

CHRISTIAN SEYBOLD

1697 Mainz - Vienna 1768

Self-Portrait [Tondo]

Gouache on vellum; c.1749. Signed at the upper edge: *Cristiano Seybolt di Magonza*.
Diameter: 113 mm (frame: 21.4 x 21.4 cm)

PROVENANCE: Private collection, Paris – J. Kugel, Paris

Christian Seybold was born in Mainz. At the age of eighteen he moved to Vienna, where he spent most of his artistic career. His contemporary Christian Ludwig von Hagedorn describes him as largely self-taught.¹ Seybold quickly established a reputation as a talented portraitist. One of his earliest works, titled *Portrait of Graf Johann Adam Questenberg*, was executed in formal Baroque style. It is only known from a print after the painting engraved by Andreas and Josef Schmutzer in 1728. Under the influence of Balthasar Denner and Jan Kupezký Seybold's work underwent a stylistic change. His portraits grew more intimate and he developed a preference for half-figure portraits and close-up head-and-shoulders portraits. Many of these depict members of his close family, genre-style character figures or heads of old people often set against a neutral background. The majority of these works are finely executed. Writing about Seybold's work in 1755, Hagedorn notes: *In many of his heads one admires his delicate touch in depicting the sitter's every pore; in this he is a true pupil of Balthasar Denner.*²

His self-portraits are among his most interesting works. In the present sheet he depicts himself *de face* gazing directly at the viewer. He wears a white shirt and a striking silk turban depicted in shimmering shades of light blue and brownish grey. The scarf casually thrown over his left shoulder is of the same material. The colours reflect and accentuate the deep blue of his eyes. His features – particularly the finely drawn mouth and the glints of light in the pupils – are delineated with remarkable vitality. The paintbrush behind his right ear is a gesture to his trade. Seybold portrayed himself and his sitters with great verisimilitude: his artistic priorities were honesty, physical accuracy and sensibility for human qualities, emotions and personality traits.

Seybold achieved considerable recognition in his own lifetime. He was appointed painter to the court of Saxony in Dresden in 1745 and four years later Empress Maria Theresia designated him *Kaiserlicher Kammermaler*. He was an associate member of the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. The list of European museums holding his self-portraits is impressive: the Uffizi in Florence, the Belvedere and the Liechtenstein Museum in Vienna, the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, the Gemäldegalerie in Dresden, the Louvre in Paris and the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Lille [fig. 1]. His work has been allowed to lapse into obscurity and is due for art-historical re-evaluation.³

¹ Christian Ludwig von Hagedorn, *Lettre à un Amateur de la Peinture*, Dresden 1755, p. 337.

² Hagedorn, op. cit., p. 338: *Dans plusieurs de ses têtes [...] on admire un finiment qui va jusqu'à l'expression des pores : c'est designer l'Emule de Denner.*

³ See Klára Garas, *Christian Seybold und das Malerbildnis in Österreich im 18. Jahrhundert*, in *Bulletin des Musées Hongrois des Beaux Arts*, Budapest 1981, 56/57, pp. 113-37.

LE CLAIRE

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Fig. 1: *Self-Portrait*,
oil on canvas, 45 x 37 cm.
Palais des Beaux Arts, Lille