Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Giuseppe Cesari Cavaliere d'Arpino (Arpino 1568 - Rome 1640)

The Annunciation

Red chalk on light brown paper, laid down.
Indistinctly inscribed B. Ellins[?] Vices[?] at the lower left and, in a different hand, Corregio at the lower right.
Numbered 30 at the lower right.
245 x 213 mm. (9 5/8 x 8 3/8 in.)

ACQUIRED BY THE CHAPEL ART CENTER, ST. ANSELM COLLEGE, MANCHESTER, NEW HAMPSHIRE.

This fine sheet is an exceptional example of Arpino's confident draughtsmanship. The drawing is a preparatory study for an altarpiece of The Annunciation, painted between 1594 and 1596 for the Cappella Aldobrandini in the church of Santa Maria in Via in Rome. The decoration of the chapel had been left unfinished by Jacopo Zucchi in 1594, and Arpino was commissioned by Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini to paint the altarpiece and two frescoes on the lateral walls of the chapel, which served as the resting place of his father, also called Pietro Aldobrandini.

A related compositional drawing by Arpino for the Aldobrandini Annunciation, also in red chalk and formerly in the Maranzi collection in Rome, appeared at auction in London in 1967 and 2008. Of the two drawings, the present sheet is closer to the final painting in the poses of the figures, though the ex-Maranzi drawing more faithfully reproduces the architectural background of the altarpiece. Herwarth Röttgen has noted of the former drawing (and, by extension, the present sheet) that it shows Arpino's tendency to make his figures quite youthful in appearance, endowing them with a sense of innocence and charm.

Provenance:

Private collection, France.

Literature:

Herwarth Röttgen, Cavalier Giuseppe Cesari D'Arpino: Die Zeichnungen / I Disegni. Vol.II: Die großen Aufträge / Le grandi commissioni 1587/93-1605, Stuttgart, 2013, pp.116-117, no.235; Marco Simone Bolzoni, Il Cavalier Giuseppe Cesari d'Arpino: Maestro del disegno. Catalogo ragionato dell'opera grafica, Rome, 2013, p.53, p.256, no.109, illustrated in colour p.53, fig.40.

Artist description:

The son of a painter from the small hill town of Arpino, halfway between Rome and Naples, Giuseppe Cesari worked mostly in Rome. A gifted and precocious artist, he arrived in Rome in 1582 at the age of fourteen, and was soon working as a garzone at the Vatican logge under the direction of Niccolò Circignani, called il Pomarancio. During his long career, which spanned nearly six decades, Arpino received important commissions from three different Popes, and came to enjoy a position of considerable significance in the Roman art world. While still quite young, he undertook the decoration of rooms in the Vatican and the Palazzo del Quirinale for Pope Gregory XIII. Among other important early projects were the decoration of the Olgiati chapel in Santa Prassede, painted between 1587 and 1595, and the Contarelli chapel in San Luigi dei Francesi, completed in 1593.

In the early 1590's Arpino also worked in Naples, where he decorated the choir and sacristy of the Certosa di San Martino, assisted by his brother Bernardino. With the accession to the papal throne of Clement VIII in 1592, Arpino became the principal painter to the Pope, who bestowed on the artist the title of Cavaliere dell' ordine di Cristo. He worked for Clement VIII at San Giovanni in Laterano between 1599 and 1600, and designed some seventy large cartoons for the mosaics for the dome of St. Peter's, executed between 1603 and 1612. He also worked extensively for the Pope's nephew, Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini, culminating in the fresco decoration of the Palazzo dei Conservatori with scenes from ancient Roman history; a project on which he was to work, off and on, for the remainder of his career.

By the turn of the century, Arpino enjoyed a reputation as one of the leading painters in Italy, serving three terms as principe of the Accademia di San Luca in Rome. For the next pope, Paul V, he was tasked with supervising the decoration of the Cappella Paolina in Santa Maria Maggiore, on which he worked between 1610 and 1612. Apart from his many mural projects, Arpino also produced small-scale cabinet pictures for private patrons, usually of mythological subjects and often on supports such as copper, slate or glass. Among Arpino's pupils was the young Caravaggio, who worked with him in the early 1590's.

Cavaliere d'Arpino's modern reputation rests more on his drawings than his paintings. As a draughtsman, he favoured red or black chalk, or a combination of the two, and his studies are characterized by a delicate yet assured line and an interest in effects of light and shade, achieved through parallel and crosshatched chalk strokes.