



Italian Paintings in the Walters Art Gallery

BY FEDERICO ZERI

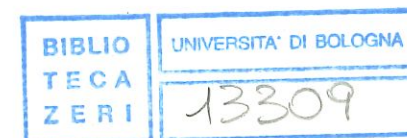
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Introduction

Apart from a few later additions, the collection of paintings catalogued in these volumes was formed by Henry Walters between 1902 and his death in 1931. Henry's father, William, had instilled in his son a passion for collecting, and Henry occasionally followed his father's lead in acquiring works of contemporary European painters. By 1894, the year of William's death, the Walters family collection included some of the most famous academic pictures of the day and a considerable number of works by members of the Barbizon School and others. Up to this point, neither Walters had sought out the Old Masters. In fact, the only Italian work of early date acquired before 1902 which is still in the Walters Gallery is the canvas from the workshop of Bonifazio Veronese which appears as an isolated item among some 175 entries in the little catalogue/list, entitled *Pictures*, published in 1899.

In 1902 the consistency and character of the Walters collection was suddenly and dramatically altered. In that year Henry Walters acquired the entire assemblage of works of art in the possession of Don Marcello Massarenti in Rome. This collection comprised not only Old Masters from various European schools, but also Greek, Etruscan and Roman antiquities, including some outstanding marbles, such as the seven Dionysiac sarcophagi from a tomb near the Via Salaria in Rome, as well as medieval and renaissance bronzes, ivories and furniture. Marcello Massarenti, a priest (often erroneously said to have been a monsignore or a cardinal), had become a member of the papal court, and under Pope Leo XIII and Pope Pius X was appointed pontifical under-almoner (*sotto elemosinere*). Massarenti lived in a room of the Vatican palace, but his zest for collecting obliged him to rent several floors in the spacious Palazzo Accoramboni in the old Piazza Rusticucci near St. Peter's in the Vatican. In this building Don Marcello housed his art treasures. The display, as early photographs show, was crowded and disordered, with objects crammed into vitrines and the classical sculpture placed in what appears to be an annex.¹

Unfortunately, very little is known about the origin of Massarenti's collections, nor do we know exactly when he started to assemble them. However, the collection was consistent enough by 1881 to warrant having a catalogue printed in which the Old Masters are described. In this rare volume (a copy of which exists in the Biblioteca Hertziana, Rome) the provenance of certain paintings is indicated. We learn that some pictures had been bought by Massarenti from old Bolognese collections, such as that of Prince Hercolani and Count Grassi, while others had been purchased in other towns of the pontifical states, such as Pesaro. It also appears likely that Massarenti's position in the pontifical court enabled him to buy

¹ The building consisted in part of older houses which were remodelled and incorporated within a palace built for Cardinal Rusticucci. The remodelling was begun by Domenico Fontana in the 1580's and completed shortly after 1600 by Carlo Maderno. The palace was demolished in 1937. Photographs of Maderno's facade and of the display of the Massarenti collection within the Accoramboni Palace illustrate an article by Dorothy Kent Hill, in *Apollo*, 100, 1974, pp. 355 f., figs. 1-3. In the same essay Miss Hill discusses the provenance of some of Massarenti's classical antiquities.

pictures from churches and monasteries. This would explain the entrance into his collection of such works as Domenico Fetti's altarpiece from San Lorenzo in Damaso in Rome. Massarenti also seems to have purchased works from the various sales of the Monte di Pietà held in Rome, and from art dealers in Paris and London.

A second catalogue of the Massarenti museum, as the owner himself used to call it, was published in 1897 and was compiled by Edouard van Esbroeck, a painter from Brussels. This volume included not only the Old Masters, but also the classical antiquities and the later objects, and attests to the enormous growth of the collection after 1881. The attributions of this second catalogue are largely fantastic and without foundation, which explains the rather suspect reputation that both Don Marcello Massarenti and his "museum" shared in cultivated circles.²

Massarenti's last important purchase was the collection of the Marignoli family of Spoleto in Umbria. The Marignoli were a very wealthy old family who had suffered severe financial reverses as a result of the failure of various speculative ventures, and their resources had been further depleted by the construction of the gigantic Palazzo Marignoli in the Via del Corso in Rome. Their collection had been kept in Spoleto, and on the death of Marquess Francesco Marignoli in 1898 it was inherited by his son Filippo. The latter was compelled to dispose of the art treasures and sold them to Don Marcello Massarenti in 1899. It was the acquisition of this group of paintings that brought about the supplement to the 1897 catalogue, published in 1900.

Nothing is known about the initial overtures between Henry Walters and Don Marcello Massarenti, but we can assume that either the Roman priest made the first attempt to catch the "rich American," or that the renown of the Massarenti museum had caught the attention of an agent working on Walters' behalf. It seems certain that Mr. Walters saw the collection *in situ* while he was abroad in 1902.

With the exception of a very few items, Henry Walters acquired the entire contents of the Massarenti collection as described in the catalogue of 1897 and the supplement of 1900. The contract was signed on April 16, 1902. The details of the transaction are still unclear, but it is known that the Italian scholar Adolfo Venturi took part in the negotiations and that among the works excluded from the sale were three paintings which Don Marcello Massarenti gave to the Italian government in order to secure the export permit. These works were certainly not the finest in the collection, and it is probable that the terms of this gift to the government were reached in order to avoid friction with the Vatican court of which Massarenti, though in a minor position, was part. Anxious to lower the total amount on which he would have to pay a United States import tax, Walters immediately sold from the collection the clocks, furniture and a few Etruscan pieces. The rest was shipped by the chartered steamer, the *Minterne*, from Civitavecchia to New York where it was stored until the completion of the building that Walters was erecting in Baltimore for his collection and that of his father. Massarenti himself died not long after the sale, on October 23, 1905.

² On this point the reader should consult Wilhelm von Bode's memoirs, *Mein Leben*, I, 1930, pp. 35 ff., as well as his article in *Kunst und Künstler*, I, 1903, p. 118.

The Gallery that Henry Walters erected to house his treasures was in the style of an Italian renaissance palace. The architect, William Adams Delano, based his design on the Palazzo dell' Università of Genoa built by Bartolomeo Bianco in 1634-36. Completed in 1908, this new Gallery was soon filled to capacity as Walters expanded his buying in many different fields—from ancient near Eastern and Egyptian sculpture to armor, tapestries and Western European decorative arts. So large did his collection grow in all fields that only a fraction of it could be exhibited at any one time. This situation was only altered in November 1974 with the opening of a modern and innovative wing adjoining the original Gallery.

For many years only a small portion of the Italian pictures of the Massarenti collection was exhibited, and of this group the early schools took prominence. Among the scholars who first studied the pictures was Bernard Berenson who knew the Massarenti collection when it was still in Rome and who visited Baltimore on trips to the United States in the years before the First World War. Berenson published many of the Walters Venetian paintings in three articles in *Art in America* (1915), which were reprinted in an enlarged and revised volume entitled *Venetian Painting in America* (1916). He also established a relationship as advisor and agent to Henry Walters—an association which lasted until around 1922, when it ended abruptly, not to be resumed. Through this acquaintance Walters made a number of purchases—either of paintings that belonged to Berenson himself, or following his advice, from dealers such as Luigi Grassi and Paolo Paolini, both of whom were closely connected with Berenson.

In addition to the Massarenti purchase and to various acquisitions made through Berenson, Henry Walters secured paintings from other sources. However, it is very difficult to identify the origin of most of these works because a great deal of the documentation was destroyed, leaving almost no evidence about the development of the collection. Only in the case of a handful of paintings do we know the dealers from whom they were bought. Of particular importance was the firm of A. S. Drey in Munich and New York from whom Walters purchased a number of major works, including the paintings by Antonio da Fabriano, Giorgio Schiavone, the Master of the Castello Nativity, Gianfrancesco da Rimini, Bartolomeo di Tommaso and Amico Aspertini. Among the other dealers from whom Walters is known to have bought paintings were Demotte of Paris, Arnold Seligman and Rey, New York, Duveen Brothers, New York, Trotti Galleries, Paris, Kelekian, Paris, and Tavazzi in Rome. Occasionally he bought pictures at auction, such as the Sofonisba Anguissola purchased at the Stillman sale of 1927. In 1922, perhaps on the advice of Berenson, Mr. Walters sold a number of paintings from the Massarenti collection; others were among those disposed of much later in 1950/51.

Some notable acquisitions have been made by purchase and gift since the Gallery became a public museum in 1934. They include the fine canvas by Leandro Bassano, the two outstanding Paninis, as well as the tiny panel by Orcagna donated by Judge and Mrs. Jacob M. Moses, the Paris Bordone from Mrs. Donald B. Hebb, the Rotari from the bequest of Philip B. Perlman, and the Passeri, a gift of Mr. and Mrs. Egon Kafka. Three important pictures from the collection of the Honorable James A. Murnaghan in Dublin were acquired

in 1973 through the Dr. Francis D. Murnaghan Fund: the altarpiece by Pacino di Bonaguida, the cassone panel by Apollonio di Giovanni and Marco del Buono, and the large and impressive mannerist panel of Jacob's Dream by Giorgio Vasari.

The paintings collection of the Walters Gallery has a character which for a public collection in the United States is unique. This character depends upon the history of its formation and particularly the dominance of the Massarenti collection which was assembled following the taste which predominated in Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century. As a result, the Walters collection of Italian paintings (notwithstanding the accessions made from different sources in more recent times) strongly recalls a Galleria of a noble European, and specifically Italian, family. Masterpieces such as the well known painting of an Architectural Perspective, the Filippo Lippi, the Pinturicchio, the Raphael, the Veronese, the Pontormo and the Batoni portrait of Cardinal Sciarra and others are surrounded by a number of fine examples by Carlo da Camerino, Bicci di Lorenzo, the Master of the Santo Spirito Altarpieces, Cristoforo Caselli, Rosso Fiorentino, Baciccio, Domenico Fetti and many others. Artists of every period are not seen in isolation, but in the company of their contemporaries, and the collection stands as a homogeneous ensemble, offering a balanced and uninterrupted survey of the history of Italian painting.³

The Walters collection thus includes many of the great Italian painters and, in addition, names which are out of fashion today and which remain outside the trends of taste and market which have been fundamental in the formation of most American public collections. For this reason the cataloguing of the Italian paintings was an especially difficult task since its inception in 1962. A large portion of the collection was unknown to scholars and had not been published; in the case of published works, the bibliography had to be ferreted out and assembled. Then, too, almost no evidence concerning the provenance of the works or place of purchase remained. As mentioned above, the majority of the Massarenti pictures had been graced with the most fanciful and misleading attributions. Moreover, many paintings which had been given French, Dutch, English, Spanish and German designations were found to be by Italian artists.

When the work was begun, many of the Massarenti paintings were obscured by layers of discolored varnish and falsifying additions. In the intervening years, however, the majority of the paintings have been skillfully cleaned by Miss Elisabeth Packard and her staff in the Walters Conservation Laboratory and now can be properly judged. The close cooperation of Miss Packard has been of the utmost importance in preparing this catalogue and I would emphasize that the laboratory/condition reports are an integral part of each catalogue entry. Not only do they reveal technical information of the greatest interest, but they are also indispensable for understanding and assessing the pictures themselves.

In determining the paternity of various paintings, especially those of the earlier schools, the author was aided by the opinions put forward by Richard Offner in a lecture in 1925, by

³ The highlights of the paintings collection are discussed in a special issue of *Apollo* devoted to the Walters Art Gallery: F. Zeri, "The Italian Pictures: Discoveries and Problems," in *Apollo*, 84, 1966, pp. 442 ff.

Berenson's *Lists* of 1932 and 1936, as well as the verbal opinions offered by various scholars visiting Baltimore from the 1930s onward: Kenneth Clark, William G. Constable, Millard Meiss, Ulrich Middeldorf, George Martin Richter, Evelyn Sandberg-Vavalà, Martin Soria, Charles Sterling, William Suida, Hans Tietze, Erica Tietze-Conrat, and Lionello Venturi. In the process of preparing the present entries, precious suggestions were made by various colleagues and friends, among them Francesco Arcangeli, Ferdinando Bologna, Miklós Boskovits, Giuliano Briganti, Andrea Busiri Vici, Anthony Clark, Everett Fahy, Elizabeth Gardner, Mina Gregori, Edward Holt, Edward S. King, Roberto Longhi, Antonio Morassi, Philip Pouncey, Roger Rearick, Terisio Pignatti, Herwarth Roettgen, Erich Schleier, Curtis Shell, Nicola Spinosa, Stefano Susinno, Peter Tomroy, Carlo Volpe, and Richard P. Wunder. Also the files of the Frick Art Reference Library were invaluable and the kindnesses of the Director, Miss Mildred Steinbach, were many. Special thanks are due Mrs. Ursula McCracken without whose indefatigable assistance and exacting methods this catalogue would never have been completed. In addition, the work of Mrs. Eugenie Petrucci in preparing the entries was of great help and her patience much appreciated. I am also indebted to Mr. Edward S. King who, as Curator of Paintings at the Walters Gallery from 1934-65, initiated the early studies of the collection and who, as Director from 1951-65, gave impetus to the preparation of this catalogue. I am particularly grateful to the Trustees of the Walters Art Gallery and to Mr. Richard H. Randall, Jr., the present Director, for their encouragement during the many years in which the catalogue was in process.

The decisions regarding the authorship of the some 475 paintings in the Walters collection reflect evidence gained from both stylistic and technical analysis. Works have been attributed to a specific artist only when positive comparisons could be made with pictures of high quality known to be by that individual. In those works in which the influence of a certain painter was strong enough to be detected, but not strong enough to indicate his direct participation, the designations "workshop of," "school of," or "follower of" were given. These terms were used to indicate authorship progressively distant from the artistic personality in question. Italian mannerism, and the baroque and rococo periods are areas that are only now being closely investigated, and as a result it was necessary to close the research on these paintings at an undetermined point and christen the pictures generically as products of certain schools. In a number of the entries for paintings still in search of an author, hints have been given that may or may not prove correct, but which in any case offer a point of departure for further investigation. It is to be hoped that other scholars will take up the study of the intriguing questions which remain unanswered. In the field of art history very few attributions are final, and every catalogue is subject to revision as the dimensions of our knowledge continue to expand.

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