

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Ludovico Carracci (Bologna 1555 - Bologna 1619)

Study of a Male Nude

Red chalk, with touches of white chalk, on light brown paper.

Laid down on a 19th century French mount.

205 x 220 mm. (8 x 8 5/8 in.)

A basic tenet of the Carracci academy was the importance of life drawing, and Ludovico, like his cousins, produced a number of academic studies of male nudes in red chalk. This was especially true of the years before 1600, a period which accounts for the majority of his drawings in the medium. A recent reassessment of Ludovico's draughtsmanship has led to a clearer understanding of the artist's use of chalk in the last two decades of the 16th century, especially in comparison to Annibale Carracci's better-known chalk studies of the same period. As Babette Bohn has written, 'During the 1580s and 1590s, Ludovico's style was quite naturalistic, because he was much more active as a draftsman in chalk and much more involved in the careful preparation of his pictures in preliminary drawings than had previously been supposed. Ludovico emerged as an artist who was quite committed to the use of chalk figure studies in preparation for his paintings and prints before 1600, although the drawings were sometimes used for different purposes than Annibale's chalk figure drawings.' Most of Ludovico's surviving chalk drawings before 1610 are studies of single male figures, depicted either full or half-length, and reflect the standard practice of drawing from the posed model.

The attribution of the present sheet to Ludovico Carracci has been confirmed by Babette Bohn, who dates the drawing to the second half of the 1580's, early in the artist's independent career. Based on a close examination of the drawing, Bohn has noted of the present sheet that 'the relatively strong command of anatomy, somewhat compromised by the handling of the neck and shoulder area, is characteristic of many Ludovico drawings, particularly during ca. 1585-90. The convincing sense of weight, notwithstanding the dynamic patterns of light and shadow that break up forms rather than furthering the portrayal of volume, is also characteristic of Ludovico's drawings during the later 1580s.' A stylistic comparison may be made with such Correggesque red chalk drawings of this period by Ludovico as a half-length study of the nude torso of a youth in the British Museum, which is in turn a study for a figure standing at the right edge of a painting of *The Flagellation*, traditionally attributed to Ludovico, in the collection of the Accademia Carrara in Bergamo.

The present sheet cannot be related to any known painting by Ludovico Carracci, and may well have been done simply as an exercise in life drawing, like a number of the artist's chalk drawings of the 1580's. Babette Bohn has pointed out, however, that this drawing may have been an unused idea for a

terminus figure in a fresco decoration, similar to the ignudi that appear in the frescoes of scenes from the story of Aeneas painted by the three Carracci in the Palazzo Fava, and variously dated to between 1586 and 1593.

Provenance:

Lucien Solanet, Paris
His posthumous sale, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 27 March 2008, lot 8.

Artist description:

The oldest member of the Carracci dynasty, Ludovico Carracci trained in the studio of Prospero Fontana in Bologna before undertaking a trip to Florence, Parma, Mantua and Venice to complete his artistic education. He was back in Bologna by 1578, when he joined the painter's guild, the Compagnia dei Pittori. Throughout the 1580's Ludovico worked closely with his cousins Annibale and Agostino Carracci, with whom he shared a workshop. All three artists collaborated on the series of frescoes illustrating the Story of Jason in the Palazzo Fava in Bologna, executed between 1583 and 1584. The three Carracci also established a private academy, whose teachings were to become a dominant influence on Bolognese painters of the succeeding generation.

Among Ludovico's early independent works are the large altarpiece known as the Madonna dei Bargellini of 1588, now in the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Bologna, and the Cento altarpiece of The Holy Family with Saint Francis of 1591. The three Carracci continued to work together on the further decoration of the Palazzo Fava in the late 1580's and the Palazzo Magnani, completed in 1592. Following Annibale's departure for Rome in 1595, closely followed by Agostino, Ludovico took over the Carracci academy and workshop. He worked on numerous decorative projects in and around Bologna, culminating in the frescoes at San Michele in Bosco of 1605-1606. Apart from a brief trip to Rome in 1602 and a stay in Piacenza between 1605 and 1609, when he collaborated with Camillo Procaccini on the decoration of the nave and apse of the Duomo, Ludovico Carracci remained in Bologna throughout his career. He continued to oversee the Carracci academy, known as the Accademia degli Incamminati, until his death.