

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Bernardo Strozzi

(Genoa 1581 – 1644 Venice)

Saint Sebastian and Saint Rocco

c. 1635 – 1636

oil on canvas

79 x 127 cm.;

31 1/8 x 50 in.

Provenance

Private collection, Genoa.

Literature

A. Matteucci, 'Note sull'attività genovese di Bernardo Strozzi', *Emporium*, vol. CXXIV, no. 743, November 1956, p. 202, reproduced in black and white on p. 203, fig. 9;

L. Mortari, *Bernardo Strozzi*, Rome 1966, p. 130, fig. 167, reproduced in black and white;

L. Mortari, *Bernardo Strozzi*, Rome 1995, p. 128, cat. no. 215, reproduced in black and white;

A. Orlando & D. Sanguineti, *Bernardo Strozzi 1582 – 1644. La conquista del colore*, exh. cat., Genoa 2019, pp. 276-277, cat. no. 41, reproduced in colour.

Exhibited

Genoa, Palazzo Nicolosio Lomellino, *Bernardo Strozzi 1582 – 1644. La conquista del colore*, 11 October 2019 – 12 January 2020.

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The following note is based on an entry by Anna Orlando in the 2019 catalogue, *Bernardo Strozzi 1582 – 1644. La conquista del colore* (see *Literature*). It has been translated from the original Italian text by Colnaghi:

In all probability neither Anna Maria Matteucci nor Luisa Mortari knew the present work from life, since the former dated it to the ‘late period of the artist’s time in Genoa’, and the latter ‘much further back, around 1618’.¹ The painting instead relates to Strozzi’s full maturity, at a time when he was already in Venice, as shown by the many possible comparisons with some well-known protagonists of his famous canvases painted in the Venetian lagoon: from the *St Sebastian* now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (fig. 1),² to the great altarpiece of *St Benedict*, to the *St Anthony of Padua* in the church of St Nicolò dei Tolentini, to give just a few examples. But, above all, the comparison with Strozzi’s canvas depicting *St Rocco*, conserved in the Scuola Grande di San Rocco in Venice, is the most revealing (fig. 2). While it is reasonable to envisage the artist collaborating with fellow painters or pupils for large-scale commissions, the same cannot be said for works of reduced dimensions like the present one, which was evidently commissioned by a private collector as a domestic reproduction of a larger, public devotional picture; slightly less vigour can be recognised only in the *St Sebastian*. The painting’s idiosyncratic style is most evident in the white tones. The virtuosity of the white handkerchief, that is unrelated to the painted narrative, is typical of Strozzi in that colour was always meant to dominate his compositions.

A sheet from the ‘Album Sagredo’ is conserved at the Louvre, Paris, and shows the preparatory studies for the hands of *St Rocco* (fig 3).³ This, together with the choice of a dark background, are further evidence that suggest that the painting was realised during Strozzi’s Venetian period. A similar plasticity can also be found in his *Allegory of Painting* of c. 1636 at the Galleria Nazionale della Liguria a Palazzo Spinola, Genoa (fig 4).⁴ A second sheet with a *Head of a woman*, formerly in the Suida Manning Collection, is today in Austin,⁵ and a third one with a *Head of a young woman* at the Marty de Cambiaire Gallery in Paris, in coloured pencil and chalk on cerulean paper,⁶ are useful in retracing the different facial typologies of *St Sebastian* employed by the master in the ‘30s and later by his fellow pupils.

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The dog biting a loaf of bread, or bringing it to the poor – just as St Sebastian and St Rocco endowed them with their care – is also a personal reference to the life of Strozzi, who spent twelve years as a Capuchin monk and transposed that reality onto our painting using a style that is suffused with mysticism and magic.

As noticed by Fiorella Spadavecchia, St Rocco is the thaumaturge who heals and St Sebastian is the patron saint against diseases, especially the plague, which was present in people's collective memory – or rather 'altrettanto intenso desiderio di scongiurarne altre per il futuro' (the intense wish to avoid future ones) was vivid in the aftermath of its outpour in 1630-31. This explains why the iconography of these two saints was recurrent in both public and private commissions.

There is a similar painting at the Pinacoteca di Bologna (inventory no. 130), where the scene is developed vertically: it can be ascribed to the workshop of Strozzi, measures 104.5 x 86.5 cm., and was formerly in the Zambecari collection.

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Figure 1. Bernardo Strozzi, *St Sebastian tended by St Irene*, about 1631 – 36.
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

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Figure 2. Bernardo Strozzi, *St Rocco*.
Scuola Grande di San Rocco, Venice

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Figure 3. Bernardo Strozzi, *Right hand raised, and left hand holding a stick*, recto.
Musée du Louvre, Paris

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Figure 4. Bernardo Strozzi, *Allegory of Painting*, c. 1636.
Galleria Nazionale della Liguria a Palazzo Spinola, Genoa

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Footnotes

¹ A. Matteucci, 'Note sull'attività genovese di Bernardo Strozzi', *Emporium*, vol. CXXIV, no. 743, November 1956, p. 202, reproduced in black and white on p. 203, fig. 9; L. Mortari, *Bernardo Strozzi*, Rome 1995, p. 128, cat. no. 215, reproduced in black and white.

² See L. Borean, 'Bernardo Strozzi e Venezia tra mestiere, collezionismo e mercato nel Sei e Settecento', in *Bernardo Strozzi 1582 – 1644. La conquista del colore*, exh. cat., Genoa 2019, pp. 325-332, fig. 3.

³ Inventory no. RF 38821; see F. Mancini, *Dessins génois XVIe-XVIIIe siècle. Inventaire general des dessins italiens. Musée du Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins*, Paris – Milan 2017, p. 225, cat. no. 328.

⁴ See G. Langosco, in *Bernardo Strozzi 1582-1644. La conquista del colore*, exh. cat., Genoa 2019, pp. 274-275, cat. no. 40.

⁵ in. 532.1999; see J. Bober, *I grandi disegni italiani del Blanton Museum of Art dell'Università del Texas*, Cinisello Balsamo 2001, cat. no. 32.

⁶ 258 x 176 mm.; see L. Marty de Cambiaire, *Dessins Génois Genoese Drawings*, exh. cat., Paris 2019, pp. 28-29, cat. no. 9.