

TOMASSO BROTHERS

FINE ART



Annibale Carracci (1560 - 1609)

Portrait of an African Woman holding a clock, c. 1583/85

oil on canvas

60 cm (23 ¾ in.) high
39.5 cm (15 ½ in.) wide

This very unusual portrait of an African woman, holding in her right hand a precious, beautifully gilded table-clock (German, around 1550 – 1600) of hexagonal shape is, in my opinion, an autograph work by Annibale Carracci. She looks at the viewer with startling self-confidence and commanding directness. She wears an expensive coral necklace and pearl earrings. Her left shoulder, arm and hand are obscured by the right arm of the previous protagonist.

After the painting's reappearance in 2005, it was subsequently cleaned revealing the presence of another figure. The right portion of the canvas revealed the right arm and shoulder part of the headdress of another woman, once the principal figure. The right arm of the woman, held down slightly diagonally, covers the left arm of the assisting African woman.

From October 2012 to January 2013 the picture was exhibited at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore (and subsequently in Princeton) in the exhibition "Revealing the African presence in Renaissance Europe". Joaneath Spicer, the Gallery's curator and author of the catalogue entry (?), sketched out a reconstruction of the original canvas, which would have been twice as wide and a little higher. The principal figure was probably seen almost frontally, but turned slightly to the left, slightly inwards to the

centre, just as the African woman turns slightly to the right, towards her.

The stylistic features of the present portrait show in my opinion and in that of Keith Christiansen the symptoms of the early style of the young Annibale Carracci, about 1583 -85: the bony structure of the right hand, which however is smoothed somewhat by the soft skin, and also the handling, the characteristically broad brushstrokes, the rich, yet dry impasto and the colours of the garment laid on her shoulders, white and beige-brown. The same could be said of what remains visible of the principal woman's dress.

One could compare the white collar in the "male head in profile" in Hampton Court (D. Benati, cat. of the exh. Annibale Carracci, Bologna 2006, no. II, 4), which Benati dates to ca. 1582-83. Also related are the bony, angular structures of the "Boy drinking" (version in Zurich, Nathan Fine Art, Benati 2006: 1583-84, and version in the Cleveland Museum of Art, formerly in the coll. of the late Peter Sharp; see the cat. of the exh. The Age of Correggio and the Carracci, Bologna- New York – Washington, 1986, p. 264, no. 84 with colour plate). In the Cleveland version the dry, but broad brushwork of the white shirt, sleeves and color can be compared. Also the portrait of a painter in the Lauro collection in Bologna (1583-84; Benati 2006, no. II,6) could be compared both for the bony structure of the right hand holding the brush and for the painterly brushstrokes of the white collar. Also the famous "Bean-Eater" (Rome, Galleria Colonna) can be compared for the angular folds of the sleeve of the white shirt.

One can also compare – for the treatment of the hands - the two similar "Holy Families", the one in Tatton Park (Holy Family with St. Francis; Benati 2006, pp. 172 – 173, III.20 : c. 1585; A. Brogi, Ludovico Carracci, Ozzano Emilia 2001, R 41 , refused as Ludovico; E. Schleier, Su tre quadri inediti o poco noti di Annibale e di Ludovico Carracci, Studi di Storia dell' Arte 13 2002, p.125 and note 2, and fig.1; Aidan Weston Lewis, review of Benati 2006, The Burlington Magazine april 2007, p. 259 as by Ludovico) and even more the "Holy Family with the Infant St. John and St. Elizabeth" in Nantes, Musée des Beaux-Arts (see B. Sarrazin, Catalogue raisonné des peintures italiennes du musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes, Paris 1994, p. 178, no. 127 with colour plate; Benati 2006, p. 130, as Annibale). One could mention also, for the treatment of the hands, the "St. Francis praying" (New York, Richard Feigen; Benati 2006, III.1 ca. 1582-83) and the other one, in the Pinacoteca Capitolina in Rome (Benati 2006, III.13), and, for the rims of the broken folds of the red cloak of "St. Jerome" (Modena, Banca Popolare dell' Emilia-Romagna; Benati III. 14 :1585(?). Finally compare the two major altarpieces of those years : "Christ crucified with six Saints", Bologna, S. Maria della Carità (from S. Nicolò di Strada San Felice), dated 1583, for the brushwork of the broken folds of the silky brocade of the cope (pluviale) of Saint Petronius, and, secondly, the "Baptism of Christ" in Bologna, S. Gregorio, dated 1585, but commissioned in 1583, for the treatment of the hands and the brushwork of the garments such as the white shirt or cloak of the youth in the left foreground and the broken folds of the golden-greenish dress of the angel playing the flute in the upper left.

Dr Erich Schleier
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Annibale Carracci and the Portrait of an African Woman Holding a Clock's provenance
Annibale Carracci was amongst the most admired painters of his time and a vital force in the creation of the Baroque style. He championed a return to the observation of nature but was also influenced by the great painters of the Northern Italian Renaissance, especially Titian, Correggio and Veronese. During the 1580s, Carracci was painting some of the most radical and innovative pictures in Europe. He introduced a new, broken brushwork technique to represent the effects of light on form and this gave his pictures an extraordinary sense of intimacy and immediacy. Through these means Annibale set the technical and artistic foundations the work of his near contemporary Caravaggio.

Born in Bologna, Annibale initially worked closely alongside his brother Agostino and cousin Ludovico, with whom he established the successful Accademia dei Desiderosi, later known as Accademia degli Incamminati, where great seventeenth-century masters including Guido Reni and Domenichino were introduced to the art of painting. In 1595 Annibale was summoned to Rome by the influential Cardinal Odoardo Farnese, who commissioned him a series of frescoes for his palace next to Campo de' Fiori. Whilst in Rome, Annibale's painting was transformed by his first-hand encounter with classical antiquity and the art of Michelangelo and Raphael, which he absorbed and integrated with his extraordinary feel

for the observation of nature and a bold application of paint. Rome's impact on the Bolognese master is clearly apparent in his frescoes for Palazzo Farnese, illustrating episodes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. These were completed around 1600, but were far from being his sole commissions in the city. Examples include *The Crowning of the Virgin* (circa 1596, New York, Metropolitan Museum); *The Birth of the Virgin* (circa 1598-99: Paris, Louvre); *The Pietà* (circa 1599-1600: Naples, Museo di Capodimonte); *The Three Maries at the Sepulcher* (circa 1600, Hermitage, St Petersburg); *The Assumption of the Virgin* (circa 1600-01: Rome, Santa Maria del Popolo); and another *Pietà* (1602/03-1607: Paris, Louvre). In 1605 Annibale fell gravely ill. He died four years later in Rome and was buried in the Pantheon, in the heart of the city.

The present painting dates to 1583-85, when Annibale was in Bologna. It is an extremely rare individual portrait of an African woman dating from the late sixteenth century. The sitter, finely dressed, holds the viewer's gaze with a commanding directness, endowing the picture with great immediacy and intensity of expression. Clearly a likeness observed from life, this painting also has a symbolic dimension. The gilded clock she holds would have been considered an extreme luxury at the time, exhibiting functions of the highest technological order for the period. It is made up of an outer hour ring with Roman numerals, for showing the time, and an inner ring with faint indications of Arabic numerals, suggesting that the clock also had an alarm function. It even appears to have been equipped with touch pieces for telling the time at night. The clock therefore exists not just as an audacious display of wealth but also as a clear signifier of the sitter's, or patron's, modernity. The clock also functions as a 'memento mori', a signifier of the passing of time and the transience of life. Parallel to this, the clock was also an attribute of Temperance, one of the four cardinal virtues alongside Justice, Prudence and Fortitude, which suggests the symbolic meaning of our picture may be two-fold.

As discovered by Dr Rachel McGarry, the earliest record of this painting dates to 1658, when it was listed in the collection of the Bolognese nobleman and connoisseur Cesare Locatelli, which comprised almost four hundred works. His inventory reads "a half-figure of a black woman with a dead head and a clock in her hand". The reference to a "dead head" is probably the result of a mistake on the note-taker's part, who understood what was actually a reference to a cut head, being the cut figure of the other sitter now missing, as a dead person's head. Locatelli's status as a keen collector and his location in Bologna, where the portrait was executed, together with the unique nature of the painting's subject, all suggest there is no doubt the reference applies to the present portrait. The canvas next appears in the 1712 inventory of the painter Carlo Maratti in Rome (1625 - 1713), listed as "Portrait of a black woman holding a clock", yet again an unmistakable description of the present work. Here, the missing central figure is referred to as "another head cut" ("Un quadro di grandezza di testa, rappresentante un ritratto d'una mora che tiene in mano un orologio, con altra testa tagliata").

When these fragmentary features of the other sitter were painted out is not documented, although it is probable that this happened between 1712 and 1722. The "ritratto d'una mora" was amongst the 124 paintings acquired by the Spanish crown in 1722 from Faustina Maratti, through Maratti's disciple Andrea Procaccini (Rome 1671-1734), who was painter to King Philip V of Spain and in charge of decorating the new palace that the monarch was having built outside of court, the Real Sitio de la Granja de San Ildefonso (the San Ildefonso Palace, in Segovia). In the inventory of the sale the picture is listed under no. 176 as "Una Mora con un orologio" ("A black woman with a clock"), leading us to believe that it was a portrait of a single figure.

The Maratti collection arrived in Barcelona around February 1723 and was presently sent to the King's new residence. There, our portrait is recorded in the various inventories taken of the royal furniture throughout the eighteenth century, including the comprehensive posthumous inventory of the King's possessions from 1747. It states that the portrait was in the Queen's antechamber, together with works by Domenichino, Agostino Carracci, Philips Wouwerman and Rosa da Tivoli. It remained in this room until Sir Arthur Wellesley, the 1st Duke of Wellington (Dublin 1769 – Walmer Castle 1852) stayed at San Ildefonso during the Peninsular War. It appears the Duke expressed an interest in a series of paintings, which the Quartermaster General for the province of Segovia, Ramón Luis de Escobedo, then presented to him as a gift. One of the twelve paintings was the present portrait: "Crate no. 3: [...] a Negress with a gilt clock in her hands" (see C.M. Kauffmann, revised by S. Jenkins, *Catalogue of Paintings in the Wellington Museum, Apsley House, London, 2009*, p. 10).

Provenance:

Cesare Locatelli (d. 1658), Bologna, mentioned in his 1658 inventory of assets as “no. 110. Meza figura d’una mora [...] et un horologio in Mano” (half-figure of a black woman [...] and a clock in her hand)

Carlo Maratti (1625-1713), Rome, mentioned in his 1712 inventory of assets as “ritratto d’una mora che tiene in mano un orologio” (portrait of a black woman holding in her hand a clock)

By descent to Faustina Maratti until acquired by the Spanish Crown through Maratti’s former pupil Andrea Procaccini, 1722

King Philip V of Spain (1683-1746), San Ildefonso Palace, Segovia, 1723

Recorded in the Queen’s Bedchamber, San Ildefonso Palace, Segovia, 1747

And by descent until August 1812

Given by the Quartermaster General for the province of Segovia, Ramón Luis de Escobedo, to Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington (1769-1852), August 1812

Private collection, England, until 2005

Exhibitions

Revealing the African presence in Renaissance Europe, no. 49

The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, USA, October 2012 – January 2013

Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton, USA, February 2013 to June 2013

Literature:

The National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors, Inc., NAWCC Bulletin, February 2006, vol. XLVIII, no. 360, cover illustration

J. Spicer ed., Revealing the African presence in Renaissance Europe, Baltimore, 2012, p. 43 and p. 130, no. 49