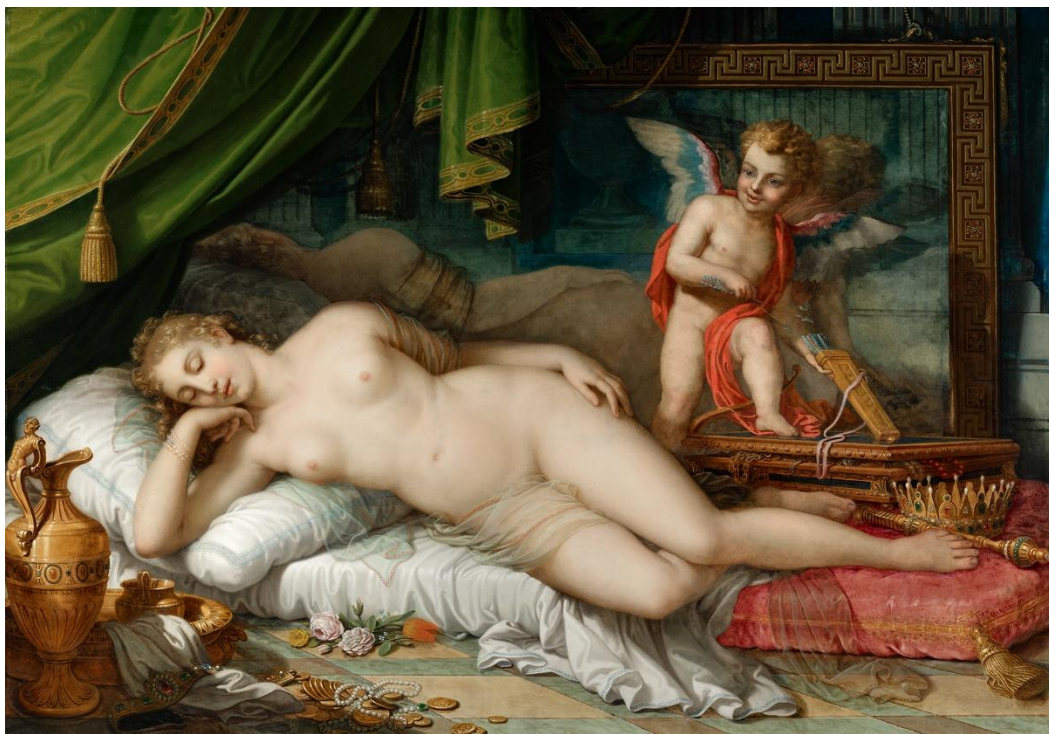


IN-SIGHT

Johann Baptist Lampi the Elder and the Younger. Overpainted and Uncovered

Upper Belvedere
13 May to 11 October 2026



Johann Baptist Lampi the Younger, *Sleeping Venus with Cupid in Front of a Mirror*, 1826 (Condition after removal of the overpainting in 2024)

Photo: Johannes Stoll / Belvedere, Vienna

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What do a Neoclassical family portrait and a Biedermeier depiction of Venus have in common? Both the portrait of *Caroline and Viktor von Tomatis* by Johann Baptist Lampi the Elder (1751 Romeno – 1830 Vienna) and *Sleeping Venus with Cupid in Front of a Mirror* by his eponymous son (1775 Trento – 1837 Vienna) were overpainted. Based on the results of technical investigations and art-historical research, this exhibition from the *IN-SIGHT* series traces the consequences of these later interventions in the work of the two artists.

General Director Stella Rollig: *Based on two works in the Belvedere's collection, this show offers fresh perspectives on the oeuvres of Johann Baptist the Elder and Johann Baptist the Younger. The eventful history of these overpainted works demonstrates how they have changed over time in terms of both their formal appearance and their content and messages. In addition, the exhibition highlights how our current views on the treatment of art—defined by the principles of conservation and the ideal of originality—have evolved through history and only started to become established in the mid-nineteenth century.*

During his time in Warsaw in 1788–89, Johann Baptist Lampi the Elder painted several portraits of the Tomatis family. Milanese dancer Catarina, née Filipazzi, had moved to Warsaw with entrepreneur Carlo Tomatis in 1765. One of the three portraits of the family by Lampi shows two of their children, Caroline and Viktor, standing either side of a bust. X-ray and infrared imaging from 2016 revealed this bust to be an overpainting: Hidden beneath the layers of paint is a portrait of their mother, Catarina, embracing her children. Based on this work and further portraits in addition to archival material, this exhibition tells the story of the Tomatis family.

In 2022 Johann Baptist Lampi the Younger's painting *Venus Sleeping on a Day Bed*—as it was then known—was also analyzed using X-ray and infrared imaging.

In this case, the figure of Cupid emerged, concealed beneath a black surface. The erasure of the god of love made the mythological content less apparent. This explains why the painting was later interpreted as a portrait of Emilie Victoria Kraus, one of Napoleon's lovers, in two twentieth-century novels set in Salzburg. It was precisely this misinterpretation that paved the way to the painting's popularity, which even reached as far as Paraguay. Now, for the first time since the revealing of Cupid in 2024, the painting will be shown to the public under its original title.

The history of these two paintings shows how fascinating art-historical research can be. The original content was forgotten due to overpainting, which resulted in misinterpretations. For the first time in the German-speaking world, the history of the Tomatis family has been examined in the context of their portraits while enduring myths surrounding this depiction of Venus have been challenged and debunked. At the same time, the comparison of the two works—encompassing the context in which they were created and commissioned—reveals the profound changes of this era that was characterized by the transition from a feudal to a bourgeois society, said curator Katharina Lovecky.

This exhibition uncovers the layers of meaning contained within two works, which had been hidden by overpainting. It shows that the meaning of artworks can be significantly altered once they leave the artist's studio: A family portrait expressing a mother's love for her children was transformed into a memorial while an idealized Venus morphed into the portrait of a local Salzburg celebrity.

EXHIBITION TEXTS

Nowadays, a painting is considered finished once it leaves the artist's studio and has been sold. Subsequent alterations are generally unusual because international standards in conservation stipulate that artworks must be preserved in their original state. However, this view only began to develop in the mid-19th century.

This exhibition focuses on two paintings from the Belvedere's collection that demonstrate how a very different attitude to altering artworks existed before such rules were established: a Neoclassical family portrait by painter Johann Baptist Lampi the Elder and a Biedermeier painting of *Venus* by his son, Johann Baptist Lampi the Younger.

As technical investigations revealed, both paintings were significantly altered by another hand. The overpainted areas have been removed from *Sleeping Venus with Cupid in Front of a Mirror* following approval from the Austrian Federal Monuments Authority. This work is now on display at the Belvedere in its original state for the first time. By contrast, experts did not approve of removing later alterations to the Portrait of *Caroline and Viktor von Tomatis*. In the case of both paintings, art-historical research helped to uncover the original meanings hidden beneath subsequent layers of paint.

Originally from Romeno in northern Italy, **Johann Baptist Lampi the Elder** moved in 1783 to Vienna, where he became one of the most sought-after painters of the Neoclassical era. In 1786 he was appointed professor of history painting at the Vienna academy. By the time he left Vienna to spend several months in Warsaw from September 1788 to March 1789, he could already look back on several stages in his career. A letter of recommendation from history painter Francesco Casanova—brother of famous adventurer and writer Giacomo Casanova—introduced the artist and paved his way into the highest circles of Polish society.

The Belvedere now holds four works from Lampi's time in Poland, three of which were painted for Count and Countess Tomatis (also spelled Thomatis). Lampi's stay in Warsaw coincided with a turbulent period in history that included the partitions of Poland by Russia, Prussia, and the Habsburg Empire. These political upheavals are also reflected in the rise and fall of the Tomatis family.

The Representation of Emotions in 18th-Century Portraiture

Johann Baptist Lampi the Elder shows Zoë with her arm around Adelaide, a gesture emphasizing the close bond between the sisters. This painting thus also reveals thematic parallels with its companion piece portraying Caroline, Viktor, and Catarina von Tomatis, in which the painter sought to express a mother's love for her children. The inclusion of emotions in formal portraits was a typical characteristic in the late 18th century, the Age of Enlightenment. It was a period when people came to be understood as individuals. This was also reflected in art with portraits sometimes placing a greater emphasis on the emotional connection between sitters than their social status. As the middle-class family model emerged, maternal love in particular was invested with high expectations and even idealized as a "natural" instinct.

Johann Baptist Lampi the Younger moved to Vienna with his father in 1783 and became a member of the Academy of Fine Arts in 1813. While Lampi the Elder mainly portrayed members of the nobility and the imperial courts, his son belonged to the bourgeois era when the free art market was in the ascendant. His career coincided with the dawn of the Biedermeier period.

Lampi the Younger's large-scale nudes depicting classical goddesses—works in cool, vivid colors that were not painted on commission—are strikingly different from his father's style. This group includes his major work *Sleeping Venus with Cupid in Front of a Mirror*. Technical investigations and art-historical research revealed in 2022 that the figure of Cupid had been painted over in the 19th century. The work's mythological content had consequently become less apparent, leading to incorrect interpretations. For the first time since Cupid was uncovered in 2024, the painting is now presented once again to the public under its original title.

Caroline and Viktor von Tomatis, 1788–89

Oil on canvas, Belvedere, Vienna

1923 exchange with Galerie J. Böhler, Munich

In this work, Johann Baptist Lampi the Elder portrayed siblings Caroline and Viktor von Tomatis on either side of a roughly sketched bust. Both the stone

head and the dark background are only loosely suggested with a broad brush. By contrast, the children's faces are sensitively rendered in fine brushstrokes.

Caroline, on the left, would later become Countess von Wengersky by marriage and lived to the age of eighty-six. She left both this work and the portrait of her older sisters, Zoë and Adelaide, to one of her daughters. Her brother, Viktor, died childless in a duel in 1818.

Sleeping Venus with Cupid in Front of a Mirror, 1826

Oil on canvas, Belvedere, Vienna

1828 acquired for the Imperial Picture Gallery at the academy exhibition

1921 transferred from the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

Johann Baptist Lampi the Elder's painting of *Venus* can be seen here for the first time since the removal of the black surface that had concealed Cupid in the background for over 180 years. A green curtain is drawn back to show Venus, the Roman goddess of love, sleeping naked on a mattress. Her back can be seen reflected in the mirror. Viewers thus take on the role of secret observers giving the scene voyeuristic undertones.

Cupid, the son of Venus, seems to be filling his quiver with arrows, about to slip away unnoticed—a motif found both in the visual arts and literature since the Renaissance.

Artists have used depictions of Venus to define ideals of female beauty since the early modern period. In the case of Lampi's *Venus*, this is literally highlighted by the addition of the word "ideal" in the title when the work was first shown at the Vienna academy in 1828.

BIOGRAPHY

JOHANN BAPTIST LAMPI THE ELDER

1751

Johann Baptist Lampi the Elder is born on December 31, the youngest child of painter Matthias Lamp and Chiara Margherita, née Lorenzoni, in Romeno, northern Italy.

1768

Following instruction with his father, continues his training in the studio of painter Franz Xaver König in Salzburg.

1772

Marries Anna Maria Franchi and moves to Verona. The couple also lives in Trento for a time. Of their seven children, two become painters: Johann Baptist Lampi the Younger and Franz Xaver Lampi (1782–1852).

1773

Appointed honorary member of the academy in Verona.

1779

Moves from Trento to Innsbruck.

1781

Paints a formal portrait of Archduchess Maria Elisabeth of Habsburg-Lorraine. Subsequently works as a portraitist not only for the imperial family but also for the nobility and the aspiring middle class.

1783

Moves to Vienna.

1786

Accepted as a member of the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts and succeeds Josef Haulinger as professor of history painting.

1788–89

Stays in Warsaw, where he paints portraits for the Polish nobility and portrays King Stanisław II August Poniatowski.

1792

Travels to Saint Petersburg, where he becomes court painter to Czarina Catherine II.

1794

Made an honorary member of the Academy of Fine Arts in Saint Petersburg.

1797

Returns to Vienna and takes up his post as professor at the academy again.

1798

Knighthood. Johann Baptist and his male descendants can now call themselves "Edle von Lampi."

1799

Made an honorary citizen of Vienna.

1815

During the Congress of Vienna, receives Czarina Elizabeth of Russia and the Bavarian royal family in his studio on January 11.

1822

Retires on full pay.

1830

Johann Baptist Lampi the Elder dies on February 11 at the age of seventy-eight in Vienna.

BIOGRAPHY

JOHANN BAPTIST LAMPI THE YOUNGER

1775

Johann Baptist Lampi the Younger is born on March 4, the second of seven children to Johann Baptist Lampi the Elder and Anna Maria, née Franchi, in Trento.

1786–94

Following training with his father, he studies at the Vienna academy under Hubert Maurer and Heinrich Friedrich Füger.

1796

Joins his father in Saint Petersburg, where he marries Anna Drawin that same year; the couple would have nine children. Like his father, he works as a portraitist of the Russian aristocracy.

1797

Made an honorary member of the Academy of Fine Arts in Saint Petersburg.

1798

Paints the portrait of Czarina Maria Feodorovna.

1799

Commissioned by the Swedish court to paint a portrait of Czar Paul I.

1804

Returns to Vienna and works in his father's studio. Portrays Emperor Francis II in the regalia of the Order of the Golden Fleece.

1813

Appointed as a member of the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts. Regularly contributes to its exhibitions thereafter.

1822

Takes over the management of his father's studio.

1825

Finishes the altarpiece depicting the Assumption of the Virgin in the parish church of Romeno based on instructions from his father, who is unable to complete the work. Lampi the Younger paints the large-scale work *Fortuna* that same year.

1826

Finishes the work *Sleeping Venus with Cupid in Front of a Mirror*.

1828

Venus is presented at the annual exhibition of the Vienna academy and acquired for the Imperial Picture Gallery.

1837

Johann Baptist Lampi the Younger dies on February 17 at the age of sixty-one in Vienna.

CATALOGUE



IM BLICK: Johann Baptist Lampi der Ältere und der Jüngere. Übermalt und freigelegt

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| Curator | Katharina Lovecky |
| Exhibition and Graphic Design | Manuel Radde |
| Exhibition Management | Stephan Pumberger, Martina Pfeiffer-Carich |
| Conservation | Stefanie Jahn, Stefanie Hasenauer, János Korényi, Ana Stefaner, Barbara Steiner |
| Installation | Christoph Gruber, Selma Kurtagic |
| Art Mediation | Michaela Höß, Kerstin Krenn, Philipp Reichel-Neuwirth |
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Time-slot tickets are required for your visit. Ticket prices can be found on the website at www.belvedere.at

For more information on the exhibition and high-resolution press photos please visit www.belvedere.at/en/press