Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Giovanni Francesco Bezzi, called Il Nosadella (Bologna 1530 - Bologna 1571)

The Dead Christ with Angels

Oil on panel.
26.2 x 38.5 cm. (10 3/8 x 15 1/8 in.)

The correct attribution of this panel, previously attributed to the Lombard painter Giulio Cesare Procaccini (1574-1625), is due to Jürgen Winkelmann, who first published the painting in 1976. Winkelmann compared this small painting stylistically to the late works of the 1560's by Nosadella, in particular an Annunciation now in the collection of the Princeton University Art Museum, as well as the artist's final work, the Circumcision in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Bologna, completed by Fontana after his death. Winkelmann also found echoes of the present work in a painting of the same subject by Nosadella's Bolognese contemporary, Lorenzo Sabatini (1530-1576), today in the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Bologna.

As Winkelmann wrote of this Dead Christ with Angels, 'There are echoes of Bronzino in the precise sculptural modelling of the body of Christ and in the knots of the supple loincloth, but these elements had already been resolved following the cerebral and stylistic feats of the [Princeton] Annunciation, even while the tomb made up of protruding stones, still a very archaic quattrocento motif, forms an appropriate space to contain the relief-like and strongly modelled figure of the dead Christ, who is represented in the guise of an ancient athlete.'

Winkelmann continues; 'It is important to note how, in this small-scale work, the artist manages to express the musical and lyrical element of his art with an intensely sentimental mood...Rather than linking it to Nosadella's late phase as in the altarpiece of Santa Maria Maggiore, one prefers to relate this noteworthy and exquisite display of elegant devotion in a small format, to the astonishingly shrewd style – alas misunderstood in Bologna, perhaps due to its being somewhat tied to the past and at the same time a harbinger of a new language – which emanates from the [Princeton] Annunciation.'

Several years later, Jürgen Winkelmann returned to the subject of this small painting, writing that 'In the last years of his life, Nosadella left behind an almost spiritual testimonial in The Dead Christ Mourned by Angels...The work is steeped in a poignant lyricism, despite being designed according to a rigid perspectival system. It is not only 15th century perspective that is re-evoked sentimentally, but also all the pictorial traditions of the past admired by the artist, from those of Parma to those of Ferrara. The jutting stones of the tomb can therefore be understood as self-quotations, which recall the sharp design of the steps in the Princeton Annunciation, even if in the Dead Christ this detail is more material.'

Provenance:

The Arcade Gallery, London, in 1965 (as Giulio Cesare Procaccini)
Daniel Katz, London.

Literature:

The Burlington Magazine, November 1965, pl.LVI (as Giulio Cesare Procaccini); Jürgen Winkelmann, 'Sul problema Nosadella-Tibaldi', Paragone, July-September 1976, pp.111-112, pl.83 (as location unknown); Elisabetta Sambo, 'Tibaldi e Nosadella', Paragone, September 1981, p.18 (as location unknown); Jürgen Winkelmann, 'Giovanni Francesco Bezzi detto il Nosadella', in Vera Fortunati Pietrantonio, ed., Pittura bolognese del '500, Bologna, 1986, Vol.II, pp.461-462, illustrated p.474 (as location unknown).

Artist description:

Very little is known of the life of Giovanni Francesco Bezzi, known as Nosadella (apparently after the name of the street on which he lived in Bologna), and the biography of the artist by Carlo Cesare Malvasia lists only two dated works. These are the frescoes executed in 1558 for the Palazzo Bolognetti in Bologna, now lost, and a painting of The Circumcision for the Bolognese church of Santa Maria Maggiore, left unfinished at the artist's death in 1571 and subsequently completed by Prospero Fontana. Malvasia records that Nosadella was a pupil of Pellegrino Tibaldi, and paintings by the two artists have often been confused, with the former long regarded as a mere follower of Tibaldi. However, recent studies of Nosadella's work have led to a new appreciation of the artist as one of the most unique and original painters of the 16th century in Bologna, where he was first registered as a painter in 1549. The bulk of his activity seems to have been as a fresco painter working in various Bolognese palaces, although almost nothing of his work of this type survives. As Malvasia notes, 'Those few works by him that are known – and they are mostly frescoes – are distinguished by their good colour (un buon colore), as with his master, and are full of erudition. And if they are not as perfect and studied, they are perhaps more powerful (terribili), singular, and resolute.' A rare surviving example of this type of mural decoration are the frescoed scenes from the story of Susanna in the Palazzo Poggi in Bologna, dating to between 1554 and 1556, on which Nosadella worked alongside Tibaldi.

Paintings and drawings by Nosadella remain very rare today. A handful of significant paintings by the artist have in recent years been acquired by American museums, notably an Annunciation now in the Princeton University Art Museum, a Holy Family with Saints Anne, Mary Magdalene and Catherine in the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles and a Presentation in the Temple in the Allen Memorial Art Museum in Oberlin, Ohio.