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LUCA GIORDANO
(Naples 1634 - 1705)

Son of the painter Antonio Giordano, under whom he first trained, Luca was placed by the Viceroy of Naples, whilst still a child in the studio of Jusepe Ribera, whose style he then absorbed so completely that many early Giordanos still pass as Riberas. At the age of thirteen he went to Rome and copied the great Renaissance and contemporary masters. He worked as an assistant to Pietro da Cortona on numerous commissions, and it is basically from Cortona that he derived his conception of the Baroque fresco-cycle, which was to be so decisive in the development of Neapolitan painting. He visited Lombardy, Venice and Florence, before returning to Naples. On his several visits to Venice he absorbed from Veronese a more colourful and graceful style of dramatic revelation in the same whole-hearted manner in which he had earlier embraced Ribera's style. He was similarly influenced to a lesser extent by many different schools and masters before evolving a style entirely his own. By 1654 he was already famous in his native city, where his supremacy lasted until his death, though he was working abroad much of the time. In 1680 he went to Florence to paint the dome of the Corsini chapel in the Carmine, returning for a second visit in 1682-3 to execute the frescoes of the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi. His fluency of invention and prodigious speed of execution earned him the nickname of "Fa Presto", and in 1692, as the only painter who could possibly finish the decoration of the vast Escorial in reasonable time, he was invited to Spain and appointed Court Painter by Charles II. He returned to Naples in February 1702 and died there three years later, having made his native city internationally important in the development of Baroque painting.

The Sacrifice on Mount Carmel: Lightning burns Elijah's offerings

(I Kings 18:38)

Canvas

61.6 x 75.6 cm.

This unpublished modello is a preparatory study for the lunette fresco in the Chapel of the Treasury in the Certosa di S. Martino, Naples (cf. Ferrari-Scavizzi, vol. III, fig. 664). It was executed after Giordano's return to Naples in 1702 and before April 1704, when the fresco was unveiled. The frescoes in this Chapel are amongst the artist's last works and, in the view of his contemporaries, also his best. De Dominici: "Luca nell'ultima opera sua, che fu la Sagrestia del Tesoro di S. Martino, fece un portento..." Paolo de Matteis wrote of Giordano, praising the works: "Le opere che lasciò in Napoli sono molte, anzi innumerevole,

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però la Cappella del Tesoro della Certosa di S. Martino, a parere de' più intendenti è la migliore". Solimena agreed: "sebbene da 'rancidi e secchi cervelli... non vi si trovi una perfetta squisitezza di corretti contorni, e di parti ricercate". Their reputation continued throughout the 18th century (L. Lanzi in 1792 concluded that "a ogni altro suo lavoro a fresco sono anteposti quei del Tesoro della Certosa") and, as Ferrari and Scavizzi note, this evaluation has continued to the present day.

Modelli for three other frescoes in the Chapel are in the City Art Museum, St. Louis, the Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle, and the Treccani collection, Milan (ibid. pp. 231-2), while the first idea for another in the series is discussed under catalogue no. 18, Heim Gallery, Summer Exhibition 1975.

Bibl: O. Ferrari and G. Scavizzi, Luca Giordano, Naples, 1966, vol. II, pp. 230-1.

Exhib: Heim Gallery, Summer 1975, no.17.