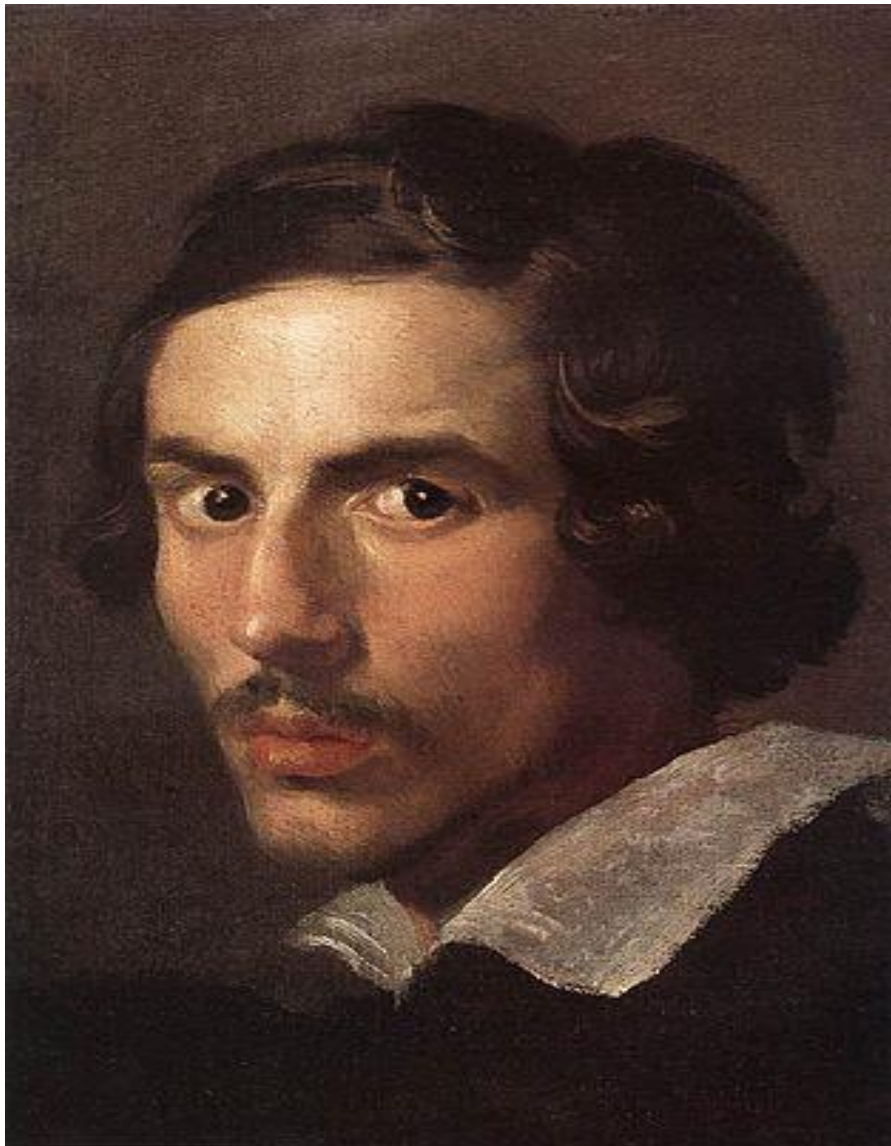


**LIVING GODS WILL**

**Biblical Artists**

**BERNINI**



**GIAN LORENZO BERNINI**

**Born:** 1598 – Naples, Italy

**Died:** 1680 – Rome, Italy

## Gian Lorenzo Bernini

From his early days as a **child prodigy** until **his death in 1680 at the age of 82**, **Gian Lorenzo Bernini** remained unchallenged as the foremost sculptor of his time.

His dynamic and exuberant style perfectly embodies the **baroque period**, of which he has become the symbol.

**Bernini** excelled in every sculptural genre (**portraiture, tomb sculpture, religious and mythological representations**). He was equally creative in other media, including **architecture, painting and drawing**.

An early practitioner of the art of caricature, he used his quick sketches to poke fun at the Roman papal court. In his all-encompassing virtuosity, **Bernini** brings to mind another prolific artist who redefined sculpture, **Michelangelo**.

**Born in Naples in 1598**, **Bernini** spent most of his adult life in Rome, a city his numerous architectural projects would eventually transform.

In 1606, **his father Pietro--himself a talented sculptor--** moved the family to the Eternal City, where he secured a number of papal commissions. Rome also provided sculptors with gainful employment restoring antique sculpture, an experience that had an important influence on the young **Gian Lorenzo**.

Trained in his father's studio, **Bernini** rapidly obtained important commissions of his own. He was in his early twenties when **Cardinal Scipione Borghese**, Pope Paul V's nephew, commissioned four monumental marble groups for his Roman villa (**Aeneus and Anchises 1618-1619, Pluto and Persephone 1621-1622, Apollo and Daphne 1622-1624 and David 1623-1624**).

The technique and naturalism displayed in these works sealed **Bernini's** reputation as a master carver who transcended his material and (sometimes with the help of specialist collaborators) **turned marble into flesh, foliage, and fur**. His fame was compounded by the award of a papal knighthood and his election as prince of the artists' academy in Rome in 1621.

It was, however, **Bernini's** ties with another papal family, the **Barberini**, that propelled his career. **Cardinal Maffeo Barberini had been a longtime protector of the sculptor**.

After his election to the papacy as Urban VIII in 1623, Barberini undertook a series of large-scale projects in which **Bernini's** sculptures played a defining role.

One of his first and most important commissions was the **Baldacchino (1624-1633)**, the monumental bronze canopy that marks the site of Peter's tomb in the crossing of **Saint Peter's Basilica**.

**Bernini** also redesigned the four central piers of the crossing, creating niches for four fourteen-foot-high statues and executing one of them, **Saint Longinus (1628-1638)**.

By then, **Bernini** was at the head of an extensive team of sculptors, stonemasons, bronze casters, draftsmen, and engineers.

Named "Architect to Saint Peter's" in 1629 (after Carlo Maderno's death), he continued to remodel the basilica throughout the following decades, most notably erecting the **Cathedra Petri (1655-1666)**, the reliquary housing Peter's throne located above the main altar.

His career survived the humiliating demolition, in 1646, of two bell towers he had remodeled for the façade after cracks appeared in one of them. He went on to devise the circular, quadruple colonnade in the piazza outside Saint Peter's (1656-1667) that radically altered the approach to the basilica by framing the façade and creating an open space for ceremonies.

**Bernini's** architectural designs are conspicuous in their innovative combination of architecture and sculpture, dubbed *bel composto* (beautiful whole), as well as in their exploitation of natural light and space.

Nowhere is this more apparent than the **Cornaro Chapel** in the church of Santa Maria della Vittoria (1647-1652). While attention always focuses on **The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa**, its effect would be diminished without the setting of multicolored marble, gilt bronze reliefs, stucco and marble portraits, as well as the concealed source of daylight above the central group.

This concern for the setting, as well as a taste for theatricality, is also visible in the lavish fountains for **Piazza Barberini (Triton, 1642-1643)** and **Piazza Navona (The Four Rivers, 1648-1651)** and in the ten marble angels he designed to stand against water and sky along the **Ponte Sant'Angelo**, a bridge across the Tiber to the Vatican (1668-1669; the two angels **Bernini** carved himself are preserved in the church of **Sant'Andrea delle Fratte**).

Interestingly, **Bernini** was also active as a set designer, playwright, and director.

Though he continued to receive key papal commissions, **Bernini** never enjoyed the same relationship with successive popes as he had with Urban VIII and sought patronage elsewhere.

In 1665, he was invited by the king of France, Louis XIV, to submit designs for a new façade of the royal palace of the Louvre. **Bernini's** fame ensured that his six-month sojourn in Paris was a major event, though his architectural designs were ultimately rejected and his equestrian portrait of the king (1669-1677) tepidly received.

However, the visit marked a watershed moment in Franco-Italian artistic relations and resulted in two important works: the diary kept by the nobleman Paul Fréart de Chanteloup, which recorded **Bernini's** observations on art, and a dynamic portrait bust of Louis XIV (1665; Palace of Versailles).

The bust exemplifies the naturalism, vivacity, and blend of psychological insight with expressions of worldly status that had made **Bernini** such a sought-after portraitist in Rome. In it, he set the standard, as he did in all other genres, for centuries to come.

**Saints Andrew and Thomas**

**oil on canvas (76 × 59 cm) – 1627**

This piece, one of Bernini's few paintings, is found in the National Gallery in London, UK.

On the left side of the painting, St. Andrew sits with a scroll in his hand. Underneath the scroll, a fish lies on the table; this references St. Andrew's origins as a fisherman. He is facing St. Thomas, and his hand is pointing out toward the viewer. With this subtle gesture, St. Andrew becomes a rhetorical figure that pulls the viewer toward the painting.

The viewer is also drawn toward the image by the literal closeness with which the scene is depicted—it feels almost zoomed in on the two men. By luring the viewer in closer, Bernini makes the viewer feel both physically and emotionally closer to the scene.

## Fountain of the Four Rivers



### Fountain of the Four Rivers Piazza Navona in Rome, Italy

It was designed in **1651** by Gian Lorenzo Bernini for Pope Innocent X whose family palace, the Palazzo Pamphili, faced onto the piazza as did the church of Sant'Agnese in Agone of which Innocent was the sponsor.

The base of the fountain is a basin from the center of which travertine rocks rise to support four river gods and above them, a copy of an Egyptian obelisk surmounted with the Pamphili family emblem of a dove with an olive twig. Collectively, they represent four major rivers of the four continents through which papal authority had spread: the Nile representing Africa, the Danube representing Europe, the Ganges representing Asia, and the Río de la Plata representing the Americas.

**Blessed Ludovica Albertoni****Blessed Ludovica Albertoni****1671 - 1674**

The figure of Ludovica Albertoni is set above the altar of the Altieri Chapel on the left side of the church of San Francesco a Ripa. Bernini designed an architectural setting that focuses attention on the marble sculpture, framing it within an archway he cut into an existing wall where a painting had previously hung.

The figure of Ludovica Albertoni is presented on a mattress at the moment of mystical communion with God. The folds of her habit reflect her state of turmoil, and her head is thrown back onto an embroidered pillow supported by a headrest.

Beneath her figure is a deeply crumpled sculpted cloth above a red-marble sarcophagus, where Ludovica is interred. The panel behind her is carved with stylized pomegranates; flaming hearts adorn the base of the windows. She is surrounded by putti, and waiting to rise to the Holy Spirit.

**Apollo and Daphne****Apollo and Daphne 1622 - 1625**

The round sculpture on the mythological episode of Apollo and Daphne was made in white marble for the gardens of the recreation village of Cardinal Scipione Borghese.

In this one, Apollo is introduced, who witnesses how the young woman raises her arms to the sky and watches as the transformation takes over her body becoming a laurel tree by the action of her father, who confers this to keep her away from the wishes of this God



**The Rape of Proserpina****The Rape of Proserpina 1621 – 1622**

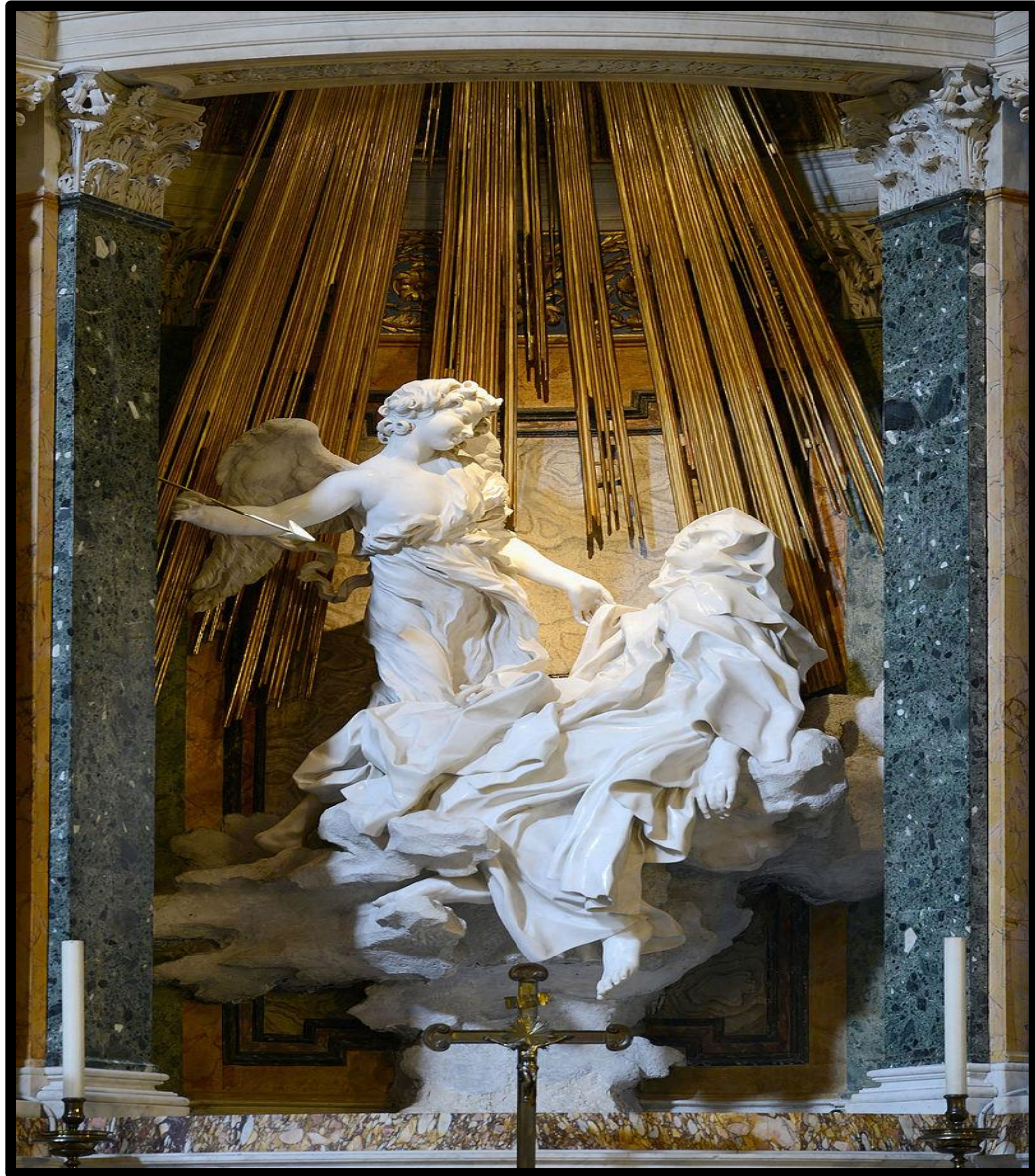
Dramatism, strength and movement are impregnated in this sculptural group that reflects a more personal and evolved style of the artist. It was commissioned by Cardinal Scipione Borghese in 1621 and represents Proserpina, daughter of Jupiter, being kidnapped by Pluto, sovereign of hell, to make her his wife.

The work is masterfully presented to be viewed from different points of view, and something admirable evidence of the young sculptor: an impressive study of anatomy, Mannerist integrated into a formidable twisted contraposto.

**David****David 1623 - 1624**

The sculpture shows a scene from the Old Testament First Book of Samuel. The Israelites are at war with the Philistines whose champion, Goliath, has challenged the Israelite army to settle the conflict by single combat. The young shepherd David has just taken up the challenge, and is about to slay Goliath with a stone from his sling.

David's clothing is typical of shepherd's attire. At his feet lies the armour of Israel's King, Saul, given to David for battle. The armor was shed, as David was unaccustomed to it and he can fight better without. At his feet is his harp, often included as an iconographic device of David in reference to David the Psalmist and being a talented harpist.

**Ecstasy of Saint Teresa****Ecstasy of Saint Teresa****1647 – 1652**

It is one of the most outstanding works of Baroque sculpture, in it, Bernini creates a theatrical picture of the Static of the Saint at the moment in which, suffering a mystical experience of pain and supreme magnificence with Christ, it transverberates in a supernatural and human way.

It is a splendid Baroque piece, where the garments add to the atmosphere and are integrated with other elements to create a sensation of celestial levitation architecturally arranged among rich marbles, polychromes and bronze.

**San Longino****San Longino 1629 - 1638**

One of his most monumental works, inspired by the moment in which Longinus converts to Christianity, which is typical of Bernini, represent people in symbolic episodes of his life.

The work acquires life, movement and the drama of the Baroque, the spectacular folds of the garment were treated with excellent size and add tension in the direction of the Holy Lance, with which the centurion wounded Christ in a side at the moment of his passion.

**Baldacchino di San Pietro****Baldacchino di San Pietro****1623 – 1634**

St. Peter's Baldachin is a large Baroque sculpted bronze canopy, technically called a ciborium or baldachin, over the high altar of St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City, the city-state and papal enclave surrounded by Rome, Italy. The baldachin is at the center of the crossing, and directly under the dome of the basilica. Designed by the Italian artist Gian Lorenzo Bernini, it was intended to mark, in a monumental way, the place of Saint Peter's tomb underneath. Under its canopy is the high altar of the basilica. Commissioned by Pope Urban VIII, the work began in 1623 and ended in 1634. The baldachin acts as a visual focus within the basilica; it itself is a very large structure and forms a visual mediation between the enormous scale of the building and the human scale of the people officiating at the religious ceremonies at the papal altar beneath its canopy.

**Habakkuk and the Angel****Habakkuk and the Angel 1656 – 1664**

In spite of the narrow niche Bernini produced a lively and dramatic composition. Habakkuk is seated on a rock with his lunch basket at his side and pointing towards the direction he wants to go, while the young and beautiful angel is leaning out of the niche, lifting Habakkuk's head by his hair and pointing toward Daniel on the other side of the chapel. The prophet is portrayed as a bearded, older but still strong man.