



Pietà

Oil on panel

193 x 117.5 cm.

Signed: Prosper Fontane(us) faciebat. Anno Dni.

M.D. (L.X.)III

This important painting, dating from Fontana's Bolognese period of the early 1560s, prior to his departure for Florence, seems to be referred to in a number of early sources, all of which indicate an original location in the Church of the Corpus Domini (also known as La Santa), Bologna, for which Fontana also painted an Assumption in 1565 (in situ).

A description of works painted for the Corpus Domini in Antonio di Paolo Masini's Bologna Perlustra (1666) mentions "'del Fontana, la depositione de Christo dalla Croce, Altare de' Campagna'", whilst Malvasia refers in the Felsina Pittrice (1678) to two Depositions, one executed for the Oratorio of the Ospedale della Morte (Bologna, Pinacoteca), "'e l'altra cosi delicata nella Chiesa del Corpo di Christo'". Worth noting is the fact that both paintings are referred to as Depositions although they are both iconographically closer to the Pietà, suggesting that the notion of the Deposition was broader in the early literature than its current use would suggest. The Heim panel is referred to again in a footnote by G.Giordani in Zanotti's 1841 edition of the Felsina where he records its presence in the collection of the conte Luigi Salina.

Stylistically, the painting confirms to trends in Fontana's work of the early 1560s. A relevant comparison might be the Baptism of 1561 (Bologna, S. Giacomo) with its evident reliance on Tibaldi's Ancona composition, modified by the Fontainebleau experience of around one year previously. Freedberg (1971) has emphasized the continuing importance of Vasarian maniera

for Fontana from the early 1550s, and the renewed contact between the two artists made close to the time of the execution of the present work may account for the strongly Vasarian overtones in the Pietà.

Prov.: Campagna family (?), Bologna 17thc.
Conte Luigi Salina, by 1841

Bibl.: Antonio di Paolo Masini, Bologna Perlustra, Bologna 1666, p.118
C.C. Malvasia, Felsina Pittrice, Vite de' pittori bolognesi, Bologna 1678, vol.I, p.219
C.C. Malvasia, Felsina Pittrice..., Bologna 1841, ed. G. Zanotti, vol.I, p.176, note 4
C.C. Malvasia, Le pitture di Bologna, Bologna 1686, ed. A. Emiliani, Bologna 1969, p.168, note 247/3