

# COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Jacopo Ligozzi  
(Verona 1547 – Florence 1627)

*An Ideal Head of a Woman with an Elaborate Headdress*

Pen and brown ink, over traces of black chalk; laid down  
31.5 x 21.4 cm (12 ½ x 8 ½ in.)

Provenance:

Private collection;

Phillips London, Old Master Drawings, 7 July 1993 lot 132;

Jean-Luc Baroni, London;

Where acquired, Private Collection, UK.



This remarkable sheet, depicting the head of an ideal woman in profile, demonstrates Jacopo Ligozzi's inventiveness and knowledge of contemporary art-historical trends. Using his typical attention to detail, the artist slowly works up the facial features and carefully delineates the numerous pearls and accessories. In every respect, she adheres to the feminine poetic ideal: a straight nose, plump lips, and long braided hair.

Through her impossibly elaborate hairstyle and portrayal in strict profile, we can place this drawing within the particularly Florentine concept of the *teste divine*: paintings or drawings of idealized heads. This theme was amply explored by painters such as Piero di Cosimo and Botticelli, before reaching an apex with Michelangelo (see fig. 1). As Paul Joannides has noted, 'Although he did not invent the genre [of the ideal head, Michelangelo] exploited it more fully and with greater imagination than any of his forerunners, and it was predominantly his example that affected later artists.'<sup>1</sup> It has also been suggested that Ligozzi may have been inspired by profile heads in the drawings of Pisanello, which he may have seen in his youth in his native Verona (fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Michelangelo, *Ideal head of a Woman*, British Museum

Fig. 3. Detail of *Saint George and the Princess*, Basilica of S. Anastasia, Verona

A further five profile studies by Ligozzi of women with elaborate coiffures are known, each closely related to the present drawing. Along with this sheet, three others were on the art market in London and sold at Phillips in 1993<sup>2</sup> (figs 4-6) while two further examples, now in private American collections, were also with Jean-Luc Baroni Ltd.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Paul Joannides, *Michelangelo and His Influence: Drawings from Windsor Castle*, exh. cat. London and elsewhere, 1996-1998, 34.

<sup>2</sup> Anonymous sale, London, Phillips, 7 July 1993, lots 127, 128 and 131.

<sup>3</sup> New York and London, Colnaghi, S Ongpin, *Master Drawings*, 1994, no. 9; New York and London, Colnaghi, S Ongpin, *Master Drawings*, 2001, no. 13.



Figs 4-6. Jacopo Ligozzi, *Teste divine*, (Phillips London, Old Master Drawings, 7 July 1993, lots 127, 128, and 131, respectively).

A related drawing in the Uffizi, dated 1612, depicts the head and shoulders of a woman wearing a comparable headdress<sup>4</sup> (fig. 7). Women with similar coiffures, though not as elaborate, are also to be found in a number of Ligozzi's paintings, such as the altarpiece of the *Visitation* in the cathedral in Lucca or the *Birth of the Virgin* at Monte Oliveto Maggiore (fig. 8).



Fig. 7. Jacopo Ligozzi, *Ideal head*, Uffizi.



Fig. 8. Jacopo Ligozzi, *Birth of the Virgin*, Monte Oliveto Maggiore, Asciano, Italy

Although born and raised in Verona, Jacopo Ligozzi spent almost the entirety of his long career in Florence, where he arrived in 1577. He was admitted into the Florentine

<sup>4</sup> Inv. 1094 S; inscribed 'Adi 29 ottobre/1612' in Ligozzi's handwriting and measuring 235 x 167 mm.

Accademia del Disegno in 1582. Ligozzi worked as court artist for four successive Medici Grand Dukes, from Francesco I to Ferdinando II, executing numerous designs for tapestries, furniture, glass, *pietra dura* and metalwork. According to Medici inventories, however, much of his work took the form of small-scale paintings, often of a devotional or emblematic nature. Ligozzi's first important public commissions came in the 1590s, when he painted two large historical scenes on slate for the Salone dei Cinquecento of the Palazzo Vecchio, and he later painted altarpieces for such local churches as Santa Maria Novella, San Marco and San Giovannino degli Scolopi. He also painted altarpieces for churches elsewhere in Tuscany; in Bibbiena, Poppi, Arezzo and at Monte Oliveto Maggiore. Ligozzi's best-known works as a painter are, however, a series of seventeen lunette frescoes of scenes from the life of Saint Francis for the church of Ognissanti in Florence, completed in 1600. Among his late altarpieces is a *Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence* for the Florentine church of Santa Croce, painted in 1611.

In keeping with Grand Duke Francesco I's interest in natural history, Ligozzi also produced a large number of scientific drawings depicting specimens of fishes, birds and flowers in the Granducal collections. An album of such drawings is recorded in the Medici Guardaroba in 1619, and a large number of natural history drawings by Ligozzi are today in the Uffizi. (Some of these drawings were also used to illustrate the treatises of the Bolognese naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi). He also provided several designs for printmakers such as Agostino Carracci, Philippe Thomassin and the chiaroscuro woodcutter Andrea Andreani. Whatever the subject, Ligozzi's drawings are invariably highly finished, often heightened with touches of gold, and combine a meticulous technique with a miniaturist's attention to detail.