Federico ZUCCARO (Sant'Angelo in Vado 1543 - Ancona 1609)

The Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, heightened with white, over an underdrawing in black chalk, on two joined sheets of paper, with framing lines in black chalk.

Made up at the lower corners, and laid down.

530 x 285 mm. (20 7/8 x 11 1/4 in.) at greatest dimensions.

This very large drawing is a preliminary compositional study, with several significant differences, for one of Federico Zuccaro's most significant late works; the monumental altarpiece of The Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence in the Chiesa dei Cappuccini in Fermo, which is signed and dated 1602. (The painting was was long thought to be by Taddeo Zuccaro, before Federico's initials were revealed when the large canvas was cleaned and restored in 1979.) The Fermo altarpiece, for which the artist was paid 200 scudi, was the last of Federico's three depictions of the subject of the death of Saint Lawrence, following an altarpiece in the Roman church of San Lorenzo in Damaso, commissioned from Taddeo but painted by Federico in 1568, and the centrepiece of the large retablo mayor at the Escorial, painted between 1586 and 1588, but now lost and known only through an engraving by Pierre Perret of 1589. The Fermo painting appears to be particularly inspired by Titian's great Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence of c.1557-1558, today in the Venetian church of the Gesuiti, which Federico must have seen

on one of his three visits to Venice. (He would also have known the later version of the subject that Titian painted in 1567 for Philip II of Spain, which was on the high altar of the church of San Lorenzo at the Escorial when he was working there twenty years later.)

James Mundy has kindly confirmed the attribution of the present sheet, and has noted that it is an autograph version or copy of another drawing by Federico Zuccaro, of similar dimensions, in the collection of the Uffizi in Florence. He further suggests that the present sheet and the Uffizi drawing, which both show significant differences from the finished painting, particularly in the background, should be regarded as studies for the Fermo altarpiece, for which no other preparatory drawings are known.

This drawing bears the collector's mark of the Cypriot art dealer and collector Nicos Dhikeos (1896-1987), who had settled in France by 1916. He lived in Lyon, where he owned a gallery dealing in Old Masters, and from 1930 onwards assembled a large and varied group of Old Master and 19th Century drawings, primarily of the Italian and French schools. While much of his collection were acquired at auction, Dhikeos also bought large groups of drawings from the heirs of the 20th century collectors Dr. A. Tardieu and Louis Maudet. The drawings were largely dispersed in the years following Dhikeos's death in 1987, and sheets from the collection are today in the British Museum in London, the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, the Louvre in Paris and the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C., among many other institutions.

Artist description:

One of the most important and influential painters of the late 16th century in Italy, Federico Zuccaro was trained in the Roman workshop of his elder brother Taddeo from about the age of ten. Between 1560 and 1563 he assisted his brother on the decoration of the Casino of Pius IV and the Belvedere in the Vatican. He spent the next three years in Florence and Venice, where he painted the fresco decoration of the Grimani chapel in the church of San Francesco della Vigna, before returning to Rome. After Taddeo's death in September 1566 Federico completed many of his brother's unfinished projects, including fresco cycles in the Palazzo Farnese at Caprarola (where he served as capomaestro) and the Sala Regia of the Vatican and the Pucci Chapel in the Roman church of Santa Trinità dei Monti. He also worked on several commissions of his own, such as two altarpieces for the Duomo at Orvieto, painted in 1568, and the decoration of the vault of the Sala di Ercole in the Palazzo Farnese at Caprarola, a project from which he was, however, dismissed in 1569.

Federico Zuccaro was among the most well travelled artists of his day. Unlike Taddeo, he travelled throughout Italy, working in Venice, Florence, Orvieto, Bologna, Urbino, Pavia, Turin, Parma and Mantua, while also visiting France, the Netherlands and England between 1574 and 1575. On his return he received a commission to complete the decoration of the cupola of the Duomo in Florence, begun by Vasari and completed by Zuccaro between 1576 and 1579. The next year he was back in Rome, contributing to the decoration of the Cappella Paolina of the Vatican, before departing for Venice, where he worked between 1582 and 1584. He established a particular practice of making drawings after works of art that he saw on his journeys; a sort of visual travel diary that attests to a broad and wide-ranging interest in the different schools of painting in Italy. (As the Zuccaro scholar James Mundy has noted, 'Federico was completely without prejudice in his omnivorous ingestion of the work of other artists, both past and present.') In 1585 he was summoned by Philip II to Spain, where he painted eight canvases for the retablo mayor, or high altar, of the Basilica of San Lorenzo at El Escorial, as well as cloister frescoes in the attached monastery. Elected the first principe of the reorganized Accademia di San Luca in 1593, Zuccaro continued to receive important commissions late into his career. He built a fine palace for himself in Rome, now the home of the Biblioteca Hertziana. Near the end of his career he wrote an artistic treatise entitled L'idea de' pittori, scultori et architetti, published in 1607.

A gifted draughtsman, Federico Zuccaro was much influenced by the drawings of his elder brother, particularly early in his long career. However, as Julian Brooks has noted, 'Federico's style was less dramatic than Taddeo's, and he answered the demands of the Catholic Church for a clearer, more iconic art. His drawings and compositions are tidier than those of Taddeo, with less robust figures, a greater interest in decorative effects, and occasionally complex iconography.' Furthermore, Federico's peripatetic career, together with his inveterate copying of the work of other artists, exposed him to a wider range of artistic influences, which often found their way into his drawings and paintings. As Mundy has pointed out, 'Whereas it would be fair to say that Taddeo's style was invented in Rome, Federico's was forged in an international crucible…The wide stylistic range of drawings might be expected but it still, at times, surprises the viewer.'