

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Luigi VANVITELLI (Naples 1700 - Caserta 1773)

Design for an Altar or Reliquary Surround

Black chalk and brown ink.

314 x 232 mm. (12 3/8 x 9 1/8 in.)

The present sheet may be compared, in stylistic terms, with a pen and ink drawing by Luigi Vanvitelli of *Saint Peter Enthroned* – a design for the chair or throne for a seated bronze statue of the saint in the Basilica of St. Peter's in Rome, executed in 1754 – that is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Also stylistically comparable is a design for a vase supported by a winged putto and a boy riding a dolphin, in the collection of the Palazzo Reale at Caserta.

As the scholar Jörg Garms has noted, '*Throughout his career Vanvitelli made important designs for altars and tabernacles, notable examples of which include the high altar of Terni Cathedral (1751-4), ...the high altar of S. Pantaleo in Rome (1752-6); and the altar of the Sampajo chapel in S. Antonio dei Portoghesi, Rome (1752-6)*'. The artist's oeuvre of drawings includes several designs for altar surrounds, such as a somewhat more elaborate but equally spirited sheet sold at auction in 1985.

Artist description:

Perhaps the most significant Italian architect of the 18th century, Luigi Vanvitelli was the son and pupil of the Dutch landscape painter Gaspar van Wittel, who had Italianized his surname when he settled in Rome in 1674. Little is known of the younger Vanvitelli's artistic education, but he seems to have begun his career as a history painter before becoming an architect around 1730. In 1732 he entered the architectural competition for the design of the façade of the Roman church of San Giovanni in Laterano.

Although he did not win the commission, his designs were much praised and in 1733 he was admitted to the Accademia di San Luca. Vanvitelli was soon named by Pope Clement XII to the position of papal architect in the Marche region. He was active in the Marches for the next few years, notably in Ancona, where he worked on the cathedral of San Ciriaco, the local churches of the Gesù and Sant'Agostino, and the buildings of the port area.

The 1740s found Vanvitelli working mostly in Rome, notably at St. Peter's, the churches of Santa Maria degli Angeli and Sant'Agostino, and the Palazzo Chigi-Odescalchi. Another significant commission was the design of the church of the Olivetan monastery of Montmorcinio in Perugia. In 1750 Vanvitelli left Rome for Naples, where he had been appointed architect to Charles III of Bourbon, King of Naples and Sicily, and was entrusted with the construction of the Royal Palace of Caserta, outside the city. Work on the massive palace at Caserta, which contained over 1,200 rooms, was begun in 1751 and completed shortly after Vanvitelli's death. During his time in Naples the architect was also engaged on the design of several churches, palaces and villas in and around the city, notably the Basilica of Santissima Annunziata, a project completed by Vanvitelli's son Carlo, as well as the large hemicycle of the public square known as the Foro Carolino, now the Piazza Dante.

Vanvitelli produced numerous drawings for buildings, interiors, altarpiece surrounds, ephemeral festive architecture and stage designs, and the largest collections of drawings by the artist are today in the museums of Naples and Caserta, while a smaller but representative group is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.