

Carlo CIGNANI (Bologna 1628 - Forlì 1719)

The Head of a Child Looking Down

Red chalk on buff paper.
A half-length study of a male nude faintly drawn in red chalk on the verso.
287 x 190 mm. (11 1/4 x 7 1/2 in.)

This red chalk study of the head of a child reflects the enduring influence of Correggio on Carlo Cignani's work. The latter was, indeed, regarded by his contemporaries and biographers as the artistic heir to Correggio and Parmigianino; the two great masters of Emilian painting of the previous century.

The physiognomy of the child in the present sheet is close to those of children or putti in several of Cignani's frescoes and paintings of the 1660's and 1670's. Similar features appear, for example, in the frescoed putti flanking medallions decorating the nave of the church of San Michele in Bosco in Bologna, completed in 1665, as well as in several versions of The Five Senses, notably in the Pallavicini collection in Rome and the Galleria Sabauda in Turin.

Artist description:

A pupil of Francesco Albani, Carlo Cignani was among the leading painters in Bologna in the later 17th century, enjoying a stature akin to that of Carlo Maratta in Rome. He was the first director of the Bolognese academy, the Accademia Clementina, and enjoyed the patronage of the Medici and Farnese families, as well as such significant foreign collectors as Prince Johann Adam of Liechtenstein

and Johann Wilhelm Wittelsbach, the Elector Palatine. Something of a perfectionist as a painter, Cignani worked in a very slow and painstaking manner, particularly in the field of fresco painting, in which he was highly regarded by his contemporaries. Among his most important fresco commissions was a cycle of mythological subjects ordered by Duke Ranuccio II Farnese in 1678 for the Palazzo del Giardino in Parma, a project which had been left incomplete by Agostino Carracci some seventy-five years earlier. In completing the work, Cignani was assisted by his chief pupil and disciple, Marcantonio Franceschini. Another significant commission was the extensive fresco decoration of the dome of the Cappella della Madonna del Fuoco in the Duomo at Forlì, which was begun in 1683. Cignani worked on the project - inspired by Correggio's famous cupola frescoes in the Duomo in Parma - for over twenty years, eventually completing the decoration in 1706. He had transferred his studio to Forlì by 1685, and lived and worked there for the remainder of his career. Apart from Franceschini, Cignani's pupils included Giuseppe Maria Crespi, Federico Bencovich and Giovanni Camillo Sagrestani.

Drawings by Carlo Cignani are rare. That his drawings were much admired by contemporary connoisseurs is seen in the fact that his large-scale cartoons for the Palazzo del Giardino in Parma were acquired by Consul Joseph Smith for the Royal Collection and are today at Hampton Court in London.