

Alessandro Turchi, known as L'Orbetto

(Venice, 1578 – Rome, 1649)

Venus and Cupid

oil on slate, 50 x 40 cm



We are quite clearly looking at a lovely pastiche which Turchi painted at the start of his time in Rome. We owe this attribution to Daniela Scaglietti Kelescian, who considers a date of *c.* 1615 to be appropriate. This, inasmuch as the soft sensitivity of the flesh is still that of Turchi's work in Verona – see, for instance, the doors now in Windsor Castle or the *Allegory of the Baptism of Girolamo Marino* commissioned in 1610 and likewise on slate¹ - and what little drapery can be seen is also typical of L'Orbetto's youthful work, with the charming doodles of the white veil behind the goddess's shoulder. And indeed, the same may be said of the precious quality of the sheen on the dark slab of stone, a tribute to the influence of Felice Brusasorzi.

The artist's gaze, however, is now firmly trained outside Verona, first and foremost on what could be

¹ Scaglietti Kelescian 2019, see literature, pp. 102-103, cat. 51.

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admired at the time in Rome's more traditional picture galleries still clinging to Mannerist culture – witness the perfect oval of Venus's face that echoes such works as the Cavalier d'Arpino's *Diana the Huntress* in the Pinacoteca Capitolina in Rome, not to mention the small Cupid clinging to his mother's neck with his air reminiscent of the style of Perin del Vaga, who appears to mirror Cesari's *Venus and Cupid* in the Failla Collection in Rome².



Fig. 1: Cavalier d'Arpino, *Diana the Huntress* (detail), Musei Capitolini

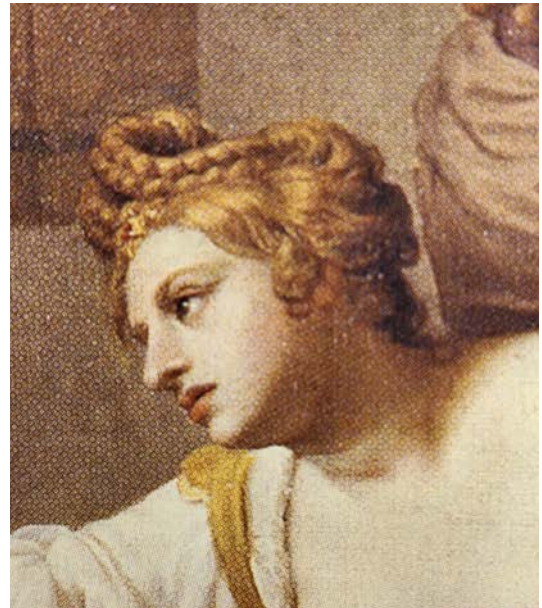
The truly striking aspect of this goddess with her fussy hairstyle adorned with pearls, however, is her echo of Florentine culture in the latter half of the 16th century, for example the sculpture of Bartolomeo Ammanati or the work of the painters who decorated the Studiolo of Francesco I de' Medici, of Jacopo Zucchi and Alessandro Allori, not to mention that of his fellow countryman Jacopo Ligozzi with his imaginative designs for theatrical settings and costumes. Turchi also painted such hairstyles on other occasions – see, for instance, his *Venus Grieving for Adonis* now in Dresden³, or his *Samson and Delilah* in a collection in Verona⁴.

² H. Röttgen, *Il Cavalier d'Arpino*, exhibition catalogue, Rome, Palazzo Venezia, june – july 1973, Rome 1973, pp. 109-110, cat. 31.

³ Scaglietti Kelescian 2019, see literature, pp. 182-183, cat. 102.

⁴ Scaglietti Kelescian 2019, see literature, pp. 126-127, cat. 68.

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Figs. 2-3: Alessandro Turchi, known as L'Orbetto, *Venus Grieving for Adonis* (detail), Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister; *Samson and Delilah* (detail), private collection.

But this highly original and deliberate harking back to the more captious aspects of international Mannerism (almost as though he wished to repeat Brusasorzi's experience in Florence in 1597 with his pupil Creara), precisely at the beginning of his time in Rome and of his encounter with more exciting new developments, may perhaps betray some kind of *captatio benevolentiae* towards a patron unknown to us but who still felt a bond with that delicate world that was on the verge of being forgotten.

Enrico Maria Guzzo

Literature:

E. M. Guzzo, in D. Scaglietti Kelescian, *Alessandro Turchi detto l'orbetto 1578-1649*, Verona 2019, cat. 67, p. 125.