

Jacopo LIGOZZI (Verona c.1549 - Florence 1632)

The Meeting of Saints Francis, Dominic and Angelus of Jerusalem at San Giovanni in Laterano, Rome

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, heightened with gold, on two joined sheets of paper, backed and varnished.

705 x 520 mm. (27 3/4 x 20 1/2 in.)

Unusually large in scale among Ligozzi's extant oeuvre of drawings, this is a finished composition study for one of a series of lunette frescoes of scenes from the life of Saint Francis of Assisi, painted by Ligozzi in the cloister of the church of the Ognissanti in Florence. The artist received the commission for this vast mural project around 1599, and worked on it over the next two decades or so, eventually completing seventeen of the thirty-one frescoes in the cloister. Starting in the southeast corner and working clockwise, Ligozzi painted every lunette fresco on the south and east walls of the cloister, as well as the two on the northwest corner. The remaining lunettes on the north and west sides were painted by other artists, sometimes working from Ligozzi's designs, including Giovanni da San Giovanni, Filippo Tarchiani, Nicodemo Ferrucci and Galeazzo Ghidoni. The painting of the cloister frescoes seems to have been largely completed by 1624.

This large and highly-finished drawing, almost certainly made to be presented to the friars of the church for their approval, is a modello for one of the last frescoes painted by Ligozzi at Ognissanti, depicting the meeting of Saints Francis, Dominic and Angelus in the church of Saint John Lateran in Rome in 1215. The lunette fresco of this scene is found at the eastern end of the north wall of the cloister, and was probably painted around 1620. Like many of the other frescoes in the cloister at Ognissanti, which have long been exposed to the elements, the lunette of The Meeting of Saints Francis, Dominic and Angelus of Jerusalem at San Giovanni in Laterano had suffered damage and sustained significant

losses, particularly in the foreground, by the early 20th century. Nevertheless, the appearance of the fresco is accurately recorded in an engraving made in the 19th century.

This drawing is the only known preparatory study for the fresco. It differs little from the final painting, apart from the area of the foreground at the lower right. Here the prominent figure of the seated youth seen in the present sheet was replaced in the fresco by a mendicant friar and a young boy, as can be seen in the reproductive engraving. Although the Ognissanti cloister frescoes underwent a major program of restoration in the 1980s, the lower foreground part of this fresco remains irreparably lost today.

A number of other highly-finished compositional drawings by Ligozzi for the Ognissanti frescoes are known, some of which, like the present sheet, are heightened with gold. These include four drawings at Christ Church in Oxford6, two sheets in the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin, and single examples in the Uffizi in Florence, the Art Institute of Chicago and the Louvre in Paris. Other drawings related to the Ognissanti frescoes include two studies for individual figures; one in the Uffizi and the other in the Städel Museum in Frankfurt.

With its dark ground and delicate highlights in gold, this drawing reveals the influence on Ligozzi of chiaroscuro woodcuts by such Northern artists as Albrecht Altdorfer and Hans Burgkmair the Elder. Among stylistically comparable drawings by the artist, although considerably smaller than the present sheet, is a highly-finished study for an unknown altarpiece or fresco of The Virgin Blessing Two Monks, Accompanied by Saints Mary Magdalene, Agnes, Cecilia and Catherine, with Christ and Angels Above, in the De Pass Collection at the Royal Cornwall Museum in Truro.

Exhibitions

New York, W. M. Brady & Co., Master Drawings 1520-1890, 2006, no.9.

Literature:

Lucilla Conigliello, Drawing Gallery: Ligozzi, exhibition catalogue, Paris, 2005, p.71, under no.20.

Artist description:

Born into a family of painters and decorators in Verona, Jacopo Ligozzi spent almost the entirety of his long career in Florence, where he arrived in 1575, summoned by the Grand Duke Francesco I de' Medici. Trained as a miniaturist (it is interesting to note that even in his large paintings he often signed his name as 'Jacopo Ligozzi miniator'), he was admitted into the Florentine Accademia del Disegno in 1582. Ligozzi worked as court artist for four successive Medici Grand Dukes, from Francesco I to Ferdinando II, executing numerous designs for tapestries, furniture, glass, jewellery, pietra dura and metalwork. According to Medici inventories, however, much of his work took the form of small-scale paintings, often of a devotional or emblematic nature.

Ligozzi's first important public commissions came in the 1590's, notably two monumental historical scenes, painted on slate, for the Salone dei Cinquecento of the Palazzo Vecchio, completed in 1592.

He painted altarpieces for such local churches as Santa Maria Novella, San Marco and San Giovannino degli Scolopi. He also painted altarpieces for churches elsewhere in Tuscany; in Bibbiena, Poppi, Arezzo and at Monte Oliveto Maggiore, and returned briefly to his native Verona around 1591. Ligozzi's best-known works as a painter are, however, a series of seventeen lunette frescoes of scenes from the life of Saint Francis for the church of Ognissanti in Florence, completed in 1600. The artist became increasingly devout as he grew older, and among his late altarpieces is a Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence for the Florentine church of Santa Croce, painted in 1611. His last Medici commission was for a series of four paintings of the Passion of Christ, painted between 1621 and 1622 for Maria Maddalena of Austria, mother of the young Grand Duke Ferdinando II and co-regent during his minority.

Ligozzi was a superbly gifted draughtsman, and was esteemed as such by his contemporaries. As one modern scholar has noted, 'The most authentic, coherent vein of Jacopo's work is expressed in his graphic output: he was a born draughtsman, a draughtsman of immense precision, of drawings so meticulous as to occasionally become for the artist and his commissioners works of art for their own sake, and sought after as such.' It is interesting to note that, when Ligozzi was engaged as a court artist by the Medici Granducal court in the early 1620's, the terms of his employment were tied to his output as a draughtsman. As the document noted, 'If there is no occasion to employ him, have him do drawings to keep him in the gallery…just have him draw, leave it up to him, whatever he does he will produce sheets worth keeping, and for that very reason we want him at court.'

Ligozzi's drawings exhibited a wide range of subject matter that included religious scenes, allegories, designs for glassware and costume studies, as well as literary subjects, notably a series of episodes from Dante's Divina Commedia, drawn between 1587 and 1588. In keeping with Grand Duke Francesco I's interest in natural history, Ligozzi also produced a large number of scientific drawings depicting specimens of fishes, birds and flowers in the Granducal collections. An album of such drawings is recorded in the Medici Guaradroba in 1619, and a large number of natural history drawings by Ligozzi are today in the Uffizi; some of these were also used to illustrate the treatises of the Bolognese naturalist Ulisse Aldovrandi. Ligozzi also provided a number of designs for printmakers such as Agostino Carracci, Philippe Thomassin and the chiaroscuro woodcutter Andrea Andreani. Whatever the subject, Ligozzi's drawings are invariably highly finished, often heightened with touches of gold, and combine a meticulous technique with a miniaturist's attention to detail.