

Niccolò Martinelli, TROMETTA (Pesaro c.1540 - Rome 1611)

The Evangelists Saints Luke and John

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, heightened with white, over traces of an underdrawing in black chalk, with partial framing lines in brown ink, on blue paper.

A study of the upper half of a draped figure in black chalk on the verso.

Inscribed federico Zucharo at the lower right.

Further inscribed 'granata(?) del ordine di s. / Domenico / in venetia (?) / presso gabriello / giotto (?) de frari / alia (?) seghini (?) della / fenice' on the verso.

241 x 200 mm. (9 1/2 x 7 7/8 in.)

Like its pendant, the present sheet can be identified as a preparatory studiy for Tronetta's fresco decoration of the Franciscan church and convent of the Capuchins in the town of Frascati, southeast of Rome. This small church, elevated to the rank of a pontifical chapel by Pope Gregory XIII, was lavishly decorated by the Pope and two of his nephews, Cardinals Filippo Boncompagni and Filippo Guastavillani, before its consecration in October 1578. Three new altarpieces were commissioned, including one by Girolamo Muziano and another by Trometta, along with a series of fresco paintings of the four Evangelists by the latter, set in false niches on the side walls of the single nave. These nave frescoes, only recently restored, were first attributed to Trometta in 2006, and the existence of these two preparatory studies by the artist serves to confirm the attribution of the mural paintings.

The drawing of Saints Luke and John appear on the left side of the nave of the church, on either side of an altarpiece of Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata by an unidentified painter. That these two drawings by Trometta originally formed one large single sheet can be seen by the two halves of a figure drawn in black chalk across the versos of both sheets.

Another drawing by Trometta of Saint Luke the Evangelist standing in a niche, possibly a first idea for the Frascati commission, is in the collection of the Harvard University Art Museums in Cambridge, Massachusetts. A drawing of a standing prophet or evangelist in a niche, also possibly related to the same commission, is in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan.

Trometta also painted a series of the four Evangelists in the corners of the frescoed vault decoration of the choir of Santa Maria in Aracoeli in Rome, and a drawing for the seated Saint Matthew in this scheme is in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York.

The possibility that Trometta worked in Venice is suggested by the inscription on the verso of this drawing of Saints Luke and John, which may record the circumstances of a now-lost, or never executed, commission.

Exhibitions

New York and London, Colnaghi, Master Drawings, 1992, nos.14-15; Stanford University, Cantor Center for Visual Arts, Classic Taste: Drawings and Decorative Arts from the Collection of Horace Brock, 2000.

Literature:

Alessandro Zuccari, ‘Cesare Nebbia tra Orvieto, Rome e Viterbo’, in L. P. Bonelli and M. G. Bonelli, ed., L’età di Michelangelo e la Tuscia, Viterbo, 2007, p.74, fig.4, p.76; Patrizia Tosini, ‘La commitenza Boncompagni e Guastavillani nella chiesa dei Cappuccini a Frascati: un’aggiunta per Niccolò Trometta e un’ipotesi per il ‘Pittore di Filippo Gustavillani’’, Prospettiva, January-April 2015, p.134, p.139, note 8.

Artist description:

According to his biographer Giovanni Baglione, Niccolò Martinelli, known as Trometta, arrived in Rome from his native Pesaro as a youth and studied with 'il Zuccheri', almost certainly Taddeo Zuccaro. He remained profoundly affected by the example of the elder Zuccaro throughout his career, although he never seems to have matched his success. In the early 1560s Trometta worked with Taddeo and Federico Zuccaro on the decoration of the Casino of Pius IV in the Vatican gardens. He was established as an independent artist by January 1565, when he signed a contract to decorate the chapel of Paolo de Castro in the Roman church of Santa Maria della Consolazione. Shortly thereafter he received the commission for what is regarded as his finest work ('l'opera migliore che egli mai colorisse', in the words of Baglione); the decoration of the vault of the choir of the Roman church of Santa Maria in Aracoeli on the Capitoline Hill, begun in late 1566 and completed within two years. Trometta also decorated two chapels in the same church, while later Roman commissions included the decoration of a chapel in San Omobono in 1584 and four rooms in the palazzo of Cardinal Cesi in 1585; both works were later destroyed.

Trometta worked in several other Roman churches, notably at Santi Apostoli, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Santa Maria della Consolazione, San Francesco a Ripa, Santa Maria della Pace and San Rocco. Apart from the Aracoeli vault frescoes and chapel decorations, as well as another chapel in the church of Santa Maria dell'Orto, painted between 1591 and 1595, and an Adoration of the Shepherds in San Giovanni in Laterano, very little of Trometta's Roman work survives. The artist also painted altarpieces for churches in his native Pesaro, one of which, a Madonna and Child with Saints, is today in the Szépmüvészeti Muzeum in Budapest, as well as some paintings for the Capuchin church in Frascati and a Last Supper painted in 1568 for the church of San Lorenzo in Tavullia, near Pesaro.

Trometta was almost completely unknown as a draughtsman until John Gere's seminal article in Master Drawings in 1963, where a number of drawings by the artist - in Munich, Darmstadt, the Louvre and elsewhere - were identified as preparatory studies for the Aracoeli frescoes. These in turn formed the nucleus of a small corpus of around forty drawings by Trometta assembled by Gere, while further drawings by the artist have since been identified in various public and private collections. The influence of Taddeo Zuccaro is clearly evident in Trometta's drawings, and a number of his studies have long born traditional attributions to one or other of the Zuccari. Characteristic of Trometta's draughtsmanship is a preference for blue paper, on which the artist drew with great assurance with pen and brown ink and wash, often with extensive white heightening.