

# COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



**ANGELO CAROSELLI**

(Rome 1585-1652)

***SAINT FRANCIS***

oil on canvas

77 x 99 cm.; 30 1/3 x 39 in.

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## Provenance

Sale, Dorotheum Vienna, 19 December 2022, lot 112 (as by a follower of Caravaggio);  
Private collection, United Kingdom.

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This striking canvas by the Roman painter Angelo Caroselli depicts a Saint in deep meditation. His arms, expertly foreshortened, leap out towards the viewer and guide the eye to the Saint's countenance and eyes, which seem to be glazed with tears. The figure is brought to life thorough expert touches of red on the neck and the hands.

Through his brown habit and the skull placed to his left, the figure is identified as Saint Francis of Assisi, the founder of the Franciscan Order. The Franciscans, formally known as the Order of the Friars Minor, are a Catholic society which focus their attention on spreading the word of God through lay society (as opposed to living a monastic lifestyle), whilst keeping to the three fundamental tenets: poverty, chastity, and obedience.

The combination of a Caravaggesque night scene with the figure of Saint Francis (very much in vogue at the time of this work) poses an interesting juxtaposition. In his sacred poem *Cantico delle creature* (known in English as the *Canticle of the Sun*), Saint Francis reserves the highest praise for the Sun, seeing it as the closest natural element to God:

Laudato sie, mi' Signore, cum tucte le tue creature, spetialmente messor lo frate sole, lo qual è iorno, et allumini noi per lui; et ellu è bellu e radiante cum grande splendore: de te, Altissimo, porta significatione.<sup>1</sup>

Beyond being an interesting visual solution then, this passage shows the theological complexity of this piece. Francis, depicted before his stigmatization (when Christlike wounds appeared on his hands, feet, and chest; his highest moment of Divine enlightenment), could be interpreted as searching for illumination amidst the darkness on two levels -- both divine and literal.

Though this composition is entirely of Caroselli's own making, another side of the artist's career involved the restoration (and even falsification) of works. As the seventeenth-century biographer Filippo Baldinucci remarked:

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<sup>1</sup> Francis of Assisi "Cantico delle Creature" verses 5-9, In *the Oxford Book of Italian Verse*, edited by St. John Lucas, Oxford 1910, 37. Blessed art thou, my Lord, with all the creatures, especially Brother Sun, who is the day, and through whom you illuminate us: and he is beautiful and radiant with much splendour: for he signifies you.

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ebbe così obbediente il pennello, che lo fece eziandio ad intera mutazione de' maggiori pittori del mondo[...] Delle copie[...], cambiate cogli originali, ... avendo il Caroselli una volta copiata la Galatea dei Carracci[...] l'aveva così bene imitata, che pareva l'originale; aveva anche ricopiata una Madonna di Raffaello, che si trovava nel palazzo Aldobrandini, con tale imitazione, che avendola veduta lo stesso Niccolò Poussin, disse, che s'e' non avesse saputo di certo dove era l'originale, quella avrebbe presa per originale.<sup>2</sup>

Caroselli's ability to constantly change his style and manner of working is a testament to the artist's technical ability, and to his status as an auto-didact. That said, when not copying the works of others, certain traits in his paintings leave an indelible and characteristic mark. In the case of the present canvas, Saint Francis' distant and almond-shaped eyes are echoed in almost all his oeuvre (see for example his *Scene of Sorcery*, **Fig. 1**). The foreshortening of the saint's face closely resembles his *Penitent Prodigal Son* in Galleria Spada, Rome (**Fig. 2**).

We are grateful to Dr Nikita de Vernejoul for confirming the attribution to Angelo Caroselli by means of a digital image.

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<sup>2</sup>Filippo Baldinucci, *Notizie de' professori del disegno da cimabue in qua* [1681] Florence 1847 III: 739-47. "He had such a way with a brush that he made copies fully imitating the styles of the best painters of the world, so much so that they could be exchanged for the original... once Caroselli, having copied the Galatea by the Carracci [...] did such a good job at imitating it that it seemed like the original; he had also copied a Madonna by Raphael, that was in Palazzo Aldobrandini, with such an imitation that Nicolas Poussin, having seen it, declared that he would have thought it original, had he not definitely known its current whereabouts".

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**Fig. 1.** Angelo Caroselli, *Scene of Sorcery*, 1620-30.  
Formerly with Canesso, Paris.

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**Fig. 2.** Angelo Caroselli, *The Penitent Prodigal Son*.  
Rome, Galleria Spada