COLNAGHI



Bernardo Strozzi

Bust-length Study for a Saint Mathew

BERNARDO STROZZI
(Genoa 1582 – 1644 Venice)

BUST-LENGTH STUDY FOR A SAINT MATHEW

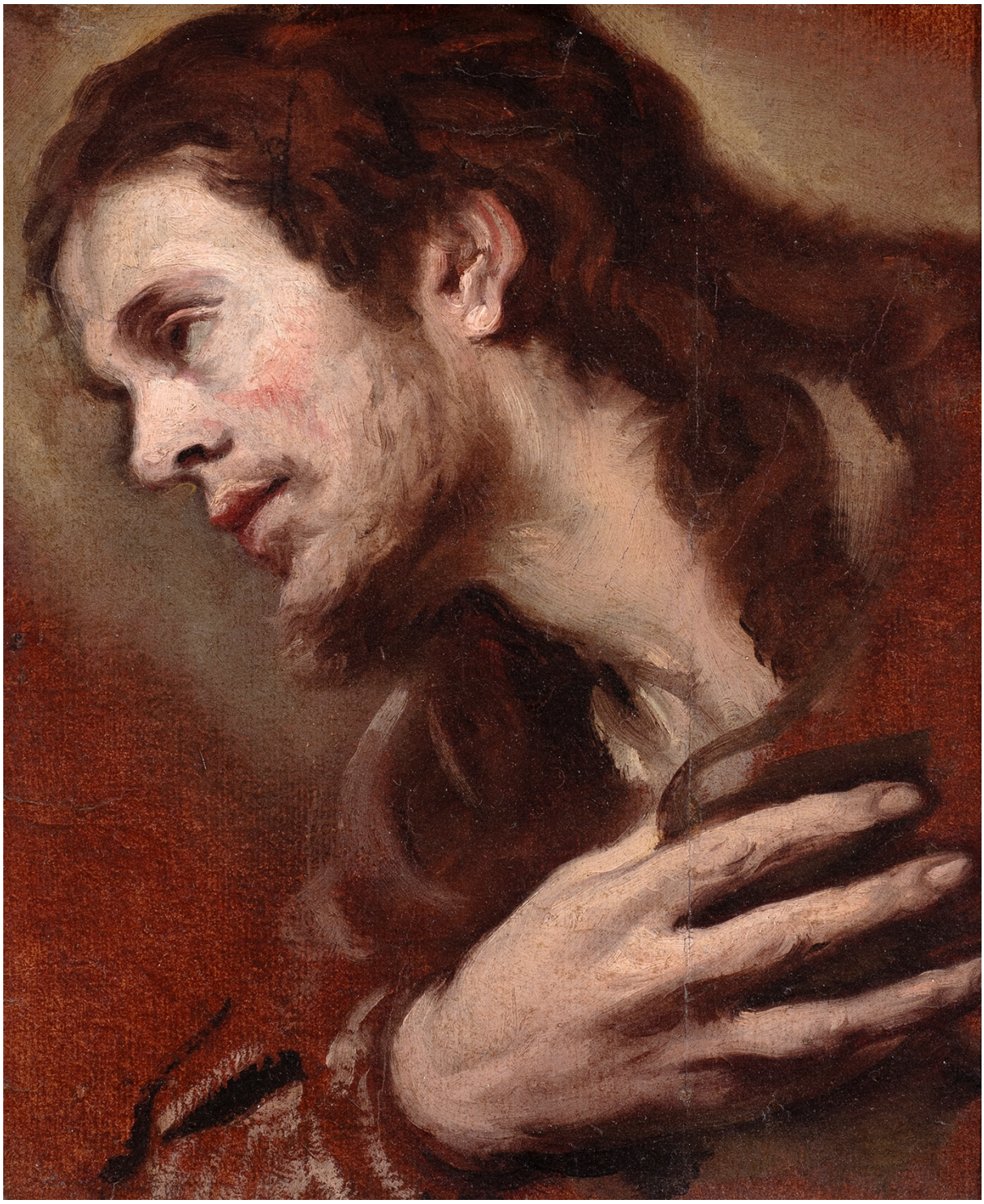
Oil on paper. Laid down on canvas
25 x 20.9 cm; 9 7/8 x 8 1/4 in.

Provenance

With Colnaghi, London, by 2001;
Private collection.

Literature

Colnaghi 2001, no. 19 (as Genoese School).



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Trained in Genoa with Cesare Corte and Pietro Sorri, Strozzi entered the Capuchin community of San Barnaba towards the end of the sixteenth century, leaving the convent in 1610. His Genoese career absorbed successive lessons from Barocci and the Lombard painters, from Caravaggesque naturalism and, decisively, from the Flemish painters (Rubens and Van Dyck) whose works were readily accessible in the city. After moving to Venice around 1630-1631, his handling became increasingly responsive to the Venetian tradition of colour, while his own vigorous painterly language proved influential on the development of seventeenth-century Venetian painting.[1]

Particularly vigorous and expressive, the present oil sketch had already been attributed to the circle of Bernardo Strozzi when it was published in the catalogue accompanying Colnaghi's 2001-2002 winter exhibition, *Master Drawings*.[2] On that occasion, however, the work was presented as a study for one of the shepherds gazing upon the Christ Child in an unidentified *Adoration*. Here, it is instead considered to relate to *The Calling of Saint Matthew* (oil on canvas, 61 × 103 cm, fig. 1), now in a private collection and dated to 1616-1617 by Camillo Manzitti in his 2013 monograph on the painter.[3] The 2001 catalogue already recognised characteristics closely associated with Strozzi, particularly in the painterly treatment of the hand and the markedly vivacious handling of the brush. Nevertheless, likely owing to the absence at the time of a sufficiently persuasive parallel within Strozzi's established painted oeuvre, the possibility of an attribution to one of his contemporaries or followers was also retained. It is worth noting, however, that when the sketch was published by Colnaghi, the aforementioned *Calling of Saint Matthew* was itself erroneously attributed to Gioacchino Assereto, thereby obscuring what now appears to be a compelling point of comparison.

Although comparatively few such works survive, preparatory oil sketches formed an established part of Strozzi's working practice. Mary Newcome devoted a study specifically to his drawings and *bozzetti* in 1993, while Gabriele Finaldi and Michael Kitson subsequently observed that the painter appears to have employed preparatory oil sketches with some frequency, often in monochrome and, on occasion, on paper.[4] A securely documented example is *Horatius Cocles on the Sublician Bridge* (oil on paper laid on canvas, 24 × 36 cm), now at the Ashmolean Museum and formerly in the Denis Mahon collection, which served as a *bozzetto* for the fresco decorating the ceiling of a room in the Villa Centurione-Carpaneto at Genoa-Sampierdarena.[5]

[1] Algeri 1995, pp. 21-38; Galassi 1995, pp. 39-55; Fantelli 1995, pp. 70-83.

[2] Colnaghi 2001, no. 19, as 'Genoese School'.

[3] Manzitti 2013, p. 89, no. 37, reproduced in black and white.

[4] Newcome 1993, pp. 14-24; Finaldi and Kitson 1997, pp. 164-165.

[5] Gavazza et al. 1995, pp. 160-161, no. 32, reproduced in colour.

Another portrait study by the *Genovese*, this time depicting a young woman wearing a pearl earring (oil on paper, 23 × 18.2 cm), appeared at Sotheby's, New York, on 29 January 2014.[6]

The facial type and physiognomy of the present work find close parallels in a number of Strozzi's strongly characterised male profiles, particularly his figures with long, swept-back hair and a small pointed beard. Comparable types recur in the *Sermon of Saint John the Baptist* in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, in *Christ and the Samaritan Woman* in the Bob Jones University Collection, Greenville – with its preparatory study *in trois crayons* now at the Morgan Library (fig. 2) – and in the figure of *Saint Roch* at the Accademia Carrara, Bergamo (fig. 3). In each, Strozzi exploits the emphatic projection of the brow and nose, the deeply modelled eye socket and the vigorous mass of hair to create a similarly forceful profile. The warm flush of red across the cheek is likewise characteristic of Strozzi's handling of flesh. As in the present study, the raised hand serves as a counterpoint to the illuminated face, both emerging against a dark background.

[6] Sotheby's 2014, lot 44, *Portrait of a Young Woman with a Pearl Earring*, oil on paper laid down on canvas, 23 × 18.2 cm.



Fig. 1. Bernardo Strozzi, *The Calling of Saint Matthew*, 1616-1617, oil on canvas, 61 × 103 cm. Private collection.





Fig. 2. Bernardo Strozzi, *Head of Christ*, black, red and white chalk on light brown paper, 39.6 × 26.2 cm, New York, The Morgan Library & Museum, inv. 1973.1.

Fig. 3. Bernardo Strozzi, *Saint Roch*, oil on canvas, 65 × 57 cm. Bergamo, Accademia Carrara, inv. 431 (900).

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