The Grand Duke’s Portraitist

Cosimo III de’ Medici and his “Chamber of Paintings”
by Giusto Suttermans
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Giusto Suttermans was “rediscovered” in 1983, with a small exhibition Marco Chiarini and a group of collaborators dedicated to him in the “Sala delle Nicchie” of the Galleria Palatina. The event was held to celebrate the purchase, on the part of the Florentine galleries, of one of the three sketches for the enormous painting with The Pledge of Allegiance of the Florentine Senate to Ferdinando II de’ Medici, executed by Suttermans and placed, in 1626, in the “Sala delle Nicchie” in the camedered space above the main door. The lunette was not displayed, since it was in a poor state of preservation due to the many decades it had passed in the storage rooms of the Florentine galleries. Along with the sketch purchased from a private collection, forty paintings by Suttermans, enriched with a nucleus of his drawings, were also showcased. An “appendix” in the catalogue, rounded off this Flemish painter’s Florentine œuvre, thereby giving a rather precise idea of the impressive consistency of his work for the Medici court. Since then, Suttermans’ personality was outlined in a thorough profile by Lisa Goldenberg Stoppato in the catalogue of the noteworthy 1986 exhibition on seventeenth-century Florentine art. The Pledge of Allegiance, which arrived at the Uffizi in 1733 and was placed by Lanzi, in 1782, in the “Sala della Niobe”, returned here in 2002 after a rather difficult restoration. Before arriving at the Uffizi, at the end of the seventeenth century that painting, exceptional for its importance and size, was moved by Cosimo III to the second floor of his palace, in the room that had once been the Hearing Hall of Cardinal Leopoldo, who had died a few years earlier. It was precisely here that Cosimo wished to pay special tribute to his court painter, dedicating an exhibition, with forty works, to him. This initiative, so ahead of its time and so modern, has today been re-proposed in the “Sala Bianca” of Palazzo Pitti, which greatly resembles the seventeenth-century, second-floor hall that no longer exists, thanks to one of its former collaborators, Lisa Goldenberg Stoppato. She began studying Suttermans for her thesis and who contributed on this specific topic in the catalogue for the 2004 exhibition on Cosimo III’s trip to Santiago de Compostela. And so, in line with the tradition of the exhibitions at Pitti aimed at enhancing and spreading awareness and understanding of the palace’s artists and treasures, the circle that was opened in 1983 regarding the figure of Giusto Suttermans comes to a close by re-proposing the exhibition of his paintings Grand Duke Cosimo III once dedicated to him.

Serena Padovani
Director of the Galleria Palatina

Lisa Goldenberg Stoppato is a scholar specialized in the history and iconography of the Medici family. Giusto Suttermans was, during the seventeenth century, the official portraitist of the Grand Dukes. He was held in such esteem that Grand Duke Cosimo III, in 1678, had an exhibition, consisting in about forty works, dedicated to him; this event was held, at the time, in a room on the second floor of Palazzo Pitti. Lisa Goldenberg Stoppato and the Director of the Galleria Palatina, Serena Padovani, re-propose, today, the exhibition that took place back then. But not in the location where it was originally held (as it no longer exists due to the various structural modifications carried out over the years), but in the Sala Bianca, the only space that can offer, at the same time, the ease of convenient public use and a regal, courtly setting. I shall not discuss here the style of a painter who knew how to give an image to the faces of the Medici “Ancien Régime” in complete compliance with the symbolic value of the age. This will be done by the editor of the catalogue, with her expertise and effectiveness, in the pages that follow. As the Superintendent of Florentine museums, I am interested in emphasising something that is as simple as it is important. The Italian Ministry of “Beni Culturali” employs the greatest talents, fosters research on an international level and guarantees this city “great” prestige and image as no one else (not even Universities or publishing houses) is still capable of doing. We do not limit ourselves to keeping museums open and to “working”, every year, nearly 5 million visitors, but we organize some of the most beautiful art exhibitions currently underway in Europe (Giambologna at the Bargello, Lorenzo Monaco at the Accademia, the Manifestazione Siriés at Pitti), are responsible for impressive publications and encourage and finance specialized studies of absolute excellence, such as the one entrusted to the catalogue that this brief introduction presents. All this is possible thanks to the professionalism and admirable dedication of the technical-scientific personnel working at our Superintendence. My staff and I sincerely wish to thank our friends and colleagues at Pitti (and more specifically, in this case, Serena Padovani, Stefano Casciu, Fausta Navarro, Rosanna Morozzi and Mauro Linari).

Antonio Paolucci
Soprintendente per il Polo Museale Fiorentino
The first task awaiting the curator of a monographic exhibition is normally the careful choice of the works that best represent the artist’s qualities. In this sense the exhibition that we are presenting is an exception to the rule. It is a faithful reconstruction of an exhibition which was organized more than three centuries ago, in 1678, by Grand Duke Cosimo iii de’ Medici to honor his portraitist Giusto Suttermans (as he signed his name). For this reason the curator of this exhibition is obliged to respect the choices made more than three centuries ago. He is thus free from all responsibility for the choice of the paintings, except for the portrait of Cosimo iii painted by Suttermans in 1658 (cat. no. 1) and the painter’s Self-portrait (cat. no. 2), which have been added in order to present the protagonists of the exhibition to today’s public. The curator’s primary task is in this case a rather different and, perhaps, far more difficult one. He must attempt to draw a clear profile of the artist, comprehensible to the modern eye, through the filter of the personal tastes of the curator who organized the exhibition for the grand duke in 1678. Since the original curator was the eminent art historian Filippo Baldinucci and a significant number of the paintings he chose are still in Florence today, we believe that the undertak- ing is worth the effort, especially because monographic exhibitions were quite rare in the 17th century. The exhibition is well worth the effort, especially because monographic exhibitions of Medici patrons. He had in fact inherited not only the immense patrimony of works of art collected by several generations of Medici patrons. He had in fact inherited not only the patrimony of the grand dukes of Tuscany, but also the collections of his uncle Leopoldo, a renowned connoisseur, and of his great-uncle Cardinal Carlo de’ Medici who had purchased and commissioned a great number of works painted by the portraitist. This desire to follow in Leopoldo’s footsteps as a patron of the arts is also evident in his determination to complete, once again with the help of Filippo Baldinucci, the collection of self-portraits which his uncle had begun. The same desire to present himself as the successor to his ancestors’ policies is apparent in an unpublished portrait of Cosimo iii de’ Medici (fig. 1) in Warsaw, which was painted by Volterrano in 1667,7 a year before the exhibition in Suttermans’ honor. In this portrait Cosimo is portrayed in grand ducal robes standing on the waterfront of Livorno, near the statue of his great-grandfather Ferdinando i de’ Medici by Giovanni Bandini, which has four bronze Moorish slaves by Pietro Tacca on its base. Ferdinando’s head, which is facing left in Bandini’s statue, is turned in the opposite direction in the painting, directly towards his great-grandson. Cosimo, who signed an edict freeing much trade in Livorno from customs in 1667, had himself portrayed as a successor to the policies of Ferdinando, the port’s greatest benefactor. The exhibition in honor of Suttermans was certainly not an isolated episode of artistic patronage. It must be interpret- ed within the general context of many initiatives taken by Cosimo in this period: For example, in the same decade he founded an academy for young Tuscan sculptors in Palazzo Madama in Rome and began the restoration of the main chapel of Santa Maria Maddalena de’ Pazzi in Florence. In 1677 the grand duke decided to bring the family’s collection of ancient Roman and Greek sculptures back to Florence from Villa Medici in Rome and, as a consequence, to complete the fresco decoration of the outer hallway of the Galleria degli Uffizi where he intended to place them.4

Who was Giusto Suttermans, the painter honored by Cosimo iii in this patrimonial and psychological context? Suttermans, portraitist to the Medici for almost sixty years, had served Cosimo’s grandmother Archduchess Maria Magdalena von Habsburg, known in Italy as Maria Maddalena of Austria, from 1621 to 1631 and had worked for his father Ferdinando ii from 1631 to 1670. The paintings exhibited in 1678 included portraits from all the phases of his career. Both deceased members of the Medici family, their courtiers and the young- est members of the family were portrayed. Thus, while pay- ing homage to his portraitist, Cosimo was also celebrating his own family. An exhibition in honor of Suttermans, who was Flemish, is also perfectly consistent with the grand duke’s tastes as a collector. Cosimo had in fact acquired a taste for Flemish and Dutch art during his travels through Northern Europe in 1667 and 1669. He had purchased many works for his collection both while traveling and afterwards with the help of agents and correspondents abroad. The exhibition in Suttermans’ honor also reveals Cosimo’s intention to continue the patronage accorded him by his deceased uncle Leop- oldo, who had purchased and commissioned a great number of works painted by the portraitist. This desire to follow in Leopoldo’s footsteps as a patron of the arts is also evident in his determination to complete, once again with the help of Filippo Baldinucci, the collection of self-portraits which his uncle had begun. The same desire to present himself as the successor to his ancestors’ policies is apparent in an unpublished portrait of Cosimo iii de’ Medici (fig. 1) in Warsaw, which was painted by Volterrano in 1667, a year before the exhibition in Suttermans’ honor. In this portrait Cosimo is portrayed in grand ducal robes standing on the waterfront of Livorno, near the statue of his great-grandfather Ferdinando i de’ Medici by Giovanni Bandini, which has four bronze Moorish slaves by Pietro Tacca on its base. Ferdinando’s head, which is facing left in Bandini’s statue, is turned in the opposite direction in the painting, directly towards his great-grandson. Cosimo, who signed an edict freeing much trade in Livorno from customs in 1667, had himself portrayed as a successor to the policies of Ferdinando, the port’s greatest benefactor. The exhibition in honor of Suttermans was certainly not an isolated episode of artistic patronage. It must be interpret- ed within the general context of many initiatives taken by Cosimo in this period: For example, in the same decade he founded an academy for young Tuscan sculptors in Palazzo Madama in Rome and began the restoration of the main chapel of Santa Maria Maddalena de’ Pazzi in Florence. In 1677 the grand duke decided to bring the family’s collection of ancient Roman and Greek sculptures back to Florence from Villa Medici in Rome and, as a consequence, to complete the fresco decoration of the outer hallway of the Galleria degli Uffizi where he intended to place them. Who was Giusto Suttermans, the painter honored by Cosi-
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1656, sig. Medicina del Principato 5033, fol. 276, published by Pieraccini 1924–1925, p. 523, pp. 542, note 4.2. The portrait could also have been painted during Margherita's visit to Florence in 1665, see Pieraccini 1924–1925, p. 1925, p. 533, note 44.


See the unpublished letter from Andrea Salvetti, Medici ambassador to England, to Medici secretary Andrea Cofri, London, 15 July 1669, sig. Medicina del Principato 4200, unpublished. Thanks to this letter we know that the portrait of Ferdinando I and Vittoria della Rovere sent to England in 1659 were half-length portraits and to Salvetti's great dismay, they were presented to the King by Henry Melbourn. Salvetti had requested a full-length portrait with both figures on the same canvas, "inter a capo a piè, et ambi due in un medesimo quadro", and insisted that the Medici should still send him the type of portrait that he had originally requested, so that he could present it to the king. He also requested another portrait for his own home. He repeated his request in vain in many other letters (see Caso 1961, pp. 189–190, but at the 28 February 1664 modern style he had not been fulfilled (see the letter from Ascanio Salvetti to Medici secretary Viviano Battista Cani, sig. Medicina del Principato 4201, unpublished). Crò suggested that the portrait requested by Salvetti might be the double portrait of Ferdinando I and Vittoria della Rovere in the National Gallery of London (as in fig. 1841–1843, no. 89, in canvas, cm 16 x 147, Londres 1983–1987, p. 183, pp. 785–786, no. 3090; The National Gallery painting cannot possibly be Salvetti's portrait; since bisti- cotti unpublished documentation date it to 1666.

Letter from Matteo Botta to Christine of Lorraine, Paris, 6 July 1611, sig. Medicina del Principato 4871, unpublished, published by Ascanio 1889, p. 406. In the letter Botta refers to portraits of Louis xiv and Elisabeth de Bourbon, which he sent to Grand Duchess Christine (Florence, Palazzo Pitti, ins. no. 1800, no. 2405 and 2399, on canvas, cm 165 x 100, see L. Goldschneider Stoppato, in I Salvo del Seicento 2005, pp. 127–128, no. 626.

Pezzi Accomodi con il signor Giusto Sutterman pittore per i Lauri dell'accademia di pace, 27 August 1854, sig. Medicina della Repubblica 691a, fol. 727.

Letter from Ascensio Ximenes to Carlo de’ Medici, 6 October 1685, sig. Medicina del Principato 5262, fol. 241, cited by Pieraccini 1924–1925, ii, p. 195, pp. 405, 409, note 11 and called to my attention by Elena Fumagalli. See the transcription under cat. no. 1.


See Enrico e Uschi H dell’Accademia, 1641–1650, a. sig. Accademia del Disegno 106, fol. 246.


See Enrico e Uschi H dell’Accademia, 1641–1650, a. sig. Accademia del Disegno 106, fol. 246.


In is a letter published by Adolfo Venturi (1882, p. 249, doc. i) Jan van Cleveher not only mentions copies he made of portraits by “signor Giusto”, but also claims that he painted the clothing in several portraits by his uncle. For further information on Van Cleveher, see Rosi 1979, pp. 141–158.


See Haskell 2001, pp. 6–12.


We know that the price paid to the painter was twenty scudi, since a payment for this amount to “Giusto Suttermans” was registered on 12 November 1658 in a book of Carlo de’ Medici’s debtors and creditors (called to my attention by Elena Fumagalli). The portrait is listed in the inventory of Cardinal Carlo’s collection compiled in 1667, as a part of a set of seven Medici portraits:

Sette Quadri in tela a olio a lati bracci i 1/4, lunghe 1 1/4, entorni in ciascunhado un ritratto, c’èt Gran Duca [ Ferdinando ii], Gran Principe [Cosimo], don Lorenzo, Giovan Carlo, Mattia, Leonpoldo e don Francesco, tutti con adornamenti d’alberosi lascio e toti dorato n° 7, scudi 140.-

The set of paintings, including this portrait, was left by Cardinal Carlo with the rest of his possessions to his grand-nephew Cosimo. The entire collection was ceded by Cosimo for an equivalent amount of money to the Guardaroba and on 30 June 1667 the portraits were registered in the books of the Guardaroba general.

The portrait of Grand Prince Cosimo was later sent to the Medici Villa of Pratolino where, as Karla Langedijk pointed out in 1981, it is mentioned by the 1748 inventory. The inventory describes a portrait of Cosimo as grand prince wearing a doublet with split sleeves and holding a hat with red feathers on it:

Un quadro in tela alla bracci 1 1/4, largo soli 19, dipinti in mezze figure ritratto del gran duco Cosimo quando era principe in abito alla spagnola, con maniche aperte e collare di trina, tiene sotto il braccio sinistro il cappello con penne scimate, e adorno di tutto intaglio straforato et tutto dorato - n. 1

By 1761 the portrait had been brought back to Florence and placed on the second floor of Palazzo Pitti. It is described in great detail by the inventory of the palace compiled that same year with three other portraits of the same format:

Quatro Detti simili alti bracci 1 soli 6, larghi bracci 1 soli 2 per ciascunhado dipinti mezza figure in uno […] e nell’altro il gran Duca Cosimo Terzo da giovane vestito alla spagnola, con collare di trina, maniche aperte, e capello in mano con penne bianche, e rosse, ai contorni adornati intagliati, straforati, e tutti dorati segnati n° 948.

According to Marco Chiariini, the portrait of Grand Prince Cosimo was sent to the Galleria degli Ufizi in 1826 and was later sent back to Palazzo Pitti where it was exhibited in the Appartamenti reali. In 1928 it was transferred to the Galleria Palatina where it still can be seen today.
One of the paintings that were sent to the keeper of Palazzo Pitti on 28 February 1678 [modern style] expressly for the Suttermans room was a portrait of a prince of Denmark. According to the 1688 inventory of the palace, he was wearing a breastplate with a white and purple sash across it:

Un quadro simile senza ornamento alto braccia 1½, largo braccia 1½ dipinto il ritratto del figlio del Re Danimarca armato con cinghia turcesca e bianca di mano del sudetto. 1638

The portrait, cited simply as “1 Danimarca”, also appears in the census of Suttermans’ works compiled by Filippo Baldinucci while he was planning the exhibition in 1678, among the “Ritratti in mano al Bernardi”. Portraits held by later Bernardinis. When the next inventory of Palazzo Pitti was compiled in 1688, the portrait had already been moved to another room on the same floor, the ninth and last chamber of the same apartment, which had a window overlooking the small courtyard and a door leading to the library. The portrait of the prince of Denmark is also mentioned in the 1716–1725 inventory of the palace. It was hanging in a room known as the “camera della Scarabattola d’oro” in the apartment of Grand Prince Ferdinando, along with twelve other portraits by the same painter. It thus is probably one of the thirteen “[…] Ritratti di Principi, Principesse, et altri soggetti” Portraits of Princes, Princesses and other sitters, painted by Giusto Suttermans, which are listed together in the ninth room of the same apartment in the 1761 inventory of Palazzo Pitti.

According to a list of consignments made by the Guardaroba, this portrait was loaned to Suttermans to be copied only a few days later, on 25 September 1660, “a Giusto pittore, datolii per copiare”, and was returned on 25 January 1661 [ab Incarnazione=1662 modern style]. Copies of Valdemar Kristian’s portrait can be found in the army headquarters at Santa Maria a Candeli outside Florence (on loan from the Galerie florentine), in Frederiksborg near Hillerød and in Schloss Hinterglasmuenster. Another copy belonged to a private collection in Alexandria in Egypt in 1993.