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MUSEI ITALIANI

Press Release

Rome, June 22, 2026. Following its presentation at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, **Metamorphoses. Ovid and the Arts** arrives at the Galleria Borghese. The major exhibition project, born of the collaboration between the two institutions, is curated by Francesca Cappelletti and Frits Scholten. From 23 June to 20 September 2026, the exhibition is presented in Rome in an **autonomous and original configuration**, the result of an extensive **international scholarly dialogue** that has brought together **over eighty works from leading European and American museums**.

Taking **Ovid's Metamorphoses** - one of the foundational and most enduring texts of the Western imagination - as its point of departure, the project explores the theme of **transformation as a universal principle** and as a **key to interpreting the cosmos**, matter, and the human condition. Ovid's poem thus becomes the gateway to a worldview grounded in change, in the instability of forms, and in the **permeability of boundaries between the human, the natural, and the divine**.

The spaces of Galleria Borghese constitute **a particularly privileged context for the development of this exhibition project**. The very foundation of the villa *fuori Porta Pinciana* is rooted in the symbolic universe of the Metamorphoses, making this site not only suitable but intrinsically connected to the theme of the exhibition. **Cardinal Scipione Borghese** commissioned the construction of the *Casino nobile* to house part of his collection, conceiving **the architecture as a cultural device capable of weaving together myth, art, and self-representation** within a coherent system of meanings. This vocation was further reinforced in the eighteenth century through the restorations commissioned by Marcantonio IV Borghese and entrusted to Antonio Asprucci, who reorganised the interiors **by placing sculptures at the centre of the rooms** and integrating them within a decorative programme inspired by the Metamorphoses, thereby shaping a context in which **the presence of Ovid becomes structural and pervasive**.

The core of the exhibition will therefore be the concept of **metamorphosis as a generative principle** capable of traversing and redefining the cosmos, matter, and the body. Through renowned myths and often tragic narratives, the Metamorphoses have for centuries provided artists with an **inexhaustible repertoire of images and conflicts**, giving visual form to passions, desires, cunning, violence, deception, and possibilities of redemption.

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METAMORPHOSES

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The **exhibition opens with the account of the creation of the world**, as narrated in the opening verses of the poem. In the section **Chaos and Creation**, works by Louis Finson, Hendrick Goltzius, Herri met de Bles, Auguste Rodin and Constantin Brâncuși visually render the transition from formless matter to the order of the cosmos, establishing metamorphosis as the generative principle of nature and life.

The reception of Ovid's text is explored in **The Poet and the Book**, which examines the transformations the poem has undergone over the centuries through manuscripts, translations, vernacular adaptations and moral reinterpretations. From the medieval experience of the *Ovide moralisé* to the philological recovery of the Renaissance, the work's remarkable **ability to adapt to different cultural contexts emerges clearly**. Here, Antonio del Pollaiuolo's celebrated Apollo and Daphne enters into an ideal dialogue with Bernini's masterpiece preserved in the Gallery, one of the most spectacular visual interpretations of Ovid's poetry.

The section devoted to **Pluto's underworld** unfolds around **Gian Lorenzo Bernini's Rape of Proserpina**. The story of Proserpina's abduction and Ceres's desperate search for her daughter becomes an opportunity to reflect on **themes of loss, rebirth and the cycle of the seasons**. Ancient works, paintings by Agostino Carracci, and Rubens's moving Orpheus and Eurydice expand the imagery of the underworld evoked in the poem.

The figure of **Arachne** introduces a **reflection on art itself as a process of transformation**. In Ovid's narrative, **weaving becomes a metaphor for poetic creation**, which in the exhibition takes shape through paintings, **tapestries and textile works capable of transforming words into images**, making visible the extraordinary narrative power of art. Interpretations by **Tintoretto and Rubens** are further complemented by precious tapestries that convey the rich visual imagination of Ovid's stories.

Among the most significant sections is that devoted to **Leda and the Swan**, one of the most celebrated episodes of Jupiter's loves. Through paintings and sculptures derived from the lost inventions of Leonardo and Michelangelo, the exhibition reconstructs the reception of a myth that, between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, became a privileged ground of comparison between painting and sculpture. Alongside these works is **Correggio's extraordinary Danaë**, an absolute masterpiece of Renaissance painting, in which divine desire manifests itself in the form of a shower of gold.

With **The myth of Pygmalion**, the focus shifts to the **relationship between art and life**. The celebrated interpretations by **Jean-Léon Gérôme and Auguste Rodin** capture matter at the very moment it seems to come alive, transforming the artist's desire into a creative act. Here, the theme of transformation becomes a **meditation on the very power of art** and its capacity to give form to imagination.



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The exhibition continues with the stories of **Perseus and Medusa**, where transformation takes on the opposing form of petrification. Through works by **Rubens, Sebastiano Ricci, Antonio Tempesta and Rutilio Manetti**, the exhibition explores a metamorphosis that can be both an instrument of destruction and a means of salvation, capable of irreversibly altering human destiny.

The exhibition concludes with a **section dedicated to the power of love**, a force that runs throughout the poem and that, in works by **Titian, Nicolas Poussin**, and in the **splendid late medieval tapestries** devoted to Narcissus and Echo, emerges as both a creative and destructive energy. Through **desire, passion, loss and contemplation**, myth reveals its enduring ability to interpret the fundamental emotions of human experience.

The exhibition path will offer a **symbolic and sensory re-reading of transformation**, evoking the tension between order and change, the fluidity of identities, and the dynamic relationship between body and nature. Within this dialogue between myth and art, metamorphosis emerges not only as a physical transformation but also as an **aesthetic and ontological category** capable of interrogating the relationships between time, space, matter, and form.

Produced in collaboration with the Rijksmuseum, the exhibition **catalogue** - available in Italian, English, and Dutch - presents the works displayed in the two venues and includes **essays by Italian and Dutch scholars**. The graphic design is by Irma Boom. The exhibition design is curated by Hubert Le Gall.

Galleria Borghese thanks **Intesa Sanpaolo – Gallerie d'Italia** and **Webuild S.p.A.** for their support.

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Quotes

Francesca Cappelletti, Director of the Galleria Borghese

"The Galleria Borghese is a place of Metamorphoses: from small collectible works to great Renaissance and seventeenth-century paintings, to Bernini's sculptural groups, the creativity and intentions of artists and patrons reveal a deep knowledge of, and continuous reference to, Ovid's poem, illustrated, interpreted, and understood also through the dynamism of imagination it inspires in both reader and viewer.

Like the other exhibitions of the Galleria Borghese, this exhibition therefore arises from the very heart of the collection and from its ongoing dialogue with poetry and with the garden, from that profound connection between art and the natural world, between narrative and image, that permeates Ovid's Metamorphoses and is reflected in seventeenth-century collections set within villa spaces.

In this case, however, there is an important new element: the exhibition is the result of an international collaboration with another major museum. For the first time in the history of the Galleria, we have worked from the outset with the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam on the development of the scholarly project, the loan requests for both venues, and the joint preparation of the catalogue.

While based on a shared list of works, the exhibitions differ, as each has interpreted the spirit and spaces of its respective setting."

Michele Coppola, Executive Director for Art, Culture and Historical Heritage at Intesa Sanpaolo:

"Being a partner in this project strengthens the vibrant relationship with the prestigious Galleria Borghese, which has developed over recent years through shared work with the Gallerie d'Italia. This collaboration has given rise to significant joint initiatives, grounded in exchange, dialogue, a shared vision, and friendship. Participation in Metamorphoses once again confirms Intesa Sanpaolo's strong presence in the country, including its support for the promotion of Italy's cultural and national heritage, alongside public institutions and the most important national museums."

Pietro Salini, Chief Executive Officer of Webuild S.p.A.

"We are proud to support the exhibition 'Metamorphoses' at the Galleria Borghese, an initiative that celebrates transformation and the evolution of forms. This collaboration confirms Webuild's commitment to promoting Italy's cultural heritage, in line with the principle of 'building through beauty' that guides our people in the delivery of major projects around the world, where humankind's ability to shape the future is expressed through the art of engineering."

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Exhibition Path

Chaos and creation

There is no better way to start the exhibition itinerary than with Ovid's account of the creation of the world, that conceptual threshold visitors must cross to enter the Universe of the Metamorphoses. In the very first lines, the poet transforms the birth of the cosmos into images, giving a form to the transition from chaos to order and making metamorphosis the original principle that governs nature, the gods and mankind; in the works of art, this imagery takes on a concrete and tangible form, translating words into vision.

The primordial chaos – a formless, orderless mass – is tamed by a mysterious deity who separates earth, water, air and fire, turning formless matter into something harmonious. This first metamorphosis shapes the sky, the seas, the mountains and forests, creating a world that, although orderly, is unstable and subject to constant change.

The works exhibited in this section convey the visual power of cosmogony. In Chaos or The Battle of the Four Elements by Louis Finson (1570/78-1617), the personifications of earth, water, air and fire are portrayed as intertwined bodies that form a vortex of energy and matter, evoking the primordial moment before the elements find their balance. The engraving by Hendrik Goltzius (1558-1617), showing the creation of the world, instead translates Ovid's story into an ordered cosmic structure, where the separation of the elements coincides with the triumph of form over chaos.

The reference to traditional biblical themes is clear in Paradise by Herri met de Bles (c.1510-1566). Here the story from Genesis is interwoven with ancient cosmology, demonstrating the persistence of a shared imagery rooted in the concept of the world's creation from formless matter.

The reflection on chaos and creation continues into the modern era with Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) and Constantin Brâncuși (1876-1957). In Rodin's The Earth, a figure seems to emerge slowly from the primordial mud, still suspended between birth and dissolution. In Brâncuși's Prometheus, the form is reduced to an ovoid essence, evoking both the origin of life and the creative act. In both works, metamorphosis is no longer merely a mythological tale, but a universal principle that governs nature, the body and matter.

The poet and the book

The metamorphoses in the text and the *Primus Amor* (First Love) of Apollo

Not only has Ovid's *Metamorphoses* been an inexhaustible source of mythological tales, it has also been highly successful in terms of publications and interpretations. Since its reintroduction into the medieval school curriculum, the poem has undergone continuous literary and figurative 'metamorphoses': translations, vernacular adaptations and moralising interpretations that adapted the myth to new cultural, religious and social contexts.

In this sense, the poem *Ovide moralisé*, composed in France in the early 14th century, played a crucial role. It reinterpreted Ovid's tales in the light of Christian morality, and populated them with knights and ladies in contemporary attire and biblical references.

The Renaissance encouraged a different relationship with the poem: with the philological recovery of the Latin text and wide circulation of illustrated editions, a return to antiquity was made possible. The extraordinary painting in the National Gallery, London, by Antonio del Pollaiuolo (c.1441 – before 1496) depicting *Apollo and Daphne*, is one example. Here, the Florentine artist captures the moment of transformation with energetic, bold brushstrokes, breathing new life into one of the poet's most famous narratives, although the style is still far removed from the classical form of the nude (Book I).

Over the centuries, the literary and visual interpretations of Apollo and Daphne were influenced by Gian Lorenzo Bernini's (1598-1680) masterpiece. It is arguably the most spectacular interpretation of the myth and the poem's verse structure, becoming the quintessential symbol of Baroque art.

The rape of Proserpina

Pluto and the Underworld

In Book V of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid recounts the abduction of Proserpina by Pluto, lord of the underworld. The young woman, busy gathering flowers, is captured and dragged into the realm of the dead. Her mother Ceres, goddess of the harvest, distraught over her loss, renders the earth barren, causing a severe famine. It is only through Jupiter's intervention that balance is restored: Proserpina, having eaten a few pomegranate seeds that bind her to the underworld, will be able to spend part of the year on earth and part with Pluto. The myth thereby explains the changing of the seasons: when the goddess returns to her mother, nature blossoms once again; when she descends into the underworld, the earth withers and prepares for rest.

The dramatic power of this tale has been a great inspiration to artists throughout the ages. The works on exhibit powerfully convey the evocative power of Ovid's story, defining the imagery associated with Pluto. The exhibition moves on from the classical Roman group of Hercules and Cerberus, which introduces the three-headed dog, guardian of the underworld and symbol of the boundary between life and death, to the sarcophagus depicting scenes from the myth, and the painting by Agostino Carracci (1557-1602) portraying Pluto. The itinerary continues with Orpheus and Eurydice by Rubens (1577-1640), which depicts the two lovers as they make their way through the darkness of Tartarus 'through silent stillness'.

At the centre of the section is the Galleria Borghese's masterpiece: the Rape of Proserpina by Bernini (1598-1680). There is extraordinary intensity in the rendering of this scene: Pluto's fingers sinking into the young woman's flesh, the terror on Proserpina's face, and the whirling movement of the bodies, bring the frenzied verses of the poet's account of the abduction to life through the material quality of the sculpture.

Arachne: weaving stories

In Book VI of *Metamorphoses*, Ovid tells the story of Arachne, a young weaver from Lydia, famous for her extraordinary skill. The girl is proud of her talent, and dares to challenge Minerva to a weaving contest. While the goddess depicts the power of the gods and punishments inflicted upon mortals, Arachne chooses to represent the deceptions and metamorphoses employed by the gods to seduce men and women. Her tapestry is so perfect that it enrages Minerva. Unable to find any flaws in it, the goddess destroys the young woman's work and turns her into a spider, condemning her to spin for all eternity.

In Ovid's tale, weaving becomes a metaphor for poetic creation and how art can transform words into images. Tintoretto (1518-1594) interpreted the myth by depicting the act of weaving itself: Arachne works at the loom under Minerva's pensive gaze. The scene celebrates intellectual imagination and artistic practice. In the painting from the Prado, Rubens (1577-1640) instead focuses on the moment of punishment, when the goddess strikes Arachne after contemplating her tapestry depicting the Rape of Europa.

In this section, Ovid's verses are given a visible form, transforming the myths into tapestries, thereby reversing the ekphrasis of Ovid's tale. The stories of Bacchus and Ariadne, Pan and Syrinx, and Diana and Procris translate the poem into precious textile surfaces. Threads replace colourful descriptions and the narrative is constructed through interwoven episodes and continuous visual references. The myth of Arachne inevitably leads to the amorous exploits of Jupiter illustrated in her tapestry and naturally introduces the next section dedicated to Leda and the Swan. Here, the myth is brought to life through sculpture, painting and artistic imagination.

Leda and the swan

The myth of Leda and the swan is one of Jupiter's amorous exploits. In Book VI, the poet includes it in the tapestry woven by Arachne, which depicts the deceptions and metamorphoses employed by the gods to seduce mortals. One of these images is Leda, queen of Sparta and wife of Tyndareus, portrayed 'beneath the wings of the swan': Jupiter, having turned himself into the swan, makes love to Leda and fathers several children: the eggs produce the divine twins Castor and Pollux, brothers of the mortal Helen and Clytemnestra. Although only a few lines of the poem are dedicated to the tale, it was enormously popular. During the Renaissance, the myth became a favourite subject of the Italian courts, captivated by the erudite, sophisticated eroticism of Ovid's fables. The extraordinary proliferation of images dedicated to Leda in the early 16th century also seems to reflect the climate of the debate on the superiority of painting over sculpture, theorised a few decades later by the poet and humanist Benedetto Varchi (1503-1565). The inventions of Leonardo (1452-1519) and Michelangelo (1475-1564), now lost but known through copies and derivations, offered two profoundly different interpretations of the story.

In the Galleria Borghese's *Leda*, based on a work by Leonardo, the relationship between the woman and swan plays out in an intimate, suspended moment, set against a riverside landscape; Michelangelo instead emphasised the majesty of the body and the erotic tension of the scene, transforming the myth into a vigorous intertwining of flesh and feathers. The painting from the National Gallery in London, on display in the exhibition, and the sculptural interpretations in the Victoria & Albert and the Bargello, originate from this invention, and are attributed to the circle of Michelangelo, specifically Vincenzo Danti (1530-1576) and Bartolomeo Ammannati (1511-1592). The section also includes Correggio's *Danae* (c.1489/94 -1534), another notorious episode from the loves of Jupiter: here the god descends like a golden rain on the body of the young woman, confined by her father Acrisius, translating divine desire into an intensely sensual vision.



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The myth of Pygmalion

Falling in love with statues

One of the most fascinating tales in the *Metamorphoses*, Pygmalion, offers an original reflection on the power of art and its ability to give desire a form. In Book X, Ovid tells of the Cypriot sculptor who, disillusioned with women, carves an extraordinarily beautiful female figure in ivory, eventually falling in love with it. During a festival dedicated to Venus, Pygmalion turns to the goddess, asking for a bride resembling his own work of art. The response is a miracle: the material becomes warm, softens under the sculptor's touch and transforms into a living body. The statue comes to life, and art seems to transcend its own limits, going so far as to imitate the power of creation itself.

In the painted versions of Pygmalion and Galatea by Gérôme (1824-1904), the metamorphosis coincides with the moment of the kiss: the white marble of the statue gradually transforms into Galatea's living skin. The sculptor's studio, filled with antiquities and works of art, becomes the place where imagination and reality seem to merge. Gérôme, a painter and sculptor, conceptually identified with Ovid's protagonist, reflecting on the artist's desire to breathe life into the material. Rodin (1840-1917) also approached the myth as a meditation on the creative process. In his interpretation, Galatea has still only partially emerged from the rough stone: her body seems suspended between inert matter and life, making the precise moment of the transformation visible.

The myth of Perseus

Freeing the maiden and turning the enemy into stone

Set alongside the myth of Pygmalion, the tale of Perseus introduces a complementary reflection on metamorphosis: in the former tale, the material comes to life. In the latter, it is the human beings who are turned to stone.

In Book IV of *Metamorphoses*, Ovid tells the story of Medusa, once a maiden and priestess of Minerva, seduced by Neptune and punished by the goddess who transformed her into a monster: her face became hideous, her hair turned into snakes, and her gaze acquired the power to turn anyone who met her gaze to stone. With the help of Minerva, Perseus manages to defeat her without meeting her gaze. He beheads her, and the Gorgon's head becomes his weapon in his later exploits. He uses it to free Andromeda and confront Phineus, brother of King Cepheus. A former suitor of the young woman, an armed Phineus bursts in during the wedding to claim her hand. At the crucial moment, Perseus raises Medusa's head and Phineus and his companions are turned to stone.

The works visually capture the story's key moments, bringing the dramatic power of the myth to life. In the painting by Antonio Tempesta (c.1555-1630) and the canvas by Rutilio Manetti (1571-1639), Perseus is depicted atop his winged steed in the heroic act of rescuing Andromeda; Sebastiano Ricci (1659-1734), on the other hand, depicts the clash with Phineus, capturing the moment when the metamorphosis is complete and the bodies become stiff 'like statues', in Ovid's famous words. In the *Medusa* by Rubens (1577-1640) the Gorgon's severed face is rendered with extraordinary intensity, translating Ovid's vision into an image: snakes ooze from Medusa's blood, born from the drops that fell to earth during Perseus' flight.

Ovid's myth reveals the dual nature of metamorphosis: a destructive force and, at the same time, an instrument of salvation with the power to inexorably alter the fate of mankind.

The power of love

Venus, Cupid and Narcissus

In the *Metamorphoses*, love is a force capable of governing men, gods and nature. It can generate beauty, life and desire, but also deception, pain and destruction. Many of Ovid's tales of metamorphoses are the repercussions of a passionate love affair: of love pursued and unrequited, impossible desire, jealousy or loss.

Cupid embodies this unpredictable force, while Venus, goddess of love and beauty, represents the ambiguous power of Eros, celebrated in the works of Titian (c.1489-1576), *Sacred and Profane Love* and *Venus Blindfolding Cupid*, where love is both an earthly impulse and a spiritual tension.

The myth of Narcissus takes this reflection on desire to its most tragic conclusion. Ovid tells of an extraordinarily beautiful young man who is incapable of returning the love of others. The nymph Echo wastes away for him, rejected until she is reduced to nothing but a voice; Narcissus, seeing his own image reflected in the water, and not recognising himself, falls hopelessly in love with it. Unable to reach that apparition, he gives in to death and is transformed into the flower that bears his name.

The millefleurs tapestry on exhibit transposes Ovid's tale into the refined world of late medieval courtly love. Narcissus is no longer in the natural landscape described by the poet, but in a garden full of flowers and symbolic animals, contemplating his own reflection in an opulent marble fountain. While the ancient myth also becomes a moral warning against pride and excessive attachment to earthly beauty, it still retains its seductive melancholic power.

In the painting by Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665), the tale is instead rendered as a suspended, silent scene, where Narcissus's lifeless body surrenders to nature, and Echo embodies the pain of unrequited love. The exhibition comes to a close with the theme of love as a generative yet dangerous force, inseparable from the elements of the cosmos - from water, flowers and the sky - and capable of profoundly transforming men, gods and nature.



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Elenco Opere / List of Works

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AUGUSTE RODIN
PARIGI / PARIS, 1840 - MEUDON, 1917

Le Metamorfosi di Ovidio
The Metamorphoses of Ovid

c. 1886

Gesso, h. 34 cm
Plaster, h. 34 cm

LONDRA / LONDON, VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM
INV. A.117-1937



HENDRICK GOLTZIUS
(e bottega / and Workshop)
BRACHT, 1558 - HAARLEM, 1617

Ordine nel caos
o La creazione dei quattro elementi
Order in Chaos
or The Creation of the Four Elements

1589

Incisione, 176 × 252 mm
Engraving, 176 × 252 mm

AMSTERDAM, RIJKSMUSEUM
INV. RP-P-1882-A-6343



ADAM VAN VIANEN
UTRECHT, 1568-1627

Brocca con coperchio
(Allegoria della creazione artistica)
Lidded ewer
(Allegory of artistic creation)

1614

Argento, con successiva doratura, h. 25 cm
Silver with later gilding, h. 25 cm

AMSTERDAM, RIJKSMUSEUM
INV. BK-1976-75

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JAN PIETERSZ BEELTHOUWER
C. 1603-1669

Caos: il disordine dei quattro elementi
Chaos: the Disorder of the Four Elements

1663

Legno di bosso, h. 22,5 cm
Boxwood, h. 22.5 cm

AMSTERDAM, RIJKSMUSEUM
INV. BK-2021-215



AUGUSTE RODIN
PARIGI / PARIS, 1840 - MEUDON, 1917

La Terra
The Earth

1896 (modello del 1884 / *model dating to 1884*)

Gesso, 47,5 × 114 × 40 cm
Plaster, 47.5 × 114 × 40 cm

STOCOLMA / STOCKHOLM, NATIONALMUSEUM
INV. NMSK 2392



HERRI MET DE BLES
DINANT O BOUVIGNES, C. 1510 - FERRARA ?, 1566

Il paradiso
Paradise

c. 1541-1550

Olio su tavola, 46,6 × 45,5 cm
Oil on panel, 46.6 × 45.5 cm

AMSTERDAM, RIJKSMUSEUM
INV. SK-A-780



CONSTANTIN BRÂNCUȘI
HOBIȚA, 1876 - PARIGI / PARIS, 1957

Prometeo
Prometheus

1911

Marmo di Carrara, 13,7 × 18,8 × 13,7 cm
Carrara marble, 13.7 × 18.8 × 13.7 cm

FILADELFIA / PHILADELPHIA, PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART
INV. 1950-134-5

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Partner:

INTESA  SANPAOLO



ÉMILE GALLE
NANCY, 1846-1904

Lacrime di soda
Tears of Soda

1903

Vetro, h. 16,3 cm; ø 17,5 cm
Glass, h. 16.3 cm; ø 17.5 cm

AMSTERDAM, RIJKSMUSEUM
INV. BK-2024-23



LOUIS FINSON
BRUGES, 1570/78 - AMSTERDAM, 1617

Caos o Allegoria dei quattro Elementi
Chaos or The Battle of the Four Elements

1611

Olio su tela, 179 × 169,2 cm
Oil on canvas, 179 × 169.2 cm

HOUSTON, SARAH CAMPBELL BLAFFER FOUNDATION
INV. 2018.1



Apollo e Dafne in Ovidio
Metamorphoseos Vulgare, foglio VII recto
*Apollo and Daphne in Ovidio
Metamorphoseos Vulgare, folio VII recto*

c. 1497

Xilografia, 90 × 142 mm
Woodcut, 90 × 142 mm

ROMA / ROME, BIBLIOTECA CASANATENSE
VOL. INC. 681



GIOVANNI ANTONIO RUSCONI
VENEZIA / VENICE, 1500/05-1578

Apollo e Dafne,
in Lodovico Dolce, Le Trasformationi, p. 18
*Apollo and Daphne,
in Lodovico Dolce, Le Trasformationi, p. 18*

c. 1548-1552

Xilografia, 63 × 90 mm
Woodcut, 63 × 90 mm

ROMA / ROME, BIBLIOTECA CASANATENSE
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MUSEI ITALIANI

Partner:

INTESA  SANPAOLO



webuild 



ANICKA YI
SEOUL, 1971

Solar Loci
Solar Loci

2023

Kelp, aquazol, glicerina, crepelina, acrilico,
LED e insetti animatronici, 144,8 × 72,4 × 71,1 cm
*Kelp, aquazol, glycerin, crepelina, acrylic, LED,
and animatronic insects, 144.8 × 72.4 × 71.1 cm*

PARIGI / PARIS, PINAULT COLLECTION



ANICKA YI
SEOUL, 1971

Water Belly
Water Belly

2023

Kelp, aquazol, glicerina, crepelina, acrilico,
LED e insetti animatronici, 185,4 × 91,4 × 94 cm
*Kelp, aquazol, glycerin, crepelina, acrylic, LED,
and animatronic insects, 185.4 × 91.4 × 94 cm*

PARIGI / PARIS, PINAULT COLLECTION



ANICKA YI
SEOUL, 1971

Sea Salt High-Rise
Sea Salt High-Rise

2023

Kelp, aquazol, glicerina, crepelina, acrilico,
LED e insetti animatronici, 147,3 × 72,4 × 72,4 cm
*Kelp, aquazol, glycerin, crepelina, acrylic, LED,
and animatronic insects, 147.3 × 72.4 × 72.4 cm*

PARIGI / PARIS, PINAULT COLLECTION



MAESTRO DEL ROMAN DE FAUVEL
MASTER OF THE ROMAN FAUVEL

Apollo e Dafne in Ovide
moralisé en vers, folio 4 recto
Apollo and Daphne in Ovide
moralisé en vers, folio 4 recto

c. 1325-1330

Pergamena, c. 80 × 80 mm
Parchment, c. 80 × 80 mm

PARIGI / PARIS, BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE,
BIBLIOTHÈQUE DE L'ARSENAL
MS. 5069 RÈS

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GIOVANNI DI NICCOLÒ DE LUTERI,
DETTO / KNOWN AS DOSSO DOSSI
TRAMUSCHIO ?, CA. 1487 - FERRARA, 1542

Apollo *Apollo*

c. 1525

Olio su tela, 191 × 116 cm
Oil on canvas, 191 × 116 cm

ROMA / ROME, GALLERIA BORGHESE
INV. 001



PIERO DEL POLLAIUOLO
FIRENZE / FLORENCE, C. 1441 - ROMA / ROME, ANTE / BEFORE 1496

Apollo e Dafne *Apollo and Daphne*

c. 1470-1475

Olio su tavola, 29,5 × 20 cm
Oil on panel, 29.5 × 20 cm

LONDRA / LONDON, THE NATIONAL GALLERY
INV. NG928



GIAN LORENZO BERNINI
NAPOLI / NAPLES, 1598 - ROMA / ROME, 1680

Apollo e Dafne *Apollo and Daphne*

1622-1625

Marmo di Carrara, h. 243 cm
Carrara marble, h. 243 cm

ROMA / ROME, GALLERIA BORGHESE
INV. CV



AGOSTINO CARRACCI
BOLOGNA, 1557 - PARMA, 1602

Plutone *Pluto*

c. 1592

Olio su tela, 109 × 130 cm
Oil on canvas, 109 × 130 cm

MODENA, GALLERIA ESTENSE
INV. R.C.G.E. 340

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PETER PAUL RUBENS
SIEGEN, 1577 - ANVERSA / ANTWERP, 1640

Orfeo ed Euridice *Orpheus and Eurydice*

1636-1638

Olio su tela, 196,5 × 247,5 cm
Oil on canvas, 196.5 × 247.5 cm

MADRID, MUSEO NACIONAL DEL PRADO
INV. P001667



Ercole e Cerbero *Hercules and Cerberus*

II sec. d.C. / 2nd century CE

Marmo bianco a grandi cristalli, 152 × 94 × 48 cm
White marble with large crystals, 152 × 94 × 48 cm

CITTÀ DEL VATICANO / VATICAN CITY, MUSEI VATICANI / VATICAN MUSEUMS
(MUSEO PIO CLEMENTINO, SALA DEGLI ANIMALI)
INV. 488



GIAN LORENZO BERNINI
NAPOLI / NAPLES, 1598 - ROMA / ROME, 1680

Ratto di Proserpina *Rape of Proserpina*

1621-1622

Marmo di Carrara, h. 255 cm
Carrara marble, h. 255 cm

ROMA / ROME, GALLERIA BORGHESE
INV. CCLXVIII



JACOPO ROBUSTI, DETTO / KNOWN AS TINTORETTO
VENEZIA / VENICE, 1518-1594

Minerva e Aracne *Minerva and Arachne*

c. 1575-1585

Olio su tela, 145 × 272 cm
Oil on canvas, 145 × 272 cm

FIRENZE / FLORENCE, LE GALLERIE DEGLI UFFIZI
INV. CONTINI BONACOSSÌ 35

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KAREL VAN MANDER
(su progetto attribuito / design attribute)
MEULEBEKE, 1548 - AMSTERDAM, 1606

FRANÇOIS SPIERING
(su modello della bottega / execution on workshop)
ANVERSA, 1551 - DELFT, 1630

Diana e Procri

Diana and Procris Bidding Each Other Farewell

c. 1610

Lana e seta, 354/351 × 546/542 cm
Wool and silk, 354/351 × 546/542 cm

AMSTERDAM, RIJKSMUSEUM
INV. NO. BK-1954-69-B



JAN (JEAN) JANS IL GIOVANE
(progetto / project)
C. 1644-1723

MANUFACTURE ROYALE DES GOBELINS
(realizzato / execution)

Bacco e Arianna

Bacchus and Ariadne

c. 1680

Lana e seta, 321 × 248 cm
Wool and silk, 321 × 248 cm

AMSTERDAM, RIJKSMUSEUM
INV. BK-1959-59-C



JAN (JEAN) JANS IL GIOVANE
(progetto di / project by)
C. 1644-1723

MANUFACTURE ROYALE DES GOBELINS
(realizzato da / execution by)

Pan e Siringa

Pan and Syrinx

c. 1680

Lana e seta, 328 × 212 cm
Wool and silk, 328 × 212 cm

AMSTERDAM, RIJKSMUSEUM
INV. BK-1959-59-D

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MUSEI ITALIANI



PETER PAUL RUBENS
SIEGEN, 1577 - ANVERSA / ANTWERP, 1640

Pallade e Aracne
Pallas and Arachne

1636-1637

Olio su tavola, 26,7 × 38,1 cm
Oil on panel, 26.7 × 38.1 cm

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS
INV. 58.18



LEONARDO DA VINCI
(da / after)
VINCI, 1452 - AMBOISE, 1519

GIOVANNI ANTONIO BAZZI, DETTO / KNOWN AS IL SODOMA
(attribuito / attributed)
VERCELLI, 1477 - SIENA, 1549

Leda e il cigno
Leda and the Swan

ante / before 1517

Tempera su tavola, 115 × 86 cm
Tempera on panel, 115 × 86 cm

ROMA / ROME, GALLERIA BORGHESE
INV. 434



MICHELANGELO BUONARROTI
(da / after)
CAPRESE, 1475 - ROMA / ROME, 1564

Leda e il cigno
Leda and the Swan

post / after 1530

Olio su tela, 105,4 × 141 cm
Oil on canvas, 105.4 × 141 cm

LONDRA / LONDON, THE NATIONAL GALLERY
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Partner:

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BARTOLOMEO AMMANNATI
SETTIGNANO, 1511 - FIRENZE / FLORENCE, 1592

Leda e il cigno
Leda and the Swan

c. 1535-1540

Marmo, 50 × 61 cm
Marble, 50 × 61 cm

FIRENZE / FLORENCE, MUSEO NAZIONALE DEL BARGELLO
INV. 73 S



MICHELE TOSINI,
DETTO / KNOWN AS MICHELE DI RIDOLFO DEL GHIRLANDAIO
FIRENZE / FLORENCE, 1503 - 1577

Leda
Leda

c. 1560-1570

Olio su tavola, 78 × 51 cm
Oil on canvas, 78 × 51 cm

ROMA / ROME, GALLERIA BORGHESI
INV. 323



Leda con cigno
Leda and the Swan

II secolo d.C. / 2nd century ce

Marmo bianco, h. 127 cm
White marble, h. 127 cm

ROMA / ROME, GALLERIA BORGHESI
INV. CVIIC



VINCENZO DANTI
(o / or)
PERUGIA, 1530-1576

BARTOLOMEO AMMANNATI
(attribuito / attributed)
SETTIGNANO, 1511 - FIRENZE / FLORENCE, 1592

Leda e il cigno
Leda and the Swan

c. 1535 (Ammannati) o / or c. 1562-1563 (Danti)

Marmo, 139 × 59 × 51 cm
Marble, 139 × 59 × 51 cm

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MUSEI ITALIANI



ALLEGRI ANTONIO, DETTO / KNOWN AS CORREGGIO
CORREGGIO, 1489/94-1534

Danae *Danae*

1530-1534

Olio su tela, 158 × 189 cm
Oil on canvas, 158 × 189 cm

ROMA / ROME, GALLERIA BORGHESI
INV. 125



PAULUS VAN VIANEN
UTRECHT, C. 1570 - PRAGA / PRAGUE, 1613

Bacile con i miti di Diana, Callisto e Atteone *Basin with scenes from the story of Diana, Callisto and Actaeon*

1613

Argento, 40,5 × 52,3 cm
Silver, 40.5 × 52.3 cm

AMSTERDAM, RIJKSMUSEUM
INV. BK-16089-A



AUGUSTE RODIN
PARIGI / PARIS, 1840 - MEUDON, 1917

VICTOR PETER
(realizzazione in marmo a cura di / reali-
zed in marble by the praticien)
PARIGI / PARIS, 1840-1918

Pigmalione e Galatea *Pygmalion and Galatea*

1908-1909
(modello del 1889 circa / *model dating to c. 1889*)

Marmo, 97 × 89 × 76,5 cm
Marble, 97 × 89 × 76.5 cm

NEW YORK, THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART
INV. 10.31

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AUGUSTE RODIN
PARIGI / PARIS, 1840 - MEUDON, 1917

Galatea
Galatea

1887-1888

Gesso e metallo, 39,5 × 28 × 23 cm
Plaster and metal, 39.5 × 28 × 23 cm

PARIGI / PARIS, MUSÉE RODIN
INV. 2434



JEAN-LÉON GÉRÔME
VESOUL, 1824 - PARIGI / PARIS, 1904

Pigmalione e Galatea
Pygmalion and Galatea

c. 1890

Olio su tela, 89 × 69 cm
Oil on canvas, 89 × 69 cm

NEW YORK, THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART
INV. 27.200



JEAN-LÉON GÉRÔME
VESOUL, 1824 - PARIGI / PARIS, 1904

Pigmalione e Galatea
Pygmalion and Galatea

c. 1890

Olio su tela, 94 × 74 cm
Oil on canvas, 94 x 74 cm

LIMASSOL - AMATHUS, COLLEZIONE DEL /
COLLECTION OF DOTT. ANDREAS PITTAS



GAETANO GUIDI
(ambito di / circle of)
ATTIVO / ACTIVE C. 1850-1880

Scudo con testa di Medusa
Shield with the Head of Medusa

c. 1870-1880

Acciaio, parzialmente dorato, velluto, cuoio, ø 61 cm
Steel, partially gilded, fabric, leather, ø 61 cm

NAPOLI / NAPLES, MUSEO CIVICO GAETANO FILANGIERI
INV. 1601

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PETER PAUL RUBENS
SIEGEN, 1577 - ANVERSA / ANTWERP, 1640

La testa di Medusa *The Head of Medusa*

c. 1613

Olio su tavola, 60,6 × 112,4 cm
Oil on panel, 60.6 × 112.4 cm

BRNO, MORAVSKÁ GALERIE
INV. A2



Applique a testa di Medusa *Applique with Head of Medusa*

fine del III - prima metà del II sec. a.C. /
late 3rd - first half 2nd century BCE

Lamina d'oro lavorata a sbalzo, ca. 4,5 × 4,5 cm
Gold plaque with relief, c. 4.5 × 4.5 cm

CITTÀ DEL VATICANO / VATICAN CITY, MUSEI VATICANI / VATICAN MUSEUMS
(MUSEO GREGORIANO ETRUSCO)
INV. MV.13664



RUTILIO MANETTI
SIENA, 1571-1639

Andromeda liberata da Perseo *Andromeda Freed by Perseus*

c. 1611-1612

Olio su tela, 177 × 120 cm
Oil on canvas, 177 × 120 cm

ROMA / ROME, GALLERIA BORGHESE
INV. 004



CORNELIS BELLEKIN
(attribuito / attributed)
ATTIVO / ACTIVE 1650-1700 C.

La liberazione di Andromeda per mano di Perseo *Perseus Freeing Andromeda*

c. 1670-1700

Madreperla di pinctada maxima, 9 × 8 × 1 cm
*Mother-of-pearl (Pinctada maxima; formerly Pteria maxima),
9 × 8 × 1 cm*

AMSTERDAM, RIJKSMUSEUM
INV. BK-NM-616

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ANTONIO TEMPESTA
FIRENZE / FLORENCE, C. 1555 - ROMA / ROME, 1630

Perseo e Andromeda (recto) e
Venere e Adone (verso)
*Perseus and Andromeda (recto)
and Venus and Adonis (verso)*

1610-1620

Tempera e olio su lapislazzulo, 23 × 17 × 0,2 cm
Tempera and oil on lapis lazuli, 23 × 17 × 0.2 cm

ROMA / ROME, GALLERIA BORGHESE
INV. 606



SEBASTIANO RICCI
BELLUNO, 1659 - VENEZIA / VENICE, 1734

Perseo sconfigge Fineo con la testa di Medusa
*Perseus Confronting Phineus
with the Head of Medusa*

c. 1705-1710

Olio su tela, 64 × 77 cm
Oil on canvas, 64 × 77 cm

LOS ANGELES, THE J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM
INV. 86.PA.591



Narciso
Narcissus

II sec. d.C. / 2nd century CE

Marmo bianco, h. 37 cm (busto)
White marble, h. 37 cm (bust)

ROMA / ROME, GALLERIA BORGHESE
INV. XXIII



Arazzo Millefleurs con Narciso
Millefleurs Tapestry with Narcissus

c. 1480-1520

Lana e seta, 282 × 311 cm
Wool and silk, 282 × 311 cm

BOSTON, MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS
INV. 68.114

METAMORFOSI METAMORPHOSES

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TIZIANO VECELLIO, DETTO / KNOWN AS TIZIANO / TITIAN
PIEVE DI CADORE, C. 1485 - VENEZIA, 1576

Amor sacro e Amor profano
Sacred and Profane Love

1515-1516

Olio su tela, 118 × 278 cm
Oil on canvas, 118 × 278 cm

ROMA / ROME, GALLERIA BORGHESE
INV. 147



TIZIANO VECELLIO, DETTO / KNOWN AS TIZIANO / TITIAN
PIEVE DI CADORE, C. 1485 - VENEZIA, 1576

Venere che benda Amore
Venus Blindfolding Cupid

c. 1565

Olio su tela, 118 × 185 cm
Oil on canvas, 118 × 185 cm

ROMA / ROME, GALLERIA BORGHESE
INV. 170



NICOLAS POUSSIN
LES ANDELYS, 1594 - ROMA / ROME, 1665

Eco e Narciso
Echo and Narcissus

c. 1629

Olio su tela, 74 × 100 cm
Oil on canvas, 74 × 100 cm

PARIGI / PARIS, MUSÉE DU LOUVRE, DÉPARTEMENT DES PEINTURES
INV. 7297

da sinistra verso destra:

Cerere insegue il carro di Plutone;
Proserpina viene sorpresa mentre coglie fiori;
Plutone rapisce Proserpina sulla sua quadriga

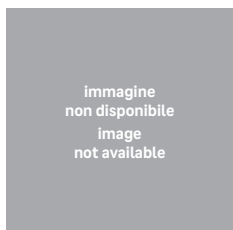
From left to right:

*Ceres chases Pluto's chariot;
Proserpina is caught picking flowers;
Pluto abducts Proserpina in his chariot*

230-240 d.C.

Sarcofago in marmo, 220 × 63 × 63 cm
Sarcophagus in marble, 220 × 63 × 63 cm

ROMA / ROME, MUSEI CAPITOLINI
INV. S249





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Love, Chaos and Other Disasters

Ovid's Metamorphoses The Podcast

On the occasion of the exhibition **Metamorphoses. Ovid and the Arts** the Galleria Borghese launches an original podcast curated by Claudio Sagliocco produced by Fandango Podcast. A sonic journey that begins with Ovid's verses and the works on display to explore timeless and deeply relevant themes: love, desire, violence and transformation.

Love, Chaos and Other Disasters. Ovid's Metamorphoses is a five-episode narrative that moves between ancient myths and contemporary sensibilities. More than a companion to the exhibition, it offers a parallel experience: a different way to enter Ovid's stories and discover how they continue to speak to us today.

Guiding listeners is the voice of art historian Claudio Sagliocco, who weaves together reflections and perspectives from scholars, actors, writers, singer-songwriters and artists. The result is a vibrant and unexpected dialogue in which myth sheds its distance and reveals itself for what it has always been: an inexhaustible source of inspiration for creative minds.

Beyond the museum galleries and far from academic language, the podcast reveals the enduring contemporary power of the *Metamorphoses*: a work that, like all classics, continues to transform alongside us and never ceases to offer new meanings.

The first episode will be available in Italian from Tuesday, 23 June on all major audio platforms, including Spotify and Apple Music, as well as on the Galleria Borghese website. Subsequent episodes will be released on a weekly basis.



 listen now

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Synopsis of Episode 1: *What Chaos! Monsters and Pursuits*

In the beginning there was no order, no form, only chaos. From this, everything comes into being: the world, the gods, and the first nightmares. From the birth of the cosmos to creatures out of control, such as the fearsome Python, this episode draws us into a universe in constant transformation, shaped by chases, fears and wonder.

Leading us on this journey are the voices of painter Stefano Faravelli, art historian Claudia Cieri Via, and writer Elisabetta Rasy, who offer new ways of reading the *Metamorphoses*.

A powerful and visionary narrative in which myth ceases to feel distant and becomes strikingly immediate, chaotic, unsettling, alive.

Following episodes:

Episode 2. Journey to the Underworld and Back

Episode 3. Jupiter the Shape-Shifter

Episode 4. Enchantment and Horror: Medusa's Abyss

Episode 5. The Power of Love



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INFORMATION

Metamorphoses. Ovid and the Arts

Press preview

June 22nd, 2026
10 am – 1 pm

Opening

June 22nd, 2026
6 pm – 9 pm

Open to visitors

June 23rd – September 20th, 2026

Tickets

- Regular € 16
- Reduced 18-25 years old € 2
- Free
- Obligatory-reservation charge, for all kinds of ticket € 2

Ticket office and reservation

Reservation is mandatory and the ticket office closes 30 minutes ahead of museum closing time.

Reservation

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Call center

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9.30 am to 6 pm

GALLERIA BORGHESSE

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00197 Rome, Italy.

Opening days and hours

From Tuesday to Sunday,
from 9 am to 7 pm
(no entry after 5.45 pm).

Closed every Monday.

The visits last 2 hours and admission is every hour.

Educational activities about the exhibition

Guided tours:

Friday, Saturday, and Sunday
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The cost is € 8 in addition to the ticket price and booking fees.

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METAMORPHOSES

OVID AND THE ARTS

EDITED BY
FRANCESCA CAPPELLETTI
FRITS SCHOLTEN

RIJKS MUSEUM



GALLERIA BORGHESI

HANNIBAL

FOREWORD

Some exhibition themes wait patiently for a museum to notice them. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is one such example: the subject was already in the air when we met one morning in Amsterdam in February 2023 to explore the possibilities for a joint project between the Galleria Borghese and the Rijksmuseum. Ovid, it turned out, had long been on each of our institutional wish lists, so it did not take us long to choose.

The Galleria Borghese was created by the visionary prelate, collector and patron Cardinal Scipione Borghese, while the Rijksmuseum is the Netherlands' 'national treasure house', born of a civic initiative. Our respective collections share a focus on 'home-grown' seventeenth-century art: the theatrical Italian Baroque in Rome, with Bernini's brilliant sculpture groups at its heart, and the restrained and realistic Dutch middle-class variant in Amsterdam, centring around the masterpieces of Rembrandt and Vermeer. These different backgrounds have yielded a magnificent result in the shape of an ambitious exhibition featuring works of art of the highest calibre – which span centuries and media alike – to do full justice to Ovid as a supreme source of artistic inspiration.

'*Metamorphoses* in art' is a perfectly logical theme given the immense influence that the Latin poem has exerted (and continues to exert) on Western culture. From the moment in 1497 when the first printed edition of Ovid's masterpiece appeared in Italian translation in Venice, its countless tales of the transmogrification of gods and humans found their way into the art of Italy and the rest of Europe. A century later, it had conquered the Low Countries too, so much so that the artists' biographer Karel van Mander could describe *Metamorphoses* in his *Schilder-Boeck* (1604) as 'a Bible for artists'.

Ovid's mythic retelling of the encounters between gods, humans and nature, and the transformations to which they gave rise, capture our imagination today as much as ever – despite being penned over two thousand years ago in what is no longer a living language. They can do this because they are so vivid, imaginative, comprehensive and, above all, universally human. Not only do the stories explain cosmic phenomena such as heaven, Earth, the course of the seasons and of the celestial bodies, they also speak to the human condition – our fears and passions, joys and sorrows, jealousy, revenge, lust and pain. Many of Ovid's myths describe the mystery of being touched by the divine: transcendent moments of enormous intensity and emotion, including the magical animation of dead matter when creating magnificent works of art. In short, the *Metamorphoses* are timeless and belong to everyone: Ovid might well be more relevant than ever.

We are grateful to everyone who has contributed to the realization of this fantastic project, including the many lenders who responded to our initiative with such confidence and enthusiasm. Particular thanks are due to our generous sponsors: The Bennink Foundation/Rijksmuseum Fonds, Blockbusterfonds, Rijksmuseum International Circle, Rijksmuseum Patrons and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science in Amsterdam, and Intesa Sanpaolo – Gallerie d'Italia and Webuild S.p.A. in Rome.

Exhibitions are ephemeral events and even the substantial catalogues that accompany them will not endure forever. All the same, we hope that something of the soul of our collaborative project will live on and will give rise to new ideas, new artworks and new emotions, because, to leave the last word to Ovid: *All things change, but nothing dies.*

Francesca Cappelletti
General Director, Galleria Borghese

Taco Dibbits
General Director, Rijksmuseum

Through Nature and Universe

Goddesses, Heroines and Nymphs in the Realms of the *Metamorphoses*

Francesca Cappelletti

On a starry night in 1611, Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) and some of his friends, most of whom were poetry lovers, gathered in the gardens at Monte Cavallo, the palazzo with a lush park still under construction on the Quirinal Hill in Rome. They were participating in an experiment to read the sky through a telescope. The place was becoming a true paradise thanks to the work commissioned by Scipione Borghese (1577–1633), the nephew of Pope Paul V.¹ Small buildings, fountains, hedges, flowering espaliers, avenues and ancient statues overlapped the ruined steps of the Baths of Constantine, creating a perfect harmony between architecture and nature. The pictorial decoration, inspired by mythology, offered the opportunity to interpret the green space, introducing concepts from ancient philosophy and poetry. The gardens were perfect for breathing new life into the ancient Roman *horti* and villa, a place suitable for *otium*, studying and conversing with friends.

Since its restoration in the Renaissance, the villa has evoked a place traditionally inhabited by beings halfway between the wild and the human such as satyrs, and naked, innocent creatures such as wood and water nymphs. As in the natural spaces described in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the gods would also meet here, willing to descend from Olympus to walk on the Earth: the statues and reliefs representing them were excavated, purchased and displayed, with preference given to subjects appropriate to gardens.² The nature surrounding the villas is not the unspoilt countryside where goddesses such as Cybele, Ceres and the Roman Tellus reign supreme. Although the primordial power of the Earth is never forgotten, even in the villa within the city walls, this is primarily a theatre designed by architects for the enchantments of Venus, who often, in her pose, replicated the attitude of the nymphs and was also harassed by satyrs, as in many paintings of the Venetian school

kept inside the villas and which still today witness, as in the case of Paris Bordone's (1500–1571) *Venus, Cupid and a Satyr* in the Galleria Borghese [fig. 1], to the existence of this tradition and of special rooms dedicated to images of Venus and the nymphs.³ Furthermore, the names of the trees, flowers and plants remind us that they have a history intertwined with human beings: anemones, daffodils, roses, sunflowers – all reminiscent of love affairs and their unhappy conclusions.

The Realm of Flora, as depicted by Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665) in an enchanting painting that he executed in 1631 in response to an extraordinary commission in Rome,⁴ is full of pain, catharsis and desire for rebirth, and the



1 Paris Bordone, *Venus, Cupid and a Satyr*, c. 1555–1565. Oil on canvas, 99 × 146 cm. Rome, Galleria Borghese, inv. no. 119



2 Nicolas Poussin, *The Realm of Flora*, 1631. Oil on canvas, 132.5 × 182.5 cm. Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, inv. no. 719



3 Baldassarre Peruzzi, *Astrological Vault*, Loggia of Galatea, before 1519. Rome, Villa Farnesina

myths narrated by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*, such as the descriptions of the goddess and her rites in his *Fasti* (8 CE), form the basis of the composition [fig. 2]. Each plant in Poussin's painting has the human being at its origin next to it. Flora dances in the centre, and behind her a pergola is dotted with a myriad of small flowers. Adonis stands pensively with his dogs, showing his wound; after having been killed by a wild boar he turned into an anemone, and his death caused the roses to be dyed by Venus who, in love and in despair, ran breathlessly, pricking herself and colouring them with her blood. Narcissus still gazes at his own image in a vase, next to the flower that was found in his place after he fell into the same water in which he had been reflected. Clytia, in love with the sun-god, cannot tear her eyes away from him and sits next to the sunflower into which she is transformed. Poussin's garden is alive: every element of nature has a human past, and the transitory beauty of spring brings with it reflections on a universe in constant transformation. The greatness of his invention lies in his understanding of the spirit of the *Metamorphoses*, demonstrating a deep and personal knowledge of Ovid and the way he brought all his characters together, united only by the passions they felt with such devastating force. Arranged in a frieze in the realm of Flora, they have the opportunity to contemplate their next form and find themselves in a place of redemption and harmony.⁵

Let us return to our evening in the garden on the Quirinal Hill, one of the many turning points in the fortunes of the *Metamorphoses*. Not just the garden, but also the starry sky could be read and interpreted in the light of transformations. Ovid's myths, obviously known to scholars even in their Latin version, had been circulating in the vernacular for some time, and in illustrated books for more than a century. They were now also found on everyday objects such as vases and dishes, as well as in great paintings. They formed the basis of astrological readings of the planets – each of which was named after a pagan deity – and of the constellations. The passing of time was marked by the presence of celestial deities of whom human beings were the 'children', and the different alignments of the planets helped to direct human destiny. '*Astra inclinant sed non cogunt*' (the stars influence, but do not compel) wrote Cicero. The more moderate exegetes of the ancient world adhered to this motto, despite much more extreme interpretations of the power of the stars over men. People looked up to the heavens, which were usually depicted in art as the abode of the gods and the realm of astrology – as, for example, in Rome on one of the ceilings of the Villa Farnesina which belonged to the wealthy banker Agostino Chigi (1466–1520) [fig. 3].⁶

We might think that after observing the stars through a telescope and listening to Galileo talk about the Milky Way, the pagan Olympus – inhabited by goddesses and gods who descend, ascend, kidnap young people of great beauty and send messengers – would never be the same again.

Around 1610, the new science was on the verge of explaining cosmic forces and trying to discover how they worked. The causes of natural phenomena – from the seasons to visible changes in the sky – could be investigated, and the stars began to be analyzed. The gods were about to be completely replaced by measurement and the laws of physics. The ancient attempt to tame the powers of the cosmos through myth, to mitigate the fear of natural events and human destiny with storytelling, linking thunder, lightning and storms to human factors such as love, passion, jealousy and the pursuit of glory, would become less and less necessary and cloaked in nostalgia.⁷ Ancient natural philosophy did not give way and disappear immediately, however, but became an even freer, intense study of a lost world and, at the same time, a *fabula* – a story to be told and painted. The planets retained their names, from the luminous Venus in the sky to Mars the warrior, to Ursa Major and Ursa Minor, which shine beyond all suffering and human transformation. The images of the gods of Antiquity and their reflection on human life endured in poetry and the arts – they do not bow to the passage of time because they are not history but myth, ‘they never happened and therefore they always are’.⁸

The figures surrounding Galileo that evening, from Cardinal Giovanni Battista Deti (1580–1630), rumoured to be a libertine, to the poet Giulio Strozzi (1583–1652), who had been at the Roman court for several years, had all been educated in Latin literature. In a journey that Ovid’s text, never forgotten, takes from late Antiquity to the fifteenth century, two new interpretations of the poem had already been enriched with images in the manuscript tradition: Pierre Bersuire’s *Ovidius moralizatus* (c. 1340) and, even earlier, the *Ovide moralisé*, by an unknown author, which closely follows the original poem but with a Christian twist. In fact, while the *Ovidius moralizatus* is a chapter of the *Reductorium morale* by Bersuire (a French humanist friend of Petrarch who had Latinized his name to Petrus Berchorius) and provides some images of the gods, the *Ovide moralisé*, written between 1316 and 1328, inspired narrative miniatures in which the gods and their exploits have a contemporary appearance and are dressed in heavy robes and fashionable headgear.⁹ Some of the myths, meanwhile, had been extracted and inserted into new literary texts, but anyone who told stories of unhappy love and wanted to draw lessons from them, could not ignore the *Metamorphoses*, as in *Le Roman de la Rose* (c. 1280), or *Épître d’Othéa a Hector* (c. 1400) by Christine de Pizan (1364–1431).¹⁰

From the first printed edition onwards, translations into the vernacular included images in various editions (not just Italian ones) until the dawn of the seventeenth century, when both the *Metamorphoses* – one illustrated by Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617) in 1589 [cat. 9], then the edition in 1606 with engravings by Antonio Tempesta (c. 1555–1630) [cat. 4] – prioritized images over the text, which was reduced to a few salient verses beneath the illustration. They were so familiar that they were used freely for wedding celebrations, theatre librettos and so-called anachronisms: works in which, ‘as painters do’, events and characters from different times are brought to the stage.¹¹ They did not disappear with the advent of the scientific revolution. Giulio Strozzi published *Erotilla* in 1615, *Natale di Amore* in 1620–1621 and *Proserpina rapita* in 1630 – texts which moved away from the *Metamorphoses* towards interpretations and free connections with contemporary life.

It is likely that the decoration of the Casino delle Muse in the garden of what is today the Palazzo Pallavicini Rospigliosi on the Quirinal Hill in Rome, entrusted by Scipione Borghese to Agostino Tassi and Orazio Gentileschi (completed c. 1611) and dedicated to the power of art and music, was already underway that evening. The Muses are part of Apollo’s procession, and it is Apollo who is celebrated throughout the garden, as is clear from the last space to be frescoed. On the ceiling of the Casino dell’Aurora in the same garden, for which Guido Reni (1575–1642) received his final payment in 1614, the chariot

of Apollo, god of the Sun, crosses the sky while the Earth is awakened by the wonderful Aurora with her rose-coloured fingers. Her hands are full of flowers, which bloom before the eyes of human beings. Here, Apollo appears in his planetary guise, while the Casino delle Muse celebrates his poetic qualities. Beauty, power and culture: Apollo has it all, as well as a wonderful garden on the Quirinal Hill.

Palaces of the Sun and Gardens of Apollo

The overlap between the personality of the patron and that of Apollo was complete. Scipione's house became the palace of the Sun, a place of harmony between all the forces of the Universe.¹² As the new Apollo, dazzling protector of the arts, he is exalted in Ludovico Leporeo's poem of 1628. *Novello nostro Apolline giocondo/ Scipion Borghese...* (Our new joyful Apollo/Scipione Borghese...) proclaims the author, describing the buildings of the villa on the Pincian Hill – in this case the current Villa Borghese – and some works of art from classical to modern painting and sculpture.¹³ The relationship between painting and mythological poetry is intense and characterizes the culture of the time in a complexity of references that do not simply lead from the text to the image but involve reworkings of the ancient text, the writing of verses to be used as an iconographic programme, and ekphrasis, the description of existing works of art.¹⁴ Poetry is the basis of the decorations. A literary reference for the frescoes of the Casino di Amore e Psiche is provided by Francesco Bracciolini (1566–1645).¹⁵ Cardinal Borghese's collection is also described in a palace that rivals that of the Sun in Scipione Francucci's 1613 text. In the first pages of his poem on Scipione Borghese's gallery, the author directly addresses Phoebus Apollo, who knows that in comparison to Scipione Borghese's residence, 'your jewelled palace in the East does not seem vast or adorned'. The palace of Phoebus Apollo shines with riches that Scipione's residence surpasses thanks to the incomparable works of art the poet is about to describe. These are hyperboles and variations on a poem which – after centuries of translation, interpretation and visual success of Ovid's poem – is in search of an original and laudatory use of the text, adapted to one of the novelties of this period: the spread and growth of art collections.

For more than a century, allegories of the seasons, the elements and the passing of time were used to decorate palaces and suburban villas, and Apollo's chariot preceded by Aurora was placed in the vaults of the galleries, as can be seen with some variations, in the Casino dell'Aurora on the Quirinal Hill.¹⁶ This was one of the most popular subjects – not only in Rome but also in residences elsewhere in Italy – and the choice of solar myths was decidedly more common than the illustration of the myths of metamorphoses in sequence. It is worth emphasizing once again that the palace of Apollo described by Ovid in Book 2 of the *Metamorphoses* is at the origin of this fashion.¹⁷ In this breathtaking palace, whose description opens Book 2, the reader is led from the open spaces of the cosmos and natural disasters such as the Flood, to a cosy place, *materiam superabat opus* (the work of art surpassed the material).¹⁸ Here the concept of a work of art, of artistic work, comes into play. It is not only the precious materials that cause amazement, but also their workmanship. The magnificent artworks represent the wonders of nature: the seas with Tritons and nymphs, and precious stones everywhere. The following figures surround Apollo:

On his right hand and on his left stood Day, Month, Year, the Generations and the Hours, all ranged at equal intervals. Young Spring was there, his head encircled with a flowery garland, and Summer, lightly clad, crowned with a wreath of corn ears; Autumn too, stained purple with treading out the vintage, and icy Winter, with white and shaggy locks.¹⁹

The owner's attempt to identify himself with Apollo led him to choose Ovid's description of the palace (into which the astonished Phaeton enters) as his model. The subjects chosen for the walls are in fact the birth of Day with Apollo's chariot, the representation of the Seasons and Time, and the myths relating to this cosmological theme. The splendour of

the palace and the personifications that inhabit it are the origins not only of the passion for mythological subjects, but also of the overall iconology of the aristocratic palace as the palace of the Sun, inhabited by an owner who has the qualities of Apollo.

These basic subjects could then be combined with a selection of myths that had already been chosen from the poem by the humanists. In fact, when discussing the palace of the Sun in his treatise on architecture, Antonio Filarete (c. 1400–c. 1469) refers to Ovid's passage in Book 2, but expands it with other themes he extracts.²⁰ These are mainly myths relating to Apollo or other cosmological and seasonal subjects such as: Galatea, the Tritons and the Nereids for water; Pluto and Proserpina for the relationship between the seasons, the Earth and the Underworld; or the stories of Perseus, in which the maritime setting reintroduced the element of water and that of Medusa's magical petrifying powers, capable of turning men's flesh into marble. Within the fresco cycles, the choice of certain episodes therefore prevails over extensive illustration, which seems to proceed almost in sequence, as, for example, in the Sala delle Prospettive (1519) in the Villa Farnesina, a truly groundbreaking example of fresco decoration with subjects taken from the *Metamorphoses*. This method of narrating the poem at length reached its apotheosis in the decoration of the Torre de la Parada, Rubens's masterpiece of mythological invention at the Spanish court [cats. 19, 57, 75].²¹

The *Metamorphoses* are therefore not just an iconographic reservoir for the subject of a single work of art or a cycle of frescoes or tapestries: the description of the palace of the Sun determines the choice of subjects to be depicted and the interpretation of the building as a whole. Furthermore, the continuous use of this book meant that not only the original text, but also its interpretations, reinterpretations and variations (which were more accessible due to the language and the presence of illustrations)²² shaped the palace – the place where daily life took place. It was important to consider the passing of time, the functioning of the universe, the relationship with nature and the fundamental role of love and poetry in human existence.

Ovid's animated nature and the landscape of painters

At the beginning of the seventeenth century in Rome, the allegorical representation of the fundamental elements of the *Metamorphoses* was challenged by a new relationship with the observation of reality. If not exactly the science of nature, its representation certainly went hand in hand with the poetic humanization of the seasons, rivers and plants. Landscape painting crept into the usual anthropomorphic depiction of natural forces, without completely taking over. In the frieze depicting the *Metamorphoses* in the Sala delle Prospettive in the Villa Farnesina (dating before 1519), all the rivers are personified, and the episodes of Apollo and Daphne and Pan and Syrinx take place in a landscape inhabited by majestic, bearded old men reclining on the lawns, whose monumentality is not particularly shaken by the dramatic pursuits [fig. 4].

The seasons in the sixteenth-century palace and villa follow Ovid's descriptions almost to the letter – as translated by Giovanni Andrea dell'Anguillara (c.1517–c. 1570) and other interpreters of the text – and can be found in the corners of the entrance halls and loggias of almost every Italian palace. The seasons in the panels on the walls of the Casino dell'Aurora, on the other hand, are landscapes captured in spring, summer, autumn and winter by Paul Bril (1554–1626), a Flemish painter who was not asked to create allegories, but rather representations of natural scenes, dotted with ancient and modern buildings which change with the passing of the seasons, while on the ceiling, the day continues to be entrusted to Apollo and Aurora. This had already happened in the dressing rooms of the Palazzetto Farnese, whose interiors have been lost and can only be reconstructed from sources. Here, landscapes from the north and around Bologna were combined with sculptures and paintings in the same small room, with a compendious representation of the universe and the passing of time through images of Day, Aurora and Night. These were framed by perspectives and landscapes depicted at different times of the day, in accordance



4 Baldassarre Peruzzi and workshop, *Apollo and Daphne and Pan and Syrinx*, Sala delle Prospettive, before 1519. Rome, Villa Farnesina

with the allegory represented in the centre of the ceiling.²³ In the Night room, around the central painting by Annibale Carracci (1560–1609), the ‘landscapes’ were created by Paul Bril. Around Annibale’s *Night Flying*, now in the Musée Condé in Chantilly, which depicts Night bearing her children, Sleep and Death, in her arms, there were four ‘larger perspective paintings of landscapes illuminated by the moon’.²⁴

In Annibale’s school, where interest in landscape developed alongside the study of ancient subjects in painting, both Francesco Albani (1578–1660) and Domenichino (1581–1641) interpreted the myths of Apollo by setting the myth in vast landscapes. In Albani’s *Apollo and Daphne*,²⁵ painted between 1615 and 1620 [fig. 5], the two figures are depicted at the beginning of the story: Daphne is fleeing and the god still seems caught in the moment when he is begging her to listen to him. There is no trace of Daphne’s metamorphosis; she is holding a spear in her hand in a rather unusual manner, almost confirming that Albani (according to his biographer Carlo Cesare Malvasia) used the ‘metamorphoses of Anguillara’, who translated Ovid into the vernacular and dedicated a certain part of his verses to describing Daphne as a huntress.

In his frescoes for Pietro Aldobrandini’s villa in Frascati, most of which have been removed and are now in the National Gallery in London,²⁶ Domenichino sets many of the myths of Apollo from the *Metamorphoses* in harmonious landscapes, rich in plateaus and distant cities. Once again, the god is associated with his solar dimension as the ruler of time passing over the villa and marking its activities, and with his poetic and musical dimensions. Daphne flees, her hair blowing in the wind, towards a river winding through the countryside. Her transformation has begun and her hands have become leaves, but there is no trace of her father [fig. 6].

The replacement of landscapes with personifications of the seasons or natural elements and their juxtaposition still leaves room for a more faithful Ovidian interpretation. The rivers become human again, through direct knowledge of poetry, Raphael’s prints and ancient sculptures, in Poussin’s *Apollo and Daphne* in Munich [fig. 7],²⁷ where the figure of Peneus, Daphne’s river father, stretches out his imposing body across almost half the painting, while Apollo embraces Daphne, with her arms transformed into branches and her body already covered with leaves.²⁸ Again, in Poussin’s *Apollo and Phaeton* in Berlin, he adheres to Ovid’s text, understanding it thoroughly.²⁹ The cold winter, the summer with flushed cheeks, the spring scattering flowers and a drunken, autumnal Bacchus in the foreground introduce Phoebus Apollo,³⁰ just as in the description of Phaeton entering the palace. They appear real and corporeal, reproducing the poem’s power to bring the forms and characters evoked to life.

In other passages describing palaces, Ovid makes the personifications so cumbersome they seem real. In such instances, familiarity with the text of the *Metamorphoses* prompted artists to imitate not only the poetic narrative, but also Ovid’s fervent ability to create



5 Francesco Albani, *Apollo and Daphne*, c. 1615–1620. Oil on copper, 17.5 × 35.5 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Peintures, inv. no. 18



6 Domenico Zampieri, known as Domenichino, *Apollo Pursuing Daphne*, 1616–1618, part of the Villa Aldobrandini Frescoes series. Fresco, transferred to canvas, 311.8 × 189.2 cm. London, The National Gallery, inv. no. NG6287



7 Nicolas Poussin, *Apollo and Daphne*, c. 1627. Oil on canvas, 97.4 × 131.1 cm.
Munich, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Alte Pinakothek, inv. no. 2334

images and bring his characters to life, characters whose traits embody the meaning of their actions. Everything can be given a face and a body: the seasons, Time (which threatens and shapes human life), the stars and clouds, even dreams. Even if they are *somnia vana* – insubstantial dreams – in the description of the dwelling place of Sleep in Book 11 of the *Metamorphoses*, they take shape in an almost disturbing way. Iris is sent by Juno to Morpheus, and the description of the rainbow goddess's entrance into the sleeping palace is extraordinary: in order to speak to the god of Sleep, the girl must make her way through the dreams that crowd the palace and block the entrances – to enter, she must push them aside with her hands.³¹

Apollo and his *primus amor*: Daphne

After Chaos and the Flood, the first of the gods to appear on the scene, outside his palace which will only be described in Book 2, is Apollo, the god of the Sun, protagonist of a love story. We encounter him armed, acting in the natural world:

It was at that time that she gave birth to the huge Python, among the rest, though indeed she had no wish to do so; and this snake, whose body covered so great a stretch of the hillside, struck terror into the new-born race of men, for they had never known its like.³²

The Earth would have been better off without such a monster, a sort of giant dinosaur, which only the *deus arcitenens* – the god who carries the bow, as Ovid describes him without naming him – manages to defeat by firing an incredible number of arrows at him. Apollo commemorates his victory by establishing games whose winners would be crowned with laurels, and since it is impossible to stop reading about Apollo, in a few dozen verses we will understand why. Proud of his victory over Python, he challenges Cupid who, determined to demonstrate his power, prepares two arrows with opposite effects: one unleashes love and the other repels it. With one he strikes Apollo, and with the other the nymph Daphne, so that he is seized by an uncontrollable passion and she by an equally relentless desire to reject him (*alter amat... fugit altera nomen amantis* – fleeing the very word 'lover').³³ Daphne did not want to marry – despite the pleas of her father, the river god Peneus, who hoped she would marry and have children – least of all to Apollo, now that she had been struck by Cupid's arrow. The nymph ran through the woods, *vitta coercebat positos sine lege capillos* (with her hair carelessly caught back by a single ribbon);³⁴ this is a fundamental element that will recur in the story and in visual interpretations of this and similar stories. Her hair blowing in the wind as she runs, barely held in place by ribbons, is characteristic of the natural and unruly beauty of nymphs – not subject to the constraints of decorum and capable of igniting sudden loves which are also *sine lege*. Here, Ovid introduces a theme that recurs consistently in other stories of pursuits and abductions. It is the very beauty of the protagonists that causes their fate, opposing their desires (*votoque tuo tua forma repugnat* – her beauty defeated her own wishes).³⁵ Here, the poet addresses his protagonist directly, pitying her because her beauty opposes what she herself could have wished for, a sort of first trigger for love, which has become decidedly unrequited due to Cupid's intervention. The theme recurs in the poem, including in the case of another victim who, even more effectively, utters these words in the first person: *Forma mihi nocuit* – beauty was my undoing.³⁶ In this case, it is a crow who warns the raven not to reveal Coronis' secret love for Apollo: she had been pursued by Neptune (*vidit et incaluit pelagi deus* – [the god of the sea] saw me, and fell in love)³⁷ while walking on the beach, and had been saved from the god's assault by Minerva, who had made feathers sprout on her body and lifted her feet off the ground as she fled, transforming her into a bird, as the goddess had done with Nyctimene who had been transformed into an owl.

Apollo's *primus amor*, therefore, presents a series of elements that, starting from Book 1, characterize the story of the unleashing of passion – often in a unilateral manner – throughout the poem. In this case, the origin of unrequited love is very clear: Apollo and

Daphne can never love each other because Cupid used two different arrows. Daphne, in any case, was opposed to marriage, but her appearance would not have allowed her to maintain her position. Apollo burns, blazes and is attracted by her hair, by those locks moving as she runs. Movement creates beauty in a certain sense, or at least enhances it (*auctaque forma fuga est*)³⁸ and fuels desire because all the other elements of the face and body acquire charm, and the running itself lends mystery to other elements: Ovid writes that Apollo imagines the details he cannot see clearly while Daphne runs to be even more beautiful. He begs her not to flee, with verses that will be repeated in vernacular poetry whenever the pursuer addresses the nymph. Comparisons are made here with the lives of animals which rightly flee from their enemies who are determined to harm them; in Apollo's case, however, love is at the origin of the pursuit (*amor est mihi causa sequendi!*).³⁹

The flight, therefore, only increases Daphne's beauty, until she realizes that losing her form will be her only hope of salvation. Hence, after turning to her father Peneus, a sudden torpor comes over her, and her hair grows into leaves, her arms into branches: *in frondem crines, in ramos brachia crescunt*.⁴⁰ The end of her flight coincides with her taking root in the ground, with the transformation of her arms into branches and her hair into foliage, lighter branches that can still move. When the roots sprout, nothing remains of her former splendour. When Apollo reaches her, he can still feel her heart beating under the bark, and he embraces her – even the wood, with imperceptible tremors, seems to shy away from his kisses.

All this – the association of beauty with running, the plea to stop, the amazement at the metamorphosis that does not immediately stop the god's love – must have presented complex challenges for the illustrators of the poem, in books as well as paintings. The story of Apollo and Daphne thus finds its way into illuminated texts, in which Daphne sometimes walks in a landscape, already partially transformed into a laurel tree, and into dynamic paintings in which she still hovers in human form in Apollo's arms, as in the painting by Piero del Pollaiuolo (c. 1441–before 1496) in the National Gallery in London [cat. 26], and in fresco cycles where she runs into clearings. The momentum of the chase and the balance between running and beauty, however, only find perfect representation in Gian Lorenzo Bernini's (1598–1680) *Apollo and Daphne* (1622–1625) [cat. 24], in which the details of the hair and fingers are truly visual poetry.⁴¹

This story is therefore fundamental. It is a kind of topos in the narrative of the *Metamorphoses*, rich in tales in which the lover, prey to an invincible and unrequited passion, runs towards the object of his desire,⁴² but also rich in tales of women transformed into trees. The myth of Daphne gave rise not only to other myths of pursuit and transformation, but also to the very idea of a maiden enclosed within a tree. In the final part of the story, we see how Ovid alludes to the tree's trembling as it withdraws from Apollo's kisses. In the *Metamorphoses*, trees not only tremble and vibrate, but also speak, cry, bleed and even give birth, as in the case of Myrrha, whose son is born directly from the trunk. Ovid returns to the transformation of a girl into a tree in Book 2, again in an Apollonian context, when the Heliades, sisters of Phaeton, are transformed into poplars on the banks of the Eridanus. Distraught over the death of their brother, they raise their arms to the sky and gradually feel the softness and movement of their limbs cease. It is a painful transformation, which their mother does not understand, trying as she does to move and break those branches, provoking the lament of her daughters, who are left with only their faces visible, the last remnant of their human appearance:

Not content with that, she tried to tear their bodies out of the tree trunks and broke off the tender branches in her hands: but drops like blood trickled from the gash, as if from a wound.⁴³

Until the transformed daughter implores her mother not to make their suffering worse, as by now *the bark closed over the last words*.⁴⁴ In a drawing by Poussin, as in the frescoes of the Palazzo Odescalchi Giustiniani in Bassano Romano, the detail of the female faces among the branches allows us to recognize Phaeton's unfortunate sisters.

Running and fleeing characterize other famous myths, from that of Zephyr and Flora to that of Pan and Syrinx. It is essential to dwell on the pursuit of Apollo and Daphne in order to understand the art of escape in Ovid which, however, does not seem to lead to satisfactory results. While the poet, in describing passionate love, emphasizes how those who flee always manage to keep their lover in their grasp, the nymphs who escape are always doomed to succumb. They certainly do not win, but they transform themselves or reach compromises.

For the German art historian Aby Warburg (1866–1929), the story of Apollo and Daphne was so pervasive that it shaped the stories of pursued and abducted nymphs in Renaissance poetry and the visual arts. In his 1893 essay on Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* and *Spring*, Warburg explains the figure of Flora in *The Birth of Venus* – with flowers seemingly emerging from her mouth – by drawing a connection with Ovid's *Fasti*, in which the heroine tells her own story in a syncopated rhythm that heightens the drama:

Tw'as spring, and I was roaming; Zephyr caught sight of me: I retired; he pursued and I fled; but he was the stronger.⁴⁵

The victim does not go into detail, as does the poet in the stories about the pursuits of both Daphne and Syrinx, where he makes the passing of time and the duration of the pursuit palpable.

Here, the protagonist focuses on verbs and action in a concise historical present: he pursued me, I fled, he was stronger. For Warburg, however, the painters (or their patrons) and their writer friends also read the rest of Ovid's poems and knew the most famous myths. Thus, the analogies with Daphne, whose pursuit had been so effectively described, creep into their painting and are particularly noticeable in her hair, tousled by running and the wind.

In the same book (Book 1), another chase is recounted after this one, which remains the archetype: it is a story embedded in another and entrusted to a god. Mercury is trying to put Argos, who is guarding poor Io, to sleep. Io has been transformed into a cow by

Jupiter after he fell in love with her. Incidentally, it should be noted that Jupiter never pursues any of his prey, preferring deception to running. His temporary metamorphosis often leads to the definitive metamorphosis of his victims. To close all Argos' hundred eyes, Mercury tells the story of the forest god Pan, who fell in love with the nymph Syrinx, daughter of the river Ladon. Syrinx had already been pursued by many suitors, all of whom she had rejected. When she sees herself being pursued by Pan, she too realizes that the only way to save herself is to abandon her human form and asks to be dissolved in water when she reaches a marsh. The naiads help her, just as Minerva helps maidens who turn to her, in a sort of female solidarity that Ovid occasionally highlights. Syrinx was transformed into reeds, and Pan, listening to the sweetness of what sounded like a lament in the passing wind, fashioned an instrument that would forever bear the nymph's name. With his mouth, he can touch the reeds and draw music from them.⁴⁶

A painting by Agostino Melissi (1616–1683), produced for Jacopo Salviati in Florence



Agostino Melissi, *Pan and Syrinx*, 1648.
Oil on canvas, laid on panel, 242 × 173 cm.
Pistoia, Antico Palazzo dei Vescovi; on loan
from the Intesa Sanpaolo Collection



9 Niccolò dell'Abate, *The Rape of Proserpina*, c. 1550–1575. Oil on canvas, 196 × 215 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Peintures, inv. no. RF 3772

and later transported to Rome [fig. 8],⁴⁷ is one of the few large-scale depictions of this myth which features in fresco cycles, but tends to appear as a rural, almost feral version of Apollo's love affair. With a few exceptions, including the large Florentine canvas, it is the presence of the syrinx in Pan's hands that reminds us of the unfortunate girl on the run. The chase, however, creates a distance between the two protagonists as well as the possibility of metamorphosis, as requested by the fugitive. A certain amount of time elapses between the glance, the ignition of passion, the recognition by the victim and the chase. In the case of Pluto and Proserpina, the myth narrated in Book 5 where Venus expresses her desire to expand her power to the Underworld, she incites her son Cupid to make the king fall in love with a girl who is, moreover, devoted to the chaste goddesses Diana and Minerva. Poor Proserpina has no time to escape. Pluto, patrolling the Earth

on his chariot to make sure that the effects of the earthquake do not bring light into the Underworld, is struck by the arrow and immediately sees a maiden picking flowers. Another time factor is central here: the specific moment rather than its duration. Everything seems to happen in an instant, in one line: *paene simul visa est dilectaque raptaque Diti* ([Pluto] saw her, and loved her, and carried her off).⁴⁸ Proserpina's body is dishevelled, her clothes are in disarray and the chariot – a symbol of war – takes off at breakneck speed. Proserpina's nymph friends, who desperately call for her mother Ceres, are outraged. Cyane speaks up and dares defy Pluto's wrath by accusing him of violating the terms of the marriage contract which, with the mother's consent, must be honoured.

In some paintings, the presence of Cyane and her transformation into a fountain, with the colours of the water changing her human form, is a decisive element, as in the painting by Niccolò dell'Abate (c. 1509/12–1571) [fig. 9]; metamorphosis characterizes this episode but does not affect the protagonist.⁴⁹ Proserpina does not run, but is seized. She cries out, and at that moment she is not heard. Once again, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, with the power of muscles that disappear into the ethereal definition of Apollo's body as he pursues Daphne, gives the most convincing sculptural transposition of the lightning-fast abduction in which there is no time for a transformation [cat. 55].

The race itself returns in another myth, now completely centred on a race that is a competition and not a pursuit, and is included in the story of Venus and Adonis in Book 10. It is the story of Atalanta and Hippomenes, which the love-struck goddess recounts to Adonis, with the warning contained within it having no effect on the behaviour and fate of the young hunter. In the story of Atalanta, who shunned marriage and therefore asked her father to allow her to marry only the man who could beat her in a race,⁵⁰ we again see the elements that characterized Daphne's flight. The girl's body becomes even more desirable in motion, revealing itself as she sheds her veils, which only enhances her beauty by casting a colourful shadow on her white limbs. Here, Ovid shows his inclination towards the figurative arts and his sensitivity to the materials of art, which have emerged on other occasions in these pages. Here, however, he is not describing a wonderfully decorated palace, but a human body in motion, yet he compares the coloured shadow cast by the cloak with the effect of a purple curtain on white marble. Hippomenes, so overwhelmed by passion that he endangers his life in the challenge, falls deeper in love during the race, which he wins with the help of the golden apples that Venus gives him and which serve to slow Atalanta's pace.



10 Guido Reni, *Hippomenes and Atalanta*, 1618–1619. Oil on canvas, 206 x 279 cm. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado, inv. no. P003090

In Guido Reni's composition, which brings the decisive moment of Ovid's myth to life and has been made famous again by a contemporary literary transposition,⁵¹ the two perfect bodies intertwine as their legs overlap, reminiscent of one of the verses spoken by Venus about beauty transcending the notions of gender [fig. 10]. To describe how desirable Atalanta's body was, the goddess, addressing Adonis, says that the girl was as beautiful as she was, or as he would have been if he had been a woman. 'Form' is a concept that transcends the masculine and the feminine, and in Reni's painting, in which the white of the bodies reflects the colour of marble with the coloured shadows alluded to by Ovid, the reference to poetry has become an essential part of the style.

Contemporary poetic translations, the large-scale use of the *Metamorphoses* as a source of mythological subjects to draw on for the decoration of increasingly numerous and extensive spaces, the popularity of landscape painting which explores the relationship between people and nature, people and open space – threatening, sublime or tameable – which confronts people with the dilemmas generated by the confrontation with the forces of the cosmos, are some of the elements that bring Ovid and the *Metamorphoses* back to the centre of seventeenth-century Italian culture. One could certainly say the same of Baroque culture, despite all the difficulties using this term extensively, given its uncertain history and boundaries. Yet it is difficult to imagine encounters more explosive and happier than those that form the basis of the Baroque: between beauty and movement, between colour and marble, between nature and suffering, between *opus* and *materia*, between Ovid and Bernini.

Notes

- 1 For contemporary accounts and comments on the Quirinal garden, see Hibbard 1972; Waddy 2000.
- 2 Franzoni 1984.
- 3 Cappelletti 2024.
- 4 Costello 1950; Rosenberg 1992; Szanto 2024.
- 5 For information on the text, which was translated in France as early as the Macé Bonhomme edition in the mid-16th century, see note n. 12.
- 6 Frommel 2003.
- 7 Saxl 1947.
- 8 Salustio 2000.
- 9 For the history of the manuscripts of the *Metamorphoses*, see Panofsky & Saxl 1933; Lord 1975, pp. 161–175; Moss 1982.
- 10 Lord 1975, pp. 161–175.
- 11 Strozzi 1621.
- 12 Cappelletti 1995, pp. 115–128.
- 13 Leporeo 1628, p. 24.
- 14 Negro 1996.
- 15 The frescoes were removed before the destruction of the Casino and are now in the Museum of Rome, see Cappelletti 2014.
- 16 Cieri Via 2003.
- 17 Cappelletti 1992.
- 18 *Metamorphoses*, Book 2:5.
- 19 Ovid 1980, p. 50 (Book 2:25–30): *a dextra laevaue Dies et Mensis et Annus/ Saeculaue et positae spatiis aequalibus Horae/ Vêrque novum stabat cinctum florente corona,/ Stabat nuda Aestas et spicea sarta gerebat,/ Stabat et Autumnus calcatis sordidus uvis/ Et glacialis Hiems canos hirsuta capillos*.
- 20 Cieri Via 2003.
- 21 Alpers 1971.
- 22 Guthmüller 1981.
- 23 In the first room, for example, the ceiling was covered with 'nineteen paintings depicting landscapes and one larger one in the middle with Apollo in the centre wearing a laurel wreath and holding a plectrum, all with small, gilded frames representing the day'. Whitfield 1981, pp. 313–328; Jestaz 1994.
- 24 On the layout of these rooms and the interest in landscape painting in the early years of the century, see Robertson 2004.
- 25 Cat. Paris 1996, pp. 73–76; Loire 2011.
- 26 D'Onofrio 1963.
- 27 Alte Pinakothek, Munich, inv. no. 2334 (c. 1627).
- 28 Rosenberg 1992.
- 29 Staatliche Museen, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, inv. no. 478 (c. 1629–1630).
- 30 For Poussin's probable knowledge of the text of *Metamorphoses*, in Giovanni Andrea dell'Anguillara's translation, see Worthen 1979.
- 31 *Metamorphoses*, Book 11:616–618.
- 32 Ovid 1980, p. 40 (Book 1:438–440): *Illa quidem nollet, sed te quoque, maxime Python,/ tum genuit, populusque novis, incognita serpens, terror eras: tantum spatii de monte tenebas*.
- 33 Ovid 1980, p. 41 (Book 1:474).
- 34 Ovid 1980, p. 41 (Book 1:477).
- 35 Ovid 1980, p. 42 (Book 1:489).
- 36 Ovid 1980, p. 65 (Book 2:572).
- 37 Ovid 1980, p. 65 (Book 2:574).
- 38 *Metamorphoses*, Book 1:530.
- 39 Ovid 1980, p. 42 (Book 1:507).
- 40 Ovid 1980, p. 43 (Book 1:550).
- 41 On Bernini and Ovid, see the essay by Lucia Simonato in this publication, pp. 62–73.
- 42 Rosati 2022.
- 43 Ovid 1980, p. 59 (Book 2:358–360).
- 44 Ovid 1980, p. 59 (Book 2:363): *cortex in verba novissima venit*.
- 45 Translation after Ovid 1976. *Fasti* V, 193: *Vêr erat. Errabam. Zephyrus conspexit; abibam./ Insequitur, fugio. Fortior ille fuit*.
- 46 *Metamorphoses*, Book 1:689–712.
- 47 Contini 1985, p. 83.
- 48 Ovid 1980, p. 126 (Book 5:395).
- 49 Béguin 1969.
- 50 *Metamorphoses*, Book 10:560–739.
- 51 Iseppi in Bologna 2024.

PROGETTO CULTURA

Progetto Cultura project is the multi-year plan of initiatives highlighting Intesa Sanpaolo's commitment to the promotion of art and culture in our Country.

At the **Gallerie d'Italia**, the four Intesa Sanpaolo museums, a selection of around 40,000 works from the **Group's art collection** is presented, ranging from archaeology to contemporary arts: at the **Gallerie d'Italia - Milano** the nineteenth-century collections of the Bank and the Fondazione Cariplo in the exhibition "From Canova to Boccioni", as well as a selection of twentieth-century artworks; at the **Gallerie d'Italia - Napoli**, the masterpiece *Martyrdom of Saint Ursula* by Caravaggio, along with works from the southern Italian context between the seventeenth and early twentieth centuries, a collection of Attic and Magna Graecian pottery, and a core of masterpieces from the second half of the twentieth century; at the **Gallerie d'Italia - Torino**, mainly dedicated to photography, visual arts and digital world, as well as the **Publifoto Archive** with over 7 million photos from the 1930s to the 1990s, and an important collection of 14th to 18th century works and furnishings, including nine 17th century canvases of the Oratory of the Compagnia di San Paolo, now destroyed; at the **Gallerie d'Italia - Vicenza** Venetian paintings from the eighteenth century, including the breathtaking sculpture *Fall of the Rebel Angels* by Francesco Bertos, and a collection of Russian Icons. Alongside the core projects for the enhancement of the permanent collection, the Gallerie d'Italia propose **temporary exhibitions** based on original scientific programs and made possible also through loans and exchanges with major national and international museum institutions. The Gallerie d'Italia, besides granting **free admission for under 18s**, also host numerous **educational activities** for schools and **inclusive** programs for audiences with disabilities and vulnerabilities.

Alongside the four venues, to be also mentioned are **the Galleria di Palazzo degli Alberti in Prato**, opened by the Bank to allow public access to a highly valuable heritage for the city, and the **Casa Museo dell'Antiquariato Ivan Bruschi in Arezzo**, now part of the artistic heritage of Intesa Sanpaolo.

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Società Editrice **Allemandi**, which has been acquired by Intesa Sanpaolo together with Fondazione 1563 of Compagnia di San Paolo and Fondazione CRC, is the publishing partner and editor of Gallerie d'Italia's publications.

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Webuild è leader globale nella realizzazione di grandi infrastrutture complesse, con focus su mobilità sostenibile, energia idroelettrica, gestione e produzione dell'acqua, edilizia green, ed è da anni riconosciuto come prima società al mondo per la realizzazione di infrastrutture nel settore acqua. Attivo in circa 50 Paesi, il Gruppo conta circa 95.000 persone (tra personale diretto e di terzi) di oltre 125 nazionalità. Con 120 anni di storia e oltre 3.700 progetti completati, vanta un track record che include 13.686 chilometri di ferrovie, 895 chilometri di metropolitane, 82.708 chilometri di strade e autostrade, 1.023 chilometri di ponti e viadotti, 3.466 chilometri di gallerie e 320 dighe e impianti idroelettrici. Tra i progetti realizzati più iconici, figurano la Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), l'espansione del Canale di Panama, il Long Beach International Gateway negli Stati Uniti, il Secondo Ponte sul Bosforo in Turchia, il progetto di risanamento ambientale Riachuelo in Argentina, nuove linee metro in città come Copenhagen, Parigi, Roma, Milano, Napoli, Doha, Salonicco e Riyadh. Tra quelle in corso, figurano opere strategiche in costruzione in Italia, come la Nuova Diga Foranea di Genova, la Galleria di Base del Brennero, l'Autostrada Pedemontana Lombarda, la Linea C della Metro di Roma, tratte delle direttrici ferroviarie ad alta velocità e/o alta capacità Genova–Milano, Verona–Padova, Napoli–Bari e Palermo–Catania–Messina, e all'estero, il progetto idroelettrico Snowy 2.0 in Australia e tratte rilevanti del Grand Paris Express in Francia. Al 31 dicembre 2025, il Gruppo ha registrato ricavi totali per €13,6 miliardi e un portafoglio ordini complessivo di €58,4 miliardi, con oltre il 95% del backlog costruzioni allineato agli Obiettivi di Sviluppo Sostenibile delle Nazioni Unite. Webuild ha sede in Italia ed è soggetta ad attività di direzione e coordinamento di Salini Costruttori S.p.A. Quotata alla Borsa di Milano (WBD; WBD.MI; WBD:IM), è inclusa nell'indice MIB ESG delle blue-chip italiane più virtuose sui temi ambientali, sociali e di governance (ESG).

Webuild is a global leader in the construction of large, complex infrastructure, with a focus on sustainable mobility, hydropower, water treatment and supply, and green buildings. It has long been recognised as the world's top contractor in the water infrastructure sector. Active in approximately 50 countries, the Group employs some 95,000 people directly and indirectly of over 125 nationalities. With 120 years of history and over 3,700 completed projects, Webuild boasts a track record that includes 13,686 kilometres of railways, 895 kilometres of metros, 82,708 kilometres of roads and highways, 1,023 kilometres of bridges and viaducts, 3,466 kilometres of tunnels, and 320 dams and hydropower plants. Among its most iconic delivered projects are the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, the expansion of the Panama Canal, the Long Beach International Gateway in the United States, the Second Bosphorus Bridge in Turkey, the Riachuelo environmental restoration system in Argentina, and new metro lines in cities such as Copenhagen, Paris, Rome, Milan, Naples, Doha, Thessaloniki, and Riyadh. Among those under construction are strategic public works in Italy, such as the New Genoa Breakwater, the Brenner Base Tunnel, the Pedemontana Lombarda Highway, Rome Metro's Line C, sections of high-speed and/or high-capacity railways between Genoa and Milan, Verona and Padua, Naples and Bari, and Palermo, Catania and Messina. Abroad, there is the Snowy 2.0 hydropower scheme in Australia and key sections of the Grand Paris Express in France. As of December 31, 2025, the Group reported total revenues of €13.6 billion and a total order backlog of €58.4 billion, with over 95% of the construction backlog aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Webuild is headquartered in Italy and subject to the direction and coordination of Salini Costruttori S.p.A. Listed on the Milan Stock Exchange (WBD; WBD.MI; WBD:IM), its stock is included in the MIB ESG index of Italy's leading blue-chip companies for ESG practices.