

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Pierfrancesco FOSCHI (Florence 1502 - Florence 1567)

The Virgin and Child with the Infant Saint John the Baptist

Red chalk and red wash.

A small sketch of the Virgin and Child(?) in red chalk on the verso.

134 x 108 mm. (5 1/4 x 4 1/4 in.)

Drawings by Pierfrancesco Foschi are very rare. Among the handful of autograph drawings by the artist in public collections are a *Virgin and Child with Saints* in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford and a *Design for a Tabernacle with God the Father and Saints* at Christ Church in Oxford, as well as a *Creation of Adam* in the British Museum in London. A black chalk study of two draped female figures is in the Louvre.

The composition of the present sheet, as noted by Anna Forlani Tempesti when it was exhibited in Florence in 1980, may be related to Foschi's painting of *The Holy Family with the Young Saint John the Baptist*, today in the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence. Indeed, this drawing may have been an initial preparatory study for the painting, which has been dated to the early years of Foschi's career, between 1525 and 1535. As Alessandro Cecchi has noted of the painting, 'The composition, densely populated by figures ranged diagonally, reveals on the one hand its debt to the altarpieces of Andrea del Sarto, in the pose of St Joseph and in the typology of the Christ Child and the young St John. But it shows the unmistakable style of Pier Francesco, who skillfully combines the sharp contours of faces and limbs with the ample masses of the bodies and draperies.'

The present sheet was first published by a previous owner, Myril Pouncey, in a pioneering article on Foschi's drawings in *The Burlington Magazine* in 1957. As Pouncey noted, 'Pierfrancesco di Jacopo di

Domenico [F]oschi's main claim to fame is that he is often mistaken for Pontormo. Yet this minor Florentine artist of the mid-sixteenth century has a personality of his own, even if it is somewhat limited in range and development.' Going on to describe Foschi as 'a sensitive and gifted draughtsman', Pouncey assembled a small group of five drawings that she attributed to the artist. Writing of the present sheet, she added that, 'I would say that the little Madonna and Child with the Infant St John is the most attractive drawing of the group were it not that it belongs to me. The abandon with which the Child reclines on the Virgin's lap contrasts delightfully with her somewhat tense mood as she prepares to suckle Him. Here, more than in the other drawings, we are reminded of Pontormo, by whom [F]oschi seems to be influenced in his vivacious handling of the red chalk and in the firm modelling of such passages as the Madonna's left arm with its reflected lights. But only [F]oschi could have realized her peculiar egg-shaped head which we encounter again and again in paintings and drawings alike. In the general development of Florentine style in the field of drawings this little study takes its place in the succession that leads from Pontormo down through Maso di San Friano and on to Giovanni Balducci at the end of the century.'

Exhibitions

Florence, Palazzo Strozzi, Firenze e la Toscana dei Medici nell'Europa del Cinquecento: Il primato del disegno, 1980, p.117, no.219.

Literature:

Myril Pouncey, 'Five Drawings by Pierfrancesco di Jacopo di Domenico Toschi', *The Burlington Magazine*, May 1957, pp.158-159, fig.25; Florence, Palazzo Strozzi, *Il primato del disegno*, 1980, p.117, no.219 (entry by Anna Forlani Tempesti), not illustrated.

Artist description:

The Florentine Mannerist painter Pierfrancesco di Jacopo Foschi (formerly, and incorrectly, known as Toschi) was a pupil of Andrea del Sarto, according to the brief mentions of him in Giorgio Vasari's *Vite*, and indeed a number of copies by him of works by Sarto are known. He appears to have been working as an independent artist by around 1529, when he is recorded as sharing a studio with his father in Florence. Foschi was a younger contemporary of the painter Jacopo da Pontormo, whom he assisted on the frescoes for the loggia of the Medici villa at Careggi in 1536. He also worked on some of the temporary decorations erected in Florence to celebrate the marriage of Cosimo de' Medici to Eleanor of Toledo in 1539, and that of Francesco de' Medici to Giovanna of Austria in 1565. Foschi received commissions from important clerics and members of the Florentine nobility, and produced altarpieces for several churches in Florence, Pisa and elsewhere in Tuscany. As one modern scholar has noted, his religious paintings are characterized by a 'simplicity and directness...a didactic clarity which only increased over the course of his long career as his style became more severe, sombre and monumental.' Perhaps the artist's best known works are three altarpieces – an Immaculate Conception with Saints Jerome, Augustine, Anselm and Bernard, a Resurrection of Christ and a Transfiguration – painted between 1540 and 1546 for the Florentine church of Santo Spirito. Foschi may also be noted for his portraiture, of which he was among the finest exponents in Florence in the 1530s and 1540s. His portraits, which often display a particular psychological insight, reflect the influences of Pontormo, Agnolo Bronzino and Francesco Salviati. One of the founders of the Accademia del Disegno in Florence in 1563, Foschi counted among his pupils Maso da San Friano.