

5 Malakoff Street, North Caulfield, Vic, 3161
Telephone: (61 3) 9509 9855 Facsimile: (61 3) 9509 4549
Email: ausart@diggins.com.au Website: www.diggins.com.au
ABN.19006 457 101

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GUIDO RENI (Bologna) 1575 – 1642

The Country Dance c.1600

oil on canvas

81 x 99 cm

Provenance:

Cardinal Borghese, Rome - his Inventory c. 1620: no. 69. 'Un quadro in tela d'un Ballo di diverse contadine e contadini alla lombarda, cornice negra con oro, alto 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ largo 4, Albano' Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Fondo Borghese busta 470

Rossano, Palazzo Borghese in Campo Marzio, Rome f.205 *Sopra al detto quadro in tela con un Paese con molte figure figurine con un ballo in Campagna alto p.mi 3 e mezzo Cornice dorata del No (sic) di Guido Reni*

Old Master Paintings, Bonhams, London, 9 July 2008, lot 101 as *Bolognese School* private collection, London

Literature:

Manili, J., *Villa Borghese fuori di Porta pinciana descritta da Giacomo Manili*, Rome, 1650, p.110 as 'L'altro d'un Ballo di villa è di Guido Reni'

della Pergola, Paola, 'L'inventario Borghese del 1693', *Arte Antica e Moderna*, 1964, n. 26

Corradini, S., 'Un antico inventario dell'quadreria del Cardinale Borghese,' in *Bernini scultore. La nascita del Barocco in Case Borghese*, various authors, Rome, 1998, pp. 449-456

Fumagalli Elena, 'Sul collezionismo di dipinti ferrarese a Roma nel Seicento. Riflessioni e aggiunte in *Il camerino delle pitture di Alfonso I*

Ballarin A., ed., *Il camerino delle pitture di Alfonso I*, vol VI, 2007, pp.173-193, particularly p.175

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It has always been presumed that Guido Reni never indulged in painting landscapes. Such an assumption was probably based on the fact that Malvasia, the primary source for his life, does not record any specific, pure landscape paintings. In some ways this is a little strange, for both of his Bolognese contemporaries, Guercino and Domenichino, indulged in pure landscapes. Guercino's, executed comparatively early in his career, were somewhat influenced by Ferrarese painting while Domenichino carried on with paintings executed in Rome and was emulated by some of his followers.

When the present *Betrothal* or *Country dance* first came to light in an auction at Bonham's it was not identified as being by the hand of any specific Master. Suggestions have been made that the painting was by Viola or Tamburini, both of which suggestions were clearly erroneous. For some time, therefore, the painting remained anonymous. Suggestions were made that the painting might be Roman rather than Bolognese and the name of Sisto Badalocchio was put forward but promptly rebutted by authorities in the field. In fact, it is quite clear that the painting has no Roman characteristics. Indeed, Aidan Weston-Lewis initially suggested that the painting might, on account of his Carraccesque qualities, possibly come from the hand of Agostino Carracci. Nicolas Turner also made this tentative suggestion.

However, Roman landscapes are notably different in character and it is clear that the painting is purely Bolognese in both tonality and structure. Subsequently, the name of Guercino was put forward on the basis of his early drawings from the Cento period. There is indeed a passing similarity to the figures in the *Country Dance* but equally there are notable differences: Guercino's figures are squatter and stubbier whereas here the figures are elongated and naturalistic. Guercino's palette is also quite different and his brushwork flatter. We know, from a few surviving landscapes, precisely how his skies and chromatic values work and these are quite different to the present picture.

Two years ago, Keith Christiansen happened to see the picture and, in discussing all the various views that had been put forward, he suggested a comparison be made with a small *Rest on the flight into Egypt* by Guido Reni (oil on copper, 28.5 x 21.5 cm) formerly in the Pat Combs collection. Comparison with this picture showed close affinity to the treatment of the landscape, of the trees and above all of the 'boneless' limbs of the figures, the features of the Virgin and Child, the profile of the angel and, of course, the colouring. The small copper from the Combs Collection can be dated c. 1604-06 in Rome. Comparison with *The Assumption*, another copper recently acquired by the Stadel Museum, Frankfurt, again shows similarities in facial type and the naturalistic postures. This latter painting is dated c. 1598. *The Country Dance* seems more evolved than the Stadel picture and the composition is more ambitious, the postures more varied and the impasto of the brushwork a little more accentuated. Thus, it would seem probable that *The Country Dance* must postdate the ex-Combs picture and predate the period when Reni was also working for Cardinal Sfondrato, that is, c. 1602-1606.

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That the painting was painted early in Reni's career is clear as there are echoes of Ludovico Carracci and even of Annibale. The culture of the Concert Party in Emilia, of course, derived from Niccolò del Abate and some of the elegant, more aristocratic figures in our composition, their dress and their poses closely echo Niccolò; for instance the seated lady in red to the left of our picture and even more so the central figure being invited to the dance looking out at us resemble Niccolò del Abate's *Alcina receives Ruggero* (Bologna, Pinacoteca Nazionale) or his various concert parties in the Biblioteca Universitaria in Bologna. Niccolò del Abate's *maniera* was then carried on in Bologna in the paintings of Mastelletta.

Even Reni's lovingly observed Italian landscape, terminating in a distant lake or maybe the sea with its tiny daubs of white, just like the distant sails in Reni's *Bacchus and Ariadne* (Los Angeles County Museum), has echoes of Niccolò's *Aristeos and Euradice* in London's National Gallery. This interest in concerts finds a later interpretation in *A Double Portrait* (Rome, Capitoline) or *The Portrait of the Four Monaldini brothers* (Scotland, Hopetown House) both by Bartolomeo Passerotti c. 1580. All would have been known by Reni. Another echo of Passerotti is the headgear worn by the seated peasants which is reminiscent of Passerotti's *Fishmonger* (Rome, Palazzo Barberini) but this of course just represents the style of the period.

One has to wonder to what degree Reni in his *Country Dance* is reflecting upon models by Annibale Carracci. He would of course have known the landscape elements of the frescoes in Palazzo Magnani. Surely, he would have seen the *Fête Champêtre* in the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Marseille, which is generally dated 1580-85. This painting has been given to Annibale¹ but, as Clovis Whitfield points out, could also be by Agostino: 'It does not seem to have been noticed that Malvasia described such a picture as a work of Agostino: 'Nell' ore appunto di quiete e di consolazione, stanchi dal lavoro nella sala de' signori Favi, opero per svariarsi e pender lena Agostino qu' paesi toccati di sopra, ov'è un ballo di villani, e i piferi sul palco in uno, e nell'altro quella caricatura del cappellaccio, comprati dal Grato, poi venduto dallo stesso cento venti doble a Monsù della Frè scudiero del Re Cristianissimo...' (I, p.324). The earliest history of the Marseille picture is in the Loménie de Brienne collection in 1662; but this would be compatible with the Bolognese dealer Cesari Grati having bought it and mentioned it to Malvasia'.²



¹ D. Porner, Annibale Carracci, 1971, no. 16A.

² C. Whitfield, *The Landscapes of Agostino Carracci: reflections on his role in the Carracci School: école française de Rome: Actes du colloque de Rome*, 1988, pp. 79-80.

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There are striking similarities between our *Country Dance* and the Marseille picture. The central, elegant figure looking out of the picture plane is taken directly from the Marseille picture, as is her mate grasping a hat in his left hand. The grouping of elegant seated ladies, in each case to the left, is also similar. The standing lady is reminiscent of Ludovico Carracci's portrait of Lucrezia Bentivoglio (private collection), which is dated 1589. Even more notable is the seated lady with pleated skirt right in the foreground of the Marseille picture, which is a direct prototype for the group of seated figures, front left, in the *Country Dance*. One wonders if Reni might also have known, once he was in Rome, Annibale's *Landscape with St John the Baptist* (London, Mahon Collection), which has been identified with a picture recorded in the 1693 Borghese inventory and where there is a similar stream cascading out of the right foreground.

The Country Dance also shows some knowledge of Ludovico. *The Family portrait* in The Hague may have influenced some of our figures as might *The Rape of Europa* fresco in Palazzo Fava, Bologna. The voluminous, puffy drapery, with its linen folds in our picture, finds echoes in the earlier Palazzo Magnani figures by both Agostino and Annibale. Again, echoes of Nicolò Del' Abate's concerts survive in the background of Annibale's *Return of the Prodigal Son* (Munich, Bayerisches Staatsgemäldesammlungen), thus the Bolognese heritage of our *Country Dance* is certain.

Since the painting is unlined, an inventory number, 115, is clearly visible on the verso. Research relating to this number so far has thrown up no information. It was only after Keith Christiansen's initial, brilliant suggestion and further study and consultation that Aidan Weston-Lewis fortuitously made a search on the Getty Provenance Index under 'Reni' rather than '115'. This immediately threw up the Borghese 1693 inventory with the remarkable indication that both then, and again some forty years earlier, the painting had been fully documented as by Guido Reni. As Aidan Weston-Lewis has observed, it is 'inconceivable' that years after Reni's demise such an untypical early work should be fully given to the Master, unless there had been concrete evidence or documentary grounds for so doing. Both Aidan Weston-Lewis and Keith Christiansen, as well as the writer, point to the distinct similarities in the landscape in the present picture with those in the Albenga, *Martyrdom of St. Catherine of Alexandrie* (published by the writer together with Stephen Pepper), and the ex-Rau *David and Goliath*. It is interesting to note that the ex-Combs *Rest on the Flight* also comes from the self-same Borghese collection (Manilli 1650, p. 111 '*Nel Camerino, che segue pieno tutto di quadri piccoli, la Madonnina vicino al Letto, alla quale un'Angelo presenta una tazza di frutti, è di Guido Reni*') and again in the 1693 inventory: '*Sotto al detto un quadretto simile (alto un palmo in circa) La Madonna il Bambino San Giuseppe e S. Gio. con un Angelo che porta una canestra di frutti de N.o 485 cornice dorata di Guido Reni*' It is a curious quirk of fate that the painting that led to the identification of the present picture was once in the identical collection in an adjacent room.

Elena Fumagalli has pointed out that the dimensions of our picture correspond perfectly with the painting described under no. 69 in a list of the paintings belonging to Cardinal Borghese variously dated between 1615-30 (Corradini, op. cit.) and post 1620 (Fumagalli op. cit.). It is interesting that Corradini transcribes the phrase '*alla lombarda*' because the Marseille *Fête Champêtre* is also called *Fête Milanaise*. No Borghese inventory prior to the 1615-1630 list is known, only lists of frames.

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There are inventories post-1693 namely one dated 1760 for the pictures on the ground floor of the palazzo but our *Country Dance* is not described as such. There is also a nineteenth century description of Palazzo Borghese and its furnishings (Aretiorio Legreto Vaticano, Arch. Borghese 309), which is as yet to be examined.³

Further evidence regarding the dating of the *Country Dance* is provided by an analysis of the costume made by Jane Bridgeman. 'The salient point in the women's appearance is the design of the overgown and ruff... most commonly worn from 1590'. She points to the particular hair styling being current between the 1590s and early 1600s. However, the men's breeches were in fashion c.1606 and more generally post-1620, as trunk hose were more common before.

Erich Schleier has confirmed the attribution and compares the *Country Dance* to an unpublished *Preaching of St John* on copper 1596-97. Aidan Weston-Lewis, Daniele Benati and Keith Christiansen confirm the attribution. Lorenzo Pericolo who has only seen photographs is also favourable.

Both Elena Fumagalli and Catherine Johnston have proposed the hypothesis that the painting may have been commissioned by the Aldobrandini. The 1611 inventory (Arch. Segreto Vaticano, Fondo Borghese, vol. 7377) remains to be researched. Keith Christiansen had thought the picture dated early in Reni's career (in Bologna) c. 1598-1600 and Erich Schleier concurs. That Camillo Borghese was familiar with Reni is made clear by the fact that Reni painted his portrait as a Cardinal (London, Matthiesen Gallery). Scipione engaged Reni's services and acquired many pictures from the Aldobrandini. Alternatively, if Scipione himself commissioned *The Country Dance* from Reni, he might have been inspired to do so by the Dosso Dossis that he owned as well as being influenced by Niccolò del Albate's work.⁴

PATRICK MATTHIESEN

See below for biographical information about the artist.

³ I am grateful to Elena Fumagalli for this information.

⁴ I am grateful to Keith Christiansen for this.

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GUIDO RENI

(1575 – Bologna – 1642)

Guido was a pupil, together with Francesco Albani and Domenichino, of the Flemish painter, Denys Calvaert. Early in 1594, he joined the Carracci's *Accademia degli Incamminati*. His first important commissions were for altarpieces in the Bolognese churches of Bologna and date from between 1595 and 1598. In 1598 he won the competition for a painted memorial to celebrate Clement VIII's visit to Bologna, an achievement which brought him to the attention of the Aldobrandini family. In December 1599, he was elected to the *Consiglio della Congregazione dei Pittori* and thereafter his career was divided between Bologna and Rome. In 1601, Reni travelled to Rome where he was influenced to some extent by the naturalism of Caravaggio (who is said to have threatened to kill him). He was probably back in Bologna by January 1603, when a memorial service was held there for Agostino Carracci and Reni engraved the funerary decorations.

In 1608, Paul V (formerly Cardinal Camillo Borghese), commissioned from him a fresco of three scenes from the life of Samson for the *Sala delle Nozze Aldobrandini* and three scenes of the Mystery of the Faith for the *Sala delle Dame*, all in the Vatican Palace. Reni's activity in the papal circle was supported by Cardinal Scipione Borghese, who took the painter into his service in October 1609. He executed the frescoes in the chapel of Sant'Andrea, adjacent to San Gregorio Magno, for the cardinal in 1609. In 1610, he was working for Paul V in the *Cappella dell' Annunciata* in the *Palazzo del Quirinale*, with Francesco Albani and Giovanni Lanfranco among his assistants. In 1611-12 Reni executed frescoes in the lunettes of the Cappella Paolina in Santa Maria Maggiore. His own style, best seen in the *Aurora* of 1613-14 (now Rome the Casino Rospigliosi), depends much more on the Raphaellesque classicism of the Carracci academy. Back in Bologna by 1615 he finished the frescoes begun earlier in San Domenico. By 1617 he completed an altarpiece of *The Assumption of the Virgin* for Genoa, a work that was much acclaimed before it left Bologna.

Reni's contact with the Gonzaga court in Mantua between 1617 and in 1621 resulted in a commission for a series of Hercules subjects for the duke. In 1621 he travelled to Naples to paint in the cathedral there but he left abruptly for Rome because of the hostility of the local artists. He was in Rome, yet again, in 1627 and probably also in 1632. He passed the rest of his life, fully occupied with commissions, in Bologna. Reni's work was very famous during his lifetime and late, but it was subjected to adverse criticism in the nineteenth century (especially through Ruskin's attacks). Reni's own concept of art and of the artist's place was lofty. In his devotion to 'ideal' beauty and his poetic reworking of many classical subjects there is perhaps some nostalgia for the Renaissance.

The Matthiesen Gallery, London