

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Raymond Lafage
(Lisle-sur-Tarn 1656 - 1684 Lyon)

Head of a woman

Pen and brown ink over black chalk
41.8 x 31.6 cm (16 1/2 x 12 1/2 in.)
Inscribed in pen and ink *Lafage fecit* and *portrait de...* and numbered 53.

Provenance:

With Henry Moore (1898-1986);
By descent to his daughter Mary Moore;
Thomas Williams Fine Art, London;
Emmanuel von Bayer, London;
Where acquired by the present owner.

Exhibition History

Edinburgh, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, *Two Horizons: Works from the Collections of Charles Asprey and Alexander Schröder*, 28 February – 19 July 2009.



Executed with confident strokes of pen and brown ink, this delicate sheet by Raymond Lafage (1656 - 1684) portrays the veiled head of a woman, her eyes turned subtly towards the viewer's right. The figure's demure gaze and the soft folds of drapery framing her face lend the image a reverential character suggestive of a Virgin or saint. Stylistically, the sheet points to an Italian inspiration: the handling of the brown ink - with fluid contour lines and rich cross-hatching for shadow - closely echoes the manner of Bartolomeo Passerotti (1529-1592), a Bolognese draftsman whose graphic work Lafage would have potentially encountered during his time in Italy (see for example this *Head of a Figure* at the Prado Museum, Inv. D001781, fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Bartolomeo Passerotti, *Head of a figure*, 1560-1570, pencil and grey-brown ink on paper. Madrid, Prado Museum.

Lafage is indeed known to have avidly copied Italian old master drawings and paintings, especially during his sojourn in Rome. In 1679, after having received his first training in the atelier of Jean-Pierre Rivalz at Toulouse, he travelled to the Eternal City, where he resided for three years, winning a drawing prize at the Accademia di San Luca and immersed himself in the study of Italian masters.

In the present sheet, the *sprezzatura* of the pen work and woman's facial features and drapery folds reflect the influence of Italian virtuosi like Passerotti and the Carracci, whom Lafage studied closely. Setting out for a second Italian journey, he died en route at Lyon in 1684, aged only twenty-eight.¹ Relatively little else is known of the artist, yet in that short career he produced a body of high-quality drawings which secured his posthumous fame among connoisseurs throughout Europe. Numerous drawings by Lafage in major collections confirm his habit of copying or reworking Italian compositions. A first example is *Christ on the Cross, Mourned by the Holy Women* (Louvre, Inv. 27340, fig. 2), a pen-and-brown-ink study of the Crucifixion with four mourning figures, within a characteristically Counter-Reformation composition. A further comparison can be made with *Head of a woman with angels holding a medallion in her hair* (Louvre, Inv. 27403, fig. 3).



Fig. 2. Raymond Lafage, *Christ on the Cross*, pen and brown ink over black chalk on paper. Paris, Louvre Museum.



Fig. 3. Raymond Lafage (attr. to), *Head of a woman*, pen and brown ink on paper. Paris, Louvre Museum.

¹ See N. T. Whitman, *The Drawings of Raymond Lafage*. The Hague 1963, pp. 1-18

Other compelling parallels are a pen drawing at the Albertina of the *Holy Family with the Infant John* and an etching by Adam Bartsch after Lafage, both featuring similarly veiled female heads (fig. 4-5).



Fig. 4. Raymond Lafage, *Holy Family with the Infant John*, pen and brown ink over black chalk on paper. Vienna, Albertina Museum.

Fig. 5. Adam Bartsch, after Raymond Lafage, *Virgin and Child with Saint Anne*, 1784, etching on paper. London, British Museum.

The sheet is belonged to the great 20th-century British sculptor Henry Moore. The drawing's principal motif - serene head enveloped in a protective covering - resonates with Moore's *Helmet Head* series (begun in the late 1930s), in which an outer shell encases an inner face or void (see for example fig. 6). While Moore's helmet concept was developed primarily from actual suits of armour and natural forms, the formal parallel with Lafage's veiled head is evident: in both, the outer contour (the veil or "helmet") creates a voluminous, shielding presence around the vulnerable human face.



Fig. 6. Henry Moore, *Helmet Head No. 1*, 1950 (cast 1960), bronze on wood base. London, Tate Gallery.