LOT 38
JACOPO ROBUSTI, CALLED JACOPO TINTORETTO AND STUDIO
VENICE 1518 - 1594
THE ANGEL FORETELLING SAINT CATHERINE OF ALEXANDRIA OF HER MARTYRDOM
oil on canvas with an arched top, relined as a rectangle
177.1 by 99.3cm.; 69¾ by 39¼in.

ESTIMATE £100,000-150,000 GBP
Lot Sold: 191,000 GBP

PROVENANCE
Commissioned by the Scuola di Santa Caterina for the altar of the Church of San Geminiano, Piazza di San Marco, Venice
Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice, after the destruction of San Geminiano in 1807
From whom acquired by Angelo Barbini, Venice, 1818, in exchange for Bartolomeo Schedoni’s Deposition
Colonel T.H. Davies
By descent to Lieutenant Colonel H.R. Davies, Elmley Castle, Pershore, Worcestershire
By whom sold, London, Christie’s, 26 July 1957, lot 148 to Betts for £1100
Ernest Joresco, Chicago, by 1959
Anonymous sale, New York, Christie’s, 18 January 1983, lot 169 (as Jacopo Robusti, il Tintoretto)
With Colnaghi & Co. Ltd., London, from whom acquired by David Bowie

EXHIBITED
London and New York, Colnaghi, Gothic to Renaissance, European Painting 1300-1600, 26 October - 12 November 1988 in London and 13 November 1988 - 28 January 1989 in New York, no.19 (lent by a private collection);

LITERATURE
F. Sansovino, Venetia citta nobilissima et singolare, Venice 1581, p.43a;
R. Borghini, Il Riposo, Florence 1584, Book IV, p.554; and subsequent eds (‘in San Gimignano una tavola entrovi Santa Caterina, e l’Agno, che la conforta, acciò vada à disputare’);
C. Ridolfi, Le Meraviglie dell’arte Ovvero Le Vite degli Illustri Pittori Veneti e Dello Stato, Venice 1648, p.48; and subsequent eds;
F. Sansovino, Venetia citta nobilissima et singolare, Venice 1663, Book II, p.110;
M. Boschini, Le minere della pittura, Venice 1664, p.101; and Venice 1674 ed., p.77 (‘La Tavola à mano sinistra, entrando in Chiesa per la porte Maggiore, con Santa Catterina, e l’Angelo, che gli annuncia il martirio, e del Tintoretto’);
M. Boschini, Il Gran Teatro delle Pitture e Prospettive di Venezia, vol. I, Venice 1720, unpaginated, no.38;
P.A. Pacifico, Cronica veneta sacra e profana, o sia. Un compendio di tutte le cose piu illustri ed antiche della citta di Venezia, Venice 1736, p.243; and Venice 1793 ed., p.49; (mistakenly as Saint Helen);
A.M. Zanetti, Della pittura Veneziana e delle Opere Pubbliche de Veneziani Maestri, vol. V, Venice 1771, p.156 (‘in S. Geminiano, è cosa sua la tavola parimente di Santa Catterina, a cui da un leggiandriissimo angelo viene annuзиato il martirio’);
J. Reynolds, Discours sur la Peinture, Lettres au Flaneur, suivis des Voyages Pittoresques, Paris 1909, p.344;
G. Adriani, Anton van Dyck: Italienisches Skizzenbuch, Vienna 1940, p.10, 6v;
S. Moschini Marconi, Gallerie dell’Accademia de Venezia. Opere D’Arte Del Secolo XIV e XV, Rome 1955, p.XVI;
C. Bernari and P. de Vecchi, L’Opera Completa del Tintoretto, Milan 1970, p.100, cat. no.126, reproduced;
P&D Colnaghi & Co. Ltd., Gothic to Renaissance, European Painting 1300-1600, London 1988, p.102, cat. no.19, reproduced;
P. Humfrey, ‘Competitive devotions: The Venetian Scuole Piccole as donors of altarpieces in the years around 1500’,
M. di Monte, 'La Morte Bella, Il Martirio nella Pittura di Tiziano, Tintoretto e Veronese', in Venezia Cinquecento, IX, 17, 1999, pp.118-121, reproduced p.119, fig.20;
M. Jaffé, The Devonshire collection of Northern European drawings, Turin, London and Venice 2002, vol. I, p.76, under cat. no.998, 6 verso b (mistakenly as lost);

ENGRAVED:

CATALOGUE NOTE
Saint Catherine of Alexandria, a virtuous virgin queen, was condemned to death on a spiked wheel by the Emperor Maxentius when he failed to undermine her Christian faith. She escaped when a thunderbolt destroyed the wheel before any harm could befall her, though she was later beheaded. Here, through powerful and eloquent gesture, an angel warns Catherine of her impending fate, recalling the more familiar iconography of the Annunciation.

This painting was produced in the later 1570s, when Jacopo Tintoretto was directing the busiest painter’s workshop in Venice. Consistent with this practice was the delegation of certain elements of the composition to the studio, including here the architectural setting, row of background figures, and much of the sky. Jacopo himself, however, most probably sketched in the foreground protagonists and completed some key passages in these figures, leaving other areas for his assistants to finish. The work of the master is particularly evident in the deft and confident handling of the angel’s head in profile, the anatomy of his muscular shoulders and arms (which Jacopo first painted nude before covering with an additional layer), and Catherine’s answering gesture, with its skilful foreshortening of her left arm and hand holding the Crucifix.

The altarpiece was commissioned by members of the Scuola di Santa Caterina for the Church of San Geminiano in the heart of Venice. Facing the Basilica in the Piazza San Marco, the small but elaborately decorated church was designed by Jacopo Sansovino and also held his tomb, along with an altarpiece by Giovanni Bellini and organ shutters by Paolo Veronese. A pen drawing of the present composition by Sir Anthony Van Dyck (Chatsworth House, Derbyshire), executed on his visit to Venice in 1622, speaks of his admiration for Jacopo’s painting. Displayed in situ until 1807, when the church was destroyed under Napoleon to make way for the new wing of the Procuratie, the canvas was transferred to the Accademia before being acquired by the art dealer Angelo Barbini, along with paintings by Titian, Paris Bordone and Veronese.

We are grateful to Dr. Frederick Ilchman for endorsing the attribution to Jacopo Tintoretto and Studio, and for his assistance in the cataloguing of this lot.