

Caylus



PIETRO PAOLINI
(Lucca, 1603–1681)

Retrato de poeta

Lucca, circa 1645-1650

Óleo sobre lienzo

98 × 73 cm

PROVENANCE:

Madrid, Ansorena sale, 21 May 2024, lot no. 124.

RELATED LITERATURE:

PELLEGRINI, E. (dir.), *Descrivere Lucca—Viaggio tra note, inventari e guide dal XVII al XIX secolo*, Pisa: ETS, 2009.

SALERNO, L., “Il dissenso nella pittura. Intorno a Filippo Napoletano, Caroselli, Salvatore Rosa e altri”, *Storia dell’Arte*, 5, 1970, pp. 34-64.

TRENTA, T., *Memorie e documenti per servire all’Istoria del Ducato di Lucca*, vol. VIII, Luca: Accademia lucchese di scienze, lettere ed arti, 1822.

VERNEJOUL, N. de, “Pietro Paolini, un caravaggesco bizzarro”, in Vittorio Sgarbi (dir.), *I pittori della luce da Caravaggio a Paolini*. Laurenzana: Contemplazioni, 2022, pp. 60-74.

_____. *Pietro Paolini (1603-1681), peintre caravaggesque de l’étrange*, Paris: ARTHENA, 2024.

Pietro Paolini was a major figure on the artistic scene in Lucca, a small Tuscan republic jealous of its independence. After training in Rome, he was profoundly influenced by the art of Caravaggio, and in the mid-1620s he became close to Angelo Caroselli. Returning to Lucca in the early 1630s, after a brief stay in Venice, he spent his career in the service of the Church and the noble families of his city. For a long time, his work retained a marked Caravaggesque component combined with a Venetian one, initially strongly influenced by Veronese before Bassano replaced him as his model. In the 1640s, Paolini opened up to new ideas and became close to the painters of the Dissenso, who were aware of their artistic genius and open to neostoicism, such as Salvator Rosa. He founded the Accademia del Naturale, introducing the aesthetic themes of the new naturalist school. Simone del Tintore, Antonio Franchi and Girolamo Scaglia passed through his academy. His artistic corpus has evolved considerably in recent years, with the appearance of new works from both the Roman and Lucchese periods.

The poet's portrait shows a peasant with a bald head, a *mondone*, in a three-quarter view, half-length in front of a neutral background. The man has the thick, weathered skin of the elderly and a few hairs on his chin. Seated at his work table, he holds his quill in his right hand with

a sure grip, while his left hand firmly holds the bulky book open on his work table, next to a small copper container that serves as an inkwell. Concentrating on his task, he gives the viewer a restrained, almost mocking smile. The light coming from the left emphasizes his emaciated face, his bald head, his forehead and cheeks furrowed by deep wrinkles; a bald laurel braid crowns his head. The drapery around him is in shades of blue-grey, highlighting his still vigorous naked torso. Depth is suggested by the oblique position of the figure and by the ledger pointing outwards from the painting.

From 1645-1650 onwards, the *mondone*¹ became the essential physiognomy of the peasant musician, but also of Paolini's wise man. The prototypes are *Le joueur de piva* (Ajaccio, Musée Fesch) and *Le joueur de luth* (Puerto Rico, Ponce, Museo de Arte de Ponce), which had great success and were reproduced in numerous versions by the painter and his studio. The iconography derives from the bald men wearing morosopher hats invented in Rome by Ribera, in the Nordic tradition of the *tutto raso*, a comedy character, the idiot, very ugly with his shaven head, who makes the audience laugh. The laurel, symbol of Apollo, is suitable for musicians, poets and heroes.

As is often the case with the artist, the painting has a strange character. The nocturnal illumination imbues the scene with a mysterious atmosphere, and the slightly tilted position of the bust and the forced diagonal of the book create an impression of instability. The meagre laurel wreath seems so derisory that it hardly evokes glory and honours. The very thin lips, sketching out a carnivorous smile that reveals the teeth, and the slanted gaze are worrying. The attribution is based on this strangeness; it is also based on stylistic and iconographic comparisons with works by the artist from the years 1645-1650. The figure has the same thin mouth, long, narrow nose, well-curved ears and slightly menacing gaze as the *Lute Player*; the only thing missing is the veins on his forehead, which have been replaced by the laurel branch. The still life plays a minor role, but the inkwell, quill and book are beautifully crafted. The hands are close to those of Achilles among the *Daughters of Lycomedes* (Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum) and the *Allegory of Sight and Touch* (private collection). We date this portrait around 1650, when the artist made the *mondoni* an essential part of his lexicon, when musical scenes evolved into peasant scenes, where the *mondone*, the old shepherd, advocates a return to simple life, nature and music.

¹ Trenta, 1822, p. 142 : Trenta mentions the 'siffatte mezze figure capricciose e grottesche'. À propos de Buonviso Buonvisi, il parle d'un achat de 'due mezze figure di questi curiosi villani, ed uno poco fa n'esistva fra gli altri in casa Baroni che per essere pelati sulla testa presero il nome di Mondoni'.

The sources mention in Luchese collections, other types of mondoni, including two Philosophers in the Mansi and Raffaelli collections.

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