

Bernardo Bellotto

(Venice 1720–1780 Warsaw)

Equestrian Portrait of the King of Poland's Page Gintowt, 1773
oil on canvas, 60 x 55.5 cm

Provenance

Commissioned in 1773 by Stanislas-August Poniatowski, King of Poland;
his collection, Royal Palace of Warsaw;
Prince Joseph Poniatowski, Belvedere Palace, Warsaw, 1798;
Henry Kent, Florence 1910–11;
Private collection, France;
Sotheby's Monaco, 5 December 1991, lot 167;
collection Erna Weidinger (1923–2021)

Exhibition

Milan 1910, Le tre esposizioni rettrospettive MCMVIII-MCMX. Mostra Miniature e ventagli, Giovanni Carnevali detto il Piccio, ritrati del settecento, p. 72, no. 18, pl. XIII
Florence 1911, Mostra del ritratto italiano dalla fine del sec. XVI all' anno 1861, p. 80, no. 13

Literature

Catalogue des tableaux appart enant a sa Majeste le Roi de Pologne, Varsovie, Chateau Royal, 1795, no. 459 (catalogue manuscrit publie dans Mankowski [op. cit. infra])
Sebastiano Ciampi, Bibliografia critica delle antiche reciproche corrispondenze, vol. II., Florence 1839, p. 237, no. 34
E. Ratawiecki, Słownik malarzow polski ch tudziez obcych w Polsee osiadlych lub czasowo w niej przebywajnych, Warsaw, 1850, vol. I, p. 55, no. 35
Ramond Fournier-Sarloveze, les peintres de Stanislas-Auguste II, Roi de Pologne, Paris, 1907, p. 144, no. 459
A. Koltowski, „Wystawa portetu we Florencyi” in: Sfinks, November 1911, no 47, p. 258
Pawel Ettinger, „Bellotto v Varshave” in: Stariye Godiy, October-December 1914, pp. 13-14
Tadeusz Mankowski, Galerja Stanislawy Augusta, vol. 1, Lwow, 1932, pp. 62, 161
Hellmuth Allwill Fritzsche, Bernardo Bellotto genannt Canaletto, Burg b. Magedburg 1936, p. 126, no. 197
Egidio Martini, La Pittura veneziana de/ Settecento, Venice, 1964, pl. 218
Barbara Krol-Kaczorowska, „Svolta di lavori fomiti alla Corte di Varsovia ed altri documenti bellotiani del periodo polacco” in: Bulletin du Musee National de Varsovie, 1966, VII, p. 68
Stefan Kozakiewicz, „Ricostruzione di un gruppo di dipinti bellotiani del periodo polacco” in: Bulletin du Musee National de Varsovie, 1967, VIII, no. 1-2, pp. 32-45, (fig. 9, p. 39)
Stefan Kozakiewicz, Bernardo Bellotto, London 1972, vol. II, cat.-no. 434, pp. 390-391;
Ettore Camesasca, l' Opera completa del Bellotto, Milan, 1974, p. 116, no. 253
Alberto Rizzi, Bernardo Bellotto. Warschauer Veduten, Munich 1991, p. 133;
Bozena Anna Kowalczyk, Bellotto and Canaletto. Wonder and Light, Milan 2017, p. 268 (colour ill.)

Estimate: 250.000–500.000 €



The painting is part of a series of four well-known equestrian or horse portraits by Bernardo Bellotto and was created for the Polish King Stanislaus II August Poniatowski (1732–1798). In 1773, Bellotto noted in his records of works delivered for the court: „quattro piccolli quadri di invenzione con cavalli presi dalla natura e Figure...“, for which he had received the sum of 200 ducats in total (Kozakiewicz, 1972, p. 388).

While two of these paintings, „Colonel Königsfels teaching Prince Joseph Poniatowski how to ride“ (fig. 1) and „Stable boy leading a horse“ (fig. 2), are now in the National Museum in Warsaw, the „Equestrian Portrait of a Hussar Officer“ (fig. 3) is in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (cf. Kozakiewicz, 1972, pp. 387–91, nos. 431–433). The whereabouts of the present work were unknown for a long time. Around 1910/11 it was documented through exhibitions and a black-and-white illustration in the Kent Collection, Florence, until it finally reappeared at an auction in Monaco in 1991, coming from a French private collection. In 2017, it was then illustrated in colour (probably for the first time) in a scientific publication by Bożena Anna Kowalczyk (Kowalczyk 2017, p. 268).

The almost square series of four – created for the Polish king – consists of two slightly horizontal formats and two slightly vertical formats. Presumably due to a lack of documentation, however, the literature gives the same dimensions for this painting as for the work in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, while the illustration in the exhibition catalogue of 1910 corresponds to today's image. A comparable Capricci series by Bellotto with different formats, two horizontal and two vertical formats, can be found in the Galleria Nazionale in Parma (cf. Kowalczyk 2017, pp. 268 and 148). The two Warsaw paintings depict horses and figures against the background of an imaginative, monumental Baroque architecture with palace wings, porticos, and an arcade; while the two vertical works show the proud horsemen riding out in a southern, equally imaginary landscape, which contains Capricci-like structures in the background. All four works are connected by the brilliant white horses that dominate them. The uniforms, glowing in red and green, also run through the paintings as a unifying element.

In contrast to the poses of the other works, the „Page Gintowt“ and his white horse are depicted almost frontally. Both look up at the viewer and seem almost to be riding towards them. Alberto Rizzi describes this emotional expressive unity of horse and rider as follows: „This rider, seated in the saddle with Anglo–Saxon confidence, is somewhat reminiscent of those servants who adopt the manner of their masters, caricaturing them in the process... The young man's upper body, as well as the head of his no less elegant horse, stand out against the sky, an effect that lends the depiction a majestic character.“ (cf. Rizzi 1991, p. 133).

The subject is clearly identified by the original title „Le page Gintowt à cheval, suivi d'un palfrenier à livrée du Roi“, listed in the 1795 catalogue of the gallery of King Stanislaus II August Poniatowski (Mankowski 1932). Stefan Kozakiewicz devoted a separate essay to this group of horse paintings in 1967 and notes that the rider is wearing the Polish officer's uniform, in contrast to the title („Nobleman in Saxon Costume“) that was incorrectly transmitted in earlier exhibitions. It is possibly Celestino Dziewiałowski Gintowt, later Major of the Royal Army and Adjutant General to the King („È probabilmente Celestino Dziewiałowski Gintowt, figlio di Antonio, nel 1779 maggiore dell'esercito della Corona, nel 1780 aiutante di campo generale del re“, cf. Kozakiewicz 1967, p. 42, footnote 21).



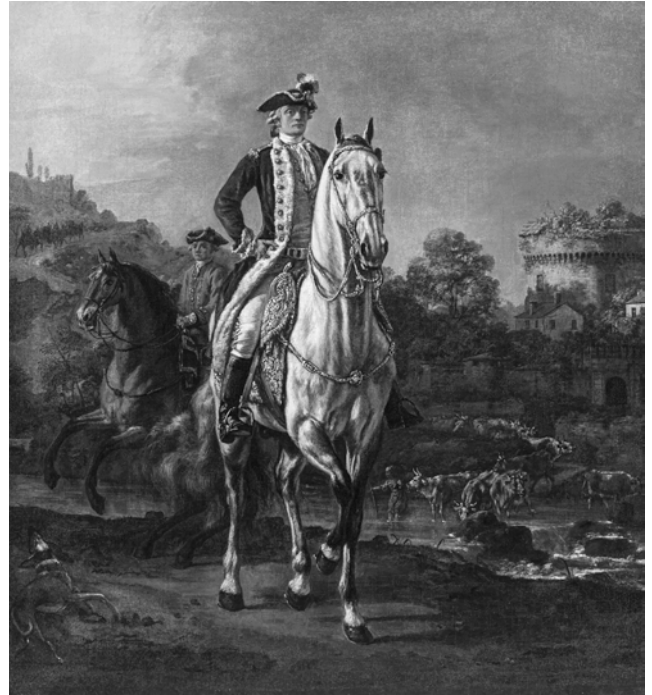
fig. 1 „Stable boy leading a horse“, 1773, oil on canvas, 73 x 81.5 cm
© National Museum, Warsaw (inv. no. MP 4276 MNW)



fig. 2 „Colonel Königsfels teaches Prince Józef Poniatowski to ride“, 1773,
oil on canvas, 73 x 81.5 cm
© National Museum, Warsaw (inv. no. MP 4283 MNW)



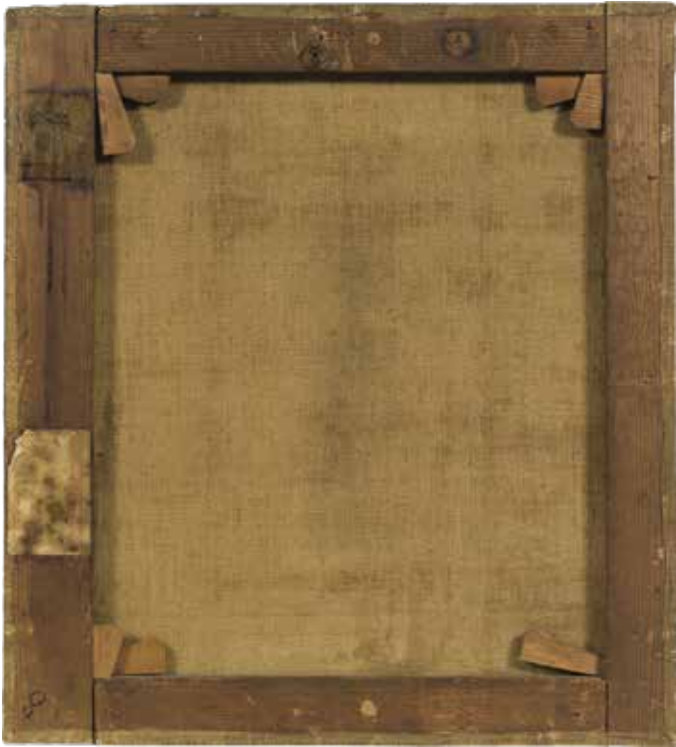
fig. 3 „Equestrian Portrait of a Hussar Officer”, 1773, oil on canvas, 73.5 x 65.5 cm
© Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (inv. no. 9119)



Even though the roots of such depictions of horses in the context of portraits of rulers or illustrations of riding schools go back to the 16th century, this series is unique in Bellotto's oeuvre. They are the artist's first genre paintings. „Although scenes from real life played a major role in his vedute, they were never before the main subject of representation. The fact that they became such in the Warsaw period corresponds to the greater importance that the staffage generally assumed in the views from that period. Even if they were not given a leading position in the vedute, they were still in full harmony with the real surroundings; here, however, where they are the main subject, the artist places them in an unreal setting“. Whereas until now horses had only been staffage elements in Bellotto's vedute, here they become the protagonists. Both the figures depicted are certain people close to the court and the horses were presumably studied directly by Bellotto in the royal stables - „presi dalla natura“, as the artist himself notes. „The artist probably received the inspiration for these paintings from the king while working on the large „View of Warsaw from the Terrace of the Royal Castle“ (fig. 4), painted in the same year 1773: it had familiarised Bellotto with the subjects and persons of his first genre paintings.“ (cf. Kozakiewicz 1972, vol. 1, pp. 165 + 174ff.).



fig. 4 „View of Warsaw from the Terrace of the Royal Castle”, 1773, oil on canvas, 166 x 269 cm
© National Museum, Warsaw (inv. no. MP 228 MNW)



Reverse



Detail collection label „Kent“

In addition to the preferences of his royal patron, the artist's own interest in horses probably also played a major role in the creation of these late works - Bellotto died in Warsaw in 1780 as a result of a stroke. Trained in the workshop of his famous uncle Antonio Canal (1697-1768), whose nickname „Canaletto“ he subsequently adopted, Bernardo Bellotto specialised primarily in vedute: first, following the tradition, of his native Venice, then later the cities of his respective clients, such as Dresden, Munich, Vienna and finally Warsaw. In „Capricci with the Capitol“ (Galleria Nazionale, Parma), painted in 1746, Bellotto used a horse as a striking figure element for the first time. From then on, horses, riders and carriages increasingly played a role as staffage in his capricci and vedute. In addition to his own studies, the depictions of contemporary artist colleagues, such as the famous English horse painter George Stubbs (1724-1806), presumably also served as inspiration (cf. Kowalczyk 2017, pp. 268 and 148).



Detail coat of arms, collection Kent



Detail exhibition label

