

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



GIULIO CESARE PROCACCINI

(Bologna 1574-1625 Milan)

LAMENTATION OVER THE DEAD CHRIST

oil on canvas
58x 89 cm; 22 7/8 x 35 in.

Provenance

Private collection, Italy, circa 1930;
With Piacenti Art Gallery, London, 2017;
Private collection, Germany.

Literature

Brigstocke, Hugh, and Odette D'Albo. *Giulio Cesare Procaccini: Life and Work* (2020), p. 339, under cat. no. 77 (as a copy).

Tanzi, Marco. "Due esercitazioni lombarde: Bernardino Campi e Giulio Cesare Procaccini" *Storia dell'arte* N.S. 1 (2018): pp. 9-30.

Wittgens, Fernanda. "Per la cronologia di G. C. Procaccini". *Rivista d'Arte* anno 15 (1933): pp. 33-64.

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



LONDON

NEW YORK

MADRID

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760

This wonderfully expressive *bozzetto* on canvas by Giulio Cesare Procaccini (one of the most sought-after painters of the Northern Italian Baroque) depicts The Lamentation of Angels over the Dead Christ. Seven weeping heavenly figures surround the dead Redeemer, who lies on a marble tomb, which has been remarkably foreshortened and elegantly draped with a thin sheet. Along with the angels, an elegantly robed figure at the right of the composition joins in the lamentation and lovingly clasps Christ's hand. The mourner's arm forms a strong diagonal line which both consolidates and adds movement to the composition. Though the figure's monumentality suggests the figure as Saint John, or perhaps just another angel, scholars have identified the likeness as that of Mary Magdalene.

The present canvas (as the inscription on the stretcher reminds us) is a preparatory work for the overdoor lunette in the Franciscan church of Sant'Angelo, Milan (**Fig. 1**). The entire complex of Sant'Angelo is decorated with paintings and frescoes by Giulio Cesare, as well as those by his brother Camillo (1551-1629).¹ Originally, the overdoor painting hung over the passage between the church's two cloisters, having later been moved to the sacristy following a fire.

The Bolognese biographer Carlo Cesare Malvasia, in *Felsina Pittrice*, lavished the lunette with praise:

Giulio Cesare [...] sfoderò il Cristo morto così bello che pare del Correggio ad un certa verità, e pel colorito [...] porta la palma di tutti.²

In addition to important historical biographers, eminent scholars such as Fernanda Wittgens³ and Nikolaus Pevsner have commented on the Sant'Angelo lunette, with the latter describing it as a "scene of serious sentiment and of true passion".⁴ Wittgens was the first scholar to discuss the creative process of the work, by adding the present canvas to discussions of the relationship between the final painting and an earlier oil on paper sketch now in the National Gallery of Scotland (**Fig. 2**).⁵ In particular, she postulated a long gestation for this work, noting clear stylistic differences between the oil sketch and this larger *bozzetto*.

Comparing the two sketches, one can only be inclined to support Wittgens' observation. Though both works are impressive, they are fundamentally different in spirit. The Scottish sheet is worked up with deep blues and reds, with an extremely feminine Magdalene. The present canvas instead, presents a scene of coppery oranges and the slightest hints of pallid blue to intensify the scene. The androgynous Magdalene's arm has been extended, and Christ's finger directly points downward. Considering the composition was designed as an overdoor lunette, this change (combined with a slightly adjusted, more directed gaze) makes the interaction between the

¹ See Maria Cristina Chiusa, *Sant'Angelo in Milano*, Milan 1990.

² "Giulio Cesare uncovered the *dead Christ*, so beautiful that in certain respects it seems a work by Correggio, and when it comes to his colouring, he beats them all." Carlo Cesare Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, Bologna 1678, pp. 286, 288.

³ Director of the Pinacoteca di Brera from 1940 to her death in 1957, and the first woman to head up a museum in Italy.

⁴ Nikolaus Pevsner, "Giulio Cesare Procaccini". *Rivista d'Arte* anno 11, no. 3, pp. 341-42.

⁵ Wittgens 1933, p. 63.

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760

viewer and Christ incredibly direct, almost as if the Redeemer is reminding us that he died for the spectator's sins.

Wittgens (1933) and Marco Tanzi (2018) view the work as an important rediscovery and an integral part of the Sant'Angelo commission. Conversely, the publication by Brigstocke and D'Albo lists the work as a copy. However, when closely comparing the present work with the final piece, there are some key differences that strongly suggest that the work in question was an integral preparatory step by the artist and not a copy. Most notably, the final work contains an additional angel to the right of the composition. Other smaller changes include the visibility of the leftmost angel's left hand (placed clasping Christ's wrist in the final composition).

The dating of the work remains open for debate-- dating Procaccini's works can be difficult due to the mélange of stylistic influences that marked his *oeuvre* from early on. Wittgens placed the inception of the composition right after the completion of the lunette depicting the *Death of the Virgin* in the Pinacoteca di Cremona (**Fig. 3**), while Brigstocke later in his career opted for a later date of around 1620 for the finished piece, that is, after Giulio Cesare's trip to Genoa, where he would be exposed to the expressive dynamism of Peter Paul Rubens and adopted a more severe style.⁶ Questions about dating aside, the lunette for Sant'Angelo remains an important testament of Procaccini's later career, with ample scholarly commentary and pictorial evidence.

⁶ Hugh Brigstocke, *Procaccini in America*, Exh. cat. London and New York (Hall and Knight) 2002, 44.

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Fig. 1. Giulio Cesare Procaccini, *The Dead Christ with Mary Magdalen and Mourning Angels*, circa 1620. Milan, Chiesa di Sant'Angelo.

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Fig. 2. Giulio Cesare Procaccini, *The Dead Christ with Mary Magdalen and Mourning Angels*, *circa* 1612. Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland.

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Fig. 3. Giulio Cesare Procaccini, *The Death of the Virgin* circa 1612.
Pinacoteca di Cremona.

LONDON

NEW YORK

MADRID