

## ARTEMISIA GENTILESCHI AND BERNARDO CAVALLINO

(Born in Rome, Italy, 1593 – Died in Naples, Italy, 1656 ) (Born and Died in Naples, Italy 1616 – 1656)

*Bathsheba at her Bath*

c. 1636-38

Oil on canvas, 185.2 x 145.4 cm

### PROVENANCE

Private Collection, UK  
Matthiesen Gallery, London

### EXPERTISE

R. Lattuada, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2015

### EXHIBITIONS

*Artemisia, Vrouw & macht*, Rijksmuseum Twente, Enschede, September 26, 2021 – January 23, 2022  
*Da Artemisia a Hackert. La collezione di un antiquario*, Reggia di Caserta, Caserta, September 16, 2019 – January 16, 2020

*Artemisia, 1593-1654*, Fondation Dina Vierny - Musée Maillol, Paris, March 14 - July 15, 2012

*Artemisia Gentileschi: Storia di una passione*, Palazzo Reale, Milan, September 22, 2011 – January 29, 2012

### LITERATURE

*Da Artemisia a Hackert. La collezione di un antiquario*. Edited by Marcella di Martino and Vittorio Sgarbi. Rome: etgraphiae, 2019, pp. 4-5.

Spinosa, Nicola. *Grazia e tenerezza in posa: Bernardo Cavallino e il suo tempo 1616-1656*. Rome: Ugo Bozzi Editore, 2013, p. 403.

Nicolaci, Michele. *Artemisia, 1593-1654*. Edited by Roberto Paolo Ciardi, Roberto Contini and Francesco Solinas. Paris: Fondation Dina Vierny - Musée Maillol, 2012, pp. 184- 185;

Nicolaci, Michele. *Artemisia Gentileschi: Storia di una passione*. Edited by Roberto Contini and Francesco Solinas. Milan: Palazzo Reale, Milan, 2011, p. 228.

From the second book of Samuel in the Old Testament, the story of David's seduction of Bathsheba was painted on several occasions by Gentileschi during her Neapolitan sojourns (c. 1630-1638; c. 1640-1654). The present work was formerly in a private English collection and then with Patrick Matthiesen, the London-based dealer.

As with other adaptations of the same subject, Gentileschi chooses to capture the moment of the young woman's bath, profiting from the opportunity to emphasize female nudity and offset her pose against the different poses of the maids, the landscape, and the architecture in the background. Michele Nicolaci suggests that these elements make the present picture the finest of the known examples. The scene takes place on an open terrace, exposed to the indiscreet gaze of any potential onlooker. Indeed, the King of Israel, protected from the sun by a parasol held by a black servant,

can be seen peering down from the large terrace of his palace onto the nude Bathsheba, who is attended to by her maids. The story goes that David, bewitched by the young woman, summons her to the royal palace whereupon they conceive a child together.

The picture's vast perspectival plan is constructed around the two balustrades, the one of Bathsheba in the immediate foreground and the one of David in the near distance. The receding floor of the young woman's balcony is paved in a diamond pattern, recalling the one seen in *Birth of the Baptist* (Madrid, Prado Museum; cat. 31). The architecture of the royal palace in the background is composed with grey stonework that contrasts with the deep blue of the sky, which is beautifully modulated and reflected in the rich lapis lazuli mantel wrapped around Bathsheba's waist. The architecture, here crisper compositionally than in the other versions, suggests an intriguing collaboration between the "*maestra*" and other Neapolitan painters recorded in sources of the period.

The well-known passage from De Dominici (1742-1745, III, p. 199) notes: "two large paintings with figures painter from life, which express the stories of Bathsheba and Susanna, and seem to be by Guido, are painted by the famous Artemisia Gentileschi, and the architecture by Viviano, with the trees by Spadaro." Even if the *Bathsheba* quoted by the Neapolitan writer is recognizable today as the Columbus picture (B. Daprà, in *Ritorno al barocco*, 2009, I, p. 148, n. 1.62), the reference allows us to presume a multiple authorship for the present version. The elegant setting and the execution of the architecture point to Viviano Codazzi, who was active in Naples between 1634 and 1647, perhaps with the assistance of Micco Spadaro (1610-1675) due to the small, curious figures that populate the loggia.

The beautifully executed maid that plaits Bathsheba's hair on the right, certainly painted by yet another hand, displays the technique of Bernardo Cavallino (1616-1656), the friend and intimate collaborator of Artemisia. The maid's pale complexion, revived by the rosininess around the eyes and cheeks, as well as the full mouth, are typical of Cavallino. In his 2013 volume on the artist, Nicola Spinosa notes that the recent conservation of the present picture, which liberates it from past and more recent restorations, allows us to conclude that the figure is indeed by Cavallino, executed in his youth (see *op. cit.*).

Together with the story of Judith, the biblical subject of David and Bathsheba is among the most frequent and successful of the painter's Neapolitan period, with another six versions known today at Potsdam, Gosford House (now lost), on the Milanese art market (cat. 49, *op. cit.*), the example in poor condition but of importance in the Palatine Gallery, Florence (cat. 43, *op. cit.*) and, although only partially by Artemisia, the study once in a private Viennese collection (cat. 46, *op. cit.*). The present picture relates to the example documented in a private German collection at Halle (Bissell 1999), which features the same servant figures. This iconography coincides with that described by Vincenzo Fanti (Vienna, 1767) of the work once in the collection of Prince Karl Eusebius von Liechtenstein, who was a passionate collector of the artist's work. Unfortunately, both the lack of

# Petzel

Information Courtesy of DYS 44 Lampronti Gallery

the “*specchio in cui si mira*” and the substantial difference in dimensions prevents the possibility that Fanti may have been referring to the present work, suggesting the existence of yet another version.

A harmonious and intriguing puzzle, the picture attests to the fame and the lively reception of Gentileschi's work on the Neapolitan artistic scene of the period, a page in the history of European art that requires further research. The stylistic affinity with the *Birth of the Baptist*, datable with certainty to 1640 – 1645 (J.W. Mann in *Orazio e Artemisia Gentileschi* 2001, pp. 405-407), is evident particularly in the faces and the architectural foreshortening to the left, suggesting therefore a dating to the late 1630s, in any case prior to the painter's English sojourn (c. 1638).