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Hendrick De Somer
David with the Head of Goliath, c. 1640

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HENDRICK DE SOMER

(Lokeren 1602 - 1655/56 (?) Naples)

DAVID WITH THE HEAD OF GOLIATH, c. 1640

Oil on canvas

101.5 x 75 cm.; 40 x 29 1/2 in.

Provenance

Property of The World Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma;
Anonymous sale, Christie's, New York, 12 June 1981, lot 9 as *Circle of Matheus Stomer*;
Private Collection, Naples.

Literature

N. Spinosa, "Aggiunte a Hendrick van Somer, "alias" Enrico Fiammingo", in *Napoli, l'Europa: Ricerche di storia dell'arte in onore di Ferdinando Bologna*, (eds.) F. Abbate & F. Sricchia Santoro, Catanzaro 1995, p. 226, fig. 180.
N. Spinosa, *Grazia e tenerezza "in posa". Bernardo Cavallino e il suo tempo 1616-1656*, Rome 2013, p. 243, fig. 205.
G. Porzio, *La scuola di Ribera. Giovanni Do, Bartolomeo Passante, Enrico Fiammingo*, Napoli 2014, pp. 97, 106, fig. 84, no. 31.
N. Spinosa, *Caravaggio e i caravaggeschi. La pittura di realtà*, (ed.) V. Sgarbi, Sassari 2015, pp. 137-138, no. 23.
N. Spinosa, *Artemisia Gentileschi e il suo tempo*, Skira, Milano 2016, p. 258, no. 84.

Exhibitions

Sassari, Palazzo Ducale, *Caravaggio e i caravaggeschi. La pittura di realtà*, 26 June - 30 October 2015.
Roma, Museo di Roma at Palazzo Braschi, *Artemisia Gentileschi e il suo tempo*, 30 November 2016 - 7 May 2017.

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This beautifully painted and arresting *David with the Head of Goliath* was first published and restituted to the oeuvre of the Flemish baroque master Hendrick de Somer by Nicola Spinosa in 1995.¹ One of the most gifted artists associated with the circle of Ribera in Naples, “Enrico Fiammingo”, as he was also referred to in contemporary local sources, fell into obscurity at an early date: by the mid-18th century, Bernardo de Dominici’s account of the artist inaccurately described him as a pupil of Ribera, alongside the equally little-known Giovanni Dó and Bartolomeo Passante. It is only in recent years that de Somer’s work and his importance have been properly redefined through archival research and the reassessment of his *corpus*. The definitive attribution of the present work to the Flemish artist relies on its close stylistic and thematic concordance with the *David* in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Nice (Fig. 1) and the antecedent version of the same subject in a private Roman collection, of identical size and signed with the initials ‘HS’.²

The handsome biblical hero, portrayed in three-quarter view against a darkened background of rocks and crepuscular landscape, is depicted wearing a feathered hat and a fur vest, while holding the sword taken from the Philistine giant in his right hand and leaning on his severed head. Previously variously ascribed to Battistello Caracciolo and Matthias Stomer, the present canvas shares the luminous intensity, detailed surface textures, and refined chromatic values of the Nice version.³ The fundamental originality of this work, however, lies in the intimate attitude of the young protagonist: no longer fierce and complacent, he now eschews the viewer’s direct gaze and appears somewhere between disenchanted and melancholic, as if the immediate sense of pride for his legendary deed has been overtaken by a more meditative disposition.

Given the exquisite quality of the chromatic effect of the sword hilt and the fine anatomical rendering of Goliath’s head, still based on famous Caravaggesque models, Spinosa regarded it as a typical work of the early 1640s. In the wake of past naturalistic research, typical of his master Jusepe de Ribera, de Somer was moving towards more fashionable ‘neo-Venetian’ painterly solutions, parallel to the artistic developments introduced by Massimo Stanzione, Bernardo Cavallino and Francesco Guarino (with whom he has been regularly confused) in those same years. A comparison with Stanzione’s own rendition of the same subject, today at the San Diego Museum of Art (Fig. 2), highlights the evolving pictorial language within the Neapolitan artistic milieu of the time. Based on analogous stylistic considerations, the

¹ Spinosa, 1995, p. 226, footnote 14.

² A third version of the same subject, which had appeared at auction at Christie’s, New York on 7 June 2002 (lot 39), with an attribution to the school of Nicolas Toumier, was appropriately returned to Somer by Giuseppe Porzio in 2012 (see Spinosa 2015, p. 138).

³ See Spinosa 2013, p. 484, for a detailed comparison between the two versions.

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present *David* can be compared to Somer's only known public commission: the *Baptism of Christ* (1641) painted by the Flemish artist for the Dominican church of Santa Maria della Sapienza in Naples, where he worked together with other *Riberaeschi* as Cesare Fracanzano and Giovanni Ricca (Fig. 3).⁴ Other significant works can be situated in this same mature phase of Somer's artistic career, as the *Lot and his Daughters* (c. 1645) at the Thyssen-Bornemisza collection (Fig. 4).

Nicola Spinosa

⁴ D. Veronique & C. Naldi, *Massimo Stanzione, Guercino, Hendrick de Somer et Fra' Galgario*, Paris 2016, pp. 20–25

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Fig. 1. Hendrick de Somer, *David with the Head of Goliath*, c. 1640, oil on canvas. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nice.



Fig. 2. Massimo Stanzione, *David with the Head of Goliath*, c. 1642-1643, oil on canvas.
The San Diego Museum of Art, San Diego.

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Fig. 3. Hendrick de Somer, *The Baptism of Christ*, 1641, oil on canvas.
Church of Santa Maria della Sapienza, Naples.

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Fig. 4. Hendrick de Somer, *Lot and his Daughters*, c. 1645, oil on canvas.
Collection Thyssen-Bornemisza, Lugano.

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COLNAGHI *London*

26 BURY STREET, LONDON SW1Y 6AL
UNITED KINGDOM

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
10AM-6PM

+44 (0)20 7491 7408

contact@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI *Madrid*

CALLE GENERAL CASTAÑOS 9
PLANTA BAJA, DCHA.
28004 MADRID

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
BY APPOINTMENT

spain@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI *New York*

23 EAST 67TH STREET, FOURTH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10065
USA

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
10AM-6PM

+1 (917) 388-3825

newyork@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI *Brussels*

RUE JACQUES JORDAENS 30
1000 BRUXELLES
BELGIUM

BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

brussels@colnaghi.com