

Daniele CRESPI (Busto Arsizio c.1598 - Milan 1630)

Study of a Right Arm [recto]; Studies of Shoulders and Arms [verso]

Black chalk on faded blue paper.

The verso in brown ink.

Inscribed Daniel in brown ink at the lower left.

426 x 274 mm. (16 3/4 x 10 6/8 in.)

Although Daniele Crespi was among the most gifted draughtsmen working in Milan in the 1620s, only about seventy drawings by him are known. Unusually for a Lombard artist of his generation, almost all of his extant drawings appear to be preparatory studies for paintings or frescoes. No independent, finished drawings by the artist seem to have survived, however.

The recto of this large drawing is a study for the arm of Saint John the Baptist in Crespi's lunette fresco of Saint Hugh of Grenoble Blessing the First Carthusian Monastery in the Valley of Chartreusein the Certosa di Garegnano, outside Milan. Painted near the end of the artist's brief career, the fresco is one of a series of six lunette scenes from the life of Saint Bruno that were part of the extensive decoration executed by Crespi between 1627 and 1629 on the nave and vault of the monastery church at Garegnano. Two further preparatory studies by the artist for the fresco of Saint Hugh of Grenoble Blessing the Monastery are known. A study in pen and ink for the entire lunette composition is in the

Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan, while a drawing in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York depicts the figures of John the Baptist, King David and other heavenly witnesses seated in clouds above the main scene. A closely comparable drawing of the Risen Christ, likewise drawn in black chalk on blue paper, is in the Galleria dell'Accademia in Venice, and is a preparatory study for another fresco at Garegnano.

As the Crespi scholar Nancy Ward Neilson has noted, the painter derived the motif of St. John the Baptist and King David in clouds witnessing the blessing of the monastery from an engraving of the same subject designed by Giovanni Lanfranco. Part of a series of twenty scenes from the life of Saint Bruno engraved by Dietrich Theodore Kruger and dated to between 1620 and 1621, Lanfranco's designs were adapted by Crespi for a number of other frescoes at the Certosa di Garegnano.

The studies of arms and shoulders drawn in pen and ink on the verso of the present sheet have been tentatively related to a painting of Salome Receiving the Head of John the Baptist, thought to be one of Crespi's earliest known works, which appeared at auction in New York in 1993. A similar sheet of Studies of Arms is on the verso of a drawing by Crespi in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana.

Exhibitions

Milan, Galleria Rosella Gilli, Disegni Lombardi dal XV al XVIII secolo, n.d. (1985?), no.49; New York, Paris and London, Colnaghi, Master Drawings, 1993 no.23.

Literature:

Nancy Ward Nielson, Daniele Crespi, Soncino, 1996, p.85 no.D36, p.66, under no.84, verso only illustrated p.203, fig.61A; Catherine Monbeig Goguel, Musée du Louvre: Département des arts graphiques. Inventaire général des dessins italiens IV: Dessins toscans, XVIe-XVIIIe siècles, pt.2: 1620-1800, Paris, 2005, p.416, under no.617.

Artist description:

Although he enjoyed only a relatively brief career of around ten or eleven years, Daniele Crespi was among the most significant painters working in Milan in the first quarter of the 17th century. Although nothing is known of his early training, he was certainly a precocious artist, for by 1619 he was assisting the painter Guglielmo Caccia, known as Moncalvo, on the frescoes of the dome and pendentives of the church of San Vittore al Corpo in Milan. Among Crespi's earliest documented independent works is the fresco decoration of a chapel in the Milanese church of Sant' Eustorgio, completed in 1621, and an Adoration of the Magi in Sant' Alessandro of around the same date. This was followed a few years later by work in the church of San Protaso ad Monachos in Milan, while between 1623 and 1627 he painted several works for Santa Maria di Campagna in Piacenza, and also decorated the organ shutters in the Milanese church of Santa Maria della Passione. An altarpiece of The Martyrdom of Saint Mark for the church of San Marco in Novara was completed in 1626. There followed commissions from two of the most important Carthusian monasteries in Lombardy which represent the culmination of Crespi's activity as a fresco painter. An extensive series of frescoes for the nave, entrance hall and ceiling of the Certosa of Garegnano, in the outskirts of Milan, depicting scenes from the early history of the Carthusian order and its founder Saint Bruno of Cologne and completed in 1629, are regarded as among the artist's finest works. A larger and equally impressive cycle of frescoes for the Certosa in Pavia, begun in 1629, was left unfinished at Crespi's death from the plague the following year, at the age of about thirty-two.

As a painter and draughtsman, Crespi's work combines both Lombard and Emilian influences. As Rudolf Wittkower has written of the artist, 'In his best works Daniele combined severe realism and parsimonious handling of pictorial means with a sincerity of expression fully in sympathy with the religious climate at Milan.' Similarly, another modern scholar has noted that 'Crespi was a true artist: learned, original, richly diverse and devoted to his art, well able to establish his artistic standpoint amid

the cultural and religious preoccupations of his time. He was also a perfectionist in technique and execution…the young Crespi early distanced himself from the Milanese academy in order to seek out new directions: mastering the rules of composition and accuracy of drawing and the absorption of 'academic tradition' were only foundations, to which he added a marvellous attention to form and a sincere and versatile pursuit of the 'natural'.'

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