Giorgio VASARI (Arezzo 1511 - Florence 1574)

The Stoning of Saint Stephen

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, lightly squared in black chalk.

Inscribed in a 17th century hand (Filippo Baldinucci?) '*Giorgio Vasari*' at the lower centre of the sheet.

Laid down on an 18th century English (Richardson) mount, inscribed '*Giorgio Vasari'* at the bottom, and further inscribed with a shelfmark '*H.45*' on the reverse of the mount.

307 x 211 mm. (12 1/4 x 8 1/4 in.)

This large and impressive sheet can be related to Giorgio Vasari's altarpiece of *The Stoning of Saint Stephen* of c.1570-1571 in the church of Santo Stefano (also known as the Chiesa dei Cavalieri) in Pisa. Vasari had received the commission for the decoration of the church, dedicated to Saint Stephen and the home of the military Order of Santo Stefano, from the founder of the Order, Cosimo I de'Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany, in 1569. The Florentine painter Agnolo Bronzino had earlier painted an altarpiece of *The Nativity* for the main altar of the church, but it was deemed to be too large for the position, blocking light from reaching the apse, and so was moved to a side altar. Vasari's painting was to serve as a pendant to that of Bronzino, which it faced on the opposite side of the main altar. Although Vasari is known to have executed a preparatory drawing for the painting by January 1570, work on the actual panel was delayed by his commitments in Rome, and the painting was only completed and installed in the church in December 1571. The composition of the Pisa altarpiece is quite possibly inspired by Giulio Romano's famous painting of *The Stoning of Saint Stephen* of c.1524 in the church of Santo Stefano in Genoa, a work praised by Vasari in his biography of Giulio Romano.

Datable to the end of 1569 or the beginning of 1570, the present sheet is one of only two preparatory drawings by Vasari that can be connected with the Pisa altarpiece. A pen and ink sketch in the collection of Anne Searle Bent in Chicago is much less finished than this drawing and must have preceded it. Both drawings, however, show differences from the final painting. While the bottom part of the altarpiece follows the lower half of the present sheet quite closely, Vasari significantly altered the upper half of the painted composition. As Härb has noted, '*in the upper register [of the Pisa altarpiece], dominated by the Holy Trinity in both [the Chicago drawing and the present sheet], Vasari introduced a newsolution; he moved the Holy Trinity to the left, adding on the right a viewof the façade of the Chiesa dei Cavalieri, which he had designed. The differences between the two drawings and the painting may also be due to the different dates of execution; both, however, were probably made at an early stage in the design process. Since the execution of the painting began in earnest only about a year and a half after Vasari had made the first preparatory drawing, compositional changes were probably introduced subsequently*.'

At around the same time that he was working on the Pisa altarpiece, Vasari painted another version of *The Stoning of Saint Stephen*, possibly with the assistance of Jacopo Zucchi, for a chapel in the Torre Pio of the Vatican; that altarpiece is today in the Pinacoteca Vaticana. Although Vasari had received the commission for the Vatican painting sometime after that for the altarpiece in Pisa, he actually completed the former work earlier, around May 1571. While the compositions of the two paintings are somewhat related, with a handful of figures repeated in each, the present sheet is much closer to the painting in Pisa.

The handwriting of the old inscription *Giorgio Vasari* at the bottom centre of this drawing is very similar to that found on several drawings in the Uffizi, and has been tentatively identified as that of the 17th century biographer, art historian and collector Filippo Baldinucci (1625-1696), who is best known for his biographies of Florentine artists published as *Notizie dei professori del disegno da Cimabue in qua* from 1681 onwards. Baldinucci was charged with assembling a collection of drawings for Cardinal Leopoldo de' Medici, although he also acquired drawings for his own collection, eventually numbering over a thousand sheets kept in four albums. These volumes, which contained mainly drawings by Florentine artists - including at least six sheets by Giorgio Vasari - were acquired in 1806 by Dominique Vivant-Denon for the Musée Napoleon and are now in the Louvre.

This fine drawing by Vasari was later acquired by the 18th century English portrait painter, author and connoisseur Jonathan Richardson Senior (1667-1745), whose extensive collection of nearly five thousand drawings was comprised mainly of Italian works of the 16th and 17th centuries. Assembled over a period of about fifty years, Richardson's collection was organized by school and date, and the drawings were further classified with a system of shelfmarks inscribed on the reverse of his mounts, as can be seen with this drawing.

The present sheet also bears the previously unrecorded collector's mark of David Hoffman H. Felix (1904-1988) of Philadelphia, and at his death passed to his widow, Claire S. Felix (1906-1993).

This drawing has been requested for the forthcoming exhibition *Vasari e Roma*, to be held at the Musei Capitolini in Rome from March to July 2026.

Exhibitions

New York, The Morgan Library & Museum, Mannerism and Modernism: The Kasper Collection of Drawings and Photographs, 2011, no.19.

Literature:

Maria Giulia Aurigemma, 'Un corpus perduto? Sui disegni di Jacopo Zucchi', *Studiolo*, 2007, p.138, note 23; Jordan Bear et al, Mannerism and Modernism: The Kasper Collection of Drawings and Photographs, exhibition catalogue, New York, 2011, pp.70-73, no.19 (entry by Rhoda Eitel-Porter); Suzanne Folds McCullagh, ed., Capturing the Sublime: Italian Drawings of the Renaissance and Baroque, exhibition catalogue, Chicago, 2012, p.65, under no.26 (entry by Florian Härb) and p.266, fig.26.1; Florian Härb, The Drawings of Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574), Rome, 2015, pp.559-561, no.376; Claire Van Cleave, The Farnese Drawings Collection, Rome and Naples, 2025, p.211, under no.47, note 5.

Artist description:

Best known today as the author of the magisterial Vite de' piu eccelenti pittori, scultori ed architetori, first published in 1550 and again in an expanded edition in 1568, Giorgio Vasari was a painter, architect, art historian and collector. A native of Arezzo, he settled in Florence in 1524, studying there with Andrea del Sarto, Baccio Bandinelli and Rosso Fiorentino before undertaking a trip to Rome in 1532. Among his major commissions were the fresco decoration of the salone of the Palazzo della Cancelleria in Rome, painted in 1546 for Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, and the extensive decoration of the various rooms of the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, a massive project planned and designed by Vasari and completed by him and a team of artists under his direction in 1572. In the 1560s he and his workshop also undertook the painting of altarpieces for several Florentine churches, notably in Santa Croce and Santa Maria Novella. Vasari was one of the founders of the Accademia del Disegno in Florence, established under the patronage of Cosimo I de'Medici in 1563. Apart from Florence, Rome and Arezzo, he worked in Bologna, Cortona, Naples, Ravenna, Venice and elsewhere, and his patrons included three popes, two Grand Dukes of Tuscany and numerous wealthy noblemen, as well as many religious and secular institutions. Also active as an architect, Vasari was involved in a number of renovations of medieval churches in the 1560s, including Santa Maria Novella and Santa Croce in Florence and Santa Maria delle Pieve and the Badia in Arezzo. He also designed the loggia of the Palazzo degli Uffizi and the Vasari Corridor, leading from the Uffizi to the Palazzo Pitti, which was completed in 1565. Near the end of his life, he and his assistants painted a cycle of frescoes in the rooms of his house in Borgo Santa Croce in Florence, and he began work on an enormous fresco of The Last Judgement on the cupola of the nearby Duomo; a project completed after his death by Federico Zuccaro.

Vasari was a gifted and prolific draughtsman, and around five hundred drawings by him survive today, the vast majority held in two public collections, namely the Louvre in Paris and the Uffizi in Florence. (This may represent only a part of his total output of drawings, however, since relatively few sheets survive from the artist's early career, with one such loss being a putative album of anatomical studies.) He generally worked in either pen and ink and wash or black or red chalk, sometimes on coloured paper, and a particular penchant for blue paper is evident in his work following a stay in Venice in the 1540s. Vasari was also an avid collector of drawings by other artists, building up a substantial collection that he carefully assembled into albums, which he referred to as his Libro de' disegni.