

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



16th Century FLORENTINE SCHOOL

The Head of Christ

Red chalk.

The sheet partially silhouetted at the right edge.

Made up at the lower right corner.

208 x 152 mm. (8 1/8 x 6 in.)

This finely executed red chalk study of the head of Christ reflects the refined sensibility characteristic of some of the artists of the Florentine school active in the early part of the 16th century. The soft modulation of tones and the delicately inclined head reveal an intimate, devotional conception characteristic of Florentine draughtsmanship following the period of Andrea del Sarto (1486-1520), whose influence is evident in the present sheet. At the same time, the gentle modelling and atmospheric softness of the line are suggestive of the refined manner of Agnolo Bronzino (1503-1572), court painter to the Medici ducal court throughout the 1540s and 1550s and the foremost exponent of the Florentine *maniera*.

Among the less than thirty autograph drawings by Bronzino that survive today are a number of somewhat comparable works, albeit executed in black chalk. These include a study of the head of a bearded man in profile to the right, datable to the early 1550s, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and a study of the head of a bearded young man, looking up to the right, which appeared at auction in 1998 and 2003 and is today in the collection of Anne Searle Bent in Chicago. Similarly, the physiognomy of the head in the present sheet is quite close to that of Christ in Bronzino's *Noli me*

tangere altarpiece of c.1560-1561, painted for a chapel in the Florentine church of Santo Spirito and today in the Louvre.

Catherine Monbeig Goguel, who has tentatively dated the present sheet to around 1535, has likewise noted a sensitivity of handling akin to the drawings of Bronzino, while further pointing out that the softness of the expression shows some similarities with the work of Giovanni Antonio Sogliani (1492-1544).