

CORNEILLE DE LYON

French school, active 1533-34, --died 1574.

This artist was born in the Hague, probably around 1500-1510, and moved to France from there. His family name is unknown ; it has been suggested that Corneille may represent a gallicization of the Dutch family name Corneliszen. He established himself in the city of Lyons (hence the eponym "de Lyon"), residing there from before 1534 until his death. He is mentioned in 1541 as painter to the Dauphin (the future Henry II), received French naturalization in 1547, and is recorded in 1551 as bearing the title of "painter and valet of the king's bedchamber". The last mention of him comes in 1574.

He is known through other sixteenth century records to have had a high reputation as a painter of portraits, mostly of members of the French court. But no certain work of his is known, and the situation as regards attributions is a confused and difficult one. Briefly, the sole basis for the ascription of works to him is that certain portraits in the collection of Roger de Gagnières (1642-1715), who bought pictures in Lyons in the seventeenth century, were attested then as being by Corneille de Lyon. A group of five portraits which found their way to Versailles, Chantilly, the Louvre, and from ~~there~~ ~~passed~~ ~~into~~ the Pierpont Morgan collection, have been identified as coming from Gagnières' collection ; and so have other portraits on the basis of seals on the backs of them. Further attributions to the artist have to depend upon this core of works ; but it would appear that studio-pieces are involved even here, ^{all} that one can legitimately speak of is of a type of portrait associated with the practice of Corneille de Lyon --a type involving small, bust-length depictions of men and women of the French nobility, with pale flesh, small hands and most often a green background.

It is evident from the number of repetitions that Corneille must have maintained a large atelier ; and probably his son, also called Corneille, and his daughter were amongst those employed in this capacity. Remoter derivations and imitations suggest further that he and his atelier created an

international vogue for the type of portrait in question --
a vogue which spread outside France to Germany, the Netherlands
and Italy.

Portrait of a Lady (called the Duchesse de Chatillon)
oil on panel, 7 x 5½ ins.

Condition

Touched up (with filling in of worm-holes) and sleeves altered after 1949 sale.⁽¹⁾

Provenance

Lord Boston, England ; D.M.Koetser, New York (sold 1945 to an unknown buyer) ; Mary Charlotte Hunter, Beech Hill, near Reading ; sold Christie's, Apr.29, 1949, no.25^(bought by Mitchell). Acquired by Dr Clowes in .

Exhibited

Ind., 1959, no.18.

Attributed to Corneille de Lyon in the 1949 sale, and certified by M.J.Friedländer (1949 also⁽²⁾) as being by him. The condition of the work and the retouching done to it (see above) make it hard to give a firm attribution, but it may perhaps be from the studio of Corneille.⁽³⁾

The identification of the sitter as the Duchess of Chatillon --presumably the wife of Gaspard, Seigneur de Froment at Chatillon and the mother of the Coligny brothers, who served as lady in waiting to Queen Eléonore, the second wife of Francis I⁽⁴⁾ -- appears doubtful.⁽⁵⁾ There is a portrait of a lady at Versailles, identified on the reverse as "Princesse de la Roche-sur-Yon"⁽⁶⁾, which bears some resemblance to the sitter in the present case, but that inscription is not sixteen century in origin, and the identity of the sitter there remains correspondingly uncertain.

Notes.

1. The Witt Lib. has a photograph showing its earlier condition. The surface is harder there, and the sleeves more detailed. According to Mr Koetser, in a note to D.Bentley-Cranch (kindly passed on to the compiler) the picture was "in perfect state of preservation" when he owned it.
2. Doc.of Apr.1, 1949 (Clowes archives)
3. D.Bentley-Cranch expressed agreement with this view (letters to the compiler, May 3 and Jul.23, 1966)
4. As suggested by ~~Miss~~ Bentley-Cranch. For a portrait of Isabelle de Hauteville, wife of Odet de Coligny-Chatillon, Cardinal de Brouillon, who might be meant, see E.Moreau-Nélaton, Les Clouet et leur Emules, 3 vols, Paris, 1924, III, fig.267 ; there is no particular resemblance.
5. It is not clear if this identification goes back any further than the 1949 sale.
6. Versailles no.3189, as Femme Inconnue (E.Soulié, Notice des Peintures....., 1854-55, II, no.3095, where the subject is identified on the basis of the inscription as Philippine de Montespedon ; Moreau-Nélaton, op.cit., III, p.262, no.32 ; L. Dimier, Histoire de la Peinture du Portrait en France au XVI^e Siècle, 1924-26, no.286, as studio of Corneille de Lyon). Inscr. on front, top left and right of headdress, "GISELLE VIZ..". The lady looks a little older and the costume differs. I am grateful to D.Bentley-Cranch for drawing my attention to this work and informing me that the inscription is not contemporary.