

Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest, note of case hearing on 14 October 2015: Pontormo *Portrait of a Young Man in a Red Cap* (Case 12, 2015-16)

Application

1. The Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest (RCEWA) met on 14 October 2015 to consider an application to export Pontormo's *Portrait of a Young Man in a Red Cap*. The value shown on the export licence application was £30,700,000 which represented the private sale price of £29m plus £1.7m commission which the applicant later clarified was commission of \$2.5m converted into GBP on the date of the application. The expert adviser had objected to the export of the portrait under the second Waverley criterion, on the grounds that it was of outstanding aesthetic importance.
2. Seven of the regular members were present (Aidan Weston-Lewis was not able to be there) and they were joined by three independent assessors, acting as temporary members of the Reviewing Committee.
3. The applicant did not confirm whether the value included VAT or not or whether VAT would be payable in the event of a UK sale. The applicant also confirmed that the owner understood the circumstances under which an export licence might be refused and that, if the decision on the licence was deferred, the owner would allow the portrait to be displayed for fundraising.

Expert's submission

4. The expert adviser had provided a written submission stating that *Portrait of a Young Man in a Red Cap*, executed in oils over bold free-hand underdrawing some of which, particularly in the head and hands, appears now visible, was a bravura piece of painting. Character and ideals were conveyed through composition, posture and the handling of paint. The brushwork was fairly thin but the carefully applied tonal layers are distinguished by swooping, energetic strokes. The sitter was arranged for maximum effect, his arms describing a circular motion, at ease but poised. The grey of his puffy sleeves contrasted with the black of his jerkin to strike a balance between the sophisticatedly suave and the martially virile. His posture accentuated further the tapering shoulders and proportionately small head. The strong accent of red provided by the cap emphasised the alertness written across his face. All this was subtly enhanced by the low point of view.
5. Born in the Tuscan village of Pontorme, whence comes his nick-name of Pontormo, Jacopo Carucci 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. Pontormo ranked 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.

6. The *Young Man in a Red Cap* can almost certainly be identified with a picture mentioned by Vasari in his *Vita* of Pontormo (1568) as depicting the young patrician and citizen Carlo Neroni, painted 'at the time of the siege of Florence' (1530-31). It is mentioned in the same breath as a portrait of a Francesco Guardi, another young patrician, which has been identified with the Getty *Portrait of a Halberdier* which is both stylistically and thematically comparable with the portrait under discussion. The siege of Florence by Imperial troops was both traumatic and bloody. The fledgling Florentine Republic, formed at the expulsion of the Medici in 1527, was allied to the French. The siege was part of the wars of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, against Francis I of France. The siege was sponsored by the Pope, Clement VII Medici, who, under some duress, had recently signed a treaty with Charles. The Pope also backed the siege as he wanted to reclaim Florence, the city of his birth, for his family.

7. Neroni was born in 1511, making him eighteen for most of the period of the siege. That age is compatible with the appearance of the youth in the portrait. In addition he wears what is probably a wedding ring on the fourth finger of his left hand. In 1530, the probable date of the portrait, Neroni married Caterina di Giuliano Capponi, a merchant banker's daughter. In his right hand the young man holds a letter, which is inscribed *Domini...* (likely for *Domino* or *Domina(e)*), i.e. 'to Don' or to 'Donna'. He is holding it close to his breast and appears to be sliding it under his jerkin, which would indicate that the letter is of a personal nature and it may indeed be a reference to the marital alliance proposed first by Carol Plazzotta as the specific context for the portrait's commission.

8. Neroni would later hold office under Duke Cosimo I, but at the time of the siege he was a republican sympathiser as was to be expected of a man whose great uncle, Diotosalvi Neroni, together with his family, had been exiled for republican leanings from Medici-run Florence in the previous century. Neroni's connection with Pontormo was not restricted to this portrait, he also commissioned from him a version of *The Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand*. This may be the painting, sometimes attributed to Pontormo's pupil, Bronzino, in the Uffizi. Pontormo's treatment of the subject, also known to us in a more elaborate version now in the Gallerai Palatina, suggests an overt connection between this early Christian story of sacrifice to the blood shed during the siege. Further republican connections between the Capponi and Neroni families are demonstrated by the fact that Neroni's father-in-law, Giuliano Capponi, was an ardent supporter of the 'Piagnoni', the Savanarolan reform movement aligned with the Republic, whilst his bride Caterina's uncle, Niccolo, served twice as 'gonfaloniere' of the Republic. It is surely not a coincidence that Capponi who had already commissioned Pontormo to decorate his family chapel in Santa Felicita with unforgettable results should have found it fitting that Pontormo should paint his daughter's future husband.

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

Applicant's submission

10. The applicant had stated in a written submission that *Portrait of a Young Man in a Red Cap*, while outstanding is not a unique work with regard to British holdings of Italian Mannerist paintings. The National Gallery already has four other paintings by Pontormo of exceptionally good quality, all in excellent condition. They also have a magnificent portrait by Bronzino on loan from the Bingham Collection from the same period as the current Pontormo, as well as several other striking works by that artist. In addition they have a very beautiful *Portrait of a Young Man Holding a Letter* by Rosso Fiorentino from the same general era. Additionally, the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool has a magnificent *Portrait of a Man with a Helmet* by Rosso Fiorentino, and the Royal Collection, Windsor, has the striking *Lady in Green* (possibly a daughter of Matteo Sofferoni) by Bronzino.

Discussion by the Committee

11. The expert adviser and applicant retired and the Committee discussed the case. They noted the paucity of examples of works by Pontormo, given that most of the fifteen known portraits by the artist are in Italy (one notable exception being *Portrait of a Halberdier*, J. Paul Getty Museum, USA, which has been transferred from panel to canvas). They considered the unusual history of this painting which had only been rediscovered, reattributed and published by Francis Russell as a Pontormo in 2008. The painting had been attributed to Alessandro Allori, when it was sold to the Earl of Caledon in 1825. However, the committee noted the words 'Portrait frate Bronzino' on the bookplate of probably the same Earl, which is glued to the back of the panel, so there has also been an early attribution to Bronzino.

12. The Committee concluded that the artist had created an extraordinarily powerful and striking portrait of a young man. The picture's low viewpoint, subtle colourings and twisted mannerist pose had been combined to produce a spontaneous impression of the young patrician's handsome appearance, elegant hands, well-cut expensive clothes, incipient activity and determination. This superb portrait in excellent condition, if somewhat dirty, was felt to offer a dense and complex potential for further research.

Waverley Criteria

13. The Committee voted on whether the portrait met the Waverley criteria. Of the ten members no one voted that it met the first Waverley criterion. All ten members voted that it met the second Waverley criterion. No members voted that it met the third Waverley criterion. The portrait was therefore found to meet the second Waverley criterion.

Matching offer

14. The Committee recommended the sum of £30,618,987 (representing the private sale price of £29m plus £1,618,987 commission of \$2.5m converted into GBP at the date of the meeting at the rate 1.5441756581) as a fair matching price.

Deferral period

15. The Committee agreed to recommend to the Secretary of State that the decision on the export licence should be deferred for an initial period of four months [this to be increased by an additional three months if the painting was exempted from capital taxation and the undertaking given included a request for 3 months' notice of sale to be given]. If, within that period, the Arts Council received notification of a serious intention to raise funds with a view to making an offer to purchase the portrait, the Committee recommended that there should be a further deferral period of six months.

Communication of findings

16. The expert adviser and the applicant returned. The Chairman notified them of the Committee's decision on its recommendations to the Secretary of State. The applicant confirmed that the owner would accept a matching offer at the price recommended by the Committee if the decision on the licence was deferred by the Secretary of State.

17. The expert adviser agreed to act as champion if a decision on the licence was deferred by the Secretary of State.