

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Sebastiano Filippi II,
called il Bastianino
(Ferrara, c. 1532 – 1602)

*Margherita Gonzaga d'Este
wearing a wedding dress,
with her dwarf Isabella*
oil on canvas
190 x 135 cm.;
74 3/4 x 53 1/8 in.

Provenance

With Jan Muller, Belgium, by 2021, from whom acquired by the present owner.

Literature

T. Ferruda, in *Festschrift per Vittorio Sgarbi. Settanta scritti e altrettanti auguri*, (ed.) E. Pepino, Masone 2022, pp. 260, 346, fig. 39, reproduced in colour;
N. Büttner & A. Orlando (eds.), *Rubens a Genova*, exh. cat., Milan 2022, pp. 127, 383, cat. no. 17, reproduced in colour;
National Gallery of Ireland, *Lavinia Fontana: Trailblazer, Rule Breaker*, exh. cat., forthcoming, reproduced (as a comparative image).

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Exhibited

Genoa, Palazzo Ducale, Appartamento del Doge, *Rubens a Genova*, 6 October 2022 – 22 January 2023, no. 17.

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This important portrait recently re-emerged on the Northern European antiques market and was immediately recognised as a Sebastiano Filippo by Tommaso Ferruda, who published it in the essay collection dedicated to Vittorio Sgarbi.¹ I agreed on the attribution from the beginning: typical of the Ferrarese artist are the style, the tactile brushstrokes, the delicate florid faces, and the figures' traits, which are not too pronounced. Alessandra Pattanaro also confirmed the attribution.

My suggestion to identify the young and pale noblewoman, who is sumptuously dressed and styled, with Margherita Gonzaga (Mantua, 1564 – 1608), the third wife of Alfonso II d'Este Duke of Ferrara, has been fully confirmed. Bastianino was close to the Duke and his young wife. Already in 1888, Venturi reported that the artist worked for Alfonso II to execute the works in Castello and the Ducale Palace and that Margherita gave him the tasks of restoring the important works that her brother Vincenzo had sent her from Mantua. She also employed the artist for the decoration of her private chapel and brought some paintings by him back to Mantua.²

A sign of great trust was the commission of the portrait of Margherita for her marriage, which has recently been identified by Stefano L'Occaso in the deposits of the Pinacoteca del Castello Sforzesco, Milan (fig. 1).³ I agree with his intuition, which is further verified by the historical records: *'[Margherita] Era vestita con un abito di broccato d'argento, e le copriva le spalle un ricchissimo manto di velluto azzurro a strascico, tutto trapuntato di aquile d'argento massiccio e costellato di gioie. In capo aveva la corona ducale tempestata di perle, di diamanti, di smeraldi di altre pietre preziose; al collo portava una collana di grosse perle di inestimabile valore, e di perle erano cosparsi i biondi capelli influenti giù per le spalle'*.⁴

While in the nuptial portrait at Castello Sforzesco Margherita is visibly a fifteen-year-old, young bride, in the present painting she looks slightly older, yet her pose and the ornate curtains are very similar. The jewels, the necklace, and the pearl earrings are also the same. The painting's quality, which recent polishing has enhanced, is nevertheless much higher: the heavy silk dress is interwoven with gold which is used to depict various floral motifs

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alternated with the ducal crown; the border is decorated with pendants in gold, rubies, sapphires and pearls, as can also be found in the belt and the long necklaces on the corset; and Margherita's beautiful visage is framed by a double collar, which is beautifully painted. A transparent veil, also interwoven with gold, is the last precious detail: fastened to the shoulder by a pendant, the angel on a small boat is perhaps a sad allusion to unhappy dynastic events. Not a child, but a dwarf, gives flowers to the young Duchess. She is also sumptuously dressed with jasmine in her hair. It is Isabella, the indivisible companion of Margherita, that Torquato Tasso also celebrated in the *Rime*. The composition has a parallel in the *Allegory of Bacchus* at the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Ferrara (fig. 2). Across the two paintings, Bastianino demonstrates great ability even in the execution of the smaller precious details, and the viewer can almost feel the swish of the silk and the jingling of the gold rings.

Sebastiano Filippi, son of Camillo, and collaborator of the Dossi, is one of the major representatives of the Ferrara School in the second half of the 16th century. This generation had an important influence on the following one, which included Ippolito Scarsella, called Scarsellino, and Carlo Bononi. Famous for his strong Michelangelesque style, as can be noted in the fresco on the apse of Duomo in Ferrara of *The Last Judgement* (1577 – 1581) and in the works for the Certosa of San Cristoforo (here he was also influenced by the late works of Titian), Filippi was one of the main protagonists working on the new construction sites of the Este family: the Castello, the Palazzo Ducale, and various other *Delizie*.⁵

Valentina Lapierre

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Figure 1. Sebastiano Filippi II, called il Bastianino, *Margherita Gonzaga d'Este*.
Pinacoteca del Castello Sforzesco, Milan

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Figure 2. Sebastiano Filippi II, called il Bastianino, *Bacchic Allegory*.
Pinacoteca Nazionale, Ferrara

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Footnotes

¹ T. Ferruda, in *Festschrift per Vittorio Sgarbi. Settanta scritti e altrettanti auguri*, (ed.) E. Pepino, Masone 2022, pp. 260-263, p. 346, fig. 39, reproduced in colour.

² See Appendix, G. Marcolini & G. Marcon, in *L'impresa di Alfonso II. Saggi e documenti sulla produzione artistica a Ferrara nel secondo Cinquecento*, (eds.) J. Bentini & L. Spezzaferro, Bologna 1987, pp. 23-69. For a profile of the third Duchess, see S. L'Occaso, 'Margherita Gonzaga d'Este: pitture tra Mantova e Ferrara intorno al 1600', in *Accademia Nazionale Virgiliana di Scienze Lettere Arti. Atti e Memorie*, vol. LXXIII, Mantua 2005, pp. 81-126.

³ S. L'Occaso, in *Museo di Palazzo Ducale di Mantova. Catalogo generale collezioni inventariate. Dipinti fino al XIX secolo*, Mantua 2011, pp. 203-204 (for the painting at Castello Sforzesco, see S. A. Colombo, in *Museo d'Arte Antica*, Milan 1999, pp. 312-314, factsheet no. 705. It is there attributed to a generic North Italian painter of the 16th – 17th centuries, the coat of arms with the Este eagle on the trawl having not been recognised. L'Occaso also mentions a three-quarter-length copy at the Museo di Palazzo Reale, Genoa.

⁴ 'Margherita was dressed in silver brocade with a rich velvet blue cape with a trawl, full of silver eagles and jewels. She was wearing a crown of pearls, diamonds, emeralds, and other precious stones, and a necklace of large pearls of extreme values; pearls were to be found also throughout her long hair'. Extract (p. 37) from Alfonso Lazzari, who collected sources and news of various types on the three wives of Alfonso II d'Este. For the triumphal entry of the young wife in Ferrara, see A. Lazzari, 'Le ultime tre duchesse', in *Rassegna nazionale*, vol. CLXXXV, a. XXXIV, Florence 1912, pp. 23-42.

⁵ See F. Arcangeli, *Il Bastianino*, Ferrara 1963; *Bastianino. La pittura a Ferrara nel secondo Cinquecento*, exh. cat., (ed.) J. Bentini, Bologna 1985; V. Romani, *Per Bastianino. La pale di San Paolo e un 'Libro' di disegni del Castello Sforzesco*, Cittadella 2001; *Lampi sublimi a Ferrara. Tra Michelangelo e Tiziano. Bastianino e il cantiere di San Paolo*, exh. cat., (eds.) A. Stanzani, A. Bliznukov & C. Guerzi, Ferrara 2017; *Bastianino. Das lebende Kreuz von Ferrara. Die Restaurierung eines vergessenen Altarbildes aus dem 16. Jahrhundert*, exh. cat., (eds.) R. Contini, R. Flogaus & M. Zielke, Petersberg 2021.