

Galerie Canesso

Tableaux anciens

THE MASTER OF THE BLUE JEANS

(ACTIVE IN NORTHERN ITALY IN THE LATE 17TH CENTURY)

Woman Begging with Two Children

Oil on canvas, 59 7/8 x 46 1/16 in (152 x 117 cm).



LITERATURE

- Gerlinde Gruber, in *Da Caravaggio a Ceruti. La scena di genere e l'immagine dei pitocchi nella pittura italiana*, exh. cat. Brescia, Museo di Santa Giulia, 28 November 1998 – 28 February 1999, p. 425, no. 90;
- Francesco Frangi, "Dai pitocchi al 'buon villan'. Metamorfosi della pittura di genere a Milano negli anni di Parini", in G. Barbarisi, C. Capra, F. Degrada, F. Mazzocca, eds., *L'amabil rito. Società e cultura nella Milano di Parini* (symposium papers, Milan, 1999), Bologna, 2000, II, pp. 1145-1162;
- G. Gruber, in F. Frangi and A. Morandotti, *Dipinti Lombardi del Seicento. Collezione Koelliker*, Turin, 2004, pp. 156-161;
- Gerlinde Gruber, in *Maestri del '600 e del '700 lombardo nella Collezione Koelliker*, exh. cat. Milan, Palazzo Reale, 1 April – 2 July 2006, pp. 128-133;
- Gerlinde Gruber, "Il Maestro della tela jeans: un nuovo pittore della realtà nell'Europa del tardo

Seicento”, *Nuovi Studi*, 11, 2006, pp. 159-161, fig. 241;

- Gerlinde Gruber, in *The Master of the Blue Jeans. A new painter of reality in late 17th century Europe*, Paris, Galerie Canesso, 16 September – 6 November 2010, pp. 44-45, no 9.

EXHIBITIONS

- *Da Caravaggio a Ceruti. La scena di genere e l'immagine dei pitocchi nella pittura italiana*, exh. cat. Brescia, Museo di Santa Giulia, 28 November 1998 – 28 February 1999, p. 425, no. 90; - *Maestri del '600 e del '700 lombardo nella Collezione Koelliker*, exh. cat. Milan, Palazzo Reale, 1 April – 2 July 2006, pp. 128-133;

- *The Master of the Blue Jeans. A new painter of reality in late 17th century Europe*, Paris, Galerie Canesso, 16 September – 6 November 2010, pp. 44-45, no 9.

According to an oral tradition, from 1850 the painting was housed in the Villa Airoldi in Albate, north of Milan, where it was still recorded at the end of the twentieth century. Bought by Luigi Koelliker in Rome in 2002, it was acquired by the Canesso Gallery in 2009, where conservation enabled a certain number of details to reappear or become more readable. The composition represents a mother and her two children, dressed in worn clothing. Her right arm reveals the remains of a slashed sleeve worn over a second, brick-red sleeve with buttons adorning a cuff made of different material and colour.¹

The woman is shown leaning on a crutch as she addresses the viewer, proffering a begging bowl. Next to her, a young girl also directs her absent stare out of the picture space. Under her apron, she carries a small pouch with a small loaf of bread sticking out of it – a detail that had remained invisible until recent conservation, and which might contradict the begging gestures of the woman and child; but such an interpretation would not be suited to the Master of the Blue Jeans' habitual neutrality in depicting people in the same circumstances.

With the exception of one corner of a wall, once again visible after recent conservation, the composition concentrates on three individuals who seem simply to have paused during their walk from left to right as they show the spectacle of their wretched condition, with dignity. In the immediate foreground, a container full of embers suggests a chilly temperature. In the context of allegory, this would be an attribute of winter², but it seems unlikely that this was the artist's intention, since this would be his sole composition in an allegorical vein. His aim, rather, was to show poverty with realism and a relative monumentality, reinforced by the realist detail of a container of embers, a direct allusion to the cold suffered by these poor people.

As regards style, the painting can be connected with the artists of the Lombard-Veneto area: the face of the mother with an upturned nose touched by reflected light on its tip, recalls the *Common Man with a Bonnet* by the young Antonio Cifrondi (Lovere, Accademia Tadini).³ The colouring, adoption of marked chiaroscuro and the sloping ground are also typical of Giacomo Francesco Cipper, known as Todeschini, in his early works. These elements allow us to date our painting approximately to the last quarter of the seventeenth century.

The depiction of poverty, described with such sensitivity, and – what is more – in works of such relatively large scale, reveal our anonymous master to be a true precursor of Giacomo Ceruti.

G.G.

Notes:

1- See Marzia Cataldi Gallo, “The Master of the Blue Jeans and the Mystique of Blue” in *The Master of the Blue Jeans. A new painter of reality in late 17th century Europe*, Paris, Galerie Canesso, 16 September – 6 November 2010, pp. 22-28.

2- Huys Janssen, in exh. cat. *De Vier Jaargetijden in de kunst van de Nederlanden*, The Hague, Noordbrabants Museum, 21 December 2002 – 21 April 2003 ; Leuven, Stedelijk Museum Vander Kelen-Mertens, 10 May – 3 August 2003, p. 121, no 16, p. 168-169, no 97. 3- P. Dal Poggetto, “Antonio Cifrondi”, in *I pittori bergamaschi dal XIII al XIX secolo. Il Settecento*, I, Bergamo, 1982, p. 403, illus., p. 502-503, no 137.