

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Italo-Flemish School
Late Sixteenth Century

Saint John the Baptist in the Wilderness

Inscribed: *Salvator Rosa* in brown ink in a cartouche on the old mount.
Pen and brown ink and brown wash, with touches of red and blue wash, heightened with gold and silver, on light brown paper with a drawn fictive, frame-like border. Laid down.

32.2 x 26.8 cm. (12 5/8 x 10 1/2 in.)

Provenance:

Private collection, England;

Bonhams Knightsbridge, 12th December 1996, lot 56 (as Circle of Giovanni Fiammingo);

Jean-Luc Baroni Ltd, London 2006, Cat. no. 14.



This highly refined drawing depicts the figure of Saint John the Baptist filling his bowl with the water of the river Jordan, amidst trees and animals. The Baptist's body gracefully twists and turns, forming a typically Mannerist *figura serpentinata*. His humble fur tunic elegantly follows and highlights the contours of his body, and his luscious and varied hair frames his incredibly direct expression. At his feet we can see a lamb, his typical companion which evokes Christ as the Lamb of God, sacrificed to take away the sins of the world. In this sheet, the lamb is accompanied by far more exotic fare: a leopard imbibes the sacred waters, as a peacock, a parrot, and two stags watch on.

Given its high degree of finish, and extensive heightening in silver and gold, this sheet is almost certainly a modello for a tapestry, to be shown to a patron for approval before work on the actual full-size cartoon was begun. This is bolstered by the disposition of the natural elements in the scene, which are arranged to gracefully cover every part of the composition and avoid large open spaces: *verdure*, tapestries showing elegantly arranged flora and fauna often employed such a technique in order to provide visual intrigue.

The non-narrative subject of the drawing, as well as the direct focus on the single figure of the saint would suggest that the tapestry may have been intended for a private home. Certain aspects of the sheet show traces of a Northern hand, likely due to the predominance of Northern artists (and hence, style) in tapestry production, but the gracefulness of the saint suggests a strong Italian, and perhaps Florentine, influence.

The first tapestry workshops in Florence were established in 1545 by the Flemish weavers Nicolas Karcher and Jan Rost, both under the patronage of Duke Cosimo I de' Medici. Unlike the tapestry workshops established earlier in Mantua and Ferrara, which were primarily concerned with providing the rulers of these city-states with furnishings for their palaces, the Rost and Karcher workshops seem to have been intended by Cosimo as the vanguard of a new Florentine industry. It appears that Cosimo wished to establish Florence as a major centre of tapestry production in Italy and hence not only encouraged Karcher and Rost to undertake freelance commissions from other patrons but also expected them to train local apprentices. Ducal commissions resulted in more than forty narrative tapestries woven in Florence between 1546 and 1553, for the most part intended for the Palazzo Vecchio. Although woven by Flemish masters, the design of the tapestries was entrusted by Cosimo to his favoured Florentine artists, notably Agnolo Bronzino and Francesco Salviati, as well as Jacopo Pontormo and Francesco Bacchiacca (Figs 1-2).

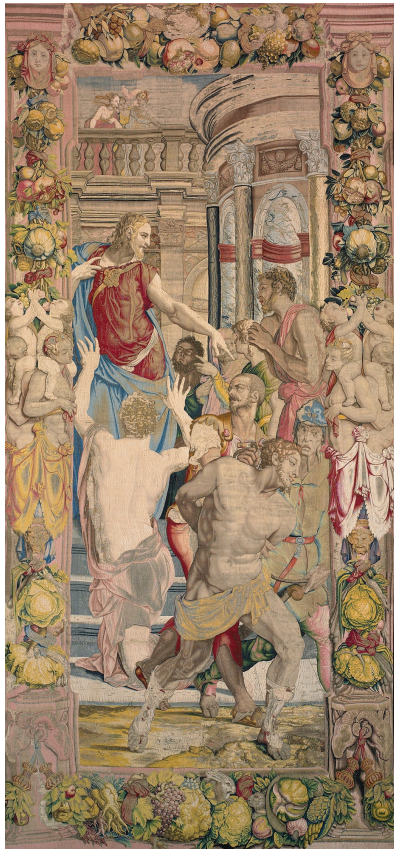


Fig. 1. Nicolas Karcher after a design by Agnolo Bronzino, *Joseph Taking Simeon as Hostage*, Quirinal Palace, Rome.

Fig. 2. Jan Rost after a design by Jacopo Carucci, called Pontormo, *Joseph and Potiphar's Wife*, Quirinal Palace, Rome.

In 1554, Cosimo established a new ducal tapestry factory in Florence, known as the *Arazzeria medicea*, which was run by local Italian weavers and which used less complex materials and techniques than their Flemish predecessors. While Bronzino continued to paint tapestry cartoons in the early years of the *Arazzeria*, the leading designer of this period was Jan van der Straet, known as Giovanni Stradano or Stradanus, who was to produce more than one hundred tapestry cartoons for the workshop, mainly intended for the various rooms of the Palazzo Vecchio and the various Medici villas. In 1575 he was succeeded as chief designer at the *Arazzeria* by Alessandro Allori, whose tapestry designs were mostly for the Palazzo Pitti. After the death of Cosimo and the accession of Ferdinando I as Grand Duke of Tuscany in 1587, tapestries of religious subjects became more popular. Later, artists entrusted with producing designs for the Medici tapestry factory included Ludovico Cardi (called Il Cigoli), Bernardino Poccetti and Michelangelo Cinganeli.

Giorgio Vasari, who had himself designed cartoons for tapestries, was well aware of the elements necessary for a successful tapestry design. As he wrote, 'there must be fantastic inventions and variety of composition in the figures, and these must stand out from one another, so that they may have strong relief, and they must come out bright in colouring and rich in the costumes and vestments'.¹ Most of the tapestries produced by the Florentine workshops in the sixteenth century are distinguished by elaborate borders, often with swags of fruit and foliage or other complex motifs.

¹ Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, translated Gaston du C. de Vere, London, 1912; 1996 ed., .II: 571.

The present sheet may be tentatively associated with the work of Jan Stradanus (1523-1605), who was the foremost tapestry designer at the *Arrazzeria medicea* in the 1560s and 1570s. The leopard in the foreground and the verdant foliage in the present sheet are also seen in *The Meeting of Dante and Virgil*, commissioned by a member of the Salviati family of Florence and today in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (Fig. 3).² Woven by Jan Rost after a design by Francesco Salviati, probably assisted by Stradanus, the tapestry may be dated to between 1547 and 1549. The edge of the composition is designed to look like a framed painting, rather than the more usual decorative border found in most Italian tapestries of the period. Also comparable to the present sheet are the animals in a tapestry of *A Stag Hunt with Traps*, woven by Benedetto Squilli in 1568 after a design by Stradanus, in the collection of the *Amministrazione provinciale* in Siena (Fig.4).³



Fig. 3 Jan Rost, after a design by Francesco Salviati (possibly assisted by Stradanus), *The Meeting of Dante and Virgil*, Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

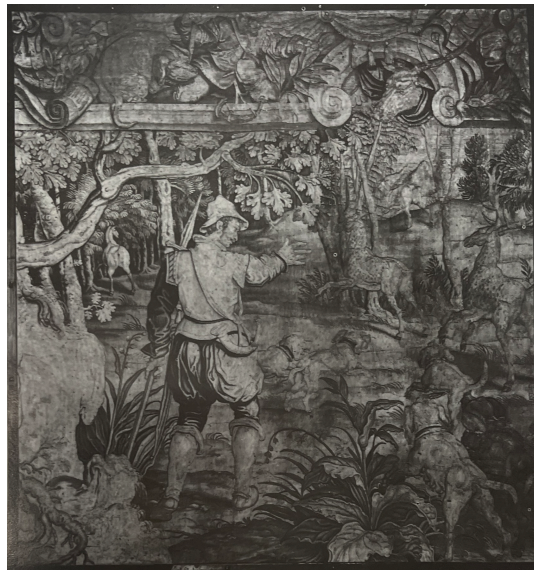


Fig. 4. Benedetto Squilli after a design by Stradanus, *A Stag Hunt with Traps*, municipal collections, Siena.

Only a few coloured modelli for tapestries of the Florentine Cinquecento are known today. This drawing may be compared in its high degree of finish and colouring to two drawings for a tapestry design by Cigoli, that were on the art market in 1991 (Fig. 5).⁴ The Cigoli drawing

² Candace J. Adelson, *European Tapestry in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts*, Minneapolis, 1994, 384-394, no.24, ill. 384; Alessandra Baroni Vannucci, *Jan Van Der Straet detto Giovanni Stradano: flandrus pictor et inventor*, Milan, 1997, 342, no.666, illustrated in colour p.334; Lucia Meoni, *Gli arazzi nei musei fiorentini: La collezione medicea. Catalogo completo. Vol I: "La manifattura da Cosimo I a Cosimo II (1545-1621)"*, Livorno, 1998, 47, fig.20.

³ Meoni 1998, illustrated 212, under nos.46-58. Similar animals are also found in several prints of hunting scenes after designs by Stradanus, such as *a Tiger Hunt*, *a Leopard Hunt* and *a Stag Hunt* from the series of over a hundred engravings known as *the Venationes Ferarum, Avium, Piscium* (Baroni Vannucci 1997, 374, 377, figs. 693.15, 693.16 and 693.33, respectively).

⁴ London, Katrin Bellinger Kunsthandel at Harari & Johns, *Drawing in Florence 1500-1650*, 1991, nos. 18a (design for the whole tapestry) and 18b (study for part of the decorative border of the same tapestry).

was for a never-executed tapestry of Pope Sixtus V at his desk, inspired by the Holy Ghost, commissioned by Alessandro Peretti, Cardinal Montalto, around 1593.



Fig. 5. Ludovico Cardi, called Cigoli, *Pope Sixtus V at his desk, inspired by Angels* (Sotheby's New York, *Old Master Drawings Including Property from the British Rail Pension Fund*, 08 January 1991, lot 16).