
BERNARDO STROZZI THE CAPPUCCINO

(Genoa 1581-1644 Venice)

The Three Fates

Pen and brown ink, gray wash heightened with white on prepared paper

20,5 x 23,3cm

Provenance :

Dorotheum Vienna, 18 April 2014, lot 111 (as « *workshop of Bernardo Strozzi* »);

Private collection, France

Related work:

Bernardo Strozzi, *The Three Fates*, oil on canvas, 144 x 130 cm, Bonomi collection, Milan; Luisa Mortari, Bernardo Strozzi, catalog raisonné, 1995, Cat. 453, Fig. p. 50, 181-82.

This sheet is presumably a preparatory drawing or a *ricordo* of the *Three Fates* of the Bonomi collection in Milan.

The drawing shows the three goddesses of fate. The Fates are, in Roman mythology, the master deities of human destiny, from birth to death. They are usually depicted as spinners measuring people's lives and cutting fate. Equivalent to the three Greek Moirai (Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos), the Roman Fates are three sisters, *Nona*, *Decima* and *Morta*. Immutable in their plans, they hold this mysterious thread, symbol of the course of life, and nothing can bend them or prevent them from cutting its weft. *Nona* – or *Clotho* for the Greeks – meaning “to spin” in Greek, seems to be the least old of the Fates. It is she who fabricates and holds the thread of human destinies. *Decima* – or *Lachesis* for the Greeks – a name which in Greek means “spell” or “act of drawing lots”, is the Fate which unwinds the thread and puts it on the spindle. *Morta* – or *Atropos* for the Greeks – inevitable” in Greek, ruthlessly cuts the thread that measures the length of each mortal's life. She is depicted as the oldest of the three sisters. The three Fates are represented here with their attributes: spindle, distaff and shears.

Besides the Milan painting, Luisa Mortari mentions two other versions: in London (Heim collection, oil on canvas, 140 x 167 cm, Cat. 455) and in Milan (private collection, oil on canvas, 130 x 144 cm, Cat. 456). Luisa Mortari dated these paintings to circa 1635 and the early years of Strozzi's Venetian period (1633-1644), because of the rough and naturalistic rendering of the figures and because of the dark colors. Strozzi thus painted the *Three Fates* on different occasions. It therefore seems likely that he not only executed detail studies but also made *ricordi* of his paintings which he might later turn to when painting new versions. This drawing could be such a *ricordo*. White heightenings indicate how

the artist conceived light in the painting, while dark areas and shades are rendered by the gray washes.

Only one detailed study is known today: the *Head of Atropos* (Luisa Mortari 1995, Cat. 67 v.) is located in the Boymans-van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam. This drawing is comparable to other works: *Head of an old woman*, circa 1635-40, black chalk heightened with white chalk in the Hermitage of Saint Petersburg and *Saint Sebastian healed by nuns* in the Church of S. Benedetto in Venice. The same face reappears in the present drawing and its following painting *The Three Fates*. These studies of head show how much the artist used black chalk and heightened white chalk. Strozzi's idiosyncratic manner is embodied as much in his drawings as in his paintings. The majority of the artist's drawings that have come down to us, less than a hundred sheets, represent studies of heads, limbs or hands, drawn in black chalk, often on tinted paper. There are, however, relatively few compositional drawings by the artist; our drawing is thus one of the rare examples. Most of his drawings are preparatory to paintings; he does not appear to have produced any finished presentation drawing to collectors.

Atypical in Strozzi's drawn work, the unusual style and technique of our drawing is however comparable to a study for *The Miracle of Saint Zita* (Luisa Mortari 1995, Cat. 7, p. 225) in Florence, Gabinetto dei Disegni e Stampe, Inv. 2151F. The painterly quality of our sheet, characterized by the use of pen and brown ink, combined with gray wash, makes it a rare and almost unique sheet among Strozzi's surviving drawings. Representing the *Three Fates*, it concentrates the composition and is executed with exceptional freedom and spontaneity. It is also a matter of naturalism as in the coarse manner of the Venetian years. In the strong typological characterization of the figures of the Fates, Strozzi here shows the influence of northern currents, indulging his instinctive need to force the expressive effects of the faces.

Strozzi was born in Genoa. He is not believed to be related to the Florentine Strozzi family. Bernardo Strozzi initially trained in the workshop of Cesare Corte, a minor Genoese painter whose work reflected the late Mannerist style of Luca Cambiaso. He subsequently joined the workshop of Pietro Sorri, an innovative Siennese painter residing in Genoa from 1596 to 1598. Sorri is credited with leading Strozzi away from the artificial elegance of Cambiaso's late Mannerist style towards a greater naturalism. In 1598, at the age of 17, Strozzi joined a Capuchin monastery, a reformist offshoot of the Franciscan order. During this time he likely painted devotional compositions for the order, including many scenes with St. Francis of Assisi whose life and deeds formed the inspiration of the order. While a monk of the Capuchin monastery of San Barnaba he came to be called by the nickname « *il Cappuccino* » (the « *Capuchin monk* »). Since he was allowed to abandon his Capuchin habit for that of a priest, he was also known as *il prete genovese* (the « *genovese priest* »).

When his father died around 1608, Strozzi left the Capuchin monastery to care for his mother and unmarried sister. He supported his family through his paintings. Strozzi's career took off during the next decade and Genoa's powerful Doria and Centurione families became his patrons. Other influences on the young painter were the Siennese Baroque artists Ventura Salimbeni and Francesco Vanni, as well as Anthony Van Dyck, who worked in Genoa several times between 1621 and 1627.

After about two decades in Genoa, Strozzi spent the latter part of his career in Venice, where he settled around 1633 to avoid having to return to the Capuchin order. In Venice, he gained fame as a painter of religious subjects but also as a portrait painter. An exuberant colourist, Strozzi reveled in the application of paint in thick impastos, and his bold manner was to influence future generations of Venetian painters. By 1632-1633 the artist had reemerged in Venice where he had been allowed to work and live. Strozzi was able to build a strong reputation within two years, despite not being a native Venetian. He gradually gained recognition as one of the leading artists of his age. The Doge of Venice Francesco Erizzo became one of his most prominent patrons. Strozzi likely painted the Doge's portrait soon after he arrived in Venice. Strozzi continued to develop his style throughout his career.
