



Palazzo  
Medici  
Riccardi

# Giovan Battista Foggini

## Grand Ducal architect and sculptor

10 April – 9 September 2025

# Giovan Battista Foggini

Giovan Battista Foggini was born in Florence on 25 April 1652 and began his career under the guidance of his uncle Jacopo Maria, a wood carver. After spending three years in Rome (1673–1676), he returned to Florence and embarked on a successful career as a sculptor, architect, and interior decorator. Working for the grand ducal family on their estates (at Palazzo Pitti and the villas of Pratolino, Castello, Poggio a Caiano, and Poggio Imperiale), Foggini soon began to receive commissions from several noble families of the city — such as the Corsini, Viviani, Pucci, Feroni, and Riccardi— who were constructing their palaces and villas both in the city and the countryside, as well as their family chapels in Florence's major churches. Equally significant was his work

as an architect for various religious orders, which, between the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18th centuries, undertook the restoration of their sacred structures. In these projects, despite working with existing and often inflexible spaces, the artist fully expressed his creative flair in the decorative renewal of interiors, while also designing new spaces. Foggini also worked on entire districts in cities such as Livorno, which was undergoing major expansion at the time. The city owes much of its 'modern' appearance to his interventions, carried out in collaboration with **Grand Prince Ferdinando** and **Grand Duke Cosimo III**. With the latter, Foggini enjoyed a particularly privileged relationship, successfully interpreting his need for grandeur and magnificence and earning his full trust. His

appointments as First Court Sculptor (in 1687) and Court Architect and Director of the Grand Ducal Workshops (in 1694) placed him at the centre of Tuscan artistic culture of the time. His influence extended beyond sculpture —such as small-format bronze works— to the astonishing objects produced under his supervision. These pieces, characterised by unparalleled luxury and elegance, embodied the perfect synthesis of diverse materials (rare woods, inlaid and assembled semi-precious stones, metals), representing the pinnacle of late Baroque Florentine craftsmanship. After nearly sixty years of uninterrupted work, the artist passed away in Florence on **12 April 1725**.

# The Antique and the Sun King

In this room are displayed two of the five sculptures commissioned from Giovan Battista Foggini by **Louis XIV, the Sun King**.

The works on view here – ***The Swordsmith*** and ***The Wild Boar***, replicas of ancient masterpieces from the Medici collections – were commissioned in 1683 by the French king's trusted official, the Marquis de Louvois. During his journey from Florence to Rome, Louvois visited the sculptor's workshop, where he finalised the price and terms of delivery. Completed in 1684, the sculptures were sent to France, where they received Louis XIV's full approval. He chose to include them in the decoration of the Palace of Versailles.

Also in this room is a porcelain version of the famous ***Laocoön*** – the Hellenistic mas-

terpiece discovered in Rome in 1506 – based on the copy of the ancient group sculpted by **Baccio Bandinelli**, now in the **Uffizi Gallery**. This piece was produced by the Doccia Manufactory using the original moulds created by Foggini for a small bronze version of the same subject, providing further evidence of the sculptor's fascination with classical statuary and its dissemination.

# The Early Years Between Rome and Florence

The pieces displayed in this room document the early career of Foggini, who spent the years between 1673 and 1676 in Rome as a student at the academy founded in the city by Cosimo III. The academy was established with the aim of revitalising late 17th century Florentine figurative culture in a more modern form. On display are drawings that clearly illustrate the young artist's formative journey, as well as several terracotta works, a medium Foggini successfully employed during this period. These include ***The Myth of Pygmalion***, presented at the competition held by the Accademia di San Luca in 1673, and another, previously unpublished, preparatory piece for the Crucifixion with Mourners in the Treasury of the Grand Dukes at Palazzo Pitti. The latter was conceived in Rome and later cast in bronze by Foggini upon his return

to Florence in 1676.

Other terracotta works —such as the documented ***The massacre of Niobe's children*** relief from 1674 and the ***Porsenna Freeing Clelia and Her Companions from Captivity***, attributed to the artist and displayed here— further highlight the development of Foggini's artistic language. Upon his return to Florence, he swiftly entered the circle of major artistic commissions of the period, the most significant of which, beginning in 1677, was the series of marble reliefs for the altars of the Corsini Chapel in the Church of Santa Maria del Carmine.

# Bronze Sculpture

This section presents numerous small bronze sculptures (bronzetti), showcasing this particular aspect of Foggini's sculptural work, which he pursued with great success from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century onward. The bronzes are displayed in their original form, with prestigious loans from Italian museums (Florence, Rome) and international collections (Munich, Dresden), alongside variations in wax, Doccia porcelain, plaster, and biscuit.

These reproductions, always based on the artist's original models, highlight the enduring popularity of these works.

Inspired by ancient literature —especially Ovid's *Metamorphoses*— the bronzes, with their subjects and underlying moral themes, exemplify the widespread influence and appreciation of these classical

texts among artists, patrons, and collectors. They stand as a refined expression of the sophisticated figurative culture of the era of the last Medici.

Displayed on the walls are large-format reproductions of select pages from the ***Giornale*** del Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, an album of various studies dated approximately between 1713 and 1717.

This collection attests to the extraordinary and inexhaustible creative energy of the artist.

# The Medici Portraits

This section presents two of the eight Medici busts created by Giovan Battista Foggini for **Cardinal Francesco Maria de' Medici** between 1681 and 1687, intended for the decoration of the Villa of Lappoggi. ***The Portrait of Cardinal Leopoldo***, originating from the Louvre Museum, was commissioned and paid for between 1683 and 1685. The bust of the patron himself, now housed in the Medici Villa of Cerreto Guidi, was completed between 1683 and 1686.

Also on display are two important bronze sculptures: ***Venus Discovering the Body of Adonis***, from the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum in Munich, which once belonged to the collection of Elector Palatine Johann Wilhelm – husband of Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici – to whom it was gifted by the princess's father, Grand Duke Cosimo III of Tuscany; and ***Mercury and Argus***, from the Bargello National Museum, shown here together with a wax model made by Vincenzo Foggini using the original moulds created by his father, Giovan Battista.

# The Galleria Manufactory: Splendour in Service of the Medici

The room is dominated by one of the greatest masterpieces born from Foggini's creative energy and visionary design: ***the Hardstone-Inlaid Table*** from Palazzo Pitti, produced by the Galleria Manufactory based on his design.

Surrounding it, celebrating Foggini's role as the mastermind behind countless extraordinary works crafted by the Real Galleria e Cappella (from 1694), is a collection of exquisite reliquaries—some in bronze with hardstone inlays, others in ebony and silver. Created by specialised artisans under the artist's supervision, these pieces showcase an extreme richness in both material and form. They stand as the highest expressions of grand ducal magnificence and reflect the deep reverence for sacred relics, their spiritual significance for the fai-

thful, and, consequently, the prestige of their possession.

Also on display are two late bronze groups created by Foggini for Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici: ***The Baptism of Christ*** and ***David and Goliath***. The first, dating to 1723–1724 and originating from Palazzo Pitti, is exhibited in its original version alongside its reproductions in other materials. The second, as the principal bronze cast from 1722—preserved in Russia—could not be secured for the exhibition, is instead represented through its derivatives in wax and Doccia porcelain.

# The *Journal*, the *Correspondence*, and other masterpieces of the Manufactories

In this final room, the presentation continues with some objects produced by the Manufactories of the Gallery, designed by Foggini. These remarkable works include both sacred items (holy water fonts; marble inlaid reliefs; reliquaries such as that of the ***Cradle of the Baby Jesus*** or the ***Bust of Saint Cresci***) and secular ones, such as the exquisite ebony boxes, bronzes, and inlays of hard stones. These objects, made to contain medicines, perfumes, and other items, were often produced to be gifted by the sovereign or family members to the powerful figures of the time, thus becoming a valuable diplomatic tool.

In the field of graphics, a particularly prolific area of Foggini's work, the original ***Journal*** of the Uffizi is displayed. This

notebook of 'notes' by the architect best represents his creative imagination, expressed in the design of objects of various kinds, such as decorations for interiors, fountains and displays, monuments, civil or religious architecture, and anything else required by his role and official duties at court.

For the first time, the previously unpublished ***Correspondence*** held in the Seminario Maggiore in Florence is also presented. This collection of over five hundred letters written to Foggini by prominent figures of his time – many artists in particular – reflects the esteem the sculptor had gained among his contemporaries.