

BEAUTY, SEDUCTION AND SHARING

EN

Art Collection
Maria and João Cortez de Lobão

21 APR — 03 JUL
2022

This large canvas of Saint John the Baptist, depicted in his youth, signed by Giovanni Baglione and dated 1610, is most likely related to a commission by Cardinal Alessandro Damasconi Peretti di Montalto (1571-1623) who, on 3 August that year, paid Baglione 100 scudi for a painting of the same theme. Nephew of Pope Sixtus V, he was made cardinal in 1585. At just 14 years old, he became secretary of the curia, patron of Bernini and Carlo Maderno, a music lover and great collector. The commission shows how Baglione was one of the most widely accepted Roman painters among the cardinals and main families of the great art collectors of the papal curia, even after the episode in which he came up against Caravaggio and other painters from his circle in court and which led to the name Baglione being frequently disparaged in a vast Caravaggesque bibliography. In 1603, Baglione accused Caravaggio and some of the painters closest to the great baroque master of being the authors of two defamatory poems about him that circulated anonymously in Rome, to which we still have access today as they have been attached to the judiciary process. Despite several of those implicated, such as Orazio Gentileschi, recognised Baglione's artistic merit during the trial, Caravaggio brusquely asserted that he did not know any artist 'who [thought] Baglione [was] a good painter'. The statement had more of an impact on contemporary historiography, after the significant appreciation of Caravaggio in the second half of the 20th century, than on the painter's fame during his lifetime and if it had any artistic influence it was the interruption of the brief period in which Baglione was seduced by Caravaggio's strong chiaroscuro, which had especially influenced his two versions of "Sacred and Profane Love" (one now in Rome, in the Palazzo Barberini and the other in the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin), painted in 1602. These highly Caravaggesque paintings, understood as a response to Caravaggio's famous *Amor vincit omnia*, were



Giovanni Baglione
(Rome, 1566-1643)

***Saint John the Baptist in the
Wilderness***

1610

Signed and dated: "EQ IO. /
BAGLIONVS /.r.p.1610"

Oil on canvas

194 × 151 cm

Fundação Gaudium Magnum

probably the direct cause of the offensive poems against Baglione.

In fact, over the course of his career, Giovanni Baglione absorbed and combined very diverse influences. Born in Rome, in 1566, after a short apprenticeship with Francesco Morelli he contributed to works on the Vatican, at the Scala Sancta, the library and the Palazzo Lateranense, incorporating influences from Veronese and late mannerist painters like Federico Zuccari and the Cavaliere d'Arpino. Illness prompted him to travel to Naples, in the 1590s, where he worked on the Certosa di San Martino, with Giuseppe Cesare. It was when he returned to Rome, at the end of the century, and in the years that followed, that his work was more clearly influenced by Caravaggio, until their conflict in 1603. Baglione then adopted an eclectic style, which revealed a critical interest in the works of his peers, influencing the literary work he produced towards the end of his life: *Le nove chiese di Roma*, published in 1639 by Andrea Fei, and *Le Vite de' pittori scultori et architetti dal pontificato di Gregorio XIII de 1572 in fino a' tempi di Papa Urbano Otavo nel 1642*, published the year before he died (1643), a series of biographies of Roman artists or artists working in Rome which was presented as a continuation of the famous *Vitae* by Giorgio Vasari. This interest in the works of other artists, and a continuous study of sculptural models, profoundly influenced Baglione's work, in a versatility that was recognised by several contemporary writers, such as Karel van Mander. Giulio Mancini (1559-1630), writer, protonotary apostolic and great collector, also described Baglione, in his *Considerazioni sulla pittura*, written between 1617 and 1621, as one of the artists who worked "with an individual style" without following "in anybody's footsteps", calling

him "a man of great civility, always honourable and respectable". Giovanni Baglione had, in effect, a career filled with recognition. He was *principe* of the Accademia di San Luca and received a knighthood in the Supreme Order of Christ from Pope Paul V, with whose insignia he always depicted himself.

The painting of the Gaudium Magnum collection representing Saint John the Baptist is the most monumental of the works in which he dealt with this theme, always preferring to depict the Saint in his youth. A beautiful canvas, dated 1600 (sold at Christie's in New York on 19 April 2007) shows Saint John almost as a child but already dressed in the attire of a prophet in the desert. Several graphic studies of the same theme also exist; one of them, belonging to Allentown Art Museum (inv. A 15942), was probably a study for the painting now on display. The figure of Saint John shows a strong sculptural conception of the form, with a figure defined by strong and precise lines and a delicate treatment of light, positioned against the dark background of a rock, leaving the right-hand side of the painting open onto a low-lying, gentle landscape, and a cloudy sky whose colours reveal the influence of Bolognese painting. The result is one of great monumentality and makes an impressive impact on the spectator. Curiously, around the same time, one of his opponents in the lawsuit of 1603, Orazio Gentileschi, painted his *David Contemplating the Head of Goliath*, now in the Galleria Spada in Rome, with a similar relationship between the landscape in the background and the main figure, showing how Roman painters in the early seventeenth century were attentive to the works of their peers, in a game of rivalries, but also mutual influences.

JOC