

Galerie Canesso

Tableaux anciens

BERNARDINO LICINIO

(VENEZIA, 1490 CA. - 1550 CA.)

Young Lady and her Suitor

Oil on wood panel, 32 x 45 in (81.3 x 114.3 cm)



Fig. 1

PROVENANCE

Caroline Murat (1782-1839), Queen of Naples; sold as part of her collection in 1822 to **Charles Vane, 3rd Marquess of Londonderry (1778-1854)**, while she was in exile at the castle of Frohsdorf in Austria (*Les archives Murat aux Archives nationales*, Paris, 1967, p. 150, under no. 100: “Vente par la comtesse de Lipona [anagram of Napoli] au marquis Vane Londonderry pour le prix de 9200 livres sterling d’une collection de tableaux faisant partie du cabinet de Frohsdorf, 29 novembre 1822. Cote 31 AP 21 dr 371”); Christie’s sale, London, 12 July 1823, lot 12 (*Thirteen Italian Pictures of the Highest*

class lately the property of Madame Murat, ex-queen of Naples and brought to this country by a distinguished Nobleman [certainly Lord Londonderry]), as Titian; **James-Alexandre, Comte de Pourtalès-Gorgier (1776-1855)**; his posthumous sale, Paris, 27 March 1865 and following days, lot 60, as Giorgione, sold for 650 Francs; collection **Ivor Churchill Guest, 1st Viscount Wimborne**, Canford Manor, Dorset; his sale, Christie's, London, 9 March 1923, lot 4, as Paris Bordone, sold to Buttery; in 1924, Amsterdam, with the dealer Jacques Goudstikker (1897-1940); Vienna, **Dr. Gustav Arens** collection, confiscated and assigned to the Führermuseum, Linz, as Palma Vecchio¹; returned, May 1948 (MCCP inventory no. 9029)²; and by descent to its last owner, who left it on loan to the Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco between 1949 and 2011; on the owner's death in 2011, the heirs offered the painting for sale at Sotheby's, New York, 26 January 2012, lot 21 (as Licinio).

LITERATURE

- Jacques Goudstikker, *Schilderkundig Genootschap*, exh. cat., The Hague, 1924, no. 91, fig. 91 (as Palma Vecchio);
- György Gombosi, *Palma Vecchio. Des Meisters Gemälde und Zeichnungen*, Stuttgart / Berlin, 1937, p. 116 (as Palma, uncertainly);
- Ferruccio Cappelletti Bentivegna, *Abbigliamento e costume nella pittura italiana. Rinascimento*, Rome, 1962, pp. 208-209 (as « scuola veneta del 1530 c. »);
- Luisa Vertova, « Bernardino Licinio », dans *I pittori bergamaschi, Il Cinquecento, I*, Bergamo, 1980, p. 414, no 24, fig. 467;
- Sophie Lillie, *Was einmal war : Handbuch der enteigneten Kunstsammlungen Wiens*, Vienne, 2003, p. 93, no 8 (as « Jacopo Palma, gen. Il Vecchio »);
- Enrico Maria Dal Pozzolo, *Colori d'amore. Parole, gesti e carezze nella pittura veneziana del Cinquecento*, Trévise, 2008, pp. 89-90, figs. 69, 94, 142 (as Bernardino Licinio);
- Véronique Damian, *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. 16-25;
- Laëtitia Giannechini, *Caroline, sœur de Napoléon. Reine des Arts*, Maria Teresa Caracciolo – Jehanne Lazaj (dir.), Ajaccio, Palais Fesch-musée des Beaux-Arts, 30 June - 2 October 2017, pp. 195-196, no. 83;
- Silvia Gazzola, in *Titian's Vision of Women. Beauty - Love - Poetry*, Sylvia Ferino-Pagden, ed., exh. cat., Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, 5 October 2021 – 16 January 2022, p. 81, fig. 43;
- Anouck Samyn, « 'From these words they came to taking each other by the hands.' The Gestural Semantics of a Nuptial Promise », in *Titian's Vision of Women. Beauty - Love - Poetry*, Sylvia Ferino-Pagden, ed., exh. cat., Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, 5 October 2021 – 16 January 2022, pp. 220-225.

EXHIBITIONS

- *Schilderkundig Genootschap*, La Haye, Jacques Goudstikker, 1924, no. 91 ;
- *Caroline, sœur de Napoléon. Reine des Arts*, Maria Teresa Caracciolo – Jehanne Lazaj (dir.), Ajaccio, Palais Fesch-musée des Beaux-Arts, 30 June - 2 October 2017, pp. 195-196, no. 83;
- *Titian's Vision of Women. Beauty - Love - Poetry*, Sylvia Ferino-Pagden, ed., Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, 5 October 2021 - 16 January 2022; Milan, Palazzo Reale, 14 February - 29 May 2022, no. 38.

The vagaries of our picture's fate during the last two centuries have been far from ordinary, carrying it through a number of great European political and historical dramas.

Starting when it was owned – as a work by Titian (1488/1489-1576) – by Napoleon's sister Caroline Murat (1782-1839) when she was Queen of Naples (1808-1815), the picture followed her to the Austrian castle of Frohsdorf, when she was forced to leave her former capital. She was only able to bring her collection of Old Masters, leaving behind the paintings commissioned in Naples from contemporary artists.³ In 1822 Charles Vane, 3rd Marquess of Londonderry (1778-1854) purchased part or all of Caroline's collection, in turn consigning thirteen items from it to Christie's in London in the following year; our canvas was among them, still given to Titian. The fairly long catalogue note enables us to securely identify the composition, by now renamed "The enamoured physician", clearly because the male figure appears to be taking the pulse of his putative patient – a seductive figure indeed, as he cannot take his eyes off her. Among the group of paintings bought from Caroline by Londonderry, the two most famous ones were by Correggio (1489-1534), the *Venus, Mercury and Cupid* and the *Ecce Homo*, both now in the National Gallery, London.⁴

It is thanks to the catalogue entry from the 1865 sale of James-Alexandre, Comte de Pourtalès-Gorgier (1776-1855), that we have been able to reconstruct these two earlier provenances, invaluable transcribed anew: "formerly in the private cabinet of Madame Murat", and "lastly in the collection of Lord Londonderry".⁵ Originally from the Swiss city of Neuchâtel, which was then owned by Prussia, the Pourtalès were Protestant financiers. James-Alexandre settled in Paris at the beginning of the nineteenth century and had a splendid neo-Renaissance style *hôtel particulier* built to house his collections. These were assembled in an encyclopaedic and ambitious way, and displayed in the gallery of his residence, one of the grandest of the 1800s, especially as regarded his extraordinary discoveries in the field of antiquities.⁶ The Pourtalès sale catalogue listed no less than three hundred paintings, and our picture was among a number of Renaissance masterpieces including the *Portrait of a Man* (the so-called *Condottiere*) by Antonello da Messina (now in the Musée du Louvre, Paris), the *Portrait of a Young Man* by Bronzino (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art), and the *Portrait of Ludovico Capponi* (New York, Frick Collection), again by Bronzino.⁷

After this sale, our painting left France for England, becoming part of the collection of Ivor Churchill Guest, 1st Viscount Wimborne, at Canford Manor, where it stayed until it was sold in 1923, and subsequently acquired by one of the great dealers of that period, Jacques Goudstikker. Exhibited by the latter in 1924 in Amsterdam as Palma Vecchio (c. 1479-1528), our panel was bought by a collector residing in Vienna, and it passed undamaged through the torments of the Second World War, after which it was returned in 1948 to the family who had owned it. This family left it on loan to the Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco between 1949 and 2011. Sold by their descendants in New York in 2012, it returned once again to Europe.

The painting's recent restoration allows us to see the work in its original condition. The reproductions of the work during the twentieth century, and right up to 2012 (as seen in the auction catalogue) show an extensive area of black repaint on the left side of the panel, covering what we have discovered to be a relief in the ancient style. Relieved of its addition, this area now shows a figure wearing a helmet and cuirass. X-radiography has also brought to light some exciting evidence of the work's creation. Initially, the pair of lovers faced one another in a different way, with the young woman in profile and her elegant suitor on a slightly lower level. The background, too, appears to have been completely different: buildings can be intuited behind the woman, and sweeps of brushwork behind the man suggest drapery. The painter thus radically altered his carefully-studied composition, ultimately presenting his heroine head-on and set in a private space, marked off by crimson-coloured drapery. She rests her arm on a piece of architecture, perhaps part of a loggia, while her lover remains in a completely open space that looks out onto a landscape. On the left, the composition is filled by the architectural balustrade and

relief, and the light tones of the stonework and the reds of the marble contrast with the blue sky at right. Was it to adapt to the iconography of such subjects – codified in Venice in the sixteenth century, becoming widespread through Titian and Palma Vecchio – that the artist finally opted for a scene that probably conformed better to the expectations of his patron? This Venetian *bella*, seen frontally and wearing a light chemise that reveals one of her breasts, takes her inspiration from Titian's *Flora* (Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi), although that painting still connotes mythology, something which is entirely absent here. We surprise this young woman in an intimate moment, an idea further reinforced by the long blond hair spread loosely across her shoulders. If we add to this her sly look, without a turn of the head, towards the seductive young man who languorously takes her wrist, the stage is fully set: no one can ignore the gesture of his left hand, held over his heart, an eloquent symbol of amorous passion and future promise. That this woman, who bears all the finery of a seductress, might be identified as a courtesan, does not really alter the essential notion of the image of a romantic and indeed titillating liaison. The young man, exquisitely dressed in what one imagines to be the latest fashion, nonetheless has a certain decorum, as implied by the white feather in his red cap and the large pale blue bow that holds his sword. The theatrical effect is heightened by the embroideries, gold jewellery and deep, shimmering colours – a sort of *Romeo and Juliet* before its time.

Thanks to Luisa Vertova, the painting has recently rediscovered its true authorship after spending the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth bearing more illustrious Venetian painters' names – the very ones who initiated this genre of latent eroticism. We have mentioned Titian, but there was also Paris Bordone (1500-1571) and Palma Vecchio. The full figures, shown half-length so as to give the impression of being closer to the viewer, are directly inspired by the work of these great masters. However, this particular scene of seduction owes a good deal to the spirit of Giorgione (1477/1478-1510), even if our painter is marked by greater realism, and by his setting the lovers in his own time. Bernardino Licinio was a remarkable portrait painter, a quality evident here in his description of faces through the play of gazes – direct and emphatic for the man, intrigued and coy for the woman. Luisa Vertova dates our painting to about 1520, that is, fairly early in his career, by stylistic comparison with the *Young Lady with a Book*, dated 1522 (Budapest, Szépművészeti Múzeum; Fig. 1). The dark-eyed sideways look is identical in each of these pictures.

Bernardino was born in Venice, but his family came from Poscante, near Bergamo. His older brother Arrigo was also a painter, as was the latter's son Giulio. Vasari's Venetian sojourn yielded nothing about Licinio, which may explain why he confused him with the Friulian painter Pordenone (*Giovanni Antonio Licino da Pordenone* [1550]; *Vita di G. A. Licinio da Pordenone e d'altri Pittori del Friuli* [1568]). His style has often led his compositions to be regarded as by Giorgione, who died prematurely and whose influence on the young Licinio was decisive. Between 1515 and 1525, like his contemporaries Titian and Palma Vecchio, he painted half-length pictures of the Madonna with saints, and then some altarpieces of the *sacra conversazione* type. Fortunately, some works clearly bearing Licinio's signature have allowed him to emerge from oblivion: the altarpiece in the church of the Frari in Venice, the *Portrait of Arrigo Licinio and his Family* (Rome, Borghese Gallery) and the *Portrait of a Man Holding an Antiphonary* (1524; York Art Gallery). From 1530 onwards, influenced by classical antiquity, his figures become sculptural, and the same holds true for his pictures of half-length *belle*, which can be interpreted as evocations of marble busts. Once again according to Luisa Vertova, the arrival in Venice of artists such as Giulio Romano (1499-1546), Jacopo Sansovino (1521-1568) and Francesco Salviati (1510-1563), and the spread of prints after Raphael, stimulated the taste for Roman art in Northern Italy; but unlike other Venetian painters, Licinio translated this "Romanism" into highly controlled images, wilfully unaware of the dramatic tensions of Mannerism.

Notes:

1. Sophie Lillie, *Was einmal war: Handbuch der enteigneten Kunstsammlungen Wiens*, Vienna, 2003, p. 93, no. 8 (as “Jacopo Palma, gen. Il Vecchio”).
2. Inventory of the Munich Central Collecting Point (MCCP):
https://www.dhm.de/datenbank/ccp/dhm_ccp_add.php?seite=6&fld_1=9029&fld_1_exakt=exakt&suchen=Suchen
3. On Caroline’s collections of paintings, see most recently Maria Teresa Caracciolo, ed., *Les Sœurs de Napoléon. Trois destins italiens*, exh. cat., Paris, Musée Marmottan Monet, 3 October 2013 – 26 January 2014, pp. 148-194; and Patrizia Rosazza Ferraris, “Per le sorelle di Napoleone, Elisa, Paolina e Carolina. Postilla”, *Les Cahiers d’histoire de l’art*, 11, 2013, pp. 73-77; Laëtitia Giannechini, *Caroline, sœur de Napoléon. Reine des Arts*, Maria Teresa Caracciolo– Jehanne Lazaj dir., exh. cat., Ajaccio, Palais Fesch-musée des Beaux-Arts, 30 June - 2 October 2017, pp. 195-196, no. 83.
4. Inventory nos. NG 10 and NG 15, both purchased in 1834 from the 3rd Marquess of Londonderry. These two pictures did not appear in the 1823 sale catalogue.
5. *Catalogue des tableaux anciens & modernes qui composent les collections de Feu M. le comte de Pourtalès-Gorgier et dont la vente aura lieu en son hôtel, rue Tronchet n° 7*, Paris, Mes Charles Pillet and Eugène Escribe, 27 March 1865 and following days, lot 60 (as “Giorgion”).
6. See Olivier Boisset, “Les antiques du comte James-Alexandre de Pourtalès-Gorgier (1776-1855): une introduction”, in Monica Preti-Hamard and Philippe Sénéchal, eds., *Collections et marché de l’art en France 1789-1848*, Rennes, 2005, pp. 187-206.
7. The façade of this *hôtel particulier*, built between 1837 and 1839 by Félix Duban at 7 rue Tronchet, has survived almost intact to this day. On the Pourtalès collection, especially as regards paintings, see élisabeth Foucard-Walter, “La rencontre d’un éminent collectionneur et d’un grand portraitiste: le portrait du comte de Pourtalès-Gorgier par Paul Delaroche. Une dation récente pour le département des Peintures”, *Revue du Louvre et des musées de France*, 2000, I, pp. 39-54; Laurent Langer, “Les tableaux italiens de James-Alexandre comte de Pourtalès-Gorgier”, in Philippe Costamagna, Olivier Bonfait and Monica Preti-Hamard, eds., *Le Goût pour la peinture italienne autour de 1800, prédécesseurs, modèles et concurrents du cardinal Fesch*, symposium papers (Ajaccio, 1-4 March 2005), Ajaccio, Musée Fesch, 2006, pp. 261-275.