

Lot 15



Auction Fine Art

Date 15.05.2023, ca. 14:10

Preview 11.05.2023 - 10:00:00 bis
14.05.2023 - 16:00:00

NEGRETTI, ANTONIO
(‘Antonio Palma’)
around 1515 Serina - after 1578 Venice

Title: Veturia stops Coriolanus from destroying Rome at the City Gates.
Technique: Oil on canvas.
Mounting: Relined.
Measurement: 180 x 298cm.

Provenance:
Private ownership, Germany;
Art dealer, London, until 1993;
Maria Pospisil, Palazzo Sagredo, Campo Santa Sofia, Venice, until 1987;
Francesco Pospisil, Palazzo Sagredo, Campo Santa Sofia, Venice.

Peter Humfrey discusses the present painting in a scholarly essay he is currently writing.

The artistic profile of Antonio Negretti, called Antonio Palma, is still not fully understood today, as he is often confused with his uncle Jacopo Palma the Elder or his son Jacopo Palma the Younger. Nevertheless, this artist managed to carve out his own place in 16th-century Venetian painting and establish himself as the author of large paintings, often depicting episodes from Roman history or the Bible.

Born in Serina, north of Bergamo, he moved to Venice with his uncle Palma the Elder after the death of his father. His uncle also died shortly afterwards. From the early Venetian period come his contacts with Bonifacio de' Pitati, Palma the Elder's most talented collaborator, who was to take charge of the master's workshop and make it one of the most productive painting workshops of the 16th century. By 1530-1540, Negretti's work was plausibly embedded in the practices of Bonifacio's workshop in the capacity of a journeyman. However, it is difficult to discern his contribution within Bonifacio's extensive and as yet little researched oeuvre, which consists mainly of large paintings of sacred and profane subjects, sometimes entrusted to collaborators. However, this type of engagement seems to have been flanked from the outset by autonomous production, mostly for private use, arising from compositions in the workshop. It was only after Bonifacio's death in October 1553, and in connection with his succession at the head of the workshop, that his figure gradually acquired greater visibility and autonomy.

The present work depicts Veturia and her son Gnaeus Marcius Coriolanus at the gates of Rome: It is an episode from the war between the Volscians and the Romans, handed down by various Roman historians. More precisely, we see the mother embracing the Roman commander Coriolanus, who had sided with the Volsces after being expelled from Rome, and imploring him not to destroy Rome by appeasing their anger. Behind them we see the camp of the soldiers on the left and on the right the city of Rome - the homeland saved by Veturia's pleas.

Antonio Palma's work is compositionally inspired by a painting from Bonifacio's workshop, which is probably why it was created around 1550, when the master was still alive and the artist established himself as an author of large-scale works with many figures. In fact, the large painting should not be considered a copy, but a richer and more refined version of a prototype by the master. There are indeed more figures, the space is realised more precisely and a multitude of details causes the viewer to shift his gaze in search of new visual impulses. On the left, the painter inserts figures into the composition that are taken from Roman sculptures he had probably seen in an antique collection in Venice. The seated soldier healing his foot is undoubtedly modelled on the famous "Spinario", a bronze or marble copy of which probably existed in Venice, while the soldiers standing next to it seem to have been inspired by Roman sculptures that were also kept in a Venetian palace.

Because of its size, it was probably a painting for a "portego", i.e. for the most majestic and representative room in a Venetian palace. This was the place where the select society gathered to entertain, eat, listen to music and dance. The present work actually comes from the Palazzo Sagredo in Venice, but we do not know whether it was painted for this place or whether it was later acquired by a member of this famous family of collectors. Certainly this composition was admired and appreciated by the Venetian clientele: We know of a second version with several variations in Burghley House, near the town of Stamford, England.

We are grateful to Peter Humfrey, St Andrews, who confirmed the attribution of the present painting on the basis of a high-resolution digital photograph.

Estimate: 78.000 € - 90.000 €

