

GUIDO RENI

(Calvenzano 1575–1642 Bologna)

The Assumption of Mary. Circa 1596-97.

Oil on copper.

58 × 44.4 cm.

Provenance: - Sampieri Galleria collection, Bologna, before 1795 until 1812. - Collection of the Viceroy under Napoleon, Eugène de Beauharnais, Milan, 1812. - Collection of the Duke of Leuchtenberg, Munich, 1852 (label verso "Herzoglich Leuchtenberg Majorats Fideicommiss. Matrikel II.3, Inventar No.154", ill. 1). - Collection of the Hermitage, St. Petersburg 1864. - Collection of Rudolph Poeschel, Buenos Aires, from 1925. - Auction of Leo Messrs Spik, Berlin, 12.-13.10.1961, Cat No. 438, ill. Lot No. 227. - Collection of Martin

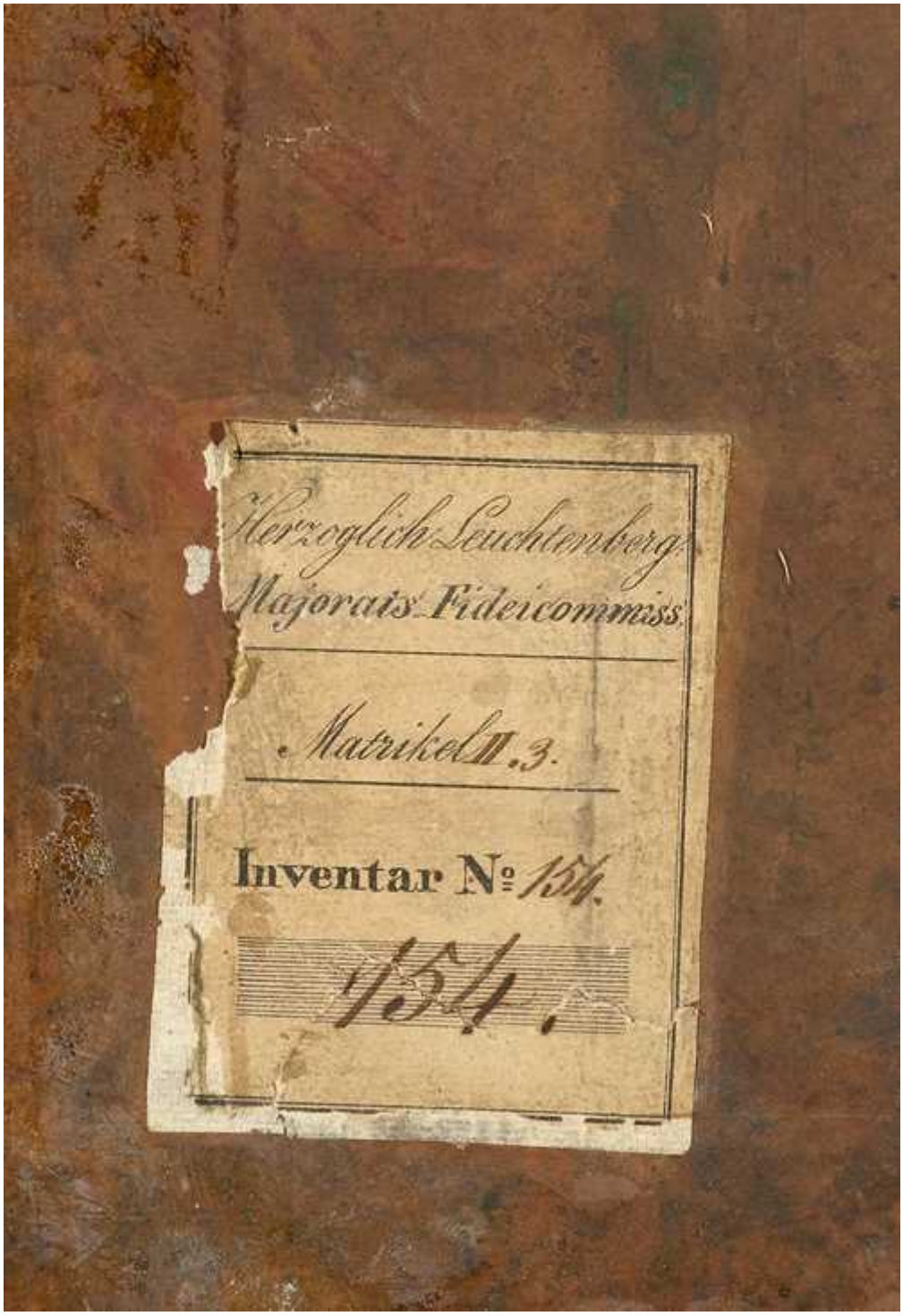
Schoenemann, Lugano. - Swiss private collection, for approx 40 years. Literature: - Carlo Cesare Malvasia: Felsina Pittrice. Vite de Pittori Bolognesi, Bologna, [1678], 2. Aufl. 1841, vol II, p. 7. - Catalogue of the Sampieri Galleria collection, Bologna, 1795, p. 19. - Catalogue of the Leuchtenberg Gallery, engravings by J. N. Muxel, commentary by J. D. Passavant, London 1852, ill. 81. - Gustav Friedrich Waagen: Die Gemälde-Sammlung der Ermitage zu St. Petersburg, Munich 1864, p. 379. - Keith Andrews: An Early Guido Reni Drawing, in: The Burlington Magazine, Vol. 103, 1961, p. 466, ill. 35. - Stephen D. Pepper: Guido Reni's Early Style. His Activity in Bologna, 1595-1601, in: The Burlington Magazine, Vol. 111, No.797, August 1969, p. 475-476, fig 3, p. 473. - Edi Baccheschi: L'opera completa di Guido Reni, Milano 1971, No. 8. - Stephen D. Pepper: Guido Reni, A Complete Catalogue of His Works With An Introductory Text, Oxford 1984, Cat. No. 3, fig. 3. This Assumption of Mary with its vibrant colours and numerous figures is a distinctive and powerful example of Bolognese artist Guido Reni's early work, which emerged recently in a Swiss private collection where it had remained undiscovered for over forty years. Besides the artistic execution, the historically significant and impressive provenance is especially noteworthy. Around 1795 to 1812 the painting was in the Sampieri Collection in Bologna. When in 1812 it was purchased in Milan by Eugène de Beauharnais (1781-1824), the son of Alexandre, Vicomte de Beauharnais (1760-1794) and Joséphine de Beauharnais (1763-1814), it entered the highest aristocratic circle of the period: the family of Napoleon Bonaparte. The label on the back of the copper plate (see fig. 1) and an engraving in a catalogue of the collection published in 1852 confirm this aristocratic provenance (see fig. 2). In fact, it was due to Eugène's mother, Joséphine de Beauharnais, who regained her footing in society after the revolutionary turmoil and death of her husband at the guillotine, and married General Napoleon Bonaparte in 1796. At Napoleon's side in 1804 Joséphine de Beauharnais became Empress of France and Napoleon adopted her son Eugène de Beauharnais in 1806. Eugène married shortly thereafter Princess Auguste Amalie of Bavaria (1788-1851) and as Napoleon's reign came to a close in 1814, the pair withdrew to the Bavarian court in Munich. There in 1817 Eugène's father-in-law,

the first king of the Kingdom of Bavaria, Maximilian I Joseph, granted him the titles of Duke of Leuchtenberg and Prince of Eichstätt, as well as their coats of arms. The prince from then on led a quiet life and died in his Munich palace in 1824. His youngest son, Maximilian III, Duke of Leuchtenberg (1817-1852), married in 1839 Grand Duchess Maria Nikolaevna Romanova (1819-1876), the eldest daughter of the Russian Tsar Nicholas I, in Saint Petersburg and presumably our painting in this way entered the collection of the Hermitage, where the art historian Gustav Friedrich Waagen (1794-1868) later inspected it, publishing it in his "Gemälde-Sammlung der Ermitage zu St. Petersburg" of 1864 (see Literature). The Bolognese art historian Carlo Cesare Malvasia (1616-1693) mentioned the painting as early as 1678 in his collection of the biographies of eminent Baroque painters in Bologna, "Felsina Pittrice." Based on Malvasia's chronological sequence of Reni's work, Stephen Pepper dates our painting to 1596-97 (see Literature). In the pose of Maria, Pepper notes particularly the influence of Annibale (1560-1609) and Agostino (1557-1602) Carracci and their altarpieces on the same subject, both in the Pinacoteca Bologna today. Annibale's Assumption is dated 1592 and was once in the Bolognese church of San Francesco. Agostino's Assumption, formerly in San Salvatore, also in Bologna, is dated to 1592-94 (see Pepper, 1969, p. 476). Reni, after his artistic apprenticeship under Denys Calvaert (around 1540-1619), joined the workshop of the Carracci brothers around 1595. There he came particularly under the influence of Agostino in the years 1596-97, after Annibale moved to Rome in the autumn of 1595. However, the respective representations of the Assumption theme by Agostino and Reni are each wholly individual. Agostino accentuates the floating character of the pose and expresses through the upward reaching arms and striding movement of the Virgin's left foot the subject of the Assumption. Guido Reni instead gives the pose of his Mary a certain gravity, which is intensified by the outstretched arms and the upward facing palms. In the angels who support her from the side and below, a sense of effort can be seen clearly. A remarkable feature of Reni's work is the individualised and varied arrangement of the angelic host, depicted playing music with various instruments. Pepper also recognises, particularly in their

faces, the influence of his first teacher Denys Calvaert. Thus, this early work is an impressive example of Reni's confrontation with his masters, in which he demonstrates his artistic virtuosity and articulates his interpretation of the subject masterfully.

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Matrikel II. 3.
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