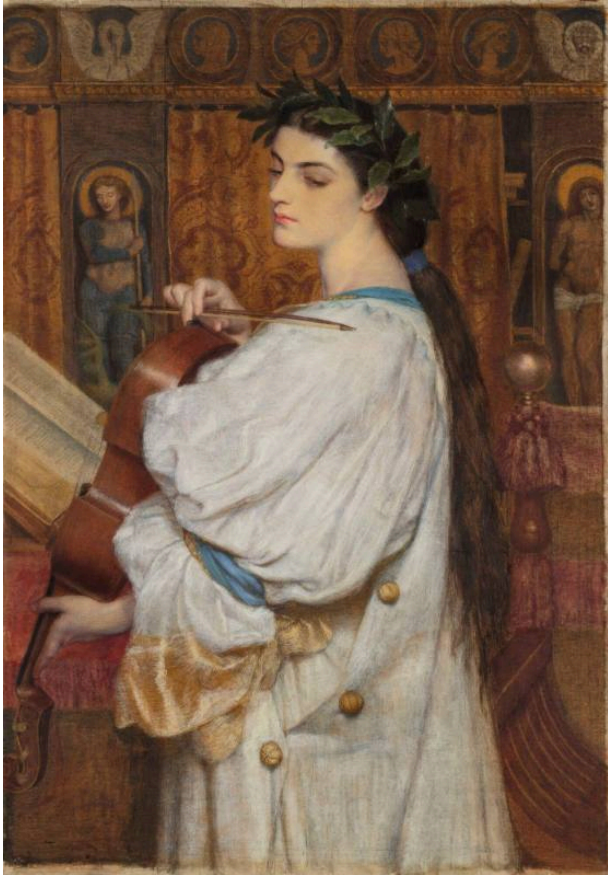


Basic Detail Report



Cassandra Fedele

Date

1869

Primary Maker

Sir Frederic William Burton

Medium

Watercolour on paper

Dimensions

81.2 × 57.5 cm

Description

Although 'Cassandra Fedele' is dated 1869, Burton's notes reveal that he had begun working on this subject three years previously. It is an excellent example of his sensitive handling of colour and meticulous drawing. The range of white tones in the sleeve is remarkable and in his use of blues and purples to create shadow Burton anticipates the Impressionists. A full-scale cartoon for this

in the National Gallery of Ireland shows how carefully Burton developed his ideas - softening the background, overcoming the clumsiness of the hand plucking the strings by the provision of a bow, and adding a chair on the right to balance the composition. The subject is not, as one might suppose at first, the Cassandra of Greek myth, but a famous Venetian poetess and musician of the 16th century. She is elevated to the status of the ancients by her crown of laurel, which links her, like her Greek namesake, with Apollo. Burton ranks her with those other heroines of ancient legend whose portrait medallions in the classical frieze in the background: Penelope, faithful wife of Odysseus; Judith who slew Holofernes and saved her people; Lucretia who chose death rather than life with dishonour after she had been raped by Tarquin, and Sofonisba, who may either be the princess of Carthage during the Punic Wars or Sofonisba Anguiscuola, the woman artist whose talent earned a name as esteemed as Cassandra Fedele in 16th century Italy. The statues of the saints in the niches and the pelican and lion above them remind us that this Cassandra is both Christian and Venetian. Burton had in 1849 painted a charming, simple portrait of his friend, the actress, Helen Faucit as 'Antigone' (National Gallery of Ireland). 'Cassandra Fedele' is very sophisticated and complex by comparison. It is Burton's response to Rossetti's 'Elizabeth Siddal as Beata Beatrix' (Tate Gallery). (Extract from 'Images and Insights', Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin, 1993, p. 59) Burton received his initial training from Henry Brocas at the Dublin Society Schools and had his first work accepted at the RHA when only 16 years of age. He journeyed around Ireland and painted figure pieces, portraits and romantic genre before leaving the country during the Famine years of

the 1840s. His later style is sympathetic with that of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood though he was never part of their circle. Cassandra Fedele was a famous 16th century Venetian poetess and musician and the subject is Burton's response to Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix* (Tate Gallery, London)