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at Galleria Borghese:
from Mongolia to the Global Baroque
January 20 – February 22, 2026

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From 20 January to 22 February 2026, the Galleria Borghese, in collaboration with the Asian Art Museum of Turin, will host **two extraordinary works by the Mongolian artist Zanabazar**, proposing an unprecedented dialogue between East and West under the banner of the “global Baroque.”

In the century of Gian Lorenzo Bernini, the unrivalled genius of European Baroque—sculptor, painter, and architect, whose ideal home is today the Galleria Borghese thanks to the patronage of Cardinal Scipione Borghese—Asia, too, saw the rise of a figure of comparable stature. Zanabazar (1635–1723).

Born in the heart of the Asian steppe, within one of the largest empires ever built by humankind, Eshidorji belonged to the noble lineage of Genghis Khaan. Renowned under his **spiritual name, Zanabazar** was recognized as *Öndör Gegeen*, “His Holiness the Enlightened One”, the first *Khutuktu Jetsundamba*, the highest religious authority of the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism in Mongolia, venerated as the **reincarnation of one of the five hundred original disciples of the Buddha**.

A spiritual leader of exceptional charisma, Zanabazar was also a brilliant linguist and, above all, **the greatest Mongolian sculptor of the early modern age**. To him and his disciples we owe works profoundly inspired by travels and periods of study in Tibetan monasteries, revered as sacred objects in places of worship and in the temples he founded throughout Mongolia. Among these, the **representations of Tara** stand out for their **extraordinary aesthetic quality**, feminine manifestations of the Buddha, divinities associated with protection, liberation, and the inner states of being.

Zanabazar succeeded in disseminating Buddhism in Mongolia on an unprecedented scale, making it accessible to ordinary worshippers. His aim was to create sculptures capable of speaking directly to the eye and the soul—natural, harmonious forms, “warm to the gaze,” as the Mongols would describe them.

Bernini and Zanabazar left an indelible mark on their respective cultures—one in Europe, the other in Asia. Both inaugurated new artistic languages, developing innovative visions and original methods to reinterpret traditional themes and subjects, creating models that would profoundly influence subsequent generations. Two distant worlds, united by a single creative force capable of changing the course of art history.

The two works on display—a refined **Green Tara** and a bronze **sculptural self-portrait of Zanabazar enthroned**—come from the Chinggis Khaan National Museum and are presented to the public within an unprecedented context of dialogue and comparison. **For the first time, works by this artist reach Europe**; for the first time in history, visitors to a Western museum can experience these presences and their **aesthetic and formal contiguity with our artistic heritage**, bearing witness to a new and fertile encounter.

The project ideally stems from the exhibition *Global Baroque. The World in*



Rome in the Age of Bernini (4 April–13 July 2025), realized in collaboration with the Scuderie del Quirinale and curated by Francesca Cappelletti and Francesco Freddolini. That exhibition highlighted the **profoundly transcultural character of seventeenth-century Rome**, shaped by commercial exchanges, diplomatic relations, and the travels of artists and religious figures, revealing a dense network of connections that anticipated contemporary globalization.

Building on this insight, the Galleria Borghese has developed **a project without precedent**, exploring the **complexity of relationships between figures and artefacts seemingly distant in historical, geographical, and technical terms, yet surprisingly close in creative spirit** and in their capacity to shape the future of the arts in these two remote regions of the world. This, too—and above all—is the spirit of the “global Baroque.”

For the public, this represents **a unique opportunity**: to admire works usually kept tens of thousands of kilometres apart, brought together for the first time as expressions of a shared historical moment.





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Zanabazar Biography

In 1635, approximately 80 kilometers southeast of the Erdene Zuu Monastery, Eshidorji, the great-grandson of Abtai Sain Khan, was born. From an early age, he displayed exceptional intellectual abilities and a deep inclination toward religious study, demonstrating a remarkable familiarity with Tibetan prayers and an early interest in spiritual teaching.

In 1639, during an assembly of the Khalkha nobility, the child, then four years old, was formally proclaimed Öndör Gegeen (His Holiness the Enlightened One) and initiated into the first monastic order by Lama Jambal Bilig No-mun-khan. On this occasion, he received the name Zanabazar, known in Sanskrit as Jnanavajra, meaning “He Who Wields the Thunderbolt Scepter of Wisdom.”

At the age of fifteen, Zanabazar traveled to Lhasa to pursue advanced studies in Buddhism. There, the Fifth Dalai Lama officially recognized him as the reincarnation of Taranatha Gunga Ningbo (1575–1634), a renowned Tibetan scholar and writer. This recognition made Zanabazar the first Mongolian, and the sixteenth in the lineage of incarnate lamas, to receive the title of Javzan Damba Khutagt, marking a pivotal moment in the history of the seven Khalkha nations.

This historic event was celebrated with the enthronement of the first spiritual and political leader of Mongolia, the Bogd Gegeen, and the inauguration of the ceremonial Danshig Naadam festival.

After completing his studies, Zanabazar returned to Mongolia at the age of nineteen, accompanied by a group of Tibetan artists and learned lamas. Invested with both religious and state authority, the First Bogd Gegeen devoted his life to the promotion of peace, knowledge, and the cultural and spiritual advancement of the Mongolian people. Under his leadership, monasteries were founded, temples were built, significant forms of sacred art were developed, the Soyombo script was created, and major efforts were undertaken to translate and compose religious texts.

In a geopolitical context marked by regional tensions and rivalries, Zanabazar also sought to strengthen diplomatic relations with Tibet, Manchuria, and Russia, promoting dialogue and cooperation over conflict.

Zanabazar died in 1723. His vision, rooted in spirituality, artistic creation, and diplomacy, earned broad popular support, even as it stood in contrast to the ambitions of certain warrior elites who sought to restore Mongolia's former military supremacy. Zanabazar's legacy remains central to Mongolia's cultural, religious, and artistic history.



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MUSEI ITALIANI



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Youth of Mongolia

LIST OF WORKS



Öndör Geegen Zanabazar

Green Tara

17th century

Bronze casting, gilt
48,5 x 76.5 x 29.7cm

Chinggis Khaan National Museum of Ulan Bator, Mongolia
© Chinggis Khaan National Museum



Öndör Geegen Zanabazar

Öndör Geegen Zanabazar

17th century

Casting, Gilt bronze
29 x 20 x 32 cm

Chinggis Khaan National Museum of Ulan Bator, Mongolia
© Chinggis Khaan National Museum



The school of Öndör Geegen Zanabazar

Öndör Geegen's Throne

17th century

Copper embossed, gilt
44 x 32 x 66 cm

Chinggis Khaan National Museum of Ulan Bator, Mongolia
© Chinggis Khaan National Museum



The school of Öndör Geegen Zanabazar

Öndör Geegen Zanabazar's backrest of the throne

19th century

Brocade silk, brass, gilt
15.5 x 4 x 26.5 cm

Chinggis Khaan National Museum of Ulan Bator, Mongolia
© Chinggis Khaan National Museum



The school of Öndör Geegen Zanabazar

Öndör Geegen Zanabazar's cushion of the throne

19th century

Brocade silk, wood
29 x 22 cm

Chinggis Khaan National Museum of Ulan Bator, Mongolia
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INFORMATION

Press preview

January 19, 2026
11 am

Open to visitors

January 20 – February 22, 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

+39 06 32810
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Groups and school reservation

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Call center

From Monday to Friday.
9.30 am to 6 pm

GALLERIA BORGHESI

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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



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