

Marcantonio BASSETTI (Verona 1588 - Verona 1630)

Two Saints in Clouds

Pen and brown ink, with brown and grey wash, heightened with cream oil paint.

Laid down on an 18th or 19th century mount, inscribed No223. and No 6 on the reverse.

141 x 192 mm. (5 1/2 x 7 1/2 in.)

Marcantonio Bassetti's oil sketches on paper seem, for the most part, to have been intended as independent works of art. That they were highly prized by collectors, and particularly foreign visitors to Verona, is seen in a comment made by his biographer, Carlo Ridolfi. In his Le maraviglie dell'arte, published in 1648, Ridolfi praised Bassetti's drawings, 'which he used to heighten with white and black oil paint on the paper', and noted that 'one still sees many drawings executed in this manner and which he mostly made during the winter, displaying them around his studio, and which he still used to sell to those who took delight in studying, and in particular to the foreigners who passed through Verona.'

Andrea Piai has kindly pointed out that the present sheet is a preparatory study, with differences, for two allegorical figures in Bassetti's fresco decoration on the vault of the cupola of the Varalli chapel, known as the Chapel of the Innocents, in the church of Santo Stefano in Verona. Built between 1618 and 1621 for the parish priest Giulio Varalli, this important Baroque chapel was decorated with works by a number of prominent Veronese painters, including altarpieces by Alessandro Turchi, Pasquale Ottino and Bassetti, as well as frescoes by Ottino and Bassetti. Both figures in this drawing are studies for allegorical female figures of Virtues painted by Bassetti in the polylobed compartments of the Varalli chapel dome. The right-hand figure, depicting a woman with a lamb, is a study for an Allegory of Meekness, while the left-hand praying figure appears in another compartment; it may also be noted of the latter figure that it is surrounded by a faint polylobed shape that matches that of the compartment in which the painted figures are placed.

The praying woman on the left of this sheet may also have been used several years later, for a figure in Bassetti's monumental altarpiece of The Virgin and Child with Saints Blessing the City of Capodistria, dating from the second half of the 1620s. The painting was commissioned around 1627-1628 by the Veronese churchman Marco Belli for the Franciscan church of Santa Marta in Capodistria (today Koper

in Slovenia) and is now on loan to the Narodna Galerija in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The left-hand figure in this drawing would seem to be a study for the second figure from the right of a group of saints in clouds at the top of the painting; in the altarpiece this figure is, however, partly obscured both by the male saint seated next to her and the hand of the Virgin.

Exhibitions

New York, Margot Gordon and Rome, Marcello Aldega, Old Master Drawings, 1992, no.28; Stanford University, Cantor Center for Visual Arts, Classic Taste: Drawings and Decorative Arts from the Collection of Horace Brock, 2000.

Artist description:

Following a period of training in the studio of Felice Brusasorci in Verona, where he studied alongside other local painters such as Alessandro Turchi and Pasquale Ottino, Marcantonio Bassetti was in Venice by about 1605. There he met the Venetian painter Palma Giovane, with whom he may have worked as an assistant, and who certainly had a profound influence on his draughtsmanship. Around 1616 Bassetti travelled to Rome, where he worked with Carlo Saraceni and became strongly influenced by the Caravaggism of Saraceni and Orazio Borgianni. He became a member of the Roman Accademia di San Luca, and between 1616 and 1617 participated in the decoration of the Sala Regia in the Palazzo Quirinale. While in Rome, Bassetti painted a Martyrdom of Saints Vito, Fermo and Rustico for the Augustinian church in Munich, followed a few years later by an altarpiece of Five Bishop Martyrs for the Veronese church of Santo Stefano. By 1620 he had returned to his native Verona, where he earned commissions for several altarpieces for local churches. He also worked on a series of portraits, most of which are today in the Museo del Castelvecchio in Verona. Bassetti died during the plague of 1630, at the age of around forty-four.