SPHINX FINE ART



Giuseppe Maria Crespi (Bologna 1665 - Bologna 1747)

Study of a Model Posed as a Seated Hercules

Verso: Study of a Male Figure

red chalk (recto); black chalk (verso)
29 x 35.3 cm (11⅜ x 13⅞ in)

This solidly muscular study of a figure masquerading as Hercules inevitably owes much to the time that Giuseppe Maria Crespi spent at a life-drawing academy, as well as to the figure drawings of Michelangelo. The seated Hercules' pose allows the artist to experiment with perspective, as the figure's enormous hand shows.

Jacob Bean has noted that Crespi's drawings and paintings often have little in common: 'it was only with brush in hand that he took those liberties that give his work its particular savour.'[1] This is in spite of the sometimes identical subject matter; Crespi did, for instance, fresco part of the Palazzo Pepoli in Bologna with *The Triumph of Hercules*. As a draughtsman, Crespi seems to have been a *diligent professore del disegno* working in an established Bolognese tradition. His *Hercules Holding a Club (Recto); A Nude Tracing a Circle with a Compass (Verso)* provides a useful comparison to the present work, especially the standing Hercules figure wielding a club. The style, both of this work, and of the present *Study of a Male Nude Posed as Hercules*, recalls the artistic style of one of Crespi's tutors, Maria Canutti (1625-1684).

The attribution to Giuseppe Maria Crespi was proposed by Donatella Biagi Maino, who has suggested that the present work must be a rare example of the artist's early style. In his youth, Crespi frequented the workshop of the Bolognese Carlo Cignani (1628-1719) and in the mid 1680s he attended a drawing academy headed by Cignani. When his master left for Forli, Crespi took over his studio with Giovanni Antonio Burrini (1656-1727).

Donatella Biagi has associated the present sheet with Crespi's assiduous studies made in life-drawing academies, which he was attending at that time in the Casa Ghisilieri. She makes an interesting

comparison with the red chalk standing academy, now in Stuttgart,[2] although that seems closer to the tradition of the Accademia Carraccesca degli Incamminati.[3] The present study shares some similarities also with the work of Burrini.

Crespi was born in Bologna and, according to Waterhouse, his work represents, 'the last flash of genius in a dying school' and 'a deliberate reaction to all that was solemn and academic in the Bolognese tradition.'[4] In his youth he copied the frescoes of the Carracci family and the early altarpieces of Guercino (1591-1666). He was also heavily influenced by the Venetian school of artists including Correggio (1489-1534), Titian (c.1485/90-1576) and Paolo Veronese (1528-1588). Crespi later drew artistic inspiration from north of the Alps, in particular in his commissions in Florence for Prince Ferdinand of Tuscany. In general, Crespi's *oeuvre* plays on several registers. He is known on the one hand for his genre scenes that depict every-day life, and the intimacy of which frequently carried over into his religious works, full as they are of tenderness and domestic details; at the same time, however, when depicting religious, antique or mythological themes, he produced works of a far more monumental and dramatic character, often with a decidedly tragic slant.

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[1] Jacob Bean *Drawings by Giuseppe Maria Crespi, Master Drawings iv,* 1966, p. 419.
[2] Sammlung Freiherr Koenig-Fachsenfeld; see M. Pajes Merriman, *Giuseppe Maria Crespi*, Milan 1980, p. 73, reproduced fig. 32.
[3] M. Pajes Merriman, *Giuseppe Maria Crespi*, Milan 1980, p. 73, reproduced fig. 32.
[4] E. Waterhouse, *Italian Baroque Painting* (Second Edition), 1969.

Provenance:

Mastai Ferretti Collection, Rome

Artist description:

Giuseppe Maria Crespi, know as *'Lo Spagnuolo'* was a painter, draughtsman and printer. His religious and mythological works are distinguished by a free brushstroke and a painterly manner. He also painted spirited genre scenes, which by their quality, content and quantity distinguish him as one of the first Italian painters of high standing to devote serious attention to the depiction of contemporary life. Such paintings as *Woman Laundering* (1700–05; St Petersburg, Hermitage) or *Woman Washing Dishes* (1720–25; Florence, Uffizi) offer straightforward glimpses of domestic chores in images that are startlingly novel for the period and look forward to the art of Jean-Siméon Chardin, Jean-François Millet and Honoré Daumier.

Giuseppe Maria was the youngest of four children born to Girolamo Crespi, a Bolognese miller, and Ippolita Cospi. His childhood was relatively comfortable, and he lived his entire life in the house that his mother's dowry had provided. At around the age of 12 he learnt to draw from the little-known painter Angelo Michele Toni (1640–1708). In the early 1680s he studied with Domenico Maria Canuti and later (c. 1684–6) in the drawing academy headed by Carlo Cignani. In the late 1680s he attended the life drawing academy in the Palazzo Ghislieri. Independently, he immersed himself in the late 16th-century works of the founders of the Bolognese school and copied the Carracci frescoes (c. 1583/4) in the Palazzo Fava, those of Ludovico Carracci and his pupils in the cloister of S Michele in Bosco (1592), and the early altarpieces of Guercino. In these years his fellow students dubbed him 'lo Spagnuolo' ('the Spaniard') because of his manner of dress. He set up on his own in 1686, renting a studio with Gian Antonio Burrini, nine years his senior, who introduced him to the Bolognese merchant and amateur, Giovanni Ricci. Financial support from the latter enabled Crespi to further his artistic education: in 1688–90 he made trips in Emilia and to Venice, following the itinerary taken earlier by the Carracci, to study the great masters of north Italian tradition: Correggio, Titian and Veronese. Like the young Carracci, too, he went to the Marches and made many copies after Federico Barocci, which were said to have sold later at high prices and in some cases even as originals. The unusually liberal terms of Crespi's contract with Ricci provided him with a ready buyer for any of his uncommissioned works, and the first of these, the *Wedding at Cana* (c. 1686–8; Chicago, Art Institute) reveals the results of his study

of Venetian painting and of Barocci. Its composition paraphrases the lower left third of Paolo Veronese's great canvas of the same subject (1562/3; Paris, Louvre) and its luminous, high-keyed palette echoes that of Barocci. Already evident are two elements that remained constants in his oeuvre: the feathery brushwork, especially in the gauzy fabrics, and the attention to genre detail, seen in his treatment of the lively cat and dog.

The early sources attest that Crespi painted genre themes at the beginning of his career, but none of these survive. He chose quotidian subjects that had some precedent in the Carracci's early works but were ignored by contemporary Bolognese artists. In 1688 he exhibited pictures of a butcher's shop and of a wine cellar, with rough men squeezing grapes in a large press. His first essay in printmaking—five prints from an aborted project to portray the craftsmen of Bologna—dates to these earliest years.

Two important events in 1690 signal the turning-point in Crespi's career from student to independent master: his election to the Compagnia dei Pittori and the commission for his first major altarpiece in Bologna, the *Temptation of St Anthony* (1690; Bologna, S Nicolò degli Albari). According to Crespi's son Luigi Crespi, this was commissioned by Conte Carlo Cesare Malvasia, who was a director of the Palazzo Ghislieri drawing academy. It openly imitates the forceful style of Ludovico Carracci and thus must have pleased Malvasia, who had accredited Ludovico with the founding of the Bolognese school. The monumental figure of St Anthony, seen from below, looms up to fill the foreground; his and Christ's body are arranged along opposing diagonals. Strong contrasts of lighting and emphatic gesture further dramatize the saint's triumph. Shortly after the altarpiece's completion, Crespi alienated his patron by caricaturing him as a dead chicken. The ensuing scandal resulted in Crespi's break with the Ghislieri academy in 1691. Sometime during the mid-1690s Crespi was invited, along with three older Bolognese painters (Burrini, Benedetto Gennari II and Giovanni Gioseffo dal Sole) to decorate Prince Eugene of Savoy's newly acquired (1694) Winter Palace in Vienna with paintings on a theme from Greek mythology. Recent research has established that Crespi's part in this prestigious commission, pendants depicting *Chiron Teaching Achilles to Drawthe Bow*and *Aeneas, Sibyl and Charon* (both 1695–1700; Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum) hung as two of three overdoors in an audience chamber. The interpretation of the themes is on a human rather than a heroic scale and includes the novel conceit of showing Chiron about to give his pupil a reproving kick: a feature that was judged by some critics to have offended decorum but appears to have pleased Prince Eugene as he proceeded to commission its pendant. Crespi's two pictures are similar in format, composition (reduced number of figures) and dark tonality to those by his Bolognese colleagues, which suggests that they all followed specific directives regarding form as well as subject. Crespi was clearly experimenting with dramatic lighting: his figures barely emerge from shadowy backgrounds, and their arms, legs and torsos are illuminated as if by lightning flashes. Only the tip of Aeneas' nose and his cheek are lit in the second painting. These effects are borrowed from Ludovico Carracci, as is the powerful figure of Charon, who mirrors the latter's St Jerome in the *Madonna degli Scalzi* (Bologna, Pinacoteca Nationale.).

Early in the 1690s Crespi made his first essays in fresco, a medium he only employed early in his career. In collaboration with Marcantonio Chiarini (1652–1730) he painted a ceiling fresco (1691; untraced) for S Francesco di Paola, Pistoia. His only surviving frescoes, two ceilings in the Palazzo Pepoli in Bologna, probably date to the end of the decade. They consist of scenes aggrandizing Marchese Ercole Pepoli and his family: the *Triumph of Hercules*, which shows Ercole's mythological namesake attaining immortality, borne in a chariot beyond the mortal realm of the Four Seasons, and the *Banquet of the Gods*, which implies (by its inclusion of the Pepoli arms in the scene) the family's place among the gods on Olympus and beyond the reach of the Fates. Using the illusionistic devices of Baroque ceiling painting, Crespi opened up the centre of each vault to show airborne figures in an uninterrupted expanse, moving up and away from the steeply foreshortened figures representing the Seasons and Fates, who seem to stand bound to the edge of their respective ceilings. These female personifications are among Crespi's most memorable creations: Spring and Summer are young peasant girls, their coarse features alive with infectious good humour; similarly laughing girls improbably represent the Fates. This irreverent approach to the gods and demi-gods of Classical mythology sets these ceilings apart from the distinguished tradition of Bolognese decorative painting upheld by his contemporaries. Also unusual was Crespi's refusal on this and subsequent occasions to collaborate with a specialist in *quadratura*.

Crespi's untraditional approach is further demonstrated in his treatment of the pastoral themes that he began to explore in small easel paintings of the 1690s. He took up the mode that had been formulated by Francesco Albani earlier in the century and had gained popularity in Bologna by the 1690s in the works of Cignani, Marcantonio Franceschini, Lorenzo Pasinelli and dal Sole. His *Sleeping Cupids Disarmed by Nymphs* (1695–1700; Bologna, Pinacoteca Nationale), in which the mythological theme provides a pretext for painting pretty young nymphs and innumerable cupids in idyllic landscapes, exemplifies the genre. He subverted the tradition by producing a humorous inversion: mischievous cupids discover and toy with sleeping nymphs (e.g. *Cupid with Sleeping Nymphs*, 1695–1700; Washington, National Gallery of Art). At least eight of his variations on this theme survive, five from the 1690s and three from the 1730s.

By 1700 Crespi had become successful enough to open his own school (which he closed in the 1720s), immediately attracting as many as 30 students. In 1707 he married Gioanna Cuppini, legitimizing the birth of their first son, who had been born in 1703. In 1701 Grand Prince Ferdinando de' Medici's Bolognese agent, as part of a project to remove famous altarpieces from churches into the Prince's collection, arranged for Crespi to paint the replacement for Giovanni Lanfranco's *Ecstasy of St Margaret of Cortona* (Florence, Palazzo Pitti), then in the church of S Maria Nuova in Cortona. Crespi's *Ecstasy of St Margaret of Cortona* (Cortona, Diocesan Museum) was unveiled to public acclaim shortly before 1 January 1702, which date provides a reference point for the artist's still uncertain chronology between 1695 and 1706. Crespi's altarpiece is not a copy of Lanfranco's, although its composition, predicated on a diagonal juxtaposition of Christ at upper left and the saint at lower right, implies his familiarity with the original or a copy of it. Significant differences, however, lie in conception and handling. Crespi reinterprets the spiritual experience in quotidian terms: Margaret kneels, not supported by angels, calmly acknowledging the celestial vision. Nocturnal lighting, shadowy recesses that dissolve form and a selective layering of transparent, luminous highlights create a sense of the figures' immateriality and confer mystic overtones. Prince Ferdinando expressed his pleasure at the commission's successful completion. Four years later Crespi hoped to attract the Prince's patronage again with the *Massacre of the Innocents*, commissioned by Don Carlo Silva, a Florentine priest, as a present for the Prince. This ambitious, multi-figured composition with over 100 figures marks the watershed in Crespi's career. A tangled skein of soldiers, mothers and babies fills the picture's lower left quadrant, while a pair of mothers lamenting over a child stand in isolation at the lower right, their quiet, vertical forms providing a counterpoise to and a dramatic commentary on the tumultuous violence. Crespi explored the theme in successive versions throughout his career (e.g. 1735–40; Bologna, Pinacoteca Nazionale.), varying the scale of the figures and describing the setting in more detail.

Once the *Massacre of the Innocents* had been completed, Don Carlo Silva proved reluctant to part with it, so in 1708 Crespi wrested it from him and delivered it to the Prince personally, surprising the Florentine court by his informality. The Grand Prince approved the painting, delighted in the artist's unconventional approach and invited him to return to Florence on an extended visit. For a while Crespi worked for Ferdinando from Bologna, sending him various works, including the unusually informal and light-hearted *Self-portrait with Family* (1708; Florence, Uffizi), in which his laughing wife watches as he pulls his eight-month-old son, Luigi, in a wagon. In 1709 the Crespi family moved to Florence, where they spent eight months living in rooms in the Grand Prince's villa at Pratolino and where their third son was born. He was named Ferdinando after his royal godfather.

In Florence, Crespi, encouraged by Ferdinando (who called him his *'pittore attuale'*) and inspired by the Prince's collection of paintings by the Bamboccianti, renewed his interest in depicting genre subjects, which he had neglected since 1690. His most intense activity in this field dates to his stay in Florence and to the period immediately afterwards. He painted both directly observed subjects and scenes with implicit narrative content, usually with satiric or comic implications. Two important works from his stay in Florence are the *Fair at Poggio a Caiano* (1709; Florence, Uffizi) and the *Flea Hunt* (1709; Pisa). The *Fair at Poggio a Caiano* represented the many colourful individuals and episodes at the annual fair and market near the Medici country villa. Rich in incident, the crowded scene includes portraits of courtiers: for example, Ferdinando and his court would have recognized Antonio Morosini, the Prince's 'fool', who at one fair had in fact impersonated a local charlatan, much to everyone's amusement, and who is shown acting out this practical joke. Anonymous anecdotes also unfold: in the left foreground the outcome of an encounter between two peasants is broadly hinted at by bawdy gestures, while in the right foreground the upper classes, represented by a young, well-dressed lady, mingle with the lower

classes, represented by a market woman offering wares.

The Accademia Clementina, the first official Bolognese academy of art, was inaugurated in 1710, and Crespi became one of its first directors. However, he disagreed with his fellow administrators over the policy of admitting artisans and amateurs as well as professional artists and ceased to attend after 1711.
Despite the death of Ferdinando in 1713, Crespi continued to explore a variety of genre themes in this decade, picturing the working class at their labour: pressing wine grapes, making silk, doing laundry. Soon after his return from Florence, c. 1710, he began to make prints illustrating *Bertoldo e Bertoldino*, a popular book of stories by the Bolognese writer, Giulio Cesare Croce (c. 1550–1609). He pictured the exploits of the shrewd but crude peasant Bertoldo and his son in three separate sets of 20 episodes: etched (Bologna, Pinacoteca Nazionale) in oil on copper (Rome, Galleria Doria-Pamphili) and in watercolour on parchment (Bologna, Biblioteca Cassa di Risparmio). The sequence and date of these sets remain controversial. Possibly Crespi identified with the salty folk hero whose non-conformity found echoes in his own often individualistic behaviour and dress.

Crespi must have lavished his most comic effects on the lost cycle of paintings that reduced his biographer, Zanotti, to side-splitting laughter, in which he illustrated the rise and fall of an opera singer. Two extant paintings have been associated with the series: the *Flea Hunt*, as known in three replicas (Pisa, Museo Civile; Paris, Louvre; Naples, Capodimonte), probably represents the opening scene in the story, and the *Singer at the Spinet with an Admirer*, known in two replicas (Florence, Uffizi; Private Collection) may reflect a later episode. In the first, a young woman performs her intimate morning ritual in a humble room in which the unexpected presence of a spinet and printed announcements of concerts allude to her musical talents, while tokens of gallantries signal her route to future success. In the second an elegantly dressed and coiffed woman interrupts her singing to receive the admiring attentions of the aristocratic lover responsible for her sudden prosperity. The dating of the project and of the surviving versions of the *Flea Hunt*, as well as the chronological sequence of the latter's known variant compositions, has yet to be fully resolved. According to Zanotti, the series was commissioned by an Englishman, to judge from circumstantial evidence not earlier than 1716. It seems likely that the Englishman requested a repetition of existing works, as Crespi's involvement with the theme began earlier with the *Flea Hunt* painted in Florence in 1709. Apart from tracing its genesis and establishing its place in the artist's oeuvre, the dating of the cycle would help to clarify Crespi's contribution to the genre of narrative satire, for thematic parallels exist that link the lost cycle to William Hogarth's series of engravings, the *Harlot's Progress* (1731), in which he claimed to have invented the 'modern moral subject'.

Probably in 1712 Crespi painted his most famous cycle, the *Seven Sacraments* (Dresden, Gemäldegal Alte Meister), which originated as an exercise in genre. Its remarkable novelty lies in the casting of the liturgical theme in an everyday idiom. According to Zanotti, the inspiration for the composition occurred in San Benedetto when Crespi observed a ray of sunlight from a broken window falling across the head and shoulder of a man in the confessional booth. Struck by the beauty of the lighting, he returned to his studio to reproduce the effect in a drawing, and subsequently in a painting, for which he borrowed the confessional, re-created the same lighting and posed the original priest and a friend. He sent the painting to the noted collector Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni in Rome, who was so impressed that he commissioned paintings of the other sacraments to be done in the same manner. Crespi accordingly produced six further canvases, usually dated to 1712, all, like the *Confession*, genre-like in tone and featuring only a few, almost life-size figures. Comments by Zanotti and Luigi Crespi indicate that contemporaries admired the paintings but were nonplussed by the originality of presenting religious subject-matter in terms of contemporary experience. They found it hard to believe that Crespi, so often ready to depict the comic and satirical, was being serious. Hence they interpreted the works as examples of the genre of narrative satire and discovered comic elements (particularly in the *Matrimony*) where a modern viewer can find none.

After his wife's death (1722), Crespi rarely left his house except to attend daily mass. He became increasingly reclusive and pious for the last 20 years of his life. Altarpieces, which provide the few fixed points in his later chronology, formed the main part of his work, though he continued to paint genre scenes. The two altarpieces he painted for the church of the Gesù in Ferrara (*in situ*) were done, like

several others, for a small sum in return for masses for the souls of deceased friends. The earlier of the two, the *Ecstasy of St Stanislaus Kostka* (1727), executed one year after the Polish saint's canonization, represents a mystic vision experienced by the young Jesuit novitiate. Its balanced composition and relatively diminutive figures are characteristic of his later religious paintings and in contrast to his earlier preference for oblique, dynamic arrangements and figures that fill the frame. His visualization of ecstasy is more mystical than in the *Ecstasy of St Margaret of Cortona*. Vaporous clouds transport the heavenly realm to earth and blur its separation from tangible reality, while the saint, his eyes closed, leans back in the embrace of angels.

In the 1720s Crespi returned to the pastoral mode that he had practised in the first decade of the century. His earlier irreverent treatment of Classical mythology yielded to a new seriousness, evident in his choice and formulation of traditional subjects. A centralized and symmetrically balanced grouping of figures structures *Jupiter among the Corybantes*. Carefully choreographed poses and gestures, controlled by selective accents of light, lead the viewer's gaze into the painting from the left, around the semicircle of nymphs, to the seated figure at lower right.

From the 1730s Crespi's religious themes become more violent, focusing in particular on the sufferings of Christ and the saints at the hands of their brutal tormentors, as for example in the *Mocking of Christ* (1735–40; Bologna, Pinacoteca Nazionale.). At the end of the 1730s he acquired a new and influential patron and friend in Cardinal Prospero Lambertini, archbishop of Bologna in 1731, who referred to him as 'suo pittore della mensa arcivescovile'. Crespi prepared the Cardinal's portrait in a lively oil sketch that conveys the sitter's intelligence and forceful personality. The finished portrait (1740; Rome, Pinacoteca Vaticana) has Lambertini, who had been elected as Pope Benedict XIV, in appropriately altered vestments and papal tiara. The Pope conferred a knighthood on the painter in 1741.
At the end of his career Crespi reinterpreted his earlier genre-like representation of confession in his *St John of Nepomuk Confessing the Queen of Bohemia* (1743; Turin, Galleria Sabauda), a historic sacred subject commissioned by Charles-Emanuel III, King of Sardinia and 17th Duke of Savoy. In 1745 Crespi suffered a stroke that left him blind for the last two years of his life. He was buried in the church of the Confraternity of St Mary Magdalene, Bologna.

Trained in the traditional workshop manner, Crespi was skilled in the technique of both fresco and oil painting, though he received few fresco commissions, possibly because he was unwilling to collaborate with a *quadratura* specialist. Most of his oeuvre is executed in oil on canvas and ranges in size from monumental altarpieces to miniaturist cabinet pictures. Small oils on copper for private patrons (e.g. *Self-portrait with Family*, 1708; 280×240 mm) account for some 15% of his production and are typically on devotional themes, pastoral or genre subjects.
From early in his career Crespi explored painterly devices derived from Venetian pictorial tradition, such as layering coloured glazes to achieve luminous effects. Contrary to contemporary practice he mixed his media, blending water- and oil-based emulsions. For light landscape passages and for flesh tints he even seems on occasion to have used tempera covered with transparent glazes to achieve a porcelain-like translucence. The poor condition of many of his works is due to injudicious attempts at restoration in the past that have removed the final glaze and thereby disturbed the tonal harmony. Works that have escaped this fate (e.g. the two small oils on copper, *Cupids at Play*, 1695–1700; El Paso, Museum of Art.) are in excellent condition.

To achieve the extreme contrasts of light and shadow that he often required in his compositions, Crespi built up impasto in the brightest areas and applied pigment thinly in the shadows and half-tones, sometimes exploiting the reddish ground. He veiled the resulting transitions with a final transparent glaze. According to Luigi Crespi, he made a daily practice of observing natural light and used aids, including the camera obscura, for reproducing desired effects in the studio. After his death Crespi was singled out by the Venetian critic Francesco Algarotti (1764) for his pioneering use of this method, for which he darkened a room in his house, inserted a lens into a hole in the door leading outside and placed a canvas opposite the lens at the focal point, so that he could study the effects of light projected from outdoors on to the canvas. His familiarity with the camera obscura probably dates to 1708–12, when scientific experimentation was encouraged in Bologna by General Ferdinando Marsili, who introduced artists, poets and scientists to the latest optical inventions following his return from Holland in 1708. The direct impact on his painting can be seen in *Courtyard Scene* (1710–15; Bologna,

Pinacoteca Nazionale) with its 'almost photographic rendering of the crumbling stones'. His fascination with singular lighting effects also led him to set up an overhead light in his studio to reproduce the fall of sunlight from high church windows.

As a young man Crespi attended drawing classes with Cignani and at the Palazzo Ghislieri. According to Luigi Crespi, he continued to draw from life models, and many 18th-century Bolognese collectors possessed examples of his drawings. Few are known nowadays, however, which has posed problems for scholars. Among the handful of sheets that may be associated with paintings, several pen-and-wash drawings on brown ground and roughed out in red chalk (sold London, Christie's, 29 March 1966, lot 164) are preparatory studies for the two frescoed ceilings in the Palazzo Pepoli. The largest surviving group, more interesting for content than for style, consists of nine red chalk studies for a set of prints (c. 1710) to illustrate Croce's *Bertoldo e Bertoldino* (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.; Stuttgart, Private Collection; Orléans, Musee Beaux Arts; Hamburg, Ksthalle).

With regard to prints, Crespi's early portrayals of craftsmen of Bologna are crudely handled. He returned to printmaking with more success in 1710–15, and the 20 etchings for the *Bertoldo e Bertoldino* series reveal greater mastery of the medium. His plates were later re-etched in a second set by his friend Ludovico Mattioli for the 1736 republication of Croce's book. Crespi's total responsibility for the original set of etchings, although attested to by the sources, has been questioned by Merriman. More recently, the set has been reattributed to Crespi's hand alone and his use of the etching needle characterized as delicate and feathery, reminiscent of contemporary Venetian artists.

Crespi's workshop must have been small, and his assistants were called on to imitate the master's style as closely as possible. His most talented student was Antonio Gionima, who worked in the studio from 1719 until his early death (1732). By c. 1730 Crespi's chief pupils and assistants were his two sons, Luigi and Antonio. Their faithful adoption of their father's figural types, repertory of gesture and classicizing compositions obscures the certain attribution of Crespi's later altarpieces, although Luigi's assistance betrays itself in mechanical repetition, the dilution of expression and a hardening of forms.

Collections

Works by Crespi are held in the following collections: Hermitage, St Petersburg; National Gallery, London; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Uffizi, Florence; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; Detroit Institute of Arts, Michigan; Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago; National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C; Vatican Museums, Vatican City; Courtauld Institute; Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, amongst others.