

Fra Semplice da Verona (Verona 1589 - Roma or Verona 1654)

The Head of a Bearded Man

Black and red chalk, with stumping, heightened with touches of white chalk, on blue paper.
Inscribed with a shelfmark Ee42 and numbered 2h / L 41 on the old mount.
158 x 108 mm. (6 1/4 x 4 5/8 in.)

Previously attributed to Jacopo Bassano, the present sheet may instead be attributed to Fra Semplice on stylistic grounds. While the drawing cannot be related to any surviving painting by the artist, similar heads appear in such works as a large painting of The Expulsion of the Unwanted Wedding Guest, signed and dated 1622, formerly in the collection of the Dukes of Hamilton and sold at auction in London in 1987. An approximate stylistic comparison may also be made with a drawing of a kneeling man by Fra Semplice in the collection of the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge.

Provenance:

N. G. Stogdon, New York and Artemis Fine Arts, London, in 1986 (as Jacopo Bassano)
Anonymous sale, London, Sotheby's, 6 July 2004, lot 38
Private collection, USA.

Literature:

New York, N. G. Stogdon, Inc. and London, Artemis Fine Arts, Drawings from the 15th to the 20th Century, 1986, unpaginated, no.3, illustrated in colour pl.3 (as Jacopo Bassano).

Artist description:

The Capuchin monk Fra Semplice da Verona was trained as an artist in the studio of Felice Brusasorci in Verona, and in the early years of his career received important commissions for paintings from the courts of Mantua, Modena and Parma. Several of his later paintings were commissioned by the Capuchin order of which he was a member, and illustrated scenes and miracles from the life of Saint Felix of Cantalice, a Capuchin monk who was beatified in 1625. Within a few years of his death in the middle of the 17th century, however, Fra Semplice was largely forgotten, and it was not until the early 20th century that his oeuvre as a painter began to be rediscovered.

As a draughtsman, Fra Semplice's work is characterized by a preference for the use of black, red and white chalks on blue paper, although a handful of pen drawings are also known. Only a relatively small corpus of drawings by the artist survives today, however, many of which have born attributions to such Bolognese artists as Giacomo Cavedone, Pietro Faccini and, in some cases, Annibale Carracci. Indeed, the influence of the Carracci and their followers and contemporaries in Bologna may be noted in both Fra Semplice's paintings and drawings, perhaps the legacy of his time spent working in Parma.