



Summer 1976, Lxh.

GIANANTONIO PELLEGRINI

(Venice 1675-1741)

One of the most successful of the peripatetic Venetian painters in the first half of the 18th century; after being trained by Paolo Pagani, Pellegrini first set off for Northern Europe in 1694. Returning in 1700, he married Rosalba Carriera's sister in 1704, and in 1708 accompanied the Earl of Manchester to England, together with Marco Ricci, with whom he had collaborated in S. Moisè. Pellegrini painted at Castle Howard, Kimbolton, and Narford Hall, but not having obtained the commission to fresco the dome of St. Paul's, set off for the Electoral Court at Düsseldorf in 1713. The year 1716 saw him in Hanover and Antwerp, and 1718 in Aix and The Hague. In 1719 he visited England a second time. Having failed to satisfy French connoisseurs with his ceiling of the Galerie du Mississippi in the Banque Royale at Paris in 1720, he spent most of the rest of his life painting for the courts and abbeys of Germany.

19 HERCULES IN THE GARDEN OF THE HESPERIDES

Canvas

192.5 x 143.5 cm.

This picture clearly belongs to the years in which Pellegrini's hitherto vivacious manner was modified by the impact of the works by Rubens that he encountered in the Palatine collection at Düsseldorf and the Low Countries between 1713 and 1718. Under this influence he emphasized dramatic chiaroscuro at the expense of decorative brushwork, and showed a new interest in the modelling of his figures. This transformation is seen at its starkest in the "St. Sebastian" painted at Düsseldorf in 1713-14, but by the time that he painted the "Four Elements of Beer" in the Brouwersheim at Antwerp in 1716, Pellegrini had reconciled the new traits with his own manner. Our picture reveals similarities in handling and in the Rubensian inspiration of the male type with the "Four Elements", but is possibly closer to the "Hercules and Dejanira" painted by Pellegrini for the saloon of the Mauritshuis at The Hague in 1718. By the time that Pellegrini again came to paint the subject of "Hercules and the Hesperides" for Lothar Franz von Schönborn in 1724 (Schloss Weissenstein, Pommersfelden), in a much modified composition, his handling had already become blander. In view of the picture's English provenance, it is tempting to suggest that the picture dates from Pellegrini's second visit to England, immediately after his work in The Hague, in 1719. It compares well with the "Queen Tomiris" in the Museu de Arte, São Paulo, which is the only other work confidently attributed to this second visit (cf. R. Pallucchini, *La Pittura Veneziana del Settecento*, Venice/Rome 1960, p. 20 and fig. 37).

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