

The Revenge of Armida

■ The Friends gift the Uffizi a painting by Cecco Bravo acquired on the antique art market

In the XVI canto of *Jerusalem Delivered*, Armida is abandoned by Rinaldo and as revenge the powerful sorceress summons a swarm of devils to an infernal assembly. The poem continues: "Black clouds the skies with horrid darkness fill/ And pale for dread became the eclipsed sun/The whirlwind blustered big on every hill/And hell to roar under her feet begun". Cecco Bravo masterfully condenses in his representation not only Tasso's account of the witches' sabbath, but above all the complex psychology of Armida: her sensuality, her indomitable character, the desperation of her abandonment, the panacea of the terrible - and useless - revenge on her lover.

The theme of sorcery, as well as the style and tenebrous atmosphere of the painting well reflects the cultural and



artistic milieu of Florence during the reign of Ferdinando II de' Medici, when intellectual circles and artistic leanings bore lively interest in necromancy. The Neapolitan painter Salvator Rosa, with his *Magherie* created during his decade long sojourn in Florence between 1640 and 1650, well represents this trend from a less morose and more

Francesco Montelatici, known as Cecco Bravo (Florence, 1601 - Innsbruck, 1661), *Armida*.

transcendental and philosophical perspective.

In his depiction, Cecco Bravo draws on sources that go well beyond immediate contingency: his wild reptile devils recall the *Medusa* by Caravaggio while the beautiful Armida somehow echoes in her pose the *Witch* in the famous print by Dürer. The highly contrasted chiaroscuro and the patchy density of the painterly surface with large extensions of saturated brown highlighting the contours of Armida's veils and body as well as the monsters' eyes and scales like flaming hot coals, were almost unthinkable in Florence before the arrival of Vittoria

della Rovere with her rich legacy of Venetian art, above all, Titian. Cecco Bravo seems nonetheless more attentive to the last stages of the Venetian artist's career and works like the *Punishing of Marsyas*, where solid color breaks down at the contours in a play of light and shadow that becomes the essence of the image, tempting the viewer to touch the serpents' slimy skin to put an end to their malefic contortions. Although curtailed along its left edge where once the monsters' extended limbs and Armida's magic wand were visible, Cecco Bravo nevertheless manages to magnify Armida's magic, seemingly invading the realm of the observer who is drawn into the scene to become almost a part of it. The spell worked well on the generous donors of the Friends of the Uffizi Gallery who, alerted by Maria Vittoria Rimbotti, ensued with lightning speed the purchase of the work and indeed obtained it on the vigil of Cecco Bravo's birthday, November 15. With compliments, maestro! ■

Eike D. Schmidt

End of year Gift

Seasons Greetings

Dear *Amici* and dear *Friends*, the year has ended with a big surprise and the proud awareness that once again we have succeeded in securing an important work for our Gallery. Thanks to the generous donation of the *Friends* following an animated sale by auction, we succeeded in adding to the Uffizi collection a seventeenth century work by the intriguing artist known as "Cecco Bravo" (baptized Francesco Montelatici). Florence boasts various testaments of his artistry, for example, in the cloister of San Marco, at the Santissima Annunziata, in the library of Casa Buonarroti, in Palazzo Pitti. The painting donated by the *Friends* to the Gallery of Statues and Paintings is entitled "Armida", as director Eike Schmidt has well illustrated in this journal issue.

During the course of the year, other initiatives in favor of the Gallery have not been lacking and with pleasure we recall the most outstanding: the conclusion of the complex and tasking restoration of the celebrated masterpiece by Leonardo, the *Adoration of the Magi*; the restoration of the tapestry

Harpooned Whale in the River Adour and the commencement of restoration on another tapestry illustrating the *Mock Attack on an Enchanted Island* (both made possible by the generous support of the *Friends*). We also financed the upgrading of the security system of the aerial corridor linking Palazzo Vecchio and the Uffizi, and finally, organized a second General Assembly of the *Amici dei Musei e delle Gallerie* at the museum of Villa Borghese in Rome last spring. The first Assembly held in September 2016 proved to be a very fruitful one in pinpointing numerous opportunities for patronage and identifying main priorities.

But no doubt, the acquisition of the painting by Cecco Bravo on the antique market stands as a particularly positive and festive end of the year celebration, truly a very special 'Seasons Greetings' for the city, for all of the *Amici* and *Friends* and for the members of the Board thanks to whose generous efforts 2018 will surely begin in the best possible way...

Maria Vittoria Colonna Rimbotti