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Corrado Giaquinto
(Molfetta 1703 – 1766 Naples)

Saint Cecilia

early 1750s

oil on canvas

65.7 x 49.5 cm.;

25 7/8 x 19 1/2 in.

Provenance

Anonymous sale, London, Christie's, 19 March 1982, lot 47 (as Giovanni Camillo Sagrestani);

Dr. Stephen Pepper, New York (as Corrado Giaquinto);

Private collection, Rome.

Literature

G. L. Hersey, in *A Taste for Angels: Neapolitan Painting in North America, 1650 – 1750*, exh. cat., New Haven 1987, pp. 295-296, 322-4, cat. no. 47, reproduced on p. 323.

Exhibited

New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery, *A Taste for Angels: Neapolitan Painting in North America, 1650 – 1750*, 9 September – 29 November 1987;

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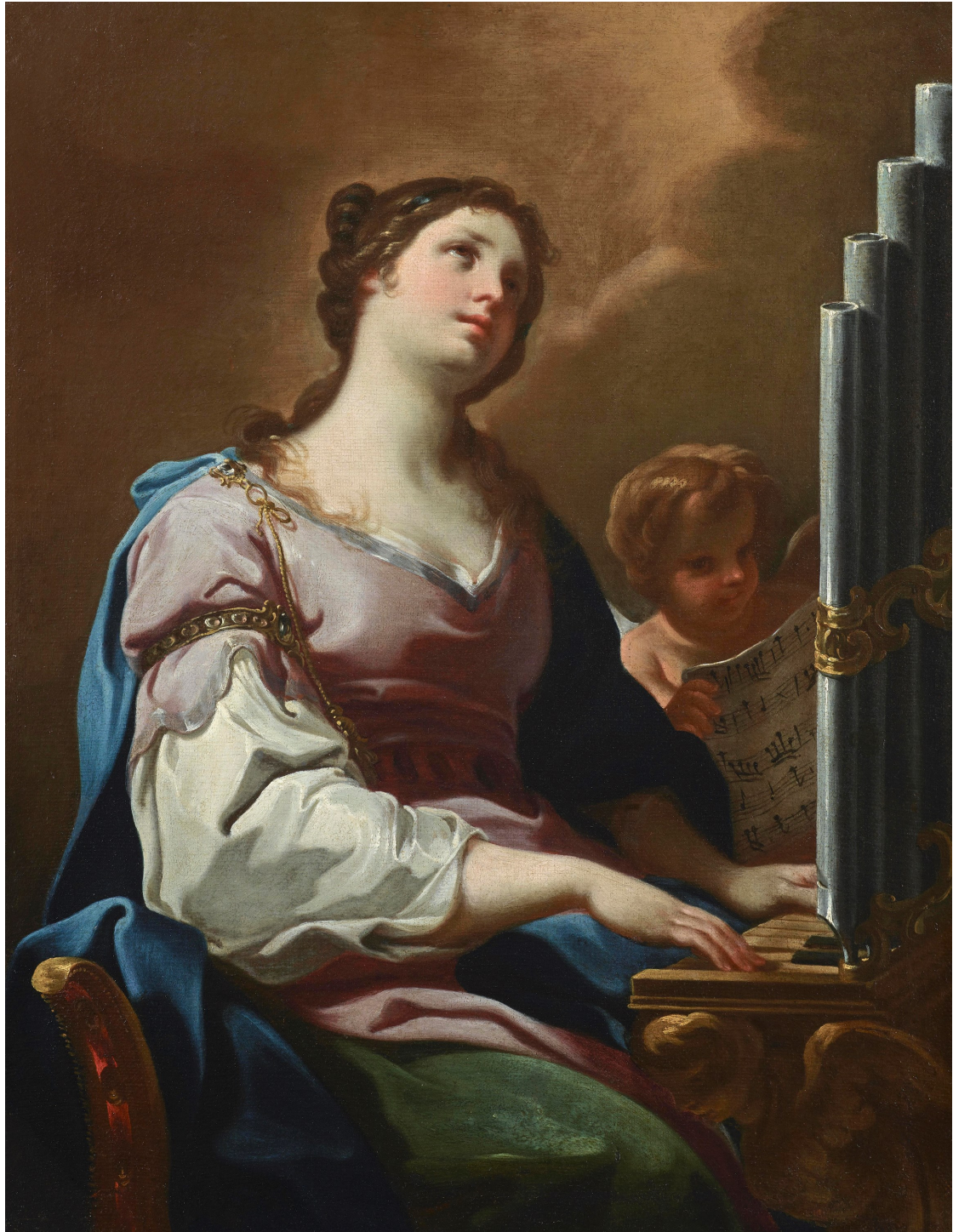
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Sarasota, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, *A Taste for Angels: Neapolitan Painting in North America, 1650 – 1750*, 13 January – 13 March 1988;

Kansas City, Nelson Atkins Museum, *A Taste for Angels: Neapolitan Painting in North America, 1650 – 1750*, 30 March – 12 June 1988.

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The following catalogue note was prepared by George Hersey for *A Taste for Angels: Neapolitan Painting in North American 1650 – 1750*, an exhibition at Yale University Art Gallery, The Ringling Museum of Art and the Nelson Atkins Museum of Art (see *Exhibited*).

The saint, of soft and ample form, is seated at the organ, fingers idly on the keys, her face suffused with dreamy prayer as if, in accordance with her legend she heard some higher music in her heart. Around the tall lead organ pipes winds a gilded filigree. The atmosphere is that of a golden cloud. Cecilia wears a salmon-coloured dress clasped with jewelled gold on the sleeves, white undersleeves, and a blue mantle tied with golden twine. Her underskirt is moss-green. Behind her a putto holds a sheet of music. A brilliant patch of crimson velvet shimmers on the gold arm of her seat.

The picture is particularly close in style to the Prado's *Justice and Peace*. The use of pastel colours – salmon, pale blue, pink, orange – is a noteworthy bond between the pictures, as are the firm, elegant, French-style drawing and clear flesh tonalities. This seems to be another picture from the early 1750s. It is a good specimen of Giaquinto at his most Roman, and particularly analogous to the *Circe*, a seated, three-quarter-length figure turned to the right from a book of astronomical signs, in the Pinacoteca, Montefortino, dated by D'Orsi to 1751-1752.¹ Both have a sumptuous clarity worthy of Maratta or Sacchi. But as with the Chrysler *Adoration of the Magi*, the figure of Sebastiano Conca comes into play – not as a stylistic mentor but as a source of compositions, for example, in the Boston *Sibyl*, dating from 1726 – itself derived from Domenichino. The amplitude of flesh, the soulful orbs turned heavenward, the distant clouds are all family characteristics. Only Giaquinto's bold colours depart from Conca's prototype. One could mention also Conca's own *St. Cecilia*, also in Boston and also of these years.² In a different way the *St. Cecilia* makes a good pair with Solimena's most Roman picture in the [present] show, the *Abduction of Orithyia* from the Walters Art Gallery. Clear, classical colours, transparent shadows, smoothly rendered, exquisite surfaces, and pearly highlights are the hallmarks. Each in its way is an obeisance by a Neapolitan artist to the Roman manner.

Saint Cecilia was a Roman girl described in the *Acts* of the Roman martyrs;³ she lived during

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the reign of Urban I (222-230 A.D.). Though destined to marry a certain Valerianus, she was secretly a Christian and had vowed herself to a life of chastity. When the wedding day arrived, and while appropriate music played, she converted Valerianus to her religious beliefs. Or, to paraphrase the *Acts*, while the wedding music played, Cecilia sang her prayer in her heart. Later she was decapitated by pagan persecutors. In the ninth century her remains were taken to the church of Santa Cecilia in Trastevere, and in 1595 her corpse was again exhumed. At this time Stefano Maderno carved a famous statue of her (1600) showing her recumbent body turned away from the viewer (Santa Cecilia in Trastevere, Rome).

In Giaquinto's period there was an office for the Feast of St. Cecilia which included the Collect: "Cecilia the virgin sang to the music of the organ and, in her heart, to God alone: 'Lord may my heart and body be immaculate, that I be not confounded'".⁴ Particularly rich musical services were celebrated in her honour and the era abounds with St. Cecilians; Domenichino painted an important cycle of her life in the Polet chapel, San Luigi dei Francesci, Rome.⁵

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Footnotes

¹ M. D'Orsi, *Corrado Giaquinto*, Rome 1958, fig. 101.

² Centro Storico Culturale 'Gaeta', *Sebastiano Conca, 1680-1764*, exh. cat., Gaeta 1981, cat. nos. 34 & 35.

³ See K. Künstle, *Ikongraphie der Heiligen*, Freiburg 1926, 146.

⁴ K. Künstle, *Ikongraphie der Heiligen*, Freiburg 1926, 149.

⁵ R. E. Spear, *Domenichino*, 2 vols., New Haven & London 1982, 178ff; K. Künstle, *Ikongraphie der Heiligen*, Freiburg 1926, 146f.