

## **GIUSEPPE CESARI called CAVALIER D'ARPINO**

Born in Arpino, Italy, 1568

Died in Rome, Italy, 1640

*Fortuna with two Tritons*

Oil on canvas, 127 x 89 cm

## **EXPERTISE**

Claudio Strinati, 30 October 2013

## **COMPARATIVE LITERATURE**

Bolzoni, Marco Simone. *Il Cavalier, Giuseppe Cesari d'Arpino. Maestro del disegno*. Rome: Ugo Bozzi, 2013, fig. 261, p. 372.

Röttgen, Herwarth. *Il Cavalier Giuseppe Cesari d'Arpino. Un grande pittore nello splendore della fama e nell'incostanza della fortuna*. Rome: Ugo Bozzi, 2002, cat. 237, p. 459; fig. 19a, p. 36.

Giuseppe Cesari was born in Arpino in 1568, the son of Muzio di Polidoro and his wife Giovanna, who was the daughter of a Spanish nobleman according to Karel van Mander's biography of the painter. The young Cesari probably arrived in Rome in 1582, where he worked under Niccolò Circignani on the decoration of the galleries on the third floor of the Vatican Palaces. Between February and July 1583 Cesari was amongst the artists commissioned to fresco the Sala Vecchia degli Svizzeri, and in the same year he became a member of the prestigious Accademia di San Luca. In 1586 Cesari joined the Congregation of the Virtuosi al Pantheon, a sign of his growing success as a painter. In November 1599 Cesari was elected President of the Accademia and was commissioned to decorate the transept of San Giovanni in Laterano, where in 1600 he painted a majestic representation of the Ascension, which earned him the title of Cavaliere di Cristo.

In this unusual depiction, the goddess of *Fortuna* is supported by two tritons, unlike the conventional iconographical solution of the globe. Close to representations of the myth of Galatea, the present composition also possesses an affinity with mythological depictions of satires, echoed here in the two tritons. This elegant figural arrangement is wholly indicative of the late work of Cavalier d'Arpino, which demonstrates an intense interest in unusual iconography, both sacred and profane. The artist, who tended to trust religious works with standardized, repetitive configurations to his workshop, reserved the execution of the most inventive compositions for himself.

The feminine prototype that is found in representations of Fortuna and Galatea – elegant, muscular and slender – was elaborated upon by Arpino at the beginning of his career in a fine drawing, the *Seated nymph under the moon* in the collection of Lord Leicester at Holkham Hall, which has been

published widely in the literature on the artist.<sup>1</sup> The figure's stance in the Holkham Hall sheet is very close to the present *Fortuna*, with the arms raised, the legs separated slightly and a defined curvature of the back. Indeed, the anatomy is almost identical where the buttocks, the dimples on the lower back and the shoulder blades are emphasised using the same tonal gradations. In 1594 – 95, Arpino painted an analogous figure on the frescoed ceiling of the Loggia of Corrado Orsini's palace, now the Pio Sodalizio dei Piceni on via di Parione in Rome, which represents Venus as a symbol of the sun. The nude figure, similar in stance and technique to the present Venus, leans against a large open shell. As such, Arpino poses yet another unusual iconographical blurring between Galatea and Venus.

A comparison between the present work and the fresco depicting two elderly satires, executed above the tombstone of Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini in the Salon of the Palazzo dei Conservatori in Campidoglio, Rome, helps us in defining the attribution and dating of the *Galatea-Fortuna*.<sup>2</sup> The ravaged but muscular bodies of the two satires and the thick application of paint, which coarsely describes anatomy in the Campidoglio fresco, are identical to the two tritons of the present picture. The Campidoglio fresco is datable to after 1630, when the artist executed several other unusual mythological works characterized by an incomparable lucidity and wit. A drawing that dates to the same period in the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle depicting the rape of a nereid by a sea god and three tritons demonstrates the same handling. The analogous subject matter, the figural placement and the treatment of anatomy enhance our understanding of the present picture, which was evidently conceived of within a few years of the Windsor drawing and the Campidoglio fresco.

While the patron of the present work, which was executed certainly after the Pio Sodalizio dei Piceni fresco, remains unknown, the 1653 inventory of the Monterrey collection in Madrid documents a picture by Cavalier d'Arpino described as *Galatea*.<sup>3</sup> There is no reason to believe that this archival reference does not relate directly to the present picture.

Upon firsthand inspection, Claudio Strinati has confirmed the authorship of Arpino and noted how the elegance of the present work is enhanced by its remarkable state of conservation, which is evident both in the support and the painted surface.

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<sup>1</sup> M. S. Bolzoni, *Il Cavalier, Giuseppe Cesari d'Arpino. Maestro del disegno* (Rome, 2013), fig. 261, p. 372.

<sup>2</sup> See H. Roetggen, *Il Cavalier Giuseppe Cesari d'Arpino. Un grande pittore nello splendore della fama e nell'incostanza della fortuna* (Rome, 2002), cat. 237, p. 459.

<sup>3</sup> A. E. Perez Sanchez, *Pintura italiana del siglo XVII en España* (1965), p. 222.