

The Candle's Waltz
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in collaboration with Thomas
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MANUELE BONACCORSI OFF-SCREEN

8 December 2021, Lucca. Vittorio Sgarbi opened this exhibition. It is titled "The Painters of Light", and features works by Caravaggio and his students.

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE - TG1 9/12/2021

Caravaggio was the first painter of light, and many more have taken inspiration from him by visiting Rome to see the fire he lit.

MANUELE BONACCORSI OFF-SCREEN

The exhibition's highlight is this large unpublished work by Rutilio Manetti, a famous Caravaggesque artist. It is titled "St. Peter's Arrest." In this case, Sgarbi is not only the curator and testimonial of the exhibition but also the artwork's owner.

ALESSANDRO BAGNOLI - ART HISTORIAN

In THE PAINTING, St. Peter is arrested by several soldiers and a king, a subject rarely depicted.

MANUELE BONACCORSI

What is the market value of Rutilio Manetti's artwork?

ALESSANDRO BAGNOLI - ART HISTORIAN

It can be up to 200-300 thousand euros here in Italy, but it might be of a higher value abroad.

MANUELE BONACCORSI OFF-SCREEN

An identical painting is stored in the database of the Carabinieri Special Unit for the Protection of Cultural Heritage. A report from Interpol accompanies it. The artwork was reported stolen in 2013 from the Buriasco Castle, close to Turin, as confirmed by the theft victim, Margherita Buzio.

MARGHERITA BUZIO - OWNER OF THE BURIASCO CASTLE

Here is the gate. They broke the chain to enter. The frame was too heavy, so they cut the canvas off, rolled it and took it with them.

MANUELE BONACCORSI

Do you think the work on display and the one in our picture are the same artwork?

ALESSANDRO BAGNOLI - ART HISTORIAN

It seems the same to me. The only difference is here.

MANUELE BONACCORSI OFF-SCREEN

A candle appears in the upper left part of the painting exhibited by Sgarbi in Lucca, but it is not mentioned in Carabinieri's report.

Gianfranco Mingardi was one of Sgarbi's art conservators of trust. He told us that one of Sgarbi's collaborators, Paolo Bocedi, delivered him a painting identical to the stolen one in May 2013. Sgarbi, too, went to his studio several times to look at it. Mingardi shows us the picture of the painting he was delivered.

MANUELE BONACCORSI

There was a rolled-up canvas... An old rolled-up canvas

GIANFRANCO MINGARDI - ART CONSERVATOR

I would never have imagined a canvas could get damaged like this. Do you see that?

MANUELE BONACCORSI

The canvas is torn, cut...

GIANFRANCO MINGARDI - ART CONSERVATOR

It is cut, see?

MANUELE BONACCORSI

In your opinion, the painting without the candle and the one with it are the same. The candle is the only difference. Is it the same painting or a copy?

GIANFRANCO MINGARDI - ART CONSERVATOR

No, it's the same.

THOMAS MACKINSON

Why did he add a candle?

GIANFRANCO MINGARDI - ART CONSERVATOR

The candle makes it unrecognisable.

MANUELE BONACCORSI

Listen, Professor, there is a minor issue with that painting: it was reported stolen.

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE

But it is not the same artwork. You are incompetent, as always.

THOMAS MACKINSON

The painting is not this one?

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE

No, it's not. Let's take a look. This one...

THOMAS MACKINSON

We found that this painting was delivered to your art conservator like this—a rolled-up canvas.

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE

This is how it was found in Maidalchina.

MANUELE BONACCORSI

However, it was delivered to Mingardi as a rolled-up canvas, which is the same canvas you exhibited. It even shows the same flaws. In other words, yours is stolen artwork, Professor.

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE

But it cannot be; this one was in Villa Maidalchina...

MANUELE BONACCORSI

It is a weird coincidence. Don't you think?

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE

It is a coincidence. There are two versions of the same author, one found in Villa Maidalchina, while the other was in that castle, which I don't remember.

MANUELE BONACCORSI

And how come Mingardi has a picture of this painting, a stolen painting, Professor? Mingardi has the image of the stolen painting and told us you were the one who delivered the artwork to him.

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE

But did I deliver it to him, or was it Bocedi?

MANUELE BONACCORSI

Bocedi did it on your account.

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE

This is Bocedi's problem.

MANUELE BONACCORSI

Professor, the problem is yours because you have the artwork. Someone should take a closer look at it.

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE

That's wrong. I have another artwork. Let me call Carabinieri so they can check it. I will contact them personally.

MANUELE BONACCORSI

It is the best thing to do.

MANUELE BONACCORSI OFF-SCREEN

Sgarbi took it badly. After our reportage went on air, he discussed the story of the stolen Manetti with Mediaset.

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE - 4TH REPUBLIC - 18/12/2023

I was attacked, insulted and offended by criminals who call themselves journalists. They are scammers. These dick heads, they suck. They are horrible, typical criminals. It was a copy. Neither this nor that painting are originals; there are many copies, and that was a poorer one.

NICOLA PORRO - 4th REPUBLIC - 18/12/2023

Was that copy stolen?

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE - 4TH REPUBLIC - 18/12/2023

Maybe this copy was stolen, but I don't know about it.

MANUELE BONACCORSI OFF-SCREEN

Your assumption is that my painting and the painting that got stolen are two different artworks. Sgarbi also denies that he had the work delivered to the art conservator Gianfranco Mingardi.

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE - 4TH REPUBLIC - 18/12/2023

The conservator told them he had worked on an artwork I had sent him. This man had probably restored another painting, not this one. He didn't work on this.

MANUELE BONACCORSI OFF-SCREEN

However, during our interview with Sgarbi, he stated the opposite. He admitted that Mingardi had restored the artwork.

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE

I recently had this restored. It was this one, not the other. I don't know anything about the other.

THOMAS MACKINSON

And who restored it?

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE

Mingardi

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE - 4TH REPUBLIC - 18/12/2023

He was in a villa bought by my mother, Villa Moidalchina.

MANUELE BONACCORSI OFF-SCREEN

Then, Sgarbi stated the same thing on TV: that the artwork came from Villa Moidalchina. This villa is located in the Viterbo countryside. It is an aristocratic residence purchased by Rita Cavallini, Sgarbi's mother, in 2000. Why did the former owner not know an original Manetti was in his house?

LUIGI ACHILLI - FORMER OWNER OF VILLA MAIDALCHINA

It was an abandoned building.

MANUELE BONACCORSI

Were there artworks inside?

LUIGI ACHILLI - FORMER OWNER OF VILLA MAIDALCHINA

No. There were frescoes but no artwork.

THOMAS MACKINSON

Have you checked if there was artwork from the 17th century in the attic?

LUIGI ACHILLI - FORMER OWNER OF VILLA MAIDALCHINA

There was no attic.

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE

If, during the restoration works, I found something in the attic that the previous owner didn't know, that's my fucking business. But why do you want to understand what was in there?

To discover that I am lucky and you are not? That you will never find a Manetti in an attic? Or at an auction?

MANUELE BONACCORSI OFF-SCREEN

In his curatorial text, Sgarbi wrote that Manetti's artwork was listed in the inventory of the villa's assets ordered by one of its residents, Andrea Maidalchini, drafted by Notary Cosimo Pennacchi and filed in the States Archives of Viterbo. We decided to look for the original deed.

ANGELO ALLEGRINI - DIRECTOR OF THE STATES ARCHIVES OF VITERBO

It should be this one, 1649.

MANUELE BONACCORSI

Can we take a look?

ANGELO ALLEGRINI - DIRECTOR OF THE STATES ARCHIVES OF VITERBO

Sure. Here it is.

MANUELE BONACCORSI

It is not so easy to read.

ANGELO ALLEGRINI - DIRECTOR OF THE STATES ARCHIVES OF VITERBO

Hoc est inventarium omnis et singulorum bonorum: A painting over the door depicting St. Peter with a maid, another painting depicting Saint Catherine, and so on, St. Peter only appears here.

MANUELE BONACCORSI

There is no mention of Rutilio Manetti?

ANGELO ALLEGRINI - DIRECTOR OF THE STATES ARCHIVES OF VITERBO

No.

MANUELE BONACCORSI OFF-SCREEN

There is a St. Peter, but the one with the maid. For Sgarbi, this proves that the work was in Villa Moidalchina. The Under Secretary also stated this on television.

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE - 4TH REPUBLIC - 18/12/2023

Then they looked for the deed and found a St. Peter in Villa Moidalchina. Don't tell me about it.

MANUELE BONACCORSI OFF-SCREEN

Even this version by Sgarbi does not stand up. The St. Peter mentioned in the deed is probably this one, which is a picture stored in the Longhi Foundation in Florence. Next to the Church's Father and the soldiers who are about to arrest him, there is a maid, a female character. The work, according to Longhi's notes, is in Belgium. In a text written in 2010 by Professor Ciampolini, the co-author of the curatorial text of the exhibition in Lucca with Vittorio Sgarbi, the work is titled "St. Peter's Arrest", location unknown.

ALESSANDRO BAGNOLI - ART HISTORIAN

We cannot refer to St. Peter's arrest. St. Peter and the Maid is the painting depicting the moment in which St. Peter denies Jesus Christ,

He denies being one of Jesus' disciples before a young girl. This one, instead, is a subsequent event told in the Acts of the Apostles concerning St. Peter's arrest.

MANUELE BONACCORSI

So, from an evangelical perspective, they are two different things.

ALESSANDRO BAGNOLI - ART HISTORIAN

Completely different. One would think, and that must require an explanation from the authors of this text, Vittorio Sgarbi and Marco Ciampolini, that they wanted to recreate an illustrious pedigree to this painting.

SIGFRIDO RANUCCI STUDIO

Well, Sgarbi is not so lucky. Mackinson and Bonaccorsi found the painting of "St. Peter with the Maid" somewhere else in Belgium. So, every attempt made by the Under Secretary of Culture to explain the origin of his painting - primarily when delivered in an uncontroversial context - falls. He changes the version according to the situation. This has already happened with the art conservator. He said Mingardi had restored the artwork; then, when he found out that Mingardi had shown us a picture of this torn, rolled-up canvas with no candle on it, he changed the whole story into, No, Mingardi was not the art conservator, it was someone else. Our reporters, Bonaccorsi and Mackinson, decided to track the painting, and this time, they did it piece by piece. We are being as severe as the Court of Cassation.

MANUELE BONACCORSI OFF-SCREEN

February 2013, Buriasco Castle. Margherita Buzio discovered that unknown people had entered her property, cut off a precious canvas by Rutilio Manetti and replaced it with a photo. Stuck between the canvas and the frame, we found a fragment of the work.

8 May 2013: The work reappeared at the Brescia motorway tolling station. The art conservator Gianfranco Mingardi told us that Paolo Bocedi, Sgarbi's historical collaborator, delivered it on account of the Art critic. Mingardi took a picture of the work; it is full of holes. And, like in a puzzle, the fragment we found perfectly matches one of these holes.

May 2018. Sgarbi's driver of trust, Valerio Zennoni, retrieved the Manetti from Mingardi's studio and brought it to Rho Ferrarese, where the Cavallini-Sgarbi foundation is located. The work, as shown in Mingardi's photos, has no candle.

Then, Valerio Zennoni brought Manetti's artwork to Padua and left it in the studio of a famous art restorer, Valentina Piovan.

In October 2020, Samuele De Pietri went to Piovan's studio, took the artwork, and brought it to the suburbs of Correggio, Reggio Emilia, to store in his shed. He owns GLAB, a company specialising in precision scanning and printing. In the delivered work, the candle appears on the upper left part of the canvas.

SAMUELE DE PIETRI - ENTREPRENEUR

We created a clone of that painting in our centre. We had the chance to scan Manetti's artwork. We took it from Padua.

THOMAS MACKINSON

Who ordered you to do so?

SAMUELE DE PIETRI - ENTREPRENEUR
Professor Sgarbi.

THOMAS MACKINSON
Has Sgarbi been here?

SAMUELE DE PIETRI - ENTREPRENEUR
Twice.

MANUELE BONACCORSI OFF-SCREEN
Samuele has some videos of Sgarbi's visits. The Professor observes the copy details and gets closer to the original artwork to notice possible differences.

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE
The exciting thing about this operation is that the thickness is below. When you see the thickness, you don't waste your time.

SAMUELE DE PIETRI - ENTREPRENEUR
This scanner analyses all the relevant data, namely the painting's surface. So, we have two data: photographic and textural data. In other words, brush strokes and craquele are all pieces of information that we can find in an artwork.

MANUELE BONACCORSI
What is craquele?

SAMUELE DE PIETRI - ENTREPRENEUR
Craquele means all the little cracks we can detect through scanning or with the bare eye.

MANUELE BONACCORSI OFF-SCREEN
Samuele and his brother Cristian showed us the HD scanning of the artwork. All the painting is crossed by cracks due to time passing, except for the spot where the candle is.

SAMUELE DE PIETRI - ENTREPRENEUR
This is the painting that we scanned. All the white shades here are the craquele of ancient artworks. For example, if we zoom in here for a second, yes. See, those cracks run in the paint, and maybe it is shrinking.

MANUELE BONACCORSI
Supposedly, the candle must show the same type of craquelè.

SAMUELE DE PIETRI - ENTREPRENEUR
See, it stops; there is nothing to see here.

MANUELE BONACCORSI
And the candle is also more prominent. We can still see the brush stroke.

SAMUELE DE PIETRI - ENTREPRENEUR
Yes, we see the candle's brush stroke. Here, we can spot the brush strokes.

MANUELE BONACCORSI

This is a sign that it was added later.

MANUELE BONACCORSI OFF-SCREEN

We found the same thing in many other spots. We compared the two paintings, Sgarbi's and the stolen one photographed by Mingardi, which is full of holes. By overlapping them, we can see how cracks disappear at the holes. And we can detect the patches' contours—here, for example, and here.

But there is more: The stolen artwork also has this horizontal line. By overlapping it with Sgarbi's canvas, the same imperfection appears at the same point.

MANUELE BONACCORSI

Do you think they are the same painting before and after restoration?

JACOPO CARLI – ART CONSERVER

I challenge anyone with a shred of an eye not to see these things, which are crystal clear. You can see how smooth the surface of this patch is; here, it is clear that there are no cracks.

THOMAS MACKINSON

Do you think the candle has been added?

JACOPO CARLI – ART CONSERVER

Something around the candle makes the painting unnatural. The traces, yes, underneath the craquelet are there, but they are saturated by this.

MANUELE BONACCORSI

Does saturated mean as if they had been covered?

JACOPO CARLI – ART CONSERVER

Exactly, as if they had been filled in somehow. When you go to do a repainting over the craquelet, the craquelet is automatically filled in.

ALESSANDRO BAGNOLI - ART HISTORIAN

The photos you have shown me clearly show that this is the same painting. The difference lies in the infamous light from a distance, that torch, which, seen at close range, does not have the appearance of a 17th-century torch. It could really be an addition made on purpose to diversify the painting.

MANUELE BONACCORSI OFF-SCREEN

Based on the very high-quality scan, Samuele and his brother made a relief copy of Sgarbi's work. It is identical in every respect to the original; it only has one flaw.

SAMUELE DE PIETRI - ENTREPRENEUR

In the dog part, some lines practically overlap the print in a parallel manner, which is present in this area. These lines, however, are not present in the original.

THOMAS MACKINSON

Why did you leave it?

SAMUELE DE PIETRI - ENTREPRENEUR

We also wanted to see if anyone would notice. I am honest. We said: let's try to leave and see if anyone notices. In the end, no one noticed.

MANUELE BONACCORSI OFF-SCREEN

These are the lines perfectly parallel. It is an invisible printing error, the only one that can allow the naked eye to distinguish the real Manetti from his copy. In January 2022, an amateur photographer visited the exhibition in Lucca and took a photo of the Manetti. Here it is. It shows the same printing error.

SAMUELE DE PIETRI - ENTREPRENEUR

If the photographer who took the picture confirms that he took this photo in Lucca and not in another location, this picture is our copy. It is Sgarbi's copy.

MANUELE BONACCORSI

Did you photograph the Arrest of St. Peter by Rutilio Manetti?

FRANCESCO BINI - PHOTOGRAPHER

Yes, last year at the exhibition in Lucca.

MANUELE BONACCORSI

Did you take this photo inside the exhibition?

FRANCESCO BINI - PHOTOGRAPHER

Yes, of course.

MANUELE BONACCORSI

Was it just the picture on display for the public to see?

FRANCESCO BINI - PHOTOGRAPHER

Yes, yes.

MANUELE BONACCORSI

Professor, it really seems that the candle has been added. The candle is in relief, while the rest of the painting is flat. I won't chase you if you don't want to talk to us.

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE

I don't want to talk. I don't understand. Are the police there? I don't know who you are.

MANUELE BONACCORSI

The whole picture is full of cracks. That very piece of the candle has no cracks. I will add one simple thing. It seems that the work you exhibited here in Lucca...

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE

...is a photograph.

MANUELE BONACCORSI

A digital copy: did you exhibit a fake, Professor?

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE

The only fakes are you.

MANUELE BONACCORSI OFF-SCREEN

Then Sgarbi gets out of the car and answers our questions in his way.

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE

You understand nothing, and you have seen nothing. The painting has been noticed. All the Italian critics have seen it. You are two wicked goats.

THOMAS MACKINSON

But listen, do you rule out that it's a digital copy?

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE

It's an original work. If you have to torture someone, you've made a mistake because I... Can we call? I'll kick you out because you don't have an appointment with me. This one doesn't have an appointment with me.

MANUELE BONACCORSI

No, no, no... Professor, professor...

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE

Who are you? Get the fuck out of here! You have not seen the painting. You will never see it.

THOMAS MACKINSON

Will you show it to us?

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE

I won't show it to you because you disgust me.

MANUELE BONACCORSI

Has the candle been added?

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE

The candle has always been there. No one added it.

MANUELE BONACCORSI

Why is it in relief?

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE

Have you seen the painting? It is not in relief at all. You have not seen it.

MANUELE BONACCORSI

I have seen the scan. The point is that the candle appears in relief in your scanned painting. It was probably added.

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE

By whom would it have been added? That's how I found the painting.

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE

Someone saw the painting at the Maidaalchina when I found it.

MANUELE BONACCORSI

Is there a photo? And who is this witness?

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE
I don't have to tell you.

MANUELE BONACCORSI
But where do you have it? In Rho?

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE
No, I don't have it anywhere. I sold it.

MANUELE BONACCORSI
You sold it? Ah, so there will be an export permit?

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE
No, because I haven't sold it abroad.

MANUELE BONACCORSI
From a technical analysis you can see whether that candle has been added or not, and you can also see...

VITTORIO SGARBI - UNDER SECRETARY FOR CULTURE
But you don't have to...You have to do the analysis of your asshole. You don't have to do any analysis. The painting was found there. There were witnesses to the painting. The painting was restored not by Mingardi but by Piovan, who did a perfect cleaning. And this is the painting. Nobody put the candle there. The candle has always been there.

MANUELE BONACCORSI OFF-SCREEN
As we were about to leave, we were stopped by the police. Sgarbi has reported us for stalking.

SIGFRIDO RANUCCI STUDIO
We missed the stalking complaint. So, what is it that has Sgarbi so upset? Maybe it is because our reporters discovered that his trusted transporter, Valerio Zannoni, moved the painting from the restorer Mingardi's studio in 2018, the one without the torch, as we have seen from the photographs to his foundation, Sgarbi's foundation. They then took this painting to another restorer, Valentina Piovan, a skilled restorer. But she says: I did not add the torch. It was already there. In 2020, there was another transfer, and Samuele De Pietri, the head of GLAB, a company specialising in high-quality scanning, went to collect the painting. He had to make a clone on Sgarbi's order of the work of art, and here something peculiar happens because by scanning at high quality, some crucial details emerge:

First of all, you can see the cracks of the old varnish that are everywhere except on the holes that were also represented in the photograph of the painting Mingardi had, i.e. the one without the torch, and on those holes, there are no cracks, a sign of recent restoration. Then, there is the added detail that one of these holes perfectly matches that piece of canvas that our Bonaccorsi and Makinson had found in the frame of the castle where the painting had been stolen. Then again, there are no cracks in the candle area, which means that it was added recently, as would also be proven by the stratification of the varnish that is still there, unlike the varnish on the rest of the painting. And then, last but not least, a defect is a horizontal crack, which is present both in the painting where there is the torch and in the photograph of the Manetti painting without the torch, the one taken by Mingardi. How is this coincidence possible? We showed all this material to two experts,

an art historian and a restorer, they say, they have no doubts: it is the same work. That is, the torch is the same work that was stolen from the castle. We have done our journalistic work; now, it is up to the judicial authorities to confirm that that painting was stolen. It is the same as the one stolen in the castle. For our part, we can say with reasonable certainty that the work of art exhibited by Sgarbi in Lucca, in short, is probably not even the original, as can be deduced from the horizontal stripes near the figure of the dog, which were left in the copy cloned by GLAB. The person in charge of the exhibition says: no, absolutely, the copy was, the painting was authentic. But he did not send us the photograph because Sgarbi, the owner, prevented him from doing so. Sgarbi then also said that his original work had now been sold. Sgarbi is also responsible for the security of paintings of artistic heritage in Italy by institutional proxy.