

Donato CRETI (Cremona 1672 - Bologna 1749)

Five Drawings on an Album Page: a. A Mythological Female Figure (Diana?), Looking Up to the Left b. A Winged Putto, Flying to the Right c. A Winged Putto, Flying to the Left d. The Head of a Woman, Resting her Chin on her Hand (Mary Magdalene?) e. The Head of a Bearded Man

Each pen and brown ink, of circular (a) or oval (b-e) format.

Each drawing laid down, within a wash mount with gold lines, on an album page.

The album page inscribed Donato Creti., and, in a modern hand, Cremonese at the bottom.

Faintly inscribed [?]ed as one Number at the bottom of the album page.

Further inscribed Tutti di Donato Creti di Bologna on the verso.

Each drawing stamped with the collector's mark of John McGouan (Lugt 1496) on the reverse of the album page.

a. 91 x 91 mm. (3 5/8 x 3 5/8 in.)

b. 59 x 77 mm. (2 3/8 x 3 in.)

c. 62 x 78 mm. (2 1/2 x 3 in.)

d. 119 x 90 mm. (4 5/8 x 3 1/2 in.)

e. 115 x 90 mm. (4 1/2 x 3 1/2 in.)

The album page: 508 x 383 mm. (20 x 15 in.)

The top and two bottom drawings on this album page may be fully attributed to Donato Creti, but the two drawings of putti appear to be the work of an artist in his studio or circle. The facial types of the three drawings by Creti are found throughout his oeuvre as a draughtsman. The head of the bearded man, for example, is very close in physiognomy to a lost painting by Creti of The Head of an Old Man, and to a closely related drawing of the same model, drawn in black chalk, in the Albertina in Vienna.

The attribution of the three drawings by Creti on this album page has been confirmed by Marco Riccòmini, who suggests that the circular drawing at the top may have been part of a larger composition. Two similar album pages, each containing seven small drawings by or attributed to Creti, were once in the collection of the 18th century painter Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792); one of these is today in the Courtauld Gallery in London, while the other was sold at auction in London in 19264.

Relatively little is known of the 18th century Scottish lawyer and collector John McGouan (or McGowan), who died in Edinburgh in 1803. A founder member of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, his collection of prints and drawings was sold and dispersed at two posthumous auctions in London in 1803 and 1804. Several drawings from McGouan's collection, including the present sheet, were acquired by the Scottish banker Sir William Forbes, 7th Baronet of Pitsligo (1773-1828).

Artist description:

At the age of fifteen, following an apprenticeship with Lorenzo Pasinelli, Donato Creti came to the attention of Count Alessandro Fava. The Bolognese count became the artist's protector and first patron, and the young Creti lived and worked in the Palazzo Fava for a number of years before becoming an independent master. In around 1700 he received a commission from the Counts of Novellara to decorate their family palace, and in 1708 he completed a large fresco of Alexander Cutting the Gordian Knot in the Palazzo Pepoli Campogrande in Bologna. Apart from fresco decorations, the early part of his career was taken up with secular commissions for easel pictures, such as the series of mythological subjects painted in monochrome for Marcantonio Collina Sbaraglia and now in the Collezioni Communale dell'Arte in Bologna. Together with other Bolognese and Venetian artists, Creti contributed to several of the well-known series of allegorical Tombs commissioned by Owen McSwiny in the 1720's and 1730's. Throughout the 1730's and 1740's, Creti produced several important altarpieces for churches in Emilia-Romagna and as far away as Palermo.

In his biography of the artist, Giampietro Zanotti writes that Creti's drawings were highly regarded by his contemporaries. (The painter Marcantonio Franceschini, for one, praised the artist as a 'grandissimo disegnatore'.) He learned to draw from the nude in the studio of Pasinelli, and in general preferred to use pen and ink wash for his studies, drawn with a rapid, calligraphic stroke, although he also produced head studies in chalk. Landscapes, figure studies and portraits make up the bulk of Creti's drawings, many of which, according to Zanotti, were given away as presents by the artist.