

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Giorgio GANDINI DEL GRANO (Parma c.1489 - Parma 1538)

Sheet of Studies of the Virgin and Child with the Infant Saint John the Baptist

Red chalk, pen and brown ink, with touches of brown wash and white heightening.

Inscribed (by the artist) *la salute la / qual d[omi]ni* at the upper right, *-liva(?)* at the left centre edge, and *Pada(?)* at the lower right.

Illegibly numbered (201?) or inscribed at the lower left.

169 x 140 mm. (6 5/8 x 5 1/2 in.)

This fine sheet, like several of Giorgio Gandini del Grano's drawings, was once attributed to both Correggio and the Lombard artist Bernardino Gatti, known as *Il Sojaro* (c.1495-1575), who was also much influenced by Correggio. The present sheet was first attributed to Gandini by David Ekserdjian in 1996, and the attribution has since been confirmed in print by Andrea Muzzi in 2004, Francesca Frucco - in her catalogue raisonné of the artist's drawings - in 2010, and most recently by Mary Vaccaro in 2015.

As Vaccaro has noted of Gandini, 'The artist's corpus of drawings demonstrates stylistic coherence, technical range, and high quality. In approach, he exhibits strong analogies with his putative mentor, and many sheets once believed to be by Correggio, and later given to Gatti, are now recognized as his. He adopted Correggio's preferred medium of red chalk, as did Gatti, but in a different manner to both of them. Their chalk strokes tend to be rounded, whereas Gandini's are more linear with sharply defined contours...Although Gandini, like Correggio and Gatti, utilized pen and ink to elaborate initial sketches in chalk, he exploited ink's potential more extensively and fluently than either of them. At times, Gandini's sensibility for line is almost akin to calligraphy.'

A stylistically comparable double-sided sheet of studies of The Holy Family and the Virgin and Child by Gandini is in the Uffizi in Florence. As Vaccaro writes of the Uffizi drawing and the present sheet, each of which includes text in a distinctive hand that is probably be the artist's own; 'both [drawings] investigate alternative compositional solutions. A sequence of visual ideas for the Virgin and Child with the Infant Baptist, filled with lively pentiments, spills across each page. Surprisingly ahead of its time, such an energetic and experimental style of draftsmanship is usually associated with later sixteenth-century artists, especially Taddeo Zuccaro (1529-1566) and Federico Barocci (c.1533-1612).'

The studies on the present sheet may also be related to Gandini's small painting of The Rest on the Flight into Egypt of c.1535, formerly in the Roschier-Holmberg and Mickwitz collections in Finland and recently acquired by the Sinebrychoff Art Museum of the Finnish National Gallery in Helsinki. A preparatory study by Gandini for the Helsinki painting, today in the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle, is also compositionally similar to the present sheet.

Among other stylistically analogous drawings by Gandini is a Virgin and Child with Saints in the Gallerie dell'Accademia in Venice and a drawing of four studies of seated angels in the collection of the Dukes of Devonshire at Chatsworth. Also similar in handling and technique are a drawing of two embracing figures in the Uffizi and a study of The Virgin and Child with Angels Crowning Saint Catherine in the British Museum.

The present sheet has a long and distinguished provenance dating back to the 17th century. Its first known owner was the portrait painter Sir Peter Lely (1618-1680), whose renowned collection of nearly ten thousand drawings, the largest ever seen in England up to that time, was dispersed at auction in 1688 and 1694. The drawing was then acquired by either the South Sea Company director Richard Houlditch (c.1659-1736), or his son Richard Houlditch, Junior (d.1760), both of whom collected drawings.

The drawing then entered the collection of Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792), the leading portrait painter in England in the 18th century, whose fame and success allowed him to assemble one of the largest collections of paintings, drawings and prints of his day. Reynolds's collection of several thousand drawings, for the most part Italian works of the 16th and 17th centuries, was dispersed at two auctions in 1794 and 1798. The present sheet was among fifty-four sheets by or attributed to Correggio owned by Reynolds, and while in his collection it was reproduced as a fine example of Correggio's draughtsmanship in an engraving by William Wynne Ryland for Charles Rogers's two-volume compendium *A Collection of Prints in Imitation of Drawings*, published in 1778.

In the early 20th century, the present sheet came into the possession of the noted Swiss collector Dr. Tobias Christ (1888-1941) of Basel, and thence passed to the Swiss art historian and museum director Hans Schneider (1888-1953), before being sold at auction in Bern in 1952. The drawing then remained in a Swiss private collection for the next sixty-eight years, and has only been exhibited once before, in Zurich in 2013.

Exhibitions

Zurich, Graphische Sammlung ETH, Zwiesgespräch mit Zeichnungen: Werke des 15. bis 18. Jahrhunderts aus der Sammlung Robert Landolt, 2013-2014, no.16.

Literature:

Charles Rogers, *A Collection of Prints in Imitation of Drawings, to Which are Annexed Lives of Their Authors with Explanatory and Critical Notes*, London, 1778, Vol.II, pp.13-14 (as Correggio); Rudolph Weigel, *Die Werke der Maler in ihren Handzeichnungen*, Leipzig, 1865, p.164, no.1891 (as Correggio); Julius Meyer, *Correggio*, Leipzig, 1871, p.507, no.726 (as Correggio); A. E. Popham, *Correggio's Drawings*, London, 1957, p.176, no.A19 (as Bernardino Gatti); David Ekserdjian, 'Correggio tradotto. By Massimo Mussini' [book review], *The Burlington Magazine*, October 1996, p.693, under no.574, fig.74 (as Gandini del Grano); Mario di Giampaolo and Andrea Muzzi, *Il Parmigianino e il Fascino di Parma*, exhibition catalogue, Florence, 2003, pp.128-130, under no.70, fig.90; Andrea Muzzi, 'Aggiunte a Giorgio Gandini del Grano disegnatore', in Alessandra Talignani et al, *Parmigianino e la scuola di Parma: Atti del convegno, Casalmaggiore e Viadana 5 Aprile 2003*, Viadana, 2004, pp.30-32, fig.5, p.36, note 12; Francesca Frucchi, 'Per Gandini disegnatore', in Vittoria Romani, ed., *Studi sul disegno padano del Rinascimento*, Verona, 2010, p.150, pp.173-174, no.12, fig.15; Michael Matile, ed., *Zwiesgespräch mit Zeichnungen: Werke des 15. bis 18. Jahrhunderts aus der Sammlung Robert Landolt*, exhibition catalogue, Zurich, 2013-2014, pp.49-51, no.16, also illustrated on the frontispiece (entry by Mary Vaccaro); Mary Vaccaro, 'After Correggio: Drawings by Giorgio Gandini del Grano for Parma Cathedral', *Master Drawings*, Spring 2015, pp.64-65, fig.6, pp.78-79, note 35; Arlene Blankers and John McEwen, 'My favourite painting: Studies of the Virgin and Child with the Infant Baptist by Giorgio Gandini del Grano', *Country Life*, 7 April 2021, p.70.

Artist description:

Very little is known of the Parmesan artist Giorgio Gandini del Grano, including the precise year of his birth, and he is only first mentioned in documents in 1528, a decade before his death. He is thought to have been a pupil and assistant of Correggio, who was certainly a profound influence on his style. (As one modern scholar has noted, 'Of all Correggio's followers, Giorgio Gandini del Grano may have been the closest and the one who, among his nearest contemporaries, seems to have understood him best.'). Gandini seems to have enjoyed a considerable reputation in his native Parma. This is evidenced by the fact that in June 1535 he was commissioned to complete the mural decoration of the choir and apse of the city's cathedral, part of a large project initially given to Correggio in 1522. While Correggio completed the painting of the interior of the cupola, he did not finish any of the remaining decoration in the church. The year after the master's death, Gandini was granted the commission to complete the work, for which he was to be paid 350 gold scudi. However, Gandini likewise died before being able to begin work in the cathedral, although he produced several preparatory drawings and full-scale cartoons for the project. (The decoration was eventually completed by Girolamo Mazzola Bedoli around 1544.) Among the most significant of Gandini's few surviving paintings is an altarpiece of The Holy Family with Saints Michael and Bernard, commissioned for the high altar of the church of San Michele in Parma and now in the Galleria Nazionale there.

The corpus of extant drawings generally accepted as by Giorgio Gandini del Grano numbers around forty-five sheets, many of which display the strong influence of Correggio, his presumed master. As Diane DeGrazia has written, Gandini's drawings show that he was 'an artist of considerable talent and originality whose vocabulary was based on Correggio but whose compositional sense was that of a classic mannerist, somewhat like Bedoli...Gandini's drawings [are] linear in quality, circular in composition, and softened by a red chalk sfumato based on a direct knowledge of Correggio. Gandini must have been a careful craftsman and, much like Correggio, experimented with various positions of his models, searching with numerous lines and pentimenti for the perfect placement, continually changing as he drew.'

Drawings by Gandini are today in the collections of the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin, the Art Institute of

Chicago, the Uffizi in Florence, the British Museum in London, the Louvre in Paris, the Albertina in Vienna, the Royal Library at Windsor Castle, and elsewhere.