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Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione, called Il Grechetto
The Raising of Lazarus, *c.* 1645

GIOVANNI BENEDETTO CASTIGLIONE, CALLED IL GRECHETTO
(Genoa 1609 – 166 Mantua)

THE RAISING OF LAZARUS, *c*. 1645

Brush drawing in red and brown oil paint, heightened with blue and white, on laid paper, laid down on canvas and mounted on paper.

54.5 × 39 cm; 21 1/2 x 15 3/8 in.

Bears on the verso the collector's mark of Baron Adalbert von Lanna (Lugt L. 2773) and the numbers *59* and *85*.

Provenance

Consul Joseph Smith (1674-1770), Venice;
Adalbert Freiherr von Lanna (1836-1909), Prague (Lugt 2773);
Sale, Rudolph Lepke, Berlin, *Collection of Baron Adalbert von Lanna, Prague* (vol. IV), 22 May 1911, lot 59 (as *Luca Giordano*);
Austrian private collection;
Sale, Dorotheum, Vienna, 19 November 2021, lot 143 (as *Follower of Castiglione*);
Private collection, France.



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Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione is one the most innovative and technically brilliant draftsman of his time, a claim that is amply demonstrated through this drawing. He often made large compositions by working spontaneously on the paper, mixing different media to create an almost rough appearance that greatly enlivens the scene. This newly rediscovered painting on paper of *The Raising of Lazarus* is a compelling and powerful addition to Castiglione's corpus. Formerly in the collection of Consul Joseph Smith, the present work is a superb example of Castiglione's mature style. It demonstrates not only the impact of artists he encountered in Rome, such as Rubens and Poussin, but also the audacious technical innovations he initiated, painting fluently with pigment and oil on paper.

The subject is the Biblical miracle in which Jesus revives Lazarus of Bethany, who has been dead and buried for four days. Castiglione's method skilfully complements his conception of the remarkable event. The dramatic orchestration of the scene, the fluid yet forcefully abbreviated construction of the figures, the expressively deformed physiognomies and the confident shorthand of the background characters are entirely characteristic of Castiglione's mature language. Above all, the extraordinary variety, rhythm and organization of the brushwork place the sheet, conceived as an autonomous work, firmly alongside his most ambitious oil drawings on paper, such as *God Appearing to Jonah* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, fig. 1) and *The Pagan Sacrifice* (Art Institute of Chicago, fig. 2).

Castiglione returned repeatedly to the *Raising of Lazarus*, treating the subject in several variants; among them is the etching of 1645–50 (fig. 3), in which Christ adopts a similar pose to that seen in the present drawing. Four drawings in the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle, by Castiglione or his immediate milieu, further reiterate the theme (see RCIN 903834, 904028, 903833, 903832).

Long obscured by an early misattribution to Luca Giordano and by the complexity of Castiglione's artistic milieu, crowded with imitators, followers and later interpreters, this work now re-emerges as a fully autograph creation by Giovanni Benedetto himself. Its scale, finish and compositional ambition underscore the central role of drawing in Castiglione's creative process, not as a preparatory exercise but as a fully resolved work of art.

The present sketch was copied by Jean-Honoré Fragonard in a drawing which he executed presumably during his sojourn in Venice, when the sketch was still in the possession of Consul Joseph Smith. Fragonard's drawing is preserved in the "Norton Simon Foundation" (F.1970.03.095.D, fig. 4) and shows the composition of the present study and the sketch of another figure. The sheet is inscribed "Benedetto G. Castiglione, Col. De Smith. Venise".

Castiglione, who was born in Genoa, travelled extensively to Rome, Naples, Parma, Florence and Mantua among other cities. Early biographers record that his masters were Anthony van Dyck, Giovanni Andrea de Ferrari, Giovanni Battista Paggi and Sinibaldo Scorza.[1] None of his paintings can be dated before the mid-1640s, but Ann Percy has argued that the artist started producing his trademark drawings, drawn with the brush and oil paint, from the 1630s.[2]
These works are greatly indebted to drawings and oil sketches by Van Dyck and Rubens; the latter visited Genoa several times between 1606-1608. By the 1650s Castiglione had fully developed the highly original drawing technique for which he is now so well-known.

We are grateful to Jonathan Bober for confirming the authorship of the present drawing. We also thank Catherine Loisel and Anna Orlando, both of whom expressed positive opinions regarding the attribution.

[1] A. Percy, *Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione. Master Draughstman of the Italian Baroque*, exhib. cat., Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1971, p. 21
[2] *ibid.*, p. 24



Fig. 1. Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione, *God the Father Appearing to Jacob*, c. 1635-45, brush with coloured oil paint and touches of brown ink; paper partly saturated with oil, 38.6 x 52.3. New York, The Met Museum.



Fig. 2. Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione, *A Pagan Sacrifice*, c. 1645-50, oil paint on tan laid paper, laid down on cream wove paper, 57.6 x 42.5. Art Institute Chicago.



Fig. 3. Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione, The Raising of Lazarus, 1645-50, etching, 22 x 31.4. New York, The Met Museum.



Fig. 4. Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *Study After Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione: Two Studies of the Resurrection of Lazarus*, 1760-61, black chalk on paper, 45.1 x 33.
Pasadena, The Norton Simon Foundation.

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COLNAGHI

COLNAGHI
London

26 BURY STREET, LONDON SW1Y 6AL
UNITED KINGDOM

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
10AM–6PM

+44 (0)20 7491 7408

contact@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI
Madrid

CALLE GENERAL CASTAÑOS 9
PLANTA BAJA, DCHA.
28004 MADRID

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
BY APPOINTMENT

spain@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI
New York

23 EAST 67TH STREET, FOURTH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10065
USA

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
10AM–6PM

+1 (917) 388-3825

newyork@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI
Brussels

RUE JACQUES JORDAENS 30
1000 BRUXELLES
BELGIUM

BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

brussels@colnaghi.com

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