

**Study by Dr. Chiara Teolato
Francesco Righetti (1749-1819)
The Borghese Gladiator**

**Bronze with dark patina
Signed and dated on the pedestal "F. RIGHETTI F. ROMAE 1787 "
Hight: 12,20 inc. (31 cm)**

Provenance: French private collection

The bronze represents the famous Greek sculpture of a young fighter portrayed in the act of protecting himself from the aggression of the enemy with the shield which, originally, had to be attached in the sculpture to the left arm raised on guard. The bronzetto with dark patina, in imitation of the ancient bronzes, rests on a base, also of bronze, which bears the signature on the back "F. RIGHETTI F. ROMAE 1787 ". The original marble, now in the Louvre, can be dated to the first century BC. and it was discovered near Neptune in 1611, becoming two years later one of the most valuable pieces in the collection of Cardinal Scipione Borghese, from which it took its name.

Subsequently, in 1807, it was bought by Napoleone Bonaparte and placed in the Salle d'Apollon at the Musée Napoléon. The sculpture, particularly appreciated for its timely and true anatomical rendering, caught in its extremely harmonious athletic gesture, was often reproduced in large and small scale since the seventeenth century. Even the bronzesists present in Rome in the second half of the eighteenth century did not fail to include this model in their productions. The statue of the Gladiator Borghese, one and a half inches high, or about 30 cm, was among the most requested pieces at the manufactory of Giacomo Zoffoli (1731-1785), active since the beginning of the seventh decade of the eighteenth century in Via degli Avignonesi. Here the bronze was sold for sixteen scudi, and was appreciated in particular by the great French tourists who chose it along with other models taken from ancient statuary, to adorn the interiors of their city residences. The Gladiator Borghese appeared in fact in the set of nine statues purchased by Francis Russel Marquis of Tavistock, between 1761 and 1762, for his Thanet House in London and now in Woburn Abbey, as well as in that elegantly arranged on the chimney of the Dressing Room, in 19 Arlington Street by Sir Laurence Dundas and portrayed by Johann Zoffany in 1769, now moved to Aske Hall in Bedfordshire, as well as in the group of bronzes chosen by the Duchess of Northumberland, Elizabeth Percy, for his residence overlooking Trafalgar Square, now divided between Syon House and Alnwick Castle. Even the manufacture of Luigi Valadier (1726-1785), which he opened from 1763 near the Teatro d'Alibert, proposed for sale the same subject, one and a half palm for twenty scudi. However, this was provided with a cipollino pedestal with a base and a white marble cymatium and a bicium hoof decorated with gilded bronze, like the specimen purchased by Gustav III of Sweden for the Royal Palace in Stockholm. Equally appreciated were the examples of the Gladiator Borghese made by the manufacture of Francesco Righetti who, formed under the careful guidance of Luigi Valadier, shortly before 1779 had

left the workshop of the master silver-plating and bronzist to open in Via della Purification a similar manufacture that in a short time was imposed on the Roman market. His debut on the international scene took place in 1781 with the realization of a series of lead castings, copies of ancient masterpieces and not only, for the villa of the famous banker Henry Hope, in Welgelegen near Haarlem. Also Righetti soon became famous for his small bronzes taken from ancient statuary, to which he copied copies taken from the masterpieces of Bernini, by Giambologna, as well as reductions in bronze of urban furnishings. Unlike the Zoffoli statues, generically signed on the pedestal, those Righetti to the usual "F. RIGHETTI. F. ROMÆ ", used until the end of the century, the bronzist also normally added the date making such serial pieces in some way of the originals, differentiating between them similar prototypes created at different times. In his shop it was also possible to purchase, on request, larger bronze sculptures or different objects such as desserts, desk sets, clocks, vases, urns and obelisks and any other ornate antique metal object. In a few years his works were a great success, so much so that the German Alois Hirt, one of the "ciceroni" most requested among the German travelers to Rome, defined in 1787, following the death of Giovanni Zoffoli and Luigi Valadier two years before, Francesco Righetti and his son Luigi, "The most famous bronzesmiths who fuse statues from the ancient to small" in the city. It was precisely in 1787 that Francesco Righetti created this bronzetto of the Gladiator Borghese inserted as a model in his printed sales catalog taken in Rome by Goethe during his stay in the city, and then dated by 1788, at the cost of eighteen scudi. In the following catalog, the one dated 1794, the bronze was instead sold for twenty scudi, even though the Roman bronzist specified that all the subjects on the list could be "supplied with its Pedestals of varj marmi with golden metal seals on the ancient taste" and consequently the price would have been adequate both to the size of the bronze and to its decoration. In addition to this first known copy of the Gladiator Borghese dated 1787, there is another one passed at auction by Sotheby's in New York on May 26, 1992 (lot 64), signed and dated "F. RIGHETTI. F. ROMÆ 1790 "and an unmarked recently passed in auction in Paris (Sotheby's 28 November 2017) without any signature, resting on an antique green marble base and a pedestal of granite and statuary marble and bronze decorations, from the collection of the cardinal Antonio Despuig y Dameto (1745-1813). This was purchased by the same, together with the Ercole Farnese, signed and dated 1789, during his stay in Rome from 1785 to 1797.

Literature:

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