GUIDO RENI

(BOLOGNA, 1575 - 1642)

Saint Jerome

Oil on canvas, 25 5/8 x 19 3/4 in (65.1 x 50 cm)





Fig. 1

PROVENANCE

London, Christie's sale, 8 December 2005, lot 45 (as Guido Reni); private collection.

LITERATURE

-Véronique Damian, *"La Vierge enfant" de Francisco de Zurbaran. Trois portraits par Simon Vouet, Pietro Martire Neri et Angelika Kauffmann. Tableaux bolonais, vénitiens et napolitains du XVIe et XVIIe* siècle, Paris, Galerie Canesso, 2014, pp. 26-31;
-Francesca Candi, *D'après le guide. Incisioni seicentesche da Guido Reni,* Bologna, 2016, p. 252;
-Raffaella Morselli, « Il ritrattoritrovato del cardinale Antonio Facchinetti di Guido Reni », in *Studi in onore di Stefano Tumidei*, Andrea Bacchi-Luca Massimo Barbero, eds., Verona, 2016, p. 215;
-Daniele Benati, in *Simone Cantarini (1612-1648). Un giovane maestro tra Pesaro, Bologna e Roma*, Luigi Gallo, Anna Maria Ambrosini Massari, Yuri Primarosa (eds.), cat. exh., Urbino, Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, 23 May -12 October 2025, p. 148-149, no. III.8.

EXHIBITIONS

Simone Cantarini (1612-1648). Un giovane maestro tra Pesaro, Bologna e Roma, Luigi gallo, Anna Maria Ambrosini Massari, Yuri Primarosa (eds.), cat. exh., Urbino, Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, 23 May - 12 October 2025.

Engraving:

Printed in reverse with respect to the painting, the engraving carried out by Jean Couvay (Arles, 1622 – Paris, c. 1675 or 1680) was published by François Langlois, called Ciartres (1589-1647) as Guido Reni (see Carlo Cesare Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice. Vite de'pittori bolognesi*, Bologna, 1678, 2nd ed., 1841, I, p. 97, "stampe di Guido Reni": "La testa del S. Girolamo, che col sasso nella sinistra si percuote il petto, sotto: S. HIEROMMUS di profondissimo bolino intagliato da Couvay: onc. 10. onc. 7. e mez. scars per dirit.").

Daniele Benati considers this new addition to the oeuvre of Guido Reni as an important rediscovery, as he noted in the catalogue of the 2005 Christie's sale in London[1]. Since then, divested of the thick layer of yellowed varnish that covered the powerfully expressive figure, it has regained all its splendour, likewise convincing Erich Schleier of the great Bolognese master's authorship.
Since our publication of 2012, Daniele Benati has pointed out the existence of an engraving by Jean Couvay (published by François Langlois, known as Ciartres) after our *Saint Jerome*, naturally reversed with respect to the original; and this very print is cited by Cesare Malvasia (fig. 1).

Saint Jerome is depicted here as a penitent hermit, beating his breast with a stone to harden his spirit against temptations of the flesh. The representation is based on the four years the scholar spent in the wilderness after converting to the Christian faith. It was on this occasion that the Doctor of the Church acquired his knowledge of Hebrew, which he later used to translate the Bible into Latin.
The expression in the saint's upturned gaze conveys an inspired sense of pathos. The potent modelling of the figure, emerging from the sombre background, from which it stands out by means of the sculpture-like red cloak, is a tour de force. The description of soft, broken folds recalls the ample draperies of the *Apostles Peter and Paul* (1605-1606; Milan, Pinacoteca di Brera), conceived in the same way so as to enhance how the figures contrast with the darkness. The artist's youthful style is reflected in the painterly freedom of handling, especially fluid in the hands and the great flowing beard and locks of hair, as well as in the swiftly rendered stone. Carefully studied light is mainly applied to the face: the saint seems bathed in his faith, and the sense of spirituality is accentuated by the bust-length format.

Daniele Benati and Erich Schleier agree that the work was painted early in the artist's career. Benati believes that our *Saint Jerome* can be dated to after 1605, while Schleier dates it to between 1606/1607 and about 1610; in other words, both art historians place it during the artist's Roman sojourn. Reni arrived in Rome at the end of 1601, and in 1605, he paid early tribute to Caravaggio (1571-1610) in the *Crucifixion of Saint Peter* (Rome, Vatican Picture Gallery) painted for Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini – a grand altarpiece dedicated to Caravaggesque naturalism. This is the language used in our Saint Jerome, at a point when Reni, struck by the revolution brought about by the great Lombard painter, aimed to approximate his style as closely as possible. The skilful use of chiaroscuro supports the figure's expressive and monumental aspects. This inclination towards the most modern approach to art – that of Caravaggio at the peak of his fame – was original, and is distinct from that of his fellow Bolognese painters, the Carracci and their pupils Domenichino (1581-1641) and Albani (1578-1660). In a certain sense, as Benati already pointed out in 2005, Reni followed this revolutionary path so as to better detach himself and proclaim his independence, leading to an individual artistic personality, that of the "Divino Guido", meditated on Raphael (1483-1520) and seeking to recreate his art[2].

For Erich Schleier, after Reni's brilliant Roman debut, our painting stands between the *Martyrdom of Saint Catherine* (Albenga, Diocesan Museum) of 1606/1607 – the dating is Stephen Pepper's – and about 1610, by comparison with the frescoes in the altar area of the Chapel of the Annunziata in the Palazzo del Quirinale[3]. Quite rightly, Daniele Benati notes the presence of an ideal tension in our saint, a world of perfection and supreme beauty that was to find its ultimate flourishing in the *Massacre of the Innocents* (Bologna, Pinacoteca Nazionale), a painting sent in 1611 to Bologna, destined for the church of San Domenico[4].

Reni's sojourn in the Eternal City was in fact a period of intense activity, as we may read in his account-book for the period 1609-1612, published and commented on by Pepper[5]. This manuscript also casts light on the perfect mastery of his craft – one of his notes states that he had painted a head of Saint John the Evangelist over the course of one evening6. His principal patrons at this time were the most prominent of all, especially Pope Paul V Borghese (1550-1621), for whom he worked in the Vatican in 1607 and subsequently in the Palazzo del Quirinale and the Cappella Paolina of Santa Maria Maggiore (1609-1610) – his most admired works.

Notes:

1- The entry for Christie's sale catalogue (London, 8 December 2005, lot 45) informs us that Riccardo Lattuada was in fact the first to recognize the full authorship of Guido Reni, although his dating of the picture to 1620/1627 was later than Daniele Benati and Erich Schleier's datings (c. 1605 and between 1606/1607 and 1610, respectively).

2- Daniele Benati, "Per Guido Reni 'incamminato' tra i Carracci e Caravaggio", *Nuovi Studi*, 11, 2005, pp. 231-247.

3- Stephen Pepper, *Guido Reni. L'opera completa*, Novara, 1988, p. 335, no. 24, pl. VIII, fig. 24 and no. 33, fig. 32; Francesca Valli, in *Guido Reni 1575-1642*, exh. cat., Bologna, Pinacoteca Nazionale, 5 September – 13 November 1988; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 11 December 1988 – 12 February 1989; Fort Worth, Kimbell Art Museum, 11 March – 14 May 1989, pp. 179-181, no. 8.

4- These two suggestions for a date during the artist's Roman sojourn have been questioned by Rachel McGarry (in writing, 13 November 2012, judging from a photograph), who sets the painting's execution in the early 1630s, comparing its brushwork, figure scale and format with the *Saint Peter* in Vienna, the *Saint Peter* and *Saint Paul* in the Prado Museum, Madrid, and the *Saint Jerome* in the Capitoline Picture

Gallery, Rome. Her opinion is shared by Richard Spear (in writing, 10 March 2022, also without having seen the painting at first hand), who draws parallels with the *Saint Jerome* in the Capitoline. Bastien Eclercy leans towards a late date, in the mid-1630s (in writing, 29 March 2022), suggesting comparison with the *Saint Peter* in the Prado. Considering the attentive, vibrant handling, Aidan Weston Lewis believes instead in a dating around 1615 (in writing, 17 March 2022).

5- Stephen Pepper, "Guido Reni's Roman Account Book – I: The Account Book", *The Burlington Magazine*, June 1971, pp. 309-317. The transcription and publication of this volume, now in the Morgan Library, New York, make fascinating reading, first and foremost for the paintings cited. We rediscovered and reattributed one of the works mentioned in 1609 in the account book, Reni's *Portrait of Cardinal Sannesi (*see Lothar Sickel, in *Deux tableaux de la collection Sannesi. Tableaux des écoles émilienne et lombarde*, Paris, Galerie Canesso, 2006, pp. 6-15).

6- Stephen Pepper, *op. cit.* in note 5, 1971, p. 315: "Adì 16 Novembre 1609 / Scudi quatro per una testa di un S. Giovanni Evangilista fatta in una sera".