

Galerie Canesso

Tableaux anciens

GIOACCHINO ASSERETO

(GENOVA, 1600 - 1649)

Pietà

Oil on beechwood panel, 10 11/16 x 8 in (27,2 x 21 cm).



PROVENANCE

Genoa, Orazio Bagnasco collection; England, private collection.

LITERATURE

- Véronique Damian, *Pittura italiana tra Sei e Settecento. Un portrait de lévrier par Baccio del Bianco*, Parigi, Galerie Canesso, 2004, p. 28-31;
- Tiziana Zennaro, *Gioacchino Assereto (1600-1650) e i pittori della sua scuola*, 2 vol., Soncino, 2011, 1, p. 448, no. A143.

Although Assereto treated the subject of the *Pietà* several times during his career, there was never such an intimate version as this. Two elements contribute to the power of this image: the small format (whose woodpanel provides the sole known example of this support in the painter's œuvre), and the composition that coils itself into this barely eleven-inch high rectangle. The curve of the abandoned body of Christ is

echoed in the tightly-arranged group of heads of Christ, the Virgin and Saint John; the latter's head is on the same level as that of Nicodemus. On the left, a bowl placed on the tomb is the only element that might distract us from this moving scene, which precedes the burial of Christ. No doubt it contains the blend of myrrh and aloes brought by Nicodemus in order to coat the winding-sheet with aromatic spices "as the manner of the Jews is to bury" (St John's Gospel, XIX, 40).

The painting is swiftly rendered and brings to mind a sketch. One should note that the execution is coherent, as much for how the artist suggests what he is painting – twirling brushstrokes for the description of Saint John's hair, vigorously rubbed in for the background – as for its unified chromatic scheme, entirely based on earth tones. Even the body of Christ does not escape this treatment. The anatomy is defined by very marked browns, which set it off from the white material of the winding-sheet that holds his body. Anna Orlando has suggested that our miniature painting, characterized by the painter's abandonment of the acid tones he had used in his early period, may be dated to the end of the 1630s or early 1640s, and is therefore a product of Assereto's maturity. Our *Pietà* is quite distinct from the two versions with variants formerly in the Mowinckel collection in Genoa and in the Cummer Art Gallery in Jacksonville, Florida. This decidedly vertical composition – with all the heads grouped in the upper part of the picture – can be associated with the picture by his teacher Andrea Ansaldi (1584-1638) now in the gallery of the Accademia Ligustica in Genoa.

For Assereto, the late 1640s (the period before his premature death in 1649) were marked by a vividly naturalistic approach: his compositions, increasingly constrained by their format, display ever stronger emotional content. Our painting's deliberate lack of theatricality and its tight composition look forward to the *Death of Saint Joseph* (Genoa, Banca Carige) from the last years of the painter's career.