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CARLO MARATTI  
(Camerano 1625 – 1713 Rome)

*ALLEGORY OF BENEFICENCE*  
c. 1650 - 1660

Oil on canvas  
144 x 80 cm; 56 3/4 x 31 1/2 in.

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## Provenance

Private collection, Italy, until 2024

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## Reference literature

A. Agresti, Carlo Maratti, *Eredità ed Evoluzioni del Classicismo Romano*, Roma 2022.

S. Rudolph, S. Prospero Valenti Rodinò, *Carlo Maratti (1625-1713) tra la Magnificenza del Barocco e il Sogno dell'Arcadia*, Roma 2024.

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*We are thankful to Dr. Alessandro Agresti for having drafted the following detailed study on this previously unpublished Allegory of Beneficence by Carlo Maratti.*

This painting, executed with the utmost refinement, features an iconography that, for now, appears to be entirely unique - at least as far as easel painting is concerned. In my view, it constitutes a remarkable addition to the oeuvre of Carlo Maratti, the leading painter in seventeenth-century Rome, and should be placed in the early phase of his long and prolific career. That phase, as we well know from the detailed biography by Giovanni Pietro Bellori, unfolded under the protective wing of Andrea Sacchi, another accomplished artist whose influence, as we shall see, is also detectable in the work presented here for the first time. Indeed, Maratti's brother Bernabeo "introduced him to the school of Andrea Sacchi [...] where Carlo attended his studies with great zeal and studied there with such perseverance that he continued them undiminished until Andrea's death [...] he surpassed everyone else, even those more advanced in knowledge and years [...] with each passing day, the name of this young man was heard more and more, so that, because of his youth, instead of Carlo, he was called 'Carluccio d'Andrea Sacchi.'" Considering that, according to Bellori, Maratti arrived in Rome around 1635 and entered Sacchi's workshop the following year, he must therefore have resided there between 1636 and 1661, the year of his master's death. During those years, he did not lack independent works, nor significant public commissions: we may recall, for example, the altarpiece of *The Adoration of the Shepherds* (1650–1651) for San Giuseppe dei Falegnami, the decoration of the Alaleona Chapel and the Chapel of the Crucifix at Sant'Isidoro (1652–1653 and 1655–1657), the altarpiece *Saint Bernard Induces the Antipope Victor IV to Submit to Pope Innocent II* for the Basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme (1657–1658), and the *Adoration of the Shepherds* for Alexander VII's Gallery in the Quirinal Palace (1657).

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In the same period, Maratti also worked for some of the most important Roman families and patrons, as attested by works such as *The Preaching of Saint John the Baptist* in the Pau Museum (1649–1650, probably commissioned by Paolo Falconieri), *Alpheus and Arethusa* in the Prado Museum (1655–1657, commissioned by Cardinal Decio Azzolino and later part of the collections of Queen Christina of Sweden), and two versions of *Diana's Bath* requested by the aforementioned Paolo Falconieri and by Lorenzo Onofrio Colonna (1657–1659). Meanwhile, *The Peace of Augustus*, painted for Louis Phélypeaux de La Vrillière (c. 1653–1658), shows that the fame of the young painter had already spread beyond the borders of the Papal States. This brief sequence of works demonstrates that although Carlo Maratti was under Andrea Sacchi's protection, he was allowed the freedom to pursue an independent career. Such was the mutual trust between the two that his older master assigned him his final artistic tasks to complete, and upon his death Maratti succeeded him as court painter to Antonio Barberini, thus finishing the series of Apostles that Sacchi had initiated.

Into this rich and varied context, we should place our previously unpublished work, about which the sources are silent and for which we neither possess preparatory drawings nor inventory records that might help determine its original provenance. Given the painting's highly erudite and unusual iconography, I would not be surprised if its possible patron might be found precisely within the Barberini circle. In it, we see a handsome young man of athletic build, with abundant flowing hair held back by a red ribbon, draped in a blue mantle decorated with gold stars. He is shown pointing towards three nude maidens, who are clearly identifiable as the Three Graces (or Charites) - Aglaea (Splendour), Euphrosyne (Joy), and Thalia (Prosperity). They stand atop a tall plinth adorned with bas-reliefs: in the first, Minerva is shown offering gifts to a youth; in the second one - though partly abraded - a half-naked man, probably Apollo, is seen crowning what seems to be the same youth, in the presence of onlookers. The scene takes place in the shade of a classical temple, beyond which



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lies a view of what appears to be a lake. In the middle ground stands a tree, on whose branches an eagle watches as other birds feed on a hare.

Using Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*, the key reference text throughout the seventeenth century for the creation of especially complex images - such as the one under consideration - we can identify the true subject of this canvas: it depicts an *Allegory of Beneficence* which, according to the 1625 edition of Ripa, is "A young man of singular beauty, with a cheerful, smiling face. He will be nude, but with a turquoise drapery, entirely studded with stars, slung over his shoulder [...]. He will raise his right arm, placing the Three Graces on the palm of his hand in the manner in which they are commonly depicted - namely one with her back turned towards us, and two facing us, their arms interlaced as if dancing. [...] And on the ground, to the right, there will be an eagle which, having seized a hare - held beneath its talons - permits various birds of prey, different from its own species, to feed on it."

Hence, while taking into account the principal elements set forth by Ripa, Maratti reweaves both the figurative and semantic framework to create a more harmonious and alluring image: rather than having the Three Graces rest on his hand, the personification of Beneficence, with graceful and elegant gestures, indicates the three sculptures of the Graces, incorporating an architectural backdrop in the antique style, as though we were standing at the entrance to a temple and at the start of an initiatory path introduced by the young figure himself. Below the tree - which has been shifted (as revealed by a conspicuous *pentimento* visible to the naked eye, with others discernible within the figure via X-ray, indicating a carefully considered and complex design) - in order to create a sense of depth through the lake view, we then see the eagle observing while other birds ravage the hare.

But what is intended by "Beneficence," and why would its iconography be illustrated - albeit with variants that, as we shall see, are anything but random - in the painting before us? That is: what might it signify? In modern Italian, as defined by the Treccani dictionary, *beneficio* (beneficence) means, among other things, "Any act or

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concession by which one does good to another person and provides material or even spiritual assistance,” or more generally “usefulness, help, relief.” However, in my view, it is in its Latin sense that it should be understood in the image we are examining: in Roman law, the *beneficium* was a decree issued to reward a person, or a special privilege or favour granted on the basis of age, sex, or condition. The Three Graces, the *Charites* of Greek mythology, are benevolent goddesses who, among other aspects, represent the perfection to which human beings should aspire. It is thus no coincidence that the personification of Beneficence points to them, and beneath them Minerva (goddess of intellect) and Apollo (god of the arts) are shown rewarding a youth. Hence, in our painting, one may also discern, in subtle form, echoes of the biography of the young Maratti himself: through study and devotion to painting, in striving for perfection, he obtains a beneficence or benefit - namely, one might suppose, admission to the temple in the background, which is almost a precursor to the Temple of Virtue depicted in the celebrated painting in which our artist portrayed himself alongside his faithful patron, Marchese Niccolò Maria Pallavicini.

Turning now to observations of a more specifically figurative nature: our painting is marked by a gentle Classicism that reflects the influence of Andrea Sacchi. This can be seen, for instance, in the elongated proportions of the figures’ anatomies and in the softly modulated chiaroscuro, as well as in the restrained colour palette that characterises the landscape. In the somewhat free execution of certain passages, with visible brushstrokes, we also detect Maratti’s affiliation with that neo-Venetian current so fashionable in those years - an approach that partly encompassed Sacchi himself. We can attribute *Allegory of Beneficence* to Maratti through pertinent comparisons with his established works. For example, the face of the young man with its perfectly oval shape, straight “Greek” nose, rounded chin, small full lips, and almond-shaped eyes is truly exemplary of a physiognomic type adopted by the master from Camerano, with variations and developments over the course of his career. Compare it with the figures in the background of *Saint Andrew Led to*

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*Martyrdom* (Fig. 1, c. 1660–1661), *Tobias and the Archangel Raphael* (Fig. 2, c. 1654–1655; both auctioned at Christie's), and the *Visitation* (Fig. 3) for Santa Maria della Pace, and the similarities are striking. In the first two paintings, we also see the same elongated hands tapering to a point, as well as the same somewhat jagged articulation of the drapery, highlighting the smooth rendering of the skin.

The anatomy of the personification of Beneficence - athletic, elegant, and slender in proportion, with a chiaroscuro modulated in subtle tonal shifts that almost *caress* the musculature to convey the softness of flesh- finds close parallels in the figure of Apollo in the aforementioned *Ascent to the Temple of Virtue* (Fig. 4, 1706), where both the face and the positioning of the feet share features with the youth in our unpublished painting. Similar correspondences also appear in the guards from the *Saint Andrew Led to Martyrdom*, in the *Guardian Angel* (c. 1655) in the Nantes Museum, and in the *Apollo and Daphne* (Fig. 5, 1679–1681) in the Brussels Museum of Fine Arts.

Turning to the Three Graces: in the *Diana's Bath* (Fig. 6) in the Chatsworth version, there appear comparably solid and fleshy bodies with rounded breasts and buttocks, precisely matching those of the figure seen from behind. Indeed, this same figure - down to the positioning of her lower body - shows similarities to Minerva in the *Judgement of Paris* (Fig. 7, 1708) at the Tsarskoye Selo State Museum, while the stance of the front-facing Grace similarly echoes the anatomical profile of Venus in that same painting. It seems almost as if Maratti, recalling his youthful endeavour, drew on it for inspiration - varying it with the great skill typical of his designs - when executing the work now in Russia, once in the collection of Marchese Niccolò Maria Pallavicini. Furthermore, the architectonic background, rendered with almost philological precision, appears in several works by Carlo Maratti, such as the aforementioned *Peace of Augustus* and *Saint Nicholas of Bari* (Fig. 8, 1712) in the Church of Santi Faustina e Niccolò di Bari in Camerano; in the latter especially, the perspective lines of the Ionic columns and the broad projecting cornice of the temple

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roof provide a stage-set conception of the architecture consistent with that in the painting under discussion.

Last but not least, another clue pointing to Carlo Maratti's authorship is the conception of the main figure, with his face turned to the opposite side from his torso and arm as he extends them into the surrounding space, thus "turning" the body's volume. We find a similar device in various portraits and in some major public commissions by the master from Camerano - see, for instance, his altarpiece for the Basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme (Fig. 9) - as in the portraits of Cardinal Jacopo Rospigliosi (Fig. 10, c. 1668), Giovanni Pietro Bellori (1672–1673), and John Hay (1677). These works were inspired by Bernini's sculpture, which our artist studied closely in order to evolve his early, purely classicist training by filtering it through the lens of the most avant-garde Baroque ideas. That dynamism, however, is not found in our *Allegory of Beneficence*, which adheres closely to Sacchi's style, shaped by the legacy of Raphael - tutelary god of the young painter's formation. Here, therefore, we note stylistic elements that suggest a dating to the sixth decade of the seventeenth century, a moment when Carlo Maratti's star was rising rapidly, shortly before he was first elected Prince of the Accademia di San Luca and came to be regarded as the leading Roman painter of his day.



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Fig. 1. Carlo Maratti, *Saint Andrew Led to Martyrdom*, c. 1660-1661.  
Oil on canvas, 120 x 160 cm.  
Formerly Christie's New York, 26 May 2000 (Lot. 59).



Fig. 2. Carlo Maratti, *Tobias and the Angel*, c. 1654-1655.  
Oil on canvas, 67.5 x 98 cm.  
Formerly Christie's New York, 26 January 2001 (Lot. 153).

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Fig. 3. Carlo Maratti, *Visitation*, 1666.  
Oil on canvas, 340 x 450 cm.  
Rome, Santa Maria della Pace.



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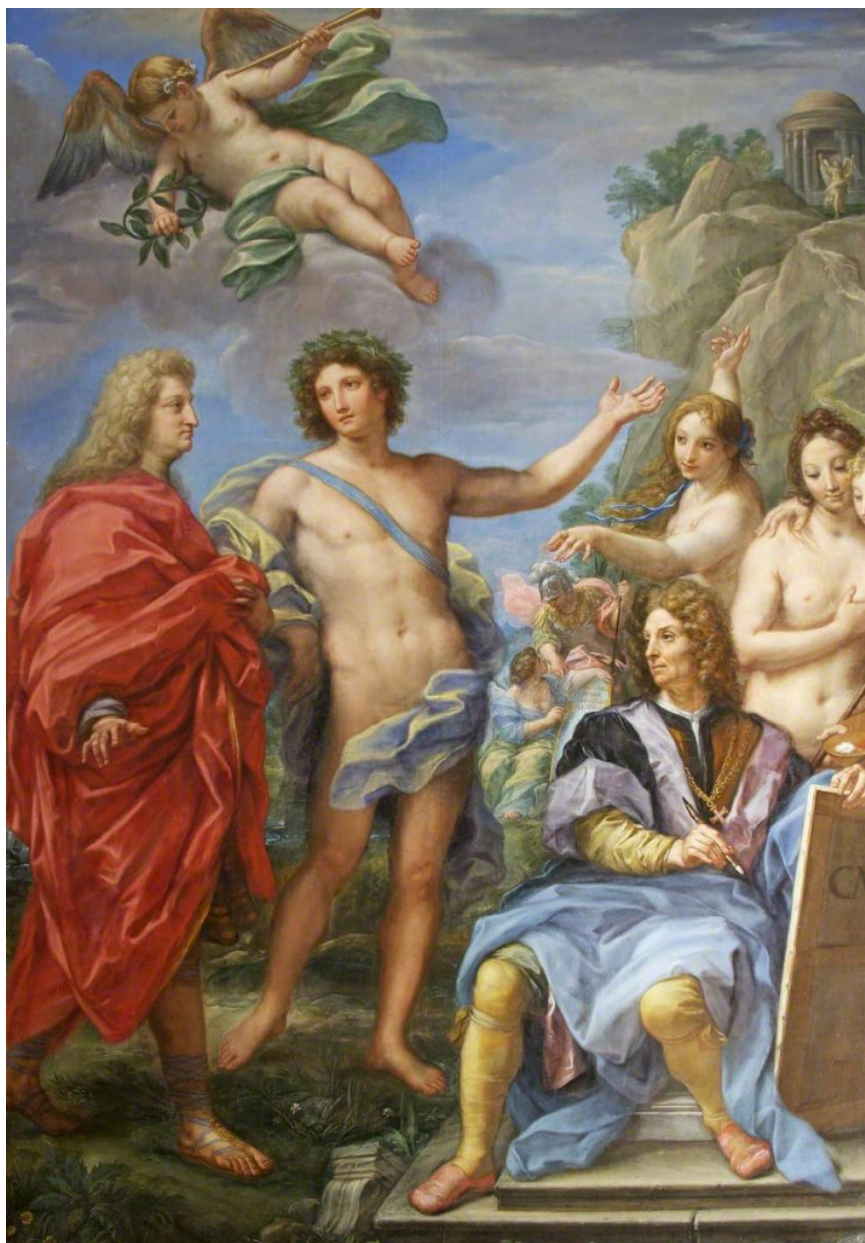


Fig. 4. Carlo Maratti, *Ascent to the Temple of Virtue*, 1706.  
Oil on canvas, 299.5 x 212 cm.  
Stourhead, Wiltshire, The National Trust (Hoare Collection).

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Fig. 5. Carlo Maratti, *Apollo and Daphne*, 1681  
Oil on canvas, 221.2 x 224 cm  
Brussels, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts.



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Fig. 6. Carlo Maratti, *Diana's Bath*, c. 1657.  
Oil on canvas, 110 x 154 cm  
Chatsworth, The Devonshire Collections

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Fig. 7. Carlo Maratti, *Judgement of Paris*, 1708.  
Oil on canvas, 176 x 231 cm.  
St Petersburg, Tsarskoye Selo State Museum.

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Fig. 8. Carlo Maratti, *Saint Nicholas of Bari Resuscitates the Three Children*, 1712.  
Oil on canvas, 245 x 170 cm  
Camerano, Church of Santi Faustina e Niccolò di Bari.



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Fig. 9. Carlo Maratti, *Saint Bernard Induces the Antipope Victor IV to Submit to Pope Innocent II*, 1657-1658. Oil on canvas, dimensions not known. Rome, Church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme



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Fig. 10. Carlo Maratti, *Portrait of Cardinal Giacomo Rospigliosi*, 1668.  
Oil on canvas, 100 x 75.2 cm.  
Oxford, Fitzwilliam Museum.