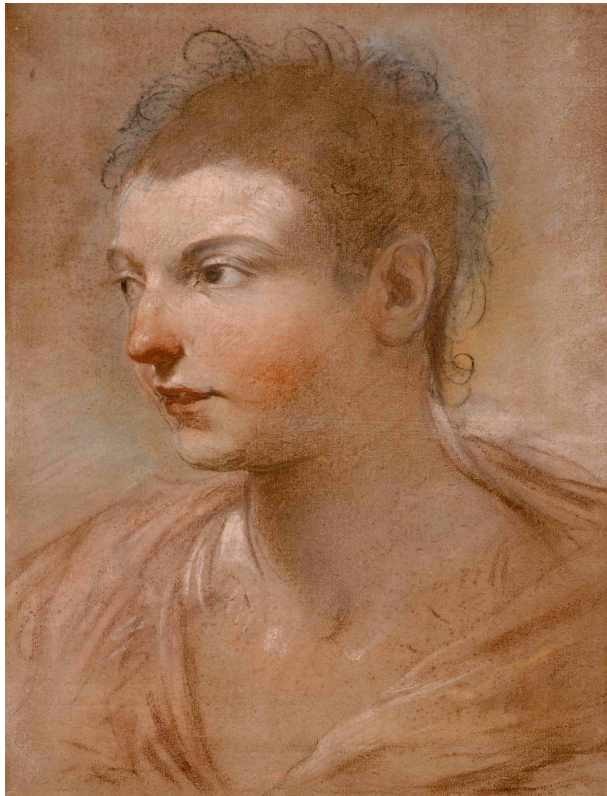


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Giuseppe Maria Crespi
(Bologna, 1665 – 1747)

Head study of an adolescent

pastel on paper

watermark: CS within a circle

38 x 28 cm.;

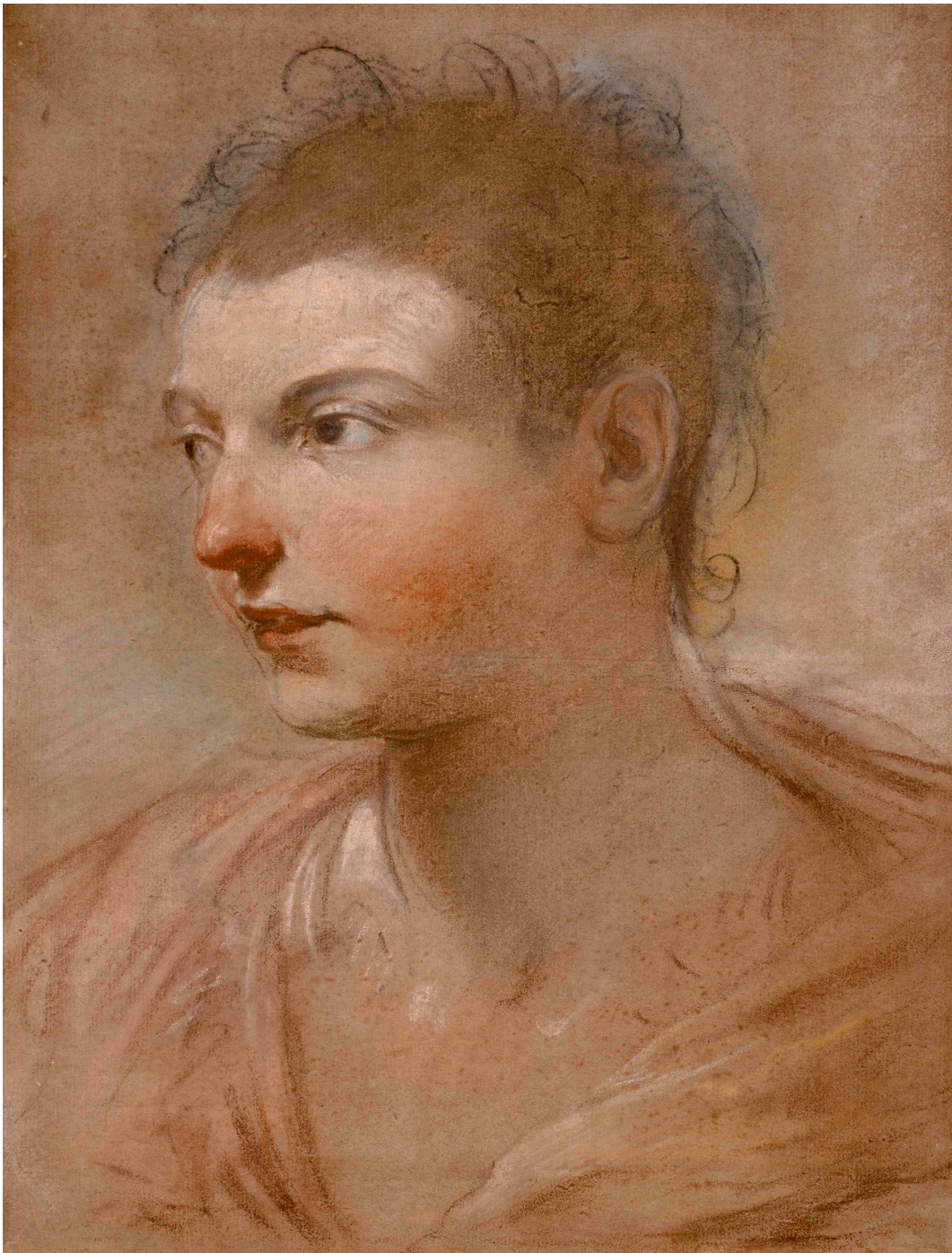
15 x 11 1/8 in.

Provenance

Private collection, UK.

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This delicately rendered pastel study of an adolescent is a *unicum* within the catalogue of Giuseppe Maria Crespi's graphic works, as it currently stands. However, it is probable that the full range of his drawing habits has not yet been credited. Crespi trained in Bologna, in the Carracci tradition, and was known for his extensive private study of the Carraccis' own frescoes. As such, he too would have likely produced large numbers of preliminary studies from life as part of his working methods as a painter. It would be surprising for such an innovative and rule-breaking artist ever to have limited himself so.

Pastel head-studies had long been fashionable in Bologna, and are a small but important component within the graphic *oeuvres* of both Domenico Maria Canuti (fig. 1), under whom Crespi worked for a time, and of Guido Reni (fig. 2), who had been Canuti's own master and, of course, a major influence on every Bolognese artist thereafter. Perhaps Crespi even learnt to use pastel directly from Canuti, since the present work certainly shares some technical characteristics with those of the older artist.



Figure 1. Domenico Maria Canuti, *Female Head*, pastel, 36.8 x 25.4 cm., Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest

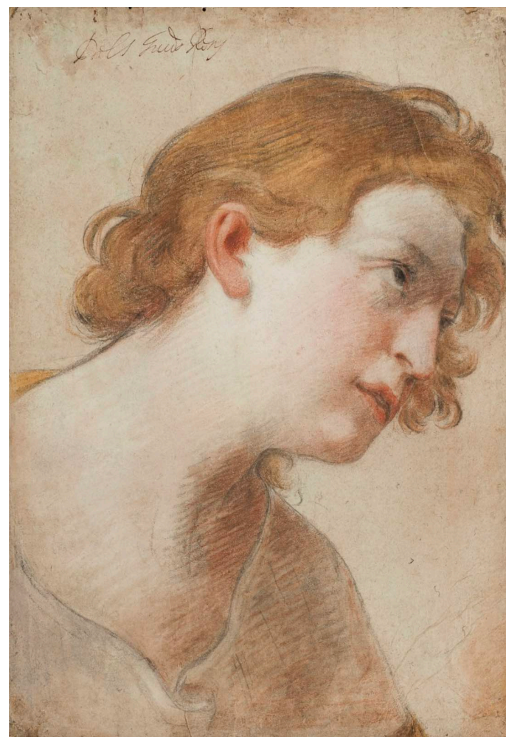


Figure 2. Guido Reni, *Male Head*, pastel, 42.5 x 29.5 cm., Private collection

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As rendered in pastel, the physiognomy of this youthful face, with its ruddy round cheeks, long nose, strong chin, arched eyebrows and full, half-opened lips, can be favourably compared to several figures, both male and female, in Crespi's better-recognised paintings. For example, there is Crespi's *Girl with a cat* (fig. 3), in the Fitzwilliam Museum, or his *Madonna and Child* in a private collection (fig. 4). But the closest and most striking comparison is to be made with the *Young man with a helmet* (fig. 5), itself an anomalous work, with its intimacy being more typical of Crespi's drawings, as the Nelson-Atkins Museum well notes. Here, though dressed in costume, the figure has also been shown in half-profile (not coincidentally, at just the extreme angle that Reni had always preferred). The similarities are even strong enough for it to be posited that the same model may have sat for both of these works, although, he might appear just a couple of years younger in the pastel. If so, that would date the pastel to *circa* 1725, in the latter part of Crespi's career, when he was increasingly reflecting not just on his own earlier work, but back on the whole Bolognese tradition.

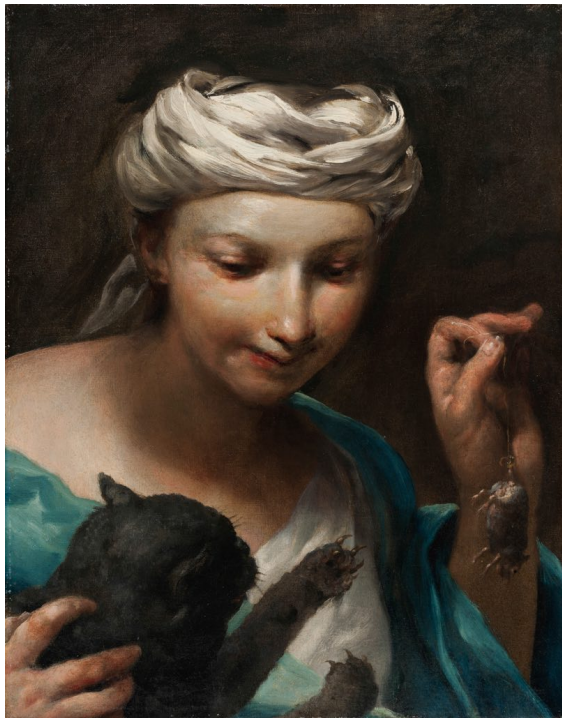


Figure 3. Giuseppe Maria Crespi, *Girl with a cat*, oil on canvas, 44.4 x 34.9 cm., Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge



Figure 4. Giuseppe Maria Crespi, *Madonna and Child*, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 41.5 cm., Private collection

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In spite of the different media, there is a certain consistency of technique between this pastel, these oils, and, indeed, many of Crespi's other works. This is most notable in the mottled red seen on the cheeks and nose, combined with strong white highlights on the bridge of the nose, the cheekbones and forehead. Crespi's art was distinguished from that of his Bolognese colleagues, as well as that of his forebears such as Reni and Canuti, by the strength of his tonal contrasts.

The present work is an important addition to Crespi's *oeuvre*, as it expands our understanding of his range and capabilities. It is fair to say that the use of pastel by Bolognese artists has, in general, been less studied. In fact, Crespi's use of this medium has not been studied at all until now.

We are grateful to Professor Daniele Benati for confirming the attribution to Crespi.



Figure 5. Giuseppe Maria Crespi, *Young man with a helmet*, oil on canvas, 64.1 x 50.6 cm., Nelson Atkins Museum, Missouri