



Bernini: His Life and His Rome

By Franco Mormando

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Sculptor, architect, painter, playwright, and scenographer, Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680) was the last of the great universal artistic geniuses of early modern Italy, placed by both contemporaries and posterity in the same exalted company as Leonardo, Raphael, and Michelangelo. And his artistic vision remains palpably present today, through the countless statues, fountains, and buildings that transformed Rome into the Baroque theater that continues to enthral tourists today.

It is perhaps not surprising that this artist who defined the Baroque should have a personal life that itself was, well, baroque. As Franco Mormando's dazzling biography reveals, Bernini was a man driven by many passions, possessed of an explosive temper and a hearty sex drive, and he lived a life as dramatic as any of his creations. Drawing on archival sources, letters, diaries, and—with a suitable skepticism—a hagiographic account written by Bernini's son (who portrays his father as a paragon of virtue and piety), Mormando leads us through Bernini's many feuds and love affairs, scandals and sins. He sets Bernini's raucous life against a vivid backdrop of Baroque Rome, bustling and wealthy, and peopled by churchmen and bureaucrats, popes and politicians, schemes and secrets. The result is a seductively readable biography, stuffed with stories and teeming with life—as wild and unforgettable as Bernini's art. No one who has been bewitched by the Baroque should miss it.

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- Sales Rank: #640896 in Books
- Published on: 2013-04-02
- Released on: 2011-11-15
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x 1.20" w x 6.00" l, 1.40 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 456 pages

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