

Bernini's painting collection: a reconstructed inventory raisonné

Franco Mormando

Here presented is the first comprehensive inventory of the paintings on display in Gian Lorenzo Bernini's home by artists other than himself at the time of his death in November 1680. Although inventories of Bernini's household dating from 1681 to 1771 have previously been published, none by itself is sufficient to provide a complete catalogue of the artist's collection. By collating the family inventories with what is known of Bernini's career, personal and professional relationships, the oeuvre of the artists identified in the inventories, and data from art market records and provenance databases, the author has compiled the most detailed description of Bernini's collection so far available, including, wherever possible, proposed new attributions, more accurate subject descriptions, and indications of the present whereabouts of the works.

At the time of his death in November 1680, Gian Lorenzo Bernini left a personal collection of nearly sixty paintings by artists other than himself, on display in the family's residence at Via della Mercede 11 in Rome's Rione Colonna. We know this from the household inventory of January 1681 drawn up at the artist's testamentary command and repeated, also according to his instructions, at twenty-five-year intervals, in 1706 and 1731. Unfortunately, these first three inventories – all published decades ago¹ – supply only the briefest information about the paintings: laconic descriptions of subjects and frames, along with canvas sizes (often very approximate), but with no attributions except when it is noted, here and there, that a canvas is 'di buona mano' ('by a fine hand') or 'di mano assai buona' ('by a very fine hand'). In 2013 our knowledge of the collection was greatly expanded by Rosella Carloni, who published, in an appendix to her excellent monograph, *Palazzo Bernini al Corso*, the detailed household inventory of 1771, compiled upon the death of the paterfamilias, Prospero Bernini (1694–1771), son of Gian Lorenzo's son Paolo (1648–1728).² Included in this inventory was a listing of the family's by then much expanded art collection, complete with attributions of many of the works, more specific descriptions of their subjects and canvas dimensions, along with estimations of their monetary value. The inventory was compiled by the Roman artist Gaspare Scaramucci (dates unknown). Scaramucci

was apparently well respected as a connoisseur, for he was called upon to serve as inventory compiler and monetary assessor of other significant painting collections of Rome, including that of Marianna Tufenni Gaulli, widowed daughter-in-law of Bernini's collaborator Giovanni Battista Gaulli (1639–1709).³

Although Carloni's annotated edition of Scaramucci's inventory correlates, wherever possible, the 1771 works of art with those in the earlier three inventories, Bernini's original painting collection cannot be reconstituted in its entirety from her text alone, for, on the one hand, it does not take into account the eighteen paintings that had disappeared from the family's collection by 1771 (nos. 5, 9, 10, 12–15, 19–21, 23, 33, 36, 42, 46, 47, 50, 57 below), while, on the other hand, it overlooks a further seven paintings in Gian Lorenzo's collection that were, in fact, still in the family's possession in 1771 (nos. 17, 18, 30, 31, 37, 53, 54 below). What follows, instead, is a reconstruction of the complete inventory of Bernini's painting collection as he left it at his death, collating all the information provided by the four inventories, enriched by new research into the relevant sources, primary and secondary. Wherever possible, the current whereabouts of the paintings are also identified. When neither the full identity nor ultimate destiny of canvases is known, conjectures are offered about possible identities and whereabouts, based upon not only the inventory information but also other available