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**Baldassare Franceschini, called Il Volterrano**  
(Volterra 1611 - 1689 Florence)

*'La Pescatrice' (The Fishermwoman), or An Allegory of Fraud*

Oil on canvas, oval, in its original carved and gilded  
Florentine seventeenth-century frame

37 x 28<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (94 x 73.5 cm.)



## Provenance

Commissioned by the marchese Fedinando di Niccolò Ridolfi (1623–1676), Florence;  
By inheritance to his brother Pietro Ridolfi (*d.* 1688), Florence;  
Niccolò di Pietro Ridolfi (1662–1727), Florence;  
By inheritance to Paris Canonici Ridolfi, Florence (*d.* 1746);  
By inheritance to Stiozzi Ridolfi, Florence;  
Anton Filippo Stiozzi Ridolfi (1752–1824);  
Probably Conte Orsini, Florence;  
Acquired in Florence in December 1829 by Sir William Eden, 6th Bt of West Auckland and 4th Bt of Maryland (1803–1873), Windlestone Hall, County Durham (inscribed on the reverse of the frame and on the stretcher: *Sr. W. Eden 39*);  
Thence by descent to John Eden, 9th Bt of West Auckland and 7th Bt of Maryland, Baron Eden of Winton (1925–2020).

## Literature

F. Baldinucci, *Notizie de' professori del disegno da Cimabue in qua*, Florence 1681–1728, F. Ranalli (ed.), Florence 1845–47, vol. V, p. 160 (as 'una Pescatrice coll'amo e con un pesce, figurata per la Fraude');  
Recorded in a nineteenth-century ms. plan of the hang at Windlestone Hall, *Catalogue of Pictures, Windlestone*, hanging on the north side of the Gallery, oval, as: 'La Pescatrice said to be by Domenichino'; attribution crossed out and inscribed underneath: 'Albano/ The first Picture/ I ever bought. I/ found it in a Bankers/ office at Florence in/ Decr. 1829–30.';

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*Pictures*, ms. list, 19<sup>th</sup> century (in Sir William Eden's hand?), no. 24: 'Elisabetta Serani 1638–1664. La Pescatrice [...]'; with annotation: 'B<sup>t</sup> in Florence, 1829';

'The Private Collections of England, No. XXX Windlestone Hall', *The Athenaeum*, no. 2599, 18 August 1877, p. 217 (as Sirani, '[...] not without cause, sometimes ascribed to Albano');

*Description of pictures at Windlestone*, ms., 8 February 1884, fol. 2 r.: 'La Pescatrice/ This Picture is of the best period of the Bolognese school [...]';

*Pictures that are Heirlooms*, ms list, n.d.: "'La Pescatrice" oval by Elisabetta Sirani/ 1638–1664';

*Pictures at Windlestone*, ms. list, 1909, as hanging in East Hall, no. 12: 'Elisabetta Sirani'; with annotation: 'Has been attributed to Albano';

*Catalogue of the Pictures at Windlestone*, ms. list, n.d., no. 12: 'Elisabetta Sirani (1638–1664)/ La Pescatrice (oval)/ Elisabetta Sirani was a pupil of Guido Reni.';

Manuscript notebook, early 20<sup>th</sup> century and before 1922 (date when the Fabritius was purchased by the NACF), as hanging in the East Hall, no. 28 (crossed out and renumbered '25'): 'Elisabetta Sirani/ La Pescatrice, oval [...] Found in a banker's office, Florence, 1829.';

G. Ewald, in *Jahrbuch der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen in Baden-Württemberg*, 1975, p. 347;

G. Ewald, 'Unknown works by Baldassare Franceschini, called Il Volterrano (1611–1689)', *The Burlington Magazine*, CXV, no. 842, May 1973, p. 276 (as 'una Pescatrice coll'amo e con un pesce, figurata per la Fraude');

C. McCorquodale, *Catalogue of an Important Group of Drawings by Baldassare Franceschini called Il Volterrano*, Sotheby's, London, 3 July 1980, under lot 55;

G. Ewald and M. Kopplin, *Von Manierismus zum Barock, Italienische Gemälde des sechzehnten und des siebzehnten Jahrhunderts aus dem Besitz der Staatgalerie Stuttgart*, exh. cat., Staatgalerie, Stuttgart, 11 December 1982 – 13 February 1983, under no. 17, p. 52 (as 'una Pescatrice coll'amo e con un pesce, figurata per la Fraude');

M. Privitera, 'Disegni del Volterrano per i dipinti di Ferdinando Ridolfi', *Paragone*, LI, 33–34, 607–609, September–November 2000, pp. 68–69 and 78–79;

M.C. Fabbri, A. Grassi and R. Spinelli, *Volterrano Baldassare Franceschini (1611–1690)*, Florence 2013, pp. 216, 345 and 363–64, no. OP 78 (listed under Lost Works).

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This arresting painting – still in its magnificent mid-seventeenth-century Florentine frame, probably designed by the artist himself – is a recently rediscovered masterpiece by Baldassare Franceschini, also known as ‘Il Volterrano’ after his native town of Volterra.<sup>1</sup> Misattributed in the past to Domenichino (1581–1641), Francesco Albani (1578–1660) and Elisabetta Sirani (1638–1665), the painting has throughout its history been referred to as ‘La Pescatrice’ (‘The Fisherwoman’), although the first written reference to it records it also as *An Allegory of Fraud*. Filippo Baldinucci, Florentine intellectual and connoisseur of the Medici Grand Ducal collections, describes it in his *Notizie de’ professori del disegno* of 1681, a primary source for artists’ biographies of the period.<sup>2</sup> Datable to the 1650s, the picture was commissioned by the marchese Ferdinando di Niccolò Ridolfi (1623–1676) and remained in the same Florentine collection until the early nineteenth century, when it was acquired by Sir William Eden, 6th Baronet of West Auckland and 4th Baronet of Maryland (1803–1873), who brought it to England. Since then, it has remained in the same family collection for almost two centuries.

In his detailed account of Franceschini’s career, Baldinucci records the many paintings made by the artist of beautiful invention for the gentlemen of the Medici court.<sup>3</sup> The highly original composition of ‘La

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*Pescatrice* explores the theme of deceit and is precisely the sort of picture to which Baldinucci is referring. In a sylvan setting, a life-size figure of a lovely young woman, her hair loosely tied with a pink satin ribbon, dips her fingertips into a scalloped marble basin filled with water. She holds a bamboo rod, which presumably she has used to catch the two fish that now lie on the mossy stone ledge before her, though what hook or fishing bait she might have used to lure the unsuspecting fish remains unclear. Around each wrist she wears a double string of red coral beads that draw attention to her rosy complexion. These bracelets, and her lips, stand out as the only red accents within the picture. The dual identification of the subject as 'La Pescatrice' and as an Allegory of Fraud points to the young woman's powers of deception. As Alessandro Grassi has recently indicated, common to the iconography of Fraud and Deception is the use of imagery that relates to fishing and to the captured fisherman. Here the artist draws out the theme of love's deception, often played according to a literary topos by the beautiful woman who catches the trusting man. It is a theme that recurs frequently in Baroque culture and is also explored by Volterrano in his allegorical painting of *Venal Love* at the Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence.<sup>4</sup>



Fig. 1: Baldassare Franceschini, *Venus and Cupid*, c. 1657-58, oil on panel, 94.7 x 72.5 cm, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart.



Fig. 2: Baldassare Franceschini, *Perseus with the head of Medusa*, c. 1657-58, oil on canvas, 95 x 72.5 cm, Staatsgalerie Schleissheim.

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Marchese Ferdinando Ridolfi stands out among Franceschini's patrons not only for the large number of pictures he commissioned but also for their inventive design and interesting subject matter. Baldinucci notes a total of seven works owned by him, listing first a group of four works, including this one: *Venus and Cupid* (Staatsgalerie Stuttgart; fig. 1);<sup>5</sup> *'La Pescatrice'* (the present painting, described as a Fisherwoman with a hook and a fish, representing Fraud); *Perseus with the head of Medusa* (Staatsgalerie Schleissheim; fig. 2);<sup>6</sup> and *Cleopatra in the act of dying* (location unknown).<sup>7</sup> With the rediscovery of this painting, it is now certain that Franceschini designed three works of the same size and oval format with matching frames and probably a fourth as well, although since the latter is lost that remains to be verified.<sup>8</sup> Baldinucci then goes on to describe another masterpiece: the large painting of *Orpheus and Euridice*, which remained in the Ridolfi collection until the mid-eighteenth century and is now in Palazzo Pucci, Florence.<sup>9</sup> The final two works referred to by Baldinucci as painted for the Marchese are both landscapes, one a capriccio, the other drawn from nature; these too are untraced.<sup>10</sup>



Fig. 3: Baldassare Franceschini, Studies for the allegory of fraud, red chalk on paper, 188 x 254 mm, Sotheby's, London 3 July 1980, lot 55.

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A sheet with two studies in red chalk has been identified as preparatory for this painting (fig. 3),<sup>11</sup> and two other drawings may also be connected to the evolution of its design. The first formed part of a sale held at Sotheby's in 1980 of almost two hundred drawings by Volterrano from a single collection.<sup>12</sup> The more developed of the two studies depicts a woman resting her hand on a rod beside a fish, with a child in the background. Set within an oval, she adopts the same frontal pose as the female figure in the painting, although in the final composition the impish child is omitted.<sup>13</sup> Above it, also inscribed within an oval, is another less evolved sketch of a woman with a somewhat severe gaze – presumably an abandoned idea since it is crossed out. As Charles McCorquodale points out, it shares the same abbreviated means of suggesting hands and hair as Franceschini's sketches for the *Perseus* and the *Venus* ovals on a sheet now in Stuttgart (fig. 4).<sup>14</sup> One intriguing possibility is that the truncated drawing at the top of the Stuttgart sheet may also relate to the *Allegory of Fraud* and is perhaps an earlier idea for it.<sup>15</sup> The grouping of the ovals certainly suggests the paintings were designed together. Marta Privitera has connected one other drawing to Franceschini's '*Pescatrice*': a sheet at the Gabinetto dei Disegni e delle Stampe degli Uffizi, Florence, of a woman shown half-length, with a similar hairstyle and décolletage to the one depicted here.<sup>16</sup> Both the drawing and the painting convey her beauty and allure. In the finished work, Franceschini keeps the leafy setting sketched on the sheet catalogued by McCorquodale and, having eliminated the child, gives greater prominence to the marble basin, which is only lightly sketched on the sheet, drawing attention to the water. Thus he develops the sensual motif, already present in the study, of the woman dipping her fingertips in water.



Fig. 4: Baldassare Franceschini,, *Studies for the 'Venus and Cupid', 'Perseus' and the 'Allegory of fraud'*, red chalk on paper, 212 x 284 mm, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart.

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Datable to the 1650s, a decade of key importance in Franceschini's career, the set commissioned by the marchese Ridolfi was singled out by Mina Gregori in the seminal exhibition on Seicento Florentine Art of 1986 as being of extraordinary beauty.<sup>17</sup> The recent reappearance of this lost painting is a significant discovery, unanimously acclaimed by all three authors of the monograph on Il Volterrano (Florence 2013), Maria Cecilia Fabbri, Alessandro Grassi and Riccardo Spinelli. Dott.ssa Fabbri, welcoming '*La Pescatrice*' as a great find, regards it as sharing facial traits and stylistic similarities with the *Venus and Cupid* and the *Perseus* and so maintains her opinion as stated in the catalogue that like the others in the set, this painting is datable to about 1657–58. In her view, this commission was therefore undertaken a short time before the frescoes in the Room of Allegories at the Palazzo Pitti, decorated by Il Volterrano in 1658.<sup>18</sup> Alessandro Grassi also regards this painting as an extremely important new addition to the artist's body of work and considers it an extraordinary piece, not least because '*La Pescatrice*' is part of the group of works that Baldinucci attests were made for Ridolfi. On the dating he postulates that the present work might slightly predate the two ovals mentioned above, since in his view it recalls the *Sleeping Amor* of about 1649–50 (Galleria Palatina) and the two ovals of *Hylas* and *Venus and Cupid* of similar date (Museo Bardini, Florence).<sup>19</sup> He therefore proposes a dating for '*La Pescatrice*' in the first half of the 1650s. Riccardo Spinelli too hails this sensational find as 'a truly beautiful rediscovery that confirms the artist's mastery'. Dott. Spinelli also draws attention to the frame of Florentine manufacture as being of Medici opulence equal to the quality of the painting.

For further discussion of the frame, see the essay by Lynn Roberts:

<https://theframeblog.com/2021/06/22/il-volterrano-and-a-baroque-florentine-frame-part-of-a-thematic-programme/>

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## Note on Provenance

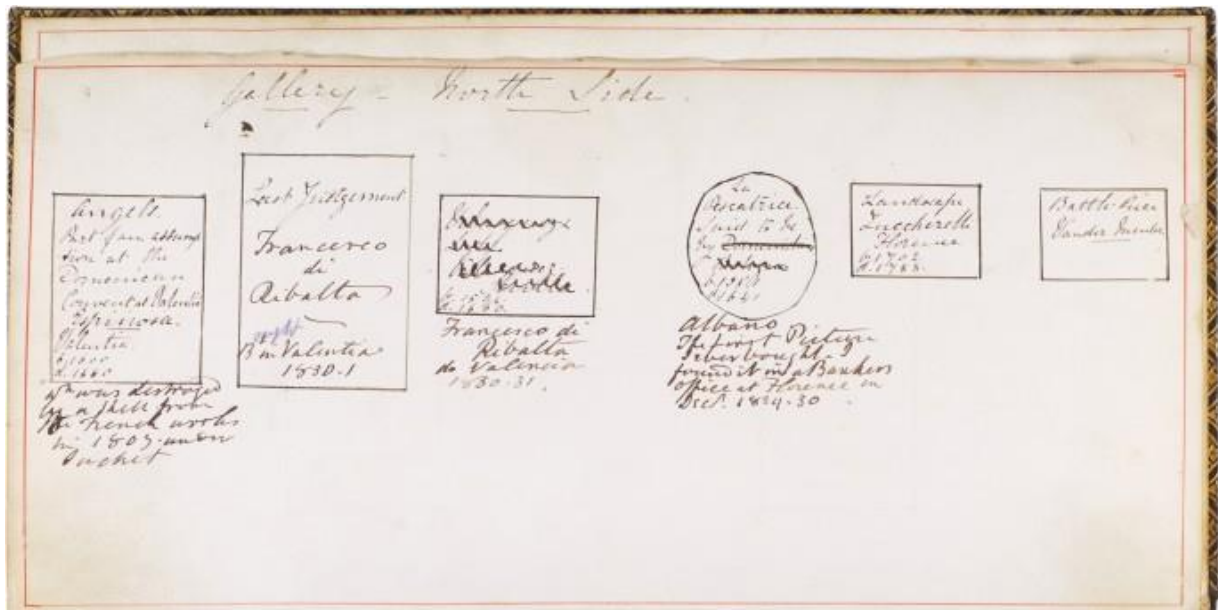


Fig. 5: Hanging plan of the gallery, north elevation, Windlestone Hall.

The art collection of Sir William Eden began with his purchase at the age of twenty-six of ‘*La Pescatrice*’. What an alluring catch this must have seemed to the young Englishman! He records buying the painting in Florence in 1829: ‘The first Picture I ever bought. I found it in a Bankers office at Florence in Decr. 1829’. He makes no mention of the other three ovals and, furthermore, the identity of the Banker on whose premises ‘*La Pescatrice*’ was first seen remains something of a mystery. Nonetheless, Maria Cecilia Fabbri has recently clarified the fate of one of the four ovals and proposed an intriguing possibility for this picture’s provenance. By the eighteenth century ‘*La Pescatrice*’ had been inherited by the Stiozzi Ridolfi, descendants of the original owner. Following the death of Anton Filippo Stiozzi Ridolfi in 1824, part of the collection was dispersed. Dott.ssa Fabbri has suggested that soon after this date two of the other ovals – the *Perseus* and the *Venus* – passed into the hands of Count Orsini (they are recorded as having come from his collection when sold in London in the 1850s).<sup>20</sup> ‘*La Pescatrice*’ is likely to have been separated from them after Stiozzi Ridolfi’s death. The fourth oval – the *Dying Cleopatra* – remained in the collection: a handwritten inventory of the Stiozzi Ridolfi paintings drawn up after 1824 records ‘*Cleopatra in the act of dying*’ as still

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in family possession. The inventory makes no mention of the other three in the set, which supports the idea that they were sold in 1824 or shortly thereafter.<sup>21</sup>

The record of the painting's acquisition, together with an attribution to Albani, is written by Sir William Eden onto a hand-drawn plan of the hang at Windlestone Hall, County Durham, where '*La Pescatrice*' was displayed alongside other works bought on his travels in Europe. Windlestone Hall, a neo-classical mansion designed by Ignatius Bonomi (1787–1870), was commissioned by Robert Johnson Eden, the fifth Baronet of West Auckland (1774–1844), to replace the family's sixteenth-century manor house, which stood on an 8000-acre estate. On the death of the fifth Baronet in 1844, the estate and Baronetcy passed to his first cousin once removed, Sir William Eden, who was already the fourth Eden of Maryland Baronet.

In his youth, Sir William travelled extensively, in Europe and later further afield to the West Indies and to North and South America. An able linguist, he cultivated his interest in art both as an amateur watercolourist and as a nascent collector, purchasing pictures in Italy and Spain. One of his most notable acquisitions was Carel Fabritius' *View of Delft* (1652), a rare and highly unusual painting, which he bought in Naples in 1836 and is now at the National Gallery, London.<sup>22</sup> There was a strong representation of Spanish pictures in the collection, which included, among others, works attributed to Vicente Maçip, Francisco Ribalta, Alonso Cano, Juan de Arellano, and three pictures by Murillo, purchases resulting from trips to Valencia in 1830–31 and Seville in 1830–32. In Spain Sir William met and later became friends with the celebrated writer Richard Ford (1796–1858), whose *Handbook for Travellers* is dedicated to him.<sup>23</sup> An anecdote of family lore recounts how it was thanks to Sir William taking his friend to visit some neighbours who lived at Rokeby that Ford chanced upon Velázquez's great masterpiece, *The Toilet of Venus*, a work which he had long been eager to trace and today one of the National Gallery's greatest treasures, 'The Rokeby Venus'.

The hanging plan entitled *Catalogue of Pictures, Windlestone* records '*La Pescatrice*' as displayed on the north side of the Gallery (fig. 5). Its oval outline – labelled '*La Pescatrice* said to be by Domenichino, Bologna' – is inscribed on the elevation.<sup>24</sup> The attribution is crossed out in Sir William's hand and '*Albano*' written underneath. It is interesting to note that already at the time of the picture's purchase in Florence, Il Volterrano's authorship seems to have been forgotten. Seen as a product of the Bolognese School and sometimes ascribed to Albani, '*La Pescatrice*' is described some years later in *The Athenaeum*, 18 August 1877, as 'a very pleasing and vivacious picture [...] The artifice of the motive is cleverly rendered in the

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voluptuous, but not lewd, suggestions of the subject'. Not long after, in a manuscript description of pictures at Windlestone dated 8 February 1884, '*La Pescatrice*' is judged to be the work of a Bolognese painter, its authorship still elusive: 'This Picture is of the best period of the Bolognese school. The grandeur in its design, the union of delicacy with strength, and the taste of its colouring render it possible to be the work of Guido, notwithstanding the character of the head has more individuality and is less idealized than was customary with that painter in his female heads. It may also be from the hand of Elisabetta Serani [sic], whose finest works of single figures are scarcely distinguishable from those of that master. In its execution may also be traced a resemblance to the style of Albano (cotemporary with the above) although a single life-sized figure by this master is scarcely known to exist. This Picture is remarkable for its being composed in its masses entirely of cold colours, a condition, as said by Reynolds, under which it was impossible to make a picture harmonious and satisfactory to the eye, which however was disputed and answered by Gainsborough by the production of his celebrated 'Blue Boy'. In the *Pescatrice* the colouring, mellow and harmonious notwithstanding, is no less evidence of the hand of a great painter than the beauty of the design.'<sup>25</sup>

Numerous nineteenth-century lists of pictures drawn up at Windlestone identify '*La Pescatrice*' as the work of Elisabetta Sirani, including one possibly in Sir William Eden's hand; another, also undated, entitled *Pictures that are Heirlooms*; and a later list dated 1909 of *Pictures at Windlestone*, which signals that its location had changed: by then it was hanging in the East Hall.<sup>26</sup> A manuscript notebook, early twentieth-century in date – and certainly before 1922, the year the Fabritius was purchased by the NACF – records it as a work by Sirani. A typed label on the reverse of the painting's frame reiterates the attribution to Sirani and names Sir Timothy Eden as its owner. Second son of Sir William Eden, 7th and 5th Bt (1849–1915), Sir Timothy, 8th and 6th Bt (1893–1963), succeeded him, his elder brother having been killed in action in 1914. Author of *The Tribulations of a Baronet*, Sir Timothy provides interesting information in the book's prologue on the art collecting of his grandfather, Sir William, whose taste for travelling and art were cultivated from a tender age and who in his lifetime was able to amass a fine collection.<sup>27</sup> As the writer of the piece in *The Athenaeum* neatly sums up: 'it is a rare thing to find a collection of old masters recently formed by a private individual [...] Windlestone is the 'youngest' English gallery of old pictures'.<sup>28</sup>

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- <sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the frame, see the essay by Lynn Roberts: <https://theframeblog.com/2021/06/22/il-volterrano-and-a-baroque-florentine-frame-part-of-a-thematic-programme/>
- <sup>2</sup> Baldinucci 1681–1728, 1845–47 (ed.), vol. V, p. 160.
- <sup>3</sup> ‘Per gentiluomini di quella corte fece molti quadri a olio di bella invenzione’, Baldinucci 1681–1728, 1845–47 (ed.), vol. V, p. 160.
- <sup>4</sup> Fabbri, Grassi and Spinelli 2013, pp. 121–26, no. 19, reproduced p. 125.
- <sup>5</sup> Inv. no. 3210; oil on panel, 94.7 x 72.5 cm. Fabbri, Grassi and Spinelli 2013, pp. 223–25, no. 64, reproduced.
- <sup>6</sup> Inv. no. 22444; oil on canvas, 95 x 72.5 cm.; Fabbri, Grassi and Spinelli 2013, pp. 222–23, no. 63, reproduced.
- <sup>7</sup> Fabbri, Grassi and Spinelli 2013, p. 366, no. OP 91. Baldinucci 1681–1728, Ranalli (ed.) 1845–47, vol. V, p. 160: ‘una Venere, che accarezza Amore; una Pescatrice coll’amo e con un pesce, figurata per la Fraude; un Perseo collo scudo, colla testa di Medusa, e una Cleopatra, in atto di morire’.
- <sup>8</sup> Information about Il Volterrano’s *Venus and Cupid* and its frame provided by Dr Christine Seidel, Curator at the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart.
- <sup>9</sup> Fabbri, Grassi and Spinelli 2013, pp. 215–17, no. 60, reproduced.
- <sup>10</sup> Fabbri, Grassi and Spinelli 2013, pp. 379–81, no. OP 155.
- <sup>11</sup> Red chalk on paper, 188 x 254 mm.
- <sup>12</sup> Sotheby’s, London, 3 July 1980, lot 55.
- <sup>13</sup> Information for the iconography of the drawing in which the child appears to be wearing horned headgear provided by Alessandro Grassi. He connects this motif with Andrea Alciato’s *Book of Emblems* (1531) and with imagery associated with Fraud. The painting’s iconography and other related aspects will be the subject of a future study by Dott. Grassi (Università degli Studi di Firenze).
- <sup>14</sup> Inv. C76/2541 verso; red chalk on paper, 212 x 284 mm. On the Stuttgart drawing, see Privitera 2000, p. 76, reproduced pl. 72.
- <sup>15</sup> Only partially visible, the figure appears to be holding a mirror.
- <sup>16</sup> No. 3396 S; red and black chalk on light brown paper, 285 x 225 mm.; Privitera 2000, p. 79, reproduced pl. 79b.
- <sup>17</sup> M. Gregori, ‘Il Volterrano’, in *Il Seicento Fiorentino, Arte a Firenze da Ferdinando I a Cosimo III*, 3 vols, *Biografie*, Florence 1986, vol. III, p. 191.
- <sup>18</sup> Fabbri, Grassi and Spinelli 2013, pp. 225–31 no. 65.
- <sup>19</sup> For the works mentioned above see Fabbri, Grassi and Spinelli 2013, pp. 158–59, no. 33 and pp. 147–52, nos 29 and 30, all reproduced.
- <sup>20</sup> William Cave, Bentry House near Bristol; his posthumous sale, Christie’s, London, 29 June 1854, lot 74 (as ‘Cupid embracing Psyche’ by Albano) and lot 75 (as ‘Perseus... and the head of Medusa’ by Volterrano), described as companion paintings from Count Orsini’s collection.
- <sup>21</sup> Maria Cecilia Fabbri has provided the relevant information from the Stiozzi Ridolfi manuscript inventory.
- <sup>22</sup> NG3714.

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<sup>23</sup> 'To Sir William Eden, Bart., These pages are dedicated, in remembrance of pleasant years spent in well-beloved Spain, by his sincere friend, Richard Ford.'

<sup>24</sup> From the nineteenth century onwards, it is described with this title in the family papers.

<sup>25</sup> Description of pictures at Windlestone, 8 February 1884, fol. 2 *r*.

<sup>26</sup> No. 12 (as Elisabetta Sirani); annotated with: 'Has been attributed to Albano mentioned in *Athenaeum*, 18 August 1877'.

<sup>27</sup> T. Eden, *The Tribulations of a Baronet*, London 1933.

<sup>28</sup> *The Athenaeum*, 18 August 1877, p. 215.