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Roman Sculptor

**Pair of Urn-Shaped Vases Decorated  
with the Four Seasons**

















### Roman Sculptor

## Pair of Urn-Shaped Vases Decorated with the Four Seasons

Marble; height 63 cm, diameter 30 cm  
Rome, ca. 1770-80

Exhibitions: *An Exhibition of European Works of Art*,  
Trinity Fine Art and Carlo Orsi at Adam Williams Fine Art Ltd, 17 -  
25 April 2002, New York, cat. no. 34.



The vases are composed of three parts: a foot, body and cover.

The fluted baluster foot, with a smooth torus and a lip with egg motifs, rests on a square plinth.

The central part is decorated with acanthus tendrils and the two sides of each vase present oval medallions with a frame of little leaves, containing depictions of the seasons: one vase has Winter and Spring, the other Summer and Autumn. The lower part of the body is decorated with gadroons, lanceolate leaves and bearded male masks. The cover with a phytomorphic knob is adorned with spiral fluting.

These vases belong to the tradition of "Piranesi vases" in which archaeological research and erudition are accompanied by inventiveness and a taste for *caprice*, clearly derived from the Rococo style.

The lower part of the body, with the masks and gadrooning, is inspired by the Borghese vase, of which we have an engraving by Piranesi included in the collection *Vasi, candelabri, cippi, sarcofagi, tripodi*,





lucerne, ed ornamenti antichi disegnati ed incisi dal Cav. Gio. Batt. Piranesi, 1778 - 80 (Fig. 1). The part of the body hosting the medallions with the allegories of the Seasons, with acanthus tendrils embellishing the surface, is clearly inspired by antiquity, and above all by the frieze of the lower register of the Ara Pacis (Fig. 2).

The vases can be connected with the work of ornamentist sculptors active in Rome at the time such as Lorenzo Cardelli (1733- 1794), a sculptor, restorer and art dealer who worked for prestigious Roman patrons. From 1780, he was involved in the work to renovate Villa Borghese with the restoration of vases and the execution of a bowl in rosso antico marble; he also sculpted the capitals with animals from the Borghese coat of arms and the side with an eagle of the base of Bernini's *Apollo and Daphne*, a sculpture group that was moved at this time to the centre

1. Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Borghese Vase*.  
London, The British Museum

2. *Ara Pacis* (detail of the plant frieze), Rome











3. Lorenzo Cardelli, Massimiliano Laboureux, *Vase with Spring*. Rome, Villa Borghese

of the room by the architect Antonio Asprucci. In 1785, he was paid for sculpting four marble vases in the shape of a *kantharos* decorated with representations of the *Four Seasons* by Massimiliano Laboureux (Fig. 3). During his career he also collaborated with great artists working in bronze and silver, above all Luigi Valadier with whom, among other things, he executed a fireplace in Palazzo Chigi (1776, Fig. 4). Cardelli's studio was described by the young Antonio Canova who visited him in 1779: "we saw several fine fireplaces adorned with carvings in an excellent taste, various vases of porphyry and marble covered with low reliefs and leaves; we also saw three copies of ancient statues, but of



4. Lorenzo Cardelli, Luigi Valadier, *Fireplace*. Rome, Palazzo Chigi

reduced size " (A. Canova, *Quaderni di viaggio*, ed. by E. Bassi, Florence 1959, p. 37)

In 2017, two vases, identical except for the subjects inside the medallions – *Satyr*s and *Nymph*s in place of the *Season*s – were sold at auction at the Koller auction house in Zurich (Koller International Auctions, Zurich, auction A182 Decorative Arts, 21 September 2017, lot 1416).

State of conservation: excellent.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: A. González-Palacios, *I Valadier*, Milan 2019, p. 160, ill. IX.8; G. B. Piranesi, *Vasi, candelabri, cippi, sarcofagi, tripodi, lucerne, ed ornamenti antichi disegnati ed incisi dal Cav. Gio. Batt. Piranesi*, 2 vols I., Rome 1778 - 80.





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