

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



17th Century FLORENTINE SCHOOL

Design for Two Spandrels, with Allegorical Figures of Faith and the Church

Red chalk and red wash, over an underdrawing in pen and brown ink, on two joined sheets of paper, laid down.

Inscribed Dom. Maria Canuti at the lower right centre and numbered N1524 in the centre of the sheet.

Inscribed Vignali(?) at the lower right centre.

Further inscribed (in a modern hand) Domenico Maria Canuti / Very similar figures occur in fresco S.S. Domenico e Sisto, Rome. / One with book + one with cup, but more foreshortened and divided / from each other by decorative frame. in pencil on the old mount.

Also inscribed (by Philip Pouncey) Giovanni da san Giovanni? P.P. in pencil on the old mount.

232 x 448 mm. (9 1/8 x 17 5/8 in.)

The author of this interesting drawing has thus far resisted a firm identification. The sheet bears a traditional attribution to the 17th century Bolognese painter Domenico Maria Canuti (1620-1684), while the noted 20th century scholar and connoisseur Philip Pouncey proposed a tentative attribution to the Florentine artist Giovanni Mannozi, known as Giovanni da San Giovanni (1592-1636). More recently, an attribution to another Florentine artist of the Seicento, Giovanni Maria Morandi (1622-1717) has also been put forward.

As noted in the modern inscription on the former mount, similar allegorical female figures appear above an arch in Canuti's extensive fresco decoration of the dome and apse of the Roman church of Santi Domenico e Sisto, a project begun in 1673 and completed in 1675. Although he painted altarpieces and easel pictures throughout his career, it was as a fresco painter of such grand ceiling decorations that Canuti came to be best known. He worked in Bologna for most of his life, and among his most important patrons were the Pepoli, a noble Bolognese family who commissioned a series of frescoes for the Palazzo Pepoli Campogrande, including an Apotheosis of Hercules on Olympus for the ceiling of the gran salone of the palace, painted between 1660 and 1670. The fame of this project led to a number of Roman commissions, and Canuti worked in Rome for five years from 1672 onwards. The remainder of his flourishing career was spent working mainly on the decoration of the Bolognese monastery of San Michele in Bosco.

However, this energetic drawing seems, on balance, more likely to be the work of a Florentine artist. Pouncey's attribution to Giovanni da San Giovanni would appear to have some merit, by a stylistic

comparison with such vigorously-executed drawings by the artist as an early red chalk study for a mural fresco composition in the Uffizi in Florence, or with the figure types in a finished drawing of an allegorical subject of Peace, in red, black and white chalk, also in the Uffizi.

Giovanni da San Giovanni was trained in the studios of Matteo Rosselli and Giulio Parigi. Among his first independent works were two ceiling paintings for the Casa Buonarroti and frescoes in the Florentine church of San Salvatore ad Ognissanti. Between 1619 and 1620 he designed and completed much of the extensive fresco decoration of the facade of the Palazzo dell'Antella in Piazza Santa Croce, still visible today, albeit in poor condition. In 1623 he travelled to Rome, where he painted frescoes in the church of the Santi Quattro Coronati and the Palazzo Bentivoglio. Returning to Florence in 1627, he soon became the leading fresco painter in the city. His most celebrated commission came in 1635, when he was tasked by the Grand Duke Ferdinando II de' Medici with the decoration of the Sala degli Argenti, on the ground floor of the Palazzo Pitti, which he painted with a series of allegorical frescoes glorifying the history of the Medici family.

Also interesting is the attribution of the present sheet to Giovanni Maria Morandi, by whom relatively few drawings are known, however. Although Florentine by birth, Morandi spent most of his career in Rome, and his style as an artist reflects a combination of both Tuscan and Roman elements. It was in Rome that the artist established his reputation, and where he was active as a painter of altarpieces for local churches as well as small devotional paintings on copper, although he continued to receive important commissions from Tuscan patrons, including the Grand Duke Ferdinando II de' Medici and the Chigi family in Siena. Morandi's draughtsmanship is characterized by a preference for a combination of red chalk with red wash and white heightening, as in the present sheet.

A very similar treatment of hands is found on the verso of a drawing in the Louvre, executed in red chalk and red wash, depicting a man holding a violin. The Louvre drawing was formerly attributed to Morandi and Canuti, but is now given to the Florentine painter Pier Dandini (1646-1712).