

Bernardo STROZZI (Genoa 1582 - Venice 1644)

The Head of Christ

Black chalk, with touches of white chalk, on buff paper.

Inscribed *Prete Genovese* at the lower left.

Numbered and inscribed *P.G. n:o 61* on the verso.

241 x 166 mm. (9 1/2 x 6 1/2 in.)

Watermark: Fragmentary trefoil.

Bernardo Strozzi's idiosyncratic manner is as readily evident in his drawings as in his paintings. The majority of the artist's surviving drawings, which number less than a hundred sheets, are studies of heads, limbs or hands, drawn in black (and sometimes red) chalk, and often on toned paper. Most of Strozzi's drawings can be related to his paintings, and he appears not to have produced drawings for sale to collectors.

This drawing can be related to the head of Christ in one of Strozzi's most successful compositions; *The Supper at Emmaus*, of which some fifteen versions are known, most of which are studio works. These can be divided into three main groups; one in which the figures are close to the picture plane and tightly cropped at the edge of the canvas, another where the scene is depicted in an interior and seen from further back, and a third iteration wherein the figures are strongly illuminated from the right edge of the

composition. Strozzi's earliest version of *The Supper at Emmaus*, probably painted in Genoa around 1630, is today in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Grenoble. A few years later, not long after his arrival in Venice in c.1633, the artist produced a second version of the composition, which is today in the Schönborn collection at Schloss Weissenstein in Pommersfelden. The present sheet is a study for this later version, which differs in several respects from the earlier treatment of the subject; in the painting in Grenoble the resurrected Christ rests his hands, holding the loaf of bread, on the table, while in the later Pommersfelden canvas Christ has broken the loaf in two and raises His arms to offer the bread to the disciples, who suddenly recognize Him. It has been suggested that the Pommersfelden painting may be the '*Cristo in Emaus con doi discepoli*' recorded in an inventory of the contents of Strozzi's studio after his death.

Another drawing of Christ in the Pommersfelden canvas, showing the full seated figure, shared the same Sagredo provenance as the present sheet and was sold alongside it at auction in 1999. A smaller variant of the present sheet, likewise from the Sagredo collection and showing slightly more of the head and shoulders of Christ, was acquired by the British Museum in 1991. All of these drawings date from Strozzi's Venetian period and are perhaps best regarded not as preparatory studies but as record drawings (or ricordi), to be retained in the studio for the use of assistants tasked with making copies of *The Supper at Emmaus*.

The present sheet, like much of Strozzi's surviving corpus of drawings, was formerly part of the Sagredo collection in Venice, and bears the inscription 'P.G.' (for '*Prete Genovese*'), together with a number, associated with that provenance. The drawings were probably acquired from Strozzi's studio by a member of the Sagredo family, and it is thought that most, if not all, of the drawings marked with a 'P.G.' inscription and number were once part of a single album in the Sagredo collection. The album must have contained at least a hundred drawings, since extant sheets inscribed 'P.G.' bear numbers between 3 and 99. Other drawings by Bernardo Strozzi with a Sagredo provenance are today in the Fogg Art Museum in Cambridge (MA), the Cleveland Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Scotland in Edinburgh, the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, the Louvre in Paris, the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam, the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Rouen, the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm, and elsewhere.

The provenance of most of the drawings in the Sagredo collection - aptly described by one modern scholar as '*the most important collection of drawings in eighteenth-century Venice as well as one of the richest in Europe*' - can be traced to the great Venetian collector Zaccaria Sagredo (1653-1729). Although the collection had been begun by his uncle Nicolò Sagredo (1606-1676), the 105th Doge of Venice, in the middle of the 17th century, it was Zaccaria Sagredo who was responsible for greatly expanding it. As the scholar Roger Rearick has noted, '*Zaccaria was the most voracious of the Sagredo collectors, purchasing numerous drawings from every school and period, and making the Sagredo collection one of the most distinguished and certainly among the largest cabinets in Italy prior to his death in 1729.*' Zaccaria bequeathed the collection to his nephew and heir, Gherardo Sagredo (1692-1738). At the latter's death in 1738, an inventory of the collection noted some 8,000 drawings, almost all of which were assembled into fifty-seven albums, as well as more than 22,000 prints. Gherardo's widow, Cecilia Grimani Sagredo (b.1755), tried to sell the collection en bloc but was only able to dispose of parts of it, while the rest was inherited by her two daughters. At some point in the late 18th or early 19th century some of the Sagredo drawings were acquired by a collector in Lyon, thought to be the landscape draughtsman Jean-Jacques de Boissieu (1736-1810). Large groups of drawings from the collection were later dispersed in Lyon, just after the First World War.

Literature:

Mary Newcome, 'Oil Sketches and Drawings by Strozzi', *Antichità Viva*, 1993, p.22 (as in a private

collection in Zurich, not illustrated); Ezia Gavazza, Giovanna Nepi Sciré and Giovanni Rotondi Terminiello, ed., *Bernardo Strozzi Genova 1581/82-Venezia 1644*, exhibition catalogue, Genoa, 1995, p.316, under no.109 (entry by Piero Boccardo) and p.324 ('I disegni di Bernardo Strozzi provenienti dall'album Sagredo'); Camillo Manzitti, *Bernardo Strozzi*, Turin, 2013, p.173, under no.223, and 'I disegni dell'album Sagredo', p.285, fig. P.G. 61.

Artist description:

Born Bernardo Pizzorno to humble parents, Bernardo Strozzi did not have a traditional apprenticeship as an artist, and studied only briefly with the minor Genoese painter Cesare Corte and the Sienese artist Pietro Sorri. He was ordained as a Capuchin monk about 1598, at the age of seventeen, and painted devotional pictures and altarpieces for his monastic community and others. After his father's death around 1608, he received permission to leave the order to look after his mother and unmarried sister, although as a lay priest he retained the nicknames 'Il Cappuccino' or 'Il Prete Genovese' throughout his life. It was also around this time that he adopted the surname 'Strozzi'. In 1610-1611 he undertook a trip to Milan, where he studied the work of such Lombard artists as Giovanni Battista Crespi, known as Il Cerano. Other influences on the young painter were the Sienese Barroccesque artists Ventura Salimbeni and Francesco Vanni, as well as Anthony Van Dyck, who worked in Genoa at various times between 1621 and 1627.

Strozzi developed a highly personal style as a painter, producing altarpieces, portraits and genre scenes. Among his important patrons were the collectors Marcantonio and Giovan Carlo Doria, from whom he received several significant commissions, notably the interior decoration of the Palazzo Doria in Genoa in 1618. Another Doria commission was for a ceiling fresco of The Vision of Saint Dominic for the Genoese church of San Domenico, executed between 1620 and 1622 and now destroyed. From 1623 to 1625, Strozzi worked concurrently on the fresco decoration of the Palazzo Nicolosio Lomellino in Genoa and at the Villa Centurione at Samperdarena.

After about two decades in Genoa, Strozzi spent the last part of his career in Venice, where he settled around 1633 to avoid having to return to the Capuchin order, and where he was known as 'Il prete Genovese' ('the Genoese priest'). In Venice he gained fame as a painter of religious subjects and, in particular, as a portraitist. Among his important commissions were paintings for the church of San Niccolò da Tolentino and the Biblioteca Marciana. He also painted a ceiling fresco for the Venetian church of the Ospedale degli Incurabili in 1635, much of which is now lost. An exuberant colourist, Strozzi reveled in the application of paint, often applied with a thick impasto, and his bold handling was to influence later generations of Venetian painters.

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