



## le Arti di Piranesi

architetto, incisore, antiquario, vedutista, designer

### Giambattista Piranesi: Biographical Outline

1720

4 October. Giambattista is born in Venice, the son of Angelo Piranesi and Laura Lucchesi. His maternal uncle, Matteo Lucchesi, Magistrato alle Acque in the Venetian Republic, will play an important role in steering him towards architectural studies.

1740

Piranesi goes to Rome as a “draughtsman” in the retinue of the Venetian Ambassador Francesco Venier and in the company of the sculptor Antonio Corradini.

1742

He furthers his knowledge of engraving and etching techniques by frequenting the workshop of Giuseppe Vasi.

1743

He publishes *Prima Parte di Architetture, e Prospettive*.

1744-1747

He visits Naples and has the opportunity to explore the excavations at Herculaneum and see the Museo Reale at Portici. After returning to Venice, he designs a “Gondola”, one of his most inspired Rococo inventions, possibly meant for the annual Venetian Regatta of 28 September.

He frequents the workshops of Giambattista Tiepolo, Gianmaria Morlaiter and the engraver Giuseppe Wagner. His initial ideas for the *Carceri* and the *Grotteschi* date from this period.

1747

He returns to Rome as Wagner’s agent and begins to work on the first group of views in *le Vedute di Roma*.

1748

He publishes his book of etchings of Roman antiquities entitled *Le Antichità Romane de’ Tempi della Repubblica, e de’ Primi Imperatori disegnate ed incise da Giambattista Piranesi architetto veneziano*.

1749-1750

The publisher Giovanni Bouchard launches the first edition of his “Prisons” – *Invenzioni capricciose di Carceri*.

1750

He publishes the miscellaneous collection of drawings entitled *Opere varie di architettura, prospettive, grotteschi, antichità sul gusto degli antichi Romani*, which include the four *Grotteschi*, better known as the *Capricci*.

He begins publication of the collection featuring ancient Roman tombs – *Camere sepolcrali degli antichi Romani le quali esistono dentro e fuori di Roma*.

1753

His marriage to Angela Pasquini brings a dowry of 300 scudi, which he uses to purchase enough material to continue with the publication of the *Vedute di Roma*.

The following year his first child Laura Maria Gertrude is born; she too will be trained in the art of printmaking.



1755

He meets the Scottish architect Robert Adam. They soon become close friends and share the same passion for antiquities and for surveying ancient Roman ruins at Hadrian's Villa and along the Appian Way.

1756

He publishes the four volumes and 252 plates of *Le Antichità Romane*.

1757

Thanks to his contacts and friendships with British scholars, artists and connoisseurs residing in Rome, he is made a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London.

1758

Around this time his son Francesco is born; he will be an assistant to his father and will continue his printmaking business.

On July 6 Carlo Rezzonico becomes Pope Clement XIII. The Rezzonico family, and especially the pope and his nephews, will be among Piranesi's principal patrons and sponsors.

1761

Ludovico Rezzonico and his wife Faustina are the godparents at the baptism of Piranesi's daughter, Faustina Clementina Ludovica. The relations with the Rezzonico family begin to bear their first fruit: Piranesi is appointed a member of the Accademia di San Luca.

He dedicates *Della Magnificenza ed Architettura de' Romani*, to Pope Clement XIII; written in Italian, the book consists of 212 pages and 38 plates.

He publishes a new edition of the *Carceri* with some additional plates.

1762

He publishes as many as three works this year: *Il Campo Marzio dell'Antica Roma* (41 plates), *Descrizione e disegno dell'Emissario del Lago Albano* (10 plates) and lastly the large plate entitled *Lapides Capitolini*.

1763

The pope approves his designs for a new apse for the basilica of St John Lateran in Rome. Although he is awarded the commission, a famine the following year means that the construction site will never be opened.

The same fate will await the project for the base with a statue of Justice of the Column of Antoninus Pius in Piazza Montecitorio.

Towards the end of the year he visits Cori in the company of the French landscape and ruins painter Hubert Robert.

1764

In February he is commissioned by the Grand Prior of Malta, Monsignor Giambattista Rezzonico, to remodel the church of Santa Maria del Priorato and the church square.

The construction work will drag on until 1766; it will be Piranesi's only built architectural project.

After adding some copper plates acquired from Francesco Bartolozzi to a collection of plates of various provenances, he publishes a series of prints of Guercino's drawings entitled *Raccolta di alcuni disegni del Barbieri da Cento detto il Guercino*.

In the frontispiece he quotes Guercino's famous enigmatic remark "Col sporcar si trova" (lit: "By dirtying one finds" or arguably "By crossing over one invents") Other works published this year are *Antichità di Cora* and *Antichità di Albano e Castelgandolfo*.

1765

Piranesi is appointed to re-design the décor and furnishings – including a fireplace and various cabinets – in the apartment of the newly appointed Senator of Rome, Prince Abbondio Rezzonico.



1766

After successfully completing the work on Santa Maria del Priorato, he is awarded the title of Cavaliere dello Speron d'Oro ("Knight of the Golden Spur").

1767

Giambattista Rezzonico commissions him to renovate the decoration and furnishings in the papal apartments at Castel Gandolfo and in the Palazzo del Quirinale.

1769

He publishes *Diverse maniere d'adornare i Cammini ed ogni altra parte degli edifizii desunte dall'architettura Egizia, Etrusca e Greca*. This book on designing chimneypieces and other furnishings includes some plates showing ideas that he has adopted over the past few years.

Pope Clement XIII dies.

1773

He publishes a plan of Rome, the *Pianta di Roma e del Campo Marzio*, with a dedication to Pope Clement XIV.

1774

At this time he is mainly occupied with decorations and furnishings, such as those in the Palazzo and Villa Gentili, commissioned by Marchesa Boccapaduli.

He publishes *Trofeo o sia Magnifica Colonna Coelide*, a book of 21 prints illustrating Trajan's Column.

1777

He visits the ruins of Paestum; with the assistance of his son Francesco, he makes a series of etchings on the subject, which will be published posthumously.

1778

9 November. Piranesi dies in Rome. His body is laid in a tomb prepared for him in the church of Santa Maria del Priorato.

His son Francesco sees to the publication of the two volumes of *Vasi candelabri cippi sarcofagi tripodi lucerne ed ornamenti antichi*, which bring together some of the last etchings from the 1770s.