

AN ART ODYSSEY 1500 • 1720



FRONTISPIECE: *Memento Mori*, a detail from Jacopo Ligozzi's *Saint Francis Adoring the Cross*.

HALF TITLE PAGE: *God the Father* a detail from Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione's *God Creating the Animals*

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AN ART ODYSSEY 1500-1720

Classicism, Mannerism, Caravaggism & Baroque

MATTHIESEN FINE ART LTD.

7/8 MASON'S YARD, DUKE STREET, ST. JAMES'S, LONDON SW1Y 6BU.

TEL: (+44) 0207-930 2437 FAX: (+44) 0207-930 1387

Matthiesen@OldMastersLondon.demon.co.uk

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AN ART ODYSSEY

An exhibition held on behalf of A.N.I.A

El Bosque de los niños

(The Sonene Village Ecological Park, Peru)

In association with

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FOREWORD

2001! We have debuted upon a new century and also marked the inception of a new millennium. Forget the brouhaha in the popular press a year ago, for this, indeed, is the year that marks 'the connoisseur's millennium' – a term coined by the quality press. Of course all our readers are connoisseurs, aren't they? Otherwise what are they doing ferreting through the endless verbiage in this catalogue? We hope that their interest is more deeply ingrained than a quick flip through some pretty pictures.....

In an attempt to mark this auspicious anniversary we have put together one last catalogue of primarily Italian painting that in some way goes to reflect its predecessors. This millennium catalogue, *An Art Odyssey 1500–1720. Classicism, Mannerism, Caravaggism and Baroque*, fills the void in our second cycle of Italian Old Master Paintings exhibitions covering the period from 1300–1800. The catalogue differs from its predecessors in having a section, immediately following this preamble, dedicated to several paintings sold through the gallery in the closing years of the last century and which have not appeared in any of our previous publications. All of these paintings would have added considerable weight to the current catalogue since they fall within the same period. Unfortunately, the pressures of a commercial art dealing business do not allow one to salt away each and every picture over such an extended period. Although in the past, as in this catalogue, there are items which have been specifically 'put away' awaiting this publication, it is, alas, not possible to do this on each and every occasion. These paintings, therefore, are reproduced without full catalogue entries as a record of our recent activity.

After some soul searching we have slightly modernised the look of the catalogue by moving away from the Baskerville and Poliphilus classic typefaces that we have used in the past and substituting Trajan and Sabon while retaining the overall general style. We believe that this, allied to a slight further increase in spacing and typeface sizing, makes the text easier for older eyes to read. We hope that you will agree.

Some thirty-three years ago I had a 'gap' year after working on restoration under the aegis of the Victoria & Albert Museum in no less splendour than the surroundings of the Ca'd'Oro in Venice. Not only do I well remember learning about Italian 'politics' there – art politics in Italy are even more

virulent and aggressive than the real variety – but also flirting with a raven-haired eighteen year old in the adjacent building just across a narrow *calle* through the windows. She was very attractive....-and then I learned that the building was a reform school for naughty girls and that they were not allowed out. At the end of that summer I decided to stay in Italy throughout the winter and to supervise the reconstruction of a small peasant cottage I had acquired while working abroad. Today it seems hard to believe that all the building materials were still brought up the *mulatiera* by a mule. Such aspects of civilisation have totally disappeared and progress now dictates that since there is no road to the door, materials now have to be carried (at far greater expense) by humans.

Throughout that winter of 1968 and the spring of 1969 I had considerable amounts of free time and my sailing activities the breadth of the Mediterranean only started in April. I therefore spent quite some time re-exploring the villages of Liguria and the immediate surroundings which I have known since I was a child, but this time I was looking at the paintings in the local chapels and churches. In this way I made friends with the late Fra' Luigi Rolandi Ricci, Marchese del Carretto di Balestrino and often dined with him in his gem of a castle tucked up a valley behind Albenga, blocking the old highway to Turin. Fra' Luigi lived with an eye to a gracious era that was fast vanishing and I remember that one of my pleasures, apart from his enchanting company and the considerable pleasures of his table and vineyard, was to chauffeur him in an immaculate 1948 Rolls Royce Silver Dawn.

The marchese possessed a number of interesting pictures including an extraordinary Magnasco which is now in the Accademia in Venice. At the foot of a ramp up to the Conscente drawbridge is the small church of Sant'Alessandro for the castle devotions and in this church there was an unpublished and outstanding Guido Reni depicting *The Martyrdom of Saint Catherine*. It was originally ordered by

the Marchese Ottavio Costa in 1606. There were other paintings of interest in the immediate vicinity – an early copy of the Kansas City Saint John the Baptist by Caravaggio in a locked *confraternità* at the foot of the hill by the vegetable gardens, a tattered *Massacre of the Innocents* by Lanfranco quietly rotting in the local priest's garret (since lost or stolen), a then unpublished Lanfranco of *The Miracle of San Verano* in Albenga cathedral, and paintings purporting to be Domenichino or Poussin in another nearby village. It was through these



Denis Mahon, Patrick Matthiesen and Stephen-pepper at Conscente in 1969

paintings that I was first to meet Erich Schleier and later Steve Pepper and Sir Denis Mahon.

The marchese told me of the existence of the Costa family archive mouldering in a dimly lit cubby-hole in a palazzo in Albenga and, for the next months, I repaired there among the un-indexed papers, *cartelle* and *filze* twice or thrice weekly in the afternoons to do research. It was a rewarding time because no one had really come to grips with this mass of paper since the nineteenth century. Not only did I dredge up information about the Reni, but also about many other paintings besides, wills, inventories and other papers relating to the Knights of Malta and to Ottavio Costa, his brother and descendents. Costa had been a patron of Caravaggio's and the Banca Herrera e Costa, bankers to the Vatican, had been a major financial force in early seventeenth century Rome. All this activity led to meetings with Pepper and Mahon. I well remember awaiting the first interview with the celebrated Sir Denis with considerable trepidation, arranging for him to stay in Alassio in the old Edwardian Grand Hotel on the beach. The next morning I sat in the sand at the feet of the *maestro* while he sat in a deckchair, under an *ombrellone*, in a temperature of over eighty degrees (it was august), wearing a heavy serge suit, his immaculately rolled umbrella stuck resolutely upright in the sand while I proffered a *krapfe* (doughnut) from a passing vendor and discussed the finer points of archival research and Guido's early development. This was heady stuff indeed! We have remained in touch ever since....

Together with Steve we prepared an article on the Reni to be published in *Apollo* and this chance encounter led to a long-standing friendship which was periodically renewed over the years as I joined P.& D. Colnaghi and Co. and later founded my own gallery. Nevertheless, there were a few lessons to be learned in the interim. My dusting down of the many Costa *filze* had yielded a fair quantity of material and only a small proportion was required for the Reni publication.¹ Some time later I was asked to pass on the information about Ottavio Costa's Caravaggios, his collection, details of the Rome notaries and other assorted information, to an Italian art historian. It was with considerable chagrin that in 1974 I saw all my research published in *The Burlington Magazine* without a footnote or an acknowledgement by this self same art historian.

Having spent the winter and succeeding spring passing my time as an amateur archivist it was time for some serious sailing with my yachting partner, and ex Courtauld colleague, Peter Fraser, aboard *Glen Maid*. However, as summer progressed we all developed an inclination to dabble as art dealers. A suitable opportunity beckoned when Stella Rudolph told us of a forthcoming house sale at the Villa Artimino, outside Florence. In our innocence we imagined that a house sale in a Medici villa would contain truly Medicean treasure (it was of course no such thing and partly the usual Italian 'packed' sale) and I promptly proceeded to blow a recent inheritance of £4000 which was all the money I possessed. This adventure proved to be rather a steep learning curve. I recall the purchase of a rather fine but totally unsaleable, at the time, *Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew*, purportedly by

Ribera (and indeed it may have been), but more probably by Langetti. In desperation after a number of years we found it a home in Prato – at a loss. Other ‘treasures’ included a very angry looking Chinese bronze god, a splendid English gothick dining table with barley sugar legs (which eventually found a home in a friend’s gothick house in Cheltenham), and a pair of magnificent Bleau library globes on which we hoped to make a quiet killing – a killing in those days being a couple of hundred in profit! The globes were promptly crushed flat in transit when British Railways dropped the crates off a crane from a significant height. It became clear to the writer that there was more to being an art dealer than immediately met the eye.....I do, however, retain one memento from this expedition. I bought a small copper representing *The Kiss of Judas* for £200, my first old master painting purchase. We believed it to be by Ludovico Carracci and it was subsequently accepted as such though more recently it has been published as by Francesco Albani.

Since those rather faltering steps and two years ‘in the wilderness’ as a property developer, much has changed. For a start the world of old masters in those years was even more of a clique than it is now. There were more dealers, especially the older and savvy variety, presumably a term now used to describe my generation. Pictures, even great pictures, seemed in inexhaustible supply and sales took place monthly. It has been the escalation in prices and the resultant increasing research and expenditure on ‘marketing’ and presentation that has changed this happy state of affairs. This was the tail end of a period when there was still a handful of dedicated great collectors, passionate about their endeavours and the modern equivalents of the aristocratic collectors of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Perhaps of even greater importance to the specialised art dealer was the American museum’s seemingly insatiable hunger for old masters, and often for things baroque. The latter trend had taken root in the 1960s when a truly outstanding masterpiece, a term more often than not abused by misuse, could have been acquired for a mere \$75,000. Of course, this was still a dramatic increase over the few hundreds the same work might have fetched in the 1940s or 1950s before Sir Denis Mahon, amongst others, ‘rediscovered’ the baroque. To have been a dealer or dedicated collector during this period, when the finest gold frames were frequently destroyed and burned to recover the value of the gold leaf, or large, dark baroque paintings acquired just for the frame, must have been a special privilege. It is hard, today, when perusing the ever more infrequent old master auctions, so over hyped, advertised and catalogued, to imagine the treasures available in thin, semi-illustrated monthly or almost weekly sales. An acute eye and a taste for combing through endless lots must frequently have given rise to the sort of ‘rush’ that an explorer experienced tumbling out of the jungle after rediscovering the Lost City of the Incas.

Over the years prices have escalated to a degree that would have been unimaginable in the 1960s. As monetary values climbed art dealing became perceived as business, even ‘big business’, and, of course, the pleasant, friendly relationships between so many dealer’s coterie progressively changed,

first to rivalry and sometimes to worse. Suddenly the finding, possession, correct identification and exploitation of a painting by a hitherto relatively obscure artist might enrich the finder by hundreds of thousands of dollars. Paintings became progressively scarcer as the competition increased and as numbers of them found their way into institutional collections. 'Agents' suddenly began to multiply like rabbits, touring remote locations while telephone lines proliferated in provincial auction houses. The final catalyst was the growth of the major auction houses. The behemoths that constitute this duopoly, which effectively now controls the market, embarked on an explosive expansion plan from the 1980s onwards. By some alchemistic miracle they claimed to represent the interests of both buyer and seller simultaneously while at the same time lining their bottomless pockets with proceeds from both.² The financing of goods and guaranteeing of minimum was topped off with a bonus represented by the buying of some old established art dealing houses and the coyly described 'private treaty sales' (effectively the auction houses acting as principals and art dealers). These developments resulted in a dramatic increase in revenues, which, in turn, led to evermore expansion with agents and offices straddling the globe. All that was needed to complete the picture was a cartel..... The result of all this expansion was a major squeeze on private dealers.

The established private dealer [who himself in all probability is a frustrated collector] traditionally hoped to advise his favoured clients, and was responsible to the client before, during and after a transaction as to authenticity, title and condition. The auction houses, however, while still apparently serving the interests of both buyer and seller, hedged themselves about with restrictions and limiting conditions. Yet to the private buyer, sucked into their maw, they apparently could do no wrong.

As their estimates became self-fulfilling the auction had virtually taken place before the hammer fell for the first time. Incredibly, whereas a private buyer might take days, weeks or months to agree a deal in a private gallery, believing that the price could only fall and that time was on his side to squeeze the dealer, the selfsame client apparently loses all control of his sense of reason when being wooed by an auction house. The client is invited to a marketing cocktail party to be softened up for a prospective lot by being told how much interest has been generated in it, how other people are also in contention so that he will have to better his bid. And this is not to mention the practice of 'chandelier bids'. What the private buyer has failed to grasp is that in many cases the dealer puts his money where his mouth is. He buys a picture because he either loves it, believes in it or sees its true value. He has put himself on the line. In contrast the auction house is the master of hype, risking no more than its overheads if a lot fails to sell and generally passing much of the cost on to the consignor. Alternatively, sensing a lack of interest, the auction house will methodically work on the consignor just before the sale to depress the reserve price as far as possible from the unrealistic hyped price they had suggested in order to secure the consignment.

Of course it is not always a totally one-way game for the auction house or else more dealers would be out of business. Despite every best intention the pressure of time occasionally, but ever more rarely, allows a major painting to slip by under catalogued, and then it is snapped up by a dealer to be proudly represented as a 'discovery'. Alternatively there are some paintings which, for a variety of reasons, are too difficult to handle at auction and which may be best left to a private dealer.

So do we seem unduly pessimistic about the future. When The Matthiesen Gallery reopened its doors in 1978 we were nearing the end of an era. The production of dealer's scholarly catalogues was a relatively new thing, largely pioneered by Andrew Ciecanowiecki at the Heim Gallery. In the 1970s, when I was at P. & D. Colnaghi and Co., an old master catalogue consisted of one or two laboriously produced letter press colour plates, a handful of black and white illustrations, and the artist's name, dates, the sizes of the canvas and possibly a line or two suggesting a dating or an opinion. Have we gone too far the other way now? Yes, probably. Much of this is once again a competitive instinct with the auction houses. As their catalogues became evermore wordy, lavishly produced and hard backed, we dealers felt, in the large, compelled to follow suite to ensure that our own publications were not instantly 'binned' upon removal from their envelopes. It is only necessary to compare a Matthiesen catalogue of 1981 with one produced in 2001 to see the difference. Arguably the pictures were more important in the humbler 1981 presentation – most of them have ended up in institutions. And yet there is a positive side to all this – the standards of scholarship have improved immeasurably and as dealers are a major source of unpublished material or 'discoveries' the whole art world has gained thereby.

It is in an attempt to recapture a little of the flavour of former times that we embarked in 1996 on a second repeat cycle of the ground that we had covered over a decade earlier (1300–1480 in 1996, 1700–1800 in 1998 and now this year, in order to mark the millennium, this catalogue filling the gap between 1500 and 1720). There is an undercurrent of uncertainty in this catalogue that echoes the human dilemma of uncertainty as to what happens next. What will happen to life as we know it in this millennium, or even in the new century that has just started? Will life survive on a ravaged planet where dozens of species become extinct each year? It is in part, for this reason that in 2001 we are sponsoring a project in the Amazon rainforest where the immense variety of plants and fauna are under threat. And so I am grateful to my friend Errico di Lorenzo for his short essay on the *Tomba del Tuffatore* that so succinctly underlines this dilemma, one that I personally feel also with this Gallery's lease shortly up for renewal. The theme is doubly underlined by the *Memento Mori* which acts as the frontispiece. I fear, therefore, that this could prove to be the last major old master theme catalogue that this gallery will produce, and that if there are to be future productions they will be more in line with our Spring Catalogue this year. Nothing wrong with that I hear you say – but its not quite the same, and I feel saddened by the realisation that however much one would like – and as

a dyed in the wool old reactionary I would like very much – it is impossible to turn the clock back to those golden years before mobile phones, fax machines, and worst of all the e-mail (the blackmail to induce a reply I often think) invaded our privacy and sense of personal ‘space’.

PATRICK MATTHIESEN

1 The Costa archives stretching back as far as the sixteenth century were not indexed. They contain a great deal of family material, inheritances, inventories and lawsuits. There is generally more material relating to Ligurian affairs than to the properties in Rome but some of Ottavio's documents refer to Rome. Unfortunately no documents relating to the Banca Herrera e Costa were found at the time. The notaries used in Rome relating to Costa properties and inventories there were Domenico Amedeo in 1627, Domenico Fonzia on 23 February 1629 and Notaio Galli from 1629.

Conscente was a *feudo* set up by Charlemagne and had belonged to the Cepulla family who ruled the Nasino valley since 1308. In 1531 Segurano Cepullino, husband of Tomasina Costa, sold one-third to Benedetto Costa. In 1547 Gio. Ant. Costa purchased the two thirds for 1500 scudi. However, in 1584 the territory became an apostolic fief held by the Vatican to whom the Costa swore allegiance and had to pay 15 *scudi d'oro* to the Albenga Curia annually. Only in 1586 did Sixtus V grant the privilege of not having to renew the investiture. Ottavio was made Count of Conscente by Gregory XV. He was also Conte di Garlenda, Paravenna e Lenguiglia e di Conte Palatino, Barone di Conscente. In 1603 the *feudo* was handed over in primogeniture to the male heirs of his son Benedetto.

A 1615 inventory in *Scanzia 4, Casa 3, no. 12* concerns chattels in Albenga and Garlenda lists '*robbe e mobile et utensili riposti in diverse case e luoghi spettante risp. A Mons. Pierfrancesco Alessandro et Ottavio fratti de Costa*'. This mentions the Reni '*Ancona grande di S. Caterina no. 1*' as being in the Chiesa di S. Alessandro as well as a Tuscan marble relief (still there in the 1960s), and paintings of S. Placido and S. Verano. It also mentions the number of bells and their ropes (one broken!). Sizes if any are in Genoese palms. Authors are rarely mentioned. More important paintings often have a curtain '*con coperta di taffeta verde*'. Although there are many paintings which one might wish to identify it is impossible to be sure on the basis of the subject

only. On page 205 of this *scanzia* there is mention of the tiny Oratorio di S. Giov. Battista where there is listed '*quadro Grande mandato da Roma di S. Gio. Battista... cuscinetto di veluto... lampedaro di lattina*'. This picture was still there on the occasion of a *Visita* in 1659 when it is described '*Icona depicta eximi pictoris manu conservatur et debitis temporibus copriatur Ideo provideatur munire de tela pro ea coprienda...*'. At one time the Kansas City Caravaggio may well have graced the Costa collections and indeed for a time both the original and an early copy may have been in the collection but at some early date it appears to have been substituted by an early copy which is still *in situ*. If the Kansas picture ever reached Liguria it was first in the main palace in Albenga. As its English provenance does not extend beyond the nineteenth century it may well have been traded during the Napoleonic period (see below). Considerable quantities of marbles were sent from Rome. The inventory mentions in *Cartone 10, Quaderno 2, doc. no. 14* three cases numbering 71 items dispatched on 2 October 1618 by Gio. Ant. Costa to his uncle.

In *Cartone Albenga 19, Quaderno 3*, lies the document of key importance published in 1974 (see above), namely the will of Ottavio Costa made in 1632 and re-established in 1639..... '*Item proibisce espressamente l'alienatione e distrattione di tutti I Suoi quadri di qualsivoglia qualità, et valore, et in particolare di quelli che si trova a Roma, opera del Caravaggio, Giuseppino (Cavalier d'Arpino?) e Guido, quali assieme con tutti l'altri disponi, e vuole, che seguita la Sua morte, siano mandati in Alberga, dove debbano esser tenuti et conservati perpetuamente per ornamento di quelli Habitationi et decoro de Suoi Successori...*' It seems probable in fact that well before his death many of his more important pictures were already in Albenga. Unfortunately an accurate inventory of the possessions in Rome was not forthcoming.

The most important inventory relating to Ottavio is dated 18 January 1639 under the seal of Notaio Caporosso (*Cartone 15, folio 4, doc. 7*). There are several

authenticated copies of this inventory that was clearly of key importance to the family succession (see 1669 copy, *Casa Costa, Quaderno 6, no. 5*). The 1639 inventory was at the behest of the 'Sig.ra Contessa Maria Cattaneo Costa, Madre, Amministratrice, Tutore e Curatrice del Sig. Filippo Costa suo Figlio di tutti I beni eriditari del Sigr Conte Ottavio Costa'. This inventory is of great interest because in a rare departure from normal practice it records 'E piu un quadro grande con l'Immagine del Giuditto fatto da Michelangelo Caravaggio con la sua cornice e basetano dinanzi... E piu un altro quadro con l'Immagine di S. Gio. Batt. nel Deserto fatto dall' istesso Caravaggio... E piu un altro quadro di S. Francesco fatto dall' istesso Caravaggio tutti con la sua cornice'. It is tempting to read too much into inventories but the very fact that the artist is specified must make one wonder if these are more than copies. The *Giuditto* almost certainly is the Vincenzo Coppi picture now in the Galleria Nazionale d' Arte Antica in Rome. It has been suggested in 1974 and subsequently that the *Saint Francis* was the Tritonio picture now in Hartford (this seems unlikely because what is almost certainly the same picture is recorded in a 1741 copy of a 1659 General Inventory as 'E piu un quadro di S. Francesco che riceve le Stimmate senza cornice, quale quadro e venuto da Roma, e deve servire per la Capella della Villa di Lusignano'). In 1651 there are records attesting to the erection and dedication of an abbey at Lusignano dedicated to the Stigmata of Saint Francis. The remains of this establishment survive today as a rather under utilised Seminary. The *Saint John* must clearly be identifiable with the Kansas City picture.

There are however intriguing citations such as 'E piu un altro grande quando nostro Signore si diede a consocere alle due discepoli tutti con cornice.... (one would like to be able to identify this Emmaus subject)... E piu un altro quadro delli tre giocatori compagno di uno che fece il Caravaggio con la Sua cornice'. This latter picture, almost certainly by a first generation Caravaggesque artist of some importance (Manfredi? Valentin?), was in 1723 and 1738 (*Albenga 4, Quaderno 8, doc. 13*) still in the main house in Albenga in the *sala grande*. At that time it hung in proximity to 'Due venere in due quadri uno piu grande dell'altro con cornici di legno che si danno la piu grande d'Annibale Carracci, e l'altro di Andrea del Sarto...'. By 1787 it is recorded in the principal Castle of Balestrino some two valleys to the north-east.

What the art historian who published the Costa

inventory did not know was that the Caravaggio *Judith and Holofernes* was not alienated as suggested after 1639, because in all probability, if it was the original, it was not in Rome at that time. An inventory of the belongings of the Contessa M. Cattaneo made in 1688 made by Pietro Costa (*Quaderno 9*) lists the *Judith and Holofernes*, the *Saint Francis* and a *S. Giovanni*, the former two in their walnut and gilt frames, the latter in a black and gilt frame. Many other pictures are recorded. A 1727 document lists the *Giuditto e Oloferne* as being in the remote castle of Nasino, at the head of the valley whose entrance Conscente guards, hanging in the 'Camera Scura'. In 1733 another inventory made on 4 October records, there were two portraits of Bianca and Laura in Nasino and that the selfsame *Giuditto e Oloferne* was by then located in the 'sala'. The last record appears to be an inventory of 1736-7 made by Notaio Stefano Durante, Podestà of Balestrino... 'un quadro di Giuditto, che taglia la testa ad oloferne, con cornice di bosco logora...'. By this date Balestrino had clearly become the main residence, as inventories show fewer furnishings in Conscente or Garlenda castles. Nevertheless an inventory of 1743 for Conscente records... '1 Ecce Homo... 1 Sta Maddalena dei Pazzi... 1 quadro di una donna che dipinge... 1 S. Giov. Batt... 1 quadro di Lucrezia Romana... 9 ritratti di imperatori antichi... Il ritratto di Mosig. Costa vescovo di Savona, altro di Mgr. Costa vescovo d'Albenga... 1 del Duca di Savoia... 1 di fiori...'

It is interesting to note that it appears that Ottavio Costa's roman house in the Via Gregoriana was not sold until 16 January 1688 (*Albenga 18, Quaderno 8, doc. 5*) when it was bought for 2000 scudi by Augusto Rosa.

Ecclesiastica 5, Quaderno 1, Doc. 1 contains a parchment relating to the removal in 1578 of the body of San Verano to a private chapel inside the house at Casa Costa. *Doc. 2* contains further information. *Ecclesiastica 4, Quaderno 13*, and *Ecclesiastica 5* all relate to San Verano. The presence later of a picture of San Verano in the Costa household, first recorded in 1616, probably to grace this chapel, almost certainly means that this was the Giovanni Lanfranco composition which is now in Albenga cathedral. (It is mentioned together with an *Ancona di S. Placido no. 1... Quadretto di tre palme di Sta Caterina con cornice d'oro portato in Castello 1616*) Further details regarding the life of San Verano may be found in *Memorie Diverse sul Mio Patrimonio* (T.2 pp. 2-130).

Yet more documents yield enticing snippets of information. 'Quadri diversi comprati. Estratto del libro

Azienda del Marchese Dom. del Caretto (p.38) lists 'Inventarie e Memorie diverse del mio Patrimonio.... Una testa di Guido dipinta sul cartone. Costa in Lire di Genova 24... Testa di S. Girolamo del Lanfranco.... Incoronazione di spine di Caravaggio... S. Girolamo che dicesi del Guido, costo lire 80... Apotheose di Enrico IV di Rubens'. The affairs of San Verano again figure in the *Manuale d'Azienda* p.165 and ff.

The larger part of the archive relates to the churches, their history, construction, the *Visite* and so on as well as some land disputes. The collection of paintings which was clearly not alienated after Ottavio's death as has been surmised was clearly of some value. The Costas had also been Knights of Malta as in 1601 Alessandro Costa (*Ecc.* IV, *Quaderno* 21, doc. 12 and *Costa* 1, *Quaderno* 12, doc 2) assumed the habit of the order on May 16th. *Casa Costa* 6, *Quaderno* 2, doc. no.44 relates how in the mid-seventeenth century the Knights of Malta sued the Costa heirs for possession of the pictures and family silver and instructed their agent to make representations to the Vatican to proceed towards excommunication of the family if they failed to obey. They did not and it seems clear that the pictures retained in Liguria were of sufficient significance to provoke the ire of the Order.

The Costa family were clearly important patrons of the arts. Ottavio's brother, Pier Francesco, who was a papal Nuncio to Savoy, was instrumental in getting Savona cathedral built prevailing on the populace to contribute funds and donating the immense sum of 2000 gold scudi himself (the Commune gave only 40000 lire!). The fact that this edifice contains works by Baglione and the Santuario della Misericordia works by Domenichino and Borgianni is no accident. He was also something of a politician. In 1573 he was abbot of the small monastery on the Isola Gallinara, soon afterwards he became maggiordomo to Sixtus V, becoming Bishop of Savona in 1587. He was concerned with the intrigues of the succession to the Duchy of Monferrato during the Franco-Spanish war. On 5 September 1621 he returned at last to Savona and then to Albenga. In 1624 he gave up his bishopric in Savona to Franc. Maria Spinola but he retained his Nunciship as a special privilege and the title of bishop until his death. In 1625 he received the victorious Vittorio Amadeo, Prince of Piedmont, who had defeated the Genovese. Piedmont had a territory close by at Oneglia with a small port. Under Pier Francesco's guidance the city of Albenga decided not to oppose Savoy and Pier Francesco, fully robed, led the delegation to greet

the victor and invite him to the family palace. He was over 80 at the time. Rubbish left by the Piedmontese troops caused disease in Albenga to which the elderly bishop succumbed. Pier Francesco, representing politics and the church, and Ottavio, finance, must have made a powerful duo.

During the Napoleonic wars the peasants became fractious and there were difficulties over land management and the maintenance of the several churches (*Garlenda cartone* 11-14). The priest at that time addressed the marchese as an equal and the del Carettos, who by then had inherited from the Costas, were forced to pay out large sums of cash. Clearly by 1800-04 they must have been in slightly straightened circumstances. *Ecc.* 4 contains a document where Bishop Dania writes to Liliana Balbi del Caretto suggesting that the *Martyrdom of Saint Erasmus* altarpiece in the church of Garlenda (thought to be by Poussin) should be sold in order to raise money for maintenance and the furnishing of a chapel as it was suggested it could be substituted by a less valuable picture. Indeed shortly thereafter an attempt was made to sell the altarpiece of *The Madonna and Child with Saint Mauro* in Garlenda then thought to be a Domenichino (but possibly by a follower such as Leveux). Between 1803 and 1805 both West and his agents and Buchanan were in contention for this picture actually depositing the immense sum of £1000 which they later found hard to recover (H. Brigstocke, *William Buchanan and the Nineteenth-Century Art Trade*, Guildford 1982, p.485 and multiple letters). The villagers threatened to burn the church down rather than part with this painting destined for Angerstein. Art dealing has never been straightforward.....

The last Marchese del Caretto died without a direct heir and in consequence adopted Fra' Luigi Rolandi Ricci. Fra' Luigi told me that until the time of the sale of the family palace in Albenga just after the war it was still well stuffed with pictures. He described to me the Rubens and an important Flemish primitive. In straightened circumstances just after World War II the Curia were also selling works of art from all the surrounding churches. One wonders whether any of Ottavio Costa's pictures reached the art market at this time.

- 2 The failure of the Art Trade to decisively mount united opposition to force the cancellation of 'the buyer's premium' by legal action or a boycott astonished the auction houses who were initially vulnerable.