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Mystery Portrait May Be a Lost Raphael

Benjamin Sutton, Friday, June 13, 2014



A portrait painting currently attributed to a follower of Giuliano Bugiardini.
Courtesy Dorotheum.

According to Italian art critic and former undersecretary of cultural heritage Vittorio Sgarbi, writing in *Corriere della Sera's* magazine *Sette*, a painting currently attributed to the followers of 16th-century Florentine painter Giuliano Bugiardini may actually be by Raphael. The portrait of an unknown woman was snapped up by collector Peter Silverman at Dorotheum in Vienna on April 9 for €36,900 (\$50,000), well over its €15,000–20,000 estimate (\$20,000–27,000), and now he is trying to have its attribution changed to the master from Urbino, *Le Figaro* reports.

“Vittorio Sgarbi is the first to suggest an attribution to the master, Silverman says. Now I’m going to let the experts have their say and see if a consensus emerges. For my part, all that I can say with certainty is that my wife and I are very happy to own this magnificent portrait.”

The opinions of numerous experts on Renaissance painting are being brought to bear on the painting. Silverman’s hunch is that its similarity to Raphael’s *Maddalena Doni*, *La Velata*, and *La Donna Gravida* portraits is more than a formal coincidence. Elisabetta Gnignera, an expert of clothing analysis, dated the painting to between 1506–08, But high-resolution photography at Paris’s Lumiere Technology lab peg its execution to circa 1515, the same year that Raphael painted his *La Velata*. Closer analysis of Silverman’s acquisition has also revealed a similar portrait of the same sitter, but looking much older and with a different, more in vogue hairstyle. For Gnignera, this suggests that the artist reworked the painting to make the sitter appear younger and her style more refined and timeless.

For his part, 16th century Italian art expert Claudio Strinati is more skeptical. “For the time being, I am not in a position to say whether or not it’s a Raphael,” he told *Le Figaro*. “When I saw the photo for the first time recently, I did not think of him.”

Silverman has struck gold once before when he acquired what turned out to be a portrait of a young Milanese woman by Leonardo da Vinci.