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1. After Antoine-Louis Barye, pair of stork candelabra. Galerie Marc Maison.

2. Antoine-Louis Barye, Tiger devouring a gharial, 1831.

3. Antoine-Louis Barye, Lion and Serpent, 1833, Tuileries Garden, Paris.

4. Antoine-Louis Barye, Theseus Fighting the Centaur Bienor, Salon of 1843.

5. The Duke of Orléans's table centerpiece, 1834–1839.

Antoine-Louis Barye is the greatest animal sculptor of the nineteenth century and one of the major names of French Romanticism. The son of a goldsmith, trained in metalwork before he was trained in sculpture, he established the animal as a subject in its own right, on a par with the human figure, and made anatomical observation the foundation of his art. His career, spanning nearly half a century, is also inseparable from the history of the editioned bronze: Barye was one of the first sculptors who sought to cast and sell his own models himself.

A goldsmith's son

Antoine-Louis Barye was born in Paris on 24 September 1795, into a modest family of jewellery craftsmen. His father, **Pierre Barye**, came from a line of Lyon goldsmiths and practised the trade himself. At the age of thirteen the boy was apprenticed to **Fourier**, a metal engraver working for military equipment suppliers, where he learned engraving, chasing and repoussé work.

Conscription interrupted this apprenticeship. In 1812 the Empire was calling for men: Barye was enlisted in the **topographical brigade of the Engineers**, then in the second battalion of sappers. Demobilised on 30 March 1814, barely eighteen years old, he returned to Fourier's workshop.

His vocation then took shape rapidly. In **1816** he entered the studio of **François-Joseph Bosio**, official sculptor to Napoleon I and later to Louis XVIII, to learn modelling, while also following the teaching of the painter **Antoine-Jean Gros** for drawing. He was admitted to the **École des Beaux-Arts** in 1818. An unsuccessful candidate for the Prix de Rome, he left the school without it and in 1823 entered the workshop of the goldsmith **Jacques-Henri Fauconnier**, where he remained for eight years. This period was decisive: there Barye modelled animals destined for goldsmiths' work and acquired an intimate knowledge of casting and chasing that would set him apart all his life from sculptors trained in marble alone.

The Jardin des Plantes

During the same years, Barye was a regular visitor to the **menagerie of the Muséum national d'histoire naturelle** at the Jardin des Plantes, in the company of his friend **Eugène Delacroix**. The two artists drew the big cats from life, attended dissections and took measurements. Barye thus built up anatomical documentation of unprecedented precision, completed by the study of skeletons and by casts.

From this method came the singularity of his work. For him the animal is neither an allegory nor an ornament: it is a creature observed, caught in the tension of combat or the stillness of the watch, its musculature and bone structure exact. It is this scientific rigour, placed at the service of a Romantic temperament, that founded his reputation.

The Salons of 1831 and 1833

Barye became known overnight. At the **Salon of 1831** he exhibited *Tiger Devouring a Gavial*, which caused a sensation and immediately marked him out as the first Romantic sculptor. The **Salon of 1833** confirmed and amplified this success with *Lion Crushing a Serpent*, his most celebrated work, which earned him a first-class medal and the cross of a **Knight of the Legion of Honour**.

What followed was harder. In 1837 the Salon jury refused his submissions, judging that his bronzes belonged to industry rather than to art — a reproach regularly levelled at editioned sculpture. Wounded, Barye ceased to exhibit at the Salon and would not return until the turn of the 1850s. He nonetheless continued to produce: the **Salon of 1843** saw the appearance of one of his masterpieces, *Theseus Fighting the Centaur Bienor*.

The Duc d'Orléans table centrepiece

Between **1834 and 1839**, Barye created for **Ferdinand-Philippe d'Orléans**, eldest son of Louis-Philippe and his most faithful patron, a monumental **table centrepiece** that ranks among his most ambitious undertakings. Composed of hunting groups and fighting animals, this ensemble, conceived as table decoration but treated as true sculpture, illustrates the artist's ambition: to make a piece of furnishing a vehicle for art in its own right.

Publisher of his own bronzes

It is here that Barye's career takes a turn that belongs to him alone. Around **1838** he opened his own **foundry**, followed by a shop the next year, in order to control the manufacture and sale of his works from end to end. At a time when sculptors depended entirely on publishers and bronze manufacturers, the aim was to protect both the artistic invention and the financial interests of the artist. Barye would also help the bronze workers and founders to organise themselves into professional associations.

The enterprise nonetheless came up against economic reality. Difficulties accumulated and forced him into partnership with the industrialist **Émile Martin**, a specialist in casting. For thirteen years Barye lost control of the editions of his own bronzes.

The situation improved in the mid-1850s. Appointed professor of zoological drawing at the Muséum d'histoire naturelle in October **1854**, he at last had a regular salary, and state commissions resumed. In **1857** he regained control of his production and formed the**Barye studio**, bringing together sculptors, chasers and patinators, which he directed until his death. Editions in small formats then allowed him to reach a very wide public, in France and abroad.

Sculptor of the Second Empire

Barye had been appointed curator of the gallery of plaster casts at the Louvre in 1848. Under the Second Empire he became in effect the regime's official animal sculptor. He took part in the decoration of the **new Louvre**, for which he executed the great allegorical groups of the pavilions — *War*, *Peace*, *Force* and *Order* — as well as reliefs. His*Lion Crushing a Serpent*, enlarged, stands in the Tuileries garden. He also produced the equestrian monument to **Napoleon I** for Ajaccio.

Institutional recognition came late. A candidate for the**Académie des Beaux-Arts** at the age of seventy, he was rejected; he stood again two years later and was elected in **1868**. The events of 1870 took him away from Paris for a few months, to Cherbourg. He died in Paris on **25 June 1875**.

The spread of his work

Even in his lifetime Barye was among the French sculptors most sought after by American collectors, who assembled important groups of his bronzes at an early date. After his death his models passed into the hands of publishers, foremost among them the **Maison Barbedienne**, which produced numerous casts from the 1880s onwards, bearing the founder's mark alongside the *Barye* signature.

This double life of the work — casts carried out by the artist or his studio on one hand, posthumous editions on the other — explains the very wide circulation of his models and the singular place he occupies in the history of French bronze. His pupils and followers, who were numerous, carried on long after him the animal genre he had founded.

Legacy

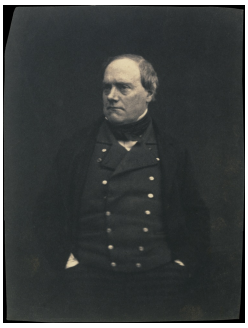
Works by Antoine-Louis Barye are held at the Musée du Louvre, the Musée d'Orsay and the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, as well as in many American institutions, in particular the **Walters Art Museum** in Baltimore, which houses one of the most complete collections in the world, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Fogg Art Museum in Cambridge.

See also

Ferdinand Barbedienne — Christophe Fratin — Mathurin Moreau — The Val d'Osne Foundry — Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse — Gilt bronze — The Napoleon III style

See our sculptures

6. Antoine-Louis Barye and Ferdinand Barbedienne, Eagle Holding a Heron, model c. 1860, cast c. 1880. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.



7. Portrait of Antoine-Louis Barye.