Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Marcantonio BASSETTI (Verona 1588 - Verona 1630)

A Triumphal Procession with Musicians Before a Chariot and Horsemen Behind

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, extensively heightened with cream oil paint, on two joined sheets of paper.

Laid down on an old mount.

145 x 570 mm. (5 3/4 x 22 3/8 in.)

A fervent and gifted draughtsman, Marcantonio Bassetti began to favour drawing over painting in his later years. An important group of monochromatic oil sketches on paper by the artist, similar in technique to the present example, is today in the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle. In his catalogue of that collection Anthony Blunt provided a succinct description of Bassetti's distinctive draughtsmanship: 'His drawings are executed in the late sixteenth-century Venetian method of almost grisaille oils on paper, but they are characterized by a type of closed composition, with the figures crowded into the front of the space, and by a method of modelling the form in little lumps or nobs, emphasized by the strong highlights added in pure white pigment. The 'ropy' treatment of the draperies combines with this to create a curiously broken high-relief pattern of lights and shades.' The artist himself seems to have regarded his drawings as akin to his paintings, to judge by his comment, in a letter of 1616 to Palma Giovane, that 'quanto si disegna, si dipinge ancora' ('when one draws, one also paints').

Bassetti's monochromatic drawings, executed with a combination of pen and ink wash and oils on paper, seem to have been done not as studies for paintings but were rather intended as independent works of art. That they were highly prized by collectors, and particularly foreign visitors to Verona, is seen in a comment made by his biographer, Carlo Ridolfi, in his Le maraviglie dell'arte, published in 1648. Ridolfi praised Bassetti's drawings, 'which he used to heighten with white and black oil paint on the paper', and noted that 'one still sees many drawings executed in this manner and which he mostly made during the winter, displaying them around his studio, and which he still used to sell to those who took delight in studying, and in particular to the foreigners who passed through Verona.'

This is one of a pair of processional scenes, which appear to form a continuous narrative composition. They may be likened on stylistic grounds to several of the large group of more than twenty drawings by Bassetti in the Royal Library at Windsor Castle. This drawing is, in particular, of similar dimensions and almost identical composition to a frieze-like drawing of The Triumph of Caesar at Windsor. The composition of the Windsor drawing ends somewhat abruptly at the left edge, and it has been suggested that the scene may have been continued on another, separate sheet, now lost. Also similar in format is a drawing of a Battle Scene by Bassetti at Windsor, which, like The Triumph of Caesar, was probably acquired with the collection of Consul Joseph Smith by King George III in 1762.

Literature:

Andrea Piai, 'Disegni di Marcantonio Bassetti e di altri artisti veronesi della sua generazione', *Verona Illustrata*, 2020, p.65, fig.41.

Artist description:

Following a period of training in the studio of Felice Brusasorci in Verona, where he studied alongside other local painters such as Alessandro Turchi and Pasquale Ottino, Marcantonio Bassetti was in Venice by about 1605. There he met the Venetian painter Palma Giovane, with whom he may have worked as an assistant, and who certainly had a profound influence on his draughtsmanship. Around 1616 Bassetti travelled to Rome, where he worked with Carlo Saraceni and became strongly influenced by the Caravaggism of Saraceni and Orazio Borgianni. He became a member of the Roman Accademia di San Luca, and between 1616 and 1617 participated in the decoration of the Sala Regia in the Palazzo Quirinale. While in Rome, Bassetti painted a Martyrdom of Saints Vito, Fermo and Rustico for the Augustinian church in Munich, followed a few years later by an altarpiece of Five Bishop Martyrs for the Veronese church of Santo Stefano. By 1620 he had returned to his native Verona, where he earned commissions for several altarpieces for local churches. He also worked on a series of portraits, most of which are today in the Museo del Castelvecchio in Verona. Bassetti died during the plague of 1630, at the age of around forty-four.