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VMFA Exhibition Spotlights 19th-Century Romantic Bronze Sculpture
Expressive Works by French Artist Antoine-Louis Barye Featured



Horse Surprised by a Lion, 1850, Antoine-Louis Barye (French, 1796-1875), bronze. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Gift of Mrs. Nelson L. St.Clair, Jr.

Richmond, Virginia — The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) is excited to feature the bronze sculptures of 19th-century French artist Antoine-Louis Barye. On view until August 22, 2021, *Romantic Bronzes* showcases more than 30 extraordinary works of art. The exhibition illustrates the distinctive features and methods of bronze casting, exploring the historical period and stylistic approach that make the sculptor’s works a singular part of VMFA’s European collection.

“Over the past 20 years, Patti St.Clair [Mrs. Nelson L. St.Clair, Jr.] has donated an outstanding collection of Barye’s casts to VMFA,” said Alex Nyerges, VMFA’s Director and CEO. “We are very fortunate to now have one of the premier collections of the artist’s finest work, thanks to both the generosity of Mrs. St.Clair and the connoisseurship she has demonstrated in carefully choosing each of these sculptures.”

The exhibition, organized by Dr. Sylvain Cordier, Paul Mellon Curator and Head of the Department of European Art, is an invitation to learn about the various motivations and techniques involved in the art of bronze casting in the age of Romanticism.

Beginning in the 1820s, many artists began creating works that defied the rigid figurative conventions of France’s Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture. Bored with the classical principles and influences from ancient Greek and Roman art that the Neoclassical school had perpetuated to the point of exhaustion, these artists devised figurative

means for expressing more directly emotional and subjective approaches to their subject matter. The tension, movement and dynamism of this new aesthetic would characterize the Romantic movement in French art and literature that became prominent over the course of the 19th century.

Antoine-Louis Barye is among the most original artists to emerge from the Romantic movement in France, and today he is recognized as one of the most important sculptors of the period. At the beginning of his career, Barye worked under the close guidance of his goldsmith father while simultaneously apprenticing with some of France's most preeminent sculptors. At the age of 23, Barye was admitted to the prestigious École des Beaux-Arts. The young artist started sculpting and casting bronzes in his distinctive and expressive style while working in the studio of sculptor François Bosio. The majority of these three-dimensional works were modeled on the detailed drawings of animals that he frequently sketched in Paris's zoological gardens.

“What distinguishes Barye's bronzes from those of the majority of his contemporaries is the predominance of the animal figures that enliven his subjects and convey diverse extremes of passion capable of moving his audience,” said Dr. Cordier. “With his obsessive scrutiny of animal behavior, Barye was hunting for innovative ways of representing heroism, dignity and similar perennial themes. Human figures most often appear as minor accessories to the visions of bestial nature that each of his compositions stage. Today, a growing sense of our responsibility for the health and conservation of our planet's ecosystems underscore our appreciation for the beauty of uncivilized nature and the nobility of the animal kingdom that are always present in Barye's oeuvre.”

The exhibition *Romantic Bronzes* is free. Visitors can customize a guided digital tour by scanning the QR codes included on the exhibition labels to access historical information and analyses of the works in both text and audio formats. More information about the St.Clair collection of Barye's sculptures can be found at www.VMFA.museum.

About the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, Virginia, is one of the largest comprehensive art museums in the United States. VMFA, which opened in 1936, is a state agency and privately endowed educational institution. Its purpose is to collect, preserve, exhibit and interpret art, and to encourage the study of the arts. Through the Office of Statewide Partnerships program, the museum offers curated exhibitions, arts-related audiovisual programs, symposia, lectures, conferences, and workshops by visual and performing artists. In addition to presenting a wide array of special exhibitions, the museum provides visitors with the opportunity to experience a global collection of art that spans more than 6,000 years. VMFA's permanent holdings encompass nearly 50,000 artworks, including the largest public collection of Fabergé outside of Russia, the finest collection of Art Nouveau outside of Paris, and one of the nation's finest collections of American art. VMFA is also home to important collections of Chinese art, English silver, French Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, British sporting, and modern and contemporary art, as well as renowned South Asian, Himalayan, and African art. In May 2010 VMFA opened its doors to the public after a transformative expansion, the largest in its history.

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts is the only art museum in the United States open 365 days a year with free general admission. For additional information, call 804.340.1400 or visit www.VMFA.museum.

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