



ROBERT SIMON FINE ART

Giovanni Domenico Ferretti
(Florence, 1692 – 1768)

Harlequin and His Lady

Oil on canvas
23 ¼ x 19 ½ inches (59.2 x 49.5 cm)



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Provenance: Private Collection, Paris.

Galeria Canesso, Paris; where acquired in 2001 by:

Sir Mark Fehrs Haukohl, the Haukohl Family Collection, Houston, TX.

Exhibited: The John & Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Florida, 25 June 2001 – 16 August 2004.

“Florentine Baroque Painting: Selections for the Haukohl Collection,” Meadows Museum, Dallas, Texas, February – August 2005.

“Baroque on the Arno: Florentine Paintings from The Haukohl Collection,” Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, March 2007 – September 2008.

“17th Century Florentine Painting: Selections from the Haukohl Family Collection,” Taubman Museum of Art, Roanoke, Virginia, 8 November 2008 – 25 October 2009.

“Florence and the Baroque: Paintings from the Haukohl Family Collection,” Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, California, 5 November 2011 – 12 February 2012.

“Italian Baroque: Paintings from the Haukohl Family Collection,” Nevada Museum of Art and Arte Italia, Reno, Nevada, 29 March – 6 July 2014.

“Twilight of a Golden Age: Florentine Painting After the Renaissance, Masterworks from the Haukohl Family Collection,” Muscarelle Museum of Art at the College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia, 25 April 2015 – 17 January 2016.

“Im Schatten der Medici: Barocke Kunst Aus Florenz, The Haukohl Family Collection,” Schaezlerpalais, Augsburg, Germany, 20 October 2018 – 20 January 2019.

“In the Light of the Medici: Baroque Art of Italy,” Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck, Remagen, Germany, 10 February – 8 September 2019.

“Im Licht der Medici: Kunst des Barock aus Florenz, The Haukohl Family Collection,” Braunschweig Municipal Museum (Städtisches Museum), Braunschweig, Germany, 15 March – 27 September 2020.

“Im Schatten der – Barocke Kunst aus Florenz,” Musée National d’histoire et d’art Luxembourg, 15 October 2020 – 14 February 2021.

“Beyond the Medici: The Haukohl Family Collection,” BOZAR, Brussels, Belgium, 25 April 2023 – 21 July 2023 (forthcoming).

- Literature: Véronique Damian, *Deux Caravagesques Lombards à Rome et Quelques Récentes Acquisitions*, Galerie Canesso, Paris, 2001, pp. 50-52, 76-77.
- Francesca Baldassari, *Giovanni Domenico Ferretti*, Milan, 2002, pp. 242, 246, 248, fig. "Dip. Com. 22."
- Françoise Hack-Lof and Linda R. McKee, *The Art Galleries: The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, The State Art Museum of Florida, Sarasota, Florida*, Sarasota, 2003, p. 10, illustrated.
- At the Meadows*, Dallas, 2005, p. 13.
- Sandro Bellesi, *Catalogo dei pittori fiorentini del 600' e 700'*, Florence, 2009, vol. 1, p. 141, plate XCVIII.
- Fabio Sottili, "Le 'Arlecchinate' di Giovanni Domenico Ferretti e la committenza Sansedoni," *Paragone*, vol. 59, no. 81 (2008), p. 45.
- William Breazeale, *Florence and the Baroque: Paintings from the Haukohl Family Collection*, exh. cat., Sacramento, 2011, p. 15, cat. no. 8.
- William Breazeale, *Italian Baroque: Paintings from the Haukohl Family Collection*, exh. cat., Reno, Nevada, 2014, pp. 40, 41, 45.
- Fabio Sottili, in *Beyond the Medici: The Haukohl Family Collection*, ed. Federico Berti, Milan, 2018, pp. 82, 93, footnote 16, cat. no. 12.
- Federico Berti, in *Beyond the Medici: The Haukohl Family Collection*, ed. Federico Berti, Milan, 2018, pp. 170-173, cat. no. 12.

This canvas is a brilliant example of Florentine rococo painting at its most spectacular. Widely exhibited at museums internationally, but privately owned for more than two decades, this masterpiece by Giovanni Domenico Ferretti depicts two of the most beloved characters from the history of Italian theatre, *Arlechino* (Harlequin) and his mistress *Colombina* (Columbine), gloriously attired and joyously dancing in a landscape. Coming from the celebrated Haukohl Family Collection, this icon of the *Commedia dell'Arte* is being offered exclusively at The Winter Show.

Ferretti was the most prominent painter in eighteenth-century Florence. Sought after for fresco decorations to adorn *palazzi*, portraits of the city's elite, and religious canvases for chapels and churches, he is nonetheless best remembered for his depictions of "The Disguises of Harlequin." Two series are known: one owned by the Fondazione CR (Cassa di Risparmio) in Florence, the second in the Ringling Museum in Sarasota, that purchased to adorn the the Asolo Theater (Fig. 1), a reconstructed 18th-century Italian playhouse acquired by the museum's legendary director, A. Everett "Chick" Austin.



Fig. 1. The Asolo Theater, Ringling Museum, Sarasota.

Commedia dell'Arte is a form of comedic theatre that was developed in Italy and became popular throughout Europe from the 16th to the 18th centuries. Performances relied on a fixed cast of characters and required the actors to improvise based on the general outline of a narrative rather than a script. The actors would intersperse jokes, dancing, and singing with the main dialogue, and these productions almost invariably centered on the theme of love, which was explored through the complex interactions and entanglements of the characters. Productions were performed both in theaters and on outdoor stages constructed in piazzas, such as in the scene depicted by Gherardo and Giuseppe Poli (Fig. 2).

Harlequin was the principal masked figure of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, and his many disguises and misadventures are the defining characteristics of both the character and Ferretti's depictions of him. He invariably plays the role of the simple-minded servant who was intelligent in his own way. His signature multi-color outfit was initially intended as a symbol of his poverty—as his clothing appeared composed of individual swatches of fabric sewn together—but it later developed into the regular pattern of triangles that added to the theatricality of this larger-than-life character, who often performed impressive acrobatic feats on the stage. Harlequin has been described as a “chameleon-like servant able to take on any human quality, just as his costume is made up of every colour in the rainbow: he can be foolish, ignorant and clumsy, but also sharp witted, loyal and kindly. His considerable acrobatic ability is combined with a rough appearance. What is more, he is always busy, hungry, and in love. He never hesitates to disguise himself in order to get what he wants and deceive other characters, always getting into trouble, and it is in these situations that he is portrayed in Ferretti's canvases.”¹



Fig. 2. Detail of Gherardo and Giuseppe Poli, *A Performance from the Commedia dell'Arte set in a Piazza*, Private Collection.

The *Harlequin and His Lady* presented here seems not to have been part of any series, but rather a special unique commission, distinguished by its refined execution and brilliant palette. Harlequin is shown playfully strutting with his lover, *Colombina*, who wears a similar patchwork costume, but one with softer, more pastel colors than that of her companion. Each carries what appears to be a mock-sword, though it is likely a *batacchio*, a noise-making bat, with which the characters might chase each other or swat their rears. This is in fact the original “slap-stick,” which has given its name to today’s practice of exaggerated physical comedy. The figures appear against a landscape of distant mountains and clouds, recalling theatrical scenography. As if illuminated by footlights, they stand out from the muted backdrop, their spectacular costumes and dynamic gestures dominating the composition. The dramatic character of the painting is enhanced and complimented by the stunning gilt “Pitti Palace” frame in which it is displayed.

¹ Fabio Sottili in *Beyond the Medici: The Haukohl Family Collection*, Milan, 2018, p. 75.