Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Giulio Cesare Procaccini (Bologna 1574 - Milan 1625)

Study of a Young Man

Black chalk, with framing lines in brown ink.
Inscribed Giulio Cesare at the lower right.
130 x 95 mm. (5 1/8 x 3 3/4 in.)

This fine drawing is a preparatory study for the head and torso of the archangel Gabriel in one of Procaccini's finest late works, the large altarpiece of The Annunciation of c.1620, which is today in the Louvre (see related image). The painting has been described by Hugh Brigstocke as 'a painting of rare beauty…[combining] a calm, static and almost classical composition, a facture and a colour whose warmth and softness evoke Barocci and Rubens.'

The attribution of this drawing has been confirmed by Nancy Ward Neilson.

Provenance:

Prince Poniatowski.

Artist description:

A painter and sculptor, Giulio Cesare Procaccini was born into an artistic dynasty that included his father Ercole and his brothers Camillo and Carlo Antonio, as well as the latter's son, Ercole Procaccini the Younger. Unlike his elder brother Camillo, who was trained in the late Mannerist artistic milieu of Bologna, Giulio Cesare's artistic education began only after he moved with the rest of his family to Milan

around 1587. His earliest training was as a sculptor, and as a young independent artist he participated in the decoration of the Duomo in Milan. Between 1597 and 1602 he was engaged on the sculptural decoration of the Milanese church of Santa Maria presso San Celso, executing two marble reliefs of the Visitation and the Birth of the Virgin for the facade. Other sculptural projects included work for the Duomo in Cremona in 1597.

It was around 1600 that Procaccini took up painting, and some of his earliest work in this medium, between 1602 and 1607, was in the same church of Santa Maria presso San Celso in Milan where he had earlier worked as a sculptor. His work in the church includes his earliest dated painting, a Pieta of 1604, as well as vault frescoes and an altarpiece of The Martyrdom of Saints Nazaro and Celso, completed in 1606. The interest in scenes of violence that characterize his paintings for Santa Maria presso San Celso remained a constant feature of his work.

Procaccini's eclectic style as a painter, however, has meant that the dating of his paintings remains problematic. In 1610 he painted six large scenes from the life of Saint Carlo Borromeo for the Duomo in Milan, working alongside his Mannerist counterpart Giovanni Battista Crespi, known as Il Cerano. A visit to Genoa in 1618 had a profound effect on his style as a painter, largely as the result of his exposure to the paintings of Rubens that he saw there. Several pictures by Procaccini remain in churches in Genoa. Together with Cerano and Pier Francesco Mazzuchelli, known as Il Morazzone, Procaccini was established as one of the leading Mannerist artists working in Lombardy in the first quarter of the 17th century. Indeed, in one instance the three painters collaborated on a single picture, the Martyrdom of Saints Rufina and Secunda (known as the 'Tre Mani'), painted in the early 1620's and now in the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan. As Ann Sutherland Harris has aptly noted of Procaccini, 'He forged a style as a painter that combines brilliant, rhythmic, impasted brushwork and dense, energetic compositions that exploit both maniera spatial compression and baroque energy.'