

A Renaissance Portrait Rediscovered: Sebastiano Serlio (1575-1554), a Bolognese Architect in France, by Bartolomeo Passerotti (1529-1592)

A large compass in his right hand, carefully prepared by a sheet of studies at the Ambrosiana in Milan, gives away the sitter's profession of architect. The cartouche at the bottom identifies him as Sebastiano Serlio (1575 - 1554).

With his characteristic burgundy coloured background, Bartolomeo Passerotti (1529-1592) has created a lively tribute to one of the greats of Bologna, the city in which they were both born. Certainly, at the late date of about 1570, Passerotti could not have had access to Serlio himself, but perhaps to a print or a drawing, although no definite portrait has survived. This effigy has certainly been romanticised a little but, with his free style and loose technique, the painter has accurately conveyed the way the model is looking with some suspense, possibly at another person just outside the frame who may be interrupting him in his reflections, but also the kindness and intelligence in this gaze.

Invited by Francis I (1515-1547), Serlio arrived in France in 1541 with the title of painter and architect to the king ("*peintre et architecte du Roy*"), and was an advisor on the construction of the chateau of Fontainebleau. He stayed for thirteen years, dividing his time between his activities as an architect and as a theoretician. His major work was the chateau of Ancy-le-Franc (1546). Attracted by its fame as a centre for printing and printmaking, he lived in Lyon during the final years of his life from 1549 to 1553, when we lose trace of him. In 1551, he published his *Libro Straordinario*, there, an album showing fifty portals.