Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Giovanni Battista PIAZZETTA (Venice 1682 - Vencie 1754)

The Apostle Saint Simon Zelotes

Black and white chalk, with stumping, on faded blue-grey paper.

385 x 307 mm. (15 1/8 x 12 1/8 in.)

One of the most obscure of the Apostles, Saint Simon Zelotes, or Simon the Zealot, is shown here with his attribute of a saw. After the death of Christ, Simon Zelotes travelled to Syria and Mesopotamia, and was martyred by being sawn in half.

The present sheet was reproduced in an engraving, in the same direction, by the printmaker Marco Pitteri (1702-1786), which was published in Venice in 1742. The print was one of a series of fifteen half-length bust-length images - based on drawings or paintings produced by Piazzetta between c.1736 and 1742 - of God the Father, Christ, the Virgin and the twelve Apostles. Pitteri's engravings proved very popular and were later reissued by Pitteri himself, while also being reproduced by other printmakers in the form of mezzotints. A handful of other drawings by Piazzetta related to Pitteri's print series are known.

A closely related drawing of Saint Simon Zelotes by Piazzetta, but showing him without the saw and with both hands clasped in prayer, is in a private collection in Rome. Piazzetta may have used this drawing for a painting of Christ Crowned with Thorns, in a private collection in Bergamo in 1982, in which the head of Christ is very close to the present sheet. A three-quarter length painting of Saint Simon Zelotes tentatively attributed to Piazzetta, in a Venetian private collection, is also based on either the present sheet or the Pitteri engraving, but shows much more of the figure.

This drawing bears the collector's mark of the physician and scientific writer Edward Peart (1756-1824), who acquired both prints and drawings, and whose collection was dispersed at auction in London over several days in April 1822. The drawing was acquired at the 1822 sale by the English soldier and politician Sir Charles Greville (1762-1832), whose collection of drawings passed by descent to his nephew, George Guy Greville, 4th Earl of Warwick (1818-1893) and was kept at Warwick Castle. The present sheet was one of many drawings acquired at the 4th Earl's posthumous sale in 1896 by the German-born art historian and art dealer Jean-Paul Richter (1847-1937), who had begun collecting drawings around 1880 and had studied the collection at Warwick Castle. The best drawings in Richter's collection, including the present sheet, were sold at auction in Amsterdam in 1913.

Exhibitions

Paris, Institut Néerlandais, Rotterdam, Museum Boiymans - van Beuningen and Haarlem, Teyler Museum, Le dessin italien dans les collections hollandaises, 1962, no.175; Laren N.H., Singer Museum, Oude Tekeningen: Een Keuze uit de Verzameling P. en N. de Boer, 1966, no.178.

Literature:

Paris, Institut Néerlandais, and elsewhere, Le dessin italien dans les collections hollandaises, exhibition catalogue, 1962, Vol.I, p.105, no.175, Vol.II, pl.CXXII; Rodolfo Pallucchini and Adriano Mariuz, L'opera completa del Piazzetta, Milan, 1982, p.112 and p.128, under no A135; Alessandro Bettagno et al, G. B. Piazzetta: Disegni – Incisioni – Libri - Manoscritti, exhibition catalogue, Venice, 1983, p.38, under no.64 (entry by George Knox).

Artist description:

Active as a painter, draughtsman, printmaker and book illustrator, Giambattista Piazzetta was first trained by his father, a sculptor, and later was a pupil of Antonio Molinari. A brief stay in Bologna between 1703 and 1705 introduced him to Giuseppe Maria Crespi, whose paintings, like those of Guercino and the Carracci, were to have a particular influence on Piazzetta's early work. Back in Venice by about 1705, Piazzetta was registered in the Fraglia, the Venetian painter's guild, by 1711. He worked in Venice for the remainder of his career, painting genre scenes, devotional representations of single saints, portraits and numerous altarpieces for local churches, as well as his only large-scale decoration; the ceiling of Saint Dominic in Glory for the church of SS. Giovanni e Paolo, completed in 1727. He also produced several hundred designs for book illustrations, many of which were commissioned for books issued by the publisher Giovanni Battista Albrizzi, notably an elaborate edition of Torquato Tasso's epic poem Gerusalemme Liberata that appeared in 1745. By the later part of his career Piazzetta enjoyed considerable renown, both within Venice and abroad, as a draughtsman and painter. In 1754, the year of his death, he was elected principe of the Accademia dei Pittori in Venice.