo Antonio Vanelli di Carrara si accordò con esso Iacopo Vanelli di far lavorare in sieme et in solidum a buona compagnia, nella Caua di Marmo Auenato e bianco, che haueuano a buona compagnia situata nelle pertinenza di Torano uogo detto la Sponda, confine li Agri della vicinanza et il Sig.r Gio. baratta, e la strada). In the nineteenth century, the Vanelli family as a whole was involved in the carving of copies, not only after Canova. Even if we don’t know yet any sculpture executed by Pietro, a pair of busts of Philosophers after the Antique sold by Sotheby’s in the early 2000s can be attributed to, Giacomo, another member of the family, as they are inscribed on the back “G.MO VANELLI DI LEOPOLDO SCULTORE IN CARRARA.”


[45] For the Demidoff family, see Francis Haskell, Anatole Demidoff Prince of San Donato (London: Wallace Collection, 1994).


[47] Giving a precise figure for the price contributed to buttressing the accuracy of the provenance.

[48] The four paintings (Interior of St. Peter’s, Rome; View of St. Peter’s Square with the Departure of the Duc de Choiseul; Interior of an Imaginary Picture Gallery with Views of Ancient Rome; and Interior of an Imaginary Picture Gallery with Views of Modern Rome) were painted in 1756–1757 for Étienne François de Choiseul-Stainville. See “Giovanni Paolo Panini, ’Interior of St. Peter’s, Rome,’ 1756–


[52] Eugène Plon, Thorvaldsen: His Life and Works (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1892), 145. I would like to thank Petra ten-Doesschate Chu for drawing my attention to this book.


[56] Synopsis of a Valuable Collection of Old Italian Paintings, Marble Statuary and Other Rare Articles of Fine Arts in the Possession of Mr. John Clark, Now Exhibiting at the Academy of Fine Arts, in Barclay Street (New York: Lesuer & Company, 1839), 3.

[57] The complete list of works is accessible through the Smithsonian Institution Pre-1877 Art Exhibition Catalogue Index, Siris-Artexhibition.si.edu.

[58] Synopsis, 18, lot 1.

[59] On the Venus Italica see Honour, “Canova e la storia.”


[61] Synopsis, 18, lot 2: “A statue in marble of Carrara, representing a Venus about 3 feet in height, receiving the Apple from Paris. Tenerani, a pupil of Canova, is the author and shows not only the natural genius of the sculptor, but also the pure and refined taste of the Canova’s school.”


[64] Synopsis, 2.


[66] In 1815, he considered moving to the United States, if he could secure one or more public commissions. The American Consul in Leghorn, Thomas Appleton, acted as an intermediary between Bartolini and the former president, Thomas Jefferson. In a letter to Jefferson, Appleton introduced his thirty-eight year old “friend” as one of the most promising sculptors in Italy: “In drawing and modelling he stands unrival’d in Italy, as he certainly will in sculpture at a period not far distant.” Thomas Appleton to Thomas Jefferson, Leghorn, October 25, 1815, quoted in D. K. S. Hyland, “Lorenzo Bartolini and Italian Influences on American Sculptors in Florence, 1825–1950” (PhD diss., University of Delaware, 1985), 33. Jefferson did not really trust Appleton, as he declared to Nathaniel Macon concerning George Washington’s statue carved by Canova for the State Capitol of North Carolina: “Appleton has a friend and great favorite in a sculptor of the name of Bartholini, whom he thinks equal to Canove, and his friendship may lead him to find difficulties with Canove and draw the job to Bartolini, of whose name I never heard but from Mr. Appleton. But I could not yield to his opinion alone against that of all Europe” (R. D. W. Connor, Canova’s Statue of Washington (Raleigh, NC: The North Carolina Historical Commission, 1910), 26. Bartolini’s reputation in the American artistic community is confirmed by the records of his death published in several periodicals. See, for example, “Death of Bartolini,” Bulletin of the American Art Union, April 1, 1850, 16.

[67] Bartolini worked on the marble until 1836, and before shipping it to Milan he exhibited it in Florence, where the statue was a great success and almost immediately became Bartolini’s most

[68] On this work, see McInnis, *In Pursuit of Refinement*, 225; and on John Izard Middleton see McInnis, *In Pursuit of Refinement*, 65–86. A passage in the travel diary of Charles Izard Manigault, another Charlestonian, reveals that Bartolini was renowned as a portraitist among the travelers: “Before leaving Bartolini’s we walked thro’ several rooms in the 2d story where on shelves under shelves & all over the floor we beheld a forest of bust in plaster of various distinguished individuals but 9/10ths of them of English ladies & Gentlemen who have passed thro’ this city in their travels.” McInnis, *In Pursuit of Refinement*, 225.


Bartolini had established, since the 1810s, a collaboration with the Lazzerini workshop in Carrara, devoted to the carving and commercialization of copies. Passeggia, “Marble Trade,” 167–68.

[70] **Appendix II. Catalogue of Marble Statuary**, lots 20, 37, 38, 64, 65, 72.

[71] On this monument, destroyed in 1915, see Caputo Calloud, “Note su Luigi Pampaloni,” 57–68.


[73] On the development of the Anglo-Tuscan sculpture trade between the eighteen and nineteenth centuries, see Sicca and Yarrington, *Lustrous Trade*.


[78] **Appendix II. Catalogue of Marble Statuary**, lots 22, 23, 27, 34, 40. Lots 79, 94, 99, 100, and 131 were also attributed to Baratta.


[80] Ms. SBd-23, E. Thompson Diary, 1848, unpaginated, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston. The first name of the author is not known.


[82] **Appendix II. Catalogue of Marble Statuary**, lots 6, 69, and 70.


[87] “Picture Buying,” *Crayon* 1, no. 7 (February 14, 1855): 100.
Illustrations

Fig. 1, Cover, *Catalogue of Marble Statuary, now Exhibited at Harding’s Rooms, School Street* (Boston: W.A. Clapp, 1834). [return to text]
Fig. 2, *Medici Venus*, ca. 200 BCE. Marble. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. Photo Alinari/Art Resource, NY.

[return to text]
Fig. 3, Antonio Canova, *Venus Italica*, 1811. Marble. Galleria Palatina, Florence. Photo Alinari/Art Resource, NY. [return to text]
Fig. 4, Berthel Thorvaldsen, *Venus with the Apple*, 1813–16. Marble. Thorvaldsens Museum, Copenhagen. Photo Gunnar Bach Pederse [return to text]
Fig. 5, Isaac Cruikshank, *A Lilliputian Auction*, 1804. Hand-colored etching. British Museum, London. © Trustees of the British Museum [return to text]