

CALLISTO FINE ARTS

17 Georgian House
10 Bury Street
London SW1Y 6AA
+ 44 (0)207 8397037
info@callistoart.com www.callistoart.com



Vincent Malò (Cambrai, 1602 / 07 - Roma, 1644)

Esther e Ahasuerus. (Allegory of Justice, with posthumous portrait of Francesco de' Medici, Prince of Tuscany)

Oil on copper, 53 x 44 cm

Possibly monogrammed "VM" on the boot of the African bystander.

Provenance: Marchesa Carlotta Giustiniani Fasciotti Cattaneo Adorno, Genoa.

A pupil of Rubens and Anton van Dyck in Antwerp, Malò established himself as a successful painter in Italy. Historians have placed the probable date of his arrival in Italy in 1634. He worked mostly in Genoa, where, according to contemporary sources, he trained Anton Maria Vassallo.

Our painting is an example of Malò's Italian works. The structure of the composition and the style of painting show the direct descent from Rubens, through the activity of the young Van Dyck.

The type of support and its size are significant. Copper allows the creation of translucent effects with colour, and of chromatism of great impact and drama.

The provenance of the painting is particularly prestigious. Carlotta Giustiniani Cattaneo Adorno, deceased in 1980, inherited three historic Genoese collections, including that of the Palazzo Cattaneo Adorno, with masterpieces by Rubens and Van Dyck.

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The subject of the painting is taken from the Bible. Ahasuerus, King of Persia, chooses Esther as Queen because of her beauty, but doesn't know that she is Jewish. She pleads with him to save the Jews of Persia and he agrees.

The lily on Ahasuerus' crown is a telling detail. Although the Persian King does not seem to be the portrait of a real person, the lily is an allusion to France, and French is also the fashion of Esther's dress. The shape of the sleeves dates it to the end of the 1630s, therefore to a moment when Malò had left Genoa and, on the way to Rome, resided in Florence.

As in many of his Genoese paintings, Malò seems to insert in this copper a portrait, specifically in the man to the far left of the scene, looking directly at us.



It is possible to suggest an identification of this sitter as Francesco de' Medici (1614-1634), fourth son of Grand Duke Ferdinando and of Cristina of Lorraine, therefore great grandson of Catherine de Medici, Queen of France, a detail that would fit well with the tone of celebration of France so evident in this copper by Malò'.

Francesco's brother, Lorenzo (1599-1648), was a well-known patron and collector, who might be responsible for commissioning this painting, in memory of his brother, from Malò'

Bibliographical Note:

A. Orlando, 'Anton Maria Vassallo', Genoa 1999, pp. 13; 18

A. Orlando, 'Vincenzo Malò tra Rubens e Van Dyck, in Van Dyck e i suoi amici. Fiamminghi a Genova 1600 ; 1640', exhibition catalogue, edited by A. Orlando, Genoa 2018, pp. 58 ; 65