

Galerie Canesso

Tableaux anciens

GIOVANNI BATTISTA CARACCILO, CALLED BATTISTELLO

CARACCILO

(1578 - 1635)

Half-length figure of a young man

Oil on canvas, 24 13/16 x 19 1/2 in (63 x 49.5 cm)



Provenance : France, private collection. **Literature :** - Véronique Damian, *Tableaux napolitains du Naturalisme au Baroque*, Paris, Galerie Canesso, 2007, pp. 8-11 ; - Stefano Causa, « Notizia di un nuovo Battistello », *Kronos*, 11, 2007, pp. 79-84 ; - Nicola Spinosa, *Pittura del Seicento a Napoli da Caravaggio a Massimo Stanzione*, Naples, 2010, p. 174, n° 27. The reappearance of this half-length figure, albeit fragmentary, is a new addition to our knowledge of the work of Battistello Caracciolo, an important representative of the naturalist movement in early Seicento Naples. Given the absence of attributes, it is unfortunately difficult to tell whether this canvas was originally part of a figure of Saint John the Baptist, which seems in any case improbable because of the lack of the characteristic sheepskin clothing across his loins. As is masterfully shown in Caravaggio's *Saint John the Baptist* in the Borghese Gallery in Rome, this tradition could nonetheless be replaced by the presence of the animal itself next to the saint. However, the youth's air of coarseness and his enticing smile seem far removed from a religious representation, and these qualities would seem instead to suggest a figure of Bacchus.

The painting's inspiration could still derive from the *Saint John the Baptist* we have just mentioned, since this was one of Caravaggio's last works painted in Naples, and one of his best-known compositions. Caracciolo has retained the idea of the figure resting on an elbow and the felicitous placing of one hand gently across the other forearm, although changing sides in this instance. The youth's gaze, directed beyond the picture space and sparkling with mischief, appears astonishing in its spontaneity, although this sort of language is typical of the painter, as is the gesture of the crossed forearms. This pose facilitates markedly strong shadows cast by the arm and hand, while the bust and shoulder in the foreground are fully lit. The artist's painted œuvre is thus enriched by a completely unpublished picture, painted shortly before 1610 in the opinion of Stefano Causa, who published a catalogue raisonné of Battistello Caracciolo's work in 2000 (1). Stylistically, our youthful Bacchus recalls the *Two Young Boys* (known as *Putti vendemmianti*, formerly Rome, private collection) and the *Young Saint John the Baptist* (Naples, Museo Filangieri) - both works, like ours, that attest to Battistello's prominent role among the Caravaggesque painters at the heart of the Neapolitan School (2). Notes : 1- Stefano Causa, *Battistello Caracciolo*, Naples, 2000. 2- Stefano Causa, as in note 1, 2000, pp. 176-177, nos. A12, A13.