

Galerie Canesso

Tableaux anciens

ANTONIO CIFRONDI

(CLUSONE, 1656 - BRESCIA, 1730)

Old Man under the Snow

Oil on canvas, 45 5/8 x 35 7/8 in (116 x 91 cm)



PROVENANCE

Collection of Davide Cugini (Albino, 1896 – Bergamo, 1991), Bergamo; acquired ca. 1991-1992, Brescia, private collection.

LITERATURE

- Collezioni private bergamasche*, 4 vols., Bergamo, 1980, vol. I, no. 142;
- Paolo Dal Poggetto, "Antonio Cifrondi", *I Pittori Bergamaschi. Il Settecento I*, Bergamo, 1982, pp. 482-483, no. 70, p. 500, under no. 128, p. 608, fig. 2;
- Enrico De Pascale, in *Pittura e verità. La commedia umana nell'arte di Antonio Cifrondi*, exh . cat., Clusone, Palazzo Marinoni-Barca, 22 December 2007 – 30 March 2008, ed. by Enrico De Pascale and Maria Cristina Rodeschini, pp. 34-35, no. 10;

-Lanfranco Ravelli, *Antonio Cifrondi. Riflessioni, riletture, aggiornamenti*, Brescia, 2008, pp. 35, 93, ill. 38;

-Filippo Piazza, in *Moretto, Savoldo, Romanino, Ceruti. Cento capolavori dalle collezioni private bresciane*, exh. cat., Brescia, Palazzo Martinengo Cesaresco, 1 March – 1 June 2014, ed. by Davide Dotti, pp. 214-215, no. 94.

EXHIBITIONS

-*Pittura e verità. La commedia umana nell'arte di Antonio Cifrondi*, ed. by Enrico De Pascale and Maria Cristina Rodeschini, Clusone, Palazzo Marinoni-Barca, 22 December 2007 – 30 March 2008;

-*Moretto, Savoldo, Romanino, Ceruti. Cento capolavori dalle collezioni private bresciane*, ed. by Davide Dotti, Brescia, Palazzo Martinengo Cesaresco, 1 March – 1 June 2014.

Our *Old Man under the Snow*, possibly an allegory of winter¹, seems to be pausing and is almost at a standstill. He has thrust the stick that helps him walk under his right arm as he warms his hands under his armpits, bending over. His gaze challenges us as we witness his pitiable appearance, dressed in the simplest clothing, patched together for the cold season. The snow is falling thick, and the surrounding landscape is already featureless. This figure, no doubt a portrait, is described in various shades of brown, and stands out perfectly against the white of the slopes and the bluish-grey of the sky. The hills are stylized, barely sketched in fluid, thinned-out pigment, a technique typical of Cifrondi's style in his last decades.

While this type of figure relates to the "painters of reality" movement, the artist's interpretation is uncommon for genre painting. The figure expresses his feelings and his experience, appearing face to face with the spectator "resigned, shivering under a snowfall"². This is personal destiny, transformed by the artist into a poetic moment by means of a dense palette and swift, strong handling, yet retaining the spontaneity of a snapshot in his depiction of the figure.

The painting dates from about 1720, at the beginning of the last decade of Cifrondi's life and career, when he came into contact with Brescia's cultural milieu. During these years, he produced a substantial series of portraits of ordinary people, depicted in the midst of their daily activities, such as *The Miller* (Brescia, Pinacoteca Tosio Martinengo) – another figure described in a wonderful range of whites – or women engaged in sewing (Brescia, Pinacoteca Tosio Martinengo) or knitting (Paris, Galerie Canesso), thus creating an entire epic of daily life, conveyed with both naturalism and poetry.

Much remains to be discovered about Antonio Cifrondi and his oeuvre, which is known to us principally through the *Life* written by the Bergamasque biographer F. M. Tassi (1793), who relates that he was apprenticed to a painter from Clusone, the Cavaliere del Negro, of whom nothing is known. Thanks to a scholarship, he was able to study in Bologna, where it appears he was a pupil of Marcantonio Franceschini (1648 – 1729), at least for three years, around 1665; he then journeyed to Rome in 1679.

Tassi tells us about a long trip in the early 1680s with his brother Ventura, to Turin and France, first to Grenoble where he carried out work in the Grande Chartreuse and then to Paris, in the service of the Duc d'Harcourt. Regarding this long journey, no evidence, either pictorial or archival, has so far been found. The return to his homeland must have taken place between 1686 and 1687, because in February 1687 he purchased a house in Clusone. Until the decoration of Casa Zanchi – from 1712 to 1716 – he worked in his hometown, and in Bergamo and its valleys, mainly painting religious subjects. It was in the ambitious decoration of the Villa Zanchi (now scattered through various private collections), meticulously described by his biographer Tassi, that one finds the beginning of his very personal approach to the painting of reality.

The last years of Cifrondi's life, between 1715 and 1730, are also poorly documented. It seems from the

rediscovery of many paintings in Brescia that he settled in that city, where – in his own state of extreme poverty – he developed his endearing figures of *pitocchi*, paupers or philosophers, in the summary style and technique that define his art.

Notes:

1- This is suggested by Dal Poggetto with respect to another painting of a figure under the snow, now in the Pinacoteca Tosio Martinengo, Brescia (p. 609, fig. 2, p. 485, no. 80), which he associates with two other figures in the same museum, considering them allegories of summer and autumn.

2- Maria Silvia Proni, *La nobiltà del quotidiano: tra mito e realtà*, Verona, 2022, p. 82.