

LUCA GIORDANO  
(Neapolitan: 1632-1705)

DESCRIPTION:

Modello for the Ceiling Fresco of the Palazzo Medici Riccardi  
Canvas: 47 3/4 x 74 3/4 inches  
121.5 x 190 cm.  
Executed 1682-1683

The present painting is one of eleven preparatory canvases for Luca Giordano's masterpiece, the ceiling fresco in the Galleria of the Palazzo Medici Riccardi, Florence. This particular example is a study for the lower portion of the ceiling on the window side of the Galleria. The fresco's intricate program, at once a compendium of classical mythology and a glorification of the Medici dynasty, was provided by Senator Alessandro Segni for Marchese Francesco Riccardi, whose father had purchased the palazzo from the Medici family in 1650.

According to Riccardi Vernaccia (see below), the subject of this modello is an Allegory of Navigation. In the center, a full-sailed ship symbolizes the efforts of man balanced against the moving forces of the winds and water. At the right, Neptune, surrounded by an entourage of Nereids and Tritons, reaches out his arms to lift Amphitrite onto his chariot. Above them, giving sanction to this marriage of the god of the sea, are Venus and Cupid. To the left of the ship are Atlas, holding the heavenly sphere, and Bacchus, returning from India in his panther-drawn chariot. The figures in the left foreground have been traditionally identified as the philosopher Pythagoras and the astronomer Aristarchus of Samos. However, F. Büttner (cited below) has convincingly re-identified the black-clad figure as the god Momus and the figure with his finger to his mouth as Harpocrates, a god of silence.

In all, there are eleven modelli for the ceiling of the gallery and one for the Allegory of Divine Wisdom in the library. The entire series remained in the Palazzo Medici Riccardi until about 1822. In that year, the paintings in the gallery were published by Riccardi Vernaccia, and the modelli, not the ceiling, served as the basis for the engravings. By 1810, however, plans had already been under way to sell the modelli (see the inventory, published in F. Büttner, cited below, p. 240) from the Riccardi collections. Ten were acquired by the Earl of Shrewsbury by the second quarter of the nineteenth century and presently form part of the Denis Mahon collection, London (for these works, which comprise nine preparatory canvases for the gallery and one for the library frescoes, see the catalogue of the Detroit exhibition, cited below, nos. 151-153, 155-161).

DESCRIPTION (continued):

Another modello for the gallery ceiling is in the Emmanuel Kaye collection, London (see Detroit exhibition, no. 154, reproduced). Entitled The Death of Adonis, it is a study for the scene immediately to the right, in the fresco, of the present composition. Like our painting, it shows no record of an Earl of Shrewsbury provenance; it should be presumed, therefore, that these two modelli remained with the Riccardi family until after the 1810 sale. In any case, our picture has been only recently rediscovered (in the past it has erroneously been referred to as The Triumph of Venus). An oil sketch for the left portion of this composition, i.e., The Triumph of Bacchus, was formerly in the Fogg Art Museum, and is now in a private collection (for an illustration of that work, see R. Millen, cited below, p. 302).

Luca's black chalk drawing of Neptune Triumphant, representing perhaps an early stage in the development of the right side of the composition, is in the Janos Scholz collection, New York (for that work, see exhibition catalogue, University Park, Pennsylvania State University, Museum of Art, Carlo Maratti and His Contemporaries, January 19-March 16, 1975, no. 33).

DOCUMENTS:

1715. Inventory of the Palazzo Medici Riccardi (see F. Büttner, cited below, pp. 239-240):

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392. Dodici Quadri di diverse Grandezze dipintovi da Giordano tutti i Modelli della Pittura di questo Palazzo

1810. Sales inventory of the modelli, Palazzo Medici Riccardi (see F. Büttner, cited below, p. 240)

ENGRAVING:

Giovanni Paolo Lasinio (1789-1855), 1822 (see below, Riccardi Vernaccia)

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REFERENCES:

Francesco Saverio Baldinucci, Vita di Luca Giordano pittore napoletano, c. 153 v., ms. in Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence (Cod. palat. 565), ca. 1710-1721. (Refers to oil sketches as follows: "fatti i modelli in dodici quadri di buona grandezza, che si conservano in d.o. Palazzo.") Ms. published by O. Ferrari in "Una 'Vita' inedita di Luca Giordano," Napoli nobilissima, V, Fasciolo 4, July-August 1966, p. 130

Francesco Riccardi Vernaccia, Galleria Riccardiana dipinta da Luca Giordano...incisa da Lasigno figlio, Florence, 1822, pp. 17-20. Reproduced pl. IV

Barnard Castle, Bowes Museum, Neapolitan, Baroque and Rococo Painting, 1962, cited under no. 55 (as lost)

O. Ferrari and G. Scavizzi, Luca Giordano, Naples, 1966, I, p. 100; II, p. 113 (cited as lost)

London, P. & D. Colnaghi, Paintings by Old Masters, 1968, cited under no. 2 (as lost)

W.H. Wilson, "An Unpublished Giordano Bozzetto," Fogg Art Museum Acquisitions, 1966-1967, Cambridge, Mass., 1968, pp. 26-35 (present modello cited as lost). Engraving reproduced p. 31, fig. 4

F. Büttner, Die Galleria Riccardiana in Florenz, Frankfurt-am-Main, 1972, pp. 43-44 (discussion of iconography), 76; 194, note 16; 239-240. Reproduced p. 270, fig. 31 (engraving)

Detroit, Institute of Arts, The Twilight of the Medici. Late Baroque Art in Florence, 1670-1743, 1974, pp. 261; 264, cited under no. 154 (as lost)

F. Borroni Salvadori, "L'Esposizione del 1705 a Firenze," Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz, XIX, No. 3, 1975, pp. 393, 397

R. Millen, "Luca Giordano in Palazzo Riccardi, II: The Oil Sketches," in Kunst des Barock in der Toskana, Studien zur Kunst unter den letzten Medici, Munich, 1976, p. 303 (as lost)

S. Meloni Trkulja, "I Due primi cataloghi di mostre fiorentine," in Scritti di storia dell'arte in onore di Ugo Procacci (ed. by M.G. Ciardi Dupré Dal Poggetto and P. Dal Poggetto), Milan, 1977, II, pp. 579, 582

EXHIBITIONS:

Florence, Santissima Annunziata, Feast Day of St. Luke (October 18),  
1705 (lent by the Marchese Cosimo Riccardi; see Nota de' quadri che  
sono esposti per la festa di San Luca dagli Accademici del Disegno,  
unique copy in Florence, Biblioteca Marucelliana; see S. Meloni Trkulja,  
"Luca Giordano a Firenze," Paragone, No. 267, May 1972, pp. 38-39  
and p. 53, note 62)

COLLECTIONS:

The Marchesi Riccardi, Palazzo Medici Riccardi, Florence, until  
the second quarter of the nineteenth century  
Private collection, England