

Galerie Canesso

Tableaux anciens

GIOACCHINO ASSERETO

(GENOVA, 1600 - 1649)

Joseph Sold by His Brothers

Oil on canvas, 59 1/2 x 76 3/8 in (151 x 194 cm)



PROVENANCE

Genoa, Aldo Zerbone collection.

LITERATURE

- Lilli Ghio Vallarino, in *Genova nell'Età Barocca*, ed. by Ezia Gavazza and Giovanna Rotondi Terminiello, exh. cat. (Genoa, Galleria Nazionale di Palazzo Spinola, Galleria di Palazzo Reale, 2 May – 26 July 1992), Bologna, 1992, pp. 91-92, no. 5;
- Giovanna Rotondi Terminiello, "Pittori e committenti per una nuova immagine", in *Genova nell'Età Barocca*, exhibition catalogue (Genoa, Galleria Nazionale di Palazzo Spinola, Galleria di Palazzo Reale), Bologna, 1992, p. 54;
- Tiziana Zennaro, *L'attività giovanile di Gioacchino Assereto e la cultura artistica a Genova tra il secondo e il terzo decennio del Seicento*, thesis, Università degli Studi di Siena, Scuola di Specializzazione in Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte (supervised by Giuseppe Cantelli), academic year 1992-1993, p. 162, no. 43, reproduced;
- Gelsomina Spione, in *La Pinacoteca dei Cappuccini a Voltaggio*, ed. by Fulvio Cervini and Carlenrica

Spantigati, Alessandria: Cassa di Risparmio, 2001, p. 107;

- Gelsomina Spione, in *Le Chiavi del Paradiso. I tesori dei Cappuccini della provincia di Genova*, exh. cat., Milan, Museo dei Beni Culturali Cappuccini, 28 March – 28 July 2003, p. 106;

- Chiara de Capoa, *Old Testament Figures in Art*, Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2003, pp. 134-135;

- Tiziana Zennaro, *Gioacchino Assereto (1600-1650) e i pittori della sua scuola*, 2 vols., Soncino, 2011, 1, p. 146, fig. LX, pp. 366-367, no. A97;

- Franco Boggero, in *La forma della meraviglia. Capolavori a Genova 1600-1750*, Jonathan Bober-Piero Boccardo-Franco Boggero, eds., Genoa, Palazzo Ducale, 27 March – 10 July 2022, pp. 40-41, no. 10.

EXHIBITIONS

- *Genova nell'Età Barocca*, Genoa, Galleria Nazionale di Palazzo Spinola, Galleria di Palazzo Reale, 2 May – 26 July 1992.

- *La forma della meraviglia. Capolavori a Genova 1600-1750*, Jonathan Bober-Piero Boccardo-Franco Boggero, eds., Genoa, Palazzo Ducale, 27 March – 10 July 2022.

Energetically painted and enhanced by the naturalistic chiaroscuro that was so dear to the Genoese painter, this grand composition, dominated by rich brown tonalities, describes a drama at its very climax: Joseph, the favourite of Jacob's sons, is being sold by his brothers to a group of Ishmaelite merchants who are travelling to Egypt (Genesis 37: 12-28). Still a young boy, he has fallen victim to his jealous brothers' plotting. This ultimate act of vengeance takes place after they have sought once again to do him harm: having stripped him of his tunic they imprison him in a cistern, and finally sell him, thus sending him far from his homeland.

The scene before us takes place around a rudimentary table where the dance of hands reflects the greed of human trafficking, and its trivialisation. The young Joseph, almost out of view for the rest of the figures but clearly emphasised by the strong fall of light, has already passed to the ownership of the merchants, seen on the right, and turns his head to dry his tears, his sole expression of sorrow. On the left, without a trace of compassion, his siblings direct their gaze to the profit they have made. The swift brushwork describing the various types of dress and hairstyle lends form to the pigment, and indeed Roberto Longhi had no hesitation in comparing Assereto to his Spanish contemporary, Velázquez (1599-1660). A camel stands out against the background, defining the scene with its reference to the caravan of merchants.

Dated by Tiziana Zennaro to the beginning of the 1640s, the picture is thus a mature work of the Genoese artist, who died prematurely in 1649. There are a number of comparisons among Assereto's paintings of identical date: suffice it to cite *The Crowning with Thorns* in the Palazzo Bianco in Genoa, close in both compositional symmetry and denseness of expression, or, for the same reasons, *The Meeting of David and Abigail* (Genoa, private collection)(1). Here, the artist's choice of colours is restrained, doubtless in deliberate correspondence with the sombre tone of this family tragedy inspired by the Old Testament. The tight framing, with half-length figures and highly expressive gestures, is a stylistic hallmark of our artist, whose Baroque idiom here seems out the muted rather than the spectacular, more in harmony with the contained grief of the young Joseph.

The recent monograph on the painter, who trained in the workshops of Luciano Borzone (1590-1645) and Andrea Ansaldo (1584-1638), has returned Assereto to his rightful place among the most significant European artists of the seventeenth century, and indeed his naturalism is every bit as fine as that of Matthias Stomer (c. 1600-after 1650) or Gerrit van Honthorst (1590-1656).

1- Tiziana Zennaro, *Gioacchino Assereto (1600-1650) e i pittori della sua scuola*, 2 vols., Soncino, 2011, 1, p. 367, A 98 and p. 357, A 89.