

Federico ZUCCARO (Sant'Angelo in Vado c.1540/41 - Ancona 1609)

Design for the Outer Wings of an Altarpiece, with a Group of Virgin Martyrs and Other Female Saints

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, heightened with white, over an underdrawing in red chalk, with partial framing lines in red chalk and brown ink, on buff paper.

Numbered 659 on the verso.

342 x 254 mm. (13 1/2 x 10 in.)

Watermark: A coat of arms with text below.

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The vertical line down the centre of the present sheet, as well as the two quadrant shapes in the upper section of the sheet, suggest that this drawing is likely to have been intended as a study for the inside doors of a reliquary tabernacle or altar. When the doors were closed, the front of the reliquary would have been surmounted by a lunette-shaped finial. With the doors open, the two halves of this composition would have been separated by the shelves holding the relics, or by a central painting. Federico Zuccaro is known to have decorated the interior and exterior of the doors of two such reliquary altars in the monastery of El Escorial in Spain. Neither of the Escorial paintings, however, depict this grouping of female saints - one shows the Annunciation and the other The Vision of Saint Jerome, each with the same subject painted on both sides of the wings - and both have arched tops. (Both works by

Zuccaro were heavily repainted by a minor Spanish painter, Juan Gómez, in the 1590s.)

As John Gere had noted of this drawing, 'Of the six seated saints in the front row, the three on the left can be identified from their attributes as Catherine of Alexandria, Agatha, and Barbara. The drawing cannot be connected with any known work by Federico. A group of female saints occurs in the northwest section of the cupola of the Duomo in Florence, but it occupies only one half of the width of the section and the figures are not grouped symmetrically as in the drawing.' What may have been Zuccaro's preparatory drawing for the outer wings of the same altarpiece or reliquary – a closely related sheet depicting A Group of Bishops, A Pope, A Cardinal and other Monastic Figures, of identical technique and dimensions to the present sheet – was on the Paris art market in 2004.

The present sheet was part of an album of seventy-three drawings, mainly by Taddeo and Federico Zuccaro, all of which had belonged to the eminent portrait painter and noted collector Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830). An obsessive and passionate collector, Lawrence assembled one of the single greatest collections of Old Master drawings ever seen in England. Four years after Lawrence's death, his collection was acquired by the art dealer and collector Samuel Woodburn (1753-1853), who was responsible for assembling the contents of the 'Zuccaro album'. In 1860, several years after Woodburn's death, many of the drawings from Lawrence's collection that were still in his possession, including the 'Zuccaro album', were sold by his heirs at auction in London.

The 'Zuccaro album' was acquired at the Lawrence-Woodburn sale in 1860 by the bibliophile and collector Sir Thomas Phillipps (1792-1872), who bought several lots of drawings at the auction. Phillipps's collection was inherited by his grandson Thomas Fitzroy Phillipps Fenwick (1856-1938), who began the dispersal of the collection of drawings, much of which was eventually acquired by the British Museum in 1946. The album of Zuccaro drawings was purchased from Phillipps Fenwick in 1930 by Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach (1876-1952), an American dealer in rare books and manuscripts. While six drawings from the album were sold to the collector Janos Scholz and are now in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, the remainder of the album remained intact until it was acquired in 1978 by the British Rail Pension Fund and dispersed at auction twelve years later.

Literature:

John Gere, 'The Lawrence-Phillipps-Rosenbach "Zuccaro Album"', Master Drawings, Summer 1970, p.129, no.15, pl.9; New York, Sotheby's, Old Master Drawings, 28 January 1998, p.79, under lot 66; New York and London, Jean-Luc Baroni Ltd., Master Drawings, 2002, unpaginated, under no.7, fig.1.

Artist description:

One of the most important and influential painters of the late 16th century in Italy, Federico Zuccaro was trained in the Roman workshop of his elder brother Taddeo from about the age of ten. Between 1560 and 1563 he assisted his brother on the decoration of the Casino of Pius IV and the Belvedere in the Vatican. He spent the next three years in Florence and Venice, where he painted the fresco decoration of the Grimani chapel in the church of San Francesco della Vigna, before returning to Rome. After Taddeo's death in September 1566 Federico completed many of his brother's unfinished projects, including fresco cycles in the Palazzo Farnese at Caprarola (where he served as capomaestro) and the Sala Regia of the Vatican and the Pucci Chapel in the Roman church of Santa Trinità dei Monti. He also worked on several commissions of his own, such as two altarpieces for the Duomo at Orvieto, painted in 1568, and the decoration of the vault of the Sala di Ercole in the Palazzo Farnese at Caprarola, a project from which he was, however, dismissed in 1569.

Federico Zuccaro was among the most well travelled artists of his day. Unlike Taddeo, he travelled throughout Italy, working in Venice, Florence, Orvieto, Bologna, Urbino, Pavia, Turin, Parma and

Mantua, while also visiting France, the Netherlands and England between 1574 and 1575. On his return he received a commission to complete the decoration of the cupola of the Duomo in Florence, begun by Vasari and completed by Zuccaro between 1576 and 1579. The next year he was back in Rome, contributing to the decoration of the Cappella Paolina of the Vatican, before departing for Venice, where he worked between 1582 and 1584. He established a particular practice of making drawings after works of art that he saw on his journeys; a sort of visual travel diary that attests to a broad and wide-ranging interest in the different schools of painting in Italy. (As the Zuccaro scholar James Mundy has noted, 'Federico was completely without prejudice in his omnivorous ingestion of the work of other artists, both past and present.') In 1585 he was summoned by Philip II to Spain, where he painted eight canvases for the retablo mayor, or high altar, of the Basilica of San Lorenzo at El Escorial, as well as cloister frescoes in the attached monastery. Elected the first principe of the reorganized Accademia di San Luca in 1593, Zuccaro continued to receive important commissions late into his career. He built a fine palace for himself in Rome, now the home of the Biblioteca Hertziana. Near the end of his career he wrote an artistic treatise entitled L'idea de' pittori, scultori et architetti, published in 1607.

A gifted draughtsman, Federico Zuccaro was much influenced by the drawings of his elder brother, particularly early in his long career. However, as Julian Brooks has noted, 'Federico's style was less dramatic than Taddeo's, and he answered the demands of the Catholic Church for a clearer, more iconic art. His drawings and compositions are tidier than those of Taddeo, with less robust figures, a greater interest in decorative effects, and occasionally complex iconography.' Furthermore, Federico's peripatetic career, together with his inveterate copying of the work of other artists, exposed him to a wider range of artistic influences, which often found their way into his drawings and paintings. As Mundy has pointed out, 'Whereas it would be fair to say that Taddeo's style was invented in Rome, Federico's was forged in an international crucible…The wide stylistic range of drawings might be expected but it still, at times, surprises the viewer.'