

Galerie Canesso

Tableaux anciens

GIULIO CESARE PROCACCINI

(BOLOGNA, 1574 - MILAN, 1625)

The Holy Family with the Young Saint John the Baptist

Oil on a single panel of walnut wood, 38 3/16 x 25 3/8 in (97 x 64.5 cm).
Inscribed on the back of the panel, "N° 3" in black ink and "61" in red ink.



PROVENANCE

Semenzato (Venice), Villa Luvinate di Varese sale, 8 March 1985, lot 258; New York, Sotheby's sale, 11 January 1996, lot 113 (G. C. Procaccini); private collection.

LITERATURE

--Véronique Damian, *Paysages et nocturnes d'Agostino Tassi. Deux tableaux inédits de Cornelis C. Van Haarlem et Giulio Cesare Procaccini*, Paris, Galerie Canesso, 2010, pp. 12-15;

-Hugh Brigstocke, "Three pictures by G.C. Procaccini at Colnaghi: *The Agony in the Garden; Christ Meeting his Mother on the Road to Calvary; The Holy Family*", in *Colnaghi Studies Journal* 01, October 2017, pp. 161-162, fig. 9;

-Odette D'Albo, in *L'ultimo Caravaggio. Eredi e nuovi maestri*, exh. cat., Milan, Gallerie d'Italia –

Piazza Scala, 29 November 2017-8 April 2018, pp. 158-159, no. 22;

-Virginia Brilliant, in *Faithful to Nature. Eleven Lombard Paintings 1530-1760*, exh. cat. ed. by Virginia Brilliant and Nicholas Hall, New York, Nicholas Hall, 2019, pp. 66-67, 92-93;

-Hugh Brigstocke and Odette D'Albo, *Giulio Cesare Procaccini. Life and Work*, Turin, 2020, pp. 236, 363, no. 119.

EXHIBITIONS

-*L'ultimo Caravaggio. Eredi e nuovi maestri*, Milano, Gallerie d'Italia – Piazza Scala, 29 November 2017 - 8 April 2018;

-*Faithful to Nature. Eleven Lombard Paintings 1530-1760*, New York, Nicholas Hall, 2019.

The quality of this recently rediscovered painting can be seen in its meticulous brushwork and remarkable condition; and it is worth noting that it was executed on a single panel of walnut wood, which is surprising given its rather ambitious dimensions. The authorship of Giulio Cesare, the best-known of the Procaccini brothers, is self-evident. Stylistic similarities with the work of Rubens, including the compositional structure, are combined with pictorial touches that reflect the enduring influence of the Lombard and Emilian traditions of the sixteenth century. While the head of Joseph, with its attentive expression, is the most solid and emphatic in structure, the *sfumato* of the Virgin's figure evokes memories of Leonardo, and the tender faces of the Christ Child and young Baptist recall models by Correggio (c. 1489-1534) and Parmigianino (1503-1540). These elements are all part of a style that was nourished by different stimuli, like the adherence to the contemporary language of Rubens, both in form and in the smooth passages of colour. This is one of the qualities that defines the painter's output between 1610 and 1620, as one can see in the *Circumcision* (1613, completed in 1616; Modena, Galleria Nazionale) or the near-contemporary *Virgin and Child and Saints* (Brescia, church of Sant' Afra). These paintings both express a maternal fusion of the Virgin and Child, and share a similar placement of the heads, which are set very close to one another, almost on the same level. However, infrared reflectography reveals that the Christ Child's face was initially designed to turn towards the beholder, whereas his head now rests affectionately against that of his mother. Procaccini also modified the position of the Virgin's right hand, which was originally placed at the level of Jesus' feet. Francesco Frangi sees further affinities with the *Virgin and Child and Saints* in the parish church of Domaso (Lake Como), which dates back to the early 1610s. There, the tight grouping of the Virgin and Child, with the infant Christ standing firmly on his mother's knees and gesturing with his right hand, is quite close to our painting, as is the distant smile of his mother. The stylistic resemblance of these three works, datable to between 1610 and 1616, enables us to place our panel within the same period. In the painting presented here, Procaccini displays the subtleties of his palette in the talented play of browns, expressed through a range of tonalities, from the light brown of the children's curly locks to the darker, denser waves of the Virgin's hair. Although the group is placed outdoors, as one can intuit from the tree trunk and patch of sky in the left background, the artist's focus is on the creation of a warm, enveloping atmosphere; this is expressed through the arms of the Virgin, who delicately lifts the young Baptist's hand to reveal the text of the book he holds, beginning with the letter P. The play of gazes and hands become the threads that connect the figures in a sweet and intimate grouping.

It is now well known from the recent studies by Hugh Brigstocke (2002) and Viviana Farina (2002) that the artist's principal patron was the Genoese nobleman Gian Carlo Doria (1576-1625), for whom he created numerous paintings over an extensive period, from 1611 to 1622.¹ Among the names of artists in this magnificent collection, that of Giulio Cesare Procaccini occurs the most frequently, by far. This

would explain why the painter was housed by his prestigious patron when he sojourned in Genoa in 1618. Several inventories of this Doria collection were drawn up over a relatively short time, and each of the three reflects the collection in a different state. As Francesco Frangi has suggested – with caution in mind, as we have no indications of dimensions or support – it may be tempting to connect our work with one of two citations, under numbers “217 una Madonna con S^{to} gio batt(ist)a e S^{to} giosepe del prono” and “438 una Madonna con S^{to} Giosepe e S^{to} gio batta del procasino” as they appear in the inventory made between 1617 and 1621; but as Viviana Farina has reminded us, we should also note the existence of an earlier inventory which includes works that entered the collection before 1617, and in which ours might appear, if we agree on a dating to between 1610 and 1615.² Yet this first inventory contains no mention of a painting of this subject, which does not totally rule out that for some reason it may have entered the collection at a later point. In the recent monograph on Giulio Cesare Procaccini by Hugh Brigstocke and Odette D’Albo, the canvas is placed for reasons of style at a slightly later date, around 1620, which for the authors could be one reason why it fails to appear in the first inventory of the collection.

The picture before us is a true piece of bravura work by our painter, Bolognese by birth but very soon a resident of Milan, where together with Morazzone (1573-1626) and Cerano (1573-1632) he became the herald of the new artistic culture of the Counter Reformation initiated by Cardinal Federico Borromeo. His contacts with Genoa were fundamental for an awareness of Rubens (1577-1640) and Van Dyck (1599-1641), both of whom he studied to enrich his own style.

Notes:

1 - Hugh Brigstocke, *Procaccini in America*, exh. cat., London and New York, Hall & Knight, 2002; Hugh Brigstocke and Odette D’Albo, *Giulio Cesare Procaccini. Life and Work*, Turin, 2020, pp. 236, 363, no. 119; Viviana Farina, *Giovan Carlo Doria promotore delle arti nel primo Seicento*, Florence, 2002; *eadem*, in Piero Boccardo, ed., *L’età di Rubens. Dimore, committenti e collezionisti genovesi*, exh. cat., Genoa, Palazzo Ducale, Galleria di Palazzo Rosso, Galleria Nazionale di Palazzo Spinola, 20 March – 11 July 2004, pp. 189-195 (on G. C. Doria).

2 - Hugh Brigstocke, *op. cit.*, 2002, pp. 130-131, nos. 217, 438; Viviana Farina, *op. cit.*, 2002, p. 205, no. 666. Only one of these paintings reappears in an inventory made after G. C. Doria’s death in 1625 (or possibly after the death of his wife in 1634), under the number “225. Una Madonna, San Giovanni e San Giuseppe del Procaccino” (Farina, 2002, p. 209, no. 225; Brigstocke, 2002, p. 137, no. 71). We are grateful to Viviana Farina, who points out that the same inventory lists a new painting of the subject : “una Madonna del Procaccino con san Giuseppe e il Putto” (Farina, 2002, p. 207, no. 147; Brigstocke, 2002, p. 138, no. 92).

A further citation appears in the artist’s posthumous inventory, which included “Uno quadreto dell Madonna con il nostro Signore et S.to Joseffo sig[nato]. No. 3”. One wonders whether this number 3 could correspond with the inscription on the back of our panel, but the inventory refers to a *quadretto* (a small picture) whose dimensions would be smaller than ours (cf. Brigstocke, *op. cit.*, 2002, p. 134).