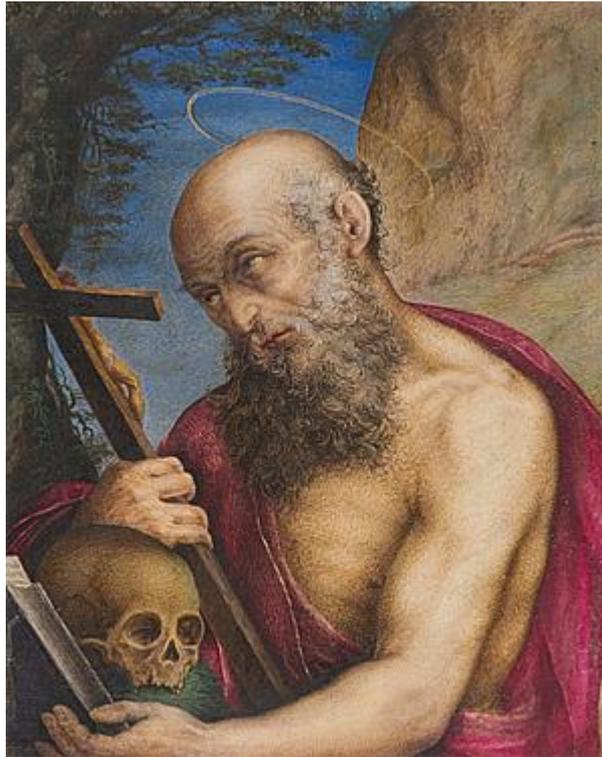


# STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



**Giovanni Battista CASTELLO (Genoa 1547 - Genoa 1639)**

## **Saint Jerome in Prayer**

Bodycolour, heightened with gold, on vellum.

149 x 117 mm. (5 7/8 x 4 5/8 in.)

Like most of G. B. Castello's gouache miniatures, this fine Saint Jerome in Prayer, executed on vellum, was almost certainly produced as an autonomous work of art intended for private devotion. As the Castello scholar Elena De Laurentis has noted of the present sheet, '[it] is a work of considerable interest, both for its highly refined artistic quality and for its probable provenance from the Escorial, alluded to by the saint portrayed, who was the titular saint of the order of monks entrusted with the management of the monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial.'

## **Literature:**

Elena de Laurentis, 'Il pio Genovese: Giovanni Battista Castello', *Alumina*, April-June 2012, illustrated p.29.

## **Artist description:**

Giovanni Battista Castello, known as Il Genovese, apprenticed in the studio of Luca Cambiaso in Genoa, probably in the 1560s, following an initial period of training with his father Antonio, a goldsmith. (His younger brother, the painter Bernardo Castello, also studied with Cambiaso.) Castello began his career as a goldsmith and indeed it was not until 1579, when he was already in his thirties, that he

began working primarily as an illuminator and miniature painter. Certainly, his grounding in the goldsmith's art is evident in the jewel-like qualities of much of his oeuvre. His earliest works are indebted to the example of the miniaturist Giulio Clovio and, through him, Michelangelo. Castello became one of the foremost miniaturists of the day, and his colourful religious scenes, usually on vellum, were widely admired and much praised. Indeed, his fame spread as far as Spain, where around 1583 he was summoned by Philip II to work on the illumination of several choir books for the Royal monastery of El Escorial. Although Castello apparently produced over two hundred choir book illuminations ('corali miniati') while at the Escorial, none of these appear to have survived.

Castello was back in Genoa by 1586, and for much of the remainder of his long career – he died when he was in his nineties - was at the peak of his artistic activity. His small, highly finished religious scenes on parchment or vellum were often framed in ebony frames as independent works, and are sometimes referred to as 'quadretti da letto' in household inventories of the period. Often inspired by Northern prints, these devotional miniatures were praised by his first biographer Raffaello Soprani as 'coloriti con esquisitezza maravigliosa', and found an appreciative audience of collectors and connoisseurs not only in Genoa and Liguria, but throughout Italy and in Spain. As Mary Newcome has noted of Castello, 'Writers and poets praised the beauty and naturalism of his work which has been confused and compared with the miniatures by Giulio Clovio and which was highly admired at the Spanish court of Philip II.' (A further measure of his success is seen in the fact that, when a special tax on municipal guild members was levied in Genoa in 1630, Castello was assessed the highest tax liability of the 142 artists then active in the city, since his miniatures, and their elaborate frames, were counted as luxury goods.) Castello also assembled a private collection of drawings and miniatures, including several works by Giulio Clovio, that was eventually inherited by his son and is today in the Galleria Regionale della Sicilia in Palermo.