

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Pietro NOVELLI (Monreale 1603 - Palermo 1647)

St. Francis Appearing to a Pope and King

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

Inscribed fori(?) no. 42- on the verso.

316 x 231 mm. (12 1/2 x 9 1/8 in.)

Drawn in the artist's very distinctive pen manner, this drawing is a study, with several significant differences, for Monrealese's painting of Saint Louis of France Receiving the Franciscan Girdle from Saint Francis, painted between 1635 and 1637, in the church of Santa Maria di Monte Oliveto (better known as the Badia Nuova) in Palermo. The altarpiece, which has undergone some repainting and has additions on three sides, differs from the drawing in several respects, particularly in the disposition of the figures. As such the present sheet must represent an early stage in the preparatory process. A variant or copy of this drawing is in the collection of the Galleria Regionale della Sicilia in Palermo.

Monrealese had painted the same subject a few years earlier for another Franciscan church, San Francesco d'Assisi in Palermo. The fresco, destroyed in the Palermo earthquake of March 1823, is recorded in an engraving published two years earlier, in 1821. Some elements of the present sheet excluded from the Badia Nuova altarpiece, such as the soldier at the right, may be found in the composition of the lost fresco, which was, however, horizontal in format.

Provenance:

Anonymous sale, London, Sotheby's, 11 June 1981, lot 108

Dr. G.A. Ricci, Rome

Anonymous sale, London, Sotheby's, 18 April 1994, lot 59

P. & D. Colnaghi, London
Private collection.

Exhibitions

Stanford, Stanford University Museum of Art, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Century Italian Drawings from a Private Collection, 1988, no.30; Palermo, Albergo dei Poveri, Pietro Novelli e il suo ambiente, 1990, no.III-19.

Literature:

Palermo, Albergo dei Poveri, Pietro Novelli e il suo ambiente, 1990, p.390, no.III-19, incorrectly illustrated p.391 as no.III-18 (entry by Santina Grasso); Santina Grasso, 'Aggiunte al catalogo di Pietro Novelli disegnatore', Storia dell'arte, 1998, p.353; Eve M. Kahn, "Shock of the Old", Apollo, September 2024, illustrated p.58.

Artist description:

Arguably the only significant painter working in Sicily in the early 17th century, Pietro Novelli, known as Monrealese after his birthplace, was established as an independent artist by 1618. The early influence of Anthony Van Dyck, who was in Palermo in 1624, is evident in Monrealese's fresco of The Coronation of the Virgin, painted in 1630 for the Oratorio del Rosario in Palermo. A trip to mainland Italy between 1631 and 1633 introduced the artist to the naturalism of Neapolitan art, typified by the work of Jusepe de Ribera and Massimo Stanzione. Following his return to Sicily, his paintings displayed a distinct affinity with the Neapolitan tradition, combined with his earlier exposure to Venetian and Flemish styles.

A typical work of this period is the Saint Benedict Distributing the Rule, painted in 1635 for the Benedictine monastery of San Guglielmo in Monreale. Monrealese's paintings are today to be found almost exclusively in Sicily, where he also executed fresco cycles such as those in the Palazzo Normanni in Palermo, painted between 1637 and 1640. He enjoyed a close relationship with the Franciscan order, from whom he received commissions to provide altarpieces for churches such as the Badia Nuova and San Francesco d'Assisi in Palermo. In the last year of his life Monrealese painted two canvases for the church of San Matteo in Palermo.