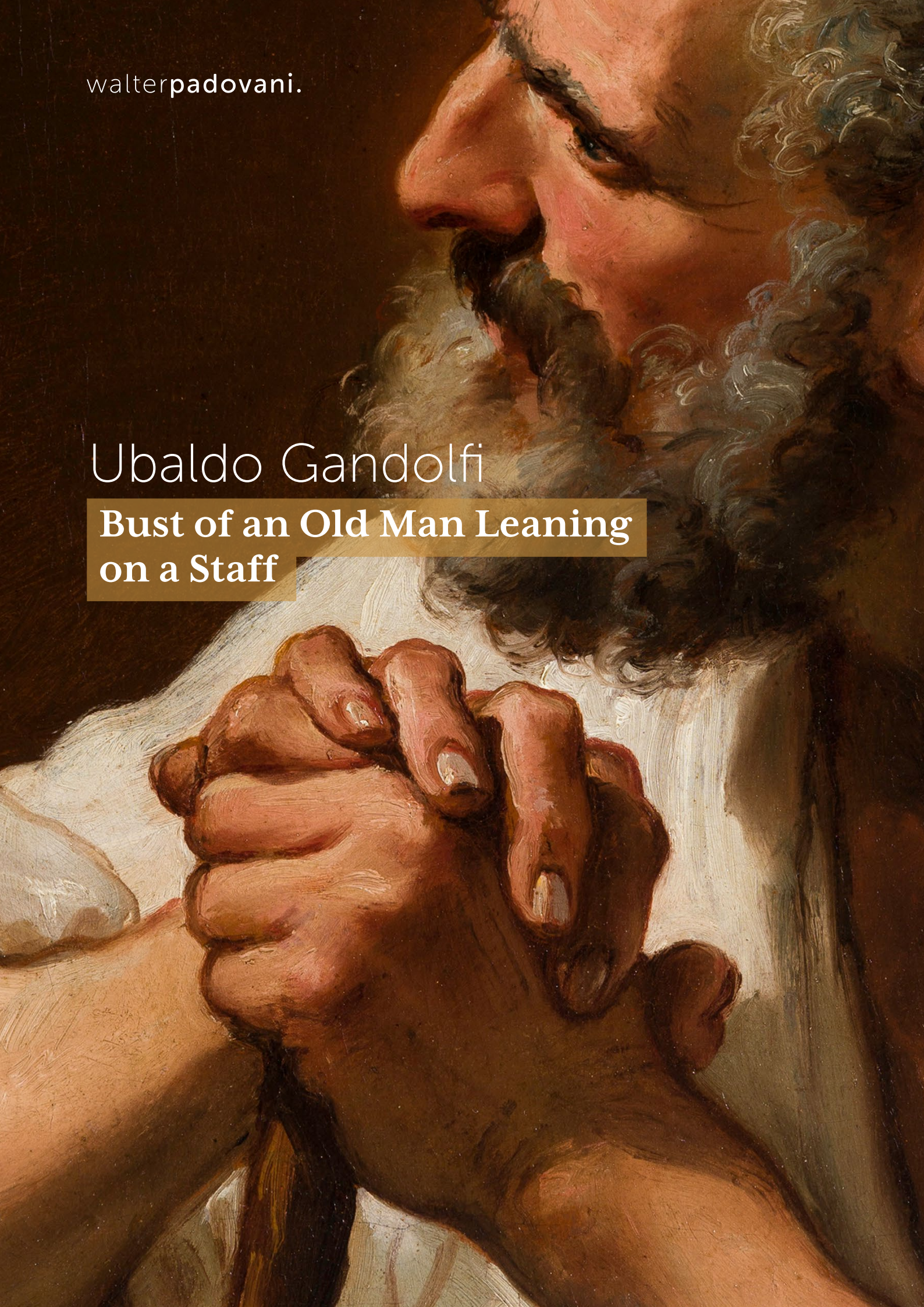
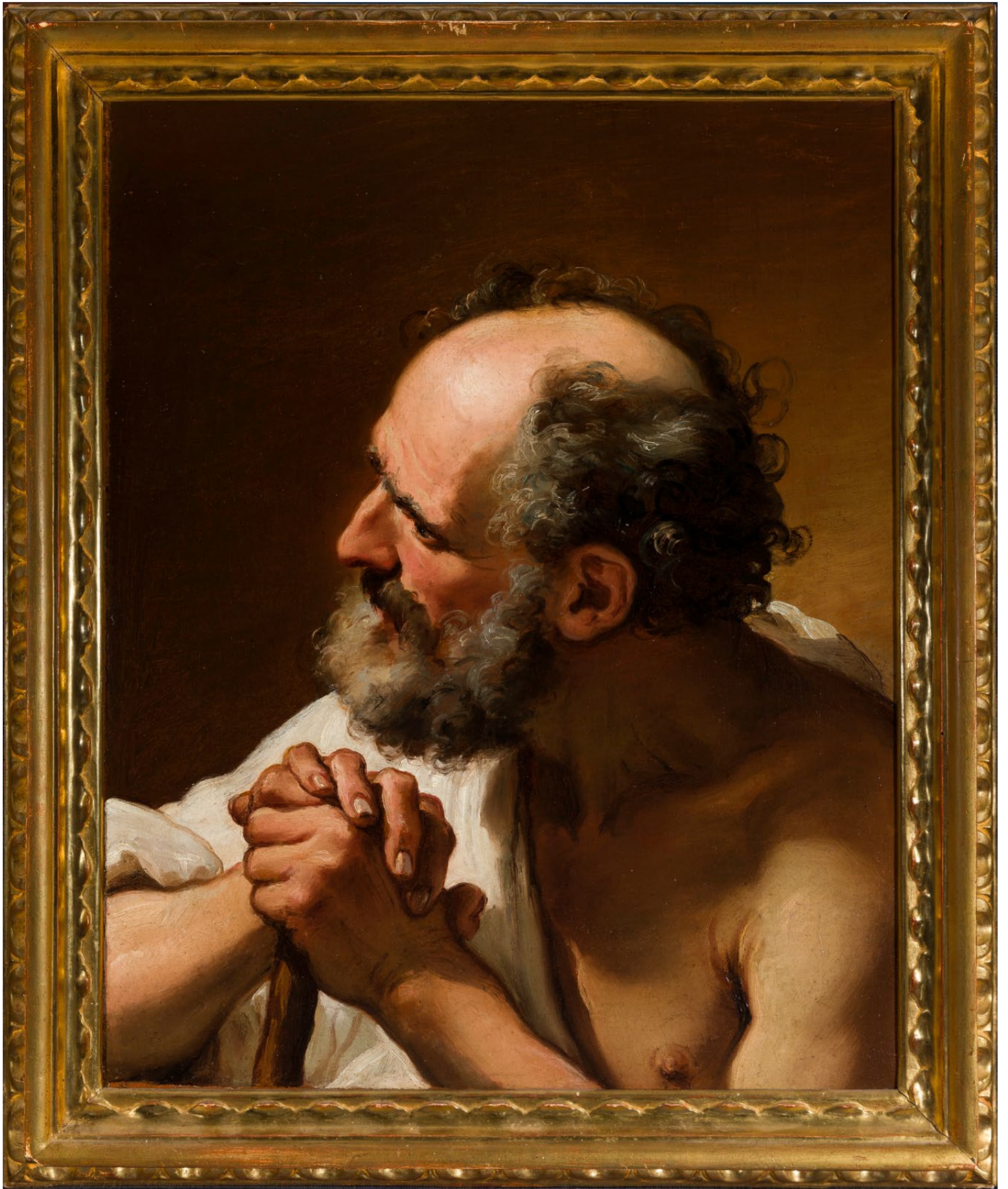


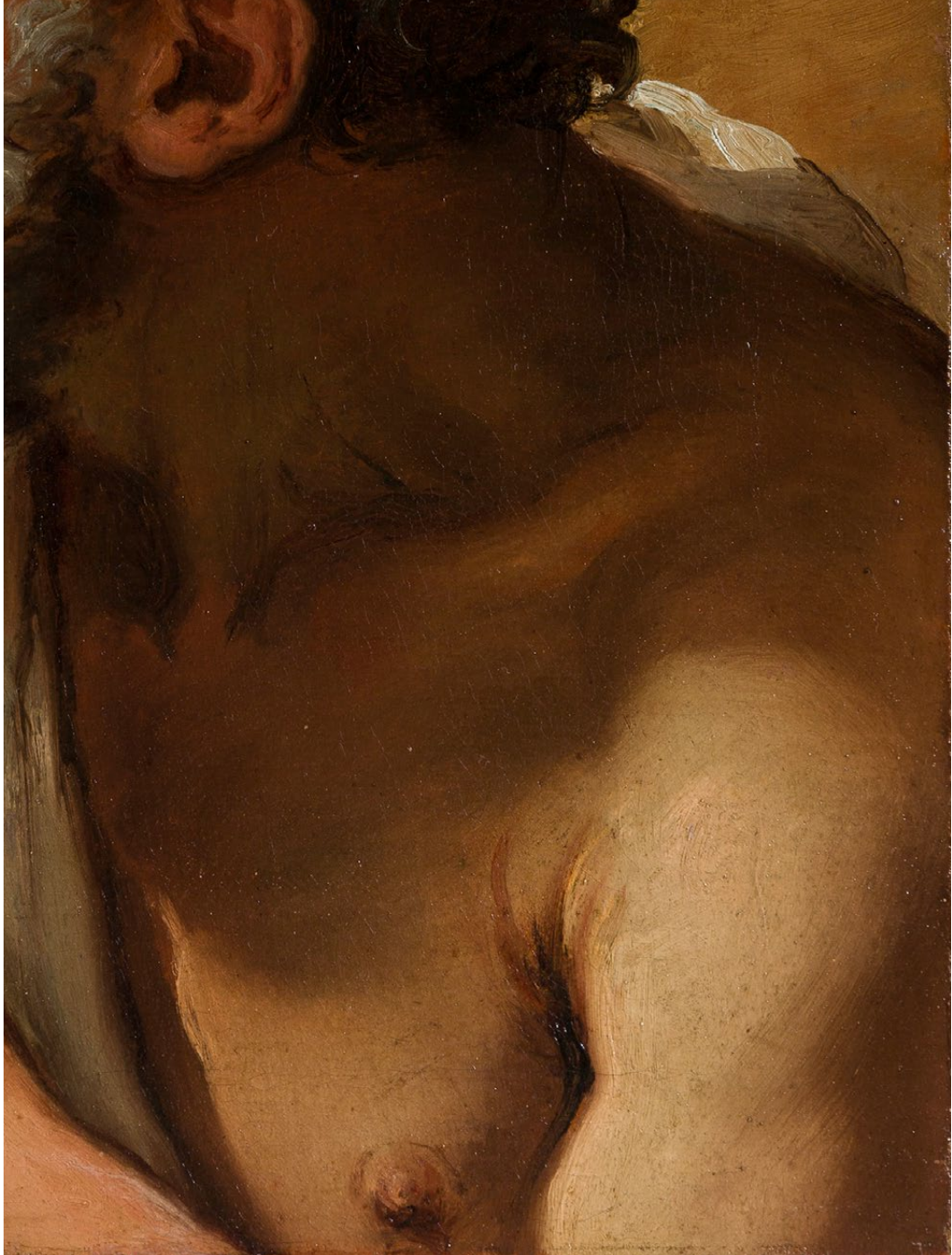
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Ubaldo Gandolfi

**Bust of an Old Man Leaning
on a Staff**









Ubaldo Gandolfi
(S. Matteo della Decima,
Bologna 1728 – Ravenna 1781)

*Bust of an Old Man
Leaning on a Staff*

Oil on canvas; 56,2 x 45,2 cm

Bibliography: unpublished

This magnificent study from life of a model in a pose, almost a “portrait” – albeit of an unknown sitter – depicted in accordance with the highest standards of a style rooted in the artist’s deepest sensitivity, is unquestionably by the great Bolognese painter Ubaldo Gandolfi, one of the foremost masters on the Italian art scene in the second half of the 18th century.

From the 1760s until his premature demise, caused by a neglected fever at a time when his creative energy was at its peak and his last works were revealing the lofty mastery that bespoke his determination to pursue the

search for perfection in painting from life, Gandolfi also exercised his talent in the production of admirable *arie di testa*, as this form of painting was christened in the 18th century, offering us an image of humanity whose features the artist proved capable of capturing with superb results not only on account of the high quality of his painting, with its thick textural brushwork applied with rapid strokes as accurate in draughtsmanship as in his choice of palette, but also on account of his rare skill in penetrating his sitter’s mood and spirit.

At a time when what had become a ful-

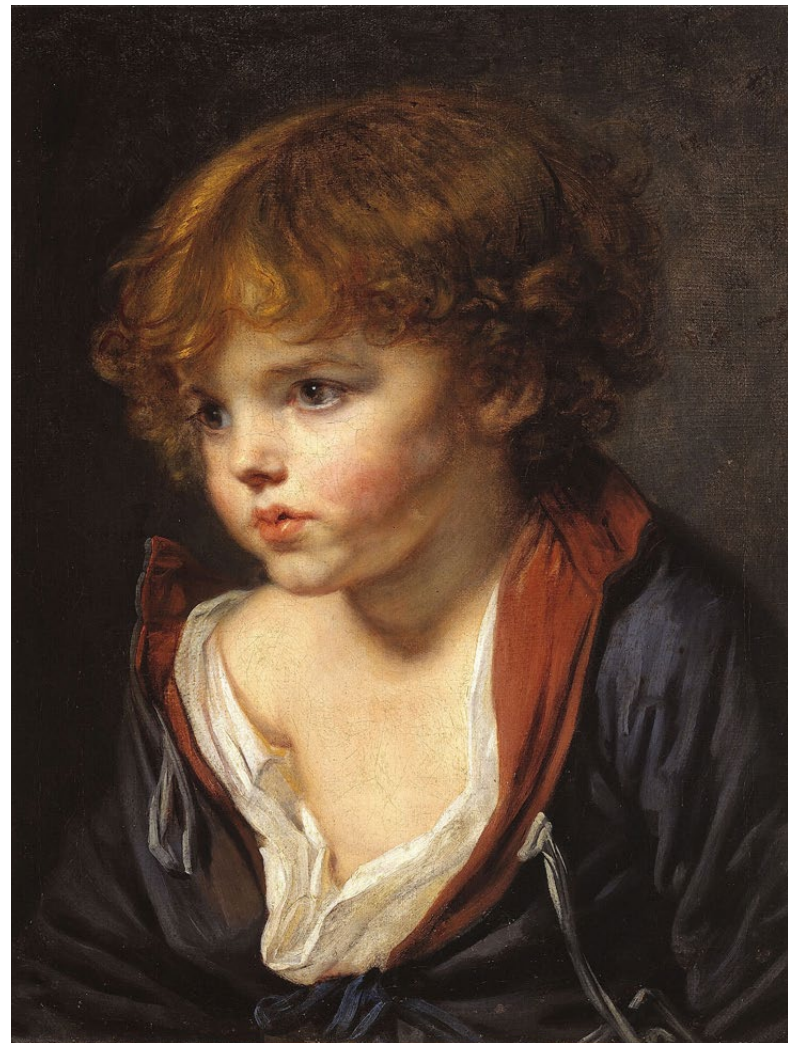
ly-fledged fashion, namely painting faces of young girls and boys and beautiful women in gracious postures sporting equally gracious expressions on small canvases, almost a legacy of the earlier Rococo style yet addressed with a vocabulary spawned by the interests of a period now steeped in Classicism – one has but to think of the numerous *arie di testa* of Rotari (fig.1) and Greuze (fig. 2), simply in Europe where Ubaldo played a leading role – Gandolfi proved capable of keeping faith with that primary search for depiction from life that is a feature of his entire output, whether mythological or religious, whilst also revealing that

interest in the study of physiognomy whose loftiest expression at the date proposed for this work, the second half of the 1770s, was to be found in the writings of Lavater published in 1772.

This extremely fine figure of an old man takes the substance of its realism from a skilled handling of the highlighting showering the sitter's face, his hands crossed on his pilgrim's staff, his white cloak shining in contrast with the shadow cast on his shoulder, the neck of the sitter with his head leaning to one side, shown in a three-quarter pose, captured in a thought-provoking meditative pose.

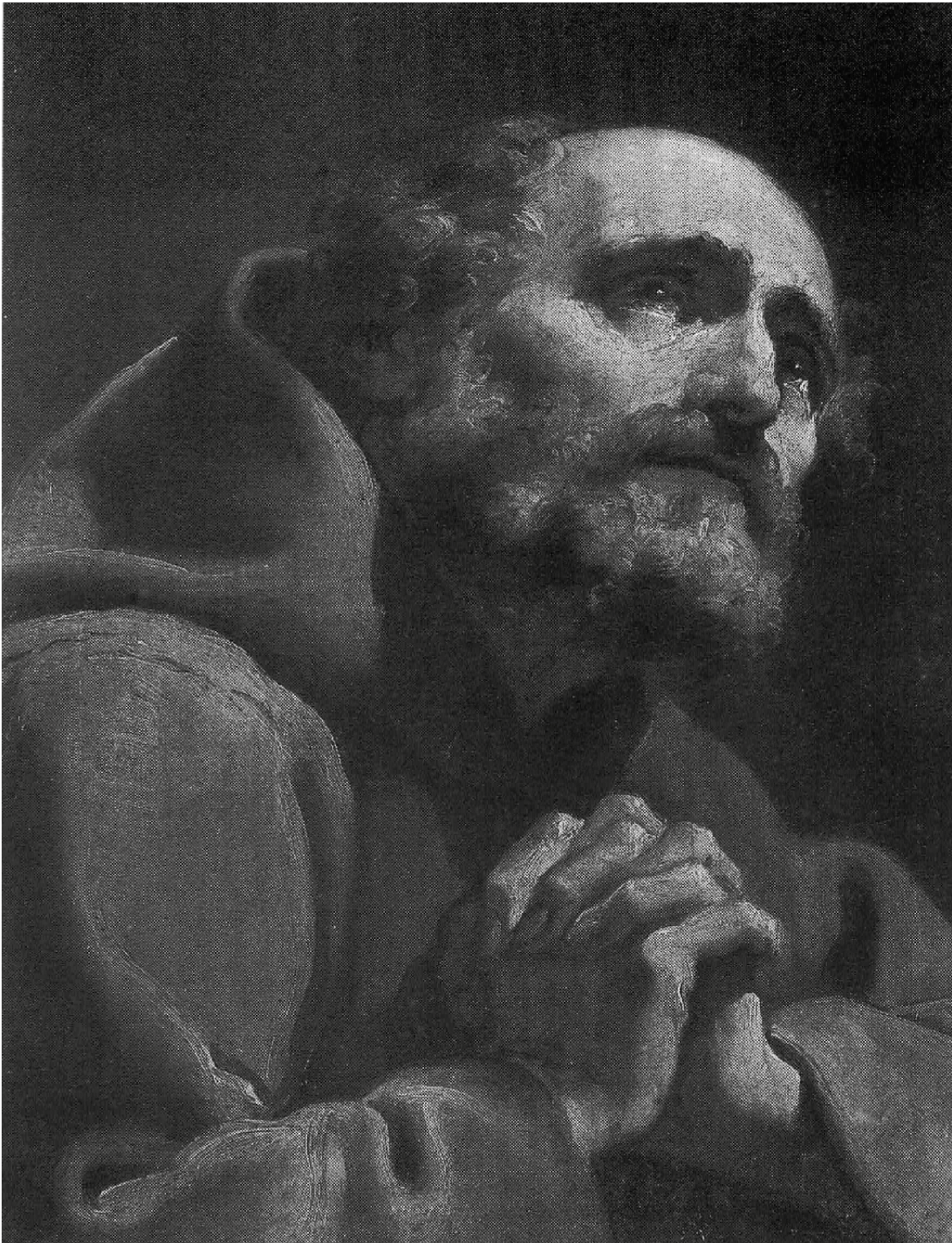


1. Pietro Rotari, *A Young Woman with a Book*, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum



2. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Blond haired boy with an open Shirt*, Paris, Cognac-Jay Museum



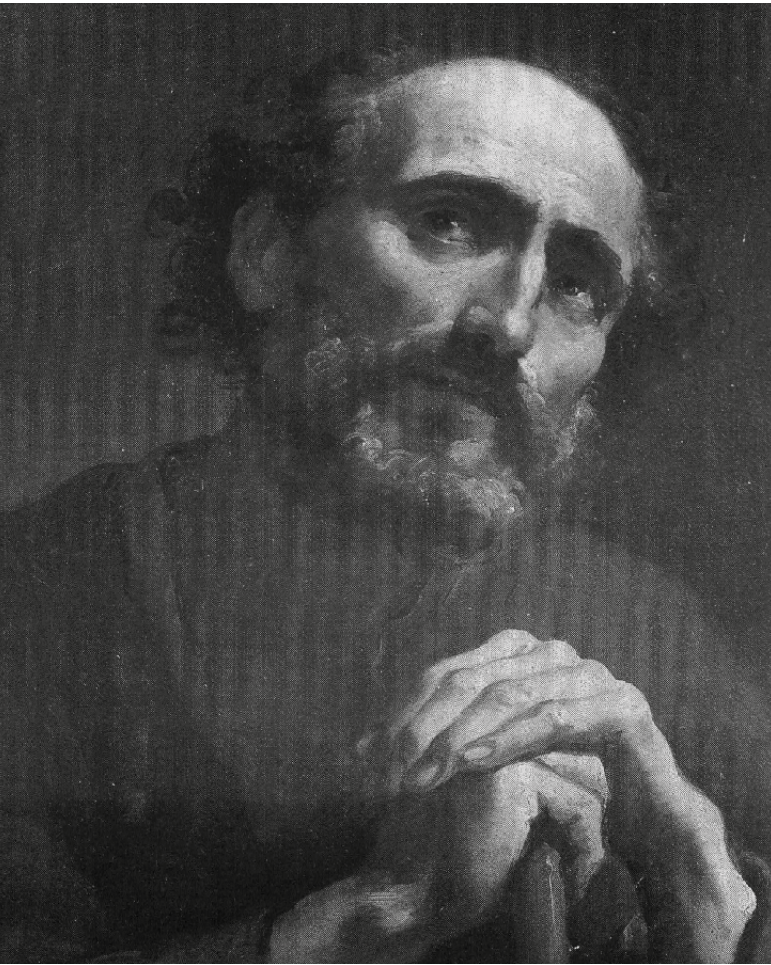


3. Ubaldo Gandolfi, *Capuchin Friar with Joined Hands*, Bologna, Museo Provinciale dei Minori Cappuccini

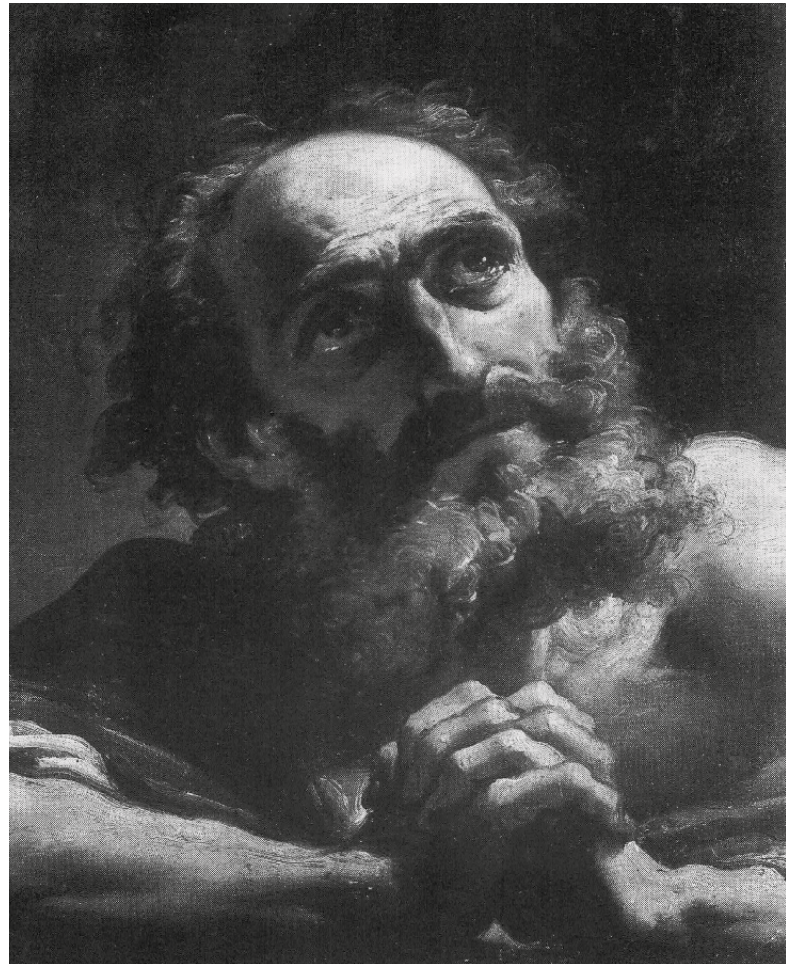
And finally, I would highlight the fact that the figure portrayed also served as a model for Gandolfi in other splendid works such as the *Capuchin Friar with Joined Hands* in the former

Museo di San Giuseppe in Bologna (fig. 3), or the *Bust of an Old Man Leaning on a Staff* and the *Bust of an Old Man with Joined Hands*, both owned by the heirs of Count Gregorio Casali (figs.





4. Ubaldo Gandolfi, *Old Man Leaning on a Staff*,
Private collection



5. Ubaldo Gandolfi, *Old Man with Joined Hands*,
Private collection

4,5), a close companion of Gandolfi who collection included many fine works of art (1).

This painting was presumably devised as a companion piece for the *Bust of an Old Man with*

a Rosary by Gaetano Gandolfi, also on display on this occasion. See that painting's fact sheet for further information.

Donatella Biagi Maino

1. They are reproduced in D. Biagi Maino, *Ubaldo Gandolfi*, Turin, Allemandi 1990, ill. 210, 156, 178



Via Santo Spirito, 26/A - Milan
P. +39 02 76 31 89 07
www.walterpadovani.com

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