

Executive Summary

1. Brief description of Item

Jacopo Carrucci, called Pontormo (1494–1556/7)

Portrait of a Young Man in a Red Cap (Carlo Neroni), c. 1530

Oil on panel, 92.1 x 73 cm

Inscribed on the paper held in the sitter's right hand: *Domi [...] n [i]/ ul e [...] elli*

A half-length portrait of a young man wearing a black leather jerkin over a grey shirt, as well as a small scarlet cap. In his right hand he holds a letter with the inscription given above. The paint is generally fairly thin, particularly in areas of carnation (face, hands), where the underdrawing is quite visible. The background is a uniform greyish-green.

2. Context

Provenance

Casa Gerini, Florence, to 1825; sold as Alessandro Allori (lot 276) to Earl of Caledon: thence by descent to current owner

Exhibition History

The National Gallery, London, 2008: *Renaissance Faces: Van Eyck to Titian*, no. 69

Selected Bibliography

G. Vasari, *Le Vite*, eds. R. Bettarini and P. Barocchi, 9 vols. (Florence, 1966–87), vol. V, p. 325; *Raccolta di ottanta Stampe rappresentanti di Quadri più scelti de' Signori Marchesi Gerini* (Florence, 1759), p. XXXIV, pl. XXVIII; G. Waagen, *Galleries and Cabinets of Art in Great Britain* (London, 1857), pp. 151–52; G. Ewald, 'Appunti sulla Galleria Gerini e sugli affreschi di Anton Domenico Gabbiani' *Kunst der Barock in der Toskana* (conference proceedings, Florence, 23–26 September 1974) (Munich,

1976), pp. 344–58, this citation p. 356, note 22; J. Cox-Rearick, *An Important Painting by Pontormo from the Collection of Chauncey D. Stillman*, sales cat. (New York, 1989), p. 43, note 55; P. Costamagna, *Pontormo* (Milan, 1994), pp. 244–5, no. 79a and p. 215, no. 68; E. Cropper, *Portrait of a Halberdier* (Los Angeles, 1997), 109; F. Russel, ‘A Portrait of a Young Man in Black by Pontormo’, *The Burlington Magazine* vol. CL (2008), 675–77; C. Plazzotta in L. Campbell, M. Falomir, J. Fletcher, L. Syson, *Renaissance Faces – Van Eyck to Titian*, exh. cat. (London, 2008), pp. 224–227, no. 69; C. Falciani and A. Natali, eds., *Bronzino – Artist and Poet at the Court of the Medici* exh. cat. (Florence, 2010), p. 80

3. Waverly Criteria

This picture meets the criterion stipulated under **Waverly 2** as a work of art of outstanding aesthetic importance. Executed over bold free-hand underdrawing, now visible in places, it is a bravura effort, conveying character and ideals through composition, posture, and paint handling. The brushwork is fairly thin, but applied with swooping, energetic motion. The sitter is arranged for maximum effect, his arms describing a circular motion, at ease but poised. The grey of his puffy sleeves contrasts with the black of his jerkin to strike a balance between the sophisticatedly suave and the martially virile. His posture accentuates further the tapering shoulders and proportionally small head. The strong accent of red provided by the cap emphasises the alertness written across his face. All this is subtly enhanced by the low point of view.

DETAILED CASE

1. Detailed description of item if more than Executive Summary, and any comments

Hailing from the Tuscan village of Pontorme, Jacopo Carrucci spent his entire career in Florence. He probably passed through the studios of Leonardo da Vinci, Mariotto Albertinelli and Piero di Cosimo, before assisting Andrea del Sarto in the early 1510s, most notably on the decorative programme at Santissima Annunziata, to which he made autonomous contributions. He first entered Medici employment in 1515 with fresco decorations at Santa Maria Novella, a relationship that would continue for the rest of his life, to be interrupted only by the expulsion of the ruling family during the short-lived Florentine Republic of 1527–30. In the 1530s and 1540s he was essentially court artist to the Medici, heading such prestigious decorative projects as the tapestry series detailing the life of Joseph and the monumental, later destroyed, decoration of the Medici Church of San Lorenzo, both commissioned by Grand Duke Cosimo I.

Despite the fact that he was a slow, perfectionist worker, he executed commissions from a range of other patrons, religious and secular alike. Among the latter was the decoration of the marital bedchamber of the patrician Pierfrancesco Borgherini, executed in 1515–18 along with Sarto, Bacchiacca and Francesco Granacci, three of his panels from which are preserved in the National Gallery, London—the only other significant paintings by the artist in Britain.

Pontormo ranks among the great portraitists of the sixteenth century, working in an expressive—or so-called ‘mannerist’—style of portraiture that integrates stylistic assertion and characterisation. Only around fifteen portraits by Pontormo survive, most of which are in Italy. The *Portrait of a Young Man in a Red Cap* had been thought lost since the eighteenth century. In 1759, it was recorded in the Gerini collection with an attribution to Alessandro Allori and engraved by Violante Vanni after a drawing by Lorenzo Lorenzi. Despite Waagen having recorded it (also as by Allori) in the collection of Lord Caledon sometime prior to 1857, it was not until Francis Russell saw it there and published it in 2008 that it

emerged from scholarly oblivion. It subsequently went on loan to the National Gallery, London, until it was sold in 2015.

Only two directly comparable pictures have come to the market in the last thirty years. One, the *Portrait of a Young Man*, formerly said to be of the young Duke Cosimo, was last sold at Christie's New York in 2014, but is in severely compromised condition. The other is the *Portrait of a Halberdier*—also often, although wrongly, thought to be of Cosimo—which was famously sold to the Getty from the Stillman Collection at a record price in 1989. The present picture is superior to the former, at least in its present state, but perhaps less immediately striking than the latter. This is in part due to it being of less meticulous finish and the consequent transparency of some paint layers, but it is surely also due to it being covered by grime and layers of degraded varnish. Conversely, the Getty painting is a transfer to canvas, while the present picture is on its original panel. In any case, *The Portrait of a Young Man in a Red Cap* is of the same moment in Pontormo's career as both pictures cited, and is similarly magisterial in its depiction of youthful pride, assertion and beauty.

2. Detailed explanation of the outstanding significance of the item

The *Young Man in a Red Cap* is virtually certain to be identical to a picture mentioned by Vasari in his *Vita* of Pontormo (1568) as depicting the young patrician and citizen Carlo Neroni, painted by Pontormo 'at the time of the siege of Florence.' It is mentioned in the same breath as a portrait of Francesco Guardi, another young patrician, which has been identified with the stylistically as well as thematically very congenial Getty *Portrait of a Halberdier*.

The traumatic and bloody siege of Florence by Imperial troops happened in 1530–31. At the time the fledgling Florentine Republic, formed at the expulsion of the Medici in 1527, was allied with the French. The siege was part of the Holy Roman Empire's wars against that powerful rival and was sponsored by Pope Clement VII Medici, who—under some duress—had recently entered into treaty with Emperor Charles V, but simultaneously nurtured a strong desire to reclaim the city of his birth for his family.

Neroni was born in 1511, making him eighteen for most of the siege period. This age corresponds well to that of sitter of the portrait. He wears what is probably a wedding ring on the fourth finger of his left hand. Neroni was married to the merchant-banker's daughter Caterina di Giuliano Capponi in 1530, making that the likely date of the portrait. The letter that the sitter holds in his right hand is inscribed *Domi* [...], likely for *Domino* or *Domina*[e], i.e. 'to Don' or 'to Donna...'. He is holding it close to his breast, apparently sliding it under his jerkin, which would indicate that it is of personal nature, and thus quite possibly another reference to the marital alliance proposed first by Carol Plazzotta as the specific context for the portrait's commission.

Neroni would later hold offices under Cosimo I, but at the time of his siege he was a republican sympathiser. He was the great nephew of Diotosalvi Neroni, whose republican leanings had led to his family being exiled from Medici-run Florence in the previous century. Neroni also commissioned a version of the *Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand* from Pontormo, probably identical with a panel in the Uffizi sometimes given to his pupil Bronzino. The artist's treatment of the subject, also known to us in a more elaborate version now in the Galleria Palatina, rather overtly ties the early Christian story of sacrifice to the blood shed during the siege. Furthermore, Neroni's father-in-law, Giuliano Capponi, was an ardent supporter of the *Piagnoni*, the Savonarolan reform movement aligned with the republic, while his bride Caterina's uncle Niccolò served twice as *gonfaloniere* of the Republic.

Surely not coincidentally, Pontormo had already decorated the Capponi family chapel in Santa Felicità with unforgettable results: his *Deposition of Christ* painted for that space between 1525–28 is one of his supreme achievements.

Beyond its martial context, the portrait is, thus, a rousing depiction of youthful idealism. Along with the *Halberdier*, it is one of the quintessential visual expressions of Republican sentiment in Renaissance Florence, as well as a first-rate example of Florentine portraiture of the sixteenth century.