

Attributed to Thomas BLANCHET (Paris c.1614 - Lyon 1689)

A Design for a Funerary Monument or Catafalque

Pen and brown ink, with brown, grey, red and green wash and touches of white bodycolour.

Numbered *2* in brown ink at the upper right.

Inscribed *V* (or *P*?)*:10* in brown ink at the lower left and *p: 9.5 0* in brown ink at the lower centre.

421 x 267 mm. (16 5/8 x 10 1/2 in.)

This large and striking sheet is a design for a catafalque or funerary monument, with angels supporting a crowned sarcophagus, flanked by skeletons as caryatids, and the whole surmounted by an oval portrait of the deceased personage. Only half of the decorative scheme is shown, since presumably many of the same motifs would be repeated at the left side, although the artist has presented variant designs for the arrangement of the candelabra. As Peter Fuhring has noted, '*Elaborate funerary monuments…were in effect beds of state in a church on which to expose the bodies of the deceased or their coffins, surrounded by allegorical figures, inscriptions, arms, emblems of honour, candlesticks etc.*'

During his career, Thomas Blanchet designed a number of ephemeral decorations, as well as at least three tombs or funerary monuments. Indeed, one of his earliest datable projects was a proposed design for a mausoleum for René Voyer de Paulmy d'Argenson, the French ambassador to Venice, intended

for the Venetian church of San Giobbe. (Executed in 1652, Blanchet's drawing is today in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.) Another design by Blanchet for a monument to the Maréchal Nicolas de Villeroi, executed in 1686, is only known today from written descriptions and an anonymous drawing reproducing the finished work. Two drawings of designs for monuments by Blanchet, now lost, are recorded in the collection of the 19th century French collector Philippe de Chennevières.

A large and significant group of drawings by Thomas Blanchet, in the collection of the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm, includes a number of pen and ink studies of angels and allegorical figures that are stylistically similar to those in the present sheet. Also somewhat comparable is a large-scale study by Blanchet for the decoration of an apse, formerly in the collection of Pierre-Jean Mariette and today in the Louvre, as well as an equally large and elaborate design for a ceiling decoration in pen and watercolour, attributed to Blanchet, which is also in the Louvre.

Artist description:

Active as an architect, sculptor and painter, Thomas Blanchet was trained in the Parisian studio of Simon Vouet between 1637 and 1645. He spent a number of years in Rome, between 1647 and 1653, and there produced designs for funeral monuments and decorations for festivals and important public events. He met numerous artists, including Alessandro Algardi in Bologna, and Nicolas Poussin and Andrea Sacchi in Rome. On his return to France, Blanchet settled not in Paris but in his native Lyon, where he was soon established as one of the leading painters in the city. Between 1655 and 1672 he directed the extensive decoration of the town hall in Lyon, unfortunately destroyed by fire in 1674. In later years Blanchet contributed to the adornment of several Lyonnais buildings, notably the Abbey of the Dames de Saint-Pierre, on which he worked between 1675 and 1684, and the Palais de Justice, completed in 1687. He painted canvases for several churches in Lyon and also designed ephemeral decorations for festivals and ceremonial occasions, such as for the visit of Louis XIV to Lyon in 1658-1659. A founder member of the Académie de Peinture et de Sculpture in Lyon in 1676, he remained the most prominent artist in the city until his death.

As Jennifer Montagu has aptly noted, 'It is [the] frankly baroque character of his work that makes Blanchet so interesting a phenomenon in the French art of the seventeenth century. In the provinces, in a city which had long served as a meeting-place on the route between Paris and Italy, a member of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture could practise a style far removed from the orthodoxy of the capital. Provincial artists tend to sink into obscurity, and, lacking the constant informed criticism which would have been unavoidable in Paris, they may all too easily slip into that carelessness which is evident in much of Blanchet's very uneven production. But this provincial existence at the same time allowed them a greater freedom to develop in their individual ways, and their originality adds a variety and richness to the texture of French seventeenth century art.'