CARLO CERESA

(1609 - 1679)

Portrait of a Gentleman with a Wig

Oil on canvas, 77 3/8 x 45 3/8 in (196.5 x 115.3 cm).



PROVENANCE

Milan, Vincenzo Polli collection.

LITERATURE

- Roberto Longhi, Renata Cipriani and Giovanni Testori, *I Pittori della realtà in Lombardia*, Milan, Palazzo Reale, April-July 1953, p. 39, no. 46, illustrated;
- Giovanni Testori, "Carlo Ceresa, ritrattista", *Paragone*, no. 39, 1953, p. 28;
- Marco Valsecchi, in *Un incontro bergamasco: Ceresa – Baschenis nelle collezioni private bergamasche*, exh. cat., Bergamo, Galleria Lorenzelli, September 1972, no. XIX;
- Mina Gregori, "Carlo Ceresa", in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 23, 1979, p. 716;
- Ugo Ruggeri, *Carlo Ceresa, Dipinti e Disegni*, Bergamo, 1979, p. 207, fig. 91;
- Luisa Vertova, *Carlo Ceresa. Un pittore bergamasco nel '600 (1609-1679)*, exh. cat., Bergamo,

Palazzo Moroni, 1983, p. 140-141, no. 76;
- Luisa Vertova, « Carlo Ceresa », in *I Pittori bergamaschi. Il Seicento II,* Bergamo, 1984, pp. 533, 566, no 90, 724, fig. 1 ;
- Simone Facchinetti, Francesco Frangi and Giovanni Valagussa, eds., *Carlo Ceresa. Un pittore del Seicento lombardo tra realtà e devozione*, exh. cat., Bergamo, Museo Adriano Bernareggi, Accademia Carrara, 10 March – 24 June 2012, p. 22, illustrated.

EXHIBITIONS

- *I Pittori della realtà in Lombardia*, Milan, Palazzo Reale, April-July 1953, no. 46;
- *Un incontro bergamasco: Ceresa – Baschenis nelle collezioni private bergamasche* , Bergamo, Galleria Lorenzelli, September 1972, no. XIX;
- *Carlo Ceresa. Un pittore bergamasco nel'600 (1609-1679)*, Bergamo, Palazzo Moroni, 1983, no. 76.

In the famous exhibition *I pittori della realtà in Lombardia* held in Milan in 1953, the Lombard painter Carlo Ceresa was represented by a series of portraits including our *Gentleman with a Wig*, and one might have been led to believe that Ceresa was only a portrait-painter. The exhibition just dedicated to him in Bergamo (2012) has instead proved the contrary, revealing a career that included a notable quantity of sacred art and, to a lesser extent, mythological subjects.

Documented in San Giovanni Bianco, where he was born, between 1609 and 1636, Ceresa then moved to Bergamo. There, he immediately came face to face with the legacy of Giovan Battista Moroni (1520/1524-1579), the great sixteenth-century portrait-painter in whose works he found inspiration for his own spare compositions, as one can see in the *Portrait of an Old Gentleman in a Red Armchair* (Florence, Fondazione Roberto Longhi). Ceresa became the accredited painter of the Bergamasque aristocracy, successfully adapting his style and composition to the needs of his patrons. Our ambitious portrait belongs to the artist's late phase, and Luisa Vertova dates it to about 1665/1670, when Ceresa could securely rival Luigi Miradori, called il Genovesino (1600/1610-1656 ?), or the Bergamasque Evaristo Baschenis (1617-1677) in this genre.

The painter offers us a powerfully expressive image, through a severe, concise language that was attuned to Lombard aesthetics. The sobriety of both composition and description of surroundings, and the lack of artifice in the sitter's pose, stand in contrast with the exquisite, decorative character of his dress. The gentleman – his left hand on the pommel of his sword and the other, fist closed, on his hip – is shown standing within an undefined space, although the ample red drape and heavy tassel on the left suggest this is his residence. The figure's expression is firm and hardly affable, and this is finely rendered by the painter, without a trace of empathy.

The virility of the sitter contrasts with the long, voluminous curly wig and precious costume, which is studied in its smallest details, including the striking orange tonality. One of the keys to the success of this portrait lies in the hiatus, consciously conveyed by the artist, between the refinement of dress – with its lace, pompoms and knots – and the wig, which releases its long, free hair over the masculine shoulders, these too covered in ribbons. Grazietta Butazzi's book on the history of dress in Lombardy supports the authenticity of such clothing, and she states that French influence led men of noble families to soften their dress code.[1] In this case, this meant sleeves that end just below the elbow, revealing a substantial quantity of white, lace-hemmed shirt; and short trousers, worn down to the knee, and very wide in Milanese fashion, reflecting a style of the late 1660s, as Butazzi also notes. Shoes with heels and a high tongue, and fastened with a buckle, were also typical of the second half of the seventeenth century. The fine linen collar was an element of military dress.

Our sitter, who unfortunately remains anonymous, is obviously proud to show off his most contemporary look, the "dernière mode" from France. The presence of the sword, one of the ultimate symbols of masculinity, is there to remind us that this inscrutable-looking gentleman would not hesitate

to draw his weapon if circumstances called for it.

The haughty attitude and austere character of both the sitter and how he is presented recur in other portraits painted by Ceresa during this period, for instance the *Portrait of a Gentleman of the Terzi Family* (private collection), in which the figure is posed in the same manner, closed fist on left hip, favouring a slight swagger, or the two large-scale portraits of a gentleman and a lady, perhaps a couple, both also in a private collection.[2]

With his full-length portraits, adopting a strong visual impact, an essential focus on stern psychological qualities and a true economy of means, Ceresa permanently anchored himself in Lombard realism at a time when the Baroque style was making itself felt throughout the rest of Italy.

Notes:

1- Grazietta Butazzi, *Il costume in Lombardia*, Milan, 1977, pp. 96, 99-101.

2- Francesco Frangi, in Simone Facchinetti, Francesco Frangi and Giovanni Valagussa, eds., *Carlo Ceresa. Un pittore del Seicento lombardo tra realtà e devozione* , exh. cat., Bergamo, Museo Adriano Bernareggi, Accademia Carrara, 10 March – 24 June 2012, pp. 278-279 no. 101 and pp. 280-283 no. 102-103.