

Galerie Canesso

Tableaux anciens

PIETRO FACCINI

(1575 - 1602)

The Return of the Prodigal Son

Oil on canvas, 29 5/16 x 22 in (74,5 x 56,5 cm).



PROVENANCE

France, private collection

LITERATURE

-Robertson, dans G. Saporì, *Risfogliando le "Arti di Bologna"* Carracci, Agostini, Massani, Algardi, Guillin. In *Nuova luce su Annibal*, S. Ebert-Schifferer et S. Ginzburg (dir.), Rome, 2011, p. 53, n° 65;

-S. Loire, *Ibidem*, 2011, p. 302;

-Mario Di Giampaolo, *Pietro Faccini (Bologna, 1562-1602)*, dir. Donatella Cingottini et Nicholas Schwed, Rome-Naples, 2026, p. 108-109, n° XIII.

Daniele Benati has recognized Pietro Faccini's hand in this unpublished work, thus increasing by one the artist's slim oeuvre - thirty-eight paintings listed by Emilio Negro and Nicosetta Roio, of which only a

dozen are certifiably autograph -supplemented by a large number of extant drawings, reminding us that Faccini was also an engraver.¹ The composition reflects a lost work by Annibale Carracci painted in about 1590 and described in early sources as placed over the altar of the Zambeccari chapel in the church of the Corpus Domini, Bologna.² Annibale's canvas was later taken to France, where it was engraved in the collection of Prince Philippe d'Orléans by J. B. Tilliard as part of the volumes illustrating the *Galerie du Palais Royal*, published in 1786, before the collection was dispersed.³

In the absence of the original, the engraving (which inverts the painting's composition) can tell us much about Faccini's creative process. Unlike the implied large-scale format of an altarpiece, our painting expresses itself through smaller dimensions and is surprising for its swift, free brushwork that does not merely repeat the famous precedent by Annibale but responds to it with additions that are characteristic of Faccini. As far as one can judge from the engraving, the physical handling in our work is less defined than Annibale's: the faces in the middle ground are no more than suggested by touches of black and white to indicate eyes, mouth or nose. This is even truer of the group of angels and the figure of God the Father, almost absent-mindedly drawn over notional clouds. The same can be said of the architecture and the tiny silhouettes that inhabit it: the painter feels no need to depict character, and only assigns them brief, pale-coloured brushstrokes. On the other hand, Faccini gives special attention to the principal group, dwelling on the felicitous gesture of the open-armed father towards his son, the latter shown kneeling on a stepped platform. The gesture reveals the emotion of the reunion, and is balanced by its construction along an impeccably rising diagonal.

Faccini's palette, dominated by reds and golden yellows and shot through with *changeant* effects, is steeped in an awareness of Venetian painting, implying a hypothetical sojourn in Venice and contact with Jacopo Bassano (c. 1510-1592), Tintoretto (1519-1594) and Veronese (1528-1588).⁴ The touches of red on the faces are clear markers of Faccini's art and reappear after 1590, as for example in the *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine, with Saint Jerome* (Rome, Pinacoteca Capitolina) which was regarded as "seventeenth-century Venetian School" before Longhi recognized it as Faccini. Moreover, the painter was not afraid of venturing into exaggerated expressions or deliberate physical attitudes. Thus, the wretched aspect of the Prodigal Son, dressed in tatters that are clearly emphasized by broad strokes of white anticipating a painter such as Domenico Fetti (c. 1588/1589-1623), is accentuated by a pose indicating allegiance, his gaze turned humbly towards his father - all as part of a direct attempt to achieve the desired effect. The idea of the kneeling figure recurs among the compositional studies for an untraced painting of *The Raising of Lazarus*, probably executed in 1595-1597, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques).⁵ The precise parallels of form and style with elements of our painting - the head exaggeratedly leaning to the right and emerging from a long neck, the steps, the spatial construction interrupted by planes allowing for varied platforms - pay further tribute to Faccini's first teacher. This painting enables us to follow the dialogue between master and pupil; once he had acquired the compositions of the great Annibale, the artist was able to make them his own and adapt them to other ends.

If we agree with Alessandro Brogi that Annibale painted his altarpiece in about 1590, this provides an approximate date for our picture, during the period Faccini was still attending the Carracci school, apparently with direct access to the initial composition. Malvasia's biography provides a detailed account, verging on the fantastic, of Pietro Faccini at the Carracci's Accademia degli Incamminati - a gifted pupil who did not hesitate to secede, as it were, and establish his own academy opposite that of the great Bolognese masters, thereby provoking the rage of Annibale. Mario Di Giampaolo dates Faccini's break with his teachers -treated at length by Malvasia - to about 1593-1594, at which point the painter's career entered a highly productive but also brief phase, since he died prematurely only a few years later, in 1602.

Notes:

- 1- Written communication by Daniele Benati, 26 June 1999. Mario Di Giampaolo accepts Faccini's authorship and will include our picture in the monograph he is preparing on the artist, which will treat both paintings and drawings. The monograph by Emilio Negro and Nicosetta Roio (*Pietro Faccini 1515/1516-1602*, Modena, 1997) only addresses the painted compositions and reproduces only the drawings that relate directly to these.
- 2- Carlo Cesare Malvasia, *Festina pittrice. Vite de pittori bolognesi...* (1678), 2 vols., Bologna, 1841, vol. 1, pp. 386-387.
- 3- See Alessandro Brogi, "Due questioni carraccesche", *Nuovi Studi*, 1996, 1, pp. 115-123 and p. 121 note 3 for earlier literature.
- 4- Mario Di Giampaolo, "Pietro Faccini", in *The Age of Correggio and the Carracci. Emilian Painting of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, exh. cat., Bologna, Pinacoteca Nazionale; Washington, National Gallery of Art; New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 10 September 1986-24 May 1987, p. 129.
- 5- Inv. 8233, recto, *The Raising of Lazarus*, Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques. All the known studies for *The Raising of Lazarus* have recently been published by Jean Goldman, "Studies by Pietro Faccini for a 'Raising of Lazarus'", *Master Drawings*, 1997, no. 3, pp. 281-288.