

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Domenico Cresti PASSIGNANO (Passignano 1559 - Florence 1638)

The Medici-Lorraine Coat of Arms Flanked by Allegorical Female Figures [recto]; Studies of a River God, a Male Nude and a Lion [verso]

Pen and brown ink.

Inscribed '[?] *hor ch'ogni animal riposa e dorme / [?] d'ogni altro animal facto defor[me] / a meza note scopagiato e solo / vo sfogado elm io dulo / Stelle uoi che la note aluminate / uoi che per l'aria mormorando and[ate] / o uenti risvelgiate in cortesia / La bella donna mia*' in brown ink on the recto.

146 x 207 mm. (5 3/4 x 8 1/8 in.)

The coat of arms on the recto of this double-sided sheet depicts the six palle (balls) of the Medici family impaled with the coat of arms of the House of Lorraine. This allows the drawing to be dated to c.1589, soon after Passignano had left Venice and returned to Florence to work on the preparations for the festivities surrounding the lavish wedding of Ferdinando de' Medici and his distant cousin, the French princess Christine of Lorraine, granddaughter of Catherine de' Medici. As Joan Nissman has noted, Passignano '*was inducted along with many other artists into the large work force necessary to produce the triumphal arches, spectacular machines, allegorical floats, and costumes required for the various wedding festivities.*' Preparation for the event took about a year and involved most of the leading artists in Florence, while the celebrations and entertainments themselves began on 30 April and took up almost the entire month of May 1589.

Both sides of the present sheet are closely related to a double-sided pen drawing by Passignano in the Uffizi in Florence, the recto of which depicts the same Medici-Lorraine coat of arms flanked by two female figures⁴, while the verso contains analogous studies of two river gods. Previously attributed to Francesco Salviati, the Uffizi drawing was reattributed to Passignano in 1975 by Annamaria Petrioli Tofani, who further posited that it was a design for the painted coat of arms on the facade of the Duomo in Florence commissioned from Passignano, for the sum of fifty-five *scudi*, as part of the decorations for the wedding of Ferdinando de' Medici and Christine of Lorraine. Passignano's very large painting of the combined Medici-Lorraine coat of arms, flanked by allegorical figures of Faith, Hope, Charity and Religion, crowned the temporary architectural structure erected in front of the Duomo, as recorded in an engraving by Orazio Scarabelli. Several months after the wedding the façade decorations were dismantled and the painted coat of arms was eventually transferred to the entrance of the Palazzo Pitti but is now lost. As Baldinucci writes, '*[Passignano] painted the coat of arms of the Most Serene Republic, which was placed above the door of the cathedral; and once the festivities were over, it was moved to the German guardhouse at the entrance to the Pitti Palace.*'

The verso of this drawing depicts a river god alongside a male nude and a lion. Similar river gods, representing the Arno and Moselle rivers, are found in another commission entrusted to Passignano for the 1589 Medici wedding; a pair of allegorical paintings of Tuscany and Lorraine that were installed as part of an elaborate temporary arch on the Ponte alla Carraia in Florence, through which passed the processional entry of Christine of Lorraine into the city. Passignano's two canvases were later moved to the Palazzo Pitti, where they are recorded in a 17th century inventory, but no longer survive and are known only through etched copies by the Florentine printmaker Raffaello Gualterotti.

A particular characteristic of this drawing is the stylistic influence of Venetian models, such as the freely-drawn pen and ink studies of Palma Giovane. A stylistically comparable pen and ink drawing by Passignano in the Uffizi – an elaborate compositional study of a *Princely Wedding* that may represent a design for a temporary stage set or the decoration of an ephemeral triumphal arch – is also likely to be related to the decorations for the Medici wedding of 1589. Among other stylistically similar drawings by Passignano is a pen study of *Paradise* in the Staatliche Graphischen Sammlung in Munich and a sheet of studies of *Tobias Healing His Father's Blindness* in a private collection, while similar pen and ink studies of male nudes are found in a number of other drawings by the artist, such as a study of the *Crucifixion of Saint Peter* in the Uffizi. Similar male nudes are found in Passignano's large genre painting of *Bathers at San Niccolò sull'Arno*, signed and dated 1600, in a private collection.

The text transcribed on the recto of the present sheet is taken from a light musical piece of a type known as a *villanella* or *villanella alla napoletana* that was popular in Italy in the second half of the 16th century. *Villanelle* were a form of secular or rustic vocal music that had originated in Naples earlier in the Cinquecento. The full lyrics to the song '*ora ch'ogni animal riposa e dorme...*' were first transcribed by the 16th century Florentine composer, musician and singer Cosimo Bottegari in his manuscript *Arie e canzoni in musica*, begun in 1574 and completed around 16021.

Artist description:

Domenico Cresti, known as Passignano after his birthplace in Tuscany, was sent to Florence at the age of nine to apprentice in the studios of the painters Girolamo Macchietti and Giambattista Naldini. He completed his training with Federico Zuccaro, whom he assisted on the decoration of the cupola of the Duomo in Florence in the second half of the 1570s, and whose style was to be of particular significance for the young artist. Passignano accompanied Zuccaro to Rome in 1580, where he worked on his first known independent commission; the decoration of the suburban Villa Montalto for Cardinal Felice Peretti, later Pope Sixtus V. Soon afterwards the young artist settled in Venice, where he spent several years in the 1580s. Among the few extant paintings from the artist's Venetian period is an altarpiece of The Crucifixion painted for the church of San Marziale in 1586. Passignano's careful study of such local Venetian painters as Tintoretto and Jacopo Palma Giovane was to be reflected in his own work throughout his later career; indeed, his paintings have often been characterized as a fusion of Tuscan draughtsmanship with Venetian colour. As the Passignano scholar Joan Nissman has pointed out, 'the importance of his years in Venice should not be underestimated. The figure types of Tintoretto and particularly Palma Giovane, and the rich atmospheric paintings of these artists and those of Titian and Veronese, had a lasting effect on his style. He was to introduce a softer and darker style of painting as an alternative to the smooth, bright, and glistening colors favored in Florence.'

Soon after his return to Florence at the end of the 1580s, Passignano contributed to the ephemeral decorations created for the wedding of the Grand Duke Ferdinando I de' Medici and Christine of Lorraine, and painted a pair of frescoes for the Cappella Salviati in the church of San Marco, which established his reputation in Florence as a fresco painter. He was admitted into the Accademia del Disegno in 1589, and over the next decade earned a number of important ecclesiastical commissions

in Florence, including a Preaching of Saint John the Baptist for San Michele Visdomini and a Resurrection for Santissima Annunziata, as well as works for Santa Maria Maddalena dei Pazzi. Indeed, together with Santi di Tito, Passignano was awarded most of the important commissions in Tuscany during the 1590s, and apart from his work in Florence produced altarpieces for churches in Lucca, Pistoia, Pisa and Rome. Among the secular works he completed towards the end of the decade were numerous frescoes for the Medici villa at Artimino and two large history subjects painted on slate, depicting scenes from the life of Cosimo I de' Medici, for the Salone dei Cinquecento in the Palazzo Vecchio, where they were paired with paintings by Jacopo Ligozzi. Vault frescoes in the chancel of the Cathedral of San Zeno at Pistoia were painted in the first years of the 17th century.

Firmly established by the turn of the century as one of the leading painters in Florence, Passignano was summoned to Rome in 1602 to paint a large altarpiece of The Crucifixion of Saint Peter for the Basilica of St. Peter's, for which he was awarded the honour of cavaliere di Cristo. He remained in the city for thirteen years, receiving commissions from such important patrons as Popes Clement VIII and Paul V and Cardinals Scipione Borghese, Maffeo Barberini, Pompeo Arrigoni and Pietro Aldobrandini, and working in the major churches of Santa Maria in Vallicella (known as the Chiesa Nuova), Sant'Andrea della Valle, San Giovanni dei Fiorentini and Santa Maria Maggiore. He provided decorations for number of villas, notably those of Cardinals Scipione Borghese in Rome and Pompeo Arrigoni in Frascati, and also sent at least one altarpiece to a church in Naples. His successful career continued after his return to Florence in 1616, with numerous projects for churches and palaces, including work for the Medici at the Palazzo Pitti and a painting for the Casa Buonarroti. Although Passignano again worked for some time in Rome in the mid 1620s, following the election of his former Roman patron Maffeo Barberini as Pope Urban VIII, he spent his last decade living and working in Florence, painting relatively few works but remaining closely associated with the Accademia del Disegno. Among his pupils were Fabrizio Boschi, Cesare Dandini, Anastasio Fontebuoni, Francesco Furini, Pietro Sorri, Alessandro Tiarini and Ottavio Vannini.

Although the 17th century Florentine biographer Filippo Baldinucci praised Passignano as a draughtsman - writing that 'I disegni del Passignano sono maravigliosi per la nobiltà della maniera, e per una loro propria morbidezza e pastosità' - his drawings have remained comparatively less studied than those of other Florentine artists of the period, such as Ludovico Cigoli or Andrea Boscoli. Nevertheless, as the scholar Annamaria Petrioli Tofani has observed, 'An able as well as prolific draftsman, Passignano left numerous drawings of the most varied types...from rapid sketches of specific groupings or dynamic arrangements of a few figures to complete compositional elaborations to carefully completed bozzetti for approval by a patron. His drawings utilize all the instruments or materials available at the time: pen, chalk, wash, pastel and oil colors, and the blue paper favored by the Venetians as well as the white paper typical of the Florentine tradition. Because of his willingness to tackle graphic expression in all the range of its possibilities...Passignano's creativity achieved its best results in drawing.' Like most of his contemporaries, Passignano prepared his paintings with compositional sketches in pen and ink and followed these with single figure studies in chalk, drawn from a posed model. Indeed, his early training with Macchietti, Naldini and Zuccaro inspired a particular devotion to the practice of life drawing, and a number of academic studies of male nudes by Passignano, mainly in red chalk, survive today in the Uffizi in Florence, the Istituto Centrale per la Grafica in Rome, the Louvre in Paris, and elsewhere.