

Justus Sustermans at Palazzo Pitti. Florence

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*Carlo Borromeo*, c.1643, for which the *bozzetto* was shown at the Accademia (Cat. No.27). In the gloom, the clear poses and emphatic gestures transform the trite icon into an urgent prescriptive narration of the transactions between humankind and Divinity. No clearer statement of the revival of Albertian ideals in Counter-Reformatory imagery is known to me, and no clearer image of Counter-Reformatory piety, embattled against natural disaster, social disorder, and the Protestants across the mountains.

ERIKA LANGMUIR

## Florence

### Justus Sustermans at Palazzo Pitti

This was the most recent of the small, stimulating exhibitions with valuable catalogues organised by Marco Chiarini in the Sala delle Nicchie of Palazzo Pitti. Like the previous shows of the series, it focussed on a coherent part of the collections of the Florentine Galleries and their internal history. Among the motives that inspired the exhibition were the three-hundredth anniversary of the death of Sustermans in 1981, and the acquisition by the Italian state for the Florentine Galleries of what is probably the final *bozzetto* for the artist's most elaborate and ambitious composition, *The Senate of Florence swearing allegiance to Ferdinando II de' Medici* (No.24), originally located in the same Sala delle Nicchie. (The *bozzetto* was illustrated in the December 1981 issue of this Magazine, p.764).

This is only the second exhibition ever devoted to Sustermans, the first being the 'permanent' display, also in Palazzo Pitti, installed by Cosimo III at the end of Sustermans's life. The considerable interval between the two is an obvious indication of the later decline in Sustermans's reputation. His posthumous fame has suffered perhaps less from his limited talents than from the monotonous features of some of the later Medici whom he was obliged to portray in endless canvases during his sixty years of office. The canon of beauty with which Sustermans's compatriots Rubens and Van Dyck invested their sitters is more compatible with present-day aesthetic standards. The present exhibition, in fact, offers an occasional parody of their official type of portraiture (Nos 2, 3, 14).

However, the range of Sustermans's talents and activities should not be underestimated, and of these the exhibition and the fully illustrated catalogue\* offer an exemplary panorama. The catalogue benefits from the collaboration of Karla Langedijk and her extensive studies on the Medici portraits. Chiarini and Claudio Pizzorusso provide expert information on allegorical and other portraits and on paintings of various subjects, including two outside loans. An important section of the exhibition was

devoted to a choice of Sustermans's somewhat neglected drawings from the holdings of the Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe of the Uffizi, here catalogued by Lisa Goldenberg Stoppato. The catalogue also contains a useful check-list by Silvia Meloni Trkulja of paintings in the Florentine Galleries attributed to Sustermans, but not present in the exhibition, and some unpublished documents, including the inventory of the artist's property made after his death (Alessandro Guidotti). This inventory lists more than three hundred paintings from his shop and his collection, some of which were acquired by the Gran Principe Ferdinando and are now in the Florentine Galleries.

The young Sustermans's fortune in Florence began more or less at the moment of his arrival in 1619-20, as a result of the impression made on the Grand Duke by his portrait of Pierre Fèvre (No.23). The fact that there was no internationally oriented specialist in portrait painting in Florence at the time meant that Sustermans, thanks to his sound training with Willem de Vos and Frans Pourbus the Younger and to his personal *penchant* for the genre, not only obtained the Florentine position but also had the opportunity to work in related smaller courts in Emilia and Lombardy as well as in Vienna and Innsbruck.

As is apparent from the catalogue and the exhibition, Sustermans's stylistic choices were eclectic. This can be clearly observed in the series of allegorical portraits of the over-pious Vittoria della Rovere, although the basic idiom remains essentially Florentine. As St Ursula (No.17) she is painted with a flesh tonality and sentiment reminiscent of Carlo Dolci, who was, however, only just twenty at that date. As St Margaret (No.20) she is painted with colours and brushwork inspired by Rubens; as the vestal Tuccia (No.21) she seems to be closer to the work of a painter like Girolamo Forabosco, though this may be mere coincidence; and as the Virgin Mary in the Holy Family (No.22) she borrows her colours from Van Dyck and through him from Titian.

Sustermans also had contacts with other parts of Italy: according to the compilers of the catalogue, for instance, with the portraits of Andrea Sacchi, which Sustermans could have seen on his visits to Rome in 1627 and 1644-45. Nonetheless, it seems that the affinities between the two artists are limited to one particular instance and are not in any case of a stylistic nature: both artists in fact portrayed the same person at two different times. As has been observed before, the *Man in armour* in East Berlin painted by Sacchi is probably identical with the sitter in Sustermans's portrait in the Museo Civico in Pistoia (No.32).

In 1638 Sustermans acquired from Rubens the large *Consequences of war*, now also in Palazzo Pitti. The arrival of this painting in his house had the effect of vivifying Sustermans's palette and of stimulating a greater freedom in his

handling of paint. Also of fundamental importance for Sustermans, as Chiarini observes, was the display in Palazzo Pitti from 1652 onwards of the splendid portrait of Cardinal Bentivoglio by Van Dyck, who had met Sustermans during his visit to Florence in 1622. A portrait such as that of *Cardinal Giovan Carlo de' Medici in an armchair* (No.5) reveals Van Dyckian elements in the general disposition and in the tonality of the reds. Of course, Sustermans never achieved the higher levels of art and fame of his northern contemporaries. His work lacks the *bravura* and elegance of Rubens and Van Dyck, nor did he possess the psychological depth of a Rembrandt, to whose work he seems to some extent to have been receptive (No.39).

The research done in recent years by Chiarini, Langedijk and others on the inventories of the various Medici collections has revealed a number of otherwise forgotten works by Sustermans, including some of his rare religious and genre subjects. Sustermans had a talent for still life and animal painting, as may be seen in his representations of birds, alive or dead, and in his portrayal of Medici dogs (No.40), both of which were popular genres in Florence. In a painting such as the *Domenica delle Cascine, Cecca di Pratolino and a moor* (No.30, first published by Chiarini in this Magazine in January 1977) Sustermans adheres to the Florentine tradition of comic subjects represented by Giovanni da San Giovanni, Callot and others, yet marries Tuscan form with the iconographic repertoire of Aertsen and Bueckelaer. It may well be worth re-examining this aspect of Florentine art from this angle.

As to the drawings, a critical evaluation was undoubtedly necessary. Christel Thiem seems to consider Sustermans's drawings as *Fremdkörper* in Florentine art history. In her book of 1977 on Florentine draughtsmen of the period 1580-1640 he is not even mentioned, although she includes his younger colleagues working in Florence. More than fifty drawings by Sustermans – many of which belonged to Cardinal Leopoldo – have long been known to be in the Uffizi, since they were included by Ferri in his catalogue of the Uffizi drawings [1890] and more recently by Kloek in his useful handlist of Netherlandish drawings in this collection [1975]. Together with a few other sheets they represent the full body of drawings by Sustermans known today. Stylistically, they are an integral part of the Florentine tradition, notwithstanding the Flemish elements seen for instance in the study of a *Seated man*, which is influenced by Van Dyck's graphic style. Among the sheets on show in the exhibition are studies for portraits and their draperies, copies after other artists such as Titian, Sebastiano del Piombo and Annibale Carracci and single figure studies for profane and religious compositions. The two drawings from the small series of Tuscan landscapes executed in red and/or black chalk (Fig.36), which, as Chiarini has

\**Sustermans. Sessant'anni alla corte dei Medici*. By Marco Chiarini et al. 135 pp. + numerous b. & w. ill. (Centro Di).

observed, are close to Cristofano Allori, are among the most delicate works of Sustermans's entire *œuvre*.

The catalogue provides us with an up-to-date survey of all the aspects of Sustermans's hitherto rather neglected work. It enhances not only our understanding of the artist but of Italian portraiture in general, a field which still requires further study and attention.

BERT W. MEIJER

## Venice

### Piazzetta at S. Giorgio Maggiore

In summer 1982 a splendid choice of Canaletto's paintings, as well as drawings and etchings, was included in the memorable exhibition at the **Fondazione Giorgio Cini** in Venice. 1983 is the tercentenary of the birth of Giovanni Battista Piazzetta (1683-1754), 'a very great artist indeed', and 'the grand exception to every generalisation about eighteenth-century Venetian art'.<sup>1</sup> But for this occasion the paintings were shown at **Palazzo Vendramin-Calergi** on the Grand Canal, and the material available for exhibition at San Giorgio was consequently restricted. The great altar-pieces would hardly have suited these rooms; and the drawings, among which the familiar *mezze figure* predominate, might have produced a rather monotonous effect, had this not been overcome by an ingenious arrangement of screens and spacing. As before, in fact, Professor Bettagno organised a fine exhibition; and there is a catalogue that is almost a monograph,\* containing, besides the individual catalogue entries, valuable essays by various writers on subjects connected with Piazzetta's art and the culture of his time in Venice.

Fine engravings after Piazzetta, and books and manuscripts, were included; but the drawings were of course the main attraction; all catalogued by George Knox, except those from the Venice Accademia, which were cared for by Giovanna Nepi Scire. There were academic figure-studies – these were the drawings that the artist used for teaching. Then the 'character-heads' and genre pieces, popularised by the engravers, fourteen of which, engraved by Cattini, were published in 1743 as *Icones ad vivum expressae* – often with two or three characters, bust-length, forming one genre subject. On the same scale are portrait drawings: the Windsor self-portrait, and four of the family of the famous *con-*

*dottiere*, Field-Marshal Schulenburg.<sup>2</sup> Pallucchini's suggestion, that certain of the 'character-heads' may be fancy portraits of Piazzetta himself ('*autoritratti idealizzati*') is surely plausible;<sup>3</sup> but whether Knox is justified in identifying other heads (Cat. Nos 37, 42-44, 55) as portraits of members of Piazzetta's family seems to me questionable.<sup>4</sup>

The profile *Head of a girl*, No.37 (Fig.44), from the Castello Sforzesco, Milan (which Knox supposes may be a portrait of Piazzetta's daughter Barbara), was to my taste one of the best drawings in the exhibition, different in style from the 'character-heads' that were so carefully finished for the engraver's sake. And there were others in this free style: No.36, again from the Castello Sforzesco (Fig.45), which is clearly connected with a figure in the large *Pastoral* painting now in Chicago; and the fine *Profile of a youth* from the British Museum (Cat. No.34), rightly connected with a painting in Salzburg.<sup>5</sup> It seems likely therefore that such free sketches were first made with paintings in mind, though the artist used some of them again later, in finished drawings to be engraved.<sup>6</sup>

Certain small composition-sketches in red or black chalk (Cat. Nos 28-32), some of them with old ascriptions to Piazzetta, have lately been connected with his paintings – two of them with the grand altar-piece of *the Guardian angel with two saints* in the church of San Vitale in Venice.<sup>7</sup> These are no more than rough notes, of little consequence artistically; but the attribution of three of them, Nos 28-30, can hardly be disputed. One small double-sided sheet in pen and ink, however, for an *Apotheosis of St Mark*, was shown as Piazzetta (No.33), despite the objection raised by Knox in his catalogue entry, that this and some others in the same rough pen-and-ink style, to which he refers, are more likely to be by the obscure Pietro Roselli, whose name is written on one of them in a contemporary hand.

<sup>2</sup> The extraordinarily vivid likeness of Schulenburg himself from Chicago (Cat. No.47) surely shows him as an older man than the drawing from the Castello Sforzesco, Milan (No.48). If so, the Chicago drawing would be that mentioned in the payment of 18th August 1738 (when Schulenburg was seventy-seven), and the Castello Sforzesco portrait would be one of four drawings paid for seven years earlier – as Dott.ssa Precerutti Garberi said in her catalogue of the Milan exhibition of 1971.

<sup>3</sup> Several of them (Cat. Nos 41, 59 for instance) resemble the etched *Head* of 1738, one of Piazzetta's only two known attempts at etching (Cat. No.168), which was included in the *Studi di Pittura*, and must surely be a self portrait *à la Rembrandt*.

<sup>4</sup> The boy in these drawings, and in several paintings, was certainly a favourite model, and this identification is of course not impossible.

<sup>5</sup> A. MARIUZ: *Piazzetta: l'opera completa* [1982], No.16.

<sup>6</sup> As was indeed the case with No.37, probably made for *Rebecca at the well* in the Brera Gallery; the girl appears again in the so-called *Fiorellin d'Amore*, the engraved drawing in Cleveland (MARIUZ, *op. cit.* D 12).

<sup>7</sup> It is sad that the splendid study for the head of the guardian angel, sold at Sotheby's, London, 18th November 1982 (lot 74), was not available for this exhibition.

Piazzetta was the artist most in demand among Venetian publishers, particularly Albrizzi, in the middle years of the eighteenth century for the resurgent market in illustrated books. A feature of this exhibition was the display of his careful preliminary drawings for illustrations – full page, vignette, or initial letter – to the works of Bossuet, Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*, and other books; the drawings came mainly from the large collection in the Biblioteca Reale at Turin (studied in detail by Maxwell White and Sewter in 1969). From the Kress album in the Morgan Library came two of the preparatory drawings, including the frontispiece, for what was probably Piazzetta's last important work, published only posthumously in 1760: the *Studi di Pittura*, patterns for drawing the human figure, each drawing engraved twice, in outline by Bartolozzi and in full chiaroscuro by Pitteri.

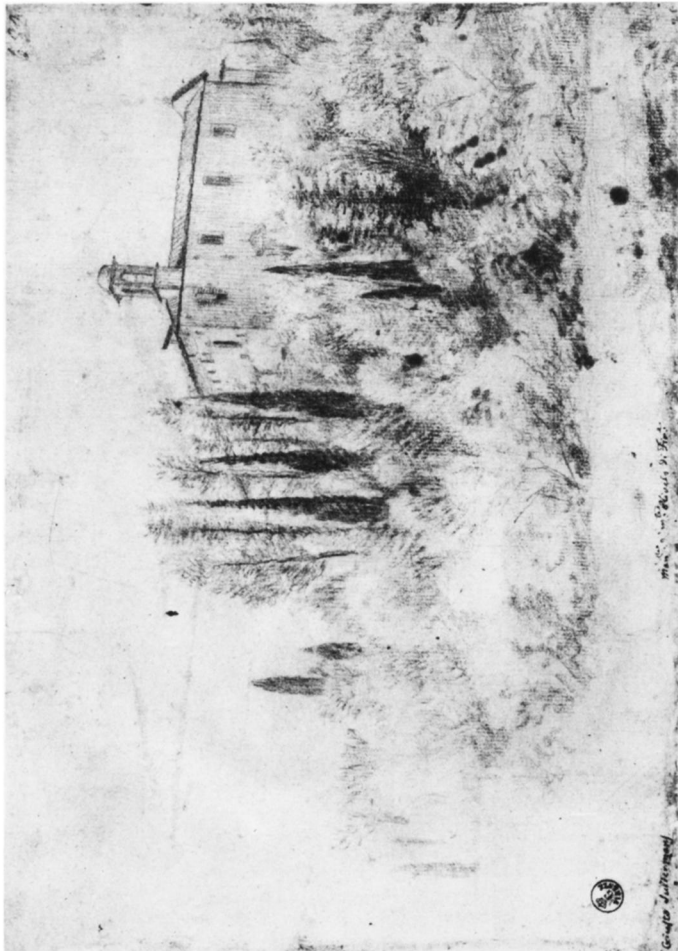
Professor Knox contributes to the catalogue not only a general Introduction,<sup>8</sup> and the detailed entries for most of the drawings, but also two of the other essays, both concerned with the relationship between drawings and the engravings after them: and in these notes he distinguishes three stages in the preparation of the book-illustrations: first, the artist's (rare) preliminary sketches in black chalk (such as Cat. Nos 66-68, for the illustrations to Bossuet); then the careful finished drawings, generally in red chalk (Cat. Nos 69A and B, and many others); and finally the counterproofs taken from these for the engraver's immediate use,<sup>9</sup> sometimes retouched or altered by Piazzetta himself – all this confirming the artist's reputation among

<sup>8</sup> Sometimes, as Knox admits, a drawing by Piazzetta, especially one of the 'character-head' type, is difficult to distinguish from one by a good pupil who learned by copying his master. The same difficulty applies to the paintings; in his entry for No.52 Knox records various attributions for the Trieste *Boy with a dog* (MARIUZ, *op. cit.*, A.110) – to Giuseppe Angeli, Giulia Lama, Domenico Maggiotto, and an anonymous 'follower' (not to mention Piazzetta himself) – although the charming drawing at Windsor and the variant at Washington (Cat. No.53) are both, as Knox says, surely by the master. The case of the fine *Bust of an ecclesiastic* in the Lugt Collection (Fondation Custodia, Paris), of which four replicas or copies exist, is an example of the frequency of repetitions among the drawings (see *The Italian Drawings of the Lugt Collection* [1983], Cat. No.269, where all five versions are reproduced).

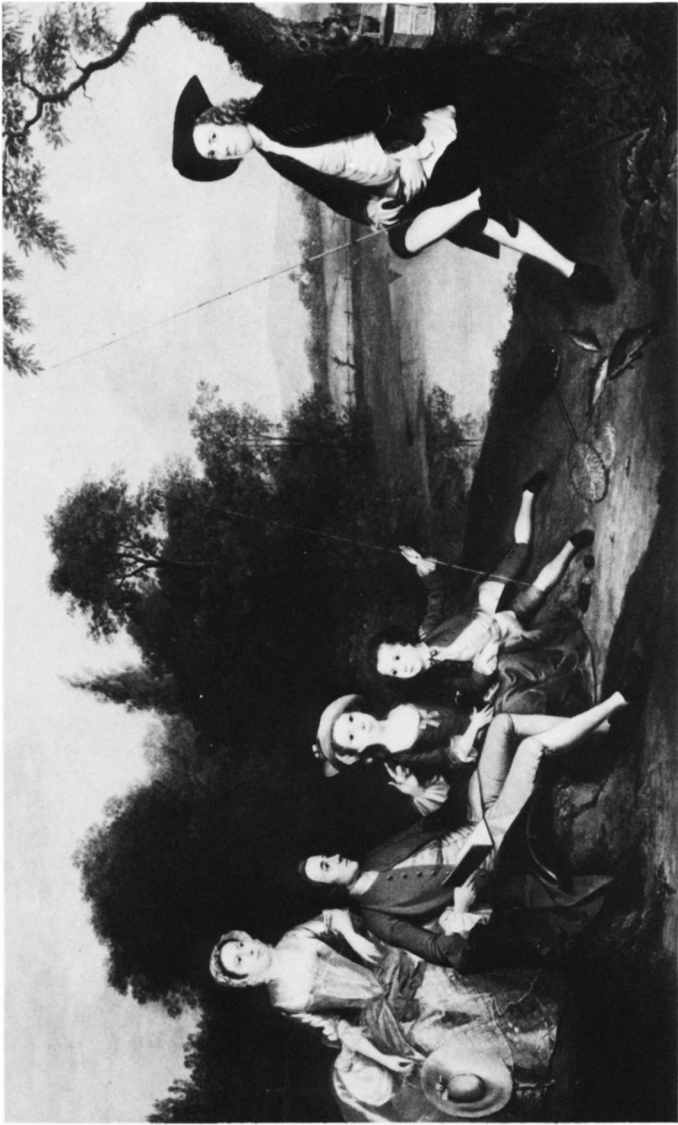
<sup>9</sup> In this connexion it is unfortunate and confusing that the catalogue reproduction of the drawing of the *Assumption of the Virgin*, No.89, which was engraved by Bartolozzi (Cat. No.127), is printed the wrong way round: so that from the catalogue it might be mistaken for a counterproof, owing to the left-handed shading. The reproduction is also trimmed below, so that the signature is not visible. This drawing and the much larger, damaged version of the same subject, which was also exhibited (No.24, from the Accademia), are both reproduced by MARIUZ (*op. cit.*, Nos 115a and 115b); but, alas, he describes No.115b (No.89 of our catalogue) as a *sanguigna*, whereas in fact it is in soft black chalk.

<sup>1</sup> MICHAEL LEVEY: *Painting in Eighteenth-Century Venice*, 2nd ed. [1980], p.56. This book contains, I think, by far the best English appreciation of Piazzetta, whose art, so greatly praised in his time, fell into disfavour in the nineteenth-century, and seems for some reason to be out of favour in several quarters today. He is represented in London (apart from drawings) only by *Abraham's sacrifice*, unfinished, badly damaged, and consigned now to the reserve rooms of the National Gallery.

\*G. B. Piazzetta – *Disegni, Incisioni, Libri, Manoscritti*. Catalogue of the Exhibition at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice 1983. Introduction by George Knox. 192pp. + 206 b. & w. ill. (Neri Pozza Editore).



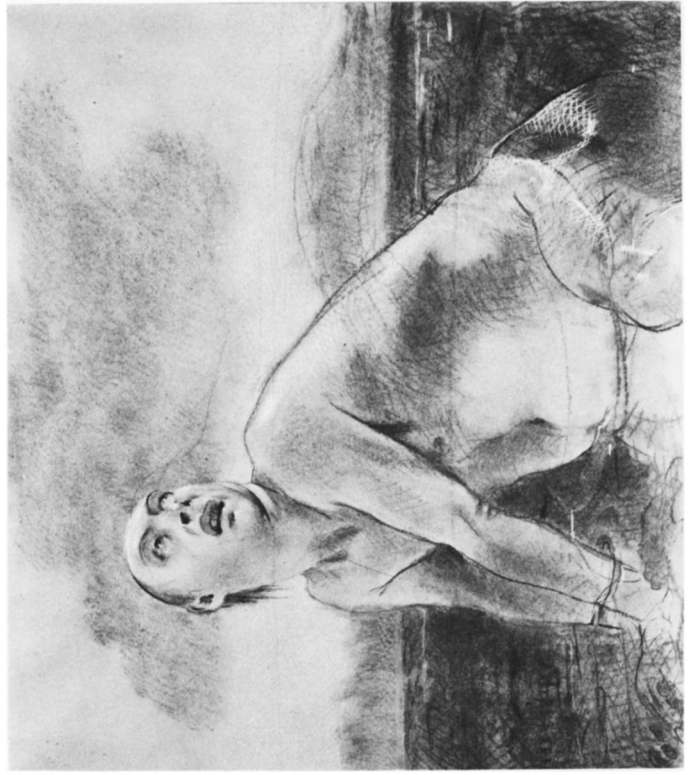
36. *View of the convent of Monte Oliveto, Florence*, by Justus Sustermans. Black and red chalk, 18.1 by 25.6 cm. (Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Uffizi, Florence; exh. Palazzo Pitti, Florence).



37. *The Swaine family of Fenestri*, by Arthur Devis. Signed and dated 1749. 64.1 by 103.5 cm. (Paul Mellon Collection, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven; exh. National Portrait Gallery).



38.



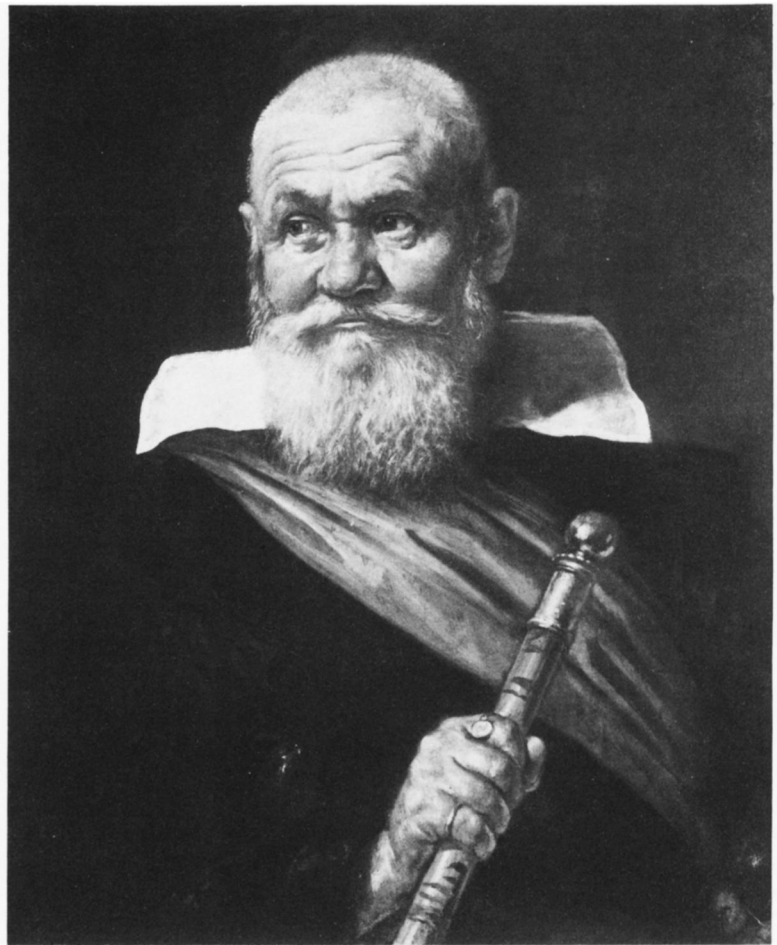
39.

38. *Horse with nude figures in a wood*, by Albert Weisgerber. Signed, 1912. 65.5 by 79.5 cm. (Moderne Galerie, Saarbrücken; exh. Leinster Fine Art, London).

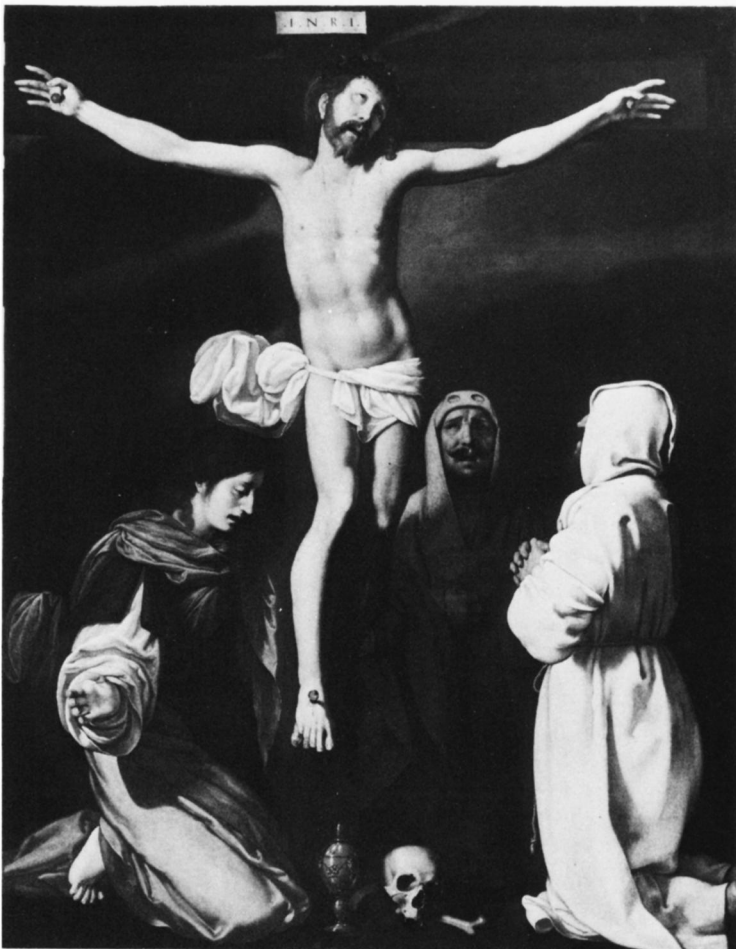
39. *Im Watt I*, by Johannes Grützke. 1978. Pastel on grey-brown paper, 98 by 110 cm. (Exh. Barbican Art Gallery).



40. *Portrait of a gentleman in a full-bottomed wig*, by Carlo Ceresa. c.1665-70. 230 by 155 cm. (Private collection, Bergamo; exh. Palazzo Moroni, Bergamo).



41. *Portrait of Elia*, by Justus Sustermans. 56.3 by 69.2 cm. (Palazzo Pitti, Florence; exh. Palazzo Pitti, Florence).



42. *Crucifixion*, by Carlo Ceresa. Signed and dated 1641. 230 by 155 cm. (S. Michele, Mapello; exh. Palazzo Moroni, Bergamo).



43. *Vision of the Blessed Felice da Cantalice with the donor Giuseppe Raspa*, by Carlo Ceresa. Signed and dated 1644. 250 by 190 cm. (S. Giorgio, Nese, Alzano Lombardo; exh. Palazzo Moroni, Bergamo).