

Aureliano MILANI (Bologna 1675 - Bologna 1749)

Ecce Homo

Pen and brown ink and grey wash, over traces of an underdrawing in black chalk.

Made up at the lower left corner.

Inscribed Ludovico [crossed out] Caracci / Aureliano Milani on the verso.

286 x 215 mm. (11 1/4 x 8 1/2 in.)

The composition of this drawing by Aureliano Milani is similar to that of a painting by Agostino Carracci of the same subject, datable to 1589-1590, which is now in the Galleria Durazzo Pallavicini in Genoa. (Indeed, the present sheet was at one time published as a preparatory study by Agostino Carracci for the painting now in Genoa.) Carracci's painting was recorded by the contemporary Bolognese biographer Carlo Cesare Malvasia as being in the Casa Melari in Bologna. Given Milani's close study of the Carracci in his youth, this drawing is likely to date from the early part of his career in Bologna, before he moved to Rome.

The present sheet may be stylistically compared with a number of other drawings by Milani inspired by Carraccesque models and depicting episodes from Christ's Passion, including a study of The Capture of Christ in the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Bologna and a Crowning with Thorns in a private collection, as well as a Flagellation of Christ sold at auction in 2000.

This drawing once belonged to the portrait painter and collector Thomas Hudson (1701-1779). From 1741 onwards, Hudson formed a significant collection of drawings and prints, with a particular emphasis on the work of Rubens, Van Dyck and Rembrandt, many acquired from the 1747 sale of the collection formed by his father-in-law, Jonathan Richardson Senior. Hudson also collected Italian drawings of the 16th and 17th centuries. At the sale of his collection held in London in 1779, the auction catalogue described the drawings as 'a Collection selected with acknowledged Taste, and forming, as it is presumed, a Cabinet of Drawings superior to any private Collection in this Kingdom.' Almost all of the drawings in the Hudson sale were sold in small groups, with no indication of the subject matter of individual sheets.

Literature:

Alessandro Brogi, 'Su un dipinto di Agostino Carracci, e il suo disegno', Paragone, January 1992, p.39, pl.53 (as Agostino Carracci); Diederik Bakhuys et al., Le dessin en Italie dans les collections publiques françaises. Le Génie de Bologne des Carracci aux Gandolfi: Dessins des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles, exhibition catalogue, Rouen, 2006-2007, p.216, under no.101.

Artist description:

Trained in Bologna by a succession of minor painters, Aureliano Milani received his true artistic education from his close study of the Carracci. Gianpietro Zanotti, in his biography of the artist, noted that the young Milani made drawn copies after the works of the Carracci ('a disegnare le opere de' suddetti Carracci'), and in particular the frescoes of the Palazzo Fava in Bologna. Milani's first datable work is an Annunciation in the convent church of Santa Maria dei Servi in Bologna, painted in 1705. Relatively few paintings survive from Milani's early years as an independent artist in Bologna, however, of which the most important is an altarpiece of Saint Jerome and the Blessed Ghisilieri in the church of Santa Maria della Vita, painted around 1718. The following year Milani settled in Rome, where he was to work for the remainder of his career. He painted altarpieces for such churches as Santi Giovanni e Paolo and San Bartolomeo dei Bergamaschi and also undertook several important decorative projects, notably a fresco cycle of the Labours of Hercules for the vault of the gallery of the Palazzo Doria Pamphili, painted in 1732. He also painted a number of genre subjects, typified by a Market Scene in a Roman Square now in the Museo Civico in Pesaro.

Milani's drawings were highly praised by his biographers, both of whom noted that he had a better contemporary reputation as a draughtsman than as a painter. Zanotti admired the artist's animated figures ('uomini nudi, muscolosi, e terribili') and diversity of subject matter, while Luigi Crespi noted of Milani that 'He made many drawings, and in truth his drawings are equal to those of any great master, for their character, for their immediacy, for their magnificence, and for the ease of execution, with which they are touched, heightened and shadowed'.