

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Niccolò Martinelli, TROMETTA (Pesaro c.1540 - Rome 1611)

The Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, over an underdrawing in black chalk, heightened with white, on blue-green paper.

A fragment of a study of a seated draped figure drawn in black chalk on the verso, backed.
311 x 228 mm. (12 1/4 x 9 in.)

This is a preparatory study for Trometta's most important project; the fresco decoration of the choir of Santa Maria in Aracoeli in Rome, which was so much admired by Baglione. The Aracoeli scheme consisted of three principal frescoes, with The Virgin and Child with Angels in the centre flanked by scenes of Augustus and the Sibyl and Augustus Sacrificing at the Altar, and with figures of the four Evangelists on either side of these. At either end of the vault were rectangular scenes of The Birth of the Virgin and The Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple, while allegorical female figures and various saints completed the scheme. The entire project, completed in 1568 after two years of labour, remains in situ, and is practically the only example of Trometta's work in Rome that survives to this day.

That the Aracoeli commission was regarded by the young Trometta as a critical opportunity to prove his artistic talents on a grand scale is seen in the several drawings for different parts of the entire project that survive. The present sheet is a study for the central figure group of the fresco of The Presentation of the Virgin, with the Virgin mounting the steps of the temple to be greeted by the high priest and his fellow priests.

Only three other preparatory drawings for the Aracoeli fresco of The Presentation of the Virgin are known. Two of these are in the Staatliche Graphische Sammlung in Munich; one showing nearly the full width of the composition and the other studying the central portion and left half of the scene. Another preparatory drawing for the whole composition, of considerable dimensions like the first of the Munich drawings, is in the collection of the Prado in Madrid.

The study in black chalk of the legs of a seated, draped figure on the verso of the present sheet may possibly be a study for the woman seated at the far right of the large compositional drawing in the Prado.

Provenance:

Hazlitt Gooden & Fox, London, in 1988
Pandora Old Masters, New York, in 1999
Private collection.

Exhibitions

London, Hazlitt, Gooden & Fox, European Drawings: Recent Acquisitions, 1988, no.29; New York, Pandora Old Masters Inc., An Exhibition of Old Master Drawings and Oil Sketches, 1999, no.6; Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Splendor and Elegance: European Decorative Arts and Drawings from the Horace Wood Brock Collection, 2009, no.120.

Literature:

London, Hazlitt, Gooden & Fox, European Drawings: Recent Acquisitions, exhibition catalogue, 1988, unpaginated, no.29; New York, Pandora Old Masters Inc., Old Master Drawings and Oil Sketches, 1999, unpaginated, no.6; Nicholas Turner, Museo del Prado: Catálogo de Dibujos. Vol.V: Dibujos Italianos del Siglo XVI, Madrid, 2004, pp.134-135, under no.39; Nicholas Turner, From Michelangelo to Annibale Carracci: A Century of Italian Drawings from the Prado, exhibition catalogue, Pittsburgh and elsewhere, 2008-2009, pp.134-135, under no.39; Horace Wood Brock, Martin P. Levy and Clifford S. Ackley, Splendor and Elegance: European Decorative Arts and Drawings from the Horace Wood Brock Collection, exhibition catalogue, Boston, 2009, p.157, no.120, illustrated p.120; Heiko Damm and Henning Hoesch, ed., galleria portatile: Italienische Handzeichnungen aus der Sammlung Hoesch, Vol.II, Petersberg, 2022, pp.52-57, no.9 (entry by Heiko Damm).

Artist description:

According to his biographer Giovanni Baglione, Niccolò Martinelli, known as Trometta, arrived in Rome from his native Pesaro as a youth and studied with 'il Zuccheri', almost certainly Taddeo Zuccaro. He remained profoundly affected by the example of the elder Zuccaro throughout his career, although he never seems to have matched his success. In the early 1560s Trometta worked with Taddeo and Federico Zuccaro on the decoration of the Casino of Pius IV in the Vatican gardens. He was established as an independent artist by January 1565, when he signed a contract to decorate the chapel of Paolo de Castro in the Roman church of Santa Maria della Consolazione. Shortly thereafter he received the commission for what is regarded as his finest work ('l'opera migliore che egli mai colorisse', in the words of Baglione); the decoration of the vault of the choir of the Roman church of Santa Maria in Aracoeli on the Capitoline Hill, begun in late 1566 and completed within two years. Trometta also decorated two chapels in the same church, while later Roman commissions included the decoration of a chapel in San Omobono in 1584 and four rooms in the palazzo of Cardinal Cesi in 1585; both works were later destroyed.

Trometta worked in several other Roman churches, notably at Santi Apostoli, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Santa Maria della Consolazione, San Francesco a Ripa, Santa Maria della Pace and San Rocco. Apart from the Aracoeli vault frescoes and chapel decorations, as well as another chapel in the church of Santa Maria dell'Orto, painted between 1591 and 1595, and an Adoration of the Shepherds in San Giovanni in Laterano, very little of Trometta's Roman work survives. The artist also painted altarpieces for churches in his native Pesaro, one of which, a Madonna and Child with Saints, is today in the Szépművészeti Múzeum in Budapest, as well as some paintings for the Capuchin church in Frascati and a Last Supper painted in 1568 for the church of San Lorenzo in Tavullia, near Pesaro.

Trometta was almost completely unknown as a draughtsman until John Gere's seminal article in *Master Drawings* in 1963, where a number of drawings by the artist - in Munich, Darmstadt, the Louvre and elsewhere - were identified as preparatory studies for the Aracoeli frescoes. These in turn formed the nucleus of a small corpus of around forty drawings by Trometta assembled by Gere, while further drawings by the artist have since been identified in various public and private collections. The influence of Taddeo Zuccaro is clearly evident in Trometta's drawings, and a number of his studies have long borne traditional attributions to one or other of the Zuccari. Characteristic of Trometta's draughtsmanship is a preference for blue paper, on which the artist drew with great assurance with pen and brown ink and wash, often with extensive white heightening.