

Biagio PUPINI (Bologna c.1490 - Bologna c.1575)

The Coronation of the Virgin with Saint John the Baptist, God the Father Above

Pen and brown ink, extensively heightened with white, on buff paper.

Laid down on an 18th century English (Richardson) mount.

Numbered k.213 at the lower right.

Inscribed (by Richardson) Biaggio Bolognes.e in the lower margin of the mount.

Further inscribed by Richardson with his shelfmarks J.43 / Z.51 / D.62 / Z.44 E and, also by Richardson, Mo Biaggio Puppini Bolognese, Discepolo del Francia, pratteco con l'Imola, / Gerolimino da Carpi Fu Goffetto. P. Resta on the reverse of the mount.

202 x 130 mm. (8 x 5 1/8 in.) [sheet]

329 x 251 mm. (12 7/8 x 9 7/8 in.) [mount]

The composition of the drawing is closely related to that of a slightly larger and more highly finished drawing by Biagio Pupini of The Coronation of the Virgin with Saint John the Baptist and Three Angels in the Louvre. The Louvre drawing has in turn been identified as a preparatory study for an altarpiece of The Coronation of the Virgin with Saints John the Baptist and Bernardino of Siena, painted for the church of San Francesco in Bologna and today in the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin.

The present sheet must represent a first idea for the same composition. As Roberta Serra has noted of this drawing, 'It is a study of the whole scene, drawn very quickly, with abundant white highlights that deliberately accentuate certain details. Beneath this almost painterly layer, the whole composition can be seen, drawn with swirling pen strokes. In this sheet, Pupini has also sketched the upper part of the scene with God the Father and the angels who appear in the centre of a large architectural arch, as well as another angel to the right of Christ. The latter is seated on a particularly elaborate throne that will be modified in the Louvre drawing. It may be deduced from this that this overall study is a first idea for the composition followed by [the Louvre] drawing, in which certain details are specified.' The abbreviated technique of this sheet is characteristic of Pupini's distinctive draughtsmanship, and among stylistically comparable drawings by the artist is a Pentecost in the Louvre.

One of the leading collectors of drawings in Italy in the 17th century, the Oratorian priest Padre Sebastiano Resta (1635-1714) assembled a large and significant group of some 3,500 sheets, gathered into about thirty albums. At least nineteen of these albums, containing almost 2,500 drawings, were compiled by Resta for his patron and fellow collector Monsignor Giovanni Matteo Marchetti (1647-1704), Bishop of Arezzo from 1691 until his death. After Marchetti's death in 1704, the Resta albums were offered for sale by his heirs. They were eventually acquired in 1710 by John, Lord Somers (1651-1716), Lord Chancellor of England. The Resta albums were in England by 1711, but Somers soon decided to break up the albums and have the drawings remounted. Before doing so, however, he had fourteen original Resta volumes lettered from A to O, with each drawing within them numbered consecutively, together with the album letter, on the recto. (On the present sheet, this so-called Resta-Somers number is the k.213 inscribed near the lower right corner.)

A manuscript inventory of the Resta-Somers albums, transcribing Resta's own notes on each of the drawings, is today in the British Library. The entry for the present sheet, listed under no. K.213, reads: 'Mo. Biagio Puppini Bolognese, Discepolo / del Francia, prattirò con l'Imola e Gerolimino / da Carpi. fugossotto(?).'

The year after Somers' death in 1716, his drawings were sold at auction in London and dispersed. This drawing then entered the collection of the English portrait painter, author and connoisseur Jonathan Richardson, Senior (1667-1745), whose collector's mark is found at the lower right corner of the sheet. Richardson owned a remarkable collection of nearly five thousand drawings, mostly Italian works of the 16th and 17th centuries, assembled over a period of about fifty years. Richardson's extensive collection was organized by school and date, and the drawings were further classified with a complex system of shelfmarks, examples of which can be found inscribed by Richardson on the reverse of the mount of this drawing.

The present sheet also bears the collector's mark of Sir J. C. Robinson (1824-1913), a scholar and curator who was a leading figure in the Victorian art world, serving as director of the South Kensington Museum (later the Victoria and Albert Museum) in London.

Provenance:

Padre Sebastiano Resta, Rome
Presented by him, as part of an album of drawings, to Monsignor Giovanni Matteo Marchetti, Arezzo, in 1698
By descent to his nephew, Cavaliere Orazio Marchetti da Pistoia

Sold in 1710 with the Resta collection of drawings, probably through John Talman, to John, Lord Somers, London (Lugt 2981)
Probably his sale, London, Peter Motteaux, 16 May 1717
Jonathan Richardson, Senior, London (Lugt 2184), with his shelfmarks and on his mount with his transcription of Resta's annotations
Probably his sale, London, Christopher Cock, 22 January to 8 February 1747
Sir John Charles Robinson, London and Swanage (Lugt 1433)
Possibly Dr. Carl Robert Rudolf, London (according to a photograph mount in the Witt Library)
Hugh and April Squire, London and Woodbridge
Their anonymous sale, London, Sotheby's, 4 July 1975, lot 54
Ralph Holland, Newcastle
Thence by descent until 2013.

Literature:

Anon., Father Resta's Remarks on the Drawings, British Library MS Lansdowne 802, undated, p.192v, no.213; Anon., An Alphabetical Catalogue of the Painters in the Collection, with the Drawings of each respective Master, referring to the several Books in which they are placed, British Library MS Lansdowne 803, undated, p.52v ('Puppini Bolognese (Biagio) 1471 / Coronation of the Blessed Virgin. J 49.'); Ralph Holland, Italian Drawings 1525-1750, exhibition catalogue, Newcastle, 1982, p.1, no.4; Roberta Serra, 'Biagio Pupini, non solo disegni!', Intrecci d'arte, 2021, p.41, note 46; Roberta Serra, Musée du Louvre: Département des arts graphiques. Inventaire général des dessins italiens XII: Dessins bolonais du XVIe siècle, Paris, 2022, p.157, under no.161.

Artist description:

Relatively little is known of the career of Biagio Pupini, who is mentioned only incidentally by Giorgio Vasari in his life of Bartolomeo Ramenghi, called Bagnacavallo, with whom Pupini often worked in Bologna. Thought to have been a pupil of Francesco Francia, Pupini is first documented - already described as magister - working with Bagnacavallo in a church in Faenza in 1511. He must have also spent some time in Rome in the late 1510's or 1520's, where he copied the works of Raphael and Polidoro da Caravaggio, although the exact date of this trip is undocumented. Pupini worked with Bagnacavallo at the church of San Salvatore in Bologna around 1524, and the following year collaborated with Girolamo da Carpi on the fresco decoration of the sacristy of San Michele in Bosco. In 1537 he again worked alongside Girolamo da Carpi on the frescoes of the Sala delle Vigne of the d'Este villa at Belriguardo, southeast of Ferrara. A painting by Pupini of The Virgin and Child with Saints John the Baptist and Nicholas of Tolentino, painted for the sacristy of the cathedral at Fabriano and now in the Pinacoteca there, is dated 1545. In his biography of the artist published in the Pitture di Bologna of 1686, Malvasia lists several paintings by Pupini, almost all of which are now lost or destroyed.

As a result of the dearth of known paintings by Biagio Pupini, his artistic personality is best studied in the many distinctive drawings by him that survive. Often on prepared or coloured paper and employing extensive white heightening, these drawings reflect the influence of both the North Italian and Roman traditions, particularly the draughtsmanship of Polidoro da Caravaggio, Parmigianino and Girolamo da Carpi. Pupini drew numerous copies after antique masters, and also several copies after works by Raphael and his followers. Relatively few drawings by Pupini, however, can be related to surviving paintings or frescoes by the artist. The largest extant groups of drawings by Pupini are today in the Louvre and the Uffizi.