

Not Charity, but Hope

An allegorical figure by Francesco Zuccarelli

Alex Shapley

A woman, swathed in loose drapery, stands in a stormy landscape, looking up towards a shaft of light accompanied by a winged putto. She clutches her breast with one hand and holds a flame in the other, which is raised to the sky. Francesco Zuccarelli's oil sketch on paper (illustrated right), now part of the Baillieu Library Print Collection at the University of Melbourne, is a curious image and is even more curious because it is unlike the majority of the works this artist is known to have produced. Zuccarelli is more commonly associated with a style of rococo decorative painting—particularly of landscapes—that he altered only marginally during his prolific career.

Francesco Zuccarelli was born in Pitigliano, Tuscany, in 1702. He moved to Florence in his youth and worked as an engraver for Francesco Maria Niccolò Gabburri (1676–1742), reproducing Andrea del Sarto's frescoes in Santissima Annunziata and the Chioostro dello Scalzo.¹ Zuccarelli is first recorded as living in Venice in 1729, where he was to work for a number of years.² In 1732 he came under the patronage of future British consul Joseph Smith. In 1746 Smith commissioned Zuccarelli and Antonio Visentini (1688–1782) to produce a neo-Palladian overdoor



series depicting British buildings in rural landscapes. Visentini, who had not visited England, had to correctly render English buildings from engravings,³ and Zuccarelli painted the figures and surrounding landscape in his typical Venetian style. Smith supported Zuccarelli during his early career, and when Smith sold his collection of books, pictures and drawings to King George III in 1762, some 30 paintings by Zuccarelli were included;⁴ these are now in the Royal Collection.

Zuccarelli did not make his first trip to England until 1752, but he was to stay for 10 years. There is evidence that Zuccarelli's work was known in England before his arrival,⁵ possibly through the patronage of such people as Joseph Smith. Richard Wilson (1713/14–1782), the British landscape artist with whom Zuccarelli is often unfavourably compared, met the Italian painter in Venice in 1751 and wrote home that Zuccarelli was a 'famous painter of this place' and that Wilson received 'strong impressions of colour and effect' from his landscapes.⁶

In England Zuccarelli was to work almost entirely as a landscape painter, producing Arcadian idyllic scenes in the Claudian tradition. He was a prodigious artist, producing an astounding number of works,

including 430 paintings, which were to decorate hundreds of English country houses. He was also a printmaker, particularly during his early career in Venice, producing a total of 43 known prints. The inscription on the verso of this work states that it is from a series of '6 original drawings, with engravings', suggesting an attempt by Zuccarelli to produce items for the print connoisseur market.⁷

Zuccarelli was a consummate businessman, trying out new subject matter for different audiences and markets. He produced a canvas inspired by William Shakespeare, *Macbeth meeting the witches* (c. 1760), the religious painting *Jacob's return to Palestine* and the classical *Hercules slaying the centaur Nessus* (c. 1762). He also received commissions for designs for tapestries, from 1756 to 1758, in which he created orientalist landscape imagery fused with rococo sentimentality.⁸ A sale of his pictures was held at the London auction house of Prestage and Hobbs on 10 February 1762, 'by reason of his returning to Italy'. The catalogue's title page describes the items sold: 'A Catalogue of the Genuine and Curious Collection of Pictures, of Mr. Zuccarelli, painted by himself ... The Works of his Fancy and Leisure Hours'. The 70 items

Opposite: Francesco Zuccarelli, *Hope* [incorrectly inscribed *La Carità* (Charity)], c. 1760–70, oil on paper, 31.4 × 22.7 cm. Reg. no. 1959.0060, gift of Dr J. Orde Poynton, 1959, Baillieu Library Print Collection, University of Melbourne.

Below: Hans Sebald Beham, *Spes* (Hope), 1539, plate 6 from series *The seven virtues*, engraving, 3.9 × 2.4 cm. Reg. no. 1959.2266, gift of Dr J. Orde Poynton, 1959, Baillieu Library Print Collection, University of Melbourne.



in that sale have been described as 'particularly odd and varied in subject matter'.⁹

The mysterious artwork in the Baillieu Library is likely to be in Zuccarelli's tradition of experimentation in the subject of his works. Apart from an album of some 20 figure studies (formerly in the Tassi Collection and now in the Piazzini dei Conti Albani Collection in Bergamo), Zuccarelli's works are generally classical landscapes with contemporary figures. During the mid- to late 1760s Zuccarelli's figures

Georg Sigmund Facius, after Joshua Reynolds, published by John Boydell, *Hope*, 1781, stipple etching, 60.8 × 44.0 cm. Reg. no. 1959.4598, gift of Dr J. Orde Poynton, 1959, Baillieu Library Print Collection, University of Melbourne.



became more prominent in relation to the surrounding landscapes, and thus this work can be dated to that period. The loose brushwork and treatment of the angels in the painting *Wooded landscape with Mary Magdalene and angels* (1765–70) is also reminiscent of the putto in this undated work. Federica Spadotto, author of the artist's catalogue raisonné, places the Baillieu's work in the period 1760–70, when Zuccarelli produced a number of devotional compositions.¹⁰ Despite the increased prominence of the figures in this period, they still have the appearance of actors in a staged Arcadian play.

The focus on the figure rather than on the surrounding landscape makes this work a rare and exceptional composition for Zuccarelli.

The work has erroneously been known for over five decades by the title 'La Carila' due to a mistranscription of the title below the image, which reads 'La Carità' (Charity, in Italian).¹¹ This is corroborated by a pencil inscription on the auxiliary support, which appears to read 'Charity'. The woman, however, does not bear any of the iconography normally associated with the allegorical figure of Charity. An early etching by Zuccarelli, *Charity* (1728), displays the attributes typically associated with Charity, that is, a woman nursing or suckling children.¹² But in the Baillieu's work, the female figure holds a flame and looks to a divine light. The gaze into heavenly light is a common symbol of faith, divine inspiration or rapture, but, in combination with the flame, it is associated with the allegorical figure of Hope, who is commonly depicted looking into a beam of light from the heavens. This can be seen in other images in the Baillieu Library Print Collection: Hans Sebald Beham's engraving *Hope* (1539, see p. 47) and a contemporaneous stipple engraving by Georg Sigmund Facius, *Hope* (1781), after Joshua Reynolds'

stained-glass window design of 1777–84 (left).

The flame is a less common attribute of Hope. She is more often accompanied by an anchor—as seen in the Reynolds print—a reference to the Biblical passage 'which hope we have as an anchor of the soul'.¹³ The flame in this instance alludes to the Greek myth of the phoenix, a creature reborn through fire, whose symbolism was adopted by early Christians. The symbol of flame associated with Hope has a precedent in 15th- and 16th-century depictions of the seven virtues, particularly in Italy. Marcantonio Raimondi's engraving *Hope* (c. 1515–25) shows a stylised flame in the top-right corner above the woman holding a container of unleavened bread (opposite). The phoenix is sometimes depicted in the flame flanking the figure of Hope, such as in the engraved playing card of an unknown Ferrarese printmaker (c. 1470–80), and Georges Reverdy's *Hope* (1550–60), both in the collection of the British Museum, London.

Zuccarelli returned to Venice in 1762 and became a member of the Venetian Academy. He made a second trip to London in 1765 and became a founding member of the Royal Academy of Arts, alongside prominent English artists such

Marcantonio Raimondi, after Raphael, *Hope*, c. 1515–25, plate 6 from series *The seven virtues*, engraving, 20.9 × 10.4 cm. Reg. no. 1959.3688, gift of Dr J. Orde Poynton, 1959, Baillieu Library Print Collection, University of Melbourne.

as Joshua Reynolds and Thomas Gainsborough, proof of the esteem in which he was held in England at the time. Zuccarelli sold a number of works on paper at Langford's on 3 April 1769, before returning to Venice, and this suggests an end date for those works with an English history and provenance, such as this work.

With the waning popularity of decorative, rococo-style painting, Zuccarelli's reputation diminished somewhat. Following his death in Florence in 1788, he became a figure of scorn. The Redgrave brothers, in *A century of painters of the English school*, a landmark book on British painting first published in 1866, denigrated his work as displaying 'mawkish and pretty insipidity'.¹⁴ But in modern times his legacy has been explored by Michael Levey in the 1950s,¹⁵ by Phyllis Dearborn Massar in the 1990s,¹⁶ and most recently by Federica Spadotto, who published Zuccarelli's catalogue raisonné in 2007,¹⁷ almost 220 years after the artist's death.

This work, one of thousands of prints and drawings donated by Dr J. Orde Poynton in 1959, is now part of the collection of the Baillieu Library Print Collection at the University of Melbourne, and is correctly identified as *Hope*, not *Charity*.



Alex Shapley is the exhibition and loans officer at the National Library of Australia, Canberra. She completed a Master of Art Curatorship at the University of Melbourne in 2013.

1 Michael Levey, 'Francesco Zuccarelli in England', *Italian Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1, January 1959, p. 3.

- 2 Jacob Bean and William Griswold, 'Francesco Zuccarelli', in James Byam Shaw and George Knox (eds), *Italian eighteenth-century drawings*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987, p. 221.
- 3 Visenti depended largely on Colen Campbell's *Vitruvius Britannicus, or, the British architect, containing the plans, elevations, and sections of the regular buildings, both publick and private, in Great Britain, with a variety of new designs ...* (first published 1715–25); see Anthony Blunt, 'A neo-Palladian programme executed by Visentini and Zuccarelli for Consul Smith', *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 100, no. 665, August 1958, p. 283.
- 4 Levey, 'Francesco Zuccarelli in England', p. 12.
- 5 Levey, 'Francesco Zuccarelli in England', p. 2.
- 6 Michael Levey, *Painting in XVIII century Venice*, London: Phaidon, 1959, p. 61.
- 7 I have searched unsuccessfully for any prints that might be from such a series. However, due to the unusual subject matter for Zuccarelli, they might exist in collections but be misattributed.
- 8 Levey, 'Francesco Zuccarelli in England', p. 5.
- 9 Levey, 'Francesco Zuccarelli in England', pp. 8, 10.
- 10 Federica Spadotto, email to Alex Shapley, 13 May 2015.
- 11 This inscription, probably added by another hand at a later date, also attributes the work to Francesco Zuccarelli (*Francesco Zuccarelli. [sic] fec.*). Federica Spadotto has since confirmed this attribution.
- 12 Collection of the Biblioteca Marcelliana in Florence and reproduced in Phyllis Dearborn Massar, 'The prints of Francesco Zuccarelli', *Print Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 3, September 1998, pp. 247–63.
- 13 King James Bible, Hebrews 6:19.
- 14 Levey, *Painting in XVIII century Venice*, p. 66.
- 15 Levey, 'Francesco Zuccarelli in England'.
- 16 Dearborn Massar, 'The prints of Francesco Zuccarelli'.
- 17 Federica Spadotto, *Francesco Zuccarelli*, Milan: Bruno Alfieri, 2007.