

**A pair of Neoclassical Italian ivory and pale green painted and carved walnut and poplar corner cupboards, with *Bardiglio* marble tops.
 Francesco Bolgiè (Turin, 1752–1834), after a design by Leonardo Marini (Turin, 1737–c.1810).**

Turin, circa 1787

Height: 35,43 in. (83 cm)
 Width: 20,07 in. (51 cm)
 Depth: 28,74 in. (73 cm)



The present pair of corner cupboards is an example of the finest production of furniture created in Turin for the Savoy court in the second half of the 18th century. The small pieces support a top in Bardiglio marble. They are finely carved and painted in white and light-green. Opening to reveal utilitarian shelves, the doors are characterised by the same decorative scheme: two cornucopias ripe with fruits at either side, ending into scrolling branches and framing two ornamental themes at centre: a lyre surmounted by the sun in between two oak branches, and a caduceus with a snake in between two olive branches, attributes of Apollo and Mercury respectively. The receding rectangles of the supports contain refined floral festoons held together by silk ribbons. The upper part, just below the marble tops, is decorated with a leaf motif, whilst the lower part presents a beaded frieze. The three tapering conical legs are connected to the main body of the piece through a drum carved with a refined chain motif. The feet end into lovely leaf-shaped sheaths.

Other than the ornamental taste and the quality of the carving, the present pieces are characterised by the white and green lacca typical of the taste of Leonardo Marini (1739–1819), one of the most fascinating figures of eighteenth-century Turin, and of Italian Neoclassicism more in general. After serving as ‘Regio disegnatore per le militari occorrenze’ (Royal architect for military events) and professor at the Royal Academy of painting and sculpture, in 1782 Marini was appointed ‘Disegnatore Ordinario della Camera e del Gabinetto del Re’ (Court architect of the chamber and cabinet of the King). Related to this appointment are a series of over 400 drawings collected in the album *Studi diversi di decorazione inventati, disegnati ed in parte eseguiti da Leonardo Marini* (Different studies of decorations invented, drawn and partly executed by Leonardo Marini), today in the Royal Library of Turin. Among these drawings, some are particularly close to the present pair of cupboards for the style of their decorations and the chromatic solution (figs.1–4). If the design can be attributed with certainty to Leonardo Marini, the actual execution of the pieces can be credited to Francesco Bolgiè (c.1752–1834), one of the royal carvers who worked closely with Marini on royal commissions.

The close collaboration of the two artists is confirmed by several archival documents of the royal administration, studied and published by Giancarlo Ferraris, dating from the period 1782–87.¹ A document dated 15 August 1787, on the 'furniture for the bedroom of H.R.H. the Signora Princess of Piedmont', mentions, '[...] after a design by Signor Marini [...] four cupboards carved in the Raphaelesque style'.² That the mentioned entry refers to the present pair of cupboards is a likely hypothesis, as the 'Raphaelesque' style mentioned in the document, i.e. grottesche, is a defining element of the present pieces.

We should mention, in the end, another pair of corner cupboard already known to the scholarly community, illustrated for the first time by Marziano Bernardi on the occasion of the exhibition on Piedmontese baroque (fig.A).³ In both the present pieces and those illustrated in the exhibition catalogue, the structure and decoration of the cupboards are the same. On the front, those pieces present decorations where the cornucopias are held by male and female figures framing, at centre, urns crowned by winged garlands. In that case, however, the carvings present a more ordinary chromatic solution: they are gilded on a white background.



Fig.A V.Vitale, *Barocco Piemontese*, 1963, vol.III, tav.246.b (private collection).

¹ G. Ferraris, Giuseppe Maria Bonzanigo e la scultura decorativa in legno a Torino nel periodo neoclassico: 1770 -1830, Cavallermaggiore 1991, pp. 92–96.

² '[...] sotto il disegno del Sig. Marini [...] quattro cantonali intagliati nello stile raffaellesco', Ferraris, op. cit., p.96.

³ V. Vitale, ed., *Mostra del Barocco Piemontese*, exhibition catalogue (Turin, Palazzo Madama, Palazzo Reale, Palazzina di Stupinigi, June – November 1963), Turin, 1963, vol.III, tav.246.b; R. Antonetto, *Il mobile piemontese del Settecento*, Turin, 2010, vol.I, p.15.



1 - Leonardo Marini, *Studio di decorazione parietale* (study for a wall decoration). Grafite, pen and watercolour on paper, 247x192 mm, in *Studi diversi di decorazione inventati, disegnati ed in parte eseguiti da Leonardo Marini*, Tav. 223, Tyrin, Biblioteca Reale.

2 - Leonardo Marini, *Studio di decorazione parietale* (study for a wall decoration). Grafite, pen and watercolour on paper, 166x195 mm, in *Studi diversi di decorazione inventati, disegnati ed in parte eseguiti da Leonardo Marini*, Tav. 132, Turin, Biblioteca Reale.



3 - Leonardo Marini, *Studio di sopraporta per il Marchese Falletti di Barolo* (study of a sopraporta for Marquis Falletti of Barolo). Grafite, pen and watercolour on paper, 124x160 mm, in *Studi diversi di decorazione inventati, disegnati ed in parte eseguiti da Leonardo Marini*, Tav. 117, Turin, Biblioteca Reale.

4 - Leonardo Marini, *Studio di sopraporta con coppa di frutti e uccelli* (study for a sopraporta with fruit cup and birds). Grafite, pen and watercolour on paper, 172x170 mm, in *Studi diversi di decorazione inventati, disegnati ed in parte eseguiti da Leonardo Marini*, Tav. 169, Turin, Biblioteca Reale.