

Exhibitions

where he learned to paint, conceived most of his works and died, leaving his workshop to his son Giovanni, who was responsible for some interventions in late paintings and for some replicas. At Treviso, where the municipality and the curators insist on using the local spelling of Bordone's name, which was discarded by both the Florentine Vasari and the Venetian Ridolfi, this international artist will not be able to shake off the prejudice that he was a provincial and second-rate master.

1 See E. Manzato, ed.: exh. cat. *Paris Bordone*, Treviso (Palazzo dei Trecento) 1984.

2 Catalogue: *Paris Bordone, 1500–1571: Pittore divino*. Edited by Simone Facchinetti and Arturo Galansino. 160 pp. incl. numerous col. ills. (Marsilio Arte, Venice, 2022), €28. ISBN 979-12-5463-001-3. The only painting in a poor state of conservation is *Christ the redeemer* (Pinacoteca di Ravenna; cat. no.41), exhibited in Treviso in 1984 and restored by the Fedeli studio in Florence in 2019–20.

3 The painting was identified as a Bordone by Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle and Giovanni Morelli, see A. Donati: *Paris Bordone: Catalogo ragionato*, Soncino 2014, pp.70 and 277–78, cat. no.53, pl.VI.

4 The painting in a private collection (no.5) can be identified with one recorded in Palazzo Pisani in Campo Santo Stefano, Venice, in 1795–1800; it was attributed to Bordone by Roberto Longhi, see Donati, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp.309–10, cat. no.87.

5 On Christoph Fugger's paintings, see Donati, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp.53–54, which gives sources and bibliography.

6 S. Pisot, ed.: exh. cat. *Die Poesie der venezianischen Malerei: Paris Bordone, Palma il Vecchio, Lorenzo Lotto, Tizian*, Hamburg (Kunsthalle) 2017.

7 The two drawings, which are related to *Bathsheba bathing* (c.1558–51; Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Cologne), were not included in Manzato, *op. cit.* (note 1).

8 On the Priuli and Treville families, see A. Donati: *Vittoria Colonna e l'eredità degli spirituali*, Rome 2019, pp.531–42, Appendix VII.

9 Donati, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp. 34–36, 94–95 and 302–303, no.80, pls.XXX–XXXI.

Sofonisba: History's Forgotten Miracle

Nivaagaards Malerisamling, Nivå
3rd September 2022–
15th January 2023

by ROBERT B. SIMON

The Nivaagaards Malerisamling, Nivå (about twenty miles north of Copenhagen), was formed in 1908 with a gift of over two hundred works from a businessman and local collector, Johannes Hage (1842–1923), and the construction of a dedicated gallery to house them adjacent to his



manor. Hage's bequest comprised a small group of Italian and Northern Renaissance paintings (including two works by Cranach the Elder), a larger selection of Dutch seventeenth-century works (among them the only Rembrandt in Denmark, a 1632 portrait of a Mennonite woman), and a significant collection of Danish Golden Age paintings and sculpture. However, the best-known picture at Nivaagaard is undoubtedly the *Family portrait* by Sofonisba Anguissola (c.1532–1625), which depicts her father, Amilcare, seated with her siblings Asdrubale and Minerva and the small family dog (Fig.11).

The painting's fame derives both from its certain authorship, given Vasari's precise description of the picture in the Anguissola home in Cremona, and its unique iconography as a semi-dynastic depiction of a non-royal, non-aristocratic family without any evident official or commemorative purpose. The painting was lent to previous exhibitions devoted to the artist – most notably those in Cremona, Vienna and Washington in 1994–95, and Madrid in 2019 – and the present exhibition both rewards the museum's generosity

11. *Family portrait: the artist's father Amilcare Anguissola and her siblings Minerva and Asdrubale, by Sofonisba Anguissola. c.1559. Oil on canvas, 157 by 122 cm. (Nivaagaard Collection, Nivå).*

and provides a broad context for the picture on its home ground.¹ It also serves to celebrate the reopening of the Nivaagaards Malerisamling following its closure due to the pandemic, during which time an ambitious renovation was completed utilising sustainable solutions, including new skylights, LED lighting, and a geothermal heating and cooling system. The exhibition will subsequently be shown at the Rijksmuseum Twenthe, Enschede (12th February–11th June 2023).

Sofonisba's *Family portrait* serves as a firm dividing point in her career. It is unfinished, and scholars agree that the reason for its incomplete state was the sudden departure of Sofonisba to Spain in 1559 on her appointment as lady-in-waiting and painting instructor to Isabel of Valois, wife of Philip II. That event was both biographically and stylistically significant: the artist's sensitive and personal portraits painted in Italy – mostly of herself and family members, and quite often signed – gave way to depictions of royalty and court figures in Spain, with most vestiges of Sofonisba's personality subsumed by an official style that prized homogeneity. No secure paintings by the artist from Spain are signed or documented, and the portraits now given to her from that period, including several in the exhibition, have only recently been differentiated from the works of her Spanish

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12. Installation view of *Sofonisba: History's Forgotten Miracle* at Nivaagaards Malerisamling, Nivå, 2022. (Photograph David Kahr).

contemporaries, such as Juan Pantoja de la Cruz and Alonso Sánchez Coello.

The exhibition follows this distinction by grouping the artist's paintings chronologically into two contiguous galleries, one featuring portraits painted in Italy, the other including works painted in Spain and in Genoa, where she would later live. Both rooms are darkened and feature deep grey walls, with the paintings brightly illuminated by theatrical lighting, a presentation that is visually dramatic, although to this viewer unnecessarily distracting (Fig.12). Digital projections of two works not included in the exhibition are shown adjacent to the paintings and are sure to confuse the viewer. Wall labels are necessarily absent as they would be illegible in the semi-darkness, and instead informative texts are placed on simulated lecterns mid-gallery, their utility rather limited as they are solely in Danish. The handsome catalogue, however, is available in both Danish and English.² The twenty-two paintings in the exhibition are only summarily listed, but essays taking various approaches, together with a useful chronology, complement the fine illustrations.

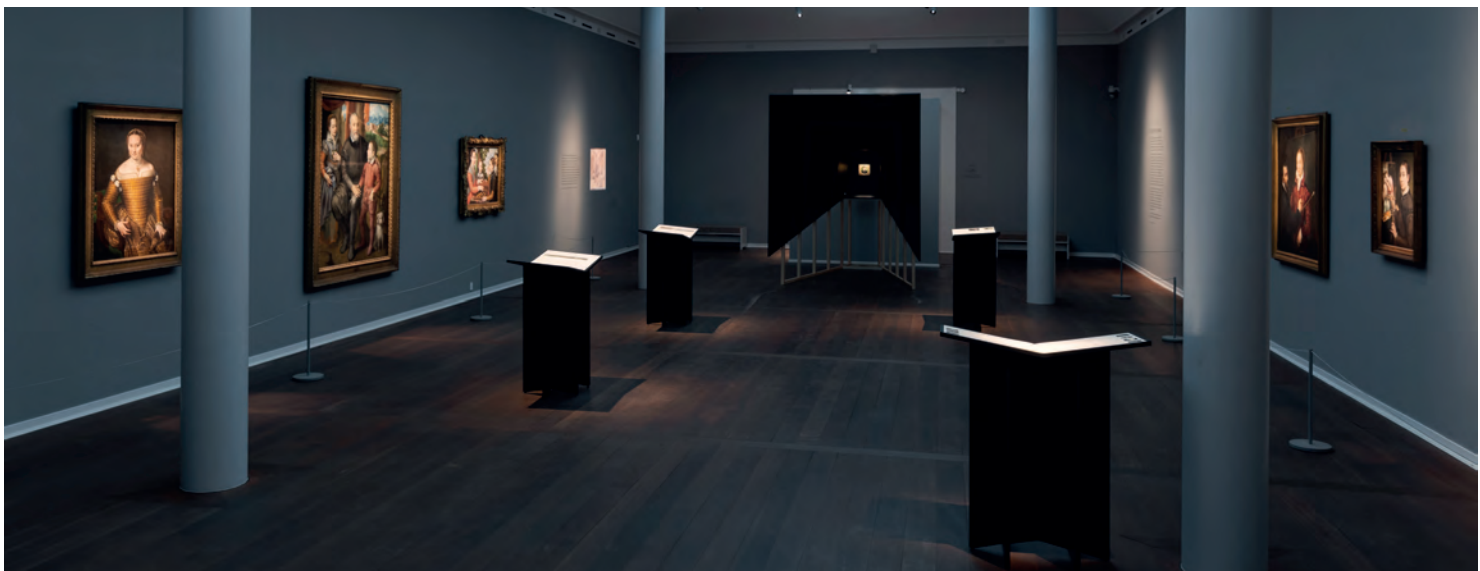
The exhibition opens with one of Sofonisba's most exquisite works, the small (13.2 cm diameter) *Self-portrait*, known as the Ashburnham Medallion after a former owner (Fig.13), which is hung within a bellows-like structure that isolates the

work from the larger paintings and promotes a kind of intimacy with the viewer.³ The *Family portrait* is flanked by the most well-known of the artist's Cremonese works, the portrait of Bianca Ponzoni, Sofonisba's mother (1557; Gemäldegalerie, Berlin), and the *Chess game* (1555; National Museum, Poznań), which depicts three of Sofonisba's sisters and a woman likely to be her cousin in a lively genre scene that is unlike any other work of the period. A remarkable aspect of this family reunion is that the frames on *Bianca Ponzoni* and the *Family portrait* appear to be of identical design, suggesting that they have been on these paintings since their time in the Anguissola household.

The superb portrait of Elena Anguissola as a nun (c.1551; Southampton City Art Gallery) hangs opposite, next to two of the most fascinating images in the exhibition (Fig.14): *Self-portrait at an easel* (1556; Castle Museum, Łańcut) and the portrait *Bernardino Campi painting Sofonisba Anguissola* (c.1559; Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena). The latter is perhaps the most problematic work in the exhibition. Here given to Sofonisba in full, as has been traditional, it has been intelligently argued by Michael Cole that the portrait is in fact a work by Campi, although the stylistic connection with either artist is uncertain.⁴ The question of the painting's attribution has had broad implications in contemporary

art-historical discourse, with feminist interpretations thriving or failing depending on the gender of the creator, the question of which figure is a self-portrait and which the 'object', and the implications of personal dynamics and agency between the two artists portrayed. To complicate this discussion, a further possibility might here be proposed. The early writer Alessandro Lamo recorded that Sofonisba and her sister Elena studied together with Campi.⁵ Although no work has yet been identified as Elena's, might she have painted this double portrait of her elder sister and teacher?

The selection of portraits from Sofonisba's time at the Spanish court is judicious, and despite the rigidity of their prescribed format, the vitality of the artist's style is apparent in all. Sofonisba's religious compositions are illustrated by three independent paintings and two pictures within pictures – the fictive *Madonna and Child* that appears on the easel in the Łańcut *Self-portrait* and a *Madonna and Child with St John the Baptist*, which hangs on the wall in the portrait of Giovanni Battista Caselli (1557–58; Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid). These are both works from her Cremonese period, as is the *Holy Family with John the Baptist and Francis of Assisi* (c.1559; private collection). The two other religious canvases – a recently discovered *Mystic marriage of St Catherine* (1588; Museo de Bellas Artes, Bilbao) and a *Madonna and Child*



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13. *Self-portrait*, by Sofonisba Anguissola. c.1556. Oil on panel, diameter 13.2 cm. (Fondation Custodia, Collection Frits Lugt, Paris; exh. Nivaagaards Malerisamling, Nivå).

14. Installation view of *Sofonisba: History's Forgotten Miracle* at Nivaagaards Malerisamling, Nivå, 2022, showing, on the left, *Bernardino Campi painting Sofonisba Anguissola* and, on the right, *Self-portrait at the easel*. (Photograph David Kahr).

(1588; Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest) – date from the 1580s and show the artist responding to the contemporary taste of her adopted home of Genoa, yet they exhibit a fluidity and grace in composition that seems a direct extension of her early work.

Part of the challenge in studying Sofonisba's career is that there seem to be three distinct styles associated with where she lived and for whom she painted. This exhibition provides a thread linking these disparate periods in her long life, but inevitably

her early works in Italy remain the most engaging to the modern viewer. This is not due solely to their beauty, often innovative compositions, or the novelty of their author being a woman. A crucial factor is that we know so little of her later work, which is perhaps less distinguishable from that of her contemporaries given our current limited knowledge. Relatively few works can be associated with her fourteen years in Spain or her thirty-five years in Genoa, and none from her fifteen

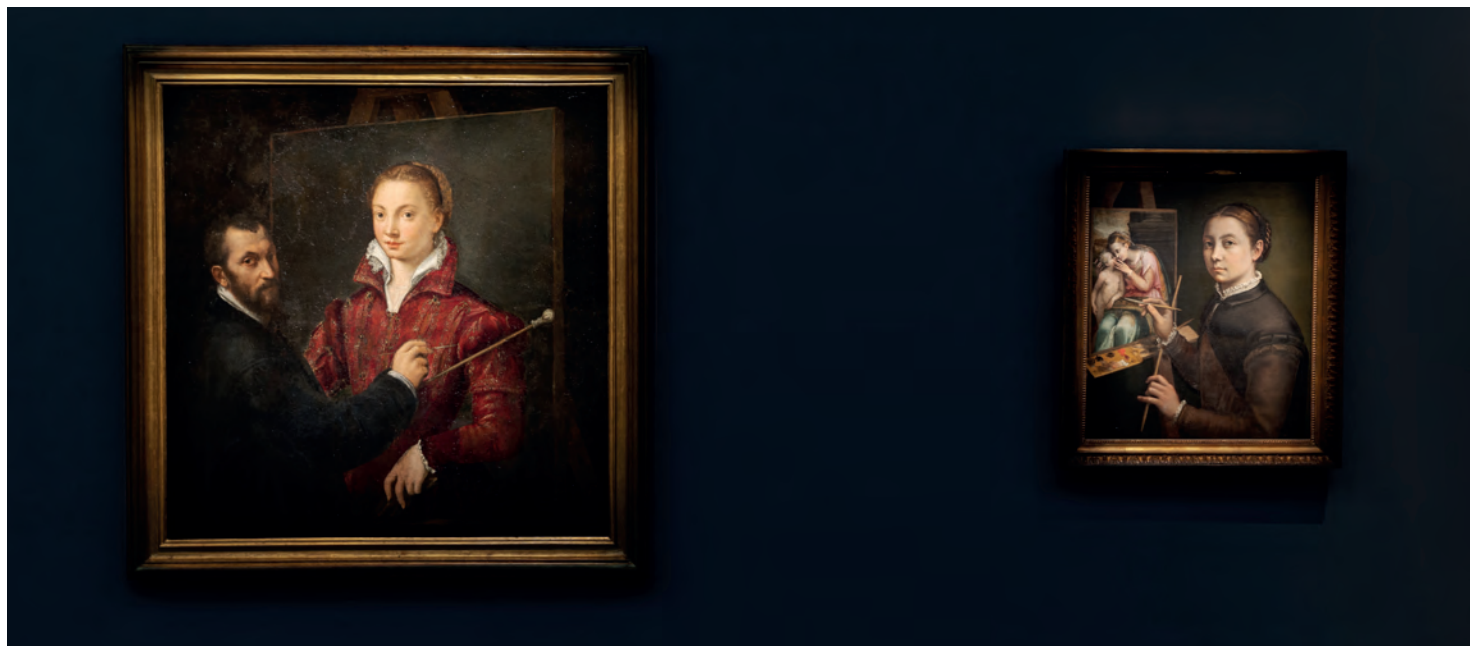
years in Sicily. When Anthony van Dyck famously visited her in Palermo in 1624, she was ninety-two and no longer active, due to her failing eyesight, but was lucid and in the presence of her own paintings.

Although the exhibition's title might seem incongruous, as Sofonisba is hardly forgotten today (to the extent that her first name alone suffices for recognition), this is a welcome monographic presentation of an artist still imperfectly understood. Only 34 of the 174 works attributed to Sofonisba in the catalogue assembled by Cole in his 2019 book on the artist are either securely by the artist or 'largely accepted'.⁶ By presenting a focused group drawn from these, this exhibition, organised by the museum's director, Andrea Rygg Karberg, provides a standard with which to judge other works, as it reveals an artist consummately engaging, and of consistent and evolving artistic personality.

1 The 1994–95 exhibition was reviewed by Andrea Bayer in this Magazine, 137 (1995), pp.201–02, and the 2019–20 exhibition was reviewed by Sheila Barker in this Magazine, 162 (2020), pp.59–61.

2 Catalogue: *Sofonisba: History's Forgotten Miracle*. Edited by Andrea Rygg Karberg and Fie Ellen Jannerup. 120 pp. incl. 49 col. ills. (Nivaagaard Collection, Nivå), DKK 150. ISBN 978–87–90054–49–6. Danish edition: *Sofonisba: Historiens Glemte Mirakel*. ISBN 978–87–90054–48–9.

3 The dates of works mentioned in this review have been taken from the catalogue



and, in some cases, do not correspond with those proposed by the present reviewer.

4 M.W. Cole: *Sofonisba's Lesson: A Renaissance Artist and Her Work*. Princeton 2019, pp.50–59.

5 A. Lamo: *Discorso intorno alla scoltura, et pittura dove ragiona della vita, & opere in molti luoghi, & à diversi precipi, & personaggi fatte dall' eccell. & nobile M. Bernardino Campo, pittore cremonese*, Cremona 1584, p.37.

6 Cole, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp.155–246.

Rubens a Genova

Palazzo Ducale, Genoa

6th October 2022–22nd January 2023

by GREGORY MARTIN

It is nearly twenty years since Genoa last mounted an exhibition to celebrate Rubens and his connection with La Superba.¹ The catalogue of the present Palazzo Ducale show, *Rubens a Genova*, is only marginally smaller than the one that accompanied *L'Età di Rubens* in 2004, although it consists of rather fewer entries.² It is made up of valuable contributions by some twenty scholars, including the curators, Anna Orlando, who assisted in the earlier catalogue, and Nils Büttner, the 'cloud-encircled meteor' of current Rubens studies who recently organised *Becoming Famous: Peter Paul Rubens* at the Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart, in 2021–22.³

Whereas *L'Età di Rubens* took as its basis the Genoese collections that contained paintings by Rubens, the intention now is to describe the culture and ambience of the city in which the artist, then in his twenties, spent only seven months in the course of four visits between 1600 and 1608, but for whose leading members he executed some outstanding paintings, and later designed his first, hugely ambitious, tapestry cycle and composed an architectural treatise illustrating the city's most prominent palaces. The underlying, important insight of the exhibition is that for the most part in this early phase of his activity, the artist was not working on his own initiative but as the employee of Vincenzo I Gonzaga, duke of Mantua (1562–1612), who it is thought offered his court artist's services to the extended Pallavicino clan, as its leading members were the indebted duke's bankers.



The curators were hampered in their selection and there are some notable absentees, most evidently from the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and Kingston Lacy, Dorset, and in other respects they had to make do with some paintings that have either over-ambitious attributions or are in a state of preservation that is less than satisfactory, or both. Nevertheless, they have succeeded in presenting a good account of the city and its culture, which the artist so much admired; indeed, he was to ask one of its distinguished citizens, Nicolò Pallavicino (1563–1619), to become a godparent to his second son (it is likely that Pallavicino would have been too ill to attend the baptism; the contemporary copy of his power of

15. *Claudia Lomellini* (?), by Guiliam van Deynen. c.1600. Oil on canvas, 204 by 120 cm. (Musei di Strada Nuova – Palazzo Bianco, Genoa; exh. Palazzo Ducale, Genoa).

attorney of 19th February 1618, in the Genoese archives, is on display).

To illustrate the Genoese ambience are unfamiliar paintings of varying quality by the still underestimated De Wael brothers, Cornelis (1592–1667) and Lucas (1591–1661), Jan Roos (1591–1638), both a still-life and figure painter, and his obscure brother-in-law Giacomo Legi (c.1600–c.1640). From the Gonzaga court, forming the Mantuan backdrop, are likenesses from the Frans Pourbus the Younger stable and colourful portraits given to the little-known *il Bastianino* (Sebastiano Filippi, c.1530–1602) and Jean Bahuët (c.1552–97). Outstanding is the fragment from Rubens's *Pala della Trinità* altarpiece (1604–05; Palazzo Ducale, Mantua) of the head of Ferdinando Gonzaga (1587–1626) (Fondazione Magnani-Rocca, Parma; no.33), the second son of the artist's employer. Although damaged, the head still seems made of flesh and blood especially when compared with those others in the room.

Very different in handling is the attributed study on paper claimed here in an essay by Ben van Beneden to be for a self-portrait (private collection; no.32), which opens the exhibition with a fanfare. This is thought to have been made in preparation for the self-portrait Rubens is said to have included in the *Pala dell Trinità*. When – as the present reviewer recalls – the painting appeared unsung in a sale at Christie's in the late 1960s, it was admired by Philip Hendy, the then director of the National Gallery, London, and a Rubens *aficionado*.

In anticipation of Rubens's activity in Genoa are the female portraits by the versatile Guiliam van Deynen (c.1575–after 1624), a Flemish contemporary who was working in Genoa; his depictions of Veronica Spinola Serra (c.1599–1601; Musei Nazionali di Genova-Galleria Nazionale della Liguria; no.71) and a woman tentatively identified as Claudia Lomellini (no.72; Fig.15) preceded by a few years the magnificent group of female portraits that Rubens executed from c.1604, of which three are on show: *Geronima*