



Veronese Workshop (Possibly Benedetto Caliari)

Veronese

Venetian, 1528 - 1588

Benedetto Caliari

Venetian, 1538 - 1598

Saint Jerome in the Wilderness

c. 1575/1585

oil on canvas

overall: 108 x 84.1 cm (42 1/2 x 33 1/8 in.)

framed: 142.1 x 116.5 x 8.3 cm (55 15/16 x 45 7/8 x 3 1/4 in.)

Samuel H. Kress Collection 1961.9.47

ENTRY

In keeping with a well-established iconography, the penitent, half-naked saint is shown contemplating a crucifix and about to mortify his flesh by beating his breast with a stone. Prominently visible are his attributes of a tame lion, the Bible he translated into Latin, and the memento mori symbols of a skull and an hourglass.

While the generic style is clearly that of Paolo Veronese, there exists some critical disagreement both on the extent of the master's involvement and on its place in his career. Following Wilhelm Suida and Bernard Berenson, Terisio Pignatti and Rodolfo Pallucchini accepted the picture as autograph; [1] but Richard Cocke called it a workshop piece, and Fern Rusk Shapley conceded that it is weaker in quality than Veronese's altarpieces of the same subject from Santa Maria degli Angeli, Murano (now in San Pietro Martire), and Sant'Andrea della Zirada, Venice (now in the Gallerie dell'Accademia). [2] Although the present appearance of the picture is compromised by its poor condition, details, such as the weak drawing of the saint's right foot and the awkward conjunction of the lion and the saint's left leg, do indeed seem to indicate that it is by a studio assistant. This assistant may perhaps be most plausibly identified as Paolo's younger brother Benedetto Caliari (1538–1598), who is already recorded as a collaborator on the paintings at San Sebastiano in the 1550s, and who became Veronese's primary artistic heir after his death in 1588. [3] Benedetto's own artistic personality is usually submerged beneath that of his brother, but the Gallery's picture shares a number of stylistic

traits with two of his best-attested independent works: the *Washing of the Disciples' Feet* and the *Christ before Pilate* (both Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice), painted in the late 1570s for the now-demolished church of San Niccolò ai Frari. [4] In particular, the treatment of the drapery in the *Saint Jerome* closely resembles that in the foreground draperies of the *Washing of the Disciples' Feet*: hard, shiny, and planar; and in both works, the musculature, too, falls into similarly stylized patterns.

The attribution of the present picture to an assistant, perhaps Benedetto, rather than to the master himself in turn affects any assessment of the date. Whereas Pignatti and Pallucchini placed the picture close to the Murano *Saint Jerome* of 1565, [5] Shapley and Annalisa Perissa Torrini argued for a rather later date, close to the Sant'Andrea version, which is generally agreed to date from circa 1580. [6] This later dating is the more convincing: apart from the fact that the lion is closely repeated from its counterpart in the finer Sant'Andrea altarpiece, the Gallery's picture shares with this work the planar pose of the saint and the twilight, atmospheric landscape, both of which contrast with the Murano version, with its clear projection of firmly modeled forms into space. The saint's profile also closely resembles that of other elderly figures by Veronese of about this time, such as the foremost king in the Hermitage *Adoration of the Magi* of circa 1580–1582. A likely date, therefore, is one close to that of Benedetto's two paintings of the late 1570s for San Niccolò ai Frari, or perhaps slightly later.

According to Suida, the work may be identical with “a little picture with Saint Jerome” by Veronese recorded by Carlo Ridolfi (1648), Marco Boschini (1664), and Anton Maria Zanetti (1733) in the passage leading to the sacristy in the church of San Sebastiano in Venice. [7] This suggestion is not necessarily contradicted by the probable provenance of the Gallery's picture from the collection of Sir Peter Lely in the late 17th century, since Zanetti could have been simply repeating the information of Boschini, without realizing that the picture had already been sold to England. Yet Ridolfi's phrase “piccolo quadretto” seems to imply a picture considerably smaller than one measuring nearly four feet by three, and the identification remains doubtful.

Shapley recorded the existence of a coarse copy in the Museo Provincial, Gerona. [8]

Peter Humfrey

March 21, 2019

NOTES

- [1] Wilhelm Suida and Fern Rusk Shapley, eds., *Paintings and Sculpture from the Kress Collection Acquired by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, 1951–1956* (Washington, DC, 1956), 192; Bernard Berenson, *Italian Pictures of the Renaissance: Venetian School* (London, 1957), 1:130; Terisio Pignatti, *Veronese* (Venice, 1976), 1:131; Rodolfo Pallucchini, *Veronese* (Milan, 1984), 86–87, 177; Terisio Pignatti and Filippo Pedrocco, *Veronese: Catalogo completo dei dipinti* (Florence, 1991), 178; Terisio Pignatti and Filippo Pedrocco, *Veronese* (Milan, 1995), 1:266–267.
- [2] Richard Cocke, “Review of *Veronese, L’Opera Completa*, by Terisio Pignatti,” *The Burlington Magazine* 119 (1977): 787; Fern Rusk Shapley, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings* (Washington, DC, 1979), 1:526.
- [3] For Benedetto Caliari, see Luciana Crosato Larcher, “Note su Benedetto Caliari,” *Arte veneta* 23 (1969): 115–130; Cecil Gould, “Caliari, Benedetto,” in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, ed. Alberto Maria Ghisalberti (Rome, 1973), 16:700–701; Luciana Larcher Crosato, “La bottega di Paolo Veronese,” in *Nuovi studi su Paolo Veronese*, ed. Massimo Gemin (Venice, 1990), 256–259; Diana Gisolfi, “Caliari. (1) Benedetto Calieri (2) Carlo Caliari,” in *The Dictionary of Art*, ed. Jane Turner (New York and London, 1996), 5:431–432; Hans Dieter Huber, *Paolo Veronese: Kunst als soziales System* (Munich, 2005), 33–48.
- [4] For these works and their dating, see Peter Humfrey and Allison Sherman, “The Lost Church of San Niccolò ai Frari (San Nicoletto) in Venice and Its Painted Decoration,” *Artibus et Historiae* 36, no. 72 (2015): 247–281.
- [5] Terisio Pignatti, *Veronese* (Venice, 1976), 1:131; Rodolfo Pallucchini, *Veronese* (Milan, 1984), 86–87, 177; Terisio Pignatti and Filippo Pedrocco, *Veronese: Catalogo completo dei dipinti* (Florence, 1991), 178; Terisio Pignatti and Filippo Pedrocco, *Veronese* (Milan, 1995), 1:266–267.
- [6] Fern Rusk Shapley, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings* (Washington, DC, 1979), 1:526; Annalisa Perissa Torrini, “San Gerolamo Penitente,” *Quaderni della Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici di Venezia* 15 (1988): 139.
- [7] Carlo Ridolfi, *Le maraviglie dell’arte, ovvero Le vite de gl’illustri pittori veneti, e dello stato*, ed. Detlev von Hadeln (Berlin, 1914), 1:309 (“Nell’andito nel passare in Sacrestia è picciolo quadretto di San Girolamo”); Marco Boschini, *Le minere della pittura* (Venice, 1664), 336; Anton Maria Zanetti, *Descrizione di tutte le pubbliche pitture della città di Venezia* (Venice, 1733), 325; Wilhelm Suida and Fern Rusk Shapley, eds., *Paintings and Sculpture from*

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE EDITIONS

Italian Paintings of the Sixteenth Century

*the Kress Collection Acquired by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation,
1951–1956 (Washington, DC, 1956), 192.*

[8] Fern Rusk Shapley, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings* (Washington, DC, 1979), 1:526.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support consists of a twill-weave, medium-weight fabric. The painting has been lined and the tacking margins have been removed, with consequent damage along all four sides. It also appears from x-radiographs and examination with a stereomicroscope that the ground is either very thin or nonexistent. The sky and background were apparently painted prior to the addition of the figure, and the paint was applied unusually thinly, with impasto restricted to the yellow highlights and some of the white on the saint's drapery.

The paint surface shows medium to heavy abrasion throughout and numerous scattered losses. Conservation treatment in 1986 involved the removal of extensive discolored retouching and overpaint, followed by extensive inpainting to match areas of original paint. Also removed at this time was a small branch above the saint's head, which was found to be a complete addition.

Peter Humfrey and Joanna Dunn based on the examination reports by Ann Hoenigswald, Jia-sun Tsang, and Carolyn Tallent

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PROVENANCE

Peter Lely [1618-1680], London; (his estate sale, at his residence, Covent Garden, 18 April 1682, fifth item on list);^[1] purchased by Anthony Grey, 11th earl of Kent [1645-1702];^[2] by descent in his family to Thomas Philip Robinson, 2nd earl De Grey of Wrest and 5th baron Lucas of Crudwell [1781-1859], Wrest Park, Ampthill, Bedfordshire;^[3] by descent in his family to Nan Ino Herbert Cooper, 10th baroness Lucas of Crudwell [1880-1958], The Hall, Horsey, Norfolk, and Struy Lodge, Beaulieu, Highland, Scotland; (Lucas sale, Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 16 November 1917, no. 123); purchased by Smith. Freiherr Detlev von Hadeln [1878-1935], Venice.

Saint Jerome in the Wilderness

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(Count Alessandro Contini-Bonacossi, Florence); sold 1954 to the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, New York;^[4] gift 1961 to NGA.

[1] The presence of the painting in this sale was brought to Fern Rusk Shapley's attention by Ellis Waterhouse (see his letter of 5 March 1959, in NGA curatorial files). The original sale catalogue consisted of a folded sheet of three closely printed pages, with no numbers assigned to the items in the lists; the sale consisted of paintings by artists other than Lely, drawings and pictures by Lely, and copies after Lely. The NGA painting is the fifth item on the first of these lists, described as "of Paul Veronese, St. Jerome, a whole figure with a Landskip [sic]," measuring in length 3 feet 6 inches and in "bredth [sic]" 2 feet 9 inches. See Brian Fairfax, *A Catalogue of the Curious Collection of Pictures of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham...also A Catalogue of Sir Peter Lely's Capital Collection of Pictures...*, London, 1758: 40, no. 5 (Fairfax numbered the lists); Charles Henry Collins Baker, *Lely and the Stuart Portrait Painters: A Study of English Portraiture before & after Van Dyck*, 2 vols., London, 1912-1913: 2:144; "Editorial: Sir Peter Lely's Collection," *The Burlington Magazine* 83, no. 485 (August 1943): 185-188; Ellis K. Waterhouse, "A Note on British Collecting of Italian Pictures in the Seventeenth Century," *The Burlington Magazine* 102 (1960): 54. In support of the identification is the exact correspondence of the dimensions (42 by 33 inches), and the account of the provenance published in 1834 (see note 3).

[2] Kent is listed as the purchaser in the account book of Lely's executors. See Diana Dethloff, "The Dispersal of Sir Peter Lely's Collection," *Journal of the History of Collections* 8 (1996): 18, 27. The full line of descent in his family is recorded in NGA curatorial files.

[3] As pointed out by Burton Fredericksen (message to Peter Humfrey, 7 October 2008), the picture appears as no. 116 in the catalogue of Earl De Grey's collection, published in 1834, *Catalogue of Pictures belonging to Thomas Philip Earl de Grey, at his house in St. James's Square*. The entry states that the picture had been purchased at the Lely sale by the Earl of Kent.

[4] On 7 June 1954 the Kress Foundation made an offer to Contini-Bonacossi for 16 paintings, including the NGA painting which was listed as *St. Jerome*. In a draft of

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE EDITIONS

Italian Paintings of the Sixteenth Century

one of the documents prepared for the count's signature in connection with the offer this painting is described as one "which came from my personal collection in Florence." The count accepted the offer on 30 June 1954; the final payment for the purchase was ultimately made in early 1957, after the count's death in 1955. (See copies of correspondence in NGA curatorial files.)

EXHIBITION HISTORY

2003 Loan to display with permanent collection, Birmingham (Alabama) Museum of Art, 2003-2014.

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- 1972 Fredericksen, Burton B., and Federico Zeri. *Census of Pre-Nineteenth Century Italian Paintings in North American Public Collections*. Cambridge, Mass., 1972: 40, 409, 647.
- 1973 Shapley, Fern Rusk. *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: Italian Schools, XVI-XVIII Century*. London, 1973: 42-43, fig. 76.
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