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EST. 1817

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Pietro Annigoni (Milan 1910-1988 Florence)

Filosofo stanco (The weary philosopher)

Signed with the artist's monogram and dated 'XLVIII'; inscribed and signed by the artist on the reverse 'Filosofo Stanco Pietro Annigoni Piazza S. Croze 9 Firenze'

Oil and tempera on panel

19 1/2 x 23 1/2 in. (49.5 x 59.8 cm.)

Painted in 1948



Provenance

Count Alberto Guidi, Florence;
with Wildenstein Gallery, London;
Private collection, New York, until 2023.

Exhibited

Florence, Società delle Belle Arti, *Mezzo Secolo d'Arte Toscana (1901-1950): Mostra di pittura, scultura, bianco e nero . . .*, Palazzo Strozzi, 1952.

Temporary loan to the Brooklyn Museum, 1969.

Literature

A. Paolucci, G. Trotta, *L'altro Annigoni. Tra Metafisica ed Esistenzialismo*, Milan, 2006, p. 42, fig. 20.

According to Bernard Berenson, "Annigoni was not only the greatest painter of the twentieth century but his works rank with the most celebrated painters of all time. He will remain in the history of art as the protester of a dark age." From his beginnings in Florence, to the height of his fame and fortune Annigoni pursued his own path, standing alone against the forces of modernism in art. Both in style and technique, he based himself on the masters of the Italian Renaissance, placing great stress on draughtsmanship and often working in tempera. Annigoni was a bohemian, a drinker, a fighter and a womaniser, yet the world's most powerful and celebrated people sought him out for portraits. In 1947, the year before the present

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work was painted, Annigoni, along with some other artists, signed *Il manifesto dei Pittori Moderni della Realtà* ("The Manifesto of Modern Painters of Reality"), which was also strongly supported by Giorgio de Chirico.

The turning point in his career was a commission from the Worshipful Company of Fishmongers to paint a portrait of Queen Elizabeth II (1954-5, Fishmongers' Hall, London); it was endlessly reproduced, including on postage stamps and banknotes in various countries, and it was rashly claimed that it made him "the most famous artist in the world – not excluding even Picasso". Amongst his celebrity sitters were several other members of the British royal family, Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, and Pope John XXIII, and the artist subsequently had many exhibitions in London - at Wildenstein in 1950 and 1954 and at Agnew's in 1952 and 1956.

Although he became known as the painter of the Queen, some of his most fascinating and moving works are studies of those at the opposite end of the social strata, such as beggars, philosophers and faceless studio mannequins. In these works, he explored his loneliness, human suffering and the condition of contemporary man. This emotional and often dark introspection was a quest that consumed him throughout his whole life, from a young age through to his later works, culminating in paintings such as *Solitude III* (1973) (Fig.1) which combined realism with the metaphysical in a deeply disturbing monumental image, painted from the similarly shadowy studio view as *Filosofo Stanco*. The majority of Annigoni's paintings of mannequins, such as two 1947 paintings both entitled *Manichino nello studio*, are, like the present painting, painted in the late 1940s (Fig.2 and 3). The mannequins are far from being mere studio tools and for Annigoni are instead instruments to explore fundamental doubts and questions on the nature of Man, an idea explored more literally in his 1953 *Would You Say This is Man? (The Lesson)* (Fig.4). In the 1947s paintings, the mannequins sit centre stage, although limp, as if they have come to life and exhausted themselves in the process. Slumped with their discarded papers they appear, like Annigoni and his *Filosofo Stanco*, wearied by their attempts to comprehend human existence.

Another theme which Annigoni explored during this time was that of the self-portrait, such as his 1946 *Self-Portrait* at the Museo Pietro Annigoni, Florence. Far more than a demonstration of his technical brilliance in representation of the face, his self-portraits throughout his career were part of his introspective psychological examination. Like his mannequins, and his self-portraits, *The Weary Philosopher* can be read as an expression of the artists state of being, and in particular a philosophical reflection of his lifelong feelings

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of psychological weariness. This overwhelming spiritual and physical tiredness, which was intertwined, is described best by Annigoni in his own words. In a 1958 copy of 'Women's Own', which was showcasing the artist's new portrait of Princess Margaret, there is an article entitled '*My Story*' which is introduced by the editor as 'the revelation of the troubled heart of a man of genius'. Written by Annigoni, in soul-bearing honesty, it serves as a beautifully open and intimate insight into the artist's weary mind.

"Some may find this difficult or even impossible to understand. Such people will never know, for instance, what it is to wake up a hundred times during the course of the darkness and fall asleep a hundred times; only to wake once more with a feeling that something essential has somehow gone wrong. This sensation of loss, of desolation, hovers at the border of consciousness as sleep returns; a sleep which does not wholly shut out physical discomfort, for all one's bones are aching, one's limbs are numb and chilled, and even the stomach and belly are sore and stiff. Again, for those who have not had to sleep like this, there can be no knowledge of what it means to awake at dawn with a sleepiness so overwhelming that it also arouses a longing for eternal slumber. The terrible hour of dawn overshadows the world; a dawn which is not the rosy Aurora of optimists, but a frozen dawn indifferent to human destiny; something atrociously apart from the human spirit, devoid of joy, of confidence, of all that one instinctively needs on waking. The sky grows pale, totally remote; far removed from all the familiar, poetic sentiments - terrible. It is not by accident that Michelangelo's '*Dawn*' in the Medici Chapel is so sorrowful a figure."¹



Fig. 1 Pietro Annigoni, *Solitude III*, 1973, Museo Annigoni, Florence.

¹ Article from *Women's Own* magazine, 1958, referenced in *Off the coast of Utopia*,
<https://offthecoastofutopia.blogspot.com/2013/12/my-story-by-annigoni-or-annigoni-down.html>

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Fig.2: Pietro Annigoni, *Mannequin in the studio*, 1947, private collection.



Fig.3: Pietro Annigoni, *Mannequin in the studio*, 1947, private collection.



Fig.4: Pietro Annigoni, *Would You Say This is Man? (The Lesson)*, 1953, Private collection.