Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Ferrau Fenzoni (Faenza 1562 - Faenza 1645)

A Cavalry Battle

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, over traces of an underdrawing in black chalk.

Inscribed *H* at the lower right.

Laid down on a 19th century Italian mount, inscribed *Della Scuola Fiaminga Antica* at the lower right.

265 x 404 mm. (10 3/8 x 15 7/8 in.)

This large drawing may be dated to the second half of Fenzoni's career, when he was working in Faenza, and is part of a group of four drawings of unidentified battle scenes, in each of which appears the same central protagonist of a young armoured horseman. Two of these drawings are in private collections and the third, which is slightly different in format and technique, was last recorded on the London art market in 1980. Crowded compositions filled with figures and horses, all four drawings depict a cavalry battle taking place around a fluttering standard, underneath low clouds through which burst rays of sunshine.

Nicolas Schwed has recently made the intriguing suggestion that these four drawings - which are datable to the later 1620's, when Fenzoni was working almost exclusively in pen and ink - might be related to the decoration of the artist's own home in Faenza. One of this group of drawings of battle scenes, today in a private collection in Paris, incorporates Fenzoni's coat of arms on the shield of one of the fallen warriors, to which the young horseman points with his sword. The same coat of arms is found on a drawing in the Uffizi which is a design for the decoration of the loggia of a palace, with two putti flanking the Fenzoni coat of arms above a landscape painting set into a painted or stucco frame. While a landscape drawing of this type is also in the Uffizi, a case may be made for the four battle scenes to have been intended as studies for paintings to be inserted into the same sort of mural decoration.

The present sheet may be compared stylistically with such drawings by Fenzoni as a Beheading of Saint John the Baptist in the Uffizi, preparatory for a painting of c.1614, and a study of Saint Martin Dividing his Cloak with a Beggar, also in the Uffizi. As Schwed has noted, these late studies 'are drawn using a technique consisting of small strokes of pen and ink, more or less dense, depending on the effects of light Fenzoni wanted to create…Fenzoni drew with this painstaking technique up to the end of his career.'

Provenance:

Dr. Carl Robert Rudolf, London (Lugt 2811b)

Presented by him to a private collector
Grieuw collection
Thence by descent
Anonymous sale, London, Christie's, 4 July 2006, lot 4.

Literature:

Nicolas Schwed, 'New Drawings by Ferraù Fenzoni', *Master Drawings*, 2000, No.1, p.46 and p.50, fig.27 (as location unknown); Giuseppe Scavizzi and Nicolas Schwed, *Ferraù Fenzoni*, Todi, 2006, pp.348-349, no. D156 (as location unknown), illustrated in colour pl.XVIII; Eckhard Leuschner, Damian Dombrowski and Luca Baroni, eds., *An Artist's Choice: Italian Drawings from the Collection of Martin von Wagner*, exhibition catalogue, Würzburg and Gradara, 2025-2026, Vol.I, p.437, under no.94.

Artist description:

Among the most interesting and distinctive, albeit lesser-known, artists of the late 16th and early 17th century, Ferraù Fenzoni arrived in Rome as a young man in the early 1580's. Between 1587 and 1591 he worked on several projects in the Vatican, notably at the Scala Santa, for which he painted a fresco of Moses and the Brazen Serpent in 1587, as well as on the decoration of the Biblioteca Sistina and the apartments of Pius V. Fenzoni also painted frescoes for the Lateran Palace and the Roman churches of Santa Maria Maggiore, Santa Maria in Trastevere and the Chiesa Nuova. Between 1593 and 1599 he worked in the Umbrian hill town of Todi, where he was responsible for the illusionistic decoration of the bishop's palace as well as several altarpieces and the extensive mural decoration of the Duomo. Although much of Fenzoni's work in the cathedral at Todi has been lost, the large and impressive fresco of The Last Judgment on the inner façade, completed in 1596, remains as a splendid testament to the artist's skill and vision.

Fenzoni returned to his native Faenza in 1599 and worked there for the remainder of his long career, painting significant works for several churches in the city over the next thirty years. Among his most important works of this period are a painting of The Pool of Bethesda, painted around 1600 for the confraternity of San Giovanni Decollato, and the decoration of the Borromeo chapel in the cathedral, completed in 1614. He also sent paintings to churches elsewhere in Romagna, notably in Bagnacavallo, Castel Bolognese and Cesena. One of his last significant paintings was an altarpiece of The Deposition of c.1622, painted for the artist's own chapel in the church of Santa Cecilia in Faenza. By the end of the 1620's, however, Fenzoni seems to have almost stopped painting altogether, due to the effects of poor sight.

According to a local biographer, Fenzoni continued to draw well into his old age; he 'drew continuously in pen; and in that way he gave to know his talent and his taste for the profession.' He is also known to have received commissions for highly finished pen drawings, produced as autonomous works of art. As one modern scholar has noted, 'drawing was for Fenzoni a powerful means of expression' and the artist is arguably better known today as a draughtsman than as a painter. Some 160 drawings by Fenzoni survive today, with the most significant group, numbering around sixty sheets, in the collection of the Uffizi in Florence.