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EST. 1817

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Giovanni Battista Caracciolo, called Battistello
(Naples, 1578-1635)

Saint Barbara

Oil on panel, oval

15 3/8 x 20 7/8 in. (39 x 53 cm.)

Painted c.1631



Provenance

Private collection, Madrid, by the 1950s when purchased by the following;
private collection, Bilbao, where purchased by the current owner.

Literature

A. E. Pérez Sánchez, *Pittura italiana del siglo XVII en España*, Madrid, 1965, p. 381.
M. Stoughton, *The Paintings of Giovanni Battista Caracciolo*, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1973, p. 163.
N. Spinosa, *La pittura napoletana del Seicento*, Milan, 1984, fig. 110.
S. Causa, *Battistello Caracciolo. L'opera completa*, Naples, 2000, p. 205.

Exhibited

S. Causa, in *Battistello Caracciolo e il primo naturalismo a Napoli*, catalogue of the exhibit curated by F. Bologna, Naples, 1991, p. 251.
M. M. Cuyás, in *Caravaggio y la pintura realista europea*, catalogue of the exhibit curated by J. Milicua and M. M. Cuyás, Barcelona, 2005, p. 130.

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Giovanni Battista Caracciolo was one of the founders of the Neapolitan school, along with Ribera. The earliest surviving document records Caracciolo's activity with Belisario Corenzio and Luigi Rodriguez on the facade of Monte di Pietà in 1601. Caracciolo apparently worked for nearly a decade in the mannerist style of Cavaliere d'Arpino, though no works from this period are known to survive. He has been called a pupil of Francesco Imparato and Fabrizio Santafede as well, but the impulse that directed his art came from Caravaggio's sudden presence in Naples in late 1606. He quickly absorbed Caravaggio's naturalism and experimented with the dramatic potential of contrasting lighting.

In 1614, Battistello travelled to Rome where he met Orazio Gentileschi and Giovanni Lanfranco. He finally returned permanently to Naples in 1622, where he received a commission in the Certosa of San Martino, where he continued to work intermittently for the remainder of his career.

The present painting is well known to scholars since 1965, when Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez¹ published it with clear attribution to Battistello, together with another panel —likely a pendant— which represents *Saint Cecilia* at the San Telmo Museum in San Sebastián. *Saint Barbara* was located in Madrid in the 1950s when it was purchased by a private collection in Bilbao where it remained until some years ago. The saint is depicted without halo, in devout attitude, with her hands clasped and her eyes looking upwards in a contrite expression, her lips slightly open as if reciting a prayer; that it portrays Saint Barbara is clear from the tower with three windows in the background, which is the best-known attribute that distinguishes her. This same approach —to denote the identity of the saint with her attribute, avoiding the use of the halo— also occurs in the oval with *Saint Cecilia*, in which the pipes of the organ played by the saint appear in the background.

The work has been displayed in important exhibitions, such as the monographic exhibit of 1991 curated by Ferdinando Bologna in Naples, and the important exhibition in Barcelona in 2005 curated by José Milicua.²

¹ A. E. Pérez Sánchez, *Pittura italiana del siglo XVII en España*, Madrid, 1965, p. 381.

² S. Causa, in *Battistello Caracciolo e il primo naturalismo a Napoli*, catalogue of the exhibit curated by F. Bologna, Naples, 1991, p. 251; M. M. Cuyás, in *Caravaggio y la pintura realista europea*, catalogue of the exhibit curated by J. Milicua and M. M. Cuyás, Barcelona, 2005, p. 130.

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The delicate appearance of the image, and the sophisticated elegance of execution, rightly lead us to think of a very late dating within the oeuvre of Caracciolo³, at a time when the fundamental influence of Caravaggio, which dominated the first years of activity of Battistello, became diluted and fused with other influences, from the porcelain surfaces of late Mannerism and the early Florentine seventeenth century, to the increasingly widespread taste of the Bolognese school, Guido Reni first of all.

A very evident comparison can thus be established with the face of the *Assumption* preserved today in the Quarto del Priore of the Museo Nazionale di San Martino in Naples, for which the same model seems to have posed as for this *Saint Barbara*, quite similar in execution as well as in the attitude of prayer depicted. This *Assumption* is documented in 1631 and so it is around this date that the oval in question must be situated.



Fig. 1. Giovanni Battista Caracciolo, *Saint Cecilia*.
Oil on oval panel, 59 x 53 cm.
San Sebastián, San Telmo Museum.

³ A dating of the beginning of the fourth decade of the seventeenth century was proposed by M. Stoughton, *The Paintings of Giovanni Battista Caracciolo*, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1973, p. 163; N. Spinosa, *La pittura napoletana del Seicento*, Milan, 1984, fig. 110; S. Causa, in op. cit. 1991, p. 251; S. Causa, *Battistello Caracciolo. L'opera completa*, Naples, 2000, p. 205; M. M. Cuyás, op. cit. 2005, p. 130.

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Fig. 2. Giovanni Battista Caracciolo, *Assumption*. Naples, Museo Nazionale di San Martino, Quarto del Priore.