

Cesare Tallone, *Il pittore in erba (The Budding Painter)*

Savona 1853 – 1919 Milan

oil on canvas, 1883

43 ¼ by 27 ½ inches (110 by 70 cm)

signed and dated lower right: 'C. Tallone fece/ Roma 1884'

- provenance: The Società di Belle Arti di Torino, 1884;
purchased by the Testa Collection, Turin;
inherited by Maddalena Tarditi, Turin;
Private collection, Italy.
- exhibited: *Esposizione Generale Italiana in Torino*, Turin 1884, no. 1757.
Cesare Tallone, Accademia di Brera, Milan 1922.
- literature: *Esposizione Generale Italiana in Torino*, Turin 1884, p. 69, no. 1757.
D. Laura, *L'Esposizione Nazionale: a zig-zag per l'Esposizione*, in *Arte e Storia*, June 15, 1884, pp. 186-187.
C. Accascina, *Il ritrattista lombardo. Cesare Tallone*, in *Secolo XX*, February 1908, p. 110.
A. Locatelli Milesi, *Artisti che scompaiono: Cesare Tallone*, in *Emporium*, 1919, vol. L, no. 295, p. 35.
C. Buonapace, *La mostra postuma di Cesare Tallone*, in *La Perseveranza*, June 11, 1921.
V. Bignami, C. Caversazzi, *Cesare Tallone, sotto gli auspici della R. Accademia di Brera*, Bergamo 1922, ill. p. 42.
A. Locatelli Milesi, *L'arte di Cesare Tallone*, in *La Rivista di Bergamo*, August 1922, ill. p. 407.
G. Nicodemi, *I libri. Cesare Tallone*, in *Emporium*, 1922, vol. LVI, no. 335, p. 192.
E. Somarè, *Storia dei pittori italiani dell'Ottocento*, Milan 1928, fig. 223.
Enrico Somarè, *Tallone*, Milan 1945, p. 152, fig. 28.
A. Geddo, Tallone, Loverini e le nuove tendenze, in *Il Giornale di Bergamo*, September 30, 1962, p. 3.
AA.VV., *Pinacoteca di Brera. Dipinti dell'Ottocento e del Novecento. Collezioni dell'Accademia e della Pinacoteca*, Milan 1994, vol. II, p. 645.
R. Forcella, F. Rea, R. Bossaglia (eds.), *Cesare Tallone: ritratti e paesaggi*, Lovere 1996, ill. p. 14.
Gigliola Tallone, *Cesare Tallone*, Milan, 2005, pp. 30-32, ill.
- note: Cesare Tallone (figs. 1a-c) was born in Savona, but after his father's death, his family moved to Alessandria where he had his first artistic studies and began as a portrait painter of the local bourgeoisie. These works were well received and in 1872 he obtained a grant from the City Council to enroll at the Accademia di Brera in Milan. He remained there until 1880, and his talent was so obvious that the distinguished painter Francesco Hayez even allowed his younger colleague the use of his own studio near the Academy. He won several local prizes for his paintings of religious and historical subjects (fig. 2) and in 1883 had success with these and portraits at the International Exposition in Rome. He was in the capital city as early as 1880, and from 1883 to 1885 lived there and worked closely with the painter Antonio Mancini. The two visited the studios of the American sculptors William Wetmore Story and his son Waldo. This proved a fruitful connection to the Anglo-American society, who in the spirit of Whistler and John Singer Sargeant, deeply influenced the course of their painting.

In 1885 Tallone was appointed professor of painting at the Accademia Carrara in Bergamo and remained there until 1899 when he assumed an even more prestigious similar position at the Accademia di Brera in Milan. He became well known for his handsome, large portraits of local aristocrats and such famous individuals as the acclaimed opera singer Lina Cavalieri and Queen Margarita (figs.3a-d), but in private work done from models, friends, and family he practiced a looser, freer style (figs. 4a-c).

Considered by most writers in the extensive bibliography as one of Tallone's most important paintings, *The Budding Painter* (titled in Italian *Il pittore in erba*) was executed in Rome, prior to his move to Bergamo. Tallone often depicted children, especially the youthful members of his own family (figs.5a-g), and here he presents his ten year old son, Enea (Milan 1876 - Lamone 1937), the child he had with his first wife, Paolina Bellati. The boy is shown sitting at an easel, holding paint brushes and a palette, as he looks directly out at the viewer.¹ The young girl posed next to him and also engaging the viewer has not been identified. Although Tallone dated the canvas 1884, it was probably done by October of the previous year, so that it could be included in the 1884 Esposizione Generale di Torino, which was a major international art exhibition (figs. 6a-d), where this and three other of his works were well received. Slightly later about 1885 Tallone used the same children as the subject of a more formal, full length painting, *The Cousins* (fig. 7), which, however, lacks the lively spontaneity of this earlier work.

This recently rediscovered painting, last seen in the poshumous retrospective of the artist's work held at the Brera in 1922, is significant not only in terms of Tallone's development, but also for representing in its free manner and choice of subject the painterly style of Mancini, who also often painted children (figs.8a-e) and the reciprocal influence on both artists of Sargent (figs.9a-b). Tallone's double portrait is a true tour de force contrasting the highly finished, smooth skin of the youthful faces to the rough textured, freely painted backdrop. The vivid splurge of red paint on the palette at the lower left is echoed by the more subdued full lips of the winsome children.

¹ In 1888 Tallone married Eleonora Tango in Rome and they had several children including Guido (1894-1967), who also became a respected painter.