

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Louis (Ludovico) Finson
(Bruges 1580 – 1617 Amsterdam)

Head of Mars

oil on canvas

83.3 x 66.5 cm.;

32 3/4 x 26 1/8 in.

Provenance

Sale, London, Sotheby's, 8 April 2003, lot 138 (as follower of Nicolas Régnier);
Private collection, Italy.

Literature

G. Papi, *La "schola" del Caravaggio: Dipinti dalla Collezione Koelliker*, exh. cat., Milan 2006, pp. 278-279, cat. no. 85, reproduced;
A. Lemoine, *Nicolas Régnier (alias Niccoló Renieri), ca. 1588 – 1667: Peintre, collectionneur et marchand d'art*, Paris 2007, p. 336, under cat. no. R. 60;
G. Papi (ed.), *Cecco del Caravaggio: L'allievo modello*, exh. cat., Milan 2023, pp. 186-187, cat. no. 30, reproduced in colour.

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Exhibited

Ariccia, Palazzo Chigi, *La “schola” del Caravaggio: Dipinti dalla Collezione Koelliker*, 13

October 2006 – 11 February 2007, no. 85;

Bergamo, Accademia Carrara, *Cecco del Caravaggio: L’allievo modello*, 28 January – 4

June 2023, no. 30.

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In the catalogue published to accompany the *Cecco del Caravaggio* exhibition in Bergamo earlier this year, Gianni Papi reaffirmed his opinion that the present painting and the highly comparable version at Hampton Court (fig. 1) are both by Flemish artist Louis Finson.¹ In doing so, he recalled Stefano Causa's comparison of the Hampton Court canvas with Finson's powerful self-portrait in the Musée des Beaux-Arts (fig. 2),² Marseille, drawing attention to the similarity between the subjects' poses, their hand gestures, the smooth consistency of their skin, and the anatomy of their shoulders and collarbones.

In the same text, Papi emphasised our painting's indisputable quality, which again confirms its autograph status: note the metallic lustre of the helmet, the workmanship of the artist's hand (which is truly Caravaggesque in a Neapolitan sense), and the shine of the figure's skin in the convex areas.³

One can deduce that Mars, the god of war, is here depicted by way of Finson's emphasis on his standing as a soldier. In addition to the armour and parcel-gilt helmet topped with a plume of ostrich feathers that the figure dons, the viewer's attention is drawn to his athletic frame and muscular shoulders, which are further accentuated by his twisted pose. His left hand strokes his beard in a philosophical manner, reminding us of his superior status.

Biography

Despite his tragically short life, Louis Finson played a major role in the Northern Caravaggesque movement. Having been born in Bruges, where he trained in the studio of his father Jacques, Finson then travelled to Italy at some point in the first decade of the seventeenth century. He is documented in Naples in 1608, where he was residing with another Flemish painter, Abraham Vinck. He had probably previously spent time in Rome, where he may have been a pupil of Caravaggio, whose works he frequently copied. In fact, we know that Finson owned three paintings by Caravaggio that were among his possessions when he died: the *Madonna of the Rosary* (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), a *Judith with the head of Holofernes*, and a *Crucifixion of St. Andrew*.

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In 1612, Finson visited Spain and shortly afterwards was active in southern France throughout Marseille, Aix-en-Provence, Arles, Montpellier and Bordeaux, where he played a key role in introducing the Caravaggesque style at an early stage.⁴ He then moved north to Paris and finally to Amsterdam in 1616, where he lodged again with Vinck, and where he died the following year.

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Figure 1. Louis (Ludovico) Finson, *Head of Mars*.
English Royal Collection, Hampton Court

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Figure 2. Louis (Ludovico) Finson, *Self-portrait*.
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Marseille

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Footnotes

¹ See first: G. Papi, *La "schola" del Caravaggio: Dipinti dalla Collezione Koelliker*, exh. cat., Milan 2006, pp. 278-279, cat. no. 85, reproduced, and more recently G. Papi (ed.), *Cecco del Caravaggio: L'allievo modello*, exh. cat., Milan 2023, pp. 186-187, cat. no. 30, reproduced in colour.

² S. Causa, 'Gli amici nordici del Caravaggio a Napoli', in *Prospettiva*, 93-94, 1999, p. 155, n. 7.

³ Papi 2023, p. 186.

⁴ See J. Bikker, in *French, Dutch and Flemish Caravaggesque Paintings from the Koelliker Collection*, London 2005, p. 38.