

Giovanni BILIVERT (Florence 1585 - Florence 1644)

The Archangel Raphael Refusing Tobias's Gift

Red chalk and red wash.
Inscribed Antonio Bilivelti figlio d'un Tedesco, impario dal Cigoli in Firenze; ebbe maniera assai morbida, bel co= / lore, Grazia, Grandezza e nobili paneggiamonti. Orlandi MI on the verso.
393 x 278 mm. (15 1/2 x 11 in.)

ACQUIRED BY THE J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM, LOS ANGELES.

This large drawing, in excellent condition, is a study for Bilivert's painting of The Archangel Gabriel Refusing Tobias's Gifts, one of the artist's best-known works. Completed in 1622, the painting is today in the Palazzo Pitti in Florence.

Provenance:

Jonathan Richardson, Jnr., London (Lugt 2170)
Anonymous sale, London, Sotheby's, 21 May 1963, lot 73
Charles F. Slatkin Gallery, New York
Acquired from them by the Ford Foundation in May 1966
The Ford Foundation, New York.

Literature:

Christel Thiem, Florentiner Zeichner des Frühbarock, Munich, 1977, p.326, no.86, pl.86.

Artist description:

The son of a Dutch goldsmith and jeweller in the service of the Medici court, Giovanni Bilivert (sometimes Biliverti) trained with Alessandro Casolani in Siena before returning to Florence and joining the workshop of Ludovico Cigoli around 1590. He became one of Cigoli's chief assistants, and remained in his studio for some fifteen years. Bilivert worked with Cigoli in Rome between 1604 and 1608, and upon his return to Florence entered the service of the Grand Duke Cosimo II de' Medici, who in 1611 appointed him designer at the Opificio delle Pietre Dure, a salaried post he retained until Cosimo's death in 1621. Bilivert's independent career as a painter, which began in Rome with an altarpiece for the church of San Callisto, continued with much success in Florence. Most of his work was in the form of altarpieces and easel pictures, and he seems to have been uninterested in obtaining fresco commissions.

Among the artist's important Florentine commissions were a painting for the cycle of scenes from the life of Michelangelo for the Casa Buonarotti, painted between 1616 and 1620, a Discovery of the True Cross completed in 1621 for the church of Santa Croce, and a Guardian Angel executed four years later for the Certosa at Galluzzo, just outside the city. Bilivert also worked in Pisa, where he completed an Annunciation and a San Carlo Borromeo in Adoration for the church of San Nicola in 1611, followed several years later by a painting of Daniel and Habbakuk for the Duomo, executed between 1625 and 1630. From around 1636 onwards he produced mainly religious pictures. Some Bilivert's last works are a Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, painted in 1642 for the Florentine church of Santissima Annunziata, and a Miracle of Saint Paul, dated 1644, in San Marco. His pupils and followers included Orazio Fidani – who wrote a manuscript biography of the master - and Agostino Melissi, both of whom derived the composition of a number of their early paintings from drawings by Bilivert.

Somewhat less than four hundred drawings by Bilivert survive, of which the largest groups are today in the Uffizi in Florence, with almost three hundred sheets, and the Louvre in Paris, which houses some forty drawings by or attributed to the artist. Like his teacher Cigoli, Bilivert's drawings were for him an important means of artistic expression. Most of his drawings can be directly related to his paintings, with the same compositions often studied repeatedly; as the 17th century Florentine biographer Filippo Baldinucci noted of Bilivert, 'he always made a great number of studies for his works.' However, he seems not to have made many drawings as autonomous works of art and, unusually for a Florentine artist of the period, produced no drawings of nudes, and almost no landscapes.