

Galerie Canesso

Tableaux anciens

JACOPO DAL PONTE, CALLED BASSANO

(1510 - 1592)

Portrait of a Man with a Small Dog

Oil on canvas, 49 × 42½ in (124.5 × 107 cm)



PROVENANCE

Dorotheum, Vienna, 13 April 2011, lot 633 (as “Leandro da Ponte, gen. Bassano”); private collection.

LITERATURE

- Véronique Damian, *Massimo Stanzione, Guercino, Hendrick de Somer et Fra' Galgario*, Paris, Galerie Canesso, 2016, pp. 6-9.

In 1995, Alessandro Ballarin established a catalogue of portraits by Jacopo Bassano, which range over a period over almost fifty years (1). According to him, our *Portrait of a Man with a Small Dog* provides an important addition to this group of works, so different from the rest of his oeuvre, which consists principally of Biblical stories, with a fondness for pastoral scenes. The painting is immediately striking for its extensive dimensions, rarely used by Jacopo for portraits. The sitter is placed before an armchair with a red velvet back, next to a table covered in the same fabric, upon which a small Crucifix is set,

near his right hand. With his left, he seems about to pet a small dog, seated on a red cushion. This little creature makes a new appearance in a body of work consisting of numerous canine portraits; its collar is finely worked and is ornamented with pearls, indicating a dog kept for company within the home. The composition is careful, and very balanced: the gentleman fills the space between two expansive areas of red, thus accentuating the austerity of his black, blue-veined costume. The sitter, whose identity remains unknown to us, stands out elegantly against a pale brown background, his gaze directed benevolently towards the viewer. This refined harmony of colour can be found in other such works by Jacopo Bassano, notably the *Portrait of a Bearded Man* in the Getty Museum, Los Angeles, built solely on pale beige and black, the latter for the sitter's clothing. Conceived with true concern for objectivity, this likeness reminds us that the artist took a great interest in portraitists from Brescia such as Moretto (1498-1554) and Giovan Battista Moroni (1520-1578). A chalk study on paper for a *Portrait of a Bearded Man* (Padua, private collection) is evidence of a similar search for realism (2). The sheet brings to the fore one of the elements also visible in our painting – details of beard and hair, described in black chalk, just as they are here in white pigment. The drawing is dated by Ballarin to between 1570 and 1580, and is therefore close to that suggested for our portrait, around 1573. This date is supported by comparison with a detail from *The Rectors of Vicenza, Silvano Cappello and Giovanni Moro Kneeling Before the Virgin and Child Enthroned between Saints Mark and Lawrence* (Vicenza, Museo Civico, 1573). The mantles of the officials portrayed there are painted in the same red lake of the velvet covering our table, with similar shadows. Jacopo Bassano was a painter of the Venetian *terraferma*, never a direct pupil of Titian (1488/89-1576) in Venice. Nonetheless he worked throughout his life under the aegis of the great master from Cadore, either through first-hand knowledge of his works or by way of prints after his most celebrated compositions. When Jacopo was born in about 1510, Titian, who was then in his early twenties, became the artistic heir of Giorgione (1478-1510) and began to dominate the Venetian scene, retaining that position for over sixty years. Jacopo's apprenticeship took place in the family workshop in Bassano del Grappa, with his father Francesco Dal Ponte, known as Il Vecchio, or Francesco Bassano the Elder (c. 1475/78-1539), a painter and founder of the dynasty; this was followed, according to early tradition, by training with Bonifacio Veronese (1487-1553) in Venice, where Jacopo is indeed recorded in 1535, although he would have first come to city in 1533. Our painter was very soon able to modernise the archaic culture of his father with the first elements of the new art of Venice. This was one of the elements that defined Jacopo's vitality, and his style was to evolve, with more elongated canons of proportion and an increasingly unstable atmosphere, often expressed through nocturnes – a more confidential mode of painting, which he used most frequently in his last works.

Notes: 1. Alessandro Ballarin, *Jacopo Bassano scritti 1964-1995*, 2 vols., Cittadella (Padua), 1995, II, pp. 242-250. We are grateful to Alessandro Ballarin for his assistance in the study of our portrait, which he plans to publish in the near future. 2. *Ibidem*, I, 1995, pp. 191-198; II, 1995, fig. 273.