

# LOOKING CLOSELY



Fede Galizia (1578 – Milan – 1630), *Portrait of a Physician (Ludovico Settala?)*, ca. 1600–05, oil on canvas, 54 x 42 cm (21 ¼ x 16 ½ in)

## PAINTING IN THE SHADOW OF THE PLAGUE: CONSIDERING ART IN 17<sup>TH</sup>-CENTURY LOMBARDY

Between 1629 and 1632, a plague beset Northern Italy. Highly expressive, decidedly eccentric, and sometimes macabre, the painting of early seventeenth-century Lombardy can seem to presage this event; later, in the wake of the plague, art reflected upon the tragedy. In the devotional works of artists like Procaccini, Cerano, Morrazzone, Francesco Cairo, Tanzio da Varallo, and Daniele Crespi, the last two whom died during the outbreak, the anguished suffering of the biblical martyrs was transformed into ecstatic and sensual rapture, as these holy figures found liberation in the revelation of eternal life. At the same time, the portraiture of the period captures the elegance and defiance of those who faced these harrowing times. At turns dramatic, morbid, and rapturous, these images do not shy away from the experience of agony and sorrow, but instead with their shadowy settings and mannered depictions of intense violence and pain, passionately portray their protagonists as inspiring heroes of miraculous survival, as exemplars of the human condition and spirit. Such works also remind us that in moments of fear and crisis, the act of creation can prove the ultimate respite.

### READ

*For an incisive, fictional account of the 17th-century pestilence that struck Lombardy, read Alessandro Manzoni's 1827 *The Betrothed* (*I promessi sposi*).*

### VISIT

*The Triennale Milan website where historian and art critic Giovanni Agosti, reflects on the plagues that swept through the city of Milan, and on the role played by art within the context of these epidemics.*

### LISTEN

*To Verdi's timeless and emotional *Requiem*, composed in memory of his friend Alessandro Manzoni.*

### LEARN

*About masterworks from this period with **Robilant+Voena**.*