

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Ferrau FENZONI (Faenza 1562 - Faenza 1645)

A Cavalry Battle

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, over traces of an underdrawing in black chalk.

The edges of the sheet laid onto part of an old mount.

264 x 401 mm. (10 3/8 x 15 3/4 in.)

This large drawing may be dated to the second half of Ferrau Fenzoni's career, when he was working in Faenza. It is part of a distinctive group of four drawings of unidentified battle scenes, in each of which a young armoured horseman is the central protagonist amid a crowded composition filled with figures and horses³. All four drawings depict a cavalry battle taking place around a fluttering standard, underneath low clouds through which burst rays of sunshine. Two of these drawings are in private collections and a third, which is slightly different in format and technique, was last recorded on the London art market in 1980.

Nicolas Schwed has recently made the intriguing suggestion that these four drawings of battle scenes - which can be dated to the later 1620s, when Fenzoni was working almost exclusively in pen and ink - might be related to the decoration of the artist's own home in Faenza. In this context, it may be noted that the present sheet incorporates the artist's coat of arms on the shield of one of the fallen warriors, to which the young horseman points with his sword. (The Fenzoni coat of arms is found in a stone armorial formerly in the artist's chapel in a church in Faenza, as well as on the frontispiece of a book dedicated to the artist and published in 1639.) The same coat of arms appears on a drawing by Fenzoni for the decoration of the loggia of a palace - showing two putti flanking the artist's coat of arms above a landscape painting set into a painted or stucco frame - which is today in the Uffizi. While a landscape drawing of this type by the artist is also in the Uffizi, a case may be made for the four battle scenes to have been intended as studies for paintings to be inserted into the same sort of mural decoration.

The present sheet may be compared stylistically with such late drawings by Fenzoni as a Beheading of Saint John the Baptist in the Uffizi, preparatory for a painting of c.1614, and a study of Saint Martin Dividing his Cloak with a Beggar, also in the Uffizi. As Schwed has noted, these studies 'are drawn using a technique consisting of small strokes of pen and ink, more or less dense, depending on the effects of light Fenzoni wanted to create...Fenzoni drew with this painstaking technique up to the end of his career.'

This drawing bears, at the lower right corner, the small collector's mark of Boguslaw Jolles (d.1912), who was active in Dresden and Vienna in the last quarter of the 19th century. Jolles began collecting drawings in the 1870s, and continued to add to his collection over the next two decades.

Literature:

Nicolas Schwed, 'New Drawings by Ferraù Fenzoni', *Master Drawings*, Spring 2000, p.46, fig.26;
Giuseppe Scavizzi and Nicolas Schwed, *Ferraù Fenzoni, Todi*, 2006, pp.348-349, no.D155.

Artist description:

Among the most interesting and distinctive, albeit lesser-known, artists of the late 16th and early 17th century, Ferraù Fenzoni arrived in Rome as a young man in the early 1580's. Between 1587 and 1591 he worked on several projects in the Vatican, notably at the Scala Santa, for which he painted a fresco of Moses and the Brazen Serpent in 1587, as well as on the decoration of the Biblioteca Sistina and the apartments of Pius V. Fenzoni also painted frescoes for the Lateran Palace and the Roman churches of Santa Maria Maggiore, Santa Maria in Trastevere and the Chiesa Nuova. Between 1593 and 1599 he worked in the Umbrian hill town of Todi, where he was responsible for the illusionistic decoration of the bishop's palace as well as several altarpieces and the extensive mural decoration of the Duomo. Although much of Fenzoni's work in the cathedral at Todi has been lost, the large and impressive fresco of The Last Judgment on the inner façade, completed in 1596, remains as a splendid testament to the artist's skill and vision.

Fenzoni returned to his native Faenza in 1599 and worked there for the remainder of his long career, painting significant works for several churches in the city over the next thirty years. Among his most important works of this period are a painting of The Pool of Bethesda, painted around 1600 for the confraternity of San Giovanni Decollato, and the decoration of the Borromeo chapel in the cathedral, completed in 1614. He also sent paintings to churches elsewhere in Romagna, notably in Bagnacavallo, Castel Bolognese and Cesena. One of his last significant paintings was an altarpiece of The Deposition of c.1622, painted for the artist's own chapel in the church of Santa Cecilia in Faenza. By the end of the 1620's, however, Fenzoni seems to have almost stopped painting altogether, due to the effects of poor sight.

According to a local biographer, Fenzoni continued to draw well into his old age; he 'drew continuously in pen; and in that way he gave to know his talent and his taste for the profession.' He is also known to have received commissions for highly finished pen drawings, produced as autonomous works of art. As one modern scholar has noted, 'drawing was for Fenzoni a powerful means of expression' and the artist is arguably better known today as a draughtsman than as a painter. Some 160 drawings by Fenzoni survive today, with the most significant group, numbering around sixty sheets, in the collection of the Uffizi in Florence.