

PRESS RELEASE

Discovery of a previously unknown
painting by Ribera

DAGUERRE

Auction, Friday 27 March 2020,
at Drouot, Paris.

Auctioneer : Daguerre

Expert : Cabinet Turquin



Jusepe de Ribera (Játiva 1591 - Naples 1652)

The Mathematician

canvas

100 × 75,5 cm

Estimate: 200 000 / 300 000 €

Discovery of a previously unknown painting by Ribera, a major 17th century artist

Jusepe de Ribera (1591-1652) was only 20 years old when he painted this work, « The Mathematician ». The Spanish born artist was yet to achieve his renown as the great painter of Naples, the city considered to be one of the most important artistic centers of the 17th century. It is in Rome, before this Neapolitan period, in around 1610, that Ribera paints this singular and striking allegory of Knowledge. The painting is unrecorded and was unknown to Ribera specialists. Now authenticated by Stéphane Pinta from the Cabinet Turquin, the work is to be sold at auction at Drouot on 27 March 2020 by the auction house Daguerre with an estimate of 200,000 to 300,000 Euros.

4 key facts to understand the painting

1. This discovery sheds new light on the artist's early period that today lies at the heart of research being done on his oeuvre.
2. The painting portrays one of the artist's favorite models, one that he placed in six other works from his Roman period.
3. In this painting, Ribera gives us one of his most surprising and colorful figures; revealing a sense of humor that was quite original for the time.
4. His experimenting with light and his choosing of a coarse and unfortunate sort of character to represent a savant echo both the chiaroscuro and the provocative art of Caravaggio. The two painters were both living in Rome in the beginning of the 1600's. Ribera would always reclaim his Spanish birth, signing his paintings "Jusepe de Ribera Spaniard".

A new addition to the oeuvre of Ribera, a major 17th century artist

Kept in a private hands by owners who had no idea of its value

The discovery of an unrecorded painting by Jusepe de Ribera (1591-1656), one of the great figures of 17th century painting, is an historic event for art. *"The Mathematician"* was found in a private home where no one was aware of its true value. *"It belongs to loyal clients of ours who have trusted us for many years. Unaware of the importance of the painting, it had never occurred to them to show it to us"*, explains Benoît Derouineau, the auctioneer at Daguerre holding the auction where the painting will be sold on Friday 27 March 2020 in Paris with an estimate of 200,000 to 300,000 Euros. Struck by *"this strong image, singular and amusing"*, Benoît Derouineau entrusted its valuation to the expertise of Cabinet Turquin, specialists in Old Master paintings. The experts there identified it as an original work by Ribera.

A completely unknown painting

This most recent discovery by Cabinet Turquin, which follows on the heels of those of paintings by Caravaggio, Cimabue and the Master of Vissy Brod, actively participates in the advancement of Art History. *"This painting was completely unknown and is not to be found in any of the existing publications on Ribera. The addition of this canvas to the body of works by Ribera allows us to deepen our knowledge of this artist, who has been the subject of new research since the beginning of the 2000's"*, explains Eric Turquin, whose offices had already discovered another early work by the artist, Saint John the Evangelist, sold at Drouot in 2012 by the auction house of Oger Blanchet and purchased by the Louvre.

Hailing from his early period, at the heart of the most recent research on the artist

Known as a major artist of the city of Naples, that in the 17th century was one of the main artistic centers of European painting, Jusepe de Ribera actually began his career in Rome in the early 1600s. *"This Roman period, during which the present painting was made, is at the heart of the most recent research being done on the artist"*, says Eric Turquin. In 2002, a group of anonymous paintings were in fact identified as being by the hand of Ribera and specifically as dating from this very first period of activity in Rome. Previously grouped together under the name of *"The Master of the Judgment of Solomon"*, in reference to one of the paintings in the Galleria Borghese in Rome, these paintings shed new light on the entire oeuvre of the artist which has subsequently been the subject of a constant flow of new scientific publications and exhibitions, similar to the one devoted to his principal student, Luca Giordano, which is currently on view at the Petit Palais until 23 February 2020.

A unique work in the painter's oeuvre

Given that this early first period is stylistically very far removed from that of his later compositions, it took art historians several decades to tie them to the rest of Ribera's oeuvre. Over the course of his career, the painter had in fact made works that were radically different one from another. *"it is the sign of a great artist, very inventive, who is capable of renewal and of a total change in style, in line with this current painting which is incisive, striking and perfectly original within the artist's body of work"*, continues Eric Turquin. *"An "extraordinary" canvas, literally, and fascinating in its modernity."*



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explains Eric Turquin, expert in Old Master paintings.

An allegory that is provocative and tinged with a sense of humor

One of the artist's favorite models

It was by identifying the figure represented in the painting that Cabinet Turquin was able to tie this painting to Ribera. "This very distinctive face seemed familiar to us. We find this elderly bald man; with his deep wrinkles and his protruding ears, in several paintings by the artist. It happens to be one of his favorite models", explains Stéphane Pinta. The artist used this model for six other works, among which are the Saint Bartholomew from the Fondazione Longhi in Florence and The Denial of Saint Peter in Rome.



Le Reniement de Saint Pierre,
1615-1616, toile, 163 x 233 cm
Inv: 438, Galleria Corsini, Rome, Italie
Gallerie Nazionali di Arte Antica, Roma
(MIBACT)
Bibliotheca Hertziana,
Istituto Max Planck per la storia
dell'arte/Enrico Fontolan



Le christ parmi les docteurs,
vers 1612-1613, toile, 188 x 270 cm
Eglise Saint-Martin, Langres, France
Collections des Musées de Langres,
Crédit: photo Sylvain Riandet

“In this painting Ribera is giving us a completely allegorical representation of Knowledge. Far removed from the stereotypical representations of great thinkers of Antiquity, with their white beards and their noble appearance, here the artist has chosen a wizened old man, heavily wrinkled and wearing ragged clothes for his own interpretation of the embodiment of knowledge.”
Stéphane Pinta, expert en au cabinet Turquin

An allegory of knowledge

Pages black with formulas and geometrical shapes are held in the sitter's hands and set on the table before him. These writings are what designate him as a savant, a philosopher or a mathematician. In Rome, in the beginning of the 17th century, images of the great thinkers of Antiquity were highly sought after. Collectors exhibited these works representing savants in their "cabinet d'amateur". "We first thought of the mathematician Archimedes but in this painting Ribera is giving us a completely allegorical representation of Knowledge. Far removed from the stereotypical representations of great thinkers of Antiquity, with their white beards and their noble appearance, here the artist has chosen to show a wizened old man; heavily wrinkled and wearing ragged clothes for his interpretation of what embodies knowledge. A provocative choice which is underlined by the sitter's own rather malicious smile", explains Stéphane Pinta.

A sense of humor unique to Ribera

"In this work, the artist gives us one of his most amusing and colorful figures. He brings a note of humor, which was completely original for the time. None of his contemporaries, starting with Caravaggio, would use humor in this way in their works. It is a dimension which is unique to Ribera", notes Eric Turquin, insisting on the theatrical dimension and the duality of this hero who is both grotesque and learned.

“Out of ugliness, he creates beauty”

The very choice of such a face - one of the "tronie", the caricature, figures with deformed features often used by the Dutch painters of the 16th and 17th centuries - is in itself a provocation. "Like Caravaggio who also happens to be in Rome at the very start of the 1600's, Ribera is an artist of the Catholic Counter-Reformation who seeks to capture the viewer's attention with forceful imagery to deliver a religious message. This man, with his awkward physique, is also a being of divine creation. For Ribera, the sort of esthetic beauty that was exalted by Raphael and the artists of the Italian Renaissance had become boring and ethereal. He prefers to show people as they are, with their flaws and their anatomical detail. Out of ugliness he creates beauty." Continues Eric Turquin and Stéphane Pinta before quoting the poem "Ribeira" written by Théophile Gautier (1811-1872) in honor of the artist, which begins with the verse: "Il est des coeurs épris du triste amour du laid".

Twenty years after the present painting, in the 1630's, with his series of "Philosophers", Ribera would again depict these scholars with the imperfect features of the common man.

A revolutionary use of light: the lesson of Tenebrism

A composition close to that of his first painting of Apostles

At the time of the creation of this painting, in the years around 1610, Ribera was settled in Rome. In spite of his young age, a scant 20 years, as well as his Spanish origins which normally would have barred him access to the network of influential relationships in Rome, the artist managed to earn an important commission for twelve paintings representing the twelve apostles: it was his first series of "Apostolado". "Each one of these paintings represents a half-length figure, as in our painting. The format chosen by the artist, roughly a meter in height, is identical because "The Mathematician" measures one meter high by 75.5 centimeters in length", adds Stéphane Pinta.

A portrait executed in two days

The expert recalls the testimony of Giulio Mancini who made note "of an artist who worked rapidly, capable of painting a Saint Jerome in only two days and a Judgment of our Lord in half-length in ten "figures" {format of the canvas} in scarcely five days". Stéphane Pinta adds: "Ribera paints extremely quickly. In spite of his young age, he has already found his own unique style that he masters perfectly. Our painting reaches us through the thickness of the creamy paint and the painter's energetic brushstroke. The colder notes – grey and pale – that surround the sitter allow the copper and mahogany colors of his wizened face to clearly emerge from the background."



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Stéphane Pinta, expert in Old Master painting, cabinet Turquin



Vertical lighting, an effective artifice

In exactly the same way as in his first series of the Apostles, the vertical lighting that the artist uses here creates a forceful contrast with the black, neutral background. This use of light is characteristic of Tenebrism, which was at its height in Rome following such experiments in painting as initiated by Caravaggio.

A precursor in experimenting with light

If the probability that Ribera would have known Caravaggio remains a subject of some debate among art historians, it is certain that the artist of Spanish origins would have been familiar with the canvases of the master of chiaroscuro. "In Rome, in the years 1610, everyone would go to admire the works of Caravaggio", adds Eric Turquin. For the expert, the Tenebrism of Ribera and his experiments with light are particularly precocious. "Precursor, he is the only one to carry out these esthetic experiments during Caravaggio's lifetime, well before followers such as the French Georges de Le Tour who would work on his use of shadow and light starting from the 1630's, some twenty years after the creation of our painting."

DA GUERRE

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Expert : Cabinet Turquin

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