

Jacopo PALMA GIOVANE (Venice 1548 - Venice 1628)

A Sheet of Figure Studies with the Virgin or a Female Saint, A Man Kneeling Before a Saint, and Several Figures Before a Lion

Pen and brown ink.
226 x 137 mm. (8 7/8 x 5 3/8 in.)

As Andrew Robison has recently noted, 'Palma effortlessly filled sheet after sheet with pen drawings showing constantly varied presentations of primarily religious subjects...Palma's pen drawings are reminiscent of those by Paolo Veronese. Both artists filled sheets with series of rapid studies, their hands barely keeping up with their thoughts, including different subjects on the same sheet in a sprightly pen...Appropriately for that speed, they both usually drew "alla prima", directly with their pen on the paper, not bothering to begin with chalk or stylus underdrawing...Palma's many drawings produced visual resources he could use or revisit for years to feed the prodigious output of paintings from his hand, and from his studio.'

Although this drawing is a fine and typical example of Palma Giovane's spirited draughtsmanship, none of the three separate studies on the sheet can be definitively related to any surviving painting or fresco by the artist. The figure of the Virgin (or a female saint) at the top of the sheet, for example, appears in a similar pose in several works by the artist, but in each case with significant differences from the figure in the drawing.

Provenance:

The Earls of Crawford and Balcarres, Balcarres House, Colinsburgh, Fife
By descent to a private collection.

Artist description:

Known as Palma Giovane to distinguish him from his great-uncle, the painter Palma Vecchio, Jacopo Negretti studied in Pesaro and Urbino, where he gained the financial support of Guidobaldo II della Rovere, Duke of Urbino. The Duke sent him to complete his studies in Rome, where he spent several years, making copies after the frescoes of Michelangelo and Polidoro da Caravaggio. On his return to Venice in 1573 he may have worked in the studio of Titian, completing the Pietà left unfinished at the master's death in 1576. To the influence of Titian was added that of Tintoretto and Veronese, which Palma combined with his experiences of Roman Mannerism to create what was to be his own distinctive, painterly style.

His first important commission came in 1578, when he provided three paintings for the ceiling of the Sala di Maggior Consiglio in the Palazzo Ducale in Venice. A prolific painter and draughtsman, Palma Giovane enjoyed a long career and received a large number of important commissions in Venice, particularly after the deaths of Tintoretto and Veronese. As well as providing altarpieces and ceiling paintings for numerous Venetian churches, Palma painted a cycle of pictures for the Ospedaletto dei Crociferi between 1583 and 1592 – a rare example in Venice of an entire cycle of paintings entrusted to one artist alone - and continued to contribute to the extensive redecoration of the various rooms of the Palazzo Ducale. He was also a talented portrait painter, although only a handful of examples are known today.

By the beginning of the 17th century Palma Giovane was firmly established as the leading painter in Venice, receiving commissions from patrons throughout Italy and beyond, such as the Emperor Rudolf II in Prague. He had a large and busy workshop, and more than six hundred paintings attributable to him or his studio are known.