

Galerie Canesso

Tableaux anciens

LUCA GIORDANO

Christ and the Samaritan Woman

Fresco on lime on a wicker support

Tondo, 43¾ in (111 cm) diameter, unframed; 56¼ in (143 cm), framed

c. 1685



Fig. 1

PROVENANCE

Commissioned by Andrea (1640-1715) and Lorenzo Del Rosso (1646-1719), Florence, palazzo Del Rosso, via Chiara (executed c. 1685 during the artist's stay at the Del Rosso residence ; inv. 1689: "Giordano, La Sammaritana al pozzo, tondo a buon fresco su la calce figura di un braccio bellissima, stimata piastre 120") ; by descent, Florence (? until nineteenth-early twentieth century) ; Galleria Antiquaria di R. Bellini e B. Berti, Florence, before 1972; private collection, Florence; 2017, with Daniele Trabalza, Foligno ; 2018, London, Canova Fine Arts Ltd. (according to the exhibition catalogue, 2023).

LITERATURE

- Michelangelo Gualandi, *Memorie originali italiane riguardanti le belle arti*, Bologna, 1840-1845, vol. II, pp. 118, 120-121 (transcribed at <https://www.memofonte.it/home/files/pdf/delrosso.pdf>);
- Oreste Ferrari, Giuseppe Scavizzi, *Luca Giordano*, Naples, 1966, vol. II, pp. 330-331 ;
- Silvia Meloni Trkulja, "Luca Giordano a Firenze", in *Paragone*, 267, 1972, pp. 34, 68, 66 note 1, fig. 35 ;
- Oreste Ferrari, Giuseppe Scavizzi, *Luca Giordano. L'Opera completa*, Naples, 1992, vol. I, pp. 102, 307, no. 333b ;
- Francesca Baldassari, Massimo Francucci, Luca Castrichini, "Luca Giordano. Due tondi 'su la calce' per i Del Rosso", in Daniele Trabalza, exh. cat., Todi, 2017, pp. 48-49, figs. 1-1bis ;
- Riccardo Lattuada, in *Luca Giordano. Baroque Master in Florence*, exh. cat., Florence, Museo di Palazzo Medici Riccardi, 30 March – 5 September 2023, ed. by Riccardo Lattuada, Giuseppe Scavizzi, Valentina Zucchi, pp. 94-95, no. 6.

EXHIBITIONS

Luca Giordano. Baroque Master in Florence, Florence, Museo di Palazzo Medici, 30 March – 5 September 2023.

This painting of *Christ and the Samaritan Woman*, like *Christ among the Doctors* (Minneapolis, Institute of Art, 2021.98), belonged to Andrea and Lorenzo Del Rosso, the Florentine collectors and Florentine patrons of Luca Giordano. This work was created during the Neapolitan painter's second sojourn in the Tuscan capital, while he was lodged in the Palazzo Del Rosso between 1685 and 1686. Part of a series of four executed for this family, these are the only two works that have known to have survived; the missing ones represent "La Mad[onn]a con Giesù in culla, san Gius[epp]e e San Giov[ann]i al natu[ral]e fatte di buon fresco" and "La Carità con tre puttini" (*Quadreria di Andrea e Lorenzo del Rosso*, 1689). In addition to forty-seven works by Luca Giordano, the inventory lists paintings by Filippo Napoletano, Pacecco De Rosa and Spagnoletto (Ribera), illustrating a taste for Neapolitan painting in this seventeenth-century Florentine collection, a phenomenon already noted by Roberto Longhi¹.

Giordano was well-connected with Florentine collectors, having already established links with them in Naples. During his two sojourns in Florence, he worked both in fresco and on canvas for the most important families in the grand duchy: the Medici, the *marchesi* Neri and Bartolomeo Corsini, Francesco Riccardi (involving the colossal project of decorating the gallery and library in what is now the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi), Niccolò Martelli, the Samminiati, the Rinuccini, and the Acciaiuoli. All these names bear witness to the intense artistic interaction between Naples and Florence during the second half of the seventeenth century².

Our tondo displays a specific painting technique – fresco applied to lime, itself fixed to a wicker frame – which demonstrates that it was conceived from the outset by the artist as a movable artwork, like the

other three *tondi* in this series. As the biographer Baldinucci reminds us, the technique originated in Florence with the work of the Tuscan painter Giovanni da San Giovanni (1592–1636) in his famous scenes executed for the Medici at villa Petraia (now housed in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence). The fresco method was later adopted by Baldassare Franceschini, known as Il Volterrano (1611-1689), for a tondo with the *Sacrifice of Isaac* (Florence, private collection). Luca Giordano embraced this Florentine technique, as well as the tondo format, which recurs so frequently during the Renaissance in Tuscany. His brushwork was renowned for its speed, and our picture was executed in two days (fresco, as its name suggests, is painted on fresh plaster, and each section of the work must be completed before it dries, thus not exceeding a single day).

The subject of the encounter between Christ and the Samaritan woman is recounted only in Saint John's Gospel (IV.1-30). While resting near a well, Christ asked a woman who had come there to draw water to let him drink, to her great astonishment, as he was not supposed to address Samaritans because of the antagonism between the Jews and the people of Samaria.

Seated before broken antique columns that evoke the Old Testament upon which the New Testament rests, Christ is depicted with a halo of white rays and his ample drapery, conversing with the Samaritan woman. The dynamic poses of the two figures, their interaction, the contrasting tones of their drapery, and the overall freshness of painting, typical of frescoes, lend perfect rhythm to the foreground. One can discern touches of pigment applied "a secco" (wet on dry), emphasizing a line of drapery or a burst of light. The background opens onto a bright, rural landscape, with alternating a lakeside scene, trees, and a sky crossed by beautiful white and blue clouds.

A brilliant artist, known to posterity as "Luca fa presto", Giordano was prolific and versatile, evolving as he studied what he saw during sojourns in Rome, Florence and Venice, before returning relatively late to his native Naples. In 1692, he left for Spain, summoned by King Charles II, and spent an extremely successful time there, painting grand frescoed decoration in the Escorial, the Casa del Buen Retiro in Madrid, and the Cathedral in Toledo – an intense and colossal output that continued for a decade. On the death of Charles II in 1702 Giordano returned to Italy, where he remained unceasingly active in Naples to the end of his life.

Notes:

1 - Roberto Longhi, "Un collezionista di pittura napoletana della Firenze del '600", *Paragone*, 75, 1956, pp. 61-64.

2 - See Oreste Ferrari, "I tempi di Firenze", in *Luca Giordano. L'Opera completa*, Naples, 1992, vol. I, pp.77-103; Elena Fumagalli, "Napoli a Firenze nel Seicento", in "*filosofico umore*" e "*maravigliosa speditezza*". *Pittura napoletana del Seicento dalle collezioni medicee*, exh. cat., Florence, Gallerie degli Uffizi, 19 June 2007 – 6 January 2008, pp. 75-119; *Luca Giordano. Baroque Master in Florence*, exh. cat., Florence, Museo di Palazzo Medici Riccardi, 30 March – 5 September 2023, ed. by Riccardo Lattuada, Giuseppe Scavizzi, Valentina Zucchi.