Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Bernardo STROZZI (Genoa 1582 - Venice 1644)

Saint Paul

Black chalk, heightened with touches of white chalk, on buff paper, laid down.

Inscribed dal tintoretto in brown ink at the upper left.

Numbered and inscribed 3 / P.G. no 27 on the backing sheet.

194 x 178 mm. (7 5/8 x 7 in.)

ACQUIRED BY THE HARVARD UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUMS, CAMBRIDGE, MA.

This fine drawing is a preparatory study for Bernardo Strozzi's painting of Saint Paul in the collection of the Museo di Palazzo Rosso in Genoa. The painting is recorded in the Sala dell'Estate of the Palazzo in the middle of the 19th century. The present sheet has been described by the Strozzi scholar Luisa Mortari as 'Definitely a preparatory drawing, and of great quality, for the painting of the same name in Genoa...It is brought to its ultimate fulfilment by the artist with a decisive pictorial sense, like few other single figure drawings [by Strozzi].'

Among stylistically and thematically related drawings is a very similar study of a bearded man, also from the Sagredo collection and later in that of Jean Bonna in Geneva, which was sold at auction in London in 2019, as well a drawing on the verso of a double-sided sheet, likewise from the Sagredo collection, in the Louvre.

The present sheet, like many of Strozzi's surviving corpus of drawings, was formerly part of the Sagredo

collection in Venice, and bears the inscription 'P.G.' (for 'Prete Genovese'), together with a number, associated with that provenance. It is thought that most, if not all, of the drawings by Strozzi marked with a 'P.G.' inscription and number were once part of a single album in the Sagredo collection. The album must have contained at least a hundred drawings by Strozzi, since extant sheets inscribed 'P.G.' bear numbers between 3 and 99. Other drawings by Strozzi with a Sagredo provenance are today in the Cleveland Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Scotland in Edinburgh, the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Louvre in Paris, the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam, the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm, and elsewhere.

The provenance of most of the drawings in the Sagredo collection - aptly described by one modern scholar as 'the most important collection of drawings in eighteenth-century Venice as well as one of the richest in Europe' - can be traced to the great Venetian collector Zaccaria Sagredo (1653-1729). Although the collection had been begun by his uncle, Doge Niccolò Sagredo, in the middle of the 17th century, it was Zaccaria Sagredo who was responsible for greatly expanding it. As Roger Rearick has noted, 'Zaccaria was the most voracious of the Sagredo collectors, purchasing numerous drawings from every school and period, and making the Sagredo collection one of the most distinguished and certainly among the largest cabinets in Italy prior to his death in 1729.' Zaccaria bequeathed the collection to his nephew and heir, Gherardo Sagredo (1692-1738). At the latter's death in 1738, an inventory of the collection noted some 8,000 drawings, almost all of which were assembled into fifty-seven albums, as well as more than 22,000 prints. Gherardo's widow, Cecilia Grimani Sagredo (b.1686), tried to sell the collection en bloc but was only able to dispose of parts of it, while the rest was inherited by her two daughters. At some point in the late 18th or early 19th century some of the Sagredo drawings were acquired by a collector in Lyon, thought to be the landscape draughtsman Jean-Jacques de Boissieu (1736-1810). Large groups of drawings from the collection were later dispersed in Lyon, just after the First World War.

Literature:

Mary Newcome, 'Oil Sketches and Drawings by Strozzi', Antichità Viva, 1993, p.22; Luisa Mortari, Bernardo Strozzi, Rome, 1995, p.124, under no.193, p.230, under no.31, and p.233, no.43 ('un bellissimo disegno preparatorio…di grande qualità.'); Piero Boccardo, 'I disegni di Bernardo Strozzi provenienti dall'album Sagredo', in Ezia Gavazza, Giovanna Nepi Sciré and Giovanna Rotondi Terminiello, ed., Bernardo Strozzi, exhibition catalogue, Genoa, Palazzo Ducale, 1995, p.324; Nathalie Strasser, Dessins italiens de la Renaissance au siècle des lumières: Collection Jean Bonna, Geneva, 2010, p.206, under no.90; London, Christie's, Old Master and British Drawings and Watercolours, Including Works from the Collection of Jean Bonna, 2 July 2019, p.43, under lot 40; Margherita Priarone, 'I disegni di Bernardo Strozzi: fortuna critica e problemi aperti', in Anna Orlando and Daniele Sanguineti, ed., Bernardo Strozzi 1582-1644: La conquista del colore, exhibition catalogue, Genoa, 2019-2020, p.368, fig.14.

Artist description:

Born Bernardo Pizzorno to humble parents, Bernardo Strozzi did not have a traditional apprenticeship as an artist, and studied only briefly with the minor Genoese painter Cesare Corte and the Sienese artist Pietro Sorri. He was ordained as a Capuchin monk about 1598, at the age of seventeen, and painted devotional pictures and altarpieces for his monastic community and others. After his father's death around 1608, he received permission to leave the order to look after his mother and unmarried sister, although as a lay priest he retained the nicknames 'Il Cappuccino' or 'Il Prete Genovese' throughout his life. It was also around this time that he adopted the surname 'Strozzi'. In 1610-1611 he undertook a trip to Milan, where he studied the work of such Lombard artists as Giovanni Battista Crespi, known as Il Cerano. Other influences on the young painter were the Sienese Barroccesque artists Ventura Salimbeni and Francesco Vanni, as well as Anthony Van Dyck, who worked in Genoa at

various times between 1621 and 1627.

Strozzi developed a highly personal style as a painter, producing altarpieces, portraits and genre scenes. Among his important patrons were the collectors Marcantonio and Giovan Carlo Doria, from whom he received several significant commissions, notably the interior decoration of the Palazzo Doria in Genoa in 1618. Another Doria commission was for a ceiling fresco of The Vision of Saint Dominic for the Genoese church of San Domenico, executed between 1620 and 1622 and now destroyed. From 1623 to 1625, Strozzi worked concurrently on the fresco decoration of the Palazzo Nicolosio Lomellino in Genoa and at the Villa Centurione at Samperdarena.

After about two decades in Genoa, Strozzi spent the last part of his career in Venice, where he settled around 1633 to avoid having to return to the Capuchin order, and where he was known as 'Il prete Genovese' ('the Genoese priest'). In Venice he gained fame as a painter of religious subjects and, in particular, as a portraitist. Among his important commissions were paintings for the church of San Niccolò da Tolentino and the Biblioteca Marciana. He also painted a ceiling fresco for the Venetian church of the Ospedale degli Incurabili in 1635, much of which is now lost. An exuberant colourist, Strozzi reveled in the application of paint, often applied with a thick impasto, and his bold handling was to influence later generations of Venetian painters.

Strozzi's idiosyncratic manner is as readily evident in his drawings as in his paintings. The majority of the artist's surviving drawings, which number less than a hundred sheets, are studies of heads, limbs or hands, drawn in black (and sometimes red) chalk, and often on toned paper. (There are, however, relatively few extant compositional drawings by the artist.) Most of his drawings can be related to finished paintings, and he appears not to have produced finished drawings for sale to collectors.