

GALERIE DUPONCHEL

Old master paintings and drawings

Guillaume COURTOIS, called IL BORGOGNONE (1628-1679)

The conversion of Saint Paul



Guillaume COURTOIS, called IL BORGOGNONE
(Saint-Hippolyte, 1628 - Rome, 1679)

The conversion of Saint Paul

Brown wash over black chalk - 10 3/4 x 8 in. (27.5 x 20.3 cm)

Gilt frame - 7 11/16 x 14 3/4 in. (45 x 37.5 cm)

Comparative bibliography:

Dieter Graf, *Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf, Die Handzeichnungen von Guglielmo Cortese und Giovanni Battista Gaulli*, Vol. II, Düsseldorf 1976, pp. 64-65

A lively, tumultuous drawing, typical of Roman Baroque

The conversion of Saint Paul is recounted in the *New Testament* book of the *Acts of the Apostles*. On his way to Damascus, the saint, who was still a legionnaire and persecutor of the first Christians, saw Christ appear to him in the form of light. He immediately fell from his horse and was struck blind. Now converted, he was baptised three days later by Saint Ananias, who restored his sight. This story was often depicted by Baroque artists who, in keeping with the precepts of the Counter-Reformation, painted a number of edifying biblical stories that exalted the Catholic faith.

Guillaume Courtois draws the scene at its climax: dazzled by the divine light, Paul, unconscious, has just fallen from his still rearing horse. While one of his comrades tries to come to his aid, the other legionnaires are shaking in confusion, frightened by the miracle. The liveliness of the brushwork combined with the strong chiaroscuro rendered by a high-contrast wash accentuates the dramatism of the whole. The witnesses to the miracle are treated as a seething mass at the foot of which lies the figure of the saint, bathed in a halo of light (ill. 1).



ill. 1: detail

In addition to the great vigour of the treatment, the technique used is rare. First of all, Il Borgognone very quickly traced the broad outlines of his composition in black chalk, over which he then applied the ink with a brush, in a gesture similar to that of a painter. Note that only the figure of Christ, at the top left of our sheet (ill. 2), has not been covered in ink. This process makes his presence barely palpable, reinforcing the miraculous nature of his appearance.

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ill. 2: detail

Guillaume Courtois, Roman painter

Like his older brother, the battle painter Jacques Courtois (1621-1671), Guillaume was born in Saint-Hippolyte, a town then belonging to the county of Burgundy. He spent his entire career in Rome, where he moved with his family as a child, fleeing the plague and the Ten Years' War.



ill. 3: Guillaume Courtois

Self-portrait

Oil on canvas - 48 x 38 cm

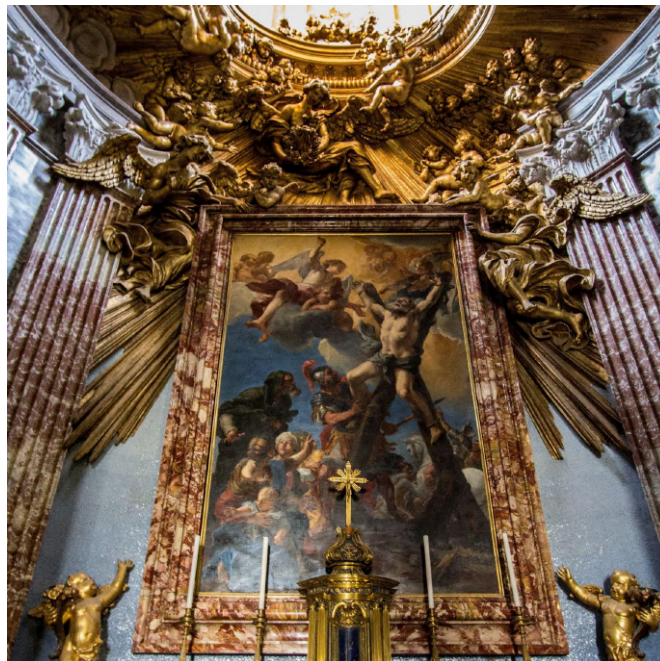
Besançon, Museum of Fine Arts and Archaeology

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He trained in the workshop of Pietro da Cortona (1597-1669), whose influence had a profound effect on his style. It was in a "Cortonesque, animated and sonorous" manner¹ that Guillaume Courtois, under the direction of Bernini (1598-1680), produced a number of decorations for churches and palaces built during the pontificate of Alexander VII Chigi (1599-1667).

Among the most emblematic examples are the *Crucifixion of Saint Andrew* for the church of Saint Andrew in the Quirinal (ill. 4), *The Battle of Joshua* in the gallery of the Palazzo del Quirinale and his monumental paintings, produced in collaboration with Gaspard Dughet² (1625-1675), for the "Prince's Room" in the Palazzo Doria-Pamphilj.



ill. 4: *The Crucifixion of Saint Andrew* by Borgognone, framed by the decoration by Bernini in the church of Saint Andrew on the Quirinal in Rome

Although he was greatly influenced by the manner of his master, he managed to develop his own style, which was much appreciated by his contemporaries. His brilliantly coloured and sharply contrasted paintings, served up by a broad brushstroke and delicious materials, as well as his drawings, many of which until recently were

¹ F. A. Salvagnini, *Le pitture di Guglielmo Courtois (Cortese) e la loro casa in Piazza di Spagna*, Rome 1937

² Gaspard Dughet painted the landscapes and Guillaume Courtois the figures.

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attributed to Giovanni Lanfranco³ (1592-1647), make him, perhaps before Ciro Ferri (1634-1689) and Lazzaro Baldi (1624-1703), one of Peter of Cortona's most brilliant pupils.

Works similar to ours

The same subject was treated by Guillaume Courtois in another sheet (ill. 5). Although the composition and treatment differ (our drawing has no pen-and-ink, for a more vivid rendering), the figures on the two sheets are very similar.



ill. 5: Guillaume Courtois
The Conversion of Saint Paul
Pen and brown ink wash
Private collection

We find this vigorous treatment in many of the artist's drawings, particularly in his *Crucifixion of Saint Andrew* (ill. 6) in the Kunstmuseum in Düsseldorf, which was preparatory to the painting for the church of Saint Andrew in the Quirinale in Rome, mentioned above.

³ Dieter Graf, *Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf, Die Handzeichnungen von Guglielmo Cortese und Giovanni Battista Gaulli*

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ill. 6: Guillaume Courtois
The Crucifixion of Saint Andrew
Grey wash on black chalk
Düsseldorf, Kunstmuseum

Framing and condition report

Our sheet is in very good condition. We had it mounted in the manner of Mariette and framed in a patinated gilt frame.



ill. 7: Our drawing framed