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Giovanni Maria Viani

Study of a Kneeling Figure

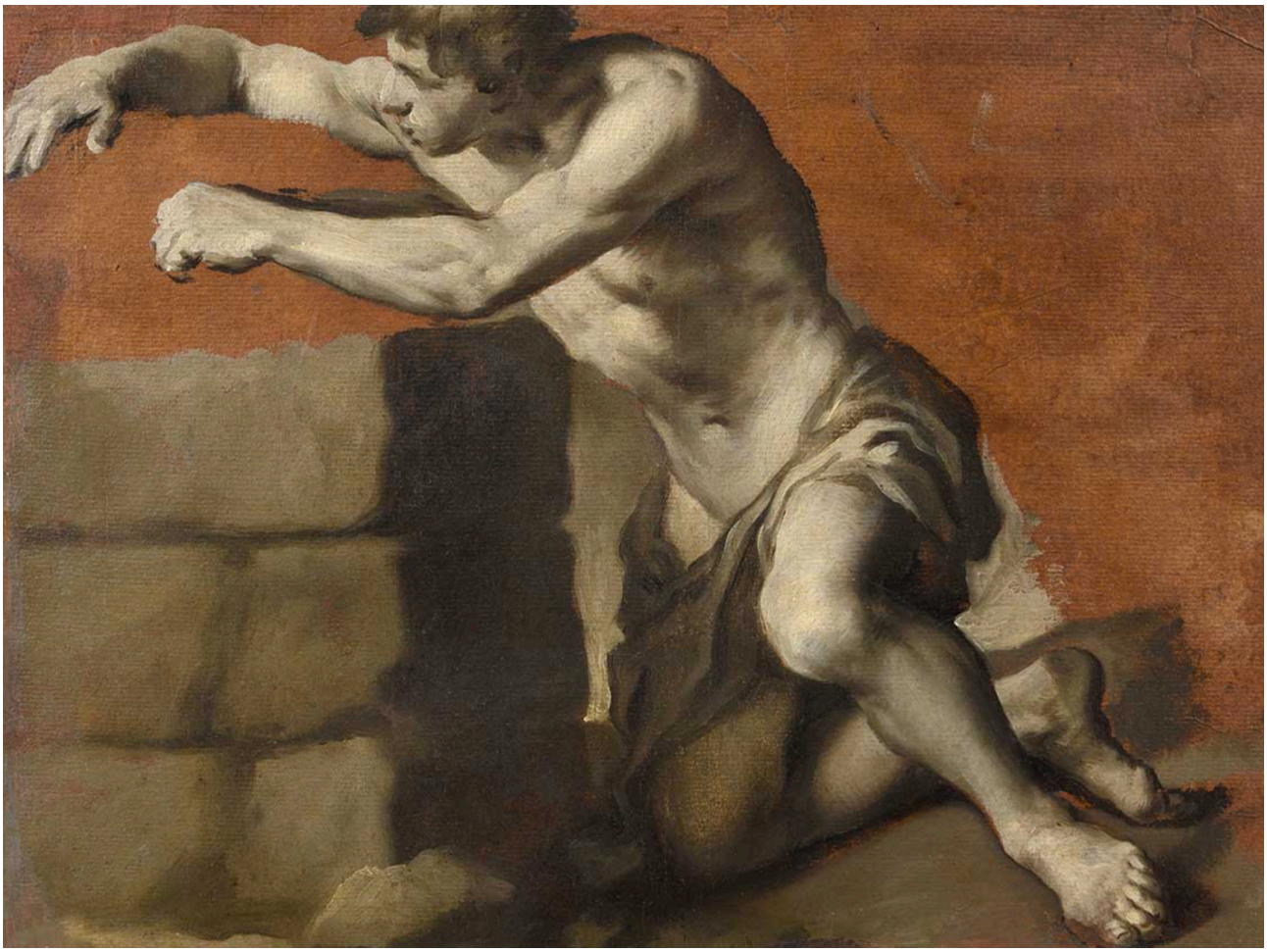
GIOVANNI MARIA VIANI
(Bologna 1636 – Pistoia 1700)

STUDY OF A KNEELING FIGURE

Oil on paper
29.2 × 39.4 cm; 11 1/2 × 15 1/2 in.

Provenance

Private collection, France.



A pupil of Flaminio Torre, Giovanni Maria Viani inherited from his master a classical manner deeply indebted to Guido Reni, under whom Torre himself had trained. During the 1670s, Viani's work still reveals an artist poised between the ideal classicism of Carlo Cignani and Marcantonio Franceschini (see, for example, *Diana and Endymion*, Turin, Accademia Albertina) and the expressive pathos of Flaminio Torre. At the same time, however, he developed a sense of monumentality and naturalism that finds a worthy precedent in the Carracci's engagement with observed reality, as may be seen in his *Saint Francis* in the church of San Rocco in Bologna. By this date Viani was already a painter of considerable reputation in Bologna, where he received numerous important ecclesiastical commissions, including the frescoes in the lunettes of the Portico dei Servi, executed in collaboration with Cignani. His work at San Michele in Bosco (1685–1693), together with the Ozzano altarpiece of around 1690, regarded as his masterpiece, secured his place within late seventeenth-century Bolognese painting and anticipated the style of his son, Domenico Maria Viani.

The practice of studying the male nude developed in Bologna with the Carracci and the establishment of their academy. In executing the present study of a nude in oil on paper, Viani placed himself firmly within this tradition. No painted figure in Viani's surviving oeuvre can be directly connected with the present nude study, although this is not in itself surprising, since such life studies were primarily exercises undertaken as part of the artist's regular practice.

The present study may nevertheless have been preparatory for a painting depicting a sacrifice, such as *The Sacrifice of Noah*. Here one finds Viani's characteristic taste for powerful and somewhat extravagant anatomies, one of the distinctive features of his art. In this respect, the present study may be compared with the print of *The Repentance of Saint Peter* by Giovanni Francesco Giodalotti after Giovanni Maria Viani, as well as with the painting of *David with the Head of Goliath*in a private collection.

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