

Cristofano ALLORI (Florence 1577 - Florence 1621)

A Sheet of Studies of Five Hands, One Holding a Knife

Red and black chalk.

Numbered N.9 at the centre.

Further inscribed Fabrini(?) / di / Firenze(?) / V774. and numbered No9. at the upper left.

275 x 211 mm. (10 3/4 x 8 1/4 in.)

Cristofano Allori produced a large number of preparatory studies for each of his painted works, and a significant corpus of drawings by him is in the Uffizi in Florence. While none of the hands in the present sheet can be definitively connected with any surviving works by the artist, the style and technique of the drawing is very close to his draughtsmanship, and we are grateful to Miles Chappell for his help in confirming the attribution. The hand holding a knife and gripping some hair, at the bottom of the sheet, would suggest that it may have been intended for a painting of The Sacrifice of Isaac, or perhaps a Judith and Holofernes.

The present sheet bears the drystamp, in the form of his coat of arms, of the Dutch-born polymath and collector Baron Cornelius Ver Heyden de Lancey (1889-1984), who had a fascinating life and career. A dentist, physician, lawyer and art historian, Ver Heyden was fluent in five languages and was a collector of French books, manuscripts, letters and autographs, as well as a small group of Italian, French and Dutch drawings. Born in Middelburg in Holland, he was the son of a physician and himself trained as a medical doctor in Leiden and America before settling in London and becoming a British citizen. A specialist in surgery of the mouth and jaw, he suffered an injury to his hand that limited his effectiveness as a surgeon, and chose to retrain as a lawyer. Called to the bar at Middle Temple, Ver Heyden came

to specialize in medical legal cases. He lived for some time in Italy in the 1920s and 1930s, in both Rome and Florence, practicing as a dentist and developing a serious interest in art history. With the outbreak of the Second World War, Ver Heyden (now Baron de Lancey) returned to Britain and was charged with establishing convalescent homes for injured soldiers on the island of Jersey. With the occupation of the Channel Islands by the Germans, he continued working as a doctor and dentist. He remained in Jersey after the war, closely involved in both medical and legal circles, and eventually becoming an Advocate at the Royal Courts in Jersey. Ver Heyden died at the age of 95.

Artist description:

The son and pupil of the painter Alessandro Allori, Cristofano Allori became one of the leading artists of the early Baroque in Florence. His earliest known works are portrait commissions of members of the Medici family, painted in the 1590's and indebted to the example of the paintings of his father and of Bronzino. From 1600 Allori came under the influence of such artists as Ludovico Cigoli and Domenico Passignano, whose work was a rejection of the hard, cold style of Bronzino and the elder Allori, and moved towards a more naturalistic and less mannered style of painting. Around this time Cristofano left the studio of his father and began working with Gregorio Pagani, as well as assisting Cigoli on the decoration of some rooms in the Palazzo Pitti, and Cigoli's influence was to be particularly pervasive on the young man's work.

The early years of the 17th century found the artist also much admired as a portrait painter, his work in this field typified by the Portrait of Bernardo Davanzati of c.1605 in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. From 1605 until his death in 1621, Allori was one of the most successful painters in Florence, counting among his patrons the Grand Duke Cosimo II de' Medici and other members of the Ducal court. Among the significant works of this period were a ceiling painting of The Embarkation of Marie de' Medici in the church of the Cavalieri di Stefano in Pisa, completed in 1605, and a massive Resurrection for the cathedral of Pistoia, on which he worked between 1602 and 1610. The last decade of his career found the artist painting religious easel pictures characterized by an intense emotionalism, graceful movement and superb draughtsmanship, notably the Judith with the Head of Holofernes of c.1615, in which the severed head is a self-portrait. Among Allori's pupils were Giovanni Battista Vanni and Zanobi Rosi.