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JUAN CARREÑO DE MIRANDA

(AVILÉS, ASTURIAS, 1614-MADRID, 1685). ATTRIBUTED TO

Baptism of Christ

c. 1680

INS. BACK: «G A» (INK PEN, UPPER CENTRAL AREA); «JULIO/ROMANO FC [SIC]» (PENCIL, BOTTOM LEFT AREA);

«446» (PENCIL, BOTTOM LEFT ANGLE)/«? GUILIO ROMANO [SIC]» (PENCIL, BOTTOM RIGHT ANGLE)

RED CHALK/LAID PAPER. 134 × 173 MM

The present drawing, with lines on both surfaces, represents both studies for the *Baptism of Christ* done in red chalk, a technique frequently used by the artist throughout the course of his career. In the front side of the paper, in a close-up, appears Saint John the Baptist anointing Christ, while at the left side of the composition two angels can be seen carrying their clothing. The scene is contained by a series of trees. The whole group, where one can observe once again Tintoretto's influence, is executed quickly, with layers of red chalk emphasizing the shadow areas. The figure of Christ leans his left knee on a rock and joins his hands in prayer while being anointed. The representation on the back, which is more in a sketching style, is concentrated on two main figures, introducing major changes as regards to the arrangement on the other side of the drawing. In this way, Saint John the Baptist this time, leans his left knee on a rock; as to the figure of Christ that appears more elevated, even though his hands are joined as is in the representation on the other side. At the right side of the composition, he barely sketches some lines in red chalk, which seems to be the scene that is inserted in the landscape. Carreño painted throughout his artistic trajectory at least two paintings with the *Baptism of Christ* theme. The one of better quality is conserved in the church of Santiago in Madrid, and is dated around 1682. Another version with the

same composition is preserved in a private collection, signed and dated 1682, which is reduced in the lower part. Along with these, a small canvas (58,8 × 50 cm) conserved in the Hermitage Museum of Saint Petersburg which is considered as a preparatory sketch of the former ones, although specialists such as Pérez Sánchez discard the attribution to Carreño². Lastly, the Provincial Museum of Guadalajara conserves a *Saint John the Baptist in the desert* also attributed to the painter, where a new representation of the Baptism can be seen in the background of the composition, at the lower left part of the painting.

Several drawings are conserved which were conceived for the Baptismal theme. The one of better quality is found in the Prado Museum and shows a very detailed study using black pencil and red chalk for a figure of Christ³. Along with this one it's worth mentioning the other two, the ones preserved at The Getty Museum (Los Angeles) and at the Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi in Florence, both done using the same technique as the one conserved in the Prado. On the front side of the drawing an angel figure kneeling down is depicted, while the back of the drawing a nude Christ with the hands crossed over his chest is represented⁴. All these drawings show diverse variants on the Baptismal theme, and the only one that seems to be directly related with some of the conserved paintings is the piece



Juan Carreño de Miranda, *Baptism of Christ*, c. 1680-1682. Madrid, Church of Santiago



Juan Carreño de Miranda, *Christ baptized*, c. 1682. Los Angeles, The Getty Museum

at the Uffizi. This one shows noticeable similarities with the canvas of the church of Santiago in Madrid, although the figures appear inverted in the drawing regarding the painting. As regards to the sketch in concern, its most direct identification is with the canvas of *Saint John the Baptist* from the

Guadalajara Museum, as in both cases the figure of Christ is represented with the hands joined in prayer. All these drawings demonstrate to what extent Carreño worked his paintings' compositions thoroughly, analysing in great detail each one of the gestures and positions for his figures.

1 On Carreño citing the written biography of 1657 by Lázaro Díaz del Valle in García López (2008) pp. 315-319. See also the Exhibition *Carreño, Rizzi y Herrera* (1986), pp. 18-55.

2 Exhibition *Carreño, Rizzi y Herrera* (1986), p. 235, cat. no. 57.
3 Exhibition *Dibujo Español* (1980), p. 53, cat. no. 72.
4 See the Exhibition *Disegni Spagnoli* (1972), pp. 95-96, cat. no. 104-105

